

Perret, Jens K.; Horn, Carmen; Holthaus, Lina

Article

E-Commerce and Luxury - From the Perspective of Female German Customers

Marketing Review St.Gallen

Provided in Cooperation with:

Universität St. Gallen, Institut für Marketing und Customer Insight

Suggested Citation: Perret, Jens K.; Horn, Carmen; Holthaus, Lina (2022) : E-Commerce and Luxury - From the Perspective of Female German Customers, Marketing Review St.Gallen, ISSN 1865-7516, Thesis Verlag, St.Gallen, Vol. 39, Iss. 2, pp. 52-59

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/276183>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.

Marketing Review St. Gallen

Privacy
as Strategy?



Schwerpunkt

Datenschutz im Dialog –
Ein Interview mit Maximilian Groth

Customer Centricity & Datenschutz –
Die Geschichte eines Missverständnisses

Consent as a Success Factor –
The Impact of Cookie Banner Tonality
and Regulatory Fit

Cookieless Marketing –
Ein Interview mit Jakob Schellhorn,
Markus Kerken & Benjamin Tück

Knowing is Half the Battle –
The Influence of Marketers' Privacy
Literacy on SMEs' Privacy Orientation

Spektrum

When Brands Take a Stand –
Navigating Emotional Reactions
to Brand Activism

E-Commerce and Luxury –
From the Perspective of Female
German Customers

Digitale Plattformen für KMUs –
Mehr als Facebook, Amazon und Co!



E-Commerce and Luxury

From the Perspective of
Female German Customers

A study of established and up-and-coming female luxury consumers reveals that in both groups there is some antipathy against the increasing digitalization of luxury brands since they expect a loss in exclusiveness. This is particularly significant in the case of Chanel, where the antipathy against digitalization is more pronounced.

Prof. Dr. Jens K. Perret, Prof. Dr. Carmen Horn, Lina Holthaus, B.A.

In the next few years, US consumers are expected to spend 20% to 30% of their total expenditure online (Boston Consulting Group, 2016). Digitalization and the resulting online trade offer new opportunities for luxury brands to connect with their customers and to reach new customers. However, it is difficult for luxury brands to generate a uniform brand image in multi-channel retail and to maintain the attributes that luxury stands for in their online presence (Hennigs et al., 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Manninger, 2012). Complexity and high performance distinguish luxury goods from goods that serve daily needs. For this reason, customers expect excellent service at all levels and unique customer relationship management (Meurer & Hirschsteiner, 2012; Okonkwo, 2009).

The online distribution of luxury brands is complicated by the mass accessibility of the internet, which impairs the exclusivity and desirability of the brand. Brands are faced with the challenge that online trading usually leads to rising sales figures, while it is essential to sell only a limited number of goods so as not to damage the image of an exclusive luxury brand (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Okonkwo, 2009).

On the other hand, rapidly evolving marketing trends are forcing luxury brands into online commerce (Boston Consulting Group, 2016) and, despite the risks, they are currently experiencing economic success, reflected in increasing sales and growth (Manninger, 2012; Okonkwo, 2009). Even the Celine brand, which had not offered online sales of its products for a long time, adopted an e-commerce presence a few years back (Ecommerce News, 2017).

The Chanel company is still implementing an integrated online retail strategy, selling glasses, perfume, make-up and skincare products via its online boutique, while fashion, jewelry and watches continue to be sold exclusively through stationary stores (Chanel, 2021; Chevalier & Gutsatz, 2020).

The aim of the present study is to identify the consumer perspective with regard to e-commerce in the luxury brand segment, with a primary focus on the Chanel brand which is currently the last one of the successful and well-known luxury brands not to have a fully integrated online portfolio.

