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## **Desirability and differentiation in cosmetics**

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Master in Management

Supervisor:

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Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management

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## Resumo

Esta dissertação examina os fatores que impulsionam a diferenciação e a atratividade na indústria de cosméticos de alta qualidade. Tem como pano de fundo um mercado saturado, caracterizado por uma concorrência cada vez mais acirrada. O objetivo é compreender como as marcas podem se destacar e atrair os consumidores.

A pesquisa baseia-se numa metodologia qualitativa. Foram realizadas sete entrevistas semiestruturadas com profissionais do setor. Uma análise temática destaca quatro áreas: o produto, a experiência, a imagem e a comunicação por meio de influenciadores e embaixadores.

Os resultados mostram que o produto é a base para a diferenciação da marca através da inovação, embalagem e desempenho. No entanto, parece que a inovação por si só não é suficiente e deve ser acompanhada por campanhas de marketing criativas que sejam consistentes com o posicionamento da marca. A experiência do consumidor através de eventos em lojas pop-up ou lojas físicas é uma ferramenta para a desejabilidade. A imagem da marca é fundamental para fortalecer o seu capital simbólico, particularmente no setor de luxo, onde a percepção simbólica e a emoção têm precedência sobre a funcionalidade do produto. Por fim, os influenciadores e embaixadores trazem autenticidade e visibilidade, bem como prestígio e admiração, respetivamente.

Keywords : Cosmetics, luxury, differentiation, desirability, storytelling, customer experience, digital influence.

Palavras-chave: Cosméticos, luxo, diferenciação, desejo, narrativa, experiência do cliente, influência digital.





## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the drivers of differentiation and desirability in the high-end cosmetics industry. It is set against the backdrop of a saturated market marked by increasing competitive intensity. The aim is to understand how brands can stand out and appeal to consumers.

The research is based on a qualitative methodology. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals in the sector. A thematic analysis highlights four areas : the product, the experience, the image and communication via influencers and ambassadors.

The results show that the product is the basis for brand differentiation through innovation, packaging and performance. However, it appears that innovation alone is not enough and must be accompanied by creative marketing campaigns that are consistent with the brand's positioning. The consumer experience through events in pop-up stores or shops is a tool for desirability. Brand image is key to strengthening their symbolic capital, particularly in the luxury sector, where symbolic perception and emotion take precedence over product functionality. Finally, influencers and ambassadors bring authenticity and visibility as well as prestige and admiration, respectively.

Keywords : Cosmetics, luxury, differentiation, desirability, storytelling, customer experience, digital influence.

JEL Classification System: M31 (marketing), L66 (Food; Beverages; Cosmetics; Tobacco; Wine and Spirits)



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## 1 Introduction

The cosmetics industry has been a particularly dynamic sector for several decades. The beauty market has experienced continuous and stable growth. According to Jbour (2025), it has grown by an average of 4.5% per year over the last 20 years. This growth is driven by the wellness trend and the increase in associated spending, scientific and technical progress (diversification and evolution of formulas and packaging), and the development of digital technology. In 2023, the cosmetics market represented more than USD 570 million in turnover (Limbu and Ahamed, 2023). The high-end segment, which is the focus of this thesis, is a significant growth driver in the field. Hagtvedt and Patrick (2009) explain that luxury brands have naturally expanded their activities, moving from fashion to perfume and then to beauty more broadly, with skincare and make-up. The major historic houses that have been offering beauty products for several decades, such as Chanel, Guerlain and Estee Lauder, are the major players in the sector. However, they now face new competitors in the form of numerous beauty lines from famous fashion houses. Liz Flora (2024) says in *Business of Fashion*, "The latest must-have accessory for a luxury brand? A beauty line". In recent years, there has been a succession of beauty line launches: Prada Beauty (L'Oréal), Rabanne Makeup (PUIG), Céline Beauté (LVMH), Hermès Beauté, and others to come, such as Louis Vuitton (LVMH) and Miu Miu (L'Oréal). At the same time, consumer expectations are changing, with consumers increasingly keen on brand experiences and identity recognition (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2016).

This evolution in the cosmetics industry has given rise to a lasting phenomenon that poses a problem: market saturation. Brands compete with each other with very similar products: women's and men's fragrances, make-up routines, anti-ageing skincare products and beauty accessories. This makes it increasingly difficult for brands operating in similar product areas to differentiate themselves. The same is true in terms of communication: it is difficult to maintain relevant visibility when a brand's messages and campaigns are drowned out by the competition. This echoes the findings of Ishankulova et al. (2024) in their article on "Current Trends in the Developments of the Cosmetic Market".

This market saturation raises questions about the ability of cosmetics brands to stand out. How can they thrive and continue to grow? What enables new beauty lines to be launched and emerge when the market seems particularly crowded? The sector's performance clearly shows that its players are successfully implementing effective strategies to overcome this situation and the challenges of the market. Michael E. Porter (1980) explains that in a highly competitive and homogeneous environment, the only way to generate a sustainable advantage over other players in the sector is through differentiation. However, as explained above, high-end cosmetics brands do not really differentiate themselves through the variety of their offerings, which are all quite similar. This situation leads them to look for other levers than the product itself to distinguish themselves. So what is their strategy? If so many beauty brands are surviving today, it is because their differentiation is not directly linked to their product. It is based on creating desire in the consumer. Beyond the desire for the functional and sensory use of the product, this refers to the creation of a symbolic dimension to owning it. There is a genuine emotional attachment to the product and the brand. This allows consumers to embody a certain status and belong to a certain community. This is what Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2016) define as the "intangible and aspirational value" of luxury.

In this environment, where brands are pushing their strategies beyond their products and where consumers no longer necessarily buy a product for its benefits or effectiveness but for what it represents, marketing campaigns are becoming the core of launch strategies. These campaigns are no longer limited to promoting a product but are developed to take the consumer on a global experience. Carù & Cova (2006) explain that today's marketing is based on creating worlds in which consumers are invited to construct meaning and project themselves. Thus, the objective of beauty brands has shifted to not only offering products that satisfy consumers' technical needs, but above all to offering desirable and unique experiences and worlds.

In this context, it is relevant to ask the following question: How can high-end cosmetics brands develop desirable and differentiating marketing campaigns in a saturated and increasingly competitive market?

In order to provide some answers to this question, this thesis is based on a qualitative study conducted among various professionals in the sector. The aim is to gather their feedback on the strategies and campaigns they have implemented and which have proven to be effective.

This work is of definite academic interest, as there is little literature that addresses the topics of luxury marketing, product innovation, desirability and digital technology in relation to the cosmetics sector. These concepts are often addressed separately or with a particular focus on



fashion. This leaves considerable scope for addressing these different concepts together. Furthermore, a cross-analysis of these themes is particularly relevant in that they are all subjects that have undergone major changes in recent years. Whether it is the cosmetics market, which has a growing number of players, the codes and techniques of luxury marketing, which are evolving and adapting to current trends and changing consumer expectations, or digital technology, which is increasingly transforming brand strategies. This work provides an up-to-date understanding of the challenges facing this rapidly evolving sector.

The relevance of this thesis is also evident from a professional standpoint. It can serve as a practical guide for professionals in the field, such as marketing development or operational product managers. These professionals must regularly conduct numerous competitive studies to understand the strategies of different brands. This competitive intelligence is essential in order to be able to make sound proposals that are tailored to the market. Sometimes, learning about the numerous campaigns run by all the players in the sector can lead one to believe that it is all just a race for creativity to stand out. Although creativity is key, success is more complex than that and requires more than just an idea that stands out from the crowd. Furthermore, the pace of launches has intensified considerably in recent years and has become particularly sustained (Roux, 2011). While the aim is to maintain consumer attention and loyalty, this puts product managers under severe pressure in terms of creativity and production. That is why this work, which links the various levers of a successful marketing strategy, is a valuable tool for understanding how to make product launches and campaigns successful and how to build a brand.

Finally, this subject is of great personal interest to me as it echoes my own career path. During my studies, I completed four six-month internships in cosmetics marketing, notably at companies such as Kenzo, Givenchy and Rabanne. During these two years of experience in the sector, I was regularly confronted with the issues raised in this thesis. I worked in both marketing development and operational marketing, so I often had to come up with product concepts and innovative campaigns, and it is very challenging to make relevant proposals. That is why this work allows me to broaden my expertise and fuel my project in this field, where I wish to continue my professional development after my studies.

The aim of this dissertation is therefore to understand how high-end cosmetics brands can develop desirable and distinctive marketing campaigns in a highly competitive environment.

Three areas guide this research in order to answer the question posed:

The first part sets out the various topics covered in this thesis. To do this, it clarifies the key concepts of the subject, which are high-end cosmetics, the notion of market saturation, and that

of desirable marketing. This part also presents the evolution of the beauty market and that of its consumers and their expectations. The second part focuses on product innovation, the foundation of a differentiating marketing campaign in cosmetics. Finally, the third part analyses the desirable marketing levers in campaigns.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Presentation of the high-end cosmetics market**

#### **2.1.1 Definition of key concepts in the study**

##### **2.1.1.1 High-end cosmetics**

High-end cosmetics are not just about ultra-high-performance, innovative formulations and technical excellence. Kapferer and Bastien (2009) point out that luxury beauty products are categorised as such when they convey an experience of prestige. This experience concerns not only the direct use of the product, but also the interactions between the brand and the consumer, which represent a strong symbolic value. They recount that Bernard Arnaud, CEO of the LVMH group, himself defined luxury products as "items that serve little purpose in the lives of consumers except to fulfil dreams". Kapferer (2015) explains that luxury is traditionally based on strong codes such as historical heritage, highly developed storytelling and rarity, all of which justify a high price. Thus, a high-end cosmetic product has significant perceived value and must be both idealised and desired.

##### **2.1.1.2 Saturation and differentiation**

Kim and Mauborgne (2005) explain that market saturation occurs when supply exceeds demand. This creates fierce competition between the various market players, who then find it difficult to stand out. According to Kim and Mauborgne, brands in this situation find themselves in a "red ocean". This is a highly competitive environment where companies compete to win over the same consumers. This space is characterised by a proliferation of new product launches, very similar offerings and uniform brand messaging. This situation is very much in line with the beauty market, where players and product launches abound without any significant increase in demand.

This situation in the beauty market is consistent with the theory of monopolistic competition proposed by Edward Chamberlain (2003). Monopolistic competition occurs when there are many companies active in a market, but each has limited power due to the uniqueness of their product. Each company offers similar products, but always with a notable difference. These differences can be in the packaging, for example, of two brands of perfume with the same scent but two very different bottles, which will not be appreciated by the same people. In makeup, this can be in terms of formula, such as two blushes from two brands with equivalent performance but slightly different shades, which will therefore not suit the same skin tones.

Furthermore, Edward Chamberlain's theory also emphasises that companies find it relatively easy to enter and exit the market and are free to set their prices, even though they are faced with competitors offering potentially the same thing. This is why brands seek to distinguish themselves with other attributes that are intangible: identity, image, distribution, storytelling, experience. This differentiation technique is becoming essential in this environment to ensure a sustainable competitive advantage.

It is in this context that Kim and Mauborgne's (2005) "blue ocean strategy" theory offers a solution to the problem of saturation. Rather than competing in a saturated market, companies seek to create new value in unexplored markets. The aim is to create new demand. To do this, they offer different products or services that do not yet exist, thereby avoiding direct competition. Companies that successfully implement this strategy unlock latent market demand and create new value: a "blue ocean". In high-end cosmetics, for example, this involves the creation of niche perfumes or technological skincare products.

#### 2.1.1.3 Desirable marketing

Kapferer (2015) states that "Luxury brands sell dreams, not products; their value resides less in functionality than in the emotions, symbolism, and experience they convey." This approach illustrates what desirable marketing is. This concept refers to the communication strategies developed by brands to create an important emotional and symbolic relationship with their consumers. It is about promoting more than just the product's function, i.e. enhancing the overall brand image to stimulate its attractiveness and the desire to own one of its products. To do this, the company mobilises various aesthetic, identity or narrative codes that are unique to it (Kapferer, 2015).

This type of marketing uses several complementary levers to achieve its goals. First, there is the visual aspect. The aesthetic character of the primary packaging is essential, which is why it is sometimes transformed into a true work of art, as is the secondary packaging, although it is often quickly discarded, and also the gift wrapping, if applicable. From an aesthetic point of view, there is also the range of visual media developed by the brand to promote and present the product (physical and/or digital advertising content). Careful attention to aesthetics is essential to highlight the high-end positioning of the products. Secondly, storytelling is a key lever in a desirable marketing campaign. Indeed, it is the highlighting of the brand's history and product concept through storytelling that will trigger the creation of an emotional connection with the consumer (Holt, 2004). Finally, the social and inspiring nature of the brand, which is now even more amplified by the presence of brands on social networks and the use of influencers, further

reinforces its desirability. The marketing campaign associates the product with a certain status or trend, making consumers want to belong to an idealised community. The aim of a desirable marketing campaign is therefore not only to sell a product immediately, but also to improve (or maintain) the overall image of the brand in the long term (Keller, 2009).

## **2.1.2 Evolution of the high-end cosmetics market**

### 2.1.2.1 Market history

To fully understand how today's beauty market works, it is essential to know how it has evolved. Eugénie Briot (2011) explains that the end of the 19th century was a decisive period in the beauty industry. It was during this period that perfumes, in particular, went from being luxury items to mass-market products. This transformation was due to technical advances that benefited manufacturers in the industry, facilitating production and making it both more efficient and less costly. At the same time, retailers, known at the time as "perfume bazaars" or shops selling products from various brands, began to develop, making beauty products accessible to a wider audience. The market then found itself in a highly competitive environment where brands offered similar products. The need to differentiate oneself emerged, and entrepreneurs such as François Coty introduced the concept of the perfume bottle as an object of art and desire. Brands began to deliberately position their products as luxury items with high symbolic value.

### 2.1.2.2 Masstige

Although mass production appeared at the end of the 19th century, it was in the 1990s and 2000s that the concept of "masstige" was introduced by Silverstein and Fiske (2003) in their article "Luxury for the Masses" published in the Harvard Business Review. The term is a fusion of "mass" and "prestige" and refers to prestigious but affordable products. According to Silverstein and Fiske (2003), these are "products and services that possess higher levels of quality, taste, and aspiration than other goods in the category, but are not so expensive as to be out of reach to middle-market consumers". The perceived prestige of masstige products directly influences purchase intent. This is due to the emotional bias created in the consumer, i.e. the associated social status and pride of ownership. Masstige thus broadens the scope of luxury without diluting its image. (Laurent and Valette-Florence. 2016)

Masstige products have developed particularly rapidly due to the rise of cosmetics retailers such as Sephora and Douglas, which have democratised access to premium beauty products. At

the same time, the development of e-commerce and travel retail has contributed to the increased accessibility of these products. High-end cosmetics are now distributed on a mass, omnichannel basis. This accessibility contradicts the very essence of luxury, which was originally based on scarcity. Luxury brands must therefore adapt their strategy to reconcile their exclusivity and image with the accessibility of their products. (Truong et al. 2008)

### 2.1.2.3 Market saturation and fragmentation

With Masstige products available through numerous channels, visibility and differentiation inevitably become a major challenge. This challenge is compounded by the constant influx of new competitors into the market. First, there are the historic luxury and fashion houses that are launching into beauty, such as Hermès, Gucci, Rabanne, Prada, Céline and others (Flora, 2024). At the same time, the beauty market is witnessing the rise of cosmetic brands created by celebrities, such as Rihanna with Fenty Beauty, Selena Gomez with Rare Beauty, Hailey Bieber with Rhode, and Lady Gaga with Haus Labs, and they are not the only ones (Peters, 2021).

Finally, the market is becoming segmented due to the rise of niche brands and ultra-selective lines launched by well-established brands. Niche perfumes stand out for their originality, exclusivity, selective distribution, limited quantities, and an experience and storytelling that is even stronger than that of mass-market perfumes. These products are generally sold directly in brand boutiques or in high-end department stores (such as Galeries Lafayette). This category includes Dior's Collection Privée and brands such as ByRedo and Le Labo. This trend appears to be a solution for luxury brands to balance their masstige product offering, while also allowing them to cultivate their prestigious image (Voyer, 2023). According to Verified Market Reports, the niche perfume market was valued at USD 4.5 billion in 2024 and is expected to reach USD 8.2 billion by 2033. At the same time, other segments are emerging on the market, such as clean beauty (Albrecht and al., 2021).

## 2.1.3 Evolution of market consumers and their expectations

### 2.1.3.1 Impact of trends on purchasing behaviour

As mentioned above, luxury brands do not necessarily sell a product for its intrinsic effectiveness, but seek to offer a more comprehensive experience and the acquisition of a certain status. Thus, consumers themselves do not choose a product for its performance, but because of the desirability of what it represents or because it is fashionable. This observation is based on the theory of consumer values developed by Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991). They

emphasise the importance of emotional value on purchasing behaviour. Indeed, the prestige, image or pleasure associated with the purchase is a determining factor in the choice of a product. Thus, according to Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991, p. 159), "consumer choice behaviour is influenced by multiple consumption values - including functional, emotional, social, epistemic, and conditional values". This statement is supported by Adulyatham et al. (2022), who specify that it is a positive emotional value that influences purchasing intent, for example, an ethical concern with the purchase of eco-friendly products. This is how trends greatly influence purchasing behaviour.

