The Flavor of Marketing:
How Food is Revolutionizing Luxury Brand Communication

CAPSTONE THESIS BY ALOISA RUF

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ADVISOR: PROF, JUDITH PROWDA

COVER PAGE ART BY OSCAR CALLEJA

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Abstract

This thesis explores how food operates as a cultural, psychological, and strategic instrument within the global luxury industry. Drawing from art history, marketing theory, and sensory studies, it traces how societies across Europe, the Middle East, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States have long used food to express hierarchy, belonging, and emotion—from the banquets of seventeenth-century Versailles to the branded cafes and collaborationy of the 2010s and 2020s. Through a comparative and interpretive methodology, the research connects historical visual traditions with contemporary brand strategies, examining case studies such as Gucci Osteria, Louis Vuitton's Desert Iftar, Dior Café, Loewe's "Tomato" campaign, and the Balenciaga × Erewhon collaboration.

The findings reveal that food has become luxury industry's most powerful advertising medium, it transforms material consumption into emotional experiences. It merges appetite, memory, and identity into one multisensory language that transcends geography and social class. In the twenty-first century, the post-covid era, where exclusivity has shifted from possession to participation, dining and culinary storytelling have become key to sustaining brand loyalty. This thesis concludes that food functions as luxury's universal language—a medium through which desire is made tangible, and through which the future of emotional branding, sustainability, and cultural empathy will unfold as this marketing trend grows.

Table of Contents

Appendix B: Figures and Visual References

Chapter 1: An Introduction to the Role of Food in Luxury Marketing

People often think of paradise as a garden. The word comes from the old Persian word pairi-daeza, which means "sacred garden" or "walled enclosure." It talked about a place where beauty, order, and plenty all lived together, where nature and culture met in peace. This picture of paradise has always been linked to food in different cultures. To dine well proved having a lot of bounty; to host an occasion became to make a piece of paradise on earth. In this way, food has always been more than just nourishment. People use it to show their culture, status, and sense of belonging. The table has been a real and symbolic place of power since the feasts of Mesopotamia and Egypt and the banquets of Renaissance Europe. What is served and how it is presented show not only taste but also status. The arts have long reflected this: Egyptian wall paintings, Renaissance banquets, and Rococo terrace scenes each turn dining into a performance of refinement and order (Mintz 1985; Levenstein 2003).

Living in the fast-paced, vivacious, and ever-changing city of New York, where fashion trends are omnipresent—from the streets to the billboards—I've been captivated by the evolving role of food in luxury brand advertising. As the luxury of food becomes even more pronounced in this bustling metropolis, it's intriguing to see how these elements intersect with broader societal issues and emerging internet aesthetics. In a city where food expenses can strain budgets and homelessness remains a pressing issue, the juxtaposition of food as a luxury item in high-end campaigns resonates on multiple levels. This dynamic highlights not just the physical allure of food but also its symbolic power. The contrast between the opulence of luxury food and the stark realities faced by many adds a layer of depth to its use in marketing. Food and how we interact with it is a quiet way to show who we are and what we want - there is indeed a lot of depth to the phrase 'you are what you eat' and that is multilayered.

Luxury brands sell idealized ideas that remind people of the promise of paradise. Ralph Lauren's cafés, Tiffany's Blue Box restaurant, and Prada's parisserie all invite people to enter stories of comfort and belonging through their designs.

This thesis analyses the role of food as a strategic language in luxury marketing. It looks at how food experiences can make people feel connected to their culture, their emotions, and their brand in different societies. By showing how food has changed from a sacred offering to a branded ritual, I aim to show that appetite is still one of the most powerful forces shaping art, culture, and consumption. Paradise reflects an ideal, what we want to be and what we want to have, and that's what marketing dictates to us.

Thesis Statement

Luxury brands maintain cultural authority while seeming inclusive and experiential by turning old dining and hospitality rituals into modern brand strategies. Food helps brands make people want things in different parts of the world, from Western indulgence to Eastern balance and Middle Eastern legacy. This study posits that the endurance of luxury in the 21st century relies not on ownership but on engagement: the capacity to experience beauty through the act of consumption.

Bourdieu's Distinction (1984) thoroughly analyses the symbolic significance of food. His research on cultural capital demonstrates the influence of socioeconomic status on taste. Eating shows how high up you are in society. To stand out and fit in, choose modest meals with caviar or good wine. This is what people think today. Food becomes a sign of prestige on social media. A picture of a Ladurée macaron or a Michelin-starred supper shows that you have good taste and have had some unique experiences. Kapferer and Bastien (2012) assert that luxury consumption signifies "social power and status" (p. 89). They believe of food as communication,

not merely sustenance, like Bourdieu. Marketers in the luxury sector put a lot of focus on brand identification and storytelling. Ralph Lauren stands for hope, tradition, and American culture. Patek Philippe creates timepieces that are meant to be passed down through generations and include emblems of legacy. These examples show how brands use narratives to make their products memorable and emotionally tied to the brand. Academics pay little attention to the increasing popularity of cafés, collaborations, and experience dinners for the purpose of sharing brand stories. Marketing has changed from selling objects to selling experiences. Food engages all of the senses, making it perfect for these events. The Blue Box Café by Tiffany & Co. and Ralph Lauren's Polo Bar want people to taste, smell, and touch the brand. Food helps develop ties between brands and customers. Hagtvedt and Brasel (2016) show how sensory and visual experiences can build this trust and loyalty. Moore and Thompson (2022) assert that brand equity connected to food and consumer loyalty are little researched. This thesis broadens the discourse by associating sensory experience with long-term strategy. Cultures view gourmet cuisine differently. Lee (2021) notes that Eastern traditions value balance and harmony, while Western ones emphasize pleasure and ease. As brands like Gucci, Chanel, and Louis Vuitton expand into cafés and culinary collaborations, their cross-cultural strategies remain unexamined.

Methodology

Qualitative, comparative, and interpretive methodology, integrating art history, cultural theory, and modern brand strategy is applied in this body of work. It aims to delineate the role of food as both cultural emblem and a marketing tool throughout history and across regions—from the banquet halls of Renaissance Europe to the cafés and advertising techniques of contemporary luxury brands. The study integrates three analytical perspectives. First, a visual-cultural analysis

looks at art, ads, and brand activations as visual texts. Paintings like '*Elegant Company Feasting on a Terrace'* (c. 1735) by Franz Christoph Janneck and *Merchant's Wife at Tea* (1918) by Boris Kustodiev are analyzed alongside Dior Café interiors and Loewe campaigns from the 21st century to uncover enduring visual grammars of taste, status, and belonging. This approach utilizes semiotic theory (Barthes 1967) and the art-historical examination of material culture to analyse the construction of meaning through composition, symbolism, and display.

Second, a theoretical framework founded on Pierre Bourdieu's 'notion of cultural capital' (1984) and Pine & Gilmore's 'experience economy' (1999) positions food as a medium for expressing class, identity, and emotion. The research synthesises concepts from marketing psychology and sensory studies, notably Rachel Herz's investigations into olfaction and emotion (*The Scent of Desire*, 2018), to explain how modern luxury brands use food to evoke memory. Third, a cross-cultural comparison looks at how these dynamics change in different parts of the world, such as Europe, the Middle East, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States. Each case is examined within its historical and sociological framework, demonstrating how luxury modifies global strategies to align with local sensibilities while preserving coherence. My research uses brand archives, press releases, and industry reports from Bain & Company, Statista, Business of Fashion, the Harvard Business Review, and other sources. These are supplemented by secondary scholarship encompassing art history, cultural theory, and marketing studies, including the works of Bourdieu (1984), Kapferer and Bastien (2012, 2017), Lipovetsky (1994), Illouz (2007), and Pine and Gilmore (1999), alongside contemporary online and social media sources, as well as fashion press such as Vogue, Highsnobiety, and Dezeen, which capture the evolving visual and cultural language of luxury in real time. By drawing from both academic and contemporary sources, this approach bridges theory and lived culture.

Contribution

The current literature identifies food as a social symbol and acknowledges its potential in experiential marketing, yet it fails to address significant inquiries like: How do branded food experiences build long-term loyalty? How do international luxury brands change their food strategies for different cultures without losing their brand identity? With this research I aim to answer these questions. The project improves both academic research and real-world use by combining historical analysis, theoretical frameworks, and case studies. It shows that food is more than just a little component of luxury branding. It's become a big part of how to develop identity, keep customers loyal, and stay relevant in a global market.

Chapter 2 – Food, Status, and Power in Art & Culture (Historical Framework)

Sharing a meal has long served as a social mechanism to unite and divide. Feasts were once used to mark peace treaties, marriages, victories, and coronations. They were public displays of power and persuasion. The banquet was more than just food; it was a stage for power, diplomacy, and belonging. In the Western world today, communal dining has mostly disappeared from everyday life and is now only for special, often fancy, events.

To know how food works as a tool in modern luxury marketing, you need to know who the audience is. The United States, China, Japan, Europe, Russia, and the Middle East have the most consumers. According to recent reports, the Americas make up 32% of the world's luxury consumption, Europe 27%, and Asia 38%. In the next few years, China alone is expected to account for almost a quarter of total demand. Japan still has about 7% of the market (Statista

2023). The United States is the biggest national market, bringing in more than one-fifth of all global sales. Russia and the Middle East are smaller in size, but they are known for their high per-capita spending and cultural emphasis on visible hospitality and prestige (Bain & Company 2023). The Middle East is the fastest-growing luxury market right now, and its rapid growth and impact on future consumer trends need to be watched. Russia is included here not only because it has a long history of great art, but also because its journey from post-Soviet scarcity to modern wealth shows how politics and instability change how people spend their money. This analysis refers to data and conditions from before the current Russian-Ukrainian war. Over the years, the geography of luxury has changed. During the Renaissance, rare imports from China, Africa, Afghanistan, and the Americas, such as Chinese porcelain, African ivory, Afghan lapis lazuli, and cacao, made Europeans feel important (Llorens Planella 2016). Venice became rich by controlling trade routes in the east (EBSCO 2025). Colonial expansion in the "Age of Exploration" (15-17th century, Britannica 2025) gave Europe control of world trade and turned imported goods into symbols of empire. As royal patronage and guild craftsmanship grew, luxury goods became a sign of a country's strength. During Louis XIV's reign, in the late 17th century, France's royal manufactories replaced imported goods with high-quality goods made in France. This set the standard for government-sponsored luxury (Chrisman-Campbell 2015).

2.1 Europe – Banquets, Power, and Visual Displays of Status

The connection between food and social status was very clear in the banquet culture of the Renaissance and Baroque courts in Europe (Curationist, 2025). What people ate was important, but what they saw people eating was even more important. In early modern Europe, imported

foods like sugar, pepper, cinnamon, and citrus fruits stood for colonial travel and access. By the late fifteenth century, imported foods began to define status as much as taste. When Christopher Columbus brought the pineapple from Guadalupe to Spain in 1493, European courts immediately fell under its spell. Monarchs and aristocrats prized the fruit as a rare delicacy and considered it an edible jewel symbolizing global conquest and sensual pleasure. The pineapple soon appeared in paintings, sculptures, and architectural ornaments as a motif of opulence and hospitality (Strong 2002; Mintz 1985). Because tropical cultivation was impossible in Europe, the fruit's scarcity magnified its prestige: by the eighteenth century, some hosts reportedly paid what would amount to nearly $8,000 today simply to rent a pineapple for display at a dinner party, using it as a performative token of wealth and refinement (Strong 2002, 112).More emblems of luxury were depicted in 17th-century Dutch still-life paintings, where artists from the Dutch Golden Age, Willem Claesz Heda and Pieter Claesz, turned table settings into subtle displays of wealth. In these quiet, silver goblets, Venetian glass, half-peeled lemons, oysters, and wine don't just suggest a meal; they also suggest access, trade networks, and class exclusivity (see Figure Figure 1. Willem Claesz. Heda, Still-Life, 1651.) Food historian Massimo Montanari says, "Food has always been a marker of distance, a map of social stratification that is edible" (Montanari, Food is Culture, 2006). People also used feasts on purpose to show off their political views and status. At the court of Louis XIV at Versailles, banquets were held in the Galerie des Glaces to show the king's rank. Seating arrangements were curated and only the elite could eat with the king (Kathryn Norberg, 2012). During the Rococo movement, one can observe an evolution where pleasure became social currency. Franz Christoph Janneck's 'Elegant Company Feasting on a Terrace (c. 1735)' (Figure 2) shows this well. The dining table resembles a stage, with layered

fabrics, gilded serving dishes, arranged fruit, and elegant posture in exclusive attire, all showing controlled leisure, which is what aristocracy is all about. Art historian Roy Strong says that banquets from this time period were "carefully rehearsed performances designed to project cultivation rather than appetite" (Feast: A History of Grand Eating, 2002). Food became cultural capital in Europe long before French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu came up with the idea. By the 19th century, dining out had become a way to group people into different classes. Table manners, the right glass, the right fork, the order of the courses, how to talk at the table, and how to behave at the table became what sociologist Bourdieu later called "a grammar of distinction," (Bourdieu 1984). Historians of food culture confirm this transformation: dining evolved into a social code that communicated education, refinement, and lineage (Strong 2002; Mennell 1996). This system of eating, which was used to tell the difference between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, has now shifted into modern luxury branding, which still uses dining as a way to create a curated experience of status and identity.

