

# The Supremification of the luxury industry

Thought leadership from The Sense Network

Compiled, analysed and edited by Sense Worldwide  
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**sense  
worldwide**

# Hello and welcome to The Supremification of Luxury

Where do you position your brand on the luxury continuum? How do you combine luxury design cues? What is informing your view on the future of luxury?

In this study the team at Sense Worldwide gather unexpected perspectives on the luxury industry from people who see things differently and think differently - The Sense Network. Together, we explore important questions about luxury, the dynamics and shifts that are shaping the future of this industry.

We hope that this thought leading study will prompt you to see and think differently about the future too.

**JEREMY BROWN**  
CEO Sense Worldwide

How do you reconcile the democratization and commoditization of an industry that was once exclusive?

If luxury is about perfection, why do brands try to shortcut their way to greatness?

If luxury is about creating meaning, why pursue collaborations without purpose?



# The Sense Network: unexpected perspectives that will help you to see differently and think differently.

**6,218**

**Network Members**

**1,313**

**Global Cities**

**25,267**

**Collaborative hours**

**552**

**Future-proofed Projects**

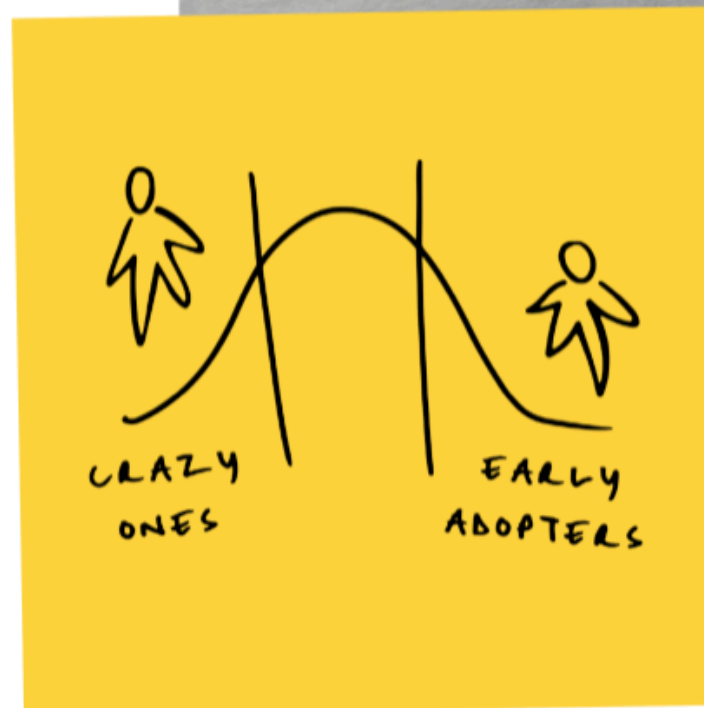
The Sense Worldwide team conducted 42 immersive interviews with luxury consumers from The Sense Network, 6 interviews with influential industry experts, and 11 in-depth conversations with senior executives from across the luxury industry.







**AGENCY**  
 THE SENSE NETWORK  
 — THE FUTURE  
 IS HERE!  
 WM. GIBSON



THE FUTURE  
 IS ALREADY HERE,  
 IT'S JUST  
 UNEVENLY  
 DISTRIBUTED

WILLIAM GIBSON  
 SCIENCE FICTION WRITER

“

There are people in society who are already living in the future. These people see things differently and think differently.

What they are thinking, feeling and doing today is an indicator of where mainstream consumer culture is heading tomorrow.

Working with people on the extremes of the bell curve will provide foresight into emerging needs and new behaviours. Breakthrough insights are easier to observe from those at the edge of culture.

Collaboration with The Sense Network inspires and builds confidence in teams to drive brand and product innovation.