#### 2.1.3.2 The central role of social media

While purchasing behaviour is largely influenced by fashion trends, it is on social media in particular that these trends develop and spread. Liu (2025) points out that platforms such as Tiktok and Instagram do more than just relay trends: they create them and promote them to amplify them. Many overexposed and viral beauty products become real must-haves, even without being particularly effective. In this context, social media has become an essential showcase for luxury cosmetics. A study conducted by Vogue Business shows that purchasing products directly via platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, or "social commerce," now exceeds purchases made in physical stores. This highlights the influence of social media on purchasing behaviour.

The impact of social media is largely due to the role of influencers, who are numerous and active on these apps. A study conducted in Saudi Arabia shows that a very high number of consumers purchase a product because they have heard good things about it from an influencer. These customers even consider the content offered by influencers to be more credible than traditional advertising (Alshurideh et al., 2021).

Furthermore, an article in Vogue Business warns about the paradoxical consumer behaviour that Gen Z and millennials may adopt. Indeed, the latter display high ethical standards but remain influenced by their need for social belonging and their enthusiasm for viral products, which are often at odds with ethical values.

## **2.2 The product: the foundation of a distinctive marketing campaign**

### **2.2.1 The product as a strategic starting point**

#### 2.2.1.1 Product innovation

Although luxury beauty brands offer more than just a product, the product is at the heart of a brand's value proposition. Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasise the importance of developing a strong product offering. In cosmetics, this can mean developing an innovative, high-performance formula, using exclusive active ingredients, or offering a unique application ritual. Take Guerlain's Orchidée Impériale Black skincare range, for example. It combines the exclusive Black Orchid ingredient with BlackImmune™ technology to deliver exceptional anti-ageing efficacy. Highlighting rare ingredients and patented technologies, as Guerlain does, immediately reinforces the perception of product quality. Good product quality is essential, particularly in the luxury sector, as it justifies the premium price point. It is also a key lever for developing and maintaining a relationship of trust with consumers.

#### 2.2.1.2 Unique Selling Proposition (USP)

To truly stand out in a market such as beauty, more than just a quality product is needed. A brand must highlight its Unique Selling Proposition (USP). Majka (2024) explains that this concept refers to the elements of a product that are unique to it and not found in competing products. The USP thus enables a clear and precise marketing positioning that is easily identifiable by consumers, who can then quickly understand what differentiates a brand's products from those of its rivals. The USP is based on four pillars: differentiation (the product must be different from what already exists), relevance (the product must meet a real consumer need), credibility (the product promise must be verifiable) and clarity (the message must be easily understandable). It is essential for a brand to communicate its USP through its marketing campaigns in order to gain an advantage, as Majka (2024) points out: "Brand messaging involves the consistent expression of the USP across all communication channels, including advertising, public relations, social media, and customer interactions". Ultimately, this concept is truly essential in cosmetics because when it is well promoted by the brand, it offers a real distinguishing feature to consumers, who are often overwhelmed by similar offerings.

Furthermore, product innovation and the USP are valuable triggers for storytelling. This provides material for building the marketing campaign and its narrative. According to Tilaar's study (2023), storytelling associated with innovation has a positive impact on purchase intent. It is a lever for brands to create greater connection and authenticity with their audience.



## 2.2.2 Differentiation based on actual, perceived or marketed performance

### 2.2.2.1 Innovate in a relevant way to ensure sustainable differentiation

It is clear that the product, and more specifically product innovation, is a driver of differentiation and a key part of a marketing campaign in the sense that it directly feeds into it. It is also at the heart of the value proposition of a luxury cosmetics brand, as it is the product that embodies and connects all aspects of the brand. Indeed, without the product, there is no packaging, no ritual of use or purchase, and no content that makes sense to promote in a campaign (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Furthermore, Teece (1986) emphasises that product innovation must not be easily imitable, otherwise it can no longer really be considered differentiating, at least not in the long term. For example, the first brands to offer mascaras with an innovative formula known as tubing enjoyed a competitive advantage due to the rarity of the product, but today many brands have developed this type of product, which no longer allows them to truly differentiate themselves (Ciarlo, 2025).

Innovation alone is not enough. It must be accompanied by relevant product design and a pleasant user experience. These two elements can also constitute product innovation. For example, a perfume may have a fairly classic scent but a never-before-seen spray that creates a unique ritual of use. Key components accompany the product, particularly the packaging, as it serves as proof to the consumer of the product's good performance and premium positioning (Shi et al., 2021).

### 2.2.2.2 Actual performance vs perceived performance

Marketing literature clearly distinguishes between so-called objective quality (i.e. the actual quality and performance of a product) and perceived quality (as imagined by the consumer). Sometimes the information communicated by brands is imperfect (e.g. incomplete) or misunderstood by consumers. Consumers will then use other signals such as price, brand or point of sale to deduce a product's effectiveness (Zeithaml, 1988). Also, as seen above, according to Shi et al. (2021), packaging serves as proof of the product's good performance, but it can also overcredit it, causing a top-down effect. Thus, the innovation perceived by the consumer directly influences their attitude towards the brand (Kim and Johnson, 2015). Ultimately, it is important for brands to be aware of and manage as much as possible the gap that may exist between the measured effectiveness of their product and that perceived by their customers.

### 2.2.2.3 Product credibility: keeping promises to build loyalty.

In the short term, campaigns draw attention to new products, but in the medium and long term, it is the product's performance that will secure or undermine the relationship between a brand and its consumers. If the product does not deliver on its promise, customers will be disappointed and may not become (or remain) loyal to the brand. If, on the contrary, the product meets expectations, a relationship of trust and attachment is more likely to develop. This leads to customer loyalty to the brand and thus to better performance for the brand (more sales, more credibility and therefore more legitimacy to maintain a high price, for example) (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Product innovation is therefore a key lever for creating desirable marketing campaigns, but it must be done correctly by brands. To have a real impact, it must not be limited to the product formula itself, but must also extend to its packaging and use. It must not be too easily imitable and must be properly communicated so that it is known to consumers and perceived in the right way in order to remain credible and build loyalty without disappointing.

### 2.2.2.4 Packaging and product adaptation: levers for building a differentiated object of desire

In the luxury and high-end cosmetics sector, packaging is more than just a container for the product; it is a central element of the brand's identity. It embodies the brand's values, its history and its message, and is an integral part of the consumer experience (Srivastava et al., 2021). When the packaging design has been carefully thought out (materials, weight, texture, aesthetics), it becomes a real trigger for desire (Voyer, 2024). Packaging is an extension of the brand, and it is important that the message conveyed is consistent with the brand's overall image. Some brands, such as Loewe and Benefit, opt for a more emotional product design with pop colours and unexpected, fun shapes (Ayach, 2024), while others, such as Chanel, offer understated, timeless designs that seek to convey a more status-oriented luxury. Each style will evoke different emotions in consumers and generate desire among targeted segments. Packaging plays an important role in a marketing campaign because it is present in all visuals.

## 2.2.3 Adaptation to the market and target audiences

If packaging must be adapted to the target segments in order to appeal to consumers, the same is true for the product itself. Today, cosmetics brands are present internationally, in markets with diverse cultures and customs. This can make it difficult for them to impact people with

very different cultural profiles. Adapting products to certain markets or directly customising packaging, for example, is therefore a solution for brands. Srivastava et al. (2022) emphasise that aligning the visual message expected by each audience without altering the brand identity is key to maintaining a desirable image regardless of the market. Guerlain has created lipsticks with customisable cases, and Prada has created a cushion foundation (a product mainly used in East Asian countries) that is only available in certain Asian markets.

## **2.3 Desirable marketing levers in cosmetics**

### **2.3.1 Experience and staging in the service of desirability**

#### 2.3.1.1 Experiential marketing

Pine and Gilmore (1998) founded the concept of the "Experience Economy," which emphasises that experiences are a lever for strategic differentiation in premium sectors. Thus, the physical trade in high-end cosmetics is not limited to the transaction. Points of sale are transformed into sensory and memorable places. This is experiential marketing. Customers are attracted by the product, but first and foremost by the atmosphere, the services offered (a product testing session with a make-up artist, for example) and ultimately the emotion generated. The aim of the sales area is to delight the consumer in order to strengthen their attachment to the brand. In the luxury and cosmetics sectors, a complete experience, with personalisation and a strong visual universe, is an important determinant of perceived value and loyalty (Dhillon et al., 2022).

#### 2.3.1.2 Pop-up stores: exclusivity and interactivity

In this sense, brands have become particularly fond of pop-ups. These are a flexible strategy for embodying exclusivity, creating moments of interaction between the brand and its consumers, and offering a unique atmosphere. This concept has the advantage for brands of being temporary and therefore stimulating consumers' fear of missing out and their sense of rarity and exceptionality. Furthermore, the principle behind this type of venue is to offer visitors experiences through interactive activities: photo booths, games, augmented reality spaces, and make-up sessions. This creates a strong emotional connection with consumers, encouraging them to spontaneously share the event on social media.

Ultimately, pop-up stores improve customer satisfaction, engagement and loyalty, as well as brand awareness (Long, 2025). Furthermore, the temporary nature of pop-up stores allows brands to adapt their storytelling to current trends, such as sensory marketing around food. Examples include Carolina Herrera's Good Girl Coffee Shop, Clarins' Red Café and Prada Picnic. These pop-up stores bring products to life in a different way and make them even more desirable by adding an element of indulgence.

### 2.3.1.3 Showcasing and attracting customers through merchandising and trade marketing

Brands don't wait to organise pop-up stores to showcase their products. On a daily basis, they use merchandising, i.e. the presentation of products in stores. The aim is to maximise the attractiveness of the sales area to encourage purchases (Anand and Ghai, 2025). In luxury cosmetics, this means highlighting the different product lines and their packaging, including elements that support the brand identity. The aim is to create a consistent, attractive and desirable environment that promotes a successful customer experience. Merchandising is therefore a strategic lever for differentiation, particularly among multi-brand retailers where consumer attention is fragmented (Kotler and Keller, 2016).

Merchandising is directly linked to trade marketing, which refers to the actions taken by a brand at its distributors to increase product visibility and thus boost sales. More specifically, brands negotiate prime in-store locations such as podiums or gondola ends for a given period of time. These exclusive locations give the brand greater visibility, allowing it to gain a competitive advantage and stand out from its competitors (Scattolini and Nardi, 2015). This is an additional opportunity for brands to showcase their product launches and offer an immersion into the brand universe. These trade periods for brands are usually accompanied by promotional activities such as product trials, free services, goodies or incentive offers with purchase. Dhillon (2020) points out that this combination of promotions and activities strongly stimulates immediate purchase intent and reinforces long-term loyalty and desirability for the brand.

### 2.3.2 Emotional communication, or how to arouse desire

To create desirable marketing campaigns, brands use emotional communication strategies. They seek to create an emotional connection with their audience to stimulate engagement and loyalty (Li, 2024). This type of communication is used across different channels: social media, influencers, brand ambassadors and more traditional media.

#### 2.3.2.1 Social Media

Social media is a real showcase of desirability for luxury cosmetics brands. On these platforms, they can highlight and even improve their image through aesthetic visuals and dynamic content. (Khan, 2018). Maintaining a well-designed Instagram account and regularly posting content allows brands to strengthen the community aspect and engagement of their audience. This is why all brands are now active on this platform, which also has the advantage of being inexpensive compared to other more traditional media (Castillo-Abdul et al. 2022).

In recent years, TikTok has also become an essential platform for high-end cosmetics brands that want to boost their desirability, particularly among younger generations. Thanks to its short and dynamic format, TikTok allows brands to make their products go viral. To do this, brands organise sponsored challenges, for example, which are taken up by numerous influencers. The content created gives the product and its brand high visibility, making them viral and trendy (Zhang, Liu and Lang, 2024). Wong (2017) explains that consumers want what is trendy. They point out that viral marketing on social media triggers this desire by stimulating the desire for social recognition.

#### 2.3.2.2 Influence

Influencer campaigns are crucial for brands because they offer visibility and virality, making them trendy. However, there are many other issues at stake when it comes to influence. Content created and shared by influencers tends to be considered more credible. The vast majority of consumers trust recommendations from individuals more than they trust brands themselves. This is accentuated when the influencer is authentic, consistent in their messaging, and has a certain area of expertise, such as beauty and fashion influencers. Through the influencer who talks about a brand, consumers will become more attached to it and more inclined to buy it (Mbonigaba and Singaram, 2024). Furthermore, influencer campaigns allow for strategic repetition of the brand message, which reinforces the emotional impact on consumers.

### 2.3.2.3 Ambassadors

Another effective lever for brands is the use of ambassadors. Brand ambassadors are usually celebrities or public figures chosen by a brand to embody its image and values. They are the face of the brand, representing its identity over time. McCracken (1989) proposed the meaning transfer model, according to which ambassadors transfer their own attributes, such as prestige, glamour, credibility or style, to the brand they represent. This improves the perceived image of the brand and thus enhances its desirability. Indeed, ambassadors inspire a desire for identification and social aspiration among their audience, which are two key drivers of consumption in luxury cosmetics (Lau et al., 2025). Furthermore, collaborating with ambassadors can give brands highly exclusive visibility, as in the case of Prada Beauty, which cleverly placed one of its iconic Prada Lip Balms in a music video by Sabrina Carpenter, the brand's muse.

### 2.3.2.4 Traditional media

Finally, to bring their campaigns to life, brands use more traditional media such as television and print. Despite the rise of digital media, these types of communication channels remain essential, particularly for building brand credibility through sustained and elegant visibility. Indeed, luxury brand advertisements in magazines or on television increase their quality and perceived value (Du et al. 2019). These media help to create lasting brand loyalty and fuel desirability thanks to the prestige associated with their use.





### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Qualitative approach**

This study is complemented by qualitative research. This allows for a large amount of data to be collected and as many aspects of the subject as possible to be addressed in order to answer the chosen question. It provides the opportunity to go into detail to understand the nuances in a fairly flexible manner. The qualitative dimension broadens the interpretation of the subject of this study, as it allows for the collection of dense and varied data. It is a research method often used to understand evolving and innovative phenomena. It is therefore perfectly consistent with the situation of the cosmetics market at the heart of this study. This market is rapidly evolving and experiencing changes in codes due to the proliferation of players, changing consumer behaviour expectations and the evolution of marketing techniques driven by the growing importance of social networks and influencers. The results of this qualitative analysis may also lead to the creation of new hypotheses, potentially unexpected at the start of the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

#### **3.2 Hypothesis**

Based on the literature review conducted in this study, several hypotheses emerge, each providing elements of answers to the problem posed. These hypotheses guide the questionnaire, interviews and analysis that follow.

- Hypothesis 1 – the product: innovation, performance and product packaging have a positive influence on the desirability of the brand and its differentiation from its competitors.
- Hypothesis 2 – image and storytelling: the brand's universe, its storytelling and its symbolic value are levers of desirability, particularly in the luxury sector.
- Hypothesis 3 – experience: experiential and emotional campaigns help to create differentiation and desirability.
- Hypothesis 4 – influencers and ambassadors: influencers and ambassadors help to amplify brand desirability.
- Hypothesis 5 – social status: the desire for and pursuit of social status reinforce the influence of marketing levers, particularly image and experience.

### **3.3 Data collection**

#### **3.3.1 Choice of method**

To verify the research hypotheses and gain an in-depth understanding of the subject, this qualitative analysis is based on interviews conducted with professionals in the sector. These are individuals working in marketing development, operations or brand management within high-end and luxury cosmetics brands. The method chosen to interview these individuals is the semi-structured interview. This methodological choice allows the interviews to be structured around a predefined framework with themed questions, while leaving room for additional questions and allowing interviewees to contribute their own examples and nuances. The questions are therefore fairly open to interpretation in order to gather as much information as possible on the subject. According to Kvale (1996), the semi-structured qualitative interview aims to discover the meaning that interviewees give to their experiences in a fluid and flexible exchange that allows for spontaneity but is guided. Ultimately, the choice of qualitative interviews is justified by:

- The relevance and richness of the data: Interviews allow us to gather more than just facts. Indeed, the subject involves testimonials, experiences and opinions, which are difficult to measure with a quantitative questionnaire.
- Flexibility: this method allows questions to be adapted or added depending on the interviewee's responses, making it possible to explore unexpected themes that may emerge (Bryman, 2012; Lim, 2024).

Each interview lasted an average of 30 to 45 minutes. This duration is considered sufficient to cover all topics without imposing an overly long appointment on participants who are already giving up their time. It is therefore consistent with recommended research practices (DiCiccio-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

#### **3.3.2 Interview guide**

The interview guide was based on the research hypotheses and the issues addressed in this study. It consisted of ten main questions, as well as additional questions to restart the conversation on certain topics and explore the answers in greater depth, depending on the time available to the interviewee.

The main questions asked were as follows:

- Can you tell us about your background?
- What defines a successful marketing campaign/product launch?

