



The Power of Stories: Luxury brand communication on social media

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Abstract

Title: The power of stories: Luxury brand communication on social media

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The purpose of this study is to explore how luxury brands portray their values through storytelling on social media. A qualitative study was conducted due to the exploratory nature of this study using a multiple case study. Moreover, both primary and secondary data was collected. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three luxury brands and thereafter with potential consumers. The findings identified four ways luxury brands portray their values through the role of brand storytelling on social media: (1) guaranteeing consistency (2) maintaining authenticity (3) remaining aspirational (4) engaging and educating. The research adds to existing literature in the luxury sector and brand communication.

Key words: Luxury brands, Brand storytelling, Luxury values, Social media

Resumo

Título: O poder das histórias: Comunicação de marca de luxo nos meios de comunicação social

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O objetivo deste estudo é explorar a forma como as marcas de luxo retratam os seus valores através da narrativa de histórias nas redes sociais. Foi realizado um estudo qualitativo devido à natureza exploratória deste estudo, utilizando um estudo de caso múltiplo. Além disso, foram recolhidos dados primários e secundários. Os dados primários foram recolhidos através de entrevistas semiestruturadas com três marcas de luxo e posteriormente com potenciais consumidores. Os resultados identificaram quatro formas nas quais as marcas de luxo retratam os seus valores através da narrativa da história da marca nos meios de comunicação social: (1) garantindo a consistência (2) mantendo a autenticidade (3) permanecendo inspiracional (4) comprometido e educado. A investigação acrescenta à literatura existente no sector do luxo e da comunicação da marca.

Palavras-chave: Marcas de luxo, *storytelling*, Valores de luxo, comunicação social

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1. Introduction

Kim & Ko (2010) suggest that in the past, luxury fashion brands have relied heavily on strong brand assets and regular customers. However, with increasing competition over the years, there has been unexpected shifts in the market driving luxury brands to change. In order to continue to provide value to customers, luxury brands have had to adapt and have done so by turning their attention to social media (Kim & Ko, 2010; Koivisto and Mattila, 2020). One can argue that social media has become a key marketing tool playing a crucial role in influencing consumer decision making (Pentina, Guilloux and Micu, 2018). Moreover, a more personal way of brand-customer relationship interaction and maintenance has emerged (Koivisto & Mattila, 2020). With technological developments, social media platforms have provided endless opportunities of new forms of engaging with consumers.. Social media has become a powerful marketing tool offering strategic advantages for luxury brands (Park, Im, and Kim, 2018; Parrott, Danbury, & Kanthavanich, 2015). In a digital age having social media presence allows luxury brands to strengthen their brand image (Kim et al., 2016). Moreover, it enables to harbor deep customer relationships through engagement and storytelling (Geissinger and Laurell, 2016).

Scholars highlight that luxury brands are not only build around their luxury features but also brand storytelling (Hughes, Bondoni and Pehlivan, 2016). Storytelling is the process of telling stories and is a highly popular approach to communication (Ben Youssef, Leicht and Marongiu, 2018). Luxury brands have been using storytelling as a means of establishing relationships with customers and communicating their symbolic value (Hughes et al., 2016; Herskovitz and Crystal, 2010).

Storytelling is the process of telling stories and is a popular approach to communication (Ben et al., 2018). Luxury brands have been using storytelling as a means of establishing relationships with customers and communicating their symbolic value (Hughes, et al., 2016; Herskovitz and Crystal, 2010). Scholars have suggested that luxury brands are built around their values and intangible characteristics such as emotions, dreams, exclusivity, and creativity (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Kapferer and Bastien, 2012).

Uché Okonkwo (2009) questions the paradox intertwined between creating and maintaining the “desire” and “exclusiveness” attributes of luxury brands on the internet, whilst simultaneously not losing their brand identity. Most of the existing literature focuses on luxury brands and storytelling but there is limited research concerning how luxury brands use brand storytelling as a communication tool on social media to portray their values. For this, this thesis aims to fill this gap by answering the following research question:

Research question: How do luxury brands portray their values through brand storytelling on social media?

The study consists of six chapters. Firstly, I reviewed existing literature aiming to understand luxury brands, brand storytelling, and social media. The following chapter, the methodology, describes how the data was collected and analysed. To answer my research question, I used a qualitative method and more specifically a multiple case study. Three luxury companies were selected, La Mer, Chanel and Cartier. This is followed by presenting the empirical setting providing a contextual background on the companies. The findings and discussion of the answer to the research question is presented and a comparison of the results is done with previous studies. Finally, the conclusion draws the main takeaway describing the limitations of the study followed by suggesting further possible research.

2. Literature Review

This section presents the existing literature on the subject and the theories this paper is based on. The literature review results demonstrates the importance of brand storytelling for luxury brands and social media. However, it must be highlighted that the research on how luxury brands portray their values through storytelling on social media is limited. Firstly, an introduction to the concept of luxury brands is given, followed by a description of storytelling and the role it plays. Further, digital storytelling is introduced thereafter luxury brands and storytelling and finally luxury brands and storytelling.

