Chanel No 5 goes MTV

On the popularization of the luxury perfume market

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In 1996 the German journal 'Parfumerie und Kosmetik' (Perfumery and Cosmetics) published an article with the significant heading "Fragrance, Prestige or Mass – The end of the beginning?". The article dealt with the blurring of the boundaries between prestige and mass perfumes. The enormous growth of the perfume industry poses serious questions on the status of the fragrance. Perfumery seems to lose its exclusive position in the luxury industry. The huge advertising campaigns attached to the launch of a new scent run the risk of damaging the scarce and exclusive standing of the perfume as a product category. In this article we look at the evolution of advertising practices for perfumes. While analyzing perfume magazine advertisements, the luxurious potential of perfumes in advertisements will be looked upon.

1   Introduction

Perfume has always been a luxury product. Contacts with Arabs during the crusades brought new perfume techniques to Western Europe. Especially at the European Courts of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, perfumes were enormously popular (Allérès, 1992; Hurton, 1991). At these courts the connection between perfumes and luxury is established. Until well in the sixties perfumes stay connected to the wealthy. To perfume oneself is considered a luxury, which is reserved for the elite. This image changes during the seventies. The entrance of women at the labor market is possibly one reason for the explosion of the perfume market in that period. The increase of discretionary income is high enough to make place for small luxury products like perfumes. Further, the changing roles of women also imply a growing emphasis on the appearance in public (at work but also in one's leisure time).
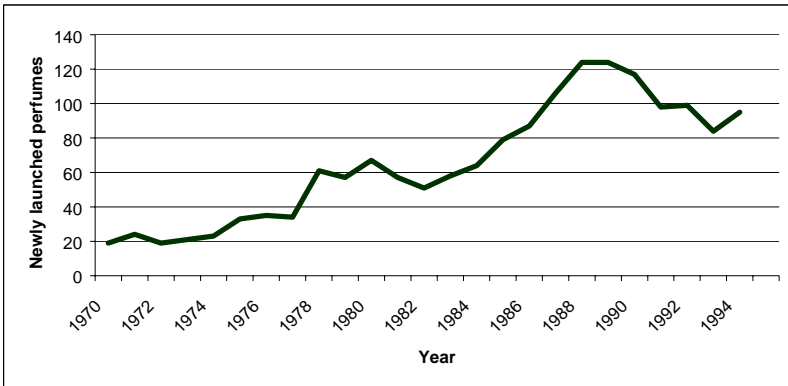
Figure 1 Evolution of new perfumes launched between 1970 and 1994 (Source: Perfumes Cosmetics, 1996, my calculation)

These societal trends have stimulated the growth of the cosmetic industry as a whole and the perfumery in particular. We do not possess any global figures that can illustrate the growth of the perfume market since the seventies. However, Figure 1 shows the growth of the perfume market by presenting the number of new perfumes launched every year. There is a first small peak at the beginning of the eighties. The curve however is rising until the beginning of the nineties. The graphic gives a clear view on the growing competition in this market. The success of perfumes as a daily product ('unquestioned parts of life' as described by Goldman, et. al. (Goldman & Wilson, 1983: 700)) implies an enormous development of a mass market for perfumes. In 1991 the market penetration for female fragrances was 90 % in France and 83 % in the United States (Joly, 1991: 98). That means that the current market of perfumes almost reaches its boundaries. The only way out is the development of new markets as children's perfumes, youth perfumes, etc. The differentiation in the perfume market is not visible in Figure 1.

This development seems to be pernicious for the image of perfume as a luxury product. The shift from a luxury towards a basic product is usually

the coup the grâce for the exclusive character of the product. The product will be forced to obey the laws of the market: parallel import with bulk-purchase prices, the deterrence of the original clientele because of the popular image.

In this article, we put forward the general hypothesis that the visual presentation of perfumes in advertisements will reflect this evolution by resembling more the imagery of basic products like household appliances compared to that of luxury watches like Rolex or Baume & Mercier. Although we analyzed all three product categories in detail, we will only present the results for perfumes in this article. We will conclude this analysis by comparing the results of the perfume industry with the other two products.

2   Methodology

In order to test the popularization hypothesis, we will empirically identify the different cultural codes used in advertisements. If producers invest certain products with a specific sign value in order to convince consumers that these products are excellent instruments in processes of distinction, it is possible to study this process. We have chosen advertisements as our research topic because the meaning transfer can be studied relatively easy with this kind of basic material. In order to do this we used a socio-semiotic starting point. We consider advertisements as signs that can be split up for analytical purposes. Before we address this decomposition of the sign in more detail, we first address the construction of our sample.

We used a stratified random sample to select the research material. Three criteria were adopted to form the different sub-samples from which the advertisements were randomly selected. The first criterion regards the kind of magazine. A completely random selection of all possible magazines would give such an enormous diversity that every meaningful interpretation

on types of magazines would become useless. Therefore, six magazines were selected. All six were Flemish magazines in the Dutch language. We selected two women's magazines (Libelle and Flair), one newsmagazine (Knack), and three glossy lifestyle magazines (Avenue, Exclusief, and Talkies). The first three magazines have a wide circulation while the glossy magazines are more restrictedly distributed.

A second criterion was imposed on the dates of issue. Only advertisements between 1970 and 1994 were selected in a biennial cycle. Every even year (1970, '72, '74, etc.) was selected in the sample. Because this criterion was still too rough, an additional restriction was imposed. Only magazines being published in June or December were selected. Selecting a certain month is not easy since all months do have their own peculiarities. Luxuries are very popular during the Christmas season (as gifts) which made December the most obvious choice. June, which differed exactly six months with December, was chosen to represent the other half of the year.

