



Department  
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# **The Power of Silence: Bottega Veneta's Social Media Abstinence**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the significance of social media as a marketing strategy in the luxury fashion industry, with a focus on Bottega Veneta case. It starts by describing social media and then investigates its influence on the fashion business. It also looks at the particular impact of social media on the luxury fashion industry and looks into alternative digital marketing strategies, like the concept of digitally improved in-store experiences. Bottega Veneta's case study highlights the brand's history, absence strategy from social media, and post-disappearance initiatives. Finally, the thesis assesses social media's important function in the luxury fashion sector and its significance in contrast to other techniques. Overall, this thesis contributes to a better knowledge of the dynamic interaction between social media and luxury fashion marketing techniques.

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## **Introduction**

Social media has become a vital part of our lives in today's digitally interconnected world, affecting how we communicate, engage, and consume information. This profound societal shift has had a dramatic influence not just on individuals, but also on sectors and corporations. The fashion industry, in particular, has seen a revolutionary impact of social media as a marketing technique, allowing firms to reach a large worldwide audience, communicate with customers in real-time, and develop a strong brand presence. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the significance of social media as a marketing strategy in the context of the luxury fashion sector, with a particular emphasis on the case study of Bottega Veneta.

The first chapter establishes the importance of social media as a marketing strategy. It begins by defining social media, which includes a variety of online platforms and mobile applications that promote user-generated content, social interaction, and information sharing. This section seeks to offer a complete overview of the various social media platforms and their essential qualities. The chapter then looks at the influence of social media on the fashion industry. Social media has altered the way fashion is consumed, discussed, and sold due to its capacity to transmit information quickly and connect with a worldwide audience. This section explores how social media platforms have become essential channels for fashion brands to showcase their products, create brand awareness, and connect with their target audience. The focus then shifts to the luxury fashion industry and the specific impact of social media within this niche segment. Luxury brands operate within a distinct market segment that values craftsmanship, exclusivity and aspirational lifestyles. This section looks at how luxury fashion brands navigate the digital environment, combining their traditional values with the opportunities and difficulties that social media presents.

The second chapter focuses on alternative digital marketing strategies that goes beyond social media, providing a comprehensive overview of digital marketing, covering a wide range of online tactics and channels. The aim is to differentiate digital marketing from social media marketing by emphasizing the various approaches and tools available to luxury brands in the digital realm. It then shifts the attention on innovative marketing strategies specifically tailored to luxury brand, considering the evolving consumer preferences, emerging technology, and shifting market dynamics. The exploration of innovative approaches outside social media enables an exhaustive evaluation of the marketing landscape for luxury fashion brands. Furthermore, the chapter investigates the concept of digitally enhanced in-store experiences. Physical retail spaces are facing new challenges as online shopping continues to grow. However, digital technologies enable the creation of immersive and personalized experiences within stores. This section looks at how luxury firms may use technology to enhance the in-store experience, using the benefits of both online and offline setting to engage customers and develop brand loyalty.

The third chapter presents the case study of Bottega Veneta, a well-known luxury fashion brand, to provide real-world insights into the interaction between social media and marketing strategies. The chapter starts with a historical overview of the brand, tracing its origins, important milestones, and positioning within the luxury fashion market. The focus then shifts on the Bottega Veneta's disappearance from social media, a bold strategic move that drew a lot of attention and speculation. The reasons behind this departure are discussed, as well as the implications for the brand's marketing efforts. The last section explores the brand post-disappearance strategies implemented and evaluates their effectiveness in maintaining brand appeal and relevance.

Finally, through the comprehensive examination of social media as a marketing strategy, alternative digital marketing approaches, and the case study of Bottega Veneta, this thesis aims to provide useful insights into the dynamic relationship between social media and luxury fashion marketing. Ultimately, it seeks to address the fundamental question: are social media indispensable for luxury fashion brands, or can alternative strategies fulfill their marketing objectives in an ever-changing digital landscape?

# CHAPTER 1: The Importance of Social Media as a Marketing Strategy

## 1.1 Defining Social Media

In today's society social media constitute a big part of the majority of people routines. Many people are influenced by trends, news, and pass most of the day updating their platforms. It is particularly difficult to give a definition of what social media are, especially because many people believe all the web can be considered as a social.

We can say that social media refers to the various digital platforms and tools that allow people to interact and share content with each other online. The term encompasses a wide range of platforms, including social networking sites, microblogging sites, blogging sites, video-sharing sites, and messaging apps. These platforms have transformed the way people communicate and interact with each other, and have become an integral part of modern society. Social media has facilitated the creation of new online communities, and has enabled people to share their thoughts, experiences, and opinion with a global audience. However, the rise of medias has also raised concerns about privacy, the spread of misinformation, and the potential negative effects on mental health and social relationships. As such, social media is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that requires careful consideration and analysis.

During the COVID-19 in 2020, as people were forced to stay home, people suddenly realized how important it was to have a sustainable social network online.<sup>1</sup> Social media became vital for both marketers and consumers; brands couldn't survive without a comprehensive social media and digital marketing strategy. It come as no surprise that the pandemic has led to a surge in social media consumption, with 72% of individuals reporting an increase in their usage.<sup>2</sup> A significant 43% of individuals state that they are sharing and posting more content on social media platforms to remain connected with their loved ones, undoubtedly due to the lockdown. While the importance of social media is already well-established, the challenge lies in determining which social media applications to utilize effectively allocate time and effort.

Frédéric Cavazza describes the media environment as a very dense ecosystem where different players live in symbioses<sup>3</sup>, providing us with a graph divided into pies and layers to make it easier for us to understand and read this sector. It is fundamental to specify that this graph provides us with data reflecting western countries, and it does not take into consideration eastern countries markets like Russia, China or Japan.

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<sup>1</sup> Gismondi, A. (2021, December 9). *Top 27 Social Media Apps for Your 2021 Strategy*. Kubbc.

<sup>2</sup> Wold, S. (2021, May 20). *COVID-19 is changing how, why and how much we're using social media*. Digital Commerce 360.

<sup>3</sup> Cavazza, F. (2016, August 30). *Social Media Landscape 2012*.

The author puts three major players, Facebook, Twitter and Google +, in the central circle since they provide users with a very large set of functionalities. He then divides the ecosystem into categories defined by the different usage provided by the social.

The first category that Cavazza identifies focuses on the socials that provide a publishing service, with blog engines like WordPress and Blogger which offer users the ability to express their ideas and opinions. Wiki platforms like Wikipedia, as well as lifeblog services such as Tumblr, allow collaborative content creation and sharing. Social Q&A sites like Quora provide a platform for users to ask and answer questions and exchange knowledge.

Sharing is another key activity on social media platforms, with dedicated online services for videos (such as YouTube), pictures sites (like Instagram), links (Delicious and Digg), products (as seen on Pinterest), music (such as Spotify), and documents (including SlideShare and Scribd). These platforms offer users the ability to share and consume a wide range of content, making social media a powerful tool for both self-expression and community building.

Playing is also a significant part of social media, with major game developers like Zynga, Playdom, SGN dominating the market. Dedicated platforms like Hi5, as well as smaller but innovative editors like Digital Chocolate and Kobojo, provide users a variety of gaming experiences that can be enjoyed alone or with others.

Networking is another important function of social media, with platforms catering to both professional and personal connections. Professional networking sites like LinkedIn enable users to connect with colleagues and industry peers, while personal networking sites like Netlog and MySpace offer a way to connect with friends and family. Platforms like MyYearBook and Classmates cater to those seeking to reconnect with former acquaintances.

Buying is an emerging function of social media, with customer intelligence platforms like Bazaarvoice offering insights into customer behavior. Purchase sharing platforms allow users to share their shopping experiences, while recommendation platforms offer personalized product recommendations.

Finally, localization-focused social media includes mobile applications which enable users to share their location. And connect with others in their area. Socialized city guides like Yelp or TripAdvisor provide users with recommendations for local business and services, while event or venue-focused platforms help users stay informed about upcoming events in their area.

