



From Scarcity to Screens

How Luxury Womenswear Brands in Europe Preserve Brand Codes in a
Digital Environment

Bachelor's Thesis

Author:	Diana Jarrah
Study Program:	BSc International Business Administration
Semester:	Spring Semester / 6 th Semester
Supervisor:	Sabrina Stöckli
Date and Place:	20 May 2026, Bern



Management Summary

Digitalisation has transformed modern luxury branding strategies hence requiring traditional physical luxury brand codes to adapt to virtual environments. The luxury womenswear industry is characterised by its reliance on semiotic elements to communicate identity, exclusivity, and symbolic meaning. Motifs, silhouettes, and signature production techniques exemplify such codes. These elements were primarily discoverable in tactile and exclusive settings. However, the shift towards the digital domain has compelled luxury brands to translate traditional brand codes into accessible online formats. Consequently, luxury brands must communicate these codes digitally in ways that preserve brand identity and intended meaning.

This paper therefore investigates how European luxury womenswear brands communicate brand codes through digital platforms while maintaining exclusivity and ensuring intended meaning is correctly interpreted by consumers.

A multi-method approach was utilised, examining eleven European-based luxury brands through semi-structured interviews and an Instagram-based visual semiotic analysis. This allowed a comparison between luxury professionals' insights and digital manifestations. Findings from both methods were independently thematically analysed through Braun and Clarke's reflexive approach before being triangulated against existing literature.

The findings suggested that brands actively translate brand codes through the combined use of implicit and explicit symbolic communication across visual, narrative, design, and cultural codes. Luxury brands combine multiple brand code formats operating collectively to reinforce identity and symbolic meaning. Visual codes currently dominate the digital domain, through subtle logo placement and colour palettes. The results also indicated that digital environments contribute to the creation of new luxury codes. Digital narrative codes appeared significant for consumer engagement when compared against hedonistic content, however, remained majorly implicitly discoverable. Furthermore, cultural codes were highlighted through spatial distancing and celebrity presentation. Although semiotic elements are utilised as prestige-enforcing mechanisms for maintaining exclusivity online, restricted access tactics such as limited-edition products are more actively managed. Finally,

while luxury womenswear brands in Europe use engagement strategies and consumer monitoring to ensure correct interpretation, limited evidence of novel interpretative mechanisms was identified.

The study contributes to the understanding of digital luxury branding strategies and provides managerial implications regarding the communication of codified exclusivity in accessible digital environments. Brand code deployment should be determined based on identity and market positioning as established, emerging, and affordable luxury brands function differently. It is recommended that continuity should direct luxury code communication, thus creating familiarity across touchpoints. Luxury brands should prioritise the digital translation of heritage, this is as heritage reinforces positive consumer perception. Ultimately, restricted access mechanisms such as gated virtual events are recommended to evoke exclusivity as cultural codes may fail to clearly convey prestige to the public.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Literature Review	5
	2.1 Brand Codes	5
	2.2 Brand codes in Luxury	7
	2.2.1 Luxury as Symbolic Signalling Systems	7
	2.2.2 Types of Luxury Brand Codes	10
	2.2.3 Brand Code Perception	12
	2.3 Omnichannel in Luxury	14
	2.4 Digital Brand Code Placement (on Social Media)	17
	2.4.1 The 4-H Framework	18
	2.5 Exclusivity-Accessibility Paradox	20
	2.6 Decoding the Dream	22
	2.7 Research Direction	23
3	Methodology	24
	3.1 Ethical Considerations	29
4	Results	30
	4.1 Interview Analysis	30
	4.2 Instagram Analysis	38
5	Discussion	47
	5.1 Key Findings and Research Question	58
	5.2 Conclusion	60
6	Bibliography	63
7	Declaration	72
8	Appendices	73
	8.1 Appendix A: Interview Transcripts and Responses	74
	8.2 Appendix B: Interview Questions	95
	8.3 Appendix C: Deductive Code Table	97
	8.4 Appendix D: Interview Analysis	98
	8.4.1 Interview Codebook	98
	8.4.2 Detailed Overview of Interview Thematic Analysis	99
	8.5 Appendix E: Qualitative Visual Analysis	100
	8.5.1 Master Code Analysis	100
	8.5.2 Instagram Posts	100
	8.6 Appendix F: AI prompts used	101

List of Figures

Figure 1: Luxury Semiotic Dreams	9
Figure 2: The Distinctive Assets Grid	12
Figure 3: The 4-H Framework	18
Figure 4: Visual Analysis Thematic Map	40
Figure 5: Chanel Post 4	41
Figure 6: Sandro Post 10	41
Figure 7: Burberry Post 2	41
Figure 8: Christian Dior Post 2 (Carousel 2)	42
Figure 9: Missoni Post 10	42
Figure 10: Chanel Campaign Post	42
Figure 11: Burberry Campaign Post	43
Figure 12: Missoni Post 3	43
Figure 13: Christian Dior Post 4	43
Figure 14: Chanel Post 3	44
Figure 15: Missoni Post 6	44
Figure 16: Sandro Post 7	44
Figure 17: Christian Dior Post 2 (Carousel 1)	46
Figure 18: Chanel Post 10	46
Figure 19: Burberry Post 6	46

List of Tables

Table 1: Brand Code Categories	11
Table 2: Interview Themes	31
Table 3: Visual Analysis Themes	39

1 Introduction

Brand codes, once entities used to assist in brand identification have now evolved into instruments of symbolic communication (Tan, 2013). Beyond brand recognition, they function as implicit carriers of meaning, which can reinforce brand positioning (Guibourgé, 2020). Therefore, brand codes have become central mechanisms in the luxury industry (König et al., 2016).

The luxury womenswear industry relied on codes such as craftsmanship or motifs as palpable assets associated with heritage and exclusivity signalling (Dubois & Paternault, 1995; Oswald, 2007; Tarquini et al., 2022). Conventionally, these codes were discoverable through tactile mediums such as flagship stores (Kozinets et al., 2002). However, the global shift towards digitalisation has transformed how consumers encounter luxury fashion. Digitalisation now serves as a critical generator and solidifier of brand impressions (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015). Therefore, luxury brands become increasingly required to communicate tactile codes through platform-adapted social media content (Radon, 2012).

Contrary to the principles that regulate other industries, luxury operates through discretion and restricted access (Heine, 2010). Due to digital accessibility, luxury's elusive nature may be at risk of diminution. Consistent exposure risks democratising these codes and thus, diminishing their symbolic value (Radon, 2012). Moreover, as some brand codes manifest through tangible input, brands must approximate their impact as effectively as possible (Tarquini et al., 2022). As luxury is rooted in consistency, this becomes increasingly important. Incorrectly displayed brand codes threaten the continuity of brand identity (Okonkwo, 2007; Oswald, 2015).

Furthermore, excess digital exposure may increase their imitation and dilution risk (Radon, 2012). The digital translation of codes may deprive their sensory depth by compressing them into algorithmic formats (Wiedmann et al., 2013).

Relevance

The scientific relevance of this study is rooted in the increasing importance of digitalisation. As the luxury industry operates through symbolic communication, it is essential to understand how meaning is constructed when codes are translated into digital environments (König et al., 2016). Brand codes, and brand identity are symbiotic (Kapferer, 2008). Therefore, it is crucial to examine how codified elements can be maintained to preserve brand identity. Ultimately, visibility is no longer fully

controlled by luxury brands owing to the democratic nature of digital platforms (Creevey et al., 2021). This paper therefore highlights how brands respond to and manage the risk of overexposure.

The practical relevance of this paper lies in its contribution to the understanding of digital brand code translation for luxury brands. Primarily, it enhances awareness of current code translation strategies. In addition, it provides insights into which codes are more effectively communicated across digital touchpoints, while highlighting where strategies must improve. Furthermore, this study evaluates the utilisation of covert versus overt codes in the European luxury fashion industry and their implications for digital branding.

Additionally, it illuminates how luxury brands manage the tension between luxury's exclusivity and virtual accessibility through current strategies. Finally, the research provides an understanding of how luxury firms ensure that their brand codes remain correctly interpreted despite digital conformity.

The Gap

While existing literature explores luxury brand theory, symbolic elements, and digital platforms, limited research integrates all perspectives within the context of European luxury womenswear (Cavender & Kincade, 2015; Jurišová, 2020; Tan, 2013). There is a lack of concrete evidence regarding how luxury brands operationalise brand codes within digital platforms and their specific translation modality.

Furthermore, while brand code interpretation has been majorly explored through the consumer's lens, studies on mechanisms employed by luxury brands to affirm intended meaning is scarce (Bachmann et al., 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of clarity regarding how exclusivity can be concretely maintained online.

Research Aim

The objective of this research is to assist in bridging the aforementioned gap. Thus, it aims to identify how luxury womenswear brands transfer physically established brand codes into their virtual counterparts while maintaining exclusivity and understanding through tangible and strategic insights. Therefore, this study is guided by the following overarching question and its sub-questions:

Research Question:

How do luxury women's fashion brands in Europe communicate brand codes through digital platforms?

Sub-Questions:

- a) How do luxury brands maintain exclusivity on these digital platforms?
- b) To what extent do luxury brands succeed in ensuring that their digital brand codes are correctly interpreted (in the intended way)?

Methodological Overview

To answer these questions to the greatest extent possible, a multi-method qualitative approach is employed.

This study first establishes a theoretical foundation and an understanding of the relevant topics by constructing a literature review.

Beyond this, six qualitative interviews with luxury professionals across Europe were conducted. Thereby allowing for a deeper comprehension of the mechanisms used by luxury brands in code translation, interpretation, and accessibility prevention. In addition to the interviews, a secondary qualitative visual analysis was utilised to facilitate the analysis of how brand codes appear on digital platforms.

The results of these methods were critically analysed employing Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) approach; whereby thematic groups arose independently regarding the interviews and visual analysis. To ensure a clear comparison against explored literature and both qualitative methods, the findings were discussed through triangulation.

To assist in code identification across the visual analysis, Peirce's Sign Theory (PST) was employed to legitimise the identity of digital brand codes with respect to icons, indices, and symbols (Atkin, 2006).

Delimitation

The exploration into brand code application and interpretation mechanisms is determined through the brand's perspective and does not investigate consumer sentiment directly.

Furthermore, only a total of eleven brands were selected for both analyses to maintain depth in semiotic evaluation and allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the strategic decisions deployed. It is also noteworthy, that this study is not exclusively confined to high-end luxury houses but rather seeks to investigate the industry from varying angles with the intention of capturing the totality of luxury branding's nuances.

Moreover, the qualitative visual analysis solely investigates Instagram content directed to English-speaking audiences, requiring English to function as the primary language of communication. The social media analysis further concerns content in the form of posts and campaigns, excluding other Instagram formats such as Stories.

Ultimately, the focus of this paper is restricted to European-founded luxury womenswear brands that continue to operate within Europe.

2 Literature Review

This section explores existing literature on brand codes and luxury brand management with the objective of establishing a clear understanding of these codes, their importance for luxury brands, and existing code translation mechanisms. Moreover, the fundamental connection between luxury and exclusivity as well as its contradiction to digital platforms is addressed.

Furthermore, contemporary developments such as omnichannel are emphasised to underline the significance of digital brand communication and to provide justification for the active translation of brand codes.

In addition, frameworks such as the Distinctive Asset Grid, the 4-H Framework, and Peirce's Sign Theory (PST) are introduced, as they provide valuable insights for digital brand code communication.

Defining Luxury

"Luxury" lacks a concrete definition and is deemed subjective. Current literature however, associates it with attributes such as high quality, authenticity, prestige, premium pricing, and connection building (Ko et al., 2017). In the fashion industry, luxury brand management is tied to experiential needs, deeming sentiment cultivation important. This is reflected by the ambitions of luxury conglomerates, such as LVMH, and their promotion of *art de vivre*. Additionally, corporate values emphasise craftsmanship, innovation, and authenticity (Kernstock et al., 2017, p. 3).

Specific emphasis must be placed on exclusivity's role in luxury, as the two concepts are strongly interconnected. Luxury is grounded in exclusivity; that is, a luxury market is often associated with "luxury" if it is perceived as inaccessible to many (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996, p. 349; Dubois & Paternault, 1995, p. 69). This rationale is applicable to the subsequent subject, brand codes. Through semiotic communication and insider recognition luxury brand codes reinforce exclusivity (König et al., 2016).

Digital brand code communication should reflect these principles. The ensuing investigation examines brand codes and how they mirror the stated ambitions and values.

2.1 Brand Codes

A concrete definition of brand codes is not standardised, and scholars have proposed differing conceptualisations of brand elements and their communication. Given the vast interpretations within

literature, three key perspectives will be investigated. These interpretations thus, provide theoretical understanding of brand codes and their implications within the luxury industry.

In semiotic marketing theory, Oswald (2015) argues that brands function as systems of signs, relying on visual, verbal, and spatial elements to function as codes, generating meaning in consumer perception. Based on this rationale, brand communication is not solely informative but also symbolic.

Further building on this semiotic foundation, Kapferer (2008, pp. 182-186) posits that brand identity is a structured framework consisting of six interrelated constituents: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image. These factors interact to guide how brands are expressed across consumer touchpoints, ultimately forming a coherent identity. Dissimilarly to Oswald, Kapferer emphasises the internal structure of brand identity as the foundation of meaning. Therefore, brands construct their identity by presenting themselves through a system of codes, encompassing symbols, designs, and terminology (Brus et al., 2025, p. 2).

Similarly to Kapferer, Keller & Brexendorf (2019, pp. 163-164) approach branding cognitively, focusing on how brand associations are formed in consumer memory. Henceforth, it is argued that brand knowledge is built through consistent exposure to brand codes. Additionally, this fosters reliability and familiarity for consumers, leading to enhanced long-term brand loyalty (Keller, 1993, pp. 8-9; Aaker, 1996, p. 114).

Combining all preceding interpretations suggests that brand codes are repeated brand-related signs (visual, verbal, spatial, and symbolic) that function as identity systems by triggering cognitive recognition and formulating meaning in consumer perception.

While some codes may be overt and identifiable, those involved with the luxury industry are often elusive as exclusivity remains centre stage (Wang et al., 2024). Additionally, in the luxury industry, these codes convey heritage, craftsmanship, and brand identity (Roncha & Montecchi, 2017).

Furthermore, it must be noted that brand codes are also referred to as assets, elements, and signifiers in varied literature. This remains true in this paper. The literature uncovered regarding the foresaid terms is consistent with the gathered definition of brand codes.

Brand Code History

The initial purpose of branding was to facilitate the recognition of the manufacturer. During the Industrial Revolution, the focus of branding and marketing broadened past basic identification. Increased competition led branding to shift towards brand differentiation by establishing trust among consumers (Rajaram & Shelly, 2012).

With globalisation in the twenty-first century, branding and marketing evolved drastically (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Historically, branding was primarily utilised to build trust, guarantee quality, and signal identity (Rajaram & Shelly, 2012). Although these functions remain relevant today, it has become ubiquitous across consumer touchpoints (Carah & Brodmerkel, 2020; Strizhakova et al., 2011).

Customers now have a wider range of brands to choose from, therefore, an additional dimension (beyond trust and quality) has emerged: connection (Akgün et al., 2013; Breivik & Thorbjørnsen, 2008). Consumers increasingly seek affinity with brands that mirror shared values. In luxury contexts, brands are also used as means to signal status (Philippe et al., 2022; Seminari et al., 2022, p. 54). Due to this evolution, consumers' emotions now affect branding and contribute to the construction of brand value and purchase decisions (Mingione et al., 2019, pp. 310-311; Hartnett et al., 2016).

This evolution suggests that branding and brand codes no longer solely operate as identification markers. Instead, they are becoming progressively significant for consumer sentiment (Phillips et al., 2014; Philippe et al., 2022; Seminari et al., 2022, p. 54). Therefore, the correct and consistent application of brand codes across digital platforms, as well as their interpretation, is imperative for building strong customer-brand relationships (Okonkwo, 2009; Keller, 1993).

2.2 Brand codes in Luxury

Luxury brands construct narratives based on complex status symbols (brand codes). These codes are individual to brands' identity and heritage (Gurzki et al., 2019, pp. 404-407). To illustrate, Chanel's stitching is inspired by horse blankets and jockey uniforms, reflecting Coco Chanel's exposure to equestrian culture (Baxter-Wright, 2017). This demonstrates that luxury codes rely on cultural capital and insider meaning (Han et al., 2010, p.15).

2.2.1 Luxury as Symbolic Signalling Systems

Symbolic Communication

Semiotic elements are central to luxury branding, as they operate as instruments of value, identity, and culturally codified communication (Dubois & Paternault, 1995, p. 69).

Luxury brand codes are often expressed through subtle “identitary values”, i.e., craftsmanship, materials, and heritage. This is curated by building semiotic richness in the form of imagery and narratives. Additionally, discreet symbolism representing particular affluent lifestyles or heritage cues contributes to the construction of market barriers (Freire, 2014). These codes amplify luxury positioning by promoting the aforementioned values in the form of semiotic narratives that consumers must learn to interpret (Freire, 2014; König et al., 2016).

Furthermore, it is argued that the deployment of brand codes plays a pivotal role in the creation and maintenance of brand authenticity. If a brand conveys attributes of genuineness, it is perceived as authentic. This parallels the concept of individual human authenticity, where “realness” or earnestness stems from personal experience, perspectives, and actions. Employing this logic, a brand’s authenticity is too, shaped by brand actions. (Ting & Ahn, 2023, pp. 592–593).

Status Signalling

Luxury brands not only construct internal symbolism based on divergent codes but also activate symbolism in cultural groups. The latter enables consumers to utilise luxury goods as signals within their peer network. The purchase of luxury items, therefore, cultivates a sense of prestige, projecting symbolic value onto consumers. This fosters an increased sense of self and well-being (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993, p. 37; Shukla, 2012, pp. 10–12).

Illustration of Brand Code Effect

Figure 1: Luxury Semiotic Dreams shows how luxury brands utilise brand elements to create meaning for consumers.

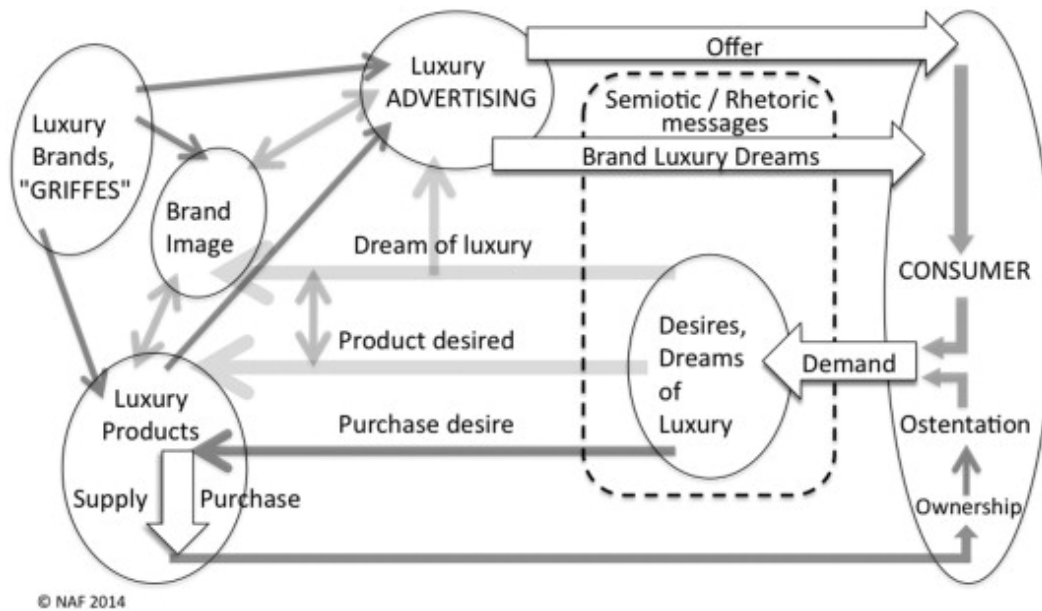


Figure 1: Luxury Semiotic Dreams (Freire, 2014, p. 2667)

Luxury fashion houses, namely "*Griffes*" create meaning through the production of "Luxury Products" and the development of "Brand Image". The luxury product in relation to this research is tangible, hence, a clothing item. Conversely, the brand image is intangible, often produced with artisanal integrity and value in mind (Freire, 2014).

This model encircles "Luxury Advertising", ergo, the medium in which brand codes are communicated. This progresses to the two constituents, "Semiotic/Rhetoric Message" (brand codes) and "Brand Luxury Dreams". Symbolism is used as a catalyst to promote Brand Luxury Dreams, thus the mirage of a luxurious existence, driven by aspirations of status and desire. Luxury brands aim to sell a lifestyle as a complementary intangible good to the consumer (Freire, 2014).

Upon arrival to the consumer, the sold dream is redirected and modelled as demand. The brand allure curated leads to "Desires" in the consumers' consciousness, promoting the purchase (Freire, 2014).

Ultimately, this illustrates that luxury branding is a system where meaning is created, transmitted, and continuously reinterpreted between brands and consumers (Freire, 2014; Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015).

2.2.2 Types of Luxury Brand Codes

As indicated in the preceding sections, brand codes are identifiable through semiotic features such as symbols and motifs (Heine, 2010, p. 156). Drawing on current literature about the dimensions of brand codes, this chapter establishes an understanding of the various types of luxury brand codes prevalent today.

Dimensions of brand codes

Oswald (2007) identifies five analytical layers of brand codes that harmonise to ensure a strong and cohesive code.

The first layer concerns the material dimension, which forms the tangible, sensory aspect of a code. By consistently presenting this to consumers across multiple touchpoints, brand association can be reinforced (Oswald, 2007).

The second layer concerns the code's structural composition. This dimension refers to how its elements are arranged, understood, and interrelated (Oswald, 2007).

Conventional or codified elements constitute the third dimension. Their clear identifiability by the masses and strong brand association render them key aspects of brand codes (Oswald, 2007).

The fourth layer is constituted by the contextualisation of brand codes. This encompasses the temporal and geographical circumstances in which codes are encountered, the associations that are formed, and the culturally significant context that is associated with them (Oswald, 2007).

The last dimension is called 'performative' and reflects the form of engagement between a brand and a consumer. It is an essential component for strengthening consumer-brand relationships and is often manifested through storytelling or digital interactions (Oswald, 2007).

Luxury Brand Code Categories

Oswald (2007) conceptualises brand codes as layered semiotic elements; this paper reorganises these layers into functional categories relevant to luxury branding.

Table 1: Brand Code Categories illustrates an interpretation of the emblematic factors identified by Oswald (2007), when applied to the luxury industry.

