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Luxury and Social Media: an incompatible union?

The case of BURBERRY

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Introduction

It is no secret that social media have drastically changed communications in the last decade. They are interactive platforms that can take different forms (blogs, social networks or websites) and are used to create and share content (articles, videos or photos) with people all over the world. Although it is clear that they have revolutionized communications altogether, social media were a real turning point for well-established brands as well as small businesses. They have become a new link between a brand and their customers, but also a quicker and cheaper way of communication and advertisements than a traditional campaign or advert to reach thousands of people. However, if mass-market brands adopted social media relatively quickly, it was not as blatant for luxury brands.

Luxury means different things for different people. A product someone qualifies as “luxury” might not be by someone else. Despite the subjectivity of this term, there are nonetheless aspects that most people agree on. Something is qualified as luxury when there is a notion of privilege, uniqueness and exclusivity attached to it. A luxury product also suggests sophistication and quality, and often involves great expense. The point is, a luxury product makes you feel special, part of a community and part of a unique experience. As of today, the luxury sector is one of the fastest growing industries in the world with an estimated annual growth of 4% to 5% in the next three years.¹ However, it has had to adapt to new technologies and have them fit into this exclusive sector.

Because of the development and increasing relevance of social media, it became imperative for luxury brands to engage with them. But how is it possible for luxury brands that convey an image of exclusivity and uniqueness to use platforms that target a substantial part of the population?

In this report, I will focus on how luxury brands make social media relevant to their elite market by using them in a unique way to suit their specific needs and goals.

In order to answer this question, I will use the example of the well-known British luxury brand Burberry. I thought that Burberry would be the perfect example as it was the first luxury brand to

¹ D'ARPIZIO Claudia, *et al*, *Bain & Company*, December 22, 2017, <https://www.bain.com/insights/luxury-goods-worldwide-market-study-fall-winter-2017/> [ref. Feb.2019]

fully embrace social media and their potential for communication. It is a forward-looking brand that managed to see before any other luxury brand how much of an asset social media could be.

I will first give an overview of social media and how they became a new communication channel that has become a priority for brands. Then I will define what is luxury and analyze luxury brands' unique way of using the Internet to their advantage. Finally, I will analyze Burberry's approach to social media by taking a brief look at their history and past marketing techniques, and then breaking down their current marketing strategy, to see how Burberry, a traditional brand, conquered the web and reinvented itself thanks to social media.

I) **Social media as a marketing tool**

a) *An overview of social media*

To understand the close link that exists between social media and marketing, it is essential to have an overview of the main social media: what type of content is posted on them, who is their target audience, and how to engage with their audience.

When the first social media websites were created in the late 1990s, their usage was only meant to be personal. They were a way to connect with other users from all over the world, and share their common interests. But no one anticipated how much they would revolutionize communication. It took a few years for brands to realize how beneficial social media could be, and how useful they could be as tools that can help a brand find new clients, engage with potential and regular customers, build their community and develop their image. As of today, there are more social media websites than ever: Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, and so on. There are so many to choose from, it can become overwhelming, and the stakes are high. An effective social media strategy can be extremely beneficial and really pay off. With that being said, if it is done badly, the consequences can be catastrophic and take a toll on a company.

So, which social media should you use? They all have their own specificities that will suit different types of profiles, whether you are using them as a brand or for personal use. Here, I am going to give an overview of a few of the main social media websites that are available and usually used by brands in order to later understand how and why they are used as a marketing tool, and what makes them an ideal tool for a good marketing and communication strategy.

Each social media has a different type of audience. Facebook is one of the most frequently used social media with 72% of Internet users using it, and only 28% using Instagram.² But this does not mean that Facebook will be the most adapted to your brand. In fact, Instagram is a better platform for influencer marketing for instance, and is the perfect platform for newer brands, when Facebook is better for already well-established brands.

² LEIBOWITZ, Brandon, "Instagram vs Facebook: Which Can Boost Your Business More?", *Dreamgrow*, <https://www.dreamgrow.com/instagram-facebook-advertising/> [ref. Jan.2019]

Facebook allows its users to post a status, which is often a short and essential message. It also allows you to publish visuals or videos, which are more likely to get attention from users and create engagement. Some of the newer features include Facebook Live, which drives even more engagement than the types of content mentioned previously. It works particularly well for brands that can use them as a more personal way to interact with their customers, presenting office events or behind-the-scene content, as well as for customer service, with private chat.

Twitter has a young audience. It is well-loved by brands as it is one of the best platforms to engage with their target audience. Indeed, it is often used for customer service as it allows the brand to discuss with and answer easily to their customers through tweets or private messages. This is a crucial element in building a brand's reputation. While some brands use Twitter to advertise and promote their brands through one-sided tweets, it is interesting to note that some of the most successful brands on Twitter use it as a way to start conversations with their customer, which helps creating a bond between a brand and their customer base. This argument can be further supported by a survey conducted by SproutSocial³, which highlights that the best way to push a customer to purchase is by being responsive, and engaging with their followers. At the same time, Twitter also works well for advertising new products or campaigns thanks to pictures or short videos, as well as promotional posts.

Instagram is one of the most recent social media platforms, but it doesn't mean it is less used in any way. In June 2018, there were more than 1 billion active monthly users on Instagram, including 25 million business profiles⁴.

Instagram is almost entirely based on visuals (pictures, short clips), which means it is particularly adapted for brands with a strong brand personality and sophisticated visuals. But the thing that makes Instagram one of the best platforms to advertise for a business, is the fact that it is the platform with the most engagement. Engagement refers to how the brand interacts with their customers and followers on social media.⁵

³ JACKSON, Dominique, "The complete guide to Twitter marketing", *Sprout Social*, <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/twitter-marketing/> [ref. Jan.2019]

⁴ Number of monthly active Instagram users, *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagram-users/> [ref. Jan.2019]

⁵ "What is Social Media Engagement?", *Big Commerce*, <https://www.bigcommerce.com/ecommerce-answers/what-is-social-media-engagement/> [ref. June.2019]

A brand that has a lot of engagement will usually receive a lot of comments and try to answer to most of them. This is a type of communication that will strengthen the relationship between the brand and its customers.

Moreover, having a lot of engagement on your pictures on Instagram for instance will make sure that your post shows up on people's feed and recommendations due to the quantity of views and comments. It is about the number of likes or reposts: it basically takes into account everything that indicates that your content is seen and has an impact. Engagement rate can be calculated, for instance, to calculate your engagement rate on Instagram, you simply have to add your likes and comments combined per post and divide it by your following. This will help you measure your influence and get an idea of your impact. So Instagram, due to the high number of appealing visuals and their young audience, has between a 3% and 6% engagement rate, which is relatively high compared to Facebook and Twitter which both have between 0.5% and 1% of engagement.⁶ Added to that, Instagram is a platform that promotes consumption: most people on this platform like to show their purchases, especially thanks to influencers, which we will discuss later on. As a result, 72% of Instagram users said they have made a purchase after seeing something posted on Instagram⁷, which emphasizes the importance for businesses to have an Instagram page.

Similarly to Instagram, Youtube is mostly based on visuals, and has more than 1 billion active users. But what makes it different from Instagram is that Youtube allows their users to post videos that can go from a few minutes to hours long, as well as interact via a comment section and broadcast live videos. This allows content-creators to be much more personal and be a lot more in-depth when reviewing products or talking about a brand, meaning that this platform works particularly well for sponsored content. From a demographic point of view, Youtube is an interesting platform as it reaches a large audience, which can be explained by the wide variety of content you can find on it. Youtube is also used by brands, especially to post advertisements or behind-the-scene content. Behind-the-scene content is about showing the customers the back office of a brand. It is a way of creating intimacy, and making the customers feel like they are a part of the brand. It can also be a way to express their personality and creativity.