Since the main subject of the research regards luxury products, a specific procedure was used in order to obtain a sufficient number of luxury products. This posed a definitional problem. Which products should be selected as luxuries ? In order to make a selection, we had to define the concept of luxury beforehand. This definitional question goes beyond the scope of this article (See: Mortelmans, 1997). Using a theoretical concept of luxury we selected nine luxury products for our sample: perfumes, watches, jewelry, lingerie, fountain pens, crystal, cutlery, spirits and luxury cars. In order to check whether some luxury codes are equally used for non-luxury products, we selected three additional basic products as our control group: shampoo, household appliances and soft drinks. The selection procedure resulted in a sample of 1372 advertisements. This paper deals only with three products from this sample. The analysis will focus on the construction of perfume ads. We will look in detail at the way in which the luxury sign value of perfume is constructed in our sample.

Before we turn to the analysis of the perfume advertisements, we first discuss our method of analysis. This is important since the analysis of sign values requires a somewhat different approach. Our starting point is the detailed decomposition of the advertisement sign. With decomposition we do not mean a splitting up of different parts of the advertisement like Leiss and others (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1986)[1]. The decomposition of the sign is based on the theoretical decomposition of Louis Hjelmsjev (Hjelmsjev, 1971) and the analytical interpretation of this theory by Mark Gottdiener (Gottdiener, 1995). Hjelmsjev sees signs as constituted of a signifier and a signified[2] or in his words an expression and a content. Both the signifier and the signified can be subdivided further in a form and a substance. As such every sign can be decomposed into four different aspects:
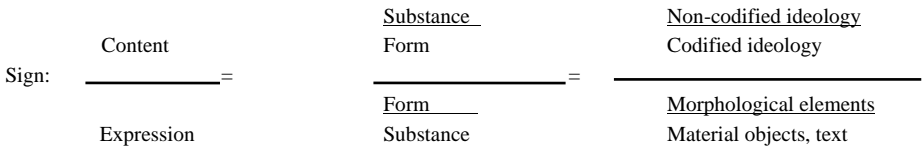
'1. The *substance of the content* is over-articulated, over-determined culture, i.e., the culture of the society as a whole which constitutes both the well-spring and the backdrop for specific codified ideologies belonging to particular cultural practices. The *form of the content*, in contrast, is the specific ideology that has been codified in practice and can be materialized in the object world through social interaction and symbolic behavior.

2. The *form of the expression* refers to the specific morphological elements that correspond to the codified ideology, while the *substance of the expression* refers to objects themselves, which correspond to codified ideology and which exist materially, even if that materiality is simply a text in the case of fictious objects. These levels of the sign are indicated in figure 1.2.

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[1]   In the research of Leiss and other, the advertisements were considered to be composed of persons, products, settings and text (Leiss et al., 1986: 180).

[2]   The original division of the sign in a signifier and a signified comes from the work of Fernand de Saussure, the French founding father of semiology (See : Nöth, 1995).

Figure 1.2 The decomposition of the sign according to socio-semiotics

		Substance	Non-codified ideology
	Content	Form	Codified ideology
Sign:	———————— =	———————— =	——————————————
		Form	Morphological elements
	Expression	Substance	Material objects, text

3. Finally, every sign is part of a system of signification, which is structured by the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes.' (Gottdiener, 1995: 29)

Gottdiener's decomposition of the sign is intended to be applied to phenomena of material culture but it can equally be applied to the analysis of images, fixed and non fixed. This paper applies this socio-semiotic theory to the study of the imagery of print advertisements. Since images can be considered as signs as well, we can decompose them in the above-presented way in order to expose their ideological construct. Because we transformed the typology of Hjelmsjev and Gottdiener for the analysis of advertisement signs, we discuss the different parts of the typology in more detail.

If we look at the four parts in which the advertising sign is decomposed, there are two parts, not directly significant for our analysis. The *substance of the content* is rather abstract. In magazines, several visual codes help us to make the distinction between an advertisement and a normal article[3]. These codes are independent from the kind of advertisement since they are inherent in our culture. Our research does not aim to describe the working of these codes. The same goes for the analysis of the *substance of the expression*. This level looks at the materiality of the advertisement sign. Advertisements are in a sense the material appearance of a company's intention to sell their products. If we analyze the signs at their pure

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[3] If the boundary between these two is not obvious, a lot of newspapers or magazines use the caption "Advertisement" in order to warn the reader of the nature of the sign.

materiality, we could look at the kind of magazine they are published in, the kind of paper this magazine uses, the place the advertisement gets in the magazine, etc. This level could be helpful in answering our main hypothesis. One could research whether or not perfume advertisements shift to another type of magazine. If perfumes are published to an increasing extent in popular magazines, intended for a mass public, this could be an additional proof for the popularization hypothesis of perfume. Since we do not have the appropriate research data for answering this question and because the focus of this paper lies on the construction of a luxury sign value in these advertisements, we will not go into detail on these levels.

For this article two levels[4] of analysis remain. The *form of the expression* is the level in which we look at the composition of the signs. Advertisements are composed of different sets of other signs. It is however, a composed sign without any structuring rules. The analysis of the form of the expression tries to find visual aggregates. In a quantitative way, we try to find classes of advertisements that can be grouped together. This analysis does not dig too deep in the meaning structure of the advertisements. It is a descriptive analysis of the signifiers found in the different advertisements. Despite the mere descriptive character of this analysis, it gives an insight in the different themes and visual constructions advertisers use to create their messages.

