

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

FROM FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE TO LUXURY PRESTIGE: STRATEGIC BRANDING AND MARKETING TRANSFORMATION IN URBAN MENSWEAR

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—Abstract—

This research examines the strategic evolution of urban functional menswear labels from manufacturers of performance-driven apparel into recognised premium and luxury fashion brands. Concentrating on three influential labels—C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym—the investigation employs a comparative case-study methodology to evaluate the way technological advancement, cultural positioning, and carefully designed marketing practices facilitate brand upgrading. Grounded in the theoretical perspectives of symbolic consumption, luxury-brand management, and experiential branding, the study explores how these companies move beyond purely functional origins to generate symbolic significance, cultural legitimacy, and aspirational prestige.

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The results demonstrate that several interrelated mechanisms—including advanced textile development, scarcity-driven product distribution, strategic collaborative partnerships, and sustained engagement with niche subcultural communities—substantially influence the reclassification of functional apparel into symbols of individuality, exclusiveness, and social distinction. The analysis further indicates that the fusion of technologically oriented design language with narrative-driven brand communication strengthens emotional attachment among consumers while simultaneously consolidating high-end market perception. By addressing a notable deficiency within existing scholarship concerning the luxury repositioning of functional fashion products, the study advances both theoretical and practical understanding. It establishes a conceptual foundation for interpreting how utility-based apparel evolves into culturally valued luxury commodities and delivers practical guidance for emerging fashion enterprises seeking to enhance competitive positioning within the increasingly convergent domains of technology, lifestyle, and luxury fashion.

Keywords: Urban Functional Menswear, Luxury Fashion Brands, Branding and Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Urban functional menswear emerged progressively as a distinctive apparel category during the 1980s, driven by the rapid expansion of metropolitan lifestyles and the intensification of consumer culture. Combining practicality with contemporary aesthetics, this clothing category diverged from both conventional formalwear and traditional outdoor garments by emphasising the integration of technical innovation with modern design principles. Its defining characteristics included the incorporation of waterproof and wind-resistant textiles, structurally adaptive garment engineering, and design features tailored to the practical requirements of urban male consumers. Rather than serving a singular utilitarian purpose, this apparel category developed as a versatile fashion solution capable of accommodating diverse urban living environments and lifestyle demands (Bolton, 2002).

The emergence of this fashion movement is closely associated with the pioneering experimentation undertaken by Massimo Osti during the 1980s. Through labels such as C.P. Company and Stone Island, Osti introduced military-inspired aesthetics and technologically advanced textile experimentation into contemporary fashion design, thereby establishing a foundational framework for functional menswear development (Bolton, 2002). During the twenty-first century, the emergence of brands such as Acronym further accelerated this trajectory by integrating advanced fabric technologies with highly experimental silhouettes. Such developments attracted a consumer segment increasingly concerned not only with technical functionality but also with fashion-

oriented identity expression. Consequently, urban functional menswear gradually established a unique market identity positioned between the decorative orientation of conventional luxury fashion and the purely utilitarian nature of outdoor performance apparel, effectively merging technological sophistication with stylistic innovation.

From the 2010s onwards, functional apparel increasingly evolved beyond its practical foundations into a premium and luxury-oriented market category. This transition involved not merely higher pricing structures or material enhancement, but a broader strategic transformation centred on luxury brand construction, image repositioning, and sophisticated marketing practices. Stone Island represents a prominent example of this evolution, having transformed into a globally recognised fashion symbol through strategic collaborations with brands such as Supreme and Moncler. Similarly, C.P. Company strengthened its premium positioning by emphasising Italian artisanal heritage alongside continuous international brand expansion (Facchinato, 2016). In contrast, Acronym became widely associated with the notion of technological luxury due to its highly exclusive distribution strategy and technologically driven design philosophy. Its market appeal largely depended upon limited-edition product releases, celebrity endorsement, and sustained association with specialised subcultural communities.

This transformation became particularly evident throughout the 2020s, as global luxury consumption increasingly shifted towards products combining functional utility with expressive fashion value. The brands consolidated their high-end market positions by expanding direct-to-consumer distribution channels, strengthening narrative-driven branding strategies, and reinforcing market visibility through enhanced storytelling and experiential engagement. As a result, urban functional menswear evolved beyond its practical origins and increasingly functioned as a symbolic representation of identity, cultural affiliation, and social distinction. Despite the growing influence of this phenomenon, scholarly investigation into the strategic mechanisms underpinning brand construction, marketing transformation, and consumer-cultural response within this sector remains comparatively limited. Accordingly, a comprehensive examination of the strategic evolution and cultural significance of these brands possesses substantial theoretical and practical relevance.

Research Question and Significance

This study concentrates on the way urban functional menswear brands convert technological advancement, utilitarian performance, and pragmatically oriented aesthetic principles into symbols associated with premium and luxury fashion positioning through strategic marketing practices. Using C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym as the principal case studies, the research investigates how these labels have progressively moved beyond a purely functional identity and established broader symbolic and culturally prestigious brand images throughout their development. By

extensively incorporating experimental textile technologies, innovative performance materials such as Gore-Tex, and design philosophies centred upon functional aesthetics, these brands have gradually cultivated highly distinctive market identities and visual recognition.

The developmental trajectory of these companies illustrates a broader transformation within contemporary fashion culture. Early initiatives by Massimo Osti introduced military-inspired design codes and artisanal experimentation into C.P. Company and Stone Island, thereby redefining the relationship between functionality and aesthetic expression within menswear. Subsequently, Acronym advanced this evolution further by integrating futuristic technological concepts with urban visual culture and architectural garment construction. Collectively, these developments demonstrate the gradual progression of functional menswear from a category centred primarily upon practical performance towards one increasingly characterised by technologically driven aesthetics and elevated symbolic brand value. Nevertheless, scholarly examination remains limited regarding the specific mechanisms through which these companies utilise marketing instruments—including scarcity-based product releases, celebrity endorsement, and technologically oriented narrative branding—to transform functional design language into indicators of luxury and exclusivity.

The theoretical contribution of this study resides in addressing a significant gap within brand-construction scholarship relating to functional apparel. Existing fashion literature has devoted comparatively limited attention to the intersection between utilitarian performance and aesthetic aspiration within functional menswear markets. Through the application of symbolic consumption theory and luxury-brand frameworks, this research analyses the marketing strategies adopted by the selected brands to demonstrate how functional aesthetics has evolved into a central medium for generating brand prestige, cultural legitimacy, and consumer aspiration. In doing so, the study provides an alternative conceptual perspective for interpreting brand discourse within contemporary fashion environments.

From a practical standpoint, the research also possesses substantial industry relevance. Within an increasingly hybridised market environment shaped by the convergence of technology and fashion, understanding how brands strategically convert functional performance into symbolic and cultural value offers important developmental guidance for emerging functional fashion companies. Simultaneously, the findings provide established apparel brands with strategic reference points for repositioning themselves within premium and luxury-oriented market segments. Consequently, the study holds value both as a theoretical contribution to fashion and branding scholarship and as a practical framework for strategic market transformation.

Research Objectives and Methodology

This study examines the strategic development trajectories of urban functional menswear brands by selecting C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym as representative case examples. The research investigates how these brands progressively converted technological innovation and design aesthetics originating from practical utility into the central value foundations of premium and luxury fashion positioning, thereby achieving substantial market advancement within an increasingly competitive fashion environment.