⁶ "How Do I Calculate My Engagement Rate On Instagram ?", *Plann*, <https://www.planthat.com/calculate-engagement-rate-on-instagram/> [ref. Feb.2019]

⁷ DANA, Rebecca, The Fashion Impact of Instagram, *Dana Rebecca Designs*, <https://www.danarebeccadesigns.com/resource/the-fashion-impact-of-instagram> [ref. Jan.2019]

But above else, it humanizes the brand by showing that there are real people behind it. This allows people to connect and identify with the brand on a more personal level, and makes it more relatable for the consumer.

Furthermore, behind-the-scene content can allow a company to give a sneak peek of a product that will be out soon or that is in the works, creating excitement within their community. Although Youtube is a platform that is massively used by brands for this type of communication, it is mostly used by influencers.

According to the Business Dictionary, influencers are “*individuals who have the power to affect purchase decisions of others because of their (real or perceived) authority, knowledge, position, or relationship*”⁸. Social media influencers are a fairly new phenomenon, created by the rise of social media. They are independent third-party endorsers that have a strong influence on their audience’s behaviors and purchases habits through tweets, videos or photographs on social media⁹. They create content to share their opinions on particular products or services based on their interests. Ultimately, their goal is to be spotted by brands to collaborate to promote a product or a service, or even a campaign. What makes them particularly interesting for advertising, is that influencers often target a niche audience. Each influencer has a particular following that is interested in particular things.

However, this is not a new practice. Word of mouth has been known to be one of the most effective types of marketing: it is a free mean of advertising for a brand, that requires less effort and less financial means than a traditional advertisement. But this practice has become even more relevant with social media, creating the Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). What distinguishes eWOM from traditional advertising techniques, is that it consists in interpersonal communication, as opposed to mass communication. Because eWOM comes from people that are relatable, its impact is different: the audience is more trusting because influencers are supposed to be unbiased, and supposedly more honest, which is what helped them become such a big part of social media.

⁸ Influencers, *Business Dictionary*, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/influencers.html> [ref. Feb.2019]

⁹ GLUCKSMAN, Morgan, “The Rise of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Lifestyle Branding: A case Study of Lucie Fink”, Strategic Communications, Elon University, 2017.

Knowing all of these features and specific purposes, choosing the right social media can be a challenge. For the customer, it is about choosing the platforms where they will be able to engage with their favorite brands, discover new ones, and share their opinions with other users. For a brand, it is about finding the right platform, to post the right content, to attract the right customers. But as difficult as it may sound, it is now imperative for a brand to be present on social media.

Indeed, as social media completely changed the dynamics between a brand and their customers and the way they interact, it is now essential that brands reevaluate their communication strategy to take full advantage of the possibilities that social media offer as a new communication channel.

b) Social media: a new communication tool for brands

Social media completely changed the way brands think about communication and implement it. Indeed, brands are drifting away from traditional communication media such as adverts on television, radio or billboards, and are being replaced by social media. Of course, one might think it is primarily because of the marketing costs that are a lot less significant using social media: they require less staff and smaller productions. But there is more to it. So what makes social media more effective than traditional media?

Business-wise, social media are used to promote brands and products, but also to create a new link between current customers, potential customers and a brand. It is an opportunity for brands to create close relationships with their customers, and attract a larger audience. Social media allow a sort of humanization of a brand through interactions in the comments or by sharing pictures of the teams working behind the scenes. This reinforces the relationship that perhaps already existed with previous customers, but most likely, it will create one that did not exist before. People may get attached to values and beliefs that a brand conveys and may relate to them, and this will translate itself into followers, traffic, and ultimately, more potential customers.

The best way to achieve that is to display your business personality on social media. Instagram is often the application of choice when talking about this. Indeed, it is mostly used by brands to publish inspiring visuals that convey a certain lifestyle¹⁰. This will work particularly well if your brand has a strong aesthetic attached to it, which we will see later, most luxury brands have. It will allow people that may not already know a brand to immediately capture its values and aesthetic.

Now, a strong business personality displayed on social media will attract followers that have something in common: this brand. It will create a group of people who shares rituals, symbols and traditions: a community with a shared identity, values and beliefs, and a strong emotional connexion to a brand.¹¹

For instance, the American sportswear brand Under Armour uses the hashtag #UAChallenge: every week, the brand shares several posts on Instagram with an athlete (such as Anthony Joshua or Stephen Curry) who challenges the Under Armour community on a specific training exercise. People will then post themselves recreating the exercise using the hashtag. This type of interactions and engagement from the community creates a strong bond between the brand and their customers. Moreover, this bond will solidify the customer's loyalty to the brand.

One other thing that tremendously helped brands build their communities in the last few years is with no doubt influencers. Traditionally, influencers were celebrities, and promoted brands on television commercials or billboards. But now, people look for someone who is relatable and reachable, meaning that they can send a message to them knowing that they will answer, and perhaps have a conversation too. Consumers want the opinions of fellow consumers, people like them, to help them make purchases.¹²

¹⁰VISIER, Agathe, "Quel est le réseau social est le plus pertinent pour ma marque ?", <https://www.slapdigital.fr/blog/quel-reseau-social-pour-ma-marque> [ref. Nov.2018]

¹¹ DESJARDINS DESCHENES, Coralie, "Luxe et médias sociaux : Stratégies des marques et motivations des consommateurs", Sciences de la gestion (Marketing), HEC Montréal, 2013.

¹² GLUCKSMAN, Morgan, "The Rise of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Lifestyle Branding: A case Study of Lucie Fink", Strategic Communications, Elon University, 2017.

So as of today, an influencer is someone that is influential on social media such as Youtube, Instagram or Twitter. It is a person who will most likely have a large following that is engaged and dedicated. An influencer will post content on social media, either sharing their daily life, or posting about their passions and interests that could range from beauty to traveling to video games.

Brands very quickly realized how useful influencers could be to market their product and services. Indeed, in a recent study, 72% of people declared having made a fashion, beauty or style-related purchase after seeing a post on Instagram.¹³

The reason why these influencers are so interesting for brands is because they often target niche audiences, as opposed to traditional marketing channels such as television which targets a mass audience. This increases the possibility of purchase from potential customers because they are likely to be interested in your brand, and the influencer's audience will become the brand's audience.

There are a few ways through which a brand can use an influencer as a marketing tool. A collaboration or sponsorship between a brand and an influencer that could reach thousands of people has proven to be extremely effective, but the most common way is through public relations (PR) packages. A company will send influencers a package with products from their lines in the hopes of being featured on their social media. This technique is cost-effective as it will only cost the brand's products, and no further expenses, but as there is no obligation to feature these products, the influencers can choose not to.

