

The Reasons on the Successful Phenomenon of Niche Brand Commercialization

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Abstract. With the development of social and spiritual civilization, people begin to pursue designs that are different from commercial and popular ones, and more niche clothing brands begin to rise with their unique cultural backgrounds and style techniques, and people become more and more tolerant of diversified clothing. Among them, Maison Margiela, as a representative of niche clothing brands, demonstrates its change in brand marketing strategy and visual innovation. The purpose of this study was to research the reasons for the commercial success of niche clothing brands. The essay took Maison Margiela as a research case and analyzed all the information and theoretical knowledge of the brand in recent years, and the final results were as followings: firstly, the design of the brand's products itself affects brand recognition, and it emphasizes the brand's characteristics and innovates visually and technologically. Secondly, brand marketing has an impact on brand recognition and should be emphasized as an innovative strategy to increase exposure and expand brand influence through social media or cooperation with celebrities. Finally, offline marketing is also an important part of the brand, as store design and environment can enhance the brand's impression, attract consumers to learn about the brand, and increase its value.

Keywords: Brand design, Brand marketing strategy, Brand image.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

With the ongoing increase in people's quality of life, customers' clothing choices are no longer centered on wearing requirements. Nowadays, with the ongoing increase in people's quality of life, customers' clothing choices are no longer centered on wearing requirements. On the other hand, with the popularity of social networks, more and more people are beginning to pay attention to niche brands, which are attracting an increasing number of consumers with their unique design, exceptional materials, and high-quality after-sales support. The growing popularity of niche clothing companies is due in part to the improved quality of their products and services and in part to the emergence of the Internet. Many niche firms can use social media and other methods to advertise their products, making it easier for them to communicate with customers.

The niche design of clothing is an inevitable trend when material and spiritual civilizations reach a certain degree of prosperity. With the improvement of productivity, after the overall clothing needs of society are fully satisfied, people start to look for symbolic features that distinguish them from others, and niche design is the phenomenon of personalized symbols that distinguish them from the masses [1]. "Niche" is the label of style; it is the precise positioning of the consumer group; it does not equal the commercial disadvantage; countless niche brands and niche demand together may gradually replace the previous mass market, therefore having a profound impact on the fashion trend [1].

At the start of the twenty-first century, most niche brand products were a direct representation of the brand's appeal, interpreting the original story or aim of the brand's design. The store's taste reflects the brand's own style and positioning; whether the brand's style is simple art or old luxury, the performance is highly intuitive. However, at the time, this type of design was more avant-garde and related more to the designer's own notion, which was not always accepted by the general public in terms of aesthetics and expression meaning. This has also resulted in the vast majority of niche brands in the market, which is not significant.

Academics, learning, and discussing different types of niche brands have been an uninterrupted topic. For example, based on the research object of "subculture", Yang Ziwei examines what changes and innovations current apparel brands have made in their design and communication strategies in order to increase their brand value and attract young consumers [2].

Zhao Xuejing took "minimalist clothing brand" as the research object and studied the problem of "positioning and design strategy guidance in the process of clothing brand development" [3]. Taking "Ethnic Trend Clothing" as the research object, Yu discusses the issue of "providing correct creative concepts and unique Chinese creative thinking for the innovative design of ethnic trend clothing with the background of Chinese classical aesthetics" [4].

1.2. Research Gap

Although there are many studies on traditional niche brands of apparel types, more and more traditional niche brands have been gradually accepted and liked by the public as niche apparel brands represented by Maison Margiela are trying to adapt to the new trend and development in recent years and have begun to conduct the transformation of marketing mode. However, regardless of which of their strategic policies have been recognized by the public, there is still a gap in academic research in this area. However, this aspect is rarely studied directly. A related research question was set up: the reasons for the success of the commercialization of the Maison Margiela brand. The aim of the research is to discover what factors influence brand value. The significance of studying this question is to provide reference and value for more traditional niche brands that want to transform in the future.

1.3. Fill The Gap

In order to solve the research problem of this dissertation, this research will take Maison Margiela as the object of research, searching the brand information of Maison Margiela, combining the theories related to brand equity, and drawing important conclusions to further explore exactly which strategic policies make it successful. And based on the results of the analysis, it will give more reasonable opinions and recommendations.

2. Case Description

Maison Margiela is a fashion label founded in 1988 by Belgian designer Martin Margiela. Under the direction of Martin Margiela, the brand has made many unique and innovative design contributions, incorporating unconventional elements, anti-fashion concepts, and repurposing techniques into its designs. Showcasing his creative designs by cutting, stretching, reconstructing, and transforming garments, Martin Margiela's influence on the fashion world lies in his groundbreaking designs and redefinition of haute couture.

