Exploring The Differences In The Influencer Engagement Strategies Of Luxury Brands

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Abstract:
Luxury fashion houses are increasingly engaging with influencers, in their social media marketing efforts, which is a paradigm shift from their dependence merely on celebrities for a myriad of reasons. Influencer engagement strategies are multi dimensional and vary significantly, right from the kind of influencers- based on their follower counts, their niche interests, employed by the brands, depending on what the objectives of the brand for the individual campaigns are. The main objective of this paper is to delve into these differences. The social media handles of the influencers engaged by four major fashion power houses- Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Dior and BottegaVeneta are analysed for the purpose of understanding how the brand positioning, the narrative of the brand messaging, among various other factors, bring about these differences. Based on the observations made, the brands that lie on the traditional end of the spectrum lean towards high end influencers, which could lend them credibility and lead to higher levels of brand awareness while the more progressive brands experiment with the kind of creators they engage with expanding beyond the fashion circles. The influencer attributes- their follower count, their content niches, and engagement strategies in terms of exclusivity, and time period of associaiton, differ depending on the category the brand fits into.
Keywords: luxury fashion houses, influencer marketing, differences in engagement strategies, brand awareness, content niches

I. Introduction:

Historically, luxury fashion brands have sought to retain an air of exclusivity when it comes to their marketing efforts, and have favoured celebrity endorsements, but with the increasing need to reach out to their potential consumer bases- Gen-Z, and millennials, and the rise in the use of newer channels of digital and social media marketing, the brands have been forced to adapt to the changing marketing landscape and are leveraging the power of influencers to make themselves more accessible. With BottegaVeneta hiring an 18-year-old girl who loves roller skating to showcase their product, to Dior employing Chiara Ferrangi, a pioneering luxury fashion influencer, the differences in the kind of influencers hired by these brands are apparent and consequently, the capacities in which they engage with these influencers becomes evident.

Social media marketing is being embraced by luxury brands at such a rapid pace because it enables them to build brand awareness, reach a wider audience, and engage directly with their consumers (Tsimonis& Georgia, 2013). The use of influencers as marketing channels demonstrates to the younger audience that they are multi-faceted. Among the various social media platforms available at the companies' disposal, Instagram is the preferred social media for luxury fashion houses and it is no surprise given that around 58% of luxury shoppers use Instagram to keep up with the latest trends as reported by an official Instagram survey in 2017 (Beauloye,2022). This app has contributed to the rise of a new marketing channel- influencers. Duffy (2020) defines social media influencers as a "subset of digital content creators defined by their significant online following, distinctive brand persona, and patterned relationships with commercial sponsors", and goes on to add that " to earn income, they hype branded goods and services to their communities of followers; such promotional communication takes the form of information, advice and inspiration." Social Media Influencers are a $16.4 billion industry according to a recent Statista report and due to the fact that the relatability factor lends more credibility to social media influencers than celebrities (Casalo, Flavian, et al., 2018), they have become an important channel of marketing for luxury fashion houses. From providing them with products to test, inviting them to events and shows, and co-creating original content for them to share, the ways in which these influencers are utilized vary vastly (De Veirman et al.,2017). These partnerships are also beneficial to the influencers given that collaborating with renowned brands, boosts the credibility of the influencers in addition to positively influencing the purchase intention of their followers (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al.,2022).

The content that these influencers post reflects their psychographic characteristics which motivate the consumers to achieve a similar aspirational self-image (Pradhan et al., 2014). Influencers are an appropriate marketing channel for the luxury industry that is built on aspirational value. Ensuring the product and endorser fit will boost the effectiveness of the message (Kahle et al., 1985). If aligned with the values of the brand, an

endorser can be an effective source of information about the efficacy or benefits of the brand (Kamins,1990). On the other hand, if this congruency is lacking, it might lead to unfavourable product evaluations (Kannungo& Pang, 1973). This makes the selection of the right influencer for the brand- a very crucial step in the entire collaborative process. The process of engagement of the brands with the influencers can be classified into four consecutive dimensions- coupling, co-shaping connections, regulating reciprocity and the fourth being the outcome of the aforementioned three steps- co-fabricated authenticity (Colucci&Pedroni, 2021).

