



# A Study on the Brand Culture of Avant-Garde Clothing with Yohji Yamamoto as an Example

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**Abstract.** Avant garde is a cultural scene that has attracted much attention in recent years. The application of avant garde art in the field of clothing has become a marketing strategy for many fashion brands to enhance their popularity. This paper mainly focuses on the brand culture shaping and its influence of avant-garde clothing. By combing the relevant research, this paper focuses on the representative figure of avant-garde fashion design, Yohji Yamamoto and its own brand, through the creation and shaping of its own brand, as well as the case analysis of its cooperation with adidas, supreme and other brands. This paper holds that the brand culture shaping of avant-garde clothing is of great significance, and cross brand cooperation is beneficial to provide an effective way for the popularization and marketization of avant-garde clothing. At the same time, this cross brand cooperation is also beneficial for consumers to more effectively understand and accept avant-garde art and its cultural elements. As a case study, this paper will be beneficial to provide reference methods for avant-garde clothing research, and provide new cases for fashion culture research.

**Keywords:** Brand Culture · Avant-Garde Clothing · Yohji Yamamoto

## 1 Introduction

Avant-garde comes from French, which means advanced guard or vanguard in English. It first appeared in art in France in the first half of the nineteenth century and is usually credited to the influential thinker Henri de Saint-Simon, one of the forerunners of socialism. He believed in the social power of the arts and saw artists, alongside scientists and industrialists, as the leaders of a new society. During the twentieth century, avant-garde began to acquire a purely artistic meaning. It is characterized by breaking away from conventional norms of society, culture, and art. As for avant-garde fashion, its roots are hard to trace. But if we have to find a specific period, it can be found starting around the 1960s and it was quite a controversial topic at the time [1]. Now there are already some studies relevant to the avant-garde garment that has been made.

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Z. Zhan et al. (Eds.): SEAA 2022, ASSEHR 675, pp. 88–95, 2023.

[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-05-3\\_12](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-05-3_12)

In the discourse on avant-garde, Krauss and Rosalind E think that the only thing fairly constant is the theme of originality. The creativity of avant-garde is not a rejection or dissolution of the past but is considered to be a birth, a beginning from zero. The emphasis on the origin is an absolute way of distinguishing between the experienced present and the tradition-filled past. And these claims of originality are the avant-garde assert. If avant-garde art can be seen as a function of originality, the actual practice of avant-garde art tends to reveal that “originality” is a working hypothesis but itself arises from repetition and recurrence. The author also explores the differences between avant-garde and postmodernism. To be specific, if there is a discourse which like a copy, it can be said to be postmodernist, which cannot be considered as avant-garde. In deconstructing the concepts of “origin” and “originality,” postmodernism establishes a historical watershed in its conceptual field and that of the avant-garde. It is obvious that the historical period in which avant-garde and modernism coexisted has come to an end [2]. Ping, Jin and Yu examine the subversion of traditional aesthetics by the avant-garde garment from the commercial perspective. They choose the designs of John Galliano as an example, telling the anti-regularity, drama, and romance shown by the avant-garde clothing. The emergence of this kind of clothing has completely overturned people’s standards of traditional clothing aesthetics due to its sense of novelty, complexity, and versatility. And from the point of view of ideology, John Galliano’s design has stable commercial characteristics. It not only embodies some commercial-style characteristics shared by the post-modern designer group but also preserves some of his style traits, which have made a deep mark on the development of clothing in this commercial era. Post-modernist dress is a complete look of the dress of the commercial era, which fully embodies the dress concept of the people in this commercial era. In addition, the avant-garde designers made full use of their unique artistic imagination to make the clothing style surpass all previous commercial eras [3]. Li interprets avant-garde fashion design from the perspective of artistic interpretation. Avant-garde art is an aesthetic form of modernity, a form with a strong rebellious spirit without losing the sense of foresight. The irrational, experimental, and continuously subversive narrative of avant-garde design gives it a high degree of freedom and a state of transcendence closer to the artwork itself, so the authors analyze the artwork and the avant-garde design by analogy. And they explore multi-dimensionality and unity of the aesthetics of avant-garde fashion. It can be said that it is the multidimensional unity of avant-garde design aesthetics that gives birth to the ever-changing avant-garde fashion design ideas. Also, the multi-dimensional aesthetic of avant-garde is breeding new pioneers in the fashion design world in turn. The understanding of the multidimensional aesthetics of avant-garde design must be seen over a long period, moving from the dialectical negation of “ugliness” toward a higher level of “beauty” [4].