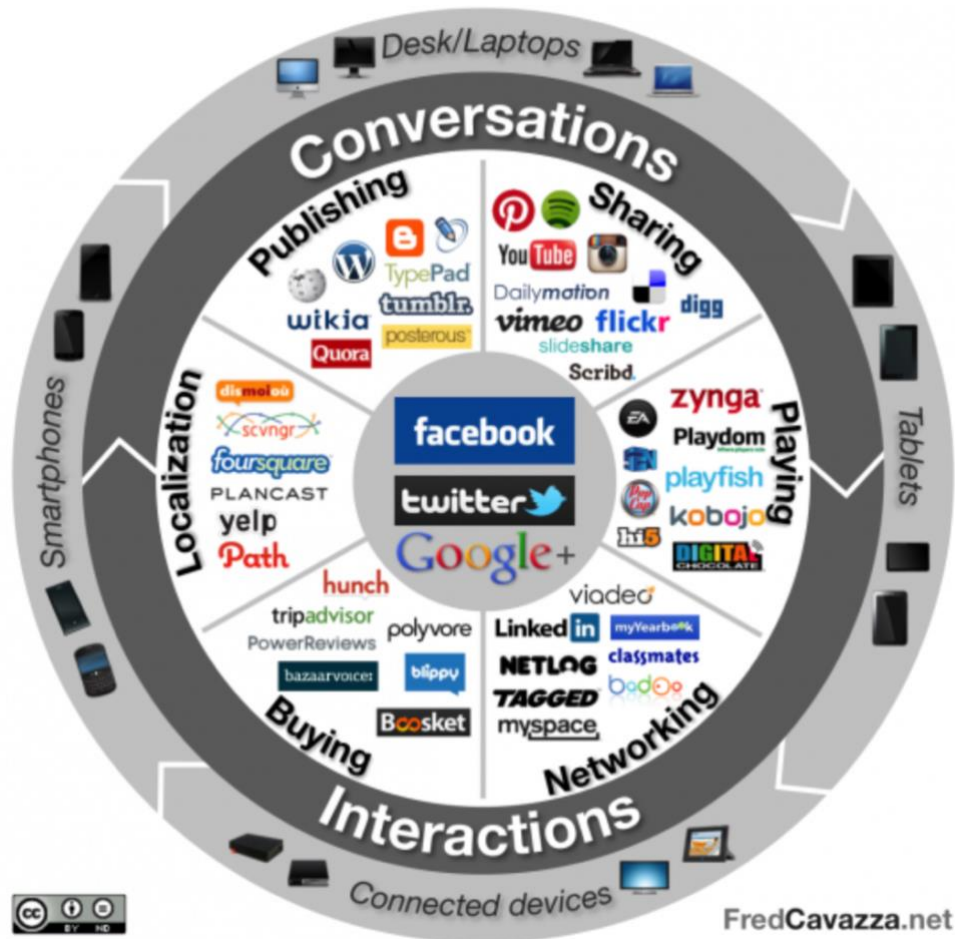


Figure 1 - Cavazza, F. (2016, August 30). *Social Media Landscape 2012*.

Given this definition of social media, and an overall overview of its landscape, it is normal to question which platform is best for your brand or business. As we know, this ecosystem lacks stability, and opting for one or several platforms cannot be regarded as a sustainable strategy in the long term, it should be seen as a short term tactic.<sup>4</sup>

The most significant aspect of establishing a social media presence for your brand is not solely centered on selecting the most appropriate platform. Rather, it revolves around creating a stable and coherent social architecture. The process of integrating your brand into social media does not solely involve selecting one or multiple social platforms and creating profiles. It involves identifying objectives and allocating resources strategically. The selection of a platform is merely a tactical manifestation of your overall strategy. Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge that the social platforms that are truly sustainable in the long run are the ones that you host and manage. Hence, it is critical to evaluate the effectiveness of a social media platform in the context of your brand's unique requirements and goals.

<sup>4</sup> Cavazza, F. (2012, March 12). *An overview of the social media ecosystem*. Forbes.



Building a consistent social architecture entails developing a clear vision, allocating appropriate resources, and evaluating performance consistently. By doing so, your brand can establish a strong and sustainable social media presence that aligns with your overall marketing objectives.

## 1.2 Social Media Impact on the Fashion Industry

The emergence and widespread adoption of social media platforms have significantly impacted the fashion industry in recent years. As we know social media has the ability to connect people from around the world and share millions of information within seconds. An impact of this phenomenon on the fashion industry is the acceleration of fashion trends, which results in a faster adoption of new styles.<sup>5</sup> Before the existence of social media, a particular style or brand might have taken years to travel from one country to another. Instead, nowadays this process happens overnight. This translates into trends going in and out of style at a rate faster than ever. Usually, the faster a particular piece of clothing becomes a trend, the faster it falls out of style. These have allowed customers to not only broaden their clothing collections, but also to renew them rapidly. Across nearly every apparel category, consumers keep clothing items about half as long as they did 15 years ago.<sup>6</sup>

Social media has brought about another contrast where buyers are shaping trends more than ever. With the power of influencers and small accounts, a single post can create massive demand. Rather than designers and retailers initiating trends based on their latest releases, it is now the consumers who are setting trends themselves, and retailers must urge to rapidly react and meet the resulting demand.<sup>7</sup>

The fashion industry has been heavily impacted by TikTok, a renowned worldwide social media application, which has emerged as one of the most dominant platforms in the past few years. The short-form video app has given rise to a new wave of viral fashion trends that spread like wildfire among the user base. These appear on the users FYP (for you page) and can feature anything from clothing haul to styling inspiration.<sup>8</sup> The majority of these viral video are created by users, rather than influential people. This explains the big popularity of this mobile application. Indeed, the majority of platform users, accounting for over 60%, belong to Generation Z, with a significant purchasing power exceeding \$150 billion, hence why brands are naturally eager to strengthen their connections with this particular target audience.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson, R. (2021, April 24). *HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECTS THE FAST FASHION INDUSTRY | THE UNTITLED MAGAZINE*. THE UNTITLED MAGAZINE.

<sup>6</sup> Remy, N., Speelman, E., & Swartz, S. (2016, October 20). *Style that's sustainable: A new fast-fashion formula*. McKinsey & Company.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, R. (2021, April 24). *HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECTS THE FAST FASHION INDUSTRY | THE UNTITLED MAGAZINE*. THE UNTITLED MAGAZINE.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, S. (2021, December 2). *How TikTok is influencing fashion retail*. TheIndustry.Fashion.

<sup>9</sup> Gilliland, N. (2021, August 20). *'TikTok made me buy it': How the video-sharing platform is influencing fashion retail*. Econsultancy.

Cassandra Russel, who is the Head of Fashion, Luxury, Beauty, and Retail Brand Partnerships at TikTok, stated that “TikTok is all about creativity and self-expression, which has huge synergies with the fashion industry. As the community continues to creatively interpret trends in new ways, conventional style rules are challenged, and real originality is born on the platform”.<sup>10</sup> The fashion industry is always looking for new and innovative ways to showcase their products and reach a wider audience, and TikTok provides a perfect avenue for that. With millions of users worldwide, fashion brands have the opportunity to connect with a global audience and engage with potential customers in a way that was not possible before.

Another strategy that retailers have adopted on the platform is the engagement of influencers. These kinds of partnerships are a natural choice for many fashion brands, with some using this strategy alongside paid ads to generate both brand awareness and sales.<sup>11</sup>

Social media has also influenced the rise of social commerce, a revolutionary approach to e-commerce as it integrates the buying and selling process into people’s daily lives and fosters a sense of community and connection. Social commerce has opened up new opportunities for both big and small brands, as well as individuals looking to create their own brands. This shift has been especially beneficial for small business and entrepreneurs, who now have access to vast markets that were previously out of reach. This impact is transforming the retail industry, as we are now seeing a shift from large retailers selling to mass markets, to millions of individuals and small businesses selling to one another within an expansive social commerce ecosystem. This change in math has created a more level playing field, with small brands and entrepreneurs now having the ability to compete in a market that was once dominated by a few big players. The result is that big brand will continue to face growing competition from thousands of smaller businesses.<sup>12</sup>

According to Accenture researchers, the social commerce opportunity is set to expand significantly in the coming years. With a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 26%, the social commerce market is anticipated to surge to \$1.2 trillion by 2025, indicating a substantial growth potential for businesses operating within this domain.

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, S. (2021, December 2). *How TikTok is influencing fashion retail*. TheIndustry.Fashion.

<sup>11</sup> Gilliland, N. (2021, August 20). *‘TikTok made me buy it’: How the video-sharing platform is influencing fashion retail*. Econsultancy.

<sup>12</sup> Murdoch, R., Wright, O., Grant, K. F., Collins, K., & McCracken, L. (2022, January 2). *The future of shopping and social commerce*. Accenture.

### 1.3 Social Media Impact on the Luxury Fashion Industry

Luxury brands provide high-end products or services that are associated with exclusivity, exceptional quality, craftsmanship, design, and prestige. They are often associated with a specific lifestyle or identity, and their price point is significantly higher than that of mass-market brands. Luxury brands typically have a strong heritage and reputation, and their marketing strategies often focus on creating a sense of scarcity and desirability. For this reason, at first luxury brands were reluctant to adopt social media as their marketing strategies. Their main fear was that the use of social media, available to everyone at any time, could damage the image, and concept, of exclusivity that luxury focuses on. Social media is often seen as a necessary rather than an exciting opportunity to reach, attract and retain customers.<sup>13</sup>

Due to the unique nature of the industry, luxury fashion brands cannot employ the same marketing strategies as non-luxury or premium companies, even with the increased customer awareness provided by social media, luxury brands are unable to tailor their strategies and products to meet the demands of their customers. It is essential for a company to maintain its brand image and integrity, and hence, they should not take into account the customers' demands if they are not aligned with the company's vision.<sup>14</sup> It is crucial to understand that luxury brands have a different approach to advertising. Instead of being solely focused on sales, their primary objective is to maintain the image of exclusivity and aspiration associated with their brand. SMM (Social Media Marketing) strategies for luxury brands is more about creating an experience for the audience, one that will reinforce the sense of luxury, rather than persuading them to make a purchase.