2.1a Expert View: An Interview with Franziska Fugger von Babenhausen

To enhance the aforementioned theoretical framework, this study incorporates an interview with Franziska Fugger von Babenhausen, an art historian and descendant of the Fugger dynasty, founded in 1459 by Jakob Fugger, one of Europe's most influential families in early modern finance, trade, and patronage. The Fuggers financed Emperor Charles V and supported major ventures of their era, including Columbus's transatlantic expeditions, shaping the economic and cultural foundations of the Renaissance. The Fuggers' economic network influenced European material culture and helped shape early ideas of prestige through dining, hosting, and collecting.

Their food, art, and building projects all came together to create a single performance of taste that foreshadowed the symbolic logic of modern luxury branding.

Franziska thought about how food has always been a sign of order and identity in European high society: "In the sixteenth century, food was just as important to culture as trade. When my family had guests over in Augsburg, the food on the table showed power and trust. Bringing in spices, sugar, citrus fruit, or wine from faraway places showed that people were connected. Giving them to someone else was a diplomatic move. Even today, food communicates hierarchy in a subtle way. We don't do as many courtly things as we used to, but we still judge settings, like how coffee is poured, where the ingredients come from, and how fast a meal is served. That language hasn't changed; it's just gotten more complicated. You can tell who belongs by how the food looks.'

When asked how this legacy lives on in modern Europe, she linked historical hospitality to modern branding: "Storytelling has always been Europe's strength. French pastries, Italian coffee culture, and Austrian table manners are all examples of heritage that hold a whole way of looking at the world. Before anyone else, sophisticated households knew this. They turned everyday activities as drinking coffee, cutting bread into small ceremonies.'

Franziska also talked about how food affects our minds when we make decisions: "High-quality food stimulates the senses. In court, it made negotiations easier; now it makes deals easier. A brand dinner or café visit does the same thing: it makes people feel at ease, which makes trust possible.'

Lastly, she talked about how food is a part of luxury: "Luxury always starts at the table—not because of what is eaten, but because of how it is shared. The table brings together memory, order, and conversation. When you learn that, you learn how to persuade people."

Her viewpoint substantiates the primary assertion of this thesis: that food perpetuates the mediation of power, belonging, and emotional connection throughout the centuries. What started as a way for the rich to socialize is now a way for businesses to market themselves—turning heritage into experience and appetite into loyalty.
(Fugger von Babenhausen 2025)

2.2 Middle East – Food as Hospitality, Honor, and Cultural Order

In this thesis, the phrase "Middle East" refers to the cultural region that includes Western Asia and parts of North Africa, including the Arab world and Iran.

Food has always been central to Middle Eastern social and moral life; hosting is to respect. According to Islamic values and Persian court culture, eating was a method to demonstrate kindness, wisdom, and balance. The Prophet Muhammad stated, "Anyone who believes in God and the Last Day should treat their guests with respect" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 6135). Diyāfa, or "hospitality as duty and grace," is a key cultural pillar in the Arab world. A guest is welcomed not only for friendship, but also as a sacred trust, indicating divine favour (al-dayf dayf Allah) (Nasrallah 2013).

Banquets were traditionally used in Europe to demonstrate power and money, but in the Middle East, feasts were intended to demonstrate moral attractiveness. It prioritises peace over display and giving above having. Based on faith and philosophy, hospitality evolved as a means of discussing morality.

‘The Feast of Sada, Folio 22v of the Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp’ (Figure 3) , thought to have been composed by Sultan Muhammad, explains the relationship between food, wisdom, and government. The painting pays honour to King Hushang's discovery of fire. Its primary emphasis is not on having a lot of food or silverware (the food was eaten by hand), but on sharing ritually. Even though the king is in command, the hierarchy collapses and everyone becomes one happy group. The image demonstrates that true leadership is tied to caring for and teaching society, and that food and knowledge go hand in hand (Canby 2009, 112).

Persian aesthetics associated these principles with self-improvement. Ideas like as zehn (clarity of thought) and adab (cultural conduct) described civilisation as a state of serenity. Eating together was a means to participate in a moral order in which kindness was the most beautiful thing. A poet named Hafez once stated, "He is not of the feast who has no light to share." This caused people to believe that sharing food meant sharing knowledge.

In Arab and Persian cultures, prestige was determined by the capacity to host with dignity rather than what one owned. According to Al-Qaradawi (1999, 88), people were advised to avoid waste, practise moderation, and be welcoming. The feast became a symbol of civilization itself, a place where people could come together rather than fight. People in the area continue to utilise these historical rules to define what luxury means today.

Contemporary luxury in the Middle East is also readily apparent. The Gulf's aesthetics are more about recognition than the Western tradition of "quiet luxury." Designer monograms, high-end jewellery, couture abayas, and runway pieces worn as everyday clothing are a method for individuals to communicate with one another. According to Business of Fashion, "logos act as identity markers in the Gulf, signalling belonging to an aspirational social world" (Robehmed

2019). In courtly paintings, prestige was conveyed by the arrangement of the setting. Today, the status has changed from banquet to body. The individual wearing it becomes the stage that is carried outside, similar to the previous mentioned European aristocracies.

2.3 China - Food as a means to maintain peace, a ritual, and an imperial order

Beginning with the Zhou dynasty (c. 1046-221 BCE), philosophers such as Confucius regarded eating as a vehicle for conveying moral lessons. Lǐ (禮) and rén (仁) influenced dietary customs. Every gesture at the table reflected their roles in the family and society. The Analects state, "In food, the exemplary person seeks not extravagance, but order" (Analects 7:36).

This reasoning is supported by recent academic studies. Roel Sterckx (2011) illustrates that ritual dining served as social choreography, shaping behaviour and hierarchy in everyday interactions. Francesca Bray and E. N. Anderson characterise food in China as "a technology of order," highlighting how material culture—vessels, tools, and ingredients—mirrors hierarchies of seniority, gender, and respect. The table functioned as a "miniature model of society," mirroring a balance similar to the ideal harmony of the state (Bray 1997; Anderson 1988).

Figure 4, 'The Night Revels of Han Xizai (10th century, Five Dynasties)' demonstrates that dining functioned as a symbol of sophistication and self-discipline. The scene depicts a private banquet with low lacquer tables set with wine, fruit, and small dishes. In this context, wine acts as a measure of self-discipline rather than indulgence. Maintaining composure reflects cultural ownership, whereas succumbing to chaos signifies a loss of dignity (Sterckx 2011, 54). Every action, whether pouring, playing, or chatting, carries moral significance. The painting's subtle examination of Han's actions transforms the lunch into a judgement.

Chinese cuisine prioritises a balance of temperature, texture, and colour. Elders are prioritised, portions are shared communally, and every action embodies authority and compassion. In the modern luxury landscape in China prestige is communicated through miànzi (面子, "face") and guānxì (关系, reciprocal relationships), typically manifested in luxury food gifts such as Moutai vodka, pu'er tea, abalone, bird's nest, and mooncakes. Bourdieu describes these gifts as symbolic capital, which transforms taste into social legitimacy (Bourdieu 1984). Veblen (1899) posits that they serve as visible markers of recognition, with prestige necessitating visibility.

China historically set the global standard for luxury goods with its exports of silk, jade, and porcelain. These items influenced European taste and Chinoiserie (Victoria and Albert Museum 2023). Bain & Company (2023) indicates that Chinese consumers represent more than 40% of global spending on luxury goods. There is more interest in translating Western maisons than in replicating them. European craftsmanship embodies Chinese values, including filial piety through gift-giving, loyalty in banquets, and harmony in hospitality. In today's digital age, food remains an essential social code. A red-lacquered box or designer mooncake fulfils the same cultural role as imperial porcelain once did.

2.4 Japan – Aesthetics of Restraint, Food as Cultural Discipline

Japan's relationship with food was shaped by accuracy, cleanliness, and knowledge of the seasons, not by showmanship or social status. A society that values care and simplicity over excess is shown by ideas like wabi-sabi ("beauty in imperfection") and shibui (subtle elegance"). From the beginning of art and ritual, a well-done presentation showed that the person was mentally clear and culturally mature.

This idea is shown in the tea ceremony (chanoyu), which was made official by Sen no Rikyū in the 1600s. In the Western sense, it's not hospitality. Instead, it's a practice of restraint in which every move is planned and the atmosphere itself becomes a form of respect. Rikyū's saying, "Tea is nothing more than this: heat the water, make the tea, and drink it right," rejects waste in favour of purpose (Okakura 1906).

Kaiseki, Japan's most formal dining custom, was shaped by this way of thinking. Kaiseki started out as tea parties and has grown into a cooking style based on seasonality, small portions, and unity. Each dish is a tiny version of something in nature, like river stones, maple leaves, or morning mist. This turns food into temporary works of art. This is what historian Eric C. Rath says about Kaiseki: "Luxury is found not in the ingredients themselves but in what the chef chooses to leave out" (Rath 2010, 43). That's not what makes something expensive in Japan; it's care, time, and skill.

This makes sense when you look at visual society. Japanese artist’s Hokusai's prints of tea tools (as for example Figure 5) turn ordinary things into symbols of wealth, beauty here comes from calmness and focus, not from having a lot of things.

These old rules still affect how Japanese people buy expensive goods. Craftsmanship and durability, not brand signals, show that someone is wealthy. A Kyoto ryōtei, a kimono workshop that has been around for a hundred years, or a Sakai knife often have more standing than things that can be seen. Japanese shoppers are still some of the smartest and most careful in the world. They value quality and sincerity over logos (Business of Fashion, 2022).

Japan, then, brings a unique model of luxury into this study: subliminal prestige based on purpose.

2.5 Russia – Power, Excess, and the Performance of Prestige

Russia's relationship with food and luxury has always been tied to power and survival. Unlike Japan, where the focus is on slowness and tranquility toward inner control, or China, where hierarchy is negotiated through symbolic exchange, Russia developed a culture where luxury functions as a public performance of power. Across three eras—the Tsarist empire, Soviet rule, and post-Soviet rise of oligarch capitalism—food and display transformed repeatedly, yet one cultural truth endures: in Russia, status must be felt. As Dostoevsky once wrote, *"We Russians have only two needs: bread and beauty."* That fusion of survival and splendor defines Russian luxury.

Tsarist Russia – Feasting as Empire

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the time of the Tsars, the Russian court adopted European dining practices and transformed them into displays of imperial power. Hundreds of people could fit into the Winter Palace for banquets, which were carefully planned to show off wealth and power (Figes 2002). During the reigns of Catherine the Great (1762–1796) and Alexander II (1855–1881), banquets displayed political power through imported wines, French chefs, and monumental sugar sculptures—ephemeral architecture designed to awe. Food became a medium of dominance and diplomacy, a way for Russia to demonstrate control through abundance, notably during this time, Europe dictated Russian's defnition of luxury. The Romanovs initially ordered the famous Fabergé egg in 1885 (Figure 6). It was a perfect example of this culture of grandeur. Each egg was crafted of enamel, diamonds, and gold, and they all represented the highest form of wealth, a collectible that had the value of jewelery. These

works of art represented a monarchy that judged beauty by how rich it was and turned handicrafts into a kind of political speech.

Soviet Russia – Official Austerity, Underground Desire

The 1917 Revolution sought to abolish luxury as a social category, branding it a tool of bourgeois decay. Marxist-Leninist doctrine recast consumption as a moral act, replacing ornament with collectivist virtue. Yet luxury endured in altered form. In a centrally planned economy defined by scarcity, access itself became aspiration. To obtain what others could not became a discreet form of power.

A parallel economy emerged for the Party elite through closed dining rooms and *zakrytye raspredeliteli*—state-run stores stocked with imported delicacies and fine goods unavailable to the public (Gronow & Zhuravlev 2015). For most citizens, luxury became memory and imagination.

Boris Kustodiev's '*Merchant's Wife at Tea* (1918)' (Figure 7) captures this tension. Painted one year after the Revolution, the image shows a lavish tea setting: pastries, porcelain, jam in crystal, and a steaming samovar beside a robust merchant's wife. It is less a portrait of celebration than one of mourning and longing. The painting imagines a class under threat, yet her table insists that Russian identity remains tied to feast, not famine. This conflict between ideology and desire came to define Soviet food culture.

