
Original Article

The anatomy of the luxury fashion brand

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ABSTRACT *Purpose:* To explore the critical dimensions necessary to create and maintain the success of a luxury fashion brand. *Design/methodology/approach:* This study adopts a qualitative approach in the form of case studies of 12 international fashion retailers. This involved semi-structured interviews with management to explore their knowledge and experiences, supported by secondary research such as internal documents and media reports. *Findings:* Identifies nine interrelated key luxury fashion brand attributes that are crucial in the creation and maintenance of the brand proposition. The management of the luxury fashion brand is complex, and requires a consistent and coherent approach. *Originality/value:* An empirical understanding of the luxury fashion brand's critical dimensions will assist in effective and efficient luxury fashion brand management.

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INTRODUCTION

The luxury goods market is significant, not only in terms of its market value (estimated to have exceeded US\$130 billion in 2007),^{1,2} but also in terms of its rate of growth – which has in the past 10 years significantly outpaced that of other consumer goods categories. The rate of growth has been driven by a variety of factors, the most significant of which has been the

increase in the number of high-net-worth individuals with an appetite for luxury brand consumption. In response to significant consumer interest and demand, the suppliers of luxury fashion goods have developed business strategies that seek to better service consumer demand by increasing availability through the extension of their geographic coverage and their market accessibility via the opening of

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dedicated points of sale.^{3–5} Fuelling and supporting this development of the luxury market has been increased media interest in luxury goods consumption, and the emergence of luxury brand awareness as an integral element of consumer culture. Consequently, a variety of studies have noted that luxury brands are among the most recognised and respected of consumer brands the world over.^{5,6}

Within the luxury offer, there is an ever-expanding offer of luxury categories. There are four principal categories of luxury goods: fashion (couture, ready-to-wear and accessories), perfumes and cosmetics, wines and spirits and watches and jewellery.⁷ More recently, the categories of luxury automobiles, hotels, tourism, private banking, home furnishing and airlines have been added.⁸ The focus of this study is the luxury fashion goods category. Firstly, this focus is justified on the basis that it accounts for the largest proportion of luxury goods sales, with a 42 per cent share in 2003,^{9,10} and the strongest product category growth in 2007.¹¹ Secondly, previous studies have suggested that the branding of luxury fashion goods is more complex than other sectors by virtue of the speed of change within the sector (the majority of luxury fashion goods are dormant at the end of the fashion season),^{2,7,12,13} as well as the scale and number of fashion items that are marketed using a single luxury brand name. Thirdly, the marketing of fashion goods is typically more complex and costly as a result of differences in product numbers, operating scale and the tendency for luxury fashion companies to take direct control of the distribution of their goods within markets. As such, these costs and the complexity of managing the marketing of this category of luxury goods have previously been shown to exceed those of the other luxury brand categories.^{8,12,14,15}

Yet, despite the significance of the luxury sector in terms of the insights that it could

provide with respect to contemporary business practise and the nature of consumption, it has been recognised that the sector has been under-represented within the academic literature.^{7,12,16} Furthermore, although the literature relevant to the branding of consumer goods has grown hugely in the past decade, the application of branding within the luxury goods sector has received minimal attention. In particular, although various recent studies have sought to delineate the form and function of consumer brands, there have been very few empirical studies that have sought to identify and understand the processes that support the creation and maintenance of the luxury fashion brand.

This study is based on the proposition that the luxury brand – and specifically the luxury fashion brand – is distinctive because of its application to diverse, ever-changing product assortments (from underwear to business suiting), that it invariably operates as an experiential brand (within the retail space), and that it functions as a means of creating and communicating an identity for the brand user. As such, it is suggested that the delineation of the form and dimensions of the luxury fashion brand will not only contribute to an understanding of the nature of luxury marketing, but will also offer further insight into the functioning of branding in general. Therefore, it is within this context that the aim of this study was to provide a framework incorporating the dimensions of the luxury fashion brand.

Given this uncertainty and neglect, and mindful of the opportunity to contribute to a wider debate concerning the nature and characteristics of product branding, two principal objectives were identified for this study:

1. to identify the dimensions of the luxury fashion brand;
2. to create a framework depicting the luxury fashion brand.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Defining the luxury fashion brand

Conceptualisations of luxury are typically derived from either a consumption perspective^{5,17–20} or from an application as a product branding device.^{7,21–23} There has emerged a strong strand of literature that seeks to explain luxury consumption, particularly in terms of having a symbolic function that operates at the individual and collective level. As such, luxury is identified in terms of its psychological value,⁵ its function as a status symbol^{20,24,25} and as a highly involved consumption experience that is strongly congruent to a person's self-concept.¹⁷ From a product perspective, luxury brands are frequently defined in terms of their excellent quality, high transaction value, distinctiveness, exclusivity and craftsmanship.^{21,23,26,27} Jackson⁷ proposes the following as the core characteristics of the luxury product:

‘... exclusivity, premium prices, image and status which combine to make them more desirable for reasons other than function’.
(p. 158)

