FASHION PUBLIC RELATIONS: A TRANSPARENT STORY

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# Table of Contents

Executive Summary 6  

1. Introduction 7  
1.1 Rationale 7  
1.2 Broader relevance 7  
1.3 Aim of this report 8  
1.4 Product 8  
1.5 Main research question and sub-questions 8  
1.6 Structure 9  
1.7 Methodology 9  

2. PR and Fashion PR 10  
2.1 Public Relations 10  
2.2 Fashion public relations 14  

3. Postmodern (fashion) public relations 16  
3.1 Web 2.0 and postmodern (fashion) PR 17  
3.2 Postmodern public relation characteristics 18  
3.2.1 Giving up control 18  
3.2.2 Transparency 20  
3.3.3 Blurring lines 21  
3.3.4 Content is king 22  
3.3.5 Current topics 23  

4. Fashion public relation expressions 25  
4.1 Public relation campaign requirements 25  
4.2 Format analytic model 26  
4.3 Analysis 27  
4.3.1 Fast fashion brands 28  
4.3.2 Middle segment fashion brands 29  
4.3.3 High fashion brands 30  
4.3.4 Couture fashion brands 31  
4.3.5 Sportswear fashion brands 32  
4.4 Results 33  

5. Conclusion 35  

Bibliography 38
Executive Summary

Public relations can contribute to a fashion brand’s success by building and maintaining a positive social, business and political image for its publics (Weiner, 2006, p.8). Studies show that a favourable perception by a customer benefits and lifts an organization’s strategy and market position. It is that image that has most likely been generated by its Public Relations department. But how is this image is sculpted and how does it reach an organization’s publics?

Throughout the years a lot has changed when it comes to answering that question. Public relations once started of as a communication method used to seduce and manipulate consumers, perhaps better known as propaganda. However, the industry managed to move on from those extremes and develop itself into a useful and respected communication industry. But it seems that once again this industry is transforming and this time there is an impact so big that some professionals say that ‘nothing will ever be the same’ (McNamara, 2011): The Internet.

Chapter one is the introduction of this research report. It will discuss the rationale, the broader relevance and the aim. It will give an overview of the main and sub questions, introduce the product and map out the structure and methodology. Moving on to chapter two, where the focus will be on explaining the definition of public relations and fashion public relations and examining its practices. It will be concluded if there is a distinct difference between the two segments of the industry or whether they show so many similarities that studies, results and theories for one can be applied to the other. Chapter three focuses on the transformation of (fashion) public relations caused by the Internet and will create a set of characteristics connected to the changes of the industry. These pillars of change combined form a analytical model that, after explaining each of them independently, will be used in chapter four to analyse fashion public relations expressions in order to see whether they embrace the transformation of the industry or not. Lastly, in chapter five, a conclusion is drawn from the research and advice for future research is given.
1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale
The world of communication has changed. The biggest disruption of the decade within communication practices might be that of the Internet and social media websites and their applications (Anderson & Rainne, 2014). There are countless studies that show that the Internet has had tremendous effects on nearly all communication industries. Although many scientists confirm the importance of embracing the changes that have been brought about by the online era, there is currently little to no evidence that the fashion public relations industry, hereafter also referred to as fashion PR, does so. Moreover, not only is it unclear what these changes entail, it is also uncertain if the fashion PR industry embraces them and or actively incorporates these changes into their practices.

With numerous studies on the impact of the Internet in communication practices, it would be expected to find a plethora of research on the way (fashion) PR has dealt with these changes and how this industry is transformed by it. However, it turns out that the practices of this industry have remained relatively opaque (Grunig, 2011), even with the advent of the Internet and the inherent transparency it brings with it.

The general absence of scientific research about fashion public relations has led to a further exploration into the topic. Although various websites exist with generic information about the fashion public relations industry, statements and information too often get backed up by a professional’s ‘know-how’ rather than by scientific facts, arguments or theories. The fashion PR industry does not seem to base its practices on any theoretical models or scientifically proven strategies, and is described as more reactive than theoretical by nature (Bredemeijer, 2010; Weijland, 2014). It is important to bridge this gap in knowledge by researching how fashion PR practices have been impacted by the Internet, and consequently, how it has responded to it.

1.2 Broader relevance
Not only is it necessary to embed this research within current scientific knowledge, it is also important to consider the broader relevance and implications this research might have. Researching the inevitable transformation of the PR industry by the Internet might also bring about a positive change in their practices in turn. The consumer expectations are ever changing, due to political or environmental change for example. However, as mentioned, there is another catalyst that had and still has immense impact on consumer expectations, communication methods and all types of industries: the Internet. New media channels and
technical innovation affected the field that public relations is operating in (S. Collister, 2017; INC, 2016). Consumers seem to have become more aware, vocal and demanding when it comes to brands (Trendwatching). It is relevant to examine to what degree (fashion) brands respond to these changes.

The insights this research might garner, can add value to the way that fashion PR sees the Internet and how it can use this to its advantage. Examining the way the industry currently acknowledges and incorporates the Internet into their practices can be a catalyst for improving the effectiveness of their messaging in general. In parallel, it will examine if public relations and fashion public relations share enough similarities to apply the analytical model in other industries that use public relations. If so, it would broaden the scope and applicability of this analytical model as a tool for public relations in all industries.

1.3 Aim of this report
The main aim of this research is to examine and determine if fashion brands incorporate communication characteristics brought about by the Internet into their public relation campaigns. Although there are many researchers that argue the importance of embracing these changes as they are considered to be positive, it is still uncertain if the fashion industry actually does so. To gain more insight into this uncertainty, an analytical model will be created on the basis of literature research. This analytical model will be comprised of the most prominent changes and effects the Internet inherently has or can have on PR practices. By elucidating these aspects, their relative impact and comparing these to current and existing campaigns, it can be determined to what degree fashion PR campaigns are currently already harnessing these changes. This will then reveal whether they are actively embracing these aspects or expose improvements. These results will be compiled into an advice that can be useful for anyone practicing the art of PR.

1.4 Product
The product will be an advice magazine based on the findings of this report targeting fashion PR professionals.

1.5 Main research question and sub-questions
The main research question of this report is:

- ‘To what degree do fashion brands incorporate postmodern PR characteristics into their PR messages?’

The research questions are:

- What is PR and what is Fashion PR?’
- What are the effects of Web 2.0 on Public Relations?
What are the post-modern characteristics of PR?
Which characteristics of post-modern public relations do fashion brands incorporate into their public relation messages?

1.6 Structure
The first part of this paper is literature-based research that will help to understand fashion public relations. Because this research report is on public relations, it is important to get a better understanding of public relations and fashion public relations. Therefore chapter two will focus on the characteristics and practices of the industry, by looking at definitions. Once that is clear, chapter three highlights the influence of the Internet and Web 2.0 on (fashion) public relations. In this chapter the new term postmodern public relations will be explained and will look beyond the classic practices of public relations to help understand the development of the industry and what these changes mean for the field.

These changes are seen as specific characteristics relating to postmodern PR and are categorized as inherent or optional characteristics. When this inventory of characteristics has been done, it will become possible to set up an analytical framework. Chapter four uses these characteristics as an analytical model to determine to what degree fashion PR campaigns are currently embracing postmodern public relations. Detailed analyses can be found in the appendix. However, the results are shown and discussed in the last sub chapter of chapter four. Lastly, chapter five will contain the conclusion of this report and an elaboration on research limitations and future research is provided.