To benefit from the internet and engage with consumers who are constantly connected, luxury fashion brands need to balance exclusivity with accessibility.<sup>15</sup> Kemp suggest that social media provides a direct means of communication with consumers, allowing businesses to gain a better understanding of their needs and preferences.

One way for luxury brands to have success on social media is to focus on visual storytelling. In the last years, with the development of new technologies, there has been a shift in the consumer behavior with respect to ways in which they assimilate information.<sup>16</sup> Nowadays 91% of consumers prefer visual and interactive

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<sup>13</sup> Marnewick, G. (2022, December 5). *Luxury Brand Social Media Strategy: Effective Guide and 5 Mistakes That Should be Avoided*.

<sup>14</sup> Giglioli, S. (2014). *The Impact of Social Media on Luxury Fashion Brands*.

<sup>15</sup> Kemp, M. (2009, July 23). Luxury brands must balance accessibility and exclusivity. *New media age*.

<sup>16</sup> Dayan, Z. (2018, April 2). *Visual Content: The Future Of Storytelling*. Forbes.

content above traditional script-based media.<sup>17</sup> This is why many businesses are attempting to meet the increasing demand for visual content.<sup>18</sup>

But what is the best platform for luxury brands to successfully tell their story through visual content? As Tenille Kopiasz, the Senior Vice President of Marketing at Parfums Christian Dior, states “The best way for luxury brands to inspire consumers has always been through storytelling. As Instagram is a visual storytelling platform, the link is a natural fit”.<sup>19</sup> Instagram is a great platform for SMM since it offers a large number of global consumers. Over 500M use Instagram every day, making it a great platform to build strong relationships with all kinds of communities, from fashionistas, travel lovers to high-end consumers. 58% utilize this social to remain current on the latest trends, fashion, and to stay informed; 49% track brands on the platform to feel a closer connection to the brand; 51% monitor celebrities to see which luxury brands they are wearing; 56% rely on Instagram to view brands’ latest collections. A recent study<sup>20</sup> showed that 65% of people who use Instagram and magazines prioritize Instagram for finding inspiration, while 57% chooses magazines instead of the platform for finding reliable information. Unlike traditional media, Instagram is an updated, interactive, and personalized resource that connect people when and where they want. This means that luxury brands can build a constant dialogue with the people who have a strong affinity with them. Also, the people who will one day spend large sums, the future wealthy, are some of the most active luxury followers on Instagram<sup>21</sup>. That’s why luxury brand keep an eye on them. Even though future influencers may not have the purchasing power of global luxury consumers, they share common habits related to media and shopping. They follow luxury brand and industry influencers and aspire to their lifestyles and purchases. This gives them a window into the world of luxury that did not exist before the birth of Instagram and makes them feel part of an exclusive club.

Lastly, also in this industry, TikTok plays a fundamental role making it a great tool for luxury brands to utilize. Due to Covid’s impact on in-person events, numerous luxury and designer fashion brands opted to stream their runway show online instead. This trend reached its peak during TikTok’s inaugural virtual fashion month in September 2020.<sup>22</sup> The hashtag #TikTokFashionMonth went viral during the fashion week, with the platform broadcasting two events per week featuring luxury brand including Saint Laurent, Louis Vuitton and Dior. Altogether, the live streams garnered more than three million views.<sup>23</sup> This has a huge impact on fashion retail, given that the platform provides accessibility and interactivity to fashion events, which increases interest

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<sup>17</sup> Anderson, B. (2015, August 19). *B2B Marketers Leverage Interactive Content For Relevant Buyer Experiences*.

<sup>18</sup> Dayan, Z. (2018, April 2). *Visual Content: The Future Of Storytelling*. Forbes.

<sup>19</sup> Instagram (2017) (n.d.). <https://business.instagram.com/a/insights/luxury>

<sup>20</sup> Source “*Print and Pixel Study*” by Kantar Millward (Facebook-commissioned study of 3,068 people ages 18-55 in the US)

<sup>21</sup> Source “*Instagram Passions*” by Coherency (Facebook-commissioned study of 1,662 people ages 18–65 in the US)

<sup>22</sup> Gilliland, N. (2021, August 20). *‘TikTok made me buy it’: How the video-sharing platform is influencing fashion retail*. Econsultancy.

<sup>23</sup> TikTok. (2020, November 4). *That’s a wrap! A look back at the first-ever #TikTokFashionMonth*. Newsroom | TikTok.

in both the industry and the brands that produce such content.<sup>24</sup> In addition, it has afforded a younger demographic, who may not have had access to runway shows otherwise, the opportunity to enjoy a front-row seat via the platform they use most often, which in turn provides luxury brands with a means to connect with this audience.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, S. (2021, December 2). *How TikTok is influencing fashion retail*. TheIndustry.Fashion.

<sup>25</sup> Gilliland, N. (2021, August 20). *'TikTok made me buy it': How the video-sharing platform is influencing fashion retail*. Econsultancy.

## CHAPTER 2: Digital marketing, Alternative Strategies to Social Media

### 2.1 What is Digital Marketing

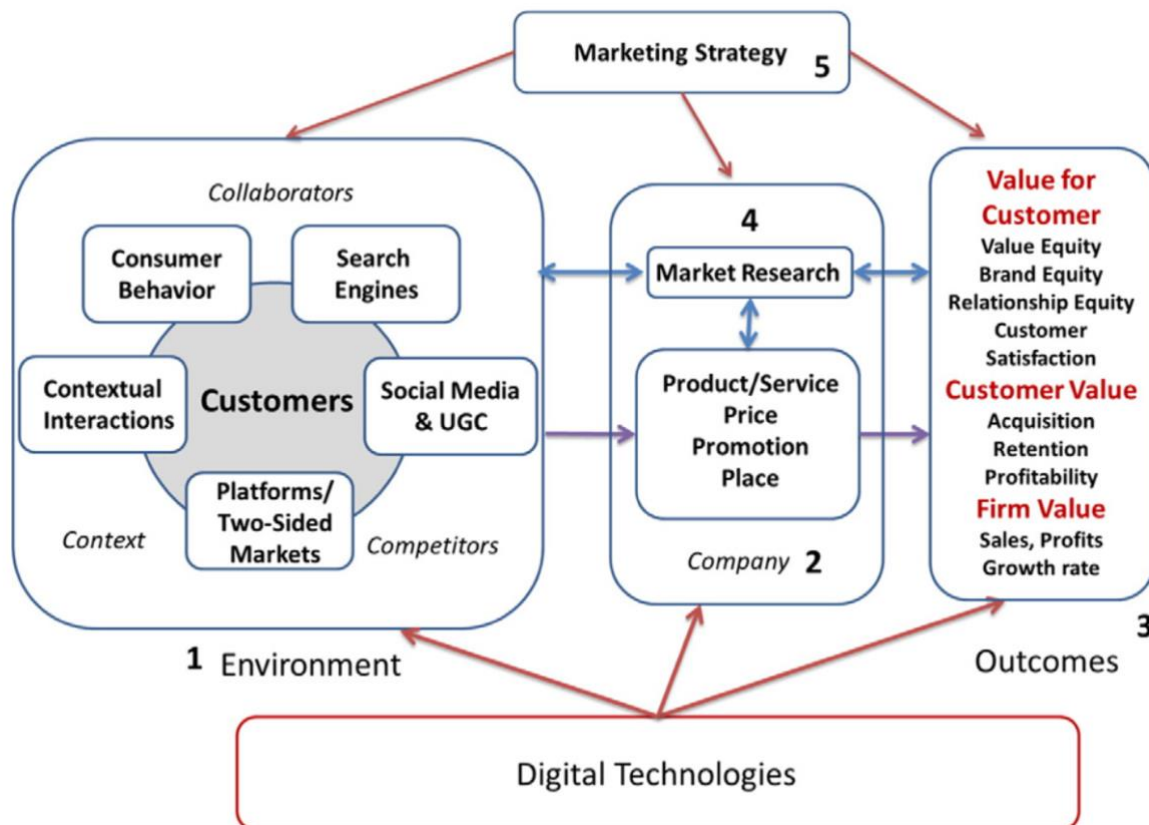
It is particularly difficult to define the term “digital marketing”, especially because of the ample technologies that marketers incorporate into their strategies. Digital marketing can be seen as the creation, communication, and delivery of value for customers and other stakeholders using actions, institution and processes made possible by digital technologies.<sup>26</sup> Dr Dave Chaffey says that digital marketing involves applying technologies which form online channels to the market, such as websites, social media, e-mail, database, mobile and digital TV, recognizing the strategic importance of these technologies and developing an organized approach to reach customers through digital and traditional communications. This approach is useful for gaining a better understanding of our customers’ profiles, behaviors, values, and loyalty drivers allows us to create integrated, targeted communications and online services that are tailored to each customer’s needs.<sup>27</sup>

To further understand this complex term, the researchers K.P. Kannan and H. A. Li developed a useful framework (Fig. 2) which outlines the essentials point of contact within the marketing process and strategies that are currently being affected or expected to be influenced by digital technologies. Additionally, the framework emphasizes our focus on discovering digital marketing concerns that will have direct or indirect impact on the company.