Post-Soviet Era – Excess Returns

When the USSR fell apart in 1991, years of austerity turned into outward wealth. Oligarchs held much of the wealth, and spending became a sign of success. Instead of not having enough, there were now champagne pyramids, German black cars, and caviar by the kilo. Luxury was not a show of vanity but a way to survive—a way to get back one's dignity via ownership. Caviar has long been a part of Russian culture, and it still stands for national pride. It was imperial under the Tsars, a currency of luxury under the Soviets, and now it shows social status and hospitality (Los Angeles Times 2016). The zakuski table, which has cured fish, pickles, and vodka on it, is still a sign of kindness and cultural knowledge. Japanese luxury finds beauty in restraint, whereas Russian prestige needs to be grand. To own a lot is to be safe; to be seen giving is to fit in.

2.6 Desire, branding, and the marketing of luxury in the United States

US luxury was never passed down from one generation to the next; it was created. In Europe, the idea of luxury comes from aristocratic lineage, and in Asia, it comes from ritual. In America, on the other hand, the idea of luxury was built from the top down through marketing and mass psychology. The "American Dream" was at its foundation a marketing effort that is still one of the most potent campaigns today. It makes people think they can be rich if they buy into it. Edward Bernays, Freud's nephew and the so-called "father of public relations," changed traditional advertising into emotional persuasion in the 1920s. He knew that people don't buy things; they buy the notion of belonging. Bernays marketed smokes to women as "torches of freedom" and bacon as the foundation of the "all-American breakfast." These were not just things people bought; they became stories about who they were. Bernays rapidly realised that in order to be successful in advertising, you need to know not only what the customer wants but also what

they are afraid of. Historian Jackson Lears contends that America industrialised the act of desire, transforming consumerism into a psychological mechanism of self-definition (Lears 1994).

By the middle of the 20th century, this way of thinking had become a national religion. The boom after World War II, the growth of suburbs, and TV ads all helped to establish a middle class that lived through its purchases. "Keeping up with the Joneses" became a moral code: having things meant being successful, and being successful meant being good. Food was the most important thing that kept this commitment. The supermarket became a site where the competitive market came out to play. Price competition harmed customers, and most importantly, the shopping experience and personal relationships with the grocers, butchers, or milk deliverers changed to anonymity. This illusion of prosperity reached visual perfection in Norman Rockwell's Freedom from Want (1943) (Figure 8).

Painted during wartime rationing, the scene is serene—a utopian family gathered around a Thanksgiving turkey. Instead of representing reality, it taps into a collective desire: that America's wealth was emotional, not material, a sense of safety and belonging no war could touch. Rockwell's feast is marketing that creates patriotism in comfort.

As the 20th century advanced, Coca-Cola and McDonald's became the most recognizable luxury brands on earth because of their novelty and their representation of the modern world. Through relentless marketing, they sold feeling: happiness, nostalgia, identity, freedom and Christmas. To "have a Coke" was to share in a global language of optimism. Sociologist George Ritzer later called this the "McDonaldization of Society", where efficiency and uniformity replaced authenticity as aspirational values (Ritzer 1993). America taught the world that luxury could be mass-produced and is a representation of patriotism.

The American Pop Art culture mirrored this transformation. Andy Warhol's 'Campbell's Soup Cans (1962)' (Figure 9) series portrayed how benevolent supermarket iconography, when looked at from a certain angle, becomes art; their abundance in shelves becomes luxury. His work defined pop culture, and this was only possible due to their recognizability (branding), and now they have become museum relics and collector's items.

Barbara Kruger's I Shop Therefore I Am (1987) (Figure 10) shows the reduction of identity to consumption in a hypnotic way, with a touch of sarcasm inspired by René Descartes."I think, therefore I am" is changed from a grounded existence in consciousness to existence through consumption. The self no longer emerges through thought but through purchase.

Today, what Americans see as true luxury continues to reflect this marketing logic. Studies from Bain & Company (2024) and Forbes (2023) show that the American consumer equates luxury with comfort, convenience, and experience, not necessarily heritage or scarcity. A Tesla, a Peloton, or a minimalist home by Apple standards is considered luxurious not because of long-lasting tradition but because of design storytelling. One can see a trend that the country of America likes to perceive what is newest and most convenient as luxury, technology packaged as lifestyle. This can be related to the United States being such a young country. Where does the European luxury standard play a role? A new sector within the US market: high-end luxury. Harvard Business Review says that getting "freedom and control" is what modern American luxury is all about, from private jet travel to personalised health care (HBR 2022). In this way, time, privacy, and access have become the most expensive things in a society that is very visible and heavily advertised.

This may help explain why, even with the recent rise in interest in "quiet luxury" styles like those found in fashion houses like The Row and Loro Piana, marketing absence is still important. This kind of understated performance only makes sense in a culture that is full of ads. Anne Cheng, a cultural critic, says that American restraint is never neutral; it's just another way of saying that you want to be seen and can afford to be seen (Cheng 2020). The reasoning is the same whether it is loud or quiet: luxury is first a story and then an object.

In America, there is a contradiction between having plenty and not being safe. Food deserts are found next to organic farmer's markets and fast food chains do very well next to restaurants with Michelin stars. People who shop at Whole Foods and people who shop at Dollar General live in the same country, but their stories are very different. It's now a sign of both class and morality to eat "clean," "local," or "organic" food. It's a way of being healthy that's linked to worth.

The look of American luxury is one of aspiration. It is performance-based, emotional, and always focused on the future. The United States not only perfected the performance of perfection—the illusion of belonging through branding. This can be seen in Rockwell's happy family dinners, Coca-Cola's global optimism, and Apple's quiet minimalism. Advertising is America's real art form because it can turn wants into lifestyles and needs into money. Where Europe built hierarchy through craft, the Middle East equated generosity with virtue, China expressed harmony through order, Japan moralized precision, and Russia displayed power through excess, the United States created culture through marketing. Each society consumes to express who it is, yet none has shaped global appetite more profoundly than America — a nation where advertising has replaced ancestry.

Chapter 3 – Food as a Strategic Tool in Contemporary Luxury Branding

In today's economy of desire, luxury isn't about what something is, but how it feels to have it. Food has always been a sign of status and connection, but now it's become a tool to market luxury goods. It builds the bridge between desire and being able to get it by stimulating all of your senses at once. Food makes luxury something you can see, taste, and share, whether it's in an ad, a pop-up shop, or a café. This chapter talks about two different but related ways that brands use food: the visual experience, which includes campaigns and digital stories, and the physical experience, which includes restaurants, cafés, and immersive spaces. Both use psychology, sensory science, and art history to get people to want something and link it to a brand.

Edward Bernays sold bacon to show people who you are. Luxury brands now sell pastries, coffee, and ceremonial teas as a way to escape to a perfect world. A Ralph Lauren store's café (Figure 11), a chef collaboration during fashion week, or melting ice cream in a Gucci summer ad all have the same goal: to get consumers interested in the brand and make it feel real. Taste is what connects the physical with emotions.

The primary conclusion from Chapter 2 is that, despite the cultural disparities across various epochs, the relationship with food remains consistent; it is the inspiration and associations, also the ones found in the pop-culture and arts, that evolve. This insight is invaluable for cultural research, aiding in the effective targeting of consumer audiences through brand strategies. As globalisation progresses and trends transcend geographical boundaries, the shifting associations and the evolving definition of luxury become increasingly intriguing in significant for this study.

3.1 The Evolution of Sensory Marketing

Branding in the 21st century has made sensory marketing clear. Taste and smell have a stronger effect on memory than sight and sound do. Rachel Herz, a neuroscientist, says that "olfaction and gustation bypass rational processing; they speak directly to the limbic system, the seat of emotion" (Herz 2016). This means that food is a great way to tell emotional stories and connect with brands.

"Food sells" has replaced "sex sells" as the marketing mantra of the 1990s and early 2000s that was also prominent with the luxury fashion houses (see the change from Sex sells to food sells in Gucci Campaign Figure 12, Figure 13). Brands now use edible experiences as the new aphrodisiac of desire, which fits perfectly with the rise of sensory marketing that uses taste and smell to access emotion before cognition (Bhamee 2023).

Brands like Hermès, Chanel, and Louis Vuitton that have always been associated with craft and heritage are now expanding their identity through food and using it in their ads and even in their physical products. In Seoul and Tokyo, you could get citrus teas matched to the colours of Hermès' world-famous silk scarves at their pop-up cafés. In Tokyo, Chanel's Le Café Beige transported customers to Paris, while in Osaka, Louis Vuitton's Le Café V served sweets adorned with the house's iconic monogram (Figure 14) (Dezeen 2020). Instead of trying to sell shoes or purses, these locations promote a sense of connection, an experience, and the ability to share—whether that's online or in person. "What does luxury taste like?" is the new "What does luxury look like?" when you go out to eat. Tell me how it feels. If you want to join the brand's universe but can't afford the $3,000 purse, all you need is a $25 cake.

3.2 Culinary Collaborations and the Politics of Taste

Culinary collaborations are the new extensions of the runway. Each partnership, from Dior × Pierre Hermé to Gucci Osteria by Massimo Bottura, turns the brand's identity into sensory experiences. Dior's pastries are like high-end fashion in that they are exclusive, precise and physically shaped as outerwear. Gucci's trattoria taps into the feeling of nostalgia and a childlike playfulness that reminisces their latest colorful collections. Prada's Marchesi cafés bring Milanese traditions into the world. Every plate is an extension of their logo and what they stand for.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) contended that taste functions as a mechanism of social distinction. Luxury marketing has changed this idea: taste is a personal experience, but being there shows that you are part of the invited group and the people who are watching on social media or in print. When you drink a Hermès cappuccino or eat in front of Gucci wallpaper, you enter their magical world.

3.3 The Emotional Economy of Taste

Not everyone understands fashion, but everyone understands food. That is why, in the context of luxury branding, food has emerged as one of the most effective ways to connect with people emotionally. Food does not need to be interpreted; it travels directly to the senses without passing through the brain. Rachel Herz, explored how taste and smell "bypass rational processing; they speak directly to emotion."

Luxury marketers use food to bridge the gap between people who want and can afford their items. Food, unlike a watch or a purse, is temporary. However, this is the reason why it could become a daily indulgence. Because of its fleeting nature, it has a greater emotional impact. Anyone who spends money at Prada's Marchesi 1824 for a croissant or at Dior Café for a coffee is effectively acquiring access to the brand universe. This occurrence signals a more systemic shift in consumer behavior. In global markets, experiencing luxury —branded activities, fine dining, and travel —now accounts for about half of total luxury expenditure (Bain & Company, 2024). Connection, rather than ownership, is the new measure of worth. According to the Harvard Business Review (2015), "emotional resonance drives more than half of brand loyalty in luxury markets."

3.5 The Sweet-Treat Economy – Wellness, Indulgence, and Everyday Luxury

The current "sweet-treat" movement in American culture shows how indulgence and restraint coexist. Pastel-toned croissants, $19 Erewhon smoothies, or matcha lattes function as lifestyle statements. In an age of inflation, wellness has replaced excess as the new luxury.

Elizabeth Currid-Halkett (2017) observes that today's elite demonstrate taste through knowledge and discipline rather than opulence. The expensive smoothie or sculpted dessert embodies that ethic. Erewhon's Hailey Bieber *Skin Glaze Smoothie* (Insider 2023) (Figure 17) operates as social semiotics—its price, rarity, and celebrity link elevate it to accessory status

As *Vogue Business* notes, "Maybe you can't solve the world's problems, but you can confront them with more energy, a stronger immune system and better sleep habits" (Moss 2025). This statement encapsulates the psychological core of modern luxury consumption: food as self-

regulation. The new indulgence promises equilibrium, a way to cope with instability through rituals of nourishment and care.

The trend began with the Starbucks Frappuccino of the 2010s (Figure 16), although not branded as healthy, and most certainly not healthy, it was the ritual of buying a small luxury for short pleasure and posting about it online, to partially show off but to also belong. This movement has rebranded itseld as “clean indulgence”. Behavioral economist Dan Ariely (2010) describes these small luxuries as “micro-rewards,” short bursts of control and comfort. As historian Sidney Mintz (1985) wrote, sweetness has long expressed power and hierarchy. In the modern version, it communicates self-care and access—the promise of balance in a chaotic world. And now we have both, sweet treat luxuries and clean sweet treats as arguably even more luxurious.

3.6 Food, Emotion, and the Digital Appetite

Food satisfies emotional hunger as much as physical desire. Eating together builds intimacy; sharing photos of food performs it. Online, the act of posting a latte or pastry signals both participation and indulgence. The consumer becomes advertiser and the audience simultaneously. Brands design these scenes deliberately. Cafés use soft light, marble tables, and monochrome palettes to ensure every photograph aligns with brand tone. Even consumers who cannot buy the fashion line can afford to photograph its pastry (Figure 15) The digital image extends the brand’s emotional reach and keeps audiences connected between purchases.

3.8 The Aesthetic Lineage of Food Imagery

Art history is often directly referenced in contemporary campaigns. The still lifes of Clara Peeters (c. 1594–c. 1657) and Willem Claesz Heda (1594–1680) (Figure 18, Figure 19) transformed seventeenth-century banquets into allegories of wealth and mortality. Franz Christoph Janneck's (Figure 2) Rococo feasts foretold the staged sociability seen in brand pop-ups today (Curationist 2025). Reiterating these compositions allows the businesses to assert cultural continuity.

