Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Financial Technology and Business Analysis
DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38845

Strategies for luxury brands to balance accessibility and exclusivity on social media

Xinying Yu[1,*,†], Shuo Lin[2,†], Beiruohan Yan[3,†]

[1]*University of Leeds, Leeds, UK*
[2]*Department of International Digital Economy, Minjiang University, Fuzhou, China*
[3]*Shandong Experimental High School, Jinan 250001, Shandong, China, 2285640094@qq.com*
**Corresponding Author. Email: Yuxinying20050410@gmail.com*
†These authors contributed equally to this work and should be considered as co-first authors

Abstract. Luxury brands require the use of social media to expand their customer base, especially among young customers. But social media focuses on visibility and communication, whereas luxury brands focus on scarcity and singularity. Other works reveal that brands could offer entrance designing content in thoughtful ways instead of mass interaction. However, there is a lack of research to compare how various luxury brands deal with this problem in reality. The study is a comparison of Van Cleef & Arpels and Gucci. It is based on the reports of the companies, official social media posts, marketing materials and selective comments made by the public. The paper analyzes how the brands become more accessible but at the same time preserve the exclusivity. Van Cleef & Arpels shares art, dance and culture stories with the world through its Dance Reflections program, and its merchandise is still scarce. Gucci employs famous personalities and high profile content to address a larger population. The Primavera AI campaign also faced negative reviews on the issue of authenticity and craft. These comments suggest that some audiences did not find the AI content appropriate to their expectations of a luxury brand.

Keywords: luxury branding, social media, accessibility, exclusivity

1. Introduction

Luxury brands are built on exclusivity, scarcity and heritage. Social media, however, depends on visibility and public engagement. It creates a challenge for luxury brands. They need to reach more people online, but they also need to protect the exclusivity that gives them value. For example, a brand may hold a VIP event that is only open to invited guests while showing it to audiences all over the world. This study asks: How do luxury brands increase accessibility on social media without undermining exclusivity?

Luxury brands face more pressure because digital platforms require broader participation from audiences. Bain predicts that the sales of personal luxury goods will decline by 2% by 2025, with the number of active consumers will drop to 330 million. By 2026, it is predicted that the younger generation will account for 60% consumer spending and the may be more inclined to consider

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38845

luxury goods as self-expression rather than traditional status [1]. Therefore, luxury brands need to attract new consumers while protecting scarcity and exclusivity.

The conflict between accessibility and exclusivity in luxury branding has been acknowledged by previous research. Social media could be used by brands to access a larger audience or to reduce the feeling of rarity. A lot of literature is written about the opportunities and threats of online interaction. Nevertheless, there are few references to particular methods that luxury brands apply to increase their audience without losing the exclusivity. The study will compare Van Cleef & Arpels and Gucci to investigate how the luxury brands may utilize social media to strike a balance between accessibility and exclusivity.

The following sections review relevant literature and explain the research method. Meanwhile, it compares the two cases and discusses the findings and limitations of the study.

2. Literature review

Luxury brands maintain their premium value through exclusivity and rarity. According to Wang et al., successful luxury brands must have high awareness and value, but they must also remain rare and exclusive [2]. This poses a problem. Luxury brands must be visible in order to appeal to consumers, yet they must maintain scarcity. Global growth has made luxury available to a larger number of consumers [2]. Shukla et al. describe this as luxury democratization, in which increased access could decrease distinctiveness and exclusivity [3].

The issue is even more complicated with social media. Consumers are now able to create, share and consume messages about brands more easily. This helps luxury brands reach more people and increase engagement. However, it allows companies to have fewer controls on their images. This can make it more difficult for brands to maintain the prestige and distance associated with luxury.

Both too much and too little access can be a threat to a brand. Fewer restrictions on luxury items can result in over-diffusion and reduce the special value of a brand [2]. Brands cannot simply withdraw from social media. A study of Instagram demonstrates that removing posts or accounts to create communication scarcity may negatively affect consumers' perceptions of exclusivity [4].

It also depends on the content that brands share. Moderation and ethics are associated with sustainability, whereas pleasure, status and display are associated with luxury [5]. These discrepancies may cause other customers to doubt the sustainability messages of luxury brands. When a message does not fit the brand, perceptions of exclusivity can be undermined [5].

Previous studies propose that this problem can be dealt with in a number of ways. The value of luxury is rooted in rarity, heritage, authenticity and symbolism [6, 7]. Shukla et al. [7] state that digital transformation has increased online visibility and consumer engagement. Creevey et al. [8] suggest that brands can create perceived accessibility through storytelling, heritage content and curated visual content rather than unlimited interaction. Basile et al. [9] find that user-generated content can increase engagement in a strong brand community, but excessive exposure on larger platforms can reduce perceptions of exclusivity.

