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### **Luxury Personalisation, Customisation and Bespoke – Increasing the Product Offer**

#### **ABSTRACT**

It could be said that true luxury products are defined through skill, connoisseurship, rarity, craftsmanship and innovation. Luxury brands on the other hand are defined by illusions of luxury, fashion, authenticity, lifestyle, aspiration, the global market and profit.

Increasingly luxury brands have introduced options to customize and personalize their products to enhance their offer and thereby creating the perception that the customer is purchasing something individual. However, these options within the realms of the luxury brand, do nothing more than offer variations on a theme. Component pieces within an existing product range are produced and offered for sale as part of an existing product category.

Offering a customised product changes the perception of the consumer. They believe they are buying something different but this is far from the reality. Luxury brands offer customisation to attempt to diversify and add value to their product offer. If one considers craftsmanship and innovation as core components in creating differentiation between luxury and luxury branded products, it could then be argued that traditional crafted products and the integration of digital technologies challenge the status quo.

As customisation and personalisation is already occupying a place of growing significance and includes viable modes of industrialised production, the product offer lacks the integrity that would be associated with a handmade luxury product.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This article sets out to explore how luxury brands are changing the perception of their product offers through the adoption of terminology that implies their products are unique and 'made for' the customer. Through the analysis of global luxury brands, specifically, Louis Vuitton and Prada it becomes apparent that the products they offer for sale, in whatever iteration, continue to make use of methods of mass production to satisfy a growing international market dominated by fashion and trends. This is in stark contrast to Tanner Krolle a traditional purveyor of luxury goods who employ hand made manufacturing in the traditional sense and consider these production methods that include hand stitching, cutting and limited production and craft skills as key components of their production. In addition, mass production is considered in the context of how luxury brands have grown as a result of being able to supply historically hand crafted products en-masse through technological innovation.

**KEYWORDS: luxury, fashion, personalisation, customisation, manufacture, branding, marketing, e-retail**

## **PERSONALISED, CUSTOMISED AND BESPOKE SERVICES**

There is a lack of clarity that exists within the luxury brands market where services offered are marketed as personalised, customised and bespoke. These services are offered both in store and in some cases exclusively on-line. What on the surface should be a clearly articulated definition of services appears to have been muddled so as to add value to the products. Personalisation is simple in that it offers the customer the opportunity to have their initials printed, stamped, embossed, appliqued or painted onto a product. Customisation is a service that should be seen to offer the customer something that is made or customised specially for them, but in reality, as is the case with luxury brands, is one that would not be possible or make financial sense if the customer were to have 'control' over the final outcome. Uche Okonkwo suggests that 'customisation and personalisation of products, services and also web pages rank among the yearnings of the current luxury consumer.' (Okonkwo, 2007: p.250) With that said, it is no surprise that luxury brands are addressing this as an additional revenue stream to increase sales. There are distinctions to be made between customisation and personalisation as will be discussed.

Historically, customisation and personalisation were intrinsic to the sale of luxury products. Luxury was defined through the provision of goods and services created specifically for the customer. As will be discussed, Louis Vuitton and Tanner Krolle for example made bespoke trunks and luggage for their customers. However as the markets grew and their customer base changed they have increasingly had to adapt to ensure that they addressed these changes through an increasingly diverse product offer.

A true process of customisation, in the case of a luxury brand, would not necessarily limit the customer's options. Limitations placed on product customisation and personalisation is prevalent with luxury brands. Specialist staff would need to be trained and be required to have expert knowledge of how a product was made, the materials used and have the authority to make decisions with the client without the limitations placed on them as to what the customer's options are. The staff would also be required to guide the customer through the customisation process. This would not be financially viable due to the price points of the personalised and customised product options. For a company to offer these services they must of course make financial sense as there is a need to control the manufacturing process. There must be little or no drain on resources ensuring that all the products offered as customised must form part of the existing product range and be limited to a number of key pieces that perform well at point of sale and are deemed to be continuum items that are not seasonal. This offer could be defined as mass-customisation as the products are mass produced. This differs from the

customised offer of Tanner Krolle, for example, where the products are limited in production and customisation, although restricted to an existing item within the collection offers the client more choice.

It is also important to emphasise here the role of the case studies (Prada, Tanner Krolle etc.) in substantiating the initial claims (lack of clarity within luxury brands market with personalised customised and bespoke service).

Okonkwo suggests that 'mass customisation is the production and sale of highly individual products and services on a bulk scale, to a mass market. In other words, it is the provision of customised products and services to every consumer who desires so.' (Okonkwo, 2007: p.249) She goes on to state that 'it involves using mass production techniques and economies of scale processes to manufacture a large variety of products at lower costs and capture more personal style needs of customers.' (Okonkwo, 2007: p.249) It is fair to say that mass customisation does offer for sale products and services on a bulk scale to a mass market, but the idea that the products offered are highly individual and that a large variety of products are offered is questionable.

