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## The Evolution of Gucci: From Traditional Beginnings to Digital Supremacy

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Gucci, a distinguished European brand intertwined with the quintessential notions of luxury, elegance, and high-quality craftsmanship, has evolved as a global phenomenon in the fashion industry. Despite its present-day prominence, Gucci originated from humble circumstances. The company's beginning can be traced back to when Guccio Gucci, after honing his skills as a leather luggage maker at Franzi, decided he wanted to switch courses.

In 1921, Guccio Gucci established the inaugural Gucci store in Florence, Italy. This store “predominantly catered to the elite in the equestrian world, where it specialized in creating finely crafted saddles and riding accessories” (Haute History, 2022). However, with automobiles gaining widespread popularity in subsequent years, the need for equestrian gear became less prevalent. Gucci, in order to keep up with changing consumer needs, eventually led the brand to venture into further realms such as making handbags, shoes, and belts (Fashion Roadman, 2022).

The effects of World War II proved to be pivotal, notably due to material shortages, with leather becoming the primary concern. Thus, the necessity for alternatives led to the utilization of materials like Naples woven hemp and pigskin. This resulted in timeless pieces like the iconic bamboo bag and the brand's inaugural print, featuring interconnected dark brown diamonds on a tan backdrop (Gupta, 2022). Around this time, Aldo Gucci, Guccio Gucci's son, identified a branding deficiency within the company. To address this, he devised the original Gucci logo,

interlocking his father's initials to form the now-iconic double G's emblem (Haute History, 2022)

During the 1960s and 1970s, the popularity of Gucci experienced incredible success fueled by a growing base of affluent customers. A turning point came when First Lady Jackie Kennedy was seen wearing a slouchy Gucci Handbag. The brand immediately renamed it 'Jackie', elevating Gucci to obtain a household status (Haute History, 2022). However, this success was later overshadowed by "internal family conflicts, ineffective management, and allegations of tax evasion that tarnished reputation and led to a loss of profits" (Gupta, 2022).

Gucci's modern era is characterized by visionary creative directors who hold a significant role in the brand's style and direction. While preserving the sense of luxury, Gucci has also undertaken an effort to make the brand more accessible to a wider, younger audience. Tom Ford's 1990 hire as the creative director established an emphasis on overt sex appeal and glamor, pushing Gucci as a symbol of sensuality and contemporary luxury. In the 2010s, Alessandro Michele solidified Gucci as a forward-thinking, unique, and maximalist brand after the debut of his first womenswear collection (Haute History, 2022)

With Gucci's transformation from its equestrian roots to becoming a worldwide fashion icon, business strategies were critical in maintaining the brand's status. Utilizing the Business Model Canvas (BMC), this framework delves into 9 key elements. In order to understand how Gucci continues to thrive in the modern fashion industry, it is important to explore these 9 blocks covering the four main areas of business: customers, offer, infrastructure, and financial viability.

- 1. Customer Segments:** This portion outlines the distinct categories of people or organizations a company intends to reach or provide services to. Gucci's customer segments have evolved, from primarily catering to the elite equestrians to now

having a diverse range of clientele such as affluent individuals, celebrities, fashion enthusiasts, and aspirational consumers. Traditionally, the products have been designed for high-income men and women between the ages of 25-55 (Kolk, 2023). However, Gucci recently broadened its target audience by introducing a new children's collection. Thus, Gucci has achieved success by continuously adapting to changing consumer preferences, allowing the brand to be prominent in dynamic markets.

2. **Value Propositions:** Value propositions encompass the products or services that a company offers, creating value for customer segments. In Gucci's case, the value proposition that is offered centers around luxurious, exclusive, high-quality products. Consumers who seek an elegant lifestyle often choose Gucci due to its reputation as a global icon of luxury and style, symbolizing their own quest for prestige. In the context of Simon Sinek's "Golden Circle" which emphasizes that "people buy *why* you do it, not *what*," Gucci stands as a prime example of a brand that has embraced this principle. The core of Gucci's success lies in the "Why" - a belief that fashion should entail self-expression and individuality while also promoting creativity and luxury. Therefore, consumers whose values and aspirations align are more inclined to participate in Gucci's vision and foster a sense of loyalty to the brand because they believe that buying Gucci's products means investing in the lifestyle and belief system that Gucci represents. Gucci's adherence to this "Why" also has proven to be fundamental in its entire marketing strategy. Tapping into the emotional and aspirational aspects of the brand, Gucci communicates a deeper purpose that resonates with the target audience. Thus

proving the point that customers are not merely consumers but also participants in the shared vision that the brand provides.

