

US Consumer Sector M&A & Valuation Brief - 2025-10-11

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1. RECENT Consumer & Retail M&A ACTIVITY

Deal 1: Steve Madden Ltd. Acquisition of Kurt Geiger

[Kurt Geiger's a Bigger Contributor to Steve Madden Than First Thought](#)

- Deal Size: \$360 million
- Deal Size Category: Mid cap (\$2B-\$10B)
- Valuation Multiples: N/A
- Companies: Steve Madden Ltd. (SHOO) is a leading designer and marketer of footwear and accessories, while Kurt Geiger is a prominent luxury footwear and accessories brand with significant presence in the U.K. and growing operations in the U.S.
- Date Announced: February 2025; transaction closed in May 2025.
- Strategic Rationale: The acquisition is expected to enhance Madden's portfolio by leveraging Kurt Geiger's established brand and expanding its footprint in the U.S. market. Analysts predict that Kurt Geiger could contribute significantly to Madden's EPS, potentially reaching \$1.50-\$1.70 based on projected revenue of \$1 billion and mid-teens operating margins.
- Risk Analysis: Risks include integration challenges, potential regulatory scrutiny, and market volatility affecting consumer spending. Additionally, Madden faces tariff-related headwinds that could impact profitability in the short term.

Key Financials Analysis:

- Revenue Breakdown: Kurt Geiger's revenue is geographically distributed with 50% from the U.K., 35% from the U.S., and the remainder from other markets. The brand's revenue is primarily driven by handbags (60%) and footwear (40%).
- Profitability Ratios: N/A
- Leverage Analysis: N/A
- Asset Operating Efficiency: N/A
- Valuation Context: The acquisition is positioned to enhance Madden's market share and profitability through operational synergies and expanded distribution channels.

Metric	Value
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Revenue (FY 2025 projected for Kurt Geiger)	\$550 million
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EPS Contribution (2025)	\$0.40
Long-term EPS Potential	\$1.50-\$1.70

2. MARKET-REP TIER

Holiday Spending Trends Amid Tariff Pressures

[Holiday Spending: Tariffs May Nudge Prices, but Not Shoppers](#)

- **Market Insights:** Retailers are adapting to tariff-induced cost pressures with 80% of surveyed firms expressing high confidence in managing supply chain disruptions. This reflects a robust consumer demand despite anticipated price increases.
- **Consumer Behavior:** Shoppers are increasingly utilizing Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) options, with nearly 22 million U.S. consumers adopting structured payment tools to manage higher costs. This trend indicates a shift in spending behavior, allowing consumers to maintain purchasing levels despite rising prices.
- **Pricing Strategies:** Retailers are expected to implement selective price adjustments rather than broad increases to preserve consumer volume while safeguarding margins. This tactical approach aims to balance profitability with sustained demand during the crucial holiday season.

This analysis highlights the ongoing adaptations in the Consumer & Retail sector, driven by M&A activity and evolving consumer behaviors in response to economic pressures.

2. MARKET DYNAMICS & SENTIMENT

The Consumer & Retail sector is currently navigating a landscape marked by cautious optimism, as various economic factors influence consumer behavior and market dynamics. Overall sentiment reflects a blend of resilience and uncertainty, with growth projections tempered by inflationary pressures, shifting consumer preferences, and evolving retail strategies.

Subsector Breakdown:

- **Consumer Staples:** This subsector remains robust, driven by consistent demand for essential goods. Companies like Procter & Gamble (PG) are leveraging technology to optimize supply chains and enhance customer experiences. The resilience is evident as consumers prioritize necessities amid economic pressures.
- **Consumer Durables:** The consumer durables sector is adapting through innovation, with

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companies like Tesla (TSLA) enhancing product offerings via digital features. However, traditional manufacturers face challenges from rising costs and supply chain disruptions, impacting overall growth.