Research on luxury brands

Research relevant to the creation and development of luxury brands is limited,^{12,16,26} and previous studies have recognised a lack of clarity with respect to what defines a luxury brand.^{5,17,28} Instead, the research examining the marketing of luxury goods has tended to take a consumer perspective,¹ specifically in terms of motivations for purchasing luxury goods.^{20,29,30} These studies are often criticised for their over-reliance on student samples and lack of appropriate external controls.¹⁶ Other key research areas within luxury include the development,^{12,31,32} the protection^{33–36} and the brand extension.^{37–39}

More recently, great attention has been given to a consideration of the dimensions

of the luxury brand (Table 1). Nueno and Quelch²³ highlight the importance of product excellence to the development of a credible luxury brand, in addition to the significance of controlled distribution. Bernard Arnault, the chief executive officer (CEO) of LVMH,⁴¹ emphasises the significance of corporate identity, culture and spirit, and furthermore indicates the importance of creative excellence in luxury brand development. Similarly, the Morgan Stanley Dean Witter⁴⁰ model considers the dimensions from a practitioners' viewpoint. Phau and Prendergast²⁸ highlight four key luxury attributes, although indicating that their identified attributes of recognised brand identity, quality, exclusivity and customer awareness are critical elements of the luxury brand. Beverland¹⁶ maintains that this is not an exhaustive list. Indeed, he proposes that these are instead the characteristics of any successful brand and not only that of a luxury brand. Consequently, Beverland provides additional dimensions within his framework, and these include elements such as external endorsement, corporate culture, brand/corporate heritage and product integrity.

In 2003, Alleres²² suggested six characteristics of a luxury fashion brand that is derived from the strong influence of the French luxury heritage brands. Considering the Italian model, Moore and Birtwistle¹² examine Tom Ford and Domenico De Sole's strategy for the repositioning of Gucci as an authentic luxury fashion brand. They identify dimensions that all require careful management to develop and create a successful brand. Although the authors make no claim that the Gucci template can be universally applied, they argue that it serves to provide a more comprehensive account of luxury brand development when compared with other studies. One of the most recent models is provided by Okonkwo,² in which she identifies 10 core characteristics of the successful luxury fashion brand.



Table 1: Overview of the key models identifying the luxury fashion brand dimensions

Critical dimensions	Niueno and Quelch (1998) ²³	Arnault (2000) ²⁶	Morgan Stanley Dean Witter (2000) ⁴⁰	Phau and Prendergast (2000) ²⁸	Alleres (2003) ²²	Beverland (2004) ¹⁶	Moore and Birtwistle (2005) ¹²	Okonkwo (2007) ²
Brand/marketing strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant marketing programme; Global reputation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brand image; A drive to reinvent oneself to be the best 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical mass; Global recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well known brand identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The brand name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing; Value driven emergence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A distinct brand identity; A global reputation; Emotional appeal
Product and design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Premium quality; Heritage of craftsmanship; Element of uniqueness to each product; Recognisable style or design; Ability to time design shifts when category is fashion intensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product quality; Creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core competences and other products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition symbols; Creations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product integrity; Iconic products/design; Control over product manufacturer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative, creative, unique and appealing products; Consistent delivery of premium quality; Heritage of craftsmanship
Price								
Exclusivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited production run 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evoke exclusivity 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Premium price 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Premium price Exclusivity in goods productions
Communications strategy			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Powerful advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase brand awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorsement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorsement; Fashion shows, store displays, PR, product packaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorsement; Fashion shows, store displays, PR, product packaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High visibility
Brand leadership/designer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personality and values of its creator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company spirit 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The creators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designer PR face of the brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tightly controlled distribution
Distribution strategy			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immaculate flagship stores Superb customer service 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flagship store and store brand concept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flagship store and store brand concept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tightly controlled distribution
Heritage					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heritage 	

Adapted from references 2,12,16,22,23,28,40,41.

And although Okonkwo² states that this is not a definitive model, she does maintain that it provides an insight into the management of a luxury brand.

Key luxury fashion brand characteristics

As Table 1 highlights, there are a number of reoccurring and divergent identified key attributes within the literature, in order to create and maintain luxury fashion positioning. Within the luxury proposition, the concept of brand – specifically the brand name and identity – is considered fundamental.^{2,7,22,42} The luxury brand requires a relevant, clear and defined marketing strategy.^{12,16,23} The strategy is formed to assist in developing the global reputation and presence of the brand, and to leverage the brand status and awareness.^{8,28} In conjunction with the concept of brand, various other attributes are considered crucial for creating a luxury brand, including product and design attributes of quality,^{2,7,9,12,16,21,23,25,27,28,42} craftsmanship,^{2,7,19,21,23,26,42} and innovative, creative and unique products.^{2,12,22,23,40,42} Bruce and Kratz¹³ highlight the fact that the iconic coveted products are central to the luxury product offer. These iconic products are typified by authentic, quality and exclusive characteristics^{26,27,38} that are aspirational. These key products often epitomise the brand signature or ‘brand DNA’,²³ as they can assist in portraying the personality and values of the creators.^{2,13} The appointment of the high-profile fashion designer enhances the appeal of the products,^{7,13} and subsequently increases their relevance to a current market. The premium price of luxury goods is only explicitly referenced in two of the frameworks within Table 1.^{2,12} Although it has been acknowledged previously that a high price positioning need not necessarily equal a luxury positioning, there is a consensus in the literature that luxury goods typically command a premium price