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<sup>26</sup> Kannan, P., & Li, H. (2017). Digital marketing: A framework, review and research agenda. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 34(1), 22–45.

<sup>27</sup> Chaffey, D. (2019, October 23). *Digital marketing definition - What is? - Digital marketing Glossary*. Dr Dave Chaffey: Digital Insights.



*Figure 2 - The Framework for Research in Digital Marketing - Kannan, P., & Li, H. (2017). Digital marketing: A framework, review and research agenda. International Journal of Research in Marketing*

This framework helps us comprehend how digital technologies are altering the business environment and overcoming the information gap between buyers and suppliers. Accessibility to a wide range of technologies and devices is changing consumer behavior, which has ramifications for businesses in terms of customer expectations, information acquisition in terms of quality and affordability, the search process, and customer expectations. Through online media, word-of-mouth, online reviews and ratings, and social media engagements, these digital technologies enable customer-customer interactions. Platforms are institutions developed through digital innovations that facilitate collaboration and use digital technologies to link a company to its market. Search engines serve as venues for businesses to collaborate with one another and engage in direct competition for customers.

Digital technologies are also changing the concept of product in three ways to provide customer new value propositions. They are adding digital services to the core product, connecting products together via digital technology, and changing products into digital services. Through e-mail, display ads, and social media, digital environments offer new ways to reach people and advertise goods and services. Additionally, digital technology may have an impact on results in a variety of ways, adding value for customers and removing value for the company.

Last but not least, marketing research is concerned with the collection and analysis of data produced by the use of digital technologies in order to comprehend the specific aspects of the environment, activities, and consequences that influence the marketing plans of the company.<sup>28</sup>

As we now have a deeper understanding of what digital marketing is, and how digital technologies impact the marketing strategies of businesses, we can underline the advantages and disadvantages of implementing such strategies.

Undoubtedly, the use of digital marketing enables firms to engage with customers effectively, to be more attuned to their needs and perceptions, and to be adaptable and flexible to changes in the external environment. Its high level of interaction, which enables interactive engagement with customers, and creates a dynamic environment that can alter based on user choices and interests, is one of its main advantages. Digital marketing also aids in removing geographical limitations, allowing businesses to instantly connect with customers anywhere in the world. Marketing professionals may track and analyze consumer behavior and create profiles as a result of the high degree of measurability of outcomes they have attained. This facilitates easier customer segmentation and targeting for more effective results. The convenience of receiving information about goods and services from the comfort of their homes is another benefit that comes with personalized advertising messages for consumers. Through social networks, businesses may connect with more users, drive more traffic to their websites, and engage with customers directly to foster a sense of trust and get their feedback.

Also, digital marketing is a good choice for start-ups and small to medium-sized businesses because it involves less investment than traditional methods. Overall, the development of new business models and tactics is made possible by digital marketing, making it a crucial part of any company's marketing strategy.

As we've seen, digital marketing has lots of benefits, but it also has some very important drawbacks that companies need to be aware of. One of the biggest disadvantages of digital marketing is that it exposes businesses to their competitors, who may easily imitate their strategies and trick customers to gain market share. Another drawback is that developing relationships with customers online necessitates understanding their psychology, which marketers sometimes ignore, resulting in less successful campaigns.

In addition to that, customers can become irritated by excessive online advertising and negative reviews, which can adversely harm a company's online reputation. Also, a lack of customer trust, improper digital use, and a reliance on technology can result in technical problems, making it challenging for marketers to stay up to speed with information and select the best tools for their campaigns. Furthermore, it's crucial to focus on content rather than merely technological solutions when developing digital marketing strategies and to

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<sup>28</sup> Kannan, P., & Li, H. (2017). Digital marketing: A framework, review and research agenda. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 34(1), 22–45.



coordinate them with the business's entire marketing plan. Finally, not all goods and services adapt themselves to digital marketing, and it may be difficult or ineffective to reach particular target markets.

In conclusion, in order to function effectively and efficiently, digital marketing initiatives must be seen as depending on a company's overall marketing development strategy. Then and only then will they be in a position to fully utilize information and communication technology in order to boost their economic performance and competitiveness.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.2 New Marketing Strategies for Luxury Brands

Luxury firms should take into account a number of aspects before launching their digital marketing initiatives. Their digital marketing strategy should be tailored with a clear understanding of their target market in mind. Additionally, by employing a tone, vocabulary, and graphics that reflect their brand philosophy, their digital marketing methods should be in line with their brand identity and values. To prevent their digital marketing techniques from compromising their brand image, they must also maintain exclusivity. Personalization is another crucial element, and luxury brands may use data-driven insights to produce individualized experiences and content that appeal to their target audiences.

Knowing the digital opportunities that are available is the first step towards digital excellence. Klaus Heine and Benjamin Berghaus<sup>30</sup> provides us with an overview of the key digital luxury brand-consumer touchpoint and their corresponding digital working areas.

The first, and most important, working area is the brand website. A luxury brand's website is an essential component of its online presence because it acts as the initial point of contact for affluent customers looking for information about the brand. Luxury consumers have high standards for luxury websites, especially in terms of aesthetics. The website can be considered as a brand-building tool that represents a brand's goals and narrative and serves as more than just a digital business card. Large businesses develop a digital hub with micro-pages for individual items, sub-brands, countries or campaign along with blog, an in-house social brand community, and an online shop, while smaller brands focus on providing an overview of products, collections and brands stories. The benchmark of excellence for a luxury industry digital hub is Chanel.com, providing clear overviews of popular topics of interest and links to micro-pages, the Chanel News blog, and social media. Chanel uses brand storytelling to explain its brand identity, drawing on sources such as the company's founder, CEO, employees, opinion leaders, working partners, customers, and products. The life and vision of founder

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<sup>29</sup> Veleva, S. S., & Tsvetanova, A. (2020). Characteristics of the digital marketing advantages and disadvantages. *IOP Conference Series*, 940(1), 012065.

<sup>30</sup> Heine, K., & Berghaus, B. (2014). Luxury goes digital: how to tackle the digital luxury brand-consumer touchpoints. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 5(3), 223–234.

Coco Chanel is explained through a series of videos with hand-drawn black and white animations that captivate users with their beauty and sophistication.

Closely related to the website working area there is the one of the search engine optimization (SEO), which aims at increasing website traffic by enhancing exposure on popular search engines. SEO refers to the organic ranking of a website just below paid search ads on various search engines like Google, Bing, or DuckDuckGo. Unlike paid search ads, which charge per click to be in the sponsored area, SEO focuses on achieving a higher position in search results for searches that align with user intent. When users click on your website's organic listing, you don't have to pay the search engine for that click. This makes SEO a highly efficient and often the most profitable method to generate new leads and driving sales for a business.<sup>31</sup>

Going on, although less exciting than more modern techniques, direct mailing have been a traditional marketing tool for quite some time, they still offer a significant opportunity for effective customer relationship management. The idea behind consistent mailings is that customer will associate and remember a brand better, the more touchpoints it establishes with them. Indeed, frequent and engaging direct mailings can serve as a key strategy for building brand awareness, raise brand awareness, and generate leads. By providing customer with regular updates about new products, services, promotions and other relevant content, direct mailings can help foster a sense of trust and loyalty among customers, resulting in higher sales and revenues. Consequently, it's critical to not undervalue the possibilities of direct mailings in a comprehensive digital marketing strategy.

Online advertising is viewed as a more aggressive method for customer acquisition on channels where the target audience is active, while websites serve as a defensive digital gateway. An example of effective online advertising is BMW's Jumping Jack campaign for its xDrive models. In this campaign, rather than using typical images of mountain or streets, it utilized the analogy of a jumping jack with independent extremities. This campaign involved banner ads with an interactive element that invited viewers to pull on the jumping jack with their mouse. This resulted in an exceptional click-through rate. This example shows how online advertising can be combined with viral marketing strategies, and it emphasizes the need for businesses to concentrate on developing innovative, compelling campaigns that add value for their target audiences and encourage them to spread the message. As a result, online advertising should be viewed as a creative and successful consumer acquisition tool rather than a traditional communication instrument.

