

Research on the Expression of Sexy Elements in Luxury Brands

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Abstract: This article applies a qualitative research method of multiple case studies to explore the expression forms and dimensions of sexy elements in four brands: YSL, Tom Ford, Versace, and Valentino. The study found that these four luxury brands are actively using sexy elements as their product selling points to gain competitiveness. Their use of sexy elements starts from the brand's visual image, including classic design elements in the brand's visual symbols, the main colors of the brand and products, iconic brand symbols, and the decoration and display of product sales stores, all consistently spreading the brand's sexy style. This study theoretically reveals the dimensions of luxury brand sexiness, enriches the relevant theories on the sexiness elements of luxury industry brands in the marketing field, and has practical reference significance for how to better apply sexiness marketing to enhance the unique attractiveness of brands and achieve market competition success.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of sexy elements in the luxury goods industry is not a new phenomenon, but has undergone decades of style evolution and periodic revival. Looking back at history, Tom Ford's creations during his tenure at Gucci in the 1990s can be considered a watershed in the aesthetic of luxury sexiness. In the era of prevalent minimalism, Ford boldly adopted designs such as hollow dresses, high heels, and metal bras, openly exploring body charm and sexual expression through fashion. This design philosophy not only challenged the aesthetic conservatism of the time, but also created astonishing commercial achievements - under his leadership, Gucci's sales skyrocketed from \$200 million in 1994 to \$3 billion in 2004, becoming one of the most successful transformation cases in the luxury goods industry.

After entering the 21st century, sexy styles were once suppressed by the minimalist trend of sexual frigidity. However, recent fashion cycles have shown that sexy elements are returning to the luxury stage with a strong posture. According to a report from fashion search engine Tagwalk, 59% of the collections during 2022 Fashion Week featured lingerie outerwear designs, while the number of low rise designs on the 2023 spring/summer runway increased by 333% compared to the previous year, with see through and high revealing designs growing by over 10% each. This recovery is not simply a replica of history, but a recreation in the contemporary context.

So, some luxury brands currently focus on a sexy style, using sexy appeal as their main selling point. In what aspects are their sexy elements reflected? What are the specific manifestations of these aspects? Understanding these issues will enrich the relevant theories on the sexy elements of luxury brands in the marketing field, providing richer methods and tools for luxury product strategies. On the other hand, insights into this issue will provide practical references for practitioners and brand managers in the luxury industry on how to better apply sexy marketing to enhance the unique appeal of brands and achieve market competition success.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Sexy Appeal

Sexiness is defined in the Modern Chinese Dictionary as the sensual sensation that can arouse the desire of the opposite sex. Xiong Ge (2022) defines sexiness as a pleasure evoked by highlighting three sexual characteristics of a person (sexual consciousness, reproductive organs, and human appearance). Lamb et al. (2016) pointed out that sexiness refers to an individual's physical attractiveness or perceived sexual attraction (Lamb et al., 2016), and sexual attraction usually refers to the ability to attract attention and induce or stimulate individual sexual thoughts (Reichert et al.,

2012). Moreover, with the development of the times, consumers have gradually become more tolerant of the definition of sexiness. In the past, people believed that the connotation of sexiness was that desire was vulgar, but now the connotation of sexiness is independence, confidence, courage, and diversity (Li Dan, 2015). There is no unified definition of sexy elements in academia. Overall, sexy elements mainly refer to visual elements that attract the audience's attention through the nudity of the human body, or through enticing expressions, postures, behaviors, etc., in order to create a sexy physiological and psychological sensation for the audience.

2.2. Sexual Self Schema

Sexual self schema refers to an individual's cognitive summary of their own sexual aspects, which may be derived from past experiences. Sexual self schema can affect people's processing of information about sex or sexuality (Pulverman et al., 2017; Sweeney et al., 2015). It refers to a person's cognition and feelings about their body, sexual attraction, sexual expression, and sexual roles. Sexual self schema is usually established in an individual's early experiences and growth process, and may be influenced by cultural, social, family, and personal factors (Pulverman et al., 2017). Sexy brand elements influence consumers through self imposed patterns, exerting varying degrees of influence on different types of consumers.

