

# Fashion Marketing

## Stephen Wigley

### Biography

Stephen Wigley is a fashion marketing professional whose industry background includes experience of retailing, branding and marketing research and analysis. Since 2010 he has been a Senior Lecturer in Fashion in the School of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Huddersfield.

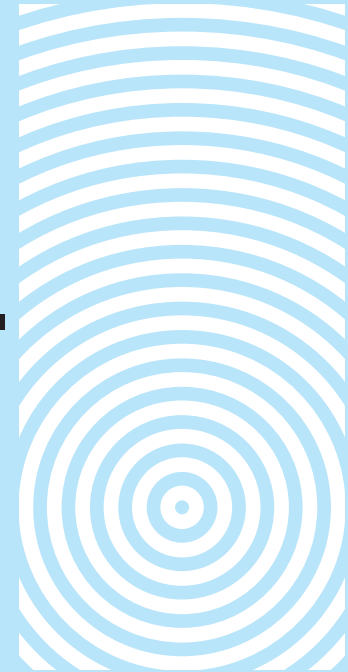
Graduating in 1998 with a degree in Politics, he began his career with a nationwide department store group where he contributed to that firm's strategic review of its menswear offer. This experience brought Stephen into contact with the wider dimensions of fashion marketing and inspired his subsequent career. In his initial position as a brand manager for one of the best-known US lifestyle fashion labels he was responsible for the presentation, promotion and protection of the brand in the UK market. He then returned to education to study for an MSc in Fashion Marketing at Glasgow Caledonian University. With a thesis comparing the

strategies and successes of two international fashion retailers, Stephen graduated in 2004 with a distinction and the prize for the highest-achieving student. This achievement prompted a position as Research Assistant at the Glasgow Centre for Retailing where he supported academic and consultancy research specific to fashion and retailing. The work there included collaboration with eminent fashion business academics and projects on behalf of international fashion brands, retailers, financial services organisations and travel companies. This position also introduced Stephen to teaching and academic writing as he published his MSc thesis findings – not something he had considered as a likely career but an excellent apprenticeship to his subsequent positions. In 2007 he was appointed Lecturer in Retail Marketing at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, where he assumed responsibility for development of that institution's International Fashion Marketing MSc programme. This role included

introducing new modules, leading student recruitment initiatives and organising annual study tours to Milan. In Edinburgh, Stephen continued research and industry collaboration, further publishing and work on marketing research projects for clients such as shopping malls and on-line fashion retailers.

Moving to the University of Huddersfield in January 2009, Stephen wished to pursue his teaching and research interests in a more specifically fashion-orientated institution while contributing to the development and delivery of fashion business modules in the School of Art, Design and Architecture. In Huddersfield he has assumed responsibility for leading MA courses in fashion design and marketing, while continuing to publish research and engage with Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) initiatives. Stephen is the fashion subject area's representative on the School Ethical Panel, most recently becoming involved in establishing the policy





on the use of fur in student collections. An active member of the School's Constructed Environments research group, he has presented research in the UK, Turkey and Italy. He has been an invited speaker at Glasgow Caledonian, Heriot-Watt and Stirling Universities, as well as at business schools in France, and is a member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing. He has also recently been invited to collaborate in writing a book focusing on Marketing Communications applied in the fashion industry.

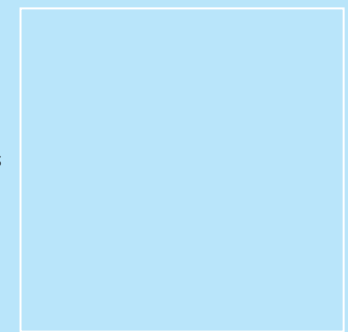
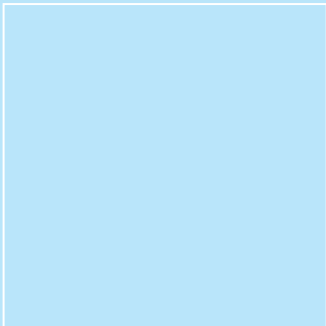
#### Current Research