Emphasis is placed upon the strategic marketing approaches implemented from the 1980s through to the 2020s, including the utilisation of technology-oriented storytelling, scarcity-based product releases, celebrity partnerships, and international brand expansion. Through these mechanisms, the selected brands successfully moved beyond function-centred product identities and established symbolic brand images associated with status, individuality, and cultural distinction. By conducting a systematic examination of the developmental trajectories of these three companies, the study identifies broader strategic patterns while simultaneously highlighting distinctions in their respective value-construction processes. In doing so, the research provides an alternative analytical perspective and practical insight into the premium transformation of urban functional fashion brands.

The study adopts a multi-dimensional methodological approach in order to ensure analytical depth and conceptual coherence. Initially, a comparative case-study framework is employed to examine the historical development and principal marketing practices of the three selected brands. This analysis encompasses dimensions such as original market positioning, technological material innovation, consumer expansion strategies, and changing levels of market recognition. Subsequently, the theoretical perspectives of symbolic consumption and luxury-brand marketing are incorporated to interpret the underlying logic of value transformation embedded within these strategic practices, with particular attention directed towards the process through which technological innovation and aesthetic design acquire symbolic cultural significance. Finally, the research integrates a systematic review of existing academic literature relating to the luxury evolution of functional fashion brands in order to establish a theoretically grounded and contextually relevant analytical framework capable of contributing to current scholarly discourse.

Through this research structure, the study seeks to establish an effective connection between theoretical interpretation and contemporary brand practice. In addition to advancing academic understanding of luxury transformation within functional fashion markets, the findings are intended to provide practical guidance and strategic reference points for functional apparel brands pursuing future market upgrading and premium repositioning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on Functional Apparel and Brand Development

Functional apparel has developed as a comparatively autonomous strand within fashion scholarship, largely due to its performance-oriented design philosophy and its distinct trajectory in both categorisation and brand evolution, which has consistently attracted academic attention (Bolton, 2002). In *Super Modern Wardrobe*, functional clothing is conceptualised as apparel specifically engineered for contemporary urban environments, emphasising practicality, adaptability, and environmental responsiveness. The text traces its origins to mid-twentieth-century sporting and military contexts, demonstrating how advancements in materials science and technological design responded to explicit functional demands, thereby establishing an early foundation for the emergence and subsequent evolution of this clothing typology (Facchinato, 2016).

This perspective is further elaborated in Massimo Osti's *Creativity*, which provides a detailed account of how Massimo Osti utilised C.P. Company and Stone Island during the 1980s as experimental platforms for integrating military-inspired design language and innovative textile experimentation into fashion production. This process gradually redefined functional apparel as a hybrid form combining technological experimentation with aesthetic articulation (Groves, 2018). Similarly, the Westminster Menswear Archive adopts a broader historical lens, tracing menswear development from workwear and uniform systems to contemporary designer-led brand identities, emphasising the central role of material innovation and craftsmanship detail in this transformation.

The intersection of technological advancement and cultural legitimacy has proven to be a decisive force in shaping functional apparel brands. As Bolton (2002) notes, during the late 1990s certain labels—including C.P. Company and Acronym—adopted hypermodern design principles aimed at producing high-performance garments responsive to the rhythms and demands of urban life. This shift not only introduced innovation at the product level but also subtly reconfigured brand expression, cultural positioning, and perceived market value. Facchinato (2016) further emphasises Osti's sensitivity to historical context combined with material experimentation, which generated a distinctive visual language and cultural identity that significantly contributed to the consolidation of functional aesthetics as a recognised design paradigm. Groves (2018), meanwhile, highlights the importance of subcultural communities in mediating brand communication, noting that consumption groups linked to football culture, for example, have recontextualised functional garments as symbolic cultural artefacts, thereby enhancing brand visibility and embeddedness within specific social milieus. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate a gradual convergence between technological design innovation and cultural discourse in shaping the developmental logic of functional fashion brands.

More recently, scholarly attention has increasingly focused on the mechanisms through which functional apparel transitions into the high-end market segment. In examining the strategic evolution of C.P. Company and Maharishi, [Bolton \(2002\)](#) identifies technological refinement and controlled scarcity as key mechanisms enabling access to luxury-oriented positioning. [Facchinato \(2016\)](#) similarly underscores the importance of craftsmanship narratives and limited production models in constructing a high-value consumption framework associated with Osti's design legacy. Building on [Baudrillard \(1998\)](#), these studies collectively illustrate how clothing functions as a medium for expressing identity and social distinction, thereby transforming utilitarian products into culturally meaningful and symbolically charged commodities. Together, they provide a multi-dimensional understanding of the developmental trajectories of functional apparel brands while reinforcing theoretical interpretations with empirical grounding.

Marketing Strategies and Brand Positioning Theory

The design trajectory of functional clothing has undergone a significant transformation over time, shifting from an originally performance-centred category into a segment increasingly positioned within high-end and luxury fashion markets. This transition is not merely material or aesthetic in nature but is closely linked to developments in marketing strategy and branding theory, particularly through the lenses of symbolic consumption, luxury positioning, and experiential marketing.

In his theory of symbolic consumption, [Baudrillard \(1998\)](#) emphasises that consumption extends beyond the satisfaction of basic needs, functioning instead as a system of meaning production. Individuals do not simply consume goods; they communicate identity, lifestyle orientation, and social belonging through what they consume. Within this framework, clothing operates as a semiotic system in which visual cues—such as brand insignia, design construction, and affiliation with specific subcultures—encode symbolic value. For functional apparel brands, the adoption of technical terminology, performance-driven aesthetics, and engagement with specialised communities has become a strategic mechanism for symbolic transformation. This enables such brands to move beyond a purely utilitarian identity and acquire broader cultural and commercial meaning within fashion discourse.

Building upon this perspective, [Veblen's \(2005\)](#) theory of conspicuous consumption further explains how prestige and perceived luxury are constructed within markets. This theory is grounded in three interrelated mechanisms: artificially constructed scarcity, premium pricing strategies, and the embedding of emotional and narrative value into the brand. Limited-edition production increases consumer desire by intensifying perceived exclusivity, while high pricing reinforces status differentiation. At the same time, storytelling grounded in craftsmanship, heritage, or technological innovation strengthens emotional resonance and legitimises premium positioning. In the context of functional apparel, these mechanisms are increasingly visible through the selective use

of advanced materials, collaborations with fashion designers, and controlled product releases. Although these garments retain elements of functionality, they are simultaneously redefined as symbolic luxury objects. This demonstrates how brands achieve upward mobility in market positioning through strategic narrative reconstruction rather than functional modification alone.

Finally, experiential brand theory offers a more consumer-centred perspective on value creation. According to [Schmitt \(1999\)](#), in an experience-driven economy, consumers are not only purchasing products but also seeking immersive and emotionally engaging brand interactions. This includes experiential retail environments, brand-led events, and curated spaces that allow direct engagement with product narratives and aesthetics. Functional clothing brands have increasingly adopted these strategies by constructing carefully designed environments and experiential contexts that elevate utilitarian apparel into lifestyle-oriented luxury goods, thereby reinforcing exclusivity and emotional attachment.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analysing the repositioning of functional apparel brands. Symbolic consumption theory explains the representational and identity-building function of clothing; luxury marketing theory clarifies the strategic mechanisms through which high-status positioning is achieved; and experiential marketing theory highlights the role of consumer experience in value construction. Together, they establish a robust conceptual foundation for the subsequent analysis of case studies in this research.

Research Gap

Although existing literature provides valuable insight into the branding and marketing foundations of functional apparel, it offers limited analytical attention to the specific transformation mechanisms through which urban functional menswear brands shift from performance-oriented positioning towards luxury and high-end branding. This absence of a structured explanation of the transition process constitutes a clear theoretical gap, which forms the central justification for the present study.

