



## Can't help falling in love? How brand luxury generates positive consumer affect in social media



Timo Mandler<sup>a,\*</sup>, Marius Johnen<sup>b</sup>, Jan-Frederik Gräve<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Marketing & International Business, Toulouse Business School, 20 Boulevard Lascrosses, 31068 Toulouse, France

<sup>b</sup> Institute of Marketing, University of Hamburg, Moorweidenstr. 18, 20148 Hamburg, Germany

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### ABSTRACT

Although researchers have investigated the role of social media for luxury brands at an aggregate level, little is known about the success drivers of luxury brand communication in social media at a more granular level. This study aims to identify the characteristics of luxury brand communication content that trigger positive consumer affect, a key determinant of strong consumer-brand relationships. Specifically, we examine the impact of non-personal (quality, heritage, conspicuousness, uniqueness) and personal (hedonism, extended self) brand luxury dimensions on consumers' affective responses to luxury brand posts. The results from a field study and an online experiment reveal that non-personal luxury dimensions evoke more positive affect than personal luxury dimensions, due to differences in their (perceived) vividness. Furthermore, the impact of certain brand luxury dimensions on consumer affect varies depending on consumers' usage experience with a brand. Our findings help managers create social media content that contributes to strong consumer-brand relationships.

### 1. Introduction

Today, many luxury brands—that is, brands that are perceived as high in quality, have a prestigious image, offer authentic value through functional and emotional benefits, inspire a deep connection with consumers, and therefore can command premium prices (Ko, Costello, & Taylor, 2017)—use social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, to communicate with consumers worldwide (Chu, Kamal, & Kim, 2013; Heine & Berghaus, 2014; Kim & Ko, 2010). In general, social media activities allow brands to gain exposure and to build relationships with consumers, with the goal of promoting sales and long-term success (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013; Kim & Ko, 2012). The relevance of social media channels for luxury brand communication is likely to increase even more as luxury brands increasingly shift their advertising budgets from print to digital media (Dalton, 2018).

Against this background, researchers exert considerable effort to assess the (dis-)advantageousness of luxury brands' social media activities (e.g., Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012). Although extant literature generally advocates for engaging in social media activities, little is known about the success drivers of luxury brand communication at a more granular level. Specifically, the literature provides limited guidance on *how* to design effective brand messages in social media. In this context, we are primarily interested in the elicitation of positive

consumer affect, defined as “a consciously experienced, subjective feeling state” (Westbrook, 1987, p. 259). Consumer affect plays a key role in forging strong ties between consumers and brands (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), increasing consumers' brand loyalty and decreasing their price sensitivity (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010), both of which are critical to luxury brands' long-term success. Therefore, the elicitation of consumer affect, and consequently the establishment and maintenance of strong consumer-brand connections, constitute a primary goal of luxury brands' communication efforts. Surprisingly, insights into how to achieve this goal in luxury brand communication in general and in social media settings in particular are limited.

To close these research gaps, we aim to identify the characteristics of luxury brand communication content that trigger positive consumer affect. Specifically, we examine the impact of non-personal (quality, heritage, conspicuousness, and uniqueness) and personal (hedonism and extended self) luxury dimensions on consumers' affective responses to luxury brand posts. For this purpose, we draw on data from two empirical studies: (1) a field study of 2,325 luxury brand posts on Facebook and (2) an online experiment involving 1,888 U.S. consumers. Our findings suggest that, from an aggregated perspective, non-personal luxury dimensions are emotionally more engaging than personal luxury dimensions. However, from a more differentiated perspective, within each class of luxury dimensions, the potential to elicit

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [t.mandler@tbs-education.fr](mailto:t.mandler@tbs-education.fr) (T. Mandler), [marius.johnen@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:marius.johnen@uni-hamburg.de) (M. Johnen), [jan-frederik.graev@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:jan-frederik.graev@uni-hamburg.de) (J.-F. Gräve).

positive consumer affect is distinct. Moreover, we theoretically argue and empirically show that the relationships between the communicated luxury dimensions and consumers' positive affect are mediated by their perceived vividness (i.e., clarity of mental representations) and moderated by the stage of a consumer's relationship with a brand (i.e., personal usage experience).

Our study contributes to the literature on luxury brand communication in three ways. First, it adds to the still limited body of research on the effectiveness of luxury brand communication in social media on a granular level. Importantly, we discover that contemporary managerial practice is subpar, in that many brands do not always emphasize the most favorable luxury dimensions in their social media communication. Our findings provide the required guidance for luxury brand managers on how to “engineer” successful social media content that contributes to strong consumer–brand relationships. Second, as a theoretical contribution, we link different brand luxury dimensions to positive consumer affect by introducing the mediating role of perceived vividness. Third, from a methodological standpoint, we use for the first time a mixed-methods approach to analyze the effectiveness of luxury brand communication. Specifically, this research involves both field and experimental data, as well as alternative operationalizations of consumer affect, including a novel measure of consumer engagement.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Luxury brand communication in social media

The literature provides empirical evidence for the general advantageousness of social media activities for luxury brands. In the context of fashion brands, for example, Kim and Ko (2010) investigate the impact of consumers' perceptions of luxury fashion brands' social media marketing (SMM) activities on their relationships with a brand and purchase intentions. They identify five factors underlying the concept of SMM for luxury brands that are positively correlated with the dependent variables of interest: entertainment, customization, interaction, word of mouth, and trendiness. The authors validate the same factors in a later study, further showing their positive impact on purchase intention and customer equity through increased value and brand equity (Kim & Ko, 2012). Other researchers have adopted Kim and Ko's (2010, 2012) SMM concept to examine the relationships between its dimensions and consumers' brand preferences, price premiums, and loyalty (Godey et al., 2016).

Furthermore, researchers have investigated *how* and *why* luxury consumers typically interact with branded content in social media. For example, Pentina, Guilloux, and Micu (2018) explore different consumer engagement behaviors that may be directed at the brand (e.g., following) or other social media users (e.g., sharing brand posts). Similarly, Kwon, Ratneshwar, and Thorson (2017) use the term “social media advocacy behaviors” (SABs) to refer to interactions with brand content (i.e., liking, commenting, and sharing) and shed light on the underlying motivations that cause individuals to engage in SABs (e.g., self-enhancement, community identification).

Despite these considerable advances, understanding of the success drivers of luxury brand communication remains incomplete. Studies that address the consequences of SMM are primarily concerned with a luxury brand's social media presence as a whole but pay little attention to the specifics of the branded content to which consumers are exposed. A few notable exceptions exist. Choi, Seo, Wagner, and Yoon's (2018) experimental study provides initial evidence that consumers' brand attitudes vary depending on the type of general message appeal (attribute- or benefit-based) luxury brands use. Kefi and Maar's (2018) survey distinguishes more broadly between informative and hedonic content and finds that the former is more likely to stimulate consumers' active participation on a luxury brand fan page. Finally, Liu, Shin, and Burns (2019) find that Tweets of luxury brands that contain words suggestive of entertainment, trendiness, or interaction increase

consumer engagement in social media. Although these studies show that favorable outcomes are a function of certain content characteristics, they provide limited insights into the role of specific brand luxury dimensions in eliciting positive consumer affect, an important catalyzer of consumer–brand relationships.

### 2.2. Content characteristics as determinants of consumer engagement

To offer managers comprehensive insight into the measures they can take to stimulate positive consumer affect, we consulted the general literature on brand post characteristics and their relationship to consumer engagement in social media (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Mochon, Johnson, Schwartz, & Ariely, 2017; Wagner, Baccarella, & Voigt, 2017). Most studies in this regard examine correlations between certain “hard” characteristics (e.g., photos, videos, links, post length, timing) and different measures of consumer engagement or post popularity (i.e., number of likes, comments, and shares). De Vries et al. (2012), for example, analyze 355 brand posts on Facebook and find that richer types of media such as videos (vs. photos) increase the number of likes but not the number of comments. Similarly, Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, and Lebherz (2014) investigate the relationship among the type of media used (i.e., photos, videos, and links), the timing of a brand post, and its popularity in terms of likes and comments. They find a strong positive relationship between the use of videos and likes while photos provoke comments.