In the case of Louis Vuitton, the personalised and customised product offer is limited and the only individualised service is the application, albeit by hand, of the painted initials and stripes on the *Monogram* Louis Vuitton products. Louis Vuitton also offer a service they call *Hot Stamping* where the customer can 'add a personal touch by hot stamping initials on an agenda cover, wallet or luggage tag.' (Hot Stamping) The customer has the option to select from 18 colours and three initials. This service is complimentary and available on selected products on-line or in store.

The personalisation service offered as part of the *Lettering Project* by Prada, which will be discussed in more detail later, are mass produced, limited to 26 variations (the number of letters in the alphabet) and applied by a machinist. It would be difficult to justify this service as highly individualised. In addition, the sales portals for customised products for both Louis Vuitton and Prada are centred around e-commerce and their websites. This mode of shopping introduces the customer to a different shopping experience than that of a personalised service supplied in a physical space or store.

The customised offer where a product is mass-produced provides variations on a theme that could be having one's initials painted on a bag in the case of Louis Vuitton, being able to choose from a database of letters to be applied onto a product in the case of Prada or being given the option to choose from existing components to 'build' a product. Examples of each of these processes will be given in detail in the individual case studies. It is useful to note that all the luxury brands discussed promote similar services where the customisation offer allows the customer to adapt an existing product with limited choice either using a template to make a slight alteration to an existing product or to select components that allow the customer to 'build' a product. Louis Vuitton and Prada both offer personalisation and customisation although they call their services different names. To provide clarity it is proposed that the following definitions will be used to clearly articulate the differences and in some

instances similarities in the services offered. These definitions are used as a guide and employ the descriptors provided by Louis Vuitton and Prada online and in store and through an interview conducted with John O’Sullivan, Chief Operating Officer at Tanner Krolle. As will become apparent in the case studies of Prada and Tanner Krolle, the use of language to describe the services differs. These differences are described in Table 1 below:

<b>Company</b>	<b>Description of Service</b>	<b>Personalisation</b>	<b>Customisation</b>	<b>Bespoke</b>
<b>Louis Vuitton</b>	Hot Stamping	Mass produced product Existing product offer Initials		
	Mon Monogram	With initials	Mass Produced Product Modular / limited choice	
	Bespoke			Made to Order
<b>Prada</b>	Lace-up Project Tie-up Project	No personalisation offer -	Mass produced product / existing modular/ Made to Order	
<b>Tanner Krolle</b>	Bespoke	Initials applied to existing and or customised and bespoke goods.	Made to Order	Designed and Made to Order

*Table 1: Descriptions of personalised services*

Personalisation is a service offered where the customer has the option to personalise an existing product with initials or to apply minor changes to a product without changing the design or construction. Customisation could be defined as a product that can be adapted to satisfy the customers’ needs.

These definitions are not definitive as Louis Vuitton, Prada and Tanner Krolle interpret the words differently. Both Louis Vuitton and Prada's personalised and customised offer is similar in that they have a standard product that is manufactured in modular pieces that can be assembled in colour or material variations. There is no option to change the design of the product in anyway. Tanner Krolle on the other hand define their customisation service as one where the customer can make minimal design changes that could include adding pockets to the interior of a bag or piece of luggage.

Louis Vuitton, as with Prada and Tanner Krolle offer services that are defined as individualising the product line. The services that both Louis Vuitton and Prada provide are similar in that the personalisation and customisation could be said to be surface changes to existing goods. The bespoke service that Louis Vuitton makes available is more in line with that of Tanner Krolle. Prada do not offer a bespoke service. In addition to the *Hot Stamping* provision as outlined above, Louis Vuitton describe their *Mon Monogram* service as both personalised and customised where the customer can 'add your initials and a stripe to turn one of our most iconic products into a one-of-a-kind piece as original as its owner.' (Louis Vuitton, 2012)

The personalisation and customisation e-retail and e-commerce websites remove the need for sales assistants as they are interactive allowing the customers to use the software to customize their products. This reduces costs, increases the control the customer has over the selection process and offers what could be defined merely as a superficial design input that the customer has over the product. Louis Vuitton offers four product options of the *Mon Monogram* service on their e-retail portal: the *Speedy*, *Pegase*, *Keepall* and *Neverfull*. What is not clear is why this service is considered to be luxury when so many high street retailers, like Nike and Levis, have been offering comparable, if not better and more interactive services for many years. Both Nike and Levis e-retail experience could be considered to be far more interactive than Louis Vuitton as there are many more options available to the customer that enhance the shopping experience. Louis Vuitton, for example, only offers a zoom tool and limited view point options. Nike ID offers ten customisation tools on their footwear site. These include upper fabric and colour, heel material and colour, quarter accent colour, lace colour and material, swoosh colour, accent stitching, sidewall colour and accent colour, sock liner, outsole colour and heel ID and colour. There are also options such as 360° views, being able to take a snapshot of your shoe to mail to friends and keep as a reference.