Luxury and E-Commerce

The Effect of E-Commerce on Luxury Brands

Worldwide sales of personal luxury goods has risen from 3.3 billion euros in 2009 to 33.3 billion euros in 2019, which means that approximately 12% of the total market is accounted for by sales via the internet (D'Arpizio et al., 2019). In today's age, however, consumers also have high expectations



Prof. Dr. Jens K. Perret
International School of Management,
Cologne, Germany
jens.perret@ism.de

Prof. Dr. Carmen Horn
International School of Management,
Cologne, Germany
carmen.horn@ism.de

Lina Holthaus, B.A.
Post-Graduate Student at Hochschule Fresenius,
Cologne, Germany
lina@mform.de

of a brand's online presence (Bazi et al., 2020; Chevalier & Gutsatz, 2020; Sherman, 2020).

More and more luxury brands recognize the need for a digital presence. They are realizing that a digital presence is essential to appeal to the luxury consumer of tomorrow (Boston Consulting Group, 2016; Sperber & Beyerhaus, 2018).

A study by McKinsey and Company (2015) shows that 75% of all luxury purchases are influenced by information consumers receive online, even if the final purchase takes place in a retail store. The experience of luxury retailing today takes place mainly in an online environment. The question that arises for luxury brands is no longer whether online retail should be implemented, but how and in what form. To do so successfully, the complex buying behavior of the new digital luxury brand consumer must be understood (Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Heine & Berghaus, 2014).

A Deloitte study shows that 58% of consumers often purchase their luxury products online. By 2025, a quarter of all luxury purchases are expected to be made online and the generations Y and Z will account for 45% of global luxury spending (Sherman, 2017).

Luxury consumers have extremely high expectations, and brands that fail to live up to these expectations will not remain competitive in the long term (Chevalier & Gutsatz, 2020). Brands need to understand how digitalization is changing the luxury goods market, as bricks-and-mortar retailing



Source: iStockphoto.

Table 1: Sample Descriptives

Established	Up-and-coming
80 Participants	71 Participants
Median age: 50.4	Median age: 22.8
Median income: 6,242.13 €	Median income: 1,674.02 €

Management Summary

Both up-and-coming and established luxury consumers have a strong antipathy against the increasing digitalization of luxury brands. A critical loss in exclusiveness and brand image are expected consequences of increased digitalization. Regarding the brand Chanel, the antipathy against digitalization is particularly pronounced; other luxury brands are viewed less critically.

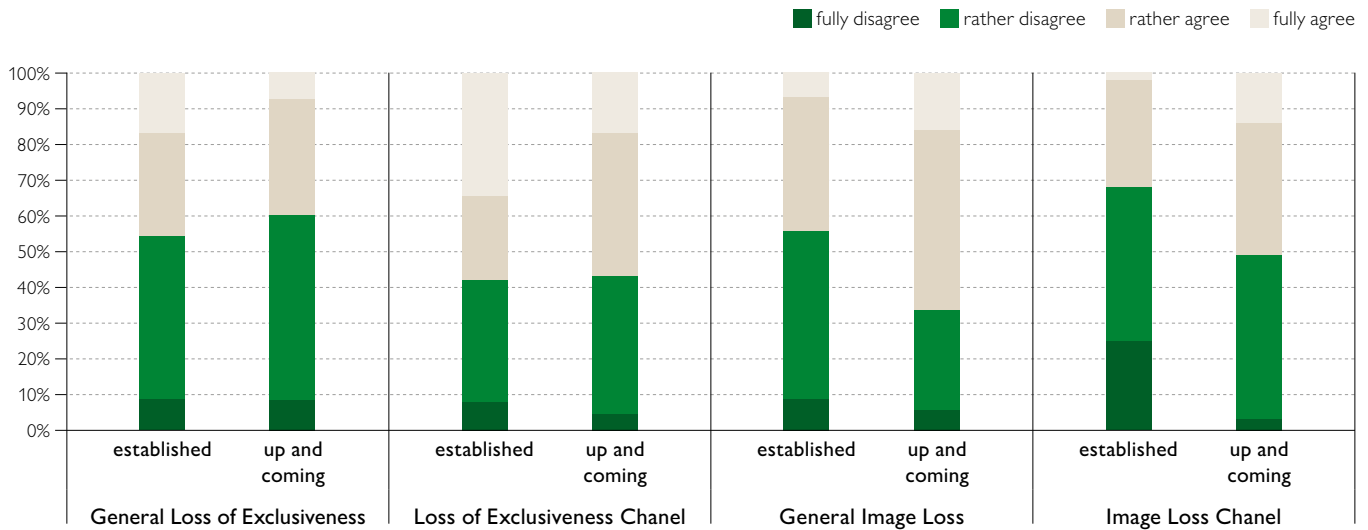
alone or traditional marketing are becoming obsolete (Som & Blanckaert, 2021).

