

# ***Research On Fashion Trends and Brand Strategies - A Case Study of Balenciaga Marketing Strategy***

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**Abstract:** In the current era of fashion driven by social media such as Instagram, Balenciaga's creative director Demna's grasp of the brand has won more attention and social share. And Balenciaga as a successful brand that has emerged in recent years, this paper focuses on the marketing strategy of Spanish luxury brand Balenciaga in recent years under the pandemic environment. Through the compilation, review, and analysis of several media, consulting, business, trend, and academic research reports on the brand, we first present the current status of the brand and then list several key marketing strategies of Balenciaga (including social media communication strategies, environmental friendliness, brand IP co-branding, and the celebrity effect). This study aims to analyze how Balenciaga, as almost the most popular fashion brand today, has been successful in terms of product and marketing. The final results of the study also show that Balenciaga's popularity is mainly due to the 'crazy' 'bold' brand strategy and the attitude of embracing pop culture and rebellious spirit.

**Keywords:** Balenciaga, Marketing, Social Media, Celebrity, Meme Marketing, Sustainable

## **1. Introduction**

The textile industry is currently the second most polluting industry in the world after the oil industry. According to research, around 60% of new garments produced worldwide are disposed of as waste each year, for example in landfills or incinerators [1]. Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General António Guterres has stated that the world is in a 'state of marine emergency', including flooding, overfishing and more. If no action is taken, there is a risk that by 2050 there will be more plastic than all the fish in the oceans combined. Fortunately, however, consumer awareness is growing and people are becoming more conscious of whether the products they buy or the consumer activities they engage in are sustainable enough. And there are already pioneers in the fashion sector (The Nordic Swan) who have managed to make synthetic fibre clothing microplastic release details into an eco-label [2]. Post-mega trends, the fashion industry in 2023 is full of economic, social and environmental challenges. Consumers are more interested in a healthy, scientific, transparent, sustainable, fair, and just fashion chain [3]. However, a trend forecast by WGSN Insider [2] shows that by 2022, consumers are concerned about their financial situation, which may lead them to spend less on discretionary spending - the more frugal consumer.

This essay will focus on a practical example of the marketing of the luxury brand Balenciaga in response to pandemic, fashion sector and consumer trends. Through the review of several academic

studies, media reports and other sources, it will present the current state of the brand, compile and analyse it using marketing communication theories, summarise and list the characteristics and strengths of specific marketing cases and the challenges encountered in the process. Balenciaga is a luxury brand that has been a success story in recent years and the analysis of its marketing is a useful reference and learning experience for the industry. It will help the brand to survive in this turbulent and ever-changing trend.

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. Development

Initially, Balenciaga's work was characterized by a sculptural quality, a flexible handling of textiles, and the use of color. Often treated as works of art by overlapping, they were also inspired by other works of art [4]. The brand was first opened in 1917 by Cristobal Balenciaga in his haute couture house in San Sebastian, Spain [5].

In 1937, the Spanish Civil War led to the opening of a boutique in Paris, France. In the post-war era, Balenciaga adopted sleek linear lines, in contrast to the hourglass-shaped garments of Christian Dior, which were the norm at the time. Balenciaga, a free artist and bold creator, was called 'the master of us all' by Christian Dior [6]. The designer Cristóbal Balenciaga thoroughly influenced women's fashion in the 1950s and created classic styles in the 1960s, such as the collar that showed the collarbone and the 'dress leader'. The brand Balenciaga was acquired by French multinational Kering (which owns brands such as Alexander McQueen, Gucci, and Yves Saint Laurent) in 2001, and in 2018, it became the fastest-growing brand under Kering.

Balenciaga designer Demna Gvasalia has decided to relaunch the couture collection that has been dormant for 53 years, with a fashion show washing up at 10 Avenue George V in a bid for continuity. Since Demna took over the creative direction of Balenciaga, he intends to redefine luxury and use digital media channels including Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube [7]. In recent years, Balenciaga has been at the centre of traffic in the fashion industry and has been a frequent sensation, especially in the youth market (millennials, Gen Z).

