

Visual and Verbal Aspects of Marketing Communication and Their Parallels with Trends Influencing the Promotion of Truffle Consumption

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores how the marketing communication of truffle brands reflects two key consumer trend pairs: sustainability–closeness to nature and luxury–hedonism. It examines how verbal and visual elements jointly construct brand meanings in the promotion of truffle consumption.

Design/methodology/approach – The study applies qualitative content analysis to the websites and social media platforms of 28 truffle brands, including 20 international and 8 Hungarian companies. Using NVivo, textual and visual content were coded along predefined trend dimensions. The analysis compared recurring verbal expressions, such as local, organic, premium, and luxury, with dominant visual elements, including natural earth tones, green palettes, and elegant black-and-gold color schemes.

Findings – The results show that verbal and visual communication largely reinforce each other. Brands emphasizing sustainability and closeness to nature tend to use earthy, green, and natural color palettes, while brands positioning truffles as exclusive and rare products rely more strongly on black, gold, and refined minimalist design. The findings also indicate that family heritage and tradition frequently function as complementary narrative elements that strengthen authenticity and emotional appeal.

Originality – The paper contributes to the literature by linking consumer trends, visual identity, and verbal messaging in the specific context of truffle marketing. It shows that sustainability and luxury are not competing narratives in this category; rather, they often operate as mutually reinforcing positioning strategies within premium food brand communication.

Keywords: truffle consumption, brand communication, sustainability, luxury, consumer trends, visual identity, verbal messaging

Paper type: Research Article

1. Introduction

Luxury consumption was once primarily associated with exclusivity, rarity, and social status, while contemporary premium brands are now compelled to respond to growing expectations regarding environmental awareness and sustainability. Sustainability messages have therefore assumed a prominent role in their communications as well (Jakopánecz, 2023). According to recent literature, luxury industry players are now more actively communicating their environmentally conscious initiatives, as sustainability is perceived as a positive commitment by consumers (Horváth & Papp, 2025). Simultaneously, the theory of hedonic consumption suggests that consumers seek experiential value—multisensory, imaginative, and emotionally rich aspects of product use (Alba & Williams, 2013).

In the market for premium and luxury products, sustainability and hedonic experience have simultaneously become defining consumer values (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013; Brandão & Cupertino De Miranda, 2022). This duality is also evident in the case of truffles: their communication combines luxury and hedonism, while truffles themselves are closely linked to nature and sustainability. Truffles are, at the same time, ecologically valuable natural forest products and rare luxury-gastronomy ingredients associated with high prestige and outstanding quality (Lehota & Komáromi, 2007); accordingly, they embody the key features of two seemingly contradictory trends—“green” sustainability and hedonic luxury.

The aim of this research is to explore the visual and verbal dimensions of the brand communication of truffle products, with particular attention to the trend pairs of sustainability–nature connectedness and luxury–hedonism, and to examine how consumer trends are incorporated into such communication, specifically trends that may influence truffle-related consumer behavior (Jámbori & Bednárík, 2023).

In this study, we analyzed the content of websites and social media platforms of 20 international and 8 Hungarian brands offering truffles and truffle-based products. Using NVivo software, we examined how motifs associated with these trends are embedded in marketing communication. In the context of sustainability, green and natural colors activate associations with the natural environment, while luxury brands often employ gold and black to emphasize rarity and elegance. Exploring the interplay between color and content contributes to a deeper understanding of truffle marketing communication, which

is particularly relevant in the premium food sector.

The investigation focused on identifying patterns, color associations, and word associations in textual and visual elements that could be linked to either of the two main trends, and on assessing how consistently these appear across brand communications. A preliminary review of websites and social media content clearly showed that the majority of brands marketing truffles or truffle-based products position their offerings along the axes of sustainability–nature connectedness and luxury–hedonism. The dual communication of luxury and sustainability is, in fact, built on a paradox: luxury is often associated with abundance, excess, and privilege, whereas sustainability rests on ideals of closeness to nature, moderation, and responsibility. The two concepts appear to be opposites; nevertheless, the narratives of premium food brands demonstrate that they frequently co-occur.

In light of the above considerations, the study sought to answer the following two research questions.