1.7 Methodology
To be able to answer the research questions, it is important to embed this in scientific research. Other sources such as online articles and interviews of PR professionals will also be utilized. Critic and academic books, journals and articles construct the base of the qualitative research on communication models and characteristics that are believed to have a positive influence on Public Relation campaigns. Using that current body of scientific knowledge will help answer the first two sub questions; ‘What is PR and what is Fashion PR?’ and ‘What are the effects of Web 2.0 on Public Relations’? The outcome of this research is then used to create an analytical model and will be instrumental in answering the question ‘which characteristics of post-modern public relation do fashion brands incorporate into their public relation messages? This model will be applied to several different messages of different brands to broaden the scope and test the applicability of the model. The outcome of that exercise will yield empirical data that will help to answer the main research question ‘To what degree do fashion brands incorporate post-modern PR characteristics into their PR messages?'
2. PR and Fashion PR
To be able to answer to what degree fashion brands incorporate postmodern PR characteristics into their PR messages, it is important to define the premises that this answer will rest upon. That is why this chapter will focus on answering the sub question ‘what is public relations?’ in 2.1 and ‘what is fashion public relations?’ in 2.2 and looks at the different definitions and characteristics of (fashion) PR that can be found in scientific literature. A comparison will be drawn between the two when this chapter is at its close.

2.1 Public Relations
There are numerous definitions about the meaning and practices of public relations. Like with many other concepts in communication sciences, there is not one single definition that all researchers, practitioners or scholars agree upon (Akyürek & Solmaz, 2003). Due to the aim and scope of this paper, the most important and significant of these definitions will be mapped out to create a general understanding of the industry. The selected definitions come from other research that have endeavoured to determine the definition of PR, from other PR professionals or institutions, or their common use in the scientific body of PR can simply not be ignored. Afterwards, the characteristics of classic public relations will be given shape.

Ries and Ries (2006) argue that public relations has become the most effective way to build a powerful brand. They say that a strong global brand is “the building of a reputation that potentially millions of people know, to create name recognition, but at the heart of it all is building trust and a brand that consumers love.” Well-known brands that prove a good example of this statement are The Body Shop, PlayStation and Harry Potter, who spend very little on brand-name advertising, but they are brands that are loved by millions (Lautenslager, 2017; Ries & Ries, 2006).

2.1.1 The definition (or meaning) of PR
As briefly mentioned in the introduction, scientists, professionals and scholars do not seem to agree upon one single definition that describes the meaning and practices of public relations. This is perhaps a result of the broad variations in practices throughout various PR industries (Akyürek & Solmaz, 2003). Bredemeier (2010) uncovered that it is not just a wide range of different industries that apply PR practices, it is also important to understand that the industry seemed to be more characterized by what it does rather then what it is. There have been countless academic papers trying to determine a catch-all definition to capture all what the industry is and does. However, the aim of the current chapter is to get a better of sense of
what traditional PR entails. With this aim, it is sufficient to look at only the most important working definitions currently in use and acknowledged overall.

In the seventies, Rex Harlow analyzed 472 different PR definitions to construct a general one. His study was the most comprehensive to date on that subject. “Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics; it involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communications techniques as its principal tools.” (Harlow, 1976).

Other frequently used or acknowledged definitions of PR are for example: “PR is an outbound marketing approach” (Mintz, 2016), or: “At its core, public relations is about influencing, engaging and building a relationship with key stakeholders across a myriad of platforms in order to shape and frame the public perception of an organization.” (Public Relations Society of America, 2017). Another published definition comes from Unleash the Power of PR by Weiner: “Public relations contribute to organizational success by building and maintaining a positive, social, business and political environment.” (Weiner, 2006: p.8). Lastly, the following definition is used in several scientific articles: “Public relations is a management function that regulates communication between an organization and its publics, with a focus on developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships.” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000; Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). According to Newland, public relations is a communication tool that serves as a brand’s voice. Its basic purpose is to communicate between an organization and its audience by using intermediaries and to hopefully influence the public’s views with its message (2016).

These definitions provide an understanding of the industry that is relatively universally acknowledged. Looking at these various definitions, the following can be surmised; at the centre of each definition are the publics. They are what the industry and its results are focussed on. They often explain it as a management or marketing function that regulates communication between an organization and its publics and does so by influencing, engaging and building a relationship with key stakeholders. Using key elements of all these definitions, the following definition is assembled aligned with the aim of this report: ‘Public relations is a management tool that regulates communications between an organization and its publics and does so by influencing, engaging and building a relationship with key stakeholders (journalists, editors, and so on). It involves creating a positive image in the mind
of the consumer and to develop and maintain beneficial relationships and to try to create and control a positive view of the publics on the organization’.

To accomplish this, PR has to commit to certain practices. These are mapped out in the following subchapter.

### 2.1.2 Defining characteristics and practices of PR

There can be a wide variety of reasons for a brand to make use of public relations. What that communication revolves around can be anything, ranging from the release of a new product to damage control after a public misstep of the brand. There are two possible ways for a brand to go about their PR activities. It can be done through an in-house PR team, which could consist of as many as just one person, or it gets outsourced to a PR agency (Musto, 2013). Regardless of this choice they have the same goal, which is in a generalised sense to communicate with its audiences (Bredemeijer, 2010).

To show distinction between different communication fields, figure 1 (Online Marketing Institute) explains the difference between paid, owned and earned media. Advertisement and marketing are seen as paid media. Owned media can be anything such as a brand’s webshop, magazine or website owned by the brand. Public relations falls under the category of earned media (Nelissen, 2015). In classic PR, this means relying on for instance a journalist, editor or other third party for the spread of its message (Nelissen, 2015).

![Figure 1 explaining the difference between paid, owned and earned media](Online Marketing Institute)
Following from that, a first characteristic of traditional PR is that it is free of costs, distinguishing itself from for instance advertisements or marketing (Bredemeijer, 2010). To place this into context; the labour of a public relations professional is not free nor has to be the product that is promoted, but how the message is spread is free of costs (Newlands, 2014). For example: a brand can buy advertisement space in a magazine to showcase a new product (advertisement), but that product could also get featured in the same magazine in an editorial spread (PR).

Secondly, traditional PR is recognized by the fact that its message is spread by a third party. In contrast, both advertising and marketing try to directly convince its consumers of its message. When it comes to branding, it is about the consumer understanding the message on the level the brand intended. Public relations on the other hand, depends on a third party (editor, journalist, news broadcaster) to help them get their message across. This means traditional PR is strictly separated from marketing and advertisement, as those industries pay for their campaigns and therefore also controls the publication itself (Crenshaw, 2013).

Thirdly, traditional PR practices are characterised by their non-transparent nature (Grunig, 2009). This means that PR practitioners mainly implement one-way communication methods and do not encourage – or even allow – dialogue between a brand and it publics (Grunig, 2006; Grunig, 2009). They use methods like press releases or product placement to distribute organisational information. This disables direct communication from an audience perspective, and furthermore, brands do not participate in active dialogue (Grunig, 2006). These methods are in line with the first three communication models that Grunig has designed to divide PR practices (1990). The first being the press agent model, second the public information model, and third the two-way asymmetrical model. Despite the specific differences between these three models, it is sufficient to mention here that they all try to persuade its publics of its message without creating dialogue\(^1\).

Moreover, traditional PR is characterised by trying to control the view of the public by using persuasion and manipulation tools to influence the public opinion, which also are found in the first three communication methods of Grunig mentioned above (1990). They neglect the views and wishes of their publics and are mainly focussed on promoting products, controlling messages, opinions and views (Grunig, 2009; Weijland, 2014). Many organisations believe that it is more profitable for a brand to persuade its publics with the intent to control their behaviour (Grunig, 2009).

