

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

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SUSTAINABILITY

DIGITAL INNOVATION

REFOCUS IMAGE

FRENCH
CONNECTION



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After launching in 1972, French Connection (FC) has become a loved brand by many worldwide. In the UK specifically, the brand reached its peak in popularity with its infamous FCUK campaign which caused controversy and wide recognition. However, financial turbulence and various ownerships has caused a loss of consumer interest and confusion in brand image.

Additionally, findings from the group report identified that FC is beginning to dwindle, with no specific objectives and no focused target audience. Major changes in the macro environment in recent years, such as the continued impact of Covid-19 on the industry, have forced retailers to become

more innovative with their business practices, put more emphasis on CSR, and find new ways to engage consumers and unfortunately, FC has failed to adapt.

Based on this research and the brand issues identified, the proposed strategy for FC is to use the latest technologies and ethical practices to become more relevant to a re-defined market of 18-24 year old consumers. With a uniformed brand identity and improved positioning against competitors, FC can regain performance in the market.

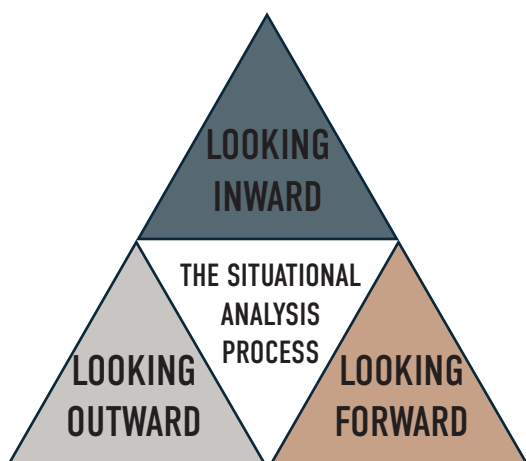


Figure 1: Situational Analysis Process model used to form analysis of FC (Adapted from NSW Government, 2023).



BRAND ISSUES:



BRAND AMNESIA



POOR DIGITAL PRESENCE



FINANCIAL ISSUES



LACK OF ETHICS & SUSTAINABILITY



PRODUCT RANGE ISSUES



POOR MARKETING STRATEGY

Figure 2: Brand issues identified. (Source: Author's Own, 2023).



The individual brand concepts developed to help rectify some of the brand issues identified include:

STRATEGY TIMELINE



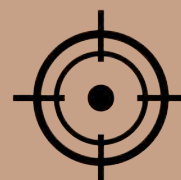
- ☐ IMC Campaign
- ☐ Mobile App Development
- ☐ Pop-Up Concept
- ☐ PR Campaign
- ☐ A/W Range Development
- ☐ Rental Programme Development
- ☐ FC Event



SUSTAINABILITY



DIGITAL INNOVATION

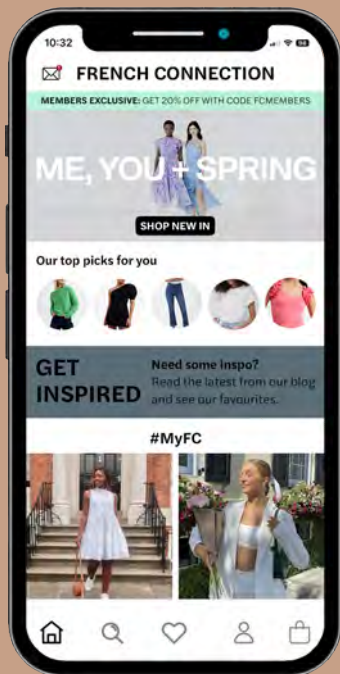


REFOCUS IMAGE

MOBILE APPLICATION

OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

Three strategic directions were proposed in the Strategic Brand Development Report (2023) for FC to strengthen their position in the market and rectify their brand issues: refocusing and redefining brand image, a stronger focus on sustainability, and digital innovation. Developing a mobile application will enable FC to rectify their poor digital presence by using modern technologies to keep them at the forefront of digital innovation. It will also allow the brand to engage their redefined younger target market, creating a community of loyal consumers, which will support the overall growth of the brand.