differential when compared with other products within the same category.^{21,26,43} The components of rarity and exclusivity are considered a significant trait of luxury brands.^{21,23,26,27,44–48} The Nueno and Quelch²³ and Okonkwo² models both identify that limited production is fundamentally linked to the maintenance of the brand exclusivity. The aura of scarcity adds to the appeal of luxury brands.⁴⁹ Managers can sustain the exclusivity of the brand through advertising, endorsement, controlling distribution and price,⁴⁹ and producing limited editions lines.^{2,23}

The environment and service provided by luxury brands are considered a crucial attributes in the luxury proposition.^{2,12,22,40,50,51} Luxury stores are considered shopping cathedrals⁵² that use architecture to convey a sense of splendour,¹³ and define the shopping experience for wealthy customers.^{13,52} The luxury environment and experience of a brand is showcased in the flagship store, which is defined as a major outlet generally located in a capital city, retaining the full collection of a fashion brand’s merchandise.⁵² These stores typically enjoy significant financial investment, and are considered crucial to a brand’s marketing communication process and reputation, and as a support for the wholesale business.⁵³ Company own-stores allow the companies to manage the customer experience at the point of sale.⁷ Customer service is also vital in the luxury consumption experience.^{2,24} Within fashion, branding has become as much about branding the experience as the product.⁵⁴ The consumption experience provides an insight into the brand lifestyle by making it a reality.⁸ Along with the control of the consumer experience, Moore and Birtwistle¹² and Okonkwo² also state the importance of controlling the manufacturer, particularly within license agreements, to ensure that the brand positioning is not compromised.

Brand heritage is considered prevalent in Alleres',²² Beverland's¹⁶ and Moore and Birtwistle's¹² models. Many luxury brands have a long history, which adds to the authenticity of the brand,²¹ and is considered one of the hallmarks of a luxury brand.⁴⁹ The retention of heritage has the ability to create nostalgia and credibility for a brand,⁵⁵ and is often correlated to the heritage of the country of origin.⁵⁶

Powerful marketing communications are considered key to building the luxury brand image.² Relevant advertising can provide support in establishing the brand image, which consequently assists in creating identity and attraction,^{53,57} and generates awareness.⁵⁸ Other means of luxury brand communication are celebrity endorsement, public relations (PR), events and direct marketing.^{2,12,16,52}

Finally as highlighted in Arnault's model (cited in Kapferer),²⁶ the company spirit is considered key to luxury fashion brand success. The investment in the spirit or culture of a firm allows the support for a brand to extend to the internal as well as an external commitment to the brand.⁵⁹ Internal branding assists the employees in understanding desire, and encourages them to deliver on the brand promise.^{60–62}

Despite the fact that many of the dimensions of luxury branding are identified in the literature, it is unclear whether and how these attributes are connected. Nor is it clear whether this is a definitive listing. Furthermore, as highlighted in the review of the frameworks of the luxury brand, there is a dearth of research that empirically considers the dimensions. Beverland's¹⁶ paper, the only empirical investigation in Table 1, is considered narrow in its scope and therefore in its application.¹²

Given this uncertainty and neglect, and mindful of the opportunity to contribute to a wider debate concerning the nature and characteristics of product branding, this study will identify the dimensions of the

luxury fashion brand and depict within a framework.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate these issues, an interpretive qualitative case study research methodology was adopted, as it is considered to be the most appropriate for an exploratory theory building approach.^{16,63–65} Furthermore, the number of research studies adopting case study design is increasing within a marketing context^{66–68} and within a luxury marketing/branding context.^{12,16} There are three main reasons that support the implementation of a case study design for this research. Firstly, as the key aim of this study is to investigate the means and methods of luxury fashion brand creation and development, the use of the case study method assists in providing in-depth descriptions and illustrations rather than surface-level observations.^{16,68} Thus, within this context, the close proximity with those involved in the management of luxury fashion brands provides the opportunity to obtain an intimate understanding. Furthermore, the case study method can provide contextual and historical dimensions to research,^{65,69} thus providing a means to consider the unique history and heritage of each brand and how these influence their decision-making today.^{16,70} Secondly, because of the lack of empirical work in the area, this approach provides a means of extracting rich and relevant data. Both Yin⁷¹ and Perry⁶⁷ suggest that the case study method can assist in compensating for a lack of established theory and/or where accepted principles and constructs have not been established and are clearly inadequate. Thirdly, there is a dearth of conceptual development within this field. The case study data facilitate the identification and construction of conceptualisations of the luxury brand building process.

