



Value-Creation Through Lifestyle Branding

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Abstract

Lifestyle is a pervasive word in the textile and fashion industry and in academia. There is no consensus as to a unified, sustained theory of lifestyle branding and operationalization tools for such a brand strategy. However, the social media surge since 2013 has increased the need to understand how brands can interact with consumers lifestyles portrayed online. This article discusses theoretical underpinnings of "lifestyle", in order for Fashion and non-fashion brands to provide relevant "lifestyle" content and allow value-creation for niche consumer lifestyles.

Introduction

If you type "lifestyle fashion branding" in Google more than 60 million results appear. It has been a buzzword in fashion media for the last fifteen years, but many in the textile and fashion industry consider it is an overused word. The rise of social media platforms since 2013, means that a wide array of consumer lifestyles is instantly available for brands online. Lifestyle "showcases" are much more accessible than 50 years ago when market research had to be conducted in order to discover attitudes, interests and behaviors of different consumers.

However, all this big data -images or texts- are only useful for brand strategy when relevant content for people's lives is presented. Consumers live "fragments" of different lifestyles simultaneously and according to moments of the day, week, month, year, so it is essential to provide tailored content for each individual's personal and social style, since "lifestyle" encompasses both dimensions. Various fashion platforms already successfully leverage specific content for niches. For instance, Yoox Net-a-porter launched a project titled "Hi_GuyZ!" focused on interests of Generation Z. It includes a section with a panel of state of mind/feelings composed of images, suggestions and words so that generation can get inspired and express culture and values [1].

Discussion

For brands, specifically non-fashion brands, entering the lifestyle terrain implies a higher competition level with any kind of self-expressive activity or self-expressive brand consumers adopt [2], so it is a harder challenge.

Gonzalo Brujó, Global CEO at Interbrand claims we are moving towards a world of "geobrand" localized by region, city or by neighborhoods, so brands must search for their communities, listen to them and think in terms of "microsegments" [1]. This overarching trends towards "communities of lifestyle" is evident in the surge of podcasts, specifically oriented towards "niches" for all kinds of tastes: fiction, humor, current news, drama, etc. [3]; and in video platforms such as TikTok. The streaming service Netflix in December 2017 revealed how it displays targeted artwork as backgrounds of film titles according to user's viewing habits and preferences. This exemplifies how technological personalization and customization targeted at customer's lifestyles is possible due to Internet and can be adopted by Fashion retail or wholesale brands by tracking customer profiles in brand apps, Instagram, or e-commerce websites, etc. The algorithm of technological platforms

suggests new content to users according to their interests and tastes, but the “type” of content still requires value-creation for it to be relevant, authentic and appealing for consumers.

However, what does “lifestyle” mean? How can Brand managers, in the textile and fashion sector benefit from adopting a lifestyle positioning in their strategies?

“Lifestyle” is clearly linked to consumption and people’s shopping behavior. It is different from tradition or customs. If we delve into its historic underpinnings, the lifestyles concept originated in the United States in the 1960s to improve market segmentation of social groups or individuals. Previous variables such as demographics: sex, age, address, income was not enough to explain the reason or motivation behind a purchase. People belonging to the same economic strata could display contradictory spending habits regarding other peers. Lifestyles therefore serve as a tool for brands to unify consumers across constricted marketing boundaries and to have a more global outreach. A teenager in Japan might have more in common regarding a shared interest, hobby or taste with another in the United States than with a teenager of the same country. For McCracken G [4] lifestyle allows to glimpse patterns of relationship otherwise unseen bringing together data that was treated dispersedly, and there was a strong conviction that this more global view could capture fundamental truths about consumption. Although other authors such as de Mooij (2004) claim that lifestyles are embedded in culture and act as an expression of culture and are more useful as a within-country criterion. For market research in the last half of the XX century, lifestyle was seen as a major behavioral concept for understanding, explaining and predicting consumer and business behavior (...) topics as mobility, leisure, social class, life cycle, status, conformity, mass, and the family as a consuming unit were all part of the “life-style fabric” (Lazer, 1963: 132, Cfr. Frank, Massy and Wind, 1972).