**3. Channels:** The Channels building block describes how a company engages and connects with its customer segments to deliver a value proposition. Gucci's channels include a diversified approach that includes both traditional and digital touchpoints. In-person boutiques provide a luxurious experience for the consumer that provides personalized customer service and allows them to interact with the high-end products directly while digital channels such as online stores offer the convenience of browsing and purchasing from the comfort of their own homes. Moreover, marketing channels can include Gucci's dominant presence on social media, word-of-mouth marketing, or even fashion shows. However, with the increasing prominence of the digital age, a shift emphasizing digital channels is likely.

**4. Customer Relationships:** Customer relationships is an important sector as it describes the types of interactions and connections that a company establishes with the customer segments. Gucci's approach to managing customer relationships has evolved with the shifting dynamics of customer needs. In the past, Gucci cultivated relationships with the equestrian elite by providing customized saddles and equipment, but in the modern era, the primary ways that customer relationships are kept are through personal assistance, such as seen through in-person boutiques, and self-service through online-shopping experiences. Social media also plays a large role in facilitating interactions that allow for customers to be engaged and build brand loyalty.

- 5. Revenue Streams:** This building block outlines the various ways that an organization generates revenue or income from its customer segments. While 55% of Gucci's revenue stream comes from product sales of its leather goods, the company also attributes much of its income to selling other accessories such as shoes, jewelry, and perfume (Sabanoglu, 2023). Moreover, Gucci can gain profit from licensing agreements and other marketing partnerships.
- 6. Key Resources:** This section describes the pivotal assets required to deliver the value proposition. Gucci's key resources encompass a diverse range of assets, both within the tangible and intangible realms. In terms of tangible resources, Gucci relies on manufacturing facilities, distribution centers, raw materials, and point-of-sale systems. Intangible resources include intellectual property, brand reputation, partnerships, and digital infrastructure. These key resources are integral to Gucci's ability to deliver products that align with the brand's value proposition.
- 7. Key Activities:** Gucci's key activities describe the operations that must be done to deliver a value proposition. Manufacturing is at the center of emphasis in order to uphold Gucci's commitment to providing high-quality products. The key activities of design and innovation are necessary to stay on the cutting edge of fashion, while marketing must be prevalent to promote a prominent presence within the industry. Retail operations are needed to keep in-person and digital platforms running, creating a compelling customer experience by providing personalized care and evolving to modern preferences.

- 8. Key Partnerships:** Gucci's key partnerships include the necessary network of suppliers and partners to enhance business operations and deliver value to customer segments. Within these relationships, Gucci maintains vital connections with various stakeholders involving suppliers, manufacturers, retail partners, and marketing partnerships. One notable example of a strategic partnership is when Gucci teamed up with its first-ever brand, North Face to create a collection that "celebrates the spirit of exploration" (Low, 2022). This collaboration allowed Gucci to connect its luxury fashion expertise with North Face's reputation for outdoor apparel, appealing to the customer segments that value both style and exploration simultaneously. Moreover, Gucci's partnership with singer-songwriter Harry Styles in 2022 resulted in the "GUCCI HA HA HA" collection, aimed at promoting "expressive emotionality of the individual" (Gucci, 2022). These partnerships have been crucial in Gucci's ability to diversify its product offerings and reach a larger customer base while maintaining its reputation.
- 9. Cost Structures:** Lastly, cost structures involve all the costs incurred to operate the business model. In Gucci's case, a value-driven cost structure is used to assist in supporting the expectation of high-quality products that offer a premium image. Various expenses such as manufacturing, material, retail operations, and marketing see high involvement within cost structures. While some of these costs may be higher than other brands, Gucci's commitment to delivering value to customers is integral to upholding the reputation and premium experience for consumers. Thus, the value-driven cost structure is a critical component of Gucci's business model.

