

The communication of Gucci's brand identity on its Instagram profile

La comunicación de la identidad de la marca Gucci en su perfil de Instagram

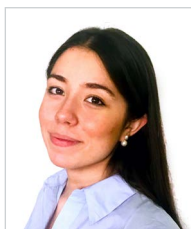


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Abstract:

Nowadays, a large community of young users follow the profiles of fashion brands on Instagram. One of the most prominent companies on this social network is Gucci, whose digital communication strategy exemplifies the endeavour of some luxury brands to redirect their efforts toward new consumer profiles. The purpose of this study is to determine the way in which Gucci communicated its brand identity on its Instagram profile during the launch of one of its collections. By using quantitative content analysis with a sample of 642 publications, brand associations structured around the aspects of product, organisation, person, and symbol have been registered according to the brand identity model formulated by Aaker (1996). The results show that the content of the publications is consistent with a brand identity that

Resumen:

En la actualidad, los perfiles de las marcas de moda en Instagram son seguidos por una amplia comunidad de jóvenes usuarios. Una de las firmas más destacadas en la red social es Gucci, cuya estrategia de comunicación digital ejemplifica los esfuerzos de algunas marcas de lujo por reorientarse hacia los nuevos perfiles de consumidores. El principal objetivo de este trabajo es conocer de qué manera comunica Gucci su identidad de marca en su perfil de Instagram durante el periodo de lanzamiento de una de sus colecciones. Mediante un análisis de contenido cuantitativo sobre una muestra de 642 publicaciones, se registran las asociaciones de marca estructuradas en torno a las dimensiones de producto, organización, persona y símbolo, según el modelo de identidad de marca formulado por Aaker (1996). Los resultados muestran que los

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presents itself as eclectic, modern, romantic, exclusive, and influential. These attributes are reflected mainly in the brand's products and in the figure of its creative director.

Keywords:

Luxury fashion; brand identity; social media; Instagram; Gucci.

contenidos de las publicaciones son coherentes con la identidad de una marca que se presenta como ecléctica, moderna, romántica, exclusiva e influyente. Estos atributos se manifiestan principalmente en los productos de la marca y en la figura de su director creativo.

Palabras clave:

Moda de lujo; identidad de marca; redes sociales; Instagram; Gucci.

1. Introduction

The dynamic nature of the fashion world reflects the evolution of tastes and trends in our society. This is evident in the continuous renewal of fashion offers and the way they are conveyed to new generations of consumers.

Currently, social media plays a prominent role in the communication of fashion brands, especially in the luxury sector (Estévez-Martín et al., 2019). Among the social media platforms, Instagram is especially attractive to brands because of its visual aspect and potential for encouraging engagement among users (Oliveira and Fernandes, 2020; Vicente-Fernández et al., 2020; Moreno, 2018).

Another benefit of Instagram is the high growth rate of its audience (Estévez-Martín et al., 2019; Ávila, 2017), whose profile is mainly from 25 to 34 years of age (Statista, 2021a). Thus, Instagram has become the benchmark platform for millennials, which is “the first generation to completely change its consumption habits and lifestyle compared to the previous one” (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019: 4).

Among fashion brands with a presence on Instagram, Gucci has been selected for this study because of its popularity and differentiating feature in digital communication with regard to new audiences (Sanz-Marcos & Pérez-Curiel, 2019).

The Interbrand Best Global Brands Report (2020) placed Gucci as the fourth most highly valued luxury brand in 2020 behind Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Hermès. Moreover, the Italian firm was ranked third among the most popular fashion brands in 2020, just behind Nike and Off-White, according to a study carried out by The Lyst Index (2020).

The growing prominence of Instagram in the realm of digital communication of fashion brands, and the relevance of Gucci as a luxury brand paradigm reoriented toward new generations of consumers, have led us to focus on the communication the Italian firm carries out on this platform. Specifically, our aim is to discover how Gucci communicates its brand identity on its Instagram profile based on an analysis of the launch period of one of its collections.

The main objective stated in the previous sentence is reflected in the following specific objectives:

- To discover the main attributes of Gucci's brand identity.
- To describe how its brand identity is expressed on Instagram through its qualities as a product, organization, person, and symbol.
- To determine if the content published is consistent with the main attributes with which the brand identifies itself.

2. State of the art

2.1. Fashion communication on Instagram

Changes in the global economy and advances in communication technology have led to significant transformations in the demands and consumption habits of the new generation of luxury fashion consumers (Ko et al., 2016; Alonso & Arébalos, 2011). This new consumer is accustomed to “exploring, comparing, sharing and buying the brands they feel attracted to online” (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019: 7). This requires working on communication strategies that are less intrusive than traditional advertising (Liberos et al., 2013).

Social media are organizations composed of people who share common interests or some kind of relationship through the Internet (Iab Spain, 2021). They all have common features, such as being a network of contacts, allowing users to have a profile, and offering tools for interaction with the content (create, share and/or participate). In this regard, they can be defined as “a virtual space for sharing information, and for resuming or starting conversations” (Llamas & Pagador, 2014: 45).

Communication on social media allows for the creation of communities between brands and their users, mainly the younger ones. In turn, these young people become content creators linked to the brand (Estévez-Martín et al., 2019). The concept of social media marketing refers to marketing communications on digital platforms that foster interaction, collaboration, and shared content between users and brands (Kim & Ko, 2012). In this sense, social media are attractive to brands because of their strong capability for audience segmentation and their ease of measuring actions, which allows them to optimize the affinity of the content with the public (Estévez-Martín et al., 2019).

Initially, luxury fashion brands were reluctant to use social media due to its inclusive, accessible nature, which is the complete opposite to the concept of luxury (Park et al., 2019). Today they are facing the challenge of maintaining the perception of exclusivity while at the same time allowing wider access to the masses (Oliveira & Fernandes, 2020; Pentina et al., 2018).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the introduction of new technologies in the luxury sector to compensate for the closure of brick-and-mortar shops and the subsequent decrease of customer touchpoints (Deloitte, 2020). In this regard, it is worth noting that the fashion industry increased its investment in social media by 52% during the first quarter of 2021 compared to the same period in 2020 (Socialbakers, 2021).

