Main Article:

Connoisseurship as a Substitute for User Research? The Case of the Swiss Watch Industry

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Abstract

Conventional wisdom holds that new product development is more successfully undertaken when design is user-led. An exception is the luxury goods sector, in which a common presentation of the brand is one where the customer should aspire to the vision of its designers. In such cases, the proprietor is often cast as a connoisseur, an expert in the brand's history who is intuitively able to give vision and direction. Within the Swiss luxury watch industry, heritage and the illusion of exclusivity are vital strategies in the communication of products as luxury items. Connoisseurship plays a central role in this communication, establishing the boundaries of brands whose products might otherwise appear similar. In such cases, connoisseurship is presented to the customer as superior to user research, engendering products with a sophistication which customer insights cannot provide. Nonetheless, whilst conventional user research methods play little part in the design of Swiss watches, less formal methods are employed. These are shown to also have application in non-luxury sectors too. The utilization of strategies employed by the Swiss watch industry in future scenarios of new product development is also discussed.

Suggested Citation: Sinclair, M. (2015). Connoisseurship as a substitute for user research? The case of the Swiss watch industry. *Journal of Research Practice*, *11*(2), Article M11. Retrieved from http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/515/420

1. Introduction

Historically, definitions of design within new product development have typically understood the consumer as external to the process (e.g., Holmes & Azam, 1995; Pahl & Beitz, 1996). However, in recent years, products which integrate the needs of users at the specification and design stages have increasingly been recognized as better able to address those needs, leading to greater consumer satisfaction and, ultimately, greater profitability (Design Council, 2008; Vredenburg, Mao, Smith, & Carey, 2002). Strategies such as user-centred design and co-design have emerged to systematize the integration of user needs into the design process (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). Whilst the implementation of such strategies is often criticized as misguided or ineffectual (Goodman-Deane, Langdon, & Clarkson, 2010; Steen, 2011), it is now commonplace for brands to talk of the extent to which they are customer-driven (Binder, Brandt, & Gregory, 2008).

A notable exception to this focus on satisfying the expressed wishes of consumers is the luxury goods sector, in which "classical marketing is the surest way to fail," (Bastien & Kapferer, 2009, p. 2). The aura which surrounds such products is built, in part, on luxury brands' communication of the notion that their products have innate qualities which are only appreciable by those with sufficient sophistication (Twitchell, 2002, p. 98). Asking consumers what they want is clearly inconsistent with such myths: instead a common projection is that of the proprietor or designer as connoisseur, steeped in the heritage of the brand yet effortlessly able to carry it forward.

This article presents two cases from the Swiss watch industry—Ulysse Nardin and Bell & Ross—whose brand communications deliberately and consistently present connoisseurship as a substitute for user research. It begins by discussing how the history of watch manufacturing has led to a situation in which "Swiss Made" has become synonymous with the notion of both technical quality and luxury. It then contrasts the traditional, 170-year history of Ulysse Nardin with the much shorter lineage of Bell & Ross, and shows how both draw on similar notions of the gifted auteur to establish their brand messages. The article explores how both brands successfully reconcile the marketing paradox inherent in combining the exclusivity of "craftsmanship" with the desire for growth in sales, and illustrates the role of the connoisseur in negotiating this union in ways which are meaningful to their customers.

The article then goes on to demonstrate that despite messages to the contrary, both brands do, in fact, conduct extensive user research, through informal channels such as hospitality events, through reports from authorized dealer networks, by the use of personal selling to valued customers, and through the use of limited and bespoke editions. This is in contrast to more formal user research conducted as part of a systematic and documented process, typically involving methods such as surveys, interviews, usability testing, and focus groups (Kuniavsky, 2003). Nonetheless, the article concludes that in an industry which has been superseded by more advanced, digital technologies, where innovations are incremental and where market volumes are relatively low, connoisseurship is an important strategy for demarcating the boundaries of more than 200 brands which make up the Swiss luxury watch industry. The article ends by discussing whether similar approaches might also be

relevant in markets not usually considered part of the luxury goods industry, and how such approaches might be implemented.