With so many options available on other e-retail sites compared to Louis Vuitton it raises the question of why they would engage with online sales and offer an online service. Moreover, it is so far removed from their core business and does not address the inherent values of the luxury experience they are trying to communicate. One explanation could be that luxury brands, already established as suppliers of aspirational lifestyle products, see this as an opportunity to further increase their sales. The question remains is, how the on-line service can be seen to be luxurious when it is simply another retail outlet, but with no one-on-one service provided. After all, luxury brands in general consider their customer service as being intrinsic to the luxury experience. Onkonkwo suggests that 'consumers want to be

treated as important through the provision of choices in product and service offerings.’ (Okonkwo, 2007: p.251) She goes on to say that ‘they want to be given the power to request and choose what appeals precisely to their individual tastes.’ (Okonkwo, 2007: p.251) The on-line personalisation and customisation e-retail offer does not address either of these issues. In her book *Luxury On-Line*, with reference to customisation online, Okonkwo is clear when she acknowledges the lack of innovation of luxury brand e-retail offers compared to, for example, Nike. She writes that consumers are becoming increasingly web and social media savvy and expect ‘extraordinary personalised experiences with the brands that they have chosen both offline and online.’ (Okonkwo, 2010: p.175) The extraordinary services she refers to relate mostly to the way in which a customer can, for example, personalise the webpage. This includes options to change the font, colours, and images and be able to ‘build’ a shopping avatar. This may enhance the online experience, but I do not believe it adds to an experience defined as luxury as there is no clear distinction, or improved service on offer.

Okonkwo also writes that ‘in addition to the customisation of web pages and contents, Internet and digital technologies also provide opportunities for products either to be entirely customised or to be dotted with touches of personalisation.’ (Okonkwo, 2010: p.176) This may be true of websites like Nike or Levis, but it is not representative of luxury brand e-retail services where at most the customer is only able to make minimal personalised changes to the select product offer. Furthermore, she goes on to assert that ‘general consensus indicates that online product personalisation, customisation and co-creation is inapplicable to luxury because luxury brands are supposed to create a ‘dream’, which means imagining what consumers desire before they even know it, and bringing this dream to life.’ (Okonkwo, 2010: p.176) Although she agrees with bringing the dream to life she disagrees ‘that luxury products may not be personalised or customised online.’ (Okonkwo, 2010: p.176) Okonkwo does make reference to the Louis Vuitton *Hot Stamping* service, but implies that luxury and luxury brand services are the same. It is evident that most luxury brands do offer personalised and customised services online, but I do not believe these services offer anything more than superficial changes. A luxury personalisation and customisation service should not be reduced to a system governed by software. The justification of online services that include adding initials or making slight cosmetic changes to a product is what distinguishes a luxury brand from luxury. The removal of contact with a specialist also removes the notion of the ‘luxury dream’ as referred to by Okonkwo. The luxury experience is established through one to one contact with a craftsman or someone with exceptional knowledge and experience of a product and or service. Providing an extraordinary experience and personal service remains one of the key elements that distinguish luxury from luxury brands.

### **Customisation**

Prada offers products within three distinct categories: men, women and children. Also, included in these three categories are sub-categories that consist of travel goods, business products, gifts and a variety of products categorised as a customisation offer. These categories are then split up into product specific differentiation. For example, within the women’s collection there are eight product categories that are

made up of fashion clothing, footwear, handbags, wallets, jewellery, cosmetics and perfumes, small accessories, gifts and sunglasses. Included within the handbag product offer are handbags that are itemised as top handles, totes, shoulder bags, clutches and evening bags, bring your own bag and mini bags. Within each of these categories there is an expansive offer that encompasses multiple colour and fabrication choices. In the shoulder bag and totes category, there are roughly 95 style options. If each outlet were to order one bag of each style in one colour way, Prada would need to produce 782,1920 bags. This is the equivalent of 16,295 bags a week over 48 working weeks per annum. By implication, while Prada today market their products as exclusive, evidence suggests that from data compiled this is far from the reality. The contemporary production line where large numbers of products are manufactured is in direct contrast to the original intentions of Mario Prada when he opened his first luxury gifts store in Milan in 1913. He focused on the production and sale of luxury luggage and exclusive gifts that he sourced from around the world. In order to situate the changes in mode of production and as a comparison to illustrate that this is not unique in the luxury brand market, the following example is offered. Burberry opened their flagship store in London in September 2012 and are reported to stock '24,000 pieces of clothing in store at any one time.' (Urwin, 2012)

In order to maintain stock levels in all luxury brand retail outlets mass production is necessary. What remains questionable is the idea that all the products sold are exclusive. Reverting back to Prada, the analysis is based on the shoulder bag and tote category offered by Prada online. This is an indication of the scale of the production line processes and requirements needed to fulfil the demand of their retail outlets to maintain stock levels.

