Chapter 4
Vintage Fashion Retailing: Building the Store Brand

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Abstract Over the past few decades, vintage fashion has become an enduring trend and vintage fashion retailers have become an integral part of the fashion retailing landscape. This chapter explores vintage fashion retailing from the perspective of brand image and the brand story and examines the positioning elements that operationalise the vintage fashion retailer brand. Vintage fashion retailers have evolved into sophisticated entities capable of competing in today's fast paced omni-channel environment. They can benefit from the creation of a strong brand image that tells the story of an era or theme through the creation of a store/brand whose appearance and display elements bring that theme to life.

Keywords Vintage fashion · Store brand building · Brand story · Brand image Brand positioning

4.1   Introduction

The increase in vintage fashion retailing has been credited to a number of developments in the fashion environment over the past 40 years. The vintage fashion movement is said to have evolved from the 1960s London, with the popularity of military uniforms associated with the Beatles' Sergeant Pepper record, and Edwardian dresses. The movement spread to New York and a yearning for the

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elegance of the 1940s and women's dresses and men's suits dating from the 1950s (Hamilton 2012). During the 1970s the vintage trend grew with the student movement adopting second-hand clothing as a means of accessing inexpensive items that could also serve as a means of self-expression. This trend continued into the 1980s when oversized shirts, coats and jackets became the uniform of the young representing the utilitarianism of the anti-fashion of the punk rock era and the androgyny and flamboyance of the New Romantic era (McRobbie 1989). During this period, the faithful vintage shopper continued to seek items of clothing from eras that represented their personal style, in particular, high end and iconic fashion brands such as Biba, Chanel, Karl Lagerfeld, Mary Quant and Thierry Mugler (McColl et al. 2013).

The new millennium saw a rapid increase in the number of "vintage" as opposed to 'second hand' or 'charity' stores. Since then, the vintage movement has grown as a means of self-expression, providing inexpensive, high-quality fashion items, and has for some become a lifestyle choice based not only on nostalgia for a particular era but as a demonstration against overconsumption of fast fashion and disposable clothing (Cassidy and Bennett 2012). There has been a steady rise in the number of vintage stores selling second cycle, used fashion clothing, which is not only more original but, given that it has been worn previously, is also sustainable and ethical (Pookulangara and Shephard 2013). This purchase and reuse of vintage clothing responds to the consolidation and polarisation of power in high street fashion retailing by moving away from fast, first cycle, new fashion clothing. Additionally, there has been a homogenisation of the high street over the past few decades which has seen a narrowing of the number of companies and, therefore, fashion choice (Martenson 2007). High street stores, on the whole, are driven by current fashion trends and sell very similar items of clothing which are often cheaply produced and can only be identified by their brand label (McColl and Moore 2014). These companies compete primarily on price and not on exclusivity. The vintage consumer, however, seeks differentiation and will often combine vintage pieces with high street items to create a unique and personal style (Tolkien 2002; Woodward 2009).

A number of high street fashion retailers have responded to the vintage phenomenon by introducing vintage ranges within stores. Sometimes these are faux vintage replicas and sometimes these are genuine vintage garments sourced from suppliers of vintage goods (Tungate 2008). Whilst these retailers are responding to vintage trends, they tend to sell small ranges with less variety than traditional vintage stores. Traditional vintage fashion stores tend to be small businesses based away from high street locations, now being joined by vintage cafés, hairdressers and home wear stores, in response to vintage lifestyle trends. The key to success for the vintage fashion retailers is the building of a strong identifiable brand image that can be reflected in a brand story and associated with a particular era. This brand image, on the whole, reflects the interests and personality of the owner and is supported by the elements of store positioning, these are, merchandise strategy, trading format (store/brand image), customer communications and customer service (McColl et al. 2013). This chapter addresses relevant literature and offers examples from three case study companies within the Glasgow area; these are Minted

