Juicy Couture: A Fairy Tale for Every Age

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Abstract

“Once upon a time in a land far, far away called Pacoima, there were two nice girls, Pam and Gela, who set out to create the perfect girly collection.” These two girls, Pamela Skaist-Levy and Gela Nash-Taylor, were able to create a luxury brand that did what was previously unthinkable—make the sweat suit sexy. Their now famous brand, Juicy Couture, is still best known for its terrycloth and velour tracksuits but it has quickly evolved into a luxury retailer that appeals to all ages.

Introduction

The essence of the brand is centered on the Juicy Fairytale, which gives a brief description of how the company was started. This fairy tale is printed on each hangtag (Figure 1) and is sometimes printed on the walls of the store.

Figure 1: Juicy Couture hang tag.
Photo courtesy of Kelli Heilenman. All rights reserved.
When first entering any one of their boutiques, it is as if you have just stepped into a fairytale come to life. You cannot help but notice the elaborately painted walls, the great glass vases filled to the brim with colorful candies, and the mounted animal heads adorned with costume jewelry and makeup. As an employee at Juicy Couture, I was able to take an ethnographic research approach to the brand and analyze what goes on behind the scenes at the boutique located at 1701 Walnut Street in Philadelphia.

![Figure 2: View of the entrance at 1701 Walnut Street.](image)

Photo courtesy of Kelli Heilenman. All rights reserved.

Ethnography refers to the branch of anthropology dealing with the scientific description of individual cultures; in other words, a field or case study (“Ethnography”). I was able to study Juicy Couture’s retailing strategies closely because I was a part of the Juicy team. The purpose of this paper is to take a firsthand look at experiential retailing and luxury consumption by researching a brick and mortar retail space. This unique luxury brand uses a lifestyle retailing strategy to create a unique shopping experience for their consumer and appeal to their target market.

**Juicy History**

Juicy Couture was founded in 1997 by Gela Nash-Taylor and Pamela Skaist-Levy, also known as the “Fluffians” or the “Juicys”. The two were introduced in 1988 in Pacoima, California by a mutual friend and soon after started designing a clothing line. At the time, Taylor was expecting
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her first child, and was inspired by the movie “Baby Boom,” wherein Diane Keaton quits her executive position to “launch a line of baby food” (Bradberry). The first product that Taylor and Levy designed and sold was a pair of maternity jeans, which developed into an entire line named Travis after Taylor’s newborn son. The label started out as a basic line of denim and t-shirts, which was very successful. They soon moved away from maternity clothes after a chain decided to recolor one of their designs based on the latest color trends. They were horrified by what their designs had turned into, and to this day are firm believers that the “designers who stay close to their philosophy are the designers you go out and buy” (Bradberry).

The end of their maternity line and first entrepreneurial venture turned out to be the best thing to happen to the business partners. Taylor and Levy started Juicy Couture with $200 each, preferring to go without a salary for two years instead of starting out in major debt with bank loans. Any money that they made was poured right back into the company (Bradberry). The partners did choose to spend more on production, manufacturing domestically instead of overseas, which most companies choose to do because of low labor costs (“Pam”). Many of the shirts featured a label that read “Made in the Glamorous U.S.A” and which still appears today. During the first year of business, Juicy made $1 million and was increasingly carried in luxury department stores like Nordstrom and Bloomingdale’s (“Pam”).

It was in 2001 that the famous Juicy tracksuit was introduced and custom designed for Madonna. The track suit has become their signature piece and has been seen on many celebrities, such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Britney Spears, Jennifer Lopez, as well as Middle-American mothers, daughters, and even grandmothers (“My J Book”). Juicy Couture has probably had the biggest impact on women’s casual wear compared to all other retailers by introducing this “California casual lifestyle” to the world. The terry and velour tracksuits were a (multi) million dollar idea. Taylor and Levy took something that people only wore around the house and made it into something that is trendy and seen on women everywhere. Track suits were now something acceptable to wear outside the house and even considered cute and sexy.

