Fashion Business Assessment: Jacquemus

Launched only in 2009, independent brand Jacquemus can already be recognised as one of the most popular luxury brands in the space today, comparable to other established luxury houses such as Dior or Gucci. Under the ownership and artistic direction of Simon Porte Jacquemus, the brands success can be attributed to his strong focus on imagery and brand identity, as well as its competitive pricing positioning within the luxury market. Additionally, the brand has established a strong digital presence on social media platforms through a clear communication and PR strategy, which has put the brand at the forefront of online community building in the digital age.

* Which business model does the brand adopt?

Jacquemus can come under the category of a creative brand through its stylistic identity and price positioning, which is comparable to that of other luxury brands. Yet, in the case of Jacquemus, its prices are below that of its main competitors, with the average price of a Jacquemus item averaging to roughly half of that of Balenciaga, Prada, or Saint Laurent **(**Mira N, 2020).The Jacquemus business model also opposes that of its competitors, with the product assortment being focused on clothes and ready-to-wear items as opposed to other luxury fashion labels by which accessories account for the largest share of the range, sometimes up to 75% (Retviews,2020).

Additionally, the Jacquemus business model is mainly based on wholesale, as opposed to the luxury leaders who have been able to develop their own distribution network. Although the wholesale model can have its own constraints and limitations relating to aspects such as control within the supply chain and negotiating power with distributors, this is not such an issue for the Jacquemus brand itself thanks to its rise in popularity and demand.

The COVID-19 crisis has certainly disrupted many businesses and their distribution practices, forcing many of them to accelerate their transition to digital channels. Although one of the main challenges for creative brands is having greater visibility within an extremely competitive market, where brands use similar tools and platforms to promote themselves, Jacquemus’ strong PR and marketing strategies put them at the forefront of successful lockdown marketing. For example, the #JacquemusAtHome series orchestrated by Simon himself invited his fans to engage with the brand through creative photos, which was then shared on the Jacquemus Instagram page. The fact that Simon chooses to run the Instagram page himself allows him to develop a more personal relationship with his consumers as he puts his own personal flare on how to navigate the platform.

* How does the brand adapt to new customer trends?

At this point, Jacquemus is known for its ability to create a buzz and moments of virality, particularly on social media. Jacquemus has gone on to create its own trends, the signature Chiquito Mini bag being a prime example. What initially was intended as PR to send invitations to press editors during the FW2019 show turned into an industry- wide trend. Showcasing the perfect balance between humour and speculation, the Chiquito bag was a recipe for a high engagement rate. Once again, Simon has proved his social media savviness and great skill for cultivating high levels of engagement.

* Does the brand have a history? If so, which one? Who is the artistic director?

Simon Porte Jacquemus is the founder and owner of Jacquemus and remains at the helm of the brand’s artistic direction. Jacquemus can still be considered as a young brand, particularly when compared to other luxury brands that have decades of heritage behind them. Despite this, the history behind the brand and its founder would become a fundamental aspect of the brand’s identity. Born in 1990 and raised in a small town in the South of France, Simon would move to Paris at the age of 18 to pursue an education within fashion. In 2009, Simon would tragically lose his mother in a car accident which prompted the creation of the Jacquemus brand under her maiden name. To finance his dream of having his own label, Simon worked at the Comme des Garcons store in 2011 and gained the support of Rei Kawakubo and Adrian Joffe**.** In the early stages of promotion, Simon asked his friends to wear his designs during Vogue’s fashion night out in 2010. This led to him being invited to present his collection during Paris fashion week. After a few years of developing the brand, Simon would have a major breakthrough as he was nominated for the LVMH prize for young fashion designers in 2015. The prize represents young and upcoming designers who are trying to make a name for themselves and includes not only a $400,000 grant, but also direct mentorship under LVMH for a year. Winning the LVMH prize would gain huge traction for any young designer and is essentially a huge jumpstart for any young brand. Simon would not go on to win the LVMH prize but would be awarded a different prize which included around $200,000 and a 1-year mentorship. LVMH clearly saw some potential within Simon and his brand which is why they decided to offer him some support.

