

BRAND(ED)  
CONTENT  
&  
LUXURY  
COMMUNI-  
CATIONS

*Quali***Quanti**

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## EDITORIAL & INTRODUCTION

*This white paper was initially published in French in June 2010 by Daniel BO, CEO of the research firm QualiQuanti and Matthieu Guevel, Research Director at QualiQuanti. This English version has been translated, adapted, and thoroughly revisited by Aurelie Pichard, International Research Director at QualiQuanti in January 2011.*

## BRAND CONTENT: THE AGE OF REASON

When we started to work on the so-called *Brand Content* phenomenon a few years ago, we were convinced that it would propagate and play a big role in the communication sphere. We were proven right, as it is now a mature topic, thoroughly apprehended by both agencies (ad, media, and digital) and marketers. We also have confirmation of the importance of this phenomenon in our day-to-day business activities.

But what do we mean by *Brand Content*? It is not *branded content*. It is larger than that. We felt the need to come up with a specific expression to describe how brands take the lead in producing content; not only web content, but also short movies, short programs, exhibitions, events, consumer magazines, books, and any other rich mediums. When we took the “ed” out of *branded* content, we wanted to refer to content that was not only endorsed or sponsored by brands, but also created by and specifically for brands.

Brands are more and more willing to organize their communication around this original content specifically designed to embrace their values and distinctive features. They produce content such as short movies (vs. the old 30s. spots), publish books (rather than just consumer magazines), and organize special events that break the mold of the traditional, which garner lots of free media coverage...

When brands started to launch their first content initiatives, they would get attention regardless of the quality of the content; the buzz and “wow” effect would spread among the audience because of the novelty of such initiatives. But now, the audience is saturated with content produced by brands because many new players have launched large content operations in the past two years. This saturation phenomenon has two consequences: first, the audience pays very little attention to non-relevant content (e.g. boring, vain or not consistent

with the brand’s universe), which makes it harder and harder for brands to get their own content noticed. Furthermore, audiences are more demanding when it comes to the quality and relevance of the content, hence forcing brands into adopting more subtle strategies to stand out in the media landscape. Appeal for novelty is not sufficient anymore to guarantee the success of content operations.

*«When we took the “ed” out of branded content, we wanted to refer to content that was not only endorsed or sponsored by brands, but also created by and specifically for brands.»*

Bearing this in mind, marketers experienced in this area have learned to better control their *editorial* strategy (e.g. the type of content that they want to endorse/sponsor/publish/produce): before launching an operation, they question the relevance of the programs, topics and themes developed to assess if they are in line with their brand’s universe. The most mature marketers on the subject have learned many lessons from their past experience with content and have integrated their specific strategy within a more structured, holistic communication strategy to produce content according to the codes of their sector and the brand’s objectives (and universe). Consequently, the content industry has become more segmented and requires a *global* strategy (vs. isolated operations) to better target the brand’s diverse audience.

# INTRODUCTION

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As a result, the *Brand Content* phenomenon has now come into its age of reason. This means that any content initiative should be apprehended within a global, unique content strategy, specific to the brand's issues, industry, objectives and universe.

*«Any content initiative should be apprehended within a global, unique content strategy, specific to the brand's issues, industry, objectives and universe.»*

The luxury industry in particular has shown its maturity as far as implementing Brand Content strategies (see the press review on our blog<sup>1</sup>). Luxury brands maintain a close relationship with the cultural patrimony, as well as the world of arts and creation, and have in the past launched many high-quality content operations. In this white paper we wanted to pay tribute to these forward-thinking brands and grant them a thorough analysis of their content strategies (consumer surveys + semiotic analysis). Brands have also shown great interest in luxury and brand content during our Brand Content Club's meetings.

This white paper has its origins in an outstanding encounter with digital communication specialist Michel Campan during one of our club's sessions (*Club Brand Content*). The paper aims to understand the *Brand Content* phenomenon, and above all to deliver inspiring ideas for implementing a content strategy.

Luxury brands have thoroughly understood the power of stories and documentaries in keeping alive the fascination, poetry and magic of luxury: while we have technically reached the age of reason, these brands allow us the luxury of dreaming along with them.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://veillebrandcontent.fr/tag/luxe>

# INTRODUCTION

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## WHY LUXURY BRANDS NEED A GLOBAL AND UNIQUE CONTENT STRATEGY

Content creation by brands was still considered daring a few years ago, aside from a few short-lived initiatives: most observers saw in these initiatives only a succession of marketing moves designed to generate little more than buzz. Supported by the digital revolution that offers us new channels of communication, it has progressively become a much-needed strategy in the current communication landscape, with its own rules, codes and ways to succeed.

The content strategy offers new possibilities for brands to create content beyond advertising, including movies, documentaries or books dedicated to their history, values, remarkable products, and the men and women – outstanding craftsmen – who designed and manufactured them. This definition, though very simple, shows how much potential there is for luxury brands to take advantage of these new media.

*«Luxury brands should seize every available opportunity to talk about themselves, distinguish themselves from other brands and revive their fascinating history.»*

Luxury companies are inherently places where creation happens. Some centuries-old brands are part of the common cultural patrimony, and have followed trends and cultural evolution throughout history. As such, they are privileged witnesses of an era, of a lifestyle, and of the evolutions of the craft industry and art movements. It is not surprising, then, that many books and documentaries have been released to recount their stories and give us backstage access to their art.

Luxury brands should seize every available opportunity to talk about themselves, distinguish themselves from other brands and revive their fascinating history (and in doing so, reveal the processes of creation). They should constantly reassert their exceptional nature: creating luxury-quality content is a great way for brands to convey the immaterial values inherited from the past and still be ahead of their time.

# INTRODUCTION

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*Vuitton's City Guides*

For luxury brands, creating content seems to be a *natural outcome, even obvious*, in line with their way of creating first-class items. Luxury houses have huge reservoirs of content that they can tap into (the founding myth, the invention of a specific pattern, the birth of a new design) to tell their brand story and detail their brand universe via content marketing operations. As branding and media strategy specialist Pascal Somarriba puts it, *"an iconic brand is a publisher without knowing it."* In the past, luxury brands used to conceive print ads and TV spots as small pieces of art, designed by world-renowned artists to convey a specific atmosphere or approach to the creative. The Louis Vuitton group has gone a step further and surpassed others in the luxury industry, for example publishing its own city guides, or choosing David Lynch to direct a short movie for Dior.

# INTRODUCTION

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Very specific rules and standards govern the creation of content and the implementation of content strategies for brands. It originates in a specific culture, different from the culture of the *message*. The aim of a content strategy is not to "get the message out" (increase the GRP), but to convey an ensemble of values and develop a complex universe (cross-media strategies). In many respects, luxury houses are *better prepared than others to embrace these new possibilities of communication* not only because creation is part of luxury DNA, but also because luxury, like *Brand Content*, responds to a supply strategy (vs. the demand strategy of mainstream brands) deeply rooted in the expression of desire.

Luxury houses are also *better prepared to collaborate with artists, designers, film directors or producers* involved in the process of creation. The porosity of the art and luxury worlds have prepared luxury brands to better understand what is at stake when creating content. Since luxury marketers are always concerned by content creation, this market is an ideal field for other industries to take a bite out of. When it comes to content, the luxury industry offers unparalleled ways to better understand the inner workings of content strategies.

*« The aim of a content strategy is not to get the message out but to convey an ensemble of values and develop a complex universe. »*

A potential risk factor exists, however. Luxury brands are predisposed, and better fit for creating content, but also doubtlessly more put at risk. They can easily lose sight of their original know-how, of their scope of skills and create content that does not relate to their universe.

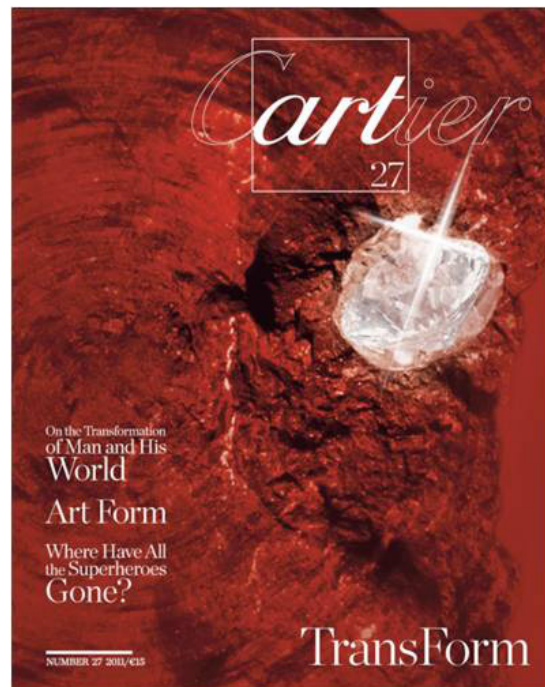


# INTRODUCTION

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Should brands - any brand, whether luxury or not - promote contemporary artists, be exhibited in art galleries or become art publishers? Some luxury brands seem to get so involved in the content creation process or in promoting artists, that they are practically positioning themselves as art directors or cultural experts of the society (and not only art ambassadors or sponsors). Is this legitimate? After all, is it not beyond their scope of business?

Let's look back to Benetton's communication strategy in the eighties, endorsing strong and controversial political messages not related in any kind to the products they were selling (woolen garments). The strategy did not exactly lead to an increase of sales (on the contrary). Professor Bruno Remaury (part of IFM, French Institute For Fashion) raised the question: are some luxury brands not doing with art what Benetton did with politics?



Cartier Art Magazine

# INTRODUCTION

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Finally, in a content strategy, it's not only about creating great content, but also about exposing the audience to the content and having it spread throughout the media landscape. It thus involves a *trans-media* strategy: broadcasting and distributing the content across a wide range of media (Internet, TV, Mobile, etc.) and devices (netbooks, smartphones, touch pads, etc.). As such, each piece of content should be specifically designed to fit each platform's specific requirements (e.g. a 5-minute short movie that also comes in a 30-second TV spot and in a print ad, is hosted on a dedicated website, but can also be shared on social networks, etc.).

This white paper aims to provide "food for thought" to luxury professionals and branding specialists interested in creating content. At a more operational level, it intends to give luxury professionals (management, marketing and communication) guidelines and a compass to help them implement a content strategy.

- What type of content initiative? (short movie, short program, consumer magazine, special event, documentary, etc.).
- What type of content is right for the brand? (entertaining, educational, practical).
- What is the media strategy?
- How can we measure the impact of the content campaigns in terms of brand reputation and image?

Only after having answered these questions can brands have the legitimacy - and accordingly the credibility - to implement a global content strategy.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 1 - WHAT IS BRAND CONTENT?