1. How are the trends of sustainability–nature connectedness and luxury–hedonism manifested in the verbal and visual elements of the marketing communication of brands selling truffle products?
2. What narratives can be identified in the verbal and visual communication of truffle brands?

2. Literature Review

Incorporating trends into marketing strategy development is a key factor in ensuring relevance and effectiveness. The tools and mechanisms of marketing communication are widely discussed in the literature. According to Keller, brand equity is fundamentally built on the associations and emotions formed in consumers' minds (Keller, 2013). In marketing communication, the meanings associated with a brand—both visual and verbal—stimulate consumer interest and engagement. The goal of marketing communication is for companies to reach, engage, and influence consumers through their messages. Its effectiveness depends not only on visual and creative solutions but also on a deeper understanding of consumer behavior. Purchasing decisions are shaped by social, economic, and cultural processes that are constantly evolving. Monitoring and forecasting these changes are essential for companies to deliver truly relevant messages. This makes trend research indispensable, as it aims to uncover emerging societal processes, their drivers and impacts, and predict how they will influence consumption habits and economic decisions (Törőcsik, 2007).

Sustainability considerations have therefore gained significant importance, as environmentally conscious behavior now plays a major role in shaping consumer attitudes. Sustainability is not merely a megatrend emerging from green movements (Jakopánecz et al., 2024), but has become a way of life, reinforced by regulatory frameworks and growing expectations placed on companies.

Luxury consumption is a form of expressing prestige and identity, often emphasizing high price, uniqueness, and pleasure (Lesták, 2019). According to Lehota and Komáromi, prestige and luxury products are typically associated with high-involvement decision-making and low purchase frequency (Lehota & Komáromi, 2007). Communication elements linked to luxury, such as exclusive packaging and high-quality materials, resonate with consumers' self-image and desired social status. Vigneron and Johnson define prestige brands as those that stand in contrast to everyday products (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Recent research highlights that today's luxury consumers increasingly combine the luxury experience with sustainable values. While the classical approach associates luxury with hedonism and exhibitionism, younger generations consider sustainability an important factor in brand choice. According to Brandão and Cupertino De Miranda, new consumer generations apply criteria such as uniqueness and self-expression in luxury consumption, while strongly considering environmental and social responsibility (Brandão & Cupertino De Miranda, 2022). Thus, the goals of luxury and sustainability are becoming increasingly aligned, and brands are challenged to find a balance between the two—many now communicate premium values alongside sustainable and responsible business practices.

Luxury and prestige consumption are among the most visible forms of hedonistic consumer behavior, expressed through purchases, possession of goods, and pursuit of unique experiences (Lelkes, 2022). Luxury brand consumption often goes beyond functionality, driven by the joy of purchasing, the feeling of exclusivity, and the desire for recognition. In classical economic and sociological theory (Veblen, 1899), luxury consumption appears as conspicuous consumption in which consumers demonstrate social status and economic power through the accumulation of material goods. In the 21st century, however, luxury has taken on new meaning—self-expression, uniqueness, and experiential value have become central for many consumers (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

New trends are also shaping the demand for luxury. The concept of sustainable luxury (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013) reflects a growing consumer preference for prestige products that offer not only pleasure and exclusivity but also ethical and environmentally conscious values. This reveals a unique convergence of hedonism and responsibility: consumers seek to enjoy the luxury experience without guilt.

Color marketing research increasingly shows that visual identity elements serve not only aesthetic purposes but also directly influence consumer interpretations and brand associations (Labrecque & Milne, 2012). Brands that build on sustainability and closeness to nature typically use palettes associated with natural, earthy tones and shades of green. These colors symbolically

convey ecological awareness, purity, and environmental responsibility, reinforcing brand credibility in “green” positioning (Pirger et al., 2025). Green symbolizes naturalness and environmental consciousness, helping eco-friendly brands strengthen their sustainable messaging. Brown suggests earthiness and organic character, making it a popular choice in the food industry and among environmentally conscious brands. Truffles, as ecologically valuable and environmentally friendly forest by-products, are closely tied to the sustainability and the nature narrative.