Today, one of the most popular platforms is Instagram, which has an appeal for brands due to its visual nature and its high audience growth rate, among other reasons. It currently plays a key role in the communication strategies of luxury fashion brands (Estévez-Martín et al., 2019; Ávila, 2017). As Oliveira & Fernandes (2020) point out, people who interact with a luxury fashion brand on Instagram are more likely to have a better personal image and show greater brand loyalty.

Instagram was established in 2010 as a photo-sharing network, yet the site wasted no time in adding the option of shared videos (Moreno, 2018). Recently, it has increased the potential for generating content by incorporating tools such as Instagram TV (videos of longer duration than those shared only on the platform's wall), Reels (videos of up to 60 seconds), or Instagram Stories (videos or photos of up to 15 seconds that remain public for 24 hours). These new features of the application allow brands to build narrative strategies that develop over time and increase engagement with users (Estévez-Martín et al., 2019).

Several authors have highlighted the suitability of Instagram for generating engagement compared to other platforms (Oliveira and Fernandes, 2020; Vicente-Fernández et al., 2020; Moreno, 2018). As a result, we would now like to briefly elaborate on this concept. According to Dessart et al. (2015), engagement consists of establishing interactive relationships between consumers and brands. In the case of Instagram, interaction is measured by adding together the likes and comments that a profile receives from his or her posts. In the first quarter of 2021, the number of interactions on this platform was 22.7 times higher than on Facebook (Socialbakers, 2021). However, Velar-Lera et al. (2020) consider that luxury fashion brands do not capitalize on Instagram's full potential for stimulating user engagement and generating communities.

Another of Instagram's advantages is the growth potential of its audience, currently estimated at 1,074,000,000 active monthly users worldwide (Statista, 2021b). Its year-on-year growth rate during the first quarter of 2021 was 10.3%, while Facebook saw very little change during the same period, increasing by only 0.8% (Socialbakers, 2021).

Regarding the user profile of the platform, Instagram has a higher level of popularity among women (51.4%) than among men (48.6%) (Statista 2021c), and the highest rate of use can be found among the 25 to 34 year age group, which stands at 32.1% (Statista, 2021a). Moreover, slightly more than two thirds of Instagram users are under 35 years of age (Statista, 2021a). These data offer an incentive for luxury fashion brands, whose survival is necessarily linked to focusing on younger audiences (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019).

2.2. The construction of brand identity

Brands are major players in the fashion industry, where not only are they a distinctive feature of the manufacturer, but they also play a symbolic role and offer unique, differentiated value to the customer. As pointed out by Okonkwo (2009: 287), luxury associated with brands "is characterized by a recognisable style, strong identity, high level of awareness, and enhanced emotional and symbolic associations".

Brand image is linked to audiences, due to the fact that it consists of a set of mental associations that audiences have with the brand, product, or organization. On the other hand, brand identity is linked to the organization, as it is based on a set of attributes or features that are foundational, distinctive, and enduring, with which the company identifies itself and differentiates its organization from competitors (Capriotti, 2009).

Aaker (1996) suggests approaching brand identity from four perspectives: product, organization, person, and symbol. In this way, the goal is to define the attributes or mental associations that will be linked to the brand in order to articulate its meaning. In the following paragraphs we will develop these four dimensions, as they will be used later as a reference for organising our analysis.

Firstly, product perspective focuses on brand associations linked to the product features or the category of goods that the brand sells. Aaker (1996) points out the limitations of this viewpoint due to its foundation in functional attributes of the products, overestimating the customer's rational decision-making process. Therefore, the author recommends broadening the perspectives of brand identity beyond product.

However, the luxury fashion market is composed of aspiring brands with a strong symbolic nature (Okonkwo, 2009). This implies that purchase decisions are very emotional. The product embodies and focuses the brand's essence and leads the customer to an emotional reaction, arousing associations with the attributes and values that the brand represents (Girón, 2011). The uniqueness

and exclusive nature of the brand “is reflected in the high quality of its products, controlled distribution, and premium pricing” (Okonkwo, 2009: 288).

The perspective of organization with regard to the brand goes beyond associations with specific products and is oriented toward enhancing the unique characteristics of the company that supports such products. Brand associations based on a company's values, corporate culture, its people, and its social responsibility are more enduring and are transferred to all of its products. In the field that concerns us, some luxury fashion brands are linked to art and culture by means of sponsorship and patronage, which enriches their narrative (Velar- Lera et al., 2020). Consequently, Aaker (1996) considers this perspective to be more comprehensive and advisable than the first one mentioned above.

The third perspective is brand personality, which is used to develop brand identity. Referring again to Aaker (1996), the researcher considers that endowing a brand with human characteristics helps people identify with it, guides its communication activity, and allows it to differentiate itself from competitors. Brand personality can be consolidated by creating links with people who represent characteristics and values connected to the brand.

To begin with, the personality and values associated with the brand's founder form the guidelines on which its identity is based (Capriotti, 2009). A clear example in the field of fashion is the influence that Coco Chanel still has on the French company after being in business for more than a century (Gautier, 2011).The creative director is also essential in the construction of a fashion brand's personality (Velar-Lera et al., 2020).

Luxury fashion brands often resort to celebrity endorsement in their promotional strategy. This “celebrity capital”, which is public awareness that certain people acquire through the accumulation of media visibility, allows brands to reach wider audiences (Driessens, 2013). To establish associations, brands use various means such as conventional advertising, product placement in film and television programmes, or the presence of celebrities at events wearing branded clothing and accessories (Estévez-Martín et al., 2019; Okonkwo, 2007).