There are differences in the way in which Prada and Louis Vuitton describe their products. Louis Vuitton name their bags, whereas Prada assign theirs a style number. This differentiates all the products and makes it easier for the customer to distinguish between items within a single product category. Prada, for example, as part of their spring summer 2012 collection in the shoulder bag category offered 29 bags in a variety of materials ranging from leather and exotic skins to nylon. In this category alone there are 81 colour options. In the totes category there are 66 bags offered, again in a variety of materials including calfskin, deerskin, ostrich, crocodile and snakeskin. In this category there are 251 colour options.

As it is impossible to gather precise information about the units manufactured an assumption has to be made to illustrate the scale of production needed to manufacture and supply all of the Prada stores worldwide. In the shoulder bag category, Prada would need to produce 669,465 units supplying one bag of each colour in each style. In the tote's category Prada would need to manufacture 4,721,310 bags, again manufacturing one of each bag for each store around the world. Satisfying a global market not only requires the ability and capability to supply product it also demands that a clear message is communicated to the customer. In the case of luxury brands this message is one of luxury, aspiration and exclusivity. All luxury brands, including Prada, capitalise on amongst other things, the notion of luxury, exclusivity and encompass options described as customisation and communicate this to

customers across the globe. These are mere perceptions increasing the value at the point of sale of all products sold bearing a luxury brand label.

### ***Prada customisation***

Increasingly luxury brands have started to offer what they describe as customised products. Allowing the customer to engage in the 'design' process adds value to the shopping experience and justifies the premium charged for the experience. Joseph Pine suggests that 'no longer do (companies) focus on producing standardised products ... for homogeneous markets. Through the application of technology and new management methods, they have found their way to a new paradigm by creating variety and customisation through flexibility and quick responsiveness.' (Pine, 1999: p.44) This model has been adopted by all sectors of the fashion industry, however, it could be argued that in some cases the products remain standardised. Prada, and as discussed in the Louis Vuitton case study, offer for sale products that allows the customer to add initials or make slight alterations to existing products. Despite the introduction of the option to customise one's product, the options are limited. This differs to the customisation offer at Tanner Krolle as will be discussed in that specific case study. For clarity, it would be useful to analyse the Prada customisation offer to better understand what it is and how it works.

Prada offer two product ranges that they call *Customisation*. They are the *Lettering Project* and the *Lace-Up Project* both available to order on-line with limited facilities to order in-store. In addition, there is a bespoke offer that is only available to order in-store. The *Lettering Project* and the give the customer a standard set of components to choose from. They could be letters as in the *Lettering Project* or uppers, soles and laces in the *Lace-Up project*.

### ***The Lettering Project***

The *Lettering Project* is described on their website as 'twenty six possibilities for selling iconic items from Prada's travel collection.' (Lettering Project) There are three items to choose from, a backpack, a 'trolley' suitcase and a shopping bag. All three items are made in nylon and trimmed with Saffiano leather. Each of the twenty six letters is available in one design and one colour way. The customisable camouflage backpack costs £645.00, whereas the same backpack without customisation costs £495.00. What is interesting to note, and through a comparison of the two items as described on the Prada website, is that although the items appear to be the same, the descriptions are slightly different. The *Lettering Project* backpack has nine bullet points describing the item, whereas the 'standard' backpack has seven bullet point descriptions. Taking into consideration that the one feature of the *Lettering Project* is the option to have one's initials sewn onto the outside of the backpack, one main feature of the bag is missing from the standard offer, that of an outside pocket that is clear to see on the product.



