

Luxury and Ignorance: From 'Savoir-Faire' to the Unknown

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ABSTRACT The label ‘luxury’ evokes vague and often unknown qualities that give a good or service the capacity to command a substantial price premium. Hence, in this article, I argue, firstly, that a core component of luxury is ignorance, or the unknown. To support this argument a systematic examination of the place of ignorance in the promotion and consumption of luxury goods and services is provided. In this way, a typology of ignorance of relevance to luxury is developed. Secondly, I argue that ignorance is deployed by both promoters and consumers in their separate and collaborative engagements with luxury. To illustrate this, ignorance in the promotion of luxury is analysed through the case of Louis Vuitton’s ‘Savoir-Faire’ print advertising campaign. Bringing to light the interactions between luxury and ignorance provides insights into the unknowns that constitute an inherent element in all that is classified as luxury.

Keywords: Luxury; Knowing; Ignorance; Unknown; Louis Vuitton.

Introduction

Knowledge of luxury in terms of the expertise required for the production of luxury artefacts and for the management of luxury brands has grown rapidly in the past decade.¹ Yet, despite luxury often being marketed through the promotion of mystery and ambiguous references to undefined but somehow exclusive qualities, the role of ignorance in relation to luxury remains under-researched. To address this oversight, this article provides a systematic exploration of ignorance in the promotion and consumption of luxury. I argue, firstly, that a core component of luxury is ignorance, or the unknown; and, secondly, that ignorance is deployed by both promoters and consumers in their separate and collaborative engagements with luxury.

Following a brief examination of the contemporary meaning of luxury, this article adopts a critical luxury studies approach to delineate the central role of ignorance in the fields of luxury promotion and consumption.² This is achieved through the application of a typology of ignorance, recently advanced in the field of organizational studies.³ In so doing, an original conceptual contribution to an understanding of the relationship between luxury and ignorance is offered in the form of a typology of ignorance of relevance to the promotion and consumption of luxury goods and services. Subsequently, Louis Vuitton’s ‘Savoir-Faire’ advertising campaign is analysed to illustrate the role of ignorance in both the promotion and consumption of luxury. Understanding the role of ignorance in the field of luxury will give those engaged in its

promotion and consumption a deeper appreciation of the unknowns that constitute an inherent element in all that is classified as luxury.

Knowing Luxury

Luxury is related to excessive quantity and viewed as superfluous, unnecessary, or an indulgence. It is often associated with expensive goods and services of the highest quality. In his highly influential book, *The Idea of Luxury*, Christopher J. Berry provides a detailed exploration of luxury and defines it as the opposite of necessity, in that it is distinct from basic needs, which are non-intentional and universal.⁴ For Berry, then, luxury is the object of wants and desires. Yet, he goes on to argue that luxuries must be the object of socially recognized desire. What is clear from Berry's analysis is that luxury cannot be objectively defined because it depends on cultural, social, and individual meanings. Consequently, not all unnecessary goods or services are luxuries to everyone. Goods which may be regarded as socially non-necessary may be 'needed' by an individual either in a specific instrumental sense or because they are the object of intense desire (i.e. psychologically necessary) or intense identification (e.g. cherished objects). Moreover, the meaning of luxury varies through time and space, and across economic, social, and cultural contexts. For the purposes of this article, luxury is viewed from the perspective of an individual in a contemporary advanced market.

In such markets, the term 'luxury' is used to describe and promote all manner of goods and services from pastries, cakes and cat food to student accommodation, hotels, and housing developments (Figure 1). Marketers stimulate what Marcuse referred to as false needs⁵ in consumers based on the promise of some ephemeral quality labelled 'luxury'.⁶ From the perspective of a producer or marketer the label 'luxury' offers an opportunity to increase revenue by securing a larger market share through product differentiation and differential pricing strategies.

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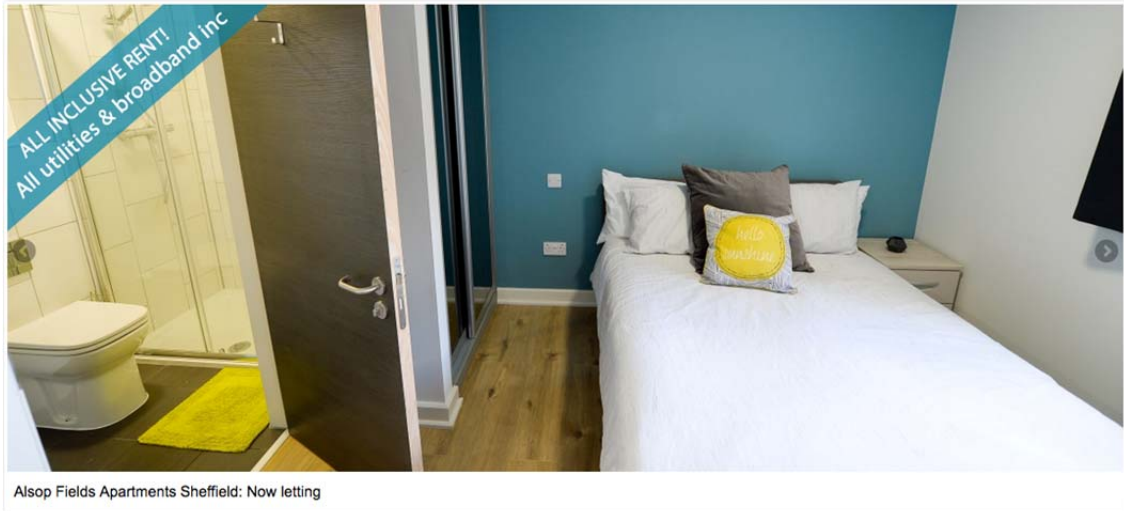


