

Loathed, Adored, and Tomorrow's Ignored

*A Qualitative Examination of the Evolution of Brand Public
Heritage Perceptions of Luxury Fashion Rebranding*

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Abstract

The interactivity and ubiquitous nature of social media puts pressure on luxury heritage brands to pay attention to the perceptions of the brand public after rebranding initiatives. Particularly for luxury heritage brands, it is integral that their communication in online settings is not only consistent and honoring of their elevated legacies, but resonate with their contemporary community. Furthermore, when luxury heritage fashion entities choose to rebrand, the brand public will undoubtedly express a perception, – but to what extent are these sentiments sustained? This leads to the question revolving around how such brands' rebranding initiatives heritage is perceived by the brand public, specifically on Instagram. Current literature and academic research separately discusses theoretical concepts relating to rebranding, social media strategies, and brand heritage, but neither the intersection of these components as phenomenon nor over time. This study will discuss these theories and provide netnographic case studies to illustrate real-life scenarios via utilizing the Instagram rebrand-related comment sections from luxury heritage fashion brands. Through sentiment analysis and thematic categorization of the empirical data, it was found that the heritage perception expressions from the brand public on Instagram were not sustained unless provoked by the brand.

Keywords: Luxury Heritage Fashion Brand, Brand Public, Social Media Sentiment, Heritage Brand Paradox, Rebranding

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1.0 Introduction

In some form or another, social media has become ingrained in many people's daily lives, as the average person spends 145 minutes daily on social media (Forbes, 2024). With the ease of accessibility, it has become very easy to engage in posts. The prominence of social media gives way to a quick rise and fall of trends, and the younger demographic that dominates social media pushes brands towards modernization and evolution. Social media has become a common marketing strategy for corporations, including luxury heritage brands, e.g., Louis Vuitton and Ferragamo, as they utilize social media to not only inform, but also to connect with consumers and form a community. Statistically, 77% of brands utilize social media to reach consumers and 90% of social media users follow at least one brand, proving the shift in consumer behavior and how they choose to interact with brands (Forbes, 2024). However, in order to maintain relevance and progress with customer demands, heritage brands, particularly, are faced with the challenge of to what extent they should rebrand.

Pfannes et al. (2021) describe that rebranding consists of changes in a brand's equity, identity, and association, which in turn have effects on the customers' perspective (Pfannes et al., 2021). Specifically, rebranding in luxury fashion can take form in various degrees contrastingly to other sectors as this can be exemplified by a new logo, change in creative director, or brand name. Consumer perception can be defined as the process through which individuals select, organize, and interpret information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world, which makes them central to understanding the impact of rebranding efforts (Kotler & Keller, 2008). The wide array of consumer reactions to rebranding efforts is influenced by factors such as age, familiarity, and individual characteristics (Pfannes et al., 2021; Collange & Bonache, 2015). Furthermore, mutual trust between firms and consumers, encompassing social ties, shared values, and an understanding of collective goals, influences how consumers react to such initiatives (Beise-Zee, 2021). As a result, rebranding efforts related to elements of brand heritage can trigger an unexpected reaction among consumers (Collange & Bonache, 2015).

The authenticity of luxury heritage fashion brands is closely tied to the niche of its consumers and their ability to authentically connect with the brand (Boccardi et al., 2016). Since there is subjectivity in heritage brand interpretations, there are close ties between consumer engagement, satisfaction, and brand resonance (Balmer & Burghausen, 2019). As a consequence, rebranding must be conducted with special attention to detail.

Visual elements hold particular significance in luxury fashion rebranding initiatives; thus, employing even minor changes has the potential to have a significant impact on consumers' perceptions (Phillips et al., 2014). Due to consumer perceptions' subjectivity, this effect can be particularly strong among aesthetically aware consumers. As a result, consumers' loyalty to a brand can be undermined by perceived fundamental changes in brand identity and may lead to the alienation of loyal customers (Phillips et al., 2014; Kaikati, 2003). A key concern for such consumers is the fear of not being able to recognize rebranded products, and having to sacrifice their emotional attachment to the brand identity that they originally cherished (Collange & Bonache, 2015).

When heritage brands want to evolve and innovate, they are faced with the dual complexity of trying to maintain their heritage, e.g., brand values, symbols, and history, while also trying to balance staying relevant. Furthermore, when a heritage brand sacrifices heritage to achieve modernity, the brand public perceptions following rebranding initiatives will be prevalent on social media where they can voice their opinions. This issue that luxury heritage brands face gave way to our research focus.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the role of heritage in shaping brand public perceptions in the context of rebranding efforts employed by luxury heritage fashion brands. More closely our research question is:

How are brand public heritage perceptions affected following rebranding efforts of luxury heritage fashion brands?

By examining the sustainability of brand public's perceptions of heritage extending to post-rebranding, this research aims to contribute to the development of a comprehensive model in the realm of high-end fashion. Building on the existing Li et al. (2021) framework of social media strategies, we aim to further bridge in elements of temporality and heritage. Thus, we seek to elucidate the dynamics of heritage perception evolution in the modern digital era. Via a close analyzing of two luxury heritage fashion brands' Instagram comment sections over time, shedding light onto the luxury heritage brand rebranding-related content influence on brand public sentiments considering varying points in time.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

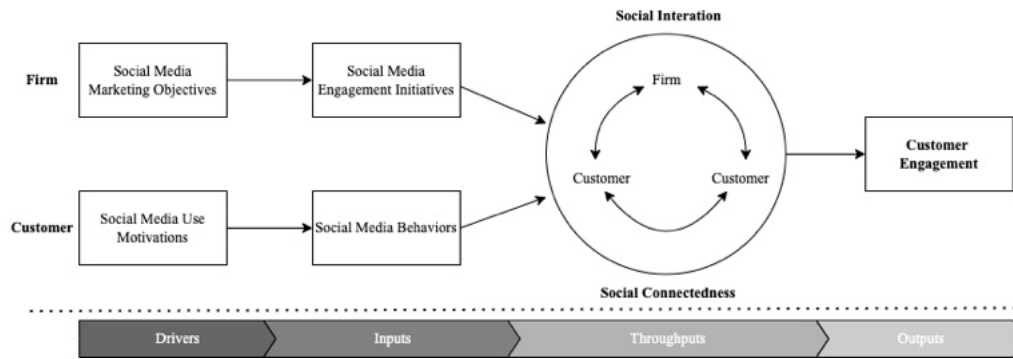
2.1 Social Media Sentiment

Social media has emerged as an effective tool for brand communication, identity construction, and consumer engagement. By using social media correctly, brands can effectively create meaningful connections with consumers, increase brand loyalty and nurture a clear identity in the current digital age. Moreover, Morley and McMahon (2011) discuss that new technologies have provided consumers with a platform that allows them to engage brands in dialogue, express their changing needs and ideas, and give brands feedback. This shift in the power dynamic between consumers and brands has given rise to brand public, which differs from traditional brand communities (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015). Unlike the latter, the brand public is characterized by continuous interest and interactivity rather than structured interaction. Participating in brand public is rooted in the desire to engage in brand discussions (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015).

Social media conversations play a key role in brand communication and reinforcing a company's identity as social media platforms function as dynamic arenas where brands can communicate their image, values, and narratives to a global audience (Kelly et al., 2010). In addition, Demangeot (2021) highlights the importance of the brand's visual identity in communication between the company and customers. With carefully selected content and strategic communication, brands can use social media to increase a sense of community among consumers (Park et al., 2020).

The growth in popularity of social media has significantly altered the power relations in creating brand equity. Today, social media has taken over the role of shaping the brand image from marketers to consumers due to the democratizing effect of digital platforms (Godey et al., 2016). Li et al. (2021) developed a model, shown in Figure 1, of Social Media Marketing Strategies based on the theory relating to a four-part process that reflects the necessity of customer engagement: drivers, which include firms' objects and customers' motivations; inputs, which include firms' engagement initiatives and customers' behaviors; throughputs, which involve interactions to exchange resources; and outputs, which are the outcome of customer engagement.

Figure 1: Social Media Marketing Strategies



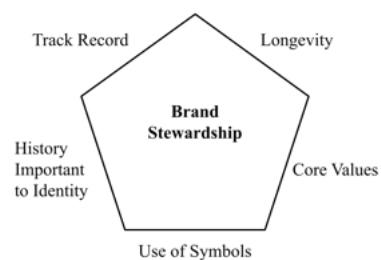
The development of social media platforms has created both opportunities and challenges for brands, which can be visible in rebrandings. Further, when consumers' attitudes towards a brand negatively shift, brands have to face the complexity of managing their image in a social environment marked by constant monitoring and feedback. Phan et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of protecting the value of brands with consistent and high-quality communication. By recognizing the conversations on social media, brands can ensure their branding efforts and consumer views are aligned, reducing the risks associated with brand identity change (Phan et al., 2011).

Case: Burberry Burberry, a British heritage brand founded in 1856, had lost its allure in the 1990s and was viewed as a “stodgy nonentity,” which led to an aggressive communication strategy to revitalize the brand (Burberry, n.d.; Phan et al., 2011). Burberry became the first luxury brand to invest in social media to appeal to the younger customer base through uploading content of influential people wearing products on their YouTube and Facebook page. Burberry generated content but also allowed customers to take part in adding value to the brand, rather than restricting consumer influence.

2.2 Brand Heritage

Brand heritage serves as a strategic resource that, when effectively harnessed, distinguishes brands and fosters differentiation, contributing to their perceived value, and can be further explained as a part of brand identity (Urde et al., 2007; Morley & McMahon, 2011). Urde et al. (2007) present a Heritage Quotient (HQ) containing five elements built around brand stewardship, which entails preserving

Figure 2: Heritage Quotient



heritage while embracing adaptability, allowing for innovation and change without compromising core brand values (Urde et al., 2007; Cooper et al., 2015). Pictured in Figure 2, the components consist of longevity, core values, use of symbols, history being important to identity, and track record. Furthermore, the more present components, the greater importance and visibility heritage plays for all stakeholders.

However, heritage itself does not guarantee value; rather, it presents an opportunity for it. It can be used for differentiation as a difficult-to-imitate element that enhances a brand's authenticity and facilitates consumer relationships (Urde et al., 2007). Urde et al. (2007) state, "All brands have a history. Some brands have a heritage" which supports the notion, heritage brands are uniquely distinct from conventional brands as they utilize history as a strategic resource to enrich, differentiate, and thrive in their market. Furthermore, a brand can be considered a heritage brand only when it employs its history through each generation of leadership while maintaining the underlying values of the brand. Heritage brands can achieve this by considering three temporal dimensions: the past, present, and future. Therefore, heritage brands can be described as "both history and history in the making," which further emphasizes the strategic choice to intertwine brand identity with legacy (Urde et al., 2007).

Brands go through a lifecycle, and no brand is immortal to the challenges of the marketplace (Cooper et al., 2015). Moreover, Cooper et al. (2015) introduce the concept of 'Heritage Branding', which involves examining, defining, activating, extending, and protecting brand heritage, safeguarding authenticity and credibility amidst market challenges. Thus, heritage brands should make careful evaluations and draw from the past, reinterpret, and adapt to contemporary contexts (Pfannes et al., 2021).

A common contribution to brand crises is flawed management (Cooper et al., 2015). Therefore, to enhance brand relevance and longevity, the heritage elements in the HQ should be managed by involving a three-step process: uncovering, activating, and nurturing (Balmer et al., 2007). Through such actions, heritage brands can leverage history and longevity as marketing tools to establish authenticity and build consumer trust and loyalty (Morley & McMahon, 2011).

Heritage gives way for meaningful interpretation of the brand, which can be accentuated by various elements such as language, symbols, and storytelling (Cooper et al., 2015). In this regard, the concept of mythopoesis is relevant as it facilitates the transfer of brand heritage across timeframes, enabling brands to remain authentic symbolic entities with high heritage value (Boccardi et al., 2016). Boccardi et al. (2016) argue that with a high level

of mythopoesis one can remain an “authentic symbolic brand,” whereas low mythopoesis would lead to a “brand museum,” an inauthentic brand where heritage is exploited or forgotten. Thus, it is crucial for heritage to be managed responsibly by present and coming managers to avoid non-optimal outcomes. Through challenging, drawing from the past, and reinterpreting, those in charge can enrich the brand heritage.

Case: Patek Philippe The luxury watch manufacturers, the Genevan Patek Philippe and Swiss TAG Heuer, can be used to exemplify and expand on the distinctiveness and intentionality of brand heritage. Patek Philippe strategically emphasizes its rich heritage as a cornerstone of its brand identity and positioning, unlike TAG Heuer, who does not particularly integrate it into its brand value proposition.

At Patek Philippe, heritage is ingrained within their ethos through delivering value to customers and stakeholders since 1839, which symbolizes its commitment to offer continual excellence (Patek Philippe, n.d.). Its longevity further reinforces this legacy; being able to successfully maintain heritage factors, even under several CEOs (Patek Philippe, n.d.; Urde et al., 2007). Patek Philippe has ten core values, e.g., quality and fine workmanship, rarity, and aesthetics, which encapsulate a distinct red thread across operations (Patek Philippe, n.d.). Moreover, Patek Philippe’s use of their iconic Calatrava cross emblem symbol, serves as a tangible representation of its past, reinforcing its heritage in the minds of consumers, e.g., the strategic placement of its logo as its profile picture and consistently across its social media.

2.3 Heritage Brand Identity

Brand identity comprises the core values, personality traits, and visual elements that define a brand’s essence, which in turn helps it differentiate from its competitors and plays a fundamental role in shaping consumer perceptions (Orheim & Bluhme, 2019). Maintaining a connection between brand identity and brand image is crucial for brand coherence and consumer perception (Gioia et al., 2000). As brand identity can be thought of as a brand’s most central quality, like DNA for humans, even small adjustments to a brand’s identity can elicit significant reactions. It is a challenge to strike a balance between staying recognizable yet up-to-date, especially for heritage brands whose identity is so strongly rooted in the past; thus, the right utilization of brand stewardship is crucial (Orheim & Bluhme, 2019).

Heritage brand identity distinguishes four dimensions, namely, price, quality, symbol, and design (Sammour et al., 2020). They are essential for sustaining the brand identity that customers can resonate with, but also for upholding a solid brand ethos and not neglecting the

heritage factors. Although appreciating heritage brand identity aspects is central, Sammour et al. (2020) point out how brand innovation plays a pivotal role in enhancing the relationship between corporate heritage brand identity and the overall brand experience. By engaging in such actions of renewal, heritage brands can engage in brand differentiation and drive consumer excitement. To reach and maintain desirable perceptions of heritage brand identity, effective management of the corporate heritage identity is needed. It can be characterized as the managerial self-understanding with regard to understanding heritage's presence and role in the organization (Balmer & Burghausen, 2014). A strong heritage brand identity will aid in organizational alignment and maintaining heritage values close to the core, even during times of renewal.

Case: Tiffany & Co. Tiffany & Co., a luxury heritage brand renowned for its high-end jewelry and diamonds, exemplifies the essence of heritage brand identity. That is, via their meticulous attention to detail and consistent brand elements, such as their trademarked robin's-egg hue, Tiffany Blue and Tiffany Blue Boxes. Despite all the evolving and upcoming trends in luxury industry branding, Tiffany & Co. has remained faithful in preserving its heritage, embodying their values of sophistication and elegance, and signaling the magic of the brand (Tiffany & Co., n.d.). Thus, the strategic choice of focusing on preserving its brand identity and values makes the brand instantly recognizable.

2.4 Luxury Heritage Fashion Brands

Luxury fashion brands can be characterized by a multifaceted anatomy of nine elements: a clear brand identity, brand communications, product integrity, brand signature, premium price, exclusivity, luxury environment and experience, culture, and heritage. Such attributes go beyond bolstering a luxury brand's authenticity and serve as a hallmark of luxury itself (Fionda & Moore, 2009). In this construct, heritage plays a central role, particularly via evoking nostalgia, catering towards viewing the brand through a lens of heightened trust, rendering its allure more prominent.

