
Navigating the LUXURY goods market *through*

STRATEGIC PRODUCT DESIGN | INDUSTRIAL PRODUCT DESIGN
MARKETING AND CONSUMER RESEARCH | DOS | TU DELFT

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The
REPUTATION
renaissance
By Ilse Kool

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ABSTRACT

The reputation of personal luxury brands has undergone a significant transformation since 2018, with the industry experiencing a reputation recession followed by an uneven reputation renaissance. This shift underscores a deeper misalignment between luxury brands and the evolving values of the new luxury consumer. Millennials, soon set to dominate the luxury market, have accelerated this change. Their engagement with brands on Instagram not only shapes brand perception but also reflects their shifting interests. As social media become central to shaping brand reputation, analysing these engagement patterns offers critical insight into the preferences of the new luxury consumer.

Keywords

Luxury brands, brand reputation, reputation recession & renaissance, Instagram engagement, multimodal thematic analysis, cultural capital, brand coolness

This study examines how successful and struggling brands manage their reputation through content and engagement practices on Instagram. Using a hybrid research approach, it integrates quantitative engagement metrics with qualitative multimodal thematic analysis conducted on six luxury brands (three successful and three struggling) between 2021 and 2023, marking the onset of the reputation recession. To guide the exploratory nature of this study, an integrative framework of brand reputation was developed to synthesise company- controlled, consumer- controlled, and co- created reputation factors. The findings reveal that successful brands leverage cultural capital, particularly through collaboration with South Korean pop culture figures, to enhance brand coolness and foster deeper emotional connections. Struggling brands fail to establish these connections, relying on conventional celebrity endorsements that lack subcultural appeal, leading to continued reputation challenges.

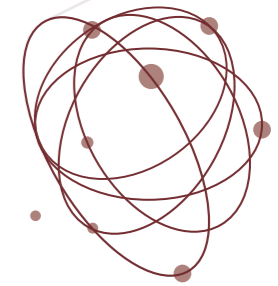
By analysing only the most and least liked posts on Instagram, subtle engagement strategy adjustments could not be identified. Additionally, excluding comment data limited deeper sentiment analysis. Moreover, this research investigates a symptom of a deeper underlying issue caused by a changed luxury consumer. Future research should explore consumer sentiment through the comment section, expand the dataset to detect brand coolness life cycle transitions and most importantly, examine the values of the new luxury consumer that shape their purchasing behaviour. Despite these limitations, this research contributes to brand reputation literature by bridging fragmented studies into a cohesive framework for evaluating brand reputation factors. For luxury brands, the reputation dashboard provides a structured framework that identifies one of these factors, brand coolness, as a competitive advantage to strengthen consumer loyalty, word-of-mouth, and brand equity. Finally, transforming an once-abstract and intangible concept into a tool for business strategy.

PHENOMENON

Reputation renaissance & reputation recession

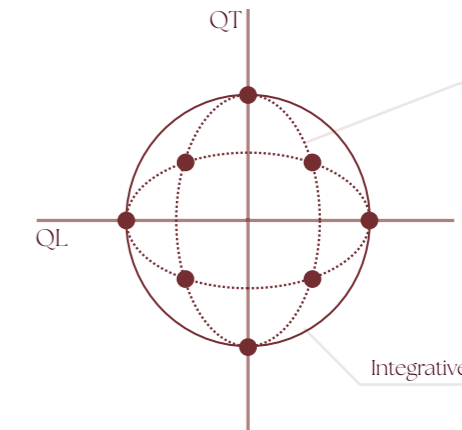
Reputation Literature

Consumer behaviour



RESEARCH

Hybrid research approach guided by an integrative framework



FINDINGS

Results synthesised with existing core constructs



Figure 1: Research transformation

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INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In recent years, a new phenomenon has been shaking the personal luxury industry, now referred to as the ‘reputation recession’—a term mentioned by RepTrak executive Stephen Hahn (Danziger, 2024). Since 2018, some of the most iconic brands in the personal luxury goods market have seen their reputations falter, casting a shadow over their once-reputable prestige. Only recently have we entered what Hahn called the ‘reputation renaissance’ (Danziger, 2024), where select brands have successfully recovered their reputation and regained their standing. Conversely, other brands continue to struggle, experiencing further declines in reputation ranking. This decline and resurgence were identified by the RepTrak Company, which surveys reputation based on key drivers. While reputation fluctuations are not new, the scale and persistence of this shift suggest that the reputation recession was not just a temporary downturn but a symptom of a deeper misalignment between luxury brands and the evolving luxury consumer.

At the heart of this misalignment lie the evolving luxury consumer values and priorities, shaped by economical, environmental, and social shifts, further solidified by the COVID-19 pandemic. This change has been further accelerated by Millennials (Generation Y), whose growing presence in the sector is expected to dominate the market by 2030 (D’Arpizio et al., 2024). These consumers turn to digital platforms like Instagram to engage with brands and communicate with the outside world, making such platforms essential digital touchpoints for the luxury industry. On Instagram, brands use visual content to convey their identity and values, which play a pivotal role in shaping consumer engagement, perception, and ultimately, reputation. Although this shift in consumer values is acknowledged in the literature, no research has been conducted to create an updated picture of the luxury consumer. However, the reputation renaissance can be seen as a real-life example of successful realignment between consumer and brand, as brands that have successfully realigned with these shifting expectations have seen their reputation recover, while those that have failed to adapt continue to struggle.

This study investigates how luxury brands have managed to reconnect with their customer base during this period of reputation recession (2021–2023). By conducting a multimodal thematic analysis that examines the interplay between visual and textual content, it compares successful brands that have regained their reputation with struggling brands that continue to face declines. The research aims to uncover actionable strategies to enhance reputation and foster meaningful connections with these new luxury consumers.

By analysing this shift, the study provides insights into navigating the evolving luxury landscape that contributed to the ‘reputation recession’ while drawing lessons from the lessons from the ‘reputation renaissance’.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study addresses the central research question through four sub-questions:

How do successful and struggling luxury brands manage their reputation through strategic practices identified in a multimodal thematic analysis of Instagram posts?

No.	Question	Approach
1	What themes can be identified in Instagram posts with high engagement compared to those with low engagement?	Data analysis: High like count vs low like count 1. Conduct thematic analysis on top-performing and low-performing posts of successful and struggling brands. 2. Compare themes in high- and low-engagement posts
2	What overarching themes are found in the Instagram posts of successful luxury brands compared to those of struggling brands?	Data analysis: successful brand vs struggling brand 1. Conduct thematic analysis on top-performing and low-performing posts of successful and struggling brands. 2. Compare the brand categories to identify similarities and differences.
3	How do thematic patterns in Instagram posts evolve over time for successful luxury brands compared to struggling brands during the reputation renaissance?	Data analysis: 2021-2023 of successful brand vs 2021-2023 of struggling brand 1. Use findings of each year (sub-question 2) within one brand to recognise patterns within the brand categories.
4	Which brand characteristics frequently appear in high-performing Instagram posts and how do they compare with those in low-performing posts?	Data analysis: themes & brand characteristics 1. Compare themes of the brand categories to the brand characteristics of Aleem et al. (2022).

Table 1: Sub-questions overview

REPORT STRUCTURE

This study adopts a detective-like approach to investigate the phenomenon of reputation recovery in the personal luxury goods sector. The research design (theoretical framework) identifies the key players, while the integrative framework of brand reputation sets the scene. Through a multimodal thematic analysis, the study unearths clues about the strategic practices employed by brands. The results section reveals the mechanisms behind these practices, whilst the discussion interprets their implications and motivations.

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction	Introduces the research context, problem statement, objectives and the role of Instagram in shaping luxury brand reputation.
Chapter 2: Literature review	Reviews existing research on the underlying dynamics of the reputation recession and renaissance. Identifies a gap in the multimodal methodologies and brand reputation literature, emphasising the need for an integrative framework.
Chapter 3: Theoretical framework	Examines the conceptual foundations, focusing on Instagram as a digital touch point and the RepTrak model. Provides an overview of luxury market trends and presents the factors shaping reputation through an integrative framework.
Chapter 4: Methodology	Details the mixed-method research design, sampling, data collection, analysis, pilot study and evaluation of the methodology.
Chapter 5: Results	Reports findings on account activity, engagement metrics and follower demographics. Answers the sub-questions and presents the thematic analysis of Instagram posts.
Chapter 6: Discussion	Analyses contradictory findings and contextual variables, including follower demographics. Examines the role of brand coolness in reputation management, exploring its lifecycle, psychological mechanisms, and research limitations.
Chapter 7: Conclusion	Summarises findings by answering the main research question, discusses managerial implications, contributions, and suggestions for future research.

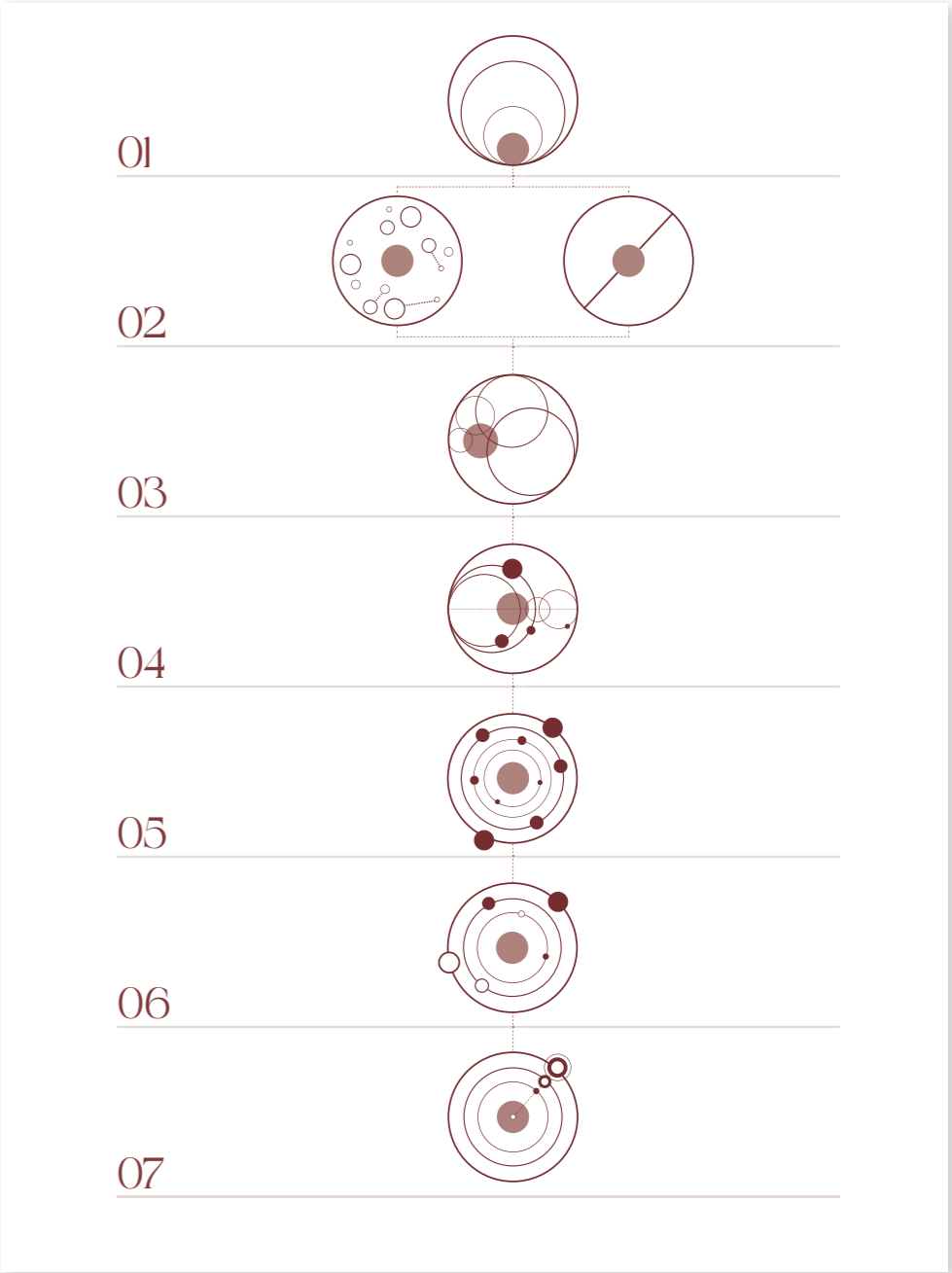


Figure 2: Report structure

LITERATURE REVIEW

SYMPTOMS OF THE NEW LUXURY CONSUMER

The luxury market has historically demonstrated resilience to economic fluctuations. While the COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary decline in demand, overall industry spending has since recovered. However, this recovery has not been uniform across all areas of the sector. Rather than simply returning to previous habits, luxury consumers have undergone a lasting shift in values and priorities. While research acknowledges the pandemic’s impact on consumer behaviour, much of the existing literature focuses on how consumer behaviour changed during the pandemic, yet fewer studies examine how luxury consumption has evolved in the years since. Given the distinct nature of the luxury industry, where purchases are often driven by exclusivity, heritage, superior quality, and high prices, understanding these shifts is particularly important (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Staggered recovery

Ceron and Monge (2023) provided one of the few studies exploring this transformation and is the only one within the luxury sector thus far. Their research on the U.S. luxury market found that while consumer confidence rebounded quickly after the pandemic, luxury spending followed a slower trajectory. Before the crisis, both consumer sentiment and luxury purchases recovered rapidly after economic fluctuations. However, their post-pandemic data suggest that even as economic optimism returned, consumers did not immediately resume previous spending patterns on luxury products. Instead, Ceron and Monge (2023) suggest that shifting values and priorities influenced this decision-making.

Reputation reset

Another outcome of these shifting expectations is the reputation recession and renaissance observed in the luxury industry. While spending levels have stabilised, brand reputation has fluctuated. RepTrak (2024) identified a period of ‘reputation recession’ beginning in 2018, when growing consumer scrutiny led to declining perceptions of many luxury brands. According to RepTrak’s 2024 report, the reputation recession was driven by interconnected factors, including the rising cost of living, climate change, and other socio-political tensions, which created an environment of consumer unrest.

These challenges were evident even before the COVID-19 pandemic, which acted as a catalyst, further intensifying consumer expectations and scrutiny of brand behaviour. Over the past four years, this heightened awareness has led consumers to reassess their relationships with brands, favouring those that demonstrate social responsibility, authenticity, and resilience (RepTrak Report, 2024).

At the same time, the growing influence of younger luxury consumers, particularly Millennials, has further accelerated this shift in values. This generation is more sceptical of brands’ ethical practices and places greater importance on social, cultural, and environmental responsibility compared to previous generations (Chatzopoulou & De Kiewiet, 2020; Lee et al., 2019).

By 2021, some brands successfully adapted to the values of the new luxury consumer, entering what has been termed the ‘reputation renaissance’. This shift highlights how brands that embraced changing consumer values were able to regain or even enhance their reputations, while those that failed to adapt continue to struggle.

Realigning with the luxury consumer

This research by Ceron and Monge (2023) and the reputation recession can be seen as symptoms of a misalignment between the new luxury consumer and luxury brands. Meanwhile, the reputation renaissance serves as an example of brands successfully realigning with their customer base. Although industry reports have acknowledged these changes, academic research on how shifting consumer values impact luxury brand reputation remains non-existent. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how evolving consumer needs, reflected through social media engagement, shape brand reputation in the luxury sector. By exploring these dynamics, this research aims to provide data-driven insights into how brands realign themselves within the shifting landscape of luxury brand reputation.

REPUTATION RESEARCH

Brand reputation has been extensively studied across disciplines such as business marketing, consumer psychology, and social behaviour, each offering unique perspectives. However, Aleem et al. (2022) identify a critical gap in the literature regarding this dimension of luxury consumption. While significant research exists on individual constructs, there is a lack of a comprehensive framework that synthesises and integrates these elements to explain their collective impact on reputation. This fragmented approach, while insightful, limits both academic understanding and practical application, making it challenging for industry professionals to derive actionable strategies. Aleem et al.’s (2022) framework attempts to address this gap by integrating core constructs such as perceived values, emotional states, and consumer engagement to explain luxury consumption outcomes. However, their framework primarily focuses on consumer-centric constructs, placing less emphasis on the dynamic and interconnected nature of reputation-building, which involves the interplay between brand and consumer.

Building on the integrative findings of Aleem et al. (2022), this research aims to extend their work on luxury consumption by incorporating additional factors that contribute to brand reputation in the luxury sector. The proposed framework expands on the multidimensional and co-created aspects of brand reputation by integrating factors controlled by companies and consumers, as well as through collaborative efforts.

This extended framework offers a cohesive understanding of brand reputation and guides the exploratory nature of this study. It also aims to provide industry professionals with practical tools for enhancing reputation through informed brand management. Further details on this framework are presented in Chapter 3: theoretical framework.



Figure 3: Reputation research & multimodal data visual

THE USE OF IMAGE AND TEXT IN THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Traditional thematic analysis, as established by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a qualitative method designed to systematically identify and analyse patterns within data, particularly textual data such as interview transcripts. While their framework offers profound insights into narrative and verbal content, it requires adaptation to address the complexity of multimodal data, where visual and textual elements coexist.

The need for adaptation is particularly relevant in the context of social media, which has become central to customer engagement and marketing. Platforms like Instagram, characterised by their blend of visual and textual content, require a multimodal analytical approach to fully capture the interplay of these modalities in user interactions with brands. Traditional methodologies, while effective for one type of data, often fail to account for the integrated nature of these interactions, potentially overlooking fundamental elements of customer interactions with brands.

Previous research has explored social media platforms by analysing these elements separately. Song et al. (2020) examined how image themes influence user engagement, using tools like RapidMiner and SPSS to analyse captions. However, their study prioritised visual content, treating textual analysis as secondary, which overlooked the interplay between the two modes. In contrast, Egger and Yu (2021) emphasised Instagram captions, employing topic modelling techniques to uncover hidden semantic meanings, thus highlighting the significance of textual components. Similarly, Muñoz and Towner (2017) emphasise the value of textual analysis on visual platforms. While these studies underscore the importance of both visual and textual content, they fall short of integrating them cohesively.

