



Press Release – For Immediate Release

To: Assignment Editor/Editor of Education and Local News Sections

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HSUHK study reveals how social media context shapes luxury brands' perception

A study by a Marketing scholar at The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (HSUHK) has found that the context in which luxury advertisements appear on social media can significantly influence consumers' perceptions of a brand, particularly when the brand is unfamiliar. The research, published in the *Journal of Global Marketing* in June 2026, provides new insights into how luxury brands can strengthen their positioning in today's digital marketplace.

Inspired by a question she encountered during more than 15 years in the luxury fashion marketing industry, Dr Jennifer Lau, Lecturer in the Department of Marketing at HSUHK, conducted the study with 850 female consumers in the United States who were active Instagram users and owned at least two fashion items worth more than US\$250 each. Among them, 66.4% had completed a college or postgraduate education, 64.5% identified as White non-Hispanic, 44.6% were aged 18–29, and 42.7% were aged 30–49.

Participants viewed a mock Instagram feed featuring a sponsored luxury fashion advertisement before completing a questionnaire measuring processing fluency and luxury perception. The experiment compared advertisements placed alongside luxury-related content with those surrounded by unrelated content, using Louis Vuitton as a familiar luxury brand and a fictitious brand, "Vitus Legrand", to represent low brand familiarity.

The findings showed that advertisements placed within luxury-related content significantly enhanced perceptions of luxury. Brand familiarity proved to be the strongest driver of luxury perception, with familiar brands consistently perceived as luxurious regardless of surrounding content, while unfamiliar brands relied on contextual cues to signal prestige, exclusivity and authenticity. "Brand familiarity overrides the inherent difficulty and barriers of the social media environment," said Dr Lau, adding that this finding challenged her original expectations.

The study also challenges the long-standing assumption that advertisements should be easy to understand. Processing fluency showed a negative relationship with luxury perception, suggesting that abstract storytelling, artistic imagery and symbolic narratives can reinforce exclusivity. "Making consumers work a little harder to understand an advertisement can actually increase the brand's perceived value because it reinforces the mystery and exclusivity associated with luxury," Dr Lau explained.

The findings suggest that established luxury brands can advertise on mainstream social media platforms such as Instagram without significantly weakening their prestige, while emerging brands should prioritise luxury-oriented environments to build credibility and strengthen perceptions of



exclusivity. “For emerging luxury brands, building prestige through association with established luxury brands is more effective than relying on social media advertising alone. Established brands, meanwhile, should embrace creative, abstract campaigns that preserve a sense of mystery and exclusivity,” said Dr Lau.

Looking ahead, Dr Lau proposes that luxury groups could develop exclusive digital platforms where emerging brands are showcased alongside established labels, allowing newer brands to benefit from the “halo effect” of well-known luxury names.

By demonstrating how advertising context, brand familiarity and cognitive processing interact, the study advances understanding of luxury marketing on social media while providing practical guidance for brands seeking to build prestige in an increasingly competitive digital landscape.

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Photo:



Photo caption: A study by a Marketing scholar at HSUHK highlights that luxury advertisements appearing on social media can significantly enhance consumers’ perceptions of luxury.

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About The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong

The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (HSUHK) is a non-profit private liberal-arts-oriented university with six Schools (Business, Communication, Decision Sciences, Humanities and Social Science, Translation and Foreign Languages, and Transdisciplinary Studies), and over 7,000 full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students. With its unique “Liberal + Professional” education model, HSUHK nurtures young talent with critical thinking, innovative minds, caring attitudes, moral values and social responsibility.

Aspiring to be a leading private university in the region, HSUHK prioritises stellar undergraduate education, top-quality faculty members, award-winning green campus facilities, innovative degree programmes, a unique residential college system that combines living and learning, interactive small-class teaching, close student-teacher relationships, impactful research, and excellent student development and support services.

HSUHK has earned various international recognitions. In the AppliedHE’s ALL ASIA Private University Ranking 2026, it secured 7th place in China. HSUHK ranked 24th in Social Sciences and Humanities and 23rd in both Business and Management and Economics and Finance among China’s top universities in the Research.com Top Universities and Top Scientists Rankings 2026. The MSc in Global Supply Chain Management programme achieved 84th place globally in the QS International Trade Rankings 2025. Additionally, HSUHK’s School of Business obtained AACSB International accreditation in 2023, a mark of excellence held by only 6% of the world’s leading business schools. HSUHK was also ranked among the top 200 worldwide on “Quality Education” and “Decent Work and Economic Growth” in the Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings 2021.