

# FASHION

Spring Thinks  
October 2023

## NEEDS A

How can brands succeed in the new cultural order?



Spring

# NEW STRATEGY



# Over the past 5 years, a number of forces have challenged fashion's existence, ecosystem and value



## 01.

### THE EXPLOSION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Both people and brands have succumbed to the algorithmic rat-race, access has been democratised and trends rise and pass at speed.



## 02.

### THE PANDEMIC ERA AND POST

Where the cadence of life as we knew it halted for 2 years, and then re-opening recalibrated how we live our lives today.

## 03.

### CLIMATE CRISIS

A growing consciousness that fashion takes a toll on the environment, compounded by the choices we make everyday, both personally and professionally.



## 04.

### CHALLENGING MACRO-ECONOMIC FORCES

With economic uncertainty, inflation and the cost-of-living crisis impacting consumers' attitudes to consumption.



## 05.

### THE RISE OF A NEW GENERATION

With a new lens on the world and an agenda prioritising self-expression, transparency, meaning and inclusion.





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On the one hand, these forces....

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**have given new life to creativity and cultural expression, strengthening the role and meaning of brand**

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On the other, they have ...

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**CREATED A  
FRACTURED  
LANDSCAPE  
THAT DILUTES  
A BRAND'S POWER**



# At recent fashion weeks, we've seen these effects at play in several ways



## THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR CHURN

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## ONGOING ETHICAL CHALLENGES TO THE FASHION SYSTEM



## TRIED & TRUE COMMERCIAL HITS VS. TRUE CREATIVITY & INNOVATION



## CELEBRITY BUZZ PRIORITISED OVER COLLECTIONS & CRAFTSMANSHIP



## A CHALLENGING LANDSCAPE FOR EMERGING DESIGN TALENT

07



# THE FASHION INDUSTRY IS AT A POINT OF RECKONING

More than ever, brands must start from a strong foundation to create and reimagine meaning for the current cultural moment





# Fashion brands far and wide have embraced the essentiality of culture, but with mixed success



GUCCI X ALESSANDRO MICHELE

Michele's maximalist Gucci captivated hype-culture hearts and minds, but lost sight of what is enduring and attracts audiences to the brand. With De Sarno at the creative helm, Gucci is set to retrench and reinvest in the codes that connect not only to the brand, but key revenue drivers such as its iconic bags.



PHARRELL WILLIAMS FOR LOUIS VUITTON MEN'S

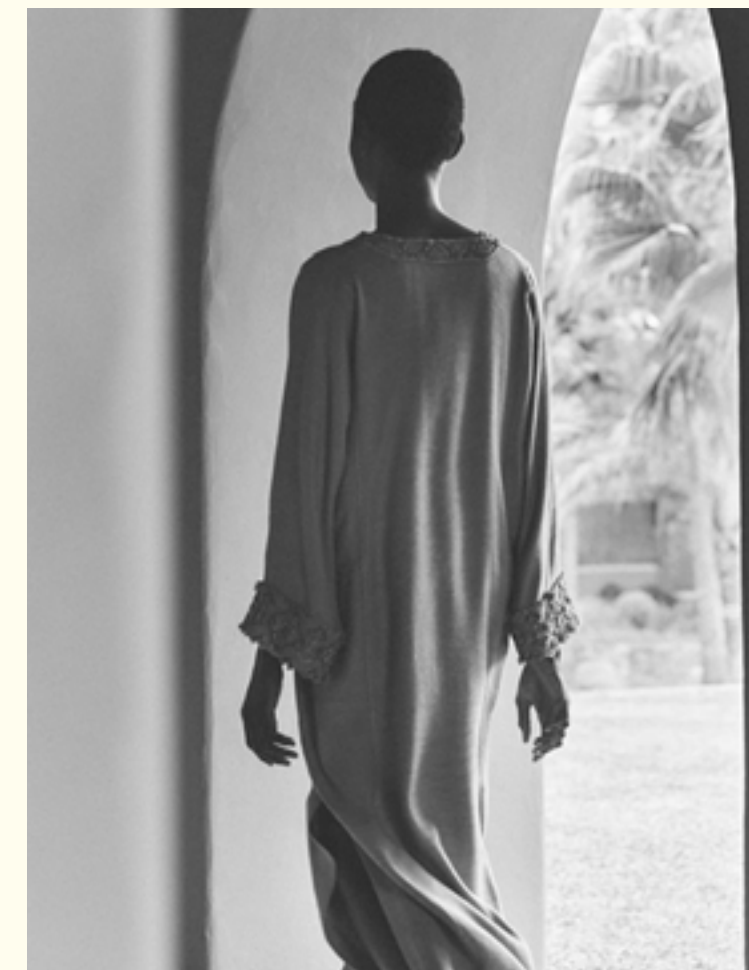
The appointment has divided audiences, with Pharrell's Paris debut 'mega-show' attracting 1.1 billion online views – but also seen as a reflection of the cultural convergence of fashion and entertainment that exists today.



