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Do luxury brands offer an optimized on-line consumer experience on their e-commerce platforms? A comparative study of Louis Vuitton, Hermès and Gucci.

Lindsay Van Regemorter

Isabelle Schuiling,

Louvain Research Institute in Management
and Organizations

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(president-lourim@uclouvain.be)

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Summary

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Key words: luxury, luxury brands, exclusivity, digital marketing, website, e-commerce, e-service quality

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President-lourim@uclouvain.be, LouRIM, UCL, 1 Place des Doyens, B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, BELGIUM
<https://uclouvain.be/en/research-institutes/lourim>

Corresponding author :

Prof. Isabelle Schuiling
Louvain Louvain Research Institute in Management and Organizations / Campus Louvain-la-Neuve
Université catholique de Louvain
Place des Doyens 1 bte L2.01.02
B-Louvain-La-Neuve, BELGIUM

DO LUXURY BRANDS OFFER AN OPTIMIZED ON-LINE CONSUMER EXPERIENCE ON THEIR E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LOUIS VUITTON, HERMÈS, AND GUCCI.

Lindsay Van Regemorter

Isabelle Schuiling

Louvain Research Institute in Management and
Organizations
Université catholique de Louvain

Abstract

A few years ago, the importance of ecommerce platforms for luxury goods was considered by some specialists as secondary as in-store experience was viewed as more important. This has changed significantly with the rapid evolution of luxury consumers who also want to buy luxury brands online. The objective of this research was to evaluate whether luxury brands have been able to adapt to these changes and if they offer an optimized on-line consumer experience on their e-commerce platforms. This will be achieved by analyzing via an exploratory research 1) the website performance, 2) the website usability and 3) the e-service quality of three luxury flagship brands: Louis Vuitton, Hermès and Gucci. The research showed that the three brands currently perform well at optimizing their respective e-commerce websites. Comparatively, Hermès is still slightly lagging behind in some dimensions compared to higher overall performances by Louis Vuitton and Gucci. Areas of improvements have been identified for all brands.

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I. Introduction

The luxury market continues to be a very attractive category despite the pandemic crisis. In 2019, it reached a 4% growth to €1.3 million on a global basis (BCG 2020) followed by a shrinkage of 20% to 22% in 2020 due to the Covid-19 crisis (Bain&Company, 2021). Depending on macroeconomic conditions, varied growth scenarios have been established for 2021, ranging from +10%/12% to +17%/19% (Bain&Company, 2021). This increase in 2019 came mainly from the growing middle class in the Asia-Pacific region (mainland China, Southeast Asia and Japan) while growth in Europe and the Americas was more modest (Bain&Company, 2020). Up until 2019 Europe and the Americas were the top regions for luxury sales, but in 2020, Asia (more specifically Mainland China) became the biggest one (Bain&Company, 2021) as Chinese people stayed home and spent in the country (BCG, 2020).

Some years ago, many specialists considered that luxury brands did not need to be present on e-commerce platforms as they needed to offer an exclusive in-store experience that on-line selling could not offer. This is the reason why they developed successful on-line e-commerce offers later than other product categories. Indeed, these last few years we have seen that consumer behavior has rapidly changed, and the retail environment became more and more digitalized. Even luxury consumers wanted to be able to buy online. It has been recently reported that “luxury shoppers are willing to purchase luxury goods online at full price as they now consider the internet as a legitimate and trustworthy channel for purchasing luxury goods” (Kim and Kim, 2018).

By 2025, analysts even consider that 20% of luxury sales will happen online (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Moreover, luxury brands now have to meet the needs of a younger panel of consumers, highly digital and mobile-oriented that will make up to 130% market growth between 2019 and 2025 (Bain & Company, 2019). It is therefore a must today for luxury brands to implement a strong omnichannel marketing program integrating offline and online distribution channels (Kim and Kim, 2018).

In view of the relatively late adoption of e-commerce website platforms by luxury companies, it is interesting to investigate whether their e-commerce platforms are optimized and to evaluate which of the luxury brands have a stronger online offer, delivering a better consumer experience. The key objective of this research is therefore to evaluate whether luxury brands have optimized their online experience on their e-commerce platforms. A comparison will be made between three flagship luxury brands: Louis Vuitton, Hermes and Gucci.

I. Review of Literature

In order to answer this research question, we will first review the literature on luxury and then review the literature on the optimization of on-line platforms generating a good consumer experience. This will be achieved by covering the concepts of website performance, usability and e-service quality.

1. Luxury

1.1. The concept of luxury

Gabrielle Coco Chanel (1883-1971) defined luxury as “*a necessity that begins where necessity ends*”. Indeed, luxury goods do “exist at one end of a continuum with ordinary goods”, but where the ordinary ends and how the concept of necessity is considered is just a matter of perception from customers (Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010). What luxury represents for some people today, may not be the same as for others, and might not even be considered as luxury tomorrow (Som & Blanckaert, 2015). To date, there is no clear definition of luxury. As indicated by Heine: “from about 20 years ago until today, there is above all a consensus in business literature that there is actually no consensus about the definition of luxury products and brands” (Heine, 2012). However, these definitions hold one commonality: they incorporate a series of dimensions used to define a luxury brand (Ko, Costello, & Taylor, 2019). There are five different dimensions: “*A luxury brand is a branded product or service that consumers perceive to 1) be of high quality; 2) offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional; 3) have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality; 4) be worthy of commanding a premium price; and 5) be capable of inspiring a deep connection, resonance, with the consumer*” (Vinerean & Opreana, 2019).

Nowadays, the luxury industry covers nine sectors, each holding relative specificities and key success factors: (1) personal luxury goods, (2) luxury cars, (3) luxury hospitality, (4) fine wines & spirits, (5) gourmet food & fine dining, (6) high-end furniture & housewares, (7) fine art, (8) private jets & yachts, and (9) luxury cruises. This paper will focus specifically on personal luxury goods, which can be considered as the “core of the core” of the luxury market. Concerning the subcategories of the personal luxury goods market, the good performers in 2020 were both the shoes and jewelry recording a growth of 9%, closely followed by leather goods with a growth of 7% (Bain & Company, 2020).

1.2. Luxury items

What exactly makes a good luxury item? Michel Chevalier & Gérald Mazzalovo provided a comprehensive answer to that question. They argued that a luxury item has to meet three criteria: a strong artistic content, the result of traditional craftsmanship and an international dimension (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2015, p. 7).

The artistic dimension is the essence of the luxury market. A luxury item is more than an item, it is an object that has been created under a careful process of refined esthetic research. Indeed, the artistic components of the offer as a whole (the product, the wrapping, the advertising concept) have to be specifically strong because customers buy objects and expect every element of these objects to be magnificent. The craftsmanship aspect is also very important as luxury customers firmly wish to believe they buy an object coming straight out of the hands of craftsmen in the designer's workshop (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2015). Finally, the international dimension. Luxury brands must have an international presence while at the same time preserve the discernable national character of the brand. Those beautiful hand-made objects manufactured by talented designers have to be seen and acknowledged by the world before customers decide to buy them in their country or abroad. Therefore, in the luxury industry, it is almost impossible to exist without having a presence in the big cities such as Paris, Milan, New York, Honk-Kong, Shanghai and many others (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2015).