Visual Codes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Colours• Shapes• Logos• Motifs	Design Codes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Item Structure• Materials Used• Craftsmanship
Narrative Codes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heritage Storytelling• Craftsmanship Narrative	Cultural Codes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Status Symbolism• Exclusivity Signals• Luxurious Aesthetics

Table 1: Brand Code Categories. (Source: Own table).

Visual codes draw from Oswald's agreement that brands can convey meaning through graphic elements such as colours, shapes, and logos (Oswald, 2007). In luxury branding, visual codes transform into consistent markers such as motifs that are associated with a specific brand. These elements trigger semiotic associations (Sheridan, 2020).

The second category, design codes, appears in reference to Oswald's consensus of material and structural impact on the distinction of brand codes (Oswald, 2007). Applying this framework to luxury brands suggests that the capabilities of materials used, craftsmanship, and item structure are all important forms of symbolism that function as codes. These codes, when exercised, become markers of heritage, quality, and authenticity even with the absence of logos (Dubois & Paternault, 1995; Oswald, 2007; Tarquini et al., 2022).

Brand codes often centre on storytelling (Oswald, 2007). This is evident in narratives of heritage and craftsmanship, which contribute to the construction of brand mythology. It is acknowledged that myth-building is ingrained in luxury brand value, thus facilitating the perception of luxury products as cultural brand signs rather than purely functional goods (König et al., 2016).

Cultural codes reflect the broader social meanings associated with a brand. Status symbolism, exclusivity signals, and luxurious aesthetics are all examples of key attributes that luxury firms rely on to allow for social signalling. However, these characteristics are not independent of the brand itself but rather, are concepts that are culturally understood by the populace. Unlike narrative codes, which emphasise heritage and storytelling, cultural codes reflect broader social meanings such as status and desirability (Oswald, 2007; Fernando, 2025, p. 8).

The above-mentioned categories demonstrate that luxury brand codes surpass visual identity. Taken together, they function to communicate exclusivity, heritage, and symbolic value online (König et al., 2016). While independently categorised above, they are expected to operate as intersecting mechanisms.

2.2.3 Brand Code Perception

Brand codes can be beneficial assets if successfully interpreted by consumers. Successful brand assets trigger significant levels of consumer recognition and recall (Phua et al., 2026, p. 2). Figure 2: The Distinctive Assets Grid developed by Jenni Romaniuk plots two dimensions, namely fame and uniqueness. These can aid in identifying what strong brand codes are and what codes need to be accompanied by other visual elements to strengthen correlation in the market (Romaniuk, 2018, as cited in Sheridan, 2020, p. 5; Phua et al., 2026).

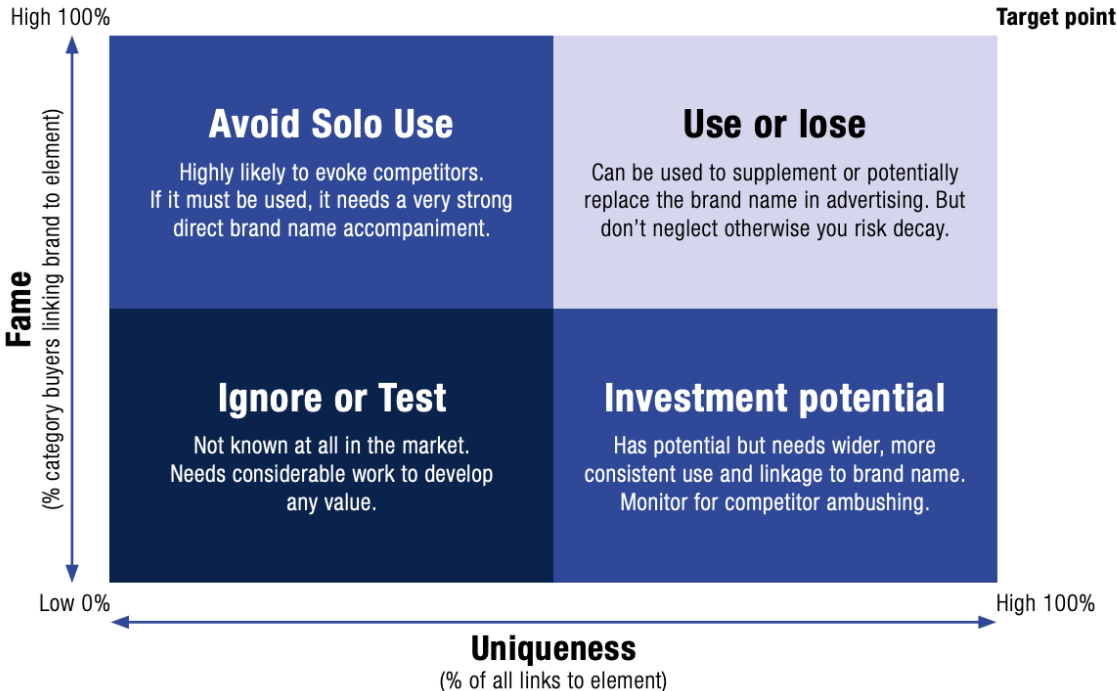


Figure 2: The Distinctive Assets Grid (Romaniuk, 2018, as cited in Sheridan, 2020, p. 5)

Fame

Fame concerns the level of recognition within a consumer group, i.e., the number of individuals that can link a brand code to its associated brand. This reflects the extent to which a code has been displayed across various platforms, introducing the concept of asymmetric association (Phua et al., 2026). Thus, brand codes and their corresponding brands are interdependent yet experience a reciprocal relationship. That is, a code may foster brand memory, while the brand may not form concrete associations with the code when depicted independently (Phua et al., 2026).

Uniqueness

Uniqueness refers to the number of code associations for one brand opposed to those of competitors. This therefore allows luxury brands to evaluate the imitability or dilution of specific brand codes by acting as a guideline to ensure that uniqueness surpasses reproduction capability. By comparing the quantity of links conjured to a specific brand through a selected code to the number of linked associations to other firms regarding the same code, the uniqueness can be determined (Phua et al., 2026).

Application of the Framework to the Luxury Industry

Strong luxury brand codes differ from those utilised by mainstream firms. For a plethora of mass market brands and even accessible luxury brands, strong brand codes consist of prominent logos, monograms, and flamboyant patterns. Within the luxury market, these codes are referred to as “loud brand codes” due to their attempt to signal status and exclusivity to the broader public (Han et al., 2010). To illustrate, the famous womenswear firm Michael Kors utilises the addition of monogram patterns in their production of handbags (Han et al., 2010).

These design choices are a derivative of high-end luxury branding and were originally dominated by luxury firms. However, these brands have increasingly diverged from the use of loud codes. This change is driven by the rise of more affordable luxury brands, which led loud codes to become diluted forms of prestige. Contrastingly, high-end companies are now exercising the use of subtle, refined, and nuanced codes for the semiotic language association with those “in the know”. “Unique” and “heritage-based” describe contemporary code qualities for these firms (Han et al., 2010; INSIDE LVMH, 2025).

A juxtaposition is evident. Fame relies on overexposure and recognisability (Phua et al., 2026). However, luxury value contradicts this through implicit and controlled asset use (Han et al., 2010). This suggests, luxury brand codes contest the traditional concept of fame. Accordingly, codified

elements are reliant on distinctiveness to retain their symbolic value. Consequently, while it may be that luxury symbols exhibit lower levels of fame, they are more effective in generating recall and exclusivity (Phua et al., 2026).

Owing to the increasing popularity of covert codes, another methodology may be better suited for maximising fame and uniqueness within the high-end luxury industry (Cho & Cho, 2025, pp. 1–3).

This is congruent to narrative-based assets (in this instance, shape and story) that often lead to higher levels of recall. This is hypothesised to be a result of ‘bizarreness’, a notion related to both distinctiveness and familiarity, where abnormal content is more likely to be memorable than the ordinary alternative. This is further emphasised by the finding related to shape-based assets, which attain the highest levels of fame and uniqueness (Phua et al., 2026, pp. 14–16).

2.3 Omnichannel in Luxury

To better understand the necessity of moving traditional brand codes online, the emergence and implementation of omnichannel are discussed within this chapter. The term “omnichannel” refers to the integration of offline and online consumer-brand interactions into a synchronised system where the consumer and the brand act both independently and as components of a unified relationship (Huang, 2020; Verhoef et al., 2015).

Emergence

Digitalisation in the luxury fashion sector is experiencing exponential growth (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015, p. 87). As a result, participation in the digital sphere has become a requisite of modern society. Due to this, the interlinkage of offline and online channels became essential to remain successful, and therefore, consumer touchpoints have broadened (Agarwal & Kumra, 2024; Heine & Berghaus, 2014; Hoang et al., 2022). However, while some luxury brands are demonstrating diligence, other brands continue to struggle in ascertaining the way that digital platforms should be treated (Heine & Berghaus, 2014, p. 224).

Implementation

A successful brand strategy relies on storytelling and aesthetic consistency; this is to ensure that customer experience and familiarity align offline and online. Consequently, luxury brands apply a cohesive appearance and behaviour across all emerging platforms through the application of brand codes (Okonkwo, 2007; 2009).

To emphasise, Okonkwo (2007) suggests that consistent visual and verbal brand communication is necessary for brand image development. This concept is concerned with the application of brand codes where these codes support the building of visual, design, narrative, and cultural aspects of identity (Brus et al., 2025, p. 2). Brand codes, therefore, can be used to unify the phygital experience (Okonkwo, 2009).

To exemplify the omnichannel approach, luxury brands now merge online shopping with curated and customised in-store product recommendations (Brandão et al., 2018). The heritage-based and luxurious narrative maintained by luxury brands should pass self-sustaining digital platforms such as websites (Mosca et al., 2024; Holmqvist et al., 2020, p. 748).

Tensions in Digital Communication

Existing literature primarily focuses on strategic consistency across various touchpoints and provides little insight into micro-level translation of brand codes and their digital interpretation. Despite this, research has found a variety of inconsistencies relative to activity required and expected of luxury firms on social media platforms. This paper labels these issues as follows: Anticipation and Delivery, History versus Hedonism, and Familiarity (Creevey et al., 2021).

Anticipation and Delivery

A gap between consumer expectations and digital luxury content exists. As luxury branding traditionally centres on exclusivity, firms tend to pursue minimal and elegant media with the intent to consolidate rarity (Liu et al., 2023, p. 78). Recent research indicates that this approach may not be optimal. Contrastingly, “expressive”, colourful, and complicated elements have been found to stimulate an increased level of engagement, manufacturing a connection to bizarreness Phua et al., 2026). This is desired, as individuals who interact with luxury firms online are more likely to purchase goods or services (Creevey et al., p. 107).

History versus Hedonism

While luxury firms consider the interactivity encouraged by expressive content, it is imperative to circumscribe this route.

Due to storytelling’s importance in luxury brand value creation, it is necessary that it remains present in digital content. This is especially crucial as storytelling is discoverable in a plethora of offline mediums and thus should be translated digitally for a cohesive customer journey (Okonkwo, 2009). The indispensability of storytelling follows when discussing customer perception. Heritage display

online in the form of classical or minimal content has been found to have a stronger positive impact on consumers than indulging in the promotion of self-aggrandisement. (Creevey et al., 2021, p. 107).

Familiarity

However, if low brand awareness exists in users, high levels of elaborate imagery are likely to promote the sense of rarity and luxury, although the opposite holds true for those highly familiar with the firm. In this opposing context, the use of simple imagery can promote the same exclusive impression. (Creevey et al., 2021, p. 115).

Although, for both user groups, luxury is considered a high-involvement good. This is due to its complexity rooted in heritage, individuality, and purchase decision based on price. Consequently, social media content should mimic this, forcing users to remain focused on specific imagery, imitating the careful thought process of completing a luxury purchase (Creevey et al., 2021, p. 115).

While the aforementioned points are identified as important, studies highlight that some luxury brands are failing to adapt to the nuances of social media and often portray digitised content similarly to those of magazine advertisements (Athwal et al., 2018). This is deemed to be a fallacy, as the culture curated on social media often relies on personalisation, whereas traditional media such as magazines depend on professionalism. (Creevey et al., 2021).

As demonstrated above, these dimensions appear to be in contradistinction. This suggests that omnichannel employment within the luxury industry is not only an extension of offline branding strategies. Instead, it is essential that phygital codes adhere to the competing rationale between accessibility, exclusivity, and interpretation (Creevey et al., 2021; Heine & Berghaus, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2015).

Two-way Communication

Literature underscores that luxury brands are conservative in exploring two-way communicative methods (Heine & Berghaus, 2014). Traditionally, firms communicated through unidirectional means, such as magazine advertisements, thereby occupying an authoritative role by influencing consumer decisions. The internet, particularly the introduction of Web 2.0, disrupted this dynamic by allowing greater levels of consumer engagement (Okonkwo, 2009). Ergo, consumers can now impact a firm's success based on collective sentiment (Creevey et al., 2021; Okonkwo, 2009).

This study posits that digital brand code translation may lead to the emergence of interactive codes. However, the implications for luxury branding are complex, this is due to its relationship with exclusivity (Heine & Berghaus, 2014).

2.4 Digital Brand Code Placement (on Social Media)

“Branding can clearly be regarded as a primary social media function” (Jurišová, 2020, p. 119). This statement reinforces the impact of social media on branding strategies. As a result of the vast number of social media users, studies indicate that the use of brand codes is important in consolidating brand perception on these platforms (Phillips et al., 2014).

Studies have uncovered that Instagram feeds that are cohesive in colour, format, and editing style lead to greater levels of brand awareness, as aesthetic appeal is Instagram’s central focus (Jurišová, 2020). Indicating that social media brand codes need to be cohesive both within and across various media (Okonkwo, 2009; Jurišová, 2020). If brand code consistency is breached, recognition and identity may be adversely affected. To explicate, continuous codes promote recall and thus nurture a stable meaning. Conversely, misinterpretations and weaker brand perception may be caused by inconsistencies in code communication (Phua et al., 2026, p. 2).

Consequently, brand signifiers on social media are often applied to mimic in-store experiences while sharing a common theme (Hyun et al., 2022, pp. 1196-1197; Lin & Ku, 2023). This can be applied through consistent motif usage, exclusivity signals, and emphasis on signature material elements (Oswald, 2007). Therefore, forms of visual, narrative, design, and craftsmanship codes should be depicted on all social media content (Lin & Ku, 2023).

Furthermore, it is posited that, heritage may be prominently showcased across social media platforms (Romo et al., 2017). As stated in the section above, 2.3 Introduction Omnichannel, it plays a significant role in consumer satisfaction online and elicits an authenticity and quality consensus among users (Creevey et al., 2021, p. 107; Zanola et al., 2025).

2.4.1 The 4-H Framework

The 4-H Framework developed by Mosca et al. (2024) is employed to categorise dimensions of successful digital heritage communication. By applying this framework, brands can structure the communication of heritage-rich content. Figure 3 illustrates these dimensions.

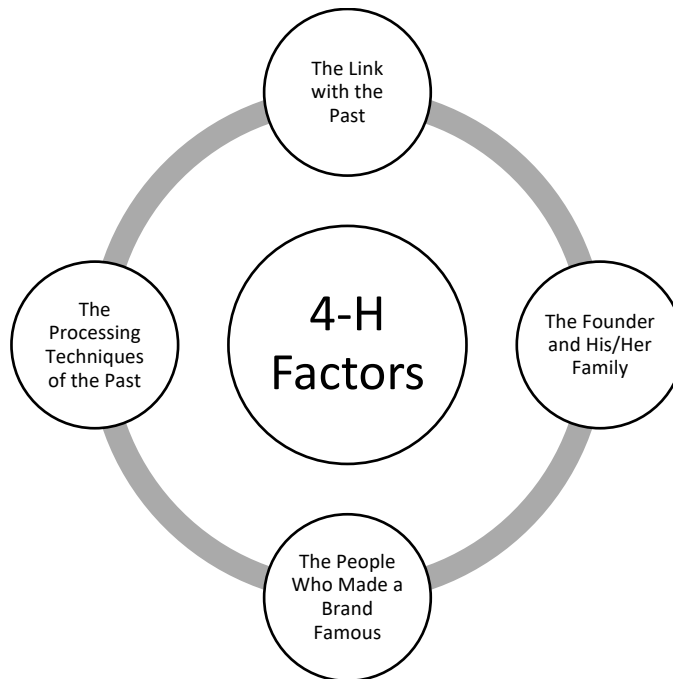


Figure 3: The 4-H Framework. (Adapted from (Mosca et al., 2024, p. 303)

In this study, the original labels “The Link with the Past”, “The Founder and His/Her Family”, “The People Who Made a Brand Famous”, and “The Processing Techniques of the Past” are referred to as “History”, “Heritage Actors”, “Heroes”, and “Handcraft”, respectively, for reasons of clarity (Mosca et al., 2024).

History

This dimension refers to past linkages, emphasising the circumstances surrounding a brand’s emergence and how it evolved over time. It includes the founder’s application of skill, determination, and vision in establishing what is now known as brand identity and “brand legend” (Mosca et al., 2024, pp. 302-304). To explicate, Guccio Gucci formally held the position of a porter and elevator attendant, an experience that aided in his understanding of luxury goods and contributed to his future as a world-renowned couturier (Gucci, n.d.).

Significant events are also used in digital heritage communication. These are typically associated with key occurrences of a specific brand. Such instances may have been instrumental in the brand’s

popularisation and continue to be referenced to strengthen brand identity (Mosca et al., 2024, pp. 302-304).

Heritage Actors

This dimension refers to people associated with the brand's origin and its respective legacy, including the founder, who contribute to the preservation of its *savoir-faire*. This is distinct from "History", as it pertains to the personification of the brand through its fundamental figures, who are regarded as symbols. To clarify, "History" is concerned with the genesis of the brand through the vision of its creator, while "Heritage Actors" relates to individuals who have played a crucial role in its continuity (Mosca et al., 2024, pp. 304-305).

Heroes

Individuals who contribute to brand fame are seen as symbolic figures that increase brand awareness. These individuals are often perceived as iconic by the public, meaning their association with the brand increases the firm's reputation. This parallel can be premised on certain celebrities using the luxury good, rendering the product to be the elite's choice. This drives a sense of exclusivity, which in turn evokes aspiration and desire in the public. The effect occurs regardless of whether it is a deliberate marketing strategy or due to the celebrity's own contentment (Mosca et al., 2024, pp. 306-307). To exemplify, Jackie Kennedy wore a particular Gucci handbag, leading to it being renamed "The Jackie" (Radon, 2012). This concept is also connected to status signalling, as discussed in 2.2.1 Luxury as Symbolic Signalling Systems.

Handcraft

The value proposition of luxury maisons is rooted in artisanship (Tarquini et al., 2022). This form of heritage communication exhibits *savoir-faire* and therefore functions as a tribute to the production process and preservation of tradition. In this manner, stores and ateliers act as semiotic figures in both, online and offline contexts. A common example includes content that showcases the contemporary manufacturing process while embracing the craftsmanship techniques originally established by the founders (Mosca et al., 2024, pp. 305-306).

Through employing these factors, it is suggested that luxury firms can mitigate the risk of exclusivity loss, while translating traditional codes. The digital presentation of these constituents facilitates the development of coherent brand identity, which is characterised by uniqueness and genuineness. This rationale emerges through the consistent use of experiential references over time, making imitation by competitors more difficult (Phua et al., 2026; Radon, 2012; Zanola et al., 2025). While the

framework itself illustrates how heritage functions through codified narratives across digital touchpoints (Mosca et al., 2024).

2.5 Exclusivity-Accessibility Paradox

Despite the aforementioned 4-H framework, that may assist in exclusivity enhancement online, researchers argue that an increased digital presence still engenders a diminution of exclusivity, highlighting the exclusivity-accessibility paradox (Heine, 2010; Radon, 2012).

Accessibility and ubiquity in the digital domain foster homogeneity, contradicting the central tenet of exclusivity in luxury brands (Dubois, 2017, pp. 327-328). When large audiences access luxury brands through brand websites and social media content, careful consideration of brand tactics is imperative to maintain perceived mystique. Overexposure, brand dilution, and imitation all manifest as potential risks of moving online (Radon, 2012).

Therefore, an alternative approach is the deliberate abandonment of social media, with intent to reposition craftsmanship and desire as a primary brand code. This strategy was adopted by Bottega Veneta in 2021 (Langer, 2021). While this approach may reinforce a profound sense of rarity, this tactic is precarious in the modern age where society favours digital presence (Dubois, 2017, p. 329; Duong & Sung, 2021).

Hennigs et al. (2012) argue that brands can align their strategies with the following dimensions to steer perceived exclusivity online:

Functional Value

Functional value corresponds to the multisensory nature of luxury firms. Luxury shoppers are exposed to a multitude of aesthetically refined content. Hence, appearance alone may not be perceived as exclusive. Luxury brands, therefore, provide value through interactive, educational, and entertaining content, mimicking offline points of contact. The primary goal is to engage consumers with brand-specific information that is unobtainable through competitors (Hennigs et al., 2012).

It is suggested that two-way communication may thereby be exercised to increase rarity. It is posited that this dimension promotes code interpretation clarity through engaging the consumer and allowing them to understand codes more deeply.

Individual Value

Self-perception (hedonism) is linked to individual value. Consumers perceive luxury brands as an extension of themselves (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015, p. 88). To add value in this dimension, brands should translate offline aesthetics digitally whilst encouraging consumer feedback to increase engagement (Hennigs et al., 2012). Individual value is argued to interlink codified elements and emotional connection through investing in customer-brand relationships.

Social Value

Affluent consumers and luxury shoppers are social media users, leveraging these platforms to manage public image. Consequently, the display of luxury acquisitions by these individuals affirms their social status within their respective networks. Therefore, accelerating brand popularity. Through strategic positioning, brands may intrinsically be linked to these individuals and vice versa (Hennigs et al., 2012). Ultimately, it is posited that through social value, prestige loss may be diminished by consistently associating codes with extraordinary individuals.

Managing the Paradox

While exclusivity-promoting tactics can be employed to equilibrate the paradox, current literature provides no firm guide regarding how the exclusivity-accessibility paradox can be seamlessly managed.

Current success stories respective to luxury firms and digital prestige employ the use of virtual showrooms, private digital events, limited edition products, the emerging world of product and experience personalisation, digital innovation (e.g., augmented reality), and social media engagement (Krsmanović, 2026).

