# Chapter 41
# The Relationship between Fast Fashion and Luxury Brands:
## An Exploratory Study in the UK Market

**Cesare Amatulli**
*University of Bari, Italy*

**Vincenzo Speciale**
*LUISS Guido Carli University, Italy*

**Antonio Mileti**
*University of Salento, Italy*

**Gianluigi Guido**
*University of Salento, Italy*

## ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores how the luxury sector has been affected by the fast fashion brands in the UK market. In particular, this chapter examines the effects of fast fashion activity on luxury brands and more specifically on how the marketing strategies of luxury brands have been drawn to the fast fashion model. Moreover, it analyzes how co-branding collaborations between luxury and fast fashion brands have positively affected consumer' perception of the luxury brands. The chapter is based on a theoretical review and two studies. Results provide insights for the international fashion business, showing how luxury fashion brands lean towards the fast fashion model and how co-branding collaborations between luxury and fast fashion brands are positive for luxury brands in terms of customer perception.*

## INTRODUCTION

Walking from London's Knightsbridge up to Old Bond Street, the shop windows of Burberry, Hermès, Louis Vuitton, and Gucci show their latest creations of refined quality materials and unique craftsmanship. Continuing across Oxford Street up to Carnaby Street, one notes pretty much the same designs at the trendy showcases of H&M, Zara, Top Shop, and Forever 21, although at significantly lower prices and quality. Luxury brands evoke rarity, heritage of craftsmanship, exclusivity, premium pricing, and superior quality (Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008). By contrast, fast fashion ensures permanent assortment rotation, low prices, and accessible variety, but with a great aesthetic content, which derives from those brands' ability to imitate the latest luxury fashion brand catwalk offerings (Byun & Sternquist, 2008; Gabrielli, Baghi, & Codeluppi, 2013). However, today it is not uncommon

to find people wearing together shoes from Gucci, jeans from Zara, sunglasses from Dior, shirts from H&M, and bags from Louis Vuitton. Even high-end consumers, typically loyal to luxury brands, are not afraid of such an eclectic mix of fashion and luxury brands (Atwal et al., 2010). The evolution of a mass class of wealthy people and the rapid growth of the Internet have allowed consumers to "trade upwards" and purchase luxury items, mixing these luxury products with fast fashion ones, in a way that seems to lead to the so called "democratisation of luxury" (Okonkwo, 2009). The new fast fashion brands have become competitors of luxury brands through the introduction of limited-edition products, celebrity endorsement, high advertisement expenditure, and store openings in prestige retail locations. Differentiating themselves is becoming extremely important for luxury companies, as they have witnessed great changes from their consumers. Indeed, luxury companies are now considering mass brands as a threat.

However, where are the boundaries between luxury and fast fashion brands? Have luxury fashion brands pivoted towards the fast fashion model? Does co-branding collaboration between luxury and fast fashion brands positively affect consumer perception of the luxury brand? This chapter explores the reactions that fast fashion marketing and merchandising strategies have generated in luxury fashion brands, and more specifically, how luxury brands have tended towards the fast fashion model. Moreover, the chapter also explores how co-branding collaboration between luxury and fast fashion brands has positively affected consumer perception of luxury brands.

The study focuses on the British fashion market, which represents more than 70 per cent of the new luxury brands launched over the last fifteen years (Okonkwo, 2007), and which continuously influences design and fashion styles (British Fashion Council, 2009). The British fashion influence has been propelled by the rise of new designer brands and chains such as Vivienne Westwood, Paul Smith, Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen, and Alice Temperley and the re-emergence of old luxury brands like Burberry and Mulberry (British Fashion Council, 2009). High levels of creativity and innovation of product design along with solid entrepreneurial skills in retail and brand management are the keys of success of these luxury brands.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### Luxury Fashion

A luxury brand can be considered a "coherent system of excellence", a harmonious universe of values, and a perfect system of attributes (Corbellini & Saviolo, 2009). Luxury brands evoke exclusivity, have a well-known brand identity, enjoy high brand awareness and perceived quality, and retain high sales levels and customer loyalty (Phau & Prendergast, 2000). Indeed, a luxury brand can be defined as the sum of feelings and perceptions people have when in contact with a particular company and its products (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008). Therefore, a luxury company brand lives in consumers' mind and its success or failure is based on how it is positioned in the consumer's mind (Parrott, Danbury & Kanthavanich, 2015). Indeed, the creation of brand value is crucial in luxury marketing activities; brand value refers to brand equity, which is an indispensable intangible asset for luxury companies and translates into revenues. The brand value is also relevant to consumers, who achieve an immeasurable level of satisfaction from luxury fashion products. The most visible and symbolic aspect of a luxury fashion brand is the brand name (Okonkwo, 2007); this is due to the fact that it is the "brand name" or "brand logo" that enchants consumers to a brand and generates a relationship between them and their chosen

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