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NICK KOLENDA

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1

LUXURY



SIGNAL A HIGH STATUS IN LUXURY BRANDS

Luxury products can be ugly, as long as they grab attention.

Luxury brands are appealing because they boost status.

But you need to *signal* this high status.

Luxury brands should be highly noticeable and attention-grabbing so that customers feel confident that people will notice their ownership of this brand.

In fact, luxury products can be ugly — *as long as they grab attention* (Cesareo et al., 2022).

Consider this person on Gucci's site:

(see fig 1)

That handbag is nearly \$4,000, and it doesn't loudly showcase the Gucci logo. But Gucci assures customers that other people will notice this handbag by showing a model wearing an extravagant accessory. You can't help but stare at this person, blaming your attention on the handbag: *Hmm, I'm staring intensely at this person. This handbag must get a lot of attention.*

Similar effects happen with grotesque imagery (An et al., 2020).

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Exaggerate a Degradation.** Ironically, upper class shoppers often buy low-class products (e.g., ripped jeans, lobster mac and cheese) to distinguish themselves from middle-class people: "Because emulating lows is costly and risky for middles, doing so provides an alternative way for highs to distinguish themselves" (Bellezza & Berger, 2020, p. 5). Consider the following scribbled shirt for \$1,350 from Balenciaga, which even boasts a "destroyed and dirty effect." Who would spend \$1k on a scribbled shirt? People who want to communicate they're wealthy enough to spend \$1k on a scribbled shirt.

(see fig 2)

CAVEATS

→ **Be Careful With Extreme Degradations.** Some brands go too far. Golden Goose received backlash for their duct tape sneakers for poverty appropriation (see Bowerman, 2016).

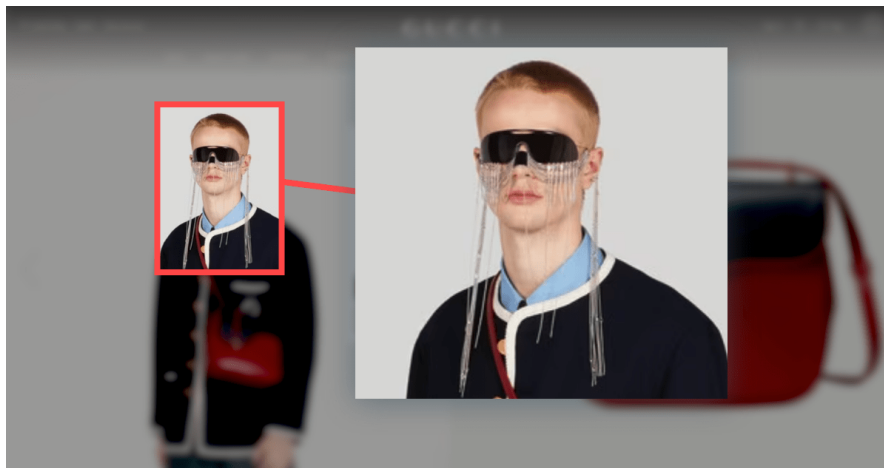
(see fig 3)

→ **Customers Must Desire Status.** Participants were less likely to buy luxury products after viewing artistic photos because this task shifted focus away from their self (Wang et al., 2023). Your branding can still be artsy, though: "When art becomes part of a commercial product, the purpose is not solely to appreciate art per se...the elevated mental state of self-transcendence is unlikely to occur" (Wang et al., 2023, p. 793).

An, D., Lee, C., Kim, J., & Youn, N. (2020). Grotesque imagery enhances the persuasi

Bowerman, M. (2016, August 30). 'Poverty appropriation': Outrage over \$600 duct-tape designer shoes. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2016/08/30/poverty-appropriation-outrage-over-600-duct-tape-designer-shoes.html>

Cesareo, L., Townsend, C., & Pavlov, E. (2022). Hideous but worth it: Distinctive ugliness as a signal of luxury. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1-22.



3





LUXURY BRANDS SHOULD ACT COLD AND DISTANT

Brands are less luxurious if they're friendly and approachable.

Luxury brands should be arrogant.

This entitlement and superiority increases desire for luxury brands.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Avoid Smiling.** Smiling reduces the appeal of luxury images (Zhu et al., 2022).

