

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN STRATEGIC LUXURY BRAND COMMUNICATIONS IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

Today, luxury brands have benefitted from globalization, resulting in the expansion of their retail stores and e-commerce activities to serve the demand for purchasing luxury products, particularly in new emerging markets. At the same time, these companies are increasing their integrated marketing communication expenditure and advertising activities. Luxury brands are now embracing digital and social media platforms as a new marketing approach, creating an online experience that is accessible, collaborative and experimental, while balancing the exclusivity and dream value for the brands. Focusing on Thailand, the rise of the middle class and a younger population, who are now traveling abroad more has resulted in greater consumption of luxury products. Thus, this study aimed to discover how the existing luxury fashion brands in Thailand are adapting digital marketing strategies that are appropriate for the Thai customers and the objective of research was to identify the role of digital media in strategic luxury brand communications in Thailand.

A qualitative approach was applied based on in-depth interviews of members of marketing teams of existing luxury fashion brands, professionals and Thai luxury consumers. Moreover, the data collection was guided by textual analysis of primary and secondary sources of data acquired from articles, textbooks, websites and related research to gain greater insight into the research topic.

The results demonstrated the increasing role of local digital marketing strategies by luxury fashion brands that can be understood as an additional communication channel to the traditional media tactics used in the Thai market. Focusing on Thai consumers, the research showed positive outcomes for the digital communication channels with increasing value of brand awareness and emotional attachment with the brands rather than motivating them to purchase the luxury products online.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the ongoing global financial crisis in the past five years and the decline of economic growth in China, luxury brands have successfully managed to expand with new stores, internet distribution and extensive advertising to serve the demand for luxury products (Brand Z, 2013). Today, luxury markets have benefitted from globalization, resulting in a new target segment of

international travelers, requiring a new marketing approach to digital media strategies. Therefore, the luxury brands are now executing digital media tactics that create an online experience that is “accessible, collaborative, and experimental” (Millward Brown, 2013).

According to Kapferer & Bastien (2013), luxury is the “ultimate version of a range” that is currently being positioned as timeless, modern, durable, personal, special and desirable in relation to money, art and fashion. According to Interbrand (2013), Louis Vuitton is ranked number 17 in the leading luxury brands in the world, with a 6% increase in brand value to US \$24.9 billion from last year, compared to the best global brand in the premium sector, L’Oreal which was listed number 39, with a 12% increase in brand value to US \$9.9 billion, or US \$15 billion less than Louis Vuitton (ibid). Luxury brands have their own unique management strategies including price premiums, limited distribution channels and no promotional advertising, which differ from the basic rules of marketing that apply to the premium brands.

The increasing demand for luxury brands has resulted in the growth of urbanization in the emerging markets of the middle classes, international travellers and young consumers, particularly in China and Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand (Bain & Company, 2013). In China, luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton and Burberry have successfully managed local digital distribution channels to their mainland customers. Global Blue (2013) reported that Thai consumers have similar shopping patterns to the mainland Chinese, showing that Thai travellers like to purchase leather goods, fashion accessories, perfumes and cosmetics from well known brands like Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Hermes. A Harrods spokesperson (Smith, 2013) added that “Harrods has seen a marked increase in the number of Thai customers visiting the store with these shoppers becoming amongst our most prominent international visitors.” In Thailand, luxury brands are planning to expand retail stores to house more luxury brands in the high-end departments stores such as Siam Paragon, Gaysorn Plaza, Emporium and Central Embassy (Li, 2013).

In the fast-growing markets, almost all luxury brands have an online presence and they engage in forms of social media or digital advertising rather than selling online. However, the digital strategies for luxury brands can be a threat by promoting a lack of exclusivity and a declining level of engagement with fans (Morphy, 2012).