*This article is an annotated version of a joint interview of Daniel Bô and Matthieu Guével conducted by Darkplanneur.*

*The creation of content by brands has become, in only a few years, an extremely important communication lever, in addition to advertising messages or public relations. Brands do their best to render the complexity of their universe visible through artistic creations that have a widening range of formats including short movies, books, video clips or interactive modules designed for the purpose of cultural content.*

*Luxury brands can make use of the strong emotional capital linked to a customer's ideals about the brand. This allows them to create inviting content, likely to stir one's imagination, to incite desire. Hence, they have the potential to tap into many different elements to make the most of their content strategy: the brand's history, its deep and unique identity, the know-how, and the lifestyle...*

Daniel Bô: What we call "Brand Content" refers to the content that is created or largely influenced by brands. Brands that have a symbolic, historical or artistic nature have the internal resources to create original content like short movies, documentaries, or books. From that moment on, the brand can think of itself as a content publisher, with an editorial strategy and a supply of creative content independent from its advertising campaigns.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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We can understand brand content by confronting it to branded content. In branded content initiatives, brands only sponsor (or finance) an already existing program. In Brand Content initiatives, the brand takes on the role of a real publisher or producer; the content comes from its own substantial material base and is specifically designed for the brand (accordingly to its identity, history, etc.); the brand sometimes even becomes a media platform *per se* (e.g. the Colors magazine by Benetton).

*«We can understand brand content by confronting it to branded content.»*

Communication channels provided by the Internet have now almost eliminated the need for a publisher, and have thus favored the development of content operations. Though hybrid situations also exist in these cases, as Louis Vuitton now selling its City Guides in its own stores but also in bookstores.

Brand Content	Branded Content
The content has its origin in the brand's symbolic, historical or artistic nature: content is exhaled after an exploration of the brand to display its values, its ambition, its rich universe, etc.	A brand partners with a content provider and uses pre-existing content with which it supposedly shares affinities or proximities.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Brand content operations do not follow the same logic as advertising campaigns. These operations do not solely aim at passing on a message or delivering a piece of information (about a product for instance), even if it is *also* important; they rather aim at delivering a strong emotional experience (editorial, educational, entertaining, etc.) to truly engage the audience, and have them interact with the brand.

*«Brand content operations do not follow the same logic as advertising campaigns.»*

Hence, consumers are not passively exposed to the content as they would be in classical ads; when the content operation is a success, they willingly go seek out this content themselves (and even sometimes buy it). As such, the brand attitude is very different from the classical advertising scheme. The primary purpose of the operation is not to lead to product purchase (by increasing awareness or desire), but simply to deliver a great, exciting experience *per se*.

This experience is exemplified in the short movies released by Cartier (filmed by French movie director Olivier Dahan) and Prada for the Men's spring collection (filmed by Chinese movie director and photographer Yang Fudong).



*Short movie released by Cartier (filmed by Olivier Dahan)*



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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There are many tools and techniques used by brands to create content. One of them is to tell stories about the brand, which has actually become a marketing field in itself called “storytelling.” It consists in conveying the values of the brand using a story (for example, the poetry and magic of Hermès illustrated in a fantasy tale). Upon hearing or reading the story, consumers connect with the brand in a special way and become emotionally attached to the brand and the universe around it. Stories can also recount the history of the brand, feature the designer of the house or showcase the know-how of the company.



*Short movie released by Prada (filmed by Yang Fudong)*

Themes and approaches are very diverse, but the end is the same: to give consumers access to the brand’s core identity and have them bond with and get closer to the brand.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Matthieu Guével: Brands’ content operations are very diverse with regards to their objectives, formats and techniques, but they all have three principles in common.

*«Brands’ content operations have three principles in common.»*

## 1 - The content has intrinsic value (whether emotional, artistic, educational, entertaining or esthetic)

In content operations, the content released by brands delivers something special that has an intrinsic value to the end audience, and is not immediately related to the purchase of the product. It can be many things: entertaining, educational, practical, etc., but the end result is that brands become entertainers or experts. As brands offer more and more services to the public (a trend which began with brand cookbooks, recipes, city guides, etc.), brand utility becomes more and more important.

When this content is available for free to the audience, it is considered as a gift or rather a donation, even though it is responding to specific communication objectives. The brand donates something of itself to its public and puts the audience into the position of giving something in return. As French sociologist Marcel Mauss<sup>2</sup> puts it in his essay *The Gift*, the donation obliges the receiver to reciprocate (offer a counter-gift). This means that when brands offer something for free (a program, a magazine, a book, useful content, etc.), they create a special bond with their public, which will result in the act of purchasing – on the condition that they offer high quality content, with great value added.

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<sup>2</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 2 - Brand content campaigns are polyphonic and rich ensembles of communication

Traditional advertising focuses on one or two aspects of a product. There is not enough time and space to talk about the many qualities or uses of the product; the ad has to get straight to the point in order to quickly convince. It can only carry a simple univocal message. The logic behind brand content campaigns widely differs from traditional advertising that operates within a limited space and timeframe. In content campaigns, the brand has more opportunity to express itself (5-10 min short movies, books, websites, social networks, etc.). The flip side of this freedom is that it has to enlarge its scope of communication and cannot only talk about its products or itself. It has to create a larger universe around the product.

For example, Van Cleef and Arpels' "A Day in Paris" series is not only about a piece of jewelry (and what it promises), but also tells a story about the universe and poetry of the brand. For instance, "Romance in Paris" recounts the story of an encounter between a man and a woman in Paris and their first moments of love.



*A Day In Paris series by Van Cleef and Arpels*

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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As Stanislas de Quercize, CEO of Van Cleef & Arpels puts it, "we are not jewelry designers, but story designers" (*"Nous ne creons pas des bijoux, mais des histoires"*).

A brand that has truly taken this to heart is Louis Vuitton: the brand has built "the art of travelling" upon their iconic trunk (a Louis Vuitton original product), which is a rich, and complex universe around travelling (See the video "where will this take you?" in which the products are hardly featured).



*Core Values video by Louis Vuitton*

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 3 - A Brand Content operation addresses the individual as a person, not only as a consumer

The content released by brands is not primarily published to push a particular product at a consumer. This is a secondary objective. The primary aim is to engage people and show that the brand shares their interests, hobbies, and values. As such, the audience is not only envisioned as a consumer, but also as a citizen, a father figure, or an art amateur. Even though the public is not fooled by the brand's end purpose (to sell its products), this extra content allows the potential buyer to connect with the brand on several emotional and spiritual levels before finally buying the product. Content is a great way for brands to bond with their audience and share cultural affinities – all of which leads to purchasing products of the brand, and eventually becoming loyal to the brand. For these reasons, content marketing is not consumer-centric like traditional marketing, but culture-centric.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 2 - WHY IS THE LUXURY INDUSTRY SO AHEAD OF ITS TIME IN IMPLEMENTING CONTENT STRATEGIES?

DB: Content strategies rely on a creative process, and creation is in the DNA of luxury brands: their own products have their origin in creative work (whether conducted by designers or craftsmen), and in the collaboration with artists (e.g. Vuitton and Takashi Murakami). For instance, when they design a window display, they think of shopping as a cultural activity: see for instance Louis Vuitton's window displays at the Champs-Elysees flagship store in Paris during the summer of 2007 (inspired by Dan Flavin).



*Louis Vuitton's window displays at the Champs-Elysees flagship store inspired by Dan Flavin, 2007*

Iconic brands can tap into many aspects of their identity to deliver great content. For example: their history and founding myths, their exclusive know-how, the origin of the product and creative idea behind the product, the designer, and the concept upon which the brand was built.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Iconic brands actively contribute to the history and innovations of the luxury industry, and to building a common culture based on what they are selling. In this way, they gain legitimacy by expressing their views on the evolution of arts and techniques.

*«When consumers buy a luxury product, they are buying more than just the product; they are also sharing the same “spirit” and values as the brand, hence taking part in a cultural experience.»*

MG: The luxury industry has close connections with (fine) arts and culture, and is thus in a good position to create and publish artistic and cultural content. What’s more, when consumers buy a luxury product, they are buying more than just the product; they are also sharing the same “spirit” and values as the brand, hence taking part in a cultural experience. For instance, when one buys Louis Vuitton luggage, they are subscribing to a certain way of travelling. This idea, associated with the product in the consumer’s mind, has its origins in all the rich content that has been released by the brand over time.



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Now for instance, take a luxury watch: it is made of extremely refined pieces, assembled with precision, and built upon mechanics that require years of elaboration and know-how to work properly. But the product goes beyond the material level: it is also an object that interrogates the intimate relationship between human beings and time. This offers many occasions to stir one’s imagination.

Marketing experts acknowledge that a brand cannot only be understood by the products it sells. The key operation for marketers would then be to build the brand’s image not just through its products (or the benefits of those products), but to define a larger ambition for the brand (“I’m not a brand that sells durable luggage, I am a brand that conveys a culture of luxurious travel”). Products end up being simply the material representation of that ambition. To go further from the brand ambition to the actual content marketers should design a global editorial strategy to achieve that ambition (e.g. what type of content should I release to build the “culture of travel?”). Luxury brands are better prepared than other brands to do so, as they have always tried to create a desirable lifestyle and universe around their products.



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 3 - WHAT IS THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF A CONTENT OPERATION FOR A LUXURY BRAND?

DB: Whereas mainstream brands tend to follow a *demand* strategy, luxury brands tend to follow a *supply* strategy. Luxury brands (and products) do not try to fulfill consumer's basic needs. Luxury marketers on the contrary try and build a rich universe around the brand to define a strong identity or personality for it, which will eventually stir the consumer's interest. Content operations help build a rich and consistent universe that will fascinate and engage the audience.

Campaigns relying on rich content communicate many messages at once and are the most powerful tools to create a bond with the audience. Antoine Lacroix (International Internet Manager at Van Cleef & Arpels) validates this point: "A house like Van Cleef, in a hundred years of existence, has gathered the know-how, excellence, and quality of work of many craftsmen and artists. And all this stays in the shadow. Journalists do not have access to our secrets, only a few people do. The Internet gives us the opportunity to get great exposure for this hidden content, and is an extraordinary tool to express the richness and density of the brand."

*«Content operations help build a rich and consistent universe that will fascinate and engage the audience.»*

MG: Luxury brands also have an educational mission to conduct, especially among new customers and growing markets: they have to educate their public, as it is not always obvious why a handbag is worth Euros 5000 rather than Euros 50, or why a bottle of wine is worth Euros 300 or Euros 3000 rather than Euros 7,50. The audience has to be initiated and become conscious of what constitutes a luxury object. They are keen on learning the rituals around luxury products; all of this is part of the dream. Content campaigns are extremely appropriate in order to educate the audience and keep this dream alive.