Overall, it is important to understand that the focus in online retailing for luxury brands is to offer consumers a holistic experience (Boston Consulting Group, 2016). However, Chanel is opposed to the expansion of e-commerce to include additional product categories in the near future (Kansara & Chitrakorn, 2018).

Research Question

The previous section described the extent to which online retail trade has developed in recent years and what influence it has on distribution in the luxury brand segment, thus putting luxury brands under enormous competitive pressure. Should luxury providers (especially Chanel) give in to this pressure and offer their women's collection online, this might lead to a change in the perception of their exclusiveness (Hennigs et al., 2012; Balasyan & Casais, 2018) and brand image (Chandon

Figure 1: Perceived Exclusiveness and Image Loss with Regard to Online Activities



Source: Own illustration.

et al., 2016; Ko et al., 2019; Quach & Thaichon, 2017) by customers, raising the following research question:

What influence does distribution via the internet have on female consumers in terms of perceived exclusiveness and brand image?

Study Design

Survey

To answer the research question, a survey was designed that targeted exclusively women. Chanel designs only women's collections, along with glasses, perfume, make-up and skincare products (Chanel, 2021).

The segment of established customers (≥ 35 years) comes primarily from the social upper class, which is committed to tradition and exclusiveness, but also feels the urge for self-realization.

The up-and-coming target group of potential female customers was born into a different era. Between 18 and 34 years old, they belong to the generations Y or Z. In contrast to the baby boomers and generation X, generation Y grew up with the technological progress of digitalization and has already been dealing with the latest communication possibilities at a young age (so-called "digital natives"). For this reason they have diffe-

rent expectations regarding the e-commerce of luxury fashion brands (Hanisch, 2018).

To collect primary data from the target groups, a questionnaire consisting of 21 questions was used, with exclusiveness and brand image surveyed as single item constructs (Diamantopoulos et al., 2012) to generate a larger response rate in a population with decreasing attention spans (Romaniuk & Nguyen, 2017). To ensure the validity and reliability of this survey instrument, a pre-test with 15 participants was conducted. The survey itself was conducted by actively targeting consumers of luxury goods in general and clients of Chanel in particular. By using the snowball technique (Thielsch & Weltzin, 2012) additional participants from the relevant target groups were recruited.

The questionnaires were filtered by three questions: the gender of the participants, the possession of luxury products, and online purchasing behavior. As a result, all participants who were either male, do not shop online, or do not own luxury products and are not considering buying them, were led to the end of the questionnaire and were therefore unable to answer the remaining questions. This resulted in a final number of 151 participants.

Description of the Sample

Table 1 provides an overview on the key descriptives of the sample, split for the two groups. Over 70% of the respondents

stated that they shop online at least once a month. Remarkably, the rates of 64% for the older generation (≥ 35 years) and 79% for the younger generation (18–34 years) are not very far apart. This confirms that female consumers of luxury products have a high affinity for digital technology, regardless of age – less than 13% said they shop online less than every three months. In both groups at least 70% own products from Chanel and are therefore familiar with the brand.

Overall, both groups form an ideal sample, as in both groups about 95% of all participants (143 respondents in all) either are already customers of Chanel or are considering buying Chanel products in the future.

Results

Exclusiveness and Image Loss

If only the questions about exclusiveness and image are considered, it becomes clear that regarding the statements “Is perceived as less exclusive” and “Improves the image of the brand” there is generally no significant deviation from the theoretical mean (see figure 1). With regard to luxury goods in general, customers and potential customers see neither a

significant loss of exclusiveness ($p = 0.517$) nor a significant damage to the brand image ($p = 0.231$) due to the online presence. This is consistent with the result that a significant proportion of the sample does not see a problem in buying luxury goods online.

