

The stories they tell

An exploratory study on how luxury and premium fashion brands profile themselves online

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The stories they tell: An exploratory study on how luxury and premium fashion brands profile themselves online

Abstract:

What do premium and luxury brands communicate in a digital world? Despite a growing number of studies in the field of luxury within the past few years, confusion persists among scholars about what constitutes a luxury brand as opposed to a premium brand. The rise of the internet has further blurred any distinction between these two categories. Today, an important tool for brands to share their values and engage consumers is creating stories online. Therefore, this thesis aims to address the research gap by describing how these brands profile themselves through stories on their websites. Moreover, this thesis delineates the similarities and differences between the stories of luxury versus premium brands. An explorative study was designed in which nearly 18 months' worth of stories published on the webpages of ten luxury fashion brands and ten premium fashion brands were analyzed by making sense of the data, open coding, developing coding sheets, engaging in categorization, and conducting abstraction. In this study, categorizations emerged from the data, and the study found that there are several similarities and differences between the stories of luxury and premium fashion brands. A key similarity between the two is that their stories are equally focused on describing their brand identity, brand heritage, and founders. A major difference is that luxury brands do not discuss discounts in their stories; whereas, premium brands promote sales in their stories. Ultimately, this thesis offers theoretical and practical implications for understanding what luxury brands are communicating to consumers online as compared to premium brands.

Keywords:

Luxury fashion brands, Premium fashion brands, Brand dilution, Internet Dilemma, Websites, Stories

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Background and thesis purpose	8
1.1.1 Research purpose and questions	10
1.2 Expected contributions	10
1.3 Delimitations	10
1.4 Thesis outline.....	11
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1 Luxury brands and brand dilution	13
2.2 Concept of luxury brands and the confusion with premium brands.....	14
2.2.1 Lack of consensus on what defines a luxury brand	14
2.2.2 The relativity of luxury	15
2.2.3 The transformation of luxury.....	16
2.2.4 Confusion between luxury brands and premium brands	17
2.2.5 Research gap.....	19
3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	21
3.1 Brand Strategies (how brands define themselves).....	21
3.2 Narrative theory and the importance of storytelling.....	22
3.3 Storytelling in the digital era	23
3.3.1 Storytelling for luxury brands and premium brands in the digital era....	23
3.3.2 An official website – the most important digital asset of a brand	24
4. METHODOLOGY	26
4.1 Scientific approach and overall research design.....	26
4.2 Research methodology	27
4.2.1 Preparation phase.....	28
4.2.2 Organizing phase	31
4.3 Quality criteria.....	36
4.3.1 Internal reliability	36
4.3.2 External reliability	36

4.3.3	Internal validity.....	37
4.3.4	External validity	37
5.	RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	39
5.1	Results	39
5.2	Analysis	40
5.2.1	Luxury brands.....	41
5.2.2	Premium brands.....	45
5.2.3	Comparison between luxury and premium brands	49
6.	CONCLUSION	55
6.1	Addressing the first research question.....	55
6.2	Addressing the second research question	56
6.3	Concluding note about the thesis purpose	57
7.	FINAL DISCUSSION	58
7.1	Theoretical contribution	58
7.1.1	Complementing existing literature	58
7.1.2	Contradicting existing literature	58
7.2	Empirical contribution.....	59
7.3	Practical implications	59
7.4	Criticism and limitations of the study.....	60
7.4.1	Nature of online data	60
7.4.2	Subjectivity of the results and analysis.....	61
7.5	Suggestions for future research	61
8.	REFERENCES	62
9.	APPENDICES.....	76
9.1	Appendix 1 – Abstraction sheet.....	76
9.2	Appendix 2 - Quantification of the results	95
9.3	Appendix 3 – Subtopics discussed by each luxury brand	97
9.4	Appendix 4 – Subtopics discussed by each premium brand	99

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Illustration of the logic of constructing categories on different levels.....	35
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Top 4 meanings evoked by the word ‘luxury’ for consumers in France, US, China, Brazil, Germany, and Japan – Adapted from Kapferer (2015, p. 11).....	15
Table 2. Differences between brand identity and brand image – Adapted from Nandan (2005, p. 268).....	21
Table 3. List of the selected luxury brands with their main story webpage links, accessed on April 2 nd and 3 rd , 2019.	29
Table 4. List of the selected premium brands with their main story webpage links, accessed on April 2 nd and 3 rd , 2019.	29
Table 5. The number of stories and the total number of words in the stories from each brand	30
Table 6. Sample part of a coding sheet	33
Table 7. Differences in the name and the size of main categories categorized by coder A and coder B	34
Table 8. Sample part of an abstraction sheet	35
Table 9. Illustration of the key topics of the stories published on the websites of the luxury and premium brands and the number of the brands who discuss these topics in their stories	40
Table 10. Summary of the key topics and subtopics discussed by the majority of the luxury brands	44
Table 11. Summary of the key topics and subtopics highlighted by the premium brands	48
Table 12. Major differences in the content of stories shared by luxury and premium brands.....	52
Table 13. Major similarities in the content of stories shared by luxury and premium brands.....	54
Table 14. Key topics that luxury and premium brands discussed in the stories published on their websites	55
Table 15. Summary of similarities and differences in the subject matter of the stories luxury and premium brands create	56

GLOSSARY

Brand dilution	The “loss of meanings that differentiate a brand from its competitors” (Hsu et al., 2016, p. 265)
Brand equity	The value of a brand that is derived from brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1996, p. 316)
Digitalization	The act of replacing traditional conducts with digital technologies to complete a task
Global luxury market	The global market comprising nine luxury goods or service sectors: luxury cars, personal luxury goods, luxury hospitality, fine wines and spirits, gourmet food and fine dining, fine art, high-end furniture and housewares, private jets and yachts, and luxury cruises (Bain & Company, 2019)
Internet dilemma	The challenge luxury brands have to maintain a personal relationship with customers and transfer ideas of exclusivity via the democratic media of online channels without damaging their brands (Baker et al., 2018)
Luxury brands	In this thesis, the term ‘luxury brands’ specifically refers to luxury apparel brands in the fashion sector, unless stated otherwise.
Premium brands	In this thesis, the term ‘premium brands’ specifically refers to premium apparel brands in the fashion sector, unless stated otherwise.
Stories	“Narratives with a beginning, middle and end that are not just a standalone set of facts” (Aaker & Aaker, 2016, p. 50-51)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and thesis purpose

The global luxury market has been growing continuously over the past two decades and is expected to continue to do so over the next six years (Bain & Company, 2019). The global luxury market is comprised of a multitude of sectors, for example, luxury cars, luxury hospitality, fine wines and spirits, private jets and yachts, and personal luxury goods. The size of the personal luxury goods sector, which is comprised of apparel, accessories, and cosmetics, reached 260 billion euros in 2018, making it the second-largest luxury sector with 22 percent of the total luxury market. Furthermore, it has been reported that the premium fashion sector, now worth over 100 billion euros, has also been experiencing high growth recently and is expected to continue to surpass the luxury fashion sector in terms of growth rate (Consultancy.eu, 2018).

At the same time, there is a growing interest among researchers to study the management and marketing strategies of luxury brands (Ko et al., 2017), especially in recent years as luxury consumption has started to shift from offline to online (Bain & Company, 2019; Deloitte, 2018). Similar to the music and automotive sectors, the luxury fashion sector is undergoing a period of tremendous change due in part to changing consumer behavior and new digital technologies (Chandon et al., 2015).

The luxury fashion sector has long avoided the adoption of digital technologies to market their brands and products; however, today luxury brands can no longer stay away from digital channels (Arrigo, 2014). The consensus within academia is that in the digital age, luxury brands face an unprecedented challenge of using mass-market marketing strategies, i.e. paid content on social media, while simultaneously emphasizing the exclusivity of their products (Okonkwo, 2010). This phenomenon is described by scholars as the ‘Internet Dilemma’, which refers to the challenge facing luxury brands to maintain a personal relationship with customers and transfer ideas of exclusivity via the democratic media of online channels without damaging their brands (Baker et al., 2018). Today brand managers of luxury fashion houses must delicately balance the seemingly paradoxical task of pursuing accessible, online strategies while keeping an air of exclusivity around their brands, which begs the question: what do luxury brands communicate in an online setting?

There is an ongoing debate within academic circles regarding how luxury brands should exist online. Some scholars argue that the concept of luxury is diametrically opposed to

the characteristics of the internet (Maman Larraufie & Kourdoughli, 2014), while others support luxury brands pursuing online communication strategies as well as e-commerce since the internet represents a major opportunity for luxury brands to promote their brand identity as well as take advantage of a major sales channel (Baker et al., 2018).

In the context of this study, the Internet Dilemma is explored due to scholars' suggesting that luxury brands exposing themselves on the internet will cause a dilution of certain brand features such as exclusivity and prestige (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Keller, 2009; Okonkwo, 2007). In their seminal work, Kapferer and Bastien (2012) distinguish the concept of luxury from premium; however, in the academic field of luxury, an opacity surrounding what constitutes a luxury brand versus a premium brand persists (Chandon et al., 2017; Miller & Mills, 2012). Meanwhile, practitioners have stressed concern about ongoing confusion between luxury and premium brands and its effects on the two categories. Lumsden (2015) claims that consumers are the ones who decide whether a brand is a luxury or premium one. However, some "[premium brands] use the words and language of luxury – as well as charging high prices" ("Luxury vs premium brands", 2008, para. 6), making it difficult for consumers to distinguish between the two. The confusion poses risks on premium brands to be "caught out in the middle – neither value for money nor luxury" (para. 12), while luxury brands "risk losing the very exclusivity which is part of their luxury appeal" ("What's the Difference," 2016, para. 3).

Other luxury scholars claim that in the digital era, brand content (i.e. storytelling) is a way in which luxury can maintain its uniqueness on the internet (Sicard, 2013). Kim et al. (2015) suggest that stories are an important avenue for luxury brands to engage consumers through enchantment or charisma. Stories are also the media through which luxury brands most frequently communicate their luxury status (Maman Larraufie & Kourdoughli, 2014). As such, it is critical and relevant that the stories of luxury brands are explored and contrasted with those of premium brands in order to uncover how luxury brands convey their status as well as reveal how premium brands, where the "highest price is justified by the highest objective quality criteria" (Chandon et al., 2017, p. 144), portray themselves. The contrast between the two can reveal how luxury and premium brands depict themselves to consumers online. By shedding light on the distinction between the two categories, the study adds another perspective to the previous work of Kapferer et al. (2017) by focusing on how the brands profile themselves online. This comparison is paramount to the academic field of luxury because the distinction between the two categories is crucial for their success, Kapferer and Bastien (2009) claim that the marketing of luxury goods needs to distinguish itself from that of premium. Thus, a study

that examines the stories of luxury and premium brands and summarizes where they correspond and diverge is necessary.

Ultimately, the question of how brand managers advertise this distinction within the context of their stories remains.

1.1.1 Research purpose and questions

Addressing the need for research studies about the distinction between luxury and premium in the digital era, the purpose of this study is to describe how luxury and premium brands profile themselves online through stories as well as to delineate the differences and similarities in the topics of their stories.

To meet the aforementioned objective, this study is guided by two research questions:

- 1) How do luxury and premium fashion brands profile themselves through the stories that they create and publish online?
- 2) What are the similarities and differences in the topics of the stories that luxury and premium brands create?

1.2 Expected contributions

The expected theoretical and empirical contributions are expounded below.

Theoretically, the findings of this research will contribute to knowledge within the field of luxury research by providing a richer understanding of the concept of luxury in the digital era.

Empirically, this thesis will provide descriptions of the similarities and distinctions of the topics of luxury brand stories vis-à-vis premium as well as how luxury brands distinguish themselves from premium brands within the contexts of their stories online. Scholars have raised concerns regarding the possibility of brand dilution and the growing confusion between luxury and premium brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Okonkwo, 2010). Therefore, the descriptions will shed light on whether and how luxury and premium brands are differentiating themselves online through stories published on their websites.

1.3 Delimitations

The primary delimitation is that this thesis focuses on the textual stories that luxury and premium brands post on their official brand websites, excluding stories published on other

digital channels, because corporate websites are brand-building tools that showcase brands' visions and stories (Heine & Berghaus, 2014).

The second delimitation is that social media stories were excluded from the study because social media channels are mainly used to convey visual messages, and the focus of this study is on textual stories which are mostly published via websites (Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007).

The third delimitation is that the investigation was limited to stories published between January 1st, 2018 to April 2nd, 2019 (the first date of data collection) since each brand's website contains a plethora of webpages on which a multitude of stories are published.

The fourth delimitation is that by choosing to only analyze apparel brands, watch and jewelry brands were excluded from the luxury and premium brands analyzed. These additional brands can be included in future research to fully cover the extent of luxury and premium fashion brands.

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis is composed of seven chapters. The chapters, as well as brief descriptions of their content, are outlined below.

1) Chapter 1 - Introduction

First, we present the background of the luxury market and identify a problem, the purpose, and the research questions of this thesis. Then, we propose the expected contributions and identify the delimitations of this study.

2) Chapter 2 - Literature review

In this chapter, we discuss our review of the literature that is relevant to the problem identified in the background and identify the research gap that this research aims to address.

3) Chapter 3 - Theoretical background

In chapter 3, we discuss relevant theories that define the scope of this study.

4) Chapter 4 – Methodology

Once the background and scope of the study are established, we describe the methodology of our research in chapter 4. We explain the empirical approaches we chose to construct this study and how this study is conducted.

5) Chapter 5 - Results and Analysis

This chapter presents the research results and our analysis of the results.

6) Chapter 6 – Conclusion

In this chapter, we answer the research questions with the findings from this study.

7) Chapter 7 - Final Discussion

Finally, we discuss the theoretical and empirical contributions and draw practical implications from the findings. Then, we identify the potential criticism and limitations of this thesis and suggest possible future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to elaborate on the background of this study and to identify a research gap. First, we discuss the literature which emphasizes the possibility of brand dilution as an effect of the Internet Dilemma. Then, we present the literature regarding the unclarity of the concepts of luxury and premium brands. Finally, we suggest a research gap in which this thesis aims to fill.

2.1 Luxury brands and brand dilution

According to Hsu et al. (2016), brand dilution refers to the “loss of meanings that differentiate a brand from its competitors” (p. 265). For brands outside of the luxury sector, differentiation is the primary driver of market share, and brand dilution causes a loss in brand equity (Hsu et al., 2016). However, Kapferer and Bastien (2009) argue that for luxury brands, “being unique is what counts, not any comparison with a competitor” (p. 316). When middle-class consumers habitually purchase luxury goods, luxury brands become less exclusive due to their being widely accessible; this is when luxury brand dilution typically occurs (Truong et al., 2009). Meanwhile, Truong et al. (2008) found that the threat of brand dilution exists for brands that use the status of their products as a selling point, which is what luxury brands are accustomed to. As such, the boundary between luxury and premium brands, which largely compete based on price, is thin (Truong et al., 2008).

With regard to the Internet Dilemma, few studies have addressed the threat of brand dilution that luxury brands may encounter after being online over the long term (Arrigo, 2018). The paradox of exclusivity versus accessibility (Keller, 2009) may result in a type of brand dilution that Pullig et al. (2006) describe as blurring, which refers to the gradual erosion of a brand’s identity in the minds of consumers. Blurring dilution harms brands by impairing their distinctiveness (Fhima, 2010).

In an effort to address the challenge of brand dilution, Hines and Bruce (2007) suggest that luxury brands invest in strategic marketing that focuses on customer experience and an exceptional retail environment. However, some scholars suggest that luxury brands maintain strict control of their distribution channels as well as avoid e-commerce (Kort et al., 2006). Since the line between luxury and premium is fragile and luxury faces the threat of brand dilution in light of the Internet Dilemma, this study seeks to describe how

luxury and premium fashion brands profile themselves in the online world. However, to do so, the definition of luxury and its confusion with premium must be explored.

2.2 Concept of luxury brands and the confusion with premium brands

In this section, we present a review of literature that discusses the definitions of luxury brands and how the boundary between luxury and premium brands is unclear. We found that scholars have not reached a consensus on what constitutes a luxury brand, and very few have attempted to define a premium brand. Furthermore, there is a confusion between luxury and premium brands among researchers, practitioners, and consumers.