Taking Yohji-Yamamoto as an example, this paper will discuss the cultural acceptance and influence of avant-garde clothing. Yohji Yamamoto pioneered the aesthetic of combining sports and avant-garde clothing and brought the niche art of avant-garde to the mainstream market through co-branding with major mainstream brands. Yohji Yamamoto’s brand has always emphasized a sense of design and exquisite craftsmanship, and this obsession with detail and the pursuit of craftsmanship is what makes this brand a representative of the avant-garde.

## 2 Related Research on Yohji-Yamamoto

Some studies have studied Yamamoto with other avant-garde artists. Yuniya's book focuses on how three famous avant-garde designers, Rei Kawakubo, Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto, emerged and established themselves in the Parisian fashion scene. In general, the Japanese designers in Paris, by combining Parisian fashion with their own culture and thus innovating in avant garde clothing, have greatly stabilized their position in the fashion capital and have earned themselves social and capital recognition. This book focuses on the impact these avant garde designers had on themselves and society through their work, rather than just on the surface of fashion design [5]. Bonnie English focuses on the research of Japanese designers who combine fashion art with ideology and use clothing as an expression of self-knowledge. The book focuses on how three famous Japanese avant-garde designers, Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo, and Yohji Yamamoto, earned the respect of the fashion industry and influenced future generations of designers and artists through their distinctive design styles. It also includes a discussion of many other famous avant-garde designers, such as Martin Margiela, and describes in detail how they were influenced by these artistic styles and eventually made a name for themselves in the fashion world [6]. As an autobiography of Mr. Yohji Yamamoto, *My Dear Bomb* is more of an exploration of the avant-garde style designer himself and the influences he has had over his years in the design field. The book is divided into three parts, each exploring Mr. Yamamoto's deep understanding of his own design style. The first section focuses on how his childhood influenced his current gender-ambiguous design style. Yamamoto was raised by his mother alone, and his fatherless life since childhood has given him a lot more respect and a different perspective on the definition of women, who he believes are more powerful than men. His designs for women's clothing are free and independent and gender-blurring, and it is from this that Mr. Yamamoto wants to attack the prejudices of traditional society against women. The central idea of the second and third parts is similar, as Mr. Yamamoto wants to express his artisanal spirit of not following trends and sticking to his heart. In today's rapidly changing fashion world, Mr. Yamamoto believes that his designs never follow trends, so they never go out of style. He talked about how he has never felt good about what he does, so when he receives negative comments from the outside world, he thinks they are more like a misunderstanding. Because his work is only an expression of his own spirituality, it is normal to encounter people who do not understand [7]. Besides, a documentary illustrates the reasons for Yohji Yamamoto's presence in the fashion industry and the origins of his avant garde masterpieces, his ideas and how they came to be [8].

## 3 Operation Strategy of Yohji-Yamamoto

### 3.1 Yohji Yamamoto and Y's

For Yohji Yamamoto, avant-garde clothing design is not only his work but also an expression of his attitude towards life, and he has dedicated his life to expressing his attitude towards people through the art of clothing.

Yamamoto debuted in Tokyo in 1977, followed by two more shows; a debut in Paris in 1981 and in New York in 1982. His first collection under the label Y's, focused on a

collection for women that reflected typical men's garments, with clothes cut in uncluttered shapes with washed fabrics and dark colors. His commercially successful main line, Yohji Yamamoto and Y's, are especially popular in Tokyo. These two lines are also available at his flagship stores in Paris and Antwerp, and at high-end department stores worldwide. Other principal lines include Pour Homme, Costume d'Homme, and the diffusion line Coming Soon. Yohji Yamamoto Inc. reported in 2007 that the sales of Yamamoto's two main lines average above \$100 million annually. Yamamoto is known for an avant-garde spirit in his clothing, frequently creating designs far removed from current trends. His signature oversized silhouettes often feature drapery in varying textures. Yohji's collections are predominately made in black, a colour which Yamamoto has described as "modest and arrogant at the same time". Black is lazy and easy – but mysterious. But above all black says this: "I don't bother you – don't bother me."

Yohji Yamamoto has been praised by the fashion industry as one of the greatest fashion designers of all time, in addition to his financial success. Since his debut in the Paris fashion industry in the 1980s, almost no one in the fashion industry or among admirers of avant-garde clothes in the globe has forgotten his name. Yohji Yamamoto's life has been full of ups and downs, and he is known for his distinctive tailoring style and love for black, which has been known as the Yohji Yamamoto style.