## **Chapter 2: Business Model Canvas**

In the digital age, companies leverage copious amounts of data to create increasingly personalized messages that, hopefully, resonate with ever-specific and segmented audiences; marketing has become an arms race of creating the ultimate “personalized touch” that converts the intrigued consumer into a loyal customer, and Gucci is no exception to this phenomenon. In the past decade, Gucci has experienced tremendous growth which has catapulted the Italian fashion house to be one of the most coveted brands not only in high-end luxury goods but in the entire business world. In 2017 alone, Gucci experienced 44.5% growth since the previous year — an accomplishment that is owed to the strategic omnichannel approach that allowed Gucci to penetrate the zeitgeist of millennial customers and become a household favorite brand for customers of age thirty-five and younger (G & Co., 2023).

In essence, the ethos behind Gucci’s modern marketing strategy is simple: identify your target customer and permeate the spaces where they spend their time. As 98% of affluent, luxury customers use the internet daily, Gucci’s omnichannel marketing initiatives are characterized by a marriage between their physical and digital customer experiences, allowing them to engage their target customer groups in a way that is unique, modern, and convenient (Lewis, 2023). In this, Gucci deploys over 10% of its annual revenues entirely to digital marketing initiatives in order to maintain dominance in the virtual marketplace of ideas and consumer attention; from redesigns of their eCommerce website to expanded customer service offerings through digital communication mediums, Gucci’s commitment to satisfying customer expectations via its online presence has become one of its greatest assets.

From a theoretical perspective, Gucci’s marketing strategy is informed by the “customer persona” that characterizes most coveted, luxury consumers: youthful, digitally savvy individuals

who care deeply about self-expression, innovation, and creativity. As a consequence, the globalization and digitization of Gucci's brand has forced the company to undergo a process of co-optation, in which the Gucci name as a hallmark for Italian craftsmanship has diminished, and the brand has increasingly become a signal for status and relevancy in popular culture amongst a youthful audience (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, Hogg, 2016).

Nevertheless, Gucci continues to export relatively the same value proposition it has for most of its history: carefully designed and thoughtfully made luxury clothing items (although their selection has undoubtedly grown since past decades, offering both men's and women's clothing and accessories that appeal to different fashion sensibilities — from traditional to avant-garde and street style). As part of Gucci's digital strategy, the bulk of their sales channels have shifted from in-store purchases to eCommerce transactions via their website and third-party distributor online stores. As a result, Gucci has experienced an enhanced ability to sell to new, younger luxury consumers and create fresh relationships with different customer demographics (as opposed to the more traditional, older buyers of Gucci and other fabled high-end labels).

In context with their marketing strategy over the past 20 years, Gucci's emphasis on digital supremacy begins with their early embrace of eCommerce in the early 2000s. Before most other high-end brands began exploring the competitive advantages of the internet, Gucci leadership began experimenting with online services that complimented the customer experience they offered in their physical boutiques, such as: more descriptive product information, custom gift wrapping, and find-in-store services (G & Co., 2023). Over time, these seemingly trivial offerings ultimately grew into the robust online strategy that has put Gucci over its competition and made it one of the most competitive brands in the world.



Prior to the 2000s era, however, Gucci's marketing strategy was primarily characterized by word-of-mouth advertising and paid celebrity promotions. One such example is Gucci's rebranding of their "Fifties Constance" bag into the "Jackie Bag" once First Lady Jacky Kennedy began sporting Gucci merchandise to cultivate an air of desire amongst elite clients (Dan, 2023). That being said, Gucci's target audience — or customer persona — was that of wealthy aristocrats who appreciated fine craftsmanship and design. It was not until the early 2000s era when mass adoption of the internet began to change the luxury consumer as we knew it, thus instigating Gucci to refocus on a new type of customer — the younger, less traditional, technical consumer that makes up half of their market share, today.