The value of a luxury good is also a difficult concept. The value of a luxury product differs according to the perception of the customer (Du, 2017). Depending on the society's state of development, on the financial resources of an individual and even on personal preferences, there cannot be a widely accepted understanding of the meaning of the value of a luxury good (Du, 2017), (Maman Larraufie & Kourdoughli, 2014). Jean-Louis Dumas, chairman of Hermès, argued that "*luxury can be very simple, for example, staying 15 minutes longer in bed*" (cited in Forbes India, 2013).

1.3. Luxury customers

In luxury, as previously indicated, there are no products, only objects that people desire. Therefore, it would be incorrect to talk about luxury customers as "consumers" as they do not consume a product but wish to acquire an object and then keep it. The customer acquires highly symbolic objects in special circumstances and does it in a special state of mind. Even repetitive purchases remain exceptional events with an emotional signification attached to it (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2015).

Nowadays, luxury brands have to answer to a more digitalized and innovative panel of customers with a strong need of information and instant purchase and with smartphones as powerful instruments (Hanania, Musnik, & Gaillochet, 2019). Luxury customers are now becoming highly digital, mobile-oriented, and social and therefore develop great expectations for what they desire in their shopping experience (McKinsey&Company, 2015). Millennials, or Generation Y¹ accounting for 35% of consumption in 2019, could make up to 45% of the luxury customer base in 2025, representing the most engaged luxury brands followers of all (Bain&Company, 2020). Yet, the younger Generation Z² is the one that will reshape the industry: accounting for only 4% of luxury purchases today, they could make up 40% by 2035

¹ Millenials or Generation Y: people born between 1980 and 1997 (Hanania, Musnik, & Gaillochet, 2019).

² Generation Z: people born between 1998 and 2019 (Hanania, Musnik, & Gaillochet, 2019).

(Bain&Company, 2020). Now, this Generation Z represents about 30% of the world population (Hanania, Musnik, & Gaillochet, 2019), and already constitutes a growing part of luxury consumption in Asian markets (Bain&Company, 2020). Connected on a permanent basis, they navigate on 4.4 different platforms in average. They are obsessed with their image and the desire to look good, which they massively expose on social media (Hanania, Musnik, & Gaillochet, 2019). Together, generation Y and Z will contribute to 130% of market growth between 2019 and 2025 (Bain&Company, 2019).

The luxury customers delivering the majority of the market growth are the Chinese people. Indeed, they accounted for “90% of the global market growth in 2019, reaching 35% of the value of luxury goods sold in the world” (Bain&Company, 2020) and are expected to account for 40% of the world’s spending on luxury goods by 2025 (McKinsey & Company, 2019). This trend is due to the rising living standards of Chinese citizen’s driving consumption levels to increase (Du, 2017). Consequently, China has witnessed an explosion of the upper-middle-class which will experience a compound annual growth rate of 28% from 2018 to 2025. This new driving force of the luxury sector in China is mostly composed of the post-’80s/’90s generation, mapping mostly the Generation Y (McKinsey & Company, 2019). To date, almost all the of the leading international luxury brands have entered the Chinese market and view it as one of the most promising market worldwide (Liang, Ghosh, & Oe, 2017). Young Chinese customers view ownership and association to luxury brands as more than “something to wear”, but as a form of lifestyle that will take them to reach a social status of distinction and exclusiveness. That newly formed community is immersed in a digital world where they are constantly looking for the latest trends and information on the luxury world, making them highly exposed to digital influence in their customer journey (McKinsey & Company, 2019).

“Clients are morphing from a mere audience to luxury brands, to critical center-stage actors who want to interact, converse, share, observe and judge brands” (Bain&Company, 2020). The emotions of this new panel of customers evolved and are now diverse, global and opinionated. This is why brands will have to switch to a new model enabling them to connect with customers in an extremely personal way and answer to the ever-evolving needs concerning the purchasing and communicating processes (Bain&Company, 2020).

1.4. Luxury and digital

As indicated in the introduction, amongst high-end luxury companies, a common understanding was that taking part in an e-commerce activity was restricted to the lower and middle product range. The rationale behind this shared wisdom was that luxury customers would not buy expensive items online, but instead would always choose personalized and tactile in-store experience (McKinsey&Company, 2014). Moreover, brands wondered how to reconcile a distribution platform defined by counter-luxury characteristics while avoiding damaging the brands’ identity and spirit of luxury (Maman Larraufie & Kourdoughli, 2014). Indeed, as luxury brands are linked to a logic of exclusivity and exceptional service quality, it brings up a challenge in the era of digital where human interactions are limited. As “the Internet is now the second most important customer contact point for luxury fashion goods” (Kim & Kim, 2018), and that “almost 40% of all luxury goods purchasing choices are impacted by what consumers see online” (Kim & Kim, 2018), there was a fear that luxury brands would lose their exclusivity and uniqueness. So, the question was not whether they should go online but how to successfully become digital-oriented without harming the luxury brand image.

Luxury companies are today acknowledging the essential role that the Internet holds in influencing luxury shoppers' purchasing decisions (McKinsey&Company, 2014). Digital marketing is a necessary tool in order to remain competitive in a society characterized by movement, fluidity and easy access to information anywhere and at any time. However, despite the growing understanding of the advantages of owning a good website, it has been, and still is a challenge for some luxury brands to adapt to the new environment (Escobar, 2016).

2. Optimization of on-line website platforms

2.1. Website Analysis

In spite of the growing importance of social media, the company website must still be placed at the center of online communication strategies and be made effective for users' access not only via desktops, but also smartphones and tablet devices. Creating an efficient website should be a top priority as users are looking primarily for convenience; they want a quick to download website that is well-structured and easy to navigate on (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). The website usability is also an important concept that refers to user interface design (Anjum, Sarker, & Ahmed, 2018).

Websites became a key complement of the communication and sales of luxury brands; "shopping intent increases as users spend time on the net, and the interest for a brand increases as users detect a good performance of their website" (Escobar, 2016). In fact, a customer's good experience on the website of a brand is a major criterium in the perception of that brand (McKinsey&Company, 2015). Websites are denominated of having "high content" when they display comprehensive information about the brand such as its history and heritage and other relevant data of interest (Escobar, 2016), and they must deliver an ease to navigation that fills user's already well-established expectations (McKinsey&Company, 2015). Customers are more inclined to navigate and purchase products from a website showing extraordinarily desirable qualities. Moreover, as "luxury e-commerce consists of 8% of total luxury sales" (Kim & Kim, 2018), and as "it is expected to grow to 25% by 2025" (Kim & Kim, 2018), providing an excellent online shopping experience is a strategic imperative for these companies.

However, luxury brands lack good practices on how to implement a quality e-commerce platform. Jung-Hwan Kim & Minjeong Kim (2018) conducted a study on the identification of the necessary requirements to have a quality e-service for luxury brands so that the exclusivity would be well communicated.

2.1.1. Evaluation of website performance

To evaluate the overall performance of a website, it is interesting to look at a few metrics. Concerning traffic, it is relevant to measure the total number of visits, monthly visits, and unique visitors per month (3) to get an idea on the popularity of each website. Regarding interactions, the number of pages consulted per visit, the bounce rate (4) and the time spent on site (these concepts will be further detailed in the

³ Unique visitors per month: "the number of unduplicated (counted only once) visitors to your website over the course of a single month" (Adobe Experience Cloud Help, 2019).

