

Skims' Inclusive Branding: Celebrity Endorsements, Cross-Border Strategies, and Emotional Resonance

Jingtong Liao

School of Design, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT, U.K.

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Abstract: This study focuses on the Skims brand and explores how it builds its brand image and attracts consumers through marketing means such as celebrity endorsement and cross-border cooperation. Firstly, the study adopted the celebrity endorsement theory and AIDA model to analyze Skims' endorsement through Nicola Coughlan, which broke the traditional aesthetic and conveyed diversity and inclusiveness. The study found that Skims successfully attracted new audiences and increased consumer trust in the brand through celebrity endorsements, especially among female consumers. This marketing campaign enhanced consumers' emotional engagement with the brand. Secondly, the study explores Skims' cross-border collaboration with Swarovski, analyzing how this collaboration stimulates consumers' desire to buy through scarcity effects and emotional marketing. However, although the partnership generated a lot of attention and purchases in the short term, there was also the issue of market fatigue caused by over-reliance on high visibility and limited releases, which affected the long-term appeal of the brand. Finally, Skims' collaboration with the NBA demonstrates the potential of brands to expand into sports, where brands successfully enhance their diverse image with the help of social identity theory and brand extension theory. However, excessive expansion may blur its original brand positioning and affect the loyalty of core consumers. Overall, Skims has successfully built a global and inclusive fashion brand through emotional marketing, celebrity endorsements and cross-border collaborations. The research shows that brands should pay more attention to the diversification of long-term strategies and enhance consumer loyalty through innovation and continuous marketing, while avoiding the dilution of brand value due to excessive expansion.

1 INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has always been one of the most dynamic and changing fields globally. With the continuous changes in consumers' demands and aesthetic concepts, brands no longer merely pursue the innovation of their products themselves. Instead, they begin to pay more attention to how to establish an emotional connection with consumers through unique brand concepts. In recent years, inclusiveness and diversity have become important topics in the fashion industry. Especially, diversified designs in terms of gender, body type, skin color, etc. have gradually become an important strategy for brand building. Skims is a brand founded by Kim Kardashian. Since its establishment in 2018, it has been committed to providing consumers with products that better meet modern aesthetics and needs through inclusiveness and comfort (Anon, 2024). Skims has not only attracted a large number of loyal

fans through its unique design concept, but also gradually occupied a place in the global market with its innovative marketing strategies.

As competition in the fashion industry becomes increasingly fierce, more and more brands are beginning to expand their market influence through cross-border cooperation, emotional marketing and other means. Skims is one of the outstanding ones. The cooperation between the brand and the jewelry brand Swarovski, the collaboration with the globally renowned NBA, and the cooperation with the British actor Nicola Coughlan not only brought new market opportunities to Skims, but also enabled the brand to demonstrate strong cross-border charm in multiple fields such as fashion, sports, and jewelry. Through these collaborations, Skims has successfully shaped an inclusive, diverse and culturally rich brand image, winning the favor of more consumers.

In the existing research, the theories of emotional marketing and brand endorsement have received extensive attention. Studies show that emotional

marketing can effectively stimulate consumers' emotional resonance and enhance brand loyalty (Baker, 1961). The alignment of the image of brand endorsers, especially celebrity endorsers, with the brand culture can also greatly influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Till and Shimp, 1998). However, although there have been many studies on emotional marketing and endorsement theories, research on how emerging brands can break industry boundaries through cross-border cooperation and create an inclusive and diverse brand image is still relatively weak. Especially when it comes to how brands like Skims can integrate with other industries in the fashion industry, academic discussions are still insufficient.

Therefore, this study aims to deeply explore how Skims has successfully shaped a diversified and inclusive brand image through marketing strategies such as celebrity endorsements, emotional marketing, and cross-border collaborations. The research will be analyzed from several aspects: Firstly, it will explore how Skims enhances the brand's market influence by leveraging celebrity endorsements and cross-industry collaborations. Secondly, analyze how brands can trigger consumers' emotional resonance through emotional marketing, thereby enhancing brand loyalty. Finally, the brand endorsement theory and Emotional Marketing will be applied to analyze how Skims helps consumers establish emotional connections and identity through brand culture and image.

This study adopts the method of combining case analysis and theory. By integrating the actual marketing cases of Skims, it analyzes the strategies and market trends behind the brand's success. The research content will be divided into several parts, including the construction of the theoretical framework, the analysis of brand marketing strategies, case studies, and conclusions and suggestions. Through an in-depth analysis of the Skims brand, this article not only hopes to provide theoretical support for fashion brands in emotional marketing and brand building, but also offers references for the innovative development of other brands in areas such as diversity and inclusiveness.