OBJECTIVES

1. Develop an engaging mobile application through the integration of technology to encourage user engagement and brand loyalty amongst FC's young, tech-savvy target market.
2. Increase sales by creating a user-friendly application that offers convenience.
3. Create a seamless omni-channel experience through the incorporation of digital technologies that can aid both the online and in-store shopping experience.
4. Offer a personalised brand-consumer experience by utilising consumer data to build loyalty and gain rich consumer insight.

“71 PERCENT of global **CONSUMERS** want companies to deliver **PERSONALISED** communications” (McKinsey & Co, 2023).

M-COMMERCE retail **SALES** in the **UK** are forecast to **GROW** to **£105BN** by **2024** (Statista, 2020).

“Over **70%** of **CONSUMERS** said that **AR** helps them to make **QUICKER DECISIONS** to **BUY** and will **PURCHASE MORE** products to try at home” (The Interline, 2023).

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

Developing an app that offers more opportunity for individualised experiences is important in engaging today’s consumer and building brand loyalty. Research into best industry practice found common themes of QR codes, wishlists, and AR features within fashion apps.

VISUALISATION



JUSTIFICATION

The mobile application encompasses the key theme of digital innovation, while also re-focusing brand image by catering to a younger target market. Given that GenZ consumers spend more time on their phones than any other generation (Statista, 2020), a mobile application provides a suitable channel of communication and method of commerce.

The pandemic forced brands to find new ways of engaging consumers, and the growth in technology presents a huge opportunity for FC to create a more tailored experience using consumer data and digital technologies such as AR. Creating memorable experiences will enable boosted sales and brand loyalty to achieve the objectives outlined.

PR CAMPAIGN

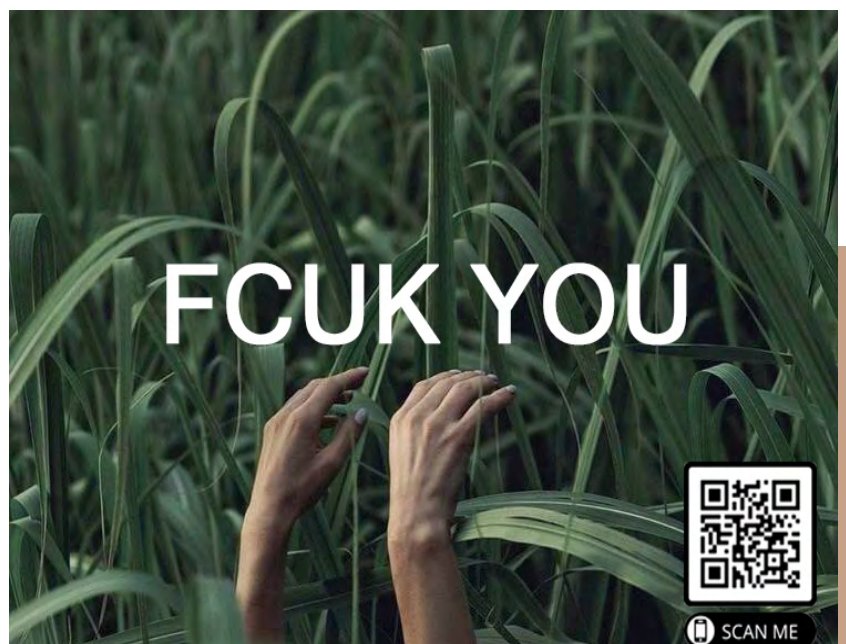
OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

To re-image a brand identity cohesively and target new consumer demographics with innovative digital technology, it is suggested that French Connection create a new PR Campaign with a creative slogan and attractive content. Especially, by focusing on sustainability through the campaign, aiming to improve brand awareness and target consumer engagement.