2.2.1 Lack of consensus on what defines a luxury brand

Scholars in the luxury research field “have attempted to define what constitutes a luxury brand without a clear consensus” (Ko et al., 2017, p. 1-2). From their review of literature in the area of luxury marketing research, Ko et al. found that most scholars derive their definitions of a luxury brand from consumers’ perceptions of luxury; thus, they came to a conclusion that “whether or not a brand is considered luxury ultimately depends on consumer evaluations of that brand” (p. 2).

Heine (2012), for instance, suggests that luxury brands must possess the image of being luxury in the minds of consumers regardless of the products they sell since certain luxury brands sell not only luxury but also non-luxury products. For example, Mercedes, which possesses an image of luxury, not only sells luxury cars but also buses for public transportation. Heine asserts that “luxury brands are regarded as images in the minds of consumers that comprise associations about a high level of price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinariness and a high degree of non-functional associations” (p. 62).

Meanwhile, Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2018) have conducted a research study on 3,217 luxury buyers from major cities in the US, Europe, and Asia and argued that the dimensions of rarity and exclusivity form the basis of a luxury brand. From their study, they found that the market penetration of a luxury brand reduces the customer’s desire for the brand. That is, if the perceived rarity and exclusivity of a brand is lower due to greater accessibility by many people, a luxury brand is deemed to lose its luxury status.

However, the meaning of luxury is “extremely heterogeneous across consumers” (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016, p. 338) and is “gearing towards individual interpretations” (Okonkwo, 2010, p. 13).

From one of his studies, Kapferer (2015) found that 3,085 affluent consumers across four continents (North America, South America, Europe, and Asia) possess differing opinions on what luxury is associated with. The study participants were asked to select attributes, from a given list of ten attributes, that they thought best define luxury. Table 1 depicts the top four attributes that participants from each country chose.

Table 1. Top 4 meanings evoked by the word ‘luxury’ for consumers in France, US, China, Brazil, Germany, and Japan – Adapted from Kapferer (2015, p. 11)

France	US	China	Brazil	Germany	Japan
High quality	High quality	Expensive	High quality	High quality	High quality
Prestige	Expensive	High quality	Pleasure	Expensive	Prestige
Expensive	Prestige	Fashion	Dream	Fashion	Expensive
Pleasure	Pleasure	Minority	Expensive	Dream	Intemporal

Although expensiveness and prestige appear to be common in the list of the top four attributes among all observed nations, Kapferer et al. (2017) argue that the term ‘expensive’ itself is also a challenge for researchers to define since consumers’ income levels along with their perceptions of expensiveness are constantly changing. Ultimately, scholars who have conducted studies on different sample groups of consumers discover different sets of attributes that constitute a luxury brand.

2.2.2 The relativity of luxury

Adding to the difficulty in defining a luxury brand, several scholars such as Chandon et al. (2015), Heine (2012), and Kapferer and Bastien (2012) propose that the term ‘luxury’ is relative and “has more than one meaning depending [on] the context” (Cristini et al., 2017, p. 105). Heine (2012) suggests that there are five conditions in which luxury can be relative: regional relativity, temporal relativity, economic relativity, cultural relativity, and situational relativity.

Regional relativity occurs when locals in a given region determine whether something is a luxury or not based on its availability in the geographical region. For example, tropical fruits are luxuries for northern countries but are not so for tropical countries. *Temporal relativity* refers to how people see an item as a luxury at one point in time but not as a luxury at other times, such as a color television. *Economic relativity*, on the other hand, is when people judge whether something is luxury or not based on their financial ability to obtain it. This explains why fine dining is a luxury for some people but not a luxury

for the wealthy ones. *Cultural relativity* recognizes cultural differences as the determinant of luxury. While shark fin soup used to be and, for some, still is a luxury among the Chinese, Westerners have largely banned the dish. Meanwhile, a pancake with jam can be a luxury for a prisoner but not a luxury for those who are not incarcerated. This example refers to *situational relativity*, which is when people in different situations have dissimilar judgments of what is luxury and what is not.

2.2.3 The transformation of luxury

Apart from the relativity, Cristini et al. (2017) argue that luxury has a transformative nature. From their review of literature that presents the concept of luxury, they found that the meanings associated with luxury are transformative in five different aspects:

- 1) *From public ownership to private consumption* - Cristini et al. (2017) argue that luxury, up until the 17th century, was seen as a danger to society and as “something that could only be accessed in the public place” (p. 102). However, due to the increase in trade and improved economy in the modern era, more and more people can and are encouraged to gain private ownership of luxury with implicit public conspicuousness (Veblen, 1973).
- 2) *From inherent excellence to media’s standard of excellence* - Inherent excellence, according to Cristini et al. (2017), refers to exclusivity brought about by creativity, craftsmanship, and exquisite materials; whereas, media’s standard of excellence is the perception of excellence which is crafted by the media and advertisement. Cristini et al. claim that at present time, media has convinced consumers of short-term consumption of mediocre luxury rather than luxury with inherent excellence; therefore, the inherent excellence, which was traditionally attached to the meaning of luxury, is losing its stance, and mediocrity is prevailing.
- 3) *From artistic creativity to profitable creativity* - “Luxury was represented by and expressed through creations like monuments, public squares and fountains for the means of public splendor” (Cristini et al., 2017, p. 103). However, the kind of creativity that constitutes luxury today is no longer solely related to art; rather, it must be the kind that inspires consumer demand and generates sales and profits.
- 4) *From long-term to short-term consumption* - Luxury used to be represented by long-standing public creations like monuments. However, the long-term approach of luxury has been shifting towards the short-term consumption of fashion luxury.

Cristini et al. (2017) claim that this shift is accelerated by the growing use of the internet as the abundance information accessible online “may feed the impatience” (p. 103).

- 5) *From “feeding the [religious] spirit and the common good to indulging the self”* (Cristini et al., 2017, p. 103) - Luxury was previously represented by religious monuments and public creations as a means to control the human desire for excessive personal indulgence. However, due to the four transformations explained earlier, luxury is now consumed by individuals to feed their desires.

From the five aspects of luxury transformation, Cristini et al. (2017) conclude that luxury was previously constituted of three attributes: excellence, creativity, and exclusivity. However, in this modern time, the three attributes, although are still “sufficient to define luxury, they are not [all] necessary” (p. 105); rather, luxury items can exist without one of these conditions being high and still be perceived as luxury items.

2.2.4 Confusion between luxury brands and premium brands

Due to the ambiguity of what constitutes a luxury brand, confusion between luxury brands and premium brands that are positioned just below luxury (Rambourg, 2014; Shien, 2018) often arises among consumers (Chandon et al., 2015), scholars, and practitioners (Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Miller & Mills, 2012). Heine (2012) claims that the “differentiation between luxury and premium brands is mainly a matter of degree, which makes it difficult to draw a clear line, especially between top premium brands and entry-level luxury brands” (p. 68). Aliyev et al. (2018) concur that the “point at which a premium product ends and luxury begins depends on individual judgment” (p. 2).

This confusion raises a question: what is the definition of a premium brand? From our review of academic literature, only a few scholars have proposed empirical definitions of a premium brand (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Reddy et al., 2009; Trefzger et al., 2016). Yet, in their attempts to define a premium brand, scholars tend to rely on the unsettled attributes of a luxury brand to make comparisons.

Reddy et al. (2009) suggest that as compared to luxury brands, premium brands have a wider distribution of their products and a lower price point; and unlike luxury brands, premium brands do not require craftsmanship in the product manufacturing and the “asset of a strong heritage” (p. 195).

Kapferer and Bastien (2012) also present a comparison of premium brands against luxury brands. They argue that luxury brands sell dreams, while premium brands sell reality. They associate luxury brands with attributes such as priceless, non-comparable, and rare while associate premium brands with attributes such as quality to price ratio, performance, and comparability.

Another possible factor that contributes to the confusion is ‘the commoditization of luxury brands’, a phenomenon where luxury brands offer goods that are more accessible than their usual products (Jin & Cedrola, 2017; Kapferer et al., 2017; Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). Today, a majority of luxury brands are owned by publicly listed conglomerates; therefore, gaining high short-term profits is crucial for the brands (Boisvert & Ashill, 2018; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). In addition, there exists a trend in which middle-class and low-income individuals seek to possess luxury-labeled products “as a way to enhance their social status” (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017, p. 11). For this reason, many luxury brands adopt a downward extension strategy and introduce product lines that are frequently accessed by middle-class consumers to increase short-term revenues (Boisvert & Ashill, 2018; Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

Another terminology that arises from this phenomenon is ‘new luxury’ (Miller & Mills, 2012; Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). When identifying new luxury products, Silverstein and Fiske (2003) refer to products that are accessible by middle-class consumers yet possess the prestigious image comparable to what traditional luxury would offer. Silverstein and Fiske (2003) classify new luxury products into three levels: accessible superpremium, old-luxury brand extensions, and mass prestige (*masstige*). *Accessible superpremium* products offer superior quality and are priced higher as compared to general premium products; whereas, *old-luxury brand extensions* are lower-priced versions of traditional luxury goods that a given brand offers. *Mass prestige (masstige)* products, which refer to mass-produced, relatively inexpensive goods that are marketed as luxurious or prestigious, are at the lowest rank in the new luxury goods market. The products are lower in quality and price compared to the upper two levels but offer an equally high prestigious image. New luxury consumers, therefore, are mainly aspirational and ‘the new rich’ consumers – consumers who have recently gained wealth (Miller & Mills, 2012). Miller and Mills assert that the new luxury consumers seek goods that explicitly express luxury brand symbolisms; therefore, the more accessible yet prestigious ‘new luxury’ goods respond well to their demand.

Nonetheless, Heine (2012) and Kapferer (2015) argue that new luxury is not a substitute for traditional luxury but rather a whole new sector. Both scholars suggest that even

though several luxury brands now offer new luxury products alongside their traditional luxury products, these brands, in addition to their original business operations, adopt a new business model and strategy to offer their new luxury products. Therefore, one should not refer to new luxury as just ‘luxury’ but rather address traditional luxury and new luxury with their appropriate terms.

2.2.5 Research gap

Given the background and literature review, there exists a gap in terms of understanding what constitutes a luxury brand versus a premium brand in the face of the Internet Dilemma. The Internet Dilemma poses new questions for luxury brands, namely, how to exist online. Practitioners and researchers alike express concern over a blurring of the distinction between luxury and premium brands, some scholars argue that such an occurrence may result in brand dilution for luxury brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Okonkwo, 2010). The distinction between these two categories is relevant because they are regularly used by practitioners in marketing practice. Derval (2018) asserts, “Brands can be equally successful with a premium or with a super luxury positioning, as long as it stays consistent with the target personas and the brand codes” (p. 75).

Previously, Kapferer and Bastien (2012) explored this distinction; however, the authors’ distinction was based on what luxury and premium brands will do for consumers rather than the inherent difference between luxury and premium (Kapferer et al., 2017). Prior research has largely focused on consumers’ perception of luxury and their purchase intentions; thus, there exists a gap in the literature regarding how brands profile themselves. Furthermore, the distinction between luxury and premium is particularly relevant to explore because, in order to be profitable, brands must employ different marketing strategies. Sicard (2013) argues that “true luxury requires a specific kind of marketing, which expresses luxury’s superiority and thus is incommensurable with marketing in all other sectors” (xvi). Kapferer et al. (2017) concur that there are different rules for marketing luxury goods that deviate from the classic marketing mix, particularly the analysis of the four Ps: product, promotion, price, and place. The scholars claim that “the reason why marketing does not seem to work with luxury goods the same way it does with everyday consumer goods, even top-of-the-range or premium consumer goods, is that the two are fundamentally different” (Kapferer et al., 2017, p. 68). Little attention has been given to research exploring the distinction between luxury and premium. As such, it is exceedingly difficult to use past research to answer the previously stated research questions, which are the following:

- 1) How do luxury and premium fashion brands profile themselves through the stories that they create and publish online?
- 2) What are the similarities and differences in the topics of the stories that luxury and premium brands create?

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Brand Strategies (how brands define themselves)

The concept of a brand has been around for centuries; in 1960, the American Marketing Association defined a brand as a “trademark, a distinctive name of a product or manufacturer, sign, symbol, design or any combinations used to identify the goods and services of a seller to differentiate its offerings from those of its competitors” (Gehani, 2016, p. 36). Essentially, brands are “intangible assets that can build shareholder value” (Nandan, 2005, p. 264).

From the perspective of brand strategists, brand identity is crucial for communicating effectively to consumers. Brand identity refers to “the unique set of brand associations that represent what a brand stands for and imply a promise to customers” (Aaker, 1996, p. 178). Since companies aim to identify themselves via differentiation, the creation and management of a brand identity are within their purview (Gehani, 2016). A brand identity is crafted in order to influence brand image, mainly how the brand is perceived by consumers (Srivastava, 2011). Kort et al. (2006) suggest that a brand’s image refers to the extent to which consumers are willing to pay extra to purchase a certain brand whilst another brand of similar quality could be obtained at a cheaper price. Table 2 below, adapted from Nandan (2005, p.268), illustrates the key differences between how brands identify themselves and how consumers perceive brands. Given the marketing focus of this research, our study is centered on the topics that luxury and premium fashion brands communicate via the published stories on their websites.

Table 2. Differences between brand identity and brand image – Adapted from Nandan (2005, p. 268)

Brand Identity	Brand Image
Source/company focused	Received/target audience focused
Created by managerial activities	Created by consumers’ perceptions
Encoded by ‘brand originator’	Decoded by ‘brand receiver’
Identity is sent.	Identity is received/perceived.

This section will explore the managerial activities and strategies a company employs to guide consumers’ purchase decisions and sustain brand equity. To establish a brand identity, the marketing mix, specifically analysis of the four Ps – product, promotion,

price and place – is an important tool for marketers (Hines & Bruce, 2007). Keller (2013) asserts that brand positioning is the central focus of a marketing strategy; brand positioning refers to the “act of designing the company’s offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the target customer’s minds” (p. 79). Furthermore, Nandan (2005) argues that brand loyalty is achieved when a congruence is reached between brand identity and brand image through interpretive communications in which the focus is on the receiver, target group, and social process. Similarly, Hagtvedt and Patrick (2009) highlight that the brand dilution research suggests that communicating messages which are incongruent with a brand concept decreases brand equity.

However, the same rules do not apply for luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Given the luxury fashion market is dynamic in nature, Hines and Bruce (2007) argue that there is no clear blueprint for luxury brands to market their products to gain a competitive position. However, Kapferer and Bastien (2012) claim that there are specific rules for marketing luxury goods, and at the heart of these rules lies the rejection of brand positioning in favor of elevating brand identity. Kapferer and Bastien (2012) assert that “luxury makes the bald statement ‘this is what I am’” (p. 62) and that to do so, luxury brands craft stories that involve the readers emotionally, build an identity, and spread quickly. In essence, building a luxury brand is about storytelling (Gurзки & Woisetschläger, 2017). Ultimately, this thesis is concerned with how luxury and premium fashion brands profile themselves through the stories shared on their websites.

3.2 Narrative theory and the importance of storytelling

The underlying premise of narrative theory is that humans engage in sensemaking to give structure and meaning to their lives (Ricoeur, 1980). Advertising is one way to construct narratives that help people make sense of the world (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Furthermore, among brand management scholars, the narrative form of storytelling is central in expressing a brand’s identity (Pulizzi, 2012). For luxury brands, the aim is to develop a dialogue, not driven by their products, but rather by addressing their customers’ needs in terms of brand experiences (Ko et al., 2016). To create an identity both internally and externally, brands employ storytelling (Mossberg, 2008). The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines a story as a “description, either true or imagined, of a connected series of events”. However, within the context of marketing, stories are more commonly defined as “narratives with a beginning, middle and end that are not just a standalone set of facts” (Aaker & Aaker, 2016, p. 50-51). Stories are a particularly successful mode of communication because they are often memorable, persuasive, spawn social communication, and easier to recall than facts (Aaker & Aaker, 2016).

