Luxury Fashion Branding

Creating and Sustaining a Successful Luxury Brand Identity through Communication
Summary

Luxury brand communication was fairly easy in the past; commerce was national, competition was moderate and consumers, who were loyal and uncritical, were easy to segment and characterise (Okonkwo, 2007, p.36, 99). This has nevertheless changed, as luxury brands, today, face a highly competitive and globalised market and critical consumers with sky-high demands for pleasure and creativity that, moreover, are difficult to segment due to a general increase in wealth that has made luxury more or less available for all (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p. 13 & Okonkwo, 2007, pp. 3, 65-68).

The above has obviously created challenges for luxury fashion brands that struggle to create synergy between today’s need for globalisation and constant recreation of originality on one side – that in itself can be challenging to manage - and luxury fashion brands’ fundamental traits of tradition and heritage that must be respected and treasured on the other (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.126, Okonkwo, 2007, p.3).

The presented issues obviously makes it quite complicated to construct an appropriate luxury brand identity, and the thesis thus aims to answer what possibilities luxury fashion brands have in order to sustain a successful luxury brand identity and image in the future through advertising in printed media and public relations events, more specifically fashion shows. This is examined by conducting a comparative analysis of the successful luxury fashion brands Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren, in which their brand identity strategies in relation to the above defined traditional communication activities are studied.

Seeing that there is an explicit focus on the sender of communication and specific communication activities, in order to reach an understanding of how Ralph Lauren and Louis Vuitton communicate their brand identity, what they communicate and why, the theoretical position of the thesis is founded on Methodological hermeneutics, as developed by Frederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), where the aim is to understand the author of a text and his emotions, intentions and thoughts behind it by means of interpretation through the hermeneutic circle (Sheratt, 2005, p.59).

Theoretically, the thesis is mainly founded on industry specific theory, created by luxury experts U. Okonkwo, J.N. Kapferer, V. Bastien, M. Chevalier and G. Mazzalovo, seeing that luxury brand communication differs from traditional brand communication in that luxury brands communicate to
strengthen a unique identity and create the notion of a dream, whereas mass and premium brands communicate in order to sell and position themselves (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.121, 210).

Well-known and respected branding and public relations practitioners, such as Kotler (2009), Tench and Yeomans (2009) and Pickton and Broderick (2005) have also been applied when relevant.

Through a rhetorical analysis of the commentary in Ralph Lauren and Louis Vuitton’s fashion show videos, and a visual, semiotic (Barthes, 1977) and formal analysis of the respective brands’ printed ads, it became apparent that the two successful luxury brands construct and communicate two completely different brand identities, through their printed ads and fashion shows, but that the identities, however, are founded on similar, underlying facets of intangible and tangible values and qualities. Based on theory and the findings of the analysis, it can thus be concluded that luxury brands must emphasise and communicate particular facets in their printed ads and fashion shows in order to create and maintain a successful luxury identity, but that they simultaneously also must make sure to construct the communication of these facets differently to appear unique and matchless, get the consumers’ attention and beat competition (Okonkwo, 2007, p. 66-67, 105).

Although the communication of the facets must be constructed differently, it is according to the above mentioned theorists evident that certain guidelines must be considered when constructing the communication of the facets. The apparent, overall dilemma of luxury branding, between the need for tradition on one hand and for creativity and recreation on the other, should be managed by distinguishing core identity traits from peripheral traits; treasuring and respecting the core and continually recreating the peripheral to fit the societal demand for creativity, excitement and trendiness (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.126).

As a final note, it is important to stress that a brand identity is created through various manifestations of which traditional communication activities is one (Chevalier &Mazzalovo, 2008, p.269), and it is consequently not enough to solely examine brand identity creation through this channel, if success should be secured. Additionally, it must also be stressed that the ultimate success of a luxury brand depends on the public’s perception and their image of the brand, which, as such, cannot be controlled by the brand. By communicating the central characteristics of the brand identity in a coherent and consistent manner, the gap between the brand identity and the brand image can, however, be decreased according to Kapferer and Bastien (2009, p.126).
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1. Introduction

“Luxury” - a word most fashion brands would die to be characterized by but only a few in fact are. It connotes exclusivity, craftsmanship and uniqueness and justifies sky-high prices (Okonkwo, 2007, p.11). The concept has throughout history played an important role in societies by being a clear indicator of knowledge and social class (Okonkwo, 2007, pp.13-26), and this has not changed in present time. Although, we have been freed from tradition-bound social stratification, this has, according to J.N. Kapferer and V. Bastien (2009), not changed people’s human need for some kind of social class system, and they argue that luxury nowadays function to recreate this for us (p.18). Being a social marker, luxury fashion products thus play a key role in our creation of identity – it influences how we dress and enables us to signify a certain lifestyle, also if we chose not to buy luxury goods, and this is essential in our modern society, where we tend to define each other based on appearance and product choices (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, pp.18-19,61-62).

In the past it was fairly easy to brand luxury, as competition was moderate and consumers were quite easy to define due to the above mentioned strict, social stratification and the tendency of consumers to remain loyal and uncritical towards a single-brand (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p. 18 & Okonkwo, 2007, p. 3, 65). This has nevertheless changed, as competition has increased and the consumer market has expanded, making it difficult to define whom to target (Okonkwo, 2007, p.3-4). Uche Okonkwo (2007) thus argues that the days are gone when luxury products simply had to be well-designed and expensive in order to sell; “Today’s luxury consumers are different. They have to be surprised, tantalized, captivated, courted, pampered and constantly pleased without end” (p.60). Put differently, luxury brands nowadays have to constantly keep up with social trends (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p.20), and recreate themselves in order to stay successful and competitive (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.132). Simultaneously, it is nevertheless also crucial for luxury fashion brands to remain faithful to the brand’s roots and original values and vision, if it wishes to keep its luxury status (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.14), and this requirement for maintaining tradition is obviously quite difficult to preserve in communication, when the brand at the same time has to be original and keep up with the spirit of the time.

But the problems do not end here; the importance of maintaining the brand’s origin also contradicts with the fact that luxury brands nowadays, according to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), must go global if they want to survive and stay successful (p.15).
Based on all of these intertwined and opposing prerequisites of branding and brand communication, is it clear that luxury fashion brands struggle “to find a synergy between its origins in tradition and the requirements of the modern business”, as Uche Okonkwo (2007, p. 3) expresses it.

1.1 Problem Statement

Having to keep the presented issues in mind obviously makes it quite complicated to create an appropriate brand identity, and it is therefore interesting to examine how luxury fashion brands should go about it in the future in order to succeed. My thesis thus aims to answer the following problem statement:

Keeping the rather challenging and contrasting prerequisites of today’s luxury branding in mind, what possibilities do luxury fashion brands have in order to sustain a successful brand identity and image in the future through advertising in printed media and public relations (PR) in relation to events?

Through a comparative analysis of the successful luxury brands Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren and their strategies in relation to the above defined traditional communication activities, my thesis will seek to answer the presented problem statement.

1.2 Scientific Method

The chosen theory of scientific method functions as a framework for the thesis, by determining the choice of method and theory applied, and hereby clarifying how knowledge is considered and obtained.

The theoretical position is founded on Methodological hermeneutics, as developed by Frederich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). The term is derived from the Greek word 'hermeneutikos', which means 'to interpret', and this is exactly what hermeneutics aims to do, as a human science, in order to reach understanding (Palmer, 1969, pp.84-86). In Methodological hermeneutics, the aim of interpretation is to understand the author of a text and his emotions, intentions and thoughts behind it by means of the hermeneutic circle that, according to Schleiermacher, enables us to put ourselves in the place of the author (Sheratt, 2005, p.59). The circle consists of two dimensions - a grammatical dimension and a psychological dimension - that in joint create the methodological basis for a general hermeneutic method of interpretation (Palmer, 1996, p.91). The grammatical
dimension focuses on interpretation and assertion of the general grammatical laws governing a text (Sheratt, 2005, p.61), whereas the psychological dimension aims to gain insight through psychological divination, which according to Sheratt (2005) can be defined as "empathy or identification with the author" (p.61), meaning that you, as interpreter, imagine yourself to be the author and in doing so will reach an understanding of the author's intentions and thoughts.