In the field of luxury fashion, Barron uses the term “muse” to refer to famous figures whose role is not limited to lending their image to the brand's advertising campaigns, but who also embody its identity and inspire its designers. (2021: 1). According to the author, “these figures represent the maximum integration of celebrities into fashion brand communication” (2021: 2).

Today, even though professional models still play a key role on the runway, they are being replaced by celebrities as the “face” of the brands. Thus, the line between models and celebrities has become blurred (Barron, 2021). Nevertheless, the characteristics and features of the models chosen for the collections are another key factor in showing a brand's personality.

The growing prominence of influencers in fashion communication is forcing us to take a closer look at the characteristics of this figure. According to Vicente-Fernández et al. (2020), influencers or digital prescribers are a new type of opinion leader with the ability to influence the attitudes and consumer behaviour of certain groups. For this reason, they are used as ambassadors and intermediaries in brand marketing strategies with their audiences.

Native influencers have become famous through social media (Iab Spain, 2019), which are platforms they use to boost their profile and build their own personal brand (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019; Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019; Fernández-Gómez et al., 2018). Sometimes, the number of followers on their Instagram account greatly exceeds the number of followers on the official

profile of the fashion brands (Amed, 2015). In that regard, influencers can be classified according to the number of followers they have. For example, a micro-influencer on Instagram is considered to have between 10,000 and 50,000 followers, and a macro-influencer ranges from 250,000 to one million (Iab Spain, 2019).

Finally, Aaker (1996) proposes brand perspective as a symbol that alludes to the brand's visual imagery and historical heritage. Any physical representation of the brand can play a symbolic role when recognized and recalled by the public, which implies a valuable asset for the company.

2.3. Gucci as a hallmark of luxury brands

Influential, innovative, and progressive. These are the three adjectives used by the iconic brand to describe itself after a hundred years of history (Gucci, n.d.).

In 1921, a new brand was born: 'Valgeria Gucci', which would later become one of the biggest names in haute couture. It was founded by Guccio Gucci, who began selling leather goods as his main product line (Jackson & Haid, 2002).

The 1940s witnessed a big change for the company and the world's perception of it as well. From a small atelier, Gucci became internationally recognized by the end of World War II (Yoffie & Kwak, 2001). Over time, the firm increased its presence in the fashion world. In 1953, Gucci opened a store in New York, its first outside Italy. According to the same authors, "Those were Gucci's golden years" (2001: 2).

In 1970, Guccio's sons, Aldo and Rodolfo, became equal shareholders in the company. This change led to poor management and a lack of strategic vision. In 1979, Gucci launched a new line known as GAC (Gucci Accessories Collection), a brand extension created to reach a wider range of consumers, but its launch resulted in the company's loss of control over quality. Extensive licensing affected the perception of the brand's exclusivity, a situation that worsened with the proliferation of counterfeits (Jackson & Haid, 2002).

When Guccio's grandson, Maurizio, became Chairman of the company in 1984, he was forced to cope with the crisis. One of his first moves was to appoint Domenico De Sole as President and Managing Director of Gucci America (Jackson & Haid, 2002). Upon arrival, he reduced the staff, eliminated licensing, limited the number of stores, took control of the North American franchises, and increased control over distribution by using in-house management (Yoffie & Kwak, 2001).

Maurizio also appointed Dawn Mello as Creative Director. With her arrival, Gucci changed its perception of fashion (Vogue, n.d.). The firm rejected innovation and returned to its origins. Far from trends, Mello brought back the bamboo tote bag, got rid of most of the production, and modified some classic designs such as horsebit loafers (Yoffie & Kwak, 2001).

The long series of changes within the firm eventually affected the company's economic status: "prices were too high, production was disorganized, and supplies were a nightmare" (Yoffie & Kwak, 2001: 4).

Faced with this situation, Maurizio sold Gucci in 1993 to the investment group Investcorp (Vogue, n.d.). After the sale, the company staff was restructured, and Dawn Mello was replaced in 1994 by Tom Ford, who revamped the image of the classic brand, which until then had focused on older people, making way for a newer, younger, more modern Gucci consumer (Yoffie & Kwak, 2001). In addition, De Sole lowered prices by 30% and increased the communication and advertising budget.

Ford and De Sole left the firm in 2004 after the purchase of Gucci by the Kering Group, its current owner. Within the group, the Italian firm shares space with other brands in the luxury fashion sector, but Gucci undoubtedly plays a fundamental role, accounting for 63% of the group's profits (Martínez, 2020).

A study carried out by Deloitte (2019) offers an appraisal of the international luxury market based on the analysis of the 100 brands that generate the most revenue. The Kering group ranks fourth in sales, with total revenue at 17,446,000,000 dollars in 2017 and a growth rate of 27.5% compared to the previous year. This means the business group ranks eighth among the 20 companies that experienced the fastest growth between 2015 and 2017 (Deloitte, 2019).

The growth of the brand coincides with the incorporation of Alessandro Michele as Gucci's creative director in 2015. The arrival of the designer has been a revolution for the Italian firm:

With the new vision of creative director Alessandro Michele, the firm has redefined luxury for the 21st century, further reinforcing its position as one of the most desired fashion houses worldwide. Eclectic, contemporary, and romantic, Gucci products represent the pinnacle of Italian craftsmanship and are unsurpassed for their quality and attention to detail (Gucci, n.d.).

Alessandro Michele's eclecticism is reflected in the introduction of new icons such as snakes, tigers, and floral elements that share the limelight with the classic two-tone stripe. Nevertheless, the designer has brought back some symbols from the past that had fallen into disuse, such as the Double G monogram in honour of the brand's founder, Guccio Gucci. According to Michele, there was a time when the firm was ashamed of its symbol, yet in his opinion the symbol should engender the opposite, which is pride in a long-standing symbol (The Fashion Law, 2016).