Figure 1
Accommodation presented as 'Luxury Student Accommodation'.⁷

In this context, Roberts and Armitage ask ‘how do we recognise luxury goods and services? How do we *know* luxury? How do we distinguish it from standard or premium goods and services?’⁸ Giving Andrex® Touch of Luxury toilet paper as an illustrative example, Roberts and Armitage question whether the addition of the label ‘luxury’ is sufficient to transform a product or service into a luxury.⁹ According to the marketing information, the Shea Butter ‘enriched sheets, scented inner core and luxurious dark brown packaging are designed to give you a fabulous feeling.’¹⁰ Yet, as Roberts and Armitage ask, does the feeling thus induced really qualify the toilet paper as a luxury good?¹¹ Given the high level of ambiguity and uncertainty in relation to what luxury is, knowing luxury is contested.

According to Roberts and Armitage consumers come to ‘know’ luxury in two key ways.¹² Firstly, through accepting the opinion of luxury ‘experts’ and all the codified knowledge that provides support for the legitimacy of luxury, including knowledge available in print and online media. The very logos adopted by the luxury brand companies encapsulate in codified form the status of the goods and services to which they are attached. Moreover, consumers yield to the authority of the companies and their retail staff – who ‘really’ know the products and their ‘authentic’ luxury qualities. Consumers put their trust in the reputations of brand names. It is for this reason that luxury goods and services normally have a strong heritage narrative that can be imparted to potential customers together with luxury characteristics including quality, rarity, and timelessness. Generally, there is no need to provide all the technical details; rather, the heritage story itself is what is important, because it speaks to the emotions of consumers and feeds their desire to possess the luxury good or service in order to become part of an ongoing story. Nevertheless, in some areas, like segments of the car or watch markets, technical detail can be a vital means of verifying luxury status.

Secondly, Roberts and Armitage point to knowing luxury in a tacit manner through the acquisition of craft skills and/or through the socio-cultural knowledge gained through the habitus of a life lived in luxurious surroundings.¹³ The difficulty of gaining such knowledge, which requires an appreciation of the materials and techniques involved in the production process¹⁴ or the rarity of a life lived in luxury, account for the reliance on codified forms of knowing which give customers quick access to understanding the luxurious qualities of a good or service. Through a well-constructed heritage or craft narrative, a product can gain all the attributes required to become a desirable symbol of luxury to many consumers. Yet, these narratives are open to embellishment, and, consequently, do not always represent a ‘true’ rendition of the history or production of a luxury good or service. Like the meaning of luxury itself these stories are open to multiple interpretations. Even so, many consumers happily absorb and act on the codified knowledge disseminated by luxury companies through their sales forces and media outlets from television and newspapers to specialist publications, such as, *The Financial Times’* monthly magazine *How to Spend It* and *The Telegraph’s* bi-annual magazine and website *Telegraph Luxury*. The tacit elements of knowing luxury are time consuming to acquire because they require a process of learning in practice. Consequently, many consumers remain ignorant of the tacit dimensions of luxury. It is, therefore, necessary to recognize the role of ignorance and the unknown in the field of luxury.

Ignorance

Prior to exploring how ignorance is of relevance to luxury, it is necessary to consider briefly, what the term ignorance means. Ignorance has attracted much attention over the last 10 years, such that we can now talk about a field of ignorance studies.¹⁵ Drawing on Roberts' study of organizational ignorance,¹⁶ a typology of ignorance is outlined below. This typology provides a lens through which to analyse the interaction between luxury and ignorance.

Ignorance is usually defined as a lack of knowledge or information.¹⁷ Given that knowledge is often defined as 'justified true belief', ignorance can be viewed as the absence or distortion of justified true belief. One might then argue that ignorance is the absence of empirically valid knowledge. However, as Smithson notes, the adoption of this approach requires established criteria for absolute knowledge or truth, yet knowledge may be socially constructed, so truth, and the absence of truth, depends on a given perspective or system of belief.¹⁸ Hence, like knowledge, ignorance may be socially constructed.

Related to ignorance is the condition of being ignorant, that is, of lacking knowledge. To be ignorant is also associated with being rude, discourteous, or stupid. A person with no knowledge may be referred to as an ignoramus. Moreover, to ignore refers to a failure or refusal to notice something or someone.

Of course, any attempt to gain an appreciation of ignorance is dependent on knowledge of its existence. Ignorance may take the form of an *unknown unknown* or a *known unknown*.¹⁹ Ignorance, as *unknown unknowns*, refers to a total absence of knowledge, such that we are not aware of our ignorance. *Unknown unknowns* are completely beyond anticipation, and, as Gross notes, the revelation of such ignorance can be a source of surprise.²⁰ Even so, experience tells us that in the future some unknown unknowns will be revealed. Ignorance, as *known unknowns*, denotes knowledge of what is known about the limits of knowledge; there are certain things that we know that we do not know. Both unknown unknowns and known unknowns derive from an absence of knowledge.