The concept of luxury extends beyond the brand's physical offerings, and it is more about the experience (Morley & McMahon, 2011). Similarly, fashion for consumers extends beyond practicality and intersects with self-perception and emotional resonance, emphasizing the importance of storytelling and emotional connections (Kapferer & Bastien, 2017). The concept of heritage is crucial since it influences consumer perceptions, fosters emotional relationships, and infuses authenticity into premium heritage fashion firms (Kapferer &

Bastien, 2017). By blending emotional values with their legacy, luxury heritage brands strive to create an authentic, nostalgic, and elevated appeal that resonates with contemporary consumers on a personal level.

In couture, luxury fashion heritage brands typically embody a legacy of craftsmanship, tradition, and exclusivity, leading to brands often having “iconic products” reflecting their core specialization, serving as key elements of their brand identity (Morley & McMahon, 2011). Heritage luxury brands encompass both commercial properties like logos and trademarks and the identity and creativity of their founding designers, further contributing to their unique appeal (Troy, 2003).

Homogeneity poses a threat to the creative industry in particular (Rodriguez Muñoz, 2023). Becoming mainstream, especially in the luxury fashion context, can lead to the diminishing of exclusivity, which might shift consumers away from the brand (Rodriguez Muñoz, 2023). Luxury heritage brands must strategize to mitigate the risk of *blanding*. *Blanding* is a term discussed by Rodriguez Muñoz (2023), conceptualizing it as the “lead to devaluation of luxury products, taking away exclusivity and not seen as unique anymore.” To combat heritage dilution and becoming out-of-date, heritage luxury fashion brands require new designers to blend elements of the original creator’s signature style with their own creative identity, striking a balance between tradition and innovation (Troy, 2003). For instance, reinterpreting iconic products and developing new styles together with eminent fashion designers can enhance heritage luxury brands’ relevance in the contemporary market.

Case: Chanel At the heart of the Parisian luxury heritage fashion house, Chanel’s, identity lie its iconic products, e.g., the little black dress, the two-tone shoe, and the 2.55 handbag, which symbolize timelessness and recognizable exclusivity that consumers feel connected to on an emotional and aspirational level (V&A, n.d.). Symbolic elements deeply rooted in Chanel’s history, such as the Camélia flower and the interlocking CC logo, additionally reinforce Chanel’s distinctiveness and serve as visual anchors that reinforce the brand’s identity and heritage. At Chanel, luxury transcends mere products (Morley & McMahon, 2011), as it combines storytelling and iconic products. By creating compelling narratives and products that last for decades, Chanel continues to captivate audiences worldwide, further cementing its position as an iconic fashion house of luxury (Chanel, n.d.).

2.5 Rebranding

Rebranding encompasses the strategic alteration of a brand's name, symbol, or design, to establish a new or distinct position in the minds of its stakeholders and competitors (Roy & Sarkar, 2015). In the context of luxury fashion, it signals an organization's transformation in an attempt to strengthen and renew the brand (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). The causation of such initiatives can be summarized into four broad categories: shifts in the ownership structure, the corporate strategy, the competitive conditions, or the external environment (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). Furthermore, rebranding tactics can be categorized into minor, intermediate, and complete changes, with each of them serving distinct purposes such as aesthetic enhancement, repositioning, or brand reinvention (Daly & Moloney, 2004).

Rebranding efforts are aimed at revitalizing a brand to sustain its life. Daly and Moloney (2004) suggest that this strategy is a continuum process rooted in adapting to societal changes and shifting consumer preferences, thus the rebranding process challenges conventional marketing practices (Muzellec et al., 2003). To emphasize, rebrandings have a strong effect on the customer perspective indirectly through a brand's equity, associations, and identity (Quang, 2022). Therefore, when an organization rebrands, it should aim to increase brand equity, attracting and retaining existing customers, while fostering their emotional bonds in relation to the brand (Marques et al., 2020).

Engaging in rebrandings is commonly found amongst the brands who have an extensive history as a strategic focal point, or a heritage brand, as such organizations must evolve, and reinterpret tradition to achieve longevity. Underscoring the dynamic nature of brand evolution and rebranding, lies the interplay between tradition and innovation in shaping consumer perceptions and brand equity (Bushnell, 2022; Demangeot, 2021). Successful rebranding efforts leverage heritage to evoke positive consumer sentiment and maintain brand loyalty, which further highlights the importance of respecting a brand's tradition amidst creative renewal. Yet, because of the interactivity of rebrandings, the initiatives can either strengthen or weaken brand associations (Roy & Sarkar, 2015). Consequently, such efforts must be executed with caution to avoid sweeping away heritage in the pursuit of renewal.

Case: Yves Saint Laurent The 2012 rebranding initiative of transforming Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) to Saint Laurent exemplifies a strategic alteration of a luxury brand's name and symbol in an effort to modernize the brand while also paying homage to its original heritage (Fashion Network, 2012).

The replacement of the iconic “YSL” monogram, originally created in 1961, with a simpler, more generic sans-serif font (Rodríguez Muñoz, 2023). Sans-serif fonts, as opposed to serif fonts, lack the decorative line motifs, resulting in a more mainstream appearance (Tocalli, 2022). This reflected a broader industry trend where companies were adopting minimalist aesthetics (Rodríguez Muñoz, 2023). Yet, consumers initially struggle to adjust to the changes, as rebrandings disrupt brand familiarity and emotional bonds. By embracing minimalist design elements and modernizing its image while incorporating a connection to its heritage, Saint Laurent as a brand managed to evolve.

Figure 3: Saint Laurent Logo Rebrand



2.6 Heritage Brand Paradox

Cooper et al. (2021) emphasize the necessity for heritage brands to maintain their original allure while simultaneously ensuring relevance. Heritage brand paradox refers to the inherent tension faced by heritage brands in balancing the preservation of traditional values and legacy with the imperative of staying relevant and innovative in a rapidly evolving market (Cooper et al., 2021). This paradox boils down to the challenge revolving around brands, even ones with strong reputations, being perceived as old instead of innovative, which is due to their strong heritage associations.

To navigate this paradox, stewardship plays a critical role by guiding brands on how to manage continuity and change. Although protecting brand heritage remains central, change should not be abandoned but rather viewed through an adaptable mindset (Urde et al., 2007). Protecting a brand’s relevance requires the ability to adjust to the right extent; therefore, management needs to facilitate leaders with a mindset of innovation yet a deep understanding of company values (Urde et al., 2007). Creative directors, for instance, can leverage their personal charisma in a response to address this paradox by infusing brands with innovation, while also staying true to the brands’ heritage and values (Cooper et al., 2021).

Beyond stewardship, three suggested guidelines emerge for resolving the heritage brand paradox: an emphasis on brand constancy, brand standards, and a need for brand renewal (Cooper et al., 2021). The solutions are a mix of maintenance and evolution, with a common goal of seeking a balance between tradition and innovation. Cooper et al.’s (2021) notion that “change can also add to life” resonates with the temporal connection between past, present, and future, which lies at the core of heritage brands. Therefore, heritage brands

can enhance their relevance through strategic rebranding efforts that improve their positioning without compromising brand identity. Overall, to deal with the tensions between brand heritage and innovation, brands must engage in efforts that aim to anchor innovation to the brand's authentic core (Cooper et al., 2021).

Case: Gucci Gucci's rebranding transformation under Alessandro Michele's leadership exemplifies how a luxury heritage fashion brand can go about renewal and embrace actions of change that address the heritage brand paradox. Firstly, Michele stayed true to Gucci's original core, which is defined by color, surprise, and magnificence by reworking the GG logo, canvas bags, and cult-like horse-bit loafers, injecting them with more contemporary elements (The Guardian, 2024). Secondly, Michele's innovation was characterized as having a gender-fluid, playful, and effusive nature to it. Finally, he used digital platforms and social media to communicate with customers and increase brand visibility (WWD, 2020). This proactive and encompassing approach to change on multiple fronts allowed Gucci to adjust to changing market circumstances.

2.7 Heritage Brand Communication & Social Media Efforts

Effective brand strategy forms the foundation of successful communication efforts, which emphasizes the potential importance of heritage to be utilized as a strategic asset (Sacco & Contz, 2023). Thus, within luxury brand communications, heritage preservation can contribute to brands' online undertakings by shaping a luxury brand's identity, and its corresponding consumer engagement. Sacco and Contz (2023) propose three different "tones of content" which highlight the multifaceted role that heritage can play in brand communication: heritage for authenticity, continuity, and market leadership. Together, these roles recognize a multitude of levels that a brand can benefit through a strategic communication of its esteemed past. Powerful marketing communications, such as advertising, celebrity endorsements, and social media present as key avenues for such brands to showcase their current, past, and coming actions naturally to the brand public (Kusumasondjaja, 2019).

In the context of social media, luxury brands must navigate a balance between entertainment, interaction, and trendiness (Business of Fashion, 2024; Arrigo, 2018). Recognizing this fusion can ultimately foster positive effects on both value equity, relationship equity, and brand equity (Arrigo, 2018). Arrigo's (2018) notion on the emerging field of "story giving" reflects the contemporary customer's active role in shaping such brand

narratives and highlights the importance of engaging storytelling in luxury brand communication for increased resonance. The interactive nature of social media presents unique challenges and opportunities for luxury brands seeking to engage with consumers online, since luxury brands must effectively use social media to communicate emotional aspects of the brand (Creevey et al., 2022). It is necessary for luxury brands to maintain the balance between interactive engagement while sustaining an exclusive, prestigious image (Park et al., 2020). By actively engaging with consumers on social media platforms and incorporating their feedback, luxury brands can strengthen their connections with consumers while safeguarding their brand equity and identity (Burnasheva & Villalobos-Moron, 2019; Straker & Wrigley, 2016).

Strategic leveraging of visual aesthetics can help luxury brands to effectively communicate heritage and shape consumer perceptions. Thus, luxury brands should prioritize expressive aesthetics in their social media content creation in order to enhance their corresponding consumer engagement (Liu et al., 2021). Furthermore, Liu et al. (2021) emphasize how it is associated with mood enhancement and self-indulgence motivations within luxury consumption. By presenting simplistic images that highlight distinctive product features and craftsmanship, luxury brands can elicit positive consumer perceptions and attitudes relating to exclusivity and quality (Lee et al., 2018). Nevertheless, even if users “do not have the means to purchase luxury products,” brands must strive to communicate their equity to the brand public (Creevey et al., 2022).

While luxury brands traditionally adopt a one-way communication approach to maintain an elevated feel, Torregrosa et al. (2023) discuss the importance of leveraging social media platforms to differentiate. By creating immersive, creative digital spaces, it invites the brand public to engage in experiences that go beyond bland brand communication.

Case: *Saint Laurent* It was evident that the previously discussed case of Saint Laurent’s 2012 rebranding sparked polarized opinions among consumers and fueled discussion, with “Saint Laurent Paris” trending on Twitter in France at the time of the rebranding (Fashion Network, 2012). The responses feature varied stances, reflecting the diverse perceptions and subjectivity that influence consumer perception. When Saint Laurent manages to resonate and time its actions in synchronization with consumers, it leads to feelings such as excitement, satisfaction, and confidence in the new direction of the brand.

Table 1: Case Summary Connections

Luxury Heritage Brand	Theory	Connection to Theory	Consumer Heritage Perception
Burberry	Social Media Sentiment	Harnessing social media in a rebranding initiative suggests a brand's balanced innovativeness via brand stewardship, which depicts a contemporary mindset that has the inherent potential to safeguard continued relevance and gain hoped-for online visibility and attention.	Presents the possibility to freely engage with a brand's official online channel, which fosters a direct relationship and communication between consumers and the heritage brand.
Patek Philippe	Brand Heritage	Showcasing a heritage brand that consequently leverages its existence through the evident utilization of all five elements of the heritage quotient to foster brand stewardship, extending beyond a brand that solely has a history.	Exposure to curated and engraved heritage factors creates a distinct aura of sophistication and can reinforce and justify the luxurious appreciation.
Tiffany & Co.	Heritage Brand Identity	Highlights the centrality of safeguarding a heritage brand's symbolic aesthetics, which represent a resonating cornerstone of their brand identity.	Resonance with a heritage brand is closely intertwined with sustained familiarity with its core.
Chanel	Luxury Heritage Fashion Brand	Presents the distinct notion of a <i>luxury</i> heritage fashion brand and its inherent elements that ought to be considered in fostering a continued and elevated brand experience when going through rejuvenation.	Luxury heritage brands employ meaningful positioning, which can be justified by their iconic history, craftsmanship, and prestigious use of symbolism.
Yves Saint Laurent	Rebranding	Engaging in a rebranding of well-established and celebrated brand identity elements of logo and name during the simultaneous appointment of a new creative director reflects luxury heritage brands' desire and imperative to undergo modernization to sustain vital competitiveness and industry-trends.	Initial expression of concern over the loss of heritage and authenticity, but over time may come to appreciation of the brand's adaptation, which honors its legacy to an extent, leading to perceptions of YSL as a dynamic luxury fashion brand.
Gucci	Heritage Brand Paradox	Exemplifying a luxury fashion brand's take on acknowledging the three steps in combating the heritage brand paradox under the influence of a new revolutionary designer, who alters a brand's embodiment of its heritage identity.	While luxury heritage brands' focus to safeguard its continuity and honor the recognizable DNA is appreciated, consumers need to see brand evolution to some extent.
Saint Laurent	Heritage Brand Communication	Heritage brands' rebrandings have potential to spark highly subjective consumer attitudes, steering their brand loyalty or resonance. The communication effects can gain significant attention in the online context in the modern era.	Elicited responses to a rebranding can vary on a spectrum, ranging from skepticism about departing from tradition, to enthusiastic responses embracing a heritage brand's modernization efforts.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Approach

A qualitative methodology was adopted to delve deeply into the perceptions of brand public members' comments regarding the rebranding initiatives of luxury fashion heritage brands online. This approach was deemed particularly relevant for deriving meaningful

insights later in the analysis. In order to address the research question, a close examination of the empirical data shapes the narrative and drawing conclusions requires our in-depth understanding of the data's content. Moreover, the qualitative methods present the opportunity for us to delve more deeply into the "fine-grained details of daily life" (Rodriguez & Storer, 2020), which help in the process of constructing a context-rich analysis that revolves around understanding a multilayered social phenomenon. This reliance on an interpretive perspective aligns well with our commitment to uncovering more nuanced themes and findings that extend beyond the surface-level, as Rodriguez and Storer (2020) also discuss. Thus, a qualitative approach underscores our commitment, as researchers, to gain a rich comprehension of the empirical data in order to be able to extract relevant emerging themes in the analysis.

Finally, a need for such an approach is highlighted by the high-level subjectivity that surrounds the luxury heritage brand rebrandings' reactions, prevalent in the users' online comments. Consequently, it requires the incorporation of our qualitative and contextual interpretations of the material, which is necessary and central to facilitating the uncovering of meaningful findings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Netnography Netnography, as defined by Kozinets (2002), is a modified method of ethnography for studying online communities which enables us as researchers to observe the natural behavior and interaction taking place within online contexts, in turn, increasing the understanding of the research topic's focus. As consumers increasingly use online platforms to share their personal opinions, immerse themselves in communities, and engage with brands, netnography makes for an appropriate method for capturing and investigating such perceptions that are shared among brand publics (Kozinets, 2002).

Moreover, this method provides access to individuals' raw expressions in online contexts, offering us insights into their naturally occurring perceptions and habits of communicating. An advantage of the method is that it allows us to capture the brand public members' unfiltered comments, as we solely scrutinize the already-posted material. This allows us to be able to draw more realistic conclusions via capturing user-generated content that has been made by the brand public members prior (Lai & To, 2015).

Ethics On the other hand, the applied netnographic approach sparks ethical considerations revolving around questions of privacy and informed consent (Kozinets, 2002). It is the absence of informed consent from participants that raises ethical concerns, in particular in such a case when we as researchers are solely observers. Yet, Eysenbach and Till (2001) argue that material posted to public online spaces can in itself be considered a form of

implied consent. Consequently, the ethical aspects of applying a netnographic approach revolves around the importance of respecting and preserving the privacy and autonomy of the participants while recognizing, appreciating, and utilizing the unique dynamics and opportunities of the online environment in conducting research.

The upcoming observed Instagram accounts of Louis Vuitton and Ferragamo fall under this category of a public online space by being freely accessible to anyone online. Therefore, it can be concluded that having published a comment on these public accounts acts as enough consent for the utilization of the respective comment's data, in accordance with Eysenbach and Till (2001).