Current researches acknowledge the opportunities and challenges that social media pose to luxury brands. However, most studies do not examine storytelling, digital change or user-generated content as a whole. There are not many works comparing various social-media strategies and demonstrating how to make a brand more available but still exclusive.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38845

3. Methodology

To ensure analysis from multiple perspectives, the data mainly come from three aspects: industry and company report including annual reports and campaign materials; official brand content on Instagram and TikTok; and audience responses in public comment sections.

A comparison of the two brands will focus on three dimensions. One aspect is the content strategy which examines whether the brand focuses on heritage and craftsmanship stories, collaborating with celebrities, or toward promotions or cultural events. The second is audience engagement that identifies replies to comments, livestreams, calls-to-action, event invitations and content by users generated. The third is overall communication style. It means that whether the brand is more classic and restrained or mass-interactive and highly visible, and how this affects exclusivity. The three sections determine whether the exclusivity of a brand is diluted or reinforced on social media.

Whlie this design scheme has a few limitations, for instance, public comments may not represent all consumers and social-media activity cannot reflect sales performance or brand success compeletely. However, its adavantages is more prominent. By comparing VCA and Gucci, it is evident that there are two complete different social media strategies for luxury brands. When combine industry reports, platform content and public comments, the perspective will be more comprehensive.

4. Case study

4.1. Case description and selection rationale

Van Cleef & Arpels and Gucci have presented a contrast on how to balance "exclusivity" and "accessibility" through adopting different strategies.

4.2. Case 1: Van Cleef & Arpels

The "Dance Reflections" project by Van Cleef & Arpels is a prime example of luxury brands resolving the tension between "social media accessibility and brand exclusivity" through cultural sponsorship. This project was officially launched in 2020. Its official statement clearly focuses on three values: "creation, transmission, and education", aiming to support artists and institutions presenting modern and contemporary dance works, and encouraging new choreographic creations. It notes that"this support also extends to initiatives to raise awareness of choreographic culture, aimed at both professional and amateur audiences."[10]. Priority should be given to supporting the art of contemporary choreography and dance popularization projects for the public instead of promoting products directly. This choice is highly consistent with the luxury strategy framework proposed by [6]. The two scholars pointed out that luxury brands must abandon the traditional marketing logic focused on the growth of sale and the competition of price. Value should be generated through the strategic leveraging of intangible cultural capital, the protection of cultural heritage and the deliberate cultivation of symbolic scarcity. "Dance Reflections" has been a relationship that lasts for a century with dance in Van Cleef & Arpels: from Louis Arpels's visit to the Paris Opera in the 1920s to the symbolic ballerina brooch of the brand in the 1940s, it has established itself as a legal guardian of artistic heritage, instead of a pure transactional retailer [10]. This approach strengthened the strategy that without direct marketing. Capferrell and Bastian emphasize that this characteristic

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38845

is the core of positioning of luxury brands. The value of brand will shift from the short-term sales to the long-term cultural influence.

According to Pine et al., businesses win by offering authentic, memorable experiences. They do not succeed simply by selling products or services [11]. The "Dance Reflections" project converts the story of the brand into a dramatic experience. Every year, the event takes place at cultural centers around the world. These include London, Los Angeles, and Hong Kong. Its performances combine dance with new artistic creations. In addition, it cooperates with artists like Olivia Bee. Van Cleef & Arpels truns a short dance movement into a silver photographic. The work showcases grand performances on stage and it also documents the detailed preparation that happens backstage [10]. The brand does not present itself as a sponsor. Instead, its role is to create artistic experiences. This choice aligns with Pine and Gilmore's thesis in 1999. Their view is that every business is like a stage. Each interaction a consumer has strengthens the brand's identity. The brand comes across as a messenger of beauty, harmony, and narratives.

Keller's customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model [12] supports Van Cleef & Arpels' strategy. The brand builds value by taking part in cultural events. According to Keller, strong brand equity comes from deep, positive, and unique consumer associations. Van Cleef & Arpels keeps funding in dance preservation and accessible education programs. These efforts build a unique brand image for the label. Target consumers see it as more than just a high-end jewelry creator. They also regard it as a guardian of global cultural heritage. To these buyers, it also stands for aesthetic value. Moreover, this method creates an emotional bond. This bond is tied to dance's elegance and precision. These partnerships raise brand awareness among luxury consumers. They also build consumers' trust in the promises of the brand beyond its products. Over time, long-term loyalty among target customers is enhanced.