Focusing on Thailand, this research aims to discover how luxury fashion brands are adapting digital and social media marketing strategies as newly available marketing channels in efforts to reach and connect with the Thai consumers in the new emerging markets. This research paper investigates the brand strategy applied to the new media for the existing luxury brands of Balenciaga, Christian Dior and Emilio Pucci in Thailand. Furthermore, this research addresses the implications of digital and social media tactics, the effects that they could have on luxury brands, as well as observing how effective they are at driving consumption among Thai consumers.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To identify the role of digital media in strategic luxury brand communication in Thailand.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do luxury fashion brands apply digital and social media marketing strategies that are advantageous for maintaining and strengthening their position and brand profile in Thailand?

2. Why are certain luxury fashion brands turning to digital and social media as part of their IMC strategies in Thailand?

EXPECTED BENEFITS

1. Provide a better understanding of the challenges that luxury brands are facing when adopting new media in their marketing communication strategies for the Thai market.
2. Provide knowledge of how existing luxury fashion brands execute IMC strategies for digital and social media and what can be learned from their practices to drive consumption among aspiring Thai luxury shoppers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

STRATEGIC LUXURY BRAND COMMUNICATIONS

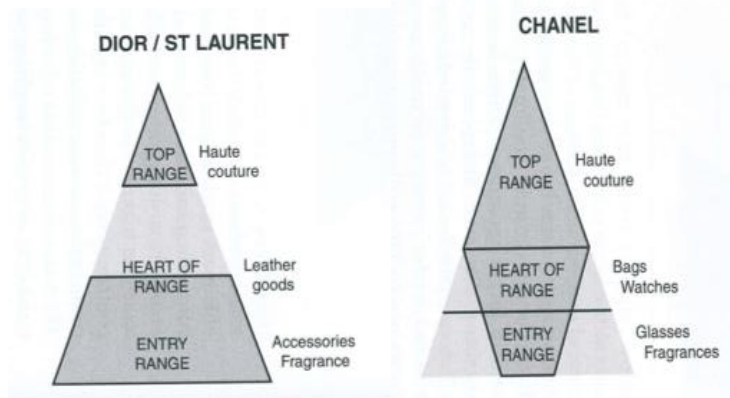
ANTI-LAWS OF MARKETING

Kapferer & Bastien (2013) explained that the standard rules of marketing are only applicable to premium brands, while luxury brands must pursue their own luxury strategy including exclusive and excellent quality of product, premium price (appropriate price), limited distribution channels, public relations-oriented and recognition of the “anti-laws of marketing” rules. Luxury marketers must persuade consumers to choose an “item from further up the range” so they can treat themselves to buy something better and more expensive (Silversterin & Fiske, 2005). Once any luxury brand has established an exclusive connection with the consumers, the consumers will not seek any other brand, but become “extremely faithful, devoted, and committed to the brand”, so the luxury product becomes priceless and can be sold at a premium in any price wars (Kapferer & Bastien, 2013)

LUXURY BUSINESS MODEL

Luxury brands fundamentally operate on their own. Brands like Chanel, Dior, Giorgio Armani and Fendi have established the pyramid business model (Figure 1), whereas Louis Vuitton follows a diamond model (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Dior and Chanel Business Models



Source: The Luxury Strategy Break the rules of marketing to build luxury brands (Kapferer & Bastein, 2012)

The Chanel haute couture house represents the highest exclusivity and positions as a ‘griffe’ on top of the pyramid due to the unique functions including “rare, made by hand, priceless and work of art”, followed by small hand-made products or upper range products including ready-to-wear, leather goods, bags, watches, shoes and fashion accessories. These types of products represent the ‘heart of the range’ in the pyramid model. At the bottom of the pyramid, the wider distribution of product includes glasses, perfumes, cosmetics and so on.

Figure 2: Louis Vuitton Business Model



Source: The Luxury Strategy Break the rules of marketing to build luxury brands (Kapferer & Bastein, 2012)

Louis Vuitton represents a diamond model that reflects variation from the pyramid shape. On top of the diamond, Louis Vuitton offers special-order luggage trunks that are at the heart of their brand’s originality and are their recognized area of expertise. The core of the range is represented by hard luggage and city bags. The bottom of the diamond symbolizes small leather goods and accessories as their entry products (Kapferer & Bastein, 2013).

