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Hollywood as a Marketing Tool for Fashion Brands: Audrey Hepburn with Givenchy in Cinema

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between fashion and cinema has long influenced how luxury brands communicate with audiences and establish cultural significance. Through film, fashion can reach consumers beyond traditional marketing channels, allowing garments, styles, and brand identities to become part of popular culture. One of the most notable examples of this relationship is the collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy between 1954 and 1961. This study aims to examine how Hollywood functioned as a marketing tool for fashion brands through this collaboration. Previous studies have demonstrated that film, celebrity culture, and fashion communication contribute to audience engagement and brand recognition. However, existing research has rarely examined how these elements worked together to support fashion marketing and long-term brand development. To address this gap, this study integrates celebrity endorsement theory and the meaning transfer model to analyze Hollywood's role in promoting and strengthening fashion brands. Using a qualitative approach based on secondary data, this study analyzes the films Sabrina (1954), Funny Face (1957), and Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961), as well as the commercialization of Givenchy's fragrance L'Interdit. The findings show that Hollywood served as a global marketing and communication platform that increased Givenchy's visibility, accelerated the spread of fashion trends, and supported brand growth through celebrity endorsement, symbolic meaning transfer, and brand extension. The study concludes that Hollywood functioned as a powerful marketing tool that contributed to the development and expansion of luxury fashion brands.

Keywords: audrey hepburn, celebrity endorsement, givenchy

Research Article

1. INTRODUCTION

Hollywood played a significant role in shaping popular culture and consumer behavior throughout the twentieth century. During the Golden Age of Hollywood, film stars became influential cultural figures whose appearances, lifestyles, and fashion choices inspired audiences around the world. At the same time, the fashion industry

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increasingly recognized cinema as an effective platform for promoting products, constructing brand identities, and influencing consumer preferences (Butchart, 2016). The development of moving-image media enabled fashion to reach audiences beyond elite social circles and transformed cinema into a powerful communication channel for fashion dissemination (Evans & Parikka, 2020; Uhlirova, 2020).

One of the most influential examples of this relationship was the collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy. Through films such as *Sabrina* (1954), *Funny Face* (1957), and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), Givenchy's designs became closely associated with Hepburn's on-screen image and contributed to the emergence of the iconic "Audrey Look" (Beghin, 2023; Hoo, 2021). Beyond fashion promotion, the partnership also supported Givenchy's brand development through the commercialization of *L'Interdit* perfume, demonstrating how cinematic exposure could facilitate successful brand extension strategies (LVMH, 2023; Ramzi, 2018).

The development of cinema as a mass communication medium transformed the way fashion was presented and consumed throughout the twentieth century. Unlike fashion magazines or runway shows, films allowed audiences to experience clothing within narratives, making fashion more accessible and emotionally engaging. As moving-image media expanded internationally, fashion was no longer limited to elite consumers or industry professionals but became increasingly visible to wider audiences. This transformation enabled cinema to function as an important channel for fashion communication by extending the reach of luxury brands beyond traditional marketing platforms (Butchart, 2016; Evans & Parikka, 2020; Uhlirova, 2020).

The growing influence of cinema also changed the relationship between fashion brands and consumers. Rather than promoting garments solely through advertisements or fashion editorials, luxury brands could establish stronger identities by associating their designs with well-known film stars. As audiences repeatedly encountered these celebrities on screen, fashion became connected to the personalities, lifestyles, and values represented by the actors themselves. This process strengthened brand recognition and allowed fashion brands to communicate symbolic meanings that extended beyond the products, making cinema an increasingly valuable marketing environment for the luxury fashion industry (Alatas et al., 2019; Tian et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the shift toward moving-image media fundamentally altered the velocity and visual narrative through which haute couture penetrated mainstream consumer consciousness (Evans & Parikka, 2020; Uhlirova, 2020). By embedding luxury garments within cinematic storytelling, fashion communication transitioned from static pictorial displays to dynamic, emotionally resonant experiences that fostered long-term brand equity and aspirational consumer identity (Butchart, 2016; Keller, 2013). Consequently, film screen exposure functioned not merely as passive product placement, but as an active mechanism for translating high-fashion exclusivity into global cultural resonance and commercial brand extensions (McCracken, 1989; Ramzi, 2018).

The collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy represents a landmark example of this phenomenon. Through films such as Sabrina (1954), Funny

Face (1957), and Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961), Givenchy's designs became globally recognizable and closely associated with Hepburn's elegant public image (Beghin, 2023; Hoo, 2021). This partnership demonstrates how cinema could influence consumer aspirations, fashion trends, and brand perception while creating long-term value for luxury fashion houses.

Despite extensive research on celebrity endorsement, branding, and fashion communication, there remains limited understanding of how Hollywood functioned as an integrated marketing system for luxury fashion brands. Therefore, this study addresses how Hollywood functioned as a marketing tool for fashion brands through the collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Givenchy, how cinema influenced consumer behavior and fashion trends during the Golden Age of Hollywood, and lastly how did the partnership contribute to Givenchy's brand development and brand extension strategies.

Previous studies have examined various aspects of fashion marketing and branding from different theoretical perspectives. Erdogan (1999) explored celebrity endorsement theory by explaining how celebrities influence consumer attitudes, brand image, and purchasing decisions through their credibility, attractiveness, and public recognition. Similarly, McCracken (1989) introduced the Meaning Transfer Model, arguing that celebrities possess symbolic meanings that can be transferred to brands through the endorsement process, allowing consumers to associate the characteristics of a celebrity with the products they promote. In the field of branding, Keller (2013) emphasized the importance of building strong brand equity by developing favorable, unique, and memorable brand associations that strengthen consumer perceptions and long-term brand value. Meanwhile, studies on fashion communication have demonstrated that mass media plays an important role in increasing the visibility of fashion trends and accelerating their adoption by wider audiences, highlighting the influence of media in shaping consumer awareness and fashion consumption (Butchart, 2016; Rambharose & Camacho, 2026).

Although these studies provide valuable insights into celebrity endorsement, symbolic meaning transfer, branding, and the communication of fashion trends, they generally examine these concepts independently. As a result, limited research has investigated how these marketing mechanisms operated simultaneously within Hollywood cinema. Based on these previous studies, this research focuses on the collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Givenchy to explain how Hollywood functioned not only as a platform for celebrity endorsement but also as a distribution channel for luxury fashion, a medium for communicating symbolic brand meanings, and a marketing tool that strengthened brand development and long-term brand growth. The objectives of this study are to examine Hollywood's role as a marketing tool for fashion brands, secondly to analyze how Audrey Hepburn promoted Givenchy through cinema and celebrity influence, and lastly to investigate the influence of film on fashion trends and consumer behavior.

This study focuses on the collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Givenchy between 1954 and 1961, particularly through the films Sabrina (1954), Funny Face

(1957), and Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961). The analysis also includes the commercialization of L'Interdit perfume as an example of cross-media brand extension and celebrity-driven marketing (LVMH, 2023; Ramzi, 2018).

The study is limited to secondary data sources, including academic journals, books, fashion publications, historical documents, and official brand archives. No primary data collection, such as surveys, interviews, or consumer experiments, was conducted. Therefore, the findings are intended to provide a historical and theoretical analysis of Hollywood's role in fashion marketing rather than a direct measurement of contemporary consumer behavior.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine Hollywood's role as a marketing tool for fashion brands through the collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is appropriate for exploring and interpreting social and cultural phenomena through multiple sources of textual and documentary evidence. Data were collected through a literature review of academic journals, books, fashion industry publications, film studies, and historical sources related to celebrity culture, luxury branding, cinema, and consumer behavior. Secondary data were analyzed using thematic interpretation to identify patterns concerning fashion marketing, celebrity influence, brand extension, and trend diffusion. The research process consisted of identifying the research problem, collecting and reviewing relevant literature, organizing and interpreting the data, and drawing conclusions based on the research findings (Creswell, 2014).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were interpreted through two theoretical frameworks: celebrity endorsement theory and the meaning transfer model.

