









REVIEW

## Advertising Semiotics in the Socioeconomic Perception of Luxury Brands

### Semiótica Publicitaria en la Percepción Socioeconómica de las Marcas de Lujo

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#### ABSTRACT

This review article analyzed the semiotics of luxury brands as a symbol of status, taking into account how advertising influences this context. The aim of this article is to identify how people who buy products from these brands perceive themselves, as well as how their social environment perceives them. To develop this article, a qualitative approach was used, collecting different ideas from several authors. These ideas go from the concept of luxury brands as a sign of socioeconomic distinction to their representation as an expression of the customers' needs and desires, placing these meanings within the semiotic field. In addition, the article considers how people interact with their environment through sensation and perception, when they connect luxury brands with their representation and meaning.

**Keywords:** Sensation; Perception; Semiotics; Marketing; Socioeconomic; Brand.

#### RESUMEN

En este artículo de revisión se analizó la semiótica de las marcas de lujo como símbolo de estatus, teniendo en cuenta como la publicidad influye en este contexto. El objetivo de este artículo es identificar cómo las personas que adquieren productos de estas marcas se auto perciben, así como la manera en la que su entorno social las perciben. Para la realización de este artículo se utilizó un enfoque cualitativo recopilando diversos postulados que han hecho diferentes autores desde el concepto de las marcas de lujo como un objeto de distinción socioeconómico hasta su representación como la exteriorización de las necesidades y deseos de los clientes, enmarcando estos significados en el ámbito semiótico. Asimismo, se considera la manera en la que las personas interactúan con su entorno por medio de la sensación y la percepción al referenciar las marcas de lujo con su representación y significado.

**Palabras clave:** Sensación; Percepción; Semiótica; Marketing; Socioeconómicos; Marca.

#### INTRODUCCIÓN

As Okonkwo<sup>(1)</sup> says, “The brand is a symbol of guarantee and credibility for the consumer, who is assured that the product they are going to purchase will deliver on its promise.” When people buy an item of clothing or an accessory, they are not just buying the product; they are acquiring an aspirational image; they seek to resemble the models on the catwalks and the unattainable people on social media. “The brand, the character in the advertisement, and the contact information were the most relevant elements”. (Maliza et al.<sup>(2)</sup>, which

indicates that visual and symbolic elements are relevant to the audience. Advertisers must be able to make intelligent and strategic use of semiotic elements so fashion brands can convey what they seek.

When you see a woman on the street carrying a bag with the distinctive Louis Vuitton flowers, you immediately associate her with a high socioeconomic status. How did this brand and its marketing team manage to associate this symbol with the brand and a social group with high purchasing power? Barthes<sup>(3)</sup> links two structural mechanisms that allow connotations to be related to certain denotations in advertising, namely metaphor and metonymy. According to this author, these elements are mechanisms that will enable advertising to reach the unconscious of the recipients and impact their language functioning. This could be a possible explanation for how the use of strategic symbols in advertising pieces can create an image or concept in the minds of consumers, which in turn can be associated with a social category if desired.

## METHOD

This work was developed as a review article to compile, analyze, and interpret relevant and up-to-date information on a specific topic. This type of research is based on analyzing secondary sources such as books, scientific articles, and academic documents. According to Sierra Bravo<sup>(4)</sup>, “Documentary or review research is based on the analysis of secondary sources, allowing the researcher to interpret, compare, and relate existing knowledge about a phenomenon without having to go directly to the field”.

For the preparation of this article, academic sources, books, and indexed articles addressing topics related to luxury brands, advertising semiotics, and consumer behavior were consulted. Key texts were selected from authors such as Okonkwo<sup>(1)</sup> and Barthes<sup>(3)</sup>, as well as recent studies such as that by Maliza et al.<sup>(2)</sup>, which offer a current perspective on the role of symbols and images in brand value construction.

The search for information focused on reliable databases such as Google Scholar, Scielo, and academic journals specializing in communication, advertising, and marketing. Priority was given to articles addressing topics such as social status, aspirational consumption, semiotics in fashion, and the influence of advertising. Subsequently, each text was read critically to identify commonalities, main ideas, and the most relevant contributions to the analysis.

