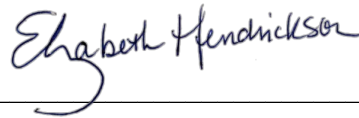


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PREMIUM PERCEPTIONS: An analysis of current and existing luxury branding strategies with
a mock guide for emerging companies

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Introduction

Researchers are drawn to the luxury fashion industry, specifically the marketing and creative strategies employed, due to how complex the market is, how large the consumer audience is, and how it is tied to social status and identity. Luxury fashion goods comprise at least \$220 billion of the global retail industry and beats an abundance of other consumer categories in the product market (Miller and Mills, 2011). This thesis will specifically analyze the current and existing branding strategies of the luxury sector in the accessible consumer product market and create a comprehensive branding guide that reflects what an emerging fashion brand can do to appear as “luxury” to consumers, without the years of history and fame to support them.

The goal of this multi-method research is to dive deep into the branding techniques of luxury versus less expensive brands and identify how designer fashion houses try to cultivate a connected consumer audience through branding techniques that encourage consumers to purchase expensive, yet minimal luxury goods. This project utilizes surveys and in-depth interviews with consumers and admirers of luxury brands to analyze a brand’s tone, reputation, physical branding guides and campaigns, in addition to the product value itself. It also seeks to understand a consumer’s fluid and developed definition of luxury as discussed in the literature review. Ultimately, this project identifies the most successful branding strategies within the luxury fashion market today, as well as consumers’ opinions and associations between certain brand attributes and what those may indicate.

This research explicitly studies the LVMH group, otherwise known as LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, which yields one of the most luxurious and high-end

associations. LVMH, founded in 1987, is a French multinational corporation that owns and manages an assortment of luxury goods, ranging from wine to fashion houses, and since the 90s, it is one of the leading conglomerates in the luxury brand management sector (Okonkwo, 2009). Some of the fashion houses LVMH owns are Louis Vuitton, Bulgari, Dior, Givenchy and Fendi — all high-end brands that, for some, elicit preconceived notions and reputations different from those of more accessible houses like Michael Kors or Kate Spade.

This project's scholarly essay explores the branding and advertising techniques, campaigns, and brand extensions of some of these houses, and it considers the idea of creating an emotional relationship of trust and attachment with a consumer. This research seeks to find patterns and common creative efforts from the very consumers that high fashion luxury companies pursue in order to maintain their successful branding image. It employs both surveys and interview material, using both quantitative and qualitative data with consumers to better understand their perceptions about certain brand attributes. The goal of the professional project is to utilize this research to create a complete creative branding guide for an emerging fashion brand that has the potential to meet perceptions of luxury goods.

Literature Review

What is Luxury Fashion Branding?

A set and technical answer to the question “what is luxury?” is one debated by researchers, and —especially in the realm of fashion and retail— luxury can be categorized by so many things. *Managing the Growth Tradeoff: Challenges and*

Opportunities in Luxury Branding uses Calvin Klein as an example for the fluid definition of luxury.

Calvin Klein was previously ranked by Forbes as the “third most desirable brand” (pg. 157), a status brand, and a premium brand. While Calvin Klein’s perfume may meet luxury brand managers’ definitions of luxury, Calvin Klein jeans do not (pg. 158). Calvin Klein fails in the luxury consideration on some levels, including exclusivity and other common luxury attributes, yet is consistently referred to as a “luxury” brand. However, some consumers may not consider Calvin Klein a luxury brand, and loop it into the category with brands like Guess and Ralph Lauren as opposed to brands considered more high fashion in Ready-To-Wear (RTW) such as Balenciaga, Saint Laurent, and Alexander McQueen. This example illustrates the idea of differing realms and categories of “luxury” coexisting for different consumer bases. Consumers may also perceive fashion and product brands a certain way and to a certain degree of luxury based on their cultural and ethnic background (Li, Li, Kambele, 2012). This niche product market and consumer group is what makes the topic so interesting and the branding model so much more complex. Researchers Ana Roncha and Matteo Montecchi developed a model called “The Luxury Matrix” that measures the degree of luxury of existing brands, and considers how to increase brand value perceptions (Roncha and Montecchi, 2017). Their methodological approach was to go over academic literature on luxury brands and “reduce identifiers of luxury to a more manageable number of macro themes or dimensions” (pg. 2). The Luxury Matrix model informs my own research design, which includes a survey measuring luxury brand perceptions with existing brand strategies, and it helps me examine my findings more in-depth.

The luxury industry has some of the best design, merchandising, and packaging you'll ever see in a product market, which is why it paves the way and inspires brand marketing for companies all around the world. As a market that sells products at such a high price point, its branding principles have been evolving for decades. Uche Okonkwo's book *Luxury Fashion Branding: Trends, Tactics, Techniques* notes that for a long time, luxury fashion branding was managed by traditional business methods, such as trial and error. But over time these were replaced by sophisticated, more developed practices in the management of luxury goods (pg. 3). Okonkwo's work covers topics such as luxury retail design, atmosphere and the art of creating and managing luxury fashion brands, in addition to digital luxury practices and the luxury fashion business model. This book serves as a guide for qualitatively analyzing the evolution of luxury fashion branding, in addition to its origins and modern business strategies. The case illustrations it provides about Armani and Pierre Cardin help to identify strategies that are successful in the field and help structure the initial survey on identity associations consumers have with luxury fashion houses and brands.

The Anatomy of the Luxury Fashion Brand identified nine interrelated attributes that provide success in brand creation and proposition: marketing communications, product integrity, design signature, premium price, clear brand identity, culture, environment and service, heritage, and exclusivity (Fionda and Moore, 2009). Frank Vigneron and Lester W. Johnson (2017) noted in *Measuring Brand Luxury Perceptions* that their goal of measuring a consumer's perceived luxury inspired them to create a guide and instrument that can be used to evaluate luxury brands, much like the aim of this

research. However, their matrix does not incorporate the visuals and observable data my surveys and interviews include.

Trends in Luxury Fashion Branding

Customer emotional attachment is a target area when it comes to luxury consumer retention rates, and a study published in the *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management* found that corporate branding had limited effect on customer attachment and brand loyalty. However, corporate association, functional benefits, and symbolic benefits had a greater impact in the role of creating emotional attachment, which is something that has to be developed over longer periods of time versus a standard campaign or new branding guide (Theng So, Parsons and Yap, 2013). This needs to be taken into account when branding for an emerging company as emotional attachment may not be a target for consumer retention, and the focus will instead be on other areas such as exclusivity and unique brand identity. The gap in this research includes how the emerging brand develops this in the time it takes to get to its current emotional attachment state, including the processes and path it takes to get there.

Other research goes in depth with exclusivity analysis. Using consumers' demand theory, *Luxury Brand Exclusivity Strategies – An Illustration of a Cultural Collaboration* shows how luxury fashion brands use different methods to maintain their relevance in the matter of "exclusivity" (Radon, 2012). The "need for unique" changes in the idea of a "renewal," and consistency in identity is important to maintain a fashion brand's integrity and identity.

Another comparable study developed a conceptual model by analyzing relationships and dimensions that encompass the luxury branding model (Miller and

Mills, 2011). Some findings from this were that brand leadership is often more important than uniqueness—whoever the brand builder is may need to have expertise in product quality selection and accompanying services that go with luxury products. Results from this study also found that brands with a more visionary outlook or those up to date with trends can be considered more luxurious than brands that are simply expressive or unique, and if consumers identify similar attributes and matching qualities between themselves and other users of the luxury brand than they are willing to pay more for the product. (Miller and Mills, 2011).

Art-based strategies are another tactic used in luxury branding and marketing techniques to communicate certain messages to the consumer audience. *Fashion Branding and Communication: Core Strategies of European Luxury Brands* reviews Prada's brand building at the intersection of art, technology and retail experience, in addition to Louis Vuitton's art-based strategy. Louis Vuitton is the leading brand of the LVMH group mentioned earlier, the company bases some of their luxury strategy upon artistic collaborations. This strategy has led LVMH to globally sponsor philanthropic and other various events, such as restoring historical monuments at major museums and contributing to exhibitions highlighting young contemporary artists (Jin and Cedrola, 2017). Jin and Cedrola's book, an excellent source in understanding the branding techniques of successful fashion houses, as well as the history and larger brand management that supports them, details that "the company's collaborations with artists are evidence of a larger project of strategic brand identity building. Art can influence the customer's mindset of a brand (e.g., thoughts, feelings, experiences, images, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes" (pg. 165). Although fast fashion brands, which create cheap and

trendy styles that mimic runway looks have a much different brand perception than luxury, that doesn't stop H&M from having various co-branding projects with designer luxury brands (Shen, Choi, Chow, 2017). It's known from Choi and Chow's study that fast fashion brands generally perform better under a more well-known, better associated partnership, which is an interesting relationship to explore and indicates the appreciation for design and brand signature of other brands from consumers.

Online Branding Strategies

Digital branding, especially in the time post-COVID-19, is essential to ensuring any successful strategic campaign aimed at consumer retention. Research exploring online branding strategies, specifically Rowley's (2009) look at branding techniques used by top fashion in the UK, informs my final creative branding guide and professional project. I can take findings from these observations that analyze how certain companies are using their digital sources and providing online services to modernize themselves, while also increasing consumer engagement and loyalty. *Luxury brand strategies and customer experiences: Contributions to theory and practice* looks at this with a more modern approach as it explores modern developments in brand strategies globally, specifically social media and digital marketing—Ko, Pahu, And Aiello explore topics such as parasocial associations, which not only encapsulate the brand identity of the company but the identify of their online influencer associations that have become a hit trend in branding or advertising a fashion company digitally (pg. 5750). Social Media Marketing (SMM) is an integral part of fashion branding's modernized strategy, and the main constructs have a confirmed positive impact on value equity, relationship equity, and brand equity (Kim and Ko, 2011). Similarly, luxury brands—one being Louis

Vuitton—do collaborations and campaigns with online influencers identifying with the digital generation, one being Gen Z icon Emma Chamberlain. Luxury brands must find their place in online communities in a way that fits their brand image without discrediting their association with luxury.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory, which will be discussed further in my method, allows for the examination of social media marketing and branding activities (Athwal, Istanbuluoglu, McCormack, 2018). *The allure of luxury brands' social media activities: a uses and gratifications perspective* looks at gratifications that are sought out by millennials, who are identified as a new “core luxury consumer group” (pg. 1). This research also gathers online data from social media listening on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to gather data from top luxury fashion brands. They were able to determine that interacting with luxury brands in media led them to the gratification of affective and cognitive need—“cognitive needs are satisfied through functional use of social media as an informative source” (Athwal, Istanbuluoglu, McCormack, 2018). This will be a useful reference when dissecting consumers’ responses to in-depth interviewing related to perception of luxury brands and reasoning behind certain perceptions and retail habits.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding my essay and project are as follows:

- I. What status must *luxury fashion brands* obtain to achieve the “luxury” association?
- II. *What brands are considered to be the most luxurious within the fashion industry and why?*

- III. *What identity associations do consumers have with luxury fashion houses and brands?*
- IV. *What are the specific branding techniques that high-end companies use to obtain their “luxury” lifestyle association?*
- V. *What kind of artistic branding elements are the most successful at creating a luxury association?*

Method

This thesis adopts both surveys and in-depth interviews to explore my research questions. The survey results will inform my interview questions. For the survey, I hope to obtain at least 50 responses using a combination of social media listening and snowball sampling. I secured IRB exemption for this project, however I will attend to whatever questions arise. To identify consistent followers/interactors among a wide array of fashion brands, I will informally contact people I know who study the industry or directly work in the fashion field. After compiling this list of possible survey respondents, I will contact the individuals using a combination of email, website, and mobile methods. I will utilize a Qualtrics survey and adopt measures provided in *Conducting Online Surveys* to obtain the most insightful and substantial information that can be used to inform my interviews and final project.

The in-depth interview will focus on specific trends in branding techniques, and my interview guide will expand on survey responses. I will conduct the interviews using open-ended questions and probes, in an arrangement that is most easy to understand and slowly gets more complex in nature. It's recommended for beginners to qualitative research analysis to start an interview question off with the phrase “tell me about...” to

ease into the subject and paint a better picture of the interviewee's initial thought process going into the interview (Jacob and Furgerson, 2012). A uses and gratifications theoretical framework will inform my understanding of the interview responses, as it looks at the consumer's attitude and motivation for certain branding consumption, and specifically here, the digital media channels pertaining to fashion (Lim and Ting, 2012).

This consumer research will ultimately inform the final product, which is a branding and advertising guide for an existing, emerging fashion brand that is not yet considered luxury. This guide will include logos, a color palette, typography, imagery and brand extensions, among other elements, and will reflect a positive association with luxury lifestyle and potential consumer loyalty. The template for this guide is offered in *Designing Brand Identity*, by Alina Wheeler, which offers insight to creating a guide's overview, look and feel, color and presentation execution (pg. 148-164). It is my goal to use this research and final branding and advertising guide as a portfolio piece, in addition to a foundation for future strategic branding, marketing, and advertising ideas.

Limitations and Expectations

A majority of the studies mentioned previously fail to analyze the overall branding efforts with the addition of physical assets, flagship store interiors, social media, and everything else that encapsulated the total picture of a particular fashion company and their branding. The goal of my study is to fill those gaps by connecting every outstanding branding feature and analyzing its role in the total brand picture, which will be explored in the interviewing process. Not all brands use the same brand attributes and campaign strategies, so I'll only be able to report consistencies across all brands the outcome from the analysis of those findings. My survey won't be able to cover every

single branding attribute, but it will recognize the most notable ones. The main elements much of the literature fails to recognize are the visual and imagery trends and strategies of these brands, as well as the tone and overall characterization. Qualitative and quantitative analysis throughout the project will help to recognize and categorize trends to hopefully identify patterns in these tactics. The goal of this is to inspire, from this point forward, future luxury branding efforts, which could then lead to brand extensions and creative marketing campaigns.

Ethical Challenges and Concepts

One ethical challenge I faced throughout this project was how to acquire authentic responses from people, so eventually an incentive prize was awarded to those who were able to provide feedback. However, I was able to go about it in a way that still allowed me to get information from them prior to the conclusion of the project. The prize incentive decided upon was a \$25 Zara e-gift card, which appeals to this generation of consumers, who are also the largest consumers of fashion fashion and micro-trends. Although Zara is a participant in this category of consumerism, I had to choose a related incentive I know would appeal to the most potential respondents. While they also offer male, not just female shopping options, they have a wide array of goods that I knew would inspire consumers via social media to click and take my survey, and possibly even allow interviewing for the in-depth analysis portion. My decision might have been different if I was sending the survey out to potential respondents that only went to fashion school or were all extremely knowledgeable on the subject matter relating to luxury, but the survey needed to go out to a larger variation of people to get a wider perspective on the research questions being considered.

Benefits

This research's purpose is to inform branding and advertising professionals of luxury or independent fashion brands as they seek to understand Generation Z perceptions. It also serves to inspire and benefit my own career path in marketing, advertising, and brand management.

Despite a brand's long-standing reputation amongst consumers, it must continuously evolve to keep the attention of both the older and younger audiences. Being able to appeal to a wide range of consumers on many levels contributes to the long term success of these brands. My branding guide will seek to cultivate both a youthful marketing approach and mature design elements that include basic, quality staples, that will capture the attention of various consumer groups. It is my goal that any emerging designer or business-owner can refer to my research-based branding guide and interpret it in a way that fits their own business or creative desires. Although fashion branding is strategic in how it's implemented, it allows for artistic freedom during its creation.

Findings

Survey Analysis

Within the category of "luxury," retailers seem to conduct themselves in a way to maintain an exclusive yet familial bond with consumers. My goal was to dive into the exclusive stereotypes of luxury fashion brands and uncover what consistent choices branding professionals could be making, whether that be strategic or creative, in order to maintain their reputation so consistently and across so many variations of fashion houses and styles. I will explore the various approaches to creative branding efforts by luxury brand strategists by surveying roughly 50 participants, consumers of luxury fashion

information or goods, and interviewing around 20% of those participants to go in-depth with their thought processes.

The initial step to accumulating brand research in correlation with consumer perceptions and artistic strategies was to collect survey responses using Qualtrics software and acquire general knowledge of luxury fashion brands. A total of 52 participants took the survey, which asked them to describe their general knowledge of trends and fashion before ranking ten luxury fashion campaigns from the 2021 Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter collections. Brands included Burberry, Chloe, Valentino, Dior, Michael Kors, Kenzo, Gucci, Marc Jacobs, Tiffany & Co., and Prada. These specific brands were chosen due to their varying stereotypes within the fashion industry. Ranking campaigns across a larger scale of luxury value will allow me to identify which campaign branding efforts stick out amongst brands creatively in comparison with their overall branding strategy. For example, Michael Kors does not have a strong luxurious association within the industry as a generalized stereotype in comparison to Dior, Gucci, or Burberry. Kenzo and Marc Jacobs are generally perceived less luxurious than Dior, Gucci, and Burberry but more-so than Michael Kors. Tiffany & Co. is our outlier here as it is strictly jewelry and not often seen as a luxury brand, but the campaign efforts and strategies are similar to those of the other brands.

The names and logos of these brands will be removed from the campaigns so that the survey participant will only be able to make decisions based on the visuals and overall creative strategy. They will be asked to rank the following campaigns based on their perception of their luxury value: Burberry's Olympia campaign (SS21), Chloe's Next Chapter (SS21), Valentino's Roman Palazzo campaign (FW21), Dior's Carvaggio

campaign (SS21), Michael Kors with Bella Hadid (SS21), Kenzo's SS21 by Felipe Oliveira Baptista, Gucci's Winter in the Park (FW21), Marc Jacobs Heaven campaign (SS21), Tiffany & Co.'s Stand for Love campaign (SS21), and Prada's SS21 campaign (see Appendix A for campaign visuals).

These specific campaigns were chosen because they each offered different and distinct visual tactics for the participant to rank, such as color palettes, themes, models, and additional components. For example, some campaigns were minimalist studio shoots while some were shot on-location. Some campaigns included famous celebrities among Generation Z at the moment, such as Bella Hadid and Zendaya. The analysis from this question is meant to answer what visual tactics professional branders use to draw the consumer in or keep a solid reputation and consumer base. Of course there are varying elements that actually go into a creative campaign, such as the photographer, creative director, editor, model or celebrity, and stylist, but this will determine which elements of the overall campaign are most successful.

Participants were then asked to rank different campaigns from SS20/FW21 (Spring/Summer 2020 collections and Fall/Winter 2021 collections) from the same brands—this time having a short description explaining the campaign as well as the name, logos and brand identifiers. This was included in Q2 to compare how participants rank campaigns in light of any preconceived notion of the brand's reputation and identity. The campaigns included in Q2 included Burberry's Surf Mobile Game (SS20), Chloe's Handle with Grace campaign (SS20), Valentino's Empathy campaign (FW21), Dior's "garden-esque) SS20 campaign, Michael Kors SS20, Kenzo SS20, Gucci's Epilogue campaign (SS20), Marc Jacobs SS20 campaign, Tiffany & Co.'s SS20 campaign, and

Prada's influencer initiative inviting Charli D'Amelio to Milan Fashion Week in 2020. These campaigns and marketing efforts were also specifically chosen due to their varying advertising tactics ranging from mobile/virtual innovations and classic campaign photoshoots to influencer strategies (see Appendix A for Q2 visuals).

Survey questions 4 and 5 explored the consumer's desire to actually purchase the brands previously discussed. The same ten brands were listed in questions 4 and 5 as the consumer was asked to rank their desire to purchase them if they were (Q4) just above their price range and were to be treated as a consumer's splurge purchase or (Q5) were more accessible to the consumer if the products were all hypothetically within their price range. I wanted to see if the answers varied depending on the consumer's accessibility to them as exclusivity seems to play a large role in the desirability of most luxury brands. Would the answers vary as the brands became more accessible, possibly staying more true to their personal style opposed to purchasing a high-ticket item that was more desirable amongst their consumer age group? Analyzing the relationship between consumer accessibility, price, and consumer desirability will help to actually pinpoint their inclination to purchase versus their visual attraction to certain campaigns (see Appendix A for questions).

Survey question six gives the participant different campaign elements: models or celebrities pictured, cinematography/visuals of campaign, setting, innovation and new ideas, originality, clear brand identity, styling used, color scheme and fonts, and asks them to pick their top three most telling elements of whether a campaign is to a higher degree of luxury. This is just to provoke a general reflection about how they ranked the campaigns in the earlier questions and provide for discussion as to which elements are the

most effective as communicating a luxury brand image. Survey question seven has the participants rank nine of the most expensive fashion brands, in their opinion and which they perceive are the most luxurious.

A Yahoo! article claims that the top ten most expensive fashion brands, starting from the most expensive, are Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Hermes, Prada, Chanel, Dior, Ralph Lauren, Versace, Armani and Fendi (Panovic, 2021). Ralph Lauren was excluded from the brands to rank in the survey because it's typical among Generation Z consumers that Ralph Lauren produces the classic polo logos, which seem less expensive than luxury bags and "designer" clothing. As such, it felt unnecessary to include as it isn't related to other brands discussed throughout the survey. Here, I wanted to see if the relationship between cost and "exclusive" brand image was consistent. Question eight asks the participant to discuss why they made the decisions they did in ranking those brands. Analysis from these questions will help to answer what, aside from price, makes one luxury brand stand out over another. The interviews will further discuss why some of these participants viewed these brands a certain way and give a better understanding as to what brands are considered to be most luxurious in the industry and why.