However, only a few studies also consider “soft” criteria, such as the content dimensions communicated in a post. Wagner et al. (2017) focus on emotional and functional dimensions used in social media communication of automotive brands. They find no consistent effects for any of the two types of dimensions. By contrast, Schultz (2017) finds partly opposed effects for three models with likes, shares, or comments as a dependent variable. He investigates various content dimensions relevant to the context of retailing brands, such as product information, promotion, and holiday specials. For example, posts featuring a promotion (vs. mere product information) decrease the number of likes but increase the number of shares. Finally, Dhaoui (2014) finds that posts stressing a luxury brand's pedigree, performance, or paucity increase endorsement and recommendation rates, whereas the use of public figures mitigates any type of engagement. To extend knowledge in the field of luxury brand communication in social media, we adopt a similar approach and investigate which specific luxury dimensions may be communicated within brand posts to evoke positive consumer affect.

## 3. Conceptual framework

Fig. 1 depicts the conceptual framework of our study. The framework reflects the notion that brand managers can emphasize certain brand luxury dimensions in their social media communication that vary in their ability to elicit positive consumer affect. We argue that the impact of these luxury dimensions on consumer affect is mediated through their (perceived) vividness and further propose consumers' personal usage experience as a factor that moderates these effects.

### 3.1. Brand luxury dimensions

As the concept of brand luxury is notoriously difficult to define, literature offers myriad alternative conceptualizations. Table 1 provides an overview of the most influential conceptualizations to date. For our study, we adopt Vigneron and Johnson (2004) Brand Luxury Index (BLI) for two reasons. First, the BLI represents the most established conceptualization of brand luxury, as evidenced by more than 1,300 citations (Google Scholar, 2019). Second, the BLI shares considerable commonalities with alternative conceptualizations, which either propose alterations to the original BLI (e.g., Wiedmann, Hennings, & Siebels, 2009) or synthesize various conceptualizations (e.g., Shukla & Purani, 2012).

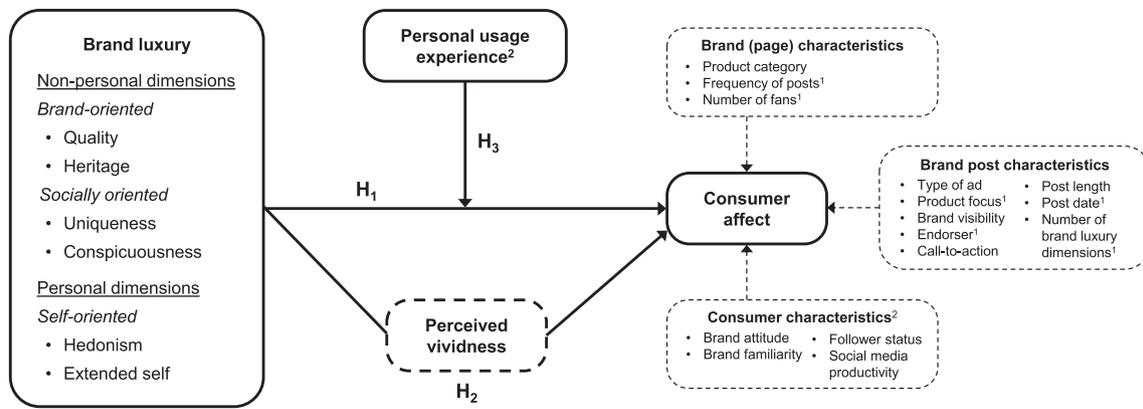


Fig. 1. Conceptual model. <sup>1</sup> Only included in Study 1. <sup>2</sup> Only included in Study 2.

Table 1  
Overview of influential brand luxury typologies.

Study	Citations <sup>a</sup>	Brand luxury dimensions <sup>b</sup>
Vigneron and Johnson (2004)	1,384	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality</li> <li>Uniqueness</li> <li>Conspicuousness</li> <li>Hedonism</li> <li>Extended self</li> </ul>
Tynan, McKechnie, and Chhuon (2010)	633	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilitarian/functional</li> <li>Cost/sacrifice</li> <li>Symbolic/expressive (other-directed)</li> <li>Symbolic/expressive (self-directed)</li> <li>Experiential/hedonic</li> </ul>
Wiedmann et al. (2009)	709	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Functional value (quality, uniqueness, usability)</li> <li>Social value (conspicuousness, prestige)</li> <li>Individual value (hedonism, materialism, self-identity)</li> </ul>
Dubois et al. (2001)	489	10 dimensions (and three individual items), including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extreme quality</li> <li>Scarcity</li> <li>Conspicuousness</li> <li>Deep interest and pleasure</li> <li>Sign value</li> <li>Objective (material)</li> <li>Collective (social)</li> <li>Subjective (individual)</li> </ul>
Berthon, Pitt, Parent, and Berthon (2009)	438	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilitarian/functional</li> <li>Cost/sacrifice</li> <li>Symbolic/expressive (other-directed)</li> <li>Symbolic/expressive (self-directed)</li> <li>Experiential/hedonic</li> </ul>
Shukla and Purani (2012)	229	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Product centric luxury (e.g., functional/utilitarian value, heritage)</li> <li>Social meanings (e.g., symbolic/expressive luxury, conspicuousness)</li> <li>Personalized meanings (e.g., experiential/hedonic, 'my luxury')</li> </ul>
Seo and Buchanan-Oliver (2019)	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Product centric luxury (e.g., functional/utilitarian value, heritage)</li> <li>Social meanings (e.g., symbolic/expressive luxury, conspicuousness)</li> <li>Personalized meanings (e.g., experiential/hedonic, 'my luxury')</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> Number of citations according to Google Scholar (accessed October 1, 2019).

<sup>b</sup> We excluded studies/typologies that are applicable only to specific product categories, such as luxury fashion brands (Miller & Mills, 2012).

The BLI distinguishes between non-personal (i.e., quality, uniqueness, and conspicuousness) and personal (i.e., hedonism and extended self) luxury dimensions. For the sake of completeness, we extend the original set of brand luxury dimensions to include “heritage” (“ancestral heritage,” Dubois, Laurent, & Czellar, 2001; “history,” Kapferer, 1997), which we classify as a non-personal luxury dimension because of

its direct relatedness to the brand and/or its products.

### 3.1.1. Non-personal luxury dimensions

The non-personal dimensions of brand luxury comprise the (1) brand-oriented dimensions quality and heritage and (2) socially oriented dimensions conspicuousness and uniqueness. The brand-oriented dimensions focus on specific inherent characteristics and attributes of the brand and its products, while the socially oriented dimensions focus on brand characteristics that depend on interpersonal influences (e.g., what people consider *conspicuous* or *unique*).

**Quality:** Consumers generally expect luxury brands to deliver high-quality products and services (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Thus, it is “imperative” that luxury brands meet consumers’ quality expectations (Keller, 2009, p. 291) and deliver “premium quality across all products in the line, from the most to the least expensive” (Nuevo & Quelch, 1998, p. 62). Indicators that can help communicate a high standard of quality include specific materials (e.g., cashmere, gemstones) or performance data (e.g., durability, top speed). Brand posts may feature product close-ups that draw users’ attention to details of the product that convey a brand’s concern with meticulous precision, high quality, and performance. Examples include close-ups of the inner workings of a luxury wristwatch or displaying the premium packaging of beauty products. Consequently, luxury brands can stress this dimension by demonstrating their superior functional attributes.

**Heritage:** In general, heritage refers to “a dimension of a brand’s identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols, and particularly in an organizational belief that its history is important” (Urde, Greyser, & Balmer, 2007, p. 4). Many luxury brands stress this characteristic, as they often have a long history and rich tradition (König, Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Haase, 2016). For example, many actively communicate the story of their founders who created the brands and shaped the core values of the company (Dubois et al., 2001). Often, the founder is the eponym of the brand, and his or her personality and myth are closely entangled with the brand itself and the consumption experience (Kapferer, 1997). Another important form of heritage is iconic products that have stood the test of time and have become classics within their categories. Thus, brand communication conveying a brand’s rich heritage showcases the founder as a person, elaborates on the founder’s or company’s history, or highlights a traditional, iconic product that has made the brand what it is today.

