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THE COMMUNICATION OF HIGH-END BRANDS THROUGH DIGITAL CHANNELS

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Graduation Type 2
Acknowledgement

This report is written with the purpose to conclude my study International Fashion Management followed at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. The study has been an experience with a lot of different steps to my final goal: the graduation. This report has been written with a lot of passion for marketing and the high-end fashion market.

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Abstract
This report discusses the digital communication channels, the digital communication possibilities and the consumer of high-end brands in the digital area. The relevance of this topic is the change of communication between consumer and high-end brands. A rise of digitalization, social media and globalization are responsible for this change. The communication between consumers and high-end brands is different than a mass market because high-end brands connect via emotional values that need to be conveyed through digital channels.

The report has three parts; first the digital communication methods of high-end brands, second the environment how they could develop in the future and third the profile of the high-end consumer. The first part examines the communication methods and tools of high-end brands and how they can build up a relationship with the consumer. The second part explains the environment of the high-end brands and how the digital communication of high-end market is moving forward to a more personal co-creative relationship. This part is relevant to portray the overall picture of how the future of digital communication of high-end brands could look like. The last part is showing the research findings on the high-end consumer and his profile. This consumer profile is being described as a tribe of the high-end brands that is in demand for an experience, interaction and engagement with high-end brands and other consumers. The main finding is the brand tribalism. Brand tribalism means how consumers and high-end brands can connect via co-creation and crow-producing methods. The methods involve the consumer and he can be part of a brand. On the other hand can brands to know what consumers think about it. According to research findings the gap in the market is a forum where high-end brands can target the right consumer information and insights, stay up-to-date due to the new technology and where they can build up a strong relationship. On the other hand consumer connect with each other within a forum to communicate about products and other desires.
Executive summary
This research report explores the digital communication channels between high-end brands and consumers. In order to give an answer to the question: What does the digitalization mean for how high-end brands connect with their consumers? The report is a researched vision on how high-end brands approach the digital channels to connect with consumers. The structure of the report is the following. First the general digital communication methods and tools of high-end brands are portrayed. Second the research on the future of the communication methods is presented. Third the findings on the profile of a high-end consumer are displayed.

The issue for high-end brands is how to approach the social web and engage high-end clients in a strong dialogue. Since it is difficult to convey a tangible high-end experience that consumers engage in the digital world. Consumer demands got increasingly unpredictable, which makes it difficult to connect with them.

The high-end consumers demand more personal and interactive contact between each other and with brands. Word-of-Mouth communication within the high-end tribe is a relevant way to connect with the tribe because the user is not dependent on the market. It is therefore seen to be more reliable, credible, and trustworthy by consumers compared to traditional marketing. In the report “Tribal marketing” describes Maffesoli the social network of tribes that are constructed by companies, products or brands that have a strong value. Needs and desires are demands that the tribe requires. Network is the place where the tribe communicates and connects with high-end brands.

Therefore it is more relevant for high-end brands than for any mass fashion market to create a tangible experience and personal relationship because the consumer pays for an emotional value. The speed of development and the unpredictable consumer demands are threats to high-end brands. That means that high-end brands need more sufficient information. According to the findings high-end brands convert social media feedback of consumers into their communication strategy by starting to implement co-creation. The purpose is to get a stronger relationship by working with the consumer, but the social media feedback is not sufficient to portray a relevant consumer profile since the demands constantly change. The future of digital communication moves towards a personal approach where consumers co-produce the demands with the brand.

The gap in the market is a platform where consumers can interact with each other about products. A connecting tool between tribe members to express wishes and desires. According to findings consumers would be enthusiastic to discuss products and demands with others within the tribe. The insights of the discussions could be a source of conjecture for high-end brands to implement insights. Interviews with respondents portray an evidence for the need of stronger dialogue with consumers from the high-end market. According to respondents the advantage is high-end brands have to stay informed about the consumer demands and usual trend forecasts would not be concrete enough because of the speed of digital developments.

The conclusion is that high-end brands try to build up a strong relationship to increase sales and to predict the consumer behavior better. The purpose is to stay up-to-date when communicating digitally and therefore high-end brands need to find the right consumer insights to connect. The communication methods and tools of high-end brands are about interaction, experience and creation. In this customer-controlled world, high-end brands have to constantly stay in touch with consumer to drive demand and desire digitally.
Chapter 1: Introduction

This report is the result of a research into the communication of high-end brands through digital channels, which has undergone significant changes due to the digitalization and changes of the postmodernity, according to the main question: What does the digitalization mean for how high-end brands connect with their customers? Digitalization is an integration of digital technologies into the daily life consumers, rejection of absolute objective truth, “What’s true for you may not be true for me” (Penfold, 2012), opposite to the modernity where only one truth exists. Postmodernity changed the way people interact with each other but also with high-end brands (Cova, 2001). The digitalization is responsible for hyper-connected consumers who are gaining more knowledge than ever before. In the modernity consumers had one answer to everything but nowadays consumers are overwhelmed by constant new digital developments (Glyn and Williams 2009).

These new innovation developments, for example live streams of catwalk shows, put high-end brands in an unfamiliar position to adapt their communication strategies digitally. Consumers do not react on what is perceived to be normal campaigns anymore and therefore they are under pressure to connect differently with their consumers (Hines, 2007). This report investigates the new ways to connect through digital channels, looks at the forecasting of it and the consumer of high-end brands. Research journeys abroad to the European fashion capitals Berlin and London, were relevant to interview professionals who are experts in digital communication of high-end brands and consumers. Interviews with high-end brands, journalists, photographers, bloggers, stylists, store owners, high-end consumers and fashion consultants from London, New York, Berlin and Amsterdam were necessary to get an up-to-date view on the digital development.

This all leads to the question what the digitalization means how high-end brands connect with its customers and retailers. Well enough reason to find out more about the digital communication of high-end brands and how consumers react on it.

1.1. Problem definition

The terminology “high-end” was created for this research report to narrow down the research area. “High-end” is differentiated from “luxury” because it includes designers that communicate frequently with consumers and are more accessible for more consumers via digital channels.

Traditional marketing approaches do not work for the high-end segment because they usually do not engage the consumer emotionally (Piper, 2006). The main problem for high-end brands is how to approach the social web and engage high-end clients in a strong dialogue. First of all high-end clients are often not interested in mass communication (Hines, 2007). Second of all the high-end brands face the challenge to connect and communicate brand values such as authenticity and sophistication via digital channels (Van Veldhuizen, 2011).

Also other fashion markets face this problem but especially the high-end market differentiates through craftsmanship, premium pricing, innovation and exclusive distribution (Chevalier and Massalovo, 2008). So how do high-end brands convey a special feeling through digital channels?
An increasing amount of consumers access the high-end market and the entry barrier of high-end brands got lower. The rise of digitalization and social media welcomes more and more consumers to join high-end brands. At the same time the competition is rising because more and more high-end brands enter the market (Okonkwo, 2005). According to Okonkwo results this in a more democratized high-end market. This democratization of the high-end market is an issue when it comes to showcasing of a collection digitally, for example by doing a live-stream of a catwalk show. This is an issue because the communication, the mentality and the target of showcasing to the public changes. Usually a catwalk show is a closed event only for a small group of people. Due to the digitalization high-end brands decide to shift catwalk show online. The catwalk shows become open to everybody who is interested. Also the consumer demands a more personal relationship with high-end brands that have to react on it in order to drive sales and traffic. But the consumer demands got increasingly unpredictable which makes it hard to target a consumer group for high-end brands.

1.2. Research objective
The objective of the report is to research the communication between high-end brands and consumers through digital channels and to provide high-end brands with information, developments and research of communicating digitally and to give an answer to the question: What does the digitalization mean for how high-end brands connect with their customers? The main objective is also to create an innovative digital communication approach that connects the high-end brands and consumers. This product has to be relevant to the high-end market and has to match the requirements of high-end brands and its tribe.

1.2.1. Presentation of the research question
The question, which further clarifies the objective, is the following:

“What does the digitalization mean for how high-end brands connect with their consumers?”

1.2.2. Sub questions
The main question leads us to the sub questions that need to be answered before the leading question can be answered:

*The Communication Methods and Tools*
- What are the digital communication methods and tools high-end brands and retailers use to reach and connect with its tribe?

*Forecasting and Innovation*
- What are the trends in digital communication and conversation methods of the future between high-end brands, retailers and customers?

*The Democratization of High-End Brands*
- What are the advantages and disadvantage to showcase openly for public for high-end brands?

*The Tribe of High-End Brands*
- What is the link between high-end brands and its’ tribe?
1.3. Restrictions and notes
This research is limited to the high-end fashion market, including the high-end brands, high-end e-commerce and its tribe.

1.4. Research methodology
In order to answer the sub questions, the required information is obtained by means of both primary and secondary research. The report is divided into three parts; brands, environment and consumer. All three parts lead up to the conclusions and recommendations for high-end brands.

1. Part one shows the research on digital communication methods of high-end brands and the tools how they communicate. The tools give insight how to achieve the methods.
2. Part two is about the future of high-end brands. It gives insight into general trends from the whole tech industry and afterwards it gets drawn down to the digital communication trends of high-end brands. The environment part includes forecasting and innovation of business models since it is important how high-end brands could communicate through digital channels in the future. It gets finalized with the digital communication trends how brands communicate their collections online with digital catwalk shows.
3. Part three shows the consumer profile of high-end brands. The consumer is getting described as a tribe. The research is about the demands and desires of the tribe.

1.4.1. Primary research
Primary information was important for all parts, brands, environment and consumer. Especially for the third part and to answer the sub questions, the required information was collected with primary research. Mainly qualitative research was necessary because it is an expert-based report and surveys would not have brought the research onto a higher level. In total ten structured and semi-structured interviews were necessary to portray a sufficient image. Research travels to London and Berlin were relevant to portray a sufficient research picture. The journey to Berlin was in March 2013 and the one to London was in April 2013. The interviews with professionals from New York were completed via Skype calls and emails.

The respondents are located in different fashion capitals worldwide but all of them are professionals who work in the fashion industry since many years. The choice of respondents was made according to their curriculum vitae and experience in their field of profession. The report is based on opinions and findings of young and experienced respondents to portray a sufficient research about the digital communication development. The interviews were structured and semi-structured.

1. Respondent Christian Stylograph is a street-style photographer who is located in Berlin. He gave a good insight about the democratization of catwalk shows, the street-style blogosphere and the vision of the new generation.
2. Respondent Julia Marinho is based in London and she is a high-end fashion designer. She has more than 15 years expertise to answer questions about the communication methods and other topics.
3. Respondent Elizabeth Entin is based in New York. She owns a digital communication platform and fashion magazine, called Runway Passport. Her
knowledge is very broad and her answers were very giving good insight into the future of digital communication and new fashion generation.

4. Respondent **Marc Wainwright** is a professional fashion photographer from London who has sufficient experience in working with bloggers and high-end brands.

5. Respondent **Sarmite Ostanevica** is a high-end designer from London and she was a good respondent for the investigation into the new generation of fashion designers and their vision onto the digital communication.

6. Respondent **Sharon Geernaert** is a stylist and storeowner from Amsterdam. She is a graduate from AMFI and she has more than many years experience and is a former marketing director from Scotch & Soda.

7. Respondent **Ursula Fritz** is an experienced fashion consultant from Frankfurt in Germany. She is also a high-end consumer, which made it very useful to hear her vision about digital communication of high-end brands.

8. An **unstructured panel discussion** was organized in Berlin with the new generation of fashion professionals helped to get new insights about their vision on digital communication. The methodology of this research method was a panel discussion with in total four young fashion professionals who are stylists, designers and bloggers and retailers. All four participants were knowledgeable about digital communication of high-end brands.

9. Respondent is **Eugene Rabkin** is located in New York and he is the creator of the forum Stylezeitgeist.

10. Respondent **Nick Verstand** is located in Amsterdam and is digital communication developer and investor, working with MYCROMAG and other institutions.

In order to research the consumer tribe in London and Berlin a nethnographic analysis has been done. For the second and third part a unit of observations helped to come to portray a sufficient image. The observation was giving findings that made the vision of the report clearer.

**1.4.2. Secondary research**

Secondary research means existing research, information that other parties already collected. For all three parts have been used the secondary research. Especially in the first and second part have been used different secondary sources for in depth research. The “Retail Marketing & Strategy” reader by Chris van Veldhuizen was very helpful to present the consumer profile and the postmodernity in this report. Also the book “Fashion Marketing Communications” by Gaynor Lea Greenwood (2013) was giving valuable information about the communication methods of high-end brands. The last most important book was “Luxury Online - Styles, Systems, Strategies” by Okonkwo (2010), it explained relevant information how high-end brands became more democratized in the last decade.

Next to that the report includes research reports, web pages, articles, journal content and existing video interviews. The video interviews have been used in the second part of the report, the environment. Two videos with Racketspace explained the developments of the digital communication in the future.
1.5. Structure of this report

**Figure 1: Structure of the report**

**Figure 1** explains the structure of the report. The report is divided into three parts. Part I has strengths and weaknesses that influence Part III and the other way around. But also the opportunities and threats of Part II have impact on Part III because of the interaction and feedback. Part II and part III also interact and influence each other.

**Chapter 1** provides an introduction to the topic with motives and declaration of the research objective and the scope of the research.

**Part I** features the theoretical part of the report. The communication methods and tools of high-end brands are presented, to provide an understanding of the possibilities of the digital communication applications and to understand that traditional marketing activities do not apply.

**Part II** explores the environment of the high-end brands. The future and possibilities of the digital communication of high-end brands are presented.

**Part III** consists of the consumer research. A tribe of the high-end brands is presented. The consumer and the communication methods, possibilities influence each other.
PART I BRANDS

Chapter 2: Communication Methods and Tools

2.1. Introduction
High-end brands got into insecure positions because of the digitalization, changing demands of the consumer and the globalization. Strong competition is responsible for high-end brands that search for expansion of their businesses. Back in the days high-end brands could rely on their regular “fan base”. But a global economic downturn brought high-end brands into the situation to connect more to its customer base online (Kennedy, 2011). Nowadays the high-end brands cannot rely on their symbols, histories, legacies or trustworthy customer relationships anymore in order to succeed.

In 2005 the fashion industry could not even imagine high-end brands communicating through the web (Okonkwo, 2010). For example the high-end fashion brand Prada did not have a website until 2007 – almost 20 years after the Internet invention (Okonkwo, 2010). According to Uche Okonkwo the fashion industry thought Internet was a medium only for the mass consumer that had nothing in common with high-end brands. Until now the Internet is one of the most challenging business areas for high-end brands (Okonkwo, 2010).