Martin Margiela, after founding the brand, continued to design clothing that was very much a leader for the industry; however, he slowly grew tired of the fast pace of the fashion industry and the endless anticipation of new collections, and the massive pressure made him decide to step down from his work related to the brand in 2009 [5]. After he stepped down, the brand was designed by a team for many years, and Maison Martin Margiela was renamed Maison Margiela [5]. To know that a brand without a soul figure is a very terrible thing, Maison Margiela's style was originally set by Margiela, but he chose to quit. As can be imagined, this is not enough to make ends meet in the market turnover. In the face of this situation, or worse, if you want to continue the brand market, then Maison Margiela needs to make appropriate changes.

Maison Margiela and Martin Margiela are like Apple and Steve Jobs. Steve Jobs was one of the founders of Apple, and he played a crucial role in the evolution of the company. He had a profound impact on Apple's technology and product design, and his departure has had an impact on Apple's technology and product design. However, since Jobs' death, even though the products have gone through a thousand changes, Apple has maintained the original design concept and visual style and has made great innovations and advances in technology. Apple has introduced many new products

and technologies since the death of Steve Jobs, such as the Apple Watch, AirPods, Face ID, iCloud, and many more. Overall, although the departure of Steve Jobs has had an impact on Apple's technology and product design, Apple still remains at the forefront of technology and continues to introduce new products and technologies.

Several studies have shown that employing design concepts, techniques, and innovation can help solve this challenge. As a result, they evaluated Maison Margiela's design philosophy and whether the strategic policy was appropriate for the market at the time.

Maison Margiela's choice of black, white, and gray as its brand colors has been around for some time since its inception. However, this color choice reflects the brand's quest for being classic, neutral, and seasonless, making the brand's image more enduring and classic. Under the deconstructed design language, Maison Margiela's observation and mastery of color make white no longer monotonous but rather a symbol of free playfulness and non-definition, creating a sense of mystery and symbolism for the brand. In advertising and publicity, Maison Margiela often emphasizes anonymity, that is to say, it does not reveal the true identity of its products or models when presenting them. This anti-conventional approach to publicity creates a unique image for the brand and stimulates consumer curiosity and interest. Its brand visual style demonstrates characteristics such as non-traditional design and tailoring, anonymity, and innovative fashion showrooms compared to traditional fashion brands. This uniqueness differentiates the brand from its competitors and appeal to consumers who seek individuality, edginess, and innovative fashion.

For the total group, Only the Brave (OTB), the parent company that acquired Maison Margiela, is not in a hurry to make quick cash. As of 2019, in the 18 years since Margiela's acquisition, the brand has never made a profit [5]. Renzo Rosso says, "Every year it was me who provided the money to keep it alive [5]. I could have expanded it; however, I didn't execute that because the idea of Maison Margiela is to ensure scarcity and small sales [5]." (OTB was founded by Renzo Rosso, the president of Italian denim brand Diesel [5].) Maison Margiela did not really turn the corner commercially until 2014, when Renzo Rosso hired John Galliano as the new creative director of Maison Margiela, despite the controversy [6]. John Galliano and Margiela are both talented designers despite their different styles.

Renzo Rosso is proud to declare Maison Margiela "the diamond at the top of the pyramid" of the fashion business. As a result, the group's cautious approach to Maison Margiela has evolved into ambitious growth. New retail spaces, a presence in cosmetics, and direct-to-consumer e-commerce are projected to help the company achieve 400 million euros in revenue by 2024. The world's first Maison Margiela Café opens in Chengdu in June 2022, while the boutique concept store at Taikoo Li Ocean Express in Chengdu extends from 125 to 230 square meters. Soon after, the world's largest Maison Margiela flagship store will open in Shanghai's JC Mandarin Plaza. This demonstrates Maison Margiela's strong belief in and commitment to the Chinese market.

In terms of brand promotion, Maison Margiela has also adopted a more open strategy, not hired fixed brand ambassadors but invited Key Opinions Leaders in related fields to participate in brand activities and promotion. Since the opening, the wide range of social media screens and the constant flow of people on site have also demonstrated the effectiveness of this marketing strategy.