As the problem statement indicates, the main objective of this thesis is to analyze and interpret specific communication activities—so called 'texts', when applying hermeneutic terminology—of the luxury brands Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren, in order to reach an understanding of what brand identity they communicate and how. This focus on the sender clearly illustrates that the theoretical position of this thesis is Methodological hermeneutics.

1.3 Structure and Theoretical Framework

The thesis begins with defining the key concepts applied in order to ensure a uniform understanding of their meaning and use throughout the dissertation. Then, the current luxury market and consumer traits will be elaborated upon and challenges in relation to these will be elucidated in the section ‘The World of Luxury’, as these external circumstances obviously affect how luxury branding should be structured and created. Hereafter, the explicit focus on luxury brand identity communication through printed advertising and PR events is elaborated upon in the section ‘Communicating Luxury’.

The thesis is mainly founded on theory and research developed by luxury branding practitioners U. Okonkwo, J.N. Kapferer, V. Bastien, M. Chevalier and G. Mazzalovo (for more information on these see Appendix 1), as it makes most sense to use industry specific experts since luxury communication and marketing differ from that of traditional goods (see section 3), which means that general marketing principles and assumptions are somewhat irrelevant. In addition to the above, supplementary scholars such as L. Hujic (2005), M. Tungate (2009), A. Brioschi (2006) and D. Pickton and A. Broderick (2005), are referred to when relevant.

In the analysis, the successful luxury brands Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren will be studied. Regarding events, Louis Vuitton’s Fall/Winter 2011-2012 fashion show and Ralph Lauren’s Spring/Summer 2011 fashion show will be analysed, as they are the ones promoted by the brands at the moment. Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren communicate about their events through the internet,
and we consequently have to examine it through this channel. More specifically, two online videos will be analysed in which Ralph Lauren 1 in Ralph Lauren’s video – ‘Watch the Film’2 - and Marc Jacobs in Louis Vuitton’s video3 - ‘Watch the Show with Marc Jacobs’4 - elaborate upon the respective fashion shows5. The focus of the analysis will not be on the visuals of the videos but instead on the voiceover/conversation, which will be examined in a rhetorical analysis that will account for the use of Aristotle’s three appeals, and elucidate what facets of luxury brand communication (figure 2), and hereby what brand identity, Marc Jacobs and Ralph Lauren aim to communicate through their fashion shows.

The printed advertisements will be analysed using Lise Mark’s (2004) formal analysis and Roland Barthes’ (1977) semiotic analysis, as these analytical methods combined will enable a thorough examination of what facets and hereby brand identity each brand communicates through printed advertising. The chosen ads are both part of seasonal Spring/Summer 2011 ad campaigns (see Appendix 3 and 4), and can consequently be said to represent the fashion houses’ most current strategies in relation to communicating the brand identity through printed advertising.

Following the analysis, a model will be created in which recommendations will be given in relation to central facets that practitioners argue, and the analysis indicates, should be communicated through events and printed advertising, in order for luxury brands to deal with market challenges and sustain a successful brand identity through these communication initiatives. Finally, a conclusion can be found.

When put in relation to Methodological hermeneutics, the analytical methods applied in the thesis - visual semiotic analysis and rhetorical analysis - corresponds to the grammatical dimension of the hermeneutic circle, whereas the interpretation of the findings then equals the psychological dimension.

1.4 Delimitation

When reading the following report, it should be kept in mind that some limitations occur. First of all in relation to the limited scope of the thesis that has restricted the level of detail and resulted in a very constrained problem statement, in which I focus solely on elements of luxury brand

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1 Ralph Lauren is the founder of Ralph Lauren.
2 Posted on www.ralphlauren.co.uk
3 Marc Jacobs is the creative director of Louis Vuitton.
4 Posted on www.fashionshow.louisvuitton.com
5 The videos can be found on the enclosed CD-ROM
communication in the fashion sector. In addition, this restriction of writing space has also resulted in a somewhat narrow theoretical framework, as a thorough treatment of many and perhaps differing opinions would have been too space consuming. This fact also had a limiting effect on the analysis, as it obviously affected the level of depth and nuance; the visual semiotic analysis only considers two printed ads that are part of campaigns, and although both ads can be characterized as representatives of their respective campaigns, it still has a limiting effect on the validity of the analysis that the campaigns were not analysed in a whole. It is also restraining that the rhetorical analysis of the videos only consider the spoken, and that the visuals are not considered. The findings and recommendations should consequently not be viewed as exhaustive or concluding, and the model in section 5 should only be considered as suggested guidelines to possible success, as final conclusions cannot be drawn based on an analysis of only two luxury brands.

When it comes to the notions success and luxury, it should furthermore be stressed that these are complex concepts that due to their subjective nature are difficult to conclude upon.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the thesis is a subjective piece of work, seeing that I, as a writer, although I strive to be objective, cannot be characterized as a tabula rasa due to my educational background that influence the way I analyse and resonate, and make me biased.

1.5 Definition of Central Concepts

In the following, central concepts of the thesis will be defined in order to establish a clear understanding of what is meant, when they are applied and mentioned in the thesis. This is essential as multiple approaches to each concept exist.

1.5.1 Definition of Branding and the Concepts Brand Identity and Brand Image

Pickton and Broderick (2005) define a brand as “the totality of what the consumer takes into consideration before making a purchase decision” (p.242), which put differently means that the brand is the sum of all experiences received by the consumer through name, logo, symbol, communication and design that differentiates the corporation and its offerings (products or services) from those of competitors (Okonkwo, 2007, p.107).

Branding is then the means for establishing a brand – what is done in relation to the name, logo, symbol, communication, design and so forth - and can more specifically be defined as a “strategy to differentiate products and companies and to build economic value for both the consumer and the
brand owner” (Pickton & Broderick, 2005, p.242). The economic value for the consumer is, according to Okonkwo (2007), created through the functional and emotional benefits that a successful brand signals to offer the consumer, who consequently feels confident that the brand will deliver a certain experience (p.9). Consumers who perceive the brand to be beneficial will then form an emotional and psychological attachment towards the brand, which will then create economic value for the brand owner, who - through loyal consumers - will have a competitive advantage and experience stable, if not increased, sales (Okonkwo, 2007 p.9).

In traditional marketing, brand positioning is viewed as the foundation of brand management, but this is according to Kapferer and Bastien (2009) different in luxury branding, where the creation and maintenance of the brand’s unique identity and dream is key (p.121), and it is thus essential for luxury brands to communicate in an aesthetic manner, which cannot be associated with that of mass produced or premium brands, who clearly communicate to sell; “In luxury you communicate in order to create the dream and to recharge the brand’s value, not in order to sell”(Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.211).

The brand identity can, according to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), be defined as the DNA of the brand, more specifically the tangible and intangible facets of the brand that define it and differentiate it from others (p.122). It is founded on six broad categories of brand manifestations; traditional communication activities, the signature system, points of sale/offices /factories, products, manifestations of company behaviour and manifestations of actual consumers (Chevalier &Mazzalovo, 2008, p.268), and of these, the focus of this thesis is on manifestations of traditional communication activities.

A brand identity has a unique brand personality, which is the outward face of the brand that through core personality traits shows the ‘true self’ of the brand; who it is and how it views itself (Okonkwo, 2007, p.110). It is important to distinguish between brand identity and brand image, as the brand image is the subjective perception of the objective brand identity, created in the consumers mind though their interpretation of all the corporate controlled brand manifestations that in joint create the brand identity (Pickton&Broderick, 2005, p.662). The ultimate goal of marketers is of course that the brand image corresponds with brand identity but this can, as the above indicates, not be taken for granted (Pickton&Broderick, 2005, p.662).

