

Ralph Lauren: A Legacy of Branding Excellence and Cultural Influence

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Ralph Lauren stands as a pivotal figure in fashion and brand marketing, his name synonymous with timeless elegance and sophistication. This paper delves into the importance of studying Ralph Lauren within the context of brand image marketing, exploring how his vision has shaped the industry. Ralph Lauren emerges as a pivotal figure in fashion and brand marketing through the lens of the documentary "Very Ralph- Ralph Lauren Documentary." The film showcases Lauren's unparalleled influence on the industry, highlighting his journey from a humble background in the Bronx to becoming a global icon of American style. One of the key aspects that underscores Lauren's significance is his ability to transcend the traditional boundaries of fashion. Unlike many of his contemporaries who focused solely on clothing, Lauren envisioned a lifestyle brand that encompassed not just what people wore, but how they lived. This universal approach to branding set him apart and allowed him to create a world of aspiration and luxury that resonated with consumers around the world.

The documentary delves into Lauren's meticulous attention to detail and uncompromising commitment to quality. From the design of his garments to the presentation of his stores, every aspect of the Ralph Lauren brand reflects a dedication to excellence. This relentless pursuit of perfection has not only solidified Lauren's reputation as a "Master of Design" but has also cemented the brand's status as a symbol of sophistication and taste. Furthermore, "Very Ralph"

highlights Lauren's pioneering use of marketing and storytelling to create emotional connections with consumers. Whether through iconic ad campaigns or immersive retail experiences, Lauren has consistently leveraged the power of narrative to evoke a sense of aspiration and desire. By tapping into the American dream and nostalgia for a bygone era, he has successfully crafted a brand image that transcends trends and endures through generations.

Ralph Lauren's brand origins and evolution are deeply rooted in his vision of creating garments that epitomized elite American style while drawing inspiration from various sources such as Old Hollywood, English Aristocracy, and the American West. The documentary delves into Lauren's upbringing in the Bronx, where he developed a keen eye for style and aesthetics from an early age. Drawing inspiration from his surroundings and the glamorous world depicted in movies and magazines, Ralph Lauren began to envision a brand that embodied the aspirational lifestyle he admired. One of the defining moments in Ralph Lauren's evolution as a brand came with the launch of his Polo line in 1967. "Established as a neckwear company named Polo in 1967, Ralph Lauren began crafting handmade ties in New York City. His dedication to quality and sporty menswear designs quickly garnered attention, setting the stage for the brand's expansion and evolution ("Ralph Lauren: History, Style, Evolution, and Influence on Vintage Fashion," 2023)." This fusion of classic and contemporary aesthetics became the hallmark of the Ralph Lauren brand and set it apart in the crowded fashion landscape. Its iconic logo, featuring a polo player on horseback, became synonymous with the Ralph Lauren brand and remains one of the most recognizable symbols in fashion today.

Looking at behind-the-scenes of the evolution of the Ralph Lauren brand, from its early days as a small menswear label to its expansion into a global lifestyle empire. Through strategic partnerships, innovative marketing campaigns, and a relentless commitment to quality, Lauren transformed his brand into a symbol of sophistication and taste. In the 1970s, Ralph Lauren's commitment to its brand propelled its rapid growth and recognition. The brand secured a space in a Bloomingdale boutique in 1970, marking the beginning of its physical presence in retail ("Ralph Lauren: History, Style, Evolution, and Influence on Vintage Fashion," 2023). Throughout the late 1970s, Ralph Lauren continued to achieve success, earning accolades such as the Coty award and supplying costumes for Oscar-winning films. The brand adeptly adapted to evolving fashion trends, embracing a cowboy-inspired style with denim and embroidered detailing. In 1981, Ralph Lauren expanded its horizons internationally, opening a Polo shop in London's New Bond Street, signifying the brand's global aspirations and appeal.