While there is a vast amount of literature available on how influencers increase brand equity on the subjects of choosing the right influencers based on objectives, and them turning out to be huge assets to the fashion houses, the benefits influencers derive from the collaboration from a self-branding perspective, and the difference in the kinds of influencer partnerships these brands forge, based on their branding needs has not been delved into. One of the most easily noticeable differences in the kind of influencers that brands engage for their campaigns is the difference in the follower count. According to affable.ai, an end-to-end influencer marketing platform, influencers are classified as micro (10k - 100k followers); macro (100k - 500k followers); mega (500k - 2 million followers), and all-star (over 2 million influencers). When it comes to the objectives that brands aim to achieve through these influencer campaigns, creating brand awareness and enhancing the brand image are the two major dimensions of brand equity that they focus on, the former to a greater extent than the latter (Godey et al., 2016). To create increased levels of brand awareness, the quantitative metric of follower count cannot be the only factor under consideration because though the likeability of influencers might increase with an increase in follower count, their perceived opinion leadership might not increase proportionately (De Veriman et al.,2017). A recent four-part series by Kati of Vogue explored how content creators with no direct connection to fashion, are being hired by luxury fashion houses for the credibility they bring to the brand campaigns by the virtue of highly engaged communities they have created around their interests/skills, which in turn leads to opportunities for these brands to embed themselves into these communities. Consequently, the kinds of influencers these brands work with have expanded from only those whose aesthetic or content is perfectly aligned with that of the brand to those that lie outside the fashion niche (Kati,2022). As Amy-Lee, a digital strategy executive puts it, opting for influencers outside the niche "tends to create a wider interest from a broader group of people, including those that would not pay as much interest to a more traditional fashion influencer campaign", and went on to state how the audiences of these influencers outside the styling space are never strictly binary simply because fashion is very personal. The abundance of influencer content available online has resulted in the rise of Genuinfleuncers, a word coined by Worth Global Style Network, meaning the influencers who "share knowledge and wisdom", rather than simply advertising products. With the hiring of Aimee Song, an all-star fashion influencer by Gucci and Dior, and Diana Pernet, a journalist, these influencers who talk about their unique interests, and address broader social issues without monetisation as the only goal, are being increasingly sought after by luxury brands (Kati,2021).

Following the selection of partners, brands have to make decisions regarding various aspects of the engagement strategies ranging from time frames- long-term vs short-term; the degree of exclusivity expected of the influencers; the formats/kinds of content to be produced; whether or not they should be appointed as the brand ambassador; the kinds, and formats of content to be produced. The novelty of the creator or the theme determines the engagement rate (Kati,2022). As the Adweek article's title put it, "brands are swapping the norm for the niche".

In terms of the format of content production, there has been a shift from institutional heavily directed campaigns to more liberal creative ones as a direct consequence of influencers being given the creative freedom in how they choose to represent the brand (Guilbant, 2023). The study conducted by Lee & Watkins, (2016) establishes how establishing long-term relationships with customers via brand ambassadors will lead to future purchases.With regards to the costs involved in hiring an influencer, apart from the direct payment made to the influencer for their body of work, various other factors - time period of the content usage, location of the advertisement, attendance fee for trips, and the number of posts determine the total cost of working with an influencer. The compensation schemes have evolved from simply gifting a product for them to use and review, and sponsored visits to fashion shows to more complex deals that might entail royalties, equity, creative, marketing and product consulting services (Kati,2022). It goes on to show how these decisions can have varying levels of impact which gives rise to the need to take a closer look at these strategies employed by different brands considering the fact that they cannot be homogenous on the grounds of different branding needs.

The findings of this paper illustrate that there indeed is a marked difference between the engagement strategies of the fashion houses right from the type of influencers- micro to all-star influencers, based on their follower count to creators in the luxury lifestyle space to creators with niche hobbies to the length of partnerships to the levels of exclusivity that is agreed upon. The characteristics of the influencer and the objectives underpinning the collaboration go on to determine a lot of these factors. Based on the kinds of engagement, there are varying outcomes. While a certain level of exclusivity can be maintained with niche influencers, it might not be possible to do the same in the case of high-end fashion influencers. Not maintaining

exclusivity in terms of engagement might work in the favour of brands as the complimentary effect might come into play when the influencers engage with multiple brands of similar stature. Partnering with high-end fashion influencers sends the message that the brand is status-oriented and gives them a lot of traction in the media directly proportional to how well-established they are within the fashion world. Generally, long-term relationships are built with such influencers to increase the credibility of the collaboration and they are showcased more often on the official pages of the brands. They also partner with niche creators outside the fashion space who have very unique hobbies as the focus of their content which results in a two-fold benefit: bringing in customers outside their traditional target market and attracting attention due to the unconventional collaborations. We take a closer look at how these differences manifest themselves in the engagement strategies across four pioneering luxury fashion brands with a special focus on their ready-to-wear fashion lines. While the more progressive brands seem to have a good influencer mix, both in terms of the follower count and the content they produce, the more traditional brands gravitate towards established fashionistas.