Preparation for data collection

Case companies were chosen based on literal replication following strict criteria. The study focuses on British luxury brands because of access restrictions. The criteria for case study selection were established as follows:

1. The cases should be identified as luxury fashion brands through both the firms and established databases, principally Walpole, Mintel and Euromonitor, positioning the brands as a luxury fashion proposition;
2. The potential selected brands should have been in existence for a minimum of 2 years. This allows for a historical review of the luxury fashion brand development;
3. The flagship stores should operate in prestige locations;
4. The potential companies should operate at least one luxury fashion store in the UK.

In order to identify companies that meet these requirements, four resources were

consulted: Walpole, a British luxury association;⁷⁴ Mintel's⁹ 'Luxury Goods Retailing' report; Euromonitor,³ 'The World Market for Luxury Goods' report; and various leading fashion journals including Vogue, Elle, Marie Claire, Arena and GQ. From these, 26 British luxury fashion brands were identified. Initially, all 26 companies were contacted, allowing them all an equal opportunity to take part in the study. This became a process of self-selection.

Out of the 26 companies contacted, 12 agreed to participate. To preserve anonymity in report findings, companies were coded (Table 2). The case brands differed in their luxury brand orientation towards heritage-based image 'history' or a design 'story'-based image, corporate size and the product offering.

Multiple sources of evidence, documentary evidence and interviews, were used in the data collection phase to protect the research from bias.⁷⁵⁻⁷⁷ In all the cases, a tape-recorded interview with the CEO, managing director or marketing director was conducted, which lasted between 1 and

Table 2: Key to case companies and similarities and differences

<i>Company</i>	<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Country of parent origin</i>	<i>Sector</i>
A	Managing Director	America	Heritage Brand; Jewellery extended into fashion (menswear and womenswear), accessories and home
B	Marketing Director	British	Heritage Brand; Accessories extended into fashion (menswear and womenswear)
C	Managing Director	Japan	Lifestyle purist brand; Fashion oriented (menswear, womenswear and childrenswear)
D	Managing Director	British	Savile Row Tailor; Fashion and accessories (menswear)
E	Marketing Director	France	Heritage Brand; Fashion and accessories
F	Managing Director	Japan	Heritage Brand; Fashion (menswear and womenswear), and accessories
G	Brand Manager	British	Savile Row Tailor; Fashion and accessories (menswear)
H	Marketing Director	France	Heritage Brand; Fashion and accessories (menswear)
I	Managing Director	Italy	Fashion oriented; Fashion (menswear and womenswear), and accessories
J	CEO	Japan	Department Store and own fashion brand; fashion (menswear and womenswear), accessories and home
K	CEO	Japan	Savile Row Tailor; Fashion and accessories (menswear)
L	CEO	Japan	Heritage Brand; Fashion and accessories (menswear and menswear)

2 hours. In order to ensure the quality of the research design, Yin⁷¹ suggested four criteria: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability, which were jointly considered at each stage. This investigation, as an exploratory case study, satisfied Yin's criteria (Table 3).

The interview questions focused on the history and origins of the brands; the characteristics that differentiate the selected case companies as a luxury brand; the marketing actions and investments that they invest in to assure, maintain and protect the brand over time; their manufacturing and distribution policies; and how these affect their brand management strategy. Finally, the interviews considered the critical success factors relevant to a luxury fashion brand.

The interviews were transcribed, and all the data and case materials analysed, so that a general sense of the data could be established. The important themes, the frequency of occurrence, relative importance to the interviewee, emergent patterns and areas of contradiction were identified in accordance with established protocols.⁸² The analysis

was conducted on a case-by-case basis and then by cross-case analysis.^{63,65} Thereafter, the conclusions were all verified and confirmed.

The findings and themes were compared with the literature on the subject area and through case report verification by the interviewee and other academics.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The cross-case analysis revealed a number of key themes that emerged from the data. The proposed themes are identified as the principal dimensions of a luxury fashion brand. Within each of these key themes, various sub-themes illustrated within the cases exist (Table 4). The following presentation of the key research findings is developed from nine principal luxury brand dimensions and the evidence from the case data, which is identified by quote number (Q1, Q2, and so on).

Clear brand identity

The importance of a clear brand identity and a clear understanding of the brand

Table 3: Case study tactics for four design tests

<i>Phase of research which tactic occurs</i>	<i>Case study topic</i>	<i>Tests</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Research design/ preparation of data collection	Use theory in single-case studies	External validity	Yin (2003) ⁷¹
Data collection	Use replication logic in multiple case studies	External validity	Yin (2003), ⁷¹ Riege (2003), ⁷² Eisenhardt (1989) ⁶³ and Parkhe (1993) ⁷³
	Use multiple sources of evidence	Construct validity	Yin (2003), ⁷¹ Riege (2003), ⁷² Flick (1992) ⁷⁶ and Perakyla (1997) ⁷⁷
	Establish chain of evidence	Construct validity	Yin (2003), ⁷¹ Riege (2003) and Hirschman (1986) ⁷⁸
Data analysis	Use case study protocol	Reliability	Yin (2003), ⁷¹ Riege (2003) and Eisenhardt (1989) ⁶³
	Develop case study database	Reliability	Yin (2003), ⁷¹ Riege (2003) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) ⁷⁹
Composition	Do pattern-matching	Internal validity	Yin (2003), ⁷¹ Riege (2003) and Huberman and Miles (1994) ⁸⁰
	Comparison of evidence within the literature	External validity	Riege (2003) and Yin (1994) ⁶⁵
Composition	Have key informants review draft case study report	Construct validity	Yin (2003), ⁷¹ Riege (2003) and Le Compte and Goetz (1982) ⁸¹

Source: Adapted from Yin, 2003,⁷¹p.34.