**Conspicuousness:** Conspicuous consumption refers to the consumption of goods or services having superior social reputations with the intention to improve or communicate social status to others (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999; Hwang, Ko, & Megehee, 2014). It involves high levels of self-monitoring and a status-signaling mentality (Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009) that helps consumers present themselves by means of a product that is recognized and highly regarded by others (i.e., status-laden). To communicate conspicuousness, brands often employ stimuli

that evoke feelings such as envy, respect, and admiration. Brand posts can emphasize characteristics such as superiority and extravagance by setting the product or brand in the context of places or people associated with an expensive, decadent lifestyle. The general aim is to express certain user and usage imagery attributes as well as a brand's capability to enable a person to become the center of attention and stand out from the crowd by conveying high social status (Phau & Prendergast, 2000).

**Uniqueness:** Uniqueness refers to the impression of a brand of being particularly special due to its sheer rareness or remarkable characteristics (Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Research suggests that the perceived exclusivity and scarcity of a branded product enhance consumers' desire and preference for it (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Brands can express their uniqueness by highlighting their products' excellent craftsmanship, innovativeness, or exclusiveness in terms of consumption. Examples of uniqueness through craftsmanship include creative product designs, use of rare materials or ingredients (e.g., diamonds in the context of jewelry), or even personalized products (e.g., inscription of personal initials on fashion items). Uniqueness can also be conveyed through innovation (e.g., by collaborating with artists; Kim, Ko, Lee, Mattila, & Kim, 2014; Pino, Guido, & Natarajan, 2017), as a pioneering product is by definition unique in that it has certain features that distinguish it from any other existing competing product. Furthermore, uniqueness can be achieved through creating contrived rareness by, for example, limiting the number of products manufactured (e.g., limited editions), limiting the product distribution (e.g., selling only in flagship stores), and charging high prices (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Dubois & Paternault, 1995). Thus, brand communication that conveys uniqueness commonly provides both attribute-related information and symbolic benefits, eliciting feelings of exclusiveness and distinctiveness.

### 3.1.2. Personal luxury dimensions

In contrast with non-personal brand luxury, personal luxury dimensions include hedonism and the extended self. These are characterized by an inward-focus (i.e., self-oriented) and are primarily related to the benefits consumers can gain by consuming luxury brands.

**Hedonism:** In general, the term "hedonism" refers to the pursuit of fun, pleasure, and excitement in the sense of sensual self-indulgence (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Okada, 2005). Luxury brands commonly offer emotional and sensual benefits that can be experienced by and transferred to consumers in a consumption situation (Moore & Lee, 2012). This intangible attribute is highly important for luxury brands because it can foster consumers' emotional attachment to a brand and further justifies its value beyond mere tangible features of the product (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993). Therefore, communication that conveys hedonism commonly emphasizes the emotional experience associated with consumption, rather than utilitarian/functional aspects (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Hedonism-eliciting brand communication attempts to support viewers' imagination of themselves in a particular consumption situation and depicts strong emotions, such as pleasure, joy, self-reward, love, passion, or excitement (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Conveying these emotions commonly requires visuals that feature people expressing their emotions while consuming a product or service, unless the emotions evoked by specific consumption situations are easily imaginable for viewers. Examples include a champagne bottle in a festive setting or a driver racing along a scenic road, both of which evoke hedonic emotions, such as joy or excitement, respectively.

**Extended self:** This term describes the construction, reinforcement, and communication of consumers' self-concept through their personal possessions (Belk, 1988). In other words, consumers, knowingly or unknowingly, regard their possessions as a part of their identity (Belk, 1988, 2013) and may use luxury brands (or services) to "enhance their self-concept and replicate stereotypes of affluence" (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004, p. 490). Brand communication reflecting these dimensions suggests that the possession or consumption of the advertised

product or service helps people establish and express an aspired personality trait, such as elegance, confidence, success, or power. Brand posts can convey this personal luxury dimension by displaying people who appear successful due to the car they are driving or attractive and desirable due to the dress they are wearing.

### 3.2. Brand luxury and consumer affect

Consumer affect is "a consciously experienced, subjective feeling state" (Westbrook, 1987, p. 259). Prior research establishes that consumer decisions are based to the same extent on affective-emotional factors as on rational-factual inputs (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1984). Positive consumer affect is particularly important in establishing, maintaining, and strengthening bonds between consumers and brands (Thomson et al., 2005), which can ultimately lead to more trust in and increased loyalty toward a brand and decreased price sensitivity (Park et al., 2010).

A key determinant of positive consumer affect toward brand communication is the vividness of information, i.e. the "self-rated degree of richness, amount of detail, and clarity of a mental image" that is elicited by receiving information (Palermo et al., 2013, p. 3). For example, the clarity of images in an advertisement (MacInnis & Price, 1987) or concreteness of a message (Petrova & Cialdini, 2005) can affect vividness. The processing of vivid information requires less cognitive resources (Keller & Block, 1997) and therefore facilitates a higher processing fluency, which in turn leads to positive consumer affect (Schwarz, 2004).

To establish a link between different dimensions of brand luxury and consumer affect, we classify the considered luxury dimensions according to the level of vividness they convey to recipients. Drawing on construal level theory, prior research conceptualizes the vividness of advertising messages along a unidimensional spectrum, ranging from high to low vividness (Hernandez, Wright, & Rodrigues, 2015). Messages with high vividness typically refer to concrete characteristics or attributes of the advertised brand or product, while messages with low vividness highlight abstract benefits from consuming the advertised product (Hernandez et al., 2015). This positive relation between the vividness of information and positive consumer affect is well established in the literature (e.g., Petrova & Cialdini, 2005).

In line with this rationale, we view luxury brand communication that involves non-personal, brand-oriented dimensions (i.e., quality and heritage) as having high levels of vividness because of their emphasis on specific, concrete characteristics of the brand and/or product. By contrast, the personal dimensions hedonism and extended self predominantly refer to benefits that consumers can gain or experience through the consumption of the luxury product. As this type of luxury brand communication conveys rather abstract goals, it tends to be less vivid than brand-oriented luxury dimensions. The non-personal, socially oriented dimensions conspicuousness and uniqueness are likely to vary between these two extremes of the spectrum given their complex nature. On the one hand, these dimensions feature non-product-related (e.g., usage imagery conveying conspicuousness) and product-related (e.g., rare ingredients conveying uniqueness) brand attributes that are only concrete insofar as others readily recognize and acknowledge them (i.e., interpersonal nature). On the other hand, these non-personal dimensions are indirectly related to certain personal benefits, such as feeling exclusive or superior, which may render the communication more abstract.

Given this classification of brand luxury dimensions, we expect that non-personal luxury dimensions have a greater potential to elicit positive consumer affect than personal dimensions. Furthermore, we assume that (perceived) vividness mediates the relationship between the communicated luxury dimensions and positive consumer affect.

**H1:** Luxury brand communication that emphasizes non-personal luxury dimensions evokes more positive consumer affect than

luxury brand communication that emphasizes personal luxury dimensions.

**H2:** Consumers' perceived vividness of a luxury brand communication mediates the relationships between communicated luxury dimensions and positive consumer affect.

### 3.3. Moderating role of personal usage experience with a brand

Luxury brands aim to foster long-term relationships with consumers to generate high levels of brand loyalty and profitability (Cailleux, Mignot, & Kapferer, 2009; Kim & Joung, 2016). In general, relationships "are constituted of a series of repeated exchanges between two parties known to each other" (Fournier, 1998, p. 346). Similarly, consumer–brand relationships develop through continuous interactions between consumers and brands (Aaker, 1996), which leads to greater interdependence and closeness (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016). Accordingly, consumer–brand relationships and the cognitive and behavioral patterns of the partners involved often progress gradually over time, similar to processes in interpersonal relationships (Fournier, 1998; Hudson et al., 2016). These changes in the consumer–brand relationship are closely connected with a consumer's experience and interactions with the brand (Fournier, 1998). Personal usage experiences with a brand can affect how consumers evaluate, use, and respond to brand communication content (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Kinard & Hartman, 2013).

