

A Discussion of a Luxury Apparel Brand Strategy in an Emerging Market: Conceptual Model with Network Perspectives

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Abstract

This study explores the Burberry apparel brand's position and its strategic behaviour seeking new customers in the new market. This exploratory research pays particular attention to business potential and opportunities in an emerging market, Vietnam. To evaluate Burberry's strategies and the potential, the collaborative network relationships are discussed in details, that is followed by the discussion of the key themes for Burberry to consider in the Vietnamese market, where Burberry has recently begun expanding its businesses. The outcome of the study suggests that the Western luxury brand apparel needs to understand the targeted markets' systems and consumer behaviour, from there it is inevitable to design strategic plan how to engage the stakeholders in the ubiquitous supply chain relationships. In the end, a conceptual model with network perspectives is proposed: The model will be an analytical framework with key agenda items for the luxury brand which aims to enter the new market, and also the research limitations and further research opportunities are discussed.

Keywords

luxury brand apparel; Vietnam
network perspective



I. Introduction

1.1 Burberry as the Royal Brand from the UK

Burberry is one of the UK's premier fashion apparel brands, founded in 1856 and currently taking steps towards becoming a global luxury fashion brand. It sells 'British' style and is well-known for its traditional, iconic trench coats, which are a symbol of the brand. Burberry has been awarded a Royal Warrant, and both celebrities and Burberry fans rely on the stylish design and quality of the garments (Mole, 2019).

In the mid-2000s, however, Burberry and other western luxury brands had become too reliant on sales to the new middle classes in China, where the possession of luxury goods is a status symbol. In line with the discussion of Asian consumer perceptions towards luxury brands, consumers' conspicuous attitudes are well-matched with the brand's values (Li et al., 2019) and the outstanding and well-known Burberry designer, Haymarket Check also acknowledges the potential of the Asian market for the brand (Sikarskie, 2019).

To support this luxury empire developed in the UK, Angela Ahrendts focused on its traditional assets and values (e.g., trench coats and tartan check) from 2006. She also opened the business on digitalised platforms, attempting to diversify the sales channels across boundaries. Following her push towards a new era for the empire, from 2014 her successor Christopher Bailey, one of the most influential fashion designers, also

implemented innovative actions with a clearer business mission (Mendes, 2017; Lloyd & Schaber, 2019). However, it was difficult for Bailey to sustain the business's performance in other countries, where Burberry's presence had started developing (Silva et al., 2019). The company's journey and challenges up to the year 2018 suggests the strategist's good lessons. In May 2014, Bailey took the role of chief creative and president of the company, with Riccardo Tisci succeeding his position in February 2018: Both of these legends have supported the historic British brand to sustain the business to attract new fans in the global market (Schweiger et al., 2020).

1.2 Research Rationale

There have been discussions relating the luxury brand and consumers' responses and behaviour. However, proposition of an analytical framework from a holistic view from a thematic-context has been waited especially in the difficult and uncertain global market, especially under the COVID-19 situation which has impacted on global enterprises as of when the authors are conducting this research note. Environmental issue such as the current COVID-19 situation has been hugely influencing the global supply chain network, that requires the social scientist to investigate further and discuss how to support supply chain management with actionable implications based on the collaborative commitments aiming to sustain the businesses. A discussion how to engage network actors to achieve the business goal under the uncertainty is one of the research topics in the contemporary context of businesses.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

This research aims to explore and evaluate a luxury brand's potential and strategies in the global market, using a British luxury brand Burberry's. Under the setting of an emerging market context with different consumer values and social system, potential collaborative strategies in the targeted market are to be summarised and proposed.