Table 4: Case study evidence

<i>Components inherent to the creation of the luxury fashion brand</i>	<i>Case study evidence</i>
<p>Clear brand identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional appeal/aspirational • Brand values/DNA • Global marketing strategy 	<p>Q1: 'Our brand has a strong aspirational appeal. Our customers want to buy us not just for our beautifully crafted products but for our prestigious image and to buy a piece of our heritage' (Company, J)</p> <p>Q2: 'All luxury fashion brands need to be clear on their DNA... what makes it different and relevant as it is a very competitive field out there. Everyone here works towards the blueprint for the brand and the brand values' (Company, F)</p> <p>Q3: '(the designer) would consider us as a fashion orientated brand which has greater emphasis on classic than say avant-garde' (Company, C).</p> <p>Q4: 'We create trends- we are fashion! That is why our customers comes to us' (Company I)S</p> <p>Q5: 'We have a three year plan to develop the (brand) further internationally as well as nationally though investment in directly-owned stores, advertising and our product offering' (Company, L)</p>
<p>Luxury communications strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct marketing; • Sponsorship; • Fashion shows; • Celebrity endorsement • Advertising; • PR 	<p>Q6: 'The communications strategy is critical within the luxury fashion sector. We use a combination of advertising, PR, celebrity endorsement and direct marketing to the customer. We need to be in the key magazines and broadsheets to ensure we are increasing awareness about the brand and the products' (Company, H)</p> <p>Q7: 'We need to show in Milan. It is vital for us. It is the place to show if you are serious about fashion' (Company, I)</p>
<p>Product integrity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional, quality and craftsmanship • Innovation and seasonal offer 	<p>Q8: 'Quality, it is all about quality. It should be the best materials, best craftsmanship and hand finished... to me luxury is something I buy today and will have in fifty years.' (Company, J)</p> <p>Q9: 'We invest in craftsmanship. In our flagship store in London we have a unique workshop on the top floor which our VIP can visit and see their investment piece be created.' (Company, A)</p> <p>Q10: 'As a luxury fashion brand we need to develop both a fashion and a classic offer in our range – we introduced over 10 000 products obviously not just in clothing and accessories but the greatest level of involvement comes from fashion. We have classics pieces which reflect our heritage but we also have fashion 'show pieces' which keep it fresh and exciting!' (Company A).</p> <p>Q11: 'Compare us to luxury cars for example- we have to design, sample, manufacturer, distribute, create our own stores, sell and eventually discount on at least a bi-annual basis, although that is changing, literally hundreds of products, styles which is huge in terms of investment... whereas luxury cars or hotels have in comparison a far easier job in my opinion' (Company, F)</p>
<p>Brand signature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iconic products • Brand livery • Recognisable style • Creative direction 	<p>Q12: '...we always have to consider the brand handwriting, to ensure it is in keeping with the brand image... it is our iconic products which truly epitomize the brand.' (Company B)</p> <p>Q13: 'We have just completely redesigned all of our packaging and packaging accessories as they were off-brand. It is so important that it (livery) enhances the luxury product' (Company, B)</p> <p>Q14: 'We have a very strong design handwriting. Our products and everything else for that matter must be inkeeping with that' (Company, C)</p> <p>Q15: 'For us the designers very much personify the brand- they are our spokesperson' (Company, D)</p>
<p>Prestige price</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent with positioning 	<p>Q16: '...we have to be sure that prices are relevant to what they are today and to luxury' (Company D)</p>
<p>Exclusivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited editions • Controlled ranges and locations 	<p>Q17: '... Managed scarcity it is a game all luxury fashion brands are playing. We all must manage the availability and exclusivity ratio. In reality, this is the management of the profitability and luxury exclusive image' (Company, F)</p> <p>Q18: 'We had to close a number of licensees as they were not in keeping with our repositioned brand image. We also stopped selling to a number of our wholesale clients as they no longer matched our stockists criteria' (Company, L)</p>