The *form of the content* is the level where we analyze the different meanings that are passed through in the advertisements. In order to create different signifieds an advertising man will use different codes to construct the desired message. In a single advertisement, he can create several

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[4] Although we analyze only two parts of the advertising sign, it is important to distinguish between four different parts. Not all material parts of the advertisement nor all codes are relevant to our research. In order to answer our main hypothesis, we pick out only two parts since these deliver the most valuable research material.

different signifieds. In our analysis however, we are only interested in the dominant signifieds. Therefore, we do not aim to construct an exhaustive inventory of the different meanings a certain advertisement possesses. In other words, at the level of the form of the content we look for the different codes that are being used in perfume advertisements. With this, we can retrace the cultural construction of the perfume ad. The results of this analysis will be compared to watches on the one hand and household appliances on the other. As such, the imagery in perfume advertisements can be evaluated and the descending hypothesis can be tested.

The analysis of the form of the content was performed in two steps. First, all product categories were qualitatively analyzed on the occurrence of codes. For each product category we used the results of the form of the expression combined with a interpretative coding in order to find the dominant codes for each category. This procedure is similar to the comparative method frequently used in grounded theory research (Strauss & Corbin, 1994: 273). In a second phase the whole sample was coded again. In this step all codes previously found as being dominant in one product category were now coded for all product categories. In this way we could also describe the quantitative distribution of the different codes found in the first phase. With this coding a division was made between luxury and non luxury codes. As we will indicate later, this was a theoretical division. If a code could be substantiated as creating a luxury signified, it was termed a luxury code. If not we used it as a non luxury code.

3   The declining luxury connotation of perfumes

As we outlined in our methodological description, we will first analyze the form of the expression of our perfume sample. After that we will concentrate on the form of the content, comparing perfume ads with both watches and household appliances.

3.1 Form of the expression

In order to construct visual analogue categories we take the presence of persons as a basic criterion. Although the relationship between persons and the product has changed dramatically over the years (Leiss et al., 1986), it remains one of the most crucial sets of signifiers in advertisements. Persons in advertisements supply the consumer more or less with an identification frame. Whether the person is presented as a user or he is presented in a lifestyle setting, the consumer is invited to identify himself with the presented person[5]. Since we try to classify the different advertisements according to the use of similar signifiers, the presence of persons is our first discriminating signifier.

	Watches (N = 145)	Perfumes (N = 197)	Household Appliances (N = 61)
Persons	22.1	55.3	57.4

Table 1 Visual classification of advertisements (column percentages)

Table 1 gives a first indication of the visual construction of perfume advertisements. More than half of the perfume advertisements uses one or more persons. Compared to the result of the other two product categories this places perfumes closely to basic products.

Merely counting persons indicates little about the construction of luxury advertisements. However, if we look at the general results in our sample there is a significant difference between the use of persons and the kind of product being advertised. Nearly 33 % of the advertisements for luxury products use persons in their campaigns while basic products show 68 %.

In terms of volume, perfume advertisements are clearly close to basic products. More important however is the setting in which persons are used and the different roles persons adopt in the advertisements. We continue our analysis with a more detailed look at the different uses of persons on the one hand and a classification of advertisements without persons on the other.

3.1.1   The use of role models

Since the form of the content is the most important part of the analysis of perfume advertisements and the imagery they are containing, we will not go into detail on the form of the expression. The form of the expression gives a rather descriptive view on the signifiers being used in the advertisement. One could compare the use of these signifiers for the different product categories in order to look for differences between these categories. The use of these signifiers however is closely tied to the product category. Promoting watches requires a different kind of themes than the promotion of perfumes or household appliances. It would be rather surprising if the same themes would reoccur in all three categories. For that reason, we will only discuss the different themes used in perfume ads very briefly. These themes give a first impression whether or not the image of perfumes resembles the mass consumption themes.

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[5]   In cases where the person in the advertisement is presented as a specialist who directs himself directly to the reader, the identification scheme is not used.

N = 109	
the Dark Lady	19 (17.4 %)
the Fair Maiden	13 (11.9 %)
Nakedness or taboo	29 (26.6 %)
Religion	11 (10.1 %)
Couple	9 (8.3 %)
Other	28 (25.7 %)

Table 2 Visual classification of perfume advertisements with persons

Although the number of perfumes for men has increased dramatically the last few decades, using fragrances in our culture was mainly considered a female habit. This historical background is not reflected in the use of women in our sample. Both male and female models are equally used to promote perfumes. If we try to construct some classification of perfume advertisements on the level of the form of the expression, we see that female models are more easily classified in distinct categories. 28.9 % of all male models in the perfume advertisements appear in our last category. I.e. they are not being portrayed in a dominant theme. For female models, this is only 15.6 %. This means that female models are being used in a more consistent way than men are.

