

“The Relationship Between High Fashion Brand’s Image, and Customer’s Behavior”

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Abstract

Shopping is all about marketing and presentation of merchandise. High Fashion Brands study the market and spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a year on advertising to create a mood or presentation of a certain concept, hoping that the customers will end up buying their products. These carefully considered campaigns aspire to raise an emotional state that lingers long after the purchase is finalized. A good example; is the budget American shoe brand “Payless” that wanted to raise its profile for the past holiday season, as it decided to play a prank and mimic the approach taken by high-end designer stores, even though only for a few days [The National, Dec, 2, 2018]. As the Payless shoes pranks social-media influencers with fake high-end brand *Palessi* (1). As the budget store posed as a fictional designer Italian label for six days, that proved that customers are psychologically affected by the display, and merchandising layout, location, and can change their perspective about the product accordingly. This research paper is going to investigate the psychology behind the relationship between High Fashion brands’ image and customer’s behavior, and how this relationship can affect the customer’s choices and buying habits.

Key words: Fashion; shoes; payless; palessi; social media; design; labels; Brands; psychology; z-generation; online-shopping.

1. Introduction

As Payless shoes (Fig 1) pranks social media influencers with fake high-end brand Palessi, the budget store posed as a fictional designer Italian label for six days. And when the budget American shoe brand Payless decided it wanted to raise its profile for the upcoming holiday season, it decided to play a prank and mimic the approach taken by high-end designer stores, even though only for a few days (1).

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Best known for its cheap prices, payless shoes mostly cost between US\$19.99 and \$34.99. Payless has recently suffered financially due to the declining sales last year, and it had to close many stores, which resulted in the loss of thousands of jobs. While this is clearly a serious time for the shoes label, payless decided to take a cheerful approach to drawing attention to itself. Payless hired Brooklyn based advertising agency DCX, which came up with the bold idea to repackage and remarket Payless as a fictional high-end Italian shoe label, entitled *Palessi* (Fig 2). The team took over an empty Giorgio Armani store for six days in Santa Monica, transforming it into a fake boutique, complete with a new logo. Although the products were regular Payless footwear, as *Palessi*, the display had to be different, and fancy, so the shoes were displayed on glass shelves and were labeled with high prices, to reinforce the designer image, with one pair, for example, inflated from \$34.99 to \$1,800. That is about 52 times of the original price. In addition to raising the prices, and upgrading the display, social media influencers were paid to attend the "launch" of the store, which was backed by a fake Instagram account and website [1].



Figure 1: Payless store UIG Getty Images



Figure 2: Pelisse store front

2. Payless Store

Payless Shoe Source Inc: Is an American discount footwear retailer headquartered in Dallas, Texas. Established in 1956 by cousins Louis and Shaol Pozez, Payless is a privately held company owned by Blum Capital, and Golden Gate Capital. In 1961, it became a public company as the volume shoe store corporation which merged with The May department stores company in 1979. In the 1980s, Payless was widely known in the U.S. for its **Pro Wings** line of discount sneakers, which often had Velcro straps instead of laces. In 1996, Payless Shoe Source became an independent publicly held company. In 2004, Payless Shoe Source announced it would exit the **Parade** chain and would close 100 Payless Shoe outlets. On August 17, 2007, the company acquired the Stride Rite Corporation and changed its name to Collective Brands, Inc. The company had a total revenue for 2011 of US \$3.4 billion. The company also has a stunt premium banner, **Palessi Shoes**. It was announced on May 1, 2012 that the company would be purchased by Wolverine Worldwide, Blum Capital, and Golden Gate Capital for US\$1.32 billion. On December 13, 2016 it was reported that all Payless shoe stores were to be closed in Australia with the loss of 730 jobs [3]. On July 14, 2014 Authentic Brand Group acquired some assets from Payless Shoe Source's division collective licensing international, LLC, which included brands such as Airwalk, Hind sports clothing, Vision Street Wear, and Above the Rim. In April 2017, Payless Shoe source filed for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy, and announced the closing of 400 stores in the United States. Payless has been struggling against online competitors such as Amazon-owned Zappos and buzzy startups like All birds

[4].