According to Keller (2016), storytelling is one method of creating intangible associations to a brand; for marketers, storytelling is a crucial ingredient to their brand strategies. The narrative approach of storytelling can provide added value to products as well as instill a sense of loyalty in consumers (McLellan, 2006). Today, the use of stories is central to enhancing brands (Denning, 2006). Ultimately, stories are powerful because they make the readers emotionally involved, craft an intriguing brand identity, and spread quickly (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). As such, stories represent a powerful way to gain awareness, persuade, communicate, and change behavior (Aaaker & Aaaker, 2016). In the context of this study, stories are the subject of the analysis because numerous brands engage in storytelling to connect people to their brands and trigger interaction (Weman et al., 2012).

3.3 Storytelling in the digital era

Today's digital era offers a plethora of opportunities for brands to communicate their values and build trust with consumers through storytelling, and new technologies allow brands to enhance their levels of customer engagement (van Laer et al., 2019). Castillan et al. (2017) assert that "new digital technologies can be used as an ideal way to familiarize consumers with the brand, to inform them about the products, the new trends and even the history of the brand" (p. 586). From consumer goods to luxury products, the internet is a crucial part of brand communication strategies (Geerts, 2013).

Brand managers employ storytelling techniques to transport their audiences via enriching narratives. This process refers to the theory of narrative transportation, which can be explained as to how an audience's absorption into a story can affect their belief systems (Green & Brock, 2000). Recent developments in technology such as virtual reality can help storytellers create even more engaging stories, which may enhance the power of said stories as well as their capacity for narrative transportation (van Laer et al., 2019). Storytelling in the digital era differs from traditional storytelling in that the internet allows for a wider audience reach. Furthermore, brands use digital communication in order to share information as well as build their image via storytelling (Castillan et al., 2017).

3.3.1 Storytelling for luxury brands and premium brands in the digital era

In this digital era, the most frequently used tool luxury brands use to communicate their luxury status online is storytelling (Maman Larraufie & Kourdoughli, 2014). With regard to the luxury goods sector, brands are so integral to luxury products that the brand is positioned before the product (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). In essence, luxury consumers

are paying for the brand first and foremost. Moreover, luxury brands incorporate their intangible brand value, which is reflected in their high prices (Dahlhoff, 2016).

New technologies and the ubiquity of mobile devices have challenged luxury fashion brands' avoidance of e-commerce and digital marketing strategies. According to Kapferer and Bastien (2012), the digital marketing strategies most frequently employed by luxury fashion brands are online presence strategies, in which brands continuously produce content that promotes interaction with their audiences. Kapferer and Bastien (2012) state, "More than anything else, the luxury brand is an epic tale carried by its stories: storytelling is its mode of expression" (p. 148).

Luxury brand managers employ storytelling to educate consumers as well as build and protect brand equity. Luxury scholars appear to concur that luxury is not only about the product itself, but also about the story and mystique surrounding the product (Sicard, 2013). As such, it is useful for brands to create their storytelling narratives to maximize positive experiences by stressing emotional elements (Tseng & Huang, 2016; Lee & Watkins, 2016). As luxury brands make the shift to online, digital channels provide opportunities for elevated storytelling. Ultimately, there is no luxury brand without storytelling (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

We are drawn to the compelling topic of storytelling for luxury vis-a-vis premium brands due to a lack of research in this particular area. According to luxury scholars Miller and Mills (2012), "[a]mbiguity in the literature and the marketplace has contributed to the difficulty in differentiating luxury brands from [premium] brands" (p. 48).

3.3.2 An official website – the most important digital asset of a brand

Marketing activities have been drastically affected by the phenomenon of digitalization (Hanssens, 2018). The internet grants an allowance for equal access to information that is unprecedented (Strauss & Frost, 2014). By providing an opportunity for e-commerce, supplying information to consumers, and allowing for closer customer relationships, a firm's website can create a strong brand identity (Vlahvei et al., 2013). Furthermore, websites can be an important source of brand equity, which Keller (2016) defines as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on customer response to brand marketing activity" (p. 3). Many scholars have claimed that corporate websites are a crucial way for businesses to communicate their image to the public; as such, websites represent a large source of data in management research (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011).

Since most luxury brands use social media as a platform for customers to share their opinions and publicly write about their experiences with the brands (Baker et al., 2018), this study limits its focus to the brand stories published on websites. Our emphasis on websites stems from their being a brand's most important digital asset since it is the first place a consumer reaches when they search for information about a brand (Heine & Berghaus, 2014). As such, it is essentially compulsory for a brand's website to be ranked first in any brand-related online search; a website is a brand's first tool in an internet marketing strategy (Gastaldi, 2012).

By exploring the topical content of the stories displayed on the websites of luxury and premium brands, this study aims to describe how luxury and premium brands profile themselves online through stories and to delineate the differences and similarities in the topics of their stories.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Scientific approach and overall research design

The purpose of this research is ultimately to describe how luxury and premium brands profile themselves online through stories as well as to delineate the differences and similarities in the topics of the stories.

To achieve this objective, we sought to gain a profound understanding of the content of stories that luxury and premium brands publish on their websites and identify recurrent patterns. Therefore, we adopted an inductive qualitative content analysis approach to conduct this study and an archival method to collect data.

Since the focus of our research is the description of the webpage-published stories created by luxury and premium brands, this thesis followed the tradition of an Interpretivist research paradigm.

In terms of the reasoning approach, inductive reasoning, which allows researchers to infer categories and conclusions from the data (Flick, 2018a), was adopted. As the purpose of this thesis is not to test existing theories but rather to explore an area that is new to the luxury research field, a deductive approach appeared unfit. Furthermore, according to Maman Larraufie and Kourdoughli (2014), the luxury identity online is different from that of traditional luxury, and a majority of studies on how a luxury brand is defined heavily relies on consumer's perceptions (Ko et al., 2017). Therefore, using an abductive approach to draw a framework from existing definitions of a luxury brand would limit the findings of our study on the content of online stories and could lead to results that are framed by the perceptions of consumers rather than results that emerge from the brands' stories themselves. Moreover, the research on how a premium brand is defined is largely limited, and the study of how luxury and premium brands profile themselves online is a relatively unexplored area. For these reasons, as compared to deductive and abductive reasonings, an inductive approach seemed most suitable to the research objective.

In deciding between quantitative and qualitative methods, we decided that the qualitative research method is more appropriate in our study due to its flexible nature. Generally, the quantitative method is highly structured and requires strictly systematic procedures of data collection and analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This structural approach would hinder our ability to engage in sense-making of the data and derive categories out of it. On the contrary, the qualitative research method allows researchers to study the subjects

at their most natural states to gain an insightful understanding of the situation and derive an accurate description of it (Flick, 2018b). Therefore, the qualitative research method appeared as a more suitable approach. In addition, we adopted a form of triangulation which is to have two researchers “perform the analysis separately and then discuss their results and obtain consensus” (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 11) to increase the validity of this qualitative study. Nonetheless, we were aware of other limitations of a qualitative research method; thus, we followed the guidelines to enhance the validity and reliability of qualitative research proposed by LeCompte and Goetz (1982) (see section 4.3 Quality criteria).

As aforementioned, we decided upon an archival method as a strategy to collect the data for this study. The reason we pursued this approach was that we aimed to study “digital texts including...webpages” (Ventresca & Mohr, 2017, p. 2) rather than understanding what the content creators intend to convey or how consumers interpret the stories. Therefore, collecting the textual stories from their websites directly is more relevant to our study’s purpose than other strategies such as conducting interviews.

With regard to the time horizon, this thesis followed a cross-sectional design, in which, at a singular point in time, we collected and examined our data to detect patterns of association (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Finally, to analyze the data, we used the approach of content analysis. The method of content analysis is “a research method for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 108). The aim of content analysis, according to Elo and Kyngäs, is “to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon, and the outcome of the analysis is concepts or categories describing the phenomenon” (p. 108). This qualification of the content analysis method corresponded very well with the objective of this study.

4.2 Research methodology

This research examined how luxury and premium brands profile themselves via the stories published on their official websites. Our focus is on the various brands’ websites, which were analyzed by way of inductive qualitative content analysis. Since luxury firms highly prioritize customer relationships, “customer-facing technology such as the firm’s website should be a key indicator of the firm’s stance towards using the internet as a branding and selling tool” (Baker et al., 2018, p. 2). Marketers are thus able to use the

brands' websites to showcase stories that encapsulate the brands and intrigue their audiences.

The process of analysis was broken down into three phases: preparation, organizing, and main analysis. In this chapter, we discuss the preparation and organizing phases, and the main analysis will be presented in chapter 5 Results and analysis. The methodology of this research was designed based upon the tradition of qualitative content analysis with a focus on providing descriptions of selected texts, as outlined by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). We applied the inductive approach to content analysis that featured open coding.

4.2.1 Preparation phase

The first phase of preparation involved considering the sample and what to analyze in detail as well as developing the unit of analysis (Cavanagh, 1997). To draw on a sample that was representative of the current state of luxury and premium brands, ten fashion brands were chosen within the luxury and premium sectors respectively based on their recent rankings featured on Deloitte's (2018) ranked list of global brands. The two qualifying criteria for the sample of luxury and premium brands were a strong economic performance as measured by Deloitte and the existence of recent stories on their websites that were written within the time frame of analysis. The first stage of sampling was consulting the list of brand rankings, and the second stage of sampling involved combing the brand's websites for the presence of stories. Ultimately, the sample consisted of 20 brands. We decided upon ten luxury brands and ten premium brands due to temporal constraints as each brand's website contains a plethora of webpages on which a multitude of stories are published.

Although most luxury brands belong to larger conglomerates, individual brands were the focus of this research since we were interested in stories on an individual brand level. Every brand selected in this study has a website. The websites were analyzed to examine how the brands profile themselves via the stories published on their websites. Namely, the webpages describing the company, company history, and the 'stories' section, if applicable, were investigated thoroughly. We examined company websites because these sites are a brand-building tool that showcases a brand's vision and stories (Heine & Berghaus, 2014).

Tables 3 and 4 show lists of the selected luxury and premium brands with the links to their main story webpages. All sites were accessed between April 2nd to 3rd, 2019.

Table 3. List of the selected luxury brands with their main story webpage links, accessed on April 2nd and 3rd, 2019.

	Luxury brands	Website
1	Alexander McQueen	https://www.alexandermcqueen.com/experience/en/category/stories/
2	Burberry	https://se.burberry.com/articles/
3	Chanel	http://inside.chanel.com/en/timeline/1910_chanel-modes
4	Dior	https://www.dior.com/couture/en_int/the-house-of-dior/since-1947
5	Fendi	https://www.fendi.com/se/fisfor/categories/fearless
6	Gucci	https://www.gucci.com/se/en_gb/st/stories
7	Hermès	https://www.Hermès.com/se/en/story/185476-men-collection-spring-summer-19/
8	Louis Vuitton	https://eu.louisvuitton.com/eng-el/heritage-savoir-faire/french-art-de-vivre#the-london-stories
9	Prada	https://www.prada.com/se/en/pradasphere.html
10	Salvatore Ferragamo	https://www.ferragamo.com/shop/eu/en/sf/world-of-ferragamo/legacy/story--37626

Table 4. List of the selected premium brands with their main story webpage links, accessed on April 2nd and 3rd, 2019.

	Premium brands	Website
1	Coach	http://www.tapestry.com/our-brands/coach/ https://uk.coach.com/dreamitreal
2	Hugo (by Hugo Boss)	https://www.hugoboss.com/hugo-inspiration/
3	Kate Spade	https://www.katespade.com/about-us/ http://www.tapestry.com/our-brands/kate-spade/
4	Kenzo	https://www.kenzo.com/eu/en/previously-on-kenzo
5	Marc Jacobs	https://www.marcjacobs.com/about-marc/editorials/?from=Top_Navigation&lcat=L2
6	Max Mara	https://se.maxmara.com/mm-world
7	Ralph Lauren	https://www.ralphlauren.co.uk/en/rlmag
8	Ted Baker	https://www.tedbaker.com/blog/uk/
9	Tod's	https://www.tods.com/ww-en/stories.html
10	Tommy Hilfiger	https://usa.tommy.com/en

In terms of selecting the unit of analysis, we determined a unit to include an individual story in its entirety since we strived to describe the manifest content of the stories, which cannot be extracted through sentence segmenting. These stories were found in the sections of the website that often contain stories about the brand (i.e. ‘Stories’, ‘Our Story’, and

‘About Us’ sections). To shed light on the brands’ recent stories, we analyzed all stories found on the brands’ webpages that were published between January 1st, 2018 and April 2nd, 2019. In instances where publish dates could not be found, we cross-referenced the story topics by conducting a Google search to find an approximate publish date. A key dimension of a brand’s website is textual content, which conveys information about the company, its product offering, new or time-sensitive happenings, and consumer education that informs beyond a brand’s product and service (Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007). As such, this study concerned itself with the textual elements of the stories that the sampled brands feature on their websites. Visual elements from those sections of the websites were purposely excluded.

All textual data were downloaded and converted into separate Word documents for each brand on two consecutive days, April 2nd and 3rd, 2019, to combat the common problem of frequent updates to websites. The textual data amounted to 424 single-spaced pages in Times New Roman with a font size of 12. The total number of stories across the selected luxury and premium brands amounted to 450 stories with a length of 139,157 words. Table 5 depicts the number of stories and the total number of words in the stories from each brand.

Table 5. The number of stories and the total number of words in the stories from each brand

Luxury Brands	#stories	#words (total)	Premium Brands	#stories	#words (total)
Alexander McQueen	24	5693	Coach	6	1019
Burberry	11	3208	Hugo (by Hugo Boss)	30	9910
Chanel	1	2282	Kate Spade	6	1164
Dior	7	6044	Kenzo	20	8497
Fendi	13	1267	Marc Jacobs	40	9305
Gucci	119	25561	Max Mara	21	3202
Hermès	6	1153	Ralph Lauren	12	9011
Louis Vuitton	9	1797	Ted Baker	71	32604
Prada	32	9422	Tod’s	4	1675

Salvatore Ferragamo	4	1796	Tommy Hilfiger	14	4547
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Once we had our data prepared and units of analysis identified, we moved on to the organizing phase.

4.2.2 Organizing phase

In the organizing phase, we worked with the data to derive our results. We followed the process of inductive qualitative content analysis proposed by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). We first engaged in sense-making for each unit of analysis (one complete story from a brand) and extracted codes that signify the themes of each story. Then, we grouped the codes into subcategories to find subtopics of the stories. Finally, we grouped the subcategories into main categories to identify key topics of stories created by luxury and premium brands. Therefore, the expected results from this study were in the form of a taxonomy comprised of main categories, subcategories, and codes derived from stories published on the websites of luxury and premium brands. The following sections explain the process of this study.

4.2.2.1 Open coding

First, we, as the two coders of this study, individually read through each unit of analysis (an individual story) and made notes of prominent themes and keywords of each unit. Every word or phrase we made as a note is called ‘a code’. Secondly, we went over our codes together to detect significant differences, discussed our reasoning, and sought an agreement on which codes to keep for each unit of analysis.

Reaching a consensus

To reach an agreement on which codes to use for each unit of analysis, we went through every unit of analysis and compared our codes for each unit. The majority of differences were uses of synonyms, uses of different phrases that convey similar meanings, and uses of plural and singular forms; for example, ‘Rural’ and ‘Upcountry’, ‘Life journey’ and ‘Journey of life’, and ‘Materials’ and ‘Material’. In such cases, we decided upon choosing a word or a phrase and using the singular form for all the codes, with exceptions for some codes that refer to plural subjects such as ‘Multiple steps in the tailoring process’. Another cause of difference was one researcher’s use of several keywords and another’s use of a

singular word to describe the manifest content. To illustrate, we present an excerpt from a story published by Alexander McQueen:

“Inspiration - Metamorphosis: the magical transformation of femininity. Extreme nature: the delicate, emergent beauty of butterflies and moths; the opalescent shine of softly-armoured Scarab beetles. Hybrids: the morphing of one creature into another, one garment into another.” (Alexander McQueen, 2018c, Women’s Autumn/Winter 2018 Show)

The difference was that, from this excerpt, one researcher coded: ‘Butterflies’, ‘Moths’, and ‘Beetles’, while the other coded ‘Insects’. Since the excerpt particularly discusses the unique beauty of butterflies, moths, and beetles, identifying them all together as insects would mask the unique features of these three specific types of insects. Therefore, in this case, we decided upon the codes: ‘Butterfly’, ‘Moth’, and ‘Beetle’, instead of ‘Insects’.