Luxury brands continue to rely on deep tones, such as black and gold, to communicate exclusivity and premium quality. Black evokes sophistication, exclusivity, and authority, while gold is a universal symbol of wealth and premium value (Labrecque & Milne, 2012). Their combination creates a visual identity that reinforces the narrative of the luxury experience.

Kotler et al. emphasize the role of integrated marketing communication (Kotler et al., 2008). A brand’s identity is constructed through a combination of visual and verbal elements. Every communication component must convey a unified message, including visual appearance (colors, logo, packaging) and verbal content (slogans, descriptions). Physical brand elements (logo, packaging shape, color) trigger immediate associations in consumers (Lesták, 2019), while verbal texts build the brand’s narrative and positioning. The psychological impact of colors can enhance the delivery of brand messages; for example, black and gold create an elegant, dignified impression, often used by luxury brands to amplify the sense of premium quality. Conscious color selection is essential for effective brand differentiation: the right palette, aligned with consumer personality and preferences, fosters identification and memorability.

In the case of truffle brands, color and language together construct a complex system of meaning that evokes sustainability, organic authenticity, or exclusive gastronomic experience in consumers. Research by Horváth and Papp shows that luxury consumers generally have a positive attitude toward sustainability. Their findings suggest that luxury brands can confidently build sustainability into their communication, as consumers perceive it not as a passing trend but as a genuine expectation (Horváth & Papp, 2025). This supports the view that luxury and environmental consciousness are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they can jointly strengthen brand positioning.

Based on our preliminary investigations, tradition, heritage, and family identity also appear in the marketing communication of premium foods in certain cultures. According to the literature, communicating brands’ historical, cultural, and familial roots strengthens their credibility, trustworthiness, and emotional appeal (Urde et al., 2007). Tradition and intergenerational knowledge function for consumers as guarantees of reliability, expertise, and authenticity (Napoli et al., 2014). Authenticity, as a consumer value, is closely linked to the narrative of tradition. Beverland found that consumers of premium wineries regard historical roots, artisanal production, and family heritage as key factors of authenticity (Beverland, 2005). This can be readily paralleled with the truffle market, where the product is often rooted in local traditional practices and regionally grounded cultural identity. In family businesses, multi-generational operation is one of the brand’s greatest strengths. Family background and tradition evoke honesty and positive consumer attitudes; consumers interpret them as guarantees of reliability and quality (Zellweger et al., 2010). These characteristics, therefore, increase brand value, which is especially significant in the premium food market where product-related stories represent substantial added value. The trend of tradition and authenticity is connected to the narrative of the “local food” trend. According to Sims, tourism based on local foods can be truly successful only if it offers not just local products but also a story and, with it, an identity (Sims, 2009). In the case of truffles, communicating local traditions, intergenerational knowledge, and cultural heritage strengthens the premium value built on the product’s uniqueness and rarity.

3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine the communication elements of 8 Hungarian and 20 international truffle brands. Qualitative content analysis is a systematic and structured method that enables the identification of patterns and thematic and conceptual categories within textual and visual data. The sample included only companies that specifically market truffles or truffle-based products.

In selecting the sample, we aimed for geographical diversity, with particular emphasis on renowned truffle-producing regions, such as Croatia and Italy (Table 1.)

Table 1. Brands (compiled by authors)

Brand	Country	Brand	Country
Truffle Brothers	Italy, USA	Truffle World Store	UK
Zigante Tartufi	Croatia	Urbani	Croatia
Karlic Tartufi	Croatia	ProDan Tartufi	Croatia
Savini Traturfi	Italy	Tartufi Istra	Croatia
Truffle House	UK	BoscoVivo	Italy
Truffles Henras	France	Lamount Truffles	Spain
La Rustichella Traturfi	Italy	Ayme Truffle Domaine de Bramarel	France
Pietro & Pietro	Croatia	Express Truffles	Hungary
Sabatino 1911	Italy	Forest Kitchen	Hungary
Truffleist	USA	Érsek Éden	Hungary
The Truffle	UK	Triflafater	Hungary
Truffle Plantin	France	Trifla Farm	Hungary
Truffle Hunter	USA	Truffle Beefbirtok	Hungary
Triffla	Hungary	Terra Tuffola	Hungary