2.1 The specificities of luxury brands

Due to its subjective nature, luxury is difficult to define (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Ko, Costello, and Taylor, 2019). Traditionally, academics have characterized luxury as high quality, expensive and non-essential (Tynan, Mckechnie, and Chhuon, 2010; Ko, Costello, and Taylor, 2017). Luxury is more about the lifestyle associated with the good rather than the good itself. These goods are often bought for what they symbolize: status and prestige (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Hennigs, Weidemann and Klarmann, 2012). Ansarin and Ozuem (2014) explain how the luxury industry has changed dramatically in the past decade, stressing that luxury is no longer a “niche for a higher level of society”. Today, more people have access to luxury goods and luxury brands influence the creation of one’s identity (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Ansarin and Ozuem, 2014). The challenge for luxury brands is to remain relevant while holding on to their values. In addition, luxury brands need to remain “true to their heritage” (Gurzki, Schlatter, Woisetschläger, 2019). In addition, luxury brands need to shift their focus to their brand legacy rather than their brand symbol (Kim & Ko, 2012). More recently, Ko et al., (2019) concludes that for a brand to be considered as luxurious, brand’s are more dependent on consumers and their evaluation of the brand, proposing that they must:

- (1) be high quality;
- (2) offer authentic value;
- (3) have a prestigious image;
- (4) be worthy of a premium price;
- (5) Inspire a connection and resonance with the consumer

Additionally, scholars have suggested that luxury brands are not only built around their values but also on their intangible characteristics portrayed by emotions, dreams, exclusivity and creativity (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Kapferer and Bastien, 2012). Further, (Hughes et al., 2016) adds that brand storytelling plays a role too. Through storytelling luxury brands are able to communicate their brand unique values to consumers.

2.2 Storytelling: an approach to communication

2.2.1 Defining storytelling

The term narrative is used differently across different subjects (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). Shelley (2012) explains that narratives are stories that are put together to make sense. Narratives can be interchangeable with the term “stories”, hence, stories are suggested to be existing narratives that can be retold through “storytelling” (Vaara, Sonenshin, Boje, 2016). According to Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu (2010), a story has a chronological sequence of events and consists of four elements, the message, the conflict, the characters and the plot. Denning (2006) supports this and adds that these elements are what deliver the value. In addition, Singh and Sonneburg (2012) describe stories as a way to “create empathy by providing meaning”, the more meaning a story entails the more likely it is to be recalled.

Storytelling is the process of telling stories (Boldosova, 2019). Storytelling is one of the oldest, most powerful tools of communication (Kaufman, 2003; Shankar, Elliott and Goulding, 2001), it is a well-established concept across different subjects. In turn, the definition depends on the context it is being applied to (Laurell and Söderman, 2018). This paper aims to explore brand storytelling therefore for a better understanding Table 1 defines important concepts.

Concept	Definition	Reference
Narratives	“Narratives are stories that weave together a series of facts (or assertions) so they make sense. Narratives create what is true for the believer, which is more germane to the believer’s life than facts. Facts are like dots on a graph. The narrative is the curve that connects them, that gives isolated data points meaning, and gives meaning shape”	(Shelley, 2012)
Story	“An oral or written performance involving two or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience”	(Boje, 1995, p.1000)
Storytelling	“Storytelling is pervasive through life. Much information is stored, indexed, and retrieved in the form of stories. Although lectures tend to put people to sleep, stories move them to action. People relate to each other in terms of stories – and products and brands often play both central and peripheral roles in their stories.”	(Woodside et al., 2008, p. 97)

Table 1: Important concepts and their definition.

2.2.1 The role of brand storytelling

Storytelling is a highly popular approach to communication (Ben Youssef, et al., 2018) and is considered one of the most effective ways a brand can connect with customers (Baker and Boyle, 2009). Stories are used by brands to create an internal and external brand culture hence companies

can develop their own story to illustrate what they stand for (Mossberg, 2008). Denning (2006) argues that storytelling is a tool to achieve a business purpose and can be used to communicate with those around them. Similarly, Fog, et al., (2010), find storytelling as an effective method for “creating an entire brand concept”, one that reflects the brand’s values. The authors continue by explaining that storytelling goes beyond the brand values as a living core story. Fog et al. (2005) explains that a strong brand is built on transparent values and on an emotional level with their customers, which is transmitted in the brands story. Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) support this by highlighting that brand storytelling creates strong and emotional connections and is fundamental as it is used as a means to inform customers. The use of storytelling is allowing brands to portray their symbolic value (Gurki, Schlatter and Woisetschläger, 2019).

