THE
STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT: MASTER PAPERS

SBM
STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT
MASTER PAPERS

Unbranded Luxury - Recreating Exclusivity

Alexandra Anthoine-Badaroux, Sarah Featherstone, Hannah Leute

Third Edition
Student Papers

2017
September - October

Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers

The Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers is essential reading for brand strategist in both private and public sector organisations, and academics in universities and business schools.

The papers are written by master student groups and follow an international journal format. The student groups selected the topics of their papers and provided updated and relevant insights into the strategic management of brands.

The mission of Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers is to "present and develop useful tools and theories for the application in practice of managing brands, and to forward the academic field of strategic brand management."

The intent of the series is to bridges the gap between academic teaching and research.

The series is a result of co-creation between students and teachers in the course Strategic Brand Management (BUSN21 – 7.5 University Credit Points; 8 weeks 50% study time), part of the master program International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund School of Economics and Management, Sweden. The published papers represent the result of the intellectual work of students under supervision of the heads of course. The content of the papers is to be read as student reports albeit the journal format. The papers are free to download and should be cited following international conventions.

Editors

Mats Urde   Frans Melin
Associate Professor   Assistant Professor

Heads of master course Strategic Brand Management (BUSN21), part of master program International Marketing and Brand Management.
Lund School of Economics and Management

SBM

STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT

MASTER PAPERS

Unbranded Luxury - Recreating Exclusivity

Alexandra Anthoine-Badaroux, Sarah Featherstone, Hannah Leute

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the phenomenon of unbranded luxury and its ability to create exclusivity and uniqueness without heavy branding.

Design/methodology/approach: Qualitative secondary data from academic journals and books have been sought to create a theoretical base. Additionally, three case studies have been examined, and semi-structured interviews have been conducted to gain primary data.

Findings:
Luxury brands following the anti-branding movement create exclusivity without obvious branding and the depiction of their logo, but through discretion and authenticity.

Research limitations/implications: The reliability of the study is limited due to the small number of case studies and interviews conducted. Moreover, the observations cannot exclude a certain degree of subjectivity. Further research is necessary to fully explore the new phenomenon. Moreover, the importance of heritage and community regarding unbranded luxury could be considered.

Practical Implications:
The new approach of unbranded luxury can be used to recreate exclusivity and distinction which has been lost due to the democratization of luxury. Hence, luxury brands will prevent losing valuable clients and uphold long-term relationships by focusing on the product, the experience and creating an aura.

Originality/Value: The new phenomenon of unbranded luxury has not yet been explored in detail. The originality of this paper derives from providing a definition and exploring the phenomenon via case studies. It is the first to offer a managerial framework guiding luxury brand managers applying the new approach.

Keywords: Luxury, Unbranded, Conspicuous Consumption, Exclusivity, Logo, Symbol, Discretion

Paper Type: Research paper

Introduction

"Less is more"
Browning, 1855

The attraction to luxury is deeply anchored in human nature (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Since the beginning of time, luxury has been a way of elevating oneself to other dimensions. The Egyptians used luxury goods to transport the dead to another world. They embalmed the dead, placed them in sarcophaguses and accompanied them with their valuable jewels to make sure they would be accepted in the next life. These practices were only reserved to the elites, such as Pharaohs and High Priests (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). However, over time the luxurious techniques spread throughout all levels of hierarchies which led to the democratization of luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

A similar trend can be identified in present society. Luxury is not only reserved to the upper class but became available to the masses due to an increasing income (Harvard Business Review, 2015). Luxury goods are nowadays purchased to display the recently achieved wealth to others and hereby, visible logos are used as a support, expressing the ability to afford well-known luxury brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Eckhardt, G. M., Belk, R. W. & Wilson, J. A., 2015). The original clientele disapprove of this shift since they no longer feel exclusive. For them, luxury goods decrease in value by becoming ubiquitous (Eckardt et al. 2015). This leads to the emergence of a new phenomenon, aiming at restoring discretion and going back to the fundamentals. A certain clientele turns away from obviously displaying their wealth with the possession of luxury goods and appreciate 'discreet luxury' (Berger & Ward, 2010; interview, October 5, 2017).
Consequently, luxury brands must rethink their strategy to react to the change in consumption and to recreate exclusivity. Therefore, brands have started to transfer the emphasis from the symbol to the substance of luxury goods by minimizing the visibility of logos. Thus, branding becomes less explicit which this paper defines as unbranded luxury.

This paper offers a comprehensive study of the new phenomenon, which has not yet been explored in detail. Based on literature review and conducted interviews, a definition of unbranded luxury is developed. Furthermore, the paper explores how and why this trend has evolved throughout the years, and describes the clientele attracted by an implicit branding strategy. Moreover, the study highlights the influence of this movement and the changes in consumer behavior on luxury branding. Case studies and interviews were conducted to take a closer look at luxury brands that already follow this approach. Based on the analysis and the literature review, the paper identifies several characteristics that are important in implicit branding. The study concludes by suggesting a framework that might help luxury brand managers to successfully apply this approach and target a 'new' clientele.

Literature Review

Definition of Luxury

In the following section, the concept of luxury is going to be defined to create a theoretical base for the subsequent analysis.
Luxury is a "blurry concept" (Kapferer & Bastien 2009, p.38) and it is often described in an imprecise way due to its subjectivity (Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). What one describes as luxury is not considered to be luxury by another. Cultural differences and social backgrounds lead to different perceptions and therefore, it is hard to find a universal consensus (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Nevertheless, there are multiple approaches trying to explain the concept of luxury.

First, luxury must be distinguished from premium. Even though Doyle and Stern (2006) claim that luxury arises by trading up from premium, Kapferer (2012) states that luxury is beyond, and increasing the prices does not turn a brand into a luxury brand (Nueno, J. L. & Quelch, J. A., 1998; Kapferer

& Bastien, 2009). Instead, luxury is the most possible extreme of the combination of several components such as design, communication, price and distribution that would separately not be adequate to define luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2012).

Secondly, luxury is determined by an ambivalent nature. It includes a social and an individual dimension (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, Heine, 2012).

Luxury for Others - Social Stratification

The word 'luxury' originates in the Latin word *luxatio* which means distance (Kapferer, 2012). With the possession of luxury goods individuals create social stratification. Luxury signals a hierarchical difference and is desirable because it elevates the consumer to the top of the social hierarchy (Veblen, 1899). This can be supported by Bourdieu (1979) who claims that the consumption of products can create a symbolic distance between certain groups. Luxury functions like a social mark that depicts the belonging to a superior class, chosen according to the owner's dreams (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

Luxury for Oneself – Personal Pleasure

Even though luxury is "influenced by the social and cultural environment … [it] remains highly personal" (Kapferer & Bastien 2012, p.20). Luxury encompasses a heavily hedonistic and individual component. It provides the owner with personal pleasure and embodies a dream of exception (Kapferer & Bastien 2009; Truong, 2010; Heine, 2012).

Summarized, luxury is for oneself and for others, and there is a strong connection between luxury, the individual and the society. Therefore, luxury can be described as a social phenomenon with a strong human attribute.

