

**Title: The Old and the New:  
Using Brand Extensions to Garner Modern Appeal at Barbour**

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**Abstract**

*Barbour*, the British luxury brand, has a long and rich heritage that has given rise to several sub-brands. The brand now hopes to modernise and entice a younger consumer, a segment they were not yet targeting, whilst maintaining appeal among profitable middle-aged customers, for whom *Barbour* has already hit the ‘ideal level of distribution for that curve’ (Bottomley, 2018).

This business case explores *Barbour*'s ongoing revitalisation attempt using brand extensions, such as the launch of the *Barbour Beacon* line and collaborations with the likes of *Supreme* (2020) and *Alexa Chung* (2019-present). It also explores *Barbour*'s partnership with *HighSnobiety*, their choice of wholesale partners and store locations. Whilst the case focuses on the brand's UK operations, it could equally be used to investigate their international operations given its strategic intent.

This business case examines how such shifts in strategy might affect the parent brand and the core customer. Brand extensions increase risk, as a poorly received brand extension may harm brand image or dilute brand meaning (Keller, 2012: 442-446). Students are asked to take the role of a marketing decision maker for *Barbour*, develop future marketing strategies

for brand extensions and to justify a recommended plan of action.

## **Learning Objectives**

- Explore how differentiated brand strategy with multiple sub-brands can benefit both the parent brand and the customer.
- Assess which brand extensions and sub-brands have been successful and unsuccessful in extending the *Barbour* brand to a modern, trend-aware audience.
- Describe the difficulties of maintaining customer appeal across multiple segments.
- Articulate and understand Barbour's core identity.
- Examine the advantages and disadvantages of *Barbour* collaborating with other brands to extend appeal to new customers.
- Assess Barbour's approach to promoting brand extensions and sub-brands and how this may have affected their success.
- Recommend and justify potential future strategies, such as wholesale partners or advertising strategies.

## **Introduction**

Barbour began in 1894 in the South Shields, in the North East of England, as a functional country brand, often worn by fisherman and farmers alike. Its functional qualities propelled its adoption by royalty and celebrities, before becoming a firm favourite with high street shoppers, and hence its transition towards fashion was cemented. (Armstrong, 2014). Today, the fifth generation of the Barbour family runs the business; after John Barbour died suddenly in 1968, his young widow Margaret was immediately appointed to the board of directors and continues to lead the company today as its Chairman (Barbour<sup>a</sup>, no date). Barbour's headquarters have remained in South Shields, but have grown to retail store presence in over 40 countries worldwide (Barbour<sup>a</sup>, no date).

Since its inception, *Barbour's* customer value proposition has been encompassed by the slogan 'the best British clothing for the worst British weather' (Harpers and Queen, 1990: 7). The brand has produced practical, outdoor clothing for over 125 years, initially retailing to local mariners, then farmers, before developing motorcycling wear in 1936 (Barbour<sup>a</sup>). Inspired by the styles she saw on the continent, Margaret Barbour designed fashionable takes

on the iconic wax jacket (the Bedale, Beaufort and Border jackets) which remain popular today. By the 1980s, well-heeled customers were wearing their *Barbour* jackets both in the town and country (Galbraith, no date). Throughout their long history, the brand has targeted both the more fashion-forward city set and rural customers, but generally weights its marketing towards the latter (Drapers, 2012).

*Barbour* has grown into a global lifestyle brand, operating as a 'branded house' (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2010: 97-98) or 'family brand' (Keller, 2012:433) and pursued a brand leadership model (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2010:8). Brand identity drives their strategy, resulting in heightened services such as rewaxing and repairs (Barbour service around 25,000 jackets each year) and an emphasis on local production in South Shields (Remsen, 2019). Their market scope is global, even producing a specific line for their substantial audience in Japan (Barbour, 2019).