Finally, to conclude the survey, participants were asked to use sliders—from 0, being they strongly disagree, to 10, being they strongly agree—to indicate their opinions on certain controversial or more generalized consumer-driven ideas within the fashion industry. These statements are as follows: luxury brands are more durable than others; luxury brands are always in style and on trend; I feel exclusive when I buy a luxury brand; it's important to me that the brand I'm wearing is visible to others; I would purchase a fake luxury product if it looked real enough. These statements, indicating

whether the participant agrees or disagrees and to what extent, will help to inform the participant's overall consumer opinion on luxury as it pertains to their life and general retail shopping habits and opinions. It provides a glance into the consumer's mind as to how they think about luxury and their opinions, before getting into specifics, such as the campaigns and desirability.

Interview Analysis

There were two parts to the in-depth interviewing process: the questions exploring the participant's knowledge and opinions of certain consumer habits and branding ideas, and further assessment of their responses to the survey. This order of parts was chosen to first get the participant thinking about luxury fashion in a way they maybe haven't yet, before diving back into questions they have already answered partially within the survey. There were three sub questions to help guide the interview process with the participant. They were first asked to give an overview of their general knowledge of luxury fashion brands, fashion brands in general, and their consumption and perception of how retail plays a part in their life. They were asked to give their opinion on what was trendy right now, based on general knowledge as well as how Gen Z culture contributes to trends. This question was introduced first because in order to collect more in-depth responses, they had to first think about fashion's current culture as well as how they contribute and consume it. More specific questions followed general awareness questions, such as those discussing how they draw the consumer in on a self-expressive level and how their location, age, culture, and surrounding plays a part in their role as a consumer in the luxury and non-luxury retail sectors. The final probe for the last set of questions was to

identify how the participant felt they would benefit personally from purchasing and owning a luxury item.

Subquestion 2 explores the participant's general understanding of what "luxury" means. They will be asked what other adjectives come to mind when they hear the word luxury, and what they feel are some identifiers, both visually and artistically, that come to mind when they think of the luxury fashion branding image. As mentioned previously, since there are multiple different categories and realms of luxury that brands fall into, I want to find consistencies among the consumer base opinion of what they think "luxury" means in a more generalized sense. They will be asked to identify any logos, colorways, shapes, graphics, or names that come to mind as embodying the luxury fashion image, and also asked about their opinion of co-branding and if a luxury brand collaborating with a lesser-value brand decreases the value of that luxury brand.

Lastly, subquestion three asks the participant their opinion on which luxury brands are consistently the "coolest" or most on-trend thing to have. This is to locate a possible distinction between the luxury image and trending fashion—will luxury always be at the top of the food chain in regards to the coolness factor or can other brands top them without being luxury, and in what cases, for what age groups? The participant will be asked to identify what makes a luxury brand timeless opposed to other brands that can typically go in and out of popularity more quickly. This is to try and identify why consumers choose designer items that may stay in style longer than fast-fashion items. This is important as fast-fashion ultimately contributes to an endless and rapidly changing trend cycle that has a detrimental impact on both the environment and those involved in the fast-fashion production industry, such as children and factory workers. The

participant will be asked if exclusivity over accessibility makes a brand more “cool,” therefore increasing their desire to purchase it, and will explore the idea of investment versus instant gratification.

Another topic to be explored from the survey responses is the idea of personally branding oneself and that affecting the way they shop and interpret luxury. The interviewee will be asked how they personally brand themselves and if it impacts their purchasing decisions versus those being made on a more impulsive level. They’ll be asked what brands—luxury or non-luxury—that they feel most align with their personality or personal style, and why. Additionally, whether they perceive someone else’s personality or personal style based on the brands they are wearing. Lastly, they will be asked if they have strong attachments with their most loved fashion items and what makes those attachments strong versus with other clothing items.

Survey Initial Observations

Initially, getting consumers to take the survey was difficult unless they were directly messaged about the research and analysis being done and for what—this is most likely due to the 10-15 minute time interval it took for participants to finish the survey. I linked it through my Instagram account (2.4k+ followers) as well and got limited responses due to the same reasons. It wasn’t until I offered a \$25 e-gift card incentive to the most popular “trendy” fashion company right now, Zara, that offers both men and women’s selections, that people started taking the survey and giving me adequate feedback to work with for sufficient data analysis. One person was able to take the survey and give feedback from the on-campus fashion magazine organization at Ohio University, Thread, nine responses came from personally messaging those I knew who

were well informed in the fashion industry, 39 respondents came from the social media and Zara e-gift card incentive, and three were unconfirmed.

Prior to the in-depth interview, I downloaded all 52 survey reports/responses individually to start a qualitative analysis as well as analyze the data provided from Qualtrics. Some significant findings that came from my initial survey observations were that most survey respondents consumed their fashion content through marketing via social media. One exception was from the older age range who consumed them based on online store browsing or friend recommendations. Others read about them, purchased them or claim to want to purchase them through online or physical window-shopping.

What was interesting and probably most significant, and what I dove into further with in-depth interviews, is that people ranked some campaigns without labels highest, but when the label was placed on them and they actually knew the brand, they placed them lowest. Kenzo, Marc Jacobs, and Michael Kors seemed to be the highest ranking for campaigns used without any sort of names or labels showing—about 25% of participants put Kenzo first, 17% put Marc Jacobs first, and 15% put Michael Kors first, despite their differing looks which will be elaborated on later. Approximately 27% of participants put Prada last and 33% put Chloe last. Kenzo, Valentino, Michael Kors, and Marc Jacobs were consistently ranked toward the top among participants, while Chloe, Prada, and Dior were ranked toward the bottom. In some cases, the campaigns that were ranked the lowest without labels were actually ranked the highest in the next question when the label was then placed on them. Approximately 28% put Burberry first and 26% put Chloe first for the second question, which was a complete flop for Chloe. None of the respondents put Marc Jacobs, Michael Kors, or Tiffany first, which was expected considering they're

not as stereotyped as high end as the other brands in the fashion industry, despite Michael Kors and Marc Jacobs being consistently ranked toward the top in the first question, without any labeling. Prada was consistently ranked toward the bottom, most likely due to the Charlie D'Amelio campaign. Influencer strategies will be explored further in the analysis. For the most telling elements of what degree of luxury these campaigns fell under, it seemed like, from the data, that the most popular answer was the cinematography and overall visuals, with the styling hitting just above models used, clear brand identity and originality (see Appendix C) which is applicable to my in-depth interview conversations with respondents on why they chose to rank the way they did.

Most people ranked Gucci, Prada, and Dior as their top choices if they were an affordable, accessible option to purchase, or a splurge purchase. If the participant were to splurge on a luxury item, 28% selected Gucci as their first option, 20% selected Dior, and 12% selected Prada. If any of these brands were more accessible to them and were within their price range, 22% selected Prada first, 20% selected Gucci as their first option, and 16% selected Dior as their first.

Ultimately, the same three lead but the order does switch around a bit, so exclusivity does play a huge role in consumer purchases of luxury brands. This is also interesting compared to the previous data collected because Chloe and Burberry ranked highest with their brand identity labeled with their visual strategy, yet they didn't appear in the top spots for most desirable brands to be consumed, whether they were a splurge or accessible option. Due to this, there are other contributing factors opposed to campaign success that have yet to be explored for a brand's luxury perception if this is related to consumer desirability. This further enforces the idea of there being different categories of

luxury appealing to certain groups of consumers in different ways, such as luxury to be consumer, luxury to be viewed as inspiration, luxury to be seen as unattainable despite the price because of age and demographics. which will be discussed among the in-depth interview responses as well.

For the most expensive brands ranked, Hermes, Louis Vuitton, and Versace had the most high-ranking spots, although Gucci places above Hermes in price-point, and Versace is the 8th most expensive, falling under Dior, Chanel, Prada, and Gucci. Some people noted they ranked brands higher based on familiarity and how long they've been around, while ranking other brands that produced mainstream street style as lower on the list, as they've become, what in their eyes is "tacky." Several participants specifically noted that they ranked the most popular brands the lowest, noting popularity as having an adverse relationship with luxury. It seems like the top defining factors for people ranking brands high was how much they've seen them around (seen them more = ranked higher) and how uncommon they are to own (less common to own = ranked higher), which in a way, contradict each other.

For Q8, which asked participants to explain why they ranked the way they did, one person who studied fashion abroad wrote, "Gucci and LV used to be higher on the list, but they are more accessible and have become more of street brands rather than luxury. They're the most common "luxury" brands I see people wearing even if they can't truly afford luxury [in the way wealthier people can]." Other survey participants noted things like personal preferences, brand aesthetics, knowledge of products, reputation, celebrity involvement, and overall history and legacy. For example, one participant noted "I ranked them based on how long they've been around as well as

impact,” and another wrote, “whether it’s been diluted by supply,” supporting the claims that limited collections play a part in the luxury/exclusivity relationship. Influencer marketing was also mentioned by a participant who noted that, “the more social media (non-fashion) influencers wearing a certain brand the less luxurious I perceive them to be; accessibility I guess. I see many with LV bags and Gucci pieces but I don’t expect to see them with Hermes.” This notion supports the fact that choosing specific influencers to access your products or repost/market them via your digital advertising channels plays an extremely important role in how you market your brand in today’s day and age, which will be explored further via my branding guide.

Another participant noted how someone ranked the most expensive brands based on their personal familiarity and nothing else, writing, “Chanel and Hermes have, in my opinion, always controlled the market for demand in high luxury. Everything else is by what’s easiest to purchase their best items.” The relationship by how easily a consumer can obtain a brand’s “best items” as a contributing factor to their degree of luxury is an important concept in designer resale. If second-hand purchasing websites such as Grailed, The RealReal and Depop sell one brand at a consistently lower price than another, more contributing sellers will start to price their items the same way, based on their familiarity with how much they can get for said item, thus decreasing the value. The most consistent element of this question, however, remains how often people see the product being worn by other people. Many participants also noted that if they see a brand worn by people in smaller cities or suburban areas much more frequently than others, they associate it with lesser-luxury brands.

Lastly, Q9 had participants use sliders to indicate how they felt about certain fashion consumption opinions on a scale from 1-10, 10 being they completely agree and feel the same. The most agreed upon idea was that luxury brands are more durable than others, averaging approximately 7/10 amongst the 51 participants who answered the question. For the concept that luxury brands are always in style and on trend, an average of 5/10 was selected upon the 50 participants who answered that question, indicating that the idea of luxury being on trend had the most middle-ground answer on whether they disagreed or agreed, most likely due to personal preferences. For the statement, “I feel exclusive when I buy a luxury brand,” 6.8/10 was the average amongst 50 people; for “It’s important to me that the brand I’m wearing is visible to others, 3.6/10 was the average amongst 47 people.

The question with the most variation was, “I would purchase a fake product if it looked real enough,” with 4.7/10 was the average amongst 43 people. However, due to the lower number of people who seemed to answer this one, it’s difficult to determine whether it was skipped purposely or not. In any case, it seems to be the least favored statement among the list. This response also had the greatest standard deviation, meaning that this might’ve been the most disagreed upon statement. Fake luxury is a very controversial principle, with the abundance of underground markets of fake-luxury sellers that exist in cities and overseas’ e-commerce websites, and it might certainly be considered the least ethical out of all the statements. I personally purchased a fake luxury product one time—a very simple, basic pair of shoes—because they were very costly on the legitimate designer website, and not many people had them at the time.

Interview Initial Observations

More general ideas that came from the in-depth interviews were that a lot of consumers, most likely due to the fact that they are Generation Z and either still attend college or just graduated, don't purchase many high-end products now, and if they do, consume it second-hand, but plan on consuming it on a larger scale after they reach a more mature and stable part of their life for (for example, attain a job promotion, have debt paid off or grad school completed). One 23-year-old male, a consumer of less than roughly 15% "high-fashion goods," noted at this point in his life he "doesn't think it's sensible to spend all of [his] money on clothes," but instead prioritizes "experiences or some of [his] hobbies," which can affect consumer perception as they don't play a large enough part in their life.

Participants all agreed that in order to achieve a luxury association within the market, the brand needed to be backed by not only quality, but a long history within the market. For example, almost all LVMH brands, which fall under a fashion conglomerate founded in 1971, were founded over 50, and up to 100, years ago. The history as well as the European association, which is known for their materials and craftsmanship, allows the luxury association to come naturally. The 23-year-old male participant noted that his most favored and respected logos and colorways of luxury fashion brands were "Louis Vuitton because the monogram logo is traditional, timeless, same with Gucci, the double G's." Louis Vuitton falls under LVMH and was founded in 1854, thus making the classic monogram a "luxury" to those through exclusivity (price point) and craftsmanship for over 150 years.

During the in-depth interviews, participants were asked about their retail and shopping habits, as well as their relationship with luxury brands and their opinion of the

“highest” luxury brands. Thrifting was consistently mentioned among participants, as well as stores with products ranging from \$20-\$100, such as Free People, Urban Outfitters, Zara, Nastygal and Princess Polly. As for what those participants perceived as the highest of luxury, Gucci was mentioned consistently, as well as Bottega Veneta, Hermes, Fendi, Chanel and Louis Vuitton.

It is notable that Bottega Veneta was mentioned considering it didn't appear on the list of most expensive brands in 2021 (Panovic). Furthermore, there must be other branding techniques explored within Bottega Veneta's strategy in order to execute their consistent luxury perception other than cost and exclusivity. They do fall under the Kering company, which also owns Gucci, Saint Laurent, Balenciaga, Alexander McQueen, Brioni, Boucheron, Pomellato, Dodo, Qeelin, Ulysse Nardin, Girard-Perregaux, as well as Kering Eyewear, and have over 50 years of history to back them (“Kering Group Brands”), but they have strong branding techniques to be kept to the same standard as Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Hermes, who all have at least 100 or more years of history to back their fashion house (“The 10 Oldest Luxury”). Some words to characterize the participant's idea of luxury included: elegant, well-made, credible, artistic, high end, very minimal, exclusive, unattainable, handcrafted, unique, expensive, tasteful, and elevated. My branding guide will explore all of these concepts in a visual/attainable sense and hopefully be able to emulate luxury standards.

The idea of minimalism in fashion branding techniques was a frequently brought up topic during the in-depth interviews as well. When minimalism didn't play a role in the brand's image, it seemed like the consumer was able to easily identify the fact that the luxury brand didn't necessarily mean it was the trendiest or coolest thing to have. The 23-

year-old male participant said “minimalism, in a way, represents today’s high end brands because people want to communicate what they’re wearing without being too flashy.” This proved evident when every person interviewed noted the colors and logos they deem to be most “luxury” were all neutrals, royal hues, and serif-esque fonts. A 23-year-old female said in her opinion the most luxury looking logos were “Tom Ford and Prada—their logos are very hard edge, blacks, serif fonts.” Another 23-year-old female agreed that “the colors black, white, most neutrals, along with the Chanel logo stands out.” Another 23-year-old agreed that the Chanel logo embodied the luxury fashion branding image, noting that it is very plain, simple, with 2 c’s. Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Burberry were also common answers among participants for most luxury seeming logos and physical branding, which correlates with the frequented answers for what the highest luxury of brands were.

Although minimalism was noted, monograms, which is a print all over bags or clothes, was mentioned as very luxury-feeling and timeless only if there’s history to back it up. The Louis Vuitton monogram was originally designed in 1896 by Louis Vuitton’s son as a way to brand his luggage business, and after 125 years the monogram still stands strong and is recognized as a famous yet still trendy style, even as Louis Vuitton continues to rebrand and market their products in new exciting ways, which I will expand on in my analysis. Responses from interviewees vary on how they choose to wear their designer or luxury pieces, whether that is outwardly obviously designer, by including the brand name on the piece, or not. Most of the participants who didn’t appreciate fashion in a more artistic sense, such as the person who acknowledges their unattainability due to their age said “I admire them, but they don’t play a huge part in my life because I’m a

post-grad college student. Once I start making money they'll play a bigger part in my life," and "I own items from a few luxury fashion brands [mostly streetwear], but I don't associate it with being consistent throughout my wardrobe," generally wanted the brands' names to appear on their clothing if they were investing in the pieces. The post-grad college student explained, "I don't necessarily like this about myself but if I'm spending a lot of money on a brand I'd like the logo to be seen just because of the splurge and that's part of the appeal sometimes. If you had more money and status it probably wouldn't matter as much." Similarly, a second participant noted "I like to have the name of the brand on the clothing. I feel like some people would disagree with that though. I want people to know what I'm wearing if I'm going to buy it though, so that's my opinion." However, the fashion student who valued the actual artisan and craftsmanship of the fashion didn't necessarily care as much if the brand name was showing on the piece, and stated "I feel like style and branding are different things. To me, no matter what brand I'm wearing, if I can style it well it doesn't matter if it's luxury or not. As long as you know how to wear it, it doesn't have to be designer."

It then follows that when fast fashion brands attempt monogram collections, such as Pretty Little Thing, Nastygol, and Missguided's monogram sweatshirts and sweat-suits, it comes off as neither sophisticated nor luxury, due to the fact that if you are choosing the brand or designer outwardly for others to see, you most likely can identify or appreciate the designer or brand's history or ethics, as well as its high price-point. It's a statement to say you worked hard or have the funds to afford a brand like this, with its luxury logo plastered all over for others to notice. When fast fashion brands like Pretty Little Thing or Missguided place their logo on the front of a graphic tee or pair of

sweatpants opposed to Fendi or Louis Vuitton, it's problematic because most consumers are simply drawn to the affordability, not the brand itself.

Another example of this draw to affordability opposed to the actual brand within Generation Z consumers is Shein, which has taken off in the last year and contributed to the fast fashion and trend cycle that has accelerated more quickly than it ever has before. Shein might have a reputation for being bad for the environment and factory-workers, but that doesn't stop young consumers from purchasing its goods because of the low price-point.

One of the topics discussed in the interview was if the participant ever had a preconceived notion of a person based on what article of clothing or brand they were wearing, and several agreed that they did perceive a person somewhat based on the brands they chose to wear. Even if a person isn't realizing it, they may be subconsciously doing it. If someone is seen wearing Patagonia, The North Face, or Chaco's, they are generally perceived as people who enjoy nature or the outdoors. People who carry a designer bag are generally perceived as appreciative of fashion or luxury items. A 24-year-old fashion industry worker noted that their personality may not necessarily be associated with the brand they're wearing, but "their consciousness to the brand's image." This is relevant to the branding professional or advertiser in the sense that they need to identify the right niche consumer group they are trying to appeal to before executing their efforts. For example, appealing to a person who admires luxury but would rather consume fast fashion is different than appealing to a person who admires luxury and also chooses to purchase luxury or other similar accessible options they've seen, such as independent brands or vintage clothing, which I'll dig deeper into in my analysis.

In addition to the consumer's general interests, prioritization of fashion in their life, and retail habits, certain demographics also play a large role in personal style and retail perception and consumption as well. Age and location were the two consistently noted demographics of participants for what they believed to influence their style and retail habits the most. A 23-year-old male who consumes luxury minimally recognized that "there are three main things" to subconsciously influence purchase decisions and personal style, "location, age, and friends. A lot of people in California dress differently than people in Ohio." This lines up with the opinion of a 24-year-old female who works in the fashion industry, who noted that there is a lot of appearance pressure in New York City versus a smaller suburban town. She's quoted saying "I live in one of the fashion capitals of the world so there is a lot of pressure." A 23-year-old female who is passionate about the fashion industry, but doesn't live in a bigger city or works in fashion, agreed by saying "location is a big thing. If I was in a bigger city like in New York I would be spending a lot more money on clothes and dressing up more. Age is a big thing—being young, I'm spending more but on less expensive things."

From personal experience, my two summers spent in New York City working in the fashion industry were an education of the undeniable judgement from those also working in the industry. You can immediately tell who's well-versed in fashion just based on the fact that they wear more independent, lesser known brands. In addition, there's almost a sense of competitiveness among people as to who owns the most hard-to-get or exclusive item. It's an unspoken but undeniable tension. Consumers who admire fashion more than the general public always aspire to be the inspiration versus seeking inspiration. Whoever can create a cool or admirable outfit first or finds a unique or

interesting designer piece not many people have earned a sense of clout in the fashion industry. The idea of an uncommon look or piece aligns with the idea of exclusivity, which is defined as “restriction to a particular person, group, or area” (Lexico). If a certain piece can be restricted to just an individual, it makes it more desirable to have, as many consumers purchase pieces to stand out and show off their own personal style versus directly copying a genre of style.

That being said, two concepts were frequently mentioned in the interviews: exclusivity and consistency. This combined with a strong history, craftsmanship, and years of perfecting various collections and campaigns—ultimately experience—is what make a label feel to the highest degree of luxury.