Loewe: The Still Life Reborn

The Loewe campaign (Figure 20) is built as a dialogue between two still-life traditions: the Dutch Vanitas and the Spanish bodegón. The grapes, gloves, and perfume bottle rest on a polished silver tray with the same formal rigor as or Willem Claesz Heda, whose works staged the tension between pleasure and restraint. Their compositions were moral performances: prosperity displayed under the shadow of transience.Loewe adopts this symbolic vocabulary to align its brand with the intellectual, Protestant idea of taste as control. The untouched grapes and unused gloves invite admiration but discourage touch, a visual reminder that desire must remain suspended to retain its power. Yet there is also a Southern undertone. The sheen of the metal and the deep green backdrop recall Spanish Baroque still lifes, where humble food objects—grapes, bread, a pitcher—were rendered with monastic precision. In those works, austerity was not moral but spiritual: beauty found in silence and scarcity. Loewe merges both codes to speak across cultural sensibilities. For Northern audiences, the image evokes disciplined taste; for Southern ones, devotion and material beauty coexist. The absence of human presence turns this campaign

into a modern still life that echoes the modern wester luxury ideal that owning less can signify more.

Gucci: The Odalisque Reframed

Gucci's campaign (Figure 22) adapts the odalisque to the postmodern era. The reclining figures are reminiscent of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' "Odalisque with a Slave" (Figure 21) and the Qajar court portraits of nineteenth-century Persia (Figure 23) which both depict luxurious leisure as a social performance. Both traditions were preoccupied with control of the gaze, the body, and the space. Ingres depicted women as ornamental extensions of empire, whereas Persian artists saw beauty as an extension of royalty. Gucci condenses these histories into a single frame, combining the theatrical artifice of European Orientalism with the stylized sensuality of Persian miniature painting.The set's planetary backdrop and heavy drapery detach the scene from historical time. It becomes a hybrid cosmology: East and West, past and future, dream and commodity. The music instrument functions as a prop of sociability where pleasure was staged rather than lived. Here, that sociability is aestheticized into stillness. The figures' languor no longer serves a male gaze but a camera's lens that transforms passivity into authority. Gucci's reinterpretation speaks to a global audience familiar with both the visual tropes of Orientalism and the politics of reclaiming them. It addresses the paradox of contemporary luxury how to celebrate beauty without reproducing its colonial codes. It's absurd and fantastical, and it's Gucci's vibrant cosmos - artistic, playful, and luxurious enough to last centuries. By directly referencing art and culture, the brand positions itself and their campagin as art.

Bvlgari: The Allegory of Desire

Bvlgari returns to one of the oldest visual metaphors of appetite: Eve and the apple she shouldn't have eaten (Figure 25). The hand resting on rough bark recalls the composition of Lucas Cranach the Elder's "Adam and Eve" (1526)(Figure 24), yet the meaning is inverted. In Cranach's world, the apple stood for giving in to temptation; in Bvlgari's world, it stands for mastery (with a hint of temptation, of course). The woman's hand doesn't give or take; it has. The serpent bracelets twist and turn with sculptural accuracy, turning a tale of sin into a piece of jewellery and power. Cranach's Eve was a warning, but Bvlgari's model is the one who made up her own story. The bracelet and what it stands for are the main points of this campaign. The person wearing it is like a snake, holding the power. This change shows how Christian visual morality has changed into a secular aesthetics of empowerment. The campaign uses a European collective memory—the tree, the fruit, and the snake—but puts it in a new light that is based on luxury: redemption through ownership**.** The campaign's composition—bare skin, textured bark, minimal color—creates a dialogue between natural imperfection and human artifice. The image thus appeals to Western viewers through biblical familiarity with a hint of humor, while resonating with global audiences as a universal allegory of control over desire and of course, since it is also a reference to Cranach's work it positions the campaign as an art piece in itself.

3.9 Contemporary Case Studies – When Food Becomes Fashion

Erewhon × Balenciaga: Wellness as a Show

Balenciaga, one of Europe's oldest couture houses, built its reputation on technical mastery and sculptural designs of the 1920's. It has stopped following tradition and started making absurdist comments on consumer life since getting new creative direction. Torn sneakers, leather trash bags and passport-shaped purses became popular in high fashion. This movement can be seen as

a form of performance art and an ironic nod to consumption, while also pushing the limits of what fashion is. The supermarket Erewhon, on the other hand, came from the California wellness movement, which has become a luxury in its own right. The sweet treat movement is back, and it's centered around the luxury of looking healthy, young, and well-fed. Its fruits and vegetables and supplements are marketed as ways to become the best version of oneself, and the prices are set so that only those who can afford to stay healthy can buy them. Both brands are known for provoking people: Balenciaga with cynicism and Erewhon with holiness. The partnership in 2024 made smoothies, calfskin paper bags, and branded hoodies, which mixed these values into one visual language (Figure 26). Haute couture became healthy groceries, and healthy groceries became haute couture.At the runway event, models and guests wore Balenciaga × Erewhon merchandise. The paper bag, once a disposable accessory out of necessity, was reimagined as an accessory at a price tag of over two thousand dollars. This gesture echoed Duchamp's readymade fountain (1917) (Figure 27), transforming the mundane into the absurdly exclusive. The act of carrying groceries has become an act of cultural participation, the idea of community is mirrored here again. Within this absurdism, the collaboration, unlike the cakes or café experiences that Louis Vuitton or Tiffany offers, is not a door to make the brand more accessible as the merchandise is still priced at luxury clothes levels. Clean eating and self-care are presented as forms of virtue, yet their accessibility depends on wealth. What was once the privilege of couture ateliers has migrated to supermarket aisles, now coded through scarcity and health. Balenciaga exploits this dissonance by presenting wellness as performance, not lifestyle. The irony functions as both critique and mirror; it mocks privilege while reinforcing it.

However, it made groceries and belonging to this community even more inaccessible — let them eat cake! The campaign thrives given that individuals are interested in Kim Kardashian, who has the same kind of influence on beauty, fashion, and health that Marie Antoinette did in France in the 1700s. Kardashian is a perfect example of the contrasts of modern luxury. Her carefully planned and frequently watched public life is what Balenciaga's absurdism is all about: the idea of the individual as a product. She shops at Erewhon and walks for Balenciaga, which ties the two companies together in a way that is easy to understand. She is the consumer who is both a participant and a product, the person who turns desire into ideology. The Erewhon smoothie, which costs $19, is less of a drink than a sign of authority. Buying it shows that you belong to a moral elite. The show goes beyond the runway and into the grocery store, where people buy, show off, and express their identities. The outcome is a picture of modern luxury that isn't fake—self-care as a status symbol, and sarcasm that isn't really obvious because it is true.

Jacquemus – Everyday Luxury and Emotional Access

Founded in 2009 by Simon Porte Jacquemus, the French brand has become one of the defining forces in contemporary luxury marketing. Although its price range sits below the highest tier of maisons, Jacquemus has successfully positioned itself within the luxury sector by creating a world that feels both aspirational and accessible. His work blends Provençal memory with minimal design and a playful, sun-soaked aesthetic that resonates far beyond fashion insiders. Jacquemus was among the first designers to incorporate food directly into his visual language. Raised in the French countryside, his approach to fashion draws on sensory familiarity—linen fabrics, natural light, the colors of fruit and soil. Through his social media presence and creative direction, he built an emotional narrative around nostalgia and simplicity that distinguishes his

brand in a market often defined by excess. His fashion shows, staged in lavender fields or golden wheat landscapes, invite viewers into a world that feels grounded and dreamlike. Food is central to his storytelling. In his “cherry” campaign (Figure 28), accessories were stacked on plates with the iconic bag placed like a cherry on top, transforming the purse into a metaphor for the finishing touch—something small yet defining. The imagery ties together French summertime, domestic warmth, and the pleasure of detail. Inside his Paris store, Jacquemus installed a sculpture of an oversized scoop of ice cream with a cherry, extending the campaign into a physical experience. These actions connect the product, the environment, and the memory.

His next collection took this playfulness further. Croissant-shaped earrings, bread-patterned fabrics, and store sculptures of toast (Figure 29) all referenced French breakfast culture. The campaign turned everyday items into luxury symbols, subverting hierarchies between high and humble.

It was both amusing and new to use butter, a common food, as a picture of a premium item. It said that Jacquemus stands for little, everyday luxuries: things that are easy to get and touch. The invites to his fashion show were even pieces of toast and butter, which was a visual joke on the phrase "bread and butter" and also made dressing in Jacquemus seem like an important part of the day.

The brand's use of food as a metaphor goes beyond that. His pop-up cafés serve croissants and coffee in pastel ceramics that mirror the colours of his clothes. These delicious encounters make the customer feel like they belong. You can join his French world by buying a croissant from the Jacquemus café or taking a picture of it.

In this way, Jacquemus' food pictures and sensory stories fit with how current luxury marketing works. It turns buying things into feelings and being able to get them into goals. Highsnobiety (2023) said, "Jacquemus has built a world of sun-washed familiarity, where food is not just a theme but a way to connect with the brand."

Loewe – From Meme to Material Luxury

Loewe's "tomato moment" revealed how deeply a brand's visual language can shape collective culture. What began as a viral image (Figure 30)—a perfectly formed tomato captioned *"This tomato is so Loewe I can't explain it"*—became a case study in how modern luxury can exist across digital imagination and physical experience. The meme resonated because Loewe had already built a clear visual grammar around organic forms (Figure 31). The tomato, though simple and sculptural, has the same sense of humour, sensitivity to materials, and conceptual accuracy that Jonathan Anderson has developed since he became the brand's creative director. Anderson's interest in fruits, vegetables, and strange natural shapes isn't just a coincidence; it's part of a long-term plan. He sees nature as a real place in a world full of digital copies. By turning something as basic as a tomato or bulb of garlic into a major motif, Loewe reframes the ordinary as spectacular. In this case, luxury is not characterized by how rare or excessive something is, but by how well you can see art in things you already know.

Anderson's reaction to the "tomato moment" made it stand out. Instead of letting the meme die, he got involved with the people who made it. He shared the picture again, talked to the person who made the original meme, and showed how to make a real leather bag fashioned like a

tomato (Figure 30) . Before that, the tomato had only been used in Loewe's candle and fragrance ads. Anderson's choice to make a real bag turned internet jokes into real art. He showed the work that went into making the purse by posting a thorough behind-the-scenes look at how the leather was dyed, sewn, and molded. This openness connected irony with truth, illustrating that fun and accuracy can go hand in one (Highsnobiety 2024).

Anderson's public response made Loewe's online community—its admirers, dreamers, and potential customers—feel like they were part of something greater. The gesture made visitors feel like they were a part of the brand's creative process. This kind of emotional give-and-take is rare in luxury, where communication usually goes one way. It made Loewe a brand that listens as much as it talks, which made it more culturally relevant and made people more loyal to it (Vogue Business 2024). The conversation did not remain online. Loewe extended it into physical experiences, culminating in an exclusive installation in Cappadocia (Figure 32), where a red hot-air balloon—designed to resemble the viral tomato—floated over the volcanic landscapes. The event completed the cycle between digital play and real-world activations. Clients who attended entered a curated fantasy, while those following from afar shared the moment through media coverage and social networks. Both audiences participated: one through lived experience, the other through collective imagination.

The "tomato" became a symbol of how easily luxury can go from digital to doing things by hand. Anderson used audience participation as a design idea, showing that a brand's power now comes not only from its products but also from its ability to turn attention into cultural memory. The people who made the memes were part of the brand's creative process, and the people who went to the event lived up to its promise. Loewe showed that the future of luxury hinges on how well a

brand can turn community into creation by combining humour, craft, and emotional intelligence (Figure 33).

3.10 Global Adaptations — Cultural Symbolism and Culinary Strategy

As luxury becomes more global, food has become the best way for marketers to show that they understand different cultures. The dinner, the dessert, or the shared ritual is a strategic bridge that lets Western maisons speak the local language of belonging. When a brand changes its sensory narrative to fit with local customs, it brings together people from different cultures and welcomes the new luxury customer.

3.11 Marketing Trends and Economic Sentiment — From “Sex Sells” to “Food Sells.”

Luxury reflects the socioeconomic conditions of the world. Marketing adapts alongside the economic environment. The sensory trend in modern advertising—highlighting food, wellness, and mindful indulgence—reflects the financial and psychological conditions of today's society. Brands are now engaging with a generation influenced by significant crises: the 2008 recession, the 2020 pandemic, and ongoing instability from inflation, conflict, and environmental concerns. In this context, luxury marketing has replaced provocation with reassurance (Illouz 2007; Lipovetsky 1994).