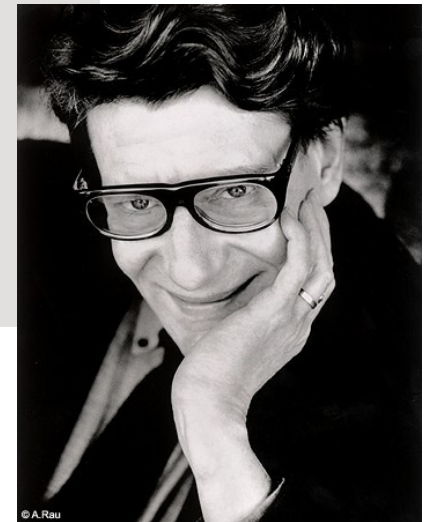
# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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What's more, I believe that content campaigns are in line with the logic behind human desire as it is envisioned by Deleuze & Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Desire does not come from the lack of a *single*, isolated object; when one desires something, he does not only want the material object, but also what it represents culturally and socially. The desire falls on an *ensemble* of objects (regardless of whether they are material or mental). For example, I want this dress and all the know-how that was required to design this dress; I want this dress, but also the bag, the man, the romantic evening, even the lifestyle that goes with it. Hence, to be in line with human desires, brands have to deliver an ensemble of content instead of univocal messages that rely on a single insight. Likewise, attention should not be drawn by emphasizing the importance of the star product, but by the integration of the product within a larger experience, lifestyle and universe. This can seem a bit theoretical, but it is definitely an important point.

*"I'm not a couturier. I'm a craftsman, creating happiness."*

**Yves Saint Laurent**





# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 4 - WHAT TYPES OF CONTENT DO LUXURY BRANDS USE MOST OFTEN?

DB: Luxury brands, for all the reasons above, tend to create:

### Artistic content

such as the short movie directed by Olivier Dahan for the Lady Dior bag starring Marion Cotillard, the “superflat monogram” designed by Takashi Mukarami for Vuitton, and videos of fashion shows (Fendi on the Great Wall of China) that become promotional artistic content.

*Short movie directed by Olivier Dahan for the Lady Dior bag starring Marion Cotillard*



*“Superflat monogram” designed by Takashi Mukarami for Vuitton*



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

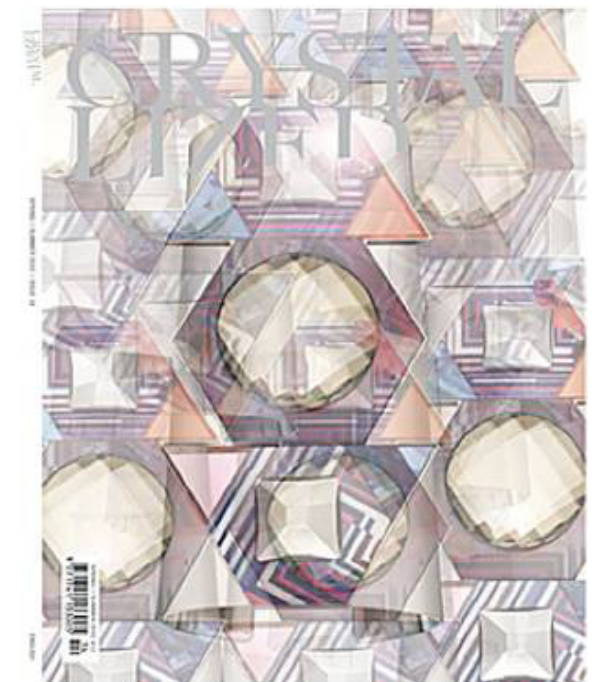
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## Educational content

that helps consumers understand the history, expertise, and the philosophy of the brand. It is already a tradition for luxury houses to publish high-end books and magazines and to sell them in kiosks (Crystallized by Swarovski), to distribute them to subscribers (Cartier Art Magazine) or in stores (consumer magazines like Manifesto published by YSL). They also publish reports on the history of the house and interviews of their designers and craftsmen.



*Cartier Art Magazine*



*Crystallized Magazine by Swarovski*

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

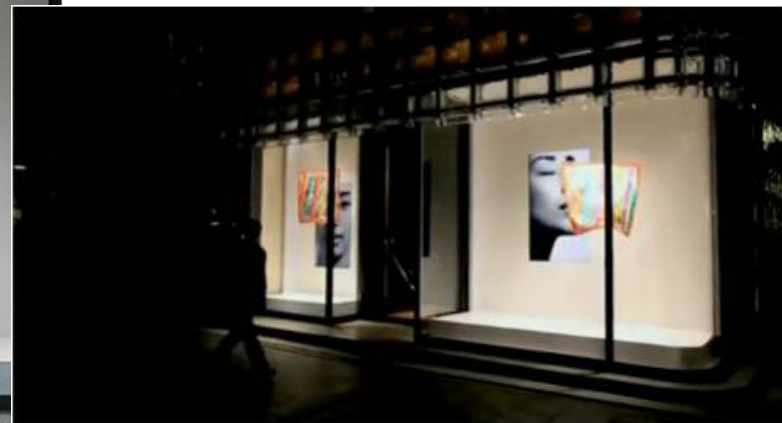
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## In-store content and special events

artistic performances or in-store exhibitions, creative window displays like the window display designed by Tokujin Yoshioka for the Hermès store in Tokyo (in which a Japanese actress blows on a silk scarf), impressive flagships built by renowned architects, etc. Similarly, exhibitions at the point of sale (Vuitton's cultural complex on the Champs-Elysees in Paris) or at cultural venues (Breguet in the Louvre museum).



*Hermès, window display in Tokyo store  
(Dec. 2009)*



This last category of content may be the most strategic one, as the content is intimately linked with the act of purchasing. This type of art, correlated to the buying experience, is extremely powerful, as the brand is not merely sponsoring an artist, but really spotlighting the artist to reveal its own identity (or one of its facets). Not only do these artistic performances drive traffic to the store, but they also express the intimate views of the brand via the artist's talent. When buying a product, the consumer is sharing in the vision of the brand, which constitutes a memorable, emotional experience.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Finally, brands make the most of new technological channels of communication (iPhone applications, social networking sites, Twitter threads, etc.) in order to engage their communities and spread "spirit" among brand ambassadors.

MG: It is essential that marketers thoroughly define their editorial strategy before launching a content operation. Content operations should furthermore be integrated in a global content strategy.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Some brands invest in the creation of isolated cultural objects like Dior did with a short movie or a video clip. Others create ensembles of related content like Vuitton's series on the art of traveling conducted by celebrities. It all depends on the objectives of the content operation.

Among the many formats and platforms that can be used, marketers have to choose the one(s) that will best fit the editorial strategy of the brand (which in the end depends on the brand's identity).

The content should be closely associated to the brand's identity. It should not be vain or extravagant, but have an effect on the brand's image, and enrich its universe. The linkage between the brand and the content should be reached at several levels:

## Thematic

The theme(s) developed in the content should be closely related to the themes sustained by the brand (and linked to the core concepts on which the brand relies).

## Stylistic

The format of the content should be consistent with the style and visual codes of the brand, so that the audience can recognize The brand's way of expressing itself (assuming that they are familiar with the brand).

## Symbolic

The values and views expressed in the content should be in congruence with the brand's vision.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 5 - A NATURAL AFFINITY BETWEEN CONTENT AND LUXURY: A DETAILED BOOK REVIEW OF THE LUXURY STRATEGY (KAPFERER)

*Luxury marketers have initiated some of the greatest content operations published by brands in the past few years. Iconic houses and brands are fond of communicating through this mechanism, which can be explained by two series of reasons.*

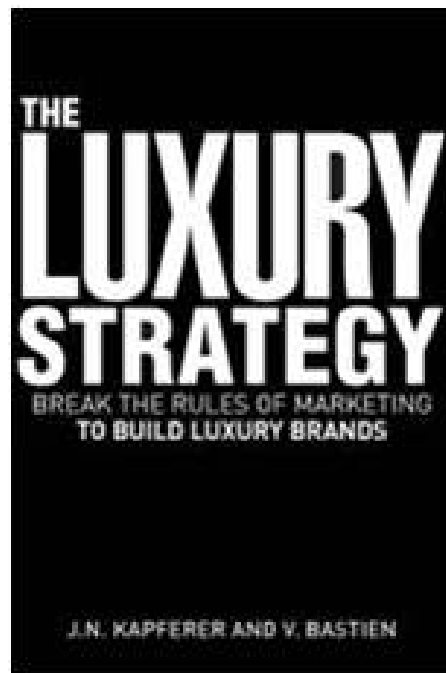
*The first reason is circumstantial: it is partly due to the mutations of contemporary means of communication, notably the Internet revolution. Iconic brands' managers have new channels at disposal with which to stir the consumer's imagination, to tell stories about their products, and to provide access to their specific know-how.*

*The second reason is more structural. Luxury brands have specific characteristics that naturally fit with content creation. The primary properties are discussed below.*



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

Luxury brands adopt specific strategies to market their products. These strategies have been thoroughly examined and explained by Vincent Bastien and Jean-Noël Kapferer<sup>3</sup> in *The Luxury Strategy*. The authors cleverly avoid the endless and useless question of “*what is luxury*,” as the simple definition of luxury would not help understand *how luxury brands behave*. Thus, the book highlights ten so-called “*anti-laws of marketing*.” Analyzing some of them will show how closely luxury communication and Brand Content operations are linked.



