

Luxury Fashion Brands are Racing to Become Pioneers in The Use of Influencer Marketing

An Exploratory Study on How This Can Be Achieved and The Impacts on Brand Perceptions

BSc Program in Retail Management

Supervisor: Alexander Mafael

Center for Retailing, Stockholm School of Economics

Author: Mariam Elsayed

Stockholm - May 18, 2022

Abstract

As the digital evolution continues to take on the world industry by industry, luxury fashion brands are left with no choice but to adapt to the new means of media consumption. Numerous luxury fashion brands are implementing influencer marketing strategies to communicate their brand's message in novel ways. However, very limited research investigates the effects this phenomenon has on luxury fashion brands in particular. Due to the grand symbolic and individual meaning luxury fashion products carry, it is necessary to understand the consequences of adopting this marketing strategy on perceived luxury value, brand identity, and brand image. Due to the existing literature gap on the subject, this thesis takes on an exploratory design that aims to address the underlying reasons why luxury fashion brands are seeing vitality in implementing influencer marketing. Thereafter, it investigates the optimum ways in which this can be achieved. Finally, the impact of this marketing strategy on perceived luxury value, brand identity, and brand image is investigated and followed by concrete recommendations for marketers in the field. This thesis implements a qualitative study approach based on a number of semi-structured industry interviews as well as two focus groups. Findings reveal that the key reasons for integrating influencer marketing in a luxury fashion context are for repositioning purposes and/ or for creating a stronger sense of community. Furthermore, findings indicate that the most ideal way of implementing influencer marketing strategies is through assessing the influencer's fit and compatibility with the endorsed brand. Finally, it was found that when implemented correctly, influencer marketing has a positive impact on brand image as well as brand identity as it reinforces the brand's message.

Keywords: *Influencer Marketing, Luxury Fashion, Luxury Value, Brand Identity, Brand Image.*

Acknowledgments

A special thank you to all the support received from friends, family, and colleagues without which this thesis would not have been possible. Thank you to all the interviewees who agreed to take the time to provide the sensational insights which made it possible to derive novel and valuable contributions that are the outcome of this study. Finally, thank you to Alexander Mafael for being a great support and providing constructive criticism throughout the duration of this study in order to enhance it making it reach its full potential.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	6
1.1 Background	6
1.2 Problematization	7
1.3 Research Gap	8
1.4 Thesis Purpose and Research Question	9
1.5 Expected Contributions	9
2. Literature Review	11
2.1 Luxury Branding	11
2.2 Brand Identity	12
2.3 Brand Image	14
2.4 Influencer Marketing	15
2.4.1 Influencers	16
2.4.2 Celebrificatoin of Influencers	16
2.5 Celebrity Endorsements	17
2.6 The Combined Theoretical Framework	18
3. Methodology	21
3.1 Study Approach and Research Design	21
3.1.1 Abductive Reasoning Approach	21
3.2 Data Collection	22
3.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews	22
3.2.2 Interview guide	23
3.2.3 Interview Participants	24
3.2.4 Interview Setting	25
3.2.5 Focus Groups	25
3.3 Data Registration and Analysis	27
3.4 Quality Concerns	28
3.4.1 Reliability	28
3.4.2 Validity	28
4. Empirical Findings	30
4.1 Overall Findings	30
4.1.1 The Luxury Fashion Market Today	30
4.1.2 Relevance of Influencer Marketing In Luxury Fashion	32
4.1.3 Influencers VS Celebrities	34
4.1.4 Negative Correlation Between The Influencer's Popularity & Perceived Authenticity	35
4.2 Adapting Influencer Marketing in Luxury Fashion	36
4.2.1 Finding Fit	36
4.2.4 The Frequency Of Influencer Marketing	38

4.3 Impact on Brand Identity, Brand Image, and Perceived Luxury Value	39
4.3.1 Impact on Perceived Luxury Value	39
4.3.2 Impact On Brand Identity	40
4.3.2 Impact On Brand Image	41
5. Analysis	42
5.1 Suggestions and Implications	42
5.2 Fit-Roadmap	43
5.3 Adjusted Theoretical Framework	45
6. Conclusion	47
6.1 Addressing The Research Question	47
6.2 Theoretical Contribution	47
6.3 Limitations and Further Research	48
7. Reference list	50
8. Appendices	57
Appendix 1: Industry-Interviews Questions Guide	57
Appendix 2: Focus Group Questions Guide	60

1. Introduction

This introduction aims to address the topic of this thesis by providing a background description of the issues brought forward followed by the problematization and signifying the existing research gap. Thereafter, the purpose of this paper as well as the research question are formulated. Finally, expected contributions are discussed.

1.1 Background

Populated by digital natives, the world has seen revolutionary developments to the ways goods are marketed and the luxury fashion industry is certainly no exception to this. Given that over half the earth's population (4.62 billion individuals making up 58.4% of the world's inhabitants) are active social media users with an average of 2 hours and 27 minutes spent daily on social media platforms (Chaffey, 2022), it is not a great surprise that marketers are immersed in the world of influencer marketing causing more brands in all different types of industries to begin implementing this approach.

With the progression of time, the retail world is constantly seeing newer segments of customers and evolving markets with uncharted potential. The developments observed in the customer base are happening quicker than ever. With this comes a great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity when it comes to grasping an understanding of what it is the new customers enjoy and like to see. Upon taking a deeper dive into the luxury fashion industry, it is apparent that the most recent group of shoppers is a particularly young and diverse one. Though historically, luxury fashion has been of interest to older, wealthier, and more mature individuals, this traditional classification is no longer applicable. The luxury fashion shopper today is younger than ever, this group of customers consists of high-earning Millennials and members of Generation Z (Wintermeier, 2021). The extremely young and novel nature of this segment is remarkably challenging for marketers due to their unpredictable shopping behaviors and unforeseeable thought processes.