- In your opinion, what makes differentiation particularly complex for a high-end cosmetics brand?
- To what extent does the product/product differentiation (formulation, innovation, packaging) really influence the success of a marketing campaign?
- Do you think consumers judge the value of a brand more on the actual performance of the product or on the image and storytelling surrounding it?
- What do you think makes a campaign particularly desirable to consumers (e.g. storytelling, experience, exclusivity, influence, etc.)?
- How important do you think emotional and sensory experiences (immersive retail, events, digital, exclusive collaborations) are in creating desirability?
- In your opinion, what role do influencers and social media play today in building the desirability of a high-end cosmetics brand?
- And what do you think is the role of ambassadors?
- If you had to sum it up in one sentence, what do you think will be the key to differentiating high-end campaigns in the coming years?

The interviews were conducted individually via Teams videoconference. As the interviewees were French, the interviews were conducted in French, which allowed for a smooth exchange. The transcripts were written in English, the language of this study.

### **3.4 Sample**

The interviewees are seven professionals in the sector. They all work in marketing and in the high-end cosmetics industry. The professions and companies are varied in order to ensure a certain diversity of viewpoints in the responses, depending on the size of the company, its positioning and its brand strategy. This type of "reasoned" sample reinforces the credibility of the results despite the small number of respondents. This is recommended by Miles and Huberman (2014) in their book *Qualitative Data Analysis*. In order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents, their names are not mentioned but are coded.

Here is a summary of the sample surveyed:

PERSONS	COMPANIES	OCCUPATIONS
Manager 1	Chanel, Louis Vuitton	Product Development Manager
Manager 2	LVMH Fragrance Brands	Trade Marketing Product Manager
Manager 3	LVMH Fragrance Brands	Media Project Manager
Manager 4	Guerlain	Operational Marketing Product Manager
Manager 5	PUIG Rabanne	Product Development Manager
Manager 6	Eugène Perma, Shiseido	Product Development Manager
Manager 7	Rocher Group	Brand Manager

### 3.5 Transcription and Qualitative Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded. This enabled transcription to be carried out. These transcriptions have been smoothed, i.e. unnecessary repetitions have been removed from the spoken expressions, while retaining the important ideas and formulations to preserve the meaning of what was said. This choice was made in order to ensure clarity for the analysis. The transcripts of each interview are included in the appendix to this thesis. They have been translated into English, as the interviews were conducted in French, the native language of the interviewees.

The analysis is based on an axial coding table. This table groups together each theme addressed by the interviewees and the important phrases and expressions that express the ideas. This makes it possible to clearly identify the themes addressed during the interviews and each person's views on the subjects. This table is included in the appendix to this thesis. It allows for familiarisation with the data and the search for convergence and divergence in the selected themes. The themes were predefined based on the questions asked. To make this table easier to understand, a second, more selective coding table summarises the key elements mentioned for each theme. This table can be found in the introduction to the results. This method of analysis is recommended by Miles and Huberman (2014).

### 3.6 Limitations and points to note

Despite the relevance of the methodology chosen for this study, i.e. qualitative analysis and semi-structured interviews, there are certain limitations to be taken into account for a proper interpretation of the results:

- The study is based on a sample of seven professionals, which is limited. Although this allows for in-depth analysis, it does not represent all high-end cosmetics companies. The decision was made not to conduct more interviews because this is sufficient to identify recurring themes and a certain saturation of the results is already beginning to be observed.
- There is a bias in the selection of respondents, who are all professionals in the sector with similar roles. The results therefore do not include the views of consumers or retailers. These are elements that could be relevant to collect if this study were to be continued.
- There is also the subjectivity of the coding process. The researcher's interpretation necessarily plays a part in the results.
- The time frame is also a limitation. The topics covered are phenomena that are highly subject to changing trends and societal expectations. What is true today may not necessarily be true in a few years' time. The validity of the interpretations may therefore be limited in time.
- Finally, the transferability of the results is limited. This study concerns a specific sector, the luxury and beauty market, and the transferability of the conclusions to other sectors, such as mass retail, is limited.



## 4 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

The table below summarises the nine main themes addressed in the interviews and the vocabulary and expressions used by the interviewees. Expressions that appear several times in one or more transcripts are only reported once in this table for clarity. This table aids in the reading, presentation and interpretation of the results. It provides a clear answer to the issue of differentiation between high-end beauty brands and their desirability.

Here is a summary of the topics covered:

THEME	SUMMARY OF OBSERVED TRENDS
Campaign success	Visibility, sales achieved, virality, originality, consistency and consumer inclusion.
Complexity of differentiation	High saturation, many launches, difficulty in standing out due to similar products and multiple players.
Product role	Product is a decisive factor in purchasing and loyalty, but its role varies depending on positioning (performance vs image and status).
Image and storytelling	Key lever for building brand credibility and creating dreams and social status; consistency is important.
Experience	Immersive and emotional experience: key to differentiation and connection, stimulating memory.
Influencer	A powerful channel for visibility, authenticity and proximity, but beware of losing trust if abused.
Ambassadors	Embodying values, transferring image and precise targeting, leveraging prestige.
Desirability	A combination of novelty, originality, repetition, experience and consumer-brand connection (status, inclusion).
Key differentiator	Product innovation, consistency with DNA, personalisation, originality and ability to build loyalty.

Nine main themes emerge from this analysis. First, those that explain the context, i.e. the complexity of differentiation and the success of a campaign. Next are the various levers that brands can use, i.e. product, image and storytelling, experience, influencers and ambassadors. Finally, two themes respond more directly to the issue at hand: desirability and key differentiators. These results will therefore present in detail all the themes addressed by the respondents.

#### **4.1.1 Market context**

In order to contextualise the results, it is important to understand the situation in the high-end cosmetics market. This is why the question "What do you think makes differentiation particularly complex for a high-end cosmetics brand?" was asked to the various managers interviewed. It is clear, and emphasised by all the managers, that the market is in a state of high saturation. In other words, more and more brands are emerging and products are being launched. Manager 4 emphasises that there are two main categories of brand launches: those originating from fashion houses and those created by celebrities. While fashion and luxury brands benefit from their already well-established image, those launched by stars benefit from an engaged community.

Despite their different worlds, these brands all offer "similar products", as Managers 3, 5 and 7 point out. It appears that this is due to the fact that all brands seek to meet the same type of need and that, by launching new products over and over again, the ideas end up resembling each other. Manager 2 highlights the fact that this saturation is exacerbated by the fact that all products are "placed on the same level by retailers". Indeed, the distribution method used by retailers reinforces consumers' perception of the vastness of the offering, which is also the case with e-commerce platforms. Ultimately, a certain accessibility can be found in beauty, even among luxury brands that seek to be more prestigious.

Manager 7 points out that, at the same time, consumers are "overwhelmed" with information and brand proposals due to the number of campaigns being run all the time. It is worth noting a comment made by Managers 1 and 3 regarding product development times, or "time to market", within luxury brands. These are very long due to procedures, compared to other smaller or newer brands, making it difficult for luxury brands to keep up with trends.



### 4.1.2 Campaign success

This study focuses in particular on marketing campaigns implemented by cosmetics companies, which is why it is key to understand the factors that determine whether a campaign is successful for these companies. This is why the following question was asked during the interviews: "What defines a successful marketing campaign/product launch?" It appears that two arguments are important and taken into account when judging the success of a campaign or product launch. These are the business factor and the image factor. All respondents agree that sales figures are essential to look at. The profiles highlight different aspects, which shows that there are several ways to analyse sales. These include the achievement of sales targets according to Manager 1, growth according to Manager 3, rankings according to Managers 4 and 3, and market share as highlighted by Manager 7.

Furthermore, it appears that performance in terms of sales figures is not the only argument, but that everything related to image is also important. Indeed, Managers 2, 3 and 4 emphasise the importance brands place on visibility, virality and interactions with their campaigns. A campaign is successful if it is widely seen, gets people talking and, as Manager 5 says, "helps to nurture a positive image of the brand". Furthermore, managers mention the importance of a good reception and critical acclaim from the specialist press. These indications lead us to ask two questions: how can a brand sell enough products to climb the rankings, and how can it create a particularly visible campaign that has a lasting impact on its brand image?

### 4.1.3 The role of the product

To understand the importance of the product in relation to the study's focus, managers were asked the following question: "To what extent does the product/product differentiation (formulation, innovation, packaging) actually influence the success of a marketing campaign?" It is clear that the product is a decisive factor in both purchasing and loyalty. In fact, most managers, particularly 2, 3, 4 and 5, mention that the product finalises the purchase decision and that only a good product will convince the consumer. Managers 1 and 5 explain that "if the product is not good, people will not buy it despite a good campaign". Furthermore, Manager 4 emphasises that the product alone can attract consumers when it is innovative and different, even if the campaign is not. This view is supported by Manager 3, who mentions that the product is the basis of the campaign.

This is what will inspire and provide material for creating content to generate visibility. Another reason why the product can attract attention on its own is its packaging and design,

according to Manager 2. In cosmetics, products often have strong symbolic value and can be perceived as objects. Manager 1 also mentions the case of the Rhode brand created by Hailey Bieber, which owes much of its success to the brand's universe, the designer and the status associated with it, rather than the quality of the products. Consumers of the brand seek to own it regardless of the product. This ties in with the idea of the strong symbolic value that products often have in the beauty industry. Finally, Manager 1, supported by Manager 6, explains that the role of the product depends heavily on the positioning chosen by the brand and whether it is more focused on image or whether it wants to be seen as an expert brand with high-performance products.

Although some brands really stand out thanks to their universe, Managers 2, 3, 4 and 6 point out that a key trend is emerging among consumers, who are placing increasing importance on product quality. Consumers are becoming more educated and informed about cosmetics, particularly thanks to social media, and will tend to seek out high-performance, quality products. This is why it remains essential for brands to ensure they meet these expectations in order to convert and retain customers. Focusing too much on image at the expense of products can lead to disappointment among customers, which would be counterproductive.

These product results confirm the initial hypothesis that innovation, performance and product packaging have a positive influence on brand desirability and differentiation from competitors.

#### **4.1.4 Image and storytelling**

All managers agree that everything related to the brand's image and storytelling is a key lever for building credibility, attracting customers, creating dreams and, therefore, desirability. The role and importance of image, like that of the product, depends on the brand's positioning. Managers 4 and 3 emphasise that the more luxurious and prestigious the brand wants to be, the more its consumers will judge it on its universe. This is linked to the fact that expectations for this type of brand go beyond the need for a product; people are interested in the status associated with the brand, its more emotional and symbolic value. Manager 5 explains that "some brands [...] really focus more on image and people's desire to own the brand, regardless of the product". This is in line with what Manager 3 explains when he says that historic houses, i.e. more luxury brands, capitalise heavily on their image, sometimes to the detriment of their products. Manager 1 points out that there is a kind of "implicit promise" with these brands that the product will be of a minimum quality, even if it is not necessarily exceptional. Finally, Manager 6 emphasises that image remains key because if it is not carefully managed, there will immediately be a

negative bias. Manager 1 adds that image and storytelling play an essential role in the public's identification with the brand and that campaigns must be easily recognisable, which is possible when the brand universe is expressed consistently.

These results are consistent with hypothesis 2: the brand universe, its storytelling and its symbolic value are levers of desirability, particularly in the luxury sector. However, they add a nuance by showing that the importance of image depends on the brand's positioning.

#### **4.1.5 Experience**

Experience is a significant expectation for consumers when they turn to high-end and luxury brands. Manager 1 explains that experience is what differentiates a luxury brand from a mass-market brand. At the same time, Manager 5 says that product promise and social belonging are no longer enough to stand out. This is what most brands offer. This is where experience, particularly emotional and sensory experience, becomes a key lever for both differentiation and desirability. Manager 2 advises that when launching a product, it is necessary to "maximise the chances of standing out through experience". According to her, people should not simply consume the brand, but experience it. Manager 4 talks about giving customers "an exclusive experience".

To reinforce this aspect of an exclusive moment, brands are increasingly organising immersive pop-up events with activities that allow the public to dive into their world (Manager 1). A key aspect of this type of moment is that it puts the consumer in an active position and thus creates a connection with the brand, according to Managers 4 and 7. The activities on offer create memories for participants, who experience emotions and sensations depending on the activities on offer, which promotes good memorisation by the brain (Managers 3 and 6). This strengthens the emotional connection that people can have with brands. Furthermore, Manager 5 points out that pop-ups stimulate FOMO (fear of missing out) among the public, due to the ephemeral nature of the moment. This is another reason for the high desirability of this type of experiential moment.

Finally, Manager 6 points out a significant limitation to this type of event. These are very local events that can only reach a small number of people who are able to attend in person. She therefore emphasises the importance of everything that happens at Pop-Up events being shared on social media by the brand and the guest speaker, so that everyone who is unable to attend can also be transported into the brand's world and experience. Another way is to include as much of the experience as possible in the customer journey at the various points of sale, as explained by Manager 4, who talks about "accompanying" customers. Manager 5 also suggests

bringing experiences online, for example through Virtual Try One, filters that allow customers to test makeup products remotely.

These results are entirely consistent with hypothesis 3, which states that experiential and emotional campaigns create differentiation and desirability. However, there is a certain nuance to this hypothesis, particularly in terms of the locality implied by experience. Solutions such as sharing the event on social media and increasing online engagement remain very limited from a sensory perspective.

#### **4.1.6 Influencers**

The main point that emerges from the question about the role of influencers is that they bring visibility. All of the managers interviewed agree that they have a major impact on the sharing of information about brands. Manager 3 explains that "influencers are the digitalisation of word of mouth". The advantage is that influencers allow brands to be seen by a large number of people (Manager 4). Today, this is a key technique for reaching and informing your audience, because, as Manager 6 says, "brands go where their customers are, i.e. on social media". Unlike traditional advertising campaigns relayed through sponsored content on social media, influencers offer certain advantages. First, brands benefit from the community aspect and the proximity that influencer communities have with them. People place a certain amount of trust in the people they follow on social media and are more receptive to following their advice (Manager 5). In addition, influencers often benefit from the authenticity that their audience attributes to them (Managers 1 and 5).

Another advantage of influencers is highlighted by managers 6 and 2, who explain that influencer campaigns allow for genuine repetition of information. The audience will see videos about the same products from the same brand several times on their social media, which increases the chances of them wanting to try the product. Indeed, as managers 4 and 7 point out, the goal is for influencers to make their community want to try and buy the product.

However, the majority of managers surveyed explain that it is necessary to be very vigilant when selecting profiles for influencer campaigns. Many influencers abuse partnerships and their community does not really trust them when it comes to the products they promote. Managers 1 and 4 also emphasise that influencer campaigns must be organised in a way that is consistent with the target audience and that the importance of these operations depends greatly on the brand's positioning. This echoes what manager 6 says about the need to go where the customer is. For some brands, it may not make sense to focus on social media if they do not have a young audience, for example.

Hypothesis 4, "influencers and ambassadors help to increase brand desirability", is partially validated by these results. It appears that influencers contribute to brand awareness and therefore to its desirability, and above all, they contribute to the desire to try the product.

#### **4.1.7 Ambassadors**

Most managers emphasised the role of ambassadors in brand desirability. First, they explained that ambassadors allow the brand to associate their image with the brand. When their image is prestigious and desirable, this is transferred to the associated brand, explains Manager 5. Manager 1 explains that the ambassador will "embody the fragrance and make people want to embody the same thing". They point out that they are very important for the image, the image being very important for desirability. Another aspect that is often mentioned is admiration (Managers 2, 3, 4, 7). In the same way that the ambassador transfers their image to the brand and vice versa, the admiration that the public may have for a celebrity who is an ambassador will be transferred to the brand. In this way, they help to reinforce the social status associated with the brand, says Manager 4.

Furthermore, this can enable the brand to benefit from its ambassador's already established community, without the same logic as with influencers. In this way, the brand can reach a wider audience and expand its reach (Manager 1). Beyond the interest in the desirability, admiration or notoriety of the brand, ambassadors seem to be a real tool for "establishing positioning" (Manager 6). Indeed, depending on the celebrities chosen to embody its image, the brand necessarily addresses the celebrity's community. People who are familiar with the ambassador will feel much more concerned, while those who do not know them will understand that it is not for them. This is why Manager 7 stresses the importance of being careful "not to send the wrong message" when choosing a particular ambassador. She warns of the powerful impact of choosing the right ambassadors, a view supported by Manager 1, who even says that this is not necessarily the lever to prioritise depending on the axis. Indeed, it has more impact in perfumery, where image is more valuable, than in skincare, for example, where expertise is prioritised.

These results are fully consistent with hypothesis 4, "influencers and ambassadors contribute to amplifying brand desirability". There is a nuance to this hypothesis: although both influencers and ambassadors are in line with desirability, their roles are not the same and each has a specific impact. These results also add a nuance to hypothesis 5, which is that "the desire and pursuit of social status reinforce the influence of marketing levers, particularly image and

experience". Indeed, the pursuit of social status also reinforces the marketing lever that is ambassadors.