In 2003, Liz Claiborne Inc. acquired the company for a Juicy price of $53 million to add to its other divisions—Lucky Brand and Kate Spade. This relationship seems odd, since Liz Claiborne is seen as a more conservative company while the ‘Juicys’ are more “laid back and sometimes cheeky,” but this is a “rare example of a corporate takeover that has worked” (Palmeri).

Taylor is seen as the more entrepreneurial of the two, while Levy’s fun-loving personality has helped to create the brand’s loyal following. Together, they have made Juicy Couture the luxury brand it is today. Their success is “driven by their own lifestyles, and their own tastes” and they “assume that if they like what they do, other women with the same aspirations will, too” (Bradberry). Today, Juicy Couture has 61 boutiques in the United States alone, and a total of 72 locations worldwide. This does not account for the numerous department stores such as Bloomingdale’s and Nordstrom that also house their collection. They currently have stores located in the United States, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.
The Juicy Lifestyle

In the book *Experiential Retailing: Concepts and Strategies that Sell*, the authors describe “Lifestyle Retailing” as purchasing products in order to make a statement about your identity, whether it be personal or social (Kim, Forney, and Sullivan 273). After seeing a picture of the two founders, it comes as no surprise that these two created such a fairytale-like shopping environment. Their long flowing hair, outrageous makeup, and the fact that they are over 50 and still dress in matching outfits, make it clear that only these two particular women could have developed such a brand. They look like they have so much fun that some would say that the Juicy boutiques are a brick and mortar extension of these business partners. Their laid-back, California-chic lifestyle makes you want to be their shopping buddy. From the portraits of Queen Elizabeth with a goatee and mustache all the way to the pink receipt paper, the store simply screams “fun.” When shopping at Juicy Couture, the customer is naturally drawn into the Juicy Lifestyle.

Each and every Juicy Couture boutique is unique. Juicy Couture does not have plan-o-grams; instead a visual team comes in and decorates the store however they want. They have general requirements coming from corporate of Juicy elements each store should have, but it is completely up to the visual team to decide what will be written on the walls, what taxidermy animal heads will be hanging on the walls, and what kinds of candy will be displayed in the large glass vases. For example, the Juicy Couture boutique located at 1701 Walnut Street features many deer heads around the store; one of which is decorated with an elaborate pearl necklace (see figure 3). No store is the same, which creates a unique experience for the customer no matter which boutique they shop at. The 12,000 square foot flagship store that opened November 6, 2008 on 5th Avenue is the biggest and most outrageously decorated among all the stand alone boutiques (Dodes).

![Figure 3](image-url): A taxidermy deer head decorated with a string of pearls, fake eyelashes, earrings and makeup. Photo courtesy of Kelli Heilenman. All Rights Reserved.
Juicy Couture's present market spans a wide range of ages, with a wide range of personalities. It is not unusual to see a mother and daughter (and even grandmother!) liking the same thing, whether it is a piece of costume jewelry or a terrycloth tracksuit. Nonetheless, Juicy Couture’s marketing focus is specifically geared to women ages 18-25. This is evidenced by the fact that, while every boutique offers women’s apparel, not every location has dog, children, baby, or men’s products. For example, the boutique on 17th and Walnut Street in Philadelphia only carries women’s and limited dog accessories. This means a woman from the ages 18-25 can go to any boutique or department store that houses the collection in the world, and she will be able to find something for herself. Juicy is aiming to sell their customer a lifestyle. They offer clothing for going out at night, hanging around the house, traveling, sleeping and more - in other words, something for everyday and for every occasion.

One of Juicy Couture’s latest marketing developments is the Juicy Passport. This new travel passport includes a discount incentive to encourage people to shop at Juicy boutiques instead of department stores, offering a new level to the shopper’s experience. By enhancing their lifestyle retail strategy even more, the company is hoping to reach out to their customers and encourage them to add travel to their Juicy lifestyle and view each boutique as a must-see destination.

**My Experience: The Juicy Life**

When starting at Juicy Couture, employees are taught “Juicy social skills” that help connect with the Juicy customer, talk about the brand, and introduce the Juicy products via the employee handbook called *My J Book: a Guide to the Juicy Way*. You are introduced to the “Juicy Life” to help interact with customers. This shows that Juicy Couture is not only a lifestyle store for their customers, but their employees as well. There are “Juicy chat-ins” when you arrive for work, they use “Juicy Math” to describe goals for UPT (Units per Transaction), conversion, ADT (Average Dollars per Transaction, and SPH (Sales per hour), and “Juicy Talk” when interacting with customers.

