

IS THERE A LIFE WITHOUT LOUIS VUITTON?

Everything you want to know about brands and branding.



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Spring 2025

Is there a life without Louis Vuitton?

Maybe not for the people passing by the shop in Tokyo. But yes, if you are not a LV fan, and you belong to a different brand audience.

Branding is about the passion between someone as a personality and a brand personality.

It is my passion for brands as a social phenomenon, that triggered the decision to start writing about brands and branding a couple of years ago.¹

My first book is about brand positioning.² The lesson in this book: *a strong brand is meaningful for its customers and prospective customers, the meaning is unambiguous for the customer, and above all the brand is distinctive from all other brands in the category.*

The book reflects what I have learned from scientists and my clients in advertising and brand consultancy. And what I have shared with students at Groningen University, and postgraduates at postgraduate schools in the Netherlands and Belgium.

This book that you are about to read is a logical sequel. It is a comprehensive overview of what we know about brands and branding, for readers who wish to dig deeper.³

¹ The self-publishing platform Brave New Books from SINGEL publishers in the Netherlands makes it possible to have my books available for interested readers. End of 2024 I have published three titles.

² The 5th extended edition has been published in Dutch: *Kracht en kunst van een sterke positionering.*

³ Therefore, I have added extensive footnotes and a list of references.

The book covers three areas of interest.

- *Facts, issues and stories about brands and branding.*
- *Theories and concepts about branding. In the book I will introduce a number of leading authors⁴. I have also explored the work of great thinkers, who have not specifically written about brands. I have asked with the help of AI what their theories and concepts could mean for our understanding of how brands work.⁵*
- *There definitely will be overlaps, because authors look at the same issues from different angles.*
- *Towards the end of the book I have covered storytelling, companion of a strong brand.*

My wife is for sure a fan of Louis Vuitton. Design, quality and of course exclusivity are her connecting values. The way she is treated as a most valuable client when she is in contact with the Paris headquarters about the 2025 agenda filling.

The treat is an important brand value to her.⁶

Brand loyalty is the resultant of loyalty to the customer, and subsequently the loyalty from the customer. High brand loyalty is characteristic for a strong brand.⁷

Louis Vuitton's journey from a Parisian trunk maker to a global luxury icon is a testament to innovation and craftsmanship.

⁴ The theories of these authors formed the main content of my contribution as a parttime academic lecturer at Groningen University, together with colleague and friend Karel Jan Alsem. Most of these authors rewrite their books, breakthrough new insights have not recently been published.

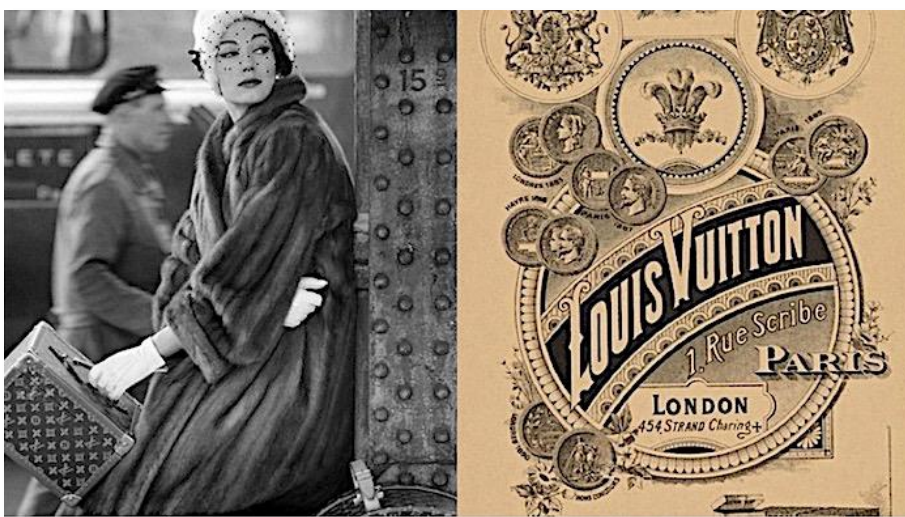
⁵ Apart from AI, which power I have detected only recently, my sources are public sources like internet and my archive of books, publications and my educational material. Illustrations from the internet have not always a high resolution. I apologize for the non-optimal reproduction. Photo on the first page and models are from Shutterstock.