This study will take the Skims brand as the research object and analyze its emotional marketing, celebrity endorsement and cross-border cooperation strategies. The research adopts a method combining case analysis and theory, focusing on how the brand builds an inclusive image and enhances market influence through diversified means. The full text will be divided into four parts: theoretical framework, case analysis, problem discussion and conclusion suggestions, aiming to provide references for fashion brands in marketing strategies and brand building.

2 SKIMS AND CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

Skims' advertising collaboration with actress Nicola Coughlan shows the brand's concept of challenging conventional beauty. Nicola is not a fashion model in the traditional sense, but her success as an actress represents a whole new 'possibility'. Through her participation, the AD tries to break the mainstream fashion's excessive emphasis on thinness and perfect bodies, and conveys the meaning of "beauty is diverse." Besides, the confidence and comfort shown by Nicola in the advertisement highlight women's dominance and acceptance of their own bodies. This campaign provides more recognition for people of all shapes and sizes, shaping a more inclusive fashion environment. What's more, the event brings sustainability to the brand's finances. The Soft Lounge promoted by the brand in this advertisement is a long-term series, and the inclusiveness conveyed in the advertisement is also a long-term value, which can consolidate consumer loyalty to the brand. Not only that, but the series also promotes environmental sustainability. The Soft Lounge collection is made from ribbed fabrics that are durable, recyclable and stretchy, and friendly to the environment (Anon, 2024c). However, although this advertisement uses Nicola's image to break through some traditional aesthetics, it still lacks the representation of real plus-size, disabled groups and non-binary gender people.

Celebrity Endorsement theory refers to a marketing strategy to promote the recognition, attraction and sales of a brand or product through the celebrity image (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995a). This theory is based on consumers' trust, affection and identification with celebrities, and they transfer this emotion to the product or brand (Till and Shimp, 1998). Through Nicola's public image and influence, the theory can explore how she helps the brand to enhance consumer trust in the product, how to attract new audiences, and the combination of her image and the brand's core values.

The theory of Celebrity Endorsement emphasizes that the success of celebrity endorsement depends on Credibility, Attractiveness and Fit (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995b). First of all, Nicola herself is a Skims user, and this real experience enhances her credibility as a spokesperson. Secondly, the positive image of her character in *Bridgerton* has also strengthened consumers' trust in her. Regarding Attractiveness, during the third season of *Bridgerton*, the British drama starring Nicola, she was very much talked about and attracted the attention of many fans for the brand. Finally, the comfortable and confident values displayed by her are highly compatible with

the brand value, breaking through the traditional aesthetic pursuit of slender and tall, and consolidating the inclusiveness and diversity of the process of consumers from exposure to advertising to taking action is analyzed in the AIDA model which was proposed by E. St. Elmo Lewis in 1898 (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). The first is Attention. The brand uses the global influence of *Bridgerton* to make the fans who watch the TV series pay attention to this brand campaign quickly. The second is Interest. The brand attracts consumers' further interest through fresh advertising visual design and product functionality. Then there was Desire, where Nicola's confident and comfortable way of showing up in ads sparked consumer desire for this lifestyle. The inclusion and encouragement of the brand for plus-size girls arouses consumers' desire to buy. Finally, there is Action, where advertising quickly converts consumers' desires into actual purchases through purchase links. The four stages of AIDA are flexibly used to achieve the goal of forming a peak purchase in the short term. Regarding the weakness of the event, it may not be inclusive enough, with no mention of other groups, such as non-binary people. Secondly, this activity focuses too much attention on Nicola. Once the popularity of the TV series passes, the sales volume will decline rapidly, weakening the long-term appeal of the product itself. For the improvement of these two points, the brand can increase the diversity of spokespersons, and try to cover people from different groups and cultural backgrounds. Secondly, the brand can strengthen the display of product details in the Desire stage, and do not rely entirely on the spokesperson image. However, the event also had a lot of social impact. This event promoted a discussion about beauty standards and self-acceptance, and was influential in changing the single aesthetic of the fashion industry. Not only that, the confident, elegant and comfortable feminine charm shown by the advertisement can arouse the resonance of many plus-size girls, encouraging women of all sizes to be brave to show their beauty. As for another revolutionary aspect of the campaign, the brand did not make excessive use of the social issue of "plus-size girls" as a brand promotion, but used a soft way to resonate with women of different sizes, including the use of soft filters and images in the visual design of the advertisement to reduce the pertinency of the advertisement (Contrastly and Schenker, 2013).

3 SKIMS-SWAROVSKI

In collaboration with Swarovski, Skims has launched diamond-encrusted tights reminiscent of Marilyn

Monroe's most classic sexy crystal dresses. This allows consumers to experience an experience that connects the classic and the modern, and the re-interpretation of this classic element also conveys the permanence and diversity of female charm. At the same time, the Skims shaper is focused on comfort and functionality, while the Swarovski crystals symbolize the highlight moment in the spotlight. Through the joint name, the brand gives every consumer the opportunity to experience the "highlight moment" in daily life, conveying the concept of confidence - everyone can shine in daily life and pursue themselves.