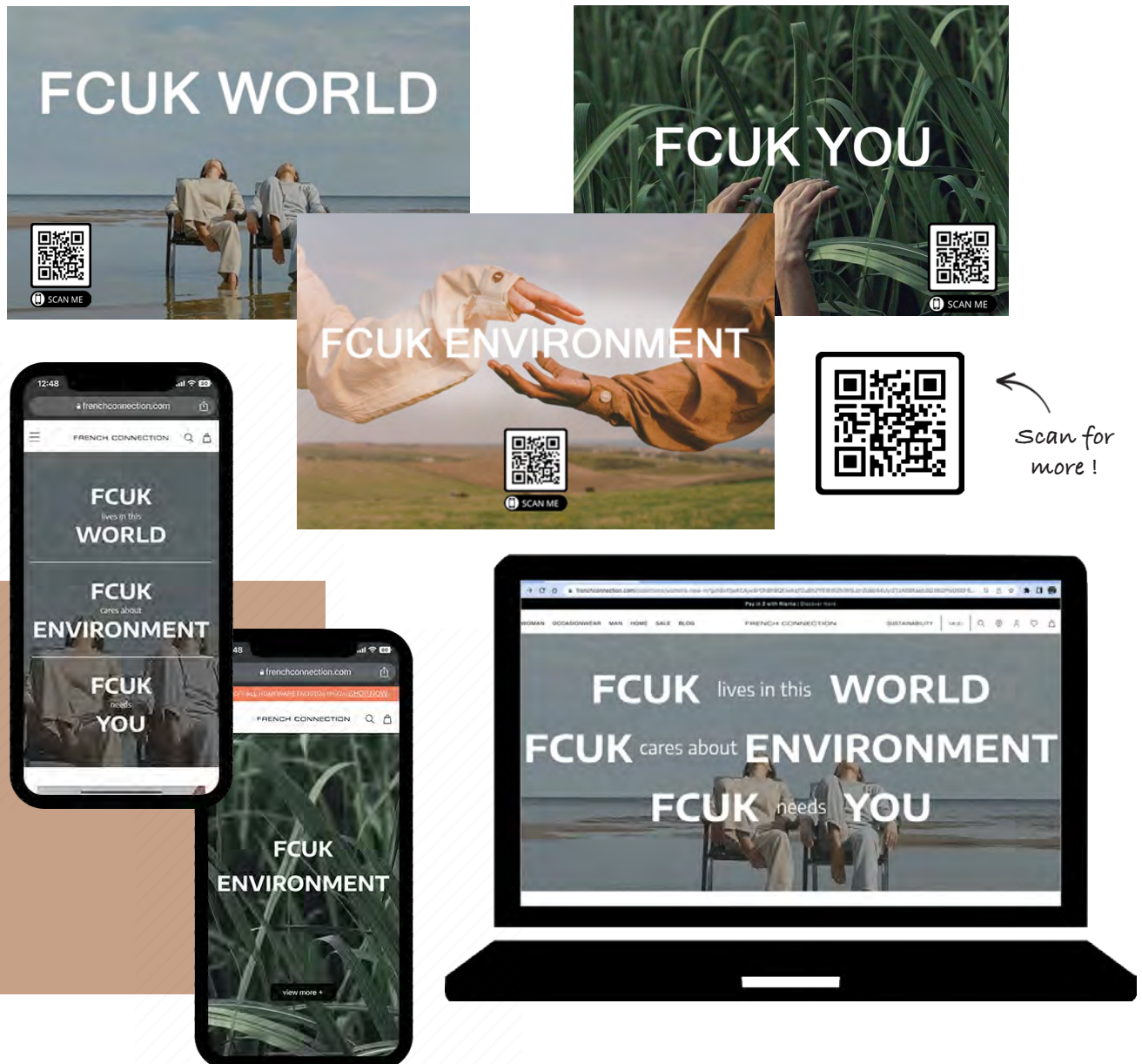
In order to support the sustainability PR Campaign, posters that can be posted through social media, venues, websites, in-store and especially magazines, and also the new website (desktop and mobile version) that consumers can access through the posters' QR codes are conceptualised. The concept explores the French Connection's strategic marketing communication, especially the PR campaign strategy by using impactful slogans and messages with a new website for the PR campaign.

OBJECTIVES

1. Create brand awareness for the sustainability
2. Attract target range group consumers (Millennial - Generation Z)
3. Drive people to access French Connection's official website



VISUALISATION



JUSTIFICATION

The innovative PR campaign contains the key themes of digitalisation, re-focus image and sustainability. The main key of the campaign to improve its brand awareness, and position compared to the competitors, and engage the redefined target market (Generation Y to Z) is:

- Lead target consumers' engagement with the captivating content of the campaign
- Deliver impactful and consistent messages to consumers

Although the concept is not totally new or innovative in the industry, it was aligned with French Connection's key strategies (sustainability, digital innovation, and refocus image). This ensures an efficient and successful concept.