⁶ Smart marketing by LV.

⁷ For fans buying Louis Vuitton it is high involvement/low risk. Herbert Krugman and Andrew Ehrenberg did research about the buying behavior related to high and low involvement, and high and low risk buying. High / high is for instance buying a house, while everyday household items are low / low.

In 1837, at the age of 16, Louis Vuitton arrived in Paris and apprenticed under Monsieur Maréchal, a master trunk maker. By 1854, he established his own workshop on Rue Neuve des Capucines, introducing flat-topped trunks covered in Trianon canvas. These trunks were lightweight, airtight, and stackable, revolutionizing luggage design at a time when rounded-top trunks were the norm. To combat imitators, Vuitton introduced a beige-and-brown striped canvas in 1876 and later, in 1888, the Damier Canvas pattern bearing the marque L. Vuitton déposée logo. After Louis's death in 1892, his son Georges Vuitton took over, launching the iconic Monogram Canvas in 1896. Featuring the LV initials and floral motifs inspired by Japanese Mon designs. This design became a hallmark of the brand and was patented worldwide to prevent counterfeiting.

Under Georges's leadership, Louis Vuitton expanded internationally, opening stores in New York, London, and Buenos Aires.



The brand introduced notable products like the Steamer Bag in 1901, the Keepall bag in 1930, and the Noé bag in 1932, originally designed to transport champagne bottles. These designs remain integral to the brand's offerings today.

In 1987, Louis Vuitton merged with Moët Hennessy, forming LVMH, a conglomerate that has since acquired over 70 luxury brands, solidifying its position as a leader in the luxury goods market. The brand has expanded beyond luggage into fashion, accessories, and collaborations with artists and

designers, continually blending its rich heritage with contemporary innovation. Today, Louis Vuitton stands as a symbol of luxury and elegance, honouring its storied past while embracing modernity.

The Louis Vuitton museum is an example beyond products.



Notably, Louis Vuitton has maintained its position as the world's most valuable luxury brand for 18 consecutive years, with a brand value of \$124.8 billion in 2023. As part of the LVMH Group, Louis Vuitton contributes to the conglomerate's impressive financial performance, with LVMH reporting revenues of € 86.2 billion in 2023.

Strong brands and their advertising campaigns are more or less synonymous with storytelling.

Here is another story about an iconic brand: Ralph Lauren.

It is the remarkable journey of a Bronx-born son of immigrant parents who built one of the most iconic fashion empires in the world.

Ralph was born as Ralph Lifshitz in 1939, in the Bronx, New York.

He was the youngest of four children in a Jewish immigrant family from Belarus. His father was a house painter, and the family lived modestly.

At age 16, Ralph and his brother changed their last name to 'Lauren', distancing themselves from childhood teasing about their original surname. In his youth, Ralph was drawn to style and aspiration. He admired classic Hollywood and saw clothing as a way to express a lifestyle.

Ralph attended Baruch College but dropped out after two years. After his service in the US Army, he worked as a sales assistant at the fashion chain Brooks Brothers and later at a tie maker.

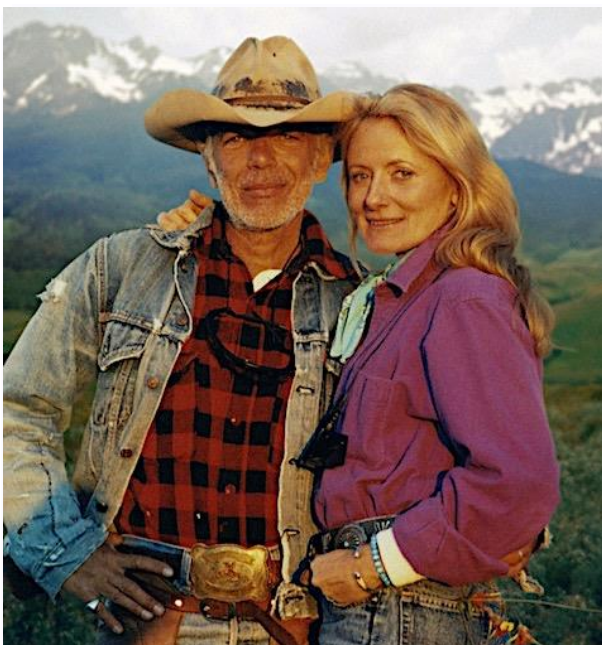
In 1967, Ralph noticed a gap in the market: most ties were slim and conservative, but he envisioned wider, bolder designs that exuded luxury and elegance. Convincing his boss to let him create his own designs, he launched a line of neckties under the name Polo, a name that embodied sophistication, sport, and class.