⁴ Bounce rate<: "a "bounce" occurs when someone visits your website and leaves without interacting further with your site. Your bounce rate shows you the percentage of your visitors who bounce off of your site" (Bounce rate analytics: how to measure, assess, and audit to increase conversions, n.d.)

section 3.1. Search Engine Optimizations are interesting metrics to consider as they suggest the degree of optimization each website performs. Moreover, the sources of site traffic can inform about popular channels; websites can gain traffic through organic search, direct search, paid search, social media, display ads, emails, and referrals. Lastly, gender and age group distribution can give information about website users (SimilarWeb, n.d.). To get this information, we will use the free analytic digital tool from SimilarWeb. SimilarWeb is a British information technology company founded in 2009. It is a free platform that assembles, measures, analyzes and gives out in-depth metrics on client engagement and traffic on websites with the help of big data (Crunchbase, n.d.; Chrome, 2020).

2.1.2. Evaluation of website's usability

As previously indicated, user interface design (commonly referred to as “usability”) is essential to survive on the web simply because if a website is not user friendly i.e. if the users face some difficulties, they might leave the site (Anjum, Sarker, & Ahmed, 2018). Indeed, if users cannot straightforwardly understand what the company offers, what they can do on the website without being lost, people will not stay on the company's website (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Website usability can be evaluated by different criteria. A review of the literature shows that 13 criteria are more commonly used to evaluate website usability (Reamonn, 2019), (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019), (Singh and Pereira (2005), by Trilibis (2014), (Ziakis, et al., 2019).

1. Website loading time: The performance of websites is becoming even more important now with the increased usage of smartphones, which typically have inferior bandwidth connections than desktops. If we refer to the average user perception of the acceptable loading time of pages, a research by Google (2017) demonstrated that it is two seconds, whereas the average European site loading time is 8 seconds. Moreover, research by Trilibis (2014) on 150 mobile responsive websites showed that only 21% of those sites required less than four seconds to load on a smartphone and 32% required between 8 and 48 seconds. Trilibis found out that the reason behind these sluggish loading times were primarily due to image size (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Page speed is indeed important for two main reasons. First, it is crucial to have a low loading page time for search engine optimization. Second, if a website is slow, it can affect the ability to generate leads, as people will most likely leave the website and interrupt a potential conversion (e.g., buy an item on an e-commerce website) (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). We will use Pingdom Website Speed Test and Google TestMySite & PageSpeed Insights which are free digital tools that can evaluate this criterion. Pingdom Website Speed Test permits monitoring uptime and performance of a website to gain a better user experience (solarwinds pingdom, n.d.). Google TestMySite will measure the speed of a specific page (Think with Google, 2016).
2. Web accessibility: It is a core requirement for websites. It can be defined as “the degree to which a product, device, service, or environment is available to as many people as possible” (Reamonn, 2019) and is achieved through the use of alternative text⁵. Indeed, all users should be able to interact with a website in spite of any disabilities they might have (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Visually

⁵ “Alt text (alternative text) is a word or phrase that can be inserted as an attribute in an HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) document to tell Website viewers the nature or contents of an image” (Rouse, 2012).

impaired users use screen readers that will read the alt attribute in order for them to understand on-site images. Two other benefits appear from using alternative text; the first one is that if images cannot load, the alternative text will be displayed on the screen at the exact spot where the image should have appeared. The second benefit is that it contributes to image SEO (Search Engine Optimization). We will use WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool to evaluate this criterion. It is a free tool that helps website owners to make their content accessible to users with disabilities. Wave will identify accessibility errors and facilitate human evaluation of site content (WebAim, n.d.).

3. The 404 web page: When a webpage requested by a user cannot be found, web servers direct the user to a “404 web page” which can easily drive the user out of the website. In order to avoid this occurrence, customization of the 404 web page by including pointers to the homepage or other pages is highly recommended because it will help keep users on the website and enhance their search experience (Ziakis, et al., 2019). We will use Woorank to evaluate this criterion. It is a free tool that will provide an SEO audit on websites. It will give the essential information needed to optimize the websites based on the errors retrieved (Woorank, n.d.).

4. Localization: A website may be visited by people from various countries and nationalities who speak different languages and who may have different product needs depending on culture attributes. The tailoring of a website to suit different countries is called “localization”. The process ranges from simply converting the website into different versions to adapting promotions depending on the country. Singh and Pereira (2005) provided a framework of the different levels of website localization. There are four types of localized websites: 1) the semi-localized website that only displays contact information about foreign subsidiaries to international visitors; 2) the localized website that is a country-specific website with language translation where relevant; 3) the highly localized website that is a country specific website including localization efforts in top of the language translation (e.g., currencies) and 4) the culturally customized website that reflects a total immersion into specific cultures, providing sometimes several websites for one country encompassing different cultures (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Reamonn (2019) has identified 9 additional criteria:

5. Presence of highly noticeable calls-to-action. “A call to action (CTA) is a marketing term that refers to the next step a marketer wants its audience or reader to take. For example, it can instruct the reader to click the buy button to complete a sale” (Kenton, 2020).
6. Good use of colors: less than five colors in one display should be achieved
7. Avoid blocks of text: break-up text should appear with one idea per paragraph with the use of bulleted lists
8. Fonts readability: It is important that the font contrasts with the background color and the text should be big enough.
9. A logo should bring the reader to the homepage
10. The primary navigation menu should rather be top horizontal or left vertical
11. Use of padding (white spaces) to give the website an airy and sophisticated look
12. Use of drop-down boxes to avoid mistakes and make it easier for the user
13. Use prompts when the user has made a mistake

2.1.3. Evaluation of e-service quality

E-service quality is a widely researched topic in the field of service research because it influences customer shopping behaviors and therefore a company's financial performance. E-service quality can be defined according to two points of view; from a firm's perspective, e-service has been defined as *"the extent to which a website facilitates efficient and effective shopping, purchasing, and delivery"* whereas from a customer's perspective, it has been defined as *"consumers' overall evaluation and judgment of the excellence and quality of e-service offerings in the virtual marketplace"* (Kim & Kim, 2018).

Previous studies have developed the necessary requirements for general e-commerce websites and they were used in the context of luxury websites without considerable revisions. Jung-Hwan Kim & Minjeong Kim (2018) chose to undertake a more exploratory approach to define a list of e-service attributes that are specific for luxury brands, instead of making the assumption that general e-service quality attributes were sufficient to evaluate the e-service quality of luxury brands. Extraordinary service quality being the primary competitive business strategy for luxury brands, it is even more important for those companies to ensure a quality e-service for their e-commerce platforms; indeed, a high standard of e-service quality is a key success factor for luxury brands.