Back in the days consumers were not as much connected with each other but nowadays they are able to communicate with other parties more frequently (Berthon, Katsikeas, 1998). One-way communication changed into the interactive two-way direct communication and brands put themselves into a more personal position by creating Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest accounts (Angella, 2012). But this development is more than a marketing strategy (Reuters, 2013). It is another way to think about the consumer who is the leader of this. Interaction is everything in this relationship – brand and customer are on one level without any restriction in time, place and medium. In this way, brands and customers start to work together – to create several new applications, products, values, services and more (Angella, 2012).

It is the first time that online and offline camps have to join forces since a usual shopping in a store does not work anymore. The focus is to get consumers back in the store. Consumers expect immediate information online and an engaging experience that might bring them back into the offline or online store. The high-end brands undergo a rapid change how to communicate and connect with consumers. The speed of changes is so quick that the high-end brands hardly can keep up with it (Kansara, 2013).
2.2. Digital communication methods

2.2.1. Experiential Marketing Communication

Experiential marketing is a relatively new orientation and it is the contrast to modern and traditional marketing. Whereas traditional marketing takes the consumer as a rational decision maker on functional features, experiential marketing sees a consumer as an emotional human who desires for pleasurable experiences. The focus is on the consumer experience and lifestyle. It delivers emotional value to the consumer. Traditional marketing approaches do not work for the digital communication of high-end brands because they do not give an experience to the consumer (Glyn and Williams, 2009).

According to Pine and Gilmore the experiential communication approach portrays sufficient communication for the high-end brands. They introduced experiential marketing communications that is concept for digital communication of high-end brands. It is helpful for high-end brands because it connects and engages with all the desires of high-end consumers through digital channels (Glyn and Williams, 2009). The high-end fashion market is complex since it stands for quality, performance, authenticity but it also needs to give an emotional experience by relating it to the different lifestyle structures of a high-end consumer. The difference with the mass market is that the mass market does not have the values and unique selling points like high performance and authenticity (Glyn and Williams, 2009).

Experiential marketing is a postmodern approach with the aim to give the consumer a pleasurable experience. Experiential marketing is a unique approach and concept that integrates elements of emotions, logic, and general thought processes to connect with the consumer. It is all about interaction, connectivity and creativity. Experiential marketing is about the essence of a product and the aim to turn into a tangible interactive experience. (Glyn and Williams 2009)

Pine and Gilmore state, “When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages to engage him in a personal way”. (Glyn and Williams, 2009) That means that a consumer only purchases not only a product but also a whole emotion. This has influence on the high-end brands to connect via emotions and experiences and not only the collection range. In the following section you can find the Four E’s which are formative for the experiential marketing communications (Glyn and Williams, 2009).
2.2.2. The Four E’s
The four E’s are a framework for the experiential marketing communication. They are based on the C’s framework. The C’s of marketing center the need of the consumer; it is cost, consumer, communication and convenience (Kearney, 1999). The concept of four Cs has been introduced as a more customer-driven replacement of four Ps, which is price, product, promotion, and place (Greenhill, 2011).

According to Greenhill the P’s and C’s are not applicable for the digital marketing communication of high-end brands because they do not focus on the emotional value of a high-end garment. When a consumer purchases a high-end item, then he wants to get an experience. The four C’s and P’s only concentrate on the consumer but not his emotional needs (Kearney, 1999). These emotional needs can be for example enthusiasm, genuineness, solidity, sophistication or pleasantness. The four E’s concentrate on communicating these and others through digital channels (Greenhill, 2011).

According to Greenhill the four E’s are developed for digital communication on behalf of high-end brands. He is the founder of Greenhill + Partners, the premier agency for bespoke luxury brand marketing (Greenhill, 2011). According to Greenhill the four E’s are better to use as a communication method framework because they consider the digital communication requirements for high-end brands better than the C’s or the P’s framework. When it comes to communicating digitally then high-end consumers demand experience, exclusivity, engagement and emotion in digital communication.

1. Experience
Consumers became more selective about what they spend their money on. Nowadays the purchase decision comes down to the question if the item is really worth it. Greenhill states, “The best way high-end brands can tip the scales in their favour is to provide unique, compelling experiences” (Greenhill, 2011). This means to the high-end brands that they need to give a complete experience when purchasing a high-end item because then the consumer might remember the experience longer. The purpose of giving an experience is that the consumer can connect positive feelings with the high-end brand.

2. Exclusivity
Usually exclusivity is on second place in the traditional marketing when using the four P’s framework. But the four E’s also concentrate on the emotional value of the high-end brands since it is related to price but also the emotion to receive something special. Nowadays the consumer purchases high-end brands to make a statement and exclusivity is a linchpin of a high-end brand (Okonkwo, 2005). For a high-end brand the purpose of communicating exclusivity is to engage consumer and product emotionally. This exclusivity gives the consumer a superior feeling and to make a statement. This means that the consumer feels like he is the only one wearing this high-end item to show his individuality (Greenhill, 2011).

3. Engagement
Engagement is the third E of the experiential marketing communication framework. For high-end brands it lies mainly in story-telling because the purpose it to engage consumers with a story they remember. According to Greenhill engaging content can range from a branded video material or a Tumblr post but it always implies a story.
The purpose for engagement is creating emotion and consumers need to be able to share this emotion via different digital channels (Bolen and Incandela, 2012). Critically said, the customer from today does not want to get convinced anymore to purchase a product with advertisements but he rather wants to feel a brand and be part of a brand journey or story. The purpose for high-end brands is to create memorable stories that can get shared with others. This means that they imply different signatures of digital communication that can vary from colours, textures, sounds, shapes, rituals or a combination of these elements to bring the brand to life.

4. Emotion
Experience, exclusivity and engagement form the final experiential communication tool that is called emotion. According to Greenhill an experience, an exclusive insider’s view or an engaging story, a particular emotion is what high-end consumers want. High-end brands need to put the emotion first and develop a physical and digital product to express and that specific emotion (Greenhill 2011).

2.2.3. Co-Creation
The experiential communication framework in the previous section showed the emotional value of a high-end product that needs to get communicated online. It is about the emotional value of a product and to turn into a tangible interactive experience, so that the consumer can experience the brand emotionally and can share it with others (Tsai, 2005). The purpose is that consumers get involved with the processes of a high-end brand, both in defining and creating value. This means that the experience high-end brands offer, is often a co-created experience of consumers. Co-creation is a digital communication method to engage the consumer (Tsai, 2005).

Co-creation creates value through new forms of interaction, service and learning. It is different to the usual communication strategies because the consumer is not passive anymore and works interactively with the company. Co-creation is an approach for high-end brands and their consumers, to be an individual part of the brand (Berthon, Katsikeas, 1998). Pine and Gilmore created figure 2 (Pine and Gilmore, 1998); it states two axes, a bi-polar construct that is about co-creative experiences. The figure is based on customer participation, inter-activity (involvement) and connection (intensity). The term “intensity” means perception of the strength of a feeling with the interaction.

![Figure 2: Experiential zones (adapted from Pine and Gilmore)](image-url)
Aesthetic, escapist, entertainment, educational are the four experiential zones. The heights of the zones decide how much the consumer is involved in the co-creative experience. The four zones should work together to offer a rich experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

**Entertainment**

*Entertainment* has lower involvement and intensiveness. According to Pine and Gilmore high-end brands need to incorporate entertainment into areas outside of the immediate experience. The purpose it to deliver an all-round experience which is everlasting (BOF, 2011).

**Educational**

The *educational* zone involves more actively. Here consumers get to know new skills or increase those they already have. It can range have *educational* dimensions. The purpose it to educate the consumer, help him to get a positive experience. That means that the high-end brands can build up an emotional relationship with the consumer (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

**Escapist**

*Escapist* has a high degree of involvement and intensiveness. Escapist activities are those that are clearly a central feature of much of high-end consumption. The purpose is to attach the consumer and make him loyal to the brand. That means that for example memberships can record a relationship with the consumer.

**Aesthetic**

*Aesthetic* offers a more passive involvement and high intensiveness. It has little effect on the environment but it seeks to engage consumers with all the senses. The aesthetic activity is about the astonishment of beauty and scarcity of a brand or product (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

All in all the communication activities of the experiential zone above showed that high-end brand’s focus when communicating through digital channels, is to create a personal relationship with the consumer. The experiential marketing approach shows that the high-end brands try to build up a brand relationship by retrieving emotional engagement with the consumer. Respondent Liz Entin from Runway Passport New York states, “There is more of an equal dialogue rather than this elite brand that customers look up to.” The purpose it to create a tangible interactive experience which can express this equal relationship between consumer and brand.
2.2.4. Digital Public Relations
When building up a personal relationship between consumer and high-end brand online, then public relations become relevant for consumers who use trend leaders and stylists as source of inspiration and information (Gaynor, 2013; p.26). Mainly online magazines and blogs carry out this information. Activities include press relationships for good stories. Those stories are supposed to engage the consumer through desires to purchase an item. Next to that press releases, sponsorships, celebrity management, product placement, events management, crisis management, guerrilla campaigns and social media are part of public relations (Gaynor, 2013; p.26).

According to Gaynor for public relations it got more difficult to see the most relevant consumer needs nowadays. The author describes that consumer needs and desires change so quickly due to the digitalization and the rise of social media. High-end brands experience that consumer needs like trends quickly change and that they are not able to manifest them or can react on them (Gaynor, 2013; p.19).
2.3. Digital communication tools

2.3.1. Product Placement
Product placement is a communication tool in digital public relations for high-end brands. It is a tool where products get placed in online editorial pieces, also called advertorials. A lot of high-end brands still use this tool with the purpose of communicating a product but the power of it shifted towards the blogosphere where the attempt gets more personal. It gets more personal because in real-time a person is wearing garments that normally are in editorials. Bloggers are humans who wear the pieces and make them personal with their individual styling, own character and presentation (Gaynor, 2013; p.26).

Respondent Sharon Geernaert is a former marketing director of Scotch and Soda. According to her fashion became more digitally, “I think (high-end) fashion is very digital nowadays, in a way almost all the fashion that we see is communicated online in some way. Whether it will be advertorials, the social media that fashion designers and fashion brands use or the e-commerce that is emerging more and more.” According to research findings, consumers want to see high-end fashion not only in mass magazines anymore but more personal and engaging through street-style blogging and other social media platforms. The purpose of high-end brands is to connect more emotionally with the consumers by doing this (Gaynor, 2013; p.33).

According to Gaynor high-end brands try to portray this personal relationship with bloggers but they find it hard to keep this information for a longer period because the demands of consumers change quickly. This means that the needs and desires of consumers are not fixed anymore (Smith, 2010). Therefore consumer insights like trends or consumer-needs are difficult to define for the fashion industry and high-end brands (Okonkwo, 2010). On one hand the consumer is overwhelmed by choices and on the other hand the high-end market is very competitive which makes it hard for high-end brands to gain sufficient consumer insights.

According to Daly and Bruce the traditional fashion buying cycle is based on long-term forecasts from historical sales and occurs years before the season. However nowadays the forecasts become increasingly inaccurate. This means that high-end brands can hardly predict popular sellers and forecast the demands of the consumer (Daly and Bruce, 2006).

2.4. Social Media
Social media revolutionized the way high-end brands communicate with their consumers. This means that consumers can interact with each other and high-end brands can use it to promote the brand. Social media is a tool to build brand awareness and to reinforce brand identity. Social media also provides an intersection between online communications and e-commerce. It helps to research the consumer psychology and mind-set of the users.

The globalization is responsible for the main shift that the consumer got empowered. This is reason why high-end brands have to interact and engage consumers more than ever before. Three shifts are the reasons for the new position of the consumer where the consumer produces and interacts content with high-end brands (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, Shapiro, 2012). Figure 3 shows the context between social media, the consumer and Web 2.0, which enable social interaction, creation of content and
distribution of content. (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, Shapiro, 2012). The reason for the changes is three shifts:

- Web 2.0 shifts the activity from desktop to web
- Consumers shift from the firm to the consumer
- Social media shifts from the firm to the collective

![Figure 3: Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers (Berthon P. R., Pitt L. F., Plangger K., Shapiro D., 2012)](image)

High-end brands try to get the attention by consumers with the interaction on different platforms. Social media platforms offer participation by sharing content for example Pinterest (Georgieva, 2012). Pinterest is a social network that allows users to visually share, curate and discover new interests by ‘pinning’ images to their own or others pinboards (Georgieva, 2012).

One example is the American high-end brand Peter Som who is one of the top leaders with a follower amount of over 3 million, in comparison to Burberry (38,000) and Proenza Schouler (9000) (Kansara, 2013). Peter Som states that his content is authentic and carries his own voice, which created the content on Pinterest. The content is not only brand-related, the brand also adds personal backstage images and editorialized boards, see figure 4. The brand creates also personal interest boards by the designer himself. But critically the brand also covers Pinterest’s most popular categories including home décor (Reuters, 2013). According to research the purpose of these personal boards is to create an engaging experience around the brand. This means that the brand uses the favorite themes of the Pinterest community to interact with as many consumers as possible (Kansara, 2013). The brand uses Pinterest on the concept of the designers’ lifestyle and enables the user to share his interests. The brand uses Pinterest to drive a high-volume of website traffic to increase sales (Georgieva, 2012).
According to Vikram Kansara who is a leading fashion journalist, high-end brands are challenged in the engagement via social media channels (Kansara, 2013). On one hand the high-end brands are looking for platforms where they can interact with consumers. On the other side high-end consumers are not necessarily interested in mass communication via social media (Cherney, 2011).

According to the research high-end consumers are not interested in social gaming and other marketing tactics that can drive engagement and that usually work for the mass audience. According to respondent Urusla Fritz consumers need to get a real experience that is hard to convey on social media. She says, “I need to get a haptic feeling. It is not only to get an (high end) item, it’s also the experience which is important!” That means that high-end brands need to find the right platform that drives traffic but also engages the consumer.

According to Imran Amed, the owner of the online fashion platform “Business-Of-Fashion”, high-end brands first tried to control content online that is not possible anymore (Bof, 2012). High-end brands lost the control for negative feedback, which can potentially damage the brand image. That means that for example negative comments on social media can threaten the brand image. It can damage the reputation of a brand (Reuters, 2013).

2.4.1. Content Share-ability

The previous section explained the social media as a communication tool. According to the research the creation of content is one of the main communication tools for high-end brands. It is about engaging content and an experience that needs to be sharable with other users, fans, friends or colleagues. (Miles, 2013). That is also the purpose to use social media as a high-end brand, it drives traffic and consumers are able to become part of a brand worldwide. The difference between high-end brands and other fashion markets is that high-end brands work with emotional values to market their products. This can be a history or a value like authenticity or sophistication. When a consumer purchases a high-end garment, then he expects an everlasting and special experience and high-end brands have to communicate this feeling through social media (Oliver, 2011).
One example is Burberry that made the first step into the emphasis of digital content and public connection to their consumers. Burberry succeeded in this like no other high-end brand with Christopher Bailey as head of design (Kansara, 2012). He amongst others is part of the new fashion generation that drives the digitalization. “The Art of the Trench” by Burberry with more than 4 million views was the first big success when it comes to digital communication of a high-end brand (King & Partners, 2013).