2. The Swiss Watchmaking Industry

Watchmaking in Switzerland first appeared in the mid-sixteenth century, initially as a response by goldsmiths to Calvinist reforms that prohibited the wearing of jewellery (Fédération de l'Industrie Horlogère Suisse FH, 2014). Unlike the English watch industry, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was driven by the demands of maritime exploration and trade (Smith, 2009), in Switzerland improvements to watch design were driven largely by fashion and taste (Glasmeier, 1991). This placed the Swiss industry in a commanding position as watches became more affordable and, through the adoption of mass production technologies at the beginning of the 1900s, Switzerland established its domination of the world watch market (Knickerbocker, 1974).

This domination continued until the 1970s, when the introduction of quartz technology, combined with integrated circuitry, decimated the Swiss industry. Competitors from the U.S., Japan, and Hong Kong were able to produce watches which were simultaneously much cheaper but also far more accurate and, in 10 years, Swiss exports fell from 40% of the world market to only 10% (Glasmeier, 1991). Factories were forced to close, and many brands were consolidated or bought out.

Throughout the 1980s and to the present day, the Swiss watch industry has undergone a remarkable transformation, on two fronts. First, SMH (Swiss Corporation for Microelectronics and Watchmaking Industries Ltd, one of the conglomerates formed by the merging of previously independent companies, renamed The Swatch Group in 1988) introduced Swatch, a precision-engineered quartz analogue watch, which once again signalled Swiss dominance of the low-cost fashion market (Norman & Verganti, 2014). Partly on the back of this success (Swatch Group owns the Breguet, Blancpain, and Omega brands, amongst others), Swiss watchmaking then aggressively marketed itself as the epitome of "fine timekeeping." The notion of Swiss-made luxury was carefully managed and assiduously protected: in order to claim "Swiss Made" at least 60% of components by value must be Swiss, and assembly and inspection must take place in Switzerland. The success of this strategy is demonstrated by the statistic that, in 2011, Switzerland manufactured only 2.6% of the world's watches by volume, yet accounted for 54% of the market by value (Deloitte, 2012).

2.1. Ulysse Nardin

While it does not have the public recognition of brands such as Rolex or Patek Phillippe among watch connoisseurs and collectors, Ulysse Nardin is regarded as one of the most innovative (Barge, 2012), having been awarded more patents than any other watchmaking company. Established in 1846, the company initially made marine chronometers before expanding to manufacture pocket and wristwatches. Patents and prizes awarded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries attest to Ulysse Nardin's reputation as the leading pocket chronometer maker (Jaquet, Chapuis, Berner, & Guye, 1970, pp. 177-179), but after World War 2 the brand's reputation diminished and it existed only as a minor player among

the Swiss manufacturers. This changed in 1983 when the company was acquired by Rolf Schnyder. In 1985 it unveiled the *Astrolabium Galileo Galilei*, which entered the Guinness Book of World Records as the most complex watch ever made (Paige & Schnyder, 1999), thus presenting the brand's vision of itself once again as a leading Swiss watchmaker. Nowadays the company is known for other innovations, particularly its perpetual calendars and jaquemarts, its "Freak" carrousel tourbillon, and the use of synthetic materials such as silicium and polycrystalline diamond within its watch movements.

2.2. Bell & Ross

Bell & Ross was founded in 1993 by Bruno Belamich and Carlos Rosillo. Initially working in partnership with German watch manufacturer Sinn, the brand is known for large, legible displays intended to replicate aircraft instrumentation.

One of the youngest of the Swiss watch brands, Bell & Ross is now part-owned by Chanel and headquartered in Paris, though manufacture and assembly is based in La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland. Unlike many other brands, including newer entrants to the market such as Urwerk and MB&F, Bell & Ross has not attempted to make a name for itself through the design of new complications. Instead it has sought to establish its reputation through association with organizations such as Recherche Assiance Intervention Dissuasion (RAID), the French counter-terrorism unit, and Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie National, the French hostage rescue unit (Hahn, 2012). In this way the company has become known as a maker of tough, reliable, and overtly masculine watches.