Brands should also focus on depicting affluent buyers through social media or highlighting the clientele and guests at elite events to showcase a sense of prestige (Kapferer et al., 2017). The representation of remote or fictional locations, elite settings, eccentric movement, or unlikely events on digital platforms may create a restraint between viewers and the luxury brand. This spatial distancing may increase perceived exclusivity, as the ultimate aim is to be deemed rarified (Gurzki et al., 2019, pp. 407–409).

Furthermore, through the notion of eccentric movement and fictional locations, a sense of bizarreness is cultivated. This revisits the potential of brand code usage highlighted in 2.2.3 Brand Code Perception. The author, therefore, argues that the combination of abnormal movements and

imaginative settings functions in two ways. Firstly, it acts as a cultural code to distinguish exclusivity, and secondly, it serves as a catalyst for memory, fame, and uniqueness (Phua et al., 2026).

In addition, Sheridan (2020, p. 11) reveals that celebrities promote memory recall respective to advertisements. This endorses the use of cultural codes to function as ideal luxury signifiers whereby the facet of exclusivity is perpetuated through ordinary exclusion and stronger branded attention. The two consequences paired enable cultural codes to be deemed of great significance.

However, it is also contended that the exclusivity-accessibility paradox is not a business fallacy; rather, it is perceived as a potential opportunity (Holmqvist et al., 2020). This aligns with a statement made by Hennigs et al. (2012) that brands can leverage their online presence to spread brand aspirations more effectively.

2.6 Decoding the Dream

Peirce's Sign Theory (PST) enables the decoding of the stated semiotic elements. This theory is to be employed respective of the analysis into social media posts and campaigns to establish a clear consensus of code-qualifying factors. Nevertheless, through Peircean semiotics, a more profound and nuanced understanding of content elements can be discovered, thereby extending interpretation beyond superficial iconography.

Peirce's work, while beneficial, is abundant. For the purpose of this research, the basic concepts of PST will be explored below as they are best suited for synthesising an understanding of luxury brand codes on digital platforms.

PST explores differing notions of symbolism: the sign (sign-vehicle), object, and the interpretant. To clarify, the sign-vehicle references the visible image; the object relates to the referred "thing"; and the interpretant is the meaning formulated in one's mind (Atkin, 2006).

This theory may be better understood using an example of a fictional photograph of a Chanel garment; the visible image would be perceived as a photo of a Chanel dress, and the object is the Chanel brand. Ultimately, what one thinks e.g., "expensive", is deemed as the interpretant.

Further, Peirce categorises signs based on their connection to their object, allowing brand codes to be identified. There is variance in signs that resemble an object, conjure a link to an object, and are

learnt based on cultural experience. These are segmented as icons, indices, and symbols, respectively (Atkin, 2006).

To illustrate, imagine a photograph of dress. The image of the dress would be the icon, while the index would be the direct connection affiliated with the manufacturing of the garment; hence, the craftsmanship is an index of skilled labour. Ultimately, the Chanel brand name acts as a symbol, as it has been culturally acknowledged to be exclusive.

Exercising this theory, fashion is more than a tangible good; it validates the notion of 'Luxury Dreams' and semiotic richness. As previously posited, the luxury industry is reliant on emblematic and symbolic signs to convey meaning and identity (Kapferer, 2008; Oswald, 2015).

2.7 Research Direction

The above-explored literature anchors this paper through identifying brand codes, their function, perception, and luxury's introduction to the digital sphere.

However, the examined studies do not specifically explicate how the various code categories are communicated on digital platforms. Furthermore, luxury's exclusivity maintenance online is a contentious subject amongst scholars. Existing research provides limited insights into whether brand codes are interpreted by consumers in the intended way, especially when communicated through subtle, implicit cues.

The next section of this paper presents the methodological approach used to address these gaps and provide an answer to the overarching research questions, as identified in 1 Introduction.

3 Methodology

This section aims to describe, explain, and justify the methodological approach utilised in this paper. It also highlights, the procedures adopted to ensure reliability and transparency in data collection and analysis. Finally, the ethical considerations applied throughout this study are discussed.

Context

Due to the nuanced, multifaceted nature of this research, two qualitative methods were selected: semi-structured interviews and qualitative visual analysis. This approach enabled the combination of insights from luxury professionals with observable digital brand communication. The literature review facilitated the comprehension of brand codes and luxury management and provided the theoretical foundation for the analysis.

The discovery of literature was facilitated by Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Swisscovery, and ScienceDirect. Furthermore, the literature review derived from a narrative review approach. As existing literature lacks a consistent conceptualisation of brand codes, this paper initially addressed a comprehensive understanding of codes. Existing studies assisted in identifying the importance of brand codes from a brand management perspective and in discovering key implications regarding their digital application. It further enabled the exploration of the digital rise in the luxury sector, the challenges and new demands that are associated with it, and the overarching paradox that is implicated. To promote transparency, page numbers have been provided wherever possible. The absence of an identified page is attributable to the fact that the point has been addressed in-depth throughout the source.

This paper employs a multi-method approach to allow for methodological triangulation, where the qualitative interviews are used to understand strategic intent, and the qualitative visual analysis investigates visual manifestation. Thus, enabling a holistic, in-depth overview of brand codes and their implications.

Both qualitative analyses focus on European luxury firms that offer women's ready-to-wear lines. As specific digital communication strategies of brand codes remain underexplored in current literature, the adopted approaches facilitate the closure of this research gap by seeking practical examples.

To specify, the qualitative interviews examine three European luxury brands. These brands are headquartered in France, Italy, and Germany. The firms and their respective locations were selected

due to high influence within the luxury market (Forecast, 2024). Moreover, three luxury professionals who do not have an exclusive association with a particular brand were interviewed based on their strong affiliation with various firms or their expertise in the luxury fashion industry. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this thesis and to guarantee the interviewees' privacy, all participants remain anonymous.

The qualitative visual analysis, however, investigates six luxury womenswear brands through a social media analysis. Five of six brands are identified; however, to protect the confidentiality of the interview participant, the identity of one brand will remain anonymous due to qualitative analyses overlap. The companies were selected in a manner allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the European luxury market, covering three influential regions, France, Italy, and England (Forecast, 2024; Merlo & Pinchera, 2023). The analysis focuses on content published on Instagram; this is due to the platform's strong luxury brand engagement when contrasted against other mediums (Lin & Ku, 2023).

Data Collection

Qualitative Interviews

The semi-structured interview comprised 17 questions. With the objective of more detailed insights, the majority of questions were open-ended in nature, and three of the 17 questions included sub-questions. This approach was adopted to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for elaboration. The following categories were explored during the interviews: brand codes, exclusivity, brand control strategies, and perception evaluation.

The selected topics enabled the exploration of various types of brand codes, insights into their digital adaptation, the maintenance of exclusivity, the risks associated with digital presence, and the personal perspective of interviewees.

Five of six interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to enhance reliability (Poland, 1995). Following transcription, all audio data was deleted to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were conducted both digitally, via telephone and Google Meet, and in-person. The remaining candidate, however, provided written responses.

The transcripts as well as the written response can be found in Appendix A: Interview Transcripts and Responses.

Qualitative Visual Analysis

For the qualitative visual analysis (social media analysis), ten posts and one social media campaign per brand were investigated. This allowed for the analysis of brand code placement techniques. 'Posts' in this context excluded comments and captions and focused solely on the visual and auditory content. Carousel posts were treated as a single post, with all included media analysed as one unit. While the captions under the posts were not used in code identification, they were used to identify social media campaigns. Therefore, explicit hashtags and content including the same overarching caption (title, description, event promotion) were deemed campaigns. Furthermore, Instagram Stories were omitted from this analysis, as their limited duration (24 hours, unless added to a 'Highlight') could introduce inconsistencies in the findings.

Sample

Qualitative Interviews

For the interview analysis, 217 potential candidates were contacted. Of those, only 13 individuals replied, and six agreed to participate in an interview. This corresponds to a response rate of 5.99% and a 2.76% interview confirmation rate. The interviews took place between the 18th and 29th of April 2026. Interviewees held positions including project managers, sales associates, social media luxury marketing analysts, and fashion brand owners. Four of the six interviewees occupied junior positions. Despite this, junior-level professionals were deemed appropriate due to their direct involvement in the execution of brand strategies and digital content. Their proximity to brand code implementation provides valuable insights into how such codes are applied in practice, particularly in the digital sphere. The remaining two participants occupied senior and executive roles.

The initial sampling strategy relied exclusively on interviews with luxury professionals working within luxury brands, specifically individuals with over two years of experience in junior, senior, or executive roles. However, due to the low response rate, the scope was required to be broadened to encompass interviews with luxury professionals working in close collaboration with brands, including employees of marketing consulting firms and other industry experts. The selected participants remain qualified due to their affiliation, know-how, and contribution within luxury brands; therefore, the information gathered remains valid.

Consequently, a secondary set of modified interview questions was developed. The two sets were designed to achieve the same result, with only contextual changes made; see Appendix B: Interview Questions.

Qualitative Visual Analysis

The Instagram sample included Burberry, Chanel, Christian Dior, Missoni, Sandro, and one additional brand (kept anonymous for confidentiality). The data set consisted of posts published between the 10th of February and the 17th of April 2026. As this research focused on women's fashion houses and more specifically on clothing-related media, sub-categories such as footwear, swimwear, accessories, and handbags were excluded from the sample. While some posts in the data set may be targeted at other market segments (e.g., cosmetics), they were investigated when women's garments were clearly visible. This is attributable to the configuration of fashion goods, which are regarded as a primary contributor to brand image and identity (Okonkwo, 2007). Therefore, when clothing was a significant component of an Instagram post, it was necessary for the content to be included in the analysis. Furthermore, although the aim of these publications was to advertise an alternative range, elements such as (non-exhaustively) clothing and background still function as semiotic symbols (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Atkin, 2006).

Content, including runway photography and videography, was not explored, as brands such as Sandro are categorised as "affordable luxury" and do not participate in runway events. This allowed for an integral analysis of the complete industry and ensured sample comparability. These findings were triangulated against the claims made in the interviews and the theoretical framework. Subsequent to the investigation, a total of sixty Instagram posts and six campaigns were analysed.

Data Analysis

Both the interview and visual analyses utilise Braun & Clarke's methodology through a deductive-inductive lens. This allows for the identification of patterned meaning across the dataset rather than solely considering frequency. The nature of Braun & Clarke's Reflexive thematic analysis provides interpretative flexibility; thus, the interviews and Instagram posts can be analysed in depth, beyond mere surface-level observations (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Interview Data Analysis

Firstly, the author investigated and read through the literature review in three conclusive passes to ensure comprehensive familiarity with the content. Through this investigation, seven predefined deductive themes arose, namely, Visual Symbolism, Narrative and Heritage Creation, Omnichannel Consistency, Exclusivity Management, Interpretation and Perception Control, Brand Authenticity and Identity, and Exclusivity-Accessibility Pressure.

To provide clarity regarding the derivation of themes, a table including the deductive codes identified, the corresponding researchers, their location in this paper, and a concise description can be found in Appendix C: Deductive Code Table.

Prior to coding, all transcripts were reviewed five times to ensure full familiarisation with the data. Using Taguette, the above-mentioned themes were applied through a deductive coding pass to all six interviews. Data congruent with the predefined literature themes were discovered and codified as a broad topic. After the completion of the deductive coding, the author began inductively coding new data that did not emerge in literature or recoding extracts with more specific codes within an overarching theme. This process resulted in 116 inductive codes. To clarify, sentences were coded based on their relevance to the predefined themes and through both a semantic and latent lens, ensuring a nuanced and thorough interpretation.

After deductive-inductive coding using Braun & Clarke's Reflexive thematic analysis, common and/or overlapping codes were merged or discarded depending on their relevancy to this paper. This therefore resulted in the affirmation of the existing themes; Visual Symbolism, Narrative and Heritage Creation, and Omnichannel Consistency. However, through the inductive analysis, the remaining themes were altered or merged to create two new themes. Moreover, due to the aforesaid technique, a new theme was identified. Ultimately, this process resulted in six overarching themes: Visual Symbolism, Narrative and Heritage Creation, Omnichannel Consistency, Tension in Digital Exclusivity Management and Perception, Brand Identity Construction, and Materiality and Experiential Gap. For transparency, the codebook imported from Taguette and a detailed overview of key responses gathered can be found Appendix D: Interview Analysis.

Visual Data Analysis

For the visual analysis, all data within each post was systematically examined. These observations were then codified into the subsequent four categories derived from the theoretical framework: visual, design, narrative, and cultural. To ensure reliability and consistency, each post and campaign was manually coded in three separate passes. Moreover, this analysis aimed to identify brand code placement, how many brand codes are used online, and what codes are not digitally exercised. The most common strategies found were then converted into the ensuing five themes, whereby common brand code translation mechanisms were merged. The themes are, namely, Controlled Visibility, Heritage as Luxury Validation, Accessibility versus Exclusivity, Exclusivity and Distance, and Craftsmanship and Authenticity. For this analysis, posts discussed in the section 4 Results, will be numerically referenced with respect to a master coding analysis.

As luxury brand storytelling is elusive, the Peircean Theory of Signs assisted in interpreting iconic, indexical, and symbolic meanings of identified brand codes, thereby linking the analysis to the explored literature. This manual investigation was constructed using Microsoft Word.

See Appendix E: Qualitative Visual Analysis for a master code analysis referencing all 60 Instagram posts and campaigns.

3.1 Ethical Considerations

The research methodology employed in this paper was executed in accordance with meticulous ethical standards. All information gathered from studies or other sources was properly cited in accordance with the APA 7th edition style to ensure academic integrity.

All interview participants were informed of the purpose of this study and how their data would be used. Moreover, interviewees were aware that participation was voluntary and could withdraw from the interview at any time. Verbal consent was obtained prior to the commencement of interviews.

The interviews were recorded and initially transcribed using the automated transcription feature in the Apple Voice Memos application (version iOS 26.3.1). To ensure accuracy and reliability, the author manually reviewed and edited the generated transcripts against audio recordings. The audio files were securely stored locally on the author's device until deletion following transcription.

4 Results

The purpose of this section is to illustrate the findings of both analyses, namely, the qualitative interviews and the qualitative visual analysis, respectively. The findings are documented in their related themes, whereby the interview analysis and Instagram analysis have derived two independently categorised thematic groups. This approach was adopted in order to establish a clear distinction between the visual evidence and the actionable insights described. The results of both analyses are explored in an overlapping manner alongside the relevant literature in the Discussion section of this paper.

4.1 Interview Analysis

The thematic deductive-inductive analysis implemented pertaining to six qualitative interviews has generated seven overarching themes whereby three themes have respective subthemes. To assist in the themes' understanding, Table 2 has been manufactured. This table demonstrates how digital brand code translation is achieved through visual, narrative, and omnichannel mechanisms, all of which is guided by brand identity. The table divides the initial literature-driven deductive themes, the collective inductive codes, and their combined themes to assist in comprehension.

The aforementioned themes (alongside subthemes) will be explored below.

Initial Deductive Theme	Merged Inductive Codes	Final Unified Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual Symbolism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic Codes • Subtle Codes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual Symbolism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative and Heritage Creation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craftsmanship Display • Digital Storytelling • Material Importance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative and Heritage Creation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omnichannel Consistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity Importance • Phygital Growth • Platform Selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omnichannel Consistency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusivity Management • Accessibility Pressure • Interpretation and Perception Control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricted Access • Overexposure Risk • Engagement mechanism • Consumer Listening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tension in Digital Exclusivity Management and Perception
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand Authenticity and Identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Driven Codes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand Identity Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solely derived from the inductive analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craftsmanship Translation Difficulty • Experience Importance and Difficulty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materiality and Experiential Gap

Table 2: Interview Themes. (Source: Own table).

Brand Identity Construction

As brand identity was identified as a central concept in all the conducted interviews and is intrinsically linked to every brand code and strategy referenced by participants, the author categorises identity as a theme rather than a supporting instrument. Consequently, the ensuing paragraphs will address the outcomes pertaining to identity.

All six interviewees referenced brand identity and frequently linked it to brand codes. To illustrate, Participant 1 states, “What emerges is that strong luxury identities are always rooted in consistency: heritage, craftsmanship, and a very controlled aesthetic language” (Participant 1, Interview) This specific quote connects narrative, design, and visual codes to brand identity. To better illustrate this finding, upon being asked to specify the identity of their respective brands or those with which they have a collaborative relationship, all participants provided responses that included factors resembling a code, such as craftsmanship, colours, and emblems.

In contrast to these findings, where brand identity is largely perceived as a static entity, one respondent argues, “identity is increasingly shaped by how brands translate these elements into experiences, both physical and digital” (Participant 1, Interview). They suggested that identity is shaped through the conversion of brand codes into experiences in both digital and physical spaces.

A further concept was affirmed by Participant 4. Given that brand identity and codes function as one entity, both constituents are not necessarily subject to drastic change. “I don't know, if they're actually transformed, they're probably just reinterpreted or brought into [a] new shape” (Participant 4, Interview).

Visual Symbolism

This theme reflects the interviewee’s consistent mention of visual code importance and their active translation. The findings illuminate a particular emphasis on colour palettes, aesthetic selection, and logo and monogram use. In connection with visual symbolism, three interconnected subthemes were identified: Minimalism and Colour, Elusive Branding, and Animated Codes.

“Visually, we rely heavily on black, white, and metallic tones and a very clean, minimalist design language” (Participant 2, Interview). Four other participants made similar statements about the importance of visual codes and acknowledged them to be most crucial. In addition, the majority of participants even emphasised the ongoing translation of visual codes into the digital sphere.

Minimalism and Colour

Participants frequently described minimalism and neutrality as key visual codes within brand identity, which are also reflected in digital touchpoints.

Five of six participants referenced colour palettes when asked about brand identity and key codes. Specifically, two participants highlighted the significance of colour schemes in establishing and maintaining a consistent identity online, while the remaining participants referred to the predominant use of achromatic schemes within their brand (both online and offline).

Four participants referenced refined visual expression relative to digital brand communication. Participant 1 stated that identity is driven by aesthetic consistency. While three participants explicitly stated minimalism, one interviewee described a “clean” digital aesthetic. Participant 6 conversely linked minimalistic design to challenges in communicating brand experience in digital environments, they posit that it signals underdeveloped translation.

Elusive Branding

Despite luxury houses operating in highly visible environments, participants described brand codes as not always explicitly placed. Participant 5, for example, described how emblems and colour palettes are tactfully encased in garment photography rather than directly presented. In addition, Participant 1 hypothesised that the centrality of traditional symbolic elements (i.e., logos) will decrease in the future.

Beyond dominant elements such as colour palettes and aesthetics, more subtle visual codes, such as typography, are deliberately translated. One interviewee mentioned: “It’s even in the small things that have to be translated, for example, the fonts that we use are selected to align with our company” (Participant 3, Interview).

Animated Codes

The interviews conducted revealed that through digital growth, some brands are beginning to reinterpret and expand code curation and/or creation. One participant indicated that there is a growing exploration into animated effects and motion design for the online environment.

Narrative and Heritage Creation

This theme covers references to storytelling and heritage in digital branding. Furthermore, it includes craftsmanship as an interplay of storytelling to manufacture and honour heritage elements. Three subthemes were subsequently identified, namely, Storytelling Adaptation, Heritage Translation Gap, and Material Integrity.

Storytelling Adaptation

Four of six participants mentioned the current use of storytelling as a core digitally translated code. Two interviewees specifically highlighted it as important. Visual storytelling was described as prevalent in contemporary digital branding and marketing. Furthermore, four participants expressed that they expect storytelling to be increasingly digitised through interactive and immersive content. This is evidenced by Participant 3’s claim when questioned regarding the future of brand codes, “I think now we have, for sure, visual storytelling, but I think that will continue in the future” (Participant 3, Interview).

One participant highlighted that narrative codes are more prone to evolution and change. Conversely, other codes, such as visual elements, are more identity-bound and static. This is seen in the following extract: “I’m sure that the stories change because in the connection with the digital

[...]. But with the other things like CLASSIFIED (emblem), they can't change" (Participant 5, Interview).

When asked about digitally translated codes Participant 6 mentioned the use of aspirational lifestyle cues, where digital storytelling emphasises leisure and wealth. "One of the ways we do this is photos of our campaigns that always include the sense of travel and resort destinations" (Participant 6, Interview).

Heritage Translation Gap

While heritage was noted to be of great importance by three of six participants, limited reference was found about how its digital translation is operationalised. The importance of heritage is evidenced by the following excerpt: "The most important brand codes are [...] symbolic (heritage, storytelling, relationship with clients)" (Participant 1, Interview). While heritage was explicitly mentioned by the above participant, Participants 2 and 5 implicitly referenced history through stating the importance of the brand's founder.

Material Integrity

Craftsmanship was referenced by five of six participants, primarily through emphasis on materiality. In the absence of physical touch, Participants 1 and 2 stated that brands utilise high-quality product visualisations. Participant 1 suggested that this is done through atelier-content, close-up reels, behind-the-scenes shots, or craftsmanship storytelling to function as a proxy for tactile quality. Another approach included implicitly signalling craftsmanship using motion visuals to reflect the meticulous manufacturing process of luxury production. "We use subtle animations and very precise motion design to reflect that engineering mindset. We also invest a lot in high-quality product visualisation" (Participant 2, Interview).

Similarly to storytelling, half of the participants suggested that craftsmanship will evolve into more interactive and immersive formats. Participant 6 noted that advancements in the realm of craftsmanship displays have already been made, with brands becoming more transparent about manufacturing processes, a phenomenon which was previously less commonly observed.

Omnichannel Consistency

This theme presents the findings relating to the cohesive understanding of omnichannel use, with a particular emphasis on the impact of continuity and platform selection on brand code translation and display. All conducted interviews underscore the need for offline and online integration.

A clear distinction was made with respect to the varying digital outlets and their intended purpose. The participants noted that, while all touchpoints are designed to be consistent, they function as separate platforms for different code categories, whereby certain channels favour select brand codes. Participants 1, 2, and 3 posited that Instagram is used to demonstrate storytelling. Participant 2 elaborated and further mentioned that the website is instrumentalised as a controlled medium for brands, while another social media platform, namely YouTube, functions as a craftsmanship display due to the option of posting long videos.

While five participants view omnichannel usage in a favourable light, it was suggested by Participant 5 that the rapid progression of digital tactics, which involve consumer interaction and experience, may be problematic. This is due to the risk of overwhelming consumers rather than enticing them, as argued by Participant 4. Moreover, Participant 6 stated that extensive digital presence undermines their respective affordable luxury company, as they mentioned that the overreliance on digital accessibility may negatively impact physical retail sales.