If we look at the way female models are being portrayed in perfume advertisements, we find three main themes. The first theme, nakedness (or taboo), will be treated further since this is also the dominant theme of male models. Besides this theme, there are two, opposite ways of portraying women in perfume advertisements. According to Diane Barthel, they are the outcome of the way in which advertisements stimulate women to dream their own story while presenting at the same time the result of this story. On the one hand, this implicates the creation of a happy conclusion, a world of romance. On the other hand, we end up with the dark side, with the underworld (Barthel, 1988). This results in two clear stereotypes: the Fair

Maiden and the Dark Lady[6]. Both stereotype ways of portraying women are frequently used in our sample. The predominance of the Dark Lady does not surprise here. Closely related to the third theme of nakedness and taboo, the Dark Lady refers to an old believe in the power of perfumes to generate sexual attractiveness. This myth finds its origin in the fact that animals frequently use odors during the mating season. Notwithstanding the fact that human beings are microsmatae (species without a well-developed nasal organ), the connection between perfume and eroticism is often found in the history of art (Hurton, 1991). Biologists have done research on this connection resulting in the discovery of the chemical *feromone*. This sexual lure softens the other sex. The weight of this chemical however should not be exaggerated since the main influences in contacts between the sexes are the eye and the ear. Smell comes only third (Van Deth, 1995: 49).

Despite the biological evidence, the mythical connection between perfume and sexual attractiveness remains vivid. This is further illustrated by the predominance of the nakedness and taboo theme in our sample. A quarter of all perfume advertisements with models contains the picture of a naked or a veiled person[7]. The nakedness theme in perfume advertisements is a recent trend. With one exception, all advertisements with a naked person[8]

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6   Diane Barthel uses the following definition of these visual stereotypes. The Fair Maiden is the image of a women that "is taken as innocent. Her sexuality is unstated or understated. In the advertisements, soft-focus photography reveals the model in a narcissistic, self-involved pose, perhaps gazing at her own reflection in a pond or contemplating the petals on a flower." (Barthel, 1988: 72) The Dark Lady on the other hand is defined as "erotic and exotic. She, and the consumer reading the advertisement, experience not *plaisir* but *jouissance*, a sensual delight not at achieving order but at exploding into erotic disorder, of passionate release." (Barthel, 1988: 72)

7   Usually these persons are totally naked. Their nakedness is hidden behind a veil or by presenting them totally black in shadows.

8   The use of the term 'naked' can be confusing. It should be interpreted literally as "without clothes". A person was considered naked as soon as no clothing was visible. This does not imply the display of a complete body including genitals. Sometimes a

are published in the nineties. Furthermore, nakedness is not only a dominant female theme. 28.9 % of male models in perfume advertisements are shown naked. Even in absolute numbers, more men are shown in the 'nakedness theme' than women. The use of naked men is a shuffle in the traditional codes of advertising. The traditional way of portraying men and women can be summarized as *men act and women appear* (Berger, 1972: 47). The consequence of this model is a stereotype way of looking at advertisements: a man should look and judge images of women. Women on the other hand should identify themselves with the women shown in the advertisements and learn how to arouse attention (Barthel, 1988). The use of models was adjusted at this "ways of seeing": men were presented more active while women are predominantly passive and decorative (Poe, 1976). The results of perfume advertisements show that this classic split is changing.

The last category of signifiers is termed the 'religious' theme. The use of the term 'religion' might be confusing. There are no advertisements that show real religious practices from a certain religion. What is meant by the 'religious' theme is the use of mythical[9] components from religion or particular images from them (e.g. a radiated head). One of the advertisements in our sample shows a Greek high priestess leaning against a temple pillar. She is dressed in wavy clothes with her hands in a devotive position above her head. Several other elements help to reinforce the mythological character. We can mention the form of the flask (an old vase), the name of the perfume (Sculpture) and the beams of light around the product, as if the perfume is given by the gods to humanity. The use of bundles of light around the product is a technique that is repeatedly practiced in the religious theme.

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naked chest or shoulder is enough to be coded as naked. Close-ups of faces, without any other part of the body were not considered naked.

[9] Since "myth" is a particular concept in semiotic theory, we preferred not to term this theme as a 'mythical theme' in order to avoid confusion.

3.1.2   Advertisements without persons

Advertising perfumes without role models implies a greater role for the product. Since the product is no more than an odoriferous liquid, the attention goes to the packaging of the perfume. The bottle of the perfume is one of the most important marketing instruments to promote scents. The shape of the bottle creates an atmosphere in the advertisements. More important though is the fact that this atmosphere should work in the perfumery where the consumer needs to choose his brand.

N = 88	
Central bottle	35 (39.8 %)
Bottle with additional objects	53 (60.2 %)

Table 3 Visual classification of perfume advertisements without persons

When models are not present, the bottle has a central position in the imagery of perfumes. Nearly forty percent of the advertisements for perfumes without models concentrate on the perfume bottle. This means that the only constituent parts of the advertisement are the picture of a flask and some textual elements. The role of these textual elements however is rather limited. If there are no objects besides the product, none of the advertisements uses body copy. In that case, perfume flasks are presented with a headline (37%) or without headline, showing only the brand name (46%). Sometimes, even the mentioning of the brand name apart from the bottle is omitted (17%). The brand name is present as a part of the perfume bottle. No body copy or headlines are being used. The product stands there alone as if it needs nothing else to sell itself. It is a powerful way of advertising playing with strong brand recognition. Therefore, only the real big perfume brands like Cacharel, Chanel, or Armani present their products like this.

