

Instagram: Digital Behavior in Luxury Fashion Brands

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Abstract. Social media has become an essential brand communication channel for fashion brands through interaction, engagement and personal communication. Instagram is one of the most important social media platforms for communication and marketing for the luxury fashion industry and is a key marketing tool for brand equity, brand loyalty and brand preference. This study examines how luxury fashion brands relate to their consumers on Instagram through seven quantitative variables (engagement, fans, interaction, number of likes, number of comments, number of publications and publications per day) and ten qualitative variables (account description, link analysis, quality of comments, stories, highlights, reels, photos in which they are tagged, feed, texts of publications and integration between Instagram and the webpage). Four luxury brands were selected as case studies: Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Hermes, and Gucci. The results show that luxury fashion brands tend to be somewhat unidirectional in their interaction.

Keywords: Instagram · Social Media · Digital Behavior · Luxury · Communication

1 Introduction

Social media have become the most effective way to concretise what the connection consumers are looking for in brands should look like. Consumers no longer see the brands as brands but as a connection, expecting a service from the brands, and a way to interact, engage, and communicate [1]. In this sense, we find a perfect parallel between what consumers are looking for in brands - connection - and social networks, which are themselves defined as connection: "Social media are the online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility" [2: 28].

Social media are now one of the most effective ways for brands to connect with consumers, as they offer more than just a means of communication. Chaffé & Smith argue that encouraging interaction and user-generated content is the most essential feature of these platforms, and using social media as a broadcast-only channel "is a mistake" [3: 225]. Instagram remains one of the most important social media platforms for communication and marketing in the fashion industry. Several researchers have emphasized Instagram's significance as a key marketing tool for brand equity, loyalty, and preference [4]. Moreover, it is highlighted as a platform that enables collaborations with fashionistas to reinforce strategic brand management [5]. However, one of the most analyzed topics is how Instagram has become an essential social media platform for driving consumer engagement [6].

This study aims to analyze the behavior of luxury brands on Instagram using three approaches: 1) creation and co-creation of valuable content, 2) engagement that fosters and builds community and immersive experiences, and 3) personal communication that improves customer service. To achieve this objective, the study begins by developing a theoretical framework based on the emerging trends in interaction marketing, engagement, and communication in social media, from a broad perspective. Four case studies are conducted to apply the three-pronged approach, which focuses on Instagram, and to analyze the behavior of luxury brands on the platform.

2 Social Media Digital Behavior Approach

In social media, the interaction that consumers seek with brands is embodied in the power they increasingly have to create and co-create with brands and the facilities they are presented with to be able to buy through social media. Firstly, in terms of creation, it can be seen from two perspectives. On the one hand, the end consumer who wants to participate in the decision-making process of brands finds social networks as the most suitable place [7]. On the other hand, we are at a time when we are no longer only talking about user generated content or influencer content. What now brings more value to brands and consumers is the development of content creation [8]. This phenomenon has been discussed [9], but the current circumstances, the development of technology, and the advances in enabling creators to monetise their content make it a more interesting reality. Most social networks are introducing features to enable them to monetise their work. According to Hootsuite, "By using creators to tap into these circles where you're not well known and adding value there, you'll reach new audiences, build cultural relevance, and learn more about your customers" [10: 12].

The creator economy is powered by passionate individuals who share their interests with an engaged community and generate income from their knowledge and skills. Its strength lies in the ability of these creators to provide content tailored to specific interests or niches. Community commerce offers a space where creators and brands can build high levels of engagement that inspire purchases [11]. Following Scaman in the WARC guide "Creator Economy" of October 2021, it is possible to distinguish between the influencer and content creator.

One grows a social following through an artfully curated life, turning themselves into a palatable canvas in order to attract the attention of relevant brands, who can easily slot into their world of considered, edited, and polished perfection. The other leans into their own talents or a specific topic, creating content that's entertaining, educational, or engaging enough to grow a strong and sticky community, which they, in turn, can leverage in numerous ways to turn their followers into their financiers – through tiered access, merch lines, product spin-offs, virtual drops and much more. Put simply, one monetises their audience through brands, the other monetises their audience directly [12: 14].