3. Connoisseurship and Exclusivity

Within the luxury industry, exclusivity is a vital strategy in instilling products with value. Connoisseurship plays a central role in this strategy, establishing boundaries and differences between brands whose products might otherwise appear similar. To appreciate the importance of connoisseurship in the creation of Swiss watches, it is first necessary to understand a fundamental difference between traditional approaches to product marketing and the marketing of luxury goods, namely the importance of exclusivity. Traditional marketing practice involves attempting to raise demand as high as possible, while ensuring that that demand can be met. Demand (i.e., popularity) is advertised as proof of the product's worth (Apple, 2011; Jeong & Kwon, 2012; Tucker & Zhang, 2011). Such an approach is tantamount to heresy for the luxury brand however, which continually strives to emphasize how few people have bought a particular product. Kapferer and Bastien (2009) highlight the counterintuitive nature of luxury marketing strategy: "In order to enter the luxury market, to build a successful luxury brand and to make it remain a luxury brand, one has to forget the classical marketing rules" (p. 312). An emphasis on rarity, often to the point where the customer must wait for the product to be made and delivered, is a key example of this principle.

3.1. Artificially Induced Rarity

A product's rarity, and the associated exclusivity of ownership which follows, are crucial for charging high prices (Kapferer, 2012) and maintaining the allure of the brand. Historically

such rarity resulted from the use of materials whose supply was limited—precious metals, gemstones, exotic animal skins, and so forth. More recently however, modern industrial mining methods and the farming of previously rare animals have reduced the natural scarcity of such materials. One response of the luxury industry has been to seek out even less readily available supplies—platinum and rhodium, for example, or aerospace-grade ceramics. Another has been to communicate a material's scarcity, even when such rarity is a myth (Epstein, 1982). The requirement for rarity is also at odds with the desire of luxury brands to increase sales, in particular in emerging markets such as China and Russia. As Catry (2003) makes clear, "all companies in the luxury goods market face the question of whether exclusivity, so central to luxury appeal, is inevitably diluted by increased market share" (p. 11). To resolve this apparent paradox, luxury brands have engaged in the creation of "artificially induced" rarity (Kapferer, 2012), one in which "the product is not objectively limited in supply but luxury firms give their buyers an illusion of rarity through the information they deliver" (Catry, 2003, p. 17). This communication of artificial rarity, and the illusion of exclusivity it creates, is a strategy at which the Swiss watch industry excels.

3.2. Multiple Brands

Swisstime, which advertises itself as "the reference for Swiss watches" (Swisstime, 2015), lists 561 watch brands, of which approximately half are regarded as true watchmakers (usually defined by enthusiasts as those which manufacture their own movements). One feature of the Swiss watch industry's contraction in the 1970-1980s was that few brands disappeared; despite being bought out by other manufacturers or absorbed into conglomerates, brands were retained as distinct entities. The Swatch Group, for example, owns 18 brands including Blancpain (established in 1735), Breguet (1775) and Omega (1848). Similarly Richemont owns 12 brands including A. Lange and Söhne (1845), Jaeger-LeCoultre (1833), Piaget (1874), and Vacheron Constantin (1755).

Retaining a high number of brands is one way in which Switzerland's watch industry has retained an aura of exclusivity. The history and heritage of each brand allows it to tell a distinct story to its customers, disguising the nature of its owning group's corporate structure. Furthermore, Swiss brands individually manufacture relatively few watches each year: Patek Phillipe, for example, produces approximately 40,000 units annually (KPMG, 2008). Thus a significant number of individual and distinct brands, each manufacturing small numbers of products each year, ensure that even while the total number of watches sold is significant (in 2011 Switzerland produced 31 million pieces [Mégevand, 2015]), the ability to appear exclusive is preserved.

3.3. The "Ebauche" Tradition

The high number of Swiss luxury watch brands also disguises another aspect of the industry, namely the production of mechanical watch movements by what is known as the "ebauche" tradition (Perez, 2000). Luxury watch brands pride themselves in their production of movements, and almost all incorporate complications manufactured in-house in their high-end and signature pieces. However, the majority of brands also use original equipment manufacturer (OEM) suppliers of movements in their lower price models, both to reduce costs and to concentrate on those aspects which bring most value

to the brand, such as the design of the visible exterior of the watch. In addition, the provisions of Swiss law require that a brand which claims its product is "Swiss Made" must use a Swiss movement (Fédération de l'Industrie Horlogère Suisse FH, 1995). This has led to a situation in which only five manufacturers (ETA, Frederic Piguet, Sellita, TechnoTime, and Zenith) supply movements to the whole of the Swiss industry. Thus, at least at the lower end of the market, many brands share the same internal movements, despite their dissimilar outward appearances (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Ulysse Nardin Maxi Marine Chronograph and the Bell & Ross BR03-94 share the same ETA 2894 movement.