This centrality of the perfume bottle only represents 40 % of all perfume advertisements without models. If additional objects are present in the advertisement, the overall look does not change dramatically. The bottle still gets the central position in the image. The sole difference is the presence of additional objects in the advertisement. These objects are largely classifiable in a few groups. In the first place, the object is surrounded by bodily parts. The bottle is grasped in close-up or it is shown in front of a chest or a neck. Second, the emphasis on the packaging of the scent is enhanced by adding the boxes in which the flasks are packed. Again, a strong emphasis is found on the way the fragrance is wrapped. Other recurring objects are jewelry and Christmas signifiers. A perfume is often given as a Christmas present. Since, our selection criterion included advertisements published in December there is a strong connection with the presentation of the perfume as a gift. We have found the same theme in advertisements for watches or fountain pens. It confirms the status of light luxury products as excellent gifts in the Christmas season.

The analysis of the form of the content gives a first insight in the image of perfume. The strongest indication of a popularized image is the use of persons in perfume campaigns. Luxury products do not use persons as frequently as basic products. The elaborate use of models in perfume advertisements shows in addition a mass consumption-like presentation of these persons. Luxury products usually show role models from higher classes. In perfume advertisements, we find these luxury models next to roles frequently portrayed in mass consumption advertisements. The use of nakedness or eroticism is an example of a theme found more regularly in advertisements for basic products. Solomon and others for example mention beer advertisements: "many beer advertisements rely heavily on (and have been criticized for) association with the Sex Kitten type" (Solomon, Ashmore, & Longo, 1992: 32) Of course, not all advertisements for perfumes resemble those of basic products. The advertisements most closely related to campaigns of other luxury products can be found in the second group (without models). Since this group is dominantly found in

other luxury products, the parallel is clear. Especially the emptiness code from the analysis of the form of the content is present in this group (see further). This analysis does not include a temporal aspect. We will not go into detail on whether or not the use of certain signifiers shifts during the years. The temporal shift in imagery for perfume ads will be tested in the analysis of the form of the content.

3.2   Form of the content

The analysis of the form of the content searches for culturally constructed codes. As we indicated before, we distinguish between two types of codes. On the one hand there is a group of codes, termed luxury codes. These codes are found predominantly in advertisements for luxury products and are assumed to create a luxury signified on the level of the form of the content. A second group is called the non-luxury codes. These codes are defined in a negative way as those codes not creating a luxury signified. The difference between both kinds of codes is made theoretically. Since this research is both a content analysis and an exploratory research, we cannot test the codes on a sample of respondents. The aim of the content analysis is mainly a descriptive one: which kinds of codes are there to be found in advertisements ? Next to that the question arises which codes can be argued to create a luxury signified ? Once this distinction is made, an analysis can be made to what extent some product categories use certain kinds of codes more than others. The main hypothesis of this article assumes perfume advertisements will use more non luxury codes compared to other luxury products.

3.2.1   Luxury codes in advertisements for perfumes

Although several different luxury codes were found in perfume campaigns, only two of them are rather dominant throughout the sample: the dandy code and the emptiness code.

3.2.1.1 Dandy code

The dandy is a nineteenth-century figure with an excessive concern for refined elegance and clothing. The prototype of the dandy was the English George "Beau" Brummell. He revolted against the prevailing bourgeois culture of his time. Considering himself an aristocrat, he tried to keep the aristocrat way of living alive by emphasizing his attire: "his standard daytime dress was a blue wool coat with lightly boned lapels and brass buttons, a buff waistcoat and pantaloons, and black, nearly knee-high boots." (Williams, 1982: 112) He became a role model for the bourgeoisie for his persistent lifestyle. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Brummell-like dandy had disappeared. Nevertheless, the twentieth century saw new appearances of well-groomed personalities that recollect the image of the dandy. E.g. Rohde refers to the Bright Young Ones (Cambridge and Oxford in the 1920s) and to pop stars like Mick Jagger, David Bowie or Prince. These new dandies express their lifestyle by means of three characteristics: "First, their dandy-ness is expressed in their well thought-out way of living. Second, there is the admiration and the fascination for their lifestyle from the public. Third, they have a somewhat ambiguous sexuality." (Translated from: Rohde, 1989: 26)

The dandy figure is used dominantly in advertising campaigns for luxury products. The code refers to the individuality of a person. The emphasis of the campaigns lies on the fact that the product is intended for someone who knows perfectly where to go in life. Someone who distincts himself with his charisma. The most common way of presenting the dandy in perfume advertisements is the distinguished gentleman with the perfect (usually black) costume. The dandy model looks self-confidently at the camera. His impressive look stares towards the consumer. The new dandy is presented in the advertisements as an extremely distinguished person. Someone with style. Someone who completely controls his external appearance. This makes the dandy perfect as a luxury code. It shows a role model of an exclusive and self-assured lifestyle.

3.2.1.2 Emptiness code

The emptiness code refers to those advertisements using hardly any visual or verbal material to create their message. The code uses empty space to give a product a luxury and exclusive meaning. The link between the luxury signified and the use of emptiness is not as evident as with the dandy code. We need to dig deeper into the possible explanation that couples emptiness to luxury. The origin of the link can be found in both psychology and sociology. The basic principle behind the connection of emptiness and luxury is called horror vacui, the fear of emptiness (Gombrich, 1970: 80).

