

Balenciaga's Marketing Strategy for Generating Interest among Generation Z Consumers

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Abstract. Balenciaga has gained popularity among younger consumers in the luxury market and has established itself as a trendsetter to a certain extent. The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons why Balenciaga, a brand that is distinguished by its unique and divergent style in comparison to other luxury brands, exerts a strong appeal on the younger generation. This study was conducted to answer this question. This study conducted research and analysis based on literature review, in-depth interviews, and questionnaire surveys. Analysis of Generation Z's motivations and psychology regarding luxury goods consumption concluded that this demographic exhibits a stronger tendency towards emotional purchasing and the cultural values embodied by brands. They tend to make purchases only after forming an affinity with the cultural ethos expressed by the brand. Balenciaga exemplifies Generation Z's consumption principle that emotional value is more important than product functionality. Moreover, in order to circumvent the propagation of an excessively unfavourable impression to consumers, the utilisation of contentious marketing strategies should be diminished accordingly. Balenciaga needs to strike a balance between mass fashion and maintaining its brand identity.

Keywords: Balenciaga, brand, marketing, Generation Z.

1. Introduction

First, people need to understand why Generation Z is called that. In general, this term refers to the generation born between 1995 and 2010. The key difference between millennials and Generation Z is that Generation Z grew up in an environment where the internet has been widespread since birth. As digital natives, they have experienced certain historical events together, shaping shared memories. Generation Z, who grew up in similar environments, shared certain similarities in their consumption habits and preferences and formed one of the most important consumer groups for the Balenciaga brand. Balenciaga has steadily gained attention within the luxury market. With the rise of Generation Z (those born between 1995 and 2010), this group has gradually developed into an important consumer group. To capture this youthful market, major brands are employing tailored marketing strategies.

The existing literature focuses primarily on the psychology of luxury consumption or deals exclusively with the marketing strategies of luxury brands, with relatively few studies specifically analysing the Balenciaga brand.

The present study examines marketing strategies targeting Generation Z consumers, focusing on the Balenciaga brand. The study explores the reasons for Balenciaga's strong appeal to young shoppers, the emotional value that Generation Z derives from luxury purchases, and the interpretation of disc celebrity marketing.

This study was based on literature research, in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys. Firstly, an extensive review of the extant literature was conducted on the subjects of luxury goods marketing, consumer psychology and the relationship between brands and brand ambassadors. In addition, the brand history of Balenciaga was researched. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with two individuals from different backgrounds. A questionnaire was developed on the basis of the aforementioned interviews, with a particular focus on Generation Z consumers. The questionnaire encompassed pivotal domains, including motivations for purchasing luxury goods, favoured marketing approaches for the Balenciaga brand, and perceptions of the brand image.

