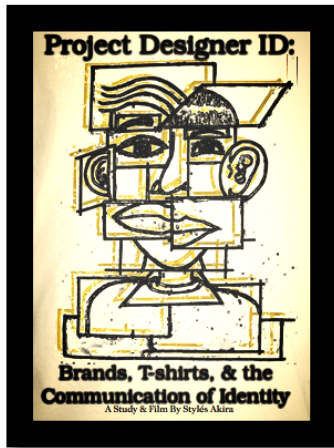


ONE SHEET No. 1: Profits vs. Prestige

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

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High-end brands maintain control of their image through exclusivity and they are made exclusive through the implementation of limited production and distribution, size restrictions, and most importantly prohibitive pricing schemes. Though such brands may charge exorbitant prices for their T-shirts in comparison to competitive product, the price may lower the bar of access to the brand per se, for individuals who desire to share in the brand experience and attribute its values to themselves, but have no other means to do so, especially when those values include high social status.



Popular opinion of real world phenomena has been demonstrated to be highly consistent between members of large sub-groups in accordance with the prevailing sociocultural climate. Some perceptions of phenomena have been shown to be near universal across time and space in human beings. Commercial corporations in general attempt to appropriate elements of experience, which have demonstrated a high consensus of positive response, in order to build effective brand images. Marketing is a socio-psychological business practice, which capitalizes off of an acute knowledge of culture as well as group and individual mental processes in order to gain insights about-, and exploit preferences and habits in the consumption of commercial goods. Through the power of media and marketing, fashion firms, in particular, attempt to establish a well-controlled, common understanding of their proposed brand identities. It is the goal of these brands to develop a specific aesthetic and a set of values, which are necessarily incorporated into the design of the garments they produce—in this case T-shirts—especially in their decoration.

Mass-market brands have taken to appropriating luxury sector marketing tactics. Discount brands including H&M, Forever 21 and UNIQLO operate under the 'fast fashion' business model engaged in regular collaboration collections with high fashion designers and brands.

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Sure, high fashion can be expensive because of the materials and the level of craftsmanship, but design should be good on every price level - and that's what the high street does so well. Today, you don't have to have loads of money to be well dressed... Never underestimate the power of a simple T-shirt, jeans and a jacket. It always looks very chic.
—Karl Lagerfeld

Status Rank	T-shirt Price	Perceived Status Rank	Brand Status
1. McQueen	\$310	1. Gucci	6.35
2. Versace	\$295	2. Armani Exchange	5.74
3. Gucci	\$245	3. RL Denim & Supply	5.47
4. Balmain	\$185	4. U.S. Polo Assn.	5.25
5. Burberry	\$150	5. Adidas	5.13
6. True Religion	\$68	6. Balmain	4.63
7. French Connection	\$44	7. Levi's	4.58
8. RL Denim & Supply	\$40	8. McQueen	4.47
9. Armani Exchange	\$32.50	9. GAP	4.40
10. GAP	\$29.95	9. True Religion	4.40
11. Adidas	\$22	11. French Connection	4.35
11. VAN's	\$22	11. Versace	4.33
13. Levi's	\$19	13. VAN's	4.29
14. U.S. Polo Assn.	\$15	14. Burberry	4.20
15. Old Navy	\$10	15. Old Navy	3.63



As fashion is an industry fundamentally based upon the rigid hierarchical ordering of superficial brand images and social status, the T-shirt is placed in a highly volatile position as a commercial commodity. It has the potential to generate incredible volumes of revenue for firms that are able to establish strong brand identities, especially for brands at the higher-end that are able to charge premiums. Yet in generating that revenue it compromises the value of those premiums and the proposed identity of those higher-end brands.

Recommendations

If profitability is the primary goal, mid-, and low-tier brands entering or repositioning in the market should emulate the marketing and aesthetic philosophies employed by firms in the upper echelons of the fashion hierarchy and mix them with distribution and sales strategies typical of the discount segment. On the contrary, brands from the higher ranks of fashion should seek to engage in collaborative collections with respected, high style, budget and discount labels, preferably operating on fast fashion models. These campaigns produce a legitimate space for luxury labels to break with the austerity marketing definitive of their segment, which serves to maximize Willingness To Pay and therefore profit margins, while minimizing exposure, and therefore profitability. By descending to the lower market consumer many luxury brands will gain much needed recognition and enhance the esteem for their principle collections by offering a small taste of their value proposition, which is consistent with their brand ethos yet accessible without compromising its exclusivity. Fast fashion business models, especially the collaborative capsule collections, have recontextualized the value systems that have maintained the façades of brand status in the fashion industry for decades. As both name and image are now subject to the challenges of a well-informed consumer audience that has been empowered with the ability to produce and distribute their own trends in fashion, corporate organizations, both high and low, would do well to engage every section of the market lest they be deposed due to overconcentration in a single sector that is suddenly overrun by rapid market changes.

Brand prominence is beneficial for fashion labels seeking saturation and popularity more than esteem. Therefore brands with these agendas should include explicit brand identification conspicuously about the outer surface of their T-shirts. This advice is given with the caveat that this profitability enjoys a limited timespan after which the brand's cachet is subject to become bankrupt. It should also be acknowledged that oversaturation under these strategies is likely to accelerate the bankruptcy process if an excess of non-targeted consumers engages the brand, such as older audiences or groups from socially deviant fringe cultural movements or if the brand and its products, though popular, are found to be vulgar or in bad taste.