3. CASE INTRODUCTION

3.1. YSL

Yves Saint Laurent was founded by French designer Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé in Paris in 1961, and is now part of Kering Group. The product line covers multiple fields, including fashion and accessories, handbags, cosmetics and perfume, and the extended category also includes glasses, watches, shoes and fragrance lines.

The brand is centered around the avant-garde spirit of breaking social taboos, committed to empowering women with power and freedom through fashion, and reshaping modern women's wardrobes. Its design blends classical art with modern rebellion, becoming a symbol of luxury fashion in France. YSL's design style is rooted in the dual genes of neutral liberation and dangerous aesthetics. It has introduced a large number of disruptive designs. For example, in 1966, the introduction of women's Le Smoking clothes transformed men's formal attire into a symbol of female power, challenging social taboos; In 1965, Mondrian skirts were introduced, using abstract geometric stitching; In 1977, Opium perfume was launched, which was inspired by Chinese snuff bottles and demonstrated the mysticism of the East. The perfume caused controversy because of its name and oriental style. These innovations all reflect the integration of art and exotic cultures. The brand also incorporates modern minimalism and dark romance. The current creative director Anthony Vaccarello continues the brand's core, emphasizing minimalist cutting and neutral expression, while injecting leather, metal elements and dark tones to balance classic elegance and street rebellion.

3.2. Tom Ford

Tom Ford was founded by American designer Tom Ford in 2005 and is now part of Estée Lauder Group (beauty line) and Capri Holdings Group (fashion line). The brand takes "extreme sexy" and "dark luxury" as its genes, and its product line covers multiple fields, including beauty and perfume product lines, such as the first flagship perfume Black Orchid and makeup line in 2006, black pipe lipstick (such as # 16 Scarlet Rouge), and private fragrance series (such as the smoke holy wood Tobacco Oud) are famous for their high color rendering and artistic packaging, with annual sales exceeding 500 million dollars. There is also a fashion and accessories product line, with a core focus on customized suits, leather items, and men's and women's ready to wear clothing. The 2025 autumn/winter collection is led by the new creative director Haider Ackermann, incorporating neutral tailoring and futuristic structures. In addition, the brand's extended categories also include glasses, watches, and home goods, forming a luxury matrix for all categories.

Its style labels include extreme sexiness, dark luxury, and Hollywood style glammers. Its Hollywood style sexy design emphasizes body narrative - close fitting tailoring (such as vacuum suits), deep V-neck and patent leather material, creating dramatic tension through light and shadow contrast, inspired by the suspenseful aesthetics in Ford's film "Nocturnal Animals". Its dark minimalism opposes apathy with "excess luxury".

3.3. Versace

The Versace brand was founded by Gianni Versace in Milan in 1978, with the Greek mythological basilisk Medusa as its symbol of deadly allure. Its design is renowned for Baroque luxury, metallic elements, and high saturation colors, serving audiences including Madonna and Princess Diana. Its product line covers multiple fields, and its core categories include high-end ready to wear clothes, handbags, shoes, accessories and perfume. The extended product line includes household goods, children's clothing, and authorized products. The sub brands and cross-border products include the young sub line Versus, the high-end series Atelier Versace, and have also ventured into the hotel industry (Palazzo Versace) and joint collaborations.

Versace's style revolves around dramatic sensuality and classical rebellion, blending three major elements, the first being Baroque aesthetics. It extensively utilizes gilded prints, Greek patterns, leopard prints, and intricate embroidery, highlighting the gorgeous visual through luxurious fabrics such as silk and velvet. For example, in the 2025 autumn and winter collection, sculptural cutting combined with Baroque vortex patterns reshapes the symbol of power. The second is physical liberation and provocative design. Pioneering oblique cutting technology, emphasizing waist hip curves; The iconic safety pin skirt and high slit dress challenge traditional exposure boundaries and interpret deadly attraction. The third is the integration of punk with the street, injecting elements such as rivets, metal chains, and quilting techniques. For example, in the 2024 autumn and winter men's clothing, tailcoats will be combined with jumpsuits, while in women's clothing, mini skirts will be paired with punk eye makeup, balancing classical elegance with youth cultural rebellion. The brand always takes breaking conventions as its spiritual core, continuously defining the avant-garde expression of luxury and sexiness through high saturation colors, mythological metaphors, and material collisions (such as leather splicing mesh).