Table 4.1 Summary of the case study brands

	Case Study 1 Minted	Case Study 2 City Retro	Case Study 3 (anonymous)
Brand profile	Established small city centre business (3 years) selling streetwear predominantly for men. High quality, affordable and wearable clothing	Established small city centre business (10 years)	Established small city centre business (25 years)
Brand story	Minted clothes. Minted condition. Minted price	Fun, colourful, authentic, nostalgia, focus on 1960s and 1970s	Children's television character from the 1970s
Merchandise strategy	The majority of pieces in new, or nearly new condition. Sourced from personal contacts	Designer labels from 1960s–1990s, psychedelic attire, burlesque. Sourced from wholesalers and personal contacts	Everyday wear from a variety of different eras, military uniforms, evening dresses. Sourced from personal contacts
Brand store image	Boutique style, merchandised by product category, simple store design, spacious	Fun reflecting personality and interests of owner	Eclectic including variety of military regalia and Scottish artefacts
Customer communications	Traditional and social media	Traditional, social media	Web presence, social media
Customer service	Personalised	Personalised	Personalised

(Case 1), City Retro, (Case 2) and Case 3 (this company selected to remain anonymous). These companies were chosen because they each represent a distinctive approach to vintage retailing in terms of retail brand story and retail design. Table 4.1 below provides a summary of the case study brands. This chapter seeks to identify the defining features of the successful vintage fashion retailer in terms of brand image and the story that the brand represents and finally considers the operational issues of store positioning that are associated with maintaining and building brand image in vintage fashion retailing.

4.2 Building the Fashion Retailer Brand

Brands have evolved from being the identifier of the product to being the identifier of the company, the principal asset that a company has in terms of offering a coherent image in a global environment, a symbolic meaning in the mind of the customer and ultimately as a means of building customer relationships (Kotler et al. 2015).

Jevons ([2007](#)) defines the brand as:

> A tangible or intangible concept that uniquely identifies an offering, providing symbolic communication of functionality and differentiation, and in doing so sustainably influences the value offered (p. 6).

Kapferer ([2012](#)) proposes that the most important elements of the brand are intangible and consist of an identity system made up of the brand image, the company values, the brand personality, image and identity as well as the name, logo, design and distribution. He suggests that the brand name is the principal indicator of brand communication and brand awareness, building consumer relationships with the brand and increasing its value. Ailawadi and Keller ([2004](#)) suggest that for retailers, the brand and brand image need to be built through the store image and store operations. In recent years, however, brand image has been extended through internet commerce and social media communications, becoming not only an important source of communication of image to the consumer but, for many small companies, the means by which they enter the market and continue trading. In some cases, companies build the online store first and transfer the brand image elements to the bricks and mortar store at a later date. Case study 1, Minted is an example of this.

The retailer brand, therefore, is multisensory and encompasses not only the physical products and services but also the whole retail firm, the name on the store front, the brands it sells, the prices and quality it offers, the image on the packaging, the levels of customer service and the image portrayed within the store (Kent and Stone [2007](#)). It is, therefore, both the image portrayed by the elements of the brand and the operational processes that deliver that brand in an efficient, effective and coherent manner (Kent [2007](#)). Most large high street fashion retailers develop and deliver their brand image on the basis of the brands that they sell. In general, high street fashion brands use the corporate retail brand, that is the corporate brand name and all the image associations that it portrays, to deliver the brand image throughout the store from the name above the door to the name on the product, communicating the brand in and out of the store with corporate images and appropriate models and celebrities to deliver the brand identity (Vahie and Paswan [2006](#)). In essence, they are branding the shopping experience through the merchandise that they sell and the in-store and online delivery of that merchandise to the customer.

4.2.1   Telling the Brand Story

Practitioners and academics have stressed the importance of telling a brand story to help bring together the image and operational elements of the brand (Woodside et al. [2008](#)). This brand story helps to clarify the meaning of the brand as well as the needs of the target market. Stories are an intrinsic part of society and culture and historians and psychologists believe that storytelling is one of the many things that define and bind society (Lundqvist et al. [2013](#)). Take, for example, the case of a

Spanish fashion brand owned by the designers. The focus of the brand is on nature, in particular, flowers, trees and the colours of the natural environment, the greens, blues and autumnal hues favoured in seasonal collections. The inspiration for this image is the carefree, bohemian woman. The styles have a bohemian edge, flowing and emphasising the natural curves of the body. The stores take their cues from nature with light fittings shaped like flowers, natural coloured wall coverings and fitting rooms inspired in design by nature. For smaller fashion brands the telling of this brand story offers a brand coherency, particularly, where the store sells manufacturer brands and does not have an own/private label brand to take the consistent corporate brand image through the store. It is this brand name, the telling of the brand story, the portrayal of the brand image through the store image, and the success of the operational elements of merchandise management, communications and customer service that identify and build brand equity for the fashion retailer.