One year later, Ralph Lauren founded the Polo Ralph Lauren Corporation with a \$50,000 loan. His breakthrough came when Bloomingdale's, an icon in retailing, agreed to carry his necktie line. It was the first time the retailer dedicated an in-store boutique to a designer.

By the early 1970s, Ralph expanded into men's and women's clothing, introducing his now-iconic Polo shirt in a wide array of colours. The embroidered polo player logo became a symbol of preppy, aspirational style.

In 1981 Ralph Lauren became the first American designer to open a standalone store in Europe, located in London. His brand expanded into fragrances, home

furnishings, and accessories, capturing a complete lifestyle vision.



Through his designs, Ralph Lauren not only sold clothes but also a dream: country estates, yachts, and refined leisure. His advertising campaigns often featured idyllic Americana.

*Ralph Lauren's designs have become synonymous with timeless elegance.⁸ His work has been showcased in movies like *The Great Gatsby* and *Annie Hall*, further embedding his brand in American culture. His collections span multiple price points, including the luxury line Ralph Lauren Collection, the casual Polo Ralph Lauren, and more accessible brands like Lauren Ralph Lauren.*

The 1990s and early 2000s saw explosive growth, but the brand faced challenges, including market saturation and changing consumer preferences. Lauren responded by streamlining operations and focusing on digital transformation, maintaining relevance in a fast-changing industry. Ralph Lauren stepped down as CEO in 2015 at the age of 77. He remains the Executive Chairman and Chief Creative Officer. His legacy extends beyond fashion. He's an avid philanthropist together with his wife Rick, supporting cancer research, education, and historic preservation.

Louis Vuitton started as a brand in 1854, Ralph Lauren in 1968. How old is branding?

Branding has evolved significantly over thousands of years, from simple marks of ownership to sophisticated strategies for building customer relationships.⁹

Ancient origins.

3,000 years Before Christ branding began with the need to indicate ownership and craftsmanship. Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans used symbols or marks on goods like pottery and livestock. Early farmers and ranchers used hot irons to brand animals, identifying ownership and preventing theft, a practice still in use today.

Medieval period.

In the Middle Ages, *guilds*, craft and merchant organizations, required members to mark their products to signify authenticity and quality.

⁸ In a hotel on Belgium's coast we stayed in the Ralph Lauren room.

⁹ Giep Franzen did extensive research on the history of brands. In a footnote above I have mentioned the manuscript, that inspired me to write *Merken, Mens en Mensheid*.

These marks served as early trademarks, ensuring that customers knew the origin and craftsmanship of goods.

The Vrije Schippers was a guild of skippers in Ghent (Belgium) that existed from the 16th century. The free skippers worked for their own account and were



allowed to sail the rivers in the County of Flanders, such as the Scheldt, the Leie and the Lieve. There were also unfree skippers; these were employed and had to transfer their goods to the ships of free skippers at the edge of the city. These

were the only ones who had permission to sail the inland waters of Ghent. There were also guilds of free skippers in other places, such as Vlissingen in the Netherlands.



In the Low Countries, now Belgium and the Netherlands, there were guilds in almost every profession. This is a shield from a guild of bakers.

Renaissance to industrial revolution.

In the 15th–17th century artisans and traders began using personal seals and logos to represent their skills and reputation, paving the way for branding to become a personal identity tool.