The relationship between consumers' personal usage experiences and the effectiveness of brand communication may be ascribed to a change in consumers' cognitive representations of a brand. More specifically, with more high-quality encounters with a brand in terms of usage, the clarity or strength of brand associations increases (Halkias, 2015; Keller, 1993). In turn, stronger brand representation facilitates consumers' processing of cues that relate to existent brand associations (Keller, 1993). Thus, personal usage experiences enrich consumers' mental representations of a brand, thereby increasing the processing fluency of brand communication (Chang, 2013; Halkias, 2015).

Consequently, we assume that consumers' experiences with a given luxury brand create mental representations of that brand that foster the perceived vividness of the communicated luxury dimensions. This, in turn, should strengthen consumers' affective responses to the corresponding brand post.

**H3:** Consumers' personal usage experience with a brand positively moderates the relationship between communicated luxury dimensions and positive consumer affect.

To investigate the effectiveness of these brand luxury dimensions in evoking positive consumer affect, we conducted two empirical studies. First, we analyzed field data from luxury brand communications on Facebook to examine the relationships between the brand luxury dimensions and user reactions as a measure of (aggregated) consumer affect. Second, to analyze the mediating role of perceived vividness and explore the potential heterogeneity of the effects, we used an online experiment with real brand post stimuli and established measures of individual consumer affect and perceived vividness. This mixed-method approach maximizes the external and internal validity of our findings.

## 4. Study 1: Field study

### 4.1. Research design

We compiled a set of luxury brands using the brand rankings by Interbrand (2017), Millward Brown (2017), and Brand Finance (2017) as a sampling frame (see Table 2). Specifically, we identified all luxury brands that were ranked among the most valuable brands in the world by at least one of these rankings, yielding 18 brands from different categories, including fashion, cars, cosmetics, and champagne. For

**Table 2**  
Luxury brand sample.

Brand name	Product category	Source	Study 1	Study 2	
			No. of brand posts	No. of brand stimuli	No. of evaluations by respondents
Burberry	Fashion	BF, IB	24	1	18
Cartier	Fashion	BF, IB	54	2	28
Chanel	Fashion	BF	103	4	73
COACH	Fashion	BF	109	3	39
Dior	Fashion	BF, IB	152	6	102
Estée Lauder	Cosmetics	BF	21	2	110
Ferrari	Cars	BF, IB	350	9	426
Gucci	Fashion	BF, IB, MB	387	6	129
Hermès	Fashion	BF, IB, MB	5	n/a	n/a
Louis Vuitton	Fashion	BF, IB, MB	68	3	61
Michael Kors	Fashion	BF, IB	176	9	159
Moët & Chandon	Champagne	IB	116	3	96
Porsche	Cars	BF, IB	164	5	203
Prada	Fashion	BF	202	5	76
Rolux	Watches	BF	59	2	97
Rolls Royce	Cars	BF	35	2	58
Shiseido	Cosmetics	BF	75	2	91
Tiffany & Co	Fashion	BF, IB	225	6	122

Notes: BF = Brand Finance; IB = Interbrand; MB = Millward Brown.

these brands, we extracted all brand posts that were published between January 1 and June 30, 2017, yielding 2,325 individual posts that constitute our unit of analysis. These posts mostly contain photos (55.8%) or videos (38.8%, i.e., 94.6% combined), alongside a few links (5.0%), events (0.2%), and status updates (0.2%).

#### 4.1.1. Luxury dimensions

We enriched the raw data by manually coding all brand posts in terms of the luxury dimension of interest, following a two-step procedure. First, we developed a detailed codebook (Web Appendix A) that defines each brand luxury dimension from conceptualizations in the literature. The codebook provides a list of relevant indicators and further illustrates each luxury dimension with the help of exemplary brand posts. Second, using the codebook and initial training sessions, we instructed two independent coders to note the absence (= 0) or presence (= 1) of each luxury dimension in a given brand post. Notably, this coding was not exclusive (i.e., a brand post could feature more than one luxury dimension at the same time). The intercoder reliabilities (Holsti coefficients) were satisfactory for all luxury dimensions, ranging from 0.79 to 0.91.

#### 4.1.2. Control variables

We further requested the coders to capture other content characteristics (inter-coder reliability greater than 0.80 for all variables) and control variables that potentially affect consumer interactions with brand posts. First, we measured several brand post characteristics such as the *type of ad*, which captures the richness of the medium used in a given brand post through two dummy variables (reference category: photos). We consider video content more sensually stimulating (= 1) than photos, while posts with only textual information (e.g., links, status updates) should have lower richness. The variable *product focus* measures whether a post is directly linked to the product (= 1) or not (= 0). *Brand visibility* indicates whether a brand (i.e., its name or logo) is clearly visible in the post (= 1) or not (= 0). The presence of an *endorser* in the ad was dummy coded (0 = no; 1 = yes). *Call-to-action* indicates whether a post includes a call-to-action that encourages users to like, share, or comment on a post or to participate in an event or competition (0 = not included; 1 = included). We also measured the length of a post in terms of word count (*post length*) and the date of publication (*post date*) to account for the ongoing diffusion of Facebook's new Reactions

feature, on which our dependent variables are based. Furthermore, we included a dummy variable that determines whether more than one luxury dimension is present in the brand post (0 = no, 1 = yes) to control for a potential ambiguity of luxury dimensions (*number of dimensions*). Second, we included brand (page) characteristics: we controlled for *product category* by using dummy variables for each category, with fashion as the reference category. In addition, we included the average *number of fans* of the respective luxury brand and the *frequency of posts* (per week) to account for specific characteristics of luxury brand pages.

4.1.3. Consumer affect

To measure consumer affect in social media, we introduce a new measure that we label the “love ratio” (LoveR). This measure is based on Facebook’s class of emotional reactions that enables users to indicate their feelings about certain posts, such as “Love” or “Anger” (Badache & Boughanem, 2017). We focus on the love reaction for three reasons. First, among the different reaction options, we consider “Love” the strongest and most positive proxy for consumer affect. Second, other reactions such as “Haha” and “Wow” are ambiguous, in that both serve various purposes and can indicate positive or negative affect (e.g., Haha can indicate that a user feels entertained by the content but can also be used to make fun of the content). Third, at the time of data collection, the love reaction was by far the most frequently used emotional reaction (Kircher, 2017). Similarly, in our data set, 86.6% of all emotional reactions were love reactions, while the other reactions were rarely used.

LoveR represents the amount of love reactions relative to all reactions to a given brand post. We consider LoveR an important extension of commonly investigated outcomes, such as likes or shares, which are considered “fairly low-level form[s] of engagement” (Stephen, Sciandra, & Inman, 2015, p. 20). By contrast, consumer affect is generally considered a “chief motivator of behavior” (O’Cass & Frost, 2002, p. 73) and a “mediating factor in the purchase process” (Schiffman, Bednall, Watson, & Kanuk, 1997, p. 361). Furthermore, by measuring the ratio of love reactions to total reactions, our LoveR measure is distinctly less susceptible to endogeneity concerns (e.g., user self-selection or biases arising from efforts to promote a given brand post; Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016), compared to conventional measures such as likes or shares.

To test our assumption that the love reaction serves as a proxy for positive consumer affect, we conducted a qualitative pre-study following the approach of Sumner, Ruge-Jones, and Alcorn (2018). We asked 211 U.S. consumers for two open statements on the meaning of the “like” and the “love” button: “In general, what do you hope to accomplish using the like (love) button as a reaction to a brand post on Facebook?” Two independent coders (Holsti coefficient = 0.85) set a coding variable depending on whether respondents’ stated meaning of the love reaction was described as more positive/stronger than a like (=1) or equal to a like (=0). We find that 90% of respondents described the meaning of the love reaction as stronger and more positively than a like while only 10% described them as equally positive. Many of the statements regarding the love reaction reveal that it represents very strong positive affect: “That it is something amazing. That I truly love the post”; “That it is something I not only purchase but believe in!” By contrast, respondents often described the “like” button as an expression of mere acknowledgment or agreement (e.g., “I want to express approval and interest of the content in the post”). Thus, the meaning of the love reaction differs substantially from a mere like, as it indicates strong positive consumer affect. The number of love reactions to brand posts can therefore serve as a proxy to quantify positive consumer affect on Facebook.