(see fig 1)

→ **Remain Aloof on Social Media.** Ignore comments, etc. Researchers recommend selective engagement by replying infrequently and reserving interactions with celebrities (Park et al., 2020). Here are tweets from luxury accounts. Most of them are showing celebrities wearing the brand:

(see fig 2)

→ **Avoid Emojis or Exclamations.** Friendliness backfires for luxury brands (Li & Shin, 2022).

→ **Lower the Temperature in Stores.** Unfriendly people are described as “cold” because social distance is intertwined with physical warmth in our brain. Interestingly, customers prefer luxury brands in cold environments because of this neural wiring (Park & Hadi, 2020).

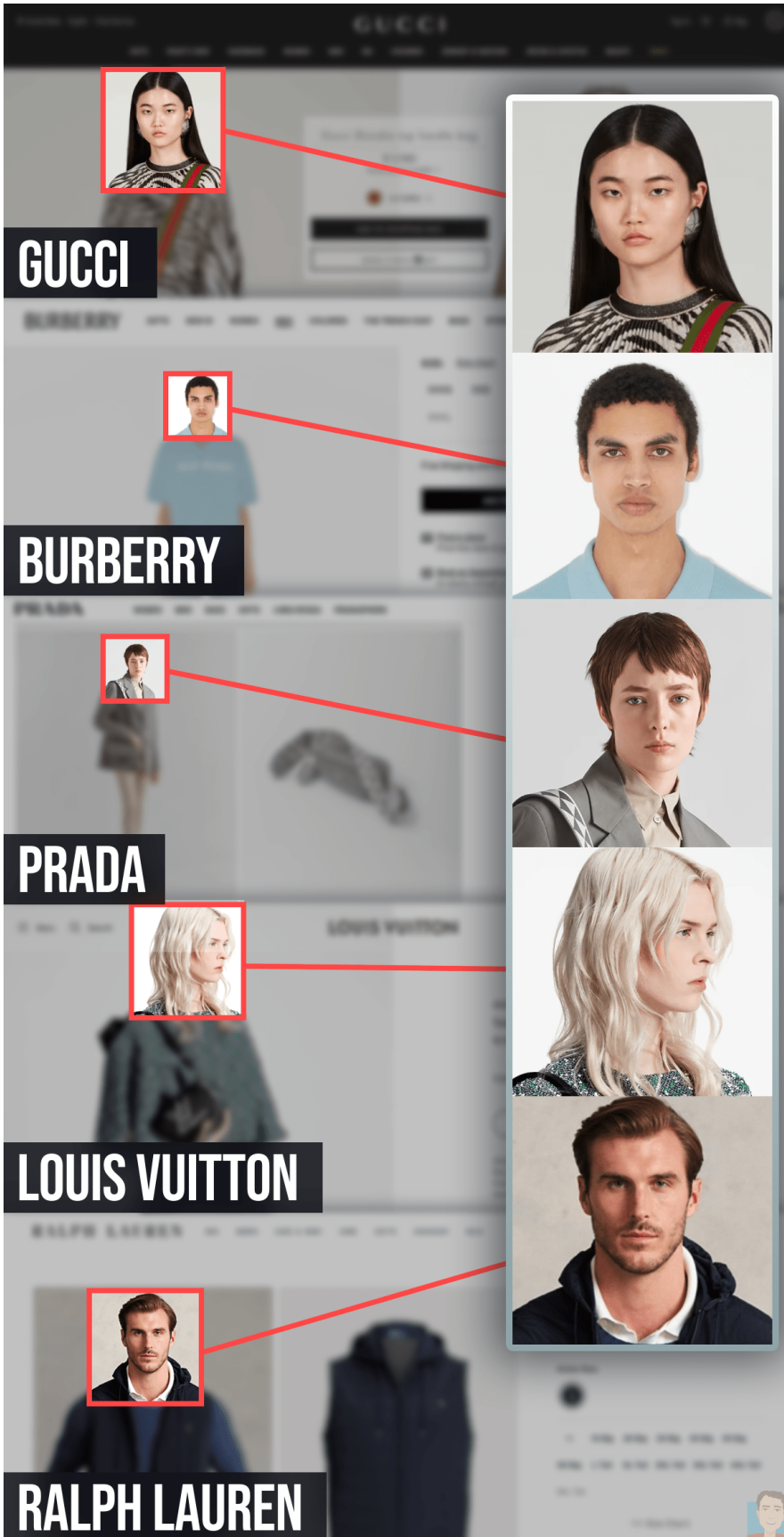
Chu, X. Y., Chang, C. T., & Lee, A. Y. (2021). Values created from far and near: Influence of spatial distance on brand evaluation. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(6), 162-175.