To achieve this aim, four objectives are emerged:

- Evaluate and discuss the potential of Burberry's business strategies and potential
- Examine the Vietnamese apparel market and consumer behaviour
- Discuss potential pathways to build robust strategies in acquiring new customers in Vietnam
- Propose an analytical framework for luxury apparel brand in the context of going in to an emerging market with different values and systems from the home nation.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Burberry's Strategy from a Network Perspective

Burberry's overall business network can be separated into two types of strategic alliances. Firstly, vertical relations refer to both upstream and downstream vertical relations. Upstream vertical relations of Burberry are contracts with international suppliers. For example, C.F&P, a manufacturer of leather goods in Italy, produced leather handbags for Burberry; thus C.F&P is a first-tier supplier (Randelli and Lombardi, 2014). Additionally, there are several raw material suppliers who distribute leathers to C.F&P, making them second-tier suppliers in Burberry's supply chain (C.F&P, 2016). Secondly, regarding downstream vertical relations, Burberry sells products according to their distribution network, namely retail, wholesale, and licensing. The retail proportion is 82% of sales, and 70% of retail sales are influenced by digital marketing (Burberry, 2018).

Consequently, another significant area for consideration could be the strategies that Burberry utilises to enhance B2B and B2C channels in Vietnam.

Burberry has many competitors, including international brands such as Coach, Gucci, Prada, and Louis Vuitton (mbaskool.com 2019). Moreover, there are several UK brands that are also competitors of Burberry, such as Alexander McQueen, Stella McCartney, and Vivienne Westwood (Bhasin, 2018). It has been demonstrated that there is intensive competition in the apparel industry, thus Burberry should focus on maintaining its brand identity, trademark, and unique digital marketing platform to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (IvyPanda, 2019). This advantage could provide Burberry with the opportunity to expand into a new market. Burberry’s operating collaboration with Farfetch, the leaders in global technology platforms, enables Burberry to expand its customer base to reach customers in over 150 countries around the world and develop a deeper relationship with other e-commerce partners (Burberry, 2018; Silvano, 2020). Accordingly, this complementary partner combined with Burberry’s digital marketing capabilities could be their main strategy for expanding their brand name, trademark, and reputation on the worldwide stage. Figure 1 demonstrates a map of the collaborative relations of Burberry’s business perspective.



Figure 1. An image of Burberry’s relational actors and collaborations (Adapted from De Wit & Mayer, 2010)

2.2 Burberry’s B2B Collaboration Perspective

Transparency in Burberry’s supply chain reveals that the existing network enhances the product and network relations of business operations (Kingdom, 2015). Burberry does not only pay attention to the quality of raw materials, but also focuses on sustainability. For example, Burberry weaves and stitches fabric in their factories using cotton sourced from the Better Cotton Initiative (first-tier supplier) who are in contact with a million cotton farmers (second-tier suppliers) around the world, to reduce environmental issues and create a sustainable supply of raw material (Burberry, 2019). Moreover, Burberry has expanded their business using a backward integration strategy by acquiring part of C.F&P (first-tier supplier), their leather goods supplier. The relational collaboration with relevant

stakeholders enables Burberry to acquire new customers of both B2B and B2C networks to develop strategic business body to penetrate into the new market (Iglesias and Schults, 2020). This acquisition will allow Burberry to reduce production costs and delivery expenditure. Also, it will enable Burberry to control the quality of material and the leather goods' sustainability.

2.3 Burberry's Marketing Communication Strategies

Burberry has become the first brand to use social media, specifically Snapchat, to grant customers access to special content at Burberry stores. Burberry collaborates with Steve McQueen (the Oscar-winning director) to produce the exclusive content in Snapchat. The strategy has added value to the Burberry brand and provided a new experience for the customer. Also, it has enabled Burberry to expand the brand to a new, younger market by targeting existing Snapchat users, and could also provide a potential channel for Burberry to deepen its relationship with customers (edublogs, 2016). Hence, digital marketing collaboration could increase Burberry's opportunities to reach the Vietnamese apparel market. In addition, Burberry has applied a diversification strategy in collaborating with other businesses such as Coty Inc., a global leader in beauty products (NYSE, 2019).

These collaborations lead Burberry's expanding market share, enhancing the brand value, and ensuring in attracting new customers in Vietnamese market (Graesser, 2019; Liu et al., 2019; Dinh et al., 2019).

2.4 Analytical Framework

Figure 2 shows an analytical framework based on the discussions so far, which indicates a conceptual pathway how British luxury brand enters into the new market to sustain and expand the businesses based on the brand value and strategic assets which have been established in the global market. Based on the framework, this research will entail the targeted market analysis and potential for Burberry to penetrate.