Alternatively, a brand or an influencer can reach out to one another to offer to work together. This will usually take the form of a sponsored post or an advert, in which the influencer is sent a product and will post original and engaging content featuring it in exchange of a compensation. This technique will ensure that the product is featured on the influencer's social media profile. However, it can be expensive, and it varies depending on the influencer and its following. Indeed, according to a report, 66% of businesses pay under \$250 for a sponsored Instagram post, and 27% pay between \$250 and \$1000.¹⁴

¹³ DANA, Rebecca, The Fashion Impact of Instagram, *Dana Rebecca Designs*. [ref. Jan.2019]

¹⁴ CARBONE, Lexie, "This is How Much Instagram Influencers Really Cost", *Later*, February 9, 2018, <https://later.com/blog/instagram-influencers-costs/> [ref. Feb.2019]

To give a tangible example, here are a lifestyle blogger's rates, who has more than 100,000 followers and a 2.5% engagement rate:

STORY PACKAGES: AVERAGE VIEWS: 15K	MONTHLY PACKAGES: 3 MONTH MINIMUM	ONE OFF PACKAGES: ASK ME FOR MORE DETAILS
5 mentions per month: \$1000 2 mentions per month: \$500 1 mention: \$300	5 photos/month: \$2500 5 photos + blog post: \$3000 2 photos per month: \$1200 2 photos + blog post: \$2000 1 photo per month: \$700 1 photo + blog post: \$1500 Shop page feature: \$500/month	1 IG photo: \$1000 Giveaway: \$1500 IG takeover: \$1500 Blog post: \$2000 Story takeover: \$1000

Source: CARBONE, Lexie, "This is How Much Instagram Influencers Really Cost", *Later*, February 9, 2018, <https://later.com/blog/instagram-influencers-costs/> [ref. Feb.2019]

If it is successful enough, this kind of collaboration is also a good way to create a long-term relationship between the influencer and the brand, that will create a feeling of trust from the potential customers towards this brand. Moreover, this long-term relationship can also evolve into something more. A brand can choose an influencer, or several, to be their brand-ambassador, which is someone chosen by a company to represent their brand in a positive way. This is a good way to increase brand awareness, and be recognizable. To illustrate this, we can take the example of Estée Lalonde, a Canadian influencer, who became a brand-ambassador for Lancôme in 2017. This resulted in regular sponsored posts, advertising for Lancôme's newest releases, and was a way for the brand to widen its target audience to younger consumers.

Whether a brand chooses to send PR packages or to establish a paid sponsorship, the most important thing is to choose the right influencer, as it will help to reach the brand's target audience and create engagement, which is the main goal. It is essential to choose a specific influencer that will suit certain needs for a campaign, and will appeal to the target audience.

So, how do you find the right social media influencer for your brand? It is recommended to follow the three Rs: relevance, reach, and resonance. Relevance is about the influencer's audience. Is it relevant to your brand or the product you are trying to sell? Is it your target audience? This is the first thing to keep in mind. Reach refers to the influencer's following. The bigger their following, the more people they will reach, the more likely you are to being noticed.

Finally, resonance is about engagement. Although a big following can ensure visibility, it does not mean they will be interested in your brand. This is why some brands will opt for smaller accounts because their followers are often more engaged and loyal, and are more likely to be interested in your product.¹⁵

What also make social media very useful for brands is the fact that they help conduct research. Using social media makes it easy for a brand to check their statistics and gain insight into their audience demographics: How old are they? What are they interested in? What types of brands do they follow? Understanding your audience will help tailor your content to them, but also attract the type of customer you want to have.

For instance, Facebook ads allow you to define your ideal customer, which will make your ads pop up on the pages of people similar to your target audience. Facebook also enables brands to use an analytic platform which shows your most popular content in your target market.¹⁶ This is the type of information that is essential to run a business and be a successful brand.

Added to that, social media allow brands to search what is being said about them very easily: using keywords in Twitter's research bar is one way to see what your customers think about your brand, your customer service and your products or services. This type of information will prove to be very useful to try to improve you brand as well as see the overall customer satisfaction.

This, is why you should be using at least one social media as one of your communication channels. They are effective platforms that are well-suited to brand communication. Nevertheless, there has been one particular industry that has been more reluctant to use social media, and has a unique way of using them to communicate.

¹⁵ VISIER, Agathe, "Quel est le réseau social est le plus pertinent pour ma marque ?". [ref. Nov.2018]

¹⁶ SMITH, Keran, 15 Reasons Why Marketing Through Social Media is a Must For Every Small Business, *Lyfe Marketing*, <https://www.lyfemarketing.com/blog/marketing-through-social-media/> [ref. Jan.2019]

II) Luxury: a unique market

a) What makes luxury so unique?

The luxury industry is one of the only industries that has been consistently growing over the years. Indeed, the overall luxury industry grew by 5% in 2017¹⁷, and is expected to continue its steady growth until at least 2021. To understand the importance of this market and its growth, it is necessary to understand what luxury really is, and what makes this market such a unique one.

In a nutshell, a luxury product is “*a work of art designed for an exclusive market.*”¹⁸ To go further, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, luxury is defined as “*great comfort, especially provided by expensive and beautiful things*”¹⁹. However, they are very broad and subjective definitions that can be further discussed: what one person will describe as luxury can be completely different from one person to another. So, there are as many definitions of luxury as there are people in the world, all depending on habits, lifestyles and means. In order to grasp the true meaning of luxury, I will identify elements that, put together, make up luxury. But firstly, I will identify the main actors of the luxury sector.

Although there is a significant amount of luxury brands on the market, some of which have kept their independence like Hermès or Chanel, it is a sector that is definitely dominated by large international groups.²⁰ Here, I am going to identify the three main luxury groups on the market.

Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy, also known as LVMH, was founded in 1987 by Alain Chevalier and Henry Racamier after the merger of Louis Vuitton and Moët Hennessy, and is the most important luxury group in the world in terms of annual revenue (42,636 billion euros in 2017). Bernard Arnault is the current chairman and CEO of LVMH, and has been since 1989.

¹⁷ D'ARPIZIO Claudia, *et al*, *Bain & Company*, December 22, 2017, <https://www.bain.com/insights/luxury-goods-worldwide-market-study-fall-winter-2017/> [ref. Feb.2019]

¹⁸ NUENO, Jose Luis, QUELCH, John A., “The mass marketing of luxury”, *Business Horizons*, issue 6, 1998, p.61-68.

¹⁹ *Luxury*, *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/luxury> [ref. Feb.2019]

²⁰ BADJIR, Ilaria, “Le digital est-il devenu le nouveau support de communication des marques de luxe ?”, *Bachelier en communication*, Haute école Louvain en Hainaut, 2012.

LVMH owns more than 50 subsidiaries, ranging from wines and spirits (Hennessy, Dom Pérignon), retailing (Sephora), fashion (Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, Fendi), jewelry (Bulgari), perfumes and cosmetics (Guerlain, Benefit, Make Up Forever).²¹

Next is Kering, previously known as Pinault-Printemps-Redoute (PPR). It was founded by François Pinault in 1963, and was specialized in timber trading. The group then shifted towards mass distribution with the acquisition of Conforama, Printemps and La Redoute²². It was only in 1999 that the group acquired its first luxury brand, Gucci, which completely changed its strategy. This acquisition was followed by many others, including Yves Saint Laurent, Boucheron and Balenciaga. Kering is now the second-largest luxury group after LVMH with an annual revenue of 15,478 billion euros in 2017.²³

Finally, the last group that dominates the luxury sector is L'Oréal. It is also the oldest: founded in 1909 by Eugène Schueller, it started as a hair dye company²⁴. It is mainly focused on cosmetics, and it has a luxury division which includes a number of high-end brands such as Lancôme, YSL beauty or Giorgio Armani.

