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The influence of rituals on luxury product consumption

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The Influence of Branded Rituals on Luxury Product Consumption Practices: Implications for Advertising

Abstract

Luxury brands embed meanings in advertising and encourage brand ritualistic behavior. Yet, do all luxury consumers interpret the rituals communicated in advertising similarly? We consider Interaction Ritual Theory (IRT) to examine how advertised rituals transform consumption practices of luxury products. We used a hermeneutic phenomenological research method, collecting interviews and photos from 18 informants. The data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach, inductively coded based on IRT's conditions. Consistent with taste regimes literature, we find champagne consumption is also practiced and ritualized according to two types of regimes. Within an open regime, informants experience champagne as a medium for engaging with limited individuals, with the product as the kernel of the experience. Alternatively, a closed regime represents a more stagnant system of social interaction, emerging as a product of the situation, often a celebration (as typically advertised). Implications for advertisers offers suggestions of how luxury brands can advertise ritualistic behavior to these two distinct groups, providing advice on how to propagate or change existing rituals.

You watch her face in eager anticipation as she removes the blue box from the jewelry satchel and unties the white ribbon. It is essential to clink champagne glasses before taking

the first sip. Subsequent research finds that rituals increase food consumption enjoyment (Vohs, Wang, Gino and Norton 2013). Tiffany & Co. has ritualized the purchase experience both via advertising and inside their retail stores. A piece of jewelry from Tiffany & Co. would not have the same value without its blue box, white ribbon, and jewelry satchel. Moreover, opening and keeping the box is just as an important part of jewelry ownership. The ritualization of a product or brand is very important for luxury brands, because it creates a brand story and prescribes situations for purchase (Otnes and Scott 1996).

Advertising often refers to pre-existing knowledge and historical consumption precedents set by advertisers, myths and ritual practices to communicate brand information (Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Johar, Holbrook, and Stern 2001). As such, brands embed meanings in advertising and encourage consumers to adopt ritualistic behavior specific to a brand or product category (Otnes and Scott 1996). It is from these readily accessible sources, such as advertising, that consumers learn rituals and social conventions (O'Guinn and Shrum 1997; Pracejus, Olsen and and O'Guinn 2006).

It comes as no surprise then that advertising is replete with examples of ritual usage: De Beers, Veuve Cliquot, Crystal Cruises, and more. Advertising has the power to create, influence, change and attenuate ritual behaviors (Hummon 1988; McCracken 1986; Otnes and Scott 1996; Sherry 1987) turning brands into ritual symbols. Thus, advertising can inform purchase heuristics, designate roles, scripts, and brand artifacts, and, in particular for luxury and experiential products, create value and cultivate brand stories (Kapferer and Bastien 2009).

Branded communications advises brands or item use during rituals, confirms proper norms, and sets boundaries (Boorstin 1973). In particular, the ritualization of a product or brand is very important for luxury brands, because rituals encourage transformation and personal status attainment (Driver 1991; Otnes and Scott 1996). Ritualization of engagement

rings has revolutionized the diamond industry in less than 100 years. Through wedding advertisements, rituals depict the transformation from singlehood to bride upon the purchase of the ring, not the wedding (Otnes and Scott 1996). Yet, do all consumers interpret the rituals communicated in advertising similarly? Are there specific regimes that guide how consumers interpret and reenact rituals promoted in advertising for luxury products in particular? How can brands respond to consumers who want to guard versus change the ritual?

We consider Collins (2004) Interaction Ritual Theory (IRT) to examine how advertised ritualized consumption transforms the consumption practices of luxury products. In doing so, we contribute to theory in the following ways: 1) we extend IRT theory by proposing two ritual regimes: open and closed, incrementally adding to IRT while focusing on luxury products and, 2) we add to the literature on rituals in advertising by suggesting that individuals in different ritual regimes interpret rituals differently, and the subsequent brand role differs. We follow the lead of Kim and King (2009) and examine consumption rituals to glean several implications for advertisers.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Rituals and Advertising

A ritual prescribes scripted behavior and social order, including product use and/or brands as symbols, creation of an environment (stage), and scripts (Driver 1991; Rook 1985; Tetreault and Kleine 1990). Symbolic ritual artifacts often include sacred objects, including food or drinks. Ritual scripts identify artifacts to use, define the rules of their usage, specify consumers, and delineate the manner in which the ritual will occur. Though, not all roles are pre-prescribed (Treice, Wolburg, and Otnes 1999). Rituals, occurring in either a public or private setting create small worlds of shared consumption experiences, which serve communal goals (Gainer 1995; Turner 1969; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). Rituals offer

these individuals an opportunity to unite emotionally (Driver 1991). Such is the case with a Tiffany's engagement ring. The consumers have consumption goals and the ritual actions (gifting the Tiffany's box) lead to the end-goals. In more public rituals, consumers select brands that are important symbols for social interaction reproduction. Driver (1991) even suggests that rituals involve personal transformation. Given little access to prior knowledge about shared consumption rituals, the dominant sources of information about the ritual come largely from advertisements, literature, and other cultural sources of information (Motley, Henderson, and Baker 2003).