Emotional Marketing refers to a marketing strategy in which a brand triggers purchasing behavior by triggering emotional resonance in consumers and enhancing their identification and attachment to the brand (Huang, 2001). Skims and Swarovski's co-branding, through the image of Kardashian and Monroe's 'sparkle,' creates an emotional experience of confidence, beauty and sexiness, which is in line with some women's pursuit of personal value and beauty. This emotional connection draws in the relationship between the brand and the consumer. Scarcity Effect is a psychological phenomenon of consumer behavior, which refers to people's stronger desire and desire for scarce and limited things (Aguirre-Rodriguez, 2013). The Skims and Swarovski co-branded product was released in limited quantities and received a lot of exposure on social media. This creates a sense of scarcity and encourages consumers to buy quickly.

Kim Kardashian sparked Internet controversy when she wore Marilyn Monroe's classic crystal slip dress to the 2022 Met Gala. Monroe is a classic sexy in Hollywood in the 20th century. Her perfect appearance and sexy and funny role style on the screen make her a classic imagination of sexy (Banner, 2008). Moreover, her life's twists and turns and tragic ending constitute a complete 'emotional narrative', which makes her image an enduring and classic sexy culture (Keen, 2006). Emotional Marketing is to enhance the psychological connection between brands and consumers by arousing consumers' emotions (Huang, 2001). In the Skims and Swarovski joint campaign, the brand uses Kim Kardashian's personal image and products that resemble Marilyn Monroe's crystal slip-on dress to evoke consumers' emotional resonance for "classic, confident, sexy and shining." This emotional resonance brings a psychological hint to consumers: wearing these crystal-embellished tights, they can also have star-like charm and confidence. By establishing emotional resonance, brands attract customers to consume and enhance consumers' brand loyalty (Baker, 1961). In addition, in the co-branding

of Skims and Swarovski, the brand adopts a limited release strategy. In a research article, the Buying Frenzy Theory in Scarcity Effect is mentioned. When the supply of goods is limited, consumers will feel a stronger sense of urgency in demand, thus promoting the purchase behavior (Balachander et al., 2009). The brand first inspires the emotional resonance of consumers, and then increases the appeal of the product by creating scarcity, thus strengthening the desire of consumers to buy. The two marketing strategies complement each other and cooperate perfectly, so that the co-branding has produced good benefits.

But although high-profile co-branding can trigger strong market attention and sales spikes, this heat is short-lived. Consumers tend to feel tired after chasing one or two high-profile co-brands (Radighieri et al., 2014), so they turn to other brands with fresh taste. Therefore, in order to keep the customers, Skims needs to constantly introduce unique, new collections to maintain market demand and brand image. Moreover, this co-branding is sold in the form of high exposure and limited quantity, which is easy to lead consumers to over-consumption. When the popularity of co-branded clothes decreases, most of the co-branded clothes will be idle, resulting in a waste of resources and environment (Coles, 2016). To improve this, brands can develop co-branded classic models, no longer limit the cooperation with Swarovski to short-term limited editions, and extend the 'fashion life' of products, so that consumers have enough time to make purchase decisions and avoid unnecessary consumption impulses.

The brand has the ability to cooperate with more luxury brands to expand its products from functional products to luxury fashion. In order to analyze this activity in more detail, the theory of emotional narrative can be used to reveal how a brand attracts consumers by telling stories that resonate with consumers' emotions. Additionally, Perceived Value theory can also be applied to analyze how a product brings functional, social, and emotional value to consumers.

4 SKIMS-NBA

The National Basketball Association announced a partnership with Skims, designating the brand as the official lingerie partner of the league's Women's National Basketball Association and USA Basketball (Anon, 2023). Skims was originally a women's clothing brand, and the cooperation with NBA can convey that NBA is not only a male field, more and more women will also participate in it, which can promote gender equality to a certain extent. Besides,

brands have always focused on inclusion and diversity, and the NBA, as a globally renowned sports league, represents the diversity of competitive spirit and global culture. This joint name can bring together the core values of the two brands, so that consumers feel that the brand is inclusive of gender, age, body type and other diversity. Not only that, the brand also promotes the combination of fashion and sports culture, and raises society's attention to healthy lifestyles. On the negative side of brand campaigns, whether brands actually promote gender equality may have an impact in light of founder Kim Kardashian's online comments that overemphasize the continuation of paternal surnames (Anon, 2023). Consumers will suspect that brands are catering to the male market at the expense of their focus on women. What's more, there may be a certain gap between the spirit expressed by NBA and the brand value of Skims, and the excessive extension of the brand may make consumers confused about the original brand characteristics of Skims, thus reducing the brand appeal.

