SOCIAL MEDIA’S IMPACT ON BRAND PERCEPTION IN THE CONTEXT OF LUXURY FASHION INDUSTRY

IINA HIETANEN

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INTERNATIONAL FASHION & MANAGEMENT

COACHES: LIGIA HERA & JACQUI HAKER
Declaration of authorship

I hereby declare that this report, as part of the graduation project aimed at attaining the BA title from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, has been written and compiled solely by me.

This project report (or any amended form of it) has never before been submitted by me or anyone else in the framework of a learning assignment aimed at the attainment of a certificate or degree, within the AMFI programme or elsewhere.

The work that was necessary for the realization of this project was performed entirely by me. All the data that have been collected are original.

All quotes from other sources are recognizable in the report by quotation marks and the sources of all my information have specifically been indicated.

Date: 13.6.2016

Place: Amsterdam

Name: Iina Hietanen

Signature
Executive summary

In the previous decade the marketing scene has undergone a drastic change due to the increasing popularity of social media. Whereas in the past, traditional marketing methods, such as print and TV, allowed the brands to be in charge of what is being communicated to the consumer, today the consumers have more power than ever before due to the two-way communication enabled by the Internet and social media.

This shift in power has created a dilemma for luxury fashion brands, which is why many of them have been reluctant to adapt to social media. The challenge in this specific industry is to find a way to embrace social media without losing the exclusive and prestige image that the luxury brands are all about.

This research report looks at the role of social media for luxury fashion brands, and aims to find out how the use of official brand pages on social media affects the way consumers perceive a luxury fashion brand and what impact it has on the brand image and brand-consumer relationship.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the past decade social media has become an important marketing tool for the fashion industry due to its ability to reach larger audiences with smaller costs compared to traditional media, and the continuously increasing online presence of the consumers (Leone, 2015; Deloitte, 2015; Hilfer, 2015; Tuten and Solomon, 2015; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2013). As Figure 1 shows, companies have reacted by progressively investing in social media to keep up with the changing business environment and consumer expectations, indicating that they have recognized the need to adjust to its consumers’ behavior.

![Figure 1: Year over year change in media ad spending worldwide (L2, 2015c)](image)

Via various social networking sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, fashion brands aim to generate brand recognition and brand loyalty, and to increase the interactivity between the company and the consumer (DeMers, 2014; Mohr, 2013; Hilfer, 2015). This interaction helps the brands to respond to the omni-channel experience that today’s luxury consumers have learnt to expect (Deloitte, 2015). Adapting to this omni-channel approach is important because in today’s retail environment in-store experience, that has traditionally been the essential piece of the puzzle for luxury brands, is simply not enough, but additionally the consumers demand digital and social media presence to fulfill their expectations.
Owning to the change in the way consumers communicate with brands and other consumers, luxury fashion brands are facing the challenge of how to incorporate social media into their marketing mix while maintaining brand integrity and an exclusive image (Brandwatch, 2015).

What drew my attention to this topic is the difference of approach to social media between different luxury fashion brands, which will be discussed later on in this report. As a consumer myself, I wanted to find out if social media actually has a devaluing impact on luxury brands’ image in the eyes of the consumer, as these brands have been claimed to fear according to various literature written on the topic of luxury brand management (Brandwatch, 2015; Aroche and Doran, 2015; Vermeren, 2014; Ozuem and Tan, 2014; Heine, 2014).

1.2 Problem definition

Throughout the digitalization of marketing activities, the fashion industry has adapted to many different forms of social media, which has presented an issue for luxury brands: the basic equation that ‘luxury equals rarity’ (Kapferer, 2012) creates a dilemma in the compatibility of luxury and social media. Dubois (2013) further explains the contradiction: “Luxury is, by definition, reserved to an elite; social media platforms embrace diversity and democracy”. Whereas in the past luxury brands have been able to maintain firm control over their brand image, social media exposes a threat to this by allowing the consumers to discuss, praise and criticize brands freely on public platforms (Hope, 2016; Brandwatch, 2015; Remy, Catena and Durand-Servoingt, 2015; Brogi et al., 2013). This has led to the empowerment of the consumer and changed the relationship between the brands and their customers, leaving many of the luxury brands wondering how to deal with the change. Another point that suggests contradiction between luxury and social media is that the heart of luxury brands’ DNA comprises of quality, heritage and exclusivity (Pragnell, 2016; Brandwatch, 2015) and the brands fear that the perception of these values could be compromised by vast social media presence. Social media can be seen to generate a risk of the kind of ubiquity often seen around mainstream fashion brands (Brandwatch, 2015), which luxury brands understandably go to great lengths to avoid.
As a result, many luxury brands have been admittedly reluctant and slow to adapt to social media in order to remain niche and elite (Pragnell 2016; Ilyashov, 2015; Heine, 2014). Thus as the marketing activities seem to increase online, luxury brands are virtually compelled to utilize social media.

After thoroughly researching the topic, I think that the refusal to accept social media as a complement to traditional media and offline retailing can result in luxury brands losing an opportunity to evolve and nurture the brand-consumer relationship and to build the allure of the brand by emphasizing a wider lifestyle aspect of the brand stories. Therefore, the main objective of this research report is to examine how exactly social media presence affects luxury brands’ image and brand perception from the consumer’s point of view.

1.3 Research question & sub-questions

In order to gain thorough understanding of the problem stated above the following research question has been outlined for this research report:

*How does social media presence affect consumers’ brand perception in the context of luxury fashion industry?*

To successfully answer this question, several sub questions need to be addressed:

1. What is meant by luxury brands?
2. What is social media?
3. What is the role of social media for luxury fashion brands?
4. Which brands incorporate social media successfully/unsuccessfully?
5. How do different elements of a social media approach affect consumers’ view of the brand?
   a. Content
   b. Activity level / frequency of posts
   c. Interaction level

The last sub-question regarding the different elements of a social media examines three pivotal areas of a social media approach, in which luxury companies often have very differing approaches.
The choice for looking at content is purely based on the fact that it is the number one reason for a fan to follow a luxury fashion brand on social media. Secondly, the activity level was selected as a factor to consider because it varies tremendously between different luxury fashion brands; some post on social media nearly everyday, while others utilize these channels once a month. Lastly, the report inspects interactivity level, because this is the key difference between social media and traditional media. Social media allows dialogue between the brand and the consumers, whereas traditional media only broadcasts the brand’s message to the consumers.

1.4 Research methodology

There will be several methods applied in order to answer the main research question.

Secondary research will help to clarify what is meant with the concepts of ‘social media’ and ‘luxury brands’ in the context of this research. Additionally, case studies and other literature regarding social media usage within the luxury segment will be used to determine the role of social media for luxury brands today, and present ideas how luxury brands could utilize this channel in the future.

Primary research will include an online survey, which will be conducted in order to help comprehend social media’s impact on the consumers’ perception of the brand. Furthermore, interviews with a social media professional and a PR professional are used to gain new insights on the matter, as well as to support the survey findings. In addition, observation and online analytics of certain brands’ Facebook and Instagram accounts will be utilized to gain a solid understanding of what the brands are currently doing on these platforms.