Many scholars, such as J. N. Kapferer (2009), M. Chevalier (2008) and U. Okonkwo (2007) argue that “the luxury business above all [is] a business of brands” (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p. 81), and that the notion of luxury would not exist if it was not for branding and its ability to create
the perception of value: “Branding is the lifeline of the luxury industry, [and] without branding there would be no luxury goods” (Okonkwo, 2007, p.10). It is thus essential for corporations, who want to be a part of and remain in the luxury market, to focus and concentrate on branding.

1.5.2 Definition of Luxury and Luxury Fashion Brands.
Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren have it, and so do Giorgio Armani, Hermés and Gucci⁶ - the luxury feel, which consumers all recognize but nevertheless find difficult to define due to its subjective and value-based nature.

The notion of luxury can be found in various product categories, but as the above indicates, the focus of this thesis will strictly be on the luxury ready-to-wear, fashion sector that offers haute couture, men’s and women’s ready-to-wear and accessories (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p.35). Within this category, luxury is in broad terms characterized by authenticity, exclusivity, uniqueness, innovation, craftsmanship, premium pricing and high-quality (Okonkwo, 2007, p.11), as well as a creative and emotional intangible worth (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p. viii).

Chevalier & Mazzalovo (2008) distinguish between three levels of luxury (p. xi), and all three levels are, as the model shows, offered by the majority of luxury brands within the fashion sector.

![FIGURE 1](Based on Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008,p.xi)

Kapferer (2006) argue that the three levels are interdependent and thus all necessary, as the creation of haute couture at the inaccessible luxury level – which functions to sell and recreate the brand universe and reinforce the brand identity - is financed by the profits made from sales at the accessible luxury level (pp.72-73).

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⁶ According to Uche Okonkwo (2007, pp.45-47): Table 2.1: Luxury Fashion Brand index.
1.5.3 Definition of a Successful Luxury Brand.
In luxury fashion, success should not be measured by company size, as luxury fashion brands, in general, are small both in staff numbers and financial terms due to luxury business characteristics such as high break-even, outsourcing, licensing and complex time-frames (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, pp.1-10). Instead, success should be measured based on the brand’s equity, seeing that branding, as mentioned above, “is integral to a luxury brand’s sustainability [, as it] creates and sustains the attraction and desire”, according to Okonkwo (2007, p.4), and it is thus logical to found success criteria on branding concepts.
Pickton and Broderick (2005) define brand equity as an intangible asset, more specifically “the value [and strength] of the brand’s name, symbols, associations and reputation to all target audiences who interact with it”, and brand value is then the financial gains that this equity translates into (p.254). The higher brand equity, the higher brand value and consequently success. According to Pickton and Broderick (2005), brand equity can be measured through an analysis of the brand’s strength (its level of awareness, dominance, loyalty and heritage), its description (the brand associations and perceived quality) and its future ability to survive on the market (pp.254-260).

2. The World of Luxury
The following section provides a general presentation of today’s rather complex luxury market and luxury consumer, as well as the challenges that both the market and consumers - because of their characteristics - create for luxury brands. It is crucial for the management of luxury brands to have a clear understanding of the competition, social trends and consumers –who they are; their needs and expectations – in their sector, as well as the related challenges, seeing that it more or less determines how the brand should structure its brand communication (Okonkwo, 2007, p. 60,70, 77).

2.1 The Current Luxury Market
The luxury market has developed rapidly in the last fifty years, as our society has changed in a number of ways (Okonkwo, 2007, p.225). One of the biggest contributors to change is globalisation - which has internationalized the luxury sector and hereby led to increased competition - as brands from all over the world now compete against each other (Okonkwo, 2007, p.38). In addition, competition has also increased due to advancements in business and management practices that, along with globalisation, have led to a lowering of the entry barrier, meaning that new luxury
brands emerge and compete for consumers’ attention (Okonkwo, 2007, p.225). Also the rise of fashion brands from ‘mass’ to ‘premium’ has increased competition and influences the luxury sector, as consumers view these products as alternatives to luxury products at better price-value (Okonkwo, 2007, p.228).

Another trait of the current luxury market is democratization, which more specifically implies that consumer markets have expanded to include more or less ‘everybody’ (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, pp.150), primarily due to a general increase in wealth not just among the best potential clients - the High Net Worth Individuals - but also among the middle-class (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.13, 103 and Okonkwo, 2007, p.71).

Surprisingly enough, the financial crisis has, according to several experts (Fellowes, 2008), not really had a negative effect on the luxury market, as the globalisation of the sector has created various national markets for the luxury brands to rely on. James Ogilvy, chief executive of Luxury Briefing says: “We’re in the middle of the maelstrom now, which affects confidence, but luxury is a long-term business for the brands involved. The customer base is broader than it was with some brands having more than 200 stores worldwide [, and] emerging markets may counteract the stagnation of some of the more mature markets” (cited in Fellowes, 2008, ¶ 18-19). John Guy, retail and luxury goods analyst at MF Global, adds: “It’s an international market now for luxury commodities and you have to measure it in those terms. Demand falls away in Britain because conspicuous consumption doesn’t go down too well, whereas in China and Russia, showing off one’s wealth is a sign of power” (cited in Fellowes, 2008, ¶ 12-13).

But it is not only global presence that saves luxury brands from the recession; Ogilvy, moreover, argues that people who are used to buy luxury will continue to do so, as they treasure quality: “This flight to quality by consumers [also] provides the key to understanding why luxury brands will survive this recession, particularly those with heritage and a strong identity” (cited in Fellowes, 2008, ¶ 19).

All in all, the current market traits indicate that it is crucial for luxury businesses to have a strong and competitive brand identity and history, as well as a global presence.
2.2 Today’s Luxury Consumer

Because of today’s high supply of luxury brands, consumers have seized the ultimate power and are no longer loyal to a single brand; they are well-informed and can pick and choose exactly what they want, and consequently have a critical attitude and sky-high demands (Uche Okonkwo, 2007, p.36,243). There are, according to Uche Okonkwo (2007), broadly speaking two major segments of luxury consumers in Western societies; namely the ‘traditional luxury consumers’ on one hand – who belong to the upper class and revere the traditional and well-established brands (pp. 29,60) - and the ‘new luxury consumers’ on the other (p.60). As mentioned, it is quite impossible to clearly segment these new luxury consumers, also named ‘New Premium Consumers’ (Hujic, 2005, ¶ 2), seeing that they do not belong to a single social class or culture (Okonkwo, 2007, p.38). Most of them can nevertheless be characterized, broadly, by certain post modernistic tendencies, such as individualism, reflexivity, a need for self-staging and self-expression, as well as a strong focus on personal, hedonistic needs (Okonkwo, 2007, pp. 59-62,68), and based on this, Chevalier and Bastien (2008), propose some specific traits: Luxury consumers are first of all eclectic, meaning that they have high expectations, want to stand out and signal professionalism and modernity through their appearance (p.173). Besides this, consumers look for luxury products with hedonistic and aesthetic value rather than functional, which means that they aim for personal pleasure more than anything else (pp.155-156). It is also essential to highlight that although consumers might not be young of age, they are indeed youthful in spirit (Hujic, 2005, ¶ 4).

2.3 Challenges

Based on the market and consumer characteristics, many challenges can be identified for luxury brands. First of all in relation to globalisation, which has increased competition in complex ways, as explained above, and moreover has resulted in new markets on differing evolutionary levels and hereby a culturally diverse consumer base that vary in needs and wishes, which makes it challenging to develop strong and streamlined brand communication and a clear-cut brand identity (Okonkwo, 2007, pp.3-4, Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006, p.70). As indicated above, international presence and globalisation is nevertheless also positive and necessary for luxury brands, as it secures and strengthens the brand by increasing the number of different markets and hereby sales (Fellowes, 2008, ¶ 18-19), so luxury brands need to find an approach that enables them to fight competition and appeal to all markets, and this is a real challenge.
The democratization of luxury obviously brings an increase in consumers, and hereby a financial advantage for the brand, but at the same time it also creates a major risk of vulgarization, which luxury brands must make sure to avoid. Democratization therefore also poses a significant challenge for luxury brands that must make sure to keep the dream of uniqueness and exclusivity alive, and at the same time be ‘available’ for all (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.11).