Celebrity Endorsement Theory explains how public figures influence audience attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral responses toward a product, message, or brand. The theory argues that celebrities are effective marketing communication tools because their credibility, attractiveness, visibility, and symbolic value can increase audience attention, message recall, and consumer engagement (Erdogan, 1999). Consumers often respond not only to the content being communicated but also to the characteristics associated with the celebrity endorser. Supporting this perspective, Alatas et al. (2019) found that messages attributed to celebrities were significantly more likely to be shared and engaged with than identical messages without celebrity sources. Furthermore, consumers frequently rely on their existing perceptions of celebrities when evaluating associated brands, making celebrity endorsement an effective strategy for enhancing brand awareness, shaping favorable consumer attitudes, and influencing purchase-related decisions (Tian et al., 2021).

Meaning Transfer Model explains how celebrity endorsement influences brand perceptions through the transfer of symbolic meanings associated with a celebrity's

public image, achievements, lifestyle, and cultural representations. Originally proposed by McCracken (1989), the model argues that celebrities carry culturally constructed meanings that are transferred to products through endorsement and subsequently to consumers through consumption. When consumers repeatedly encounter a celebrity–brand association, these symbolic characteristics gradually become part of the brand's identity and influence how the brand is perceived (Tian et al., 2021) Expanding this perspective, Wong et al. (2020) suggest that consumers may transfer not only positive attributes such as attractiveness, credibility, and status but also the cognitive processes used to evaluate celebrities. As a result, endorsement effects can shape both consumer perceptions and evaluations of a brand, even when the celebrity is not considered a perfect fit with the endorsed product (McCracken, 1989; Tian et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2020).

Hollywood as a New Distribution Channel: The Contractual Shift.

With *Sabrina* (1954), Audrey Hepburn set a new precedent in mid-twentieth-century cinema by rejecting the Hollywood studio's costume design system and contractually mandating the use of Hubert de Givenchy's haute couture. This transformed Hollywood's business model from an in-house costume maker into a platform that could distribute and showcase external fashion brands. The collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy in *Sabrina* (1954) reflects an important shift in Hollywood costume production, where external fashion designers began to replace traditional studio-based costume departments. Instead of relying solely on Paramount Pictures' internal costume system, the film incorporated Givenchy's haute couture designs into Hepburn's on-screen transformation. This marked a departure from standard Hollywood production practices, as fashion design was no longer confined to studio-controlled wardrobe departments but involved direct collaboration with an independent luxury fashion house (De Blanche, 2014).

Fashion reporting on the production of *Sabrina* highlights that Hepburn's engagement with Givenchy's work helped establish a creative relationship in which Parisian couture became central to the visual identity of the film. Rather than functioning as a purely decorative costume, the garments contributed to character construction and narrative development, particularly in defining Hepburn's post-transformation elegance. This integration of haute couture into Hollywood filmmaking demonstrates how cinema began to operate as a platform through which external fashion brands could be visually embedded within global media narratives (Beghin, 2023; Hoo, 2021).

Sources also indicate that this collaboration contributed to a broader transformation in costume practice, where fashion houses gained increasing involvement in film production. The use of Givenchy's design in *Sabrina* is often cited in fashion history discussions as an early example of designer-led costume influence in Hollywood, where cinematic production became a space for showcasing luxury fashion to international audiences. This shift effectively positioned Hollywood as a distribution channel for haute couture, enabling fashion brands to reach audiences far beyond traditional fashion institutions such as runway shows or editorial publications (Hoo,

2021).

Hollywood served as a powerful marketing tool because of its ability to reach global audiences through mass media. Givenchy utilized the cinema screen as a living billboard that introduced its designs to millions of viewers, while Hollywood simultaneously benefited from the prestige and authenticity associated with Parisian haute couture. This created a mutually beneficial relationship in which fashion and film reinforced each other's commercial and cultural value.