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\(^1\) Further explanation on Grunig’s communication models can be found on p.86-87 of the process book
Lastly, the content of traditional PR messages generally focus on either products or pseudo-events. It focuses on for instance their products or the positive endorsement of it (Newlands, 2006). This can be obtained through anything ranging from a free feature in magazines, newspapers, radio, television or other media channels (Theaker, 2012). PR realises those goals through sending out press releases to third parties, organising press days or by creating pitches (Weijland, 2014; Moore, 2014).

In sum, the public relations industry is placed under the same marketing umbrella, neighbouring with branding, advertisements, and promotional marketing. However, although under the same umbrella, the industries are clearly separated due to their nature, being either earned, owned or paid media. PR is seen as earned media, and is characterised by its free dissemination, which is dependent on a third party. It is also recognized by its non-transparent nature because of its use of one-sided communication models to persuade audiences. Furthermore, it tries to control its message and its reception by persuasion and manipulation tactics and its message is often mainly focussed on either products or pseudo-events.

2.2 Fashion public relations
Now that the definition and characteristics of traditional public relations have been established in general, it becomes possible to zoom in further on fashion public relations in particular. The following subchapter will provide a better understanding of the fashion PR industry, and it will outline the differences between fashion and traditional public relations. This will make clear if traditional PR as described above also holds true for fashion PR, or if this is a distinct industry that has its own set of rules.

2.2.1 The definition (or meaning) of fashion PR
Exploratory research highlights that the fashion PR industry suffers from similar disagreements when it comes to defining and describing its practices. Weijland, an alumnus from the Amsterdam Fashion Institute, came to this same conclusion when writing his paper on the topic of Fashion Public Relations in May 2014. After he held various interviews and conducted in-depth research, he was able to formulate a definition for fashion public relations. Due to the aim and scope of this report, his definition will be used as a base because he constructed his definition utilizing the scientific knowledge available on fashion PR. Weijland (2014) has formulated the following definition: “Fashion PR is what you do, what you say and what people say about you (image) in a strategic manner. It aims to influence influencers
to obtain free press and word of mouth promotion. It builds relationships with companies and consumers."

Key elements in this definition can also be found in the definition of traditional PR, in the sense that both have the same basic purpose to communicate and to create and maintain a relationship with its audience. Both definitions show that the main focus is on describing PR as a communication tool to manage the view of its publics. Furthermore, it speaks about being free press that is obtained through a third party, like traditional PR practices. As the definitions of both industries show that they are built on the same fundamental principles, the following definition is based on that of Weijland’s, but extended by further literary research outside of the fashion PR perimeters:\(^2\): ‘*Fashion PR is what a brand does, represents, says and what people say about it (brand image), in a strategic manner. It is a management and or marketing tool that aims to influence influencers and or its audiences. It enables a brand to interact with its publics and aims to obtain free press and promotion through a third party. It builds relationships with consumers and companies and involves creating a positive image in the mind of the consumer and to develop and maintain a beneficial relationship. It is the art of building and maintaining a strong connection between a brand and its audiences. It gives a brand its voice.*’ Fashion PR practices are mapped out in the following subchapter and compared to classic PR practices.

### 2.2.2 Defining characteristics and practices of fashion PR

Besides the similarities found in the definitions, more parallels can be drawn. As with traditional PR, fashion PR has the possibility to work with either an in-house team or with an agency (Weijland, 2014). Similar to traditional PR, it is considered earned media and therefore relies on obtaining free press through a third party (Weijland, 2014; Moore, 2012). It also does not combine other communication fields such as marketing or advertisements into their practices, because in that case it would no longer be seen as PR (Musto, 2013). Similar to traditional PR, Weijland (2014) also establishes fashion PR to be non-transparent. By conducting interviews with fashion PR professionals, it became clear that this industry mainly makes use of the first two one-sided models of communication that Grunig identified (Weijland, 2014). Fashion public relations also utilizes these communication models to exert control over its message and its reception by mainly focusing on persuasion and manipulation tactics (Bredemeijer, 2010). Lastly, the content of a fashion PR message can range from a product, promoting a new fashion line or information about the brand (Bredemeijer, 2010).

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\(^2\) Also taking into account that Weijland’s report was focused specifically on emerging designers.
In sum, despite specific differences such as the specific product (fashion-related or not), it seems that both industries share enough elements of its definition and practices. This means that for the scope of this report, the two are similar enough to be considered the same industry and used interchangeably. This would mean that theories of both fashion and traditional PR are applicable to both. Therefore, literature that is focussing on general PR will also be used as it translates to fashion public relations. Moreover, this means that the analytical model that is designed for fashion public relations in chapter 3 can also be used by other industries that make use of public relations.

3. Postmodern (fashion) public relations
In the previous chapter, the definitions and characteristics of public relations and the niche industry within PR, fashion public relations, have been examined. This showed a clear separation between different communication practices (PR, advertisement, branding and marketing), the lack of transparency within the field, the focus of the content being on the product, its target being journalists and editors and distinct ways of controlling the messages while practising PR. However, PR is redefining its shape due to the rise of the Internet. This chapter will examine this transformative quality and the impact the Internet has or can have on PR practices. Although it might be somewhat of an exaggerated claim that the Internet changes everything, when it comes to PR, it is an unavoidable conclusion that nothing will ever be the same again (Phillips & Young, 2009, p.1). By examining the impact of the Internet on PR practices, an inventory of changes within the industry can be made. These changes can be defined and described as characteristics of this new age PR, further up ahead coined as postmodern public relations.

The impact and consequences of the Internet will be discussed in 3.1. After which it becomes possible to zoom in on the postmodern characteristics brought about by this impact in 3.2. There the focus will lie on 5 significant characteristics: 3.2.1 Giving up control, 3.2.2 Transparency, 3.2.2 Blurring lines, 3.2.4 Content is king and, 3.2.5 Current content. These elements combined form an analytical model that will be used to analyse fashion PR campaigns in chapter four. It is possible that there are others, less distinct characteristics that could be linked to the uprise of the Internet, however due to the scope of this paper the focus will on these five.
3.1 Web 2.0 and postmodern (fashion) PR

Many researches agree that the rise of Web 2.0\(^3\) is fundamentally reshaping the public sphere and public communication practices in journalism, advertising, marketing and public relations (e.g. Dahlgren, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Meyer, 2004; Pavlik, 2008; Ruskoff, 2003). Although there are perhaps other smaller influences that play a role in the changes of PR, the focus will be the influence of the Internet, simply because of its massive and measurable impact on PR and its practices.

‘The web (2.0) has changed everything’ is a statement that has been claimed by many researchers over the years, for instance by Phillips and Young (2009) in their book regarding online public relations, or in studies by Solis and Breakenridge (2009). Connected to the rise of the Internet, is the rise in usage of social media and social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. In January 2014, research showed that seventy-four per cent of online adults now uses social networking websites (PEW Centre, 2014). In 2016, ninety-seven per cent of adults aged between sixteen and sixty-four say they have visited or used a social network within the last month (Mansfield, 2016).

Those changes have had tremendous influence on how people, consumers and organizations communicate and thus have had major influence on communication practices. Web 2.0 has created an intensification of global connection and the globally connected working field. (MacNamara, 2010; Grunig, 2011).