This research aims to bridge this methodological gap by developing a qualitative framework for multimodal analysis that equally values visual and textual data. Unlike prior approaches, this framework seeks to preserve the embedded meaning and context of both modes. By adopting an inductive approach, the study aims to identify shifts in consumer preferences in Instagram engagement that influence luxury brand reputation. Additionally, the integration of AI enhances the scalability of qualitative research, enabling researchers without technical expertise to analyse large volumes of multimodal data efficiently. This approach not only makes qualitative analysis more accessible to researchers but also meets the evolving methodological demands of digital platform research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

DIGITAL TOUCH POINT: INSTAGRAM

Instagram is a visually driven social media platform where users share and interact with various forms of multimedia content, including images, carousels (multiple images in a single post), GIFs, videos, and real-time stories (24-hour image or video posts), all supported by written captions. Its visual-centric nature distinguishes Instagram from other platforms that prioritise text-based interactions. With its core demographic being users aged between 18 and 30 years (Haq et al., 2022), Instagram has become a valuable tool for brands seeking to engage this growing customer base.

From a branding perspective, Instagram serves as a critical touchpoint, enabling brands to encourage customer engagement, build communities, and shape their online perception. By delivering curated and strategic content, brands leverage Instagram’s visual storytelling capabilities to communicate their identity and values while promoting direct interaction with young consumers.

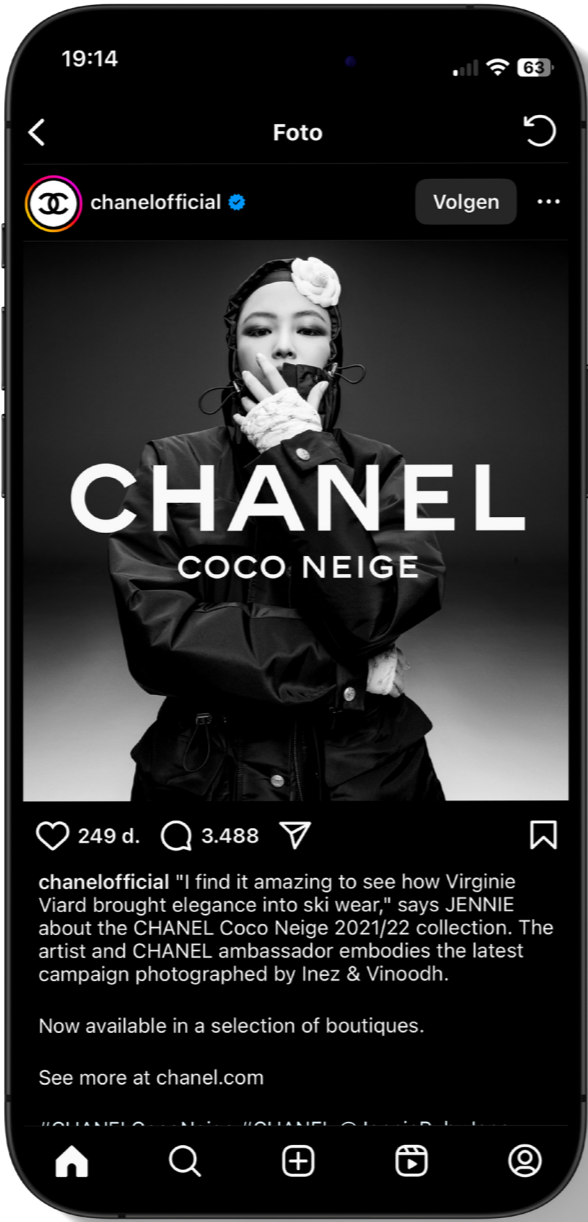


Figure 4: Instagram post of Chanel

REPTRAK

RepTrak has monitored the reputation of luxury companies since 2005 and conducts the world’s largest reputation benchmarking survey, covering over 60 countries (Our Story | RepTrak, n.d.). This survey evaluates companies based on seven independent reputation drivers: performance, products & services, innovation, workplace, conduct, citizenship, and leadership (Ultimate Reputation Guide Reputation Drivers | RepTrak, n.d.).

To qualify for the survey, companies must meet three criteria:

- Global revenue exceeding \$2 billion (USD)
- A familiarity threshold above 20% in at least 7 out of 14 countries
- A reputation score above the global median of 67.3 points

Eligible companies are ranked based on their global reputation scores, forming the Global RepTrak 100. Table 2 details rankings from the past three years in the luxury personal goods sector (Danziger, 2014).

The RepTrak model is widely regarded as reliable due to its refinement and validation over the years. Studies by Ponzi et al. (2011) and Fombrun et al. (2025) demonstrated the model’s reliability and effectiveness in capturing stakeholders’ perceptions across industries. However, it is worth noting that both authors were affiliated with the Reputation Institute, which developed the model. Independent research by Alloza-Losana and Carreras-Romero (2020) affirms the model’s consistency across diverse environments, though more external validation would strengthen its credibility. Despite this, the RepTrak system is broadly used in academic research, underscoring its utility.

This study minimises risks by using the RepTrak ranking solely for case study selection and not for further analysis.

GLOBAL REPTRAK TOP 100

Personal luxury brands

Personal luxury brands	2021	2023	2024	RepTrak ranking point change 2022 to 2024
Rolex	1	6	3	-2
Chanel	27	39	24	-3
Dior			28	
Estée Lauder	40	48	64	-24
Giorgio Armani	53	47	65	-12
Ralph Lauren	69	81	83	-14
Burberry	50	88	90	-40
LVMH	48	91	93	-45
L'Oréal	57	78	95	-38
Hugo Boss	63	80	96	-33
Hermès	79	96	99	-20
Prada	95	99		

Table 2: RepTrak ranking of personal luxury brands (Danziger, 2024)

LUXURY GOODS MARKET

The luxury market reached an estimated €1.5 trillion worldwide in 2023, demonstrating resilience despite macroeconomic challenges such as COVID-19. Projections indicate global luxury spending will rise to €2.5 trillion by 2030, with personal luxury contributing 25% of the total in 2023 (D’Arpizio et al., 2024). This segment forms the primary focus of this study.

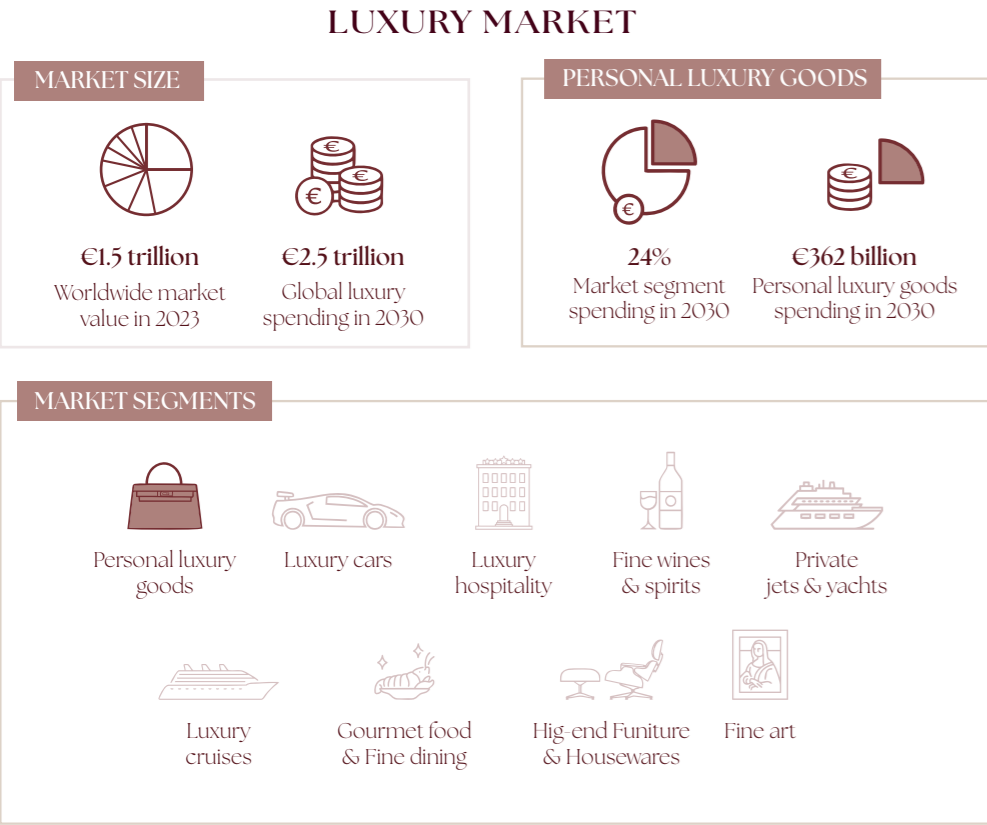


Figure 5: Luxury market infographic

This growth is shaped by several emerging trends that highlight the shift in consumer preferences, spending behaviour, offering valuable context for the field of this research.

Experiences over products

The luxury market has seen a clear shift in consumer preference from physical goods to experiences. Experiential luxury, such as travel and events, has gained significant traction as consumers increasingly prioritise meaningful, social, and memorable interactions over material purchases. Experience-based goods, including luxury cars, have also benefited from this trend, reflecting the growing importance of lifestyle-driven spending patterns in a post-COVID society (D’Arpizio et al., 2024).

Growth of the jewellery market

An area of notable growth within the luxury market segments is fine jewellery, which appeal to consumers as both a status symbol and a secure investment during uncertain times. Its growth reflects a shift towards purchases with emotional and financial value, making it the fastest-growing segment (D’Arpizio et al., 2024).

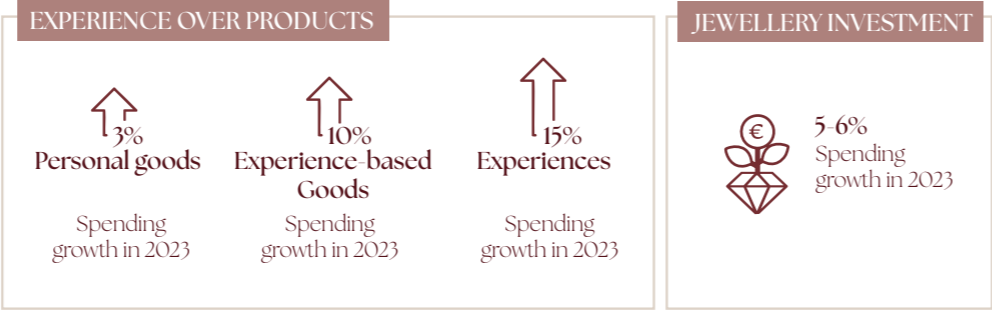


Figure 6: Personal luxury market trends - Experiences over products & Jewellery investment

The shift towards a younger consumer market

The luxury market is undergoing a generational transition, with younger consumers (Generations Y, Z, and Alpha) becoming the dominant force driving demand and shaping industry trends. Millennials, or Generation Y, remain the largest and most influential group within the personal luxury goods segment, setting the tone for brand engagement and purchase behaviour. Meanwhile, Generation Z is emerging as a key driver of cultural and social change, influencing broader consumer preferences with its focus on social and cultural issues. This emphasis on experiences and a meaningful lifestyle reshapes their expectations of the luxury market (D’Arpizio et al., 2024).

Geographical shifts

The centre of luxury consumption is shifting from Western markets to Asia, with Mainland China emerging as a dominant force. Asia’s share of the luxury market has grown steadily, while the American market has seen a decline, primarily due to reduced spending by aspirational consumers. Japan has also gained traction, driven by increased tourism and localised branding efforts, such as exclusive partnerships between luxury brands and local artisanship, solidifying Asia’s growing influence in the global luxury market (D’Arpizio et al., 2024).

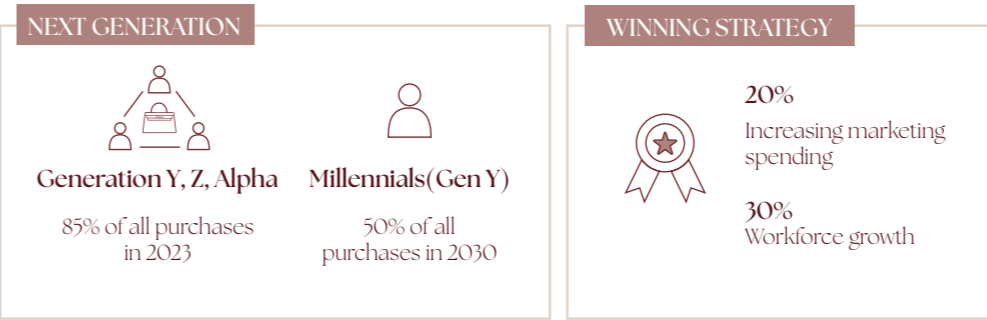


Figure 7: Personal luxury market trends - Next generation & winning strategy

The winning strategy

As growth slowed in 2023, winning brands set themselves apart through strategic investments in visibility and workforce development. These actions enhanced their resilience and positioned them for continued success during challenging times (D’Arpizio et al., 2024).

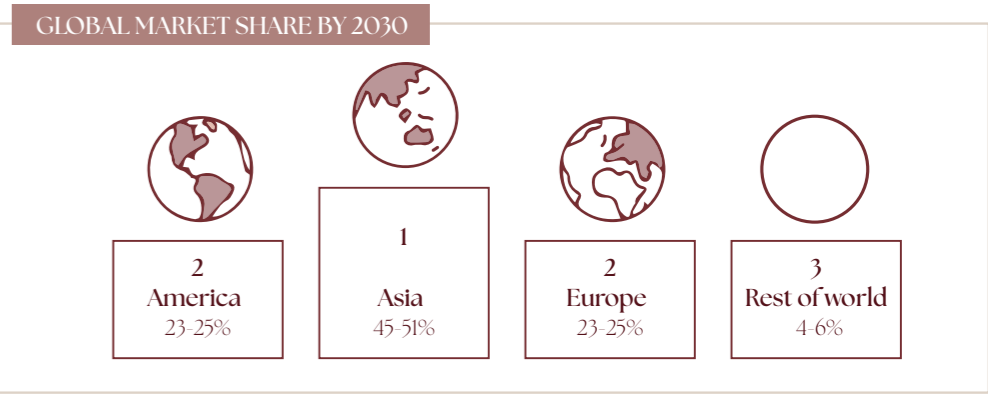


Figure 8: Personal luxury market trends - Global market share by 2030

FACTORS BEHIND BRAND REPUTATION

Reputation is a well-known term that, at first glance, may appear simple. However, the various literature domains connected to this construct reveal a complex and interconnected web of factors. To navigate this complexity, this study utilises an integrative framework that synthesises the key constructs influencing brand reputation (see full version in Appendix B). Figure 9 provides a simplified version of the framework, beginning with tangible elements, such as touchpoints, and progressing towards more abstract constructs that culminate in brand reputation. The aspects highlighted in pink represent the specific areas examined in this research. As mentioned previously in the literature, reputation formation involves multiple stakeholders, each contributing to or influencing the process. To reflect this, the framework is divided into three categories based on control: company-controlled, consumer-controlled, and co-created aspects.

Company-controlled aspects

Touchpoints serve as the primary point of interaction between the consumer and the brand (De Keyser et al., 2020). These touchpoints can take digital, physical, or social forms (Bolton et al., 2018) and are classified as firm-initiated, consumer-owned, or social/external/independent touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This study focuses on digital brand-owned touchpoints, such as Instagram posts, which are carefully curated to craft brand narratives and influence consumer behaviour (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Tafesse and Wien (2017) identified 12 categories of brand posts, each designed to elicit specific consumer interactions, emphasising the strategic importance of these touchpoints.

Consumer-controlled aspects

Digital touchpoints create opportunities for interaction between the brand and the consumer, fostering brand engagement. Brodie et al. (2011) describe engagement as a psychological state that emerges from co-creative brand experiences. This engagement is multidimensional, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components (Borel & Christodoulides, 2016). This research focuses on emotional engagement, which reflects how brand content influences consumer feelings towards the brand (Borel & Christodoulides, 2016).

The culmination of these interactions and engagement can shape customers' perceptions of the brand and nurture brand loyalty (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Keller (2003) describes this as the associations and beliefs that consumers have about a brand. These perceptions are further influenced by key brand characteristics, such as authenticity and brand coolness (Aleem et al., 2022), as well as perceptual components like brand associations and brand fondness (Foroudi et al., 2018). Together, these interactions, brand characteristics, and perceptual components play a vital role in shaping customer perceptions.

Co-creation

Co-creation involves the collaborative development of intangible assets like corporate reputation, customer equity, and brand equity (Rust et al., 2021). This study focuses on brand equity, defined as the cumulative value of a brand in a consumer's mind, which enhances trust and increases the likelihood of purchase (Arora & Neha, 2016). Moreover, brand equity elements significantly influence how a brand's reputation is perceived (Sözer et al., 2017).

Building on this foundation, brand reputation can be defined as an overall impression held by current and potential customers, employees, partners, investors, and non-relationship brand stakeholders. It influences how stakeholders think, feel, and talk about a brand while also affecting financial performance (Rust et al., 2021). Dorčák et al. (2017) classify reputation into three types: primary (direct consumer experience), secondary (external influences), and cyclical (social attitudes). This research focuses on primary reputation, emphasising the critical role of direct interactions with brand-owned touchpoints in shaping consumer perceptions.