Given the nested structure of the data (i.e., brand posts are nested within brand pages), we use multi-level regression analysis (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) with random intercepts to analyze the data. We specify the proposed luxury dimensions alongside the control

**Table 3**  
Study 1: Results of the multilevel regression analysis.

Independent variables	$\beta$	SE	p
Constant	6.508	0.998	< 0.001
<i>Non-personal luxury dimensions<sup>1</sup></i>			
Quality	0.929	0.162	< 0.001
Heritage	0.565	0.285	0.048
Conspicuousness	0.263	0.137	0.055
Uniqueness	0.027	0.320	0.933
<i>Personal luxury dimensions<sup>1</sup></i>			
Hedonism	0.399	0.236	0.091
Extended self	-0.277	0.270	0.305
<i>Controls: Brand post characteristics</i>			
Type of ad (1 = Video) <sup>2</sup>	0.706	0.183	< 0.001
Type of ad (1 = Links/Status) <sup>2</sup>	-0.225	0.297	0.448
Product focus (1 = yes)	0.540	0.206	0.009
Brand visibility	0.342	0.193	0.077
Endorser (1: yes)	-0.366	0.351	0.297
Call-to-action	0.735	0.379	0.053
Post length	-0.006	0.003	0.080
Post date	0.005	0.001	< 0.001
No. dimensions per post: 2 or more	-0.082	0.164	0.617
<i>Controls: Brand (page) characteristics</i>			
Product category (1 = Cars) <sup>3</sup>	-1.376	0.492	0.005
Product category (1 = Cosmetics) <sup>3</sup>	-0.186	1.283	0.884
Product category (1 = Watches) <sup>3</sup>	-3.176	0.733	< 0.001
Product category (1 = Champagne) <sup>3</sup>	-1.900	0.846	0.025
Number of fans (in 100 k)	-0.002	0.006	0.680
Number of brand posts per week	-0.002	0.068	0.978
N	2,325		
Snijders/Bisiker R2 (Level 1/2)	0.215/0.409		
ICC/BIC	0.232/10192.200		

Notes:  $\beta$  = (unstandardized) regression coefficients, SE = robust clustered standard error. <sup>1</sup>luxury dimensions are dummy coded (0 = absent; 1 = present) with a control group (without any luxury dimension) as a reference category. <sup>2</sup>Reference category: image; <sup>3</sup> Reference category: fashion; model includes samplings weights for luxury dimensions to reduce bias occurring from disbalance in frequencies.

variables as predictors of LoveR. To account for potential dependencies among the standard errors within each level-two unit, we estimate clustered robust standard errors.

4.2. Results

The descriptive statistics of our independent variables indicate that, on average, the love reaction had a share of 7.19% of all user reactions per luxury brand post and was the most clicked emotional reaction. Furthermore, luxury brands use the six dimensions in an unbalanced way (see Appendix A). While luxury brand posts frequently feature quality (44.6%) and uniqueness (33.6%), other dimensions are used only occasionally (conspicuousness: 18.7%, hedonism: 14.4%) or less frequently (extended self: 11.0%, heritage: 7.2%). Approximately one in eight brand posts (13.9%) did not feature any specific brand luxury dimension. Given this imbalance, we used sampling weights to obtain an approximately equal distribution of luxury dimensions in our model.

Table 3 summarizes the results of the model estimations. The results suggest that four of the six brand luxury dimensions evoke positive consumer affect. In line with our theoretical expectations, the non-personal, brand-oriented dimensions quality and heritage are the strongest drivers of LoveR ( $\beta_{\text{quality}} = 0.929$   $p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta_{\text{heritage}} = 0.565$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Regarding the non-personal, socially oriented dimensions, conspicuousness has a marginally significant effect on LoveR, while uniqueness is not significantly related to consumers’ affective reactions to brand posts ( $\beta_{\text{conspicuousness}} = 0.263$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ;  $\beta_{\text{uniqueness}} = 0.027$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ). Similarly, the personal luxury dimensions show an inconsistent pattern, such that hedonism slightly increases LoveR while extended self has no significant effect ( $\beta_{\text{hedonism}} = 0.399$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ;  $\beta_{\text{extended self}} = -0.277$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ).

**Table 4**  
Study 2: Results of the linear regression analysis.

Dependent variable	Model 1 Positive consumer affect			Model 2 Perceived vividness			Model 3 Positive consumer affect			Model 4 Positive consumer affect		
	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i>
Constant	1.054	0.122	< 0.001	2.099	0.188	0.000	0.288	0.105	0.006	1.034	0.122	< 0.001
<i>Non-personal luxury dimensions<sup>1</sup></i>												
Quality	0.243	0.080	0.002	0.279	0.123	0.023	0.141	0.066	0.033	0.247	0.079	0.002
Heritage	0.165	0.073	0.024	0.229	0.112	0.042	0.082	0.061	0.177	0.162	0.073	0.026
Conspicuousness	0.236	0.076	0.002	0.341	0.117	0.004	0.111	0.063	0.079	0.387	0.097	< 0.001
Uniqueness	0.048	0.079	0.547	-0.069	0.122	0.571	0.073	0.066	0.266	0.189	0.096	0.049
<i>Personal luxury dimensions<sup>1</sup></i>												
Hedonism	0.219	0.079	0.006	0.048	0.121	0.695	0.202	0.065	0.002	0.112	0.090	0.214
Extended self	0.041	0.081	0.610	0.029	0.124	0.814	0.030	0.067	0.648	0.040	0.080	0.622
<i>Brand post characteristics</i>												
Type of ad (1 = video)	0.106	0.048	0.027	-0.008	0.073	0.915	0.109	0.040	0.006	0.111	0.048	0.020
Brand visibility (1 = yes)	-0.016	0.051	0.753	0.151	0.079	0.054	-0.071	0.042	0.092	-0.010	0.051	0.848
Post length	-0.001	0.001	0.333	0.002	0.002	0.305	-0.002	0.001	0.063	-0.001	0.001	0.378
<i>Brand (page) characteristics<sup>2</sup></i>												
Product category (1 = Cars)	0.139	0.051	0.006	0.313	0.078	< 0.001	0.025	0.042	0.555	0.139	0.050	0.006
Product category (1 = Cosmetics)	0.024	0.074	0.744	-0.189	0.113	0.095	0.093	0.061	0.128	0.037	0.073	0.613
Product category (1 = Watches)	0.477	0.127	< 0.001	0.446	0.195	0.022	0.314	0.105	0.003	0.462	0.126	< 0.001
Product category (1 = Champagne)	0.358	0.106	0.001	0.057	0.163	0.726	0.337	0.088	< 0.001	0.347	0.106	0.001
<i>Consumer characteristics</i>												
Personal usage experience	0.009	0.011	0.395	0.007	0.017	0.688	0.007	0.009	0.450	0.001	0.013	0.908
Brand attitude	0.141	0.014	< 0.001	0.298	0.021	< 0.001	0.032	0.012	0.007	0.142	0.014	< 0.001
Brand familiarity	0.041	0.013	0.001	0.035	0.019	0.075	0.028	0.010	0.006	0.043	0.013	0.001
Facebook brand follower (1 = yes)	0.396	0.064	< 0.001	0.489	0.099	< 0.001	0.217	0.054	< 0.001	0.382	0.064	< 0.001
Social media productivity	0.123	0.018	< 0.001	0.231	0.028	< 0.001	0.030	0.015	0.010	0.121	0.018	< 0.001
<i>Mediator</i>												
Perceived vividness							0.365	0.012	< 0.001			
<i>Interactions</i>												
Conspicuousness × usage experience										0.069	0.028	0.014
Uniqueness × usage experience										0.071	0.028	0.011
Hedonism × usage experience										-0.076	0.028	0.007
N	1,888											
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.174			0.216			0.434			0.180		

Notes:  $\beta$  = (unstandardized) regression coefficients, SE = standard error. <sup>1</sup> Luxury dimensions are dummy coded (0 = absent; 1 = present) with a control group (without any luxury dimension) as a reference category. <sup>2</sup> Reference category: fashion. The variable “Usage experience” was mean-centered for ease of interpretation in model 3. Brand post characteristics “Product focus” and “Endorser” were not included in the model because of multicollinearity with the luxury dimensions quality and extended self (i.e., all randomly selected posts that communicated quality [extended self] included a product focus [an endorser]).

