Concept Development

BA (Hon) Cordwainers Fashion Bags and Accessories:

Product Design and Innovation

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**The Brand Name**

‘A brand name is one of the most important elements of a brand identity, as it needs to define a unique offer, communicate effectively to a particular audience, capture a set of specific values, and look and sound good!’ (Slade-Brooking, 2016, p.52)

The brand name, HUTLER, deranges from the combination of Hannah and Butler, the founder’s name. This gives the brand a sense of personal identity, meaning that every time something is purchased from the brand, a piece of the founder’s heart and creativity is within it. According to Ghurye (2015) a brand name should be easy to understand, have longevity and be something which customers can visualise and build a bond to. HUTLER is also simple and striking meaning the brand can be recognised world-wide.

**Concept**

*The life of an animal is worth more than human fashion desires.*

HUTLER aims to produce beautiful, empowering bags for discerning, style-led females.

With a strong focus on animal welfare, the collection will be of minimalistic and functional design created using high-quality vegan leather.

**Brand Ethos**

‘Great brands do not sell products; they sell an ethos’ (Fannin, 2010). A great ethos is what encourages valued customers, people who believe, to invest in what a brand is about. In the case of HUTLER, it is to encourage people to shop animal-cruelty free. McCartney (2015) provided an alarming statistic that over 50 million animals a year are killed for the fashion industry. HUTLER aims to cultivate and inspire the public, to realise that animal lives are worth more than human fashion and clothing desires, and showcase that is is possible to create beautiful, yet fashionable, vegan accessories.

The Vegan Society’s formal definition of veganism is that ‘it is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose’ (Vegan Society, 2017). According to Marsh (2016), Veganism is on the rise in the U.K. A survey was conducted in 2016 by the Vegan Society, which found that 542,000 people now favour a plant-based diet, an increase of 350% on 2006. Quinn (2016) states that almost half of the surveyed number of Vegans are aged between 15 and 34 (42%), with the majority living in urban areas and nearly a quarter (22%) living in London.

**Logo and Branding**

‘In the fashion industry it is particularly important to get your name and logo right, as they are such an integral part of creating your overall brand image’ Meadows (2014, p.43).

**Consumer**

As Meredith (2013) explains, it is only possible to reach your target consumer effectively once you have grasped both their demographics and psychographics. The demographics explain who the buyer is, using plain facts such as gender, age, income etc. whereas the psychographics explain their motives to buy, such as spending habits and hobbies.

Blumenthal (2011) mentions how important demographics and psychographics are in relation to understanding whether or not the prospective consumer can afford, would want or needs the bag being sold to them and whether it is accessible for them to purchase.

For HUTLER to be successful, it is of great importance that the target consumer is heavily analysed. A questionnaire was conducted on 15th October 2017 by the founder, to discover the demographics and psychographics of people who exclude meat from their diets, to then find a target consumer to aim towards (Appendix 1). The survey was answered by over 1100 people, mainly females who follow a plant-based diet.

For the demographic segment, the most popular age bracket was between 18 and 25, (32.8%) and the most common occupation was Student. The survey also found that the average spend on a bag was less than £50, which all links these findings together.

For the psychographic segment, 79.7% of people described their purchasing habits as quantity over quality. 85% of people asked would avoid purchasing clothing or accessories made from leather and a massive 96.9% were more inclined to buy a product knowing it is cruelty free.

The statistics from this questionnaire were then analysed, deciding that the HUTLER consumer is a discerning, style-led female with a deep passion for animal welfare. They are selfless, sophisticated and well-driven. They are home-owners, earning an average - above average salary, who work hard for what they possess. This means quality is more important to them over quantity, taking items at face value and purchasing accordingly.

HUTLER will aim to break age boundaries, focusing more on the essence of the consumer. Therefore, the minimalistic and functional style of the brand will suit any age.

**Competitors**

“I looked at my competitors and I thought that, if they could do it, I could do it. And if, they are popular and doing well, I could compete with them.” (Tommy Hilfiger, no date).