3.2 Selection: Luxury Heritage Fashion Brand

With a focus on heritage brands, luxury heritage fashion brands were chosen as the scope, and this body of work will follow two case studies of Louis Vuitton (LV) and Ferragamo. Based on the HQ elements presented by Balmer et al. (2007), both LV and Ferragamo can be classified as heritage brands.

Table 2: Louis Vuitton and Ferragamo as Heritage Brands (HQ)

	Louis Vuitton	Ferragamo
Longevity	Long history dating back from its founding year of 1854. Presents enduring legacy via its continued presence in the fashion industry ever since.	Established as a prominent luxury fashion house with a rich history spanning nearly a century from its founding year in 1927.
Core Values	Upheld core values of quality craftsmanship, innovation in design, and commitment to luxury are communicated and prioritized over time.	Commitment to bringing about Italian luxury via exceptional attention to detail in style, design and craftsmanship, upheld in all operations and fronts.
Use of Symbols	The iconic LV monogram and Damier pattern are synonymous with the brand and make it instantly recognizable.	Ingrained in its heritage are well-known and repeated symbols such as the Gancini motif or Varina ballet flats that customers celebrate.
History Important to Identity	The brand story of the founder Louis Vuitton and the generations followed by him are continually communicated in the brand's narrative.	Stories of its founder, Salvatore Ferragamo, and his pioneering footwear design has a lasting prevalence in the brand DNA.
Track Record	Epitomized by having a status as a groundbreaking, world-leading, reliable, and innovative luxury brand speaking to generations.	Diverse product range has proven alluring to a global audience, evident in widespread distribution.

Finally, these two heritage brands were selected for analysis, as both of them have recently undergone a rebranding initiative. However, the employed strategies varied across

each other, those of which will be further explained in the following sections and the drawn linkages to the brand public's heritage perceptions effect in the digital context.

Louis Vuitton

History of Louis Vuitton Louis Vuitton (LV), an emblem of luxury and elegance, was founded in 1854 (Louis Vuitton, n.d.). Established as a luxury luggage manufacturer, Louis Vuitton quickly rose to prominence for its innovative designs, impeccable craftsmanship, and commitment to quality. Today, the brand continuously expands its offerings to encompass a wide array of luxury goods, including handbags, accessories, ready-to-wear, and footwear, while maintaining its reputation as a symbol of timeless sophistication (LVMH, n.d.).

Notable Rebrandings & Creative Directions In 1987, the merger with Moët Hennesy transformed Louis Vuitton from a family-owned business to a brand owned by the multinational luxury goods conglomerate Louis Vuitton Moët Hennesy (LVMH), which today owns 75 luxury brands (Britannica, 2024; WWD, 2024).

At the center of the brand is the monogram logo—interlocking L and V, together with a floral pattern created in 1896. Preceding this, in 1888 the Damier print, a checkerboard pattern, was introduced and has since produced a wide range of Damier canvases and various creative directors have continued to find unique, inspiring ways to incorporate the monogram logo into collections. Throughout the brand's life, the logo and iconic prints have transcended each generation of creative direction (Vogue, 2018).

The brand has continuously pushed boundaries, blending its rich heritage with contemporary sensibilities to captivate a new generation of luxury consumers. Collaborations with artists result in new reinterpretation of the brand's iconic monogram, cementing Louis Vuitton's relevance among a younger demographic. Notably, innovative streetwear brand collaborations further solidified Louis Vuitton's status as a front-runner in contemporary fashion (Vogue, 2018).

In 2018, Virgil Abloh, the founder of the streetwear brand Off-White, designer, DJ, architect, and artist, was appointed as the artistic director for Louis Vuitton's menswear. This marked a significant milestone for LV, ushering it in a new era of innovation and cultural relevance by infusing the brand with elements of urban culture and street style (The New Yorker, 2019). Abloh aimed to incorporate diversity while layering LV brand heritage to shake up the fashion industry, break stereotypes, and challenge preconceived ideas (Sotheby's, 2021; Vogue France, 2021). He was adored and supported by a wide audience, which still holds true beyond his passing at the age of 41 in 2021.

The 2023 Rebrand In February 2023, LV announced the appointment of the American musician Pharrell Williams as the creative menswear director. This surprising decision signifies a departure from conventional norms within the luxury fashion industry, as it was the first time a musician has been given such a large creative platform (Harper's Bazaar, 2023; The New York Times, 2023). Williams, born in Virginia Beach, career has spanned from music producer to streetwear designer prior to his new role at Louis Vuitton. In 2003, Williams's co-founded streetwear brands, Billionaire Boys Club and Ice Cream, collaborated with Marc Jacobs to create a pair of sunglasses for LV, and a few years later, he designed jewelry for the brand (The New York Times, 2023).

The appointment represents a continuation of their longstanding partnership, with CEO Pietro Beccari noting, "I am glad to welcome Pharrell back home" (Harper's Bazaar, 2023). Beccari's decision simultaneously stems from striving to push forward LV's legacy, noting that after Abloh's passing he could not hire another "classical designer" (The New York Times, 2023).

The recent LV efforts display the brand's initiatives to reach younger, new audiences and bring together different aesthetics and cultures. This overarching goal has been visible in collaborations with artists, musicians, and celebrities, as well as streetwear brands (Ma, 2024). Thus, a rebranding effort that combines Williams's creative vision with LV's spirit of innovation and heritage, has the potential to combat the heritage brand's paradox of renewal while valuing the past.

Ferragamo

History of Ferragamo Salvatore Ferragamo S.p.A., the parent Company of the Salvatore Ferragamo Group, embodies a heritage fashion luxury brand with a legacy dating back to 1927. The brand today is esteemed for footwear, leather goods, apparel, and accessories and has been rooted in tradition and Italian-made high quality (Salvatore Ferragamo Group, n.d.). The work of the Italian-born designer, Salvatore Ferragamo, displayed continuous innovation and experimentation with various materials, e.g., experiments with cork, designs for stiletto heels, construction techniques, and colors (Ferragamo Museo, n.d.). His legacy still lives on as the company produces a wide range of products while maintaining impeccable craftsmanship.

Despite its enduring legacy, the Ferragamo brand had gradually become perceived as outdated and disconnected from contemporary fashion. The brand's traditional image and conservative approach to design were no longer resonating with evolving tastes. While

competing heritage brands were innovating and adapting their strategies, Ferragamo remained stagnant, relying too heavily on its “classic craft and skill” (Forbes, 2018).

The 2022 Rebrand Due to the rise of a plethora of disruptive newcomers and fast-paced fashion cycles, Ferragamo recognized an urgent need to rejuvenate. The brand was catalyzed by the appointment of Maximilian Davis, a British designer, as the new creative force behind the brand. The London College of Fashion graduate and founder of “Maximilian” was appointed at 27 years old to open a new chapter for Ferragamo. Davis’s prior designs are characterized by “sharp tailoring, bold silhouettes, and richly textured fabrics, all rendered with an elegant sensuality” (Time, 2022). The selection of Davis to lead Ferragamo’s rebranding reflects its commitment to revitalizing its image, re-energizing the brand, and connecting with younger audiences (The Wall Street Journal, 2023).

Davis’s fearless approach to rebranding Ferragamo was evident from the outset, as he made sweeping changes to the brand’s visual identity, including dropping “Salvatore” from its name and modernizing the logo with a minimalist serif typeface and a vibrant, flaming red shade (Arnaut, 2023). Davis’s choices were inspired by the late Ferragamo’s career origins, stating, “I wanted to pay tribute to Salvatore’s start by bringing in the culture of Hollywood – but new Hollywood” (Vogue India, 2023). While both Davis’s vision and the Ferragamo rebranding as a whole encapsulates a departure from tradition, it still pays tribute to its heritage and craftsmanship (Milano Finanza, 2023).

The 2022 strategic decision stems from Ferragamo’s aim to recruit new audiences stating that “younger consumers who want to be surprised and constantly in touch through different forms of engagement and interaction, product casualization, demand for constant innovation and creativity” (Salvatore Ferragamo Group, 2023). Thus, Ferragamo’s rebranding strategy reflects concepts of brand stewardship and brand identity, as it seeks to responsibly guide the brand’s evolution while preserving its core values and legacy. Analysts acknowledge the challenge in restoring Ferragamo to its former glory, as the recent updates to the brand may require time to resonate with local consumers (Milano Finanza, 2023).

3.3 Empirical Material

Instagram Instagram emerges as the principal platform for data collection, particularly a data scrape of Louis Vuitton’s and Ferragamo’s comment sections where brand public members have expressed their perceptions. As Instagram allows for aesthetic showcasing of their brand, it is often a preferred platform for luxury brands seeking to

resonate with their target audience and cultivate brand image, warranting its selection as the focal point for this investigation.

With 4.9 billion global users on social media (Wong, 2024), the choice of Instagram was motivated by its widespread user base, abundant data accessibility, visual-centric interface, and facilitation of diverse media sharing, renders it conducive to engaging younger demographics and eliciting unfiltered, instant consumer responses (Geng et al., 2021). Instagram serves as a dynamic platform for sharing visual content with a user base known as followers. Key features such as hashtags (#), user tagging (@), and liking facilitate content discovery and engagement. In the context of this research, the focus will be on analyzing user engagement through comments, likes, and the posts appearing in the brands' feeds. Finally, it gives users control over their content consumption, making it best fit for capturing consumers who actively want to voice their perception of a brand.

Data Collection In order to conduct a consistent analysis, the data from both Instagram accounts were collected on 24 April 2024. On this date, Louis Vuitton's official account, @louisvuitton, had 55.5 million followers, followed 8 users, and had 7,848 posts. Ferragamo's official account, @ferragamo, at this date, had 7.4 million followers, followed 1 user, and had 6,039 posts.

Heritage is about connecting the three time dimensions of the past, present, and future. Therefore, we deemed it important and central to consider different points in time with regard to the rebranding to be able to capture any development of consumer perceptions with regard to the temporal aspect. For both brands, the process of gathering the empirical material of Instagram comments started by selecting their initial rebranding announcement posts, followed by choosing relevant posts after the rebranding initiative. This resulted in six LV posts and seven Ferragamo posts, with their corresponding comment sections to be further examined. Comments gathered under a plethora of posts allowed for the capturing of a broad spectrum of brand public members' reactions over time and contributed to ensuring that the findings are not skewed by a limited sample of posts gathered solely from a single point in time.

Louis Vuitton Data Selection Louis Vuitton made their official rebranding announcements in four posts that were uploaded in pairs over two days. In order to capture the brand public's possibly evolving stance, a rebranding announcement post's comment section from each day, 14 February 2023 and 15 February 2023, was chosen for examination. The following two selected comment sections are posts from the newly appointed Williams's first fashion show, approximately four months after the announcement. These posts were

deemed relevant as they have an explicit linkage into the rebranding's physical and visible consequences. That is, they are more likely to result in empirical material that contains brand public' perceptions in response to the initiatives compared to a regular Louis Vuitton Instagram upload. The last two chosen comment sections are from a year after the rebranding's eruption, from under Instagram posts that pay tribute to Williams's first LV collection, thus again directly linking into the rebranding.

Ferragamo Data Selection Ferragamo announced their rebranding in a single post on 20 September 2022, whose corresponding comment section was chosen for investigation. Furthermore, it was deemed important to include the comment sections of two rebranding-related posts that were uploaded already on the following day. Both proved relevance for examination to gain more relevant empirical material for deeper understanding of Ferragamo's rebranding's posed initial consumer perceptions, as its Instagram comment section does not boast particularly engaged discussions. The following two comment sections were collected under Ferragamo's posts regarding Davis's first Spring-Summer 2023 fashion show on 24 and 25 September 2022. Furthermore, the last two comment sections are selected from posts approximately one year from the rebranding's launching: the 19 September 2023 post was chosen as its capture explicitly discusses Davis's reinvented shoe wear, whereas 23 September 2023 showcases his new Spring-Summer 2024 collection, making them both relevant for gathering data on the rebranding's aftermath.

Sample Size In conducting a qualitative research, especially when doing analysis of vast amounts of data, striking a balance between the data's manageability and comprehensive analysis is of importance. Social media content, while rich in its insights, therefore poses some distinct challenges regarding its sheer volume, which requires actions to be taken to narrow down the empirical data for an effective analysis (Piña-García et al., 2016; McKenna et al., 2017). Moreover, such a challenge is underscored by the need to familiarize ourselves thoroughly with all the data, in order to draw meaningful and qualitative conclusions (Morse, 1995).

Given the intrinsic features of this study at hand, it surfaces necessary actions to be taken to filter the data to ensure its adequacy for a qualitative analysis (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2017). Furthermore, in light of the characteristics inherent in the social media context and its data, an adoption of a narrowed sample size serves as a context-dependent imperative for practicality (Lenth, 2001). This approach does not only address the challenge of managing vast amounts of available information, but equally, it positions us at an

advantageous starting point for grasping Louis Vuitton’s brand perceptions within the social media landscape (Georgakopoulou, 2017).

For Louis Vuitton, the examined comments even under the first four posts’ comment sections included 14,970; 2,358; 5,703; and 2,369 comments, already totaling an excessive amount of empirical data for our thesis qualitative approach. Thus, studying LV’s brand perception through the examination of comments on Instagram necessitates a reduction in data volume to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the brand public diverse perceptions (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The decision to choose a 5% random sample of the qualified comments allows for manageable yet randomized data while simultaneously being able to present us with a representative overview (Latzko-Toth et al., 2017). This resulted in the number of comments being narrowed down to 749, 118, 285, and 118, respectively. All in all, this process reflects a practical consideration, and it was done in order to make the volume of the data more manageable while still being able to portray a representative presentation of the comment sections as of 14 January 2023, 15 January 2023, and 21 June 2023.

For Ferragamo, due to an initially manageable number of empirical data, all comments were considered prior to criteria fulfillment.

Criteria for Comments The following criteria are motivations that demonstrate a systematic approach to obtaining qualified data. This ensures that the analysis of the selected comment sections are relevant to the research question and cater to provide insights into both brands’ evolving heritage perception.

Table 3: Criteria for Comments

Platform	The comments should be published on the platform of Instagram under the selected posts on Louis Vuitton’s (@LouisVuitton) and Ferragamo’s (@Ferragamo) official accounts.
Chronological Alignment	The comments should be posted within 24 hours of the time when the brands uploaded the content. This ensures the comment’s alignment with the context of the time of posting, and best exhibits consumers’ spontaneous reaction to the content at the time. Furthermore, as it remains possible for brand public members to comment on old posts, this criteria simultaneously filters out too recent comments.
Relevance	The considered and relevant comments should be related to the Instagram post or the brands themselves, in order to draw analyses on the brand public members’ stance towards the entity and its activity. Thus, we disregard comments that are statements that do not add any opinions towards the brand, its actors or action, or that can be considered irrelevant spam, e.g.,       <i>DjEago XO CAPALOT Records</i>” (25 September 2022). Irrelevant emojis that do not provide any known impression towards the post will also be disregarded, as they can vary in interpretation and consequently do not inform us about the person’s perception in a plausible manner and indicate a desire to leave a mindless comment, e.g., “    ” (25 September 2022) is deemed irrelevant.

Language	The comments containing text should be expressed in English. Only looking at English comments ensures that even all slang expressions, typical to pop-culture, can be equally interpreted, whereas the meaning of comments in other languages and their corresponding slang would not be easily identifiable.
Slang	Although slang might seem cryptic and unknown to outsiders, slang comments with pop-culture references will be considered in order to draw a representative conclusion and account for the raw perceptions and natural way of communicating. Online language is constantly changing, resulting in the development of digital communication to incorporate tone and intention, e.g., using emojis ironically (Abril, 2022). Thus, careful consideration of such comments will take place in the later analysis.
Emojis	As we want to gain a realistic sample of data that represent the brand public's contemporary and commonly used ways of expressing their perception in online setting interactions, we deemed it important to include emoji comments. Emojis have established a role in everyday communication alongside text and make for an important sector of language (Kröll, 2022). This was emphasized by the Oxford English Dictionary in 2015, as the "Word of the Year" was an emoji, thanks to how prevalent it was in communication (Alshenqeeti, 2016). The use of emojis falls under "iconographic communication", making them function as cohesive cues in bringing about the intended perception in an illustrative manner (Siever et al., 2020). Moreover, emojis are able to demonstrate, to an extent, some physical communications' non-verbal cues about feelings and intentions, and even play a part in cross-cultural interaction via use of established emojis (Alshenqeeti, 2016). Thus, in the context of social media, communicating through the utilization of emojis is a naturally occurring, quick, and convenient way for brand public members to express opinions without having to type text.
Interaction	When users use "@", Instagram's tagging feature, to involve or discuss others, their comment will be considered. Note: In line regards to General Data Protection Regulation guidelines and ethical considerations to anonymity, Instagram usernames will be undisclosed and comments where a user used the "@" feature to engage in a dialogue will be generalized to "@user".