Brand communities are another important marketing strategy in the luxury industry. A brand community refers to a distinct group of individuals who share common interest and admiration for a particular brand. This community is not limited by a physical geographic location and revolves around a specific branded product or

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<sup>31</sup> Crain, G. (2023, February 7). SEO: What It Is And Why It's Important. *Forbes*.

service. Similar to other communities, it is characterized by shared understanding, established rituals and traditions, and a sense of ethical responsibility.<sup>32</sup>

A notable example of a luxury brand community that is managed in-house, is [theartofthetrench.com](http://theartofthetrench.com) by Burberry. This community invites customers to share their personal stories and photos related to the iconic Burberry trench coat, and the brand regularly chooses and features their favorite submissions on the website's homepage. As a result, a gallery of photos showcasing the unique sense of style of customers from all over the world is produced. Additionally, brand communities can be directed towards particular customer base sub-segments. For example, Mercedes has established a private community called [generationbenz.com](http://generationbenz.com) with the goal of connecting with Generation Y customers.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, social content communities, which enables the preservation and sharing of media content, are a useful tool for digital luxury marketing. Digital channels should be considered by marketers as an addition to their toolkit, and an in-depth digital strategy should be built as part of their entire brand management plan, requiring an involvement of top management in the development of this strategy. The aim of social content communities is that it encourages brand-consumer interactions, but also facilitates consumers to communicate with one another. Another important aspect is that marketers need to be aware that, with or without their participation, the digital world is already talking about their brand. Maximizing positive consumer-to-consumer interactions and media coverage on third-party platforms including blogs, web forums, review sites, and online magazines, should be the goal of social campaigns. The importance of consumer-driven and third-party touchpoints is highlighted by various studies showing that purchase decisions are strongly influenced by independent third-party reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations from family and friends. For this reason, instead of self-promotion, it is advised that business owners engage someone else to speak on their behalf, because source credibility is a significant factor in persuasion.

Mobile and tablet apps are growing in importance in the last few years, becoming a crucial area of focus for digital luxury marketing. However, as shown by the negative user reviews of the Gucci Style App, it is not sufficient to just develop an app and jump on the trend.

“Whatever you do in luxury, you should do it right”<sup>33</sup> so developing apps that reflect great luxury and quality is essential for a brand to keep its reputation. In addition to giving customers a seamless luxury experience, tablet apps are being employed as salesperson help at the point of sale (POS). While tech enthusiasts could find this appealing, there is a danger of over-digitalization. So, when creating digital marketing strategies that appeal to luxury consumers, it's important to strike a balance between technological innovation, authenticity, and usefulness.

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<sup>32</sup> Muñoz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand Community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412–432.

<sup>33</sup> Heine, K., & Berghaus, B. (2014). Luxury goes digital: how to tackle the digital luxury brand–consumer touchpoints. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 5(3), 223–234.

The last working area that Klaus Heine and Benjamin Berghaus analyzes is the one of e-commerce. While some managers prefer to rely on personal relationships, well-known luxury shops set the bar for developing intimate and individualized customer interactions. For example, Chanel uses digital channels to maintain its brand, but wants to drive customers to their stores since they don't believe that the internet fashion retailing meets the standards of a shopkeeper experience. However, by providing extensive personal shopper programs and quick customer supports it is possible to bring e-commerce closer to the shopkeeper's standard, proving that digital interactions can still feel personal and attentive.

### **2.3 Digitally Enhanced In-Store Experience**

The main goal of the luxury in-store experience is to provide customers with a premium shopping experience. The sense of exclusivity, sophistication, and elegance is what luxury shops strive to achieve in their stores. This experience may include special touches like attentive staff, personalized customer service, exclusive products, and an overall environment that matches the brand's image of luxury.

The development of new technologies, and the search for unique experiences by customers, is pushing brands to develop new type of stores, implementing technologies and various activities, to stand out from the crowd.

The typical store, which serve as the ultimate representation of a luxury brand, is the Flagship store, which offer a comprehensive customer experience in large facilities situated in the most famous city centers. These stores are owned and operated by the luxury label; they supply solely a single brand with a complete range of products on offer. The purpose is to provide customers with a total brand experience, not only to provide them with a location to purchase the brand's products. A clear example can be found with the Ralph Lauren's Fifth Avenue, New York, flagship store, which has an internal restaurant where clients can shop and eat. This enables customer to fully immerse in the Ralph Lauren world.

On the other hand, concept stores provide a distinctive shopping journey that immerses the customer in the world of the brand. The goal is to evoke a sense of exploration and discovery through a variety of suggestions, drawn from both the wide range of products on display and the environment's architectural design.

In addition, Maison's have recently been opening new types of stores including pop-up stores located in unexpected and secret locations offering unique items at reasonable costs. Similarly, temporary stores with unspecified opening and closing times, thereby encouraging shoppers to make immediate purchases. A further innovation is the shop in shop, which is a specific retailer store related to a brand, completely autonomous, that is located within another store. Multi-brand stores, instead, provide a platform for growing brands to receive visibility alongside established luxury brands.

While flagship and concept stores were originally seen to be the ultimate luxury shopping experience, the rise of the internet and digital devices has resulted in the rapid evolution of online platforms as a sales channel. Thus, to deliver an efficient shopping experience, luxury brands have established a mixed retailing model that comprises both physical stores and virtual shops. The online channel provides mono-brand virtual shops that can be operated directly by the manufacturing company or through skilled consultants, and this allows customers to participate in a virtual brand experience by viewing videos, photos and product assortments. In addition, the expansion of the online channel has encouraged fashion companies to establish an omnichannel or Retail 4.0 strategy that provides integrated and interchangeable distribution channels for searching, ordering, purchasing, delivery and returns. In this way the e-commerce websites serve as the consumer's initial point of contact and complements the physical store by encouraging visits and enabling mobile experiences.<sup>34</sup>

But how can brands improve the in-store experience embodying new technologies? To better address this question, it is useful to first provide a definition of the Phygital concept. First of all, the term "Phygital" refers to the connection between the physical and digital world. The goal of this concept is to establish a connection within the marketing communication ecosystem, bridging the gap between brands and consumers, as well as between users and the products. The phygital concept includes the latest avant-garde knowledge and technological developments in communication, which are then applied within the physical environment.<sup>35</sup> This concept has transformed the way businesses interact with their customers. The employment of instruments connected with this notion has made marketing communication considerably more dynamic, faster, and pushes human perception to its limits. Phygital is frequently referred to as an omnichannel customer experience since it offers multi-channel strategy to selling a product or service while ensuring a smooth customer experience. This method not only improves the customer experience but also build the relationship between businesses and their customers.

There are several technologies used in-store by the fashion industry in order to improve the shopping experience for customers. These technologies include beacon technology, which transmits special coupons in real time with the help of Bluetooth connection. RFID technology displays price information and available color for products that are picked up or moved on information screens. Wi-fi can provide several customer data, when they connect to it, such as the number of consumers and their movements to assist in identifying their interests and determining if they are new or returning clients. QR codes on the other hand, can link client

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<sup>34</sup> Cabigiosu, A. (2020). Digitalization in the Luxury Fashion Industry. In *Palgrave advances in luxury*. Springer International Publishing.

<sup>35</sup> Dominika Moravcikova and Jana Kliestikova, " Brand Building with Using Phygital Marketing Communication," *Journal of Economics, Business and Management* vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 148-153, 2017.

to a company websites, photographs, video, promotions, or events by storing digital information. Near Field Communication (NFC) technology enables wireless payments and data exchange between devices.

Consumers can also access product catalogs, dedicated content, and movies on digital kiosk, which can also record consumer presence at the point of sale. Interactive dressing rooms allows consumers to view each product variants and share their fitting with friends for instant feedback. In addition, body scanning allows shoppers to digitally try on products, creating a 3D model that can be reused across different stores. Also, passers-by can interact with interactive showcases through visual, tactile, or audio interaction, which helps to strengthen the brand's identity.

Going on, innovative features that digitize the customer buying experience can be provided through virtual reality and augmented reality technologies. Virtual reality uses a computer-generated environment to immerse people in simulated world, whereas augmented reality uses a headset or mobile device to overlay virtual information onto a live camera feed, allowing consumers to experience three-dimensional visuals.

To alter how luxury goods and services are sought and bought, the fashion industry is using modern technology in a variety of ways. Companies must now have effective e-commerce systems, be active on social media, and please customers who demand experiential purchases. LVMH, for example, has made several investments in innovative start-ups that have developed digital mirrors for changing looks in virtual dressing rooms.<sup>36</sup>

As a result, the digital world is influencing changes in business models, distribution channels, and product development.

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<sup>36</sup> Cabigiosu, A. (2020). Digitalization in the Luxury Fashion Industry. In *Palgrave advances in luxury*. Springer International Publishing.