Furthermore, according to Participant 2, the growth of phygital tactics summoned the creation of new, digitally conscious codes, as reflected in the statement: “Digital requires its own language” (Participant 2, Interview). In addition, Participant 1 highlighted the modern use of “meme-able” content, optimised campaign formats, and influencer collaborations on digital platforms.

Conversely, Participant 4 reported that luxury fashion brands do not demonstrate indications of continuous digital acclimatisation; rather, their evolution occurs in phases where digital presentation accelerates, especially in periods of digital dominance such as global pandemics, yet tends to dissipate.

Half of the participants made remarks on the future of omnichannel touchpoints. They stated that these touchpoints are expected to diverge and expand into augmented reality (AR). “I think they'll become more interactive and immersive, especially with technologies like augmented reality, for example” (Participant 4, Interview).

Materiality and Experiential Gap

As identified in the Material Integrity subtheme, craftsmanship was emphasised to be pivotal to the luxury industry. In contrast, a potential translation gap was highlighted for all participants.

Experience was also referenced in five of the six interviews with great emphasis on the need for phygital growth laden with customer-centric journeys. Simultaneously, concern was raised regarding digital communication mechanisms by participants. This theme, therefore, attempts to explicate the divide.

Participant 4 claimed that craftsmanship is the centre of luxury brands. However, when interviewees were asked about the most difficult codes to translate onto digital platforms, the majority stated craftsmanship and brand experience. Three participants specifically acknowledged in-store experiences. As demonstrated by the following excerpt: “Craftsmanship, material quality, and the in-store experience are the hardest” (Participant 1, Interview).

Participants 1, 2, and 3 were among those who made the aforementioned claims; however, they also indicated that both craftsmanship and in-store experience are likely to digitally expand in the future, creating a potential divergence between perceived translation difficulty and digital development.

Conversely, Participants 1 and 5 stated that luxury brands will never be fully digital due to the necessity of in-store experiences. Participant 1 further noted that the emotional impact of entering a physical store and engaging with products is challenging to replicate digitally. The same participant also posited that this is a contributing factor to the preference of many consumers (particularly elementary shoppers) for in-store purchases. The interviewee argues that in-store shopping fosters a heightened sense of wealth for consumers and functions as justification for expenditure.

Tension in Digital Exclusivity Management and Perception

This theme captures exclusivity tactics operated by luxury brands. The interview responses highlight a lack of clarity among brands in how exclusivity should be managed. Moreover, the three following subthemes were identified: Exclusivity Tactics versus Digital Contradiction, Visibility and Perception, and Imitation and Dilution Risks and Control Mechanisms.

Exclusivity Tactics versus Digital Contradiction

Five of six participants reported that their respective brands employ exclusivity tactics. Four participants stated tactics ranging from limited drops and stock to selectively curated content and collaborations. Nevertheless, four participants proposed offline-only mechanisms to maintain

exclusivity, including garment tailoring. This was referenced by Participant 3: “I would say it's definitely the more exclusive services that we offer, for example, custom tailoring of our items.” (Participant 3, Interview). Participant 4 added that collections and events that are solely available offline are utilised as an exclusivity strategy.

Moreover, when asked how brands balance reach with prestige, Participant 1 stated that brands use content intended to create high visibility paired with controlled distribution to compensate for the rarity loss. Contrastingly, Participants 2 and 3 stated that their respective firms selectively post and focus on audiences that are relevant to the firm’s objectives. The remaining participants were unable to provide a response to this question.

Visibility and Perception

Only two of six interviewees were able to address potential visibility benchmarks. Participant 2 stated that these are not purely numerical. While engagement tracking is a mechanism, brands also directly investigate the types of individuals interacted with.

Engagement metrics were noted to not only serve as tools to track visibility but also as indicators of code understanding, as stated by four participants. Participants 2 and 3 highlighted that brands selectively prioritise quality and engagement context to align with brand identity. This, paired with customer listening, was identified as a common strategy within the industry to ensure appropriate code interpretation. In contrast, Participant 6 mentioned that code perception is monitored through in-store requests where consumers enquire about collections based on digital codes.

Imitation and Dilution Risks and Control Mechanisms

Four of six participants concurred that code imitation poses a digital risk for brands. As stated by Participant 2: “Digital makes imitation much easier” (Participant 2, Interview), highlighting how digital accessibility can impact luxury uniqueness. Contrarily, Participant 6, who operates in the affordable luxury industry, posited that this is not a perceived risk as their industry is not as susceptible to imitation.

Nonetheless, the four participants (including Participant 6) asserted that legal implications are established to evade risk. Rather than solely relying on legal protection, three participants stated consistency across touchpoints strengthens identity, which in return mitigates imitation risk.

Similarly, an overexposure risk emerged relative to brand dilution, suggesting that visibility may erode rarity, as concurred by half of the participants. Responses regarding dilution monitoring and mitigation varied among the candidates. However, predominant tactics included over-exposure tracking, consumer listening, consistency, strict brand guidelines, and selective partnerships. This is evidenced by the following extract: “Yeah, again, just very strict brand guidelines, and of course, our selective collaborations with some people” (Participant 3, Interview).

While overexposure has been indicated to be a risk, Participant 1 stated digital presence may be beneficial for current luxury brands. “Over-exclusivity” has been suggested to be a potential predicament. Participant 1 thereby posited that digital exposure may assist in mitigating this.

4.2 Instagram Analysis

Based on the preceding hybrid approach described, the ensuing themes have been discovered, Controlled Visibility, Heritage as Luxury Validation, Exclusivity and Distance, Craftsmanship and Authenticity, and Digital Accessibility versus Luxury Exclusivity.

To validate the stated concepts and aid in converting raw codes into a thematic synthesis, Table 3 was configured. The table depicts the predefined deductive code categories across the sixty posts and six campaigns. Furthermore, it provides specific examples of brand codes to assist in reliability and assurance. By aggregating the findings from the stated six luxury fashion brands, ranging from affordable to high-end luxury, the matrix illustrates how online brand code usage aligns across the industry. Additionally, the table demonstrates the Peircean relationship to the prescribed codes to assist in depicting a thematic link.

Theme	Code Category	Brand Code	Brand	Peircean Category	Interpretation
Controlled Visibility	Visual	Minimal logos	Chanel, Sandro	Indexical	Signals insider recognition and exclusivity
Controlled Visibility	Visual	Emblem use & Maximalism	Anonymous	Symbolic	Signals brand identity and visibility
Craftsmanship and Authenticity	Design	Zig-zag knit pattern	Missoni	Iconic	Directly links brand identity and heritage
Craftsmanship and Authenticity	Design	Stitching and garment details	Burberry	Indexical	Signals quality and handcraft
Craftsmanship and Authenticity	Design	Atelier visuals	Christian Dior	Indexical	Communicates authenticity and handcraft
Heritage as Validation	Narrative	Paris/London settings	Chanel, Christian Dior, Burberry	Indexical	Linkage to brand origin
Heritage as Validation	Narrative	References to Founder	Christian Dior, Burberry	Symbolic	Creates brand myth
Heritage as Validation	Narrative	Iconic Garments	Burberry	Iconic	Represents heritage
Atmospheric Storytelling	Narrative	Travel & leisure imagery	Missoni, Christian Dior	Symbolic	Constructs aspirational lifestyle
Exclusivity and Distance	Cultural	Celebrity ambassadors	Chanel, Christian Dior, Burberry	Symbolic	Signals status
Exclusivity and Distance	Cultural	Distanced framing	Sandro	Indexical	Creates sentiments of limited access
Exclusivity and Distance	Cultural	Elite settings	Chanel, Christian Dior	Symbolic	Reinforces restricted access
Accessibility versus Exclusivity	Cultural / Narrative	Reels & Storytelling	Christian Dior, Burberry	Indexical	Signals accessibility and authenticity
Accessibility versus Exclusivity	Cultural / Narrative	Behind-the-scenes content	Burberry, Christian Dior, Sandro	Indexical	Signals accessibility and authenticity
Accessibility versus Exclusivity	Cultural / Narrative	Interactive / social media aware	All brands	Symbolic	Modern luxury behaviour and engagement

Table 3: Visual Analysis Themes. (Source: Own table).

In parallel with this, a thematic map (Figure 4) was created, this serves as a visual aid for understanding the preceding themes and their connection to the above-mentioned code categories. The map illustrates how luxury brand codes are found on Instagram and their interrelated implications. Thus, brand codes are found to act as one, rather than discrete entities.

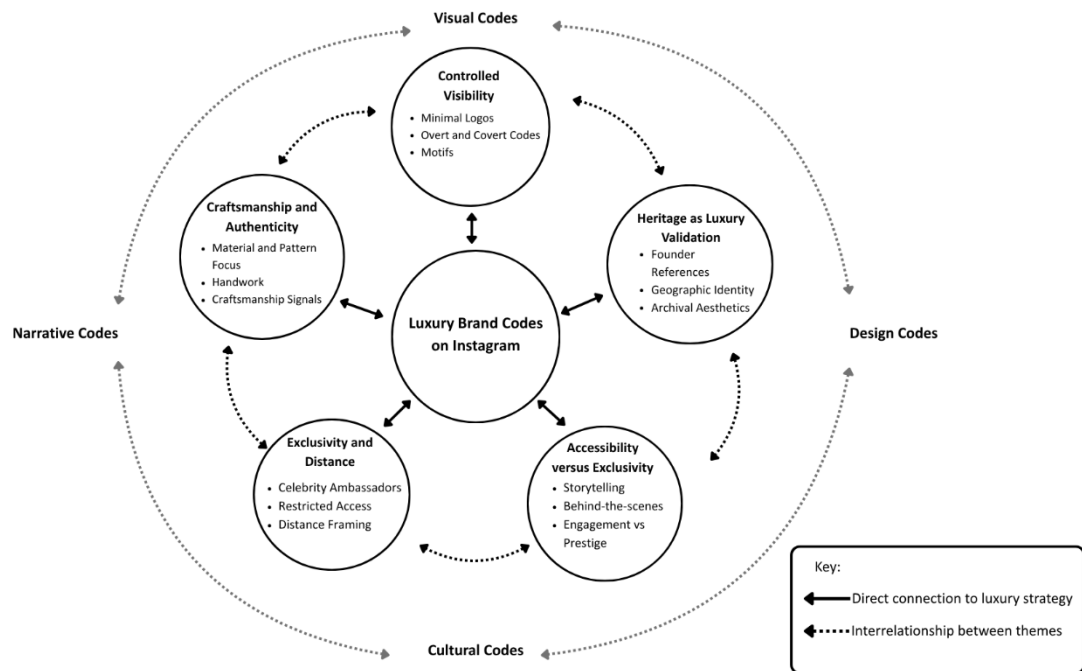


Figure 4: Visual Analysis Thematic Map. (Source: Own figure)

For transparency reasons and to improve legibility the following posts can be found in Appendix E:

Qualitative Visual Analysis:

- a) Figure E1: Burberry Post 3
- b) Figure E2: Christian Dior Post 7
- c) Figure E3: Sandro Post 5
- d) Figure E4: Sandro Post 6
- e) Figure E5: Sandro Post 8

Controlled Visibility

As stated in Table 3 and Figure 4, this theme explores how brands navigate the tension between recognition and the use of subtle visual elements. The analysis presented that while logos are ubiquitous amongst five of the six investigated brands, they are frequently employed as indexical absences or placed implicitly.

To exemplify, Chanel Post 4 utilises vectoral logos coupled with garment placement contexts to support brand identification. Conversely, Sandro Post 10 demonstrates a complete avoidance of visible branding. A significant pattern amongst four of six brands includes occasional vector logo use at the end of reels (storytelling-focused content).

More commonly, it has been demonstrated that brands frequently employ other identity-related assets. These include maximalist or minimalist content, the latter of which is aligned with the brand's established identity. Additionally, patterns or materials associated with a given brand are seen, such as in Burberry Post 2.



Figure 5: Chanel Post 4.
(Chanel [@chanelofficial], 2026a).



Figure 6: Sandro Post 10.
(Sandro [@sandroparis], 2026e).



Figure 7: Burberry Post 2. (Burberry
[@burberry], 2026b).

Using Peircean semiotics, posts were classified to contain symbolical, indexical, or iconic categories. Logos and emblems frequently appeared as symbolic elements, while restrained logo placement and brand-associated visual assets presented were as indexical and iconic elements.

Heritage as Luxury Validation

The most predominant code discovered within this analysis is respective to heritage signals. All brands analysed have explicitly or implicitly displayed historical markers. Respective to explicit heritage elements, this included content directly addressing the history of certain garments, founder presentations, and archived documents and clothing. This is clearly found in Burberry Post 3 and Christian Dior Post 2 (Carousel 2).

The implicit heritage (narrative) codes discovered significantly interlink design and visual codes. To explicate, intricate details placed that correspond to the founder's preferences are digitally presented. These details are often minimally visible and embedded within heritage elements. As discovered in Christian Dior Post 7, flower motifs were used consistently. Conversely, Missoni Post 10 displays their zig-zag pattern.

Moreover, geographical identity as a form of historical homage was employed by all six brands. To revisit Missoni Post 10, the brand's signature colours on the garments themselves act as codified heritage. Brands use locations to code heritage, as seen in Chanel Campaign Post, where the setting is Paris.

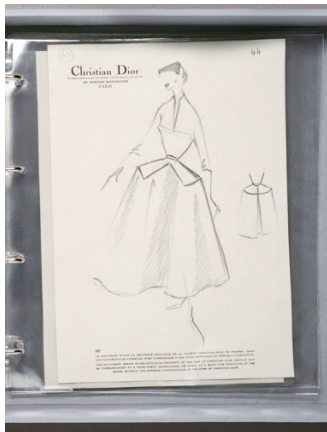


Figure 8: Christian Dior Post 2 (Carousel 2).
(Christian Dior [@dior], 2026a).

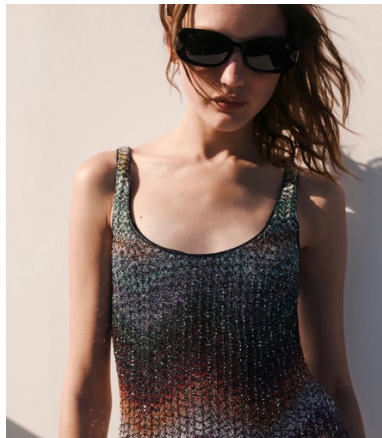


Figure 9: Missoni Post 10.
(Missoni [@missoni], 2026a).



Figure 10: Chanel Campaign Post. (Chanel
[@chanelofficial], 2026c).

Archival sketches and geographical references were discovered as indexical elements. Whereas patterns and founder-related imagery were identified as iconic elements.

Accessibility versus Exclusivity

Five of six brands implemented connection building, social media aware content. This theme relates to the need to balance engagement with a maintained sense of prestige. Christian Dior Post 4 presented consistent forms of engagement-orientated content in the form of behind-the-scenes content where model expression and conversation are done in a natural manner. This is nonetheless balanced by an eminent sense of editorial-style photography. Furthermore, Burberry Campaign Post allows for a natural showcase of model conversations and opinions.

Contrastingly, Missoni Post 3 was not found to utilise any accessibility nor engagement markers and remained consistent with high-photography content.

While some brands execute both forms of content (engaging or aloof), others completely avoid the incorporation of engagement-presenting content. Some brands incorporated behind-the-scenes content in a manner that remains polished, such as Sandro Post 6.



Figure 11: Burberry Campaign Post. (Burberry [@burberry], 2026c).



Figure 12: Missoni Post 3. (Missoni [@missoni], 2026b).



Figure 13: Christian Dior Post 4. (Christian Dior [@dior], 2026b).

Human-like and unrefined content was identified as indexical, additionally editorial-style imagery functions as a symbolic marker of prestige.

Exclusivity and Distance

It is imperative to acknowledge that this theme concerns the sentiment elicited by the brand's online presence, whereas Accessibility versus Exclusivity explores the type of content employed.

All brands presented indicators of distance. Five of six brands (excluding Missoni) have exercised the presentation of celebrity ambassadors, as seen in Burberry Campaign Post, Chanel Post 3, Christian Dior Post 4, and Sandro Post 5. In addition, the stated brands also incorporated elite settings such as private events and prestigious ceremonies.

While Missoni did not explicitly demonstrate this, it was implicitly achieved through aspirational travel and leisure cues. This can be found in Post 6, where a relaxed and tropical-like atmosphere is used. Additionally, an alternative technique is demonstrated in Sandro Post 7, which was found to utilise muted facial expressions alongside distanced framing.



Figure 14: Chanel Post 3.
(Chanel [@chanelofficial], 2026b).



Figure 15: Missoni Post 6. (Missoni
[@missoni], 2026c).



Figure 16: Sandro Post 7.
(Sandro [@sandroparis], 2026b).

Exclusivity-related content presented symbolically through association with celebrities and brand ambassadors. Elite settings and spatial distancing were noted as indexical, and aspiration lifestyle imagery was identified as iconic.

Alternatively, Missoni employed aspirational cues through, indexed travel-oriented and leisure focused settings. Furthermore, Sandro's content demonstrates indexical emotional restraint and distanced framing, contributing to a visually detached presentation.

Craftsmanship and Authenticity

This theme concerns the way in which traditionally physical design codes are translated into the digital sphere. This analysis observes that craftsmanship is inherently displayed through material-dominant content alongside the showcasing of handwork and atelier signals. This can be too, categorised into implicit and explicit symbols.

To exemplify, Burberry Post 6 clearly demonstrated the use of high-quality materials through close-ups of the garment and through the use of water-repellent fabrics. Burberry, however, also clearly presented craftsmanship in the form of descriptive content regarding the innovation of founder-created materials and the direct quality of the material. This post also conclusively displayed close-ups of stitching. This is done similarly in Christian Dior Post 2 (Carousel 1). While the content is instrumentalised as a heritage marker, it simultaneously displays craftsmanship through the description of garments and the atelier sketches required to bring the garment into fruition. Chanel Post 10 followed this rationale through atelier-like content. The stated examples all correlate to explicit signals.

Contrastingly, other firms implicitly alluded to craftsmanship through product-focused content, as seen in Sandro Post 8. Nevertheless, the presentation of handwork functioned as a craftsmanship-defining signal as found in Chanel Post 10 as it proved that the garment was processed using skilled labour.

A contrast was identified in how craftsmanship is visually expressed across brands. Contemporary luxury brands more frequently employed product-orientated imagery and garment focused close-ups, whereas heritage brands more commonly incorporated atelier references, handwork, and production-related imagery.



Figure 17: Christian Dior Post 2 (Carousel 1).
(Christian Dior [@dior], 2026a).



Figure 18: Chanel Post 10. (Chanel
[@chanelofficial], 2026c).



Figure 19: Burberry Post 6. (Burberry
[@burberry], 2026a).

Indexical craftsmanship demonstrations were rooted in handwork depiction. Material and stitching close-ups were identified as iconic signifiers, whereas sketch-based representations were noted as symbolic.

5 Discussion

This section aims to examine the relationship between the interviews, social media analysis, and literature through triangulation.

Among the observations it has become evident that brand codes do not act as fixed symbolic elements. While some code categories, such as visual codes, remain predominantly stable, they still evolve online. Brand codes are dynamically communicated and shaped by platform requirements, consumer understanding, and controlled visibility. Hence, how visual, narrative, cultural, and design codes are stabilised or altered is highlighted. Additionally, how exclusivity tension orchestrates virtual code communication is addressed.

Brand Identity and Interconnected Codes

The genesis of all brand codes has been linked to brand identity, where identity is manifested through the construction and utilisation of codes, as identified in the literature (Kapferer, 2008). The social media analysis supports this view by evidencing the use of codified elements linked to brand identity. However, the interview analysis only partially confirms this notion. An interview participant's perspective contradicts the influence of brand identity by suggesting that identity is dynamic and evolves over time. This is evidenced through the evolution of animated codes.

However, the interview results also suggest that brand identity may not change due to its interconnectedness to other codified elements. The digital sphere has created a divide in identity perception within the industry. The following sections explore code categories, their coexistence, and their digital translation through implicit and explicit connection to identity. Key contradictions will also be evaluated.

Visual Codes and Visibility

In the context of a densely populated digital environment, the need to reinforce a brand's online image is reflected through logos, emblems, colours, and aesthetic choices (visual codes) (Heine & Berghaus, 2014; Okonkwo, 2009; Oswald, 2015). The Distinctive Assets Grid coupled with the recognisability function of brand codes reflects this (Phua et al., 2026; Sheridan, 2020, p. 5).

However, as discussed below, tension exists between the visibility requirements of the grid and the inaccessible nature of luxury. This raises the question; how can luxury firms obtain fame when their codes are purposefully understated.

The Distinctive Assets Grid and Luxury Tension

As established, strong luxury codes are considered unique and heritage-based (INSIDE LVMH, 2025; Mosca et al., 2024). The importance of uniqueness remains consistent in the Distinctive Assets Grid and is further confirmed by luxury brands themselves (Phua et al., 2026). However, this framework does not seem to take the nuances of luxury branding into consideration.

The categories “Avoid Solo Use” and “Use or Lose” act as contradictory principles. Avoid Solo Use implies that brands should not rely on one sole symbol and often accompany it with a direct brand name (Sheridan, 2020). In the elusive luxury industry, this may result in a loss of insider recognition. Conversely, Use or Lose, prompts the need for consistent application of one code to reinforce acknowledgement (Sheridan, 2020). For luxury firms this repeated exposure might risk diminishing exclusivity through excess visibility. This prompts the question: does understatement still function as a strong brand code carrier for luxury firms online?

Ultimately, the tension between fame and subtlety may be resolved through the pre-established status of luxury brands. Henceforth, established houses may be less exposed to visibility risks due to their heritage and recognisability. While emerging luxury firms face a greater strategic conflict.

Visibility Beyond Fame

The Instagram analysis and interviews have confirmed that luxury brands deploy subtle and discreet brand codes. This is evidenced by strategically placed visual codes such as logos and emblems or the sole reliance on visual style to drive recognition.

The Anticipation-Delivery gap discovered in the literature is utilised to explicate the implications of aesthetic decisions on luxury brands. This gap relates to the collective belief within the luxury industry that minimalistic and classic visuals are the ideal digital tactic to remain exclusive (Creevey et al., 2021). This is further supported through the interviews and social media analysis’ illumination on minimalism through colour palette. The interviews also spotlight typography, suggesting that refined aesthetics are meticulously managed.

Importantly, the theory discovered, many consumers do not perceive minimal branding as desirable if not associated with certain contexts. Conversely, this strategy is primarily effective among established luxury audiences (Creevey et al., 2021).