3.4. Valentino

Valentino was founded by Italian designer Valentino Garavani in Rome in 1960. It is one of the world's top luxury brands known for its haute couture and exquisite craftsmanship. The brand's product portfolio covers multiple fields: the core mainline includes Haute Couture and high-end ready to wear collections, with each customized piece handmade by about 40 craftsmen from the Roman workshop, emphasizing uniqueness and artistry; The accessory line is named after Valentino Garavani and covers iconic handbags (such as Rockstud rivet bag, 2025 new "9TO5" multifunctional bag), shoes, and small leather goods; Red Valentino's secondary line focuses on youthful design, blending playful elements with modern fairy tale style; In addition, it has also expanded to authorized categories such as perfume series, cosmetics, watches and glasses. In recent years, the brand has explored sports aesthetics and neutral styles through the VLTN series, further expanding its audience boundaries.

Valentino's style is rooted in timeless elegance and luxurious femininity, with a design philosophy that emphasizes empowering women with strength and confidence through clothing. The iconic Valentino red is a strong and noble exclusive red that has become the brand's visual symbol, frequently used in dresses and accessories, symbolizing passion and vitality. In terms of craftsmanship, the brand combines traditional Italian tailoring with modern art elements: classic styles often feature fitted cuts, off shoulder perspective, lace inlay, and smooth satin, highlighting women's curves; At the same time, he is skilled in combining palace style luxury (such as Baroque flowers, bows) with contemporary rebelliousness, such as punk aesthetics decorated with rivets. The current creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli has been independently in charge of the brand since 2016. Building on the legacy of Roman nobility, he has infused inclusivity into the brand, driving continuous evolution between classics and innovation through transgender design, multicultural inspiration, and eco-friendly materials such as replaceable makeup cores.

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE CASES OF SEXY ELEMENTS IN BRANDS

The four high-end luxury brands focused on in this study all have distinct brand sexy elements. Through the use of their sexy elements, the brands enhance their recognition and differentiation, and gain competitiveness. It can be seen that the sexy elements of the brand are ubiquitous in various

aspects, including the design of product brand visual symbols, interior decoration design of brand stores, material and prop design, etc., all of which uniformly convey a sexy charm style to the outside world.

4.1. YSL

Firstly, the YSL brand has a wide range of sexy elements. In terms of typical elements, its classic signature product Le Smoking showcases a feminist style, advocating for women to speak independently. This neutral and sexy style makes women very charming. The brand also boldly launched perspective clothing, causing a sensation in the industry; In terms of color, YSL uses poppy red and matte black, which are very dangerous and attractive colors. The direct use of red Opium perfume in 1977 caused Orientalism controversy. Black is a symbol of the gender revolution solidified in the smoking suit of 1966. On the iconic symbol, the brand uses a metal material logo, adding a luxurious and sexy style; In terms of store image, YSL's flagship store in Taikoo Li, Chengdu features a 24K gold foil ceiling reflected by black agate walls, replicating the dangerous and tempting duality through the contrast of matte materials. Gold symbolizes the order of the upper class society, while black represents the subversive undercurrent.

4.2. Tom Ford

The Tom Ford brand also showcases its sexy style in various image exports. It extensively incorporates velvet elements in its product design, conveying a luxurious, gorgeous, and extravagant style. In terms of brand color, TF is good at using patent black and metallic luster. Patent black represents the cold, mysterious and high-level feeling of the brand, and is often used in lipstick packaging (such as classic black pipe series), perfume bottles (such as Black Orchid) and ready to wear design to convey the "dangerous and charming" attraction. Metallic color represents luxury, delicacy, and Hollywood style Glamour, often paired with black to form a classic black gold combination. In terms of brand logo symbols, the letter combinations of T (Tom) and F (Ford) overlap at a 45 degree angle, forming a tight and tense structure that symbolizes the balance between desire and restraint. In terms of store image, the spatial design of Tom Ford's Hong Kong IFC counter can be called a "precision laboratory of desire". Through the dramatic collision of materials and colors, the brand's dark and sexy aesthetics are transformed into an immersive consumer experience. The Indonesian Macassar Ebony wood used in the sales store comes with natural stripes of chocolate and black brown, with a hard texture like metal, symbolizing primitive desire and danger. The ivory white Karara marble echoes the high cold posture of traditional luxury goods with pure white, and the warm texture of the stone also suggests the possibility of ambiguous physical contact.