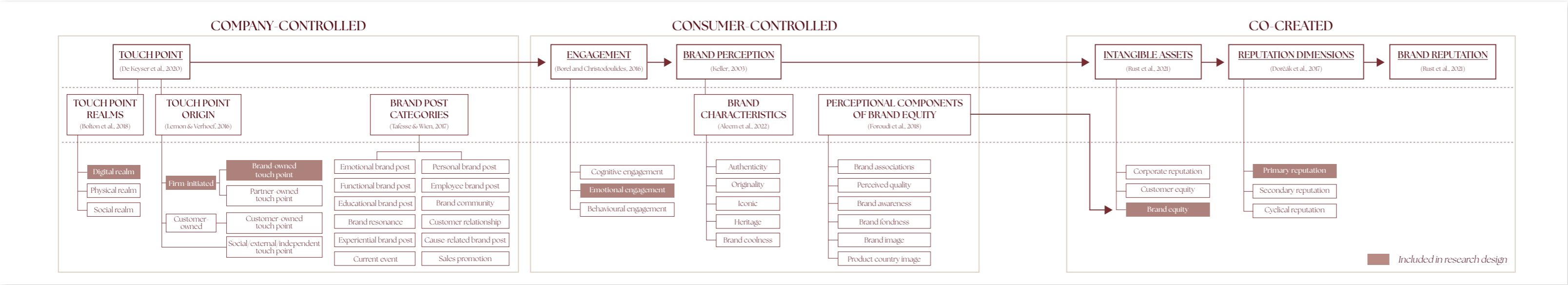


Figure 9: Simplified version of the integrative framework

RESEARCH SCOPE

This literature review has highlighted the complexity of shaping brand reputation due to its extensive network of interconnected factors. To provide clarity, this research focuses on a subset of these factors, highlighted in pink in Figure 9, centring on consumer perceptions of brand reputation. Specifically, it investigates the factors that shape primary reputation, derived from first-hand experiences with digital brand-owned touchpoints.

The study will analyse themes emerging from consumers' emotional engagement with Instagram posts from various brands. This focus on digital brand-owned touch points allows for a deeper understanding of how such interactions influence consumer perceptions. Additionally, the core constructs of brand perceptions, including brand characteristics, perceptual components and brand equity, will be assessed to identify possible patterns in the data.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a hybrid research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to examine digital engagement on Instagram and its impact on brand reputation in the luxury sector. A systemic multimodal thematic analysis was conducted on Instagram posts from six selected luxury brands, covering the period of 2021 to 2023. This period marks the start of the reputation recession among several luxury brands.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design follows a three-stage process: quantitative sampling, qualitative thematic analysis and synthesis of the findings. Figure 10 provides an overview of this design. The first stage involved quantitative sampling, where posts were ranked based on like count to identify the top 10 best and worst performing posts per brand. The second stage consisted of a qualitative thematic analysis, where AI-assisted textual descriptions were generated and analysed to identify key themes. The final stage involved, thematic synthesis, integrating the findings from the thematic analysis with relevant literature to identify and define the strategic approaches employed by successful brands.

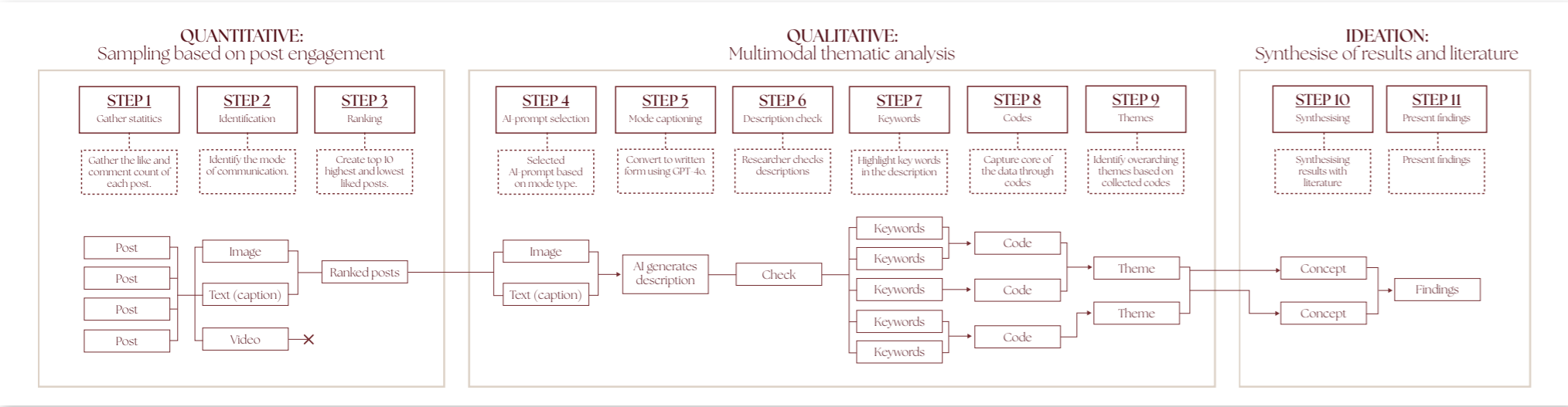


Figure 10: Research design process

Tools and software

A range of tools was utilised across different stages of this research to ensure efficiency and consistency. Table 3 summarises the tools, their purpose and the research stage in which they were applied:

Stage	Tool	Purpose
Data collection	Instagram desktop	Collect the exact like count per post.
	Instagram app	Collect the exact comment count per post.
	SnapInsta	Download images from Instagram accounts.
	TrendHero	Follower count history
	Influencer Hero	Follower information
	Microsoft Excell	Collect post statistics and create a ranking of posts.
Data processing	Gpt-4o by OpenAI	Creates a description of the image in combination with the provided caption.
Data analysis	Microsoft Word	Conduct thematic analysis.

Table 3: Overview of used tools

SAMPLING

Case study subjects

The selection of the case study subject was based on the Global RepTrak 100 ranking, a widely recognised measure of corporate reputation in the luxury goods sector. To ensure relevance for analysing digital engagement, purposive sampling was used to identify brands that experienced significant reputation shifts between 2021 and 2023, as documented in the RepTrak reports published between 2022 and 2024. This selection process allowed for a purposeful examination of how digital engagement corresponds to fluctuations in brand reputation.

A total of six brands were selected and categorised into two groups based on their reputation trends, as shown in Tables 4 and 5. The selected brands were grouped into two categories: successful brands with a high reputation score (Dior, Rolex, Chanel) and struggling brands with a low reputation score (Burberry, L'Oréal, Hugo Boss). Although LVMH exhibited a substantial decline in ranking, it was excluded from the analysis due to its conglomerate structure, which complicates brand-specific engagement analysis.

No.	Successful brands	2022	2023	2024	Ranking change 2022-2024
1	Dior			28	
2	Rolex	1	6	3	-2
3	Chanel	27	39	24	-3

Table 4: Successful brands based on the overview by Danziger (2024)

No.	Struggling brands	2022	2023	2024	Ranking change 2022-2024
	LVMH	48	91	93	-45
1	Burberry	50	88	90	-40
2	L'Oréal	57	78	95	-38
3	Hugo Boss	63	80	96	-33

Table 5: Struggling brands based on the overview by Danziger (2024)

Customer engagement

Instagram posts in this study were ranked based on like count, which serves as a direct measure of consumer sentiment towards a brand, whether positive or negative (Borel & Christodoulides, 2016). Engagement on social media varies in depth, with actions such as liking, sharing, and commenting reflecting different levels of involvement (Yoon et al., 2018). Traditionally, comments have been considered a stronger indicator of engagement than likes or shares. Ji et al. (2017) describe liking and sharing as ‘shallow engagement’ since they require little effort, while commenting is classified as ‘true engagement’ because it involves a higher level of cognitive effort. Furthermore, comments are regarded as ‘profound engagement’ since they reflect stronger emotional investment and indicate that users are actively engaging with the content rather than passively reacting to it.

However, the reliability of comment count as a brand engagement metric has diminished due to changes in how users interact on Instagram. Increasingly, comments are used for social activism, with discussions often unrelated to the brand or its content (Haq et al., 2022). This shift is largely driven by Instagram’s platform limitations, which emphasise visual content while restricting resharing options. Unlike platforms where users can easily redistribute posts, Instagram limits the reach of activism-related content, leading some users to utilise comment sections of well-known brands to gain visibility. Consequently, a high comment count no longer necessarily reflects engagement with the brand itself (Haq et al., 2022). While excluded as an engagement metric, comment count was utilised to support post identification and verification during image and caption extraction.

To maintain consistency and accuracy, share count was also excluded. At the time of data collection, Instagram had not yet made this feature publicly available, and although it was introduced later, its delayed release made it impractical to integrate into the dataset. Given these methodological challenges, like count was chosen as the primary engagement metric, as it provides a reliable quantitative measure of positive consumer engagement, making it suitable for this study’s research objectives.

Mode and media form

Instagram posts contain multiple media forms, or modes, combining visual elements such as images, GIFs, carousels, and videos with verbal components like captions. The interaction between these elements to create meaning is known as multimodal discourse (Yang & Zhang, 2014). Since captions provide crucial context, analysing images alone would not fully capture the complete user experience. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, this study employs a tailored multimodal approach, integrating both visual and textual content (see Data processing section).

For consistency and reproducibility, the study focuses exclusively on images and carousels with captions, as these provided structured, static content suitable for thematic analysis. Videos were excluded due to their multi-frame nature, which complicates extracting a representative theme. Additionally, GPT-4o cannot reliably generate textual descriptions of videos, potentially introducing inconsistencies in data interpretation. Excluding videos ensures a standardised analytical framework, improving comparability across posts.

DATA COLLECTION

Instagram posts from the six selected brands (2021–2023) were collected over a three-week period through manual extraction by the researcher. Due to Instagram’s limitations, bulk data extraction was not possible, preventing automation. At this stage, no media types were filtered, ensuring a comprehensive dataset. Like count and other relevant statistics were recorded in Excel, with separate sheets for each year and brand, as shown in Table 6. Data were gathered using both the Instagram smartphone app and desktop application to ensure accuracy and consistency.

Brand	Date of publication	Year	Type	Likes	Comments	Data of extraction
Rolex	13-1-2023	2023	image	226.725	3.635	30-9-2024

Table 6: Post statistics example in Excel

After ranking the posts, each post was assigned an identification code in the following format:

Brandname_PublicationYear_RankingNumberandType_PublicationDate

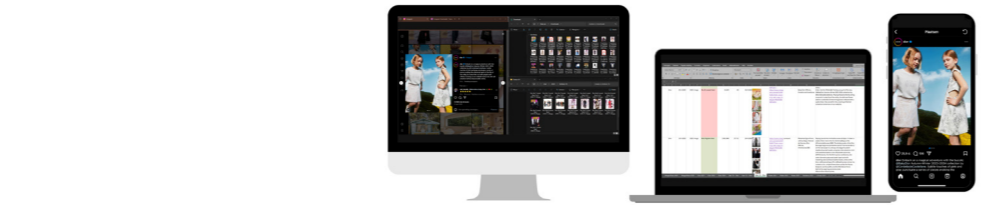


Figure 11: Data collection set up

Images were identified based on their like and comment count before being downloaded directly from Instagram using SnapInsta. They were then labelled according to their identification code and systematically organised by brand, year, and ranking category. After the primary researcher completed the ranking process, an additional researcher assisted with extracting the ranked images and captions, entering data into the database, naming files, and downloading images. This task followed clear standardised instructions (Appendix C) to ensure accuracy. Since no data interpretation was involved, the process carried no risk of bias or impact on the study’s results. After this stage, the remainder of the research was conducted without assistance.

During data collection, it became evident that Burberry’s Instagram posts prior to 2023 were missing. As a result, datasets from Burberry from earlier years were excluded from the analysis, a challenge that is addressed in the methodology evaluation section later in this chapter. However, the datasets for the other brands were complete, ensuring the overall comparisons remained valid. The final dataset comprised 32 datasets, resulting in the analysis of 320 Instagram posts in total.

Category	Brand	Likes					
		Top 10 Most liked			Top 10 Lowest liked		
Category	Brand	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Successful brands	Dior	DS 1	DS 2	DS 3	DS 4	DS 5	DS 6
	Rolex	DS 7	DS 8	DS 9	DS 10	DS 11	DS 12
	Chanel	DS 13	DS 14	DS 15	DS 16	DS 17	DS 18
Struggling brands	Burberry	DS 19	DS 20	DS 21	DS 22	DS 23	DS 24
	L’Oréal	DS 25	DS 26	DS 27	DS 28	DS 29	DS 30
	Hugo Boss	DS 31	DS 32	DS 33	DS 34	DS 35	DS 36

Table 7: Dataset (DS) overview

DATA PROCESSING

To ensure consistency in thematic analysis, the different media types within a post, including images, carousels, and text, were converted into a uniform format using ChatGPT-4o to maintain their interconnected context. This approach ensured consistency across datasets while minimising manual interpretation, which could introduce subjectivity. Automating the description process also allowed for efficient handling of large volumes of data while maintaining accuracy. However, since AI lacks contextual understanding beyond explicit visual elements, a structured prompt was necessary to enhance its interpretative capabilities. The prompts were developed based on a conversion process tailored to each media type.

The prompt for generating rich textual descriptions was based on the Scene Description Graph (SDG) framework by Aditya et al. (2017). This framework identified key elements in images, such as objects, actions, and scenes, and linked them with inferred relationships and broader themes. By integrating these components, SDG enabled descriptions that extended beyond explicitly visible features, incorporating contextual and emotional nuances for deeper interpretative richness.

Since SDG was designed for single-image analysis, it did not fully address the complexities of carousel posts, which contain multiple images requiring relational analysis. To resolve this limitation, additional steps examined continuity, contrast, and shared themes across images. This ensured the analysis captured not only individual image content but also narrative progression and thematic connections between images.

The process for converting both single-image and carousel posts was refined through an iterative process to ensure reliability and effectiveness. ChatGPT-4o was used to identify gaps and anticipate potential shortcomings, leading to continuous improvements in prompt design. The adapted conversion process of each media type is visualised in a flowchart in Figures 12 and 13. The final prompts can be found in Appendix F, while Appendix E provides an overview of the prompt development and evolution.

Single image analysis

The analysis of single-image posts begins by identifying key objects, actions, and overall scenes within the image. Simultaneously, the caption is analysed to extract themes, tones, and messages. These insights are then combined in the integration phase, where visual and textual findings are merged. Then, contextual elements such as relationships between objects, emotions, and themes are incorporated. Finally, all this information is synthesised into a comprehensive description that captures the full meaning of the post.

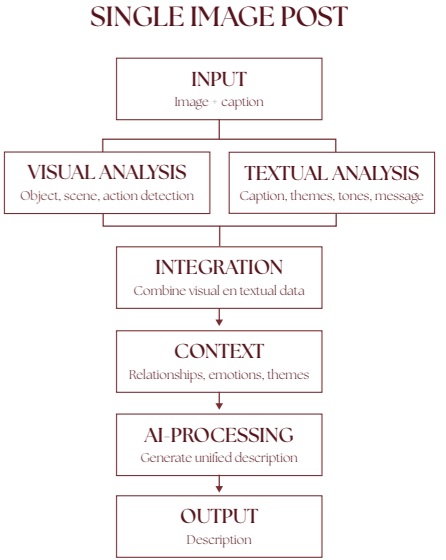


Figure 12: Single image post analysis

Carousel analysis

For carousel posts, the process is similar to single-image posts but includes an additional relational analysis step to account for multiple images. Along with analysing each image individually, the relationships between images, such as continuity, contrast, and shared themes, are explored. This step ensures that the final description not only captures the details of each image but also reflects their connections and overall narrative.

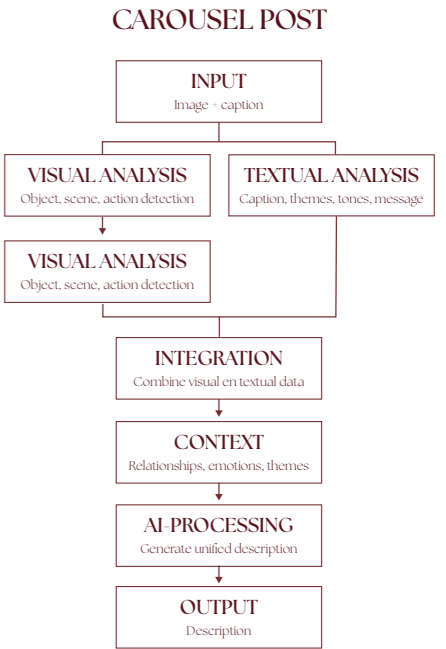


Figure 13: Carousel post analysis

DATA ANALYSIS

To ensure a systematic and reliable thematic analysis, relevant data were extracted from the Excel database and structured into a Word table for clear organisation, as shown in Table 7. This table included AI-generated descriptions alongside the original Instagram captions and images, allowing the researcher to verify the AI-generated content for accuracy and maintain contextual integrity. Simultaneously, this process allowed the researcher to familiarise themselves with the dataset, forming the basis for subsequent analysis.

The occurrence of each code was recorded and compiled into a Word table for each ranking category across three years (see Table 9). Corresponding codes were then grouped to form themes, following an iterative process that allowed recurring patterns to emerge naturally across the dataset. To structure this process, inductive coding was applied, following the six-step thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2006) (Appendix D). This approach allowed themes to emerge directly from the data rather than being limited by predefined categories.


Identification code	Visual data extraction	Tags	Instagram caption	Mode caption (optimised by the researcher*)	Codes
Dior_2021_No.2 Highest liked_6-3-2021		Kim Jisoo (K-pop star)	The new Dior global ambassador for both Fashion and Beauty, @Sooyaaa__ – a member of the girl group @BLACKPINKOfficial – embodies with her singular audacity, the House's modernity and the passionate creativity of @MariaGraziaChiuri, who was inspired by the Korean singer for her #DiorFall21 collection. Jisoo will also perfectly incarnate the empowering makeup created by @PeterPhilipsMakeup. © @WKorea	The image showcases Jisoo a young woman with long, wavy black hair cascading over her shoulders, wearing a short-sleeved knit sweater with a muted floral pattern. She carries a black quilted Dior handbag with a gold logo, its structured elegance contrasting with her soft, textured attire. Her expression, calm yet intense, is enhanced by flushed cheeks and bold lips, projecting confidence. The ethereal background in soft blue and violet hues creates a dreamy, abstract atmosphere, centring attention on the subject. The caption identifies her as Jisoo, a BLACKPINK member and Dior's new global ambassador for fashion and beauty. It highlights her embodiment of Dior's modernity and the creativity of Maria Grazia Chiuri, connected to the #DiorFall21 collection , and Peter Philips' empowering makeup. The harmonious interplay of luxury and casual fashion reinforces themes of artistic innovation and empowerment, aligning the image with Dior's vision.	K-pop star Product showcase

Table 8: Example of a post that has been coded

The identified themes were systematically compared across key dimensions, as summarised in Table 10. This comparison examined variations in engagement metrics, reputation categories, and thematic patterns across different brand types and time periods, providing a deeper understanding of the relationship between brand reputation and consumer interaction. To visualise these relationships, a thematic map was initially created and later refined to highlight the most significant themes. By structuring these comparisons, the analysis ensured that each sub-question was addressed through empirical findings, establishing a strong foundation for answering the main research question.