* How is the brand’s identity expressed?

Jacquemus can be considered as a luxury brand due to its clear brand DNA and strong focus on story telling as Simon states ‘I don’t do collections, I do stories, so I always focus on the story as well as the clothes’ (Graham, M 2014).Simon often draws inspiration from his childhood and his home in the South of France. On many occasions, Simon has expressed that his mother is his muse, and the brand was created as a result of her passing as aforementioned. When asked if he views his brand as a tribute to his mother, he expressed ‘To me, it is my mother. It might seem a bit strange, but to me, it’s more than a tribute. She is a woman who still lives through Jacquemus.’ (Wild Magazine, No Date**).** Simon often tries to convey a narrative in his collections, particularly in his catwalk shows. An example includes his SS16 show, which began with a large red woollen ball, symbolic of recent trauma in Simon’s personal life, being pushed by his eight-year-old cousin, Jean.

Often paying homage to his native Provence, warm hues and primary colours are predominant in both the clothing and accessories. Simon puts less emphasis on the timeless black, which can be considered a staple among other luxury labels and instead includes colours like pink, beige and green. Additionally, a strong sense of French patriotism is expressed through the use of blue, white and red in many of his collections, with many of his designs based around updated French classics and archetypal French concepts, like ‘La Femme Enfant’ or ‘La Grand Matte’. Simon can be cited as ‘The go-to designer for the Parisian it-girl’ with collections that ‘embody a playful French spirit’ (Graham, M 2014).

* What is the brand’s communication strategy?

A large portion of the brand’s current popularity must be attributed to its strong communication strategies and the Instagram platform has served as an integral part of the brand’s PR and marketing, with the Jacquemus account amounting over 3.2 million followers. Despite many others typically having a team to develop a social media strategy, Simon manages the account himself and not only has he successfully curated an aesthetically pleasing feed but has also managed to establish a deeper connection among his consumers. Each post is repeated 3 times and has become a signature at this point, creating straight lines and a feeling of tidiness when scrolled through. As well as showcasing the recent collections, Simon gives his followers an insight into his lifestyle, often posting selfies and images that evoke his inspiration. As a result, Simon has made the brand more personal and relatable as a strong sense of interaction is conveyed between him and his followers.

Jacquemus is now known for their savvy social media strategies and has had a series of online viral moments. One that sticks out occurred during the pandemic, where he posted a series of images in his home in the South of France of a woman with an orange and lemon placed under her heels, mimicking the cult shoe ‘Les Chaussures Salvador’. A trend was born as fans recreated the image with citrus fruits and other items under the hashtag #JacquemusAtHome. Simon shared these images on the Jacquemus Instagram page, celebrating his fans creativity and engaging them with the brand’s core idealism. By choosing to manage the Jacquemus Instagram himself, Simon disputes the perception that designers are ‘untouchable’, a notion that so many designers of the past have tried to convey. Instead, Simon invites his customers into his world. Jacquemus has certainly set the tone for other brands, who wish to have a high consumer engagement.

Alongside social media strategies, Simon has also developed numerous fashion films to accompany his collections. His first one made in addition to his FW11 collection named ‘The Factory’. Shot on a vintage camera, the film follows two young girls dressed in items from the collection running the factory (Jacquemus, 2011**).** Short films would then be made for all his future collections. Films are a great medium for Simon to facilitate his love of storytelling and showcase the inspirations behind the collections. They provide another insight to the creative process and serve as a true personification of his art as the consumers are shown his creative vision.

* What kind of model of society does the brand defend?

