



From Whispers to Woo: A Study on Storytelling and Minimalism in Chanel's Marketing of Chanel No. 5 Perfume.

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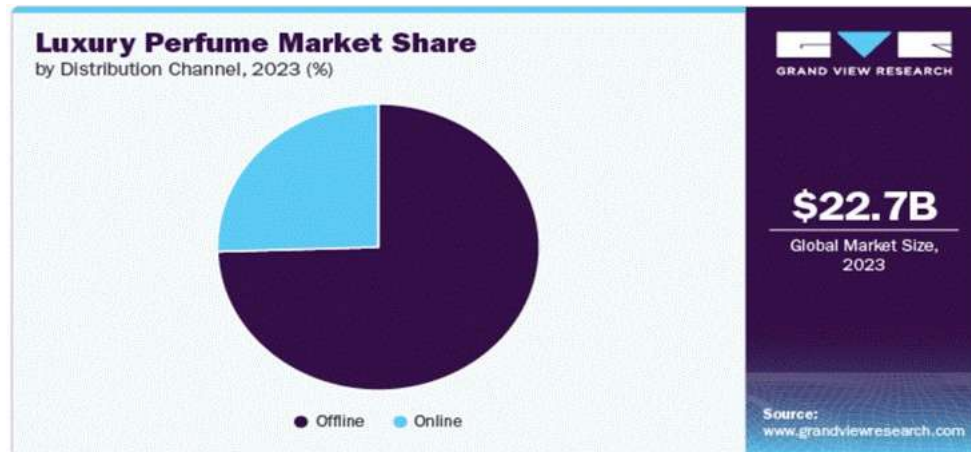
Luxury branding relies on storytelling as a medium to target and engage consumers. This study examines how the luxury perfume brand Chanel utilises narratives to develop a story about its product, Chanel No. 5, and how a minimalist approach is integrated into its marketing of the product. Using a qualitative semiotic and visual content analysis, the research examines ten campaigns from Instagram and YouTube, focusing on symbolic imagery, sparse text, design, and narrative structure. The findings reveal that Chanel's marketing strategy avoids traditional explanatory messaging and instead relies on symbolic storytelling where the product itself becomes the narrative focal point. However, this study contributes to the literature on branding and consumer behaviour, providing new insights.

Keywords: Perfume Industry, Luxury, Minimalist, Marketing

Literature Review:

a) **Luxury perfume industry:**

The luxury perfume sector symbolises sophistication and exclusivity as it is a mix of rare ingredients. Top brands such as Chanel and Tom Ford are dominating the market, fueled by higher disposable incomes and growing consumer demand (Statista, 2023; Deloitte, 2022). The luxury perfume market was worth nearly \$23 billion globally in 2023 and is projected to grow by about 6% yearly through 2030. Furthermore, as companies improve their marketing strategies and as consumer preference revolves around luxuries, demand for premium perfumes increases, as evident- sales of luxury perfumes have skyrocketed worldwide. Popular brands like Gucci, Hugo Boss, and Calvin Klein are seeing a big jump in purchases, which reflects that consumers now consider "fancy perfumes" as a must-have part of their daily grooming rather than an occasional treat. Nearly three-quarters of luxury perfume sales in 2023 happened in physical stores since customers enjoy testing fragrances in person, which is all a part of the fancy shopping experience among consumers, letting them ensure that the scent works with their skin. Expert guidance from staff adds confidence while avoiding shipping delays and getting instant gratification makes in-store purchases appealing. (*Luxury Perfume Market Size, Share & Trends Report, 2030, 2023*)



Source: (*Luxury Perfume Market Size, Share & Trends Report, 2030, 2023*)

The luxury perfume industry can also be understood from the perspective of growth, challenges and opportunities (Research, 2025b).

Growth Drivers

- As countries in Asia and Africa grow economically and more people move to cities, their citizens have extra cash to spend. This means more folks are buying high-end perfumes and other luxuries, giving brands a chance to expand in these markets.
- Luxury perfume brands are now using AI tech that tailors' scents to you, creating custom fragrances that make the shopping experience feel special. This personal touch not only makes customers happy but also lures them back to brands that offer these unique, made-for-them products.

Restraints

- Making luxury perfumes is expensive. They require rare ingredients and fancy packaging to keep the quality intact and maintain that exclusive feel, due to which smaller brands cannot make a profit from them.
- New strict rules about the ingredients of the fragrance in the key markets are making it harder for brands to keep up, with everything from the compliance cost shooting up and the innovation slowing down. These stricter standards slow down new ideas and hit both big names and small startups in the industry.