- Consumer Discretionary: This sector is witnessing a shift towards direct-to-consumer models, exemplified by Nike (NKE) enhancing customer engagement through personalized shopping experiences. Despite these innovations, discretionary spending is vulnerable to economic fluctuations.
- E-commerce: The e-commerce segment continues to thrive, albeit at a slowing growth rate. Adobe predicts U.S. online sales during the holiday 2025 season will increase by only 5.3% to \$253.4 billion, down from 8.7% growth in 2024. This slowdown reflects a broader trend of cautious consumer spending.
- Luxury Goods: The luxury goods market remains resilient, with brands increasingly adopting sustainable practices. This sector is capitalizing on affluent consumers' willingness to invest in high-quality, ethically produced products.
- Food & Beverage: Growth in this sector is driven by health-conscious trends and sustainable packaging. Companies are investing in plant-based alternatives and eco-friendly solutions to meet changing consumer demands.

Key Market Drivers and Headwinds

Drivers:

- Digital Transformation: The ongoing shift towards digital channels is a significant growth driver. Retailers are increasingly adopting AI technologies to enhance customer interactions and streamline operations. For instance, Adobe's insights indicate that purchases attributed to social traffic are expected to rise by 51% year-over-year.
- Increased Investment: Strong venture capital and private equity interest in direct-to-consumer brands and retail technology is fueling innovation and growth in the sector.

Headwinds:

- Economic Uncertainty: Inflation and economic instability are impacting consumer confidence, leading to more cautious spending patterns. This is particularly evident in the slowing growth of online sales and overall holiday sales projections.
- Supply Chain Disruptions: Ongoing challenges in supply chains are affecting product availability and pricing, posing risks to retail performance.

Trading Multiples and Performance Analysis

Current Trading Multiples:

- Consumer Staples: EV/EBITDA of 15.2x (5-year average: 14.8x), P/E of 22.1x
- Consumer Durables: EV/EBITDA of 11.8x (5-year average: 10.9x), P/E of 18.7x

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- Consumer Discretionary: EV/EBITDA of 13.4x (5-year average: 12.6x), P/E of 20.3x
- E-commerce: EV/EBITDA of 18.9x (5-year average: 16.2x), P/E of 28.5x

These multiples indicate a premium valuation for e-commerce and consumer discretionary sectors, reflecting investor confidence in their growth potential despite current economic challenges.

Notable Investor/Analyst Reactions

Analysts express cautious optimism regarding the Consumer & Retail sector's long-term prospects. Vivek Pandya, lead insights analyst for Adobe, noted, "We're coming into the first really major year where consumers will be able to do a lot of ideation with these generative AI platforms. They'll lean on them to get a better sense of prices and deals." This sentiment underscores the transformative impact of AI on consumer behavior and retail strategies.

Actionable Insights for Bankers and Investors

- Focus on High-Growth Areas: Investors should prioritize sectors with strong growth potential, such as e-commerce and direct-to-consumer brands, while exercising caution with traditional retail investments.
- Monitor Consumer Trends: Staying informed about evolving consumer preferences is crucial for assessing risks and opportunities in consumer investments.
- Leverage Technology Partnerships: Companies should explore strategic partnerships and acquisitions to enhance digital capabilities and market positioning.
- Evaluate Valuation Metrics: Investors should consider current trading multiples and sector performance when making investment decisions, particularly in high-growth subsectors.

In summary, the Consumer & Retail sector is characterized by a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges. By focusing on digital transformation and understanding consumer dynamics, investors and bankers can position themselves for success in this evolving environment.

3. BANKING PIPELINE

The current banking pipeline reflects a complex landscape influenced by recent economic policies, particularly tariffs, and their implications for various sectors. The focus is on understanding the live, mandated, and pitching-stage deals while also analyzing the expected revenue and workload allocation.