The arrival of Alessandro Michele was also an important step forward in the brand's digital communication strategy. In collaboration with CEO Marco Bizzari, the creative director laid the foundation for a strategic plan in 2017 focusing on interaction with a younger audience. As a result, digital platforms have acquired greater prominence in the brand's communication strategy, especially Instagram (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019).

According to Velar-Lera et al. (2020), Gucci stands out from other luxury fashion brands due to its high level of activity on Instagram, registering an average of 3.7 posts per day. The brand is also renewing its *look* and language in order to cater to the new millennial audience. These changes "reflect the digital revolution that is making Gucci the most popular and most highly viewed brand on Internet sites" (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019: 7).

However, Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos (2019) have also revealed that Gucci makes only moderate use of influencers in its Instagram communication, thereby reinforcing its own independence from external agents. With regard to Gucci's new communication strategy, the figure of Michele occupies a preferential place, as he positions himself as an influencer in the brand's official account. Likewise, the product is the core element of communication and the main asset of the brand, which is positioned "as a legitimate and influential opinion leader for its community of followers" (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019: 19).

In order to define Gucci's identity, it is necessary to know the essential, distinctive, long-lasting qualities with which the brand identifies itself and differentiates its image from that of its competitors (Capriotti, 2009). Based on the information above, we have identified a number of attributes that Gucci communicates explicitly. In order to facilitate understanding, we have grouped them into three categories following a time period criterion, which is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Gucci's Identity

Past	Present	Future
Romantic	Modern	Influential
High quality	Eclectic	Innovative
Italian craftsmanship	Exclusive	Progressive

Source: prepared by the authors

Firstly, in the category entitled *past*, we find attributes that refer to the heritage accumulated by the brand over a century of history. Gucci identifies with the artisanal tradition and know-how that are directly linked to its origins. These qualities confer legitimacy and authenticity to the brand. We have included the attribute “romantic” in this category due to its connotation of nostalgia and the idealization of the past. However, this is a very broad concept that can encompass several meanings, such as rebelliousness, transgression, fantasy, idealism, independence, freedom, and passion.

The category entitled *present* establishes a link between tradition and progress. The brand identifies itself as modern, and as belonging to the present time. It is also defined as eclectic, or in other words, it combines different styles and existing elements to obtain an original, innovative result. The term eclectic might even have connotations of flamboyance or quirkiness. In addition, it is linked to romanticism in terms of transgression of the norm and the revival of aspects of the past, whose reinterpretation is a typical postmodern attitude (Campi, 2007). Eclecticism also leads us to the idea of diversity as opposed to homogeneity. Finally, Gucci does not explicitly mention the attribute of “exclusive”, but this is derived from the brand’s alignment with the concept of luxury and its identification as “one of the world’s most desired fashion houses” (Gucci, n.d.).

Finally, with regard to the category of *future*, we find attributes such as influential, innovative, and progressive. As such, Gucci is positioned at the forefront of fashion as a creative brand that lays the foundation for future trends, highlighting its influential role, as pointed out by Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos (2019).

3. Objectives and hypotheses

All of the above explains the attractiveness of Instagram as a communication platform for fashion brands, both for its visual and interactive nature, and its user profile as well. We have also confirmed that Gucci is a brand with a long history in the luxury sector whose permanent challenge is self-renewal without losing its essence, in order to connect with new generations of consumers. The redefining work carried out by Alessandro Michele has meant a change in the value offered by the brand and, consequently, in its communication style. Thus, the general purpose of this research is to study the communication of Gucci’s brand identity through its Instagram profile during the launch of one of its collections.

Specifically, we want to identify the main attributes of Gucci’s brand identity. Likewise, another of our purposes involves specifying how the brand’s identity is expressed on Instagram through its aspects as a product, organization, person, and symbol. Finally, we want to determine if there is coherence between the content published by the brand and its main attributes.

According to the objectives, and based on the literature review, the following research hypotheses are proposed herein:

H1: Gucci's creative director, Alessandro Michele, holds a preferential place in the brand's publications compared to other celebrities and influencers, whose prominence is lower.

H2: The eclecticism of the brand is reflected not only in its designs, but also in the diversity of its models and their physical appearance.

H3: The brand displays a strong link to its products in the content of its posts.

H4: Gucci's communication on Instagram is consistent with the brand's core attributes of its own identity.

4. Methodology

In order to analyse the Italian firm's communication on Instagram, a quantitative content analysis was carried out, which can be defined as "a technique that is undoubtedly the most well-developed, and enjoys the greatest scientific prestige in the field of documentary observation" (Sierra, 1997: 287). This method, which allows us to discover the manifest content of communication in a systematic, objective, quantitative way (Berelson, 1952), aims to measure specific variables (Kerlinger, 1986).

The systematic nature of the analysis implies calculating the frequency with which certain features are manifested in content, according to Zurutuza (2012). To do this, the researcher must define the object of study, sample, time frame, and units of analysis. Once these are established, it is necessary to standardize the processes of coding, analysis, and evaluation (Wimmer & Dominick, 1996). Delimitation of these processes seeks the difficult to obtain objectivity of content analysis, as the results cannot be influenced by the researcher's opinion.

In the present research, the object of study is Gucci's communication on its official Instagram account, which is @gucci, during the launch of one of its collections. For this purpose, the sample we have selected has been taken from publications made between September 27, 2019 and January 12, 2020. The delimited time frame corresponds to the period from the first publication of the spring-summer 2020 collection until the announcement of the autumn-winter collection.

Each of the publications that makes up the main feed of the Italian firm has been defined as a codifiable unit. We decided to study this content exclusively, as this page is the first one viewed when entering the Gucci profile. Regarding the content, it should be noted that each of the elements that form the galleries will be considered as independent units. On the other hand, Stories, filters, and Instagram TV that were not posted on the feed have been excluded from the coding, as well as tagged images and Reels, since the latter did not exist at the beginning of the research, so they were not considered when the code was designed. As such, in the end we obtained a total of 642 units of analysis.