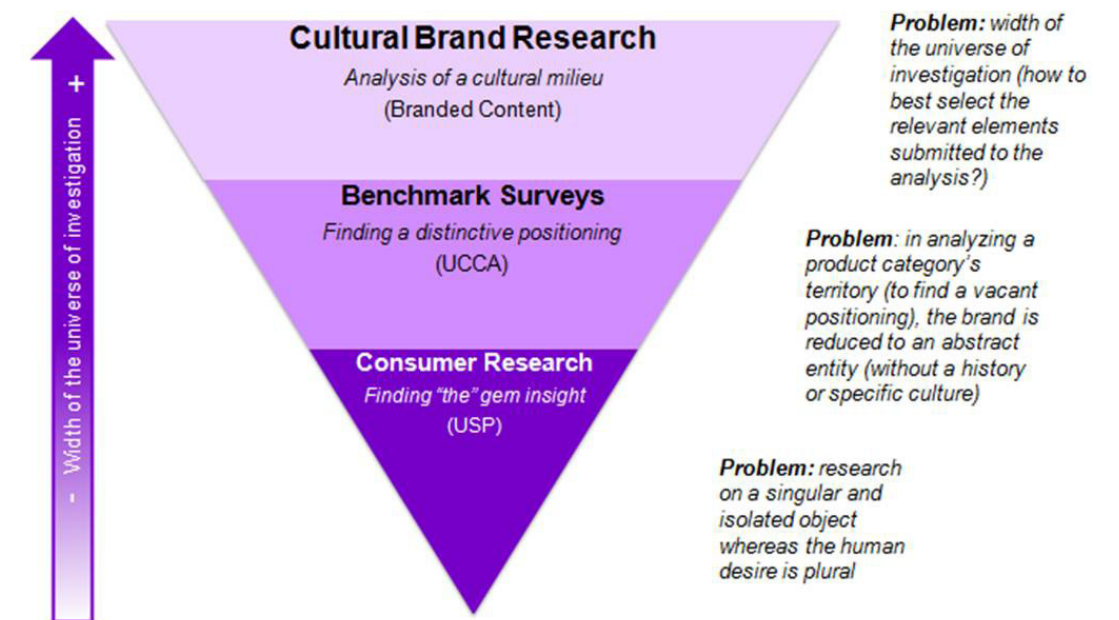
<sup>3</sup> Vincent Bastien is one of the most experienced senior managers in the luxury business. He has been a top manager at some of the most prestigious luxury companies (Louis Vuitton Malletier, Yves Saint Laurent Parfums, Sanofi Beaute, Roger & Gallet, Parfums Van Cleef and Arpels, Oscar de la Renta and Fendi). He is now an Associate Professor at HEC Paris, where he teaches Strategy in Luxury. Jean-Noël Kapferer is one of the few worldwide experts on brand management. He wrote thirteen books, including *Strategic Brand Management*, which is the key reference for top-level MBAs. As a professor at HEC Paris, he conducts executive seminars on luxury all around the world.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

## Forget about positioning, luxury is beyond comparison

The first anti-law of marketing consists in reversing the classical logic of marketing. Traditional marketing as implemented at Procter & Gamble or L’Oréal, has been built on several ground principles.

The first principle is based on the “consumer first” motto: in order to succeed, the brand has to respond to consumers’ needs and expectations, and define a specific positioning which is to be distinct from the competitors. To do so, it relies on a USP (Unique Selling Proposition) or a UCCA (Unique Competitive and Compelling Advantage). At this stage of marketing, the brand is completely “consumer-centric.” To get to the USP, marketers conduct qualitative surveys (often U&A studies) to dig out that gem insight that will lead them to success. With this core insight, they go to their ad agency whose job is to interpret the deeper meaning of this insight and execute it in a compelling and memorable way.



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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To get to the UCCA, marketers conduct benchmark surveys to find out what makes them different from their competitors. In operationalizing the strategy, they create a distinctive territory that the brand can occupy. In this matter, the brand is rather “brand-centric,” even though it is limited to only one of its facets (and is, so to speak, put in a box).

French designer Christian Lacroix did not likely follow these guidelines. Instead, he created his own “style” and set himself apart from other established designers such as Yves Saint-Laurent, Chanel and so on. A glimpse into the history of luxury houses is enough to wipe away any doubt that the traditional approach is necessary here. Luxury brands do not solely rely on comparative approaches: it is not what rivals do or consumers want that counts, only *what the brand does*<sup>4</sup>. Like Jean-Noël Kapferer says, a luxury house is “self-generated:” the brand does not establish itself in comparison to its competitors or in response to some consumers’ expectations – even if it still looks at what the competition does and at what consumers say – it rather tries to offer something unique, attractive and original enough that consumers take interest in it at their own initiative.

*«Content offer marketers unlimited possibilities to express the brand’s culture.»*

In this respect, all tools and communication strategies that help brands define and enrich their core identity are of great value for marketers. Such is the content strategy. It offers a myriad of ways to retell the story of the brand and describe its universe in an original and poetic manner... and inherently tops every attempt to do so with traditional advertising.

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<sup>4</sup> To be more precise: luxury marketers do listen to their customers, even very carefully. They also use benchmark surveys, and do reporting and monitoring, their focus being what is hip and in style. But, the brand remains the point of reference, and normally stays loyal to its core identity even while changing styles season to season.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Content offer marketers unlimited possibilities to express the brand’s culture: glimpses into the brand’s history, a focus on an iconic item, a portrait of the designer, the renewal of the founding myth, backstage access to the techniques and know-how are just some of the ways this is done. We have reached an era of communication where marketers need to be culture-centered.

Classical Advertising	Content Strategy
ONE single insight or benefit (consumer centric)	A global identity and culture (MULTIPLE facets)
Poor content: univocal message One of the facets of the brand identity (brand-centric)	Rich content: polyphonic messages The complexity and many facets of the brand universe (culture-centric)
Effect: desire to buy	Effect: attachment to the brand

When they buy a luxury product, luxury consumers aren’t simply buying another item. They are also buying a part of the brand, and in doing so they indicate that they want to be a part of the brand’s myth. The cultural background of the brand then becomes an essential part of the product itself. Anyone who understands that this culture is inextricably linked to the brand itself will be able to increase the perceived value of the brand, especially in growing markets such as China, where consumers are most of the time not aware of this background but keen to learn about it.



## WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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### “Cultivate closeness to the arts for initiates”

The second principle is that luxury brands aim at promoting an idea of “good taste.” Hence, they cannot simply be followers of the fleeting trends of their era, nor associate their brand with well-established artists and not expect to have to do more work than that. They need to come up with a new model after which the “good taste” of the era is carved, and to set future trends themselves. That is why luxury houses promote and collaborate with upcoming artists. They even organize cultural events and special exhibitions that follow a cultural strategy, as Cartier did towards contemporary art, graffiti or comic books.



*Short movies directed by Takashi Murakami  
for Louis Vuitton.*

These operations are not only sponsored by brands, but beyond that they are fully connected to the brand’s universe and they even express the brand’s vision of art. In doing so, the brand positions itself as a cultural agent and leader. Brands can equally show how creative and forward thinking they are. A great example in this category is the imaginative short movies directed by Takashi Murakami for Louis Vuitton.

## WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Another tool used to promote the cultural vision of the brand is the development of sagas around short-lived collections (and lines). For example, in order to nurture the Dior’s myth, Dior Couture produced the “Lady Dior Bag” saga. The first episode, “*Lady Noire Affair*,” was filmed in Paris by French director Olivier Dahan. The second, “*Lady Rouge*,” was a video clip filmed in New York, with music composed by the rock band Franz Ferdinand. The third, called “*Lady Blue*,” was produced in Shanghai under the direction of David Lynch. The fourth, “*Lady Grey*,” was shot in London, and directed by James Cameron Mitchell. This is a way for Dior to renew the consumers’ attachment to its brand beyond the seasonality of its products.

*“I love luxury. And luxury lies not in richness and ornateness but in the absence of vulgarity (vulgarity is the ugliest word in our language. I stay in the game to fight it.)”*

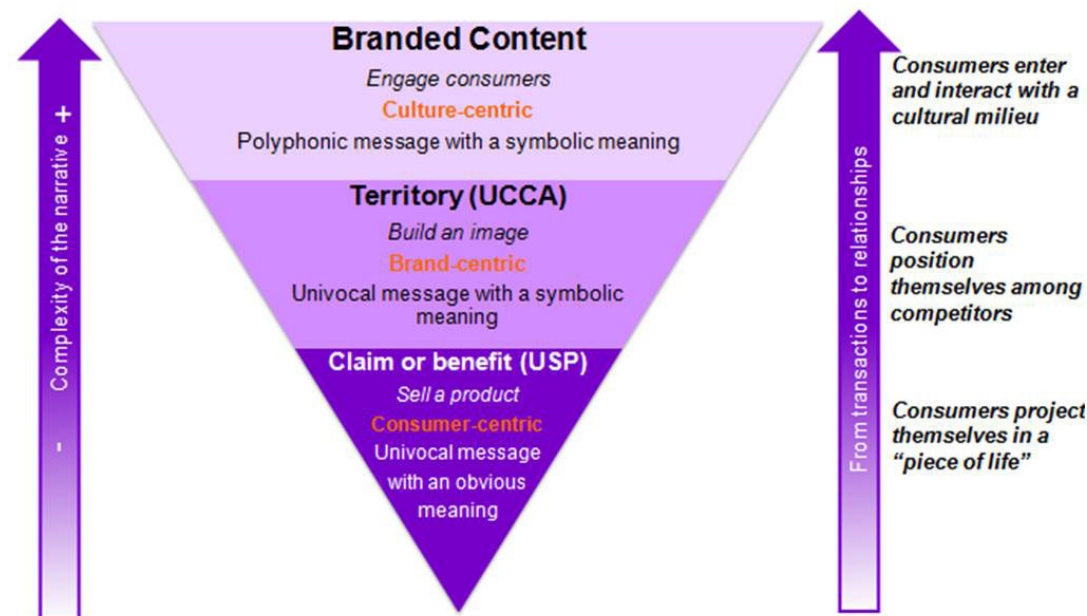
**Coco Chanel**



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

## Communicate outside of your target

The third ground principle outlined in The Luxury Strategy is that more (sometimes a lot more) people should know about the luxury brand than only the people who can actually afford to buy it. This dynamic movement between exclusivity and openness is the very *raison d'être* of luxury: on one hand, a luxury brand, if unknown, is not desirable, hence would not be considered luxury<sup>5</sup>; on the other hand, a luxury brand that everybody can afford is not luxury anymore, as it does not play its social role (distinguishing the “happy few” from the rest of the population). Luxury brands should find the appropriate distance to talk to their audience (whether consumers or not). *Broadcast your fashion show on the web, but let only an “elite” attend the physical show.*



<sup>5</sup> Jean-Noël Kapferer takes the case of the production of textile or dishes that would be totally isolated on the heights of Bhoutan, unknown of the rest of the world: it could be named local craft industry, but not luxury.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

It is extremely important even for people who cannot afford to buy luxury items to be aware that such items are the state-of-the-art pieces of jewelry, mechanics, or technology, etc. The population has to be initiated to the luxury culture in order to acknowledge that the claims of luxury houses are legitimate (not vain). It is certainly a challenge to educate people on what constitutes a luxury item, when they have no clue about the culture and history of the brand. This is especially true in growing markets such as China, where consumers are not familiar with western brands or their history. What do “French standards of excellence” even mean to a Chinese person? Advertising messages asserting the high value of the brand (and its superiority) are rather vain and won’t serve this purpose. Creating documents, interviews, reports, and stories that everyone can access through the Internet, can provide a deeper exploration into the brand’s history, know-how and rituals.