Yohji Yamamoto, who was born in 1943 and nurtured by his mother, saw the low status of women in Japan after WWII ended, and after graduating from Keio University in 1966, he began studying fashion design. Yamamoto despised everything in his early years, including worldly ideals, petty bourgeois sensibilities, and traditional Japanese norms and regulations. "After WWII, many Japanese women were forced to work outside the home to support their families, but they were not regarded equally to men." Yamamoto began designing outfits for women that were loose but comfortable, smart and elegant, in order to make dressing for work easier for them. Despite studying fashion design in France, Yamamoto was not integrated into Western aesthetics. Yamamoto employed the kimono as the foundation for a non-fixed clothing concept with layers, drapes, and wraps, whereas Western dress codes frequently used tight gowns to depict women's curves. Yamamoto is inspired by the elegance of traditional Japanese clothes and uses a rich blend of colors and materials to portray the concept of fashion. Yamamoto starts with two-dimensional straight lines to generate an asymmetrical appearance, but Western designers tend to cut three-dimensionally from top to bottom on mannequins. This elegant idea is at the heart of traditional Japanese dress culture, as these uneven forms appear natural and fluid rather than arrogant. Yohji Yamamoto's apparel features asymmetrical collars and hemlines, and the brand's clothes take on a distinct aesthetic when worn with physical movements. Yamamoto's distinct style, which was molded by the merging of the spirit of traditional Japanese culture and avant-garde clothing design, has not only achieved a firm foothold in the fashion business, but has also impacted western designers in turn.

### **3.2 Yohji Yamamoto and Adidas (Y-3)**

In today's society, to adapt to the development of the market better, cross-brand cooperation and communication are becoming more and more popular. Such cooperation often brings win-win benefits to both brands. The case study of the collaborative brand between Adidas and Yohji Yamamoto (Y-3) in the following show the benefits it brings

to Adidas and the help for the mass and marketable of the Yohji Yamamoto. It also shows such collaboration between brands is a way to help avant-garde garments realize popularity.

Founded in 1949, Adidas is a member company of Adidas AG, a German sportswear manufacturer. It named after its founder Adolf Adi Dassler and began producing footwear in Herzogenaurach in 1920 [9]. And the adidas Group is one of the global leaders in the sporting goods industry nowadays, offering a wide range of products around the three core segments, Adidas, Reebok and Taylor Made-adidas Golf. The Group has more than 25,000 employees worldwide and sales of around €9.5 billion [10]. The collaboration between Adidas and Yohji Yamamoto began on October 7, 2002, with the first launch of the Adidas Sport Style division collection designed by Yohji Yamamoto in Paris' Stade de Charlety. Basing on the trust, a new brand, "Y-3", was born, incorporating the strengths of both companies. The collection presented in Paris consists of men's and women's shoes, apparel and accessories. And over 1,000 sportswear retailers, journalists and celebrities attended the event [10]. The collaboration between Japanese fashion icon Yohji Yamamoto and the authentic sports brand adidas has created a new market segment. Since the launch of the brand, it has caused a global rush to buy. According to the official statement of Adidas, since 2003, Y-3 has grown into a major force with a distribution network of 500 doors worldwide including mono-brand stores, shop-in-shops and its first true flagship store in Tokyo. Y-3 continue to focus on strengthening retail relationships and opening additional mono-brand stores as well as shop-in-shops in the leading capitals across Europe, the US and Asia; supporting a strong customer base and steady sales growth, whilst maintaining a limited and exclusive distribution [10].

We find that cooperation between Adidas and Yohji Yamamoto is based on the inherent mutual complementary resources. These two brands have their advantages, but in the process of development revealed some unavoidable problems, so cooperation between them has become necessary.

From the view of Adidas, the cooperation with high-end fashion brand can help it enter the fashion field, catch the trends of consumer and set a unique position in the market. As one of the world's leading sports brands, "marketability" is an important label of Adidas. Adidas has always taken the market and consumer needs as the starting point [11]. However, as time goes by, the "aesthetic fatigue" of the market is more obvious [12]. The cooperation with Yohji Yamamoto is a good remedy to solve this problem. Yohji Yamamoto brought a new design feeling and aesthetic experience to Adidas, making the image of Adidas more fashionable so that this traditional sports brand leap onto the pages of Fashion. The cooperation also help Adidas expand its consumer range. Nowadays, as spiritual culture is increasingly developed, a single consumer experience is no longer able to stimulate people's desire to consume [13]. With Yohji Yamamoto's high-end positioning, adidas encompass high-end consumers who could not be included under the previous positioning.