1.5 Research limitations

The limitations of the research include restricted information into brands social media analytics and return-on-investment data, as well as limited scope of the survey regarding the number of participants.
1.6 Structure of the report

The structure of this report will be the following:

The first chapter briefly introduces the background of the topic and explains the idea behind the perceived incompatibility of social media and luxury brands. This is followed by the relevance of the research, the research question and the sub-questions. It also explains the methodology and the limitations of the research.

In the second chapter the terms “luxury”, “luxury brands” and “social media” are defined. Additionally, this chapter discusses the social media usage in today’s society and outlines the core difference between traditional media and social media platforms.

Furthermore, chapter three starts by justifying the choice of social networking sites Facebook and Instagram as the main focus within this research paper. From here on the report continues to focus on the selected platforms, and discusses their role for luxury fashion brands. It also examines a few brands and their different approaches to social media, and reasons behind these choices.

The focus on chapter four is on the empirical data analysis. It critically looks at the primary data in the light of the secondary research, and aims to explain social media’s effect on the consumer’s perception of the brand. It also breaks social media into separate elements such as content, activity level and interaction level, and looks at their effect on the overall image that is communicated to the consumer.

The last chapter draws conclusions on the topic and aims to answer the main research question in short. Furthermore, this chapter also gives suggestions for further research.
2. Defining luxury brands and social media

2.1 Definition of luxury, luxury products & luxury brands

By simple dictionary definition the word “luxury” often refers to something that is considered more of an indulgence than a necessity, something desirable that provides pleasure and comfort but is hard to obtain and often expensive (TheFreeDictionary.com, n.d.). To elaborate on this definition, luxury experts Kapferer and Bastien (2012) imply that the concept of luxury has to do with “a hedonistic experience or product made to last” that is priced significantly higher than its functional value would suggest, and that the distribution of the goods is purposefully restricted to maintain the exclusive image. Therefore, owning a luxury product that is desired by others makes the consumer feel special, and acts as a means of social distinction and communication of status.

Moving on to define luxury products and luxury brands, Heine (2012) writes the following: “luxury products have more than necessary and ordinary characteristics compared to other products of their category”, including relatively high pricing, quality, aesthetics, extraordinariness, and symbolic meaning. Luxury brands are regarded as “images in the minds of consumers” that are associated with the characteristics mentioned above.

When discussing the concept of luxury, one must consider the relativity of the terms used in the definition; the decision of what is seen as desirable, necessary or ordinary varies depending on the perspective; in different geographical areas, times, social classes, cultures, and situations, the same resource could be viewed differently (Duma, Hallier Willi and Steinmann, 2015; Heine 2012).

In the context of this research paper, the definitions related to luxury are defined from a Western perspective and for the present. Additionally, luxury brands are defined as companies that offer products that are associated with the characteristics mentioned above in the definitions, and are therefore harder to obtain and often more expensive than average fashion goods. Within the scope of this research, luxury consumers are defined as not only the customers of luxury brands, but also as
the fans of luxury fashion brands on social media pages. The followers of these pages share a common interest towards luxury fashion, and are likely to be potential or already existing customers.

2.2 Definition of social media

Social media can be defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Jahn, Kunz and Meyer, 2012). By a simpler definition, it comprises of all two-way communication platforms online that allow users to interact with each other by sharing information, content and opinions (Gul, Shahzada and Khan, 2014; Brogi et al., 2013; Phan, Thomas and Heine, 2011; Johnston, 2011). In this sense, it is typical that a common interest, such as a luxury fashion brand, attracts a group of people to a social media site, creating a community where the fans can openly express their opinions.

2.3 Traditional vs. social media

Traditionally, luxury brands have had full control over the brand development process, and the customers have had the role of passive “receivers” in this communication process (Okonkwo, 2010; Jahn, Kunz and Meyer, 2012). For instance, advertising on traditional media, such as print and TV, only allows the brand to broadcast its message to the consumers, therefore making it a one-way communication. Within the past decade, social media has transformed this communication process by making it a two-way direct communication by allowing the consumers to communicate directly not only with the brand but also with each other (Mosca and Gallo, 2016; Kim and Ko, 2012). Due to this change, social media is significantly influencing the consumer behavior and playing an important role in molding consumer brand perceptions (Brandwatch, 2015; Ozuem and Tan, 2014), as described in the next chapters of this report.
2.4 Social media usage in today’s society

Before moving on to describe the opportunities that social media offers for luxury brands, the report highlights the relevance of this research by taking a look at where social media stands in our daily lives in today’s society, focusing on the modern luxury consumer.

Due to the rapid development in technology, a new generation of consumers, ‘the digital natives’, has emerged. These consumers have grown up using the Internet and social media, and they expect the brands to be present and active on these online platforms (Synthesio, 2011). Since many luxury fashion brands also target these millennial consumers, under the age of 35, it is important to consider the appropriate marketing channels to reach them. Economist also reports that millennials will be the main consumers of luxury products by 2026 (The Economist, 2014), which highlights the importance of adapting to the digital environment that this demographic is using.

In order to respond to this change in the consumer behavior, social networks have become an influential marketing tool for fashion brands as a means to attract more consumers through effective communication (Ansarin and Ozuem, 2015). In fact, the use of social media is still on the rise; as of January 2016, there were 2,31 billion active social media users globally, and the number has grown 10% since January 2015 (Kemp, 2016). Moreover, the average Internet user currently spends 1 hour 49 minutes per day on social networks, which has also increased in the previous years (GlobalWeb-Index, 2016). In addition, over the past few years, the consumers’ online habits have changed, and the social media has surpassed the search engines in becoming the number one driver of the overall traffic to websites (Shareaholic, 2015). This traffic, in turn, is likely to result in increasing e-commerce and increasing brand awareness, which must be seen as a positive effect by the brand itself.

For a long time, luxury brands have asked themselves if they should embrace the digital opportunity, and whether it is a phenomenon that is worth investing time and money on (Dial, 2014; Jahn, Kunz and Meyer, 2012). However, the real question in today’s society should be how these brands should go about doing it (Heine and Berghaus, 2014).
Even though luxury industry has been late to adapt to social media (Brandwatch, 2015), based on the following usage figures within this segment the luxury consumer is more than ready for the change. The luxury consumer is very active online; 80% use social media on a monthly basis, about half are weekly users, and more than one-fourth are daily users (Remy, Catena and Durand-Servoingt, 2015), each of them using an average of three different platforms (Deloitte, 2015). In addition, two-thirds of luxury consumers generate social media content, such as images, videos, product reviews or re-postings of content created by others, at least once a month, 15% doing it daily (Remy, Catena and Durand-Servoingt, 2015). Moreover, McKinsey&Company’s recent research shows that 75% of all luxury purchases are influenced by what the consumers see, do or hear online, even if the actual purchase happens in a physical store (Remy, Catena and Durand-Servoingt, 2015).

Therefore, social platforms present an important marketing and branding opportunity for the luxury industry, and steering clear of social media might lead to a brand losing an edge, and falling behind the market leaders (Gul, Shahzada and Khan, 2014; Brogi et al., 2013).
3. Social media in the context of luxury fashion industry

3.1 The relevant social media platforms for this research

Due to the broadness of the concept of social media, this research paper focuses on official online brand pages on social networking sites, and in particular looks at two major players in this field; Facebook and Instagram. These platforms are broadly used within the luxury segment, by both the companies and their consumers. As Figure 2 points out, these are the two most used social media platforms in the world, when excluding messaging applications Whatsapp and Messenger (L2, 2015a).