This drastic shift in the markets combined with the excessive use of social media platforms led to the utilization of influencer marketing across the globe. The use of influencer marketing has seen steady and rapid growth, from being a 1,7 billion USD industry in 2016 to a whopping 13,8 billion USD in 2021 (Santora, 2022). This striking fact becomes justifiable when putting into perspective the monumental impact influencers have over their fans. Social media influencers are greatly trusted by their viewers, this massive trust attributes a great deal of credibility to influencers which manifests itself in purchase decisions made by their viewers. In a survey conducted by Nielsen, the global measurement and data analytics company, it was proven that 92% of consumers have more trust in influencers than an advertisement or traditional celebrity endorsement (Weinswig, 2016). For this reason, it is no surprise that several well-established luxury fashion brands have started dipping their toes into the pool of influencer marketing. One prime example of this is Louis Vuitton's choice of pronouncing young brand ambassadors including Emma Chamberlain, a Youtube star, and one of generation Z's most recognized social media icons today (Mahadevan, 2021). That being said, it remains a mystery how this approach is succeeding beyond merely generating monetary returns and brand recognition.

1.2 Problematization

The mere idea of venturing out of the norm and implementing a new method of marketing carries risks and involves a number of uncertainties. Influencer marketing as a phenomenon is no exception to this. Though the concept of influencer marketing is seemingly simple, it is an intricate and complex concept requiring marketers to engineer an approach that is applicable to their unique brand and industry in order to minimize the risks and side effects that may occur when implementing this approach.

It is no doubt that influencer marketing has been around for many years, however, it is only recently that luxury fashion brands began to join in on this marketing trend. Because luxury fashion brands are highly distinct and greatly different from non-luxury brands, marketers in this industry were fearful of cheapening their brand's value through involving influencers in their

business. This marketing approach is thought to make brands far more accessible which could consequently decrease the brand's perceived luxury value, something which is greatly detrimental to the future of luxury fashion brands (Donawerth, 2020). On the other hand, it is not advisable to avoid this marketing approach altogether given that in today's digital era, marketers ought to adapt to the new means of media consumption in order to stay relevant in emerging markets (Ibid). For this reason, this conflict in interests reveals the key problems exhibited within this subject.

1.3 Research Gap

The topic of this thesis aims to minimize the existing research gap in regard to the use of influencer marketing within the luxury fashion sector. Firstly, as previously highlighted, the academic world is lacking evidence motivating why luxury fashion brands would choose to implement this approach. Thus far, the world has been led by examples of high-end luxury fashion brands engaging in this phenomenon without a theoretical understanding of why this is happening. Existing literature does highlight the necessity of incorporating this marketing approach within the luxury fashion industry for the core reason of fitting in with the world's newest means of communication (Kulke, 2021). However, little is known in regards to what other reasons may support the use of this marketing method for luxury fashion brands. Extremely limited literature dissected this specific area which highlights the first gap identified - understanding why a luxury fashion brand should or should not partake in influencer marketing practices.

Secondly, in line with the aforementioned gap, the overall lack of literature in regards to motivating this marketing approach for luxury fashion brands, leads to the second gap where an understanding of what aspects need to be thought of in the case that influencer marketing is found to be suitable for this industry. While the world has seen several examples of this phenomenon in practice, little theoretical evidence demonstrates exactly how to maximize the uncharted potential in a luxury fashion context.

Finally, there is a lack of theoretical evidence on what impacts influencer marketing has on the consumer when it comes to their evaluations of the brand. Little is known in regards to what happens to the perceived luxury value of the brand, brand image, and brand identity when influencer marketing is implemented.

1.4 Thesis Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to develop and strengthen an understanding of the use of influencer marketing in a luxury fashion context. This exploratory approach led to the formulation of the following research question:

How Can Luxury Fashion Brands Make Use of Influencer Marketing and What Implications Could This Have On Brand Identity, Brand Image, and Perceived Luxury Value?

The above research question can be divided into the two following subquestions:

What circumstances and characteristics constitute the choice of influencers if any?

How is influencer marketing impacting brand identity, brand image, and perceived luxury value?

This study aims to set focus on the company side more than the consumer's as this research is meant to guide marketers in the industry in decision-making processes. Nonetheless, a consumer's viewpoint is still assessed to provide companies with an understanding of the bigger picture.

1.5 Expected Contributions

The outcome of this thesis is expected to aid academics as well as marketers in the field. The contribution in an academic sense is aimed to build on existing literature on influencer marketing by providing further evidence on the phenomenon's relevance in the luxury fashion industry. In a

practical sense, the study is expected to provide concrete guidance and implications for marketers on whether influencer marketing is relevant for their brand and if so, what considerations need to be made to achieve this successfully. Furthermore, this study is expected to provide an overall view of the present-day market's opinions and thoughts on this phenomenon when observed in a luxury fashion context.

2. Literature Review

This section provides descriptions of previous literature on aspects that are influenced by market developments in luxury fashion as well as the use of influencer marketing, through elaborating on the following concepts: “Luxury Branding”, “Influencer Marketing”, “Celebrity Endorsements”, “Brand Identity” and “Brand Image”. This literature review is developed into a framework that constitutes the basis for the semi-structured interviews carried out to derive the findings for this research.