*«Content is one of the most valuable assets a brand can use to spread luxury culture across new territories.»*

Content is one of the most valuable assets a brand can use to spread luxury culture across new territories. Luxury brands have huge pools of content that they can easily release on the Internet (at limited cost and fast timeframe). TV programs and documentaries also tap into these pools of content to explain the techniques and know-how of the brand. For example, the program “*Mains et Merveilles*” (released in France on TV5 Monde) draws on the experiences of craftsmen and people passionate about their art (saddlers, jewelry makers, cobblers, perfume makers – called “noses,” wine makers, etc.). The purpose of the program is not to reveal the products’ secrets but to strengthen the brand’s myth while creating new ways for consumers to be enchanted by certain high-end products or their designers.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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The craftsmen are filmed in very high definition, with close-ups on their work, so that nothing is lost from the dexterity of the movements to the craftsmanship needed to make a bag or a watch. But the creation of content is not limited to storytelling. Innovative brands really create cultural experiences that go beyond strict narration into the viewer's imagination. Through these types of shows, more people have access to this content and are able to comment<sup>6</sup> or share their experiences with the brand.

This content can also be designed to emphasize the feeling of exclusion for the people outside of the brand's pool of consumers. When releasing videos of private parties or fashion shows that everybody can watch on YouTube or Facebook, brands subtly underline the private part of these events: each person watching these videos witnesses their own exclusion from an event he or she did not attend.

Finally, luxury marketers can address their different audiences at several levels. Depending on their level of familiarity with the brand, people will be able to decipher and analyze the content at varying degrees: the majority of people will understand the explicit references and literal meaning of the content, whereas initiates and fans can decipher the metaphors and implicit messages, recognizing the style of the brand or some of its visual codes, and thus making them feel special (as if only they had access to this hidden content).

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<sup>6</sup> Being able to comment is essential: content is comment. The quality of content can be assessed by its ability to be commercialized as it is, and also by the amount of comments and discussion it triggers, notably on social networks, beyond simply whipping up a storm (specialized reviews, analysis, similarities with other works, etc.)

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## Conclusions

Among the ten anti-laws of luxury marketing outlined in *The Luxury Strategy*, some deal with pricing, some with distribution, and some with the industrial processes behind the creation of luxury products. We have focused our analysis only on the three principles directly related to branding and communication: they are nevertheless enough to prove that there is more than contextual harmony between luxury and content.

*«What really matters is showing how the brand resonates with its milieu and what it brings back to society – whether culturally or socially.»*

More than ever, in a context where luxury codes are imitated and adopted by other non-luxury brands, luxury brands have to prove their legitimacy and showcase their uniqueness. Most importantly, they have to renew the brand's original myth by telling rich stories about their history and know-how. For example, Ralph Lauren succeeded in forging a legitimate founding myth through the use of history while tapping into the literary myth of *"The Great Gatsby."* But storytelling is not enough to achieve this goal. It is too restrictive and sometimes nothing more than a self-congratulatory message from the brand. What really matters is showing how the brand resonates with its milieu and what it brings back to society – whether culturally or socially. Content operations allow brands to do so and as such, allow brands to truly become cultural agents. Content strategies, which communicate cultural identity, should thus absolutely be part luxury marketers' strategies.



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 6 - DENSITY IS KEY FOR LUXURY BRANDS

As brands publish and produce more and more content they dramatically change the way marketing is done. This forces us to revisit the well-established distinction between business and art (selling goods vs. creating a piece of art). Marketing is no longer purely sales (though was it ever?); it is also about the creation of inspirational and aspirational content.

This implies that marketers have to deal with a great number of professions that are foreign to their core business. Notably, they need to learn how to deal with the art scene and entertainment industry. Engaging in dialogue with artists, directors, actors, photographers, writers, painters, and the like is not usually part of their job description, although it has become essential for marketers to be able to share their vision, vocabulary, and concepts. Why? To create a piece of content that truly serves the brand: the ideal situation is one where the artist feels respected in his artistic integrity, and marketers feel that the brand's vision and values have been well-reflected and not "perverted" in the content.

Collaboration with artists can be tricky, but we have shown above that luxury brands, as creative brands par excellence, have a natural affinity with artistry. What they may be missing is the historical and philosophical background of art or the appropriate terminology. Art history and philosophy have very powerful insights in describing a brand and its universe; they are the perfect place to start when creating content operations.

Not only do content operations offer a fresh look at the brand, but they allow better understanding of the brand's universe. This is the concept of density. The concept was forged to describe artwork, but could very well be applied to luxury items.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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We firmly believe that luxury marketers can find helpful resources in art history and philosophy to understand their brand and achieve their marketing goals.

Take, for example, the perpetual question of "what is art?." It is as debatable as the question "what is luxury?." American philosopher Nelson Goodman defends the argument that the true question is not "what is art?" but rather "when is art?." He asserts that a piece of art is only art when it follows very specific criteria such as the criteria of density, relative repletion and symbolism<sup>7</sup>.

A work of art is *replete*, synthesizing a wide variety of meanings, representations and intentions; it shows a density that other items do not have. Nelson Goodman takes the case of Hokusai's drawing of Fuji Yama Mountain using a single line. In this artist's rendition, a minor variation in shape or color is of great importance, as it is loaded with meaning. Each area of the drawing interacts with the whole and the tiniest modulation acts as a symbol (of softness, of sturdiness, of calm, of wisdom, etc.). One can look at the drawing over and over again and find a new modulation after each look, which gives it new meaning. Now, when this very same line is used in a diagram, a stock chart for example, it works in a plain, obvious and univocal way: it does not symbolize nor exemplify anything, it just indicates a result. One quickly covers each and every angle of it, and the line does not mean anything "beyond" the result.

*«A work of art is replete, synthesizing a wide variety of meanings, representations and intentions; it shows a density that other items do not have.»*

Luxury items and codes of expression work the same way as the language of art. They follow the principles of density and repletion: (i) "the closer you look, the more you see" and (ii) "the more you are interested, the more you discover." Luxury items can be compared to a chest of drawers: they are full of surprises, allowing for an endless, almost infinite, exploration until one reaches the most secret and hidden places.

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<sup>7</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hackett Publishing, 2001

## WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Likewise, each time one looks at a (true) luxury ad, the exploration does not seem to come to an end: there is always a new aspect of the ad that is revealed, whether a visual effect (light, colors, small details, etc.), a cultural reference or a hidden intention.

*“What I learn about the brand and its product is proportional to the level of interest I show in the content released by the brand.”* A single ad, although it can receive a plurality of interpretations, cannot be enough to let me understand the brand’s complexity, whereas a short movie, a dedicated video or website, a blog, a special program or event can.

*«The symbolic background of the brand constitutes its immaterial patrimony that is extremely important in order to differentiate a luxury brand from a non-luxury brand.»*

For example, if you go to the Lady Dior handbag website (<http://www.ladydior.com/>), you will be able to learn about the legend behind the product. This gives you an idea of how an iconic myth is built. Via various types of executions released by Dior, you learn about the know-how (the craftsmanship), the choice of material, the historical icons who adopted the bag (Lady Di - hence the name of the bag), etc. This symbolic background constitutes the immaterial patrimony of the brand that is extremely important in order to differentiate a luxury brand from a non-luxury brand. Without this immaterial patrimony (cultural density and *repetition*), the Dior bag would be just another ultra-expensive bag.

The problem is that only a few people know about this immaterial heritage, especially in the East (Middle-East or Asia). It used to be passed on to neophytes through in-store sales associates, but that is certainly not enough. The in-store experience is key and should be as cultural as possible, but the reception of this brand culture has to be prepared; people have to be initiated (and exposed) to the brand’s universe to actually enter the store. For example, in India, British shoe designer Jimmy Choo deployed a huge PR campaign and released content for a whole year before actually introducing the said products to the market and opening its stores.

## WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Creating content is an answer to this problem as it enables luxury brands to fully express their immaterial patrimony via the cultural and visual density of content creation. Giving access to the brand’s richness and complexity is exactly what makes the brand desirable (“the more you will look into it, the more you will discover”) and *aspirational*.



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 7 - BRANDED CONTENT GOES BEYOND BUILDING A GREAT STORY

(It's not only about pleasing the audience, but also about making a gift to the audience).

Storytelling is essentially the "art of telling stories". But if that is so, what exactly is a story? A story is generally defined as a complex narrative structure with a specific style and set of characters, which ultimately brings a sense of completeness to the reader. We use stories to pass on accumulated wisdom, beliefs, and values. Through stories we explain how things are, why they are, and our role and purpose in history. Storytelling distinguishes itself from simple argumentative discourse as it is recounting history through a specific story. From this point of view, storytelling isn't only the art of telling stories, it is also the art of pleasing (e.g. convincing through emotion): it is part of communication in the era of what R. Jensen calls the "dream society." This is the model of society currently emerging, built around matters of the heart and emotions, no longer bound by technical information or rational thought. Today, a moving story holds much more power than argumentative discourse that worked well during the '50s.

*«Storytelling isn't only the art of telling stories, it is also the art of pleasing (e.g. convincing through emotion).»*

Branded content refers to the content created and published by a brand. This content can be encapsulated in storytelling, and take the form of a movie or a book on the history of the brand, of a report that gives insight into the workmanship of the product, along with many other types of executions. In this way, these elements thus become brand stories based on complex narratives. Brands are also particularly well positioned to release cultural content, with regards to the complexity of elaboration of their products. There are many fascinating ways to detail things like where the materials come from, how glass constructed, how one treats leather, or how clockwork functions. There are poetic ways to tell a story about different crafts. In sharing know-how, brands become a legitimate outlet for this type of content.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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This deeper knowledge will be more attractive to a customer than an argumentative essay or advertisement.

Storytelling and editorial content are similar for several reasons. They both participate in a similar mutation of traditional communication:

- They are both the expression of an "ensemble" (polyphonic communication vs. a unequivocal message). Instead of focusing on one single and isolated element of the communication mix, we are trying to integrate the "core" element of the campaign within a rich ensemble, a complex structure that will give it more weight and carry all of its possible meaning (whether it be a story with characters and a plot, a particular user's experience with the product, etc.).
- They also have the same purpose: to please and seduce the audience instead of convincing it. Both types of content distinguish themselves from argumentative discourse in the sense that they are not based on rational or theoretical arguments, but try to echo with the audience's feelings and lifestyle, either by providing an immediate benefit to the consumer (branded content) or by conveying emotions (storytelling). Branded content, moreover, brings something to the table: cultural content that is useful, informative, educational or entertaining. Both aim, in different forms, to anchor communication in experience, with an approach that is not discursive but experiential.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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But branded content goes beyond storytelling, as it has something to do with the brand utility, which is not implied in storytelling. All branded content operations should bring something extra – beyond the message – to the audience. Content comes with a value-added benefit, whether the brand teaches me something, educate my taste, elevate my spirit or is a practical aid. Storytelling, on the other hand, does not give me anything: it puts forward the brand’s values, plays on emotion, and organizes the plethora of signs emitted by the brand in an integrated ensemble. The consumer can then understand the brand better and get closer to it. Even so, storytelling will fundamentally be about the brand whereas branded content is wholly about servicing the audience.