3. Analysis on The Problems

3.1. The Reasons on Brand and Product Design

As a unique fashion brand, Maison Margiela's products themselves are designed to reflect not only unique tailoring and remodeling techniques but also innovative and distinctive features in visual communication design. Through unique and innovative visual communication design, a brand can visually differentiate itself from other brands, stand out in the market with unique images and elements, and define the brand story [7]. Maison Margiela's products are often presented using unconventional and avant-garde imagery in visual communication mediums such as advertisements, promotional materials, and fashion shows. This includes the use of unusual filming and photography

techniques, the exploration of new visual effects and creative compositions, and the use of unusual modeling choices. This non-traditional approach to imagery allows Maison Margiela's campaigns and advertisements to stand out from other brands, enhancing the brand's identity and uniqueness.

As the aspect of visual communication, it can not only establish a specific image and personality for a brand, which could help to build brand image and shape consumer perception and awareness of the brand. But also helps to deepen the connection between consumers and brands, communicate specific messages to audiences more accurately, and build a sense of loyalty and brand recommendation [8].

Maison Margiela often interprets clothing and brands from an ambiguous point of view. They create a suspenseful and thought-provoking atmosphere through the use of metaphors, puns, and symbols. This unconventional visual expression triggers the viewer's thoughts and imagination while adding to the mystery and appeal of the product and brand. On the other side, in the digital new media context, unique and innovative design elements can stimulate consumers' interest and curiosity, triggering their emotional resonance and goodwill towards the brand and constantly expanding the outer edges of the concepts, with the emergence of a lot of new ideas for development. Maison Margiela's visual communication design is full of experimentation and innovation. They try to combine different media and art forms, such as fashion shows combined with performing arts and installations, as well as cross-border cooperation with artists, photographers, and directors. These experiments and innovative attempts not only bring new visual experiences to the brand but also convey a new way of perceiving and thinking about the products, further strengthening the brand's personality and uniqueness.

3.2. The Reasons on Brand Marketing

Maison Margiela also uses a range of brand marketing strategies to increase its visibility and awareness.

Maison Margiela, as a niche clothing brand, has increased its visibility and recognition by collaborating with some well-known fashion KOLs. For example, the brand has collaborated with some fashion bloggers and celebrities to showcase Maison Margiela's designs and products on social media and share their own favorites and recommendations about the brand. Through KOL collaborations, Maison Margiela is able to leverage the influence and fan base of these fashion opinion leaders to build consumer identification with the brand, prompting them to connect with the brand and increase exposure. That is due to the fact that positive word of mouth leads consumers to have a favorable attitude towards brands [9]. By collaborating with KOLs, brands are able to build word-of-mouth effects through their authentic product experiences and recommendations, thus increasing brand awareness [9]. Moreover, as experts or opinion leaders in a specific field, KOLs recommendations and opinions will have a greater impact on their fans, prompting them to build emotional resonance with the brand and increase their awareness of it.

Researchers also demonstrated the importance of the media and word-of-mouth (WOM). In the study "Co-branding of Apparel Brands in the Social Media Era", Shi Xue demonstrated that in the face of problems and challenges, as long as apparel brands utilize social media well and pay attention to design and strategy innovation, apparel brands can provide conditions for co-branding through the power of social media and then develop in a healthy way [10]. And in the study of the relationship between brand and WOM recommendation, Zhang Minxi demonstrated that consumers are used to collecting WOM information to guide their shopping decisions and that brand knowledge has a significant positive impact on WOM behavior, thus finding that maintaining consumers' WOM has become one of the most important marketing tasks for brands [11].

3.3. The Reasons on Brand Image

Maison Margiela markets its brand through its offline stores, utilizing store design, the overall environment, and displays to enhance brand perception.

Maison Margiela's stores are known for their unique design and out-of-the-box style. They focus on creativity and innovation in store design, using non-traditional materials, layouts, and décor to create a distinctive spatial ambience, thus providing an extraordinary shopping experience. Moreover, Maison Margiela's stores are dedicated to creating an experiential shopping environment by creating a unique atmosphere through elements such as music, light, and smell. They want consumers to feel the brand's creative spirit and unique artistic atmosphere in the stores, thus deepening their impression of the brand.

The design and decoration of the store are two of the most important factors in enhancing the brand's impression. A unique and consistent sense of branding is created through design styles, color palettes, and material choices that echo the brand's image and values. The exterior and interior of the store should fit with the brand's image, catch the eye, and leave a lasting impression on the customer. Through these in-store brand marketing strategies, Maison Margiela is able to enhance the brand impression, attract consumers to learn about and purchase the products, and develop a positive perception and identification with the brand.