In 1477, the English printer William Caxton published the first advertising pamphlet for his own books. Soon others followed his example. Newspapers were also introduced, in which advertisements also appeared from the

seventeenth century. However, this advertising was aimed at a relatively small audience.

The 18th–19th century is the era of the industrial revolution. The invention of the steam machine leads to mass production and mass consumption.



The Spinning Jenny for spinning wool was invented in 1764 by James Hargreaves. It created new brands like Shetland wool.

This industrial revolution transformed branding. Companies needed to distinguish their mass-produced goods from competitors. The rise of packaging and advertising made logos, names, and slogans essential.



The Bass Brewery, founded in 1777 in Burton-upon-Trent, England, became known for its pale ales.

The Bass Brewery's Red Triangle is the first trademark under the United Kingdom's Trade Mark Registration Act of 1875. The red triangle symbolized its high-quality beer and was widely recognized.



The beer appeared in paintings such as Édouard Manet's A Bar at the Folies-Bergère.

Below on the painting.

In the Benelux the oldest brand has been registered by F.X. De Beukelaere, a distillery.



Bols, a genever drink, became a brand in 1574 but was not registered as a trademark.

Bols is a brand for almost four-and-a-half centuries. When the last family member sold Bols as a company in 1816, she prescribed that the brand-name Bols must be forever on the products.



From the Netherlands comes another great brand story.

Schelvispekel (haddock brine) is the oldest fisherman's drink sold in the Netherlands. Its origins date back to the 17th century when fishermen from Vlaardingen made their own drink on board the North Sea. They had exchanged the schelvis (haddock) with the herbs such as cinnamon and nutmeg from the VOC ships returning from the Indies. They let the herbs soak in the brandy and thus had their own strong drink against the bitter cold. In the 17th century this herbal bitter did not yet have a name.

Where does the name Schelvispekel come from? It tastes neither of fish nor salt. When the fishermen came ashore after fishing on the North Sea, they



were greeted by their wives. They wondered why their husbands so often went down on their cutters. In order not to arouse suspicion, the fishermen said: 'the schelvis is in the brine'. And so the fishermen were able to continue to

distill and drink their own schelvispekkel on their cutters undisturbed for centuries. Nowadays, schelvispekkel is only distilled by the distillery H. van Toor & Jzn in Vlaardingen (Netherlands).

The 20th century is the age of modern branding.

In the early 1900's branding moved beyond simple product identification. Companies like Coca-Cola and Kellogg's focused on emotional connection and lifestyle marketing.



Logos and typography became iconic, with firms investing in unique visual identities.

The 1950's and 1960's, the Mad Men era, saw the rise of advertising agencies,¹⁰ solidifying branding as a crucial business strategy.

¹⁰ Advertising agencies are founded in the 19th century. Volney B. Palmer started the first agency in 1843. I have worked for 20 years at BBDO. More about BBDO and holding company Omnicom later in this book.

It is 1962.

In the office of Don Draper of the advertising agency Sterling Cooper¹¹, the management of Lucky Strike is about to leave the office. Disappointed.

The brainstorming session has not produced a good campaign concept. Lucky Strike is an old established brand, but in 1962 the tobacco industry is under fire in the public opinion.



Then Don Draper stands up. He asks the management: 'Tell me more about how Lucky Strike is made from tobacco.' Don walks to the whiteboard and writes down one of the answers 'It's toasted!'.¹²

In the late 20th century branding expanded into storytelling and emotional appeal. Globalization created universal brands like Nike, McDonalds and Apple.

21st century: digital branding.

Social media and e-commerce reshaped branding. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok allow brands to engage directly with consumers. Influencer marketing became a major branding strategy. Individuals started cultivating *personal brands* online, leveraging platforms like LinkedIn and personal websites.

¹¹ Sterling Cooper is the fictional agency, that forms the scenery of the successful TV series *Mad Men*. 1962 was also the year that the famous Dutch agency *Franzen, Heij en Veltman* was founded. Franzen is Giep Franzen, who I have mentioned before.

¹² Used as a tagline/payoff in an actual Lucky Strike campaign.