3. The Palessi Event

At the Palessi event, for example, the influencers were tested on their reaction to the "new" brand and, possibly aware of the paycheck sitting in their pockets, many were enthusiastic, calling the shoes extremely high quality, elegant, sophisticated and versatile. Some even went as far as purchasing a pair or two at the inflated prices. After Payless revealed the truth behind Palessi. The prank has succeeded in not only grabbing headlines for Payless, but also proved that the customers are deceived by product labeling [Sana Abbasi], and as payless was clever in bluffing influencers, and customers, this incident proved that customers lack knowledge in products quality, and that the advertisement and display, in addition to location played a vital role in impressing the customers. As the store was It was full of \$20 heels and \$40 boots, but obviously the setting and the fake Italian-sounding name confused people, and they were willing to pay hundreds of dollars for the shoes. The highest offer was reportedly \$640, an 1,800 percent markup from the shoe's original price, and Payless pretended to ring up more than \$3,000 worth of shoes before revealing the prank and recording everyone's faces for a series of commercials that will run on TV and all of the brand's social channels throughout the holidays [2]. Doug Cameron, the chief creative officer of the DCX Growth Accelerator "The agency Payless partnered with for the stunt," told AdWeek, "Payless customers share a pragmatist point of view, and we thought it would be provocative to use this ideology to challenge today's image-conscious fashion influencer culture." He also referred to the stunt as a "social experiment," which is language I do not care for outside of horror movies [2].

4. The impact of brand image on consumer behavior

Brand image has been studied extensively since the 20th century due to its importance in building brand equity. In the increasingly competitive world marketplace, companies need to have a profound insight into consumer behavior and try to educate consumers about the brand in order to develop effective marketing strategies. Brand image is the key driver of brand equity, which refers to consumer's general perception and feeling about a brand and has an influence on consumer behavior. Most of companies' marketing strategies concentrate on how to influence consumers' perception, and attitude toward a brand, establish the brand image in consumers' mind, and stimulate consumers' actual purchasing behavior of the brand, therefore increasing sales, maximizing the market share and developing brand equity [7]. Although the spending decision is influenced by brand features and attributes, the brand image determines if the customer is convinced to spend this amount. Despite the differences of consumers' lifestyle and the way of information processed, brand image remains the dominant impacting factor of consumption decisions. On the other hand, some researchers believe that brand equity should be evaluated in terms of market share, market value and cash flow. However, financial performance can be described as, brand premium and market share; While non-financial performance refers to the brand awareness, brand reputation, brand loyalty and brand association.

5. Impact of "brand image" on customer's attitude toward the brand

Keller came up with the concept "customer-based brand equity (CBBE)" in 1993, which refers to the various

reactions to the branding campaign from consumers who have knowledge of the brand in varying degrees. In other words, brand image and brand awareness are the basis and sources of brand equity. According to Keller (1993), positive brand image could be established by connecting the unique and strong brand association with customers. The concept “brand image” has drawn significant attention from academics and practitioners, because it played an important role in the marketing strategies. Although brand image is recognized as the driving dynamics of any brand quality, and brand performance, few studies have elaborated on the relationship between brand image and brand equity (Fig 3). The brand knowledge should be built and understood before the consumers responds positively to the branding campaign. If consumers have knowledge of any brand, the company will possibly spend less on brand expansion, while achieving higher sales [8] Based on Keller (1993), Lassar and his colleagues (1995) held the opinion that brand equity came from the customers’ confidence in a brand. The greater the confidence they place in the brand, the more likely customers are willing to pay a high price for it [8] . However, this consumer confidence stems from five important considerations:

1. The brand performs its functions based on the way it was designed, so the design plays a vital role in the performance of the product
2. The social image is associated with purchasing or owning the brand.
3. Consumers’ recognition and sentimental attachment with brand
4. The balance between the brand’s value and its performance
5. Consumers trust in the brand

Table 1. Brand image concept in the brand literature.