In some rare events, we had almost entirely different sets of codes for one same unit of analysis. For example, from the story *Cotton on: Blogger Picks* (Ted Baker, 2018c), one researcher derived the codes: ‘Cotton’, ‘Ruffles and frills’, ‘Simple but elegant’, and ‘Statement sleeves’; whereas, the other coded: ‘Cotton’, ‘Design’, ‘Trends’, and ‘Wearability’. To finalize a list of codes for this story, we applied our logic of coding to decide which codes to keep and which ones to disregard if any.

The logic of coding

The logic of our coding is explained through an illustration. Here, another unit of analysis from Alexander McQueen serves as an example to illustrate how we assign codes to a unit of analysis:

“With its roots in workwear, denim is pieced and patched. An exploded, deconstructed vintage denim jacket is slashed at the elbow and waist and is worn with a skirt fitted at the hip then flared to mid-calf, pieced again, and with a delicate antique floral fluted and irregular handkerchief cotton hem. The play between masculine and feminine, hard and soft, darkness and light that lies at the heart of the house of Alexander McQueen couldn’t be more evident here.” (Alexander McQueen, 2018a, Denim)

From this unit, we derived four codes: ‘Denim’, ‘Floral’, ‘Multiple steps in the tailoring process’, and ‘Vintage’. This is because ‘Denim’ is the main object in this story. Meanwhile, the story talks about the denim being vintage with antique details; therefore, ‘Vintage’ serves as another code. The story also explains how the delicate ‘Floral’ pattern creates a softer side to the harder material of denim. Lastly, the story narrates how the denim piece has gone through ‘Multiple steps in the tailoring process’ before it becomes

a completed product. As such, codes represent dominant keywords or themes in the online stories.

4.2.2.2 Coding sheets

Upon our agreement on the final list of codes for each unit of analysis, we separately engaged in the categorization of codes and transferred them onto two coding sheets, one for the luxury brands and the other for the premium brands. During this stage, we generated initial categories out of the codes; codes that seemed to broadly convey similar notions were grouped into one initial category. As we created our coding sheets on Excel software, we listed the initial categories in the columns and assigned the codes in rows below the category to which they belonged.

Referring to the sample story ‘*Denim*’ from Alexander McQueen (2018a) (see section 4.2.2.1 Open coding), we illustrate how the codes are categorized and put onto a coding sheet in table 6.

Table 6. Sample part of a coding sheet

		Columns - Initial categories			
		Craftsmanship	Fabric	Pattern	Fashion style
Rows - codes	Multiple steps in the tailoring process	Denim	Floral	Vintage	

4.2.2.3 Grouping and Categorization

Upon the completion of each of our separate coding sheets, we compared our sheets, discussed the reasoning behind category placement, and collapsed some of the initial categories that were similar to one category. This step was to reduce the number of categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). For example, we collapsed the initial categories ‘Fabric’ and ‘Material’ together into one category ‘Material’ because all the codes under the two initial categories can be represented by the new category ‘Material’. The new categories are now called subcategories; and as mentioned earlier, we named each subcategory in a way that depicts what the subcategory represents. For example, the subcategory ‘Material’ represents codes that are raw materials such as ‘Denim’, ‘Feather’, and ‘Gem’. Therefore, subcategories identify subtopics of content in online stories created by luxury and premium brands.

4.2.2.4 Abstraction

At this stage, the subcategories are categorized into higher-order categories, entitled as main categories. The purpose of creating the main categories was to discover key topics in the stories that the luxury and premium brands published on their official websites. For example, as exemplified in table 8, we categorized the subcategories ‘Material’, ‘Pattern’, and ‘Style’ into the main category ‘Product communication’. This is because the three subcategories, as well as a few other subcategories (see Appendix 1), belong to the topic of ‘Product communication’.

In this process, we also worked independently to create the main categories before discussing together to reach consensus. Comparing our sets of main categories, we found minor differences such as the name and the size of a main category. For instance, one researcher created a main category ‘Corporate activity’ consisting of a set of subcategories; whereas, the other created three main categories: ‘Customer’, ‘Public Relations’, and ‘Technology’, altogether consisting of the same set of subcategories under ‘Corporate activity’. Considering that the main category name ‘Corporate activity’ can represent subcategories that the other coder assigned to the latter three main categories (See table 7), we decided upon using the main category ‘Corporate activity’.

Table 7. Differences in the name and the size of main categories categorized by coder A and coder B

Main category - coder A	Subcategories	Main categories - coder B	Subcategories
Corporate activity	- Celebrity endorsement/featuring	Customer	- Customer engagement
	- CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)		- Style advice and product guide
	- Customer engagement		- Target market
	- Employer branding	Public Relations	- Celebrity endorsement/featuring
	- Story sharing		- CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)
	- Style advice and product guide		- Employer branding
	- Target market		- Story sharing
	- Technology		
		Technology	- Technology

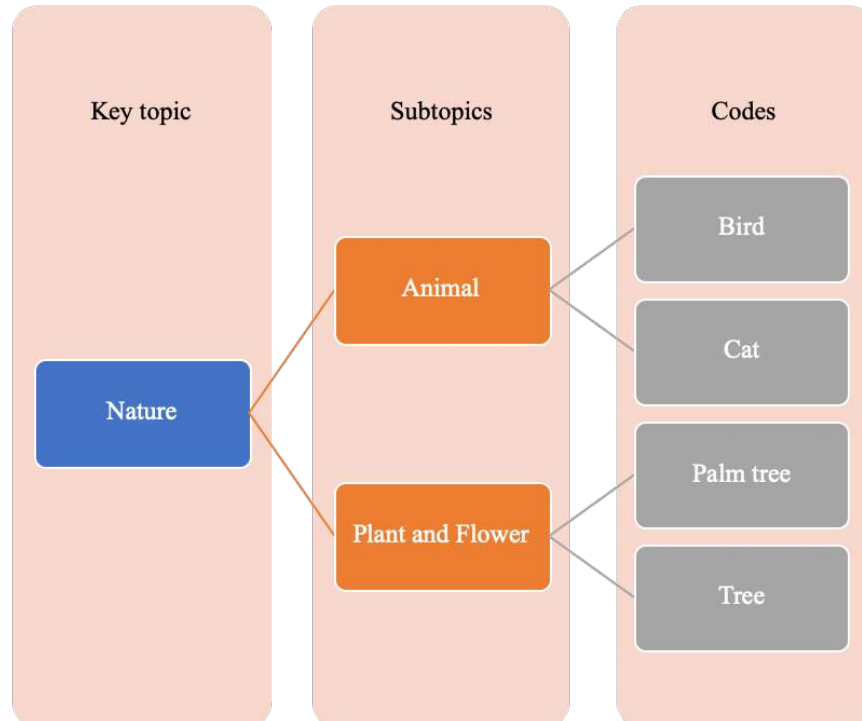
This process yielded two finalized ‘abstraction sheets’: one for luxury brands and another for premium brands. On each abstraction sheet, columns represent main categories, subcategories, and codes. Table 8 illustrates how the abstraction sheets were composed.

Table 8. Sample part of an abstraction sheet

Main categories	Subcategories	Codes
Product communication	Material	- Denim
		- Feather
	Pattern	- Floral
		- Geometric
	Style	- High-waisted
		- Minimalist

The finalized abstraction sheets present the results of our study, which consist of the main categories, subcategories, and codes. To summarize, we exhibit figure 1 which depicts “the logic of constructing categories on different levels” (Graneheim et al., 2017, p. 32).

Figure 1. Illustration of the logic of constructing categories on different levels



4.3 Quality criteria

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), the criteria to assess the quality of business research are reliability, replicability, and validity. Generally, reliability refers to the degree to which the research findings are replicable; whereas, replicability measures how replicable the research design is if some other scholars were to repeat the same study. Validity checks whether the research findings are trustworthy and transferable to other contexts. However, Bryman and Bell, as well as Flick (2018a), assert that the nature of qualitative research makes it difficult for researchers to use the three criteria to assess the quality of qualitative studies. Nonetheless, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) argue that in qualitative research, although the validity refers to the same measurement objectives, reliability rather refers to the replicability of the study – namely, whether the repetition of this study by other researchers would yield the same results. They propose that for qualitative research, the quality criteria should include internal reliability, external reliability, internal validity, and external validity. For this reason, these four criteria were used for the quality assessment of this qualitative research.

4.3.1 Internal reliability

Internal reliability assesses whether other researchers would agree with how the original researchers interpret the data. This study proves its internal reliability using a strategy that LeCompte and Goetz (1982) refer to as ‘multiple researchers’, which is a quality-enhancing strategy that other scholars, such as Elo and Kyngäs (2008) and Given (2008), also suggest specifically for a study using qualitative content analysis. As discussed earlier, during the process of open coding, grouping, and categorization, we, the two researchers of this study, initially worked independently with our own judgment before comparing our results and reasonings to uncover any discrepancy and find a consensus (see section 4.2.2 Organizing phase). In addition, since the data collected in this study are written texts readily available online, there is no concern about the loss or misinterpretation of raw data during the data collection process.

4.3.2 External reliability

External reliability determines whether the study can be replicated and still yield the same findings. This aspect of quality in qualitative research is difficult to enhance since “unique situations cannot be reconstructed precisely, even the most exact replication of research methods may fail to produce identical results” (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 35). In order to “approach rather than attain external reliability” (p. 37), we follow some external reliability enhancement strategies suggested by LeCompte and Goetz (1982). We specify

the websites that are our data sources, sections on the websites from where we collected the data, and access dates. We also explain our study process and coding and categorizing criteria in detail. By doing so, other researchers can replicate the study using a similar set of data and most possibly come to comparable results.

4.3.3 Internal validity

Internal validity refers to the degree to which the researchers' observations and measurements represent reality. In this study, our collected data, results, and analysis represent reality for two reasons. Firstly, the fact that data collected in this study are written texts readily available on the selected brands' websites over the specific time period limits not only the issue of subjects being influenced by researchers, which often occurs in an interview session, but also the risks of researchers purposefully neglecting any data that appear to contradict the uncovered patterns. The data in this study, therefore, are inclusive and at their most natural states.

4.3.4 External validity

External validity is concerned with the generalizability of the findings. According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), "external validity depends on the identification and description of those characteristics of phenomena salient for comparison with other, similar types" (p. 51). In this research, there are two major concerns that could impact the generalizability of the results. First, there is a concern about the representativeness of the samples. The one hundred largest luxury and premium fashion brands, as defined by Deloitte (2018) in terms of financial performance, formed the population of this study. In an effort to sample a group that could best inform us about how they profile themselves online through stories, we engaged in purposive sampling, which Neuendorf (2002) defines as a type of sampling that "involves the researcher making a decision as to what units he or she deems appropriate to include in the sample" (p. 88). In the context of this study, brands were chosen based on their inclusion on the Deloitte list as well as the existence of stories on their websites.

Another concern is regarding the researchers' influence on the context being studied. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that this concern can be alleviated with a rich description of the context being studied and the full process of the content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). As discussed earlier in section 4.3.2 External reliability, we describe the data sources and data collection and coding process in rich detail (see section 4.2.1 Preparation phase). In chapter 5, we also explain our results and analysis with illustrations and references to the categories and codes that we derived from the data.

Strategies were undertaken to increase the validity of this study. It was difficult to eliminate all threats, i.e. nonrandom sampling, to external validity. However, in the tradition of qualitative research, the intent of this study is not to generalize information but rather to “elucidate the particular, the specific” (Creswell et al., 2007).

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the results of this study, which consist of categories derived from the inductive qualitative content analysis of stories that selected luxury and premium brands published on their official websites from January 1st, 2018 to April 2nd, 2019. A descriptive analysis of the results is also discussed in this chapter.

5.1 Results

The results of this study took the form of a taxonomy composing of main categories, subcategories, and codes, which were derived from the units of analysis.

As summarized in section 4.2.1 Preparation phase, in this study, there are 450 units of analysis in total: 226 from the luxury brands and 224 from the premium brands. Each unit of analysis represents a unique story that each brand publishes on its website within a section that consists of stories about the brand, such as ‘Stories’, ‘Our Story’, and ‘About Us’.

From the 226 units of analysis from the luxury brands, we derived 610 codes, which were grouped into 42 subcategories, which were then categorized into 11 main categories. From the 224 units of analysis from the premium brands, we extracted 549 codes, 48 subcategories, and 12 main categories.

As discussed in section 4.2.2 Organizing phase, we coded and organized the taxonomy in the way that the main categories depict the key topics of the brands’ stories; whereas, subcategories represent subtopics within a key topic, and codes constitute a subtopic.

Table 9 gives an overview of what key topics are present in the stories and the number of the selected luxury and premium brands that include each key topic in their stories. Additionally, we present an extensive version of this table which elaborates on the quantification at the subtopic level in Appendix 2. Furthermore, Appendix 3 specifies which subtopics each luxury brand includes in its stories, while Appendix 4 depicts the subtopics that each premium brand discusses in their stories.

Table 9. Illustration of the key topics of the stories published on the websites of the luxury and premium brands and the number of the brands who discuss these topics in their stories

	Luxury (n=10)			Premium (n=10)		
Key topics	#brand	%	#code	#brand	%	#code
Art form	9	90	65	5	50	26
Atmosphere and theme	9	90	90	6	60	30
Brand communication	10	100	38	10	100	54
Corporate activity	5	50	38	7	70	105
Country and location	5	50	36	6	60	20
Distribution	3	30	7	4	40	14
Humankind	10	100	152	9	90	89
Lifestyle	2	20	11	5	50	32
Nature	6	60	26	6	60	16
Occasion*	-	-	-	2	20	27
Production	7	70	37	6	60	25
Product communication	9	90	110	10	100	111

* Only premium brands include this key topic in their stories.

5.2 Analysis

In analyzing the results, we focus on certain key topics that have been discussed by the majority of the luxury and premium brands or that appear to be significant. The criterion we used to select these key topics involved one of the following:

- The key topic is used by more than the average number of selected luxury or premium brands that discuss each key topic (the average of the numbers in the ‘#brand’ column: 6.8 for luxury brands and 6.3 for premium brands) or,
- The key topic consists of more than the average number of codes in each key topic (the average of the numbers in the ‘#code’ column: 55.5 for luxury brands and 45.8 for premium brands) or,
- The key topic is not discussed by the other brand category.

In the following sections, we discuss our analysis of the selected key topics from the luxury brands and the premium brands. Additionally, we present our findings of differences and similarities across all topics discussed in the stories of luxury and premium brands.

5.2.1 Luxury brands

Based on table 9 and the criteria explained above, we can identify six key topics around which the majority of the luxury brands tell stories: Art form, Atmosphere and theme, Brand communication, Humankind, Production, and Product communication. Below, we discuss our analysis of each of the six key topics, based on its corresponding subtopics and codes:

1) Art form

Nine out of ten luxury brands tell stories about some forms of art, with art performance and visual art being the most frequently addressed subtopics. For example, Gucci has a story around the subtopic of art performance with the code ‘Exhibit’:

“Shown at the Daelim Museum, ‘Is It Tomorrow Yet?’ is the first solo exhibition in Asia by Coco Capitán. The young artist and photographer—whose signature handwriting featured on a lineup of ready-to-wear pieces and accessories from the Gucci Fall Winter 2017 collection—presents over 150 artworks in a wide range of media including photography, painting, handwriting, video, and installation.” (Gucci, n.d.-b, Daelim Museum)

Additionally, Salvatore Ferragamo has a story about visual art with the code ‘Paint’:

“Ann Craven painted a series of watercolors on paper, called the ‘Shoe Portrait’. The work was created for the ‘The Amazing Shoemaker’ exhibition and depicted Ferragamo’s most iconic shoes.” (Salvatore Ferragamo, n.d.-b, #Innovation).