Through meticulous attention to detail and a keen understanding of his target audience, Lauren crafted a brand image that exudes luxury and aspiration. Ralph Lauren's understanding of the power of storytelling and its role in shaping brand perception creates innovative marketing strategies and the development of the brand's iconic image. From the very beginning, Ralph Lauren sought to create not just clothing but an entire lifestyle experience. One of the key marketing strategies highlighted in the documentary is Lauren's use of nostalgia and Americana to craft a distinct brand identity. "The advertising campaigns of Ralph Lauren integrate stylish men and women dressed in Ralph Lauren clothing, portraying a lifestyle of aspiration that appeals to consumers in search of enduring elegance and refinement Guevara, M. (2022, January

18).” Through carefully curated campaigns and immersive retail environments, he invited consumers into his world, evoking a sense of aspiration and desire.

Another characteristic of Ralph Lauren's marketing strategy is its emphasis on exclusivity and luxury. From the lavish Polo Bar in New York City to the lavish Ralph Lauren flagship stores around the world, Lauren spared no expense in creating a sense of luxury and sophistication around his brand. The documentary highlights Lauren's pioneering use of celebrity endorsements and strategic partnerships to enhance the brand's visibility and appeal. “Ralph Lauren also broke the codes when he had Tyson Beckford in those beautifully fitted suits... level here is a black man three, four thousand dollar suit in a GQ magazine, Wall Street guys were looking at this and you know uh CEOs businessmen were looking like this suit is nice really nice I need to get this -Andre Leon Talley (“Very Ralph,” 2019).” By tapping into these timeless themes and not following fashion industry norms, he was able to create a sense of authenticity and nostalgia that set the Ralph Lauren brand apart from its competitors.



Ralph Lauren's influence on fashion and lifestyle branding is multifaceted and far-reaching, as demonstrated by the emergence of the Lo Life subculture in Brooklyn, New York during the 1980s and the brand's lasting impact on vintage fashion. From clothing to home

furnishings to fragrances, every aspect of the Ralph Lauren brand was carefully curated to evoke a sense of luxury, sophistication, and aspirational living. This holistic approach to branding revolutionized the industry and set a new standard for how fashion brands engage with consumers. His influence extended far beyond the runway, shaping the way we dress, decorate our homes, and even how we define success. Ralph Lauren's influence on fashion and lifestyle branding is multifaceted and far-reaching, as demonstrated by the emergence of the Lo Life subculture in Brooklyn, New York during the 1980s and the brand's lasting impact on vintage fashion.

The Ralph Lauren Lo Life's, a street gang originating in the Brownsville and Crown Heights neighborhoods of Brooklyn, became emblematic of a unique subculture centered around the brand's iconic Polo clothing and apparel. "Wearing the newest designer clothes helped people forget about their everyday problems. But it wasn't just about wanting to look flashy or rich or having a lifestyle that seemed impossible to reach. It was a way to deal with tough times. It was a way to get through life (Kemet High, 2016)." While their activities primarily revolved around the theft and flaunting of Ralph Lauren merchandise, their obsession with the brand symbolized a desire for the status and success associated with Ralph Lauren's preppy and upscale image. "When we looked at the clothes, it made us realize that there's more to life than just being stuck in Brooklyn and living at a slow pace. It encouraged us to chase after those things: to go sailing, to walk on Fifth Avenue, to be among the wealthy and privileged, and to try to achieve the American Dream in our way. And for us, that meant getting into fashion and showing off (Kemet High, 2016)." Despite their unconventional means, Lo Life's underscored Ralph Lauren's influence as a cultural phenomenon, with their prominence reflecting the brand's ability to evoke aspiration and exclusivity.

Ralph Lauren's enduring impact on vintage fashion is evident in his ability to blend timeless inspirations with modern sensibilities. Unlike other designers who may seek to reinvent themselves with contrasting ideas, Ralph Lauren's brand identity has remained consistent, emphasizing sophistication and elegance through tailored silhouettes, classic fabrics, and intricate detailing. By drawing inspiration from Ivy League aesthetics and American styles, Ralph Lauren has seamlessly integrated vintage elements into contemporary fashion, from polo shirts and blazers to denim and cowboy boots. Ralph Lauren's advocacy for vintage style extends to accessories, including leather belts, bags, and silk scarves, further solidifying the brand's influence on fashion beyond clothing. Using vintage-inspired fabrics such as tweed, herringbone, and corduroy, Ralph Lauren has revitalized and reimagined classic garments for each new generation, reinforcing his status as a visionary in the fashion industry. His legacy continues to inspire designers, marketers, and consumers alike, reaffirming his status as a true pioneer of American style.



