

In Fashion, Brands Intensify Their Comeback

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Goodbye, store brands. Hello, Nike and Armani. The latest results from Brand Keys Fashion Index show that 29% of clothing shoppers say brand is an important factor in their purchase decision, more than tripling in importance in the last four years.

In 2008, when retailers were desperate to sell clothes, only 8% of consumers said they cared about brands. Big gainers in this year's ranking include luxury brands such as Armani, Versace and Chanel, as well as leisure brands like Nike.

Overall, Ralph Lauren/Polo came in at first place.

“No matter the category, we see one trend growing,” writes Amy Shea, EVP for Brand Keys, Inc., the New York-based brand and customer loyalty research consultancy -- “the increasing importance of fashion brands. While it’s true that consumers are not spending recklessly, that very reality is what drives them into the arms of true brands.”

Lauren was the most-mentioned brand overall, with 39%; a favorite sports team (like those Yankees hats or Red Sox t-shirts) came in second, declining to 36%; followed by Armani with 34% (compared with 32% in last year’s rankings); Nike, with 30%; and Versace and Chanel, tied at 27%.

For men, the favorite sports team came in first with 43% (up from 42% last year); followed by Nike, 38% (36%); Ralph Lauren/Polo 36% (35%); and Armani 32% (30%).

For women, Ralph Lauren was tops with 41% of mentions (even with last year’s 41%); followed by her favorite sports team with 38% (36%); followed by luxury brands Chanel 36% (32%); Armani 35% (34%); Versace 33% (30%); and Dior 31% (30%). J. Crew came in at No. 7 with 29%, a big jump from 24% in last year’s ranking.

“The rising importance of fashion brands generally, and these fashion brands specifically,” notes Shea, “indicates that value, or the perception of value-via-brand, is of much greater import to consumers, and ultimately, to the success of fashion brands.”

Brand Keys bases its ranking on 7,500 respondents, first asking them to indicate the importance of fashion brands, compared to how important they were in the past, and then to name (unaided) the brands that matter most.