Gucci's aforementioned "It girl", Jackie Kennedy, was an appropriate resemblance of Gucci's primary customer for the era (and frankly, for most of the company's history); nevertheless, the internet ushered in a new era of celebrity in which the monopoly on consumer attention has been fractured by a blossoming "celebrity bourgeois" of social media influencers that have captured smaller, dedicated audiences through online platforms. As a reported 73% of Gen Z follow influencers online, attaining a holistic understanding of Gucci's modern digital strategy requires us to examine how Gucci is using social media marketing and influencer sponsorships to appeal to their younger target customers and develop their modern customer persona (Voxburner, 2022).

A shining example of Gucci's exploration in influencer marketing can be observed in their partnership with Francis Bourgeois — who, at the time of writing, boasts 3.1 million followers on TikTok — in which they commissioned him to publish promotional Gucci content on his social media channels, effectively exposing their brand to millions of Gen Z consumers (Voxburner, 2023). With reference to semiotics research, Gucci's collaboration with Francis

Bourgeois (and other social media stars) is an effort to reinforce the notion in younger consumers that Gucci is a coveted brand amongst their peers. In this specific example, Gucci does so by associating Gucci merchandise (*the object*) with Francis Bourgeois (*the symbol*) to create *a sign* — Francis Bourgeois fashionably wearing Gucci apparel — which encourages *the interpretant* that Gucci is favorable amongst Gen Z audiences.

Over the decades, Gucci's marketing strategy has taken an unrecognizable form compared to its word-of-mouth strategy prior to the 1950s. Still, the company looks to the future to proactively respond to ever-shifting consumer expectations. One such example of their evolving response to customer preferences is the Gucci ArtLab initiative, which is the development of a 37,000-square-foot manufacturing plant with the purpose of producing materials in a more sustainable manner. As “luxury consumers increasingly conscious of the impact their purchases have on society and the environment”, Gucci's sustainability efforts allow them to manage the consumer's *involvement* with their brand and effectively remain in their patrons' good graces (G & Co. 2023).

The story of Gucci's success is the story of its adaptive marketing strategies in response to a constantly advancing technological landscape. As previously discussed, Gucci's brand has evolved in recent years to accommodate the behaviors and desires of an entirely new class of customer; however, they did so by replacing the “person” with the “persona”, and effectively profiling an audience of people using a vague amalgamation of ideas that loosely describe specific individuals with very real desires to be seen, admired, and envied. According to Gucci's success, the company has done an excellent job at convincing these people they have the means to satiate these desires. Nevertheless, the race to relate to a fickle customer base is a constantly evolving task — which marketing methods the Italian fashion house identifies as the best

avenues for success given the advent of large language models, concurrent blockchain protocols, and other technological innovations will ultimately determine their competitive standing amongst other high-end retailers for the decades to come.

### **Chapter 3: Time for Change**

Current analysis of Gucci's marketing trends begins with the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Flora print with a revival where Gucci adhered to its well-established marketing approach of pairing popular personalities with timeless products when promoting the Flora fragrance alongside Miley Cyrus. Especially adept at adapting stars to their promotions, Gucci paired up with Dakota Johnson in homage to promote the classic 'Jackie' 1961 handbag. Additionally, "undergoing a bohemian, inclusive, and gender-neutral revival, the brand brought in Harry Styles, among others, to do a talk show called 'The Beloved Show' with James Corden." (Dan, 2023). "The fashion house is not just in it for a famous race, rather they are set on teaming up with the right celebrity that reflects the brand's message and identity appropriately." Gucci's approach to reaching its desired audience on social media defies traditional norms. "While other luxury brands prefer to keep a distance from fans, Gucci's social media marketing strategy embraces the current culture, even going as far as using memes to promote its watches." A further example applies to the campaign "That Feeling When Gucci" which "uses the brand name as an adjective meaning luxurious and engages with younger fans via the quirkiness of the internet age." "The unconventional luxury brand is not afraid of taking risks if it means reaching a wider audience and putting its own name forward. The strategy of Gucci has always been to stand out. They are not interested in being unreachable, they're busy being irreplaceable" (Dan, 2023).