Desire as a Threat to Desire as a Source of Comfort

In the late twentieth century, "sex sells" transcended mere advertising; it embodied a cultural zeitgeist. The “sex sells” phenomenon emerged in the 1950s–1990s, tied to postwar consumer optimism, suburban expansion, and the sexual revolution of the 1960s–70s. Desire was dramatic, overt, and often perilous. Calvin Klein, Dolce & Gabbana, and Tom Ford (Figure 34) established their brands through seduction, characterised by glossy skin, provocative language, and erotic

tension. This defiant aesthetic aligned with a context of economic growth and optimism (Williamson 1978; Jhally 1990).

The twenty-first century, in contrast, ushered in fatigue. In the wake of various crises, consumers prioritised stability over stimulation. The generation raised during the Y2K era cultivated a need for emotional safety, wellness, and balance. In the current economy, food has become the primary symbol of comfort and purity, surpassing the body. Steaming coffee or a doughnut now serves as a symbol of self-care, akin to what perfume bottles and bare skin represented in the past —a fleeting moment for oneself. The marketing tagline evolved from "sex sells" to "safe sells." This trend reflects sociologist Eva Illouz's (2007) concept of emotional capitalism, where emotions are commodified and brands market comfort over confrontation. Gilles Lipovetsky (1994) outlines a postmodern shift "from transgression to tenderness," where luxury shifts from being shocking to a soothing presence to maintain its relevance. Food imagery in the 2020s wellness economy illustrates this logic: sensual without being sexual, lavish yet permissible, intimate but secure.

Economic Indicators and Emotional Replacements

The relationship between economic anxiety and aesthetic behaviour is well-established. In times of financial uncertainty, consumers typically transition from major luxuries to smaller ones, a trend noted by economists and marketers (Kapferer and Bastien 2017). In 2001, Leonard Lauder introduced the Lipstick Index, noting that lipstick sales increase during economic downturns while sales of luxury goods decrease. Subsequent psychological research corroborated this finding: Hill, Rodeheffer, and Griskevicius (2012) demonstrated that minor, affordable pleasures can symbolically reinstate a sense of control and optimism when larger aspirations seem

unattainable. In 2022, U.S. lip-makeup sales increased by approximately 50 percent year-over-year, surpassing the overall beauty industry (Danziger 2022).

Fashion historians note a pattern in the Hemline Index, suggesting that skirt lengths increase during prosperous periods and decrease in times of recession (Taylor 1926; van Baardwijk and Franses 2010). While its predictive ability is contested, it highlights a lasting reality: consumer aesthetics reflect emotional states tied to financial sentiment (The Economist 2009).

Today, the Lipstick Index takes on an edible form. The $25 designer dessert, limited-edition smoothie, or branded café experience epitomizes the "lipstick" of the wellness generation. During inflation and social fatigue, indulging in food rather than fashion fosters a sense of control and continuity. Consumers now exert power via self-care instead of seduction (Hill et al. 2012; Kapferer and Bastien 2017).

Food as a Luxury During Recession

This substitution illustrates that the rise in food-centric marketing serves as an economic strategy. Similar to lipstick in 2001 or red nail polish in the Great Depression, "luxury food" offers an affordable means of aspiration. (Lipovetsky 1994; Kapferer and Bastien 2017).

This reflects the experience premium, where rising uncertainty leads consumers to prioritise emotionally rich experiences over financially substantial goods (Pine and Gilmore 1998). Dining out, capturing a croissant, or sharing a branded beverage acts as both solace and social capital—an expression of hope during challenging periods. The current "food sells" trend represents the latest phase in a century-long cycle of aesthetic adaptation to crisis.

The link between consumer psychology and economic conditions indicates that the food-as-luxury trend is not just aesthetic; it is also symptomatic. It illustrates how societies leverage sensory pleasure to navigate instability. Red lipstick symbolised resilience, while green matcha now embodies a moment of calm amidst chaos (Hill et al. 2012; Danziger 2022).
This figure, from the Hill, Rodeheffer, and Griskevicius (2012) Journal of Personality and Social Psychology article that empirically demonstrated the Lipstick Effect, illustrates the experimental finding known as the “Lipstick Effect.” Participants exposed to recession-related information reported a stronger desire to purchase attractiveness-related products (right bars) compared to control products (left bars), suggesting that economic threat increases investment in symbolic or aesthetic self-enhancement (Figure 35)

The transition from "sex sells" to "safety sells" (not an official term, was created to exemply idea in this thesis) has created a new luxury consumer influenced by uncertainty. This audience prioritises emotional stability and authenticity over spectacle, favouring intimate, sensory, and culturally significant experiences. Brands convert reassurance into ritual by employing food, care, and hospitality to foster a sense of belonging.

The Mooncake as a Cultural Currency in China

The mooncake is one of the most powerful symbols in China of how luxury brands adapt to local cultures. Mooncakes are small pastries filled with egg yolk and lotus seed paste. They stand for family togetherness and the cycle of renewal during the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival. In the last ten years, their round shape and ceremonial exchange have become a cultural touchpoint for multinational businesses that want to get close without being intrusive.

The Lucky Cloud Box by Louis Vuitton started the craze in 2009. It was a wooden box with a personalised mooncake in each drawer. The gesture was little but well thought out; it combined Chinese symbols with Western grandeur and patisserie. Dior, Hermès, and Chanel soon followed suit, making limited-edition boxes that merged the mooncake's traditional shape with lacquered finishes, metallic clasps, and famous logos (Figure 36). What started as gifts for clients has turned into a yearly event on sites like Xiaohongshu, where "designer mooncake unboxings" are popular every

September. Fendi's 2023 lantern-shaped set and Audemars Piguet's shadow-theater box were collector's items that sold online for hundreds of euros.

This technique promotes inclusivity and is based on Chinese history and culture, which makes customers feel like they are being addressed to and are a part of this world. It's crucial for European luxury brands to show that they recognise the beauty of other cultures and talk to them. This helps to welcome and inspire consumers from other countries to enter the realm of European luxury. The mooncake is like a cultural passport that lets European businesses join the Chinese market, which is becoming more and more closed off, in a way that is respectful. It changes luxury from something people want to something they all do.

Middle East – Hospitality as Status

Food is the centre of social life in the Middle East, and hosting is a way to show respect. Luxury brands that do well in this area know that being prestigious isn't just about being exclusive; it's also about being generous. The Louis Vuitton x Sadeem Desert Iftar in Dubai (Figure 37) is a good example of this. The temporary café was in the dunes and combined high-end design with Emirati hospitality. The structure, which was simple, had a monogram and was lit from within

like a desert lantern, served as both a dining area and an installation. During Ramadan, guests could only book a few evening seats to share an iftar made by local chefs and decorated with Vuitton's travel themes.

The partnership turned the sacred act of breaking fast into a full-on brand experience. It made Louis Vuitton seem like a part of the regional tradition instead of just an observer. In this way, the desert café was in line with Middle Eastern ideas of communal gathering and ritual generosity, and it continued the maison's long story of travel and exploration. As mentioned earlier, in Islamic thought, ideals such as *zehn* and *adab* frame dining as an act of moral and intellectual generosity. Louis Vuitton's iftar reflects this philosophy and shows that the brand knows its customers and the local beauty and idea of luxury whilst adding its own creative twist to the Middle East.The regional success of this approach lies in its sincerity. By merging aesthetic codes, European design with Arab foods and modest clothes—Louis Vuitton created a moment that honors the local whilst remaining true to their brand identity. Guests left with memories rather than merchandise, and observers online participated in the shared fantasy. Food here served as both entry and metaphor: the breaking of bread as the breaking of cultural distance.

Europe – Heritage and the Modern Banquet

In Europe, luxury and dining have always been intertwined. The modern banquet—whether at *Monsieur Dior* in Paris or *Gucci Osteria* in Florence—translates centuries of aristocratic ritual into contemporary brand storytelling. What once signified lineage now signals belonging. These experiences use food as narrative, positioning dining as a gateway into heritage.

At *Monsieur Dior*, the menu becomes an edible archive: cakes mirror the curvature of couture silhouettes, and plating mimics the geometry of dressmaking (Vogue 2023) (Figure 39). Guests actively participate in Dior's design language (Figure 38). Similarly, *Gucci Osteria* by Massimo Bottura reinterprets the Renaissance banquet through playful Italian excess (The Guardian 2022). Each course performs Gucci's identity: creative, eclectic, and rooted in art history (Figure 41).

From a marketing perspective, both spaces extend the brand's core equity into sensorial form. They transform intangible heritage into multi-sensory engagement, deepening emotional recall. The guest's photograph of a dessert or table setting becomes a piece of user-generated advertising—a modern equivalent of the Rococo terrace scene. Dining here sells the feeling of refinement, not the food itself (Figure 40).

These restaurants draw customers from all over the world, yet their symbolic syntax is still very European. The European rules of distinction that still shape the global lexicon of luxury are what give fine dining its aesthetic appeal: linen, symmetry, candlelight, and careful service. Even when manufacturers adapt their food to other countries, they still use this inherited framework to say "elevated taste." The European table still sets the standard for how luxury should look, feel, and taste.

For marketers, this dominance is a way to make money. Europe's culinary tradition gives both authenticity and hope; it shows global consumers that a brand's story is based on continuity. The result is a worldwide shorthand for elegance that quietly keeps European control over the idea of luxury around the world.

Europe, where the idea of luxury was initially made official through royal banquets and guild craftsmanship, still shows off its status through feasting. But the meaning has shifted. Now, the

modern feast is made up of carefully chosen experiences that honour the past instead of the present.

Contemporary Japan – Precision as Branding

By retracing centuries-old craftsmanship, the intial idea behind luxury, Loewe's Kyoto Tea Installations (Figure 42, Figure 43) offer a contemporary interpretation of Japan's aesthetic of care. Kaikado, a sixth-generation family workshop that has existed since 1875, collaborated on the project. Touch, rhythm, and the preservation of tradition were its main themes (Pin-Up 2025). Each item—a tray, a vase, or a hand-forged tea caddy—was viewed as part of a ritual rather than as a finished good. People were forced to pause and pay attention by the exhibit, which transformed the act of serving tea into a tactile and concentrated experience.

For Loewe, this collaboration demonstrated cultural awareness in addition to making design more appropriate for the region. Through collaboration with Kyoto artisans, the brand entered the Japanese market based on respect rather than dominance. Listening and realising that luxury in Japan is more about how something is handled than how it looks was the aim, not making a sale. The Japanese belief that true refinement derives from care, not from having too much, was evident in every surface, proportion, and texture. Loewe's endeavour is thus a translation as well as a tribute. By fusing the contemporary corporate story with the ancient art of the tea ceremony,

the piece shows that ritual may still serve as the foundation for contemporary luxury. What used to take place in the tea room is now reflected in personalised interactions where food and drink stand for balance, accuracy, and deference. Loewe transforms from a European home in Japan into a guest in the country's rich history whilst staying true to their playful nature.

Contemporary Russia – Visibility Reimagined

In present-day Russia, luxury is shown through being seen, being generous, and having clear proof of prosperity, the opposite of ‘quiet luxury’. The way people understand prestige is shaped by their cultural memory of scarcity and the historical relationship between wealth and safety. This means that marketers need to use luxury as an emotional comfort in their ads. Luxury is something that can be seen, touched, and shared. Dolce & Gabbana's Alta Moda dinners (Figure 45) and Bvlgari's Caviar Nights (Figure 44) are two examples of this kind of event. Both combine high fashion and food to show that their presence is permanent and that the customer belongs. Dolce & Gabbana's identity is based on family, ancestry and costumes. Aligning with Russia's love of lineage and dedication makes their cultural impact stronger (Vogue 2021; Tatler 2021). The dining table becomes a way to connect people, turning Italian playfulness into Russian grandeur. Bvlgari's Caviar Nights take a same concept by combining jewellery and food into one sensory language (Something About Rocks 2024). Caviar, traditionally associated with Russian riches beyond it being a delicacy, is a demonstration of fortitude. In times of political or economic turmoil, the return of old luxury symbols such as caviar reflects a cultural longing for security and continuity (Roger 2015). In societies marked by past instability, the public display of wealth serves not mere vanity but validation—proof of control, prosperity, and restored order. Russia is a wealthy country, and the Dolce & Gabbana’s defining characteristics, ornate excess, theatrical staging, and Mediterranean sensuality—are quite appropriate there. From a marketing

perspective, these activations serve to provide a sense of security by presenting a show, in addition to giving customers an occasion to wear their products. As a tool for social positioning and self-legitimation, Bourdieu argues that taste is fundamentally biased (Bourdieu 1984). Here, physical presence is just as important as mental clarity when it comes to strength, and vice versa for beauty. So, the events put on by Dolce & Gabbana are beyond the entry to their world but they also offer a fleeting sense of stability and distraction in an otherwise politically instable environments.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Synthesis: The Universal Language of Desire

Throughout history, the act of dining has intricately reflected how societies express their values, create structure and community. What was previously exclusive to royal banquets or temple feasts has now been adapted by branded cafés and immersive marketing events. Food has become a significant emotional entry point to luxury brands, skilfully expressing their identity across various cultures and generations. The historical frameworks previously analyzed, from European craftsmanship, Middle Eastern hospitality, Chinese harmony, Japanese precision, Russian abundance, to American aspiration, now come together to form a cohesive global language of taste. The desire for real experiences instead of pure material possession has shaped the world of consumption and marketing.