#### 4.1.8 Desirability

These interviews reveal that a combination of factors work together to make a beauty brand desirable. The status and social dimension of the brand is an important factor. As Managers 1 and 2 explain, people are influenced by the desire for social belonging, their desire to be part of a brand community. This gives them a sense of prestige and self-worth. A beauty brand conveys a strong image that is transferred to the people who consume it, allowing them to claim a certain personality. These results are consistent with hypothesis 5: "the desire and pursuit of social status reinforce the influence of marketing levers, particularly image and experience". However, it appears that the pursuit of social status is more than just a means of reinforcing other levers, but can represent a lever in its own right. It should be noted that status remains closely linked to image in particular.

Another key point for desirability appears to be originality, creativity and innovation. In other words, everything related to novelty. Manager 5 emphasises that "novelty arouses curiosity and creates excitement". In this sense, Manager 2 explains that it is beneficial for brands to develop original campaigns that stand out. She adds that novelty can be tricky to approach because it is always tempting to follow trends, which guarantee a certain degree of success with consumers, but that it remains the right way to differentiate oneself and create that buzz. Managers 3 and 4 support this view on the role of creativity in campaigns. It allows one to "arouse the curiosity of one's audience" (Manager 4). Manager 7 even adds that the creativity and ingenuity that brands demonstrate in developing innovative products and original campaigns can inspire admiration from the audience. It appears that a brand does not necessarily have to go through an ambassador to have an audience or even a community that admires it.

As previously mentioned in the results on the theme of experience, the responses to the question on desirability, "What do you think makes a campaign particularly desirable to consumers?", show that consumer involvement and the creation of a bond with them are essential. Manager 2 therefore recommends including consumers in campaigns to "give them an immersive experience ". Manager 7 emphasises the importance of creating a bond with customers and getting them involved so that they feel valued. Manager 5 points out that this closeness to customers strengthens the relationship of trust. Finally, Managers 3 and 4 explain that pop-up stores and events are an excellent way to engage consumers and that they are powerful drivers of desirability.

These results are further evidence supporting hypothesis 3: "experiential and emotional campaigns create differentiation and desirability."

To conclude on desirability, Manager 6 reiterates the importance of social media presence to show consumers that a brand is attractive and desirable.

#### **4.1.9 Key differentiator**

It is clear from these interviews that the product is a central basis for differentiation. Manager 2 even refers to it as the "key to success", provided it is properly supported by a campaign to raise awareness. Manager 6 emphasises product expertise as a sustainable differentiator. The importance of product innovation is also supported by Managers 3 and 4. These opinions are tempered by Manager 7, who points out that product innovation alone is not sustainable because its effects wear off. Indeed, other competing brands can quickly replicate the new product, hence the importance of supporting product innovation with other products. This nuance thus applies to hypothesis 1: "product innovation, performance and packaging have a positive influence on the desirability of the brand and its differentiation from its competitors". In this sense, Manager 2 points out that a good product will struggle to perform well on the market without being supported by a campaign. The importance of communication for innovation to be effective is also highlighted by Managers 3 and 6, who specify that it enables the creation of a link with the brand.

Several managers explain that it is not only the product that allows differentiation, but also the creativity of the campaign and communication (manager 3). Experience, as seen above, is also a factor in desirability and differentiation. Manager 5 emphasises these two levers by explaining his recipe for success: "Work on the brand image with great experiences to ultimately build loyalty through a good product."

Finally, two key concepts remain to be taken into account for success. Product innovation, experiences and good communication that promotes the image are factors of desirability and differentiation, but it is always necessary to pay attention to positioning and consistency, as Manager 1 points out. This is supported by Manager 2, who explains that consistency enables credibility. As for positioning, it is essential that it be clear in order to implement consistent actions (Manager 6).

## **4.2 Discussion**

### **4.2.1 Market saturation and complexity of differentiation**

Both the literature on the subject and the results of the interviews highlight the growing saturation of the beauty market. This market is characterised by a significant increase in product launches, new players and marketing campaigns. Roux (2011) mentions in his studies the intense pace of product launches that brands are currently undertaking. As explained by Manager 5 and Hagtvedt and Patrick (2009), the trend is for brands that were initially fashion-oriented to expand into beauty, a field that inspires dreams, as Manager 6 puts it. This notion of luxury as a source of dreams is also addressed by Kapferer (2015), who says, "Luxury sells dreams." Several managers (1, 2, 3, 4) mention that it is difficult for brands to stand out, particularly because of the launch of very similar products. This dynamic is also confirmed by the literature, which explains the high degree of homogeneity in the offering and the fact that products tend to be very similar (Kotler and Keller, 2016; Majka, 2024). This market situation described by managers is consistent with what Kim and Mauborgne (2005) describe as a Red Ocean with very intense competition between market players.

This difficulty is compounded by changing consumer expectations in the beauty market. Consumers are increasingly demanding in terms of the quality of what they buy, due to the fact that they are becoming better informed. These expectations are notably behind the Clean Beauty trend presented by Albrecht et al. (2021). Indeed, they are more knowledgeable about formulas and their impact on both the body and the environment, as explained in sections 2, 3, 4 and 6. The literature supports this view, explaining that it goes beyond the new values that consumers are attached to. Consumers are looking for high-performance products, but they also want these products to be in line with their values in terms of sustainability, responsibility and authenticity (Tilaar, 2023; Shi et al., 2021).

### **4.2.2 The product as a lever for differentiation**

Despite changes in marketing practices, the product remains at the heart of cosmetics brands' marketing strategies. This is supported both by the literature and by the comments of the managers interviewed. Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasise that product innovation, bringing something new to the market, is a determining factor and one of the most important factors for differentiation. This is in line with the work of Majka (2024), who reiterates the importance of having a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) when a brand launches a product on the market, otherwise it risks being lost among other offerings.



Furthermore, Tilaar (2023) points out that the role of the product for the brand is not limited to its simple utilitarian function and the fact that it meets a need, but that it has real marketing functions. It is in fact a driving force for building the campaign's storytelling, working on the brand image and inventing experiences to offer customers. This is confirmed by manager 3, who refers to the product as the "basis of the campaign". The areas of focus around the product are not necessarily its formula and functionality. Voyer (2024) points out that packaging can be a direct driver of desirability and differentiation. In this sense, Manager 2 talks about the product as an object that may be desired for its symbolic value, because it is designer, for example.

Several managers explain that even if a campaign attracts attention and generates interest because it creates high visibility, the product remains the decisive factor in convincing consumers to buy and subsequently retaining their loyalty. This is in line with the work of Zeithaml (1988) and Shi et al. (2021), who distinguish between perceived quality and actual quality or performance. This difference echoes what Manager 2 explains. Indeed, she points out that in the luxury sector in particular, perceived value can dominate actual value because, given the brand's positioning, its products must necessarily perform well. It should be noted that opinions on this subject differ, as Manager 3 says that consumers expect tangible proof of the quality of what they are buying. This makes sense given the changing expectations of highly informed consumers (Tilaar, 2023; Shi et al., 2021).

In any case, several managers, notably the 5th and 7th, emphasise the importance of product credibility in ensuring customer loyalty and therefore the brand's longevity. The product must not disappoint, which is the risk when perceived performance exceeds actual performance. This idea is in line with the work of Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), which demonstrates how loyalty is influenced by trust in the brand and its offering and product satisfaction.

Product innovation seems to be a solution to overcome competition and create and penetrate what Kim and Mauborgne (2005) present as a Blue Ocean. Furthermore, a limitation to product innovation is highlighted by Ciarlo (2025) and Manager 7. Both warn that product innovation alone is not enough because it is not sustainable. Indeed, when a brand offers a new product with unique features never seen before, it runs the risk of being copied by its competitors. Although development times can be quite long, as Manager 1 points out, this only gives the brand an advantage for one or two years.

### **4.2.3 Consumer experience and staging**

In this extremely competitive cosmetics market, the consumer experience is a key strategic lever for brand differentiation and desirability. The literature and work of Pine and Gilmore

(1998) on the "experience economy" emphasises that the value offered by the brand is no longer limited to the product itself, but also extends to the staging that accompanies it, transforming the act of purchasing into a genuine experience. In this context, Dhillon et al. (2022) and Long (2025) have shown that various immersive devices, such as pop-up stores, in-store events and innovative merchandising, which immerse consumers in the brand universe, create desirability and engagement. This phenomenon has also been observed by the managers surveyed. Managers 1 and 2 emphasise the effectiveness of offering pop-ups with in-store experiences and events. The aim is to allow consumers to discover the product in a sensory and interactive way. It should be noted that the results of the interviews shed some light on the limitations of pop-ups and in-store experiences, which is not really apparent from the literature. Manager 7 highlights the local dimension of these levers. She explains, along with manager 5, that these events need to be well publicised on social media, particularly in order to reach more people, and that the experience needs to be transferred to the digital sphere.

Speaking of pop-up stores, Manager 5 reveals that they generate a strong sense of curiosity and urgency due to their ephemeral nature. This phenomenon of Fear Of Missing Out pushes people to act quickly, which reinforces the desirability of the brand and its products. This is in line with Long's (2025) observations that the temporal and spatial scarcity of these events triggers consumption.

Furthermore, it also works with in-store promotions such as Trade Marketing, as discussed by Dhillon (2020), who explains that this stimulates immediate purchase intent. This method is supported by managers 2 and 3, who emphasise the role of merchandising and Trade Marketing in campaigns. Furthermore, the ephemeral and exclusive nature of these levers appears to be a solution to a problem raised by Truong et al. (2008), who explain that luxury beauty brands are now much more accessible. They are losing some of the exclusivity and rarity that initially defined them. Limited-time events help to maintain a certain prestige and exclusivity for these brands. Ultimately, the experiential nature of luxury is central to the concept, as Kapferer and Bastien (2009) point out when they describe luxury products as a "prestigious experience".

#### **4.2.4 Image, storytelling and emotional communication**

In the world of luxury cosmetics, brand image plays a very important role, much more so than in other sectors or in more mass-market distribution. Kapferer (2015) even explains that in the luxury sector, where value is based on several intangible aspects, image and perception take precedence over functionality. It should be noted that this point of view goes against that defended by the majority of managers and what Kotler and Keller (2016) propose, which places

greater emphasis on innovation and the role of the product. Manager 2, on the other hand, emphasises that value is perceived more through brand image than through products. Opinions may differ on what has the most value, but it seems that the more premium the brand, the more important the image. This is why Keller (2009) explains that sometimes campaigns do not have the direct objective of selling products, but rather of improving and maintaining the brand image in the long term. Le Manger 7 pointed out in interviews that the factors used to determine whether a campaign is successful depend on its objectives, which may be business-oriented or image-oriented.

According to Holt (2004) and Keller (2009), brand storytelling plays a key strategic role in developing "brand equity". By telling a coherent and meaningful story, brands can embed themselves in the public's mind and create an emotional connection with their consumers. The results of the interviews, and particularly the comments made by Managers 4 and 1, confirm this perspective. According to them, storytelling reinforces the perception of luxury and fuels desirability. Consumers do not just buy a cosmetic product, but also the social status associated with it, all the symbolic and emotional value that Kapferer (2015) refers to as intangible. Furthermore, emotional communication is a lever linked to image. Li (2024) emphasises that it is a means of generating engagement and desirability. Manager 7 explains that it is relevant for brands to play on the emotional side to engage consumers. This can be achieved through messages that go beyond the product itself, such as messages about mental health or self-confidence.

#### **4.2.5 Influencers and ambassadors**

Influencers and ambassadors are an excellent way to play on emotional communication. The authors explain that both influencers and ambassadors allow brands to benefit from existing communities and connections. While influencers offer brands an image of authenticity and allow them to benefit from the trust of their followers, ambassadors contribute more to generating admiration and benefiting from the special connection they have with their audiences.

This echoes McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model (1989), which explains that the attributes of a celebrity can enhance the perceived image of a brand. Managers 1, 3 and 4 emphasise that ambassadors embody the values and identity of the brand, while also transferring their own prestige to it. Ambassadors are therefore part of a longer-term brand strategy. The results of the interviews show that McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model (1989) can also be applied to influencers. Mbonigaba and Singaram (2024) discuss the influence of influencers on

consumers who are attached to them and who will become attached to the brand through transfer.

According to all the managers, influencers play a key role in brand visibility. They talk about creating buzz by being very present on social media, with the hype creating desirability. This observation is in line with the literature and the work of Liu (2025), Alshurideh et al. (2020) and Khan (2018). They present social media as a tool for triggering viral dynamics, particularly among younger generations. This ties in with the notion of creating buzz mentioned by Manager 6. As the literature states, social media is an excellent lever for activating young people.

Manager 1 therefore warns about the relevance of influencers in certain cases and the need to always be consistent with one's positioning in one's communication strategy. In this sense, Manager 6 reminds us to go where our customers are. These comments are consistent with the discourse of Srivastava et al. (2021), who emphasise the importance of adapting to the market and its audience. It appears that this notion of adaptation, which is mainly considered from a product perspective in the literature, must also be applied to the various levers activated during a campaign. Manager 1 identifies consistency between actions and the audience as a key to success.

The interviews also reveal a significant limitation to influencer strategies. Particular attention must be paid to the credibility of influencers. As Managers 5 and 7 point out, the proliferation of partnerships or stories can undermine people's trust in certain influencers. This is in line with the comments made by Alshurideh et al. (2020), who emphasise the importance of authenticity being perceived in influencers' recommendations. Ultimately, the activation of these strategies, influence and ambassadorships are complementary and represent a decisive lever for brands. They can thus develop emotional communication and achieve visibility, authenticity, admiration and a quality image in parallel. Social networks are the basis of these strategies and are used as an accelerator.

## 5 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to analyse the levers that reinforce the differentiation and desirability of high-end cosmetics brands. The complexity lies in the market situation, which is characterised by saturation and significant competition, as well as rapidly changing consumer expectations, trends and practices. A qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with seven industry professionals was used to provide answers to the problem. As a reminder, the problem is: How can high-end cosmetics brands develop desirable and differentiating marketing campaigns in a saturated and increasingly competitive market? The qualitative study was used to collect a wealth of detailed data and highlight nine main themes that provide insights into the context and relevance of the subject, as well as answers to the question posed. These themes are: market context, product, image and storytelling, experience, influencers and ambassadors, desirability and key differentiators.

The results of this study indicate that market saturation and product similarity, which lead to intense competition, are the major challenges that brands must overcome. This confirms the work of Roux (2011), Kim and Mauborgne (2005), and Kotler and Keller (2016) studied in the literature review of this thesis. This situation makes differentiation difficult and raises the question of how brands can stand out. This context of extreme competition reinforces the importance of a 360° marketing strategy, which combines several levers to activate in order to make consumers want to choose one brand over another.

The product remains the strategic basis of the brand in terms of innovation, formula performance and packaging. It is the key to convincing consumers and subsequently retaining their loyalty. The results of the interviews confirm that the product has more than just a functional and utilitarian purpose. Indeed, it fuels storytelling and the creation of experiences offered to customers in order to attract them. An important limitation noted by Ciarlo (2025) is that product innovation alone is not enough to provide a sustainable competitive advantage. This is due to the speed with which competitors can replicate new products.

This is one of the reasons why experience appears to be a relevant lever for differentiation and desirability for the brand. The consumer experience can consist of pop-up stores and point-of-sale promotions. These moments, which place consumers in an active position, help to create an emotional connection with the brand. They help to reinforce the perception of prestige and exclusivity highlighted by Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Kapferer and Bastien (2009) in their work. The local dimension of these experiences means that they need to be shared on social media in order to reach a wider audience and maximise their positive impact.

Image and storytelling play a decisive role, particularly for the most luxury-positioned brands. Indeed, these are brands for which the perceived value often exceeds the actual value of the products (Kapferer, 2015; Holt, 2004). The value of the products is in fact highly symbolic. Emotional communication, whether conveyed through brand campaigns, influencers or ambassadors, helps to generate both engagement and desire. In the beauty and luxury sectors, purchases are often motivated by the consumer's desire for belonging and social recognition, hence the importance of a consistent, high-quality image that reflects the brand's positioning.

Influencers and ambassadors who nurture the brand image are an additional lever. Influencers bring visibility, authenticity and proximity to their engaged community, strengthening the link with brands. Ambassadors transfer their prestige and the admiration of their audience to the brand, thereby contributing to the social status associated with the brand (Meaning Transfer Model by McCracken (1989)). The results of this study also highlight the importance of developing influence and ambassador strategies that are consistent with the brand's positioning in order to preserve its credibility.

The desirability of a brand is therefore built on different levers that must be combined in a consistent manner, namely the product, the experience, creativity and image. Social influence is also important in activating the desire for status, hence the relevance of ambassadors. These different tools not only feed the desirability of the brand but also differentiate it from its competitors in a sustainable way when they are properly mastered. This is in line with a clear, predefined positioning and a value proposition tailored to consumer expectations.

This study therefore confirms the hypotheses formulated but adds some nuance. In particular, it highlights social status as a key factor that brands need to convey to their audience.

This thesis has certain methodological and theoretical limitations. Initially, the qualitative study was conducted on a sample of seven professionals from the high-end cosmetics sector. Although their testimonies provide valuable insight into the subject matter thanks to their operational perspective, the number of people interviewed remains limited. The diversity of profiles and the size of the sample do not allow for generalisation of the study, which represents more of a solid exploratory basis on the subject.