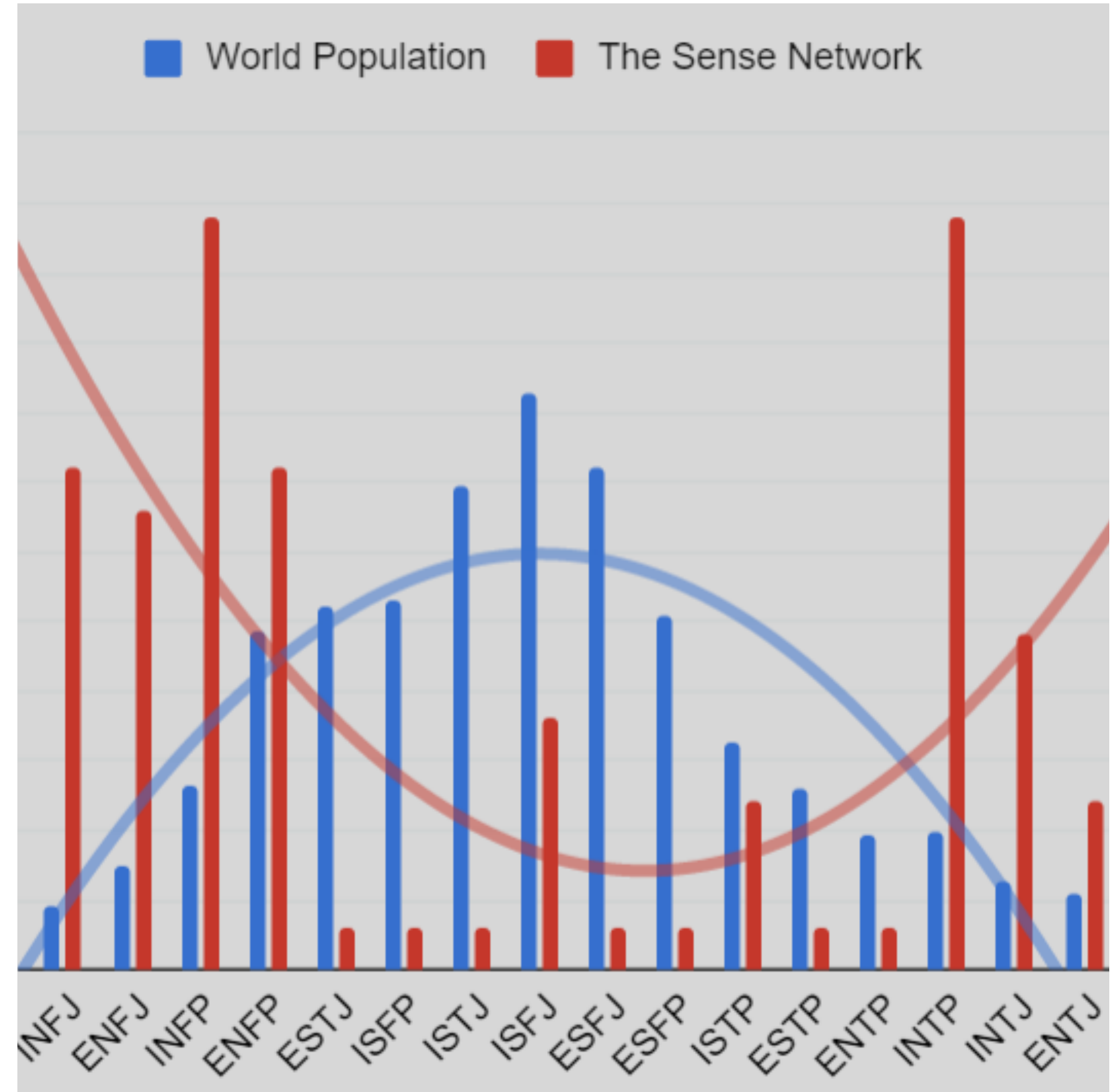


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We can see a pattern that the most successful breakthrough strategy projects tend to have similar, visibly higher cognitive diversity scores.

Our research shows that The Sense Network over-indexes on intuitive types of people by 58.3% compared to the mainstream global population – individuals who are deeply reflective, big-picture thinkers, and enjoy imagining new possibilities.

Kamila Jasinska  
Business Analytics  
University College London



# The Supremification of Luxury

# **Are you a ringmaster or the killer clown?**

**In a world where luxury is commoditized, democratized and ‘Supremified’, delivering luxury with integrity requires careful thought and precise action.**

**Category conventions have been challenged, ‘old’ status signifiers of luxury have been reframed and design codes shifted. New ideals have made way for luxury experiences that stretch industry norms like never before.**

**This report on luxury captures a strategic view on emerging industry dynamics and takes a deep dive into consumer shifts across the globe. The future of luxury is here.**

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**Luxury has turned into a circus.**

**A desperate spectacle. The flimsiness of luxury brands is killing luxury.**

**Johannes, UK  
Luxury Critic, Director Condé Nast  
College of Fashion and Design**



# Luxury brands must push boundaries and take risks to differentiate themselves.

“True luxury cannot carry mass. Mass produced luxury is losing the purity of craft that makes a luxury object or experience so special.