<b>Prada</b>	<b>Lettering Project</b>	<b>Standard</b>
	BACKPACK	BACKPACK
	FABRIC BACKPACK WITH SAFFIANO LEATHER TRIM	CAMOUFLAGE PRINT FABRIC BACKPACK WITH SAFFIANO CALF LEATHER TRIM
	PERSONALIZATION WITH SAFFIANO LEATHER LETTERS	ANTIQUED SILVER HARDWARE
	ONE OUTSIDE POCKET	REAR ENAMELLED TRIANGLE LOGO
	ENAMELLED TRIANGLE LOGO	TECHNICAL NYLON AND METAL CLOSURE
	NYLON AND METAL TECHNICAL CLOSING	PRADA LOGO LINING
	ONE INSIDE POCKET	ONE INSIDE POCKET
	PRADA LOGO LINING	
	L 27 H 45 D 17 CM	L 45 H 27 W 17 CM

*Table 2: Comparison of Prada personalisation and standard product offer*

Although the bags appear to be exactly the same there is inconsistent information available to describe the items. This raises the question about how luxury is communicated today. Where one would expect the level of service that includes product descriptors to be in line with the company's ethos of providing 'its customers products of unequalled quality, creativity and exclusivity.' (Group Profile) One would expect this statement to apply to all areas of activity within the Prada group including the communication and descriptors of product.

### ***The Lace-Up Project***

The *Lace-Up Project* offers customers the option of customising a pair of shoes and described on the their website as: 'the British-inspired lace-up with double sole in cord and micro, seen in the Spring Summer 2011 fashion shows, are exclusively available on Prada.com and in the Prada store Corso Venezia 3 in Milan.' (Lace-Up Project) The description of the customisation offer reads as, 'customers have twelve different colours to choose from; the shoe can be made in either one single colour ... or in one of five colour combinations.' (Lace-Up Project) *The Lace-Up Project* differs in that the shoes are not offered as standard items for sale in store. It is not clear how Prada consider the *Lace-Up Project* to be customisable as the customer has a limited choice, albeit that there are twelve different colours. There is, however, a wider colour choice than the shoes offered in store and on-line where there are in some instances, only three colours to choose from of any one style of shoe. With the *Lace Up Project*, there is no option to change the colour of the sole, upper, laces or any other component that makes up the shoe. This is in contrast to the extensive shoe customisation offer available on the Nike website where there are numerous choices available to the customer. These include two choices of the fabric for the upper and ten colour choices, eleven colour choices for the Nike *Swoosh* logo, eleven colour options for the upper accent, twelve colour choices for the midsole rim and lining, four colours for the midsole, two choices of sock liner (one cushioned and the other responsive), two choices of outsole with seven colour choices, eleven colours of laces with the option of a second pair of laces and two choices for the tongue iD – the customer can have the Nike logo or their initials (Nike ID). There is also the option to capture two customised designs, as illustrated below, and send them to friends for comment.

It could therefore be argued that customisation within the realms of the luxury brand do nothing more than offer variations on a theme. The *Lace Up Project* offers one style of shoe and is a constant offer that does not change with the season. The shoes could be seen to be a core part of their collection as they are continually on offer for sale. The tender is similar to that of the *Lettering Project* in that the component parts that make up the items are what could be considered as constant and can be produced irrespective of an order. The three items that Prada offer as part of the *Lettering Project* are core pieces in their collection available for sale without being customised. Prada can therefore manufacture additional pieces of the items and allocate them to customisation. The customisable component pieces are the letters that are selected by the customer and sewn onto the item of their choice. In my view,

both the *Lettering Project* and the *Lace-Up Project* are limited and do not fully address the notion of customisation.

Ultimately, the customer's perception of a product is crucial. Offering a customised product changes the perception of the purchaser. They believe they are buying something different. Pine suggests that 'what used to be large demand for standard mass-market products has fragmented into demand for different "flavours" of similar products.' (Pine, 1999: p.45) As I have elucidated, and in this instance, the use of customisation is there simply to add value to the product offer by implying that customers have more choice, when in fact there are limits. It is the 'modular' form of customisation as previously discussed. The Prada customisation offer attempts to offer the buyer a product that, on the surface at the very least, appears to be different from the core product, but on inspection is not different at all. Pine goes on to suggest that 'because demand has fragmented, the large, homogeneous markets have become increasingly heterogeneous' and that the 'niches are becoming the market, shifting power to the buyers who demand higher-quality goods that more closely match their individual desires.' (Pine, 1999: p.45) Luxury brands are attempting to address the changing markets through expanding their product offer. What is evident, however, is that luxury brands are not innovating in their 'enhanced' product offer. They are in fact competing with high street, sports and fashion retailers, like Nike, who have been offering enhanced customised products for some time.

Luxury brands have only recently introduced customised products online. Both Nike and Levis have been offering a much more extensive customisation service since the 1990's. Through the introduction of mass-customised services, luxury brands are trying to capture what was once an important element of their original service, one of exclusivity and catering to the customer's wants and needs. As more and more disposable goods and services become available and the customer tires of seeing multiples of products carried or worn by other customers; they need to feel that what they are buying into, in a world where more luxury branded products are available than ever before, is superior and lives up to the expectations that they set for themselves.