Among others, TikTok has created the Creator Fund [13]. By collaborating with content creators, brands can offer customers added value, reach new audiences, establish cultural relevance, and gain a deeper understanding of their customers [10: 12]. In addition, some beauty brands are migrating to their own community platforms "shifting focus from the major social media channels to new beta platforms such as Newness and Supergreat" [12: 25].

Social media have become one of the top sources of information about brands, second only to search engines, and particularly in the younger age group, 16-24 years old, it is the first source of information [14]. Regarding ecommerce, it can be said that "social becomes the heart of modern shopping" [10: 29]. Consumers are using social media in all phases of the purchase journey. They use social media to get information, get inspired, research, evaluate brands, and, of course, buy and share their experience. Particularly in fashion, this is understood as an omnichannel fashion consumers' journey as a highly social experience [15]. Social media are "first and foremost about community: the collective participation of members who together create value" [2: 132]. Socialization of media consumption is thus reflected in the appearance of new intermediaries in the digital environment who act as advisors for other users they influence [21]. Brands' use of content creators generates, expands, and strengthens these communities around a common interest [16]. Alongside the pleasure of material possession in fashion, there is an emerging "pleasure in the virtual possession of content" [17: 408]. Social media serve as a portal to inspiring worlds, and the act of discovering, exploring, and sharing these worlds provides an emotionally gratifying experience. This virtual journey is not merely a private desire, as users are compelled to express themselves publicly, imbuing their messages with strong emotional content and tone. Luxury brands have astutely capitalized on this phenomenon, creating immersive universes on their websites and social platforms that invite users to dream while awake. These experiences do not necessarily require purchases, but they provide brands with a platform for garnering notoriety and visibility in an oversaturated content environment [17].

Consumers are looking for a personal and close communication with brands. Brands must be transparent and authentic to show a human side and be trustworthy companies. In this sense, social networks have become the right place to achieve this close relationship with consumers. Social networks have always been perfect platforms for customer care. For example, Twitter has been characterized by the service being immediate, convenient, and effective. However, talking about customer care, linked to what consumers are demanding and focused on the possibilities that social media allows. According to Gartner (2021) [18], 60% of all customer service requests will be managed via digital channels by 2023. Therefore, demand for integrating customer care channels is increasing and social networks are taking on an even greater role.

3 Methodology

In order to analyze the behavior of luxury brands on Instagram with the three-pronged approach outlined in the previous section, each approach has been associated with a group of variables to be studied.

A double methodology was used to analyze the Instagram performance of four selected brands [19, 20]. First, the Fanpage Karma Social Media Analytic Tool was used to analyze the brands' most significant quantitative Instagram metrics [2] from January 1, 2022, to October 30, 2022. Second, a qualitative analysis was conducted on the behavior of the four brands on the social network during the first week of October 2022 (3–9 October). The analysis was based on ten variables [2, 3, 10], including account description, link analysis, quality of comments, stories, highlights, reels, tagged photos, feed, texts of publications, and integration between Instagram and the webpage (Table 1).

Approach	Variables analyzed				
	Quantitative	Qualitative			
CONTENT	N° Highlights Integration between Instagram and the Webpage	Publications Comments Stories topic Reels Photos in which the brand are tagged			
COMMUNITY	Number of Likes Number of Comments Number of Publications Publications per day	Comments Likes Highlights topics In the Feed/Posting Panel			
PERSONAL Account Description COMMUNICATION Link Analysis		Account Description Reels Texts of Publications Comments			

Table 1. Variables analyzed. Own elaboration based on Velasco-Molpeceres et al. 2023 andAlberghini et al. 2014

This study focuses on the digital behavior of luxury brands on Instagram. To this end, four luxury brands were selected as case studies. From the list of "Best Global Brands 2022" compiled by the Interbrand company, the top four luxury brands have been chosen. These four brands were ranked the following positions: Louis Vuitton (14), Chanel (22), Hermes (24) and Gucci (30).

4 What Brands are Doing on Instagram to Connect

4.1 Louis Vuitton

Quantitative Analysis

Louis Vuitton has a total of 859 publications in the analyzed period (January 1, 2022 to October 30, 2022). It uploads an average of 2.9 posts per day. The page performance index is 37%. Engagement amounts to 0.46%. The interaction rate with the posts is 0.16%, with the number of likes amounting to 65,300,000 and the number of comments to 432,000 in the period covered by this analysis. Per publication, the number of organic likes is 76,000, and the organic comments are 503.