In addition, ignorance can result from ignorance about knowledge, which gives rise to *knowable known unknowns*, *unknown knowns* and *errors*. A *knowable known unknown*, which Congleton calls rational ignorance,²¹ differs from a known unknown in that it is knowable given sufficient motivation and resources to acquire it. For instance, we may know that we have no knowledge of a foreign language, in the sense that it is a known unknown to us, but, if we have the time and sufficient motivation, we could learn the language and, in so doing, convert a knowable known unknown into a known. *Unknown knowns* refer to things that we do not know that we know.²² They include the tacit knowledge that individuals are not always aware that they possess.²³ Unknown knowns denote ignorance of existing knowledge rather than ignorance itself. Such ignorance does not prevent the use of the unknown knowledge because often its use is automatic, in the sense that we may be able to do something, like ride a bicycle, but not be able to fully articulate how we do it. *Errors* arise from distortion, founded on confusion or inaccuracy, or incompleteness, based on uncertainty or absence.²⁴ Errors can occur because of the limited cognitive capacity of

humans.²⁵ We are not able to process all the information available to make a decision given a restricted timeframe.

A further type of ignorance emerges from the refusal to recognize knowledge or its unconscious suppression; this includes *taboos* and *denials*.²⁶ A *taboo* is socially constructed ignorance in the form of a social prohibition or a ban on certain knowledge, perhaps because it is viewed as dangerous or polluting. For instance, due to state censorship, 28 years after the 1989 student led protests and subsequent massacre in Tiananmen Square, knowledge of the event remains largely a taboo in mainland China.²⁷ *Denials* represent the ignoring or repressing of knowledge that is too painful to know or that does not fit with one's current understandings of the world. Knowledge that does not correspond with one's existing cognitive frameworks creates a degree of dissonance, which can challenge understanding.²⁸ Tolerating such cognitive dissonance through denial is a common response and is sometimes referred to as wilful ignorance or wilful blindness.²⁹ The loss of a treasured item or a loved one can initially evoke such ignorance.

Ignorance also arises from the conscious suppression of knowledge through *secrecy* either by individuals or by organizations.³⁰ Ignorance arises for individuals and organizations when they are subject to the secrecy of others. Certain types of secrets may be socially sanctioned, such as those arising from the individual's right to privacy. Hence, ignorance can also be identified with *privacy* - the ability of an individual or group of individuals to restrict access to, or information about, themselves. Unlike secrecy, privacy is multilateral in nature and it is enshrined in the laws of many countries and in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Existing and evolving social and cultural practices together with information and communication technologies also determine patterns of privacy. For instance, the disclosure of private information about celebrities by members of social media sites like *Twitter* and *Facebook* is currently testing the enforcement of privacy laws.

From this brief overview of ignorance, it is evident that there are three key sources of ignorance: the absence of knowledge; ignorance about existing knowledge; and, ignorance arising from the suppression of knowledge. As Figure 2 shows, each source is associated with particular types of ignorance. These types of ignorance can exist at various level from the individual to the organization and beyond to society. The typology of ignorance outlined here is employed in the next section to analyse ignorance from the perspectives of those promoting and consuming luxury.