![Figure 2: Top Apps By Usage (L2, 2015c)](image)

These two social networking sites are not only the most used by the consumers, but the most popular social channels for brands to adapt to respectively, within the fashion industry (Morrison, 2015).

The ultimate decision to focus on these two platforms was based on the survey results that show that these sites are the consumers’ choice of social media to use for following luxury fashion brands. Figure 3 demonstrates that 59% of all respondents say they use Instagram for this purpose, and 48% utilize Facebook, many of the respondents choosing both.
Furthermore, when looking at Figure 4, it becomes apparent that Facebook and Instagram are predicted to be the top choices of social media and internet users in the future as well, highlighting the relevance to examine the effect that the use of these specific platforms have on the perception that consumers have of the luxury brands.
Facebook, being the most popular social network in the world with its 1,59 billion monthly active users (Kemp, 2016; Jones, 2015), allows image, video and text content. It is a particularly important channel for luxury brands because of its broad reach and versatile opportunities content-wise (L2, 2015a).

Instagram, currently having 400 million active monthly users (Kemp, 2016), has quickly become the social network of choice for luxury brands and their followers because of its photo- and video-friendly layout that allows visual storytelling (Scott, 2015; Sherman 2015), high engagement rates and appeals to an attractive demographic (Jones, 2015; Simply Measured, 2015).

Consequently, these two are the most pertinent social media platforms for this research. It is important to note that in the context of this research paper, the term ‘social media’ is used when talking about Facebook and Instagram specifically.
3.2 The role of official social media pages for luxury brands

In general, marketers often tend to treat social media pages, such as Facebook and Instagram, as a marketing tool that is solely set out to increase sales and profits (Ansarin and Ozuem, 2015). Even though, sales and profits might follow, luxury brands should look at social media from another perspective, because it can offer them a way to create an intimate connection with the consumer of the social networking era. Whereas a few years ago luxury brands used to see the online presence purely as another advertising channel (Okonkwo, 2010), it has finally started to dawn on them that Internet and social media have a significantly bigger role in the brand communication and in building even stronger brand-consumer relationships (Pragnell, 2016; Mosca and Gallo, 2016; Doran and Aroche, 2015; Kapferer, 2014; Heine, 2014). Okonkwo (2010) summarizes the opportunities of a brand’s online presence as “a multi-channel for communications, branding, client services, retailing, consumer analysis, client congregation, marketing, customization and product development”, from which many roles can be applied to social media.

Firstly, due to the competitive nature of the luxury industry, deeper insight to the consumer is essential (Deloitte, 2015; Kapferer and Bastien, 2012). Social media analytic tools are able to give the brand an access to social data of their user base, including age, gender, interests, geographical location, education and work history (Doran and Aroche, 2015; Doig, 2014). Such information helps to improve the brand’s marketing approach on that specific channel by delivering content that meets the users’ interests better. By using this kind of content, the posts appeal to the consumer in a deeper level, enabling a more meaningful connection between the brand and the consumer. Additionally, for example the Page Insights feature on Facebook allows the brand to see what time their fans are online, helping the brand to time their posts more accurately.

Secondly, social media serves as an impeccable platform to listen to consumers; what is being said about the brand, specific products or campaigns, and how other users react to it (Brogi et al., 2013). The brands can benefit from following these conversations in the comment section on Facebook or Instagram by using the feedback to improve in different areas, for instance in product development or marketing activities.
Furthermore, social media should be considered as a communication tool that offers the brand an ability to express their identity, strengthen their values and sustain the brand image (Ansarin and Ozuem, 2015). Therefore, social networks can act as a branding and storytelling channel by offering a perfect platform to build the allure of the brand and the luxurious lifestyle around it and by conveying the uniqueness of brand intangibles (Deloitte, 2015; Kapferer, 2014). Nonetheless, as discussed earlier, social media introduces a challenge for luxury brands, when it comes to protecting their brand image, due to the consumers’ ability to comment anything on these pages, whether positive or negative or true or false. However, the opportunity to interact with the consumers gives the brand a chance to steer the conversation in a certain direction. Since these online discussions will happen whether the brand is involved in them or not, social media presence is an opportunity to influence the way that these discussions are perceived by other users.

It is no secret that the luxury companies like to keep their distance to the general public, this being one of the factors that make them so exclusive and desirable. At the same time, luxury fashion brands are accustomed to having an intimate connection with their customers, in the past mainly through in-store experiences. Nowadays, the brands’ Facebook and Instagram pages offer a way to give the fan base a closer look at the brand in the form of a more personal and authentic content than what the formal advertising campaigns convey. Examples of this content could be videos and pictures of behind-the-scenes fashion shows or the making-of of certain products. The core idea is to make the viewer feel special, as the content is exclusive to the users of the site. According to Hope (2016), the appeal to the consumers is evident: “they think they’re getting a peek inside a famously exclusive and private world”. In reality, everything that we see on luxury brands’ social media is highly thought through and controlled (Hope, 2016).
3.3 On social media or not?

Today, at least some level of social media presence among fashion companies seems to be a norm, and almost every successful luxury fashion brand operates a brand account or a page on at least one social media platform (Jahn, Kunz and Meyer, 2012), most often on Facebook. However, in the past, many luxury brands have created these accounts without fully understanding the purpose of these pages, or just to demonstrate that they are up-to-date with the digital marketing environment (Doran and Aroche, 2015; Okonkwo, 2010). When the idea of how to use these accounts is not understood and the brand refuses to allocate the necessary resources to successfully manage the sites, the results can be unfavorable. While poor management of these sites might end up doing more harm than good for the brand image (Phan, Thomas and Heine, 2011), a well-planned social media strategy can help in brand management and in creating a holistic digital experience that is appreciated or even expected by the consumers of the social media era.

Different luxury fashion brands have approached social media in significantly different ways and within a varying time frame. This research takes a look at three brands; Burberry, Yves Saint Laurent and Céline. Figure 5 shows that these three brands are placed far apart from each other based on their digital competitiveness level; Burberry being a top performer, YSL ranking around average and Céline scoring low (Exane BNP Paribas, 2014). This chart is based on the brands’ digital performance, at the same time giving an indication about their level of adaptation to social media, since these two often go hand in hand.

Figure 5: Digital Competitive Map (Exane BNP Paribas, 2014)
3.3.1 Burberry

Burberry, being one of the first luxury brands to invest into social media early on, is often considered as a major trendsetter in social media marketing (Phan, Thomas and Heine, 2011). The brand repositioned itself successfully with the help of social media, making the brand more fashionable and more attractive to a younger consumer base. Today, Burberry is one of the most followed and most active brands on social media, and operates many different platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, Snapchat and Periscope. In 2009, the brand even established its own social media site called Art of the Trench (Milnes, 2015), which has been extremely successful. Already in 2011, this digitally innovative fashion house dedicated over 60% of its marketing budget towards digital (Barrett and Bradshaw, 2011), whereas in 2008 the same figure was only 1.5% (Phan, Thomas and Heine, 2011), pointing out the brand’s considerable investment on the matter. For Burberry, digital and social media are currently a core of its marketing activities, and play a key role in the brand’s success (Phan, Thomas and Heine, 2011). Whereas concrete results from social media usage alone are hard to distinguish regarding Burberry’s brand rejuvenating process, the repositioning as a whole can be said to have been extremely successful. This has been measured in the change of consumers’ perception of the brand, as they increasingly see Burberry as “a contemporary brand” and “a trend-setter” and their desire to buy from the brand has increased after the repositioning (Phan, Thomas and Heine, 2011). In addition, L2 Digital IQ Index 2015 ranks Burberry as the number one luxury fashion brand in the field of social intelligence (L2, 2015a).