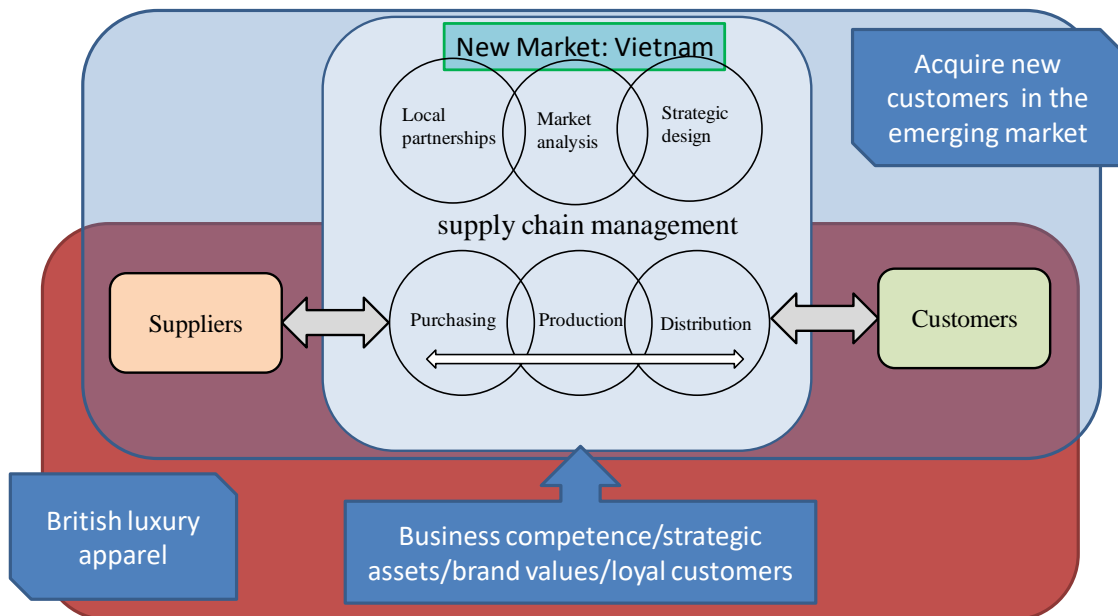


Figure 2. Network perspectives of business (authors' collections)

III. Research Methods

3.1 Approach

A term-based search method was applied to this research which analysed the literature of peer-reviewed articles in English-language journals and relevant professional articles available from online databases (Groß, 2014). Based on the desk research, a literature review of the articles in the theme of this study was carried out to develop actionable implications for Burberry's business strategies in the new market. From this process, actionable recommendations for the British luxury apparel brand for expand the business network and sales channels in Vietnamese market based on the own competences and consumer behaviour (Baumeister, 2013; Webster and Watson, 2002).

3.2 Data Sources and Study Selections

The published articles were identified through searches in EBSCO and ScienceDirect databases during the period from 2000 to 2020. Keywords, titles and abstract information were checked and selected (Levy and Ellis, 2006). The main search terms were categorised in two groups: (a) "Burberry," "business strategy," and "Vietnam," and (b) "apparel," "Vietnam," "consumer," and "market." The symbol # was used for identifying all possible words with these two key terms: for instance, "strateg#" was used to search, e.g. strategy, strategies, strategic, strategize, and strategise. The professional materials such as books, company reports, news articles on newspapers, and other relevant Asian online materials from non-academic resources were also searched.

Only English articles were considered. Book chapters and studies that have been published in non-peer-reviewed journals were also considered because the main aim of this research note is to make an exploratory discussion as a pilot study before conducting a precise systematic review. A manual selection of the title information of the identified resources for this research revealed 317 article which were to be further reviewed as the basis for developing research outcome with actionable implications. In doing so, the authors attempted to focus more on the recent publications so that the critical discussions can be conducted based on the recent topics and strategies of Burberry's.