This list is obviously not extensive as there are other international groups that hold a significant place in the luxury sector like Richemont, which owns Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels or the luxury online retailer Net-A-Porter. It is also interesting to note that although these groups are internationals, they are for the most part dominated by French brands, which highlights the domination of the French know-how and excellence when it comes to luxury.

Besides luxury retailers, the other main actors of the luxury sector are consumers. Contrary to mass retailing, the goal is not to target as many people as possible but rather target a specific branch of the market. However, in the past few years, the luxury sector has experienced a shift in their type of consumers.

²¹ Wikipedia contributors, "LVMH - Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton", *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/LVMH_-_Moët_Hennessy_Louis_Vuitton [ref. Feb.2019]

²² French retailers

²³ Wikipedia contributors, "Kering", *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kering> [ref. Feb.2019]

²⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "L'Oréal", *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Oréal> [ref. Feb.2019]

The different types of luxury consumers I will consider here are based on a research conducted by Mindshare North America, which is a global media agency network.²⁵ Firstly, 24% of the people surveyed were identified as “Strivers”. In this group, more than half of the people surveyed are aged between 18 and 34, which demonstrates the change in the main consumers of luxury that were generally older, and shows the importance of millennials²⁶ in this market. The “Strivers” are young people in their early careers and see luxury as “the evidence of success”. We have seen previously that influencers affect purchasing decisions, and it is also the case for luxury. Indeed, this group is very likely to be influenced by social media influencers when making a purchase. It is also the case for the second most important group, the “Trendsetters” which similarly to the “Strivers” are young and connected to social media.

The next group that was identified was the “Aesthetes” and this is where the shift in age becomes clearer with only 19% of people between the age of 18 to 34. Their revenue is also significantly higher, with 33% that have a revenue between \$100,000 and \$149,000 per year as opposed to the “Strivers” which were mostly middle class.

The following group, “Only the Best” is similar to the “Aesthetes” but they are slightly older and have a higher revenue. Both groups like to do some research on a brand before making a purchase, are interested in the quality of the product and the brand’s leadership. Finally, the last group, which makes up 19% of this research is “Comfort First”. This group is by far the oldest, with 42% of people above 65 years old, and the lowest millennial percentage (only 9%). They look at luxury as a way of life and focus on comfort. Thanks to this study, it is clear how luxury is transforming, shifting from a sector that was reserved to older and wealthier people to younger generations that are not necessarily qualified as wealthy. Moreover, it shows how different generations look for different things when buying luxury items.

Now, we have seen that luxury has specific actors, but it also has very specific components that are essential for any luxury brand to be qualified as luxury by the majority of people. Indeed, traditional luxury brands share some characteristics that can help us figure out what can be qualified as luxury.²⁷

²⁵ The Future of Luxury Marketing, *Mindshare*, February 15, 2018, <http://www.mindshareintheloop.com/home/2018/02/15/future-luxury-marketing-newest-research/> [ref. Feb.2019]

²⁶ “Millennials”, or “Generation Y” is a term used to refer to people born between the 1980s and early 2000s. It is a generation that is often targeted by marketing campaigns.

²⁷ NUENO, Jose Luis, QUELCH, John A., “The mass marketing of luxury”, *Business Horizons*, issue 6, 1998, p.61-68.

Quality is a key factor when identifying a luxury product or service. Indeed, the high price point of luxury goods is justified by their quality which is significantly higher than what can be found in high street and popular brands. When someone buys something they qualify as luxury, they expect it to have been made with an excellent know-how and a skilled labour force. It is expected that even the least expensive product from a line should have been made with the same attention to details and expertise as the most expensive one: every product from a luxury brand should be and feel premium. Therefore, the expectations when buying a luxury product or service are significantly higher than when buying a “traditional” product, due to the price, but also to the reputation of the brand.

In fact, a luxury brand’s reputation is extremely important: its excellence has to be recognized worldwide. One way this has been done is by emphasizing on the brand’s country of origin when that country is known for its excellence in that product’s category. For instance, we can think of France’s wines or Switzerland’s watches. A luxury brand should also have a distinctive style and design. An item from a luxury brand should be recognizable without having to look for the brand’s name: *“In luxury, if somebody is looking at somebody else and fails to recognize the brand, part of its value is lost. It is essential to spread brand awareness beyond the target group.”*²⁸ An example for this could be Burberry’s iconic trench coat or the two Cs of Chanel’s logotype, which are usually plain and minimalistic to reflect the idea of sophistication and chic. This is often linked with another essential part of a luxury brand, which is story-telling. A brand that is qualified as luxury generally has a strong historical past that will impact its image and story-telling. Whether it is Burberry, Chanel or Yves Saint Laurent, more often than not, luxury brands are recognizable by their names. It is usually their founders’ name, which alludes to family history. In these cases, their names are trademarks, and allow the brand to build its whole story-telling strategy around their heritage of craftsmanship and know-how.

One other aspect that is essential to luxury is experience, and more specifically, in-store experience. In the age of digitalization and online shopping, it can be surprising to see that most luxury products are still bought in stores. But when you think about it, luxury is all about experience. It is about touching, smelling and seeing the products to be able to feel the quality and the thought-process that has gone into it in order to fully appreciate it.

²⁸ KAPFERER J.N., BASTIEN, V., *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, 2nd edition, London, Kogan Page, 2009, p.70.

But this can become an issue for retailers: how do you attract customers to bricks-and-mortar stores, that is to say traditional physical stores, when people like to shop online?

While keeping the traditional and elite aspect of their brand, they need to be on top of the latest trends and latest technology. For instance, in Le Bon Marché in Paris, several luxury brands (especially beauty brands) have incorporated virtual reality and interactive platforms in their stores, to try on lipstick virtually for example. This offers a new kind of experience, encouraging people to come to the store but still keeping it modern and innovative.

Finally, exclusivity is perhaps the most important element that makes up a luxury good. A luxury product is supposed to only be available for the elite, in other words, it should not be available for everyone, because if it is, it is no longer considered as luxury for most people.

There is this idea of uniqueness that comes from buying a luxury product, thanks to its limited production, distribution and high pricing. The rarer a product is, the more coveted it will be. To illustrate this, we can take the example of the famous Birkin bag by Hermès, which requires the customer to go on a waiting list to have the opportunity to buy this bag. It can not be purchased online and in any other stores than Hermès. The only exception is if you are buying it second-hand, and in this case, it is available online on specialized websites such as Collector Square.

Nevertheless, with the change in the type of consumer that buys luxury, exclusivity has become less and less important to new customers. Indeed, there is definitely a democratization of luxury. For instance, we can mention H&M's various collaborations with luxury brands such as Moschino or Balmain which can be bought on H&M's website at prices that are high for a mass-market brand but very low for a luxury brand. Even if these collections are limited in stock, it is nowhere near as exclusive as the majority of luxury products.

So, how did something as elitist as luxury become so popular? This can be attributed in part to social media and the digitalization of society which in some ways forced luxury to expand their market, using a specific social media strategy. Now, everyone has access to luxury. And while this is an opportunity for growth for the luxury sector, it is also a danger for one of luxury's core value which is exclusivity.

b) *The luxury market in the Web 2.0 era*

Although the luxury sector was steadily growing, stagnation was looming because of the sector's exclusive nature. It became crucial for luxury brands to expand their market to make sure they kept on growing: "As with rarity, the luxury market could only grow by becoming less exclusive. If an object is out of reach, we cannot desire it."²⁹ In the age of digitalization, the answer was easy: be more present on the Internet. But how does a luxury brand, which has to be somewhat exclusive and rare to be qualified as such, use platforms that are targeted towards mass audiences?