The design of the code is original, and its structure is based on the four perspectives of brand identity formulated by Aaker (1996). The code comprises twenty-three variables with their respective values, as shown in Table 2. At the end of the research, the data were processed using the programme known as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), and these are displayed in frequency tables in the following section.

Table 2. Categories of analysis used in the research

FORMAL FEATURES		
1	Number of the analysis unit	
2	Period	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. September, 2019 2. October, 2019 3. November, 2019 4. December, 2019 5. January, 2019
3	Type of analysis unit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Photograph 2. Video 3. Cover of a carousel 4. Internal content of a carousel
4	Author of the analysis unit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gucci 2. Other
BRAND ASSOCIATION		
Associations with people		
5	Were celebrities present in the unit of analysis?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
6	Celebrity Profession	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influencer 2. Actor 3. Musician 4. Designer 5. Several of the above 6. Other
7	Was mention made of Alessandro Michele?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
8	How was Alessandro Michele mentioned?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Account 2. Hashtag 3. Image tagging 4. Several of the above
9	Do models appear?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
10	How many models are shown?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One 2. Various
11	If only one model appears, which gender is he or she?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Male 2. Female 3. Undefined

12	If only one model appears, what is her or his age?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minor (0 - 17 years old) 2. Young (18 - 30 years old) 3. Adult (over 30 years old) 4. Not discernible
13	If only one model appears, what is his or her appearance?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Slim build 2. Average build 3. Solid build 4. Not discernible
14	If only one model appears, what is her or his race?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Asian 2. White 3. Black 4. Other 5. Not discernible
15	If several models appear, is there gender diversity?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No 3. Not discernible
16	If several models appear, is there age diversity?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No 3. Not discernible
17	If several models appear, is there size diversity?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No 3. Not discernible
18	If several models appear, is there racial diversity?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No 3. Not discernible
Association with products		
19	Do recognizable branded products appear?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
20	Category of the products shown	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clothing 2. Accessories 3. Cosmetics 4. Fragrances 5. Footwear 6. Other

Association with the organization		
21	Is reference made to issues related to Corporate Social Responsibility?	1. Yes 2. No
22	Is reference made to the Kering Group?	1. Yes 2. No
Association with symbols		
23	Are there any recognizable iconic brand elements?	1. Gucci logo overprint 2. Full Gucci logotype 3. Double G monogram 4. Monogram pattern 5. Two-tone Gucci stripe 6. Horsebit buckles 7. Snake 8. Dragonfly 9. Other 10. Several of the above 11. None

Source: prepared by the authors

5. Results

During the period covered by our research (September 2019 to January 2020), we counted a total of 642 posts on the Official Gucci Instagram account. In this section, we present the results obtained from the analysis of all the publications. We display the formal features first, and then the content features.

5.1. Formal features of the publications

As shown in Table 3, October was the month with the highest percentage of publications (33%). In November (23.8%) and December (23.1%), the volume of publications fell, with hardly any differences between them. September (10%) and January (10.1%) were the months with the lowest frequency of publication, although these numbers are very relative, as we did not study these months in their entirety –we started on 27 September and ended on 12 January.

Table 3. Publication period

Month of publication	Percentage
September 2019	10
October 2019	33
November 2019	23.8

December 2019	23.1
January 2020	10.1
Total	100

Source: prepared by the authors

Nearly half of the publications are part of the internal content of the carousels (49.5%). However, if we take each carousel as an independent unit, their covers represent 15% of the publications. Likewise, individual photographs account for 28.5% of the content shared by the firm. Finally, videos published individually make up the remaining 7%.

Regarding authorship of the publications, we consider the author to be the Instagram account that made the original post, in order to differentiate between publications signed by Gucci and those from other accounts that were reposted by the brand.

The results show that Gucci was the sole author of all the brand's content. In other words, 100% of the content that Gucci posted was created by the brand and did not include content from other accounts using the repost option.

5.2. Brand associations with people

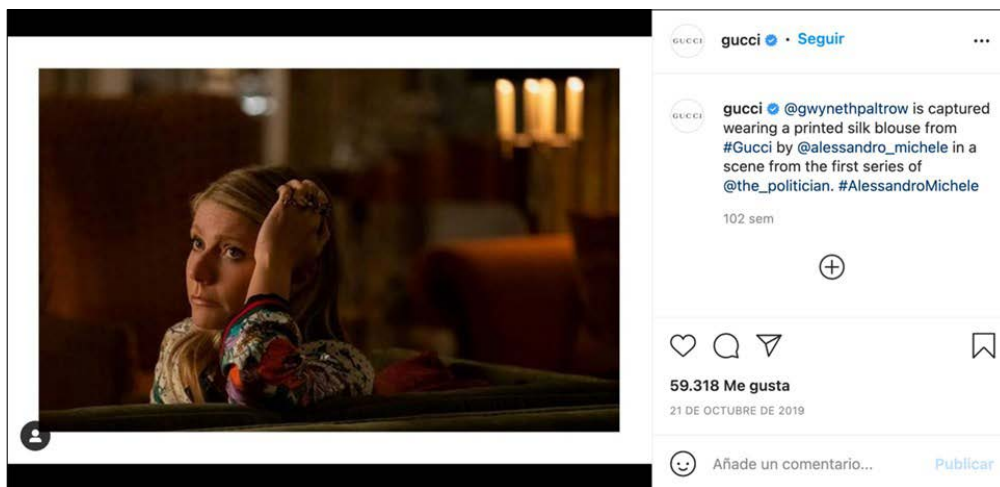
This study of the communication of Gucci's brand identity on Instagram has been organized around the four perspectives of brand identity construction proposed by Aaker (1996), which are person, product, organization, and symbol.

Firstly, we have developed the *person* brand perspective through the association between Gucci and certain people on its Instagram profile.