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS (IMC)

Belch & Belch (2012) explained that an IMC strategy is a combination of the promotional mix of advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal selling, event marketing and interactive marketing. Different promotional channels aim to maintain brand identity, brand equity and customer loyalty at every touch point for profit and greater sales.

LAYERS OF LUXURY COMMUNICATION

At the mass-market level, media advertising is a major component of in-store promotion. The closer the media tools get to the top of the pyramid, the less important role it plays in advertising because luxury is meant to communicate and is never meant to advertise. The VIP events represent intimacy and a form of one-to-one relationship. Other communication strategies are public relations, shop window displays, and digital ad campaigns. Strategically, headquarters of the luxury brand define and execute all types of strategic communications in terms of managing the country-specific internet sites and in designing worldwide events, sponsorships and fashion shows among other activities. By doing so, the local management teams in the different countries make an effort to create more memorable events in order to maintain the

brand identity. Thus, public relations are a major part of the local management in relation to building a special relationship with VIPs and major customers (Kapferer & Bastein, 2013).

THE INTERNET AND COMMUNICATION IN LUXURY BRANDS

Kapferer & Bastein (2012) suggested that the Internet can lead to an opportunity to introduce new potential consumers to luxury brands. Luxury brands must create brand content that constructs editorial, visual images and sound content that is able to deliver contextual information about the brand, its personality, its roots and its history. The presence of a luxury brand on the Internet plays an important role in creating and enhancing a consumer's personal experience with the brand. Chevalier & Gutsatz (2012) identified two major current trends: (a) luxury brands should integrate communication and distribution channels on the Internet; and (b) the Internet and social media are tools at the service of a customer relationship strategy.

LUXURY BRAND EQUITY

Kapferer & Bastein (2012) stated that luxury brands must develop a symbolic meaning through quality, creativity and status in order to gain pricing power. Furthermore, luxury brands must strongly link to heritage, identity and human creativity talent. Moreover, the core of the luxury brand is identity, which can be measured from the brand's roots, its heritage and "a legitimacy created from authority, class, and creation, more than from expertise". The brand identity prism includes brand physique, brand personality, relationship, brand values, customer reflected image and customer self-concept. Chanel is a classic example where the brand is not restricted to one expertise or haute couture, Chanel has extended its product lines by selling ready-to-wear clothing, fine leather goods, shoes, perfumes, watches and accessories. Kapferer & Bastein (2013) indicated that luxury appears 'late' in adapting to digital and social media tactics on the Internet. To build brand equity in the digital media, a luxury brand needs to keep in mind the implications of the digital era in the future while implementing its strategies in the present.

DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Wertime & Fenwick (2008) highlighted that digital media marketing trends include web, internet media, email & viral marketing, mobile platform, gaming, user-generated content, digital signage and Internet Protocol Television. Smith (2013) explained that social media is a new approach that relies on dialogue, storytelling and building a long-term relationship. Social media can be divided into three consumer social experiences: peer branding, crowded based customer service and shared discovery; each offers consumers the chance to critique, question and promote brands.

RELATED STUDIES

Adams (2013) described a change in buying experience as modern luxury consumers demand easy shopping for products and an environment that gives them an opportunity to purchase with ease and comfort. It can be argued that selling excellent products on the Internet will ruin the exclusivity of the brand and the product; however, selling only entry products seems to attract new customers and to prevent fake goods being peddled (Kapferer & Bastein, 2013).

According to Clay Shirky (2010), the term "cognitive surplus" represents the population of the world, who are collectively willing to volunteer, contribute, collaborate and celebrate their free time on social media. Dickins (2013) believed that social marketing is an opportunity for luxury brands due to activities such as official public relations feeds, occasional viral videos and online promotions as long as they are not the sites for engaging in a community forum of online consumers as occurs with premium brands. It appears that luxury brands are still not making the

most of opportunities to implement their marketing and communication strategies on social media (ibid).