When a brand uses the Internet as a marketing tool, there are a few options available to them: advertise, distribute and communicate. According to *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, a luxury brand should not advertise too much, and it should use specific channels, which the authors classified using a pyramid to show which type of advertising technique should be used in the luxury sector.

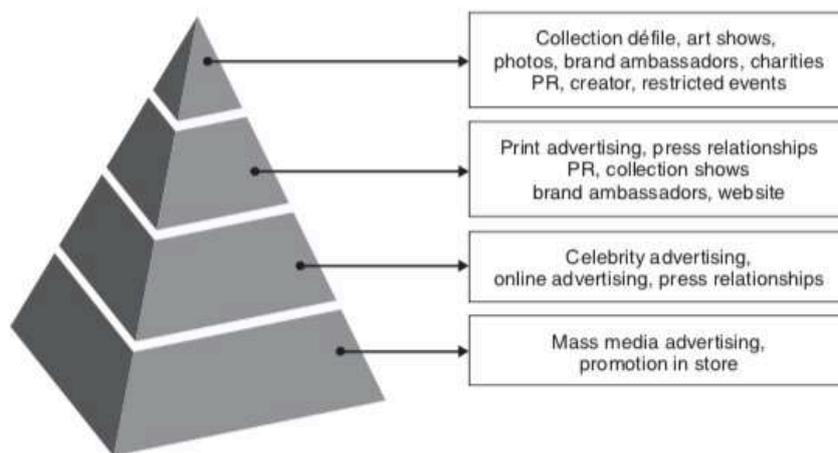


Figure 11.1 Layers of luxury communication

Source: KAPFERER J.N., BASTIEN, V., *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, 2nd edition, London, Kogan Page, 2009, p.213.

²⁹ KAPFERER J.N., BASTIEN, V., *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, 2nd edition, London, Kogan Page, 2009, p.95.

Looking at this pyramid, it is clear that according to the authors, social media advertising should not be used by luxury brands. However, we can argue that this book was published in 2009, meaning that social media and online marketing did not have the same importance as it has now, ten years later. Indeed, according to a study conducted in 2014, 40% of luxury purchases were influenced by the consumer's digital experience³⁰, which again demonstrates how increasingly important the Internet is even for luxury brands. Nevertheless, the main idea remains relevant: a luxury brand should advertise sparingly.

Although luxury brands have to be selective when considering how to advertise, the Internet is still a place with a lot of potential for sales. In *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, the authors argue that luxury brands should only use the Internet to communicate, which we will discuss afterwards, but not for distribution. Their argument is that the Internet is too anonymous, and that it is completely at odds with luxury values which focuses on experience and relationships between the brand and the customer. But nowadays, every luxury brand has its own website where it sells its products just like in store. So how do they keep the luxury feeling and unique experience that takes place in store, online? Well, the brand has to create a link with its customer after the sale: customer service or reservations, the brand has to find a way to attract the customer to their physical store to establish a physical link and offer them the experience of the brand in their store. Moreover, brands do not sell all of their articles on their websites, because as soon as an item is sold online, it is less luxurious. For example, you can not buy a Birkin bag on Hermès' website, you have to physically go to the store to even be on the waiting list. It is the same thing for Chanel's website where a lot of their jewelry is not available for purchase online. Keeping items offline is a way to make sure that yes, sales will increase because some products are now available online, but the brand will remain a luxury one because some of them can only be found in their physical store, maintaining the notion of exclusivity that is essential to a luxury brand.

In addition, luxury brands now also use the Internet to sell their products thanks to third party websites like Net-A-Porter, Luisaviaroma or Mytheresa which are online retailers specialized in luxury. However, it can be argued that brands found on these websites can no longer be considered as luxury, because they are subject to mass-retailing which is against luxury core values.

³⁰ DAURIZ, Linda, REMY, Nathalie, SANDRY, Nicola, "Luxury shopping in the digital age", *McKinsey & Company*, May 2014, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/luxury-shopping-in-the-digital-age> [ref. Mar.2019]

It can be a great opportunity for brands to increase their sales and brand-awareness beyond their target group, and be a part of the “affordable luxury” sector but it can also mean that they are now perhaps too accessible to the general public. This is why some brands choose not to be featured on these websites, like Dior, Chanel or Hermès, to preserve their image, keep control of their brand and remain exclusive. As I mentioned, these third-party websites can be engaging for potential customer, especially due to their huge following on social media. For instance, Net-A-Porter has more than 3 million followers on Instagram.

An essential part of luxury is communication, and because it is so different from usual mass-consumption brands, its communication strategy is completely different. Luxury brands sell a lifestyle, a fantasy, a goal, and it is crucial to convey these ideas through social media, as opposed to an ordinary brand that is more likely to want to be seen as relatable and achievable for the average consumer. Luxury brand communication is often seen as a dream: it has to be enigmatic and elusive enough that most people find a way to identify with their universe. This is why luxury brand communication has to be very aesthetically pleasing, artistic and not too direct, and tend to be more cautious on their social media profile.³¹

With luxury brands, the goal is to communicate, to cultivate the imaginary, and not to sell and advertise: their content will be “*aspirational rather than accessible*”³². Because the value of a luxury brand heavily relies on its image, social media have proven to be fitting. On social media, luxury brands will still keep this idea of exclusivity. They will post less often and they will be more protective over their brand. This means that they might not respond to comments or entirely disable them in order to keep control on what is said about them while still giving potential customers a glimpse of their brand through their feed. Their social media will be a reflection of their image and what they want to convey, often using story-telling to deliver a message. Overall, their social media pages will be more mysterious, polished, unique and minimal than mass-market brands. All of their social media must be coordinated and aligned with the brand’s product and aesthetic: colors, hashtags and content.

³¹ KAPFERER J.N., BASTIEN, V., *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, 2nd edition, London, Kogan Page, 2009, p.210.

³² GILLILAND, Nikki, “Why Chanel is the most influential luxury brand on social”, *Econsultancy*, April 11, 2018, <https://econsultancy.com/why-chanel-is-the-most-influential-luxury-brand-on-social/> [ref. Nov.2018]

Even though luxury brands want to have control over their social media, it is important that they still engage with their consumers. Because engagement is at the heart of social media, it is almost necessary in order to be a successful brand on the Internet nowadays. This can be as simple as an automatic private chat opening when you visit a brand's Facebook page which feels like a personal invitation into a brand's world. One thing that has been extremely popular among luxury brands is streaming videos of their shows live on their social media, which again, makes the customer feel like he is part of it and a valued member of this community. Luxury brands should also tailor their social media strategy to luxury consumers³³. That is to say using Twitter to foster excitement around events (like Fashion Week which now thanks to social media is an event that is well-known and followed, even by non-luxury customers), Facebook to target offers and Instagram or blogs to engage with and influence potential customers.

Celebrities and influencers also play a huge part in communicating for brands, and luxury brands are no exception. One way this has been done is through "*online ambassadors*"³⁴. There is even more at stake for a luxury brand because the ambassador has to embody the values of the brand and reflect the exclusivity and luxuriousness of the brand as well. The ambassador is likely to have a significant following, including people that are either already consuming luxury goods or are potential customers. However, this practice can be harmful to a brand. Because luxury relies so much on the customer-brand relationship, introducing a celebrity can jeopardize this relationship because the customer will associate the brand with the celebrity, therefore reducing the imaginary and dreamlike universe of the brand.³⁵ But it is important to note that influencers especially helped making the industry a lot more accessible and less elitist, helping brands such as Gucci or Yves Saint Laurent generate sales, and think differently about luxury. However, if it is common for a celebrity to collaborate and be the face of a luxury brand, it is still unusual for luxury brands to use influencers as much, although it is less and less true.