2. Research Methodology

A historical overview of Balenciaga reveals that the brand has upheld "rebellion" as its core identity since its inception. Through its continuous push against the boundaries of fashion and its significant emphasis on gender-neutral designs, Balenciaga resonates profoundly with Generation Z's pursuit of individual expression. According to Yuyang Xu's graphics, Parisian fashion house Balenciaga's primary target demographic is aged 18 to 34, which precisely aligns with Generation Z's current age range. Furthermore, findings from this article's survey indicate that 51.9% of Generation Z consumers responded that the brand exerts a significant influence on their generation [1]. According to Liubo's research, luxury goods are products or services that offer consumers individual experience and are characterised by scarcity and limited supply. Such goods also give consumers a feeling of superiority [2]. According to a study by Ojemu, Wilson and Ilka Azemi, consumers develop a sense of community around issues that are important to them, and this applies equally to brand identity. Furthermore, Ye Xinyu's study shows that Balenciaga uses the concepts of 'disruptive innovation' and 'sustainable innovation' in its design and branding[3,4]. The 'Efficacy-Awakening' model shows that today's consumption can have positive emotional effects [5]. Following a literature review, in-depth interviews were conducted with two Generation Z individuals from different backgrounds and consumer segments. Respondent A has a unique artistic perspective and is an art student. He shows no brand loyalty and regularly buys high-quality clothing and shoes that exclusively meet his personal preferences and requirements. She perceives Balenciaga as a brand favoured by trendsetters, citing elements inspired by rappers and the brand's appeal, which is primarily aimed at younger target groups. Her style is eclectic. Yet she has never bought anything from Balenciaga because he considers the brand incompatible with her own aesthetic sensibilities. In fact, visiting the label's boutique further diminished her interest in buying, as she found the sales staff to be overly trendy. This left her utterly afflicted with a phobia of hipsters. Respondent B is a young office worker who is familiar with Balenciaga but has never purchased any products from this brand. He has experience purchasing luxury handbags and shoes and typically spends between ¥1,000 and ¥5,000 on clothing. He considers 5,000 to 6,000 yuan for a branded logo T-shirt to be overpriced. Instead, he says he prefers to save money and buy a bag from another brand on the second-hand market, where the resale value tends to be better. His main concern is value retention. Although luxury goods generally have poor value retention, he still wants to choose products that retain relatively good value at the time of purchase. The questionnaire for Generation Z was developed based on the content of in-depth interviews, distributed via social media, and yielded 79 valid responses. One limitation of this study is that the sample consisted mainly of respondents from first- and second-tier Chinese cities, with insufficient sample size and representativeness, which may limit the research findings. Based on the content of in-depth interviews, a questionnaire for Generation Z was designed and distributed via social media, yielding 79 valid responses. One limitation of this survey is that the respondents were mainly from China's first- and second-tier cities, resulting in insufficient geographical coverage and sample size. Consequently, the research findings may be subject to certain limitations. According to research conducted for this article, Generation Z's perception of Balenciaga's brand image is characterised by avant-garde elements inspired by street fashion and trends, alongside contradictory aspects. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 1, the main motives for luxury consumption among Generation Z are brand affinity (connection to brand culture and design aesthetics) and status symbolism (display of social status and financial capability), accounting for 42% and 25% respectively. This suggests that purchases are primarily driven by a personal interest in a brand's unique culture or style and represent a form of payment for the intrinsic value that arises from this interest. Furthermore, brand recognition is equally important. For instance, when Generation Z consumers wear specific clothing, other consumers immediately recognise the brand, thereby gaining social recognition and establishing their identity. The style, which can be described as understated elegance, is characterised by its high cost and exclusive nature, and is not aligned with the preferences of Generation Z. The prominence of status symbols is matched by a marked trend-following, demonstrating Generation Z consumers' fervent passion for embracing fashion currents. Should a brand become entirely disconnected from

contemporary trends, Generation Z will simply cease purchasing it. As seen in its past “garbage bag” case, Balenciaga maximises trend-leading designs. Following its release, a DIY transformation craze swept social media, with users styling their knitted bags into chic outfits for Parisian-style photos.