These changes have a profound effect on the landscape of (fashion) public relations created by web 2.0. The new form of PR – post web 2.0 – will be called postmodern public relations or postmodern fashion public relations. Postmodernism is a late twentieth century style that is known to be characterized by people becoming more self-conscious and moving away from ‘big truths’ like the church (Duignan, 2017). People started to form their own opinions and had a greater need for individualism. Something similar has happened due to the rise of the Internet: consumers are no longer surrendered to ‘the laws’ of brands (Trendwatching, 2016; Simmons, 2008). For a long time organizations were in control when it came to what the consumer knew about their products, production methods and so forth (Grunig, 2006). However, social media websites have created a shift in power from organization to publics, who may not have a recognized role or defined interest in a brand (Simmons, 2008). Due to similarities in how consumers are now moving away from the big truths, are becoming more individualistic and or self-conscious and are getting more control

\(^3\) Web 2.0 suggests a new version of the World Wide Web. However, it does not refer to an update to any technical specification, but rather to cumulative changes in the way Web pages are made and used’ (O’Reilly, Battelle, 2009). Explanation and history concerning Web 2.0 can be found in the process book on page 88-90.
just as with the original postmodernism movement, this new form of PR will therefore be called postmodern public relations.

### 3.2 Postmodern public relation characteristics

Changes brought about by the Internet are seen as the characteristics of postmodern PR and will be divided by inherent characteristics and optional characteristics. Of the five characteristics, the first two, giving up control and transparency are inherently connected to postmodern PR. Due to the Internet, they are inherently present in online messages. However, although they are inherent, brands still have a choice to make these characteristics work in their advantage. This will be further explained at each characteristic. The last three, blurring lines, content is king and current content are optional. This means that although the Internet changed the field, practitioners are not forced to incorporate these characteristics.

#### 3.2.1 Giving up control

The first inherent characteristic of postmodern PR is giving up control. Before the existence of the online world, organizations could more or less choose whether they wanted to give up control or not. Losing control in this sense means publishing a message on a medium that is open for publics to respond and share. MacNamara says that due to a more connected working field, organizations are being forced to let go of control over their PR messages (2010). However, what is perhaps even more important is that the uprise of the Internet shed light on the false beliefs concerning control that many public relations practitioners had in the first place. Grunig (2011) highlights this by saying that the revolution of digital media within the practices of public relations are actually less than many believe. This is due to the fact that many public relations practitioners live under the false pretense that they can: “(1) Choose their publics, (2) Control the messages received by their publics, (3) Control the cognitive interpretations publics form about organisations and, (4) Can persuade publics to change their attitudes and behaviors” (Grunig, 2011: p.5). He argues that many theories show that publics create themselves and that they control the message to which they are exposed.

Although this indicates that PR practitioners never had full control over the flow of information they send out to begin with, it contributes to the belief that with the rise of Web 2.0 the little control they once had is diminishing. A characteristic of postmodern PR is therefore ‘giving up control’ [of the message after it gets sent out]: members of publics can talk freely to each other about products and organisations, and information is widely available to everyone with little cost and effort (Grunig, 2006; Grunig, 2009).

In figure 2 (Heffernan, 2017) the amount of control versus the reach of the message is visualized. If a company is willing to give up control (or the false assumption of it) over their
Public relation campaigns, the model shows that the reach of that campaign stretches way further than when for instance the content is bought (and thus controlled). However, there is still a high amount of resistance with PR practitioners when it comes to giving up that control and these practitioners doggedly copy the way they use traditional media (papers, magazines and so on) to new media (blogs, websites, social media and so on) (Grunig, 2009). With the on-going developments and lack of control in the future, it will be difficult for practitioners not to start to embrace these changes (Grunig, 2009; Sedeke, 2011). The only way in which public relations can manage cognitive representations is by actively participating.

It is this participation that is the optional and thus strategic side to this inherent characteristic. The upside is that when a brand embraces this characteristic it can work in their benefit. If a brand has a well-formulated PR message, they are strategically utilizing this inherent characteristic, and use the voice of the public to spread their message even further. If publics are excited, inspired, and intrigued by a message, the chances of that message receiving more likes, having more shares, becoming viral⁴ are greater.

Figure 2 Control versus reach (Heffernan, 2017)

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⁴ The definition of going viral is; “an image, video or link that spreads rapidly trough a population by being highly frequently shared with a number of individuals” (Urban Dictionary, 2017) or “a video, image, story, and so on to spread quickly and widely among internet users via social networking sites, e-mail” (Collins Dictionary, 2017)
3.2.2 Transparency

Transparency is the second inherent characteristic of postmodern public relations. With 100 million bloggers, and millions of consumers on social media, consumers are no longer the just the receiving end, the audience, but rather one of many voices. (Engeseth, 2006). Web 2.0 forces a higher level of transparency from brands and this transparency – forcibly – causes practitioners to be more ethical and authentic because publics are watching how organizations go about their business. In turn, being more transparent, ethical and authentic shows to attract more consumers (Tesseras, 2015).

The public is no longer constrained by the information that organisations choose to distribute and it is reshaping the way in which brands, organisations and even governments are sharing information, which is creating a more transparent and ethical arena (Grunig, 2009). Millions of sources are now available to any member of the public, but also to journalists. Moreover, these sources can be consulted at any time from any location. According to MHP communications, being transparent is the most important factor when communicating with audiences. They found that eighty-five per cent of global consumers see transparency and honesty as a crucial factor when a brand communicates its message (2017). Social media is at the core of this increased transparency in public relations.

Brands are being held accountable for their actions now more than ever. An example of this was during the American Airline incident in 2017, when a man was violently forced to give up his seat (Petroff, 2017). When refusing to give his seat up, the Airline security forced him off the plane by which he ended up in hospital. Social media shared clips of the incident, and tens of thousands of people were outraged by what happened. Perhaps more importantly was the response of American Airlines after the incident: they suffered from a severe backlash because they did not engage in a dialogue with the publics. As publics are increasingly influential when it comes to shaping an organization’s reputation, it is important that organizations embrace this inherent characteristic.

Grunig uses transparency as a characteristic in his two-way symmetrical communication model, to which he also refers as the ‘Utopian model’ (2011). In his papers he shows that the two-way symmetrical communication model would be the ideal when it comes to practicing PR. He says; “Public relations should always involve two-way symmetrical communication between an organization and its public. It requires listening to the constituencies on which an organization depends as well as analyzing and understanding the attitudes and behaviors of those audiences. Only then can an organization undertake an effective public relations campaign” (Inc. PR, 2016; p.1). Although on paper the fourth model is seen as the ideal, not many organizations currently (solely) apply the two-way
communication model yet. However, many organisations are still hesitant because they believe that it is more profitable for a brand to persuade its publics rather than to have a dialogue with them (Grunig, 2009). This hesitance shows directly in the numbers; in the USA for instance only fifteen per cent of the PR firms actively uses the fourth communication model (PWC Center, 2016).

Organisations have to allow for dialogue between them and their audience. However, with a postmodern PR approach, organisations should take it a step further: they should not only allow for dialogue but they should actively participate. Replying to questions in the comment section of a post for instance or when a hot-button situation arises, participate in conversations rather than creating a brand-versus-consumer attitude (Grunig, 2011).

3.3.3 Blurring lines
The third postmodern PR characteristic is optional and is named blurring lines. Previous to the existence of the Internet all communication industries were linear industries that are placed under the same umbrella. However, since the rise of the Internet and social media, it seems the lines between communication professions have gotten blurrier but the significance of combining them greater. As explained in chapter two, public relations was all about a free publication (earned), publicised by anyone but the organization itself to promote a new product, an event or news concerning the organization. This could be in newspapers, magazines or being mentioned on a television show.

