

TITLE: The music takeover of the fashion industry

STANDFIRST: *With fashion brands favouring musicians to represent them, what does this mean for the future of both industries?*

Over 250 million people across the globe tuned in via livestream to watch Puerto Rican reggaeton star Bad Bunny's history-making Coachella set in April earlier this year. Bad Bunny not only redefined what it means to be a Latin artist in America, but his custom black Mugler corset dominated the stage and cemented his status as one of the year's biggest fashion icons.

Or take Rosalia's 2022 album, *Motomami*. Its album themes and visual art inspired a resurgence of futuristic infused biker fashion. Her custom Acne Studios top for her Coachella set saw the brand's Google search data rise by a staggering 1050 per cent. Brands working with musicians aren't anything new, but arguably their influence has been underestimated until now. June was a mammoth month for musicians; from the premiere of Pharell's debut collection as creative director of Louis Vuitton, to Dua Lipa unveiling her own Versace summer collection.

The trend is clear – musicians are the latest stakeholders in the fashion industry and the boundaries between the two will only continue to blur as more collaborations occur. But what does this mean for the future of the fashion industry? And how will this affect the consumer?

Musicians are called artists for a reason. In today's hyper visual world, it is not enough to simply post a song. They craft their albums, performances and image to create a full package that resonates and inspires, creating a loyal fanbase. It makes sense why a fashion house would look to a musician as their muse as they have dedicated fans that support their artistry. Beyoncé's *Renaissance* tour is set to be one of the highest-grossing tours of all time, therefore it comes as no surprise that brands are battling it out to collaborate with her. While this year may be prevalent in terms of collaborations, there's a rich history between musicians and fashion that has been evolving for years.

Where the crossover began

After the Golden Age of Hollywood in the 60s, the 70s paved the way for disco-themed outfits inspired by Bowie and hippie chic inspired by Fleetwood Mac. It was a cultural shift where

people were less inspired by movie stars and instead craved authenticity. It wasn't enough to simply listen to music – they wanted to embody it. Nivara Xaykao, Culture Director of trend forecasting agency Fashion Snoops, explains “it probably wasn't until the Studio 54 days that we really started to see the relationship come to fruition.” Referencing the iconic, hedonistic NYC nightclub, Xaykao acknowledges that most collaborations mostly happened through stage costumes – a stark difference to everyday fashion. “As current trends blur the line between what is costume and everyday dress, the idea of official collaborations starts to make more commercial sense.”

Flash forward to the present day and that bridge has been crossed between costume and everyday fashion, with musicians being the key influencers. NYC-based merchandising consultant and trend forecasting company DONEGAR | TOBE first identified music as a muse in their 2017 report. They stated: “Musicians are the new designers, stylists, editors and influencers. It's not what Anna Wintour [*Vogue* editor] likes that matters, it's what Rihanna wears to the grocery store.” Public interest is invested in musicians as it's another way for them to connect with their artistry.

“The concept of a musician as a fashion brand was arguably supercharged by the growth of rapper's popularity in the 80s and 90s and their eventual leveraging of that status into brands – clothing, perfume, etc,” says Sarah Rozansky, Creative Director at DONEGAR | TOBE. Streetwear, a new sub-genre of fashion, was influenced by rappers who then monetised their image by collaborating with brands to make their fashion accessible to their fans. “[They were] giving the likes of MCM, Chanel, Fendi, LV, Comme de Garçons, and Tommy Hilfiger street-cred and a new consumer audience,” explains Rozansky. The impact of streetwear demonstrated a change in the fashion industry. Musicians created a trend that then translated into luxury brands, rather than fashion brands dictating the trend for the musician to follow. Take the Supreme x Tiffany & Co campaign; a luxury brand collaborating with a streetwear brand to introduce themselves to new consumers. Streetwear was inspired by musicians.