*«Storytelling will fundamentally be about the brand whereas branded content is wholly about servicing the audience.»*

Branded content goes further than storytelling because it implicates a veritable display of generosity from the brand toward its audience: the brand does not simply communicate to talk about itself and how wonderful it is, but it tries to deliver something to its public that has value-added, so that they can ultimately associate the positive experience with the brand.

Brand Content	Storytelling
Brand Utility (communication should have a value per se: informing, educating, entertaining, helping)	Brand Attachment
Giving (materially or symbolically)	Producing an effect/eliciting an emotion
Focus is on the audience	Focus is on the brand
Art of engaging	Art of convincing

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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If the brand makes a real “gift” to its audience (a magazine, a mobile app, a game, an educational DVD, etc), the audience feels obligated to give something back to the brand. To the gift responds a counter-gift, a spontaneous reaction that brings the audience closer to the brand because they feel psychologically indebted to it (see chapter 1, Marcel Mauss and its essay on *The Gift*). It’s thus through content that the brand gives itself the means to truly engage the consumer. On the other hand, storytelling merely aims to produce emotion internally.

*«It’s through content that the brand gives itself the means to truly engage the consumer.»*

The problem is that the reaction to this emotion is extremely contingent, the logic of emotions being extremely hard to control: it is hard to say if a seducing story will actually raise emotions in people’s mind, and much less if this emotion will actually be a trigger for a concurrent action. This problem of causality in action correlative with that of persuasion, makes it difficult to measure the effectiveness of storytelling. Branded content, to the contrary, weaves an ineffable link with the brand: if I feel indebted to the brand, there is less risk that I will forget about it. Content leaves an indelible symbolic imprint in people’s mind that a single story alone cannot leave. If a story is a great way to stir one’s imagination and raise one’s feelings, it is also likely that the brand hidden behind the story might be forgotten once the story is over.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 8 - WHAT MAKES A BRAND DESIRABLE?

*Luxury items are designed to please and seduce individuals by delivering memorable emotional experiences that break with daily routine and preoccupations. French philosopher and sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky argues that people do not buy (or desire) luxury items to get social recognition anymore; they also see a way to reach a feeling of wellness or bliss via “emotional consumption.”*

*Luxury houses are perfectly fit to create these experiences, both sales- and culture-related, by launching content operations. After all, there is a good reason that luxury flagship stores are designed to deliver unique and intense emotional experiences around a product. The ultimate goal is to enhance customer satisfaction.*

*How can content inspire customers' desires? Alternatively, what do content operations tell us about the mechanics of desire?*

From a practical perspective, we can describe brand content operations through a great variety of formats, purposes, and executions. They can be found from online editorial content to print (advertorial, consumer magazines and books), from short movies to short programs, from product placement to sponsoring, or from VIP events to public exhibitions. This content can also be distributed across a wide range of media: from TV to print, from regular brand websites to dedicated websites and social media, in stores or in dedicated locations (and corners).

From a theoretical perspective, it can also be useful to revisit the concepts that have been used in branding and marketing (desire, satisfaction, loyalty, engagement, etc) over the past decade to see how the logic of content affects them.

One of the purposes of brand communication has been to raise the consumer's willingness to buy a product. So what is behind the mechanics of desire? How should the logic of brand communication work to respond to the mechanics of desire?

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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There are many theoretical approaches to desire. Below we discuss three of them.

## Desire can be envisioned as a response to a missing object

*“I want this object because I’m missing it.”* This is how Plato envisions the object of love in the *Symposium*<sup>8</sup>. In this conception, desire is satisfied and love happens when one meets (and takes possession of) their other missing half. The individual is seen as an incomplete subject, and fulfilling his desire is a path to self-accomplishment. In this sense, he wants the brand's product because it allows him to fill a part of himself that would have been missing otherwise. Following this conception, to arouse consumers' desire, advertising's job is to emphasize the effect of the deprivation of the missing object on the individual (*“see what you're missing”*).

## Rene Girard built another conception of desire: the theory of mimetic desire

which has been applied to marketing by Marie-Claude Sicard<sup>9</sup>. It states that the object of desire is not predefined – is even indefinite: an object becomes an object of desire only because it is desirable to others. People want things that are desirable to others (that they admire) in order to be like them or get recognition from them. In marketing terms, this translates into “how to spread desire.” In terms of communication, it means that the desire is highly relational and sociable. Its mechanics rely on three stakeholders: the consumer, the object, and the mediator. In response to this model, marketers have imagined several solutions, such as emphasizing the product's quality, making it the “star” of the advertisement, creating buzz around the product, or getting a celebrity endorsement.

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<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, Reed. Chicago University Press 2011

<sup>9</sup> Marie-Claude Sicard, *Les Ressorts caches du desir*, Village Mondial 2005

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Gilles Deleuze, in his essay *Anti-Oedipus*<sup>10</sup>,

has a different approach to desire. He argues that contrary to common sense, there is no such thing as a single and isolated “object of desire.” What we really want is always an aggregation of objects. The object is always part of a wider universe. It is the whole universe that is desirable, not the single object that works as a metonymy of the universe. For example, when I see a dress in the window display, what I want is not only the dress, but also the shoes that go with it, the style of the woman encapsulated in the dress and even the lifestyle of that woman.

*« It is about building layers of content that will enrich the global culture of the brand and develop the brand’s myth.»*

A product is thus more than just a product. Let’s take a Coca-Cola can for example: it is not only a red and white aluminum can filled with a cola drink; it is a part of American culture, encapsulating a philosophy of optimism and a vague nonchalance associated with the post-war period and the American dream. The brand is so rich with history that tomes could be written about it (and have been!).

In the end, these examples should elucidate a clear conclusion: a product cannot be taken out of its cultural and historical background. All of these layers ultimately constitute the culture of the brand. Hence, drinking a Coca-Cola is being part of that brand culture or universe.

Likewise, when Pampers released a series of videos about how babies perceive the world when they are in their mother’s wombs, P&G marketers were clearly trying to highlight that Pampers is not only about changing a diaper. It is also about helping parents understand their toddler’s world.

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<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University Of Minnesota Press, 1983

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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There are further examples in the way that Vuitton or Chanel communicate about their iconic items (trunks, luggage, accessories, etc.). They give consumers access to a larger picture and inscribe the product in a much larger universe and lifestyle. But all this goes beyond simply making an item iconic. It is about building layers of content that will enrich the global culture of the brand and develop the brand’s myth. Only through that can brands become desirable.

Still, marketers have to determine in what part of the brand patrimony (or heritage) they should tap into to best build a strong brand culture. There are many aspects of the brand that could be exploited:

## Uses (over time) and attitudes about the product

The product could be featured in real life conditions (e.g. a video of a chef cooking with Brand X chocolate); the brand can show how to best use their product (e.g. tips for applying Dior Mascara on the Dior YouTube channel); or finally, how to make the most of a product (e.g. how to wear a Hermès scarf at the “I love my scarf” website).

## Product linkage

Which other brands or products is the brand in question associated with, and how is the brand affected by this association/collaboration? (e.g. co-branding, like a Nespresso coffee in a Villeroy & Bosch cup)

## Product elaboration and know-how

A behind-the-scenes look at the product: what it is made of, how it was designed, crafted, sources of inspiration behind the product, choice of shapes, colors, etc. (e.g. the film “Craftsmanship” at Van Cleef and Arpels website).



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Film “Craftsmanship” at Van Cleef and Arpels website

## The history of the brand (storytelling)

The main elements of the history are adapted in a story to better serve the brand and nurture the myth (how it was established, what the founding figure’s vision was, etc.); see Bell & Ross website for example.

## A charismatic figure within the company

(leader, designer or CEO): let them introduce the new products or collections. Also what works here are interviews and personal branding (through storytelling). Key examples are Steve Jobs at Apple, Bernard Arnaud at LVMH or Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel.

## The social and historical background associated with the brand

especially when it became iconic): country of origin, social influence over time, role in history, etc.).

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## The cultural universe of the brand

symbols, representations, implicit elements, an emblematic universe, and the core concepts on which the brand relies (e.g. the *French Modernity* for Chanel, the *Art Nouveau* for Perrier-Jouët).

All of these elements can be exploited to build a complex universe around the product. That is how a brand becomes a dense, consistent entity, a living being, and not merely an isolated and abstract name.

Unfortunately, some products are not as thoroughly engaging as others. It can be trickier to build a universe around those types of things. But even these products can become desirable and engaging (though maybe not at the same level of engagement as a Chanel bag or Hermes scarf). Wrigley’s (chewing gum) has proven that even cheap products can become “cool” and desirable if marketed properly.

Brands used to rely on consumers to maintain vitality and continue their traditions. Now, they are taking the lead in creating fresh content, effectively renewing the brand’s history and enriching its universe. They have to, because consumers are paying increasingly less attention to traditional advertising. It is becoming harder and harder for brands to gain visibility in a crowded landscape.

To resonate with a consumer’s inner desires, it is not enough to simply expose the consumer to the product (for example, beautiful ad campaigns where the isolated product becomes the star). It is essential to inscribe the product in a larger ensemble, universe, lifestyle, context, and experience by letting the consumer become an intimate part of the brand’s universe.

In the end, no matter how human desire really works (maybe each of the three conceptions is partly right), content is a sure way to engage consumers at a deeper level and foster emotional attachment to the brand.



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 8 - TYPOLOGY OF THE CONTENT USED IN IMPLEMENTING BRAND CONTENT STRATEGIES

*It is sometimes hard for marketers to decide which type of content fits their brand identity and objectives the most, and which type of content operation(s) to launch. Should they produce a short movie directed by a famous film director? Sponsor short programs or documentaries about their craftsmanship and know-how? Release an iPhone app?*

*Among the many forms of content, marketers seem to prefer the ones aiming to entertain the audience, as it is the most obvious way to associate the brand to a pleasurable experience. French semiotician Jean-Marie Floch has shown that luxury brands are justified in creating entertaining content, as luxury consumers are sensitive to the symbolic values and mythical background behind the product beyond its practical use and technicality<sup>11</sup>.*

*All content should ultimately please the end audience. But this does not mean that all content should necessarily be entertaining and fun. It has been a challenge for brands to match the allure of the entertainment industry and create value-added programs that deliver a truly entertaining experience. Some brands manage to do so (in collaboration with studios or film directors), while others instead create informative, practical and educational content. It all depends on the brand's identity and goals.*

*Brands should define their global content strategy before launching an operation to make sure that the style, format and type of content is in line with their core identity and universe.*

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Marie Floch, *Semiotics, Marketing and Communication: Beneath the Signs, the Strategies*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 1 - Entertaining and fun content

This content has come from the connection between the advertising and the entertainment industries<sup>12</sup> and covers the fields called *branded entertainment*, *advertainment* and *advergaming*. A clear example in this family of content is the series of short movies launched by BMW starring Clive Owen and Madonna, directed by Guy Ritchie.