Despite holding broad lifestyle appeal, *Barbour's* STP strategy (segmentation, targeting, positioning) prioritises a mature audience, 'a slightly older consumer in their 40s', which are *Barbour's* most profitable age segment (Bottomley, 2018). Their choice of wholesale partners works in tandem with this, in the UK distributing primarily to *John Lewis*, and also to accounts with *Fenwick* and *House of Bruar*, department stores with middle-aged, middle-class clientele (Intel, 2012). Per Kotler's (1997) STP concept, *Barbour* maintains this segment by primarily targeting them in their brand communications, including Instagram and email marketing, and weight their strategy towards this segment in their stores, their core collections and many of their brand extensions.

*Barbour* has historically leveraged its core value proposition, extending into new product categories and developed sub-brands to market to new segments using new associations. Brand extensions can be defined as the use of an existing brand name to extend into new product markets, such as *Barbour Dogs*, whilst sub-brands are subsidiary or secondary brands created as an opportunity to reach new audiences, and include examples such as *Barbour International*. The core principle of quality outdoor clothing is ever-present, retaining timeless relevance for its functionality and as a recognisable icon. There are two main sub-brands: original *Barbour* country wear, with which the brand is synonymous, and *Barbour International*, their complementary heritage motorcycling line which attained grit

and glamour through endorsements from Steve McQueen and a feature in *Skyfall*, the 2012 James Bond film (Mellery-Pratt, 2013).

*Barbour's* continued brand extension and sub-brand strategy, with each line carefully positioned for additional market coverage, has to-date produced: *Heritage collections* (for the country); *Gold Standard* (the premium collection shown at Paris Fashion Week); *Coastal collections* (for a mature customer); *Barbour Dogs*; childrenswear; a range of collaborations and more (Bottomley, 2018). The permanence of these lines varies, as while some return each season, others remain limited or one-off collections.

Over time, the core brand has developed some associations which could be considered outdated by some customers. Today, the iconic wax jacket, present in all the brand's collections, is considered 'a symbol of wealth... [and] traditionalism' and 'an idiom of aristocracy' (Elan, 2020). Furthermore, Barbour have been granted three Royal Warrants, which are issued to those who supply goods and services to HM The Queen, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh and HRH The Prince of Wales; though prestigious and widely accepted to signify high quality<sup>1</sup>, these may risk alienating modern customers who are increasingly indifferent to monarchic endorsements (Crace, 2011). In 2019, *Vice* criticised the *Barbour* wax jacket as 'heterosexual male fashion' and the uniform of 'corporate lawyers and bankers' (Staples, 2019); a symbol of conformity, irrelevance and conservativeness, which has further translated into political associations, with the jacket described, albeit jokingly, as a 'Tory'<sup>2</sup> emblem (Drapers, 2012). These associations are divisive and might risk brand equity, yet, simultaneously, associations with the Queen (who has owned hers for 25 years), and subsequent features on *Netflix's* 'The Crown' have sparked renewed interest in the brand, showing that they could be repositioned for more appeal among customers (Unity Blott, 2017; Singh-Kurtz, 2020).

## **Business Challenge**

Over the last few years, *Barbour* has aimed to revitalise their offering for a modern, stylish customer whilst maintaining their classic, traditional appeal (Pavarini, 2019; Roberts, no

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<sup>1</sup> 47.3% of people believe a Royal Warrant shows high quality (Brand Finance, 2018: 7)

<sup>2</sup> The word Tory relating to a member or supporter of the UK Conservative Party.

date). Though they aim to continue prioritising their profitable middle-aged customers, *Barbour* has already hit the ‘ideal level of distribution for that curve’ (Bottomley, 2018) and hope to diversify their clientele. Since 2018, *Barbour* has strategically employed two forms of brand extension to increase relevancy: age-segmented sub-brands and collaborations with fashion brands.

### **Age Segmented Sub-Brands**

To ensure relevancy across all ages, *Barbour* has employed a strategy of age segmentation, simultaneously releasing two sub-brands, *Barbour Coastal*, aiming to dress those with a ‘slower pace of life’ (Barbour<sup>b</sup>), and *Barbour Beacon*, a menswear collection for a young, logo-conscious consumer.

