

**Exploring Symbolism in Masstige Brand Advertising Within the Discursive  
Context of Luxury: A Semiotic Analysis**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP .....	3
LIST OF FIGURES .....	4
LIST OF TABLES .....	5
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	6
ABSTRACT.....	7
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION .....	9
1.1 Research Background.....	9
1.1.1 Introduction to Luxury Identifiers.....	9
1.1.2 Defining Masstige Brands.....	10
1.2 Research Objective.....	11
1.3 Research Methodology: Semiotics.....	11
1.4 Research Significance .....	12
1.5 Paper Outline.....	12
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW .....	13
2.1 LUXURY IDENTITARY VALUES .....	13
2.1.1 Heritage: Place and Family/Founder.....	13
2.1.1.1 Place as Heritage .....	14
2.1.1.2 Family and Founder as a Source of Heritage .....	15
2.1.2 Craftsmanship: Product Quality, Artisanhip and Premium Pricing .....	16
2.1.3 Rarity: Product, Distribution, Promotion.....	18
2.1.4 Hedonic/Experiential Value and Social/Symbolic Value .....	19
General Conclusion.....	21
2.2 ON MASSTIGE BRANDS.....	22
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHOD .....	26
3.1 Method of Analysis: Semiotics .....	26
3.2 Sample.....	28
CHAPTER 4 – DATA ANALYSIS.....	30
CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS .....	63
CHAPTER 6 – DISCUSSION .....	65
CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....	68
CHAPTER 8 – LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS.....	70
REFERENCES.....	71

**ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3 Middle Range/Masstige/Luxury Items.....	29
Figure 4.1 Calvin Klein 1.....	30
Figure 4.2 Calvin Klein 2.....	33
Figure 4.3 Coach 1.....	35
Figure 4.4 Coach 2.....	37
Figure 4.5 Michael Kors 1.....	39
Figure 4.6 Michael Kors 2.....	41
Figure 4.7 Armani Exchange 1.....	42
Figure 4.8 Armani Exchange 2.....	44
Figure 4.9 Gucci 1.....	47
Figure 4.10 Gucci 2.....	49
Figure 4.11 Dolce & Gabbana 1.....	50
Figure 4.12 Dolce & Gabbana 2.....	52
Figure 4.13 Chanel 1.....	54
Figure 4.14 Chanel 2.....	56
Figure 4.15 Louis Vuitton 1.....	58
Figure 4.16 Louis Vuitton 2.....	60
Figure 4.17 Common Explicit Advertising Cues.....	64
Figure 4.18 Common Implicit Advertising Cues.....	64

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Calvin Klein 1.....	30
Table 4.2 Calvin Klein 2.....	33
Table 4.3 Coach 1.....	35
Table 4.4 Coach 2.....	37
Table 4.5 Michael Kors 1.....	39
Table 4.6 Michael Kors 2.....	41
Table 4.7 Armani Exchange 1.....	42
Table 4.8 Armani Exchange 2.....	44
Table 5 Masstige Brand Advertising Cues.....	46
Table 4.9 Gucci 1.....	47
Table 4.10 Gucci 2.....	49
Table 4.11 Dolce & Gabbana 1.....	50
Table 4.12 Dolce & Gabbana 2.....	52
Table 4.13 Chanel 1.....	54
Table 4.14 Chanel 2.....	56
Table 4.15 Louis Vuitton 1.....	58
Table 4.16 Louis Vuitton 2.....	60
Table 5.1 Luxury Brand Advertising Cues.....	62
Table 5.2 18 Identified Masstige Brand Cues.....	63
Table 5.3 19 Identified Luxury Brand Cues.....	63

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## ABSTRACT

Many consumers are drawn to the allure of prestige brands such as Calvin Klein, Michael Kors, Ralph Lauren, Victoria's Secret, to mention a few, and as a result, prestige brands have seen global financial success especially in North America, Europe and Asia (Silverstein & Fiske, 2005). These brands do not fit the luxury frame neither are they middle-range brands; they form a category of brands termed as masstige brands, a phenomenon seldom researched in marketing literature. This study explores Masstige branding, a modern, profitable business which sees the production and distribution of prestige goods with mass accessibility. There is need for research that provides an understanding of the prestigious nature of masstige brands and this dissertation hopes to fill this gap.

In order to understand the prestigious value of Masstige brands, the paper discusses Masstige brand values within the context of luxury brands, drawing similarities and differences between Masstige and luxury brand identity. The research asks: whilst masstige brands are similar with middle-range products in terms of the 'mass', what values do masstige and luxury brands share that reflect 'prestige'? Extensively, what values are exclusive to masstige (and luxury) brands? Simply put, the paper ultimately aims to answer the question: what constitutes a masstige brand?

To answer these questions, the research employed the semiotic method to analyse the advertising of eight brands, four Masstige and four luxury, identifying common and differing brand cues. The sample were randomly selected but were restricted to fashion campaigns between 2009 and 2015 with saliently encoded brand meanings. The masstige samples include Calvin Klein, Michael Kors, Coach and Armani Exchange while the selected luxury brands include Gucci, Dolce and Gabbana, Chanel and Louis Vuitton.

The analysis found that five common implicit advertising themes shared by luxury and masstige brands include exclusivity, independence, sophistication, accomplishment and pride. Four themes most common with luxury brands include authenticity, heritage, timelessness and prestige of which the last two are unique. Three themes most common with masstige brands include seasonality, allure and adventure of which seasonality is unique.

Due to the small scope of existing research on the topic, this exploratory research aims to contribute to the understanding of Masstige brands as a vital phenomenon and masstige branding as a practice. By identifying the identity values of masstige brands through this empirical research, researchers and scholars can build on the findings and further explore the phenomenon while masstige brand managers can utilize these thematic strategies in the marketing of their products. The paper begins with an introduction and presents relevant literature review on luxury and masstige brands followed by a semiotic analysis, and closes with a discussion, conclusions, implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.



## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this section is to introduce the research and its purpose. This section will provide a general overview on luxury brand identity as conceptualized in literature and introduce the focal topic of this paper, Masstige brands. It will also briefly outline research objectives, significance, methodology and the paper's outline.

### 1.1 Research Background

#### *1.1.1 Introduction to Luxury Identifiers*

Luxury comes from the Latin word 'luxus' meaning "soft or extravagant living, sumptuousness, opulence" (Dubois, Czellar, & Laurent, 2005). Luxury goods in ancient times were associated with wealth, exclusivity and power and consuming them brought excessive pleasure (Castelli, 2013, p. 827). Kapferer (1997) defines luxury as 'art applied to functional items' (p. 253). In addition, luxury goods are "goods for which the simple use or display of a particular branded product brings esteem on the owner, apart from any functional utility" (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004, p. 486). Luxury goods were handmade from the finest materials thereby attaining the characteristics of craftsmanship and quality attributed to luxury today. They are relatively costly (Ng, 1987), possess high brand awareness and global reputation (Phau & Prendergast, 2000), have high functional and symbolic values (Reddy & Terblanche, 2005), have perceived prestige (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999), and are distributed in limited quantity via specialised channels establishing exclusivity (Kapferer, 2001). All these combined contribute to excellence, brand aura and desirability (Burgelman, Antoni, & Meza, 2004). Based on these definitions, one can observe the hedonic (i.e. pleasure), social/symbolic (i.e. wealth, status, exclusivity) and functional (i.e. useability and quality) attributes of luxury. The literature review on luxury identity values identify five umbrella values derived from these studies and provides a comprehensive discussion on each. The purpose of this is not only to provide a literature review, but also to support the paper's own analysis of luxury brand advertising that observes these values.

### ***1.1.2 Defining Masstige Brands***

While there has been considerable study into luxury brands, the case is opposite for masstige brands. Masstige brands, also referred to as ‘accessible luxury’ or ‘new luxury’ evolved as a direct response to making luxury accessible to the masses. According to Truong, McColl, and Kitchen (2009), masstige brands “are often targeted to the mass and are less expensive than traditional luxury goods, which have a well-confined exclusivity in terms of both accessibility and price” (p. 376). Although this offers some sort of definition of Masstige brands, there is yet to be a widely-accepted definition of Masstige as discussion on the topic is still scarce. Moreover, different scholars have described the phenomenon with various terms including ‘masstige’, ‘accessible luxury’, ‘new luxury’ and ‘populence’.

Introduced as ‘new luxury’ in the pioneering book *Trading Up*, Silverstein and Fiske (2003a) define new luxury goods as “products and services that possess higher levels of quality, taste, and aspiration than other goods in the category but are not so expensive as to be out of reach” (p. 1). Silverstein and Fiske distinguish three forms of new luxury namely accessible super-premium goods, old luxury brand extensions, and masstige. Accessible super-premiums are priced at or near the top of their category, old luxury brand extensions are priced lower than their parent goods and masstige goods are priced lower than super-premiums. Referring to new luxury as ‘masstige’, Castelli (2013) believe that unlike luxury brands, masstige goods are “not necessarily rare or manufactured in low volume [but] they acquire the luxury label due to design, additional services or the aura created by the brand” (p. 832). Granot, Russell and Brashear-Alejandro (2013) introduce the term ‘populence’ – a mash-up of popular and opulence – defining it as new luxury that involves “the mass production and distribution of premium goods and services” (p. 33) that is ‘accessible, intimate, ubiquitous’ and centred on experiences.

Drawing similarities from all three definitions, this paper offers a holistic definition and defines masstige brands as goods that enjoy perceive prestige through their highly aspirational and technical value yet are accessible and affordable at premium prices to reach a broader target market. Unlike Silverstein and Fiske, this paper interchanges ‘new luxury’ with ‘masstige’ based on the ‘mass prestige’ appeal the three forms of new luxury share.

## 1.2 Research Objective

To address the literature gap, the research pose interrelating questions. Given that masstige brands have the dimension of ‘prestige’ akin to luxury brands, how do they communicate this image? In other words, whilst masstige brands are similar with middle-range products in terms of the ‘mass’, what values do masstige and luxury brands share that reflect ‘prestige’? Extensively, what values are exclusive to masstige (and luxury) brands? The ultimate objective of this research is to identify what constitutes a masstige brand from a thematic perspective. The dissertation sets to answer this question through a semiotic analysis of masstige brand advertising.

## 1.3 Research Methodology: Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs – verbal and non-verbal – and their significance within the environment they are communicated. The theory gained popularity in the twentieth century as linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and philosopher Charles Peirce separately began developing the construct. Saussure (1998) believed that a sign is made up of a dyadic relationship between a signifier (image) and signified (concept) while to Peirce, a triadic relationship exists between an object (i.e. idea), a sign (i.e. communication vehicle) and an interpretant (i.e. meaning) (Hoopes, 1991). Pierce suggested that a sign can be iconic (likeness to an object), indexical (cause-and-effect) or symbolic (abstract representation). Linguist Roland Barthes (1968) expands the interpretant dimension asserting that meaning can be denotative (literal meaning) and connotative (subjective meaning). In short, semiotics involves the deconstruction of meaning and the world of advertising which is encoded with signs is demonstrative of this.