VOGUE WORLD

Making its debut during LFW, the 'entertainment extravaganza' seemingly ticked all the cultural boxes – from celebrity to fashion, theatre to music and more – but left critics baffled and fans cold.





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# A brand's success can be found at the intersection of culture and brand DNA

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Mining this intersection allows brands to create meaning for their audiences, helping them to make sense of and navigate the world they live in



# Spring's Five Principles for Succeeding in the New Culture Order

As the past five years attest, creating meaning isn't as easy as one might think. But with the following five principles, fashion brands can build strategies with strong and enduring foundations – both connecting with the cultural moment and providing deeper meaning

## 01.

### Interrogate what lies at the heart of your brand

Striking the balance between old and new is never easy – if pushed too far in either direction, it can detract from the essence of the brand.

Start by identifying the truths about the brand, looking at what has created cultural and commercial success since its inception.

Define the iconic codes you want to carry forward – of identity, of product, of service.

Think about the brand story, key milestones, and what its audiences have loved about it over time.

Bring these forward, while allowing for re-imagination in today's cultural context.

**H**edi Slimane's tenure as Creative Director at Saint Laurent was characterised by his successful overhaul of the house, bringing it back to its origins by restoring its vibrancy and relevance – harking back to the late 60s and early 70s when the brand best embodied its values of liberation, sophistication and bringing style to the streets. As Saint Laurent and Kering Group Deputy CEO, Francesca Bellettini, explains, "When you clarify the brand positioning, then everything comes together...People recognise the authenticity..."





02.

## Harmonise your customer of today and tomorrow

Many fashion houses have been caught up chasing gen Z and millennials, and have neglected or - at worst - alienated the loyal, core customers who actually drive sales.

While product plays a role, building brand affinity and loyalty ultimately rests on the ability to connect with consumers on an emotional level – a quality that can transcend generations.

Be open to a dialogue with customers and act to safeguard and evolve the elements of the brand that resonate.

Keep in mind that customer engagement comes in many forms – from social media buzz to spend and relationships built in-store.



**F**ollowing Alessandro Michele's departure, Gucci have embraced an 'elevation strategy' aimed at recapturing the 'grown up' Gucci audience who had strayed from the brand during its youth-centric maximalist era. In addition to introducing more timeless pieces, they have rolled out ultra high-end private Salons where VIP shoppers can enjoy service that is every bit as exceptional as the price points.

Under Sabato De Sarno, 'Italianness' has become a central and unifying theme, rooted in the brand's heritage and appealing across generations. To that end, his debut runway show, Gucci Ancora, was complemented by experiences on youth-centric platforms Roblox, Zepeto and China's QQ, with playful elements conceived to engage Gucci's fans of tomorrow.

03.

## Strike the balance between brand and creative director to deliver your vision

There's a delicate balance to be struck between respecting a brand's enduring codes, while harnessing the excitement and creativity of your creative director.

'Newness' and reinvention are essential to capturing attention in an 'always on' environment – but minding the codes is how you create enduring brand power.

Keep in mind the intersection of brand, audience and culture to inform your direction.