Note. ETA is owned by Swatch Group. As well as manufacturing under its own name, ETA also sells movements using the brand names Valjoux and Lemania. Blancpain, which is also owned by Swatch, manufactures movements under the brand name Frederic Piguet, but only supplies to Swatch Group brands.

The ebauche tradition is therefore an instrumental part of the production of artificial rarity, in that it allows the continuation of small, distinct brands which would otherwise be unable to manufacture highly sophisticated movements (Baker, 2000). However, it also plays a further role in the perception of exclusivity, in that it provides brands with platforms on which to create many variants of the same product. The supply of movements by an OEM demands that brands incorporate a modular (rather than integrated) architecture within their designs, one in which, simplistically, the movement can be "dropped in" the watch case. This in turn allows brands to create small production runs of watches whose internal configuration, parts, and assembly are identical. The power of a system in which multiple designs can be created using the same internal movement is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. 42 Bell & Ross watches using the ETA 2892A2 movement.

3.4. Limited Editions

In parallel to the strategy of small production runs, the Swiss watch industry also uses limited editions to artificially induce exclusivity. Limited editions may incorporate a new design, such as the Ulysse Nardin *Tellurium J. Kepler*, limited to 99 pieces, but are more typically variants of standard designs, incorporating new material or colour combinations such as the Ulysse Nardin*Acqua Perpetual*, limited to 500 pieces (Figure 3). In both cases, production is limited to a predetermined number of pieces even if customer demand suggests that more units should be manufactured. This not only generates publicity (brands will often announce limited editions at major trade fairs such as Baselworld), it also ensures a second-hand market amongst collectors in which prices are kept high, further adding to the reputation of the brand.

Figure 3. The Ulysse Nardin Acqua Perpetual Limited Edition, numbered 397 of 500 pieces.

4. Connoisseurship as a Substitute for User Research?

In *The Luxury Strategy* (2012), Kapferer and Bastien note 24 ways in which traditionally accepted marketing principles are abandoned in the marketing of luxury goods. These include seemingly paradoxical strategies such as "forget about positioning" (p. 65) and "raise your prices to increase demand" (p. 75). Of these 24 principles, which they term the "anti-laws of marketing," five are directly concerned with ways of ensuring the customer's needs and wishes are kept apart from the product design and development process:

(a) Do not pander to your customer's wishes
(b) Do not respond to rising demand
(c) Dominate the client
(d) Do not test
(e) Do not look for consensus

Such approaches are further supported by Okonkwo (2007, pp. 132-133), whose seven stages of new product development in the luxury goods industry makes no mention of the consideration of user requirements during the generation or selection of new product ideas.

This disregard of customer needs is a deliberate and considered strategy. As Kapferer and Bastien (2009) make clear, nothing could be more alien to the luxury brand than "involving customers in the shaping of a brand, in co-creation, in consumer empowerment and in creating a relational intimacy" (p. 318). Consumers do not purchase luxury products because those products meet their functional needs; rather they do so because luxury products "fulfil ego and self-esteem needs, reinforcing social status and projecting a self-image" (Okonkwo, 2007, p. 62). A luxury brand which sought to portray itself as subservient to its customers' needs would thus destroy the image which caused its customers to aspire to it. By not listening to customers however, an obvious danger is that the luxury brand might appear directionless, either following whimsical trends or endlessly reinterpreting its own history. It is in giving luxury brands direction that the role of the connoisseur is critical.