*Short movies by BMW starring Clive Owen and Madonna, directed by Guy Ritchie*

These operations are highly praised by the public, receiving a high number of click-through rates via social media. Although the marketing budget can be rather high, given the success of these operations among audiences and the free media coverage, they are the most popular among marketers.

Furthermore, these operations are extremely efficient in strengthening the brand's aura, garnering visibility, and creating attachment to the brand. This content is not only based on a celebrity endorsement, though. The purpose of such content is not to simply to declare: "adopt the brand because Madonna loves it."

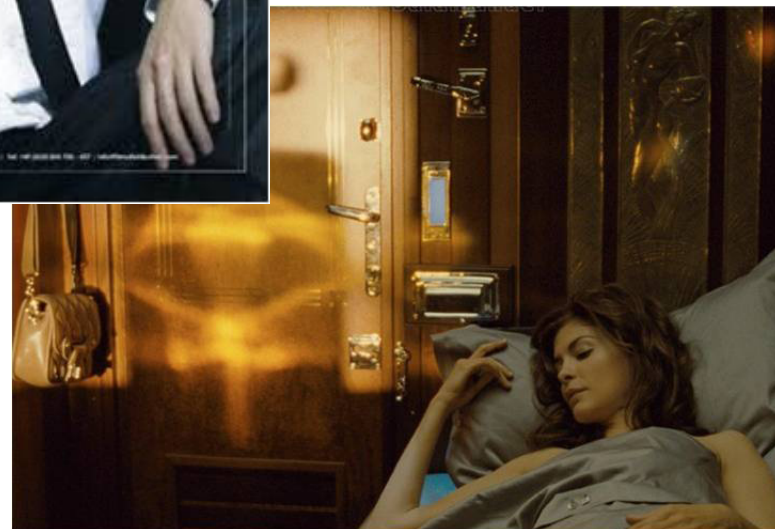
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<sup>12</sup> Scott Donaton, *Madison & Vine, Why the Entertainment and Advertising Industries Must Converge To Survive*

## WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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There should also be a specific affinity between the celebrity (or artist), the values and representations he or she is associated to, and the brand. For example, when Audrey Tautou was chosen to star in the Jean-Pierre Jeunet short-movie released by Chanel for its N°5 perfume, it was certainly for a reason. She had just starred in the movie “Coco Before Chanel” directed by Anne Fontaine (released in 2009).



*Movie “Coco Before Chanel” directed by Anne Fontaine (released in 2009).*

## WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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These operations aren’t always successful; they can be negatively perceived by the audience if poorly executed (bad image quality, simplistic scenarios), or not consistent with the brand’s universe, when the audience does not see what the short movie has to do with the brand. Also, if the presentation of the product is too obvious, content can be mistaken for a poorly-disguised ad (a way for brands to trick the audience into watching a commercial). To truly satisfy the audience, they should bring something new to the table and maintain a high standard of quality (as the quality of the content affects the brand’s perceived value).

Since this content comes at a high cost, marketers should think twice before producing it: does the execution respect the style and codes of expression of the brand? Does it faithfully reflect the values shared by the brand? Is the theme consistent with the brand’s universe?

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 2 - Useful and practical content

Another family of content includes content that can be classified under the concept of brand utility, which refers to all types of content where the brand plays the role of a guide or offers assistance to its audience. User manuals or guides for instance establish a practical connection with the brand, and can be extremely powerful in building a connection with consumers. Beyond the practical side of the product (cookbooks published by brands or recipes on the packaging), it should also enrich the brand experience altogether.

A good example is the make-up tutorials on You Tube posted by video blogger Michelle Phan (a Vietnamese-American make-up artist) who was hired by Lancôme to feature Lancôme products in her videos. See for example, the *Lady Gaga Bad Romance Look*.

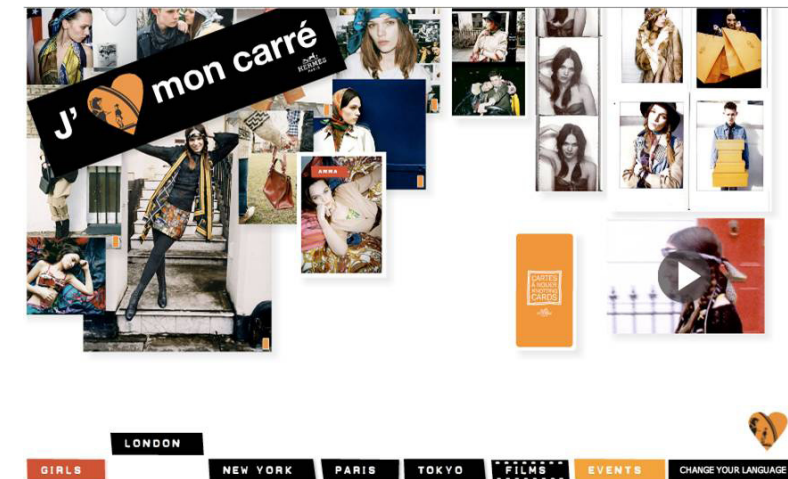


*Make-up tutorials on You Tube posted by video blogger Michelle Phan for Lancôme*

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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There is also an emotional way to communicate around the uses of the product. For example, “I love my scarf” by Hermès showcases the different (and stylish) ways to wear a Hermès scarf.



*Website «I love my scarf» by Hermès*

Software and applications (smatphones, iPods, iPads, etc.) also belong to this category. Most of the time they are designed to be useful and helpful tools. But more and more they also deliver a lifestyle experience. For example, during the summer of 2008, Visa promoted their concierge service, only available to Premier cardholders, via a text messaging campaign. Having noticed that this population was often approached by wine merchants to buy expensive wines, they launched a wine pairing service via the mobile platform (upon texting the name of a dish, you immediately receive wine suggestions).



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 3 - Informative and educational content

The last family of content aims at informing and educating the audience around the universe of the brand. It focuses not only on the proper use of the product, but also the history, the know-how, and the theme(s) evoked by the brand. Luxury brands are in a good position to create this type of content given the extent of their history and the richness of their universe.

Storytelling can indeed be a very powerful tool to create an emotional connection. For example, on the Hermès website, you can find interviews of *Caluche* perfume maker Jean-Claude Ellena about his inspirations and about the process of creation of the perfume. This interview gives the audience a sense of the spirit of the perfume beyond the mere scent. Consumers are extremely keen on learning about what is behind the product (symbolic, spiritual, representations, etc.) and beyond its material description.

*«Brands can investigate larger topics around their universe and even intervene in public debates or influence social trends.»*

What's more, brands can investigate larger topics around their universe and even intervene in public debates (on environment issues, sustainable development, racism, discrimination, etc.) or influence social trends (in art, culture, fashion, music, etc.). Some brands even dramatically extend their universe beyond the products they sell. For example, Louis Vuitton has built a strong and rich universe around travel, which all started with an iconic trunk. The brand has released a tremendous amount of content around travel: city guides, audio guides, even video tours guided by celebrities such as Sean Connery in Edinburgh, Catherine Deneuve in Paris and Francis Ford Coppola in San Francisco. The global content strategy that was executed by Ogilvy and Mathers really helped the brand in developing its universe and making it desirable.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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Obviously, not all brands can have such a consistent strategy across a great variety of media and formats, but it is important to keep trying by finding the specific themes that could be associated with the brand. These themes come to the surface after a thorough analysis of the brand's identity and history (semiotic analyses are of course also very helpful).

There is one basic principle for a content operation to be successful: it should take an independent point of view, not necessarily from the brand's perspective. Being impartial is a necessary condition for success.



# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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## 9 - HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR BRAND'S HERITAGE AND PATRIMONY

*With the almost omnipresence of digital media across multiple platforms, content released by brands has more and more visibility, surpassing the limits of traditional advertising messages that rely on huge media budgets.*

*Nonetheless, just because brands can create content, it does not mean that they should, or that they know how to do it. To be successful in their content operations, they should first carefully examine and select the elements that are part of their brand's heritage to design their strategy.*

*The first step is to clearly identify which elements are powerful enough to create a rich and dense universe and best reflect the brand identity. Brands are reservoirs of content and knowledge, but they cannot randomly choose anything from these reservoirs to build their story.*

*Once they have selected the relevant content in their corpus, they can design a content strategy accordingly. Only after designing this strategy should content operations be executed.*

Consumers often perceive content operations as a cutting-edge and avant-garde means of communication. Brands that support these operations are hence perceived as modern and innovative, making the most of new communication channels and digital media. This content, even if it is not immediately sales-related, is extremely efficient in building the brand's image, engaging the audience, and helping the brand radiate on a worldwide scale. Hence, most brands have already launched initiatives to release content using all of the technologies available to distribute their content across the digital sphere (web, social media, mobile, etc.). Some of them have a very consistent strategy across platforms and devices, other launch operations randomly because they feel they need more of a presence in media channels.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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To be truly engaging, these initiatives should be integrated in a consistent content strategy, because choosing the right content is not only about telling a story, it's more about building a story.

From a consumer's perspective, there is strong intellectual gratification in finding out about the brand's history: understanding where it started and how it got to where it is now. Consumers are really keen on finding out what is behind the product and the role that the luxury house has played in history. Giving them access to the history of the house can also be perceived as revealing a secret, and conveys the feeling of taking part in an exclusive community. They feel initiated into the brand's universe. Interviewing designers and releasing documentaries or books on the house gives the public access to the symbolic meaning of the brand and to its values, therefore strengthening its role in society.

*«From a consumer's perspective, there is strong intellectual gratification in finding out about the brand's history.»*

Beyond the execution itself, just like in advertising, it is also interesting for people to get backstage access in how the content was produced: for example, the "making of" Lady Dior videos are as popular as some episodes of the saga.

But marketers should see beyond the brand's core identity and also make the most of the events organized by the brand (not only sponsored, but truly organized).