3.4 Method for Analysis

For analyzing the collected empirical material of the rebranding initiatives, two types of analyses were applied. Through the utilization of such methods featuring classification and segmenting of the gathered material, they also aided in leveraging the general examination into pinpointing more in-depth insights of the empirical data in our striving to gather substance for the research question.

Sentiment Analysis

The application of a sentiment analysis allows for gaining insight on the subjective data, which contain perceptions and opinions that have been posted by online users (Gangrade et al., 2019). Thus, it involved the classifying of all the qualified comments into one of the three sentiment categories: negative (-1), neutral (0), or positive (1). These categories reflect the emotional response that the brand public members' comments hold, those of which can come across as expressions of, e.g., excitement for the positive sentiment or disappointment for the negative sentiment. Moreover, the comments whose content's stance was bland and impartial in tone, without having any additional information about the user's intended tone or opinion, are classified as neutral. Ultimately, the sentiment analysis leaves us with categorized data that can be interpreted as the brand public members'

comment to either being for, against, or indifferent regarding the content of the uploaded content on the brands' Instagram posts.

Table 4: Interpretations for Categorization

Slang	Use of slang language is particularly prevalent among individuals who are embedded in particular communities, or closely acquainted with the personalities being discussed (Saputra & Marlina, 2019). Therefore, slang's presence in the Instagram comments can indicate a user's level of familiarity with the brand or person, and was interpreted as positive as it utilizes niche jargon. Additionally, contemporary sayings, evident in comments such as " <i>LET HIM COOK</i> " (16 February 2023) or "👉👉 <i>simply trash</i> 🗑️, <i>darling...</i> 👉👉" (21 June 2023) were especially closely examined as such comments might have opposing intended meanings that are not clear from the outset or incorporate contradicting emojis to emphasize the underlying negative sentiment.
Emojis	Qualified comments containing only emojis hold an identifiable impression that convey us with information of the users' perception, e.g., 🍕, ❤️, 😊 are positive and 🤔, 🙄, 🗑️ are negative.
Interaction	When users use Instagram's tagging feature, their comment will be considered as neutral, if it is not followed by any text beyond the tagged person. That is, as it indicates a desire to communicate with other users, start a dialogue or draw attention to show the post to others, but we cannot draw conclusions on the user's perception.

Thematic Analysis: A Heritage Assessment Process

To delve into the content of the comments and allow for our comprehension of the deeper meanings and evolving perceptions of the brand public, we employed a thematic analysis. This included further systematic categorizing of the comments, within the sentiments, into relevant various themes and sub-themes that consistently kept surfacing within the discourse. There was a specific focus dedicated to isolating and identifying key elements related to brand public's luxury heritage fashion brand perceptions, in alignment with this research's scope. This entailed a thorough examination of comments to possible pinpoint references to the brand's history, tradition, legacy, values, symbols, or changes in visual brand identity, among other heritage-related aspects. Thus, the overarching goal was to derive such insights and topics that are intrinsic in Louis Vuitton's and Ferragamo's rebranding journeys.

Overall Comprehension Through a comprehensive review completed by reading through all the relevant gathered comments, we aimed to grasp the empirical data's general discussion. From the outset, we were able to identify four repeatedly surfacing and most commonly discussed areas around which the online interaction seemed to revolve around for both Louis Vuitton and Ferragamo. Namely, those were symbols and design, corporate impact, a brand person's impact, and a temporal consideration. Consequently, these were identified and labeled as headers for broad themes which were decided to be utilized in later

stages and to be further developed into more brand-specific relevant subcategories, based on the opinions expressed by the brands' public.

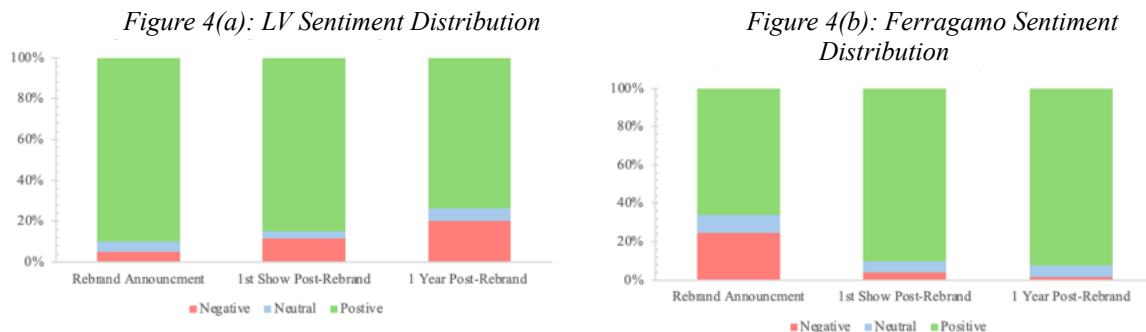
Categorization Having grasped a general all-encompassing understanding of the comments, the next stage involved categorization of the bunch. That is, all individual comments were meticulously examined, and each was then assigned a numerical-code, in correspondence to the surfaced broad themes that were identified in the previous step of the process. More specifically, Category 1 (Symbols & Design) revolves around references to the brands' visual elements; Category 2 (Corporate Impact) is aimed at Louis Vuitton, or Ferragamo as an entity; Category 3 (Impact of an Individual) addresses the people within the brand, be it the brand's designer or director; and Category 4 (Temporal) has a linkage to the passing of time evident through references to the past or longing for the future, for instance. Finally, Category 5 (Assorted) was established, under which falls all remaining comments that were non-generalizable opinions that could be used to support several of the category themes. In essence, the qualitative codes showcase the thematic occurrence, that is, they capture a theme within the comments, which proves helpful in the later stages of analyzing of the contents (Rodriguez & Storer, 2020). Upon in-depth re-examining of the initial theme allocations, and evaluations for all the data points, we were left with all the comments being categorized and having a code.

Formation and Refinement of Sub-themes Leveraging the identified broad themes, and comment organization, we put efforts into crafting more specific titles for the categories that would accurately reflect the users' reactions towards the rebrandings and heritage. This stage of aligning the brand public members' comments with relevant thematic elements within and across the surfaced themes and categories were central to presenting results in a coherent, and temporally logical manner to examine any patterns. The final sub-themes were required to be brand-specific, precise, and representative enough of the sentiments expressed by LV's and Ferragamo's brand public. That was crucial in order to offer a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the online perceptions surrounding the two heritage brands.

Continual Collection of Quotes During the process, representative comments were continually selected and organized into tables under the broad themes. These quotes served to substantiate the analysis, guide in the cultivation and formation of the brand public perceptions for both brands, and thus increase the realistic character of the analysis.

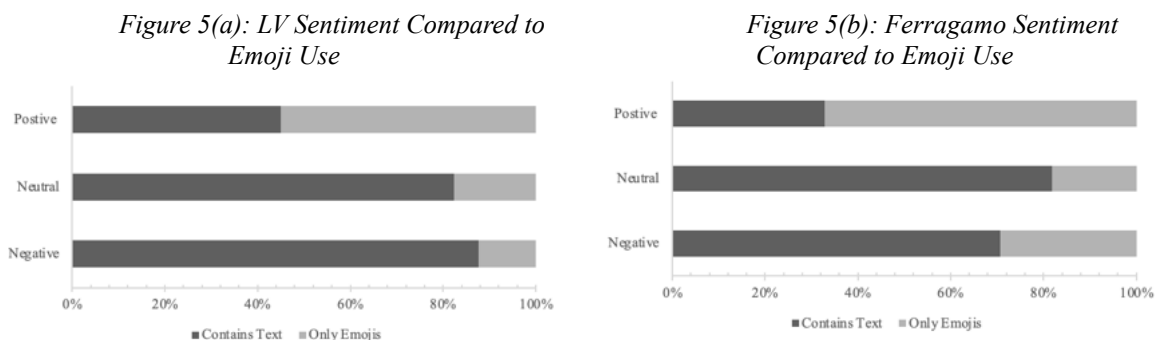
4.0 Analysis

The examination of Louis Vuitton's and Ferragamo's rebranding initiatives, as time passes, shows variances and evolution in how the brand public views heritage, expresses such perceptions, and in the emergence of topics, thereby addressing the research question.



Note: Graphs are represented as a percentage of total comments per time period

The Tables 5 and 6 in Appendix C and D prove that while the two brands employ strikingly different behavior on Instagram, similarities do emerge. As shown in the above Figure 4(a) and 4(b), the overall brand public presented more positive sentiments than negative and neutral. When the brand public felt negative emotions towards a post, they were more likely to write a comment expressing their emotions. Contrastingly, as shown below in Figure 5(a) and 5(b), when the brand public felt positively towards the post, they were more likely to leave a comment with only emojis rather than write text. Similarly, the comment sections of both brands expressed similar emoji usage (see Appendix F, Table 9).



Note: Graphs are represented as a percentage of total collected comments by sentiment

Visually, the brands take varying approaches to the content that they post on their pages (see Appendix C & D). Ferragamo's rebranding has a strong focus on contrasting their feed with the bold red and stressing the new logo, rather than putting equal or more emphasis on the new creative director, Maximilian Davis. Ferragamo utilizes shorter, concise captions, creating a sleek portfolio. The result of this strategy is visible in the comments, where the

discussion revolves around the visual brand identity. Ferragamo's rebranding was met with a more varied reaction, with a greater portion of the brand public's comments being negative, and a significantly lower focus on the appointed designer. It can be interpreted as consumers having been more focused on Ferragamo's bold choice of color and their conspicuous logo changes, which may have overshadowed the importance of Davis' appointment in the users' eyes. The rebranding at Louis Vuitton was the appointment of celebrity Williams, therefore, many comments concerned his employment. LV received mostly favorable feedback and consumer resonance, which is apparent through the abundance of positive discussion, accompanied by a plethora of supportive emoji comments. Further, the visuals posted by LV were mixed and aesthetically diverse with longer captions resembling a personal diary, resulting in a high level of engagement.

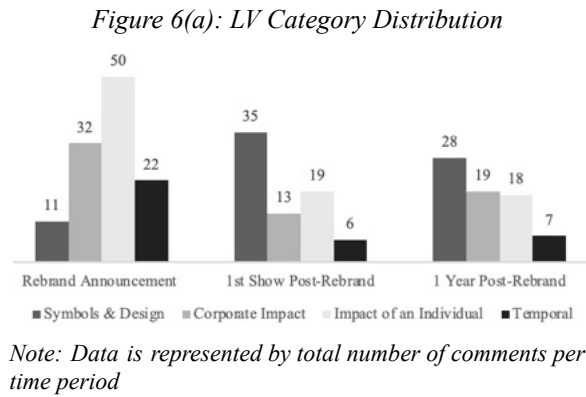
The analysis combines a temporal element, and it was observed that both brands experienced a spike in engagement at the time of the rebranding, but in time, it decreased. Over the course of the observed one year, there was a decrease in positive discussion for LV, whereas it was the opposite for Ferragamo. At the same time, the percentage of negative comments is inverted between the brands: an increasing negative sentiment for LV, contrary to Ferragamo's time evolution. This changing trend tells how the consumer perception is constantly evolving, stressing the need for ongoing adaptation to strike a balance to fight the disapproval that might be building up, and to uphold the brand public's devotion.

In the following analysis, when category distribution is discussed or visually represented, it will focus on Categories 1-4. As mentioned, Category 5 relates to non-generalizable opinions that could be interpreted as supporting several of category themes, therefore, analyzing the categories that provide clear opinions poses to be more fruitful in drawing conclusions. While overall all comments will be considered, a focus on these categories gave way to understand implications about actions taken and how consumers perceived rebranding initiatives beyond negative, neutral, and positive.

4.1 Louis Vuitton

Louis Vuitton's rebranding generated buzz, mainly positive, yet there was also some

cautiousness to be observed among the brand public. It is evident how the users are expecting authenticity and originality, not just flashy changes and a celebrity endorsement. Moreover, the focus is on specific elements related to LV heritage perceptions, which surfaced particularly through users' remarks on Williams's artistic vision, innovation, and the potential influence of his previous work on LV's brand identity, shown in Figure 6(a).



4.1.1 Rebrand Announcement

While Louis Vuitton already has an active Instagram, the rebranding announcement post made the number of likes and comments spike exceptionally high, signifying the occurrence's weight in heightened attention and commentary revolving around the brand. To emphasize, the post reached over one million likes, whereas the like count of previously uploaded content typically ranged between 30,000 to 70,000 likes.

Symbols & Design

The caption of the post on 14 February 2023 touches upon how LV views Williams and how he aligns with the brand: "The way in which he breaks boundaries across the various worlds he explores, aligns with Louis Vuitton's status as a Cultural Maison, reinforcing its values of innovation, pioneer spirit, and entrepreneurship". As the caption condenses, LV is utilizing Williams to act as a symbol of the new chapter and era that the brand is entering.

It's a Match: Williams & the LV Brand Identity

"Couldn't have picked a better ambassador to continue the streetwear look and continue to be the intersection of music, fashion and culture 🙌🏽" (15 February 2023)

"This is such a befitting appointment. Congratulations to @pharrell and well done to @louisvuitton on this incredible appointment." (14 February 2023)

This alignment is noted by the brand public, as is seen in the comments. Furthermore, the rebranding appointment announcement changes the consumer perception of the brand equity as it is reconnecting and rooting it to the contemporary era.

Suspicious for the Designs

"Here comes the WEIRD SHIT 🤪" (15 February 2023)

As LV enters a new chapter, the brand public explicitly expresses doubt and worry

about the changes that will occur in designs. This user's joking comment exemplifies the opinion and await that by judging Williams's previous work, LV might experience a similar appearance that is perceived odd.

"Given these patterns LV are culturally misappropriated, it seems rather ironic that they'd continue to use a familiar face. I'm interested in seeing the social and economic reparations LV has and will make." (14 February 2023)

"...but whatsoever higher end brands just tryna bite off streetwear and black fashion so that's really what this is" (15 February 2023)

However, some brand publics used this rebrand as an opportunity to highlight that LV should have addressed other aspects of the brand identity that they want to see change, beyond a mere new creative director. Thus, the users go on to question whether the appointment truly aligns with the brand, or is it trying to present themselves as something they are not.

Corporate Impact

Skepticism of the Rebranding Strategy

"Im gonna call this 'nepo/celeb culture in high fashion.'....couldnt be worse wtf" (15 February 2023)

"🤔 @lvmh when you leave it up to the millennial hiers/kids 📈📉📊" (15 February 2023)

Amongst the 4.98% negative comments, many of the brand publics' discussions are directed towards the corporate strategy at LVMH as an entity. There is a common opinion that luxury heritage brands have become more focused on utilizing celebrities and the surge of nepotism in fashion. Thus, the brand public view the decision employed that fame is more important than heritage.

"@user 100 fashion houses became celebrity worshippers" (14 February 2023)

The rebranding also sparked heated discussions, which can be due to the emotional connections heritage brands especially hold amongst people, and users' subjective familiarity tied with such brands due to their creative characteristics and having been around for a long time.

Is Williams's Actually Qualified?

"Forget those that are qualified let's just hire someone everybody knows over someone who's qualified and has dedicated there life to this art form and isn't just a hobby." (14 February 2023)

"Can we get some real designers and not just hype people designing for the brand 😏" (14 February 2023)

The appointment of the celebrity musician caused brand publics to question the qualifications of Williams's and why LVMH viewed him as a qualified person to take on the

role. The comments question his fit, experience, and vision, and go on to suggest hesitation regarding his ability to lead LV's design direction.

"Ok so now singers can be creative director without any diploma in Luxury or Haute Couture or he's not a creative director. Lmao LV is cancelled. Bye." (14 February 2023)

Several users view Williams only as a celebrity and believe that an individual with a higher education in fashion would be more qualified, make LV more trustworthy, and would be more aligned with its core of exceptional design and craftsmanship.