The Importance of the Brand

"There is no luxury without brands"
Kapferer & Bastien 2009, p.116

In 1988, Belk stated that people create their social identity by purchasing branded objects that define their extended selves (Belk, 1988). Veblen (1899) supports this by claiming that people consume and choose products in order to communicate certain characteristics and signal their desired identity. Thus, consumption is driven by a symbolic meaning which does not derive from the product itself. Instead, these emotional associations are added by the brand (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998; Onkonkwo, 2009; Heine, 2012) which therefore becomes an integral element of the luxury product. Consumers may even choose the brand before the product (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

The symbolic power which can be gained through creativity, status, heritage and quality (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) makes a luxury brand unique and hard to imitate (Heine, 2012; Kapferer, 2012).

With consideration to the given definition of luxury, it can be added that a luxury brand serves two functions. It provides personal pleasure and moreover, creates elevation since it enables recognition and distinguishability.

The Importance of the Logo

As previously mentioned, consumers want to be recognized in a certain way. However, consumption itself is not enough to create recognition (Berger & Ward, 2010). A certain degree of visibility regarding the purchased objects is necessary, and "brands assist the signaling process through visible logos and explicit patterns" (Berger & Ward, 2010). A logo or label can be defined as "a symbol or other small design adopted by an organization to identify its products (…)" (Dictionary, O. E., 2017). Kapferer & Bastien state that labels "re-updated the function of what was called 'étiquette' at the court of French kings Louis XIII and Louis XIV: an obligation to expenditure and show" (2009, p.86).

For luxury brands the logo is an important part of their identity. It supports the brand and enables its recognition from a distance. Hence, larger logos facilitate the communication of the desired identity and the ideal self (Berger & Ward, 2010). By obviously portraying the logo, the owner can prove power and the ability to afford luxury, and consequently

creates a distance towards others that do not have access to luxury brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Berger & Ward, 2010). The label functions as a 'social seal' marking a rank and displaying it to the public (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

It must be mentioned that luxury products display their labels to a different extent (Berger & Ward, 2010). Looking at luxury brands in the market, the more expensive the collection of a brand, the smaller the brands label, and the less explicit the branding (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Berger & Ward, 2010).

Managing a Luxury Brand

Due to the specialty of luxury brands, traditional marketing and branding strategies cannot be applied (Okonkwo, 2009). Managing a luxury brand requires a different way of thinking. It does not only include the management of a high quality product, but must consider the intangible values that go beyond the object: the brand's aura (Kapferer, 2017).

Both, the tangible and intangible components are embedded in the brand identity, which should be the center of luxury brand management since it contributes to the creation of the clients' own identity (Belk, 1988; Kapferer, 2017). Luxury brands must remain true to their core (Kapferer & Bastien, 2015) in order to fulfill their main task which is creating uniqueness and exclusivity (Okonkwo, 2009). The brand must make the owner feel special by being the only one owning the brand, and therefore excluding the others. If exclusivity is not present it might lead to the brand's devaluation (Kapferer & Bastien, 2015).

In order to generate this exclusive feeling, several characteristics must be evaluated while managing a luxury brand. Based on Dubois, Laurent and Czellar (2001), Heine (2012) composed six criteria that must be carefully considered.

First, the *price* must be high. Pricing is heavily correlated to social stratification and thus, enables the brand to mark the gap and gain pricing power (Okonkwo, 2009; Kapferer &

Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2012). Compared to premium brands, luxury brands do not justify their price. The magic encapsulated in luxury brands, and the conveyed feeling of elevation are sufficient enough to trigger a purchase (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). The second characteristic is *quality* (Onkonkwo, 2009; Heine, 2012). For a luxury brand, the physical product matters profoundly and a suprior quality must be sought (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Thirdly, *aesthetic* is a major criterion. Heine (2012) claims that the product must embrace a world of elegance and finesse. Another important aspect is *rarity*. Luxury brands must not follow a mass production logic in order to appear hardly accessible and scarce (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008; Heine, 2012). Distribution channels must be strategically located and selective (Okonkwo, 2009). Besides, heavy advertising diminishes the brand and its aura (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Kapferer, 2017). Luxury brands should not communicate to sell because the reference to monetary value suggests that there is nothing more to say about the brand (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). On the contrary, the benefits of the product, and the message behind it must be conveyed in a subtle and artistic way (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). The fifth criterion is *extraordinariness*. Brands should appear unique and offer the unexpected (Heine, 2002). In addition, luxury brands must provide a multisensory experience to enable consumers to 'live the brand' and immerge into another world (Heine, 2012). Purchasing a luxury product should be like finding the 'temple' and, in the end own the masterpiece. Lastly, *symbolism* is mentioned (Heine, 2012) which will not be discussed in detail, since it was addressed previously.

Considering the given criteria, it can be noticed that popular luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Dolce & Gabbana and Michael Kors tend to ignore some of the basic principles (Rein, 2011; Mulholland, 2012). Heavy promotional activities and the proliferation of stores lead to an omnipresence of the brand, conflicting with the principle of rarity.

The Emergence of a New Phenomenon

Looking at the current luxury market, a trend towards smaller logos and a more implicit branding can be recognized. A specific clientele increasingly demands discreet luxury (Eckhardt et al. 2015; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2012). In order to understand this change of mindset, it is relevant to examine the past.

Before the 19th century, luxury was secluded to the elite. Only those who were wealthy enough, and had the affinity with luxury were in possession of lavish goods (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). This changed as the industrial revolution in the late 18th century gave way to the rise of living standards, reduced societal gaps, and led to an increase in consumer spending. Moreover, the increase in female power as well as the development of mass communication, have made luxury accessible and identifiable at an alarmingly rapid pace (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Heine, 2012). Luxury has become omnipresent.

Another driver of the upcoming phenomenon is the rising popularity of accessories in the luxury market, which permits 'access via series' (Harvard Business Review, 2015; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Besides, high-grade counterfeits entered the market (Harvard Business Review, 2015), possibilities to rent luxury products such as fashion pieces or cars arose (The Economist, 2005), and designers of luxury brands created collections for mass retailers (Harvard Business Review, 2015). All this has led to the democratization of luxury. A broader consumer base could elevate themselves without being truly wealthy or of a higher status (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Eckardt et al. 2015). Clients who have not been confronted with the luxury concept now have access to an array of luxury products. For them, the brand functions as a catalyst helping to identify luxury by referring to the brand name and to visual signals (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). By exhibiting the logo of the brand, the masses are able to pretend to belong to the elite. The phenomenon of conspicuous consumption emerged. Veblen describes it as "(...) a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure" (1899, p.57). This type of consumption aims at enhancing one's social prestige and is closely connected to the exposition of highly visible logos. Heine (2012) states that quality and performance become less relevant whereas large-scale logos and identifiable symbols gain importance.

The Switch to Inconspicuous Consumption

The possession of luxury brands was no longer an indicator of wealth and social class. (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Eckhardt et al. 2015). The signal value of brands decreased since they were not able to serve their function of social stratification anymore (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). The elite could not distinguish itself from the masses which ultimately resulted in a loss of interest (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

Consequently, the upper end market has rejected conspicuous consumption (Eckhardt et al. 2015) and has switched towards inconspicuous consumption (Berger & Ward, 2010). The elite now cares less about the logo and favors discreetly branded luxury products (Eckardt et al. 2015). Patrick De Kerchove, owner of an exclusive concept store in Switzerland noticed this change among a certain clientele, looking for un-stamped items of extreme quality (interview, October 5, 2017).

