

## There's No Such Thing as Overexposure in Fashion

by Lauren Sherman 11/24/14



Just before Halloween, Pharrell Williams announced his latest fashion collaboration with Adidas: a collection of felted Stan Smith sneakers and matching satin track jackets in white, lime green, and orange. The line, which is available to purchase in stores and on Adidas.com, is the second installment of a three-part extravaganza between Williams and the German sportswear giant. It's also only one example of Williams' multiple—and frequent—design-driven ventures of 2014. Since January, the multi-hyphenate star has taken over Colette, hooked up with G-Star, started a hat craze with Vivienne Westwood, launched a fragrance with Comme des Garçons, and partnered with Moynat on a collection of four- and five-figure handbags.

On his website, Williams is described as a “creative force,” and it's not a terrible modifier. In fact, he's akin to another prolific creator, Karl Lagerfeld, who recently designed a \$175,000 monogrammed punching bag for Louis Vuitton. (For the record: It also comes with a pair of leather boxing gloves, a floor mat, and a suitcase for storing it all.) Lagerfeld likes to associate with lots of different

kinds of brands: He's partnered with everyone from S.T. Dupont on a pen collection to Diet Coke on custom bottles. Then there's his Barbie. And the branding of his cat, Choupette, who has her own Wikipedia page. Not to mention the posse of celebrity BFFs and muses who help keep him in the spotlight, including Rihanna, Keira Knightley, and Rita Ora. Most recently, Lagerfeld appeared in a series of Instagrams posted by a shirtless Justin Bieber, hinting that the two were collaborating on some sort of photo spread or advertising campaign.

A newer addition to this corner of the celebrity stratosphere is Cara Delevingne (who is reportedly working on a single with Pharrell and frequents Lagerfeld's runway), who has built her brand through social media, crafting a goofy party-girl character who has changed the modern modeling game. In many ways, Delevingne's big personality harkens back to the incomparable supers of the early '90s, although she has a much bigger sound piece: There's Twitter, where she boasts 1.9 million followers, and Instagram, where 8.2 million people are following her. There, her fans can keep up with her many projects, including collections for DKNY and Mulberry and campaigns with Burberry, Tom Ford fragrance, Topshop, John Hardy, Yves Saint Laurent beauty, Balmain...the list goes on, and will soon include a few plum film roles. In 2015, Delevingne will star in *Paper Towns*, an adaption of the young-adult mystery by John Green, the author of *The Fault in Our Stars*.

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**- Gerry Philpott**

(President and CEO of E-Poll Market Research)

There's a lot going on for people like Williams, Lagerfeld, and Delevingne. And for fashion-industry observers, it can sometimes feel overwhelming. Every week, there's another announcement of another initiative, some new chance to bold-face these already-familiar names. The Web, for all its value, has

exacerbated that cycle. To be sure, few online publications are immune to the lure of a Kate Middleton or Kim Kardashian West headline. Not only do these names garner plenty of clicks, but they also keep the conversation going on social media. For instance, a Google News search for “Kim Kardashian, Paper”—referring to the reality-TV star’s revealing cover for the New York indie mag—garners more than 5.5 million



hits. And Middleton’s upcoming trip to Manhattan is likely to generate hundreds of “what she wore” posts, as banal as those outfits might be.

So how much is too much? It’s a tricky thing. To declare someone as “overexposed,” they must reach a point of diminishing returns on their efforts. And based on the snowball effect we see with stars like Williams, good things lead to only more good things. Sometimes a seemingly impossible amount of good things.

“In today’s world, I’m not sure if there is a ‘too much,’” says Gerry Philpott, president and CEO of E-Poll, a research firm that measures awareness of brands and people through online surveys. “If you want a brand collaboration to be seen by as many people as possible, overexposure doesn’t hurt.”

Style.com asked E-Poll to send out a survey listing a handful of major fashion names, from Alexa Chung to Kanye West. While Kim Kardashian West was deemed overexposed by a good chunk of the audience—61 percent—the others were cast in a strictly neutral light. Cara Delevingne, the girl whose face fashion news can’t get enough of, generated an overexposure rate of just 3 percent. Kate Moss, who is currently gracing her 36th cover of *British Vogue*, where she is also a contributing editor, has an overexposure rate of 14 percent. And Lagerfeld? Just 6 percent. To say perspective plays a role in this can’t be overstated.

For many of these fashion personalities, the key to reaching the masses without alienating—or annoying—their core audience seems to be about choosing the right projects. “It’s less about the particular designer or number of collaborations, and more about the nature/authenticity,” says Shireen Jiwan, founder of Sleuth, a brand consultancy. “Pharrell, for instance, does an enormous amount of collaborations. But they seem to be a genuine manifestation of his passions or interests in that moment.” So much about being a star today is also about diversification: If you’re not selling records, you’ve got to be selling concert tickets, T-shirts, and a whole slew of other stuff. Could he take it too far, though? Jiwan doubts it. “When it’s kind of ridiculous, like Alicia Keys as the creative director of BlackBerry or Lindsay Lohan at Ungaro, it passes like a ship in the night,” she says. “Pharrell focuses on stories of substance.”

For all the push-pull celebrities endure when it comes to choosing which projects to take on and how many, it’s also true that an individual can control how much she puts herself out there. What happens when a brand, or an item of clothing, is so popular that it becomes a cliché? Consider the logo sweatshirt commoditized by street style’s overenthusiastic stars, or when a designer’s signature print is copied 10-too-many times by fast fashion. In the past, these items were sometimes referred to as “burnt.” Now, instead of one burnt item every season, there are 10.

But do enough people find that irritating for it to ever be bad? It's important to remember that mass exposure can mean major sales. The key, though, is to have the next big thing already lined up before the current look loses steam. Maybe brands and people aren't so different after all, then. The key to staying relevant, for both, is staying in the game. And getting your name out there—either through a new partnership or a new must-have piece—is the only way to do it. So to hell with overexposure. Because there's always something, or someone, new to look forward to. Fashion's finest need to make sure they're that thing.