

Kenzo Communication Research Analysis

By: Maya Mitchall

Part One

KENZO is a modern luxury brand that was founded in Paris by Takada Kenzo in 1970. When it was founded, the brand was known for being a reflection of the founder's principles, including embracing cultural diversity (specifically with Asian influence), mix-and-match aesthetics, and good craftsmanship, which distinguished him from his European counterparts. Today, the brand has evolved to be known for daring fashion, embodying positive energy, modernity, boldness, and contagious freedom while still sticking to its roots of cultural diversity and timelessness. The brand is described by Highsnobiety as being "Asian influence on traditional European designs, delivering borderless fashion that celebrates cultural diversity." (*KENZO: What to Know About the French Luxury Brand* | Highsnobiety, n.d.).

Nigo was appointed Creative Director of KENZO by the CEO of LVMH in 2021. He describes Takada Kenzo and the brand stating "Kenzo san's approach to creating originality was through his understanding of many different cultures. It is also the essence of my own philosophy of creativity. Inheriting the spirit of Kenzo san's craftsmanship to create a new KENZO is the greatest challenge of my 30-year career." (Kenzo, n.d.) The designer himself is known for his streetwear, and is professed to have changed the landscape of global street culture with his acute sensitivity to detail and through frequent collaboration with some of the best-known companies and creative individuals in the world. This has heavily translated into his work for the KENZO brand, as the product collections heavily lean into a streetwear aesthetic with pieces such as sweatshirts, hoodies, graphic-tees, and casual pants. The products still pay homage to Takada Kenzo, as mixes of prints, exuberant yet harmonious colors, and nature-inspired graphics characterize the collections in a form of sophisticated creativity. Not only that, but each product collection on their website can be categorized by a specific prominent graphic element. For example, VARSITY JUNGLE featured an emblem of a yellow tiger roaring, BOKE boy had a specific cartoon-esque doodle graphic, and BOKE Flower 2.0 showcased a more abstract version of the Japanese 'boke' flower and was frequently used on products as the 'O' in the KENZO logo. (Kenzo, n.d.) The brand's products also appeal to the people he frequently collaborates with, often having famous musicians as influencers to either wear his clothing or perform at his runway shows.

Nigo also is directing the brand vision to target a younger audience, or a more "new-generation mentality" in his more recent campaigns. In the Spring-Summer 2023 campaign, the brand put out a statement saying "For the KENZO Spring-Summer 2023 Campaign, Artistic Director Nigo distills the timeless vision of the Maison into an essential message for a new-generation mentality. Capturing the values embodied by his practice at KENZO – worldliness, inclusivity, individuality – the campaign personifies the multi-faceted and optimistic nature of Nigo's work in a character-centric cast." (Kenzo, n.d.) This was reinforced by a diverse cast of young models who served as the face of the campaign. These efforts align with the demographic and values of

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younger millennials and Gen Z (who are the most ethnically diverse population to date), as they prioritize diversity, inclusivity, and authenticity.

In terms of their communication strategy, KENZO's tone of voice embodies the Creator archetype. They believe in constantly innovating, reinventing, or providing modern takes on Takada Kenzo's original ideas. Their Instagram copy reflects this tone of voice, with examples being the following:

- "Spring has sprung and the exclusive KENZO Poppy capsule embodies the fauna and flora heritage of Kenzo Takada with a fresh twist by Creative Director @Nigo for the Spring Summer 2022 collection" ,
- "  Japanese heritage meets @Nigo's modern twist, introducing the transcendent KENZO Denim collection, head-to-toe now available on KENZO.COM" , and
- "Future is in the past : The pixelated K of KENZO recalls the brand's traditional geometric jacquard designs, given a fresh twist by @Nigo. Discover the collection on KENZO.COM" (*Instagram*, n.d.)

The brand employs a variety of content types to promote their various collections, with the most frequent being Themed Shooting of a Collection, Celebrity/Influencer Content, and Identity Content. Other less frequent but still present content types include Mood Content, Event Content, Still Life, and Product-Focused Editorial Columns. Themed Shooting of a Collection is the most prevalent content type by far, as most of their Instagram is focused solely around the release of new collections. Still Life, Event, and Influencer content support the themed shootings and bring awareness to the collections. As I previously mentioned, they also utilize popular musicians typically in the rap or hip-hop industry as influencers to promote their products as well, such as Kid Cudi, Original Koffee, Lolo Zouaï, Tinashe, Lil Baby, Pharell Williams, Jaden Smith and Doja Cat. Other influencers have the opportunity to create the copy themselves through the use of collaborative posts. For identity content, post captions discuss the inspiration behind the collection and how it ties to an aspect of brand messaging. For example, statements such as "Natural elements are an homage to the House founder Kenzo Takada #KENZONIGO" , and "@Nigo, Artistic Director, approached the poppy from a contemporary point of view, applying it to two wardrobes of archetypical garments. Designed for women and men, respectively, each is genderless in nature. Available now in selected stores worldwide and on KENZO.COM" tell the viewer about the history of the brand and reiterate brand messaging about daring and borderless fashion. (*Instagram*, n.d.). Content covering events (in the past year I observed) was limited to runway shows, with the exception of the high-profile event of Kid Cudi wearing KENZO to the MET Gala. Lastly, the brand briefly mentions a product-focused editorial column called KENZO DENIM with a few posts informing readers about Japanese denim crafting and how it is incorporated into designs for a collection.

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Part Two

In my opinion, I think overall the KENZO's copy accurately reflects the brand's values, visions, and heritage. Starting off with the self-described vision from their website in comparison to how other important websites and stakeholders in the fashion industry describe the brand (such as Highsnobiety), there is already an alignment that indicates that their brand positioning is coming across correctly. The brand's position as being daring, bold, positive, and modern, while at the same time prioritizing cultural diversity gives them a competitive advantage since it is unique to the brand. I personally have not seen another brand focus on making cultural influence a key part of their ideals, designs, or messaging before KENZO. This also has the added benefit of connecting with consumers from a variety of backgrounds as well as younger consumers (a target audience for the brand), since they prioritize diversity. The website's product categories and campaigns, as well as the products themselves, also accurately reflect the brand's core values. This is an extremely important thing since it reinforces the positioning to consumers and provides an excellent foundation for relevant social media content. In analyzing their Instagram copy for the duration of a year, it seemed to me that their copy towards the very beginning didn't have a clear tone of voice. Captions such as "Hide and seek into the KENZO's jungle 🐼🌴🌸" and "Denim invades the streets 🌸🏢 Collection available on KENZO.COM" with lots of emojis and slang focused on sounding young rather than reflecting the primary messaging of the house. (*Instagram*, n.d.) However, starting with the Poppy S/S 2022 collection, the copy changed to emphasize the messaging of the House and its creative director. There was more verbiage relating to how new collections are innovations of designs or styles from the founder of the brand (as well as an increase in identity content), being bold, having freedom, and cultural diversity (shown primarily by describing cultural influences of the collections). After these changes, I believe that the messaging across platforms from the KENZO brand is consistent and effective. As a follower of the brand within their target audience, I was immediately intrigued by the brand's cool streetwear aesthetic, bold graphics, bright colors, and mixed patterns which was reinforced by their social media content as time went on. After conducting this research, I found that my initial perception of the brand matched the vision of the brand and its creative director, which for me is hard evidence that their brand positioning is being communicated effectively to consumers.

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Citations:

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