Turning away from conspicuous consumption, the elite sets itself apart from the 'nouveaux riches', and the masses (Eckhardt et al., 2015). The vice president of Barneys supports this statement as follows. "[It's about] expression through details, exquisite materials and things that are not so identifiable." (Shi, 2011). Moreover, Emanuele Molina, president of Valextra, an Italian luxury company claims that the upper class has "found satisfaction in rediscovering private luxury" (2011 cited in Shi, 2011). Hence, luxury is becoming more personal than social and a trend towards uniqueness and individuality can be observed (Eckardt et al. 2015).

The Clientele of Unbranded Luxury

The following paragraph takes a closer look at the clientele favouring implicit branding.

According to Kapferer & Bastien (2009) the luxury clientele can be divided into consumers that are more sensitive to the logo, and consumers that are more sensitive to the product. The authors hereby distinguish between four different luxury consumers as illustrated below.
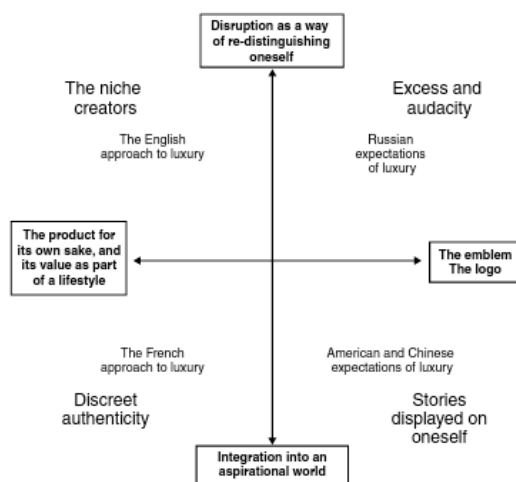

Figure 1: Kapferer & Bastien, 2009

Kapferer & Bastien (2009) state that the attitude towards logo size depends on consumer wealth and status. This paper focuses mainly on the bottom left quadrant including the clientele which possess both, high status and wealth. Kapferer & Bastien (2009) define it as the French approach to luxury where the consumer worships discreet authenticity. They intend to hide their wealth and do not feel the urge to prove their status to others. For them it is crucial to keep their rank among the like-minded (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). These consumers concur that "[l]uxury should be visible in itself, just by the sake of your own education in recognizing it" (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012, p.121). Those consumers appreciate authentic products and "are sensitive to the intangibles, the intensity of a rare, shared moment" (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.120). Patrick De Kerchove states that "the typical consumer of un-branded luxury goods …[is] eco-friendly,

attracted to quality and the process that goes behind the creation of an item and probably an art-lover. He would be discrete and elegant, for sure." (interview, October 5, 2017).

To a certain extent, the clientele is also situated at the top left quadrant, since it wants to display its individuality and separate itself from others (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

Concluding, being wealthy and able to afford a luxury good is not enough (Berger & Ward, 2010). The clientele must have the competence and taste to detect real luxury. Therefore, they need a certain cultural capital to be able to acknowledge the product at its true value (Bourdieu, 1979; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). The cultural capital is made up of social assets such as cultural knowledge which differs from people within different classes (Bourdieu, 1979). People sharing the same essential knowledge are able to "decode the meaning of subtle signals that facilitate communication with others 'in the know'" (Berger & Ward, 2010). These 'subtle signals' enable identification in a more understated manner. They are difficult to be recognized by the masses and therefore, harder to imitate (Berger & Ward, 2010). Hence, the elites can remain among their peers (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

Considering the subtle signals, it can be noticed that conspicuous consumption still exists within like-minded consumers who are able to recognize and value the brand's features (Berger & Ward, 2010).

As a conclusion it can be said that cultural capital propels preference. As Teil (2005 cited in Kapferer & Bastien, 2009) suggests, luxury encapsulates a dual qualification, combining the component of wealth and the ability to understand authenticity and value true luxury.

Market Reaction

The switch of the upper class' consumption patterns creates challenges in the field of brand management. How should luxury brands be managed in the future? Must they adapt to the new trend. How can a brand be managed inconspicuously? How can they create

uniqueness and exclusivity without relying on the strength of their logo?

Recently, luxury brands started to decrease the size of their logos and made them less visible (Harvard Business Review, 2015). Brands focus more on the product itself; its tailoring, fabric, and relationship with the consumer (Crabtree, 2016). The brand identity is becoming more important than the logo. The brand Bottega Veneta, showing no label on its products already proves that the strategy can be successful (Nadeau, 2007). Hermes also reacted and launched a less conspicuous brand in China. It is called Shiang Xia and targets the elite trying to distinguish itself from the masses that are showing off with blatant logos (Harvard Business Review, 2015).

Defining the New Phenomenon

Concluding the literature review, the phenomenon can be defined as follows. Unbranded luxury is a relatively new phenomenon emerging in the luxury sector. An increasing amount of luxury brands follow an implicit branding strategy by shifting away from exhibiting big logos on their products. The focus therefore lies more on the inherent qualities of the product itself. Luxury becomes discrete and is only recognized by consumers sharing a similar cultural capital. It is not about exposing wealth in an obvious way. Exclusivity that was lost as soon as luxury became affordable is recreated in a different way.

This new trend of unbranded luxury is on the rise (Eckhardt et al. 2015). Even in countries such as China, where consumers typically favor big logos, a slow movement towards smaller labels can be detected (Eckardt et al. 2015). Harvard Business Review (2015) even forecasts this to become a global phenomenon. This highlights the importance of the paper taking a closer look at a relatively unexplored trend.

Methodology

A base understanding of the topic was examined through literature to gain knowledge and forethought to the conceptualisations of luxury. The study sought credible theoretical information, collected through a variety of peer-reviewed academic journals. Great consideration was taken into the review of the relevance of the topic, and date of publication. The vast majority of these journals were obtained through the extensive library offered by Lund University's online databases, for example, 'Ebscohost'.

A deductive approach was used to draw upon previously established research of the traditional marketing of luxury brands, in order to underpin the introduction of unbranded luxury. The most appropriate research design to assess the new phenomena of unbranded luxury, was the examination of three case studies, all with a focus on implicit branding. Hereby, the paper examined the brands 'The Row', 'Diptyque' and 'Jacques Marie Mage'. Secondary sources such as websites were used to examine the company.

In addition, primary data was collected via interviews, to explore both, a business and a consumer perspective (Bryman & Ball, 2015). The study adopted a qualitative approach (Bryman & Ball, 2015). Due to the exploratory nature of this topic, this was the most adequate method of research (Mason, 2002). Since there is no definitive answer regarding the size of a sample (Mason, 2002) two interviews and one questionnaire were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to identify different perspectives on unbranded luxury (Mason, 2002). These were held either in person, or via telephone. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled specific topics to be covered, but allowed flexibility for the interviewees to elaborate, providing more detailed insights otherwise unknown (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The first interviewee owns an exclusive concept store in Switzerland. The second interview was conducted face-to-face with a

consumer regularly purchasing luxury goods. Both interviews covered an array of questions linked to the subject topic. The third interviewee was provided with a questionnaire due to personal time constraints, preventing the execution of an interview. However, this questionnaire has not been discussed, due to the respondent's inability to decode the questions as expected (Foddy, 1993).

Each interview was held in the interviewee's native language, and later re-written in English by the authors in order to avoid language barriers *(Appendix A)*.