2.1 Luxury Branding

In order to better understand the challenges luxury fashion brands are facing in the present day in regards to new market developments and changing consumer preferences, it is crucial to coin the definition for luxury and address the changes this term has seen through the years according to previous literature. The concept of “Luxury” is a particularly challenging one given that the academic world tends to fail to set a clear-cut, universal definition for it (Kapferer, 2009). A great majority of the existing definitions for the concept of luxury, tend to replace the word “luxury” with an equivalent word that remains undefined such as “premium”, another word that fails to grasp the essence of the concept (Ibid). An example of this is Vigneron and Johnson’s definition of “*the highest level of prestigious brands encompassing several physical and psychological values*” (Wiedmann, Hennings, and Siebels 2007), this definition fails to define “prestige”. To add clarity to the ambiguity of this concept, Kapferer proposed three main notions to be considered when defining luxury, namely: luxury as a concept, luxury as an economic sector, and luxury as a specific strategy (Kapferer, 2009). To better conceptualize the notion of luxury, a comprehensive model including all relevant value sources of the consumer’s luxury value perceptions was proposed by previous literature (Wiedmann, Hennings, and Siebels 2007). The model draws on four key aspects, namely, financial value, functional value, individual value, and social value (Ibid). This model’s relevance for this thesis lies in the identification of the four first-order latent variables as they encompass an overall description of the different values of luxury.

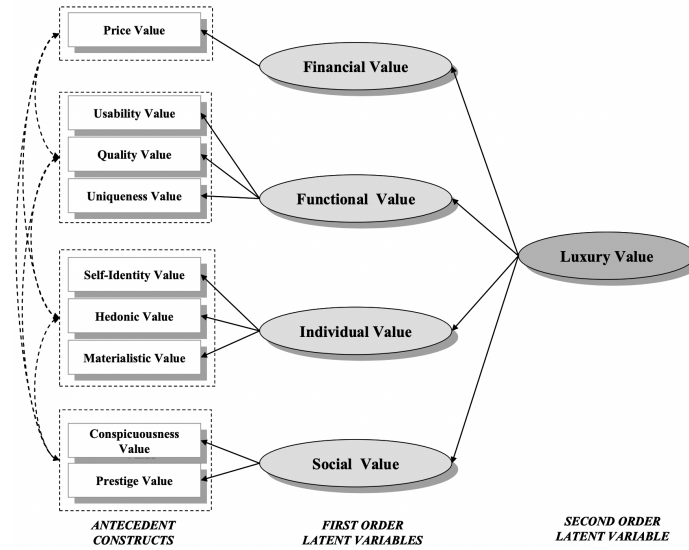


Figure 1- Wiedmann et al., 2007 Consumers' Luxury Value Perception Cross-Cultural Framework

To shift focus from a general analysis of luxury value to what luxury has become today, it is necessary to acknowledge that luxury value is greatly influenced by the era in question as well as the consumer (Yeoman, 2010). In the present day, luxury fashion brands are seeing a consumer that is exceptionally young in age (Langer 2021). Research shows that this type of customer seeks validation, to them individualism is extremely vital and is connected to self-presentation and one's image (Howard, 2018). For this reason, it is relevant to argue that luxury value today lies within individual value as well as social value.

2.2 Brand Identity

In a luxury fashion context, brand identity is a concept with substantial weight. Amongst the aforementioned values of luxury, individualism, and self-presentation are fundamental aspects that make a luxury brand luxurious (Wiedmann, Hennings, and Siebels 2007). For this reason, brand identity is one of the greatest determiners of the brand's luxury value (Sternbauer, 2022). The concept of brand identity is defined as “a unique set of brand associations implying a promise to customers and includes a core and extended identity.” (Ghodeswar, 2008). This construct is defined and developed internally within the company and is then communicated to

the consumers in various ways (Ibid). While previous literature argues the importance of external elements when it comes to defining brand identity, it is undeniable that this concept is fully controlled by the company, where the consideration of external elements is merely a way of communicating this identity to the masses (Urde, 2013).

Previous literature on brand identity unanimously stresses the importance of communicating the message to the target group. One evident example of this is Ghodeswar's PCDL Model where the second stage of the brand identity-building model suggests "*Communicating the brand message*" which proposes amongst other things the use of celebrities to communicate the brand's message (Ghodeswar, 2008). Another clear example is Aaker's Brand Identity Planning Model entailing a customer analysis segment which further highlights the urgency of communicating the brand's message to consumers (Aaker, 1996). Aaker's model suggests that a brand can build its identity as a product, organization, person, or symbol (Ibid).

In this study, Aaker's Brand Identity Planning Model is adapted and integrated into a theoretical framework to better understand which aspects of the model are impacted by the use of influencer endorsements in a luxury fashion context. In particular, this model's relevance lies in the four key identifications of brand identity, namely, brand as product, brand as an organization, brand as a person, and brand as a symbol. This model's purpose is to provide classifications of the different types of brand identity which are aimed to guide the study towards finding answers to the research question. For this reason, the aforementioned relevance of the model is justified.