Luxury is about craft and intuition – an inherent sensitivity built into and felt in each and every detail. We need to stop pushing big logos and loud branding and, instead, replace it with subtle cues.”

Jack, UK  
Senior Director, Luxury Design



“Price tags and endorsements alone no longer position luxury brands, but it's what they inspire within us. Luxury means bringing a sense of wonder: The world stands still for a moment and enhances your appreciation of life. The excitement, experience and inspiration felt creates a palpable energy. It leaves you expanded, mesmerized, breathless, enchanted, awestruck.”

Anna-Marie, US  
Luxury Consumer



“The word ‘luxury’ is used haphazardly. Too many brands live under the guise of being luxury. When, in fact, we live in a modified stock component world.”

Johannes, UK  
Luxury Critic, Director Condé Nast  
College of Fashion & Design

# **The Supremification of Luxury: Five industry dynamics and consumer shifts that will shape the future of luxury.**

**01 FauxLux: No shortcuts to luxury**

**02 The elasticity of luxury design cues**

**03 Sustainability: The value of luxury values**

**04 Made (authentically) in China**

**05 Visionary vanguard**

# 01

# FauxLux: No shortcuts to luxury



# Brands can't shortcut their way to luxury

In a world where more brands claim to be 'mastering' the art of luxury, how do you differentiate as a luxury brand?

One thing is certain, if you want to design like a luxury house, you can't think and act like a CPG brand; their businesses demand scale and cost saving.

To be a luxury player, a CPG brand cannot simply dress up a mid-market product for the Met Gala. Luxury players foster a culture of luxury, which is hard to replicate.



ASKET, 'The Pursuit of Less'

# **If luxury is all about value, why has it become an industry of volume?**

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**Cost driven generic standardization flies in the face of luxury.**

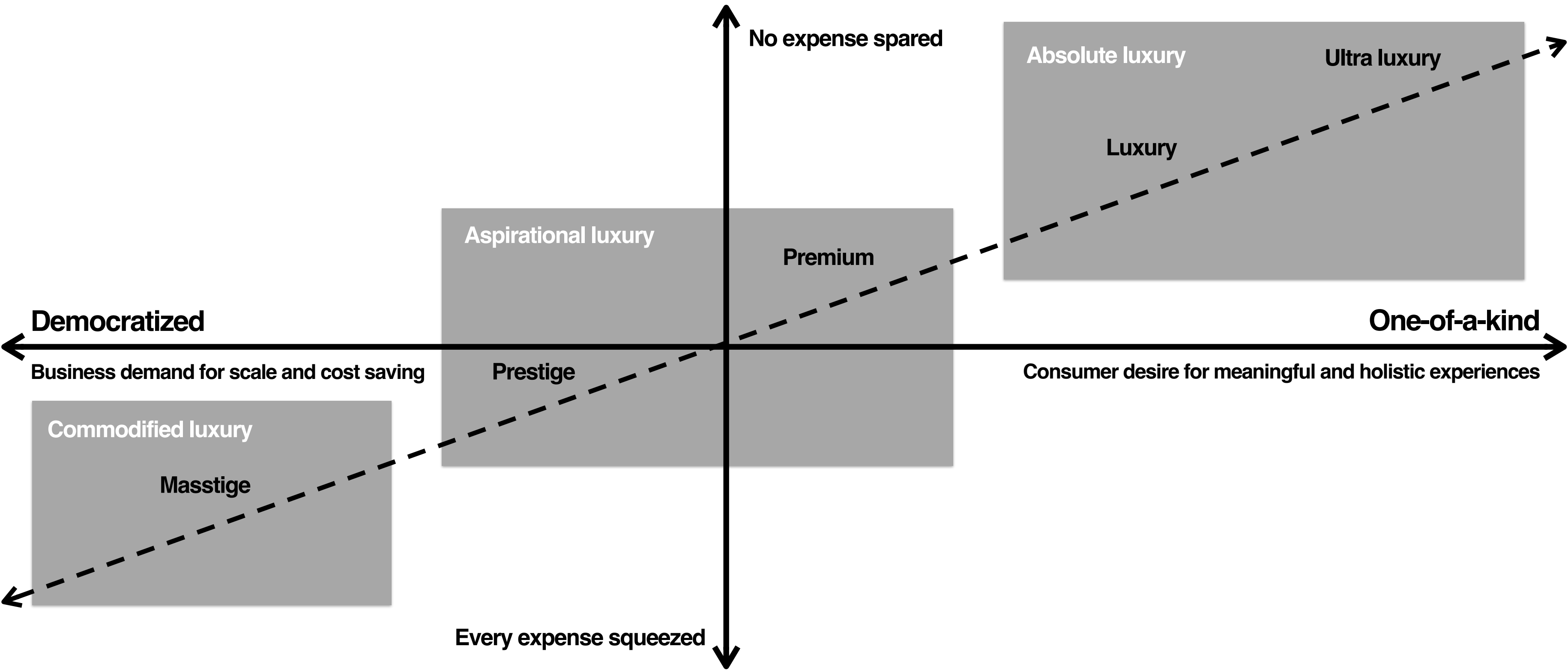
**Value analysis tends to cheapen the quality of a product with the single objective of increasing margin.**