4.3 Building the Vintage Fashion Retailer Brand

For vintage fashion retailers, the development of brand image is equally enriched by the development of a strong brand name, a coherent brand story, unique merchandise, a consistent and creative store/online brand image, creative and targeted communication and excellent customer service. Because the product does not take the retailer's brand name, the key is to build a retailer brand, or what could be referred to as the corporate brand, albeit on a small scale, that represents an era or the story of the goods sold.

4.3.1 Defining Vintage Fashion

McColl et al. (2013), define vintage fashion as:

> Garments and accessories which are more than twenty years old, which represent a particular fashion era, and which are valued for their uniqueness and authenticity (p. 148).

DeLong et al. (2005) propose:

> In clothing, vintage usually involves the recognition of a special type or model, and knowing and appreciating such specifics as year or period when produced or worn (p. 23).

When McColl et al. (2013) carried out their vintage fashion research in 2011, the most popular vintage fashion period was the 1980s with a continuing interest in the 1940s to the 1960s. While interest in the 1980s has endured, the fashion forward are now looking to the late 1990s and the early 2000s for vintage fashion inspiration, thus continually widening and renewing the potential era and ultimately extending stock supply. With all this choice of different eras successful vintage fashion retailers need to build an individual and strong brand image based on the needs and wants of the target customer.

4.3.2 Defining the Vintage Consumer

Unlike high street fashion stores, vintage consumers tend to be less homogenous in relation to age or interests. Hansen (2000) has segmented the vintage consumers into groups such as young professionals who want high-quality clothes at modest prices, or young people keen on retro subculture styles like Punk, Rave or Mod. Others propose the desire for differentiation (Coulson 2003; Finnigan 2006; Malem 2008; Woodward 2009) and groups such as taste-makers, stylists, designers and image makers use it as a source of inspiration and a reference point. McColl et al. (2013) identified two groups of customer, one aged between 18 and 25 years, the most common group driven by price and trends, and a group aged over 30, more loyal vintage consumers who appreciate individual and unusual pieces and who are less concerned with price. Additionally, there are customers of any age who look for items for special occasions, for example, a dinner suit or an evening dress. Other customers are, for example, television or theatre companies looking for costume, people interested in Burlesque and people who like to wear more unusual clothing traditionally worn by another gender.

In recent years, consumer trends have seen the rise of the 'hipster'. Hipsters have adopted all things vintage and made them cool, from drinking from jam jars to using typewriters, riding vintage bikes with no gears and wearing thick-rimmed glasses to seeking out workers' dungarees and heritage brands. It may be that the hipster as a concept has become mainstream, the beard being the most common representation of hipster style that has been adopted as a fashion trend by men in general (Greif 2010). There is, however, an aspect of sustainability, ethics and slow fashion that is associated with the hipster movement and is representative of vintage fashion. Like vintage consumers, hipsters are a group of people who embrace a more ethical and sustainable lifestyle.

4.3.3 Creating and Telling the Vintage Fashion Retailer Brand Story

Vintage fashion retailers are normally a reflection of the interests and knowledge of the owner-manager. They are usually the creators of the brand story (Woodside et al. 2008). This brand story often relates to an era, a music genre or a youth movement with a merchandise focus based around that era, for example, the 1950s rock n roll era, the 1960s and 1970s 'Harley Davidson' era, the mod era of the early 1960s, the 1940s Hollywood glamour and wartime (Hamilton 2012) or, more recently the street wear associated with skateboarding. The customer is very much part of the brand story. They seek out merchandise and request or favour certain pieces. The merchandise is selected and sourced for them by the retailer on the basis of their understanding of both the era and the story, as well as the needs of the customer.