In *Supermodern Wardrobe* ([Bolton, 2002](#)), supermodernist design is framed as the integration of technological functionality and stylistic expression within urban environments. However, the work does not explicitly examine the strategic marketing processes through which brands translate technological innovation and aesthetic design into elevated market value within the luxury segment. Similarly, [Facchinato \(2016\)](#), in *Ideas from Massimo Osti*, documents the pioneering contributions of Massimo Osti in advancing technical aesthetics through C.P. Company and Stone Island, yet it does not systematically analyse how these brands operationalise marketing strategies to achieve upward repositioning in high-end fashion markets.

Theoretical limitations are also evident across the core frameworks. [Baudrillard \(1998\)](#) theory of symbolic consumption provides a foundational explanation of how fashion operates as a medium of identity construction and status representation; however, it does not directly address the marketing infrastructures and strategic channels specific to functional menswear. [Veblen's \(2005\)](#) theory of conspicuous consumption identifies scarcity, pricing strategies, and narrative construction as key mechanisms of luxury positioning, yet its conceptualisation is primarily grounded in traditional luxury goods and does not fully account for how urban functional apparel leverages technological innovation and design experimentation to construct luxury value. Likewise, [Schmitt \(1999\)](#) experiential marketing theory highlights the role of consumer experience in value creation, but does not specifically explore how functional apparel brands strategically integrate technological performance with aesthetic communication to bridge the gap between utility and luxury positioning.

Taken together, these limitations indicate that existing scholarship lacks a systematic investigation into the strategic marketing processes through which urban functional menswear brands transition from performance-based identities to luxury-oriented market positioning. The present study addresses this gap by analysing the marketing practices of C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym. Through this case-study approach combined with relevant theoretical frameworks, the research aims to reconceptualise the positioning logic of functional apparel brands and provide a more structured understanding of their evolution within contemporary fashion systems.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This paper adopts a case-study research design and focuses on three major brands within the field of urban functional menswear, namely C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym. The primary objective is to analyse how these brands have strategically repositioned themselves from performance-oriented design frameworks towards luxury fashion positioning, thereby redefining their market identity and competitive status. The case-study methodology is particularly appropriate in this context, as it enables an in-depth and context-sensitive examination of complex branding processes and facilitates richer theoretical interpretation ([Yin, 2018](#)).

The selection of these brands is justified by their significant influence on the evolution of functional apparel and their distinct approaches to luxury positioning. C.P. Company and Stone Island were founded by Massimo Osti in 1971 and 1982 respectively, initially characterised by the integration of military-inspired aesthetics with advanced textile experimentation. Over time, both brands progressively transitioned from technical performance wear into recognised entities within the high-end fashion sector. In contrast, Acronym, founded by Errolson Hugh in 1994 with its first product release in

2002, is widely recognised for its futurist, technology-driven design philosophy and highly experimental approach to functional apparel. The differences in their origins, design philosophies, and marketing strategies provide a strong comparative foundation for analysis. These contrasts not only enhance the analytical depth of the study but also enable a more comprehensive examination of the developmental trajectories of functional fashion brands, particularly in relation to their progression towards luxury market positioning (Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection

In this study, a diverse range of data sources has been employed to ensure a comprehensive and robust analytical foundation. The examination of brand histories is primarily constructed through official brand websites, corporate reports, and reputable media publications. Official materials provided by C.P. Company and Stone Island offer detailed insight into the evolution of their technological innovation and design philosophies over time. Similarly, official communications from Acronym provide a structured chronology of product development and key milestones. In addition, external news sources contribute supplementary perspectives by documenting independent commentary and highlighting significant developments within each brand's trajectory.

The analysis of marketing practices focuses on how strategic initiatives are operationalised in practice, with particular attention given to collaborations, retail environments, and promotional strategies as mechanisms of luxury brand construction (Eisenhardt, 1989). Collaborative projects, often involving limited-edition releases with other brands or designers, are examined as instruments of scarcity and cultural relevance. Retail analysis explores how flagship stores employ spatial design and experiential architecture to reinforce brand identity and aesthetic positioning. Promotional activities are assessed through the lens of visual storytelling and aesthetic communication, evaluating their effectiveness in strengthening brand perception and symbolic value. These insights are derived from official brand communications, specialised fashion industry publications, and expert critical reviews, collectively providing a credible and multi-layered evidential base for analysis.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of this study is structured around a three-dimensional model comprising brand development, market positioning, and marketing strategy. Within the brand development dimension, the analysis examines the historical evolution of each selected brand, the origins of their technological innovation and aesthetic orientation, and the ways in which target consumer groups and positioning strategies have shifted as these brands transition from performance-oriented markets towards high-end and luxury segments.

This research adopts symbolic consumption theory (Baudrillard, 1998), luxury marketing theory (Veblen, 2005), and experiential marketing theory (Schmitt, 1999) as its core conceptual foundation in order to support the underlying research proposition: that urban functional menswear brands are capable of transforming a function-based identity into luxury value through strategic marketing practices. Symbolic consumption theory is used to interpret how brands construct identity and status meaning through culturally embedded symbols within clothing. Luxury marketing theory explains the mechanisms of upscale transformation, particularly through scarcity creation, premium pricing strategies, and narrative-driven brand construction. Experiential marketing theory, in turn, highlights how interactive and sensory brand engagements contribute to the perception and reinforcement of luxury value through consumer–brand experiences.

The empirical material collected for this study will be interpreted through these integrated theoretical lenses to identify the underlying dynamics of brand transformation processes. This triangulated approach provides a structured interpretive framework for examining how functional menswear brands evolve into culturally and commercially established luxury entities, thereby strengthening the theoretical grounding of the overall research design.

CASE STUDIES

To understand the developmental trajectories of each brand, it is necessary to examine key milestones within their historical evolution. The timeline below outlines significant events that have shaped the identity of C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym, including early technological innovations, major collaborative partnerships, and phases of international expansion. This chronological overview provides a structured visual framework for interpreting how these brands progressively shifted their strategic focus from functionality-centred design towards high-end fashion positioning and broader cultural relevance.

C.P. Company

C.P. Company is widely recognised as a leading example of urban functional menswear, with a clear evolutionary trajectory from utility-centred apparel production towards luxury-oriented fashion positioning. Founded by Massimo Osti in 1971, the brand progressively integrated technical experimentation with a refined design sensibility, which ultimately shaped its distinctive identity within contemporary fashion. In its early development during the 1980s, the brand introduced military-inspired design language, most notably through garments influenced by Dutch motorcycle police jackets. These early designs successfully combined urban practicality with aesthetic innovation, establishing a foundational balance between functionality and visual distinctiveness (Facchinato, 2016).