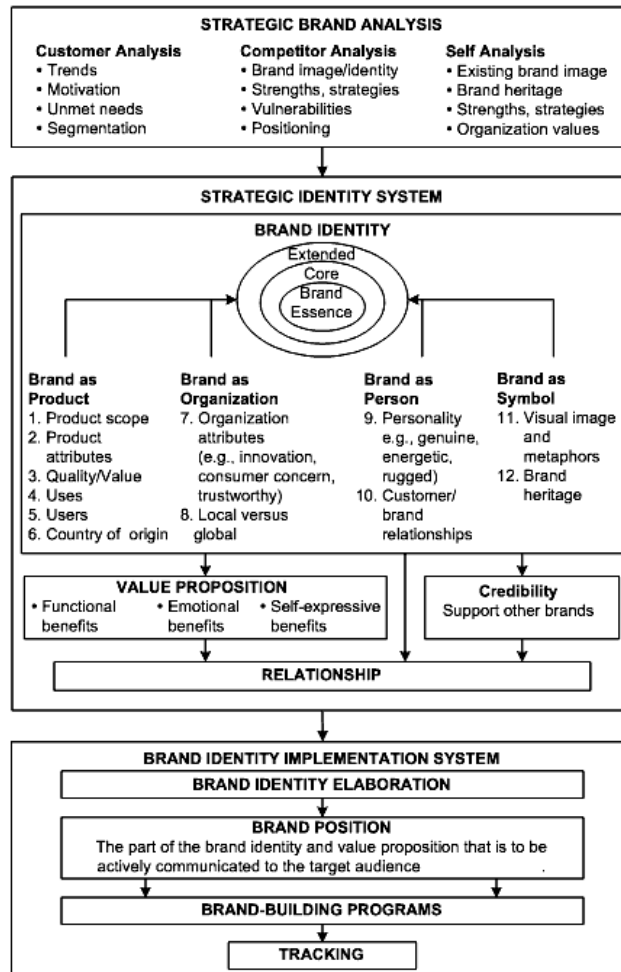


Figure 2 - Brand Identity Planning Model (Aaker, 1996)

2.3 Brand Image

Similar to brand identity, brand image is a greatly sensitive area for luxury fashion brands. Referring back to the different values of luxury, prestige and social status were key indicators of luxury value (Wiedmann, Hennings, and Siebels 2007). Prestige and social status are observed in the way individuals are perceived by the population. The way a population views a brand impacts the social status of the individual wearing the brand's attire. Therefore, following this reasoning, brand image is an exceptionally vital facet to consider when assessing the use of influencer marketing.

In contrast to brand identity, brand image is defined as “ *a representation of the overall perception of the brand and is formed from information and past experience of the brand*” (Takaya, 2019). While the concepts of brand identity and brand image are intertwined, there is a key distinction to be made, namely, “*brand image is the perception of the brand as a reflection of consumer associations of the brand. The company’s image means that the public perception of its corporate identity*” (Hartono and Dewi, 2019). For this reason, the concept of brand image is highly dependent on the individual and is uniquely defined by each and every consumer thus making it prone to change over time (Kaemingk, 2019). Due to its ambiguity, the academic world does not provide an extensive list of models and frameworks for measuring brand image.

Previous research found evidence that the concept of brand image is closely tied with celebrity endorsements (Byberg et al., 2015). In fact, one of the core reasons companies choose celebrity endorsement strategies is to boost their brand image (Ibid). The ways by which celebrity endorsements are capable of achieving this are discussed further in the celebrity endorsements section of this literature review.

2.4 Influencer Marketing

This stream takes a deeper dive into the phenomenon of influencer marketing which has taken over the world since its start in the early 2000s (Richardson, 2022). This marketing strategy is defined as “*A company’s use of a celebrity, a blogger, social media influencer or other influential person to communicate their message - usually through the influencer’s own channels*” (Hörfeldt, 2015). This method of marketing has become an extremely relevant method for brands to communicate their offerings to consumers, as it has been reported that 3.4 billion individuals are actively using social media, which constitutes 45% of the world's population (Geyser, 2022). The academic world is lacking evidence on which approach to selecting influencers is deemed most suitable in a luxury fashion context and the implications this has on brand identity, luxury value as well as brand image. Existing studies on the topic of influencer marketing regardless of the industry have the tendency of setting focus on the monetary returns this generates and the impact this approach has on turnover and purchase intentions (kumara,

Durai, and Scholar 2020). Furthermore, previous literature revealed findings that encourage implementing this approach in order to boost brand awareness (Ferina, Sri, and Putu, 2021). However little is known in regards to whether luxury fashion brands fall under the same umbrella of reasoning.

2.4.1 Influencers

After defining the phenomenon of influencer marketing, it is crucial to establish the definition of “*Influencers*” in order to introduce their relevance in endorsing a brand. At its core, an influencer is “*A person with the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by promoting or recommending the items on social media.*” (Oxford Language, 2022). As suggested in the definition of influencer marketing, influencers are common people who share their experiences on social media platforms, what makes them particularly stand out is the large following they have making them “microcelebrities” (Abidin, 2016).

2.4.2 Celebrificatoin of Influencers

After setting clear definitions for influencers and influencer marketing, the process of the celebrification of influencers is defined. While celebrities in the traditional sense acquire their status from external media such as magazines and television, due to establishing substantial remarks in the entertainment industry such as film and music, the process by which social media influencers acquire their status is fundamentally different (Brooks et al, 2021). Through having direct interactions with their audience, influencers gradually build their capital by directly responding to requests from their followers (Ibid).

The impact of integrating influencers in the marketing world has been tested in comparison to the use of traditional celebrities. It was proven that due to their high similarity to the target group, consumers placed more trust in advertisements showcasing influencers than those showcasing traditional celebrities which have led to increased advertising effectiveness (Schouten et al, 2019).

2.5 Celebrity Endorsements

In accordance with the literature review provided on influencer marketing, it is well established that influencers are a form of celebrities and can be used for campaigns and advertisements (Ibid). For this reason, it is relevant to adapt the already existing literature and models on the use of celebrity endorsements to derive new findings with regard to the use of influencers in a luxury fashion context.

The academic world currently encompasses four key models for choosing a celebrity endorser, the identified models are 1. The Source Credibility Model, 2. The Source Attractiveness Model, 3. The Match-up Hypothesis and 4. The Meaning Transfer Model (Yang, 2018).

