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Love brands: The luxury industry's next frontier

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Many of today's most recognizable luxury brands were created in the 19th century and are rooted in the traditions and rituals of the time.

These rituals dictated the elite's consumer habits: when two wealthy families married their children, a ring and other jewels would be exchanged.

When they celebrated the nuptials, Champagne would be needed for the toast.

A night at the opera called for the finest brocades and laces.

Indeed, luxury houses exercised a kind of brand dictatorship over their consumers, telling them what to consume, when and exactly how to do it, according to the strictest rules of etiquette. Everything was steeped in meaning and tradition.

With the spirit of the industrial revolution, expertise and craftsmanship also became increasingly important ingredients to the luxury status.

Just as the Eiffel Tower was the pinnacle of engineering expertise, the Mont Blanc writing instrument demonstrated the pinnacle of savoir-faire in that domain.

And if an elite consumer were in need of a trunk for a sea voyage, there were few malletier brands that mastered the necessary savoir-faire among them, Louis Vuitton and Moynat.

Changing with the times

Today, our consumer habits have changed.

We have gone from the brand dictatorship of the 19th century to the birth of the consumer citizen-artist and from obeying cultural authority to cultivating self.

We have also gone from a top-down, brand monologue, to multiple dialogues.

And from a long-term orientation, with a focus on tradition, to a present scenario orientation.

To date, the success and longevity of luxury brands has been based primarily on the respect they command.

This respect is derived through four key factors: Most true luxury brands have been around for a long time and this sense of history is a major source of legitimacy.

A lot of importance is also placed on their place of origin. Many high-fashion houses originate in Paris, and Champagne does not deserve the name unless it comes from the region.

Luxury brands are also attached to the character of their primary consumers. Louis Vuitton trunks and bags earned their status as luxury items because, for the most part, only the elite could afford to travel.

Finally, luxury goods are about savoir-faire and craftsmanship, with products often made to order for elite clientele.

But is keeping to these factors enough?

Are luxury brands keeping up with the changing times and the evolution of other brand-consumer relationships?

What we call "love brands," such as Apple, focus on tapping into our emotions by creating connections through experience. Future generations of luxury consumers will be looking for that experience through four dimensions:

Consumers are looking for sensorial experience

Where luxury products were once the establishment, today's consumers are challenging the establishment. They want more than just the product.

To delight the consumer, sensorial experiences sight, smell, taste, touch and sound are a must.

Beautiful flagships, architecture and music serve to add the dream factor.

The Chanel Lumiere Tower Ginza, designed by Peter Marino, is a conceptual rendering of classic Chanel tweed.

BEIGE is the penthouse Ducasse restaurant open seven days a week to provide experiential pleasure.

Chanel's culture is engraved in the colors of the restaurant with black, white and beige, thus giving customers an additional reason to come to the Chanel Lumire Tower.

Consumers want to learn and discover

Customers also want to be informed when they make a significant purchase historic reputation is not quite enough.

To maximize a luxury experience, consumers want to know how the product was crafted.

Whereas brands in the 19th century dictated to their consumers what they should do, consumers now want to discover, enrich themselves, and understand first-hand. They want to see behind the curtain to the making-of their purchase.

Indeed, this is a growing trend amongst luxury brands, with Chanel's workshop experience, for example, providing a select few clients with a back-stage peek at how their products are made.

In addition, events such as cooking classes at the Ritz hotel in Paris are becoming increasingly popular.

Consumers want the brands to care about them

For a long time, the luxury brand-consumer relationship was a long-distance love affair.

Brands were distant and determined consumer behavior in a top-down monologue.

Now, consumers understand that long-distance relationships fizzle.

If luxury brands are to command more than just respect, and tap into an emotional connection with consumers to become love brands they need to open up a dialogue, listen, understand, share and make their consumers feel truly special.

This is an area in which luxury brands have the opportunity to shine by becoming consumer centric. Their products are not industrial, so the ingredients are there to make them unique, special and made-to order.

Consumers want to be involved, to be part of the brand

In a sense, we are returning to the origins of luxury.

Where once upon a time, monarchs would order products based on their specifications, luxury consumers now

...and the concept of the brand has evolved to the consumer's expectations.

want the opportunity to be involved in the process of creation.

The future is one where popular culture can claim a luxury brand for itself and make it what they want and this is a reality to which luxury brands must adapt.

But involving the consumer takes the caring experience one step further. It is about caring for the planet as well as fellow citizens.

Love brands give their consumers the sense that they belong to a social community where they can co-create and co-design.

AS THE TIMES change, it is critical for luxury brands to keep up, or risk becoming dinosaurs.

Commanding your clients' respect is important, but tapping into their emotions is perhaps even more so. After all, you cannot be luxury without having people dream about you.

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Adapted for style, this article previously appeared in [ESSEC Knowledge](#), an online media source that taps into the research and expertise of ESSEC faculty to offer the latest business research, management tips, insights and expert analyses of current events.

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