## RESULTS

Considering the sources reviewed for the preparation of this article, it was found that the semiotic elements used by luxury brands are associated with a particular social level or hierarchy within a given social group. This is achieved through the use of images and the association of concepts.<sup>(5)</sup>

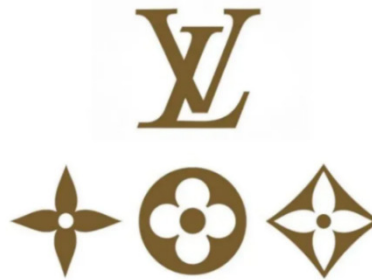
The human brain performs two critical processes when interacting with its environment: sensation and perception.<sup>(6)</sup> Sensation is the process by which external stimuli are captured through the senses. At the same time, perception refers to the process by which a person interprets this stimulus based on their experiences and knowledge acquired throughout their life cycle, thanks to neuroplasticity. This is why their interpretation may vary even if two different people are exposed to the same stimulus.

The brand we will focus on is Louis Vuitton, and the symbols we will analyze are its LV characteristics and flowers. To begin detailing them, it is essential to understand where they come from. The famous LV letters were created in 1896 when the son of the brand's founder, George Vuitton, decided to use these initials for the logo in honor of his father.<sup>(7)</sup> At that time, the brand went through a period in which various imitators tried to copy its designs, which is why George Vuitton set himself to design a specific pattern that would make the process more difficult for counterfeiters. This is where the three characteristic flowers were born, which people would later associate with the brand and social status.

The logo “seeks to generate recognition and recall in the public's mind, as well as to achieve identification of the advertiser”.<sup>(8)</sup> Gutierrez<sup>(9)</sup>, with this, the author implies that the logo is a significant visual symbol when it comes to generating positioning and recall in the minds of consumers. In the case of luxury brands, we can see a clear pattern in using simple logos without too many embellishments, which makes them seem unattainable and aspirational to the middle and lower social classes. These brands do not need to prove what they are by using enormous flourishes; the simplicity of their logos is what gives them that air of quiet luxury, that feeling of “effortless perfection,” which is a concept strongly associated with families that have been of high social standing for a long time, what I call the “old money” style.

In the case of Louis Vuitton, simplicity and minimalism are notable characteristics of its logo and floral pattern. This brand uses these symbols without excessive embellishment on most of its products, and people often recognize the brand just by its pattern without needing to see the logo. Returning to the sensory perception process, the visual stimulus is the flowers. Because of the use of these flowers throughout its history in its various products, people have believed that they are Louis Vuitton. The sociocultural factor began to take root in the minds of consumers when people belonging to the upper echelons of society (Jacqueline Kennedy, Michael Jackson, and Madonna, to name a few) used products with this pattern and logo. This is when the cultural factor combines with the stimulus and creates the perception among the lower-middle classes that Louis Vuitton is aspirational. They begin to associate it with purchasing power and status. For people in

the upper classes, these brands are not aspirational; they see them as a symbol that “subtly” reinforces the hierarchy they already know they have.



brandemia\_

**Figure 1.** Louis Vuitton pattern

Source: <https://brandemia.org/historia-del-legendario-logo-de-louis-vuitton>

Like Louis Vuitton, other luxury brands have used visual symbols that have left a mark on people's subconscious. Additional examples include Gucci, which features its iconic interlocking “GG” letters, a pattern found on various products. This distinctive use of combined letters is also very present in the logo and aesthetic of Yves Saint Laurent, which merges the initials “YSL” in its brooches and designs. These three brands have in common the perception of luxury that their symbols generate in the public; their use of simple typefaces, capital letters, and stylized combinations is associated with and assumed to represent luxury and status globally.

The following table compiles the postulates of different authors on Brand Equity, a key concept in understanding brand, identity, and brand perception. It also presents diagrams that summarize their approaches.

### Analysis

After analyzing the Louis Vuitton brand and the importance of the symbols that make up its identity, we can conclude that brands and the symbols that comprise them influence social hierarchy. This is due to how people perceive themselves and how they seek to project themselves to others. At the same time, this influences how third parties perceive people who use brands, as Kapferer argues in his identity prism.<sup>(10,11,12)</sup>

On the other hand, Berthon et al.<sup>(13)</sup> addresses the characteristics and attributes of luxury brands. The first is the material aspect, which refers to the quality of the raw materials. The second aspect is the individual aspect, which is characterized by the value the consumer gives the brand. Finally, the third aspect is the brand as a signal to third parties. Considering Berthon's statement, the value consumers attribute to the brand is related to its ability to satisfy not only physical but psychological needs, functioning as a reaffirmation for upper-class individuals.