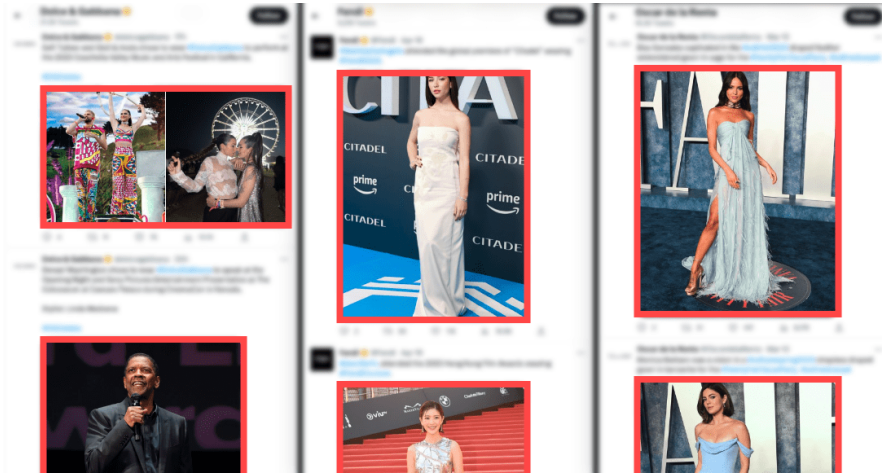
Li, Y., & Shin, H. (2022). Should a luxury Brand's Chatbot use emoticons? Impact on brand status. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*.

Park, J., & Hadi, R. (2020). Shivering for status: When cold temperatures increase product evaluation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 30(2), 314-328.

Park, M., Im, H., & Kim, H. Y. (2020). “You are too friendly!” The negative effects of social media marketing on value perceptions of luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 529-542.

Zhu, H., Zhou, Y., Wu, Y., & Wang, X. (2022). To smile or not to smile: The role of facial expression valence on mundane and luxury products premiumness. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 65, 102861.





2



DEPICT LUXURY PRODUCTS IN FAR AND HIGH PLACES

Luxury products are more desirable when they are located further away from people.

Luxury brands are aspirational.

If these brands are too attainable, we no longer desire them. Therefore, luxury brands should feel distant from customers.

In one study, customers preferred a luxury backpack when they were standing far away, but they preferred an everyday backpack when they were standing closer (Chu, Chang, & Lee, 2021).

(see fig 1)

ADVERTISE IN DISTANT MEDIUMS

Selling a luxury watch? Consider advertising in billboards. This fixed distance instills the desired perception.

Plus, viewers need to look up at billboards. Powerful brands are more appealing when they are located up high (Sundar & Noseworthy, 2014).

ZOOM BACKWARDS IN VIDEOS

Luxury brands are more appealing when videographers move further away from these products (Togawa & Sugitani, 2022).

ANGLE LUXURY PHOTOS UPWARD

Children visually look up at their parents. From a young age, we associate upward angles with powerful entities.

Even today, tall people are typically stronger and more powerful.

Researchers found that upward angles activate power. Even mundane products, like white rice, look more powerful when the brand photography is positioned with an upward view (Van Rompay, De Vries, Bontekoe, & Tanja-Dijkstra, 2012).

(see fig 2)

Chu, X. Y., Chang, C. T., & Lee, A. Y. (2021). Values created from far and near: Influence of spatial distance on brand evaluation. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(6), 162-175.