"@user going to design school won't prevent you from success, but this playing victim card most definitely will. There are plenty founding heads of design houses without formal design education probably some of your heroes." (15 February 2023)

"Worst choice they could have ever made. Dudes not even a designer" (16 February 2023)

However, a common argument to refute the rejection of celebrity appointments highlight examples of designers who lack formal education. Amongst the negative comments, individuals point out the possibility for him to do succeed by referencing his longstanding presence in the field and other successful designers who share a similar background to his.

Impact of an Individual

The Williams's Fan Base Has Entered the Comments

The designer himself has 15.2 million followers on Instagram, showing that he has a large fan base and supporters, whose presence was evident in both posts announcing his appointment as creative director.

"Congratulations!!! 🎉🎉🎉" (15 February 2023)

"Pharrell made me fall in love with streetwear back in 2004, congrats ❤️" (14 February 2023)

"That's right bro @pharrell 🍷🍷🍷" (14 February 2023)

Positive reception towards Williams has also been expressed through the brand public wishing him a warm welcome and congratulating him on his new role. It was evident that his appointment was celebrated by his many enthusiastic fans. The positive sentiment was further reinforced via a comment's playfulness and a tone of acquaintance and humor. This was often made even more explicit by the incorporation of heart emojis, and other similar icons that convey expressions of affection.

Williams is Creative!

"Congratulations Pharrell Williams I know you are going to make Louis Vuitton hotttt 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥" (15 February 2023)

"Creative genius fr" (15 February 2023)

"I can see the creativity already 🔥" (15 February 2023)

Amongst the 89.93% positive comments regarding Williams's appointment, the brand public discuss how they are looking forward to seeing the fresh perspective he will bring with his creative direction at LV. Users express that they are anticipating him to be innovative, infuse new energy into the brand and upgrade its DNA. Through praising LV in its choice, commenters hold Williams in a high regard and have faith in his artistry.

“Billionaire boys LV clube 🍷💎” (14 February 2023)

Moreover, a plethora of the comments reflected praise of his brand, Billionaire Boys Club, and hopefulness towards seeing the BBC style incorporated into LV in the future.

“P” (14 February 2023)

“Skateboard P x Louie V 🔥🔥🔥” (15 February 2023)

“LOUIS P” (15 February 2023)

Additionally, the fans commented variations of remarks related to Williams's personal heritage that plays a large part of his image. Repeatedly in the comment section there were mentions of his home state and his high school nickname, Skateboard P, that has stuck with him throughout his rise to fame. This discourse contributed to the positive sentiments and showed the excitement towards the collaboration between Williams and LV.

Comparisons to Abloh

“rip Virgil 🕊️” (15 February 2023)

“Omg What happened to Virgil 😭😭❤️” (14 February 2023)

There is a discourse of users comparing Williams's to his predecessor, Virgil Abloh, and the brand public showcasing emotional and mournful feelings relating to his passing.

“Big move tho but nobody can replace Virgil” (16 February 2023)

“Continuing Virgil's legacy and bringing so much more to the table Congrats 🔥🔥” (14 February 2023)

“V would be honored, V would be so proud... 🕊️” (14 February 2023)

Moreover, the new appointment even caused a user to reflect upon the talent that Abloh had, and how he was able to revolutionize Louis Vuitton. However, opinions vary between some thinking that Williams has big shoes to fill and can never make Louis Vuitton reach a level it used to be under Abloh's direction, whereas others find that he will be able to properly carry on Abloh's legacy and make him proud.

“The guy that brought us bape ice cream & billionaire boys club if it werent for him there would be no ye or virgil 🙏” (15 February 2023)

“@user uhhhhh so even with a handheld smart computer some people can't be saved... ” (14 February 2023)

The negative discourse partially stems from the brand publics finding that Abloh is irreplaceable. To refute this claim, brand public reason that Williams has inspired other creators through his artistry and reference his accomplishments.

Temporal

Reflecting the Moment

“❤️👏👏👏 Smart move Louis, stay relevant they gon buy cause he said so! ❤️”
(14 February 2023)

“WE ARE IN THE DOUCHIEST ERA CURRENTLY, COURTESY OF FASHION/MUSIC SYNERGIES” (14 February 2023)

“After vergil is like going backwards” (15 February 2023)

The brand public presents mixed optimism and skepticism of both the direction the brand is going in, and where it came from. While some feel as though this will keep the brand updated and modern, others are disappointed in the position and direction the brand is in, and cannot help but to keep making references in LV’s past era with Abloh.

Curious for the Upcoming

“@pharrell congratulations this is very exciting, can’t wait to see your vision for Louis Vuitton come to life 🍌🍌🍌🍌” (15 February 2023)

“🌟 He is a visionary, smart, intelligent and I can’t wait to see the collection!!!”
(16 February 2023)

“Will there now be an LV x Adidas collaboration in the future?” (14 February 2023)

“CONGRATS...can't wait to c what's in store” (14 February 2023)

Brand public present excitement towards Williams’s future collections, and are eager about future collaborations that could arise from this new partnership.

Purchase Behaviors

“Couldn't have been a better move. Might actually cop some designer now 🔥🔥🔥”
(14 February 2023)

“I stopped buying Louis bags after Virgil passed 🎵” (14 February 2023)

“I WANT TWO OF EVERYTHING PLEASE!! 😎🔥😍❤️” (15 February 2023)

For some, the renewal ignited an interest for the brand, while it was suppressed to others. Regardless of varying opinions, the users express the rebranding’s impact on their future purchasing behaviors. Emphasized by the attention bringing writing style, exclamation marks and use of emojis, this user’s enthusiastic comment exemplifies the excitement some brand public hold for supporting Louis Vuitton in the future.

4.1.2 First Show Post-Rebrand

LV's debut show following the appointment of Williams occurred four months later after the announcement on 20 June 2023. Williams collection for the Men's Spring-Summer 2024 Show was unveiled at the Pont Neuf in Paris. At this show, he debuted "Damouflage": a print that combined the Damier print with a type of military camouflage, digital camo (Financial Times, 2023). Digital camo was developed in the late 1990s and utilizes grids of pixels inspired by early computer graphics. Pixelation grew in popularity in 2021 pop culture due to video games, e.g., Minecraft, as Gen X resonated with the feeling of nostalgia evoked from the print. This style was featured in competing luxury brands in Kenzo's line in 2021 and at the Loewe Spring/Summer 2023 collection (Financial Times, 2023). The debut collection resulted in discussions to be dominated by opinions of designs and pieces created.

Symbols & Design

"Damouflage" or Minecraft?

The caption of the post stated "the debut collection of Pharrell Williams evoked a contrasting heritage savoir-faire with a trailblazing vision".

"Minecraft?!...the first thing that came into my mind. I see I'm not the only one."
(21 June 2023)

"@user and he better thank Minecraft for the inspiration too 😂😂" (21 June 2023)

"Damier Pixelated Camo Crazy 🔥💚" (21 June 2023)

"You forgot to tag Minecraft 😂 You look great!" (21 June 2023)

However, in the comment section, users compared the take of the Damier pattern to a Minecraft video game. While some comments showed support in the print, many commenters felt that it was foolish and made sarcastic comments towards the design.

LV is Bland

"LV collaboration just keeps getting worse. Just stick to bags what you're known for"
(21 June 2023)

"LV, time to move to Bronx or Miami. Paris is not for you if you are going to that."
(21 June 2023)

Commenters perceived that the brand became less on many fronts: less Louis Vuitton, less luxury, and less unique. Negativity regarding the rebranding was directed at the brand and at Williams, pointing out that the brand is not producing anything unique, and shifting away from what they do and have been known to do well.

*"Who's actually buying these clothes **!?!?**" (21 June 2023)*

"@user You're right! I'm definitely not the person who is targeted by this collection as well. I was talking about show too, because I don't think many people can project themselves in this kind of clothing." (21 June 2023)

Users also express Louis Vuitton to be having a less and less clear target market and losing their focus as to who to cater to. It implies an underlying perception that users' might feel the brand is losing its grip and aimlessly producing collections.

"@loewe ??!!! 🤔" (21 June 2023)

"Sadly this was sloppy. Some of these looks looked like they were from fashionnova/shein." (21 June 2023)

Further, the collection evoked the brand public to feel that Louis Vuitton was on a path of becoming more bland, and even possible to mix up with a competitor in the industry.

Corporate Impact

New Issues Emerge

"Sooooo many talented designers who've been perfecting their craft for decades and they give the role to a celebrity. Also, why is the catwalk video full of black people and not ONE white person was shown??? Are we irrelevant??? Why are we being discouraged. Why can't all races be beautiful at once!!" (21 June 2023)

"LV really wants that black dollars..." (21 June 2023)

While the questioning of LV's decision to appoint a celebrity that began in the rebranding announcement post is presented again, commenters discuss deeper issues that triggered by the show. Compared to the announcement posts, the brand public is now able to visually see the direction of LV's rebrand, thus creating discourse that extends beyond the design. Consumer engagement with the post regarding LV's show reflects how its rebranding's influence extends beyond traditional luxury consumers, visible through discussions that involve cultural and socioeconomic themes, too.

You're Wrong! LV is Ahead of Its Time

"Louis Vuitton ahead of every brand rn Fr" (21 June 2023)

"So many broke AF people in the comments criticizing as if they have money to buy a simple LV dust bag LOL calm yourselves huns, you are not the target audience of this brand 🤔😂😂" (21 June 2023)

There is discourse alluding to LV being ahead of its time and changing the game of fashion. Users come to defend the brand and argue that others are missing the aims of the brand.

Impact of an Individual

Pharrell Is Fashion

"@user please note that Pharrell is in fact a designer. Yes, it's true he didn't graduate from a design school but it's about creativity." (21 June 2023)

"@user Music and Musicians literally pioneered the fashion industry in a way that no other has. They are more influential to the masses than many designers. They are fashion." (21 June 2023)

"👏👏 He his multitalented, you don't have to be a designer to bring out the fashion!! It's called gifts!" (21 June 2023)

Users are now able to visually see the work of Williams, which led to some positive discussion expressing acceptance to the appointment.

"@user Box yourself. Who are you to box other people's talents?" (21 June 2023)

"@user but Parallel Williams has been in this game for a long time , just because his first collection wasn't a fit FOR YOU doesn't mean it's bad he knows what his doing they gave him LV for a reason" (21 June 2023)

The interactive nature of Instagram gives way for Williams's supporters to defend him and participate in frequent debates regarding his legitimacy as a designer.

Temporal

Anticipation for the Future

"New era 🍀" (21 June 2023)

"Culture shifting. This representation changes a lot of our purview for generations to come. Blessed to witness it. Thanks for always leading and inspiring us all. 🙌🙌🙌" (21 June 2023)

"A lot of innovative pieces here and I'd love to see how they age in the fashion community 🔥" (21 June 2023)

"Well done @pharrell for building bridges between fashion, entertainment and bringing luxury back alive! 🍷🍷🍷" (21 June 2023)

After the show, comments expressed a positive perception of LV's new direction under Williams's creative leadership, indicating anticipation for the brand's future.

4.1.3 One Year Post-Rebrand

One year after the rebranding, LV strategically decided to post content relating to Williams's debut collection eight-months prior. The brand posted three reels, two of which were analyzed, that promoted a video uploaded to the brand's YouTube channel delving into the behind the scenes of the Williams's process and the many facets of creating his first collection.

Symbols & Design

Loyalty Towards Innovation

"It's not just about the fashion it's about the confidence and empowerment they evoke."
(17 February 2024)

"Another tornado 🌀🌀" (16 February 2024)

Despite the changes undergone at LV, there are implications of a strong brand loyalty being present. That is, consumers express appreciation for Louis Vuitton's willingness to experiment and engage in continual innovation, while recognizing its meaning beyond the visuals. Commenters acknowledge that efforts of the rebranding can be seen as hit or miss, but over time the rebranding effects cascade and can even stir-up the industry.

Resurfacing Past Emotions

"Mmmm camo.. haven't seen that before" (17 February 2024)

"Honestly i love Lancilo's #pharellewilliams work but that camo is too much. I dont know whats worst putting black bags over each other or this camo lol.. high fashion is like going to a Homedepot now dayz... that girl that makes nfl gear is better than this... smh #prayforusall #LV" (17 February 2024)

Negative sentiment towards "Damouflage" persists, comments present themes of lack of innovation and adverse comparisons of the design. The caption states phrases such as "many facets of creativity" and "daring motif", but users disagree with this proclamation.

"It's terrible ! Design are so poor ! Sad what LV became !" (16 February 2024)

"I ❤️ LV— But, this ain't it. 😞" (17 February 2024)

However, some of the brand public's criticizing comments have an apologizing tone, and they incorporate their underlying longing for an improved version of Louis Vuitton, and the design choices it has been employing. It makes it evident how large an effect the symbolic elements have on brand perceptions, and the comments can be interpreted to signify how the users hope they still enjoyed the brand like they used to.

Corporate Impact

Still Wondering About the Target Market

"So not us! Make affordable wear! Just saying! I used to love the affordable wear from P...but who am I" (17 February 2024)

"We don't need this right now we are trying to buy houses right and take advantage of an amazing stock market." (17 February 2024)

Comments of people who might not necessarily be LV's target market, as they are consumers who do not have the spending power for their products.

Behind the Scenes

"I use to be fascinated by all this. I use to love watching what is happening in the world of high fashion and luxury. Now i find this pointless. I see nothing meaningful..."

(17 February 2024)

"The real question @user where do we watch all of these behind the scenes footage?"

(16 February 2024)

"Can't wait to watch it I'm so glad i got a few items from this beautiful collection"

(16 February 2024)

Featuring behind the scenes of Williams's first show is a strategy to give followers insight about what is going on at the brand in an aim to intrigue and provide understanding about the creative direction. The behind the scenes evokes various emotions from disappointment to curiosity.

Impact of an Individual

Williams's Impact on the Brand Image Becomes Visible

"GENIUS 🔥🔥🔥 PHARRELL How Taking STREETWEAR UP To Other LEVEL!!"

(17 February 2024)

"Epic fail Pharrell" (17 February 2024)

"Those micro sunglasses are so passé Love @pharrell as a music artist , but this was a fluke chance and he is not delivering Stick to music" (17 February 2024)

The video clip of Williams' explanation of his creative process and decisions leads some to resonate with his vision. However, it also resurfaces past negative sentiments regarding his innovation and design. Whether opinions are positive or negative, the creative director has had an undeniable impact on Louis Vuitton's brand image.

Temporal

Still Yearning for the Past

"What shift? You rocking Minecraft camo dawg" (16 February 2024)

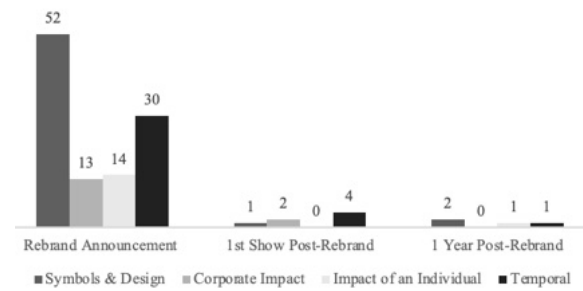
"We miss Virgil Abloh's creative mind" (16 February 2024)

The posts evoked an emotion of longing, which is seen through a continual stream of comments missing LV's heritage from the Abloh era. Rather than praising the future, a large amount of the comments are making references to the past and express wistfulness and nostalgia. Within the year that Pharrell has been in this role, a chunk of the brand public still feels that Pharrell is neither bringing in a new era nor living up to the expectations.

4.2 Ferragamo

The following section explores how consumers perceive brand heritage during the rebranding of Ferragamo, during which the brand changed its logo, name and appointed a new creative director, Maximilian Davis. Furthermore, the focus is on elements relating to Ferragamo's heritage perceptions, surfaced particularly through brand identity change and the innovation that Davis brought to the brand, as shown in Figure 6(b).