Celebrities appear in 23.2% of the brand's posts. Our understanding of a celebrity is that of a famous person with high social standing who was not playing a role as a model at the time of publication. Given that celebrity endorsement is a common practice in the brand's communication strategy, we will illustrate the data shown in Table 4 with some examples.

Most of these celebrities are actors (40.3%) and musicians (26.2%). An example of the former is Gwyneth Paltrow, who appears in diverse contexts, such as the following: a scene from the series *The Politician*; the cover of *Harper's Bazaar* magazine; and in a photo-shoot of the actress in New York. In all of the publications, she is wearing an explicitly-referenced Gucci garment. Actresses Sienna Miller and Elle Fanning have also appeared at several events wearing Gucci garments. The former is also a model for Gucci.

Figure 1. Post with actress Gwyneth Paltrow



Source: Official Gucci account (2019)

With regard to musicians, Iggy Pop stands out, appearing in a *GQ Magazine* report wearing a Gucci shirt and performing at an event organized by the brand as well. Harry Styles is also shown in a music video scene, as well as in a television performance wearing Gucci clothing. Both musicians also model for the brand.

The presence of influencers is very low (2%), a fact that confirms the brand's independence from these figures. In this context, we highlight the link with Sinead Burke, an activist for inclusive design in the fashion industry, something that reinforces the brand's commitment to diversity.

Celebrities from other fields (20.8%) tend to be associated with art and culture. One example is a publication dedicated to filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón, who received special recognition at the LACMA Art + Film Gala sponsored by Gucci. In this sense, Velar-Lera et al. (2020) highlight the frequent use of art as a narrative element by the Italian firm.

Table 4. Professions of the celebrities

Celebrity professions	Percentage
Actor	40.3
Musician	26.2
Influencer	2

Designer	1.3
Several of the above	9.4
Other	20.8
Total	100

Source: prepared by the authors

Nevertheless, Alessandro Michele is the most prominent figure and is mentioned in nearly all the publications (97.5%) through image tags, mentions on his personal account, and through hashtags. Moreover, on most occasions (98.1%), several of these tools are used in the same publication. We can see that the brand's link with its creative director is very close, as he is even mentioned in publications in which his image does not appear. This confirms the role of the creative director as an influencer of the brand itself (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019).

Regarding the presence of models, they appear in 55.9% of the publications. In this regard, it is more common to find publications with only one model (59.6%) than with several (40.4%). Results related to the main features of the models shown in publications in which only one model appears are displayed below.

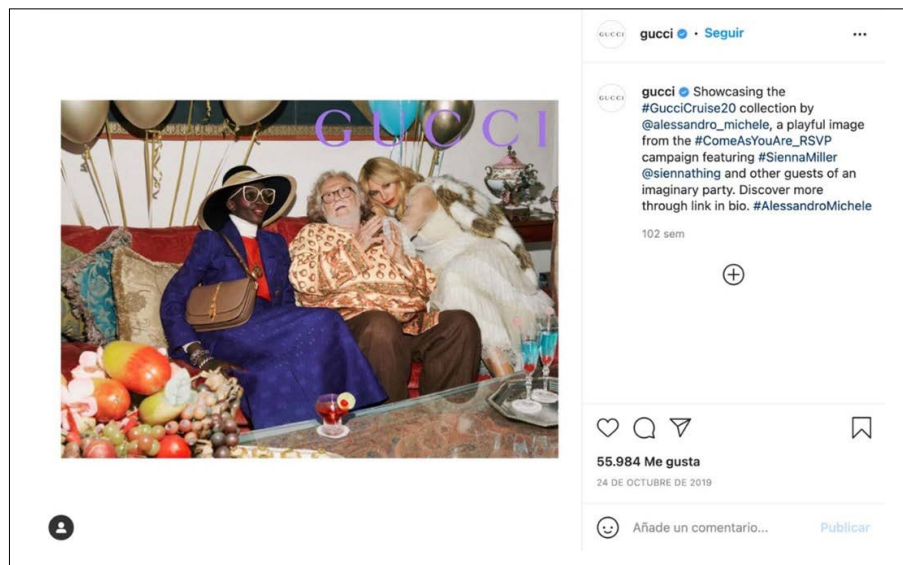
In 36.8% of the publications, the models are women, while in 27.9% they are men. In the remaining 35.3%, it was not possible to clearly differentiate this characteristic due to the pose, the ambiguity of the model, or the framing of the picture.

The age of the models in most of the publications is between 18 and 30 years old (42.5%). Models who appear to be over 30 appear in 18.7% of the posts. In this regard, it should be noted that the assigning of age was a matter of interpretation by the researcher, as it was not possible to verify exact ages in all cases.

In this context, we have also found a large volume of publications in which this feature is not apparent (38.3%), for the same reasons mentioned above. Finally, the presence of minors is almost non-existent (0.5%).

The predominance of youthful-looking models is consistent with the brand's orientation toward a younger audience. However, the notable presence of models who are rather more mature highlights the eclecticism and diversity that characterize the brand, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Post of the Gucci Cruise 2020 Collection



Source: Official Gucci account (2019)

Regarding the physique of the models, in more than half of the publications where only one model appears, the model has a slim (55.6%) or average (11.3%) build. Again, in a large percentage of the publications this feature cannot be assessed (32.2%), due to the fact that the silhouette of the model is not visible for various reasons. Finally, the scarce presence of models with a large build (0.9%) is striking. We have observed that the eclecticism and diversity with which the brand identifies itself is not reflected in this regard.

In publications with only one model, the most prevalent race is white (41.1%), followed much further behind by blacks (13.9%), and Asians (11.5%), as shown in Table 5. In this context, we also found an abundant number of publications in which this feature could not be discerned (32.1%) for the reasons explained above.

Table 5. Race of the models

The models' race	Percentage
Asian	11.5
White	41.1
Black	13.9

Other	1.4
Not discernible	32.1
Total	100

Source: prepared by the authors

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Next, the results for posts featuring multiple models are shown below, which provide more information about the diversity shown by Gucci on its Instagram profile.