As previously mentioned, Simon makes references to his hometown in the South of France in his collections through choice of colour palette and fabric selection. Simon’s homage to his French heritage is also conveyed in the stories he tries to create in his collections, ‘it was simple stories, stories of women in the south of France, a woman who takes her car, who goes to the beach’ (IFM, 2020). Simon has stated that he often designs with his mother in mind, creating clothes that he pictures she would wear. At the same time, he has a faithfulness to designing clothes for his own generation, at prices that are attainable to them. Jacquemus is a young French brand that caters to fashion forward individuals who appreciate a strong narrative and concept behind their clothing. Customers of the brand admire playful, wearable garments at a more affordable price point compared to other luxury labels. The brand welcomes those who express a youthful personality and who have an interest in French culture.

Aside from the visual references to French culture in the garments, the global perspective of the brand as a whole should also be mentioned. Historically, the main purpose of fashion brands was to manufacture clothes and make profit. However, a shift in values can be identified as we move into the current digital age, where having a voice has its significance. We are certainly living in a generation where we expect brands to have a point of view and opinions on relevant topics going on in the world. This trend could perhaps be more geared towards heritage brands, who are now being examined for their practices and who must unravel their own responsibility. With that being said, Jacquemus was created in the digital era and its popularity can certainly be linked to its online presence. Therefore, in this context it is arguably unacceptable for Jacquemus to have limiting global perspectives fuelling the brand.

In a number of ways, Jacquemus has widened its global perspective by challenging old models of the luxury fashion industry. Expressed in Ls:N Global’s ‘Future Forecast for 2021’**,** this past year has escalated the priority for ‘more sustainable and ethical approaches that prioritise livelihoods while retaining creativity’ – a notion that Jacquemus aligns with: ‘I decided to slow my company , to show just summer and winter. It’s also a decision to make my company feel well’ (Tse,2020). It is evident that Jacquemus has taken significant steps to reduce its environmental impact in response to the current climate crisis as well as curating a healthy working environment for its employees – an aspect of the industry that has also been subject to criticism amidst the recent exposures of employee exploitation among fast fashion brands.

Jacquemus’ current consciousness towards sustainability does align with current concerns within fashion, in regard to brands re-evaluating their practices. In order to keep up with consumer demands and evolve its global perspective, the brand must continue to work towards greater brand sustainability and equality.

* Does the brand have an innovation strategy?

Although a large amount of French influence and affiliation can be associated with the brand, that is not to suggest that the brand is exclusive to a specific demographic to any degree. In fact, quite the opposite can be said about the brand as it has been praised in its approach towards inclusion and diversity.

In the article ‘3 ways the Jacquemus show pioneered positive change’ by Mewawalla T. (2020), the author highlights Jacquemus’ spring 2021 show as demonstrating inclusivity in the fashion world, through its casting of models made up of different body types. Furthermore, the casting also included a lot of racial diversity, with 60% of the models from the collection being models of colour.

Jacquemues’ approach to inclusivity goes beyond the casting of its models but refers also to its price positioning and sizing availability. Simon states, ‘My strategy is very clear, to make a high-end clothing brand with strong visual impact, but the price is the price of the contemporary design brand’ (Retviews, 2020).The brand has the lowest price positioning compared to its competitors and also holds the highest averages of sizes available. Although the brand is not perfect and there are certainly areas where they can still improve, it can be argued that Jacquemus is setting a good example in their approach to inclusivity.

* Does the brand have a sustainability strategy?

Within the last few years, Jacquemus has made several adjustments to its business practices in an effort to be more environmentally aware. For example, in an attempt to reduce company and industry waste, Jacquemus will now only release two collections instead of four (TSE,2020). Another big change to note is that this year, the French fashion house decided to replace their fashion show with a digital presentation, thus reducing the energy and potential waste that may result from a traditional runway show. As many physical shows were cancelled due to the pandemic, this change can also be seen as an innovative practice in this digital era.

Mentioned in an article taken from Forbes magazine (TSE,2020), Simon speaks about how he would rather have his manufacturer hold the sustainable fabrics than switch to a different supplier. He has also stated that in his future collections no more than ten fabrics would suffice as opposed to the use of a hundred different ones. Jacquemus is showing a progression towards a less wasteful industry and is being considerate of the impacts of his business practices. Despite these adjustments, Jacquemus does not brand itself as a sustainable company (Retviews,2020). There are certainly areas of improvement if the brand wants to hold helping the environment at the core of its values, like reducing the use of synthetic fibres.