Burberry started its Facebook page in early 2009, and adapted to Instagram in 2011, well ahead of most high fashion brands. On Instagram, Burberry’s content has been consistent and intriguing from early stages onwards, whereas on Facebook the published content has changed quite a bit, which is understandable since the brand has maintained its brand page for over seven years already. The biggest changes are visible in the change of social media’s role for brands and in the quality of the photographs and videos, which has obviously improved as the technology has come forward. Throughout the years social media has become more of a professional channel for brands to present themselves, therefore the content today is more screened and matched to the desired brand image than it was seven year ago, as demonstrated in Image 1.
Whereas Burberry’s content on Facebook currently focuses mostly on its products, its Instagram account shows more backstage-driven material, demonstrating that each platform should display different content. This is important so each platform offers something new, inducing consumers to follow the brand on various platforms.

3.3.2 Yves Saint Laurent

Yves Saint Laurent seems to be an average performer when it comes to digital communications, such as social media (L2, 2015a; Exane BNP Paribas, 2014). However, it has been a late adapter to the world of social media; the brand first posted on its official Facebook page in 2012, and only started its Instagram account in January 2016, both years after most fashion brands. YSL’s social media approach has been more cautious, less active and less dedicated than some of its competitors, therefore leaving room for improvement. The brand’s activity on Facebook has increased along the way, being 2,3 posts a week in the first quarter of 2016, which is still only half of Burberry’s, for example.
YSL follows a very consistent track content-wise on both channels, as Image 2 shows, but the brands’ content can be described as slightly unsurprising, therefore not fully meeting the consumers’ expectations of an innovative high fashion brand, such as YSL. However, the brand delivers high quality photos, and uses celebrity endorsement on its social media frequently.

Yves Saint Laurent recently changed its creative director, which caused the brand to erase all of its Instagram posts, replacing them with a single photograph of the new creative director, Anthony Vaccarello. It is yet to find out if this is a sign of a new Instagram approach or an aggressive send-off for Hedi Slimane, the previous creative director (Wang, 2016).

Even though YSL does not translate its creativity to its social media channels with full potential, it is meeting the standards of an average social media presence within the luxury fashion segment. It manages to satisfy the basic expectations of the digitally savvy consumers for the time being by offering a social media presence that focuses on its products and already existing campaigns, but the content is not as creative and engaging as the one of Burberry’s.
3.3.3 Céline

When it comes to digital, Céline remarkably drags behind other luxury brands. The brand lacks social media presence as well as e-commerce site entirely. The refusal has been a conscious decision; the brand's creative director Phoebe Philo has stated that “the chicest thing is when you don’t exist on Google” and commented the non-existent social media presence by saying “I’d rather walk down the street naked than join Facebook” (Kansara, 2014; Jeffries, 2013). Philo’s views about online anonymity have strongly been reflected on the brand's approach to digital presence. As a result, Céline is often placed among the worst digitally performing brands on various rankings (L2, 2015a; Exane BNP Paribas, 2014).

Céline undeniably stands out because of its approach, and it does not seem to have an influence on the brand’s success measured in sales. LVMH Group’s recent annual reports state that the brand has maintained its steady growth (LVMH Group 2016; LVMH Group 2015) during the time of digitalization without taking part in the phenomenon of social media and e-commerce, indicating that the brand's choice to rely solely on its products and traditional media rather than social advertising has not hurt the sales. Additionally, this approach seems to fit the brand’s discreet brand identity quite well.

Even though Céline has refused to establish its own social media pages, the brand is highly visible and a topic of discussion on countless blogs and other social media, and fans have created unofficial accounts for the brand on Facebook and Instagram. While the brand’s refusal of digital communications might help the brand maintain its cool, exclusive and distant image, the brand-consumer relationship might suffer because of this choice. The brand’s CEO, Marco Gobbetti, has explained the choice by saying that the company prefers to engage with customers in the store, the way they reputedly like to be engaged with (Mau, 2014). It is yet to be seen how long this approach remains viable, and how long the brand’s “it-bags” are bringing the money in.
4. Empirical data analysis and findings

4.1 Methodology

The primary research was conducted through an online survey (Appendix A), which was mainly targeted to people who have an interest towards luxury fashion. The survey, consisting of both multiple choice and open-ended questions, was randomly sent out to the followers of various luxury fashion brands on social media, namely Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube, and to people who either work or study in the field of fashion. This selection of respondents allowed the majority of the participants to be able to accurately answer the specific questions about luxury brands’ social media pages, and the effects that these pages might have on their perception of the brands. Because the main focus of this research paper is to determine Facebook and Instagram's effect on how the consumers view the brand and how the use of these sites affects the brand-consumer relationship, the final results only take into account the answers of the respondents who indicated that they use at least one of these two channels to follow luxury brands.

Additionally, two interviews were conducted on the topic; one with a PR professional, Amanda Alinikula, from SpaltPR Helsinki, and another one with a social media professional, Petra Tiirikainen, from Dingle. Their professional background gave new insights into the topic by examining it from different perspectives. Alinikula works for a PR agency, whose clients include luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton and Tag Heuer, and that offers social and digital PR services among others. Her knowledge about luxury brand management in particular provided an understanding of how luxury fashion brands act in the media in order to protect their image. Tiirikainen, on the other hand, works for Dingle, a company specialized in social media marketing. Her input offered interesting views on the specific actions that have proved to be successful for the company's clients in the past, and due to the rapidly changing nature of her work, she is up-to-date on the most recent news and practices in the field of social media.
4.2 Social media’s effect on brand perception

To start with, the survey results (Appendix A) verify that social media indeed has an effect on the consumers’ brand perception; 86% of the respondents say they think the use of social media affects the way they view the brand. Interestingly, even though luxury fashion brands have been cautious to expand their communication to social media because of the reasons addressed earlier, according to the survey results, Facebook and Instagram’s positive effects on the luxury consumers’ perception of the brand seem to outweigh the negative ones.

As Figure 6 suggests, more than 4 out of 5 participants agree that a luxury brand’s social media page increases brand loyalty, and additionally makes the consumers feel closer to the brand, creating stronger brand-consumer relationships. The closer relationship is often achieved by revealing more of what is happening behind the brand, and sharing the brand stories.

According to the survey results, the fear that social media threatens luxury brand’s exclusive image seems to be somewhat gratuitous; only 6% of the respondents using Facebook or Instagram to follow luxury brands agree with the statement “social media makes the luxury brand lose its exclusive image”. However, 23% feels that social media makes luxury brands overly accessible, highlighting the importance of carefully designing a luxury-fitting social media strategy.

