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**ABSTRACT**

Chanel is of one the most successful luxury brands in the world. The brand's founder Coco Chanel is the soul of the business, and the key to Chanel's success. This paper has looked into Chanel's marketing strategy with regard to its brand ambassador, cross-media collaboration, and business expansion. By doing so, this paper will offer an insight into the brand's international success.

**Introduction**

"I want to be a part of the future," said Ms. Chanel (Harold, p.14). This combination of ambition and vision has created the unique brand of Chanel. From the beginning of the brand's creation in the early 20th century, Ms. Chanel's creative style has transcended the times and continued to inherit and develop, and moreover, it still affects us deeply today. Chanel's clothes are always simple, elegant, and advocating freedom, and now these qualities have become the signature of the brand. The most signature designs of Chanel include its Boy Bag, 2.55 Quilted Bag, Two-Tone Shoes. This paper will analyse the luxury brand Chanel and its initiative in linking its products with established artistic practice. This paper will begin with an introduction of the person Coco Chanel and the brand Chanel in general. It will be followed by an in-depth analysis on the brand promotion strategy as a luxury brand, with reference to Bourdieu's theory of taste. This paper will examine three aspects of Chanel's effort of linking their products with established artistic practice, 1) Brand Ambassador, 2) Crossover, 3) Business Expansion. It will argue that Chanel's promotion strategy has successfully put Bourdieu's theory into practice, and has established the brand as a leader of high-end luxurious products.

**Chanel: the Person and the Brand**

Coco Chanel was the founder of the luxury brand Chanel. Her life story, particularly her romantic relationships with her lovers have contributed hugely to the establishment of her brand. Chanel was born in a remote village on August 19, 1883, and soon became an orphan. The nun raised her and taught her the basic sewing skills. Since the age of twenty, Chanel has worked in a knitwear company. Chanel also devoted herself to singing in a music cafe, and was nicknamed "Coco" by her audience, and this nickname remained with her for a lifetime. Étienne Balsan, the wealthy racecourse owner, quickly noticed her and pursued her. Chanel discovered the world of equestrianism with Balsan, which gave her a lot of inspiration. She also discovered the social activities of the racecourse and socialized with women who she thought were wearing similar hats. Chanel thought they were all "silly girls." Chanel's distinctive temperament attracted everyone's attention (Harold, p.18). She soon met the love of her life in the group of friends around Arthur Edward 'Boy' Capel.

Capel encouraged her and lent her the funds needed to open a store, allowing her to open her first fashion store on Rue Cambon in Paris in 1910. Then, another store was opened in different parts of France. Success came very quickly, and she paid off every penny that borrowed from Capel. The young Chanel is an excellent designer no one can match. When an American magazine saw her new style, it was love at first sight. Her love affair with Capel inspired her to continue to design masculine clothing, which was later called neutral. She stole Capel's trousers, pajamas, and generous tops, as well as his narrow straw hat for artistic experiment. Chanel's modernist views, menswear styles, and simple designs are greatly influential. They have made her become one of the important figures in the fashion industry in the 20th century. Chanel advocates a new "lifestyle", which not only gives women freedom of action, but also gentle and elegant. In short, it was Chanel's unique life story, and her love affairs with



different lovers that shaped her and her brand. The luxury brand Chanel has huge influence not only in France, but also across the entire world, and it remains one of the most successful luxury brands in the world today. The rest of this paper will examine cases of magazine and newspaper promotions with reference to Bourdieu's theory.

### **Bourdieu's Theory of Taste**

Pierre Bourdieu's work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* can be used to explain the artistic practice of Chanel. Before getting to the brand, this section will give a very brief introduction to Bourdieu's theory.

People of different classes are usually familiar with their own class culture, but they are not only unfamiliar with the culture of another class, but also often have a situation of order and superiority. There are hidden rules of measuring one's cultural level. In the past, sociology explained this social hierarchy with the idea of class. It was mostly based on whether an individual had capital, or assets, or what occupation he was engaged in to judge which class a person belongs to. For example, plumbers and engineers belong to different classes. However, French sociologist Bourdieu said that although economic factors and material conditions are the ultimate criteria for explaining class differences, the rules of the game for classes are presented in the form of culture. Bourdieu believes that behind the so-called good or bad taste is the dominant class's cultural preference, which is used to distinguish the difference between oneself and the vulgar others, and to consolidate one's own advantages and legitimacy.

According to Bourdieu, taste is not an inborn quality, but is closely related to education level and social origin. Many surveys have proved that all cultural practices and preferences in literature, painting or music are firstly closely related to education level, and secondly to social origin. The relative importance of family background and formal education depends on the different levels of teaching and recognition of different cultural practices by the education system.

From the consumption of cultural commodities, Bourdieu believes, the class attributes shown by members of different status groups will become more visible. In other words, members of the same status group pursue the same or similar cultural consumption tastes to seek identity within the class, while distinguishing them from other status groups and classes. This process of separation is demonstrated through the operation of habitus between classes and groups. Habitus creates a comprehensive quality of taste, speech, dress, appearance and other reactions. Habitus is not only the meaning of habit, but also refers to the mentality, cognition, or thinking structure of people dealing with social life in daily life. Therefore, the similar consumption patterns and cultural tastes of certain social classes are often the result of similar or even the same habits.

The luxury brand Chanel, and other luxury brands of course, has taken advantage of this conception of distinction of taste as part of their strategy of branding. It has established Chanel as a luxury that will function as a type of class, or taste indicator. That is to say, by consuming the product of Chanel, it will give the user's a feeling of belonging to a community that is often deemed as having a good sense of fashion. The remaining of this paper will apply Bourdieu's theory to Chanel's promotion, and explore how Bourdieu's concept functions in real life.