4.1. Connoisseurship and Luxury

Connoisseurship is intimately related to luxury because of luxury's intimate relationship with heritage and exclusivity. Heritage gives luxury brands depth and prestige (Kapferer, 2012). It is a core characteristic of a luxury brand (Okonkwo, 2007, p.105), and it is the reason why previously referred to brands such as Blancpain and Breguet advertise their date of establishment so prominently. In parallel with this exclusivity, style acts as the most important marker of exclusivity in products whose functionality (as in the case of ebauche tradition movements) is indistinguishable. Thus the connoisseur, whose credibility relies on a sense of history and a "commit[ment] to the idea that style is meaningful" (Neer, 2005, p. 7), is essential to the customer's belief in the validity of a luxury brand.

The connoisseur within a luxury brand has a dual role: not only to give creative direction to the brand's products as well as its image and communication, but also to act as a figurehead (Catry, 2003). This is not the same as that conventionally referred to in the literature of connoisseurship. The purpose of the art connoisseur, for example, is not to create new work, but rather to apply a considered discrimination which "helps him or her make a sophisticated judgment about the worth of a piece of art, a judgment that employs criteria appropriate for the genre in which the artist had worked" (Donmoyer, 2005, p. 78). Nonetheless, the skills of the art connoisseur are precisely those which the luxury brand's director must also employ.

Connoisseurship requires "judgment informed by intuition . . . but only if grounded in a thorough understanding of the work itself" (Robinson, 1998). It demands the application of discerning opinion, however that opinion only gains validity through a foundation of historical knowledge (Neer, 2005; Schwartz, 1988; Van Rees, 1989). Furthermore, an appreciation of quality is fundamental, since "distinctions of quality are both a tool and a goal of the practice of connoisseurship" (Ebitz, 1988, pp. 208). An identifiable figure possessing these skills is also essential to a luxury brand's image. Within the Swiss watch industry this is typically the proprietor in the case of long-established brands, though with newer entrants to the market the figurehead is often a designer. In both cases though, and unlike those who gave their names to many Swiss brands, the connoisseur is rarely trained as a watchmaker.

4.2. Connoisseurship and Heritage

The notion of the Swiss watch connoisseur as a devotee and defender of heritage is crucial to the luxury brand's presentation. In some cases (e.g., Audemars Piguet, Panerai, and TAG Heuer) this is achieved by the involvement in the business of family descendants of the original founder. In other cases the allusion to heritage must be more carefully constructed. Thus, in the case of Ulysse Nardin, the corporate myth is of Rolf Schnyder, an adventurer and visionary who "had a problem accepting the rules" (Ulysse Nardin, 2011), yet who "found his calling, to restore one of the world's greatest names in high-end watchmaking to its former glory" (New Sabah Times, 2010). Since Schnyder had no previous involvement in Ulysse Nardin's history, it was imperative that his name be tied to the brand's heritage in other ways. His biography therefore talks of resurrection and rebirth, and "the opportunity to be involved in one of the truly great names in horology" (Wikipedia, 2015). Schnyder's name and his recognition of Ulysse Nardin's historic achievements and value are consistently intertwined, such that the brand's vision and future direction are indistinguishable from his own.

For a company such as Bell & Ross, whose history is only two decades old, the task of invoking the heritage of connoisseurship is more complex. It is achieved through the brand's designer and co-founder, Bruno Belamich, whose story is one of a "passion for the 'instrumentation' look" (Thompson, 2010, p. 114) of aircraft control panels. This is enhanced, and historicized, by references to Belamich's internship with the watchmaker Sinn, founded in 1956 by pilot and flight instructor Helmut Sinn. Finally, it is grounded in the often told challenge of co-founder Rosillo to Belamich to "go back to our roots" when designing the BR-01, which was to become the icon of Bell & Ross's style. These roots were not those of a brand established in 1994 however, but rather the control panels of vintage aircraft.

The distinctive style of Bell & Ross watches is further legitimized through their use by professionals such as pilots, deep-sea divers, and bomb disposal experts, a fact mentioned in virtually all articles about the brand (see, e.g., Disher & Rosillo, 2002; Hahn, 2012; Müller, 2012). Yet despite an aesthetic which, it is implied, is highly valued by such users, nowhere is it suggested that the needs of such professionals might be taken into account when designing the watches. To do so would devalue the second requirement of the luxury connoisseur figurehead, that of being the creative visionary.