Figure 6: Social media’s effects on luxury brands’ brand loyalty, brand-consumer relationship, purchase intention and exclusive image
Unsurprisingly, 92% of luxury fashion brand followers on Facebook or Instagram admit that the exposure to the updates of the newest products, catwalk shows etc. create a desire to buy the brand’s products, building the allure and desirability aspect around the brand. In contrast, slightly less than half of the respondents claim that bad reviews or complaints on these channels would make them lose their interest in purchasing from the brand. Therefore, social media’s effects on purchase intention seem to be bidirectional.

Additionally, the survey respondents suggest that social media increases the admiration around luxury brands within the fan base, and creates a friendly relationship between the brand and the consumer, which are both positive effects from the brand’s perspective.

4.3 Social media elements

4.3.1 Content

The survey shows that majority of the followers of a luxury fashion brand’s Facebook or Instagram page prefer image and video content over text, which is not surprising as the industry itself is a highly visual one.

The respondents underline a few essential points regarding luxury brands’ social media content. First point is quite obvious; the need to provide high quality content that is creative. Similarly, both of the interviewees, a PR professional and a social media professional, mention that the core of luxury fashion brands’ social media is innovative, inspirational, high quality visual content. The survey respondents suggest that both, formal advertising campaigns and content with more of a personal touch are extremely important content categories.

While product mentions and celebrity features still create approximately half of all content in the field of luxury fashion (L2, 2015a), brands are also embracing more innovative ideas for content such as short films especially made for social media and digital advertising. A good example of this would be Burberry’s “From London with Love”-video campaign starring Romeo Beckham, which resulted in record engagement levels across social media in the end of 2014 (Burberry Group plc, 2015).
In addition, special 3D product presentations, statements of the CEO, exclusive photographs taken at brand related events and music that evokes certain emotions are suggestions that luxury brands should utilize on their Facebook and Instagram pages (Jahn, Kunz and Meyer, 2012; Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2012). The content should be creative, and surprising at times, and the brands should not get stuck on their comfort zone. Again, Burberry has explored this kind of ingenious content by creating Burberry Acoustic, that films acoustic music performances of less known artists, who are wearing Burberry, and publishes the video clips on Facebook and Instagram.

Another crucial element regarding the content of the page is that it offers enough variety. For example, showing images of the same runway show or advertising campaign day after another gets boring quite quickly. This might disappoint the followers and make them view the brand as unimaginative, even if the designs were the opposite. The social media professional who I interviewed points out a pitfall that many luxury brands’ are guilty of on social media: “if the content of your social media page is only advertising the brand’s products, it can have a negative impact on how the consumers perceive the brand. A brand should focus on content marketing and create content, outside of its own product offering, that combines the brand’s interests with its fans’ interests”. Many survey respondents also mention that they would like to see other content in addition to advertising material. Ozuem and Tan (2014) agree with this: “It is crucial to note that what specifically seems to devalue the name of the luxury brand in the eyes of the consumers is the act of luxury brands trying to promote products to them, and not its mere presence on Facebook.” Kapferer and Bastien (2012) continue by saying that it is essential for luxury brands to understand that social media should be used to communicate to create a dream in the consumer’s mind, not to sell. Once again, Image 3 shows that Burberry is a great example of this; the brand’s Instagram presents images of finely hand-sewn details of its couture garments emphasizing the uniqueness of the brand’s luxury products, celebrities wearing them, and posts about London, highlighting the brand heritage.

However, a majority of 87% of the survey respondents thinks that visual content in the form of formal advertising campaign images and videos, and catwalk shows is an important element of the social media pages for these brands, because many followers like to stay up to date about new products
and be the first to see the new campaigns. Consequently, luxury brands need to find a balance between product-driven posts and other kind of content, through which it can increase the admiration around the brand, and build stronger brand-customer relationships. Ideally, brands should strive for followers to view the brand as a real “friend” as one the survey respondents put it. This kind of relationship enhances the way the brand communication is perceived by the fans, making previously disturbing advertising posts seem reasonable and even interesting (Jahn, Kunz and Meyer, 2012). In summation, it is all about balancing the variety of content to keep the social media feed interesting.

In addition, consistency and suitable content in relation to the brand identity is important. One of the interviewees mentions the following as one of the building blocks of a great social media approach for luxury fashion brands: “Content and captions that are in line with the brand identity, and the stream of posts that are consistent.” Berghaus, Reinecke and Muller-Stewens (2014) add that social media approach should be in line with the marketing approach used on other channels. However, this is not to be confused with offering the exact same content across different social media; one the interviewees remind that each social media platform should be treated as its own entity, and each of them should bring some added value to the users.
4.3.2 Activity level

First off, 94% of the survey participants agree that luxury brands should be present and active on social media. Additionally, nearly 7 out of 10 respondents consider frequent Facebook or Instagram updates “very important” or “moderately important”. However, many participants also mention that luxury brands should refrain from being overly active. This is pointed out to be one of the factors that might make these brands seem too mainstream. This seems logical, as luxury brands do not, under any circumstances, want be associated with mass marketing. What would be the perfect level of activeness in this industry then? Alinikula suggests approximately one post a day: “Too many posts might drive followers away, as their newsfeed fills up with only brands’ posts. On the other hand, what is the point of following a brand that only posts a few times a month?”

4.3.3 Interaction level

Interaction between the brands and the consumers is one of the key elements that social media offers (Kim and Ko, 2010; Jahn, Kunz and Meyer, 2012). Due to the fact that luxury fashion brands are used to one-way communication, many of them have approached social media with the same attitude, without realizing the essence of listening to their consumers and interacting with them. Hence, in this area, most luxury fashion brands certainly have plenty of room for improvement. Currently, based on my observation on different brands’ Facebook and Instagram pages, the majority of luxury brands rarely, if ever, respond to followers’ comments on neither of the platforms. On the contrary, 64% of the survey respondents defined the ability to interact with the brand as “very important” or “moderately important” and a vast majority indicated that the brand’s responsiveness to consumers’ comments, criticism and questions is important to them (Figure 7).

Both of the interviewees also agree that this is the stumbling block in the luxury fashion industry. Jahn, Kunz and Meyer (2012) write that the essential factor of a social media strategy is the level of interaction, not the amount of fans, and continue explaining that luxury brands should aim at answering the users’ questions immediately and communicate proactively, especially in the case of negative comments. At the moment, negative comments that have not been addressed are inevi-
tably one of the main factors that can affect the luxury brands’ image negatively when other consumers read them. Additionally, bad reviews and complaints about the brand can influence the purchase intention; 46% of the survey respondents indicate that this kind of comments would make them lose their interest in buying products from the brand.