Launched in 2017, *Barbour Coastal* attempted to corner an older, financially comfortable demographic which shops for clothing as often as their younger counterparts<sup>3</sup> (Mintel, 2020). In the UK alone, the over-55 population grew 10% to 20.5 million between 2014 and 2019, and are forecast to continue growing across the world (Mintel, 2020), making age segmentation seem viable. However, the role of seniors in society is changing: they are working for longer, striving to remain active and are more technologically savvy than retailers give them credit for<sup>4</sup> (Mintel, 2020). The collection was heavily advertised on Instagram to capture an increasingly online demographic, used young models in its marketing campaigns, but failed to take this older customer’s dislike of age segmentation into account (Mintel, no date). Its message contradicts the trend towards activity in older aged populations and arguably does not incorporate trend-led elements which studies show that this demographic desires (Mintel, no date).

With regard to targeting a younger customer, *Barbour* mistakenly believed that their *Heritage* collections covered this market. However, it became clear that the high prices and distribution to their normal wholesale accounts meant that they were simply ‘targeting a more astute customer who was younger in the head’ (Bottomley, 2018). Even their fashion-forward

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<sup>3</sup> 95% of women aged 55+ bought clothes in the last 12 months, similar to their younger counterparts (Mintel, 2020)

<sup>4</sup> 70% of over-55 women have shopped online for clothing in the last 12 months (Mintel, 2020)

collaborations (e.g., *Alice Temperley* in 2010, *Paul Smith* in 2012, and *Land Rover* in 2014 and 2017) had been targeted at *Barbour's* current mature audience and did not leverage the brand vertically, to foster appeal among different demographics.

Therefore, in Autumn 2018, *Barbour* launched *Barbour Beacon*, specifically designed for a younger demographic. This menswear-only collection paid homage to the brand's heritage, redesigning the classic wax jacket and classic fisherman's jumpers, but also held a strong focus on logos to attract a market interested in so-called 'logomania'. Notably, it has been separated from the core brand; from its launch, *Barbour Beacon* has not retailed from *Barbour's* online store and is not widely available in its brick-and-mortar stores. Rather, direct-to-consumer retailing took place via *Barbourbeacon.com* and *Barbour's* Carnaby street store, the historic epicentre of youth culture. The brand primarily took a wholesale approach, partnering with *END*, a popular streetwear retailer based in Newcastle (close to *Barbour's* native home), *Topman*, and online pure-player *ASOS*, as opposed to their traditional department store wholesale partners, *John Lewis* and *Fenwick*. As *Barbour Beacon's* own website is now defunct, wholesale partners remain the main retail channel for this sub-brand.

Despite basic similarities between the campaign images, *Barbour* used entirely different strategies to launch and brand these age segmented line extensions. While *Barbour Coastal* was heavily integrated into the normal retail mix, *Barbour Beacon* remains notably absent from the majority of these channels, with the emphasis placed on partnerships with external organisations such as *Highsnobiety* and *End*.

## **Fashion Collaborations**

Since 2018, *Barbour* has partaken in numerous collaborations, some of which targeted and maintained their core, 'slightly older consumer in their 40s' (Bottomley, 2018), including both *Laura Ashley* and *National Trust* in 2020. However, the brand has made concerted efforts to pour their resources into collaborations with youthful, fashion-forward brands.

The majority of the brand's collaborations have been with menswear street style brands, including *Supreme*, *NOAH*, *Norse Projects*, *Margaret Howell* and Japanese brands *and wander* and *Kaptain Sunshine*. This would perhaps be surprising to the traditional *Barbour*

customer, as most of these collaborations have not been advertised on their normal online marketing channels, such as their *Barbour.com* blog, Instagram and Twitter. The single exception is *Barbour x NOAH*, which drew from the brand's heritage more patently than other collections, by using images from the 80s and 90s catalogues on t-shirts. This collection even used the same original tagline, 'who cares if it rains' (Stanley, 2020). Marketing of all streetwear collaborations took place through external outlets, primarily magazines such as *HighSnobiety* (with whom *Barbour* themselves have partnered). *Barbour's* marketing strategy varied and often did not promote these collaborations, which sometimes retailed through the *Barbour* website where drops were uploaded without ceremony, or the collaborator's own retail channels.