Applying semiotics to advertisements requires deconstructing the text in order to examine its structure and interpretations perceived by its target audience (Richard & Nadin, 1987). Although this paper does not primarily examine the perception of the target audience of the advertisements, it does examine interpretations of advertisements from the researcher’s point of view. In addition to the point of view of the researcher, the researcher gather interpretations made on online forums, a form of Netnography, to provide rich insight. Through a semiotic analysis, the paper hopes to answer the questions: How do masstige brands communicate identity? What similarities and

contrasts exist in the identitary communication of masstige brands and luxury brands? The chosen Masstige brands include Calvin Klein, Michael Kors, Armani Exchange and Coach and the chosen luxury brands include Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Dolce and Gabbana and Chanel.

#### **1.4 Research Significance**

Masstige brands evolved as a direct response to making luxury accessible to the masses therefore cannot be treated as mass brands neither can they be labelled as luxury. While there has been considerable research on luxury brands, there has not been much research on masstige brands and its facets. This research fills this gap by exploring the image it communicates through its advertising. The inductive method of semiotics used provides an increased understanding based on real-life masstige brands and campaigns while the exploratory nature of the research provides fresh insights. The research provides insight into the way masstige brands communicate the aspect of ‘prestige’ being that it is the very thing that differentiates them from middle-range brands. From this, key identifiers drawn should inspire further research into the area for the benefit of academics and brand managers.

#### **1.5 Paper Outline**

This section has introduced the research and its purpose. The rest of the paper presents in detail a literature review of luxury brand identitary values, a review of the literature on masstige brands so far, an introduction to the semiotics methodology and sampling used, the analysis of the samples, discussion, conclusion, limitations, implications, and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 LUXURY IDENTITARY VALUES

The most common characteristics that are associated with luxury brands documented in literature include heritage, craftsmanship, rarity, hedonic value and social value. The following section explores each value as conceptualized in literature.

#### 2.1.1 Heritage: Place and Family/Founder

Heritage is a key source of value for luxury brand identity (Dion & Borraz, 2015; DeFanti, Deirdre, & Caldwell, 2014; Rees-Roberts, 2012; Carcano, Corbetta, & Minichilli, 2011; Socha, 2010; Urde, Greyser, & Balmer, 2007). A commonly-cited definition of heritage within a luxury brand context considers heritage as “a dimension of a brand’s identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols and particularly in an organizational belief that its history is important” (Urde et al., 2007, p. 5). Track record involves a demonstrable performance over time with accumulated credibility and trust. Longevity is the result of a consistent track record and of the cultivation of brand identity rooted in history. Longevity breeds timelessness which Moët Hennessy • Louis Vuitton S.E., (LVMH) CEO Bernard Arnault believes takes years even decades to build (Wetlaufer, 2001). Core values refer to consistently long-held values that inform brand positioning and the brand promise; these values guide organizational culture, actions, corporate strategic decisions, and contribute to organization’s reputation (Lloyd, 2011). Heritage is also reflected through the use of symbols that express the brand’s past. The Gucci’s equestrian motif, for example, represents and signals the brand’s equestrian background, and the green-red-green band displayed on a variety of products represents the flag of Italy, its country of origin (DeFanti et al., 2014). Finally, history rooted in heritage is important to brand identity. Building on Lowenthal’s (1998) distinction between history and heritage, Urde et al. (2007) consider history as the exploration of an opaque past and heritage as a way to make history relevant for the present and the future. Swiss luxury watch brand Patek Philippe, for example, includes “since 1839” and “You never actually own a Patek Philippe, you merely look after it for the next generation” in their communications emphasizing the historical origins and its relevance for the future in regards to brand ownership and timelessness. While such characteristics of luxury brand heritage operate

on a micro level, heritage on a macro level reflects the themes of place (e.g. country of origin or manufacture), family management or ownership, and the legacy of the founder.

### ***2.1.1.1 Place as Heritage***

Luxury products are an ‘expression of territory’ rooted in a culture (Carcano et al., 2011, p. 49), geography and time. Whether it is the town, city, region or country in which the luxury product is designed or where it is assembled (Chao, 1993), place of origin plays a significant role in communicating heritage. Dolce and Gabbana, for example, is associated with Sicily whereas Salvatore Ferragamo is associated with Florence and their brand stories reflect these associations. Furthermore, well-known luxury brands are mostly European and founded in the 18th and 19th centuries and have achieved thereby the key attribute of longevity. Place as heritage is however no longer limited to date of origin or to country or origin/manufacture, a sense of place can be manifested through retail store ambience and product information. Dion and Borraz (2015) find that luxury brands sacralize their physical stores – regarded as heritage stores – by creating a mythical atmosphere grounded in identity and history. The resulting brand aura within these stores reinforces the brand’s heritage. Luxury brands also communicate heritage through iconic product information that signifies time of origin, place of origin and brand history. Examples include Chanel’s iconic 2.55 quilted Chanel bag named after its date of release (February, 1955), Cartier’s exclusive collection of watches called ‘13’ reflecting the brand house’s location 13 Rue de la Paix, Louis Vuitton’s classic Alma bag named after the Parisian Place de L’Alma square where Avenue Montaigne meets the River Seine, Gucci’s iconic Stirrup Bag in the shape of a stirrup which signifies the brand’s equestrian heritage.

While place may be physical or geographic, place may also be connected ideologically to a historical moment in time. Dior, for example, used the photograph of one of the most emblematic faces of European cinema, Alain Delon, to promote the classic Dior Homme fragrance. The photograph was taken in 1966 and chosen deliberately to mark the year of the fragrance’s creation and the rise of glamorous consumerism in Europe. Blomback and Brunninge (2013) analyse this campaign within the context of heritage and point out the congruent perception of Delon and Dior as timeless subjects and the

nostalgic glimpse consumers are invited to take upon reading the text. Blomback and Brunninge (2013) suggest that Dior uses this visual storytelling simultaneously to communicate the brand's role in the post-war consumer boom that gave birth to luxury fashion. By establishing 'historical resonance', consumers engage emotionally with the brand through its back story. The use of Alain Delon is both a celebrity endorsement strategy and a symbolism strategy that connects the brand with a historic time and place, thereby making historical facts relevant to the establishment of brand heritage. A similar example is Gucci's iconic floral print designed in 1966 initially for the style and cinema icon Grace Kelly, the Princess Grace of Monaco, and now used on a variety of Gucci products to signify this brand's history (DeFanti et al., p. 48).

### ***2.1.1.2 Family and Founder as a Source of Heritage***

Millward Brown report that 80% of the top 10 luxury brands in 2010 are owned or managed by a family (Carcano et al., 2011). Such ownership informs competitive strategies, company operations, and brand identity (Blomback and Brunninge, 2013) whereby brands incorporate the history of family into brand identity. In addition to the family association, there may be a focus on the founder him/herself whereby the founder's legacy becomes the cornerstone of the brand and its product. Many well-known luxury brands are named after their founders and collections may be founder-inspired. As a response to the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 that saw consumers withdraw from luxury spending, Sidney Toledano, CEO of Christian Dior, capitalized on founder-heritage prompting designer John Galliano to create pieces that reflected heavily the legacy of Christian Dior himself (Socha, 2010). Gucci products exude elegance akin to founder Guccio Gucci whose son recollects him as "a man of great taste [whose] imprint was on every item he sold" (Fordren, 2001, p. 11). Another classic example of founder legacy on brand identity is Chanel. *Inside CHANEL* is a series of visual stories uploaded onto the Chanel web platforms that link the story of founder Chanel with the brand, and hereby accentuating the brand heritage. Chanel's rhetorical construction of history through brand storytelling convey legitimacy and identity and informs future strategic directions (Suddab, Foster, & Trank, 2010).

In conclusion, as Dior CEO Sidney Toledano confirms, brand meaning in the luxury sector is inherent in heritage insofar as the products exist across time and carries

authentic stories (Socha, 2010). Heritage imbues the brand with a form of legitimacy thereby becoming a source of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1985) acquired on the basis of prestige or recognition (Calhoun, 2002). Executives discover that amidst an increase in counterfeit products in China, customers appreciate luxury brand stories and perceive brands with heritage to be authentic and of high quality (Socha, 2010). Thus, family or founder values and traditions, and culture and a sense of place reflect brand values that bestow authenticity, legitimacy, credibility and perceived timelessness on a luxury brand.

### **2.1.2 Craftsmanship: Product Quality, Artisanship and Premium Pricing**

The nineteenth century saw luxury as the product of great craftsmen (Berthon, Pitt, Parent, & Berthon, 2009), a view that is still held today. Craftsmanship supports a luxury brand's artisan roots (Millward Brown, 2015) through product design crafted by specialized expertise. Craftsmanship ensures that the luxury good is of the highest quality through the use of raw ingredients and quality materials. Product quality refers to product performance and physical aesthetics (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

Performance includes functionality, reliability and durability and expectations of superior technical performance. The physical characteristics of luxury brands reflect artisanship, that is, an artistry of product style and design unique to the brand. Luxury is often described as art applied to functional items signifying good taste (Kapferer, 1997, p. 253). Art may signal affluence (Berger, 1972); art "belongs to the good life; it is a part of the furnishings which the world gives to the rich and the beautiful" (p. 135). As with works of art, "luxury brands tap into the myths and icons of culture, and promise the consumer access to transcendent experiences such as beauty, limitless wealth, and immortality" (Oswald, 2010, p. 416). Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2012 employ the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) which requires participants to present a visual image that represents a luxury brand. One participant, for example, likened a luxury brand to the Mona Lisa representing 'the artistic quality of haute couture' and the artist/designer; she referred to haute couture as 'moving art' (p. 288). In addition to these functions of luxury as art, art often inspire luxury brand imagery – especially in advertising – wherein brands use artistic methods or histories in ways that are relevant to the brand. Another way luxury brands is likened to art is



through limited editions of luxury collections that are sometimes signed by the designer like original works of art (Catry, 2003, p. 13).

Some luxury brands often boast specific product traits, innovation and manufacturing techniques passed down generations and such product identifiers contribute to the brand's reputation (Carcano et al., 2011, p. 50). A Leo Cut, for instance, is a high-quality diamond cut that contains 68 facets as opposed to the traditional 58 facets and can only be recognized by connoisseurs; such connoisseurship establishes uniqueness (Castelli, 2013, p. 839). Christian Dior prides itself in creating products of great functionality, Louis Vuitton in travel trucks in a classic style and which that withstand long journeys, Rolls-Royce in its outstanding performance and quality of materials (Berthon et al., 2009, p. 48), Hermes and Cartier in product excellence, uniqueness and 'beauty of the object' (Kapferer, 1998). The value of craftsmanship to the luxury concept is even more evident in the iconicity of certain products that are deemed timeless, an example of this is Gucci. The Gucci Artisan Corner is a retail event that displays the brand's Florentine leather goods craftsmanship. For this event, Gucci artisans travel worldwide to selected stores to run workshops where they assemble and produce iconic handbags such as the Bamboo, New Jackie, New Pelham and G Wave (Gucci.com, 2015). According to Gucci:

“This initiative offers a unique insight into Gucci's time honoured traditions as clients can witness first-hand the superb craftsmanship involved in producing every item in Gucci's leather goods collection: artisans hand-stitch handles, assemble bamboo handles, prepare leather strips for woven stitching and hand emboss customer's initials during the events” (Gucci.com, 2015).