Growth Opportunities

- By offering luxury perfumes online, brands can reach customers beyond their physical store locations, making high-end fragrances more accessible to a wider audience with just a few clicks.
- Luxury Perfume brands are collaborating with celebrities and fashion labels to launch limited edition perfumes to attract different types of customers and amplify brand visibility through increased conversation and cultural relevance.

b) **Storytelling techniques used in the luxury perfume industry:**

Storytelling has always been relatable and central to human connections and has expanded in various forms. While some scholars like Anderson (2010) hold onto the purity of oral traditions, modern voices champion their adaptation to text, screens, and even TikTok narratives. Take consumer reviews, for instance. As Khammash and Griffiths (2011) observed, these aren't just star ratings but rather intimate narratives. Today's shoppers are actively seeking raw experiences from real people rather than polished ads. It's like crowdsourcing trust: when a review feels personal, it resonates. This claim is supported by Juppi (2017) in research they conducted, which shows clearly that narrative-driven reviews feel more relatable to consumers, just like advice from a trusted friend, and when a story hits home. It doesn't just inform but also heavily influences, as revealed by Ludwig's 2013 study (Te Wierik et al., 2023). The stories stored in the fragrance bottle especially appeal to consumers' emotions. When they pick up the bottle, an imagery gets created in their head which takes them on a tour of the whole perfume journey, making them feel the emotions and inspiration the bottle holds. Therefore, a storytelling approach turns the whole idea of buying perfume into a whole new experience, which leaves an impression on the customer's mind. For instance, consider a fragrance inspired by a Parisian love affair. Its packaging, perhaps featuring soft colour pallets and French text, creates a romantic setting before the first spritz. In an industry deeply tied to memory, fantasy, and the senses, storytelling is more than marketing. Moreover, it's a tool for building emotional connections (Shi, 2024).

c) **Marketing luxury perfumes using minimalist marketing and related theories:**

One of the most popular marketing techniques for luxury brands is the minimalist approach. This type of marketing technique is characterised by simplicity, focuses on the primary brand values and produces a strong brand message. This is often characterised by quality rather than quantity, allowing luxury brands to subtly tell a story without overwhelming consumers (Luffarelli et al., 2019). Luxury brands like Chanel have embraced a minimalistic marketing style that avoids clutter and instead focuses on elegance, using minimal dialogue and evocative visuals, allowing the fragrance's iconic status to speak for itself, without the need for elaborate explanations or excessive content. This kind of visual restraint isn't just aesthetic; rather, it reflects deeper values such as

elegance, timelessness and emotional depth. Chanel suggests that the product itself is iconic enough to carry the story. A simple image of the perfume bottle placed under the golden light carries a layered story without ever needing to say it out loud (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Rocamora, 2009).

Research question:

- How are narratives used for developing a story by luxury perfume brands?
- What storytelling components promote luxury perfume brands using a minimalist approach?

Methodology:

We conducted qualitative and interpretive research to explore how luxury perfume brands, specifically Chanel, utilise minimalist marketing techniques and storytelling to develop strategies that emotionally captivate their audience. This study mostly depends on secondary data, as industry knowledge and current research offer a complete basis for examining trends in luxury marketing. The benefits of using secondary data lie in its wide availability and credibility, especially when sourced from reputable platforms and industry-specific content (Johnston, 2017). Given that the intersection of minimalist theory and luxury perfume branding is a relatively new area of research, we adopted an interpretative approach supported by a combination of secondary and digital media data (Saunders et al., 2019).

A total of 10 Chanel No. 5 campaigns (from 2012 to 2024) were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on Instagram posts and YouTube ads that prominently featured minimalist storytelling. The analysis involved coding these ads based on six major categories: visual style, textual messaging, audio choices, symbolic objects, celebrity integration, and narrative structure. This study is limited to secondary data (i.e., video ads and social media content) and does not include interviews or consumer surveys. While this narrows the scope, the richness of visual and symbolic content in Chanel's campaigns compensates for this by offering deep interpretive potential.

Analysis and Result:

Table 1: Narratives in a story for Chanel

<i>Types of Narratives/ Social media Platforms</i>	<i>Instagram</i>	<i>YouTube</i>
Year	2022, 2023, 2024	2012-2024
Texts: <i>Tag line Most words used Is it highlighted differently</i>	1. They ask rhetorical questions and then state-"N°5 IS THE ANSWER" 2. Timeless 3. Mystery, Luxury & Exclusivity 4. Storytelling Approach	1. Forever Feminine 2. Text is Sparse but impactful → The focus is more on the visual narrative and less on heavy text. 3. N°5 IS THE ANSWER
Audio: <i>Is it a song or music? Is the music late old, or classic?</i>	1. Daft Punk- 2001 2. Ukrainian music- 1916	1. Iconic Pop Songs 2. Cinematic Orchestral Scores 3. Similarity in all audios-creates Emotional, Dreamlike, and Ethereal Ambience.
Video: <i>Timing of the day, Colour palette used, characters in the video, dialogues in the video or just actions or body movements, background place.</i>	No significance of day/night since- the fragrance of the moment, implies can be applied at any time.	Same as Insta