Figure 6(b): Ferragamo Category Distribution



Note: Data is represented by total number of comments per time period

4.2.1 Rebrand Announcement

Captions of the posts relating to the rebranding announcement utilized language such as, “A NEW CHAPTER.” and “THE HERITAGE AND THE NOW.”, (see Appendix D, Table 6(a)) underscored Ferragamo's commitment to signaling change, modernization, and combating perceptions of antiquity. Interestingly, it is emphasized by the brand's preceding social media behavior a few days prior to the rebranding announcement, which included posting of several blank white pictures to build anticipation. It sought to further signify the upcoming rebranding effort's importance, entailing a transformation of notable brand elements to push out a new brand identity, and will in essence be done overnight. The rebranding initiative on Instagram caused a spike in engagement, since prior posts typically had around 3,000 likes.

Symbols & Design

The rebranding sparked a particularly substantial response concerning the symbols and design changes.

Where Did the Originality Go?

“Loosing origins. Respectfully disagree” (22 September 2022)

Many users expressed how they perceived a loss of heritage, uniqueness, and originality, evident in them viewing the rebranding as an unwanted departure from Ferragamo's iconic brand identity. One of the primary points of disagreement was around the new font that was being introduced in the rebrand.

“Wtf! What’s creative in this? The new font looks like the one from Ferrero Rocher!”
(21 September 2022)

This is exemplified by a user even comparing it unfavorably to the logo of an Italian confectionary brand. The comments underscored a widespread disappointment with the font choice, which was perceived to be lacking, especially regarding not being able to exceed, or even fulfill, that of the timeless elegance which was associated with Ferragamo’s previous signature logo.

Renewal! It’s Trendy!

“Bad decision, loses identity, it is a follower strategy like others did.” (21 September 2022)

This user expressed frustration with the perceived lack of Ferragamo’s brand identity in their modification to the visual brand elements. As explicitly stated, the brand’s facelift is simply perceived to be an unfavorable strategy that competitors have also undergone, and the comment neither supports the decision nor perceives the change to be fitting for Ferragamo.

“Joining the trending 🤔” (21 September 2022)

The perception of such a “follower strategy” is further supported by comments who simply view Ferragamo as following the broader industry trend of engaging in hasty renewal, instead of making more well-thought-out decisions that would cater towards improved brand continuity. This comment’s written content together with the choice of a laughing emoji encapsulates how the user is laughing at Ferragamo’s desperate attempt to stay relevant. For such a group of users, who thought the brand was swiftly jumping on the trendy bandwagon of changing brand elements, the rebranding resulted in an immediate judgement.

“Nice... for a law office plaque 😂😂” (22 September 2022)

Furthermore, some users actively mocked the rebranding, which emphasizes the perceived mismatch and lack of exclusivity in the new logo. Therefore, it indicates a loss of heritage, and confusion surrounding the new brand identity.

“Following the crowd like YSL without Yves and HUGO BOSS with Boss... For an Italian brand, a big mistake with a fall of such heritage.” (20 September 2022)

One user in particular went beyond expressing their subjective opinion based on feelings, to drawing comparisons to other luxury heritage brands that had undergone similar design changes. It led to a perception that the rebranding was not a positive step for Ferragamo, as the comment clearly states. This referencing other brands highlights a more broad concern among certain consumers, regarding the apparent loss of individuality and uniqueness in the luxury fashion landscape.

Nostalgia

“RIP Salvatore 🙏 😞” (20 September 2022)

“These names are sacred after all these years... It's sacrilege to change them... I'm sorry”
(21 September 2022)

Amidst the dissatisfaction with the rebranding, some users expressed nostalgia for the old logo and brand name. They had viewed them as to having employed a meaningful element and being integral in familiarity to Ferragamo's brand identity, but now being sacred. Consequently, the comments conveyed a sense of loss and disappointment over the perceived departure from Ferragamo's heritage. The user's apologizing tone further highlights how they experience fundamentally sorry and disheartened by the decision to become more mainstream.

“No longer ‘sally’” (21 September 2022)

This user's comment further addresses the nostalgic sensation, as it reflects a sense of familiarity and affection towards the brand, which is evident by their usage of a nickname formulated from the Salvatore. This indicates a deep-rooted connection with Ferragamo's original identity, and therefore it suggests that consumers already instantly feel a sense of loss, even grief, for the brand's previous image.

Unrecognizable Ferragamo

“Go Ferrari! 🚗 no, wait.. what?! WHY? Salvatore was a genius and the company should keep celebrating his memory and identity in the brand name (we miss the Yves in Saint Laurent)” (20 September 2022)

This comment shows how the rebranding had led to a departure from Ferragamo's iconic image, which resulted in confusion and skepticism among the user. It suggests that the rebranding may have led to alienating a segment of Ferragamo's brand public who had valued the brand's previously prevalent heritage and its distinct identity. Especially with bashing the absence of Salvatore Ferragamo's name in the brand and drawing a parallel with Yves Saint Laurent, it underscores the importance of honoring the founder's legacy for luxury heritage brands.

“I thought it was a Loubotin ad” (20 September 2022)

This user's comment summarizes how the rebranding made them mix up Ferragamo with another luxury brand, Louboutin, famous for its Pantone red, instead. It highlights an unwanted consequence of the rebranding whose aim of harnessing change for a modern updated look, was instead perceived to be too far from its core and too similar to that of a competitor. With the users repeatedly expressing a strong desire for the brand to remain true to its roots and uphold its legacy in the face of modernization efforts, this presents the flipside

of not adhering to it. This highlights the challenges which are associated with rebranding initiatives, where brand heritage and identity are highly valued by consumers.

Embracing the Natural Change

On the other hand, some users expressed a sense of natural acceptance of the new name, suggesting a perception that they viewed this consequence of the rebranding as an inevitable occurrence bound to take place and present an indifferent stance towards the rebranding.

“That’s all anyone ever called you guys anyway lol” (20 September 2022)

“Nice. That’s what we call it anyway. 🔥” (20 September 2022)

The comment indicates that the users had long referred to the brand as simply “Ferragamo” without particularly emphasizing or recognizing the name’s Salvatore part. Such comments suggest a perception that the rebranding merely formalizes what was already common practice among some consumers. This perspective reflects a level of acceptance of the decision of the updated name and implies that for these users, the change may significantly neither alter their future perception nor usage of the brand. Moreover, these responses suggest that although the rebranding might not be viewed as essential, the users are open to embracing the change and are not expressing concerns about the brand’s future direction. Thus, such comments rather convey a sense of optimism or anticipation for the brand’s new identity.

“Loving the new RED 💋🔥” (22 September 2022)

As the red-themed rebranding announcement post itself stood out from Ferragamo’s previous style of Instagram pictures and their typical colorway, a user pointed out the visual change, as seen in this comment. It signifies a notable symbolic shift, and adds a layer to the excitement surrounding the brand’s reinvention, further emphasized by the choice of emojis. Ferragamo’s color choice may thus be interpreted as a bold statement of change which further aims and seemingly succeeds in fueling the positive sentiment among users.

Corporate Impact

The commentary within the category of corporate impact, more directly aimed at Ferragamo as a luxury fashion brand entity, offers another profound perspective of insights into the brand public members’ view on the rebranding.

Um... I’m Confused

“Epic fail. What next... discontinue the Gancini? 😞” (21 September 2022)

This user’s comment not only conveys disappointment and sadness, but it also hints at a deeper concern regarding the impact on Ferragamo’s existing assortment consisting of

iconic products. By specifically mentioning the timeless Gancini bag, a symbol of Ferragamo's heritage and craftsmanship, the comment highlights the perceived potential risk of diluting or even discontinuing such cherished objects. Thus, it conveys broader questioning among the consumers about Ferragamo's upcoming commitment to keep preserving its identity when pushing for modernization. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining brand continuity and honoring both the legacy and consumers' emotional connection to those iconic products that hold significant sentimental and cultural value for Ferragamo's customer base.

| *"Will products now have that logo instead of the full name?"* (20 September 2022)

Similarly, another user raises questions about the future branding of Ferragamo products, through inquiring about the updated logotype. This comment highlights the surfacing uncertainties regarding the visual identity of Ferragamo's products post-rebrand, and suggests a potential disconnect between the new brand image and existing product lines.

Are You Trying to Cater to Everybody?

| *"Cheap looking. Yet another brand I love chasing away its regular customers in order to attract the sneaker and ripped jeans crowd."* (21 September 2022)

This comment presents the rebranding has resulted in aversion towards the brand, and perceiving its output not as luxury. It goes to showcase how Ferragamo's customer base is defined in a sense to describe a broader, trend-driven audience. It accentuates how the rebranding seemed to result in the brand attempting to appeal to a broader target market, making it deviate from its traditional and elevated aesthetic which was more catering towards a niche customer base.

This Reminds Me of Another Brand

| *"Same as with YSL ... nooooo the iconic logo should have stayed"* (21 September 2022)

| *"Another failure in the making just like @burberry"* (21 September 2022)

As Ferragamo's rebranding shares similarities to other brands' renewal initiatives, several comments surface that make comparisons to those of its luxury fashion brand competitors. The comments encapsulate feelings of frustration and disappointment, thanks to the perceived lack of originality and creativity. In essence, there is underlying skepticism and feelings of letdown towards the necessity of Ferragamo's rebranding, particularly in the light of suboptimal examples present in the industry.

| *"Balmain, Balenciaga, Burberry, Saint Laurent, and Berluti all made the exact design change. You can't exactly say this is a new chapter. This is a net negative for your brand. Pity."* (22 September 2022)

Moreover, another user draws parallels between Ferragamo's rebranding and those previously done by several luxury heritage brands. This comment underscores the importance of differentiation and innovation that should be implemented in an original, strategic and smart way. It suggests that Ferragamo's rebranding has failed to achieve these objectives and will consequently not flourish. Overall, such comparisons serve to contextualize Ferragamo's rebranding within the broader landscape within the fashion industry and highlight perceived shortcomings of the new brand identity in relation to its competitors. Underlying, a frustration as to why engage in a rebranding that has evidence to be perceived negatively.

Impact of an Individual

Davis Sparks Interest

“so ready for Maximilian's era!” (20 September 2022)

“We await you, King 🤴” (22 September 2022)

The anticipation for Davis's era as the new creative director of Ferragamo surfaces in the comments following the rebranding announcement, demonstrating a sense of enthusiasm for the incoming creative direction under him. The comments express direct excitement, support and awaiting the direction that Davis's leadership will take Ferragamo to, or bring to the table for the brand overall. Although the post does not heavily emphasize Davis's role as the new creative director, beyond him being tagged in it, users nonetheless associate the rebranding with a broader shift in leadership and creative direction. By the users' expressing excitement for his era, they signal their expectations for fresh perspectives and innovative designs under his stewardship.

“GO Max 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥” (20 September 2022)

The choice and use of emojis in the language to help convey the users' intended message further reinforces the positive sentiment of anticipation and eagerness for Davis's newly starting era. Overall, the absence of negative comments regarding the shift in leadership, reflects a sense of optimism, which correspondingly suggests a belief among users that his appointment is viewed as rather pleasant. On the other hand, it might be perceived as a more of a minor and non-central action that is outshone by the other modifications, further emphasized by Davis not being an established designer widely known to the public.

Temporal

Anticipation for the New Ferragamo

“THE REBIRTH” (21 September 2022)

“🔥🔥🔥🔥 can't wait for the new collection” (22 September 2022)

“It makes so much sense...I'm so excited for this new journey” (21 September 2022)

“Future, you're welcome 🚀” (20 September 2022)

In a response to Ferragamo's rebrand announcement, a portion of the users expressed their eagerness towards anticipating the evolution. The comments' underlying tone catches the brand public opinion that even though the rebranding might have come as a surprise, it is perceived as a sensible and logical next step that is being welcomed with open arms by many. It indicates that Ferragamo's signaling of change might lead to a new allure being created around it, presenting the possibility of bringing in new consumers through heightened attention, and igniting interest in its current customer base.

“THE NEW FERRAGAMO! 🔥🔥🔥🔥” (20 September 2022)

“Finally moving forward 🏡🏡🏡” (20 September 2022)

Such comments indicate the brand public clear sense of enthusiasm for the redefined direction, and see it as a natural path going forward. The use of cheering emojis in the language underscores the positively perceived transformation, further suggesting that users view it as a fresh start characterized by achieving simplicity via innovation.

“Changing the name should be the beginning right? Please bring an evolution to the brand. As a 25-year customer, I feel so sad that the brand lost the reputation in Asia... Ferragamo really needs a big change..!” (21 September 2022)

Amidst the anticipation and excitement, one user stood out for expressing a mourning of loss and disappointment over the perceived decline in Ferragamo's reputation. Moreover, this individual expresses concerns on their brand image, and essentially calls for substantive changes to be done, beyond mere visual rebranding. It underscores another type of anticipation, and wishful thinking of the brand to keep updating its offering. Thus, there are high expectations, and an urgency for the brand to address broader issues affecting its current market perceptions and appeal.

4.2.2 First Show Post-Rebrand

Two days after the launch of the new brand identity, Ferragamo debuted a show under the creative direction of Maximilian Davis. The spark of engagement caused by the

rebranding led to an assumption of the cause of the maintained consumer intrigue and activity.

Temporal

Is It Ugly, or Is It Lovely Now?

“*Fashion nowadays has become so ugly looking!*” (25 September 2022)

This user addresses the past and the present, by expressing their perception of a divergence in their expectations and the direction of the brand’s aesthetic. It implies that in the big picture, they perceive contemporary fashion trends, including that of Ferragamo’s new design choices, as aligned with what they consider to be unattractive. Thus, indicating a disconnect of efforts to modernize a brand’s image and consumers’ preferring traditional aesthetics instead.

“*Love this year collection 🥰*” (25 September 2022)

“*Wonderful 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥 can’t wait to see them in store!!!!*” (26 September 2022)

These users’ highlight how this particular collection employs a special liking for them and makes them eager to anticipate its coming availability. Their positive witnessing of the rebranding’s effect is further emphasized by enthusiastic emojis and exclamation marks, reinforcing Ferragamo’s resonance with them.

Assorted

The responses under the post of the first fashion show since the rebranding appear to be mixed, which is indicated by the Category 5 classification. Overall, the majority of individuals are expressing enthusiasm for the collection, while only a few remain critical or indifferent towards the brand’s direction.

Absence of Engagement

“👉👉” (24 September 2022)

“❤️” (25 September 2022)

“👉” (25 September 2022)

Unlike the three initial announcement posts, there is a notable absence of sustained written comments regarding the rebranding, and the majority of comments contained only emojis of the positive sentiment. The lack of sustained discussion or controversy surrounding the rebranding during this point in time indicates either acceptance or a subsided interest and emotions towards the brand’s new identity among the brand public. Moreover, Ferragamo’s quietened-down comment sections suggest the rebranding did not become a trending topic or

generate significant buzz within the fashion community or its followers. This lack of engagement could indicate that the rebranding failed to capture the attention or interest of consumers to the extent that the brand had hoped for.

Rebranding Discussion Is Over

“Blown away 🤩🤩🤩” (24 September 2022)

“Just W❤️W” (25 September 2022)

“This is absolutely stunning ❤️” (25 September 2022)

Comments as such reflect a positive sentiment towards the collection and the show. It highlights that, at least for some individuals, the focus has shifted from the rebranding itself to the fashion designs showcased by the brand. Even though the Instagram post from the fashion show was the first to showcase Davis’s concrete work for Ferragamo, no comments were directly addressed to him. However, by commenting on the fashion, users still make remarks of Davis’ designs, a cascading effect of the rebranding.

“Trendy but not classy” (25 September 2022)

This comment exemplifies the other end of the sentiments’ spectrum. While the vast majority may appreciate the new direction, others still have conflicting views. This user seems to hold some reservations about Ferragamo’s aesthetic choices post-rebrand, as they view it as contemporary chic yet not groundbreakingly classic. Simultaneously, the context of the post is presenting the Spring-Summer 2023 collection, whose aim is not to showcase classic couture but rather the creative director’s more playful approach to the coming season. In that regard, the user expresses that Davis succeeded.

4.2.3 One Year Post-Rebrand

One year after the rebranding, Ferragamo’s Instagram presented a stronger focus on how the brand and Davis together are redefining and reviving older elements into the present. Published material revolved around design and Davis’s Spring-Summer 2024 fashion show.

Temporal

What? This is Not a “New Ferragamo”

The perception of little change beyond the logo is evident in the brand public members’ comments where the main emphasis was on the visual brand identity, which indicates they may not perceive significant alterations beyond the rebranded logo. That is, as the most visible changes are quickly observable by the eye and thus the users seem to view the rebranding as more of a superficial change over a remarkable transformation.