II. Literature Review:

Theoretical Integration:

We examine the paradigm shift in the marketing strategies of luxury brands allowing them to use influencers through the lens of institutional theory.

From Pabst to Pepsi: The Deinstitutionalization of Social Practices and the Creation of Entrepreneurial Opportunities:
(Hiatt et al., 2009)

The dual role of social movement organizations in terms of contributing to the creation of new entrepreneurial opportunities while delegitimizing existing belief systems thus contributing to the downfall of certain other industries is analyzed in this paper. One of the major contributions of the paper is that it demonstrates how the tactics employed by social organisations can have both intended as well as unintended effects. Their findings also illustrate the fact that the characteristics of the industry at a point in time might have mediating effects on the tactics employed by movement groups/third parties. Their second contribution explores how delegitimization of certain practices might lead to the creation of new markets. Their final contribution highlights that social movements by bringing about broader cultural shifts can produce unanticipated organizational outcomes. While this paper wonderfully illustrates how institutional pressures bring about organizational changes and create new entrepreneurial opportunities using social movements, it does not talk about how consumers can be change agents, bringing about major changes in the marketing practices of entire industries. Drawing on the contributions of this paper, we can see how consumers or followers have played a huge role in legitimating the use of influencers by luxury fashion houses by lending them credibility. There has been a shift in focus from celebrity endorsements to influencer partnerships due to the credibility lent to them by the communities they have built around themselves. Consumers find influencers to be more relatable and hence the products they endorse are perceived to be more genuine than celebrity endorsements. This shift in normative expectations has played a huge role in creating the billion-dollar influencer industry.

Exploring CRM effectiveness: an institutional theory perspective:
(Hillebrand et al.,2011)

This article studies the effectiveness of Consumer Relationship Management and in a broader sense, that of marketing practices through the lens of institutional theory. The findings of this paper have many real-world learnings for brand managers and one of the key lessons is that importance of motivation for imitative behaviour matters. Adopting a practice simply because competitors are using it might not be very productive and only if there is an alignment between the particular practice and the firm's marketing strategy, should it be done. Influencer strategies lie right at the intersection of marketing practices and institutional theory. Building on the findings of this paper, luxury brands cannot make strategic choices about influencer engagement practices solely based on the practices prevalent in the industry or by following the lead of their competitors. The brands have to focus on ensuring brand-endorser fit to achieve maximum impact.

Influencer Marketing:
The following papers will explore certain central themes and trends within the influencer marketing industry.

Influencer advertising on Instagram: product-influencer fit and number of followers affect advertising outcomes and influencer evaluations via credibility and identification:
(Jansen et al.,2021)

This article analyses the impact of product-influencer fit and the number of followers on positive advertising outcomes and influencer evaluations. They also investigate the mediating effect of perceived

influencer credibility and identification, on influencer likeability and advertising outcomes in terms of attitude towards the product and purchase intention. According to their findings, the fit and the number of followers go hand in hand: the higher the number of followers, the more likely the product and the ad would be greeted positively. However, for this to happen, the influencer's self-branded image must be reflected in the endorsed product, especially when a macro influencer (influencers with followers on the higher side) is in question. Influencer endorsements were also found to be particularly effective if perceived credibility and identification were taken into account. Although it is an excellent paper that has contributed to the understanding of how recruiting different kinds of influencers can have varying impacts on customer perceptions, it does not investigate how different firms deploy varying partnership strategies based on their branding needs and influencer attributes.

Instafamous and Social Media Influencer Marketing:
(Jin et al.,2019)

The purpose of this paper is to explore the difference in the effects generated by two celebrities who belong to very different categories- Instagram celebrities versus traditional celebrities on source worthiness, brand attitude, envy and social presence. As a part of their study, the participants were exposed to the profiles of Eva Longoria (categorised as a traditional celebrity), and Olivia Palmero (fashion blogger), and they found that despite them being very similar in terms of their fashion styles and the products they endorse, they were perceived very differently by the consumers. Based on the results of the study, among the celebrities who were perceived as equally attractive, differences in the levels of relatedness quantitatively indiced with social presence led to varying levels of trustworthiness amongst the customers. When consumers see a brand's products worn by characters that they can relate to, the desire to fulfil their needs by purchasing the product endorsed, created by social comparison, and brand affinity increases, and this finding is extremely relevant as social media marketing is highly dependent on interactivity and relatability quotients. The difference in the impact that the two very different categories of influencers can create is explored in detail and helps us in understanding the reasons why consumers relate more to the influencers. What is not touched upon is how within the influencer industry, there is a marked difference in the impact created by various categories of influencers that determines the brands they are recruited by and the ways in which the brands choose to partner with them.