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION PLAN

SUMMARY

The purpose of introducing an IMC plan is to enable French Connection to visualise how change within the brand can improve market share and consumer relations. Although there are three advised areas for French Connection to focus on mentioned in the Strategic Brand Report, this concept will be more targeted towards refocusing brand image but there will still be strong regards to both digital innovation and sustainability (Strategic Brand Report, 2023, p.7). Specifically, this concept is advising the brand to introduce an IMC to include

BRAND ISSUES:



POOR MARKETING
STRATEGY



POOR DIGITAL
PRESENCE



BRAND AMNESIA

the use of:

- Social Media marketing.
- PR events.
- Influencers.

OBJECTIVES

1. Align brand aesthetics
2. Increase consumer engagement
3. Educate consumers on the ease of sustainable renting



SOCIAL MEDIA VISUALISATIONS



Instagram: Pre-launch



TikTok Advert



Instagram: Post-launch

JUSTIFICATION

The approach to social media will alter French Connection's aesthetic showcased online to match the aesthetic of the products to make a more unified image. For this concept, the theme of the new aesthetic being introduced is minimalistic, yet classy, using a neutral colour palette to avoid 'overstimulation' (WGSN, 2023b).

As the target audience is becoming more refined to 18-24 year olds, instead of the previous '18-35', the use of specific social media platforms, promotions, and influencers will be slightly different (French Connection, 2023b). Additionally, since almost 75% of these millennials are considering shifting their purchasing decisions 'to reduce their impact on the environment', French Connection would be highlighting how the new scheme would now appeal to them (NielsenIQ, 2018 cited in Barelet et al, 2023).

RANGE PLAN

AW23/24

OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

FRENCH CONNECTION|MAYA
LOMAS|10725691

French Connection have introduced a new product line which is designed to attract a previously untapped market of 18-24-year-olds. The range was inspired by trend forecasting, and the objective was to capture the attention of this demographic by offering versatile and comforting designs that fit their adaptable and mobile lifestyles, while also reflecting a desire for homely comforts, outdoor pursuits, and timeless fashion.

The French Connection range incorporates the macro trend forecast of "care culture" by using earthy and natural tones such as "sepia," "carambola," "sage leaf," and "glacial blue" in its colour palette. This creates a youthful autumn/winter collection that appeals to the target audience.

Additionally, sustainability was a major focus of the range, and French Connection made conscious efforts to reduce overproduction by using deadstock fabrics for several styles. Furthermore, they prioritized designing products with more sustainable fabric compositions than previous collections.

Overall, the French Connection range offers a fresh approach to their usual design aesthetic, catering to a younger demographic while also demonstrating a commitment to sustainability. By incorporating trend forecasting and using a new colour palette and sustainable fabrics, French Connection has successfully targeted a new market while simultaneously addressing growing concerns about environmental impact.

OBJECTIVES

- **SUSTAINABILITY:**

French Connection's sustainability efforts in the collection were a top priority. The brand consciously chose to incorporate more environmentally friendly materials and fabric compositions into the garments, in an effort to reduce its carbon footprint. The range utilized deadstock fabrics, which refer to leftover materials from previous collections or production runs, to reduce overconsumption and minimize waste. This approach supports the circular economy in fashion by keeping materials in use for longer.

- **NEW CONSUMER APPEAL:**

The brand's aim with this new collection was to appeal to a younger demographic that they had not previously targeted. To achieve this, the brand had to step out of its comfort zone and embrace trend-led designs. The French Connection range offers versatile and comforting designs that appeal to the adaptable and mobile lifestyle of the 18-24 age group, while also incorporating homely comforts, outdoor pursuits, and timeless fashion. The brand used trend forecasting to ensure the collection would resonate with its intended audience.

- **INCREASE SALES REVENUE:**

The overarching goal of the collection was to drive sales and revenue growth for the brand. French Connection has experienced a decline in sales since 2017, and this new range was seen as a way to reverse that trend. The range's emphasis on sustainability, trend forecasting, and a younger demographic was a strategic move to reposition the brand and attract new customers. By targeting a previously untapped market, French Connection aimed to expand its customer base, drive sales, and ultimately enable future growth for the brand.