Zhang (2013) remarked that luxury marketers are now limiting their marketing and communication platforms through social media, suggesting that the luxury brands should concentrate on improving marketing communications and customer relationships through social media rather than focusing on mass consumption selling of entry products. The study also showed that developing a storytelling of the brand on social media is the best approach for luxury brands to build brand loyalty with existing customers, foster brand awareness for potential customers and sustain the brand profile.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Data was sourced from primary and secondary sources through interviews, related studies, textbooks, articles, the Internet, annual reports, newspapers, news, magazines, websites and social media. It was used to examine the Integrated Marketing Communication tactics that luxury brands are adapting in the Thai market to gain insights into the attitudes, concerns, motivation and behavior regarding the use of digital and social media in the luxury sector in Thailand.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

This qualitative research implemented individual in-depth interviews with members of the marketing teams from Balenciaga, Dior and Pucci, and with professionals from the fashion industry in Thailand and also with three groups of luxury consumers consisting of university students (18-24 years old), first jobbers (25-29 years old) and business owners (35-50 years old).

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Luxury brands now include digital media and social media tactics as part of their strategic marketing and communication. Existing luxury brands such as Balenciaga and Pucci are now attempting to utilize social media platforms to communicate with a wider group of local consumers, particularly younger luxury customers, newcomers and regular customers. The results indicated that luxury customers are very positive about digital and social media marketing tools.

In the new emerging markets, luxury brands in Thailand are slowly adapting digital and social media marketing strategies in the form of digital out-of-home advertising such as digital billboards at high traffic volume locations or in high-end shopping malls among luxury consumers and also a digital advertising campaign at the cosmetic counters. Moreover, social media platforms are managed under luxury retailers such as PP Group and Club 21. Dior is also using adapting influential marketing with celebrity endorsement on Instagram. As a result, these digital media channels are increasing while traditional media channels such as e-newsletters, SMS messaging or letters still remain important to the luxury brand strategies that offer direct contact with their customers.

Digital and social media platforms such as official websites and social media sites that are operated by headquarters, present global strategies of luxury brands that aim to make customers aware of the brands. Moreover, the local strategies promoted through Club 21 Thailand Instagram and Facebook accounts are very successful among Thai consumers, resulting in a high level of engagement with different luxury brands. The results showed that Thai luxury consumers now consider digital and social media networks as one of the major communication channels in addition to the traditional media to keep abreast and up-to-date with the brands.

However, the majority of Thai consumers still believe that in-house service is the core of the luxury strategy to purchase the products and to savor the luxury experience. The fundamentals of retail experience remain significant in the Thai market while more consumers choose to buy online or outside the flagship store. If luxury brands are locally focused on their own digital channels, it may harm the brand image and reputation.

The survey results showed that luxury marketers will adapt more digital media tactics in the future; they suggest that luxury brands might link to digital and mobile marketing platforms through high-end fashion magazines in the near future. Therefore, this research identified the goal of increased digital activity by the existing luxury brands in Thailand due to the new market of luxury target customers and their shopping patterns in the society.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role of digital media in strategic luxury communications can be characterized under the following headings.

GLOBAL DIGITAL STRATEGY OF LUXURY BRANDS

The results showed that the use of digital strategies for existing luxury brands in Thailand is fully controlled in-house by their Italian or French headquarters who operate and manage the luxury websites and social media platforms. The brand manager of Emilio Pucci explained that the global strategy with digital media aims to promote the image of the brand internationally. For example, any brand activities such as private events or fashion shoots from the magazines, that have taken place in Thailand, are posted and updated through the official website and Pucci Facebook page by headquarters. This concept of the digital approach is supported by Kapferer & Bastein (2012:265) "Headquarters define and carry out all strategic communications, unify the country-specific internet sites, design worldwide events, sponsorships fashion shows, etc." Moreover, Chevalier & Gutsatz (2012) also considered that a brand can present history, essence, events and collections through an institutional website without getting in touch with the customers. The study results showed that the majority of Thai luxury shoppers believe that official websites and social media platforms of specific luxury brands are informative and accessible even though they do not engage with the brands.