According to Christopher Bailey, the design director of Burberry, is the “The Art of Trench” website a community with sharable content about the classic trench coat of the company and it allows consumer-to-consumer interaction, see figure 5. “Digital communications is an integral part of our culture at Burberry, so in the end it touches everybody,” (Amed 2012) says chief creative officer Christopher Bailey, who leads the rebranding process of Burberry as a luxury company for the digital age.

Figure 5: “The Art of the Trench” by Burberry (Burberry, 2013)

2.4.2. Conversion of feedback in social media
The high-end brands are challenged to change their way of digital communication but some brands also decided to take feedback from social media into account (Godwin, 2013). When it comes to connecting and engaging then an interactive talk is the essential part of it (Jung, 2013). Earlier high-end brands were in the elite position not to listen to the feedback of consumers or users online. But with the rise of social media high-end brands started to convert feedback into their brand DNA (Feitelberg, Young, Edelson, Wicks, Karr, 2012).
One example is the US based high-end brand Proenza Schouler that is constantly listening to the feedback of their digital fan base. According to the brand, “On Instagram, for example, we were posting pictures of runway images and someone was like ‘we don’t want to see runway images anymore, we see those on Style.com already, make these more personal.” The brand reacts on its feedback in social media and connects personally. The purpose of this interaction is to stay up-to-date about the consumer needs and to drive traffic on social media platforms. That means that the conversion of feedback plays an important role in the brand image. Even the Spring Summer 2013 Tumblr collection is inspired by the social feedback. The feedback is based on co-creation, where the high-end brand takes a personal approach. The figure 6 shows an example of this approach.

Figure 6: Proenza Schouler Fan Page Facebook (March, 2013)

2.4.3. Advantages and disadvantages of social media
According to the research, there is a contradiction between social media and high-end brands. The two opposites are working together nowadays but actually by looking at the concept of a high-end brand it is not a logical relationship. Social media is inclusive and the more people know about it the better. It does not have a barrier or entry and it is oblivious to who is involved. Only small amounts of people know about high-end brands. It has a bigger barrier to entry and it is discerning to who is involved.

According to respondent Marc Wainwright, who is a fashion photographer, high-end brands could not have got to social media any other way. He says, “Exclusive High End Brands by definition have exploited intrusive social media to get where they are. There simply couldn't have been a conflict. We are all to blame. We are the intrusive social media” He adds, “Social engineering is a dangerous thing. Handle with care. Be aware of the knock-ons and consequences. We are all too hungry to learn.” That
means that high-end brands make use of social media and they have to move together with the social media developments. Nevertheless according to Marc Wainwright high-end brands need to handle the social media platforms with care, not to damage a brand image.

According to respondent Liz Entin who owns a social media platform, brands have to make big mental changes that have been exclusive and not for everybody. But she also adds that every brand from low to high segment needs to target exactly who they really are and whom they are talking to. She sees social media as a tool to communicate and reach those people.

According to the research there are disadvantages and advantages to use social media as communication tool. It can attract the wrong crowd and it is hard to engage the consumer with emotional values via social media. On the other hand it is a tool to engage and interact worldwide (Godwin, 2013). High-end brands can drive more traffic around their products than ever before and they are able to communicate with consumers from all-over the world to increase sales. The table 1 shows all the advantages and disadvantages to communicate with social media as a high-end brand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Bigger audience</td>
<td>o Lack of creation of exclusive feeling or the atmosphere that has been created within a store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Offer personalized connection with consumer</td>
<td>o High-end consumers not interested in mass gaming and other marketing tactics for the mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Engagement</td>
<td>o Negative feedback can damage brand image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Build brand awareness</td>
<td>o No proof for credibility of the authors and users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Interact socially with the help of different media</td>
<td>o Content possibly attracts for wrong crowd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Not dependent on time and medium</td>
<td>o Speed of development in digital communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Intersection between online communications and e-commerce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Less costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Drive traffic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of social media

2.5. Video Content
The creation of videos is a relevant and the story-telling communication tool that social media uses. The popularity of sharing videos on Youtube, Vine, Vimeo and other video sharing platforms is very high therefore high-end brands also joined this development. According to the corporation Cisco accounted online videos 56 percent of all consumers Web traffic in 2012. The research showed that videos are a relevant medium to show motion and emotion like exclusiveness or authenticity (Kansara, Feb 2013).

One example is the high-end brand from today Proenza Schouler. Some high-end brands choose to embrace the contemporary Internet culture more than others. But this brand is living “the digitalization” of fashion. In 2012 the brand presented a Tumblr-inspired collection video, directed by David Sims and Eddie The Wheel. Their digital
communication strategy is to engage the consumer by interacting with different social media tools. The brand works with controversial YouTube films by Harmony Korine, GIF-based Twitter campaigns by Jeanette Hayes and for example a video called “Desert Tide” (Kansara, 2013).

The “Desert Tide” video is created using the virtual world Second Life, see figure 7. It features four avatars from virtual Second Life dressed in digitized looks from the Fall/Winter 2012 collection. Instead of strutting about the place and striking carefully practiced poses, the avatars carry out edgy dance to Blank Banshee’s ‘Cyber Zodiac’ music (Kansara, 2013). According to the research this video has the purpose to tease a discussion about the making of the video. Consumers ask in online forums, “What does this all mean?” and “What is fashion?” and “What even is the internet?”. After heating up the discussion, the brand reached over 20,000 views of the video on Youtube with the purpose to drive traffic in social media and get the attention of the consumer.

Figure 7: Proenza Schouler “Desert Tide” Video (Youtube, 2012)

The high-end brand embraced the digital world with a lot of curiosity. Both owners see themselves rather like artists of the web than marketers (Kansara, 2013). “When it comes to digital, they’re not marketers, they are artists, and, thereby they become the best marketers, because it’s authentic” observed Oliver Walsh, founder of Wednesday Agency, the digital agency that designed the new website of PS in March 2013 (Kansara, 2013). The purpose of these videos and other interaction is to create curiosity. The brand also interacts with consumers directly to stay up-to-date about their needs and desires.
2.6. Blogging
The blogging part got divided into two parts; the personal blogging and cooperate, organizational blogging tool.

Personal Blogging: According to Smith in 2010 blogs were still not considered as an appropriate channel for PR activities but that changed in the short time period until now (Smith 2010). From a brand perspective the blogosphere can be a useful tool to communicate the unique selling points of a brand. That means that the brand needs to have a look at who is the target: for example a blogger can inspire the brand with presenting the brand more personal with individual content (Xifra and Huertas 2008).

According to Kretz and Valck personal bloggers become increasingly the glue factor for the relationship between high-end brands and the consumer. They are like a „lens“ through which the reader may choose a brand and determine on a purchase. But it depends on the quality of the relationship between a blogger and the reader. Kretz and Valck state, “the quality relies on the „reading contract, the evolving presence of the advertised brands in the blog’s content; and the amount of privacy shared by bloggers with their audience“ (Kretz and Valck 2010). That means that not every blogger is the same effective for a high-end brand but it also depends on the individuals house rules of a blogger.

By now blogs include information, entertainment and opinions but also incorporated elements and formats of mainstream websites such as advertisements and more engagement with readers (Godwin, 2013). Currently personal blogs transform into an interactive media and publishing. Personal Blogging became a medium for self-expression and a channel for public relations to represent brands’ interests. Research confirmed that working with bloggers could benefit the ones who practice it and brands (Xifra and Huertas 2008). The figure 8 shows how the high-end brand Gucci is advertising at the American personal blog of BRYAN BOY.

![Figure 8: High-end brand Gucci is advertising at the personal blog of BRYAN BOY (Bryanboy, 2013)](image-url)
On the other side the blogosphere faces the fear not to loose the individuality or the authenticity by participating public relations interests of high-end brands. A blogger argues, “I lose a lot of individuality and it becomes an assembly line” (Smith, 2010). Also a lot of readers take inspiration and validation from the readers’ feedback. This can influence the content of personal bloggers and often public relations content is drifting away from what the readers came for.

**Cooperate and organizational Blogging:** Another tool to connect between consumer and high-end brand are online platforms that have been created by the brand itself. Online communities and platforms where brands blog and are created by the brand can be a tool to connect between tribe and high-end brands. Examples range from own created magazines, for example NOWNESS by LVHM (Kansara, 2012).

NOWNESS is a French online magazine that blurs the lines between editorial and promotional content. The purpose of this online magazine is to inspire the consumers of the high-end brands by the LVHM group, such as Kenzo. Figure 9 shows the blur between promotional and editorial content of NOWNESS.

![NOWNESS by LVHM](NOWNESS, 2013)

**Figure 9:** NOWNESS by LVHM (NOWNESS, 2013)

### 2.7. Mobile Phone Applications

The smartphone revolution gives a lot of opportunities to high-end brands that are operating offline, online or both. Mobile phone applications are rather active than passive engagement with the brand, however companies need to ensure that they collect and use consumer details in a responsible and targeted manner. Consumers possibly unsubscribe and associate negative experience towards the brand that passes their details on without permission or gets their name, interests or family composition wrong (Gaynor, 2013; p. 33).
According to the digital communication agency King & Partners, high-end brands are challenged because the high-end consumer is not all that interested in social gaming and other marketing methods that can drive engagement and that work with a mass audience. The high-end brands must provide an added value to provide them with an exclusive feeling and a personalized service (King & Partners, 2013).

An example would be the IRAS mobile phone application, which is launching in Spring 2013 from King & Partners and Basil Farano. The company states that consumers can use IRAS to follow their favorite brands and reserve products to pick them up in store, all in one device. It’s a completely new way to shop. For example sales associates can use IRAS as a tool to connect to their best customers. The service is available for both iPad and iPhone. IRAS’s recommendation page gives users options to reserve the product to pick up at the store or chat with a sale associate to learn more about that particular product. But you can also set up appointments with any given brand in the IRAS stream. A personal meeting with sales associates is the follow up of this service (King & Partners, 2013). The purpose is to build up a better service when purchasing a high-end item. But also the company can get better insights about the consumer behavior.

The figure 10 shows the appearance of the IRAS mobile application for smartphones and tablets.

Figure 10: IRAS mobile phone application by King & Partners (King & Partners, 2013)
2.8. Conclusion
The main finding of digital communication methods is that traditional marketing approach does not work for the high-end segment because it does not engage the consumer emotionally; therefore the report portrays in chapter 2 the experiential communication marketing. The approach centres the emotional value of a high-end brand product and tries to deliver an experience (Glyn and Williams, 2009). The framework of the experiential communication approach has four pillars; exclusivity, emotion, experience and engagement. Co-creation is part of the experiential approach and tries to engage the consumer by working with him together. That means that high-end brands have to know what the consumer demands.

Social media is the biggest communication tool for high-end brands and that means consumer interact with high-end brands on different digital channels. For brands it is relevant to create an interactive experience that can be shared with other consumers (Gaynor, 2013). High-end brand Proenza Schouler is going even further by converting social media feedback into their strategy and trying to build up a strong relationship. The purpose is to get to know the consumer demands and to drive traffic on social media platforms. Next to that personal bloggers become a marketing tool for high-end brands and are asked to market products of high-end brands or the brands create their own cooperate blogs. That means that blogging becomes a public relations approach (Kretz and Valck 2010). Moreover mobile phone applications are created by to engage consumer on a personal level and deliver a better service (King & Partners, 2013).

The main advantage of social media is to interact more personal with a big amount of consumers, get attention and create curiosity. The main disadvantage is to find the real crowd, which means consumers who are also the real customers of the brand.

The second main finding is that high-end brands have problems to collect sufficient consumer insights like needs and wants, to connect with them. This means that the consumer is overwhelmed by choices and that the sales forecasts of brands are not accurate anymore (Daly and Bruce 2006). By building digital channels, high-end brands try to get the attention, drive traffic, collect consumer data and use them to interact and engage digitally via social media, video content, packaging, blogging and mobile applications.
Chapter 3: Forecasting and Trends

3.1. Introduction
Part II portrays the communication possibilities for high-end fashion brands. It explores the tech industry and how the technology will influence the digital communication channels of high-end brands. Part I researched that high-end brands communicate via experiential communication methods and part II explains how this could develop in the future (Pratt, Borrione, Lavanga, D’Ovidio 2012).

Chapter 3 is general research about the tech industry developments and the digital communication trends in the fashion industry that are relevant for the high-end fashion market. The purpose is to look further than the fashion industry to portray sufficient information.

Chapter 4 explains the innovation in business models. The purpose is to portray the innovation in digital business models that eventually will affect the way of connecting digitally as a high-end brand.

Chapter 5 explores the development how high-end brands show their collections seasonally via digital channels and the impact of catwalk showcasing in the Internet.

3.2. Observational research of the tech industry
The report refers the term “tech industry” to a number of innovators and manufacturers, but eventually refers to high-tech businesses worldwide (Pratt, Borrione, Lavanga, D’Ovidio 2012). The research has been done via units of observations by evaluating existing video material and interviews.

Case Study Racketspace and Marc Andreessen
The case study is the video interview between Racketspace, a company that researches startups and the future of technology, and Marc Andreessen. He is on the boards of HP, Facebook, and many others and is largely seen as one of the best investors on Sand Hill Road, which concentrates on venture capital companies (Andreessen M., 2013). Andreessen and Racketspace discuss in a video interview the future of tech industry in terms of digital communication, which is also important research, taking the high-end communication into consideration (Andreessen, 2013)

According to Marc Andreessen the overall statement is that people are going to have a virtual overlay on the real world. He describes this development as a shift into a virtual world where we create a projection of the real world (Andreessen, 2013). Until now a consumer was not able to talk to a car but this will be possible with the help of better consumer knowledge and collection of consumer data. The main forecasting is personalized and predictive consumer knowledge that leads to improved products and personalized services.

To conclude a whole new bunch of consumer data and knowledge will have the impact for many sectors, he names the car industry. An example is car leasing and the data collecting of customers driving behavior. This would have the effect that leasing contracts would be much more personalized and the driving behavior would influence the decision what leasing contract for whom.
Another example is mutual network (known from Facebook and other social communities), which could decide the ranking of customer services. It could rank the priority in data supply. For example the rental of vacation apartments would be affected by making a better decision who to trust. This system has never been developed to a great extend yet. It is a revolution in terms of consumer knowledge and data collection.

3.3. Observational research of digital communication

Also this research has been completed with the help of units of observation and video interviews. This chapter got narrowed down from the whole tech industry to the digital communication.

Case Study Racketspace and eBay

The interview about eBay's contextual and personalized future with its head of mobile Steve Yankovich and Racketspace helped to get a better impression how the future of digital communication in the clothing industry will look like. The Interview brought up the same future tech direction like the previous one. Steve Yankovich tells how eBay also believes in a contextual and personalized future (Yankovich 2012).