1. The Source Credibility Model

This model is led by the theory that a credible source plays a role in influencing consumers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, where credibility is described as “*the extent to which the source is perceived as possessing expertise relevant to the communication topic and can be trusted to give an objective opinion on the subject*” (Goldsmith et al., 2000). This model highlights two key facets for credibility, namely trustworthiness, and expertise, the more consumers perceive a celebrity to exhibit the two mentioned facets, the more credible they are regarded (Yang, 2018).

2. The Source Attractiveness Model

Similar to the model prior, the source attractiveness model is led by the theory that a celebrity that is perceived to be more attractive can lead to improved attitudes toward the advertisement (Bhatt, Jayswal, and Patel 2013). The relevance of attractiveness can be subcategorized into two dimensions, physical attractiveness and virtuous attributes including lifestyle, personality, and intellectual skills (Erdogan, 1999).

3. The Match-up Hypothesis

Deviating from the aforementioned source models, the match-up hypothesis proposes a model that taps into the congruent relationship exhibited between the celebrity chosen to endorse a product/ brand and the subject being endorsed (Kamins 1990). It is proven that the stronger the

similarity is between the celebrity and the endorsed brand/ product, the higher perceived believability is which translates to more positive attitudes towards the endorsed subject (Kamins and Gupta, 1994).

4. The Meaning Transfer Model

Finally, the meaning transfer model addresses the importance of the symbolic meaning to consumers' purchases (Campbell and Warren, 2012). This theory suggests that the meaning conveyed through the celebrity endorser is dependent on factors such as the celebrity's characteristics, personality, or profession and is subject to change, therefore the mere use of celebrity endorsements is not a guarantee of success (Roy and Jain, 2016). It is suggested that the transferred meaning lies in three notable areas, namely: the culturally constituted world, the consumer good, and the individual consumer (McCracken, 1986).

In addition to the aforementioned models, Bergkvist et al. shed light on an additional crucial facet which is the celebrity motive. It was found that a celebrity endorser that is perceived to be motivated to collaborate with a brand due to reasons beyond money such as quality, results in more positive brand evaluations from the consumer (Bergkvist et al, 2016).

2.6 The Combined Theoretical Framework

Due to the limited literature on the use of influencer marketing within luxury fashion, no existing model captures the facets that would answer the research question of this thesis, *"How Can Luxury Fashion Brands Make Use of Influencer Marketing and What Implications Could This Have On Brand Identity, Brand Image, and Perceived Luxury Value?"*. For this reason, a combination of the aforementioned models from previous literature is integrated resulting in the below model which is aimed to be used as a base to guide the semi-structured interviews.

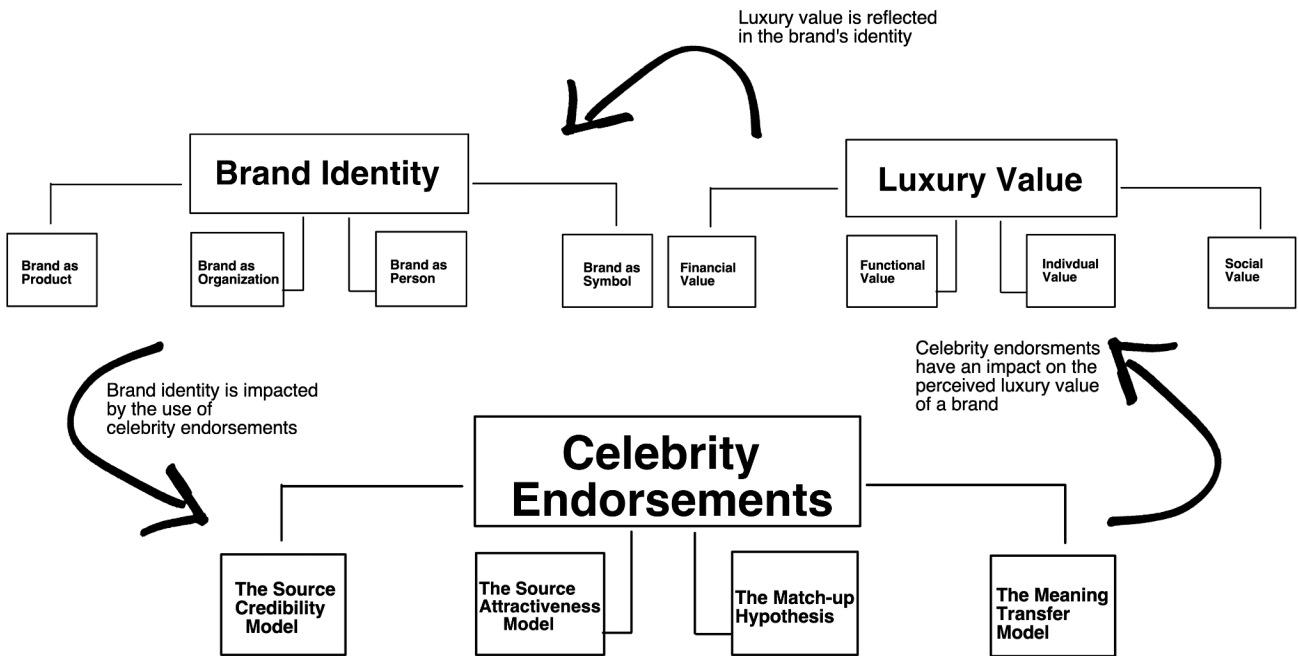


Figure 3 - Combined Theoretical Framework

Through integrating models from previous literature, it is possible to derive new findings on the topic. The integrated model above will reveal the impact the celebrity endorsement strategy has on brand identity and the brand's luxury value. The framework suggests that the three concepts circulate. Firstly, it is suggested that the luxury value of a brand reflects the brand identity. As illustrated in Aaker's brand identity planning model, one of the key ways a brand's identity is determined is by its visual image, metaphors, and brand heritage. By this, Aaker suggests that unique symbols, which can mean different forms of visual representations of a brand including unique product design as well as people associated with the brand (celebrity endorsements), are capable of communicating a certain message to society (Meyerson, 2019). These are all concepts that are greatly linked with the concept of luxury value. As Wiedmann et al.'s luxury value perception framework suggests, one of the key dimensions of luxury value is the social value, this is explained as the social acceptance of status symbols and luxuries in society (Wiedmann et

al, 2007). For this reason, it is relevant to assume that the concepts of brand identity and luxury value greatly impact each other.