Moreover, academics suggest that stories provide a brand with a theme and common ground between consumers and brands, allowing them to have their own experience within the brand’s story (Singh and Sonneburg, 2012). Stories are of high importance to brands (Escalas, 2004; Brown, Kozinets and Sherry, 2003), enabling connections to be formed with customers and among them and used to catch consumers interests (Escalas, 2004). Moreover, the author explains that brand storytelling results in loyalty and engagement from the receiver. Kaufman (2003) adds that brand storytelling results in a personal communication which leads to trust. Singh & Sonneburg (2012), describe stories in relation to a brand, as a means to create “awareness, comprehension, empathy, recognition, recall and providing meaning to a brand”. Brands can use stories as a way to highlight their brand benefit for consumers' understanding. In turn, stories generate positive feelings, “increasing brand trust, raising awareness and making the brand unique” (Kaufman, 2003). Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo (2012), highlight four key features in powerful storytelling: authentic, concise, reversal, and humorous. The authors suggest that incorporating these features will help brands differentiate from competition and create a competitive advantage. Table 2 defines brand story elements.

Brand story elements	
Element	Definition
Authenticity	Associated with genuineness, reality and being truthful
Conciseness	Associated with clarity, straight to the point while still getting the message across
Reversal	Associated with recognizing problem-solving capabilities
Humorous	Associated with increasing brand liking

Table 2: Brand story elements (Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo, 2012, p. 263)

Laurell and Söderman (2018) identify four roles of storytelling: combination of contents (combining content that form a story), relational (become related to each other), communication (stories are communicative) and marketing (influence of the story creation). Table 3 presents the four roles of storytelling and the literature reviews central findings in relation to brand storytelling.

The role of brand storytelling		
Role of storytelling identified by (Laurell and Söderman, 2017)	Findings (from my own literature review)	Study
Communication	Recall information	(Escalas, 2004)
	Humans learn, retrieve and tell information mainly in the form of stories	(Woodside, 2006)
	For awareness, comprehension, empathy, recognition, recall and providing meaning to a brand	(Singh & Sonneburg, 2012)
	In order to provide insight and educate target markets	(Hughes, Bendoni and Pehlivan, 2016).
Relational	Storytelling is an effective ways to connect with customers	(Baker and Boyle, 2009)
	Storytelling enables connections to be formed with customers and among them and used to catch consumers interests	(Escalas, 2004)
	Strong brand is built on transparent values and an emotional connection with their customers.	Fog et al., (2005)
	Storytelling creates strong and emotional connections	Herskovitz and Crystal (2010)

	to communicate with those around them.	Denning (2006)
Marketing	storytelling is allowing brands to portray their symbolic value	(Gurki, Schlatter, Woisetschläger, 2019).
	illustrate what they stand for	(Mossberg, 2008).
	highlight their brand benefit for consumers' understanding	
Combination of contents	Storytelling generates positive feelings	(Kaufman, 2003)
	Storytelling provides meaning to a brand	(Singh & Sonneburg, 2012)
	storytelling creates a brand concept	(Fog, et al., 2010),
	narratives are stories that are put together to make sense.	(Shelley, 2012)

Table 3: Role of storytelling identified by (Laurell and Söderman, 2017) and findings from own literature review.

2.2.2 Digital storytelling

Digital storytelling involves using digital software together with a narrative and a multimedia element such as: images, video, text and audio (Rossiter and Garcia, 2010). Combining digital tools and multimedia elements results in an effective digital story, being described as an art of telling a story together with modern technologies (Alexander, 2011). Rampton (2016) explains

that digital storytelling increases brand loyalty, trustworthiness and consumer connection. There is a significant visual impact of combining words from simple stories into interactive ones.

2.3 Luxury Brands and Storytelling

Storytelling is key for luxury brands. Luxury brands typically use storytelling as a communication tool to establish relationships with customers using their symbolic value (Hughes, et al., 2016; Herskovitz and Crystal, 2010). A luxury brand story portrays its unique history and enables brands to educate consumers on their brand. Further, storytelling enables luxury brands to portray characteristics customers are looking at within a brand (Hughes et al., 2016). Kapferer and Bastien (2009) emphasise how luxury brands' core focus “is to seduce the consumer into the dream world of the brand”, this to enchant the customers to desire, increasing sales. Through storytelling luxury brands communicate a message that will enhance the consumers’ perception of the brand. In addition, the intangible aspect of a brand is of high importance, luxury brand as an “epic tale” composed by stories, become a brands form of expression (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012).

2.4 Social media and luxury brands

One can acknowledge the drastic development of social media over the past decade with Facebook, Twitter and, Instagram dominating the industry (Laurell & Söderman, 2018). Social media allows users to communicate through content but also allows them to socialize, connect and interact with others (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The Luxury industry has previously been skeptical and resistant to integrate social media into their marketing communication (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch 2017). Since luxury brands have previously been seen as exclusive, social media was seen as a threat due to its massive reach, overexposure and a risk of losing control over their brand image. However, due to its interactive nature, social media has become a powerful marketing tool offering strategic advantages for luxury brands (Park, Im, and Kim, 2018; Parrott, Danbury, and Kanthavanich, 2015) enabling marketers to reach consumers directly (Lee and Watkins, 2016). Social media allows two-way communication with no restriction in time and place (Kim & Ko, 2012; Lee, & Watkins, 2016). In turn, social media has become a vital communication tool for brand-customer relationships and the consumer decision-making process (Petina, Guilloux & Micu, 2018; Hughes et al., 2016). In contrast to traditional marketing, marketers use social media

to help to harbor deep customer relationships through engagement and storytelling (Geissinger and Laurell, 2016).