Rituals exist because they constitute the habitus or the orientation of those who practice them (Bourdieu 1990). They are learned and practiced in consequence of cultural contexts and consumers construct their self-concept via consumption rituals (Sherman and Cohen 2006). Prototypical behaviors are thus part of the collective group memory but this does not mean they cannot be dynamic. Rather, they are constructed, maintained and modified depending on the context in which they exist as well as to which other prototypes they are compared (Fiske and Taylor 1991; Hogg and Terry 2000). For many consumption rituals, the dominant sources of information about the ritual come from advertisements, literature, and other cultural sources of information (Motley, Henderson, and Baker 2003) because consumers look to these cultural sources for self-construal (Zhang 2009).

Advertising can also change existing rituals, making certain products more appropriate or product use in new contexts appropriate. When changing customs, advertisers must explicitly describe how to incorporate new aspects into existing rituals (Otnes and Scott 1996). Brands can also use the package design as a source of information about the changed ritual by providing information or creating a prop for the consumption ritual. Package color and motifs can impact symbolic identification and usage. This is true for Moët & Chandon's newest champagne Ice Imperial. This champagne was created with young people in mind,

who enjoy drinking mixed drinks and cocktails over ice. Likewise, this champagne is meant to drink over ice. Moët Ice Impérial represents a new way of drinking champagne, as an everyday drink while under the sun. The new “Ice Pack” for sale includes three bottles of champagne, 6 goblets, and an ice bucket. The bottle design includes a white lacquer color and Moët’s trademark black tie and gold medallion detailing.

Interaction Ritual Theory

Collins (2004) argues that a macro perspective of rituals establishes fixed, overarching meanings and rules. In his IRT, he proposes a micro approach, where researchers “put ritual interaction in the center of analysis, and [...] derive the ups and downs of cultural belief from it” (p. 32). Rather than examining the cultural capital of consumers and analyzing their consumption habits in consequence, as per Bourdieu (1984), Collins proposes examining how situational features influence a consumer’s approach/avoidance to ritualized symbols. As such, the focus is on the situation as well as on the individual. Interactive rituals require four conditions: 1) a co-presence of others, 2) barriers to outsiders or the creation of inclusiveness, 3) a shared focus on the ritual, and 4) a shared emotional experience. It is the feedback between the third and fourth condition that leads to sentiments of collective effervescence, a shared emotion, which solidifies the ritual. As such, “interaction ritual theory provides a processual model for the construction of symbols; it has the further advantage of showing just when and to what extent those meanings are shared, reified, and imposed, when they are ephemeral—and all the gradations in between” (p. 32). Consequently, IRT is an appropriate framework for examining rituals from luxury advertising because it encourages a fine-grained examination of if, why, and how consumers interpret brands as symbols to be ritualized.

Champagne As A Ritualized Product

Rituals have important influence on cultural production in industries of culture, such as the luxury market and champagne (Anand and Watson 2004). While changing markets and industries use traditional forms of marketing activities, luxury brands (e.g., champagnes, fashion designers) tend to use tradition and historic ceremonies to establish value. Like other luxury brands, champagne brands reference their histories in their locations (e.g., photos, brand stories, processes, associations, etc.) and reproduce them in their advertising (Beverland and Luxton 2005). Champagne firms draw deliberately on their histories to create positions, which lead to a very strong product umbrella brand – champagne as a unique product with its unique story and rituals (Charters and Spielmann 2014). In consequence, champagne firms often refuse to engage in inauthentic mass marketing, as this would deviate from the product’s sacred role in the ritual (Charters 2011).

Rather, champagne marketing has traditionally used certain cues to establish the celebratory nature of champagne and its ritual for consumption. Specifically, the champagne bottle with champagne flutes is stylistic of champagne advertising as is the exploding cork. A few select champagne flutes designate the importance of the occasion, with bubbles in the glasses, suggesting that the champagne has just been poured. Sometimes the ads have images of party décor or feature rules associated with champagne drinking rituals, such as the expected “pop” when uncorking (Klara 2013). Like other luxury brands, champagne brands use standardized advertising strategies, which make ritualistic communications globally common. Whereas other products glocalize or adapt their advertisements to different cultures, champagne brands manage their advertisements in house in order to reproduce the same image globally (CITATION).

