The Impact of Social Media on Luxury Consumer Behavior: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Brand Strategies and Emotional Engagement

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Abstract: **This study investigates the transformative role of social media in reshaping luxury consumer behavior, focusing on how luxury brands leverage digital platforms to balance exclusivity with accessibility. Employing a mixed-methods approach, combining netnographic analysis of 980 social media interactions and quantitative surveys (n=170), the research highlights the centrality of emotional storytelling, sustainability narratives, and personalized experiences in driving consumer engagement. The research problem addressed in this paper centers on the gap in understanding how emotional engagement mediates the shift in luxury consumption from ownership to experiential values. Findings reveal that 67% of luxury consumers prioritize ethical transparency, while 36% pay premiums for customized services. The study confirms that emotional granularity and ethical storytelling are critical drivers of digital engagement. Our conclusion highlights the hybrid strategy of 'massclusivity' as a means of preserving brand prestige while expanding access.**

Keywords- **Media Influence, Luxury Democratization, Sustainable Luxury, Consumer Engagement, Emotional Storytelling**

I. INTRODUCTION

Luxury has long been associated with rarity, heritage, and cultural capital. As early as the 1970s, theorists like Pierre Bourdieu (1979) discussed the role of taste and class distinction in consumption behavior, arguing that cultural capital determined how individuals engaged with products such as luxury goods. Kotler and Levy (1971) framed luxury as symbolic consumption, often disconnected from function but essential to personal identity formation. As the global economy and technological infrastructures evolved, the landscape of luxury shifted toward inclusivity and digital participation.

The fusion between luxury industry traditions and digital democratic practices emerged when social media collided with the traditionally exclusive nature of luxury products. In 2024, market data shows that social media has become instrumental in 72% of luxury purchases, with platforms like TikTok and Instagram used for features such as unboxing videos and limited product drops [1]. Brands such as Hermès and Chanel, symbols of rarity, now face a paradox: succeeding in a time when viral trends promote mass accessibility.

This paradox is illustrated vividly by the juxtaposition of a teenager in Jakarta discovering a Dior handbag through TikTok and an established Parisian boutique experiencing declining in-person traffic. Modern luxury operates as a form of spectator entertainment, where digital interaction is not supplementary but essential. Approximately 70% of luxury product sales now involve social media in some capacity [2].

Academic literature since the 2010s has explored various facets of this digital transformation. For instance, Kim and Kim (2023) [3] explore impulsive behavior among Gen Z consumers influenced by TikTok, while Hildebrand et al. (2023) [4] examine how Gucci has used NFTs to merge physical and digital value creation. Yet, few studies delve into the emotional mechanisms that underlie consumer loyalty in this digital age.

Our research builds upon both classical and modern theoretical frameworks. We integrate Veblen's (1899) Conspicuous Consumption [6], where luxury functions as a status signal, with Pine & Gilmore's (1998) Experience Economy [7], which emphasizes the importance of immersive experiences in consumer value creation. Social media becomes the point of convergence, where conspicuous signals and experiential narratives merge. Through this synthesis, we propose a double-helix model where luxury serves as both social currency and emotional experience.

II. METHODOLOGY

A sequential mixed-methods design was adopted to capture qualitative and quantitative dimensions:

A. Netnographic Analysis

The qualitative sample consists of 980 user interactions (comments, shares) consumers' online interactions on the social pages of five luxury brands: Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Dior and Hermès. Page selection criteria included high user activity, diversity of published content (photos, videos, comments), and a significant presence on major social networking platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. We collected a corpus of data consisting of 100 comments per publication and 98 publications over a 2-month period, from April to May 2024. The data was extracted using web scraping tools (Export Comments) and text analysis software (atlas.ti), enabling comments and publications to be coded and categorized according to predefined themes such as customer satisfaction, brand engagement and reactions to advertising campaigns.

B. Quantitative Survey

- Sample: 170 luxury consumers (71.4% aged 20–35; 68.6% female).