Currently, there is limited research in respect to how luxury brands use storytelling to communicate their values online. The existing research is focused on luxury brands and storytelling, however fails to contribute to how luxury brands portray their values through brand storytelling on social media. Therefore, it would be interesting to understand how luxury brands use storytelling as a form of communication tool to portray their value in order to capture the purpose of the research, the following research questions are developed:

Research question: How do luxury brands portray their values through brand storytelling on social media?

3. Methodology

This section describes the how the research was conducted and analyzed, which involves the research design, the data collection, and the data analysis.

3.1 Research design

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of how luxury brands use storytelling on social media as a means to portray their luxurious value. Therefore, I chose a qualitative research approach. A qualitative approach is used to collect in-depth details on a phenomenon (Collis and Hussey, 2014) and to gain an in-depth understanding of participants thoughts and perceptions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Also, by adopting a qualitative approach different themes may arise and theoretical contributions to existing literature can be made. Moreover, the study has an exploratory nature (Saunders et al., 2012).

More specifically, I conducted a multiple case study. A case study is an in-depth analysis on a specific topic (Saunders et al., 2012) related to the research question. A case study allows a closer look into the real-life context of the topic. Moreover, a multiple case results in a more solid results. The choice of the brands followed the criteria chosen by Tynan, McKechnie and Chhuon (2010) who investigated the nature and co-creating value for luxury brands. In line with the research question, the choice of the brands had to have (1) global iconic status (2) aspirational and (3) use social media as a communication tool. Based on the three criterias and my linkedin network, three luxury companies were selected, Cartier, Chanel and La Mer.

3.2 Data collection

Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. Firstly, I collected primary data. I interviewed three different managers of the selected brands. I carried out three in-depth semi-structured interviews with the three individual brand managers in order to gain meaningful insight, this allowed more complex ideas to be explored and for the interviewees to speak freely (Saunders et al., 2012). The interviews focused on understanding the brand story and how the brand uses social media to portray its luxury brand values.

As the research progressed, I felt that more data should be collected in order to triangulate and complete what the managers had said. Triangulation involves using two or more sources of data to increase the reliability of results (Saunders et al., 2012). Since the study aims to understand how luxury brands portray their values through storytelling on social media, it was important to understand if their customers understood what they were trying to portray. This is what Grassi (2020) did when exploring luxury brands exclusivity and consumer engagement. The author collected the data through two methods: interviews with experts and a focus group with consumers. Since the study takes an exploratory approach it was flexible and easily adapted to change (Saunders et al., 2012). Similarly, I therefore decided to conduct five semi-structured interviews with potential consumers. The interviews with the consumers focused on exploring whether or not the luxury brands were able to communicate their value through storytelling. Five participants were selected through non-probability sampling, according to Saunders et al., (2012) the minimum sample size for a semi-structured interview is five. The participant selection followed a similar criteria to Bazi, Filieri, and Gorton (2020) who investigate customer engagement with luxury brands. The participants were selected based on if they had (1) purchased a luxury good in the past six months and (2) followed one of the selected companies on Instagram. Hence, those who failed to meet these screening questions were not interviewed.

The interviews with the customers were inspired by Van Driel & Dumitrica (2021) who combine the interview with visual content to study professionalization of Instagram influencers. The authors study how influencers remain authentic on Instagram and how they are perceived by their audience. This provides insight into how the brands put their content into practice and how the consumers interpret it. Hence, in-depth semi-structured interviews took place combined with visual content. The visual content was selected from the brand's social media platform, Instagram. Instagram was selected because during the first interviews, the brand managers all explain the importance of Instagram over other social media platforms. This is in line with Dahlhoff (2016) who highlights that YouTube and Instagram are mainly used by luxury brands for online engagement and visual storytelling. The author continues to emphasize the premium visual feel of Instagram. In addition, Instagram allows videos (longer and shorter) to be uploaded, therefore Instagram was selected as the social media platform.

Visual content was collected from the respective Instagram pages. The time frame for observation was from January 2020 to December 2020, where the participants observed the content and expressed what they believed was being communicated. By showing the visual content, I was able to understand how the participants interpret the content and how the brands put their storytelling into practice. The interviews had a similar structure; open-ended questions were prepared beforehand to help guide the conversations whilst other questions arose throughout the interview. This also allows participants to speak freely and for the probing technique to be implemented.

Number	Type of Data	Name of the Interviewee	Organization	Position in the Organization	Date of the interview	Length of the interview
#1	Interview	F1	La Mer Technology	Social Media Manager	29/11/2020	45 min
#2	Interview	F2	Chanel	Head of Merchandise, Planning and Buying	30/11/2020	60 min
#3	Interview	M1	Cartier	Area Sales Manager	30/11/2020	60 min

Table 4: Table of the primary data

Number	Type of Data	Name of the Interviewee	Age	Date of the interview	Length of the interview
#1	Interview	F1	25	9/03/2021	60min
#2	Interview	F2	29	9/03/2021	45 min
#3	Interview	F3	33	10/03/2021	60 min

#4	Interview	M1	33	11/03/2021	60 min
#5	Interview	M2	35	9/03/2021	45 min

Table 5: Table of the interview of the customers.