Secondly, it is suggested that brand identity dictates which celebrity endorsement method is most applicable to maintain the luxury value that a brand holds. As Aaker suggests, a key aspect to consider when building and maintaining brand identity is the way by which this identity is communicated to the target audience. This is referred to as “brand position” - *“the part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience”* (Aaker, 1996). As highlighted above, this is elaborated on by suggesting that the type of individuals a brand associates itself with, ie. celebrities or influencers endorsing the brand, play a massive role in the symbolic meaning communicated. Therefore it is valid to conclude that brand identity impacts the choice of a celebrity endorser.

Finally, it is suggested that the brand’s identity will be impacted and reshaped depending on the use of celebrity endorsement and in this case influencer marketing. As highlighted in the aforementioned point, brand identity is greatly impacted by the way by which this is communicated, for this reason, the combined theoretical framework suggests a change in brand identity caused by celebrity endorsement activities. The assumed circularity of the combined theoretical framework is therefore justified.

3. Methodology

This section describes the methodology of this thesis through illustrating the scientific approach chosen to conduct the study by elaborating on the underlying reasons for selecting the chosen companies and interviewees for data collection in addition to discussing the design of this study. Furthermore, a description of the study's reliability and quality concerns is addressed.

3.1 Study Approach and Research Design

The study design that was deemed most appropriate for this thesis is an exploratory study. This study design allows for an in-depth exploration of the luxury fashion market today and strategic processes concerning marketing activities. Furthermore, a qualitative approach was selected to derive findings as it is optimum in fulfilling the purpose of this study due to an added level of complexity and flexibility that would otherwise be lacking from a quantitative approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011). A qualitative approach encompasses the following key characteristics: naturalism, ethnomethodology, emotionalism, and postmodernism, these concepts are greatly relevant for this exploration in particular as they allow for a better understanding of reality. In the context of this study, acquiring subjective explanations of marketing processes is essential as it provides a deeper and more enriched exploration of the subject (Ibid). Without this flexibility to explore the matter, the findings of this thesis would have been greatly compromised. While quantitative research derives generalized findings that are applicable to a greater population, a qualitative one explores behaviors, values, and beliefs in a given situation. Therefore, due to the rarity of empirical research on the subject, it was deemed necessary to favor a qualitative approach over a quantitative one for this study.

3.1.1 Abductive Reasoning Approach

In order to avoid the flaws observed in deductive and inductive reasoning approaches, abductive reasoning was chosen for this thesis (Lipscomb, 2012). This was achieved by firstly constructing a literature review which became the foundation and starting point to tackling the exploration of the subject, followed by the observable examples of the use of influencer marketing by luxury

fashion brands. Thereafter the theoretical framework derived was adjusted along the way according to both empirical findings as well as referring back to the literature review. Unlike inductive and deductive reasoning, abductive reasoning does not require a complete set of evidence to draw conclusions, instead it embraces the lack of completeness allowing for more creativity and intuition to derive a most probable conclusion given the set of data at hand (Butte College, 2019). Due to the explorative nature of this thesis, little evidence is established on the matter therefore abductive reasoning was deemed most appropriate. Furthermore, research suggests that abductive reasoning is ideal as it is believed to be the only logical reasoning approach that introduces new ideas (O'Reilly, 2016).

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection process for this thesis consisted of two stages. The first stage included carrying out interviews with individuals working in the industry to get companies' viewpoints on the subject in order to be able to draw conclusions and offer recommendations that are relevant for marketers in the field. Thereafter, two focus groups were carried out consisting of participants that are aimed to be representatives of the target audience for the majority of luxury fashion brands in the present day. The reason for choosing to carry out industry interviews first and focus groups second is primarily due to the assumption that companies already have ongoing customer analysis routines, therefore the insights acquired from the interviews would provide explanations to why marketing practices are done in a certain way in the modern-day. This knowledge would be greatly beneficial when conducting the focus groups in the second stage as it would make it possible to quickly draw links between the acquired information from stage one and the statements made by participants. Through being equipped for focus groups, it is possible to ask questions related to the topics and issues brought forward by interviewees in stage one which would provide the full picture from both the companies' side as well as the customers' side.

3.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

In order to avoid confining the exploration of the matter, a semi-structured interview approach was used. Previous literature unanimously encourages including a mixture of a few close-ended

questions together with a majority of open-ended questions that are later followed by leading questions, as this is agreed to be the optimum way to tackle a qualitative study (Newcomer, Harry, and Wholey, 2015, pp.492–505; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Edmondson and McManus, 2007). This approach was achieved through first preparing an interview guide containing all key topics thought to aid in answering the research question. Interviewees were then allowed to deviate from the questions to shift focus on various other relevant aspects of the subject.