**The importance of brand’s responsiveness on social media**

![Pie chart showing the importance of brand's responsiveness](image)

*Figure 7: The importance of brand's responsiveness to consumers’ comments, criticism and questions*

Addressing the issues on behalf of the brand could minimize the negative impact of these comments. Image 4 presents customers’ criticism regarding the customer service that they have received from the brands. These comments could be easily dealt with by commenting the public post by apologizing for the unsatisfactory customer service and by saying that the customer has been contacted privately to discuss the matter. Xia (2013) mentions that this kind of vulnerable reaction to criticism is effective in relationship building because it conveys sincerity and respect for consumers. It would also give other readers the indication that the brand truly cares about its customers and strives for the best possible customer service.
Besides the interaction between the brand and the consumer, it is also essential to keep an eye on the ongoing conversations between the users. “When fans act inadequately they can ruin the special image of a brand within seconds” (Jahn, Kunz and Meyer, 2012). According to Brogi et al. (2013) brand loyalty is greatly influenced by the online comments, insights and opinions of the site users, positive or negative. Therefore, luxury brands should increase the response rate to the users’ comments, and eliminate completely inappropriate comments off of their social media site.
5. Conclusions and further research

5.1. Conclusion

The aim of this research paper was to examine social media’s impact on how the consumers view a luxury brand, and focus on Facebook and Instagram in particular. The research question of “How does social media presence affect consumers’ brand perception in the context of luxury fashion industry?” was tackled by using secondary and primary research to investigate the role of social media for luxury brands, and how the use of official brand pages on Facebook and Instagram affects the brand perception and the brand equity of luxury fashion brands. The primary research consisted of an online survey and interviews with industry professionals, and the results show that social media indeed has various effects on the brand-consumer relationship and the way the consumers perceive the luxury brand.

The main findings include the following:

1. 87% of the respondents agree that the use of these channels increases brand loyalty.

2. Nearly 9 out of 10 respondents claim that following luxury brands on Facebook or Instagram make them feel closer to the brand. This indicates that the use of these social media platforms can help the brand to build more intimate and more meaningful relationships with its consumers.

3. Only 6% of the respondents think that social media presence makes the luxury brand lose its exclusive image. However, 23% feel it makes luxury brands overly accessible.

The secondary research supports the statement that social media offers luxury fashion brands a great tool to strengthen the brand-consumer relationship. Additionally, it provides them with a platform that they can use to build the allure of the luxury lifestyle and admiration around the brand, and to express the brand identity.
In contrast, the research reveals that one of the main stumbling blocks for many luxury fashion brands is the interaction between the fan and the brand. While majority of the followers seem to expect the ability to interact with the brand and consider the responsiveness to their comments, criticism and questions important, many luxury fashion brands do not engage in any kind of dialogue with the consumers on Facebook or Instagram. Additionally, negative comments that are not addressed by the brand can have a negative effect on consumers’ perception of the brand.

To conclude, within the scope of this research, social media’s positive effects seem to outweigh the negative ones, and a mere presence on Facebook or Instagram does not seem to dilute the exclusive brand image. However, in order to be successful on social media, it is important that the brand allocates enough resources to maintain these sites.

5.2 Suggestions for further research

Suggestions for further research would be to examine the main findings in a deeper level, and finding out the reasons behind these findings. Researching what kind of actions on social media, for example content, activity and interaction-wise, encourage brand loyalty, and what are the reasons behind the fact that nearly 1 out of 4 respondents agree that social media makes luxury brands overly accessible. Additionally, it would be interesting to research the effects that active interaction, or in contrast the lack of it, has on the brand-consumer relationship and the overall image communicated to the consumer via an official brand page of a luxury brand.
Reference list


Doig, E. (2014). User experience - how brands engage customers online. Lecture at Royal Melbourne University of Tech-


Appendix

Appendix A: Survey results

The percentage on the top is screened for respondent that indicated that they use Facebook and/or Instagram to follow luxury fashion brands on social media, the percentage below, marked with * is the result for the entire sample.

Q1: What is your gender?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Screened</th>
<th>Entire Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>77.78%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22.22%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2: What is your age?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Screened</th>
<th>Entire Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 18</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6.35%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 24</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42.86%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34.92%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.59%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6.35%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7.94%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64 or older</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.00%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q3: What is your nationality?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>38%</th>
<th>41.27%*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15.87%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14.29%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11.11%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7.94%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1.59%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1.59%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1.59%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1.59%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordanian</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1.59%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish/Russian</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1.59%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4: Please answer the following questions about yourself as a consumer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Do you own any luxury branded fashion products? If yes, please specify the brand(s) in the comment box.</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.60%*</td>
<td>19.05%*</td>
<td>6.35%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. Do you follow any luxury fashion brands on social media? If yes, please specify the brand(s) in the comment box.</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.93%*</td>
<td>38.98%*</td>
<td>5.08%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comments A:
Hermes, YSL, Balenciaga
Dior, Acne, Marc by Marc Jacobs
Saint Laurent Paris, Chanel, Alexander Wang, Louis Vuitton,
Dior, Chanel, Burberry, Tiffany & co, Tommy Hilfiger,
Prada
YSL, Alexander Wang, Marc Jacobs, Michael Kors and many others
Hermes, YSL, Christian Dior, Diane von Furstenberg, Ralph Lauren
Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs, Michael Kors, Dior, Boss
Chanel, Saint Laurent, Isabel Marant etc.
Calvin Klein
Brooks Brothers, Ralph Lauren, Gucci, Luis Vuitton, Hermes, Chanel
LV, Givenchy, Michael Kors, Canada Goose among others
Calvin C, Tommy H, S & S, Armani
Tommy Hilfiger, Supertrash, Guess, Nubikk
DKNY Louis vuitton micheal kors
Moncler, Tods, Armani, D&G
Bottega Veneta, Larsson & Jennings (if counted luxury?)
Michael Kors, Furla, Longchamp
Longchamp
Mulberry, LV
Gant hilfiger marco polo marimekko burberry
Burberry, Calvin Klein, Benetton, Guess,
moschino, chanel, massimo dutti, victoria's secret, burberry
Louis Vuitton, Longchamp
Calvin Klein, Chloe, Marc Jacobs, Victorias Secret
Fendi, Louis Vuitton, Hermes, D&G, Mulberry, Saint Laurent, Celine
Michael Kors, Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, Tiffany & Co., Coach
Brooks Brothers, Burberry, Ralph Lauren, Armani, Maybach
Valentino, Hugo Boss, Ralph Lauren
Louis Vuitton, Ted Baker, Ralph Lauren
DKNY, tommy hilfiger, guess, hugo boss...
Michael Kors
Burberry, Calvin Klein, Mulberry, Tiger of Sweden
Michael Kors, Ted Baker, Marimekko
Versace, dkny, michael kors
burberry, police, longchamp
Ralph Lauren, BMW
Michael Kors, Ralph Lauren, Marc Jacobs
Maje, Henri Bendel
Ted Baker
Ralph Lauren, Michael Kors, Guess, Donna Karan
Viktor & Rolf, Guess, Michael Kors
Tiger of Sweden, Hugo Boss, Tommy Hilfiger, Gant, Ralph Lauren
Anya Hindmarch, Gucci, Stella McCartney, Carven, Tabitha Simmons, Celine,
Givenchy, Balenciaga, Louis Vuitton, Stella McCartney, Golden Goose, Moncler, Dries Van Noten and many more
Burberry, Calvin Klein
Marc Jacobs, Ted Baker
Junghans