The 24-year-old female who works in the fashion industry in New York City noted, “Exclusivity is a really high thing. I was thinking with most of Hermes products you can’t just buy certain handbags brand new, you have to be offered or go through a screening process. Chanel doesn’t make a lot of the same bags. Gucci I would definitely say because of the price range and exclusivity,” while a 23-year-old female who works in retail in Ohio said, “I feel my perception of things is based on what I’ve been exposed to, and Versace I haven’t been exposed to which makes it feel more high end.” Here, several concepts come into play. Hermes is known for its exclusivity and even references in pop culture. In “Sex and The City,” character Samantha Jones is a wealthy corporate woman in New York and still has to use powerful connections to get a Birkin bag. You can stay on the Birkin waitlist for years, in addition to having to be invited to purchase it (Erickson, 2021). You can’t walk into an Hermes store and purchase the bag whenever you want. The Hermes CEO was once even quoted saying the essence of the brand is all

about “creating desire” and exclusivity, price, and desire seem to all be intertwined according to interview responses (Adams, 2015).

Relatedly, a 21-year-old student who prefers shopping fast fashion over sustainable or independent brands, is even quoted saying in her interview, “I think the fact that not everyone can have it makes it more desirable for sure. Hermes bags are an example.” She also mentioned, “Dior, Hermes, and Prada just remind me of rich people, when I see successful people wearing these they remind me of old money. I feel like Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Gucci are just more talked about and common and come across less luxurious because a lot of lesser-income people may own things from them.”

Consistency, as well as balancing product exclusivity to create a sense of desire, was something mentioned by participants in ranking the campaigns as well as describing a good branding image. Consistency may show put togetherness and cohesiveness, appealing to the consumer audience because they seem extremely knowledgeable in branding tactics and also seem to know what they’re doing within the space—if a brand appears more consistent, reliable, and put-together, it will make the consumer trust the brand and feel a certain way the brand is targeting.

The 24-year-old female who works in New York City in the luxury fashion industry and the 23-year-old female who works in Columbus in the non-luxury fashion industry both discussed ideas of cohesiveness with campaigns being a contributing factor for ranking them above others or making the brand stand out as more luxurious than the rest. In order to be luxurious, you need to be credible and reliable, as mentioned before, which is why consistency remains such an important factor—you need to have artistic value and consistency within that to achieve a certain level of credibility it seems. The

23-year-old female noted on the campaign ranking that “sleekness, making it look natural yet artistic and not posed,” as well as “consistency with black and white campaigns,” referencing Burberry, ultimately provided the credibility that allowed her to rank it higher. The 21-year-old female who wasn’t as big a consumer or admirer of luxury brands, claimed that ranking campaigns higher for her included products with “logos plastered all over [them], red bottoms” and other defining characteristics, which reference consistent branding strategies that Fendi and Christian Louboutin execute. A student majoring in advertising and marketing communications at a fashion institution also noted she ranked a campaign lower because it didn’t show a clear or consistent brand image.

Consistency can also be another term for a brand’s “signature,” such as the example of red bottoms on Christian Louboutin, the eggshell blue packaging used on Tiffany purchases, the Bottega Veneta signature green color, as well as Off-White’s quotation marks they use in their branding are all examples of their consistent brand “signatures” that have obviously contributed to their success.

The topic of “old money” and “rich people” that one of the participants brought up goes hand in hand with the idea of traditional versus new high-end. Luxury almost exists in different categories or realms and that is made apparent by the way the participants describe their experiences with them. Runway luxury exists in a different realm than consumable luxury because runway is more commonly valued for its artistic value versus consumables, which is why there’s such heavy media coverage for things like the Met Gala. But the same can be said about luxury consumables by those who view it as such. Fashion existing in different realms is open to interpretation by the person based on how it already plays a role in their life.

A 23-year-old male interviewee stated, “there’s a difference between traditional high end and new high end. Off-White and say like, Chrome Hearts are new high end and traditional are more like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Burberry and Saint Laurent.” When the 23-year-old from Columbus was explaining why she disagreed with luxury brands always being in style and on-trend, she said “it’s just in a different realm than trending street wear.” The student majoring in advertising and marketing communications at a fashion institution noted that if she perceived someone based on the brands they’re wearing, when she “sees someone wearing Off-White or bright colors they might not be as outgoing,” and “there’s definitely certain identifies” when perceiving someone based off the category or kind of luxury they’re wearing.

In my experience, the classic, “traditional” luxury brands are considered to be Hermes, Chanel, Fendi, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Saint Laurent, Burberry, Versace, while more “trendy” luxury brands are Prada, Miu-Miu, Vivienne Westwood, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Marc Jacobs, and Jacquemes.

The streetwear category of luxury includes Off-White, Palm Angels, Chrome Hearts, Commes Des Garcons and Heron Preston. There are also a more high-end side of luxury streetwear such as Maison Margiels, Rick Owens and Helmut Lang.

The traditional categories have always reigned supreme and are admired by the most dynamic range of people, from young men to classy, wealthy, women, to young girls dipping their toes into the fashion industry, These are the brands that tie all the ideas of luxury, including neutrals, classic colors, silhouettes, minimalism, and consistency all together and have been backed by years of history. Branding-wise, finding a happy medium between branding for the purpose of consumption rather than art or inspiration

will help sell the product better and hopefully to this dynamic range of people previously discussed. The student majoring in advertising and marketing communications at a fashion institution noted, “I think of them as aspirational because I can’t afford it. It’s definitely aesthetic and admirable and I tend to look at them as inspiration.”

However, vintage is always an option and tends to be the most accessible way to consume luxury for many people, regardless of their income or demographics. Brands like Fendi, Burberry, and Louis Vuitton can be purchased for much lower prices than retail on websites like Grailed and Depop, which has become one of the most popular ways to shop “exclusive” brands amongst Gen Z.

Vintage shopping was continuously mentioned in the interviewees' shopping and retail habits, as well as reasoning for luxury not always being the “coolest” thing to have. The 23-year-old male noted in his interview, “Vintage can be cooler because the items are way more rare,” and the 24-year-old New York City fashion industry worker said, “Now in my life, I would buy something when I need it which ranges from thrifting and vintage clothing to stuff above the fashion trends, like & Other Stories, Oak & Fort, more independent designers.” Also, in later questions about personally branding herself, she mentions vintage as a way of rebranding oneself style-wise.

Another participant, a fashion industry worker in her early 20s, said, “I like to sell my clothes so I don’t have a lot of clothes at once, usually on Curtsy and Mercari and then cycle in new clothes because I get sick of stuff easily,” and she usually gets a designer purchase off The RealReal, which are all second-hand shops. The New York City fashion student said, “If I were to buy something designer it would definitely be for resale or at a vintage store.” When resale store owners are grouping these designer pieces

with other more-affordable vintage pieces, the effect is similar in the way that the shop will only have one of each item, and despite whatever price it is, the odds of another person having that piece is unlikely.

The same principle goes for independent designers. Fashion-enthusiasts who do deep research on new and upcoming designers are typically more familiar with lesser-known and less-expensive brands, despite whatever price point they may fall at, drawing them into purchasing it because of their seeming “exclusivity” to only the small following they have. Prioritizing artistic design styles and quality puts them above fast fashion in terms of seemingly “luxury” status. The 24-year-old fashion industry worker made a point in saying, “I think there is a correlation with exclusivity shopping and independent brands because smaller brands aren’t necessarily unpopular, but they would be considered exclusive due to their size versus the idea of the luxury brand being exclusive because not many people can afford it.” This enforces the idea that if you can find a unique independent brand that has great styles and quality, but a smaller following due to maybe the lack of resources from the designer, this can become a wardrobe piece that emulates a luxury piece. Ultimately, uniqueness and rarity makes an item “priceless” therefore emulating the goal of luxury brands.

Celebrities and influencers also impacted both the participants' campaign ranking for luxury value, and some of their purchase decisions, however, not one interviewee thought inviting Charlie D'amelio to Paris fashion week was a good idea. TikTok influencers aren’t big name celebrities being talked about and valued for their art, such as movies, shows, albums, or businesses, but instead got famous off of a bit of talent in combination with luck and timing, such as Addison Rae, who got invited to the Met Gala.

There's no fashion representation from her, and data shows having someone like that as the face of your brand isn't successful—50% of the 50 participants who answered that question initially ranked this influencer in the bottom three spots, despite the fact that the brand was Prada, which appeared consistently in luxury associations. This goes to show that influencers, when done incorrectly, can harm a brand's image. Inviting the right people and having related creators represent your brand is key to growth, especially for a brand that may not be as established. This will be discussed further in my branding guide. An actually well-done example of this would be Emma Chamberlain, who is an influencer who paved her way in the fashion space uniquely—she was a huge part of Louis Vuitton's rebrand in 2019, attending every fashion show and paved the way for Generation Z to acquire a newfound love for this fashion house (Regan, 2021).

Similarly, the actual designer or person behind the label can create an association as well. A brand that's independently owned, as mentioned before, needs a face of its company in order to show off the consumer base it's targeting. So if I, as a 21-year-old college student, started an independent label, it would have to stay true to my personal fashion aesthetic in order to be successful. So I could brand it as I would personally brand myself, since I know what I appeal to. This is why the question of how interview participants branded themselves was in direct correlation with how they view outside fashion brands and trends. Being someone who prefers to shop classic 90s-esque pieces such as mini skirts, low-rise pants, platform shoes, and a mixture between preppy and grunge, I would have to really stress those principles through my own fashion label, but elevate it in order to become successful. The sample branding guide will explore this. Other independent brands that have done this have been able to fully elevate themselves

in a way that basic, common brands haven't been able to do, almost to the point of luxury-level associations.

An independent designer won the LVMH prize in 2021, and one participant noted that the idea of independent designers is what's trending, rather than just luxury. The fashion student explains, "I would say that trending right now are Namushka, Dion Lee, Magda Butrym, and Nensi Dojaka who just won the LVMH prize" which are all independent brands that are lesser-known and don't work under a larger conglomerate. Dion Lee is considered luxury despite being independent—their price points match more with luxury than smaller more accessible independent brands do, and they exist within the realm of luxury as previously discussed. I feel this is due to the fact that Dion Lee made the brand almost completely about himself, giving the brand his own name, designing pieces that he would wear, and using other marketing strategies—such as the Dion Lee DJ mixes he creates. In relation to ideas mentioned as important factors by interview participants, the brand also keeps consistency within all designs and ad campaigns, neutrals, and elevated twists on classic silhouettes, which have contributed immensely to their success.

I also had the pleasure of working for Dion Lee over the summer, directly under the brand manager and social media and PR director, and I'd say the influencer gifting, finding people who identified with the brand, while also keeping up with who was relevant in pop-culture at the time, was an important and emphasized part of a brand manager's role in order to keep the brand's integrity—which has been proved by the survey and interviewers.

Some additional topics that arose from interview participants included fast-fashion and the trend cycle impacting luxury perception, the idea of luxury fashion making the consumer feel superior, as well as part of something exclusive, and similar faces of good-looking, similarly built people can make campaigns feel repetitive and not interesting - unless they are celebrities or influencers being utilized correctly in the campaign. One interview participant who works in the industry noted, “I feel like [luxury fashion] is a very instant gratification type of thing. I would feel good about it for a few days.” This is an interesting notion as it may indicate the “magic” of luxury brands disappears the more often you buy things at a certain price point. For someone who doesn’t typically splurge on themselves, a \$100 coat could be a very exciting purchase, but over time, as they purchase more and more items around the \$100 range, it could cease to be something exciting for them, thus increasing their desire for more and more expensive items.

This is why, for the brand guide, it will be important to appeal to various consumer audiences by more than just price, but instead unique marketing ideas, quality, and visuals. Keeping the attention can be even more difficult than obtaining it in the first place.

Analysis

To analyze my interview responses, I put almost everything the subject stated into a chart/sheet document and categorized responses to find common topics, consistencies, and connections between people and ideas, some of which was already mentioned in the initial interview findings. My analysis also explored common creative efforts by brands to achieve their luxury lifestyle association from a creative standpoint. Some repetition of

phrases occurred within the chart to fill in the blanks and connect subjects to the ideas they were speaking on across the board. From the information collected among participants, both survey and interview, the common themes that kept being approached besides exclusivity and consistency were the ideas of being “minimal” and “timeless,” as well as other concepts such as historical, neutral, and versatile. The thing about fashion is that, much like art, it’s open to all sorts of opinions and outlooks on styles, designers, and trends. “Luxury” is defined as the state of great comfort and extravagant living (Lexico), which can be a different experience for each individual. These ideas explore what the connection between luxury and fashion means to different people and how it can be captured within a brand in a centralized way.

To start, I thought it was interesting how the brands that ranked the highest for campaign luxury-appeal, regardless of whether it accompanied the campaign or brand name, included Kenzo, Marc Jacobs, Michael Kors, and Burberry, but for Q4 and Q5, the top three brands most likely to be consumed whether it was a splurge purchase or hypothetically within that consumer’s budget, were Dior, Gucci, and Prada. Here, the idea of different ways people consume luxury comes into play. The participant’s purchase choices rely heavily on their relationship with the luxury image. Their preferences might differ from their idea of traditional luxury. For example, if the participant likes more trendy luxury over traditional, although they may rank the Chloe campaign first, they may prefer Prada's overall branding image, which has a lot of different factors. Prada remains consistent with their triangular logo, minimalistic pieces, simplicity and functionality. While Chloe is more dreamy and girly, embodying more of that traditional luxury image, they didn’t succeed in their "next chapter” campaign,

which averaged near the bottom of the ranking. This may have been due to the fact they were attempting something different than normal and steered clear away from their traditional, girly branding efforts by executing a more sleek, non-fashion centered campaign. This proves that for long term success, consistency as well as playing to the brand's strengths works out best. Answers may have varied if the participant was shown multiple campaigns and chose to rank groupings over individual campaigns, but it definitely allowed for specific branding techniques to be examined. Chloe's "refresher of their visual palette" (Wittmer, 2021) was not perceived by consumers as luxury, while Kenzo's modern take on "nomadic spirit" (Marson, 2021) and distance photography proved to be more of a success.

Bottega Veneta, owned by conglomerate Kering, didn't appear on the most expensive brands list, but it remained thought of as exclusive and luxury by interview participants. When Bottega Veneta is usually seen on influencers and celebrities, it tends to be the same signature styles and colors. For instance, there are several variations of their most popular handbags that they have kept consistent, as well as their consistent and successful colors, like forest green and orange. An article by Jing Daily that focuses on Bottega's reinvention over the last few years notes that with the rapidly changing trend cycle and turnover by Generation Z, keeping core values within a company while also putting modern twists on successful designs is what keeps these brands relevant in the market (Langer, 2021). In their words, "the core positioning of a brand should never change, but expressions need to change with consumer preferences." In addition, the authors discuss how Bottega's consistent storytelling has helped reinforce customer trust, because if they are delivering their core values across the board, it reinforces long-term brand equity. Here, signature style becomes just as appealing as a brand logo or name being on the actual piece. If the consistency is so

prevalent within the brand, people familiar with the fashion industry will automatically know what it is because of its signature styles, versus just knowing what it is because the name is visible on the front. As noted by many participants of the interview, if they're going to spend a lot of money on one thing, they want other people to notice it's expensive to elevate their perception of style. A lot of celebrity/influencer fashion icons, such as Dua Lipa, Bella Hadid, Hailey Bieber and Emma Chamberlain, don't need to worry about the public not knowing—their overall style is tracked by the public, as well as social media “closet” accounts that locates things they're wearing with the price and brand, most oftentimes exclusive or designer pieces you may not expect to be designer or exclusive. These celebrity influencers don't need to show the brand name or signature outwardly in their style because they already have so many people informing others of that for them. This gives them much more freedom to be a style icon and try new things that aren't outright luxury or trendy yet, despite having a stylist, of course.

So, why does exclusivity play such a big role in luxury consumerism? It all goes back to the psychological principle of wanting what you can't have, especially when it comes to showing others a unique style. A 2018 Business Insider article discussed human nature's desire to want what we can't have. When we typically think of this, it most likely is in relation to relationships and certain “unattainable” people, but the same principle can apply to other things, such as a bigger house, nicer car, a different physical feature such as bigger lips or different colored eyes, or certain unattainable items like rare clothing and accessories, or at least clothing and accessories that no one else has. Things we can't have often or on a consistent basis provides more of a reward-factor and more dopamine in your brain once you finally get it (Dodgson, 2018). This is an interesting relationship because 50% of survey takers said, on a scale from 1-10, they think it's important for people to notice the brand they're wearing. In this case, the bottom four options were selected, meaning they disagreed with this principle. So, for

most it seems like they only want people to notice the things that are worth more, and don't really want people to notice the things that are worth less. This can be achieved by pricing items a certain way and holding the quality and materials used to a certain standard. For example, \$80-\$120 is a more desirable option for a "splurge," as opposed to a \$500-\$800 item, but still feels like more of a reward than, say, Shein items, which are averagely priced anywhere from \$4-\$15. Still, using 100% cotton or satin alternatives opposed to acrylic, polyester, or nylon might make the purchase feel worth it (Payer, 2021). Also, higher price points include anything sustainable or "limited," like a limited-time-only collection.

Building on the idea that vintage gives off the same feel as designer, it seems like those who are drawn in by vintage and independent designers usually purchase those types of pieces either for collective reasons or for people to notice them. It isn't something the general public who shops the same trends and fast-fashion has seen before. The same can be said about luxury pieces—because of their price and rarity within the younger age group, due to entry-level incomes, a new designer piece someone is wearing usually catches one's eye. Being young and passionate about any aspect of the fashion industry enforces the consumer to purchase items in order to create unique looks that makes them stand out amongst the crowd. In addition, having maybe one familiar designer piece accessorizing a look with clothing no one has makes the whole entity seem unattainable.

Hypothetically, you could go to a Goodwill outlet where they sell clothing by the pound and pick up unique vintage pieces, making a whole outfit for \$5 or so, and accessorize with a high-end monogrammed bag, and suddenly the whole outfit will look expensive and luxurious. Especially with vintage or secondhand clothing, it will be

inexpensive in cost, but the quality will still be there. At the end of the day, quality is extremely noticeable and sits on the body differently. Real leather, suede, silk and other expensive or well-made materials can make an outfit seem expensive, especially to compliment that singular designer piece.

Vintage and rarity is an interesting concept to compliment luxury and high-priced items. Influencers that have a big impact on Generation Z, such as YouTuber Emma Chamberlain or model Bella Hadid, will purchase a vintage item, most likely for under \$20 at a second-hand store, and on the rare occasion that someone is able to find that exact item at another second-hand store, the value will increase dramatically as it's been seen on a celebrity, although the actual worth at the second-hand store will only be a few dollars. In my experience shopping on second-hand platforms or websites, people will specifically advertise vintage pieces, for example "as seen on Bella Hadid" and although the piece may be only be typically sold for a few dollars at a thrift store, the fact that a celebrity was interested enough to purchase it in combination with the rarity increases the worth.

There's no reason why someone can't walk into any thrift store and pick up unique vintage pieces they haven't seen on anyone else and create a unique look that, in their eyes, increases the value, regardless if they're a celebrity or not. Many brands have picked up on the appeal of vintage and second-hand, and large popular retailers like Urban Outfitters even have their own vintage "one-of-a-kind " section to shop directly on their website. Not only is vintage great for emulating a luxury feel by exclusivity and quality, it allows anyone interested in fashion to experiment with their personal style and

choose things that appeal to them, not because someone else is wearing it, but because no one is.

On rare occasions, small independent designers can also emulate luxury and to a certain point, work their way up to the actual standard of luxury. This excludes the independent brands who have connections in the industry and market themselves as luxury from the start, such as Dion Lee and can succeed in doing so because of those connections. Brands like Orseund Iris, Guizio and Mirror Palais that are relatively new started off as less expensive and independently-owned, but as people started purchasing and following them more, the initiatives grew to more and more luxury-seeming. Distinctions between what are couture or independent, yet luxury-seeming brands, are apparent within the industry. But over time, use of a branding guide such as the one I propose, can blur those lines. Orseund Iris started only using materials such as silk and 100% cotton, as well as only releasing a few unique, yet expensive designs. Mirror Palais does the same thing in showing the process of perfecting their designs and fit, as well as only using 100% silk and releasing a few designs at once, keeping the exclusive factor intact. These designs were refined upon and by only releasing a few of them, the brand's image was consistent and clear—consistency was discussed previously—and this made them extremely desirable. They only used neutral tones, high-quality materials and kept their brand image and pieces minimal, much like the high-ticket branding elements repeatedly discussed by interview participants for brands such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel, and Hermes. In addition, the designers behind the brands actually have followers themselves and need to present themselves in a way that an influencer would in order to market their brand to their desired consumer audience.

Guizio's designer Danielle Guizio has over 118,000 followers on her personal Instagram account, and made it so her cool-girl street style came across in her unique designs that appealed to the likes of those who were fans of her personal style as well. The brand garnered fame before she did personally (409,000 Instagram followers), but she has definitely played a huge role in keeping that consistent brand image that contributed to its success. The same thing goes with Mirror Palais's founder Marcelo Gaia, who has 10,700+ followers on his personal account and keeps his content in line with the label's brand identity—Orseund Iris's founder @lanathecowboy also has over 48,000 followers on her personal Instagram account. Here, it is clearly evident that those good at branding themselves can make or break their label's success. When done correctly in correlation to the fashion's branding principles, it can pave way for major successes.

There was a contradicting principle that was made evident throughout my research. Many participants ranked brands they were familiar with for questions like most luxury seeming, but also made the idea of the importance of exclusivity extremely prevalent. Here, it is clearly evident that in order for brands to be successful they must find a balance between exclusivity and familiarity.