In addition, the current consumer traits, as described above, furthermore pose a challenge for luxury brands that must find ways to meet the high expectations and demands without compromising the brand’s identity, if they want to win the consumers approval and keep their prominence (Okonkwo, 2007, p. 38). “To continue to “speak” to them, the brand must also renew itself…without losing its fundamental substance. It must be able to change without getting lost in the process” (p.217), says Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2008) – and that is a real challenge that is further complicated due to the consumer differences that exists both internationally and nationally, which makes it complicated to communicate in a way that satisfies all consumers (Chevalier &Mazzalovo, 2008, p.174-175).

3. Communicating Luxury

A brand’s identity is, as described in section 1.5.1, founded on six broad categories of brand manifestations that in joint “make up the sensory approach of the brand’s identity” (Chevalier &Mazzalovo, 2008, p.269). Of these, this thesis focuses solely on the traditional communication manifestations, and the creation of a successful luxury brand identity through these, as the objective of the problem statement explicitly is to examine what possibilities luxury brands have in relation to printed advertising and PR events. With the above in mind, it is nevertheless crucial to stress that a successful luxury brand identity cannot be created solely through brand communication, and that the other manifestations must be examined as well, when managing the creation of a luxury fashion brand identity in real life.

3.1 Creating and Recharging the Dream through Communication.

The luxury fashion brand is presented to the market through the communication manifestations that, according to Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2008) create awareness, inform, and generate positive attitudes and desires towards the brand (p.270). The main purpose of communication in luxury is
not to generate immediate sales, as it is in the classic market, but instead to, first of all, create the notion of a dream surrounding the luxury brand and, secondly, to continuously recharge it to uphold the brand’s value as luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.210). Recreation and recharging of this dream is crucial for a luxury brand, today, as consumers expect to be constantly captivated and astonished by the brand and its dream that, according to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), is weakened every time a product is sold and hereby reveals a bit of the dream and decreases exclusivity (p.128, 212).

Kapferer and Bastien (2009) furthermore argues that “without awareness there is no dream” (p.129), which implies that the general public should be targeted along with current and potential consumers, as a societal consensus of the brand’s prominence and unique dream will increase the luxury brand’s exclusiveness and reinforce its status as luxury (p.118).

The broad spectrum of traditional communication covers a variety of one-to-one and one-to-many communication activities, such as personal selling, customer service, advertising, sales promotion and public relations, and many of these activities often overlap (Pickton & Broderick, 2005, pp.17-18). The specific focus on advertising in printed media and restricted PR events is founded on Kapferer and Bastien’s (2009) layers of luxury communication model (p.213) that illustrates the traditional communication activities and their level of importance in luxury brand communication (Appendix 2). According to this model, and hereby Kapferer and Bastien (2009), PR activities in relation to restricted events, are of highest importance in luxury brand communication followed by advertising in printed media, which explains why these activities are relevant to focus on in the forthcoming analysis (p.213).

### 3.2 The Facets of Luxury - What Is Essential for Luxury Brands to Communicate?

In section 3.1 it became evident that the most essential thing for luxury brands to communicate is the notion of a dream, which projects a sense of fantasy and distinguishes luxury products from ordinary consumer goods (Okonkwo, 2007, p.152). But what does this dream in fact entail? It can, in short, be characterised as having two dimensions; a social dimension that confers social class and empowers the consumer with a certain value and identity, as well as an aesthetic dimension related to the multi-sensorial nature and intrinsic emotional pleasure of the offerings that consequently appear to be much more than simple, functional products (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.128).
In general, the objectives of brand communication are to reflect the brand's ethics, give factual information, be remembered, have a visual impact and generate emotions and attitudes, and these overall objectives of communication also exist in luxury communication (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, pp.273-274). In continuation of this, the following model summarizes what Okonkwo (2007), Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2008), Kapferer and Bastien (2009) and Brioschi (2006) repeatedly seem to highlight as the most important facets of intangible and tangible values and attributes that luxury brands should focus on in their communication, in order to create and maintain a successful luxury identity:

![Luxury Brand Communication Model](image)

**FIGURE 2**

It differs from brand to brand which facets are emphasised the most, as well as how they are communicated, depending on the particular brand and strategy in question, as well as the target market, seeing that consumers, as elaborated upon in the preceding, differ internationally (and nationally) in relation to which facets they think are the most important for a luxury fashion brand identity to rely on (Kapferer, 2006, pp.69-70). As elaborated upon in the introduction, some of these

Sources:
Uche Okonkwo, 2007, pp.105, 239
Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, pp. xi-xiii, 19, 153-155
Kapferer, 2006, pp.69-70
Brioschi, 2006, pp.198-206
important facets contradict each other, such as for example tradition and creativity, and figure 2 consequently also visualises the communication challenges that luxury brands face nowadays.

### 3.3 Communicating Luxury through Advertising

In relation to communicating luxury through advertising, it is important to emphasise the explicit focus on *printed* advertising, seeing that mass media advertising in television, according to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), is irrelevant in luxury communication, as it is unable to create the personal relationship with the consumer that luxury brands seek, and moreover since television is perceived by consumers to be a medium through which brands communicate in order to sell, which luxury brands, as mentioned, do not do and do not want to be perceived to do (pp.212-214).

Advertising’s role in luxury communication is, as mentioned above, different from its role in traditional marketing, since luxury fashion brands do not advertise to sell but to communicate the dream surrounding the brand (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.212).

As illustrated in the layers of luxury communication model, print advertising is of secondary importance in luxury communication but nevertheless still vital, seeing that the luxury brand through its presence in glamorous and prominent fashion magazines, such as Vogue, manifests its status as a luxury brand, and is able to reach a large luxury fashion interested audience of potential as well as current consumers (Okonkwo, 2007, p.146).

Put differently, printed advertising functions to maintain, develop and strengthen the luxury brand’s identity, create awareness and enhance the visibility of the luxury brand on the market, which, as mentioned in section 1.5.3, are key for a luxury brand in order to stay successful and competitive (Okonkwo, 2007, p.145 & Pickton & Broderick, 2005, p.614).

### 3.4 Communicating Luxury through Public Relations.

Events are in this thesis limited to those directly organized by the brand, more specifically fashion shows (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p.282).

In general, PR functions to promote and generate awareness in order to establish goodwill and loyalty towards a brand (Pickton & Broderick, 2005, p.567 & Uche Okonkwo, 2007, p.154). Put differently, Uche Okonkwo (2007) argues that the aim of PR activities “*is to influence...people’s*
knowledge and feelings regarding a company and its offerings, including its identity and image” (p.154), in order to “persuade consumers and the public of the authenticity of the brand” and build favourable relationships with stakeholders (p.154). Events are consequently essential for luxury brands that through these are able to achieve the above, create a buzz, surprise the public and overtly display, engage and involve consumers in what the brand is all about (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen., 2009, pp.705-706, 710-711).

It is clear that luxury brands do not follow conventional marketing methods, and the evident focus on communicating rather than advertising indicates that all luxury communication initiatives are in fact strongly driven by PR techniques, and that the benefits of PR are of vital character for luxury brands, who must have a strong brand identity, high credibility, a favourable relationship with consumers as well as a high level of goodwill, in order to maintain their luxury status and remain successful and competitive (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.213, Okonkwo, 2007, p.111, Tench & Yeomans, 2009, p.258).

4. Comparative Analysis

Through the following comparative semiotic and rhetorical analysis of the successful luxury brands Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren, it will be examined what brand identity they respectively aim to communicate and create through their printed ads and events, and what facets (figure 2) they each emphasize, and thus consider to be essential, in luxury brand communication today.