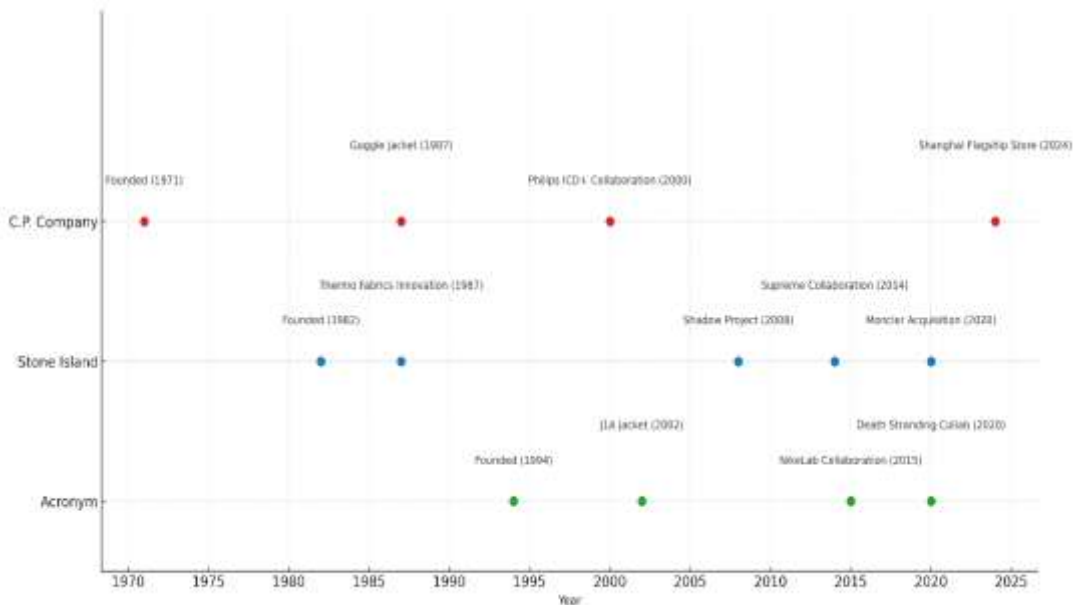


Figure 1: The Timeframes of the Main Milestones in the History of C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym Since their Creation to the Present-Day Events

During the late 1980s and 1990s, Osti drew inspiration from Japanese civil defence uniforms and the Swiss M70 field jacket to develop one of the brand's most iconic innovations, the Goggle Jacket. By integrating protective eyewear elements directly into garment construction, the design extended beyond conventional functional apparel and became a defining symbol of the brand's experimental ethos (Bolton, 2002). This period marked a crucial phase in which technical experimentation evolved into a signature aesthetic language, reinforcing brand identity through design innovation rather than purely utilitarian purpose. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, C.P. Company expanded its scope beyond traditional functional design into interdisciplinary innovation. The Philips-Levi-ICD+ jacket, developed in collaboration with Philips and Levi's, represented one of the earliest integrations of wearable technology in fashion, incorporating music playback functionality into garment design. This innovation demonstrated the brand's willingness to operate at the intersection of fashion, technology, and lifestyle systems (Bolton, 2002; Facchinato, 2016). Similarly, the Urban Protection Series (1999) introduced modular and adaptable structural concepts that further reinforced the brand's transition towards advanced functional experimentation and laid groundwork for later premium repositioning.

In the 2000s and beyond, the brand increasingly emphasised modularity, transformability, and material innovation as central design principles. The Spring/Summer 2000 "Transformables" collection exemplified this direction by focusing on adaptable garment structures designed for changing urban conditions (Bolton, 2002). Following 2010, continued investment in fabric technologies and

performance materials, combined with collaborations across sportswear, streetwear, and avant-garde design sectors (including partnerships such as Patta), contributed to strengthening the brand's aesthetic credibility while simultaneously elevating its positioning within the premium fashion hierarchy. These developments collectively facilitated its gradual transition from a niche technical label into a globally recognised fashion entity with luxury associations (Groves, 2018).

From a market positioning perspective, C.P. Company initially targeted a highly specialised consumer base, including Italian intellectual and artistic circles attracted by its experimental sportswear philosophy. Over time, its audience expanded to include influential subcultural groups such as the Paninari in Italy and the Casuals movement in the United Kingdom, both of whom adopted the brand's distinctive combination of functionality and stylistic identity (Facchinato, 2016). This gradual diffusion into broader youth and subcultural markets enabled the brand to evolve into a mid-to-high-end fashion presence, supported by sustained innovation in materials and increasing engagement with luxury-oriented collaborations. As a result, its symbolic value expanded significantly, repositioning it from a niche technical label to a widely recognised name within contemporary luxury fashion discourse (Brandstar, 2025).

Marketing strategies have played a central role in this repositioning process. The brand has consistently developed curated visual and editorial narratives that emphasise its heritage and technical sophistication, often disseminated through printed publications and cultural storytelling formats (Facchinato, 2016). These materials have also contributed to broader cultural visibility, including touring exhibitions and archival presentations that reinforce brand legitimacy. In parallel, increased visibility across resale markets and digital platforms has further amplified its cultural capital, generating user-driven promotion and reinforcing desirability (Parkhouse, 2025).

The brand's 50th anniversary programme in 2021 marked a particularly significant strategic milestone, featuring a series of monthly limited-edition collaborations with brands such as Patta, Barbour, Adidas Spezial, and Emporio Armani. These collaborations extended across product categories including outerwear and accessories, reinforcing the brand's cross-market appeal while maintaining its core identity rooted in technical innovation (Bernstein, 2024). In addition, the publication of a commemorative volume documenting five decades of design evolution further strengthened its cultural positioning by consolidating its historical narrative into a curated brand archive (Bernstein, 2024).

More recent collaborations have continued to reinforce this dual strategy of heritage preservation and contemporary relevance. Partnerships with designers such as Aitor Throup, Kiko Kostadinov, and Junya Watanabe have reinterpreted iconic garments such as the Goggle Jacket and fishtail parka within modern design contexts, further strengthening the brand's association with technical precision and conceptual fashion

innovation. Alongside these collaborations, international expansion has remained a strategic priority, exemplified by the opening of its first flagship store in Shanghai in 2024, signalling a clear ambition to consolidate its presence within global luxury markets (China, 2024).

Collectively, these initiatives—including collaborations, cultural programming, digital engagement, and retail expansion—demonstrate how C.P. Company has systematically redefined its functional heritage as a valuable cultural and commercial asset. Rather than abandoning its utilitarian origins, the brand has strategically reinterpreted them within a contemporary luxury framework, thereby embedding technical functionality within a broader system of symbolic and cultural fashion value (Hildreth, 2025).

Stone Island

Stone Island originated as a spin-off from C.P. Company, founded by Massimo Osti in 1982, with the explicit intention of creating a more autonomous experimental platform dedicated to material research and design innovation. Osti's conceptual inspiration was partly drawn from the literary works of Joseph Conrad, from which the brand developed a narrative identity centred on exploration, maritime symbolism, and conceptual notions of journey and endurance (Facchinato, 2016). During its formative phase in the 1980s, the brand prioritised functional integrity and structural durability as core design principles. Early innovations such as Tela Stella and Raso Gommato demonstrated a strong emphasis on material robustness, performance reliability, and utilitarian construction. However, as the brand evolved, it increasingly challenged the conventional separation between functional utility and aesthetic expression. The introduction of thermo-sensitive textiles, reflective surface treatments, and nylon-metal fabrications expanded the expressive potential of technical garments, effectively redefining performance wear as a hybrid form of functional and visual design innovation (Groves, 2018).

From the 2000s onwards, Stone Island further intensified its experimental approach through advanced fabric systems such as David-TC and through the development of the Shadow Project in collaboration with Errolson Hugh, founder of Acronym. This partnership marked a significant extension of the brand's technological and conceptual design language into more progressive and avant-garde territory (Groves, 2018). In the 2010s, sustainability-oriented experimentation became increasingly prominent, including the exploration of water-soluble materials and limited-edition production cycles designed to reinforce both innovation and exclusivity. By 2020, the acquisition of the brand by Moncler signalled its formal integration into the global luxury fashion system. The subsequent 40th anniversary collection in 2022 further reinforced the synthesis of historical legacy and contemporary innovation, consolidating its dual identity as both technical and luxury-oriented (Groves, 2018).