4.3. Valentino

The classic element of Valentino brand is rivets, with sharp shapes that evoke a sense of danger and give consumers a sexy feeling. In terms of color usage, the brand's signature color is electric powder, a highly saturated fluorescent powder with extremely strong visual impact. In terms of the brand's iconic symbols, the "V" letter in classical serif font was initially used in the 1960s, with a slightly thicker diagonal line on the left side than on the right side, reflecting the aesthetic influence of the Italian Renaissance. In the 1980s, it evolved into an oval shaped "V" logo, symbolizing the noble emblem and strengthening the brand's noble genes. In 2019, the V logo was reinterpreted using antique brass material. In 2022, a full version of the V logo print was launched, which is radical and artistic, expressing a sexy style. In terms of store design, the Rome flagship store reconstructs the sacred sense of the church dome with a 6-meter-high marble colonnade and double spiral staircase.

4.4. Versace

The typical element and iconic symbol of the Versace brand is Medusa, derived from the Greek mythological serpent haired succubus. Legend has it that anyone who looks directly into her eyes will instantly petrify. Brand founder Gianni Versace chose it as the brand logo, symbolizing suffocating beauty, not passive appreciation, but active conquest, showcasing a dangerous and sexy beauty. Another classic element of Versace is leopard print. In 1982, it "ganged up" it with an Oroton metal mesh skirt (leopard print+gold chain armor). Versace's leopard print includes classic yellow black leopard print, pink leopard print, and digital pixel leopard print. In terms of brand color, the main color of the brand is yellow, which was first widely used on Oroton metal mesh skirts by the founder in 1982 to counter the trend of minimalist neutral colors. Yellow, as a symbol of the sun god Apollo

in Greek mythology, forms a dramatic contrast between "light and darkness" with the brand logo Medusa - representing both the vitality of the Mediterranean sun and the deadly allure of being corroded by gold. In terms of store design, the Taipei 101 store combines traditional luxury with a futuristic feel, showcasing a sexy style.

Table 1 compares and analyzes four cases in four dimensions: brand typical elements, brand colors, brand logo symbols, and store image. We can see that the sexy images of the four brands are presented uniformly through various means. The brand's sexy style permeates almost all marketing strategies to the fullest extent. This also better illustrates the successful communication of the brand's sexy elements. Through diversified channels, consumers can comprehensively understand and perceive the sexy image and charm that the brand wants to convey.

Table 1. Performance of Sexy Elements in Luxury Brands

	Typical elements of the brand	Brand color	Brand logo symbol	Store Image
YSL	Smoked packaging, perspective packaging, metal	Poppy Red+Black	Metal Cassandre Logo	Chengdu Taikoo Li flagship store black and gold contrasting colors
Tom Ford	Velvet	Lacquer black, metallic luster	Interlocking T/F letters	Hong Kong IFC counter uses ivory white booth paired with Indonesian Makassar ebony to achieve contrast
Valentino	Rivet	Electric powder	V logo+electric powder	The flagship store in Rome reconstructs the sacred sense of the church dome with a 6-meter-high marble colonnade and double spiral staircase
Versace	Medusa sea monster, leopard print	Yellow	Medusa Avatar	The collision of traditional luxury and futuristic feel at Taipei 101 store

5. CONCLUSION

Through the comparative study of the above four luxury brands, we can see that today's luxury brands have begun to use sexy elements as their product selling points to gain competitiveness. Their use of sexy elements is also extremely extreme, starting from the brand's visual image, including classic design elements in the brand's visual symbols, the main colors of the brand and products, iconic brand symbols, to the decoration and display of product sales stores, all consistently spreading the brand's sexy style. This study theoretically identified the dimensions of brand sexiness in the luxury goods industry and explored the similarities and differences in sexiness styles among different brands. This enriches the theory of sexiness style marketing and provides good practical reference for luxury goods industry enterprises and practitioners.

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