Case studies

In the following part, this paper assesses three case studies of luxury brands that follow the trend of discreet luxury as defined above. The aim is to examine their branding strategy and develop managerial implications. This is necessary since the phenomenon is unexplored and the literature does not yet explore this topic in detail.

Jacques Marie Mage

Jacques Marie Mage is a design-centered luxury eyewear brand based in California and founded in 2001, by the French-born designer Jerome Mage. Each pair of glasses is considered as a "collectible spectacle" (Jacques Marie Mage, 2017a); a piece of art that the owner will keep forever. The products are offered at approximately one hundred carefully selected retailers such as the famous exclusive concept-store 'Colette' in Paris.

The brand's logo depicts the founder's initials on a medallion. However, only historical motifs are displayed on the glasses (Jacques Marie Mage, 2017a).

The materials used to produce the items are selected on a very strict basis. They must be rare, precious, sustainable, colorful and of extreme high quality, such as acetate or gold polished titanium (Jacques Marie Mage, 2017a). Regarding the shape, it is original, geometrically perfect and reconfigures the artistic movements of previous centuries such as the art deco period (Jacques Marie Mage,

2017a). Each piece is designed in Los Angeles and hand-crafted in Italy or Japan, on a micro-production basis; around 450 pieces per model. The company targets clients with a "discerning tastes" (Jacques Marie Mage, 2017a). Besides, the brand offers entirely customized products and personalized service. The brand owns a showroom reserved for a certain clientele located in an exclusive and historical building in Los Angeles (Jacques Marie Mage, 2017a).

Moreover, individuality and uniqueness are core values of the brand. "Individuality is an inalienable right, an idea that demands its own unique expressions. Our mission at J.M.M. is to empower people to make personalized impressions, by offering spectacles that are unparalleled in their commitment to craft and creativity" (Jacques Marie Mage, 2017a).

Furthermore, ethical considerations are highly encompassed in the brand DNA. The production process follows fair and ethical methods and the percentage of the brand's revenue is allocated to charitable causes (Jacques Marie Mage, 2017a).

Alongside the emphasis on the product's features and its fineness, the brand offers a unique experience. Entering the website and the social media channels, the client is not just given the opportunity of buying the product but can enter a world lauded with imagery connected to dream and art. Some mysterious pictures do not even portray the product itself but display paintings, landscapes or still life (Jacques Marie Mage, 2017b).

Diptyque

Since the antiquity, perfume has been a luxury product; first to communicate with the Gods and then to enhance the queen's beauty. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Haute Couture houses identified the profitability of fragrances, promoted through brand ambassadors (Le Guérer, 2017).

However, when looking at the luxury brand pyramid presented by Kapferer (2012), it is obvious that cosmetics are concentrated at the bottom and are therefore just slightly endowed with the authentic aura of the brand. Buying a

fragrance from Chanel or Dior is the most affordable item you can get from these luxury brands. The logo is depicted on the bottle but what people actually show to others is the smell, nowadays highly recognizable by the masses (The Telegraph, 2016).

Diptyque is an independent brand offering candles and perfumes founded in Paris in 1961. It was established by three friends, all from the world of fine arts and passionate about design and beauty (Diptyque Paris, 2017). The brand does not have a specific logo. Instead, it often uses a medallion from the 18th century displaying the number 34 which represents the address of the first shop they opened in the famous neighborhood Le Marais, Paris (Diptyque Paris, 2017). Therefore, a considerable emphasis is set on the origin of the product and the "Made in France". However, the illustrations of the medallion are adapted to the specificities of each fragrance and are not even visible on the private collections (Diptyque Paris, 2017).
The brand operates in its own stores in Paris, London, New-York, Tokyo and San Francisco and moreover, works in partnership with carefully selected retailers such as AEGON-AEGON in Lausanne, Switzerland. Even though the brand only offers limited number of stores and selects the locations mindfully, it has rapidly expanded in the past years (Leboucq, 2016).

Furthermore, the brand aims at providing a very unusual sophisticated collection of unisex personal fragrances. When entering the shop, the personnel explains that buying a Diptyque product is an experience; a multiple steps process of understanding the complex composition of the fragrance to finally liking and buying it (interview, October 3, 2017). Indeed, the chemistry of the scents differ from the classical palette perfumery. The client is confronted to a new kind of scent and must learn to appreciate it. (Diptyque Paris, 2017). The raw materials selected to formulate Diptyque's creations are noble, rare and precious. The different components are sought by experts from all over the world and must

fulfill specific criteria such as: being ethically produced with the utmost care (Diptyque Paris, 2017). In addition, the containers are made by the Cristallerie of Saint-Louis in France (Diptyque Paris, 2017). Due to the fact that the smell of a person is a very unique and personal, the private collections are produced in very limited series and it takes more than four years to develop them (Diptyque Paris, 2017).
Social media is the only channel used by the brand to promote its creations. It has never been associated with any brand ambassador. Due to its name 'Diptyque' which represents a two panels painting and the backgrounds of its founders, the brand highlights its close relationship to art, design and graphics. This is noticeable on the website as well as on its Instagram account (Diptyque, 2017).

The Row

The Row is a US based, luxury fashion retailer established in 2006 by two American actresses. It was originally intended as a project to design the perfect, ageless t-shirt (Smith, 2014). The owners Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen have now transformed the brand by creating a sense of fine and timeless fashion through their designs, with a focus on high quality fabrics and impeccable fit. The Row poses an art deco stylized logo displaying overlapping letters, 'T' and 'R' as a depiction of their brand name. The simplicity for the logo itself grants the brand anonymity. Although in possession of a logo, this graphical representation of the brand is not displayed on any form of their clothing, and only displayed in a minimized way, on one of their products (Mower, 2011). Co-owner Mary-Kate Olsen stated in an interview with the Wall Street Journal "Our whole point was if it's good product, it will sell without a label or a logo or a face behind it and it worked" (Smith, 2014). 'The Row' has chosen to avoid displaying their logo on its website (The Row, n.d.), only using it as a visual representation of the brand on social media platforms such as Instagram (The Row, 2017).

It is the style of the brand's design which evokes elegance, using material and well-proportioned shape to make their collection distinctive (Mower, 2011). The use of subtle colour palettes and luxurious materials demonstrate their appeal to the sophisticated women, separating them from the masses as the clothing portrays a sense of sublime perfection (Singer, 2017). The discrete aesthetic offered to their clientele is pulled from the heritage of Savile Row (Mower, 2011) who have inspired the brand to create luxurious textiles, which feel like they are made-to-measure. It is clear that The Row as a brand is unboastful. This feeling is carried through all of their products (Holgate, 2016). It is customization that creates a different and memorable experience (Fridlander, 2014).

On their Instagram account, the brand demonstrates artistry; the blending of art and the fine details of fashion, alternating between posting artistic impressions by famous creators and imagery of their collections (The Row, 2017).

With only 2 stores globally, The Row offers a unique experience transcending customers from fashion to art, to interiors and back again (Holgate, 2016). There is a feeling of intimacy, by creating a space which is reminiscent of the feeling of home (Schneier, 2016). This feeling is created by mixing a composition of fine art, furniture, interiors and ceramics, all blended together using a neutral palette harmonising these mixed spaces. Consumers are able to explore and introduce themselves to the collection at their own pace (Holgate, 2016).