The phenomenon of horror vacui is originally derived from art theory. It is the urge to fill all empty space with all kinds of details. This urge however is not strictly bound to the art world or to artists. Psychologically the principle of horror vacui is equal to the human instinct to decorate. One of the differences between man and animal is our capacity to decorate things: "When we see primitives decorate themselves it occurs to us that they do it mainly to resemble animals, whether they use feathers, colorful paints, or masks. But no matter how their behavior may resemble that of animals, the distinction is vast and crucial because it involves the meaning of the word 'ornamentation;' viz., an intentional emphasis is given an object, whether it be a man or an inert thing, by enriching addition." (Prinzhorn, 1995: 20) One feels an inner urge to cultivate their surroundings. Some say this urge is more prominent in primitive tribes or in periods of great decadence. Even in our time, where the instinct to decorate is largely suppressed, we find some traces of the instinct in the habit of writing on walls in public toilets or scribbling in writing pads. Psychology gives the principle of horror vacui a rather artistic color. This meaning of the term has survived in art theory: the urge to complete a certain decoration with increasing detail. However, it does not give a satisfying explanation of the link between this horror vacui principle and the luxury signified in our sample. Therefore, we need a more sociological explanation.

In order to connect emptiness to luxury we need to translate the horror vacui into a social phenomenon. Emptiness can be defined as soberness. This opens the door to the civilization theory of Norbert Elias. According to this theory, the increasing differentiation of societal functions leads to the formation of more stable political organs acquiring the monopoly of force[10]. Connected to this process of state formation, there is a psychological evolution creating diverse mechanisms of self-control: "Through the interdependence of larger groups of people and the exclusion of physical violence from them, a social apparatus is established in which the constraints between people are lastingly transformed into self-constraints. These self-constraints, a function of the perceptual hindsight and foresight instilled in the individual from childhood in accordance with his integration in extensive chains of action, have partly the form of conscious self-control and partly that of automatic habit" (Elias, 1982: 242-243). Elias describes several domains in which the civilization process changes human behavior, all being some restraints on the human instincts or lusts: eating (with knife and fork), sleeping (not naked), spitting, personal hygiene (Elias, 1978). One of the most striking results from his study was the stratified division of the self-control. Although quantity remains a sign of power and wealth, austerity penetrated on several domains as a sign of distinction. Instead of a horror vacui, some sort of amor vacui arises among the higher classes. Austerity, abstinence, the 'empty' becomes a sign of cultivation and good taste. Letting one go is no longer tolerated. Slowly this evolution permeates society. We all use a knife and fork when we eat, we all wash ourselves, and we all are dressed on the streets. Nevertheless, the principle of amor vacui remains a distinctive sign. The power to control oneself remains a sign of

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[10] Elias treats the state formation in the transition from the medieval feudalism to the nation states in the Renaissance.

excellence[11]. The amor vacui in higher classes goes further than taking note of etiquette. Soberness as such, restraining oneself and especially the esthetical appreciation of emptiness makes the principle of amor vacui to a mark of distinction. The emptiness code should be placed against this background. Only those who have the power to overcome their own horror vacui, are brought to the essence of the advertisement: the luxury product. Emptiness as a code creates the luxury signified because our cultural background considers the suppression of the decoration instinct as valuable and exclusive.

3.2.2   Non-luxury codes in the advertisements for perfumes

Perfume advertisements contain more non-luxury codes than luxury codes. A detailed analysis of all non-luxury codes found in perfume ads is not possible. Therefore, we restrict the discussion here to the two codes most prominently found in our sample.

3.2.2.1   Taboo code

Using bodies or body parts in advertisements in order to sell products is a subject of heavy debates for decades. Most of these debates start from the same premise: signifiers from the human body are detached from their signified in order to play a role in a commercial circuit. In this manner the human body is not only redefined, it also is said to alienate man from his own self, from his own body. These criticisms are not only targeted towards the perfume industry or against the decorative use of human beings in advertising, they go to the heart of the consumer society. Advertising changes the meaning of goods, changes our contact with objects in a radical way. Advertising as such and advertising for cosmetics in particular contributes to this radical change in meaning. Stuart Ewen mentions a 'commodity self' as an addition to the 'social self'. The basic sociological concept of social self refers to the self-image one creates during the

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[11]   In his Distinction, Bourdieu gives several examples of differences in esthetic taste as well as differences in uses and habits differ on several domains. He illustrates the working of the amor vacui principle on several domains (Bourdieu, 1994).

interaction with others. The 'commodity self' is the self-image created by surrounding oneself with objects (Ewen, 1976). The origin of this attention lies in a paranoid frustration of people with their own body and social self. Advertising for cosmetics (including perfumes) takes advantage of these feelings of frustration by linking body parts with products. The advertised products are miraculous solutions for the prevailing frustrations. The promised solutions have a lot in common with magic systems in primitive tribes (Williams, 1960). Goldman goes even further with his "fetishized" body (Goldman & Wilson, 1983: 707). Body parts receive properties that become signs of the whole body.

Before the nineties, fetishized bodies were female. Advertisements almost exclusively used female bodies as connections to a product. Since the nineties however, also male bodies are frequently used. Several naked males appeared in our sample. Men, who were always encouraged to look (at women) find themselves now on the opposite side. They are being portrayed as sex objects, as worth to be looked at (Berger, 1972). Nevertheless, we cannot observe a similar image of males and females. Although some authors (e.g. see: De Beule, 1988) announce the rise of the male pin-up, we need to put things in perspective. If males are portrayed with the taboo code, they are not automatically a sex object. Naked men are nearly all portrayed in a lying posture with closed eyes. The closing of the eyes indicates an egocentric activity, which can be interpreted as 'enjoyment'. The male model is often surrounded with water or drops. He seems to be in deep thoughts. These signifiers create a totally different meaning than those that create a sex object (Emmelkamp, 1993).