The brand story then, is told from the perspective of the store owner, and artifacts around the store offer insights into the lifestyle elements of the story; for example, motorbike regalia, household objects, a radio, television, valuable merchandise pieces in frames and army uniforms. Take, for example, the case of the Glasgow based vintage retailer, Case Study 3 which specialises in vintage clothing, and in particular, army uniforms, vintage jewelery and evening/occasion dresses. Case 3 uses name of a children's television programme from the 1970s, based around a gentleman, who in each episode visited a fancy dress/costume store, dressed up in an outfit in a changing room, left the changing room through a magic door and entered a world where he had an adventure wearing that outfit. He returned through the door in the changing room back to his everyday life with a memento of his adventure. Examples of his adventures see the character dressed as a spaceman or travelling back in time as a knight in armour. In this case, it is clear that the brand story reflects the interests of the owner. It is represented by the brand name, translated into the store image and in turn it reflects the interests of the customer. In Case Study 1, the Glasgow based vintage store Minted, the name refers to the condition of the clothing but is also a reference to a portrayal of wealth. The company sells streetwear which is freshly laundered, repaired and presented by category and brand of garment as new stock might be presented in a high street fashion store. The shop sells relatively up market vintage brands such as Stone Island and Adidas classics as well as new clothing that reflects the vintage product offering and the interests and personality of both the owners and the customers.

Other cases of brand stories are where vintage fashion retailers build their image around the story of wartime. The clothing of the 1940s exemplifies the patriotism, scarcity and practicality necessary during this period. Simple trims, minimum amounts of fabric and masculine shoulder pads, symbolic of women taking on traditionally male roles in the workplace, all represent this period in history. The store image is represented by artifacts, for example, gas masks and ration books, from this period. Alternatively, the story might consist of post-war glamour and style of a more liberated period, for example; the 1950s images of Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly wearing the Dior 'New Look' full-skirted dress. The fullness of the skirting was made by gathering or pleating using six yards of lightweight fabric, a sign of the end of post-war scarcity. This may be represented in store by artifacts such as time-saving gadgets used in the home which tell the story of post-war female emancipation. In addition, music can be used within the store to represent and reinforce the story and can help to endorse the image of the era, for example, Glenn Miller's big band music from the 1940s to Punk Rock from the 1970s.

The brand image, therefore, is created through the telling of that brand story (Lundqvist et al. 2013) and is carried through the store by the merchandise and the store/online brand image. For vintage fashion retailers, this can be carried out in a creative, authentic and original manner. The store name displayed on the store front represents the brand and can act as the focus for creating the story, building the image and ultimately generating brand equity (Keller et al. 2011). The merchandise displayed in the window sets the scene for the story and is the first contact that the customer has with the brand image. This merchandise will, by the very nature of

vintage clothing, be original and unique. The lifestyle artifacts used in the store can be more permanent and are a creative display of the image of the store. The artifacts are original to that store. The brand image created within the store tells the story of the brand and displays the personality of the owner in greater depth. The merchandise and artifacts create the atmosphere and contribute to the elements of design (Kent 2007). It is important, therefore, for the vintage fashion retailer to create a strong and specific brand image with which potential customers can identify. The vintage market is highly competitive and a strong brand image allows the retailer to become the destination brand of choice (Nobbs et al. 2011).

4.3.4 Operationalising Vintage Brands

4.3.4.1 Vintage Fashion Retailer Merchandise Strategy

Vintage fashion retailers are amongst the most enthusiastic and dedicated of fashion store owners. They are often interested not only in the merchandise but in the whole era or genre that it represents. As small companies, they are generally the centre of all operations both in-store and online, including sourcing, merchandising, pricing, packaging, communications and customer service. For any fashion retailer large or small, vintage or high street, merchandise is the most important aspect of brand positioning and brand image. The more closely this merchandise meets the needs of the customer the more successful the store will be. This is highly dependent on the owner-manager understanding the needs of the customer. Small stores are very close to their customer and have the opportunity to interact closely with them to meet their needs and wants (McColl et al. 2013). At a micro level, the owner-manager can identify individual customers and match them to individual pieces of merchandise. In turn, the customer can sell on relevant fashion pieces to the store owner, thus in a small way co-creating the brand by jointly supplying the merchandise for the store.

