



Redefining luxury construct

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Abstract

Luxury as a state of great comfort or elegance, especially when involving great expense or an inessential, desirable item which is expensive or difficult to obtain or a pleasure obtained only rarely. Dreams and longings provoke not only self-expression through art, but also the impulse 'to single oneself out through ornamentation, make a mark through monuments, seduce others by acquiring or giving rare objects, and finally to better enjoy life by improving one's food and surroundings. Voilà le luxe.' In other words, man has aspired to better things since he first glimpsed the stars. The primitive impulses behind our desire for luxury also nudge us towards a clearer definition of this slippery word. As Castarède suggests, luxury is often associated with the realm of the senses: voluptuous images, tastes, odours and sensations. Indeed, sensuality is a key component of many luxury brands. Luxury is something that is amalgamation of fine craftsmanship, rarity, history/story with specific focus. Extreme quality and exclusive in its identity, something that cannot be easily recreated, and something that stands out amidst all its accessible and affordable counterparts.

Keywords: craftsmanship, rarity, focus, history/story

Introduction

Dictionary defines luxury as a state of great comfort or elegance, especially when involving great expense or an inessential, desirable item which is expensive or difficult to obtain or a pleasure obtained only rarely. In his 1992 book *Histoire du Luxe en France*, Jean Castarède mentions a 30,000-year-old ivory figurine known as the 'Venus of Brassenpouy'. He notes that she has braided hair. 'As bizarre as it might seem, one of the first concerns of man (or woman) was not clothing or protection, but seduction.'

Ornamentation predates clothes and weaponry, he argues. Castarède also points out that early man shared another of our basic urges, which is to dream. Dreams and longings provoke not only self-expression through art, but also the impulse 'to single oneself out through ornamentation, make a mark through monuments, seduce others by acquiring or giving rare objects, and finally to better enjoy life by improving one's food and surroundings. Voilà le luxe.' In other words, man has aspired to better things since he first glimpsed the stars. The primitive impulses behind our desire for luxury also nudge us towards a clearer definition of this slippery word. As Castarède suggests, luxury is often associated with the realm of the senses: voluptuous images, tastes, odours and sensations. Indeed, sensuality is a key component of many luxury brands. Christopher J Berry offers further clues in his book *The Idea of Luxury* (1994). He writes that luxury is often, erroneously, perceived as all that is superfluous. But 'if it takes six screws to secure a shelf then more than that number are redundant... [And] a seventh screw is not a "refined" luxury good.' Instead, Berry submits the idea that a

luxury is a refinement on something that already exists. It is not superfluous, but it is substitutable. In other words, any second-hand jalopy will get you from A to B, but driving a Bentley provides an additional sensual pleasure. Berry remarks that luxuries generally have a wide appeal, even though they remain out of reach of the majority. Antiquarian books and rare stamps may be extremely precious to niche groups of collectors, but despite their value they are not considered luxuries. All of us, however, can imagine enjoying a weekend at a five-star hotel. For Berry, luxury falls into distinct categories: food and drink, clothing and accessories, shelter and leisure. These are areas where the basics are available to most of us, but where luxurious substitutes are available to a few.

Concluding all that, Luxury is something that is extreme in its quality and exclusive in its identity, something that cannot be easily recreated, and something that stand out amidst all its accessible and affordable counterparts

Luxury is practiced by brands in various forms. But in general, any luxury brand is composed of four key factors; craftsmanship, history/story, focus and rarity.

Craftsmanship

It is the art/skill of breathing life into objects, the intimate link between the human soul and the inanimate. It is the dexterity of hands, a skill achieved after years of dedication and practice. Great Craftsmanship is characterized by the epitome of human insights, instincts and predictions that even most precise machines and computers of now can't compete with. It is the result of an approach that involves passion, wisdom and

intelligence versus productivity, compliance and qualification. A good craftsmanship becomes the value, generating differentiation factor for a brand. Salvatore Ferragamo is one such brand which reflects on the values that have allowed them to keep their roots (of Florence's arts and crafts traditions) intact, even throughout the difficult transition to industrial production. According to them, belief in sharing and developing skills in craftsmanship is not only about manual know-how but a mental process in which quality and continual research into materials and technology go side by side. Enormous work has been done at Ferragamo to serialize made-to-measure footwear, to the extent of producing more than 80 fittings per model. Most of the manufacturing stages are done by machine, but the machine is always guided by man's experienced hand.

