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Abstract

Authenticity, by definition, is the quality of being genuine or true. Recently, there have been efforts to define authenticity in terms of marketing, in which the definition is not as clear cut. Research on authenticity is scarce and scattered. This study aspires to contribute to this void in the research. The purpose of this study was to analyze the presentation of authenticity of personal luxury brands. The document analysis was central method in this research. Documents were used as primary source because entry to these companies was restricted. The empirical framework consisted of number of documents drawn from the company websites. The selected brands represent seven of the largest luxury brands in the industry. In order to get more comprehensive outlook on subject and to further the credibility of the research, an expert in luxury branding industry was contacted. An interview with Philippe Mihailovich was conducted in Paris, in May 2007.

Luxury is a world of its own. Standard marketing rules do not often apply to luxuries. Also the structure of the brand architecture separates the luxury brands from the ordinary brands. Luxury brands follow the hierarchy proposed by Jean- Noël Kapferer. In this hierarchy, *a griffe* represents the peak. The concept of griffe proved also to be a salient point to this research. A griffe is closely related to the hero of the brand story and often provides face to the brand.

Both status and story aspects were assumed to affect perceptions of authenticity. Presumption was that brands would lean on either status or story. However, the evidence shows that status and story are not, in fact, two opposite ends of the spectrum, but status is often an element of a luxury story. The story, in turn, was found to be momentous to authenticity. In marketing, a powerful story entwines the story of the brand and that of the customer.

The story affects how authenticity is presented, but it remained unanswered what authenticity consists of. The authenticity attributes assumed were drawn from Michael Beverland's research in 2006 focusing on authenticity in luxury wine trade. These attributes included: heritage, quality, method of production, stylistic consistency, reference to place and appearing to be above commercial constraints. Research findings supported the original model to some extent, however, the model evolved somewhat throughout the study. It was the face that brought the research together. Face, hero and griffe are often the same person, the creative talent of the brand. The revised model combined also method of production and quality. A superior quality was found to be a derivative of meticulous method of production and superior materials.

Key words	Authenticity, Storytelling, Luxury, Griffe, Brands
Further information	