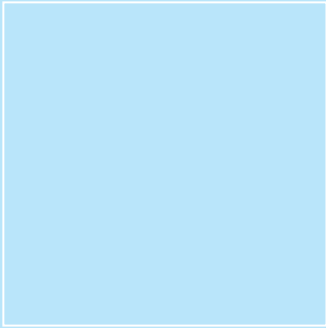
It is clear that not all fashion brands are the same, most obviously in terms of their commercial performance, customer profiles, geographic spread and product ranges. Stephen's research interests are in developing a conceptual model which categorises fashion businesses according to their key competences, and defining the ways in which different types of firms may grow by focusing investment around those key competences.

Categorising fashion brands according to their competences is a surprisingly difficult task, not least thanks to their vast diversity. Some, such as that of the late Alexander McQueen or 'cult' brands such as Comme des Garçon, are founded on the distinctive creative genius of their founders or key designers. Others are less avant-garde in terms of design but have success due to branding skills which make names such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Chanel synonymous with style, status and prestige around the world. The impact of American-originated fashion giants such as Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger may be attributed to marketing skills which create desirable lifestyle imagery whilst diffusing that image to products accessible to most consumers. In the UK, the success of mid-market retailers such as Next and M&S in the UK is rooted in creating competitive retail environments and managing a complex network of stores and products. Finally, the 'fast fashion' businesses of Zara, Topshop and H&M

are founded on their ability to manage a supply chain which can immediately distribute short runs of intra-seasonal on-trend items efficiently at a global level. Stephen's research to date suggests that the key competences relevant to the success of a fashion brand are found (to greater or lesser extents according to the business) in design, branding, marketing, retailing and distribution.

Reinforcing this conceptualisation, Stephen's upcoming paper 'A conceptual model of diversification in apparel retailing: the case of Next PLC' (due 2011 in *The Journal of the Textiles Institute*) shows how the British retailer has been able to grow by investing in the activities critical to their success: in product ranges (ie entering new product categories such as jewellery, home wares etc); in retail formats (ie by opening new types of stores); in sales channels (ie by developing new routes to markets such as online retailing); in foreign markets (ie entering geographically diverse markets); and in business support (ie by





enhancing the efficiency of activities such as manufacturing, distribution and financial management which support the core business). This paper and its conclusions underpin the core focus of Stephen's future research which aims to formalise a typology of fashion brands according to their core competence.

However Stephen's research interests extend more broadly into the fashion industry, its participants and customers as a whole. For instance, with colleagues from the School of Art and Design (Kevin Almond and Steve Swindells) and from the School of Human and Health Sciences (Abigail Locke), he is collaborating on a project funded by University Research Funds to investigate the effects of the presumed 'obesity crisis' on fashion design, marketing and consumers. This research acknowledges the contradiction evident in the proven changes in the size, shape and weight of female UK fashion consumers

while the industry that serves them remains apparently obsessed with unrealistic stereotypes of feminine beauty. Alongside the practical and commercial problems this raises in the design and promotion of fashion products, the psychological and social effects of this will be explored.

Stephen's recently completed projects include studies of specific aspects of the fashion industry. One of these proposes the first published conceptualisation for the motives, management and outcomes of strategic alliances between fashion businesses ('Strategic alliances in the fashion sector – motives, processes and outcomes', with AK Provelengiou due 2011 in *The Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*). Another stream of research investigates the role played by architects in contributing to the brand image of fashion retailers by considering their collaboration in the design of stores. This has

resulted in two presentations (with E Larsen at the Eirass Conference on Retailing and Consumer Services and with K Nobbs and S Anderson at the Design Principles and Practices Conference), and journal publications under review. Further projects consider the dimensions of the high street fashion retailer's brand and digital marketing for fashion brands. Each of these projects will contribute to Stephen's longer-term project investigating the roots of success for a fashion brand.