The two cases demonstrate that higher brand accessibility does not always weaken uniqueness. Uniqueness can be actually weaken by a lack of consistency. Both brands gave up traditional marketing strategies and focused on building cultural connections. Their differences point to a key factor. When social media content draws on cultural heritage, it must clearly show that the creations are made by humans. This includes cultural heritage like the dance roots of Van Cleef & Arpels. They should also avoid pushing sales too hard. In this way, higher accessibility enhances the brand's cultural capital. It will not weaken the brand's special halo. If social media content focuses on speed and technical performances, it will be easy to create tension. If the content has little connection to culture, audiences will doubt the brand's commitment to rarity. Wide dissemination then becomes a reputational risk.

4.3. Case 2: Gucci

4.3.1. Basic situation

Gucci is an Italian luxury fashion brand within the Kering Group [13]. It is known for creative design, Italian craftsmanship, and cultural influence. In this study, Gucci is used as a contrasting case. It helps examine how high social-media visibility may challenge a luxury brand's exclusivity, authenticity, and brand identity.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38845

4.3.2. Social media strategy analysis

4.3.2.1. Strategic direction

Gucci uses social media to increase public visibility and stay connected with popular culture. Its content covers sport, music, fashion, and cultural events. Also, the brand still mentions craftsmanship and heritage. This approach enables Gucci to reach audiences beyond traditional luxury consumers. It also keeps the brand visible in culture.

4.3.2.2. Specific tactics

The strategy used by Gucci in order to reach more people is sport and celebrity partnerships. Here, the Gucci is a Feeling campaign features tennis player Jannik Sinner [14]. The campaign connects Gucci with sports, lifestyle, and celebrity culture. It offers other channels of exposure to the brand to those who would not necessarily have been customers of luxury fashion items.

Gucci also features the content of craftsmanship. Gucci in the Making: GG Marmont portrays five craftsmen creating a handbag. It has quilting, stitching and the Double G hardware. The video says that it takes more than seven hours of work and 152 steps to manufacture it [15]. Such details are interesting because they draw attention to the time, manual labor and skills used to create these products.

Gucci uses Instagram and TikTok to publish campaign photos, product stories, and short clips. The brand also replies to the comments by the audience. They help the brand in becoming more visible and create stronger connections with the general population.

4.3.2.3. Effects and exclusivity risks

The Primavera AI campaign can be considered as one of the possible threats in the digital communication of Gucci. The company also released promotional photos created by AI on Instagram. There were photos where a woman sat in a wood-paneled restaurant and a couple sat in a car. They resembled fashion editorials, and some official posts were marked as Created with AI. It resulted in people talking about it in terms of the so-called AI slop. A few visible comments questioned the appropriateness of the campaign based on the expected values of authenticity, originality and quality of a luxury brand [16].

Visual style was not the only problem that could be mentioned. There were other viewers who were concerned with the use of AI. They asked if AI-produced images were compatible with human creativity, skills, and artworks. It generated a rift between the image of Gucci as a luxury brand connected to innovative and artisanal qualities and the manner in which the campaign was perceived by some audiences.

The brand can be more accessible through the celebrity campaigns and direct interaction by Gucci. Nevertheless, the Primavera campaign demonstrates that visibility may turn into a threat when the content is not perceived as reflecting luxury values. Kapferer and Bastien [6] state that luxury brands cannot afford to adhere too much to the logic of mass-marketing since the meaning of luxury is based on rarity, symbolic differentiation and sense of distinction. AI does not necessarily lessen exclusivity. Some viewers of the campaign regarded the AI content as inconsistent with human creativity, craftsmanship and the quality that Gucci is supposed to have.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38845

5. Discussion

These findings suggest that accessibility and exclusivity need not be treated as opposing forces in luxury branding. The crucial point, though, is that accessibility does not mean making products more widely available or owned. Luxury brands instead need to distinguish between different kinds of accessibility. Social media can open up access to brand narratives, cultural meanings and experiential value, while exclusivity is preserved through restricted ownership, scarcity and craftsmanship. The real question, then, is not whether luxury brands should become more accessible, but how they can engineer selective forms of accessibility that deepen consumer relationships without eroding the symbolic distance on which luxury value depends.