The Gucci Artisan Corner initiative functions to support Gucci brand attributes of quality, exclusivity and innovativeness appropriate to the luxury concept; the event draws attention to excellence (DeFanti, Deirdre, & Caldwell, 2014). One aspect of the event is the engraving of a customer's initials on the finished product which serves to establish the notion that craftsmanship also promotes uniqueness through customization: high-end diamonds, for example, are uniquely crafted, Burberry personalizes perfume by inscribing the user's initials on the bottle (Millward Brown, 2015)..

The exclusivity and superiority of luxury brands in the domain of craftsmanship enables a luxury brand to command a premium price for its products. As Vigneron and Johnson (1999) note, premium pricing increases quality perception and consequently perceptions of prestige. Antoni, Burgelman and Meza (2004) confirm that consumers are prepared to pay a premium price for superior product quality which they identify as the key defining characteristic of luxury. While premium pricing is not restricted to luxury brands (Dubois and Czellar, 2002), it is one of the defining characteristics of a luxury brand.

In conclusion, whether it is the aesthetics of Hermes' Birkin bag and Montblanc's Meisterstück fountain pen (Carcano et al., 2011), Gucci's use of exotic hides from crocodile, python and ostrich for fabrics (DeFanti et al., 2014), or the hand-crafted Rolex Sea-dweller that works 1,220 meters underwater (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), technical superiority is a necessary condition of luxury goods. Product quality is achieved through "technology, engineering, design, sophistication and craftsmanship" (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004, p. 491). Product quality justifies the premium pricing attached to luxury goods. Altogether, craftsmanship and high pricing remain two crucial identity values of luxury promoting uniqueness, prestige, and exclusivity.

### **2.1.3 Rarity: Product, Distribution, Promotion**

Rarity in the world of luxury relates to scarcity and exclusivity in relation to product components, availability, distribution and promotion. Luxury consumption is antecedent to mass consumption; luxury brands, therefore, strive to remain exclusive by addressing the needs of an elite market. Catry (2003) suggests that "like magicians, the luxury incumbents seek to perform an illusion where actual scarcity is replaced by a perceived rarity" (p. 11). Catry's (2003) intensive discussion on the principle of rarity argues that luxury brands generate perceived rarity through 'artificial shortages, limited series, marketing channels [and fewer] store locations' (p. 11). Based on this, Catry establishes four forms of rarity: natural rarity, techno-rarity, limited editions, and information-based rarity. Natural rarity implies a controlled availability of 'raw ingredients, components or production capacity' (p. 11), techno-rarity refers to a 'continuous investment in innovative product features' (p. 12), limited editions indicate the production of 'special series' and 'one-to-one approaches' (p. 13) while information-based rarity requires

brands to communicate through premium media channels and exclusive events. Vogue and Harper's Bazaar magazines, for instance, frequently feature luxury brand advertising. In addition to these and in line with the discussion on craftsmanship, product expertise is exclusive and therefore can be perceived as rare. In conclusion, rarity commands prestige and through rarity, luxury brands remain exclusive and maintain their luxury status.

#### **2.1.4 Hedonic/Experiential Value and Social/Symbolic Value**

The characteristics of luxury discussed so far (heritage, craftsmanship, premium pricing, and rarity) has focused on tangible characteristics. Luxury, however, extends beyond the material towards the individual and the social (Berthon, Pitt, Parent & Berthon, 2009). This section describes the individual aspect; the hedonic/experiential characteristic of luxury and the social/symbolic identity value (Freire, 2014) of luxury.

##### *2.1.4.1 Personal Value*

Personal value is a crucial component of luxury goods wherein consumers purchase these goods for experiences of 'fun, feelings, pleasure, excitement, and fantasy' (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009, p. 610). 'Experience' and 'personal' are the key words here. Roper, Caruana, Medway and Murphy (2013) performed a discourse analysis of luxury from a consumer perspective and find that responses are highly subjective; that is, a consumer's perception of luxury consumption arises from a personal standing. In addition, 'experiencing, being and doing' (p. 387) are common themes reflected in the discourse. Roper, Caruana, Medway and Murphy (2013) go as far as to define luxury as not just a physical product but as an experience. As one of the respondents, Ruth, imagines, "It was an incredible evening, and not something you can experience all the time, wrapped by returning to a lovely hotel . . . that's luxury. Not things you can buy" (p. 387). Furthermore, hedonic gratification distinguishes value brands from luxury brands wherein the former highlights product quality and functionality in relation to the price paid and the latter is centred on the psychological and sensory gratification provided regardless of price (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009, p. 610).

Consumers often associate luxury with a dream, or a dream world (Dubois & Paternault, 1995), and when discussing luxury goods use hedonic terms such as 'opulent', 'pleasing

to the touch and eye’ and designed to ‘indulge and delight’ (Tynan et al., 2010, p. 1160). Hedonism in luxury involves the sensual and the magical (Kapferer, 1998) that ‘makes life beautiful’ (Dubois, Laurent, & Czellar, 2001). It is the ‘dream’ one hopes to experience through consumption (Godey, Pederzoli, Aiello, Donvito, Wiedmann & Hennigs, 2013). For example, BMW promises to provide ‘sheer driving pleasure’ (Tynan et al., 2010); Gucci values focus on sensuality thereby marketing its products as sensory gratifiers (Kapferer, 1998); some Hermes’ advertising is dream-like and feature character storytelling experiences (Kim, Lloyd, & Cervellon, 2015). In line with brand experiences, luxury goods may also be experienced within a co-creation space that involves dialogue with the firm, the industry, with brand ambassadors and with the brand community (Tynan et al., 2010), providing “exclusivity, recognition, access to privileged information and prestige” (p. 1161) sought in luxury consumption.

#### *2.1.4.2 Social Value*

Defining the social value of luxury, Wiedman, Hennigs and Siebels (2009) argue that social value is the “perceived utility individuals acquire with products or services recognized within their own social group(s)” (p. 628). Along the social dimension, luxury goods bestow perceived status on the conspicuous-driven consumer. A brand’s exclusivity and rarity boosts perceived uniqueness whereby consumers can demonstrate personal taste, stand out, or avoid similar consumption (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004, p. 490). Veblen’s (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption is often used to explain the social value of luxury. Veblen argues that the motivation behind consuming luxury goods conspicuously is to signal one’s wealth, power and status to others. The purpose of conspicuous consumption is to either distinguish oneself from the masses, that is, the ‘snob effect’ or to belong to aspire to a higher class, which has been termed the ‘bandwagon effect’ (Leibenstein, 1950). Conspicuous consumption facilitates a ‘social display of superiority’ (Roper, Caruana, Medway, & Murphy, 2013). Furthermore, luxury goods offer a sense of an extended self (Belk, 1988) in that they help consumers to enhance their self-concept, replicate stereotypes of affluence and serve as a symbolic marker of group membership (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Luxury is associated with an affluent lifestyle, hence, luxury brand consumption is a signifier of an affluent lifestyle. The value of the public consumption of luxury lies in its quality, its sophistication and craftsmanship, demonstrating taste and wealth.

In conclusion, luxury goods construct an evolved narrative, myth, or dream-world wherein they provides a signal to others and to oneself. To drive a Ferrari, for instance, signals wealth at the same time provides an experience that reinforces the consumer's self-image (Berthon et al., 2009, p. 48). A holistic conclusion to these two intangible values of luxury is reflected in Vigneron and Johnson's (2004) Brand Luxury Index (BLI). The BLI introduces five dimensions divided into the personal (perceived extended self and perceived hedonism) and the social (perceived conspicuousness, perceived uniqueness, perceived quality). On a personal level, luxury consumption provides emotional benefits in the form of pleasure and satisfaction; on a social level, luxury consumption gratifies the need for status and differentiation/belonging.

### **General Conclusion**

This literature review has discussed the five umbrella facets of luxury which can be identified across two dimensions - firstly, brand attributes that includes heritage, craftsmanship and exclusivity, and secondly, brand meaning that includes the attributes of hedonic/experiential and social/symbolic. A substantial amount of work has been dedicated to constructing frameworks that group these luxury identity values but there is yet to be an overarching framework. Exploring luxury values from the consumer's perspective, Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009) identified four dimensions: the financial costs of luxury products; functional attributes including quality, uniqueness, usability, reliability and durability; individual gratification in terms of the materialistic values of hedonism and self-identity, and social dimensions that include conspicuousness and perceived prestige. Tynan, McKechnie and Chhuon's (2010) examination of three real-life luxury brands in dissimilar product categories identified the outer-directed and self-directed values of luxury. Outer-directed values included the utilitarian (i.e. product excellence and craftsmanship) and the symbolic/expressive (i.e. conspicuousness, status, uniqueness); inner-directed values included the experiential/hedonic, relational (i.e. brand community and brand relationship), and cost/sacrifice (rarity, exclusivity). Berthon, Parent and Berthon (2009) introduced a three-dimension model that asks what the brand means to the individual (experiential), what the brand means to others (symbolic) and what physical attributes and performance is delivered by the brand (functional).

In an attempt to integrate these various findings, one can conclude that luxury goods, in addition to possessing functional attributes, are personal and social (Godey et al., 2013). Specifically, on a functional level, luxury goods possess high quality aesthetics and performance based on heritage; on a personal level, luxury goods provide hedonic gratification; and on a social level, luxury goods bestow prestige on the consumer or purchaser through high cost, exclusivity, and prestige. A holistic definition therefore provides that luxury brands be “high quality, expensive and non-essential products and services that appear to be rare, exclusive, prestigious and authentic and offer high levels of symbolic and emotional/hedonic values through customer experiences” (Tynan et al., 2010, p. 1158). Additionally, most luxury brands are widely recognised to possess a powerful and positive reputation on a global level, and to convey perceived world-class excellence (Brun & Castelli, 2013).

## **2.2 ON MASSTIGE BRANDS**

Luxury brand houses marketed principally to niche markets until the late twentieth century when distribution channels began to open to wider affluent markets (Castelli, 2013). The marketing strategy became to democratize luxury by attending to the aspirational middle-market who desire the benefits of luxury but at lower cost. This phenomenon is referred to as Masstige. Masstige brands, an abbreviated form of mass prestige, evolved as a direct response to making luxury goods accessible to the masses. In the United States, the purchase of masstige brands and products reached an estimated \$400 billion in 2003 and is expected to reach \$1 trillion by the end of the decade (Silverstein & Fiske, 2005). Silverstein and Fiske attribute the global success of this phenomenon especially in North American, European and Asian markets to various societal and economic factors including higher disposable incomes, rising home equity, retailer discounts which contribute to savings, and an increase in the number of working families, flexible family structures, higher divorce rates, higher levels of taste, and greater emotional awareness. As the middle-market becomes more affluent, individuals are able to purchase products at premium prices ranging from home appliances to food and alcohol brands; clothing to toy brands; travel to healthcare brands.