PUSH AND PULL MARKETING STRATEGIES

Push strategies involves taking the product directly to the consumers at the point of purchase in the form of traditional media and communication channels such as direct marketing (letters, e-mail, SMS messaging, catalogues and product samples), event marketing (private shows, trunk shoes and fashion shows), and personal selling (telephone calls, mobile chat applications and in-person experience with the sales assistants). Another way of luxury marketing is via pull strategies that involve motivating customers to seek out to the brand in channels including sales promotions (gift cards, reward points, discounts), public relations (fashion magazines and

newspapers), advertising (print ads, billboards, digital out-of-home ads, TV, direct mailing) and online advertising (digital banner, search and e-mail) and interactive marketing (mobile marketing and social networking). Pull strategies also include word-of-mouth from friends, relatives and family members.

IMPORTANCE OF HIGH-END FASHION MAGAZINES

The results showed that fashion magazines are the main traditional media tool that luxury brands cannot avoid using, showing that the brands must maintain a close relationship with the high-end fashion magazines in order to sustain their brand profile and image among the sophisticated Thai readers. Brand representatives from Balenciaga, Dior and Pucci agreed that fashion magazines are the most effective marketing tool with promoting and branding through advertorials, fashion shoots, fashion news and updates about the latest collections. The in-depth interview results showed that the majority of top management level or senior consumers still rely on traditional media through personal selling and fashion magazines, especially from ad campaigns and advertorial contents. Therefore, these tactics aim to promote the international image of the luxury brands while making an effort to balance this with an understanding of the lifestyle and behavior of Thai readers.

Since fashion magazines dominate as the priority marketing tool, the future trend of digital strategies by luxury brands may involve promoting digital contents and ad campaigns through the mobile applications of popular high-end magazines such as Vogue Thailand, Elle Thailand and Marie Claire Thailand.

LOCAL MANAGEMENT OF LUXURY BRANDS IN THE THAI MARKET

The role of local public relations and brand relationship with VIPs and major clients must be actively executed to communicate with Thai customers. The results showed that exclusive private events, e-newsletters and letters remain important indicators of local marketing strategies to engage and deepen relationships with major customers.

LOCAL DIGITAL STRATEGIES OF LUXURY BRANDS IN THE THAI MARKET

Luxury retail companies like Club 21 Thailand and PP Group Thailand are tending to increasingly adapt digital media strategies because they are many luxury brands in the companies. Club 21 Thailand is now managing luxury brands such as Balenciaga, Dolce & Gabbana, Givenchy and Stella McCartney; the company is now expanding its digital presence through digital advertising, mobile application and social media channels particularly Facebook and Instagram. Meanwhile, PP Group which distributes Pucci, Saint Laurent, Celine and other labels is now also integrating social media marketing strategies via Facebook and Instagram. Haute couture brands like Dior and Chanel are now using digital out-of-home billboards to present their entry product lines such as perfumes and cosmetics. Sales assistants of Louis Vuitton use iPads to present the new arrival of products and fashion shows to the customers in the boutiques, which is another way of local digital execution in the Thai market. According to the brand manager of Pucci and the senior marketing communication manager of Club 21, headquarters need to approve the ad campaigns before posting them on local social media channels, while they have opportunity to post images of luxury products via Instagram and Facebook that must portray the luxury image of the brands. Moreover, brands must keep the feeling of exclusivity of the product that is attached to the brand in social media space.

BRAND PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE ON INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATON OF LUXURY BRANDS IN THAILAND

The results showed that luxury consumers are greatly influenced by digital media especially the brand websites and social media platforms because these digital channels offer instant and fast responses to their interests regarding the luxury brand or the product. The three groups of respondents presented the same response that digital media and social media are the channels of communication for luxury brands at many levels. The majority of consumers among the three different age groups felt positive about using the Internet because it is the medium that they used constantly in their daily lifestyles. In addition, digital media for luxury brands can bring high brand awareness and create the temptation for shoppers to buy the product.