4.2 Analysis of Louis Vuitton

The French fashion house Louis Vuitton, founded in 1854, is considered to be the world’s leading luxury fashion brand by many. Interbrand, a brand consultancy firm, ranked the brand high above all other luxury fashion brands as number sixteen on their Top 100 of Best Global Brands of 2010 (p.17). Here financial performance, the role of the brand in a purchase-decision process, and the strength for the brand to continue to be profitable were key criteria in determining the rankings (Interbrand, 2010, p.11).

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7 The succeeding luxury fashion brand on the list was Gucci at rank #44.
Also Milward Brown Optimor, a brand strategy and financial consultancy firm, continuously rank Louis Vuitton as the ultimate luxury brand, with an overall brand value that went up 2 percent to $19.78 billion in 2010 (Sherman, 2010, ¶ 6). This ranking is based on brand value, contribution and momentum (Selezny, 2011, ¶ 5).

As this indicates, Louis Vuitton can clearly be characterized as a successful luxury brand in relation to the definition of what a successful luxury brand is (see section 1.5.3).

### 4.2.1 The Fall/Winter 2011-2012 Fashion Show

In the video, Louis Vuitton’s creative director Marc Jacobs comments on the fashion show whilst watching it with friend, stylist and editor-in-chief at Love magazine Katie Grand.

The video is dominated by the rhetorical appeal ethos that establishes an overall credibility and trustworthiness towards what is communicated, which is essential in PR, as elaborated upon in section 4.3 (Tench & Yeomans, 2009, p.258, Corbet, 1971, p.72). The ethos appeal is both situated – due to his position as creative director of the brand and hers as a stylist - and invented – through the friendly and personal tone of the conversation that makes the viewer feel as if she is listening to a private and unbiased conversation.

Ethos is moreover applied in joint with logos in Jacobs and Grand’s intelligent explanations of fabric, colour and design choices and their facts about the show – “Yes, we used 67 girls...” (12:00) – through which they highlight the professionalism, sense of quality, luxury and craftsmanship that Louis Vuitton clearly aims to signal through the show. Logos is developed through inductive enthymemes; as arguments are build on common sense beliefs and generalizations of what is rare, expensive and luxurious, which then convinces the viewer/listener (Kies, 1995, p.28); “The texture was so beautiful and there’s such a rich mixture of texture...with python and metallic crocodile” (03:50). Through these continuous descriptions of innovative design combinations and extravagant use of rare and expensive fabrics, skins and gold, it furthermore becomes clear that Louis Vuitton through the show aims to communicate an avant-garde, exclusive, rich and artistic value.

All in all, the show will through the above be able to persuade the public of the authenticity of Louis Vuitton as a luxury brand, and hereby increase coherence between the brand identity and brand image (Uche Okonkwo, 2007, p.154).

A variety of differing designs are presented in the show, according to Jacobs, who explains it as a consideration for consumers and their individual wishes. This articulated concern for customers is
communicated through ethos and logos, as described above, and also pathos, in order to arouse the emotions of the audience, and hereby persuade them (Kies, 1995, p.23) to believe that a real concern exist in relation to the fashion show for presenting something special and relevant. As this indicates, the show is supposed to elucidate the brand’s raison d’être – its relevance and reason for being (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, pp.18-19). This pleasing and creative spirit of the show will create a buzz and increase the goodwill between consumers and Louis Vuitton, which, as elaborated upon in section 3.4, is vital (Kotler et. al., 2009, p.710).

Throughout the video, Grand and Jacobs also use the three appeals –logos, ethos and pathos– to communicate the ideal, female user of Louis Vuitton. More specifically, this is done by constantly referring to the models by name, elaborating upon their human traits (pathos), and using their expertise and factual knowledge to analyse the meaning behind the outfits (ethos and pathos). In their own words, the ideal Louis Vuitton woman can thus be said to be portrayed in, and communicated through, the show and the models “...it’s a perfect collection for her...well, for all of them they love themselves in it” (10:14). More explicitly, “she” is characterised as: sweet, mysterious, beautiful, strong, sexual, rich, uptight, naughty and feminine.

One could assume that the exclusivity of the event is sacrificed, when ‘ordinary’ people are able to watch it and hear Marc Jacobs comment on the show and Louis Vuitton, but this is nevertheless not the case, as he through his idealized pathos descriptions of the models, and detailed ethos and logos comments on the exclusive, expensive and rare materials and fabrics, indirectly signals that this show, and hereby Louis Vuitton, is unattainable for most people. The event consequently reinforces social stratification and the notion of an unattainable dream.

4.2.2 The Spring/Summer 2011 Printed Advertisement

The ad (Appendix 3) depicts three beautiful women wearing stunning dresses and extravagant make up -two of them are sitting in chairs, holding Louis Vuitton bags, and one is lying across a table with a fan in her hand.

The dominating composition of the photograph is oval, which results in a strong sense of dynamism and movement (Mark, 2004, p.14) that is further intensified through the many small diagonal,
vertical, horizontal and hyperbolic lines found all over the photograph in the models’ body postures and graphic dresses. The most apparent lines are plotted in below:

![Diagram of lines](http://www.myfdb.com/tear_sheets/310373-louis-vuitton-ad-campaign-spring-summer-2011-shot-2)

The tilted and staggering nature of the many lines contributes to a slightly unstable and dramatic pictorial space that at first sight appear chaotic, but since the oval composition is the dominating principle the overall impression is nevertheless still balanced, although busy and dynamic (Mark, 2004, pp.12-15).

Applying Barthes (1977), the most apparent trick effect is the impressionistic light sparkle that has been superimposed on the photograph and connotes a feeling of dreamlike, almost artificial, luxury and glamour.

![Image of Louis Vuitton](http://www.myfdb.com/tear_sheets/310373-louis-vuitton-ad-campaign-spring-summer-2011-shot-2)

This feeling is further emphasized by the pictorial setting that consequently can be characterised as a trick effect in itself, as the location, the styling of the models and their poses appear rather surreal and arranged. This unnatural and rather synthetic impression that the trick effects in joint connote is nevertheless not negative, as it gives the image an aesthetic quality that emphasises its dreamy nature, and hereby signifies that this is the unique and avant-garde dream that Louis Vuitton is surrounded by.
Moving on to the connotator pose, the models all have a rather explicit body language that gives the impression of effortless luxury and cool individualism. The model in the left side of the image has a carefree but slightly sexually provocative attitude; sitting down, holding a fan behind her head, and gazing directly at the viewer with her head lifted -as though she could not care less- whilst holding a Louis Vuitton bag in an almost presenting position. In the centre of the ad, a model is lying on a table holding a fan in her hand. Her body language is inviting and flirtatious; her legs are playfully elevated, she is slightly arching her bag and caressing her neck with her fingers, whilst gazing directly at the viewer with a cool attitude. The model sitting in the right side of the ad is very much signalling the same as the two others; she looks untroubled, elegant and superior, and holds a Louis Vuitton bag in a frontal manner, signalling that it is an important accessory. All in all, their poses and facial expressions signal cool glamour, graceful poise, extravagance, feminine and sexual flirtation, unique and expressive individualism and carefree spirits; something out of the ordinary.

Specific objects also function as inducers of associations in the ad (Barthes, 1977), and of these, the presence of the two Louis Vuitton bags should first of all be mentioned, as these are placed in dominant positions within the frame to emphasise the presence of Louis Vuitton, and moreover connote the idea that without Louis Vuitton none of ‘this’ would be taking place. In addition, the bags also signal uniqueness, individualism and craftsmanship as they, although being the same model, clearly have been custom made with differing colour schemes, which indicates that they are personalised and well-crafted objects that are highly appropriate to use in a luxurious and avant-garde setting. The gold bowl with cherries and the beautiful fans symbolise hedonistic pleasure and highlight the first class atmosphere of the image, which is further emphasised through the models’ extravagant, youthful and artistic outfits, jewellery and styling (hair and makeup) that moreover adds vibrancy to the image.