In this evolving landscape, luxury marketing shifted focus on creating emotional reactions than on simply selling a specific product. The goal? Returning customers, as they become attached to the brand through the brand ethos. Tapping into emotions in such a way, makes the brand and the product endlessly memorable as Neuroscientist Rachel Herz (2017) emphasises, that smell and

taste engage with the limbic brain, creating lasting bonds. Indulging in an Audemas Piquet macaron or entering a Louis Vuitton Cafe transforms the experience beyond branding; it makes the consumer forget that this is for marketing, as the consumer is having this all-sensory (and distracting) experience.

The campaigns of the late twentieth century thrived on erotic tension and spectacle; however, contemporary consumers seek tranquillity, intimacy, and a feeling of well-being. Gilles Lipovetsky (1994) describes this postmodern transition as a quest for emotional equilibrium, whereas Eva Illouz (2007) refers to it as "emotional capitalism," where emotions are commodified. Food harmonises seamlessly with this developing economy: it represents closeness, provides solace, and communicates in a universally understood dialect.

This logic underpins the rise of the "sweet treat" movement, where small luxuries stand in for mindful repetitive indulgences. They make pleasure feel intentional and self-aware, are an easy entry ticket into belonging and make the customer feel in control. Here is where brands create emotional anchors: moments that reward, comfort, and subtly reaffirm identity.

Across regions, food-based branding adapts to different cultural ideals of beauty and belonging. In China, designer mooncakes express unity and respect; in Dubai, Louis Vuitton's desert iftar embodies generosity; and in Japan, minimalist tea rituals mirror discipline and care to name a few examples. Each interpretation shows how luxury brands translate their core identity through local food and hospitality traditions without losing coherence. By inviting consumers to eat, sit, or share within their world, brands bridge cultural boundaries while maintaining a consistent emotional signature and offer a sense of comfort 'safe space' for their customers.

The strength of these strategies lies in participation. As Pine and Gilmore (1999) describe in *The Experience Economy*, modern value is created through engagement, not ownership. A branded café, pop-up, or tasting event lets the consumer step into the story rather than merely observe it. The flavor fades, but the feeling lingers. This continuity between brand and memory is what sustains long-term customer loyalty.

Food allows luxury stores to evolve from mere transactions to fostering individual connections. Through sensory marketing brands link instinct with imagination and tap into our subconcscious or conscious desires.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Future Outlook: From Feast to Feeling

Luxury has always mirrored human well-being, class and desire. From royal banquets to branded cafés, what has always been an emblem of power has become more associated with emotion. The table, whether marble or digital, continues to stage the same human drama: belonging. This thesis has shown that food, more than any other sensory medium, translates cultural difference into shared experience. It connects past and present, ritual and marketing, art and commerce.

In the twenty-first century, the value of luxury no longer lies in mere ownership but in perception — the ability to *feel* refined, not to possess refinement. Food has become the most persuasive medium for this new economy of feeling as it opens the doors to participate in somethig greater. The consumer no longer buys singular luxury objects but the atmosphere surrounding it. This aestheticization of consumption and of eating, photographing, and sharing for performances of this belonging has become logic of contemporary luxury. The healthy smoothie, the matcha latte, or the designer cake exists as an extension of this narrative.

This study has demonstrated that branded food experiences cultivate long-term loyalty not through repetition but through emotional resonance. International luxury brands sustain their identity across cultures by translating their stories whilst adapting to local environments and blending in. A Dior café in Paris, a Louis Vuitton mooncake in Shanghai, or a Loewe tea installation in Kyoto all express the same core message: this is our world of luxury and exclusivity that knows no borders. Food becomes the common denominator through which brands can easily branch out globally whilst staying intimate and even local. The next phase of the industry is defined by the dynamic interplay of authenticity, wellness, technology and the communication with the target audience.

Even if Europe still sets the standards for luxury in terms of style and history, cultural authority is becoming more shared. America is currently the world's tastemaker economy due to its entertainment industry that shapes international pop culture and trends. What is desirable, relatable, and worth wanting to be a part of. From the sweet-treat movement to the Erewhon–Balenciaga collaboration, luxury is no longer based on old-world pedigree but on how well-known it is online. People like Kim Kardashian are a good example of this paradox: they turn exclusivity into ambition by being visible instead of coming from a certain background. As luxury moves into a time characterised by this digital narrative and algorithmic trends, it will find a balance between European legacy and American immediacy. The yearning for authenticity will remain, yet there will be more of an interplay between classical and futuristic, ever changing ideals.

At the same time, digital sensory technologies will redefine how conveying emotion is designed and delivered. Artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and multisensory branding will soon simulate texture, scent, and taste through screens and can allow to expand marketing horizons in

ways that havent been seen before. In such a context, the café or dessert may become even more of an authentic form of human connection a reminder that true attachment is still rooted in touch and presence. As algorithms personalize every recommendation, emotional authenticity will become the rarest commodity.

It will be revealing to observe how these dynamics evolve amid political instability and widening inequality. Luxury, which once defined aspiration through exclusion, now navigates a world marked by uncertainty and fatigue. In this context, aestheticized consumption provides both escape and reflection, a way to to have the feeling of order, beauty, and meaning in chaos. The findings of this research suggest that marketers who understand this balance can craft strategies that feel intimate rather than boastful and how through storytelling the world will cross culturally connect even deeper.

Ultimately, food endures as the purest medium through which luxury creates these emotional connections. It engages all the senses at once, ephemeral and unforgettable, intimate yet universal. From the mooncake to the smoothie, from the desert iftar to the Ralph Lauren café, food transforms desire into dialogue. It remains the universal language through which luxury communicates what words cannot.

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Appendix A - Interview Fraziska Fugger von Babenhausen (Conducted by

Aloisa Ruf, 2025)

1. Historical role of feasting

In European aristocratic culture, especially during the Renaissance, banquets were more than meals—they were social and political tools. In your view, what role did hospitality and dining play in shaping influence and status among elite families like the Fuggers?

Hospitality and dining always played a pivotal role in shaping and manifesting status, respect and influence of historically powerful families like the one I was lucky enough to be born into. Especially during the Renaissance, the Fuggers who cultivated deep economic and cultural ties to Italy (especially Venice and Rome) were constantly hosting important political, religious and aristocratic figures and their entourage, whose physical and emotional wellbeing had the highest priority. In order to achieve the most productive outcome during and after such lavish banquets, absolute VIP treatment of every guest welcomed by the Fuggers was essential to securing the closing of important business and political deals, promoting future marriages into nobility, and growing a solid network of key players and partners around the entire globe.

2. Food as a symbol

Historical accounts and artworks show exotic foods—spices, citrus, sugar sculptures—on elite tables. Why did food function as a symbol of power and global reach during that time?

Showcasing expensive and hard to come by foods painted in artworks, spread out on banquet tables, placed beautifully as decoration and served in skillfully prepared exotic dishes symbolized not only great wealth and power but proved the elite status in society of any host rich enough to spoil their guests with such rare and highly sought after delicacies. For example, a "luxury pineapple craze" began in the 15th century after Christopher Columbus first brought the juicy sweet delight from Guadalupe to Spain in 1493 and several Monarchs began falling head over heels in love with it. Europe went nuts for "la piña" in the 16th and 17th century as can be seen in many paintings, sculptures and ornaments of the time. During a moment when sweet foods and sugar were hard to come by and exotic fruits were impossible to grow outside a tropical climate, the pineapple obsession as a status symbol of wealth resulted in people spending up to what today would be 8.000 dollars to simply rent one for a few hours to impress their dinner guests.

3. Ritual and hierarchy

Many European feasts followed strict codes of etiquette, seating order, and ceremony. How did dining rituals communicate hierarchy in a way words did not?

Nobody was allowed to begin eating until the host and his wife placed the first bite into their mouths. Food was always served first to the highest ranking personalities and only afterwards continued down the order of nobility and position of importance. This often resulted in the actual eating time for the lower ranked guests being severely shortened and restricted since the same rule for dining start, went for dining end. When the King and Queen or whoever was hosting finished their dish, no one else was allowed to continue eating theirs either. Legend has it, a very famous Austrian dish known as "Tafelspitz" became more famous because of this strict code of etiquette. The Emperor Franz Joseph devoured his favorite lunch of in vegetable broth boiled beef served with apple and horseradish mousse with such speed, his hungry Officers who had to stop eating once the Emperor finished, afterwards went to the Hotel Sacher were they received more slow boiled beef which could be enjoyed in peace until everyone was satisfied and recharged.

4. Art connection

Banquet scenes appear frequently in European painting. Do you believe these scenes reflect reality, or were they designed to project a certain image of refinement and superiority?

I believe there to be an element of both reality and exaggeration in stunning and impressive banquet scene masterpieces painted for courts and nobles throughout European history. From old recipe and food delivery documents I found in the Fugger archives, fantastically delicious and luxurious food was transported regularly from Italy and around the world to the Fugger Palaces in Augsburg and Swabian countryside Castles like Hans Fugger's Schloss Kirchheim. A gorgeous Italian Renaissance painting from the Castles' collection by Vincenzo Campi depicting a beautiful "fruit vendor" surrounded by baskets bursting with freshly harvested delicacies, confirms the image of wealthy merchants like the Fuggers who not only showed these luxury foods in their art collection but simultaneously served them to their guests regularly. Some paintings such as stunning Dutch and Italian artworks depicting flower, seafood and exotic fruit arrangements often show food and floral combinations which could never be found or sourced at the same time during a specific season. These are examples of impressive fantasy scenes designed as extravagant show pieces to solely project the image of power, beauty, abundance, influence and trade connections.

5. Continuity to today

Modern luxury brands now use food experiences—like Dior cafés or Louis Vuitton dinner events—as brand storytelling. Do you see a connection between these and historical court banquets?

Food has always been a symbol of indulgence, wealth and pleasure when put in connection with luxury and power. To stimulate the basic senses of touch, smell, taste and sound has historically been a successful tactic for seduction and people pleasing. Selling a luxury product and enticing the costumer to feel want and in some cases almost lust for it, usually results in a high sales success rate. This has never been any different in past centuries or in human history for that matter. Coming together and enjoying food at the top-quality level, stimulates those who seek the

best, to buy the best. If you love something, you want to have it and ideally buy it. In Germany we say, "Liebe geht durch den Magen" … which literally means, love enters through the stomach. It seems to be true that positive exhilarating food experiences can stimulate the costumers' senses to the point of truly loving and desiring a product even more.

6. European identity and luxury

From your perspective, what is uniquely European about the relationship between food, prestige, and cultural identity?

I'm not sure if this relationship between food, prestige and cultural identity is uniquely European. Sure, the aristocratic history in Europe with it's noble lavish courts from the Roman Empire, Greek Civilization, the Austrian Empire, Versailles, the Spanish Courts, and the British Empire explode with fabulous stories and examples of how food and luxury and prestige are intertwined, but I believe this relationship has always been present throughout the history of the world. Think of the Persian empire with Emperor Cyrius and his "paradise garden" and highly intelligent tactic of inviting his foes for a lavish feast the night before battle to only decide the next morning after spectacular food, wine, music and deep conversations if fighting and killing each other is really the most productive path to choose or if peace and business might actually be the wiser and more positive way to go. The Arabic world has an amazing culture of hospitality linked to food and building relationships while hosting guests. The topics of cuisine, luxury, etiquette, and ceremonial practices at the courts of ancient Asian emperors offer a wealth of material for scholarly research and discussion. Think of ancient Egypt and how much juicy luxury and food history can be discovered in hieroglyphs, papyrus rolls and pharaonic tombs! And who knows how far back we could go… I bet Atlantis has amazing food and luxury stories we could still discover.

7. Personal insight

Do you feel that the legacy of hospitality still matters in European culture today, and if so, what do people misunderstand most about luxury in history?

If people misunderstand luxury in history it might be tied to certain exaggerated behavior like romans eating for days and throwing up their food, certain Greek erotic practices linked to extreme extravagance, wasting of food and pompous overloading luxury life designed to keep nobility controlled and sedated in Versailles and other rather nasty behavior tied to decadence. I believe that in some circles, this behavior may still persist today, albeit behind closed doors. In the end the legacy and art of hospitality will always matter. Even though over time, the way it is lived and celebrated might have changed, the root of what hospitality means and why it is important for humans will always remain the same. People coming together, enjoying food, exchanging stories, feeling at ease and building strong connections is the most valuable way to create the future, celebrate the present, preserve the past and my favorite part… close great business deals! Hence, food is a highly helpful advertising tool to sell luxury goods like hotcakes.