The primary competitors of HUTLER have been carefully researched and considered due to their cruelty-free ethos and product range offering. According to Meadows (2015), it is important to study potential competitors to analyse what works well for them in terms of styles, colourways and price points.

Matt & Nat were established in 2005 in Montreal, Canada. With the brand name, Matt & Nat, deriving from MAT(T)erial & NATure, it is heavily committed to creating sustainable, vegan, accessories which have taken inspiration from the colours and textures of nature The brand sits at a High Street mid to low price point offering a wide range of bags and accessories- ranging from small goods and cross body bags to handbags and over-night bags. Small vegan goods start at £35 and the most expensive bag coming in at £160. Matt and Nat sell through it’s own website and stores and also enjoys success from being stocked in both well established and independent shops, from ASOS to smaller, high-street boutiques - Matt & Nat (2017).

Wilby, founded in 2013, are a London based brand with the majority of it’s products being made in the United Kingdom. The idea for Wilby was born in Chelsea, an affluent district of London, this serves as inspiration for the collections, making mass-produced style bags with feminine touches. The brand aims to be committed to creating collections which the consumer finds both ethical and fashionable, feeling safe in the knowledge that it is sustainable, aiding the environment with every purchase. All of the bags which Wilby produces are Vegan approved by PETA. Wilby’s target consumer are women aged between 21-35. The brand sits at a mid to low high-street price point ranging from £39 for a purse to £120 for the most expensive handbag. The majority of Wilby’s business is from online sales, selling through it’s website, as well as, having four other online stockists. Wilby do not have a store of their own, however, are stocked in a few independent shops worldwide.

LaBante are a British based company, established in 2009. The company produce bags and jewellery which are both feminine and practical. All of which are ethically produced, environmentally friendly and animal-free. LaBante aim to ‘change people’s opinion of faux leather handbags, which can be just as sumptuous and buttery as real leather’ (https://labante.co.uk/about, 2017). LeBante produce unimaginative designed feminine bags for the mass-market. The target consumer which LaBante aims towards are females aged 21-35. The brand markets themselves at a middle- low high street price point with small accessories starting at £45 and the most expensive bag reaching £149. As well as selling through it’s website, the brand is also stocked in Debenhams and House of Fraser.

Denise Roobol is a vegan bag and accessory brand based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The brand prides itself on its clean-cut lines and minimalistic style, whilst also adhering to the brand ethos that fashion accessories can be vegan friendly (http://deniseroobol.com/about). The target consumer is female aged between 21 and 35. As well as selling through the company’s own website, Denise Roobol also sell through numerous independent stores within The Netherlands, as well as, selling through a couple of independent stores in Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Australia.

Although Stella McCartney is not a primary competitor of HUTLER, it is seen as a brand which can be aspired to due to their eco-friendly and sustainable core. It is currently the only 100% Vegetarian Luxury brand in the market to-date. Stella McCartney is constantly researching and developing new sustainable materials and techniques which can be used in production. The brand also collaborates with other sustainable companies such as Ocean Plastic, ECONYL yarn and Bolt Threads, to ensure its products are as eco-friendly as possible. After debuting a menswear line in November 2016, Stella McCartney now targets Males, Females and Children. Their target consumer is aged between 25 and 45 with an excellent house-hold income. As well as being a strong Omni-Channel brand selling through its own website and stores, the brand is also sold globally through the most prestigious departments stores and online websites from Harrods and Saks Fifth Avenue to Matches and Net-a-Porter. Stella McCartney has a loyal celebrity following, as well as a strong Social Media presence.

**Market**

HUTLER markets itself as an aspirational, accessible luxury label.

Chitrakorn (2015), explains that accessible luxury brands conduct themselves the same way as true luxury brands do in the way that they deliver high-end customer service, attain well-considered stores in prestigious locations and their luxurious packaging. The differentiating factor between the two being their market positioning and price points. Accessible luxury is a strategy that creates desirable products, which are not overly ostentatious like luxury brands but are accessible to a wider audience. In a report published by Exane (2017) (Appendix 2), it explains that due to recent price increases of luxury branded products, it has created a massive gap in the market which aspirational luxury brands can move into. The handbags which were analysed during the report had a median price of EUR290, which is over a quarter of that which luxury brands charge.