One example is eBay’s new mobile app that lets you have things delivered from stores in San Francisco. So the two big words are personalization and big data. The head of mobile eBay says how „creepy“ it is to track consumers buying behaviour or even localize it – but that is the future. eBay is working on real-time delivery of a product where data gets collected that is relevant (Yankovich 2012).

To bring it closer to the digital communication of high-end brands the forecasting research showed slightly different results. Interviews with digital communication professionals from the fashion industry indicated another interesting trend. For example respondent Liz Entin from the digital platform Runway Passport New York states, “I think it will continue along the path we are going down now. Much more back and forth dialogue between brands and customers. People turning to the public and researching their own unique taste more than ads and huge label magazines defining that for them.” That means that she believes in a more personal dialogue, which is based on an equal relationship. But also the consumer got empowered to follow his own choices by researching everything themselves.

According to respondent Julia Marinho digital communication and the fashion industry will be more closely linked than before. “Digital communication will allow to keep data of customers and this will give them a better service.” That means this statement is in line with the observational research in the tech industry, which believes in personalized and contextual communication. According to Julia Marinho the data will give consumers a personal presentation of their favourite pieces, sizing, which is still an issue when you are shopping online. If the brand has got data about the customer it will immediately offer the correct size, meaning less returns.

According to the respondents Liz Entin and Julia Marinho this research finding is in line with the one from part I. That means that high-end brands need more consumer data to connect more precisely with them on digital channels. The purpose is to attach the consumer stronger to the brand. That means that high-end brands need more consumer insights. The issue is that insights like trends are not long-term and high-end brand find it hard to pinpoint them.
3.3.1. Personalization in digital communication

The two previous sections portray the research the consumer communication could be more precise and more personalized. This consumer knowledge would take the digital fashion communication into a new perspective. Personalized shopping in the Internet would revolutionize the shopping experience and the consumer behavior. Net-A-Porter editor in chief Lucy Yeomans is convinced of this development. She states that fashion e-commerce will surely be able to look after their customers better. They will be able to connect more personalized and services will please individual needs and inspiration better (Kansara 2013).

One of the first personalized digital communication tools in the e-commerce introduced Net-A-Porter. Geo-targeting is part of this personalized communication. “If it is sunny where you are, sandals come up”. According to Lucy Yeomans the situation could be that you arrive in a cold city and get delivered with a coat at your hotel. Smartphone devices will take the personalized approach further. E-commerce fashion company Farfetch is already busy working on this device (Kansara, 2013).

Looking ahead, high-end fashion brand-executives state that they expect to be able to use technology to personalize and customize information for individual consumers, by, say, sending a package of photos showing outfits deemed suitable based on past purchases (Miles, 2013).

One of the examples of personalized communication is the social magazine app Flipboard (Reuters, 2013). According to Reuters the Flipboard launched in March 2013 and it offers readers to create and share their own magazines. The app is letting readers customize their own content with different topics and interests. All of this can get shared with other readers, see figure 11. It is about the user who can create individual content that he is interested in. The User can chose between published sources and content from social media. This movement could be relevant in the future for high-end brands because it gives the consumer even more power to it’s individuality by co-creation (Reuters, 2013).

![Figure 11: Flipboard application to customize own newspaper content (Flipboard, 2013)](image)

Also in social media the personalized media communication goes further. For example Facebook is moving towards a “newspaper-like” content design. In March 2013 Facebook changed its newsfeed where users can show better their images and videos to make the social network more of a personalized newspaper (Reuters, 2013). This personalized media movement is one of the trends to watch, because it can mean a lot to the communication of high-end brands. Both examples show that media and social media move towards an individualized concept in content and communication.
3.3.2. Google Glasses

The Google glasses are part of the big personalized and digitalized communication movement. The glasses combine what many other fashion companies still dream of. Among others you can communicate through the glasses digitally and the e-commerce Warby Parker supports Google to make them more stylish since they look otherwise not appealing enough (Miller, 2013).

Google glasses have a computer processor that lets you reach the Internet through Wi-Fi. The glasses let you take pictures and record video without using your hands. You even can send “images to friends or post them online, get walking directions, search the web by voice command and view language translations” (Miller, 2013). The first fashion high-end brand using the glasses was Diane von Fürstenberg. In the Autumn/Winter 2013 season she collaborated with Google Glasses for her collection presentation at New York Mercedes Benz fashion Week. The figure 12 shows the models backstage while wearing the glasses, The brand included the glasses on the catwalk models to give the audience a backstage view of the show. This really opened eyes to a big part of the digital fashion communication - from model to consumer within real-time.

Several articles quote the future of fashion aims to bring consumers even closer to the happening by creating wearable micro-cameras. Real-time “model cams” and the Google glasses capture what it is like to walk the runway (Kansara, 2012).

Figure 12: Diane van Fürstenberg Fashion Show A/W 2013 (Vogue, 2013)
3.4. Conclusion
The trend and forecasting of digital communication showed different developments about contextual and personalized data collection and communication. The case studies of the tech industry showed that companies work on real-time deliveries of products and improved knowledge about the consumer (Yankovich 2012). According to respondents strong dialogues could lead to improved connection and online service between high-end brands and consumers.

According to findings, the opportunities bring also threats because the tech industry is moving forward very quickly, see table 2. For brands it stays difficult to keep up-to-date and to collect sufficient consumer insights (Kansara 2013). The main opportunity is the empowerment of the consumer, since a brand is then able to have stronger dialogues with the individual. That means that high-end brands need more consumer data to connect more precisely with them on digital channels. The purpose is to attach the consumer stronger to the brand. That means that high-end brands need more consumer insights. The issue is that insights like trends are not long-term and high-end brand find it hard to pinpoint and market them (Reuters, 2013). The example is geo-targeting that is used by the retailer Net-A-Porter. According to Net-A-Porter different products come up in the online shop per location or weather. The purpose is to deliver a better service and more personal approach to different circumstances.

The main finding is the GOOGLE glasses that revolutionized the personal approach with consumers. The high-end brand DVF made a fashion show and included models wearing those glasses during and after the fashion show. According to Kansara models were filming the show from their perspective and in real-time the material was viewable for consumers to get a better perspective from the view of a model. The purpose is to create a more engaging experience (Kansara, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Personalized communication approach</td>
<td>o Difficulty to collect consumer data</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Intercommunication through smart glasses</td>
<td>o Empowerment of the consumer</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Classification for data knowledge</td>
<td>o Investment in digital communications necessary to stay up-to-date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Empowerment of the consumer</td>
<td>o Digitalized communication needs to be handled with care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Consumer generated content</td>
<td>o Speed of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Individualized concept in content and communication</td>
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Table 2: Opportunities and threats
Chapter 4: Innovation in business models

4.1. Introduction
Chapter 4 portrays findings on new innovative business models that change the high-end communication through digital channels. In the previous chapter was discussed what the general tech industry could look like in the future. The term business model is describes how high-end brands create, deliver, and capture value with different approaches (Miles, 2013).

This chapter portrays the findings on a new development how media, social media and e-commerce are converting into a multi-channel vision. The research topic has high relevance when it comes to the communication of high-end brands because they will be affected by it. These three business approaches get introduced in chapter 4:

- Transmedia storytelling model
- Crowd-producing model
- Multi-channel e-commerce model

4.2. Transmedia storytelling model
In this chapter the term “transmedia storytelling” is getting introduced. Transmedia storytelling is the method of telling a story across multiple platforms by using different digital technologies. This means personalized experience for the individual. Also high-end brands started to adapt to this trend. Story-telling content was already highlighted in the chapter of communication methods because it is efficient to engage with consumers (Kansara, 2013).

According to Miles the Internet has become first point of reference for fashion and by now a growing amount of people prefer it rather than written critiques on print media. Inspiration for the next purchase is not coming from magazines anymore but multi-channel blogging and online media made the change. The web made everything possible in real-time and high-end brands are under pressure to stay 100 per cent up-to-date. “If you aren't, you will be dead soon…and in a way it's not fun not to be involved with the use of recent, the most recent, inventions. I love all that!” quoted by Karl Lagerfeld (Miles, 2013).

Due to the fact that fashion media companies start to target the Internet generation by taking a different approach to platform, communication and content. Established high-end brands still use the traditional way to advertise in magazines. But the young fashion media embraces new business models centred on the physical magazines (Ünaya, 2012).

According to respondent Liz Entin from Runway Passport New York, “People like to discover and put together their own looks and find their own unique designers. They communicate their sense of style online with friends (Facebook, Instagram, emailing/texting to friends new favourite outfits) as well as to strangers (ie lookbook.nu)”. An increasing amount of brands start to understand that the media is shifting and that the traditional approach does not work very effectively anymore. Lookbook.nu is a platform to share and show daily outfits.
Next to that, the recession gave the print advertising a hard time. According to the World Advertising Research centre forecasts the print media continues to decline by another 4 per cent in 2013 (Kansara, 2013). Also the digitalization and the Web give high-end brands and e-commerce a cost-effective way to engage with consumers even better, by creating online communities on social media, offer co-creation, cooperate blogging or even mobile applications, the possibilities are broad. Therefore “transmedia story-telling” is a trend to interact with the consumers on many different channels online (Kansara, 2013).

One example is Bullett Media, a company which publishes a website for fashion content. According to Bullett Media almost all revenues come from sponsored content deals by like-minded brands instead of traditional advertising. Next to the editorial part the company also offers an e-commerce store of its own, stocked with pieces from the own magazine (Kansara, 2013). The figure 13 shows the e-commerce. The company uses “transmedia storytelling” to connect with the consumers on different platforms.

![Bullelt Media e-commerce integrated into the transmedia storytelling method](Bullett Media, 2013)

### 4.3. Crowd-producing model

The model is based on user-generated content, comments, blogging, and everything else that is not made by expert contributors. There is a growing market of consumers who search products before they decide to buy an item. User-generated content became an important part of data used in the process to decide about a purchase (Pratt, Borrione, Lavanga, D’Ovidio, 2012).

High-end brands and retailers could use this content as feedback for crowd-producing. In this way the brands get more creative content, which possibility increases the loyalty of a consumer. It also deepens the engagement and it could identify trends before competitors (Pratt, Borrione, Lavanga, D’Ovidio, 2012).
According to the journalist Kansara other fashion media companies are moving already towards the crowd-producing and co-creation of user-generated content. This evolution empowers the consumer to another level of editing.

One example is the lifestyle magazine V Magazine from New York City, which also follows the development by inventing the Vfiles. They are digital folders containing a blend of original content created by the V-editors and content created by members of the Vfiles community where users can communicate about interests. The figure 14 shows the Vfiles. “We give our users fun things and original programming to watch, collect and contribute too — a vault of fashion media,” says V Magazine (Kansara, 2013). The purpose is engaging the user and user-generated content can fulfill demands.

![Most Popular Now](image)

**Figure 14:** Vfiles by V Magazine (VFiles, 2013)

According to Kansara the approach of a growing amount of companies is to integrate user participation and “go the multi-channel way” (Kansara, 2013). They let the audience participate in a dialogue of fashion, which can even form the foundation of a company, like for example V Magazine does it with the Vfiles.

One other example is the high-end brand Alexander Wang that started using this innovative business model. In 2013 it partnered with Samsung to create a bag. Members of Alexander Wang’s inner circle created own digital prints, which the designer incorporated into unique prints. The purpose of this collaboration is to gain attention and to engage consumers (Buck, 2013).
4.4. Multichannel e-commerce model
Research portrayed that a new wave of websites, applications and services arises in a multi-channel e-commerce approach. The term is described as a fusion of retail operations in such a manner that enables transaction of a customer via many digital connected channels. The purpose is to connect the store experience with the fashion content to shorten the path from inspiration to transaction (Rickman, 2007).

This development started recently in 2012 therefore less sources started to report this fusion between media and e-commerce (Kansara, 2013). This online assemblage between purchase and inspiration could be one of the most important developments for a high-end customer. According to Suzy Menkes is a change of rules getting introduced into the media world of fashion.

With the decrease of print media, the industry thought of a new way to connect revenue and inspiration, the fusion between transaction and inspiration. One example is the high-end e-commerce Net-A-Porter that started to combine different channels of inspiration and transaction (Conti, 2013). It is the first online retailer with editorial-style content added to its e-commerce sites. The e-commerce leader just launched the editorial magazine THE EDIT with a print version published in fall 2013. Lucy Yeomans is the editor-in-chief of Net-A-Porter, according to her consumers expect a better fusion between looking at an editorial and shopping the items out of it. She says, “The things that are constant are storytelling, seduction and service. You can’t just make a catalogue, because a catalogue is boring. And another really important constant is a point of view; a sense of curating” (Kansara, 2013). That means that a usual magazine for inspiration is not enough anymore.
THE EDIT is the first digital fashion magazine of a retailer where customers can shop out of its editorials directly online. The purpose is engagement and expansion of their audiences. The figure 15 shows the archive of the THE EDIT by Net-A-Porter.

![THE EDIT ARCHIVE](image)

**Figure 15**: THE EDIT archive with all editions (Kansara 2012)

According to Farfetch founder Jose Neves the fusion is between magazines and e-commerce a strong development, “I think it’s quite clear that the worlds of e-commerce and media and social media are converging. You have amazing e-commerce websites with impeccable content, but they are e-commerce websites; they don’t have the authoritative voice of *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair* and other titles”. The monetisation of their users through transactions is the new way to generate. (Kansara, 2012). Jose Neves calls the multi-channel vision as a main development where consumers can shop and get inspired at the same time.
One other example is the lifestyle magazine Harper’s Bazaar from the United States that launched ShopBazaar in September 2012 and built one of the leading shopping sites (Kansara 2012). The purpose is to give the consumer the chance to shop his favourite items “out of the editorial”. That makes the way between inspiration and a purchase quicker and easier for the consumer. The purpose for magazines is to gain more power by doing this development after the decrease of print media.

![ShopBazaar](https://example.com/shopbazaar)

**Figure 16:** Harpers Bazaars’ new online shop ShopBazaar (Shopbazaar, 2013)

The approach of high-end brands and retailers is to create an experience or a dream, tell a story on different digital platforms rather than only show a catalogue magazine. The new evolution is the fusion of transaction and inspiration. Currently the trend is that the media starts to transform into a retailer and the other way around. According to Kansara the future of digital fashion is multi-channel communication and magazines as retailers or retailers as magazines that could be part of it (Kansara, 2013).

On the other side in the digital web it became much harder to catch the right information for high-end brands because information like trends is moving much more spontaneously. It got almost impossible to predict popularity since it is a race against time. D. Greenhill, founder from Greenhill & Partners, states, “Fashion directors of the future will have learned to sense the ever-changing rhythms of market trends and will react quickly and flexibly” (Greenhill, 2011). That means that the previous sections already portrayed the research findings how high-end brands issue the impossible prediction of consumer needs nowadays.