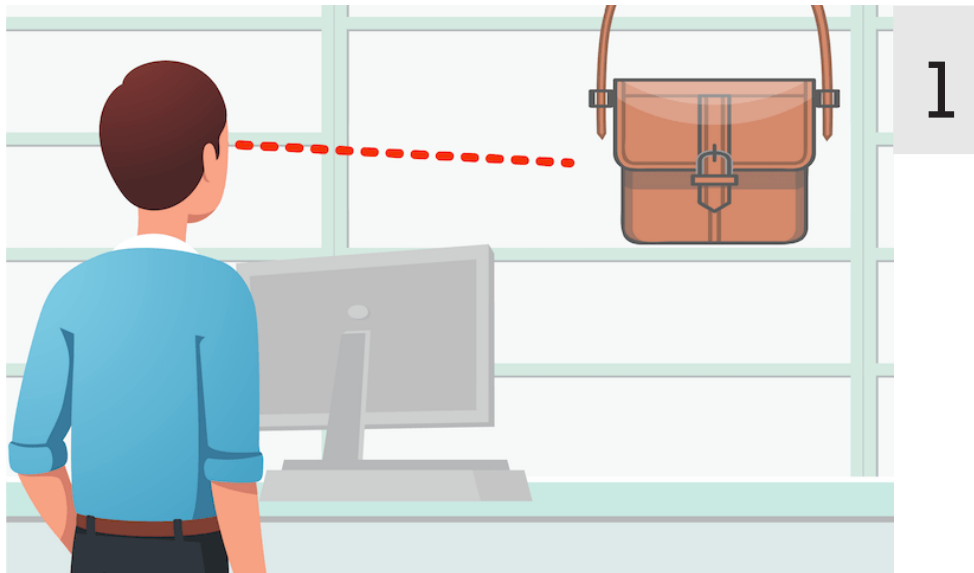
Park, J., & Hadi, R. (2020). Shivering for status: When cold temperatures increase product evaluation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 30(2), 314-328.

Park, M., Im, H., & Kim, H. Y. (2020). "You are too friendly!" The negative effects of social media marketing on value perceptions of luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 529-542.

Sundar, A., & Noseworthy, T. J. (2014). Place the logo high or low? Using conceptual metaphors of power in packaging design. *Journal of Marketing*, 78(5), 138-151.

Togawa, T., & Sugitani, Y. (2022). Looks Far Beyond My Reach: The Zoom Effect in Product Videos Influences Luxury Perception and Purchase Intention. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 32(4), 687-698.

Van Rompay, T. J., De Vries, P. W., Bontekoe, F., & Tanja- Dijkstra, K. (2012). Embodied product perception: Effects of verticality cues in advertising and packaging design on consumer impressions... *Psychology & Marketing*, 29(12), 919-928.



UPWARD
More luxurious

DOWNWARD



LUXURY FONTS ARE THIN, SPACIOUS, AND UPPERCASE

Just like the stereotype of the upper class, luxury fonts are tall, thin, and beautiful.

Fonts resemble traits from the real-world:

(see fig 1)

Luxury fonts should resemble the typical perception of upper class people – such as tall, thin, and beautiful. Something will “feel right” about these fonts.

Why spacious? Because products seem more valuable with more space (Sevilla & Townsend, 2016).

Why uppercase? Because brands seem more luxurious with uppercase letters (Yu, Zhou, Wang, & Wang, 2022). Lowercase fonts are too friendly and approachable (Teng, Xie, Liu, Wang, & Foti, 2021).

Sevilla, J., & Townsend, C. (2016). The space-to-product ratio effect: How interstitial space influences product aesthetic appeal, store perceptions, and product preference. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 53(5), 665-681.

Teng, L., Xie, C., Liu, T., Wang, F., & Foti, L. (2021). The effects of uppercase vs. lowercase letters on consumers' perceptions and brand attitudes. *Journal of Business Research*, 136, 164-175.

Yu, Y., Zhou, X., Wang, L., & Wang, Q. (2022). Uppercase premium effect: The role of brand letter case in brand premiumness. *Journal of Retailing*, 98(2), 335-355.

REAL-WORLD FONTS



1



*Lean
Forward*



**Short
Bold
Condensed**



Tall
Light



Touching



ISOLATE LUXURY BRANDS FROM EVERYDAY FOLKS

Mainstream customers weaken the exclusivity of a luxury brand.

Customers buy luxury brands to boost their status.

Luxury brands seem less appealing if *anybody* can acquire them.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Push Models Further Away.** Ads convert better when the model is located further away (Chu et al., 2021)

(see fig 1)

→ **Orient Gazes Away.** Your brand should be so exclusive that regular folks aren't worthy to look at it.