Contrary to the image of male models, the sexual availability of female models is not avoided. Female models described earlier as the Dark Lady use signifiers indicating that the women depicted are sexually available. Nudity and sexual signifiers in the taboo code are often found in perfume advertisements. The use of the code is more explicit with female models showing more direct eye contact or provocative poses. However, the taboo

code uses sexual signifiers not only overtly. Sometimes the message is subtler. Faces and bodies are photographed in the dark revealing only a black silhouette. Papson suggests that the use of anonymity also has a strong sexual or erotic connotation. He equals anonymity with a certain threat. This threat is considered to arouse some desire: "threat intensifies sexuality to a level transcending everyday experience" (Papson, 1985: 64). We think the presence of threat is not necessary. The use of nudity or suggestive shadows is enough to intrigue the consumer. The hidden exudes a mysterious attraction. This taboo code however does not produce a luxury signified. The emphasis on physical pleasures contrasts with the exclusivity and selectiveness of classic luxury brands.

3.2.2.2 Religion code

The second non-luxury code found in perfume advertisements is not as important as the taboo code if we look at it quantitatively. The occurrence of the code however in advertising campaigns is striking. Religion does not seem to be an attractive theme to be used that frequently in advertising campaigns. Therefore, we need to elucidate the choice of 'religion' as term for this code. As we mentioned earlier, religion should be interpreted broadly. The religion code is used for those advertisements in which some divine subject is touched upon. Clouds are an example of this. Frequently, a flask is presented amidst clouds. We can consider this as the use of the religion code because of the association that made between heaven as a cloudy world and the flask as some god in the center of it. The example we mentioned earlier used the Ancient Greek world as a setting in which the perfume is presented. The high priestess and the symbolic presentation of divine powers by surrounding the perfume bottle with a corona, is a clear expression of the religion code.

The religion code does not use images of priests or ceremonial rituals of contemporary religions. It is more an intrinsic coupling of symbolic divine powers to the product. The advertiser's intention is to call some

supernatural powers and to couple these with the product (the perfume). Therefore, mythological references[12] are frequently used in this code. Mythology presents a time when gods lived on earth. They possessed supernatural powers and strength. These powers need to be transferred to the consumer, promising him to be supernatural and immortal. Again, the stress on the physical performances or the sometimes caricatural supernatural magic contrasts with the image of a consumer becoming exclusive by using a luxury product. No allusions are made to the fact that the consumer can distinct himself with this perfume.

3.2.3 The luxury image of perfumes

After this detailed presentation of some of the most dominant codes in advertisements for perfumes, we want to place the use of these codes in perspective. Therefore, we compare the occurrence of the codes with the codes being found in advertisements for watches on the one hand and those for household appliances on the other hand. The result of this comparison is presented in Table 4a and b[13].

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[12]   As we mentioned in the analysis of the form of the expression, the term 'mythical' is a better description of the theme being used here. However, since this term has several other scientific connotations we prefer to use 'religion' both in the analysis of the form of the content as in the analysis of the form of the expression.

[13] Not all codes found in our research are mentioned in the table. Only those codes dominantly present in one of our three product categories are presented.

	Perfumes (N = 111)	Watches (N = 269)	Household appliances (N= 64)
Luxury codes[14]			
Golden code	-	13.8	-
Emptiness code	9.0	10.4	-
Technology code (quality based)	-	17.8	-
Dandy code	15.3	16.7	-
Total (of all luxury codes)[15]	*37.0*	*97.0*	*3.0*

Table 4a Luxury codes in advertisements of perfumes, watches, and household appliances (column pct. of most frequently used codes)

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[14] The golden code uses gold to create a luxury signified. This can be done by presenting the color gold or by mentioning the word 'gold'. The technology code is explained in footnote 17.

[15] Not mentioned luxury codes are: the gift code, the nostalgia code, the jewelry code, the quality code, the distinction code, the scarcity code, the nationality code, the designer code, and the art code.

	Perfumes (N = 111)	Watches (N = 269)	Household appliances (N= 64)
Non luxury codes[16]			
Taboo code	24.3	-	-
Leisure code	10.8	-	-
Religion code	16.2	0.4	-
Family code	1.8	0.7	34.4
Technology code[17] (time-based)	-	-	51.6
Total (of all non-luxury codes)[18]	*63.0*	*3.0*	*97.0*

Table 4b Non-luxury codes in advertisements of perfumes, watches, and household appliances (column pct. of most frequently used codes)

Table 4a and b shows a significant difference[19] in the use of luxury and non-luxury codes for the three selected products. The table confirms part of our hypothesis: the image of perfumes appears to be less luxurious than

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[16] The *leisure code* presents a leisure activity (e.g. a beach) in which the product is situated. The *family code* stresses the family bound character of the product.

[17] The use of the technology code as a non-luxury code may be striking. We found the same code in advertisements for both luxury and non-luxury products. The use of the code however was different. In luxury advertisements, the technology code stresses the quality of the commodities being used to construct the product. Watches for example that are made of exceptional sorts of steel or fountain pens that are made of Chinese lacquer. The difference with the non-luxury technology code lies in the time aspect. No luxury product uses the technology code to stress the objective life span of a product. Basic products, like household appliances, all stress the life span. They use the technology code to indicate that the use of new technologies will prolong the life of the washing machine. Luxury products avoid these indications since that would place them on the level of daily appliances.

[18] The following codes are not mentioned in the table: the naturalness code, the party code, the hedonistic code, and the lifestyle code.