In contrast, when the question is directed to Chanel products, it is clear that Chanel is perceived differently than luxury goods in general. The participants strongly agree that the product is perceived as less exclusive if sold online (t-test against the theoretical mean with $p = 0.001$) and that e-commerce will have a significantly negative effect on the brand image (t-test against the theoretical mean with $p = 0.013$). Figure 1 shows the ratings in detail.

Since figure 1 suggests a relationship between the perception of a loss of image and a perceived loss of exclusiveness, it is worthwhile to ask for more details.

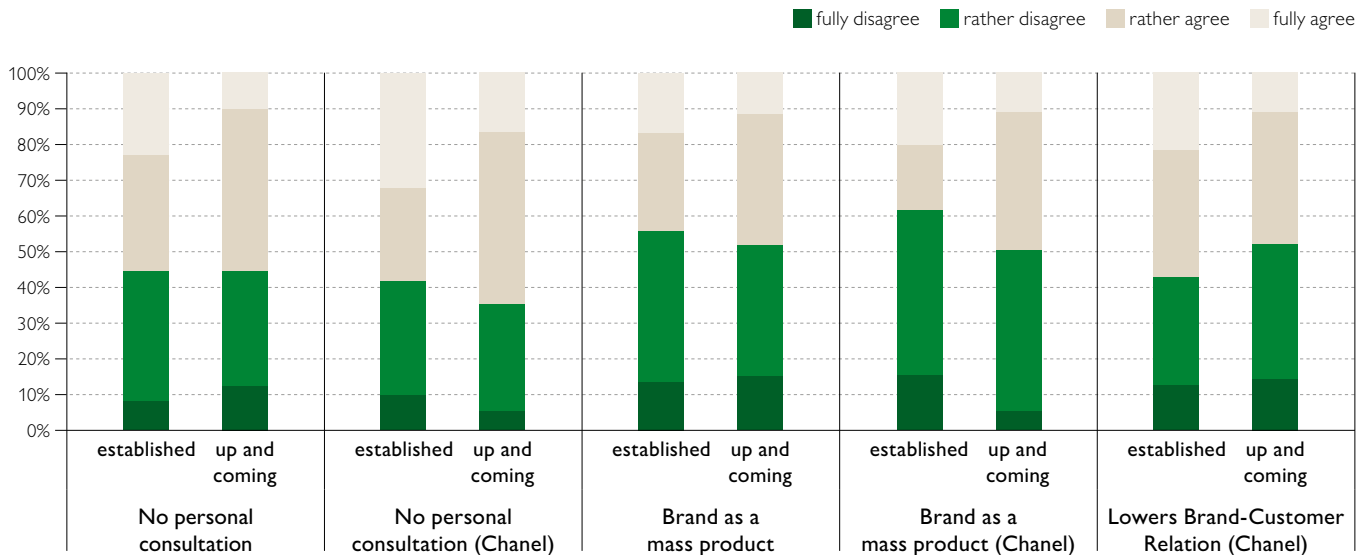
With regard to the evaluation, it is irrelevant whether the test subjects have already had contact with Chanel, own a product from Chanel or not, since the evaluations differ only marginally. This also applies to the attitude towards luxury goods in general. Online activities are marginally rated more

Table 2: Perceived Loss in Exclusiveness and Image by Professional Qualification and Household Income

By Professional Qualification:				
	General Loss in Exclusiveness	Loss in Exclusiveness Chanel	General Image Loss	Image Loss Chanel
Fulltime employed	2,40	2,62	2,76	2,39
Part time employed	2,46	2,54	2,85	2,15
Unemployed	2,00	3,00	2,50	3,00
Homeworker	2,64	2,21	2,69	1,92
Student	2,52	2,76	2,81	2,55
Pensioner	2,43	2,00	2,71	2,00
No Answer	2,50	3,00	2,50	2,50
By Household Income:				
	General Loss in Exclusiveness	Loss in Exclusiveness Chanel	General Image Loss	Image Loss Chanel
Below 1000	2,56	2,50	2,86	2,21
1000–2000	2,45	2,68	2,66	2,55
2001–4000	2,29	2,61	2,68	2,56
4001–6000	2,29	2,79	2,63	2,29
Over 6000	2,69	2,33	3,00	2,00
No Answer	2,38	2,63	2,75	2,44

averages, scale of 1 = fully disagree to 5 = fully agree. Source: Own illustration.