As an additional analysis, we ran another model in which we directly contrasted non-personal and personal luxury dimensions by using a dummy variable (0 = personal, 1 = non-personal dimensions) and excluded posts without any luxury dimension. We again used sampling weights for correcting for unequal distributions. The results show a marginally significant, positive effect of aggregated non-personal luxury dimensions ( $\beta = 0.497, p < 0.10$ ; for full results, see Appendix B), in partial support of H1.

### 5. Study 2: Experimental study

Although our field study paints a comprehensive picture of luxury brand communication in social media with high external validity, it has some shortcomings that we eliminate in an experimental study. First, we are interested in the mediating effect of perceived vividness and the moderating role of personal usage experience, which cannot be measured satisfyingly with Facebook data but can be measured with a survey-based design. Second, field data always have limitations regarding causality due to potential unobserved confounding factors. In an experimental study, we can ensure a more controlled setting and also account for individual differences. Finally, our dependent variable LoveR serves as a proxy for positive consumer affect; however, we cannot rule out alternative motivations for this reaction. Therefore, the experiment allows us to obtain introspective data with a higher level of validity.

#### 5.1. Research design

For our online experiment, we chose the United States as a suitable setting because it constitutes the largest market for luxury goods worldwide (Deloitte, 2018). In collaboration with a professional panel provider, we recruited 1,888 consumers who (1) have a moderate to high interest in luxury goods and (2) have a Facebook account. We employed a between-subjects design in which each respondent was exposed to a single, randomly assigned stimulus. As stimuli, we used real brand posts from the field study to ensure high levels of realism and comparability of our findings across studies. Specifically, we drew a random set of 10 brand posts for each of the six brand luxury dimensions, considering only posts that exclusively featured the respective dimension. To balance the number of photo and video posts, we selected five stimuli of each kind. In addition, we sampled 10 stimuli that lacked any luxury dimension to serve as a control group in our analyses. As a result, we collected ratings on 70 different stimuli. To ensure sufficient validity of our manipulation, two additional, independent coders again classified the selected stimuli on the basis of our codebook, resulting in an acceptable agreement compared to previous coding (Landis & Koch, 1977).

After seeing a brand post, each respondent indicated the extent to which it evoked positive affect. We measured (experienced) consumer affect toward the luxury brand post using Jiang and Punj (2010) three-item scale (“To what extent did the Facebook post make you feel each of the following emotions?” “pleasant/happy/enjoyed”; measured on 4-point scales anchored by 1 = “not at all,” 2 = “a little,” 3 =

“moderately,” and 4 = “strongly”;  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). After some unrelated buffer questions, we measured respondents’ perceived *vidviness* of a stimulus using five items from Petrova and Cialdini (2005) measured on a 7-point scale (1 = “not at all,” 7 = “very much”;  $\alpha = 0.90$ ): “attention catching,” “clear,” “exciting,” “detailed,” and “communicating a strong image.” Then, as additional control variables, we measured a set of consumer characteristics, including *usage experience* (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachandra, 2000; “I have no/extensive personal usage experience with it”; measured on a 7-point bipolar scale), *brand attitude* (Petrova & Cialdini, 2005; “unfavorable/favorable,” “negative/positive”; measured on 7-point semantic differentials;  $\alpha = 0.74$ ), and *brand familiarity* (Batra et al., 2000; “Not at all/very familiar with it”; measured on a 7-point semantic differential), as well as the individual social media usage behavior, including the status as a follower (0 = no; 1 = yes) of the presented brand and a person’s *social media productivity* (Hocevar, Flanagin, & Metzger, 2014; 3 items, e.g., “How often do you ... read posts by brands in your timeline on Facebook?” measured on 5-point scales anchored by 1 = “less than once per week,” 2 = “once per week,” 3 = “several times per week,” 4 = “once per day,” and 5 = “several times per day”;  $\alpha = 0.81$ ). In addition, we used several brand post characteristics from Study 1 as controls in our analyses (Table 4; for descriptive statistics, see Appendix B).

## 5.2. Results

We analyzed the data in a stepwise manner. First, we regressed positive consumer affect on all brand luxury dimensions and the control variables (model 1, see Table 4). Similar to our findings in the field, the results show that the non-personal, brand-oriented luxury dimensions quality ( $\beta = 0.243$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and heritage ( $\beta = 0.165$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) significantly elicit positive consumer affect. Furthermore, for the non-personal, socially oriented dimensions, we again find a positive effect of conspicuousness ( $\beta = 0.236$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and no significant impact of uniqueness ( $\beta = 0.048$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ). For the personal luxury dimensions, we find the same mixed effect pattern—a significant, positive effect of hedonism ( $\beta = 0.219$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a non-significant effect of extended self ( $\beta = 0.041$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ). Thus, we find additional (partial) support for H1 from a differentiated perspective.

Second, we assessed the mediating role of perceived vividness by estimating the effects of the six individual brand luxury dimensions and controls on this variable (model 2). The results provide initial evidence for our theoretical assumptions: respondents perceive significantly higher vividness when luxury brands emphasize quality ( $\beta = 0.279$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), heritage ( $\beta = 0.229$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), or conspicuousness ( $\beta = 0.341$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) in their communication. By contrast, the communication of both personal dimensions and uniqueness does not significantly increase perceived vividness ( $\beta_{\text{hedonism}} = 0.048$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ;  $\beta_{\text{extended self}} = 0.029$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ;  $\beta_{\text{uniqueness}} = -0.069$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ). Furthermore, including perceived vividness in model 3 with positive consumer affect as a dependent variable exerts a strong positive effect ( $\beta = 0.365$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, perceived vividness seems to absorb part of the impact of the non-personal luxury dimensions, as we observe weaker effects of these variables (e.g., the effect of heritage turns non-significant;  $\beta = 0.082$ ,  $p > 0.10$ ).

To formally test the mediating role of perceived vividness in the relationship between the communication of luxury dimensions and positive consumer affect, we used the bias-corrected bootstrapping approach (5,000 samples, 95% confidence interval) implemented in Hayes (2018) PROCESS macro. The results show significant indirect effects on positive consumer affect through perceived vividness when luxury brands communicate quality ( $\beta_{\text{ab}} = 0.102$ , lower limit confidence interval [LLCI] = 0.020, upper limit confidence interval [ULCI] = 0.189), heritage ( $\beta_{\text{ab}} = 0.084$ , LLCI = 0.005, ULCI = 0.168), or conspicuousness ( $\beta_{\text{ab}} = 0.124$ , LLCI = 0.039, ULCI = 0.210). By contrast, both personal luxury dimensions and uniqueness exert no

indirect effect on positive consumer affect through perceived vividness ( $\beta_{\text{ab, hedonism}} = 0.017$ , LLCI =  $-0.020$ , ULCI = 0.189;  $\beta_{\text{ab, extended self}} = 0.011$ , LLCI =  $-0.080$ , ULCI = 0.100;  $\beta_{\text{ab, uniqueness}} = -0.025$ , LLCI =  $-0.118$ , ULCI = 0.067). This provides first partial support for H2 from a non-aggregated perspective.

In a next step, we again directly compared the effectiveness of non-personal and personal luxury dimensions using a dummy variable (0 = personal, 1 = non-personal) while excluding the control condition without any luxury dimension. The results indicate that the communication of non-personal luxury dimensions leads to higher perceived vividness than the communication of personal luxury dimensions ( $\beta = 0.163$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which in turn increases consumers’ positive affect. Consequently, we observe a significant indirect effect of non-personal luxury dimensions on positive consumer affect through perceived vividness ( $\beta_{\text{ab}} = 0.058$ , LLCI = 0.005, ULCI = 0.117). Thus, we also find support for H1 and H2 on an aggregated level.