Arguably the most popular collaboration is *Barbour x Alexa Chung*; initially a one-off, women's limited collection launched in Autumn/Winter 2019, now a recurring, seemingly integral part of the *Barbour* brand, as of Autumn/Winter 2021, unlike many of the streetwear collaborations. Alexa Chung is a British television presenter and model, with a global reputation as a style icon, who has partnered on many successful fashion collaborations (Hoang, 2016). Perceived by many as a trendsetter and muse to many fashion brands, the halo effect she generates with branded partners, made her a good fit for *Barbour* (Ibid, 2016). Chung's signature added pockets and patchwork to classic *Barbour* silhouettes from the archives and is marketed heavily through *Barbour's* normal channels, and with great fanfare in major fashion magazines including *Vogue* (Newbold, 2021). The collection is equally present in *Alexa Chung's* retail mix. New wholesale partners for this collection include luxury online pure-player *Net-a-Porter*, alongside standard wholesale partners such as *John Lewis*. This collaboration, in particular, has garnered broad appeal, both among a traditional *Barbour* customer and the fashion set, and has been worn widely, from the Duchess of Cambridge to characters on new television shows, such as *I Hate Suzy* (Elan, 2020).

One of the main draws of collaborating with *Barbour* is the 'irony' (Elan, 2020; Newbold, 2021) of adjoining a modern brand with one which still holds many ancient associations of exclusivity, playing into a broader cultural zeitgeist of subverting norms, anti-establishment sentiment, but also a desire to invest in true quality and craftsmanship (Woolf, 2020). This is true of *Alexa Chung*, as well as the streetwear brands, with the designer having said of *Barbour* that 'it's so uptight and proper that it then becomes interesting and ironic outside of

an equestrian context' (Newbold, 2021). These brands chose to collaborate with *Barbour* because of their core value proposition: their functional, quality outdoor clothing. Most brands approached *Barbour* for collaboration, rather than vice versa, inspired by their 'respect' (Stanley, 2020) for the wax jacket's longevity and seeking an exchange of credibility. Furthermore, each collection avoided an excessive change to *Barbour's* core products, even if a collection was designed with the collaborator's customer in mind, for example, *NOAH x Barbour* and *Supreme x Barbour*. Brendon Babenzien, *NOAH's* Creative Director, said of their collaboration: 'We really only wanted a bit of *NOAH* to enter the conversation; too many updates to an already incredible product and you could spoil it' (Stanley, 2020). Alexa Chung mirrored this sentiment in an interview for her first collection, saying 'It's less about modifying and more about throwing a mirror up to show what makes them great and figuring out how that might be appropriate for a younger audience' (Graver, 2019).

### **Integrating vs. Separating: *Barbour's* Approaches to Brand Extensions**

Having discussed the forms of brand extension used by *Barbour* to modernise the brand, it is clear that some extensions are integrated heavily into the core brand, while others remain distinctly separate. The aim of a brand extension is always to increase visibility, but a brand must also consider whom they wish to target.

Keller (2012: 448) articulates this in his basic conditions for successful collaborations: that the customer is aware of the parent brand's positive associations, that the brand extension will evoke these, that negative associations are not transferred from the parent brand, and that the brand extension does not create negative associations. To protect parent brand equity and salience, *Barbour* prioritised whom they consider their core customer: the middle-aged. The main channels of their retail and marketing mix are the reserve of this profitable core customer, targeting them effectively by side-lining other markets (Sherman, 2015). Sub-brands with an older or 'ageless' focus (*Barbour Coastal*; *Barbour x Alexa Chung*) are integrated into the core *Barbour* brand and retailed alongside their most profitable lines. Meanwhile, *Barbour's* non-traditional, youthful divergences, such as *Barbour Beacon* and *Supreme*, are distanced from the core brand, so as not to affect their core customer (Sherman, 2015). Equally, the new clientele targeted by these extensions may not appreciate some of *Barbour's* core brand associations, such as upper-class exclusivity. It is a challenge to balance



*Barbour's* marketing, branding and strategy between their core customer and new target segments, compounded further by the launch of brand extensions.