In terms of market positioning, Stone Island expanded from a niche Italian subcultural label into a globally recognised symbol within high-end streetwear and luxury fashion markets. In its early phase, it gained strong cultural traction among the Paninari youth subculture in Italy during the 1980s, followed by significant adoption within the British Casuals football supporter movement, where its compass logo became a widely recognised cultural marker (Groves, 2018). During the 1990s, its presence expanded across Europe and Japan, particularly among consumers interested in technically advanced apparel. By the 2010s, its visibility increased substantially within North American markets, where it was frequently adopted by hip-hop artists such as Drake and Kendrick Lamar, further embedding the brand within global popular culture (Groves, 2018). Following its acquisition by Moncler, the brand's positioning shifted decisively towards the luxury segment while retaining its subcultural credibility and authenticity.

The transformation of Stone Island from a performance-focused label into a luxury-oriented fashion entity has been driven by a combination of technological storytelling, strategic collaborations, celebrity endorsement, and international expansion. Its foundational identity as an “anti-fashion” brand remains evident in its continued emphasis on material innovation, exemplified by early developments such as Tela Stella, which function as both technical and symbolic references to its heritage (Groves, 2018). Collaboration strategies have played a central role in reinforcing its cultural relevance, including limited-edition partnerships with brands such as Supreme, Nike, Dior, and New Balance, each of which contributed to the brand's visibility across different market segments (Guardian, 2024).

Celebrity associations have further strengthened its symbolic capital, with collaborations and cultural endorsements involving figures such as Drake and Liam Gallagher, reinforcing its connection to music-driven subcultures and youth identity formation (Guardian, 2024). At the same time, corporate investment activity—including Temasek's minority stake acquisition in 2017 and Moncler's majority acquisition in 2020—has accelerated its integration into the global luxury market infrastructure (Guardian, 2024). Collectively, these developments demonstrate how Stone Island has systematically transformed its functional and technological foundation into a consolidated luxury identity through the strategic convergence of material innovation, cultural narrative construction, and global brand expansion.

Acronym

Acronym was founded in 1994 in Munich by Errolson Hugh and Michaela Sachenbacher, initially operating as a design consultancy focused on integrating technological innovation with everyday apparel. The name “Acronym” reflects the brand's conceptual orientation towards distilling complex technical and functional ideas into streamlined, efficient design solutions (Sabukaru, 2022). Its early development in

the late 1990s marked a pivotal entry into applied fashion technology, notably through a snowboard jacket produced in collaboration with Burton Snowboards, which incorporated integrated Walkman control functionality.

In 2002, Acronym transitioned into an independent label with the release of the Kit-01 system, including foundational pieces such as the J1A jacket and the 3A modular backpack. These products established the brand's core design language, defined by the use of high-performance materials such as GORE-TEX and the introduction of the Tec Sys modular construction system, which collectively emphasised ergonomics, adaptability, and technical precision (Fashion, 2011). Subsequent design developments expanded this system through innovations such as Escape Zip and specialised storage solutions, reinforcing a design philosophy centred on functional optimisation and modularity.

Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, the brand continued to refine its technical identity through increasingly complex material and structural experimentation. The Shadow Project collaboration with Stone Island introduced advanced textile applications such as David-TC and GORE-TEX Pro, further integrating avant-garde aesthetics with high-performance functionality. In the 2010s, products such as the J47A-GT jacket and P10-CH trousers incorporated systems including Schoeller Dryskin and Interops architecture, strengthening durability and modular adaptability within the brand's evolving product ecosystem (Fashion, 2011). These developments positioned the brand at the intersection of technical apparel innovation and conceptual design practice.

From 2016 onwards, Acronym expanded its influence through collaborations with NikeLab, particularly within the ACG line, where technologies such as GORE-TEX Infinium and magnetic fastening systems were used to merge performance functionality with contemporary streetwear aesthetics (Reddit., 2017). In the 2020s, the J115-GT jacket further demonstrated this evolution through the integration of removable liners and lightweight GORE-TEX Active materials, reflecting a continued emphasis on technical refinement alongside emerging sustainability considerations. Collectively, these stages illustrate how Acronym has maintained a consistent equilibrium between experimental engineering, minimalist aesthetics, and high-performance apparel design, gradually consolidating its position within the niche segment of high-end functional fashion (Sabukaru, 2022).

From a market positioning perspective, Acronym has deliberately remained within a highly specialised luxury niche, closely aligned with Techwear subculture and technologically oriented consumer groups. Its early identity strongly resonated with audiences seeking highly functional, innovative garments characterised by modular systems such as Tec Sys and advanced GORE-TEX applications (Sabukaru, 2022). Rather than pursuing mass-market expansion, the brand has maintained exclusivity through limited production runs, high pricing strategies, and tightly controlled

distribution channels, with certain garments exceeding 1,000 euros, thereby reinforcing scarcity-driven symbolic value (Reddit, 2017).

During the 2010s, flagship releases such as the J47A-GT jacket and collaborative NikeLab projects further solidified its position as a leading reference point within Techwear culture, combining futuristic design language with high-performance material systems. The brand's reliance on digital communities, discussion forums, and word-of-mouth dissemination has played a critical role in strengthening its cultural positioning within niche consumer ecosystems. Additional collaborations, including the Call of Duty: Black Ops III J1A-GT project (2015–2016), extended its visibility into gaming and digital culture, while the 2020 partnership with ASUS ROG produced the 3A-MP1 backpack using Dyneema composite materials, further aligning the brand with advanced technological ecosystems (Nowre, 2023; Sabukaru, 2022).

These collaborative and limited-edition strategies, combined with high-end pricing and small-batch production, have reinforced the brand's exclusivity while significantly enhancing its symbolic capital. Through this sustained integration of technological innovation, scarcity mechanisms, and subcultural engagement, Acronym has successfully transformed its design ethos into a distinctive form of niche luxury positioning within the global functional apparel market.

DISCUSSION

Cross-Case Comparison

High technological innovation and functional performance constitute the central driving forces behind C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym, contributing to their strong resonance across multiple subcultural groups. Each brand has also strategically utilised collaboration as a key mechanism to facilitate its transition towards luxury market positioning. However, their approaches differ in orientation and emphasis. C.P. Company tends to integrate technological innovation with cultural heritage, reinforcing its value system through collaborations that reference established design traditions and legacy aesthetics. In contrast, Stone Island leverages advanced technical textiles to construct a form of “heritage-oriented innovation,” elevating its brand status through cross-sector partnerships that strengthen its luxury appeal. Meanwhile, Acronym emphasises a more radical, technology-driven and subculture-specific positioning, relying on highly selective collaborations and experimental design systems. Despite these variations in strategic orientation, all three brands demonstrate a shared trajectory: the systematic translation of functional apparel design into a framework aligned with high-end and luxury fashion positioning (Stake, 2006).

Commonalities

Despite the distinct identities of C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym, their development has been fundamentally grounded in advances in technology and functional design, with performance-oriented innovation serving as the primary catalyst for their gradual transition towards high-end and luxury market positioning. All three brands consistently prioritise experimentation in material technologies and garment construction. For instance, C.P. Company is widely recognised for its pioneering work in garment dyeing techniques, the development of distinctive technical fabrics, and signature innovations such as the Goggle Jacket, which merges functional protection with a highly recognisable visual identity.

Stone Island places strong emphasis on material research and textile innovation, combining functional performance with high visual distinctiveness to create garments that are both technically advanced and aesthetically expressive. In contrast, Acronym is defined by highly engineered construction systems, including modular configurations, layered structures, and precision tailoring that prioritise adaptability and ergonomic efficiency (Fashion, 2011). In terms of cultural positioning, each brand has developed a distinct subcultural alignment. C.P. Company has historically been associated with Italian intellectual circles, avant-garde artistic communities, the Paninari youth culture, and the British Casuals movement. Stone Island has long maintained strong links with UK football supporter subcultures and later gained prominence within the UK grime music scene.