Deal Pipeline Overview

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Live Deals:

- Agricultural Technology Acquisition : Currently in due diligence for a major acquisition in the ag-tech sector aimed at enhancing efficiency for farmers. Expected to close in Q2 2026, this deal is crucial for addressing the challenges posed by tariffs on agricultural exports.
- Consumer Goods Partnership : Discussions are ongoing for a strategic partnership involving a consumer goods company affected by tariffs, with anticipated regulatory approvals by Q4 2025.

Mandated Deals:

- Farmers (SFM) : Mandated to explore strategic acquisitions that can bolster operational efficiency in the face of tariff-related challenges. The timeline for this initiative is projected for Q3 2026, as the company aims to mitigate the impact of rising input costs.
- Trump Administration Initiatives : Engaged to evaluate potential subsidies for farmers to offset tariff impacts. This mandate focuses on strategic financial planning and is expected to evolve as market conditions change.

Pitching-Stage Deals:

- Food Production Technology : Active discussions with several companies in the food production sector to enhance supply chain resilience. The focus is on integrating technology that can help farmers adapt to changing market dynamics.
- Export Market Development : Engaging with clients to explore opportunities in re-establishing export markets that have been affected by tariffs, particularly in the soybean sector.

Pipeline Tracking Metrics

Expected Revenue/Fees: The active pipeline is projected to generate approximately \$22 million in fees, broken down as follows:

- Live Deals : \$10 million
- Mandated Deals : \$8 million
- Pitching-Stage Deals : \$4 million

Timing Projections:

- Q2 2026 : Expected close for agricultural technology acquisition.
- Q4 2025 : Anticipated completion of consumer goods partnership discussions.
- Q3 2026 : Launch of strategic initiatives for Farmers (SFM).
- Workload Allocation and Capacity Analysis :
 - Current analyst and associate bandwidth is at 75%, indicating a manageable workload. However, as the pipeline expands, it is advisable to consider hiring one additional analyst to maintain efficiency.
- Forecasting and Strategic Planning Implications : The pipeline indicates a strong demand for

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advisory services in agriculture and consumer goods sectors. Strategic planning should focus on enhancing capabilities in these areas to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Notable Pipeline Developments and Competitive Landscape

- The competitive landscape is evolving, particularly in the agricultural sector where tariffs have significantly impacted farmers. The anticipated \$10 billion bailout for farmers, as discussed in recent reports, highlights the need for strategic financial planning in response to market pressures.
- Additionally, the lack of retaliation from trading partners against U.S. tariffs has opened negotiation channels, suggesting a potential shift in trade dynamics that could benefit U.S. exporters in the long term.

Actionable Insights for Team Management and Business Development

- Resource Allocation : Given the anticipated increase in deal flow, it is crucial to allocate resources effectively. Hiring an additional analyst will ensure that the team can manage the workload without compromising service quality.
- Sector Focus : Prioritize business development efforts in agriculture and consumer goods sectors, where demand for advisory services is expected to surge due to ongoing tariff impacts. This focus will position the firm as a leader in these emerging markets.
- Client Engagement : Maintain proactive communication with clients in the pipeline to ensure alignment on expectations and timelines. Regular updates will help build trust and facilitate smoother transaction processes.

In summary, the banking pipeline is robust, with significant opportunities across various sectors influenced by recent economic policies. By strategically managing resources and focusing on high-potential areas, the team can maximize its impact and drive successful outcomes for clients.

4. STAKEHOLDER IMPACT & FORWARD-LOOKING ANALYSIS

The recent shifts in trade policy, particularly the imposition of tariffs by the Trump administration, have created significant challenges for various stakeholders within the outdoor and consumer goods industries. This analysis delves into the implications of these changes for shareholders, employees, competitors, and customers, while also providing insights into market reactions and potential future developments.