**The challenge that luxury is facing today is that the entire industry is dragged down by those who cheapen their value prop.**

**When you begin to compromise you are one step closer to being a commodity.**

**US Luxury Group President**

# Luxury contenders cannot cut their way to greatness.





# Where is your brand on the luxury continuum?

**The democratization of luxury is attracting new aspirational consumers to enter the world of luxury.**

**The ubiquity and accessibility of luxury is not only stretching conventional definitions of luxury, but also blurring the lines which differentiate true luxury from premium, prestige and masstige.**

**The culture of artistry and unapologetic excellence is being stifled by value analysis. The creative freedom to experiment and take risks is being lost.**



Louis Vuitton x Supreme

02

# The elasticity of luxury design cues



# The future of luxury is fragmented

**Luxury's capacity to hold seemingly opposing polarities in tension is the creative force that shapes and drives luxury culture.**

**The remixing of luxury (i.e. Fendace, Gucci x Balenciaga) has granted greater license for brands to experiment with their equity and iconic designs – inviting a broader range of audiences to experience the brand.**

**Traditional markers of 'good taste' will be challenged. Dualistic paradigms are a thing of the past. The future of luxury will resist and escape the confines and binaries of 'high culture' and 'low culture'.**



Gucci x Balenciaga



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**Luxury is becoming more fragmented.**

**I see a lot of opportunity for elasticity in the definition of luxury where different expressions of luxury can co-exist.**

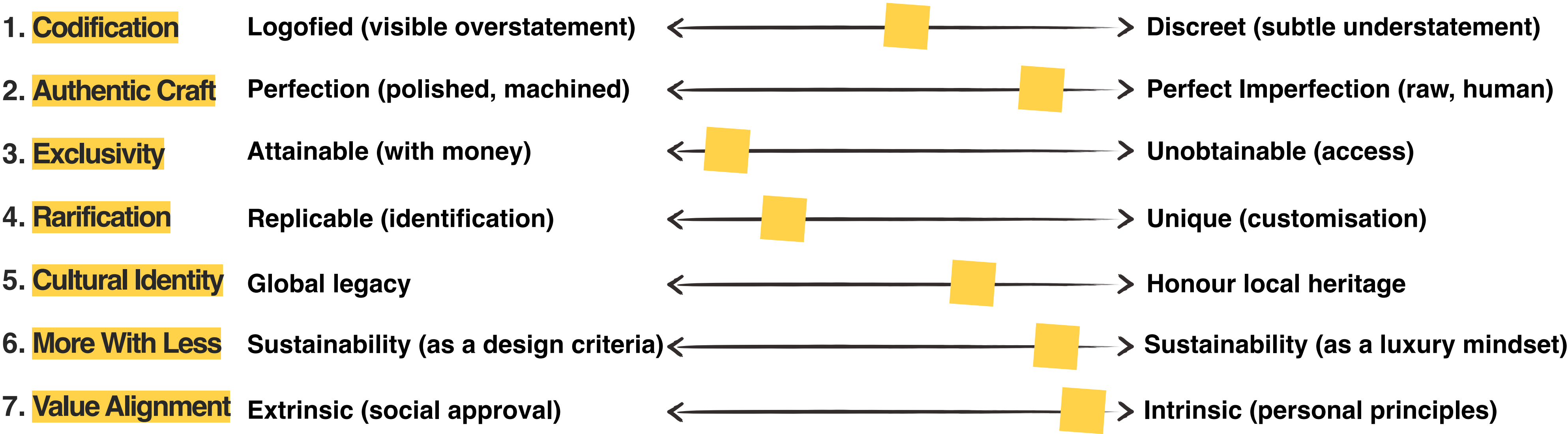
**It's a delicate dance between wanting to remain relevant all the while remaining aspirational, exclusive and not for the masses.**