Qualitative Analysis

Account Description. The account description reflects a formal style typical of the brand's identity. The language used is cold and professional. There is no appeal to consumer closeness or use of colloquial language.

Link Analysis. The link on the account's homepage covers its commercial aspect and is continuously updated to reflect the brand's active campaigns. It currently redirects to the page of the brand's new collection with Yayoi Kusama. Scrolling down reveals windows related to different collections and iconic bags.

Quality of Comments. Consumer feedback and followers' opinions on collections are visible on the feed. Comments are mostly positive, with emoticons showing support for the brand. However, now many comments address the feminist revolution in Iran, seeking awareness and support from the brand and its followers.

Stories. The stories showcase the new campaign featuring Liya Kebede and the Capucines. Some stories include a link redirecting to the collection's main page, emphasizing the tool's commercial intent and formality.

Highlights. Only one folder in the account feed features stories specifically related to the brand's latest campaign: #LVxYakoiKusama. This campaign can also be found on the website's home page.

Reels. The latest reels feature short videos showcasing the current campaign. For example, Louis Vuitton used the tool during fashion week to showcase its participation and new spring/summer collection. The goal is to entertain followers with dynamic content that reflects the brand's identity, showcasing products, fashion shows, collections, and

famous personalities wearing the brand at important events like Ana de Armas on the Venice 2022 festival red carpet.

Photos in Which They are Tagged. LV only displays what the brand chooses to showcase in its feed, foregoing the user generated content aspect.

Feed. The brand's feed follows a coherent aesthetic divided by collections/themes. During an active campaign or event, the focus is on related content. This is reflected in a predominance of video content during fashion weeks, alternating with carousel images.

Texts of Publications. Publications feature accompanying text and product promotion. The brand effectively uses tags to relate celebrities to the brand and abundant hashtags created for the campaign.

Integration Between Instagram and the Webpage. LV's website does not reference its instagram account. The only way to access it is through an icon in the "follow us" section of the bottom bar.

4.2 Chanel

Quantitative Analysis

On its Instagram profile, LV has 52,831,623 followers and 34,798,941 likes. They post an average of 2.8 times per day, with a performance of 26% and engagement of 0.23%. Posts are typically shared between noon and midday, with Tuesdays or Fridays being more prominent in the last year. The brand receives the most interaction on Saturday and Thursday mornings. The most used and interacted-with word in the last year has been "Chanel." The brand's hashtag, #ChanelShow, is frequently used, and the hashtag that has received the most feedback is #CHANELFragance.

Qualitative Analysis

Account Description. Chanel's Instagram account description is notable for its brevity, reflecting the brand's formal style and professional identity. The language used is straightforward and businesslike. The brand changes the account link every time it shares new updates, directing consumers to the appropriate page.

Link Analysis. The link in Chanel's Instagram bio directs users to their latest video on their YouTube channel, a collaboration with Pharrell Williams' Black Ambition to launch a mentorship program for black and Latino entrepreneurs. This partnership reflects the brand's commitment to investing in human potential and promoting greater representation in culture and society. By integrating this campaign across its social media platforms and website, Chanel projects a sense of unity and constant updates, positioning itself as an active brand.

Comments. Recently, Chanel's posts have received less engagement from their followers, with some only receiving around 40 comments. However, their collaborations with model Jennie have increased the number of comments on their posts. Despite this decrease in engagement, most comments are positive and supportive of the brand. It is

worth noting that there has been an increase in comments regarding the political situation in Iran during the first few days of October, which can be seen as a form of complaint.

Stories. The brand's current stories are centered on showcasing new products and collaborations, using a mix of photography and video formats. This approach is common, with frequent updates of this type of content. The stories are often commercial, with direct links and hashtags provided to help followers easily access the brand's offerings. While still inspirational for all, the content is particularly geared toward women.

Highlights. Chanel's Instagram account does not have featured stories, highlighting the links in the account description. This encourages users to follow the account to avoid missing any updates and stay up-to-date with the brand's latest moves.