2) Atmosphere and theme

Ninety percent of the observed luxury brands discuss specific themes, and more than half of the ten brands tell stories with atmosphere. In its story about the theme of ‘Fortune’, Dior narrates:

“Still today, Monsieur Dior’s fetishes haunt the history of the label, from the twinkling star atop of the Dior building in Ginza, to the *Dior VIII* watch, from the Autumn 2013 make-up collection that colours the face with “Mystic Metallic” reflections to the jewellery range from the Autumn-Winter 2013 ready-to-wear fashion show that cast a spell by adorning the hands and ears with jewels resembling lucky charms. All these creations take good fortune as their theme, as though to bring eternal luck.” (Dior, n.d.-a, Believing in One’s Destiny).

Another example is a story from Prada, which talks about ‘Sunset’ as an atmosphere:

“Sunset on May 4, 2018 is at 7.55 pm. The dominant light color of the show space is dark silver, red and black. Red panels and lighting system installed on the windows create an “augmented sunset” atmosphere, to enhance the artificiality and to contrast with the daylight outside.” (Prada, n.d.-b, Prada Resort 2019).

Gucci, in the meantime, showcases a story with a setting in the ‘80s’:

“Deller’s film looks in depth at these social antecedents in the early and mid-1980s: the initial wave of acid house fever and media hysteria in the late 80s, its resurgence in the form of large-scale outdoor raves between 1988 and 1990, and the clampdown, which curtailed its power as a revolutionary force by the end of 1993.” (Gucci, n.d.-d, Everybody in the Place).

3) Brand communication

All of the ten luxury brands share content about their brand identity in their stories. Seventy percent of the brands convey stories of their brand heritage and the founder of the brands. Hermès, for example, has a story depicting the identity of ‘Hermès woman’:

“Assertive looks, crisp lines, confident sensuality. With her long legs in high-waisted shorts, a pencil skirt or close-fitting trousers, the Hermès woman steals a march on winter.” (Hermès, n.d.-b, Women’s Autumn-Winter 2019 Runway Show).

Salvatore Ferragamo expresses the heritage of the brand through a story about the origin and transformation of its brand logo:

“The logo was born when the Ferragamo company was founded in Florence and linked the designer’s name to the city of Florence “Ferragamo’s Creations Florence Italy”. It was changed when the company decided to include the founder’s name in its logo.” (Salvatore Ferragamo, n.d.-c, Story – Legacy – Salvatore Ferragamo).

Another example is Chanel, who tells stories with the focus on its founder, ‘Gabrielle Chanel’:

“Gabrielle Chanel is at the height of her fame. She employs 4,000 workers and owns five boutiques on rue Cambon in Paris.” (Chanel, n.d., Inside Chanel).

4) Humankind

All of the ten selected luxury brands published stories that revolve around the human experience, and 90 percent of these brands include the subtopics of the diversity of human existence and human nature in their stories. Gucci, as an example, has a story about the human experience of going through ‘Emotional difficulty’:

“From passing too much time staring at her body in the mirror to growing stronger and finding beauty in freedom of judgement, in the second episode, Holly Blakely remembers the emotional difficulties of her life as a young dancer.” (Gucci, n.d.-e, Growing Pains with Holly Blakey).

The subtopic of the diversity of human existence is discussed by, for instance, Gucci, who talks about ‘Gender fluidity’ and ‘LGBT’:

“If you talk about gender fluidity to someone older, the chances are they will immediately associate it with the LGBT community. While it was important to represent that element - and the struggles that fluidity presents from external forces - it was equally important to show how other young people have absorbed gender fluidity into their everyday lives.” (Gucci, n.d.-f, The Future is Fluid).

In discussing human nature, Burberry wrote this excerpt: “Rebellious youths scaled fence walls in one space, sending a message of liberation and freedom, while order and structure prevailed in the other.” (Burberry, n.d.-b, Tempest), from which the codes: ‘Rebellious’ and ‘Free spirit’ were drawn.

5) Production

Seven out of the ten luxury brands convey stories about the production of their goods. All of these seven brands discuss the subtopic of craftsmanship with codes that illustrate artisanship such as ‘Hand embroidery’, ‘Embellishment’, and “Multiple steps in the tailoring process’. For example:

“Intricately hand-drawn silk prints and hand-embroidered and painted embellishments are inspired by the British Art Nouveau style and the natural world. Delicate tendrils, swooping, swirling lines, flowers, leaves, animals and birds all feature. A Paisley motif references both Connemara shawls and Beardsley’s ink drawings: it is woven and embroidered across everything from fluid lace dresses to corseted overcoats.” (Alexander McQueen, 2018b, Pre Autumn/Winter 2018)

From this excerpt of a story by Alexander McQueen, all three codes were derived.

As another example, Salvatore Ferragamo delineated the ‘Multiple steps in the tailoring process’ in one of its stories:

“The highly complex construction process carried out in the Salvatore Ferragamo workshops has 260 separate, standardized phases requiring over six hours work by an expert shoemaker and over four days shaping of the upper on a last.” (Salvatore Ferragamo, n.d.-a, #Craftsmanship).

6) Product communication

Nine out of ten luxury brands share stories about their products, and most of the brands refer to the subtopics of material and style. Another notable subtopic is the country of origin of their products since this subtopic is not mentioned by the premium brands. Looking further into the codes that constitute material and style, we found that the brands focus on narrating how selective and exquisite their materials are and how their style is mostly classic and timeless.

Identifying the materials, Hermès wrote: “Summer brings leather on bare skin. Water-repellent calfskin, light deerskin and summer cashmeres offer fluidity and sensuality.” (Hermès, n.d.-a, Women Resort Spring-Summer 2019). The brand pointed out specific types of genuine leather and fabric: ‘Calfskin’, ‘Cashmere’, and ‘Deerskin’.

Likewise, Louis Vuitton is specific about the uniqueness of their ‘Reptile skin’ materials:

“Showcased is an exquisite collection of rare pieces made from Python, Alligator, or Crocodilian skin. Each skin is unique with its own pattern of scales, just like a human fingerprint. The exotic collection come in vibrant colours of saphir, cerise, or bordeaux, in iconic Louis Vuitton styles such as City Steamer, Capucines, or Petite Malle.” (Louis Vuitton, 2018, French Art de Vivre ‘Exotic Leathers’).

To conclude, the majority of the luxury brands create their stories around the key topics of Art form, Atmosphere and theme, Brand communication, Humankind, Production, and Product communication. The results also demonstrate that within each of the key topics, there are some subtopics that at least half of the ten selected brands highlight in their stories. Table 10 summarizes subtopics that are highlighted within each of the six key topics.

Table 10. Summary of the key topics and subtopics discussed by the majority of the luxury brands

Selected key topics:	Major subtopics:
Art form	Art performance Visual art
Atmosphere and theme	Atmosphere Theme Time
Brand communication	Brand heritage Brand identity Founder

Humankind	Diversity of human existence Human experience Human nature
Production	Craftsmanship
Product communication	Country of origin Material Style

5.2.2 Premium brands

The results reveal that there are five key topics around which the selected premium brands create their stories, including one topic that is unique to the premium brands. Below, we discuss the five key topics that the premium brands discuss in their stories: Brand communication, Corporate activity, Humankind, Occasion, and Product communication.

1) Brand communication

Similar to the luxury brands, all of the selected premium brands have stories that focus on brand communication and the subtopic of brand identity. For instance, Max Mara presents the ‘Max Mara identity’ through a story excerpt:

“In the beginning, no one realised how special it was — and yet, still today, it represents style and value that don’t fade with time. Sketched by Anne-Marie Beretta in the 80s, the 101801 coat was created: the heart and essence of the Max Mara identity.” (Max Mara, n.d., Our Story: The Icon).

Despite this similarity with luxury brands, one noticeable difference is that 70 percent of the selected premium brands include the subtopic of brand characteristics, a subtopic that is not apparent among the luxury brand stories. For example, Ralph Lauren states in its ‘About Us’ section that it is a ‘Global leader’:

“Ralph Lauren Corporation is a global leader in the design, marketing, and distribution of premium lifestyle products, including apparel, accessories, home furnishings, and other licenced product categories.” (Ralph Lauren, n.d.-a, About Us).

Meanwhile, Coach claims that it has certain qualifications that make the brand ‘Unmistakeable’:

“It is the innovative design, unparalleled craftsmanship, and all-American attitude that make each collection of handbags, accessories, shoes, and ready-to-wear unmistakably Coach.” (Coach, n.d., History).

2) Corporate activity

Seven out of the ten premium brands include the topic of corporate activity in their stories. A majority of the brands discuss the subtopics of celebrity endorsement, corporate social responsibility, and most distinctively, customer engagement, story sharing, style advice and product guide, and their target markets.

Kenzo, for example, published a story that featured the celebrity ‘Britney Spears’:

“La Collection Memento N°2 focuses heavily on denim and was inspired by the 1986 Paris runway debut of KENZO Jeans. But a more esoteric theme is “Icons”, the KENZO motifs are all featured heavily in the project, alongside Britney Spears.” (Kenzo, 2018a, Kenzo Presents Britney Spears).

Furthermore, the brand narrated a ‘Story’:

“In the distance, a shadow appears, only to flicker out of sight just as suddenly. Gradually, the young woman and the shadow play an abstract game of cat and mouse throughout the teeming flora of the island.” (Kenzo, 2018b, Island Spirit).

In communicating its corporate social responsibility, Kate Spade published a story about how it engages in ‘Community development’ and ‘Woman empowerment’ with an excerpt stating:

“[T]hrough our on purpose collection, we build suppliers that help transform communities by employing and empowering its primary agents of change: women.” (Kate Spade, n.d., On Purpose).

Ted Baker, to further exemplify, has a story that explicitly identifies one of its target audiences ‘Tall people’:

“Ted’s mates Crouchy and Foz are kind of a big deal (6’7” and 6’6” to be precise), and they have a hard time finding clothes that fit just right. Luckily for them, Ted’s T for Tall range is the perfect solution, designed especially for those with a head for heights. That calls for a trip to the pub in Ted’s book...” (Ted Baker, 2019a, T for Tall: Just Got Taller).

In another story, the brand invites consumers to engage by choosing ‘Your shade’ and downloading an electronic wallpaper reflecting that specific shade:

“Complete the questions below to help decide whether you’re more of a fiery fuchsia, rocking a rosy quartz, or showing your subtle blush, and claim your downloadable wallpaper beneath to own your shade with pride.” (Ted Baker, 2018d, Find Your True Hue).

Ralph Lauren similarly provides ‘Style advice’ in one of its stories:

“Take the skinny pant, which looks just as great with a classic white oxford for a Monday meeting as it does with an easy T-shirt and moto jacket for a studio visit on Thursday. Pair it with the blazer (over the pinstripe shirt if you’re out to make a real statement) for a relaxed spin on the traditional slacks-and-jacket combo—the ultimate take on the new power suit.” (Ralph Lauren, n.d.-b, Learn Your Stripes).

3) Humankind

Hugo by Hugo Boss presents a story about doing a ‘Good deed’ and bringing ‘Happiness’ to others:

“...it’s the little things that Presley Gerber values the most. “I like making others happy, doing whatever it is, like helping an old lady cross the street.”” (Hugo, n.d.-a, Berlin State of Mind).

Similarly, eight other premium brands have stories about the subtopic of human nature. Tod’s, for example, published a story focusing on a human ‘Gesture’ that is meaningful to the brand:

Tod’s celebrates Ciao, the quintessential Italian greeting whose spontaneity is recognized by people all over the planet. A universal symbol that this year celebrates two centuries of history and that links many Tod’s friends who took part in a special campaign by interpreting Ciao with their unique personalities and style. A simple, friendly and brief gesture to share with the same spontaneity as the casual elegance and lifestyle appeal of Tod’s. (Tod’s, n.d.-a, #ciaobytod)

4) Occasion

Occasion is a distinct topic solely found in the stories of premium brands. Specifically, Hugo by Hugo Boss and Ted Baker have several stories that center on holidays and special occasions. For example:

“The invitations are flooding in, which can only mean one thing – wedding season is here again. Whether you’re the bride or groom, or on the guestlist, your search for the perfect look ends here. Shop cocktail dresses, formal suits, shirts, skirts and more from HUGO.” (Hugo, n.d.-c, The Wedding Edit)

The codes derived from this excerpt are: ‘Wedding preparation’ and ‘Wedding outfit’ which construct the subtopic of special occasions.

Meanwhile, Ted Baker published a story about holidays with ‘Christmas tradition’:

“[It is] finally here, advent calendars are empty and the presents that were patiently sitting under the tree are now torn open and being spun, painted, dressed and kicked around. It’s a magical mayhem happening while the smell of Turkey fills the room. Ted doesn’t hold back

when it comes to Christmas, especially his outfit – suits and bow ties, dresses with faux fur trim, nothing is too much.” (Ted Baker, 2018f, Ted’s Occasionwear Guide: The Mini-Me Edition).

5) Product communication

All ten of the premium brands describe their products in their stories, specifically the style of their products. The subtopic of material is also brought up by 80 percent of these brands, while 60 percent include also the subtopic of product functionality.

In discussing the ‘Easy but chic’ style and the ‘Wearable’ functionality of its products, Ted Baker wrote:

“...contrast collars with scalloped finishes, intricate fringed cable knits, and boldly-striped colour blocks punctuate easy, wearable garments, giving them fresh edge and new purpose.” (Ted Baker, 2018b, Crane Reaction: Ted’s SS18 Colour by Numbers Collection Launches).

Also, Hugo by Hugo Boss narrated the functionality of being ‘Light’ and the type of ‘Fabric’ as a material of its suit:

“Presenting this summer’s go-to tailoring option – the Aer Suit. Discover HUGO's lightest suit ever, cut from one layer of superfine fabric and perfect for every creative spirit who won't be held down.” (Hugo, n.d.-b, HUGO Tailoring).

To conclude, most of the selected premium brands include in their stories the key topics of Brand communication, Corporate activity, Humankind, Occasion, and Product communication. Within each of the mentioned key topics, some subtopics have been discussed by a majority of the selected brands or are unique to the premium brands. Table 11 summarizes subtopics, within each of the five key topics, that are highlighted by a majority of the premium brands.

Table 11. Summary of the key topics and subtopics highlighted by the premium brands

Selected key topics:	Major subtopics:
Brand communication	Brand characteristic Brand identity
Corporate activity	Celebrity endorsement/featuring CRS (Corporate Social Responsibility) Customer engagement Story sharing Style advice and product guide Target market
Humankind	Human nature

Occasion	Holidays Special occasions
Product communication	Functionality Material Style

5.2.3 Comparison between luxury and premium brands

In this section, we identify noticeable differences and similarities across all the key topics, subtopics, and codes derived from stories published by the luxury and premium brands. From the results, we notice nine major differences:

- 1) A majority of the premium brands discuss their brand characteristics; whereas, none of the luxury brands mentions the subtopic of brand characteristics in their stories.
- 2) The premium brands encourage customer engagement through their web-based stories and refer to their social media channels; whereas, luxury brands occasionally make references to social media but not in a way that triggers engagement and inspires audience interaction. For example, Marc Jacobs (premium) wrote an excerpt:

“On a side note, his Instagram handle is @themarcjacobs and I would highly suggest looking up a video of Jacobs and DeFrancesco in panda suits on one of their rare excursions in Shanghai. You can thank me later.” (Marc Jacobs, n.d.-a, Fashion #legend Marc Jacobs).

Meanwhile, Alexander McQueen (luxury) composed:

“In a special collaboration with @TheJohnDeakinArchive, the Spring/Summer 2019 menswear collection was an homage to the legacy of Deakin portraiture and photographs of graffiti shot on the streets of Paris and Rome.” (Alexander McQueen, 2019, Tailoring and Soho)

Moreover, in terms of technology, luxury brands write about advanced technology more than their other digital communication channels. Gucci, for instance, narrated a ‘Humanoid robot’.