One must not forget, and as already discussed, customisation was at the heart of the original Louis Vuitton business. Louis Vuitton did customise his products to satisfy his customer's needs. Vuitton's 'principle of designing the trunk, specifically ordered by the customer, around the objects that it would contain, rather than trying to fit objects into an existing trunk design.' (Pasols, 2005: p.31) was one approach that addressed customisation. On the other hand, Mario Prada did not offer a customised service; he simply provided premium quality goods to his customers.

The notion that luxury brands supply goods that are exclusive is questionable especially where, in the case of Prada, the products are mass-produced. Pine offers an interesting insight into the contrast between mass customisation and mass production. Although he does not consider luxury brands, the analysis provides a thought provoking argument. If one were to consider Prada as a company that mass produces the majority of their products, including those that are offered for sale as customised, the

notion of exclusivity remains questionable. By its very nature an exclusive product is limited in both manufacture and supply. Pine suggests that a focus of mass customisation should provide variety through flexibility and quick responsiveness. It may be that Prada do in fact provide flexibility, however, it is evident that they do not, in the greater scheme of things, provide variety as is evident through their customisation offer. They do provide variety across their fashion products as the very nature of what a fashion company does it to change the products offered for sale each season, or in some cases more often.

As a point of reference, I have used Pine's diagram from his book *Mass Customisation*. He considers three areas of activity, *Focus*, *Goal* and *Key Features* in two categories of production, mass production and mass customisation. There are obvious principles of mass production and mass customisation that could be applied to luxury brands, such as, Prada and Louis Vuitton. In the first instance the focus of all areas of mass production, whether a product is customised or not, must consider putting in place efficiency measures to ensure that production is controlled to make certain that the production line is managed in a way that maximises output. In addition, the goals of both mass production and mass customisation must also consider areas of product development where consideration is given to innovative manufacturing methods. Mass customisation could be seen to enhance the product offer through a customisable product that gives the end user choice of product. The choice is, however, limited as the product must remain true to the brand and at the same time retain the brand identity. Luxury brands adoption of mass customisation is not as diverse as Pine suggests when he asserts that 'everyone finds exactly what they want.' (Pine, 1999: p.44) It is evident from my research, as illustrated in both this case study and that of Louis Vuitton, that the customisation offer is limited. A common feature is that nearly all manufacturers of mass customised products consider the end cost. Fashion companies, and in this case a luxury brand, whose aim it is to sell products seasonally, or who have the capability and capacity to introduce new lines on a regular basis does not appear to change their customisation offer. Consequently, this is not a short product life cycle. The opposite is in fact a more realistic view to be considered where luxury brands are concerned. The products are mass produced with additional components added.

I offer an additional category to Pine's diagram in Table 3, that of *Luxury Brand Mass Customisation* to establish similarities between mass production techniques that are used to maximise output and mass customisation methods of production which are very similar. Where consideration is given to the three main areas in the two modes of production that Pine considers, the notion of luxury brand mass customisation is not so distinct that one would not be able to reconcile the differences. I suggest that the similarities between mass production, mass customisation and luxury brand mass customisation adopt similar, if not the same, principles of production. Although the goals may be different to what Pine suggests, the ultimate aim of a luxury brand could be interpreted as one that focuses on minimal disruption to the production cycle where the product has a long lifecycle. The price points of a luxury brand product remains high despite mass production. It is the marketing and communication of the brand values that elevate the value of the product.

	<b>Mass Production</b>	<b>Mass Customisation</b>	<b>Prada - Luxury Brand Mass Customisation</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Efficiency through stability and control	Variety and customisation through flexibility and quick responsiveness	Standard product with a limited customisation offer - initials
<b>Goal</b>	Developing, producing, marketing, and delivering goods and services at prices low enough that nearly everyone can afford them	Developing, producing, marketing, and delivering affordable goods and services with enough variety and customisation that nearly everyone finds exactly what they want	Price points increase Limited customization Greater profit Minimal disruption to production cycle
<b>Key Features</b>	Stable demand Large, homogeneous markets Low-cost, consistent quality, standardised goods and services Long product development cycles	Fragmented demand Heterogeneous niches Low-cost, high quality, customised goods and services Short product development cycles Short product life cycles	Stable demand Low-cost High return Short product development cycles Long product lifecycles

Table 3: Differentiating mass production, mass Customisation and Luxury Brand Mass Customisation

## **PERSONALISATION, CUSTOMISATION AND BESPOKE – MARKETING A SERVICE TO ADD VALUE TO A PRODUCT**

As a result of what could be termed as a market that is saturated with luxury brands due in part to their global presence and continued growth it has become increasingly important to try to offer services that appear on the surface at least to offer something that is tailored to the individual. Increasingly, luxury brands have introduced services that imply that a product is made or tailored to a customer's needs. This could be something that is bespoke, made for the customer to their specifications or customised, where in the case of Prada and Louis Vuitton initials of the customer are painted, embroidered or applied onto an item. These services, however, do come at a cost. For example, the standard Louis Vuitton *Keepall 50* travelbag without customisation costs £680.00 whereas the customised *Keepall 50* with 3 painted letters and stripes costs £920.00.