An important finding of the new business models and communication development is the new form of investments into digital communication (Menkes, 2013). According to James Bilefield, the president of Condé Nast International Digital, investment in new business models is part of wider company strategies (Menkes, 2013).
4.5. Conclusion
The main finding of part II is a vision that got observed by videos and discussions
about the future and innovation developments of digital communication. Part II
portrays the personalized multi-channel communication opportunities that high-end
brands could implement into their communication strategy (Rickman, 2007).

High-end brands like Alexander Wang already implement business approaches like the
crowd-producing approach. A crow-producing method is a co-creation of a product
together with the consumer. According to the journalist Kansara fashion media
companies are moving towards the crowd-producing and co-creation of user-generated
content. That means that they create a multi-channel where only content by consumers
is presented. This evolution empowers the consumer to another level of editing
(Kansara, May 2013).

But according to the research high-end brands are facing the issue to collect the right
consumer data to engage the consumer stronger. Therefore increasing investments are
required to give the consumer a multi-channel experience online. The purpose of these
new business strategies and technologies is to connect more efficiently with consumers
and to attach them stronger to the brand.

The second main finding is the transmedia storytelling approach where the fusion of
transaction and inspiration is a new concept that reveals stronger interaction.
According to Kansara this fusion in digital communication is the biggest development
in the fashion industry. This concept is getting translated into the fusion of print media
and e-commerce. That means that magazines become retailers to connect inspiration
and transaction at once. Magazines like Harpers Bazaar US started recently to connect
the editorials with an online shop, where the consumer can shop an item “out of the
editorial”. The online shop of Harpers Bazaar is called Shopbazaar and the purpose of
this development is to make revenue, gain power and to fuse transaction and
inspiration for the consumer.
Chapter 5: Public fashion shows of high-end brands

5.1. Introduction

According to the research high-end brands started to engage the mass and their global consumers with public fashion shows via digital channels due to the rise of digitalization (Pernet, 2012).

Instead of a closed event high-end brands started to broadcast, live stream and showcase digitally their collections. The research question is based on the theory that high-end brands and their catwalk shows are for a small amount of people and the rise of social media, which invites everybody to watch the digital catwalk shows. This public form to showcase collections is getting discussed as a democratic development of the high-end brands. According to Faurholt this development started already a few years earlier (Faurholt, 2008).

In the early 2000s high-end brands started to incorporate a democratization strategy into their business plans (Faurholt, 2008). In 2004 Karl Lagerfeld’s collaboration with H&M was the kick-off, the figure 17 shows the campaign. According to Faurholt other high-end brands added more affordable collections afterwards. The purpose was to enter the middle class market. Designers and high-end brands saw the mass market growing and took the business opportunity that resulted in an inescapable trend (Choufan, 2013). According to Flur and Branston this development raised fear in branding issues that the high-end brands would open up too much and that the barrier of exclusiveness would decrease (Flur and Branston, 2011).

Figure 17: H&M Collaboration with Karl Lagerfeld, 2004 (Faurholt, 2008)
According to Euromonitor there are several reasons why the high-end fashion market opened up in the early 2000s. One of them is the rise of working women who wanted to have more affordable designs to express their sophistication through clothes and accessories in the workplace (Euromonitor, 2011).

Thus a lot of high-end brands developed in the era of new luxury, which is referred to mass luxury. More affordable lines, sub-brands or endorsed brands were the beginning. According to Canon SEE BY CHLOÉ is one example, since it is the sub-line of CHLOÉ. Reasonable materials and fewer embellishments are the tools for cheaper price points (Canon E., 2011). High-end brands have been using the strategy increasingly in the past decade as an answer to the consumer demands. The brands see it as a modernization of their image (Kondej, 2011). According to Kondej this is a result a lot of brands that changed their way to connect and communicate with consumers.

![SEE BY CHLOÉ SS 12 advertisement by Suburbia Agency (Suburbia, 2013)](image)

**Figure 18:** SEE BY CHLOÉ SS 12 advertisement by Suburbia Agency (Suburbia, 2013)

### 5.2. The Street-Style Blogosphere Revolution

Rise of digitalization, social media and globalization revolutionized the fashion industry. According to Smith the named facts have an impact on the fashion industry (Smith, 2010). The impacts are named:

- New accessibility to global fashion industry
- Rise of public voices
- Transformation of closed, exclusive fashion industry
- Mental change of showcase
- Democratization of high-end brands
- Rise of bloggers
The impacts are happening in the fashion industry right now. Bloggers make the fashion industry more accessible. The rise of public voices brings journalists and magazines into insecure situations because they lose power. With the extreme increase of the popular and hyped blogosphere also the street style imagery becomes powerful and the closed, exclusive fashion industry opens up. This has the effect that high-end brands do live-streams of catwalk shows and make it accessible to everybody who is interested. This development democratizes the fashion industry (Smith, 2010).

The street-style blogosphere turned the fashion show-goers at fashion weeks into virtual actors on digital stage and big amounts of followers watch them. The figure 19 shows the popularity of the street-style blogosphere. Followers via blogs and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram are tracking them for new updates. The blogosphere is a new fashion scene, which changes the mentality of the fashion industry (Menkes, 2013).

Figure 19: Popular street-style blogosphere at the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, New York 2013 (Adam Kitz Sinding, 2013)

Being a street-style blogger and being a street-style photographer has become a real business and attracts high-end brands for marketing deals. Being a blogger has become a new way of celebrity treatment (Menkes, 2013). Respondent Marc Wainwright says, “Bloggers are gaining in view time, all the time. Bloggers will come and go ... and they will evolve ... remarkably rapidly... the worst will fall by the wayside ... but the best will be the kings and queens of media space and attention and will command followers much the same as pop stars ... and the very best will hold onto them.” According to him are bloggers much like celebrities and as a blogger it gets harder to be on top of it.
The journalist Suzy Menkes has a critical opinion about the popularity of bloggers. According to her are bloggers famous for no reason. In her article “The Circus of Fashion” she criticizes the “celebrity circus of people who are famous for being famous” (Menkes, 2013). This article heated up the blogger discussion like never before. She argues against bloggers who are known for their Facebook pages, blogs and the participation of marketing deals and events. According to the platform Signature9 is the most influential blogger “The Sartorialist” who has over 176,000 Facebook fans and even published books about his work, see figure 20. Suzy Menkes argues against bloggers who often ignore the journalistic ethics like acceptance of gifts (Kansara, Feb 2013). But is it not hypocritical to state journalists acting independently? For example Vogue states that it favors garments from their advertisers with more editorial coverage (Kansara, Feb 2013).

Figure 20: THE SARTORLAIST: CLOSER published by the Scott Schuman (Facebook, 2013)

5.3. Public Showcase via Live Stream
High-end brands present their collections every season at fashion weeks in the main fashion capitals around the world. According to Weller is it a highlight for the fashion industry to look at the new collections twice a year but the high-end brands introduced the live stream of a fashion show. The purpose is to make the presentation of the collection more accessible for the people who are not invited or do not have time or live abroad (Pernet, 2012).

Weller describes the main function of a fashion show, which is face-to-face meeting of the fashion production system. This international mixes of people and meetings are part of the information exchange and networking system in the fashion industry. The meetings underpin the cultural production of the fashion brands. The second main reason of a fashion show is to retrieve new investments, in the hope to get on the fashion map and to attract publicity (Weller, 2008). According to Oliver fashion weeks are the time for editors and buyers to note what consumer would want next season (Oliver, 2011). Usually the fashion shows are closed events.
According to Weller, live streaming is a video platform that allows users to view and broadcast video content through the Internet. To live stream a fashion show means that consumers can watch the show at the same time as it happens and a single fashion show is accessible for thousands of people who have the feeling to sit front-row (Menkes, 2013). The figure 21 shows how a consumer can see the show at real-time.

For high-end brands, the catwalk shows remain to be an essential publicity tool, but the system has changed drastically. That means that it started like a marketing tool but it resulted in a fashion industry that seems to be more open to everybody who is interested in it (Kansara, Feb. 2013).

Figure 21: High-end brand Alberta Ferretti live streams from Milan Fashion Week (Alberta Ferretti, 2013)

According to the research, use of high-end brands also the live streaming as a research opportunity to measure the interest of the consumer since lately. Regular viewers see what editors and buyers see and this will eventually affect when people pause on an outfit or post Twitter messages. These insights help to predict the buying behavior better (Clifford, 2013). That means that this is an opportunity to increase sales and gain insights about the consumer demands.
One other example is the high-end brand Burberry that offers customers to order runway collection, as the shows are live streamed. It is called Retail Theatre. According to Vogue UK is the purpose of the concept to broadcast content allover the world (Alexander, 2010). The Retail Theatre broadcast shows the collections directly into 25 worldwide flagship stores. Following the private viewing, customers are able to browse the collection on iPads where they can buy pieces directly. Please see figure 22 Burberry’s Retail Theatre (Alexander, 2010).

![Burberry’s Retail Theatre](image)

**Figure 22:** Burberry’s Retail Theatre (Burberry, 2013)

On the other hand consumers are worried that the authenticity and creativity could get lost because the show is not an experience anymore. According to interviews are consumers preferring to watch a catwalk show live, to get the experience of receiving the invitation and see the garments live. Garment details and the sphere of a catwalk show are also not much tangible on a computer screen when watching a live stream.

Respondent Sharon Geernaert states, “I think the high-end consumer will always stick by the authenticity of the brands they cherish. In that way it is no danger for the high-end brands”. Also respondent Urusla Fritz adds, “Digital fashion shows are great for a first look and impressions but cannot replace a proper show, in my eyes. I need to get a haptic feeling. And to see it in real.” That means that the real high-end consumers rather get the physical experience of a catwalk show to get an emotion for the collection.
5.3.1. Pre-Taped Digital Fashion Shows
The next of a fashion show live stream are pre-taped fashion shows. That means that recently high-end brands decided to tape their collection presentations via videos and present them digitally instead of doing a real one without a real audience. Figure 23 shows the pre-taped show by Peter Som who is one of the first high-end brands that creates a catwalk show only in the digital world. According to the journalist Kansara pre-taped shows have been launched in 2012. They show real models on a video and offer access to detail shots of fabrics, prints and accessories, as well as behind the scene moments and designer inspiration (Kansara, Jan 2013). The purpose is to reach and engage consumers globally but it is also a reasonable option to pre-tape a fashion show. It also modernizes the brand image.

According to the research are pre-taped shows good to give editors and buyers a chance to see and review a show without adding another show to the overloaded fashion week schedules (Kansara, Jan 2013). According to interviews with respondents offer pre-taped shows new worldwide engagement with consumers but the experience to see a show physically and the emotion to see it live might get lost.

According to the interviewed high-end brand Sarmite Ostanevica live streams and pre-taped shows are a great opportunity for consumers. “Live-Stream and digital shows are very exciting as they give the opportunity for people to follow the loved brands across the world. As well the fact that fashion is so international, digitalization is necessary.” But interviews with consumers showed that they still favour the physical attendance of a fashion show.

According to the primary research the consumer is sceptical in general if such digital show(s) could be able to replace the physical experience. They see a fashion show as an exclusive experience that might loose authenticity when watching a pre-taped video.

Figure 23: Peter Som’s pre-taped video, without real audience (Digitalfashionshows.com, 2013)
5.4. Conclusion
The democratization of high-end brands started with the rise of working women when they introduced sub-lines like See By Chloe earlier. With the rise of bloggers the industry is getting even more open to new voices. For high-end brands especially the street-style blogosphere became a relevant marketing tool. According to the Suzy Menkes this development displeases journalists because they seem to loose their authority. According to Menkes the reason is the street-style blogosphere takes away the creditability of journalistic ethics (Menkes, 2013).
To conclude with the rise of public voices the fashion industry is getting transformed into an open industry, which used to be a closed and exclusive group. Moreover the fashion industry undergoes a mental change to communicate more global.

The main finding of this section is the digital catwalk development with which brands try to reach consumers globally. The new and innovative way to present a collection via live-stream and pre-taped shows has the purpose to reach more consumers globally. That means that the closed and elite industry opens up by inviting the public to be part of it. According to respondents the consumer gets the opportunity to follow his beloved brands across the world by watching live-stream of the shows. According to Sharon Geernaert fashion professionals doubt if the unreal experience is not taking away the authenticity of a real catwalk show.

To conclude high-end brands try to give a more personal approach by engaging the consumer during catwalk live-streams and collection of consumer data to give better service. Recently high-end brands set up live stream and pre-taped shows with the purpose to reach more consumers but they also use it as a research tool to get more consumer insights. That means that it got harder to predict consumer demands due to the overwhelming choices of consumers.

Moreover table 3 shows the main advantage sand disadvantages to give a public fashion show via digital channels. It takes the primary research into account when talking to consumers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Broader audience since democratization of high-end</td>
<td>o Branding issues of exclusiveness &amp; authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Higher and quicker reach</td>
<td>o Radical new accessibility to the global high-end fashion industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Modernization of high-end image to a more dynamic image</td>
<td>o Speed of communication changes puts pressure on brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Bigger amount of potential future clients</td>
<td>o Bigger authority for investments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Rise of bloggers as free advertising, personal approach</td>
<td>o Threat for brand image; authenticity &amp; creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Direct insight on consumer preferences</td>
<td>o Decrease of the brand appreciation</td>
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Table 3: Advantages & Disadvantages of Democratization
Chapter 6: The tribe of high-end brands

6.1. Introduction
The third part of the research part is all about the consumer of high-end brands. First the third chapter portrays the research how the consumer is described as a tribe nowadays, in the section “Postmodern era” (Bauman 1991). Afterwards are the findings on consumer behaviour and demands presented. According to the research is the consumer profile is divided into these areas:

- Rituals and cult objects
- Needs and desires
- Network

The terms rituals and symbols are introduced for the research report. They are modes of behaviour that occur as a spontaneous invention. Needs and desires are demands that the tribe requires. Network is the place where the tribe communicates and connects with high-end brands.

6.2. Postmodern era

“The simulacrum is never what hides the truth - it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.”

By Ecclesiastes (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1)

According to theorists is the 20th century is divided into two different periods; one characterized by the modernity movement and the other by postmodernity. Some theorists believe that the postmodernity is an answer to the modernity (Baumann, 1991). The difference between modernity and postmodernity are approaches towards life. Modernity is a progressive movement of society is associated with what has been described as modernity. According to the philosopher Jean Baudrillard postmodernity is a “tendency in contemporary culture characterized by the problem of objective truth and inherent suspicion towards global cultural narrative” (Glyn and Williams, 2009). That means that the society is not based on one-truth anymore.