“Hiroshi Ishiguro spent almost his life designing a series of photorealistic androids, ERICA being just one of them. His creations have a striking resemblance to their human counterparts - one called Gerinmod HI-2, for example, is modelled on Ishiguro himself. Gerinmod HI-2 has a height of 140cm, over 50 pneumatic actuators, arms, legs, a plastic skull, metal skeleton, urethane foam flesh and silicone skin.” (Gucci, n.d.-g, The Performers: Hiroshi Ishiguro).

- 3) The premium brands tend to specify their target markets in their stories, while the luxury brands do not appear to do so.

- 4) Unlike the luxury brands, some premium brands discuss sales promotions and discounts in their stories. For example:

“For two days only, he’ll be offering some of his most exquisite bridal styles with discounts of up to 50% off. From romantic fairy tale gowns to dramatic show-stoppers, don’t miss the chance to find your dream dress at a steal.” (Ted Baker, 2018a, Ted’s Bridal Sample Sale)

- 5) Even though lifestyle is not discussed by the majority of the luxury brands nor by the majority of the premium brands, the latter includes stories describing people’s lifestyles more often.

For example, Ralph Lauren (premium), published an excerpt narrating:

“That night, back in Victor, I enjoyed a plate of baby back ribs at Big Hole BBQ washed down with a couple of Snake River Brewing Company IPAs, then drove back to my hotel under a sky full of about a million stars, and was in bed and asleep by 9:30 p.m.” (Ralph Lauren, n.d.-c, The River Wild).

In comparison, Gucci (luxury) published a story about ‘Fine dining’ and ‘Wine’:

“The Michelin Star Chef—who brings his wide-ranging Japanese and Peranakan culinary background—has recently created an entirely new French-inspired menu, to be tasted with Bibò’s wine collection, which features over 140 different varieties.” (Gucci, n.d.-a, Bibò Restaurant).

- 6) Several of the premium brands share stories about holidays and special occasions; on the other hand, none of the selected luxury brands does so.
- 7) Within the key topic of production, the premium brands describe their production expertise; whereas, the luxury brands do not mention this subtopic. Moreover, the stories about premium brands’ production strategy discuss new products and fashion collections; whereas, the luxury brands focus on the rarity and exclusivity in stories about their production strategy.

To illustrate, Tod’s (premium) shares a story portraying its unique ‘Know-how’ as the source of its production expertise:

“At Tod’s elegance is interlaced with a unique know-how, permeated by a typically Italian focus on detail and by a taste for all things well made.” (Tod’s, n.d.-b, Fall/Winter 19/20).

In addition, Ted Baker wrote a story about its ‘New product’ and ‘Seasonal collection’:

“Get a head start on your new season style with Ted’s latest Colour by Numbers collection. Full to the brim with bold prints and dazzling details, these latest looks were made with the modern woman in mind.” (Ted Baker, 2019b, Colour by Numbers).

On the other hand, Louis Vuitton profiles its products as being ‘Exclusive’ to special orders:

“The exceptional savoir-faire of the Asnières artisans is such that even today, key pieces are created here: rigid trunks, designs in rare or exotic leathers, special orders.” (Louis Vuitton, n.d., Asnières, The Heart of Louis Vuitton)

- 8) Only luxury brands mention the country of origin of their products; the premium brands do not discuss this subcategory in their stories. Chanel, for instance, specifies ‘Paris’ as the origin of its jewelry collection:

“A milestone is reached with the launch of the first CHANEL Fine Jewelry collection in the heart of the place Vendôme in Paris. In 1997, CHANEL establishes 18 place Vendôme as the home of CHANEL Fine Jewelry.” (Chanel, n.d., Inside Chanel).

- 9) In their stories, the luxury brands are specific about the luxuriousness, exoticness, and rarity of their materials, while the premium brands describe the high quality of their materials.

For instance, Ted Baker wrote: “Freddy chooses the CLELLY cotton top for a clean and crisp take on the essential white tee.” (Ted Baker, 2018c, Cottoned On: Bloggers’ Picks).

Meanwhile, Prada wrote about its luxurious ‘Silk’ and ‘Satin’:

“..., gradient nuances and color ranges that are meticulously controlled and printed on luxurious silk and satin which is then ironed and pleated and on refined knits,...” (Prada, n.d.-a, Prada Making of Tie-Dye).

As a conclusion, table 12 depicts the major differences in the content of stories shared by luxury and premium brands.

Table 12. Major differences in the content of stories shared by luxury and premium brands

Key topics	Subtopics	Luxury brands	Premium brands
Brand communication	Brand characteristic	-	Describe brand characteristics
Corporate activity	Customer engagement	-	Encourage customer engagement
	Target market	-	Specify the target market
	Technology	Occasionally refer to social media sites, but discuss more about cutting edge technology	Refer to social media sites
	Promotion	-	Advertise about their sales promotions, discounts and perks.
Lifestyle	Activity and Travel	-	Provide recommendations on how to prepare for some activities and give tips for travel preparation and travel guides for some cities
	Food	Tell stories of high-end dining and drinking culture	Tell stories of food and drink in general
Occasion	All subtopics	-	Share stories about holidays and special occasions and give suggestions on how to prepare for them
Production	Production expertise	-	Reference the expertise in production and the standard of excellence
	Production strategy	Focus on rarity and exclusivity	Introduce new and seasonal products
Product communication	Country of origin	Specify the country of origin of their products	-
	Material	Identify selective materials that are luxurious, exotic, and rare	Claim the high quality of their materials despite them

			being commonly used by general fashion brands
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Regarding the similarities, we noticed three major points that both luxury brands and premium brands share in common:

- 1) Luxury and premium brands almost equally share stories about their brand heritage, brand identity, and founders. To exemplify, Dior (luxury) narrates several stories about its founder, for example:

“Having become a designer for Piguet, then Lelong, then a couturier at the age of 42, Christian Dior tirelessly constructed his dresses like an architect, chose his colours like a painter and surrounded himself with those who would show his art in its best light, such as photographer Willy Maywald and designer René Gruau.” (Dior, n.d.-b, Christian Dior and the Art World)

Likewise, Marc Jacobs (premium) tells stories about its founder, with one story stating:

“After 30 years Marc Jacobs continues to unabashedly shape the boundaries of American fashion. The indefinable characteristics of his namesake label are the result of a certain unique, uncommonly frank and brilliantly outspoken perspective” (Marc Jacobs, n.d.-b, Meet Marc Jacobs).

- 2) Within the topic of distribution, both luxury and premium brands mention that they have a global distribution.

To illustrate, Burberry (luxury) wrote in their timeline story that they have a ‘Global distribution’: “2014: Burberry directly operates over 500 stores around the world.” (Burberry, n.d.-a, Our History), and Tommy Hilfiger (premium) made a statement that it has a ‘Global expansion’:

“With the support of strong global consumer recognition, Tommy Hilfiger has built an extensive distribution network in over 100 countries and more than 1,800 retail stores throughout North America, Europe, Latin America and the Asia Pacific region.” (Tommy Hilfiger, n.d., Company Overview).

- 3) Both luxury and premium brands refer to nature as a source of inspirations for their product design. For example, Gucci (luxury) wrote:

“Embroidered velvet cushions are cut in the shape of animals, such as a cat’s head and an owl or bee, a handmade laundry basket is colorfully decorated in a black cat motif,...” (Gucci, n.d.-c, Dressing Spaces).

In similar notion, Ted Baker (premium) composed:

“Flowers, as a subject, have long been a part of Ted’s design handwriting, and he loves the myriad ways in which they can be reinvented and interpreted each season through scale, colouring, composition and form.” (Ted Baker, 2018e, How Does Ted’s Garden Grow? A Trip to RHS Chelsea Flower Show).

Table 13 summarizes the major similarities in the content of stories shared by luxury and premium brands.

Table 13. Major similarities in the content of stories shared by luxury and premium brands

Key topics	Subtopics	Luxury and premium brands
Brand communication	Brand heritage, Brand identity, Founder	Narrate stories of the brand heritage, brand identity, and founder
Distribution	Distribution strategy	Similarly refer to the global distribution
Nature	All subtopics	Describe nature as an inspiration for their product design

From the comparison, it can be concluded that even though luxury and premium brands create their online stories around mostly similar key topics, they discuss subtopics and details (codes) within each key topic quite differently. Yet, there are certain prominent similarities. In chapter 6, we conclude how our findings answer the research questions and discuss whether we have reached our thesis purpose.

6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we revisit the purpose of this thesis and the research questions and discuss how our findings contribute to them. The purpose was to describe how luxury and premium brands profile themselves in their online stories and to delineate the differences and similarities in the content of those stories. The research questions were: ‘How do luxury and premium fashion brands profile themselves through the stories that they create and publish online?’ and ‘What are the similarities and differences in topics of the stories that luxury and premium brands create?’ The findings from our study provide answers to both research questions, and thus, the purpose of this thesis is deemed to be fulfilled.

6.1 Addressing the first research question

The first research question was: ‘How do luxury and premium fashion brands profile themselves through the stories that they create and publish online?’

The findings from this study show that there are recurrent patterns, or key topics, of content in the stories that luxury and premium brands create and publish on their websites. All of the key topics that luxury and premium brands discuss in the stories are presented in table 14. In our analysis, we identified significant key topics that the majority of the luxury brands or most of the premium brands present in their stories. For luxury brands, the significant key topics include Art form, Atmosphere and theme, Brand communication, Humankind, Production, and Product communication. For premium brands, the significant key topics are Brand Communication, Corporate activity, Humankind, Occasion, and Product communication. In table 14, the significant key topics are identified in bold text.

Table 14. Key topics that luxury and premium brands discussed in the stories published on their websites

Luxury brands	Premium brands
Art form	Art form
Atmosphere and theme	Atmosphere and theme
Brand communication	Brand communication
Corporate activity	Corporate activity
Country and location	Country and location

Distribution	Distribution
Humankind	Humankind
Lifestyle	Lifestyle
Nature	Nature
-	Occasion
Production	Production
Product communication	Product communication

Therefore, we conclude that luxury brands profile themselves by associating their online stories with several forms of art, narrating certain atmospheres and themes, communicating about their brands (i.e. brand heritage, brand identity, and the brand founder), telling stories about humankind such as human experience and nature, explaining about their production (how they craft their products), and discussing attributes of their products.

As for premium brands, we conclude that they profile themselves by communicating about their brands (i.e. brand characteristics, brand heritage, brand identity, and the brand founder), describing their corporate activities such as their social responsibilities and customer engagement, telling stories about humankind, associating the brands and their products with holidays and special occasions such as Christmas holidays and weddings, and communicating attributes of their products.

6.2 Addressing the second research question

The second research question was: ‘What are the similarities and differences in topics of the stories that luxury and premium brands create?’

From this study, we found several similarities and differences in the topics of the stories luxury and premium brands create. The similarities and differences are listed in table 15.

Table 15. Summary of similarities and differences in the subject matter of the stories luxury and premium brands create

Similarities	Differences
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<p>Subtopics that luxury brands and premium brands discuss in similar details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - brand heritage, brand identity, and founder - global distribution - nature (as an inspiration for their product design) 	<p>Subtopics that luxury brands discuss in their stories, but premium brands do not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - country of origin
	<p>Subtopics that premium brands discuss in their stories, but luxury brands do not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - brand characteristics - customer engagement - target market - sales promotion and discounts - activity and travel - holidays and special occasions - production expertise
	<p>Subtopics that luxury brands and premium brands discuss in different details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technology (Luxury brands talk more about cutting edge technology, while premium brands make reference to social media.) - Food (Luxury brands tell stories of high-end dining and drinking culture, while premium brands talk about food and drink in general.) - Production strategy (Luxury brands focus on rarity and exclusivity of their products, while premium brands introduce new collections) - Material (Luxury brands talk about selective and exquisite materials, while premium brands mention the high quality of their materials)

6.3 Concluding note about the thesis purpose

By answering the two research questions as presented above, this thesis has described how luxury and premium brands profile themselves in their online stories and delineated the differences and similarities in the content of those stories. In chapter 7, we discuss the theoretical and empirical contributions and practical implications of this study, considering that the purpose of this research has been fulfilled.

7. FINAL DISCUSSION

7.1 Theoretical contribution

The findings from this study contribute to the existing literature about luxury brands and premium brands in both complimentary and contradictory ways.

7.1.1 Complementing existing literature

Firstly, the results from this paper support the findings from a research study conducted by Maman Larraufie and Kourdoughli (2014), which reveals that in comparison to their usual offline communication strategy, luxury brands communicate more about their products than their brands online. Referring to table 9, even though all the ten selected luxury brands communicate stories about the brands themselves, there are only 38 codes associated with brand communication; whereas, there are as many as 107 codes that construct the topic of product communication.

Secondly, our findings complement some theories earlier proposed by Dahlhoff (2016). As we found that only luxury brands discuss the country of origin in their stories, the results of this study complement Dahlhoff's theory stating that the importance of country of origin has a stronger effect on luxury products than on other goods. Furthermore, Dahlhoff asserts that luxury brands' use of discounts may result in a loss of brand equity; interestingly, we found that luxury brand stories do not mention sales or discounts in the stories published on their websites.

Thirdly, from our analysis, we concluded that luxury brands profile themselves by associating their stories with art. This finding confirms the theory suggested by Chailan (2018) and Kapferer (2014) that art has taken a crucial role in the strategy of luxury brands. The two scholars claim that by associating the brands and their products with art, luxury brands can remain distinct amidst the growing competition in the fashion sector and the confusion between luxury brands and premium brands.

7.1.2 Contradicting existing literature

Miller and Mills' (2012) Brand Luxury Model (BLM) suggests that brand leadership is more important to luxury brands than uniqueness: "brands that are trendy, up-to-date, or visionary are likely to be more luxurious than brands that are unique, original, creative, expressive, or imaginative" (p.1477). However, the codes derived from this study do not appear to support that luxury brands are profiling themselves as trendy or up-to-date.

Rather, we observed that luxury brands illustrate their creativity and imagination in their brand stories through a multitude of codes that construct the key topic of atmosphere and theme; for example, ‘Classic with a contemporary twist’, ‘Exotic’, and ‘Fantasy’. Moreover, as illustrated in table 12 and 15, luxury brands rather focus on rarity and exclusivity of their products; whereas, premium brands, instead, explicitly reference seasonal trends in their stories.

7.2 Empirical contribution

This study has ultimately reached its expected contribution in that it provides a richer understanding of how luxury brands and premium brands distinguish themselves in the digital era through their stories online; it has provided descriptions of key similarities and differences in the topics discussed by the luxury and premium brands. The study of luxury brands in comparison to premium brands appears to have been scarcely conducted despite the existing concerns raised by luxury scholars regarding the possibility of a luxury brand dilution due to the Internet Dilemma and the growing confusion between luxury and premium brands (Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Miller & Mills, 2012; Okonkwo, 2010). Therefore, this thesis supports the shift of the direction of current luxury research to consider the possible overlap of luxury and premium brand stories and the consequences that the overlap could have in terms of brand dilution.

7.3 Practical implications

As for practical implications, this thesis serves as a description of the topics luxury and premium brands discuss in their stories, which can assist luxury brand managers in their aim to avoid brand dilution by maintaining uniqueness online. The study found that luxury brand stories cover more topics related to product communication (107 headings across 9 luxury brands) than brand communication (38 headings across 10 luxury brands). However, luxury managers would be wise to reduce communication regarding their products since the “current desire for luxury does not only relate to the inherent characteristics of the products themselves, but also to the brands and the images they convey through the brand prominence” (Cristini et al., 2017, p. 102). Ultimately, the essence of luxury revolves around what the brand represents rather than the product itself (Thomas, 2007; Han et al., 2010).

Moreover, this research imparts guidance to luxury brands attempting to maintain their uniqueness online by offering valuable descriptions of how the content of their stories compares to those of premium brands. If luxury brands truly aspire to distinguish

themselves, a description of how the content of their stories compares with premium brands should be valuable as luxury brands seek to avoid the brand dilution prophesied by the Internet Dilemma phenomenon. Additionally, the findings of this thesis can be of use to premium brand managers who may be interested in aligning their stories more closely to those of luxury brands.