From the selected websites, we collected key textual content and visual identity elements. The research began by developing a coding framework based on two dominant trends—sustainability/naturalness and luxury/hedonism—and their associated verbal expressions. The verbal coding units consisted of words and expressions that carried autonomous meaning, depending on whether they clearly conveyed meanings related to a given trend. The visual coding units comprised colors and visual elements used in communication that possessed independent meaning, especially of the dominant color palette, composition, natural or exclusive material effects, nature-related motifs, web design elements, and the settings of product photographs and lifestyle images. Such elements can be reliably identified and compared along clearly defined categories (Bell, 2004). Regarding the sustainability–naturalness connectedness dimension, we assigned verbal and visual indicators, such as natural, local, organic, forest, earthy, and green, as well as earth tones, motifs of wood, leaves, forest, and soil, natural textures, and simple, restrained compositions. By contrast, the luxury–hedonism dimension was associated with elements such as premium, exclusive, gourmet experience, rarity, and indulgence, as well as the use of black, gold, and white, clean and elegant compositions, glossy or marble-like surfaces, and product representations situated in refined gastronomic settings. Using NVivo software, all content was imported and analyzed through multi-level coding. Text excerpts and visual elements were categorized according to predefined codes. From the coded database, we extracted verbal and visual features that aligned with the studied trends. The analysis focused on the frequency and interrelation of conceptual categories, such as “closeness to nature” and “premium indulgence.”

Visual elements were coded according to a defined coding system, and each element was classified using operationalized categories. In identifying visual characteristics, we did not rely on general aesthetic impressions but on specific predefined criteria, such as the dominant color palette, the presence of nature-related motifs, material effects, compositional simplicity, or the depiction of exclusive environments. Visual coding was continuously compared with verbal content, so that the textual context also supported the interpretation of images.

A limitation of the method is that the interpretation of visual content cannot be fully objective, as the meaning of images is always partly context-dependent.

4. Results

Sustainability-Closeness to Nature Trend

Across the websites, descriptors referring to naturalness and proximity to nature were frequently used; terms such as “nature,” “natural,” and “forest” were common. Visually, green and brown tones dominated, along with motifs of wood and leaves, as well as photographs depicting forest landscapes. Packaging and web design often featured natural materials—such as paper textures and wood-like effects—and simple, minimalist forms.

Interestingly, the term “sustainability” appeared explicitly on only four foreign websites. However, visual identity consistently



Fig. 5. NVivo word cloud

Tradition and Heritage

Beyond the dominant trends, the verbal and visual communication of tradition and family heritage emerged strongly. This referred to the idea that the product creators possess generational expertise. In 17 brands, we coded 117 words related to “family,” “generations,” “tradition,” and “heritage.”



Fig. 6. NVivo word cloud

Family stories, local traditions, and cultural heritage became brand elements that added authenticity and emotional depth to the products. Tradition was not positioned as the opposite of modern consumption, but rather as a value-added component, creating a bridge between past and future, generations, and continents within the global market.

Dominant and Mixed Trends

To enable a more detailed interpretation of the research, we also conducted additional analyses that revealed more nuanced relationships between visual and verbal elements, as well as the structure of transitions between the two trends (sustainability–closeness to nature and luxury–hedonism).

Based on a predefined coding table, we examined the frequency of dominant trends—that is, brands whose visual and verbal communication belonged predominantly to a given trend—as well as that of “mixed” narratives, meaning the communication of brands that do not align exclusively with one trend or the other but draw on elements of both. In terms of dominant trends, 12 brands fell into the luxury–hedonism category, 4 into the sustainability–closeness to nature category, and a further 12 into the mixed category. This indicates that the sample was characterized more strongly by luxury-oriented communication and by solutions combining elements of multiple trends. Mixed narratives appeared among brands that communicated motifs of tradition and family heritage. This suggests that the narrative of tradition functions as a transitional zone between the two trend poles.

Colors and Motifs

Based on the analysis of visual codes, clearly identifiable recurring patterns of color use and motif organization emerged in the communication of the 28 brands examined. Among the dominant colors, gold was the most frequent, appearing in the communication of 20 brands. It was followed by beige/natural tones (17 occurrences), then black (15), and brown (11). Green, a color more strongly associated with nature connectedness, appeared as a dominant visual element in only 5 cases. Thus, the visual identity of truffle brands is shaped not primarily by the classic green “eco” palette but rather by natural earth tones and by dark, elegant shades associated with premium value. The combined frequency of gold, black, brown, and beige/natural tones suggests that visual communication simultaneously conveys naturalness and premium character.