Meanwhile, Acronym has cultivated a global niche following within the Techwear community, characterised by consumers with a strong orientation towards technological innovation and functional minimalism (Groves, 2018). Across these differing cultural contexts, the three brands have strategically employed collaboration as a mechanism to integrate technological advancement with subcultural capital. This dual dynamic has enabled them to progressively transition into the luxury segment, enhancing both functional value and symbolic meaning within their brand identities.

To systematically illustrate the strategic development of C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym, Table 1 presents a comparative overview of their transformation from function-oriented labels into luxury-oriented fashion brands. The table synthesises key dimensions including technological foundations, cultural positioning, marketing strategies, and resulting brand positioning outcomes. Positioned between the discussion of shared characteristics and brand-specific differences, this comparative framework serves as a reference point for the subsequent analysis and provides a clear visual representation of how each brand adopts a distinct pathway towards market elevation.

Table 1: Comparative Trajectories of Men-Focused Fashion Brands going Luxury

Brand	Founding Year	Functional Focus	Subcultural Influence	Luxury Strategy	Marketing Tactics	Positioning Outcome
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C.P. Company	1971	Military-Inspired Design, Garment Dyeing, Modular Structures	Paninari, British Casuals, Italian Intellectuals	Archive Curation, Italian Craftsmanship, Global Retail Expansion	Brand Archive, Anniversary Exhibitions, Designer Collaborations	Heritage-Luxury Blend, Urban Trendsetter
Stone Island	1982	Durable Materials like Tela Stella, Thermosensitive Fabrics	Paninaro, British Casuals, Hip-Hop Culture	High-End Collaborations (e.g., Dior, Supreme), Acquisition by Moncler	Fabric Innovation, Storytelling, Music/Celebrity Tie-Ins	Global Luxury-Tech Hybrid Brand
Acronym	1994	Techwear, GORE-TEX®, Modular Systems	Techwear Community, Gamers, Futurists	Limited Editions, Cross-Sector Tech Collabs (e.g., ASUS, NikeLab)	No Traditional Ads, Storytelling Via Gaming, Niche Digital Presence	Niche Luxury Icon in Functional Techwear

Differences

C.P. Company has consistently integrated technological innovation into its product development while simultaneously drawing upon Italian design heritage as a foundational aesthetic and cultural reference. The brand has continuously expanded the boundaries of urban functional menswear, particularly through advanced garment-dyeing techniques and other material innovations. Its cross-industry collaborations, including the wearable technology jacket developed with Philips and Levi's, illustrate its adaptive capacity and forward-looking orientation towards contemporary lifestyle integration (Groves, 2018).

Stone Island initially emerged as a sub-label but progressively evolved into a globally recognised luxury brand through the strategic use of avant-garde textile innovation and international expansion supported by the investment and corporate structure of Moncler. Its elevated market positioning was further reinforced through milestone releases such as the 40th-anniversary collection, which simultaneously emphasised innovation continuity and consolidated its status within the luxury fashion hierarchy (Brandstar, 2025). In contrast, Acronym originated as a design consultancy before transitioning into an independent label, maintaining a consistent emphasis on technical experimentation, modular design, and minimalist aesthetics. The brand continues to operate within a highly controlled niche market, sustaining its identity through limited production cycles and a strong reliance on craftsmanship and technical precision (Fashion, 2011).

In terms of market positioning, C.P. Company has gradually expanded beyond niche subcultural markets to reach urban middle-to-high-end consumers, positioning itself at the intersection of Italian heritage and contemporary urban lifestyle, and appealing

particularly to intellectual and creative audiences (Finance., 2024). Stone Island has undergone a more pronounced transformation from subcultural affiliation to global luxury recognition, leveraging strong performance in North American and Asian markets to establish a dual identity that appeals to both streetwear and high-fashion consumers (Guardian, 2024). Conversely, Acronym remains firmly anchored within the Techwear subculture, targeting a highly specialised consumer base characterised by technological enthusiasm and a preference for exclusivity, where limited visibility and controlled distribution are integral to its brand value proposition (Reddit., 2017).

From a marketing perspective, C.P. Company has reinforced its traditional brand values through structured brand storytelling, cultural narrative construction, and sustained cross-border collaborations that enhance its visibility within contemporary streetwear contexts (Facchinato, 2016). Stone Island has relied on high-profile collaborations, celebrity associations, and strong financial backing to accelerate its global luxury positioning (Guardian, 2024). Meanwhile, Acronym employs a deliberately restrained marketing strategy, prioritising scarcity, selective collaborations, and community-driven visibility within Techwear ecosystems (Reddit., 2017). Collectively, these strategies demonstrate that although each brand follows a distinct pathway, all three systematically translate functional performance and technological innovation into elevated luxury or near-luxury brand positioning through differentiated marketing architectures.

This section therefore highlights both the convergences and divergences in how the three brands transition from functionality to luxury. The key similarities and differences in branding logic, innovation orientation, and marketing strategy are synthesised in the diagram below for comparative analysis. In this Venn diagram, the author illustrates the major similarities and differences in the approaches of C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym with respect to branding strategies, technological or technical orientation, and market positioning.

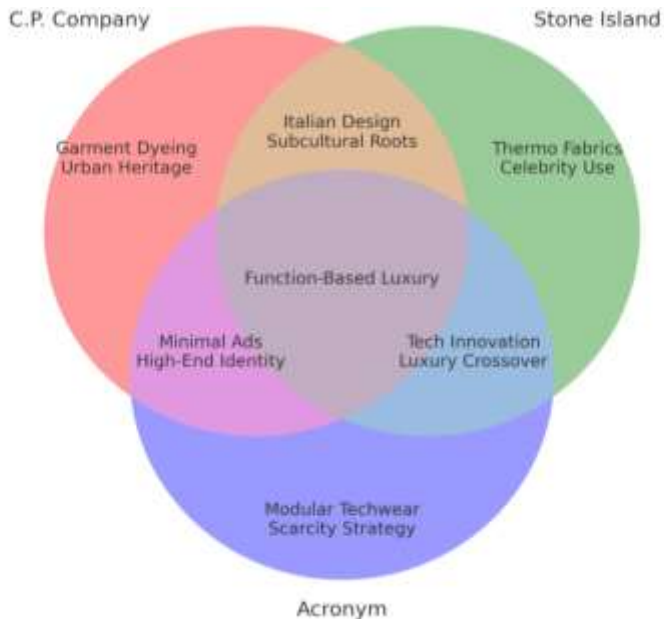


Figure 2: Strategic Overlaps and Differences Between C.P. Company, Stone Island as well as Acronym

Significance

C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym have been analysed in terms of their evolutionary trajectories, market positioning strategies, and strategic orientations, demonstrating how technological innovation and cultural narrative construction can be leveraged to generate brand value and facilitate progression into the high-end market (Malhotra, 2010).

Although all three brands place strong emphasis on advanced materials and utilitarian design principles, each has pursued a distinct strategic pathway to enhance its market value. C.P. Company is rooted in Italian design tradition and urban cultural sensibility, Stone Island is more closely aligned with the mechanisms of luxury fashion and global premium branding, while Acronym operates within a niche, identity-driven framework centred on material experimentation and technological innovation. Collectively, these differentiated approaches illustrate how technology-oriented fashion brands adapt to evolving market demands through divergent strategic priorities.