YouTube vloggers' influence on consumer luxury brand perceptions and intentions:
(Lee & Watkins,2016)

This study probes into the potential of fashion bloggers on YouTube- a video-sharing site, to be luxury ambassadors, viewed through the lenses of para-social interaction and comparison theories. The possibility of the relationship between viewers and vloggers on YouTube influencing the perceptions and purchase intentions of customers is examined. Their findings established a major management lesson: values, beliefs, and desires of the brand's target audience should be central in choosing the vlogger to be their brand ambassador, considering that a vlogger who is perceived as similar to the viewer or exhibits traits that viewers find desirable has an increased chance of leading to PSI, which ultimately leads to positive luxury brand perceptions (i.e., brand luxury,brand-user-imagery fit, luxury brand value, and purchase intentions). Furthermore, the more the participants closely associated with the vlogger, the stronger the effect it had on increasing luxury brand perceptions. As noted in the 'future research' section of their paper, the study does not take into account the usage of one of the most prominent social media platforms of the current time - Instagram which is the primary focus platform for my paper along with drawing insights from what is posted on YouTube. One other major differentiating factor is that their entire analysis of the vlogger-viewer dynamic is conducted from the consumer perspective and does not discuss the relationship of luxury brands with influencers from the viewpoint of fashion houses.

Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behaviour:
(Godey et al., 2016)

Literature on social media marketing efforts and their effectiveness from the perspective of branding literature in terms of the creation of brand equity, and how it influences other branding goals such as brand loyalty, preference and price premium is quite scant. The authors of this paper try to cover this gap by investigating how social media marketing efforts contribute to brand equity creation and influence consumer behaviour towards a brand. They discovered that in planning social media campaigns, it is crucial to consider all five elements of Social Media Marketing Efforts - entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word-of-mouth. Moreover, SMMEs have a significant positive effect on two dimensions of brand equity: brand awareness and brand image, to a larger degree on the latter than the former. While this paper discusses various aspects of deploying social media as an effective tool in brand marketing comprehensively,it fails to account for

the rise of influencer prominence within marketing campaigns, whose meteoric rise in recent years warrants them a place in the branding literature, which would be the main focus of my paper.

Got to be real: An investigation into the co-fabrication of authenticity by fashion companies and digital influencers:
(Colucci and Pedroni, 2021)

The ways in which fashion houses leverage a new group of cultural intermediaries - Digital Influencers (DIs) in their marketing campaigns and build relationships, as a core part of their brand communication strategies, in Italy are examined in this paper. Even though their ability to influence markets has been extensively studied, the process through which the body of work is built - brands and influencers collaborating to shape the narrative has often been overlooked. Exploring the underlying dynamics of achieving co-fabricated authenticity revealed that the entire process of brand-influencer collaboration is a four-stage process, with the first three stages being - coupling, shaping connections, and regulating reciprocity; the final stage, which is also the outcome, is co-fabricated authenticity, produced right at the intersection of corporate commercial needs and DI's narratives and practices. Although the framework provided by the paper, classified into ten sub-themes for influencer engagement is highly relevant in terms of the managerial implications, they do not touch upon the differences between influencer engagement strategies across different luxury brands.

III. Case Studies:

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of how brands collaborate with influencers, according to their branding needs and brand identities, we examine two major collaborations that received a lot of attention in the media. Gucci and Louis Vuitton have over 50 million followers on Instagram and engage actively with influencers, which makes them ideal for comparison.

Case Study 1: GUCCI:

Gucci has a very strong influencer mix - from creators outside the fashion space like the trainspotter Francis Bourgeois, and pottery artist Lisa Assano, to top luxury influencer-turned-entrepreneur like Chiara Ferrnagi promoting their ready-to-wear-line. We analyse their unexpected partnership with Francis, which has gained a lot of attention all over social media:

GUCCI X Francis Bourgeois:

Luke Magnus Nicolson, better known as Francis Bourgeois, has amassed more than 1.6 million followers on Instagram by creating content focused on his unique hobby of trainspotting, which puts him in the category of mega influencers, and has an engagement rate of 3%, which is considered to be quite impressive.

As a part of their holiday-centric campaign, Gucci hired him to model for a photo shoot and star in an advertisement for the same. The advertisement was shot against the backdrop of a 2MT locomotive, which was perfectly aligned with the core interest of Francis. The video which was created in partnership with High Snobiety, a media company, featured him as the all-in-one conductor, ticket taker, and narrator. Francis wore a puffer jacket from the collection and put up a post on his page, which garnered more than 200,000 likes. This collaboration worked out well because the main theme was "exploration and outdoor activities", and that is in line with Francis's interests. Francis's content is not featured on the Instagram page Gucci. More recently, he posted a picture of him boarding the Majestic Imperator wearing a Gucci suit, as well as a picture of him exploring the sets of a Gucci fashion shoot. The locomotives - the primary interest area of Francis - seem to be the common denominator of all of these advertisements. It is evident from the repeated collaborations, albeit within a very short period of time, that the partnership is not an ad hoc arrangement. He was even invited to their Twinsburg show, of which he posted a sneak peek on his page, alongside another post of him going to the shop to pick an outfit for the event. Both of these posts have been liked by around 60,000 and 120,000 people respectively.