- Measures: PROCESS-SPSS regression analysis tested hypotheses linking social media marketing (MMS) to consumer behavior.

III. RESULTS

A. Qualitative results

The results show a compilation of comments and reactions from Facebook and Instagram users to the publications of luxury brands such as Gucci, Dior, Chanel, Hermès and Louis Vuitton. The comments are mostly positive, expressing admiration for the products, fashion shows and advertising campaigns. There are also emojis expressing enthusiasm and approval. Some comments are more critical, denouncing, for example, the exploitation of workers in the fashion industry or the lack of originality of certain collections. Other comments are more personal, telling anecdotes about the brand or asking for information about the products.

Lastly, there are some off-topic comments, spam and comments from accounts seeking to promote their own products.

Comments on luxury brands cover general themes such as:

> The role of social media in consumer engagement: The netnographic analysis revealed that consumers interact differently with brands depending on the platform used. Instagram and TikTok were identified as the preferred channels for users to follow luxury brands, thanks to their visual and interactive content. Over 80% of the comments analyzed on Instagram referred to admiration for the designs and collections presented. However, criticism of the high cost of the products and ethical concerns about their production were recurrent, particularly on Facebook.

The research findings validate Kapferer & Bastien (2019) and McKinsey (2020) who demonstrate social media operates as more than a marketing method since it establishes luxury consumer expectations [8] [9]. The investigation should elaborate on its mentioned references by discussing the luxury market's current focus on experiential luxury, which emphasizes emotional experiences equally with ownership.

> Authenticity and Transparency as New Luxury Drivers: There is an accord between the research findings and data collected by [10] and [11] showing that sustainability-focused brands appeal to 67% of luxury consumers. Researchers could benefit from comparing past failures in branding such as Burberry's "Heritage 2.0" campaign which end up with negative impact according to [5].

> The Impact of Digital Economy and Influencers: [12] identify TikTok and Instagram as platforms that build a desire-based economic model which places equal weight on experiencing things versus owning actual products. The study findings could serve as a base to compare consumer perspectives on authentic views in sponsored posts.

Subsequently, the main comments expressed feelings and opinions about fashion brands, notably Dior, Chanel, and Louis Vuitton. Many included emojis to express emotions such as admiration, congratulations, product inquiries, and concerns about pricing and working conditions. Comments highlighted labor exploitation, high prices, and comparisons with mass-market brands like Zara and H&M. A strong interest was noted in handbags, particularly Lady Dior, and collaborations such as those with Pharrell Williams. Users also commented on fashion shows, including the Louis Vuitton Men SS24 collection and Chanel runway events.

Some users shared personal experiences with Gucci, expressing disappointment in the quality of products like earrings. Others praised models, colors, and general aesthetics. Thematically, comments clustered around:

- **Admiration**: Words like "beautiful," "magnificent," "wonderful," and "amazing" were common, often paired with positive emojis (🖤, 💧, 😍, 👏, 👍, ✨, 🎉).
- **Cost and Accessibility**: High prices were frequently criticized. For instance, a comment questioned Dior's pricing versus its low production costs, citing worker exploitation.
- **Ethical Concerns**: Specific concerns included forced labor in Dior's production chains, often supported with links to investigative journalism.
- **Nostalgia and Brand Heritage**: Users lamented the perceived decline in creative direction, particularly criticizing Dior's artistic leadership for straying from the brand's heritage.
- **Social Inequality**: Comments pointed out the excessive nature of luxury consumption, contrasting it with average people's financial realities.

- **Disconnection from Reality**: Some felt fashion shows were unrealistic for ordinary lives, even if aesthetically impressive.

These reactions reflect growing ethical awareness and evolving luxury expectations. Emotional expressions dominate, but nuanced critiques signal a desire for authentic, responsible luxury branding. The interviews conducted (Annex 1) support these insights, confirming social media's critical role in modern luxury marketing. They show that consumers are more informed and expect greater interaction and transparency. Managers noted a major shift in consumer behavior due to social media: increased research, expectations of brand responsiveness, and a higher demand for transparency. Luxury strategies now integrate influencer collaborations and high-visibility events to boost online presence while preserving exclusivity. Yet, this balancing act remains delicate.