It is evident that functional fashion is no longer confined to utilitarian performance alone; rather, it can be reinterpreted as a vehicle for cultural meaning and luxury expression. The transformation of these brands highlights the critical importance of balancing technological innovation, cultural significance, and strategic brand positioning. This comparative analysis demonstrates the multiple pathways through which functional apparel can transition into the luxury segment, offering a range of

models for emerging brands seeking to evolve beyond performance-based design towards a form of contemporary, culturally embedded luxury.

Theoretical Validation

The theories of symbolic consumption, luxury marketing, and experiential branding provide a comprehensive explanatory framework for understanding how C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym have transitioned from utilitarian origins into high-end fashion positioning. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives clarify the mechanisms through which functional apparel is reinterpreted and revalued within contemporary fashion systems. Taken together, these theories offer an integrated analytical lens for understanding how value is constructed, communicated, and enhanced within urban functional menswear, particularly in relation to its progression from performance-based design to culturally embedded luxury positioning within the fashion industry.

Symbolic Consumption Theory and Brand Identity Transformation

The theory of symbolic consumption proposes that, within the evolution of C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym, symbolic associations play a central role in the shift from purely function-oriented apparel towards culturally embedded and luxury-oriented goods (Baudrillard, 1998). Originally, these brands were positioned around high-performance garments designed to meet the demands of urban lifestyles in dynamic and often demanding environments. However, over time, changing consumer expectations and evolving market conditions led to a reconfiguration of value, whereby symbolic meanings, cultural references, and identity markers became increasingly embedded within product design. As a result, functional garments gradually evolved into expressive artefacts that communicate identity and social meaning.

A clear illustration of this transformation can be observed in the Goggle Jacket developed by C.P. Company in 1988. Inspired by Mille Miglia endurance racing, the design originally served a functional purpose by incorporating protective eyewear elements and a sleeve lens allowing visibility of a wristwatch. Although its original utilitarian function has diminished in relevance in the contemporary digital context, the jacket has retained strong symbolic significance as a visual identifier of the brand's heritage and design philosophy. In this sense, its practical utility has been reconstituted as a cultural and aesthetic marker through which consumers recognise and associate with the brand identity.

This shift demonstrates how symbolic meaning contributes directly to value creation within fashion markets. Symbolically charged brand elements strengthen emotional attachment and reinforce consumer loyalty by embedding identity and cultural resonance into product design. Through the deliberate construction of such symbolic value systems, C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym have not only expanded their

market reach but also differentiated themselves within the fashion industry, successfully transitioning from functional apparel producers to entities associated with luxury-oriented cultural positioning.

Luxury Marketing Theory and the Elevation of Functional Apparel

The theory of luxury marketing emphasises that product value is increasingly derived from symbolic meaning rather than functional utility, where goods operate as markers of identity, exclusivity, and social status (Veblen, 2005). Within this framework, the trajectories of C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym can be understood as a transition from performance-oriented apparel production towards fashion entities operating within the logic of luxury branding.

Stone Island provides a clear illustration of this transformation. Initially, its development was grounded in technical performance, focusing on durable and weather-resistant fabrics designed for functional use. Over time, however, the brand progressively shifted towards the production of visually distinctive materials characterised by heightened aesthetic and technological complexity. Innovations such as thermo-sensitive textiles, highly reflective surfaces, and metal-infused nylon constructions demonstrate a deliberate convergence between technical functionality and visual expressiveness. This evolution reflects how material experimentation can be mobilised to construct symbolic meaning and reposition functional garments as contemporary luxury objects.

Across all three brands, early positioning within niche performance markets gradually expanded into broader fashion-oriented segments through increased emphasis on design refinement, material quality, and visual differentiation. This transition aligns closely with luxury marketing principles, which prioritise exclusivity, differentiation, and perceived uniqueness as core value drivers (Veblen, 2005). In this context, limited-edition releases and high-profile collaborations function as strategic mechanisms for generating scarcity and enhancing desirability. Restricted distribution further reinforces this effect by strengthening perceptions of exclusivity, a defining characteristic of luxury consumption. Through these mechanisms, C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym have successfully integrated functional performance with symbolic capital. Their evolution demonstrates how performance-driven design can be reconstituted as a form of high-end cultural expression, ultimately redefining the boundaries of functional fashion within the contemporary luxury landscape.

Luxury Perception and Experience Marketing Improvement

The experiential marketing theory emphasises the enhancement of brand value through the stimulation of consumers' sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses, thereby strengthening brand attachment and long-term loyalty (Schmitt, 1999). Within this framework, C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym demonstrate how

experiential strategies contribute to their transition from functional apparel producers to luxury-oriented fashion entities.

Acronym has adopted a distinctive form of digital and narrative-driven experiential marketing through its collaboration with the video game *Death Stranding*. In this project, co-founder Errolson Hugh not only contributed functional design elements inspired by iconic garments such as the J1A-GT jacket for the protagonist Sam Porter Bridges but also appeared as an in-game character. This integration of real-world design logic into an interactive virtual environment enabled consumers to engage directly with the brand's design philosophy through immersive digital storytelling. By embedding its aesthetic and functional identity within a game world, Acronym extended its experiential reach, strengthening emotional engagement, brand recognition, and cultural resonance within technologically oriented consumer communities.

More broadly, these brands have employed experiential marketing through limited releases, exclusive collaborations, and immersive brand environments that allow consumers to participate in the construction of brand narratives. Such strategies transform consumers from passive recipients into active contributors within the brand ecosystem, generating emotional value that extends beyond functional product utility. In doing so, experiential initiatives reinforce not only the technological credibility of the garments but also their cultural meaning and emotional significance.

Overall, experiential marketing enhances the emotional connection between consumers and brands, particularly within high-end and luxury segments where symbolic and affective value plays a central role in purchasing behaviour (Schmitt, 1999). When consumers associate brands with distinctive experiences, they are more likely to develop stronger emotional attachment and long-term loyalty. In the context of functional apparel brands seeking upward market mobility, experiential marketing provides a critical mechanism for integrating technological performance with lifestyle-oriented consumption. It enables C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym to reconfigure functionality as an experiential and emotional asset, thereby reshaping consumer perception and increasing perceived brand value within the luxury fashion landscape.

Theoretical Integration

C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym demonstrate a clear evolutionary trajectory from purely functional apparel towards products embedded with cultural, symbolic, and luxury value, achieved through the integrated application of symbolic consumption theory, luxury marketing theory, and experiential branding. Symbolic consumption theory posits that consumers do not make purchasing decisions solely on the basis of practical utility; rather, consumption is also driven by the desire to express identity, social affiliation, and cultural positioning through symbolic meanings embedded within

products. In this context, these brands embed cultural narratives, design codes, and visual markers within their garments, transforming functional clothing into instruments of self-expression and social differentiation (Baudrillard, 1998).

Luxury marketing theory, by contrast, focuses on value enhancement through the construction of brand identity and symbolic exclusivity. Through strategies centred on product differentiation, controlled scarcity, and craftsmanship-led narratives, these brands elevate functional apparel into aspirational objects. This process merges the technical credibility of performance-oriented clothing with the desirability associated with prestige fashion, thereby strengthening both market positioning and consumer perception (Veblen, 2005). Experiential marketing theory further contributes by emphasising the creation of immersive brand experiences that engage consumers at sensory, emotional, and cognitive levels.

By designing distinctive brand interactions and environments, these companies not only meet functional expectations but also construct elevated perceptions of lifestyle and luxury. Such experiential engagement enhances emotional attachment and strengthens long-term consumer loyalty (Schmitt, 1999). Collectively, these three theoretical perspectives explain how functional menswear brands such as C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym have successfully transitioned from performance-driven design systems into culturally resonant and luxury-positioned fashion entities.