This research led to the development of a comprehensive list of attributes essential to fully embrace the e-commerce opportunity and provide customers with an unprecedented luxury shopping experience. The list contains 107 e-service attributes classified in 7 different categories (Kim & Kim, 2018). These categories are the following:

- Browsing dimension. The browsing dimension covers 12 e-service attributes that help customers find the information they are looking for on the website. It also facilitates product search. Good organization and userfriendliness of a website are crucial factors in assessing web quality and are positively correlated to site revisit intention and purchase decision.
- Transaction dimension. The transaction dimension covers 16 e-service attributes aiming to provide the customers with the easiest and safest purchasing process. In the e-commerce context, transaction is the high-task relevant attribute converting site navigators into customers and impacting overall website quality perception and satisfaction. If met, this critical element leads to trust and repurchase behaviors.
- Company and trust dimension. The company and trust dimension covers 12 e-service attributes that have the only purpose of fostering a positive relationship between the customers and the company by installing a climate of trust. Company information helps reduce customers' concerns about data privacy and therefore perceived risk about information sharing which enhances confidence in the brand website.
- Personalization dimension. The personalization dimension covers 28 e-service attributes that would help deliver a personalized shopping experience to the customers by offering various options and special services. Offering a tailored service to customer's specific needs leads to satisfaction and fosters buying impulse.
- Product presentation dimension. The product presentation dimension covers 28 e-service attributes that provide various ways to present the products on the website to offer the best feeling of exclusivity. Especially relevant for fashion websites, sophisticated visual product presentation modes evoke an internal state of pleasure in the consumer's mind and lead to a more positive product evaluation process.

- Website design dimension. The website design dimension covers 5 e-service attributes that have the purpose of enhancing the website's aesthetics to give it the best overall appearance. Online luxury shoppers are looking to purchase the whole product, namely the place of purchase in addition to the product. Therefore, website design is of the utmost importance in the process of attracting and converting site navigators to customers.
- Entertainment dimension. The entertainment dimension covers 6 e-service attributes that include extra features such as social media or trend information. Entertainment drives emotional excitement and positive brand impressions and thus, influences exploratory behavior and site involvement.

II. Exploratory research methodology

As indicated in the introduction, we have decided to compare three flagship luxury brands and analyze the optimization level of their e-commerce website platforms. These are Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Gucci. They have been selected for several reasons. First, they belong to the personal luxury goods market, representing “the core of the core” of the luxury segments, and especially to the subcategory's “shoes”, “jewelry” and “leather goods” achieving the highest growth (Bain&Company, 2020). Furthermore, they all belong to the KHLCC (Kering, Hermès, l'Oréal Luxe, LVMH, and Chanel), a “group” covering the flagships of the luxury industry (Deloitte, 2019). In fact, Gucci was chosen as it largely represents the most important share in revenues of the group Kering, making of Gucci, Kering's crown jewel. Louis Vuitton was selected as it is the flagship of the LVMH group. Lastly, Hermès was chosen for its particularity of still remaining today mainly owned by its heirs. In fact, this suggests a higher tendency towards tradition, making the House Hermès interesting to confront to Louis Vuitton and Gucci, both belonging to two of the biggest luxury conglomerates worldwide.

The proposed research is an exploratory research as website e-commerce platforms will be evaluated by the researchers based on the criteria identified in the literature review. It is a qualitative approach as we have to evaluate if the criteria are present or not on the websites. The criteria have been well defined to prevent any errors in the interpretation. It remains however a qualitative approach and there is always a possibility of subjective answers by the researchers. For the e-service quality content analysis, the coding guide is the one used by Kim and Kim, 2018. The analysis will be achieved by using the different frameworks that have been identified in the literature.

III. RESULTS OF THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

We will first show the performance results of the three selected luxury brands websites, then we go on with the usability analysis of their websites. We will end this analysis with the e-service quality evaluation based on the framework of Kim and Kim (2018).

3.1. Website performance analysis

Traffic and interactions

If we look at metrics concerning traffic (See Table 1), namely the total number of visits, the number of monthly visits, and the number of unique visitors per month, we can suggest that Louis Vuitton and Gucci both score high, leaving Hermès with significantly lower numbers. The lower performance from Hermès in traffic metrics could be linked to the different Hermès' target customer base which is older (estimated to 30+) than the ones of Louis Vuitton and Gucci (estimated to 18-50). The older target group might be less inclined to navigate online.

Regarding interaction metrics, we observe no significant difference in the number of pages per visit, which is high with a number of 7 pages for all three websites. When looking at the bounce rate, Hermès and Gucci reach a level close to 50% whereas Louis Vuitton outperforms them with a lower bounce rate around 40%. The same trend is observed concerning the duration of a visit. Where Hermès and Gucci both have around a 3-minute-long visit, Louis Vuitton almost reaches an average of 5 minutes. Overall, it appears that Louis Vuitton's website is the best at retaining users, which would suggest a better website optimization (e.g., design, usability). This statement will be reviewed by the other analysis conducted in the usability area.

Table 1 — Overview of traffic and interactions metrics from Nov 2019-Jan 2020 worldwide

Domain	Total number of visits (in million)	Monthly visits (in million)	Unique visitors per month (in million) *	Pages per visit (#)	Bounce rate (in %) **	Duration of a visit (hh:mm:ss)
hermes.com	9.11	3.04	2.20	6.53	51.91	00:02:44
gucci.com	36.66	10.88	7.32	7.41	47.94	00:03:08
louisvuitton.com	41.53	13.84	7.96	7.47	39.96	00:04:51

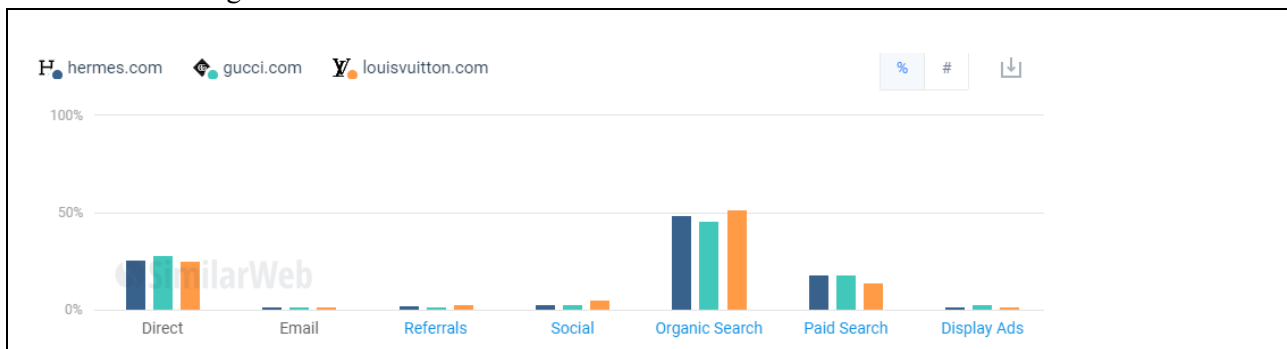
*Unique visitors per month: “the number of unduplicated (counted only once) visitors to your website over the course of a single month” (Adobe Experience Cloud Help, 2019).
 **Bounce rate: “a “bounce” occurs when someone visits your website and leaves without interacting further with your site. Your bounce rate shows you the percentage of your visitors who bounce off of your site” (Bounce rate analytics: how to measure, assess, and audit to increase conversions, n.d.).

Source: SimilarWeb (2019-2020)

Source of traffic

By looking at Figure 1, we can see that organic search is the primary source of traffic for luxury brands in general. Indeed, users have the habit of searching for a brand through the search engine search bar because it appears easier to them than typing in the exact URL of a website (Beauloye, 2019). The second traffic source is the direct search, although still remaining less important than the organic search.