Perspective	Sources	Definition of brand image
Blanket definitions	Herzog (1963) [3]	Consumers'general perception and impression of a brand
	Newman (1985) [4]	Consumers'perception of a product's total attributes
	Dichter (1985) [5]	Consumers'general impression of the product or service
Meanings and messages	Noth (1988) [6]	The symbolic meaning embedded in the product or service
	Sommers (1964) [7]	Consumers'perception and recognition of a product's symbolic attribute
	Levy (1973) [8]	The symbolic meaning of purchasing the product or service
Personification	Martineau (1957) [9]	Brand image reflects consumers'characteristics, and they purchase the brand to express themself
	Bettinger (1979) [10]	The personification of a product, which can be manifested as “adult” and “children”
	Sirgy (1985) [11]	Image of the brand resembles human personality
Cognitive or psychological elements	Gardner & Levy (1955) [12]	Brand image is consisted of consumers'opinion, attitude and emotion toward a brand, which reflects the cognitive or psychological elements of the brand
	Levy (1978) [13]	Consumers'overall impression about a brand or product, which includes recognition, feeling and attitude toward it
	Bullmore (1984) [14]	Consumers'general perception and opinion of a brand's total attributes
	Kapferer (1994) [15]	Consumers'general perception about the brand feature's association

Figure 3: Brand image concept in Brands literature

6. The relationship between the brand image and the consumer’s self - concept

With the increase of number of brands in the market, consumers make their purchase decisions mainly based on the brand image rather than the quality or functionality of the product itself. Moreover, when the brand image is consistent with the consumers’ self-concept, the consumers would give a preference to it. According to the self-concept theory, one’s self- concept is a collection of perception about himself that includes elements such as capabilities, characteristics, shortcomings, appearance and personality [9] Moreover, consumers would think better of the brand as long as its image is in line with their self-concept.

7. The 15 Most Popular Luxury Brands Online in 2019

A good way to predict sales, and future growth for a luxury brand, is by its current popularity online. According to Luxe digital October 2018 report, the top fifteen world’s luxury brands are the ones ranked the most popular among wealthy consumers, predicting that they will stay performing strong in 2019 [9]. Each of these 15 brands get significant customer’s attention, as well as driving substantial online conversation among social media influencers. What is interesting is that after number 15 on the list of Luxe digital, the number dropped significantly, and the top five brands achieved 60% of the prosperous customer’s attention. However, estimating the online popularity of a luxury brand includes measuring the brand value, and its popularity in social media, most talked about, and sought after online [9].

Table 1: The top 15 most popular luxury brands online in 2019 according to Luxe digital [9]

Rank	Brand	Share of Search Interest	Web Traffic	Social Media Audience	Social Media Engagement
1	Gucci	22.34%	9,440,000	54,144,179	13,600,000
2	Chanel	11.79%	4,270,000	67,499,041	2,591,803
3	Louis Vuitton	9.67%	7,700,000	56,886,821	7,400,000
4	Hermes	9.29%	1,770,000	10,356,812	1,380,000
5	Rolex	8.03%	4,530,000	15,813,354	438,000
6	Tiffany	7.69%	2,130,000	20,874,200	801,000
7	Dior	5.62%	2,910,000	48,306,113	6,290,000
8	Armani	5.47%	1,990,000	24,685,216	974,000
9	Prada	4.97%	1,530,000	23,934,422	2,186,210
10	Balenciaga	4.39%	2,180,000	9,158,109	1,696,459
11	Cartier	3.63%	1,280,000	12,279,311	314,015
12	Burberry	3.62%	2,790,000	43,329,468	1,485,372
13	Lancôme	1.90%	107,070	13,290,575	338,781
14	Yves Saint Laurent	0.89%	1,760,000	11,825,457	804,593
15	Bulgari	0.70%	1,200,000	11,277,114	696,071

Gucci: Gucci ranked number one on the list of the most popular luxury brands of 2019, as its sales and market share are up. Affluent millennials love the Italian brand Gucci and its hashtag was mentions across digital platforms and outsized all other luxury brands worldwide. Gucci’s most popular items are the belts, flipflop, and shoes (Fig 4)