In any case, since the last decades of the XXth century, many studies have analyzed consumer lifestyles in the United States (VALS Survey, AIO), in France (COFREMCA, Sociovision) and around the globe – mostly Europe- using different parameters. Lifestyle was defined as psychographics – psychological attributes-, or as the sum of attitudes, interests and opinions. The common underpinning was the importance of the “value” behind the consumer’s behavior, the ‘worth’ that he/she gave to that product or service.

However, this array of quantitative research around lifestyles declined due to a lack of common theory and a lack of consensus as to how to measure or define the concept [5]. Brands such as Avon, Elle Magazine or Lancome have used such lifestyle research, and also global advertising agencies Ogilvy & Mather and research companies such as Nielsen or Euromonitor among others present ongoing reports on consumer lifestyles (Kahle and Valette-Florence, 2012). Social media has enhanced the availability and importance of lifestyles, and the need to research and better grasp the concept, and these authors claims testing is the best option [6].

In Spain, meca of fast fashion company Inditex, but also a hub for SMEs lifestyle companies many fashion communications agencies communicate around lifestyle: Notabene is “Making Lifestyle a Conversation”, Replica presents itself as a “lifestyle communications agency”, Equipo Singular and The Gallery Room both claim they are “specializing in lifestyle”. And other International strategic communication companies such as Newlink have a lifestyle division [7].

The fashion industry is an ideal match to use the lifestyle concept. Both are rooted into the social and cultural nature of humankind, and lifestyle becomes attractive for other FMCG or wholesale brands that wish to acquire a more “fashionable patina”. In addition, the lifestyle concept is elastic and flexible, and ties into the trend of humanizing a Brand, and the current surge of persona brands, where people become brands themselves.

We posit a wider lifestyle branding approach should be considered. It is not only about using an influencer to cater to a specific lifestyle, i.e. taste, interest, attitude, etc. Lifestyle is an elastic concept suitable for the ephemeral context of consumption but at the same time a call for authenticity, of the ‘genuine’. For McCracken G [4] the most powerfully appealing aspect of lifestyle is it allows to conceive consumption as an “interrelated patterned phenomenon”. ‘Lifestyle’ is a way of dealing with concepts such as social class and personality, of capturing ethnographic detail without having to embrace the conceptual and operational problems of these paradigms. The lifestyle idea “allows to glimpse patterns of relationship otherwise unseen” [4].

Conclusion

Some Textile and Fashion brands might only use lifestyle imagery in their advertising and as an “appearance”, for product innovation or for testing different retail channels and others might find it better to become a lifestyle brand per se. No unique and shared lifestyle branding theory exists. Although in the case of the later the Interbrand Brand Glossary [8] provides some clarity: “A Lifestyle brand [...] is a brand targeted at an audience based on how they live, and it identifies itself with their interests and activities, wants and needs, likes and dislikes, attitudes, consumption, and usage patterns. The attributes of a lifestyle brand are tailored to specific audiences in order to achieve early adoption and sustained use”.

A high executive at Google Spain mentions that many Fashion brands are not taking full advantage of the insights available through on line consumer behavior and how in the fashion industry, communications strategies are very generic when in fact there are abundant tools available online for companies to tailor their communications to specific customers. A recent Mintel report claims global consumer trends such as “wellbeing, surroundings, rights, experiences, value, identity and technology” [9], are fine but these need to be tailored to a geo-local context in order to help

consumers decide what to buy, watch, do or eat in their different geographic and local time frames.

Above all gaining insight into the theoretical underpinnings of the lifestyles concept might allow SME fashion brands, FMCG and wholesale brands to better tailor their communication strategies to their customer niche. Consumer lifestyles provide an oasis of content to increase brand value and better brand positioning. Rather than being only data-driven it is about creating content for each pool of consumers: their interests, tastes, likes and dislikes, attitudes, behaviors even their unknown desires. In addition, lifestyle includes personal style as well as social style. It is about a shared interpretation, a set of values in common and patterns of consumption that reflect them.

Lifestyle branding has close links to relationship, content and niche marketing, as well as Brand authenticity. After all branding is more about relationships, about the “added-value” that explains the true relationship between a company and a customer, and what makes a brand different from a commodity. How should this lifestyle ‘value’ be created and shared by companies/brands and what does it mean for each consumer?

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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