

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Will luxury fashion brands continue to embrace pop culture, licensing into 2020s?

December 10, 2020



LVMH-owned Fenty launched in 2019. Image credit: Fenty

By ELLEN KELLEHER

Luxury brands including Gucci, Prada, Louis Vuitton and Moschino made their mark on pop culture in the 2010s, but may be losing some of their influence into the 2020s with the rise of streetwear and athleisure.

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According to the fourth annual "The Influentials" report, produced by [License Global](#) magazine, a number of luxury brands became more mainstream and accessible in the 2010s. Their decade-long hold on global culture extended to the start of the 2020s, but they have since been surpassed in popularity amid the pandemic by athleisure specialists such as Lululemon.

"This report is the business of brands and what are brands if not the consumer expression of pop culture," said Amanda Cioletti, content director at [License Global](#), Santa Monica. "This report examines trends over the course of the past decade and looks to the future and what will chime, making it an excellent window into where businesses and brand owners can place their focus."

The report was compiled from survey data of License Global's readership and tech data as well as discussions with industry leaders.

Luxury licensing

In the last decade, luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Dior, Gucci and Prada leveraged licensed brand partnerships and popular culture to grow their customer bases.

A marker for fashion innovation came back in 2012 when designer Virgil Abloh's Off-White label, known then as Pyrex Vision, was introduced and helped to cast a new direction for high fashion.



Louis Vuitton's collaboration with Supreme. Image credit: Louis Vuitton

In another moment, in 2014, Moschino tapped the irreverent designer Jeremy Scott as its creative director. The move allowed for the introduction of tie-ups between fashion and fast food after Mr. Scott introduced a capsule collection which relied on McDonalds for its inspiration ([see story](#)).

Other luxury brands partnered with mass market retailers such as H&M for limited collections.

In 2014, designer Alexander Wang forged a partnership with H&M for athleisure wear. In 2015, French luxury brand Balmain also struck up a deal with H&M and launched a campaign starring Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid ([see story](#)).

By the close of the decade, heritage brands such as Dior, Fendi and Louis Vuitton had fought to keep attention by taking a more populist approach as well. In 2017, Louis Vuitton surprised its fans by setting up a line with streetwear brand Supreme and creating a collection that is still sought by collectors ([see story](#)).

Celebrity loomed large in the branding world in the last decade, but pop star Rihanna made a particularly impactful contribution, with the launch of Fenty ([see story](#)).

With the collection starting simply as a collaboration between Rihanna and sportswear brand Puma, the singer later introduced licensing deals for 11 fragrances as well as a number of apparel lines. Now owned by LVMH, Fenty's fashion and beauty lines stand out for embracing a "drop" approach and centering inclusivity.

With the 2020s underway and work-from-home culture permeating most aspects of everyday life, people's attention has further shifted to streetwear and athleisure brands.



Dior launched its first leisurewear capsule collection, Chez Moi, in an embrace of casualization. Image credit: Dior

VF Corporation's acquisition of Supreme for \$2.1 billion in November ([see story](#)) is indicative that the embrace of casualwear is set to continue in the decade ahead.

Brands such as Lululemon, the yoga gear specialist, have also grown in popularity this year, according to the report. Companies such as activewear group Outdoor Voices and Japanese retailer Uniqlo are set to expand licensing programs as well.

More 2020 trends

Branding partnerships for luxury players are becoming ever more creative and this trend also played out in 2020.

Louis Vuitton, for instance, notched a first when it partnered with the National Basketball Association for its men's

spring/summer 2021 menswear capsule collection. The three-year arrangement was orchestrated by Mr. Abloh, men's artistic director at Louis Vuitton in addition to his role at Off-White.

The collaboration marks Louis Vuitton's first and only partnership thus far with a North American sports league ([see story](#)).

The pandemic was the chief story of 2020 and the disruption it caused also prompted a shift towards authenticity by brands.

A number of Italian heritage brands highlighted their artisanal side to show support.

Earlier this year, Fendi showcased the intricacy of the handiwork of its artisans in a new film series focusing on craftsmanship.

In "Hand in Hand", the company's creative director Silvia Venturini Fendi cast a light on the Italian craftsmen who are responsible for the various pieces in Fendi's collection. The campaign reflects Fendi's desire to evaluate its place at the end of the supply chain at a difficult time and broadcast its solidarity with its network of suppliers ([see story](#)).

"The economic, social and physical impact of 2020 is not something that can be underestimated," License Global's Ms. Cioletti said. "2021 will very much be a recovery year for brands as they find their footing after a dramatic 2020."

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