### 2.2. Features

Demna portrays Balenciaga as taking the brand's long-standing classic design experiments and applying them to high street fashion pieces such as hoodies, jeans and oversized sneakers, attempting to give these everyday pieces a couture and ready-to-wear appeal. The revamped Balenciaga has focused on the luxury streetwear and sneaker categories in an attempt to bring them up to par with the status of fine evening dresses and high heels. In addition to this, a Kering Group report states that creative director Demna Gvasalia has not used real fur since he started working at Balenciaga. He believes that 'couture is the most sustainable way to consume [8]. This has also led to a desire to replace traditional animal products with more sustainable alternatives (including fur, leather and exotic skins) [9]. The brand is active in promoting sustainability in the fashion industry, highlighting on their website that they are committed to achieving 100% metal-free tanned leather in their collections and to aligning with Kering in terms of raw materials and production processes by 2025. In addition to this, a resale service has been created in collaboration with Reflaunt to encourage recycling, reduce waste and reuse old clothes and accessories [10]. The following is a compilation of Balenciaga's marketing strategies, illustrated by case studies.

### 2.3. Disruptive Content

The "attention economy" is a measure of the value of people's attention. Due to the enormous abundance of information in the current digital age, there are limits to how much information people can receive and process—their attention is limited and scarce. Often, more information means more attention is scarce. As an example, the platform Instagram often has display ads, and due to its large, user base, the ads are able to be noticed by a wider range of people so that the audience becomes a marketable asset [11].



**Figure1.** Balenciaga SS 2023 Ready-to-wear [12].

In recent years, Balenciaga has adopted a strategy of integrating art and topicality into its brand and design, mainly in the form of 'disruptive content'. For example, fashion stakeholders and social media users accused the Balenciaga SS2023 show of being completely disrespectful to haute couture and of being ugly as beauty. After the fermentation of the topic, its heat and traffic reached a climax, and this is what such controversial topics can bring - a lot of attention economy and media impact value.

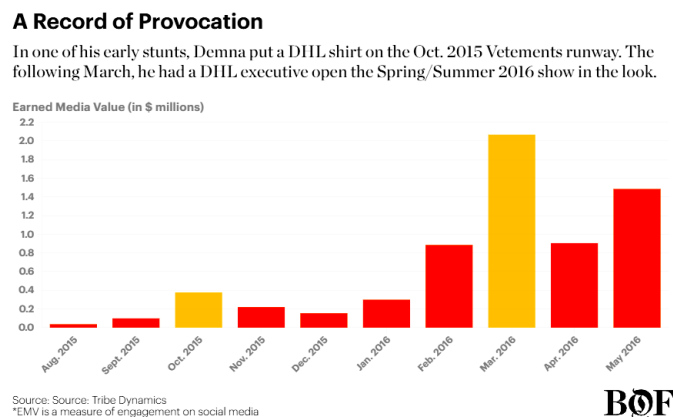
To briefly explain the show, it was divided into three main themes around identity: how to define 'beauty' (a constant theme at Balenciaga); how to define "luxury"; and breaking gender stereotypes. The show's creative director, Demna, portrayed our modern life - a life with feet of clay. Demna's thinking was that it was most challenging to interpret a new aesthetic through clothes that hadn't been done before [13]. Such a design idea stands almost in opposition to luxury and high lifestyle, expressing a rebellion against luxury and high lifestyle by combining clay, models, and luxury. The second point is that the model has blurred its target audience by encrusting the clogs (a traditional piece) with diamonds (modern technology). This all surfaces that there is no absolute beauty or good or bad in the eyes of the design. The third point of statement gives an example of men in fishnets and ballet flats in the show, even including shapewear, children and bottles to look after them. When you see a white father with a black baby, this drama causes you to wonder and think about social identity: could his husband/wife be black? Is the baby adopted by him? Is he a homosexual wearing women's shoes? Does he carry a bottle, a pacifier and a nappy in his handbag, so he's a good child-minder? These associations are what Demna wants the audience to understand about women's issues in the context of patriarchal deconstruction, as well as LGBTQ+ and racial issues. Through this show, Demna satirises the current trend of a fragmented life, where the audience observes the daily rise and fall of different hotspots in social media, while lacking their own subjective ideas and creativity. Through this event, he hopes that the audience will be able to find their own identity in this age of information explosion. In general, this kind of controversial topic has always been a marketing strategy that Balenciaga has adhered to. Similarly, meme marketing is also a classic tactic - creating

a piece of art or other eye-catching effects to engage the audience and increase the brand's impact [14].