### **Bourdieu's Theory in Practice: Chanel's Promotion**

#### **Brand Ambassador**



**Fig.1 Screenshot from CHANEL. Where beauty begins**

To establish the brand as a luxury brand, it is essential to choose the right brand ambassador. Take Chanel's 2013 advertising video as an example, Chanel has chosen Diane Kruger, an international star, to be its brand ambassador. People who have watched the movie *Troy* will definitely be impressed by the beauty of Kruger. Her elegant and

intellectual temperament is in line with Chanel's brand image, that is to say, a French elegant style. In the advertisement, she has always been confident and graceful no matter when she shuttles in the city or on the beach, coupled with Chanel's classic outfit. The message of the video is clear: every woman should start to yearn for such an independent and beautiful life by starting to use Chanel's product.



**Fig.2 screenshot from CHANEL. Where beauty begins**

Another example will be Chanel's choice of using the Hong Kong Chinese international star William Chan as its brand ambassador. Chanel is putting great attention to its choice of brand ambassador even to a local level. It has picked William Chan, who was a Chinese Hong Kong dancer and singer, and has recently been elevated as a superstar in China by its outstanding acting performance in TV drama. William Chan is the Chinese Prince Charming for many Chinese ladies, and he is well known for his good taste in fashion. Chanel's choice of brand ambassador has received numerous positive comments from the Chinese social media, such as Weibo and Wechat. It has again shown how Chanel has utilised its choice of brand ambassador to set up a brand image that is distinguishing from other brands.

#### Crossover



**Fig.3 screenshot from CHANEL. Where beauty begins**

In its 2009 ads, Chanel has crossovered with the production team of the movie *Amelie*. Chanel often cooperates with film directors. For example, in "Train de nuit", which is an ad for the signature No. 5 perfume, Chanel collaborated with the director Jean-Pierre Jeunet and the heroine Audrey Dodo.

Even for commercial shooting, Jeunet still maintains its strong image style. He also collaborated with Nagata Tetsuo, hoping to present the warm and gentle brand image of Chanel perfume through warm colors. The strong and vivid colors in the film make people even more fascinating to return to *Amelie*.



**Fig.4 screenshot from CHANEL. Where beauty begins**

Chanel has demonstrated how to avoid appearing too commercial by placing products in advertisements. Based on the concept of light projection, the director Jeunet uses lamps to illuminate the perfume bottle and reflect the shadow it produces on the wall of the room to present the outline of the product. And move the light source in time to control the imaging position, so that the picture could only have artistic beauty and brand exposure, but also create a soft and moving visual effects like water waves. "This is my inspiration from the perfume bottle on my wife's makeup cabinet." Jeune said that he doesn't like to use the word "product" because it sounds too commercial. Therefore, he thought of incorporating the perfume into the story through light and shadow. Its innovative and aesthetically-presented shooting method is invisible, promoting the brand spirit of Chanel, and this image is also one of the favorite scenes of the heroine Audrey Dodo.

Back to Bourdieu's theory, Chanel has used an award-winning film director to film its ads. The French movie *Amelie*, is famous for its artistic values and its representation of French elegance and decency. By making its ads a continuation of the well-received movie, Chanel is linking it to the artistic industry, and branding it as a product as a piece of art instead of simply a commercial product.

#### Business Expansion



**Fig.5 screenshot from CHANEL. Where beauty begins**

To establish Chanel as a high-end brand, Chanel also expanded its business to other high-end products, such as wine. Chanel has a world-wide reputation for its leading role in the fashion business, but Chanel is not satisfied with it. To make its brand outshine all its competitors, Chanel also invests in the wine business. In 1994, the Chanel Group acquired the historic Chateau Rauzan-Segla on the left bank of Bordeaux. After that, large-scale business restructuring was carried out, vines were replanted, and the proportion of grape varieties was adjusted. Create a Chanel-style wine feel. Since then, the Chanel Group has acquired more and more wine businesses, and they are well-received in the industry.

The message is clear here: Chanel should be seen as a synonym of good taste. Similar to its fashion business, Chanel is not pursuing quantity in its wine business. It only acquires those wineries that have a rich historical background. When linking it back to Bourdie's theory, it is obvious that Chanel is attempting to branding its brand to be the

symbol of luxury. The wine industry of France has a significant reputation around the world, and is famous for its simple and elegant taste, which fits Chanel's brand image. By expanding its business, it is an add-on to its original fashion brand and gives a clear message to its target customers.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Chanel's promotion strategy can perfectly fit into Bourdieu's theory of taste. The success of Chanel is based on its marketing strategy and the way it establishes its brand image. Beginning from its founder Coco Chanel, Chanel has a very clear brand image that separates it from its rivals. Since the brand was founded in 1910, it has become a symbol of French elegance and decency. It has promoted a different kind of female beauty contrasting to the traditional conservative understanding of women. As Bourdieu's theory would have suggested, Chanel has distinguished itself from other normal brands, and making it a representation of taste. Chanel has invested hugely on its ads and its brand ambassadors, and moreover, expanding its business to other high-end industries. It leaves more impression that that Chanel is a brand that only belongs to those who appreciate its high qualification. It creates a social symbol, a totem, for the upper-class and elites community. Chanel products will create a communal understanding of the user as having good taste and it only represents a small group of people who can understand and afford it.

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