4.3. Connoisseurship as a Source of Brand Vision

Schwartz (1998) writes:

> The connoisseur's sensitivity to style, at its best, can be compared to the ear of the musician with absolute pitch, the feeling for numbers of the computation whiz, the hunch of the crack detective or the practiced diagnostician. Without being able to tell us how they know certain things, they are sure that they do, and we believe them. (p. 261)

This ability to see what others do not is of central importance to the luxury brand. Since luxury products are aspirational, their design cannot be grounded in the requirements and experiences of their customers. Instead, according to Kapferer and Bastien (2012), luxury "is the expression of a taste, of a creative identity, of the intrinsic passion of a creator" (p. 62) and "comes from the mind of its creator, driven by a long-term vision" (p. 65). In the case of Bell & Ross, this vision manifests itself in the image of Belamich as the "Young Turk," eager to shake up the traditional industry with products "way beyond the specifications that most watchmakers boast in their trendy catalogues" (Belamich, 2012). For Ulysse Nardin, the approach is subtler, with Schnyder cast as the inheritor of the founder's vision, as his company biography relates:

> he has enabled Ulysse Nardin to transcend its past and achieve an even higher place in the rarified constellation of watchmaking's legends . . . the spirit of the watchmaker Ulysse Nardin has . . . become inextricably intertwined with Schnyder's own. (Wikipedia, 2015).

Throughout the Swiss watch industry similar stories are invoked, though each with their own individual flavour. At Carl F. Bucherer, for example, the company's owner is the founder's great grandson, ensuring "the founder's philosophy continues to characterize the brand" (Carl F. Bucherer, 2013); at Patek Phillipe the father and son presidents "personally stand by all the commitments embodied in the Patek Phillipe Seal" (Patek Phillipe, 2013) and advertise using the slogan "you never actually own a Patek Phillipe. You merely look after it for the next generation" (Leagas Delaney, 2013); while at Graham—"an unrepentantly English name for an exquisitely English watch" (Graham, 2013a)—the seventeenth-century watchmaker "would have been proud" of the founder's drive to "create a form of mechanical perfection that doesn't look or feel like just another Swiss watch" (Graham, 2013b).

4.4. User Research within Luxury Brands

While the public presentation of a luxury brand precludes an interest in its customers' needs, in reality a significant amount of user research does, in fact, take place. This is not to say that luxury brands covertly engage in conventional practices such as questionnaires or focus groups, but rather that user insights are gained through less formal and more subjective methods. Some of the ways in which Swiss watch brands gather information about their customers' aspirations and requirements include the following.

4.4.1. Hospitality

The provision of hospitality, whether at sporting events such as Wimbledon (sponsored by Rolex), cultural institutions such as the Bolshoi Ballet (sponsored by Audemars Piguet), or prestigious trade events such as the Monaco Yacht Fair (sponsored by Ulysse Nardin), is one of the most important ways in which luxury watch brands engage with their customers. Such events bear little resemblance to more conventional user research exercises: participants will be invited rather than recruited; "research sessions" will be more akin to friendly chats than formal interviews; and no attempt will be made at either consistency or impartiality. Yet the outcome, particularly when the event involves the brand's connoisseur

figurehead, will be the accumulation of many small insights into the lifestyles of the brand's best customers (Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010). These insights may never be formally recorded, but they will inform, or reinforce, the connoisseur's vision of how the brand should move forward.

4.4.2. Authorized Dealers

In accordance with Kapferer and Bastien's (2012, p. 67) instruction to "make it difficult for clients to buy," most Swiss luxury brands sell exclusively through authorised dealers or their own boutique stores (Okonkwo, 2007, p. 80). While the primary purpose of such a strategy is once again to communicate exclusivity, it also ensures the customer is served by trained staff with an understanding of, and loyalty to, the brand. This in turn provides a deep vein of customer insight into perceptions of the brand and why one product is purchased rather than another.

4.4.3. Limited Editions

As previously detailed, limited editions are production runs of designs where the number of pieces manufactured is deliberately restricted. As there is no expectation of high volume sales, a brand which is uncertain of a particular design is able to test it by launching the product as a limited edition and gauging its success. It the product sells well, a very similar design can be launched as a standard edition.