Taking new luxury brands Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren as case studies, Truong, McColl and Kitchen (2009) attempted to further clarify new luxury brand positioning in relation to old luxury and middle-range brands. Truong et al. (2009) calculate the average prices of these three brands and find that old luxury brands cost 3.10 times more than new luxury brands, while new luxury brands are 2.20 times more expensive than middle-range brands. The authors then measured their average level of perceived prestige and discovered that consumers found old and new luxury brands to be relatively close on the scale (1.14) whilst new luxury was much more prestigious than middle-range brands (1.74). Therefore, while traditional luxury goods maintain prestige through exclusivity and high prices, masstige goods are able to pursue a mass targeting strategy with limited accessibility and with relatively lower pricing and still maintain brand prestige.

Extensively, Castelli (2013) distinguishes new luxury into three forms namely: accessible super-premium goods, old luxury brand extensions, and masstige. Accessible super-premiums are priced higher than masstige goods while old luxury brand extensions are priced lower than their parent goods. Silverstein and Fiske (2003a) hold that with masstige brands, consumers are more interested in the image associated with them rather than the product itself, as opposed to luxury brands. This phenomenon then “refers to goods that are not necessarily rare or manufactured in low volume; these goods acquire the luxury label due to design, additional services or the aura created by the brand” (Castelli, 2013, p. 832). Whilst there is current work on distinguishing the forms of new luxury, there is yet to be work on identity values of masstige brands as there is for luxury brands. This paper thus attempts to fill this gap by presenting original research that can help inform and shape masstige branding.

As with luxury brands, masstige consumers purchase for functional, symbolic and hedonic gratifications. Silverstein and Fiske (2005) argue that new luxury brand purchases are based on three essential components namely assurance of quality (technical), superior performance (functional) and emotional appeal (emotional). They refer to this as the ‘ladder of benefits’ wherein all three influence each other chronologically. In terms of the technical and functional, they posit that new luxury consumers “appreciate quality, technological innovation, and an aura of authenticity” (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003, p. 56). Exploring the emotional component, Truong et al. (2009) assert that whereas old luxury goods express status, class and exclusivity, new

luxury goods lean strongly towards emotional appeal (Silverstein & Fiske, 2005). Unlike with the older luxury brands, consumers are drawn towards the image and emotional benefits associated with the masstige brand rather than the product itself. This insight led to an extensive study which identified four emotional motivations that influence the masstige purchase behaviour of participants. Emotional motivations include Taking Care of Me (well-being, beauty and youthfulness, renewal and reward, and time for myself); Connecting (attractiveness, affiliation, membership); Questing (Adventure, learning, play); and Individual Style (self-expressing, self-branding, signalling). The first motivation involves self-indulgence as a reward for hard work or as a goal to improve well-being. Connecting sees new luxury goods as tools of attraction that signals taste, values and qualities to others in a way that is appealing. In addition, new luxury consumption allow consumers to align themselves with groups that share similar or aspirational values and interests. Questing, implies new luxury consumers seeking goods and services that will provide adventure and excitement. The last motivation involves the expression of individuality and personal achievements through style. Silverstein and Fiske (2005) conclude that new luxury “generally appeal to a set of values that may be shared by people at many income levels and in many walks of life” (p. 57), whereas old luxury carry primarily elitist values.

Building on these ideas, Granot, Russell and Brashear-Alejandro (2013) conducted consumer-based exploratory research into the appeal of masstige (or populent) brands which resulted in a purchase. From the consumer’s point of view, the seven appeals of populent brands include quality, style, selective conspicuousness, signalling, self-catering, exploring, and inconspicuous consumption. While quality reflects the technical expectations of masstige goods, the rest of these appeals reflects the emotional dimensions identified in Silverstein and Fiske’s study. With style, for instance, participants identified that consuming masstige goods gratify their desire to be different from others as it helps to express their personal taste and achievements and appear ‘hip’, ‘stylish’ and ‘unique’ (p. 37). Signalling and Inconspicuous Consumption reflects the Connecting dimension whereby masstige goods are utilized as tools to form relationships, to impress others and to belong through bandwagon consumption. Selective Conspicuousness and Self-catering reflect the ‘Taking Care of Me’ dimension whereby participants purchase masstige goods for special occasions or to treat themselves. Finally, participants report that masstige goods provide a sense of adventure and liberation when seeking new consumption experiences (p. 39) echoing the Questing



dimension. These observations led the authors to conclude that new luxury serves two primary purposes for consumers: to provide an opportunity to indulge in personal pleasure (luxury for self) and to demonstrate success (luxury for others). Masstige brands, therefore, “provide a language and nonverbal method of self-expression and social dialogue” (p. 38).

Truong et al. (2009) suggest that to achieve success with masstige brands marketers must invest substantial resources into creating aspirations to indulge in personal pleasure and to demonstrate success. Advertising is one of the most important resources needed to achieve success with masstige brands. This paper aims to analyse masstige brand advertising and observe common cues used to communicate prestige which in turn create an aspirational brand. The goal is to identify the identity values of masstige brands. The paper ultimately aims to contribute to the understanding of masstige brands as a vital phenomenon and masstige branding as a practice. It is important to note that the luxury brand literature distinguishes between ‘emotional’ and ‘symbolic’ values (the ‘emotional’ refers to the personal/hedonic and the symbolic refers to the social/status-bestowing) while the masstige literature does not acknowledge this difference.

## CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHOD

### 3.1 Method of Analysis: Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs which involves investigating the meanings an object communicates based on the environment in which it is communicated and the audience to which it is communicated. The theory of semiotics gained popularity in the 20th century as linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and philosopher Charles Peirce began, separately, to develop the construct. Saussure (1998) believed that a sign is made up of a dyadic relationship between a signifier (image) and signified (concept) while for Peirce, a triadic relationship exists between an object (i.e. idea), a sign (i.e. communication vehicle) and an interpretant (i.e. meaning) (Hoopes, 1991). Peirce suggested that a sign can be iconic (likeness to an object for instance, for example an image of a car), indexical (cause-and-effect relationship as in the tyre tracks) or symbolic (abstract representation such as the car's brand logo). Linguist Roland Barthes (1968) expands the interpretant dimension asserting that meaning can be denotative (literal meaning) and connotative (subjective meaning). Although, he later contested this view proposing that denotations may also function as connotations as meanings may shift depending on their environment; it is difficult, therefore, in certain circumstances to separate the literal from the ideological (Barthes 1977).

Semiotic analysis in advertising examines what visual, aural, or textual cues are used to represent the product or brand, to what audience and with what purpose (Zakia & Nadin, 1987). It requires a deconstruction of codes contained within these cues in order to identify surface-level literal meanings and underlying symbolic meanings. For instance, luxury advertising often contains artistic elements which Berger (1972) holds to be a sign of affluence. Surrealism as an art form, for instance, combines highly realistic imagery with reality-defying content (Messaris, 1997) and is thought to have an 'elite appeal' and so have influenced luxury product advertising (Page, 2006). The viewer (i.e. interpretant) is invited to activate meaning from the juxtapositions encouraging them to experience the mythical through luxury consumption. Consumers who hold this view of art may interpret the text within this context, viewing the product as a work of art which asserts the luxurious identity of the brand. Freire (2014) performed a semiotic analysis of a Hermes and Louis Vuitton advertisements, examining particularly the implicit meaning of the verbal and visual rhetoric contained

within. She explored the aspects that communicate the characteristics of luxury she identified as ‘identitary values’, concluding that luxury advertising strengthens identitary narratives and its power “lie in the art of combining synergistically, in a spatio-temporal fiction, different symbols and semes to achieve their individual and collective reinforcement, within a coherent semantic context” (p. 2674). In other words, coding for luxury advertising is made from pre-conceived values related to luxury brands and these values are reflected through the cues that communicate them.

So, whilst luxury advertising communicates its identity by transcending literal meanings through implicit imagery, how do masstige brands communicate identity? What similarities and contrasts exist in the identitary communication of masstige brands and luxury brands? Furthermore, whilst luxury brands aim to fulfil higher order needs such as esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1954), what needs do masstige brand advertising reflect and hope to fulfil? To answer these questions, this paper carries out a semiotic analysis of two advertisements from different campaigns by four masstige and four luxury brands, totalling sixteen advertisements. The analysis identifies the objects in each advertisement, their interpretations on a denotative and connotative level, and the resulting implicit and explicit values communicated. Implicit values refer to underlying themes contained within the advertisements while explicit values refer to the literal reading of the underlying themes. Following this, the paper combines identified implicit and explicit values under masstige and luxury brands then identifies the number of times each value is mentioned to determine the most common values. This is an attempt to draw empirical conclusions - not generalizations – regarding those key symbolic values that are crucial to masstige brand identity. In other words, whilst masstige brands are similar to middle-range products in terms of the ‘mass’ (i.e. accessibility), the analysis hopes to identify those values that make masstige brands similar to luxury products, and to create prestige and ultimately those values that are exclusive to masstige brands.

To support the semiotic analysis, the author will gather interpretations of the studied advertisements made by online commentators to enrich the data and to widen the author’s perspective. This is a form of Netnography, the marketing research technique that observes and analyses consumer interaction on online forums (Kozinets, 2002). Interpretations were gathered from the following sites: [www.searchingforstyle.com](http://www.searchingforstyle.com) (Blog), [www.mtv.com](http://www.mtv.com) (News site), [www.thefashionspot.com](http://www.thefashionspot.com) (Forum),

[www.fashiongonerogue.com](http://www.fashiongonerogue.com) (Blog), [www.bragmybag.com](http://www.bragmybag.com) (Blog), [www.styleite.com](http://www.styleite.com) (Blog), [www.ilvoelv.com](http://www.ilvoelv.com) (Blog), [www.purseblog.com](http://www.purseblog.com) (Blog). The use of this research method in the paper provides readings outside of the researcher's own interpretations and offers a glimpse into real-life keywords used to interpret the studied texts (i.e. advertisements). The interpretations drawn from online sources will be integrated with the author's semiotic analysis.

### **3.2 Sample**

To limit the scope of this research, the author has researched within the domain of fashion brands. The selected masstige brands are Calvin Klein, Michael Kors, Coach, and Armani Exchange and the selected luxury brands are Gucci, Dolce and Gabbana, Chanel and Louis Vuitton. To choose the campaigns for analysis, the researcher chose campaigns within the past six years to maintain relevancy. The samples were chosen based the idea that masstige brand price strategy fall between middle range brands and luxury brands (Truong et al. 2009). The researcher compared satchels by brands from the three groups to determine pricing strategy (see Figure 3 below). Details were sourced from brand websites and online stores. For the purposes of semiotics, the researcher selected campaigns with saliently encoded brand meanings.