Figure 1 — Overview of traffic sources from Nov 2019-Jan 2020 worldwide

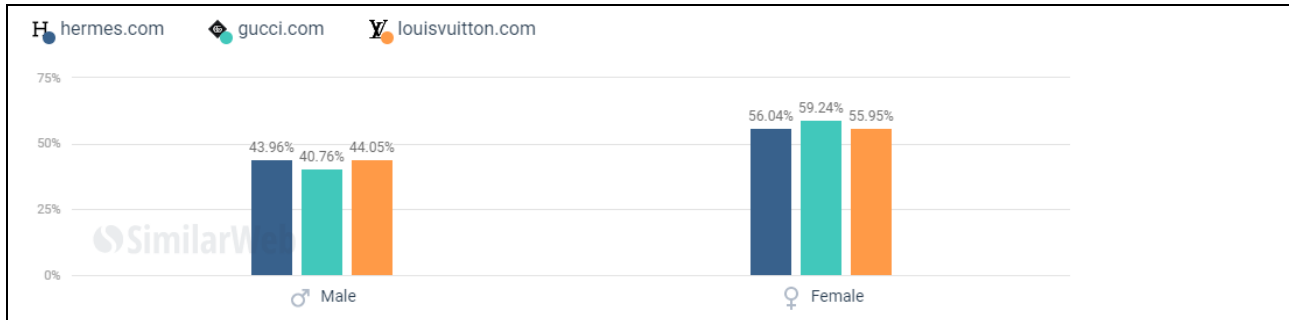


Source: SimilarWeb (2019-2020)

Demographics

It is now interesting to understand who is actually navigating on the websites. Figure 2 shows that overall, women are more inclined to visit the websites of Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Gucci than men although men represent a significant share of the traffic. Comparatively, there is no significant difference between the three brands, aside from Gucci slightly attracting more women and Louis Vuitton and Hermès more men.

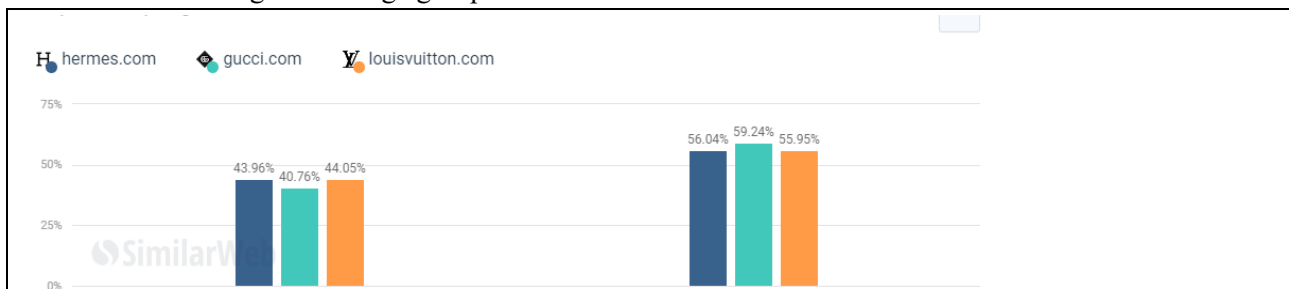
Figure 2 — Gender distribution from Nov 2019-Jan 2020 worldwide



Source: SimilarWeb (2019-2020)

Lastly, if we refer to Figure 3, we see that the younger generation (25-34 years old) is the primary user of the 3 websites. Interestingly, Hermes is less used by the 18-24 age group, which is in line with their relatively older target group.

Figure 3 — Age group distribution from Nov 2019-Dec 2020 worldwide



Source: SimilarWeb (2019-2020)

3.2. Website usability analysis

In line with the theoretical framework identified in the literature review, one table has been developed to present the 13 criteria selected in the literature.

Results show that the 3 websites present good usability as they meet almost all the criteria in an optimized way. More specifically, 11 out of 13 criteria are met by Louis Vuitton, 10 out of 13 by Hermès and 11 out of 13 by Gucci.

However, some potential improvements can be highlighted:

- Concerning the important topic of page speed, all 3 brands, Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Gucci are not performing that well as all record times report above the recommended 2 seconds for loading time (Google) on a computer. This is confirmed by the time speed on mobile. They all should use the online tool *PageSpeed Insights* to improve the situation.

- For Louis Vuitton, there is no use of prompts, and the level of localization could be improved. First, if a user makes a mistake in a field when ordering an item, and the website does not explain what is expected in that field, the user might stop the purchasing process and leave the website annoyed. Second, Louis Vuitton has country specific websites, but the vast majority of them only offer English as language choice, and as “language is the first cultural barrier that tourists encounter while travelling” (Ivanovic, 2008), the same barrier can occur to users navigating on a website.
- For Hermès, the calls to action are not really visible to catch users’ attention and the product descriptions are not well structured. We can also note that Hermès has country specific websites, but the vast majority of them only offer English as language choice, which can constitute a barrier for non-English speakers.
- For Gucci, there are 3 areas for improvement: First, there is an issue concerning readability; in fact, Gucci chose a Serif font for its website, which makes sense for a luxury brand who wants to appear elegant and sophisticated. However, Serif fonts tend to be harder to read when scaled at a smaller size (deBara, n.d.), which makes Gucci’s editorial content not always easily readable. Second, as Louis Vuitton, Gucci does not use prompts when the user has made a mistake in the ordering process of an item, which can be a reason for order interruption. Lastly, Gucci’s 404 web page does not provide any alternative to the user (e.g., a button to easily go back to the home page).

We could also highlight the best practice that we have identified in this analysis:

- Louis Vuitton has a very clear website, mainly reflected in the way the primary navigation menu is organized. In fact, a few general categories are presented in the top part (e.g., women), leading to a next layer where all the product categories are listed (e.g., wallets and small leather goods), then leading to a focused last layer listing more precise categories within that first category (e.g., long wallets)
- Hermès presents a good 404 web page. It uses a familiar and funny vocabulary, and it provides two calls-to-action, namely one to go back to the home page and one to try out a new search.
- Gucci’s best practice is its website localization. Independently from the country specific website, 6 languages will always be available, namely German, French, English, Spanish, Italian and Chinese to translate the website.