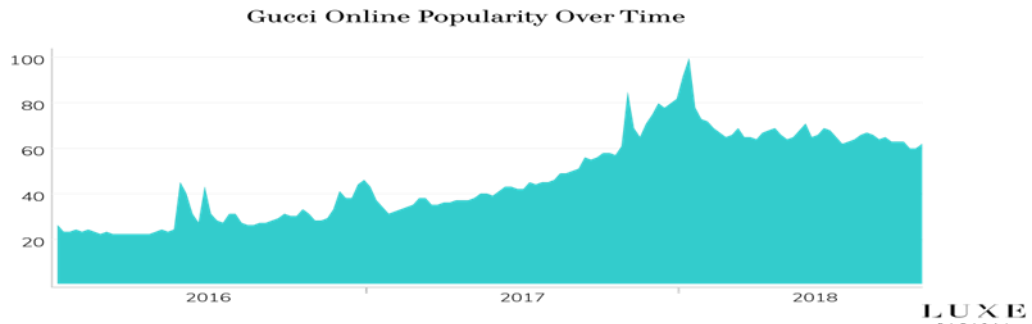


Figure 4: Gucci Online popularity over time, Luxe digital

Chanel: The French couture house Chanel ranked second on the list but is only number 87 on Forbes list of the top 100 most valuable brands in 2019, with an estimated brand value of \$8 Billion. Chanel is leading in digital luxury storytelling with thumb-stopping visuals and engaging videos. The brand most popular items are the bags, and fragrances. **Louis Vuitton:** The French luxury house LV ranked number three on our list of the most popular high-end brands online. The popularity of the brand has particularly grown after the designer Virgil Abloh became their new menswear Art Director. The brand most popular items are the belts, bags, and wallets. **Hermès:** The French luxury house Hermès ranked number four on our list as it has recently launched its new website internationally. The brand most popular items are the belts, Birkin bag, and scarfs. **Rolex:** Took the fifth place. The world-renowned luxury watch company is also featured on Forbes top 100 most valuable brands in the world, taking spot 71 with an estimated brand value of \$9.3 Billion. Rolex has a solid brand presence in the world of sports with endorsements in golf, motor sports, tennis and yachting. Some of the world’s most famous athletes advertise for Rolex watches including Tiger Woods, Roger Federer, Lindsey Vonn and Phil Mickelson. **Tiffany:** The American high-end brand Tiffany & Co. took the sixth place. Their product range includes jewelry, crystal, stationery, water bottles, fragrances, and watches. Tiffany started to sell a selection of styles online in collaboration with Net-a-Porter (the first retailer to sell Tiffany online, outside of its own channels) to reach a new generation of customers. Tiffany rings, necklaces, and bracelets. **Dior:** Christian Dior SE, commonly known as Dior, is a French luxury goods company. Dior takes the seventh place on the list. Maria Grazia Chiuri, became the creative director of the French luxury brand in July 2016, brought a *Millennial-friendly approach* to Dior. Her famous “*We Should All Be Feminists*” statement t-shirt [10], and the social media friendly “J’adior” branding among kitten heels and bags attracted huge attention on Instagram. Dior was labelled as Instagram’s most buzzed-about fashion brand of 2017, and When Rihanna wore the T-shirt “*We Should All Be Feminists*” she had 1, 745,748 likes on the social media. Some of the most popular items sold by Dior are the glasses, and beauty products. **Armani:** Armani is a famous privately-owned Italian luxury fashion house founded by Giorgio Armani in 1975. The luxury fashion brand offers a broad range of fashion products that range from leather goods and ready to wear, to watches, shoes, jewellery, accessories, and more. **Prada:** Founded in 1913 by Mario Prada, Italian luxury fashion house Prada has grown into one of the most notable luxury brands in the industry. It’s the rise of athleisure accessories that pushed Prada in the topmost popular luxury brands online in 2019. The Prada effect was mentioned in Vogue trend report of 2018 [11], and It successfully captured new interests with its inspired marketing campaigns and new product lines. Prada most popular items are the glasses, bags, and shoes. **Balenciaga:** Part of French luxury group Kernig, Balenciaga is

becoming one of the fastest-growing fashion luxury brands in the world. Their most popular items are shoes, and sneakers. **Cartier:** Cartier takes the eleventh place on the list of the most popular luxury brands online. Its timeless designs and successful video's content, and strong marketing strategies, and direct to customer's e-commerce website, with well-integrated customer service features, and 360-degree views of products, has put Cartier on the list's eleventh place (Fig 5)



Figure 5: Balenciaga advertisement in Luxe digital, oct, 2018

Burberry: The British luxury brand that was founded in 1856, and headquartered in London, England. Their iconic fashion products include trench coats, ready-to-wear clothes, fragrances, fashion accessories, cosmetics, and sunglasses. Burberry has revealed a brand-new logo and monogram (Fig 6) as part of a major rebrand under Riccardo Tisci [12].