3.3 Data analysis

I carried out all interviews online through zoom, they were recorded and thereafter transcribed for analysis. Then, the data was analyzed by using an open-coding method (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This entails selecting keywords related to the research question and categorizing broader categories into more specific ones and recurring themes. I began by reviewing the interviews of the managers to identify the key themes. This allowed common themes and patterns to be identified. Further, to complete what the managers were saying, secondary data was collected. In addition, the interviews with the customers gave insight to understand if they perceived the values being portrayed by the luxury brands on social media. The goal was to understand if by observing the brand's social media page the potential customers would identify what each brand is trying to communicate. Here, the same method for analyzing the data was used, an open-coding method. This also facilitated common themes and patterns to be identified. Once the analysis took place, this allowed similarities and differences between the two interviews to be compared.

Interview with the brand experts		
First order codes	Second Order codes	Final Code
Chanel: “Be faithful and true to the Chanel’s origins and our consumers”	Right wording	Maintaining authenticity
Cartier: “a picture is not enough”		
Chanel: “refined simplicity”		
Cartier: “by creating stories around how products are made creates a special meaning about our products”.	Heritage and History	
La Mer: “to tell a compelling story, it needs to remain authentic to who the brand is”.		
Chanel: “Chanel would not be Chanel without, Coco Chanel”		

Table 6: Example of coding

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Title of the document	Author	Date Publication	Type of document	Use in the Analysis
FACE LIFT IN A JAR?	Christine Gorman	8/14/2000	Article	Understanding why the la mer creme is seen as a luxury
La mer marketing heritage brand to millennials - and hollywood: Women's wear daily	Allison Collins	21/02/2019	Article	How La Mer has turned to modern marketing to portray their heritage
The Creme de la Mer Ritual by La Mer	La Mer		Video: youtube	Brand insight
See The World You Want To Sea La Mer Blue Heart	La Mer	17/06/2020	Video: youtube	Brand insight
La Mer Takes London	KATHLEEN BAIRD-MURRAY	24/01/2020	Article Vogue	Brand insight
La Mer Jars Got a (Special-Edition) Facelift	JENNA RENNERT	4/10/2019	Article Vogue	Brand insight
Crème de la Mer, Discover the Miracle...	La Mer		Youtube interview	Brand insight
Cartier's rules for success	CNN	11/4/2008	Interview - CNN	Cartier CEO Bernard Fornas discusses jewelry trends and his rules for remaining the number one jeweler in the world.

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Why is Cartier so expensive	Top Trending	16/01/2020	Youtube interview	The story behind cartier luxury
New global study into luxury brands - Product quality, brand heritage most important. Cartier tops global list, Tiffany is top with US consumers		Jun 15, 2018		Product quality is the most important driver of luxury perception in every market. Either quality or brand heritage scored highest out of all eight principle components of the Luxury Index.
Panthère de Cartier	Cartier	7/1/2020		Brand insight
History of Cartier Jeweler to the Kings and Queens	<u>Andrew Pidor</u>	8/2/2020		Brand insight
Cartier	Forbes	27/07/ 2020	Forbes	Brand insight
Chanel	Forbes	15/10/2020	Forbes	Brand insight

Table 7: secondary sources

4. Empirical Setting

This chapter presents the selected companies. A brief history of the company is presented, followed by a description of their main product or service. The interviews with the managers and with the customers are used to give some insight into the values of the brands. In addition, their social media presence is presented.

4.1 La Mer Technology

In 1965, scientist Dr. Max Huber founded Crème de la Mer. German-born, Dr. Max Huber was originally an aerospace physicist who suffered from a horrible accident due to a lab explosion that resulted in severe burns. 6,000 experiments over 12 years led him to discover “Crème de la Mer” the miracle cream that would enable him to transform his skin. The cream is known as the “miracle broth” due to its unique ingredient composition and process. As suggested in the name, the sea is where it all began, the formula is created through a fermentation process involving kelp. Today, La Mer is a world-renowned skincare and cosmetic brand.

After Dr. Huber’s death in 1995, La Mer joined The Estée Lauder family. Today, La Mer is the most “coveted skincare brand in the world”. Fabrizio Freda, president, and chief executive officer states that in 2018 a record was achieved in net sales. By investing in multiple stores worldwide, digital and social La Mer reached double-digit sales moreover, contributed to over \$1 billion in net sales. From the interviews, La Mer identifies itself as “a premium luxury skincare brand” adding that the ocean plays a vital role in their brand image due to its “miracle broth”. Currently, La Mer has 1 million followers on Instagram, 1.4 million on Facebook, and 20.1 million on Youtube.