IV. Discussion

4.1 Aspects of the Vietnamese Apparel Market and Industry

a. Vietnam's Position in the Global Apparel Market and Industry

In Vietnam, international brands account for 60% of the total retail market. Nowadays, Vietnamese are more able to access luxury brand retail outlets such as Dior and Louis Vuitton, due to both brands being available on commercial streets and the huge populations in Dong Khoi and Nguyen Hue in Ho Chi Minh City. In addition, Vietnamese retailers have started offering international brands to Vietnamese customers in stores called 'multi-brand outlets' (Vietcetera, 2019).

b. Supply and Distribution Network of the Vietnamese Apparel Market

With regard to suppliers of Vietnam's garment industry, the United States is a huge supplier of cotton, providing 53% of Vietnam's total cotton supply (USDA Foreign Agriculture Service, 2018). Although Vietnam needs to import raw materials, Vietnam's government also supports the apparel industry by providing reductions to import duties and tariff rates on raw material production. As part of the distribution network, department stores play a key role in retail sales since the economic reform, and retail sectors have been

restructured with new emerged store formats such as supermarkets, mini marts, and convenience stores: Also, online retail sales in Vietnam have significantly increased, by around 61% in the last year; however, they still only account for 2.8% of total retail sales (Vietcetera, 2019). It is possible that Burberry could focus on collaborating with local department stores to reach Vietnamese customers, while continuing to utilise Burberry's digital knowledge and leveraging of complementors such as eMarketing.

c. Collaborative Relationships

Abdullah et al. (2005) pinpointed collaboration as a valuable asset for organisations such that, with collaboration, organizations can better achieve their desired ends together rather than achieving it alone. Organisations that embrace collaboration can create a valuable advantage of attaining their objectives (Abdullah et al., 2005). Burberry has a brand presence for more than 163 years giving them an outstanding knowledge of the retail market as well as having achieved multiple successful collaborations with strategic alliances (Burberry 2019). Burberry's creative collaborations have successfully combined the relational actors' skills to attain set goal, even with the collaboration between rival firms who operate within the same sector which enabled the win-win relationships within the luxury apparel brands (Parida et al., 2013)

Burberry considers having close monitoring and control over the supply chain processes and maintaining their reputation as an important value for the company (Moore and Birtwistle 2004). Therefore, while considering the collaborations in Vietnam the prospective partners should have the characteristics to perform up to 4Cs (e.g., capability, compatibility, commitment and control) (Mellahi and Frynas 2015). Conflicts in collaboration can also arise from differences in perspective of the parties and lack of communication might be potential challenges for the sustainable relationships with commitments and trust throughout the collaboration (Vaaland 2004; Shen and Mikschovsky, 2019). Burberry must take measures to ensure cultural and language constraints become an obstacle. Moreover, to ensure a sustainable behaviour in the Vietnamese market, Burberry should abide to the ethical code of conduct and legal policies set in Vietnam when making collaborations (Le et al., 2019).

Vietnam's recently signed with Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), members of CPTPP countries have agreed to eliminate duties from 97 to 100% of tariffs for imports from Vietnam that qualify under the applicable rules of origin (Burke et al., 2019) as well as Vietnam's signing of the EU-Vietnam-Free Trade Agreement (FTA) which aims to protect investors and investments has made Vietnam open to international trade and investment (Sardinha, 2017). Thus, Burberry's products manufactured can be imported to Vietnam with low tariffs decreasing cost on the company's entry into the new market.

Vietnam developed industrial zones mainly for production exports and high tech in order to attract more foreign investors, as of December 2018, 326 zones were created with 249 already operating (Huong & Dung, 2019; Khuong & Yen, 2016). Burberry could utilize their manufacturing within these industrial zones and benefit from the low labour cost. Not only the public sectors' interventions, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO's) and United Nations are also critical collaborators for the business. Burberry has a good reputation of collaborating with multiple NGO's. According to the Voluntary National Review (2018), United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been aligned with Vietnam's long-term development strategy, Vietnam's business council for sustainable development has been an initiative by the public sectors to encourage foreign and local investment and do business in lined with SDGs. Vietnam joined International

Labor Organization (ILO) in 1992, and they are aiming to promote ethical employment, build healthy labour market to support Vietnamese labour force, (International Labor Organization 2019). Burberry has also committed to human rights policy (Burberry 2019b), collaboration with ILO in Vietnam has been enhancing Burberry’s reputation in Vietnam as a sustainable company. Burberry could collaborate with Better Work Vietnam which is partnership with ILO and International Finance Corporation and World Bank Group to improve working conditions as well as increase competitiveness of the garment industry (Brown et al., 2014) collaborating with Better work Vietnam can help provide work opportunities.