## CHAPTER 3: Bottega Veneta Case

### 3.1 History of the Brand

Bottega Veneta is an Italian luxury brand founded in 1966 by Michele Taddei and Renzo Zengiaro in Vicenza, Veneto. In the 1960s and 1970s, the brand became an expression of high quality, discrete elegance, and craftsmanship, and it achieved success as an outcome. After Zengiaro left at the end of the 1970s, the brand was handed over to Laura Braggion and her second husband, Vittorio Moltedo, who was the brand's creative director. Moltedo boosted the brand's early success in the United States by opening the first store in New York in 1972 along with working as an assistant to Andy Warhol, who produced the short film "Bottega Veneta Industrial Videotape" in 1985.

In 1995 Edward Buchanan, after graduating from Parsons School of Design, joined Bottega Veneta as design director and was tasked with creating the first ready-to-wear collection of the brand alongside Laura Moltedo. The brand's first fashion show was held in October 1998 at Palazzo Serbelloni. Buchanan left after six years to create his own brand with another Bottega Veneta alumna Manuela Morin, and Giles Deacon joined the design team for a year.

In May 2001 the Moltedos left Bottega Veneta shortly after Gucci Group<sup>37</sup> acquired it, and Patrizio di Marco was hired from Céline to join Bottega Veneta as chief operating officer. He was then appointed to CEO the following month, and Tomas Maier was hired as the brand's creative director, setting up the foundations for Bottega Veneta's comeback.

The German-born Maier reshaped Bottega Veneta's image in an era of luxury branding gone wild. He created a refined, realistic, and constantly evolving signature look for the brand that was not influenced by trends. Bottega Veneta's woven leather bags, best known as Intrecciato,<sup>38</sup> became a signature item, and Maier used the strength of the brand's artisans as well as the cultural heritage of the region to create a lifestyle label. Maier preferred sophisticated designs that promoted individualism, thus the brand's tagline "When your own initials are enough"<sup>39</sup> appealed to his vision.

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<sup>37</sup> The retail conglomerate Pinault-Printemps-Redoute (PPR), now known as the luxury group Kering. <https://www.kering.com/it/>

<sup>38</sup> At the time sewing machines were not able to work with leather materials. Bottega Veneta's artisans needed to use extremely fine leather to fit the thin needles. In order to make leather goods strong enough, the artisans cut the leather and entwined it into the famous intrecciato pattern. Source: <https://stillinfashion.com/when-your-own-initials-are-enough/#:~:text=In%20the%201970s%2C%20the%20company,for%20the%20company%20in%201980s.>

<sup>39</sup> Early brand tag line advertisement, 1970s.

Di Marco task was repositioning Bottega Veneta in the luxury market, and his clear vision along with determined execution paid off. In six years, after restructuring its global organization and distribution, the brand's revenues increased more than ten times over. Di Marco leaved the company in 2009 to take over as CEO of the Gucci brand.

His successor was Marco Bizzarri, that became the president and CEO of Bottega Veneta in January 2009. Even if his entrance in the company coincided with the global recession, he was still able to guide the brand trough a further period of growth. Bizzarri kept on building the brand on discreet luxury and craftsmanship, constructing new offices in Milan and investing in the company's human resources introducing new headquarters to its staff in 2013. Bottega Veneta's headquarters resides in the majestic 18<sup>th</sup>-century Villa Schroeder-Da Porto in the Veneto area of northern Italy. The property received the Green Building Council's LEED Platinum Certification, making Bottega Veneta the first Italian company to achieve that level in the fashion and luxury market. The structure included the atelier, management and administrative offices, precious hide storage, 5.000 bag archives, a museum, a restaurant and its own school of artisan. Bizzarri also drove expansion in Asia and extended the brand's retail footprint, including the opening of a flagship store in Milan.

In 2014, Bizzarri assumed the role of CEO for Kering's newly established Couture and Leather Goods division, giving him full supervision of a significant portion of the company's luxury brands. His successor was Carlo Alberto Berretta, who was appointed CEO of Bottega Veneta in January 2015 and left a year later succeeded by Claus-Dietrich Lahrs, at a time when the brand was impacted by the luxury downturn, with many analysts lamenting the lack of product innovation, an over-reliance on Chinese and tourists' clients, and limited brand awareness in developed markets.

In 2018, after 17 years, Maier left Bottega Veneta. Under his creative leadership, the brand's income increased from 48 million euros in 2001 to nearly 1.2 billion euros in 2017.<sup>40</sup> Despite its success, the brand began to struggle again as demand in its primary market of Asia declined and it failed to reach a Millennial audience. His successor was Daniel Lee, previously creative director of ready-to-wear at Céline. Lee helped to revitalize the brand by infusing new youthful energy into its collections. He introduced fresh designs, particularly in accessories, like the signature Pouch bag, the Cassette bag and the Lido sandals, that immediately became best-sellers. Lee also used unique disruptive marketing techniques, such as deleting the brand's Instagram account and hosting traveling fashion shows in unconventional locations including London, Berlin and Detroit.

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<sup>40</sup> Zargani, L. (2022, March 1). Bottega Veneta Through the Years. *WWD*.



Bottega Veneta went through a period of growth and financial success under Lee's leadership. However, Lee unexpectedly left the company in November 2021, which was seen as a layoff given the complex personality of the designer. Despite this setback, the brand continued to grow under the leadership of CEO Bartolomeo Rongone, who contributed to 24.2 percent increase in revenue in 2021 over the previous year. Rongone has also worked to increase the brand's exclusivity by eliminating all markdowns and streamlining the brand's wholesale accounts.

Following this decision, Kering selected Mathieu Blazy, former Bottega Veneta design director, as the company's new creative director, who is expected to keep Lee's New Bottega aesthetic. Bottega Veneta shows returned to Milan under Blazy. Furthermore, the company has announced plans to relocate its headquarters to Milan's San Fedele Palace by the end of 2023.<sup>41</sup>

In conclusion, Bottega Veneta's history is one of reinvention and triumph. From its humble beginnings as a small leather goods company in Vicenza, the brand has evolved into a global luxury powerhouse known for its timeless designs and dedication to quality and craftsmanship. While the brand has faced several challenges and changes over the years, its ability to adapt and evolve has kept it relevant and successful in an ever-changing industry.

### **3.2 Disappearance from Social Media**

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Bottega Veneta disappeared from the social media landscape, especially Instagram, the most followed platform of the brand with over 2.5 million followers. This revolutionary decision triggered a broad debate in the fashion world, with many opposing points of view.

Although this decision impacted all the western world, it did not follow the same path in China. This is because in Asia social media are fundamental for each business, specifically China is the biggest social media market in the world. It is estimated that over 850 million Chinese people use internet, which represent 60% of the entire population, and this number keeps growing, resulting in an increase of 18% between 2019 and 2020 only. In China, social media are not a trend, they are an essential component of life. Thus, "if you delete your social media you do not exist anymore for the Chinese consumers".<sup>42</sup> For this reason, Bottega Veneta's Weibo, WeChat, and Little Red Book accounts remained active, since the more frequently you appear on Chinese consumers phone, the more they will remember and trust your brand.

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<sup>41</sup> Puchkov, M. (2022). The Story Of The Brand: Bottega Veneta. [www.lofficiel.cy](http://www.lofficiel.cy).

<sup>42</sup> GMA. (2021, January 19). Bottega Veneta Shut Down its Social Media. . . Except in China. *Fashion China*.

The CEO of Kering, François-Henri Pinault, after the social world was shocked by the strategy adopted for the brand, provided an explanation for Bottega Veneta's separation from social media. Pinault stated that "regarding its digital communication strategy, it's not disappearing from social networks – it's merely using them differently. Bottega has decided, in line with its positioning, to lean much more on its ambassadors and fans by giving them the material they need to talk about the brand through various social networks, by letting them speak for the brand rather than doing it itself. [...] In order to be very complementary, we don't want to replicate the same thing at every brand. Bottega has had a very specific positioning for years, which is now being reinforced".<sup>43</sup>

Since Daniel Lee was appointed as creative director of the brand, it was clear that Bottega Veneta would have adopted a "strategy of absence".<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Lee never owned a personal Instagram account. He is known for his strict privacy, rarely participating in interviews or offering context for his upcoming collections. Lee has also made a point of limiting the audience for his exhibitions, for example the Spring/Summer 2021 collection, which had been maintained in the tightest secrecy for months before being made public, was showcased in a private viewing at London's Sadler's Wells Theatre. The event was only accessible to a selected group of celebrities and industry insiders like Kanye West, Stormzy, Neneh Cherry and others, and no phones were allowed during the event to avoid any risks of photographs leaking.<sup>45</sup> This exclusive approach to showcasing his works is a way to merge experiential luxury with the allure of a secret society.<sup>46</sup> This method contrasts significantly with that of other luxury brands, which used social media to directly broadcast their shows in 2020 in order to conform to Covid-19 limitations.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, a survey of 500 luxury industry executives provided by Forbes<sup>48</sup> further strengthens the decision of Bottega Veneta. The survey indicated that social media is failing to satisfy luxury firms' expectations for the third year in a row. Despite spending money, resources and time on social media, only 30% of luxury companies rated Instagram as "very effective", with Facebook at 16% and Pinterest, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, WeChat and TikTok obtaining even lower ratings. According to this results, social media failed to generate qualified leads for luxury products and services.