4.2 Cartier

Cartier was founded in 1847 by a Parisian jeweler, Louis-François Cartier who bought the store from his employer. Soon enough, Cartier became world-renowned for jewelry and was mainly worn by members of the upper class. King Edward VII named Cartier "Jeweler of Kings, & the King of Jewelers". In 1899 Cartier’s sons took over the family business to make it international by becoming present in both London and New York (Cartier). The brand quickly started making watches, which today are icons such as the Santos (1904), the Tortue (1912) and the Tank (1919).

Cartier is the best known for their jewelry and watches, above all, for pushing boundaries. During the interviews, Cartier discussed how “creativity, sharing, freedom and excellence” are in Cartier’s core values. Cartier continues to push boundaries whilst remaining true to their origins. This is also evident when M2 shares that Cartier’s Instagram page portrays “timeless yet creative”. In 1997, Cartier became part of the Richemont luxury group and is today the luxury group is valued at \$12.2 billion (2020). Currently, Cartier has 410.4 million followers on Instagram, 4.8 million on Facebook, and 154 thousand on Youtube.

4.3 Chanel

At the age of 12, Gabrielle Chanel was put in a convent after the passing of her mother. Chanel was raised by nuns who taught her how to sew which later led to her life’s legacy. Chanel opened her first boutique in 1910 selling hats. The boutique was highly popular among french actresses which helped her establish a strong reputation and open more stores. Chanel revolutionized the fashion world when she introduced traditional male pieces into her collections. In 1915 Chanel opened her first couture house in Biarritz and then later in Paris, where it still remains.

Chanel is more than just a brand, Gabrielle Chanel was a style icon and still today Chanel is a reflection of Chanel’s lifestyle. The brand Chanel is owned by Chanel and is valued at \$113 billion (2019). Currently, Chanel has 4.36 million followers on Instagram, 22 million on Facebook and 1.79 million on Youtube.

5. Findings

The existing literature fails to acknowledge how luxury brands use brand storytelling on social media to portray their values. As social media continues to evolve luxury brands need to find new and creative ways to remain exclusive and true to their brand identity. The following chapter will answer the research question: How do luxury brands portray their values through brand storytelling on social media?

5.1 Guaranteeing consistency

A practice identified to how the luxury brands portray their value is by guaranteeing consistency. From the analysis two main strategies emerged to guarantee consistency.

5.1.1 Consistent brand image

The findings identify consistency as a key practice. The managers stress the importance of being credible, maintaining the brands reputation and staying true to their brand identity on social media. Explaining that in order to remain credible and exclusive they should always evoke the same feeling to their followers and consumers, despite the platform. By being consistent the luxury brands are able to portray their values, as they are always inline. The manager of Cartier stresses that consumers have a strong image of “what is Cartier” and that its identity is what distinguishes them from other brands.

“It is so important to be consistent across the different channels... our brand should always look and make you feel the same. It is like having a relationship”. (Interview of area sales manager, Cartier)

This is evident when one customer discusses that she has a clear brand image of what Cartier is and that for her it is important to have the same experience wherever Cartier is.

La Mer highlights that their story is the most effective way for them to connect with customers and remains the same today as when the brand was founded, explaining that it is consistent and that it is what people remember. The manager continues by explaining that they have a brand image that is also a reflection of their values, therefore all content created needs to be a reflection

of that. It is also identified that the brands have very specific guidelines to go by when posting on their social media channels.

“we have very strict guidelines to follow, everything needs to be linked back to the brands value”. (Interview of social media manager, La Mer)

5.1.2 Guaranteeing consistency through brand aesthetics

From the analysis of the data emerged the importance of the visual elements to maintain consistency. The cases show that colours and symbols play a fundamental role in the luxury brands. The same colours are used and iconic designs are frequently reintroduced. Implying that consistency is what stays in the memory. The manager of Cartier explains that they frequently use their “iconic panthere design” and “the red colour” because it resonates with the consumer and emotions are conveyed, above all, it is a reflection of Cartier.

An important element to also consider that is frequently brought up are the aesthetics of the layout of the page. This plays an important role especially on Instagram, Chanel explains the visual content is directly linked with storytelling. Similarly, La Mer explains that their Instagram page needs to be “pleasing to the eye”, continuing by saying that the style and images/videos need to make sense as a whole. One customer shares that La Mer’s Instagram page is peaceful and compares it to Chanel’s Instagram page suggesting that La Mer portrays a harmonic feeling to the consumer.

“La Mer transmits peace because of all the water elements that are used. It is light in comparison to Chanel’s Instagram page” (Interview with customer)

5.2 Maintaining authenticity

Maintaining authenticity was identified as the second practice to how the luxury brands portray their values. From the analysis two main strategies emerged to how they maintain authenticity.

5.2.1 Choosing the right words

Authenticity is a key component for luxury brands. The findings show how important it is for the three brands to reflect authenticity on social media, also expressing the importance of being truthful when communicating. Through storytelling the luxury brands are able to combine different content to form a story. This is reflected when Chanel comments that authenticity is an essential element to the House of Chanel, highlighting that it is also how consumers perceive the brand. Moreover, provides meaning to the brand.