The integration of haute couture into Hollywood cinema reflects a broader industrial and cultural logic in which film functions as a global marketing platform for fashion brands. Recent scholarship on fashion and moving-image media argues that cinema does not merely display clothing but actively contributes to the construction and circulation of fashion meaning. In this context, film operates as a visual dissemination system in which garments gain cultural visibility through narrative and screen presence, allowing fashion to reach audiences on an international scale beyond traditional fashion communication channels (Evans & Parikka, 2020; Uhlirova, 2020).

Fashion film research further explains that the moving image has become a significant medium for shaping fashion identity and value. Cinema provides a space in which clothing is not only seen but also emotionally and narratively framed, increasing its cultural resonance. This process enables fashion brands to benefit from cinematic exposure, as garments displayed on screen often acquire symbolic meaning linked to character, narrative, and performance. As a result, film becomes a strategic site where fashion visibility is amplified and circulated across a global audience (Uhlirova, 2020).

At the same time, Hollywood benefited from its collaboration with haute couture through enhanced visual prestige and aesthetic authenticity. The inclusion of Parisian couture in film production contributed to a refined visual style that strengthened cinematic representations of elegance and modern femininity. This exchange produced a mutually beneficial relationship in which fashion gained exposure through cinema, while film gained cultural legitimacy and aesthetic distinction through its association with luxury design. Consequently, Hollywood and fashion operated within a reciprocal system in which each industry reinforced the visibility and value of the other (Chilton & Wecker, 2025).

Monetizing the Silhouette: The Audrey Look as a Global Trend Filter.

The relationship between film and fashion began in 1911 when designer Paul Poiret filmed models showcasing his collection at a promotional event. As moving pictures made couture accessible to wider audiences, fashion and film developed a mutually beneficial relationship that later flourished during Hollywood's Golden Age. The synchronicity between the fashion and film industries thrived during the Golden Age of Hollywood. Parisian couturiers began to work with Hollywood stars and formed lasting relationships, such as between Hubert de Givenchy and Audrey Hepburn. Film costumes were mass-produced for a fashion-conscious audience, and sales of cosmetics flourished due to Max Factor's innovations in on-screen makeup (Butchart, 2016).

For instance, the satin Little Black Dress (LBD) worn by Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) demonstrated the capacity of cinema to filter, popularize, and disseminate fashion trends to mass audiences. Through Hepburn's portrayal of Holly Golightly, the dress became more than a costume worn by a film character; it evolved into a highly recognizable fashion symbol associated with elegance, sophistication, and modern femininity. Givenchy created a dress that combined sophistication and understated glamour. At the front, the sleeveless silhouette had a simple but modish bateau neckline. At the back, it featured edgy, strategically placed cutouts revealing her shoulder blades in an alluring, subtly sexy way (Cerini, 2020).

From the perspective of Celebrity Endorsement Theory, Audrey Hepburn functioned as a powerful celebrity endorser for Givenchy's designs. Although her role was primarily as an actress rather than a conventional brand ambassador, audiences associated the elegance, sophistication, and modern femininity embodied by Hepburn with the garments she wore on screen. As the theory suggests, consumers often transfer their positive perceptions of a celebrity to the products and brands linked to them. Consequently, Hepburn's visibility and credibility enhanced the appeal of Givenchy's designs, transforming the Little Black Dress from a film costume into a highly influential fashion statement. Through repeated exposure in cinema and media coverage, Givenchy benefited from increased brand recognition and consumer admiration, demonstrating the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement in shaping fashion preferences.

The partnership between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy can also be understood through the Meaning Transfer Model. According to this theory, the symbolic meanings associated with a celebrity are transferred to the brands and products they endorse. Throughout her career, Hepburn cultivated a public image characterized by elegance, sophistication, grace, and modern femininity. Through her repeated association with Givenchy's designs in films such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), these qualities became closely linked to the Givenchy brand. Consequently, consumers did not simply perceive Givenchy's garments as fashionable clothing; they viewed them as representations of the refined lifestyle and identity embodied by Hepburn. The iconic Little Black Dress illustrates this process of meaning transfer, as its cultural significance stemmed not only from its design but also from its association with Hepburn's enduring image. As a result, Givenchy's creations acquired symbolic value that extended beyond their functional purpose, strengthening the brand's prestige and influence within the fashion industry.