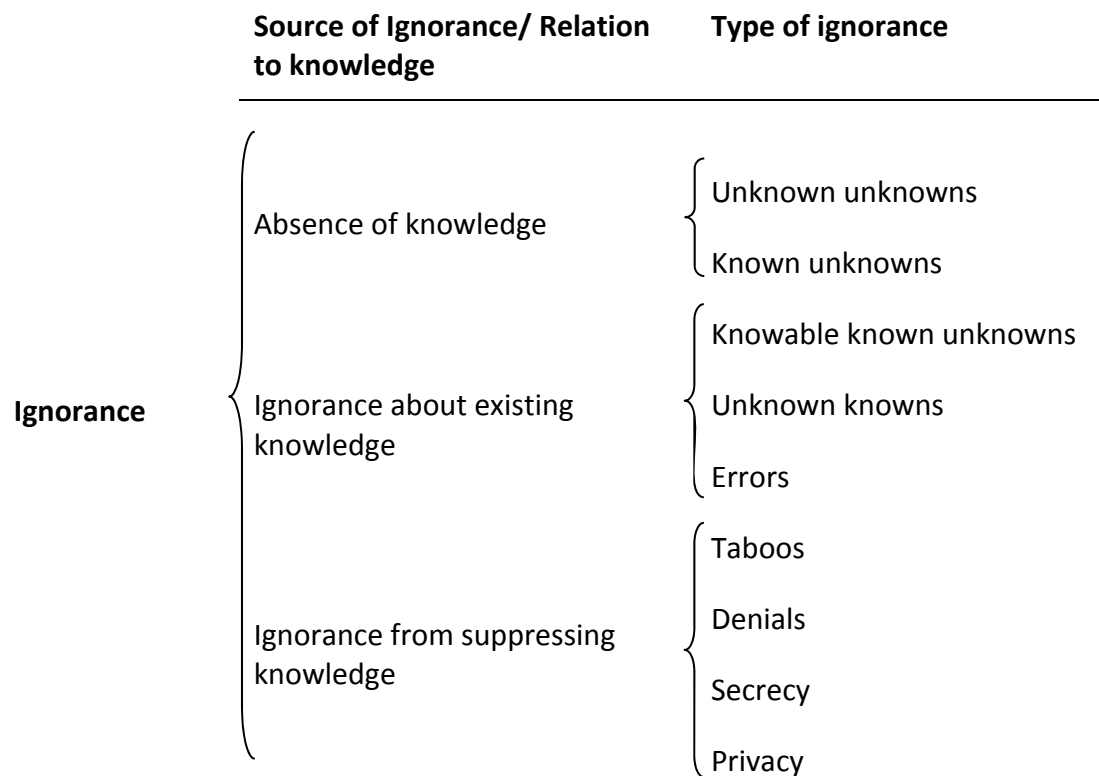


Figure 2
Sources and Types of Ignorance³¹

Luxury and Ignorance

The promotion of luxury goods and services is subtler than that found in traditional sectors. Passive advertising, involving merely the distribution of information to customers, is rarely used by luxury companies, which prefer to actively engage their customers. According to Kapferer and Bastien luxury communication tends to occur in four key ways: firstly, by communicating with existing clients to induct them into the brand family; secondly, through whisper communications, which involves VIP events; third, through song communication, which involve Public Relations (PR), larger events, shop window displays and targeted digital methods; and, fourth, with small amounts of highly impactful advertising.³² By focusing on communication methods such as restricted events, PR, sponsorship of cultural and charity events, luxury companies create and maintain a mystery around their goods and services, because they are not directly promoting their products but rather associating their brand with certain types of successful people, or particular social and cultural events. The development of such associations enhances the luxury brand's identity. Buying the luxury allows customers to align their identity with that of the luxury brand and the people and activities associated with it. Indeed, consumers buy into an idea of a luxury brand community.

Luxury brand companies may be exposed to *unknown unknowns* when significant changes occur in the field of marketing. So, for instance, the rapid growth of social media and its use in the promotion of goods and services is something that has taken many luxury companies by surprise in the past decade. As a result of denying the significance of such change, many luxury companies have been slow to exploit the full potential of this new promotional channel.

The promotion of luxury can exploit the consumers' exposure to *unknown unknowns* by playing on potential risks, uncertainties and insecurities to which they are exposed. Moreover, luxury consumers may have *unknown unknown* desires that are triggered by the promotional activities of luxury brands. The exposure of unknown unknowns is unexpected and can create surprise for luxury consumers. The development of new goods and services can satisfy desires that consumers had previously never contemplated.

How consumers will react to the promotional activities of luxury brand companies is a *known unknown* in the sense that it is known that they will react in some way but the detail is unknown. Indeed, companies may employ specialist marketing consultants to undertake market research to help anticipate their consumer's reactions in an effort to minimize this type of known unknown. Similarly, consumers may be aware of their ignorance of certain aspects of luxury, that is, they are aware of *known unknowns*. Yet, rather than seeking to overcome such ignorance, consumers may rely on luxury companies to provide evidence of, for instance, the authenticity of luxury goods and services. Known unknowns may be overcome with research on the part of the company or the individual. However, there is no guarantee that such effort will make a known unknown known. Hence, there is a difference between known unknowns and *knowable known unknowns*.

Ignorance in the form of *knowable known unknowns* can be overcome by luxury companies through, for example, buying-in knowledge when necessary to supplement their own from consultants and business service companies. Luxury companies must make choices about the nature of the knowledge they acquire and what they can manage without. Similarly, consumers of luxury can participate in educational

programmes and private study to overcome the knowable known unknowns of particular luxuries. However, consumers are often time poor and therefore seek to buy the services of experts rather than specialize themselves. So, for instance, rather than undertaking a programme of study on fine wine an individual may prefer to employ the services of a sommelier. It would be difficult for a consumer to have knowledge about every aspect of every luxury good or service that they consume. We are all subject to bounded rationality and have limited cognitive capacities.³³ Consequently, we must make choices about what knowledge to acquire and process and what knowledge to ignore. Therefore, consumers remain ignorant of some aspects of luxury, but this does not necessarily diminish their ability to gain satisfaction from their luxury consumption. For example, to appreciate the aesthetic appeal of a fine timepiece it is not necessary to fully understand the mechanics that ensure accuracy and longevity. Rather, most consumers are happy to put their trust in a reputable luxury brand, safe in the assumed knowledge that the product is of the standard that can be expected of the luxury brand.

Luxury companies may seek to deploy *unknown knowns*. Luxury goods and services have certain qualities that are not necessarily explicitly articulated in promotional activity, like heritage and craft stories. In fact, the unknown aspect of a luxury may be accentuated because it offers scope for multiple interpretations and therefore a wide market. Moreover, ignorance in the form of *unknown knowns* may underpin a consumer's desire for a luxury good or service. Customers desire something because they feel or believe that it will give them some form of satisfaction. However, consumers are not always able to articulate how the product will fulfil their expectations. Nevertheless, their feelings or beliefs may be based on tacit knowledge, including, for instance, an implicit understanding of what gives them personal happiness or fulfilment. Indeed, consumers of luxury may use tacit knowledge that they are unaware of when making a purchase. A consumer may draw on a highly developed aesthetic sensibility, an intuition or eye for quality and style, without being aware of the tacit knowledge upon which such capacities depend.

For companies, ignorance in the form of *errors* occur when they make mistakes due to incomplete information, perhaps based on a lack of due diligence. This can occur when developing promotional relationships with entertainment or sports celebrities who, unknown to the company, are engaged in activities that are not aligned with the image the luxury brand wishes to project. If, and when, the information comes to light it may be potentially damaging for the brand. So, for instance, when the tennis player Maria Sharapova tested positive for a prohibited substance in 2016 a number of her luxury brand sponsors, including Porsche, suspended their promotional activities with her in order to avoid the potential damage that a continued association might have on the luxury brand's reputation.³⁴ For consumers, ignorance in the form of *errors* may be revealed when they purchase something yet find that it has no value to them shortly thereafter. Such errors can occur because of the false needs created by exposure to the promotional activities of luxury companies which stimulate in consumers false desires for luxury goods and services.³⁵ Additionally, individuals are unable to fully process all the information they have about themselves, certain things remain unknown or only subconsciously known. Therefore, individuals are prone to make mistakes about their wants and desires.