4.4.4. Bespoke Editions

Bespoke editions allow a small number of highly valued (typically wealthy) clients to request a unique treatment of a design, which will not be offered to other customers. Bespoke pieces are generally considered highly confidential and it is rare to find details of either the designs or the customers who commissioned them. There are exceptions to this. An exception is Andrew Luff, a collector who has ordered a number of bespoke pieces. A typical bespoke design exercise will involve a commissioned piece, based on a model that already exists, and customization will "include dials and cases with personalized designs and engraving as well as technical details such as adding functions to existing calibers . . . Movement parts, such as rotors and bridges, can be hand-engraved or skeletonised as the client wishes" (Doerr, 2009, p. 85). Bespoke editions therefore provide brands with insights as to future themes which products may explore.

4.4.5. Mass Customization

Mass customization is defined as a flexible production system allowing individual products to be manufactured with near mass production efficiency (Tseng & Jiao, 2001). It is usually enabled by a web browser interface, known as a toolkit, which allows customers to experiment with different configurations in order to arrive at their ideal product (Hippel & Katz, 2002). Within the luxury industry it has yet to find widespread adoption (Okonkwo, 2007, p. 247), though a number of brands such as Fabergé and Jaeger-LeCoultre have attempted to reconcile the apparent tension between the need for exclusivity and the ubiquity of the Internet. For brands which do adopt mass customization, the opportunity

exists to gather data in a similar way to that offered by bespoke customization, though with a much wider customer base.

5. A Model to be Emulated?

According to Tynan et al. (2010), "luxury goods sit at one end of a continuum with ordinary goods, so where the ordinary ends and luxury starts is a matter of degree" (p. 1157). Despite an earlier insistence that luxury goods and everyday consumer goods are fundamentally different (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009), Kapferer (2012) appears to agree, writing that the "luxury business model can be applied to companies in any sector" (p. 456), citing Apple as an example of a non-luxury brand which adopts some of the traits of the luxury business model (this observation has become even more pertinent following the launch of the Apple watch, particularly the gold edition, and more recently its partnership with Hermès). It is therefore of relevance to consider ways in which non-luxury brands may utilize some of the strategies of luxury marketing, and the implications of doing so.

One of the most immediate ways in which Apple has previously adopted the strategy of luxury brands is in the position of the connoisseur, a role which Steve Jobs performed at least as well as his contemporaries in the Swiss watch industry. Following his death, numerous commentators wrote of Jobs's "genius" (Gillmor, 2011; Isaacson, 2011; The Economist, 2011) and the ways in which other companies might follow Apple's lead. Undoubtedly the strategy adopted by Apple has been successful—it commands considerable brand loyalty and for a time was the world's most valuable company (Benzinga Insights, 2012).

A second way in which Apple emulates the strategy of luxury brands is in its attitude to user research and the extent to which it informs design. Apple's presentation of itself as a company which takes no account of user requirements is notorious, as exemplified in Jobs' exclamation: "How can I possibly ask somebody what a graphics-based computer ought to be when they have no idea what a graphic based computer is?" (Kahney & Sculley, 2010). By creating an image of the brand, and its connoisseur figurehead, as one which knows what is best for consumers—better, indeed, than they know themselves—Apple clearly follows Kapferer and Bastien's (2012) command not to pander to customer's wishes. As such it has become something of a cause célèbre amongst designers annoyed by the extent to which they are required to take account of user needs. Yet by dividing opinion with this apparent disregard for its customers' requirements, Apple merely follows another of Kapferer and Bastien's instructions not to seek consensus.

A particularly interesting aspect of Apple's reputation with regard to user research is the way in which, similarly to luxury brands, it is largely a false construct. As Jobs himself admitted, Apple makes extensive use of user testing (Seeking Alpha, 2010), and the information gathered informs product development. Furthermore, Apple's own stores (and in particular the "Genius Bars" where customers receive one-on-one advice about their products) are rich sources of information with regard to consumers' use of products.