Social Identity Theory, proposed by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner, is used to explain how individuals construct self-concept and self-identity by belonging to groups (such as culture, ethnicity, occupation, etc.) (leaper, 2011). According to the theory, a person's self-concept consists of two parts: personal identity and social identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Ashforth and Mael mentioned in their article that people will classify themselves and others into different groups, and then strengthen their sense of identity through the association with the group, forming a sense of belonging to the ingroup (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). The reason why this theory is used is that Skims associates itself with social groups such as athletes and fitness enthusiasts through co-branding with NBA, and shortens the distance with consumers through group identification. Brand Extension Theory is a concept in marketing, which is used to explain how enterprises can use the existing brand awareness and reputation to launch new products or enter new fields. This reduces the cost of promotion and increases the chances of success (Claire Deng and Messinger, 2021). With this strategy, Skims reduces the difficulty of entering new areas and expands the application scenarios of the brand.

In their article, Stets and Burke mention that Social Identity Theory suggests that people assign themselves to a group and reinforce their connection to it (Stets and Burke, 2000). The positive, stylish and healthy outlook on life conveyed by the association with the NBA will attract people who share the same outlook. The brand conveys a message to consumers: buying Skims is not only about buying a product, but

also about identifying with a brand's attitude towards life. The brand brings different cultures and audiences into the same space, promoting the interaction and identification of groups in the field of fashion and sports. At the same time, it establishes a connection between customers and brands, and improves brand loyalty. Besides, Völckner and Sattler refer to the theory of brand extension in their article that successful extensions can strengthen a brand's core values and perceptions when the brand expands into new markets or product categories (Völckner and Sattler, 2006). Skims has successfully entered the field of sports by cooperating with famous sports events. This not only gives Skims more visibility but also expands the brand values. At the same time, this cooperation also extends Skims product positioning from the field of comfortable and slim-fit clothing to the field of sports fashion, expanding the use of the brand products. This is not just a simple product line extension, but a strategic enhancement of brand image diversification. Although Skims has entered the sports fashion space through a partnership, this may have an impact on the brand's existing market position. For example, do core consumers feel that the brand has lost its sense of closeness and uniqueness because it has entered a 'male-dominated' space? Studies have shown that excessive brand extension will lead to a departure from the core value, which may make consumers confused about the original value of the brand and even reduce the original appeal of the brand (Sood and Keller, 2012). In the long term, if a brand frequently engages with areas that are not relevant to its initial positioning, it may lead to a brand image out of focus. In order not to deviate from the original comfort and home style of the brand, when cooperating with the NBA, brand can avoid blindly following the sports trend, but focus on the design style of sports comfort and retain the brand characteristics. Not only that, in order not to let the brand produce an image that caters to men, brands can learn from NIKE's "Dream Crazier" advertising campaign, which makes it clear that women are the main body and encourages women to break through stereotypes (Binlot, 2019). The two campaigns contrast with Skims' limited involvement in women's sports and can learn from NIKE's approach to promoting female empowerment.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In terms of brand marketing, Skims has successfully leveraged celebrity and social values to create an emotional connection with consumers through its partnership with Nicola Coughlan. While this partnership has effectively enhanced the brand's

visibility, there is still room for improvement in terms of inclusion. In the future, Skims can further expand the brand market by adding broader diversity, while making more long-term positioning in sustainability and brand strategy. At the same time, Skims' collaboration with Swarovski demonstrates the potential of brands in terms of market influence, consumer connectivity, product innovation and cultural expression. Through this cross-border cooperation, Skims not only successfully entered the high-end market, but also further demonstrated its ability to diversify in the fashion industry. In addition, Skims' partnership with the NBA is an important expansion of the brand's strategy. As a globally renowned sports brand, the NBA represents the diversity of sports and competitive spirit, and Skims has strengthened its influence in the field of sports fashion through this partnership, attracting more sports fans and young consumers. This collaboration not only increases the brand's market reach, but also further shapes Skims' image as a diverse and inclusive fashion brand. Emotional marketing and symbolic consumption theory provide strong support for Skims brand marketing. Emotional marketing helps brands build emotional resonance with consumers, while symbolic consumption theory explains how brands inspire consumers' identity and emotional belonging through unique products and images. Through these strategies, brands strengthen the deep connection with consumers and enhance brand loyalty.

To sum up, Skims has successfully built a diverse and inclusive fashion brand on a global scale through celebrity endorsements, cross-border collaborations and emotional marketing. Nevertheless, brands need to pay more attention to maintaining core values in future development and avoid over-reliance on short-term effects in cooperation. By further optimizing the consumer experience, expanding the market and strengthening the brand's sustainability strategy, Skims is expected to consolidate its market position in the future and achieve long-term brand success.

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