History / Story

A sense of eternity stemming from a brand's ability to remain constantly relevant by perpetually embodying its own past and future. Storytelling is one of the very important aspects of luxury. A luxury brand always has a history/heritage associated with it. It has a personality, values and beliefs. A Luxury brand just doesn't sell products rather it sells hopes, dreams and an aspirational lifestyle that is attached to the product. This is why, at times, how the product has come to existence, the story and background of its producer and who all consume the product becomes even more important than the product itself. A Luxury brand needs to feel alive in order to be aspirational. It needs to have a unique presence in terms of the way it presents itself or communicate with its consumers. Unlike other brands, luxury brand is the one that sets the standard of quality rather than industry setting the standard. A luxury brand needs to be constantly relevant among different generations. It strikes a perfect balance between the heritage of past and opportunities of future. It is Classic and trendy at the same time.

The notion of time is exemplified in the Patek Philippe Museum (Geneva). The building selected to house the collection has a long history dedicated to all things horological - having housed gem cutters and jewelers such as Ponti Gennari and Piaget, and specialists in watch case and bracelets. It is a legacy of not just a name, but to an entire history of watchmaking. It is preservation of time past for today and for generations to come. The museum not only house the entire Patek Philippe collection from 1839, it also tells the story of over four centuries of watchmaking - thus displaying passion that celebrates the brand and transcends the brand.

Burberry is powerful example of a company that has understood the value of storytelling. "Art of the Trench" is a website put up by Burberry in celebration of and dedication to one of their most famous assets and achievements - their quintessential trench coat.

The origins of a brand contribute great deal to history and storytelling. 'Made-in' by Prada offers a great perspective on this argument. Prada's collection launched in 2010 was sourced from the best in artisanal techniques around the world, from tartan in Scotland to embroidery in India. The labels in the garments read 'Prada, Milano, made in Scotland',

reinforcing the quality of the brand's origin, while celebrating the local heritage of each specialist craft.

Focus

Focus for a luxury brand can be defined as the art of knowing, doing or pursuing much of a little and not, a little of much. Luxury brands are always associated with extreme standards of quality and craftsmanship in their products. In order to achieve such high level of quality, years of dedication, understanding and passion is required. Unlike other brands that usually think of expanding their business via getting into different product lines, launching different brand extensions, a luxury brand seeks to deliver excellence within a product / service, going deeper into every aspect of it. This limitation of scope is done deliberately by luxury brands so that they can focus on constantly refining and pioneering new techniques, materials etc within a product category, thus maintaining past and building future at the same time.

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Rarity

Rarity is one of the most important aspects of luxury and becomes very crucial for the brands that want to be perceived as luxurious brands. Taking the ownership of the products that are rare and aspirational to many gives its owner a sense of accomplishment and pride. Owning rare products, materials or experiences make the owner stand out of the crowd and satisfies the innate need of a human being to stand out among others. Such products further starts to act like status symbols. Luxury Brands practice rarity in several forms. Some prefer producing limited quantity of a desirable product, others take time to achieve remarkable quality in their products which make them rare and thus even more desirable. In such cases devotion to excellence results in the rare availability of the product. Luxury brands tend to elude and exclude over mere producing their products. Rarity in luxury is very contextual in its nature. It varies from place to place and time to time. Also the desire of people for the product also determines whether

rarity will act in making that product luxurious or not.

Conclusion

The carnal /primitive characteristic of man is to dream, to desire those dreams. Therefore, we see the birth of aspiration - 'to be desirable'. Luxury, was a superfluous aspiration back in the day but it continues to stimulate the primitive emotion of man even to this day. 'Luxurious aspirations' turning into reality was a dream that could come true for the rich and the opulent and it would continue to be just aspirations for many - back in the day. However, the times have changed and 'luxury' and 'luxurious objects' have become a realistic dream for many. So, how does an object of luxury survive and preserve its identity in this day and age? By boasting of its four key factors that are unique to it that sets it apart from the rest of the world - craftsmanship, history/story, focus & rarity. Since becoming rich has become easier for the common man in this generation, how does a person achieve the title of being the most "desirable"? How do they set themselves apart from each other when being rich is becoming more and more common? By possessing objects of luxury, the definition of luxury will change again when man has new aspirations.

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