This is partially simplified by using differentiated online communications, which allows email subscribers to opt-in to emails about specific sub-brands, and differentiated social media accounts, such as separate Instagram accounts for *Barbour*, *Barbour International*, *Barbour Dogs* and *Barbour Japan*, maximising their relevance across multiple markets. However, many of *Barbour's* modernised brand extensions do not have a clear place in this structure, as each page focuses on maintaining salience of their unique identity, meaning new, modernised aspects of *Barbour's* brand identity are not consistently communicated online. For example, though it is clear from many opinion articles that many young professionals wear wax jackets in the city or for their commute, the *Barbour* Instagram page does not reflect this in their marketing strategy (Staples, 2019; Barbour, 2021). For example, of fifty Instagram posts, spanning the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2019 to the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2021, only five posts show a city location, and three of these promote the *Barbour x Alexa Chung* SS2021 campaign (Barbour, 2021). However, this is notably similar to *Land Rover*, who target a comparable lifestyle segment and previously collaborated with *Barbour*; though this off-road car has accumulated a large urban fanbase, only six of their last fifty posts displayed an obvious urban setting, spanning the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January to the 14<sup>th</sup> of February (Land Rover, 2021).

### **Considering *Barbour's* Strategy: Key Issue**

In recent years, many lifestyle brands have worked on streamlining their value proposition: something recommended by industry commentators to survive a crowded, product polluted market (Clark, 2016:16). Approaches to growth are becoming less clear cut, yet it is an interesting contradiction that *Barbour* has further segmented their brand since 2018, prioritising a middle-aged consumer as their core customer in all brand communications, whilst curating new lines for new customers which orbit the very edges of the *Barbour* universe.

However, as a lifestyle brand, their value proposition is attractive and applicable to a very wide range of segments; a *Drapers* review described their target customer as 'almost everybody' (Drapers, 2012). Despite tailoring their core brand image towards the middle-

aged, *Barbour* retains ageless appeal; the wide-reaching success of collaborations such as *Barbour X Alexa Chung* shows that many mature customers would be willing to shop ‘younger’ collections, and vice versa. Young customers equally retain interest in *Barbour*’s core product line, taking hand-me-down *Barbour* jackets to be rewaxed (something the brand prides itself on) and integrating them into their own wardrobes, and shop streetwear spinoffs (Remsen, 2019; Woolf, 2020). *Barbour* wearers span the full spectrum of age, gender and class; the wax jacket is an equalising garment, worn by both the Queen of England and farmers alike, with a shared lifestyle: aptly named, the ‘Barbour way of life’ (Barbour<sup>c</sup>).

## **Business Questions**

### **Major Question**

Take the role of a marketing decision maker for Barbour, develop and evaluate options for future strategies around brand extensions, and justify a recommendation for Barbour.

### **Study Questions**

1. Do you think that age segmentation was a sound strategic strategy for *Barbour*? If not, how would you alter *Barbour*’s STP (Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning) strategy?
2. Do you think *Barbour* has marketed its brand effectively to multiple segments? Why? If *Barbour* hopes to entice more fashionable, modern or younger customers, how can they effectively target this segment without altering appeal among their wider customer base?
3. *Barbour* is an enduring brand with a broad base of appeal. Articulate *Barbour*’s core identity with a Kapferer’s brand prism, using the information provided in this case study.
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of collaborating with other brands?
5. Keller (2012: 457) wrote that ‘line extensions which receive strong advertising and promotional support are more successful than those extensions which receive meagre support’. Do you think that distancing some extensions from *Barbour*’s core brand affected their success? Justify your answer.
6. Whilst *Barbour* hopes to maintain appeal with their middle-aged, core customer, any brand

extension or collaborator should typically complement the core brand. For example, an unexpected collaboration, such as *Supreme x Barbour*, may be exciting for a streetwear customer who would not usually shop at *Barbour*, but could risk alienating *Barbour's* traditional customer. Suggest brands for *Barbour* to collaborate or partner with in the future. Who would you appeal to, their core, middle-aged customer, or new segments? Would you choose to modernise, or showcase *Barbour's* heritage?