However, the lack of desirability among content consumers may not be a major concern for luxury firms. As suggested by the interview results, this is due to the established reliance on strategically controlled content. Nonetheless, an interviewee and the literature posited that luxury brands are less likely to centralise identity through explicit visual codes, such as logos, in the future. This in turn would support the ideology of visual restraint and reliance on insider knowledge, thereby potentially connecting exclusivity to visual codes.

Insider knowledge may generate customer gratification through hedonic value, as consumers derive satisfaction from recognising implicit brand meaning (Han et al., 2010; Hennigs et al., 2012; König et al., 2016). Thus, emphasising the cultivation of luxury aspiration through codes (Freire, 2014). Suggesting that visibility within luxury branding does not depend on mass recognition, but rather on restrictive appreciation.

Identity Alignment

It can be argued that brands do not merely utilise minimalism as an exclusivity cue, as mentioned above, but also as a form of identity alignment through embodying the brand's values and image. Therefore, whether luxury brands present themselves as minimalist or maximalist may depend on brand personality. This contrast in aesthetic language was highlighted across multiple brands' Instagram posts.

Consequently, even in the absence of overt branding, industry followers may still identify brands based on their aesthetic identity. Over time, aesthetic consistency cultivates an immediate symbolic recognition, whereby consumers associate brands with particular luxury meanings, while those meanings themselves become inseparable from the brand (Okonkwo, 2007; 2009; Phua et al., 2026).

However, as many brands are discovered to employ similar semantic visual decisions, a better strategic method may be pairing the use of implicit logos and refined aesthetics with more apparent brand codes such as iconic patterns. These codes relate to other symbolic signifiers and do not include the brand name as it is manifest. This may be interpreted as "high performing" codes, as suggested by Interview Participant 1, or rather, uniqueness on the Distinctive Assets Grid (Phua et al., 2026). Iconic maison brand codes such as patterns are often rooted in heritage, thereby illuminating a co-reliance between codes (INSIDE LVMH, 2025; Mosca et al., 2024).

Heritage and Craftsmanship Storytelling

Narrative codes relate to heritage and craftsmanship where both factors contribute to the construction of brand mythology (König et al., 2016). Narrative codes must be consistently placed across all touchpoints to enhance brand experience. While initially stated by the literature, the interviews reinforce this (Okonkwo, 2007).

The literature also states that storytelling (narrative codes) functions through memory recollection due to its affiliation with bizarreness (Phua et al., 2026). As a result, storytelling may compensate for the lack of fame-inducing attributes by strengthening uniqueness and brand recall. As heritage and craftsmanship narratives differ from brand to brand, they can function as markers of distinctiveness due to their inability to be associated with competitors.

The Mutability of Narrative Codes

The interview analysis reveals that storytelling differs from other brand codes due to its mutability (Okonkwo, 2007). Luxury brands' mythology may change over time, highlighting a contrast; storytelling must be consistent enough to preserve brand identity while simultaneously being subject to change for cultural relevance. Alternatively, this also asserts that brand identity evolves over time which supports the interview findings. It is thus argued that while visual codes and aesthetic language should remain static to preserve recognisability, narrative codes must adapt culturally to prestigiously mesh history with modern evolution.

Athwal et al. (2018) indicates that particular luxury brands fail to acknowledge the intricacies of digital platforms. The Instagram findings demonstrate this through a variation in storytelling strategies. Some brands still heavily rely on editorial-style content, rather than a narrative focus. Thereby these brands predominantly utilise decontextualised item presentation and minimal brand world-building, which indicates a lack of digital flexibility and minimal emotional branding.

Explicit and Implicit Heritage Translation

Current literature highlights the notability of heritage. Heritage is predicated on genuineness and brand behaviour, primarily described as an authenticity indicator (Gurzki et al., 2019). Furthermore, the literature highlights its significance in consumer fulfilment, digital displays of heritage cues are more valued than demonstrations of hedonic symbolism by consumers (Mosca et al., 2024).

Digital heritage strategies and translation techniques have been clearly identified through the 4-H Framework (Mosca et al., 2024). However, many investigated brands present minimal displays explicitly related to Heritage Actors.

This may reflect the need to balance, digital engagement with insider recognition. To assist in the comprehension of this rationale, the contrasting impact of Heroes and Heritage Actors will be explored. Luxury experts possess the required cultural capital to decode the historical and hereditary nuances of Heritage Actors imagery. Conversely, the general populace may lack this knowledge. Ergo, this content may fail to resonate with a broader audience. On the other hand, celebrities or Heroes already occupy global prominence thus, they offer more accessible recognition for the masses. Through utilising Heroes displays, large-scale legibility is achieved without compromising brand prestige.

Heritage operates on two levels: firstly, literature and Instagram posts highlight that it is communicated explicitly through founder references and depictions of heroic figures online. Secondly, through more latent signals such as motifs, patterns, and garments (handcraft) as discovered by interviews, Instagram posts, and literature. To exemplify, the use of floral motifs in Christian Dior represents the founder's own admiration for gardening (Martin & Koda, 1996). Whereas Missoni's zig-zag pattern discreetly pays homage to the founders and their handwork (*Object Voices / ZIGZAG | European Fashion Heritage Association, n.d.*). Indeed, design and narrative codes are closely intertwined. Consequently, certain historical references remain recognisable only to those in the know.

The Heritage Divergence

A distinct gap is apparent regarding the prevalence of heritage as a narrative derivative, whereas the literature and social media analysis coincide, the interview results diverge. The divide arises as few participants directly acknowledged heritage manifestations. However, it must be noted that a subtle alignment to the 4-H framework was implied by some interviewees. While techniques themselves were not stated, references to the founder have been appreciated as facets of identity. The author suggests that this misalignment may stem from the fact that half of the participants were not directly affiliated with a specific luxury firm.

Craftsmanship on Digital Platforms

Current literature suggests that craftsmanship functions simultaneously as a design, narrative, and authenticity code (König et al., 2016; Oswald, 2007). Its affiliation with design is rooted in garment production, material focus, and item structure (Oswald, 2007). Craftsmanship narratives however, were shown through production-focused storytelling. Handcraft content, as identified in Explicit and Implicit Heritage Translation, connects craftsmanship to heritage and authenticity by foregrounding traditional luxury manufacturing methods (Mosca et al., 2024). This is further demonstrated by displays of brand storytelling, materiality focus, and mentions of founder-created fabrication on social media.

Furthermore, craftsmanship is evidenced to be both the most significant and difficult brand code to translate, as reported by the interviews. One participant stated that techniques such as behind-the-scenes content, atelier shots, and close-up reels are used to communicate craftsmanship online. This is also, corroborated by the social media analysis, thereby cultivating craftsmanship storytelling. The interview findings expose a contradiction where craftsmanship is described as central to luxury brands, while ambiguity exists in digital translation. However, the recurring presence of craftsmanship-related symbols found during the social media analysis suggests that craftsmanship is visibly translated within digital brand communication yet operates tacitly.

Intriguingly, the creation of a new semiotic function, namely, motion visuals, was identified in the interviews. This is reflected in animated garment-stitching content on Instagram. Hence, suggests that luxury brands begin to replicate traditional craftsmanship properties, previously only discoverable on physical products, in online environments using innovative technologies. Furthermore, it indicates that brands treat digital brand code creation with the same level of savoir-faire as tactile goods.

Interview findings posit that, craftsmanship has become increasingly transparent through the display of production techniques. This contrasts with their prior concealment. Consequently, it is suggested that the increased disclosure acts as an authenticity driver online. This, in turn, may contribute to emotional branding, reinforcing the consumer-brand relationship (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015).

Cultural Codes, Exclusivity, and Signalling

Literature suggests that cultural codes function as status-signalling entities, whereby codes and products transcend their physical form (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Fernando, 2025; Han et al., 2010). The social media analysis supports this claim through celebrity ambassadors, elite event displays, and aspirational settings. These results align with established literature via bizarreness, spatial distancing, and memory recall (Gurzki et al., 2019; Phua et al., 2026; Sheridan, 2020).

The Instagram analysis reveals a novel finding compared to the literature and the interview results. Luxury brands employed distanced framing and restrained facial expressions in their content, which impedes the viewer from establishing an emotional connection to those associated with the brand. Thereby, the mentioned techniques function as exclusivity and restricted-access communicators. Henceforth, this contradicts the recognised importance of emotional connection in luxury branding, as it may hinder relationship construction.

The interviews concur with the presence of aspirational imagery, expressed through affluence. Lifestyle content therefore promotes luxury brand dreams through the symbolic display of leisure and freedom. Figure 1: Luxury Semiotic Dreams reiterates this notion by showing how brand codes shape brand image and influence purchase intent (Freire, 2014).

Digital Heroes

Due to the interconnectedness of brand codes, the author believes that it is necessary to briefly revisit the 4-H Framework by focusing on Heroes (Mosca et al., 2024). While Heroes are primarily identified through the social media analysis, interviewees consistently indicate their controlled role in driving digital exclusivity. Brand ambassadors and celebrities are strategically featured across luxury social media accounts. Therefore, brand advocates may function as both cultural codes and heritage displays. The relationship between these individuals and luxury brands links luxury to wealthy society, thereby reinforcing the perception that luxury is associated with elite economic actors.

Consequently, exclusivity may be cultivated through emblematic significance. This dynamic further reinforces status signalling cues whereby purchase behaviour signals affluence to peer networks. As posited in the literature, a brand's identity may be built on consumer-brand relationships, thus suggesting that exclusivity is strengthened through luxury cultural schemas (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Hennigs et al., 2012; Shukla, 2012).

The Exclusivity-Accessibility Paradox

The paradox stems from the inherent need for luxury firms to present prestige, while remaining relevant in an accessible digital environment (Dubois, 2017).

Many interview participants acknowledged the existence of the paradox, therefore reinforcing its relevance within the luxury industry. While this phenomenon is considered to be a fundamental constraint for digital growth in luxury companies, it is simultaneously perceived as an opportunity by the literature and interview results (Hennigs et al., 2012; Holmqvist et al., 2020). Brands leverage this to engage more with consumers and diminish the “over-exclusivity” found today, as posited by an interviewee.

Controlled Exclusivity

The deployment of Heroes, as previously discussed in Digital Heroes, can also be perceived as a means of exclusivity control (Mosca et al., 2024). However, existing studies alongside the interview results emphasised the use of exclusivity tactics not related to brand codes, such as the provision of limited goods and invite-only digital events (Krsmanović, 2026). These tactics act to maintain a sense of exclusivity for the luxury brand itself; this may promote growth into the digital sphere by mitigating overexposure concerns. Digital prestige mechanisms will be further discussed below.

The interviews have identified that selective posting may act to support rarity. Primarily, it limits the frequency and range of brand content. This could reduce digital exposure and reinforce a sense of restricted access, thereby creating informational scarcity. Therefore, audiences may engage only with a select portion of a brand’s universe. This suggests that brand transparency is purposefully prevented, restricting a complete understanding of identity. As a result, this fosters mystique and exclusivity. The lack of transparency also likely restricts the replication of digital brand identity.

Interviewees revealed that visibility benchmarks are closely interlinked to engagement through the tracking of consumer traction and demographics. As a result, the author suggests that this functions as a mechanism to enhance the exclusivity created by controlled posting. The findings also revealed that companies ensure that brand audiences align with brand identity. This implies, brands selectively prioritise quality and engagement context over isolated visibility, as explored previously.

Although, digital-first strategies have been illuminated, the interviews revealed a reliance on offline exclusivity mechanisms, such as personalised in-store services. This echoes Bottega Veneta’s strategy of absence on social media (Langer, 2021). Phygital growth is forecasted to increase in the future as

indicated by the interviews. However, current exclusivity tactics still largely depend on offline mechanisms. This suggests that brands may need to develop new and evolved tactics to reinforce exclusivity in increasingly digital environments. Nonetheless, the movement of luxury online cultivates an additional risk: imitation and dilution.

Imitation and Dilution

Imitation and dilution have both, been determined as conclusive digital risks by the interviews and literature (Radon, 2012). Although, uniqueness is found to function as a potential barrier to imitation and dilution by increasing brand association and mitigating replication (Phua et al., 2026). As iconic brand components such as patterns are considered unique to a brand, it is posited that these codes must remain consistent to hinder replication.

Intriguingly, this risk is not consistent across the luxury fashion industry. Interviews posit that affordable luxury brands have a lower risk when operating online. This may be because affordable luxury brands tend to emulate higher-end luxury firms rather than those in the same market segment. The literature supports this by arguing that high-end brands are the originators of pioneering concepts, such as the use of “loud” codes, that ultimately become utilised by affordable luxury brands. This, in turn, forces luxury brands to transition towards covert codes as a form of differentiation (INSIDE LVMH, 2025).

Omnichannel and Luxury

It has become evident that consistency not only plays a significant role regarding brand identity but also in the creation and representation of brand codes across various offline and online platforms (Okonkwo, 2007; 2009). This is as consistency may aid in building brand recognition and a sophisticated brand image (Phua et al., 2026). The importance of this is established in the literature, reinforced through interviews, and demonstrated by the social media analyses.

However, an underlying tension exists. Prior to the emergence of Web 2.0, luxury brands communicated in a unidirectional manner, meaning, consumers were unable to engage with brands (Athwal et al., 2018; Okonkwo, 2009). A recent shift towards two-way communication has prompted brands to integrate engagement-oriented digital content, acknowledging its favourable impact on consumers. As two contrasting approaches are employed, a risk of inconsistency may arise as brands must alter content execution. Therefore, if not strategically executed, the disparity in method could become obvious to consumers, thereby rupturing the illusion of cohesion and jeopardising the intended function of brand codes.

Engagement or Exclusivity

As indicated in this paper, engagement is of high importance (Hennigs et al., 2012). This may be due to the existing cultural understanding of luxury brands' relationship to prestige (Dubois & Paternault, 1995). Therefore, it is suggested that significant exclusivity reinforcement may not be necessary for customers. In a society where branding and identity are increasingly determined by consumer-brand relationships, it is essential for brands to consider consumers' preferences and opinions. Interview results support this by stating the importance of client feedback in evaluating code interpretation. Misunderstood brand codes can result in a risk of brand identity misinterpretation, potentially leading to a reduced brand value. Despite this, a further discrepancy relating to two-way communication and engagement-oriented content has been observed. The Instagram analysis uncovers that while some brands are successfully implementing interactive content, others abstain. Such data indicates that brand code application across the luxury industry varies.

The interviews and social media analysis suggest that luxury brands do not seem to place much emphasis on engaging content but rather on controlled visibility. This finding contradicts the literature, where engagement is described as a crucial factor in digital brand presentation (Hennigs et al., 2012). Although, it is posited that engagement may not be central in practice, its importance should still occupy a peripheral role, as it aligns with consumer preference.

Platform Selection

Digital code translation appears to function differently across various platforms; whereby differing touchpoints are designated for specific brand codes. This is suggested to improve the communication of particular codes. The literature identifies Instagram as a notable platform for luxury brands, while interviews reinforce its importance in digital storytelling (Jurišová, 2020; Lin & Ku, 2023).

This suggests that certain brand codes may only become legible to avid followers. The rationale behind this statement is that, if specific brand codes are confined to particular platforms, there is a risk of other brand codes becoming obscured or overlooked on those same platforms. Therefore, users who only engage with one digital channel may lack exposure to alternative codes, potentially weakening cohesion. However, given that luxury brands wish to avoid overexposure, this approach may serve as a means of filtering individuals who do not align with the brand.

Additionally, both, literature and interviews indicate the increasing relevance of advanced technologies such as AR in brand code translation (Krsmanović, 2026). Nonetheless, this rapid technological advancement may risk overwhelming consumers as proposed by the interviews.

Therefore, brands must find a balance between innovation and symbolic clarity to avoid confusing consumers.

Brand Experience as a Brand Code

Brand experience was highlighted by the literature as a characteristic of luxury brands (Okonkwo, 2007; 2009). Its frequent mention in the interviews suggests that experience may function as a new brand code. Although it may not share all established properties of traditional brand codes, namely visual, verbal, spatial, and/or symbolic, it is posited that brand experience can still function as a code due to its ability to stimulate recognition and its association with brand identity, thereby challenging existing literature (Oswald 2015; Kapferer, 2008; Keller & Brexendorf, 2019). Its novelty lies in its direct consumer involvement that is less easily applicable to other code categories.

The importance of brand experience stems from its ability to foster emotional connection (Kernstock et al., 2017). However, interviews reveal that experience is difficult to replicate online due to its tactile, atmospheric, and interpersonal reliance. Digital spaces have been stated to be unable to fully replicate touch, immersion, and personalised services and thus, do not generate the same experiential value. Further, suggesting that a portion of luxury value is derived from sensory constituents, making full digital translation unlikely.

Furthermore, due to the difficulty in translation many brands may either struggle to digitise or purposefully avoid the digitisation of experiences. In-store interactions play an important role in justifying purchase decisions. This might be due to factors associated with luxury purchases such as service, status signalling validation, and emotional reassurance. Therefore, in-store experiences warrant their high price and prestige.

As a result, brands may intentionally create experiential gaps between digital and physical mediums to preserve exclusivity. Full experiential replication can risk exhausting scarcity, while partial inaccessibility sustains mystique and creates an allure of rarity. This links back to selective visibility and restricted access by limiting wider public engagement within the luxury world. Solely certain individuals enter luxury retail environments, reinforcing the notion of personalised service and cultivating an insider culture. This therefore strengthens exclusivity and status signalling (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Hennigs et al., 2012).

5.1 Key Findings and Research Question

This section aims to isolate and highlight the key discoveries of the triangulation analysis by considering and responding to the research questions associated with this paper.

Digital Brand Code Translation

Traditional brand codes are discoverable in varying iconic formats; however, they remain largely elusive. Visual codes are considered to be the easiest codes to communicate due to their consistent mention in all three explored research dimensions. They are expressed through controlled aesthetics such as selected typography, colour palette, subtle motif, logo placement, and patterns, which form a visually coherent brand identity online.

Narrative codes are transformed in both implicit and explicit ways. Brands use heritage cues, such as founder references, heroic figures, and handcraft, as well as covert indexical brand codes that are primarily legible to insider audiences (Mosca et al., 2024). In doing so, luxury brands translate codes with strategic precision, ensuring that they resonate with established consumers and new audiences.

Narrative display of craftsmanship entails direct homages to traditional materiality and techniques (Mosca et al., 2024). In the category of design codes, however, it is demonstrated in the form of atelier content, close-up videography, and materiality details.

A divide in how narration is displayed online has been identified. Many luxury brands are adopting “digital language” by creating interactive content for their audience, while other brands maintain a restricted approach. It is also illuminated that narrative codes function dynamically and are often translated into digital formats with contemporary relevance. Therefore, narrative codes function implicitly as a visionary, connecting principles of the past, present, and future of luxury fashion brands.

Cultural codes act as tools of exclusivity demonstration and status, ergo, blending narrative and social comprehension (Fernando, 2025). Through these codes, prestige is maintained, thus, exclusivity itself can function as a brand code. To achieve this, brands focus on spatially distanced imagery, highlighting luxury lifestyles. Additionally, a more subtle way brands codify exclusivity is through muted facial expressions in social media content. However, as this reduces emotional connection, the customer-brand relationship may be negatively impacted. The main intent of luxury

fashion brands may be to cultivate a unique identity separate from the masses that is solely reflected in their consumers (Gurzki et al., 2019; Phua et al., 2026).

The emergence of a new brand code, “experience”, has been realised. While the majority of assets are discoverable in the digital environment, experience appears to have the least virtual expression. This suggests that luxury brands purposefully keep that code offline to foster uniqueness and exclusivity.

Luxury fashion brands strategically use different digital platforms to communicate certain codes. As continuity remains important across all touchpoints, brands apply coherent visual styles and storytelling themes (Okonkwo, 2007). Through synchronising brand codes in both, digital and physical touchpoints, luxury brands build a unified brand universe while maintaining their elusive nature.

Exclusivity and Interpretation

While cultural codes are suggested to function as carriers of digital exclusivity, other mechanisms such as selective posting, limited goods, and invite-only events are indicated to act more effectively online (Krsmanović, 2026). This is because it explicitly restricts the masses from entry into certain deluxe facets of luxury brands, immediately increasing perceived exclusivity. Moreover, as cultural codes are more covert, they might not be directly interpreted as signals of prestige by consumers. Finally, this paper does not solve the exclusivity-accessibility paradox, but highlights mechanisms utilised by brands to preserve exclusivity in digital communication.

Brand codes may be only effective when they are correctly interpreted (Phua et al., 2026). Consumer engagement serves diverse purposes, from functioning as a visibility benchmark to interpretation control. In both instances luxury brands assess engagement through levels of interaction, demographics, and brand alignment. The alignment with brand identity is used to indicate correct interpretation. Additionally, direct consumer feedback serves as a more explicit evaluation method that may also assist in social value (Hennigs et al., 2012).

Nonetheless, imitation and dilution are indicated as resolved through legislative methods, strong brand cohesion and identity. This relates to the use of robust semiotic figures which, when consistently reinforced, cultivate a sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness that is difficult to replicate (Phua et al., 2026). However, affordable luxury brands appear to inherently face a lower risk due to their function and position in the broader market.

5.2 Conclusion

Luxury women's fashion brands in Europe communicate brand codes digitally through coordinated, visual, narrative, cultural, and design strategies that preserve exclusivity while beginning to adapt to algorithmic and engagement-oriented environments. Exclusivity remains fundamental to luxury brands' digital communication through semiotic signifiers and controlled and selective strategies. Finally, interpretation concerns identity curation and consumer listening.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this paper indicate, that the digital code translation in luxury fashion houses depends on brand positioning and strategic objectives. While established brands may rely less on explicit exclusivity reinforcement, new luxury brands should actively construct both prestige and visibility through digital channels. This can be achieved through cultural codes and overt logo use to establish digital presence before transitioning into subtler motifs.

Moreover, brand codes should be strategically prioritised across the luxury fashion industry. New players in the market may have to focus on explicit visual codes, affordable luxury brands on storytelling through bizarre imagery, and high-end luxury brands on narrative codes.

The use of covert visual codes may enable recognition for established brands but is likely to be insufficient for new entrants. Therefore, new luxury firms should continue to communicate to both, insider and broader audiences online. This can be done through niche symbolic references coupled with overt engaging content.

As heritage codes are paramount to brand identity construction, brands should introduce selective explicit heritage motifs through educational or interactive content. However, the strategies must remain aligned with the brands' aesthetic language. This strategy allows brands to reinforce positive consumer perception without relying on extensive engagement democratisation.