“Be faithful and true to the Chanel's origins and our consumers” (Interview with Head of Merchandise, Planning and Buying, Chanel)

Further, from the analysis of the data emerged that the choice of words was a major component to how the brands reflect authenticity. The managers discussed how the choice of words can really influence one's perceptions of their brand. Often the wording revolves around the brand's value. The manager of Cartier explains “a picture is not enough” and how using words such as “rarity and craftsmanship” not only portrays Cartier's prestigious image but also embodies their entire brand heritage and traditions. Similarly, Chanel regularly uses paradoxes to attract attention, such as “casual elegance” and “refined simplicity” to symbolise who they are. The managers demonstrate the use of the brand story element conciseness, using short words or phrases to get their point across. In addition, “craftsmanship” is frequently used by Cartier and by Chanel which communicates the luxury characteristics.

Most of the potential consumers comment on the captions that are used by the brands, suggesting that they play a positive role. One customer explains how certain words “are a reflection of the brand”. However, another customer explains that she never reads the captions due to time.

“I like scrolling and looking at Images or Videos. I do not take the time to read anything”
(Interview with customer)

5.2.2 Staying true to their heritage and history

The luxury brands use their origin and heritage to communicate their authenticity. Cartier and Chanel often describe the product's journey and how it is influenced by their history to the creation of a piece. Through stories the luxury brands are able to relate to consumers and catch their attention.

“by creating stories around how products are made creates a special meaning about our products”. *(Interview of area sales manager, Cartier)*

La Mer’s powerful story uses authenticity and reversal of brand story elements. By using the founder’s name, education and job they are portraying authentic detail. The founder was in an accident that led him and to the product, in this case the reversal.

“to tell a compelling story, it needs to remain authentic to who the brand is”. *(Interview of social media manager, La Mer)*

Chanel also explains how Gabrielle Chanel plays a central role in Chanel's authenticity. By using Gabrielle Chanel as part of the brand’s storytelling is what makes the brand unique and creates meaning to the brand. Evidently, Chanel was more than just a boutique Chanel herself was a fashion icon and representation of what the brand symbolized.

“Chanel would not be Chanel without, Coco Chanel” *(Interview with Head of Merchandise, Planning and Buying, Chanel)*

Interestingly the potential consumers had a clear and concrete image of who Chanel was.

“CoCo Chanel was a fashion icon, she took the fashion world by storm. Still today people use pieces that were created 50 years ago, the little black dress and the classic flap bag.” *(Interview with customer)*

“I really believe that even if people are not interested in fashion, they know who CoCo Chanel was.” (Interview with customer)

5.2.2 Selecting the right influencers

During the interviews, it is discussed how influencers and celebrities shape the brand’s identity. Both Chanel and Cartier agree that “influencer marketing” is nothing new but has drastically changed due to social media. Cartier explains how having certain “brand ambassadors” is a way of communicating exclusivity stating that “Cartier was worn by the royals”.

However, both luxury brands note that today influencers are a lot more personal and relatable. It is also suggested that who they chose today to be a part of the brand is a direct reflection to who they are. Hence emphasizing that they need to be authentic to the brand. Chanel refers to their ambassadors as “heroines” which is also a reference to Gabrielle Chanel herself. Evidently, luxury brands are able to use celebrities and/or influencers to tell a story to market themselves. This enables the brands to portray their symbolic value. One could also argue that relations between a follower and a consumer are formed.

One customer shares that when she watches the Oscars or the Met Gala the celebrities wearing Chanel or Cartier really reflect the brand.

“You pick a choose who you think is a right fit. When Lily-Rose Depp wore Chanel at the Met Gala, it couldn't have been a better fit. She symbolizes everything Chanel stands for” (Interview with customer)

5.4 Remain aspirational

Previous literature emphasises how luxury brands' core focus “is to seduce the consumer into the dream world of the brand” (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Through social media, Chanel explains that they bring their followers into “Chanel’s world” by posting content aiming to have an emotional connection. Moreover, by bringing followers into a dream world it creates a sense of community. In addition, it enables Chanel’s to portray their exclusive value.

Two customers highlight that even if you are not part of that community you get to enter the brand's world on Instagram.

“By watching their videos you want to be part Chanel, even if it is sitting in their fashion show” (Interview with customer)

La Mer explains that part of their storytelling is to create meaning that the followers can relate with, “identify themselves with”. Cartier explains that it is not about the products in themselves but what they symbolize.

“Buying an iconic product from a brand is to some extent a reflection of yourself”. (Interview of area sales manager, Cartier)

It is suggested that consumers become more involved when they see something that reflects who they are or wish to be. Cartier is “selling a dream”, explaining that there is an emphasis of being in love and that “the love bracelet” represents that. The interviewees explain that part of being a luxury brand is being aspirational and creating a desire. La Mer highlights that “some posts are for daydreaming”, adding that storytelling plays an important role in creating that desire.

5.4 Engaging and educating the potential consumers

During the interviews, the managers of the luxury brands confirm that they mainly use social media to engage with their younger demographics. The brands discuss the need to resonate with the target market and how through stories they are able to convey meaning. This demonstrates that through storytelling they are able to communicate to provide meaning. Moreover, storytelling enables luxury brands to provide insight and educate the target markets. Through interactive content the luxury brands are able to resonate with the target and capture their attention.