Ignorance in the form of *taboos* may influence the promotion and consumption of luxury in various ways. At a general level, ostentatious displays of wealth may be taboo and therefore impact on the way luxury is promoted, perhaps, for instance, leading to an emphasis on greater sustainability and longevity than non-luxury alternatives. The types of luxuries consumed, can also be influenced by such a taboo, leading to discreet or stealth luxury consumption.³⁶ A further example of a taboo in the promotion of high-end luxury goods and services relates to the price tag. While for most goods and services displaying a price tag is the norm, for high-end luxury displaying price would be regarded as rather vulgar. Furthermore, taboos may reveal themselves in preferences for certain colours rather than others,³⁷ certain styles of dress, and so on. Some taboos derive from cultural or religious norms. For instance, luxury wines and spirits, like all alcoholic beverages, are taboo in Islamic states, although this does not prevent their discreet consumption in such countries.

Ignorance in the form of *denial* for a luxury company might involve the refusal to recognize the damage to its image and reputation of certain business activities, not only in relation to sourcing materials and production methods but also in terms of the overzealous protection of intellectual property rights (IPR). For instance, in 2008 Louis Vuitton sued the Danish artist Nadia Plesner following her inclusion of an image of a Louis Vuitton style bag in her art work which was printed on t-shirts to raise funds for the organization *Divest for Darfur*. Although Louis Vuitton initially won the case, Plesner continued to use the image in her art, and, in 2011 the case was overturned.³⁸ Louis Vuitton's pursuit of the IPR infringement case generated negative publicity for a company at the heart of the luxury conglomerate LVMH, which seeks to support 'culture, youth and humanitarian action'.³⁹ In pursuing this IPR case, Louis Vuitton ignored the negative impact that such action would stimulate.

In addition, the promotion of luxury as exclusive seeks to deny the reality that luxury goods and services are often mass produced and can be purchased at outlets like the *Chic Outlet Shopping*® Villages, which offer a collection of luxury brand outlets in 'village' settings with discounts of up to 60% on their previous seasons' collections.⁴⁰ Similarly, the promotion of European luxury through an emphasis on European production can be evidence of companies engaging in *denial* and/or *secrecy*. For while some luxury companies are open about the production of their goods in low cost countries, like Hermès, which acknowledges its use of low cost labour in Mauritius to hem scarves by hand, others deny the use of low cost labour from the Far East.⁴¹ Thomas documents the practice of Italian luxury leather goods produced by Chinese owned factories employing illegal Chinese labourers in Italian towns such as Prato with its long history of producing leather goods for brands like Gucci and Prada.⁴² Clearly, this is not the story that luxury companies wish to promote. Rather, they promote the idea of leather goods produced by European crafts people working in small European workshops. Nevertheless, in recent years, luxury companies like Prada have begun to be more open about their global production, indeed, even making an asset of production in a variety of locations.⁴³

For consumers *denial* reveals itself in the form of wilful ignorance regarding how luxury goods and services are produced. Consumers' desire for the product allows them to ignore the negative side of luxury goods produced through outsourcing to contractors in low cost locations, where workers are subjected to sweatshop conditions with poorly regulated health and safety practices. Also, consumers ignore

the dark side of luxuries, for example, the negative impact of the sourcing of 'blood diamonds' and 'conflict minerals'.⁴⁴

Ignorance in the form of *secrecy* can be an important element in the promotion of luxury. Companies may circulate limited information about a new good or service with the aim of stimulating interest in its launch as well as to reinforce the exclusivity of the luxury. Here, secrecy is deployed to stimulate interest. Moreover, secrecy ahead of a launch may be vital to protect the company's intellectual property. Secrecy entails privacy, which may be a particular selling point of certain luxury services. In particular, security, health, accountancy, tax and legal service providers need to offer privacy. In fact, privacy may be a component of any good or service directed to Ultra High Net Worth (UHNW) individuals.⁴⁵

Additionally, *secrecy* can be an important requirement for the satisfactory consumption of luxury. For instance, anonymous buyers of fine art choose to extend their collections through private acquisitions or telephone bids at auctions and to enjoy their purchases in secret locations. Furthermore, many UHNW individuals live on private estates hidden from the public eye and enjoy holidays on exclusive island retreats. Ignorance in the form of *secrecy* and *privacy* are intimately connected for many consumers of luxury. While conspicuous consumption is associated with some sections of the luxury market, for other sections consumption involves privacy in the form of, for instance, private jets and yachts. Escaping from the public gaze can in itself be a luxury, yet the secrecy and privacy of UHNW individuals necessitates the perpetuation of ignorance among other sections of society. For example, the leaking of the Panama Papers in 2016 concerning the work of the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca revealed the secret financial arrangements of UHNW individuals including the extensive use of shell corporations for reasons of privacy.⁴⁶ These sort of arrangements are also used to hide the illegal and morally questionable activities of the unscrupulous and criminals engaged in activities such as fraud, tax evasion, and the avoidance of international sanctions. More recently the leaked Paradise Papers revealed the formerly secret arrangements made by the offshore legal services provider Appleby for wealthy clients and corporations to invest in tax havens.⁴⁷ The privacy afforded the clients of companies like Mossack Fonseca and Appleby requires secrecy and such secrecy may be deployed for both legal and illegal activities. The privacy of those with the resources necessary to employ such legal advisors creates ignorance for others concerning the channelling of investments through tax havens to avoid or minimize tax liabilities.