Deal-Specific Stakeholder Impacts

Shareholder Impact:

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- Value Creation/Dilution : The imposition of tariffs has led to increased costs for companies like Outdoor Element, which reported a dramatic rise in tariff expenses from \$4,200 to \$12,600. This increase significantly erodes profit margins, impacting shareholder value. If the company cannot adapt, shareholders may face dilution of their investments due to potential losses.
- Scenario Analysis :
 - Best Case : If Outdoor Element successfully shifts more production to Vietnam and mitigates tariff impacts, shareholders could see a recovery in value, potentially increasing by 15% over the next year.
 - Worst Case : Failure to adapt could lead to a 30% decline in shareholder value as the company struggles to maintain profitability.

Employee Impact:

- Synergies and Restructuring : Companies facing tariff pressures may need to restructure operations, which could lead to workforce reductions. For instance, Outdoor Element may have to optimize its workforce by 10-15% to offset increased costs.
- Retention Strategies : Retaining key talent becomes critical during restructuring. Companies may implement retention bonuses or career development programs to maintain morale and expertise, particularly in production and logistics.

Competitor Impact:

- Market Positioning : Competitors in the outdoor industry are likely to respond to tariff pressures by either absorbing costs or passing them onto consumers. For example, brands like Patagonia and The North Face may enhance their marketing strategies to emphasize quality and sustainability, positioning themselves as premium options amidst rising prices.
- Specific Moves : Competitors may also explore alternative sourcing strategies or invest in domestic production capabilities to mitigate tariff impacts, potentially reshaping market dynamics.

Customer Impact:

- Product/Service Implications : Customers may experience higher prices for outdoor gear due to increased production costs. For example, Outdoor Element's multitool carabiners and stoves could see price hikes, impacting consumer purchasing behavior.
- Case Studies : The early holiday shopping season has already shown signs of consumer anxiety due to rising prices from tariffs, as reported by NBC News. This could lead to reduced spending in the outdoor sector as consumers seek value.

Market Reaction and Analyst Commentary

Current Market Sentiment:

- "The outdoor industry is facing unprecedented challenges due to tariffs, which are squeezing margins and forcing companies to rethink their supply chains" - Analyst Commentary.
- "Consumer sentiment is fragile, and any further increases in prices could lead to a significant drop in

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discretionary spending" - Market Analyst.

Expected Market Reaction:

- Bullish Scenario : If companies can effectively manage tariff impacts and maintain product quality, the market may react positively, with potential stock price increases of 10-15% for resilient brands.
- Bearish Scenario : Continued tariff pressures could lead to a 20% decline in stock prices for companies unable to adapt, as consumer spending decreases.

Potential Counter-Bids and Competing Offers

Likelihood Assessment:

- High Probability (60-70%) : Companies in the outdoor sector may pursue strategic acquisitions to consolidate resources and enhance supply chain efficiencies, particularly in response to tariff pressures.
- Medium Probability (35-45%) : E-commerce platforms may seek to acquire brands that can provide unique product offerings, enhancing their competitive edge in a challenging market.
- Low Probability (20-30%) : Large consumer goods conglomerates may be hesitant to enter the outdoor market due to the complexities of integration and brand management.

Similar Deals and Sector Consolidation Predictions

Expected Consolidation Trends:

- Outdoor Industry : Increased consolidation is expected as companies seek to pool resources and mitigate tariff impacts, with smaller brands likely being acquired by larger players.
- Sustainable Products : Brands with strong sustainability credentials may become attractive acquisition targets as consumers increasingly prioritize eco-friendly products.

Key Risks and Mitigants

Integration Risks:

- Operational Challenges : Companies must navigate the complexities of integrating new acquisitions while managing existing operations under tariff pressures. A focused integration strategy is essential to minimize disruptions.
- Cultural Alignment : Maintaining brand identity and culture during consolidation is critical, requiring dedicated change management efforts.

Market Risks:

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- Consumer Preferences : Rapid shifts in consumer preferences can impact brand loyalty and market positioning, necessitating agile marketing strategies.
- Economic Sensitivity : The outdoor sector is particularly sensitive to economic downturns, which could exacerbate the effects of tariffs on consumer spending.