List of Illustrations

FIGURE 1. WILLEM CLAESZ. HEDA, STILL-LIFE, 1651.
OIL ON PANEL, 69 × 56 CM.
RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM. IMAGE VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.
HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:WILLEM_CLAESZ.HEDA-STILL-LIFE-_WGA11239.JPG

FIGURE 2. FRANZ CHRISTOPH JANNECK, ELEGANT COMPANY FEASTING ON A TERRACE, C. 1735, OIL ON COPPER, 41.3 × 52.1 CM. SOTHEBY'S, OLD MASTERS ONLINE SALE, LOT 8, 2018. IMAGE VIA SOTHEBY'S. CHRISTOPH JANNECK'S ELEGANT COMPANY FEASTING ON A TERRACE (C. 1735)

List of Illustrations

FIGURE 3. SULTAN MUHAMMAD (ATTRIBUTED), “THE FEAST OF SADA”, FOLIO 22V FROM THE SHAHNAMA (BOOK OF KINGS) OF SHAH TAHMASP, CA. 1525. OPAQUE WATERCOLOR, INK, SILVER, AND GOLD ON PAPER, 24.1 × 23 CM (PAINTING); PAGE 47 × 31.8 CM. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. (ACC. 1970.301.2) FIGURE 1. WILLEM CLAESZ. HEDA, STILL-LIFE, 1651.
OIL ON PANEL, 69 × 56 CM.
RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM.
IMAGE VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.
HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:WILLEM_CLAESZ.HEDA-STILL-LIFE-_WGA11239.JPG

List of Illustrations

FIGURE 6. HOUSE OF FABERGÉ, GATCHINA PALACE EGG, 1901. ENAMEL, GOLD-GILT, SEED PEARLS ETC. WALTERS ART MUSEUM, BALTIMORE (ACC. 44.500). IMAGE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS. HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:HOUSE_OF_FABERG%C3%A9_-GATCHINA_PALACE_EGG-WALTERS_44500-_OPEN_VIEW_B.JPG

FIGURE 7. BORIS KUSTODIEV, MERCHANT'S WIFE AT TEA (КУПЧИХА ЗА ЧАЕМ), 1918. OIL ON CANVAS, 120 × 120 CM. RUSSIAN MUSEUM, SAINT PETERSBURG. HTTPS://EN.RUSMUSEUM.RU/COLLECTIONS/PAINTING-OF-THE-SECOND-HALF-OF-THE-XIX-CENTURY-BEGINNING-OF-XXI-CENTURY/ARTWORKS/KUPCHIKHA-ZA-CHAEM/

FIGURE 8. FREEDOM FROM WANT, NORMAN ROCKWELL, 1943. OIL ON CANVAS, 116.2 × 90 CM. NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM, STOCKBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS. [HTTPS://GOLDENAGEPOSTERS.COM/PRODUCTS/1943-FREEDOM-FROM-WANT-NORMAN-ROCKWELL-FOUR-FREEDOMS-OWI-NO-45-FULL-SIZE?VARIANT=39586427109479] (HTTPS://GOLDENAGEPOSTERS.COM/PRODUCTS/1943-FREEDOM-FROM-WANT-NORMAN-ROCKWELL-FOUR-FREEDOMS-OWI-NO-45-FULL-SIZE?VARIANT=395864271094

FIGURE 9. ANDY WARHOL, CAMPBELL'S SOUP CANS, 1962. OIL ON CANVAS (32 CANVASES EACH 50.8 × 40.6 CM). PRIVATE COLLECTION / MUSEUM (VARIOUS). IMAGE VIA SOTHEBY'S. HTTPS://WWW.SOTHEBYS.COM/EN/ARTICLES/THE-STORY-OF-ANDY-WARHOLS-CAMPBELLS-SOUP-CAN

FIGURE 10. BARBARA KRUGER, UNTITLED (I SHOP THEREFORE I AM), 1990. PHOTOLITHOGRAPH ON PAPER SHOPPING BAG, 43.9 × 27.3 CM. KÖLNISCHER KUNSTVEREIN, COLOGNE. HTTPS://PUBLICDELIVERY.ORG/BARBARA-KRUGER-I-SHOP/S

FIGURE 11. RALPH'S COFFEE, CAFÉ BY RALPH LAUREN AT AVENTURA MALL, MIAMI (INTERIOR VIEW). OPENED 2022. IMAGE VIA AVENTURA MALL. HTTPS://MIPYMAG.COM.BR/CAFE-RALPH-LAUREN-AVENTURA-MALL-MIAMI/

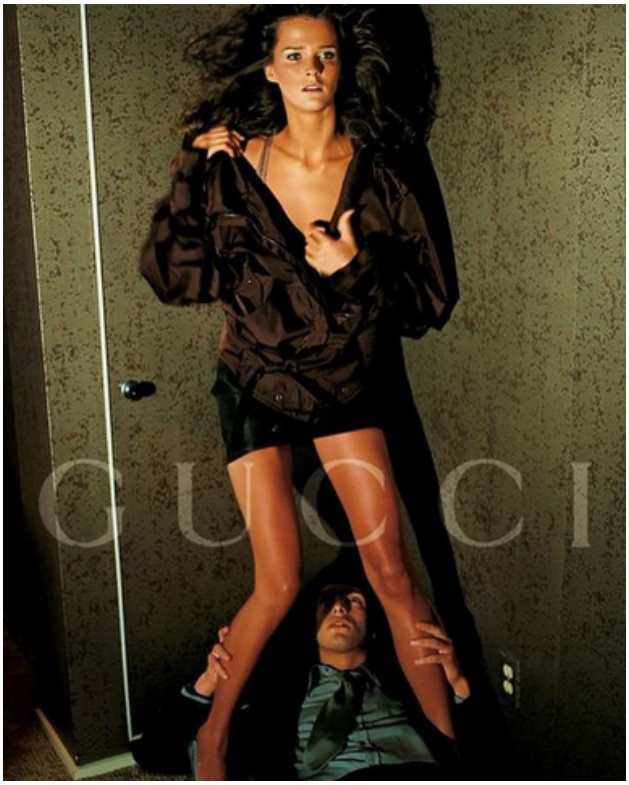

FIGURE 12. PHOTOGRAPH BY MARIO TESTINO, GUCCI SPRING/SUMMER 2003 READY-TO-WEAR ADVERTISEMENT (MODEL: CARMEN KASS), 2003. CAMPAIGN STILL, FEATURED IN GUCCI ADVERTISEMENT SERIES. (SOURCE: FASHION MODEL DIRECTORY) HTTPS://WWW.FASHIONMODELDIRECTORY.COM/BRANDS/GUCCI/ADVERTISEMENTS/2003/SPRING-SUMMER/41619

FIGURE 13. GUCCI, LOVE PARADE SPRING/SUMMER 2022 CAMPAIGN (FEATURING SNOOP DOGG & MILEY CYRUS), 2022. PHOTOGRAPH BY MERT ALAS & MARCUS PIGGOTT. CAMPAIGN STILL, COURTESY OF GUCCI. HTTPS://WWW.DAZEDDIGITAL.COM/FASHION/ARTICLE/55504/1/SNOOP-DOGG-AND-MILEY-CYRUS-STAR-IN-GUCCI-S-LOVE-PARADE-CAMPAIGN

FIGURE 14. LE CAFÉ V BY DIOR (INTERIOR/LAUNCH SNAPSHOT), 2024. IMAGE VIA NATASHA TRAVELER. HTTPS://NATASHA-TRAVELER.TW/LE-CAFE-V/

FIGURE 15. PRADA CAFFÈ AT HARRODS, LONDON, INTERIOR INSTALLATION, OPENED MARCH 31 2023. HARRODS, KNIGHTSBRIDGE, LONDON. IMAGE VIA PRADA PRESS RELEASE. HTTPS://WWW.PRADA.COM/US/EN/PRADASPHERE/SPECIAL-PROJECTS/2023/PRADA-CAFFE-HARRODS.HTM

FIGURE 16 UNKNOWN CREATOR, [TITLE OR BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF IMAGE], [C. 2016]. PINTEREST PIN. HTTPS://WWW.PINTEREST.COM/PIN/20758848277784759/

FIGURE 17. UNKNOWN CREATOR, [BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF IMAGE], PINTEREST PIN, ACCESSED [OCTOBER 22,2025]. HTTPS://WWW.PINTEREST.COM/PIN/733946070569679145/

FIGURE 18. CLARA PEETERS, STILL LIFE WITH A BASKET OF FRUITS AND NUTS, A COFFEE POT AND A ROEMER ON A SILVER PLATE WITH CHERRIES, STRAWBERRIES, GRAPES, PEACHES AND A STAG BEETLE, CA. 1615. OIL ON PANEL. IMAGE VIA PINTEREST

FIGURE 19. WILLEM CLAESZ. HEDA, STILL LIFE WITH FRUIT PIE AND VARIOUS OBJECTS, 1634. OIL ON PANEL, 43.7 × 68.2 CM. MUSEO NACIONAL THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA, MADRID. HTTPS://WWW.MUSEOTHYSSEN.ORG/EN/COLLECTION/ARTISTS/HEDA-WILLEM-CLAESZ/STILL-LIFE-FRUIT-PIE-AND-VARIOUS-OBJECTS

FIGURE 20. UNKNOWN CREATOR, [DESCRIPTION OF IMAGE], PINTEREST PIN, ACCESSED SEPTEMBER 2025. HTTPS://WWW.PINTEREST.COM/PIN/687432330665566865/

FIGURE 21. JEAN-AUGUSTE-DOMINIQUE INGRES (AFTER), ODALISQUE, 1842. OIL ON CANVAS, 76 × 105 CM. WALTERS ART MUSEUM, BALTIMORE (ACC. 37.887). HTTPS://ART.THEWALTERS.ORG/OBJECT/37.887/

FIGURE 22. CMDIGITAL PRODUCTION, BRINE BK9W9, N.D. DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH/FILM STILL. IMAGE COURTESY CMDIGITAL PRODUCTION. HTTPS://WWW.CMDIGITALPRODUCTION.COM/WORK/BRINE-BK9W9

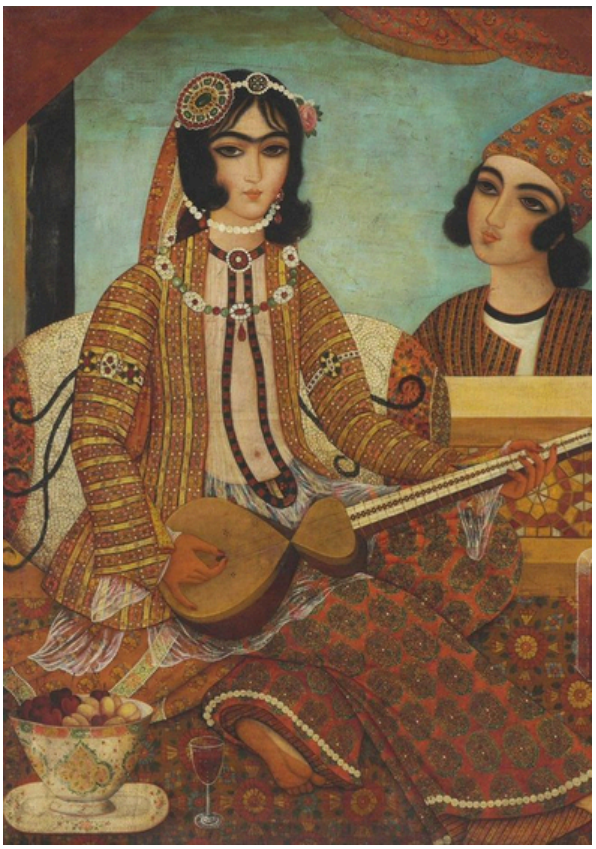

FIGURE 23. UNKNOWN ARTIST (QAJAR IRAN), A LADY PLAYING A STRINGED INSTRUMENT, EARLY 19TH CENTURY. WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER. IMAGE VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS. HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:A_LADY_PLAYING_A_STRINGED_INSTRUMENT,_QAJAR_IRAN,_EARLY_19TH_CENTURY.JPG

FIGURE 24. LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER, ADAM AND EVE, 1526. OIL ON PANEL. HTTPS://WWW.MEISTERDRUCKE.UK/FINE-ART-PRINTS/LUCAS-CRANACH-THE-ELDER/1554279/ADAM-AND-EVE.HTML