Van Cleef & Arpels' Dance Reflections offers a useful illustration of how accessibility can be extended through cultural meaning rather than physical possession. The project is not primarily a vehicle for jewellery sales; instead, the brand puts its weight behind contemporary dance, artistic creation and cultural education. This aligns with Kapferer's contention that luxury value is built on heritage, cultural legitimacy and symbolic meaning rather than conventional commercial communication [6]. Cultural initiatives of this kind allow consumers to enter the symbolic world of the maison without gaining any greater access to owning its products. Social media, in turn, becomes a channel for circulating cultural narratives and brand values, fostering emotional connections while the exclusivity of ownership remains intact.

There is also a clear resonance here with Pine's experience economy thesis: the brand is staging meaningful experiences rather than merely dispensing product information [11]. Through artistic collaborations and cultural engagement, Van Cleef & Arpels deepens its emotional relationship with audiences and stretches brand associations beyond jewellery making. Read through customer-based brand equity framework [12], such activities enrich brand meaning by positioning the company as a cultural participant rather than simply a luxury retailer. None of this works, however, unless consumers perceive the cultural outreach as authentic. If these projects read as indirect marketing rather than genuine patronage, they can undermine cultural credibility and dilute brand authenticity. Accessibility reinforces exclusivity, in other words, only when it produces real symbolic value rather than mere exposure.

Gucci presents a rather different picture, one that exposes the risks of highly accessible digital communication. The brand's deployment of celebrities, entertainment content and cultural collaborations has undoubtedly raised its visibility and drawn in younger consumers. But this strategy also makes clear that higher engagement does not automatically translate into stronger luxury value. The problem is not simply that more people know the brand; it is that excessive familiarity can shrink the psychological distance that fuels luxury desire. When accessibility is driven above all by visibility rather than meaningful brand associations, the line between luxury and ordinary consumption starts to blur.

This is precisely the concern raised by Creevey et al. [8], who argue that luxury brands should offer controlled accessibility rather than unrestricted interaction. Digital innovation and consumer engagement can sharpen cultural relevance, but luxury consumers still prize authenticity, craftsmanship and human creativity as the wellsprings of luxury value. The rise of AI-generated content has made this tension more acute, since technological efficiency can sit uneasily alongside expectations of originality and artisanal making. Gucci thus shows that social media strategies built mainly around exposure and engagement can weaken luxury positioning when they lose touch with these foundational principles.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38845

Overall, these two cases show that accessibility in luxury branding is a multidimensional process, not a single lever to be pulled. Van Cleef & Arpels shows how brands can expand cultural and experiential accessibility while holding the line on ownership exclusivity. Gucci, by contrast, underscores the dangers of overexposure when accessibility becomes detached from symbolic distinction. The implication is that luxury brands should not be chasing maximum visibility on social media. The more productive path is selective accessibility — letting consumers engage with brand meanings while safeguarding the rarity, authenticity and exclusivity that give luxury its value.

6. Limitation

This study contrasts the way in which luxury brands strike a balance between access and exclusivity on social media. It also have several limitations. These limitations define the scope of the findings.

First of all, the study includes only two brands, namely Van Cleef & Arpels and Gucci. The choice of these brands was based on the fact that they have diverse social-media strategies. The findings cannot be extrapolated to represent the whole luxury industry, and other industries, such as hospitality, automobile, and beauty. The two brands can also be separated based on their product, pricing, brand history and demographic targeted by the brands. Therefore, the differences among them may not necessarily stem from the social-media strategy.

Secondly, the research paper is based on publicly accessible company reports, official social media posts as well as selected public comments. The comments might be the opinions of users who are more active, vocal, or critical. They do not represent the population of all consumers. These comments are utilized to illustrate observable audience reactions, but not the general view of consumers. Social-media actions and comments also cannot indicate sales and brand worth or overall business achievement. These findings are affected by various factors such as pricing, distribution, quality of the product and conditions in the market.

Finally, the study is conducted purely on the basis of publicly available information. It does not consider platform information such as demographic information of audience, viewing behavior, personal correspondence or VIP customer engagement. This type of information would have given a deeper understanding of the perception of accessibility and exclusivity among various groups of consumers. Future studies may involve using public social media analysis with consumer surveys, interviews, or internal brand data.

7. Recommendation

However, implementing selective accessibility also involves potential challenges that luxury brands must carefully manage. The main advantage of this approach is that it enables brands to increase consumer engagement on social media without sacrificing the symbolic distance that supports exclusivity. By providing access to cultural narratives, craftsmanship and brand experiences, luxury brands can connect with younger digital consumers while strengthening emotional relationships and long-term brand equity. This approach shifts consumer attention away from product availability towards the meanings, heritage and values associated with luxury ownership.