At the same time, keeping the same identity for both online and offline is really important. Wang and Huang once demonstrated that the consistency of online and offline brand image significantly and positively affects the brand experience, which in turn positively affects the quality of retail brand relationships such as brand trust, word of mouth, and willingness to co-create value, with brand experience playing a key mediating role [12]. As well as in the "brand co-branded product attributes on consumer purchase intention" study, Yang and Qiao once demonstrated that brand co-branded products cannot be the sole pursuit of brand name effect but should be based on the emotional value perceived by consumers and other aspects of the value of the brand co-branding of the two sides of the suitability to be one of the fast-developing product marketing models [13].

4. Suggestion

4.1. Suggestion on Brand Value

In order to increase brand loyalty from the consumer, Maison Margiela can further enhance the brand value through the following visual communication:

First of all, Maison Margiela should conclude about how to design the logo of its brand. Maison Margiela's logo and identity can be an important visual element of the brand that is directly recognizable and associated with the brand, although Maison Margiela's logo details are shown in the different collections. Different collections are shown; however, it is still possible to innovate and transform the logo in the most significant way. Of course, the brand should maintain the consistency of the logo and signage; whether it is on store signage, advertising posters, or product packaging, the brand logo can be clearly displayed in order to strengthen the consumer's recognition and memory of the brand.

Secondly, through different multimedia media such as images, text or multimedia forms, the creative story of the brand, the design process or the source of inspiration behind the product can be displayed in the store, which can allow consumers to better understand and experience the brand's values and deeper meaning, and stimulate consumers' interest and curiosity.

Through these visual communication methods, Maison Margiela can further enhance the brand's visual identity and sense of creativity and artistry, thus increasing the brand's added value and attractiveness and winning more consumer recognition and loyalty.

4.2. Suggestion on Brand Awareness

In Maison Margiela's brand marketing, in addition to direct brand promotion, various activities can be organized for marketing and promotion. For example, seminars and lectures can be organized related to the fields of fashion, art, and design, and industry experts and opinion leaders can be invited to share their views and attract the attention of consumers and fashion lovers. This not only demonstrates Maison Margiela's expertise and depth as a creative brand, but also builds relationships

between the brand and consumers. Or collaborate with the local community: Organize collaborative events with the local community, such as fundraising for charities and participating in community art projects. Such activities can demonstrate Maison Margiela's concern and involvement in social responsibility while strengthening the ties between the brand and the local community and enhancing the brand's social image.

Through these activities, Maison Margiela can establish a closer connection with consumers and increase brand awareness, favorability, and loyalty. The regular organization of events can create continuous topics and hotspots for the brand, effectively enhancing its value and influence.

4.3. Suggestion on Brand Image

In addition to direct branding and organizing events, Maison Margiela's brand marketing can be furthered with online activities and store-themed planning. For example, Maison Margiela can connect with consumers through social media platforms and online events. For example, online fashion seminars, design challenges, or art competitions can be organized to encourage consumers to participate and interact with the brand. These online activities can increase brand exposure, attract new users, and provide consumers with the opportunity to learn more about the brand. Brand impressions can also be deepened by combining offline and online activities. For example, hosting a live stream of an online event in store or promoting an offline event online to get more people involved the combination of online and offline events can increase brand accessibility and engagement, as well as provide consumers with a more continuous brand experience.

By planning these online activities, Maison Margiela can further deepen the interaction and connection between the brand and consumers and enhance consumers' brand awareness, love, and loyalty. At the same time, these strategies can also increase the brand's exposure and influence, expanding its audience.

5. Conclusion

The paper takes "Maison Margiela" as the object of research, conducts a branding inquiry, explores how to succeed in the commercialization of a brand, and analyzes the brand impact, brand positioning, innovative visual design, and other academic theories through Maison Margiela. "Maison Margiela" was investigated and examined using brand influence, brand positioning, innovative visual design, and other academic theories. The final conclusion is that the design of the brand product itself, the innovation of the marketing strategy, and the co-branding of the planned activities have increased Maison Margiela's brand value and brand impression, which are the three key reasons for Maison Margiela's success.

Through the study of the successful commercialization of the Maison Margiela brand, insights into brand marketing can be gained. This is important for the study of brand strategy, brand impression enhancement, and successful brand marketing activities in a competitive market.

This article provides references and values for some internationalized and niche clothing brands and also shows the direction of Maison Margiela's future development. At the same time, there are some shortcomings in the article. For such a niche brand, more in-depth market data and consumer survey analysis can increase the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the research. More data can provide more concrete situations and insights to further support the views and conclusions of the article. It is also important to analyze consumer surveys from a frontline perspective, which can provide more direct feedback and insights that can offer valuable suggestions for brand development and improvement. In future studies, consideration can be given to incorporating more realistic data and surveys to further refine the analysis and inferences about the brand. This can help researchers better understand the commercialization model and market practices of brands.

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