

COLUMNS

## New kind of prestige: Ueber-brands

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*Supreme/Louis Vuitton collection 2017*

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As we embarked on extensive research into what drives the sustained success of certain premium-priced brands for our latest book, we confirmed a big shift in how the need for and expression of prestige through brands manifests itself across categories and countries.

Old rules of prestige brand making price, provenance, precious materials are still present, but new ones have established themselves next to them, sometimes in defying opposition.

Classic categorizations such as "luxury," "premium" or "mass" are in flux, with new ones such as "affordable luxury," "masstige" or "super-premium" coming and going. How do you define a Supreme, the brand that sells limited-edition fashion and apparel items at outrageous prices to skateboarders or rather those who want to feel like those cool members of the skateboard, hip-hop, punk rock and youth culture scene? The average skateboarder hardly has the money to buy these items.

What do you call it when Damien Hirst puts his art on one of their boards or when Louis Vuitton launches a Supreme collection that outdoes the classic in hype and price? We are living through times of change, experiencing a lot of contradiction in our marketing- and branding-dominated worlds, but also excitement and intrigue.



*Supreme/Louis Vuitton collection 2017 lookbook*

A new kind of prestige has emerged and with it a new kind of marketing is taking hold, with new mantras, mechanisms and a new language.

Of course, much of this is about evolution rather than revolution. Maybe that is how it seems to have crept up on brand builders on either side of the luxury-to-mass spectrum, striking many as a revelation today.

Brands without distinguished family trees appropriate strategies that were supposed to pertain to luxury brands as Jean Noel Kapferer would define them in his book (Kapferer, 2009).

Supreme sells, but through a very select number of mostly own stores, including its Webstore, of course. Established luxury brands act in less expected ways, venturing into previous no-go areas such as social media with gusto.

Embracing digital technology and social media is famously credited for the turnaround of British luxury brand Burberry.

The very "haute jouailler" Chaumet rocked its brand and audience with a teasing "**Double Take**" of the "Jeune et Jolie" actress Marine Vacth just after she made a splash at Cannes for playing a teenage prostitute in the film, "Young and Beautiful." What an unconventional way to rejuvenate a firmly conservative luxury jeweler.

*Chaumet: The Double Take by Marine Vacth*

This new mixing of models makes for a rather motley crew, ranging from long-established and rarefied Herms craft to popular behemoth Red Bull soda, from small but high-minded Aesop beauty products and activist Patagonia outdoor gear to rather fun and funky Mini cars, living and breathing prestige in modern ways as they are growing in categories and at price points as diverse as their generational or cultural appeal.

Which is why we coined the new term "ueber-brands." Their prestige extends beyond traditional notions as they set new standards for this very old concept that takes our hearts and minds and their markets on a journey into the future. They are a cut above the rest in a word, they are "ueber," German for "above and beyond."



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UEBER-BRANDS project prestige less through high prices and celebrating themselves as rarefied, but more so by evoking pride and aspiration through ideals and ideas wrapped in mythical storytelling. Less by building exclusivity through extreme restraint and scarcity, but by mixing these with a dose of inclusivity, sometimes even allowing for ubiquity, astutely balancing exclusion with connection.

And, third, less through push advertising and more by living brand-specific convictions and radiating them from the inside, not afraid to confront uncomfortable realities rather than glamming it all up. Still telling stories of dreams come true, probably even more than ever, but more as truths enhanced rather than realities faked.

#### **Sidebar: Why the term ueber-brands?**

Why call this new breed of premium brands "ueber-brands?" It was the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who coined the term "ueber-mensch" (loosely translated as "super-man") in his 1873 masterpiece "Also Sprach Zarathustra."

The term describes someone the German "mensch" is appropriately gender-neutral who is willing to take risks to try and advance humanity beyond personal benefit and comfort. He or she establishes new values that influence the lives of others, inspiring and guiding them to a higher level, self-determined instead of being driven by external authority or sheer opportunity.

And that is exactly what strong brands do today, especially modern prestige ones. They have increasing social and cultural significance. They are no longer just beacons of status or building blocks of our identities. They are morphing into mythical fixtures and leaders, sometimes creating movements not unlike religions or political parties. They have created and become narrative constructs that inspire our public discourse, provide meaning to rally around or to reject, influencing and often guiding our lives, not just materially or functionally but emotionally, ethically and even spiritually.

Apple is the classic ueber-example, having built a cult not only around its superior design and innovative products, but ultimately its mission of making technology for the creative class. It has enshrined this mission into a myth, starting with the iconic commercial, "1984," officially aired once during Super Bowl XX and establishing Apple as the David against the then-Goliath, IBM. A hammer-swinging youngster runs into a hall filled with brain-washed lemmings enraptured by Big Brother talking down on them, shattering the gigantic screen and crushing the whole aura and power of the establishment at the same time. That very instant, a countercultural icon was born.

Although Apple has now become the establishment itself and most customers now do not even know about that commercial anymore, the spirit of the brand still lives, beguiling and guiding us to "Think Different" and re-inventing the way we shop electronics, listen to music or use watches on the way.

Apple has stayed true to its archetypal character and that is why we have stayed true to them, enjoying the benefits of a well-catered lifestyle while still feeling a bit like the creative rebels we once were or always wanted to be.

It is this attitudinal promise that made Apple the ultimate ueber-brand and us loyal, happily paying more for products that are not always "technically superior." Apple continues to inspire and guide us at least for now.



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