Comments B:
Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Balenciaga, Burberry...
Dior, Prada, Miu Miu, Nina Ricci (This list could go on for a while)
Burberry, Lacoste, J.Crew, Valentino, Dolce & Gabbana, Ralph Lauren
Burberry
Michael Kors, Burberry, Alexander Wang...
Hermes
Chanel, Burberry
Calvin Klein
Givenchy, LV, Chanel
Tods
Gucci, Prada, Burberry, Stella McCartney, many more
Mulberry, LV
marimekko marco polo
chanel, D&G, victorias secret, massimo dutti
Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Gucci, Dior and Prada
Calvin Klein, Chloe, Marc Jacobs, Bulgari, Moschino, Gucci, Victorias Secret, Louis Vuitton
Saint Laurent, Mulberry, Chloe
Michael Kors, Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, Tiffany & Co., Burberry, Dior, Gucci, Versace, Chloe, Fendi, Prada, Marc Jacobs
Louis Vuitton
Chanel, Dior, Tiffany & Co., Prada, Victoria Secret
Burberry, Louis Vuitton, Michael Kors
Michael Kors
Ralph Lauren, BMW, Hermes, Hugo Boss, Louis Vuitton, Versace, Calvin Klein
Michael Kors, Louboutin, Tiffany & Co., Bulgari
Louis Vuitton, Maje, Chloe
Louis vuitton
Anya Hindmarch, Gucci, Stella McCartney, Carven, Saint Laurent
Saint Laurent, Stella McCartney, Balenciaga, Dior, Golden Goose
Burberry, Louis Vuitton
Ted Baker, Michael Kors
Jimmy Choo, Alexander Wang, Burberry
Louis vuitton
I follow almost all standard luxury brands' like Chanel etc.
Q5: What are the main reasons why you follow luxury fashion brand(s) on social media? (Only answer this question if your answer was “yes” to the previous one.)

To get inspired and see what the brand is up to regarding runway shows, products etc.  
I like to know what products they have, and see their photos  
Inspiration  
They post lovely pictures and you can follow their projects  
See latest clothes they offer and they have some cool pictures.  
Inspiration, updates on products and campaigns  
To get inspiration. Love Hermes campaigns!  
For inspiration, and learning about new trends and products straight away  
Nice looking clothes  
To stay up to date on new trends  
Guess, Victoria’s Secret, Chanel  
To see the newest collection  
Keep up to date with current collections, other interesting relating stuff such as artist collabs or events  
News and new products  
new product news  
For inspiration; I love chanel’s advertising campaigns; and to stay in line with fashion trends of some of my favourite brands  
Because I love fashion and those brands make timeless products that have high quality.  
Interesting posts, inspiring photos and designs, fashion tips  
Because of the interest in new products, news, inspiration  
To look and admire amazing clothes & accessories and to get inspired for outfit ideas  
Inspiration and learning more about the brand  
These pictures are inspiration; I like to look at lifestyle pictures; I have a general interest in fashion  
To get inspiration, to look at beautiful images, to be up to date with new products / ad campaigns etc.  
To see the new products and get ideas for my own style  
Entertainment, high quality photos  
Inspiration, high quality and innovative designs & photos, entertainment, etc.  
Inspiration, staying up-to-date with the luxury fashion world  
To get new information, easy way  
Inspiration  
For the contents, is interested to know the news and found inspirations  
To stay updated on their new products  
To be updated with new products, get inspired and to see nice pictures  
Luxury brands portray a lifestyle that is desirable yet unachievable for many people. We look up to the brands, wishing we could afford a lifestyle, without worrying about the financial aspect  
To inspire my fashion and to inspire me to make money to buy them  
To be up to date about fashion

Q6: Which social media platform(s) do you use most often for following luxury fashion brands online? Many answers are possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>47.62%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>6.35%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>58.73%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube</td>
<td>11.11%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>20.63%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>11.11%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>19.05%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.35%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q7: What type of content do you prefer to see on a luxury fashion brand’s social media? (1=prefer the most, 3=prefer the least)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68.25%*</td>
<td>19.05%*</td>
<td>12.70%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.63%*</td>
<td>65.08%*</td>
<td>14.29%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.11%*</td>
<td>15.87%*</td>
<td>73.02%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q8: How important do you consider the following features of a brand’s social media page/account?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about the company</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.63%*</td>
<td>38.10%*</td>
<td>33.33%*</td>
<td>6.35%*</td>
<td>1.59%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting updates and news about the brand, its products and</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upcoming events</td>
<td>57.14%*</td>
<td>33.33%*</td>
<td>4.76%*</td>
<td>3.17%*</td>
<td>1.59%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual content in the form of formal advertising campaign images/videos,</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catwalk shows etc.</td>
<td>52.38%*</td>
<td>31.75%*</td>
<td>12.70%*</td>
<td>3.17%*</td>
<td>0.00%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual content with more of a personal touch (behind-the-scenes photos/</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>videos, introducing relevant people behind the brand etc.)</td>
<td>46.03%*</td>
<td>36.51%*</td>
<td>14.29%*</td>
<td>3.17%*</td>
<td>0.00%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand's views on different current topics</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.70%*</td>
<td>28.57%*</td>
<td>31.75%*</td>
<td>26.98%*</td>
<td>0.00%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to interact with the brand (praise, complaints, customer service etc. aimed at the brand itself)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to interact with other users of <em>the community</em> (reviews, general discussion etc. aimed at other consumers)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand's responsiveness to consumers' comments, criticism and questions</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent updates (for example one post a day)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User generated content (content created &amp; provided by the brand's audience) for more authentic experience</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contests</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct opportunity to shop products featured in the posts</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments / other features I consider important:

I think it is important that the social media channel is not only an advertising channel (to show the existing ads) but it adds value to the “traditional” form of advertising - including other content too.

User friendly: easy to navigate through

Personally, I am not in the position to afford luxury products, however, I find it very important to be able to interact with the brand, because it makes the brand more personal and gives the “permission” to be part of the lifestyle without having to own products. It’s also great to communicate with other fans of the brand and be part of the overall conversation. The responsiveness of the brand is crucial here, if it wasn’t for that, I would not be following the brands I do.
Q9: Please indicate the level of agreement on the following statements about social media’s effect on your view of the luxury fashion brand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It makes me feel closer to the brand</td>
<td>36% 26.98%*</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6% 6.35%*</td>
<td>2% 3.17%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It makes the luxury brand lose its exclusive image</td>
<td>0% 0.00%*</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>26% 23.81%*</td>
<td>2% 3.17%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It makes me trust the brand more</td>
<td>17% 14.29%*</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2% 3.17%*</td>
<td>4% 7.94%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It increases brand loyalty</td>
<td>38% 28.57%*</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4% 6.35%*</td>
<td>0% 0.00%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media presence makes luxury brands overly accessible</td>
<td>2% 1.59%*</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>17% 15.87%*</td>
<td>7% 12.70%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to the updates of the brand's newest products, catwalk shows etc. create a desire to buy its products</td>
<td>45% 36.51%*</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4% 4.76%*</td>
<td>0% 0.00%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad reviews and complaints about the brand on social media (on the brand's own page) make me not want to buy products from the brand</td>
<td>6% 11.11%*</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>9% 6.35%*</td>
<td>2% 3.17%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media has no effect on the brand image</td>
<td>6% 4.76%*</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>53% 50.79%*</td>
<td>9% 6.35%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comments / other effect I think social media might have on luxury brand’s image:

It makes me trust the brand more if the actions on social media are transparent.