Figure 2: Reasons for a Loss in Exclusiveness



Source: Own illustration.

positively by those who have not yet had any experience with Chanel than by Chanel customers. However, potential customers are even more critical of Chanel's brand development than current customers.

Considering that each participant was first queried about luxury products in general and later about Chanel products, a paired two-sample t-test can answer whether a significant difference exists that sets Chanel products apart from luxury goods in general.

The tests show that both the perceived loss in exclusiveness ($p = 0.000$) and the loss in brand image ($p = 0.000$) are significantly stronger with regard to Chanel.

Tertiary Impact Factors

A variance analysis shows that significant differences with regard to the age of the test subjects only occur in terms of brand image. As seen in figure 1 in particular, customers over 45 are much more critical of online activities and anticipate a stronger loss of image than younger customers. In the case of exclusiveness, such a statement is not possible.

This statement can be supported by Spearman rank correlations, which are insignificant for exclusiveness ($p = 0.281$) but significantly negative for brand image with a coefficient of

-0.308 ($p = 0.000$). A similar picture results if instead a χ^2 test is used, although here no statement can be made about the direction of the relation. Thus, the older age group expects a loss of image from an online strategy, while both generations are relatively homogeneous in their attitudes with regard to exclusiveness.

While there are no significant differences with regard to professional qualifications, as the upper part of table 2 suggests and a variance analysis confirms, income shows weakly significant differences for brand image ($p = 0.057$).

As in the case of age, the correlations are similar in the case of income, if luxury goods in general are considered instead of the special case of Chanel.

In summary, it can be said that there is no general negative attitude towards the sale of luxury goods via the internet. However, as soon as the case of Chanel is considered, a brand that particularly pushes exclusiveness through scarcity, this opinion changes. With regard to Chanel, a loss of exclusiveness as well as damage to the brand image is perceived if the company enters the online market. It becomes apparent that a loss of exclusiveness is perceived homogeneously over the categories age, income and employment. In terms of brand image, the older cohorts are somewhat more critical, as are the cohorts with the highest and lowest incomes.

Loss in Exclusiveness in Detail

Additional questions were included in the survey regarding the question how the loss of personal consultation is viewed by the two generations – in general and with regard to Chanel in particular. Also, it was asked whether a switch to an online strategy would lead to the products being viewed more like mass products. Finally, regarding Chanel products the question was added whether an online strategy would result in a weaker brand–customer relationship.

Again, the results show that Chanel as a brand is perceived in a special way as compared to other luxury brands in general (see figure 2).

Using two-sample paired t-tests allows testing for differences between Chanel and luxury products in general. This shows that there is a significant difference ($p = 0.009$) in that the loss of personal consultation is viewed as more problematic for Chanel. Running a one-sample t-test against the theoretical mean of 2.5 shows that for Chanel this effect (mean = 2.77) is viewed as particularly critical.

The answers to the question whether products and brands might become more like mass-market products are the same ($p = 1.000$), independent of the luxury brand under consideration. The mean of 2.48 also shows that this issue is neither considered to be particularly critical nor particularly irrelevant on average. Thus, equating an online strategy with a switch towards a mass market strategy is a subjective view and in no way generation-specific.

Conclusion

Although luxury brands have long resisted the e-commerce trend, they have increasingly been forced to go digital. The last

few years have shown that the implementation of e-commerce within this industry is possible and is expected by the consumers currently and in the future. Thus, a potential demand for the implementation of e-commerce for the complete range of Chanel products exists from the perspective of some customers. Should Chanel give in to this demand in the future, the study shows that a potential threat to competitiveness could arise since the participants clearly perceive a potential loss in the

In summary, it can be said that there is no general negative attitude towards the sale of luxury goods via the internet.

brand image related to it. The complex requirements of luxury customers must be taken into account to ensure that the brand does not lose its previously highly exclusive status, since going online is considered to result in a loss of exclusiveness, at least by a certain proportion of the participants.