Francis, a young lad with a passion for trains, whose shooting technique involves the use of head cams, does not exactly fit the conventional fashion influencer archetype, but this choice by Gucci has proven to be quite successful, considering the attention it has garnered in the form of likes, views, and indirectly through videos put up by other creators analysing the unexpected partnership. While the brand may not have appointed him as its official ambassador, they partnered with him in many other forms, such as invites to shows, sponsored gifts, and advertisement and photoshoot features.

Although he is famous in his own right, his audience is pretty niche and collaborating with him reflects how willing Gucci is to experiment with the kind of influencers they work with. This goes on to show the brand's interest in expanding beyond its traditional customer base. While he endorses other brands on his page, none of the other fashion powerhouses has recruited him, which is advantageous for Gucci because his audience will equate him with only one of the high-end fashion brands.

Case Study 2: Louis Vuitton:

With Emma Chamberlain and CharliD'Amelio as their brand ambassadors, both of whom have featured in the Forbes 30 under 30's list, in the content creators category, Louis Vuitton has an all-star influencers rooster to be proud of. They also have mega influencers with lower follower counts, like Micah Gianneli, endorsing their brand. Here we take a look at how the brand has partnered with one of its top ambassadors, Emma, over the years.

Louis Vuitton X Emma Chamberlain:

Emma Chamberlain, a YouTuber whose growth from a young girl who put out slice-of-the-life videos to a fashion icon has been nothing short of phenomenal, which has led to her being named in Forbes's '30 under 30' list in the social media category and also being featured in TIME's 25 most influential people list. To quantify the influence she has, her Media Impact Value was around $16 million, as reported by Launchmetrics, a data analytics provider, which made her the top influencer at the 2022 Met Gala.

Louis Vuitton co-sponsoring her attendance at the Paris Fashion Week along with YouTube essentially marked the beginning of her luxury fashion career. Louis Vuitton announced her as their brand ambassador that very year, which goes on to show how much they value their partnership. Since then, they have flown her to Paris Fashion Week multiple times to attend their shows. Despite her remarkable growth, her content has remained authentic, and relatable. The majority of the content she produces is primarily featured on- the house's YouTube channel, on the youtube channels of high fashion magazines like Harper Bazaar, and her Instagram and youtube accounts. The house puts out promotional content on its official channel to leverage the wide reach she has. She creates promotional content for the brand in a variety of formats- including get-ready-with-me videos of her preparing for fashion shows, a trivia video of her answering questions about the brand's history, sneak peeks into fashion shows, and a travel video of her exploring Paris in 48 hours, among other videos, to raise the brand awareness among her fanbase. The creative freedom afforded to her by the brand, allows her to retain her unique style of video making, while also portraying the LV brand to be more open to experimentation, which is in stark contrast to the heavily directed style of shooting advertisements with celebrities. This in turn lends more credibility to the entire collaboration.

In 2021, the brand even invited her to attend their virtual show and sent her pieces for her to try on, and she vlogged her experience on YouTube. In addition to these videos where she directly endorses Louis Vuitton, she also uses the brand's products in her other videos, which goes on to show how truly integrated the brand is into her everyday lifestyle, a subtler product promotion technique. While she does mention that clothes were loaned to her for special occasions, it is unclear as to what the overall arrangement might be. She has worn LV garments to several red carpet events, from her Met Gala debut, to the Vanity Fair Oscar party, the TIME 100 event, and the W magazine season dinner, all of which have been featured in high fashion magazines. While she does post content promoting LV regularly, other fashion houses have also taken notice of her. Valentino gowns, Cartier jewellery, and Jimmy Choo shoes are now a part of her red-carpet wardrobe. Cariter recently appointed her as their brand ambassador, which is a testament to her incredible growth within the fashion industry. The non-exclusivity might serve LV too, as her being the ambassador of other fashion houses only lends her more credibility to the brand, and also reinforces the product-influencer fit. Alongside one of the most famous TikTok influencers, Charli D' Amelio, she was chosen to model for the LV Squad and LV Sunset campaigns. She had modelled for their 2021 Fall Winter shoe collection as well, demonstrating how deeply she is involved with the brand. When the brand launched "LVTV", a new vertical on YouTube that features Behind-the-scenes, and editorial content, they naturally picked her once again to create content for its launch.