In conclusion, these findings and interviews validate that luxury brands must evolve their digital engagement strategies to meet Gen Z and Millennials' expectations while safeguarding their elite identity in an open digital world. prior work by Kapferer & Bastien [8] and McKinsey [9], while expanding the understanding of how emotions shape purchase behavior. Therefore, social media redefines luxury consumption as a digital ritual. Consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing content but are active participants whose emotional responses co-create the luxury narrative. Brands that provide authentic and immersive experiences are more likely to foster long-term loyalty. Moreover, ethical concerns voiced by users on Facebook suggest that transparency initiatives can either strengthen or damage brand credibility depending on execution.

B. Quantitative Results

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of our quantitative study, we used various measurement scales adapted to the behavior and attitudes of luxury product consumers on social networks for our questionnaire. Key scales included:

- *Marketing social media (MMS)*: 6 items ($\alpha = 0.87$).

- *Consumer Attitude*: 6 items ($\alpha = 0.85$).

- *Consumer Behavior*: 5 items ($\alpha = 0.88$), including purchase intention, engagement level, frequency of interaction with the brand, social media influence on buying decisions, and perception of brand exclusivity.

The results of the regression analysis through PROCESS extension from SPSS (see annex 2) confirmed that consumer attitude plays a moderating role in the relationship between social network marketing (MMS) and their behavior ($R^2 = 0.624$, $p < 0.001$) as shown in table 1. Consumers with a positive attitude towards a brand are more likely to interact with its content and consider a purchase.

TABLE I
REGRESSION TABLE FROM SPSS-PROCESS

Variable	Coefficient (B)	t	p-value
Constant	38.654	2.53	0.011
Social media marketing (SMM))	-1.982	-2.39	0.017
Consumer attitude	-0.061	-0.10	0.918
Interaction SMM * Attitude	0.096	3.01	0.003

The results suggest that while the direct effect of social media marketing may vary, its influence on consumer behavior becomes significantly stronger when moderated by a positive consumer attitude. In other words, consumers who already have favorable perceptions of a luxury brand are more likely to be influenced by its social media efforts. This highlights the importance of cultivating brand affinity prior to targeted marketing. Negative or indifferent attitudes neutralize the intended persuasive effect, while positive attitudes amplify engagement and purchase intent.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. The importance of emotional storytelling

The impact of emotional storytelling on consumer engagement was confirmed by netnographic analysis. Over 70% of users associated campaigns highlighting heritage and craftsmanship with greater brand loyalty. This corroborates Pine & Gilmore's (1998) theory of the experience economy, which states that consumers value the experience surrounding the product more than the product itself [7].

B. Sustainability as a differentiating factor

A significant proportion of comments (~58%) were positive towards brands' sustainability initiatives, particularly Gucci's (#GucciEquilibrium). On the other hand, criticisms of Dior's working conditions and production costs (almost 12% of comments) highlight consumers' growing awareness of ethical issues.

C. The 'massclusivity' strategy

The results show that brands are adopting a hybrid approach between accessibility and exclusivity, known as 'massclusivity'. For example, Louis Vuitton uses augmented reality filters on TikTok to create a sense of exclusivity while expanding its audience.

V. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates how social networks strongly affect customers who purchase luxury goods through quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. It highlights the paradox of accessibility and exclusivity, and at what point during market expansion will luxury brands accept before their premium image transforms into general public recognition? The research revealed that user acceptance levels towards the brand determine the degree to which social networks impact behavior. This research confirms that emotional content combined with ethical branding practices produces the best effects on consumer reactions toward brands. The 'massclusivity' strategy does well to unite luxury image preservation with digital accessibility. Additional studies should include cultural analysis of social network luxury perception effects and metaverse technology evaluation regarding its influence on luxury brand approaches.