3.2.2 Interview guide

The interview guide developed to lead the semi-structured interviews consisted of questions based on literature. The questions were thereafter sectioned into the following four clusters: *Business & Target group*, *Brand Identity*, *Brand's luxury value*, *Celebrity Endorsement (Influencer marketing)*, and *Brand Image questions*. The processes of constructing the questions and identifying the different clusters for the interview guide began by viewing the matter from wider scope through identifying the key themes that would aid in answering the research question. The research question of this thesis tackles the following themes: The luxury fashion market today, the impact on brand identity, the impact on brand image, the impact on the perceived luxury value, and the phenomenon of influencer marketing. After identifying the key areas for exploration, the literature review section, as well as the combined theoretical framework, were utilized to construct questions that touch upon the existing literature. For example, identifying what determines luxury value today according to Wiedmann et al.'s model "Consumers' Luxury Value Perception Cross-Cultural Framework", was integrated into the interview guide in the form of different questions in the "Brand's luxury value" cluster. Finally, after the construction of questions was complete, a discussion with the thesis supervisor took place to make changes that were necessary and highlight areas that needed further detail.

In order to maintain the use of abductive reasoning throughout the interviewing process, the interview guide was altered and tweaked along the way to capture different dimensions of the topic. The initial interview guide used throughout this study can be found in appendix 1.

3.2.3 Interview Participants

The selection criteria for interview participants were intentional and aimed to capture a group of individuals with a deep understanding of the topic and proven work experience within the luxury fashion industry. The qualitative approach of this study suggests a very selective and purposeful way of choosing interview participants as the aim is to have a clear representation of the industry's marketing operations (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The selected interview participants were required to fulfill one of the two criteria set. The first selection criteria required participants to fulfill the following objective: Individuals must currently or within the past two years have held a position in marketing, communication, or social media within a luxury fashion brand. The reason for setting this criterion is due to the vitality of having solid knowledge that is up to date on the subject. It was necessary that individuals held positions within the aforementioned departments given that this is where influencer marketing as a strategy is most discussed.

If candidates do not fulfill the first criteria, they must fulfill the following one in order to be interviewed: Individuals must have held a corporate position within the luxury fashion industry for many years (5-10 years) regardless of the department of work. The reason for considering such participants is due to having observed market developments through the years. Through being immersed in the industry for many years, such individuals are greatly familiar with what it is that shapes a brand's identity and how the luxury world has evolved through the years.

The participants that were selected for the study were contacted through the global career hub "LinkedIn" as well as through mutual connections from workplaces. After a successful search for candidates, a great range of participants were interviewed. While it was deemed necessary to set the aforementioned criteria for interviewing the participants, there was a great focus on the variety in the individuals' geographical backgrounds. The selected interviewees worked in the business in the following countries: China, Italy, Sweden, and France. Additionally, the interviewees selected had different work experiences and reasons that make them relevant candidates for this study. This diversity in interview participants broadens the scope of the study

and sheds a light on different angles that are of great relevance to the research question. Furthermore, participants interviewed either currently or previously worked at one or more of the following luxury fashion brands: *Alexander McQueen, Acne Studios, Nicolas Kirkwood, Daniel Wellington, Toteme, Claudie Pierlot, Prada Group, and Gucci*. Additionally, participants that fulfilled the first selection criteria held one or more of the following positions within the aforementioned luxury fashion brands: *Global Content Manager, Global Social Media Manager, Social media & brand content manager, China marketing responsible, PR responsible, Head of communications & community and Director of communications*.

The number of interviews was not decided prior to the interviewing process as this data collection method must remain ongoing until saturation is reached (Nascimento et al., 2018). After seven interviews were conducted, answers began to repeat and saturation was reached. Finally, one last interview was conducted to verify the saturation and conclude the interviewing process.

3.2.4 Interview Setting

The aim was to carry out all interviews in person due to the proven benefits of having face-to-face discussions and to better grasp the full range of the participants' expressions in terms of body language, tone, and energy toward the questions (Saarijärvi and Bratt, 2021). Seven out of eight interviews were therefore carried out in person to optimize the benefits mentioned. Due to sickness, one interview had to be compromised for an online video meeting carried out on the online meeting platform "Zoom". Conducting an online video interview is considered to be the most similar format to an in-person interview which is the reason for selecting this approach when necessary (Ibid).

3.2.5 Focus Groups

In order to acquire consumer insights on the subject to better explore the impact of using influencer marketing on brand identity, brand image, and perceived luxury value, it was deemed necessary to utilize the use of focus groups. Focus groups are proven to be an optimal method to

use in this context due to their ability to allow individuals to rely on each others' opinions to come to conclusions which are not achievable with regular one-on-one interviews. (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The aim was to carry out two focus groups. The reason for this is to maintain the abductive reasoning throughout the process. This is achieved by reviewing the outcomes from focus group number 1 and making slight changes and tweaks to the questions asked in focus group number 2. The number of participants within each focus group was determined to be five. While several pieces of literature generally encourage the use of around eight participants (Tynan and Drayton, 1988), it was deemed more valuable to conduct two focus groups each containing a smaller number of participants in order to increase the quality of the findings (Richardson, 2014). Furthermore, previous literature proved that the purpose of recruiting the sample should be the main determiner of the number of participants (Lane et al., 2001).

The selection criteria for participating in the focus groups were fairly simple. The only criteria set requires participants to have a genuine interest in the consumption of luxury fashion. Through merely being interested in this niche, an individual automatically becomes a target for luxury fashion brands thus becoming relevant for this study. Due to the fairly lenient nature of the aforementioned selection criteria, participants consisted of friends and peers born between the years 1997 and 2001 with a passion for luxury fashion. These individuals are greatly culturally diverse coming from various different countries including China, Ireland, Italy, Sweden, Ukraine, and Venezuela. The participants were asked to take part in this study through a direct verbal agreement.