Table 1 Types of Ignorance of Relevance to Luxury Promotion and Consumption

Type of ignorance	Promotion	Consumption
Unknown unknowns	For companies, exposure to unknown unknowns becomes evident when there are changes in the environment that give rise to surprise. For many companies, the rapid growth in social media revealed an unknown unknown and took many by surprise.	Consumers may have unknown unknown desires that are triggered by the promotional activities of luxury promoters.
Known unknowns	Known unknowns exist in relation to how customers will react to promotional activity. A known incompleteness of knowledge can lead to the outsourcing of exposure to such ignorance through the employment of specialist marketing consultancy firms, or can direct the development of such skills internally. However, there is no guarantee that a known unknown can become known.	Consumers may be aware of their ignorance of certain aspects of luxury. Therefore, they look to luxury companies to provide evidence of authenticity. Heritage and craft stories and indicators of quality are employed by consumers as a means to validate the luxury status of goods and services, and thereby overcome their known unknowns.
Knowable known unknowns	Knowledge that is not central to the company's promotional activity may remain knowable known unknowns. Where such knowledge is important for promotional activity it may be developed through investment in relevant staff or gained through outsourcing activity, such as advertising and legal service.	There is knowledge that consumers could develop about luxury, e.g. through the participation in educational programmes. However, consumers are often time poor and therefore buy the services of experts or rely on promotional information rather than develop specialist knowledge themselves.
Unknown knowns	Luxury goods and services have certain qualities that are not necessarily explicitly articulated in promotional activity. This element may feature in promotional activity because the mystery that it evokes opens up multiple interpretations and therefore helps to ensure that a good or service is attractive to a wide market.	A consumers' desires may be underpinned by unknown knowns. Customers desire something because they believe that it will give them pleasure but they don't know how it will do this. Feelings may be difficult to articulate but they can be based on some form of tacit knowledge.
Errors	May be evident in the use of inappropriate promotional activity for luxury goods and services. The use of celebrity endorsements may be an error if information about their transgressions comes to light. Companies are unable to process the full information on every aspect of their decision making and therefore errors will occur.	Consumers may purchase something and find that it has no value to them after the initial purchase. In such cases, their purchasing decision may have been based on incomplete information or an inability to process all the relevant information.
Taboos	Taboos exist in relation to luxury promotion. For instance, in some sectors the display of a price tag would be a taboo.	Consumers cannot contemplate the purchase of certain things because of cultural or social taboos. In the field of luxury this might be connected to excessive displays of wealth in some countries/cultures.
Denials	The refusal to recognize when the company's activity is ineffective or having a negative impact. Or, overlooking the reality of production conditions in promotional activity.	Denying the reality behind the production of luxury goods and services. For instance, industrial accidents, sweatshop working conditions, blood diamonds, and environmental damage.
Secrecy	Secrecy may be used in promotional activity to encourage interest in a new product or service. An element of mystery is important for many luxury goods and services – this requires a degree of holding back information.	Purchase and consumption of luxury may occur in secret. For instance, anonymous buyers of fine art, island retreats, private estates etc.
Privacy	Promotion may involve confidential communication with clients. For instance, in the provision of information about new financial services to UHNW individuals.	Much luxury consumption involves privacy, for instance, private jets and yachts.

As this section has revealed the various types of ignorance identified in the previous section and summarized in Table 1 are relevant to luxury promotion and consumption. Clearly ignorance is an integral part of luxury. To elaborate further on how ignorance is portrayed as an integral element of luxury goods, the next section focuses on the print advertising campaign titled 'Savoir-Faire' launched by Louis Vuitton in 2010.

From 'Savoir-Faire' to the Unknown

The case of Louis Vuitton's 2010 advertising campaign titled 'Savoir-Faire', which can be translated as expertise, know-how, or knowledge, is an excellent example of the deployment of the unknown in the promotion of luxury. The campaign produced by Ogilvy & Mather, Paris, consisted of a series of print advertisements depicting, in a Vermeer inspired manner, individuals hand 'crafting' leather goods in a highly stylized and sanitized context. No sign of the dust and clutter of the workshop, but rather the cleanliness of an environment staged in a photographic studio; no sign on the 'crafts person' of hands worn and shaped by years of producing leather goods, but rather the delicate hands of carefully selected youthful models. Each image was accompanied by texts that highlighted the individual attention to detail bestowed on the product at hand. One advertisement showed a woman handcrafting folds in a wallet, a second showed a woman with needle, thread and beeswax who appeared to be hand stitching the handle of a handbag, and, a third showed a man painting the sole of a shoe. The first two of these advertisements were banned by the U.K.'s Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) because they could have misled consumers into thinking that the Louis Vuitton products on display were handmade, when machines were also used in their production.⁴⁸ In response to the UK ASA's decision, Louis Vuitton argued that the advertisements paid 'homage to the craftsmanship' of its employees rather than provided an accurate depiction of the manufacturing process.⁴⁹

In relation to ignorance, it is not so much the deceit of the images employed to suggest handcrafted goods that is of interest but rather the deployment of ignorance or the unknown in the texts accompanying the three images. So, for instance, in the first advertisement (Figure 3) the text titled 'The Young Woman and the Tiny Folds' states:

In everything from Louis Vuitton, there are elements that cannot be fully explained. What secret little gestures do our craftsmen discretely pass on? How do we blend innate skill and inherent prowess? Or how can five tiny folds lengthen the life of a wallet? Let's allow these mysteries to hang in the air. Time will provide the answers. (Emphasis added).



THE YOUNG WOMAN AND THE TINY FOLDS

In everything from Louis Vuitton, there are elements that cannot be fully explained. What secret little gestures do our craftsmen discreetly pass on? How do we blend innate skill and inherent prowess? Or how can five tiny folds lengthen the life of a wallet? Let's allow these mysteries to hang in the air. Time will provide the answers.