Furthermore, the absence of the consumer perspective is another important limitation to consider. The study focuses on the perspective of marketing professionals. However, it is clear from the study that a brand's desirability and differentiation are partly subject to perception and are therefore fairly subjective concepts. This leads to an interesting avenue for further research. It would make sense to supplement the results with a quantitative or qualitative consumer survey. This would make it possible to compare the beliefs and observations of industry

professionals with another reality on the ground. Another way to explore the subject in greater depth would be to interview professionals working within an even wider variety of brands, such as celebrity brands, independent brands, niche brands, or agencies. This would allow for even greater diversification of managerial perspectives.

Furthermore, this research has a specific time dimension. The market is marked by changing trends, purchasing behaviours, expectations and tools. The conclusions of this thesis are therefore valid at a specific point in time and their validity over time is uncertain. This is why it may be relevant to conduct a similar study in five years' time in order to compare changes in practices.

The interesting questions that now arise include: What differences exist between the strategies implemented by managers and the actual expectations or perceptions of consumers? Are the drivers of desirability identified in high-end beauty also found in other luxury sectors (fashion, jewellery, hospitality)?





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## 7 Appendices

### Appendix A – Transcript of interview 1

Can you tell us about your career path?

I started out as an intern in the cosmetics industry at a small company called Manucuriste, and I was quite far removed from the product itself. I was more on the digital side. But in any case, it was a first step in the industry, so to speak, and then I switched to product development. Finally, a job as a product manager. When I joined Kenzo Parfums in 2021, I did a six-month internship working on perfume. Then I did my first year of work-study, still at LVMH Fragrance Brands, for my master's degree on the Givenchy brand, still in perfume. I worked on Key Moments, which included everything related to the holidays, limited editions, and promotional offers such as gift sets and end-of-year gift sets. After that, I finished my studies with a year-long work-study programme at Vuitton on the launch of their makeup line. I finished my work-study programme a year ago and since then I have joined Chanel as a product manager for make-up, still as a product development manager. I work on the make-up collections, which are limited editions that include a complete look, i.e. eyes, lips, complexion and nails.

What defines a successful marketing campaign/product launch?

I think the first indicator is whether we have managed to achieve our sales targets. Because we are working with limited editions, we actually, how can I put it, we scale our campaigns over two or three months because that is how long they will be visible in stores, because after three months they are removed. Anything that hasn't been sold is destroyed. So, have we sold everything we predicted? That's what we call the forecast. Then I think there are also returns in general. Finally, if we look, for example, at the comments we've had on social media or the returns we've had from our regions, i.e. customers who have returned items to stores and these returns have been reported to head office. I'm thinking in particular of a campaign at the end of last year which used very bold colours, there was purple, there was green. It was quite an ambitious look, so we got feedback saying that it wasn't necessarily very suitable for everyday wear, and so on.

What do you think makes differentiation so complex?

I would say it's complicated because there are more and more brands. Finally, there are a lot of new brands coming in, whether in the luxury sector or more generally, such as make-up. It's still something that's supposed to be more affordable. There are lots of brands coming into

the US, and even Asia. Anyway, the market we currently have in Europe is extremely saturated with lots of competitors offering more or less the same thing, and it's just the positioning that can change. That's our concern. Finally, I would say that one of the concerns we have is that the larger the structure and the more international it is, the longer the development times are, and so we are much less agile than other brands that can develop in a very short time and send everything out because they are very local or because, on the contrary, they have fewer CSR standards to comply with, for example. All the big brands have very long time-to-market cycles, which puts them at a disadvantage compared to smaller brands that have shorter development times. Also, in terms of production quantities, they are very large at Chanel, for example, so this lengthens the lead times because it requires certain procedures, for example.

To what extent does the product/product differentiation (formulation, innovation, packaging) really influence the success of a campaign?

I should say that it is very important, but in reality, I'm not sure it is that important. Ultimately, it depends on the brand, its positioning and what we consider to be success. Because if we analyse success over two or three months, in my opinion, the product doesn't matter that much, because if you do a big advertising campaign and generate a bit of interest, people will buy the product because the campaign has made them want it overall, without trying to find out if the product really performs well, for example. On the other hand, if your product doesn't live up to expectations, they'll be less likely to buy it again. Ultimately, it's more about the long term that will have a big impact.

Finally, when we look at brands such as Rhode, for example, which are not innovative in themselves, they manage to target their consumers thanks to their communication and image rather than their products. What Rhode offers can be found among its competitors. In this case, for a brand with strong communication and image such as Rhode, which is fuelled by the popularity of its founder Hailey Bieber, the product is no longer so important. No matter what the brand offers, customers want something because it's trendy. The brand's success is completely linked to its universe.

Do you have a counter-example of a brand that is really emerging thanks to the performance of its products?

I don't have anything specific in mind, but I do think that in the luxury sector, even a very high-performance product alone is not enough, because people are looking for something else, or at least more than that. So communication and advertising campaigns are more important.

However, when it comes to skincare, this may be the case for skincare brands. They are selling a product that meets a need or solves a problem, whereas a perfume doesn't really have any benefits.

Do you think consumers judge the value of a brand more on the actual performance of the product or on the image and storytelling surrounding it?

I think it depends on how the communication is done. If the communication focuses on how wonderful the product is, promises great results and therefore encourages people to try the product, but the product does not live up to its promises, it is misleading. So the value of the brand will be judged by its products and their actual performance. Poor product performance will actually discredit the brand and diminish its perceived value in the eyes of the consumer. In the case of Rhode, where communication is focused on storytelling, the brand will be judged more on its image. If you buy a Rhode product but it is not great, you will not complain because you know that you did not buy it for its performance but for the fact that you own a product from the brand. Ultimately, consumers' judgement of a brand will depend on and be influenced by what it communicates and promotes.

In the case of Chanel, do you think the brand is judged more by its image or its products?

For Chanel, which is a very well-established brand, I think it's a mix of both. The main reason people buy it is for the status it brings, but behind the brand's positioning there is an implicit promise that the product will deliver. In the case of Chanel, people don't judge the brand so much by its advertising campaigns because its value is too deeply rooted in the collective imagination, like Dior. People buy Chanel to enter its world and thanks to the consistent image it has communicated for decades.

What do you think makes a campaign particularly desirable to consumers?

I think it's a bit of everything, a mix of different touchpoints, the storytelling chosen for the campaign, the specific experiences offered, such as events, for example, and the fact that it communicates through partnerships with influencers. It's really the fact that all of this coexists in a super coherent way. For example, someone might see a poster for a new product in the street, then walk past a shop where it's displayed in the window, then see an advert on Instagram and watch a video of an influencer talking about it on TikTok. Repeating the message everywhere and ensuring that everything is consistent with the same way of expressing the brand universe makes the campaign highly recognisable and its impact even stronger. Is there

a particular touchpoint that should be prioritised to make a campaign particularly desirable? I think it depends on the message you want to convey and your positioning. If you want to target Gen Z, then it makes sense to focus on a big influencer campaign on social media to stimulate them and make them want to discover the product. If you're targeting older people, such as women in their 40s, there's not much point in investing in influencers because they won't see the content. For this type of profile, it's better to go for traditional media such as outdoor advertising.

Among the latest campaigns you've seen, which ones have made an impression on you and made you want to buy from the brand?

The Vuitton launch campaign really worked for me. I'm obviously biased because I worked on the brand, but I find their positioning interesting. They chose very high prices to attract a different clientele from their expected competitors such as Chanel, Guerlain and Hermès. They offer products that go well with leather goods, so it's very consistent with their history and brand universe. The surprise of their launch makes you want to buy their products. Then there's Rhode's latest capsule collection for this summer, which had a very strong colour scheme with yellow, and I found that striking and appealing. She also offered accessories such as phone cases with her products, which is unusual and really innovative in the beauty industry, and it works because you want both the product and the accessory that goes with it. I wouldn't necessarily want the product without the accessory offered alongside it.

How important is the emotional and sensory experience (immersive retail, events, digital, exclusive collaborations) in creating desirability?

I think it's very powerful in perfume. There's a more sensory, even dreamlike aspect that makes the worlds always very engaging. In perfume, there's less measurable product promise, so we really try to interest the consumer in everything around it, such as the experience, the brand universe, the person we are and the energy we convey when we wear the perfume. That's why it works well in perfume to create very immersive pop-ups with animations. I think that in makeup it's less important and that in most cases the consumer is more interested in the performance of the product. Especially because for this type of product, many people now buy online, so it's less about the sensory experience. Perfume is still a purchase that people enjoy making in person, to test it and smell it. After all, the experience offered is what differentiates a luxury brand from a more mass-market brand, allowing luxury brands to maintain their positioning. The importance of the experience also depends on where the person makes their

purchase. If someone goes to a Chanel boutique or department store to get advice and assistance, they are clearly coming for the experience and to enjoy a special moment. They could have simply gone to Sephora, where the products are also available.

What role do influencers and social media play today in building brand desirability?

I think it depends on the influencer chosen. If they have an engaged community that trusts them, and they don't tend to advertise too much, meaning they only do so when they really like a product, then this can have a very positive influence on the brand. It's important for them to be authentic so that people want to do what they recommend or be like them, and therefore want to have a certain product. However, if an influencer creates a lot of sponsored content with brands, sometimes I find that the only impact will be the visibility of the product, in the sense of showing that it exists. But as the content will be drowned out by too much other content on the same level, it will not make people want to buy it more than another product.

What about the impact of ambassadors on brand desirability?

That's a good question. Again, I think it's stronger in perfumes. The brand will really look for the right person to embody the perfume and make people want to embody the same thing. The ambassador must, in a manner of speaking, represent the person you will be when you wear the perfume. So it's a direct driver of desirability. In make-up or skincare, it's more rational, so having an ambassador is less important. Brands tend to focus on faces that represent the make-up results or the benefits of the products. Depending on the angle in question, the ambassador may be relevant but not necessarily the priority lever to use. After that, it will in any case allow you to reach a wider audience, that of the ambassador. Their community will be interested in what they do.

If you had to sum it up in one sentence, what do you think will be the key differentiator for high-end campaigns in the coming years?

I think the most important thing is the positioning you want. If your positioning is clear, you will be able to prioritise the right levers and activate them in a relevant way to reach your target audience, who your product should appeal to. There are so many brands out there that it's important to choose your niche so you don't get lost in the crowd and end up targeting an audience that your product isn't suited to. Successful brands have precise positioning, such as Rhode and Chanel, to follow the examples mentioned. They each target a specific audience and are very consistent in all their activations, and this repetition is effective. By reaching the right

people, you also ensure their loyalty because they are more likely to appreciate your product. There is also the whole aspect of social status and personality associated with a brand that works well. So openly showing who the Rhode girl is or who the Chanel girl is will reinforce the positioning and the message.

## **Appendix B – Transcript of interview 2**

Can you tell us about your background?

I went to business school and specialised in marketing for my master's degree. More specifically, in my final year, I focused on luxury marketing, so I tried to do internships related to this sector. I started with Etam, in lingerie, where I worked mainly on their own stores and retail marketing, and then I did my end-of-studies internship at LVMH Fragrance Brands for Givenchy in trade marketing for several brands such as Sephora, Marionnaud and Nocibe. Then I switched to a fixed-term contract, still in the trade marketing team, but more in merchandising.

What defines a successful marketing campaign/product launch?

For me, a successful marketing campaign is one that you see a lot because it stands out, it's original, and so people talk about it. It's a campaign that takes up space, that people talk about on social media and by word of mouth because they've seen it on the street or in shop windows. For me, the originality of the campaign is very important for it to be successful. Originality can be, for example, a particular experience related to the product that the brand offers its consumers. The originality of the campaign helps to make it striking and have a strong impact because people are surprised to see something they are not used to and inevitably react, which gets people talking. And coming back to offering an experience, it's an excellent way to make an impression on consumers and get them talking, which will increase the visibility of the campaign. Ultimately, a successful campaign is a visible campaign. The more visible the campaign, the more likely it is that a large number of people will take an interest, try out or even buy the product.

What do you think makes differentiation so complex?

Today, there are a huge number of brands coming in from all over the world. We see campaigns and brands everywhere at many retailers. Consumers are quickly overwhelmed by a flood of information and offers. The fact that multi-brand retailers such as Sephora are very popular makes it even more difficult for brands to stand out. Brands present in a store like this are all on the same level, grouped together in the same place to offer the same type of product. This highlights the saturation of the market, especially for consumers. Beyond perfumeries, cosmetics products are increasingly accessible through a variety of different channels, sometimes at retailers such as Monoprix, which do not normally specialise in beauty, and also online with the development of all e-commerce platforms. This creates accessibility to all

products, and often the same accessibility regardless of the brand. In addition, all brands seek to meet the same needs and expectations and, above all, to align themselves with the same trends, so products and campaigns tend to look alike.

To what extent does the product/product differentiation (formulation, innovation, packaging) actually influence the success of a campaign?

The product has a significant impact on the success of the campaign because it is what ultimately determines whether or not a purchase is made. The campaign will attract attention, but the product will really convince the consumer. Often, the most important thing for consumers is the performance of the product: whether the product they are about to buy is effective and not useless. Another increasingly important criterion for consumers today is product composition. If it is not good, many people will look elsewhere. This expectation was less prevalent ten years ago and is becoming increasingly important. This is especially true with the advent of apps that allow consumers to evaluate product composition and the wealth of educational content available on social media that provides information on product composition, what is good or bad, and why consumers should be careful. At the same time, there is a major trend towards well-being and self-care, which means not using products that are bad for the body, particularly those containing harmful ingredients. A good formula and good product performance will therefore have a positive influence on a campaign. Then, of course, the packaging will also have a positive influence. People want to have products that are like beautiful, almost decorative objects to put in their bathrooms. This gives the product a greater sense of value and also gives people an extra reason to choose a certain attractive product over another. The aesthetics of the packaging can also serve as the basis for the campaign and create its own universe. It can attract attention, but be careful: if the product does not deliver in terms of performance and formula, people will move on, even if they love the product's design. Everything related to the product will create arguments that will convert after the campaign has attracted attention.

Can you give an example of a brand with a campaign or packaging that attracts attention but whose products do not live up to expectations?

There's the Glow Recipe brand, which has generated bad buzz precisely because it attracts a lot of attention with its original, very cute packaging and a strong sensory universe based on fruit. Their products are supposed to be fruit-based, such as watermelon. And ultimately, customer feedback says that the products are no good, that they're useless. So be careful,



because a campaign can be successful but ultimately fail to build loyalty if the products are disappointing.

Do you think consumers judge the value of a brand more on the actual performance of the product or on the image and storytelling surrounding it?

I'm thinking of the Dyson brand, which has developed hair care products. It has a real position of expertise and a very good reputation for everything related to hair styling appliances, and it has decided to launch hair care products. The fact that it is not a low-end cosmetics brand and that it does not have this expertise, but rather another brand that has gained it, is a hindrance. I don't think it's playing on the right field and it won't be able to surpass other more established brands in this area. It has expanded its activities too much and its positioning is not consistent. When it comes to luxury brands, people judge them on their image. Their premium positioning also immediately inspires confidence because people tend to think that if a product is offered by a luxury brand, it must be a good product. There is an image of know-how, premium quality ingredients and long-standing expertise. I think that actual performance has less of an impact on judgement because the image of the brand and its status take precedence.

In the case of Givenchy, where you have worked extensively, do you think the brand is judged more on its product performance or its image?

On its image, I think, because it's a very well-established brand with products that are renowned for being good, so people instinctively trust the brand.

What do you think makes a campaign particularly desirable to consumers?

As I mentioned earlier, creating a campaign that is original and stands out is an excellent way to make it desirable. People see lots of campaigns all the time, so if one stands out, it will capture their attention and interest, making them more inclined to discover the product. So it's very important to be different, not to do what all the other brands are doing, even if it's tempting to follow the rules to show that the brand is trendy. But you have to do it intelligently and innovatively, while showing that it's trendy. It can even create a trend, which is even better than following one. Another key point is to include the consumer in the campaign. You have to give them an experience, put them in an active position. This could mean offering activities on a pop-up, talking to them at the point of sale, letting them test, smell and compare things. If these interactions with consumers are consistent with the campaign, it allows them to immerse themselves even more in the brand's universe. Engaging several of a person's senses will

stimulate them more and make a bigger impression. When we buy a luxury brand product, we are also looking for a certain status, to belong to a community. The feeling of belonging is even stronger if we play a role. What's more, people are always very curious in shops and are attracted by activities. We want to take part and not miss out, especially if there are things to be won, for example.

Can you give an example of a powerful sensory experience offered by a brand?

There is, for example, the Lancôme brand, which has a dedicated boutique on the Champs Elysées in Paris. Personally, I have no affinity with the brand; I don't think I'm the target audience. However, I loved my visit to the shop; it was a real experience from the moment I arrived. When you walk in, there's a café area and a counter where you can buy pastries, which immediately creates a warm atmosphere. Someone offered me a cup of tea and sat down with me to explain the concept of the shop, tell me about the activities on offer and let me try out the new products. There is a very distinctive atmosphere and a very pleasant ambiance. You experience so much, even though you just came to buy a perfume. The in-store experience is really well thought out from start to finish, with innovative elements such as technological diagnostics that add an expert touch. And of course, everything made sense, was coherent and rich without being too much or overloaded.