Public relations is blending more and more with the fields of marketing, branding and advertisement (Garcia, 2012). The POE-model explains (figure 3, Content Marketing Institute, 2016) that although there is still a difference between earned media (PR), paid media (advertisement, marketing) and owned media, they now are no longer linear but overlap each other. Due to the Internet, owned media can now be a social media website, such as Twitter, Instagram or Facebook, which, in contrast to the past is a free medium. A postmodern public relations feature can be an advertisement that is posted on social media, meaning the advertisement is indeed still paid for. However, the posting on social media is free. Moreover, this means that the publics can now spread this message rather than a journalist that chooses whether the product or campaign will or will not be published.
Due to these blurring lines, brands replace old school ‘push marketing’ more and more by ‘pull marketing’ (Robertson, 2017). This is an important development because pull advertisements are being connected to create brand loyalty and customer control, whereas push advertisement is more concerned with short-term sales and results (Robertson, 2017). This shows a shift in the mentality of organizations towards consumers, brand connection and brand loyalty. ‘Good public relations is becoming as important as the brand itself’ is a statement from the book The fall of advertising and the rise of PR (Ries & Ries, 2002). This statement confirms that the one is no longer more or less important then the other. ‘PR, branding or advertisement by themselves are no longer able to produce a brands’ marketing needs’, says Engeseth (2006). However, Engeseth also says it is not clever to amputate one of them, one should instead get it to work alongside with the other. This is a significant change in combining the different fields rather then having them separated.

3.3.4 Content is king

The fourth postmodern PR characteristic is optional and is called content is king. The phrase ‘Content is King’, was coined by Bill Gates back in 1996 and is now, twenty years later, once again of great importance (Engeseth, 2006, Torossian, 2016). When social media started to become more prevalent, consumers became savvier to marketing of all kinds (Torossian, 2016). As sites filled up with paid advertising, people began to ignore ads as they have in the
past with paid advertising. A short solution was targeting ads by a person’s browser history, but this practice has become more transparent to customers as well. This has started the shift from product focus to content in PR messages (Torossian, 2016). Rather then with traditional PR practices, this postmodern PR characteristic no longer has the product as main focus, currently all eyes are on the story.

Firstly, this characteristic concerns itself what message its campaign carries and secondly, if its publics can identify with this message. It seems that the content of a PR message is no longer just focusing on journalists or editors that choose a product to feature (Asskenazi, 2014; Torossian, 2016). With social media, PR is focusing on the public to be their journalist and to create a connection with them. For these postmodern consumers it is important that they can identify themselves with the story and they look for messages that have more than the direct purpose of ‘selling products’ (Simmons, 2008). Moreover, it seems that now more than ever; publics look for brands and stories that create some sort of value and authenticity rather than as said just trying to sell them something (Labarre, 2017). For instance; consumers go through their Facebook feed and see how their local supermarket looks after less fortunes by giving them free meals. This most probably results in feeling a positive connection, that leads to choosing that supermarket over another one. The content, in this case a brand story and PR stunt, added value for this consumer and will create a brand connection and more brand loyalty (Trendwatching, 2016; Torossian, 2016).

3.3.5 Current topics
The fifth optional characteristic revolves around the connection to current events. Due to the rise of the Internet, current content has become of greater importance than it was before. With consumers being connected 24/7, it is important that the message of a PR expression is current. Dan Neely, CEO of Networked Insights recently said that business on a global scale wasted $347 billion on marketing campaigns that were unsuccessful because of their content not being interesting to its targeted audience (2017). He says this has to do with the fact that now more then ever brands and agencies should focus on becoming and more importantly staying relevant, which in this case means staying current, to their customers. If a brand is unable to connect with its audiences on a level that is relevant to them, they will move on and find a brand that does fulfil that requirement.

Lautenslager is an award-winning marketing and PR consultant and he says; “Good public relations is the telling of a good story. The better the story, the better the acceptance by the public and the better the public relations” (2017). The postmodern consumer wants to be able to identify with brands (Torossian, 2016). When the content connects to what consumers
are looking for, the Internet works as a tool that enables direct, sometimes real-time individualized interaction with postmodern consumers (Simmons, 2008). It builds consumer trust if a brand embraces hot-button issues or immerses humorous topics into their PR message, which can also contribute to a brand its authenticity (Doupnik, 2017).

In sum, with conversations continuously taking place all over the world, it is important that organisations start using public relations as a way to join these conversations (Grunig, 2009). This means brands must start to see public relations as more about relinquishing control; it is about openness, trust and authenticity (Merholz, 2005). This connects seemingly to Grunig’s Utopian or two-way symmetrical communication model. This asks brands to not only be more transparent but to actively join and promote conversations with its publics (2009). As Simmons describes in his paper (2008), it is the postmodern consumer that seek out both individualistic but also communal brand experiences. The empowered digital consumer is moving away from ‘the big truths’ told by brands. They are no longer led by one supreme power that tells them what they should believe or buy and the new form of PR, postmodern public relations, plays in on these developments. This power shift has resulted in a change of focus when it comes to the content of PR campaigns. The target group has moved from PR professionals to the actual audiences, with them no longer being on the receiving end but often the ones that share, like or (re)post a campaign. Moreover, it is important for the postmodern consumer that they can relate to the content and therefore brands incorporate for instance political, environmental or humorous messages into their campaigns, rather then just pushing a product. Besides that, it is important that the content of postmodern PR campaigns is current, as the Internet has enabled the world to be connected twenty-four seven. All of this happens while the boundaries of what is PR have become vague and combining communication sciences such as PR, advertisement, marketing and branding has become of greater importance. This is the result of social media changing the perimeters of owned media, now that this can also be a free medium it can be seen as PR however, the content can still be part of paid media like an marketing campaign.

This chapter has looked at various characteristics that have changed the public relations sphere. The changes are seemingly connected to the rise of the Internet and are in a way inevitable, however a brand can choose to embrace these changers rather than trying to keep things as they were. These five postmodern characteristics together form an analytical model. Each characteristic on its own contributes an independent value to a postmodern public relation campaign, and will be used to analyze PR messages in the next chapter.
4. Fashion public relation expressions
The previous chapter looked at the transformation of the field of public relations influenced by the rise of the Internet. It became clear that public relations is indeed shedding its old shape in theory. This chapter will use the postmodern characteristics as an analytical tool to examine if current fashion public relation campaigns apply the postmodern theory in reality. The outcome will establish to what degree the PR expressions incorporate postmodern PR techniques into their practices.

Firstly, the requirements for choosing the public relation expressions are listed in 4.1. The way the characteristics will be used within the model is explained after in 4.2. After which, in 4.3, a total of ten fashion PR expressions will be analysed two of which belong to a specific segment: fast-fasion brands, middle segment fashion brands, middle segment fashion brands, high fashion brands, couture fashion brands and sportswear-fashion brands. The results of the analyses will be discussed in 4.4.

4.1 Public relation campaign requirements
To get an even broader understanding of fashion PR campaigns, the fashion brands have been separated into the following five segments: fast-fashion brands, middle segment fashion brands, middle segment fashion brands, high fashion brands, couture fashion brands and sportswear-fashion brands. In this way it is possible to analyse if one market uses postmodern PR more then the other. Due to the scope of this report per segment two brands have been selected. Before analysing the fashion public relation expression, the actual campaigns need to be selected. Samples for each segment have been selected on the following criteria:

1. Meets the requirement of the definition of public relations as given in chapter 2.2.1
2. The expression must be focused on fashion due to the aim of this research report.
3. To make sure the characteristic current topics can be tested, the campaigns will not be older then 24 months.
4. The campaigns will have an online element to it in order to analyse the online characteristics.
5. The chosen brands are well-established fashion brands as they have a bigger focus and budget for incorporating public relation practices in contrast to smaller or emerging fashion brands5.