LOUIS VUITTON

Figure 3
Louis Vuitton print advertisement from 2010.⁵⁰

In this text, we can see ignorance deployed in the form of the unexplained, secret gestures, and mysteries that only time will reveal. In the second advertisement, the text is titled 'The Seamstress with Linen Thread and Beeswax'. Again, the unknown is leveraged as a quality inherent in the luxury product:

A needle, linen thread, beeswax and infinite patience protect each overstitch from humidity and the passage of time. One could say that a Louis Vuitton bag is a collection of details. But with so much attention lavished on every one, should we only call them details? (Emphasis added).

Here infinite patience is evoked as a key ingredient, yet what does this mean? Anything with infinite qualities is impossible to measure or calculate and so it becomes unknowable. Furthermore, the text elevates the 'details' to something mysterious and unknown. Finally, the text of the third advertisement is titled 'The Craftsman with his Brush':

In a Louis Vuitton shoe there is, of course, quality you can see: superb materials, an impeccable finish and perfect proportions. But other qualities remain unseen: the craftsman's skill and the simple elegance of his gestures, repeated so often and precisely. Not forgetting the final touch: a coat of dark paint to protect the sole and enhance the beauty of every step. (Emphasis added).

Here, we are told that there are certain 'unseen qualities' in Louis Vuitton shoes that derive from the craftsman's skill. Given that these skills are 'unseen', they cannot be known, and this unknowable quality is actively promoted in the advertisement.

In Louis Vuitton's 'Savoir-Faire' advertising campaign, it is the unexplained, secret, mysterious, infinite, 'details' and 'unseen qualities' that are emphasized. Ironically, in an advertising campaign titled 'knowledge' it is the unknowns that are highlighted as of central significance to the products rather than the knowledge that goes into crafting the wallet, bag and shoes.

Through the injection of ambiguity into promotional campaigns, the company appeals to a wide range of potential customers who interpret the communication in their own idiosyncratic fashion. The promotion of vague nebulous qualities allows for multiple interpretations by customers. In this way, the communication strategies of luxury companies involve providing only minimal hard information; the rest is suggestive and designed to stimulate positive emotions that consumers can take up and make their own. Unknowns are a key attraction of luxury because they allow the consumer to use their own imagination to make a product their own by producing an individualized interpretation of its ambiguous features. Each consumer can interpret the 'mysteries' evoked by the incomplete information provided in their own distinctive way, giving luxuries a very personal and idiosyncratic meaning. Consumers happily buy-in to an illusion, which they co-create in collaboration with the luxury company.

By playing on the ephemeral, vague and ambiguous aspects of their products, in promotional activities such as the Louis Vuitton advertisements considered above, luxury companies create ignorance and employ it in a strategic manner to generate demand for their products. It would however, be naive to think that all consumers accept the image of the crafts person as authentic, rather it is the ambiguity of the language that affords the multiple interpretations that attracts consumers who are seeking fulfilment through the purchase of something unique and individualized. In some sense, consumers collude with luxury companies in the construction of an illusion of luxury. In this way, a product that is produced in large quantities, even mass-produced under factory conditions, can gain the status of what Lucien Karpik refers to as a singularity.⁵¹ For Karpik, singular products are multidimensional, uncertain and incommensurable and their markets are opaque with competition based on quality rather than price.⁵² Consequently, through leveraging the unknown, luxury companies in collaboration with consumers elevate the price of luxury goods and services from one based on cost plus mark-up to one that reflects the difficulty of valuing the qualities of the unique.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although the market for luxury is growing rapidly, the nature of luxury remains poorly appreciated. By taking an ignorance perspective on luxury, this article has highlighted important qualities of luxury goods and services. The unknown is a core component of luxury goods and services for many consumers. Because holding and evaluating knowledge of every detail of a range of luxury goods and services is beyond the cognitive capacities of most individuals, luxury consumers rely on the authority and reputation of luxury companies to inform their purchasing decisions. But, as we have seen, ignorance is not merely confined to consumers. Luxury companies are both exposed to ignorance and they employ ignorance. For instance, through the deployment of promotional activities that enhance mystery and ambiguity, luxury companies ensure that they appeal to the widest audience. The promotion of luxury employs ignorance to present qualities that are open to multiple interpretations. Consumers are left to translate the vague and often ephemeral characteristics of luxuries offered to them in promotional activities. Hence, by bringing to bear their own desires and imagination consumers are able to identify the potentially unique sources of satisfaction offered through the seemingly luxurious exclusive goods and services to which they are exposed.

Understanding the role of ignorance in the promotion and consumption of luxury offers valuable insights into the meaning of luxury and luxury brands. Through an application of a typology of ignorance, this article has begun to uncover the role of ignorance in the promotion and consumption of luxury. The article offers an original conceptual contribution to understandings of the relationship between contemporary luxury and ignorance through a systematic examination of the place of ignorance in the promotion and consumption of luxury goods and services. The typology of ignorance of relevance to luxury presented in this article captures the role of the unknown in key areas of luxury promotion and consumption. As such, it offers valuable insights for luxury companies and consumers.