Merchandise then, is sought for its individuality and relation to the era and the brand image/story. Vintage store owners are able to build a profile of their customers and can respond easily to developing trends. The individual pieces of merchandise often tell a story themselves and customers will sometimes seek out that story. The merchandise then takes on a meaning for them because of its history. It is often sold to the vintage store owner by individuals selling on pieces that have meaning to them or their families (Tungate 2008). They will sometimes tell the story of the merchandise which can then be passed on to the customer.

Some vintage fashion retailers sell new products which represent the same theme or era alongside the vintage merchandise. This would normally only happen where they complement the existing stock. For high street retailers, the development of own brands allows them better control of their brand image and store operations and the own brand name would normally be the same as the corporate brand name (Burt and Sparks 2002). In some cases vintage fashion retailers produce their own brand

merchandise, thus helping to reinforce the brand image. This is a fairly unusual and bold move for a vintage fashion retailer, however, it demonstrates a fusion of first and second cycle clothing being presented under a vintage brand image and brand concept.

Most vintage fashion retailers, for example, in the cases of City Retro (Case 2) and Case 3, sell almost entirely used clothing. This ranges from well-known brands to traditional unbranded or lesser known brands of vintage items. For City Retro, the concept of vintage represents fun in the sense of dressing up, perhaps in colourful and unusual ways (Tseëlon 1992). Their most popular items tend to be 1960s and 1970s dresses that have a sense of the psychedelic, and sheepskin jackets, old Doc Martin boots and dungarees. Popular brands are always Biba, Bus Stop, Mary Quant, Burberry and designer labels such as Dior and Chanel, however, these are becoming more difficult and expensive to source. For vintage fashion retailers, as for any fashion retailer, the merchandise that they source and sell is modified as new vintage fashion trends arise. Customers will change allegiance to brands and styles over time whilst staying loyal to enduring brands and trends. For example, for Minted, the vintage fashion retailer specialising in street wear, Adidas and Stone Island are enduring brands that are always sought after. The brand Fila was popular over the past few years but has been surpassed by the American brand Specialist.

Vintage fashion retailers source from a variety of places. These include flea markets, car boot sales and second-hand stores (Bardhi and Arnould 2005; Marzella 2015). Berlin, in particular, has a burgeoning vintage market that provides sourcing opportunities. In the case of City Retro stock is sourced from warehouses in the UK and across Europe. These warehouses supply and ship merchandise to the retailers in bulk, which for some has proved to be cheaper than travelling and choosing their own stock. For other cases, this has led to them receiving poor quality and low-value merchandise resulting in high levels of wastage. This type of sourcing, however, has proved successful for City Retro where the supplier knows the store owner and understands the brand image and the brand story. The stock delivered from Europe comes from various places, particularly Eastern Europe where there is a rich heritage, vast areas of developing economies and, partly because of this, a lack of local interest in vintage goods.

Much of the stock sold in vintage stores comes from individual contacts. In all three cases, resale activity is now a common means of both sourcing and selling vintage items with sites such as eBay, Amazon and ASOS offering marketplace trading. Other sources of supply are from customers who are selling back worn vintage pieces and from people selling on the possessions of older relatives. Interestingly, vintage fashion retailers will source merchandise from each other's stores, for example, it is not unusual for vintage fashion retailers from the major cities to visit stores in Scotland to source individual pieces. This seems to be an acceptable vintage trading practice because, unlike high street fashion retailers, these pieces do not carry a brand name that may be damaged by being sold through an inappropriate outlet.