Consumer reaction: <i>Positive, negative</i>	Positive regarding the fragrance and negative because of performance issues (longevity and sillage)	Celebrity admiration, Cinematic appreciation, music appreciation “The ads are viewed as short films or visual poetry, making people comment on the storytelling, music, and aesthetic rather than the product.”
Personal experience: <i>(Yes/No)</i>	no	no
Interactivity level: <i>(is the video ending with a question for the consumers, any polls or need to share or subscribe)</i>	All videos and captions end with no.5 as the answer. They launched an Instagram filter as well where users could virtually "wear" the red N°5 bottle or place it in their surroundings in 2021.	n/a
Behind the scenes	Yes, they humanise their campaigns to make them feel authentic	n/a
Cause-driven	Feminine Liberation	Sustainability

Our eyes are our strongest senses; we see before we smell or hear. Chanel knows this. Their No. 5 ads don't rely on dialogue or explanations. Instead, they use striking visuals, black-and-white films, slow-motion elegance, and glowing skin to make us feel rather than think. A woman in a golden dress isn't just a model; she becomes a symbol of luxury. This visual language speaks

directly to our subconscious, making perfume feel like more than just a product—it feels like art. Luxury perfume brands create a language that people can relate to. This language works because it taps into universal desires like elegance, confidence, or allure and in the case of Chanel: The Myth of the Eternal Feminine, it leaves room for personal interpretation. The brand reinforces this language through minimalist visuals (think black-and-white films with glowing close-ups) and cultural associations (Marilyn Monroe's famous quip about wearing "just a few drops to bed"). The legendary tagline "No. 5 is the answer" perfectly encapsulates this strategy as it doesn't explain what perfume does but positions it as the solution to an unspoken question about identity and desire.

Luxury perfumes use carefully selected ingredients to trigger specific emotions and associations, much like how pumpkin spice evokes cosy autumn feelings or lavender promotes relaxation. Chanel No. 5's composition works similarly but with more sophisticated intent: its aldehydes create a sparkling, futuristic impression to convey timelessness; jasmine and ylang-ylang add depth and mystery to suggest sophistication; while may rose and sandalwood provide a balance of softness and strength to represent complete femininity. These aren't just pleasant smells - they're psychological tools carefully chosen because our brains naturally link scents with memories and emotions. The fragrance goes beyond physical application to create mental associations because the smell is processed in the brain's limbic system, which handles memory and emotion. This scientific understanding of scent psychology, combined with artistic composition, transforms a simple fragrance into a powerful personal statement that shapes how wearers perceive themselves and how others perceive them.

Furthermore, a luxury perfume isn't just about the scent; it's about the ritual. The weight of the bottle, the sound of the spray, the way the fragrance evolves over hours—all of it makes wearing Chanel No. 5 feel like stepping into a legend. The packaging might catch your eye, but the story is what makes you stay.

Chanel No. 5 isn't just a perfume; it's a dream in a bottle. By combining stunning visuals, primal storytelling, and psychology-driven scent notes, it doesn't just appeal to our noses rather than speaks to our souls. Other luxury brands do the same (Dior with J'adore, Guerlain with Shalimar), but Chanel's genius is in making timelessness feel personal. When you wear No. 5, you're not just wearing a fragrance uniform; you're wearing a story, and that story is yours. Chanel N°5 is making strides in sustainability as well, another way to intrigue consumers, particularly in its packaging. A 100th-anniversary limited edition of the fragrance features recycled glass bottles and biodegradable paper packaging. This move demonstrates Chanel's commitment to reducing its environmental impact and aligning with the principles of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Conclusion:

This study explored how luxury perfume brands, particularly Chanel No. 5, use narratives to develop brand stories and which storytelling components best promote luxury perfumes through a minimalist approach. To address these research questions, a qualitative methodology was employed, combining secondary data analysis with narrative and visual examination of Chanel's campaigns on Instagram and YouTube. The findings reveal that Chanel No. 5's marketing avoids traditional, explanatory messaging and instead relies on symbolic storytelling, where minimalist visuals, sparse text, and evocative music allow the product itself to become the narrative's focal point. This approach not only reinforces the perfume's iconic status but also invites consumers to project their desires and emotions onto the brand, creating a deeper emotional connection. Inference from the study suggests that minimalist storytelling enhances luxury branding by fostering personal interpretation and emotional engagement, making the consumer an active participant in the brand's narrative.

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