This can be done in several different forms. For example, independent brands like Mirror Palais and Oresund Iris, as previously mentioned, do an excellent job at only releasing a few pieces at once, sometimes even one new design in a lesser quantity at a higher price point. This in combination with really honing on their social media and influencer marketing, they're able to make the brand exclusive enough to start identifying with that luxury perception, while still remaining an independent brand. The appeal here

is different from fast fashion because instead of giving the consumer a wide array of pieces to pick from at very low price points, they get just a few extremely refined, good quality pieces to choose from which makes the purchase seem more worked towards by the consumer.

The same goes for any brand that makes expensive pieces that ultimately don't seem unattainable to people based on their particular shopping habits. Spending \$200 on say 10-12 things from Nastygal, Pretty Little Thing, or another fast fashion shop isn't as much of an investment as spending \$200 on one nicely made and unique garment. These fast fashion pieces get rotated out of the trend cycle so quickly that a consumer may feel like they need to be making these large quantity, but cheap purchases to keep up with changing styles, versus someone who purchases from an independent brand where piece will stay in style longer because the price point makes it seem less attainable, more exclusive for people to own, when in reality they all may be spending the same amount of money.

While high luxury brands such as Prada, Louis Vuitton, and Fendi change their creative director every few years, it's difficult to keep that relevant, consistent brand image. Finding a new face that aligns with the desired consumer audience's fashion ideals is essential for staying relevant in a time when trends and fashion opinions seem to change faster than ever before. This sentiment was mentioned previously, as well in the Jing Daily article noting that it's important to create modern adaptations to fit the Gen Z narrative while also staying true to the brand's core beliefs.

The Charli D'Amelio Prada initiative in 2020 was an example of poor branding with an influencer who doesn't identify herself with the fashion industry. In contrast,

Emma Chamberlain being part of the Louis Vuitton rebrand was an excellent move on their part, and an example of where this was done successfully. A 23-year-old fashion enthusiast who worked in the industry highlighted this, and said “I think that was a great branding move with them. I don’t really see Louis Vuitton and her aligning well but it’s brought them back into relevancy with Gen Z,” Similarly, a 21-year-old fashion student noted, “I think specifically I don’t like when they use influencers that don’t really understand fashion as much—it doesn’t make sense, like Addison Rae at the Met Gala. I don’t see the point of putting luxury on someone who doesn’t understand it. I like Claire Rose and Ami Saw so I like seeing luxury on them because they appreciate it.”

The reason Emma Chamberlain’s collaboration with Louis Vuitton worked more seamlessly than any campaign similar to Charli D’Amelio’s, is because of the various shared characteristics Emma could bring to Louis Vuitton. Many interview participants, as well as survey participants, noted the influencer or celebrity associated with a certain campaign or advertising strategy. The person the brand chooses creates a strong association, which again pertains to the principle that if I or anyone else were to start our own clothing brand, it would have to align with our personal style and characteristics in order to be successful and work properly.

Louis Vuitton was starting to appear as “tacky” to many consumers, as the classic brand monogram has been around for a long time. According to my observations and as a consumer of Emma Chamberlain’s online content the last few years, she combines humor, relatability, and fashion in her videos. Her humor and relatability stood out to many people within Generation Z, because at the time, there weren’t many young influencers who were able to stand out from the rest as relatable. Although Emma lived in

California, she was never flashy or snobby. Down-to-earth people appear more appealing to people who don't have a similar following. In addition, Emma, in a way, birthed the recent "thrifed" style that gained popularity on Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram. Her style combined a laid back Californian feel with vintage grandpa-esque pieces (vintage button downs, baggy jeans, trucker hats, and more) to give her this unfussy take on the girl-next-door. Over the course of many months, I've been doing some analyzing on social media to see what digital content circulates certain trends and from whom, and recent trends she's sported are short ugg boots worn with jeans as well as clogs that were popular in the late 90s and early 2000s.

In addition, Emma Chamberlain was also invited to the 2021 Met Gala and was asked to be the one to interview other celebrities at the end of the carpet walk. Vogue did a whole series of interviews on their YouTube channel about Emma interviewing these celebrities, and she even somehow made these celebrities wearing priceless couture seem somehow relatable. Louis Vuitton of course dressed her for the event in a one-of-a-kind gold gown, which brought even more attention and relevancy to the brand's new designs, opposed to their old, now considered "vintage" ones.

By choosing an influencer who is admired for both her style and personality, and also sets trends instead of following, Louis Vuitton was able to create a unique rebrand that still aligned well with their core branding principles. The move helped bring back to life this seemingly corny monogram print that has existed for so many years and encouraged people to look at the brand in a different way. I even dug up my mom's vintage mini speedy bag for the upcoming fall season - illustrating to me that if a brand

makes you revisit something you once thought was corny, they're winning in terms of marketing themselves in order to stay relevant.

According to the data collected, celebrities overall seem to have a huge impact on consumer's perception of that brand and purchase decisions, which makes sense, considering their impact on the trend cycle and choice as to what is considered "relevant" at that moment in the fashion industry. A recent and ironic example of this is a recent headline (November 12, 2021) done by InStyle, which reads "Supermodels Can't Stop Wearing These \$60 Sneakers — and Now Neither Can Megan Fox," which discusses Vans Old Skool sneakers, which have always been in style for casual consumers of clothing. For example, these sneakers were a staple for those within my age demographic and early-to-late high school, and my sister has even been wearing them as her go-to shoe in middle school and high school for the last few years. But now all of the sudden they are considered relevant in regards to luxury and street style because Megan Fox and other celebrities are seen wearing them? This illustrates celebrities' direct involvement with trends, and while one can still have good fashion sense without wearing what a celebrity is wearing, it certainly contributes to how "cool" your style is at that point in time.

Several statements were made by interviewees about emulating a celebrity or influencer when ideating a sense of style. One male participant noted, "People generally want to fit in or emulate the celebrity, so they buy the same brands or styles that celebrities wear. So I guess that's how I [brand myself]." Another participant that works in the fashion industry in New York City noted, "Celebrities and popular figures tend to play a big role [in marketing a brand], the longevity of the brand will still be there." Also,

a consumer of more fast-fashion than an admirer of luxury stated, “Pinterest and TikTok fashion influencers [play a role in my consumption].

I’ve definitely bought pieces I’ve seen on tikTok without even leaving TikTok. Emma Chamberlain as well. When discussing the ranking of the campaigns as well, almost every interviewee mentioned the subject of the campaign and made an association with the visuals and that person. Celebrities ultimately play a part in setting a tone or certain mood that the brand can build upon creatively.

The “old money” aesthetic previously discussed is an important one to tie together the ideas of neutral color palettes and minimalism that a lot of luxury fashion is known for. Its characteristics encompass preppy or basic clothing, such as blazers, sweater vests, matching sets, classy dresses, and any other high-end staple piece that one would typically associate with places like estates or even country clubs. Classic style never incorporates neon or bold colors, unless it’s a classic red or emerald green, and also is rarely eccentric in style. This is the basis of most luxury fashion brands. Almost every luxury or expensive brand will have their take on a basic blazer, pair of trousers, little black dress, button-down shirt, and items of that nature. Basics and simplicity are the backbone of luxury because once you nail the perfect basics, the focus can be on the quality and fit of that piece. The longer spent carefully designing and making this garment perfect for the consumer, ultimately, the more it’s worth—and most consumers, despite their level of understanding of fashion will almost always go for the basic neutral colors. Neutrals, as previously discussed, are the stereotyped colors for luxury, and minimalism and simplicity was consistently mentioned by interview and survey participants when describing their idea of high-end products.

Refer to Appendix E for creative brand guide.

Brand Guide Rationale & Discussion

The branding guide for mock brand “m'èlodie” utilizes the elements discussed and analyzed within the data collection chart and scholarly essay to visually present how an emerging fashion brand could do to appear as “luxury” to consumers. Many independent brands have been successful at creating a luxury association through the utilization of different tactics: quality, pricing, design, marketing, and strategy. Orseund Iris and Mirror Palais, just two examples of independent labels that have been around for less than 5 years, have accumulated a cult following and are deemed luxurious by influencers and celebrity stylists due to their visual and strategic identity. While emerging brands can't be backed by the years of history and culture similar to Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Gucci, and Saint Laurent, there are certain characteristics of high-end fashion that can be adopted by new brands in order to develop the same association and high prestige that many designer brands enjoy. If combined with the sense of “timelessness” discussed in interviews with consumers and paired with modern business approaches for accelerating the brand's exclusive identity, there's no doubt that an emerging brand can emulate the brand tone that many consumers and admirers of fashion attribute to luxury.

Lana Johnson, designer of Orseund Iris, started her label from scratch and instead of following the traditional business approach for marketing a brand, took a seasonless approach and released singular styles once she felt fit (Campbell, 2019). She brought the audience along with her through the design process and was extremely engaged with her

followers in order to obtain feedback and opinions. Her use of creative storytelling through social media enchanted an audience and allowed her to explore using exclusive drops, unique pieces and ultimately more expensive and better quality materials that she knew she could invest in because of her audience's loyalty, similar to consumer loyalty with luxury designer brands. Surprisingly, independently owned labels such as Are You Am I, Danielle Guizio, and Heavy Manners all use similar marketing and consumer loyalty strategy.

I wanted to combine the creative endeavours pursued by independent labels in combination with the data collected from surveys and interviews to create a brand guide that could be a solid foundation for any emerging fashion brand that wanted to join this creative space as a designer or curator. "m'èlodie," my own personal adaptation of these creative endeavours, also allows me to use skills learned in various fashion schools around the world, such as Parsons Paris and the London College of Fashion. I took a fashion design course at Parsons in summer 2019, and a fashion styling online course through the London College of Fashion. In 2021, I learned color theory, mood board storytelling, presentation skills, etc. that have allowed me to create a brand idea that's cohesive and aligns with certain brand properties.

Firstly, I used a certain thought process while ideating the name "m'èlodie." Participants from the interviews discussed brands like Gucci, Prada, Bottega Veneta, Louis Vuitton, Dior, Hermes, Fendi, and Chanel as being the most luxurious in their eyes. Almost all of these brands have European origins, and while I can't reproduce the years of history luxury fashion brands like these do, I can choose a similar aesthetic to base the brand around, starting with the name. Hermes, for example, has Greek origins and refers

to the Olympian god and son of Zeus, while also referring to its original creator Thierry Hermès (“The history of hermes,” 2018). Hermès was born in Germany to a German mother and French father, so I experimented with different French and Greek names to come up with a name for my brand. I didn’t want to name the brand just my last name, Dahl, despite it’s Scandinavian/German origins, due to the fact that independent brands such as Orseund Iris, Mirror Palais, Aya Muse, etc. had more proactive names that I felt drew the consumer in and captured the essence of the brand. After searching through European and Greek name lists and being drawn to ones like “Iris” and “Anais” I ultimately picked “Èlodie,” a French name of Germanic, Latin and Greek origin meaning wealth and riches (CharliesNames). The appeal of this name in combination with the irony of giving it that “old money” feel was a sure sign for me to use it as a starting point for my brand name. I wanted the brand to give off a feeling of luxury, quality, and ultimately a feel of wealth, which was the perfect coincidence being drawn to Èlodie. As for the “m” at the beginning, since the brand was hypothetically being marketed in the United States, I wanted it to sound familiar sounding to the first-language English-speaker. “Èlodie” to me, sounded like the English word “melody” which is succession of musical tones that merge to create a singular entity for the listener. I thought this was interesting because of the various interpretations this could have for fashion brands. Melodies could represent cohesiveness, beauty, charm, and anything else up to interpretation to the consumer. These things ultimately equated to the name “m'èlodie.” And as every brand or company needs a mission statement, m'èlodie “seeks to redefine luxury by immortalizing classic silhouettes and curating pieces of modern grandeur.”

“Luxury apparel & curated vintage” is written in cursive as the tagline just to give consumers an indication of what kind of goods they are selling before it potentially becomes more widely known and familiar. The luxury apparel will be original designs that are quality materials, and would be designed by a small team to highlight the process and perfection of each design. These will be simple, everyday pieces that the consumer will be confident spending more money on as opposed to quick purchases on things within fast fashion or things that fall victim to the trend cycle. The concept of timelessness, also discussed in the in-depth interviews, was described as “the minimal stuff” and something purchased to gain the max amount of wear. One interviewee stated “I would say there’s a really fine line between keeping the original look of the brand but also bringing in modern designs or trendiness of that time.” In my eyes, this equates to taking well-loved pieces over the course of many years, and reapplying them to new, unique styles. Inspiration photos were included in the brand guide, but these would include things like trench coats, trousers, faux leather pieces, basic tanks and tees but with a unique twist, mini skirts, and other fashion pieces that have stood the test of time. Things like halter tops, bold patterns, skinny jeans, and other styles that have exited the trend cycle won’t be included in the brand’s original designs. It will instead spend time perfecting one jacket in multiple colorways, one trouser or one specific top.

The “curated vintage” component was added due to the frequently discussed topic of thrifting and vintage within the in-depth interviews. The concept of vintage equating to luxury in terms of exclusiveness was something I really wanted to explore in the brand guide. Because so many participants mentioned vintage or thrifting as a shopping habit and noted that it can sometimes even be considered cooler than luxury, it was important

to note. Normally to be considered “vintage” a piece needs to be at least 40 years old, but for those who frequent second-hand shops, vintage can mean as little to 25-30 years old in their eyes, a practice I’ve observed through watching an abundance of thrift and vintage hauls done by fashion enthusiasts and influencers. I’ve noted that more often than not, those who enjoy showing off their clothing from thrift stores on Tiktok or YouTube will call pieces vintage, just by the feel and look of the garment and tag. When something was put into production over 25-30 years ago, it will no longer be sold by retailers, thus only making it available in second-hand shops, therefore increasing the “exclusivity” of the piece. In addition, when you walk into a second-hand shop, there’s usually not multiples of one item, unless it was donated by the same person who just so happened to enjoy the style and have duplicates. Vintage can be just as appealing as luxury in this way because no one else is likely to get their hands on that same piece, which is the appeal of buying a very expensive pair of shoes or handbags, to some.

This is why I wanted to include “curated” vintage as part of my brand. The brand would hypothetically source vintage pieces from second-hand shops or online second-hand retailers in order to find pieces that fit the brand’s tone, mood and identity; examples of some pieces that would be chosen are shown in the guide as well. As for pricing, it’s tricky business when you’re sourcing vintage or designer pieces to curate a shop, so trial and error with increasing the price slightly more than it cost is a good way to start. Because the original designs would be priced anywhere from \$100-\$300, the curated vintage should be within that range as well. Much better deals can be found at brick-and-mortar thrift and resale stores. Goodwill outlets even sell clothes for around \$1 a pound, but for the purpose of this brand guide and to highlight what kind of pieces

would be sought after for the curated vintage, I sourced them via popular online resale site Depop. Other good options are Mercari, Poshmark, and eBay.

“m'èlodie” uses a serif font for its logo, and its subheading is a dainty cursive to keep it unique and to similar standards as those independent brands previously discussed. A sophisticated serif in combination with a unique dainty cursive will give it that classic look while also having it stand out a bit amongst the crowd of serif fonts, which is vital in order to at least capture the attention of a new consumer audience. Some other luxury fashion brands that use serif fonts in their name and logo include Prada, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Dior, and Tom Ford, which are actually all mentioned as the brands whom interview participants most admired their logos and typeface. Repeating phrases for describing these logos and typefaces included “timeless” and “traditional.”

Next, the brand mood board/tone of the brand actually directly comes from my mood board done for the London College of Fashion’s fashion styling intensive course I completed. I took this course in order to educate myself and get direct feedback from a professional in the industry who had experience creating these boards for fashion campaigns, which I thought would be an excellent way to base the brand identity and color palette off of for this emerging brand (see Appendix # - my course completion certificate). This mood board was chosen to brand this mock label due to its high-end, sophisticated, yet modern nature, while also noting the color palette of the moodboard in relation to the “classic colors” mentioned by interview participants while discussing luxury. If you refer to the brand mood/tone page, you can see the mood board only features neutrals, with some deep red and green tones. The mood board also specifically includes images with twists on classic fashion, such as repurposed classic pearls and

simple mesh and cotton styles adorning the body in a unique way. Also included is a classic trench look with an edgy approach and a masculine suit jacket look worn by a female opposed to the traditional male who would choose that masculine silhouette. These images are supposed to convey a sense of classic adoration, while updating pre-existing styles.

The colors deep forest green, burnt red, muted camel, gray-tan, and tan were chosen as the branding hues for things such as social media themes, website content, logos, and other branding elements such as tags, and on the physical garments and hypothetical store fixtures. While they may seem a bit like fall colors, the dark tones and neutrals capture that luxury essence that brands such as Louis Vuitton and Gucci do by incorporating only muted versions of hues in their designs and branding. Similar to the red and green tones I used, Gucci started using the signature red and green stripe in designs in the 1930s when certain leather was difficult to come by, amplifying Gucci's motive to use alternate materials (Blazofsky, 2019). Similarly, several interview participants noted that the campaigns who used certain colors felt more luxurious, most likely due to the associations they have with brands like Gucci and Louis Vuitton. One participant said "colorful feels messy," and, "dark blues, beige, and dark greens," was a sophisticated color palette to market a brand as luxury. Another participant agreed, saying that "bright colors can come across as not chic sometimes, so classic colors" were more luxury-seeming to them. A third participant agreed in saying that luxury, to her, seemed like "lighter browns, nudes, blacks, and subtle prints," confirming the idea of muted, deep, and neutral tones appealing to the taste of those who admire luxury fashion.

I decided to go for an independent-brand approach for releasing original garments not on a traditional seasonal schedule that typically come out with many pieces or looks, or even sourcing garments from a wholesaler like many online boutiques do. Original designs, even with a slight variation to traditional styles, bring much more attention to the brand as it's something new and exciting. New online boutiques can oftentimes carry the same clothing pieces as other online boutiques due to the limited range of clothing wholesalers can provide, and you can almost always find the same exact things for a much cheaper price on websites delivering from China. Referring to the mood board, the pieces will be inspired by 90s runway looks, but with a modern adaptation. I chose the 90s because many 90s styles have remained timeless over the years, and are still relevant and trendy today. The 90s inspiration style gives the brand a retro feel, making it cohesive with the curated vintage aspect of the brand. Some examples of inspiration pieces are included in the brand guide.

In 2019, I completed a social media strategy course with Professor Parul Jain, Ph.D, and came up with some social media marketing ideas I thought could work for the brand Are You Am I, which is one of the new, independent brands that I previously discussed that inspired some of my brand guide ideas, such as the pricing and limited drops. Are You Am I, along with brands like Mirror Palais, gives the consumer a very personal, immersive experience with the brand and designer by taking them along the process of designing and creating the piece. It allows interaction and engagement with consumers and provides an experience as well as the end product for purchase. This is an important factor to marketing the brand as luxury, if done correctly, and will be a vital aspect to digitally marketing m'elodie. In addition, my social media marketing proposal

for Are You Am I, included several content buckets, one of which was fashion short films highlighting the brand's aesthetic and style, opposed to fashion shows that more high-budget brands have accessibility to do. I think this would be a great utilization of Instagram's "Reels" video feature, which would put all this content in one place for the consumer to find.

In regard to influencers, over the course of the past few months while conducting research, I also was constantly analyzing social media to see who was clicking with consumers in both a fashion and relatability sense, and who was even impacting my personal purchase decisions based on these things. One person that stood out to me was Bridget Brown, who has, as of November 2021, 31k followers on Instagram and 139.2k followers on TikTok. Her content includes thrift hauls, luxury hauls, and lifestyle content that appeals to followers due to her spunky personality and dry sense of humor. I thought she was a perfect example for an influencer to use for an emerging brand trying to appeal to those as luxury. Bridget is also a fan and consumer of second-hand and vintage pieces, so the brand aligns perfectly with her personal sense of style. Additionally, I learned from my time spent interning at Dion Lee under the brand manager that the goal is to choose influencers that will actually wear and post the product, so starting out with a more attainable influencer will help to jumpstart the traffic to the brand's socials. And as I learned from my research on celebrity and influencer utilization in campaigns, finding someone relatable who can bring a new face to the brand, such as Emma Chamberlain for Louis Vuitton, is a strategy that can have a huge impact on the branding success.

The first digital "mock campaign" would feature influencers showing off some of the curated vintage pieces that m'elodie sent to them, and would then introduce a

giveaway that m'èlodie will be choosing one new follower of theirs to style in some of their curate vintage pieces and be sent a complete look. According to social media listening, it seems like the quickest way to spread information and advertise a brand is to conduct giveaways in which the winner would win a free product. An incentive for the influencers to participate in this could also be picking out which vintage piece they personally want, so it's more inclined to fit their vision of a certain outfit or how they would go about styling a certain garment. The promotional image was shot and edited by me.

The second digital “mock campaign” would highlight the short fashion films previously discussed and Instagram’s Reels feature, as well as a unique “candid” approach on marketing, by walking around in common spots where @watchingnewyork people are typically photographed. This account gained immense popularity in the last year as it allows people to see NYC’s street style in the wild, even if you don’t actually live there. I think a great marketing tactic would be to walk around areas where these people may be typically photographed in order to appear on the Instagram account wearing the brand’s original pieces. Then, these photos could be used as promotional ones for the brand. Because many people are already familiar with @watchingnewyork, it would up m'èlodie’s reputation amongst residents of New York and general fans of fashion and street style.