Liquids play a key role in aspects of ritual consumption, and its consequences, such as identity sharing and group affiliations (Belk 2010). This is especially true of champagne, where advertisers have propagated the champagne sharing ritual, its consumption for special

occasions, and all that it entails for over a century, and this especially with print advertising (Charters 2011; Guy 2003). Drinking champagne requires a symbolic ritual artifact (the champagne itself), a script (rules about who, when, and where drinking occurs), a context in which to share it, performance roles (how to drink, how much to consume, how to act while drinking), a staged environment, an end goal, and an audience (peers, restaurant staff, sommelier) (Treice et al. 1999). Champagne consumption has symbolic elements of ritual and emotions, such as special occasions with the family, or an important consideration when inviting friends over (Mora and Moscarola 2010). When it comes to sharing champagne, many individuals associate their experiences with their sensual memories, including taste, smell, and sound (Mora and Moscarola 2010).

However, while champagne is often associated with the ubiquitous advertised image of celebrations (weddings, birthdays and so on) this only accounts for 50% of champagne drinking. For many, champagne is consumed for more informal social events, contrary to the advertised ritual. Most consumers assume good quality champagne should have a high price. However, many champagne firms have attempted to use advertising to change conventional traditions and rituals associated with champagne, such as suggesting more affordable champagnes are just as high quality, changing the reason to drink champagne, and even how to drink champagne (Klara 2013). Furthermore, globalization and extensive trade has began shifting consumers' perceptions of champagne as a big house, big brand, expensive product to a small producer, unknown brand, reasonably priced product, accessible to all (Asimov 2015). In consequence, and as suggested by Collins (2004), champagne rituals are shifting and consumer interactions with it seemingly dynamic. Thus, examining consumer's champagne rituals in juxtaposition to their personal consumption practices may reveal the types of symbolic attachment they have with champagne.

METHODS

In order to understand consumer perceptions of champagne rituals, we used a hermeneutic phenomenological research method (Langdrige 2007). Ethnographic data (interviews and photos) were collected from 18 informants over a four-month period. The snowball sample (Atkinson & Flint 2001) was accomplished through authors' personal contacts. Informants range in age, nationality, and gender, as well as experience and involvement with champagne. Table 1 provides details regarding the informants.

In our approach, we used a two-tier data collection strategy, meant to encourage trust and enhance data quality (Ziller 1990). Informants were first asked to collect images that represented the meaning and the role that champagne had in their lives in order to capture unconscious attitudes (Heisley and Levy 1991). Once informants completed the task, they handed in the images to the researchers who then scheduled an in-depth, one-on-one interview with the informants. The images provided in the first part of data collection were used to stimulate discussion with the informants (Collier and Collier 1986) A total of 27 pictures were provided.

In the second stage of data collection, semi-structure interviews were conducted with the informants, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in English or in French, depending on the informant and the researcher. The first question informants were asked was: "what is the process you last went through to share champagne with others?" Questions pertaining to what and who influences their champagne consumption were also asked. Informants were asked to detail the images they provided. Finally, informants shared information regarding their personal consumption. After the fifteenth interview, it was assumed that data saturation was attained as no new information or novel insight was obtained from informants 16, 17, or 18 (Strauss and Corbin 1994).

The data were analyzed using a grounded theoretical approach (Glaser 1978; Pettigrew 2000). The researchers independently analyzed the images and then the interview transcripts. Data were inductively coded based on the four conditions of IRT theory. A thematic analysis of the images was conducted (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006) as was an iterative analysis of interview transcripts to group themes as they emerged. The two researchers together then analyzed the images and transcripts in order to determine the similarities in their analysis as well as their interpretations of the emergent themes. Specifically, the researchers examined the situations in which champagne rituals were described, at what point in the ritual champagne is present, and the importance of brands in defining the rituals.

APPROPRIATING LUXURY RITUALS

The first emergent theme appeared from an analysis of the role of champagne rituals for our informants. Consistent with research on taste regimes and the ways of practicing taste (Arsel and Bean 2013; Hennion 2007), we find that the rituals for champagne is also based on a regime, or “discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates practice” (Arsel and Bean 2013, p. 899). However, and according to Collin’s (2004) IRT, we focused on the situation rather than the product when examining the possible regimes. Furthermore, we examined each condition of IRT and thus two types of ritual regimes emerged.