The interviewees addressed that social media is a great way to engage and educate consumers, through storytelling the luxury brands are able to educate their followers to understand their brand value. Chanel has a series named “Inside Chanel” where they have a mini-series about different

aspects of the brand. Moreover, the manager explains that their brand ambassadors frequently do short videos talking about their life and what Chanel means to them. The findings indicate that Chanel uses a humorous story element to relate to the consumers.

On the other hand, La Mer is a cosmetic brand and frequently posts “how to videos” to educate their consumers. La Mer emphasizes how they need to stay creative to set them apart from the competition and capture the follower’s attention. Unlike traditional marketing, La Mers manager expresses how online they have a massive reach, how through Instagram the content was a brand driver,

“it is so accessible despite the price point of our products”. (*Interview of social media manager, La Mer*)

The findings reveal several factors that explain how luxury brands successfully use social media to portray their values through brand storytelling. It is asserted that luxury brands communicate their brand values through creating meaningful stories. The brands use storytelling marketing to portray their symbolic value and what they stand for.

6. Discussion

Evidently, the findings support previous findings that storytelling plays a powerful role in luxury brand communication as a means of portraying their value (Hughes, et al., 2016; Herskovitz and Crystal, 2010). The findings also support Laurell and Söderman (2017) previous research on the role of storytelling. Firstly, it is clear that luxury brands use storytelling for communication. Through stories, the luxury brands are able to create awareness (Singh & Sonneburg, 2012), recall information (Escalas, 2004), and provide insight and educate target markets (Hughes, et al., 2016). The findings show that one way luxury brands communicate their brand values is by guaranteeing consistency. It also suggests that by sticking to the same visual elements the luxury brands strengthen credibility by staying true to their brand identity. Also consistent with previous studies, authenticity is a key component for luxury brands. Interestingly, the findings show that the choice of words is a major factor in how the brands are able to reflect authenticity. Through storytelling, the luxury brands are able to combine different content to form a story which can be reflected in the wording together with imagery or videos.

Laurell and Söderman (2017) also identify relational to a role of storytelling, to build relationships with customers which is also supported by the findings. Taking Chanel as an example, by being aspirational the luxury brand is able to build an emotional connection with the receiver. Kapferer & Bastien (2009) explain that luxury brands seduce consumers into a dream world and this is highlighted by the findings. Furthermore, Chanel and Cartier indicate that through storytelling they have built an emotional connection with their customers by going back to their heritage and history. It should also be noted that in the case of Chanel, the founder Gabrielle Chanel still plays a central role and is still today someone people look up to.

In terms of marketing as a role for storytelling, the findings show that through celebrities and/or influencers the luxury brands are able to tell a story in order to market themselves. This enables the brands to portray their symbolic value through someone else. Hence the findings suggest that relations between a follower and a consumer are formed based on brand. In addition, La Mer uses Instagram for its massive reach and frequently posts “how to videos” to educate their consumers and also to portray their symbolic value and what they stand for. An interesting finding was that all three brands use brand story elements highlighted by Chiu et al., (2012). However, the reversal

element associated with problem-solving was harder to identify in Cartier and in Chanel's communication strategy.

7. Conclusion

This section answers the research question by concluding the main findings from the analysis.

The purpose of this paper was to explore how luxury brands portray their values through brand storytelling on social media. Prior studies have mostly focused on luxury brands and brand storytelling however limited research has been conducted regarding how luxury brands communicate their values through brand storytelling on social media. To answer the research question: How do luxury brands portray their values through brand storytelling on social media, a qualitative study was conducted due to the exploratory nature of this topic using a multiple case study.

A conclusion that can be drawn is that with social media luxury brands need to remain creative in order to distinguish themselves from competition. The research conducted identified four ways luxury brands portray their values with the help of brand storytelling on social media: (1) guaranteeing consistency (2) maintaining authenticity (3) remaining aspirational (4) engaging and educating potential customers. Further, the study finds that the luxury brands aim to have an emotional connection with their followers and through storytelling they are able to give meaning to their brand.

7.1 Limitations

Firstly, this study is restricted to three luxury brands which limits the data collected. Also, the luxury brands selected were not in the same category therefore general conclusions were drawn rather than identifying differences and similarities. In addition, only Instagram was taken into consideration as the main social media platform therefore the results are limited to one platform. Also, the companies chosen should have been approximately in the same size, Chanel and Cartier are a lot greater in comparison with La Mer.

7.2 Future research

The data collected indicates that further research should be conducted on the topic however, a broader sample should be selected in order to successfully identify similarities and differences. One could also investigate to what degree the social media platform influences luxury brands storytelling. It would also be interesting to investigate storytelling from a cultural point of view, to understand how storytelling is shaped by different cultures. Also, in regards to future study it is suggested that the study should be replicated as a quantitative study in order to obtain a larger sample and thus, more generalizable results.

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