The evolution of postmodernity is the overall topic when it comes to contemporary tribes of the high-end market. According to the researcher Marco Mossinkoff neo-tribes are a new way to describe the consumer. They are changeable social communities that can be called micro-cultures with own value systems (Mossinkoff, 2011). The French sociologist Michel Maffesoli is the pioneer in tribal thinking. Maffesoli (1996) is the original defender in the study of tribal consumption groups (Tuominen, 2011). In the report “Tribal marketing” Maffesoli describes the social network of tribes that are constructed by companies, products or brands that have a strong value. He describes the influences of the tribe concept as an important part of the working life (Cova, 2001). Tribes are not defined by traditional segmentations like by age or geographic (Cova, 2001).
According to Cova tribes exist in the postmodern era. Tribes are connected through emotional value that is also the reason why the high-end consumer is described as a tribe. High-end brands connect through emotional value such as authenticity. In the age of social media are tribes relevant since they are connecting on digital channels where individuals meet and connect and come together to form a group they belong (Cova, 1997). One of the main findings is that consumers set independence and individuality as their priority in the postmodern era.

According to Glyn consumption is a defining feature of postmodern societies (Glyn and Williams, 2009). For consumers a tribe is a helpful tool to define his identity and that is also the reason why a tribe has own symbols and rituals. That is also the reason why tribes are important for the fashion industry, because for tribes are clothes a sign of recognisability. Clothing is a part of a culture that is important for tribes (Cova, 2001).

The postmodern tribes are not stable; they are small-scale, affective and not fixed by any established parameters from the society. According to Mossinkoff emotions, lifestyles, moral beliefs, fashion styles and consumption methods are the glue-values of a tribe (Mossinkoff 2011). Tribes create their own complexes of meanings, symbols. Every consumer in the postmodern society belongs to several tribes and he can act in different roles in each of them. Cova describes this role as a specific mask (Cova, 2001). Therefore modern and traditional marketing tools are not relevant anymore to classify a consumer. For high-end brands the experiential marketing from chapter 2 is a better approach to engage the consumer emotionally.

When it comes to the ultimate experience that high-end brands give to their consumers by using experiential marketing; hyper-reality and image are most relevant. Hyper-reality means that the reality has become an image, illusion and simulation. So a simulated environment reproduces reality. According to postmodernist Jean Baudrillard a simulacrum is not a copy of the real but it becomes truth in its own right, the hyperreal (Baudrillard, 1994). Berthon and Katsikeas state; “Hyper-reality engenders a general loss of sense of authenticity – ie what is genuine or real” (Berthon and Katsikeas, 1998). The result is that people consume images that have become more important than what they stand for. One example is the American high-end brand Proenza Schouler that takes the hyperreal as part of its design. The brand deconstructed and manipulated the Navajo pattern with the help of computers and created a new two-layer structure. The figure 24 shows the pattern. One of the owners states, “We are not so interested in inventing new shapes or silhouettes; that feels old to us.” He also says that technology is everything to the brand, the computer lets them know whether the brand wants to go forward with a certain idea” (Suleman 2011). Here the brand states that reproduction of imagery is part of the design strategy.
6.3. Tribe profile

The tribe of the high-end brands is a micro-culture that is defined by companies, products or high-end brands that have a strong value. The high-end tribe is like all other tribes not defined by rational segmentations like by age or place.

This section portrays the research findings on the high-end tribe, which is a group of consumers and fans of the high-end brands. The high-end tribe has like every other tribe certain characteristics. The tribe shares passion for the lifestyles of high-end brands and certain products define it. The community is held together by an emotional bond but is not fixed by any parameters. The tribe’s identity lies in shared experiences such as the purchase of a high-end item. Certain rituals, behaviour, needs & desires and network define the high-end tribe profile.

For high-end brands there are a lot of changes in their environment to connect with a consumer digitally and to stay on top of it, it is relevant to watch the targeted consumer and to develop an interactive way to communicate with the tribe digitally. That means that high-end brands have to involve the tribe with co-creation or crowd-producing methods like described in the previous chapters. High-end brands try to react on these demands with trend forecast and trend scouting but the demands change so quickly that it stays hard to predict them. According to respondent Eugene Rabkin forums are communication channels for tribes where consumers discuss and connect about products. High-end brands would need to make use of those insights that consumers discuss in forums to build up a loyal relationship.

6.3.1. Rituals and symbols

The high-end tribe exists by the attraction of certain rituals and of its cult-objects. Interviews with consumers portrayed the rituals and symbols of the high-end tribe.

The ritual of the high-end tribe is the collection of branded material. This means that high-end tribe members collect material from the high-end garments that they purchase (Megehee, Spake 2011). According to respondent Ursula Fritz who is a high-end consumer, it is a ritual to collect look-books, tags and boxes from the high-end purchases. The purpose is to keep a memory of the purchase experience. It shows the emotional value of a consumer to each item he purchases. The figure 25 shows the packaging of high-end brand called MIU MIU that is the sub-brand of Prada.
The cult-object of the high-end tribe is the specific bag model called “PS11” by the American high-end brand Proenza Schouler. This bag model got released in 2010 and it is a small satchel bag made of leather. It carries a cult status because it is one of the first handbags by Proenza Schouler. The handbag got famous after several bloggers wore it to fashion weeks. The PS11 went from a “IT-bag” status into a cult object. It is a cult-object because it is a model that is getting released every season with a new design twist, for example one was created with the digitized Navajo print. It even has its ‘own Facebook fan page with tribe members connecting about the passion for the bag. Also in forums high-end tribe members discuss the relevance of this model. According to the specific handbag forum Purseblog users discuss the PS11 bag model in over 200 threads.
The tribe behaviour of high-end brands has some significant communication channels and tools. They range from social to mobile applications, online forums and blogs. Being a blog follower, liking Facebook fan-pages and updating the Instagram regularly are part of the story-telling literature, which is created personally. The main intention is to stay up-to-date but also to create your visual identity; creating visual narrative art, which is deepening the understanding of brand myths (Eunju, Megehee 2011). That means how is it branding its concept and the reputation of a brand. One example is a tribe member who discusses the products of high-end brands with other tribe members in social media and in specific online forums such as the Purseblog.

### 6.3.2. Needs and Desires

The desire of the high-end tribe members is the expression for individuality and the esteem for authenticity. The tribal consumption is based on a brand experience (Kansara, 2013). According to Mossinkoff the main desire is the ethno-sociological approach that focuses on the glue value between a person and a tribe (Mossinkoff, 2011).

According to the research the glue value can be an emotional value or an experience, for example the passion for a high-end product. The purchase intention like quality or innovation is a driving factor in the high-end tribe. The individual consumer has the belonging to express his individual characteristics. The tribe also shares the need for uniqueness and self-monitoring. A product helps him to wear “statement” and fulfil his need to belong to a certain group but stay an individual person. Affective attitudes are powerful predictor of behaviour because they involve consumer feelings of the tribe. To purchase an item feels like a “hedonic reward” to the individual (Eunju, Megehee, 2011). To outline the needs and desires:

- Expression for individuality
- Esteem for authenticity
- Passion for high-end products
- Need for uniqueness
- Need for self-monitoring

Theorist Bernard Cova created the tribal clover with the purpose to make tribes more understandable. Figure 27 is a description of the tribe and his environment. Both axes show the moments when tribal members gather for rituals (occasions) but also when they meet physically (institutions) (Cova, 2001).

- **The Places** is to meet physically.
- **The Gatherings** is to gather for rituals.
- **The Trend** are names and thoughts that the tribe is making up.
- **The Day-to-Day Practice** are personal daily experiences.
According to figure 26 the tribal clover by Cova is edited with the interests of the high-end tribe. Primary and unit of observations portray a sufficient image what this tribe interests. Each of the clusters has four examples that can change unregularly. The examples are snapshots in time. Figure 28 shows the rituals and trends of the tribe:

- **The Places** are the niche forum Purseblog, the VFiles community and e-commerce Moda Operandi
- **The Gatherings** are digital fashion shows, the launch of the retailer magazine THE EDIT, the handbag crowd-produced by Alexander Wang
- **The Trend** are the PS11 bag, the Tiger designs by KENZO, the video by PRADA candy perfume
- **The Day-to-Day Practice** is the daily use of Twitter, Instagram and the digital “Business of Fashion” journal
6.3.4. Network

Word of mouth (WOM) is a communication channel where the consumer is not dependent on the market, it is therefore seen to be more reliable, trustworthy, credible compared to traditional marketing. WOM within online communities and digital platforms is a relevant way to connect between tribe members. Internet is relevant for tribes and for companies to understand what the consumer wants. That means that consumers swapped the time spent on the street for their laptops, mobiles and tablets therefore Internet is an important connecting tool for the high-end tribe (Brown, Broderick, Lee, 2007). In online forums and communities consumers indicate what they are looking for.

An Internet forum, also called as online discussion board, is a site where an individual can create an account and post messages and interact with other users. According to respondent Nick Verstand forums are important sources of inspiration and information for consumer and brands and companies can retrieve information what consumers really care about.

According to respondent Eugene Rabkin, the owner of the niche online forum StyleZeitgeist, tribe members from the niche market are connecting and communicating about products. The niche market is defined as an artisanal craftsmanship market. Eugene Rabkin states that he started the forum with one member in 2006. Out of own passion he tried to find others who feel the same about the niche market. He says, “It turned out that on the Internet there are many people with similar tastes. Who knew? One evening, about two years ago, I was having dinner with a forum member and a friend and we were reminiscing about how much better the magazines used to be, and he suggested that I start one”. According to him forums are the future of tribe communication. The figure 29 shows the threads from StyleZeitgeist.

![Figure 29: Content page with threads from the niche forum of StyleZeitgeist (StyleZeitgeist 2013)](image-url)
According to Kansara forums have been mainly unnoticed by the fashion industry until recently (Kansara, May 2012). That means that fashion companies do not track consumer wishes and do not implement them into their strategy. According to him the reason is that not every company understands the value of forums. But with the growing importance to connect to their tribes, also forums become more relevant. That means that tribe members express their wishes and desires in forums and discuss the emotional value of brands (Unknown author, 2013).

Recently smart fashion firms started to implement insights and started to understand the value of forums. The firms realized that there is no easier way to reach their audience and increase brand insights than becoming engaged in forums (Kansara, May 2012). One example is the London based concept store LN-CC from the implied niche market on page 56. The buyers work closely with StyleZeitgeist. LN-CC takes the input of the niche tribe members as a source of conjecture for both upcoming and established collections, as well as relevant feedback about selection and its fulfillment of collections. According to Eugene Rabkin StyleZeitgeist even launched a print magazine for the niche market and started to work with different fashion agency called SOME/THINGS recently.

Other markets work with forums already longer and to take co-creation concept of them into their brand strategy. One example is Apple, which interacts on a company webpage with consumers about their wishes for the upcoming products. The purpose of Apple is to predict the demand and wishes better. Consumers are enthusiastic to be part of the brand and can co-create their favourite products.

The research portrays that forums become increasingly a connecting spot for tribe members in general to create a community feeling. According to the findings of chapter 2 traditional marketing approaches are not effective anymore because consumers got empowered. Next to that word-of-mouth communication in online forums gets more interesting to a bigger amount of companies because they miss predictable information for sales and trend forecasts (Kansara, May 2012). In the time of social media the forum development is a more personal approach for the individual tribe member and it is more democratic than a blog. WOM is communication channel for consumers where the user is not dependent on the market. It is therefore seen to be more reliable, credible, and trustworthy by consumers compared to the traditional push marketing. Consumers need to be able to identify the real character of a brand by unique brand-specific content and other tools such as an online forum (Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007).

According to findings consumers communicate about the personal wishes on handbags in the online forum called “Purseblog”. One example is the user Robyn Loraine, who asks other users to give an opinion to the new bag model PS13 by Proenza Schouler. The figure 30 shows the thread where Roybn asks others to communicate about the design of the bag. This entry on the handbag forum Purseblog portrays that tribe members are in demand for more contact between each other. It also shows that high-end brands get to know concrete knowledge what the consumer wants.
From point of view of the consumer there are advantages to use a forum. The advantage is to interact with each other by exchanging tips and discussing hot topics. Also the discussion boards save information posted on a topic for other users to see at any time, this creates a discussion environment. The discussions are not in real time that means that rarely turns into heated arguments as users can research and consider their comments before replying, this makes the discussions more high quality. Also it is a more democratic way to communicate than a blog (Callan, 2012).

The London store manager of Rick Owens points out the communication at forums such as StyleZeitgeist. “I also have an account at StyleZeitgeist and I really like the discussions, which I would not have in real life – just because the people in the forum are very passionate”. According to the digital communication investor Nick Verstand from Amsterdam are forums the future to connect with a tribe. He states, “high-end tribe members want to connect through the emotional value and a forum for high-end consumers would make sense. You have to go further on the whole digitalization movement, therefore creating a platform where they can come together is a good one.” He says that brands need to stay up-to-date with the new technology and that high-end brands need to watch the consumer demands better. To recap these are the main research findings on forums:

- Connecting tool between tribe members
- Tribes express wishes and desires in forums
- Source of conjecture for fashion firms, e.g. LN-CC
- Fashion firms start to implement insights
- Co-creation and crowd-producing concept
- Consumers are enthusiastic to be part of a brand (e.g. Apple)
- Result more precise and predictable consumer knowledge
The gap in the market is a specific online forum for the high-end fashion market. By looking at the forum market there is no digital forum that concentrates on the high-end fashion market.

6.3.4.1. Unit of observation 1
The individualization and self-expression of the high-end tribe community plays a role in conversations in social media. According to the findings tribe members discuss the individualization and more personal approach of the high-end brands. Consumers communicate about the known high-end brands like Gucci and Louis Vuitton that released the statement to move towards a more unique and personal design approach (Pilgaard, 2010).

According to Suleman those brands want to work decreasingly with the mass logos, what they are known for. For Louis Vuitton is that the logo of the handbags and other accessories. The purpose is to move towards a more discreet luxury, which is subtler, more sophisticated and fits into the mass-customization concept that the high-end tribe demands. According to Suleman is this part of the communication change on high-value, logo-free collection items. “They are shifting away from typical emerging market preference for logos and other visible signs of luxury spending, and shifting to a global mindset of uniqueness, high-quality and understatement in luxury items” (Suleman, 2013). That means that high-end brands such as Louis Vuitton approaches the demands of the consumer to work with more mass-customization and crowd-produced approaches which fit into the tribe demand for more self-expression.

6.4. Brand Tribalism
The basic rules of tribal marketing are that the brand has to interact with the consumer directly and let him co-create within the process of a company, in terms of product and emotionally. This gives brands the opportunity to improve the product and consumers have often more knowledge than the product designers (Van Veldhuizen, 2011).

Nowadays consumers develop unique and engaging relationships with their brands and to conceptualize these relationships has become increasingly important. Fournier explains that brand relationships are important in the mind of the consumer. According to van Veldhuizen they could take place in different forms and are differently strong. An important character of the consumer-brand relationship has been the brand community, for example an online forum. The values can be measured in terms of brand personality, brand attachment, brand love and brand experience (Van Veldhuizen, 2011).

