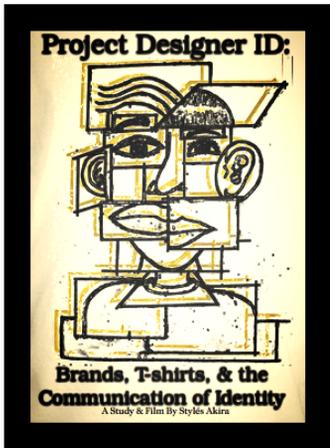


ONE SHEET No. 2: Cultural Strategy

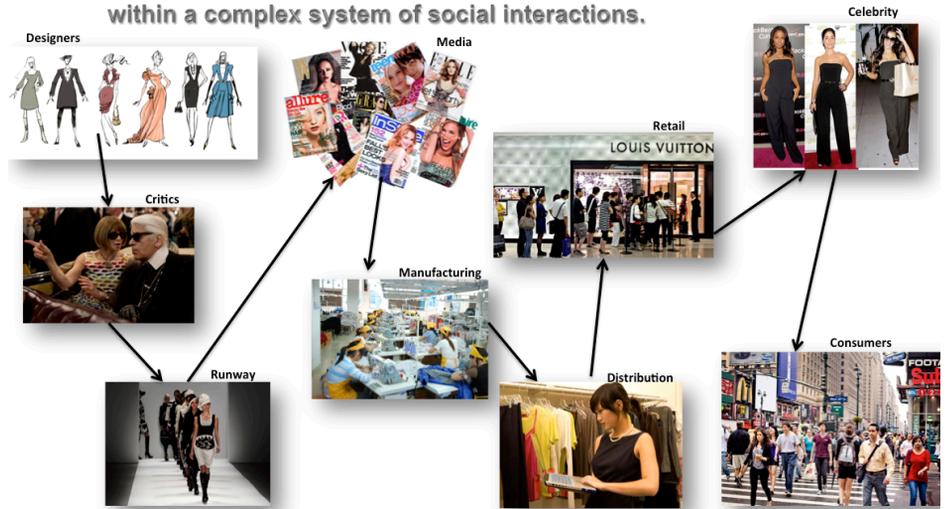
Designer ID: Brands, T-shirts, & the Communication of Identity

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The prevailing interpretations of brand identity—specifically regarding the shifting of tastes or ‘fashion’ with regard to consumer perception—are largely taken as if they are at the complete disposal of the successful execution of corporate strategy, more specifically, brand strategy. The intangible factors of reality render corporate strategy dependent on the climate of the social culture. While the literature mentions this in passing, even qualitative analyses of organizational-, corporate-, and brand identity fail to give cultural climate proper emphasis. Studies discuss history and context but neglect the significance of a comprehensive assessment of an industry and its cognate markets in real-time.

Fashion is a cultural construct incorporating art and design, which constitutes a class of visual communication embedded within a complex system of social interactions.



Media have played a tremendous role in the prominence of status consumption with the rise of niche television, online, and mobile-based entertainment catering to specific lifestyles. Research asserts that media is a premier source of influence in the materialistic tendencies found in consumers and the state of the modern consumer culture at large. Of particular note has been the rise of celebrity culture-, and luxury lifestyle-driven content, which aims to stimulate the audience's sense of narcissism and secure their viewership with the far-fetched fantasy of attaining fame and fortune.

Malcolm McLaren & Vivienne Westwood, 1976



T-shirts are a youth driven market and the direction of that market is largely the effect of a constant reaction to individual and group expression stimulated by a countercultural worldview. Independent designers and firms are the foundation of the T-shirt market in terms of its creative energy, the leadership of its innovative momentum, and the sociopolitical orientation of the linguistic and visual communication articulated in its trends, which tend to be drawn from the wealth of cultural diversity found in coastal metropolitan locales. While mainstream commercial brands may often serve as leaders in the fashion industry under top-down models of trend distribution, T-shirts are a market segment where trickle-up theories appear to be substantiated, largely as an effect of the simplicity of the post-production footprint which they depend on for the majority of their communicative value. Furthermore, that communicative value is in many ways more potent than any other garment class as a result of its explicit mode of expression—that is to say, through text, graphics or a combination of the two. Though large-scale commercial firms may achieve equal ground in the T-shirt segment due to its openness, they mostly lack the incentive to dominate this sector as its trends move forward on small scales at a rapid pace, and seek to challenge the status quo in a way that may be inconceivable for an organization with complex interests, culturally divested stakeholders, and financially centered business goals.

Brands construct discursive narratives for their products and services through the gestalt of market activity that they engage in over time. Moreover, the production of brand image is achieved through the aesthetic motifs surrounding a brand's gestalt market presence in general, including design features of logos, store décor, packaging, and product design. They select target audiences to match their desired brand image, and they establish visual paradigms through advertisements, media coverage, modeling, and endorsement, etc.

The assertion of status with T-shirts is not purely based upon economic factors for brands or for consumers, but heavily reliant on notions of association dealt through cultural influence. T-shirts are by nature canvases for current trends, relatively disposable within the scope of a collection, and highly price sensitive.

Recommendations

In consumer markets strategy involves not only extensive knowledge of the industry, but a thorough understanding of the plethora of societal factors which have an influence on that industry. Commercial consumption is highly sensory process, with a significant emphasis on the visual. Under this logic one might argue that it is essential for brand marketers to have an extensive knowledge of visual trends as they pertain to one's own market and to any other major symbolic market, moreover, a historic repertoire of visual trends in consumer culture in general. Beyond this, a brand manager should seek to establish a firm grip on the linguistic discourse, past and present, of the market in question. This semiotic approach to market dynamics will provide the skilled marketer with a deep rooted acumen for the forces which impact the market from all angles, and the effects they have on its assigned symbolism.