Fast forward 20 years to the present day, and collaborations with musicians like Bad Bunny, Rosalia and Dua Lipa are dominating. It is a distinctive marketing shift that has worked. “There is a thread of privilege and exclusivity that runs through the traditional fashion system, which is out of step with the times,” says Xaykao. The result? We are seeing musicians get promoted to high-status fashion positions due to their dedicated fandoms. “Brands are realising the power

that fandoms wield these days, and in recognising the music star or group, the fans feel 'seen' as well."

Authenticity for the win

Consumers are less interested in the cookie-cutter, corporate moulds actors and influencers embody, instead gravitating towards artists that they deem more authentic and relatable. In a post-covid world where connection was stunted, a lot of people sought comfort and company through their favourite musicians. "The connection is inherently more emotional and intimate, which in an increasingly lonely and detached world, people are craving. Concerts and festivals are booming as a result," says Rozansky. "It's no wonder brands are monetising emotionality and sentimentality."

Fashion brands have previously worked with actors and social media influencers, however this year there has been a drastic switch. Take fashion's biggest night for example, the Met Gala. In 2022, Anna Wintour surprised the industry by allowing Gen Z influencers AKA TikTokers to attend the event such as Addison Rae. All five members of the Kardashian-Jenner clan along with matriarch Kris Jenner were invited to the Met Gala for the first time. A lot of criticism after the event suggested that it was losing its exclusivity. Historically reserved for A-list celebrities and with ticket prices averaging \$30,000, critics argued it was not worth the price-tag and it was losing its value.

This year's Met Gala was a stark difference. The Kardashian-Jenners were cut to just three – the effect of their dwindling popularity in recent years. There was not a single social media influencer in sight, besides interviewer/YouTuber Emma Chamberlain. The event was co-hosted by Dua Lipa, and fashion houses chose to dress musicians over actors. Jacquemus made his debut with Bad Bunny as his muse. "Coming with their own sound, style/aesthetic and a genuine fanbase, musicians are additive partners for brands; the brands can pull inspiration from a creative muse," says Rozansky. This was indeed the case for Jacquemus whose bride and groom duo outfit with Bad Bunny was influenced by the star's own risk-taking fashion choices he has demonstrated in recent years. "Actors, whose job it is to play various characters, are more of a blank canvas, on which the brand must impose creative direction," says Rozansky. This is also true of social media influencers in that many let brand partnerships, rather than their own tastes, dictate what they wear and what they post. A musician's artistry

inspires the clothing rather than simply being a famous figure wearing them – a clever branding technique.

Social media and star power

Fashion marketing in the age of TikTok, aimed at achieving virality, is perhaps equally as important as the collection that is paraded on the runway. Laura Hawkins, Acting Associate European Features Director at *British Vogue*, recalls that the first 'viral' moment was a combination of music and fashion. Whilst impeccably dressed at Vogue House, wearing a black chiffon shirt, she recounts how people were searching so much for Jennifer Lopez's infamous green, jungle Versace dress, that it led to Google images being invented. "She basically created the viral moment before social media was a thing. And then Donatella Versace chose to recreate that in SS20, and they had a Google search bar at the show searching for the dress," says Hawkins. The same premise went viral twice over the span of 20 years, demonstrating the power that musicians hold over marketing strategy.

Another fashion house that has adopted musicians into its DNA is British brand, Burberry. "When Christopher Bailey was Creative Director of *Burberry*, he'd often have an emerging British band perform, and then a lot of those people would then star in his campaign," says Hawkins. "He was one of the early people to really focus on that. In the mid-noughties, music and fashion became so aligned in terms of gig culture and indie culture, and people were inspired by how they dressed." The emergence of the indie aesthetic was born and intensified in the early 2010s. It branched out into the Rockstar girlfriend aesthetic spearheaded by Glastonbury regulars Alexa Chung and Kate Moss. "When you look at those shows, you really see a moment in time."