* ~~Text removed by the researcher~~
Text added by the researcher

Brand	Dior		
Category	Top 10 most liked		
Overarching theme	Celebrity endorsement	Product showcase	Beyond the product
2021	Actress (1/10)	Actress (1/10)	Accomplishment of ambassador (1/10)
	K-pop star (7/10)	K-pop star (7/10)	Behind the scenes (2/10)
	Athlete (1/10)	Athlete (1/10)	
2022	K-pop star (6/10)	Product showcase (9/10)	Accomplishment of ambassador (1/10)
	Singer (1/10)		Loss of Dior customer (1/10)
	South Korean actor (1/10)		
	South Korean rapper (1/10)		
	Royalty (1/10)		
2023	K-pop star (9/10)	Product showcase (9/10)	
	Actor (2/10)	Bond between idol and brand (1/10)	
	Singer (1/10)		
	Artist (1/10)	Prestigious event (1/10)	

Table 9: Example theme overview

Question no.	Key dimension	Comparison
1	Engagement metric	High like count vs. low like count
2	Reputation categories	Successful brands vs. struggling brands
3	Evolution of reputation categories	2021-2023 of successful brands vs. 2021-2023 of struggling brands
4	Brand characteristics	Themes & brand characteristics

Table 10: Comparison of theme's resulting from thematic analysis

PILOT

The initial research design aimed to analyse all posts from the six brands over three years to ensure a comprehensive dataset that captured long-term engagement trends. The plan involved bulk-downloading posts from each brand’s account using WFDownloader, a tool selected for its ability to efficiently collect large sets of images. These posts were then imported into Excel, along with additional data such as media type and publication date. Each image and caption was treated as a separate extract, with image descriptions to be manually generated by the researcher. The thematic analysis was originally intended to be conducted independently on image descriptions and captions, without integrating the two elements. However, after further literature research, the importance of conserving the interconnected nature of these modes became more apparent, leading to the development of an integrated AI-based method.

To test the feasibility of the original research design, a pilot study was conducted using Giorgio Armani, another brand from the RepTrak 100. The pilot revealed that processing all posts manually over three years was too time-consuming for a single researcher within the study’s timeframe. Additionally, a further review of the literature highlighted the importance of conserving the interconnected nature of the visual and verbal elements of Instagram posts, reinforcing the need to analyse these elements together as a unified mode rather than separately.

As a result, several methodological adjustments were made to enhance efficiency, feasibility and analytical depth:

- A quantitative approach was implemented to create a selection of posts per brand, reducing the dataset to a manageable size without compromising analytical rigour.
- AI-generated image descriptions replaced manual descriptions, significantly improving efficiency.
- AI descriptions were based on both the image and caption simultaneously, ensuring a context-rich interpretation while maintaining consistency.
- SnapInsta was used instead of WFDownloader, allowing for more precise content selection and reducing unnecessary bulk data collection.
- Tags or persons featured in images were manually registered by the researcher with their name and occupation.

METHODOLOGY EVALUATION

Ethical considerations

This study does not present significant ethical concerns related to privacy, as all data were collected from publicly available brand accounts and did not include any personal or sensitive information. Ethical considerations related to the use of AI-generated descriptions were addressed by ensuring transparency about the tool’s role and documenting the exact approach used in data processing and analysis.

Reliability

The reliability of this study was strengthened through a structured and consistent data collection process. Clear sampling criteria ensured consistent extraction from Instagram, while immediate data processing minimised errors and inconsistencies. The use of standardised prompts for AI-generated descriptions helped maintain interpretative consistency across datasets, ensuring a uniform and reliable basis for thematic analysis. Additionally, AI-generated descriptions were manually reviewed by the researcher to verify their accuracy in reflecting both the visual and textual context of each post.

However, the study acknowledges the possibility of fake likes generated by bots, which could introduce data impurities. As there was no feasible method to verify or eliminate bot-generated engagement, this limitation could not be mitigated. Nevertheless, since the posts were ranked based on engagement metrics rather than relying on absolute numbers, these small inconsistencies should not significantly affect the overall findings.

The pilot study played a crucial role in identifying potential challenges early in the research process. It allowed the researchers to refine the methodology, improving both efficiency and data quality. However, some challenges to reliability remained. AI’s limited ability to recognise personal tags or identify individuals required manual intervention, introducing potential subjectivity. Additionally, the manual data collection process may have affected time consistency and repeatability. Future research could improve data reliability by implementing automated data extraction tools. Finally, this study provided a snapshot of Instagram posts at the time of data collection, meaning any later edits or deletions by brands were not accounted for.

Viability

The inclusion of original Instagram content and AI-generated descriptions in one overview during the thematic analysis ensured that data verification and contextual accuracy were maintained. This approach helped capture the full essence of the posts, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, the application of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis framework added credibility to the research, as this method is a well-established and widely used approach in qualitative studies.

Using like count as the primary engagement metric further strengthened validity, as it provided a consistent and clear measure of positive consumer engagement. However, while the findings are valid for exploring customer engagement within the luxury brand sector on Instagram, they may not be fully generalisable to other social media platforms or industries. Additional research would be needed to address whether engagement patterns differ across other digital environments. Furthermore, while this study contributes to understanding customer engagement as a factor influencing brand reputation, it does not establish a causal relationship. Brand reputation is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon influenced by numerous external factors beyond the scope of this study.

Challenges and mitigation strategies

To address the challenges encountered in this study, several mitigation strategies were implemented where possible. The table 10 outlines the key challenges identified and the corresponding measures taken to minimise their impact on data reliability and analysis.

No.	Challenge	Mitigation strategy
1	AI does not recognise tags referring to personal accounts.	The researcher manually verified and identified individuals referenced in posts. Consumers viewing the posts in their original context would already have identified the individuals based on social media content consumed in the past.
2	Comment count can be misleading, as users often resort to the comment section of big brands for social activism, making it an unreliable engagement metric.	Comment count was excluded from the research design after the pilot study revealed its complexity and potential distortion of engagement data.
3	The study could not exclude all impurities, such as bot-generated likes.	There was no feasible way to manually verify each like, making this a limitation that could not be mitigated. However, findings were interpreted based on ranking rather than absolute numbers, ensuring that the results remained largely unaffected.
4	Instagram updated its app, which led to the rounding of like counts, which may affect accuracy without intervention.	To ensure precise data collection, like counts were extracted using both the Instagram desktop application and mobile app to cross-validate results.
5	Posts from Burberry prior to 2023 were missing from their Instagram account.	The dataset for the remaining available year of Burberry was analysed. The datasets for the other brands were complete, ensuring that overall comparisons remained valid.

Table 11: Challenges and mitigation strategies

RESULTS

KEY METRICS

Key metrics related to account activity, engagement metric and follower demographics provide essential context to the results.

Account activities

The activity metrics in Table 12 reveal significant variations in posting frequency and content and content types across brands. Dior and L'Oréal consistently posted a high volume of content, exceeding 1,000 posts each year. In contrast, brands like Hugo Boss and Rolex had considerably lower activity, below 500 posts annually. Within the three years period, Chanel and Rolex increasingly adopted video content, whereas Dior and L'Oreal remained predominantly image-focused. However, despite these differences in account activity, no clear relationship between posting frequency, content type and reputation category emerged from the data.

	Year	Dior	Rolex	Chanel	Burberry	L'Oréal	Hugo Boss
Account name		@dior	@rolex	@chanelofficial	@burberry	@lorealparis	@boss
Number of image posts	2021	1.009 (68%)	91 (61%)	609 (53%)	345 (87%)	660 (59%)	275 (71%)
	2022	869 (68%)	95 (61%)	473 (50%)	-	699 (61%)	207 (50%)
	2023	992 (69%)	58 (39%)	335 (46%)	-	673 (60%)	183 (55%)
Number of video posts	2021	473 (32%)	59 (39%)	536 (47%)	51 (13%)	459 (41%)	110 (29%)
	2022	416 (32%)	62 (39%)	477 (50%)	-	448 (39%)	204 (50%)
	2023	440 (31%)	91 (61%)	396 (54%)	-	448 (40%)	150 (45%)
Total number of posts	2021	1.482	150	1.145	396	1.119	385
	2022	1.285	157	950	-	1.136	411
	2023	1.432	149	731	-	1.121	333

Table 12: Account activity per brand

Engagement metrics

The engagement metrics presented in Table 13, reveal mixed trends across brands. While follower count consistently increased over the years, engagement rates showed significant variability. These fluctuations in mean likes and standard deviation reveal inconsistent post-performance both across brands and over time. This suggests that despite growing audiences, trends in digital performance are influenced by a combination of brand-specific strategies and external factors rather than a clear uniform pattern within these engagement metrics.

	Year	Dior	Rolex	Chanel	Burberry	L'Oréal	Hugo Boss
Mean likes	2021	84.473	247.411	213.742 ↑	18.463	6.155 ↑	26.144
	2022	150.717 ↑	274.252 ↑	114.028	-	4.959	30.631 ↑
	2023	108.683	97.072	43.903	-	5.790	29.084
Standard deviation (SD) of like count	2021	95.362	187.722	856.706 ↑	34.608	8.548	98.423 ↑
	2022	593.947 ↑	669.753 ↑	329.891	-	13.968	85.819
	2023	309.635	60.479	69.304	-	21.823	47.393
Follower count	2021	38.759.264 (25 dec)	12.395.724 (31 dec)	48.050.564 (26 dec)	18.775.712 (28 dec)	9.448.918 (23 dec)	9.406.633 (25 dec)
	2022	42.398.728 (27 dec)	13.592.760 (26 dec)	53.558.948 (27 dec)	20.003.600 (29 dec)	10.079.346 (31 dec)	10.956.113 (28 dec)
	2023	45.522.008 (24 dec)	15.717.102 (31 dec)	59.557.248 (29 dec)	20.170.652 (31 dec)	10.833.460 (31 dec)	11.981.798 (30 dec)
Engagement rate	2021	0.2	2.0	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.3
	2022	0.4 63.10% ↑	2.0 1.09% ↑	0.2 52.14 ↓	-	0.0 24.47% ↓	0.3 0.59% ↑
	2023	0.2 2.84% ↓	0.6 69.39 ↓	0.1 65.38 ↓	-	0.1 8.63% ↑	0.2 13.18% ↓

Table 13: Engagement metrics

Follower demographics

Extracting follower demographic data for the specific timeframe in this study was not possible. Instead, this information was retrieved at a later date, specifically 16-02-2025, reflecting follower metrics at that moment. Across all six Instagram accounts, the majority of followers fell within the 25-34 age range, aligning with the Millennial target audience (29-44 years old). Most followers of Dior, Rolex and Chanel were based in the United States. However, location data for Burberry, L'Oréal and Hugo Boss was unavailable due to account-specific restrictions on information access.

	Audience location (Top 5)		Audience age		Gender	
Dior	United States Brazil Italy Russia France	12.6% 8.5% 6.6% 4.9% 3.9%	18-24 y 25-34 y 35-44 y 45-64 y Average age:	29% 45% 16% 5% 30.0	Male Female	24% 76%
Rolex	United States Italy India Brazil United Kingdom	14.8% 8.4% 7.8% 5.9% 4.1%	18-24 y 25-34 y 35-44 y 45-64 y Average age:	27% 46% 18% 6% 30.5	Male Female	74% 26%
Chanel	United States Brazil Italy Russia Mexico	14.1% 8.9% 6.3% 4.3% 3.8%	18-24 y 25-34 y 35-44 y 45-64 y Average age:	29% 45% 15% 5% 29.9	Male Female	24% 76%
Burberry	-	-	18-24 y 25-34 y 35-44 y 45-64 y Average age:	27% 46% 17% 5% 30.3	Male Female	33% 67%
L'Oréal	-	-	18-24 y 25-34 y 35-44 y 45-64 y Average age:	32% 46% 13% 3% 28.8	Male Female	8% 92%
Hugo Boss	-	-	18-24 y 25-34 y 35-44 y 45-64 y Average age:	31% 44% 16% 5% 29.7	Male Female	61% 39%

Table 14: Follower demographics (extracted on 16-02-2025)

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Through a systematic coding process, overarching themes were identified (Appendix G) and visualised in thematic maps (Appendix H). The findings are discussed according to the corresponding research sub-questions.

Q1. What themes can be identified in Instagram posts with high engagement compared to those with low engagement?

Figure 13 presents the refined thematic map differentiating between low and high engagement posts. The original thematic maps, before refinement, can be seen in Appendix H. High engagement posts frequently feature celebrities endorsing the brand or its product, many of whom regularly appear in the top-performing posts and often have been named ‘brand ambassadors’. In contrast, low engagement posts tend to feature lesser-known individuals, such as regular models, craftspeople or employees, rather than celebrities. Furthermore, many low-engagement posts address themes unrelated to the direct promotion of a product and go beyond this by talking about such as environmental initiatives, charitable efforts and social activism.

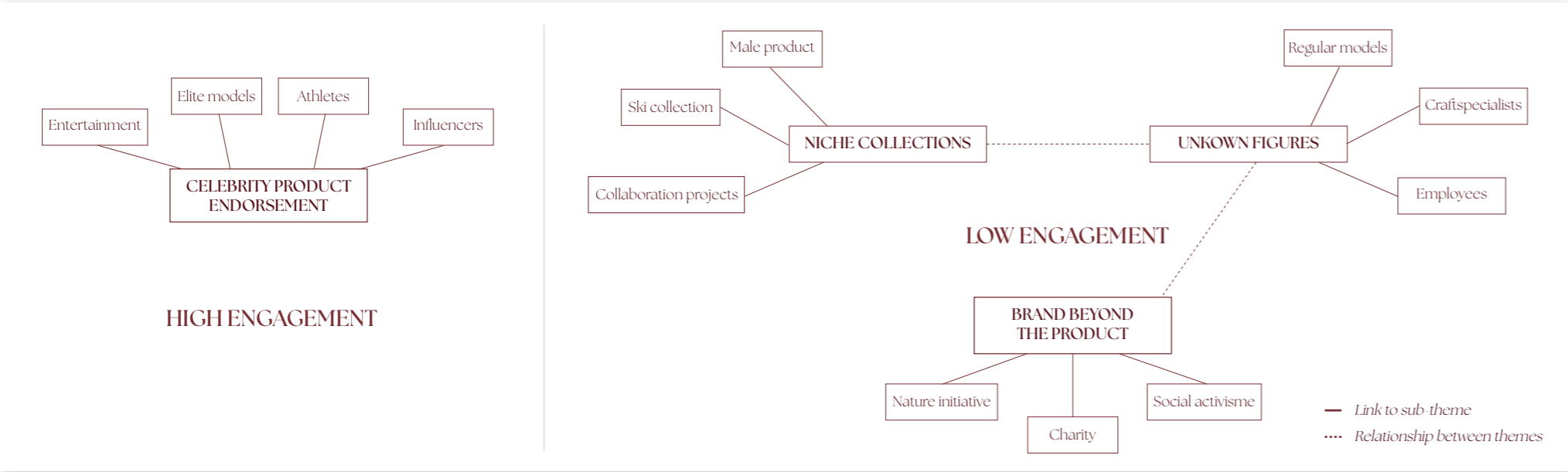


Figure 14: Refined thematic map of high and low engagement

Q2. What overarching themes are found in the Instagram posts of successful luxury brands compared to those of struggling brands?

The primary distinction between successful and struggling luxury brands lies in their choice of celebrity endorsement. While both rely on famous figures to promote their products, successful luxury brands frequently feature South Korean celebrities from the entertainment industry, leveraging their global appeal and cultural influence. These celebrities dominate the top-performing posts. For instance, in 2021-2022, 7 out of 10 posts featured Jennie, a K-pop singer, increasing to 8 out of 10 posts in 2023. Dior’s collaboration with Jisoo, another K-pop singer, resulted in her appearing in 7 out of 10 posts in 2021, 6 out of 10 in 2022 and 9 out of 10 posts in 2023. In contrast, struggling luxury brands collaborate with celebrities from diverse backgrounds but fail to include South Korean figures.

Q3. How do thematic patterns in Instagram posts evolve over time for successful luxury brands compared to struggling brands during the reputation renaissance?

No discernible pattern emerged from the thematic analysis to suggest a significant evolution in social media strategies or behaviour in the three year time period.

Q4. Which brand characteristics frequently appear in high-performing Instagram posts and how do they compare with those in low-performing posts?

High-performing Instagram posts frequently feature a celebrity, emphasising the brand characteristics of Brand Coolness. Collaborating with celebrities allows the brand to benefit from the perceived ‘coolness’ associated with these public figures, which is subsequently transferred to the brand itself. This association positively influences the consumer’s perception of the brand.

Anomalies

Both Rolex and Burberry initially appear to deviate from the overall results based on their thematic mapping. However, further analysis in the discussion section reveals a core principle that explains this deviation.