(see fig 2)

→ **Avoid Mannequins In Stores.** Mannequins aren't the social elite, so they shouldn't be touching your brand.

→ **Display Fewer Customers.** Be careful with social proof: A luxury watch seemed less appealing after it

encouraged customers to tag their photos on Facebook (Park et al., 2020).

(see fig 3)

→ **Partner With Celebrities.** Mainstream customers weaken luxury brands, but celebrities and influencers strengthen them (Pangarkar & Rathee, 2022). Product placements work, too (Rossi et al., 2023).

→ **Enclose Luxury Brands in Glass.** Products seem inferior when other people have touched them (Argo et al., 2006).

(see fig 4)

Chu, X. Y., Chang, C. T., & Lee, A. Y. (2021). Values created from far and near: Influence of spatial distance on brand evaluation. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(6), 162-175.

O'Guinn, T. C., Tanner, R. J., & Maeng, A. (2015). Turning to space: Social density, social class, and the value of things in stores. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(2), 196-213.

Pangarkar, A., & Rathee, S. (2022). The role of conspicuity: impact of social influencers on purchase decisions of luxury consumers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 1-28.

Park, M., Im, H., & Kim, H. Y. (2020). "You are too friendly!" The negative effects of social media marketing on value perceptions of luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 529-542.

Rossi, P., Pantoja, F., Yoon, S., & Kim, K. (2023). The mind of the beholder: congruence effects in luxury product placements. *International Journal of Advertising*, 42(3), 562-588.





4





DESCRIBE THE CRAFTSMANSHIP OF LUXURY PRODUCTS

Customers buy luxury brands to signal their status, but they also expect high quality products.

Craftsmanship is a strong selling point for luxury brands.

From the Rolex website:

Rolex uses only naturally occurring gemstones of the highest quality, very carefully selected according to strict criteria of purity, clarity and intensity. The master gem-setters at Rolex are hailed for their technique in producing flawless setting and alignment and emphasizing the exquisite brilliance of the precious stones....The 18 kt gold that adorns Rolex watches is created and cast in the Manufacture's own foundry. These exclusive alloys, composed of 75% pure gold and a mix of silver, copper, palladium and indium, are the fruit of long years of research to perfect the process.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Describe Craftsmanship By Humans, Rather Than Tech.** Luxury brands seem inferior if they were designed by technology or AI, except for functional products (e.g., automobiles; Xu & Mehta, 2022).

→ **Avoid User-Generated Designs.** Some brands acquire designs from users: "Threadless features the user designer's name on the tag inside its T-shirts and even ships every product with a card emphasizing that like-minded others create its designs" (Fuchs et al., 2013). If you do follow this strategy, legitimize the designs (e.g., describe the users as artists, partner with celebrity users, etc.; Fuchs et al., 2013).

Fuchs, C., Prandelli, E., Schreier, M., & Dahl, D. W. (2013). All that is users might not be gold: How labeling products as user designed backfires in the context of luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Marketing*, 77(5), 75-91.

Xu, L., & Mehta, R. (2022). Technology devalues luxury? Exploring consumer responses to AI-designed luxury products. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1-18.



DEPICT LUXURY BRANDS IN SLOW MOTION

Slow movements heighten the perceived importance of luxury products.

Luxury products are more appealing in slow motion.

It happened with a Facebook ad for luxury chocolate: People were willing to pay higher prices for these slow products (Jung & Dubois, 2023).

WHY IT WORKS

The researchers argued that slow motion immerses people into ads, but I see another explanation.

If you analyze daily life, you'll notice that slow movements are associated with certain traits:

→ **Caution.** You move important objects slowly (e.g., baby)

→ **Effort.** You spend more time on important tasks (e.g., proofreading an email to your boss).

Slow motion frequently co-occurs with importance. Neurons that fire together wire together: Ads that display slow motion should trigger the idea of importance.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Use Long Fade Animations.** On most luxury websites, hovering over a product triggers slow fading transitions.

(see fig 1)

Jung, S., & Dubois, D. (2023). When and How Slow Motion Makes Products More Luxurious. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222437221146728>



1

0

MILLISECONDS

1000



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