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the brands that follow the approach of unbranded luxury has made it possible to highlight recurring elements present in their strategy. Jacques Marie Mage, The Row and Diptyque go back to the fundamental characteristics, which have been ignored by many other luxury brands as mentioned in the literature review. The high price range question is not discussed in the previous assessment of the brands since it is not a main criterion of the new type of luxury.

The first commonality of all brands is that there is no considerable advertising and no visual identifier anymore. Moreover, the brands do not leverage on the popularity of their founders or brand ambassadors. This can be confirmed by Kapferer (2017), who states that only when the creators disassociate themselves from the brand, luxury is enabled. The brands create exclusivity in a different way as explained below.

Emphasis on the Product Features

Patrick De Kerchove asserts that "luxury is now focusing again on the object … the craftsmanship, know-how, and value injected in the product makes it valuable even without a frame around it" (interview, October 5, 2017). The logo exists but is not obviously displayed on the items. Besides subtle visual signals are used as cues of quality and preciosity, that only a few people can recognize such as the cut, the shape, the material and the details. Concerning the intrinsic value of the elements comprised in the product, the emphasis is put on scarcity, mere authenticity, quality and sustainability. Each of these brands highly value craftsmanship. The designers gain the status of artists applying their know-how to serve the brand and transform its products into masterpieces.

Authenticity and magic of the brand

A sophisticated inconspicuous brand reflects complexity (Eckhardt et al., 2014). The magic conveyed by these luxury brands derives from heritage, tradition, creativity, and authenticity. What makes the brand so exclusive is the halo of mystery around it. Nothing is obvious, the brand in itself triggers curiosity and imagination attracting the clients. The magic of the aura can be experienced in stores and showrooms which differ in the way that they do not emphasize the product but create an

atmosphere. The stores can be compared to art galleries or even temples.

Discreet Communication

Curiosity and excitement are not created by constantly pushing the brand and its product. The brand adopts a discreet way of communicating to its target. Patrick De Kerchove (interview, October 5, 2017) states that it is both discretion and elegance which drive consumer towards luxury. Typical heavy advertising methods are considered inappropriate and may ruin the aura of the brand. According to Théry Schir (interview, October 3, 2017) massive advertising, as well as the use of multiple brand ambassadors has become tedious and confusing. Finding the Instagram account of a specific brand is, once again, a deliberate act of the consumer voluntarily finding its way to the brand.

Personal pleasure, elevation and uniqueness

Théry Schir states that "you distinguish yourself by being one of the few who know the brand, who know that the material is supreme and produced in ethical conditions" (interview, October 3, 2017). Possessing an item of a luxury brands should lead to a true personal satisfaction since the client is able to value the product's mere quality. Personal pleasure is a main component of the consumption of luxury. This has been confirmed by Patrick De Kerchove, claiming that consumers "want luxury for … [themselves] and not to show off. It's way more satisfying" (interview, October 5, 2017). Furthermore, the offer of customization enables the clients to feel unique and exclusive. This feeling is strengthened by a personalized service in the store. Patrick De Kerchove states "service is a fundamental part of the creation of exclusivity and uniqueness" (interview, October 5, 2017). Even though he only represents the luxury brands by selling them, he feels responsible for honoring them while creating a close relationship with his clients, and advise them personally. Feeling unique allows the clients to distinguish themselves from the masses. The feeling of

uniqueness is strengthened by the fact that the items are produced in very limited series. Moreover, they are only available in a few stores. Searching for the product, and having the taste and knowledge to appreciate its tangible and intangible value are part of the selection process. Furthermore, only people belonging to the same community will be able to recognize the brand. The masses are excluded. This exclusion is strengthened by the use of art, design and abstract imagery which creates entry barriers due to the fact that only a clientele with a certain cultural capital is able to understand the message (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, consumption is not completely inconspicuous. However, it is not about distinguishing from the masses anymore but to about being recognized by like-minded consumers as discussed previously.

The findings of the study confirm the suggestions given in the publication from Harvard Business Review (2015, p.27). In order to be less conspicuous a brand must focus on the "experience, artistry, or utility (...) [;] emphasizing the artisans behind its products, its tasteful stores, and its high-quality customer service". "[T;]acit cues (...) transport brands into different contexts and spaces, allowing for greater private pleasure as well as brand transcendence and an ability to demonstrate cultural capital (Eckardt et al., 2015)".

Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, the application of the new approach can be of interest since it can recreate the exclusivity of luxury brands that has been lost due to the democratization of luxury. Based on the previous studies, the following model has been developed. It is a first step towards a guiding framework helping managers to apply an implicit branding strategy.

Exclusivity is the aim of the branding strategy and is therefore situated in the center of the framework as illustrated in figure two. In order to create exclusivity, the three criteria of

authenticity, artistry and the creation of an experience are of high importance. They must be considered while looking at the brand, the product, the communication and the clients.
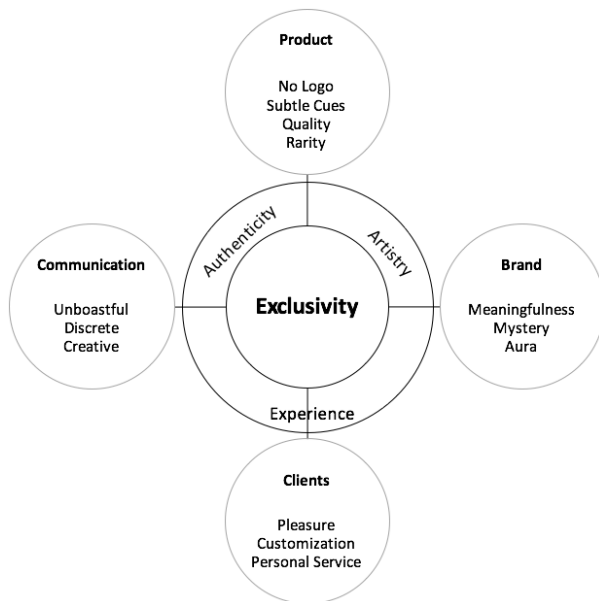

Figure 2: Author's Own

Considering the outer circles, the following steps must be taken care of:

Product

> ➢ Reduce or hide the logo and play on codes and subtle signals
> ➢ Emphasize quality and preciosity
> ➢ Limit the production and the number of stores

Brand

> ➢ Brand around artistry
> ➢ Create barriers to access the brand
> ➢ Create mystery around the brand
> ➢ Be meaningful and responsible
> ➢ Make it rare

Communication

> ➢ Soften promotion; do not push the product
> ➢ Do not use a brand ambassador

Client

> ➢ Customization - make luxury personal
> ➢ Create personal pleasure
> ➢ Offer a personal service

Conclusion

According to Patrick De Kerchove the unbranded luxury trend will coexist with others, evolving in parallel but staying narrow and only perceptible by a few (interview, October 5, 2017). However, relying on clients that are merely interested in the logo might lead to a high fluctuation of customers since they are unfaithful and do not appreciate the brand's identity, its culture and its aura (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). A luxury brand's exclusivity must derive apart from the logo in order to create a long-term relationship with clients interested in the products' quality and the substance rather than the symbol. However, this approach requires a target group that has status, wealth and obtains the cultural capital to worship minimalism and discreet luxury (Wilson et al., 2015). Otherwise, using this approach might lead to the misidentification among customers due to implicit branding. They might consider the brand and its products to be less valuable (Berger & Ward, 2010). In addition, luxury brands must find the balance between being present enough to become profitable, and staying exclusive at the same time (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

Limitations and Future Research

The study of this paper has certain limitations. First, the developed definition of unbranded luxury has not yet been confirmed by literature. Besides, the study only examines three case studies and the findings can therefore not be generalized. Moreover, the observations cannot exclude a certain degree of subjectivity. In addition, only three interviews were conducted and none of the interviewees was managing a luxury brand that followed the approach of unbranded luxury.