Key dimension	Comparison
Authenticity	Refers to the perception of a brand being genuine to the brand's core values. Authentic brands often use their brand history, emotional appeal and distinct designs to distinguish themselves from imitations products.
Originality	The brand's uniqueness and creative identity a brand by showcasing innovation and distinctiveness. This is done through showcasing creative designs and craftsmanship.
Iconic	Iconic brands achieve long-term recognition by using symbols or elements that become culturally significant. They position themselves by using recognisability as a benchmark in their industry.
Heritage	Represents a brand's historical roots, longstanding reputation and impact left behind by a brand, such as manufacturing and environmental aspects.
Brand coolness	Relates to the ability of a brand to remain relevant, desirable and appeal to the current luxury consumer. Consists of 10 dimensions: Extraordinary, aesthetically appealing, energetic, high status, rebellious, original, authentic, subcultural, iconic and popular (Warren et al., 2019).

Table 15: Brand characteristics (Aleem et al., 2022)

DISCUSSION

The results reveal that successful luxury brands predominantly feature South Korean celebrities in their high engagement posts, leveraging these figures to emphasise the brand’s coolness. Struggling brands, by contrast, tend to focus on Western-oriented celebrities that are not connected to subcultures and other less engaging themes, resulting in lower performance. These findings unveil a powerful strategy that sets successful luxury brands apart: the ability to tap into subcultures and utilise their cultural capital through celebrity endorsements to achieve a higher level of brand coolness. This underlines the importance of aligning brand strategies with the principles of coolness and their subcultural appeal. This chapter starts off by discussing contradictory findings and contextual variables such as follower demographics before further explores the concept of brand coolness, the psychological mechanism that makes it so compelling and how struggling brands can harness this phenomenon to elevate their status.

Reputation renaissance evolution

Sub-question 3 examined longitudinal patterns in the reputation renaissance of both successful and struggling brands. However, no clear patterns emerged over the three-year period. This may be due to the relatively short timeframe, which may not be sufficient to capture meaningful thematic shift.

Additionally, subtle adjustments in brand strategies and messaging may not be reflected in the top 10 highest and lowest engagement posts, as these posts represent extremes rather than the full spectrum of content. As a results, smaller-scale changes may have gone unnoticed within the current research design. A more comprehensive analysis over a longer period of time, including a larger sample of posts may provide greater insights into gradual thematic evolution.

Consumer engagement values

The engagement patterns observed in this study did not align with the values typically associated with Millennials, the primary follower group of all investigated brands. This generation prioritises social, cultural and environmental responsibility more than previous generations (Chatzopoulou & De Kiewiet, 2020; Lee et al. ,2019). RepTrak similarly reported a growing consumer preference for social responsibility, authenticity and resilience (RepTrak report 2024). However, the results suggest otherwise. High-engagement posts primarily featured celebrity endorsements, while low-engagement

posts highlighted lesser-known individuals or non-promotional themes such as environmental initiatives, charitable efforts and social activism. These engagement behaviours contrast with Millennials’ stated values. Demographic analysis confirmed that Millennials formed the largest proportion of the follower base. Since this study focused on the top and bottom 10 most-liked posts, other age groups were unlikely to have significantly influenced the results. This suggests a gap between stated values and digital engagement patterns.

One explanation is that while Millennials favour socially responsible brands when making purchasing decisions, their online interaction follow different drivers. Social responsibility content may be passively consumed rather than actively engaged with, whereas celebrity-endorsed posts generate immediate attention due to their aspirational and entertainment appeal.

Scepticism may also play a role. If social responsibility posts seem disconnected from the brand’s core activities, Millennials may perceive them as marketing rather than genuine commitments, reducing their desire to like the post.

Follower nationality

The findings from sub-question 2 indicates that successful brands differentiate themselves from struggling brands by collaborating with South Korean celebrities rather those without a strong subcultural following. A possible explanation for the resulting engagement could have been a dominant follower base from South Korea or other Asian countries. However, the demographic analysis did not support this assumption. The largest nationality represented among the followers of successful brands was the United States, with Asian countries not appearing in the top 5 follower locations.

It is important to note that nationality data for bottom three brands were unavailable due to Instagram account restrictions. This limitation prevents a full comparison and leaves open the possibility that struggling brands had a significantly different follower composition. A more comprehensive dataset could provide deeper insight into the relationship between audience demographics and engagement levels.

BRAND COOLNESS

Warren & Campbell (2014) defined brand coolness as a positive, socially constructed and subjective trait attributed to cultural entities such as people, brands, products, trends, etc. At its core, coolness is driven by their autonomous nature and thus their ability to break away from societal norms and follow their own motivations while remaining relevant and contextually appropriate.

Their research further highlights that cool brands are perceived as extraordinary, aesthetically appealing, energetic, high-status, rebellious, original, authentic, subcultural, iconic and popular (Warren & Campbell, 2014). These traits collectively shape how consumers perceive a brand and enhancing any of these elements can significantly boost its coolness. Later research by Warren et al. (2019) emphasised that brand coolness impacts consumer behaviour, increasing the likelihood of consumers favouring a brand, discussing it through word-of-mouth (WOM) and demonstrating a higher willingness to pay (WTP). These findings emphasise the importance of understanding and leveraging the traits that contribute to coolness to maximise their impact and benefits.

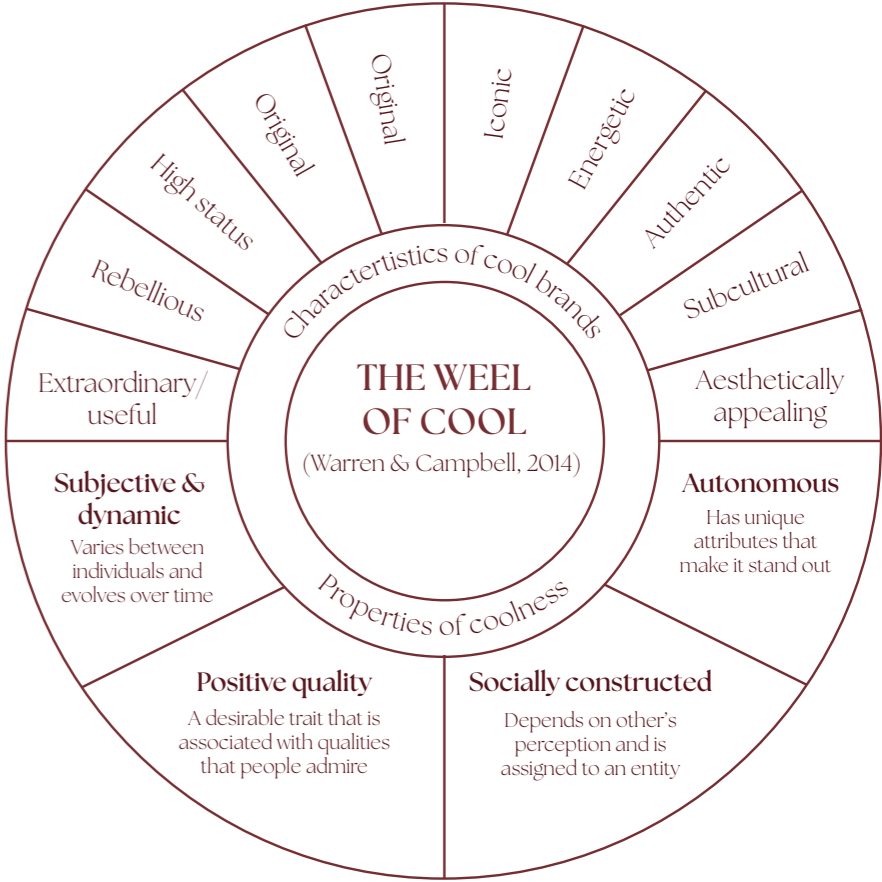


Figure 15: Coolness properties & characteristics of cool brands

Life cycle of brand coolness

The Life cycle of brand coolness, as described by Warren et al. (2019), illustrates the dynamic nature of brands over time. Cool brands typically start by embodying subcultural coolness, where they resonate with a small, niche audience through traits like rebellion, authenticity and originality. These brands, referred to as ‘Niche Cool Brands’, build their reputation by resonating deeply with distinct groups. As some of these brands grow in popularity, they gain broader recognition and transition into ‘Mass Cool Brands’. At this stage, they are admired for their high status, iconic designs and popularity. However, with increasing reach and mainstream acceptance comes the risk of losing the unique qualities that originally made them distinct. This can lead to a shift into the ‘Uncool Brands’ category. This process illustrates the challenge of maintaining coolness across various phases, especially when brands expand their customer base.

Psychology behind brand coolness

Understanding why people are drawn to cool brands reveals a contrasting balance between two fundamental human desires: standing out and fitting in. On one hand, people desire to express their individuality, while on the other hand, they seek to avoid social isolation by fitting into a group. This phenomenon, identified by Brewer (1991) as Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT), explains how individuals navigate this duality.

Building on this idea, Deviance Regulation Theory (DRT) by Blanton and Christie (2003) examines how people decide when and how to deviate from social norms by focusing on their behavioural decisions. DRT emphasises that individuals are motivated to break norms in ways that enhance their self-image without risking alienation. This dynamic is where cool brands find their compelling balance.

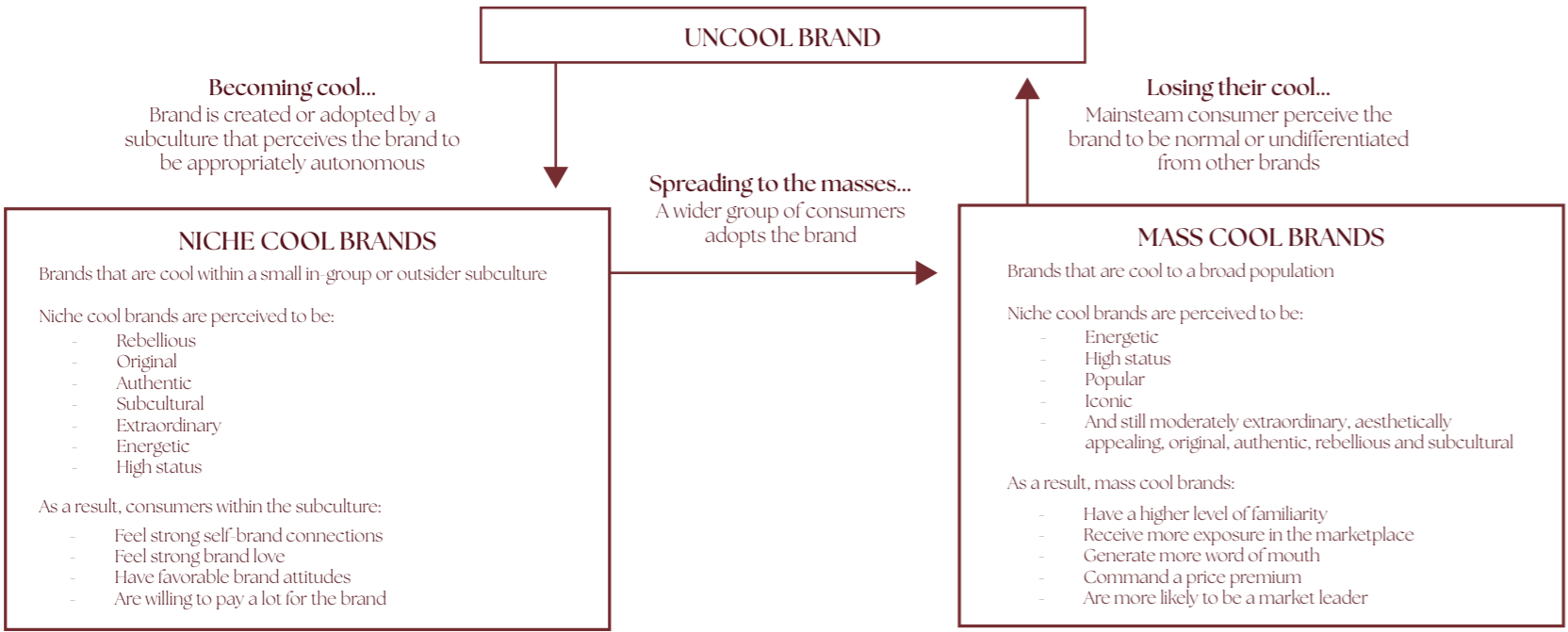


Figure 16: Life cycle of brand coolness (Warren et al., 2019)

Brand coolness dimensions

Koskie and Locander (2023) define brand coolness into four dimensions based on two key factors: Subcultural appeal (the desire to stand out) and popularity (the desire to fit in). These dimensions offer valuable insight into how brands position themselves and connect with their audiences. Figure 16 visualises the placement of the case study brands within these dimensions.

Each category highlights specific strategies brands can adopt to maintain or enhance their position. By identifying where a brand falls within these dimensions, companies can more effectively leverage their coolness capital to align with consumer expectations and improve market position.

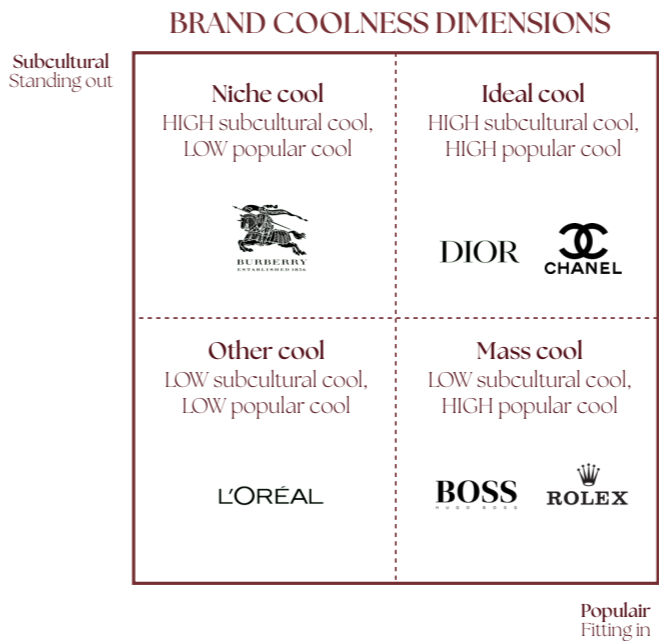


Figure 17: Brand coolness dimensions (Koskie & Locander, 2023)

Niche cool

Niche cool brands cater to specific subcultures, emphasising individuality, rebellion and originality. These brands resonate with consumers who strive to stand out and often result in premium prices due to their unique exclusivity and emotional resonance. To maintain their niche cool status, these brands safeguard their unique identity, autonomy and deep connection to their audience. To transition into the ‘ideal cool’ category, niche cool brands must thoughtfully incorporate elements of mass coolness, such as a broader appeal and high status. At the same time, they must preserve their ability to make consumers feel unique.

Burberry acts as a niche cool brand by appealing to consumers who prioritise standing out over blending in. Thematic analysis reveals that Burberry’s high-performance posts prominently showcase visual branding elements such as logos and patterns, while low-performing posts lack clear brand identifiers. This reflects Burberry’s audience’s desire for recognisable branding that distinguishes them from the mainstream.

Ideal cool

Ideal cool represents a balance between niche appeal and mass popularity, enabling brands to attract larger audiences while preserving the exclusivity that supports premium pricing. This positioning is often seen as the ‘sweet spot’. It combines the ability to make consumers feel unique with broad popularity, ultimately strengthening brand loyalty and boosting revenue potential. Brands in this category maintain their position by refining their appeal to niche groups through strategies such as introducing exclusive product lines, forging co-branding partnerships with niche brands and releasing limited-edition items to create a perception of scarcity. Subtle design changes, such as unique product shapes or colours, also help consumers stand out (Berger and Heath, 2007). In addition, through effective marketing communications, these brands emphasise how their customers align with their own desired in-groups while differentiating from other undesired groups (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

Dior and Chanel are widely known for their luxurious and high-status reputations, which they skilfully enhance by maintaining a sense of exclusivity through strategic subcultural collaborations. Chanel's partnership with Jennie Kim, a member of the global K-pop group Blackpink, enhances the brand's connection to a youthful and global subculture. Similarly, Dior collaborates with Jimin (a member of BTS) and Jisoo (a member of Blackpink) to tap into the same cultural influence. These partnerships strongly resonate with their audiences, as is evident from thematic analysis. Most high engagement posts from both brands feature these ambassadors, reinforcing their position in the ideal cool category.

Other cool

Brands in the other cool category struggle to capture the allure of subcultural or popular appeal, often finding themselves defined by functionality rather than charisma. These brands lack the recognition or symbolic associations that drive coolness, which means they must actively work to stand out. To elevate their coolness, they should emphasise unique qualities while boosting their visibility and creating stronger connections with broader audiences.

L'Oréal serves as an example of this category. Known for its highly functional and widely accessible brand, L'Oreal focuses on delivering reliable beauty solutions rather than fostering a subcultural identity or projecting high status. Its strength lies in its affordability and dependability, but this practical focus limits its ability to evoke the emotional resonance or exclusivity needed to reach higher dimensions of coolness.

Mass cool

Mass cool brands thrive by helping customers fit in, offering widespread popularity, status and recognition. However, their mainstream appeal often comes at the cost of individuality, leaving these brands without the distinctiveness needed to stand out. To transition into the ideal cool category, mass cool brands must foster emotional connection and adopt strategies that emphasise differentiation. Many of the strategies used by ideal brands, such as exclusive collaborations or unique product lines, can help achieve this transformation.

Hugo Boss and Rolex showcase the characteristics of the mass cool category with their global recognition, high status and broad audience appeal. Rolex, for example, is synonymous with wealth and precision. Their Instagram engagement highlights the preference of its audience for posts showcasing its iconic products over those exploring subcultures like luxury sports. Similarly, Hugo Boss's appeal is rooted in its professional and accessible image, which prioritises widespread recognition over subcultural identities.

HARNESSING CULTURAL CAPITAL OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS

Celebrity endorsements play a vital role in branding by creating strong associations between a celebrity's identity and a brand's image. To understand the impact of these endorsements, it is essential to explore the underlying mechanisms that drive their effectiveness and the psychological bonds they foster. In this section, we explore the psychological allure of celebrity endorsements and their impact on brand perception.