Reels. Chanel frequently utilizes reels to promote their new collections with a feminine and timeless style that merges their image with the personality of their founder. This has resulted in a strong and personified brand with human qualities reflected in their advertising.

Photos in Which They are Tagged. Chanel does not provide access to its Instagram grid for user-generated content. This suggests that the brand carefully curates its feed and only displays what it intends to showcase, disregarding the user-generated content aspect.

Feed. Chanel's feed embodies simplicity and elegance, organized by color, reflecting the brand's strong identity and values of independence, power, freedom, and singular femininity. They showcase products, fashion shows, collections, and videos of famous personalities wearing the brand, like Penelope Cruz in a Chanel dress from the fall-winter 22/23 collection with Chanel's high jewelry pieces. Chanel maintains its heritage while adapting to current trends. Through the buy button on their profile and some posts, Chanel allows easy access to their ecommerce for dynamic and easy purchases of featured products.

Texts of Publications. Chanel's posts use text to tell a story and showcase the products featured in the post. They also effectively utilize tags to connect celebrities with the brand and hashtags created by the brand that are relevant to the post.

Integration Between Instagram and the Webpage. The homepage has a simple strip at the bottom that links to different social networks, including Instagram. However, the strip only displays the name of the application without any icons, and there are no other network references or posts shown.

4.3 Hermés

Quantitative Analysis

Hermès has experienced impressive growth in recent months, with an increase of 86,396 followers on Instagram. The brand now boasts a following of 3,163,142 fans on the platform, achieving a high performance rate of 10%, surpassing some competitors. On average, Hermès shares 0.22 posts per day, with the most active time being around 4 pm

daily. This coincides with the peak interaction time, demonstrating the brand's effective use of the social network.

Hermès posts a variety of content, including carousels, videos, images, and reels. However, reels generate the most interaction. The brand's success on Instagram can also be attributed to its extensive use of words and hashtags, with the former being particularly noteworthy. While some of the most commonly used words such as "Hermès," "bag," and "artist" generate significant interaction, this is not always the case with hashtags. Overall, Hermès is performing well on Instagram, thanks to its strategic content and effective use of the platform.

Qualitative Analysis

Account Description. Hermès is a contemporary artisan that has been crafting quality goods since 1837. Their Instagram bio is concise and informative, avoiding colloquial language or emotional appeals to followers. While their formal style differs from the content on their feed, their bio accurately describes their brand as a "contemporary artisan," emphasizing their rich history and expertise.

Link Analysis. Hermès includes a link to their Instagram account description that directs followers to their website. The link showcases the brand's latest fashion show for the Spring/Summer 2023 season, and features updates and products related to the upcoming season. By continually updating the link, Hermès demonstrates a commitment to keeping their followers informed and engaged.

Comments. Hermès' posts receive an average of 100 comments, with the majority being positive and accompanied by supportive emoticons. While the brand does not respond to comments or offer customer service through its account, they receive more feedback when its posts are particularly original. For instance, posts featuring unique drawings or less common videos tend to generate higher engagement.

Stories. Hermès uses its Instagram stories to showcase new products in its campaign, utilizing photography and video formats. The brand frequently shares these types of stories, often including direct links and relevant hashtags to facilitate purchasing. The content is characterized by a minimalist and brightly colored aesthetic, with standout drawings that capture attention.

Highlights. Hermès' Instagram account features seven distinct highlight folders. The standout among these is the covers, which showcase drawings of the brand's products and other aspects, all featuring an orange color scheme with occasional variations in background color (such as green, yellow, and orange). This lends an air of authenticity and originality to the brand's profile. Additionally, in keeping with Hermès' artistic reputation, the account includes a highlight folder dedicated solely to the brand's most unique drawings (SECRET). Finally, the account features WOMEN and MEN highlight folders, showcasing the brand's items.

Reels. Hermès' Reels align with the brand's aesthetics, utilizing bright colors and combining authentic imagery with hand-drawn illustrations. Some of the Reels are particularly inspiring, evoking emotions in the viewer, such as the recent video showcasing the word "Sertir" ("Feel"). In addition to conveying emotion, Hermès also uses this space to debut new garments, presenting their originality through music, lighting, filters, and editing.