4.2 Consumer Behaviour in the Vietnamese Apparel Market

a. Consumers Behaviour

Vietnamese consumers are more likely to have a high demand for fashionable products, and are willing to pay a higher price to develop their standard of living (Liu and Zhang, 2019). Vietnamese consumers have got to purchase luxury goods with (HKTDC, 2017), and this has led Vietnam to become a potential market for luxury apparel brands such as Burberry. Also, in this digital age, Vietnamese consumers tend to purchase products online (Le and Hoang, 2020) and the variety of available products online attracts more consumers (Giao et al., 2020). Consequently, Burberry should develop an online shopping platform with more languages and features to satisfy customers, as well as considering it a strategy to enter Vietnam.

Cultural issues affecting B2B collaboration and communications in Vietnam should be also carefully examined. Figure 3 shows a cultural comparison between the United Kingdom and Vietnam, with Hofstede’s six dimensions. There are two crucial different dimensions: The power distance score and individualism. This could demonstrate that group opinion is significant to Vietnamese decision-making, while British people decide individually (Ngo et al., 2019). Burberry should be aware of communication etiquette and consider these differences while accessing the stakeholders and building robust partnerships. A UK based company also must consider the hierarchical order and the way of managing its human resource while entering Vietnam market. In terms of B2B collaboration, it takes time for company to build mutual trust and also need to show respect and genuine interest while communicating with partners because Vietnamese place a great deal of saving face (Rowley et al., 2007). As noted, cultural differences including linguistic barriers should also be considered carefully in the business context (Syakur et al., 2020).

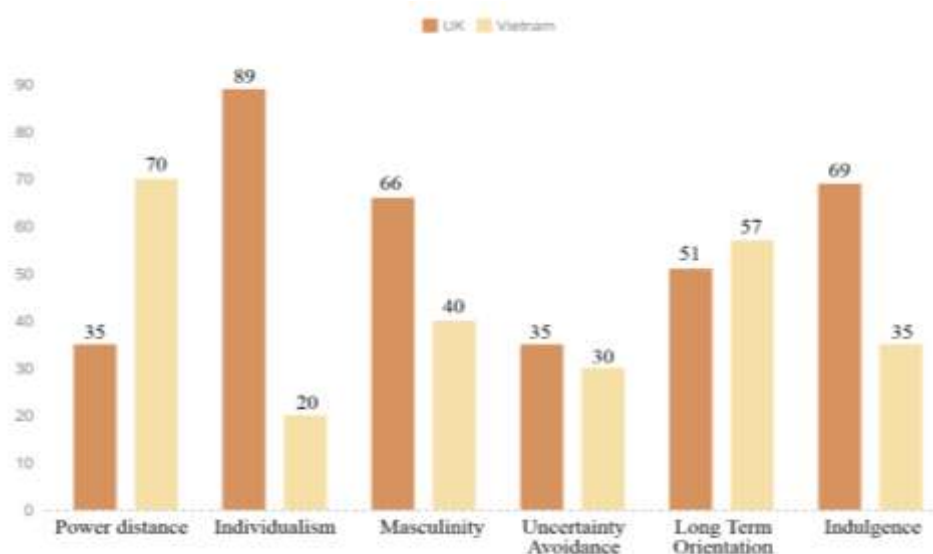


Figure 3. Culture comparison: The United Kingdom and Vietnam (Hofstede Insight, 2019)

b. Consumer Behaviour and Attitudes in the Vietnamese Apparel Market

Consumer behaviour and attitudes are important factors that need to be understood while making participation strategy. Vietnamese consumers' attitudes, values and behaviours have changed rapidly (Tambyah et al. 2009). The conflicts between 'traditional self' and 'modern self' have influenced the past values of Vietnamese consumers (Lee & Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen et al. 2009). Furthermore, in Vietnam, there are competitions among foreign brands such as from Japan, South Korea, Europe and the U.S., thus, understanding of Vietnamese consumers' behaviours toward foreign brands is also necessary for firms to be prepared for the competition in Vietnam market (Vuong & Khanh, 2020).