**Figure 2.** A \$1,790 calfskin leather trash bag, caused controversy online [15].

One of the more typical examples of Balenciaga's use of meme marketing: Balenciaga created a \$1,790 rubbish bag, which when seen with this headline was believed to be enough to raise the curiosity of the audience. Some saw it as questioning the definition of luxury and satirising fashion, others thought it was creative, others thought the price was ridiculous and it sparked controversy [16]. Yet it was this strategy that enabled Balenciaga to overtake Gucci as the most popular fashion brand. Through meme marketing, Demna was able to communicate well with its audience and consumers (millennials: nearly 60% of the brand's consumers) were actively involved.



**Figure 3.** A Record of provocation [17].

## 2.4. Creative Collaboration/Promotion

Balenciaga's branding strategy for its collaboration with The Simpsons, with the primary aim of promoting the SS 2022 collection, ended up exceeding its expectations - becoming one of the most popular collaborative collections in the fashion industry. A ten-minute short film that tells the story of a Simpsons family with the brand's SS 2022 collection fashion show and pieces, but reinforces Balenciaga's brand image in a way that was not anticipated [12]. The animation, one of the world's most popular collections, presents a complete behind-the-scenes process of preparing a show for the fashion industry in a ten-minute short film, including drawing, patterning, cutting, building the show, make-up and fitting. This cross-disciplinary collaboration brings a new energy and forward-thinking expression to the fashion industry, linking fashion, culture, entertainment and technology to shake up the traditional perception of the brand.

## 2.5. Celebrity

Kim Kardashian, the social media superstar attended the 2021 Met Gala in a Balenciaga skinny jumpsuit and long runner. At a time when pandemics are hindering the course of the fashion industry, Kim, a master of social media mega-traffic, brought more to Balenciaga than simply trying on the brand's clothes. Demna chose to black out her Demna chose to silverwave her face in black, reducing her to a silhouette or a symbol, hiding her identity just like the models in the Balenciaga show. Experimentation with silhouette and garment construction was a hallmark of Balenciaga under Demna, while using detailed elements to critique and satirise social issues [18].

Kim Kardashian has over 200 million followers on Instagram, so it's not hard to recognise her by any other means, despite not being able to see her face. It is also precisely because Kim is an influencer who is a talking point wherever she goes that this fits in well with Balenciaga's marketing strategy of favouring controversy. It can be said that collaborating with famous IPs is a classic strategy for fashion brands in recent times, and Balenciaga's collaboration with The Simpsons is one of the most successful examples of this. However, the choice of IP or partner should be carefully considered. Firstly, working with an IP that has a good reputation requires a significant budget. Secondly the purpose of the partnership is to fill the gap when consumers are tired of the brand, using co-branding to breathe new life into the brand to attract consumers. The ultimate goal is to directly stimulate sales. Similarly, turning consumers to an aural online platform can make up for the lack of interaction during the pandemic period. With people burned out on ZOOM and the quest for wellness, people want convenient ways to learn to work and live without looking at a screen. Research by a phone provider showed that at the height of the pandemic, landline calls in the UK spiked by almost 50% [19]. There are options to develop or work with audio social media applications to create content that will connect with audiences even further. Target specific groups, consider the brand's connection to its community of consumers and tailor relevant content to engage with them effectively.

## 3. Conclusion

Overall, Balenciaga's marketing strategy can be said to revolve around the word "crazy," embracing pop culture and shrugging off stereotypes. It intentionally avoids commercialization, sticking to the pioneers in the production of products and content, but actually brings lucrative commercial rewards. In terms of marketing strategy, the three primary aspects of the brand—adherence to disruptive content, creative collaboration, and precisely selected celebrity effects—have kept the brand active and caused frequent viral spreads—leading to social media controversy. However, there are some points that cannot be addressed in this study, such as whether Demna, who is at the core of meme marketing design, can produce such products consistently. On the contrary, how to keep the attention of consumers once they have adapted to Balenciaga's style. The study itself is limited to secondary research data and lacks some quantitative data as a basis for argument, which is a point worth studying and improving in the future.

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