

What Does It All Mean? Shoppers Take a Stand

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Labels with a strong brand message continue to draw consumers to the cash register.

According to the 2011 Fashion Brand Index by Brand Keys Inc., 29 percent of U.S. apparel buyers gravitated toward brands with a distinct point of view when deciding what to buy. These include Ralph Lauren, Armani, Calvin Klein and Brooks Brothers, among others.

“With every fashion option, from black T-shirts to the latest couture, brand meaning is increasingly a larger factor in the buying decision,” said Amy Shea, executive vice president of global brand development for the New York-based brand and customer loyalty research firm. “This fits with what we are seeing, not only in fashion, but across all the product/service categories we track. Those brands that actually stand for something are being sought out by consumers...when it comes time to decide which brand to buy.”

Seven years ago, fewer than 3 percent of apparel purchases felt fashion brands and logos were important, but that number jumped to 14 percent in 2009 and doubled, to 28 percent in 2010. This year, it has inched up to 29 percent.

“That shows that is not an anomaly,” Shea said. “This is a real change in mind-set. Brands have become more important and that’s how consumers make their decisions.”

In a world “overrun by commodities,” Shea added, “true brands provide meaningful differentiation, which is why so many of the fashion brands consumers feel most engaged with are luxury brands, which have built their houses on emotional meaning.” She said it’s “no accident” that these brands rank high with consumers. “Price isn’t their strong suit; they stand for something.”

But it’s not just luxury brands, with their big marketing budgets, that made the list. J. Crew, Guess, Levi’s and Banana Republic were also ranked high this year.

“The Gap does a ton of advertising but didn’t make the list,” she said. “It’s because they don’t really stand for anything. They have trouble creating differentiation. J. Crew is similar, but made the list. It’s not just the Michelle Obama factor, but it’s also that they’ve carved out a place for themselves by acting like a couture brand.”

The survey was conducted among 7,500 men and women between 21 and 65 years of age.

The Brand Keys Fashion 15

- 1.** Favorite Sports Team
- 2.** Ralph Lauren
- 3.** Armani
- 4.** Calvin Klein
- 5.** J. Crew
- 6.** Banana Republic / Burberry
- 7.** Levi's / Polo
- 8.** Chanel
- 9.** Dior / Versace
- 10.** Guess
- 11.** Tommy Hilfiger / Donna Karan
- 12.** Brooks Brothers
- 13.** Juicy Couture / Marc Jacobs /
Victoria's Secret
- 14.** Dolce & Gabbana / Gucci
- 15.** Abercrombie & Fitch / Izod /
Yves Saint Laurent