Figure 6: Burberry New logo, 2019

Lancôme: Part of L'Oréal Paris, Lancôme is a French luxury perfumes and cosmetics house. Lancôme is the first and only purely beauty luxury brand on Luxe digital list of the most popular luxury brands online. Lancôme's digital performance is topped off with a high volume of editorial content and how-to videos uploaded onto their site. Lancôme has collaborated with some of the most popular YouTube stars including Estee Lalonde and invested in display and video advertising. The launch of La Vie est Belle with the actress Julia Robert, has generated over 1.5 million views. Lancôme most popular items are foundations, mascara, and perfumes. **Yves Saint Laurent:** Founded in 1961, Yves Saint Laurent is a French luxury fashion house and Kering's second-largest brand. Yves Saint Laurent's current success can be attributed in part to diversification, from ready-to-wear to leather goods, shoes, eyewear and more. Yves Saint Laurent most popular products are

cologne, perfumes, and cosmetics. **Bulgari:** The last one the list. Ending our list of the most popular luxury brands online is the Italian heritage luxury jewellery and accessories house, Bulgari, founded in Rome in 1884. Bulgari has made significant improvements to its website which are worth noticing, from live chat to content investments on product pages. Bulgari’s presence in social media is especially strong due to its localization approach and social for good campaigns. Launched globally on November 20th in awareness of Universal Children’s Day, Bulgari will donate \$1 to “Save The Children” each time the brand’s own video is socially shared. They will also donate \$1 for a closed eye wish selfie [13]. Their most popular items are: Watches, jewelry, and rings (Fig 7)

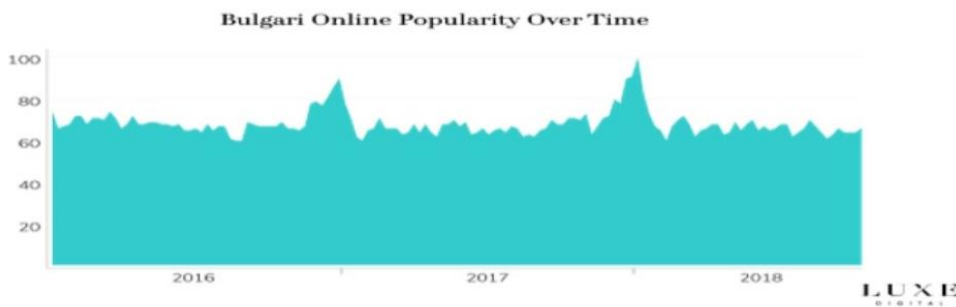


Figure 7: Bulgari brand popularity online, Luxe digital, 2018

8. Generation Z consumers

Generation Z consumers are online big spenders for luxury goods. More than a third of Chinese luxury shoppers already purchase luxury products within both offline and online channels [14]. With Generation Z becoming the largest group of consumers, according to the latest OC&C survey. Global consulting firm OC&C Strategy Consultants has released a report entitled “Bridging the trust gap – The end of the luxury e-commerce dilemma in China”, which aims to offer luxury brands insights into Chinese consumers’ preference on luxury brand spending, in particular the online channels [15].

