

Compare and contrast the stores of two luxury brands, Burberry and Prada

Introduction

The utility of brand identity in modern enterprise is quickly evolving beyond the push-based advertising agenda of a fragmented and geographically distributed brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005). As marketers identify and employ compelling messages in the definition and architecture of their brand identity, consumers are challenged to assess, interpret, and engage with these innovative characteristics (Loureiro et al., 2014). For luxury fashion retailers, the brand identity is a composite of both the marketing enterprise and the retail experience, aligning consumer perceptions with a robust and transparent spectrum of identifying characteristics that unify the brand message and identity (Gentile et al., 2007). In an effort to differentiate in the highly competitive luxury marketplace, retailers are increasingly relying upon a range of aesthetic and identity-specific characteristics within their retail outlets to manifest a unique and compelling experience (Maxwell, 2016). The following sections will compare and contrast the retail outlet strategies of two market leading luxury brands, Burberry and Prada, in order to identify particular traits and characteristics that are conducive to competitive advantage and demand-enhancing outcomes.

Market Position

The form, function, and identity of the luxury store represents the 'locus' of an organisational focus, unifying the perspectives of stakeholders within a singular establishment that transcends the multi-channel marketing strategy of a given brand (Doyle et al., 2008, p. 553). Whilst many retailers in the fashion industry have adopted more generic retail standards, Moore et al. (2010) contest that the luxury retailer is differentiated by the strength, heritage, and reputation of their brand. From quality to pricing and exclusivity, the luxury agenda is driven by a brand DNA that is based on prestige, image, and superiority in an industry in which luxury fashion is increasingly commodified and generalised (Moore et al., 2010). For brands like Prada, for example, King (2014) observes a relationally-centred marketing message that is based upon surprise and elegance, instilling continuity and high status messages in each consumer exchange. With a heritage steeped in luxury fashion, Burberry leverages more than 160 years of status and fashion

innovation to draw distinction between its brand and other competitors, legitimising its luxury status through historic justification of its quality and market position (Burberry, 2016)

The distinction between status and quality in the luxury fashion market is of critical importance to companies like Burberry and Prada who are objectifying their products within the context of consumer-specific marketing campaigns. 'High involvement shopping', an experiential process described by Wu et al. (2015, p. 299) relies upon the development of an identity-based alliance between the consumer and the brand. Celebrity status, for example, at Prada has created an alliance between the brand and a new generation of millennial consumers as reputation and elitist characteristics drive new styles and demand perspectives (Dacre, 2016). This form of transition, however, is challenging, as Prada has remained an 'icon of global wealth' for generations by producing consistent, predictable, and legacy styles for affluent, typically older consumers (Halzack, 2015, p. 1). Transitioning its brand DNA towards a more dynamic representation of identity and value ultimately requires an alliance between the marketing communications channels and the retail establishment, whereby in-store replication of iconic models from recent fashion shows or Prada-sponsored events are compelling new consumer interest (Carreon, 2011; Dacre, 2016).

At the foundation of the modern Burberry brand is a commitment to digital enterprise, whereby targeting and positioning initiatives were based upon consumer expectations and values amongst specific populations (Swire, 2014). By focusing on youthful, born-digital consumers and modernising both the on and offline store experiences, Burberry has emphasised a paradigm of individuality, whereby distinctive fashions overshadow mass production and commodification (Swire, 2014). As Burberry has committed to an individualised experience, Doyle et al. (2008) challenge that in order to differentiate from other luxury retailers and store experiences, there must be an active investment in consumer-centred service throughout the full scope of the shopping process. From the lighting and store aesthetics to the service providers and in-store communication, it is this transcendence of individuality that allows Burberry to attract luxury fashion consumers and retain their interest in spite of limited stock and selective clothing styles. Predicated upon what Nobbs et al. (2012, p. 925) characterise as a 'strategic purpose', it is this

continuity between Burberry's marketing messages and its in-store aesthetic that serves as a conduit or unifying representation of brand 'artefacts' and heritage values in physical form.

Brand Messaging

Underscoring the core characteristics of an effective brand messaging campaign are a commitment to image-specific factors that influence brand identity and consumer perceptions of the brand's values, personality, and identifying characteristics (Oliveira-Castro et al., 2008). Burberry, for example, has created a model for seamless integration between on and offline shopping catalogues, by replicating the digital experience within its flagship retail outlet on London's Regent Street (Caroline, 2014). The strategy is based upon the realisation of continuity throughout the brand's marketing presence, ensuring that on and offline experiences are complementary and consistent (Caroline, 2014). Driven by in-store technology that complements the on-the-rack aesthetics of the Burberry product, consumers are presented with images and lighting characteristics that complement the online browsing experience, transcending the gap between physical and virtual in order to enhance consumer experience and self-identification (Patel, 2013). Ultimately, such efforts mirror the 2004 missteps (non-functioning or inconsistent technology) of Prada to introduce experimental shopping experiences using RFID tags and in-store digitisation of fashion trends (Lindsay, 2004). Specifically, the integration of RFID tags into clothing at Burberry retail outlets creates interactive environments in which consumers select clothing items and then manipulate their own environment on the basis of these selections, personalising the shopping process and aligning self-identification with the images and personas displayed throughout the retail screens and brand message (Patel, 2013).

