

COLUMNS

5 forces behind luxury fashion's transformation

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Most exciting creations today combine luxury reference points with the raw, visceral nature of street culture. This, of course, is not new.

Ever since the 1968 Paris riots, Yves Saint Laurent took what he witnessed on the streets of Paris and filtered it through his own high-end vision.

Vivienne Westwood and her high-fashion punk came next, followed by Raf Simmons, Hedi Slimane and others.

What makes the mix of the opulent and the raw attention-worthy is that it dismantles conceptions about luxury design.

Speed of feed

Modern luxury is today firmly placed beyond any traditional categorizations, and that is a good thing.

The worlds' collision creates a conundrum for luxury strategy, which now needs to be smarter than ever. It cannot be just about cultural appropriation think Valentino's cornrows' fiasco from last year. It needs to appreciate, and participate in, the culture from which it borrows.

Similarly, focus on mere aesthetics will not get a brand very far in the modern cultural context.

To stand apart and successfully compete, brands need a clear and strong brand identity. This identity needs to move at the speed of social feed.

Contemporary luxury strategy is about creating modern culture by combining identity, speed and community. Here are five forces that emerged in the post-luxury, post-street categorization that inform it:

Limited Edition: Modern luxury consumers are all about having experiences, information and products that no one else has.

Flair for the obscure, reflecting a taste meticulously cultivated and nurtured with a collector-like obsession, is

luxury's new currency.

To be known by a small, elite group of fans both builds a brand's equity and ensures that a brand is lucrative in the long run.

Creative networks: For the longest time, editors, critics and brand managers working at the handful of conglomerates that control the industry built the fashion brands. Now, fans build the brands.

To succeed, brands need to simultaneously build upon what is already out there and to use their existing networks be it Instagram, WeChat, a local nightclub or a favorite DJ to test and spread their ideas.

Clothes, not fashion: Cool is not what critics tell you it is. It is what the street demonstrates.

Successful brands are built through their products, designed specifically and uniquely to be worn by the end customer.

This is a simultaneous enforcement and subversion of luxury: just think Buscemi, which projects a kind of opulence that seems straight out of the Dolce & Gabbana circa 1994 playbook, but it delivers it in a thoroughly wearable way.

The culture of #Revolution: Protest is the prevalent cultural attitude circa 2017 and beyond.

Everyone from Zara to Dior encourages us to rebel against something or, at least, to look like we do.

It is the New York L subway train's aesthetics of angst, made appealing globally to fit the mood of political and social unrest.

The language of reference: Streetwear fans know that many of the greatest designs to ever be seen on a T-shirt, pair of sneakers or a hoodie were borrowed from outside the industry.

Mining the wider culture for commercial purposes is not new. Think back to Carven's appropriation of katakana, Stussy's linked "S" logo or, more recently, Gosha Rubchinskiy and Junya Watanabe's use of Cyrillic. The result is fashion that doubles as cultural commentary.

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