Photos in Which They are Tagged. Hermès' Instagram account is focused solely on its feed and does not have an open space for user-generated content. However, the brand's feed is notable for its originality and consistency. Hermès greatly emphasizes color, which is evident throughout the feed. Each campaign has a strong sense of unity, with posts often grouped together in sets of three or related through drawings. Despite this consistency, there are still differences between campaigns, allowing for a sense of differentiation. Hermès executes this aesthetic approach very effectively. The carousels typically consist of two to four photos, and the brand's signature animated designs and vibrant colors create a unique feed that sets it apart from its competitors.

Texts of Publications. Hermès' post captions are attention-grabbing and descriptive, often starting with a short sentence to introduce the post. They are carefully crafted to engage the audience and sometimes take the form of short stories that transport followers to another world. This aligns with Hermès' overall brand aesthetic, which is characterized by a dreamy and fantastical vibe. The captions are rich in details but remain engaging and attractive to the audience.

Integration Between Instagram and the Webpage. The Hermès website does not include any references to its Instagram account on its homepage except for the logo displayed at the bottom of the page. Clicking on the logo will take you directly to the brand's Instagram account.

4.4 Gucci

Quantitative Analysis

Gucci's Instagram account has amassed a total of 49.4 million followers, with an impressive 2.5 million gained in the past year. The brand's high engagement rate of 0.43% has contributed to this growth, as has its frequency of posting, with an average of 2.65 posts per day. With a performance rate of 36.00%, Gucci is among the top-performing luxury brands on Instagram. The account is active throughout the day, keeping followers engaged with a variety of content including images, carousels, videos, and reels. The use of descriptive and engaging language, such as "presenting," "styling," and "wearing," is also notable. Finally, the most-used hashtag on Gucci's Instagram, #AlessandroMichele, is also the one that generates the most interactions. Overall, Gucci excels on this platform thanks to its consistent and engaging content strategy.

Qualitative Analysis

Account Description. The account's description, "The world of Gucci, as envisioned by Creative Director @alessandro_michele on.gucci.com/Gucci2022", reflects the brand's formal and professional style. While it may not be particularly approachable or use colloquial language, it does convey a sense of luxury and exclusivity that aligns with the brand's identity.

Link Analysis. The account description includes a link to the brand's website, covering its commercial aspect. This link is regularly updated to reflect the latest campaigns

and brand status. Upon clicking the link, followers are presented with a carousel of highlighted elements such as "Gucci 25H Watches," "Gucci and the Savoy," "Circular Fashion: An Exclusive Service," and "Gucci Horsebit 1955."

Comments. Currently, comments on Gucci's posts can be broadly categorized into two issues. Firstly, positive feedback related to the brand's internal affairs, such as new product launches and campaigns. In these comments, followers frequently use emoticons, especially hearts, to show their support for the account. Secondly, the comments are also influenced by the ongoing feminist revolution in Iran, with many users including the hashtag created to support the cause.

Stories. The brand's activity on Instagram stories is inconsistent. While some days they upload several stories, there are days when they don't upload anything. They tend to use videos more often than photos and frequently use hashtags and links. Occasionally, they repost reels or TV content on the account. Additionally, they add titles to each story when featuring photographs from the catwalks.

Highlights. Gucci's Instagram account features an impressive 92 folders highlighting various events, product announcements, and brand news. Each folder has a title that typically includes the brand name, such as "GucciArchive," "GucciResort," and "GucciPets," and some even incorporate relevant hashtags like "#Gucci100," "#GucciAria," and "#GucciDiana." Despite the high number of folders, they are organized in a visually appealing manner that engages followers. However, the brand's activity on stories is currently low, with uneven frequency and a preference for video over photo format. The use of hashtags and links is prominent in their stories, and they also occasionally reshare reels and TV content. Additionally, the catwalk photographs on their stories feature a title for each story.

Reels. Gucci uses short Reels to showcase new products, provide video summaries of runway shows like "The Gucci Twinsburg Fashion Show," and feature celebrities wearing their garments at various events. For instance, the brand shared a video of Ryan Gosling wearing a suit designed by Alessandro Michele at a Netflix premiere for the film "The Gray Man."