The analysis of logos and motifs revealed a complex picture. The most frequent visual solution in the logos was the use of

tree, mushroom, and leaf motifs, with 15 occurrences, followed by visual elements referring to family, tradition, or heritage, with 14 occurrences. Premium gastronomic representation was identifiable in 13 brands. Minimalist, clean compositions (7 brands) and natural textures—such as wood, paper, or rustic surfaces—(6 brands) appeared less frequently. The distribution of motifs suggests that visual communication simultaneously incorporates nature-connectedness, premium quality, and imagery that references heritage and tradition. The relatively high occurrence of premium gastronomic environments indicates that brands position themselves as higher-prestige and more refined.

The visual analysis shows that in the identities of truffle brands, natural, earth-based color palettes, nature-related motifs, and dark and gold shades that reinforce a premium effect all play a defining role. This duality suggests that visual communication simultaneously draws on the semantic fields of naturalness, tradition, and luxury.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis, brand communication surrounding truffle consumption appears to integrate both of the examined trends. The verbal and visual content simultaneously conveys a narrative of natural origin and messages centered on exclusive experience and premium quality. This indicates that brands strive to emphasize both closeness to nature and luxury in their marketing communication.

A prominent theme is the inclusion of family and tradition, which can foster a sense of emotional proximity between consumers and brands. At the same time, the hedonic consumer experience, as defined by Hirschman and Holbrook, is clearly evident in communication strategies, as brands aim to stimulate the senses, evoke emotional associations, and suggest indulgent value (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

The visual identity's color trends—earth tones versus elegant dark shades—further reinforce the duality of the communicated messages. The content analysis clearly demonstrated that the psychological impact of color and verbal messaging often appears in mutually reinforcing ways. Brands conveying sustainability messages tend to use nature-inspired palettes, while those emphasizing luxury rely on color schemes that express sophistication and exclusivity. The study shows that in the promotion of truffle consumption, sustainability and premium luxury/hedonism are both relevant narratives; they are not mutually exclusive categories, but through appropriate narrative and visual framing, they can become mutually reinforcing positioning elements. The narrative of family heritage and tradition communicates the stability and authenticity of brand identity, functioning both as a guarantee of quality and as a source of emotional attachment. The communication of premium value and exclusivity, the dominance of black and gold, minimalist and elegant design, and imagery evoking gourmet environments support the contrast effect characteristic of prestige brands and strengthen categorization as “specialness.” Experience and sensuality-oriented wording on the verbal side is likewise consistent with the concept of hedonic consumption, which understands consumption as a multisensory, imaginative, and emotionally rich experience. With regard to the sustainability–closeness to nature trend, it is particularly noteworthy that the term sustainability rarely appears explicitly, while visual codes (earth tones, natural textures, forest motifs) are strongly present. Some brands tend to build green meaning through an implicit system of signs, such as origin, naturalness, and craftsmanship, rather than through explicit sustainability claims. Thus, meanings associated with sustainability are often conveyed in indirect, visually coded forms.

The findings of the study also support the view that colors do not serve merely an aesthetic function but also perform meaning-bearing and positioning roles: green and brown activate notions of naturalness, purity, and environmental consciousness, while black and gold convey exclusivity, sophistication, and premium quality.

The results concerning the luxury–hedonism dimension can also be interpreted within the relevant theoretical frameworks. In the communication of the brands examined, truffles appeared not simply as food products but as rare products endowed with experiential value and status meaning. Luxury positioning is reflected not only in wording but throughout the entire identity system: the dominance of black and gold, minimalist and elegant design, and products depicted in gourmet environments all reinforce the idea that truffles are a symbol of exceptionalism, elite consumption, and refined gastronomic experience.

Overall, the results indicate that the communication of truffle brands creates a complex system of meanings in which naturalness, luxury, experience, and tradition complement one another in shaping consumer perceptions.

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