### MIDDLE RANGE ITEMS



Aldo  
*Caltabellotta Satchel*  
13'' x 9.9''  
\$55 USD



Nine West  
*Stepping Forward Satchel*  
15'' x 9.5''  
\$89 USD



Steve Madden  
*Frisky Faux Satchel*  
13'' x 12.5''  
\$108 USD



Jessica Simpson  
*Allison Satchel*  
12.5'' x 11''  
\$98 USD

### MASSTIGE ITEMS



Calvin Klein  
*Saffiano Satchel*  
14'' x 9.5''  
\$228 USD



Michael Kors  
*Sutton Saffiano Satchel*  
13'' x 9''  
\$328 USD



Coach  
*Nolita Satchel*  
8'' x 6''  
\$295 USD



Armani Exchange  
*Leather Lizard Satchel*  
12'' x 8''  
\$300 USD

### LUXURY ITEMS



Gucci  
*Supreme Canvas*  
10'' x 15''  
\$1,530 USD



Dolce & Gabbana  
*Sicily Satchel*  
10'' x 8.25''  
\$2,495 USD



Chanel  
*Lambskin Bowling Bag*  
10.6'' x 5.5''  
\$5,200 USD



Louis Vuitton  
*Retiro Handle top*  
10'' x 7''  
\$2,110 USD

Figure 3

## CHAPTER 4 – DATA ANALYSIS



Calvin Klein 1: features Lara Stone and Tyson Ballou shot by Mert & Marcus for AW 2012

**Figure 4.1**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Woman vs Man</b> <b>(woman with an</b> <b>‘O-face’ in a</b> <b>seductive pose is</b> <b>on the ground</b> <b>positioned</b> <b>between the</b> <b>man’s legs while</b> <b>the man sits at</b> <b>the edge of the</b> <b>car)</b>	<p>A woman lying on the ground with eyes closed in a sensual trance has become a motif in Calvin Klein print adverts.</p> <p>According to Page (2006), “lowering oneself physically connotes subordination and dependency...floors suggest less clean, less pure, less exalted” (p. 100). In this advert, the woman lays on the floor surrendering to her sexual desires. O-face is a colloquial term that stands for ‘orgasmic face’; here, it reinforces self-indulgence. Her bare legs are raised signifying a sexual invitation. She points her right shoe towards the man’s phallic area becoming a phallic symbol that signifies sexual indulgence. She is not dependent on the man’s full presence as she</p>	<p>Self-indulgence</p> <p>Sexuality</p>	<p>Pleasure</p> <p>Allure</p>

	gets satisfaction from Calvin Klein clothing. This encapsulates the popular brand slogan: 'Nothing comes between me and my Calvins'.		
<b>Black vehicle (at a halt in an unknown location)</b>	The vehicle is situated in an unknown location adding a level of mystery to the advert. Vehicle signifies a journey or transportation mirroring the woman being transported to a sensual state of mind. The car is visible in other photos of the campaign and appears to be a classic vintage car.	Classic Travel Covert	Authenticity Adventure Exclusivity
<b>Colour (Black-and-white image)</b>	Semiotician Roland Barthes hold black and white to be a status of authenticity (as cited in Grainge, 1999). Black and white is commonly synonymous to 'classic' or as Grainge concluded from his analysis of black and white imagery in TIME magazine, it can signify an authentic past or nostalgia for the present. Pae (1989) also posit that the monochrome is 'eye-catching', 'nostalgic' and offers a 'shift from reality'. Black and white specifically in this advert serves a dual purpose: it aligns classiness and authenticity with the Calvin Klein brand whilst representing the minimalistic collection on offer. A commentator online expressed that the advert gives a faux Helmut Newton vibe – Newton is a photographer famous for his provocative black-and-white photography.	Classic	Authenticity
<b>Leaves</b>	Fallen leaves are indexical of Autumn signifying the Fall collection in this advert. Fallen leaves is often a symbol of death and change. A commentator online posit that fallen leaves for her signifies a loss of	Autumn Sexuality	Seasonality Allure

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innocence, particularly sexual innocence. This echoes the use of leaves by the biblical Adam to cover his nakedness – his own loss of innocence. This interpretation can be applied to the current advert within the context of sexuality and loss of purity.

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<b>Style</b>	The woman wears a black structured top, leather skirt, black belt and croc heels; the man wears suit pants with leather croc oxford shoes. The style represents the smart and independent career individuals the advert aims to target.	Professionalism Style	Career Success Sophistication
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**Table 4.1**





Calvin Klein 2: features Edita Vilkeviciute and Tyson Ballou shot by Mario Sorrenti for SS 2014

**Figure 4.2**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Structured building with stairs against sky backdrop</b>	The concrete building has a modern design and its sharp, structured edges elude power. The sky represents a touch of nature and being high up signifies accomplishment. It is limitless and represents things beyond our experiences. Stairs carry similar symbolic interpretation. Stairs in Greek temples were historically scaled for the gods, rather than humans (Campbell & Tutton, 2014, p. 21). In film, party guests of a high standing usually descend from grand stairs to join the common people. For instance, in <i>Titanic</i> , Jack is introduced to the upper class by climbing the stairs that bridged the gap between the lower and upper social stratification. In Hitchcock films,	Covert Wealth	Exclusivity Accomplishment

	stairs is often used for dramatic effect to represent ascent versus descent, the known versus the unknown. Thus in this advert, the stairs against the backdrop of the sky in an exclusive location signify elevation/accomplishment and exclusivity.		
<b>Couple pose in a lower-angle shot (woman looks into the camera while man looks ahead)</b>	In film, lower-angle shots bestow power and intimidation. The woman and the man are arm-in-arm and with this shot, they symbolize a 'power couple'. Their energetic posture and facial expressions express independence, confidence, and masculinity/femininity.	Confidence	Pride
<b>Sunshine</b>	Sunshine is symbolic of happiness, love and the absence of darkness as portrayed in literary works such as Hawthorne's <i>The Scarlett Letter</i> and Shakespeare's <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> and in paintings such as Vincent van Gogh's landscapes. In this advert, the couple seem fulfilled which is a cause for happiness. A more relevant interpretation, however, is the demonstration of the Summer collection as sunshine is indexical of Summer.	Summer	Seasonality
<b>Style (man with sleek hair, black tee and blue jeans; woman with black tee, black skirt and white jacket)</b>	The woman and man are dressed in smart and minimal casual attire. Black tees with blue jeans is a classic casual wear. The movie-star old Hollywood slicked-back hairstyle the man is wearing signify sophistication, elitism and masculinity.	Classic Style	Authenticity Sophistication

Table 4.2



Coach 1: titled 'Cinematic Americana' featuring Binx Walton, Dylan Xue, Grace Hartzel, Julia Bergshoeff, Lexi Boling, Molly Bair, and Valery Kaufman shot by Steven Miesel for SS 2015

Figure 4.3

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>American suburban neighbourhood</b>	Placing the models against the backdrop of an American suburban neighbourhood connects the target market and the brand to a place – America. The creative director for this campaign, Stuart Vevers, intended to evoke 'a sense of everydayness'.	Everydayness Place/ Americanness	Personal Heritage
<b>New York's Empire State Building background</b>	The iconic Empire State Building associated with the main photograph connects the brand to its place of origin – New York.	Place/ Americanness	Heritage
<b>The gang of girls (with man in the background)</b>	They all strike similar poses evoking confidence. They stand in agreement evoking sisterhood. The sisterhood indicates exclusivity because they represent a subculture that is anti-mainstream wherein they share a common visual cue – fashion.	Sisterhood Confidence Individuality Covert	Affiliation Pride Independence Exclusivity

<b>Vintage car</b>	Vevers holds that the collection was inspired by vintage <i>road-trip</i> cinema. Vintage car further evokes the sense of place and nostalgia.	Classic Travel	Authenticity Adventure
<b>Rainy, wet season</b>	Rain in this advert signifies the Spring collection. In addition, Vevers notes that it makes the collection appear ‘dreamlike’ thus desirable. Rain also emphasize the group’s youthfulness.	Spring Youthfulness	Seasonality Renewal
<b>Colour - Vintage</b>	According to Grainge (2000), nostalgia serves as a “socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity... [it represents] a yearning... a form of idealized remembrance... of longing or loss” (p. 28). Thus in this advert, vintage evoke nostalgia, a longing to belong. It communicates heritage, Americanism and an authentic past. The warm tones also symbolize the warm weathers before sundown in Summer/Spring.	Classic	Authenticity
<b>Style (fur, coats, warm colours, similar fashion and hair styles, handbag)</b>	Fur signifies wealth. The cross-over bag is a motif in Coach advertising. The style is offbeat suggesting unconventional culture. Vevers notes the goal of reflecting the ‘West Coast subcultures of music, skate and surf’ ( <i>Coach</i> , 2015). The Coach bag is shared accessory iconic of the sisterhood.	Wealth Sisterhood	Accomplishment Affiliation

Table 4.3



Coach 2: titled 'Coach Dreamers' featuring Zoe Kravitz shot by Mikael Jansson for AW 2014

**Figure 4.4**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Zoe Kravitz (mid-shot)</b>	Actress, singer and model Zoe Kravitz is a young Hollywood talent with a cool, bold and edgy persona. This is reflected in her personal style and music. She fronts the electropop band Lolawolf and is the daughter of famous singer-songwriter Lenny Kravitz. The creative director intended for the campaign to reflect 'independent spirits' who communicate "cool, effortless ease, optimism and a sense of spontaneous freedom" (Chan, 2014). This is evident through her happy and optimistic demeanour as well as real-life persona. This photograph is a mid-shot and seems personal.	Confidence Individuality Everydayness Americanness	Pride Independence Personal Heritage
<b>Colour – black and white</b>	The black and white monochrome in this advert signifies simplicity and amplifies the core ideas mentioned in the Calvin Klein adverts above.	Classic	Authenticity

<b>Rain</b>	Rain can be perceived as nourishing, therapeutic or indicate a re-birth. The iconic scene in <i>Singin' In The Rain</i> sees Gene Kelly's character sing and dance in the rain in celebration of new opportunities. Water signifies a baptism and hope for things to come and in this scene, so does the rain. Zoe Kravitz's smile and optimism could similarly signify a renewal or the hope to 'make it through the rain'. Hence, the rain provides a positive interpretation of the shot.	Youthfulness	Renewal
<b>Style (U.S.A labelled sweater, matching scarf, leather skirt and shoulder-cross Coach bag)</b>	Even in the rain, Zoe Kravitz who represents the target market remains stylish. The U.S.A insignia on her sweater confirms the American identity of the brand, an identity prevalent in Coach's communications. Sweater signifies warmth. The shoulder-cross bag is iconic to Coach. An online commentator noted the sweater is similar to the one worn in the horror film <i>The Shining</i> but believes Zoe 'takes the creepiness out'.	Americanness Style	Heritage Sophistication

Table 4.4



Michael Kors 1: features Simon Nessman and Karmen Pedaru shot by Mario Testino for SS 2014