In 51.7% of the publications, gender diversity was observed. In 21.4% of the cases, only one gender is present, and in the remaining 26.9%, this feature could not be discerned.

Racial diversity was also present in the majority of posts in 51% of the cases, as opposed to 23.5% in which models of a single race appeared. Finally, similar to the situation above, this feature could not be discerned in 25.5% of the cases.

Equally striking was the diversity of ages observed in 40% of the publications, compared to 28.3% in which the age of the models was homogeneous, and 31.7% in which it could not be discerned.

When comparing these results with those obtained previously with regard to publications with only one model, we can see that diversity of race and age is more representative in those publications in which several models appear.

The size of the models is the only variable in which homogeneity (39.3%) is greater than diversity (36.6%). It should be noted that in all these cases, the presence of large sizes is practically non-existent, with a predominance of slim and average builds.

5.3. Brand Association with Products

Branded products appear in 55% of the posts analysed. These results confirm the prominence that Gucci gives to the product in its communication strategy on Instagram (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019).

In Table 6, we can see the predominance of accessories (47.9%), followed by clothing (34.3%), and then footwear, the latter of which has a more discreet presence (10.2%). The scarce presence of fragrances (2.8%) and cosmetics (3.1%) may be due to the fact that the firm has a specific account for the beauty sector.

Table 6. Product category

Product Category	Percentage
Clothing	34.3
Accessories	47.9
Cosmetics	3.1
Fragrances	2.8
Footwear	10.2

Other	1.7
Total	100

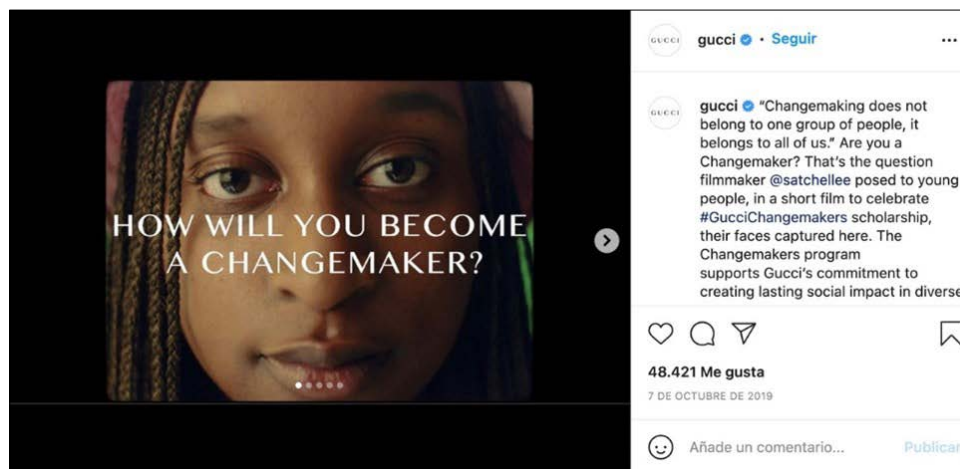
Source: prepared by the authors

5.4. Brand associations with the organisation

From the brand perspective of *organisation*, publications about CSR issues and those concerning the Kering Group have been identified.

Only 3.3% of the publications refer to issues related to corporate social responsibility. Those that stand out refer to the Gucci Changemakers scholarship program aimed at American students with an interest in the world of fashion (Gucci Equilibrium, 2021).

Figure 3. Publication concerning a CSR initiative



Source: Official Gucci account (2019)

The absence of links between the Italian firm and the Kering Group is noteworthy, given that none of the posts show references to the French business group (0%).

5.5. Brand association with symbols

This last section analyses the presence of symbolic representations of the brand on its Instagram profile through its most representative icons.

In 52% of the publications, at least one iconic feature of the brand appears. In most cases, several of them appear in the same publication (31.2%) on different garments and/or accessories, as shown in Table 7.

In publications in which a single feature appears, the monogram pattern is the most common (19.8%). In second place is the horsebit buckle (11.9%), followed by the Double G monogram (9.6%).

The Gucci full logo appears on garments in 7.7% of the publications. Moreover, in 8.5% of the cases it is added later and appears overprinted in the foreground.

The Gucci two-tone stripe appears less frequently (3.7%). However, on several occasions it occupies more space than other brand icons, serving as the background of the publication.

The least represented iconic elements were the snake (0.4%) and dragonfly (0.4%), which Alessandro Michele introduced into the brand's imagery. Thus, we have observed that the most frequently used icons are those that have been with the brand for the longest amount of time.

Table 7. Presence of iconic features

Iconic detail	Percentage
Gucci logo overprint	8.5
Gucci full logo	7.7
Double G monogram	9.6
Monogram pattern	19.8
Gucci Two-tone stripe	3.7
Horsebit buckles	11.9
Snake	0.4
Dragonfly	0.4
Other	6.8
Several of the above	31.2
Total	100

Source: prepared by the authors

6. Discussion and conclusions

The visual, interactive nature of Instagram, along with the multitude of functionalities integrated into the application, have allowed fashion brands to generate a high level of engagement with users. This offers the opportunity for firms to strengthen their relationship with new generations of consumers. However, it also poses a challenge for luxury brands, as they are forced to adapt their communication strategy to the digital environment while keeping the perception of exclusivity intact.

Against this backdrop, the study herein shows how Gucci has adapted its communication strategy to Instagram while remaining faithful to its main attributes of identity.

Firstly, all the publications were created by the firm –they were not taken from other Instagram profiles. This control over authorship of content reinforces the perception of exclusivity and independence of the brand. Rather than follow trends, Gucci creates them. The firm also positions itself as an influential brand using its Instagram account.