Sustainable fabrics:

Conventional fabrics used in fashion and home goods are often unsustainable due to environmentally damaging sourcing, chemically-intensive processing, and poor end-of-life prospects.

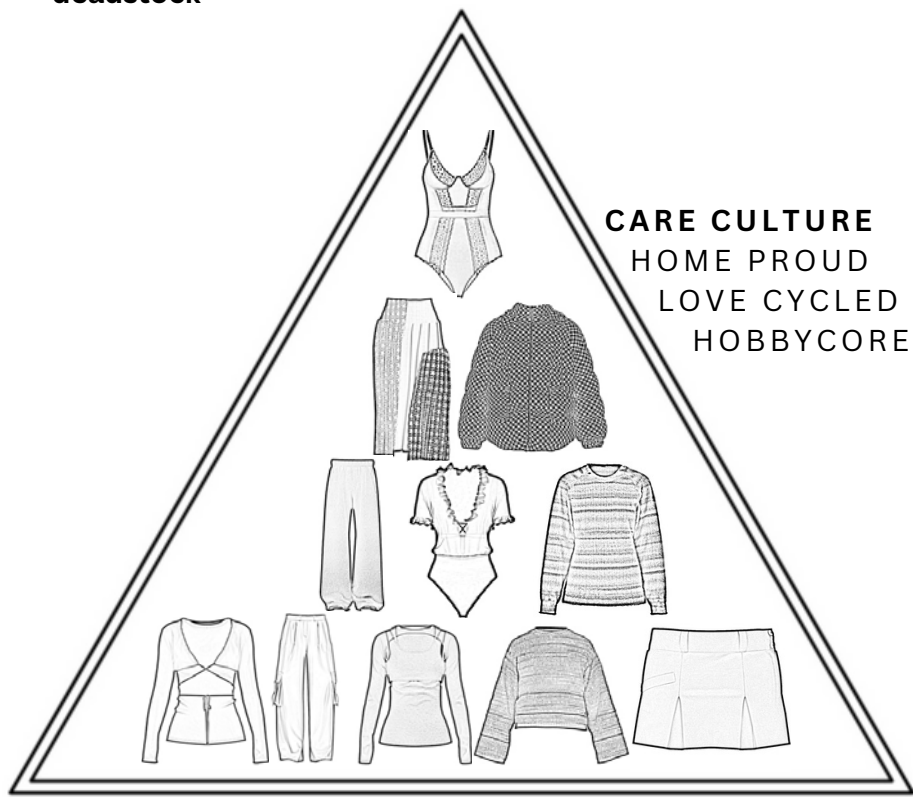
Sustainable fabrics prioritize organic and chemical-free farming, recycled materials, circular manufacturing, and sustainable disposal methods to minimize environmental impact.

Sustainable fabrics used in the range:

- organic cotton
- recycled polyester
- cashmere
- bamboo linen
- deadstock

Deadstock materials:

Using deadstock materials in a fashion range has positive impacts on sustainability by reducing waste and overproduction in the fashion industry. It also promotes the use of existing resources instead of producing new materials, reducing the environmental impact of fashion production. Additionally, it can result in unique and limited-edition pieces, which may increase their desirability and exclusivity among consumers.



JUSTIFICATION

This collection, inspired by the "care culture" trend, is highly versatile in nature, with each style designed to offer multiple ways of wearing it. This multi-functional aspect of the clothing increases the overall value of the product, making it more appealing to consumers who are looking for versatile and practical options.

The ability to wear a single item in multiple ways also addresses the issue of overconsumption, which is prevalent amongst the target consumer demographic. By offering versatile and multi-functional pieces, the collection encourages consumers to invest in quality items that can be worn in a variety of ways, reducing the need to constantly purchase new items.

This collection is highly representative of the "care culture" trend, which is driven by the rise of flexible and migratory lifestyles, and the appeal of homely comforts, outdoor pursuits, and classic styles. The designs are comforting and practical, with a focus on providing solutions for the needs of the modern consumer.