Table 2 — Websites’ usability criteria

Usability criteria	Tool used	Louis Vuitton	Hermès	Gucci
1. Website loading time	Pingdom Website Speed Test	Homepage of the Belgian website (computer) 2.38 sec	Homepage of the Belgian website (computer) 3.37 sec	Homepage of the Belgian website (computer) 3.17 sec
	Google TestMySite	n/a No – not good: 2.60 sec on a mobile with 4G network in Belgium	n/a No – not good :3.40 sec on a mobile with 4G network in Belgium	n/a No – not good :2.90 sec on a mobile with 4G network in Belgium
2. Web accessibility (Alt tags)	Woorank	Yes - Homepage of the US website Yes - No alt tags missing!	Yes Homepage of the US website Yes - No alt tags missing!	Yes Homepage of the US website Yes - No alt tags missing!
3. 404 web page	Woorank	Yes - The 404 web page is customized with an original image as well as a polite message advising to try again or to contact the client services for help (with contact info right under).	Yes - The 404 web page is customized in that the message is made funny and original while offering the possibility with 2 CTA to navigate back to the homepage or to try the search option again.	Yes - The 404 web page has a customized background but the message appearing on the page is basic and does not offer any alternative solutions to users.
4. Localization**	/	Yes. Highly localized.	Yes. Highly localized. - There is a “localization” page	Yes. Highly localized. - There is a “localization” page

		- There is a “choose your country” page with 29 countries. However, most of the time, the only language available is English. - For remaining countries, an international website in English is available. - Currencies are adapted for every country. - Overall, no difference between website content. N.B. The Belgian website is only in English, not available in French nor in Dutch.	- with 27 countries. However, most of the time, the only language available is English. - No international website available for remaining countries. - Currencies are adapted for every country. - Overall, no difference between website content. N.B. The Belgium website is available in French but not in Dutch.	- with 34 countries. However, not every site is translated according to local language, but a scrolling menu proposing German, French, English, Spanish, Italian and Chinese is always available. - Currencies are adapted for every country. - Overall, no difference between website content. N.B. The Belgium website is available in French but not in Dutch.
5. Presence of visible calls-to-action	/	Yes. Rectangles with contrasting font and background.	No. They are just underlined and not in rectangles which makes them less visible and persuasive.	Yes. Rectangles with contrasting font and background.
6. Good use of colors: less than 5 colors in one display	/	Yes. Mainly black and white with some beige touches.	Yes. The main colors are beige, black and white.	Yes. The main colors are light grey, black and white.
7. Avoid blocks of text: break-up text with one idea per paragraph, use bulleted lists	/	Yes. Text is broken up in paragraphs for the editorial content and bulleted lists are used for product description.	No. Text is broken up in paragraphs for the editorial content, but no bulleted lists used for product description.	Yes. Text is broken up in paragraphs for the editorial content and bulleted lists are used for product description.
8. Fonts Readability: contrasting with background color, text big enough	/	Yes. Black font on a white background. Sans serif* font and text big enough.	Yes. Black font on a beige background. Serif* font and text big enough.	No. Black font on a light grey or white background. Serif* font and text not big enough.
9. Logo brings you back to the homepage	/	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
10. Primary navigation menu is top horizontal or left vertical	/	Yes. Top horizontal.	Yes. Left vertical (click on the hamburger menu icon to see the menu).	Yes. Top horizontal.
11. Use of padding (white spaces)	/	Yes. Good use of padding. Airy website.	Yes. Good use of padding. Airy website.	Yes. Good use of padding. Airy website.
12. Use of drop-down boxes	/	Yes. In the order process: for the title, country, and the prefix of the phone number.	Yes. In the order process: for the title and country.	Yes. In the order process: for the title and the prefix of the phone number (the country is predefined).
13. Use prompts when the user has made a mistake	/	No. The field appears in red, but no example on how to properly fill in the boxes.	Yes. Shows an example on how to properly fill in the boxes.	No. It tells the user it is wrong but no example on how to properly fill in the boxes.
*Serif vs. Sans Serif fonts: Serif fonts have decorative tails within the letters while Sans serif fonts are made up of simple lines (deBara, n.d.). **Localization: the tailoring of a website to suit different countries (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 310).				

Source: based on Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), Reamonn, (2019), Ziakis, Vlachopoulou, Kyrkoudis, & Karagkiozidou (2019)

3.2.1. E-service quality

To evaluate the e-service quality of the e-commerce website platform of the three luxury brands, we have used the framework proposed by the Juang-Hwan Kim & Minjeong Kim (2018), as indicated in our literature review. It consists of a list of 107 e-service attributes grouped in 7 dimensions. The analysis has been conducted based on the respective Belgian websites of Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Gucci.

Browsing dimension

This first dimension evaluates the browsing quality (See Table 3). Results are very good for all 3 brands as they meet 11 out of the 12 browsing criteria. Hermes could however improve relatively to the 2 other brands. Hermès is the only one not offering a “view all” option, which means that users must inevitably choose a specific page. We can also see that the internal search engine does not always work well for Hermès. Moreover, Hermes does not have an advanced search function, only a few suggestions appear when a user types a keyword whereas Louis Vuitton and Gucci propose categories, photos of products, etc. to efficiently help the users in their quests. One improvement for Louis Vuitton is to offer a sorting option.

Table 3 — Kim & Kim e-service framework - browsing dimension

E-service attributes		Louis Vuitton	Hermès	Gucci
		Available or not?	Available or not?	Available or not?
1. Advanced search function*		Yes.	No.	Yes.
<i>Comments</i>			Only very few suggestions appear.	
2. Sort of items (by most popular, latest arrival, etc.)	Available?	No.	Yes.	Yes.
	1 option available			
	2 options available		Yes.	Yes.
	3 options available			
3. Filter items (by color, size, style, price, etc.)	4 or more options available			
	Available?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	1 option available			
	2 options available			
4. Browsing option (by page, view all, by product, etc.)	3 options available	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	Available?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	1 option available		Yes.	
	2 options available	Yes.		Yes.
5. Search engine (by key word,	3 options available			
	Available?		No - The only option available is to browse by page, there is no “view all” option.	
5. Search engine (by key word,	1 option			
	Available?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.

product number)	available			
	2 options available	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
<i>Comments</i>			No - Keyword option not efficient No- Product number option works but the user lands on the SRP displaying 1 result instead of directly landing on the single product page.	No - Product number option works but the user lands on the SRP displaying 1 result instead of directly landing on the single product page.
6. Shopping cart		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
7. Sitemap		No.	Yes.	Yes.
8. FAQs		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
9. Browsing instructions		Yes.	Yes.	No.
10. Browser requirement		Yes.	Yes.	No.
11. Dead links	Yes			
	No	No deadlinks.	No deadlinks.	No deadlinks.
<i>Comments</i>		Tool used: Woorank. Only checks the homepage of the website.	Tool used: Woorank. Only checks the homepage of the website.	Tool used: Woorank. Only checks the homepage of the website.
12. Back to top		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
<i>Comments</i>				The icon only appears when the user reaches the very bottom of the page.
*Advanced search function can be defined as going beyond autocomplete which means both completing the user's query in the search bar and offer specific suggestions to allow visitors to directly filter their search and pick from the right category (WebFx, n.d.).				

Source: based on Kim & Kim (2018)

Transaction dimension

The second dimension was created to give users the most convenient and safest transaction process. Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Gucci all understood the importance behind this objective. They all perform very well, as all criteria are met. The basic information (e.g., shipping and handling info, return processing info, item availability) is available on all three websites. Regarding more advanced attributes such as packaging info, alternative ordering method, they are offered by the three websites. Indeed, in the context of fashion luxury items, packaging can be a very important differentiator (Kim & Kim, 2018). Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Gucci all also provide the maximum convenience concerning payment options, express checkout, and shipping method.