How important do you think the emotional and sensory experience (immersive retail, events, digital, exclusive collaborations) is in creating desirability?

For me, it's absolutely necessary. This is clear from the example I just gave. Consumers need to experience the brand; that's what they expect. The only cases where I don't see this as necessary are for well-established products that have loyal customers who come back regularly to restock. But for a product launch, you need to maximise your chances of standing out with the experience. It's also less of a problem not to have a significant experience at retailers such as Sephora, but only a beautiful display with successful merchandising, than not to have any experience in a brand store. That would be a real mistake.

What role do influencers and social media play today in building brand desirability?

Influencers and networks play a key role in providing visibility and information. For me, they are important in the sense that, even though I don't place my complete trust in influencers, the more I hear about a product, the more I see it, the more I want to try it. The repetition of positive reviews and all the comments people make about a product on social media really make

you want to form your own opinion. However, you shouldn't rely on this alone, because the cosmetics industry is oversaturated with influencers and people can miss out on information about a product if it's only shared by influencers or on social media. Yes, influencers have a role to play, but not at the expense of other aspects of a campaign (events, other media such as outdoor posters). It's important to give equal weight to the different touchpoints in a consistent manner.

What about the impact of ambassadors on brand desirability?

They play the role of associating their image with the brand and the product. When we admire a celebrity who is an ambassador for a brand, we naturally have more admiration for the brand. We transfer our emotions for celebrities to the brand. I don't think it will ever be a direct argument for purchasing, but it helps to build the campaign, make it impactful and create desirability for the brand through admiration for the personality. It plays an unconscious role; we feel less manipulated, so to speak, than with an influencer, for example, because it is more subtle and therefore well suited to luxury brands.

If you had to sum it up in one sentence, what do you think will be the key differentiator for high-end campaigns in the coming years?

For me, the product is the key to success. The fact that it is effective, that it has a good formula, i.e. a good composition and attractive, aesthetic packaging. And a good product needs a campaign to make itself known and make people want to buy it. To achieve this, the priority is originality in consistency. The campaign must not be too conventional, but it must be consistent across the various channels so that the brand universe is clearly defined, consistent with the brand image and consistent with the target audience. For example, to mention a recent case, Benefit, a brand that targets a fairly young audience, created a display at Sephora that was like a mini supermarket, and all the product packaging was transformed into food packaging. It was original, immersive, consistent with the brand's fun universe and consistent with a young target audience that likes fun activities. However, a display like this is local and therefore not enough! That's why the last very important point is to leverage as much as possible to reach as many people as possible.

### **Appendix C – Transcript of interview 3**

Can you tell us about your career path?

I am currently a Media Project Manager at LVMH Fragrance Brain. Before that, I worked at Givenchy and Kenzo Parfums. I completed a Bachelor's degree at EDHEC Business School. I then went on to complete a Master's degree at ESCP in Madrid and London, specialising in marketing and digital media. I did several internships in publishing in trade marketing, at a media agency for luxury brands, and at LVLH Fragrance Brands for Givenchy and Kenzo Perfumes as a media project manager. I have continued in this position, where I have been on a fixed-term contract for several months. So I work on media strategy, campaign implementation and monitoring, as well as more analytical tasks related to performance and competition.

What defines a successful marketing campaign/product launch?

One of the first things we look at to determine whether a campaign has been successful is its virality. Was there a lot of talk about your product during and after the campaign, and about your brand? Was it widely seen on social media? To do this, we use several KPIs such as EMV for influence. We also look at the use of hashtags for the campaign and how often they are used in organic, i.e. spontaneous, content. This is a strong indicator of virality because it means that people who have not been paid at all want to talk about the product and the brand themselves. This means that we have succeeded in making an impression, which is one of the goals of the campaign. Then, of course, there is the business side of things. We look at the figures and results to see if it goes beyond virality, if we are meeting our product sales targets. It is also interesting to look at the ranking, as this allows us to position the product against those of our competitors. We also look at sales trends. Ultimately, a successful campaign can be one that goes viral, achieves sales targets, generates growth or improves rankings.

What do you think makes differentiation so complex?

It's complicated because there are more and more players, both small and large. Each one will have its own specific characteristics, but they will all offer similar products and sell in the same places. In terms of products, it's also difficult to innovate because there are already so many out there, and they've been around for a long time. What's more, brands are releasing products more and more often to stay attractive. Most have several launches per year. So, inevitably, it is becoming increasingly difficult for brands to find something new. Another thing is that they have fairly long development times, which are often restrictive. A brand may have an idea for a very trendy and attractive product, but it will take more than two years to develop

it, and by the time it is released, many others will also have had time to come up with the idea, or it will no longer be trendy, for example. The fact that trends change very quickly makes the work of brands much more complex.

It is also difficult from a campaign perspective because all the players are very active in this area, and the various channels are constantly flooded with content. Advertising exposure is also saturated. In addition, all brands have similar ideas because they have the same sources of inspiration and are all trying to be trendy. There is also the temptation to reproduce what has worked before, because it is reassuring to know that it has already been popular, but the content will inevitably lack originality because it has already been seen.

Influencers are not bound by non-competition clauses, so the same person might talk about Prada one day, Givenchy the next, and then Dior. This accentuates the fact that information is drowned out by the masses. All these factors also mean that consumers are less loyal to a particular brand than before. They want to try everything because they are offered so many choices.

To what extent does the product/product differentiation (formulation, innovation, packaging) really influence the success of a campaign?

For me, it's a huge factor in success because you can have the best, most interesting, visible and original campaign, but if your product doesn't deliver, it's not going to work. People may be tempted by the campaign, but that won't last once bad reviews start to emerge. I also think that today, the whole aspect of formulation and composition is becoming increasingly important. Consumers are paying more attention to what's in the products they consume, and this is true for all sectors. That's why the product is the key to success; it's also the basis of the campaign. What's more, it's a tool for differentiation, for example through packaging, which can attract customers and influence their purchasing decisions because they really like the design and the product itself, especially in the case of perfume.

Can you give an example of a brand that ran a very good campaign but ultimately offered a disappointing product?

Louis Vuitton recently launched its make-up line (with lip and eye products) and ran a major influencer campaign to publicise the launch. They sent PR kits to numerous influencers, especially those who regularly work with beauty brands. They chose to send the kits as gifts, meaning that the influencers agreed to receive the packages but were not paid to talk about them, so they were under no obligation to do so. They also had no obligation to promote the

products positively. There was a huge wave of videos from these influencers testing the products and being disappointed. For example, because the eyeshadows weren't very pigmented or the lipsticks looked exactly the same as others that were 10 times cheaper. Many people feel that the performance of the products does not live up to what one would expect for that price. In fact, one of the ways Louis Vuitton has chosen to differentiate itself is through its very high prices. This shows a certain positioning that is different from luxury brands that are distributed and consumed on a more massive scale. I therefore think that Louis Vuitton has not targeted its campaign well in relation to its products. The people who received the PR kit are too far removed from the brand's main target audience, and so it is not working. This shows the importance of having a precise positioning and, above all, of correctly targeting your campaign to the audience for whom the products are intended. In the case of Louis Vuitton, its customers are not people who consume content created by influencers. Their campaign does a good job of informing people about the existence of the products, but it will not create desire among those who have seen it because they are not the target consumers.

Do you think consumers judge the value of a brand more on the actual performance of the product or on the image and storytelling surrounding it?

I think that for a very long time, it was storytelling and brand image that mattered, and I think that today, that tendency is reversing. I say this in the sense that the product and its actual performance are becoming increasingly important. Today, there is a real consumer demand for products with good formulas that are respectful of their bodies, the environment and animals. People are much more knowledgeable about the field than before, thanks in part to social media. As they have more knowledge, they have higher expectations and really want brands to deliver on product performance. Also, with the number of options available on the market, people think that there must be some very good products out there. This is why brands with a very simple universe, such as The Ordinary, are performing well today. Despite the importance of products in the luxury sector, image remains very important because customers also look for what surrounds the brand, i.e. its status, so it is important to continue to maintain its image. And indeed, historic brands that are deeply rooted in the market capitalise heavily on their image, sometimes at the expense of their product, which is why consumers are changing their expectations somewhat. These brands need to adapt to changing expectations.

What do you think makes a campaign particularly desirable to consumers?

I find that something that has been working well lately and really creates desirability among consumers is teasing the launch and the product. Brands really benefit from playing on the mystery surrounding their next new product. It intrigues people, gets them talking, makes them wonder, and makes them wait for the launch. Consumers are more attentive and there is a buzz around the product even before we really know what it is. Another thing that works well for desirability is the creativity of the campaign. Even on a traditional channel like television, some brands manage to have a super creative and original campaign. Also, when the brand seems to be having fun with its content, it makes you want to have fun with it by consuming it.

From a retail perspective, offering activities and small experiences to consumers is often very appreciated. People love to feel involved, to receive gifts, for example. In terms of consumer involvement, some brands have asked their audience to vote to choose the future face of a launch, as was the case with Armani and Saint Laurent, and it has been very successful.

Among the latest campaigns you've seen, which ones have made an impression on you and made you want to buy from the brand?

Chanel recently made a film for the launch of its Chanel No. 5 perfume. The two-minute launch film was directed by Lucas Guadagnino, a well-known director. It features Margot Robbie, the actress and face of the perfume, and Jacob Elordi. This launch video is a real short film with a script and artistic flair. This had never been done before. I think it creates real prestige around the brand, generating admiration for the quality of the work, the relevance of the idea and, ultimately, the product itself. The brand also capitalises on the director's reputation. The story of the short film is also very moving, which makes it even more powerful.

Another very memorable campaign is also from Chanel with the launch of their new perfume Chance Libre, which features the singer Angèle as its muse. Angèle created a song especially for the launch, which was used as a teaser in the product's advertising video. In addition, they really pushed the song's universe by sending PR kits in the shape of record players to influencers, for example. Once again, this is a concept that has never been seen before and has been taken to the next level, making it even more powerful.

How important do you think emotional and sensory experiences (immersive retail, events, digital, exclusive collaborations) are in creating desirability?

It's essential because the human brain remembers things much better when it feels emotions and sensations. So it's a way of making a more lasting impression. It works very well with perfume, which strongly associates smells with memories, so brands play on this a lot. That's

why there are so many perfume pop-ups, which are temporary spaces created by the brand to immerse consumers in their world with activities, product tests, gifts to be won and photos to be taken. It works very well; people really enjoy going to have an experience. Once again, it allows people to feel involved and concerned, and in this dynamic of seeking status through luxury, it works well because consumers immediately feel important.

What role do influencers and social media play today in building brand desirability?

In fact, influencers are the digitalisation of word of mouth. Word of mouth has always had a huge impact on all brands. Influencers work on the same principle, but the response is much faster. Everyone can access the content, share their opinions and recommend that people try a product. However, there are many precautions to take with influencers because some profiles have a bad reputation or may find themselves in a last-minute situation with regard to their partnership with the brand. We cannot completely control what they often say they will do, especially when it comes to sending free gifts without a contract, as in the example of Louis Vuitton earlier, where several profiles gave negative feedback.

As for social media, it really serves as a digital showcase for brands.

And what about the role of ambassadors?

Ambassadors play an important role in brand image and the admiration we have for it. It also allows brands to anchor their positioning or, on the contrary, change it if necessary. Depending on the audience of the personality chosen to be the brand's muse, the brand will target a certain type of person. It's a very good targeting tool. For example, Lancôme chose Olivia Rodrigo for one of their perfume campaigns, thereby directly targeting a younger audience, the singer's fans. Conversely, someone who doesn't know the ambassador will feel much less concerned and think that it's not a product for them. You're not going to target the same person with Jenna Ortega (who is with Dior for their lip product) as you would with Julia Roberts.

If you had to sum it up in one sentence, what do you think will be the key to differentiating high-end campaigns in the coming years?

For me, the keys to successful differentiation are not neglecting new media and not forgetting old media. You have to be everywhere to anchor yourself in the minds of consumers. You have to use these different levers in the right way during your campaign to make it effective and relevant. It's important that everything makes sense and that the audience understands the



story the brand is telling across the different channels. Then you have to innovate, be original while staying true to yourself, to your brand DNA, and remain consistent over time. You have to keep a close eye on your competitors to stay up to date, avoid doing something that has already been done too many times, and prepare for new trends. This applies to both campaigns and products.

## Appendix D – Transcript of interview 4

Can you tell us about your career path?

I did a bachelor's and master's degree in marketing at a business school. I did several internships in cosmetics at LVMH fragrance brand and now I do operational marketing at Guerlain. I am in charge of the Europe and Africa export zone.

What defines a successful marketing campaign/product launch?

A very important factor that defines a successful campaign for me is the amount of interaction with the campaign. In other words, did the campaign get people talking, did people react to it, did they show interest? This is easy to find out today thanks to social media, where people are used to liking, commenting and interacting. Then, of course, there are the figures and performance. In other words, did the product sell well, were the objectives achieved? Brands often organise their launches to fall at the same time each year. This allows them to compare the performance of campaigns from one year to the next. We often say that a campaign is successful if it performs better than the equivalent campaign the previous year. There are also rankings that are closely watched, i.e. a product's market share compared to its competitors. This allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the situation. So, a successful campaign for the company will, of course, be one that has enabled it to achieve its sales targets and, secondly, its visibility. Visibility is an important point because consumers will judge the success of the campaign on this, and it is also important from an image and prestige point of view that consumers have the impression that the brand is performing very well.

What do you think makes differentiation so complex?

It is also complex because today, beyond the fact that there are many products launched by brands, there are above all more and more brands. Many of these brands are launched by stars such as Rihanna with Fenty Beauty, more recently Rare Beauty with Selena Gomez, Rhode by Hailey Bieber, and Haus Labs by Lady Gaga. These are all brands that are promoted by highly visible celebrities with large communities behind them. It always works well because all the people who love these personalities want to buy their brand's products to support them. They have really brought a new dynamic to the market, where there were historic brands such as Guerlain, Chanel and Dior, by playing with new codes, particularly the playful aspect. At the same time, many fashion houses are also launching beauty lines, such as Rabanne, Prada, Hermès and Louis Vuitton. All of this has created a multitude of players.

To what extent does the product/product differentiation (formulation, innovation, packaging) really influence the success of a campaign?

Having a truly different product obviously makes it easier to stand out. It is not necessary to offer a truly innovative or different formula; it can simply be through the format of the product. For example, Rabanne offers mini eye shadow palettes with only two shades. Usually, brands offer much larger palettes with around ten shades. This makes Rabanne attractive because it offers a format that cannot be found elsewhere, inevitably at a lower price, which can meet the specific need for a smaller item or the desire of customers who do not want entire palettes full of shades they will not use because there are too many colours. The fact that consumer expectations regarding product quality are increasing also means that the product has more impact. For example, they are increasingly looking at product formulas and their composition. If a person sees that a product has a poor composition, there is a good chance that they will decide not to buy it, even if they were very attracted by the campaign and the brand's promises. Ultimately, the product is extremely important because it finalises the purchase decision and can attract customers on its own by being distinctive.

Do you think consumers judge the value of a brand more on the actual performance of the product or on the image and storytelling surrounding it?

For luxury brands, those that originated as fashion brands, value is largely judged on image and storytelling, which is what they emphasise. For new players in the market, I think they are judged more on the performance of their product because consumers will question the legitimacy of their arrival on the market. The question arises as to why the brand is there and what it seeks to offer us. People will test the brand or find out what it is worth by reading reviews because, even if the communication is very well done, people do not necessarily trust it; they know that the brand will obviously present itself in the best possible light. Today, with social media, I think brands need to be very careful about their image because it can quickly deteriorate due to a single disappointed person talking about it, and even if people may find the products to be good, they may judge the brand poorly because of a bad review that leaves a bad impression.

Do you have an example of a brand for which this has been the case?

Yes, for example, Jeffrey Star's make-up brand. Initially, the products were excellent and recommended by make-up artists. Jeffrey Star got involved in scandals and problems, which gave the brand a very bad image, as it was directly associated with him, and this put the brand

in a very bad position from which it is struggling to recover. People quickly moved on to something else, which is easy to do with so many competitors. That's the danger, in fact. All it takes is one bad break to be replaced and forgotten if you don't know how to bounce back.

What do you think makes a campaign particularly desirable to consumers?

First of all, for me, a desirable campaign is one that makes you want to go and try the product in the shop. I find that really showing an innovation in the product in your communication makes you want to go and try it for yourself to see whether or not it's relevant. For example, the latest fragrance launched by Rare Beauty is the brand's first fragrance, which normally focuses on make-up, so there's the big launch aspect that piques curiosity and makes you want to know if it's worth it. They also offered packaging with a spray that's really different from what's currently available. It's very large, not tiny like perfume sprays usually are. There's a slightly different application method, a different gesture, and seeing it in videos makes you want to try it yourself. So, an excellent way to make your campaign desirable is to pique your audience's curiosity by highlighting something truly new and inviting people to try it for themselves.