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5 As Weijland found in his study emerging designers have difficulties finding funds to finance big PR campaigns or paying for the services of public relation agencies (2014).
4.2 Format analytic model

To ensure consistency in the use of the model and its characteristics, the following format will be applied to all samples. The specific characteristic is mentioned and followed with a yes, maybe or no answer. Below is an explanation on how each characteristic is tested.

In the previous chapter, there has been a division into inherent characteristics and optional characteristics. Firstly the two inherent characteristics will be highlighted, after which the focus will be on the three optional characteristics.

*Inherent Giving up control:* Consumers can talk about, post, share, re-tweet, review or blog without the consent of an organization as soon as a campaign is released. As previously discussed, this means that this aspect is inherently connected to postmodern PR. This characteristic is analysed by looking at how and if the campaign invites consumers to actively share, retweet or use a special hashtag created for a campaign, as this indicates a willingness from the brand to give up control. When these elements are there, the characteristic is present in the expression.

*Inherent Transparency:* Although the Internet has enabled more transparency, not yet all organizations embrace this new side of public relations. Transparency inadvertently comes about when an organization posts something on a social networking website. However, an organization can choose to embrace a transparent, two-way communicating model. Therefore, as part of this analyses it is important to see what the brand chooses to do with their comment section. If brands show an active and open communicative attitude towards its publics, it indicates they embrace this postmodern characteristic by applying the two-way communication model. If there is a comment section, and the brand actively replies and participates, the characteristic is present in the expression.

*Optional Blurring lines:* It is important to combine various communication sciences for this postmodern characteristic. Rather than being linear, studies show it could be beneficial when industries overlap one another. This happens when a campaign features an advertisement or marketing campaign on a free medium such as Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, which transforms a paid ad into a free PR campaign. When paid, owned and earned media are combined, the characteristic is present in the expression.

*Optional Content is king:* There has been a shift concerning the content of a PR message. Research shows that focussing the message on the consumer can create more brand loyalty. This characteristic will be analysed by looking at the goal of the PR campaign. If the

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8 It has become clear that although two of the characteristics are inherent, a brand can still *choose* to make these characteristics work to their benefit. As the answer to those characteristics is automatically yes, they will be further analysed to which extend they got implemented.
campaign centralises symbolic value, (such as a political message or humour) rather than focussing on merely the product, this characteristic is present in the expression.

**Optional Current topic:** The rise in global connection has led to people having continuous access to the web, newsfeeds and social messaging sites. Increasingly, this has the effect that consumers are a lot more up to date about what is going on, to a certain degree anywhere in the world at any time. It is therefore important that an organization utilizes current topicalities when creating and publishing a new PR campaign. If a campaign features a topic that is not older then twenty-four months, the characteristic is present in the expression.

### 4.3 Analysis

Looking at the results of the analyses of different fashion PR expressions, the results are scored based on how many postmodern characteristics were present in each messaging. Because five characteristics are present in the analytical model, the score can range between 0 (incorporating no elements at all and not embracing the inherent characteristics) to 5 (using all the characteristics actively). From this score, it becomes clear to what degree the brand incorporates them: ranging from very low (0/5), low (1/5), middle (2-3/5), high (4/5), to very high (5/5). Figure 4.3 shows the table of results of the conducted research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Giving up control</th>
<th>Transparency</th>
<th>Blurring lines</th>
<th>Content is King</th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Inherent characteristics</th>
<th>Optional characteristics</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fast Fashion</td>
<td>Hennes and Mauritz</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Fashion</td>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle segment</td>
<td>Diesel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle segment</td>
<td>Calvin Klein</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Fashion</td>
<td>Gucci</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Fashion</td>
<td>Stella McCartney</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couture Fashion</td>
<td>Iris van Herpen</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couture Fashion</td>
<td>Viktor en Rolf</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>2/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport Fashion</td>
<td>Nike</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport Fashion</td>
<td>Adidas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0/7 / 5N / 3M</td>
<td>0/7 / 6N</td>
<td>0/7 / 3N</td>
<td>0/7 / 2N / 3M</td>
<td>0/7 / 3N / 3M</td>
<td>0 yes / 9 no / 3 maybe</td>
<td>16 yes / 8 no / 4 maybe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.3 Table of results*
4.3.1 Fast fashion brands

1. H&M - #LoveHappensHere

See image and campaign explanation in analyses in process book page 6-7.

**Inherent Giving up control:** Yes, H&M decided to use the official hashtag of London Pride 2017. With that they showed to be open and willing to participate in the viral campaign they are promoting.

**Inherent Transparency:** Yes, H&M shows responses in their comment section. This varies from answering questions to when a dress comes back in stock to answering questions about for instance their environmental footprint. This shows that H&M is actively embracing a transparent, two-way symmetrical approach.

**Optional Blurring lines:** Yes, it can be seen as part of a marketing campaign. It is postmodern PR because the marketing campaign is using a PR stunt to attract customers to their store, also by posting it on their Facebook page it becomes postmodern PR.

**Optional Content is king:** Yes, this is coherent with the postmodern characteristic content is king because it does not centralise a product but rather focuses on H&M showing support for the LGBT+ community.

**Optional Current:** Yes, the subject of their message is focussed on the London Gay Pride. Not only is it a current event, LGBT+ right have been a hot topic in 2016-2017 with different nations taking different political stances. When president of the United States D. Trump announced he was against gay marriage, a lot of brands have chosen to show support for the LGBT+ community.

2. Zara - What does fashion mean to you

See image and campaign explanation in process book page 8.

**Inherent Giving up control:** Yes, Zara initiates spread of this campaign with a specific hashtag created for this campaign.

**Inherent Transparency:** Yes, they clearly ask consumers to participate in a conversation with them in their comment section.

**Optional Blurring lines:** Yes, although this is an editorial, Zara clearly tries to accomplish more than only showing their latest summer line. By using this advertisement on their social media page as a conversation starter, they use it as a postmodern PR tactic.

**Optional Content is king:** Maybe, although the content is meant to start a conversation, the main focus of the content is still the promotion of their latest editorial.

**Optional Current:** No, nothing in this campaign is focussing on any current events or topics.
4.3.2 Middle segment fashion brands

3. Diesel - #makelovenotwalls


**Inherent Giving up control:** Yes, Diesel promotes its campaign by accompanying it with a specific hashtag, inviting people to share their campaign and spread their message.

**Inherent Transparency:** Yes, Diesel shows that it is embracing postmodern transparency. They are making a lot of effort; replying to posts in the comment section, not being backed down by sceptical comments, taking time to show appreciation for positive comments and answering questions of all sorts.

**Optional Blurring lines:** Yes, this advertisement campaign because the creation of the add has been paid for. This is a brand story and marketing campaign because the brand takes a political stance against the current president of the United States. However, it is also a PR campaign because the content is sent out as a message to focusing on the publics and its spread is via social media pages.

**Optional Content is king:** Yes, rather than seducing audiences into buying products, Diesel sees the importance of creating a connection. Publics want to hear a story they can identify themselves with. Diesel evaluated what is of importance to its consumers and created a message that tries to create a connection. It reached people on an emotional level rather than a consumption level.

**Optional Current:** Yes, this campaign is aimed to address the presidential election of the United States of America. One of the electoral campaign notes of the new elected president was that he would build a wall between America and Mexico in order to keep ‘unwanted immigrants’ out of the United States. This is a very current topic for many consumers around the world.