Besides the impressionistic light sparkle, connotators of photogenia are also created through the employment of clair obscure modelling light, as an external light force lightens the photo strongly frontally, and almost impressionistically emphasises the fabric and quality of the bags, and creates a light play in the background surface, hair, makeup and sparkling dresses of the models, which intensifies the artistic and dreamy feel of the ad.
The strong and intense colour scheme is dominated by the primary, secondary and tertiary colours purple / blue, red / pink, yellow / golden / orange, brown and the achromatic colour black. The colours are all juxtaposed and consequently activate each other, which creates a colourful, warm and intense visual experience (Mark, 2004, p.35). The symbolic values of the dominant colours strengthen the connotations of creativity, individualism, fashion and luxury in the ad. Figure 3 accounts for the colour codes of the most dominant colours:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Symbolism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Blue with purple undertones | • Blue symbolises "high-status" and perfection. It engages the viewer and expresses exhilaration.  
• Purple is an uplifting colour that connotes a sense of mystique and royalty, and encourages creativity. |
| Gold                    | • Symbol of the sun, the most pure light, divine radiance and holiness. |
| Red / Pink              | • Red symbolises passion, love and sexuality. The colour is also said to encourage action and confidence, increase enthusiasm as well as stimulate energy.  
• Pink signals youthness, fun and excitement and has the same connotations of excitement, energy, sensuality and passion as red. Pink is also characterised as the colour of happiness and lightheartedness. |
| Black                   | • Is authoritative and powerful and evokes a sense of potential and possibility. |

Moving on to connotators of aestheticism, it can easily be argued that the ad is inspired by portraits from the 17th-18th century Rococo period, where members of the aristocrat society were portrayed in sophisticated and beautiful clothes in light and vibrant colours (Rococo Portraits, 2008, ¶ 3). The artistic resemblance and associations to a period where the upper class were portrayed in extravagance helps to further stress, although quite implicit, the luxurious and avant-garde values that the ad seeks to communicate.

Only the above discussed light sparkle has been superimposed on the image, and consequently we cannot as such speak of syntax. However, since the ad is a part of a campaign it can be said to be a fragment in itself that in sequence with the additional ads from the campaign will intensify the communicated.
Finally, in relation to the text-image relationship, the ad is dominated by anchor, as the listing of the brand name in the right corner of the white frame elucidates that Louis Vuitton is the driving force behind this dream of glamour and pleasure depicted in the ad. Also, the retail details in the right corner function as anchor, as the exclusiveness communicated visually is verbalized and thus stressed. Put differently, the text has a repressive value, as it, although quite implicit, guides the viewer’s interpretation (Barthes, 1977, p.40).

4.3 Analysis of Ralph Lauren

The American luxury brand Ralph Lauren was founded in 1967 by Ralph Rueben Lifshitz, and has since then experienced tremendous success. In 2010 the brand was named “Luxury Marketer of the Year” by Luxury Daily\(^8\), due to their successful and forward-thinking marketing initiatives that according to editor in chief of Luxury Daily, New York, Mickey Alam Khan (2010), have “become a byword for excellence with consistent creative messaging and effective call to action in an era where luxury brands struggle to retain their mystique” (2010, ¶ 4). The brand’s communication strategy in relation to events and printed advertising is consequently worth examining.

4.3.1 The Spring/Summer 2011 Fashion Show

In a voice-over, Ralph Lauren elaborates upon the process of creating and designing the collection and show. Just as in Louis Vuitton’s video, Ralph Lauren naturally has a high level of credibility and trustworthiness by being the founder and driving force behind the brand, and ethos is consequently used as a rhetorical strategy in the same way as in the Louis Vuitton video, mostly as situated due to his status and authority. Ethos is nevertheless not the dominating appeal, seeing that the voice-over to a very high degree is founded on emotional, pathos appeals, as Ralph Lauren throughout the video elaborates on his feelings regarding the show and collection, and consequently aims to create sensation and establish a favourable relationship with consumers based on sympathy and understanding, which is vital in PR (Okonkwo, 2007, p.111).

Lauren first of all argues that “the best pleasure is the creativity... [, and] not accepting the ordinary (0:07), where after he mentions a humble concern and self-critique in relation to achieving and designing ‘the very best’ and not settling: “You have to put the time into greatness...you can’t

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\(^8\) A trade publication that focuses on how luxury brands conduct their marketing and commerce efforts across mediums (Mickey Alam Khan, 2010, ¶ 2)
have greatness overnight” (0:25) & “I worry...did I do the right thing, did I dig in to my creativity to come up with something new?” (0:45). All in all, this signals that there is an overriding focus on detail, quality, innovation and creativity in his designs and the show.

By showing concern for the above, goodwill -which as mentioned is vital (Kotler et. al., 2009, p.710) - is generated through the show, as consumers will feel that Ralph Lauren is an authentic and first-class luxury brand.

“Fashion is about change. It’s about youth. It’s about aspiration. It’s about what’s going on in the world (01:14)...you got to create something and make it new every season (02:02)”. The parallelism (Kies, 1995, p.25) and declarative nature of the quotes creates a self-solemn and precocious tone that in an sensational and coherent way stresses, what Lauren clearly wants the fashion show and collection to signal; namely youth, creativity, innovation, desire and the brand’s raison d’être (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, pp.18-19). Lauren constantly indicates that the fashion show must radiate creativity to such as degree that the audience will perceive the brand’s offerings to be innovative art that breaks the rules and reaches higher, in order to become “worlds and dreams for people” (1:48) - as he puts it himself in a sensational tone. Communicating the brand’s creative spirit through the show is, as mentioned, essential, as it creates a buzz, increases the level of goodwill, engages consumers and clarifies what the brand is ‘all about’, which will decrease the gap between the brand identity and the brand image held by the public (Okonkwo, 2007, p.154, Kotler et. al., 2009, p.710),

As in the Louis Vuitton video, an ideal woman is also described through Laurens thoughts on who he designs for, which obviously clarifies the type of woman the luxury brand aims to communicate through the show. More specifically, she is described as strong, distinctive in quality and taste, bohemian, intellectual, European or very American. In relation to the last, this indicates that Ralph Lauren aims for the show to appeal to both European and American women.

Ralph Lauren ends the video with a nostalgic, emotional and retrospective comment in relation to what he thought, when the show was taking place: “Enjoy this moment, this is how life is dreamt to be” (03:53) – he says, and hereby signals that the show aims to communicate the before mentioned feeling of a dream surrounding the brand (see section 3.2).
4.3.2 The Spring/Summer 2011 Printed Advertisement

The ad (Appendix 4) depicts a beautiful and natural-looking, young woman sitting on what looks like a worn table, dressed in cream and white coloured clothes and impressive high heeled skin shoes. The uniform background is creamy white with brown and grey tones.

The image appears stable and balanced due to the dominating horizontal composition that creates a middle-to-high horizon. Vertical lines running through the woman’s upper body and arm, as well as the jacket fringes and earrings, also influences the composition, and creates a strong sense of order in the pictorial frame, which contributes further to the static and calm feel of the image (Mark, 2004, p.4-5). A subtle sense of movement is however established through the diagonal lines created by her legs, which adds an interesting sense of delicate depth and vibrancy to an otherwise simple and harmonic setting. The most apparent lines are illustrated below:

![Image of Ralph Lauren ad](http://www.myfdb.com/tear_sheets/321307-ralph-lauren-collection-ad-campaign-spring-summer-2011-shot-6)

In line with the compositional principles, there are no connotators of trick effects intervening at the plane of denotation, and this strengthens the harmonic and natural feel that the image connotes through its setup. In relation to pose - the second of Barthes’ connotators (1977, p.22) - the model is positioned as a stereotypical model; sitting down with a leg bent and an arm resting slightly on it, whilst calmly gazing directly at the viewer, which makes her radiate elegance and look classic, graceful and relaxed. The static nature of the picture combined with the fact that she is all there is in the frame, gives the impression of her constituting the essence and spirit of the brand, as a personalised representative of the Ralph Lauren Collection label and the brand’s overall identity. Through her appearance, the ad also connotes the feeling and presence of a dream, characterised by
authenticity, class, well being and beauty of which she is a product, and she invites the viewer to join her in this dream through her direct and eye-levelled gaze that furthermore generates an impression of confidence and power.