Another way to make a campaign desirable is through partnerships. Partnering with another brand or event. For example, Givenchy took F1 driver Pierre Gasly as an ambassador for their new fragrance Gentleman Society. They organised events in collaboration with him on the theme of F1 with several personalities from the world of motor racing, they were present at races such as the Monaco Grand Prix as sponsors, and they used F1 visual codes in their campaign, such as helmets and racing suits. They took advantage of an already strong, desirable and admired universe to transfer its appeal to their brand. Thanks to a partnership like this, it is recruiting Pierre Gasly's community, the F1 fan community in general, and is placing itself in a very prestigious position because it is a sport with an excellent image and reputation. The storytelling is very strong and sophisticated. In addition, it was an opportunity for the brand to organise pop-up events and podiums to attract people and make them want to experience F1, when in fact it was just to promote a fragrance.

How important do you think the emotional and sensory experience (immersive retail, events, digital, exclusive collaborations) is in creating desirability?

It plays a very important role; it's really a lever for creating desirability. This ties in perfectly with my previous example of Givenchy's partnership with Pierre Gasly and all the storytelling

around F1. The brand is really seeking to create strong emotions in its audience, especially admiration.

It's also because it's a lever that works that brands take such care in organising events and nurturing their customer experience at the point of sale. When someone goes to a shop to test products and is accompanied by a sales assistant from the brand who explains and presents the products to them, they have a real experience. There is an emotional aspect to this because it creates an exclusive moment for the customer with the advisor or make-up artist who is looking after them. This helps to create a bond with the brand. If this moment and interaction is positive, the person will be more inclined to buy the product. It is also to prolong this sensory experience that brands often offer testers so that customers can try out the products at home and go through the application ritual.

In recent years, the sensory experience has even moved online, with filters that allow you to test the effect of make-up using a camera.

What role do influencers and social media play today in building brand desirability?

I think they play an important role because they make consumers want to try the product. Influencers often talk about a brand's products by showing how to apply them, how they look and giving their opinion. As there is a huge amount of this type of content, people are aware that it is not necessarily reliable. That's why it can make consumers want to try the product for themselves and form their own opinion after being intrigued by influencers. It's interesting because this phenomenon of wanting to try the product for yourself works just as well with bad reviews as it does with good ones. For example, there are reviews that are not necessarily very positive about Louis Vuitton products, in the sense that influencers have said that they are products like any other and therefore not worth the price, and all this content makes people want to find out for themselves.

Otherwise, social media as a whole allows brands to inform and be seen by a large number of people. It also allows them to play on content repetition, as people see the same campaign several times across the brand's accounts, influencers and organic content, which makes the brand's messages stick in people's minds more permanently.

However, be careful who you target and how you position yourself on social media, as this may not be well received by older generations who are not familiar with these communication codes. So use it in a way that is consistent with your audience.

And what do you think of the role of ambassadors?

In fact, people will be impressed by certain partnerships that brands form with certain personalities and vice versa. People are also impressed that a particular personality has been approached by a particular brand. Ambassadors have a big impact on brand image. They transfer some of their image to the brand and vice versa. They create admiration and, effectively, desirability for the brand. However, it is important not to focus all your efforts on this, because although ambassadors play an important role in image, storytelling, reinforcing the social status associated with the brand and stimulating community spirit, they do not necessarily convert. In other words, ambassadors generally do not teach us anything about the product, and a great ambassador does not necessarily mean a great product. If the product is not convincing at first glance, customers will not buy it even if they love the ambassador chosen by the brand.

If you had to sum it up in one sentence, what do you think will be the key differentiator for high-end campaigns in the coming years?

For me, the number one key is innovation and offering a product that doesn't exist on the market, whether in terms of ingredients, packaging or sensory appeal. Today, having a good product that is clean for the body and the environment is really valued, hence the growing trend for clean beauty. People are much more aware of brand responsibility than they were a few years ago. All of these are important aspects of differentiation. And then there's everything to do with the campaign to play on the desirability of the brand and make people want to buy from your brand rather than the competition. And to be desirable, I think you need to have a good ambassador, at least for luxury brands, and a comprehensive campaign to accompany the product launch with experiences, events and content on social media. That's the basis, but as all brands do it sometimes, it remains complicated. And that's why there's personalisation, something I hadn't mentioned yet but which is super important. It allows you to differentiate yourself because you're offering a unique, personalised product, and that makes the products desirable because the person feels special to have a unique product.

## **Appendix E – Transcript of interview 5**

Can you tell us about your career path?

I attended business school and earned several dual degrees in management and marketing. So, I have a bachelor's degree and a specialised master's degree. I have been working in cosmetics and marketing for several years. I have worked for several companies of different sizes, which has been quite interesting. I worked at a start-up, a medium-sized company that offers monthly beauty boxes, and also at large luxury brands, one that has been well established for many years and another that has more recently entered the beauty market. It's very enriching to have different brand perspectives like this, as the approaches and ways of building projects are not at all the same. So, today I'm working on makeup product development within the Puig group.

What defines a successful marketing campaign/product launch?

For me, a campaign is successful when it has encouraged people to try and buy the product and has helped to foster a positive image of the brand. From the company's point of view, it's clearly the figures that count at first glance, so whether the objectives have been achieved. But I also find it interesting to know what constitutes a successful campaign in the eyes of the public. People like to judge what brands do, discuss what works and what doesn't, say what they would have done differently, or that a particular idea is great. For the public, a successful campaign is one that is everywhere: on the streets, in shops, on television, on social media, and in magazines. The more visible the brand is, the better the image people will have of it. Provided, of course, that what the brand shows is relevant, high-quality, original... everything that makes a campaign memorable. Ultimately, the visibility of the campaign is also an argument for its success. And I would add the fact that it needs to be aligned with the different types of visibility, that everything is consistent, otherwise you lose your audience.

What do you think makes differentiation so complex?

Brands are struggling because competition is getting tougher and tougher. The market is saturated with brands and new products. There is a real trend towards beauty, whether it's luxury and fashion brands exploring this sector or celebrities launching their own cosmetics brands. There are also well-known make-up artists who are creating their own brands. The more players there are, the harder it is to gain market share because it is inevitably divided. And from a differentiation point of view, there is a saturation of ideas and so many products that they all end up looking the same. Beyond the fact that there are more brands and therefore inevitably

more products, there is the fact that in recent years, brands have gotten into the habit of launching many new products each year. In general, they launch new products every three or four months. This allows them to remain attractive because novelty arouses curiosity and creates excitement. Retailers such as Sephora, which sell the products, know that new products attract customers, so they encourage brands to launch them by giving them more visibility, for example. This can take the form of promotions, catwalk shows or partnership events. There is therefore a whole context that pushes brands to launch many products, which saturates the market, and a trend in beauty that means there are also more and more brands.

To what extent does the product/product differentiation (formulation, innovation, packaging) actually influence the success of a campaign?

In most cases, it is the product that influences the final purchase decision, so it inevitably has a significant impact on the success of the campaign. As we said earlier, a campaign is successful, in part, when it has achieved its sales objectives. So if the product is not good, people will not buy it, despite a good campaign that made them want to. Another argument that shows that the product is extremely important is that it is the basis of the campaign. It is the element that will inspire teams to build a narrative and create content around the product's promise. Without a product, there is no campaign that makes sense. Ultimately, it is the product that really builds loyalty, and loyalty is one of the main objectives of a brand. Having loyal customers leads to a more stable situation over time. That's why brands seek to create what are known as Hero Products. That's really a marketing term. It is a brand's flagship product, the one for which it is known and the one that people love to buy again and again. For example, there are Fenty's Glossbombs, which are lip products that come in a wide range of shades and have made the brand even more famous.

On the other hand, it should be noted that today, some brands are not looking to make products that are highly differentiated or performant in terms of their formula, but rather focus more on image and people's desire to own the brand, regardless of the product. In this case, the product becomes almost more than an accessory. This is the case for Rhode and Glossier, which are ultra-trendy brands that people want to own without necessarily wanting a specific product. In fact, the influence of the product on a campaign also depends on the brand's positioning and what it is trying to sell: image, status, performance or utility.

Do you have an example of a brand that is really emerging thanks to the performance of its products?



In makeup, there's Benefit, a brand with a strong, playful image that can be appealing, but it's not a celebrity brand, a makeup artist brand, a fashion brand or even a luxury brand, even though the prices are at the same level. And so this brand has really made a name for itself as an expert in mascaras because they are very popular and really well made. It doesn't particularly sell storytelling; it's really the product performance that people are looking for.

Do you think consumers judge the value of a brand more on the actual performance of the product or on the image and storytelling surrounding it?

I think it depends on the brand's positioning. This ties in closely with what I was explaining earlier. Some brands seek to sell a dream, an experience, or social status, in which case they will be judged on their image and only secondarily on their product. This is the case for ultra-trendy brands such as Glossier, luxury brands, and perfume brands. Make-up artist brands and high-end skincare brands will be judged on the actual performance of the product. The more the brand emphasises the product promise, the more its customers will expect it to deliver. And the more it promotes storytelling, for example with lots of visuals of ambassadors, the less people will be interested in the product and therefore less demanding. It also depends on the audience and the type of consumer. Younger people are generally more sensitive to social status, while older people have more perspective and are more interested in performance. Of course, the two can go together, and this is often the case in the luxury sector, where we find both product quality and the more emotional and symbolic value of the object and the brand.

What do you think makes a campaign particularly desirable to consumers?

In fact, it depends a lot on the consumer. We are not all going to be receptive to the same things. That's why brands have to play on all fronts in order to attract as many people as possible. A campaign and a brand will be desirable thanks to an ambassador, for example, thanks to great in-store promotions, thanks to an event such as a pop-up or a prestigious partnership, or thanks to lots of very good reviews from influencers who are effective. In marketing, we always talk about 360 campaigns because we know that all touchpoints must be activated to be effective. Repetition also works very well on people. The more they see and hear about a product or brand, the more curious they will be and the more they will want to check it out. I find that one thing that works very well in creating desirability is to create a link between the brand and customers. Make them feel included in the project, give them the impression that they are participating, that they are important. This is especially true in the luxury sector, where there is a search for symbolic value.

How important do you consider emotional and sensory experiences (immersive retail, events, digital, exclusive collaborations) to be in creating desirability?

These are indeed important levers in a campaign. In luxury, people are looking for more than just a product, and today the product promise and the promise of social belonging are no longer enough to stand out. All brands offer this. From one luxury brand to another, we have the same type of product, and since their positioning is similar, they also have the same type of status. So ultimately, it is the experience that the brand offers that will enable it to differentiate itself and attract more customers. It will create a moment, and therefore memories and a connection with the brand. Anything that is exclusive or ephemeral stimulates FOMO (fear of missing out) in people, and it works very well. It allows us to rediscover the rarity of luxury and premium products, which is somewhat being lost. It's clearly a matter of playing on emotions in this type of operation. And this experiential aspect is so important that it is also carried over online with, for example, Virtual Try One, online product tests such as filters.

What role do influencers and social media play today in building brand desirability?

Networks and influence make it possible to relay the launch, inform everyone about the arrival of the new product on the market and, ideally, create a buzz. For example, there was such a craze on social media around Lancôme Lash Idôle mascara when it was launched that it sold out online and in several shops. There is also a sense of closeness with influencers; Gen Z in particular often trusts influencers more than traditional advertising. As they are considered more accessible, there is a greater sense of authenticity. They transform the marketing promise into something more relatable. In addition, they add a lifestyle aspect which, in my opinion, really creates desirability. However, we must be very careful with influencers because sometimes some of them abuse partnerships, so we no longer trust them. Some find themselves in controversies and with a bad image that can tarnish the brands they collaborate with.

What about the impact of ambassadors on brand desirability?

Unlike influencers, ambassadors embody the brand's values. They transfer their image and notoriety to the brand. This can also help target certain audiences, such as Dior, which chose Rihanna as the face of its Dior J'adore perfume. Normally, this is a perfume for women, but by partnering with Rihanna, they are immediately targeting younger consumers who have more affinity with the artist. Ambassadors are powerful symbols of desirability because they are synonymous with prestige and contribute greatly to storytelling.

If you had to sum it up in one sentence, what do you think will be the key to differentiating high-end campaigns in the coming years?

For me, the perfect scenario is to run an impactful campaign to create buzz and excitement around the launch, prompting impulse purchases and raising awareness of the product. Then it's a matter of working on the brand image with great experiences to ultimately build loyalty through a good product.

## Appendix F – Transcript of interview 6

Can you tell us about your career path?

I attended business school, Néoma Rouen. During my time there, I did an exchange programme in India. I did my end-of-study internship at Shiseido in Perfume and then stayed with the group for about five years, in various positions in business development and marketing project management, notably at Zadig & Voltaire. So my work involved both significant figures and a lot of creativity. Then I joined a start-up in the jewellery industry, which was a very different world and, above all, a very different way of doing business. Everything moves very quickly there, so I was the brand's marketing director for a while, then I returned to cosmetics, where I currently work at Eugene Perma. There, I manage the product marketing development team for several brands. These are mainly professional hair care products.

What defines a successful marketing campaign/product launch?

For me, it's the impact of the campaign. In other words, what people are saying about the campaign and what the feedback is. This can be quantitative or qualitative. On social media, it's easier to measure performance using hashtags and communication team tools. So if the figures are good in terms of views and impressions on social media, that's an argument for saying that the campaign is successful. Of course, from a business perspective, there is the question of how many sales there are, and even how many orders there are from retailers who will resell the product. Obviously, the first step is to have a good sell-in before hoping for a good sell-out. Finally, there is one last indicator that I find quite interesting, which is the reception from the press. Before launching a product, we present the campaign to the press and we can immediately see whether or not there is enthusiasm among journalists. These are people who are very experienced and see a lot of launches, so they know how to judge what will appeal and what will work or not.

What do you think makes differentiation so complex?

The cosmetics market is saturated, with a proliferation of players. In fact, beauty is a dream world in which there is a lot of desirability, and that makes people want to get involved. Beyond celebrities and big brands getting involved, there are also influencers trying their luck, driven by their communities and, inevitably, the emergence of social media. It's an industry that seems accessible, and there's a lot of marketing involved, so many people think that all you need is a great concept and you'll be able to make a name for yourself. It is indeed one of the few

professions where marketing is at the heart of projects. So ultimately, differentiation is also complex because there are many very similar products on the market.

To what extent does the product/product differentiation (formulation, innovation, packaging) really influence the success of a campaign?

I think there are two sides to this question. It depends on the brand's strategy. Some brands will be very image- and concept-focused, offering products that are solid but not particularly out of the ordinary, but which will be very well marketed with a highly developed campaign. This is the kind of product that can create a buzz, thanks to social media and influencers, and will do very well for a while, but there is a high risk that it will run out of steam and be forgotten as soon as the brand stops promoting and communicating about it. Other brands will focus more on product performance with a more scientific approach. This is the case for us at Eugne Perma because, as we sell our products partly to professionals, there is a slight ethical issue in offering products that are really good. In this case, brands offer products that have been tested by consumers or scientists, with proven, quantifiable results. It may take longer for the product to emerge, but it will have more sustainable business performance because it will build loyalty. The importance of the product depends on the brand's positioning, whether it is more trend-oriented and image-focused or whether it has more of an expert position.

Do you think consumers judge the value of a brand more on the actual performance of the product or on the image and storytelling surrounding it?

I think that ultimately we all judge a brand on the effectiveness of its products. Even if that's not what the person came for, product performance, if what they buy is rubbish, they won't go back. What's more, people today are quite careful about what they consume. They are well educated thanks to the accessibility of information, so they will be looking closely at the quality of the formula. In hair care, for example, it is now well known that silicone is not a good ingredient, so they will look for silicone-free products. But it is more the image and storytelling that will attract them at first glance and enable recruitment. If the brand is not desirable, it is more complicated. Especially since there has always been a competitor that may be more attractive. Also, if the brand image is not well maintained, there will immediately be a negative bias for the consumer, who will not want to know more. So you have to be careful to make a good first impression.

What do you think makes a campaign particularly desirable to consumers?

For me, it's really the presence on social media. Frankly, I think it accounts for 80% of the desirability of the brand and the product. It's the perfect tool because it allows you to show the results of the product and highlight its claims. It also allows you to educate consumers about how to use it, its benefits and its formula. You can also highlight its concept and storytelling. Consumers often buy a product because they know more about it. Social media and influencers also allow information to be repeated, which helps it stick in people's minds.

How important do you think emotional and sensory experiences (immersive retail, events, digital, exclusive collaborations) are in creating desirability?

It's extremely important, and I think that the sensory and even olfactory aspects can play a big role. It's well known that smells have a strong influence on memory and emotions, helping to create powerful memories. In fact, this is why it is even used in certain treatments for Alzheimer's disease. Smell also plays a key role in product satisfaction and loyalty. A product may not be amazing, but if it has a great smell that consumers are attached to, they will continue to buy it. All of this is directly linked to emotions as well. Brands often offer events to create experiences and play on sensations and emotions, but there is still a big limitation to this type of event, which is local. For it to have a real impact, it needs to be widely shared on social media so that more people see that there was an event and it serves the brand's image.

What role do influencers and social media play today in building brand desirability?