³³ DAURIZ, Linda, REMY, Nathalie, SANDRI, Nicola, "Luxury Shopping in the Digital Age", *McKinsey&Company*, April 2014. [ref. Mar.2019]

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ KAPFERER J.N., BASTIEN, V., *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, 2nd edition, London, Kogan Page, 2009, p.216

I will add that social media are an interesting experiential tool for luxury brands. They allow a brand to post previews of new products and see the response and engagement, which will help them figure out if a product should be sold on the Internet, in store, or both, as well as the amount that needs to be produced depending on the amount of positive responses.

In conclusion, the Internet is an incredible opportunity even for luxury brands. It allows them to widen their distribution channels, and generate more sales. It also allows them to communicate beyond their target market, fostering brand-awareness on a larger scale and displaying their brand personality thanks to a flawless social media feed. However, it is a difficult balance to maintain: to remain exclusive and part of something unique all the while targeting a new kind of customer via the Internet and especially social media.

So, the question remains. How do luxury brands successfully adapt their social media profiles and, at a larger scale, their Internet presence to fit their elite market, and still be qualified as a luxury brand? Using the example of Burberry, I will examine if it managed to bring digitalization and luxury exclusivity together, and see if it fulfilled two conditions to thrive on the Internet: “*correct, personalized identification and multi-sensory experience*”³⁶.

³⁶ KAPFERER J.N., BASTIEN, V., *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*, 2nd edition, London, Kogan Page, 2009, p.223

III) The case of Burberry

a) A brief history of Burberry's marketing strategy

Burberry is one of England's oldest luxury brands. Created in 1856 by Thomas Burberry, it primarily focused on outdoor clothes. In 1879, Burberry created the gabardine, which became the iconic coat that we know today. In 1901, the Equestrian Knight logo, now one of Burberry's most recognizable features, appeared for the first time. Burberry's gabardine as well as accessories were used by the military in the First and the Second World War, which emphasizes their position as a historical brand. After the Second World War, they continued to create clothes for civilians, for both men and women.

Burberry became a quoted company for the first time in 1920, and their now emblematic check print was registered as a trademark and incorporated on the lining of their trench coats. Formally Burberry's, it became Burberry in 1999, and opened its first store in London, which demonstrated the brand's status as "*an iconic, global luxury brand*". In 2002, the company was listed on the London Stock Exchange after an initial public offering. They launched their first transactional website in the United State in 2004, followed in 2006 by the UK transactional website, showing their avant-garde spirit by being one of the first luxury brands to launch its website to sell their products online. Finally in 2012, they opened a new store in London, which they described as a "*digitally-advanced brand experience*", with the ambition of combining their website and the physical store environment for the first time.³⁷ This is one of the points that I will discuss in the next part, showing how Burberry managed to create a unique in-store experience thanks to digitalization.

Burberry is a high-end brand that focuses on sophistication and quality. It is very recognizable thanks to its checked print, made popular by its former CEO, Rose Marie Bravo. It is targeted towards affluent, elegant and elitist segments of the population, and has this notion of exclusivity and inaccessibility to the lower classes attached to it.

³⁷ Burberry Plc, <https://www.burberryplc.com/en/index.html> [ref. Mar.2019]

If Burberry's became famous thanks to its iconic trench coat and check inner lining, it became necessary to adopt a new strategy in the early 2000s in order to widen its market and develop its brand. It is Rose Marie Bravo who succeeded in making Burberry one of the most iconic British luxury brands. She changed Burberry's image, made it more modern and updated, while still keeping its key features (the trench coat, the check print and the very apparent Britishness of the brand). However, one of the downsides of this democratization of Burberry is that it lost some of its exclusivity because it was often subject to counterfeits that were worn by people from lower-classes.

2006 was the real turning point for Burberry's marketing strategy. Angela Ahrendts was appointed CEO of Burberry, and she had one goal: to make Burberry the world's first fully digital brand.³⁸ But why? Well, she wanted to purify the message of the brand, make it exclusive again. This is why she decided to remove the check pattern from the majority of Burberry's products, in order to stop being associated with counterfeits as much. Moreover, she wanted to attract a younger market, and going digital was the way to do it. Angela Ahrendts succeeded in making Burberry the first luxury brand to be digital, making it ahead of its competitors at the time.

Burberry launched Burberry Cosmetics in 2013. Even though Burberry already had perfumes, the launch of their cosmetics brand was something completely new, and it was a huge success. It allowed Burberry to conquer a new market: the beauty industry. It allowed people that could not necessarily afford luxury items (such as the Burberry trench coat) to get a high end product from an emblematic luxury brand. It was a way to target new customers, usually younger, and have them get to know part of Burberry's universe.

In 2018, Burberry decided to revamp the brand, and changed its brand identity. Brand identity refers to all the different elements that a company chooses to represent their brand and present to the consumers. It can be values, missions or the target market, but also aesthetics such as the logo, the color palette or the typography used by the brand.

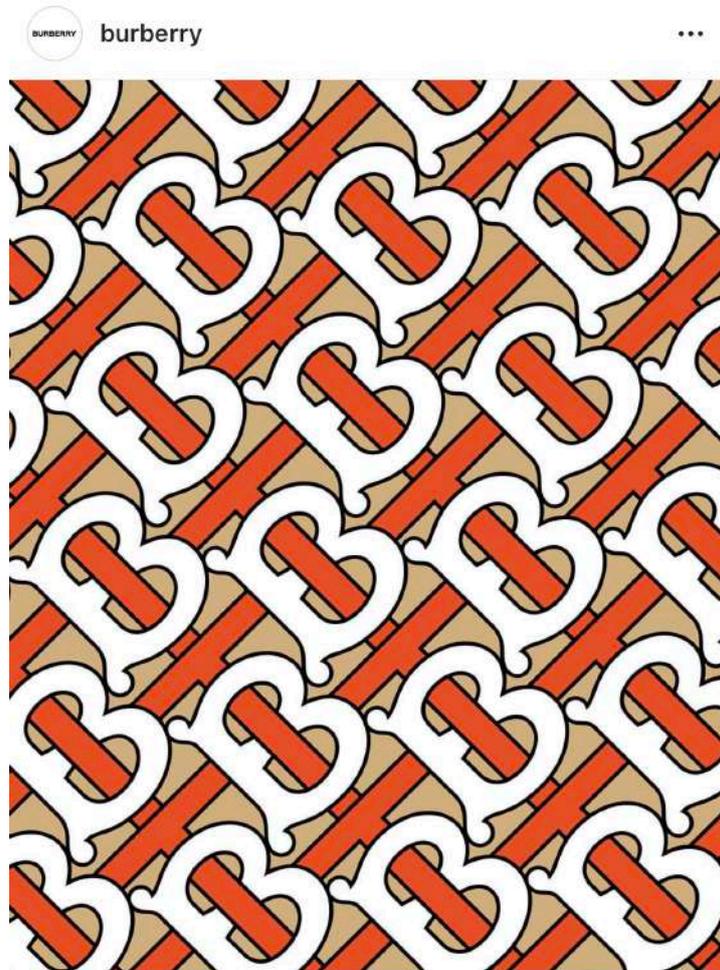
³⁸ LECEMIA, Quentin, "Case Study: Is Burberry's Social Media Use the Best Amongst Luxury Brands?", *Social Wall*, September 28, 2016, <https://socialwall.me/en/burberry-social-media-use-luxury-brands/> [ref. Nov.2018]