Within an open regime, informants experienced champagne as a medium for engaging with limited individuals, who mutually focus on the product because the champagne is the kernel of the experience. The consumption process starts with champagne selection, and the experience is brand-centric, resulting in a more personal versus collective effervescence via exceptional shared emotional attachment to the product. The open regime consists of a negotiated ritual, one that can be explored and extended.

Alternatively, a closed regime represents a more stagnant system of social interaction and the role of the self within the consumption experience. A closed regime starts with the situation, often a celebration, where the champagne acts as an accessory to the collective effervescence, and often results in enhanced cultural and symbolic capital for the group versus the individual. Those in a closed regime have banalized the rituals surrounding champagne and have rather hegemonic discourses related to product and more difficulty naming brands.

Open Ritual Regimes

Informants practicing an open ritual regime exhibit a tendency to explore and extend the ritual of champagne consumption. Because they tend to play with the boundaries of ritualistic situations, their experience is bounded by the intimacy of the group. Moreover, these informants create, rather than being invited to, the social occasion from the purchase of the product. The occasion revolves around the ritual artifact (the champagne) similar to Otnes and Scott's (1996) description of transformation, and the settings and other props depend on the ritual artifact. Informants involved in the open ritual regime have higher knowledge about champagne, where to purchase it, and yet are less likely follow specific rules. For example, the notion that a special occasion is required for purchasing champagne does not resonate with these informants. Rather, the champagne artifact integrates into everyday life and it is the presence of champagne that renders a banal evening into a special occasion. The individuals in the open taste regime have a higher knowledge about champagne, so know where to purchase it and sometimes do so impulsively. They understand how to enjoy it without its typical accessories (apero or desserts).

Interestingly, the brand figures prominently in the discourses of the informants practicing an open ritual regime and also emerges in the images provided (see Appendix). As well, the brands are relatively expensive and hard to find, which is interesting as informants in

the open ritual regimes tend to see champagne as an everyday possibility, and apparently do not mind putting forth the investment required for such luxury brands for average meals or occasions. The champagne brand occupies a central role in the occasion, through its physical presence, the discussion, and its elevation. A substitute for champagne, such as a beer or sparkling wine, would not work. The role of the champagne is critical for the success of the occasion and marks the sharing experience as an official special event.

For example, Allen's image of champagne Salon, an exclusively vintage champagne, produced only 38 times in the 1900's and sold at only around 60,000 bottles per vintage is juxtaposed with his discussion about champagne being the starting point for his meals. The food and decorations become secondary aspects of the sharing ritual, like accessories. Paula provides images of Laurent Perrier Rosé as well Dom Pérignon, both higher end luxury champagnes, and explains that these were acquired because it seemed logical to have at home, just in case an occasion to imbibe might arise.

Allen "Different types of cuisines need to be selected to go along with the champagne. Normally, once I found a nice champagne in a shop, I will start to arrange a dinner with a group of friends to share the champagne."

Paula "I saw that there was a Laurent Perrier with a pretty box and I thought it would be nice to have it in the apartment. Just passing by and I saw it and it gave me the idea that it would be nice having it at home. You know, sometimes you receive good news or friends come over unexpectedly...it is always good to have something that you can celebrate with."

Ryan "We could have it [the champagne] after the meal or during the meal, so I will be looking at the type of food we will be choosing. For instance, it can be a white meat or a fish to accompany it."

Informants in an open regime also negotiate preconceived stereotypes about champagne and propose new ways of buying and consuming champagne. In this way, the brand role is critical to the open regime. Informants have specific ideas of how to transform the occasion based on the brand of champagne. This is because individuals in an open ritual regime pay special attention to the brand name and specifically the brand story. While these

informants in part flex their cultural capital, especially in terms of the brands they name (in particular Sylviane), they are in fact creating very specific barriers to outsiders. It is also interesting to note that these individuals are not older, but can be younger and novices. In part, they create a cultural capital barrier by demonstrating that they are more knowledgeable than others, but they also create psychological barriers by distinguishing themselves in terms of their deep interpretation of champagne's meaning in their lives, which suggests that the nature and construal of rituals for informants are not age dependent.

Sylviane "I buy [champagne] from the Duty Free store..Sometimes, I buy the best bottles because they are less expensive at the airport. Otherwise, and if I really did not have advance time and it's a little at the last minute, I will go to Carrefour."

Sylviane "Personally, I prefer rosé champagne, and I favor bottles from brands like Veuve Clicquot. [...] When I was younger, I knew of Moët, and all those other brands... But growing up, I've discovered other brands that are less bling-bling... For me, champagne is really about the brand and its history."

Daniela "I think when you choose something, in this case champagne, for a loved one, you look more carefully at the product, I mean you research more and you try to be something more special."