The overall price point in which HUTLER markets itself at, is within the upper high street sector, with prices starting at around £55 for small vegan goods and up to £350 for larger vegan accessories. If pricing was to reach the £500 mark for a bag, it would take the brand away from the accessible luxury umbrella, therefore the brand would have difficulty succeeding under this higher bracket due to being a new, unknown fashion brand. The vision for HUTLER is to always stay under this accessible luxury umbrella as from conducting vigorous research, this is where the largest gap in the market is for vegan products and where HUTLER has a chance to dominate.

**Positioning**

Solca (2015), gives insight that accessories are still very much a growing market and currently account for almost 30% of the total global luxury market. This is a growth of 18% on 2003, most of which has been driven by the sales of handbags alone. According to Morley (2016) over half of female British citizens (51%) bought a handbag last year, accounting to a current accessories sector worth £2.7billion. However, Mintel (2017) report that due to a recent trend for smaller and less expensive styles, consumers are moving towards more mid-priced brands over luxury labels.

‘With key designers, such as Stella McCartney and Shrimps' Hannah Weiland, all flying the cruelty-free fashion flag, vegan fashion is officially taking off’ (Klerk, 2015).

‘Findings by Grand View Research [estimated](http://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/synthetic-leather-market) that the global vegan leather industry is to be worth $85 billion by 2025. Just to compare, global sports footwear is currently valued at [$90.4 billion](https://fashionunited.com/global-fashion-industry-statistics)’ (Zieba, 2017).

‘In total, 3.25% of the British population, around 1.68 million people, are either vegetarian or vegan. More than 850,000 of vegetarians and vegans also avoid leather, wool and other animal products. The recent rise in popularity of fake leather jackets and a variety of non-leather footwear indicates that these products appeal to many more people than vegans alone’ (Boo, 2017.)

**PESTLE**

PESTLE stands for the six most detrimental factors harbouring the fashion industry which cannot be controlled by small businesses and their competitors. PESTLE stands for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental, all factors which effect the fashion industry. Political issues such as Brexit, terrorism and stalled trade deals are all current concerns. Economic volatility is important to monitor as it can heavily affect sales and profits of businesses globally. Issues such as economic booms, where civilians have more disposable income than before, therefore can purchase more and also recessions where consumers are not willing to spend much and are warier with their money.

Social factors within the fashion industry are things such as population increases, style changes and cultural differences. Currently, there is a clear generational change undergoing with Millennials as well as taste and consumers becoming more discerning and in-the-know. Technology plays a big part in the evolution of the fashion industry, as development within the internet, computers and mobile devices make browsing and purchasing much more accessible for consumers offering advanced shopping options such as same day delivery and online help based chats as well as large web-based retailers such as Amazon. L represents Legal, focussing on labour laws and common laws which may be applicable to retail and business, ensuring safe and fair employment laws for all workers concerned.

The Environmental factor of PESTLE looks closely at sustainability, encouraging brands to be more environmentally considerate within their design and manufacturing.

Mintel (2017) reports that the fast-fashion sector of retail is currently slowing down due to a demand for better quality products and more involved customer service.

**SWOT:**

**Strengths:**

Veganism is on the rise (Marsh, 2016).

Vegan fashion is taking off (Klerk, 2015).

The founder has vast knowledge in the production of accessories.

Gap in the market for an aspirational, accessible, luxury vegan brand.

Rise in luxury brand prices means a bigger market for aspirational luxury brands.

Founder has a deep passion for animal welfare and wants to share this and encourage others.

**Weaknesses:**

Ensuring prices stay at the target price whilst not compromising on functionality or design too much.

Start up costs for a new company are expensive.

Removing age boundaries within the consumer spectrum may make it hard to address certain consumers.

Being a start-up company, strong interest in the brand may effect sales in the long run.

Only producing a small number of products at the start may limit the consumer.