Gucci is linked to celebrities in approximately one out of every four publications by using a variety of celebrity endorsement strategies. Even though the celebrity profiles are diverse, each of them embodies at least one attribute with which the brand identifies itself. One example is the association with singer Iggy Pop, known for his transgressive, irreverent attitude. The predominance of actors, musicians, and other personalities related to art and culture is consistent with the creative, progressive stance of the brand as well. Some of these celebrities are highly integrated into the brand communication strategy and even play the role of a model, which is an increasingly common practice in the field of luxury fashion, as Barron (2021) points out.

By contrast, the prominence given to influencers is practically non-existent, a fact that confirms the independent essence of the brand, whose capacity to influence does not depend on external agents (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019). Comparing these results with those obtained by Velar-Lera et al. (2020), we have observed that brands such as Saint Laurent, Burberry, and Chanel resort to such personalities much more frequently than Gucci, which reinforces the independence of the latter.

However, the closest link is the one established with the creative director, Alessandro Michele. The figure of the designer is omnipresent in the brand's content, as his name appears in nearly all the publications, either in the form of a hashtag or a mention. Research carried out by Velar-Lera et al. (2020) has shown that of all the brands studied, mentions made of the creative director occur much less frequently (6.6%) than with Gucci. This further highlights the importance of Alessandro Michele in Gucci's digital communication strategy, as he is positioned as the brand's main influencer (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019). Thus, we can conclude that Alessandro Michele currently represents the hallmark of Gucci's identity and that his figure embodies the main attributes with which the brand identifies itself.

These findings demonstrate the validity of our first hypothesis, which proposed that the figure of Alessandro Michele occupies a preferential place in the brand's publications compared to other celebrities and influencers, whose prominence is lower.

The eclecticism and modernity with which the Italian firm identifies itself are represented in most of the characteristics of the models who appear in their publications. Racial and age diversity is notably evident in the posts in which several models appear.

As mentioned above, Gucci's emphasis on celebrities and its tendency to include them as models in its collections is noteworthy. A characteristic feature of the brand is to combine anonymous people with celebrities, thereby accentuating its eclectic, heterogeneous character.

Gender diversity is also very common in the brand's publications, as well as the ambiguity of some models. This is related to the change that Gucci has been fostering since 2016, when the brand decided to present its women's and men's collections simultaneously in a single fashion show. In this way, the brand disassociates itself from the dual-gender concept and takes a more progressive, inclusive position.

Nevertheless, the inclusive nature of the brand is not reflected in diversity of size. Almost none of the publications presents large sizes and, on the very few occasions when this happens, they are linked to CSR activities.

Therefore, we find that while gender, race, and age diversity is widely represented in the publications analysed, Gucci's diversity is limited in the area of physique.

This partially confirms our second hypothesis: the eclecticism of the brand is not only reflected in its designs, but also in the diversity and physical appearance of its models.

Gucci's official Instagram account is a showcase where the brand displays its new products while continually renewing itself. Thus, identifiable branded products appear in more than half of its posts. This confirms Gucci's total identification with its products, which represent the core of its communication and the brand's most important asset (Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos, 2019).

The strong presence of accessories strengthens the brand's association with this category of products, which is linked to the artisanal origins of the firm. Moreover, the carefully selected photographs of its products highlight the refined quality of the materials and meticulous attention to detail, thereby enhancing the perception of luxury, quality, and exclusiveness inherent to the brand.

The distinctive designs crafted by Alessandro Michele are characterized by reinterpretation and a combination of styles from different periods and cultures. Thus, these products are a reflection of the designer's eclectic, romantic proclivities.

All of the above confirms the third hypothesis, which envisioned a close link between the brand and its products in the content of its posts.

On the other hand, Gucci made no mention of the Kering Group in the content it posted on Instagram during the period analysed. By disassociating itself from the parent company, which manages various brands, Gucci is able to preserve its own identity, once again demonstrating its independence.

Even though content related to corporate social responsibility is nearly non-existent, by no means does this imply that Gucci has no interest in portraying itself as a socially responsible brand. On its Gucci Equilibrium platform (equilibrium.gucci.com), the brand expresses its commitment to various social causes, including the fight for gender equality and sustainability. This initiative has its own Instagram account, where specific content related to the brand's social responsibility is posted.

Although Gucci does not explicitly communicate this type of content on its official Instagram account, some of the brand's values are evident in its publications, especially those related to gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, for the reasons outlined above. In this way, the brand demonstrates sensitivity to certain social causes.

Regarding the iconic aspect of the brand, at least one of its symbols appears in slightly more than half of the publications. In most cases, they are discreetly revealed, integrated into the design of certain products. In some publications, the Gucci logo gains more prominence by appearing overprinted in large dimensions over the image.

The brand's classic icons take precedence. The Double G monogram is the most recurrent symbol, especially in the monogram pattern application. This is evidence of the pride that Alessandro Michele claims to feel for this icon. On the other hand, the new symbols introduced by the creative director have a much more discreet presence. Gucci's classic symbolism takes us back to the brand's most mythical essence, highlighting romanticism by evoking its glorious past.

Based on the findings above, we can safely say that the fourth, and most important hypothesis of this research, has been confirmed: Gucci's communication on Instagram is consistent with the brand's core attributes.

The main contribution of this research compared to previous studies is the exploration of Gucci's brand identity attributes and determining how they are expressed in its brand communication on Instagram. Specifically, this work confirms some of the results obtained by Pérez-Curiel & Sanz-Marcos (2019) and builds upon them with additional contributions as well. Likewise, the in-depth study of a single brand complements the research carried out by Velar-Lera et al. (2020), whose perspective is more general, as it covers the activity of several luxury brands on Instagram.

The content analysis, based on the brand identity model of Aaker (1996), presents an innovative approach that can be used in future lines of research. In this way, the results obtained might be broadened even further by extending the chronological sample, extrapolating the code to other fashion brands, or by studying Gucci's communication in other media.

7. Acknowledgements

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