Mechanism behind celebrity endorsements

Celebrity endorsements operate through the Meaning Transfer Model (MTM), introduced by McCracken (1989), this process explains how celebrities, as cultural symbols, can infuse brands with their own social and symbolic meaning. The MTM outlines a three-step process. First, the cultural meaning of the celebrity is established through their public persona. Next, this meaning is transferred to the brand during endorsement, creating a symbolic association. Finally, consumers adopt this meaning as part of their own identity when they purchase and use the endorsed product.

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The bond between celebrity and consumer

The power of celebrity endorsements lies in the emotional bond fans feel with their idols. According to Moraes et al. (2019), these relationships can range from admiration to envy, with one of the most striking forms being parasocial relationship (PSR). In PSR's, fans perceive a one-sided yet authentic relationship with their idols, even though the interaction is carefully curated (Moraes et al. (2019). For K-pop idols, self-disclosure plays a key role in creating this illusion of intimacy. By sharing personal updates about their lives, families and experiences, idols build trust and a feeling of closeness with their fans (Lacap et al., 2023). Admiration can further evolve into wish identification (WI), where fans aspire to emulate their idol's appearance, style and values. In the K-pop industry, where idols are portrayed as near-perfect figures, this aspiration often exceeds admiration, creating a level of celebrity worship and admiration, where idols become a larger-than-life figure (Lacap et al., 2023).

The trust built between fans and idol through self-disclosure not only strengthens the parasocial connection but also enhances the credibility and brand loyalty towards the endorsed brand. Fans often perceive the endorsed products as an extension of their bond with the celebrity, further deepening their emotional investment (Lacap et al., 2023). These devoted emotions and connections transform fans into passionate brand advocates, eager to embrace and support the brand that brings them closer to their idols.

ACHIEVING BRAND COOLNESS

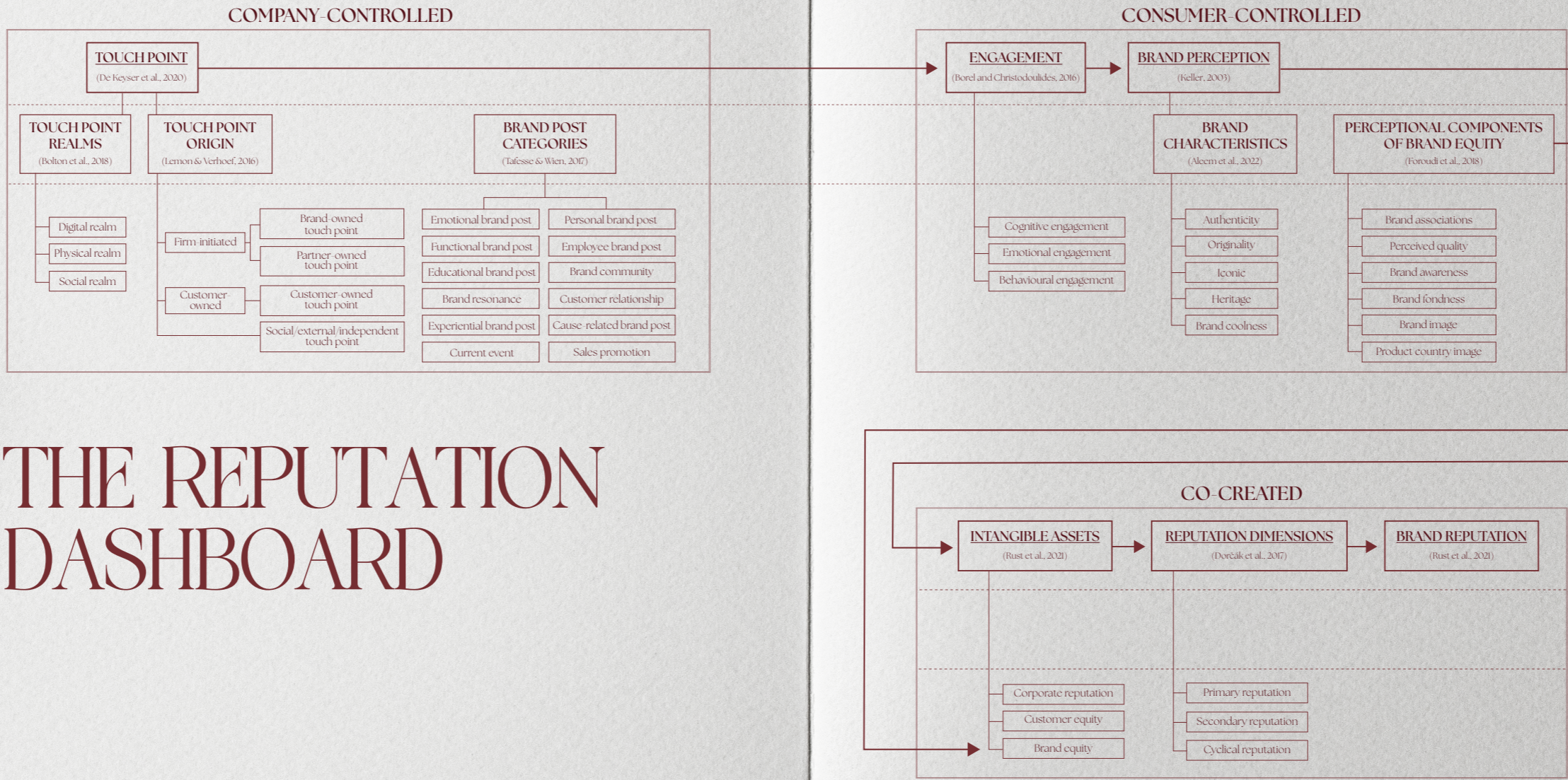
This study highlights how niche cool brands strategically leverage collaborations with South Korean celebrities, particularly K-pop stars, to enhance their cultural relevance and appeal. These partnerships help brands tap into cultural relevancy and achieve brand coolness while maintaining their broad audience. However, their effectiveness depends on the alignment between the brand's identity, audience and values with those of the celebrity.

Beyond celebrity endorsements, various other strategies can foster brand coolness such as such as limited-edition releases, cultural collaborations and symbolic branding. Achieving and sustaining brand coolness requires a tailored approach, where brands must continuously evaluate their positioning and refine their strategies. When executed effectively, this strengthens emotional appeal, consumer loyalty and market positioning.

THE REPUTATION DASHBOARD

The integrative framework developed through literature research functions as a dashboard, enabling brands to monitor and adjust the key factors that shape their reputation. In this study, it was used to explore differences between high- and low-reputation brands through the lens of social media engagement. At this moment, brand coolness emerged as one of the most influential dials. High-reputation brands effectively leveraged this characteristics, while low-reputation brands struggled to do so.

What makes this dashboard particularly valuable is its adaptability. As market trends shift, consumer values evolve and academic literature expands, new dials can be added or adjusted to reflect emerging insights into brand reputation. In the ever-changing landscape of luxury, maintaining a strong reputation requires brands to continuously refine their strategies. This framework provides a structure and yet flexible tool for companies to assess their reputation, benchmark against competitors and adjust their positioning. Its adaptability ensures the long-term relevance, equipping brands with the tools to navigate an evolving market. Additionally, it bridges the gap between academic research and practical application, helping brands translate insights into actionable strategies.



LIMITATIONS

Despite its insight, this research has several limitations. First, collaboration posts on Instagram, where multiple accounts share a single post and pool engagement, were not considered. This may have inflated engagement metrics due to the combined viewership. While cross-referencing patterns mitigated this issue, future studies should account for these engagement boosters to improve accuracy.

Second, the exploratory nature of the research was limited to a single researcher, restricting the ability for additional validation of the AI-generated descriptions and the thematic analysis. Including multiple researchers would have enhanced reliability but this was beyond the resource scope of this academic thesis project. Future research should address this limitation to strengthen methodological rigour.

Third, the analysis was impacted by the absence of Burberry's Instagram posts prior to 2023, as these posts were no longer available on the platform during data collection. Consequently, data sets for earlier years of Burberry had to be excluded, reducing, the ability to track longitudinal engagement trends from this brand. However, since the datasets from other brands were complete, the integrity of the overall comparative analysis remained intact.

Figure 18: The reputation dashboard (simplified version)

CONCLUSION

This research set out to answer the question:

How do successful and struggling luxury brands manage their reputation through strategic practices identified in a multimodal thematic analysis of Instagram posts?

The reputations of luxury brands are fundamentally shaped by their ability to harness cultural relevance and build emotional connections. This research found that successful brands, such as Dior and Chanel, excel by leveraging brand coolness through strategic collaborations with globally influential celebrities and leaders of subcultures, particularly South Korean pop stars. These partnerships allow brands to tap into the cultural capital of their celebrity collaborators, rooted in the strong emotional bonds idols share with their fans. Through endorsements, the trust, admiration, and loyalty fans feel towards their idols are transferred to the brand, fostering deeper consumer engagement. Fans become passionate advocates, actively supporting these brands as extensions of their connection with idols. These transferred values enhance credibility, loyalty, brand equity, and overall perception of the brand, collectively shaping its reputation. In contrast, struggling luxury brands often collaborate with Western-oriented celebrities lacking strong subcultural followings, missing the opportunity to create similarly impactful emotional connections.

Research reflection and future directions

The combination of qualitative thematic analysis with quantitative engagement metrics proved to be an effective approach for identifying patterns and strategic practices that set successful brands apart from struggling ones. By integrating visual and textual content into a unified framework, this study provided a more comprehensive understanding of how different elements interact to shape consumer engagement and brand reputation. This approach successfully captured the nuanced interplay between imagery, captions, and follower engagement, demonstrating the value of a multimodal perspective in reputation research.

However, this research also encountered limitations. The exclusion of comment count as an engagement metric, due to its evolving use in social activism, restricted the ability to reliably analyse these deeper forms of consumer interaction. Future research should replicate this study while incorporating comment-based engagement metrics, as they could provide richer insights into sentiment in brand interaction. Given Instagram's restrictions on bulk comment extraction, this would require a manual approach, which would demand more resources for filtering and analysing comment data.

Additionally, an unexpected finding was the influence of South Korean pop culture on luxury brand engagement. While this strategy contributed to the brand coolness for two of the successful brands, it is not the only way to enhance brand coolness. Although Berger and Heath (2007) and Koskie and Locander (2023) briefly mention alternative strategies, further research is needed to systematically explore different approaches for brands to cultivate and determine which strategies are most effective for different brands and consumer segments.

Beyond these insights, the study also revealed the need for further research into the brand coolness lifecycle in this age of reputation recovery. Examining a three-year period of the reputation renaissance was insufficient to capture clear transition patterns between different stages of brand coolness. Additionally, the preselection of the top 10 most liked and the top 10 least liked posts limited the ability to detect subtle, incremental adjustments in brand strategy. Future studies should adopt a broader dataset and extend the timeframe to reveal more granular changes that signal shifts in brand coolness cycle. A longitudinal study spanning five years or more could reveal valuable insights into how brands apply their engagement strategies to transition through different stages of brand coolness as they try to recover in this period of reputation renaissance.

Finally, this research investigated a symptom of a deeper issue: the misalignment between evolving values of the luxury consumer and marketing strategies of luxury brands. By revealing the needs of the new luxury consumer through their engagement patterns, this study highlighted how these interactions eventually shape brand reputation. While engagement metrics like likes capture immediate reaction, they do not fully explain the underlying values that drive purchasing decisions, which remains the ultimate objective for most brands. Future research should move beyond engagement analysis to explore the values and psychological drivers behind luxury consumption in the post-COVID era. Understanding how these evolved consumers perceive luxury and what influences their purchasing behaviour would provide brands with actionable insights to align their marketing and product strategies with shifting consumer expectations and ensure success beyond digital touch points.

Contributions to literature

This research sheds light on the previously unexplored phenomenon of the reputation recession in the luxury goods sector, offering new insights into the deeper misalignment between luxury brands and the evolving luxury consumer. By investigating the recovery of the symptom of this misalignment, strategies were unveiled to improve one's reputation that was shaped by this new luxury consumer. Thus providing the foundation for understanding their interaction values through their engagement and reigniting a scholarly conversation about the values of the luxury consumer in the post-COVID world.

Traditional methodologies often treat visual and textual data separately, limiting the ability to capture the full complexity of consumer engagement and digital platforms. This study addresses this gap by introducing an innovative multimodal thematic analysis that integrates both elements, providing a richer and more nuanced approach to analysing social media content. Beyond enhancing the depth of qualitative analysis, this method leverages AI-driven scalability, making large-scale qualitative research more efficient and making advanced data analysis accessible to researchers without coding expertise. This approach not only enhanced the depth of qualitative analysis but also introduced AI-driven scalability, making it more efficient and accessible for future qualitative research.

Drawing inspiration from the framework of Aleem et al. (2022), this study incorporates and adapts key literature findings to build a cohesive understanding of reputation creation. It adds depth to existing theoretical conversations by distinguishing reputation factors based on control. Thus, contributing to the call for more practical and comprehensive perspective on reputation management. This contribution bridges the significant gaps in both theory and methodology, equipping researchers.

Managerial implications & contributions

Luxury brands aiming to boost their reputation in the personal luxury goods market should start by assessing their brand coolness dimension. Understanding their position on the spectrum between mass popularity and subcultural exclusivity allows for the strategic refinement of branding strategies. This study highlights the effectiveness of one of the strategies to enhance brand coolness: celebrity endorsements with those possessing strong cultural capital and a dedicated subcultural following. Such partnerships enable brands to maintain cultural relevance, enhance emotional connection, and strengthen consumer loyalty.

By integrating strategies that leverage brand coolness, luxury brands can directly influence consumer behaviour, increasing brand favourability, stimulating word-of-mouth (WOM) promotion, and enhancing customers' willingness to pay (WTP). These elements collectively bolster brand equity, providing a competitive edge. The strategic implementation of these principles not only improves brand reputation but also reinforces the brand's position in a highly competitive market.

Moreover, the reputation dashboard developed in this study offers managers a cohesive framework for understanding and influencing brand reputation. It empowers them by identifying the key factors that shape brand reputation and can be strategically adjusted. Additionally, this framework enables managers to compare their brand's reputation with that of their competitors and unveil shifts in consumer preferences. By providing a structured and adaptable framework, this dashboard transforms reputation from an abstract and intangible concept into a tool for business strategy.

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APPENDIX

GRADUATION BRIEF

DESIGN FOR our future

TU Delft

Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

Name student Ilse Kool Student number

PROJECT TITLE, INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM DEFINITION and ASSIGNMENT

Complete all fields, keep information clear, specific and concise

Project title Navigating the Personal Luxury Goods Market Through the Reputational Renaissance.

Please state the title of your graduation project (above). Keep the title compact and simple. Do not use abbreviations. The remainder of this document allows you to define and clarify your graduation project.

Introduction

Describe the context of your project here; What is the domain in which your project takes place? Who are the main stakeholders and what interests are at stake? Describe the opportunities (and limitations) in this domain to better serve the stakeholder interests. (max 250 words)

Within the personal luxury goods market, reputation is a vital part of a company's success. This research aims to identify effective strategies to enhance primary brand reputation by analyzing digital touchpoints based on digital engagement, particularly on Instagram.

The final design will be tailored for brand managers of luxury brands and provide actionable guidelines to positively influence their reputation among Millennials through their digital touchpoint: Instagram. Additional stakeholders include luxury brands such as Rolex, Chanel and Dior (high reputation) and Burberry, LVMH, and L'Oréal (struggling reputation). Which form the foundation for the guideline. The core interests at stake due to low reputation are brand equity, consumer trust, and market positioning within the evolving luxury industry.

The primary stakeholders are future consumers of the luxury market: Millennials. Who seek brands that align with their evolving preferences and allow them to express their identities.

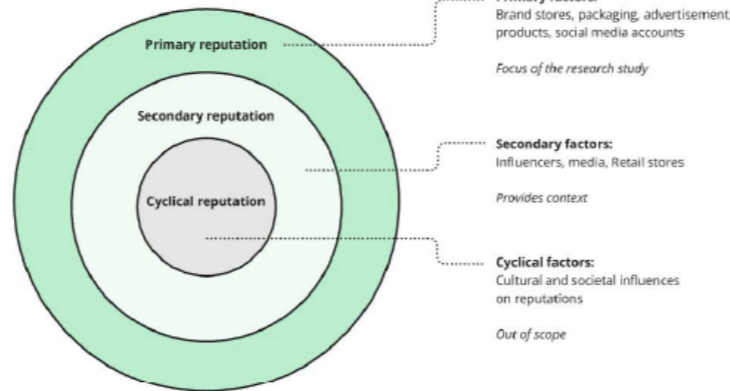
Additionally, branding experts and marketers may serve as an external advisor on effective revitalization strategies based on their experience. Other stakeholders, such as Luxury brands and retailers, will not be directly involved in the primary research but will provide context to the motivations of the primary stakeholders.

Limitations may include the challenge of constraining timeframe (2021-2023) of the analysis due to limited resources, such as manhours. Potential bias in the thematic analysis when interpreting images is also a concern and will be mitigated by using a structured AI prompt followed by human checks for bias. Furthermore, This research will focus on primary reputation, which may not explain the full extent of reputation drivers. However, the outcome of this study also presents opportunities. Brand managers will gain actionable guidelines for their digital touchpoints, enabling them to positively influence their brand's reputation and customers.

→ space available for images / figures on next page

introduction (continued): space for images

Brand reputation diagram



The brand reputation diagram was created based on: Dorčák, P., Marković, P., & Poljak, F. (2017). Multifactor Analysis of Online Reputation of Selected Car Brands. *Procedia Engineering*, 192, 719-724. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proeng.2017.06.124>

image / figure 1 Brand reputation diagram

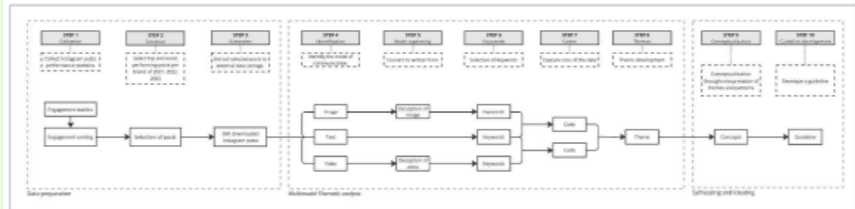


image / figure 2 Thesis roadmap

DESIGN FOR our future

TU Delft

Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

Problem Definition

What problem do you want to solve in the context described in the introduction, and within the available time frame of 100 working days? (= Master Graduation Project of 30 EC). What opportunities do you see to create added value for the described stakeholders? Substantiate your choice. (max 200 words)

This research addresses the lack of effective strategies to combat the decline in reputation, particularly the luxury market today. It aims to tackle the "reputation recession" in the personal luxury goods sector. Particularly as they navigate the evolving expectations of the Millennial consumers. This research will focus on identifying these strategies through digital engagement on platforms like Instagram.