[19] Chi²$_{(2)}$: 279.3, p: 0.001.

other luxury products. Perfumes are usually treated as luxury products while advertising campaigns use a different strategy. The analysis of the form of the content shows that the image created for perfumes is rather composed of mass consumption elements.

With the purpose of testing the hypothesis that the luxurious image of perfume advertisements is diminishing, we checked the occurrence of these codes for temporal changes. Since our sample was drawn between 1970 and 1994, we could bridge a period of nearly 25 years. The only problem with this analysis is the number of codes appearing in each of these periods. Not all periods were equally represented. In order to overcome the unequal distribution we checked all frequencies against the total amount of codes appearing in that period. This relative approach made a comparison between the different periods possible.
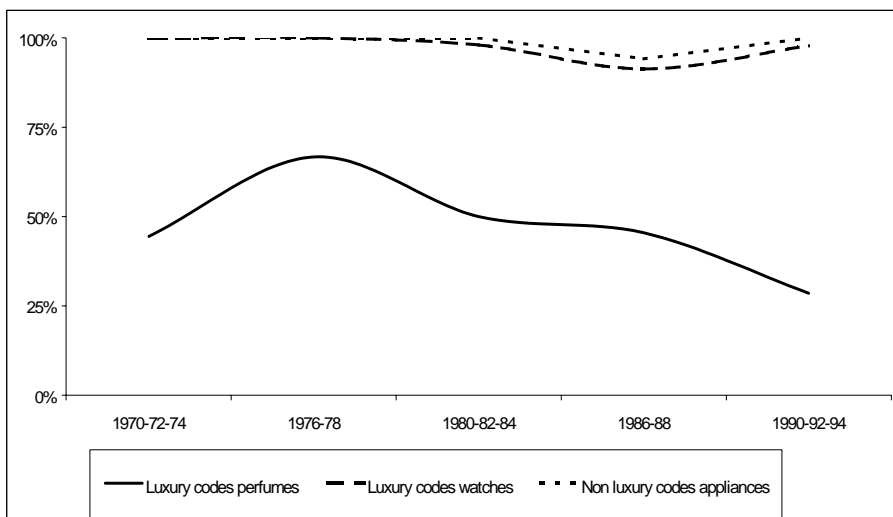

Figure 2 Percentage of codes relative to the total amount of codes.

Figure 2 shows the evolution of codes since 1970. The graphic represents the occurrence of luxury codes for both perfumes and watches and the occurrence of basic codes for household appliances. The use of luxury

codes in advertisements for watches is nearly constant over time. The same picture is shown by non-luxury codes for household appliances. This is not a surprising result. Table 4 showed 97 percent for both watches and household appliances for luxury and non-luxury codes respectively. This makes great differences over time nearly impossible.

Advertisements for perfumes however show a different picture. With the exception of the early seventies, there seems to be some evidence to support our main hypothesis. However, there is no dramatic change in imagery during the research period. Perfume advertisements are changing over time but only gradually. During the 1990s still a quarter of the codes in advertisements are constructing a luxury signified. The status of perfumes is changing but not dramatically.

4   Conclusion

We focused on the construction of the luxury signified in advertisements for luxury products since perfumes form an outsider in the luxury world. The in-depth analysis of perfumes showed some luxury codes. With these codes scents in advertisements can be transformed into luxuries. The analysis indicated however that perfume advertisements are no longer creating pure luxury products. The evolution of the market of perfumes necessitated another image, another target public. Advertising campaigns for fragrances not only show a different use of codes, there is equally a tendency over time. Perfume campaigns are increasingly targeted at mass consumption markets. Developing the self and being attractive are more central to perfumes than social distinction (vertically). Exclusive advertisements hardly fit into this mass market. The target group has clearly changed. Perfume advertisements no longer want to attract a small exclusive public, nor a wealthy one. The intensified competition and the high percentage of failures in this ruthless world shift the attention towards the mass market in order to recover the costs of these massive campaigns.

In this respect, perfumes already have lost their status of luxury product. Some brands, like Hermès, try to stop this evolution by withdrawing their perfumes from the mass market and selling them exclusively in their own boutiques (Lebas, Israel-Russo, & De Gouyon, 1990: 65) In the long run, we believe there are two possible outcomes. One is the total decline of the perfume market as a luxury market. In that case, perfumes will be considered basic products like bath foam or soap. Advertising strategies will be completely targeted at a mass market without using any luxury signified. A second and more likely scenario[20] is the division of the perfume market. Classic luxury houses will increasingly withdraw their products from the mass market reserving them only for a selective top segment of the market. In this market, the luxury sign value of perfumes will be highly stressed. This exclusive perfume market will be complemented by a mass market with different rules and laws. The well-established link between high status and exclusive scents will be totally broken there.

Maybe the popularization of the perfume industry might have penetrated other luxury domains as well. During the Parisian haute fashion days in the Summer of 1998, Edmonde Charles-Roux lamented about the invasion of the perfume industry in the oracle of luxury: "They have prostituted high fashion. Today high fashion no longer serves to dress women but to sell perfumes" (Goyvaerts, 1998: 36). This may be a sign that the booming

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[20] Currently, the perfume market shows a certain duality. The main threat of the upper layer of the market will be the mass retailer buyers who buy the most exclusive brands cheap and dump them elsewhere at bulk-purchase prices (Hession, 1996: 482). This strategy prevents the upper layer of the perfume market to evolve.

perfume industry is sponging on related industries in order to save itself from a self-destructive popularization.

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