Summarizing, it is precisely the classic Chanel target groups that are most critical of the transition to a complete online portfolio. The stance of the future target groups points only slightly into another direction. Thus, the question remains whether the interviewees are just anticipating a detrimental effect which will not occur once the switch to a full online portfolio has been realized (cf. attitude–behavior gap). Answering this question, however, would require a more complex multi-period design, thus offering future research potential.

While a certain distortion due to the self-perception as a Chanel customer and the associated gain in prestige cannot be ruled out, this is nevertheless an important point that Chanel

Main Propositions

- 1 Chanel serves a distinct group of customers that needs to be examined in a specialized study.
- 2 Digitalization decreases luxury brands' perceived exclusiveness and brand image.
- 3 Antipathy against digitalization is stable across all generations.
- 4 Compared to other brands, the antipathy is more strongly pronounced for the luxury brand Chanel.

Lessons Learned

- 1 Traditional luxury brands need to evaluate brand image effects when considering transferring parts of their portfolio online.
- 2 Exclusivity needs to be ensured online as well as offline but it needs to be communicated more strongly to consumers in an online context.
- 3 Perceptions and antipathies of established and up-and-coming customers do not differ significantly with regard to expected brand image effects.

should consider in its future online activities. However, the perspective of Chanel itself has not been included here. The question is whether their arguments are similar to those of the consumers, or whether there are there additional factors, possibly anchored in the corporate culture, which influence the corporate decisions. As requirements of the up-and-coming customers can only be predicted to a limited extent, increased market research in this direction is essential in order to identify and respond to customer needs.

While the present study offers a good insight into the assessment of Chanel's German customers, this regional limitation is also its greatest weakness, and the question arises to what extent the opinions and assessments of German customers are representative of customers from other countries and cultures. Also, the results of this study regarding Chanel can only

be transferred to other brands if they are following a similar brand management strategy. Chanel's clientele is predominantly female, precluding a comparison of gender differences in the perception of exclusiveness regarding the brand Chanel. Expanding the research focus to luxury brands in general or brands that serve women and men equally would make the analysis of potential gender differences and underlying reasons a worthwhile endeavor.

Finally, the study was conducted preceding the Covid-19 pandemic which has led to an increased acceptance of e-commerce solutions and the development of new business models as well as digital services to enhance the digital luxury shopping experience, i.e. virtual shopping assistants or consultations. Comparing pre-Covid and post-Covid perceptions would thus represent an interesting research topic. ■