Finally, to analyze the moderating role of usage experience on the effects of the luxury dimensions, we again used the differentiated set of the six brand luxury dimensions. We first tested interactions between usage experience and each luxury dimension separately. We observed no significant interactions for quality, heritage, or extended self. For reasons of parsimony, we then included all significant terms at once (see model 4). The results show that personal usage experience strengthens the effects of conspicuousness ( $\beta = 0.069$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and uniqueness ( $\beta = 0.071$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) on consumer affect, while it reduces the effect of hedonism ( $\beta = -0.076$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, we found only partial support for H3, such that personal usage experience solely increases the effectiveness of non-personal, socially oriented dimensions and even mitigates the impact of hedonism. We conducted an additional floodlight analysis using the Johnson–Neyman technique to identify the level of the moderator at which these effects turn statistically (non-)significant (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013). Fig. 2 depicts the corresponding results. Panel A shows that conspicuousness has a significant effect on positive consumer affect at medium and high usage experience levels (i.e., higher than 2.43). Panel B indicates that uniqueness evokes positive consumer affect only at usage experience levels higher than 5.69. Finally, panel C shows that the positive effect of hedonism turns non-significant at high levels of usage experience (i.e., at values higher than 5.04).

## 6. Discussion

Existing research generally advocates for the use of social media activities for luxury brands but offers little advice on *how* to design effective brand communication in social media. This study adds to a limited stream of literature on the role of content characteristics in luxury brand communication in social media by shedding first light on the role of luxury-specific dimensions in eliciting positive consumer affect, a key driver of strong consumer–brand relationships. Specifically, we investigate the impact of non-personal (quality, heritage, conspicuousness, and uniqueness) and personal (hedonism and extended self) brand luxury dimensions on consumers’ affective responses to luxury brand posts. To do so, we employ a mixed-methods approach comprising a large-scale field study of luxury brand posts on Facebook and an online experiment involving U.S. consumers.

Overall, the results suggest that luxury brand communication that emphasizes non-personal luxury dimensions is more effective in eliciting positive consumer affect than communication that stresses personal luxury dimensions. However, the potential to elicit positive consumer affect also substantially varies among the individual luxury dimensions within each of the two groups and is further contingent of consumers’ personal usage experiences with a given brand. We explain these variations by theoretically arguing and empirically demonstrating that the brand luxury dimensions differ in perceived vividness, which determines the ease with which consumers process the communication.

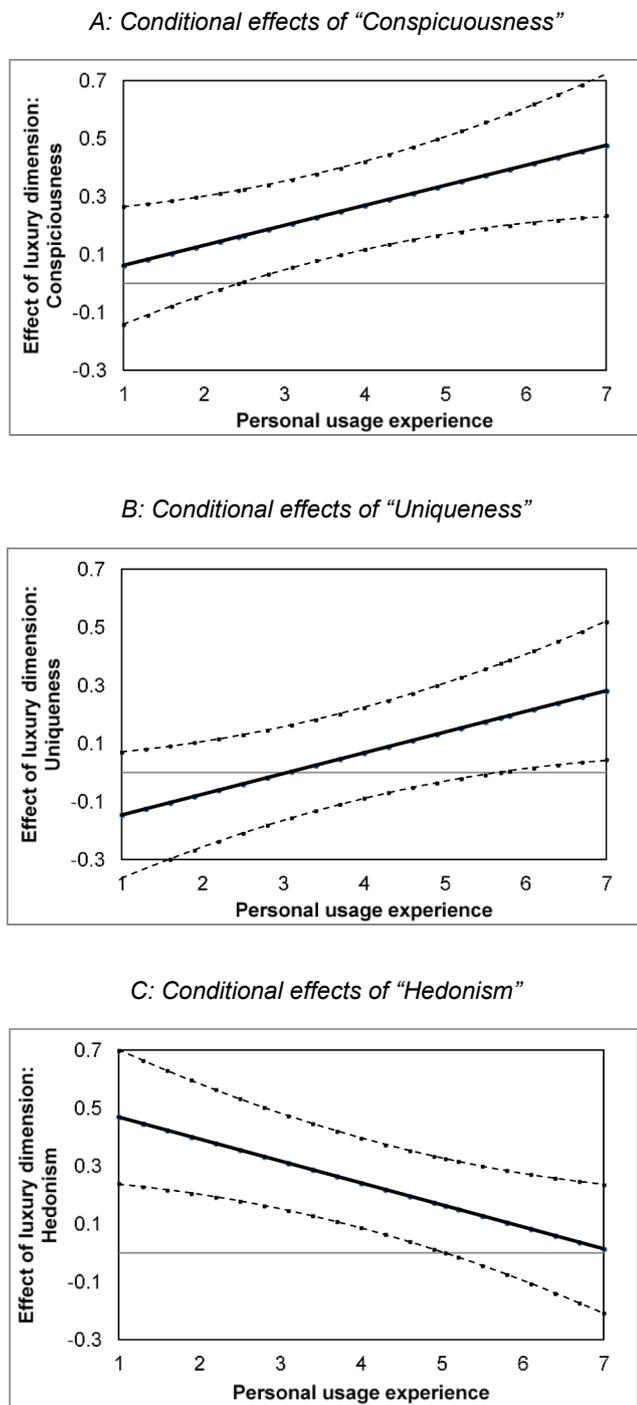


Fig. 2. Study 2: Johnson–Neyman plots for the conditional effects of brand luxury dimensions.

6.1. Theoretical implications

This study extends knowledge on the relevance of different brand luxury dimensions for fostering consumer–brand relationships through social media. Despite the presumed desirability of each luxury dimension, our findings clearly show that not every luxury dimension is capable of emotionally engaging consumers. Only the non-personal luxury dimensions quality, heritage, and conspicuousness show a consistent, positive effect across both studies. The superiority of non-personal to personal luxury dimensions is due to their comparatively high vividness. Their concrete nature requires less cognitive effort, which increases processing fluency and consequently stimulates positive

affect. In the field study, quality has the strongest influence on consumer affect. In the experimental study, which also controls for individual-level differences, the strength of its influence is comparable to the impact of heritage and conspicuousness. Notably, uniqueness is the only non-personal luxury dimension to have no significant impact on consumer affect across both studies. Despite being conceptually classified as a non-personal dimension of brand luxury, communication conveying uniqueness tends to be less concrete than communication involving, for example, brand-oriented information. Its nature is interpersonal, in that uniqueness-related communication can only be fluently processed if consumers’ social environment unambiguously recognizes and acknowledges the communicated information as being suggestive of uniqueness. This might not always be a given, especially in the context of the culturally diverse audiences of brand pages in social media.

Another noteworthy exception is the marginally significant, positive relationship between hedonism and positive consumer affect in the field data. Importantly, the experimental data show that hedonism is not significantly related to perceived vividness, which supports our theoretical framework but also indicates that other mechanism might trigger positive consumer affect. A possible explanation is emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993), which can foster consumer engagement in social media (Berger, 2014). Accordingly, consumers may react to or even mirror the displayed emotions in a subconscious and automatic manner, instead of consciously processing the greater theme of hedonic luxury.

Our findings further contribute to the relevant literature by demonstrating the moderating role of consumers’ personal usage experiences with a brand. We find that the effectiveness of individual luxury dimensions in evoking positive consumer affect can vary across stages of a consumer–brand relationship. Specifically, the effect of the non-personal, socially oriented dimensions conspicuousness and uniqueness on positive consumer affect become stronger over time, while the impact of the personal dimension hedonism decreases throughout the progression of a consumer–brand relationship. These seemingly opposing effects may be explained by the evolution of a brand’s mental representations over time. Given the social nature of conspicuousness and uniqueness, consumers may exchange more information about the brand (as the signaling purpose requires them to understand how others perceive the brand), through which existing mental brand representations are strengthened. This increase in perceived vividness results in even more positive consumer affect. By contrast, the inward focus of hedonism implies a subjective experience that is typically not shared with others. The conditional effects reveal that hedonism evokes positive consumer affect only at low levels of personal usage experience but exerts no influence at later relationship stages. Prior research suggests that throughout the course of a consumer–brand relationship, emotional components such as passionate feelings may decrease over time (Ahuvia, Batra, & Bagozzi, 2009). Therefore, hedonism may be emotionally contagious when a brand’s mental representations in consumers’ minds are weak, but it does not create positive consumer affect in the long run.