Another implication that could be interesting for luxury and premium brands to consider is that even though there appear to be significantly more differences than similarities among the topics of stories created by luxury and premium brands, as delineated in section 5.2.3 (Comparison between luxury and premium brands), scholars still concur that there exists a confusion between luxury and premium brands among not only the consumers (Chandon et al., 2015) but also scholars and practitioners (Heine, 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Miller & Mills, 2012). This implies that luxury brands may need to reconsider the effectiveness of their current strategies to distinguish themselves from premium brands online.

Given how a brand manager would like to cultivate the perception of its brand, this thesis offers many descriptions of the subject matter explored by a variety of brands in both luxury and premium fashion sectors. Managers of both luxury and premium fashion brands can benefit from reviewing the findings of this study.

7.4 Criticism and limitations of the study

This thesis was conducted using an established empirical research approach and strategies that enhance the reliability and validity of a qualitative study. However, there are criticisms and limitations to consider when analyzing the research findings.

7.4.1 Nature of online data

Since the data collected in this study was solely from online publications, it can easily be altered or eliminated over a short period of time. For example, a brand may decide to change its website layout and delete some stories from the ‘Stories’, ‘Our Story’, and ‘About Us’ sections, from which we collected the units of analysis. Therefore, the applicability of the results and analysis from this thesis is subjected to time constraints. For this reason, specifying the period of publication time of the selected data can help readers to decide under which other circumstances the results from this study can be applied.

Nonetheless, as discussed in section 4.2.1 Preparation phase, some of the selected brands do not identify publication dates on their websites. As such, we had to estimate the publication period by cross-checking other references such as the brands' social media channels and fashion magazine articles that mention topics of the non-dated stories.

7.4.2 Subjectivity of the results and analysis

As mentioned earlier in section 4.1 (Scientific approach and overall research design), qualitative research has certain criticisms and limitations (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this study, one criticism to consider is that the study results are subjective to the “unsystematic views” (p. 413) and interpretations of the researchers. Even though the results and analysis in this study were developed from multiple discussions and agreements of two researchers, having more researchers involved in the analysis would have enhanced the internal reliability of this study.

7.5 Suggestions for future research

Since luxury and premium brands constantly add new stories on their websites, it will be interesting to replicate this study in the future and compare the results to find out if and how the brands change the key topics and details at the subtopic and code levels overtime.

Another suggestion is that a research study using the deductive content analysis approach can be conducted, using the categories from this study to code stories from luxury and premium fashion brands other than the ones already selected in this study. Results from the suggested research will serve to test the external validity of this study.

Moreover, as mentioned in section 1.3 Delimitations, future research that investigates how luxury and premium brands profile themselves through online stories can include watch and jewelry brands, in addition to apparel brands, to fully cover the extent of luxury and premium fashion brands.

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9. APPENDICES

9.1 Appendix 1 – Abstraction sheet

This appendix presents the final abstraction sheet which consists of the taxonomy of main categories, subcategories, and codes derived from stories published on the selected luxury and premium brands' websites.

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Art form	Art performance	Art gala	Art form	Art performance	Cinema
		Art museum			Solo performance
		Artistic city			
		Backstage			
		Behind the scene			
		Cinema			
		Concert			
		Dance			
		Dance performance			
		Dancer			
		Event			
		Exhibit			
		Gallery and exhibition			
		Performance			
		Performance art			
		Stage			
		Theater			
	Literature	Anthropology		Literature	Biography
		Antique bookstore			Book
		Book and text collection			Book of pop art, fashion, people in fashion world
		Book			Fashion publication
		Bookstore			Historical fiction
		Language			History
		Library			History of fashion
		Literary society			Literary
		Magazine			Memoir
		Scholarship			
		Science fiction			
		Zine			
	Media	Documentary		No media	
		Film			
		Film production			
		Studio			
	Music	TV show		Music	
		Disco			Blue music genre

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		DJ			British musician and band
		Electronic music			Pop
		House music			
		Music			
		Rapper			
		Rapping			
		Singer			
		Singer songwriter			
		Singing			
	Visual art	Abstract		Visual art	Art and culture
		Architecture			Art book
		Art			Artist
		Artist			Artistic expression
		Artistry			Family portrait
		Artwork			Film
		Collection of art and antique			Historical architecture
		Creation			Imagery
		Creative community			Multiple talents of an artist
		Creative poetry			Photography
		Graffiti			Polaroid
		Imagery			Work of art
		Inspiration from art			
		Instant photograph			
		Instillation			
		New artist			
		Paint			
		Sculpture			
		Self-expression through art work			
		Sketching/ Caricature			
		Street art			
Atmosphere and theme	Atmosphere	Allure	Atmosphere and theme	Atmosphere	Calming
		Ambiance			Relax
		Ambiguous			Surreal
		Beyond reality			Vivid
		Comfort			
		Enchanted			
		Harsh reality			
		Illuminated			
		Illusion			
		Intense			
		Lingering			
		Lit			
		Lively			
		Low key			
		Magical			

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Mysterious			
		Neon light			
		Obscure			
		Open space			
		Physical space			
		Psychedelic			
		Sensual			
		Sound			
		Sparkly			
		Sunset			
		Surreal			
		Twisted reality			
		Vibe			
		Whimsy			
	Theme	Agriculture		Theme	American dream
		American			Blues for summer
		Bare look			Everyday
		Baseball			Fairytale
		Boxing			Fantasy
		Caricature			Goddess
		City			Health and wellness
		Club culture			Hedonism
		Enchanted forest			Imagination
		English archetype			Legend
		Equestrian			Magic
		Exotic			Majestic
		Fairytale			Military
		Fancy			Mini me
		Fantasy			Mystery
		Fortune			Myth
		Fruity			Opulence
		Glamour			Paranormal
		Goddess			Rave
		Hollywood			Space
		Home			Unexpected twist
		Horror			Urban
		Legend			Utopia
		Medieval			
		Military			
		Myth			
		Mythical creature			
		Night out			
		Nightlife			
		Party			
		Punk			
		Rock N Roll			
		Roman Emperor			
		Rural			
		Sailor			
		Saddler			

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Sophistication			
		Spirit			
		Sport			
		Supernatural			
		Treasure			
		Unicorn			
		Urban			
		Victorian England			
	Time	80s		Time	70s
		Ageless			Ancient
		Ancient			Timeless
		Classic			
		Classic with a contemporary twist			
		Contemporary			
		Future			
		History			
		History of the English society			
		Modern			
		Modernity meets tradition			
		New			
		Old vs new			
		Retro			
		Roman history			
		Timeless			
		Year of dog			
Brand communication	No brand characteristic		Brand communication	Brand characteristic	Best of its kind
					Brand personality/character
					Contemporary
					Creator of a trend
					Different from traditional luxury
					Enhancing the accessibility of fashion
					Everyday luxury
					Free spirited/don't care what people think
					Global leader
					Innovation
					Modern classic
					Positioned between luxury and apparel
					Practicality
					Premium
					Relatability
					Specialty

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
					Standard of excellence
					Strong value
					Unmistakable
					Vague mention of creator, but more like the brand itself.
					Vision
					Widely accessible
					Widely known
					Youthful
	Brand heritage	Archive		Brand heritage	Archive
		Archive symbol			Heritage
		Burberry heritage			Legacy
		Creating a heritage			Tradition
		Heritage			Japanese heritage
		Historic motif			Preppy heritage
		Historical house motif			Representative of the brand's heritage
		Homage			
		Transgression of the brand			
	Brand identity	Face of Gucci		Brand identity	American
		Flagship store			Casual tone
		G motif			Design experience (history)
		Gucci Garden			Designs led and approved by an award winner
		Gucci hub			Innovation
		Gucci place			Italian
		Hermès woman			Logo
		Horse imagery			Max Mara identity
		House of McQueen			Max Mara's face
		Iconic			Signature mark
		Iconic canvas			Signature product
		Iconic clutch			Symbol
		Iconic coat			Tiger
		Iconic trench			
		Landmark HQ			
		Logo			
		New look			
		Signature			
		Symbol			
		Visual identity			
	Founder	Creating and preserving the original		Founder	Award
		Creator			Award-winning designer
		Creator/founder			Controversy

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Experiment			Creator
		Flemish inspiration			Founders' achievement
		Gabrielle Chanel			Founding principles
		Legendary			Founding story
		Revolutionary			Hard work pays off
		Talent			Icon
					Paradox of being an artist and a businessman
Corporate activity	Celebrity endorsement/featuring	Award winning actor and musician	Corporate activity	Celebrity endorsement/featuring	Britney Spears
		Celebrity			Celebrity
		Celebrity model			Celebrity athlete
		Dapper Dan			Celebrity model
		Elton John			Pro surfer
		Harry Styles			Instagram celebrity model
					Teen model
		Karl Lagerfeld			
		New born star			
		Nicki Minaj			
	CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)	Charity		CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)	Autism
		Circular economy			Carbon footprint
		CSR			Changing a stereotype of models
		Diversity and inclusion statement following a scandal			Charitable cause
		Local community			Charity organization
		Nonprofit			Community development
		Renovation			Company value
		Restoration			Compliance
		Sustainability			Corporate governance
					Cotton production
					Counterfeit
					Environmentally friendly
					Fraud
					Helping others
					Human rights
					Inclusion in fashion
					Legality
					LGBT
					Philanthropy
					Restoration
					Support autistic community
					Support new entrants into the fashion industry
					Support sustainability

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
					Support women
					Sustainability
					Sustainable supply chain
					Treat children in need of better lives
					Treat endangered animals
					Women empowerment
					Women's rights
	No customer engagement			Customer engagement	Being personal
					Being relatable
					Choose your bag style preference
					Choose your style adventure
					Cocreation
					Customer engagement
					Engagement
					Giveaway
					Q&A
					Quiz
					Showing gratitude to customers
					Your shade
	Employer branding	Brand team		Employer branding	Advocacy
		Career			Advocate and support entrepreneurship
		Global workforce			Career journey in the fashion industry
		Interview			Career opportunities for everyone
		Obstacles on the career path			Careers in fashion industry
		Recruitment			Diversity
		Training			Employee spotlight
					Equality
					Fair treatment of employees
					Interview
					Job diversity
					Mentorship
					Overcoming challenges in career
					Positive employer branding
					Safe workplace
					Variety of work
					Worker's safety
	No story sharing			Story sharing	Behind the scene

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
					Bibliography of the designer
					Daily life stories through portraits/pictures
					Dark side of the fashion and modelling industry
					Easy to read
					Influence of a magazine
					Intro to new creative director
					Narrative
					Story
					Upcoming content
	No style advice and product guide			Style advice and product guide	Christmas gift idea
					Finding the right fit
					Gift guide
					Gifts for ladies
					Last minute
					Outfit inspiration
					Speech tip
					Style advice
					Style forecast
					Tips
					Vacation guide
					Watch guide
					Wedding outfit idea
					What if
	No target market			Target market	Female boss
					Modern woman
					School essentials
					School outfit
					Student perk
					Woman
					Tall people
	Technology	Android		Technology	3D printing
		AR (Augmented Reality) tech			Digital gadget
		Digital			Electronic product
		Gucci app			Gadget
		Humanoid robot			Instagram
		Innovation			Pinterest
		Instagram			Social media
		Lab			Social media hashtag
		Mobile app			Use of technology
		Robot			
		Scientific flower			

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Use of technology			
		Virtual experience			
Country and location	Country, city, and region	Berlin	Country and location	Country, city, and region	China
		Britain			Cities
		California			Florence
		Cannes			Greenwich
		China			International cities
		Detroit			Ireland
		Europe			Italian cities
		Holiday destination			Los Angeles
		International cities			Mediterranean
		Japan			Mexico City
		Los Angeles			New York City
		New York City			Paris
		North London			Wimbledon
		Rome			
		Southern England			
		Tokyo			
		Tuscany			
		UK's countryside			
		West countryside			
	Venue	Beverly Hills		Venue	City landmark
		Extraordinary location			Fresh market
		Farm			Instagram able (photogenic) spot
		Flower market			Magical garden
		French seaside			Museum
		Garden			Royal residence
		Harlem			Yoga place
		Landmark			
		Monument			
		Plantation			
		Roman heritage site			
		Station			
		University			
		Venue			
		Villa			
		Villa museum			
		Wine estate			
Distribution	Distribution strategy	Campaign	Distribution	Distribution strategy	Extensive distribution
		Delivery			Global expansion
		Global distribution			Runway
		Runway			
	No promotion			Promotion	Activewear promotion
					Discount
					Sale

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
	Store feature	Atelier		Store feature	Bridal boutique
		Display window			Launch event
		Showroom			Music themed store
					New store
					Online shop
					Popup store
					Shop window display
					Store interior design
Humankind	Diversity of human existence	All generations	Humankind	No diversity of human existence	
		Children			
		Contemporary family			
		Conventional beauty			
		Cross generational			
		Diversity			
		Diversity and inclusion			
		Ethnicity			
		Female			
		Female empowerment			
		Feminine			
		Gay			
		Gender equality			
		Gender fluidity			
		Girl			
		Heroine			
		Intersex			
		LGBT			
		Male			
		Masculine and feminine			
		Modern femininity			
		Refugee			
		Sexuality			
		Social justice			
		Strong woman			
		Unique individual			
		Woman			
	Human anatomy	Bare Skin		No human anatomy	
		Body			
		Facial Component			
		Heart			
	Human experience	Battle		Human experience	Building a life/career
		Capturing the moment			Building a relationship
		Celebration			Collaboration of the likeminded
		Challenge			Discovery
		Change			Embracing heritage

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Childhood			Evolution
		Circle of life			Family
		Competition			Going through puberty
		Danger			Memorable item
		Death			Memorable moment
		Education			Mother and child
		Emotional difficulty			Nostalgia
		Emotionally moving			Obstacles in the path towards success
		Escape/freedom			Personal image
		Evolution			Reputation
		Experience			Revolution
		Expressing self-identity through the outfit			Ritual
		Faith/destiny			Student life
		Family			Success
		Female friendship			Transformation
		Fostering			
		Friend			
		Fun			
		Hallucination			
		Heirloom			
		Human evolution			
		Interaction			
		Interconnected			
		Journey of life			
		Life and death			
		Life experience			
		Mother and daughter			
		Mourning			
		Movement			
		Nostalgia			
		Nurturing			
		Questioning reality			
		Race			
		Religion			
		Romance			
		Sisterhood			
		Solo wanderer			
		Student			
		Teenager			
		Tradition			
		Transformation			
		Traveling			
		Wedding			
		Youth			
	Human nature	Active		Human nature	Authentic
		Activist			Beauty
		Advocacy			Being different

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Appropriation			Being valued
		Aesthetic			Charming
		Athletic			Cheeky
		Attraction			Commitment
		Beauty			Confidence
		Being misunderstood			Stubbornness
		Being whoever you want			Cool
		Character			Creative
		Collaboration			Desire
		Conflict			Dream
		Conquer			Encouragement
		Darkside			Endless curiosity
		Daydream			Energetic
		Desire			Enthusiasm
		Dream			Excitement
		Duality			Expressing self-identity and social status with the outfit
		Eclectic			Freedom
		Empowerment			Free-spirited
		Energy			Fresh
		Evolving and growing			Friendly
		Experimenting			Fun
		Exploration			Gesture
		Fearless			Good deed
		Freak			Happiness
		Free spirit			Harmony
		Free to create self-identity			Individuality
		Gesture			Inspiration
		Hide			Interest
		Human			Laughter
		Idealism			Lively
		Identity			Lowkey
		Imagination			Mood
		Impulse			Optimism
		Individuality			Outspoken
		Inner self			Passion
		Insecurity			Playful/zest
		Inspiration			Quirky
		Multiple characters of a person			Refreshed
		Natural beauty			Romance
		New identity			Safe and hidden
		Optimism			Self-care
		Originality			Self-love
		Passion			Self-assurance
		Perspective			Sensation
		Positive vibe			Sensory
		Private			Sensual
		Protect			Serenity/tranquility