In order to fully explore the new phenomenon, further research on other case studies is necessary. Besides, an interview with a brand manager of a luxury brand following an implicit branding strategy might provide a

deeper insight into the topic. Furthermore, a study of brands that used to emphasize on their logos and now turn towards implicit branding would be of interest. Another aspect that could be investigated is the importance of heritage regarding unbranded luxury. Some elements were detected in the analysis of the case studies but could not be discussed in detail. Besides, the role of the elite community could be further explored.

References

Bell, E & Bryman, A. (2015). Business Research Methods, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 15, no. 2 , pp.139-168, Available Online: https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article/15/2/139/1841428/Possessions-and-the-Extended-Self [Accessed 18 September 2017]

Berger, J. & Ward, M. (2010), "Subtle Signals of Inconspicuous Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 37, no. 4, pp. 555-569, Available Online: https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-abstract/37/4/555/1795043/Subtle-Signals-of-Inconspicuous-Consumption?redirectedFrom=fulltext [Accessed 18 September 2017]

Bourdieu, P. (1979). Distinction: A Social Critique of The Judgement of Taste. London: Routledge

Browning, R. (1855). Andrea del sarto. *Robert Browning: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, pp. 2-9. [pdf] Available at: http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/scribe/Some%20poetry%20and%20prose.pdf [Accessed 18 September 2017]

Chevalier, M., & Mazzalovo, G. (2008). Luxury Brand Management: A World of Privilege. London: John Wiley & Sons.

Crabtree, J. (2016). No logo: Why un-branded luxury goods are on the rise. Available Online: https://www.cnbc.com/2016/11/28/no-logo-why-un- branded-luxury- goods-are- on-the-rise.html [Accessed 18 September 2017]

Dictionary, O. E. (2007). Oxford English dictionary online, Available Online: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/logo [Accessed 18 September 2017]

Diptiyque (2017). Diptiyque Paris [Instagram] Available from: https://www.instagram.com/diptyque/?hl=en [Accessed 17 October 2017]

Diptyque Paris (2017). Our Story | diptyque Paris. [online] Available Online: http://www.diptyqueparis.co.uk/our-story [Accessed 17 Oct. 2017].

Doyle, P., & Stern, P. (2006). Marketing Management And Strategy. London: Pearson Education

Dubois, B. & Duquesne, P. (1993). The Market for Luxury Goods: Income Versus Culture. *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp.35-44, Available Online: http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/03090569310024530 [Accessed 21 September 2017]

Dubois, B., Laurent, G. & Czellar, S., 2001. Consumer Rapport to Luxury: Analyzing Complex and Ambivalent Attitudes. *Les Cahiers de Recherche*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp.1–56. http://www.hec.fr/var/fre/storage/original/application/5ecca063454eb4ef8227d08506a8673b.pdf [Accessed 28 September 2017]

Eckhardt, G. M., Belk, R. W. & Wilson, J. A. (2015). The Rise of Inconspicuous Consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 31, no. 7-8, pp. 807-826, Available through: LUSEM Library website http://www.lusem.lu.se/library [Accessed 2 October 2014]

Elliott, R. & Wattanasuwan, K. (1998). Brands

as Symbolic Resources for the Construction Of Identity. *International journal of Advertising*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 131-144, Available Online: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02650487.1998.11104712 [Accessed 21 September 2017]

Foody, W. (1993). Constructing Questions for Interviews and Questionnaires Theory and Practise in Social Research. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Friedlander, R. (2014). 65-Year-Old Linda Rodin on Modeling for the Olsens: 'I Was Respected for Who I Am', Available Online: http://www.elle.com/fashion/news/a15288/another-reason-to-love-the-row/ [Accessed 17 October 2017]

Harvard Business Review (2015). Luxury Branding Below the Radar. *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 93, no. 26-27. Available through: LUSEM Library website http://www.lusem.lu.se/library [Accessed 10 October 2014]

Heine, K. (2012). The Concept of Luxury Brands, [pdf] Available at: http://www.conceptofluxurybrands.com/content/20121107_Heine_The-Concept- of-Luxury-Brands.pdf [Accessed 23 September 2017]

Holgate, M. (2016). The Row's Ashley and Mary-Kate Olsen Are About to Open Their Most Beautiful Store Yet, Available Online: https://www.vogue.com/article/mary-kate-ashley-olsen-the-row-new-york-store [Accessed 17 October 2017]

Jacques Marie Mage (2017a). Jacques Marie Mage Los Angeles, Available Online: https://jacquesmariemage.com/product/193/ [Accessed 16 Oct. 2017]

Jacques Marie Mage (2017b). Jacques Marie Mage, [Instagram] Available from: https://www.instagram.com/jacquesmariemage/ [Accessed 16 Oct. 2017]

Kapferer, J. N., & Bastien, V. (2009). The Luxury Strategy. Kogan Page, London.

Kapferer, J. N., & Bastien, V. (2012). The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands, London: Kogan Page

Kapferer, J. N. (2012). The New Strategic Brand Management: Advanced Insights and Strategic Thinking, London: Kogan Page

Kapferer, J.N. & Bastien, V (2015): The Luxury Strategy. Breaking the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands. London: Kogan Page

Kapferer, J. N. (2017). Managing luxury brands, in J. N. Kapferer, J. Kernstock, T.O. Brexendorf, S. Powell, S. (eds), *Advances in Luxury Brand Management,* London*:* Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 235-249

Leboucq, V. (2016). Dytique Rajeunit Son Image et Met le Cap Sur l'Asie, Available Online: https://www.lesechos.fr/11/02/2016/lesechos.fr/021689819016_dyptique-rajeunit-son-image-et-met-le-cap-sur-l-asie.htm [Accessed 17 October 2017]

Le Guérer, A. (2017). Histoire du Parfum, Available Online: http://www.parfumeurs-createurs.org/gene/main.php?base=33 [Accessed 17 October 2017]

Mason, J. (2002). Qualitative Researching, London: SAGE Publications

Mower, S. (2011). Behind The Row: Meet Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, Available Online: https://www.vogue.com/article/mary-kate-and-ashley-olsen-balancing-act [Accessed 13 October 2017]

Mulholland, A. (2012). Michael Kors: Has The Luxury Brand Become a Victim of its Own Success, Available Online: http://www.ctvnews.ca/lifestyle/michael-kors-has-the-luxury-brand-become-a-victim-of-its-

own-success-1.2275950 [Accessed 14 October 2017]

Nadeau, B. (2007). Luxury Without Labels, Available Online: http://www.newsweek.com/luxury-without-labels-104241 [Accessed 21 September 2017]

Nueno, J. L., & Quelch, J. A. (1998). The Mass Marketing of Luxury. *Business Horizons*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 61-68, Available through: LUSEM Library website http://www.lusem.lu.se/library [Accessed 8 October 2014]

Okonkwo, U. (2009). The Luxury Brand Strategy Challenge. *Journal of brand management*, vol. 16, no. 5-6, pp. 287-289, Available through: LUSEM Library website http://www.lusem.lu.se/library [Accessed 10 October 2014]