This partnership might be highly successful in creating brand awareness among her audience demographic: 18 to 24-year-old Gen Z females population, as this demographic constitutes the majority of her audience . Additionally, Lancome's Lehman also told Vogue that Emma is a highly suitable influencer for targeting the pop culture-loving Gen-Z. To quantify the success of this collaboration, using the simple metric of Instagram likes will suffice as each of her recent posts, where she has tagged LV has garnered upward of 2 million likes on average. During the year 2021 alone, she generated more than $2.33 million in Media Impact Value for the brand (Launchmetrics).

IV. Brand Positioning Map:

Using the following brand matrix, we take a closer look at the differences in the influencer-brand dynamics across four huge brands within the luxury fashion industry.

As illustrated by table 1.1,the x-axis is representative of the design aesthetic of the garments of the brand - from traditional classic timeless designer wear to more experimental statement pieces that push the boundaries of fashion. The y-axis reflects the differentiated product offering of the fashion house, from haute couture to more functional clothing. While all of the fashion houses combine various elements within the matrix in what they offer to their clientele, certain signature designs, the way they are described in high fashion

magazines, and the language they employ in their self-promotional media pieces and their websites serve as the basis for this segmentation. This classification is focused solely on the upscale ready-to-wear garment lines of these brands. The brand positioning chart is only one possible way to segment the industry , and is also bound to evolve as new creative directors take charge, as the values and priorities of the brands change with changes in management, market demand, and environmental changes, among other factors.

BottegaVeneta - As Vogue describes it, BottegaVeneta is a brand that rigorously pursues the 'non-branded philosophy' (Zamindar,2022). In line with its brand philosophy, its digital marketing strategy took a turn when Daniel Lee took over the reins of the house; it suddenly disappeared from the entire social media landscape and launched a quarterly digital journal, which has worked in its favour, by creating an air of exclusivity around their releases. Over the years, it has produced a number of iconic couture pieces, while avoiding the game of logos entirely, keeping in mind the preferences of its customer base - that of "stealth wealth"- and maintaining its image as an insider brand. Fast forward to the 2010s, if the appointment of Daniel Lee, its former creative director who was described by Phelps, in 2019 as someone with an "instinct to experiment" and the debut collection of its new creative director MatthieuBlazy, where everyday garments were effortlessly turned into objects of luxury, which was dubbed as 'where modern grunge meets ladies who lunch' by the W magazine (Bateman,2022), is any indication of the direction the brand is headed towards, it certainly belongs to the first quadrant. As Nicole Phelps of Vogue noted, 'Blazy's ambition is not to dress celebrities or enter the lofty salons of haute couture but to create dresses for every occasion', which cements its position on the map.

Dior - From its roots in Belle Epoque socialist fashion to its iconic "New Look", a term coined by the then editor of Harper Bazaar, Maison Dior epitomizes Haute Couture. Dior revolutionised the Parisian fashion industry by bringing extravagance and glamour back into post-war society (Tomes,2017). Since then, the fashion house has evolved with the change in creative directors - softening of its famed silhouette by Saint Laurent, its primary focus shifting to sculptural pieces under Gianfranco, it returning to its feminine, understated and reminiscent roots guided by Raf Simmons, and emphasizing the feminist-centric and classic influences by Chiuri (Phillips,2022). Throughout the century-long journey, it has retained its core essence - opulent ultra-feminine couture which places it in the second quadrant.

Louis Vuitton - When Marc Jacobs, one of the most influential designers of all time, who was associated with the company for 16 long years, and helped shape its design quotient, put together the first ready-to-wear collection for the Maison in 1997, Vogue described it as 'classic, contemporary, luxurious, against a backdrop of a luggage company- utilitarian and practical'. Louis Vuitton has stayed true to its core values of functionality and excellence. The nomenclature used in some of its more famous recent campaigns - "the art of travel", and" the spirit of travel"- illustrates where the company's focus lies. Louis Vuitton's monogrammed hoodies, trench coats, puffers, parkas, and denim jackets have all become fashion staples with a functional edge, which is why the brand is best suited for the third quadrant.

Gucci - In Alessandro Michele's words, fashion reflects the history and social change. As much as Gucci has remained true to its Italian origins through the years, and is known for its very high quality of craftsmanship, under Alessandro Michele's leadership, it has evolved into a brand synonymous with gender-bending and experimental fashion. Given that Michele studied costume design, the incorporation of theatrical elements into the Gucci wardrobe is natural (Bowles,2019). Staying true to their spirit of experimentation by featuring eye-popping colours, bold patterns, and textures in their pieces, they make the perfect fit for the fourth quadrant.