**Figure 4.5**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Couple on a yacht at the sea</b>	Michael Kors is a lifestyle brand and this is communicated through their marketing. Michael Kors' communication goal is to represent 'the life of the ultimate jetsetter'. In this advert, the couple are on a private journey on a yacht symbolizing the lifestyle of the upper-middle class. The sunshine signifies a beautiful day for a luxurious experience such as this and reflects fulfilment as in the Calvin Klein advert. The campaign portrays casual romance and a commentator online described the advert as a 'modern day love boat'.	Travel Confidence Leisure Covert Wealth	Adventure Pride Lifestyle Exclusivity Accomplishment
<b>Woman sit with coach bag in between her</b>	Just as the shoe in the first Calvin Klein advert in this analysis becomes a phallic symbol, so does the bag in this Michael Kors advert. Here, the woman is not	Individuality Sexuality	Independence Allure

<b>laps holding a bank card</b>	dependent on the man and what he offers and is content with Michael Kors and the brand's offering. She holds what appears to be a bank card which confirms her wealth.		
<b>Style (man and woman are wearing MK clothing)</b>	The couple enjoy life in Michael Kors casual chic clothing, linking Michael Kors with the wealthy and accomplished target market. The clothing is casual and perfect for the sunny weather.	Summer wear Style	Seasonality Sophistication

Table 4.5





Michael Kors 2: features Benjamin Eidem and Karmen Pedaru shot by Mario Testino for Fall 2014

**Figure 4.6**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Aircraft/ private jet</b>	The aircraft, specifically a private jet, is another aspirational symbol of wealth. Michael Kors taps into this lifestyle representing the realistic lifestyle of the affluent consumer or the idealistic lifestyle of the aspiring consumer. Steps here also signify upward rising in status.	Travel Wealth Covert	Adventure Accomplishment Exclusivity
<b>Couple (woman in a laced dress posing outwards from the steps of the plane; man on the phone in blur)</b>	The woman poses on the stairs of the plane confidently as if to flaunt her outfit. She maintains some distance from the man who is positioned behind a blur, asserting her independence. She wears classy attire made of lace. Lace fabric is considered 'artistic', 'superior', 'delicate', 'wealthy', and of 'priceless value' (Goldenberg, 1904).	Confidence Wealth Individuality Style	Pride Accomplishment Independence Sophistication

**Table 4.6**



Armani Exchange 1: features Alejandra Alonso, Marlon Teixeira and Camila Queiroz shot by Matthew Scrivens for SS 2013

**Figure 4.7**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Young models posing; two with O-face</b>	A man is seen halfway out of the pool while the two women are positioned on the wooden path. They appear to be relaxed and are quite close in proximity. They also communicate confidence and youthfulness. The male and one of the females express the orgasmic face, reinforcing self-indulgence and sexuality.	Self-indulgence Sexuality	Pleasure Allure
<b>Location – the pool</b>	The swimming pool provides leisure and pleasure for the three models. It offers a relaxing environment and symbolizes the lifestyle of the upper-middle class. Water signifies youthfulness and rebirth.	Youthfulness Leisure	Renewal Lifestyle
<b>Style (revealing casual wear)</b>	The outfits are revealing to further communicate sexiness and boldness.	Sexuality	Allure

<b>Black and white</b>	Whereas black and white signify authenticity and nostalgia in some contexts, here, it matches the mood of the narrative – simplicity and relaxation.	Leisure	Lifestyle
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Table 4.7



Armani Exchange 2: features Irina Shayk and Marlon Teixeira shot by Matthew Scrivens for SS 2010

**Figure 4.8**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Location:</b> <b>Beach and sand</b>	No one else is visible at the location, just the couple, signifying exclusivity. The waves in the background mirror the intensity on the man's face. His face indicates strong sexual desire. The sand on their bodies provides a visual cue that expresses sexual intimacy between the couples. The beach also represents youthfulness and the Summer collection.	Leisure Summer Sexuality Youthfulness Covert	Lifestyle Seasonality Allure Renewal Exclusivity
<b>Style:</b> <b>Revealing bodies and wet hair</b>	Here, the revealing bodies perform two duties: indicating beach attire and communicating sex. It serves as a platform to showcase sexual desire represented by the intensity of the waves and his face.	Summer Sexuality	Seasonality Allure
<b>Poses (woman lay on the sand)</b>	Irina Shayk is a Victoria Secret angel, hence a sex symbol who reinforces this characteristic with the brand. As	Individuality Sexuality	Independence Allure

<b>while man hover over)</b>	<p>postulated in the Calvin Klein analysis, floor indicates something ‘less pure’ – in this case, it is sex. The woman lays on sand with the man hovering above her. She looks into the camera as if to tell the spectator she is in control of the narrative. The man grabs onto her swimwear looking at her intensely as he responds to her beckoning.</p>		
<b>Black and white</b>	Black and white here reflects the simplicity of the action in this shot.	Leisure	Lifestyle

Figure 4.8

### MASSTIGE BRAND ADVERTISING CUES

	Calvin Klein	Coach	Michael Kors	Armani Exchange
<b>Explicit Values</b>	Autumn	Americanness	Confidence	Covert
	Classic	Classic	Covert	Individuality
	Confidence	Confidence	Individuality	Leisure
	Covert	Covert	Leisure	Self-indulgence
	Style	Everydayness	Style	Sexuality
	Professionalism	Individuality	Sexuality	Summer
	Self-indulgence	Style	Summer	Youthfulness
	Sexuality	Place	Travel	
	Summer	Sisterhood	Wealth	
	Travel	Spring		
	Wealth	Travel		
		Wealth		
		Youthfulness		
<b>Implicit Values</b>	Accomplishment	Accomplishment	Accomplishment	Allure
	Adventure	Adventure	Adventure	Exclusivity
	Allure	Affiliation	Allure	Independence
	Authenticity	Authenticity	Exclusivity	Lifestyle
	Career Success	Exclusivity	Independence	Pleasure
	Exclusivity	Heritage	Lifestyle	Renewal
	Pleasure	Independence	Pride	Seasonality
	Pride	Personal	Seasonality	
	Seasonality	Pride	Sophistication	
	Sophistication	Renewal		
		Seasonality		
		Sophistication		

**Table 5**



Gucci 1: features Karmen Pedaru, Joan Smalls, Hailey Clauson, Nikola Jovanovic and Gen Huisman shot by Mert Alas & Marcus Piggot for SS 2011

**Figure 4.9**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Luxurious location (big house in Miami)</b>	The modern house used in this ad appears to be situated on a tropical area suggesting it could be a holiday home. This communicates wealth, an affluent lifestyle and exclusivity.	Wealth Covert	Accomplishment Exclusivity
<b>Women vs Men (women strike poses while men watch)</b>	The women each strike a pose with an O-face at their various standings conveying confidence, power, independence and desirability. They are looked upon by the two male figures not objectively but in intrigue. The women 'stand tall' with their heads high as if they have conquered life's quests. The men are bare-chested but the women pay them no attention for this, implying independence.	Confidence Individuality Self-indulgence	Pride Independence Pleasure

<b>Style (multi-coloured outfits on the women)</b>	The style is classy and the colours are rich. They are styled in the colour-block trend so they are very on-trend for that season.	Sexuality Style	Allure Sophistication
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Table 4.9





Gucci 2: features Raquel Zimmermann, Joan Smalls and Nikola-Jovanovic shot by Mert & Marcus for Pre-fall 2010

Figure 4.10

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Moroccan Desert</b>	The ad is shot in the desert signifying exclusivity and adventure. The colours are golden signifying affluence.	Travel Wealth Covert	Adventure Accomplishment Exclusivity
<b>Vehicle</b>	The vehicle looks expensive and is possibly the vehicle of transportation to the desert location. It could also signify the man's aggression.	Travel Wealth	Adventure Accomplishment
<b>Women vs Man</b>	The two women lay against the car in a submissive but not passive pose, while the man hovers over one of them as if to kiss her. The poses are not passive because they are still actively demonstrating independence with their bodies, for instance, hand on hip and legs crossed or raised.	Confidence Sexuality	Pride Allure
<b>Style</b>	Their outfits indicate maturity and sophistication.	Style	Sophistication

Table 4.10



Dolce & Gabbana 1: titled 'Enchanted Sicily' featuring supermodel Claudia Schiffer alongside Bianca Balti, Kate Bogucharskaia and Natasya Sten shot by Domenico Dolce for AW 2014

Figure 4.11

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Exotic garden</b>	In this campaign, the medieval meets a Sicilian fairy-tale story set in an enchanted forest. It resembles a marriage between the traditional 'Snow White' scene and the modern 'Game of Thrones' setting. Sicily also represents the brand's heritage, hence the campaign pays homage. The campaign was set on an Italian Island in Sicily.	Place Covert	Heritage Exclusivity
<b>Women vs Men (women pose strongly as men serve fruits in the background)</b>	In this campaign, the women dominate while the men serve them fruits. A woman wears the crown indicating that she is a queen and the woman also hold high status. Another woman holds an apple signifying the biblical Eve and the story of temptation. The rest of the women hold Dolce and Gabbana bags	Sisterhood Confidence Eminence Wealth	Affiliation Pride Prestige Accomplishment

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	echoing the affiliation vibe observed in the Coach advert analysed above.		
<b>Style/colours</b>	The style is a mix of black and florals exuding a mixture of mystery, class and fairy-tale. The collection embodies Sicilian baroque tradition pioneered by the Sicilian architecture of the 17 <sup>th</sup> and 18 <sup>th</sup> century. Sicilian baroque reflect extravagant and gothic characteristics and this is represented by the sophisticated style herein.	<b>Style</b>	<b>Sophistication</b>

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Table 4.11



Dolce & Gabbana 2: features José Maria Manzanares and Bianca Balti among others shot by Domenico Dolce for SS 2015

**Figure 4.12**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Flamenco dance movements</b>	The campaign demonstrates Spanish influence on Sicilian tradition and culture. There are different mini stories in this advert: the Flamenco dance between two couples, the conversation between two <i>nonnas</i> , and the conversation between the three young ladies. Flamenco is Spain's oldest cultural dance and exudes sensuality and romance. It stems from Gypsy tradition in fusion with Moorish, Andalusian and Spanish Folk styles. The model is Spanish thereby emphasizing authenticity.	Classic Culture Confidence	Authenticity Heritage Pride
<b>Style (Spanish and Italian)</b>	The Mediterranean style is Spanish and Italian-influenced. It	Classic Culture	Authenticity Heritage

	is authentic, sensual, classic and opulent. Red is also a romantic colour.	Iconic	Timelessness
<b>Older women and young women in conversations</b>	The older women in the ad indicates that Dolce and Gabbana is a generational and timeless brand rooted in friendship and family.	Transgenerational	Timelessness

Table 4.12



Chanel 1: features Lily Allen shot by Karl Lagerfeld for AW 2009

Figure 4.13

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Lily Allen (British songwriter, singer, actress and TV presenter)</b>	Lily Allen is a young British songstress, actress and television personality. Her celebrity persona is bold, outspoken, fun and feisty. In this advert, she is a modern-day Audrey Hepburn who represents elegance and sophistication while communicating youthfulness and independence. Lily also personifies Holly Golightly's character in <i>Breakfast at Tiffany's</i> – a classic American movie. This campaign mixes the young with the classic; the modern with the timeless elegance.	Confidence Iconic Individuality	Pride Timelessness Independence
<b>Style (bag, accessories, dress, jacket, tiara, shades, gloves, chignon hairstyle)</b>	She is over-accessorised bringing a playful and self-indulgent side to the campaign. Her style is chic and glamorous. The tiara represents royalty, signifying wealth and status.	Style Self-indulgence Wealth	Sophistication Pleasure Accomplishment