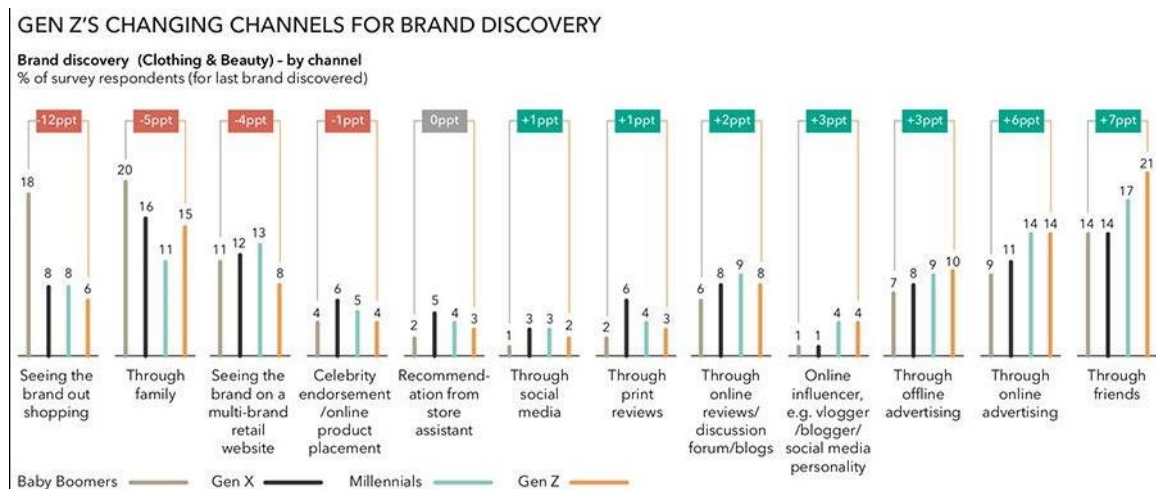


Figure 8: Gen Z’s changing channels for brand discovery, Jan 30, 2019

According to the survey, online luxury shoppers are growing across all generations, as they represent a higher share of younger age groups, with more Gen Z respondents (born after 1995) (59%) saying that they are shopping online, compared to millennials (born between 1980 and 1995) (37%) and Gen X (born between 1960 and 1980) (26%). However, Gen X respondents said they are more likely to get in the habit of shopping more often online in the future. Chinese Gen Z luxury shoppers spent more than RMB 50,000 last year, compared to only 32% for millennials and 34% for Gen X. 66% of Gen Z respondents agreed that the price was not an issue, it is what they liked is what was important, and made them make the purchase online. On the other hand, 50% for Gen X agreed on the same concept [15] (Fig 8).

9. Conclusion

High Fashion Brands and major companies study the market, and invest into studying consumer's behaviors, and advertising to create particular images that will stay in the customer's brains, hoping that they will love and buy their products. These carefully considered campaigns aspire to raise an emotional state that lingers long after the purchase is finalized. A good example; is the budget American shoe brand Payless that wanted to raise its profile for the past holiday season, as it decided to play a prank and mimic the approach taken by high-end designer stores, even though only for a few days. The fake high-end brand Palessi story, proved that as a fictional customer are psychologically affected by the display, and merchandising layout, location, and can change their perspective about the product accordingly. Since there are so many brands in the market, companies started to educate consumers about their brands in order to develop effective marketing strategies. Brand image is the key driver of brand equity, which refers to consumer's general perception and feeling about a brand and has an influence on consumer behavior. However, financial performance can be described as, brand premium and market share; While non-financial performance refers to the brand awareness, brand reputation, brand loyalty, and brand association. According to Keller (1993), positive brand image could be established by connecting the unique, and strong brand association with customers. Brand image is the key driver of brand equity, which refers to consumer's general perception and feeling about a brand, and has an influence on consumer behavior. Most of companies' marketing strategies concentrate on how to influence consumers' perception, and attitude toward a brand, establish the brand image in consumers' mind, and stimulate consumers' actual purchasing behavior of the brand, therefore increasing sales, maximizing the market share and developing brand equity. Moreover, it was proven that there is a relationship between the brand image and the consumer's self-concept. consumers would think better of the brand as long as its image is in line with their self-concept. The most popular 15 Luxury brands online in 2019 listed by Luxe digital, with Gucci being the most popular luxury brand, and Bulgari ranking number 15, it was obvious that these brands have worked hard to either change their creative Art Directors, or change their logo as in the case of Burberry, or use a new strategy, and revive their websites, to be able to attract more online customers. They have invested into expensive advertising campaigns with movie stars, singers, and influencers like Rihanna who wore the statement T-shirt designed by Dior, which said "*We Should All Be Feminists*", and had 1, 745,748 likes on the social media, boosting the sales of Dior. Generation Z consumers are online big spenders for luxury goods. (born after 1995), (59%) saying that they are shopping online, compared to millennials (born between 1980 and 1995) (37%), and Gen X (born between 1960 and 1980) (26%). What is interesting is that 66% of Gen Z respondents agreed that the price was not an issue, it is what they liked is what was important, and made them