Lastly, if m'èlodie were to ever venture into brick-and-mortar, I think a boutique showroom, much like many luxury brands have, would be a great idea. Chapter 4 in Uche Okonkwo’s book highlights luxury retail design and atmosphere offers great examples of how to evoke luxury in a physical store concept and other brands that utilize this as part

of their brand identity as well: “The Chanel monochrome black and white, which evokes classic chic, is felt both in stores and in other aspects of the brand’s communications” (83). If we’re trying to approach this from an independent brand angle that gives that luxury feel, I think using the brand’s color scheme as well as trendy furniture, almost giving it a “homey” feel, would be effective in bringing that luxury lifestyle aspect to it as well. Are You Am I is a prime example and even allows consumers to book a shopping experience at their elegant loft and take photos while shopping. Is this approach a gimmick or the future? Perhaps, like a Cartier watch, only time will tell.

Future Research

I hope that my findings and brand guide are useful to people within the fashion branding industry who are trend forecasters, such as companies like WGSN and The Doneger Group, as well as those working within small fashion businesses or categories of luxury in general. Although my survey and interview data inform consumer perceptions for this point in time, brand perceptions may change over time based on their marketing and advertising success and new and improved principles can be introduced. Ideally, if a study like this was replicated 10 years from now, the idea of “timelessness” might be revisited with regard to the psychological correlation of consumers’ ages and longevity of fashion pieces.

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Appendix A

12:29

State the following things; your name, if you are a student and/or currently working, your current major/occupation, & how you consume luxury fashion brands; *do you read about them, purchase them, see them on social media, learn about them in school, work directly with them, etc.?*

Putting personal preferences for the campaign aside, on a scale from 1-10, 1 being the highest **perception** of a **"luxury" brand** and 10 being the lowest, rank the following visual campaign strategies:

12:29

12:29

12:29

Putting personal preferences for the campaign aside, on a scale from 1-10, 1 being the highest **perception** of a **"luxury" brand** and 10 being the lowest, rank the following visual campaign strategies:

12:29

With Wilson and Tiffany's 2020 holiday campaign with models Ezra Miller, Kristen Bell, and Cameron Diaz, showing themselves with their pets as well as pet-friendly accessories. The idea here is to make wearing luxury goods and take care with your pet. Tiffany lists in their marketing plan and ads.

Aside from their visual campaign, Prada took a different approach for social media marketing, specifically TikTok. By using Chief Executive Officer's 2020 Milan Fashion Week show.

Michael Kors used his Spring 2020 ad campaign as a contribution to the first American relief. It was done in the presence of a newly 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, United Aid and Relief for Women.

Kenzo's FPCW '2020 Giving' Campaign features a holiday party set in the city where the workplace becomes an impromptu site of festive cheer, lights and hot—It features a cast of eclectic characters, representing a wide range of people and the working day.

12:29

Kenzo's FPCW '2020 Giving' Campaign features a holiday party set in the city where the workplace becomes an impromptu site of festive cheer, lights and hot—It features a cast of eclectic characters, representing a wide range of people and the working day.

The Blue 1825 campaign plays homage to California like when in Monterey there is wine. The campaign is a series of images and images in "purple" atmosphere that are taken and installed as props.

Photographer David LaChapelle captures a dreamy group of models including Lisa Lutz, Tasha Kroyer, Jessica Pimentel, Alice Babi and Tugayhan Olan in Marc Jacobs 2020 campaign. Bold silhouettes and pastels were used to create a look & color palette.

With Wilson and Tiffany's 2020 holiday campaign.

12:29

On a scale of 1-10, 1 being the most likely and 10 being the least likely, how likely are you to purchase from the previously ranked brands, given they are just **above** your price range (splurge item):

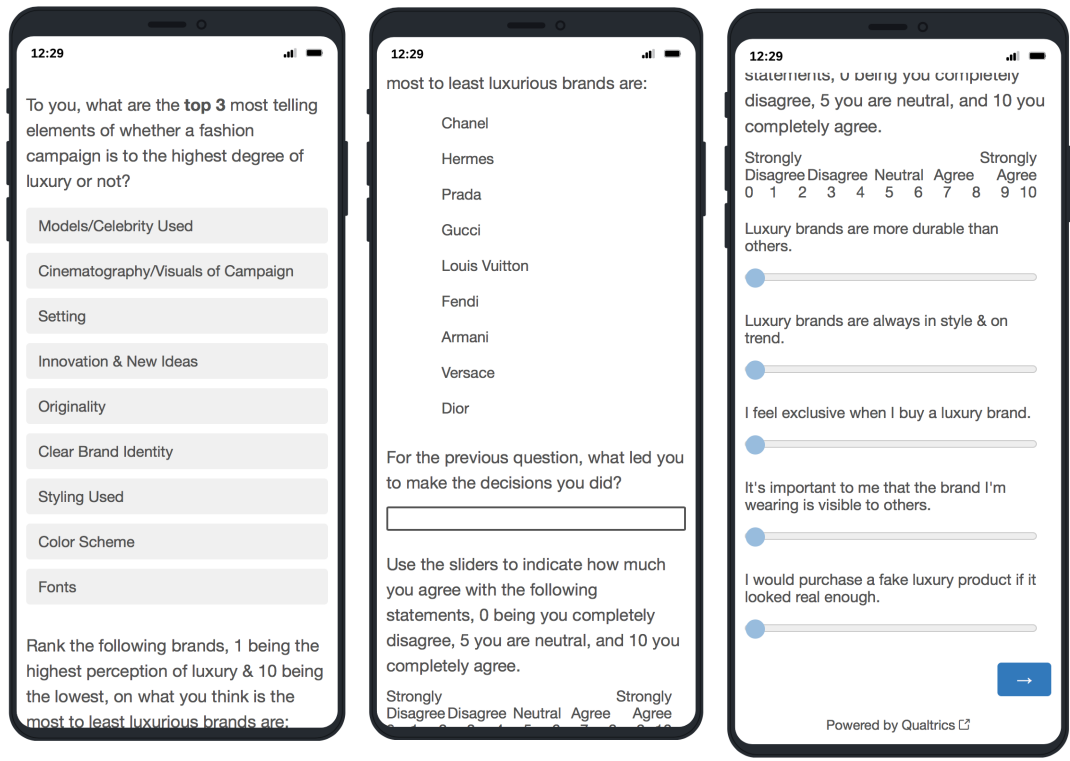
- Burberry
- Chloe
- Valentino
- Dior
- Michael Kors
- Moncler
- Gucci

12:29

Marc Jacobs
Tiffany & Co.
Prada

On a scale of 1-10, 1 being the most likely and 10 being the least likely, how likely are you to purchase from the previous brands, given they are **within** your price range (affordable, accessible):

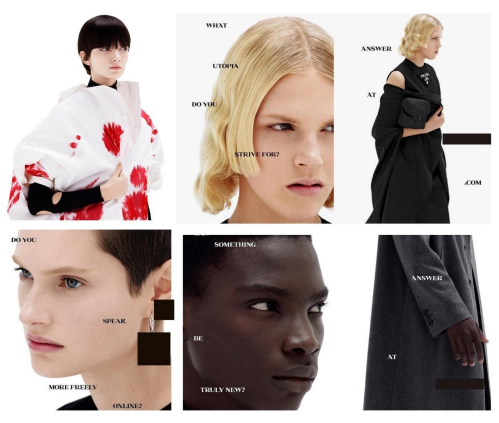
- Burberry
- Chloe
- Valentino
- Dior
- Michael Kors
- Moncler
- Gucci
- Marc Jacobs
- Tiffany & Co.
- Prada



Appendix B

Below are the campaigns that were included in the survey without their names or logos appearing on the campaign visual. This is to be used as a reference when, in the interviews, ranking certain campaigns a certain way is mentioned.

Prada



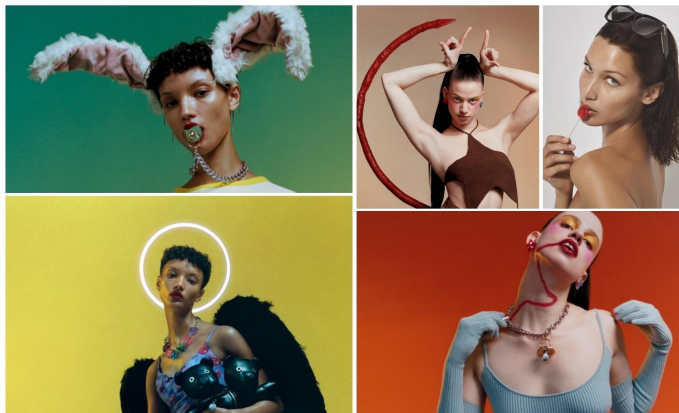
Kenzo



Gucci



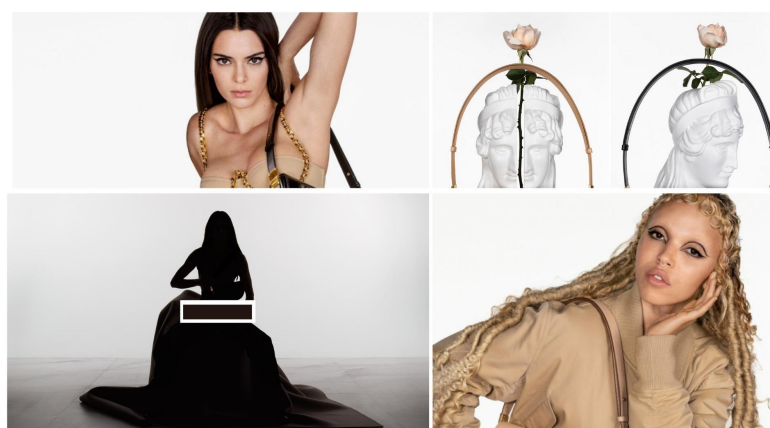
Marc Jacobs



Michael Kors



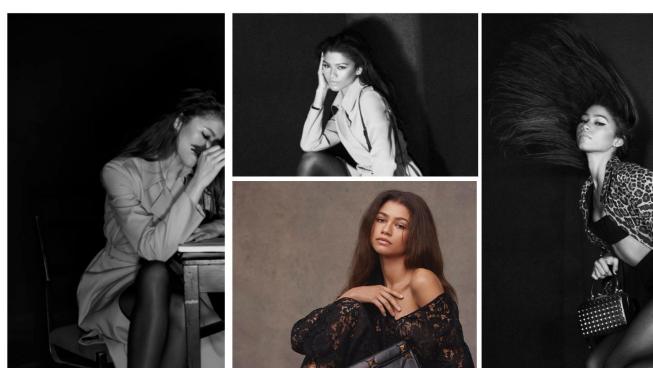
Burberry



Tiffany



Valentino



Chloe



Dior



Appendix C

Table 1
List of Tentative Interview Questions

Guiding RQ What are the specific branding techniques that high-end companies use to obtain their “luxury” lifestyle association? & What kind of artistic branding elements are the most successful at creating a luxury association?

Presenting the Purpose

I’ll be collecting some information based on consumer perception of luxury fashion brands as well as their branding elements. You, as someone who works in fashion or learns about the industry academically, most likely has more experience with it than someone unfamiliar with the field. Try to be honest and unbiased toward any brands or companies you’ve worked with in the past. I’ll be taking these responses and analyzing them to collect in-depth qualitative data that will then be used to format an experiment showing variations of a luxury brand mock-up.

Introduction

Tell me about your familiarity with fashion brands, including which ones you consider to be “trendy” right now outside the realm of luxury, and which luxury brands you feel are on the highest end of the luxury spectrum.

Subquestion 1 What are your retail & shopping habits, including the stores you tend to shop at and if you occasionally splurge on a luxury item?

1. Why do you choose the particular brands you do, aside from price? Being specific, what draws you to them on an artistic & self-expressive level?
2. What is your relationship with luxury fashion brands? What do you think of them and how do they play a part in your life?
3. Has luxury brand awareness changed your perception of less expensive and less exclusive brands?
4. Do you think your location, age, culture, and surroundings plays a big part in your fashion perception & consumption?
5. (Hypothetically) how do/would you benefit personally and in other ways from purchasing luxury items?

Subquestion 2 How would you define “luxury” if you were to explain it to someone?

1. What other adjectives come to mind when you hear the word “luxury”?
2. Visually and artistically, are there some identifiers that come to mind when you think of luxury fashion brands or seek out new ones?
3. Are there particular logos, colorways, shapes, graphics or names that really embody the luxury fashion branding image?
4. What are your most admired logos, colorways, etc. of certain fashion brands and why?
5. What’s your opinion on co-branding? Do you think co-branding with a lesser value brand decreases the value of the luxury brand—for example, Alexander Wang for H&M or Jean Paul Galutier for Target?

Subquestion 3 Are luxury brands always the “coolest” or most on trend thing to have?

Probe What makes a luxury brand timeless opposed to other brands that can typically go in and out of their extent of popularity more quickly?

1. Do you find that exclusivity over accessibility makes a brand more “cool”, therefore increasing your desire to purchase it?
2. How do you personally brand yourself and do you ever have the urge to purchase something to achieve this personal brand? What’s an example of some and why?
3. What are some brands, can be luxury or non, that you feel like most align with your personality or personal style and why?
4. Do you ever perceive someone’s personality based on the brands they are wearing as they align with the company’s own personality and brand?
5. Do you have a strong attachment with your most loved fashion items, and do those typically end up being the most expensive?

Conclusion

Is there any other information you can think of and would like to share regarding luxury fashion brands and your opinion of their identity? For example, are there any brands right now that you feel have grown or have done a better job than others lately at branding their product image?

Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix C



Appendix D

Below are the eight interviews that were conducted for qualitative data. Each took about an 1 hour to 1 ½ hours, but not every question from the original interview guide was addressed with the participant just based on how much information they gave from their initial survey responses. Their occupation or title was only included if it was relevant to the information being discussed.

INTERVIEW #1

23-year-old male; Cleveland, OH

Wednesday, September 1st

Why do you choose the particular brands you do, aside from price? Being specific, what draws you to them on an artistic & self-expressive level? People get interested in fashion by seeing what their friends, role models or celebrities wear. People generally

either want to fit in or they're emulating the celebrity, so they buy the same brands or styles that celebrities wear. So I guess that's how I do it. Vintage is huge right now, so I shop resale sites and stores as well just because of the unique selection.

What stores do you shop at? Thrift stores like Savers & Volunteers of America, H&M, and local vintage thrift stores.

Which luxury brands do you feel are on the highest end of the luxury spectrum?

Gucci, but there's a difference between traditional high end and new high end. Off-White & say, Chrome Hearts, are new high-end, and traditional is more like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Burberry, and Saint Laurent.

What are your retail & shopping habits, including the stores you tend to shop at and if you occasionally splurge on a luxury item? I try to find the specific style I want to achieve or specific item I want for the cheapest amount of money possible.

Why do you choose the particular brands you do, aside from price? Based on either what the brand represents or styles that they integrate into their offerings because it appeals to people your age or shares my interest.

Being specific, what draws you to them on an artistic & self-expressive scale?

They're not generic clothes, they're styled in unique ways that's different from generic or common styles. I like brands that are consistent in their delivery, like Vlone or Supreme—they have something consistent on every one of their shirts.

So it's something you can rely on that keeps you going back to it? Yes, it's a new twist on a traditional, yet centralized idea.

What is your relationship with luxury fashion brands? What do you think of it and how does it play a part in your life? I own items from a few luxury fashion brands, but I don't associate it with being consistent throughout my wardrobe. For example, I would say that less than 15% of my wardrobe can be defined as "higher-end" fashion, so I don't walkways dictate my buying habits on luxury brands. It's a diverse wardrobe with various styles and many brands of varying sizes and stature.

So you don't think owning luxury brands is necessary to having 'good' style in your eyes? The only situation in which I make a comment on what someone's wearing is if they're wearing something distasteful. So I try to have my whole wardrobe to be tasteful based on what my friends would think because they share some of the same interests as me.

Has luxury brand awareness changed your perception of less expensive and less exclusive brands or would you say it hasn't affected it? I can appreciate the reputation that a lot of luxury fashion brands do because a lot of them are backed by history or consistency in the market, but I don't necessarily look down on other brands that don't fall under the umbrella because I wear a lot of inexpensive brands.

What would change in your style or shopping habits if you did have the money to shop for more luxury brands? I would probably have a few more luxury items. For example you could say my wardrobe would be 30-35% high end opposed to 10-15% but I don't necessarily think that every item in my wardrobe would be expensive, I would maintain a mix because I don't think it's sensible to spend all of your money on clothes, but rather experiences or some of my hobbies.

Would you also say that only buying expensive things takes away the creativity of it because you're more limited? Maybe the limited brand selection would be bland but the brands aren't necessarily boring because they come out with new styles or curated items.

Do you think your location, age, culture, and surroundings plays a big part in your fashion perception & consumption? Yes. There are three main things: location, age, and friends. A lot of people in California dress differently than people in Ohio.

Do you think certain areas dress more fashion-forward and would that change for you if you moved to one of those areas? Probably over time if I'm there for a while as I buy new items, but my current wardrobe is more sustainable—I've been my same size and I'm not trying to do a complete replacement of my wardrobe.

Hypothetically, how do or would you benefit personally and in other ways from purchasing luxury items? They make me feel good when I wear them because I feel like I'm different or exclusive from the majority of society.

How would you define "luxury" if you were to explain it to someone? Products and services that are elegant, well-made, and credible.

What do you mean by credible? For example, I'm not going to buy Logan Paul's brand over Yeezy because [Kanye West] has a more profound image and I view him as more credible as a stylist.

What other adjectives come to mind when you hear the word "luxury"? Tasteful, elevated, exclusive.

Visually and artistically, are there some identifiers that come to mind when you think of luxury fashion brands or seek out new ones? I like to have the name of the brand on the clothing. I feel like some people would disagree with that though. I want people to know what I'm wearing if I'm going to buy it though, so that's my opinion.

Are there particular logos, colorways, shapes, graphics or names that really embody the luxury fashion branding image? Traditional branding logos because they're appreciated by the general society, although they may not care to wear them, they are recognized as being generally viewed as on more of an upper level than normal brands. Minimalism in a way represents today's high end brands because people want to communicate what they're wearing without being too flashy.

What are your most admired logos or colorways of certain luxury fashion brands and why? Louis Vuitton because the monogram logo is traditional, timeless, same with Gucci, the double G's.

What's your opinion on co-branding? Do you think co-branding with a lesser value brand decreases the value of the luxury brand—for example, Alexander Wang for H&M or Jean Paul Galutier for Target. I don't think it diminished the value of them because it's not very likely for two brands of equal stature to collaborate, just because they're competitors, so they more-so compliment each other because they open up possibilities for people that wouldn't be able to afford high end brands.

You don't think that it's tacky? No, I think it's good because I would definitely buy something that's co-branded because that's just what aligns with my personal buying habits.

Are luxury brands always the "coolest" or most on trend thing to have? No.

Under what circumstance are they not? Vintage can be cooler because the items are way more rare.

What makes a luxury brand timeless opposed to other brands that can typically go in and out of their extent of popularity more quickly? Traditional and value-added offerings.

Such as? High quality and tastefulness in the clothing.

Do you find that exclusivity over accessibility makes a brand more “cool,” therefore increasing your desire to purchase it? I think it makes it more attractive to people who can afford it versus people who can't because they're tempted to buy it and have the means to—it might not reflect others' personalities or fit within their budget.

How do you personally brand yourself and do you ever have the urge to purchase something to achieve this personal brand? If you were to make a moldboard of Jack & Jack's style what would be on it? Vintage stuff, sports stuff, and quality basics like joggers and shorts.

What are some brands, can be luxury or non, that you feel like most align with your personality? Nike.

Why? Because of the innovative products & it's renowned throughout the world.

Do you ever perceive someone's personality based on the brands they are wearing as they align with the company's own personality and brand? No. I can't because brands mean different things to different people and they're associated with different things and different people. For example, me and my friends all wear the same brands but we also tend to deviate from those brands based on our individual interests, but more or less we have similar personality and interests.

Do you have a strong attachment with your most loved fashion items, and do those typically end up being the most expensive? I used to have a strong connection with them, but now I don't because there's more important things to me than having a few high end items in my collection.

So you just prioritize other things above having a strong sense of personal style? I have bigger priorities than upgrading my personal style based on what's newest or trendiest in the market. Most of my wardrobe is based on functionality and quality.

Is there other information you can think of and would like to share regarding luxury fashion brands and your opinion of their identity? For example, are there any brands right now that you feel have grown or have done a better job than others lately at branding their product image? Off-White associates with a lot of entertainment such as music, hip-hop, and sports with their Nike collaboration. Fear of God is a great high end twist on essential clothing items without falling directly under the category of luxury fashion. They literally have the slogan “essentials” on some of their hoodies and tees. It's ironic that high-end fashion brands are trying to replicate something that is generally viewed as mainstream which is unique.

SURVEY REVIEW

[Inquiring about ranking Marc Jacobs first in Q2, where no names or logos were included to indicate the brand] I think that a lot of brands introduce obscure styles to stand out and attract attention.