4. Calvin Klein - Calvin Klein or nothing at all

See image and campaign explanation in process book page 11.

**Inherent Giving up control:** No, Calvin Klein does not use specific hashtags or any other endorsements to promote the online presence of this campaign.

**Inherent Transparency:** No, they do not reply to any of the messages posted on their social media pages.

**Optional Blurring lines:** Yes, as part of their advertisement, Calvin Klein featured all the models in short clips telling a personal story about love or something they learned to love about themselves. This is an advertisement, but CK promoted the short films on Facebook
and Instagram.

**Optional Content is king:** Maybe, the main focus of this PR campaign is not solely on the product. Although it focuses on celebrating woman, the main campaign shows woman in their Calvin Klein underwear. However, the Instagram clips are not about the underwear at all and try to show the short stories of the woman as little documentaries.

**Optional Current:** Maybe, the main aim of the videos seems to be on celebrating woman, although feminism has existed since the sixties, women’s rights and feminism seem to have gained momentum again. With celebrities in these videos endorsing the movement, it seems to create a lot of attention around it the topic once again.

4.3.3 *High fashion brands*

5. **Gucci - Meme**

See image and campaign explanation in process book page 12.

**Inherent Giving up control:** Maybe, Gucci did mean for this campaign to go viral as an attempt to participate in the online arena. However, besides posting it on social media website they do not specifically imply that consumers should repost or share this campaign.

**Inherent Transparency:** No, Gucci did not take any specific attempt to reply or engage in dialogue.

**Optional Blurring lines:** Yes, the content of the post is paid for, as the designers are paid to create this certain content. Also Gucci released this as an advertisement. However, their choice to promote this through social media makes this a postmodern PR campaign.

**Optional Content is king:** Maybe, although there is a humorous approach to this meme campaign, it does focus on the product, the watch, and this campaign is created to get extra attention for its upcoming release.

**Optional Current:** Maybe, memes are a fairly current thing. However, the content is not necessarily current.

6. **Stella McCartney - Announcement of spring 2018 collection**


**Inherent Giving up control:** No, Stella McCartney shows no intention to promote this post with any hash tags or encouraging audiences to repost or retweet the post.

**Inherent Transparency:** No, there is no active implementation of two-way symmetrical communication methods.
Optional Blurring lines: No, this is nothing but a PR message on Instagram. It is not an advertisement, marketing approach or a brand story and it serves no other function but announcing a new collection.

Optional Content is king: No, the content is solely focussed on announcing a new collection. Although they use a pun connected to their imaging the message holds no other function then informing the publics of the new spring collection.

Optional Current: No, the post does not future any current events.

4.3.4 Couture fashion brands

7. Iris van Herpen - upcoming 10 year anniversary


Inherent Giving up control: No, this post from Iris van Herpen uses a couple of hashtags, however they are general hashtags and not specifically dedicated to her ten-year anniversary.

Inherent Transparency: No, on not one of the social media platforms did the brand reply to any of the comments, therefor disregarding interactive use of communication.

Optional Blurring lines: No, this post merely functions as a press release announcing the ten-year anniversary of the designer.

Optional Content is king: No, the content that is featured is not focussed on anything but the product. The model is a famous singer but she serves no other role then showcasing the outfit.

Optional Current: No, there is no current subject featured in this PR expression.

8. Viktor & Rolf - Action dolls

See image and campaign explanation in process book page 15.

Inherent Giving up control: No, the brand does not seem to have developed a special hashtag nor do they give clear implication that the readers and followers should spread this message. Although the dolls are ‘action dolls’ it does not seem to inspire the publics to any action or interactivity.

Inherent Transparency: No, the brand does not reply or interact with its publics.

Optional Blurring lines: No, this is a PR message informing consumers about the upcoming Fall 2017 collection.

Optional Content is king: Yes, although the content is also about their new collection the designers wanted to make a statement when they decided to use ‘dolls’ instead of models. Moreover, they amplify this by giving a clear description about what the dolls do and what message they embody. Therefor, this is a yes, although it does also has a level product
presence, their latest fashion line, Viktor and Rolf clearly wanted to vocalise a message by using these dolls.

Optional Current: Yes, the dolls focus on spreading a message that promotes a more conscious and awakened consumer. Being more conscious is something that has been developing for a while now, however, this is still found in many current developments.

4.3.5 Sportswear fashion brands

9. Nike - The ball should bounce the same for everyone
See image and campaign explanation in process book page 16.

Inherent Giving up control: No, although this characteristic is inherent Nike did not seem to make any effort in incorporating it into this campaign.

Inherent Transparency: No, Nike does not incorporate this characteristic at all it seems. This campaign suffered from a massive backlash. Nike created a campaign about social equality when underpaying their factory workers in Asia. In nearly every comment box there are a lot of negative comments. However, instead of creating a new post with an explanation or taking the time to reply to unhappy customers, Nike chose for radio silence, which in return infuriated audiences even more.

Optional Blurring lines: Yes, although the post is featured on Facebook and Instagram, the content is also seen in their advertisement video, campaigns, billboards and more.

Optional Content is king: Yes, the content of this post is focussing on a social equality matter and does not actively show or promote certain products.

Optional Current: Yes, Nike shows effort to portray interest in the well being of others with this campaign. They have a massive following and with this add try to spread to message of importance of equality.

10. Adidas - #Originalis never finished

Inherent Giving up control: Yes, Adidas created a special hashtag #Originalis showing incentive, they want people to actively share this message.

Inherent Transparency: Yes, they reply to many different types of messages. Whether it is answering questions about products or with humorous messages or emoji’s. Furthermore, Adidas shows even more activity when it comes to transparency as they host live-stream talks with their customers, answering questions and enabling direct dialogue.

Optional Blurring lines: Yes, this is a film as part of a marketing campaign, used as an
advertisement to tell their brand story but posted on their social media making it postmodern PR.

Optional Content is king: Yes, the film does not focus on the promotion of Adidas products but merely on spreading its message concerning the redevelopment of individualisation.

Optional Current: Maybe, although individualisation and originality is an important topic to the postmodern consumer, it not possible to pin individualisation and originality into a time frame.

4.4 Results
The analysis of ten different brands within five separate segments yields the following results:

Fast fashion segment
H&M scored 2 out of 2 inherent characteristics and 3 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 5 out of 5. This expression has a very high post-modernistic public relations approach. Zara scored 2 out of 2 inherent and 1 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 3 out of 5. This expression has a middle post-modernistic public relations approach. Bringing the average of the fast fashion segment to 4 out of 5. Therefore, this segment has a high post-modernistic public relations approach.

Middle fashion segment
Diesel scored 2 out of 2 inherent characteristics and 3 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 5 out of 5. This expression has a very high post-modernistic public relations approach. Calvin Klein scored 0 out of 2 inherent characteristics and 1 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 1 out of 5. This expression has a low post-modernistic public relations approach. Bringing the average of the middle fashion segment to 3 out of 5. Therefore, this segment has a middle post-modernistic public relations approach.

High fashion segment
Gucci scored 0 out of 2 inherent characteristics and 1 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 1 out of 5. This expression has a low post-modernistic public relations approach. Stella McCartney scored 0 out of 2 inherent characteristics and 0 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 0 out of 5. This expression has a very low post-modernistic public relations approach. Bringing the average of the high fashion segment to 1 out of 5. Therefore, this segment has a low post-modernistic public relations approach.
**Couture fashion segment**

Iris van Herpen scored 0 out of 2 inherent characteristics and 0 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 0 out of 5. This expression has a very low post-modernistic public relations approach. Viktor and Rolf scored 0 out of 2 inherent characteristics and 2 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 2 out of 5. This expression has a low post-modernistic public relations approach. Bringing the average of the couture fashion segment to 2 out of 5. Therefore, this segment has a middle post-modernistic public relations approach.

