

The Shadow of History on the Globalisation Strategy of Luxury Heritage Fashion Brands': Case study of Burberry and Aquascutum During the 'Cool Britannia' and 'Creative Britain' Era.

Abstract

With the trend of younger consumers in the luxury market, an increasing number of luxury brands are turning their attention to the demands of the younger generation. Facing such a dynamic market environment, heritage luxury brands are in need of exploring how to find a balance between their traditions and the preferences of young consumers. Research into luxury marketing has examined the efforts of various brands and analysed their effectiveness, acknowledging the importance of cultural capital in the management of luxury brands. However, due to the unique heritage and innovative needs of certain established luxury brands, it remains crucial to study their historical trajectories and how they interact with the broader cultural context that has not been considered as 'mainstream' before. This developmental paper emphasises the transformation of brand culture into a form of capital within the luxury sector and highlights the significance of the historical paths of two quintessentially British luxury brands during the era of British subcultural development. It also proposes that historical analysis will play a pivotal role in this research and guide the future work for heritage brands in international markets, such as in China.

Keywords: Luxury, branding, culture capital, subculture, historical analysis

Word count: 1442

1. Introduction

The focus on the cultural and creative industries has boosted the UK's creative industry in fashion, design, music, gaming, and overall national brand image from a governmental level. The creative industry has received systematic support from the government.

If 'culture' is defined as a generalisation of people's lifestyles and habitus, then it is not only the royal culture that makes up British culture, but all the music, subcultures, and fashion brought about by class rebellion, all represented by Britishness. Luxury goods are carriers of meanings hence the buying is more about a cultural behaviour in this sense (Belk, 1988; Gurzki and Woisetschläger, 2016). Consumers are increasingly motivated to acquire these fashion collections in order to gain objectified cultural capital, which in turn enhances their social status, sense of belonging, and symbolic distinction.

Changing contexts for the luxury fashion brands and how luxury brands can maintain the impacts to the diverse consumer body, such a context change has led to a broader need for culture investigation, especially understanding of the cultural context of luxury brands (Chandon, Laurent and Valette-Florence, 2016).

To constantly cast impacts on new market demand, the heritage brands need to shift focus from understanding the generation's intention to purchase to the emerging subculture, and even in different contexts due to globalisation trends. The formative environment shaped by the era can have a lasting impact on an individual, influencing their behaviour and, consequently, their consumption patterns (Shin, Eastman and Li, 2022). Young people from different eras and cultural backgrounds, influenced by their respective environments, develop distinct demands and expectations towards luxury brands. This research asks the question: How can Heritage Luxury Fashion Brands embody coolness as a form of cultural capital throughout time and globally?

2. Brief overview of literature

2.1 Luxury branding in changing market

Researchers have explored the consumption motivations of young consumers, such as those observed by Giovannini, Xu and Thomas (2015), which include typical luxury purchasing motivations such as the need for a shopping environment experience, status needs, and

celebrity influence. Some articles have highlighted more specific strategies for adapting traditions to emerging demands, such as extending the consumption environment to virtual settings and platforms, integrating social media and entertainment (Shin, Eastman and Li, 2022), with celebrity effects also focusing on street culture, such as with hip-hop stars (de Burgh-Woodman, 2020). Among which, researchers also have investigated significant roles of coolness played in the marketing strategy of brands and identify construction of the brands (Warren et al, 2019).

2.2 Culture, Subculture, and Culture Capital theory

According to Beckerleg (2014), culture is perceived as what constitutes the daily lives of a given group of people. These people's daily lives involve the values, mores, traditions, and essential laws that guide how they live their daily lives. Culture is considered to consist of patterns that are explicit and implicit in symbols. Culture constitutes the exceptional achievements of human groups. Culture includes the embodiments in artefacts, which are the critical centre of culture and constitute the tradition that the people are known to practice.

Culture is an essential element that can play a huge role in dividing people (Chan. 2010). It is on this basis of the divisive nature of culture, that societies considered to be complex tend to have multiple subgroups as well as subcultures. In these subgroups and subcultures, consistency of struggles that groups engage in thump the legitimacy of their adopted behaviours, lifestyle, and values against a culture that is perceived to be dominant in the region. In most cases, it is often perceived that a dominant culture does utilise culture as a tool for making their dominance legitimate, giving them an upper hand in controlling the strata that are perceived to be subordinate.