Table 4 — Kim & Kim e-service framework - transaction dimension

E-service attributes		Louis Vuitton	Hermès	Gucci
		Available or not?	Available or not?	Available or not?
1. Order instructions		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
<i>Comments</i>		Easy to find: in the FAQ.	Hard to find: in the Terms and conditions.	Only restricted to information on payment.
2. Multiple order option		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
3. Alternative order method	Unavailable			
	By telephone	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	By telephone			

	and mail			
4. Order from catalog	Unavailable	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Available			
5. Express checkout		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
6. Guest checkout		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
7. Item availability		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
<i>Comments</i>		Users can also find out about in-store availability.		
8. Promotional codes		No.	No.	No.
9. Shipping method info.	Unavailable			
	Standard shipping only			
	Express shipping only		Yes.	Yes.
	Both	Yes.		
10. Shipping option	To me only	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	To 1 alternative address			
	To multiple addresses			
11. Payment options	1 option available			
	2 options available			
	3 options available			
	4 or more options available	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
12. Shipping & handling		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
13. Refund processing info.		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
14. Packaging info.		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
15. Sales tax		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
16. International shipping	Available?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	Only to Belgium			
	Only to France			
N.B. This analysis has been conducted during the month of June 2020				

Source: based on Kim & Kim (2018)

Company and trust dimension

The third dimension evaluates the positive relationship created between the brands and its customers. The results are surprisingly not very good for the three brands. 5 out of 12 criteria are not met by Louis Vuitton and Hermès and 4 out of 12 by Gucci. The three companies should have a good “about us” section. Louis Vuitton and Hermes do not have any and the Gucci’s one is very brief. The history of the company is even

not mentioned. It is however key for luxury brands to communicate their history, values and quality. Then, even though Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Gucci all have a dedicated page (even a dedicated website for Gucci) about their commitment in sustainable development, only Gucci posted a code of business ethics, which is today, and especially for the younger generation, an important information to learn about the values of the company.

Table 5 – Kim & Kim e-service framework - company and trust dimension

E-service attributes	Louis Vuitton	Hermès	Gucci
	Available or not?	Available or not?	Available or not?
1. Company history	Yes.	No.	No.
2. General company information	No.	No.	Yes.
<i>Comments</i>	Missing an “About us” section	Missing an “About us” section	Very concise.
3. Term of use	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
4. Recall information	n/a	n/a	n/a
5. Affiliate program	No.	No.	No.
6. Investor relations	No.	Yes.	No.
7. Business ethics	No.	No.	Yes.
8. Press release	No.	No.	No.
9. Privacy policy	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
10. Security policy	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
11. Security certification*	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
12. Corporate social responsibility	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
*Security certification: “A website security certificate is a validation and encryption tool, part of the HTTPS protocol, which secures and encrypts data going back and forth between the server and the client browser. [...] Websites that use security certificates are identifiable through the HTTPS address starter and the padlock icon that appears in the address bar” (Techopedia, s.d.).			

Source: based on Kim & Kim (2018)

Personalization dimension

The fourth dimension evaluates whether the brands offer tailored and personalized services online (Kim & Kim, 2018) (See Table 7). All three brands could improve in this dimension as 8 out of 26 criteria are not met by Louis Vuitton, 10 out of 26 by Hermes and 5 out of 26 by Gucci. Indeed, all the brands offer the basic attribute of delivery and return, namely return/exchange policy, free shipping/return order, preaddressed return label, status tracking, and store location. However, Louis Vuitton and Gucci go one step further in comparison with Hermès that is only proposing phone and email while Louis Vuitton offers the possibility to contact the brand via Messenger and Twitter and for Gucci proposes WhatsApp and live chat. Concerning upgraded services such as interactive shopping aids, gift wrapping/gift message services, proposition of alternative products/matching items, and customized alteration services (only in store for Hermès), the three brands have optimized their website to include all these attributes. We should notice that both Louis Vuitton and Gucci have added the possibility to make a Wishlist and to “share an item” with a friend via mail/social media but not Hermes. We can remark that the three brands could add more personalized suggestion tabs such as “must-haves”, “look we love”, and “designer picks”. They all invite people to sign in for a newsletter and download the app (except for Hermès not having a mobile app).

Table 6 – Kim & Kim e-service framework - personalization dimension

E-service attributes		Louis Vuitton	Hermès	Gucci
		Available or not?	Available or not?	Available or not?
1. Satisfaction guarantee				
2. Return/exchange policy		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
3. Free shipping	Available?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	Standard free shipping on all order	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	Standard free shipping over a certain amount			
Comments		Shipping in express delivery is chargeable over €2000.	Delivery is chargeable for furniture objects.	
4. Free return		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
5. Pre-addressed return label		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
6. Order status tracking		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
7. Store location		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
8. Company contacts	1 option available (email or telephone)			
	2 options available		Yes.	
	3 options available			
	4 options available (email, phone, fax, and mail)	Yes.		Yes.
Comments		Phone, email, Messenger, Twitter are proposed as contacts.	Phone and email are proposed as contacts.	Phone, email, WhatsApp and live chat are proposed as contacts
9. Interactive shopping aid	Available?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	Live help	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	email	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
10. Alteration service		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
Comments			Only in-store.	
11. Gift wrapping		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
12. Gift card/message		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
13. Gift receipts		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
14. E-gift card/certificates		No.	No.	No.
15. E-store credit card		No.	No.	No.
16. Suggestions for items	Available?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	Alternative products			
	Matching products			
	Both	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
17. Promotions	Available?	No.	No.	No.
	1 type of promotion			
	2 types of promotion			

		3 types of promotion			
		4 or more types of promotion			
18.	Wish list		Yes.	No.	Yes.
19.	Share an item with friends	Available?	Yes.	No.	Yes.
		Email only			
		Social networking sites only			
		Both	Yes.	No.	Yes.
Comments		Via Facebook feed/story, Twitter, Pinterest, or email)		Via Facebook feed/story, Twitter, Pinterest, or email)	
20.	Printer friendly option		No.	No.	Yes.
21.	Catalog request		No.	No.	No.
22.	Account management		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
23.	Links to alternative sites		No.	Yes.	Yes.
Comments			External link about the Hermès foundation	External link to book a table at the Gucci Osteria.	
24.	Share designer favorites	Must-haves	Yes.	No.	No.
		Look we love	No.	No.	No.
		Designer picks	No.	No.	Yes.
Comments		Section called “Must-haves and essentials”		Section called “Gucci beloved”	
25.	Newsletter signup		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
26.	Download App for Mobile		Yes.	No.	Yes.
Comments			There is no Hermès app.		

Source: based on Kim & Kim (2018)

Product presentation dimension

The fifth dimension evaluates how the products are presented on the website. Overall, Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Gucci are doing equally well when presenting their products. A size chart with international conversions is always available, as well as 7 or more pieces of information per product, model measurements, item code, size request, alternative color view, and at least 5 choices of images. Concerning the way the images are presented, different views and functions are proposed (back view, side view, close-ups, full screen, zoom function, etc.) by the three websites, well complementing the written description. Louis Vuitton is the only one presenting a video that gives a virtual reality to the products. The areas for improvements for the three brands would be to add even more options to view the products, such as a 3-D rotation or a possibility to have a magnified view by rolling over the images. Gucci is the only one offering a quick look, which is a very handy option to enable customers to scroll quickly through the different items without having to click on them.