**D**aniel Lee has spoken at length about his process of "bringing Burberry back to somewhere I felt familiar with" – a journey that has seen him revive and reinterpret elements of the brand's heritage that resonate with him and, critically, the contemporary audience. From the iconic knight symbol to the vibrant cobalt blue, campaigns featuring talent that exemplifies modern Britain and, most recently, a LFW takeover of Bond Street Underground station, Lee's vision has playfully reimagined Burberry's heritage through the lens of the cultural zeitgeist – and done so with quintessentially British vim and vigour.



## 04.

### Connect your values to cultural moments fast and slow to drive your cultural currency

Canadian anthropologist Grant McCracken developed a framework for fast and slow culture that provides a helpful lens for identifying the relevant communities, sub-cultures and movements a brand might connect to.



## FAST

At the same time, brands can respond to fast culture: the social media trends, fads and ‘flash in the pan’ viral moments which have meaning in the market right now – but must have a robust structure in place, using the lens of brand to choicefully guide selection.

### SKIMS X WHITE LOTUS

In a genius move, Kim Kardashian’s shapewear brand, Skims, cast White Lotus’ infamous duo, Simona Tabasco and Beatrice Granno in its Valentine’s campaign, released just as the show reached its pop culture zenith.

## SLOW

Slow culture looks deeper: it is the underlying operating system of culture, the enduring, macro-trends that act as elemental drivers shaping the public’s beliefs and opinion, and yet are often so subtle as to pass without remark.

**CHLOÉ X GABRIELA HEARST** During her tenure as creative director at Chloé, Gabriela Hearst was

responsible for embedding sustainability at the heart of the house – a legacy that will remain with the business, even as she moves on. With Hearst at the helm, Chloé responded to the growing consciousness amongst fashion consumers, achieving B Corp status, introducing a social impact measurement tool and successfully launching a resale programme.



## 05.

### Consider how you show up

In today’s fractured landscape, brands must carefully consider how they ‘live’ across a range of touchpoints:

**ON SOCIAL MEDIA** Weigh up the role of ephemeral, ‘one off’ moments that lack cumulative impact versus creating meaning by responding to newly enduring attitudes and behaviours.

**VIA FASHION SHOWS & SPECTACLES** While tentpole fashion events can draw eyes and create hype, ongoing brand-building activities are critical to long-term brand success.

**VALUES IN ACTION** Thanks to increased transparency and consumer scrutiny, it’s never been more critical that brands practice what they preach. From accountability around CSR goals to established houses offering support to emerging designers, brand actions must be imbued with meaning.

**DIVERSITY & INCLUSION** An important part of the new cultural order and yet brands are still missing representation as a clear and obvious way to build community (and bottom line) in a meaningful way – extending far beyond the performative show casting moment.

**DESIGNS FOR A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD** The latest shows seem to have confirmed that designers have finally found their groove: “a hybrid look for a hybrid world”, as Vanessa Friedman has coined it. Across the board, collections hit a sweet spot of interesting, yet still wearable, chiming with a more conscious approach to consumption and desire for high-quality, timeless pieces.





# Spring's Five Principles for Succeeding in the New Cultural Order

# 1.

## Interrogate what lies at the heart of your brand

Identify the foundational beliefs, the enduring emblems and milestone moments that embody your brand. Bring these forward, while allowing for re-imagination in today's cultural context

# 2.

## Harmonise your customer of today and tomorrow

Building brand affinity and loyalty ultimately rests on the ability to connect with consumers on an emotional level – a quality that can transcend generations. Be open to a dialogue with customers and act to safeguard and evolve the elements of the brand that resonate

# 3.

## Strike the balance between brand and creative director

'Newness' and reinvention are essential to capturing attention in an 'always on' environment – but minding the codes is how you create enduring brand power. Keep in mind the intersection of brand, audience and culture to inform your direction

# 4.

## Connect your values to cultural moments fast and slow to drive your cultural currency

From enduring macro-trends to viral social media fads, always use the lens of brand to choicefully guide how you connect to culture

# 5.

## Consider how you show up

From social media to brand actions imbued with meaning, carefully consider how you 'live' across a range of touchpoints



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October 2023  
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**If you'd like to find out more about  
how partnering with Spring can help  
you succeed in the New Cultural Order,  
please reach out to us at:**

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