The fringe jacket and metallic buckle belt function as objects signifying the rural and Western inspired, American spirit that Ralph Lauren is known for (ralphlauren.com). Besides this, they also connote a feeling of classy femininity in joint with the shirt and earrings, due to the white and creamy colours, the embroidery on the shirt and the detailed and feminine design of the belt emblems, earrings and jacket. This femininity is further emphasised through the high-heeled shoes that in addition, through their height, material and unique design also indicate craftsmanship, individualism and power.

In relation to signifiers of photogenia, modelling light is applied in the form of a strong spotlight that shines directly on the model that is placed slightly to the left in the pictorial space. This light is then gradually weakened from left to right, which gives a soft impression and leaves the viewer with a feeling of overview (Mark, 2004, p.27). The colour scheme is dominated by creamy-white, subtle grey tones, as well as light-brown and hints of metallic shine.

![FIGURE 4](image)

**White**
- Symbolises purity, cleanliness, clarity and neutrality

**Brown**
- Signals stability, reliability and approachability, as well as a connection with the earth; it is associated with the natural and organic.
- It moreover connotes a feeling of wholesomeness and a sense of order.

**Grey nuances**
- Is perceived as classic, long-lasting and refined.
- Connotes a feeling of authority.

**Sources:**
Lise Mark, Formal Analysis, 2004
Kate Smith, Colour Meaning, Symbolism and Psychology, 2011.

Figure 4 accounts for the symbolism of the dominating colours, and illustrates that they in joint communicate and reinforce the same key facets as described above; namely those of wholesomeness, class, femininity, purity, stability, timeless beauty, American heritage, understated but strong individualism, and a connection with nature.
There are no signifiers of aestheticism, as the ad simply aims to communicate the core spirit and dream of the brand, without any associations to history besides the brand’s own.

Regarding syntax, the brand name “Ralph Lauren Collection” is superimposed on the image in a light, brown colour, which creates a suprasegmental and overall connotation of the woman being the essence of Ralph Lauren and the Collection label in particular. Store details and internet references are also superimposed in the right corner or the ad, which signifies the brand’s local presence and its unconventional use of the internet medium. The text-image relationship is consequently that of anchorage, as the text directs the reader to 1) recognize that the portrayed woman is a product of Ralph Lauren Collection, 2) visit the stores and 3) go online to “Explore the iconic world of Ralph Lauren”.

4.4 Comparison of Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren

Through the analysis it becomes evident that Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren are quite dissimilar in relation to the brand identity they communicate through their printed ads and fashion shows. Applying theory of Kapferer (1992), their respective identities are elucidated below through identity prisms (Kapferer, 19929):10:

---

9 Cited in Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p.186
10 Seeing that the thesis focuses solely on the sender of communication and the communicated, the reflection and self-image categories express how the luxury brands would like these to be constructed through their communication.
LOUIS VUITTON

Leather bags / goods
Extravagant women's wear

Exclusivity
Credibility
Loyalty

Liberated
Strong
Individualistic
Fashionable
Prosperous
Quality
conscious
Refined

Physique
Personality

Relationship
Culture

Reflection
Self-image

Picture of sender

Powerful
Strong
Seductive and flirtatious
Avant-garde
Extravagant
Refined
Unique

Stylish and luxurious travel bags
Craftsmanship
Exclusive women's wear

“I am a unique and fashionable woman, with an extravagant and glamorous lifestyle”

FIGURE 5

RALPH LAUREN COLLECTION

Classic women's wear and accessories

Extraverted
Enduring
Straightforward

Classy
Beautiful
Confident
Feminine
Graceful
Natural

Physique
Personality

Relationship
Culture

Reflection
Self-image

Picture of sender

Sophisticated
Self-confident
Calm
Traditional but slightly original
Sensual
Feminine
Elegant
Down to earth

American heritage
Craftsmanship
Graceful and feminine women's wear

“I am a confident and feminine woman with class and taste for American tradition”

FIGURE 6
As the identity prisms (Kapferer, 1992) illustrate, Louis Vuitton aims to communicate a unique, luxurious, sexual, highly artistic and hedonistic dream universe with creative, self-expressive and well-crafted offerings for superior women that are individualistic, stylish, strong and beautiful, and live / want a lavish lifestyle filled with self-indulgence, extravagance and glamour, whereas Ralph Lauren aims to communicate the notion of a dream build on class, timeless and natural beauty, American heritage, sensual femininity and confident individualism, with high quality products that have been innovatively created -yet with respect for tradition- for powerful and elegant women, who belong to the elite and seek exclusive and understated, hedonistic offerings.

Based on the above, the two luxury fashion brands appear to have completely different identities, but they are in fact quite similar on a deeper level, namely in relation to their underlying strategies, as they highlight and focus on the same facets (figure 2) but simply construct the communication of them differently\textsuperscript{11}. Referring to figure 2 and the identity prisms above, Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren Collection communicate and build their identities on the following facets:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|}
\hline
EXCLUSIVITY, PRESTIGE & RARITY \\
INDIVIDUALITY & PERSONALISATION \\
INNOVATION, CREATIVITY & ARTISTIC SENSE \\
AESTHETICISM & BEAUTY \\
A UNIQUE DREAM / UNIVERSE \\
A HERRITAGE OF CRAFTMANSHIP & PREMIUM QUALITY \\
TRADITION & HISTORY \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{FIGURE 7}
\end{figure}

Seeing that both theory and analysis findings indicate that these specific facets are vital to emphasise, it is argued that these are essential to implement and communicate, in order to create and maintain a successful luxury brand identity

\textsuperscript{11} An example: Where Louis Vuitton highlights facets of exclusivity, prestige and rarity through connotations of glamour and extravagance, Ralph Lauren does so through associations to class and elegance.
Ralph Lauren does mention that the brand aims to be relevant for both European and American women, but this global aspect is in no other way communicated through the ad or fashion show, and consequently it can be argued that none of the luxury brands put emphasis on communicating global presence or ethical and social responsibility through their printed ads and fashion shows.

5. How to Maintain or Create a Successful Luxury Brand Identity

The analysis showed that the successful luxury brands Ralph Lauren and Louis Vuitton focus on the same facets in both their printed ads and fashion shows but communicate them differently, in order to create unique and distinct dreams and hereby brand identities, which, as indicated throughout the thesis, is key in the current competitive environment, where consumers seek individualism, professionalism, aestheticism, and hedonistic pleasure, and consequently select the luxury brands that set themselves apart, have a unique identity, and are best at projecting a dreamy universe (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, pp.155-156, 173 & Okonkwo, 2007, p.77).

Seeing that it is impossible to formulate a clear cut definition of a successful luxury brand identity, the model below instead focuses on these essential, underlying facets, and presents guidelines as to what must be kept in mind, according to practitioners and based on the analysis findings, when highlighting these facets in printed ads and fashion show events.
Guidelines and prerequisites in relation to key facets in PR restricted events and printed ads communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACETS</th>
<th>GUIDELINES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusivity, prestige &amp; rarity</td>
<td>• Explicit mentions of status appeal should be avoided; it should be signalled indirectly (^1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Never mention price (^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Signal ingredients, technical, production, distribution and information rarity (^3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Incorporate some aesthetic codes that only individuals with a certain taste notice; this will increase the brand's prestige in the eyes of these individuals that are key consumers (^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition &amp; history</td>
<td>• There are no luxury brand without roots: Elucidate essential traditional or historic related aspects /elements of the brand - such as signature fabric or designs - if there is no history: Invent it - it provides the brand with a non-commercial aspect (^5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Keep in mind: The emphasised traditional aspects will only be valuable if they are relevant (^6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do not focus on the past; communicate tradition in contemporary and artistic settings (^7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumers seek timeless luxury (^8): luxury must embody time, and timelessness can be communicated through coherence in values and respect for tradition (^9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism &amp; personalisation</td>
<td>• Luxury brands must be superlative never comparative - indicate that the brand is one of a kind without comparison, as this increases the vital feeling of uniqueness (^10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Costumization is a key requirement of luxury consumers today (^11a) - it should thus be signalled, for example through product display (mostly in printed ads). Communicating costumization will increase the brand's perceived level of exclusivity (^11b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumers want to stand out - highlight the brand's individuality (^12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A heritage of craftsmanship & premium quality

- References to country-of-origin, when the country has favorable connotations, has a positive effect on perceived quality\(^\text{13}\).
- Communicate quality cues both intrinsically (part of the product) and extrinsically (related to the product)\(^\text{14}\).