The definition of the terms to describe customisation differ from company to company. Louis Vuitton describe their offer as *Mon Monogram*, a service that is limited to 3 initials and a 2 colour stripe. Interestingly, O'Sullivan has a very clear idea of how the words are used to describe a particular service. For example, where Prada and Louis Vuitton use the term 'customisation' to describe a method used to individualise a product, O'Sullivan describes this service as 'personalisation'. He claims that where Prada and Louis Vuitton offer the customer the option of adding their initials to a product or making a slight change through an existing product offered for sale, this is personalisation and not customisation. He goes on to suggest that these offers have set the parameters of what can be ordered. O'Sullivan describes customisation as 'working with the customer on their brief and show them the archive to see aesthetically where they want to go and what they want from their product.' (O'Sullivan, 2012) He goes on to explain that 'the customer chooses exactly what they like and then build on their brief.' (O'Sullivan, 2012) Simpson agrees saying that although the item may be customised it is often based on something that has been made before and that 'it is not really starting from scratch, it is not like commissioning a piece of art that really has not existed before'. He gave an example of a client who had a collection of Fabergé eggs and wanted a special case to put the eggs in as he was carrying them round wrapped in cotton wool in his attaché case. He explains the process; 'we were given the size of the eggs and based the box on an existing jewellery box, but with special dividers and incorporated a handle on the front and quad hinges.' (Simpson, 2012) Simpson goes on to clarify that even though the box was based on something that they had already made it was bespoke as it was vitally important for his client to have something in which to transport his Fabergé eggs. This type of personalised service is not available from either Prada or Louis Vuitton as characterised on their websites, although a customer may be able to commission Louis Vuitton to do this type of work in their Paris workshops. Prada do not undertake commissions in the same way.

The various offers of 'creating' a Prada or Louis Vuitton product that has an element of personalisation is predominantly an on-line service, although with both companies the customer could elect to go into a store to purchase a bag from Louis Vuitton that has their initials painted onto the item. Inevitably, there is no contact with the person who will be undertaking the painting of the initials. This is arranged with the sales person, but this same service is not possible with Prada. However, they do offer *Made to Measure* suits that must be purchased in store. The *Lettering Project* (where the customer can choose their initials and have them applied to a selection of products) and the *Lace-Up Project* (allows the customer to customise their shoes), must be purchased on-line using the software on the e-store.

It is useful to distinguish between the services that Louis Vuitton, Prada and Tanner Krolle offer in order to understand the types of service and how the three companies interpret the notions of personalisation, customisation and bespoke. Tanner Krolle offer three services: customisation, personalisation and bespoke. The customisation offer is articulated as providing 'customisation of our core collection, offering personalised colours, linings and other finishes.' (Bespoke and Custom Made, 2012)

As I have already established, Tanner Krolle's customisation offer is one where the customer has the opportunity to select a product from their archive and make changes to it, these could include 'changing the lining, the colour, or other finishes.' (Tanner Krolle, 2012) O'Sullivan states that they 'offer the customer four options of lining colours, four different leathers, two different pieces of hardware and maybe adding a pocket if requested.' (O'Sullivan, 2012) He goes on to stress that although this is a service that is offered to all customers it is very difficult logistically as they have to go 'into a mini-production of one unit each time as the threads have to be changed on all the machines, the edge stain has to be changed, the leather has to be drummed with a minimum of ten skins.' (O'Sullivan, 2012) Simpson goes further saying that there have been instances where a customer has requested an item to be made from a particular leather not understanding the process. He asserts that where this happens there is a need to explain the process to the customer and if need be tell them that they will not be able to make the item requested. This process is in complete contrast to the Prada and Louis Vuitton offer as it is only available in store and the customer needs to make an appointment to meet with the craftsman. O'Sullivan suggests that what Prada and Louis Vuitton offer is not customisation, rather personalisation as there is no contact with the craftsman, nor is there the opportunity to discuss how a product may be customised. He says that by implication adding one's initials is personalisation as the initials are the only distinguishing feature of the product.