The critical and known weakness of Gucci is its unstable management. The continuous change in the upper management causes pronounced and significant changes in the company policy and vision, making it difficult for associated parties, employees, and customers, to get along with it. Furthermore, as the company continues to diversify its brand portfolio, there is a potential risk of brand dilution, which could pose a threat to the company. Another major weakness, which is mainly due to the existent expectation of the market of luxury brands is to continue innovating and diversifying things. If it's not enacted appropriately, it can become a weakness for the company. It's frequently critiqued that these luxury brands face flak in advertising. For example, using sexuality in advertising and exploiting the sexuality of female models. However, it's also proved by Gucci's marketing strategy that "sex sells" (Key, 2023).

The Four Action Framework, a strategic management tool, can offer valuable insights towards crafting a new marketing direction for a prestigious brand like Gucci. To begin, Gucci can focus on "Eliminate" by identifying areas where it can trim excessive costs, perhaps in its supply chain or non-essential product lines. This reduction in expenses can then be reinvested in "Raise" actions, enhancing product quality or expanding sustainable and ethical practices. This plan was also already in motion when they announced their 10-year "Culture of Purpose" sustainability strategy in 2015 - underpinning a series of targets generating positive change for people and the planet by 2025. Simultaneously, by "Reduce," Gucci can analyze aspects that may not be as highly valued by its target audience, optimizing market campaigns and minimizing wasteful expenditures. Lastly, Gucci should consider innovative "Create" strategies, such as novel collaborations with emerging designers or artists and utilizing immersive digital experiences to reach younger, tech-savvy consumers. With its increasing prominence, Gucci could expand its brand through the use of generative AI to create hyper-personalized

experiences. By implementing these principles, Gucci can reorient its marketing strategy to maintain its luxurious appeal while adapting to evolving consumer preferences and marketplace dynamics.

Gucci can implement strategic marketing changes effectively by aligning them with a new business model canvas. By revising its **customer segments** Gucci can explore uncharted markets or niche demographics, adapting its products and messaging accordingly. There are significant opportunities for Gucci to make its international presence more prominent, especially in the Asian Market. By marketing in countries like India and China, Gucci can work to expand its promotional strategies. Even in developing economies, there is a considerable portion of its population in its upper middle class that would opt for showing its newly cultivated wealth through luxury brands like Gucci (Key, 2023). The brand can emphasize a **value proposition** that integrates sustainability, innovation, and exclusivity to captivate its customer base, focusing on the essence of luxury. Through refined **channels**, Gucci can enhance its online presence and engagement, deploying virtual and augmented reality experiences to connect with tech-savvy consumers. This can be incorporated through blockchain to create gamified experiences or even applying big data to create stylized profiles of certain geographical regions/demographics, and use that information to create products that would be most appealing to the target customer groups - 'This is Your Gucci' - customizing the website to represent the specific consumer's interests. Leveraging this, they can build stronger **customer relationships** by offering personalized experiences, loyalty programs, and transparent communication about ethical practices. **Revenue streams** may diversify with the introduction of exclusive collaborations and digital experiences. **Key resources** could expand to include technology partnerships, allowing Gucci to harness the power of AR and VR effectively. The brand can reduce expenses in

non-essential areas with a keen focus on **cost structure**. Overall, a new business model canvas will empower Gucci to adapt and thrive in the evolving fashion landscape while preserving its core values and identity.

A new persona for Gucci needs to take into account the demands of environmentally-conscious consumers while still attracting an audience that has a commitment to luxury that extends beyond just aesthetics. Luxury brands intentionally cater to a limited proportion of the population, the exclusivity of luxury is what makes these brands inherently desirable. Developing a new persona should not abandon the foundation that Gucci was built upon which was to “redefine fashion and luxury through an innovative lens grounded in the heritage of Italian craftsmanship” (About, 2023). However, moving forward an “Eco Luxe” persona will position Gucci as a forward-thinking, eco-conscious luxury brand that values sustainability, innovation, and timeless elegance. This image should reflect a hardworking young adult in the corporate sector who embodies a harmonious blend of classic luxury and environmental responsibility, catering to an audience that seeks both opulence and ethics.