6.2. Managerial implications

Our findings provide guidance on the design of successful luxury brand communication in social media. From a content perspective, managers should “engineer” brand posts that stress non-personal brand luxury dimensions. First, managers should reinforce their brands’ quality claims. This can be achieved through visual brand posts that showcase the quality of the used material or ingredients or provide objective performance data testifying to the brand’s luxurious and superior nature. Second, managers should use social media to educate consumers about the history and values of their brands. The heritage of a brand can be effectively communicated with content that sheds light on meaningful personas related to the brand (e.g., its founder) or

commemorates iconic products from the past. Finally, consumers are likely to emotionally engage with luxury brand communication that reflects conspicuous consumption motives. Such brand posts may display the target brand within the context of a wealthy lifestyle, which signals the owner’s social status and attracts the admiration of others. The latter can also be effectively realized through the use of celebrity testimonials.

By contrast, an emphasis of the personal brand luxury dimensions hedonism and extended self or uniqueness appears to be of little value for generating positive consumer affect in social media. However, our findings also show that the effectiveness of specific brand luxury dimensions depends on the stage of the consumer–brand relationship. Communication efforts primarily intended for customer acquisition should emphasize hedonism as it only emotionally engages consumers with relatively little personal usage experience. Conversely, communication targeted at customer retention should focus on conspicuousness and uniqueness, as consumers’ affective responses are more pronounced at later stages of the consumer–brand relationship.

Importantly, our findings reveal that contemporary managerial practice is subpar. Although many luxury brand posts indeed feature quality appeals, managers currently overuse uniqueness and underuse heritage, which has a positive impact on consumer affect.

### 6.3. Limitations and future research directions

This study is subject to several limitations that highlight promising avenues for future research. Although Facebook is the most important social media platform to date for luxury brands, the importance of other channels such as Instagram and Twitter is steadily increasing (PMX Agency, 2017). Future studies could investigate luxury brand

## Appendix A. Study 1: Descriptive statistics

Variables	Freq. (rel.) / Mean (SD)
Love-Ratio	7.19 (2.56)
<i>Non-personal luxury dimensions</i>	
Quality	1,037 (44.60%)
Heritage	169 (7.27%)
Conspicuousness	435 (18.71%)
Uniqueness	780 (33.55%)
<i>Personal luxury dimensions</i>	
Hedonism	335 (14.41%)
Extended Self	256 (11.01%)
<i>Controls: Brand post characteristics</i>	
Type of ad: Video	909 (39.10%)
Type of ad: Image	1,290 (55.45%)
Type of ad: Links/Status	126 (5.42%)
Product focus (1: yes)	1,521 (65.42%)
Brand Visibility	1,333 (57.33%)
Endorser (1: yes)	1,310 (56.34%)
Call-to-Action	43 (1.85%)
Post length	27.29 (2.669)
Post date	91.25 (52.85)
No. Dimensions per post: 2 or more	803 (34.54%)
<i>Controls: Brand (page) characteristics</i>	
Product category: Cars	549 (23.61%)
Product category: Cosmetics	96 (4.13%)
Product category: Watches	59 (2.54%)
Product category: Champagne	116 (4.99%)
Product category: Fashion	1,564 (67.27%)
Number of fans (in 100 k)	11.04 (54.67)
Number of brand posts per week	8.26 (4.49)

communication in a multi-channel setting to shed light on the effectiveness of standardized versus adapted communication strategies across multiple social media channels.

Regarding the type of luxury products, our study focuses on personal luxury goods that are common tangible products. However, luxury services such as luxury hospitality deserve more research attention, because they account for a major share of the global luxury market (D’Arpizio, Levato, Kamel, & de Montgolfier, 2017) and may require the use of a different communication approach. Therefore, studies could examine the relative importance of certain luxury dimensions for tangible and intangible luxury products in a comparative manner.

Furthermore, the use of Facebook Reactions to measure consumer engagement could be extended. In our study, we introduced a novel measure based on the love reaction to measure positive consumer affect. Future research could derive similar measures for other types of user reactions, especially negative reactions. Finally, given the increasing consumer demand for luxury goods in emerging markets (Kim & Ko, 2012), further research on cross-cultural differences in consumer responses to luxury brand communication in social media is necessary.

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Appendix B. Study 2: Descriptive statistics

Variables	Freq. (rel.)/ Mean (SD)	Correlations																						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
1. Consumer affect	2.63 (0.90)	1																						
2. Quality	257 (13.6%)	0.06	1																					
3. Heritage	370 (19.6%)	0.02	-0.20	1																				
4. Conspicuousness	255 (13.5%)	0.02	-0.16	-0.20	1																			
5. Uniqueness	225 (12.0%)	-0.06	-0.15	-0.18	-0.15	1																		
6. Hedonism	237 (12.6%)	0.05	-0.15	-0.19	-0.15	-0.14	1																	
7. Extended self	314 (16.6%)	-0.05	-0.18	-0.22	-0.18	-0.16	-0.17	1																
8. Control group	229 (12.1%)	-0.05	-0.15	-0.18	-0.15	-0.14	-0.14	-0.17	1															
9. Perceived vividness	4.92 (1.41)	0.63	0.05	0.06	0.04	-0.05	-0.04	-0.05	-0.02	1														
10. Type of ad (1: video)	920 (48.7%)	0.06	-0.01	0.02	0.02	-0.05	0.00	-0.01	0.03	0.05	1													
11. Brand visibility	1,206 (63.9%)	0.05	0.20	0.07	-0.15	0.03	-0.15	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.41	1												
12. Post length	29.5 (25.7)	-0.03	-0.21	-0.15	0.00	0.09	-0.13	0.29	0.11	0.02	0.09	0.08	1											
13. Category: Cars	687 (36.4%)	0.03	0.00	0.37	0.05	-0.09	-0.16	-0.19	-0.04	0.13	-0.02	0.12	-0.14	1										
14. Category: Cosmetics	201 (10.7%)	-0.08	-0.14	0.08	-0.14	-0.13	0.13	0.11	0.05	-0.13	-0.05	0.05	-0.14	-0.26	1									
15. Category: Watches	97 (5.1%)	0.04	-0.09	-0.11	-0.09	-0.09	-0.09	0.52	-0.09	0.03	0.24	0.18	0.58	-0.18	-0.08	1								
16. Category: Champagne	96 (5.1%)	0.07	0.20	-0.11	-0.09	-0.09	0.17	-0.10	0.06	-0.01	-0.23	0.17	-0.16	-0.18	-0.08	-0.05	1							
17. Category: Fashion	807 (42.7%)	-0.03	0.04	-0.31	0.12	0.24	0.04	-0.07	0.02	-0.05	0.05	-0.30	0.04	-0.65	-0.30	-0.20	-0.20	1						
18. Usage experience	3.58 (2.12)	0.17	0.06	-0.07	-0.01	0.03	0.12	-0.09	-0.02	0.13	-0.03	0.00	-0.24	-0.02	-0.06	0.07	0.25	0.25	1					
19. Brand attitude	5.06 (1.47)	0.31	0.03	0.03	-0.06	-0.02	0.08	-0.07	0.01	0.37	0.05	0.05	-0.03	0.07	-0.10	-0.03	0.02	0.00	0.21	1				
20. Brand familiarity	4.72 (1.84)	0.21	0.04	-0.01	-0.02	0.03	0.06	-0.07	-0.03	0.19	0.00	0.00	0.03	-0.09	-0.12	0.02	-0.03	0.17	0.53	0.30	1			
21. Facebook brand follower	211 (11.2%)	0.21	0.00	-0.04	0.02	0.03	-0.05	-0.03	0.09	0.20	-0.03	-0.08	-0.02	-0.08	-0.07	-0.04	-0.04	0.15	0.26	0.15	0.20	1		
22. Social media productivity	3.04 (1.1)	0.21	-0.05	-0.02	0.02	0.04	0.01	-0.04	0.05	0.23	-0.01	-0.04	-0.03	-0.06	0.01	-0.11	-0.02	0.11	0.18	0.12	0.13	0.24	1	

Notes: N = 1,888; Variables 9, 17, 18, and 19 were measured on 7-point scales; variable 1 on a 4-point scale, and variable 22 on a 5-point scale. Correlations in bold indicate statistical significance at the 1% level

## Appendix C. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.10.010>.

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