Strong relationships can be categorized as cults and tribes in a social and structured context; to put people together through a shared social and interpersonal experience (Cova 1997). The consumer and the brand are not dependent on external criticism (Luedicke and Giesler 2007) yet members of the tribe have limited contact with one another outside that created allegiance of the brand. The members are loyal and the tribe takes time, effort and emotion in the brand.
6.5. Conclusion
To conclude, consumers are described as a tribe in the postmodernity. A tribe is an unstable micro-culture which has the same interests. A tribe is an unstable community that connects nowadays mainly in online communities. A tribe shares rituals, needs, desires and cult objects. So-called glue-values are bonding emotions that glue the tribe together. Internet is one of the main platforms to connect and communicate with each other within one specific tribe.

According to respondents the high-end tribe shares the ritual to collect every brand material that they get with a purchase because the high-end items have an emotional value for them. The cult object for the high-end tribe is the PS11 bag by Proenza Schouler because it is released every season with a new twist. The individual consumer of the high-end tribe has the belonging to express his individual characteristics and the purchase intention like quality or expression of a statement is a driving desire of the high-end tribe member. The tribe also shares the need for uniqueness and self-monitoring. According to research findings brand tribalism is a new way to connect with a consumer as a high-end brand. That means that traditional marketing is not approaching the high-end tribe, but tribal marketing would be a solution for high-end brands. The purpose of tribal marketing is to build up a more personal relationship with the tribe members.

According to findings the gap in the market is an online forum for high-end brands. This could be a communication tool giving more relevant insights about the consumer and connecting the tribe members with each other. A forum would be an opportunity to practice tribal marketing better for high-end brands since relevant consumer insights are the base for a stronger relationship between consumer and brand.

Forums are part of the future of Internet communication for tribes. The reason is the role of Internet changed the consumer behaviour. High-end brands could use forums as source of conjecture for consumer demands and insights. For high-end brands forums make it easier to predict and understand consumer behaviour better in order to create an engaging experience. Tribal marketing enables consumers to not only consume products but it enables them also to be part of a brand, which can link them to others of the high-end tribe. The unit of observation portrayed how high-end brands try to approach the consumer more personal by changing logo mass products into mass-customized and individual pieces.
Chapter 7 / Conclusion

“What does the digitalization mean for how high-end brands connect with its customers and retailers?”

7.1. Research Question Conclusion

The research aim was to portray the digital communication channels of high-end brands. Therefore the report is structured in three parts, high-end brands, the environment and the consumer. The execution is done by structured and semi-structured interviews with respondents from the fashion industry. Units of observations were relevant to see the main findings how the consumer interacts on digital channels. Secondary research was relevant to critically distinguish the opinions of the respondents.

The result of this research is a vision on how high-end brands communicate digitally nowadays and in the future. Currently high-end brands communicate through digital channels to convey an emotional value to their products and to build up a personal relationship with consumers. This value is retrieved by interaction, engagement and experience.

By comparing the traditional marketing approach and the experiential marketing method showed that the traditional one is not sufficient for high-end brands. Because they do not give a whole experience online with a high emotional value. Experiential marketing is a method that connects the consumer by creating experience, exclusivity, engagement and emotion through digital channels.

The finding on the environment of high-end brands is a more democratized fashion industry. That means that high-end brands start to interact globally on digital channels, for example public catwalk shows on digital channels. The purpose is to build up personal relationships on digital channels and let consumers participate or to offer better services. High-end brands and media start to combine different platforms to offer richer experience and start to work closely with the opinion of consumers.

According to the respondents high-end brands do not interact enough on a personal level until now. Recently high-end brands started to convert and implement feedback from consumers on social media. But the retrieved consumer information from social media is not concrete enough. Another main reason is the speed of development that decreases the opportunity to collect relevant consumer insights.

The demand of consumers is to build up a strong relationship with the brand and to connect digitally with others who are also enthusiastic about high-end fashion. High-end brands are increasingly able to predict consumer behavior and trend forecasts become less precise due to the digitalization. Therefore high-end brands could build up much more loyal relationships with consumers when they would be able to know better what consumers want.
Therefore the gap in the market is a platform where consumers can interact and discuss about high-end products. Until now the market is missing a high-end platform that triggers the high-end tribe and draws the attention of the high-end fashion industry. A solution would be a discussion board, also called online forum where a consumer tribe gathers. In a high-end forum tribe members could build a high-quality discussion environment within the tribe. Other social media platforms do not offer discussions to such high extent like in a forum. Word-of-mouth is one of the most relevant communication approaches in the high-end tribe because the user is not dependent on the market. It is therefore seen to be more reliable, credible and trustworthy by consumer compared to traditional marketing. This exchange of information could be used by high-end brands to get into a stronger and more interactive dialogue with the consumer.

The advantage of a forum is that high-end brands can collect more predictable and concrete feedback and information. High-end brand could use it as a more precise and more predictable source of conjecture for building relationships through co-creation, crowd-production and other interactive tools. This means that high-end brands could deliver the demand for more personal relationships better.
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Appendix 1

Interview Christian Stylograph, street-style photographer

The Stylograph is a street style photographer from Berlin with work experience worldwide. He is working for Zalando, Refinery29 and other digital platforms. The fashion weeks worldwide are his home and next to that he is every day on the streets to discover stylish people.

In the interview with him in Berlin he talks about the changes at his business, how bloggers became so powerful and how he sees the future of digital communication of street style.

○ How did the street-style photography change?
The scene really changes extremely quickly. At fashion weeks the photographers are almost like paparazzi. Bloggers get completely equipped by designers. The business at fashion weeks, in front of the tents, just got too extreme because more and more photographers come every scene. I mean when I started then it was so different. Nowadays I even have the problem that more and more people say NO to my pictures when I ask them to take one – because street photography is already too much for many people. Unfortunately the romantic aspect is gone and for a lot of people it gets too commercial – they do not want to get shot anymore. It gets so hard to stay personal and make different picture than the others – sometimes it is just another angle.

○ How do you imagine the future of streetstyle?
A lot of new ones come every season and a lot of crap as well. I think the quality will establish and there will be a few top bloggers and street style platforms which will maintain the market. You can see that development now already. It is almost impossible to become a famous blogger anymore – the market is actually covered already. On the other side the streetstyle photographer of HUMAN OF NEW YORK makes a new point of view – he lets other side of humanity see in streetstyle.

○ What do you think about the statement "Is fashion democracy a disease"?
My clients want streetstyle images from fashion weeks, otherwise I could not survive. So I actually live for the fashion democracy. It is paying bills versus the expectations of most fashion people who want to see new streetstyle faces – instead of the known ones from fashion weeks. When it comes to bloggers then it got almost impossible to get up anymore because only a few rule the market. The same development is in the streetstyle photography. It is important to stay authentic but for example Adam Katz or Humans of New York gets almost 1000 new followers per day on Facebook. The negative part of the fashion democracy for my job is that people, who I want to take a picture of, increasingly say no after they know that I am a street photographer. This is a new development, which scares me. I see that people recognize streetstyle photography as commercial or they might get too many requests.

○ What do your clients e.g. Zalando and Refinery29 expect of you as streetstyle photographer?
When it comes to Zalando then the images have to be sellable but I never take pictures with that background information. I heart from other photographers that they often do
not accept images with too extreme streetstyle. Renfiery29 mostly choose famous bloggers instead of unknown individuals. In general the fashion week images really go the best even if I do not even appreciate the extreme business and how it developed over the years.

○ What development do you see in Berlin between fashion and tech start-ups?
I know fashionfreaks, which is fashion start-up from Germany but in general I see that more and more fashion brands and tech start-ups team up.

○ What do you think about social media and digital communication for high-end brands?
I think it is different for them than with other brands because the real clients will buy without any social media impact.

○ What is the future definition of streetstyle photography?
It could go into the more personal direction like e.g. Humans of New York. A lot of people at fashion weeks overdress and it might be be that the picture / photographer amount decreases in the end. Often you don’t even have enough time for a picture. Try to find another background – different than all others.

○ What is the motivation of the new fashion generation?
I think the motivation is in general presence, especially for bloggers- You need to show yourself and a present e.g. at a fashion showcase of a designer. It is part of this new generation. For bloggers also streetstyle is a way to stay present. Young designers do PR by dressing bloggers – to stay present in the big world of fashion.
Appendix 2

Interview Julia Marinho, head of design NEXT
London

- What do you notice how high-end brands and designers communicate digitally with their consumers nowadays?

In the last few years this technology boom has been taking over the mass media. In fashion designers need to be on the front line if they are to be recognized or even mentioned in some twitter or by a fashion blogger. It allows designers and consumers to communicate quicker in the sense that when a new trend is out it will be global as feeding information is simultaneous.

- How can you describe the new generation in the fashion industry? What is their way of seeing things and how do they communicate? What are their desires & intentions?

At the moment I think the new generation in the fashion industry are led mainly by the high end brands and by "the on trend designer". It is a consumers business and not a creative business in my opinion. It’s a bloggers world at the moment and they can set the trends but this means That high street brands will all be getting inspiration from the same sites and when you go either online or to the shops you can't find anything original. The fashion industry for me is led by figures and not originality at the moment. Only the new independent designers can still bring some creativity to the fashion industry.

- What are the directions in digital communication in the fashion industry for the future?

This is a very important point for fashion at this moment. The two are more linked than before. Digital communication will allow to keep data of costumers and this will give costumers better service, with presentation of their favourite pieces, sizing, which is still an issue when you are shopping online. If the brand has got data about the costumer it will immediately offer the correct size, meaning less returns.

- Is fashion democracy a disease or does it even exist (What are your thoughts on trend adaption)?

I think fashion is addictive, a disease, it spreads around the world like a virus, contagious virus. It takes you to another level. You always hv to be wearing the latest statement piece, the latest it bag to even be considered in some groups. I think it brings people together but it does also make you apart. With the high street you can always be a part of this "contagious disease" with the affordable labels but it goes back to the point before, there isn't creativity in fashion, it's adaptation of one brand to another.

- Which high-end brands are the most engaging and communicate the best online? (think of social media presence or content etc)

Everyday we are bombarded with emails about the latest statement piece or the latest "it bag" from all sorts of brands, from high street to the higher end brands and stores...
that sell designer grands only. What I find fascinating, and without mentioning names, think the marketing is fantastic nowadays. It's very powerfull when you go online or get an email with the latest trends. Brands give you a complete outfit, a complete look, you don't even have to think anymore how to put two pieces together. A stylist does this for you. You don't even get to choose anymore to say if you like or not! Don't take me wrong but I think we are losing our identity our self identity, what makes us different from everybody else if that makes sense.
Appendix 3

Interview Elizabeth Entin, founder of Runway Passport
New York City

- **How can you describe the new generation in the fashion industry? What is their way of seeing things and how do they communicate? What are their desires & intentions?**

I think the new generation is more into finding what they like on their own and then sharing with everyone versus following major magazines which state what everyone should wear. There are not key designers, looks and trends the same way. People like to discover and put together their own looks and find their own unique designers. They communicate their sense of style online with friends (facebook, instagram, emailing/texting to friends new favourite outfits) as well as to strangers (ie – lookbook.nu)

Their desires are to be unique, have their own look and discover something new as opposed to wearing what everyone else is or the old school- prestige of big labels.

- **What do you notice how high-end brands and designers communicate digitally with their consumers nowadays?**

Brands need to have a more personal relationship. Being a brand name alone is no longer enough. There is more of an equal dialogue rather than this elite brand that customers look up to.

- **What are the new directions in digital communication in the fashion industry of the future?**

A: I think it will continue along the path we are going down now. Much more back and forth dialogue between brands and customers. People turning to the public and researching their own unique taste more than ads and huge label magazines defining that for them.

- **Is fashion democracy a disease or does it even exist?**

I think its wonderful. It gives everyone who wants it a chance to express their style. And more brands and young creative designers a chance to grow their line.

- **What do you think about social media and digital communication for high-end brands? Is there a conflict between the intrusive social media and the exclusive high-end brands?**

I think it is a bit of a change for the high-end brands who have always been exclusive and not for everybody. I think though that every brand – high end or not needs to target exactly who they really are and who they are talking to and use social media to communicate and reach those people.

- **Would you like to communicate with others from the „digital fashion industry“ online on a platform?**


I already do! I would be open to adding another.

- **What do you think about street style photography and how does the future look like?**

I love it. I think it is going to be harder to be the next “Sartorialist” as tools are making it easier and easier to take good photos and everyone is now sharing with each other.

- **What development do you see in New York between fashion and tech start-ups?**

There is much more of a relationship between the two now. Fashion PR firms and designers are really excited to work with tech start-ups. Big names are realizing it is the way to go and are very open to sharing content and selling online. There is a growing investor group too.
Appendix 4

Interview Marc Wainwright, fashion photographer
London

My first submission was to Amateur Photographer, when I was just 16. It was a set I'd taken using a beautifully crafted French Dejur 35mm camera entrusted to me by my uncle a war artist to record a school visit behind the iron curtain in 1973. Some of the pictures I took then, still stand the test of time. Although friends always sought me out saying I had 'a good eye', having graduated from University penniless, I embarked on a highly rewarding and exciting career as an accomplished Management Consultant. However, in 2009 with the purchase of my first professional DSLR, my enthusiasm for photography was taken to a whole new level and quite unexpectedly began to take over my life. I still don't really know what happened, but suddenly I was getting requests to take photographs not only from friends and acquaintances, but from all sorts of people who I hadn't actually met before. The variety and frequency of these word of mouth recommendations made my decision to try and make a go of photography on a full time basis, remarkably easy. No doubt that decision was also helped by the fact that my family had by now an assured, if modest income which could help cushion any gaps in client commissions. Soon I found myself working with models, celebrities and designers on portfolios and look-books as well as attending fashion events in Brighton, Oxford and London for runway shoots. I've now had work published in all sorts of magazines and exhibited in galleries in Oxford, London and Teddington and have even had images purchased for use by the BBC.

It took me a while to acknowledge that I have a unique style ... but the number of people from all over the word telling me that my images are instantly recognisable as being 'mine' has become irrefutable. My aim has always been to produce quirky, edgy, dramatic and memorable images. I've even been quoted in the press (see http://westoxon.org.uk/events/o3-gallery-helps-celebrate-oxford-fashion-week) as having the motto “Rare the evanescent echo that ekes out existence in the palps of time”.

○ What does the digitalization mean how your work connects with your fashion clients and brands? What changed in your way of working?

It almost goes without saying that digitization and the Internet has revolutionized the way photographers work with their clients. It's made things easier and quicker to turn round, providing more opportunity to hone and tune client critical images so they are absolutely right and fit for purpose without undue effort and time.