In regards to the brand loyalty, I think social media is only effective if its done right! I think Mansur Gavriel, is a good example of successful social media management.

Allows you to find out more about the company and it’s corporate culture

Use of celebrities

In my opinion, it builds a community around the brand. People can interact with each other or with the brand, making it seem like a friendship that is being cultivated by both the brand and the people that interact with it. The lifestyle that the brand stands for creates an association of abundance, which many people strive for in their lives.

Q10: Do you think luxury brands should be present and active on social media? Please explain your answer.

Yes, it is essential nowadays, not just from the advertising perspective but it also gives the brand an opportunity to share their luxurious events and such with the fans, and promote the VIP lifestyle that the fans strive for.

Yes, it would be silly not too. Countless times I have been reminded or introduced to a product on social media and have ended up buying it. I think there are appropriate strategies to maintaining exclusivity, whether it is posting ambiguous but intriguing posts about a brand or something along the lines of that! there are too many possibilities with it to be against it, the brand just has to be creative.

Yes I believe so, upcoming luxury brands more so because social media can definitely help grow the brand in so many ways, however I do believe those running the brand accounts should use it to a certain extent.

Yes, I think it’s a great way for the brands to show themselves to the people who can’t afford it, so they can enjoy the stories etc. And the brands can ‘stay in touch’ with the people who actually buy stuff.

Not necessarily, completely up to them because it comes with positives and negatives.

I think they should be there, these platforms are great for marketing and it only makes sense that luxury brands are present on them as well.

Yes. It’s the perfect place to enhance the image of brand. And for me as a customer to come even closer to the brand and get more knowledge about news. I also feel more apart of the world of the brand when I know it is possible to interact with them; comment and ask questions directly. Two way communication is much better than one way communication!

I think they should be active on the social media, cause everyone nowadays is active there. It would be weird if they wouldn’t be active.

Yes, i see it as a great opportunity for these brands to share more about what goes on behind the brand, without forgetting the high end edge that is important for these brands.

Not necessarily

Sure, free speech.

Yes I think it increases the admiration around these brands within the fan base (which is different from the customer base). Luxury brands should use social media (next to other advertising channels) to make their followers desire their products; simply seeing images/videos of products/events etc. on their feed won’t make the brand lose their exclusive image.

Yes. I like seeing posts on fashion brands on Instagram, as it allows me to feel closer to a (otherwise unattainable) brand.

Yes

yes, I think it’s important to have brand presence in at least some of the social media channels. It’s easy to keep customers up to date about new events, collections etc.

yes

Yes

Present but not highly active, photos and updates of new collections

Yes it makes me easily make more information

I do think they should be active, but not excessively, as it makes them too mainstream. Also luxury brands should not be active in matters that are not related to their products, e.g. expressing political or other views

Yes. 1. Free advertise 2. Connecting with lots of customers.

Totally, I don’t know what I would do if I couldn’t follow my favorite luxury brands online. Even if I can’t afford 90% of what they sell I love to look and become inspired.

Yes. It keeps customers interested.

YES!! My newsfeed would be so boring without luxury brands!
To be honest, I do not use social media a lot but if I did, I wouldn’t mind being able to follow my favorite luxury brands.

Yes because all brands should have some sort of platform to reach out to people who only communicate through social media. Social media is important to this generation.

Yes, luxury or not, all brands should use this marketing channel nowadays. Luxury brands just need to make sure they stay consistent in their marketing approach throughout different channels, and keep their luxury image by sharing high quality content.

Yes, in that way its easy compare different products.

I strongly agree that luxury brands should be present on social media. It is a channel to reach many potential customers, with a small investment. Moreover, the brands can target their customers better, as the people following the brand have a general interest in the brand. By this your advertisments are automatically targeted to the right consumers. In contract, with television you reach a broad mass, but not the right consumers that are interested in your brand. On the other side, mature and older customers are not necessarily on social media platforms. A luxury brand should not neglect these customers, as they are likely to be long-term customers.

Yes, they should be. This gives them an opportunity to guide the online discussions about their brand that would happen with or without their presence on social media.

Yes, to gain interactive, loyal, connected audience and sell more!

Yes, they can get more consumers to buy their products and build their brand image to certain direction

Certainly, social media is an up to date medium for reaching consumers worldwide and of a wide range of age groups

Yes I definitely think that it's certainly in the best interest of luxury fashion brands to be present/active in social media because it brings them closer to the customer, the customer closer to them, it also allows the customers to see the brand from a whole new perspective, and finally it's a creative, up to date, and innovative medium for advertisement through which companies can reach significant numbers of consumers.

Yes I think they should. It gives the brand the possibility to strengthen the consumer relationship on a more personal level and push the customer loyalty at the same time.

Yes. By doing that right way its good advertise

Yes but interestingly - not just adverts but to make one feel closer to the brand

Yes, but to reinforce their innovation, creativity and quality, not the superficial side with a white thin celebrity having their product.

Yes! Increases brand loyalty and the brand manages to stay on top of mind of its customers.

Yes

In these years is very important, the Brand have to be present in the social media, for brand awareness, for increase the public and popularity, to keep updated the followers.

Yes, it is an important part of today's society and an essential marketing tool. The information (about the brand itself as well as its products) is easily available to everyone through social media, which of course increases on the sales.

Yes, every consumer brand should be there. It's just the matter of how to be and what to do there.

Absolutely. If a brand is not present nowadays, it loses its position in our society. We are highly connected through social media and we crave the online interaction with people and brands. It makes the brand more human and it increases brand loyalty and the desire to afford the products and live the luxury lifestyle. Conversation with customers/reacting to complaints/being personal as a brand is key here. The presence alone is not enough, it needs constant updating and interaction on every platform separately.

Yes because that way they are brought closer to consumers. Also seeing luxury brands in social media creates a need to get them.

Yes

Yes they should be. This way customers are always informed about the latest news and items dropping. Also it strengthens the bond between brand and customer

* Absolutely. They don’t afford to be absent.

* Yes, its good for the brand’s image

* Yes, social media is an important form of advertising and building a positive brand image in the eyes of current and prospective clients.

* I don’t think it’s necessary

* Yes, they should be, but they could be present in a different way than more accessible brands to maintain their luxury image.

* Yes, because social media is quickly becoming equal to regular media and other marketing channels.

* To an extent. There are a lot of trolls or competitors that will often make false posts to hurt or destroy a brand’s reputation and there’s really no way for the brand to protect itself properly. I see it all the time.

* I don’t see any reason why they should not be present on social media, even if I myself don’t use it.

* Yes. It’s a good way to advertise.

* People use nowadays more social media to get information than for example newspapers. Customers want to know the brand well and to be the part of it
Yes, I don’t see why they shouldn’t be.

I really don’t care cause I don’t buy products because of their brand.

Yes, most of the people nowadays spend a lot of time on social media on their phone or laptop. The luxury brands should or have to be active on social media to reach more people. Marketing on the television or next to the road is not enough as we don’t look outside anymore during traveling and when the tv is on most of the time we are also busy on our phone.

Present yes. Active not too much. Hate overkill.

Yes. Why not? Should fruit seller be present and active at the market?