The research findings also showed that luxury brands that are adapting digital and social media platforms are now balancing the online luxury experience and retail experience to the consumers. Balenciaga and Emilio Pucci Thailand are now integrating social media platforms as part of their integrated marketing communication management, in particular Instagram and Facebook, for which they offer multiple activities to connect with the customers in both online and offline worlds. The study results showed that Thai luxury consumers are learning about the products through contents such as discount prices, exclusive products and activities with the brand or invitations to the events on the social web platforms. According to Kapferer & Bastein (2012), luxury brands must create brand content that delivers context on editorial information about the brand, its history, depth and personality.

In particular, Dior is now integrating social media strategies in their marketing using their own channel of communication via “influential marketing” through celebrity endorsement with a Thai superstar. The brand ambassador strategy can be applied to a single person who is paid or receives the product, who must have a great personality and be able to testify positively about the product that they use (Kapferer & Bastein, 2012). As a result, this tactic leads to positive feedback and word-of-mouth promotion from consumers who walk into the stores.

The majority of respondents among the three groups surveyed felt positive toward digital and social media channels but they did not consider them the most influential when it came to seeking luxury products. Many respondents still believed that traditional media tactics such as fashion magazines, fashion shows, e-newsletters, mailing catalogues, print ads and billboards still remain the most influential channels that luxury brands offer. Together with digital media, the traditional tactics of luxury brands are meant to bring customers into the stores and make purchases.

Moreover, the majority of respondents were very dependent on retail service and experience in the stores as was also pointed out by the luxury brand manager of Pucci that service and good manners are the main factors that make consumers buy the products. Kapferer & Bastein (2012) stated that digital activity must be integrated with the network of shops to maintain luxury service and sensory experience. This is related to the finding that luxury consumers may or may not be motivated to buy the product, but they can get a sense of the luxury and passion of the brands through a brand website and the social media channels when they are not in the shops.

Adam (2013) suggested that the old rules of luxury buying invite customers into the luxury boutiques where customers buy brand products as well as a luxury experience. In contrast, today’s luxury customers value easy shopping and a product experience that feels less luxurious without having to go to the flagship stores. Today, some respondents buy luxury products on e-

commerce sites such as the Siam Brand Name website and Net-a-porter.com, at duty-free shops, outlets and independent shops in Bangkok, through Facebook and Instagram or in the flagship boutiques in foreign countries.

PURCHASE INTENTION AND MOTIVES FOR PURCHASING LUXURY FASHION BRANDS

Traditional media tools such as sales promotion, email, SMS messaging, billboards, fashion magazines and private events are more likely to motivate Thai consumers to increase shopping for luxury products. At the same time, most customers believe that digital platforms are also inspiring and can trigger them to buy luxury products because they are able to see the images of actual products before they go to the store. In addition to building brand awareness, luxury consumers also believed that luxury websites and social network channels give them the opportunity to see the product before they enter into the store, which can create a desire to buy a product. Some digital platforms provide similar editorial content as the fashion magazines especially through celebrities. Kapferer & Bastein (2012) referred to the Internet providing an opportunity that enabled larger groups of new customers to visualize the intangibles as well as delivering the uniqueness of brand identity and the services to the customers.

According to Lyer (2012), the ultimate role of digital media with a luxury brand is to drive sales through online shopping or e-commerce as well as to indirectly bring customers to the stores. This statement does not support the digital strategy in the Thai market as a distribution channel on the luxury online websites is not available and not part of the luxury strategy of the brands. On the other hand, the interview results supported Lyer's argument that digital media can indirectly lead customers to the stores as they wish to touch and feel the products they have seen online.