FCUK EVENT

OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

In order to address the recommended strategic directions laid out by the Strategic Development Report (2023) of refocusing brand image and digital innovation, a French Connection Event is proposed. A physical event will allow FC to engage with their consumers and display a new, refocused brand image. This will both enable access to their redefined target market of 18-24, and enhance the community felt amongst existing consumers. Furthermore, the integration of digital technologies will aid in generating eWOM to further expand both brand awareness and consumer base.



BRAND AMNESIA



**POOR DIGITAL
PRESENCE**



**POOR MARKETING
STRATEGY**

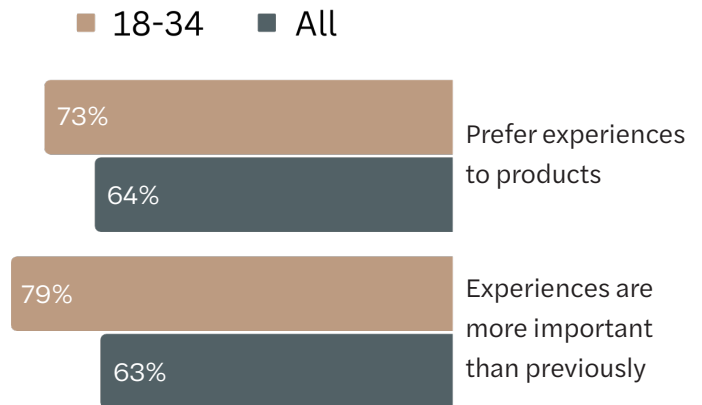


OBJECTIVES

1. Development of a physical event that encourages brand engagement both in brick and mortar stores and online via social media
2. Increase brand awareness and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) amongst Gen Z consumers
3. Integration of digital technologies such as Augmented Reality to enhance event

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

The development of a physical event will capitalise on the desire for experiences over physical goods that is displayed by Gen Z consumers (Savvy, 2019). This will build brand loyalty and consumer engagement both offline and online, fostering the development of a brand community.



VISUALISATION



JUSTIFICATION

An event held by French Connection allows the brand to demonstrate its refocused brand identity whilst showcasing its commitment to digital innovation. Digital natives and younger consumers are showing an increasing desire for an experiential brand experience, not just

a product-based one (McKinsey & Co, 2023), and this provides FC with a unique opportunity to access this consumer base. Furthermore, press and eWOM generated by the event will contribute to a reduction in the key issues outlined of brand amnesia, poor digital presence, and poor marketing strategy.

ReCONNECTION

Rental Programme For French Connection

OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

French Connection's new strategic direction should address its many pain points, namely the lack of digital innovation and sustainable practice shown in its marketing communications. As part of its efforts to capture a new trend-focused consumer group aged 18-24, development in these areas is crucial. By 2025, French Connection's rental programme should be wholly owned (rather than have its communications and operations outsourced to third-party Hire Street), named *ReCONNECTION*. It will be functioned exclusively via the bespoke app, with competitive pricing and a comprehensive yet concise user guide. The utilisation of augmented reality (AR) to enable users to try garments on before renting will be implemented. The launch of its rental programme will be supported by a range of promotional activities, including a pop-up store, events, and a capsule collection using sustainable materials and deadstock fabrics.

ReCONNECTION



OBJECTIVES

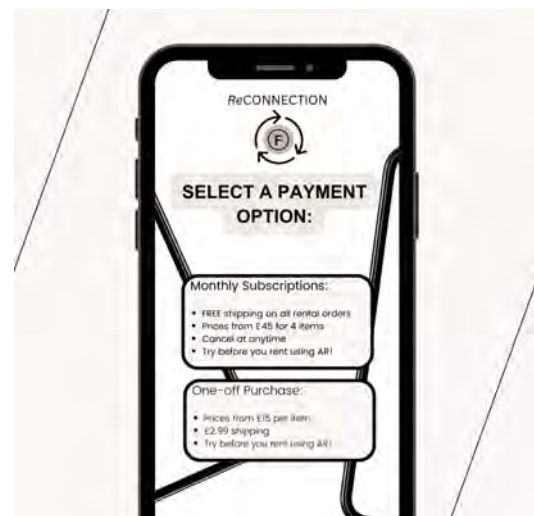
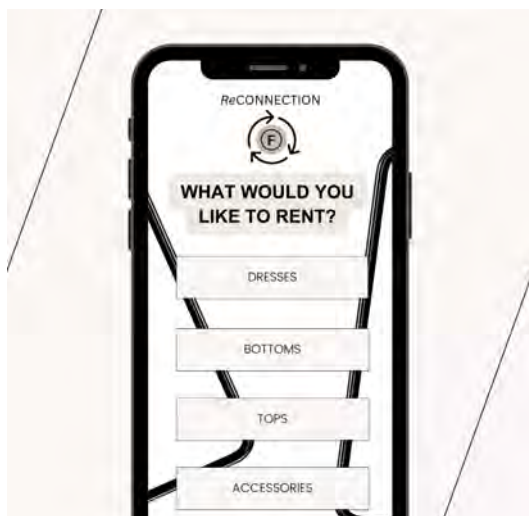
1. ReCONNECTION rental should contributing 20% of yearly revenue.
2. 15% of FC's new customer acquisition should come via *ReCONNECTION*.
3. 18-24 year old segment should grow by 30% between 2023-2025.
4. All garments offered on *ReCONNECTION* should be made from sustainable materials or deadstock fabrics.