**Opportunities**

Selling Direct-to-consumer gives the chance to sell the story and ethos of HUTLER.

Producing a small number of products at the start can help consumers identify the brand and brand style easily.

Removing the age boundaries could be hugely positive and give the brand a bigger platform to build upon.

Design will only be a small fraction of the business, so study more into business and find a business partner with these strengths and with the same vision and passion for animal welfare.

**Threats**

With Brexit deals still undergoing, the British economy is still uncertain.

Developing a new brand with unique ideas and designs will be difficult to copyright.

Veganism is on the rise so could potentially become a crowded market.

The affordable, accessible luxury market might too become crowded if luxury price points continue to rise.

**MICRO**

Micro Environmental factors are those which can be controlled within a small business, such as customers, competitors and distribution. The largest micro environmental impact is made by customers. This can be addressed by knowing the target audience and developing effective marketing strategies which will directly target the consumer. Employees are also an important factor of micro environmental for they are the ones who sell the products and service which will drive the business forward towards economic success.

**Retailing**

HUTLER understands the importance of retailing a brand correctly. According to Business of Fashion, (The Basics | Part 8 – Marketing, 2013) it is important where your product is sold and how it is perceived, as this influences the type of consumer which you target.

Research conducted by the founder on 15th October 2017 (Appendix 1) found that shopping in-store and online were almost equally favoured. Mintel (2017) discovered that over the course of two years, the online purchasing of accessories has risen significantly. Fernandez (2017) advises that direct retail is superior as it offers better margins, less overhead costs and gives the opportunity to merchandise a whole collection together. While Sherman (2016), suggests that the direct-to-consumer model is ideal as it gives the opportunity to develop relationships with consumers who are decreasingly brand-loyal whilst also giving the option to charge a lower price point for a product of higher quality. ‘Direct-to-consumer investing has grown steadily in the last five years and this growth will continue in the coming years. As well as positive market conditions for growth, there is also consumer demand for direct services’ (Osguthorpe, 2016). According to Business of Fashion, (The Basics | Part 8 – Marketing, 2013), owning and selling through a direct-to-consumer website, means more control over the environment and experience which the consumer receives, allowing for the brand story to be told exactly as wanted, which could be the most powerful and influential marketing tool of all.

Through this research, it has been decided that HUTLER will sell direct-to- consumer through a website directed by social media, and through occasional pop-up stores. As a start-up business, a website will capture the traffic which is generated through social media and other advertising platforms, indicating which types of marketing strategies work well and which products are most popular. The Business of Fashion (The Basics | Part 8 – Marketing, 2013) stress the importance of sales data and analytics to understand what has and hasn’t worked well, vital in deciding the route the business should take. Wholesale recaps will then be generated from this seasonally, making sure that it is clear what products are best sellers, target price points and competitor insights. Whereas a Pop-up shop will offer a face-to-face experience. Pollock (2014) explains that hosting a pop-up shop will link offline experience with the e-commerce site, driving traffic back online to produce more consumers and sales.

**Promotion**

HUTLER aims to direct consumers to the company website via Social Media channels. Sklar (2013) points out that Social Media is a key platform for interacting and engaging with target consumers, as customers are at their most loyal when they feel connected with, in fact they are 70% likely to spend more with a company due to a history of good service. The Business of Fashion (The Basics | Part 8 – Marketing, 2013), instruct that social media platforms should be monitored daily to ensure that all interactions are seen to and the importance of remembering that social media is conversational, meaning it is important to listen to followers and collate valuable feedback.

‘Promotion is how you deliver your label’s message to your target audience…Your new fashion label must convey a strong, identifiable message to which buyers, press, and consumers can relate’ (Meadows, 2014, p.155). Sherman (2016) advises that as the retail market becomes more crowded and competitive, it is more important than ever for a brand to develop its own visual identity in order to win over new customers, their loyalty, admiration and (hopefully) money.

HUTLER aims to promote the brand ethos through a range of visuals, on social media platforms, to convey the feeling and image of the brand, telling and selling a story to the consumer.