The resulting guideline, created as a result of the findings will be designed for brand managers. Helping them better align their digital content with the preferences of Millennial consumers. For consumers, the aim is to offer branded content that resonates with their evolving preferences and enabling them to better connect with luxury brands.

Assignment

This is the most important part of the project brief because it will give a clear direction of what you are heading for. Formulate an assignment to yourself regarding what you expect to deliver as a result at the end of your project. (1 sentence) As you graduate as an industrial design engineer, your assignment will start with a verb (Design/Investigate/Validate/Create), and you may use the green text format:

Design a strategic guideline to improve brand reputation for luxury brands in the personal luxury goods market.

Then explain your project approach to carrying out your graduation project and what research and design methods you plan to use to generate your design solution (max 150 words)

Figure 2 illustrates the roadmap for this graduation research project. The main research process consists of 11 steps and is divided into three categories. The primary research focuses on archival research, which investigates the primary reputation of luxury brands. Additionally, this project allows for optional context by examining secondary reputation factors. However, this is not the main focus of the research.

This study uses a multimodal systemic thematic analysis of Instagram content (still images and captions) across 6 major luxury brands, 3 with high reputations (Rolex, Chanel, Dior) and 3 with struggling reputations (Burberry, LVMH, L'Oréal). The analysis covers posts from 2021 to 2023, focusing on the top 10 best and worst-performing posts based on engagement rates. The investigation will seek to identify thematic patterns that contribute to the reputation score changes and suggest best practices for other brands.

Project planning and key moments

To make visible how you plan to spend your time, you must make a planning for the full project. You are advised to use a Gantt chart format to show the different phases of your project, deliverables you have in mind, meetings and in-between deadlines. Keep in mind that all activities should fit within the given run time of 100 working days. Your planning should include a kick-off meeting, mid-term evaluation meeting, green light meeting and graduation ceremony. Please indicate periods of part-time activities and/or periods of not spending time on your graduation project, if any (for instance because of holidays or parallel course activities).

Make sure to attach the full plan to this project brief. The four key moment dates must be filled in below

Kick off meeting 3 Sep 2024

Mid-term evaluation 8 Nov 2024

Green light meeting 31 Jan 2024

Graduation ceremony 7 Mar 2025

In exceptional cases (part of) the Graduation Project may need to be scheduled part-time. Indicate here if such applies to your project

Part of project scheduled part-time

✓

For how many project weeks

28

Number of project days per week

4,0

Comments:

Motivation and personal ambitions

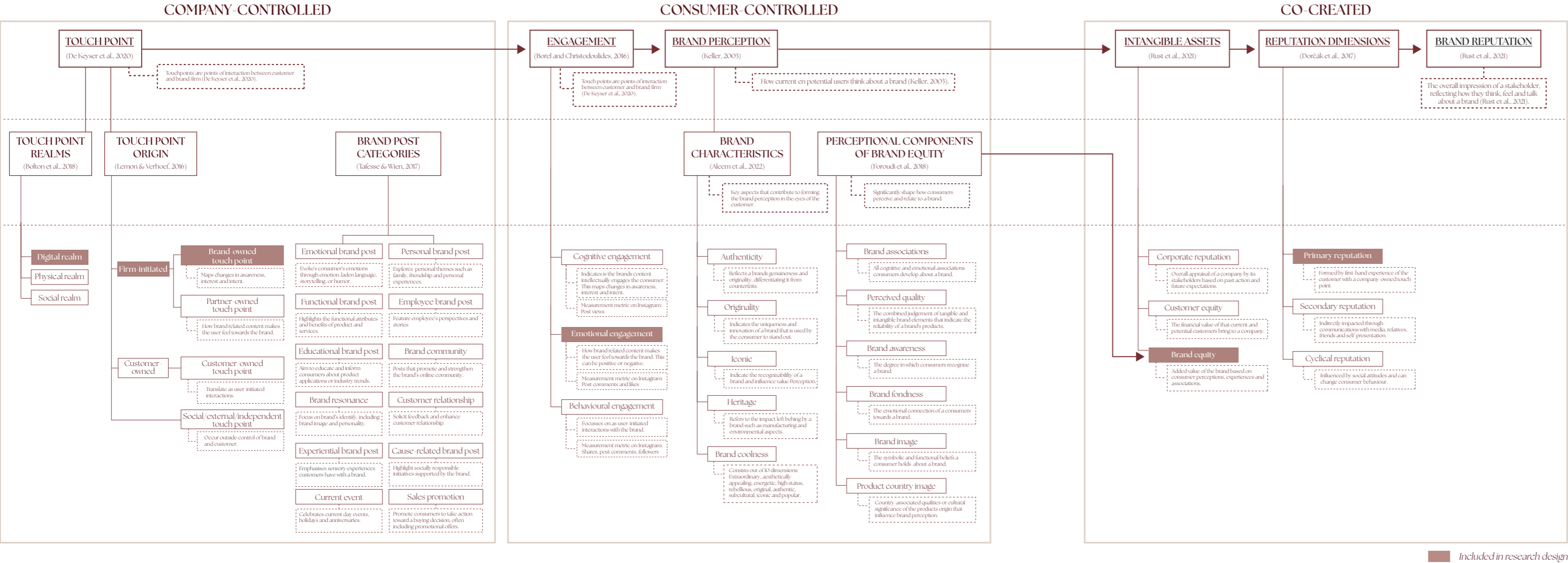
Explain why you wish to start this project, what competencies you want to prove or develop (e.g. competencies acquired in your MSc programme, electives, extra-curricular activities or other).

Optionally, describe whether you have some personal learning ambitions which you explicitly want to address in this project, on top of the learning objectives of the Graduation Project itself. You might think of e.g. acquiring in-depth knowledge on a specific subject, broadening your competencies or experimenting with a specific tool or methodology. Personal learning ambitions are limited to a maximum number of five. (200 words max)

I have always been fascinated by luxury brands and consumer behaviour. This project allows me to combine my interest in luxury branding and psychology with my academic background in strategic product design to uncover actionable strategies for brands that utilize consumer interests for business growth. Through this graduation project, I am to gain in-depth knowledge of effective brand reputation enhancement strategies and to better understand consumer behaviours in the luxury industry. Ultimately, the obtained knowledge will broaden my skill set and help in my future aspirations in my brand strategy career.

INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK OF REPUTATION FACTORS

Below, all factors forming the brand reputation are visualised.



DATA COLLECTION GUIDELINE

Data extraction

INSTRUCTION MANUAL

Table of content

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WORKPLACE SET UP - EXAMPLE	5
DATA EXTRACTION INSTRUCTION	6
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ORGANIZATION - FILE MANAGEMENT	8

2

Introduction & materials

IMAGERY AND CAPTION EXTRACTION

TASK:

- Collect images and captions of the preselected posts from instagram and put them in the excell sheet and on the drive.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Laptop or computer with additional screen
- Instagram app on smart phone
- Instagram account (Enable like count : settings > settings and privacy > Lik count and shareactivities > Do not hide

MATERIALS PROVIDED:

- ZIP-file



SOFTWARE:

- SnapInsta (<https://snapinst.app/nl>)
- Excel

Workplace set up - Instruction

SET UP YOUR WORKSPACE ACCORDING THE IMAGE BELOW

- Log into your own instagram account in the desktop and app
- Open the Excel data base file, downloads folder, image extraction folder
- Organize screen according to workplace illustration



1

Workplace set up - Example

The image shows three devices: a desktop monitor, a laptop, and a smartphone, all displaying the same mobile application interface. The desktop monitor shows a detailed view of a product page for a white dress, with a sidebar on the right displaying a grid of other products. The laptop shows a similar view but with a different layout, possibly a list of products. The smartphone shows a full-screen view of the product page. This illustrates the app's ability to sync data across different devices.

2

Brand	Date of post	Year	Type	Links Ranking	Likes	Comment	Date of extract	Visual data extracted	Link	Media type	Notes	Description data extraction (optional)	Media caption (if generated)
Dior	30-1-2023	2023	image	No.2 highest likes	4.118.077	53.969	29-1-2024	 	https://www.instagram.com/diorofficial/p/Cs3Wt3vZu3I/ https://www.instagram.com/diorofficial/p/Cs3Wt3vZu3I/ https://www.instagram.com/diorofficial/p/Cs3Wt3vZu3I/	carousel	JPMN, evilmovienGE, BTS official	The House is thrilled to announce @JPMN from BTS as new Dior global ambassador. Pictures here in a colorful look from @diormakeup23. The image is new and looking to be a creation from Artistic Director of Dior men's collections, @MHLKinsons.	

- Brand
 - Year
 - Top 10
 - Bottom 10

Source: (Braun and Clark, 2006)

48

PROMPT EVOLUTION

Old prompt exploring one prompt for both media types:

“Analyse the provided image or carousel (a series its associated caption. Provide a combined, objective description that captures the key elements of both the visual content and the textual caption. Focus on identifying the main objects, actions, and the overall scene depicted. Include specific details about colors, emotions, and contrasts in the visual content, as well as any notable themes, tones, or messages conveyed in the caption. Structure your response as a concise paragraph of approximately 100-150 words. Additionally provide in bullet points the key words: main objects, actions, overall scene, emotions, themes, tones, message. Avoid using any external sources and base your analysis solely on the provided materials.”

Old prompt for images:

“Analyse the provided image and its associated caption using a structured approach to generated a unified and objective description. Focus on identifying the main objects present in the visual context, describing their attributes such as size, colour and location, as well as capturing any actions or interactions they are involved in. Consider the overall scene context, including elements that can be inferred, such as atmosphere, environment, and broader setting. Highlight the relationship between object, action and the scene, ensuring the spatial and logical connections are clearly articulated. Pay particular attention to the caption, extracting its theme, tones and key message, and align these textual elements with the visual data to create a coherent narrative. Emphasizing any inferred details, such as emotions, contrasts, overarching themes, and combine these with the observed elements to produce a concise paragraph of 100-150 words that cohesively integrates the visual and textual information. Structure the description to maximize interpretability and thematic richness, avoiding external sources and basing the analysis solely on the provided materials.”

Old prompt for carousels:

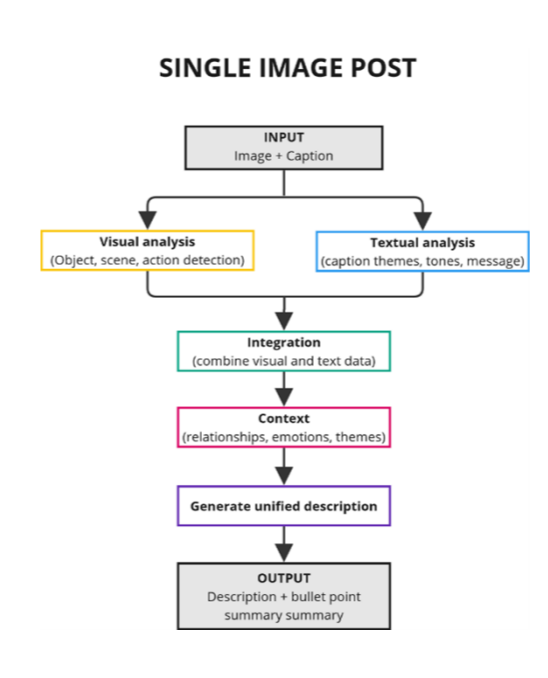
“Analyse the provided carousel (a series of images) and its associated caption using a structured approach to generate an unified and objective description. Begin by examining each image individually, identifying the main objects present, their attributes such as size, colour and location, as well as capturing any actions or interactions they are involved in. For each image, determine the scene context, including elements that can be inferred, such as atmosphere, environment, and broader setting. Highlight relationships within each image, including spatial and logical connections between objects, actions and the scene. Next, evaluate the relationship between the image in the carousel, focusing on continuity, progression, contrasts, or recurring themes that may merge across the sequence. Pay close attention to the caption, extracting its overarching themes, tones and messages, and align these textual elements with the visual data from the carousel as a whole. Emphasize any inferred details such emotions, contrast or collective themes and synthesize the observed and inferred elements into a cohesive narrative that integrates all the images in the carousel with the caption.

Structure the output as a concise and cohesive paragraph of 100-150 words that capture the collective narrative of the carousel, ensuring interpretability and thematic richness. Base the analysis solely on the provided materials, avoiding external sources.”

FINAL AI PROMPTS

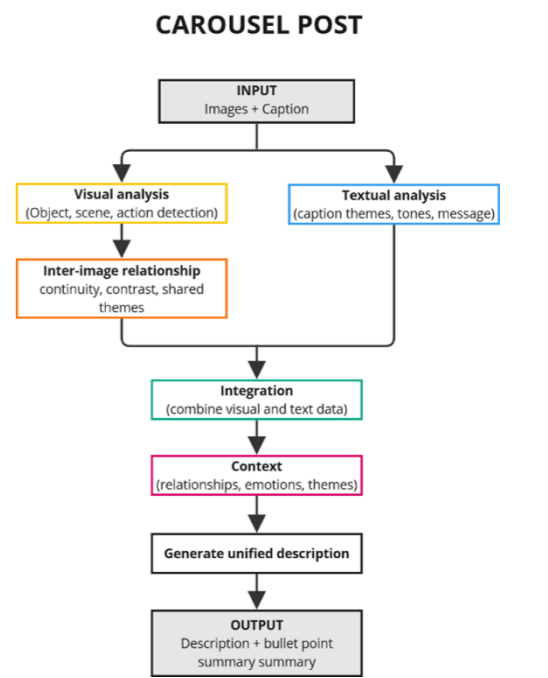
AI prompt for single-image posts

“Analyse the provided image and its associated caption using a structured approach to generate a unified and objective description. Focus on identifying the main objects present in the image, describing their attributes such as size, colour and location, as well as capturing any action or interactions they are involved in. Evaluate the overall scene context, including inferred elements such as the atmosphere, environment, and broader setting. Highlight relationships between objects, actions, and the scene, ensuring spatial and logical connections are clearly articulated. Pay particular attention to the caption, extracting its themes, tones, and key messages, and align these textual elements with the visual data to create a cohesive narrative. Emphasize any inferred details, such as emotions, contrasts, or overarching themes, while ensuring these inferences are grounded in the visual and textual content. Avoid speculative assumptions or external sources, basing your analysis solely on the provided material. Structure the output as a concise, unified paragraph of 100-150 words that maximizes clarity and thematic richness.”



AI prompt for carousel posts

“Analyse the provided carousel (a series of images) and its associated caption using a structured approach. For each image, provide a brief description of its main objects, actions, scene context and inferred elements (e.g. atmosphere or environment). Then evaluate the relationship between image, considering spatial, temporal, and thematic connections. If the carousel depicts a sequence, capture cause- effect relationship or progression. Highlight contrasts, recurring themes, or shared ideas between images. Ensure the caption's themes, tones, and message are aligned with the visual data, but independently analyse images before integrating them with the caption. Avoid speculative inferences, limiting deductions to what can be reasonably observed. For carousels with more than six images, group them into clusters abased on related themes and summarize each cluster. Structure the output as a single cohesive paragraph (100-150 words) that integrates individual analyses, inter-image relationships and the caption into a unified narrative, ensuring interpretability and thematic richness.”