The concept of cultural capital, introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, offered a powerful framework for understanding how social distinction is reproduced through seemingly non-economic resources such as knowledge, taste, and cultural competence. Defined as a form of capital rooted in symbolic and aesthetic value, cultural capital enables individuals to signal their social positioning through practices and preferences (Bourdieu, 1984). There are three states of cultural capital, embodied, institutionalised and objectified.

Bourdieu (1984) conceptualises the embodied state as a mode of capital acquired through an extensive process of internalisation and pedagogical labour, necessitating personal investment over time by the individual. For example, bodybuilding or receiving suntan. The

institutionalised state is received in the form of academic qualification and recognition of cultural competence. Objects can serve as carriers of symbolic meaning, and when such meanings are embedded in tangible forms, such as artworks, fashion garments and houses, they take the form of objectified cultural capital. This materialisation of culture represents one of the three states of cultural capital outlined by Bourdieu (1984). Objectified cultural capital can be appropriated by agents such as individuals or social actors, who use these cultural goods to demonstrate taste, acquire recognition, and ultimately gain access to social advantage or elevated class status. However, in order to activate the value of objectified capital, the individual must also possess the embodied competence to interpret or use these objects meaningfully. These signals need to be defined by a rather large group of people or institutionalised to make these signals salient as status markers.

Research methods

This study examines Burberry and Aquascutum as two case studies within the development of fashion and creative industries during the ‘Cool Britannia’ era in the 1990s, highlighting their parallel yet distinctive contributions to the global fashion market. Both brands originated in Britain, embody rich historical narratives, and have come to represent British luxury fashion through their significant cultural capital. This research employs historical methods to examine the branding strategies and their implications for both brands before and after this key historical period.

Content analysis, defined as a systematic method of quantifying phenomena (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008), has been selected due to its suitability for observing the consequences and reflecting the changes in branding during the period. This method will be used to analyse data collected from authoritative fashion magazines, brand reports, and books. The abductive method will be used, first to conduct open coding of the text and images in the data. These will then be classified against cultural capital theory. The codes will be organised according to the timeline for each case, then visualised in a coordinate system to compare the degree of cultural embodiment of the two brands across different historical periods. Specific triggers identified in the cases will be analysed to answer the research question.

Initial findings and conclusions

The emergence of “潮人 Chao-Ren” (Trendsetters) in the 1970s–1980s Hong Kong exemplified the stylistic hybridity produced in this setting. These youth subcultures drew upon British and Japanese influences, fusing Mod-influenced clean silhouettes, blazers, and Chelsea boots with local pop-cultural aesthetics. Mainland Chinese youth, increasingly exposed to Hong Kong media in the reform era, began incorporating these styles into their self-presentations. However, cultural interpretation does not always bring the desired outcome beyond the UK. A semiotic challenge emerged nearly two decades later with the unveiling of the "TB" monogram under Riccardo Tisci in 2018, who is also an Italian fashion designer. The monogram was designed by Peter Saville, inspired and developed from archival sources and intended to honour the brand's founder, Thomas Burberry (Vogue, 2018). The TB monogram elicited similar critical responses to those that accompanied Roberto Menichetti's design. In the global consumer markets, especially in one of Burberry's important markets like China, the initials "TB" sparked confusion and unintended associations on social media. Among Chinese luxury consumers, the monogram was widely interpreted jokingly as visually or phonetically reminiscent of "TaoBao", one of China's largest e-commerce platforms. In addition, in another important Burberry market in America, The TB could alternatively be mistaken for Tory Burch, a premium brand already known for its distinctive "T" monogram.

In future research, how the culture captive was perceived differently will be more systematically studied based on in the case study, showing the mechanism of local interpretation and how subculture could be embodied for heritage luxury brands in the UK to represent Britishness.

The results of this study could significantly contribute to the field of research on established luxury brands. Firstly, by systematically analysing the cultural embodiment of brands across the historical period, it provides deeper insights into how a brand's cultural capital is constructed and evolves. Secondly, this approach also reveals the dynamic relationships between brand strategies and consumer perceptions, offering historical support for brand management and market positioning strategies. Finally, this case study offers heritage luxury brands insights into maintaining brand vitality and serves as a reference for developing culturally adaptive branding strategies when entering new markets.

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