*My J Book* splits up the customers into four distinct groups: Get Me Stuff; Because…; Friends Rock; and Move It. Associates are then trained to offer Juicy finds that fit each of these customer segments. For example, the “Because…” customer is interested in what exactly they are paying for. An employee would then inform them of the fabric quality of the garments, the fact that 65% of the clothing is made in the United States, or special details on the garments. Employees are encouraged to use this scripted methodology to interact with each type of the Juicy customer, thereby increasing sales (“My J Book”).

Sales associates are not required to wear Juicy to work, but must look like the styles they carry and current colors. However, Juicy Couture has a distinct look that is not easily mimicked by many other retailers. Managers have suggested taking an article of clothing and transforming it to make it look like pieces carried in the store. For example, an employee might replace the buttons on a shirt or cardigan with gold ones to make it look juicier. Associates are also filled in on the latest Juicy trends. They are told what is in and what is out so that associates can look the part and fit what is considered “Juicy” at the moment. In this way, the employees’ styling
becomes an integral part of the Juicy Couture lifestyle retailing strategy targeted towards the customers. The customer is literally surrounded by everything Juicy.

(Perceived) Juicy Luxury

Kim, Forney, and Sullivan define “luxury consumption” as owning something that is prestigious and exclusive or trendy and fashionable (31-32). The price tag for Juicy Couture seems to imply that these are luxury goods, but does the actual clothing itself justify the high prices? In many Juicy Couture Boutiques, you will find the phrase “For Nice Girls Who Like Stuff” plastered on a wall. The boutique in Philadelphia has a similar phrase painted directly above the store entrance (figure 4). This is important because Juicy Couture is acknowledging the fact that what they are selling is just “stuff” - things that people do not need, a luxury. As previously described, they offer stuff for you, stuff for your boyfriend, and even stuff for your dog (they even have dog treats in the store!). Although it may be unusual to describe the things offered in an apparel store as indulgences, the clothing prices clearly takes these products out of the “necessity” category.

Figure 4: The phrase “Buy Me Stuff” is painted right above the entrance to the boutique. Photo courtesy of Kelli Heilenman. All rights reserved.

Recently, each Juicy Couture boutique had a staff meeting to discuss how the collection would be moving in a new direction. As part of their retailing strategy, associates were trained in product knowledge to better explain the high prices of the merchandise. This training included information on fabric content, the presence of full lining in shirts and dresses, “bling” details,
and specialized “Juicy” zippers. Each detail affects the price of the various garments sold in the store. Juicy employees understand that this is a luxury brand, and are prepared when customers question the prices.

Juicy Couture pays a great deal of attention to small details so that the retail space always looks its best. They believe that if the sales floor doesn’t look nice, people will question why they are spending so much money for the product. Every zipper on the folded track jackets must be lined up vertically, every seam on the pants must be aligned, and every logo on the graphic tees must be identical. By presenting the clothing with such perfection, the customer subconsciously justifies spending over $200 on what is essentially a sweat suit. Each Sunday the Walnut Street boutique has to take a picture of the tracksuit wall to send in to corporate headquarters. Figure 5 is an example of a photo that would be sent in to be judged by the corporate visual team. Corporate then decides whether the wall is up to its high standards or if everything needs to be refolded.

![Figure 5: the terry wall needs to be perfectly folded. Photo courtesy of Kelli Heilenman. All Rights Reserved.](image)

The End of the Fairytale

The fairytale world ends once you enter the backroom. All fairytales must come to an end and in this case, as an associate, I was able to compare the customer’s experience of the Fairytale that Juicy Couture aims to create and what goes on after that Fairytale world disappears. The luxurious goods don’t seem quite as glamorous and the Juicy lifestyle no longer seems as much fun once you see behind the “Curtain”. One might say it’s not unlike being one of the supporting players in any theatrical “Production”.
Works Cited