A unique dream / universe

- It is essential to have a high level of awareness (see section 3.1) in order to be able to create the notion of a dream. But at the same time the dream is also dependent on the brand being exclusive and rare, and printed ads and fashion shows must consequently signal that the brand is not for everybody\(^\text{15}\).
- Depending on the target public, the dream should be built on either a social - "what would I like to be" - or personal - emotional desires - value\(^\text{16}\).

Aesthetics & beauty

- There is a strong consumer wish for beauty and hedonistic pleasure, and it is thus vital to communicate in highly aesthetic codes\(^\text{17}\).
- Aesthetics must develop over time, and progress with coherence and stability\(^\text{18}\).

Innovation, creativity & artistic sense

- Do not be a follower! Be creative, bold and look to the future; aim to communicate a closeness to contemporary arts that yet have to appeal to the majority, as this will make the brand a patron of emerging trends, and provide it with an artistic value that sets it apart from fashion and thus also nurtures an overall and vital timelessness\(^\text{19}\).
- To signal innovation and creativity is key, but make sure to do it in coherence with tradition and distinctive values\(^\text{20}\).

\(^1\) Brioschi, 2006, p.205
\(^2\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.211
\(^3\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, pp.92-94
\(^4\) Brioschi, 2006, p.205
\(^5\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.85
\(^6\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.89
\(^7\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.118
\(^8\) Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p.154
\(^9\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, pp.87-88, 90
\(^10\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.82
\(^11\) Okonkwo, 2007, pp.247-248
\(^12\) Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p.172
\(^13\) Brioschi, 2006, p.205
\(^14\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.129
\(^15\) Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p.174
\(^16\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.155
\(^17\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.215
\(^18\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.74,100
\(^19\) Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p. 121, 126,

\(\text{FIGURE 8}\)
The above given recommendations, will enable the brand to maintain its strength, description and future ability to survive on the market (see section 1.5.3), and will thus secure, or even increase, the brand’s equity and hereby success.

Through the analysis of Ralph Lauren and Louis Vuitton it became evident that both brands respect and consider the above in their communication initiatives and since both can be characterised as successful luxury brands this is viewed as a validation of the guidelines.

The success of the luxury brand identity is, when all comes to all, dependent on the public’s subjective perception of the brand identity, more specifically the brand image, which as described in section 1.5.1 cannot, as such, be controlled by the brand. Successful PR initiatives can however, as mentioned (section 3.4), decrease the gap between the brand identity and brand image, by persuading the public of the brand’s authenticity and facilitating understanding (Okonkwo, 2007, p.154), and experts, in addition, also argue that coherence in communication increases the chances for brand image to correspond with brand identity, which stresses the importance of coherence in brand communication in relation to the central characteristics of the brand identity – its heritage and tradition (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.126). This need for consistency does nevertheless not mean that the luxury brand should restrain from evolving in relation to its peripheral brand identity traits – such as aesthetics and creative expressions - as it, as previously stressed, is vital for a luxury brand to continuously revive its dream and stay up to date on social trends and fashions to captivate consumers and avoid demystification (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008, p.221). As this indicates, it is vital for luxury fashion brands to be aware of, and distinguish between, core and peripheral identity traits, in order to manage the bilateral needs of tradition on one hand and trendiness on the other that exists in relation to printed ads and PR events communication. Put differently, it is advised that the central traits remain indifferent and respect tradition, whereas the peripheral can be altered and changed to meet the demands for creativity and recreation (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.126).

5.1 A Final Note...

It is once again important stress that the above only focuses on brand identity communication, and thus only elaborates upon the brand identity constructed through brand identity manifestations of traditional communication initiatives, more specifically in relation to printed advertising and PR events (see section 3). In order to conclude on how to create and maintain a successful brand
identity, it would thus have been necessary to consider and examine all manifestations and initiatives in the respective categories.

When it comes to the facets global presence and ethical and social responsibility (see model 2), the findings of the analysis in joint with printed advertising and PR events’ role in luxury branding (see section 3.3 & 3.4), indicate that they are not essential to focus on in these activities. It is however vital to stress that they should not be forgotten, as theory do indicate their importance (Tungate, 2009, p.213, Okonkwo, 2007, p.304 & Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.15) and they are, consequently, vital facets to focus on in other traditional communication initiatives or manifestations for that matter.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to examine what future possibilities luxury fashion brands have in today’s challenging environment in order to sustain a successful brand identity and image through traditional communication initiatives, more specifically advertising in printed media and PR, as these initiatives according to Kapferer (2009) are of highest importance in luxury communication nowadays (p.213).

In order to answer this, a comparative analysis of the successful luxury brands Ralph Lauren and Louis Vuitton was conducted by first applying Lise Mark’s (2004) formal analysis in joint with Roland Barthes’ (1977) semiotic analysis to analyse the Spring/Summer 2011 printed ads of both fashion houses, and secondly by conducting a rhetorical analysis of the commentary in two online videos in which Ralph Lauren and Marc Jacobs comment on what they aim for their Spring/Summer 2011 fashion show and Fall/Winter 2011-2012 fashion show respectively to communicate.

Through the analysis, it became evident that the two luxury brands have completely dissimilar brand identities; where Ralph Lauren communicates an essence of class, sophistication, natural beauty, tradition, sensuality and womanly confidence, Louis Vuitton, in difference, aims to communicate an identity characterised by glamour, seduction, authority, avant-garde creativity and self-indulgence.
The analysis, however, showed that the two successful luxury brands fundamentally, in fact, are quite similar, as they are founded on the same overall communicative facets, and consequently only differ in regards to the construction of the communication of these. The essential facets of PR event and printed advertising communication are listed below:

EXCLUSIVITY, PRESTIGE & RARITY
INDIVIDUALITY & PERSONALISATION
INNOVATION, CREATIVITY & ARTISTIC SENSE
AESTHETICISM & BEAUTY
A UNIQUE DREAM / UNIVERSE
A HERRITAGE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP & PREMIUM QUALITY
TRADITION & HISTORY

Based on theory of relevant practitioners - such as Kapferer & Bastien (2009), Okonkwo (2007) and Chevalier & Mazzalovo (2008) and the findings of the analysis, it can thus be concluded that luxury brands can maintain a successful brand identity by founding their brand identity communication in printed ads and PR events on the above mentioned facets, and then constructing the communication of them differently, in order to create a unique brand identity and dream, which is crucial in today’s society, where consumers have seized the ultimate power, only want the best and can pick and choose between the various luxury brands at offer (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p. 121, Okonkwo, 2007, p. 66).

It is, however, not enough to simply found the luxury brand identity on the facets, as some vital prerequisites and procedures presented in figure 8, according to the abovementioned experts, must be considered, when constructing communication. By following these guidelines and defining central and peripheral identity traits, luxury brands will be able to deal with today’s many dilemmas of luxury brand communication - such as the need for heritage on one hand and creativity on the other - seeing that they will be aware of what to change (the peripheral traits) and what to preserve (the central traits), as well as how to do so.

The guidelines were validated through the analysis of the successful luxury brands, as it became clear that both Ralph Lauren and Louis Vuitton respect and follow the guidelines.
Bibliography


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Images

Front page picture retrieved from http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-B1qbs8m-_u0/TWz5LPfJkNI/AAAAAAAATi/fEeTjl3ltpE/s1600/luxury%2Bbranding%2Blogo.jpg (May 01, 2011).