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

Within a year of the rental programme's launch, the rental programme is expected to contribute between 20-30% of the brand's annual revenue. According to Chen (2021), a subscription-based service where customers are charged monthly recurring payments in exchange for a set amount of clothing exchanges is essential to maximising profitability. A report by Bain and Company

(2020) suggests that when an item is rented at least 20 times, it can generate profit margins with upwards of 40 percent. However, with the aim of attracting a younger consumer with less disposable income, ReCONNECTION should also offer an option for one-off rentals for those have previously been put off by the steep prices and commitment of rental subscriptions (Lieber and Chen 2022; Maguire, 2020).

VISUALISATION



JUSTIFICATION

Where businesses who rely solely on rental struggle with the logistical costs, those who are supplemented by traditional selling are thriving. French Connection has the benefit of being an established brand with a customer who is ready and willing to

buy their products. With FC's newly targeted 18–24-year-old (Gen Z) consumer, who are more responsive to rental clothing largely due to lack of space in their homes, and also spend the most time on their phones using apps (Statista, 2020), ReCONNECTION should prove successful (Carroll, 2023).

POP-UP STORE

OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

Targeting the newly-established gen-Z consumer, this pop-up concept is focused around providing a positive consumer experience and to form strong consumer-brand relationships. Through aspects such as 'shoppertainment' (Fashion Snoops, 2023), this pop-up concept aims to not only offer repair services, but also involve the consumer in circular economy practices by 'designing' their own bag using deadstock fabric and a lay-plan software. The use of technology, omnichannel retailing and sustainable practices will target FC's brand issues surrounding sustainability and digital presence and, in turn, help achieve the objectives.

BRAND ISSUES



LACK OF ETHICS & SUSTAINABILITY



POOR DIGITAL PRESENCE

FURTHER KEY POINTS



CIRCULAR PACKAGING



REPAIR SERVICE



LAUNCH EVENT

OBJECTIVES

1. Spread brand awareness for newly-established consumer
2. Successfully trial circular-economy concept
3. Increase consumer engagement through in-store technology & omnichannel retail

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

Prominent themes of current and future retail trends include service shops and hyperphysical experiences (Fashion Snoops, 2023), both promoting immersive consumer-experiences that can be utilised throughout the pop-up whilst testing and validating FC's new refocus strategy (Robertson, 2018).

Competitors such as Jigsaw are taking advantage of consumers' increasing understanding of circular economy through repair schemes (Nazir, 2023), meaning their consumer-brand relationships are deepening, resulting in stronger loyalty.

VISUAL MERCHANDISING CONCEPT



DIGITAL COSY
(WGSN, 2021)



DIGI-REAL INDUSTRIAL
(WGSN, 2021)



NATURE-INFUSED
(WGSN, 2021)



JUSTIFICATION

By incorporating circular practices and utilising technology to involve the consumer into the process, it gives them an opportunity to 'become the connection' when using the lay-plan software. Therefore, the consumer would create an association of the positive

experience with the bag, forming a sense of meaningful connection (Connor-Crabb et al., 2016 in Vignali et al., 2016) with not only the product they create, but also FC as a brand.



REFOCUS IMAGE DIGITAL INNOVATION SUSTAINABILITY

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