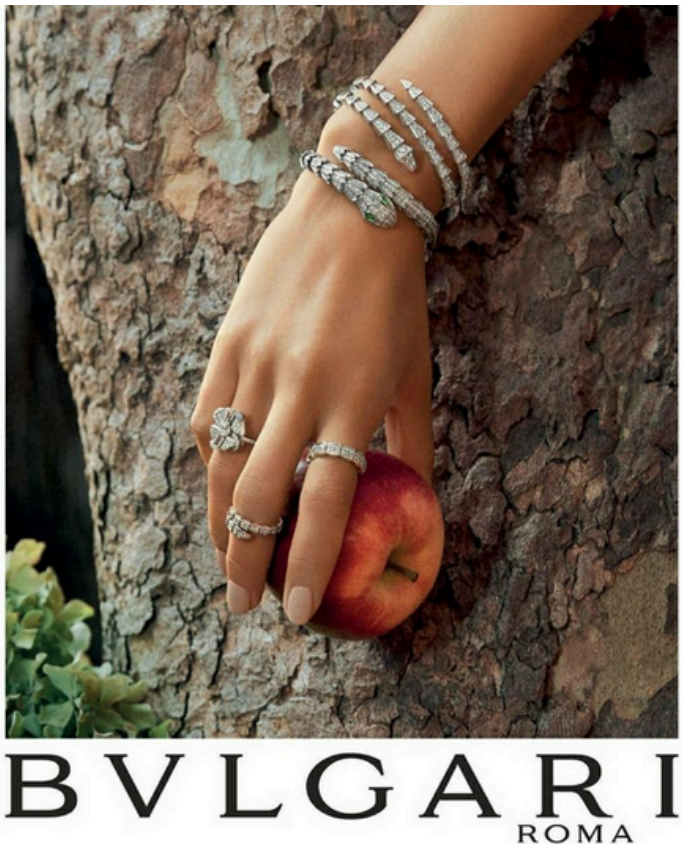

FIGURE 25: TAN, CORINA. 2020. “WILL COVID-19 CHANGE HOW WE SHOP FOR LUXURY JEWELLERY?” HER WORLD, APRIL 9. HTTPS://WWW.HERWORLD.COM/STYLE/WATCHES-JEWELLERY/COVID-19-LUXURY-JEWELLERY

FIGURE 26: KHAIRA-HANKS, PRIYA. 2023. "BALENCIAGA'S ODE TO LOS ANGELES INCLUDES ATHLEISURE…" FASHIONISTA, 3 DECEMBER. HTTPS://FASHIONISTA.COM/2023/12/BALENCIAGA-FALL-2024-LOS-ANGELES-REVIEW

FIGURE 27. PROFZUCKER, UNTITLED PHOTOGRAPH (FLICKR PHOTO ID 8276910959), DATE UNKNOWN. DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH. FLICKR. HTTPS://WWW.FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/PROFZUCKER/8276910959/

FIGURE 28: RETAIL BOSS. 2025. "JACQUEMUS." RETAIL BOSS. HTTPS://RETAILBOSS.CO/TAGS/JACQUEMUS/

FIGURE 29. UNKNOWN CREATOR, [BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF IMAGE], PINTEREST PIN, ACCESSED NOVEMBER 3, 2025. HTTPS://WWW.PINTEREST.COM/PIN/2392606047727034

FIGURE 30: PURO DISEÑO. 2024. "LA INCREÍBLE HISTORIA DEL MEME QUE SE CONVIRTIÓ EN EL ACCESORIO DE DISEÑO VIRAL DE LOEWE." PURO DISEÑO, [DATE OF PUBLICATION IF KNOWN]. HTTPS://PURODISENO.LAT/TENDENCIAS/LA-INCREIBLE-HISTORIA-DEL-MEME-QUE-SE-CONVIRTIO-EN-EL-ACCESORIO-DE-DISENO-VIRAL-DE-LOEWE-2024/.

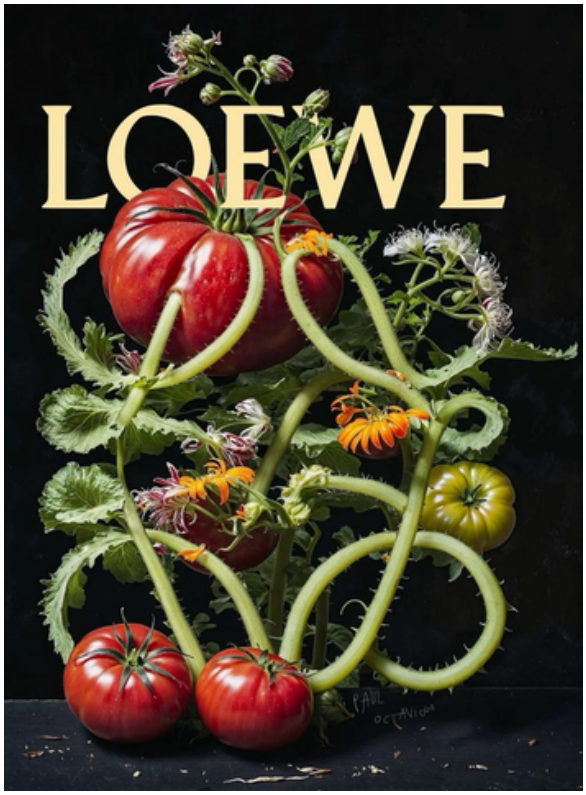

FIGURE 31: MURRAY, ARI. 2025. "FRESH FROM THE GARDEN — #HT #LOEWE." LINKEDIN POST, MAY 2025. LINKEDIN. HTTPS://WWW.LINKEDIN.COM/POSTS/ARIMURRAY_FRESH-FROM-THE-GARDEN-HT-LOEWE-ACTIVITY-7374636777753591808-1JBO/

FIGURE 32: WHITEPAPERBY. 2024. “LOEWE GLOBO TOMATE CIELO CAPADOCIA.” WHITEPAPERBY. HTTPS://WHITEPAPERBY.COM/LOEWE-GLOBO-TOMATE-CIELO-CAPADOCIA/

FIGURE 33: VENTURA, ALEJANDRO. 2025. “THE MEDITERRANEAN: A KEY SETTING FOR LOEWE’S SUMMER STRATEGY.” HIGHXTAR, 30 JULY. HTTPS://WWW.HIGHXTAR.COM/EN/THE-MEDITERRANEAN-A-KEY-SETTING-FOR-LOEWES-SUMMER-STRATEGY/

FIGURE 34:L’ETANG, JESS (OR OTHER AUTHOR IF KNOWN). 2009. “FRIDAY COLUMN | SHOCKVERTISING.” THE BUSINESS OF FASHION, APRIL 17. HTTPS://WWW.BUSINESSOFFASHION.COM/ARTICLES/NEWS-ANALYSIS/FRIDAY-COLUMN-SHOCKVERTISING/

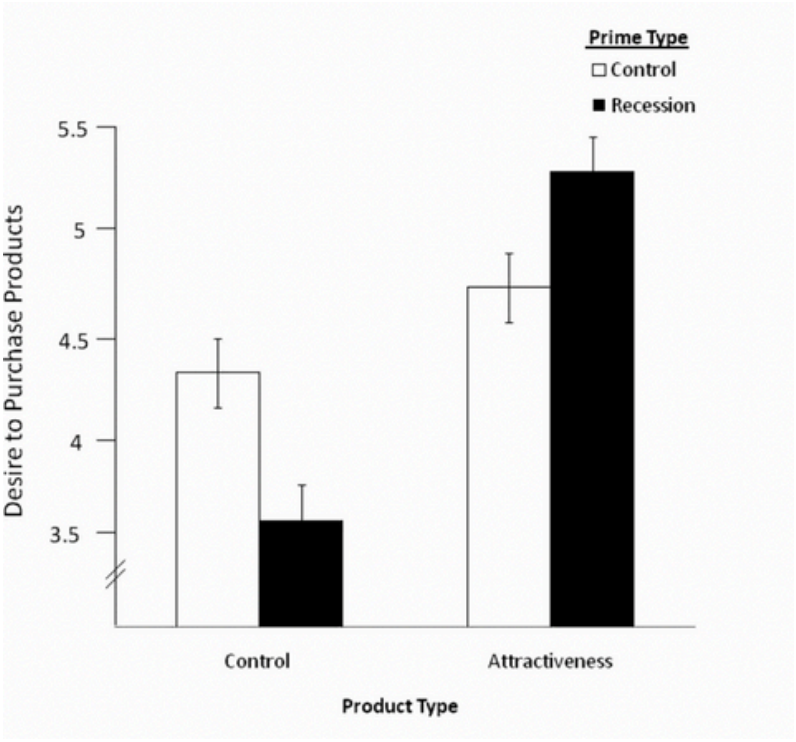

FIGURE 35: HILL, SARAH E., CHRISTOPHER D. RODEHEFFER, VLADAS GRISKEVICIUS, KRISTINA M. DURANTE, AND ANDREW E. WHITE. 2012. "BOOSTING BEAUTY IN AN ECONOMIC DECLINE: MATING, SPENDING, AND THE LIPSTICK EFFECT." JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY 103 (2): 275–91. HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1037/A0028657

FIGURE 36: HYPEBEAST. 2020. "BEST MOONCAKES FOR MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL: LOUIS VUITTON, VERSACE, GUCCI." HYPEBEAST, SEPTEMBER 3. HTTPS://HYPEBAE.COM/2020/9/BEST-MOONCAKES-MID-AUTUMN-FESTIVAL-LUXURIOUS-HOLIDAY-LOUIS-VUITTON-VERSACE-GUCCI

FIGURE 37: "BOOK THIS LOUIS VUITTON DESERT IFTAR NOW, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE." LIST MAGAZINE, MARCH 17, 2025. HTTPS://WWW.LISTMAG.COM/EN/EAT-DRINK/EXPERIENCES/BOOK-THIS-LOUIS-VUITTON-DESERT-IFTAR-NOW-BEFORE-ITS-TOO-LATE-3296

FIGURE 38: GDR. 2022. “GDR VISITS … DIOR’S 30 AVENUE MONTAIGNE FLAGSHIP IN PARIS.” GDR, MARCH. HTTPS://GDRUK.COM/INSPIRE/GDR-VISITS-DIORS-30-AVENUE-MONTAIGNE-FLAGSHIP-IN-PARIS/

FIGURE 39: INSTAGRAM. 2023. “REEL SHOWING DIOR PASTRIES].” INSTAGRAM VIDEO, POSTED JANUARY 23. HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/REEL/C6UBAOKMRMV/

FIGURE 40: TOM & LORENZO. 2022. “JARED LETO, MILEY CYRUS, SNOOP DOGG, BEANIE FELDSTEIN AND JUNGJAE LEE FOR GUCCI LOVE PARADE AD CAMPAIGN.” TOM & LORENZO, FEBRUARY 21. 42: LA ESPLORA. 2025. “TRAVEL & CULINARY.” LA ESPLORA – THE MAGAZINE FOR TRAVEL, CULINARY & LIFESTYLE. ACCESSED OCTOBER 22,2025. HTTPS://WWW.LAESPLORA.COM/EN/TRAVEL-CULINARY/

FIGURE 41: (NO DATE) GUCCI OSTERIA IN FLORENCE WAS JUST AWARDED ITS FIRST MICHELIN STAR - FASHION MAGAZINE. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://FASHIONMAGAZINE.COM/WELLNESS/GUCCI-OPENS-MICHELIN-STAR-RESTAURANT-FLORENCE/ (ACCESSED: 01 NOVEMBER 2025).

FIGURE 42: LOEWE-SUNA-FUJITA-CAPSULE-COLLECTION-STYLE-FASHION-MAIN-TLO (3) (LOEWE-SUNA-FUJITA-CAPSULE-COLLECTION-STYLE-FASHION-MAIN-TLO (3) (ACCESSED SEPTEMBER 8TH,2025) TOM + LORENZO. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://TOMANDLORENZO.COM/2024/11/LOEWE-X-SUNA-FUJITA-CAPSULE-COLLECTION/LOEWE-SUNA-FUJITA-CAPSULE-COLLECTION-STYLE-FASHION-MAIN-TLO-3/ .

FIGURE 43: LOEWE-SUNA-FUJITA-CAPSULE-COLLECTION-STYLE-FASHION-MAIN-TLO (3) (LOEWE-SUNA-FUJITA-CAPSULE-COLLECTION-STYLE-FASHION-MAIN-TLO (3) (ACCESSED SEPTEMBER 8TH,2025) TOM + LORENZO. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://TOMANDLORENZO.COM/2024/11/LOEWE-X-SUNA-FUJITA-CAPSULE-COLLECTION/LOEWE-SUNA-FUJITA-CAPSULE-COLLECTION-STYLE-FASHION-MAIN-TLO-3/ .

FIGURE 44: ITALIENISCHER SCHMUCK, UHREN UND LUXUSPRODUKTE: BVLGARI DEUTSCHLAND (NO DATE B) FINE ITALIAN JEWELRY, WATCHES AND LUXURY GOODS. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.BULGARI.COM/DE-DE/?SRSLTID=AFMBOORHRFRJRKAMWBPF-AJJRKZP-JHPIDWHEMBKW9DVNZOJYEI4J398 (ACCESSED: 03 OCTOBER 2025).

FIGURE 45: PETRARCA, E. (2018) INSIDE DOLCE & GABBANA'S ALTA MODA EXTRAVAGANZA, THE CUT. AVAILABLE AT: HTTPS://WWW.THECUT.COM/2018/04/INSIDE-DOLCE-AND-GABBANA-ALTA-MODA-FASHION-SHOWS.HTML (ACCESSED: 03 OCTOBER 2025).