

From Coach to Old Navy: The Role of Politics in U.S. Fashion Trends

DATA 450 Capstone

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1 Introduction

The fashion industry is a dynamic field that is a reflection of broader societal changes, including political and economic events. This project aims to analyze how significant political events have influenced consumer spending on fashion, by a comparison between luxury and mass-market brands. The study will examine sales trends for Tapestry (luxury brands like Coach, Kate Spade, Stuart Weitzman) and Gap Inc. (mass-market brands like Old Navy, Gap) to observe patterns in consumer behavior during key historical moments. By using time-series data and statistical analysis, this project will provide insights into the relationship between political events and fashion consumption in the United States.

To provide historical context, I will be using the Mercatus Center's yearly "[The Economic Situation](#)" December release, which provides a detailed analysis of key economic trends, policy changes, and financial developments in the United States. This report examines indicators such as GDP growth, inflation, employment rates, and fiscal policy. Events such as presidential elections, financial crises, and major legislative changes will be annotated in the visualizations to highlight potential correlations with shifts in fashion sales.

2 Dataset

Since I will be focusing on the years 2012 to 2024, the primary dataset will be built using annual financial reports from [Tapestry](#) and [Gap Inc.](#), which provide disaggregated net sales data for U.S. regions. These reports are consistent in format for these brands over several fiscal years, making them suitable for time-series analysis.

Variables:

- Year: Fiscal year of the report.
- Brand: Specific brand (e.g., Coach, Old Navy).
- Net U.S. Sales: Annual sales revenue in millions of dollars.
- Region: U.S. sales only (extracted from global figures).

3 Data Acquisition and Processing

The data will have to be manually extracted from the annual financial reports since they provide detailed, disaggregated U.S. sales figures. While this process requires a time investment of approximately 1 day, the reports are consistent in format, which ensure accuracy for my research.

Steps:

- Download annual reports for both companies.
- Extract U.S. net sales data for each brand from tables in the reports.
- Organize data into a structured format (CSV) with columns for year, brand, sales, and region.
- Clean and standardize data (e.g., converting units).

This manual data preparation ensures a high-quality dataset for analysis and allows for a direct comparison between luxury and mass-market brands.

4 Research Questions and Methodology

Research Question 1: How do U.S. sales of luxury brands (Tapestry) compare to mass-market brands (Gap Inc.) during major political and economic events from 2012 to 2024?

- Plan: To answer this question, I will create a time-series plot comparing annual U.S. sales for Tapestry brands and Gap Inc. brands from 2012 to 2024. Key events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and presidential elections, will be marked on the timeline to identify potential correlations. Each brand's sales will be represented by being color-coded by company with annotations for major events.
- Output: Time-series visualization with annotations.
- Estimated Time: Around 6 to 8 hours.

Research Question 2: Do luxury and mass-market brands experience different sales trends during periods of political instability from 2012 to 2024?

- Plan: I will calculate the percentage change in U.S. sales year-over-year for each brand. A bar graph will be created to display these changes, grouped by brand category (luxury vs. mass-market). The analysis will include regression models to determine if the impact of these events differs between the two categories.
- Output: Bar graph and regression analysis.
- Estimated Time: 6-8 hours.

Research Question 3: How do consumer spending patterns shift during specific events?

- Plan: Using the cleaned dataset for the years 2012 to 2024, I will identify and highlight periods of sudden increases or decreases in sales. I will create a simple line graph to display changes in sales by brand category over time. Additionally, I will explore correlations between these shifts and economic events.
- Output: Line graph and correlation analysis.
- Estimated Time: 6-8 hours.

5 Work plan

[Fill in the list below with a plan for what you will do each week, starting 2/10. You should have around 7 hours worth of work each week. Writing work counts. Several tasks have already been filled in for you.]

Week 4 (2/10 - 2/16):

- Data tidying and recoding (1-2 Days)
- Question 1 (6-8 hours).

Week 5 (2/17 - 2/23):

- Question 2 (6-8 hours).

Week 6 (2/24 - 3/2):

- Question 3 (6-8 hours).

Week 7 (3/3 - 3/9):

- Review research and create notes on findings/correlations (4 hours).
- Presentation prep and practice (4 hours)

Week 8 (3/10 - 3/16): *Presentations given on Wed-Thu 3/12-3/13.*

- Poster prep (4 hours)
- Presentation peer review (1.5 hours)

Week 9 (3/24 - 3/30): *Poster Draft 1 due Monday morning 3/24 at 9am. Poster Draft 2 due Sunday night 3/30.*

- Peer feedback (2 hours)
- Poster revisions (1.5 hours)

Week 10 (3/31 - 4/6): *Final Poster due Sunday 4/6.*

- Peer feedback (1.5 hours)
- Poster revisions (2 hours)

Week 11 (4/7 - 4/13):

Week 12 (4/14 - 4/20):

Week 13 (4/21 - 4/27): *Blog post draft 1 due Sunday night 4/28.* [All project work should be done by the end of this week. The remaining time will be used for writing up and presenting your results.]

- Draft blog post (4 hours).

Week 14 (4/28 - 5/4):

- Peer feedback (3 hours)
- Blog post revisions (4 hours)
- [Do not schedule any other tasks for this week.]

Week 15 (5/5 - 5/8): *Final blog post due Tues 5/7. Blog post read-throughs during final exam slot, Thursday May 8th, 8:00-11:20am.*

- Blog post revisions (2 hours)
- Peer feedback (2 hours)
- [Do not schedule any other tasks for this week.]

6 References

[Gap Inc. Annual Reports](#)

[Tapestry Annual Reports](#)

[“The Economic Situation” 2012 Release](#)