As craftsmanship is a central element of luxury brands, firms should invest strategically in craftsmanship translation beyond narrative embodiment. As a result, craftsmanship would be increasingly presented through silhouettes and fabric, thereby emphasising its function as a design code.

It is recommended that exclusivity should primarily be strengthened through restricted access control. Nonetheless, as prompted by the interview results, an over-exclusivity issue may exist. Therefore, brands could benefit from tier-based exclusivity access, such as membership-like programmes. While top-tier members enjoy access to highly exclusive events, lower-tier participants receive more limited privileges, creating differentiated status levels.

Luxury brands should ensure consistency across platforms and in manifestations of identity. Therefore, it appears necessary for luxury fashion houses to continue to employ phygital methods to resonate with wider audiences, especially those who do not have physical access to the brand. However, certain experience-based codes are argued to remain offline to reinstate a sense of mystique. In addition, owing to the demonstrated importance of cohesion, the author suggests that continuity should act as the governing principle of digital luxury strategy. While engagement and customer listening assist in brand code interpretation monitoring, more explicit techniques should be utilised. The author suggests that educational content can support consumers' brand code interpretation without reducing perceived exclusivity. It must be noted, however, that this should not be applied to all brand assets, as this may jeopardise intended rarity.

Methodological Reflection and Limitations

The methodological approach selected enabled a nuanced approach to this research. A qualitative research approach enabled in-depth and context-rich insights into the complex and semiotically driven luxury industry. The semi-structured interviews provided nuanced and actionable insider perspectives on brand code usage. The initial intent of this paper was to compare brand strategy and implementation on the same six brands through interviews and a visual analysis. However, due to the low response rate and time constraints, a limited number of brands could be analysed in depth, despite one case of overlap. Notwithstanding, the study offers critical insights through examining the European luxury womenswear market and its renowned industry firms. Contrastingly, due to affiliations with certain brands and reputation requirements, there may be a risk for limited transparency in responses.

In addition, the Instagram content analysis functioned as a tangible display that complemented the interview findings by offering observed instances of digital brand code deployment. The triangulation of data strengthened the validity of findings by enabling the cross-comparison of data between perceived strategies and observable practices. Thereby allowing a more holistic understanding of semiotic communication in luxury.

Several methodological drawbacks must be acknowledged. As limited interview participants were directly affiliated with the marketing department, this resulted in insufficient depth in certain sections of department-specific data. Furthermore, the social media analysis resulted in interpretative difficulty, particularly when distinguishing between campaign content and general branding. Identifying relevant Instagram posts was an additional challenge, this is as, significant overlap in product portfolio imagery exists. Moreover, the semiotic Instagram analysis is inherently interpretative, introducing a degree of potential research subjectivity and bias in the identification and categorisation of brand codes. The qualitative visual analysis introduces temporal limitations where data solely reflects a specific moment period and thus, may not reflect overall code utilisation of luxury brands.

Ultimately, the methodological methods utilised provided sufficient information in answering the overarching research questions by highlighting tangible evidence in code translation. Mechanisms and further empirical strategies employed by luxury brands remain unclear. Nevertheless, the interviews enabled a comprehensive understanding of exclusivity strategies deployed. However, it generates further doubts regarding whether exclusivity loss constitutes a significant risk in online environments. While the research briefly examined interpretation management strategies, it did not identify novel specialised techniques utilised by brands to manage code understanding.

Future Research

Future research could employ the notion of luxury semiotics online for consumer-based investigations, as this paper primarily focuses on brand strategy. This includes a direct investigation into brand code perception and interpretation. Additionally, research could investigate the direct impact of overt versus subtle codified elements on customer-brand relationships and identity. As a growth in AR technologies has been noted, it may be beneficial to explore the translation of brand codes on the specified medium and how customers respond to this evolution.

Based on methodological shortcomings, future studies may incorporate quantitative approaches to assist in a more precise measuring of audience engagement and its relationship to brand code interpretation more precisely. In addition, investigations into the same companies in both, interviews and social media analysis may be beneficial to gain a more in-depth understanding of technical strategies. Research could also broaden the virtual scope across differing digital platforms to compare how codes are adapted in varying environments. These avenues pave way for further empirical exploration into how luxury brands and their respective semiotic elements operate and are interpreted within the digital domain.

6 Bibliography

- Aaker, D. A. (1996). Measuring brand equity across products and markets. *California Management Review*, 38(3), 102–120. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41165845>
- Agarwal, D., & Kumra, R. (2024). From runway to homepage: Synthesizing luxury brand strategies in digital scape. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 14(2), 101–128. <https://doi.org/10.14707/ajbr.240175>
- Akgün, A. E., Koçoğlu, İ., & İmamoğlu, S. Z. (2013b). An emerging consumer experience: emotional branding. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 99, 503–508. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.519>
- Freire, N. A. (2014). When luxury advertising adds the identitary values of luxury: A semiotic analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(12), 2666–2675. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.04.004>
- Athwal, N., Istanbuluoglu, D., & McCormack, S. E. (2018). The allure of luxury brands' social media activities: a uses and gratifications perspective. *Information Technology and People*, 32(3), 603–626. <https://doi.org/10.1108/itp-01-2018-0017>
- Atkin, A. (2006). *Peirce's Theory of Signs (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*. Retrieved April 11, 2026, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/>
- Bachmann, F., Walsh, G., & Hammes, E. K. (2018). Consumer perceptions of luxury brands: An owner-based perspective. *European Management Journal*, 37(3), 287–298. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2018.06.010>
- Bagwell, L. S., & Bernheim, B. D. (1996). Veblen Effects in a Theory of Conspicuous Consumption. *The American Economic Review*, 86(3), 349–373. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2118201>
- Baxter-Wright, E. (2017). *The little book of Chanel*. Welbeck Publishing Group Limited.
- Brandão, A., Ataide, A., Campos, P., & Loureiro, S. M. C. (2018) *Luxury on omni-channel retail: A literature review approach*. In Research Advancements in National and Global Business Theory and Practice: Proceedings of the 11th Annual Conference of EuroMed Academy of Business (pp. 1-3). EuroMed Academy of Business.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676x.2019.1628806>
- Breivik, E., & Thorbjørnsen, H. (2008). Consumer brand relationships: an investigation of two alternative models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(4), 443–472. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-008-0115-z>

- Brus, R., Hartnett, N., Faulkner, M., & Driesener, C. (2025). Assessing branding strength: comparing marketer judgement and consumer data for brand identity elements. *Journal of Brand Management*, 33(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-025-00395-y>
- Burberry [@burberry] (2026a, March 28). *Driving rain The Burberry trench – handling the british weather for over a century*. [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DWbIHylAFqM/?igsh=bmdjaXZzNGNpbms1>
- Burberry [@burberry] (2026b, March 24). *Hot tropic New layers for warm but unpredictable summer days, crafted from tropical gabardine*. [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DWRe3sGiFkB/?img_index=2&igsh=bW9wdnpydGVydfF4
- Burberry [@burberry] (2026c, March 22). *‘I always want to wear a good beige trench’*. [Video]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DWL7TmujRvy/?img_index=1&igsh=ZDlxYnJ5NXk1eXd1
- Burberry [@burberry]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved April 15, 2026, from <https://www.instagram.com/burberry/?hl=en>
- Burberry [@burberry] (2026d, March 25). *The story of tropical gabardine – the lightest of our signature fabrics, originally developed by Burberry for warmer climates*. [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DWTbFrPjalj/?igsh=enYyMHdkcWQ1eHBz>
- Carah, N., & Brodmerkel, S. (2020). Critical perspectives on brand culture in the era of participatory and algorithmic media. *Sociology Compass*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12752>
- Cavender, R., & Kincade, D. H. (2015). A luxury brand management framework built from historical review and case study analysis. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 43(10/11), 1083–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijrdm-07-2014-0103>
- Chanel [@chanelofficial] (2026a, March 11). *Fall Winter 2026 Collection Matthieu Blazy for CHANEL*. [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DVvgyrpDB-R/?img_index=2&igsh=MTBqNXk3Mm1ncTRzeQ==
- Chanel [@chanelofficial] (2026b, February 23). *Gracie Abrams and Maya Rudolph at the 79th edition of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts Awards*. [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DVG67K8DCHI/?igsh=MWgyMzk2bXJ0dnk4eg==>
- Chanel [@chanelofficial] (2026c, February 3). *Margot Robbie at the Paris premiere of Emerald Fenell’s latest film, “Wuthering Heights.”* [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DUTiHKYjuNF/?img_index=2&igsh=MXBsbWRobjh0Mno2Zg==
- Chanel [@chanelofficial]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved April 8, 2026, from <https://www.instagram.com/chanelofficial/>

- Chanel [@chanelofficial] (2026d, March 23). *Starring Margot Robbie and directed by Michel Gondry*. [Video]. Instagram.
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DW0IJ6_sPGe/?igsh=MXVtank2NTR0bHZkMw==
- Cho, M., & Cho, E. (2025). The hidden signals of luxury: Investigating inconspicuous consumption and the mediating role of social connectedness. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 87, 104398. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2025.104398>
- Christian Dior [@dior] (2026a, March 16). *From the archives – an original dress, miniature toile and documentation of the eponymous Autumn Winter 1952-1953* [Carousel]. Instagram.
https://www.instagram.com/p/DWUKXSTiGk8/?img_index=1&igsh=cWE5YWw3bm9oOXRr
- Christian Dior [@dior] (2026b, March 17). *Mia Goth gets ready for the 98th Academy Awards in custom Dior* [Video]. Instagram.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DV92EOWCJ6u/?igsh=MWRyenVhZ3NwNXBmbA==>
- Christian Dior [@dior] (2026c, March 16). *Oscar nominee Rose Byrne getting ready to attend the 98th Academy Awards in custom Dior*. [Video]. Instagram.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DV9eISHCA67/?igsh=MXZkamoyY2N4eDh4aw==>
- Christian Dior [@dior]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved April 10, 2026, from <https://www.instagram.com/dior/?hl=en>
- Creevey, D., Coughlan, J., & O'Connor, C. (2021). Social media and luxury: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 24(1), 99–129.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12271>
- Dubois, B., & Paternault, C. (1995). Observations: Understanding the world of international luxury brands: the “Dream Formula.” *Journal of Advertising Research*, 35(4), 69–76.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00218499.1995.12466480>
- Dubois, B., & Duquesne, P. (1993). The Market for Luxury Goods: Income versus Culture. *European Journal of Marketing*, 27(1), 35–44. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090569310024530>
- Dubois, D. (2017). Digital and Social Strategies for Luxury Brands. In *Save chapter Luxusmarkenmanagement* (pp. 327–337). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-09072-2_16
- Duong, V. C., & Sung, B. (2021). Examining the role of luxury elements on social media engagement. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 12(2), 103–119.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2020.1853585>
- Object Voices / ZIGZAG | European Fashion Heritage Association*. (n.d.). European Fashion Heritage Association. Retrieved April 21, 2026, from <https://fashionheritage.eu/object-voices-zigzag/>

- Fernando, B. (2025). Luxury's DNA: A Systematic Review of Brand Attributes and transfer Strategies. *Zenodo (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research)*.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18430226>
- Romo, Z. F. G., García-Medina, I., & Romero, N. P. (2017). Storytelling and social networking as tools for digital and mobile marketing of luxury fashion brands. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies (IJIM)*, 11(6), 136. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijim.v11i6.7511>
- Gucci (n.d.) *History of Gucci*. https://www.gucci.com/ch/en_gb/nst/history-of-gucci. (17.04.2026).
- Guibourgé, J. (2020). Semiotics : about logo, identity and brand image. *Unilim*. Retrieved January 15, 2026, from
https://www.academia.edu/110865325/Semiotics_about_logo_identity_and_brand_image
- Gurzki, H., Schlatter, N., & Woisetschläger, D. M. (2019). Crafting extraordinary stories: decoding luxury brand communications. *Journal of Advertising*, 48(4), 401–414.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2019.1641858>
- Han, Y. J., Nunes, J. C., & Drèze, X. (2010). Signaling Status with Luxury Goods: The Role of Brand Prominence. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(4), 15–30. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.4.015>
- Hartnett, N., Romaniuk, J., & Kennedy, R. (2016). Comparing direct and indirect branding in advertising. *Australasian Marketing Journal (AMJ)*, 24(1), 20–28.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ausmj.2015.12.002>
- Heine, K. (2010). The personality of luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 1(3), 154–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2010.10593067>
- Heine, K., & Berghaus, B. (2014). Luxury goes digital: how to tackle the digital luxury brand–consumer touchpoints. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 5(3), 223–234.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2014.907606>
- Hennigs, N., Wiedmann, K., & Klarmann, C. (2012). Luxury Brands in the Digital Age – Exclusivity versus Ubiquity. *Marketing Review St Gallen*, 29(1), 30–35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11621-012-0108-7>
- Hoang, D., Kousi, S., & Martinez, L. F. (2022). Online customer engagement in the post-pandemic scenario: a hybrid thematic analysis of the luxury fashion industry. *Electronic Commerce Research*, 23(3), 1401–1428. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10660-022-09635-8>
- Holmqvist, J., Wirtz, J., & Fritze, M. P. (2020). Luxury in the digital age: A multi-actor service encounter perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 121, 747–756.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.038>

- Huang, W.-J. (2020). Literature Review on Omnichannel Retailing. In *Expert Journal of Marketing* (Vol. 9, Issue 1, pp. 1–7) [Journal-article].
https://marketing.expertjournals.com/ark:/16759/EJM_901huang1-7.pdf
- Hyun, H., Park, J., Hawkins, M. A., & Kim, D. (2022). How luxury brands build customer-based brand equity through phygital experience. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(8), 1195–1219.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254x.2022.2052937>
- INSIDE LVMH. (2026, March 23). INSIDE LVMH. Retrieved December 3, 2025, from
<https://www.insidelvmh.com/>
- Jarrah, D. (2026). *From Scarcity to Screens: How Luxury Womenswear Brands in Europe Preserve Brand Codes in a Digital Environment*.
https://osf.io/tskfa/overview?view_only=9ecc0f798d1b486b82f69a6e973bc58
- Jurišová, V. (2020) Building Brand Identity on Instagram. In C. Karpasitis, (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 8th European Conference on Social Media (ECSM 2020)*. Academic Conferences and Publishing Limited.
- Kapferer, J., Kernstock, J., Brexendorf, T. O., & Powell, S. M. (2017). *Advances in luxury brand management*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51127-6>
- Kapferer, J. (2008). *The new strategic brand management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299305700101>
- Keller, K. L., & Brexendorf, T. O. (2019). Strategic Brand Management Process. In *Springer Reference Wirtschaft* (pp. 155–175). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13342-9_8
- Kernstock, J., Brexendorf, T. O., & Powell, S. M. (2017). Introduction: Luxury Brand Management Insights and Opportunities. In *Advances in Luxury Brand Management* (pp. 1–24).
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51127-6_1
- Ko, E., Costello, J. P., & Taylor, C. R. (2017). What is a luxury brand? A new definition and review of the literature. *Journal of Business Research*, 99, 405–413.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.08.023>
- König, J. C. L., Wiedmann, K., Hennigs, N., & Haase, J. (2016). The legends of tomorrow: A semiotic approach towards a brand myth of luxury heritage. *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science*, 26(2), 198–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2016.1143155>
- Kozinets, R. V., Sherry, J. F., DeBerry-Spence, B., Duhachek, A., Nuttavuthisit, K., & Storm, D. (2002). Themed flagship brand stores in the new millennium. *Journal of Retailing*, 78(1), 17–29.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/s0022-4359\(01\)00063-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0022-4359(01)00063-x)

- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2020). *Reading images*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099857>
- Krsmanović, S. (2026). Digital marketing and the transformation of exclusivity in luxury branding. *Bizinfo Blace*. <https://doi.org/10.71159/bizinfo260003k>
- Langer, D. (2021). *What brands can learn from Bottega Veneta's reinvention*. Retrieved April 7, 2026, from https://www.luxurydaily.com/wp-content/uploads/pdf_cache/3/2/5/4/3/9/325439.pdf
- Lin, F., & Ku, T. (2023). Effect of digital brand experience on luxury fashion brand authenticity, attachment and loyalty. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 54(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v54i1.3583>
- Liu, Z. J., Yildirim, P., & Zhang, Z. J. (2023). Less is more: A theory of minimalist luxury. *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy*, 33(1), 78–110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jems.12558>
- Forecast, M. D. (2024). Europe Luxury Fashion Market Size, Share & Analysis, 2034. In *Market Data Forecast*. Retrieved April 20, 2026, from <https://www.marketdataforecast.com/market-reports/europe-luxury-fashion-market>
- Martin, R., and Koda, H. (1996). *Christian Dior*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum Of Art. Retrieved April 21, 2026.
- Merlo, E., & Pinchera, V. (2023). Configuring Cultural Emerging Industries: A comparison of the French and Italian fashion industries. *The Business History Review*, 97(4), 779–807. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007680523000880>
- Mingione, M., Cristofaro, M., & Mondì, D. (2019). “If I give you my emotion, what do I get?” Conceptualizing and measuring the co-created emotional value of the brand. *Journal of Business Research*, 109, 310–320. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.11.071>
- Mosca, F., Batat, W., & Chiaudano, V. (2024). Heritage Communication on Social Media in the Luxury Brand Market: The 4-H Factors Framework. In *Digital Transformation for Fashion and Luxury Brands* (pp. 293–311). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35589-9_14
- Missoni [@missoni] (2026a, March 11). *Caperdoni fabric, where Missoni heritage evolves into modern elegance*. [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DVwF2UVAaVp/?igsh=dzRvcnV1Z2kwazNq>
- Missoni [@missoni] (2026b, April 8). *Chasing the light*. [Photograph]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DW4HF5GGUB9/?img_index=1&igsh=Z29wZDVrN2Fob2Zj
- Missoni [@missoni] (2026c, March 25). *From city to shore, pieces move between occasions with the refinement of Caperdoni*. [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DWUG-Y7FBsr/?igsh=MXB5YjAxY3BzcnBzcQ==>
- Missoni [@missoni]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved April 16, 2026, from <https://www.instagram.com/missoni/?hl=en>

- Okonkwo, U. (2007). Luxury fashion branding. In *Palgrave Macmillan UK eBooks*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-59088-5>
- Okonkwo, U. (2009). Sustaining the luxury brand on the Internet. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(5–6), 302–310. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2009.2>
- Oswald, L. (2007). *Marketing semiotics*. Retrieved March 4, 2026, from
<https://marketingsemiotics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SEMIOTICBRANDSOswald-copy.pdf?>
- Oswald, L. (2015). The structural semiotics paradigm for marketing research: Theory, methodology, and case analysis. *Semiotica*, 2015(205), 115–148. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2015-0005>
- Philippe, D., Debenedetti, A., & Chaney, D. (2022). How brands mobilize status, reputation, and legitimacy cues to signal their social standing: The case of luxury watchmaking. *Marketing Theory*, 22(3), 333–358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931221089327>
- Phillips, B. J., McQuarrie, E. F., & Griffin, W. G. (2014). The Face of the Brand: How art directors understand visual brand identity. *Journal of Advertising*, 43(4), 318–332.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2013.867824>
- Phua, P., Bali, L., Anesbury, Z., & Sharp, B. (2026). Shape-based assets are strongest: benchmarking distinctive brand asset performance across industries. *International Journal of Advertising*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2026.2637295>
- Poland, B. D. (1995). Transcription quality as an aspect of rigor in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1(3), 290–310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049500100302>
- Radon, A. (2012). Luxury brand exclusivity Strategies – an illustration of a cultural collaboration. *Journal of Business Administration Research*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.5430/jbar.v1n1p106>
- Rajaram, S., & Shelly, C.S. (2012) History of branding, *International Journal of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Research*, 1(3), pp. 100–104.
- Roncha, A., & Montecchi, M. (2017) The underpinning strategies leading to high value perception of luxury fashion brands, *The IUP Journal of Brand Management*, 14(3), pp. 7–21.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334654619_The_underpinning_strategies_leading_to_high_value_perception_of_luxury_fashion_brands.
- Sandro Paris [@sandroparis] (2026a, March 15). *A dialogue in silhouettes with the guests of the house*. [Video]. Instagram.
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DV35CYulzBq/?igsh=MWg2Ymg4eGFtc2ZsMg==>
- Sandro Paris [@sandroparis] (2026b, March 2). *A summer state of mind, defined by clean lines and light textures* [Video]. Instagram.
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DVY8aROkWxS/?igsh=MTkzZTI5dDdienZ6aQ==>

- Sandro Paris [@sandroparis] (2026c, February 23). *Embracing the volume of the season. Fluid silhouettes for an effortless stride.* [Photograph]. Instagram.
https://www.instagram.com/p/DVG7wGVJfW/?img_index=2&igsh=MWttaXd5OXAwbXN1bA=
 ≡
- Sandro Paris [@sandroparis] (2026d, March 20). *Moments of grace. When contemporary style meets the timelessness of the coast.* [Video]. Instagram.
https://www.instagram.com/p/DWg8AKoiErC/?img_index=1&igsh=d2lvNGk3MmU1ZnBt
- Sandro [@sandroparis]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved April 12, 2026, from <https://www.instagram.com/sandroparis/>
- Sandro [@sandroparis] (2026e, March 13). *The faces of the season captured at the Opéra Comique* [Photograph] Instagram.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DV1WLIWiMmQ/?igsh=MTNwOGUzdWZ0eDZxcA==>
- Seminari, N. K., Rahyuda, I. K., Sukaatmaja, I. P. G., & Sukawati, T. G. R. (2022). Self-Brand Connection: a Literature Review and Directions for Further Research. *Jurnal Dinamika Manajemen*, 13(1), 53–65. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jdm.v13i1.32439>
- Seo, Y., & Buchanan-Oliver, M. (2015). Luxury branding: the industry, trends, and future conceptualisations. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 27(1), 82–98.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/apjml-10-2014-0148>
- Sheridan, A. (2020). *THE POWER OF YOU*. Retrieved March 18, 2026, from https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2020-02/ipsos_views_power_of_you_0.pdf
- Shukla, P. (2012). The influence of value perceptions on luxury purchase intentions in developed and emerging markets. *International Marketing Review*, 29(6), 574–596.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02651331211277955>
- Strizhakova, Y., Coulter, R. A., & Price, L. L. (2011). Branding in a global marketplace: The mediating effects of quality and self-identity brand signals. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 28(4), 342–351. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2011.05.007>
- Swaminathan, V., Sorescu, A., Steenkamp, J. E., O’Guinn, T. C. G., & Schmitt, B. (2020). Branding in a hyperconnected world: refocusing theories and rethinking boundaries. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(2), 24–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242919899905>
- Tan, D. (2013). *The Semiotics of Alpha Brands: Encoding/Decoding/Recoding/Transcoding of Louis Vuitton and implications for Trademark laws*. LARC @ Cardozo Law. Retrieved January 15, 2026, from <https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/cardozoaelj/vol32/iss1/7>


- Tarquini, A., Mühlbacher, H., & Kreuzer, M. (2022). The experience of luxury craftsmanship – a strategic asset for luxury experience management. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 38(13–14), 1307–1338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2022.2064899>
- Ting, L., & Ahn, J. (2023). Luxury brand cultural symbolism: signaling effect on customer well-being. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(5), 590–605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254x.2023.2275134>
- Verhoef, P. C., Kannan, P., & Inman, J. J. (2015). From Multi-Channel retailing to Omni-Channel retailing. *Journal of Retailing*, 91(2), 174–181. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2015.02.005>
- Wang, X., Sung, B., & Phau, I. (2024). How rarity and exclusivity influence types of perceived value for luxury. *Journal of Brand Management*, 31(6), 576–592. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-024-00359-8>
- Wiedmann, K., Hennigs, N., Klarmann, C., & Behrens, S. (2013). Creating Multi-Sensory experiences in luxury marketing. *Marketing Review St Gallen*, 30(6), 60–69. <https://doi.org/10.1365/s11621-013-0300-4>
- Zanola, E., Stachel, C., & Greco, S. (2025). Leveraging heritage argumentation strategies in luxury fashion brands' storytelling. In *Springer proceedings in business and economics* (pp. 53–67). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-99481-4_5

7 Declaration

I confirm that I have written this thesis independently. All text passages that do not originate from me are clearly marked and provided with a precise reference to their origin. The sources used (also applies to illustrations, graphics, etc.) are listed in the bibliography.

