

COLUMNS

## The end of lying: The new transparency in luxury and politics

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There has been a fundamental change in the role of the consumer. Mass digitization and the democratization of all information have irreversibly changed the way individuals interact with the world around them.

Modern consumers are now empowered to discover their own tastes, opinions and preferences, rather than being hugely impressionable to the powers of everything from well-worded political manifestos to the tantalizing imagery employed by luxury brands.

As a result, this consumer is no longer so easily enticed and seduced. They expect more considered communications from figures of authority, which are sensitive to their more discerning tastes and in line with their elevated expectations.

We are seeing a new wave of individualist voting, manifest in the upcoming British general election which is predicted to have an **unusually high churn rate**, with nearly half of 2015 Labour voters saying they will vote for a different party on June 8, challenging their traditional party ties.

Disillusionment with traditional party politics is such a global phenomenon that we even see leaders Macron (France) and Trump (United States) gaining presidency without initially even having the backing of a political party.

Again, this is indicative of a new audience, empowered by information to challenge traditional and accepted ways of interacting with political entities. It seems that what the consumer desires is a deeper, more human, and more meaningful interaction with government and leadership.

We see the same sentiment echoed in consumers' interactions with luxury brands.

Luxury had so long been about brands holding an elevated position away from society, insisting on a one-way conversation with their adoring audiences.

Smart brands are already beginning to shift.

Louis Vuitton's changing brand communications, from logo-centric creative to experience and collaboration-rich

Louis Vuitton's changing brand communications from logo-centric creative to experience and collaboration-rich projects most recently with Jeff Koons personifies this moving power balance.



*Jeff Koons discussing his collaboration with Louis Vuitton. Image credits: Louis Vuitton*

### *Louis Vuitton presents an interview with Jeff Koons for Masters*

In this new age, however, we are seeing these conventional walls of discourse broken down, as even the most elevated of luxury brands have begun to bring the audience into a conversation with the brand.

Chinese actress Yang Ying, aka Angelababy, has just been appointed as Dior's first brand ambassador in China and, similarly, Jaeger LeCoultre is specifically targeting Eastern audiences with blogger Papi Jiang, to many traditional luxurians' chagrin.

Besides embracing influencers, luxury brands are increasingly thinking of new ways to subvert long-held norms of luxury to appeal to more savvy consumers.

Take **Manolo Blahnik's** current collaboration with Vetements. Through one pair of boots, Manolo has changed the discourse with its consumer and created a more exciting and unexpected narrative.



This shift in consumer mindset applies not only to their disillusionment with brands and political parties, but also at a more granular level in their levels of trust.

In an information age, it is impossible for politicians to spin a web of delusion to entice voters without it being picked apart.

The British information commissioner has opened a **formal investigation** into the use of data analytics for political purposes in an effort to cater to more discerning audiences who question the statistics presented to them.

Given recent "alternative facts," the supposed \$450 million-a-week (United Kingdom) National Health Service (NHS) boost and automotive emissions scandals, this is hardly surprising.

We even see this disillusioned mindset seep into advertising tactics during elections, with the activist group "**Who Targets Me?**" calling for greater transparency in digital advertising targeting and how voters are being influenced, to the same level of monitoring that that applies in other areas of political campaigning.

We are beginning to see this skepticism appear in consumer relationships with brands, too.

Whereas historically luxury brands could use opacity in their processes and manufacturing as part of the seduction and magic of the brand, consumers will now demand ethical considerations are brought to the forefront.

Luxury conglomerates and niche labels alike are increasingly considering their environmental impact, with Kering's 2025 ethical strategy which will "help craft tomorrow's luxury" with the tripartite approach of care, collaborate and create.

#### *Kering 2025 : Crafting tomorrow's luxury*

The language of luxury communications seems so often outdated and insensitive to an informed and connected consumer, who is ready to make her own brand choices.

To seduce and entice this consumer, we must not hope to simply blind them with dazzling creative executions and brand promises, but rather bring them into our world to inspire and challenge them through experiences and education.

IN A POST-TRUTH world where the faltering political elite is increasingly recognizing their own precarious status, the custodians of luxury brands must take heed if they are to avoid the same fate as Trump distrusted, mocked and maligned.

Ironically, the end of lying does not mean that brands no longer have to fear telling the truth. It means that we have to use transparency as a platform from which to say something more profound, more meaningful.

*This article first appeared in Digital Luxury Group's **Luxury Society**. Reproduced with permission and adapted for style.*

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