“No difference between now and the past... only a logo rebranding. Client service in the store still the same, store layouts the same” (24 September 2023)

This comment encapsulates feelings of disappointment and disapproval regarding a perceived lack of change. The reflective dissatisfaction with the font and logo change suggests that the user expected more substance in the modifications, beyond just the visual identity. This supports that the rebranding did not fully meet the expectations of some consumers, who anticipated a more comprehensive rejuvenation of Ferragamo image and offerings.

Assorted

Let's Only Talk About the Show

“Stunning Collection! 🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟” (24 September 2023)

“Love it” (19 September 2023)

“Every look was phenomenal” (23 September 2023)

Comments praising the collection indicate that despite surfaced reservations about the rebranding, some users still appreciate Ferragamo’s fashion offerings, evident through such admiration. This suggests that while the rebranding may not have resonated or fully met the expectations of all consumers, the brand’s strengths in fashion designs remain appreciated.

“Outstanding 🌟love the collection, the best ever !” (23 September 2023)

“The best one so far!!!! 🌟🌟🌟🌟” (23 September 2023)

These users’ comments highlight the perceived success of specifically Davis’s most recent creations for Ferragamo, indicating that the rebranding managed to improve the brand. Enthusiastic comments, coupled with wording choices such as the superlative “the best”, suggests that Davis’s designs were perceived as a successful execution of the vision of rebranding.

5.0 Discussion

Rebranding efforts are aimed at revitalizing a brand to sustain its life, and are rooted in adapting to societal changes and shifting consumer preferences. As discussed by Muzellec & Lambkin (2006), a cause of rebranding initiative can be sorted into four broad categories, ownership structure, corporate strategy, competitive conditions, or the external environment, of which Louis Vuitton’s and Ferragamo’s driving force is a change in competitive conditions. Both entities aimed to progress innovation and modernize in order to reach new

audiences and maintain a position as a market leader. While the brands have similar motivations, the rebranding efforts differ on the continuum of rebranding as in Louis Vuitton's tactics lean towards being intermediate, whereas Ferragamo's can be interpreted as complete change (Daly & Moloney, 2004). At LV, the organization decided to further advance efforts begun by Virgil Abloh of bridging together different aesthetics and cultures by appointing a new menswear creative director. However, the appointment of celebrity musician, Pharrell Williams, gave the conglomerate a new image as hiring a famous personality deviates from conventional tactics of hiring an established designer. Similarly, Ferragamo hired a new creative director, Maximilian Davis, but dissimilarly, its rebranding additionally debuted a new logo and name.

5.1 Tackling the Heritage Brand Paradox on Instagram

These rebranding cases attempt to tackle the heritage brand paradox by aiming to follow the guidelines presented by Cooper et al. (2021): an emphasis of brand consistency, an emphasis of brand standards, and a need for brand renewal. However, the manner in which the rebrandings were presented on Instagram followed different tactics.

The three suggestions to tackle the paradox at Louis Vuitton were shown through the aim to seamlessly intertwine the change with their current feed aesthetic. LV contrasted their previous post with a black and white photo of Williams followed by a longer caption that described the appointment, who he is, and a message from the CEO. Following the four rebrand related posts, LV reverted to posting other brand related content. Whereas, Ferragamo slowly signified to their followers that a change was coming, by posting six white photos without a caption before posting their first rebrand announcement post. Captions of posts made by Ferragamo were often a sentence or a phrase, giving way for the brand public to draw their own conclusions. Immediately following the rebranding, Ferragamo posted content from their first show, allowing the brand public to visually understand their new narrative through viewing the new collection and the prominence the newly introduced color red would be having at the brand.

Through the analysis of the combined comment sections relating to rebranding announcement posts, the brand public present a feeling of hesitance and question the initiatives. These heightened reactions build upon existing theory that luxury heritage brands employ a meaningful position in consumers' minds, therefore, sparking an emotional response.

5.2 Decisions in the Pursuit of Brand Renewal

Brand Identity on Brand Equity

A logo is the representation of the brand's meaning, concept, value, for this reason Ferragamo changed its logo to reflect its shift in position. As mentioned, Ferragamo aims to reach the younger demographic that are pushing the evolution of luxury (Chen, 2018). Currently, luxury consumers appreciate an approachable brand appearance through simplified, functional logo design consequently resulting in the popularity of all-capitalized flat typeface and simplified sans-serif font, e.g., Saint Laurent. The loss of the script font and removal of "Salvatore" from Ferragamo, reflects this minimalist aesthetic. Furthermore, the success of color associations to a brand identity, e.g., Tiffany Blue, has resulted in a popularity increase as a brand strategy. However, the development of a lasting brand symbol is a long process (Chitrakorn, 2023), consequently, Ferragamo claiming of Pantone red proves to be a difficult identifier from the perspective of the brand public. While the use of red stems from Ferragamo's heritage from designer Salvatore Ferragamo's famed sparkling red shoes, consumers already associate the color with other brands, e.g., Christian Louboutin and Ferrari.

It could be assumed that Ferragamo wanted the focal point of the rebranding announcement to be the new logo and color prevalence, rather than the appointment of Davis, since he was only tagged on the post and not discussed in the caption. While the fashion house made more changes beyond the identity shift, the symbolic transformation outshone other rebranding efforts, proven by the dominance of comments that were categorized as relating to Category 1, and negative emotional response of the loss of "Salvatore". Although the new brand identity overall is deemed to reflect the mood of modern times, 24.49% of comments on the rebranding announcement posts were negative sentiments. Yet, the posts relating to Davis's first show and one year post-rebrand reflect a significant drop in negative sentiments and engagement. Consequently, the decrease in engagement allows one to theorize that the initial shock factor and surprise has worn off, coupled with acceptance of the rebranding.

At The Helm of New Direction

As discussed, both fashion houses employed new creative directors. Creative directors serve as an example of brand stewardship, lying at the center of the HQ (Urde et al., 2007). Characteristics of brand stewards of heritage brands should embody four principles to nurture, maintain and protect brand heritage: a sense of responsibility, long-term continuity,

safeguard trust in the brand and adaptability (Urde et al., 2007). However, the differing presentation of the creative directors on Instagram, tied with their personal background, produced notable conclusions on the brand public view on heritage.

Creative Director as a Known Persona to the Brand Public On Instagram, the focal point of Louis Vuitton's rebrand posts was the appointment of a new creative director, given that it was the key element of its rebranding. Employing a known public figure, i.e., Pharrell Williams at LV, at the helm of the brand, produces a new narrative and presents skepticism towards brand equity despite his past collaboration with the brand. Louis Vuitton aims to have relevance amongst younger demographics, therefore, one must acknowledge Williams's associations with pop culture and relationships with celebrities. His fame challenges the values LV has long presented of craftsmanship, sophistication and savoir-faire, as his employment highlights the brand's efforts to capitalize on fame. Consequently of his appointment, the engagement on the Instagram posts regarding Williams were significantly high, which reflects prevalent buzz surrounding the persona.

Known figures have their own fan base that support their endeavors therefore, under these circumstances, the fan base show endorsement on the Instagram pages of their brand partnerships. The prevalence of instant enthusiasts is also true with instant haters. Celebrity figures' history and background are publicly known, resulting in higher amounts of expectations, prejudices, and benchmarking compared to a relatively unknown person. Even before knowing what they will produce, the brand public makes comparisons and assumptions of their fit for the role. In the sample comment section of the rebranding announcement, there is an overwhelming amount of positive comments, 89.97%, with a high focus directed towards Williams. Due to his fan base, skeptics and adversaries are repressed by the positive perception of him.

The first show under Williams's direction and one year after his appointment reflects a drop in engagement. In addition to this, there is a stronger focus on symbols and design as well as the decrease of engagement made the negative comments appear more prevalent. Despite the change in interaction, the themes of discussions of praising and mocking Williams were sustained. Notably, throughout the three analyzed time periods, Williams is the focal point of the posts, therefore, suggesting that celebrity employment can be used as a strategy to promote the brand and gain online attention from the brand public.

Appointing a "Real" Designer Using the example of Ferragamo, the appointment of Maximilian Davis, a relatively unknown, younger designer, results in the brand public to lack a strong association, knowledge or expectations of him in his new role. Over all three time

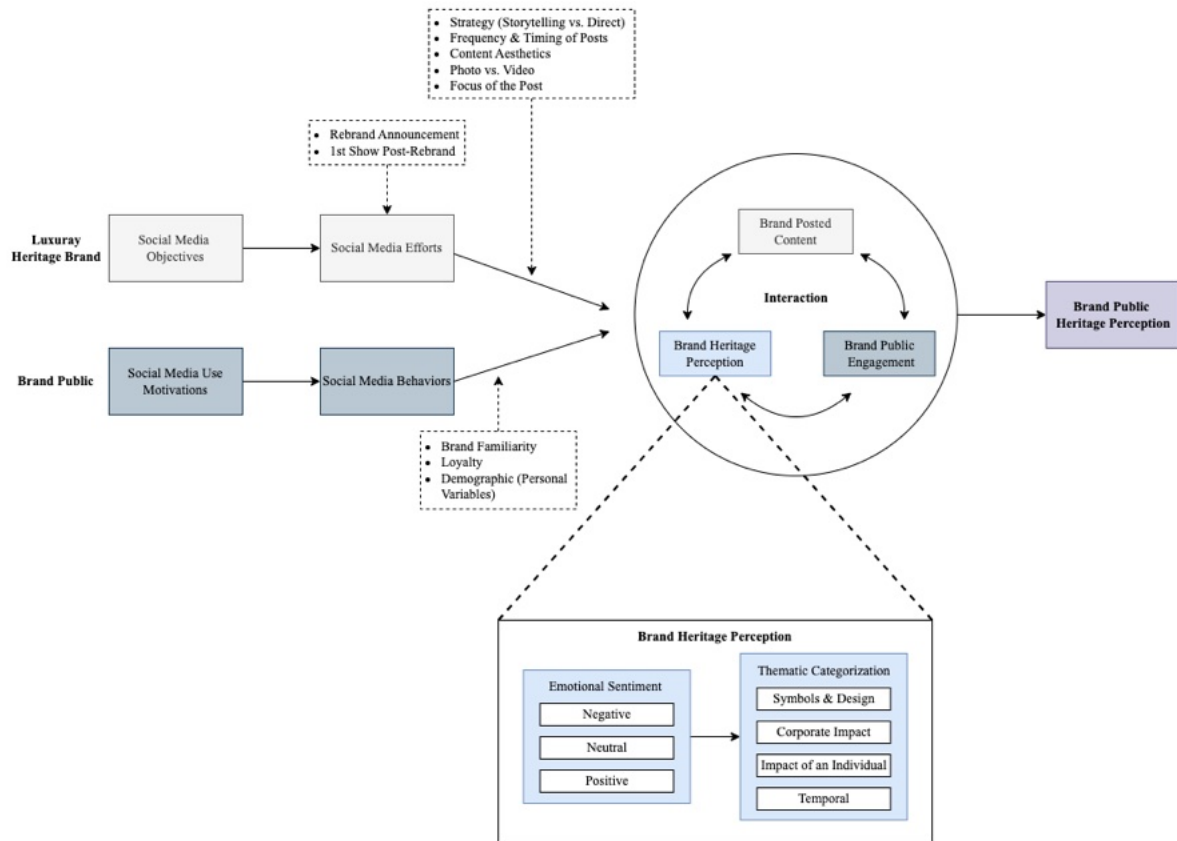
periods, the comment sections prevail overall minimal attention and reaction towards Davis. In combination with Davis's unfamiliarity and Ferragamo's less emphasis of his appointment on Instagram, his nomination is overlooked by the brand public, contrasting to LV. In this context, it suggests that users view a director that is formally educated in design and seemingly appears to have the necessary qualifications for the role, does not encounter questioning and skepticism from the brand public.

6.0 Contributions

Our study aims to contribute to fill a gap in research by shedding light on the dynamics of brand public heritage perception evolution on Instagram following luxury heritage fashion brands' rebranding efforts. Through the development of a model, we provide a framework which uniquely combines our interpretations in addressing the research question revolving around the evolving nature of brand public sentiments within the digital realm.

Theoretical Implications The two case studies on luxury heritage fashion brands resulted in conclusive results that can be interpreted in regard to brand public rebranding perceptions in social media context. Building upon the model presented by Li et al. (2021), we created a model summarizing and incorporating our key findings: *Brand Public Heritage Perception on Luxury Heritage Brands' Social Media* (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Brand Public Heritage Perception on Luxury Heritage Brands' Social Media



In regard to the heritage brand paradox, rebranding initiatives must maintain an allure of magic (Cooper et al., 2021), therefore, social media objectives should also align with heritage brand identity not only for consistency, but to strengthen authenticity. We conclude there are variables that differ in the execution of social media efforts amongst brands, e.g., storytelling or a direct approach, frequency and timing, and content aesthetics. On the brand public side, their behaviors, e.g., commenting, will be affected by individual variables such as brand familiarity, loyalty and demographic.

Furthering Li et al. (2021), interaction between brand posted content, heritage brand perception and brand public engagement, therefore, this relationship affects brand public heritage perception. To exemplify this interaction, Louis Vuitton's rebrand announcement, focused on Williams, resulted in comments being directed towards him; whereas, Ferragamo's post, centered around the new visuals, resulted in the brand public to discuss brand identity over Davis. Additionally, brands can harness time in different ways, either to re-ignite excitement, cool down negativity, or maintain interest. To elaborate, LV had high engagement on their rebranding announcement, but the following two time periods showed a decline. Even though the posts one year later had reduced engagement, the series of

behind-the-scenes videos of Williams's first show caused old discussions to resurface. Contrastingly, at Ferragamo, the rebranding and the first show after the rebranding showed similar levels of engagement, possibly due to the brand public still being intrigued by the previous day rebranding.

To mitigate negative perception, luxury heritage brands in particular should not push for brand renewal if not deemed necessary (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). Changing for the sake of trendiness or due to competitors conducting renewal is not a strong enough motivation. Additionally, consumers are able to identify the difference between heritage-respecting rebranding and disingenuous, bandwagon trend rebranding. Heritage brands face the challenge of their longevity: being perceived as old over innovative, despite having a strong reputation (Orheim & Bluhme, 2019). To combat the brand heritage paradox on social media, it is integral that the brand aims to protect the authentic core, e.g., communicating what standards are absolute and will remain essential to the brand (Cooper et al., 2021). Luxury heritage brands can maintain market relevance through ongoing, purposeful peripheral adjustments, but must remain aware of the effects such changes will have on the brand public perception.

Managerial Implications As a result of our study, some implications for managers arise in the context of brand public perception on social media. Firstly, luxury fashion heritage stewards must maintain brand resonance: an entity can pursue innovation, but the familiar, long-built core of legacy should not be sacrificed. Thus, if brands do not responsibly communicate their upheld heritage in rebrandings, it gives way for crisis to occur (Cooper et al., 2015). Secondly, stewardship is at the heart of heritage, hence luxury heritage brand leaders must be representative of both continuity and change to foster sustained prestige (Park et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2015). Further, each new leader, or creative director, should make a powerful contribution through balancing heritage with modernity (Troy, 2003) because unbalanced efforts will be perceived by the brand public as insincere and unfit to uphold brand culture. Lastly, luxury heritage brand managers should be aware that the social media rebranding content embodies linkages to a brand's past, resulting in surfacing of reflections from the brand public related to heritage perceptions. Overall, the discussions in the comment sections, whether negative, neutral or positive, are reflective of personal connections and subjective emotions the brand public has with the entity.

7.0 Conclusion

Contrastingly to Louis Vuitton, Ferragamo has notably smaller engagement on Instagram, however, as proven by their competitor, a celebrity appointment creates buzz and could be used as a tactic to generate sustained involvement from the brand public. Additionally, Ferragamo's rebrand consisted of changes extending beyond a new creative director, therefore, the appointment of an unconventional persona may not have worked for the brand as it could have been negatively perceived as distortion of the brand image. Despite Ferragamo's slight Instagram presence, the brand public response suggests that when identity is drastically altered, conveying heritage would be valued and appreciated. Unlike Ferragamo's comments that showcased a focus of brand identity, the Louis Vuitton personification of the rebranding to celebrity Williams, resulted in comments revolving around him instead.