## **Teaching Notes**

This case study is designed for students in intermediate courses to apply and integrate concepts related to fashion brand strategy and management. To successfully complete the case study, students should have a basic understanding of the global fashion industry and brand management. This case could be used as a discussion format in a seminar lasting 60–90 minutes on brand extensions, sub-brands, brand architecture and brand equity.

**Brand equity** relates to the overall strength of a brand from a customer perspective. Both Keller (2003) and Aaker (1991) provide extensive theorisation on the construct, which is generally accepted to comprise four key brand assets: awareness, association, perceived quality and loyalty. Brand awareness leads to learning and the formation of associations. Brands then become a mark of quality that consumers trust that results in brand preferences, building brand loyalty. In relation to the case, the brand equity construct could be used to evaluate how the collaborations contribute to *Barbour's* brand strength.

### *Pre-class activities*

Students could be asked to individually consider the case and prepare their answers prior to class, if time is limited. Any pre-class activity could then be used as the basis for in-class small group or full class discussion. Digital tools like Padlet could be used for groups to post their response prior to the class, to generate interactive in-class discussion.

Out-of-class activities can be complemented by referring students to the online resources, like some of those listed below, which provide further context to the brand.

Students are encouraged to explore academic journal articles and definitions of brand extensions and sub-brands, in order to achieve a better understanding of the topic. Students can use terms such as “brand management”, “brand architecture” or “brand equity” as

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keywords, to discover current discourse on the topic (*N.B.* refer to the reference list to get started on this). Subsequently, students can then explore how Barbour applies this to their own strategy.

Instructors may select a limited number of the business questions based on relevancy and time available. Other questions may be set some as follow-up activities or group assessment tasks.

*In-class activities*

Before beginning the discussion, students could be asked to summarize and introduce the case. This should take approximately 15 minutes.

One or more of the business questions may be used for a) in-class small group discussion and dissemination to the whole class b) student role-play, assuming the role of Barbour directors / decision makers to identify strategies and discuss the options, advantages and disadvantages of each.

At the end of the class, allow time for students to reflect on and write what they have learned from the case study and capture any additional questions they have. Questions can be addressed at the end of the class or at the beginning of the following class.

**Links to Barbour's website and social channels:**

<https://www.barbour.com/uk/>

<https://www.barbourinternational.com/uk/>

<https://www.instagram.com/barbour/?hl=en>

<https://www.instagram.com/barbourinternational/?hl=en>

<https://www.instagram.com/barbourdogs/?hl=en>

[https://twitter.com/Barbour?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/Barbour?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor)

<https://twitter.com/barbourint?lang=en>

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## **Definitions**

**STP strategy:** STP stands for segmenting, targeting, positioning and is a model conceptualised by marketing expert Kotler in 1997. Marketing in this way ensures that a brand is positioned in a consumer's mind for maximum appeal.

**Brand extension:** Varley et al. (2019: pg 116) defines brand extensions as 'a brand management strategy that sees brands using the name of one of their existing brands for the purpose of entering new product markets. The purpose of extensions is to help brands achieve higher awareness and extended consumer reach'.

**Sub-brand:** A subsidiary or secondary brand created as an opportunity to reach new audiences. A retailer may use a number of sub-brands to segment by customer or product area (Varley et al., 2019: pg 166-167). These do not necessarily have to use the same name as the parent brand; for example, Ralph Lauren has sub-brands which include, Polo, Purple Label, and Club Monaco.

**Brand equity:** Core brand management concept, defined as the 'marketing effects uniquely attributed to the brand' (Keller, 1993, p.1 cited in Varley et al, 2019: pg.110). Comprises five brand assets: loyalty, awareness, quality, associations and other proprietary brand assets.