**Karinna, Spain  
Futurist & Luxury NFT Pioneer**



# How does your brand dial these luxury design cues?

Luxury’s future looks more like a series of scales and levers than one way shifts. Learning to push and pull the different levers creates new modes of expression for luxury brands.



# 03 Sustainability: The value of luxury values



# **The Power of Less: New signifiers of luxury**

**Labels and logos are no longer sufficient to justify a luxury purchase.**

**Luxury consumers are seeking out the brands and products that align with their personal values.**

**As people become increasingly conscious of the impact that businesses have on themselves and planet, they look to luxury brands to set the agenda on sustainability, ethical manufacturing, and mission-oriented quality goods. These are the key markers in peoples' perception of new and meaningful luxury.**



Haeckels: The skincare pioneer exists as an amplifier of the natural world, driven by trying to solve the world's waste problem



# Going beyond design criteria: Sustainability as a luxury mindset

“My idea of luxury fashion has gone from designer labels and extreme exclusivity to true quality. It took me purchasing a black LGBTQ-owned purse to realize that it was okay for me to not have the same relationship to luxe that everyone else did. This freed me in a way. I could have my own relationship with my luxury items. I don’t have to use it as a status symbol.”

Nneka, US  
Luxury Consumer



“We need to experiment with disruptive innovations at a small scale that drive ‘more with less’.

More emotions. More quality. More impactful experiences. With less materials. It means developing a stronger consciousness for less.”

Marc, France  
SVP Creative Design



“Using leather to create an elegant look is still perceived as luxurious by many. But I think using and innovating around new materials is luxurious. Reusing old fishing nets, for example, to produce the foot mats for the cars. I perceive this as luxurious because these brands think forward; they think further using different, new and recycled materials. This is true luxury to me.”

Britta, Germany  
Automotive Expert



# Sustainability: from tick box to luxury mindset

Today's luxury consumers are drawn to brands brave enough to disrupt conventions that the old ideals of luxury have subsisted on. Where sustainability is not a box ticking exercise but a key driver of luxury design.

Purposeful luxury and imaginative utility are challenging traditional concepts of exuberance and superfluousness. Luxury design is about integrity and purpose, not environmental tokenism.

In a world where luxury is moving away from shows of status toward embodied values, how might we design with more purpose?



BMW i3: uses recycled nylon yarn made from fishing nets for floor mats

# 04 Made (authentically) in China



# Leading edge China: Luxury (re)evolution

**Chinese consumers are no longer willing to leave taste-making in the hands of the brands that have failed to do their homework and account for local nuance.**

**Leading edge consumers are appointing themselves as the new arbiters of taste.**

**They are directing their buying power toward both local and global luxury brands that approach the market with cultural savviness and humility.**



Florasis – homegrown c-beauty brand celebrating Chinese heritage



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**There is a growing desire for a  
‘Made in China’ narrative.**

**The most forward thinking  
consumers in first tier cities are  
moving away from big brands, and  
are now seeking homegrown brands  
that allow them to make an identity  
statement; using authentic local  
cues that tell a narrative that is true  
to Chinese identity.**

**Tianwei, China  
Launched WWD's China edition**



# Guochao is here to stay

**Over 25% of Chinese consumers choose “Made in China” over “Made in France”.**

**People’s growing pride for “Designed in China” signals the entry of a new aesthetic – and the growing guochao movement shows no signs of slowing down.**

**Where international brands fall short of creating emotional resonance with Chinese consumers, homegrown brands wield authority – and they’re just getting started.**



Documents 闻献 fragrance label – avant-garde concepts housed in the Shanghai flagship store



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**Given the backlash against superficial localization efforts, the grovelling of luxury brands to the Chinese market, thoughtless campaigns and the disingenuous commercialisation of Chinese culture – we will see more investment being funnelled into local, homegrown brands.**

**Kieran, HongKong  
Luxury PR Specialist, SVP**



# Watch-outs in heritage storytelling

Across China's luxury capitals, tolerance for cultural appropriation and inauthenticity is at an all time low.