The growing use of social media, tied with pressure for brands to innovate and evolve, underscored the need to understand how rebranding efforts are perceived in the brand public eye. Comprehension of such discourse gives way for luxury heritage fashion brands to recognize whether voiced sentiments are withstanding or temporary, based on the initiatives. Utilizing research and findings from our case studies, we address the research question by concluding that succeeding the rebranding efforts of a luxury heritage fashion brand, the brand public expressing their heritage perceptions on Instagram are not sustained unless provoked by the brand.

8.0 Limitations

Limitations of this qualitative study can be divided into several factors. Firstly, the sole utilization of Instagram as the digital context possibly restricts the finding's generalizability, since other social media platforms may generate different user perspectives on heritage rebrandings. Moreover, hidden or deleted comments, and the narrowed sample of Louis Vuitton's comments, acts as a limitation as we do not analyze all remarks. Based on the criteria for qualified comments, the analysis was constrained to be based on relevant, English, and emoji comments posted within 24 hours of the Instagram content upload. This holds the possibility to overlook potentially valuable insights from non-English comments and does not fully represent the complexity and longevity of heritage rebranding implications. In combination with the chosen three timeframes, the limited temporal constraints for the data

might not capture the breadth of the brand public's perceptions and reactions over time, additionally, luxury heritage rebrandings might have surprising surfaced reactance even later. On the other hand, the employed netnographic approach only allowed us to observe the brand public members' reactions without being able to collect insight about their personal connections, loyalty, or familiarity with the brands, those of which could have a heavy influence on their emerging perceptions. Also, users could have differing or contradicting ways of communicating online, or "online personas", whose effects are not captured. Finally, applying a thematic analysis can be a limitation, as the findings were rendered based on emergent categories of commonly surfaced topics, formulated via our subjective interpretation of the data.

9.0 Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies could dive into heritage discussions on social media platforms beyond Instagram, as well as consider a wider range of posts beyond the focal rebranding-related ones, in order to gain a more thorough picture of how luxury heritage fashion brands convey their heritage. Additionally, investigating how the brand public heritage perceptions are affected for controversial luxury heritage brands, who are facing backlash or experiencing a scandal, such as Balenciaga, could further describe the opportunities and challenges of communicating heritage in rebrandings. Finally, researching the luxury heritage fashion companies' perspective on their rebranding social media activities has potential to give insights onto the strategic approach and objectives of heritage communication.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Data Disclosure

The empirical material, from Louis Vuitton's and Ferragamo's Instagram comment sections for the selected posts, were downloaded from the official Instagram application using a Google Chrome extension tool, IG Comment Export Tool. This free source was selected since it was able to access an unlimited amount of Instagram comments and received good user reviews. The tool was able to scrape Instagram posts for comment ID, comment text, username, profile URL, profile pic URL and date, which is within the scope of information needed for the analysis. The Chrome extension was user-friendly and does not ask for personal Instagram password, nor any of personal data including Instagram user information, story, visit history, posts, and social relationships.

Having gathered the material, the data processing for the thesis was done using the framework offered by LangChain for developing applications powered by large language models (LLMs). With this tool, the sentiment analysis and classification of the comments into selected categories were done using OpenAI's ChatGPT 3.5 Turbo version of the LLM model. It is recognized that large language models can hallucinate, and generate false information or facts that are not based on real information or events. For this reason, we manually verified the sentiment analysis and classification of the comments made by the language model for all the comments in the analysis. The actual data analysis for the thesis was done using Microsoft Excel and R.

Ad Targeting Hello. (2024). *IG Comment Export Tool* (Version 1.2.7) [Chrome Extension]. Chrome Web Store. Available at: <https://chromewebstore.google.com/detail/hpfnaodfcakdfbnompnfglhjmkoinbfm>.

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Appendix B: AI Disclosure

The generative AI tool of OpenAI's ChatGPT as well as Grammarly for Google Docs were utilized to improve the language through proofreading, and for individual word suggestions. This has been done to increase the writing process's efficiency, for enriching the language, and for ensuring the content comes across in a clear manner. Moreover, AI was used to help with the initial process of segmenting and categorization of the empirical material, to get alternative insights into how the data could be interpreted. However, due to AI's notable inconsistency in the interpretations, combined with the material's high level of subjectivity, we recognized a need for subjective human evaluation instead.

Yet, a critical mindset was kept throughout the process, as it is recognized, and became evident, that not all the suggestions coincide with the intended, fact-based and original meanings. In accordance to this, each AI presented suggestion was evaluated individually, and accepted only if deemed to improve the initial alternative. To further reduce the risks with AI, it was not used to produce the actual content itself. All in all, the main learning from employing artificial intelligence revolves around the notion that its quickness was rather often overshadowed by false or repetitive output, which resulted in its limited use in the thesis writing process.

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Appendix C: Empirical Material for Louis Vuitton

Table 5(a): Selected Rebrand Announcement Instagram Posts

 <i>Rebrand Announcement 1</i>	 <i>Rebrand Announcement 2</i>
Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CopvowFN3vQ/ Media Type: Picture Date: 2023-02-14 18:06:21 CET Total Likes: 1,002,647 Total comments: 15,727 Tagged: @pharrell Caption: Louis Vuitton is delighted to welcome Pharrell Williams as its new Men's Creative Director. His first collection for Louis Vuitton will be revealed next June during Men's Fashion Week in Paris. Pharrell Williams is a visionary whose creative universes expand from music to art, and to fashion – establishing himself as a cultural global icon over the past twenty years. The way in which he breaks boundaries across the various worlds he explores, aligns with Louis Vuitton's status as a Cultural Maison, reinforcing its values of innovation, pioneer spirit, and entrepreneurship. "I am glad to welcome Pharrell back home, after our collaborations in 2004 and 2008 for Louis Vuitton, as our new Men's Creative Director. His creative vision beyond fashion will undoubtedly lead Louis Vuitton towards a new and very exciting chapter." – Pietro Beccari, Louis Vuitton's Chairman and CEO. #LouisVuitton #PharrellWilliams	Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CosdQGrrMl4/ Media Type: Picture Date: 2023-02-15 19:23:25 CET Total Likes: 339,780 Total comments: 2,555 Tagged: @pharrell Caption: Pharrell Williams joins Louis Vuitton as the new Men's Creative Director and will debut his first collection for Louis Vuitton in June during Men's Fashion Week in Paris. #LouisVuitton #PharrellWilliams "I am glad to welcome Pharrell back home, after our collaborations in 2004 and 2008 for Louis Vuitton, as our new Men's Creative Director. His creative vision beyond fashion will undoubtedly lead Louis Vuitton towards a new and very exciting chapter." – Pietro Beccari, Louis Vuitton's Chairman and CEO.

Table 5(b): Selected 1st Show Post-Rebrand Instagram Posts



Debut Show Post-Rebrand 1 - Cover Photo



Debut Show Post-Rebrand 2 - Cover Photo

Link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ctu8bdkq8UP/>

Media Type: 3 Photos

Date: 2023-06-21 01:11:18 CET

Total Likes: 657,564

Total comments: 6,079

Tagged: @pharrell

Caption:

Men's Spring-Summer 2024 Show. Pharrell Williams closed his debut show for Louis Vuitton in a digitalized Damouflage motif suit, paying tribute to Paris with the reinvigorated emblem of the Maison. Watch the full show via link in bio.

#LVMenSS24 #LouisVuitton#PharrellWilliams

Link: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CtvMTdDKqjb/>

Media Type: Video

Date: 2023-06-21 03:31:14 CET

Total Likes: 708,658

Total comments: 2,546

Tagged: @pharrell

Caption:

Men's Spring-Summer 2024 Show. Infused with a welcoming optimism, the debut collection of Pharrell Williams evoked a contrasting heritage savoir-faire with a trailblazing vision. Watch the full show via link in bio.

#LVMenSS24 #LouisVuitton #PharrellWilliams

Table 5(c): Selected 1 Year Post-Rebrand Instagram Posts

 <i>One Year Post-Rebrand 1 - Cover Photo</i>	 <i>One Year Post-Rebrand 2 - Cover Photo</i>
Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/C3armaqtppnn/ Media Type: Video Date: 2024-02-16 17:34:24 CET Total Likes: 70,593 Total comments: 386 Tagged: @pharrell Caption: Men's Spring-Summer 2024. Following the design process to the show on Pont-Neuf, @pharrell shares the many facets of creativity behind his first collection for Louis Vuitton. Watch the full video on YouTube. #LVSpeedyP9 #LVMenSS24 #PharrellWilliams #LouisVuitton	Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/C3avGkdNVvz/ Media Type: Video Date: 2024-02-16 18:16:56 CET Total Likes: 57,740 Total comments: 362 Tagged: @pharrell Caption: Men's Spring-Summer 2024. Delve behind the scenes of @pharrell's debut collection, uncovering the precious details from daring motifs to the new Speedy P9. Watch the full video on YouTube. #LVSpeedyP9 #LVMenSS24#PharrellWilliams#LouisVuitton

Appendix D: Empirical Material for Ferragamo

Table 6(a): Selected Rebrand Announcement Instagram Posts		
 <i>Rebrand Announcement 1</i>	 <i>Rebrand Announcement 2</i>	 <i>Rebrand Announcement 3</i>
Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CivU9qpSwAE/ Media Type: Photo Date: 2022-09-20 19:00:21 CET Total Likes: 17,304 Total comments: 549 Tagged: @_maximiliandavis_ Caption: Salvatore Ferragamo becomes FERRAGAMO.	Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CixUQoRM15Z/ Media Type: Photo Date: 2022-09-21 13:32:41 CET Total Likes: 10,042 Total comments: 140 Tagged: @_maximiliandavis_ Caption: A NEW CHAPTER. #FERRAGAMO Artistic Direction by @edwardquarmby @dobedorepresents	Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cix5wTQseyr/ Media Type: Photo Date: 2022-09-21 19:00:19 CET Total Likes: 14,093 Total comments: 157 Tagged: @_maximiliandavis_ Caption: THE HERITAGE AND THE NOW. #FERRAGAMO

Table 6(b): Selected 1st Show Post-Rebrand Instagram Posts

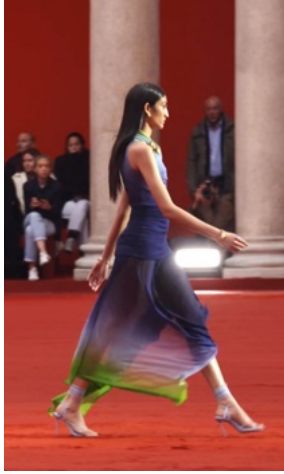
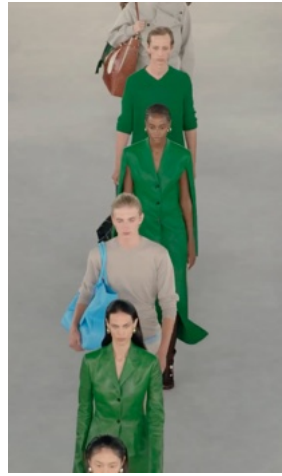
 <i>Debut Show Post-Rebrand 1 - Cover Photo</i>	 <i>Debut Show Post-Rebrand 2 - Cover Photo</i>
Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/Ci510rADIRf/ Media Type: Video Date: 2022-09-24 21:02:18 CET Total Likes: 25,291 Total comments: 249 Tagged: @_maximiliandavis_ Caption: ETHEREAL ELEGANCE. #FERRAGAMOSS23	Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/Ci74XgXjk32/ Media Type: Video Date: 2022-09-25 16:02:00 CET Total Likes: 19,439 Total comments: 156 Tagged: @_maximiliandavis_ Caption: SUNSET AND SUNRISE. #FERRAGAMOSS23

Table 6(c): Selected 1 Year Post-Rebrand Instagram Posts



One Year Post-Rebrand 1



One Year Post-Rebrand 2 - Cover Photo

Link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CxYmNhvspPF/>

Media Type: Photo

Date: 2023-09-19 18:59:27 CET

Total Likes: 15,890

Total comments: 83

Tagged: N/A

Caption:

18-karat gold sandal reinvented by @_maximiliandavis_ for the #FerragamoFW23 Collection.

Details of Paolo Veronese, 1570-75. By permission of the Ministry of Culture – Gallerie degli Uffizi. Discover more at the link in bio.

Campaign Concept and Creative Direction

@ferdinandoverderi

Link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CxidAEisOF5/>

Media Type: Video

Date: 2023-09-23 14:52:33 CET

Total Likes: 25,600

Total comments: 184

Tagged: N/A

Caption:

#FerragamoSS24 by @_maximiliandavis_

Appendix E

Table 7(a): Louis Vuitton Data Collection of Comment Section – Sentiment Compared to Emoji Use

Louis Vuitton					
Time Period		Sentiment			Total
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	
Rebrand Announcement	Contains Text	38	35	371	444
	Only Emojis	5	9	409	423
	Total	43	44	780	867
1st Show Post-Rebrand	Contains Text	40	13	165	218
	Only Emojis	6	1	178	185
	Total	46	14	343	403
1 Year Post-Rebrand	Contains Text	56	17	76	149
	Only Emojis	8	4	160	172
	Total	64	21	236	321
Total	Contains Text	134	65	612	811
	Only Emojis	19	14	747	780
	Total	153	79	1359	1591

Table 7(b): Louis Vuitton Data Collection of Comment Section – Categorization and Sentiment Distribution

Louis Vuitton					
Time Period		Sentiment			Total
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	
Rebrand Announcement	Category 1	5	1	5	11
	Category 2	13	3	16	32
	Category 3	8	5	37	50
	Category 4	3	0	19	22
	Category 5	14	35	703	752
	Total	43	44	780	867
1st Show Post-Rebrand	Category 1	22	3	10	35
	Category 2	5	1	7	13
	Category 3	3	1	15	19
	Category 4	0	0	6	6
	Category 5	16	9	305	330
	Total	46	14	343	403
1 Year Post-Rebrand	Category 1	22	2	4	28
	Category 2	15	2	2	19
	Category 3	7	3	8	18
	Category 4	2	0	5	7
	Category 5	18	14	217	249
	Total	64	21	236	321
Total	Category 1	49	6	19	74
	Category 2	33	6	25	64
	Category 3	18	9	60	87
	Category 4	5	0	30	35
	Category 5	48	58	1225	1331
	Total	153	79	1359	1591

Table 8(a): Ferragamo Data Collection of Comment Section – Sentiment Compared to Emoji Use

Ferragamo					
Time Period		Sentiment			
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
Rebrand Announcement	Contains Text	91	43	119	253
	Only Emojis	41	8	237	286
	Total	132	51	356	539
1st Show Post-Rebrand	Contains Text	6	7	35	48
	Only Emojis	0	1	96	97
	Total	6	8	131	145
1 Year Post-Rebrand	Contains Text	2	4	41	47
	Only Emojis	0	3	67	70
	Total	2	7	108	117
Total	Contains Text	99	54	195	348
	Only Emojis	41	12	400	453
	Total	140	66	595	801

Table 8(b): Ferragamo Data Collection of Comment Section – Categorization and Sentiment Distribution

Ferragamo					
Time Period		Sentiment			Total
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	
Rebrand Announcement	Category 1	30	6	16	52
	Category 2	11	0	2	13
	Category 3	1	1	12	14
	Category 4	5	2	23	30
	Category 5	85	42	303	430
	Total	132	51	356	539
1st Show Post-Rebrand	Category 1	0	0	1	1
	Category 2	2	0	0	2
	Category 3	0	0	0	0
	Category 4	2	0	2	4
	Category 5	2	8	128	138
	Total	6	8	131	145
1 Year Post-Rebrand	Category 1	0	0	2	2
	Category 2	0	0	0	0
	Category 3	1	0	0	1
	Category 4	1	0	0	1
	Category 5	0	7	106	113
	Total	2	7	108	117
Total	Category 1	30	6	19	55
	Category 2	13	0	2	15
	Category 3	2	1	12	15
	Category 4	8	2	25	35
	Category 5	87	57	537	681
	Total	140	66	595	801

Appendix F

Table 9: Most Frequently Surfaced Emojis for Louis Vuitton and Ferragamo

Positive Emojis	
Negative Emojis	