Advertising and marketing firms that represent luxury companies anticipate that clients will increase their expenditure in internet/digital, mobile, and email marketing, while decreasing their spending in all other

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<sup>43</sup> Salamone, L. (2021). Bottega Veneta explained its disappearance from social media. *Nss Magazine*.

<sup>44</sup> Salamone, L. (2021a). Bottega Veneta never left Instagram. *Nss Magazine*.

<sup>45</sup> Snowden, H. (2021). Why Bottega Veneta's Social Axe Is More Than Just a PR Stunt. *Highsnobiety*.

<sup>46</sup> Salamone, L. (2021a). Why did Bottega Veneta disappear from all social media? *Nss Magazine*.

<sup>47</sup> Snowden, H. (2021). Why Bottega Veneta's Social Axe Is More Than Just a PR Stunt. *Highsnobiety*.

<sup>48</sup> Danziger, P. N. (2021, January 7). Bottega Veneta Shutting Down Its Social Media Accounts Might Signal A Trend. *Forbes*.

media. Interestingly, advertising and marketing executives have a different perspective on social media than luxury firms, with nearly two-thirds (63%) saying that Instagram is very effective for their clients, and 40% believing Facebook is, and only 10% of firms evaluated Twitter as effective for clients. This implies that each group assesses effectiveness in a different way. Traffic, likes, and shares are important for agencies, whereas luxury brand are more concerned about making revenue through social media. Thus, we can say that the ineffectiveness of social media in attracting the right customers to a luxury brand can be attributed to the over-promising and under-delivering nature of these platforms, and because of that, Bottega Veneta's decision to exit social media could be a start of a new trend.

Furthermore, according to Kering's financial press statement,<sup>49</sup> Bottega Veneta's revenues increased significantly during the first quarter of 2022. Despite a high comparative basis, sales reached €396 million, a 21% increase as reported and a 16% increase on a comparable basis. Similarly, sales increased by 59% compared to the first quarter of 2019. This growth was led by strong results in directly operated stores, particularly in Western Europe, North America and Japan, where sales increase by 18% on a comparable basis. On a similar basis, Bottega Veneta's wholesale channel, which is also being optimized, contributed to a sales increase of 10%. These results show that the absence of a social media presence has had no major impact on Bottega Veneta's sales performance.

In summary, for Bottega Veneta, maintaining an active presence on social media seems unnecessary in an age where social media can bring about both positive and negative outcomes. Indeed, the brand prefers to take a cautious approach and minimize their online footprint.<sup>50</sup> Bottega Veneta is merely curating its marketing messages in a way consistent with its branding by withdrawing from social media, and other brands are expected to follow the company's footsteps. Moreover, people who can purchase luxury goods, such as the products made by Bottega Veneta, may not spend much of their time to social media content. They lead busy lifestyles and are already exposed to a multitude of advertisements. They expect luxury firms to understand their demands, exhibit respect and tailor each interaction to their preferences. As a result, flooding their social media feeds with irrelevant posts is not an efficient way to achieve these objectives.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the brand departure from these platforms might allow it to liberate its considerable digital marketing budget for other innovative projects that more directly engage actual spending customers.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Kering 2022 Financial Document. [https://www.kering.com/assets/front/documents/KERING\\_DF\\_2022\\_US.pdf](https://www.kering.com/assets/front/documents/KERING_DF_2022_US.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Salamone, L. (2021c). Bottega Veneta never left Instagram. *Nss Magazine*.

<sup>51</sup> Danziger, P. N. (2021, January 7). Bottega Veneta Shutting Down Its Social Media Accounts Might Signal A Trend. *Forbes*.

<sup>52</sup> Iredale, J. (2021, November 2). Why Bottega Veneta Will Eventually Return to Social Media. *Town & Country*.

### 3.3 Post-Disappearance Strategies

Bottega Veneta's decision to exit social media has prompted the luxury brand to implement changes to their marketing strategy. Instead of relying on their own social media accounts, the brand is utilizing word-of-mouth marketing and influencer marketing. The decision to erase its social media accounts is an ambitious move that may be interpreted as a method to promote their brand through stealth luxury.<sup>53</sup> By depending only on their fans to sell their products via word-of-mouth and influencer marketing, the brand may achieve a mysterious and exclusive appeal, making it more desirable to consumers. Bottega Veneta products may become items that pop up organically depending on consumer taste by removing the corporate account and leaving only the fans to promote the brand, rather than being promoted through typical corporate channels. This method may result in more authentic and organic brand growth, as well as higher levels of customer involvement and loyalty.

The move by Bottega Veneta to erase its social media accounts is an attempt to capitalize on the power of word-of-mouth marketing. According to this strategy, if a client posts a picture or a comment about Bottega's products on social media, the information will spread more naturally than if the firm posts on its official account. Bottega seeks to develop a more authentic and engaging relationship with its audience by depending on customer feedback and reviews, which could lead to increased brand loyalty and sales. Indeed, after the brand left Instagram, several fan accounts, (also known as brand communities, see Chapter 2.2) dedicated to displaying the brand's work, emerged on the platform. Notable accounts such as @bottegabenetaworld with 223 thousand followers and the most popular one, @newbottega curated by Laura Nycole, which has over 1 million followers, including high-profile fashion icons such as Alexa Chung and Virgil Abloh. These accounts all include curated mood boards of Bottega Veneta's prior campaigns as well as user-generated content, similar to how top celebrities tag official brand accounts on their posts. Thus, the brand even after quitting social media, it still has presence on Instagram, with about 2.3 million posts using the has tag #BottegaVeneta and 144 thousand photos with the hashtag #BottegaVenetaBag. Furthermore, on TikTok, video with the hashtags #BottegaVeneta and #BottegaVenetaShoes have had over 207.3 million and 6 million views, respectively. Professor Benjamin Simmenauer of Institut Français de la Mode stated that "you have to make the difference between having an Instagram account and being on Instagram. Not having an official page does not mean that Bottega Veneta will no longer be present. The brand will stop producing social networking content, but the community, the fans, the clients will continue to post, there will still be unofficial accounts, hashtags".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Tashjian, R. (2021, January 5). Why Did Bottega Veneta Delete Their Social Media? *GQ*.

<sup>54</sup> Luxus. (2021, January 7). *Can luxury do without social networks?* Luxus Plus.

According to Edelman<sup>55</sup>, a marketing consulting business, the majority of customer between the ages of 18 and 34, or 63%, trust what influencers say about brands more than what brands say about themselves in advertising. This emphasizes the significance of influencer marketing, particularly among younger groups. These findings imply that influencers have a major impact on customer purchasing decisions and can be more effective than traditional methods of advertising in promoting companies. But, as explained by Bottega Veneta's spokesman, the term "influencer" does not apply to social media influencers who are paid to wear and promote a brand's items. In reality, the firm does not provide its items to influencers or celebrities. The brand only sends thank you gifts to editors and on rare occasion to intimate friends of the house. Certain e-tailers, such as Net-A-Porter, matches.com, Farfetch, may have had agreements with influencers to advertise Bottega Veneta's products on their sites, which may have contributed to a spike in sales.<sup>56</sup>

A further marketing strategy developed by the brand includes the launch of a digital magazine. This innovative approach seeks to engage their audience and collaborators in new ways. The quarterly periodical, named "Issued", provides readers with more than simply editorial shoots; it also includes film that enhance the storytelling of their products. Bottega Veneta is demonstrating their commitment to offering their clients with an exceptional experience that goes beyond standard marketing methods, by exploring new possibilities for brand engagement. Daniel Lee explained to the Guardian, the reasoning behind this decision: "Social media represents the homogenization of culture. Everyone sees the stream of content. A huge amount of thought goes into what I do, and social media oversimplifies it. There is a mood of playground bullying on social media which I don't really like. I wanted to do something joyful instead. We are not just a brand, we are a team of people who work together, and I don't want to collude in an atmosphere that feels negative".<sup>57</sup> The first issue includes a music video for Missy Elliott's in which she is dressed head to toe in Bottega Veneta and photographed by Derek Blanks. According to Lee, the content was designed with the goal of holding the audience's attention for an extended period of time, similar to a film. Among other things, the first issue includes a series of black-and-white GIFs by photographer Danielle Neu showcasing the fashion designer Barbera Hulanicki. Additionally, there is a brand-new interpretation of the brand's footwear by Elaine Constantine, as well as captivating footage of the British parkour group Storrer reaching over rooftops.<sup>58</sup>

Going on, Bottega Veneta's experimental approach has sparked interest in the fashion industry with their latest strategy: the eye-catching out-of-home advertisements. The luxury firm has spent the last years investing in innovative ways to promote their products that goes beyond traditional marketing approaches.