Nevertheless, selective accessibility requires careful strategic management because increasing digital engagement may create tensions with traditional luxury principles. Social media platforms are designed around openness, sharing and widespread visibility, which can make it difficult for brands to maintain rarity and symbolic distance. Even carefully controlled content can reach large audiences, meaning that accessibility must be managed through the type of access provided rather than simply the amount of exposure created. Furthermore, cultural and experiential strategies require

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38845

continuous investment in authenticity, creativity and long-term commitment. If consumers perceive these activities as purely commercial communication rather than genuine cultural contributions, the brand may lose credibility and weaken its symbolic value.

Therefore, luxury brands should adopt a balanced approach that focuses on selective rather than unlimited accessibility. Brands should use social media to communicate cultural meanings, craftsmanship and brand heritage while maintaining exclusivity through restricted ownership, scarcity and controlled access to products and experiences. The objective should not be to maximise visibility, but to create meaningful consumer participation in the brand's symbolic world while protecting the elements that make luxury desirable.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, luxury brands can increase accessibility on social media without undermining exclusivity by redefining accessibility itself. Rather than expanding access to products and ownership, brands should provide access to symbolic, cultural and experiential values that strengthen luxury meaning. Accessibility and exclusivity are not inherently contradictory; they only become conflicting when increased visibility results in greater availability and reduced distinction.

Although social media has challenged traditional luxury principles by encouraging openness and interaction, luxury brands do not need to abandon scarcity and distance. Instead, the key challenge is to manage the boundaries of access by engaging consumers with the brand's symbolic world while protecting limited ownership, craftsmanship and authenticity.

Therefore, successful digital luxury strategies should focus not on maximum exposure, but on building long-term brand meaning and desirability. Selective accessibility allows luxury brands to remain culturally relevant while preserving the rarity and exclusivity that define luxury value.

References

[1] Bain & Company, & Fondazione Altagamma. (2025). Finding a new longevity for luxury. https://www.bain.com/insights/finding-a-new-longevity-for-luxury/

[2] Wang, X., Sung, B., & Phau, I. (2024). How rarity and exclusivity influence types of perceived value for luxury. *Journal of Brand Management, 31*(5), 576–592. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-024-00359-8

[3] Shukla, P., Rosendo-Rios, V., Trott, S., Lyu, J., & Khalifa, D. (2022). Managing the challenge of luxury democratization: A multicountry analysis. *Journal of International Marketing, 30*(4), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031X221126925

[4] Nechaeva, O., Dasmi, C., Mazzoli, V., Vannucci, V., & Donvito, R. (2025). Scarcity in luxury brand digital communication: Unveiling its effect on consumer perceptions. *International Journal of Advertising, 44*(7), 1195–1226. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2024.2427516

[5] Kong, H. M., Witmaier, A., & Ko, E. (2021). Sustainability and social media communication: How consumers respond to marketing efforts of luxury and non-luxury fashion brands. *Journal of Business Research, 131*, 640–651. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.08.021

[6] Kapferer, J.-N., & Bastien, V. (2012). *The luxury strategy: Break the rules of marketing to build luxury brands* (2nd ed.). Kogan Page.

[7] Shukla, P., Rosendo-Rios, V., & Trott, S. (2025). Luxury: Where next? *Psychology & Marketing, 42*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22244

[8] Creevey, D., Coughlan, J., & O'Connor, C. (2022). Social media and luxury: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 24*(1), 99–129.https: //doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.1227

[9] Basile, V., Brandão, A., & Ferreira, M. (2024). Does user-generated content influence value co-creation in the context of luxury fashion brand communities? Matching inclusivity and exclusivity. *Italian Journal of Marketing, 2024*, 419–444. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43039-024-00103-9

[10] Van Cleef & Arpels. (2026). Dance reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels. https://www.vancleefarpels.com/bh/en/the-maison/articles/dance-reflections-by-van-cleef-and-arpels.html

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38845

[11] Pine, B. J., II, & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The experience economy: Work is theatre & every business a stage*. Harvard Business School Press.
[12] Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing, 57*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.2307/1252054
[13] Kering. (2026). ReconKering: True luxury, next luxury. https://www.kering.com/en/news/recon-kering-true-luxury-next-luxury/
[14] Kering. (2025). Activity report 2024. https://www.kering.com/api/download-file/?path=KERING_RA_24_ALL_EN_PP_c8132fd463.pdf
[15] Gucci. (2025, June 28). Gucci in the making: GG Marmont [Video]. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLpXkC7CU5g
[16] Francombe, A. (2026, March 30). The anti-AI slop playbook. *Vogue*. https://www.vogue.com/article/the-anti-ai-slop-playbook