Philipkoski, K. (2014). Label Free is The New Luxury, Available Online: https://www.forbes.com/sites/kristenphilipkos ki/2014/10/27/the-new- luxury-is- label-free/2/#19ddf799518a [Accessed 21 September 2017]

Phau, I. & Prendergast, G. (2000). Consuming Luxury Brands: The Relevance of the 'Rarity Principle'. *The Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 122-138, Available through: LUSEM Library website http://www.lusem.lu.se/library [Accessed 8 October 2014]

Rein, S. (2011). For Louis Vuitton Being Too Popular in China is Not Good, Available Online: https://www.cnbc.com/id/45282770 [Accessed 17 October 2017]

Schneier, M. (2016). Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen Make a Home for The Row in New York, Available Online: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/26/fashion/ mary-kate- olsen-ashley- olsen-the- row.html [Accessed 17 October 2017]

Shi, J. (2011). No logo – Luxury Products

Without Overt Branding are the New Mark of Exclusivity. Available Online: https://www.ft.com/content/8afe8c12-f401-11e0-b221-00144feab49a [Accessed 23 September 2017]

Singer, O. (2017). The Olsen Twins' Rules For Sartorial Success and Aspirational Elegance, Available Online: http://www.vogue.co.uk/gallery/olsen-twins-the-row- spring-summer- 2018 [Accessed 17 October 2017]

Smith, R. (2014). The Surprise Luxury Label, Available Online: https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-surprise-luxury-label-1400107473 [Accessed 17 October 2017]

Surtees, P. (2012): Luxury Brands Have Lost Their Exclusivity, *Financial Times,* 7 October Available Online: https://www.ft.com/content/46d88398-0e1e-11e2-8b92-00144feabdc0 [Accessed 12 October 2017]

The Economist (2005). Inconspicuous Consumption, Available Online: http://www.economist.com/node/5323772/prin t [Accessed 12 October 2017]

The Row (n.d.). Available Online: https://www.therow.com/about [Accessed 17 October 2017]

The Row (2017). The Row [Instagram] Available from: https://www.instagram.com/p/BaHIbASHT_X /?taken-by=therow [Accessed 17 October 2017]

The Telegraph (2016). The Most Iconic Fragrances and Perfumes of All Time, Available Online: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/beauty/tips-tutorials/iconic-fragrances-perfumes-time/charlieblue-6-100ml-edt-revlon/ [Accessed 14 October 2017]

Truong, Y. (2010). Personal Aspirations and

the Consumption of Luxury Goods. *International Journal of Market Research*, vol. 52, no. 5, pp. 653-671, Available through: LUSEM Library website http://www.lusem.lu.se/library [Accessed 10 October 2014]

Veblen, T. (1899). The Theory of the Leisure Class, London: Macmillan

APPENDIX A INTERVIEWS

Within this appendix, three interviews conducted on unbranded luxury are presented. The main focus for these interviews was to gain understanding of the meaning of unbranded luxury, from the perspective of the interviewees, who have an affinity to luxury. This is either through a personal connection, or through their working environment.

All interviews began with the following definition of un-branded luxury to enable both interviewer and interviewee to converse with the same level of understanding of the topic.

The phenomenon of unbranded luxury:
Unbranded luxury is a relatively new phenomenon emerging in the luxury sector. An increasing amount of luxury brands follow an implicit branding strategy by shifting away from exhibiting big logos on their products. The focus therefore lies more on the inherent qualities of the product itself.

From these interviews, we can see that our definition of unbranded luxury has been observed by the interviewees. It is also believed that brands decision to minimalize, or hide the logo, and refrain from over exuberant promotional activities appeals to a particular type of customer. Quality is a key determinate which is sought in luxury brands, and quality is personal. It is also demonstrated by both interviewees that money is not the main criterion which drives unbranded luxuries success, instead these brands are more reliant on creating a far-reaching feeling of the brand, "the aura" as suggested in the first interview. It is the experience the interviewees have with the brand which makes the brand itself important to the interviewee.

INTERVIEW 1 – EXCLUSIVE CONCEPT STORE OWNER – Patrick De Kerchove

This interview was conducted via telephone from Lund, Sweden on the October 5, 2017. It was conducted by telephone as a result of the interviewee being located in Lausanne, Switzerland. The conducted interview was semi-structured, but followed an outline to cover topics such as anti-branding and capture understanding of consumer characteristics of un-branded luxury. The participant gave clear answers to the questions, enabling a clear and concise interview.

Have you noticed the anti-branding movement when purchasing big luxury brands?
>Yes, I noticed this in a certain layer of my clientele. Others choose to buy stamped articles [which are] obviously related to a well-known brand. Especially teenagers and middle-class people. It is funny because in parallel to this anti-branding movement, you have this very branding focused movement where two brands leverage on their names [e.g. SUPREME and LOUIS VUITTON] where the point is to notice the brand right away.

What is your personal feeling about the anti-branding movement?
>I've personally always selected and consumed unbranded items but of very high quality. To me it seems to be a sane and essential behaviour. I also think that luxury nowadays is different from what it used to be back in the days. Discretion is back on tracks and the change is palpable. Luxury is about having time, space, well-being and doing meaningful things such as consuming with a citizen mind-set.

Why do you think this movement has occurred?
>Realization of ethical issues and a pure quest for quality above all. You want luxury for yourself and not to show off. It's way more satisfying.

Do you think this approach will last in the future?
>For sure. It will coexist with other trends because todays trends are a melting pot of everything, but will remain very narrow and perceptible only by a few.

In your opinion, what drives a customer to an unbranded luxury goods?
>Elegance and discretion.

According to you, how is luxury best defined?
>Luxury is getting access to quality, sophistication and know-how, the craftsmanship.
>It is also a path to uniqueness and dream.

Is the main purpose of these un-branded brands to gain market share & increase sales? Or is it to create an exclusive community?
>Money is not the purpose in most of the cases. I have close relationships with the brands I sell in my shop because I meet a representative at least twice a year, and I can assure you that their purpose is not to make me buy more, but to make sure that I'll be a good representative of their brand aura. For the major part of the brands I distribute, the no logo is not a strategy, it's a reason of being, and of course the community created around it is very exclusive, but once again, not in a show-off way, it   is   just   different.

Do you think that the no logo approach can fit any brand?

No, some brands have their business models based on the depiction of a logo [the minimisation, or hiding of a logo].

Identifiable luxury logos are used to distinguish wearers from non-wearers: How do you think an un-branded luxury good can create distinguishability and exclusivity?

The choice of the material, color, shape, like Balenciaga and Bottega Veneta, and the cut. If you are really attracted to quality, you will notice.

Do you know the following brands?

The Row: Yes.

Jacques Marie Mage : Yes.

Diptyque : Yes I sell their perfumes in my shop

What would be the characteristics of the typical consumer of un-branded luxury goods?

Eco-friendly, attracted to quality and the process that goes behind the creation of an item and probably [an] art-lover. He would be discrete and elegant for sure.

How can a brand create excitement/involvement without advertising heavily?

It is all about the dream and quality it provides.

How do you promote your concept store in Switzerland?

By offering exclusive items of extreme quality. I mainly use social media and word of mouth to be known.

What is the best part of your selection process?

