

COLUMNS

What luxury brands can learn from Burberry x Marcus Rashford

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Fashion giant Burberry has partnered with British footballer (soccer player) Marcus Rashford to support U.K. youth organizations and charities globally. Image credit: Burberry

By **Glyn Atwal**

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Football, otherwise known as soccer in the United States, is often referred to as "the beautiful game." Despite its physical nature, football played at the highest level is associated with style and even elegance as observed by the former Arsenal coach, Arsene Wenger, "Football is an art like dancing is an art but only when it's well done does it become an art."

Luxury brands, including some of the more traditional brands such as Louis Vuitton, have sought to take advantage of not only the sport's popularity but the associations of its distinctive character and culture.

In the bag

Since 2010, Louis Vuitton has provided the travel case for the World Cup trophy and launched a leather goods collection for the last World Cup, Louis Vuitton's 2018 FIFA World Cup.

Beyond the prestige of international tournaments, luxury brands compete to sign the biggest names or artists to win over the "fan fashionista."

Cristiano Ronaldo (CR7) was famously the face or body for Armani and is currently the brand ambassador for Tag Heuer and the Chinese automobile brand Wey.

Kylian Mbappé, one of the fastest-rising stars in the world of football, is a brand ambassador for Hublot and Bulko Homme, a Japanese men's skincare brand.

David Beckham, whose playing days ended in 2013, is still able to master endorsement deals with brands such as Tudor and Haig Club.

Luxury brands are seduced by footballers who do not only play at the highest level but enjoy the iconic status, which can also be attributed to their carefully crafted physical and lifestyle appearance.

It is the power and uniqueness of the elite footballer as demonstrated by their social media following that increases

brand awareness and desirability amongst a wider audience and ultimately leads to a positive image transfer.

However, despite the success of past endorsements, luxury brand executives need to question if the conspicuous celebrity lifestyle is, in fact, outdated as younger consumers critically evaluate the meaning of authenticity.

Some footballer celebrities are somewhat "promiscuous" in that they will advertise almost anything and everything. Do luxury brands need to up their game to avoid the risk of scoring an own goal? Can luxury brands learn from Burberry to develop a more meaningful brand relationship?

Burberry's relationship with football was not always ideal.



In the summer of 2020, British footballer Marcus Rashford helped to raise 20 million in financial and food donations for food distribution charity FareShare. Image credit: Burberry

High scorer

At the turn of the millennium, the Burberry signature check scarf or baseball cap became associated with football hooligans. It was an image that did not give the brand any favors. Today, the brand is using the credibility of the Manchester United and England international footballer Marcus Rashford to create different brand imagery.

The 23-year-old footballer gained widespread respect and recognition with his high-profile campaign to end child food poverty in the United Kingdom.

In the summer of 2020, Mr. Rashford helped to raise 20 million in financial and food donations for food distribution charity FareShare.

However, his determination matched with diplomacy to lobby politicians captured the public's imagination. This included the ability to influence U.K. government policy to protect U.K.'s most vulnerable children during the pandemic. He received an MBE in the Queen's birthday honors list for his ongoing charitable and campaigning efforts.

Many footballers have led and supported a diverse range of social campaigning initiatives.

Mr. Rashford is somewhat different, being that he represents a genuine voice. Gen Z can relate to his personal story in a way that is difficult to emulate.

The footballer talks from the heart as he speaks from his own childhood experience using food banks and soup kitchens. He is not merely a world-class player but an ambassador for social change.

The March issue of *Time* magazine features Mr. Rashford on its title as one of the 100 most influential people.

Burberry has partnered with Mr. Rashford to support U.K. youth organizations and charities globally.

The youth charity project has featured Mr. Rashford in the "Voices of tomorrow" campaign. #DanceAndDonate on TikTok is a celebration of Burberry's empowerment of youth.

The decision to partner with Mr. Rashford was not based on-pitch performance, fashion acumen or social media following.

These factors were certainly not ignored but the brand-celebrity match was determined by the need to develop an intense emotional bond. In one word: trustworthiness.

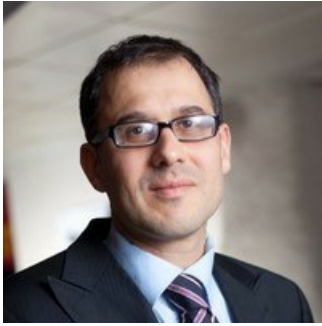
THE PARTNERSHIP between Burberry and Mr. Rashford has important transferable learnings.

Luxury brands need to establish substance over superficiality. This is particularly relevant in China, where celebrity

influence is measured overwhelmingly by quantitative metrics.

The decision for Loewe to sign the female U.S. footballer Megan Rapinoe is further testimony that inner personality traits reflect a deep appreciation of character.

Is it time for luxury brands to kick ordinariness into touch?



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