In comparison, during Hollywood's Golden Age (roughly the 1920s to 1960s), costume design was an essential element of cinematic storytelling and visual spectacle. Hollywood studios invested heavily in costumes that reinforced star personas, enhanced narrative development, and projected glamour to audiences worldwide. Although these costumes significantly influenced public fashion, they were primarily created to serve the artistic and commercial needs of film production rather than to promote independent fashion brands. As a result, costume design functioned mainly as part of the Hollywood

studio system instead of a strategic marketing collaboration between cinema and luxury fashion houses (Gutner, 2021; Landis, 2007).

However, in contrast, the collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Givenchy introduced a different approach to cinematic fashion. Rather than relying on elaborate costumes, their designs emphasized simplicity, elegance, and wearability. The most iconic piece in women's fashion is the little black dress, a simple yet stylish staple whose popularity has stood the test of time. Givenchy brought sleek chic to the fore in the 1950s and '60s at the House of Givenchy, where he introduced the concept that haute couture could be pared down and worn daily. He was attuned to silhouettes that were flattering to the female shape and envisioned an aesthetic that was understated and refined. Audrey Hepburn was Givenchy's greatest inspiration for 40 years and was also the brand's most famous ambassador. The graceful, elegant Hepburn manifested Givenchy's vision of the modern woman who wanted to feel feminine and stylish in beautifully tailored clothes that could also be deceptively simple. As she once said, "His clothes are the only ones in which I feel like myself. He is more than a designer; he is a creator of personality." He reciprocated her admiration, asserting, "There is not a woman alive who doesn't dream of looking like Audrey Hepburn." In 1957, he introduced Givenchy Parfums with a signature scent inspired by her (Reinke, 2020).

Cinema-Backed Fragrance Marketing.

One of the most successful collaborations between the film and fashion industries during the mid-twentieth century was the commercialization of L'Interdit by Givenchy. Originally created in 1957 by Hubert de Givenchy as a personal fragrance for Audrey Hepburn, the perfume was reserved exclusively for the actress before being released to the public several years later (Castellani, 2020; LVMH, 2023). According to fashion historians, when Givenchy proposed commercializing the fragrance, Hepburn jokingly replied, *"Je vous l'interdis!"* ("I forbid you!"), a remark that later inspired the perfume's name, L'Interdit (Castellani, 2020; Ferrer, 2005). The launch of L'Interdit represented an important milestone in Givenchy's marketing strategy because the brand successfully transformed a personal relationship between a designer and an actress into a valuable marketing asset. By leveraging Hollywood's popularity and Audrey Hepburn's public image, Givenchy introduced a new product with significantly greater visibility than conventional fragrance promotion strategies of the period. The campaign also established Hepburn as one of the earliest Hollywood actresses to become the official face of a luxury fragrance, creating a model that continues to influence luxury marketing today (LVMH, 2023; Ramzi, 2018; Roff, 2011).

From the perspective of Celebrity Endorsement Theory, the L'Interdit campaign demonstrates how public figures can be used as marketing communication tools to increase audience attention and strengthen the effectiveness of brand messages. The theory suggests that celebrities enhance brand awareness through their visibility, credibility, and symbolic value (Alatas et al., 2019; Erdogan, 1999). In this case, Audrey Hepburn functioned not only as the face of the campaign but also as a communication

medium that enabled Givenchy to reach a broader international audience. The association between Hepburn and L'Interdit increased the campaign's appeal and improved the likelihood that consumers would notice and remember the brand (Tian et al., 2021).