Table 4: Continued

<i>Components inherent to the creation of the luxury fashion brand</i>	<i>Case study evidence</i>
Luxury heritage • Brand history and/or story	Q19: 'Our heritage is extraordinary so of course we are going invest in it and try to educate customers through our museum archives and website, and the products and product ranges.' (Company, H) Q20: 'Everything is based around him (the designer) he controls everything. It is all about his personality' (Company, I)
Environment and consumption experience • Globally controlled distribution • Superior service • Flagship stores	Q21: 'Our flagship stores were designed by truly amazing architects, in an amazing building to create an amazing space to showcase our brand in a completely controlled environment which allows our customers to experience the lifestyle at our 'Motherstores'. We aspire to create the ideal international luxury experience' (Company A) Q22: 'Service is key in the luxury environment thus our staff are carefully recruited and trained to be approachable and friendly to add to the (consumption) experience' (Company, E)
Luxury culture • Internal commitment to the brand • External partnership commitment to the brand	Q23: '...the culture of the company is important you can not create a successful brand without the right management team, internal commitment to the brand and the brand vision and right external partnerships' (Company, C) Q24: 'We have exceptional partnerships with our licensees and manufacturers. We are strict in our management and control but we are very proud of our partners and hopefully this is reciprocated' (Company, K)

values were apparent in each of the case companies (Table 4, Q2). Nearly all of the brands discussed the importance of a clear brand identity and values that truly differentiate and entice the consumers on a functional as well as emotional level (Table 4, Q1). The 'fashionability' element was considered a brand value that was apparent in each of the brands, although with differing degrees of importance. The heritage in conjunction with the legacy of the original creator of the brand prompted the level of importance of each of the brands placed on this element (Table 4, Q3 and Q4).

Each of the case companies had a developmental strategy to invest in the distribution, awareness and positioning of the brand over a 3- or a 5-year period (Table 4, Q5).

Marketing communications

All of the brands invested in a communications strategy. The methods differed between brands, however. To increase brand awareness and a luxury fashion brand

proposition, the case companies employed all or a combination of the following marketing communication tools: fashion shows, advertising, PR, direct marketing and celebrity endorsement (Table 4, Q6). All of the brands considered direct communication with the customer on a personal level an area of growing importance. They all partook in direct marketing to ensure that a relationship was developed with the customer. The investment in PR made, '... the brand interesting and attainable' and raised awareness. A number of the brands also invested in catwalk shows and considered these a vital element of luxury fashion positioning (Table 4, Q7). These brands tended to place greater importance on the fashion element of the brand.

Product integrity

This key theme emerged as significant in the case companies, and within each there were several sub-categories, which included 'product quality' (Table 4, Q8) 'craftsmanship'

and *'attention to detail'* (Table 4, Q9). To achieve their *'fashion status'*, each of the case companies invested in innovation and creativity. A parity between the classic luxury and the fashion directional pieces was achieved through balancing the collections (Table 4, Q10). Many introduced fashion *'show pieces'* for press or VIP customers. Case Company J highlights the difference between managing luxury fashion and luxury goods which require higher levels of investment in management, time and resources (Table 4, Q11).

Brand signature

Each of the companies recognises the importance of the brand signature and iconic products, referring to them as the *'designers' style'*, *'handwriting'* or the *'brand DNA'*. Each considered these inherent to the luxury fashion brand. All of the brands produce or sell numerous product categories that need to be internal, consistent and coherent, which will minimise the damage of confusing the consumer (Table 4, Q12). Each of the brands ensured that the whole collection had a clear signature through comprehensible managerial direction initially, and then repeated meetings to finalise the products (Table 4, Q14). The iconic product epitomises the brand signature (Table 3, Q12). In a number of the cases, the iconic products have close connections to their heritage. The design is extended to the packaging and livery (Table 4, Q13). Each company considered it vital that the packaging cohered with the brand image. All of the case companies identified the importance of a design team (Table 4, Q15) and invested in eminent designers to work on various products of their collections to *'... raise and punctuate the fashion element of the brand'* (Company D).

Premium price

The importance of price was clearly identified by all of the respondents as a means

of developing the luxury status of the brand. The price not only reflected the handmade product and quality attribute associated with luxury, but also suggested the element of exclusivity of a product, as high price creates a barrier of entry (Table 4, Q16). A number of the cases employed strategies to increase exclusivity, including limited edition products and ranges, and through strategic alliances.

Exclusivity

Exclusivity is inherent to luxury brand positioning (Table 4, Q17) as defined by the literature. Each of the case companies strictly controls the distribution and accessibility of the brands to ensure exclusivity (Table 4, Q18). Furthermore, the findings revealed that exclusivity can be controlled through limited production runs and the number and typology of distributors in each of the cases.

Heritage

All of the case companies have extremely interesting histories, and each has highlighted the value of remaining faithful to the historic positioning (Table 4, Q19) or the founding and current designer (Table 4, Q20) of the brand because this strategy has the ability to add and maintain the brand's authenticity. For example, Company C produced a book illustrating its history, and retained original features from the leather production process; and Companies A, J and H preserved their history through an extensive exercise of attempting to buy back archive pieces and by reproducing products or design-based products from their archive collection.