Table 7 — Kim & Kim e-service framework - product presentation dimension

E-service attributes		Louis Vuitton	Hermès	Gucci
		Available or not?	Available or not?	Available or not?
1. Size chart	Available?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	Measurement only			
	Measurement with international conversion (IC)			
	Measurement and measurement guide			
	Measurement with IC and measurement guide	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
2. Product descriptions (# of pieces of information)	3 (basic info: color, size, price)			
	4 (basic info + 1 more)			
	5 (basic info + 2 more)			
	6 (basic info + 3 more)			
	7 (basic info + 4 more)	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
3. Model measurement		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
4. Item code (style #)		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
5. Size request		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
6. Quick look		No.	No.	Yes.
7. Back view		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
8. Side view		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
9. Larger view		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
10. 3-D rotation		No.	No.	No.
11. Close-ups		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
12. Magnified view (rollover image)		No.	No.	No.
13. Zoom function		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
14. Full screen		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
15. Virtual model		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
16. Video presentation		Yes.	No.	No.
17. Customer review & rate		No.	No.	No.
18. Number of alternative images	None			
	1 alternative images			
	2 alternative images			
	3 alternative images			
	4 alternative images		Yes.	
	More than 5	Yes.		Yes.
19. Presented on mannequin		No.	No.	No.
20. Presented on model		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
21. Presented on hanger		No.	No.	No.
22. Presented as flat		Yes.	No.	Yes.
23. Picture size		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
24. Fabric swatches		No.	No.	No.
25. Close-up's		No.	No.	No.

fabric swatches				
26. Alternative color view		Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
27. Consistency of presentation	Consistent	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	Inconsistent			
28. Consistency of image size	Consistent	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
	Inconsistent			

Source: based on Kim & Kim (2018)

Website design dimension

The sixth dimension is about website aesthetics. There is space for improvement. Gucci has a slider displayed on top of the page featuring a short video and images; Hermès' top of the page features a video, and Louis Vuitton only sticks to images. None of them employs background music.

Table 8 — Kim & Kim e-service framework - website design dimension

E-service attributes	Louis Vuitton	Hermès	Gucci
	Available or not?	Available or not?	Available or not?
1. Background music	No.	No.	No.
2. Flash intro	No.	No.	No.
3. Graphic intro	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
4. Video intro	No.	Yes.	No.
5. Brand logos	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.

Source: based on Kim & Kim (2018)

Entertainment dimension

The seventh and last dimension about entertainment relates primarily to social media as well as to some nice-to-have additional features to enhance website content quality. Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and Gucci all provide links towards their social media accounts, reflecting luxury brands' efforts to generate engagement with customers. The social media used by the three brands are the same: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. None of them posts any style trends and only Louis Vuitton and Gucci (very concise for Gucci) published a designer biography. These elements could be improved to create interest and positive brand impression (Kim & Kim, 2018).

Table 9 — Kim & Kim e-service framework - entertainment dimension

E-service attributes		Louis Vuitton	Hermès	Gucci
		Available or not?	Available or not?	Available or not?
1. Style trend info.		No.	No.	No.
2. Designer biography		Yes.	No.	Yes
<i>Comments</i>				Very concise.
3. Social networks	Unavailable			
	1 option available			
	2 options available			
	3 options available			
	4 or more options available	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
<i>Comments</i>		Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, Pinterest, Foursquare.	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube.	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Google+.

4. Retailer blog		No.	No.	No.
5. Coupon on social networks		No.	No.	No.
6. Online survey		No.	No.	No.

Source: based on Kim & Kim (2018)

4. Conclusion

The digital disruption has progressively changed the name of the game in the luxury industry, providing luxury brands with an opportunity to leverage digital tools. Indeed, customers “now consider the Internet as a legitimate and trustworthy channel to purchase luxury goods” (McKinsey & Company, 2015), and 80% of luxury sales are digitally influenced today (McKinsey&Company, 2018). Moreover, the luxury customer base is evolving towards a young, highly digital, and mobile-oriented panel that developed high expectations concerning their online shopping experience.

Considering these facts, luxury companies are today acknowledging the importance of becoming successfully digital-oriented. Therefore, the key objective of this paper was to evaluate if luxury brands have optimized their e-commerce websites in order to offer the best possible experience to their customers. This was evaluated by comparing three flagship luxury brands: Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Hermes in three areas: 1) the website performance, 2) the website usability and 3) the e-service quality. The key conclusion is that all brands have optimized well their e-commerce platforms. However, Hermès lags a bit behind in some dimensions in comparison with the two other brands. Areas for improvement have been however identified for all brands.

In terms of website performance, the three websites receive a good amount of traffic but both Louis Vuitton and Gucci have significant higher number of visits, number of monthly visits and number of unique visitors per month than Hermès. Organic search is the primary source of traffic for the three websites and luxury brands in general. We could say that Louis Vuitton has even an advantage in website attractiveness since consumers stay longer (5 min instead of 3 min) on the site and the bounce rate is also higher at 40% in comparison with Gucci and Hermes at 50%. Finally, Hermes attracts less the younger generation of 18-24 and a bit more the older generation, which is in line with its target group. The three websites, however, should improve in page speeds on computer and on mobile phones (>2 seconds). Comparatively, Louis Vuitton’s website is the fastest, and Hermès the slowest.

In terms of website usability, we can say that the three websites present overall good usability by meeting all at minimum 10 criteria out of the 13 identified. There are however some areas for improvements for the three brands. For example, adding more language options on Louis Vuitton’s website would improve the website usability, better structuring the organization menu of Hermès’ website and changing the font used on Gucci’s website should also be recommended.

In terms of e-service quality of each website, all brands performed overall at a good level, following the framework proposed by Kim & Kim (2018). Out of the 9 dimensions analyzed, the browsing dimension and the transaction dimension are very well optimized. There is, however, room for improvement for the

company and trust dimensions. Some important improvements have to be done on the three brands. Louis Vuitton and Hermès' websites are both missing a page containing general company information: create an "about us" tab. Hermès and Gucci's websites are both missing a page on company history. This is however extremely important for luxury brands in order to establish their story of tradition and heritage. Louis Vuitton and Hermès are both missing a code of business ethics.

Concerning the personalization dimension, it is overall well optimized for the three websites: Basic attributes (i.e. return/exchange policy, free shipping/return, preaddressed return label, status tracing and store location) are available as well as upgraded services (i.e. interactive shopping aids, gift wrapping/gift message services, proposition of alternative products/matching items) are available and personalized marketing (i.e. newsletter, download the app option (except for Hermès which does not have an app)).

Concerning the entertainment dimension, it is optimized concerning the fact that they all provide links towards their social media accounts. However, some additional features could be leveraged: add a comprehensive designer biography on Hermès and Gucci's websites and add style trends information on the three websites. Finally, concerning the product presentation dimension, it is overall very well optimized for the three websites as well as for the website design dimension. The three websites all use different kinds of visuals: Louis Vuitton only sticks to images on the home page; Hermès' website features a video on top of the home page; Gucci's website uses a slider featuring a short video and images on top of the home page.

For future research, it would be interesting to extend the analysis to more than three luxury brands to better evaluate the situation of the luxury industry. It would also be useful to complete the analysis of the social media platforms used by the three brands to evaluate if they provide a good consumer experience. Social media platforms are fully part of the digital experience consumers get from their luxury brands.

It is important to point out one limit to this work which is linked to the exploratory nature of our approach. Since the analysis was qualitative, the content of the comparative analysis, structured according to the frameworks identified in the literature was based on the researchers' judgment and interpretation. A more quantitative approach with at least 10 different luxury brands could be an interesting follow-up to our work.

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