In Yohji Yamamoto's view, it can raise his profile, expand his influence and guide the direction of consumption of the younger generation by collaborating with sports brands [14]. Although, Yohji Yamamoto was deficient in marketing operations, the partnership with adidas gave him the marketing channels he needed to integrate more deeply

into the market and get closer to consumers. As a pioneer in the clothing industry, Yohji Yamamoto has both an avant-garde concept and a distinctive personality in his designs, and his brand of clothing conveys imaginative concepts. However, in reality, Yohji Yamamoto's clothing did not sell well and was only a niche item even in the Japanese market [14]. It is a drawback that cannot be ignored when the clothing is too artistic and the design concepts are too personal to understand. Ultimately, Yohji Yamamoto said that Adidas is a very personal inspiration to him, which seemed like a kind of relief.

Along with the launch of the Y-3 brand, more and more consumer groups have paid attention to avant-garde garments and may choose the related elements of clothing in the process of future consumption consciously or unconsciously. In addition, during choosing the garments, they will pay attention to the design and the ideology behind the clothes conveyed rather than only care their practicality. This also drives to improve the aesthetic art quality of consumer groups and improves people's aesthetic taste in dressing subconsciously.

### 3.3 Yohji Yamamoto and Supreme

Yohji Yamamoto is a representative of Japanese avant-garde designers, who have created the brand Y-3 with Adidas, combining sports and avant-garde designs. Avant-garde clothing is breaking through the traditional perception of modern clothing, and it can even be said that it has changed the general direction of fashion, giving modern clothing unlimited possibilities. At the same time, avant-garde clothing has a strong sense of design and expresses a spirit of mavericks and rebellion.

Supreme and Yohji Yamamoto are both prominent brands in their respective fields. Supreme is a well-known mainstream brand, known for its bright red color and distinctive supreme logo. The styles are more popular, and new collections in association with many brands have become the center of the trend. In our perception, supreme and Yohji Yamamoto are the two extremes of the fashion world. The pioneers are known for their unique designs and their freedom to rebel. One of them caters to the current trend market, while the other is "against" the mainstream, i.e., the anti-mainstream culture.

When these two brands collide, they not only bring huge benefits to both brands but also give meaning to the trendy brand through the pioneering art. In the form of clothing, each item carries the signature Supreme logo and Yohji Yamamoto's signature. The style is a break from the basic Supreme style with avant-garde silhouettes and graffiti elements. Pioneer art is a niche art to be sure, but this collaboration brings this niche art to the public eye and raises the brand's profile. For supreme, the avant-garde design not only makes their clothing more designable but also gives supreme clothing a new meaning [15].

Nowadays, more and more people are blindly pursuing trends and losing themselves, so this joint collaboration is a balance between niche art and popular trends. Pioneer art emerged as a rebellion against the government's extremism and the pursuit of freedom, where people could wear their own distinctive clothes and not care about the world's gaze. So this co-branding not only incorporates the design sense of the clothing but also the logo needed for the mainstream elements. Supreme mainly relies on co-branding with major brands to enhance its own brand value, while Yohji Yamamoto's brand value

comes from his different brand concepts and niche design. The mutual support of the two brands has resulted in a century of co-branded collections.

## 4 Conclusion

Avant-garde clothing is a very malleable kind of clothing. Yohji Yamamoto is the most representative figure, who not only brought avant-garde clothing to the international stage but also collided with many hip brands to create different styles. This paper has introduced its co-branding with Supreme and Dr. Martin, and this combination shows the infinite possibilities of avant-garde clothing. And avant-garde clothing expresses an ideological and spiritual pursuit such as the spirit of rebellion and individuality, which makes it a rebellion against power and the expression of people's spirit. The innovative nature of avant-garde clothing has attracted more and more people of all ages to express their individuality by wearing avant-garde clothing. The avant-garde is also an experimental style because it is anti-mainstream in spirit. This style, which is not accepted by most, is also an expression of its rebellious spirit. This study will help to provide young people who pursue personality and avant-garde clothing with knowledge about avant-garde clothing, especially to provide new cases for avant-garde clothing research.

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