Even though the majority of respondents felt positive about accessing luxury brands online and that digital media was one of the most important communication channels, they said that they would not shop online in the future. This finding supports the statement by Kapferer & Bastein (2012), who pointed out that Internet sales are not suitable for luxury brands but very well adapted to the premium fashion brands or possible luxury entry products. Therefore, the Internet can be used as a complementary service for existing luxury customers or as an introduction to the brand story or to the product for potential new customers.

The interview results showed that the lack of "touch" and "feel" experience was a major problem that deterred customers from buying luxury products online. The brand manager of Pucci, explained that as customers cannot try on Pucci clothes or touch the fabrics, this makes it hard to shop online. The majority of the respondents added that they can never be sure about the quality of the products if they cannot handle them. Many respondents were not at all motivated to buy luxury products online because they did not trust any of the shopping websites, as they preferred shopping in the stores only. Chevalier & Gutsatz (2012) said that the essence of a luxury product is "feel" and "sense", as luxury marketers and sales people believed that luxury must be bought in a store when customers had to touch and feel the product and that the presence of a sale assistant was essential. Therefore, it can be understood that the role of digital media to a luxury brand in Thailand is not to be a focus for online shopping. In order to drive sales and attract new potential customers in the market, luxury brands are now executing digital and social media strategies and planning to expand online tactics in the future.

There are limitations to the digital strategies of luxury brands in Thailand where the traditional media channels such as local public relations and direct marketing are the most significant communication channels to Thai customers. Thai luxury consumers tend to believe that shopping at the flagship store is the ultimate luxury experience with the ultimate accessibility of the brand and the product.

Based on the study, selling online was not on the agenda for any of the luxury brands at the moment; therefore the main shopping highlight is on the experience at the store. Furthermore, the interview results showed that the in-house experience with the right salespeople is the most important aspect that retail and service operations need to better understand to serve the customer in contemporary times. It can be seen that not every Thai customer stays connected with the luxury brands though the new technology as it is more meaningful to the younger target customers. The results also showed that luxury customers online cannot get the same brand experiences including VIP treatment and accessibility of the actual product as in the boutiques.

According to Chevalier & Gutsatz (2012), the concept of retailing luxury brands must enhance “wow” factors such as “the extravagant use of the empty of space”, fascinating window displays and exclusive products to reinforce the brand image and strengthen the emotional bond with the customers. Moreover, Gutsatz & Auguset (2013) stated luxury brands should improve customer loyalty by developing service and customer relationships at the store. The study results showed that luxury brands can deepen their relationship with the local customers through their sales people, as service is the cornerstone of customer relationships which includes shopping by appointment, sending hand-written thank you notes, the availability of sale shopping, delivering purchases and calling or sending messages through chat applications with the customers.

The representatives of the luxury brands in Thailand believed in a combination of traditional media and digital media approaches when dealing with Thai customers because the customers are now using smartphones or tablets that can access the digital and social media sites of the brands directly. As a result, it can be said that digital media provides support for the luxury brands to help customers learn more about the brand and the product to fulfill in-house experiences.

SUGGESTIONS

Even though much has been written about luxury brands and the Internet, no substantial academic studies are available on the role and the impact of digital media on the luxury brands in the Asian market. Another key limitation is that this research topic explores a new area, with considerable potential for further investigation.

The current research was limited by not being able to interview top luxury brands in Thailand such as Louis Vuitton and Chanel due to these brands maintaining strict confidentiality on their brand marketing information. Furthermore, the researcher was restricted from more intensive study of the digital tactics that the brands apply due to the direct control of many aspects by the brand headquarters located outside Thailand.

It is recommended that future research consider a quantitative approach to observe and understand the consumers’ behavior and perceptions regarding the consumption of digital media and luxury brand strategies. This could include further investigation into where luxury consumers begin searching for information about luxury brands and products before they go to the official websites or social media channels. Furthermore, the current study only interviewed 27 luxury

consumers, mainly from Bangkok, so quantitative research is recommended based on a larger and more diverse sample of luxury consumers from all over Thailand to understand and perceive the consumers' needs.

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