Each time a brand organizes a live event, it should be transformed into a program (video) that can be distributed online. A live event resonates far beyond the actual event. For example, all catwalk shows are now recorded and most of the time also broadcasted on the web to make people dream about the clothes, even those who are not in the attendance and cannot even afford to buy them. These operations help luxury brands find a balance between being highly exclusive and selective and being open to the public.

# WHY DOES LUXURY LIKE CONTENT?

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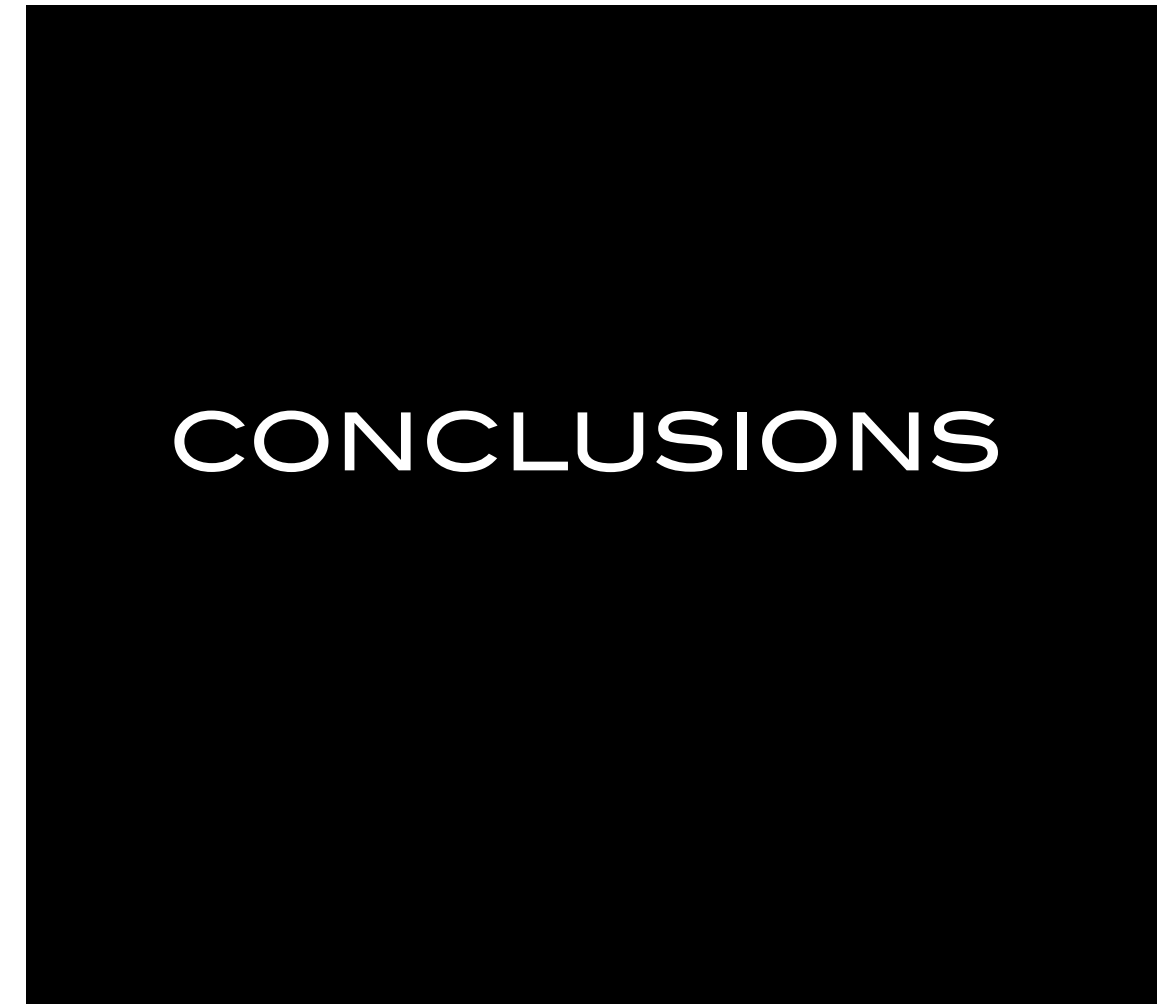
Not only is this a way to increase the event's total audience, but it is also a way to prolong the event and make it last longer in people's memory. For example, in April 2010, Hermès organized an International Horse Jumping Show at the *Grand Palais* in Paris. To complement the event, it also released interviews, pictures, and broadcasted it on a dedicated website.



*International Horse Jumping Show at the Grand Palais in Paris by Hermès*

During the competition, people could also wander around the Grand Palais in order to learn more about the brand, its products, its know-how in saddlery (leather processing) and horse riding in general. The event was so successful it will be held again in April 2011.

Using these events to create content is a great way to distribute fresh and innovative ideas around the brand, beyond the conventional and sometimes boring content released after superficial research on the brand's identity. Content around events is extremely stimulating and engaging to the audience. It is a powerful tool used to convey the energy, poetry, and magic of the brand, giving the sense of "something hip and happening" in the brand's life. Events are thus a great way to update the brand's legacy and ensure its longevity.



# CONCLUSIONS

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## TOP 10 RULES OF LUXURY MARKETING

- 1) Define a specific editorial – or should we say cultural – strategy, in order to be able to choose a content strategy in synergy with the brand’s universe. Create content that expresses the brand’s deep identity and universe.
- 2) The quality of the content should be your first preoccupation. Do not create mediocre content that would only be perceived as an enhanced version of an ad. Be demanding in showing the richness of your brand and the complexity of your products.
- 3) Do not demand the full attention of your audience if your content does not deliver added value to this audience, whether educational, entertaining or practical.
- 4) Create content that is truly original and inspirational. Boring academic lessons on the history and know-how of your brand do not belong: content should convey the poetry and the magic of the brand.
- 5) Partner with ambassadors or artists when you release your content. Keep some secrecy and carefully monitor your community to keep everything under control.
- 6) Work in collaboration with experts in content creation and trust their professional judgment, as they know exactly what the audience expects and what format to use in order to get visibility in a dense and competitive landscape. Your editorial legitimacy is at stake.
- 7) When you measure the effectiveness of your content operation, do not only consider the click-through rate, but also how long the audience was exposed to the content, to assess the audience’s engagement and attachment to the brand.
- 8) Carefully examine the subliminal values that appear in the content for they will be transferred to the brand. Evaluate how close the intrinsic values of the content are to those of the brand.

# CONCLUSIONS

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- 9) Include a clever distribution strategy (via digital media) to increase the visibility of your content (especially on the web). The quality alone is not enough to bring in a large audience.
- 10) Use cross-media strategies: all content operations should be connected to one another, and to the ad campaign. Each media platform should create a way for the consumer to access another part of the whole operation (from a 5-minute short movie on the web to a print ad in the news or a special event).

# AUTHORS & CONTACTS

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### AUTHORS



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HEC, Sciences Com', and Carat Academy Alumni, BA in Sociology, former experience in Advertising (Saatchi & Lintas), 20 years of experience in Market Research.

Daniel Bô is a HEC Business School alumni and CEO of marketing research firm QualiQuanti, which he founded in 1990. Over the course of his 20 years of experience in marketing research, Daniel has implemented a unique methodology to evaluate brand communication initiatives, while combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques. He pioneered in surveying non-traditional forms of advertising such as product placement, advertorial, sponsoring, and celebrity endorsement, and has now gained considerable experience in all forms of branded content communications, from print to online and digital. Over the past 5 years, he has reviewed and analyzed hundreds of operations released across the globe. This research has culminated in a book, co-written with Matthieu Guevel, and published in September of 2009: "Brand Content, comment les marques se transforment en Medias". Since 2003, in collaboration with Matthieu Guevel, he has developed an expertise in luxury brand consultancy, notably with the launch of the subscription-based survey 'Codes Of Luxury', which was granted an award in 2008. Enriched by this double expertise, in September 2010, he released the subscription-based survey 'Brand Content and Luxury'.



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Aurelie Pichard has graduated from the Sorbonne University with a master's degree in Philosophy, and also holds a master's degree in Marketing Communications from ESC Rouen Business School. She is an international research director at QualiQuanti. In her primary experience, she served as an analyst in a public relation and communication strategy firm (Image 7) and worked on several accounts including Gucci, YSL, PPR, Lazard, Colony Capital, Groupe du Louvre, and Groupe Barrière. She spent three years in the USA where she served as a marketing and business development manager at a post-boom dotcom company (Wcities, online and digital content provider), and helped brands implement online content in their marketing strategy.

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**Matthieu GUEVEL**

Research Director, Head of Ethnographic Studies

HEC, PhD in Philosophy, 5 years of experience in Semiotic & Ethnographic Research.

Matthieu Guevel is a HEC Business School alumni and holds a PhD in philosophy. As a Research Director at QualiQuanti, he specializes in semiotic research and luxury brand consultancy. He has worked with many luxury brands such as Dior, Chanel, L'Oreal, Hennessy, Mumm, Perrier-Jouët, etc., and gained an advanced knowledge in luxury communications and luxury marketing practices. He has initiated and co-written the book "Brand Content, comment les marques se transforment en Medias," released in 2009. He also publishes a blog on the convergence between art and advertising, product promotion and in-store marketing: <http://lartdushopping.blogspot.com/>.

# AUTHORS & CONTACTS

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## QualiQuanti

Based in Paris, but working with brands all over the globe, QualiQuanti is a market research company specializing in qualitative research. Founded in 1990, the firm designed a unique methodology to combine quantitative and qualitative research techniques in order to obtain actionable insights and deliver rich, operational results.

With its web panel, which launched in 2000 and now counts over 350,000 members, QualiQuanti is now recognized a major player in online research.

Having surveyed many marketing initiatives and communications over the past 20 years, QualiQuanti has gained considerable experience in helping brands define and build successful communication strategies.

Notably, QualiQuanti has a specific interest in non-traditional forms of advertising such as branded content and branded entertainment. Over the past 5 years, the company has reviewed and analyzed hundreds of operations released across the globe. This research has culminated in a book published in September of 2009<sup>13</sup>.



<sup>13</sup> *Brand Content, Comment les marques se transforment en média ?*, Daniel Bô and Matthieu Guével, Ed. Dunod

# AUTHORS & CONTACTS

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In this book, we argue that brands, especially luxury brands, can no longer use traditional forms of advertising to communicate with their audience but should also implement global content strategies to create attachment to their brand and truly engage their audience.

As a result, QualiQuanti is now also helping companies implement content strategies within their main communications plans, notably working with many luxury brands. References include Dior, Moët, Hennessy, Krug, Chanel, L'Oreal, Absolut, Mumm, and Perrier-Jouët.

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