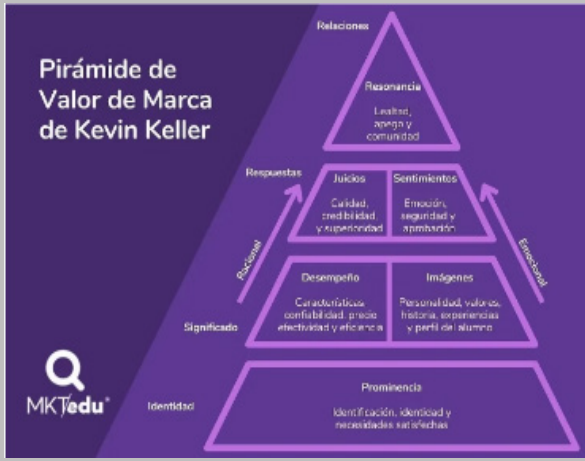

On the other hand, as stated in the third aspect (“the brand as a signal”), the symbols used by luxury brands can generate a stimulus, as exemplified in the case of Louis Vuitton. Through this stimulus, the perception of the brand is constructed as an aspirational object for those who cannot access this type of luxury product. Therefore, the brand becomes a sign of exclusivity and status for these people.

Adding to the above, Okonkwo<sup>(1)</sup> explains that brands are made up of attributes and elements that influence how people perceive and interpret them. Returning to the example of Louis Vuitton, visual elements, such as the flower pictogram, act as symbolic stimuli. On the other hand, the logo also plays an important role, as it completely shifts the focus to the product. In this way, what is most valued is not the product itself but what the brand means. This reaffirms what a study mentions: when consumers seek to satisfy a need or desire, they think first of the brand and not the product.<sup>(14)</sup>

Based on the above, we can conclude that the customer's desire or need is not focused on the product but on the brand, both in terms of what it represents for themselves, whether it is a reaffirmation or an aspiration and in terms of the perception of third parties and what they seek to project through the brand.

In conclusion, exclusivity and status are not directed at the quality or efficiency of the product but rather at the number of people who can access and purchase luxury brands. As mentioned, a study emphasizes that greater desire on the part of consumers drives sales. Still, this increase ultimately leads to losses, as luxury brands can generate less exclusivity and desirability. Likewise, a study argues that the individual desires to feel part of a higher class.

Table 1. Theoretical Approaches to Brand Equity: Conceptual Synthesis and Graphic Representation

Concept	Aaker's postulate	Keller's postulate	Kapferer's postulate
Brand Equity Models	Aaker emphasizes that the name, logo, and symbols—properties that identify brands—can add or subtract value to the company and also to the customers who use them. On the other hand, it is important to mention that Aaker mentions two types of product quality: technical quality, related to the functionality of the product, and subjective quality, based on the feeling the consumer experienced when using the brand.	Keller emphasizes the importance of the consumer and their cognitive process, covering everything from tangible and rational aspects such as quality and other physical characteristics of the product to intangible aspects such as the emotional connection that the customer develops with the brand. In addition, Keller links these elements to brand recall, highlighting the importance of both current and potential consumers directly associating the brand with a need or desire.	Kapferer emphasizes, in his identity model, six fundamental elements in the composition of a brand: the physical, personality, self-image, culture, reflection, and relationships. In this context, the element of “reflection” stands out, which is not limited to what the brand is visually, but rather how it becomes a mirror in which the aspirations and what the consumer wants to project to the world are reflected.
Authors' diagrams			
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## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the semiotics of luxury brands are an extremely influential factor in establishing a relationship with socioeconomic status. Brands such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Yves Saint Laurent have developed such a strong identity that they have managed to associate certain visual stimuli with high purchasing power.

Patterns and logos play a fundamental role in building these brands, as they generate recall in consumers' minds. It is admirable how neuroscience is integrated with marketing to build a brand perception capable of transcending cultures and generating not only identification but also a perception of luxury.

Semiotics has been a vital element in human life since ancient times, and its evolution has enriched multiple disciplines. Linking knowledge such as neuroscience, semiotics, design, and marketing allows us to break down barriers, such as language barriers, and connect with diverse audiences. This integration enables a brand to position itself and, as noted, create a social identity with which some consumers feel reaffirmed. In contrast, others see these products as aspirational symbols linked to success and economic well-being.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

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