

# Preface

by *Dante D'Angelo*\*

Digital transformation has given companies – and above all us marketers – the ability to magnify our brands and products as marketing campaigns can now be amplified multi-channel, multi-cluster, multi-platform, multi-language, through any kind of paid, earned and owned touch-points.

Yet, “*power is nothing without control*”: in fact, although nobody could argue that a great design and engaging digital content are must-have ingredients - as brands first need to evoke emotions and fuel coolness - if you fail to execute the strategy, the great content and superior design will fail as well. On the other hand, if strategy and control are well implemented but the message is not creative and appealing, then results will also not be achieved.

This couldn't be truer than in Fashion and Luxury industry. There's a big difference between having a large social media presence and using it effectively to build meaningful and convert converting leads into sales. It's often difficult to understand, but it can have a tremendous impact on your results.

Although Fashion and Luxury companies have always invested heavily in brand image building and amplification, today the unparalleled explosion of digital media and increased brand content consumption both run the risk of turning companies into broadcasting entities. Designing the right business model is key, as well as integrating new roles and skills into our organizations: digital asset producers, video-making consultants, digital media buyers, just to name a few professionals.

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As a senior marketing professional, I have had the opportunity to work with a company which has embraced experiential marketing at an early stage and has put it step ahead of the competition. The transition has not always been easy but the initial efforts have paid off. Great creativity is always present but nevertheless, engineering marketing calendars and alignment to project scheduling are now dynamic and ongoing processes within our organization. In less than five years we have witnessed radical changes in our marketing strategy: it continued to evolve from traditional to digital and from digital to “*experiential*”.

Whether marketing is more “*art or science*” has been heavily debated in the past, by both academics and professionals. With the rise of digital marketing and consumer mobility, this debate has finally come to an end: “*art and science*” is the perfect paradigm. It describes what companies need to deploy: extraordinary digital customer journeys, memorable digital campaigns and content whose level of engagement is outstanding compared to that of their peers.

Being a project leader and main sponsor of this cross-functional approach, I can confirm that it has never been so fascinating to have so many actors working together and strategize each project thanks to everyone’s contribution: designers, content makers, digital tech, merchandise, retail, communication, marketing, customer service – they are all there.

In recent years, I have had the honor and the pleasure to often discuss, investigate and collaborate with this book’s authors on these matters. I am grateful for their friendship and professional support and I wish them every success with my warmest congratulations for such a unique publication exploring customer engagement in the luxury industry.

# Foreword

Customer experience and customer engagement are widely covered topics both by academics and practitioners. But the debate on customer experiences and touch-point design has been developed so far without any industry specific approach, mainly considering services or mass brands. In this book we aim to apply the customer experience perspective to industries where emotional engagement is key to brand success.

Fashion and Luxury brands are conceptually different to most fast-moving consumer goods brands for many reasons (value creation process, role of the creative vision, seasonality, omni-channel distribution and communication) and require a specific approach to customer engagement that no publication has addressed to date. Furthermore, the current literature on customer experience is somewhat practical, with a very “how to” (build, map, measure) perspective.

Our approach starts with a review of academic literature on customer experience followed by an analysis of the evolution of the Fashion and Luxury eco-system over the last fifty years. It is necessary to understand how these industries have transitioned from a traditional product-driven approach to a creativity-driven and consumer-centric approach in order to appreciate the challenges that these companies face today. From there we move on to build a conceptual framework to emotional concepts of experiences, journeys, touch-points and engagement in Fashion and Luxury, to subsequently build a unique, inspiring and memorable experience that we define as “signature”.

The designer signature has always been at the core of Fashion and Luxury; when we say that something is very Valentino, Armani, Ralph Lauren, Chanel, we are immediately understood. Investigating what a

signature means today and how it can be managed to craft the consumer experience across external channels and internal departments is the ambitious objective of this book.

Fashion and Luxury brands are experiencing a slump: it seems they have lost the magic that fuels the desire for something we don't need.

Our vision is that a signature engagement and experience strategy in these industries could entice the customer to return. Signature means designing and managing the experience both as an art and a science. Brands should "craft" the customer journey as they do with products, injecting creativity and their special touch into all relevant touch-points. Not all touch-points are equal. Brands should be able to select those that will make a difference in terms of customer relevance from those that are just "nice to have". In crafting the experience, not only physical and digital touch-points should be considered but also, as we stress for the first time, human touch-points and people management.

If the shift to automated systems is inevitable, particularly for convenience goods, we believe that for premium and luxury goods, the human touch in terms of service and interactions will be the ultimate luxury in a world of "tap and go". Making products and brands relevant for people and aligning the employees with the brand value proposition and its signature through training and incentives is key to sustainable success.

Crafting touch-points is not enough if the execution is not well-engineered. From our research, it has emerged that for most brands, managing engagement is more guesswork than science. We emphasize that the greatest challenge is that Fashion and Luxury organizations are usually divided into silos (design, marketing, sales...) where the consumer-centric approach is in declarations but not facts. To become signature, the customer journey should be the result of a new organization design and company culture enabled by three factors: data and technology, people and organizational mechanisms and processes, as well as design and execution.

The big trap that Fashion and Luxury companies often fall into is the attempt to improve the experience offered, starting with specific technological enhancements or functional projects, without actually approaching the experience from the consumer perspective. Companies often confuse the strategic vision of a consumer-centric approach and the enablers (technology, processes, organization, data or content) that allow its completion: this trend hardly jeopardizes the ability to offer a consistent, valuable and unique experience to the consumer, because initiatives autonomously un-

dertaken by a specific department are typically ineffective and are lack coherency with the positioning and brand signature.

The aspiration pursued by brands towards a signature experience is a harmonious blend of science and art: it is the combination of moments in which a company is able to flawlessly manage all of the customer needs and create instants of surprise, magic, experimentation and uniqueness, that lead to the generation of a personal and unrepeatable emotional bond between a brand and a human being. Therefore, if most brands are still trying to focus on how to offer a *dropfree* customer experience, capable of meeting consumer service level expectations and avoiding disappointment, this book aims to go further by describing what should be beyond this indispensable layer of scientific services and touch-points. The signature experience is the ability of a brand to transfer to its consumer audience the uniqueness of its creative positioning, through initiatives and services that cannot be imitated nor reproduced, without losing the vast majority of their perceived value.

The book is rich in practical examples and best practices resulting from a research project about consumer centricity and customer experience management carried out at SDA Bocconi in collaboration with MAPP and VALUE LAB's ongoing Fashion and Luxury Observatory that takes into consideration hundreds of brand and retail experiences in the industry at an international level.

We would like to thank all our interviewees and friends who shared their experiences with us. We all share a vision about the Fashion and Luxury industries: the future lies with those who own their past and lead rather than follow.

*"In a machine age, dressmaking is one of the last refuges of the human, the personal, the inimitable."*

– Christian Dior