make the purchase online. All these findings prove that there is a great relationship between High Fashion brand's image and customer's behavior, and that the customer if he or she believes in the product and likes it, it is more likely that they will purchase it. Moreover, the social image is associated with purchasing or owning the brand. In addition to the customer's recognition, and attachment with the brand, the consumer's trust in the brand is another important factor, that determines the decision of the customer to purchase the products.

10. Declaration

Availability of data and material:

Dataset(s) derived from public resources and made available with the article

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14. Professional Summary

Dr. Sana Abbasi has over 15 years' experience in Fashion Design, textiles, and merchandising. She is highly talented at higher education academic-level, in addition to management and leadership. Technically-savvy with outstanding relationship building, professional training, and presentation skills. She is also a motivated Associate Professor with a solid experience in managing all levels of large-scale projects, including budgeting

and administration. Dr. Sana Abbasi is a highly ambitious Fashion Designer with strong background in sales, advertising, and luxury retail management. Furthermore, she is also an expert in trend forecasting, and market analysis. Dr. Sana Abbasi has a full awareness of client's needs, and the needed experience in directing & chairing the Fashion Design Program, recruiting faculty and students, with a strong leadership skill. She is also very knowledgeable in products' designs and has excellent abilities in juggling multiple tasks and working under pressure. Her broad industry experience includes: Fashion collection designs based on high fashion trends, pattern making, draping, textile printing, and fashion production methods, sewing techniques, Art-to-Wear, fashion styling & merchandising. Dr. Sana Abbasi is also familiar with the fashion design computer related programs, and she has excellent academic and research skills, in the fields of, Art, textiles, business, psychology of clothing, and many areas in relation to Fashion Design. Dr. Sana Abbasi has worked closely with the continuing education programs developing professional training programs, workshops, and Diplomas. Dr. Sana Abbasi was the curator of the first under water fashion show in the Middle East, Atlantis, Dubai, and a former Fashion Designer/Art Director at Guess Jeans, Co. Los Angeles, USA. She also taught Fashion Design at many prestigious Universities in Los Angeles, including Cal State University, Northridge, and Woodbury University. Dr. Sana Abbasi established the first Academic Fashion Design Program in the Middle East in 2011, at the American university in the Emirates, Dubai, and she chaired the Fashion Design Department at Dar Al-Hekma University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Dr. Sana Abbasi is currently coaching and training the Fashion Design trainers at Niagara College Capacity Building Program, in Madinah, KSA.

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15. Limitations of the Study

Not being able to attend the event and be involved in the actual experience to be able to judge better how customers reacted to this display and image transformation from payless to Pelisse.

16. Recommendations

1. marketing and presentation of merchandise plays avital role in customer's behavior and attitude towards the brand. Therefore, it is recommended that each brand keeps the persona and image representing it constant and current
2. Payless shoe store had its popularity and customers, and the fact that it tried to copy high fashion and become a higher brand it lost its image and has recently suffered financially due to the declining sales last year, and it had to close many stores, which resulted in the loss of thousands of jobs
3. Costing of products reflects quality, design, production level, and many other factors. If the brand tries to step out of its limitations, they will suffer and lose their identity
4. Customers are influenced by presentation, as in this case of Pelisse many were enthusiastic, calling the shoes extremely high quality, elegant, sophisticated and versatile, even though they were the same shoes. That is an indication that customers react emotionally to products presentation and some are less knowledgeable about quality
5. Its is crucial to keep presentation in mind for less expensive brands, as that will boost the sales, based on the Pelisse experience