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	<p>The Coco Cocoon bag is practical and light-weight. It is also reversible and given the recession of 2009 during which the campaign ran, the bag's reversible style has been termed online as 'recessionista chic', a mesh between fashionista and recession.</p>		
<b>Black and white monochrome</b>	<p>The black and white monochrome is classic Chanel inferring authenticity as in previous analyses.</p>	Classic	Authenticity

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Table 4.13





Chanel 2: features Gisele Bündchen shot by Karl Lagerfeld for SS 2015

Figure 4.14

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Gisele Bündchen</b>	Gisele Bündchen is a top Brazilian supermodel who Chanel chose to represent their brand for her ‘natural beauty and modern femininity’. She is considered by many to be sophisticated, elegant, fresh and alluring. An online commentator wrote: “I’m happy that is Gisele fronting this campaign and not Cara or any other young girl, she brings a level of sophistication to the label that it desperately needed...and so does the B&W”, another wrote: “Gisele makes Chanel fresh, chic” while another stated: “Gisele brings a layer of elegance and sophistication which is very unique...” (The Fashion Spot, 2014).	Style	Sophistication
<b>Location (Paris – in front of café de Flore)</b>	Paris is the home of Chanel and in this photograph, the café de Flore is a popular destination. The café is one of the oldest	Leisure Place Eminence	Lifestyle Heritage Prestige



and most prestigious coffee places in the city. It boasts famous clientele and is a favourite place for fashion editors. Paris is widely considered the ‘city of love’ thereby connoting romance. Thus in this advert, Paris is iconic, timeless and authentic. A blogger stated: “This beautiful ‘life after the sun goes down’ concept is really freeing and fresh while remaining incredibly true to the Chanel name and heritage, showcasing the product in the most aspirational way as only Chanel & Karl can do” (Stylesnooperdan, 2014).

<b>Black and white</b>	Black and white photography is a Chanel signature. In this advert, it also represents simplicity, sophistication and class.	Style Classic	Sophistication Authenticity
<b>Style (tweed pantsuit, print jacket, barefoot, no accessories, minimal makeup)</b>	Gisele wears a tweed pantsuit and jacket with no accessories, minimal makeup and no shoes. This communicates simplicity and a casual vibe. It reflects the relaxed atmosphere and represents Chanel as a ‘down to earth’ brand.	Everydayness	Personal

Table 4.14



Louis Vuitton 1: titled 'Chic on the Bridge' featuring Karlie Kloss, Daria Strokous, Jac Jagaciak shot by Steven Miesel for Pre-fall 2013

**Figure 4.15**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Bridge</b>	This campaign reflects heritage through the theme of travel. In this advert, the models are seen on New York's iconic Brooklyn bridge. Although Louis Vuitton is a Parisian brand, showing the brand in other iconic cities reflects its transnational status. New York is also one of the fashion capitals of the world.	Travel Place Transnational	Adventure Heritage Recognition
<b>Yellow car</b>	The yellow car is a New York taxi. This particular object is placed in the advert to represent New York and complement the yellow Alma bag on display. The colour bridges the gap between the location and the brand. The car also reflects the underlying theme of travel. It ties the brand to a place communicating heritage even though the brand is originally from Paris.	Travel	Adventure
<b>Style (yellow Alma leather bag, dark bag, dark)</b>	The bold 1934 iconic bag is a symbol of elegance, timelessness and authenticity. Its design was influenced by the Art Deco	Iconic Classic Style	Timelessness Authenticity Sophistication

<b>lipstick, black leather wear)</b>	<p>movement of the 1930s. The style is clean and chic. The yellow bag contrast add boldness and elegance to the look. The dark red lipstick with leather add a level of sophistication. This is one of four print adverts of the campaign– the other three were shot in Paris and China. The models hold blue Alma bags on the Pont du Carrousel bridge in Paris overlooking the blue sea, lacquer red bags on Shanghai’s Waibaidu Bridge in red light backdrops, and all the colours in a night-time shot at the brand’s hometown, Paris. An online commentator described the bag as ‘lady-like’ and ‘elegant’ and expressed their desire to ‘flaunt it from shop to shop’ just because it makes them ‘feel good’ (Bragmybag, 2013).</p>	Professionalism Confidence Individuality Sisterhood	Career Success Pride Independence Affiliation
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Table 4.15



Louis Vuitton 2: features Christy Turlington, Karen Elson and Natalia Vodianova shot by Steven Miesel for AW 2010

**Figure 4.16**

Object	Semiotic Analysis	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
<b>Dressing room (chairs, mirrors and glowing lights)</b>	This campaign was shot in a studio designed like a Hollywood dressing room backstage. Thus, it symbolises status and accomplishment. It is also quite intimate given its size in the shot and proximity of the models.	Eminence Covert Wealth	Prestige Exclusivity Accomplishment
<b>Style (full skirts and bustier dresses, ponytail hair, LV Speedy bags, hand-on-waist pose)</b>	The collection was inspired by the 50s and 60s and the styling reflects this. Here, the brand bridges the gap between retro and modern, the classic and the new. The style is glamorous, elegant and embodies eternal femininity. In addition, the models are in their 20s, 30s and 40s and this was deliberate to communicate that Louis Vuitton is a brand for all ages and transcends generations. It also communicates the message that ‘success can come at any age’. Their poses exude independence and success. An online commentator likened the models to	Confidence Individuality Classic Transgenerational Style Sisterhood	Pride Independence Authenticity Timelessness Sophistication Affiliation

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‘Barbie, circa 1959’. Another notes:

“...feels like a fairy-tale world of luxurious perfection. I am entirely envious of the women in these photos, they appear as if they have fascinating stories to tell” (Dusil, 2010).

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<b>Colour (sepia and grey tones)</b>	The colour reflects the 50s and 60s theme of this campaign. Coupled with the style, the vintage is iconic of old Hollywood glamour. It is authentic and timeless.	Classic	Authenticity
		Iconic	Timelessness

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**Table 4.16**

**LUXURY BRAND ADVERTISING CUES**

	<b>Gucci</b>	<b>Dolce &amp; Gabbana</b>	<b>Chanel</b>	<b>Louis Vuitton</b>
<b>Explicit Values</b>	Confidence	Classic	Classic	Confidence
	Covert	Confidence	Confidence	Covert
	Individuality	Covert	Everydayness	Classic
	Self-indulgence	Culture	Eminence	Eminence
	Sexuality	Eminence	Iconic	Iconic
	Style	Iconic	Individuality	Individuality
	Travel	Place	Leisure	Place
	Wealth	Transgenerational	Place	Professionalism
		Sisterhood	Self-indulgence	Recognition
		Style	Style	Sisterhood
<b>Implicit Values</b>		Wealth	Wealth	Style
				Travel
				Transgenerational
				Transnational
				Wealth
	Accomplishment	Accomplishment	Accomplishment	Accomplishment
	Adventure	Affiliation	Authenticity	Adventure
	Allure	Authenticity	Heritage	Affiliation
	Exclusivity	Exclusivity	Independence	Authenticity
	Independence	Heritage	Lifestyle	Career Success
	Pleasure	Prestige	Personal	Exclusivity
	Pride	Pride	Pleasure	Heritage
	Sophistication	Sophistication	Prestige	Independence
		Timelessness	Pride	Prestige
			Sophistication	Pride
			Timelessness	Recognition
				Sophistication
				Timelessness

**Table 5.1**

## CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS

The number on the left-hand side of each table below reflects how many brands demonstrate the respective value in the sampled advertisements. For example, only one masstige brand (Coach) reflected a sense of Culture/Place (Explicit value) through the portrayal of (American) Heritage (Implicit representation) whilst out of the four luxury brands, three reflected these same values. The author thus considers brands that reflect three or more values as common values akin to that brand type (i.e. Masstige or Luxury) in order to develop a framework that addresses the purpose of this research. In addition, the values in italics below represents values exclusive to either Luxury or Masstige Brands sampled and not shared by both.

18 IDENTIFIED MASSTIGE BRAND CUES		
	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
2	Classic	Authenticity
3	Confidence	Pride
4	Covert	Exclusivity
1	Everydayness	Personal
3	Individuality	Independence
2	Leisure	Lifestyle
1	Culture/Place	Heritage
1	Professionalism	Career Success
3	Style	Sophistication
3	Sexuality	Allure
1	Sisterhood	Affiliation
3	Travel	Adventure
3	Wealth	Accomplishment
2	Self-indulgence	Pleasure
4	<i>AW/SS wear</i>	<i>Seasonality</i>
2	<i>Youthfulness</i>	<i>Renewal</i>

Table 5.2

19 IDENTIFIED LUXURY BRAND CUES		
	Explicit Values	Implicit Values
3	Classic	Authenticity
4	Confidence	Pride
3	Covert	Exclusivity
1	Everydayness	Personal
3	Individuality	Independence
1	Leisure	Lifestyle
3	Culture/Place	Heritage
1	Professionalism	Career Success
4	Style	Sophistication
1	Sexuality	Allure
2	Sisterhood	Affiliation
2	Travel	Adventure
4	Wealth	Accomplishment
2	Self-indulgence	Pleasure
3	<i>Iconic/Transgenerational</i>	<i>Timelessness</i>
3	<i>Eminence</i>	<i>Prestige</i>
1	<i>Transnational</i>	<i>Recognition</i>