V.   Suggestions And Recommendations:

In this section, the most prominent influencer collaborations of each of the four brands has been examined to come up with tailored recommendations for each of the quadrants of which they are representational:

Quadrant 1:
Example Brand: BottegaVeneta
Example Influencer: OumiJanta

As a brand, it will stand out if they maintain low levels of social media activity. Instead of engaging with their customers directly through social media, they could publish their content online - in the form of digital journals for instance- which would help them maintain an air of exclusivity, and give them higher levels of control over the narrative being crafted. Further, posts by influencers who attend their shows, articles in high fashion magazines, and fan pages created by those who adore the brand will lead to more organic engagement with the products of the brand, allowing the brand to truly harness the power of word-of-mouth. The alternate influencers selected to promote the brand could be newer Gen Z niche influencers who create content around their hobbies/passions, outside the world of fashion as unexpected collaborations tend to generate more

conversations around them. They should ideally be in the mega influencer category with a very high engagement rate, which will translate to high engagement with the brand itself. The influencers can be urged to wear the pieces while engaging in their regular activities, affording them more creative freedom, which will lead to the creation of more authentic content. The relationship does not necessarily have to be long-term, it can be for a short time period with specific goals, such as promoting the launch of a new collection or targeting a very specific type of audience among other goals. Gifting or loaning garments would be more feasible than recruiting them as brand ambassadors considering the shorter duration of the partnership.

Quadrant 2:
Example Brand: Dior
Example Influencer: ChierraFerrangi

Pioneering brands that want a broad reach across varied customer segments on a global scale should recruit all-star influencers, who have established themselves in the luxury fashion space. These influencers should preferably have very high Media Impact Value, and Media Earned Value. The wealth of experience and the credibility that these veteran influencer-turned-entrepreneurs bring to the table from having witnessed the evolution of the fashion content creation industry, from essentially being blogs on websites to the levels that they have reached today by leveraging social media, cannot be undervalued. Attention from print and social media, high fashion magazines, and the fashion world, in general, is guaranteed due to their high status in the fashion influencers' hierarchy. In terms of influencer-brand dynamics, a long-term engagement that includes invitations to their shows, lending of garments for red carpet appearances, and making custom gowns for their special events would lend more credibility towards the endorsements made by the influencers since they will then be perceived as genuine patrons of the brand. Engaging influencers who create content in the luxury fashion space serves two purposes: acquiring new customers who aspire to imitate the aspirational lifestyles of the creators and assuring the existing customers that they have made the fashionable choice by picking their brand. The segments of the audience who cannot immediately afford the products will also identify the brand as a symbol of luxury. This allows the brand to retain its status while being more accessible. Alliances with influencers of such high status will translate to higher levels of consumer engagement with the social media pages of the brand, and hence posting their content on the brand's official social media handles will lead to more direct interaction with their customers while also providing them with insights into the kinds of potential audiences that the brand can target in the future based on the data that they collect. Collaborations with multiple brands are to be expected of such influencers, and it might boost the credibility of the brand, and cement its position as one of the leading brands in the luxury fashion industry by the virtue of association with brands of similar stature.

Quadrant 3:
Example Brand: Gucci
Example Influencer: Francis Bourgeois

Choosing to work with niche Gen-Z influencers, outside the luxury fashion space could prove to be quite useful, if the objective of the campaign is growth beyond their existing customer base , by acquiring a highly segmented audience that constitutes the majority of the following of the influencer or if the concept of the particular campaign is highly aligned with the kind of content that the influencers produces. These influencers are perceived to be more credible, and with the rise in demand for more genuine content in an oversaturated market, partnering with these influencers who have built close-knit communities around their passions can bring the brands closer to the audiences by creating positive brand sentiments. Partnerships can be strengthened through repetitive collaborations in the form of invitations to shows, featuring them in campaigns, and gifting of items among other forms of engagement, as continuity of endorsement builds credibility. The length of the partnerships can be determined based on how well the collaborations are received by the audiences. Granting them the creative freedom to craft the narrative of the content they produce to promote the brand merchandise will lead to the production of a more authentic output, which will make the endorsement seem less directed, and that in turn, will increase the relatability factor. Unexpected collaborations where creators showcase their perceptions of the brand images in their unique styles of content creation are becoming increasingly prominent, due to the amount of publicity they generate. Exclusivity in the context of the influencers not being engaged with other high-end luxury fashion brands is a positive outcome because the followers will tend to associate the particular influencer with only the specific aspirational brand.