The word count from 1 Introduction to 5.2 Conclusion (pp. 1–62) amounts to 18'203.

Date, Author's signature:

20.05.2026, 

I also declare that I have worked with the AI-based tool ChatGPT when preparing this assignment.


I used the tool for the following work:

Linguistic reviewing (grammar & punctuation) for the text spanning from 1 Introduction to 5.2 Conclusion (pp. 1–62).

I confirm that I have checked AI-generated texts or text fragments critically.

The most relevant prompts are listed in Appendix F: AI prompts used.

Date, Author's signature:

20.05.2026, 

8 Appendices

List of Figures

Figure E1: Burberry Post 3	100
Figure E2: Christian Dior Post 7	100
Figure E3: Sandro Post 5	100
Figure E4: Sandro Post 6	100
Figure E5: Sandro Post 8	100

List of Tables

Table C1: Deductive Code Table	97
--------------------------------	----

8.1 Appendix A: Interview Transcripts and Responses

Interview Participant 1

Location: -

Date: 18.04.2026

Written responses:

1. How would you describe the identity of your brand or those you have worked closely with?
Working in Retailoscope, I focus less on a single brand identity and more on decoding how luxury brands express themselves across touchpoints. What emerges is that strong luxury identities are always rooted in consistency: heritage, craftsmanship, and a very controlled aesthetic language. However, in today's environment, identity is increasingly shaped by how brands translate these elements into experiences, both physical and digital, rather than just products.

Brand Codes

1. What are the most important types of brand codes companies use in the luxury fashion industry and why?
The most important brand codes are visual (logos, monograms, colors), material (fabrics, craftsmanship), and symbolic (heritage, storytelling, relationship with clients). These codes are essential because they create instant recognition and justify the perception of value and exclusivity.

2. Do luxury fashion companies translate traditional brand codes into digital formats?
Yes.

2.1 If so, how?
Through highly curated visuals, art/design direction, and storytelling on platforms like social media. craftsmanship is translated into close-up professional reels, atelier content, BTS videos, or slow, cinematic storytelling.

3. What brand codes are more difficult to transfer into their digital counterparts?
Craftsmanship, material quality, and the in-store experience are the hardest. The emotional impact of entering a boutique or touching a product is difficult to recreate digitally, and this is why most of the consumers, especially "new" in the industry, they prefer to buy things in-store (gives more a sense of richness and justify the money spent)

4. What brand codes, if any, purposefully remain offline or unchanged?

High-touch client experiences, private appointments, and certain exclusive collections often remain offline to preserve rarity and intimacy.

5. What brand codes have been specifically created for online use?

Digital-first aesthetics such as campaign formats optimized for social media, meme-able content, and influencer collaborations are designed specifically for online environments.

6. What digital platforms are best suited for communicating brand codes?

Instagram and TikTok and Pinterest for visual storytelling and reach; websites for controlled brand environments and real data; and increasingly private channels (like client apps or newsletters) for exclusivity.

Exclusivity

1. How do luxury fashion brands maintain a sense of exclusivity on digital platforms?

By controlling access, limiting product drops, and curating content very selectively. When not everything is shown and not everything is purchasable.

2. What digital mechanisms do brands use to help maintain exclusivity online?

Limited drops, invitation-only events, private online sales, and clienteling via messaging apps.

3. How do luxury fashion brands balance reach with brand prestige?

Brands use high-visibility content to attract attention but maintain prestige through scarcity and controlled distribution. (The big economic law of scarcity)

4. Are there benchmarks for acceptable levels of visibility?

Not sure I can respond to this one as I don't have a specific answer.

Brand Control Strategies

1. How do brands monitor whether digital brand codes are interpreted as desired?

Through social listening, engagement metrics, and qualitative analysis of audience reactions.

2. Is imitation of digital brand elements a concern?

Yes.

2.1 What measures are in place?

Trademark protection, legal action, and continuous innovation: important to stay ahead creatively.

3. How do brands monitor the risk of brand dilution?

By tracking overexposure, discounting, and misaligned collaborations.

3.1 What measures are in place?

Tight control over distribution, selective partnerships, and strong brand guidelines.

Perception Evaluation

1. Has digitalisation strengthened or weakened luxury brand identity?

Both. It has increased accessibility and visibility but risks overexposure. Strong brands have managed to use digital as an amplification tool without losing identity.

2. What is the greatest risk of having digital brand codes?

Loss of exclusivity and over-democratization of the brand image. Which can be a strength today as fashion is a industry more and more perceived as too exclusive and not enough democratised.

3. How do you see brand codes evolving in the future?

They will become more experiential and hybrid: blending physical and digital, but physical stores and pop up won't disappear soon.

3.1 What codes will be transformed?

Craftsmanship and storytelling will evolve into more immersive formats (video, AR, digital experiences), while traditional symbols like logos may become less central compared to overall brand universe and experience.

Interview Participant 2

Date: 18.04.2026

Location: In person

Interview transcription:

Author: How would you describe your brand's core identity?

Participant 2: So, I would say, CLASSIFIED is fundamentally a design and engineering brand that happens to operate in fashion and lifestyle. Our identity comes from the idea that form follows function, which goes back to CLASSIFIED the designer of the CLASSIFIED. So everything we do is rooted in precision, performance, and clarity of design. We're not about decoration or seasonal trends. We're more about creating products that are purposeful, technically refined, and visually reduced to the essentials. That's what really, in the end, what really defines us, understated luxury with a strong engineering backbone.

Author: Perfect, now we can move onto the Brand Code's section of the interview. What are your company's brand codes, and which would you consider the most crucial to your firm?

Participant 2: So, our brand codes are quite consistent and intentionally restrained. Visually, we rely heavily on black, white, and metallic tones, and a very clean, minimalist design language. Materials are also a big part of our identity. Things like high quality leather. But beyond the visual site, one of the most important codes is actually how we think about products. We always communicate from an engineering perspective. So, for example, why something is designed the way it is? What function? If I had to try, like, the most important ones, I'd say design minimalism and material authenticity are absolutely central.

Author: Do you translate traditional physical brand codes into digital forms? If so, how?

Participant 2: Yes, actually, very deliberately. We try to ensure that the digital experience reflects the same principles as the physical product. So, for example, our websites and digital platforms are very clean and structured. There's no unnecessary complexity. We use subtle animations and very precise motion design to reflect that engineering mindset. We also invest a lot in high quality product visualisation. So materials represented as realistically as possible. The idea actually is that even in a digital space, the brand should feel controlled, refined, and functional.

Author: Are there codes that are more difficult to transfer, online?

Participant 2: Uh, yes, so the biggest challenge is definitely anything related to physical sensation. I believe that you can't fully replicate the weight of a product, the texture of materials, or the way something moves in your hand. Those are very important in our category. especially in luxury. We can approximate it visually, but it's never quite the same as experiencing the product in person.

Author: And what codes, if any, purposefully remain offline or unchanged?

Participant 2: I would say the, in-store experience and tactile interaction remain very important and can't really be replaced. Also, the level of personal service and consultation, that's something we intentionally keep very high touch and physical because it reinforces the premium nature of the brand.

Author: Have brand codes been created specifically for online use?

Participant 2: I would say, yes, definitely. Digital requires its own language, so we've developed things like micro interactions, scrolling behaviour, and platform specific storytelling formats. For example, how a product is revealed as you scroll or how transitions work, those are all part of our digital brand expression now.

Author: What digital platforms are best suited for communicating brand codes?

Participant 2: It depends on the object, I would say. Our own website and e-commerce are the most important because that's where we have full control over the experience. Then platforms like Instagram are very strong for visual storytelling, while YouTube works well for more in-depth content, I would say, like showing design processes or product details. Each platform plays a different role, but they all need to stay consistent with the brand, of course.

Author: Thank you so much for your input on Brand Codes, we can now move onto Exclusivity.

Author: How do you maintain a sense of exclusivity on digital platforms?

Participant 2: So, exclusivity today is, I would say, less about being invisible and more about being selective and controlled. We focus on quality over quantity, not posting too much, not following every trend, and making sure everything we show is aligned with the brand. Also, the way we present products very clean, very deliberate, already creates a certain distance that supports exclusivity.

Author: What digital mechanisms do you use to help with keeping exclusivity?

Participant 2: So we sometimes use things like limited online releases for early access for selected customers. But more broadly, it's about curation, who we collaborate with, where we appear and how often.

Author: How do you reach, how do you balance reach with brand prestige?

Participant 2: That's actually always a balancing act. Of course, digital platforms push for reach and engagement. But we're very careful not to compromise the brand just to get more visibility. So we'd rather have small, a smaller, highly relevant audience than very broad exposure that doesn't fit the brand.

Author: Are there any benchmarks for acceptable levels of visibility?

Participant 2: Um, yes, I would say, but they're not purely numerical. So we look at things like who we're reaching, how people engage and whether the context fits the brand. So it's as much about quality as it is about scale.

Author: Thank you once again, we can now move to Brand Control Strategies. How do you monitor whether digital brand codes are interpreted as desired?

Participant 2: We actually combine data and qualitative insights. So we look at engagement metrics and sentiment, but also things like customer feedback and brand perception studies. It's important to understand, not just if people see content, but how they actually interpreted it.

Author: Is the risk of digital brand element imitation and area of concern for your company?

Participant 2: I would say yes, definitely. Digital makes imitation much easier.

Author: And What measures are in place to mitigate that risk?

Participant 2: So we protect what we can, legally, of course, but more importantly, we focus on consistency and depth. So, a strong brand is actually quite difficult to copy if it's executed properly across all touch points.

Author: How do you track the risk of brand dilution?

Participant 2: We monitor whether the brand starts to feel too common or inconsistent. So that can come from overexposure or from being present in the wrong context.

Author: And are there any measures to mitigate that risk?

Participant 2: I would say, yes, so we have very strict brand guidelines and centralized control, and we're very selective with partnerships and collaborations.

Author: Amazing, your insight is incredibly beneficial. Now we can move onto the section of this interview where you can talk about your own perspectives. Has digitalisation, in your opinion, strengthened or weakened luxury brand identity?

Participant 2: I would say it's a bit of both. It's strengthened, strengthened brands by allowing for better storytelling and global reach, but it also creates a kind of risk of overexposure and loss of exclusivity. So it really depends on how well it's managed. I would say.

Author: What do you think is the largest risk of having digital brand codes?

Participant 2: Probably losing distinctiveness. A lot of brands use the same platforms and formats. So, in my opinion, there's a risk that everything starts to look similar if you're not very disciplined.

Author: How do you see brand codes evolving in the future?

Participant 2: I think they'll become more interactive and immersive, especially with technologies like augmented reality, for example.

Author: What codes do you think will be transformed?

Participant 2: I personally think that things like materiality and retail experiences will increasingly move into digital formats. But I also believe that the core identity, our focus on function, precision, and clean design, that won't change. Those are timeless.

Interview Participant 3

Location: Telephone

Date: 20.04.2026

Interview transcription:

Author: How would you describe your brand core identity?

Participant 3: Yeah, I would say our brand's core identity is of timelessness and elegance. I guess compared against the luxury industry, we are more into simplicity. This would be the neutral colour palette we have or clean lines. But for our clothing manufacturing, we have a lot of very tailored, very structured garments that are high in quality. We try to remain authentic and luxurious.

Author: What are your company's brand codes, and which ones would you consider most crucial to your firm?

Participant 3: Yeah, I guess going back to the visual side of things, I would say that our most important brand codes are the minimalistic design that we have or our colour palette. Also, our tailoring that it is so structured and precise. And the high-quality materials that we use all in all.

Author: Sorry, which ones are the most crucial?

Participant 3: Oh sorry, my mistake. I would say, the timelessness and definitely the uh, sense of elegance that we bring as a company. It makes us recognisable.

Author: Do you translate traditional, like, the physical brand code into digital formats?

Participant 3: Yeah, we try to we definitely translate the physical codes through storytelling. For us, this is more towards, like the refined aesthetic of a clean look. And, you know, it's even in the uh, small things that have to be translated, for example, the fonts that we use are selected to align with our company. And I guess since we must talk about social media, of course, because it's so important. On social media, I would say everything is uh, curated to align with the brand's original identity and to be translated online.

Author: Are there codes or what codes are more difficult to transfer into their digital counterparts?

Participant 3: I mean, yeah, I think, I think the very clear and obvious one is things that you can touch. I think, that is quite difficult. I mean, in the sense of materials and fabric and feeling. It is difficult to replicate the physical experience of touching an item. And this is also with the in-store experience that you get when you go to touch the item and see the item in reality, it comes with a personalised service that it is difficult to do online

Author: Are there any codes that purposefully remain offline or are unchanged?

Participant 3: Yeah, in this sense, I would say it's definitely the more exclusive services that we offer, for example, custom tailoring of our items. Or like I said, the in-store client experience, it's very one-to-one and exclusive.

Author: Are there brand codes that have been created specifically for online platforms?

Participant 3: Yeah, for sure. In storytelling, through uh, motion visuals. And the types of social media layouts that we use to maintain, the brand's overall identity and uh aesthetic. But whilst we do this, we also want to keep in mind that, it needs to be modernised for the platform.

Author: And to present these codes, what digital platforms you think are best suited?

Participant 3: I'd say Instagram and the official website are the key platforms for us. I mean, Instagram and the website, in the sense, they allow for this digital storytelling to be done quite strongly. But then, also, you have to keep in mind that, you know, that there's social media and websites you can only see so much, so we kind of opt for YouTube for longer forms of content and digital magazines for campaigns and whatnot to really give a sense of storytelling and identity.

Author: Super, uh, we will now go into the exclusivity section, thank you for your responses. How do you maintain a sense of exclusivity on digital platforms?

Participant 3: We try to give very good high-quality content. We would rather, post very good content that aligns with our identity and limiting our overexposure on the platform. We don't want to consistently post and then become too common. I mean, yeah, again, it's with maintaining a consistent and you know, refined, aesthetic.

Author: Are there any digital mechanisms in place that you used to help with keeping exclusivity?

Participant 3: Well, in this sense, I would say, selective, product releases. Or, online collaborations that are limited, Invite only events.

Author: How do you balance reach with your brand prestige?

Participant 3: Could you please specify what reach is?

Author: Engagement or visibility.

Participant 3: Yeah, like I said, we prioritise quality over quantity when communicating online. We don't want to compromise the brands image and its exclusivity for the sole purpose of, you know, reach, as you said. So, our collaborations and our campaigns are very carefully selected to make sure that aligns with our brand's values.

Author: Are there benchmarks of acceptable, acceptable levels of visibility?

Participant 3: Yeah. we evaluate the types of engagement, so not only, how many people are seeing our post, but how exactly they are engaging. We just want to ensure that our visibility aligns with the brand's position.

Author: Coming to brand control strategies, how do you monitor whether digital brand codes are interpreted as designed?

Participant 3: For this we rely on our customer, of course, because, we hope that the content is correctly seen. Also definitely through customer feedback and online our engagement analysis. Which is basically listening to our customers.

Author: Is the risk of digital brand element imitation an area of concern for your company?

Participant 3: For sure, for sure. It is a significant concern when you are working in the uh digital space.

Author: Are there any measures in place to mitigate that risk?

Participant 3: Yeah, we have legal implications in place. For example, we have, you know, trademark protection, and we control our distribution quite carefully to make sure that nothing is out of our control. And yeah, I think strong brand consistency is, uh, it is harder to copy every detail that way.

Author: How do you track the risk of brand dilution?

Participant 3: Yeah, again, this is with the customer perception, the point of view of the brand. And just making sure we are consistent on all our channels, online or offline, like in store.

Author: What measures are in place to mitigate the risk of brand dilution?

Participant 3: Yeah, again, just very strict brand guidelines, and of course, our selective collaborations with some people.

Author: Now coming to the last category of the interview perception evaluation, I wanted to know if digitalisation strengthened or weakened luxury brand identity?

Participant 3: In my opinion? It has definitely strengthened, but it has to be managed definitely very carefully because there are risks with moving online, but when managed carefully, it can definitely strengthen a brand. I mean, it allows a brand to reach a much bigger audience. There are, locations that don't have access to a flagship store and our customers enjoy directly purchasing from the brand to enjoy the experience. But it also helps with, you know, storytelling and our identity and to make sure to solidify that.

Author: What do you think is the largest risk of having digital brand codes?

Participant 3: Oh, I would say, becoming too available, I guess. As a luxury company we can risk our sense of, not everyone can access it.

Author: So, having too much exposure?

Participant 3: Yes, yes.

Author: How do you see brand codes evolving in the future?

Participant 3: Oh, I mean, with, yeah, with how technology is going now, there's definitely been a lot of, you know, advancements, and especially with AI, I think brand codes will become more digital. But again, it would have to maintain a sense of exclusivity and authenticity, and the history of the brand.

Author: What codes do you think will be transformed in the future?

Participant 3: Yeah, I mean, I think now we have, for sure, visual storytelling, but I think that will continue in the future. And customer interaction and retail experiences. I guess they would evolve the most. As currently, they are not perfectly placed online and translated correctly. But I think in the future it would definitely be possible.

Interview Participant 4

Location: Google Meets

Date: 21.04.2026

Interview transcription:

Author: How would you describe the identity of your brand or those you have worked closely with?

Participant 4: I mainly would then talk about augmented weaving, it's a very experimental brand. We're still in the in the moment right now building our brand. It's kind of like growing out of itself. So it's kind of building its own identity by itself by actually just making stuff. The main point is really to bring digital and physical together or kind of like put it on the opposite and find the way the right point in between or the paths that are in between. Yeah, this is what was leading us from the very beginning to the point now and it also continues like that.

Author: Great, lets move onto Brand Codes. So what are the most important types of brand codes companies use in the luxury fashion industry and why?

Participant 4: Well, um. Here, I'm not really sure, I see stuff, but it's like not really, I don't really have any clear answers to it. Obviously, I also look on the topics that I am in interested, like digital uh, development parts or digital craft as well. Um, and yeah, you see that also more and more coming, I would say. Um, But I don't think they're yet the most important ones. They're really, these are points that are just slowly, slowly evolving and obviously have started during the corona times when we really didn't have any way to touch stuff. So obviously that was the moment when it grew with the metaverse and everything, like when this kind of time started. But now also after now 6 years after corona started, it's, it kind of like got pushed away again back in the physical world. I'm happy that we can touch things and, um, yeah. So it was a bit like a big bump. So it started like really massively and then it's gone again. And I guess the brands are just trying to figure this out how to deal with these tools

Author: Do luxury fashion companies translate traditional brand codes into digital formats? If so, how? If not, why?

Participant 4: Definitely. I mean, in the end, all the communication happens on data to platforms and it's so getting pushed and pushed. I mean, the digital world, it's growing so quickly. Yeah, and it gets more and it gets like so full with stuff, right? So I guess that's also the hard part. That's why they also try very quickly different approaches. Yeah. And for us, obviously, on the other side, sometimes it's just overwhelming because like every day something new comes to us. And I also realize when you see people, at some point, they also reach a little bit the limit to take more in. So, yeah.

Author: What brand codes are more difficult to translate into their digital counterparts?

Participant 4: Not really sure. I mean, by now, I think it's, you see also really good examples out there, which try to bring also the physicality or like how things are made. The craft is really in the centre also of these luxury brands. Like is pushing it a lot where they really try to show how things are made. That, obviously, back in the days was a complete different approach because it was all kind of like hidden in a city. And now it's kind of more opening.

Author: What brand codes, if any, are purposely remaining offline or unchanged?

Participant 4: I don't know. I mean, brand codes. I think these days, I guess, physical or offline is probably how it's hardest to get. So it gains a lot of value because it's hard to reach it. Because I need to travel to a place to get that or yeah, and online, we have it all the time in front of us. right? I have all my screens where I can reach that stuff very easily. Its the question if it's very exclusive, I guess, then they keep it offline. As, I mean, as fashion shows are also very, very exclusive. They were always very exclusive. I think, I don't know, 20 years ago, even more, so hard to get into these shows. These days, it's also a bit more open. And also obviously many brands open it that you can watch it on the live or so. But yeah, I guess that's that's how they make it very exclusive. Not going online, yeah?,

Author: For sure, what digital platforms are best suited for communicating brand codes?

Participant 4: It depends. I assume it depends a bit on your target. Instagram is one target, but then you have also younger targets that are probably more on TikTok or or Snapchat. And then obviously you have also digital platforms like in a wider sense where like Roblox that's like a lot of young, these are really the teenagers where you try to reach them.

Author: Perfect! Now we can discuss Exclusivity. How do luxury fashion brands maintain a sense of exclusivity on digital platforms?