The open ritual regime is defined in the images as occurring in restrained settings; these tend to include only two to three glasses of champagne set in an intimate setting, where the bottle is often prominent and images of actual people absent (see Appendix). While there are barriers to outsiders regarding the interpretation of the product, the actual consumption of champagne is free of rules and ideals. It is respecting the quality of the situation that primes over the respect for the champagne norms:

Sarah "I would probably only bring champagne if it was a close friend/ loved one because I tend to splurge on champagne (\$75 and up)."

Ryan "I choose to share champagne with a loved one."

Sylvaine "I don't have precise rules. Flutes or wine glasses, eventually if we really don't have a choice cups, but the best of probably in flutes."

Allen “A party of 3 to 4 is a perfect size for the champagne sharing experience because everyone can get a good taste of it without drinking too much.”

Ian “Sometimes we drink it alone, sometimes not. We do it quite often, probably too much. We don’t need a special occasion. We drink it like a bottle of wine.”

As the informants and images provided by them demonstrate, barriers allow for a more careful mutual focus in an open ritual regime, one that is centered around fewer individuals but individuals who are closer in terms of affectionate relations (e.g., husbands, wives, parents, etc.). When asked who they prefer to share with, they often referred to a “loved one.” They believe drinking champagne alone or in very small social worlds are acceptable. However, exploring the champagne sharing ritual is best done with close others who also want to explore the ritual. While many expressed sharing with significant others, rarely did the sharing expense extend beyond a group of two to four individuals. Closer relations lead to more personal emotional attachment that springs in tandem from an attachment to the brand. The intimate few use champagne to create bonding opportunities, learn about champagne brands, and build unity in their relationships. The collective effervescence comes from sharing a specific brand with those closest to the informants, with fewer rules and apprehensions, helping them build social capital based on trust, cooperation, and reciprocity (Bourdieu 1984):

Daniela “I think there is a certain charm in choosing something that not a lot of people know, something that is special because it is a local production or the wine seller is a family that has been working there for centuries or something like that.”

Ian “Laurent Perrier rose is our best option. We have a special preference for rose. [...] Sometimes we drink it alone, sometimes not. We drink a bottle of champagne as a couple, just by ourselves enjoying a perfect date with the person you love. We do it quite often, probably too much. We don’t need a special occasion. Sometimes we just drink champagne when we’re stressed. We drink it like a bottle of wine. It turns to be romantic for us.”

William “At the end I bought Moet & Chandon...I was thinking about several options of champagne, at the end I chose it based on my own taste and my family’s taste. We have

had champagne in several occasions before this moment, so I just went for our favorite, and the one that I knew would never let us down...The brands that I buy most frequently are Moët & Chandon and also Veuve Clicquot.”

Closed Ritual Regimes

In a closed ritual regime, the informants tend to banalize the ritual, making champagne experiences more predictable and routine but specific to special, formal occasions. The informants regard champagne as an accessory, as opposed to central, to such consumption experiences. Those in closed ritual regimes protect the ritual by treating the script as a rigid set of rules to follow. The ritual maintains its roots in the past, as advertising has prescribed based on what champagne sharing should be. Thus, the ritual of champagne consumption is more hegemonic. The informants protect their ideal of champagne by using only sacred objects alongside the champagne (e.g. flutes, table settings, etc.). We note that those in closed ritual regimes first determine if the occasion calls for champagne. Only then do informants purchase champagne, as if motivated by social expectations (norms). As opposed to Driver's (1991) notion of the transformative process of the artifact in the ritual, individuals operating in closed regimes perceive the champagne as merely an accessory to mark the occasion. The celebration would still occur without champagne. In other words, the artifact is nonessential, though there is an expectation that champagne will be offered. When applying Collins (2004) IRT framework in closed ritual regimes, we note that champagne ritual consumption happens because there are other people, often many, and minor barriers to outsiders. Non-consumption of champagne at special occasions is perceived as a social transgression.

Anne “Let's just say that a luxury champagne must also be an ‘accessory.’ For example, a collector's bottle with a particular style that one might keep [after consuming the champagne]. I went to wedding in Brittany and they didn't serve champagne; that was bizarre.”

Lisa “Just like you wouldn’t wear your gala dress to anything else than a gala, because it is about that special event. I would not wear it to anywhere else, because then the illusion is broken. Going back to the bottle of champagne...it is more about the idea of being together with your very, very expensive bottle of champagne than the actual champagne itself.”

Champagne, the artifact, gives sense to the social occasion, making it special, something worth remembering. The mutual focus becomes then the situation, not the product. Furthermore, champagne only appears if the social occasion is important enough, notably weddings, engagements, and job success. These special occasions can also serve to teach others about the rules of champagne drinking, reinforcing social and consumption hegemony. Informants related a sense of lacking control over the social occasion. If the informant creates the celebration, the rules nonetheless guide the consumption experience.