Literature

- Balasyan, I., & Casais, B. (2018). Keeping exclusivity in an E-Commerce environment: The case of farfetch.com and the market for luxury clothes. *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media*, 4, 6–27.
- Bazi, S., Filieri, R., & Gorton, M. (2020). Customers' motivation to engage with luxury brands on social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 112, 223–235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.02.032>
- Boston Consulting Group. (2016). Digital or die: The choice for luxury brands. <https://www.bcg.com/de-de/publications/2016/digital-or-die-choice-luxury-brands.aspx>
- Chandon, J.-L., Laurent, G., & Valette-Florence, P. (2016). Pursuing the concept of luxury: Introduction to the JBR special issue on luxury marketing from tradition to innovation. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(1), 299–303.
- Chanel. (2021). Chanel – Offizielle Website: Mode, Parfums, Makeup, Uhren, Fine Jewelry. <https://www.chanel.com/de/>
- Chevalier, M., & Gutsatz, M. (2020). *Luxury retail and digital management: Developing customer experience in a digital world* (2nd edition). Wiley.
- D'Arpizio, C., Levato, F., Prete, F., & Gault, C. (2019). 2019 Luxury goods worldwide market study: Eight themes that are rewriting the future of luxury goods. Bain & Company. https://www.bain.com/globalassets/noindex/2020/bain_digest_eight_themes_that_are_rewriting_the_future_of_luxury-goods.pdf
- Dhaliwal, A., Singh, D. P., & Paul, J. (2020). The consumer behavior of luxury goods: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2020.1758198>
- Diamantopoulos, A., Sarstedt, M., Fuchs, C., Wilczynski, P., & Kaiser, S. (2012). Guidelines for choosing between multi-item and single-item scales for construct measurement: A predictive validity perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 40(3), 434–449.
- Ecommerce News (2017, December 7). French fashion brand Céline launches ecommerce website. *Ecommerce News Europe*. <https://ecommercenews.eu/french-fashion-brand-celine-launches-ecommerce-website/>
- Hanisch, H. (2018). *Die aktive Generation Y im 21. Jahrhundert*. Books on Demand.
- Heine, K., & Berghaus, B. (2014). Luxury goes digital: How to tackle the digital luxury brand–consumer touchpoints. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 5(3), 223–234.
- Hennigs, N., Wiedmann, K.-P., & Klarmann, C. (2012). Luxury brands in the digital age – Exclusivity versus ubiquity. *Marketing Review* St. Gallen, 29, 30–35.
- Kansara, V. A., & Chitrakorn, K. (2018). Chanel strikes farfetch deal to augment boutiques. *Business of Fashion*. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/fashion-tech/chanel-strikes-farfetch-deal-to-augment-boutiques>
- Kapferer, J.-N., & Bastien, V. (2012). *The luxury strategy: Break the rules of marketing to build luxury brands* (2nd edition). Kogan Page.
- Ko, E., Costello, J. P., & Taylor, C. R. (2019). What is a luxury brand: A new definition and review of the literature. *Journal of Business Research*, 99, 405–413.
- Manninger, K. (2012). Herausforderung „Multi-Channel-Management“ – Luxusvermarktung im Spannungsfeld traditioneller Kanäle und digitaler Revolution. In C. Burmann, V. König, & J. Meurer (Eds.), *Identitätsbasierte Luxusmarkenführung: Grundlagen – Strategien – Controlling* (pp. 237–257). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-8349-4060-5_15
- McKinsey & Company. (2015). Digital inside: Get wired for the ultimate luxury experience. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/digital-inside-get-wired-for-the-ultimate-luxury-experience>
- Meurer, J., & Hirschsteiner, S. (2012). The art of luxury experience – Customer Experience Management zur erfolgreichen Umsetzung von Luxusmarkenerlebnissen. In C. Burmann, V. König, & J. Meurer (Eds.), *Identitätsbasierte Luxusmarkenführung: Grundlagen – Strategien – Controlling* (pp. 201–220). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-8349-4060-5_13
- Okonkwo, U. (2009). Sustaining the luxury brand on the internet. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(5–6), 302–310.
- Quach, S., & Thaichon, P. (2017). From connoisseur luxury to mass luxury: Value co-creation and co-destruction in the online environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 81, 163–172.
- Romaniuk, J., & Nguyen, C. (2017). Is consumer psychology research ready for today's attention economy? *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(11–12), 909–916.
- Sherman, L. (2017). Decoding Chanel's Gen-Z strategy. *Business of Fashion*. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/professional/decoding-channels-gen-z-strategy>
- Sherman, L. (2020). The next wave of luxury E-Commerce. *Business of Fashion*. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/professional/resources/case-study/the-next-wave-of-luxury-e-commerce>
- Som, A., & Blanckaert, C. (2021). *The road to luxury: The new frontiers in luxury brand management*. Wiley.
- Sperber, S., & Beyerhaus, C. (2018). Steigerung der Markenbekanntheit durch Social-Media-Marketing – ein Fallbeispiel. *Marketing Review* St. Gallen, 6, 68–75.
- Thielsch, M. T., & Weltzin, S. (2012). Online Befragungen in der Praxis. In T. Brandenburg & M. T. Thielsch (Eds.), *Praxis der Wirtschaftspsychologie II* (pp. 110–127). MV Wissenschaft.