Evidently, ignorance warrants further consideration among scholars, practitioners, and individuals engaged with luxury. The prevalence of the unknown in both the promotion and consumption of luxury suggests that the luxury sector offers a potentially fruitful context in which to study the unknown. For practitioners, acknowledging the potential value of ignorance in relation to luxury paves the way for its active management. An awareness of the various types of ignorance provides the first step towards the development of techniques to manage the unknown to maximize brand value. For consumers, an awareness of how their own ignorance may be manipulated or exploited by luxury companies allows them to strengthen their understanding of their relationship with suppliers of luxury. While there are many sophisticated consumers of luxury goods and services, the rapid growth in both national and international markets in recent decades has resulted in a growing number of new customers who rely heavily on luxury companies' guidance regarding the standing of various luxury goods and services. However, it is also important to recognize that consumers are also active in sustaining ignorance in the field of luxury not only because they may, for instance, deny the mass production techniques used to produce goods presented as handcrafted but also because they desire the unknown, mysterious qualities evoked by luxury and its promoters. In some instances, consumers collude with promoters in the perpetuation of the unknown qualities of luxury because it can satisfy their own desire to possess unique items. The extent to which producers and consumers of luxury knowingly engage individually and in collaboration with the unknown is an avenue for further investigation. Nevertheless, the first step towards developing a deeper appreciation of luxury and the unknown is to recognize our ignorance, which, in the Socratic tradition, is a form of wisdom – a form of wisdom that is surely of value to all involved in the luxury sector.

Notes

1. See for instance: Tungate, *Luxury World*; Ricca and Robins, *Meta-Luxury*; Hoffmann and Coste-Maniere, *Global Luxury Trends*; Kapferer and Bastien, *The Luxury Strategy*; and, Chevalier and Mazzalovo, *Luxury Brand Management*.
2. Armitage and Roberts, *Critical Luxury Studies*.
3. Roberts, "Organizational Ignorance."
4. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*.
5. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*.
6. Armitage and Roberts, "Luxury New Media."
7. Internet screen grab from <https://www.westone-alsopfields.com/Default.aspx> accessed 09/12/2017.
8. Roberts and Armitage, "Knowing Luxury." 33.
9. Ibid., 33.
10. Description available at: <http://www.waitrose.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductView-10317-10001-61019-Andrex+shea+butter+toilet+tissue+%289+per+pack%29.html?storeId=10317#.U24MBVehzaY> (accessed 8th December 2017).
11. Roberts and Armitage, "Knowing Luxury".
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
- 14 Ricca and Robins, *Meta Luxury*.
15. See for instance: Gross, *Ignorance and Surprise*; Gross and McGoey, eds. *Handbook of Ignorance Studies*; McGoey, ed. *An Introduction to the Sociology of Ignorance*; Roberts and Armitage, "The Ignorance Economy"; and, Roberts, "Organizational Ignorance".
16. Roberts, "Organizational Ignorance."
17. *Oxford Dictionary of English*.
18. Smithson, *Ignorance and Uncertainty*.
19. Gross, *Ignorance and Surprise*; Proctor, "Agnotology: A Missing Term"; Witte et al., "Lessons Learned from Ignorance: The Curriculum on Medical (and Other) Ignorance".
20. Gross, *Ignorance and Surprise*.
21. Congleton, "Rational ignorance, rational voter expectations, and public policy: A discrete informational foundation for fiscal illusion".
22. Witte et al., "Lessons Learned from Ignorance: The Curriculum on Medical (and Other) Ignorance".
23. Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*.
24. Smithson, *Ignorance and Uncertainty*.
25. Simon, "A behavioural model of rational choice".
26. Witte et al., "Lessons Learned from Ignorance: The Curriculum on Medical (and Other) Ignorance".
27. Tatlow, "A high-proof tribute to Tiananmen's victims finds a way back to China"; and, Lim, *The People's Republic of Amnesia*.
28. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*.
29. Berry, "The way of ignorance"; and, Heffernan, *Willful Blindness*.

30. Proctor, "Agnotology: A Missing Term".
31. Roberts, *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting*, 105.
32. Kapferer and Bastien, *The Luxury Strategy*, 258-9.
33. Simon, "A behavioural model of rational choice."
34. *The Guardian*, "Maria Sharapova maintains support of major sponsors despite two-year ban."
35. Armitage and Roberts, "Luxury New Media."
36. Faiers, "Sartorial Connoisseurship, the T-shirt and the Interrogation of Luxury."
37. Faiers and Westerman Bulgarella, eds, *Colors in Fashion*.
38. The details of the case and the final judgement are available on Nadia Plesner's website: <http://www.nadiaplesner.com> (accessed 17/11/2017).
39. LVMH, *LVMH 2016 Annual Report*.
40. See: <http://www.chicoutletshopping.com/en/company/about-us> (accessed 17/11/2017).
41. Thomas, *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Lustre*.
42. Ibid.
43. Tokatli, "'Made in Italy? Who cares!' Prada's new economic geography."
44. Ayres, "The international trade in conflict minerals: coltan."
45. An ultra-high net worth (UHNW) individual is defined by Wealth-X as someone with \$30 million in assets or more (see Wealth-X, *World Ultra Wealth Report 2017*).
46. Obermaier and Obermayer, *The Panama Papers*.
47. *The Guardian*, "Paradise Papers."
48. Passariello, "U.K. Bans Two Vuitton Ads"; the designers admitted that sewing machines had been used, but said production of the bags was 'not automated' and that there were over 100 stages in the making of each bag.
49. Brownsell, "Louis Vuitton 'hand-made' campaign falls foul of ASA".
50. Internet screen grab from:
https://files1.coloribus.com/files/adsarchive/part_1393/13939105/file/louis-vuitton-louis-vuitton-original-81346.jpg accessed 09/12/2017.
51. Karpik, *Valuing the Unique*.
52. Ibid., 20.

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