Camille “If we bring people together and there is champagne, then it’s because we are celebrating something in particular, that we are happy to be together, and happy where we are.”

JP “Champagne, compared to wine, is not to be drunk on a daily basis, it is something rare, especially open for special occasions. [...] It’s drunk for special occasions, celebrations like weddings, anniversaries, national holidays, or birthdays. Thus, those celebrations are planned in advance and relatives are invited a long time ago.”

Anne “When we drink champagne with foreigners, we explain to them how champagne is made, how it should be correctly opened, what to do, what not to do, etc.”

Mister “I share it with those in close relationships, and I will never drink it alone. For me, luxury wine can be purchased as a collection, champagne cannot.”

Informants in closed ritual regimes focus on the interaction between people around the product, and in consequence of the special occasion. This means that champagne consumption should occur in larger groups and settings, and not usually in intimate contexts. Drinking alone is out of the question. The images provided confirm this perception, as many exemplify specific special occasions (e.g., Formula 1 winners) and multiple glasses clicking together

(see Appendix). For informants in a closed ritual regime, the brand is not mentioned and not a pillar to the experience. There is a form of commodification of the product category as “champagne” rather than individual brands.

Chloe “It is kind of sad to drink champagne by yourself. We always make sure to share it with our friends.”

Sophia “Champagne is always a group experience.”

The shared emotional experience comes from an attachment to the social gathering and its meaning rather than to the product or to brands. There are rules to respect in light of the occasion when champagne is being served. Furthermore, informants in a closed regime are very aware of their interaction with the product and perceived interaction of others with the product, not in an emotional but rather in a normative way. Fabienne has very little emotional attachment to champagne, even lamenting its probable waste but nonetheless quintessential role in festivities.

Fabienne “Champagne is often wasted because people will likely want to drink other types of beverages during the event, we might even have to spray people with champagne, I’m thinking like Formula One races, so we probably won’t purchase expensive champagne since we probably won’t even appreciate it.”

Though the informants come across as having many opinions about the brands they enjoy, they seldom had clear preferences, as those in an open ritual regime do. They often mentioned that “good” or “quality” brands should be purchased, based on the ritualistic hegemony. Though very few felt strong enough to suggest any brands voluntarily. Moreover, when stated, the champagne brand stood out for many as a symbol of social prowess, more so than as a signal of quality. Interestingly, most in the closed taste regime thought that buying champagne at a specialty store is better for buying a good brand, that supermarkets were not good options to find good brands. If they provide branded pictures, informants in a closed regime did not mention the brands. When probed, informants could not remember “good brands.” Anne even provides a nameless, brand-less champagne image (see Appendix).

Nadège “Especially if the champagne is a good quality one, it’s important to share it with selected people.”

Anne “For me, a luxury champagne is a champagne I am not going to find at a supermarket. It’s a champagne that will cost a certain price, and that must be associated with a particular bottle shape.”

Sebastien “For sure, opening a Krug 1990 makes people happy, more so than if you open a bottle from a small producer from 2008 or a similar product. People are touched when you open a fancy bottle in that price range rather than a more banal option. They feel more important and that we have a better impression of them.”

Lisa “No, actually I do not [remember the brand]. Having this champagne from this very old, traditional champagne company, that kind of did it. That gave the extra touch to the moment. I think I have written down the name of the champagne bottle somewhere.”

Finally, informants in a closed ritual regime reaped a form of collective effervescence from a mutual focus and shared emotional experience that originates from having the right product, at the right price, with the right look, for the right people. Such informants had several rules for the champagne brand they chose to purchase based on packaging features. Rules exist dictating what a champagne bottle to purchase should look like, mentioning the bottle shape, color, symbols on the bottle, and the label. The symbols on the packaging are critical for the purchase occasion. For instance, some of the informants mentioned the gift box (see Appendix). Some elected to keep the bottle and/or the package after the consumption in order to remember the occasion. They would even write the date of the event or the occasion name to as a souvenir to the event. This is likely related to lower levels of involvement and knowledge with the product category. Nonetheless, informants in a closed ritual regime focus on extrinsic product features rather than the intrinsic features of champagne.

Lisa “It would be appropriate to have something that looks like you really want to celebrate something. So I found one that looked really good: it was silver and ladylike. And it looks very high scaled so I think ‘I will just buy it.’ And when it is below 50 euros, I would say, ‘no, maybe I am not a good friend.’ If she keeps [the bottle as a souvenir] in her bedroom on her closet, she can look at it, you know... a bit like a trophy.