OVERARCHING THEMES

Dior - Most liked

Brand	Dior		
Category	Most liked		
Overarching theme	Famous figures	Product showcase	Beyond the product
2021	Actress (1/10) K-pop star (7/10) Athlete (1/10)	Product showcase (9/10) Collaboration project (1/10)	Accomplishment of ambassador (1/10) Behind the scenes (2/10)
2022	K-pop star (6/10) Singer (1/10) South Korean actor (1/10) South Korean rapper (/10) Royalty (1/10)	Product showcase (9/10)	Accomplishment of ambassador (1/10) Loss of Dior customer (1/10)
2023	K-pop star (9/10) Actor (2/10) Singer (1/10) Artist (1/10)	Product showcase (9/10) Bond between idol and brand (1/10) Prestigious event (1/10)	

Dior - Least liked

Brand	Dior				
Category	Least likes				
Overarching theme	Non-famous person	Famous figures	Product showcase	Beyond the product	
2021			Product showcase (7/10)	Social activism Female empowerment (3/10) Behind the scenes (1/10)	Heritage Dior movie (2/10)
2022	Regular models (7/10) Photographer		Product showcase (9/10) Collaboration project (4/10)		Loss of Dior partner (1/10)
2023	Regular models (7/10) Artists (2/10)	Actress (1/10)	Product showcase (10/10) Collaboration project (5/10) Special edition of a classic (2/10)	Female empowerment (3/10)	

Chanel - Most liked

Brand	Chanel			
Category	Most liked			
Overarching theme	Famous figures	Non-famous person	Product showcase	
2021	Famous actor (1/10) K-pop singer (7/10) Famous model (1/10) Famous Athlete (1/10)	Regular model (1/10)		High profile showcases Fashion magazine (1/10) Red carpet event (3/10)
2022	Famous South-Korean model and actress (1/10) K-pop singer (7/10) Tribute to passing of ambassador (1/10) Actress /actor (3/10) Singer (1/10)			
2023	K-pop singer (8/10) Actrice (4/10) Singer (2/10) Super model (2/10) Royalty (1/10) Movie director (1/10) Rapper (2/10) Musician (1/10) South-Korean rapper (1/10) Chinese Actor (2/10) DJ (1/0)	Regular model (1/10)	Product showcase (3/10) Emotional connection between K-pop singer and product (1/10)	Red carpet event (1/10) Fashion show (1/10)

Chanel - Least liked

Brand	Chanel			
Category	Least likes			
Overarching theme	Craftmanship	Product showcase	Industry prestige	Famous figures
2021	Production process (6/10) Craft specialist (6/10)	Product showcase (2/10) Heritage product extension (2/10)	International Art and culture award 2/10)	
2022	Artist (1/10) Artist collaboration (1/20)	Product showcase (9/10)		
2023		Holiday promotion(2/10) Product showcase (10/10)	Fashion show (1/10) Regular model (4/10)	Musician (1/10)

Rolex – Most liked

Brand	Rolex			
Category	Most liked			
Overarching theme	Storytelling	Product showcase		Brand prestige
2021	Design inspiration (2/10)	Product aesthetic	Product performance	
		Product aesthetic (7/10)	Product functionality (4/10)	
			Production process (1/10)	
2022		Product aesthetic (7/10)	Product showcase (10/10)	Historical achievements of product users (1/10)
			Product functionality (2/10)	
			Production process (2/10)	
2023		Product aesthetic (7/10)	Product showcase (10/10)	Rolex charity award (1/10)
			Product functionality (4/10)	
			Product showcase (10/10)	
2023		Product aesthetic (7/10)	Product showcase (10/10)	Heritage reference (1/10)
			Product functionality (4/10)	
			Product showcase (10/10)	

Rolex – Least liked

Brand	Rolex				
Category	Least likes				
Overarching theme	Rolex heritage	Product showcase		Brand prestige	Famous athlete
2021	Advertising throwback (1/10)	Product aesthetic	Product performance	Rolex charity award (1/10)	
	Historical achievements of product users (2/10)		Product showcase (5/10)	Rolex planet initiative (1/10)	
	Athlete sponsorship (2/10)		Product functionality (3/10)		
2022	Historical achievements of product users (5/10)	Product aesthetic (5/10)	Production process (1/10)	Heritage reference (1/10)	Athlete (4/10)
			Product showcase (4/10)		
			Product functionality (5/10)		
2023	Historical achievements of product users (2/10)	Product aesthetic (2/10)	Production process (1/10)	Rolex planet initiative (1/10)	Athlete (1/10)
			Product showcase (8/10)	Rolex Arts initiative (1/10)	
			Product functionality (5/10)		

L’Oréal – Most liked

Brand	L’Oreal				
Category	Most liked				
Overarching theme	Non-famous person	Famous figures	Product showcase		Beyond the product
2021	Regular model (1/10)	Model (1/10)	Product performance	Product showcase (9/10)	Artistic visual (1/10)
		Actress (2/10)	Product benefits (6/10)	Holiday promotion (1/10)	Social advocacy (1/10)
			Special ingredient (3/10)		Diversity in shades (1/10)
2022		Actress (3/10)	Special ingredient (4/10)	Product showcase (6/10)	Activism for animal free testing (7/10)
			Product benefits (4/10)	Prestigious event (3/10)	Scientific experts (1/10)
				Brand event (1/10)	
2023		Actress (2/10)	Product benefits (2/10)	Product showcase (4/10)	Ambassador reveal (1/10)
		Model (2/10)		Brand event (1/10)	Get to know the ambassador (3/10)
		Singer (1/10)		Prestigious event (2/10)	Activism for animal free testing (3/10)
2023		Super model (8/10)			

L’Oréal – Least liked

Brand	L’Oreal				
Category	Least likes				
Overarching theme	Non-famous person	Famous figures	Product showcase		Beyond the product
2021		Actor (1/10)	Product performance	Product showcase (8/10)	Activism for animal free testing (8/10)
			Product benefits (5/10)		Planet-friendly product (1/10)
			Special ingredient (2/10)		Men-charity campaign (2/10)
2022	Employee (1/10)	Singer (3/10)	Need for product (1/10)		Social advocacy (2/10)
		Actress (2/10)	Product benefits (3/10)	Product showcase (4/10)	LGBTQIA+ allyship (1/10)
		Human rights activist (1/10)	Special ingredient (1/10)	Brand event (3/10)	Activism for animal free testing (3/10)
2023	Regular model (2/10)	Model (1/10)	Need for product (1/10)		Social advocacy (2/10)
2023	Expert		Product benefits (2/10)	Product showcase (9/10)	Activism for animal free testing (8/10)
			Special ingredient (1/10)		Planet-friendly product (1/10)
					Holiday post (2/10)
2023					Social advocacy (2/10)

Hugo Boss - Most liked

Brand	Hugo Boss			
Category	Most liked			
Overarching theme	Non-famous person	Famous figures	Product showcases	Big Campaigns
2021	Regular model (3/10)	Famous actor (3/10) South Korean rapper (2/10) Super model (5/10) Tiktokker (3/10) Athlete (3/10)	Product showcase (8/10) Collection launch (3/10) Holiday promotion (2/10)	Sports infusion (7/10)
2022		South-Korean actor (3/10) Rapper (1/10) Tiktokker (2/10) Famous actor (1/10) Athlete (3/10) Famous model (1/10) Singer (1/10)		Brand empowerment campaign (9/10)
2023		South-Korean actor (3/10) Athlete (1/10) Tiktokker (1/10) Super model (1/10) Influencer (1/10) Comedian (1/10) Actor (1/10) Race car driver (1/10)	Product showcase (1/10)	Brand empowerment campaign (7/10)

Hugo Boss - Least liked

Brand	Hugo Boss			
Category	Least likes			
Overarching theme	Non-famous person	Famous figures	Product showcases	Big Campaigns
2021	Regular model (6/10) Athlete (1/10) Influencer (1/10)	Rapper (1/10)	Product showcase (5/10) Fashion magazine (3/10) Store opening (1/10)	Female empowerment (4/10)
2022	Columnist (1/10)	Influencer (2/10) Athlete (2/10) Former first lady (1/10) Super model (2/10)	Fashion magazine (2/10) Holiday promotion (3/10) Collection launch (1/10) Collaboration project (1/10)	Brand empowerment campaign (6/10)
2023	Regular model (4/10)	South- Korean social media start (1/10) Model (1/10) Tiktokker (1/10) Influencer (1/10) Actor (1/10) Athlete (2/10)	Catering to South-Korean Style (1/10) Fashion magazine (2/10) Product showcase (3/10) Collaboration project (3/10)	

Burberry - Most liked

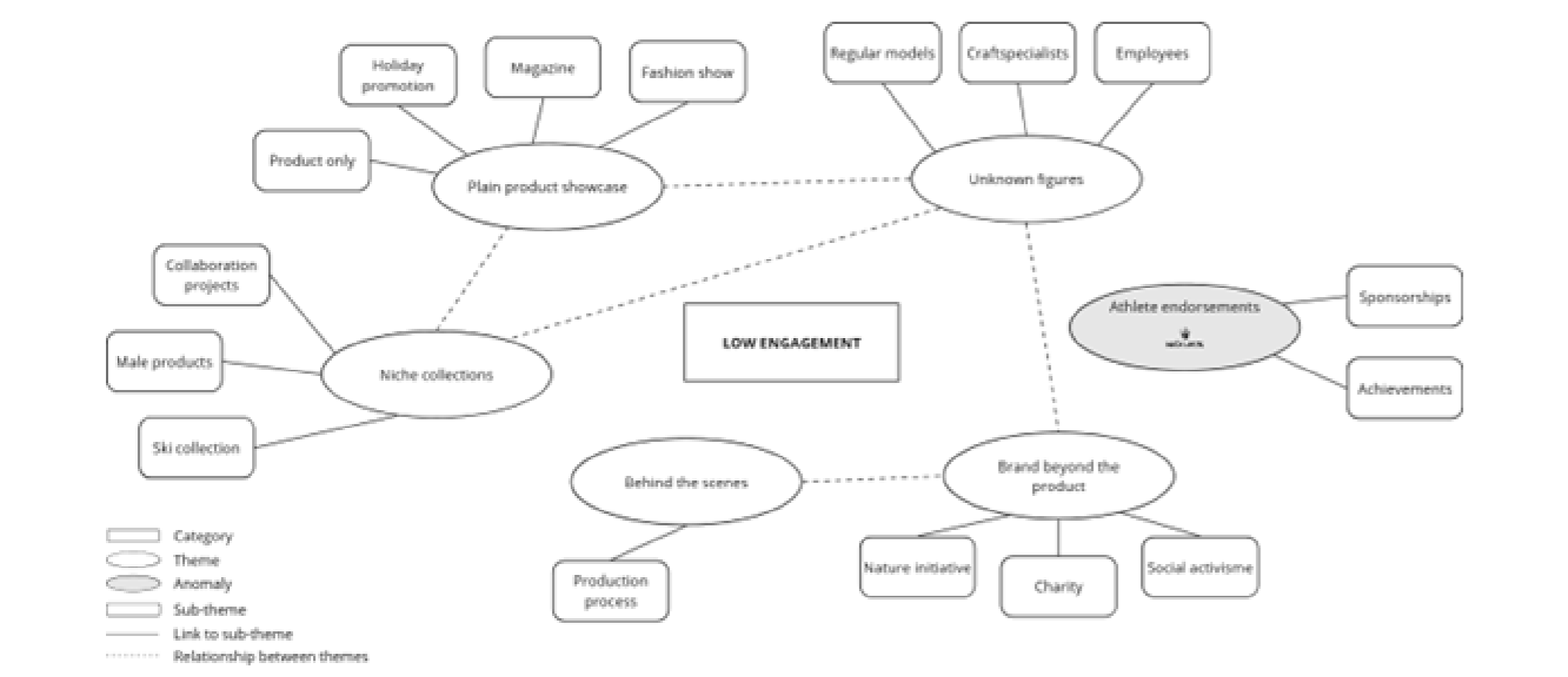
Brand	Burberry		
Category	Most liked		
Overarching theme	Branding elements		Famous figures
2021	Explicit branding	Subtle branding	Famous athlete (1/10) Famous artist (2/10)
	Explicit Branding elements (visual) (5/10)	Subtle branding elements (Visual) (8/10)	
	Explicit Branding elements (textual) (10/10)	Subtle branding elements (Textual) (2/10)	

Burberry - Least liked

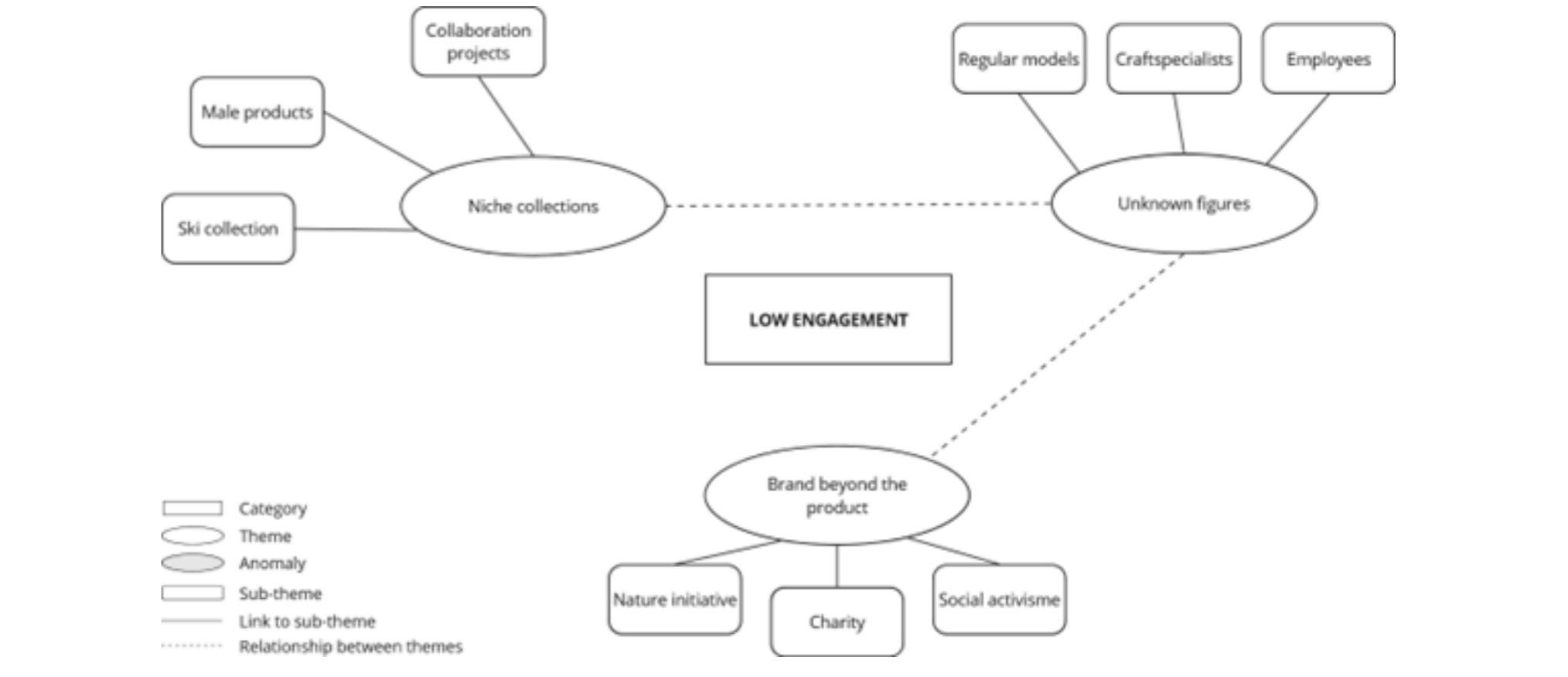
Brand	Burberry			
Category	Least likes			
Overarching theme	Branding elements		Fashion industry	
2021	Explicit branding	Subtle branding	Non-famous person	Company event
	Explicit Branding elements (visual) (1/10)	Subtle branding elements (Visual) (1/10)	Regular model (5/10)	Fashion show (5/10)
	Explicit Branding elements (textual) (10/10)	Subtle branding elements (Textual) (3/10)		

THEMATIC MAPS

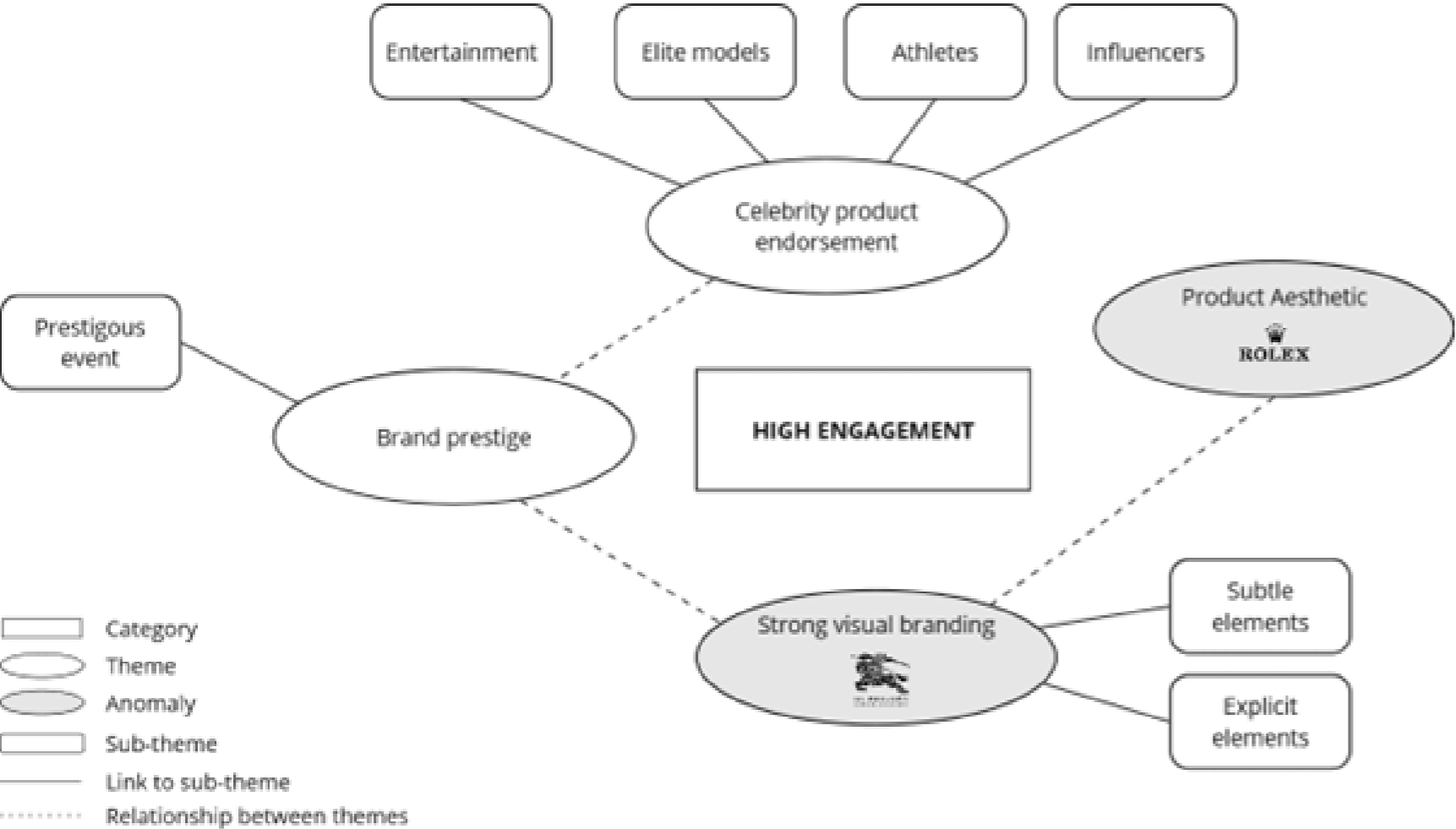
Low engagement thematic map (before refinement)



Low engagement thematic map (after refinement)



High engagement thematic map (before refinement)



High engagement thematic map (before refinement)