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Realization			Simplicity
		Rebellious			Smart
		Self confidence			Spirit
		Slay			Spontaneity
		Strength			Trust
		Struggle			Unique
		Thought process			Uniqueness
		Truth			Whimsy
		Unconventional			
		Underground			
	National culture	Chinese and Japanese cultures		National culture	Asian
		Chinese New Year			Chinese
		Cultural heritage			Cultural fusion
		Cultural diversity			Culture
		Cultural fusion			Evolving culture
		Culture			French
					Fusion of cultural influences
					German
					Indian heritage
					Italian art and culture
	Phenomenon	Evolverment of beauty		No phenomenon	
		Globalization			
		Scandal			
		Social class and inequality			
		Social issue			
		The age of copying			
Lifestyle	No activity		Lifestyle	Activity	Activity
					Commuting
					Dance
					Dressing up
					Escaping boredom
					Fishing
					Golf
					Grooming
					Hosting parties
					Indulging/pampering
					Manicure
					Ping pong
					Socialize
					Sport
					Surf
					Table tennis
	Food and drink	Espresso		Food and drink	Cafe
		Fine dining			Cafe culture

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Fine restaurant			Food
		Fish and chip (Chippy)			Fresh produce
		French gastronomy			
		Gourmet			
		Restaurant			
		Restaurant culture			
		Spirit bar			
		Tea			
		Wine			
	No travel			Travel	Adventure
					Car
					Exotic experience
					Exploration
					Jetsetter
					On the go
					Packing
					Travel and dining
					Traveling
					Traveling in style
					Vacation
					Voyage
Nature	Animal	Beetle	Nature	Animal	Fox
		Bird			
		Butterfly			
		Cat			
		Chameleon			
		Dog			
		Dragon			
		Gorilla			
		Moth			
		Pet			
		Piglet			
		Pig			
		Swan			
		Tiger			
	Element	Element of the Earth		Element	Element of the earth
		Electric			Sand
	Environment	Climate		Environment	Natural scent
		Environment			Spring
		Scent			Spring/summer
		Summer			Sun
		Sun			Unpredictable weather
					Weather
					Winter
	Landscape	Beach		Landscape	Jungle

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Beauty of the wild nature			Natural scenery
		Landscape			River
		Natural scenery			Sea
					Tropical
	Plant and flower	Blackberry		Plant and flower	Tropical flower
		Flower			
		Palm tree			
		Tree			
No occasion			Occasion	Holiday	Christmas gift
					Christmas light
					Christmas outfit
					Christmas tradition
					Christmas/new year
					Festive season
					Holiday
					Mother's Day activity
					New year resolutions
					Spread the joy
					Valentine's date prep
					Valentines' Day
				Special occasion	Bridal gown
					Bridal style
					Celebration
					Dinner party
					Gift
					Groom's outfit
					Occasion dressing
					Occasion outfit
					Party
					Wedding destination
					Wedding outfit
					Wedding prep for groom
					Wedding preparation
					Wedding show
					Wedding venue
Production	Craftsmanship	Artisan	Production	Craftsmanship	Artisan
		Attention to details			Attention to details
		Bespoke			Craft
		Construction			Crafted with care
		Craft			Craftsmanship
		Craftsmanship			Handmade
		Decoration			Jewelry making
		Detail			Polish
		DIY			Refinement
		Codes			Skill

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Embroidery			Tailor
		Hand and technology			Technique
		Hand embroidery			
		Hand stitching			
		Hand work			
		Handmade			
		Knit			
		Methodology			
		Multiple steps in the tailoring process			
		Neat			
		Pearl effect			
		Silhouette			
		Sketching			
		Skill			
		Structure and shape			
		Tailor			
		Technique			
		Work in process			
	No production expertise			Production expertise	Italian excellence
					Know-how
					Local expertise
					Talented designer
	Production strategy	Exclusive		Production strategy	Big package
		Limited edition			Limited edition
		Local production			New product
		Machinery			Planning and execution
		Patent			Product variety
		Rare			Seasonal collection
		Set production			Small package
		Special collection			Special collection
		Venue transformation			Ultra-exclusive
Product communication	Accessory	Accessory	Product communication	Accessory	Bag
		Bag			Crossbody bag
		Clutch			Jewelry
		Eyewear			Loafers
		Heels			Statement accessory
		Jewelry			Tote
		Mask			Watch
		Shoes			
		Silk Scarf			
		Sneakers			
		Sylvie Bag			
		Watch			
	Clothing type	Cardigan		Clothing type	Activewear

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Coat			Dress
		Dress			Garment
		Garment			Office attire
		Scarf			Rainwear
		Sweater			Seasonal clothing
		Tracksuit			Seasonal trend
		Trench coat			Sportswear
					Suit
					Trousers
					T-shirt
					Winter outfit
	Color	Bright color		Color	Blue
		Color			Blues for summer
		Contrast			Bright color
		Dark			Color
		Green			Neutral hue
		Metallic			Pink
		Neon			Signature red
		Red			
		Saturated			
		Shades of blue			
		Technicolor			
	Country of origin	England		No country of origin	
		Florence			
		France			
		Hometown			
		Italy			
		London			
		Paris			
		Scotland			
	Functionality	Customizable		Functionality	Characteristics and functionality
		Custom made			Characteristics of a collection
		Personalized			Dress to impress
		Product function			Functional dressing
		Ready to wear			Functionality and appearance of the products
		Unique			Light
		Unisex			Power of clothing
					Product oriented
					Ready to wear
					Utility
					versatile
					Wearable
	Material	Calfskin		Material	Cotton
		Canvas			Crystal

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Cashmere			Denim
		Deerskin			Fabric
		Denim			Faux fur
		Fabric			Gem
		Feather			Leather
		Gem			Mix of materials
		Jewel			Quality material
		Lace			Stainless steel
		Lamb skin			Swarovski crystal
		Leather			Texture
		Material			
		Metal			
		Reptile skin			
		Satin			
		Silk			
		Tweed			
		Velvet			
		Wool			
	Other items	Candle		No other items	
		Chair			
		China (dish)			
		Decor			
		Fine goods			
		Fragrance			
		Luggage			
		Mirror			
		Ornament			
		Product			
		Trophy			
		Trunk			
	Pattern	Floral		Pattern	Animal print
		Geometric			Bold print
		Monogram			Circle
		Pearl			Floral
		Print			Geometric
		Reptile			Geometric shape
		Rose			Graphic print
		Seashell			Heart print
		Tree of Life			Pattern and print
					Shape
	Style	Active		Style	A mix of everything/over the top
		Athletic			Alternative style
		Bling			Artsy
		Conservative			Athleisure
		Couture			Attention grabbing
		Elegance			Casual

Luxury brands			Premium brands		
Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
		Fashion			Casual elegance
		Funky			Chic
		Haute couture			Classic retro
		High waisted			Comfort
		Luxury			Contrast
		Minimalist			Cool style
		Neat			Cozy chic
		Simplicity			Cute
		Sleek			Dapper
		Street look			Dazzle
		Streetwear			Distinctive
		Style era			Easy but chic
		Unfinished look			Eclectic
		Vintage			Elegance
					Effortless
					Experimental
					Fashion
					Forever chic
					Glamour
					Interchangeable
					Local style
					Luxurious aesthetic
					Matching
					Maximalism
					Minimalism
					Modern
					Modern and ancient
					Modular
					New luxe
					Oversizing
					Perfect fit
					Personal style
					Preppy
					Retro couture element
					Ruffles and frills
					Shoulder design
					Simple but elegant
					Special fit
					Statement sleeves
					Street style
					Sturdy
					Throwback look
					Trend setter
					Trendy
					Ultraminimal

9.2 Appendix 2 - Quantification of the results

This appendix presents the number of the luxury brands and the number of the premium discussing each key topic and subtopic (in the ‘#brand’ column) and the number of codes constructing each key topic and subtopic (in the ‘#code’ column).

	Luxury (n=10)			Premium (n=10)		
	#brand	%	#code	#brand	%	#code
Art form	9	90	65	5	50	26
Art performance	5	50	17	2	20	2
Literature	4	40	12	3	30	9
Media	2	20	5	-	-	-
Music	3	30	10	2	20	3
Visual art	9	90	21	5	50	12
Atmosphere and theme	9	90	90	6	60	30
Atmosphere	6	60	29	4	40	4
Theme	9	90	44	6	60	23
Time	8	80	17	6	60	3
Brand communication	10	100	38	10	100	54
Brand characteristics	-	-	-	7	70	24
Brand heritage	7	70	10	5	50	7
Brand identity	10	100	19	10	100	13
Founder	7	70	9	6	60	10
Corporate activity	5	50	38	7	70	105
Celebrity endorsement/featuring	5	50	9	7	70	7
CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)	3	30	9	5	50	30
Customer engagement	-	-	-	3	30	12
Employer branding	2	20	7	4	40	17
Story sharing	-	-	-	5	50	10
Style advice and product guide	-	-	-	5	50	14
Target market	-	-	-	5	50	6
Technology	4	40	13	3	30	9
Country and location	5	50	36	6	60	20

	Luxury (n=10)			Premium (n=10)		
	#brand	%	#code	#brand	%	#code
Country, city, and region	5	50	19	6	60	13
Venue	4	40	17	1	10	7
Distribution	3	30	7	4	40	14
Distribution strategy	3	30	4	4	40	3
Promotion	-		0	1	10	3
Store feature	2	20	3	1	10	8
Humankind	10	100	152	9	90	89
Diversity of human existence	9	90	27	-	-	-
Human anatomy	2	20	4	-	-	-
Human experience	10	100	49	6	60	20
Human nature	9	90	60	9	90	59
National culture	4	40	6	4	40	10
Phenomenon	3	30	6	-	-	-
Lifestyle	2	20	11	5	50	32
Activity	-	-	-	4	40	16
Food and drink	2	20	11	2	20	4
Travel	-	-	-	5	50	12
Nature	6	60	29	6	60	16
Animal	1	10	14	1	10	1
Element	1	10	2	1	10	2
Environment	6	60	5	6	60	7
Landscape	2	20	4	3	30	5
Plant and flower	3	30	4	1	10	1
Occasion	-	-	-	2	20	27
Holiday	-	-	-	2	20	12
Special occasion	-	-	-	2	20	15
Production	7	70	37	6	60	25
Craftsmanship	7	70	28	6	60	12
Production expertise	-	-	-	3	30	4
Production strategy	3	30	9	5	50	9
Product communication	9	90	107	10	100	111

	Luxury (n=10)			Premium (n=10)		
	#brand	%	#code	#brand	%	#code
Accessory	6	60	12	4	40	7
Clothing type	6	60	8	5	50	12
Color	5	50	11	5	50	7
Country of origin	6	60	8	-	-	-
Functionality	5	50	7	6	60	12
Material	8	80	20	8	80	12
Other items	6	60	12	-	-	-
Pattern	6	60	9	3	30	10
Style	9	90	20	10	100	51

9.3 Appendix 3 – Subtopics discussed by each luxury brand

This appendix presents the list of subcategories that each of the selected luxury brands discusses in its stories. The ‘x’ mark signifies the presence of that subtopic in the brand’s stories. In addition, the ‘#brands’ column summarizes the number of the luxury brands who narrate stories about each subtopic.

	# brands	Alexander McQueen	Burberry	Channel	Dior	Fendi	Gucci	Hermès	Louis Vuitton	Prada	Salvatore Ferragamo
Art form											
Art performance	5	x				x	x	x		x	
Literature	4				x		x		x	x	
Media	2				x		x				
Music	3		x			x	x				
Visual art	9	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Atmosphere and theme											
Atmosphere	6	x		x		x	x	x		x	
Theme	9	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Time	8	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x
Brand communication											
Brand characteristic	-										
Brand heritage	7	x	x		x		x		x	x	x
Brand identity	10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Founder	7	x	x	x	x	x			x		x
Corporate activity											
Celebrity endorsement/featuring	5				x	x	x			x	x
CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)	3		x				x				x

	# brands	Alexander McQueen	Burberry	Channel	Dior	Fendi	Gucci	Hermès	Louis Vuitton	Prada	Salvatore Ferragamo
Customer engagement	-										
Employer branding	2						x			x	
Story sharing	-										
Style advice and product guide	-										
Target market	-										
Technology	4	x					x		x	x	
Countries and locations											
Country, city, and region	5	x				x	x			x	x
Venue	4				x		x			x	x
Distribution											
Distribution strategy	3				x		x			x	
Promotion											
Store feature	2						x		x		
Humankind											
Diversity of human existence	9	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Human anatomy	2						x			x	
Human experience	10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Human nature	9	x				x	x	x	x	x	x
National culture	4	x			x		x			x	
Phenomenon	3					x	x			x	
Lifestyle											
Activity	-										
Food and drink	2						x		x		
Travel	-										
Nature											
Animal	1						x				
Element	1	x									
Environment	6	x	x		x		x	x		x	
Landscape	2	x					x				
Plant and flower	3	x			x		x				
Occasion											
Holiday	-										
Special occasion	-										
Production											
Craftsmanship	7	x			x		x	x	x	x	x
Production expertise	-										
Production strategy	3						x			x	x
Product communication											
Accessory	6		x			x	x	x		x	x
Clothing type	6	x	x		x		x	x		x	
Color	5					x	x	x		x	x
Country of origin	6	x	x				x		x	x	x
Functionality	5		x				x		x	x	x
Material	8	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x
Other items	6	x		x	x		x		x		x
Pattern	6	x	x			x	x	x		x	
Style	9	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

9.4 Appendix 4 – Subtopics discussed by each premium brand

This appendix presents the list of subcategories that each of the selected premium brands discusses in its stories. The ‘x’ mark signifies the presence of that subtopic in the brand’s stories. In addition, the ‘#brands’ column summarizes the number of the premium brands who publish stories about each subtopic.

	# brands	Coach	Hugo (by Hugo Boss)	Kate Spade	Kenzo	Marc Jacobs	Max Mara	Ralph Lauren	Ted Baker	Tod's	Tommy Hilfiger
Art form											
Art performance	2				x				x		
Literature	3			x		x		x			
Media	-										
Music	2				x				x		
Visual art	5				x		x	x	x	x	
Atmosphere and theme											
Atmosphere	4			x	x		x		x		
Theme	6	x			x	x	x		x	x	
Time	6		x		x	x	x			x	x
Brand communication											
Brand characteristic	7	x	x	x		x		x	x		x
Brand heritage	5	x			x		x	x			x
Brand identity	10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Founder	6			x	x	x	x	x			x
Corporate activity											
Celebrity endorsement/featuring	7	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	
CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)	5	x		x					x	x	x
Customer engagement	3				x	x			x		
Employer branding	4	x						x	x		x
Story sharing	5			x	x	x			x		x
Style advice and product guide	5		x				x	x	x	x	
Target market	5			x			x	x	x	x	
Technology	3						x		x	x	
Country and location											
Country, city, and region	6		x		x	x			x	x	x
Venue	1								x		
Distribution											
Distribution strategy	4			x		x		x			x
Promotion	1								x		
Store feature	1								x		
Humankind											
Diversity of human existence	-										
Human anatomy	-										
Human experience	6	x		x	x			x	x	x	
Human nature	9	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
National culture	4				x		x		x	x	
Phenomenon	-										

	# brands	Coach	Hugo (by Hugo Boss)	Kate Spade	Kenzo	Marc Jacobs	Max Mara	Ralph Lauren	Ted Baker	Tod's	Tommy Hilfiger
Lifestyle											
Activity	4			x				x	x		x
Food and drink	2				x				x		
Travel	5				x		x	x	x	x	
Nature											
Animal	1				x						
Element	1				x						
Environment	6		x		x	x		x	x	x	
Landscape	3				x			x	x		
Plant and flower	1								x		
Occasion											
Holiday	2				x				x		
Special occasion	2		x						x		
Production											
Craftsmanship	6	x		x			x	x	x	x	
Production expertise	3						x			x	x
Production strategy	5					x		x	x	x	x
Product communication											
Accessory	4		x					x	x	x	
Clothing type	5		x		x		x	x	x		
Color	5		x	x			x		x	x	
Country of origin	-										
Functionality	6		x			x	x	x	x	x	
Material	8	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x
Other items	-										
Pattern	3		x		x				x		
Style	10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x