**Sportswear fashion segment**

Nike scored 0 out of 2 inherent characteristics and 3 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 3 out of 5. This expression has a middle post-modernistic public relations approach. Adidas scored 2 out of 2 inherent characteristics and 3 out of 3 optional characteristics bringing them to a total of 5 out of 5. This expression has a very high post-modernistic public relations approach. Bringing the average of the sportswear fashion segment to 3.5 out of 5 making them score ‘very high’. Therefore, this segment has a high post-modernistic public relations approach.

In sum, not all analysed brands embrace a postmodern public relation approach yet. However, the majority of the analysed brands, six out of ten, have an average score of high or very high. Moreover, three out of five segments score middle post-modernistic approach or higher. The analysis shows that H&M, Diesel and Adidas score highest, with a shared first place for H&M and Diesel. With four out of ten brands scoring low or very low, Iris van Herpen and Stella McCartney share the last place. The fast fashion and sportswear segments embrace a post-modernistic approach the most, they score the highest on average out of all five analysed segments, with an average of 4 out of 5 for fast fashion, and an average of 3.5 out of 5 for sportswear. The high fashion and couture fashion segment have the lowest scores out of all segments, with averages of 0.5 out of 5 and 1 out of 5. The brands in these segments least embrace a post-modernistic approach. The analysis makes it clear that these ten brands have more difficulties incorporating the inherent characteristics. They both have four yes’s, the only difference is one ‘maybe’ for giving up control. The scores of optional characteristics ‘content is king’ and ‘current content’ are very close, but the characteristic that gets incorporated most is ‘blurring lines’.

Grunig has already mentioned that there are still many PR practitioners that blindly copy old media tactics to new media outlets (2011). The findings from the analysis confirm this argument to some extent. Some brands such as Stella McCartney and Iris van Herpen
blindly copy old PR media tactics to the new media landscape. Consumers are looking for authenticity, connection and brands that participate and care about what is going on with consumers. An example of this is Diesel, who seems to grasp every aspect of a postmodern public relation approach into their campaign. It is possible that a brand does not fulfil all post-modernistic characteristics, however, they can still excel in some of them. For instance Adidas, when it comes to embracing the transparent characteristic. They respond to comments on their social media pages, answer questions and make jokes with consumers that reply on their posts. However, they seem to have come up with a way of taking this characteristic a step further by hosting live-stream video chat in which they discuss topics, such as originality, with their publics. The analysis shows that these fashion brands not yet all embrace the changes that are found in literature.

5. Conclusion
This research report identified the changes that the Internet has brought about within the (fashion) public relation industry. These changes have been identified as characteristics of postmodern public relations and have been used to analyse ten different fashion PR campaigns in order to establish to what degree the fashion public relations industry has incorporated and embraced post-modern PR.

Initially, it was important to examine both traditional public relations and fashion public relations, it definitions and its practices. Although the industry does not seem to agree on one singular definition the most important have been selected in chapter 2.2 to give a better understanding of the industry. In this report, the following definition has been used: ‘Fashion PR is what a brand does, represents, says and what people say about it (brand image), in a strategic manner. It is a management and or marketing tool that aims to influence influencers and or its audiences. It enables a brand to interact with its publics and aims to obtain free press and promotion through a third party. It builds relationships with consumers and companies and involves creating a positive image in the mind of the consumer and to develop and maintain a beneficial relationship. It is the art of building and maintaining a strong connection between a brand and its audiences. It gives a brand its voice’. Comparing traditional public relations to fashion public relations ultimately lead to the conclusion that the two share enough similarities to use studies written on classic public relations for fashion public relations and consequently also broadening the scope and applicability of the current findings to cover PR in general.

The primary research at first showed that (fashion) public relations in its traditional shape is placed under the marketing umbrella. Here its neighbours with branding,
advertisements, and promotional marketing. However, due to their nature, being either earned, owned or paid media the industries are clearly separated. PR is characterised by its free dissemination, which is dependent on a third party and is therefore seen as earned media. It is also recognized by its non-transparent nature because of its use of one-sided communication models to persuade audiences. Furthermore, it tries to control its message and its reception by persuasion and manipulation tactics and its message is often mainly focussed on either products or pseudo-events.

However, public relations and other communication are being reshaped by a disruptive force; the Internet. The influence of the online world on communication sciences and industries are tremendous and there are many studies that indicate that although it might not change everything, it is surely to say that nothing will ever stay the same. It became apparent that these changes could be used in a positive way, contributing to the purpose of classic PR. The fact that it can be used in a positive way also implies that it can have a negative impact. It turns out that this is a choice the brand or organization can make. It follows naturally then, that public relations practitioners should embrace the changes that the Internet has brought about and incorporate the new methods into their practices.

This research report coined a new term for this way of practising public relations: postmodern (fashion) public relations. The title ‘postmodern’ is chosen because this new movement shows similarities with the post-modernistic movement of the early twentieth century. Consumers are moving away from ‘big truths’ from brands like civilians started to move away from big truths from institutions like the church. The consumer/civilian is developing a greater sense of self-consciousness and the need for individualism and identification.

The identified characteristics make up this new way of practicing PR, and together form an analytical model that is able to test to what degree brands incorporate a post-modernistic approach in their PR messages. They are divided under inherent and optional characteristics. The first inherent characteristic, giving up control, focuses to what degree a brand is willing to let go of control once a PR campaign is published. The second inherent characteristic, transparency, concerns Grunig’s two-way symmetrical communication model and to which extend brands are willing to incorporate this in their PR approaches. Thirdly comes the optional characteristics of ‘blurring lines’, which showed the greater importance of combining earned, owned and paid media methods. The fourth optional characteristic is called ‘content is king’. This showed the shift of focus from the product to the story that a campaign contains. The fifth and final optional characteristic, ‘current content’, zooms in on the importance of current content as a result of the Internet, as consumers are now connected to
any source of information twenty-four seven. This made it possible to answer the main research question central in this report: *To what degree do fashion brands incorporate post-modern PR characteristics into their PR messages?*

Currently, three of the tested fashion brands seem score high or very high and therefore seem to fully incorporate a post-modernistic approach into their public relation messages. A two of the tested fashion brands have a middle high score and only incorporate certain postmodern characteristics into their approach. However, there is no pattern in which postmodern characteristics they incorporate. Half of the tested brands scored either low or very low and of those, two did not make use of any of the characteristics. The biggest hurdle for many is 1) Giving up control and 2) Transparency. In average the optional characteristics got implemented most but the inherent characteristics more often got not implemented.

Due to the scope of this research, there are some limitations to be considered. Firstly, only the five most prominent changes of the Web 2.0 on public relations have been examined. With the proliferation of the Internet, it could have other impacts that have been left out of scope here. Moreover, only five segments and ten fashion brands have been selected for the analytical research and analysed only two fashion brands per segment. Even though this gives clear indication to what degree PR practices harness these changes positively (or not), further research could be undertaken to solidify these results quantitatively. The fact that certain segments seem to have a tendency to include more or less changes into their practice, it could be an interesting endeavour to see why. By taking a more in-depth look into different segments with a bigger variety of brands, one can start to establish whether one segment incorporates postmodern public relations more than others.
Bibliography