The impact of social media and globalisation in the modern age is not to be underestimated in the switch to musicians for fashion brands. The artists that brands collaborate with have huge followings and loyal fandoms which results in extensive coverage of the campaigns. "Someone like Rosalia last year was on this huge international tour, and then she was announced as the face of Acne Studios. They've had this long trajectory and progression on social media of that focus," says Hawkins. "I actually went to see her at Wembley last year, and it was an amazing experience because 99 per cent of the show is in Spanish, and she's managed to amass this

amazing global reach. Acne was very smart to tap into that and since she's obviously become even more of a global star."

In a controversial move, Acne Studios this month have selected Kylie Jenner as their new ambassador. The change was met with criticism, particularly from a Gen Z audience on TikTok, however, Jenner has rebranded herself this year moving away from the Kardashian aesthetic and into her 'cottagecore' era. Appearances with rumoured boyfriend, Timothee Chalamet, meant her name was plastered in the headlines this summer. "Whether the reception is negative or positive, any PR seems to be good PR," notes Nivara Xaykao. "[However] there is a negative sentiment developing around professional influencers."

Negative PR was not an issue for Pharell however, as his debut show as Creative Director of Louis Vuitton was live streamed to millions across the globe last month and cemented the transition from the fashion shows of the 90s and 00s. "Fashion brands have had to evolve and adapt and become more aware that the industry is leaning into becoming an entertainment industry," says Hawkins. "Fashion really just isn't about clothes anymore, particularly catwalk shows." Brands are having to find new ways to market clothes to consumers, with transforming the catwalk into a spectacle rather than just a show being one of the ways.

The show was indeed a success, amassing over 1 billion views; 700 million views across Vuitton's owned platforms and another 300 million views across press accounts. In comparison, the FW23 campaign in January of this year reached 441 million views. "The fact that the show ended with the performance from the Creative Director and Jay-Z is really reflective of the moment," says Hawkins. "The videos that I saw on social media of the Vuitton show were actually much less focused on the clothing and catwalk. They were either focused on the musicians performing like the Gospel Choir, or Pharell and Jay-Z performing at the end which is really interesting." The Louis Vuitton show is proof of the new normal; a hybrid of music and fashion, that is focused on both fashion and spectacle.

The nitty gritty marketing tactics

Working alongside musicians is one way to captivate that audience and it comes as no surprise. Anthony McGrath, Head of BA Fashion Marketing at UAL, explains how both the fashion and music industries are in a state of flux. From a music perspective, there have been changes in

consumers' consumption of how they engage with music due to streaming platforms. The fashion industry must constantly evolve to remain relevant to increasingly fickle demographics where loyalty is low priority. "The industry has had to look to new ways to increasingly engage with their different thinking, different acting consumer, for example, moving to online platforms and social media becoming a legitimate method to purchase goods," says McGrath. "It seems like a logical move for industries that share similar DNA within a similar market."

Not without its challenges though, McGrath identifies that collaborating with a huge artist comes at a great cost – far more than using a traditional model or supermodel to promote their brand. However, McGrath believes it is worth the risk. "The benefits speak for themselves when a brand selects the right celebrity for an endorsement, it is literally worth its weight in gold," says McGrath. "However, equally if they do make a bad choice then this can be detrimental to the brand." GAP are facing the financial consequences of one bad decision as they are in the process of suing Kanye West for \$2 million.

So what is the key formula to a successful campaign between a musician and fashion house? McGrath smiles. "This is a good question and if there was a 100 per cent guaranteed formula, I would be a very rich man," he laughs. "The golden rule with marketing is one size fits all never works. This is why knowing your consumer needs, wants, likes and dislikes is so essential for a brand to know." When selecting a face for a campaign, fashion houses must take all of the above into account.

An artist that possesses a large social following and a dedicated legion of fans is not enough to be the right fit for a fashion brand. And not just any musician can have a successful fashion collaboration. Authenticity is key. Take the Dua Lipa x Versace collaboration for example. Hawkins recounts Dua Lipa's longstanding friendship with Versace since the early days of her career, even closing their show in 2021. Often when brands select the model of the moment, such as Bella Hadid, they become the face of the season and their impact lessens. "It does mean that maybe the affiliation with that brand is limited a bit," says Hawkins. This makes the Dua Lipa collaboration particularly smart. "Customers know that she's got that strong connection with Versace and she represents what Versace wants to be today – to have that youthful, sexy appeal that's not just completely affiliated with 80s or 90s fashion."