So you think that it makes a brand more high end when they do that? I think that a lot of brands that are luxury generally try to do different, new things because there needs to be a fresh representation of their marketing.

[Inquiring about ranking Kenzo second] It gives off a streetwear vibe, which a lot of brands are moving toward in my opinion through collaborations and marketing, and that's what I feel a lot of other brands are headed toward.

So you think in doing these strategies with a more modern take, it makes the brand higher end? Yes.

[Inquiring about the middle-ranked brand campaigns: Valentino, Prada, Burberry, Gucci] I put the next 4 within the same category because they all looked similar to me, they all had these good looking people who were posing. For example, I just saw an Armani commercial where a good looking male model came out of the ocean and the viewpoint was just looking at his face the whole time. When I see models' faces in branding and advertising it definitely does appeal to me as being a luxury brand, but always just follows the same framework.

And you think that's less luxury seeming than the first two, when they were more outlandish? Yes. Polo Ralph Lauren does similar basic advertising with models' faces and basic marketing. Their marketing can also follow that profile even if they're not as high end.

Why did you rank those ones above the Dior classical painting interpretation ad? It looked like a painting so I wasn't able to get what the brand was trying to communicate with me.

Why did you put the Michael Kors and Chloe campaigns as the last ones? By using New York as the background, it's not very creative. Anyone could put their brand in front of the New York City skyline and it could look more elevated. People with a lot of money reside there. Being in a metropolitan area doesn't necessarily give off that it's a luxury brand.

[Inquiring about the campaigns in Q3] I put the Burberry one first because I like collaborations. Obviously surfing is not synonymous with Burberry but if they can assert themselves with something like surfing then I can appreciate that. The collaboration offers a fresh new perspective while staying true to their history. When there's an opportunity for them to assert themselves with a new venture, they can do this and it's kind of cool. The Dior one was elegant in the way she was dressed, proper, something they could wear on a day to day more elevated, and in the Chloe one it's simply fancy clothes for a fancy occasion, but that's why I ranked them as first, second, and third.

You put this Michael Kors one above Valentino, Prada, and Gucci. Why did you do that? Because of the background elements. It's more specifically curated.

What do you think about the Prada one inviting Charli D'Amelio to Milan fashion week? I don't think Charli D'Amelio is a credible representation of their brand, so that's not a determining factor of them being a high-end brand. Paid sponsorships are really common and to me it questions the authenticity of the person being used in the sponsorship and the actual interest in the brand.

And then you put Gucci & Tiffany last? Yes, they followed the same standard stereotypes with plain models' faces in advertising and I put the ones that were the least interesting to me last.

[Inquiring about Q5] I would've put innovation and originality instead of models and styling.

You put Gucci, Dior, and Prada first in question seven. Why did you put those first? You think they are more luxurious, generally, than Versace, Armani, and Fendi? I was looking at the question as discussing more of their ready-to-wear stuff and a realistic consumer perspective versus a runway perspective. I feel like Prada and Dior are more exclusive and are looked at as more high-end than Armani or Versace.

So if you were more well-versed in runway and the larger umbrella of luxury, would you have ranked differently? Yeah, I think so.

Why did you put Gucci first? I see it a lot with celebrities and hear their references in songs. They seem to be a universal player in the luxury fashion world.

[Inquiring about Q9] Why did you put a 5 in terms of how much you agreed with the statement that luxury brands are always in style and on trend? My perspective

on style is changing and brands might not always be able to acclimate to my current interests.

When you put a 10 for if you would purchase fake luxury items if they looked real enough, would you still opt for that over a more well made, but affordable option?

Yes.

So if there was a similar wallet at a price point that was better quality but no high-end brand name, would you still opt for the designer dupe? Yes, just because the other one might be more aesthetically pleasing or tasteful to me, personally, if other people are going to see it.

INTERVIEW #2

*24-year-old female; New York, NY, Fashion PR & Brand Assistant
Tuesday, September 7th*

Tell me about your familiarity with fashion brands, including which ones you consider to be trendy right now outside the realm of luxury, and which luxury brands you feel are on the highest end of the luxury spectrum.

I think that when living in New York, you're surrounded by fashion on the entire low-end to high-end scale, so starting with the least expensive would be sportswear and fast fashion brands like Nike, adidas, H&M, Forever 21, and fashion from Target and Walmart. Most trendy would be Nike, FashionNova & Shein. The Brands on the highest end of the luxury spectrum would be Prada, Bottega, and others like that.

What are your retail & shopping habits, including the stores you tend to shop at and if you occasionally splurge on a luxury item? Now in my life, I would buy something when I need it, which ranges from thrifting and vintage clothing, to stuff above the fashion trends, like & Other Stories, Oak & Fort, more independent designers who create basics and wardrobe staples. I think there is a correlation with exclusivity by shopping at independent brands because smaller brands aren't necessarily unpopular, but they would be considered exclusive due to their availability versus the fact that the luxury brand is exclusive because not many people can afford it.

Why do you choose the particular brands you do, aside from price? Being specific, what draws you to them on an artistic & self-expressive scale? Most of the time I choose a brand if I love something. I don't necessarily think about the production behind it, and if I love the designer personally, such as the message that the actual person designing it can bring to the table. Luxury fashion is very inspiring to see what people

can do with clothes, how they make other people feel. It's more than just clothes, it's considered art.

Has luxury brand awareness changed your perception of less expensive and less exclusive brands? I wouldn't say it's changed my perception because there's just different markets in the industry that you just have to accept. What's changed my mind about the smaller and less exclusive brands would be the independent designers.

Do you think your location, age, culture, and surroundings plays a big part in your fashion perception & consumption? Definitely. I live in one of the fashion capitals so there is a lot of pressure.

How would you benefit personally and in other ways from purchasing luxury items? I think there is the feeling of exclusivity and longevity of the piece.

How would you define "luxury" if you were to explain it to someone? Art or artists.

What other adjectives come to mind when you hear the word "luxury"? Wealth, exclusivity, popularity, top of the food chain.

Visually and artistically, are there some identifiers that come to mind when you think of luxury fashion brands or seek out new ones? Celebrities involved in the campaigns, being inclusive of different models and personalities, and just having a range of different people and influencers is something that would draw me in.

Are there particular logos, colorways, shapes, graphics or names that really embody the luxury fashion branding image? The Gucci and Prada logo but I don't identify with logos really and I don't really identify with graphics.

What are your most admired logos and colorways of certain fashion brands and why? The Gucci one—the timeless one they've always had.

What's your opinion on co-branding? Do you think co-branding with a lesser value brand decreases the value of the luxury brand—for example, Alexander Wang for H&M or Jean Paul Galutier for Target? I don't think it has anything to do with the value of it, but it has more to do with the brand image or value of the brand. I feel like because luxury brands are in such a niche market and it makes people feel like they're a part of something, by incorporating the lower market it makes them feel included and softens up the brand image, not in a bad way, and makes it more relatable and like they're a part of something.

Are luxury brands always the “coolest” or most on trend thing to have? No.

What makes a luxury brand timeless opposed to other brands that can typically go in and out of their extent of popularity more quickly? Celebrities and popular figures that tend to wear them play a big role. The longevity of the brand will still be there.

How do you personally brand yourself and do you ever have the urge to purchase something to achieve this personal brand? What’s an example of some and why? I can’t say I would brand myself, I just buy things I like no matter the cost or label.

Do you stick to a certain aesthetic? No, some days I’d be feeling one way and some I’d be feeling another.

What are some brands, can be luxury or non, that you feel like most align with your personality and why? Vanilla Sand Swimwear, thrifting vintage, Dana Fooley, Zara, Mango, and & Other Stories.

Do you ever perceive someone’s personality based on the brands they are wearing as they align with the company’s own personality and brand? Not technically their personality, but I do associate that they’re conscious of the brand's image.

Do you have a strong attachment with your most loved fashion items, and do those typically end up being the most expensive? I do have a strong attachment and the price ranges.

What makes you more attached to a fashion item? How badly I needed it at the time versus how badly I wanted it.

Is there any other information you can think of and would like to share regarding luxury fashion brands and your opinion of their identity? For example, are there any brands right now that you feel have grown or have done a better job than others lately at branding their product image? I feel like Gucci has been very inclusive in terms of influencers and campaigns, and aware of the current day situations and crises internationally.

SURVEY REVIEW

[Inquiring why she ranked Dior first and Valentino’s second for Q2] I ranked Zendaya’s second because it had a celebrity in it who has a really huge following and

ranked Dior's first because they used a renaissance painting and incorporated models in that. Visually the more "artistic" something is the more high end they could be.

[Inquiring why she ranked Michael Kors third and Burberry fourth] Michael Kors used Bella Hadid and used New York as the skyline so it gave this very chic new york vibe to it. For the fourth, Kendall and FKA Twigs were in a studio—it didn't really have a theme and was very simple.

[Inquiring why she ranked Kenzo fifth and Prada sixth] For the Kenzo one, it wasn't a studio. They didn't have to pay for any of the locations they were at and there wasn't a strong theme to it. #6 wasn't as much of a campaign, it was almost as if I was looking at a lookbook—not that much effort artistically.

[Inquiring about ranking Chloe seventh] It doesn't show any product. If you were to look at it you would never know it was a fashion label doing this campaign.

[Inquiring about ranking Gucci eighth, Marc Jacobs ninth, and Tiffany tenth] For Gucci, I feel like the park didn't align with all of the outfits, but it's possible it aligned with the people. If I wasn't socially aware I wouldn't know who they are. For the ninth, it wasn't really depicting the clothes. I couldn't really get a sense of the fashion they were trying to portray. With #10, the connection to the clothes isn't there.

What thought process did you use while ranking? How strong the connection was with the theme and the clothing is how I ranked them.

[Inquiring about responses to Q3] I ranked the Burberry one first. They did a good job portraying the monogram and they did it in a unique way. The interactiveness of it is very smart. Chloe second because, "handled with grace," you'd think of something flowy and they did something smart with fashion. It was very on brand with the theme. Dior didn't really capture the essence of garden-esque; the connection was shaky. Gucci's gift-giving was a holiday party. It seemed like they were in the office celebrating someone's birthday. It just looks like they're modeling. In my eyes it didn't really depict the clothing that well. I would've actually put gift-giving in there to make it more a holiday party. It didn't align with the gift-giving holiday theme. For the fifth, Marc Jacobs, you can't really capture the diversity of the group when they're all black and white photos. For the sixth I ranked, Kenzo, it's in New York and it's not necessarily nomadic. It doesn't really capture the essence of youth. I ranked Tiffany seventh—it gave more of a makeup ad. It didn't really highlight the jewelry they were wearing. I feel like the models' faces were more of the main attraction. I ranked Valentino eighth because not everyone can associate themselves with these influencers. It would've been better if they related to more realistic

people in problems versus influencers. With Prada doing this approach and Charlie D'Amelio wasn't a good representation because of her followers. I ranked Michael Kors last because it's not giving true America—not everyone lives on a Beverly Hills estate. American culture isn't necessarily an estate place.

So what made you rank certain campaigns the highest according to your thought process? The theme and name of the campaign, and the image they were trying to recreate. Also how valuable and unique the story was behind the campaign. How cohesive the imagery was to the story behind the campaign also makes it feel more high-end.

For your hypothetically splurge items [Q4], you would rank Gucci, Chloe and Dior highest, why? Because of their resale value, it's more of an investment, in case I would want to resell it, these are more valuable.

And those within your price range? Valentino is very underrated and less widely bought than say Gucci.

[Inquiring about top answers to questions 6: models, celebrities, cinematography] The better everything is the higher the cost the campaign is. Clear brand identity you would expect out of the brand if they are that well known and you are paying that much for it.

[Inquiring about Q7] Exclusivity is a really high thing. I was thinking with most of Hermes products you can't just buy certain handbags brand new, you have to be offered or go through a screening process. Chanel doesn't make a lot of the same bags. Gucci I would buy because of the price range and exclusivity. I ranked Prada, Versace, Armani last because you can find these brands in some department stores so they are more saturated in the market.

[Inquiring about responses to Q9] Luxury brands are always in style and on-trend. If you say the name of the actual brand it's always going to be on style or on trend in that case.

You only put a 4 for always on trend though? Because not all the time someone knows what you're wearing, so I wouldn't feel that exclusive to the general public. When it's not branded or if the logo is not on it it's less exclusive, as well as staple pieces from the brand. I don't like the idea of knowing the brand I wear because I don't wear it to be associated with the brand, I wear brands for the style of it and how it makes me feel.

INTERVIEW #3

*23-year-old female; Fashion Merchandising & Business Graduate
September 9, 2021*

Tell me about your familiarity with fashion brands, including which ones you consider to be “trendy” right now outside the realm of luxury, and which luxury brands you feel are on the highest end of the luxury spectrum. I’m familiar with fashion because I’ve studied it for four years in college, and then I also worked in the fashion industry since high school by working retail and in the fashion industry as well with internships. “Trending “ right now would be Gucci with the belts, Louis Vuitton brands, and Marc Jacobs wearing on the street day-to-day. Gucci and Louis Vuitton would be on the highest end of the luxury spectrum. Specifically, I would say Louis Vuitton.

What are your retail & shopping habits, including the stores you tend to shop at and if you occasionally splurge on a luxury item? I feel like I am mostly online shopping now and probably every other week. I would splurge on a luxury brand every so often for a special occasion.

Why do you choose the particular brands you do, aside from price? Being specific, what draws you to them on an artistic & self-expressive scale? When I see campaigns that are more minimalist and modern, I’m drawn to them that way, so in an artistic way I’d want it to be more simple and minimalistic.

What is your relationship with luxury fashion brands? What do you think of it and how does it play a part in your life? I feel like my relationship with them is like—my grandma would take us shopping in Chicago and just show us what it’s like. If you can purchase something for a special occasion one day you can buy this one day. My relationship with them was always that they was this special thing. Now, I wouldn’t go into a Louis Vuitton on like a Wednesday to buy something, it’s definitely more special occasion shopping.

Has luxury brand awareness changed your perception of less expensive and less exclusive brands? Kind of in a negative way I think. If I were to buy something from Walmart I wouldn’t think it’s good even though it’s fine.

Do you think your location, age, culture, and surroundings plays a big part in your fashion perception & consumption? Yes. In Columbus, since it’s a big city, like with Easton, it’s something I’ve grown up around. Being around it and shopping and being so close to it has made me immerse myself in fashion. Yes, my age does for sure, right out

of college your lifestyle is a lot different, I can't shop as much now that I'm on my own. My city has affected it too, like with boutiques walking down the street.

(Hypothetically) how do/would you benefit personally and in other ways from purchasing luxury items? I feel like it's a very instant gratification type of thing, I would feel good about it for a few days.

Do you think the instant gratification thing would be prolonged if it was something you were thinking about for a while? If I was thinking about it and wanting it forever I would appreciate it more.

How would you define "luxury" if you were to explain it to someone? High-end, some modern, very minimal and very exclusive.

What other adjectives come to mind when you hear the word "luxury"? High-end and exclusive, sometimes expensive can come to mind.

Visually and artistically, are there some identifiers that come to mind when you think of luxury fashion brands or seek out new ones? Things a lot more neutral, minimal, simple, and less flashy.

Are there particular logos, colorways, shapes, graphics or names that really embody the luxury fashion branding image? The color black, white, and most neutrals. The Chanel logo stands out and definitely Gucci, Louis Vuitton and the Burberry monograms.

What are your most admired logos, colorways, etc. of certain fashion brands and why? Lighter browns, nudes and blacks, and subtle prints.

What's your opinion on co-branding? Do you think co-branding with a lesser value brand decreases the value of the luxury brand—for example, Alexander Wang for H&M or Jean Paul Galutier for Target? No, I think it's a cool concept, it doesn't lessen them at all, it's targeting more people and expanding their own brand.

Are luxury brands always the "coolest" or most on trend thing to have? I don't think so, no, I think there are a lot of on trend things right now that aren't luxury.

What makes a luxury brand timeless opposed to other brands that can typically go in and out of their extent of popularity more quickly? I think the minimal stuff. I think the Gucci stuff, which is flashy, goes in and out. Sometimes the more simple the longer it stays timeless.

Do you find that exclusivity over accessibility makes a brand more “cool,” therefore increasing your desire to purchase it? Sometimes yes, it kind of goes along with the gratification thing. I bought this, but it’s a luxury product, and it’s cool to know I worked to be able to do this. It’s not that different from more moderately priced brands so you shouldn’t feel that different.

Do you feel like your expensive stuff is comparable to your more moderately priced stuff then? Some of it, yes. Sometimes I feel like it would last longer. From the outside if it was something simple I don’t think a lot of people would notice, but inside it’s better quality for me.

How do you personally brand yourself and do you ever have the urge to purchase something to achieve this personal brand? What’s an example of some and why? I don’t know if I reached that level yet. I try to switch up my brand. I don’t think I have ever purchased something to achieve that personal brand.

What are some brands, can be luxury or non, that you feel like most align with your personality and why? Since I’ve been working from home I just wear loungewear a lot. Right now it’s just Lululemon, Athleta, and Zara to wear out. I like Abercrombie and their denim, but honestly just comfortable clothes.

Do you ever perceive someone’s personality based on the brands they are wearing as they align with the company’s own personality and brand? Sometimes if I see someone walking down the street and they’re wearing a certain luxury item, I’ll think that of them, but I don’t think that someone who’s wearing that brand is necessarily promoting what the brand is promoting at that time.

Do you have a strong attachment with your most loved fashion items, and do those typically end up being the most expensive? I feel like my most loved fashion items come and go, so if I were to purchase something, I’d love it for a little and then buy something else. For my most expensive ones, I will care for them more, but that doesn’t mean I favor that over something else.

Is there any other information you can think of and would like to share regarding luxury fashion brands and your opinion of their identity? For example, are there any brands right now that you feel have grown or have done a better job than others lately at branding their product image? I don’t know if I’ve kept up with brands right now, just due to not being in school for them anymore, but anything specific no.

SURVEY REVIEW

For the first question, why was Prada your first and Kenzo your second ranked? I think especially for the first one, the minimalism and sleek, clean, modern approach makes me feel like it's luxury. For the second one, it's definitely different from the first one, but I thought the artistic and visuals of it were just very luxurious to me and I'm not sure why. The simple and coolness combination made it seem very luxurious in my brain.

[Inquiring about ranking Burberry third and Gucci fourth] Burberry, like the first one, is very simple and modern. For Gucci, the way it's very artistic and the patterns stood out to me.

What made you put the Prada one above the Burberry one? I think the way that no one in the first one is looking at the camera seems a little more high end than those looking at the camera—it makes it seem less posed.

[Inquiring about Valentino ranked sixth and Tiffany seventh] Neither stood out much, they were simple but not as simple and organized as the first few. It made it seem less put together almost. There's no centralized thing pulling them together.

[Inquiring about Dior ranked ninth and Michael Kors tenth] For Dior, I was just confused with the time frame. For Michael Kors, it looks too flashy. It doesn't look as simple—it just looks like a magazine photo.

Would you say you had a certain thought process while ranking? The biggest thing was my visual attractiveness for them. For example the last one was just basic and not interesting. The first two pictures are just put together and interesting while still remaining sleek.

For Q2, what made you rank the Chloe campaign first? What I liked about it was it was simple, yet elegant and feminine, which is what I was drawn to and made it appear luxury.

What about Marc Jacobs as your second? For this one I liked that they were all black and white. For the last question I ranked them lower but this campaign was consistent in black and white.

[Inquiring about ranking Tiffany third and Burberry fourth] The Tiffany one was just very minimal. For Burberry, I liked the consistency with the monogram and colors.

Is there anything Chloe & Marc Jacobs just did better at? The first four blended together a bit for me but they definitely stood out amongst the rest.

What about why you ranked Prada, Valentino, and Kenzo last? There was just a lot going on and there's nothing pulling those together.

So would you say for these, would you say you ranked based on how well they executed it while staying true to a centralized idea? Yes.

[Going over Q4 & Q5] I would be more likely to purchase Gucci, Prada & Burberry because they seem more high end to me, so I would have more of that gratification if I were to purchase those. For Tiffany, I would be likely to purchase it because they had a really good ad above and I'm not going out of my way to purchase it like I would be the others.

[Inquiring about her answers to Q6: Cinematography/Visuals of Campaign, Innovation & New Ideas, Color Scheme] I feel like I definitely used these. Like I said before, the things that looked clean, minimal and modern were the biggest things for me, and if the company was up to date with the new idea, it means they're a good company. The color scheme has a lot to do with drawing people in and tying together the campaigns.

For 7, why did you put Versace first? I feel like my perception of things is based on what I've been exposed to, and Versace I haven't been exposed to, which makes it feel more high end.

Why Armani and Chanel last? I think I put Chanel last because I feel like it's gotten more trendy and less special. I feel like it's around more so it seems not as special to me. There's also a lot of dupes you can buy now.

Why did you put an 8 out of 10 for agreeing with "Luxury brands are more durable than others?" I put 8 because it seems like it will last a lot longer to me, but it's not something that everyone would notice.

Why did you put 3 out of 10 for if "Luxury brands are always in style & on trend?" I put 3 for next one because it's just a different realm in relation to "trending" street wear. It's high fashion and streetwear, it's definitely more unique.