Participant 4: Mm. I guess that's the hard part. Um, that's why they're all supposed to produce and produce, to figure out more and more, um, because as we know, we swipe, swipe, swipe, our attention is like, what is it? 5 seconds or something? Nothing, yeah. or not even anymore. So, yeah, you have to deliver a lot. Um, Yeah, exclusivity. I still think it's with with exclusive offers to certain targets as well. And probably you reach them in a different way than just social media. Maybe also something to do, maybe the fashion shows could be. Or also with, like, probably special offers in in sense of collections, like... sometimes you get certain parts only in Asia. Sometimes there is like a special collection just in Paris and you can only get it in that one shop in Milano. Or so, I guess that's a way to make it really exclusive.

Author: What digital mechanisms do brands use to help maintain exclusivity online?

Participant 4: Could you maybe give an example.

Author: Like exclusive online events or like exclusive, like gated content.

Participant 4: Yeah, of course.

Author: How do luxury fashion brands balance reach with brand prestige?

Participant 4: Honestly, no clue.

Author: Are there benchmarks for acceptable levels of visibility?

Participant 4: Also no clue.

Author: No worries at all, we can move onto Brand Control Strategies. How do brands monitor whether digital brand codes are interpreted as desired?

Participant 4: Oh, I guess that's probably has something to do with the engagement. So how much are they reacting and in which way? I mean, there are different ways to react these days. It's not just enough to have a like. You need to have even more than that. Sometimes, I mean, this is also a bit new. It's not about the amount that you have of engagement. Yeah. It's more like, yeah, back in the days, I don't know, when social medias popped up, it was all about to get 1000s of likes. Yeah. These days you can be a very small brand online and then, but you have like a high percentage of engagement. I think that's the most important part.

Author: Is the imitation of digital brand elements, an area of concern for luxury brands?

Participant 4: No clue.

Author: How do luxury fashion brands monitor the risk of brand dilution?

Participant 4: No clue, maybe craftsmanship or heritage.

Author: Great, now we are at the final section and I would love to hear your opinion on the following questions.

Author: Has digitalisation strengthened or weakened luxury brand identity?

Participant 4: I think it does definitely strengthen, pretty sure, because you reach better, you can also communicate better. Um, you can also target all kinds of people and sections, um, at the same time, um, yeah, obviously it got more complex and it takes also more time or like preparation and work and all kinds of workforce as well. So also costs more, I guess, but I definitely think this pushed it a lot more.

Author: What do you think is the greatest risk of having digital brand codes?

Participant 4: Hmm. Not sure if there is a risk, actually. I, I mean, obviously you, you reach out further and you probably have a, a small overview what's actually happening. So maybe that's the hard part to gather all this information easily. So you probably lose very quickly the access to that.

Author: How do you see brand codes evolving in the future?

Participant 4: Yeah, well, here for sure, one thing is going back to like craftsmanship. This is like the biggest that came comes to my mind it is also the one that I am working on. So, um, How they're evolving. Yeah. I mean, they have to become very unique in a specific, uh, corner, like, I think that's the most important part that you're completely unique. You cannot just like be or yeah, that just doesn't work anymore. And I think here they're also trying a lot to figure out how to get this uniqueness. Um, and I guess that's also the hardest part. So... Yeah. And that's why they have to put

a lot of effort in it. So, and probably also invest a lot of time and a lot of money also into that. So, yeah, sure.

Author: What code do you think will be transformed?

Participant 4: Yeah. I don't know, I, I also think it's very, you see that too. Like also Hermès and Chanel and all these, they also go back to their original code. Yeah. It's something that I noticed as well. They really push these stories to the feet again, which is also nice, obviously. You bring your obviously, like older targets back in, but also you can feed younger targets as well with history, which is always has a big value, I assume. So, so yeah. Yeah. So transformed, I don't know, if they're actually transformed, they're probably just reinterpreted or brought into a new shape.

Interview Participant 5

Location: Telephone

Date: 22.04.2026

Interview transcription:

Author: How would you describe your brand's core identity?

Participant 5: The identity is like uh, the CLASSIFIED (emblem), and it was CLASSIFIED (founder), actually.

Author: Great, now we can begin with the section called Brand Codes, uh, what are your company's brand codes, and which ones would you consider most crucial to your firm?

Participant 5: Yes, for sure the CLASSIFIED (emblem) because it always repeats the history of CLASSIFIED (founder), yeah.

Author: Do you translate traditional brand codes into digital formats, if so, how? If not, why?

Participant 5: I mean its iconic, the CLASSIFIED (emblem) is CLASSIFIED (brand name). Uh, it can be in small, for example, details, it depends it can be in big details also. For example, in the accessories, in the items, and on the buttons, because it is the brand.

Author: Are there any other translated codes other than the CLASSIFIED (emblem)?

Participant 5: There is also the prints and the colours that are part of CLASSIFIED (emblem). But it is inspired through fashion periods, so you know uh, uh the inspiration of the codes depends on the designer.

Author: Perfect, and what codes are more difficult to transfer into their digital counterparts?

Participant 5: Actually, I didn't take part in anything like that because it's not my position.

Author: No worries, what codes, if any purposefully remain offline or unchanged?

Participant 5: Uh, from my department I guess the custom experience in person because dealing with each client is different.

Author: No worries, what codes, if any purposefully remain offline or unchanged?

Participant 5: I'm sure that the stories change because in the connection with the digital, e-commerce and all the shop and everything was all in one. But with the other things like CLASSIFIED (emblem), they can't change.

Author: Have brand codes been created specifically for online use?

Participant 5: In the luxury catwalk collection, uh, no.

Author: What digital platforms are best suited for communicating brand codes?

Participant 5: The website, I think, also Instagram and Facebook, it depends for what.

Author: Thank you for your insight, that's all for the Brand Codes section, we can now move to Exclusivity. How do you maintain a sense of exclusivity on digital platforms?

Participant 5: Uh, for example the haute couture of CLASSIFIED (brand name), is not selling online. The haute couture is exclusive because its custom to one body. This is what you see, uh, in the media, in Vogue. But you don't find these either in normal shops, there isn't two of one dress in this collection. Also, not a lot of sizes are available in the collections online and its limited.

Author: What digital mechanisms do you use to help with keeping exclusivity?

Participant 5: Uh, I honestly wasn't involved in this so I couldn't tell you. But generally, I would say no discounts or anything like that.

Author: No problem! How do you balance reach (engagement and/or visibility) with brand prestige?

Participant 5: Again, this is more the marketing department's responsibility, I don't know.

Author: Are there benchmarks for acceptable levels of visibility?

Participant 5: I don't know, uh, if there are specific uh, benchmarks, but we just try not to be too online.

Author: No worries, thank you for your responses on Exclusivity mechanisms, the following questions will be about Brand Control Strategies. How do you monitor whether digital brand codes are interpreted as desired?

Participant 5: I don't know about certain maybe strategies or something but we go more or less based off customer feedback based on previous things we put online.

Author: Is the risk of digital brand element imitation an area of concern for your company?

Participant 5: Of course, there's always a risk. But people that are used to, uh, the brand, customers used to the brand know what is the difference.

Author: What measures are in place to mitigate that risk?

Participant 5: Uh, well, we are legally covered but also there is always a risk, it can't fully go away.

Author: Of course, how do you track the risk of brand dilution?

Participant 5: I think we just need to very consistent because, uh, when you are consistent your image becomes stronger.

Author: What measures are in place to mitigate that risk?

Participant 5: Yes, like being consistent everywhere, all the time.

Author: Great, thank you so much for your feedback, the next section will just be based on your opinion.

Participant 5: Maybe I can help more here with better answers.

Author: They will be for sure helpful, has digitalisation strengthened or weakened luxury brand identity?

Participant 5: I don't think it weakened. Uh, with the online also, they are open into, uh, other countries where they don't have shops or they don't have for example, the size you want in-store we can order for you from another store. Anyway, people still like to go to the shops, to be inside the store is a completely different experience.

Author: What do you think is the largest risk of having digital brand codes?

Participant 5: There isn't such a great risk but there is still a risk of being copied but copies can also be made in-store.

Author: How do you see brand codes evolving in the future?

Participant 5: I think they will definitely become more digital. But it will never replace the real experience of going in the shops because it feels completely different when you go see the things in real life and touch items.

Author: And, what codes do you think will be transformed?

Participant 5: We will try all the codes I think but like I said, the experience of in-store can never be the same online.

Interview Participant 6

Location: Telephone

Date: 29.04.2026

Interview transcription:

Author: How would you describe your brand's core identity?

Participant 6: In a nutshell, I would say our mission is to design and deliver, stylish, high quality fashion, and accessories that balance sophistication with everyday wearability. We do this through many different ways. Personality being one of them for example we try to reflect confidence and glamour.

Author: What are your company's brand codes and which ones would you consider most crucial to your firm?

Participant 6: There are a few different brand codes that we use. I would say the first one would be visual codes. For example, like gold and silver accents and hardware. Also, our monogram, colours, like black, beige, whites, and then also seasonal trend colours, like lemon, orange, hot, pink, and even sky blue. On top of that, we try and aim for clean, structured silhouettes, especially in our handbags. We also use verbal codes. Some of these are tone, for example, upbeat, confident, aspirational tones. We also use messaging, often centred on lifestyle, like travel, success, city life, things in that realm. We also try put emphasis on words like jets, jet sets, luxury, effortless, and cool. Another crucial one are sensory and experimental codes. For example, our bright, polished retail spaces. Or materials, like leather, metallic finishes that we use, and our handbags.

Author: Great, thank you so much. And I would love to know, do you translate traditional, so physical brand codes into digital formats? If so, how? If not, why?

Participant 6: So we do translate traditional physical brand codes into digital forms. One of the ways we do this is photos of our campaigns that always include the sense of travel, resort destinations. And they also incorporate products, especially with a big focus on our handbags specifically.

Author: And what codes are more difficult to transfer into their digital counterparts?

Participant 6: I would say the hardest one is digital experience communication, because right now, it still remains quite minimal, it is white, clear, and doesn't, doesn't get visibly inspired by codes like monograms.

Author: Super, now we can move on to the exclusivity section of this interview. The first question is, how do you maintain a sense of exclusivity on digital platforms?

Participant 6: So this is something that we've actually worked on quite a bit. So if the products are sold out, most likely, they won't come back. There are limited editions, online store only products that don't arrive to the shops.

Author: What digital mechanisms do you use to keep to help with exclusivity?

Participant 6: I wouldn't be too sure as I don't work in the digital aspect. I can only tell you about my observations externally. So I wouldn't be able to help this question.

Author: No worries, How do you balance reach, so engagement and or visibility with brand prestige?

Participant 6: Like I said before, this isn't really my, uh my realm of expertise, but from an outsider's point of view. Just don't post too much or use too much email marketing. Just do the right amount of communication.

Author: And are there benchmarks for acceptable levels of visibility?

Participant 6: Once again, I'm not too sure on this question, sorry.

Author: No worries. Now we can move on to brand control strategies. How do you monitor whether digital brand codes are interpreted as desired?

Participant 6: Okay, so I would say if clients who come into the store with the correct information that they were communicated about collections or sales online, I would say.

Author: Is the risk of digital brand element imitation, an area of concern for your company?

Participant 6: I wouldn't say so, so I don't think in general it's an issue for the middle segment brands. Sometimes it's easy to see something similar in other brands because the trends are the same. The basic bag shape for example are like 10 to 20 styles, so it's easy to have a similar product.

Author: Ah, does your brand have any precautions to mitigate that risk, in case?

Participant 6: Well yes, we predominantly use patents, and in general, if you have a strong identity, it will be too obvious to copy.

Author: How do you track the risk of brand dilution?

Participant 6: We always try and ask ourselves, what are we doing different from competitors

Author: What measures are in place to mitigate that risk?

Participant 6: We try and mitigate it by trying to think of the people, their behaviours, their expectations from us and our stores, and also just to try and be friendly to all customers. Also to love your job, because that's the best way to retain customers.

Author: And you believe that the retention of customers can assist in preventing brand dilution?

Participant 6: Yes, for sure

Author: Perfect! Now we can move on to the section of perception evaluation, and here I would love to hear your opinions on these concepts.

Author: Has digitalisation strengthened or weakened luxury brand identity?

Participant 6: I would say, It's weakened physical retail because now we have to compete with online sales from different brands. But If we strengthen our online sales and our online presence, I think that will increase our outreach as well and that will strengthen our brand identity.

Author: What do you think is the largest risk of having digital brand codes?

Participant 6: I would say the largest risk of having digital brand codes is the offline part of retail. This might be a risk as it appeals more inconvenient against to online stores.

Author: How do you see brand codes evolving in the future?

Participant 6: I think the best way to evolve our brand codes is by trying to invest more in clienteling and experiences.

Author: So, you don't think that the movement will be predominantly online. You believe that brand codes will continue to evolve more so in physical experiences?

Participant 6: Yeah I would agree with that.

Author: What codes in specific do you think will be transformed?

Participant 6: I would say new loyalty programs being introduced, and having more of a presence on, on social media, like, ads and stories specifically on, on Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat, for example. The goal would be to become more appealing to Gen Z as they are the main consumers or client based. that use social media.

8.2 Appendix B: Interview Questions

First Set of Interview Questions

General

1. How would you describe your brand's core identity?

Brand Codes

1. What are your company's brand codes, and which ones would you consider most crucial to your firm?
2. Do you translate traditional (physical) brand codes into digital formats?
 - 2.1. If so, how?
 - 2.2. If not, why?
3. What codes are more difficult to transfer into their digital counterparts?
4. What codes, if any, purposefully remain offline or unchanged?
5. Have brand codes been created specifically for online use?
6. What digital platforms are best suited for communicating brand codes?

Exclusivity

1. How do you maintain a sense of exclusivity on digital platforms?
2. What digital mechanisms do you use to help with keeping exclusivity?
3. How do you balance reach (engagement and/or visibility) with brand prestige?
4. Are there benchmarks for acceptable levels of visibility?

Brand Control Strategies

1. How do you monitor whether digital brand codes are interpreted as desired?
2. Is the risk of digital brand element imitation an area of concern for your company?
 - 2.1. What measures are in place to mitigate that risk?
3. How do you track the risk of brand dilution?
 - 3.1. What measures are in place to mitigate that risk?

Perception Evaluation

1. Has digitalisation strengthened or weakened luxury brand identity?
2. What do you think is the largest risk of having digital brand codes?
3. How do you see brand codes evolving in the future?
 - 3.1. What codes do you think will be transformed?

Second Set of Interview Questions

General

1. How would you describe the identity of your brand or those you have worked closely with?

Brand Codes

1. What are the brand codes of your company, or the company you work with, and which are most important?
2. Does the company translate traditional (physical) brand codes into digital formats?
 - 2.1. If so, how?
 - 2.2. If not, why?
3. What codes are more difficult to transfer into their digital counterparts?
4. What codes, if any, purposefully remain offline or unchanged?
5. Have brand codes been created specifically for online use?
6. What digital platforms are best suited for communicating brand codes?

Exclusivity

1. How does the brand maintain a sense of exclusivity of digital platforms?
2. What digital mechanisms does the brand use to help with keeping exclusivity?
3. How does the brand balance reach (engagement and/or visibility) with brand prestige?
4. Are there benchmarks for acceptable levels of visibility?

Brand Control Strategies

1. How does the brand monitor whether digital brand codes are interpreted as desired?
2. Is the risk of digital brand element imitation an area of concern for the company?
 - 2.1. What measures are in place to mitigate that risk?
3. How does the company track the risk of brand dilution?
 - 3.1. What measures are in place to mitigate that risk?

Perception Evaluation

1. Has digitalisation strengthened or weakened luxury brand identity?
2. What do you think is the largest risk of having digital brand codes?
3. How do you see brand codes evolving in the future?
 - 3.1. What codes do you think will be transformed?

8.3 Appendix C: Deductive Code Table

Theoretical Origin	Initial Deductive Theme	Description	Literature Review Reference
(Oswald, 2007; Oswald, 2015)	Visual Symbolism	An analysis into the digital translation of traditional luxury codes respective to use and placement.	Brand Codes, Types of Luxury Brand Codes
(Creevey et al., 2021; Freire, 2014; König et al., 2016; Oswald, 2007)	Narrative and Heritage Creation	Explores the online depiction of brand storytelling and the visualisation of heritage online.	Types of Luxury Brand Codes, Implementation, 4-H Framework
(Huang, 2020; Jurišova, 2020; Lin & Ku, 2023; Okonkwo, 2007; Okonkwo, 2009)	Omnichannel Consistency	Explores the online presentation of brand codes and phygital continuity.	Omnichannel in Luxury, Implementation, Emergence
(Dubois & Paternault, 1995; Ko et al., 2017; Ting & Ahn, 2023)	Exclusivity Management	An investigation into the strategic tactics utilised by luxury brands to maintain scarcity and prestige.	Luxury Brand Management, Symbolic Communication, Status Signalling
(Okonkwo, 2009; Phua et al., 2026)	Interpretation and Perception Control	An exploration into how consumer engagement and brand identity are managed online.	Two-way Communication, Brand Code Perception
(Phua et al., 2026; Ting & Ahn, 2023)	Brand Authenticity and Identity	This correlates to the necessity of brand codes to reinforce brand identity and genuineness within a dynamic digital environment.	Status Signalling, Brand Code Perception
(Hennigs et al., 2012; Kapferer et al., 2017)	Exclusivity-Accessibility Pressure	This addresses the tension between digital relevancy and inaccessibility, with a focus on how it is managed.	Exclusivity-Accessibility Paradox

Table C1: Deductive Code Table. (Source: Own table).

8.4 Appendix D: Interview Analysis

8.4.1 Interview Codebook

Due to the size of the Interview Codebook the file can be accessed via the Open Science Framework (Jarrah, 2026): https://osf.io/tskfa/overview?view_only=9ecc0f798d1b486b82f69a6e973bc58e

8.4.2 Detailed Overview of Interview Thematic Analysis

Theme	Codes	Quote	Participant Number
Visual Symbolism	Aesthetic Codes	"the most important ones, I'd say design minimalism and material authenticity are absolutely central."	Participant 1
	Subtle Codes	"This would be the neutral colour palette we have or clean lines."	Participant 3
		"while traditional symbols like logos may become less central compared to overall brand universe and experience". "it's even in the uh, small things that have to be translated, for example, the fonts that we use".	Participant 1 Participant 3
Narrative and Heritage Creation	Craftsmanship Display	We use subtle animations and very precise motion design to reflect that engineering mindset. We also invest a lot in high-quality product visualisation."	Participant 2
	Digital Storytelling	"craftsmanship is translated into close-up, professional reels, atelier content, BTS videos, or slow, cinematic storytelling." "I think now we have, for sure, visual storytelling, but I think that will continue in the future."	Participant 1 Participant 3
		"I'm sure that the stories change because in the connection with the digital [...]. But with the other things like CLASSIFIED (emblem), they can't change."	Participant 5
Omnichannel Consistency	Material Importance	"Materials are also a big part".	Participant 2
	Continuity Importance	"The most important brand codes are visual (logos, monograms, colors), material". "they all need to stay consistent with the brand, of course."	Participant 1 Participant 2
		"it's with maintaining a consistent and you know, refined, aesthetic."	Participant 3
	Physical Growth	"I think they will definitely become more digital."	Participant 5
	Platform Selection	"They will become more experiential and hybrid: blending physical and digital". "Then platforms like Instagram are very strong for visual storytelling". "It depends. I assume it depends a bit on your target."	Participant 1 Participant 2 Participant 4
Tension in Digital Exclusivity Management and Perception	Restricted Access	"I would say it's definitely the more exclusive services that we offer, for example, custom tailoring of our items."	Participant 3
	Overexposure Risk	"By controlling access, limiting product drops, and curating content very selectively." "So that can come from overexposure or from being present in the wrong context."	Participant 1 Participant 2
		"Oh, I would say, becoming too available, I guess."	Participant 3
	Engagement Mechanisms	"I guess that's probably has something to do with the engagement." "So we look at engagement metrics and sentiment".	Participant 4 Participant 2
		Consumer Listening	"For this we rely on our customer, of course, because, we hope that the content is correctly seen. Also definitely through customer feedback". "but we go more or less based off customer feedback based on previous things we put online."
Brand Authenticity and Identity	Identity Driven	"What emerges is that strong luxury identities are always rooted in consistency: heritage, craftsmanship, and a very controlled aesthetic language."	Participant 1
		"Our identity comes from the idea that form follows function, which goes back to CLASSIFIED, the designer of the CLASSIFIED". "Craftsmanship, material quality, and the in-store experience are the hardest."	Participant 2 Participant 1
Materiality and Experiential Gap	Craftsmanship Translation Difficulty	"Uh, yes, so the biggest challenge is definitely anything related to physical sensation. I believe that you can't fully replicate the weight of a product, the texture of materials".	Participant 2
	Experience Importance and Difficulty	"I would say the, in-store experience and tactile interaction remain very important and can't really be replaced." "I think they will definitely become more digital. But it will never replace the real experience of going in the shops-".	Participant 2 Participant 6

8.5 Appendix E: Qualitative Visual Analysis

8.5.1 Master Code Analysis

Due to the size of the Master Code Analysis the file can be accessed via the Open Science Framework (Jarrah, 2026): https://osf.io/tskfa/overview?view_only=9ecc0f798d1b486b82f69a6e973bc58e

8.5.2 Instagram Posts

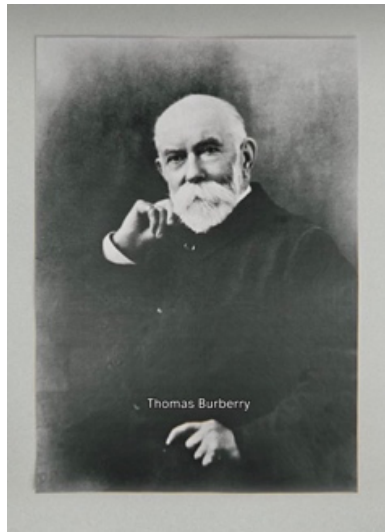


Figure E1: Burberry Post 3.
(Burberry [@burberry], 2026d).



Figure E2: Christian Dior Post 7.
(Christian Dior [@dior], 2026c).

Figure E3: Sandro Post 5.
(Sandro [@sandroparis], 2026a).



Figure E4: Sandro Post 6.
(Sandro [@sandroparis], 2026d).



Figure E5: Sandro Post 8.
(Sandro [@sandroparis], 2026c).

8.6 Appendix F: AI prompts used

For the linguistic revision the following prompts were inserted into ChatGPT:

- a) "Highlight punctuation mistakes, do not change sentences and do not generate any text."
- b) "Highlight sentences where grammar/legibility could be improved, do not change sentences and do not generate any text"
- c) "Is the following excerpt grammatically correct?"
- d) "What are synonyms for [word]? Provide a list of ten synonyms."