There are 3, probably the exploration part where I go everywhere to explore [an] amazing universe and discover passionate people, and the moment I have this one [mental and emotional connection] click and I fall in love with a brand or a product. I only sell things I love; they are all master-pieces to me. Also, when my clients fall in love as well, and therefore validate my choice. Service is also a fundamental part of the creation of exclusivity and uniqueness.

How do you choose the products you want to distribute?

As I said before, I love every single thing I sell, I would be totally incapable of selling something that is not my taste. I also select responsible brands with a purpose.

Do you think luxury is subjective?

Absolutely, and it would be boring either way [otherwise].

Do you agree with the definition of unbranded luxury that we mentioned in the beginning?

Yes, totally, your topic is fascinating, I'm glad people your age are interesting in this type of questionings.

INTERVIEW 2 - CLIENT INTERVIEW – Théry Schir

This interview was conducted face-to-face in Geneva, Switzerland on the October 3, 2017 and took approximately 60 minutes. The interview was conducted in a café in Geneva which created a relaxed atmosphere. As with the above, this interview was semi-structured, but followed an outline to cover topics such as whether un-branded luxury is a trend with longevity, and asks whether the consumer is familiar with the brands chosen for the case studies researched.

Have you noticed the anti-branding movement when purchasing big luxury brands?
>I noticed that new luxury brands have come up with a different approach, yes. Well-known luxury brands such as Paul Smith were already playing on that concept of not showing any logo, or [atleast] in a very discrete way.

What is your personal feeling about the anti-branding movement?
>I actually like it because it enables people to really care about the real quality of the product. In my opinion, showing off with a logo has become vulgar, because it creates even more distinction between people, whereas wearing a quality product without a logo is just something that is pleasant for the person who's actually wearing it. No comparison with others but focus on myself.

Why do you think this movement has occurred?
>The past years, the focus has been put on feeling good as a person and not compared to others. Most well-known luxury brands can now be purchased by almost everybody and this creates disinterest from people coming from high society. It is probably a bit selfish and show-off, but belonging to a mass trend has become less attractive. Personally, I've been fed up with massive advertising and the use of 10 different brand ambassador every season.

Do you think this approach will last in the future?
>There will always be brands focusing on logos because they sell, and [these brands can] make profit but more and more brands are trying to focus on being discrete and to attract the consumers for other reasons. This 'un-branded' mindset is already shared by many people and, in my opinion, it might last because it is relevant.

In your opinion, what drives a customer towards an unbranded luxury goods?
>Pride of wearing a crafted good and seeking good quality and authenticity as well as, the mystery behind it, because people don't know that what you're wearing is a special good. It is a new way to make yourself different. The fact that you really have to 'look for' the product, because it is only sold in a few shops, makes the purchase even more attractive, because once you found it, you really feel like you deserve it.

According to you, how is luxury best defined?
>Knowledge, amazing quality, rareness, and taste.

Is the main purpose of these un-branded brands to gain market share & increase sales or is it to create an exclusive community?

In my opinion, it is supposed to remain niche market in order to remain unique otherwise it's just another ephemeral trend. Feeling part of a small community 'who knows' is pleasant to me.

Do you think that the no logo approach can fit any brands?
No, as I said before, I think that it is meant to remain a niche market. Some brands have built their reputation [image] on the visible logo [e.g. Lacoste and Louis Vuitton Monogram].

Identifiable luxury logos are able to distinguish wearers from non-wearers: How do you think an un-branded luxury good can create distinguishability and exclusivity?
You distinguish yourself by being one of the few who know the brand, who know that the material is supreme and produced in ethical conditions.
I think those brands create a small community of interested, and curious people who want to stand out for themselves, and appreciate quality products.

I like the personalized service I receive from luxury shops, the atmosphere and the quality.

What would be the characteristics of the typical consumer of unbranded luxury goods?
Curiosity, Knowledge about the field in general [the material, cut, scent], open-mindedness, originality, and the desire to stand out without showing-off.

All that can be linked with your social background but not necessarily, I think that some people just have the feeling to be able to appreciate beautiful things.

What would be the benefits of buying unbranded VS branded?
Discretion, different and personally satisfying feeling. An element of uniqueness, the pleasure to wear things you like and in which you feel good and different.

How can a brand create excitement/involvement without advertising heavily?
Social-media, exceptional service and direct contact.

What is the best part of your purchasing process?
Looking for a place where I could find the item, discovering it and discussing with the sales people because you can tell how passionate they are.

For a luxury brand are physical no logo, high quality products, enough to sustain a successful brand?
Success doesn't mean the creation of a massive group with a huge portfolio, success to me is getting enough revenue to keep on creating new collections and expand a bit but not going global.

Do you know the following brands?
The Row: Yes my uncle designed their shop in LA, but unfortunately they only offer womens clothes so far and as a student, I could not afford to purchase their products.
Jacques Marie Mage : Yes, I have a pair of their sunglasses

Diptyque : Yes, I have have several of their fragrances and I really enjoy going to there shop in Paris. The personnel is very attentive to the client's satisfaction. They look for what could suit you the best while explaining that liking Diptyque's fragrances demands involvement.

Do you think luxury is subjective?

Yes totally, sometimes for me luxury is way more simple than buying expensive clothes or a perfume. Getting a cool and cheap item in a flea market or a piece of Art by a totally unknow artist are other kinds of luxury, but once again, it makes you feel unique.

Do you agree with the definition of unbranded luxury that we mentioned in the beginning?

Yes but you should also mention that price is not necessarily a good indicator of quality.

INTERVIEW 3 – GENERAL BRAND MANAGER OF CHANEL IN CHINA – Andy Hou

Have you noticed the anti-branding movement?
Not really, but I observed ore and more personalization, mix and match with the different brands.

What is your personal feeling about the anti-branding movement?
Consumers are smarter and know what do they want, not really see the movement coming up, but I see people have more choices via internet and WeChat.

Why do you think this movement has occurred?
Not really noticed in Asia so far! People are still very brand oriented, but to certain extend to smaller and niche brands.

Do you think this approach will last in the future?
I hope not, because, I will lose my job... but it's an evolution, people will have more choices and way to consume... not only on branded thing! Therefore, this industry (FMCG or luxury) represents billion and billions USD. It won't die easily.

In your opinion, what drives a customer to buy an unbranded luxury good?
Price, quality, trend, channel

Why would a luxury brand choose the strategic approach of moving away from big logos? Niche market (no name as brand is a brand itself) Brand represent the identity of the product and its quality...

According to you, what is luxury?
Tradition/heritage, High price, Good quality, And innovative product or service

Do you think that the no logo approach can fit any brand?
Not really, it's a process and evolution... follow the life cycle! Today, big name's problem is how do they communicate and take the market share.

Identifiable luxury logos enable the owners to distinguish themselves: How do you think a less branded luxury good can create distinguishability and exclusivity?
There are big names and small market share's company or vice versa. Not really a problem, just a company strategy, building a brand requires time, financial investment and quality product or service. It comes with time to build the reputation.

What would be the characteristics of the typical consumer of unbranded luxury goods?
Hard to identify, but there some brands are under-valued, due to lack of investment and sufficient advertising. Those customers are able to identify them because they do have time, highly educated, don't won't to be associated with popular brands. Still very niche.

Do you think luxury is subjective?
Not for me.

Do you agree with the definition of unbranded luxury as mentioned in the beginning?
I don't really know … I don't it applies to what I have been working on since 2012.