Top: old logo; Bottom: new logo.
Source: burberry.com [ref. Mar.2019]

Burberry used the Equestrian Knight as their logo for more than a hundred years. It was emblematic of the Burberry house, classic, and traditional. They used a serif font as their typography for their Burberry logo, which conveyed an image of tradition, heritage and an “old-school” feel. However, in 2018, Burberry changed their logo. They changed the font, using a sans serif font, which is more modern and sleek, and removed the Equestrian Knight. Through this change of design, it is clear that Burberry was trying to reinvent their brand, and wanted it to be more current in order to target a new younger market. At the same time, they also launched a new monogram that has the initials of the founder Thomas Burberry, weaved into a colorful design of orange, beige and white. This new monogram, that was posted on Burberry’s Instagram with the hashtag #newera, was a way for Riccardo Tisci³⁹ to change the creative direction of Burberry, and giving it a second life, which is less traditional and more modern.

³⁹ Riccardo Tisci was named Chief Creative Director of Burberry in 2018.



Burberry's Instagram post of the new monogram
Source: [instagram.com/Burberry](https://www.instagram.com/Burberry)

The logo was displayed in different parts of the world like on the front of their flagship store in Seoul, or on buses in New York.

These various changes, whether they were about the design or the target market, always involved the Internet, and took advantage of the digitalization of our society. Burberry has always been ahead of its time when it came to using the Internet. First with Angela Ahrendts, and then with Riccardo Tisci, these changes were made possible thanks to an impeccable social media strategy. In the next and last part, I will analyze Burberry's digital ascension and see how a traditional luxury brand adapted their social media and Internet presence to fit their elite market.

b) *Digital ascension: what kind of marketing strategies has Burberry used?*

As I mentioned previously, Burberry launched its first transactional website in 2004 in the US and 2006 in the UK. However, a website was not enough to conquer a new market, and the vast area that is the Internet. In fact, it is mentioned on Burberry's website that one of the pillars to their marketing strategy is of course communication. They insist on the fact that this communication has to be focused on social media and digital platforms:

We are evolving our communications to be led by product and made for social media. Placing our products at the centre of our communications, we will leverage our digital and social media reach to convey new energy. We will reignite brand heat and change customer perception, using bold consumer engagement, reinventing editorial content and increasing our focus on experiences, using pop-ups and capsules to continually engage consumers with the brand.⁴⁰

In fact, 60% of Burberry's marketing budget is spent on digital media.⁴¹ Burberry's marketing strategy centers around social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and creates content that is suited to each platform. Burberry was actually one of the first luxury brands to use Facebook back in 2009.

It all began with The Art of the Trench campaign, which was their first one after getting into the digital world. The Burberry team created a website where they posted pictures of people wearing the iconic Burberry trench coat. The idea was to revive this product, making it more trendy, but it was also about making the customers feel valued and important. It established a close relationship between the brand and their customers, and encouraged them to be loyal towards the brand. Users could share the content on various social media such as Facebook or Twitter. The same year, Burberry streamed their Spring/Summer 2010 show live on Facebook.⁴² It was the first luxury brand to ever do something like this, giving common customers an exclusive look at their new collection, which was usually reserved to celebrities and journalists. This is now a common practice that a number of luxury brands use for their fashion show.

⁴⁰ Burberry Plc, <https://www.burberryplc.com/en/index.html> [ref. Mar.2019]

⁴¹ LECHEMIA, Quentin, "Case Study: Is Burberry's Social Media Use the Best Amongst Luxury Brands?", *Social Wall*, September 28, 2016. [ref. Nov.2018]

⁴² AYUSHYA, Na, "Case Study On How Burberry Became A Digital Luxury Brand", *Digital Vidya*, November 26, 2016, <https://www.digitalvidya.com/blog/case-study-on-how-burberry-became-a-digital-luxury-brand/> [ref. Dec.2018]

The next campaign launched by Burberry which secured its place as a leader on social media was the Burberry Acoustic campaign in 2010. With this campaign, Burberry promoted new local bands who performed and recorded songs while wearing Burberry products. The idea was to conquer a younger part of the market, and connect with millennials. The bands selected all shared an identity and aesthetic that suited Burberry, and it was a way to showcase the importance of British culture for Burberry. Overall, this project had a good response and generated engagement on their social media.

In 2011, they launched the first “Tweetwalk”. This campaign was a collaboration with Twitter where they shared backstage visuals of the new Burberry Spring/Summer 2012 collection before the show. Moreover, Burberry gave the opportunity to their followers to buy some products from their latest collection before they were officially released to the public, which created immediacy and excitement around the products, rather than buying them months later when they officially came out. This campaign was a huge success, and generated a lot of engagement on Twitter. Indeed, the hashtags #Tweetwalk and #ChristopherBailey trended on Twitter.⁴³

Finally, one of the last major campaigns launched by Burberry that strengthened its position as a digital leader was the Kisses Campaign. Launched in 2013, this campaign was a collaboration with Google on the occasion of the launch of Burberry cosmetics. A website was created and allowed users to send virtual kisses in the color of one of the Burberry Lipsticks. They could also add a personalized message. Thanks to Google Street View, users could track their virtual kiss until it reached its recipient. Again, this campaign was a massive success, generating more than 250,000 searches on Google during the campaign.⁴⁴

Burberry continues to release several campaigns every year using the social media platform that is best suited to the type of content they want to present. For instance, in 2018, they released their Christmas campaign as a short film on Youtube, featuring British celebrities such as Naomi Campbell or Matt Smith, wearing all Burberry products.

⁴³ AYUSHYA, Na, “Case Study On How Burberry Became A Digital Luxury Brand”, *Digital Vidya*, November 26, 2016. [ref. Dec.2018]

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

It is clear through these successful campaigns that Burberry knows how to make the best out of their social media. They use each one of them for specific content: Facebook for live events, Instagram for visuals, and Youtube for short videos. Twitter has also proven to be very useful as a platform for their customer service, available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Furthermore, their content is always tailored to their target market, and always fit the Burberry aesthetic. As a luxury brand, it is clear that it is important for Burberry to always favor quality and uniqueness over quantity.

Despite the fact that campaigns were extremely useful for Burberry to develop its digital marketing strategy, they were not the only way to do it. Burberry's website is an excellent example of their digital strategy. It is coherent with the rest of their social media, keeping the same color palette, as well as consistent visuals that reflect the image and personality of the brand. But besides its appealing visuals and aesthetically pleasing layout, their website is also extremely effective. Indeed, it is very quick to load and easy to navigate. Moreover, the website offers original content, such as pictures of the behind-the-scenes of their shows, or articles on their latest campaigns. All of these features help differentiate a mass-market brand's website from a luxury brand's website. A luxury brand such as Burberry will put a lot of effort into their visuals and general appearance of their website to make them fit a certain aesthetic and reflect the exclusivity and quality of their brand. But they will also try to bring added value to their website so that it becomes a real experience. They are taking advantage of the fact that people are increasingly buying products online (even luxury, although it is still mostly bought in store) and recreating an in-store experience online.