Stated in a report made by Retviews, Simon’s aim is to design clothing that can be worn frequently and not just on a single occasion. This idea demonstrates a higher cost per wear and discards the archaic tradition that a garment should only be worn once. Also in the report, it shows that Jacquemus uses many natural fabrics, the highest being 31% cotton and 9% linen but the remaining 60% are composed of non-sustainable fabrics. In a recent survey, 93% of people said Jacquemus as a brand could still be doing more to be even more environmentally friendly. This demonstrates from a consumer standpoint that there is an expectation of fashion brands to be more environmentally orientated in their practice through greater transparency.

* Which are the brand’s product categories?

As previously mentioned, accessories and shoes make up the highest share of the assortment mix within the luxury segment, demonstrating how essential these items are when it comes to margins. Jacquemus, on the other hand, comprises their range between accessories and clothing at almost 50/50. Perhaps this ratio is due to the brand still being quite young and, similar to its competitors, has started by focusing on clothing and as the brand continues to evolve, will put more emphasis towards accessories.

* How are collections structured? Which are the key materials used?

Jacquemus’ brand identity comes to the forefront in the structure of their collections. Simon loves to take inspiration from his home, and this is reflected in the focus of natural fabrics, like cotton, linen, and viscose. Simon stated in an interview that his choice had his grandparents in mind: ‘we have tomatoes in the garden, so we eat tomatoes’. (Retviews,2020)

Simon’s choice of colour palette pays homage to his hometown and ‘gets off the beaten tracks’ (Retviews, 2020) and puts more emphasis on warm colours. Additionally, Jacquemus offers more dimensions in terms of average sizes available when compared to its competitors, which are shown at his runways.

The conceptualisation of Simon’s collections can differ from season to season, he expresses ‘The Jacquemus woman exists but how to define her’ (IFM,2020). Simon states that ‘the steps to create a collection, it’s never the same thing’ (IFM,2020) and his inspirations can range from concepts, paintings, designs, or references to artists. ‘Things must remain spontaneous, and they remain so’, he states. Simultaneously though, Simon remains conscious of the balance between his creative endeavours and his entrepreneurial ambitions, suggesting that it is common sense ‘If last year, a lot of short dresses were selling well, it’s a shame not to propose any’ (IFM,2020). Despite his overarching awareness he has also stated that ‘it does not mean that sales will define my next creations’ (IFM,2020).

* Does the brand have iconic products?

Although there is a strong focus on garments in Jacquemus’ product range, accessories certainly hold their place among Jacquemus shows, as demonstrated by the Chiquito mini handbag which has taken social media by storm. Alongside the label’s oversized straw hat, both items have now become a signature, their popularity boosted by huge social media engagement.

* Does the brand organise fashion shows? If so, what is the message vehiculated through fashion shows?

Fashion shows serve as a great vehicle for Jacquemus to illustrate the stories Simon wants to tell. Most recently, Jacquemues showcased their SS21 collection in a wheat field an hour outside of Paris. Entitled ‘L’Amour’, Jacquemues’ spring/summer show is one of the first major fashion spectacles to take place since the pandemic. The show was on a much smaller scale, both in terms of guest count and in the size of the collection and the nature of the snaking runway allowed for social-distancing guidelines to be followed. The collection was dedicated to Simon’s hardworking team and he has explained how the pandemic changed the idea behind the collection. It is not uncommon for Jacquemues to make such a spectacle out of his runways, from the 10th Anniversary Show set in the dreamlike fields of lavender in Provence or the SS16 show that featured Simon’s cousin pushing along a red woollen ball. Much like the garments he creates, the Jacquemus runway shows also reflect the things that inspire him.

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