Vietnamese consumer's confidence level has peaked in the past decade (Nielsen 2018) and the Vietnamese customers are willing to expend their expenditures on apparel products. Also, the young generation spend more on apparel product than average because of high individualism which makes them want to be stylish (Nguyen et al., 2019). The country's large young population also generates the potential for luxury market (Earl, 2012; Le and Quy, 2020). Nayak et al. (2020) discussed Vietnamese aged between 18 and 35 years old are now trying new things and experiences, and younger consumers think luxury is about new experiences (Vuong et al., 2019). In line with these discussions, Kusumadewi (2019) suggested that the influence of cultural and social values on consumers' individual behavior should be considered carefully in the international market context. Current snapshots of Vietnamese consumers' behaviour is summarised in Table 1 based on the discussions developed by Ferrell and Hartline (2011).

Table 1. Vietnamese consumer behaviors (amended from Ferrell and Hartline 2011)

Stage	Vietnamese consumer behaviors
Need Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Northern (Hanoi): Do not want to lose "face" - Southern (HCM): I buy it because I want it
Information Search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in mobile and internet search. The effectiveness rate of digital ad on mobile phone is 75% (Nielsen, 2017) - Vietnam is ranked 7th in using social media over the world => a lot of influence from social media (We are social, 2018) - High collectivism => reference groups are very important (Hofstede Insight, 2019)
Evaluation of Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Urban: Passionate about luxury brands - Rural: Rely on recommendations from retailers & commercials (Sweden Business in Vietnam, 2018) - In urban area, most important factors when buying clothes are cost, design and quality respectively (Q&Me Surveys, 2017)
Purchase Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Majority of grocery purchase is still made in stores (Sweden Business in Vietnam, 2018) - Prefer to pay by cash (Kantar worldpanel, 2017) - E-commerce is growing. 98% internet users have bought something online (Nielsen, 2018)
Post Purchase behaviors	It totally depends on individual experience.

The Vietnamese consumers who value more on latest fashion, well-known brand and country of origin preferred foreign fashion brands over local fashion brands (Lee and Nguyen 2017). They considered that foreign brands as higher quality and more attractive than local fashion brands.

c. topics of Vietnamese Young Consumers: Ethical Values

Vietnam government adopts many policies to protect intellectual properties such as copyrights and trademarks for company to sell and distribute luxury goods in Vietnam (Fforde, 2019). However, Vietnam still has one of the highest rates of intellectual property

violations in the world, especially for branded goods which are widely re-produced in this country (Long & Vinh, 2017). Thus, the risks brought by counterfeits are still existing while selling luxury products in Vietnam.

Vietnam's Ecommerce Association estimated annual growth rates to reach 16.5% from 2017 to 2021 (Vietcetera 2017). The expansion of the youth based middle class in Vietnam is has been characterized as internet fueled class, the increase use of social platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and as smartphones becoming accessible and affordable the online user penetration especially in online shopping has risen (Dabija et al., 2019; Vietcetera 2017)

Young consumers' perceptions for luxury value can be also discussed with a theme of ethical views (Chen et al., 2019; Gazzola et al., 2020; Le & Quy, 2020). They have a great desire to save their money and invest in projects that serve society and the environment. This generation's personality traits such as ecological consciousness and social consciousness greatly affect their purchasing decisions. They always seek diversity and variety to spread the values of equality and justice in society (Chen et al., 2019). In doing so, Vietnamese younger consumers are prone to use online shopping channels (Do et al., 2019; Ho & Chen, 2014; Van Nguyen et al., 2019).

There is another B2B topic we should consider: Duc & Nananukul (2018) suggested that supply chain model itself should be redesigned from renewable energy resource-based, such as biomass energy should have impact on rearranging the whole supply chain relationships. In line with the boosting CSR requirements with UN SDGs impact on the businesses, Gopi & Rao (2016) discussed the manufacturing and delivering the products and services have to contribute in reforming the global business to a new economic paradigm.