Within the luxury retail format, Manlow and Nobbs (2013) observe several trends that transcend brand-specific environments including an emphasis on marketing communications, a relational and individual focus, and an enterprise agenda (e.g. sales, product access, location-specific advantages). For this reason, site-specific and in-store characteristics affect the reputational capital of a given retailer, potentially enhancing or diluting the brand message in accordance with consumer perspectives and symbolic representations of the store identity (Manlow and Nobbs, 2013). In fact, evidence from an international survey of luxury fashion retailers by Arrigo (2015) revealed that location-specific forces have significant identification

implications for brand messaging and consumer perceptions of brand quality, reputation, and status. For this reason, generic storefronts and commodified retail establishments have the potential to dilute brand value and consumer perspectives, leading to a conflict of messaging and identity as companies strive to diversify their market position (Arrigo, 2015). Burberry, in direct contrast to such diversification strategies, has narrowed not only its in-store selection, but its store position throughout the global marketplace in order to create a dimension of exclusivity that limits consumer access and enhances the experiential tenets of in-store shopping.

Whilst Prada has failed to achieve the location-based exclusivity of the Burberry retail establishments, the company has utilised its in-store marketing and aesthetics to manifest conditions of exclusivity and consumer-centred experiences. Citing an open-format, low-marketing presence, Fiore (2010) observes a London-based Prada flagship store with low product per square metre features, a prestige-based pricing strategy, a non-descript storefront, and selective in-store vignettes. The low density strategy is designed to construct a sense of individuality and personalisation within a retail enterprise that is typified by volume-based sales and crowded consumer environments (Fiore, 2010). By actively minimising the number of displays, number of products, and number of styles, Prada prioritises iconic fashion and exploratory, rather than reactive or tactical consumer behaviour. It is this form of selective interaction between the brand and the consumer that typifies the Prada brand identity and escalates a high-cost fashion icon to an in-demand market leader in both on and offline retail consumerism (RDB, 2015).

Contrast Between Brands

In order to target specific consumer populations, Burberry has utilised its in-store culture and service experiences to reflect its ideal position for a youthful, discerning, and custom-centred consumer (Swire, 2014). Sales outcomes include significant retail growth as consumers link the on and offline experiences, pursuing distinctive styles that are individualised via online channels and then customised and sampled at the store level (Swire, 2014). Prada, alternatively, has relied heavily upon reputational capital that is being driven by celebrity engagement, market status, and international positioning as the brand continues to expand its identity and presence throughout both traditional (e.g. older, affluent, experienced) and emergent (e.g. millennial, new money,

individual) markets (Halzack, 2015). Within the Burberry store, the lack of product is as important as the access to particular styles and in-the-moment displays, creating access hurdles for discerning consumers that recognise the advantages of selective and personalised shopping experiences. For Prada, iconic aesthetics ranging from a black and white checked floor to stark white walls and simplified displays are indicative of selective offerings and in-demand products at a luxury-store premium price (Carreon, 2011; RDB, 2015). However, whereas Burberry is driven by an innovative concept of worn-by-design, Prada has adopted a designed-for-sale approach, creating a stark differentiation in the nature of the in-store consumer experience and the underlying strategies being employed at each of these luxury retailers.

The strategic representation of individuality within the Burberry retail strategy achieves what Moore et al. (2010) have identified as a critical bridge between consumer expectations and distinctive brand characteristics and features, eliminating commodity characteristics in favour of selective, personalised experiences. It is this formal exclusivity that allows luxury retail establishments to characterise the core values and root agenda of the brand, selectively representing the best features and strengths of the brand without the noise and interference of outside environments (Nobbs et al., 2012). In contrast, however, Prada has relied heavily upon its exclusivity and identity within the global community to present a very opulent and indulgent brand image, but to create a form of arm's-length gap between the consumer and the product. Elevated in-store shelving, for example, is used to position purses and handbags out of consumer reach, manifesting an artistic, on-display aesthetic, but limiting consumer access and compelling employee-consumer interactions. Burberry, alternatively, utilises images of target consumers to represent its brand identity and highlight its accessibility to a broad, diverse, and individualistic population of consumers within its retail stores. This distinction ultimately reflects a broader reputational fissure between these two companies, and as a result, creates competitive variations that are likely to affect long term growth and sales potential.

Recommendations

Each of these retailers has developed a robust reputation and identity based upon the exclusivity of luxury fashion retailing. However, whilst Prada has traditionally marketed to older, more

affluent, urban consumers, Burberry has developed an in and out of store campaign to attract younger, fashion-savvy consumers with an individualised spirit and agenda. The selectivity of in-store stock, for example, compels Burberry shoppers to actively engage in the shopping process or risk lost styles and bespoke products that are likely to be consumed by other individuals. Prada has offered equally exclusive product lines; however, elects to architect its identity and characteristics on the basis of celebrity status and identity, a strategy that may ultimately dilute the individualisation of the products and accessories. From a store-based perspective, each of these retailers has been extremely successful; however, there are particular characteristics observed in this analysis that can be utilised more effectively in order to stimulate sales and enhance the brand-consumer alliance throughout the multi-channel shopping experience:

Recommendation 1: Experiential Retailing Must be Consumer-Driven: The retailing experience is personal; and therefore, it cannot be commodified. Consumers must actively engage in their own experiential outcomes by selecting in-store resources (e.g. digital connections, personalisation stations, store divisions) that are attractive and compelling. This involves environments that encourage individuality and self-customisation of the shopping experience.

Recommendation 2: Environmental Features Should be Identity-Forming: The brand-consumer alliance is conditioned by the brand identity and its intersection with consumer values and self-identification. Therefore, any luxury fashion retailing experience should be identity-forming within the context of this unified perspective. Consumers should immerse themselves within the brand through interactive, value-specific experiences within the retail environment.

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