From redefining American style to pioneering the concept of lifestyle branding, Lauren's influence extends far beyond the realm of fashion. A closer look at specific campaigns and product lines reveals the genius behind Ralph Lauren's branding strategy. Ralph Lauren's marketing campaigns excel at motivating people. For example, in campaigns like "Polo Dreams," the brand showcases stories of individuals who have accomplished their goals. One of the advertised campaigns involves photos, books, and a 30-minute film, and it marks a collaboration with Morehouse College and Spelman College. "Despite being predominantly White institutions now, they have historically educated Black students during segregation and still do today ("Ralph Lauren & the American Dream," 2022)". The story of Black people is a crucial aspect of our collective past but discussing it can be uncomfortable. By doing this, Ralph Lauren creates a feeling of aspiration and determination in consumers. This makes people feel more connected to the brand and more eager to be a part of it.

Ralph Lauren offers a broad range of products, including clothing, accessories, home decor items, and fragrances, to suit diverse consumer needs. One prominent example highlighted in the film is the launch of the Polo Ralph Lauren brand. Inspired by the timeless elegance of polo players and equestrian sports, Polo Ralph Lauren captured the essence of casual luxury and became an instant classic. The brand's iconic logo, featuring a polo player on horseback, became synonymous with the Ralph Lauren aesthetic and remains one of the most recognizable symbols in fashion. Overall, the case study presented in "Very Ralph" offers valuable insights into Ralph Lauren's approach to branding and marketing. By focusing on quality, authenticity, and

aspirational living, Lauren has created a brand that transcends trends and resonates with consumers across generations.

Despite its storied history, the Ralph Lauren brand has not been immune to challenges. From shifts in consumer preferences to increased competition, Lauren's empire has faced its fair share of obstacles. As consumer preferences evolve and new competitors emerge, Ralph Lauren has had to continuously innovate to stay relevant. This includes adapting to shifts in consumer behavior, such as the rise of online shopping and social media. With a large following, Ralph Lauren uses Instagram and Twitter to connect with its audience. Ralph Lauren has navigated challenges related to brand perception and cultural sensitivity. At times, the brand has faced criticism for its portrayal of luxury and exclusivity, with some accusing it of promoting an unrealistic and exclusionary ideal. In response, Ralph Lauren has worked to diversify its marketing efforts and showcase a more inclusive vision of American style that celebrates diversity and authenticity. CEO Patrice Louvet states “Focusing on inclusion and diversity is not only good for business and for our teams; it's also our moral obligation. Everyone has an inherent right to a dignified human experience and expansive opportunity. Nobody should be stereotyped, silenced, or overlooked. Ralph and I aspire for all of us to simultaneously stand together for our values whenever they are tested and become the microcosm of the culture, we seek in the world around us.” By staying true to its core values of quality, authenticity, and timeless elegance, Ralph Lauren has managed to overcome obstacles and maintain its status as a cultural icon and a beacon of branding excellence.

Ralph Lauren's legacy in fashion and brand marketing is profound and far-reaching. Through the documentary "Very Ralph," we gain insight into his remarkable journey from humble beginnings to global acclaim. Lauren's vision transcends mere clothing, encompassing a lifestyle brand that resonates with consumers worldwide. His meticulous attention to detail, commitment to quality, and innovative marketing strategies have set him apart in the industry. From iconic ad campaigns to immersive retail experiences, Ralph Lauren has mastered the art of storytelling, evoking aspiration, and desire in his audience. Moreover, his influence extends beyond fashion, shaping cultural phenomena like the Lo Life subculture and vintage fashion revival. Despite facing challenges, Ralph Lauren continues to adapt and innovate, staying true to its values of inclusion and authenticity. Ralph Lauren is more than just a fashion designer; he is a visionary whose influence extends far beyond the realm of clothing. Through his innovative approach to branding and unwavering commitment to quality, Lauren has left an indelible mark on the fashion industry, shaping the way we perceive style and luxury.



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