

# Retail marketing of fashion

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There are few areas of human existence that are as transient as the rules of fashion. The nature of fashion makes today's fads as expendable as tomorrow's are necessary. Images of the latest fashion, some largely impractical and never worn by the general public, are presented as mini-revolutions of style and sophistication, unlike anything that has ever been seen before, even if there is a good reason for such an absence. This leads to reviews, hype, and media attention to clothing that the majority of people care little to see or hear about, even though like a trainwreck they cannot look away. The fashion industry continues to experiment and cater to a world far above the common retailer, but it is the job of these retailers to make sure that they are on the forefront of the fashion wave. Sometimes, this includes embracing tradition or convention, sticking to more conservative fashion that never goes out of style, such as jeans and a t-shirt. However, sometimes radical departure from the norm is the fashion of the day, and retailers must decide whether to embrace the change in name of profit, or stick to tradition. The careful line between encouraging fashion innovation and fostering consumerism remains blurred by things like the media, as they attempt to sell conformity in fashion rebellion. Few industries are as adept at selling rebellion as the fashion industry, which relies on change as a fundamental necessity. Fashion also challenges boundaries and champions individuality, and this can be seen in advertisements for clothing and shoes, as they use the technique of selling rebellion in fashion to appeal to consumers and retailers alike.

In the essay, "The Selling of Rebellion" by John Leo, he demonstrates how the marketing world has attempted to sell the ideas of breaking loose of

boundaries through consumerism. “ Breaking the rules” has become desirable, after decades of advertisers suggesting those that break the rules transcend the boundaries of the common world. This tactic is especially useful on young consumers. In his essay, Leo points out how Madison Avenue targets the youthful desire for freedom and individuality, and coopts its rhetoric for purposes that are uniquely conformist (Leo). This marketing strategy manages to sell the illusion of freedom, while encouraging “ transgression” on the part of consumers. To Leo, transgression allows people to break the boundaries while staying within the greater circle of conformity, to rebel and while conforming. A transgression here and there is acceptable, while only transgression can become as oppressive as the strictest rules, though. However, this philosophy of transgression has become the foundation for a new generation of fashion advertisement and reflects the almost permanent condition in the fashion industry which touts every season as the ultimate in fashion.

Some of the latest fashion trends include targeting a large male population that has recently been almost as fashion-conscious as females have traditionally been. This not only applies to clothing and shoes, but has also extended to places where men have previously not been included, including perfumes and colognes. While aftershave and cologne has been used for decades to help men achieve a sense of manliness, recent body sprays and scents have been targeted at younger men who are highly fashion conscious, and in all reality, metrosexual. One of the main retailers to profit off this change is Tag Body Spray. Tag is a body spray for men, geared mainly towards younger men. While perfume sprays have traditionally been

directed towards women, Tag has attempted to break this rule and create a new one: body spray is a positive trend for male fashion. Tag advertisements usually feature young men surrounded by beautiful women that cannot help but be attracted to men who wear it. The slogan for Tag is: “ Consider Yourself Warned” (Tag). In one particular magazine advertisement, the selling of rebellion becomes apparent as a young man stands in the middle of the ad dressed in ripped jeans, a ripped shirt, with a missing sneaker and wearing handcuffs. Bikini-clad beauty pageant contestants in sashes surround him, smiling and pulling at his shirt. The thing that makes the ad the selling of rebellion is that it is in a police station, with an officer in the foreground closely inspecting the bottle of Tag. This suggests that those men that use Tag are not only in danger of creating riots among beautiful women, but also in danger of being arrested. Tag wearers are rule breakers. The fact that the slogan is a warning makes it seem as if Tag is dangerous and meant only for those strong and courageous enough to handle it. No longer is men’s scented hygiene products used to represent a rugged or manly persona, but are instead used to represent a youthful, hip, somewhat irresponsible lifestyle of hedonism and promiscuity. By promoting rebellion in the young, fashion items such as Tag Body Spray helps adjust to the changes in fashion, while simultaneously making conformity seem original. This spirit of fashionable rebellion can also be political or social in nature to sell clothing and shoes, as in advertisements for Reebok.

In one advertisement by Reebok, it becomes evident that the fashion industry has adjusted to the growth in popularity of hip-hop culture. The traditionally rebellious hip-hop culture appears to be the target in the

advertisement, as the people featured in the ad are part of that culture. In a large, two-page ad the simple white sneaker is featured on the top far right, with the slogan below it reading: “ i am what i am. cartel style” (Reebok). On the left page stands a young man dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, wearing flashy jewelry and holding a bullhorn. Behind him are many different people of all ages and races, and they all stand in front of housing projects. There is also a giant boombox in the foreground, and on the page are the words: “ voice of the people” (Reebok). The young man’s shoes are the same as on the other page, and are prominently featured, while the shoes of those behind him are muted and barely visible. In the advertisement, all the people wear serious expressions and the suggestion is that they are rebelling against something, and the man with the Reebok sneakers is the leader. The idea of a cartel immediately calls to mind a faction that unifies in a common goal, and the dissatisfaction of the collective suggests that they are serious. The sneaker itself takes on a whole new meaning, being less something that protects feet and more of something that fashionable revolutionaries wear. This blatant targeting of a hip-hop counterculture is far removed from the runways and fashion show usually associated with the fashion industry, but reflects a profit-motivated attempt to capitalize on hip-hop culture’s emphasis on style over substance, and fashion over social relevance.

While all fashion attempts to separate itself, usually by sophistication or innovation, some clothing lines seek to define themselves through their simple, easy-going styles to reflect a different target audience. American Eagle Outfitters featured a two-page advertisement in Rolling Stone

magazine that sought to appeal to the sense of adventure and rebellion. The ad consists of a young man dressed in casual clothes--a printed t-shirt over a long-sleeve baseball undershirt and shorts that are frayed at the bottom. The man is lying on his back with a big smile and is being held up by many different hands, implying that he is body surfing over a crowd. The slogan that spans the two pages reads: "LIVE YOUR LIFE" (American Eagle Outfitters). This ad seems to fly in the face of high fashion, suggesting those that dress for comfort and pleasure enjoy life more than those who are slaves to fashion. The symbolism of the young man being elevated above the crowd also suggests that his carefree attitude makes him superior to the masses. This is an attempt by the fashion industry and retailers to target those that are concerned little with fashion, but find comfort their main priority.

The fashion industry is in flux like few others, and retailers are highly aware of this fact. Advertising for clothing and shoes, as well as the clothing and shoes that retailers produce and carry, is not only a representative of what is popular, but also of what they want to be popular. The immense effect of advertising fashion rebellion over conformity touches every industry, every product, and can sometimes create a permanent image of a manufacturer. While individuality is beneficial, turning it into a commodity can be confusing and misleading for many. Rebelling against practicality can also be negative, and as long as consumers use common sense when deciding purchases, advertisements that sell rebellion will remain a suggestion and not a mandate. But, with the success selling rebellion has had in the past, it is certain that it will continue long into the future for the fashion industry, as

well as any other industry that relies on change and progress to make its money.

Works Cited:

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