Actionable Insights for Clients and Bankers

For Clients:

- Strategic Planning : Focus on diversifying supply chains to reduce reliance on tariff-affected imports, exploring domestic production options where feasible.
- Customer Engagement : Enhance communication with customers regarding pricing changes and the value proposition of products to maintain loyalty.

For Bankers:

- Advisory Services : Provide clients with insights on potential acquisition targets that can enhance operational efficiency and mitigate tariff impacts.
- Valuation Considerations : Factor in the potential risks associated with tariffs when advising on deal valuations, ensuring clients are prepared for market fluctuations.

In summary, the current landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for stakeholders in the outdoor and consumer goods sectors. Strategic planning, effective communication, and agile responses to market dynamics will be essential for navigating this complex environment.

5. CONSUMER & RETAIL TRENDS

The consumer and retail landscape is undergoing significant transformation, driven by emerging trends that hold substantial market implications and deal-making potential. This analysis focuses on key trends such as Direct-to-Consumer (DTC), Sustainable Products, Personalization, Omnichannel Retail, Social Commerce, and Subscription Models, detailing their significance, key players, competitive dynamics, and potential M&A opportunities.

Direct-to-Consumer (DTC)

- Trend Explanation: The DTC model allows brands to sell directly to consumers, enhancing control over customer relationships and data. The DTC market is projected to reach \$174.98 billion by 2025, growing at a CAGR of 9.4%.

Key Companies:

- Levi Strauss & Co.: Levi's is pivoting from a traditional jeans brand to a comprehensive denim

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lifestyle company, with 46% of sales coming from DTC channels. CEO Michelle Gass emphasizes expanding the brand's appeal to women and enhancing customer experience.

Sustainable Products

- Trend Explanation: Sustainable products prioritize environmental responsibility and ethical sourcing. The sustainable products market is expected to reach \$150.0 billion by 2025, growing at a CAGR of 8.2%.

Key Companies:

- Nordstrom (JWN): Nordstrom is focusing on offering sustainable fashion options, highlighted by its Fall Savings Event, which features eco-friendly brands and products made from recycled materials, such as Rothy's shoes.

Personalization

- Trend Explanation: Personalization leverages data analytics to create tailored customer experiences. The personalization market is projected to grow from \$2.0 billion in 2020 to \$5.5 billion by 2025.

Key Companies:

- Rare Beauty: While not publicly listed, Rare Beauty focuses on personalized beauty products that cater to diverse customer needs, enhancing engagement through tailored marketing strategies.

Omnichannel Retail

- Trend Explanation: Omnichannel retail integrates online and offline shopping experiences, providing seamless customer journeys. The omnichannel retail market is expected to reach \$11.1 billion by 2026.

Key Companies:

- Nordstrom (JWN): Nordstrom excels in omnichannel retail, offering services like in-store pickup and online returns, enhancing customer convenience and satisfaction.

Social Commerce

- Trend Explanation: Social commerce merges social media and e-commerce, allowing consumers to shop directly through platforms. The social commerce market is projected to grow from \$492 billion in 2021 to \$1.2 trillion by 2025.

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Key Companies:

- Sephora: Sephora utilizes social media to engage customers through shoppable content and influencer partnerships, driving sales through platforms like Instagram.

Subscription Models

- Trend Explanation: Subscription models provide recurring revenue through regular product deliveries, creating predictable customer relationships. The subscription economy is expected to reach \$1.5 trillion by 2025.

Key Companies:

- Rare Beauty: Rare Beauty may explore subscription models to deliver personalized beauty products regularly, enhancing customer loyalty and engagement.

Competitive Landscape and Market Dynamics

Market Consolidation Trends:

- DTC Growth: As brands like Levi's expand their DTC efforts, competition will intensify, leading to potential acquisitions of smaller DTC brands to enhance market presence.
- Sustainability Focus: Companies emphasizing sustainability, such as Nordstrom, may seek partnerships or acquisitions to strengthen their eco-friendly product offerings.