China-originated brands are leading a new design vision, rooted in rich artistic heritage and narratives that protect and honour Chinese identity.

Luxury brands that fail to understand and respect cultural nuances can lose legitimacy overnight. Collaborations between global brands and local labels model a way for luxury brands to pay homage the right way.



SK-II PITERA Essence x White Rabbit nostalgic collaboration



05

**Visionary vanguard**

# Defying convention to shape the future of luxury

The luxury industry needs a visionary vanguard to redraw the industry rather than follow a pattern.

Luxury consumers are ready for market leaders to instigate new ways of encountering the luxury category.

The future of luxury will be led by brands that stretch the imagination. Brands that dare to be experimental and design with a vision and purpose powerful enough to subvert accepted codes.



Arpa Studios: Omni-sensorial journey exploring the sensory basis of consciousness and sense-blending potential.



# Mind-expanding, exquisite and transcendent. True luxury rekindles a sense of wonder.

“Luxury inversions. When raw becomes rare. Finding perfection in imperfection. Feeling a sense of luxury in the seemingly unluxurious. Think wild olives from Greece. I adore that they are stored in a nondescript bottle; it doesn't need fancy packaging. It's meaningful because of its connection it has to this place.”

Sharon, US  
Luxury Consumer



“Higher states of luxury are no longer just about the product, but the entire immersive experience surrounding it; a journey far beyond simply using a product. It's an extra layer or dimension that is added to the experience. It's more about the concept than it is about the product. It's experimental and challenges conventions of form and function.”

Johannes, Italy  
Senior Manager, Fashion Collabs



“I think of an environment where I feel inspired and the level of comfort is unimaginable. Spaces composed of levels of elegance that have been crafted according to my past experiences and future expectations. Products that are designed for deep comfort and joy. A customized experience that brings together my most unconscious meanings of a good life.”

Jaime, Japan  
Luxury Designer



# Luxury inversions: reimagining the industry

**Luxury can subvert, if not destabilise, our collective definition of luxury and luxury experiences. The next iteration of luxury is not about going bigger, louder or flashier.**

**The beauty of luxury is about the surprise discovery of discreet details and delight of hidden cues. Ideas that can embrace the strangely harmonious imperfections and encounters that are found in nature.**

**From a consumer perspective, leading luxury brands have a responsibility and are expected to reimagine the future of the luxury industry.**



Nasomatto: an experimental olfactory platform founded by Alessandro Gualtieri. "Nasomatto" translates as 'crazy nose'.

# The authors

**Alex Rückheim**

**Title:** Head of Innovation

**Country:** Germany

**Languages:** German, English

**Innovation strategist and creative thinker. Alex believes in creating value through empathy and collaboration.**

**In his role at Sense Worldwide, his personal focus has been to develop, embed and execute a more creative and non-traditional approach to research design, innovation and strategy.**

**Alex has led insight, innovation and strategy projects for the likes of Estée Lauder Companies, Samsung, Yeezy, depop and adidas.**





# The authors

**Susan Moon**

**Title:** Senior Innovation Consultant

**Country:** United States

**Languages:** English, Korean, Mandarin

Susan began her career as a culture researcher in Shanghai and has since worked across Korea, the US and China to build brand communities and create brand narratives grounded in culture.

In her role at Sense Worldwide, she is most energized by the opportunity to apply cross-cultural perspectives to discover new solutions to old problems.

Susan has led cultural insights and strategy work for the likes of L'Oréal, WMF, Häagen-Dazs and Pernod Ricard.





**Sense Worldwide is a global innovation firm. We help organizations to think differently about the future and deliver breakthrough results.**

**We seek out fresh perspectives from people who see things differently. We call this cognitive diversity. This is how we inspire and develop breakthrough innovation.**

**Since 1999 we have helped 250 of the world's most innovative organizations to be more innovative. Our success stories include Nike, PepsiCo, Sonos, Estée Lauder Companies, Courvoisier and Yeezy.**



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