The campaign can also be explained through the Meaning Transfer Model, which proposes that symbolic meanings associated with a celebrity can be transferred to brands and products through repeated associations (McCracken, 1989; Tian et al., 2021). Through the continuous connection between Hepburn and L'Interdit, qualities such as elegance, sophistication, and grace became integrated into the fragrance's brand identity. As a result, L'Interdit was marketed not merely as a perfume but as a representation of an aspirational luxury lifestyle associated with Hepburn's image (Wong et al., 2020). This symbolic relationship reflected the long-standing creative partnership between Hepburn and Givenchy, in which Hepburn became the embodiment of Givenchy's aesthetic values both on and off the screen (Hellstern, 2005; Ramzi, 2018). Consequently, the fragrance acquired symbolic value beyond its functional purpose and became closely associated with the elegance and timeless femininity represented by Hepburn.

From the perspective of Strategic Brand Management, Keller (2013) argues that successful brands are built through strong, favorable, and unique brand associations. The success of L'Interdit can therefore be understood as a strategic effort to strengthen Givenchy's brand image through carefully managed associations. By consistently linking the fragrance with Audrey Hepburn, Givenchy created associations centered on luxury, elegance, authenticity, and exclusivity. Furthermore, Hollywood served as a powerful communication channel that increased brand exposure and reinforced brand awareness, one of the key components of customer-based brand equity (Keller, 2013). This strategy enabled Givenchy not only to improve brand recognition but also to establish a stronger and more distinctive brand image in consumers' minds.

Overall, the case of L'Interdit demonstrates how Hollywood functioned as an effective marketing tool for luxury fashion brands. Through the combined use of celebrity endorsement, symbolic meaning transfer, and strategic brand association, Givenchy successfully utilized cinema as a platform to increase visibility, strengthen brand image, and create long-term value. The collaboration between Hubert de Givenchy and Audrey Hepburn illustrates how the integration of fashion, cinema, and celebrity culture generated not only cultural influence but also sustainable competitive advantages in luxury brand marketing (Keller, 2013; Ramzi, 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined Hollywood's role as a marketing tool for fashion brands through the collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy between 1954 and 1961. The findings demonstrate that Hollywood functioned as more than an entertainment industry; it operated as a global communication and marketing platform that enabled fashion brands to reach international audiences. Through cinema, luxury fashion could be integrated into popular culture, allowing brands to gain visibility beyond traditional fashion channels such as runway shows and editorial publications.

The study found that Audrey Hepburn played a significant role in promoting Givenchy through both her on-screen performances and public image. Films such as *Sabrina* (1954), *Funny Face* (1957), and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) established a strong association between Hepburn and Givenchy's designs, reinforcing the brand's identity through celebrity endorsement and symbolic meaning transfer. Audrey Hepburn's elegance and popularity further strengthened the brand through celebrity endorsement, while repeated exposure in films increased Givenchy's visibility, brand recognition, and prestige.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that cinema significantly influenced fashion trends and consumer behavior during the mid-twentieth century. The popularity of the *Audrey Look*, particularly the iconic Little Black Dress featured in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, illustrates how film could transform costumes into widely adopted fashion trends. Compared with the more theatrical and extravagant styles associated with earlier Hollywood productions, the Hepburn–Givenchy collaboration promoted a minimalist and wearable aesthetic that resonated with consumers and influenced the ready-to-wear fashion industry.

The collaboration between Givenchy and Audrey Hepburn supported the brand's growth by fostering strong connections with sophistication, elegance, and luxury through constant film exposure. Hepburn's public image became closely linked to the Givenchy brand, increasing brand equity and differentiating it from competitors. This relationship also supported Givenchy's brand extension strategy through the launch of the L'Interdit fragrance, which successfully leveraged Hepburn's celebrity status to promote a new product category. By transferring Hepburn's symbolic qualities to both the fashion house and its perfume, Givenchy expanded beyond haute couture while maintaining a consistent luxury brand identity.

Overall, the collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Givenchy demonstrates how Hollywood could effectively support fashion marketing, trend diffusion, and brand development. Future research may expand this discussion by examining other designer–celebrity partnerships or by exploring how contemporary digital media platforms continue the relationship between fashion, celebrity culture, and visual entertainment in the twenty-first century.

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