4.3.4.2 Building the Vintage Fashion Brand/Store Image

The predominant means for portraying the retailer and fashion brand retailer image is within the store and online. Vintage stores are often located close together in the 'vintage area' of a city. This can evolve when one or two stores which are 'concept leaders' move into the location and draw customers to that area. It is common for fashion stores who have a similar target customer to locate near each other so that they benefit from each other's trade (Newman and Patel 2004). The three case companies, Minted, City Retro and Case 3 are all in the same locale. The literature stresses the importance of creativity, as the appearance of the fashion store and the in-store experience become an integral part of the core brand (Vahie and Paswan 2006). Integral to the brand is the in-store experience portrayed in the design elements of visual merchandising and display as well as atmosphere and space (Davies and Ward 2005). These become the points of differentiation from nearby competitors. A key element of this is the vintage store image which is typically a representation of the store owner and brand story that they are telling, and the artifacts within the store that represent their personality and interests. In the case of City Retro, props are used in the windows as well as inside the store to represent a fun, vibrant and colourful story. These include, for example, a jukebox, a pinball machine, an ET doll from the 1980s movie, neon signs, an old ghetto blaster, children's and teenage Christmas albums from the 1950s to the 1980s, an original Star Wars poster from the release of the first movie in 1977, and a Raleigh Chopper bike from the 1970s. The company is, however, aware of the tendency to create a 'cluttered' image within the store due to limited space, high stock levels and mismatched displays of merchandise and will recycle stock that has been in the store for too long, reselling it at markets or sending it to charity shops.

4.3.4.3 Building and Maintaining Customer Communications

All of these vintage fashion retailer cases have an online presence that acts as a means of communication and reinforces the brand image. An online presence advertises the stock in the store, is an alternative sales channel, and is a way of building stronger relationships with the customer. It also acts as a means of collecting customer data and allows the store owner to see the most popular pieces and trends that customers are purchasing. In recent years, vintage stores, like all fashion stores, have embraced the internet and social media as a means of communication (Verhoef et al. 2015). The main means of advertising and direct communication are Instagram, Pinterest and Facebook. Facebook allows immediate feedback and direct communication with customers. It also allows communication of associated vintage or music events and sponsored advertising. In addition, it allows the store owners to raise interest in anticipated merchandise and existing pieces. Instagram and Pinterest act as storyboards for the Minted brand, in particular, and often include

images of not just the merchandise but associated images of the store interior and exterior and pictures that represent the brand image and help to tell the brand story. Additionally, all of the case study retailers use traditional methods of communication such as leaflets and posters to advertise at particular events and markets (Peterson and Balasubramanian 2002).

4.3.4.4 Delivering Customer Service

As with many small businesses, the case study stores are able to offer individualised customer service. This applies not just to in-store customer service but also when sourcing items for individuals. Customers will often ask store owners to look out for brands or pieces for them. Many customers will visit a store each week or regularly and enjoy the personalised aspects of customer service. Vintage stores offer more than personal service, they can engage in conversation about the garment, the story of the garment and the background to the brand. This, in turn, increases the length of time that the customer spends in the store and helps build stronger bonds between customer and staff (McColl et al. 2013). The customer is experiencing the brand, is delving into the treasure chest of clothing and is able to engage in conversation with like-minded individuals.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter is based on three case studies of vintage retailers within the city of Glasgow. It has defined the successful features of vintage fashion retailing with regards brand image, telling the brand story and discussing the operational issues involved with maintaining the brand. Vintage fashion retailers are able to offer a unique retail experience. The customer can fully engage in the brand story, not only with the product but through the extended narrative of its provenance; its era, brand identity, lifestyle and heritage. Vintage fashion retailing is a fairly unique business model, particularly in terms of sourcing, where the customer in essence becomes in many instances, the supplier and purchaser. The vintage store owner is uniquely positioned to provide an exclusive, personalised customer service that is predicated upon a mutual interest and shared story between vendor and buyer. The ethical and sustainable issues which are intrinsic to vintage fashion are an increasingly important concern in the global environment. To help vintage fashion retailers become more successful and to further the need for sustainability in the fashion industry, additional research is required. Further empirical studies will help to provide a clearer picture of critical success factors in vintage fashion retailing and will help to define the diverse needs and wants of the vintage fashion consumer.

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