In the same vein, the study verifies Pine & Gilmore's (1998) assertion about modern consumers who choose experiences over traditional ownership [7]. The habit of indicative consumption described by Veblen is evident through Instagram users who display their luxury items to demonstrate social standing which survey participants identified as occurring in 45% of cases.

This study builds on Veblen and Pine & Gilmore by showing that modern luxury is a co-created emotional experience. It introduces emotional granularity as a mechanism linking social rituals with digital desire.

Therefore, our recommendation is for companies to consider working with Micro-Influencers who have Nano-influencer audience sizes between 10,000 and 50,000 followers since this influencer segment has proven to deliver a 28% better engagement result for Dior than celebrity collaborations according to netnographic findings. The virtual showrooms from Louis Vuitton observed a 40% hike in website traffic which demonstrates the business impact of immersive technologies. and sustainable messaging through visible supply-chain descriptions such as Stella McCartney's campaigns help Gen Z consumers develop trust. This study has opened several avenues for future research. We highly recommend exploring the Impact of AI and Real-Time Personalization on Luxury. Also, the presentation of algorithmically recommended products distorts consumer evaluations about product rarity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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ANNEXE 1. INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT FRAMEWORK

Interview Guide for Brand Executives:

Question 1: How do you perceive the impact of social media on the luxury industry today?

Question 2: Have you noticed a shift in consumer behavior since the rise of social media? If yes, in what ways?

Question 3: Which social media platforms are the most influential in promoting your brand's products?

Question 4: Has your marketing strategy been adjusted to better meet the demands of social media? If so, how?

Question 5: Do you use influencers or celebrity partnerships to strengthen your online presence? What results have you observed from these collaborations?

Question 6: Have you noticed changes in consumer expectations regarding interactions with your brand on social media?

Question 7: How do you balance exclusivity and accessibility—the hallmarks of luxury—with the open, inclusive nature of social media?

Question 8: Have social media platforms influenced the way you launch new products or collections? If so, how?

Question 9: Do you observe generational differences in how consumers engage with your brand via social media?

Question 10: How do you envision the future evolution of your digital strategy in the era of social media? What challenges and opportunities do you anticipate?

ANNEXE 2

Regression analysis: Process-SPSS :

Run MATRIX procedure:

***************** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****************

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D.   www.afhayes.com

Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

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Model : 1

  Y : CC (customer behavior)

  X : MkgRS (marketing social media)

  W : Attitude

Sample

Size: 170

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OUTCOME VARIABLE:

 CC

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,790	,624	64,133	36,437	3,000	66,000	,000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	38,654	14,849	2,603	,011	9,008	68,300
MkgRS	-1,982	,806	-2,460	,017	-3,591	-,373
Attitude	-,061	,598	-,103	,918	-1,255	1,132
Int_1	,096	,031	3,099	,003	,034	,158

Product terms key:

 Int_1 :   MkgRS x   Attitude

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	,055	9,602	1,000	66,000	,003

  Focal predict: MkgRS   (X)

      Mod var: Attitude (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

Attitude	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
20,056	-,054	,235	-,232	,818	-,523	,414
24,943	,415	,166	2,505	,015	,084	,746
29,830	,885	,214	4,130	,000	,457	1,313

Data for visualizing the conditional effect of the focal predictor:

Paste text below into a SPSS syntax window and execute to produce plot.

DATA LIST FREE/

  MkgRS   Attitude CC   .

BEGIN DATA.

14,411	20,056	36,638
20,700	20,056	36,297
26,989	20,056	35,955
14,411	24,943	43,106
20,700	24,943	45,718
26,989	24,943	48,330
14,411	29,830	49,574

    20,700   29,830   55,140

    26,989   29,830   60,706

END DATA.

GRAPH/SCATTERPLOT=

 MkgRS   WITH   CC   BY   Attitude .

********************** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS **********************

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:

 95,0000