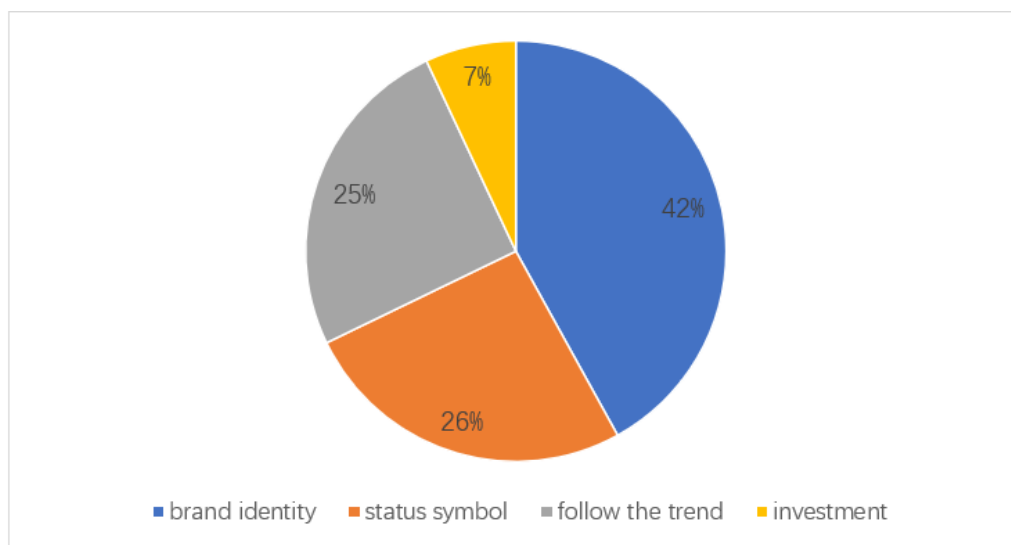


Fig 1. The main reasons why Generation Z buys luxury.

According to a study by Xiao Xi, the consumption of luxury goods has become a means of enhancing emotional well-being in everyday life. As a result, Generation Z is increasingly inclined to pay a premium for the intrinsic value of their interests rather than just for the actual value of the product. This is consistent with the findings of the survey in this article [5]. Balenciaga frequently employs a “rustic” aesthetic in its marketing campaigns, which are also controversial. In 2020, Balenciaga launched a campaign in China for the country's Valentine's Day celebrations, featuring backgrounds reminiscent of rural wall calendars from the 1980s and 1990s. The advertisements employed simple slogans such as ‘I love myself’ and ‘You love me’, with limited-edition bags printed with these slogans also being sold. This advertisement sparked significant controversy in China, as the promotion of the Valentine's Day collection inadvertently became a marketing gag promoting the company's own products. While some perceived it as ‘in poor taste,’ this study argues that it also represents a form of self-expression. Furthermore, Balenciaga has diversified its product line to include everyday items such as the French Fry Bag, woven carrier bags and key rings. By positioning these everyday items as luxury goods, the brand conveys the notion that fashion has its origins in everyday life. This approach, when combined with an environmentally conscious ethic, aims to democratise the traditionally ‘unattainable’ image of luxury and render it more accessible to the general public. The promotion of sustainability initiatives has been demonstrated to engender a sense of psychological satisfaction among consumers [6]. The house of Balenciaga has gained renown for the design of its fashion show invitations, which are characterised by a high level of creativity and are based on themes that are readily understandable. For instance, it has reinterpreted invitations by reusing old iPhone 6S devices, receipts and chocolate bars, thus refusing to rely solely on traditional paper. The propagation of such invitations by prominent individuals through social media platforms is of paramount significance in fostering interest and catalyzing discourse. This approach assists consumers who are unacquainted with Balenciaga in comprehending the brand's aesthetic and philosophy, while online marketing activities fortify and promote the relationship between the brand and its customer base [7]. Balenciaga generally prefers to cast non-professional models over celebrities in its advertising campaigns. This “de-celebrityisation” strategy places the brand and product at the forefront rather than the model, enabling consumers to imagine themselves embodying the brand's aesthetic with equal passion. It also serves to shield consumers from the influence of celebrity endorsements. According to the meaning transfer model, consumers become sceptical about how brand ambassadors convey the brand's core values [8].