The year of Mugler

This sentiment is echoed by arguably one of the brands of the year – Mugler. They have also collaborated with Dua Lipa, as well as Bad Bunny and Beyonce for her *Renaissance* World Tour. Aydha Mehnaz, Celebrity and Brand manager at Mugler spearheaded these campaigns. “For the celebrities that we work with, it’s not like we just support them on a one off basis. We’ve been supporting each other for years,” says Mehnaz. Mugler first worked with Dua Lipa whilst she was promoting her Grammy award winning album, *Future Nostalgia*, and the relationship has since blossomed. “She even wore us last weekend, one of the new collection pieces, so she’s always one of the first ones to get it.”

The rhinestone bodysuit worn by Dua Lipa was a worldwide success and catapulted the Mugler brand into the mainstream. Mehnaz reveals how her bodysuit took months to make as every crystal was individually stitched by hand. Whenever any crystal was missing, it was sent back to Paris where it would be restitched and sent out again. The iconic mesh panels dominated their H&M x Mugler campaign so fans could achieve Dua’s look for less. “Mugler is a very popstar driven brand. It’s about time that we had a collaboration that actually made you want to look like a pop star,” says Mehnaz. The H&M collaboration came about due to Casey Cadwallader’s, Creative Director of Mugler, commitment to affordability. “Some pieces sold out within minutes, so that speaks for itself in where the desirability for the brand itself stands.”

Mugler chooses to work with musicians specifically as the act of performance and working with performers has always been a part of the brand’s DNA. Mehnaz explains how their founder, Mr Thierry Mugler, was a part of the ballet which is where his love of performance originated. He led projects such as costume design for Beyonce’s tour in 2009 which built a strong relationship with the artist and cemented Mugler in the performance industry. “Mugler being a partner for the artist to become their best is something that we thrive in. It’s like an exchange of DNA in a way where you’re essentially getting to know more about who the artist is, their persona, what image they’re trying to build and how it fits in the Mugler universe,” says Mehnaz.

Regarding Bad Bunny’s Coachella performance this year, Mehnaz shares that he’s one of the first Mugler men. “Bad Bunny likes to take risks and that’s something that is exciting to work with,” says Mehnaz. They would constantly be going back and forth sharing new ideas and concepts. “He wore a corset hoodie which is our version of taking something that’s street and then incorporating couture,” says Mehnaz, with publications dubbing it as a new form of

menswear that's about to come. Incorporating ground-breaking fashion into the art of performance and showmanship is coherent with Mugler's brand history.

The future of fashion

Nurturing a relationship with artists is something that Mugler has done exceptionally well. It is a tactic that has trickled down from luxury to mid-tier brands. Not being able to afford the high cost that comes with Grammy award-winning musicians, smaller brands instead choose to support upcoming musicians. After placing runner up in the Nicholas Daley award for emerging artists, upcoming soundcloud singer Feeo was selected for Fred Perry's shirt campaign. "It was a very cute experience, they were trying to platform upcoming artists which is cool - the whole idea was that we were all being our truest selves while wearing the iconic Fred Perry polo," says Feeo. She acknowledges that the way in which we dress can act as visual cues and codes about who we are as people. "It becomes the most immediate form of language, whether you choose to engage with trends or actively avoid them," says Feeo. "For me, making art is about communication with the outside world so the way I dress becomes a part of that."

Fashion and music will always be inextricably linked, with the boundaries between the two continuing to blur in the future. While established musicians will always be sought after for marketing campaigns, there is space for smaller artists to participate. "To be honest, fashion might be one of the only ways that musicians are able to make big money. The music industry is in a big moment of change right now, and artists aren't really able to make sustainable amounts of money from music alone," says Feeo. "Fashion and music have always had a relationship, and I think that will only continue, particularly if musicians are getting an income from doing campaigns."