The bespoke service is described by Tanner Krolle as 'craftsmanship at its finest, for those who seek the best and demand exclusivity there can be no more treasured possession than a piece created by one of our craftsmen from our extensive archive or from a customer's original concept.' (Tanner Krolle, 2012) The bespoke offer is a service that they describe as a highly specialised and personal service. Simpson suggests that the bespoke process is akin to producing wine, because the leather is never the same and that sometimes the craftsman has to adapt the way he works purely because of the condition

of the leather. O'Sullivan compares their bespoke service to *haute couture* where the customer is at the heart of the decision making and goes back to the original intent of the designer. The process is described by O'Sullivan as 'working with the client on the design, showing leather swatches and then work from there. Once the design is decided we work on what is called a *salpa* where we model the design in almost a cardboard material, a material that works very much like leather where adjustments can be made before making the final product.' (O'Sullivan, 2012) This process gives the customer complete control over the item they have ordered allowing them to make intricate decisions about the product that would include compartment sizes, pockets or drawers for specific items or to fit into specific places, for example, a boot of a car. The customer also has the option to add finishes; one customer ordered a set of luggage that was set with flawless pink diamonds.

Prada do not define the customization offer in the same way as either Tanner Krolle or Louis Vuitton. The three distinct services offered; the *Lettering Project*, the *Lace-Up Project* and *Made to Measure* are described as stand-alone offers due to the differences of the service and product offered. The *Lettering Project* is described as 'twenty-six possibilities for sealing iconic items from the Prada's travel collection.' (Lettering Project, 2012) Although there are in fact 26 letter combinations there is no function to allow the customer to change any of the letter designs. This could be perceived as the most minimal application of customization as it is, at its most basic level, the application of pre-made letters to a specific Prada product. The *Lace-Up Project* offers customers 12 different colours to choose from; the shoe can be made in either one single colour (of which there is a choice of 7) or in one of 5 colour combinations. (Lace-Up Project, 2012) The *Lace-Up Project* as a customizable offer is questionable as the only thing the customer has a real choice of is their initials on their shoe bag. The *Made-to-Measure* service offers 'suits, coats, jackets, shirts and trousers.' (Prada Made to Measure, 2012) In the suit category there are two style options, the classic and the slim. There are 300 fabric choices.

Louis Vuitton market their customised service as *Mon Monogram* and describe it as combining 'the elegance of Louis Vuitton's most iconic shape and the originality of customisation.' (Mon Monogram, 2012) The service is described in the following way: 'the service invites you to make your own creation in a few easy steps: select your preferred model, pick two colours for the stripes and add your initials. The 200 million possible combinations of *Mon Monogram* ensure the utmost uniqueness.' (Mon Monogram, 2012) The offer suggests that the customer is able to 'make their own creation', however, on inspection and having gone through the process on line the options are limited, despite the claim that there are 200 million possible combinations. In the first instance there are four styles with four choices of customisation to choose from. The styles are; the *Keepall*, the *Pegase*, the *Speedy* and the *Neverfull*. The customer is given a standard choice of 17 colours that can be used to create a variety of stripes with four placement options. In addition, there is the same colour choice for initials that are always placed centred on the product of choice.

It is evident that although Prada, Louis Vuitton and Tanner Krolle market services as personalised, customised, bespoke or made to order the former offer what could be defined as variations of a theme.



Standardised, modularised components that are easily assembled with minimum effect on the production line as the products already exist. This is unless the customer is purchasing at the very top end of the product offer, and only Louis Vuitton and Tanner Krolle do this. However, Louis Vuitton charges a considerable amount more for their bespoke service than Tanner Krolle. In 2010 Luxist the webzine reviewed a Louis Vuitton humidor that was custom made and sold by the Pullman gallery for \$68,000.00. (Stern, 2012) A comparable trunk made by Tanner Krolle would cost £15,000.00.

The research conducted illustrates a difference between interpretations of terminology within the luxury market. The terms personalisation, customisation and bespoke are used differently by purveyors of luxury goods and luxury brands and should not be seen as interchangeable since they deliver very different product options and services to the customer. Luxury brands use the terminology to capitalise on the value added through the use of such terms. This is confusing to customers as the distinctions are lost through an illusionary offer. The use of these descriptors differ significantly from the various purveyors of luxury goods and luxury brands. The luxury brands describe a service that implies that the customer will receive an individualised product when in fact these represent only minor modifications to a mass market product. It could be said that the service provided is not transparent since the customer may not fully understand that the products they are buying are permutations of existing products with slight amendments, while implying that something is customised. In addition, there is no contact with the maker, distancing the buyer one level more from experiencing the design and production process first hand. Luxury brands and purveyors of luxury goods share a language, but the words they use have very different interpretations and intentions.

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## Tables

Table 1. Descriptions of Personalised Services.

Table 2. Comparison of Prada Personalisation and Standard Product Offer.

Table 3. Differentiating Mass Production, Mass Customisation and Luxury Brand Mass Customisation