Table 5.3

### Common Explicit Advertising Cues: Similarities and Differences



Figure 5.1

### Common Implicit Advertising Cues: Similarities and Differences

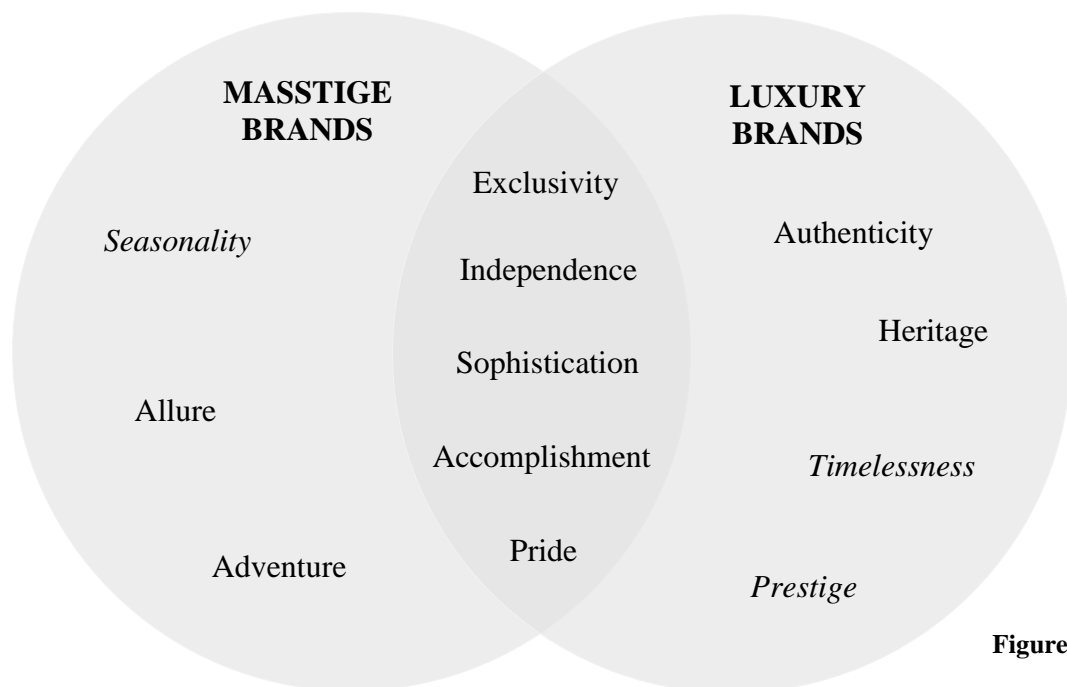


Figure 5.2



## CHAPTER 6 – DISCUSSION

The common underlying themes across the luxury and masstige brand advertisements analysed include exclusivity, independence, sophistication, accomplishment and pride. Exclusivity is communicated through exotic location and lifestyle, as in the case of Calvin Klein and the sky backdrop, Coach's subcultured sisterhood, AX's isolated beach setting, Michael Kors' sea location, Gucci's tropical home and dessert settings, Dolce and Gabbana's forest surrounding, and Louis Vuitton's backstage dressing room. Communicating exclusivity taps into the principles of rarity, hedonic values through indulgence, and the gratification of differentiation. In a nutshell, exclusivity in both luxury and masstige brands serves the purpose of creating an aspirational brand through the depiction of an aspirational lifestyle within an exclusive location. Independence is represented through the depiction of confidence (through postures) and personal freedom (through props). Particularly, across both masstige and luxury brands, the female is at the centre of this theme. For instance, Coach's gang of girls depict 'female power' engaged in an independent lifestyle, as do Louis Vuitton's girls on a New York bridge and in the vintage Hollywood dressing room. Zoe Kravitz for Coach represents an independence spirit while Lily Allen for Chanel demonstrate her freedom to consume conspicuously. Other adverts take it a step further by depicting the female's independence in relation to the male. For instance, Michael Kors bag becomes the phallic symbol in place of the man while in the brand's other advert, the man is blurred out while the woman strikes a heroic pose on the stairs of the presumed private jet. Irina Shayk controls the male gaze in AX's advert while female models control the male gaze in both Gucci adverts.

Sophistication is communicated through style, from Calvin Klein's classic look and professional attire, to Michael Kors and Coach's casual chic, from Gucci's bold colours to Dolce and Gabbana's rich Sicilian florals, from Chanel's modernized Audrey Hepburn style to Louis Vuitton's Hollywood vintage and semi-gothic leather look. Sophistication reflects high product quality which adds to the prestige value of the brand. Accomplishment is communicated through symbols indexical of wealth, as in the instance of the sky backdrop in the Calvin Klein's advert signifying elevation, Coach and Chanel's materialistic display, Michael Kors and Gucci's lavish travel destinations (e.g. sea, Moroccan desert, tropical holiday home), Louis Vuitton's old Hollywood backstage 'actresses' suggestive of career success, and Dolce and Gabbana's forest

royalty narrative. In terms of pride, a key *motif* across the masstige and luxury adverts is the depiction of confidence through the postures and demeanours of the protagonists. Frequently used expressions include hands on hips with heads high, stern looks directed at the viewer, and displays of happiness. In these adverts confidence implies pride and is driven by independence and accomplishment. An exception is the Dolce and Gabbana flamenco advert where cultural pride is depicted through dance.

The common themes akin to the luxury brand advertisements include authenticity, heritage, timelessness and prestige. Authenticity in this paper alludes to the classic, the original, and the iconic and this characteristic is observed across three of the four luxury brands analysed. Authenticity is most observed in Dolce and Gabbana's Mediterranean setting, Chanel's black and white signature and Louis Vuitton's 1934 iconic Alma bag, all of which are linked with brand identity, whereas in the masstige adverts, *faux* authenticity is identified in classic styling, black and white photography and vintage props, none of which is iconic to the brand. Heritage is a characteristic akin to luxury brands as discussed in the literature review. Heritage in the luxury brand analysis is represented by place and culture, as in the depiction of Chanel's birthplace, Paris; Louis Vuitton's depiction of New York as a fashion capital, and Dolce and Gabbana's Sicilian home and Mediterranean culture. The only instance wherein Heritage is evident in masstige adverts is in Coach's depiction of the brand's home, the United States, and its suburban values. Heritage is not a trait shared by other masstige brands. Timelessness within the domain of luxury brands signifies longevity of iconic characteristics of the brand. In the analysis, Dolce and Gabbana and Louis Vuitton represent themselves as a brand that transcends the generations; Chanel channels Coco Chanel's iconicity, and Louis Vuitton demonstrates the timelessness of its Alma bag. The adverts that display iconic products boosts the craftsmanship attribute of luxury goods discussed earlier. Prestige in this analysis is used to refer to reputation and status. Dolce and Gabbana display royalty; Chanel depicts a famous Paris destination; Louis Vuitton depicts stardom. The depiction of prestige adds to the perception that luxury is consumed by individuals of higher standing and that luxury brands are well respected.

Common themes across masstige brand advertising are seasonality, allure and adventure. Across all four masstige adverts, the clothes are primarily seasonal and are reflexive of current collections. It is important to observe that in the luxury brand adverts, styles are more unique to the brand rather than seasonal while for masstige

brands, styles are generic. For example, Coach's clothing is casual presenting the Spring/Autumn collection while Dolce and Gabbana's floral style reflects the brand and is not advertised for seasonal use. In other words, luxury styles closely reflect the timelessness of the brand while masstige styles primarily reflect current collections. An interesting instance is Coach's inclusion of the crossover handbag which is iconic of the brand; iconicity, however, is not shared by other masstige brands. Sexuality is a common explicit motif across three of the four masstige brands. Calvin Klein clothing transports the female protagonist into a sensual state; the Michael Kors bag acts as a phallic symbol, and models in the Armani Exchange's adverts are bare-chested exhibiting the orgasmic face. On one level, sexuality enhances the narrative of independence while on another level, the clothing activates the need for attraction towards the self and to others. Interestingly, Gucci is the only luxury brand that features this motif using sexuality to communicate feminine independence and allure. In regards to adventure, the travel theme is prevalent across three of the masstige brands and is signified by the presence of cars, yachts and aircraft. Perhaps masstige brands aim to communicate that the masstige consumer is adventurous and affluent enough to travel in style. Whilst adventure is also observed in luxury brand Gucci's Moroccan desert and Louis Vuitton's New York bridge advertisements, it is not observed in the other two brands therefore cannot be regarded as a defining attribute of luxury brands. Adventure also links to the message of wealth and accomplishment that both masstige and luxury brands aim to communicate.

## CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The research has analysed masstige advertising in relation to luxury brand advertising in order to identify common and unique themes. Firstly, five common implicit advertising cues shared by luxury and masstige brands include exclusivity, independence, sophistication, accomplishment and pride. These cues signify higher-order hedonic and social needs both brand types aim to satisfy. Secondly, the analysis has uncovered the themes of authenticity, heritage, timelessness and prestige in the luxury brand advertisements confirming previous discussions on these luxury signifiers. That is, luxury brands aim to be perceived as authentic brands based on heritage with timeless products and a prestigious reputation. Thirdly, the analysis discovered the themes of seasonality, allure and adventure in masstige brand advertising. Masstige clothing are trendy and in season, they make the wearer feel sexy, and are aimed towards the adventurous spirit. This is consistent with the studies that have discovered that people consume masstige products for its quality, to be stylish, to signal, to cater to self and to explore (Granot et al., 2013; Silverstein & Fiske, 2005). Timelessness and prestige appear to be the only two themes unique to luxury brands while seasonality is the only theme unique to masstige brands. However, it is interesting to observe Coach taking the luxury route by displaying themes of heritage (Americanness) and iconicity (cross-over bags) akin to luxury brands whereas Gucci takes the masstige route with the lack of key luxury identifiers. The Gucci brand, however, is an established luxury brand with accrued perception of luxury, therefore, the lack of key luxury identifiers may not diminish its luxury identity and status. With Coach, as discussed previously, longevity breeds timelessness and heritage and iconicity are ways to communicate timelessness. Therefore, Coach's strategic display of heritage and iconicity could prove effective in communicating and emphasizing the brand's prestige value.

The paper here has set out to answer the question: what constitutes a masstige brand? In regards to pricing, while price is not reflected in the analysed advertising, masstige brands cost less than luxury brands but are more expensive than middle-range brands (Truong et al., 2009). In regards to distribution, there is yet to be research on whether channels of distribution are less exclusive for masstige than for luxury brands, and possibly more in line with mass brands. Similarly, with respect to promotion there is lack of research on those marketing channels that are used to advertise masstige brands as opposed to mass and luxury brands, and how this influences masstige brand identity.

Whilst this paper does not address price, place and promotion, it does shed a light on what constitutes the masstige product and brand. From the analysis, masstige products are seasonal, trendy and are made to make the wearer feel good. Beyond this functional benefit lies its social and hedonic benefits of exclusivity, independence, sophistication, accomplishment, pride, adventure, and allure. This research is useful for brand managers who hope to further understand the masstige phenomenon and to maintain brand identity. It is beneficial to advertisers who are now able to select which key signifiers or cues to use to communicate product and brand benefits, especially intangible benefits. It is also beneficial for current masstige firms with a desire to enter the luxury market and are now able to craft brands using luxury signifiers. Finally, the research contributes to the masstige literature which is still in a nascent stage. The research offers empirical insight into masstige identity communication within the context of luxury branding.

## **CHAPTER 8 – LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

The purpose of this research has not been to make generalizations but rather to offer insight into some themes that define masstige brand identity given the lack of work in this area. Given the relatively small sample of advertisements examined, it is possible that there are other themes that may not have been present in the advertisements analysed. Moreover, the least common themes in the present adverts may be the most common themes that are uncovered using a different set of advertisements. Therefore, to test the reliability of the results, there is a need for replicated research using appropriate inductive approaches. In addition, the themes drawn from the analysis are interpretations made by the researcher which have provided insight into encodings made by the advertisers and brand advisements. However, it would be useful to draw insights and interpretations from the consumer's point of view in order to observe similarities and differences in themes. This will provide a rich understanding of branding masstige and luxury brands in ways that are relevant for the consumer; it will also assess advertising effectiveness. In addition, the sample is restricted to fashion campaigns, therefore, masstige brand research in other product categories is advised to assess correlation of identity values among differing product categories. The limited scope of the masstige literature provides a huge opportunity for empirical research on the phenomenon. This paper thereby contributes to the literature presenting ideas for future considerations.

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