**Design Development**

The full range of design development can be located in the accompanying sketchbook.

**Inspiration**

The first ever collection for HUTLER will play homage to the minimalistic and feminine ethos of the brand. HUTLER has a strong story so will present itself as a lifestyle brand rather than a fashion brand. Being an ethical and sustainable company, HUTLER prides itself on the longevity of its products. This means not modelling products too much on seasonal trends, however the brand will look upon mainstream trends for slight inspiration in order to appeal to a mass market.

The main inspiration for the first collection will stem from 1950’s Parisian Chic, envisioning Bettina Graziani, a French model from the 1950’s, as a muse. HUTLER looks to ‘The New Look’ 1947 Carolle Line Collection by Christian Dior as a starting point. This collection revolutionary in the way which the female body was clothed and quickly became an iconographic symbol of youth and beauty as well as an indicator for a promising future. ‘To be creative and new, you need to know what has happened before, and react against it’ (Davies, 2017). Dior’s 1947 collection was about change for the better, and that is exactly what HUTLER’s vegan-led collection will be about. The research will hone in on what drove Christian Dior to make such a revolutionary collection, his inspiration behind the line and how this can be used to inspire the first collection of HUTLER.

**Products**

The first range that HUTLER aims to manufacture and send to market will consist of a maximum 8 pieces. Blumenthal (2011) advises that you should stick to a core number of styles for the first collection, all of which have something similar tying them together. This group of handbags will be known as the core collection.

HUTLER aims to create a collection starting with small leather goods, ranging to a weekend bag. According to Mintel (2016), 29% of those who have purchased a bag in the last 12 months, state they now favour smaller bags such as a grab bag or clutch bag. So baring this in mind, the range will feature smaller styles over larger ones.

The core style of the brand is feminine and minimalistic. As the products aim to have longevity, the collections will be dominantly black in colour, which will always stay classic. Research conducted by the founder on 15th October 2017 (Appendix 1) found that out of 1107 people questioned, 51.3% preferred black bags over any other colour.

HUTLER aims to keep the product range small and exclusive, only offering new products/ colourways once a year. As Fernandez (2017) advises, consumers of accessories do not seek the seasonal newness in the same way they do from apparel, favouring distinctive items that can be worn all year, which is a huge advantage for accessory designers. This means that HUTLER will be able to operate on a slower calendar than apparel brands, branching out gradually while being able to always have core stock available.

**Material**

‘Second to oil, fashion and textiles is the most polluting industry in the world’ (*How can the fashion industry become more sustainable?* 2015).

HUTLER models itself on being animal-cruelty free so it is of the upmost importance that vegan leather is used throughout every collection. Currently, most vegan leathers are still being developed, however, will be more widely available through the coming years. HUTLER aims to form a partnership with a vegan leather manufacturer, which will benefit both parties, such as Stella McCartney with Ocean Plastic. In the future, HUTLER aims to research and create vegan leather of their own, however this is very costly so will be looked at to the future.

**Supply Chain**

Meadows (2014) explains the four main stages of supply chain, which are: research, design development, production and sales and distribution. The supply chain is key to maximise profit margins and minimise wastage and is more important than ever with a rise in offshore production and fast-fashion. Blumenthal (2011) gives beneficial insight as to how overseas manufacturing is the way forward if producing for the mass market and is the best way to maximise profit and reduce production costs. Factories in the Far-East also have a more flexible manufacturing schedule as they have more labour power and specialised machinery. HUTLER aims to produce a large number of bags for the mass market so manufacturing in the Far-East is a definite to keep costs low and maximise profits, making sure that all production processes are overseen, to make sure the brand ethos is not jeopardised.

**Conclusion**

This report has identified that both Veganism and the aspirational accessible luxury are on the rise. This seems the perfect time to present and grow HUTLER as a brand which can dominate both of these markets.

HUTLER will start to build a core collection, a website and social media platforms to market and really sell the story of what the brand is about. This will attract potential consumers, who will put their faith and trust into the brand and its products, allowing for close customer relationships to develop.