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<sup>55</sup> *Only One-Third of Consumers Trust Most of the Brands They Buy*. (2019, June 18). Edelman

<sup>56</sup> FIDES AKHSAN, Muhammad; KORONAKI, Eirini. The Impact of Luxury Brand's Social Media Disappearance towards Product Marketing: The Case of Bottega Veneta. *Asian Journal of Research in Business and Management*, [S.l.], v. 4, n. 3, p. 258-272, sep. 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Cartner-Morley, J. (2021, March 31). Bottega Veneta ditches Instagram to set up "digital journal." *The Guardian*

<sup>58</sup> Neira, J. (2021). bottega veneta launches digital magazine 'issue 01' following its disappearance from social media. *Designboom | Architecture & Design Magazine*.

In September 2021, gigantic images of the new advertising campaign have appeared on the rooftops of warehouses near the Los Angeles' LAX airport, strategically placed there so that only people flying off and landing could see them. The subjects, which include the dancer Roberto Bolle and the musician Arca, are also visible in the dark thanks to neon lights that defined the shapes of the endorsers.<sup>59</sup>

Also, in January 2022, the brand displayed an installation on the Great Wall of China. This exhibit included not only the prominent display of Bottega Veneta's name and logo, but also incorporated the Chinese characters “新春快乐”, which means Happy New Year.

The installation utilized a combination of Bottega Veneta's signature green color and a vibrant tangerine shade of orange, which was purposefully chosen by the company due to its auspicious symbolism in the Chinese culture as a representation of luck. The Kering-owned brand also made a donation to the Shanhai Pass, one of the Great Wall of China's major passes and its easternmost stronghold. It also ran a Chinese New Year advertisement that included the same color of orange as the installation.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Williams, R. (2021, November 19). Bottega Veneta Sports Campaign on Rooftop Near LAX. *The Business of Fashion*. /

<sup>60</sup> Pearl, D. (2022, January 12). Bottega Veneta Hosts a Brand Takeover On the Great Wall of China. *The Business of Fashion*.

## Conclusion

The strategy of absence from social media of Bottega Veneta can be seen as a risky move, but it also comes with potential benefits. One advantage is that younger generations, who grew up with social media, are becoming increasingly more concerned with social issues and thus they are more likely to support brands that share their same values. This is supported by a report which found that 83% of millennials are interested in brands that align with their values, and about two-thirds of millennials say they have boycotted a brand that took the opposing view on an issue.<sup>61</sup> Another benefit is that it can help overcome the consumer exhaustion given by aggressive advertising practices. Millennials and Gen Z have been overexposed to this kind of advertising, and they often don't trust businesses and prefer peer recommendations over a company website or social media.<sup>62</sup> Thus, by limiting their presence on social media, Bottega Veneta can avoid overexposure and build customer trust. This may result in a brand image that is more solid and genuine, which may provide competitive advantage in the crowded fashion luxury market.

However, there are also some downsides to this strategy. Firstly, many customers before making a purchase decision, will search a brand's official social media account to find all the information such as the materials, the price, the available colors, and without a presence in those platforms, the flow of the purchase may become more complicated discouraging potential customers. Indeed, according to GlobalWebIndex, 54% of social media users use social media to research products and 71% are more likely to purchase products based on social media referrals.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, targeting younger generations via social media is a crucial step, because they are the future of luxury purchasing and are more likely to use the platforms for research. A study showed that Gen Z will account for 45% of global luxury purchases by 2025,<sup>64</sup> demonstrating the need for luxury brands to utilize social media to "plant" their values on the platform.<sup>65</sup>

The strategy adopted by the brand started to raise the important question of whether luxury brands can operate successfully without social media. As mentioned in Chapter 3.2, Forbes survey showed that luxury brands are having trouble turning their social media following into sales, and as a consequence of this, businesses are faced with the choice of investing resources to establish stronger relationships with offline customer, the ones

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<sup>61</sup> Kitterman, T. (2020, December 14). *Report: 83% of millennials want brands to align with them on values - PR Daily*. PR Daily.

<sup>62</sup> Caïs, C. (2021, July 15). *Luxury Brands And Social Media: When Less Is More*. *Forbes*. 4

<sup>63</sup> Barysevich, A. (2020). *How social media influence 71% consumer buying decisions*. *Search Engine Watch*. /

<sup>64</sup> Statista. (2021, November 1). *Gen Y and Z share of global personal luxury good market in 2017 and 2025*. /

<sup>65</sup> FIDES AKHSAN, Muhammad; KORONAKI, Eirini. *The Impact of Luxury Brand's Social Media Disappearance towards Product Marketing: The Case of Bottega Veneta*. *Asian Journal of Research in Business and Management*, [S.l.], v. 4, n. 3, p. 258-272, sep. 2022.

who actually spends money into their products, or concentrating on expanding their social media presence in order to maintain their relevance online.<sup>66</sup>

Some brands started approaching the idea of stepping away from social media, in a different way than that of Bottega Veneta. Several big names in the fashion and beauty industry, including Balenciaga, Kylie Cosmetics, and KKW Beauty, have recently employed a strategy of wiping their Instagram accounts ahead of a promised rebrand. This action has the potential to attract both consumer and industry attention, which can be a valuable commodity for businesses. However, it is a high-risk proposition because brands may see a drop in sales while competitors remain active online. While larger brands may be able to shoulder the risk, smaller brands without the backing of a conglomerate or celebrity may be unable to temporarily forego their social media platforms. Furthermore, in order to pull off the disappearing act, brands must outline a specific timeline of exit and reentry, be transparent with customers, and pay attention to details, other than a new logo or product.

Despite the threats, the benefits of deleting a social media account before rebranding can include more time to launch a rebrand cohesively and more traffic to a brand's website, where it can collect valuable consumer data that is lost on social media. In addition, when luxury firms opt to delete their social media profiles, they run the danger of being regarded as a publicity stunt. This is especially true when there is a minimal communication around the rationale for a dark period. Stunt marketing is typically incompatible with the image that luxury firms aim to portray, and may even alienate existing customer who were loyal to the old brand identity. To alleviate these worries, firms might issue an honest statement ahead of the social media break, emphasizing to customer that the activity has a genuine purpose. By doing so, brands can solve any doubts and reinforce the message, while maintaining transparency and build trust with their customers, ensuring they remain loyal to the company through the transitional period.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the challenges posed by social media, brands and marketers must still find ways to establish direct connections with their customers. While it may not be possible for them to abandon these platforms completely, they can take a back-to-back approach (or its modern-day equivalent). Utilizing email marketing, messaging, and loyalty programs that promote consumer interaction above savings is one example. These strategies do not rely on advertising platforms owned by tech giants, allowing brands to have greater control over their messaging and consumer interactions.<sup>68</sup>

In conclusion, we can say that it is possible to exist without social media, as demonstrated by Bottega Veneta's ability to boost sales despite disappearing from social media. However, it is realistic to assume that not all

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<sup>66</sup> Shaw, S. (2021). The Bottega Veneta Experiment: What Happens When Fashion Goes Offline? – Social Media. *L'Officiel USA*.

<sup>67</sup> Mondalek, A. (2022, March 3). The Art of Going Dark on Social Media. *The Business of Fashion*.

<sup>68</sup> Mondalek, A. (2021, November 19). Should Fashion Break Up With Big Tech? *The Business of Fashion*.



brands will be able to follow suit.<sup>69</sup> According to Watson, an assistant professor of marketing at New York University Stern School of Business, on social media our persuasion knowledge is activated, meaning that we are aware that marketers are trying to sell something to us, but reaching people on other platforms might surpass that. This approach, however, will not work for every brand. Brands with low brand awareness and consumer loyalty may suffer, but those with strong word-of-mouth referrals and other ways of reaching their community may increase perceived exclusivity and authenticity by removing themselves from social media, making consumers feel closer to the brand because it isn't attempting to communicate with everyone.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the strategy adopted by Bottega Veneta could potentially mark the beginning of a new trend for luxury fashion brands. However, it is important for brands to carefully evaluate their unique brand image and the specific consumer demographics they wish to target. Only then they can determine whether it is the right move for them to undertake in an ever-changing digital world.

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<sup>69</sup> FIDES AKHSAN, Muhammad; KORONAKI, Eirini. The Impact of Luxury Brand's Social Media Disappearance towards Product Marketing: The Case of Bottega Veneta. *Asian Journal of Research in Business and Management*, [S.l.], v. 4, n. 3, p. 258-272, sep. 2022.

<sup>70</sup> Webb, B. (2021, November 22). Lush is quitting social media. The start of a trend? *Vogue Business*.

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