Instead of having to have multiple face-to-face meetings with clients before a shoot ... ideas and images mood boards and storyboards and detailed shoot plans can be exchanged, refined and agreed. After the shoot, First Cut 'contact sheets' can be rushed out ... to enable clients to select and agree those images they specifically want to shortlist for use and to provide feedback on any alterations they would like to have made during further post production. For instance, as a result of feedback I was quickly able to remove manufacturer's brand identifications from all footwear used in my shoot on the 2,500 acre Arbury Hall Estate in Nuneaton of the new annual catalogue for the Chinese ShooterKing clothing brand; see http://www.shooterking.co.uk. What's changed most in my way of working is the ability to turn things around quickly and accurately without the need to spend non-
productive time travelling to meet with clients over minor matters.

- **What do you think about streetstyle photography and how does the future look like?**

I adore street style photography. Unlike studio shoots and reserved location shoots where pretty much everything is controlled ... the photographer and the models and in fact everyone one involved at the time ... pretty well have to think on their feet. Not only to take into account changing weather conditions, which can be less than ideal on the day ... but also to make use of unforeseen opportunities and the entirely unexpected. As a result, street style shoots show real and genuine spontaneity that soars and shines through. It provides unquestionable impact. Everyone can see and feel that. This makes a refreshing change from the current fad for over-photo shopping of fashion images, which means that nothing we are seeing is real any more. Yes you can doctor streetstyle images too ... for instance to remove overblown highlights resulting from shooting in the sun or to add in a vagrant to heighten dramatic impact. But what you are taking away ... is what is real and present ... and in due course the great educated public will be able to see through all that. ... and such images will become recognized as too easy and worthless. They won't stand the test of time. For me, I can still visualize images I first saw in Paris Match some 40 or more years ago. So reality, though relative, has real importance. Streetstyle is going to grow in importance. 'Real' is going to become more and more valued as less and less of our lives remain real.

- **What impact will bloggers have in the future?**

I can almost draw a parallel between bloggers and disk-jockeys. At one time it was the musician who created the music alone ... and now it is recognised that the way a particular disc-jockey plays the 'records' they have in their arsenal also has something to say in the way things are presented. The same can be said of museum curators. Magazines have all but reached the end of the road. Yes to survive they will become e-zines. Yes they will take you to places you otherwise wouldn't think of going. But bloggers are gaining in view time, all the time. Bloggers will come and go ... and they will evolve ... remarkably rapidly... the worst will fall by the wayside ... but the best will be the kings and queens of media space and attention and will command followers much the same as pop stars ... and the very best will hold onto them. For they will tangibly add value at every turn. If I had any free money, I'd constantly seek out, find and invest in the best bloggers ... and help make it easy for them to make it happen. They are the future whether or not they are 'in town'.

Please explain your opinion to the topic about trends in digital communication in fashion

- **What are the new directions in digital communication in the fashion industry of the future?**

Globalisation. We can already sniff out and scan fashion trends going on under our very noses round the world. So much of it is going to be recognised as 'so what'. Those that are truly innovative will quickly stand head and shoulders above the world wide morass. But for how long? How quickly new ideas will promulgate, grow, then wither
and die? Speed of change becomes increasingly important for survival. Whereas, Innovation becomes the life blood required of re-generation. Time-to-market becomes the holy grail.

We will have Global Media. It is ultimately Planetisation. I cant really foresee how this will be exploited for individual survival... but I can foresee individuals able to pool their brainpower in ways we cannot even envisage as of now.

○ **What development do you see in London between fashion and tech start-ups?**

Like photography now things are digital, the hurdles to entry into the game have steadily lowered. There are a great many so called photographers out their competing for too few paying clients. Few will become stars. In some ways this has also reduced the hurdles to starting up of new designers. New designers with something to say are able reach out and find their targeted marketplaces quicker. But something will have to give. Un-established Photographers and Designers cannot go on living on air for much longer. We are fast reaching a catharsis. What is currently seen as opportunity will become an impossible burden to bear as cost sinks all but the strongest swimmers. But we need to foster new designers. They are our lifeblood. They are the future. Start-Ups are essential. Although I foresee 'London' as an irrelevance ... indeed for that matter is any capital ... I do admit to trend-setters. If London wishes to remain a Trend Setter for any length of time, then the Fashion Industry which has congealed here must find new ways to foster a gamut of new designers that want to showcase here. London Fashion Week that has grown in its own self-grandisement needs to change to the point that for every established 'name' that's shown ... a completely independent new start-up designer can be chosen to do a follow on showcase using some of the same models, thats shown before the next 'name' is able to be shown on the same runway. Now that would inject 'the birth of the cool' into what has become a stale 'so what' LFW ... and like streetstyle promote spontaneity to well heeled audiences... that with the likes of Runway Passport will become World Wide.

○ **What do you think about social media and digital communication for high-end brands? Is there a conflict between the intrusive social media and the exclusive high-end brands?**

High End Brands are increasingly exploiting nuances of Social Media and Digital Communication Devices to time & cost effectively target identifiable kudos brand promoters and buyers alike. From my point of view, this is potentially good ... it certainly saves me with being inundated with offers of things that waste my time even looking at momentarily. But does that mean they've got it right? Won't that also mean I become isolated from whatever else is 'out there'? Won't that mean that there will become increasing polarisation (read sectarianism) between 'my group' and the next. Won't that mean inevitably result in some form of war? Remember the 'wars' between the Mods & The Rockers. They became extreme. Social engineering is a dangerous thing. Handle with care. Be aware of the knock-ons and consequences. We are all too hungry to learn.

Exclusive High End Brands by definition have exploited intrusive social media to get where they are. They could not have got there any other way. There simply couldn't have been a conflict. We are all to blame. We are the intrusive social media. T'was
ever thus. Long be it so!
Appendix 5

Interview Sarmite Ostanevica, high-end fashion designer
London

- What does the digitalization mean how your brand connects with its customers and retailers?

Fashion is a very fast moving industry and brand digitalization is very important to share your vision and share brand awareness.

- What are the methods / tools your brand uses to reach and connect with your customers? What are your new solutions to connect more personal with your customers?

With my brand I organize events and exhibitions almost every season and my brand collaborates with lot of photographers and stylists. I do love the artistic side of my brand as mostly all collections are inspired of art and every cut and line has it’s meaning. On everyday basis- we do connect with our followers on Facebook and twitter and enjoy every supporter as yourself - Fashion Passport.

- Do you feel a change when it comes to labelling and branding on digital representation of your brand?

I like that digitalization makes brand more accessible and more international

- How digital is fashion nowadays?

Very digital.

- What do you think about digital fashion showcasing and live streaming at fashion week? Will it replace the real showcasing at fashion weeks?

It is very exciting as gives opportunity for people to follow the loved brands across the world. As well the fact that fashion is so international digitalization is necessary

- What are the desires, intentions and needs of the new fashion generation?

Being original and simple
Desires: be more international with digitalization
Intentions: be unique and original
Needs: less high street as it is very difficult for young designers to compete with cheap mas production goods made abroad what are most of the time copies of designers. More understanding for customers to see value of designers work. Convince society to not see just a trend when it comes to clothes but see clothing as an art.

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Appendix 6

Interview Sharon Geernaert, stylist and shop owner
Amsterdam

- Do you believe that public relations like product placement are still powerful enough for high-end brands?

It will definitely always have a function and high-end brands would be crazy not to make use of it, but it is not the leading way of reaching the consumers in the future. I think more powerful is the collaborations with other worlds besides fashion, like art, music and other products that is becoming a trend nowadays.

- Is fashion democracy a disease or does it even exist (What are your thoughts on trend adaption)?

Fashion democracy is more a trend than a disease, it is the way things work nowadays, consumers are limited in the spending pattern and therefore become very demanding of what they want and will buy. Brands are almost forced to live up to it. I think the high-end consumer will always stick by the authenticity of the brands they cherish. In that way it is no danger for the high-end brands.

- How can you describe the new generation in the fashion industry? What is their way of seeing things and how do they communicate? What are their desires & intentions?

It is definitely known of the new generation that everything needs to happen quick, there is a huge trend in everything that involves social media and people also expect this to be there. “You are not on Facebook? Why?” They expect to find the clothes they buy online; they like and share things they love. The world needs to know. People have the need to be connected to all these resources.

- What do you think about live streaming and other public showcasing of high-end brands?

I think it is a good way for high-end brands to reach their consumers and maybe an even wider range of them, because of the easy accessibility, but on the other hand it takes away the realness of the interaction away completely.

- How digital is fashion nowadays?

I think fashion is very digital nowadays, in a way almost all the fashion that we see is communicated online in some way. Whether it will be advertorials, the social media that fashion designers and fashion brands use or the e-commerce that is emerging more and more. Sometimes I don’t know if the last one is a good thing, because it takes away the authenticity and charm of the experience that fashion actually is.
Appendix 7

Interview Ursula Fritz, Fashion Consultant for rekapltd. com
Frankfurt am Main

- What is your favorite high-end fashion brand and from which online retailer do you shop the most?

There are a few. I prefer mix and match instead "from head to toe". Hermès, Saint Laurent, Dior, Chanel, and from time to time Dolce & Gabbana. My preferred online shops are net-a-porter, and mytheresa (but I still prefer, if possible, to buy in a shop).

- What do you think about digital fashion shows and the live streaming of runways? (A lot of fashion brands have chosen for live stream & broadcasting of their runway shows, for example Gucci...Do you maybe think it is attracting the wrong customers?)

Digital fashion shows are great for a first look and impressions but cannot replace a proper show, in my eyes. I need to get a haptic feeling. And to see it in real. To try it on (this, of course, applies to high end items -- not to T-shirts, casual items, etc.). It is not only to get an (high end) item, it's also the experience which is important! I even have a box with all the special garment tags inside because they represent the absolute experience of the brand. They remember me of the special purchase.

- In your opinion - which high-end / lifestyle brand communicates the best online? (e.g. best features, best online experience, social media or online communities etc.)

Louis Vuitton (I am NOT a fan!), Hermès (for smaller items), Chanel, Prada.

- What is your favorite fashion / shopping app for mobile phones?

I am Blackberry-addicted, therefore fashion apps are too complicated.

- Do you know any online fashion & lifestyle magazines? If yes, what are you favorites?

Vogue, Elle, Style.com
Appendix 8

In Berlin I organized a table of four individuals from the fashion scene in Berlin. The four discussion members were also from the new generation of fashion and I have had chosen them because they all have an inspiring point of view when it comes to digital communication and the fashion development.

The discussion round was open and unstructured to see what topics come up during the next hour.

Discussion Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dana Roski</th>
<th>Marina Hoppmann</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29 Years old</td>
<td>20 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store Owner &amp; Stylist</td>
<td>Sales Person at WALD</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Vanessa Olt</th>
<th>Liese Schaminski</th>
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<tr>
<td>22 years old</td>
<td>24 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion design student</td>
<td>Blogger and Intern at Purpur Styling</td>
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The discussion round started immediately with digital communication of high-end brands. The first sharable moment was, when a music song came out of the speakers. It was the soundtrack of the fragrance ‘Love, CHLOE ’commercial video and the group started to discuss the music and the Chloe ad where they noticed a beautiful lifestyle. The music and the picture of the lady in the commercial were immediately present at all of them. Other sharing moments were other Youtube videos or mobile phone applications.

So the question was what is the new generation of fashion in Berlin. They answer that a lot of Berlin based designers suddenly cross over with bigger fashion companies for example the new collaboration between Kaviar Gauche that is a German high-end brand and the online retailer Zalando. These kind of new collaboration seem to happen since big companies enter the city Berlin increasingly. Most Berlin based fashion companies are very young and start from small. They discuss that since a short time the department store giant BREUNINGER or the retailer ABSEITS from Stuttgart started to shoot all their campaign shootings in Berlin.

The discussion round goes further how Berlin based retailers buy nowadays their collections and how they communicate online. An example is the retailer WALD Berlin which is a high-end store in the location Berlin Mitte – the mekka of fashion and technology start-ups. Dana Roski who is part of the discussion round is owner of the store. It just went online and the store communicates almost everything via Facebook. All updates or news are getting first communicated towards the followers and this is their main tool to connect. An own newspaper and various TV shootings remain to stay marketing tools but real personal connection with their followers happens online on Facebook and Instagram.
Appendix 9
Interview Eugene Rabkin, founder of STYLEZEITGEIST
New York City

- **What do you think about traditional marketing like product placement, advertisements etc.?**

I think most of it is cultural and visual pollution. Some of it is well done, but at the end of the day it's about selling product.

- **What are your first thoughts when you think about invisible marketing? ("Absence equals presence" quote by Margiela)**

Same as above, marketing is marketing, the method is irrelevant. Margiela did not set out to be invisible with marketing in mind. He simply found glamor vulgar.

- **Do you recognize any similarity when it comes to the marketing of these bespoke brands?**

The only similarity between them is they don't have money to buy advertising in magazines.

- **Do you think invisible communication (for example closed websites by brands or agencies) is strong enough in the time of the digitalization and rise of social media?**

No, it's not. But perhaps they don't want to be the next Gucci.

- **Do you believe that style forums (like StyleZeitgeist) and online communities will have a bigger impact for more personal marketing in the future?**

Undoubtedly.

- **How do you see the future for this niche market in terms of their communication towards their tribe?**

Like with any underground movement it will grow and be coopted by the big industry forces and watered down for mass consumption.

- **Trend adaption becomes something “normal” in the industry and especially small designers can hardly keep their uniqueness. What do you think about this development?**

I think it will be harder and harder to be unique, but not impossible.
Appendix 10

Interview Nick Verstand, digital communication investor
Amsterdam

- **What do you think about traditional marketing like product placement, advertisements etc.?**
  Outdated & not really efficient anymore.

- **How do you see tribe member communicating online with each other?**
  I personally know Stylezeitgeist and it’s really nice to talk to there to others who feel the same about a product. I recently was discussing with other users about the quality of a Ann Demeulemeester coat and I really like the passion in this forum but it is really for a specific market.

- **Do you believe that style forums (like StyleZeitgeist) and online communities will have a bigger impact for more personal marketing in the future?**
  For sure, it is a logical follow up by what happens now. I mean look how everybody tries to reach people who have the same interests and companies search an option to collect that information.

- **What digital project are you developing at the moment?**
  Well I can’t tell you all about it because we just started but within 6 months its going to be on the market. I just started to work on the fusion of fashion and technology with designers and other creative services. I collect them and give a platform to connect.

- **What do you think about magazines becoming retailers?**
  Wow that is really incredible movement. I mean every fashion firm seems to convert into a multi-channel in such small amount of time. I also work with 3 new projects that concentrate on fusing different consumer demands. By now there are so many people working individually that they need some sort of platform to connect and communicate. Facebook and other social media platforms are not enough.

- **How do you see the high-end market in the digital channels connecting with consumers?**
  High-end brands need to invest more to connect and co-create with their consumers. Often marketing teams are too small to make a bigger impact but in general I think that high-end brands need to focus better how to reach them in the digital channels. The brands need to stay up-to-date with the new technology. They need to watch the consumer demands better. High-end tribe members want to connect through the emotional value and a forum for high-end consumers would make sense.