

You are what you wear

IDEA Nº 85

BRAND CULTURE AND LOGO WORSHIP

The 1980s ushered in a yuppie culture of work hard, play hard, and sweat it all off at the gym afterward. It was the decade of making it big—big hair, big breasts, big expense accounts, big jewelry, and big shoulders. And it was fashionable to be seen to be splashing the cash.

It was also a decade of fashion companies using big marketing budgets and expensive ad campaigns to raise the profiles of their brands. They were selling the image rather than the actual product, and cashing in. And the consumer was led by the nose.

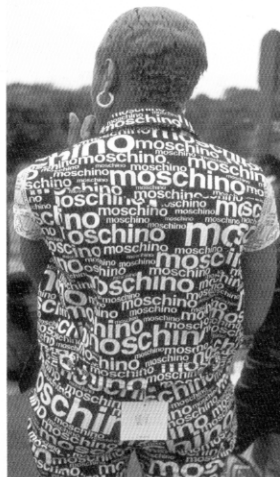
With this ostentatious style of dressing, it became fashionable to wear your preferred label on your wrist, your belt, or your chest—be it the relatively discreet polo player of Ralph Lauren, Chanel's linked Cs, or the designer logos of Versace, Moschino, and Dior. For sports and casualwear the essential logos were the Nike swoosh and the Adidas stripes. If you could not afford the head-to-toe look, you could say it with accessories—a Louis Vuitton bag, a Rolex watch, a Moschino belt, or Chanel shades. On the street, a price tag on show even became a status symbol.

Logos had been around for decades. Georges Vuitton branded early twentieth-century luggage with the Louis Vuitton initials and iconic flower. In the 1920s Jean Patou monogrammed knitwear, while Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Pierre Cardin, Yves Saint Laurent, and then Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein were masters of brand-building. But in the 1980s it was vital to show your logo. Naomi Klein wrote in her book *No Logo* (2000): "Gradually, the logo was transformed from an ostentatious affectation to an active fashion

accessory. Most significantly, the logo itself was growing in size, ballooning from a three-quarter-inch emblem into a chest-sized marquee."

By the 1990s the big-budget marketing campaigns had backfired for some of the luxury brands. The ordinary person on the street started to wear clothing and accessories bearing the logos or insignia of such brands as Burberry, but teaming them with casual and mass-market clothing. This damaged the brands' luxury image. Loud logos went out, and the marketing machines had to work even harder to validate and sell the new designer clothes that looked minimalist and utilitarian rather than obviously expensive.

Today the consumer has become more demanding, more savvy, and less prone to brand loyalty. He or she wants something individual and of real value if it bears a high price tag—a limited edition handbag, or a one-off vintage piece. Clothing and accessories by successful fashion brands (but with subtle logos) are still sought after, but it is much more chic to own something that is rare or unavailable to others, or that only those in the know can recognize as elite and special. ■



Flaunting shop labels became a status symbol.



Ex-soap-opera star Daniella Westbrook overdoes the Burberry check on London's Bond Street, 2004.