Writing of the way in which tool-less additive manufacturing (AM) technologies enable small production runs, Campbell, Hague, Sener, and Wormald (2003) have suggested the potential for the bespoke industrial designer. Such a designer would clearly have much in common with the designer of today's Swiss watches, who emphasize limited editions and low manufacturing cycles. While luxury brands engage in such strategies to promote exclusivity, they nonetheless create a marketplace in which many more variants exist than with conventional, mass-produced products. In addition, despite its apparent lack of enthusiasm for mass customization, the flexible modularity which such systems demand (Pine, 1993) is also closely aligned to the modular architectures required by the ebauche tradition of manufacture. Thus, designers working for luxury brands, who are skilled at the creation of difference while simultaneously consolidating a brand's image, may find those skills are also ones which non-luxury brands find valuable as AM technologies become more common.

The bespoke industrial designer may also find it necessary to adopt their luxury strategies. Speaking at a Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) event titled *Twenty-First Century Manufacture*, Aldersley-Williams (2011) proposed that "in the coming decades, what we may see is that design and manufacturing look less like they did in the 20th Century, and more like they did in the 14th." In such a future, designers exploiting the ability of AM technologies to create unique designs may find themselves working directly with customers, following instructions in the manner of pre-Industrial Revolution craftsmen, and thus resembling those engaged in the creation of luxury bespoke designs.

One final scenario in which more conventional design practices might emulate those of luxury brands concerns longevity. It is a core principle of sustainable design that the lifespan of products should be increased (Cooper, 2010; Spangenberg, Fuad-Luke, & Blincoe, 2010). Yet this also appears to be at odds with consumerist desires to discard and replace products with newer models. However, this conflict between longevity and consumerism is one which luxury brands navigate with ease. Luxury products such as Swiss watches have well-established logistics of service and repair, and a vibrant second-hand market also contributes to their increased lifespan. Clearly the cost of a luxury product plays a significant role in the deciding the ease with which it is discarded. Nonetheless, looked at over the product's lifetime, a luxury watch may cost little more than the buying and replacing of successive products. Thus, it may be that the luxury business, often regarded as the epitome of consumption, offers clues as to how to conceive sustainable design processes in future.

6. Conclusions

This article has demonstrated how the traditional rules of product marketing are overturned by the luxury goods industry, which deliberately creates an illusory image of rarity and non-consensual customer engagement in order to invoke an aura of exclusivity. Central to this strategy is the role of the connoisseur figurehead, depicted as effortlessly able to direct the brand through the application of a unique vision, rooted in the company's history. While this research has concentrated on the examples of Ulysse Nardin and Bell & Ross within the Swiss watch industry, the importance of heritage and

the role of the connoisseur are similarly recognizable in the luxury sector of industries such as fashion (e.g., Chanel, Dior, and Dolce & Gabbana), automotive (e.g., Bugatti, Ferrari, and Rolls Royce), and wines and spirits (e.g., Dom Pérignon, Glenmorangie, and Moët & Chandon).

A key role of the connoisseur figurehead lies in convincing a brand's customers that it is indifferent to their needs and wishes. This presentation lies at the heart of Kapferer and Bastien's (2012) "anti-laws of marketing," and is necessary for the portrayal of the luxury brand as aspirational: as emblematic of status which the customer is privileged to attain. Yet as this article has shown, the notion that luxury brands do not engage in user research is largely untrue—while research may not resemble that recommended in traditional new product development literature, it is nonetheless conducted through informal and less readily recognized channels.

Through the example of Apple, this article has also indicated how brands not conventionally thought of as luxury can successfully adopt luxury strategies where these support its business strategy. Clearly Apple does not follow a luxury business model in all its operations: its outsourcing of production to China and its increase of production to meet demand are clear violations of the "anti-laws" of marketing. However, for a company with a figurehead able to emulate those in luxury industries, the image of a brand led by a visionary connoisseur can be a powerful marketing tool. Yet Apple also demonstrates the risks encountered by brands that invoke connoisseurship without the additional support of heritage, so well understood within luxury industries. With Jobs no longer the guiding figurehead, it is by no means clear that Apple can continue to build on its previous successes (BBC News, 2013). Thus companies attuned to new production paradigms such as mass customization and additive manufacturing, engaging with the necessities of sustainable lifecycle management, may instead be those best suited to adopt the strategies of luxury brands.

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