I've already talked about this quite a bit, but they do play a central role in brand communication. And for the public to desire the brand and its products, they need to be exposed to them. So influencers make all this possible. Before, television was the only way to make a product visible, but today it doesn't have as large an audience as it used to. Brands go where their customers are, which is on social media. What's more, these platforms really enable communities to be created, whether it's a brand community or an influencer community talking about the brand. And this community aspect works very well, especially when it comes to desirability.

What about the impact of ambassadors on brand desirability?

Ambassadors really represent the brand. So it's a good tool, if you can call it that, for establishing your positioning. At Eugene Perma, we really focus on professional, expert products with scientifically proven effectiveness. So we chose to go with ambassadors who are actually well-known hairdressers with large communities on social media. We involved them

in the product creation process and then let them speak about it. The fact that the ambassador is an expert themselves and knows what they are talking about immediately gives us an expert position too, as a brand that people trust. There is a projection of the trust we have in the hairdresser who is an ambassador because we know them a little and follow what they do, the trust that the ambassador has in the brand if they work with it, and thus the consumer also has trust in the brand.

If you had to sum it up in one sentence, what do you think will be the key to differentiating high-end campaigns in the coming years?

I think differentiation will really come down to product expertise and effective communication based on scientific evidence and results to establish brand legitimacy and create lasting relationships of trust and loyalty with customers. Then, for these products to become known, you need reliable, transparent and even inspiring sources of information, such as influencers and ambassadors. Finally, to get people interested in and appreciative of the brand, you need to work on a beautiful image that is consistent with your products and your target audience.

## **Appendix G – Transcript of interview 7**

Can you tell us about your career path?

I did a master's degree at Neoma Business School. I have several experiences in cosmetics marketing: I worked in product development at Yves Rocher, operational marketing at LVMH Fragrance Brands, and now I am Brand Manager for a brand of parapharmacy and pharmacy products. So I have worked in several professions and several product categories, from luxury to more scientific, which is very interesting.

What defines a successful marketing campaign/product launch?

First of all, it depends on the objective of the campaign. Some are really image-focused, while others are more business-oriented. Sometimes the brand knows that it won't be immediately profitable with a certain campaign, but that it will be later on with longer-term benefits. In any case, a brand will look at the figures in detail, what it has sold to retailers and what has been sold to consumers. We will also look at performance trends. This is a very good indicator, as it allows for comparison. Compared to competitors, compared to the same period last year, or even compared to another launch of the brand. We also look closely at market share, which allows us to see how we are positioned; so if we have gained market share during and after the campaign, it means that it has been successful.

What do you think makes differentiation so complex?

Obviously, it's the fact that there are more and more very similar products on the market. Basically, we choose a product to meet a certain need we have. Today, all brands offer more or less the same thing. Consumers are becoming more and more knowledgeable, so we need to focus on other points of differentiation. How can I sell more than others in order to be different and attract customers? It is very difficult to capture the attention of consumers who are overwhelmed with information and marketing messages.

To what extent does the product/product differentiation (formulation, innovation, packaging) really influence the success of a campaign?

When a brand offers a truly distinctive product that cannot be found elsewhere, it will have a big impact on the success of the campaign. That is, of course, if the brand manages to communicate effectively about its product so that people are aware that it exists. This was the case, for example, with Rare Beauty blush, Selena Gomez's brand. They have a format and texture that had never really been seen before, so people were naturally interested. This is also



why packaging is so important, because it can allow the brand to be innovative even if the formula isn't, by offering a pack or application method that isn't commonly used. This is the case with the trend for stick products, for example. Sometimes certain brands deliberately offer more classic products, essential basics, but focus on other things to be successful, more on the marketing around them.

Do you think consumers judge the value of a brand more on the actual performance of the product or on the image and storytelling surrounding it?

I think that initially, people filter brands and products based on their quality. Once they have selected products that meet their expectations, they will see which brand and which universe they have the most affinity with.

What do you think makes a campaign particularly desirable to consumers?

There are several ways to make your brand and campaign desirable. For example, there is authenticity and connection with your customers. This is what Glossier chose to do when launching the brand. They really engaged the public to co-create the brand's products by asking them about the types of products they wanted, the colours, the scents. In this case, consumers feel very included; they participate and this makes them feel important. It affects their desirability for the brand with which they have created a connection. There is also the fact of offering a sensory, immersive experience with immersive pop-ups, for example. Here too, this puts consumers in an active position in the sense that they are experiencing a moment. The creativity and ingenuity of brands in showcasing their products inspires admiration in people and thus desirability. There is also transparency, being very clear about ingredients, product uses, formulas, and taking an educational approach, which is actually a good lever. This is Typologie's strategy. There is also the fact of playing on the emotional side, as brands created by celebrities do, playing on the affection and admiration that their community has for them, or luxury brands that play on the prestige, exclusivity and status associated with them. Another way to play on the emotional side is through the messages that the brand conveys. Some communicate values and topics that go beyond their product, such as Selena Gomez, who talks about mental health with her brand Rare Beauty.

How important do you think the emotional and sensory experience (immersive retail, events, digital, exclusive collaborations) is in creating desirability?

I think it's very important to include these elements, firstly because they are part of consumer expectations, and secondly because they are an additional strong point for differentiating yourself and creating desirability among your consumers. I have a counter-example in mind, that of the La Rosée pop-up organised in Paris in July. I went there as part of a field trip and expected an experiential event with entertainment and activities, which is what brands usually offer at this kind of event. But in the end, there was none of that; the pop-up was just a place to shop. The products are available in all chemists and online, so they're not difficult to access. So, just to buy a product from the brand, I don't want to make a special effort to go to an event and spend time there. In fact, I felt that my visit was pointless. This is why it is important for brands to offer an experience that can be enjoyed even without making a purchase, to give meaning to the visit and to engage their audience. Since this is what all brands offer, if one does not do so and does not put itself on the same level, even though it is in the same product category, it will inevitably be disappointing. Ultimately, cosmetics are about the senses; they appeal to the senses by definition, which is why it is important to play on this.

What role do influencers and social media play today in building brand desirability?

Influencers play a role in visibility and information. But when it comes to brand desirability specifically, I think it's very hit or miss. Macro-influencers who do a lot of partnerships quickly lose authenticity and credibility. People are aware that the content is paid advertising. There are many caveats to consider for influence to be interesting. I find that the fact that they do a lot of partnerships can even reinforce the feeling of saturation, because the products presented are once again drowned out among others. I think that in the end, it will rarely trigger a direct purchase, but it will make people want to try it out by stimulating their curiosity.

And what about the impact of ambassadors on brand desirability?

I think the value of an ambassador depends a lot on the brand's positioning and the messages it wants to convey. For example, in the case of skincare, whether high-end or not, I think it can lose the desired authenticity and be counterproductive in the sense that customers do not feel represented or find the brand's advertising and visuals unrepresentative. Of course, this can create admiration, but it can also be a hindrance. These hindrances are less prevalent in perfumes, which is why this approach works best in this sector. But be careful not to send the wrong message, because what an ambassador conveys is powerful.

If you had to sum it up in one sentence, what do you think will be the key to differentiating high-end campaigns in the coming years?

It is certain that the market will continue to become increasingly challenging in the years to come. The keys to differentiating yourself and creating a desire in people to buy your brand are diversifying your product ranges, offering interesting products that not everyone else is making, providing the best possible experience, and playing on the emotional side to engage your consumers. Make them feel both concerned and important. Product innovation is not enough because it is not sustainable, as brands can quickly reproduce an innovative product that has just been released.

Appendix H – Axial coding table

	COMPANY	POSITION	CAMPAIGN SUCCESS	COMPLEXITY OF DIFFERENTIATION	PRODUCT ROLE	IMAGE & STORYTELLING	EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCERS	AMBASSADORS	DESIRABILITY	KEY DIFFERENTIATORS
MANAGER 1	Chanel, Louis Vuitton	Product Development Manager	Sales target Sold everything we had forecast Customer and salesperson feedback	More and more brands Saturated market Large companies have very long time-to-market cycles	I'm not sure it's that important It depends on the positioning. If the product doesn't live up to expectations, they will be more reluctant to buy again The brand's success is completely linked to its world (Rhode) Skincare is more important Well-established company [...] mixes both [...] through the brand's positioning, there is an implicit promise that the product will follow suit	Enter their world Make the campaign recognisable	(Emotional and sensory) very strong in fragrance [...] fewer product promises Very immersive pop-ups with animations (Makeup, skincare) consumers are looking more for product performance The experience [...] differentiates a luxury brand from a mass market brand	Influencer campaign on social media to [...] make people want to discover the product Depends on positioning Depends on the influencer chosen Authentic Product visibility	Embody the fragrance and make people want to embody the same thing Reach a wider audience Depending on the approach, the ambassador may be relevant but not necessarily the priority lever to use	The status it brings The fact that everything coexists in a coherent manner Depends on the message you want to convey The surprise of their launch makes you want to Social status and personality associated with a brand	Clear positioning to prioritise the right levers By reaching the right people, you also ensure their loyalty

Desirability and Differentiation in Cosmetics

	COMPANY	POSITION	CAMPAIGN SUCCESS	COMPLEXITY OF DIFFERENTIATION	PRODUCT ROLE	IMAGE & STORYTELLING	EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCERS	AMBASSADORS	DESIRABILITY	KEY DIFFERENTIATORS
MANAGER 2	LVMH Fragrances Brands	Trade Marketing Product Manager	A campaign that we see a lot Stands out, is original People are talking about it on social media Getting people talking	A lot of brands are coming All brands are treated equally by retailers Market saturation E-commerce platforms Accessibility	This is what ultimately determines whether or not a purchase is made. The campaign will attract customers, but the product will really convince them Consumer expectations, product consumption Packaging, attractive items Create arguments Campaign [...] successful but does not build loyalty because the products are disappointing	I think that actual performance has less of an impact on judgement because what is perceived by the brand's image and status takes precedence.	The in-store experience is carefully thought out from start to finish Consumers need to experience the brand For a product launch, maximise your chances of standing out with the experience	Provide visibility and information Repeat positive reviews. Don't put all your eggs in one basket, because influence	Associate their image with the brand Admiration for the brand Create desirability for the brand through admiration for the personality	Campaign that is original and stands out Don't do what all the other brands do, even if it's tempting to follow the rules to show that the brand is trendy Include the consumer in the campaign, create an experience Seek status, belonging to a community.	Product as the key to success A good product needs a campaign to make itself known The priorities are originality and consistency

## Desirability and Differentiation in Cosmetics

	COMPANY	POSITION	CAMPAIGN SUCCESS	COMPLEXITY OF DIFFERENTIATION	PRODUCT ROLE	IMAGE & STORYTELLING	EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCERS	AMBASSADORS	DESIRABILITY	KEY DIFFERENTIATORS
MANAGER 3	LVMH Fragrances Brands	Media Project Manager	Its virality Seen on social media Business side Ranking Growth	More and more players Similar products Several launches per year and per brand Relatively long development time Trends change very quickly Saturated advertising exposure	You can have the best campaign [...], but if your product doesn't deliver, it won't work Consumers are paying more attention to what's in products They are more knowledgeable and have higher expectations This is also the basis of the campaign	Long- established companies with a strong market presence capitalise heavily on their image, sometimes at the expense of their product	The human brain remembers much better when it feels emotions and sensations People really enjoy going out to have an experience	Influencers are the digitalisation of word of mouth Many precautions must be taken with influencers Digital showcase for brands	Important for brand image and the admiration people have for it Target a certain type of person.	It is important to have a clear positioning and, above all, to target your campaign correctly to the audience for whom the products are intended. Teaser for the launch and the product Creativity of the campaign Offer promotions Consumer involvement	Be everywhere to anchor yourself in consumers' minds Innovate, be original while remaining true to yourself, your brand DNA Monitoring competitors

## Desirability and Differentiation in Cosmetics

	COMPANY	POSITION	CAMPAIGN SUCCESS	COMPLEXITY OF DIFFERENTIATION	PRODUCT ROLE	IMAGE & STORYTELLING	EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCERS	AMBASSADORS	DESIRABILITY	KEY DIFFERENTIATORS
MANAGER 4	LVMH Fragrance Brands, Guerlain	Operational Marketing Product Manager	The amount of interaction with the campaign. Visibility Figures and performance Rankings	Many products launched by brands More and more brands Brands promoted by celebrities Fashion houses entering the beauty market	This can simply be done through the product format Meeting specific needs Consumer expectations regarding product quality are increasing The product is extremely important because it finalises the purchasing decision and can attract customers on its own by being distinctive.	Luxury brands [...] value is largely judged on image and storytelling, which is what they promote.	This is a real lever for creating desirability Experience an exclusive moment Receive assistance from a salesperson Create a connection with the brand	They make consumers want to try out the product Inform and be seen by a large number of people Use in a way that is consistent with your audience	The ambassador has a big impact on the brand image They transfer their image Create admiration Strengthen the social status associated with the brand	A campaign that makes you want to go and try the product in store Really show innovation in the product Arouse the curiosity of your audience Partnerships Pop-up events and catwalk shows	Innovation and offering a product that does not exist on the market Having a good product that is clean for the body and the environment A comprehensive campaign Personalisation

## Desirability and Differentiation in Cosmetics

	COMPANY	POSITION	CAMPAIGN SUCCESS	COMPLEXITY OF DIFFERENTIATION	PRODUCT ROLE	IMAGE & STORYTELLING	EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCERS	AMBASSADORS	DESIRABILITY	KEY DIFFERENTIATORS
MANAGER 5	PUIG Rabanne	Product Development Manager	Successful when it encouraged people to try and buy the product and helped to foster a positive image of the brand	The market is saturated with brands and products being launched The more players there are, the harder it is to gain market share because it is inevitably divided	The product influences the final purchase decision. If the product is not good, people will not buy it despite a good campaign. The product that builds loyalty	Some brands [...] really focus more on image and people's desire to own the brand, regardless of what product it is	Look for more than just a product [...] the product promise and the promise of social belonging are no longer enough to stand out Allows you to differentiate yourself and attract more Exclusive or temporary events stimulate FOMO Transported online	Relay the launch, inform [...] create buzz Proximity to influencers Authenticity Be careful with influencers, as some abuse partnerships and are no longer trusted	Embody the brand's values Transfer their image and reputation to the brand Target specific audiences	Stay attractive because novelty arouses curiosity and creates excitement Play on all fronts to attract as many people as possible Repetition works very well on people Create a bond between the brand and customers	Create buzz Work on the brand image with great experiences to ultimately build loyalty thanks to a good product



Desirability and Differentiation in Cosmetics

	COMPANY	POSITION	CAMPAIGN SUCCESS	COMPLEXITY OF DIFFERENTIATION	PRODUCT ROLE	IMAGE & STORYTELLING	EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCERS	AMBASSADORS	DESIRABILITY	KEY DIFFERENTIATORS
MANAGER 6	Eugène Perma, Shiseido	Brand Manager	The impact of the campaign [...] both quantitative and qualitative Business perspective Welcomes the press	Saturated Increase in the number of players Industry [...] accessible [...] lots of marketing Many very similar products	Brands focused on product performance The importance of the product depends on the brand's positioning, whether it is more trend-oriented and image-focused or whether it has more of an expert position. They are well educated thanks to the accessibility of information	Some will be very image- and concept-focused Image and storytelling will attract customers at first glance If the brand image is not carefully crafted, there will immediately be a negative bias	Creating strong memories There is a big limitation to this type of event, which is local It needs to be widely shared on social media so that more people see that an event has taken place and it serves the brand image	Brands go where their customers are, i.e. on social media Showcasing the product's results and highlighting its claims also helps to educate people about how to use it, its benefits and its formula Repeat the information. Create communities	Representing the brand Establishing its positioning	Presence on social media	Product expertise, good communication, building trust and lasting loyalty with customers Consistent image with your products and target audience.

Desirability and Differentiation in Cosmetics

	COMPANY	POSITION	CAMPAIGN SUCCESS	COMPLEXITY OF DIFFERENTIATION	PRODUCT ROLE	IMAGE & STORYTELLING	EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCERS	AMBASSADORS	DESIRABILITY	KEY DIFFERENTIATORS
MANAGER 7	Rocher Group	Operational Marketing Product Manager	It depends on the campaign objective [...] image-focused or more business-focused, performance trends Performance evolution Market share	More and more very similar products on the market Consumers [...] experts [...] overwhelmed with information and offers	When a brand offers a truly distinctive product, [...] it will have a major impact on the success of the campaign Some brands deliberately offer more traditional products, [...] but focus [...] more on marketing	Once she has selected products that meet her expectations, she will see which brand and which universe she has the most affinity with.	This is part of consumer expectations Puts consumers in an active position in the sense that they are experiencing a moment	Visibility and information Regarding desirability [...] very hit or miss Many warnings to take into account Rarely triggers a direct purchase, but it will make people want to try it out by stimulating their curiosity.	Depends on the brand's positioning Loss of authenticity Creates admiration but can also be a hindrance Be careful not to send the wrong message, because what an ambassador conveys is powerful	Authenticity and connection with customers They participate and this makes them feel important. It affects desirability The creativity and ingenuity of brands in showcasing their products inspires admiration Communicate values and topics that go beyond their product [...] mental health	Product innovation is not enough because it is not sustainable Put in as much experience as possible, play on the emotional side to engage your consumer

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