Why did you put 4 out of 10 for “It’s important to me if brand is visible to others?”

It makes me happy knowing what I think of it versus what other people are seeing or thinking of it.

INTERVIEW #4

21-year-old female, Cincinnati, OH; Communications Student

September 13th, 2021

Tell me about your familiarity with fashion brands, including which ones you consider to be “trendy” right now outside the realm of luxury, and which luxury brands you feel are on the highest end of the luxury spectrum. I know the very common fashion brands that are trendy like Princess Polly, Shein, Nastygal—the ones that are more affordable are the ones I’m familiar with. Just based on my level of understanding, I’d say Dior, Hermes, Prada are the highest luxury.

What are your retail & shopping habits, including the stores you tend to shop at and if you occasionally splurge on a luxury item? I shop on Shein very frequently because of the affordability, Princess Polly, H&M, Pacsun. I do a lot of large order purchases every once in a while instead of going shopping here and there. If I splurge on a luxury item it’s something I know I’ll wear often like a really nice pair of shoes or jeans.

Why do you gravitate toward Shein, Princess Polly and H&M? As being a college student who only has time to work in the summer, the affordability and ability to be on trend is very appealing.

Why do you choose the particular brands you do, aside from price? Being specific, what draws you to them on an artistic & self-expressive level. I feel like the brands I named can have some really fun trendy pieces, but they’re also very wearable pieces, like H&M has a lot of great affordable basics.

Is there anywhere you draw inspiration from? Definitely Pinterest and TikTok fashion influencers. I’ve definitely bought pieces I’ve seen on TikTok without even leaving TikTok. Emma Chamberlain as well.

What is your relationship with luxury fashion brands? What do you think of them and how do they play a part in your life? From a high fashion standpoint, I think they’re so beautiful and I really appreciate them but at this time in my life I feel like they are unreachable for me right now.

Has luxury brand awareness changed your perception of less expensive and less exclusive brands? Seeing those luxury items, I have the awareness that they're more high end, but I do feel like they're in two different categories.

Do you think your location, age, culture, and surroundings plays a big part in your fashion perception & consumption? I feel like living in a sorority house, the fashion I'm surrounded with I'd the fashion I tend to gravitate towards. All the college students are wearing cute tops and jeans. I know I'm going to get a lot of wear out of those things going to bars and whatnot. For my age, I can dress young and fun and not feel the need to look mega-put together because there's really no pressure.

Hypothetically how do or would you benefit personally and in other ways from purchasing luxury items? I would be taken more seriously and people would look at me differently, which could be good or bad. Having those luxury items would make me feel like a more put together person.

How would you define "luxury" if you were to explain it to someone? I feel like it's a mix of high quality purchases made with the best materials and handcrafted as well as expensive and things that aren't insanely common and overused.

What other adjectives come to mind when you hear the word luxury? Expensive, quality, fancy, and chic.

Visually and artistically, are there some identifiers that come to mind when you think of luxury fashion brands or seek out new ones? Anything that has the logo pasted all over it I identify with luxury. Materials, patterns also can be like anything. I think of bags most often and red bottoms.

Are there particular logos, colorways, shapes, graphics or names that really embody the luxury fashion branding image. The LV, Double C's for Chanel, the G in Gucci for the belt. Gucci has a tiger. Darker colors usually embody luxury fashion to me. Bright colors can come across as not as chic sometimes, so classic colors. I always love anything neutral toned because it's classic. Sometimes the Gucci one looks really pretty but sometimes it's overdone and gross. I think it depends on what fabric it's in or what it's made of. I don't like when the logo is in metal. The Dior one is really pretty. Chanel also.

What's your opinion on co-branding? Do you think co-branding with a lesser value brand decreases the value of the luxury brand—for example, Alexander Wang for H&M or Jean Paul Galutier for Target? I think it definitely decreases the value. To

me, it's oddly placed in H&M and Target and the whole point of luxury is not everyone can have it, so it kind of contradicts itself.

Are luxury brands always the “coolest” or most on trend thing to have? Yes and no, the concept of luxury will always be on trend but certain pieces that get overused and stereotyped become no longer trendy. Anything you can buy fake I think becomes less trendy and cool. The Gucci belt is a good example of this.

What makes a luxury brand timeless opposed to other brands that can typically go in and out of their extent of popularity more quickly? I feel like it depends on who wears them. I think when really classy and beautiful women wear these pieces they just make them look timeless.

Do you find that exclusivity over accessibility makes a brand more “cool,” therefore increasing your desire to purchase it? I think definitely, yeah. I think that the fact that not everyone can have it makes it more desirable for sure. Hermes bags are an example.

How do you personally brand yourself and do you ever have the urge to purchase something to achieve this personal brand? What's an example of some and why? I definitely try to reach for super fun tops and neutral bottoms that go with a lot. I definitely have tons of accessories at all times. Having a rounded look and not just having one fun top. I really like crop tops and fun glasses and sunglasses.

What are some brands, can be luxury or non, that you feel like most align with your personality or personal style and why? Princess Polly has very wearable pieces and advertised toward my age group and I definitely identify with just being young and trendy. Pacsun and Brandy Melville for sure as well.

Do you ever perceive someone's personality based on the brands they are wearing as they align with the company's own personality and brand? Definitely not, I feel like most people tend to just shop for what they like and not the brand's message. I know so many people who shop on Shein but they don't have great ethics but I don't identify with them.

Do you have a strong attachment with your most loved fashion items, and do those typically end up being the most expensive? Yes I do with unique items, like a fun pair of boots or whatever I have that's the most comfortable. Sometimes I'll splurge on something and it ends up being my favorite but I also have a \$2 pair of earrings from Shein that are my favorite.

Is there any other information you can think of and would like to share regarding luxury fashion brands and your opinion of their identity? For example, are there any brands right now that you feel have grown or have done a better job than others lately at branding their product image? In the past, Gucci didn't give off the look and feel that I normally think of, but lately I've seen a lot of pretty and elegant pieces. Coach is also making a comeback in their advertising and their pieces have been really cute.

SURVERY REVIEW

Why did you rank Dior first for Q2? This reminds me of renaissance and old paintings and whenever I think of that I think of expensive, elegant and beautiful. I think the dark lighting as well.

Why Valentino second and Kenzo third? For Valentino, I really love the black and white and the usage of Zendaya as a model, especially how simple and clean it was it came across luxury. As for Kenzo, it kind of gave me vibes of luxury in the real world. I loved the lighting in all of these photos, and I thought they were fun while still being fun while also giving off that luxurious vibe.

[Inquiring about ranking Michael Kors fourth, Burberry fifth, and Prada sixth] I wasn't a fan of the Michael Kors ad because they look like they're trying too hard. I didn't understand the concepts fully of the Burberry and Prada didn't give off the luxury vibes to me.

Why did you rank the remainder below those ones? I thought the Tiffany one was way too simple. The pieces in the photo don't feel luxurious. I would put #8 (Gucci) above #4 (Michael Kors). I feel like the pieces give off luxury to me and wouldn't be sold fast fashion anywhere. For #9, Marc Jacobs, the colors put me off, and when I think of luxury, neutral tones pop up more for me, and #10 (Chloe) just looked like a nature ad for me.

Do you think you would've ranked differently if you knew the brand? Yes, if I didn't love the campaign I would've seen it differently and applied my preconceived notion of the brand to how I ranked.

[Inquiring about ranking Dior first] For Dior, I love the dreamy lighting and flowers. They pair well, to me, with luxury.

Why Marc Jacobs second? I really love the black and white and the pieces feel very high end.

Is there a reason the Burberry one didn't feel luxurious to you? I didn't like that the character felt very cheap and commercial to me. It didn't fit my preconceived notion of Burberry.

Did you have a certain thought process? Definitely lighting was a big thing for how I ranked. The pieces within the actual shots, if they were very cool and that I wouldn't see in fast fashion. I'm also looking for something unique but cool, something you wouldn't see in a commercialized brand or campaign.

For Q4, why did you rank Dior, Prada, and Burberry first? They always make very elegant pieces and they just give off expensive, if they were above my price range, they are what I think people would look at most and what I think would be the most worth it.

And if all of those brands were within your price range? For this one I kind of guessed, I feel like my answers mostly stayed the same because I don't have enough knowledge on luxury fashion to really deviate my answers. I would just continually buy those pieces over others—pieces I would wear a lot and reflect my personal style.

Did your responses to Q6 apply to how you ranked in the previous questions? I feel like it applied to how I ranked. When I can see the full campaign with the cinematography I can really see what the brand is trying to give off. The styling if it's used in cool and fun ways and fonts, a luxury brand typically uses more clean, refined fonts opposed to fast fashion brands.

Why did you rank the way you did for Q7? Dior, Hermes, and Prada just remind me of rich rich people, when I see successful people wearing these they remind me of old money. I feel like Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Gucci are just more talked about and common and come across as less luxurious because a lot of lesser-income people may own things from them.

[Inquiring about highest slider, which was a 9 out of 10 for "It's important to me that the brand I'm wearing is visible to others"] I feel like if I were to buy something simple, I would want the brand name to be on it so people would know. If I had more money I definitely wouldn't care as much.

To elaborate, what is your take on purchasing fake items? I feel like if people think that it's real, it gives off the same exact perception and I like the look and I'm not surrounded by a lot of people who would be able to tell.

INTERVIEW #5

20-year-old female; Fishers, IN; Biology Student in Ohio

September 14th, 2021

Tell me about your familiarity with fashion brands, including which ones you consider to be “trendy” right now outside the realm of luxury, and which luxury brands you feel are on the highest end of the luxury spectrum. I look at them in magazines and on social media, and I think that specific brands are Urban Outfitters and Free People and lounge clothes like Free People’s new loungewear line.

What are your retail & shopping habits, including the stores you tend to shop at and if you occasionally splurge on a luxury item? I definitely shop online the most, stores like Princess Polly, Urban, Free People, Aerie. I occasionally splurge on a luxury item, probably a purse or accessory I can wear with a lot of things or shoes. I feel like those are the most practical and reliable if I’m choosing to spend a lot of money on them.

Why do you prefer online? It’s more convenient and they have all their offerings on one platform.

Why do you choose the particular brands you do, aside from price? Being specific, what draws you to them on an artistic & self-expressive level? I like that they’re all casual and relatable which is what I typically shop for being a college student. Those are the clothes that I see the most advertised to me for my age group.

What is your relationship with luxury fashion brands? What do you think of them and how do they play a part in your life? They don’t play a large role in my life right now, being a college student on a budget, but I would definitely like them when I do start working.

Has luxury brand awareness changed your perception of less expensive and less exclusive brands? I think I’m drawn to quality at the price point I can afford at that point you can afford in your life.

Do you think your location, age, culture, and surroundings plays a big part in your fashion perception & consumption? Yes, I think at this point in my life we all go for the cheapest options and save money for spring breaks and going out, but if I lived somewhere else maybe not. People in Ohio don’t care as much and there’s less pressure being on a college campus versus a city. When I get older I feel like there will be more

pressure to buy expensive things because as you mature, it's expected that your style matures in a way.

Hypothetically how do or would you benefit personally and in other ways from purchasing luxury items? It would definitely make me feel more sophisticated and confident.

Why do you feel luxury fashion gives off more mature vibes than fast fashion? When you get older, I think you tend to splurge on things you're willing to keep for a majority of your adult life opposed to being sucked into the trend cycle.

How would you define "luxury" if you were to explain it to someone? Expensive, nice quality, and fancy.

Visually and artistically, are there some identifiers that come to mind when you think of luxury fashion brands or seek out new ones? The materials are usually more expensive, such as silk over satin and where people are wearing them. Also, dinner outfits opposed to going out outfits.

Are there particular logos, colorways, shapes, graphics or names that really embody the luxury fashion branding image? Neutrals definitely come to mind. You're not going to find anything neon pink that's going to be worth buying so expensive in my opinion.

What are your most admired logos, colorways, etc. of certain fashion brands and why? Louis Vuitton just because the monogram and brown is very classic and timeless.

What's your opinion on co-branding? Do you think co-branding with a lesser value brand decreases the value of the luxury brand—for example, Alexander Wang for H&M or Jean Paul Galutier for Target? No, because I think they're just trying to be inclusive for customers and that should be appreciated and not decrease the value of that brand.

Are luxury brands always the "coolest" or most on trend thing to have? Yes because I think everyone within my age group desires those types of things because of our age group.

What makes a luxury brand timeless opposed to other brands that can typically go in and out of their extent of popularity more quickly? Once you buy the high-end

product, you're going to want to wear that more based on getting wears out of it of what you pay versus not really caring how much you wear an \$8 shirt.

INTERVIEW #6

*23-year-old female; Columbus, OH; Fashion & Graphic Design Graduate
September 15, 2021*

Tell me about your familiarity with fashion brands, including which ones you consider to be “trendy” right now outside the realm of luxury, and which luxury brands you feel are on the highest end of the luxury spectrum. I think Abercrombie has been really popular recently. They are rebranding after Aritzia. Zara is really in and keeping themselves relevant with the trends and their price point is really fair except their online store is really hard to navigate. Motel Rocks and Glassons do a good job of being trendy, but don't try too hard, and they have a good price point. Steve Madden does a great job of always being on trend. For Luxury, Dior and Chanel just because they're classics and they're some of the most expensive and well-known.

What are your retail & shopping habits, including the stores you tend to shop at and if you occasionally splurge on a luxury item? I shop a lot—I like to sell my clothes so I don't have a ton of clothes at once, usually on Curtsy and Mercari and then cycle in new clothes because I get sick of stuff easily. I do buy stuff a lot, recently jeans. I shop at Glassons the most and I get stuff off Curtsy. I like the idea of splurging on a luxury item. I haven't done that recently but maybe once or twice a year. Usually I'll get it off The RealReal though.

Why do you choose the particular brands you do, aside from price? Being specific, what draws you to them on an artistic & self-expressive level? I would say on the luxury side I'm more likely to shop for a certain brand if they're keeping an effort to stay relevant. I think Prada has done a good job recently of setting trends within edgy and street style. I think that's where Chanel and other well-known brands lack. They're well-known for their history but not so much for their current stuff. I will shop for certain brands if I see a lot of color on their social media, their instagram looking nice attracts me to them.

What is your relationship with luxury fashion brands? What do you think of them and how do they play a part in your life? I admire them, they don't play a huge part in my life because I'm a post-grad college student. Once I start making money they'll play a bigger part in my life.

Has luxury brand awareness changed your perception of less expensive and less exclusive brands? Yeah, I mean I've always not really loved fast-fashion brands and recently it's not my style. Sometimes it looks like they're trying too hard. Like with Shein I don't like how cheap, and Princess Polly and bigger boutiques that have a lot of the same exact stuff with different prices, but everyone has it.

Do you think your location, age, culture, and surroundings plays a big part in your fashion perception & consumption? Yes, location is a big thing. If I was in a bigger city like in New York I would be spending a lot more money on clothes and dressing up more. Age is a big thing being young. I'm spending more but on less expensive things.

Hypothetically how do or would you benefit personally and in other ways from purchasing luxury items? It's something to admire so it would make me happy to look at it. It would be nice to style it and incorporate it into as much as I can. I would feel a little bit guilty for spending a lot of money on something. I'd have to make a really careful decision on what I buy.

How would you define "luxury" if you were to explain it to someone? I would explain it as brands that usually have been around for a long time. Anything or any brand that custom makes things could be considered luxury. If the price point is higher than average department stores.

What other adjectives come to mind when you hear the word "luxury"? Unique, expensive, and exclusive.

Visually and artistically, are there some identifiers that come to mind when you think of luxury fashion brands or seek out new ones? I think of black and white, clean design. I know that's not the case for a lot but it comes to mind. Nice fabrics and aesthetically pretty and a lot of luxury follows the luxury of a big city like Paris or New York.

Are there particular logos, colorways, shapes, graphics or names that really embody the luxury fashion branding image? I think Tom Ford and Prada—their logos are very hard edge, blacks, serif fonts.

What are your most admired logos, colorways, etc. of certain fashion brands and why? I really like Jacquemus aesthetic and branding—it just feels natural to me. Orseund Iris, I really love they have a natural neutral aesthetic and classic silks and materials.

What's your opinion on co-branding? Do you think co-branding with a lesser value brand decreases the value of the luxury brand—for example, Alexander Wang for H&M or Jean Paul Galutier for Target? I think that at least in my eyes it decreases the status of the luxury brand—it changes the viewpoint of consumers a little bit and it changes the value of that luxury brand.

Are luxury brands always the “coolest” or most on trend thing to have? No not necessarily. I think you can still be on trend, for example Zara is always on trend typically but not luxury.

What makes a luxury brand timeless opposed to other brands that can typically go in and out of their extent of popularity more quickly? I would say there's a really fine line between keeping the original look of the brand but also bringing in modern designs or trendiness of that time.

Do you find that exclusivity over accessibility makes a brand more “cool”, therefore increasing your desire to purchase it? Yes.

How do you personally brand yourself and do you ever have the urge to purchase something to achieve this personal brand? What's an example of some and why? Yes, I would say when I find something that fits my aesthetic I will purchase it to fit my brand which is timeless pieces and staples, but mixing in some trends. I always look at Pinterest and other people's instagrams to get inspo for a personal brand.

What are some brands, can be luxury or non, that you feel like most align with your personality or personal style and why? I would say Glassons, and I like that they're sustainable and it's good for my brand at least for the time in my life right now.

Do you ever perceive someone's personality based on the brands they are wearing as they align with the company's own personality and brand? Yeah I would say cooler and more unique brands can kind of get you to interpret that person in that way.

Do you have a strong attachment with your most loved fashion items, and do those typically end up being the most expensive? Yes. I would say if something is more expensive I want to treat it better. Even some things that fit me really nicely I have an attachment to because it's how often I wear it.

Is there any other information you can think of and would like to share regarding luxury fashion brands and your opinion of their identity? For example, are there any brands right now that you feel have grown or have done a better job than others

lately at branding their product image? It's NYFW so I was looking for well-known models like Kendall and Bella to get more attention and relevancy. Givenchy did her Met Gala look for example.

SURVEY REVIEW

For Q2, why did you rank that Michael Kors campaign first with Bella? In my head, I connect luxury with the city, so the fact that NYC is in the background and using popular models seems very luxurious to me.

Why the Kenzo one second? I like the visuals and the patterns seem luxurious.

Why the Dior and Chloe campaigns last? For the last one, I ranked last because there weren't any clothes really shown and for the renaissance one I think I was just kind of bored by it.

What was your thought process? A lot of it was just my first look and first impression if they had a recognizable face or if I can recognize it and correlate it with a brand.

Why did you rank Burberry first for the campaigns including their brand names and logos? I really like the colorway, I liked the font and logo incorporated and patterns incorporated. The Burberry one just felt more unattainable and exclusive than the Burberry and Kenzo toward the bottom.

[Discussing how she ranked for Q4 and Q5] I misinterpreted the question as to how likely I was to buy—I don't really consider Michael Kors or Marc Jacobs to be luxury anymore.

[Discussing Q7] Chanel, Dior, Hermes are the most expensive looking and highest status—everyone knows who they are.

Why did you put Gucci & Louis Vuitton last? I've just seen them around the most just in the area I live in and I'm personally not the biggest Louis Vuitton fan.

What's your opinion on Emma Chamberlain with Louis Vuitton? I think that was a great branding move with them, I don't really see Louis Vuitton and her aligning well but it's brought them back into relevancy with Gen Z.

[Inquiring about luxury brands being visible on clothing, Q8] I don't necessarily like this about myself but if I'm spending a lot of money on a brand I'd like the logo to be

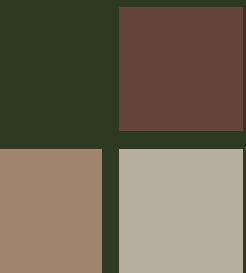
seen just because of the splurge and that's part of the appeal sometimes. If you had more money and status it probably wouldn't matter as much.

Appendix E

Branding Guide

m'èlodie

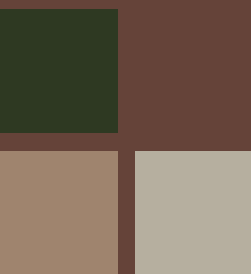
luxury apparel & curated vintage



Brand Name

Elodie is a French name that means "foreign riches". Because the goal of the brand is to emulate a sophisticated "old money" feel, I chose a name that's origins are European, and also has an association to wealth.

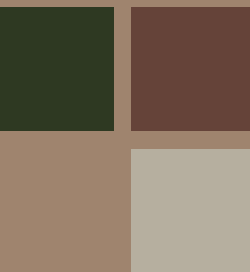
The "m" at the beginning is to make the brand more familiar to the English-speaker, since the brand will be primarily marketed in the United States. "m'èlodie" sounds like "melody" which means "voice or line, is a linear succession of musical tones that the listener perceives as a single entity." This could symbolize many things, such as harmony between colors, silhouettes, etc.



Mission Statement

m'élodie *luxury apparel & curated vintage*

seeks to redefine luxury by immortalizing classic silhouettes and curating pieces of modern grandeur.