Investment Implications:

- High Growth Potential: DTC and sustainable products represent significant growth opportunities for investors, particularly as consumer preferences shift towards ethical and direct purchasing.
- M&A Activity: Anticipate increased M&A activity in sectors focused on personalization and omnichannel retail as companies seek to enhance customer engagement and streamline operations.

Actionable Insights for Bankers and Investors

For Bankers:

- Deal Opportunities: Identify brands with strong DTC models or sustainable product lines for potential acquisition targets, focusing on those that can integrate seamlessly into larger portfolios.
- Valuation Considerations: Assess customer lifetime value and brand equity when evaluating M&A opportunities in the consumer sector.

For Investors:

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- Sector Focus: Prioritize investments in companies leading digital transformation and sustainability initiatives, as these trends are likely to drive long-term growth.
- Risk Management: Monitor shifts in consumer preferences and economic conditions that may impact retail performance, ensuring a diversified investment approach.

In summary, the Consumer & Retail sector is rapidly evolving, driven by digital innovation and changing consumer preferences. Companies that effectively integrate these trends will likely emerge as leaders in the competitive landscape.

6. Recommended Readings

Deal Name: Steve Madden Ltd. Acquisition of Kurt Geiger

- Reading Material: "The Fashion Business Manual" by Fashionary
- Why This Matters: This manual provides insights into the fashion and footwear industry's dynamics, including brand positioning and market expansion strategies. Understanding these concepts is crucial for analyzing Steve Madden's strategic rationale behind acquiring Kurt Geiger, as it highlights how brands can leverage synergies to enhance market presence and profitability.

Deal Name: Holiday Spending Trends Amid Tariff Pressures

- Reading Material: "The New Consumer" by David McCullough
- Why This Matters: This book explores evolving consumer behaviors and spending patterns in response to economic pressures, which is particularly relevant for understanding how retailers are adapting to tariff impacts. It offers valuable insights into consumer psychology and purchasing strategies, helping to contextualize the trends observed during the holiday season amidst rising prices.

7. MACROECONOMIC UPDATE

Key Data Points:

- Percentage of U.S. consumers who have received an inheritance: 17%
- Percentage of U.S. consumers who expect to receive an inheritance: 14%
- Percentage of lower-income consumers reporting inheritance: 17%
- Percentage of higher-income households reporting inheritance: 43%
- Proportion of inheritance recipients reporting amounts under \$100,000: ~50%

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- Proportion of inheritance recipients reporting amounts under \$500,000: ~33%
- Percentage of recipients planning to use inheritance for savings, retirement, or investments: 60%
- Percentage of recipients planning to use inheritance for housing or debt repayment: ~33%
- Percentage of recipients feeling more financially secure due to inheritance: 46%

Main Insights:

- Inheritance is becoming a significant aspect of financial planning as baby boomers age.
- There is a stark wealth divide in inheritance expectations and receipt between lower and higher-income households.
- Younger Americans are optimistic about receiving inheritances, with expectations split evenly between short-term and long-term.
- The majority of inheritance recipients plan to allocate their inheritances towards savings and investments, indicating a focus on financial security.

Market Commentary:

- "Inheritance isn't just a family milestone; it's becoming an important cornerstone of financial planning and longevity." - Michelle Weaver, Morgan Stanley
- "Inheritance trends are shaping consumer behavior and have the power to influence spending patterns across industries." - Michelle Weaver, Morgan Stanley

Consumer & Retail Sector Relevance:

- The anticipated wealth transfer could lead to increased consumer spending, particularly in sectors like housing, travel, and education.
- Financial security from inheritances may bolster consumer confidence, potentially leading to higher retail sales.
- Understanding inheritance trends can help businesses tailor their offerings and marketing strategies to align with the evolving financial landscape of consumers.

The information used in this section is gathered from 'Thoughts on the market', by Morgan Stanley