One thing that confirmed Burberry's place as a digital leader was the inauguration of their flagship store in 2012. In an interview, Christopher Bailey, former CEO of Burberry, mentioned that:

We had realised that we had created a lot of platforms that only exist online so we decided we had to bring these to life. Our approach to the store was to make a bridge between the online and offline experience. Today I think we're less concerned about where we actually shop, and more concerned about the experience we have while we're shopping.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ SWIRE, Robin, "Why is Burberry's Digital Strategy So Good ?", *Parallax*, April 28, 2014, <https://parall.ax/blog/view/3047/why-is-burberry-s-digital-strategy-so-good> [ref. Dec.2018]

In-store experience is one of the most important aspects of a luxury brand. By creating one of the most innovative digital stores in the world at the time, Burberry created a link between their website and their physical store. To sum up the idea behind this incredible project, Anna Ahrendts declared that “*walking through the doors is just like walking into our website*”.⁴⁶ In this store, giant interactive screens are displayed at the end of every aisle, broadcasting campaigns or videos of the brand. Besides being a retail store, it is also a giant advertising platform. There are also iPads throughout the whole store which allow customers to design and personalize their dream trench. And finally, the music playing in the store changes according to the time of the day and the customers that come in, creating a unique and special experience for each one of their customers.⁴⁷ This store was an opportunity for Burberry to attract their new target market, a younger audience. Whether it attracts people passing by in the street that are intrigued by this digital store, or people that are already familiar with the brand and want to live a unique experience, what is sure is that there is something for everybody in it. Burberry managed to create a store that had both a luxury feel and a digital, modern aspect to it.

Using influencers for a luxury brand is a tricky thing. If Burberry has already invited fashion bloggers such as In the Frow to their show during Fashion Week, it has yet to use them as brand ambassadors or as a recurring marketing tool. From what I have gathered, Burberry does not want to work with too many influencers, and likes to build close relationships with them. For instance, they worked with the fashion blogger In the Frow in 2016, where she introduced her followers to Burberry’s new makeup collection. This is understandable: while a mass-market brand will want to generate as many views and sales as possible, it is in Burberry’s interest to keep a certain amount of exclusivity and use influencers sparingly.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Burberry is available on third-party websites such as Net-a-Porter or Mytheresa. These websites offer a wide range of Burberry’s product, including their trench. Although these websites are great to generate sales, I thought it was surprising to see Burberry available on these websites after putting a lot of effort on their own website and their physical stores.

⁴⁶ NEBIA, Amelle, “Burberry dévoile à Londres le flagship digital le plus innovant du monde”, *Emarketing.fr*, 19 septembre 2012, <https://www.e-marketing.fr/Thematique/retail-1095/Breves/Burberry-devoile-Londres-flagship-digital-plus-innovant-monde-195825.htm> [ref. Dec.2018]

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

However, it is clear that these third-party websites are especially used by a younger audience that is more connected, and it can be a way for Burberry to attract new customers that can eventually become loyal customers, who are likely to buy products from Burberry's own website and stores in the future.

Thanks to Burberry's innovative mindset, its effective social media presence and the digitalization of their brand as a whole, they succeeded in building a real community, and a close relationship with their customer-base. All of these additions to their brand resulted in a rise in sales in 2016 that was 14% higher than the rest of the luxury fashion market, outperforming all of its competitors.⁴⁸ Burberry understood very quickly the importance of a strong digital strategy and presence on social media. As Christopher Bailey, former CEO of Burberry declared: "*Technology is an intrinsic part of most people's lives. All we've done is make sure to weave technology into the fabric of the company. This is how customers live, they wake up with a device in their hand and life begins.*"⁴⁹ Nevertheless, if Burberry was the most followed brand on social media in 2016 with 7 million followers on Instagram and 17 million likes on Facebook, it is not the case anymore⁵⁰.

While Burberry is still on the Top 15 of the most popular luxury brands online, it is only twelfth, behind brands like Gucci, Chanel or Louis Vuitton.⁵¹ I believe that this will be one of Burberry's greatest challenges in the next few years: maintaining its status as a leading luxury brand as well as maintaining its status as an innovative digital leader. In the past few years, brands like Gucci or Dior have really stepped up their digital strategy. For instance, Dior has used the fashion and beauty influencer Tanya Burr to post several sponsored pictures on Instagram wearing Dior clothes during the 2019 Fashion Week, which advertises Dior to a younger demographic. Gucci has been seen all over social media lately: which influencers do not have the iconic Gucci belt? Digitally, all of these brands are huge competitors for Burberry. We can only hope that the change of creative director that took place in 2018 will bring vitality to the brand, and that Burberry will be able to overcome these new challenges.

⁴⁸ SWIRE, Robin, "Why is Burberry's Digital Strategy So Good?", *Parallax*, April 28, 2014. [ref. Dec.2018]

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ AYUSHYA, Na, "Case Study On How Burberry Became A Digital Luxury Brand", *Digital Vidya*, November 26, 2016. [ref. Dec.2018]

⁵¹ EPPE BEAULOYE, Florine, "The 15 Most Popular Luxury Brands Online In 2019", *Luxe Digital*, February 2019, <https://luxe.digital/digital-luxury-ranking/most-popular-luxury-brands/> [ref. Mar.2019]

To sum up, over the years, Burberry has achieved a strong digital strategy, using social media successfully and taking digitalization to another level. It succeeded in changing and reorienting its target market. Burberry reinvented its brand, made it younger and more modern, but still kept a traditional aspect to it that is its true essence. In the next few years, I think we can expect new innovations from Burberry that will try and hopefully succeed in keeping its place among the best luxury brands both online and offline.

Conclusion

To conclude, I think it is safe to say that luxury and social media are not mutually exclusive. Given the time that we live in, social media are a significant element of how we consume, which makes them essential for a brand's communication strategy. They are a fundamental tool that can make or break any brand depending on the way they are used. An effective social media strategy is now compulsory for brands, whether they are new or already well-established. Every day, we are influenced by social media to purchase or look into new products, new brands and new trends, and it is no exception for the luxury sector.

Luxury brands have had to adapt to a changing society and evolve in a digital environment that can seem contrary to their standards. If at first glance social media might not seem relevant to this exclusive sector, you might want to take a look again. Luxury brands proved that what matters is the way in which they are used. Indeed, by using the right amount of communication with their consumers on social media while still managing to remain exclusive and aspirational, luxury brands demonstrated that social media can fit a luxury brand's communication strategy, despite their generic and common nature that is at odds with luxury's core values. In that sense, luxury brands definitely succeeded in making their social media relevant to their market.

Burberry is the perfect example of a traditional luxury brand that successfully brought together digitalization and luxury. By being the first luxury brand to take advantage of the potential of social media, it established itself as a digital leader in the luxury sector before any other brand in its category. Burberry's irreproachable social media strategy allowed the brand to reorient its target market and reinvent the brand to fit the new challenges of luxury: a sector that has had to conquer a younger market that is less preoccupied by the idea of exclusivity than by the quality and prestige of a brand.

Now, I believe it is essential to keep in mind that social media are ever-changing platforms. While most luxury brands have achieved a solid social media strategy in the past few years, it is crucial to stay on top of it. Using the example of Burberry, we have seen how a top luxury brand with an effective social media strategy can quickly be overtaken by new competitors. Therefore, it is imperative for luxury brands to continue to adapt their social media to their market in order to keep them relevant.

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