Photos in Which They are Tagged. In the tags, followers can be seen using various Gucci products. In this way, the follower can see Gucci's user-generated content.

Feed. Gucci's Instagram feed is visually striking due to the amount of information presented in each post. Bright colors and multiple objects are common features in their photos. The brand achieves a cohesive look by applying the same filter that emphasizes saturation. In addition, they often publish several photos or videos in a row, allowing for a clear separation between them. For instance, in a photo shoot with Ryan Gosling, they shared six different posts, and during one of their fashion shows, they uploaded six videos showcasing the outfits worn by attendees. The result is a feed with a distinctive aesthetic coherence.

Texts of Publications. The post descriptions on Gucci's feed are highly informative, often listing the garments featured in the photo. After providing this information, the brand incorporates various hashtags, including those related to the model or celebrity featured in the post, as well as Gucci's own hashtags. The brand also tags both the model/celebrity and the Gucci designer. In posts introducing new products, Gucci employs capital letters and bullet points to emphasize and visually organize the information.

Integration Between Instagram and the Webpage. The website's main page lacks references to Gucci's Instagram content, and user-generated content is not featured. However, a "Follow Us" section displays the brand's logo and the names of its social media accounts. The follower can easily access the corresponding social network pages by clicking on the links.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

After analyzing the four cases, it is evident that the behavior of the brands on Instagram reinforces their communication and marketing strategies based on the approach presented in the theoretical framework.

To summarize, the following table has been included to compare the quantitative data (Table 2).

	Engagement	Fans	Interaction	Number likes	Number comments	Number publ.	Publications per day
Louis Vuitton	0,46%	49.000.000	0,16%	65.300.000	432.000	859	2,9
Chanel	0,23%	52.831.623	0,08%	34.798.941	278.826	830	2,8
Hermès	0,11%	12.317.995	0,10%	3.757.502	30.282	328	1,1
Gucci	0,43%	49.355.906	0,16%	60.754.131	336.932	791	2,65

Table 2. Instagram analytics. Own elaboration based on Fanpage Karma data (January 1st–October 31th, 2022).

The table indicates that Louis Vuitton and Gucci have the highest engagement rates among the four selected luxury brands. However, the data suggests no direct relationship between having more followers and a high engagement rate. Instead, a direct relationship exists between the number of interactions (likes and comments) and engagement rate.

Louis Vuitton has a smaller community than Chanel and Hermes, but its followers are more active in commenting on the brand's content. Moreover, Louis Vuitton posts more frequently on Instagram, which is crucial in maintaining the interest and activity of the community. On the other hand, Hermès needs to work on this aspect to match the frequency of its competitors.

Although Gucci is an exception, luxury brands tend to focus on one-way communication and do not usually incorporate user-generated content. While they try to engage users through comments, they typically do not work on tagging consumers. In this sense, they still have an opportunity for improvement in relation to that indicated by Chaffé and Smith [3], Jin and Ryu [5] and Oliveira and Fernandes [6]. Instead, stories and reels serve as commercial tools to showcase new products and campaigns. These brands ensure that the promotional aspect remains significant and coherent with their brand identity.

The homepage of the brands' websites does not refer to their Instagram posts. The only connection is the logo or name at the bottom of the page or a section called "follow us". Following Tuten and Solomon [2] and Khan [4] these luxury brands could utilize coordinated efforts between their Instagram account and website to strengthen brand values, improve communication coherence, and increase user interaction.

Regarding comments, users not only participate in supportive comments but also engage in current affairs in which the brands take sides, especially on civil rights issues. For example, the protest movement in Iran stood out during the investigated interval, which Louis Vuitton and Gucci explicitly supported.

The brands exhibit disparate behavior concerning the use of featured folders of the highlights. In fact, Chanel does not have any, while Gucci has 92 folders. They should consider making it easier to find stories through highlights, depending on the space occupied by the consumer on the account.

Finally, the brands have a formal tone in their account description but update links to promote specific campaigns. They should further develop the demand for personal and close communication from consumers.

This study demonstrates how Instagram is a strategic marketing tool for content dissemination, but luxury brands use it primarily for one-way communication. Instead, they should take advantage of Instagram's features to generate emotional conversations with millions of consumers and integrate the consumer into the platform and experience.

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