Quadrant 4:
Example Brand: Louis Vuitton
Example Influencer: Emma Chamberlain

In order to paint the brand image as a highly status-oriented one, selecting all-star influencers to feature in their campaigns might be ideal. Recruiting of these influencers need not be limited to those in the luxury fashion segment, albeit an interest in, and an affinity for high fashion would lend more credibility to these partnerships. Partnering with trendsetters in their respective industries might bring in customer groups who might not otherwise interact with the brand content. Forming long-term relationships by recruiting them as brand ambassadors, inviting them to attend offline, and online events, asking them to model for their shoots, and sending them products will lead to more organic content creation processes, higher levels of purchase intention among consumers, and will ultimately lead to better overall engagement rates for the social media content of the brands. Rules of engagement do not necessarily need to solicit exclusivity given that if similar brands appoint them as their ambassadors, it will only fortify their position as one of the top brands in the industry.

VI.   Limitations And Directions For Future Research:

One of the primary limitations of this paper is the non-examination of TikTok, a video-sharing platform, which is heavily used by luxury influencers, and fashion houses alike. On the grounds that every social media app has its own unique characteristics and functionalities, taking a closer look at how the influencer-brand dynamic takes shape in TikTok, and how it differs from that of Instagram would make for an interesting comparative case study. The second major drawback is the differences in influencer partnership strategies between high-value product lines vs low-value product lines of the same brand not being analysed, considering the fact that these fashion houses create separate pages for their beauty product ranges, and clearly display higher levels of influencer engagement. The third major limitation is that disclosures of paid partnerships with these influencers according to the relevant laws in force, its ramifications on the purchase intention of the consumers, and how this ultimately affects the kinds of partnerships forged have largely gone under-examined. One other angle that has not been examined is the usage of third parties in the equation - communication and PR agencies by these brands, in the context of how they can affect certain aspects of the brand-influencer relationships. Lastly, it is important to note that the influencer industry is still in its nascent stages, and these partnerships are bound to evolve as the market matures, which will ultimately result in the emergence of more identifiable patterns.

VII.   Conclusion:

The shift in normative expectations has revolutionised the ways in which the luxury fashion industry markets. Majority of the luxury fashion brands have a good influencer mix across a range of niches in terms of the content produced, and follower counts. In regards to the kind of engagement practices that these brands deploy, naturally, there is no one-size-fits-all strategy. There are notable differences brought about by an array of factors, including the objectives of the specific collaborations, the brand messaging narratives that they want to convey to their audiences, and the attributes of the influencers themselves. On the one hand, the brands on the traditional end of the spectrum prefer high-end fashion influencers to cement their position as trendsetters within the industry, while, on the other hand, the more progressive brands show higher levels of interest in niche influencers outside the fashion space with close-knit communities, which reflects their willingness to experiment. The micro to mega influencers are partnered with when the primary objective of the brand is to promote a particular collection or promotion of a certain event, and there is a high possibility that this arrangement is made for the short term period. By not providing them with an institutionalised template to follow, and by affording them high levels of creative freedom, the content that is generated is much more organic and authentic. Out-of-the-box collaborations with influencers who lie outside the fashion space attract a lot of attention on social media from consumers, and other content creators alike. These partnerships are suitable when the content of the influencer is perfectly aligned with the theme of the campaign or when the goal is to acquire a highly segmented set of customers that constitute the majority of the influencer's followers. Considering that these influencers do not work with direct competitors of the brands, their audience tends to associate the influencer with only one of the aspirational brands.

On the other hand, the brands that choose to portray themselves as status-oriented, partner with high-end fashion influencers with large numbers of followers. The dynamic the brands share with luxury influencers is that of long-term continual relationship achieved by engaging with them in a variety of ways from collaborating with them to create content in a wide variety of formats, asking them to model for their photoshoots, inviting them to their shows, asking them to host fashion shows to appointing them as their brand ambassadors. Their repetitive engagement lends more credibility to the collaborations, and in turn, leads to higher purchase intention among the customers. Though they are involved in the creation of general formulaic

formats of content, their vision, values, and authenticity drive much of the creative process - leading to unique outcomes. Content pieces are posted directly on the social media handles of the brand, which results in their pages receiving higher volumes of traffic. These collaborations receive a lot of coverage in the media circles, and on social media, which is why it is ideal to utilize them to reach a wide variety of customer segments. Terms of engagement do not seem to necessitate exclusivity in the context of endorsing competing brands; rather they seem to leverage the same to strengthen their market position by letting the complimentary effect come into play. The nascent influencer industry is rapidly evolving, and consequently, these relationship dynamics are bound to change which will lead to the emergence of clearer distinguishable patterns.

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