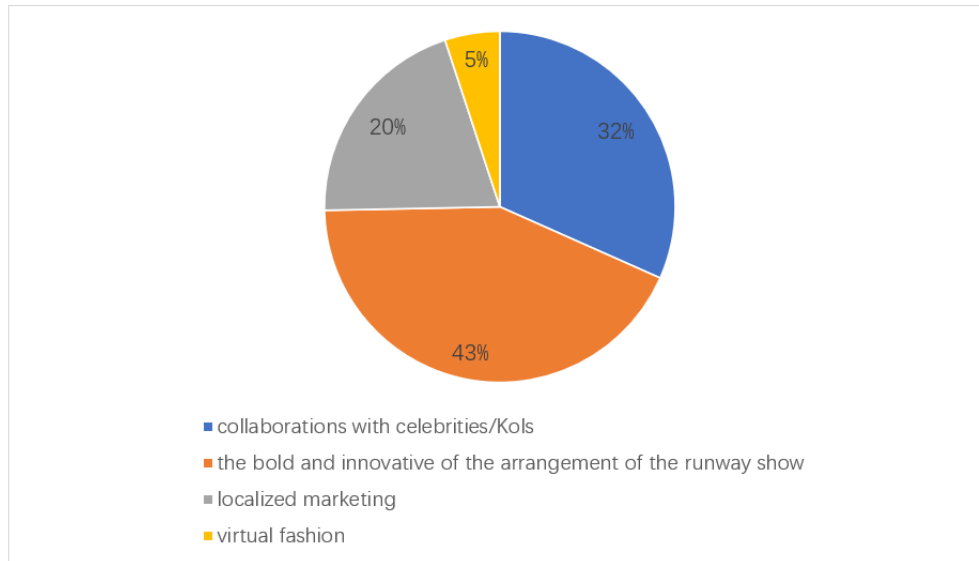


Fig 2. For Balenciaga's marketing approach, Generation Z's preference.

3. Research Findings

Fashion shows serve as a vital channel for conveying brand identity and cultural ethos, thereby shaping consumers' perceptions of the brand. According to survey findings, as shown in Figure 2, among Balenciaga's various marketing approaches, the most favoured by consumers is the bold innovation in runway show staging, accounting for 43%. For example, Demna Gvasalia designed a runway themed “resistance to climate change and war” for the finale of the 2022 collection. The venue was transformed into an environment of extreme weather conditions, with howling winds and blizzards making it almost impossible for the models to walk. The models were confined within a vast glass dome, while the audience observed from outside. This powerfully conveyed humanity's helplessness in the face of impending doom. Not only was the intended message of this season's garments effectively communicated, but this unique design also garnered significant attention. Such a striking design is also based on the principle of ‘attention economy’, which aims to increase brand awareness more quickly [9]. Valencia is adept at developing region-specific marketing strategies to appeal to consumers in China's mainland. For example, in 2025, the company launched co-branded T-shirts as part of a collaboration with Alipay, China's largest online payment app. This project was designed specifically for Chinese consumers and attracted a lot of attention while increasing brand awareness in China. In the United States, the brand collaborated with the hugely popular animated series ‘The Simpsons’ and launched not only animated content but also a range of clothing items. Through such online promotions via social media and other platforms, the brand gained popularity among Generation Z [9,10]. As shown in Figure 2, the survey questionnaire indicates that 20% of consumers demonstrate a preference for localised marketing. However, Balenciaga should reduce its use of controversial marketing strategies. Over-reliance on such approaches carries the risk that they will ultimately backfire on the brand. If the company decides to pursue controversial marketing, it must align it with the “anti-authoritarian” values that resonate with Generation Z. Additionally, Balenciaga has collaborated with the video game “Fortnite” to develop virtual clothing and in-game items for this project. Research into the metaverse is also establishing itself as a future trend in brand marketing [11].

4. Conclusion

This study shows that Generation Z consumers place greater importance on the emotional value derived from the consumption process than on the intrinsic value of the product itself. Valenciaaga's philosophy is predicated on the notion that fashion is inextricably linked to life, and this is manifested

in his practice through the reinterpretation of quotidian objects. Concurrently, he eliminates synonyms such as 'refined' and 'elegant' from the domain of luxury goods. Balenciaga functions as a medium that articulates the inner self of the individual and their sense of belonging to society. The purchase of these products provides consumers with a means of addressing their emotional needs and functions as a symbolic form of communication within society. This brand has effectively redefined the concept of "luxury". The significance of the brand story and its ability to convey a compelling narrative is paramount in establishing a sense of identity, superseding the notion of material abundance. The significance of this research lies in demonstrating that storytelling and the conceptual expression of a brand hold great appeal for Generation Z, thus confirming the principle that emotional value takes precedence over product functionality for this age group.

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