Color Palette

muted neutrals

Deep
Forrest
Green

Burnt
Red

Muted
Camel

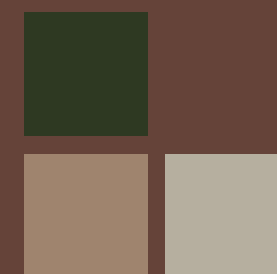
Gray
Tan

Tan

Typography

Cormorant Infant Regular AaBbCc

Shopping Script Demo Re AaBbCc



Logos

m'èlodie
luxury apparel & curated vintage

m'èlodie
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m'
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luxury apparel & curated vintage

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luxury apparel & curated vintage

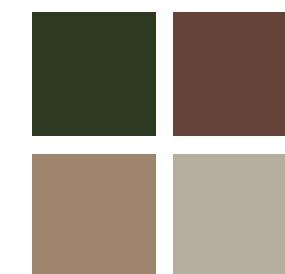
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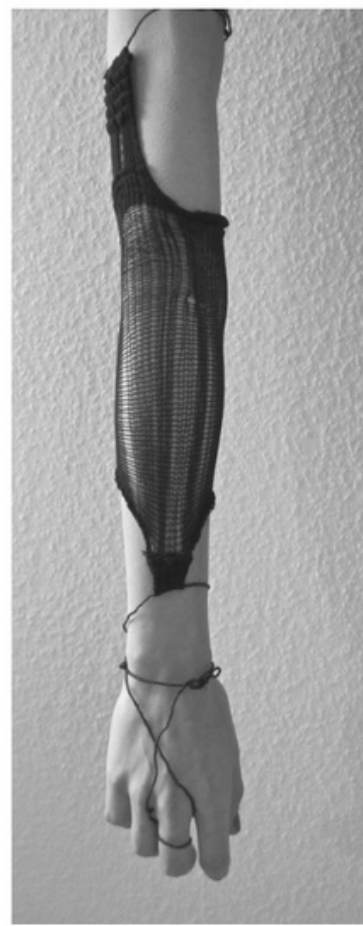
m'èlodie
luxury apparel & curated vintage

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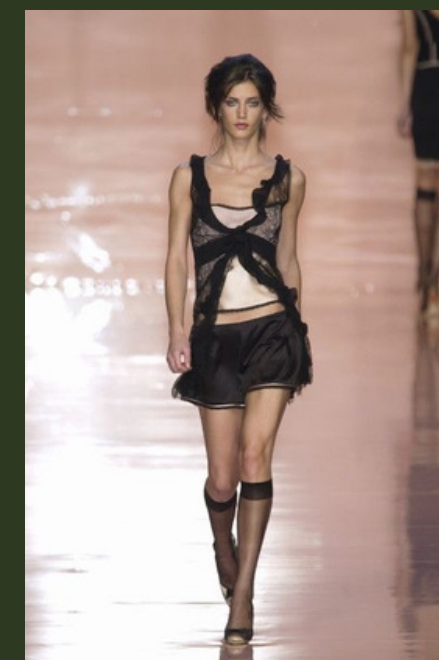
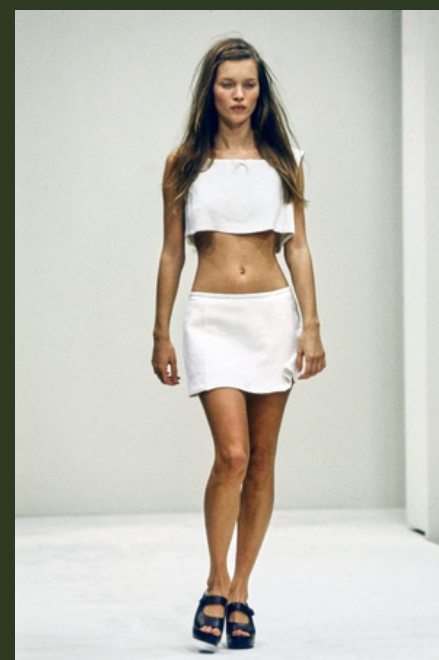
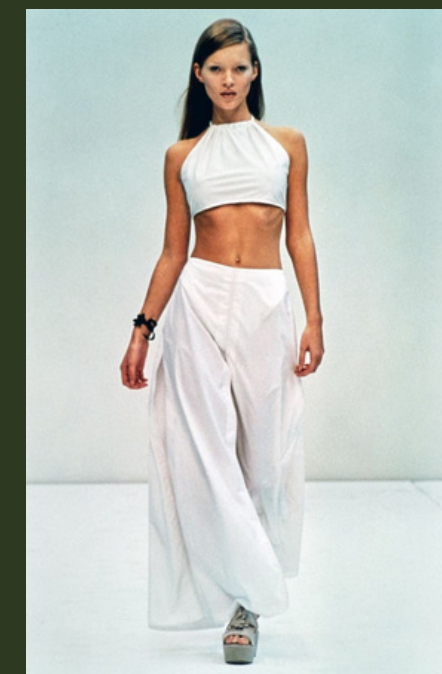
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Brand Tone Mood



Inspired By 90s Runway



Limited Pieces vs. Collections

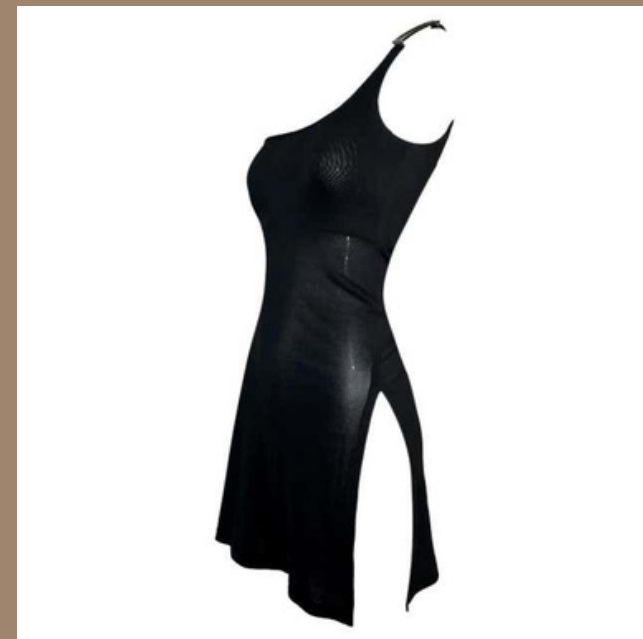
m'èlodie will only release a few pieces at a time to keep the brand limited, but at a price point that is still accessible. Time in between collections will allow the brand to highlight the design process of creating everything to make the purchases a bit more personal to the consumer. Below are some examples of drops, with inspiration pieces to represent the feel of each one.

Inspiration - First Drop

Inspiration - Second Drop



unique t-shirt in brand colorway



basic "little black dress" with a twist.



unique, vintage-feeling cardigan or jacket.



perfect-fitting black faux leather tank basic.

Curated Vintage

m'elodie will also have a curated vintage component to the brand inspired by the success by many second-hand resellers. Vintage designer pieces at a cheaper can be just as rare or exclusive feeling as new designer pieces that can go for up to double or even triple the cost (the next slide will highlight the price range that m'elodie would go for)—below are examples of vintage pieces sourced from affordable second hand websites that could be featured in the shop:



Vintage Pants



Vintage Versace
Jacket



Burberry Tee



Vintage Miu
Miu Heels



Vintage Burberry
Sweater



Early 2000s. Marcel
Marongiu Tank



Vintage Bra

all sourced via Depop <https://www.depop.com>

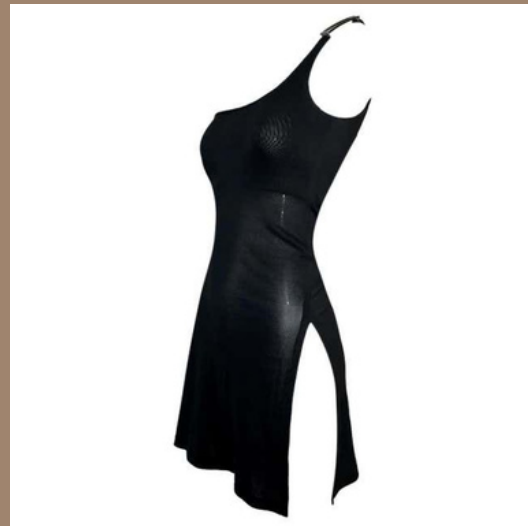
Pricing

m'elodie will take after independent designers who use quality material to make the garments carefully, but not any real leathers, high end silks, etc. to make anything over \$300. Finding a happy medium between low-end and high-end designer prices is key in labeling something as an investment piece, as well as using sustainable and good quality materials that don't break the bank.

Limited Pieces:



Colorblock Knit Tee \$110



High Slit LBD \$230

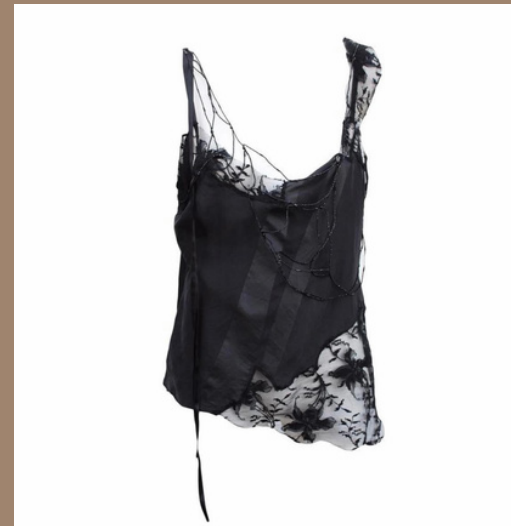


Cardigan Jacket \$160



Faux Leather Crop \$130

Curated Vintage:



Sourced for \$150, Sold for \$180



Sourced for \$120, Sold for \$160



Sourced for \$16, Sold for \$40



Sourced for \$55, Sold for \$100



Sourced for \$100, Sold for \$120



Sourced for \$126, Sold for \$150

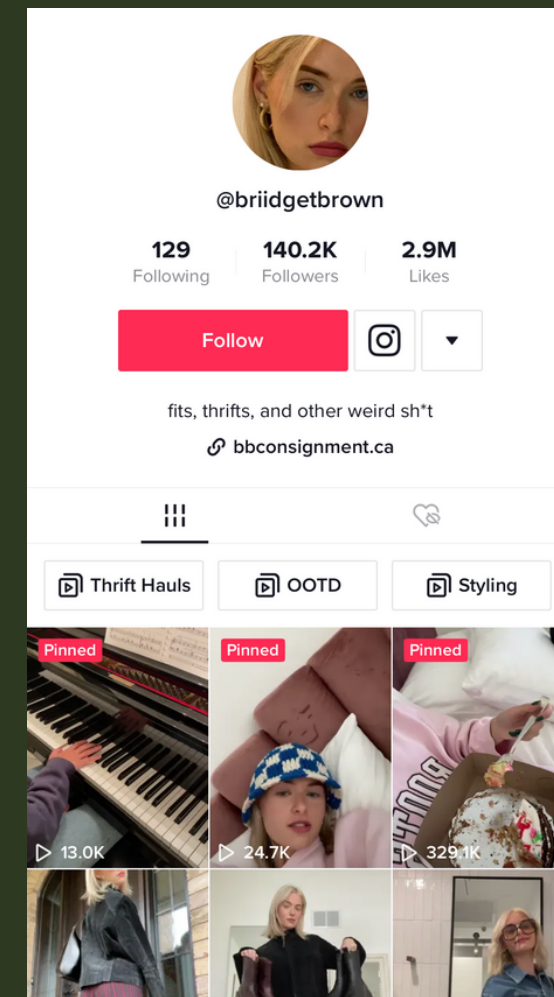
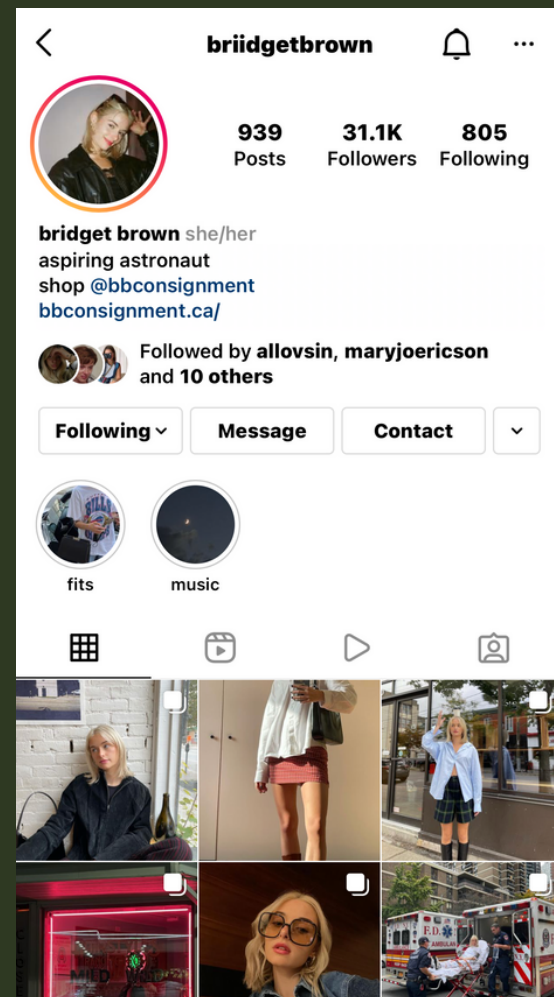
Social Media Marketing

Because social media marketing plays such a huge role in modern brand marketing practices, influencers will have a large part in getting traffic to the brand's account while being able to style pieces in a way that suits their personal style. This is the case for many smaller companies, who either select the pieces to send to the influencer, or have the influencer select them themselves to wear and style. Because m'elodie will have such a limited range at first, the approach would be to send the influencer the one or two unique pieces from the designer's drop and then a piece from their curated vintage.

Like many smaller independent brands who label themselves as a lower end luxury brand, taking the consumer along the journey and process of creating the garments gives the brand a much more personal feel when the final product is released and purchased.

Influencers

Because m'elodie will have original, unique designs and isn't just a wholesaler boutique, they're able to take the approach of sending slightly larger influencers like micro influencers (10k-50k) and then eventually mid-tier influencers (50-500k) their products. Starting out with smaller influencers or choosing influencers who style aligns with the brand's image will increase the likelihood that the influencer will post and "market" the brand, such as example Bridget Brown:



Mock Campaign #1: Giveaway

The first campaign would have a goal of marketing the curated vintage component of the brand. It would start by sending 1-2 pieces based on value to 5 influencers of choice that exist in the same realm of fashion and lifestyle influencing to promote a giveaway. The influencer would then post themselves styling the piece and introduce the giveaway initiative to followers:

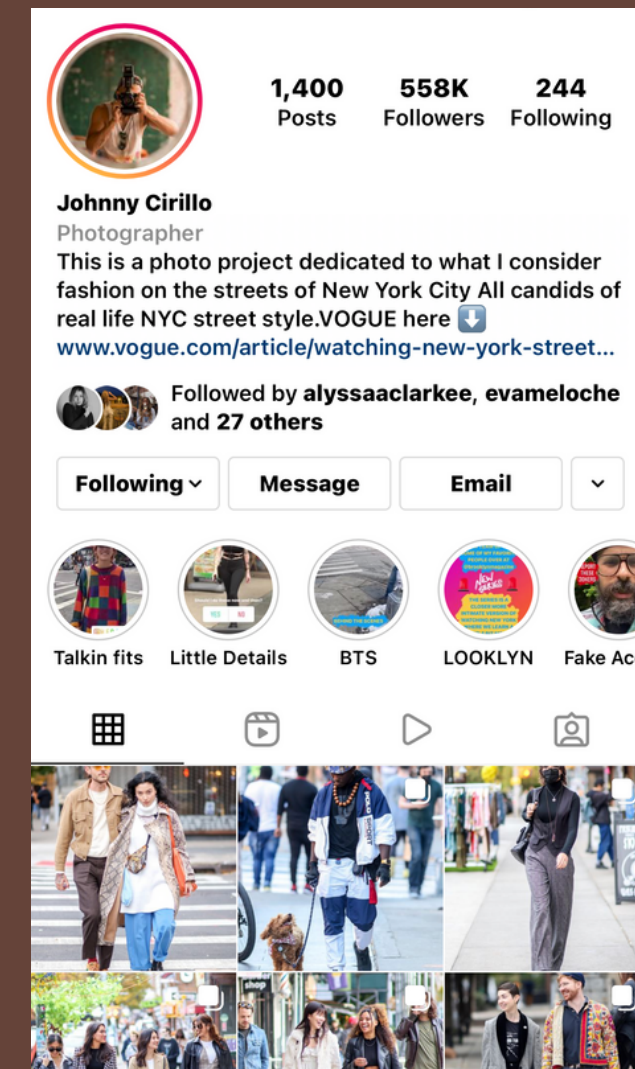
"This is how I style my m'elodie curated vintage piece! If you want to be styled by their team and receive a complete look from their collection of curated vintage, follow them at @m_elodie on Instagram and repost their style bundle giveaway to your stories!"



@m_elodie

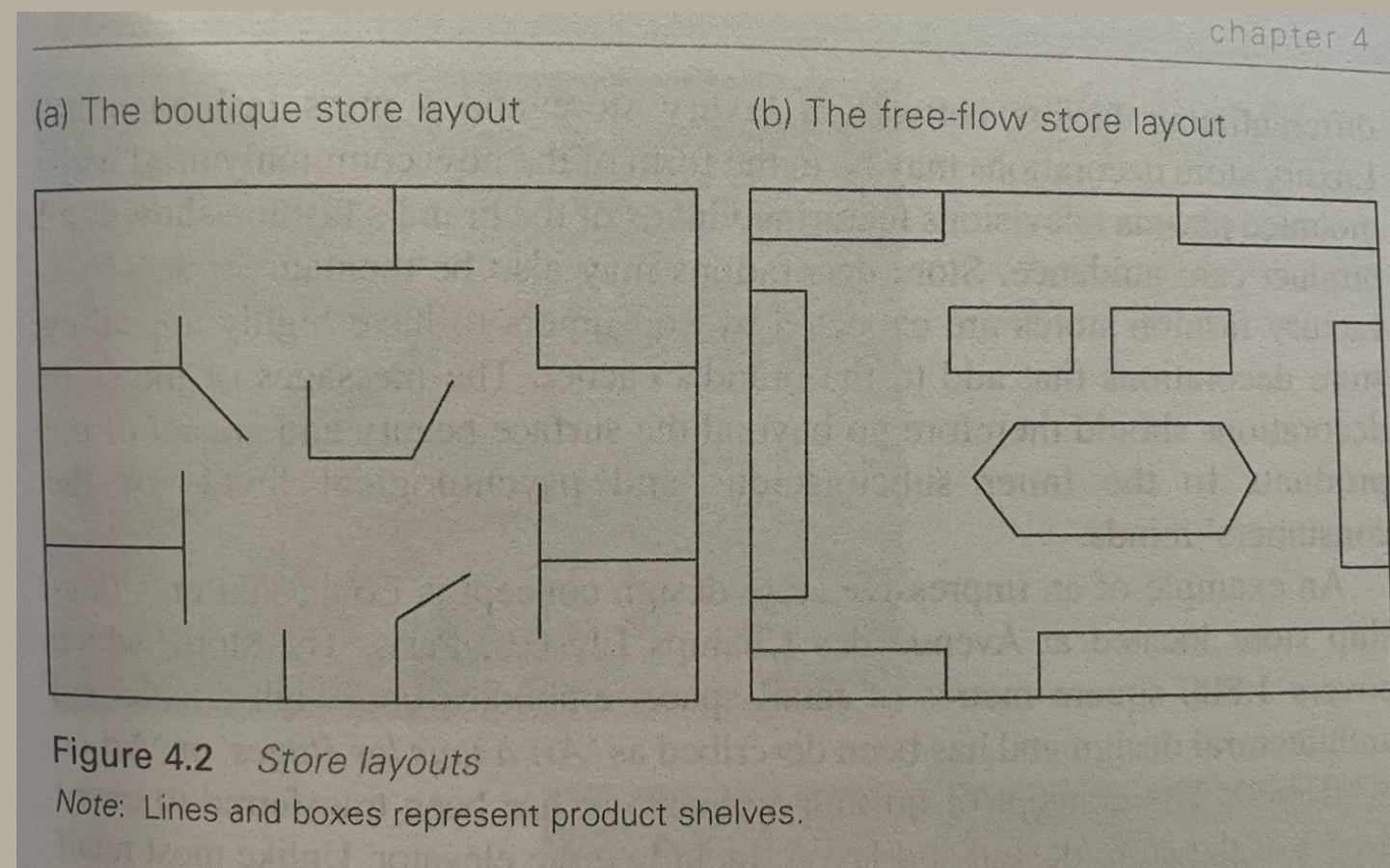
Mock Campaign #2: Reels & Candid Awareness

The second campaign would have a goal of marketing the original designs component of the brand. It will utilize Instagram reels to highlight short creative fashion films with the pieces, as well as attempt to be photographed on New York street style social accounts such as @watchingnewyork to bring candid awareness to the brand.



Physical Store Concepts

m'èlodie will take a boutique showroom approach that many luxury brands do before gaining the reputation and popularity to eventually have multiple locations and a singular flagship. The first showroom would be small in size but utilize all space to be a beautiful shopping "experience" for consumers.



Interior inspiration via Are You Am I