Thomas “I don’t know much about wine and champagnes. So, I always look on the bottle first. I just look at bottles and pick the nice-looking ones. If you want to impress the person visually but I think most of my friends do not know about wines either. So if I buy something that looks nice, they probably think that it is a very nice bottle. Especially if the age is older. 2005 is probably more fancy than 2012. My strategy is to buy things within a price range, which will have a nice impact when you see it.”

Camille “For me with a bottle of champagne of a luxury brand, I’m sure to have a good quality champagne. Very recently, I am influenced by the marketing of Moët & Hennessy who is very good and advertises everywhere.”

Fabienne “I think that the price is one of the first things which I pay attention to, which influences my choice at first. I set a minimum price. In general, I think that the more expensive the champagne, the more I think it will be a good quality champagne. Other aspects that influence my choice: the packaging design, the label, the color and shape of the bottle! But, a clear, red, or white bottle, for example, will not be good! I would not associate those colors with a quality champagne!”

However, the consumption of champagne adds to the collective effervescence by attributing to those who buy and consume it a sense of social importance. Informants in a closed ritual regime seek to gain cultural and social capital by consuming champagne, not by knowing about it, but because this consumption happens at special occasions in which they have been invited to participate. Many informants compared themselves to the other party-goers or others, claiming social status for themselves after the champagne sharing. By sharing a good champagne, the actors experience upward social mobility, through an increase in cultural capital, consistent with Bourdieu (1984), where the champagne promotes the social mobility of the actor without the use of economic means. The symbolic capital provided from the champagne enhances the social status of the purchaser.

Sophia “Not a lot of people know about champagne therefore we usually drink the most commercial ones such as Veuve Clicquot or Moët & Chandon. However, it depends on your social group.”

Fabienne “[When serving champagne] it’s probably related to the fact that I want to give myself a certain image, define a certain social status. I think it’s also a bit selfish, because I want to show people that I can afford this bottle.”

Michael “The influence [of the sharing occasion] could be any number of things...showing off.”

BRAND ADVERTISING IMPLICATIONS OF RITUAL REGIMES

In a 2009 campaign, champagne maker Piper-Heidsieck partnered with Louboutin to create a specialty package called Le Rituel, sold on the website of the same name and at high end specialty stores. The new collaboration drew upon the ritual of drinking out of dancers' shoes, performed by Russians and the French in the 1880s. The communications reflected Cinderella and Parisian decadence. The bottle of champagne sold in a package with a flute designed like a shoe (Ramirez 2009). Based on the analysis, individuals in open and closed taste regimes would react differently to this brand story. Individuals with open regime tastes would collect these special editions and appreciate the avant-garde associations with the brand. Yet, those in a closed regime might feel disgusted when suggesting that individuals drink out of women's shoe.

As suggested by the data, those in an open regime are more likely to see champagne as collectible, and appreciate the art behind the brand. Therefore, these limited edition designs and bending of the "normal" rules of champagne drinking are more appropriate ways of connecting to these groups, and even gaining a following. Open regimes have very clear preferences for brands, and they specially relate to the history and quality of the brand. During guided visits, these champagne brands focus on the role of the land, the art of fermentation in varied containers that influence the taste, and the essence of the grape. Thus, each year, the champagne may taste different. The smaller-production champagne houses and the brands which appear more avant-garde, such as Piper Heidsieck, cater to the open regime's appreciation of novelty and knowledge. Therefore, champagne brands looking to change the ritual or reinvent themselves should cater to those consumers in an open taste regime, through the art of champagne production.

Consumer's luxury brand expectations, including rituals, are often interpreted through the advertising and communications brands create. Understanding how consumers integrate brand messages into their rituals with the products and brands as well as the role that brands play in rituals is important. Champagne brands have in part understood this because some, such as Roederer, Ruinart, Dom Perignon focus on "the art" and the lifestyle associated to champagne consumption in their print advertising. By doing so, they speak to those practicing open ritual regimes. Champagne is for every day, for intimate groups, personal rituals, a means to learn about the product and to reap emotional experiences from its consumption.

Alternatively, brands such as Mumm and Taittinger choose to focus on event sponsorship and communication initiatives. Those in open regimes, like Sylvaine, often referred to moving on from these brands through more nuanced knowledge and preference for brands like Piper Heidsieck, with deep histories and stories. Still, Mumm and Taittinger rely on consumers in closed regimes to purchase their brand. These brands are very traditional, and are clearly related to celebration. What would Formula One race winners do if they did not have champagne to spray each other with? Likewise, Taittinger is essential to the annual Screen Actor's Guild awards ceremony. This regime is about marking special occasions, ensuring that specific norms and rules are respected and that emotional attachment comes from the social capital acquired by the consumption of branded, recognizable champagne. In guided visits to the caves of these traditional brands, the tour guide often speaks about the role of the founder, the tradition of champagne making, the quality of the brand, and how important blending is in order to preserve the brand's traditional taste.