Luxury environment and experience

All the representatives identified the significance of both the store environment and superior service to brand luxury creation. Firstly, the store environment is typified by the flagship store, which was considered

crucial by the Chief Executive of Company C, as *'it is an important part of what the consumer is paying for'*. Company A considered the London flagship the *'motherhouse'*, as it is the home of the brand (Table 4, Q21). The flagship was considered to require the greatest investment but it provided the paramount experience. A number of the representatives also highlighted the fact that the flagship store actually assisted their licensing and wholesale business. For the business-to-business customer, the store provides an insight into the personality and soul of the company, which assists in the development of a working relationship. Other distribution methods included boutiques, wholesale and licensee. The level of investment decreased accordingly, however, as did the level of control. The service provided by all the case study companies was considered superior to other fashion brands and the more diffused luxury brands. The companies claimed to provide this level of service for their customer, as it added to the experiential dimension, which was considered essential for luxury (Table 4, Q22). Many of the brands offered personalised service, which included staff spending hours with a client, direct personal phone calls and merely ensuring the shopping experience is made as easy as possible. Clearly, each of the companies views this as an inherent quality that a brand should offer their consumers. Control over the distributors, suppliers, manufacturers and licensees was considered crucial in the creation and maintenance of the luxury fashion brand.

Culture

The management of the internal and external relationships with the brand was developed through the company culture (Table 4, Q23 and Q24). This aspect assisted in the luxury brand proposition authenticity, according to Case Company C. The culture of a brand refers to the expertise behind the brand. All of the Case Compa-

nies recognise the importance of the right people working internally to create the brand, from management to the staff on the shop floor. Furthermore, within the organisation there is a need for honesty, integrity, morality and teamwork, as without these the message created would be false.

In conclusion, each of these aforementioned components is considered important in the creation of a luxury fashion brand, as each add to the luxury brand image and positioning. The research findings identified the interrelated components of a luxury brand through an examination of the actions undertaken with each of the representatives of the case studies. This builds on the findings of the literature, which either discussed luxury brands on a surface level or considered the concept from a generic perspective rather than specifically to the luxury fashion market.

Discussion

Figure 1 illustrates the various components inherent to the luxury fashion brand as derived from the findings of the research. The model identifies nine key components that are inherent to the creation of a luxury fashion brand. Each attribute consisted of a number of sub-categories, which all must be *consistent* in order to create the brand. The first major dimension identified was the clear brand identity. Clear brand identity relates to the symbolic nature and the intangibles of luxury brands and the future development and investment into the brand. The fashion element of each of the brands has a strong correlation to the brand values. Although each of the brands clearly has a fashion element, they place differing levels of importance on and investment into the fashion factor. The second component, marketing communications, refers to the common methods employed to create awareness, which include fashion shows, celebrity endorsement, advertising, direct marketing, events sponsorship and PR. Each of these