#### **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

From a theoretical perspective, Gucci should continue working on actively embracing emerging technological trends in order to pursue their target customer in more meaningful and effective ways, as they did with the advent of the internet. By utilizing disruptive technologies such as generative AI, blockchain, and big data, Gucci can access a first-mover advantage amongst high-fashion retailers to the effect of building closer relationships with their customers, cultivating greater brand loyalty, and securing their industry dominance:

- 1. Reimagining Customer Engagement:** Within the traditional luxury paradigm, consumer engagement remained largely passive as the post-purchasing

engagement was limited to an occasional visit to the in-person boutique stores or receiving periodic brand communication. Due to the incoming digital age, active-post purchase engagement is not just a possibility but a strategic imperative for Gucci. A significant portion of the “active engagement strategy” hinges on the brand’s ability to foster digital communities, notably within the Metaverse. Gucci demonstrated its forward-thinking approach by becoming the first major luxury brand to establish a digital realm within the Metaverse platform. In this “Gucci Vault Land,” users have the opportunity to “journey through the fashion brand’s history through games and NFTs (Marr, 2022). As consumers experience this within Metaverse, they experience the brand in ways that are rooted in the concept of active participation, where customers are no longer passive observers but co-creators in their own luxurious experiences. Through challenging conventional luxury marketing models and embracing the new changes that the digital age has brought about, reimagining customer engagement should continue to be a cornerstone of Gucci’s marketing vision. Not only do these approaches enhance customer engagement, but they also set a precedent for the entire luxury fashion industry. Conclusively, this facet of the theoretical perspective is disruptive in nature because it challenges the established norms and traditional models within the industry.

2. **Integration of Digital Culture:** In traditional luxury marketing theory, maintaining an image of exclusivity and high society often meant detaching from mass culture. However, in order to appeal to the younger, digitally-savvy consumer base, it is imperative that Gucci must continue its integration of digital

culture. In the aforementioned marketing strategy “That feeling when Gucci,” the brand successfully integrates the digital culture in order to connect with a diverse and younger audience on their terms by using memes and internet culture. While the former perspective centered around elitism and detachment from mainstream culture, Gucci’s ability to embrace digital culture exemplifies a willingness to recognize the changing dynamics of luxury marketing in the digital age. This shift is inherently disruptive in nature as it challenges the long-standing conventions of luxury marketing, breaks down barriers in order to reach a more diverse audience, and reflects the changing dynamics in consumer engagement, effectively modernizing Gucci’s approach to embracing culture.

Gucci’s marketing activities have proven to be highly successful, reflected by the brand’s exceptional standing in the industry. As the Gucci brand image goes hand-in-hand with notions of luxury, sophistication, and quality, Gucci has been able to adapt to the modern era. In the digital age, Gucci’s marketing strategy has strategically evolved to appeal to a younger audience by utilizing social media, influencer marketing, and digital engagement. By teaming up with celebrities and influencers such as Francis Bourgeois and Harry Styles, Gucci has not only brought more customers to its platform but also has redefined the concept of luxury for the newer generation. Although there is some room for improvement — especially within the realms of post-purchasing engagement and targeting emerging markets such as India and China — by implementing personalized experiences and empowering consumers to generate user-made content, Gucci can further customer loyalty. Moreover, expanding into emerging markets presents a growth opportunity, allowing Gucci to fully tap into the potential that these areas offer.



Gucci's journey from humble beginnings to digital supremacy showcases the brand's ability to adapt, innovate, and maintain its reputation for promoting quality and luxury. As Gucci continues to adapt to ever-changing consumer preferences, it reinforces the notion that true luxury transcends mere clothing, focusing on how a brand resonates with consumer aspirations and values. With its rich heritage and visionary business model, Gucci is the epitome of timeless sophistication and elegance. Looking forward, Gucci is certain to face both challenges and opportunities as it navigates the emerging trends and technologies in the industry. As Gucci continues to fearlessly explore the marketing and branding possibilities emerging technologies have to offer, it is a surety that the Italian fashion house will remain a fierce competitor as the preeminent designer retailer for decades to come.

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