Beyond advertising to a closed regime, there appears to be a larger opportunity in establishing and re-establishing connections with their customers since many are not brand loyal and have low brand knowledge. Because these individuals are rather hegemonic in their ideas about champagne sharing, branded advertising and other promotional criteria directed at

this group should use certain cues, such as conviviality, status, flutes, groups, and special occasions. It is unlikely at the present time that individuals in a closed taste regime would change their understanding of this luxury sharing ritual to buy more champagne for collection, to make champagne sharing more common, or even to convince these individuals that a good priced champagne merits trying. Additionally, placement in wine stores is crucial, as many believed that grocery stores were not the place to find good champagne.

Brands should focus marketing efforts on the bottle and packaging, as the majority of the purchase decision occurs in the store (if not predetermined by the brand reputation) based on the bottle and label. Many champagne makers, including well-known brands are playing around with the rules of making and bottling champagne. For instance, as previously mentioned, Moët & Chandon have recently created their newest champagne Ice Imperial, in a white bottle. This champagne would be more relevant for someone in an open taste regime based on bottling choices despite the fact that this brand's popularity makes it relevant for the closed taste regime.

While it can be hard for brands to know which ritual regime their key consumer segments preference, brands may choose to engage in varied communications approaches in order to reach both types of consumers. For example, brands may sponsor intimate sporting events (e.g., horse races) or even be present on airline business class menus in order to reach those practicing the open ritual regime while they can also create print ads in special issues of fashion magazines (e.g., the holiday edition) and sponsor the opening-night gala of large, public art exhibits to reach those who practice a closed ritual regimes.

Based on industry figures, champagne sales are stagnant if not declining in Europe. Many champagne labels are pushing for overseas growth, including emerging economies and BRICs countries (Euromonitor 2014). In designing advertisements targeting these consumers, brands cannot assume their products are known or labels understood by the markets, even in

cultures where drinking alcoholic beverages is rare. Furthermore, not all countries have established drinking traditions and conventions. Without a drinking tradition established, marketers have to educate potential consumers through advertising, web sites, and other marketing means (DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack 1992). Champagne brands have the ability to redefine the ways that the brand fits within existing cultural rituals.

Although our research focused on champagne, the implications of the findings can be applied to other luxury products. As previously mentioned, jewelry and fashion brands may consider focusing on not just the age or the economic resources available to their consumers but also the ways in which they incorporate the consumption of their products in their lives, especially since the luxury industry advertising tends to be more universal. As our results suggest, consumers in both our stated regimes were interested in purchasing high-end bottles. Their consumption approach to the brands were however very distinct.

Although the multi-cultural sample certainly adds validity to the study implications and generalizability, the sample size and variance is a limitation of the current study. Future studies should examine the same phenomenon cross-culturally to further examine how different cultures interpret the same ritual, even within the same taste regime. By the same token, future research should examine the frequency and occasions from which different cultures consume champagne, as well as other ritualized luxury products.

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TABLE 1

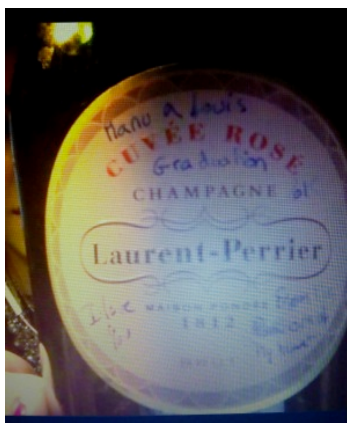
Sample Data, Presented in Order of Collection

Name (Gender)	Age	Nationality
William (M)	27	Mexican
Camille (F)	22	French
Nadège (F)	22	French
Paula (F)	24	Colombian
Sarah (F)	55	American
Chloe (F)	25	French
Sebastien (M)	40	French
Anne (F)	56	French
Daniela (F)	28	Spanish
Ryan (M)	26	Irish

JP (M)	22	French
Thomas (M)	33	French
Sylviane (F)	22	French
Allen (M)	24	Taiwanese
Ian (M)	50	English
Fabienne (F)	49	French
Lisa (F)	22	Dutch
Sophia (F)	54	Brazilian

APPENDIX 1

Open Ritual Regime Images



Closed Ritual Regime Images