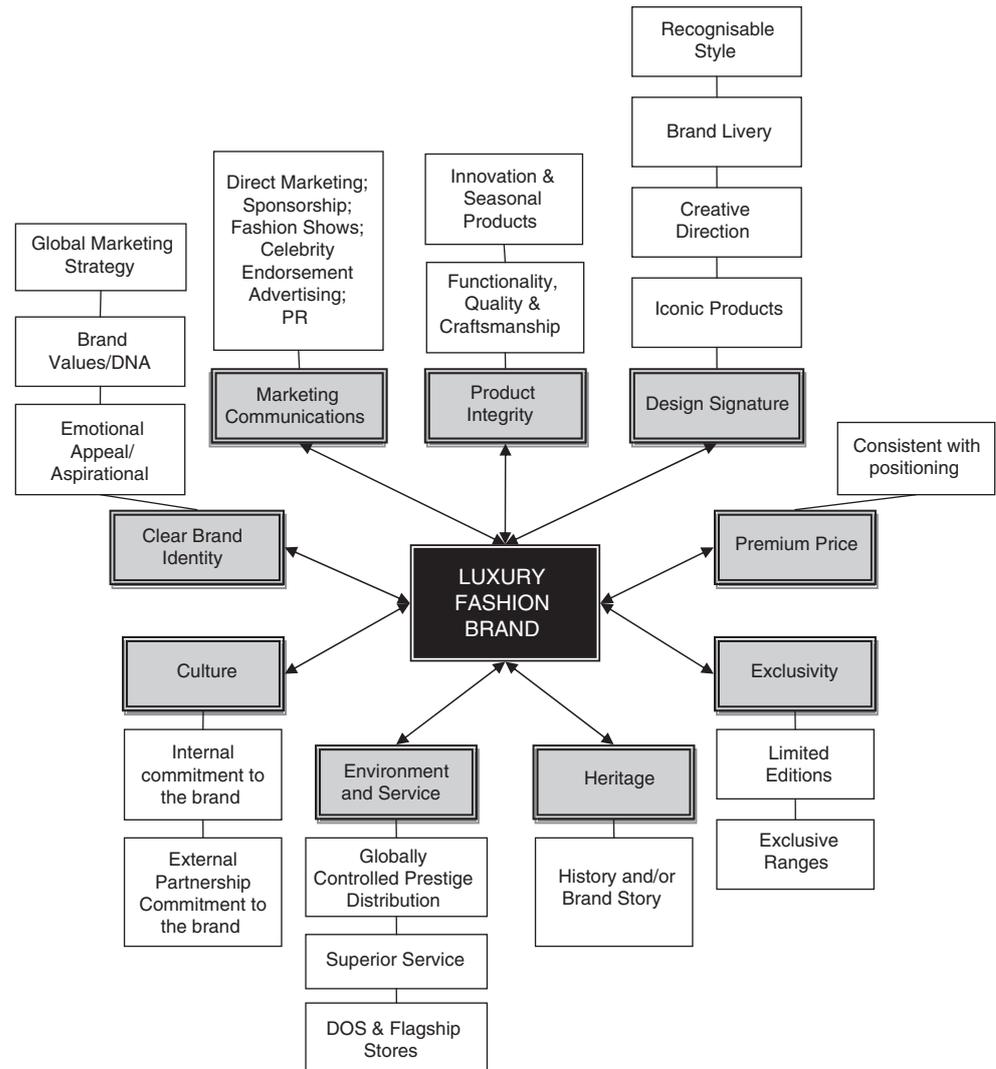


Figure 1: The components of a luxury fashion brand.

methods needs to be coherent and to work towards a common goal of increasing consumer awareness. The subsequent category considers the product integrity, and includes various elements such as quality, craftsmanship and attention to detail. The fashion element within the product is derived from investment in innovation, creativity and the appointment of an eminent fashion designer, which together allow a company to achieve the luxury fashion status and integrity in this attribute. Within the product range, the importance of design signature along with

iconic products, eminent designers and brand livery was considered vital in the creation of a luxury brand. The importance of price relevance was clearly identified in the literature^{19,26,43,83–86} and similarly by each of the case companies. The following component, exclusivity, relates to accessibility of the brand and the need for this to be strictly controlled, in terms of product availability and distribution, in order to be coherent with the rest of the attributes. The subsequent component relates to the history and heritage of a luxury brand, which

was considered crucial for the brand, as it brings an element of authenticity. The store environment and service appear together, as each of the case companies considered the store environment part of the service.

The environment within the context of the luxury fashion market is encapsulated in the form of the flagship store and the superior service, which provide customers with the ultimate brand experience. Culture, the final component, refers to the expertise behind the brand, which must be coherent and consistent from management, manufacturers and designers to the sales staff, to ensure the success of the brand.

All of these elements are interdependent and need to be maintained *simultaneously*, as independently they do not infer luxury status. In each of the cases, however, the firms placed varying levels of emphasis on each of the components illustrating the path-dependent nature of luxury fashion brand creation and development.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the importance and growth of the luxury sector,^{3,5,16,19,42} investigation into the creation and maintenance associated with luxury fashion brands has received limited empirical exploration within the research literature.^{16,28} The research that is available, despite Beverland's¹⁶ study, which is confined to the wine sector, is not developed from an empirical basis or directly focused on the fashion sector. Therefore, this investigation sought to address research neglect through the provision of a framework for luxury brand marketing in the fashion sector. Although these components could arguably be applicable to a generic luxury brand, the differences among luxury fashion brands stem from the emphasis placed on the specific elements, namely, the investment into innovative and seasonal new product development, the appointment of a renowned fashion designer as a creative director, directly owned stores and

flagship experience and finally, Milan, New York, Paris or London fashion shows. All of these are considered vital in the quest to achieve 'fashion' status. The greater the emphasis placed in these characteristics, the greater the fashion orientation of the luxury brand.

This study has identified an empirically developed model, the elements of which are interdependent and cohesive. These attributes must be managed concurrently in order to create and maintain a luxury fashion brand positioning. Thus, the management of the luxury brand demands a consistent and coherent approach.

Limitations and future research

It is noted that this study has limitations, most notable of which is the scale of the research. Moreover, all of the case companies were British, because of accessibility issues, which results in the study being culturally narrow. Although the brands' country of origin is limited to the British perspective, the parent companies of the brands are diverse, with representation from France, Italy and Japan. There are a couple of areas that could be considered for future research. Firstly, there is an opportunity to extend the study to a larger number of companies, which would help to identify the extent to which these findings have a wider application. Secondly, investigating the brand cross-culturally would provide an insight into any cultural differences in the marketing of luxury.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study has examined the issues intrinsic to luxury fashion marketing, and has identified the areas that need to be considered by brand managers and marketers, although creating and maintaining the luxury fashion brand. The key findings include nine inherent interrelated attributes crucial for creating a luxury fashion brand in the context of the luxury fashion market, and the

successful management of the luxury fashion brand demands a consistent and coherent approach from the brand custodians.

Furthermore, it can be concluded from the key findings that the process of creating and maintaining the luxury fashion brand is an extremely complex activity that requires continual planning and investment of resources in conjunction with coherent and consistent marketing and management decision making to generate the possibility of achieving success. Finally, through an in-depth analysis of the marketing issues inherent to luxury fashion branding, this study has contributed to the growing body of research available on luxury fashion brands.

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