Brand Value Elevation Mechanisms

C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym brands have effectively achieved the uplift of their value from functional apparel to luxury positioning within their brand development processes. The following are the major strategies on which this transformation is based:

The Strategy of Scarcity: Limited production runs and exclusive product positioning increase consumer demand by enhancing perceived rarity and uniqueness. This controlled availability strengthens desirability and reinforces exclusivity as a core value driver.

Emotional Branding Strategy: These brands are closely associated with specific cultures, subcultures, and historical narratives, generating emotional resonance among consumers. This connection strengthens brand loyalty and deepens consumer identification with the brand identity.

Strategic Alliances and Co-Branding: Collaborative product development and co-marketing initiatives with other high-end brands or globally recognised companies enable these brands to leverage external brand equity. This strategy expands visibility, enhances credibility, and supports upward market repositioning.

Brand Power Accumulation: Over time, these brands have built strong market presence and consumer trust through continuous innovation, consistent product quality, and sustained engagement with their audiences. This ongoing process of value creation reinforces a cycle in which brand credibility strengthens consumer trust, and consumer trust further consolidates premium brand positioning. As a result, their status as luxury or near-luxury brands becomes deeply embedded within both the market structure and consumer perception.

In order to extract the lessons from the case studies, the diagram below outlines the key stages through which functional fashion brands transition into luxury positioning. It illustrates the movement from technical performance orientation towards symbolic and emotional value creation, culminating in a redefined position within the luxury market.

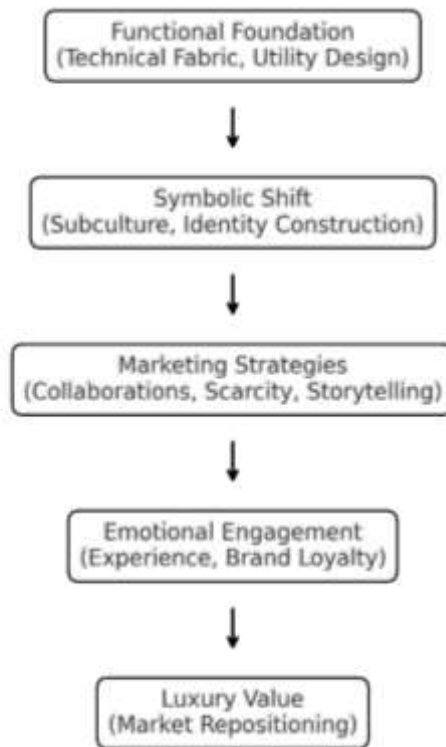


Figure 3: Brand Value Building Process

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Research Conclusion

C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym demonstrate that urban functional menswear integrates technological innovation with advanced branding strategies, enabling a transition from performance-based utilitarian apparel towards luxury-oriented fashion positioning. Although the three brands follow distinct developmental pathways, they converge on a shared set of strategic principles governing brand transformation. The primary strategies include the deliberate use of scarcity, emotionally driven brand construction, strategic alliances, and long-term brand equity development. These brands intentionally limit production volumes, emphasise product uniqueness, and introduce exclusive releases, which collectively enhance consumer demand while reinforcing perceptions of rarity and exclusivity.

In addition, the brands actively cultivate associations with specific cultural contexts, subcultural communities, and historical narratives. These associations strengthen emotional engagement, deepen consumer identification, and reinforce long-term brand loyalty. At the same time, collaborations with high-end fashion houses and influential industry partners serve as a critical mechanism for expanding brand visibility and reinforcing premium positioning. Through co-branded releases and coordinated marketing initiatives, these partnerships enhance market recognition and elevate perceived brand value.

The sustained success of these brands is not the result of isolated actions but rather the outcome of continuous investment in technological innovation, consistent product quality, and sustained engagement with consumer communities. Over time, this has generated a reinforcing cycle in which consumer trust strengthens brand reputation, and accumulated reputation further consolidates premium positioning within the high-end market. Through the strategic implementation of these mechanisms, C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym have successfully transitioned from functional apparel producers to luxury-positioned fashion brands, offering a replicable framework for the high-end transformation of urban functional menswear brands in other markets.

Theoretical Contributions

This paper is devoted to the transformation of functional clothing brands towards luxury positioning and examines this process through selected case studies. Based on this premise, the application scope of symbolic consumption theory is further extended to explain how functional brands gradually transform products originally centred on practical performance into symbolic representations through technological advancement and cultural discourse. This process also provides new insight and strengthens the explanatory capacity of the theory in research on brand transformation.

The second theoretical perspective examined in this article concerns the strategies adopted by functional apparel brands in their transition towards the high-end market, particularly in relation to product differentiation and scarcity creation. This not only

contributes to a deeper understanding of luxury marketing mechanisms but also demonstrates the applicability of this framework in communicating value within non-traditional luxury segments. Moreover, this article highlights the role of experiential marketing in the process of brand value creation and development. Through the construction of immersive experiences and emotional engagement, functional clothing brands can enhance consumer interaction and strengthen retention. This finding confirms the relevance of experiential marketing theory in phases of brand transformation and underscores its value in industries centred on functional performance.

Overall, this study integrates the perspectives of symbolic consumption, luxury marketing, and experiential branding to construct an analytical framework explaining how functional apparel brands transition into luxury fashion. It provides a new theoretical perspective for brand management by focusing on the dynamic interaction between technological innovation, cultural narrative, and experiential strategies, while also offering practical implications for future marketing practice.

Practical Implications

Using the development trajectories of C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym, this article examines a set of key strategies that enable functional clothing brands to successfully enter the luxury fashion market. These trajectories demonstrate that brand elevation is typically driven by long-term investment in technological advancement, active collaborative practices, and the deliberate construction of scarcity and immersive brand environments. The findings therefore offer practical implications for functional brands seeking to reposition themselves within high-end market segments.

Through continuous technological development, these brands redefine product characteristics that were originally centred on performance, transforming them into markers of technical refinement and specialised craftsmanship. This shift enhances perceived value by repositioning functional garments as culturally and technically sophisticated objects in the minds of consumers. In addition, collaboration with designers, artists, and other brands serves as a strategic mechanism for reinforcing brand distinction. Such partnerships enable the co-creation of limited and highly distinctive products, strengthening exclusivity while simultaneously expanding cultural relevance and market visibility. Collectively, these integrated strategies contribute to the gradual construction of a high-end brand image in consumer perception, thereby supporting more secure and elevated market positioning. The combined application of technological innovation, scarcity creation, and strategic collaboration demonstrates how functional apparel brands can transition from performance-oriented positioning towards luxury-oriented identity construction, with significant implications for future brand development practices.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

In this paper, the analysis of the transformations observed in C.P. Company, Stone Island, and Acronym demonstrates how the transition of urban functional menswear brands towards luxury value positioning is achieved. However, the study has several limitations, primarily related to its reliance on a limited set of case studies, which may not fully represent the broader diversity of the functional apparel industry. In addition, the research does not incorporate quantitative data to complement the qualitative approach, such as sales performance metrics or consumer survey data. This limitation may reduce both the generalisability and the empirical robustness of the findings.

Future research could expand the scope by including additional functional apparel brands, thereby improving the breadth and applicability of the conclusions. It may also incorporate consumer behaviour analysis, the impact of co-branding strategies, and perceptions of luxury positioning through surveys or interviews. Such extensions would help address the current lack of quantitative validation and provide a more comprehensive understanding of how functional clothing brands evolve within contemporary fashion systems, strengthening both theoretical and practical contributions.

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