V. Conclusion

5.1 Overall Discussion with Contribution

In recent years, the Asia-Pacific area has become the most important region for Burberry, not only because it provides the largest market share of its revenues (41%), but also because it has been the fastest growing market, which has enabled Burberry to sustain its business as a whole (Burberry, 2018).

The research analysed Burberry's' network strategies of collaborations with relevant stakeholders. Ho et al. (2017) suggested the supply chain collaboration should be the key for the businesses to enhance the sustainability especially in the textile and apparel industry. According to economic growth and the demand for internationally branded products, the Vietnamese market is an appealing market for Burberry to enhance its business in the coming years. This is also a great opportunity for Burberry to consider its new market participation for Burberry to seek the business opportunities in Vietnam. At the same time, business background infrastructures such as intellectual property rights should be paid attention to (Department of International Trade, 2016). How to fight against the counterfeit issues have been critical for Western luxury brands in the global markets.

Figure 4 demonstrates the key agenda for the luxury apparel brands when they plan to enter into the new market.

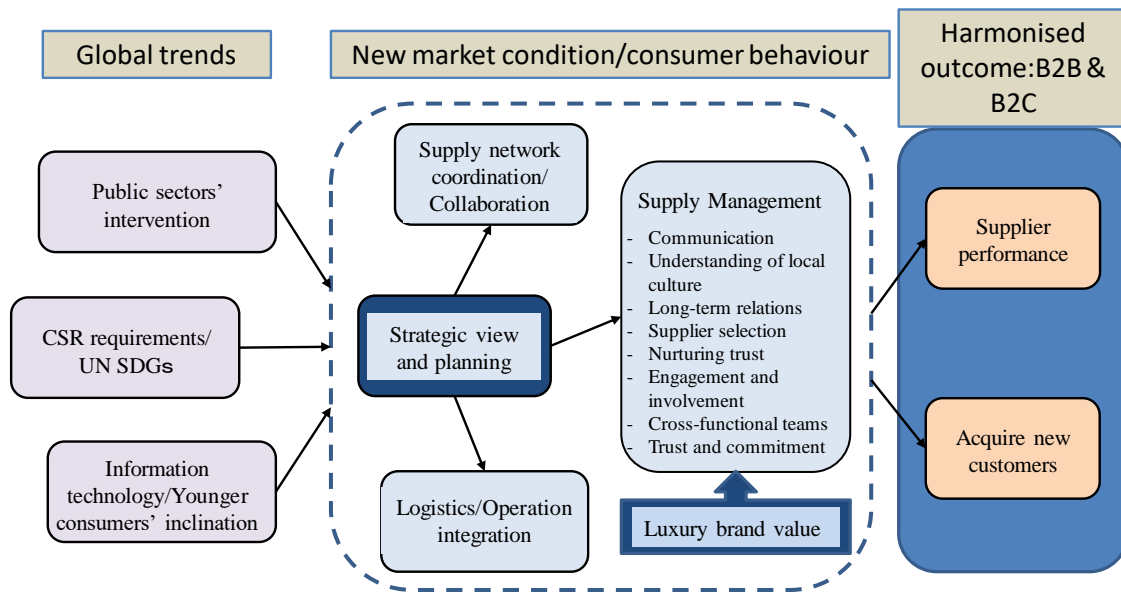


Figure 4. Key agenda for the luxury apparel brands when entering into the new market (Adapted from Chen & Paulraj, 2004)

5.2 Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

As an exploratory research, this study stays as a pilot stage and the outcome should be validated to enhance the contribution by providing more actionable recommendations based on the apparel brands for the next phase.

From the globalised business perspectives, the relevant network actors should share the values and an instrument is needed to engage the stakeholders in the ubiquitous relationships. Especially under the huge COVID-19 impact on the global supply chain network, how to sustain the global businesses as network actors should remain one of the key agenda items for the future. How to tackle the obstacles for the seamless network relationships would be another key research opportunity for the business researchers, as well.

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