Similar to the industry interviews, a guiding set of questions was prepared to contain key topics for exploration. The key topics addressed within the focus groups are *the Meaning of luxury to the consumer, general thoughts on influencers and influencer marketing, thoughts on seeing influencers in a luxury fashion context, and brand identity & luxury status associations*. This guide is found in appendix 2.

The focus groups were carried out in a face-to-face setting in a similar manner to the industry interviews. Participants were seated around a round table in a way where all participants could see and react to each other's thoughts.

3.3 Data Registration and Analysis

Each interview was recorded using a mobile phone after receiving consent from the participants to do so. In accordance with GDPR regulations, all interviewees were kept anonymous. The average time spent per interview was 25 minutes. All interviews were carried out in English due to English being the working language for all participants. Shortly after each interview was complete, the recordings were transcribed in order to ensure capturing the full range of the interviews.

To analyze the findings, data were categorized into different clusters in accordance with the thematic method (Braun, Clarke, and Terry 2015). This analysis approach is optimum for qualitative research as it highlights the repeated issues brought forward by the interviewees and focus group participants. The thematic method was applied in 6 key steps, namely, familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and labeling themes, and writing up the findings (Caulfield, 2019). Firstly, prior to analyzing the data at hand, it was necessary to become familiar with the content, this was achieved through listening to the audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups and transcribing them. The second step entailed highlighting repeating themes, similar statements, and concepts in the different transcription documents. After having highlighted the observed repeated topics, the process of generating themes began by combining similar issues into different themes. After a set of themes was identified, they were reviewed to assess their relevance and accuracy in relation to the data collected through listening back to the recordings and reviewing the transcriptions. Thereafter, the themes were labeled according to the different issues they cover to provide a concrete set of findings. Finally, the themes were written in the empirical findings including a number of quotes to motivate and strengthen the claims made.

After implementing the thematic approach, the established set of themes is presented in the empirical findings section. In order to identify the below themes, the coding process was done through highlighting common topics amongst both interviews in stage one as well as the focus groups in stage 2. Since both stage one and stage two aim to provide answers to the same topics, it was deemed suitable to find similarities across both stages to identify the themes.

3.4 Quality Concerns

3.4.1 Reliability

Literature defines reliability as the consistency of a measure (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This study demonstrates clear evidence of strong external reliability given that replicating the approach of this study would be applicable in the future and at different points in time. In contrast to this, the study exhibits a lower level of internal reliability due to the reliance on solely one observer's conclusions. Furthermore, saturation was deemed to be reached according to one author's judgment on the repetition of themes amongst the interviewees. This reliance on one observer's judgment on the level of saturation can cause internal reliability concerns. However, in order to minimize the effect of this issue, constant referral to previous literature on the subject as well as the interviewees' claims was utilized to support the judgments made and reduce any potential biases.

3.4.2 Validity

This study's internal validity is considerably strong. It is argued that the nature of a qualitative study allows for an exceptionally strong internal validity as it allows the observer to match the observations made with theoretical ideas (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This study is no exception to this, given that the extensive time spent interviewing the subject matters was utilized to match the concepts with the theoretical ideas.

While it is argued that the nature of qualitative research tends to pose external validity concerns, this study aimed to minimize this matter through employing a diverse group of interviewees with

different geographical backgrounds, work experiences, and brands in hopes of acquiring findings that can be generalized. The emphasis on diversity amongst participants increases the level of external validity to a notable degree as it makes it possible to generalize findings to some extent (Ibid).

4. Empirical Findings

This segment presents the empirical findings of this study through illustrating three key areas identified, namely: Overall Findings (4.1), adopting influencer marketing in luxury fashion (4.2), and the impact of using influencer marketing on brand identity, brand image, and perceived luxury value (4.3).

4.1 Overall Findings

4.1.1 The Luxury Fashion Market Today

The luxury fashion industry has seen numerous shifts through the years. The interview participants for this study elaborated on the current state of this market through expanding on the changes that took place as well as providing a description of the luxury fashion customer today. The majority of interviewees agree that luxury fashion brands today are embraced by anonymity and mysteriousness. Brands are striving for uniqueness, innovation, and a desire to always be unexpected. These elements of luxury fashion are what cause one luxury brand to excel over the other.

“Today, it’s all about focusing on great design, product, great quality, not staying still, and most importantly being more silent and anonymous in our communication” - Company Representative

Similarly, participants in focus group number two expressed similar feelings towards the purpose of luxury. It was stated that the reason they find this industry fascinating is due to the individualism and unique self-expression it provides.

“I like the feeling luxury fashion makes me feel, I like being complimented for it and looking different” - Focus Group Participant

By linking this back to the theoretical framework proposed, this shows evidence that the center of luxury value today falls within the individual value as well as the social value.

The Luxury fashion shopper in the present day is a diverse one. Interviewees described this group of people to be quite broad and inclusive of a wide array of people. One key observation brought forward by nearly all interviewees is the age of the luxury fashion shopper today. It is revealed that a large majority of today's luxury fashion consumers consists of a younger generation than observed before. This ties back to the evidence shown in the literature review section (Langer 2021).

“When I have been into a store, I have seen very young customers coming in with parents” -

Company Representative

When assessing the luxury fashion market today, focus groups' participants revealed that not all luxury fashion brands can market their brands in the same way. It was highlighted that some luxury fashion brands can be classified as well-renowned, while others can be classed as semi-renowned. This classification becomes relevant when analyzing the findings. Participants elaborated on this distinction by stating that well-renowned luxury fashion brands are ones that have a strong brand heritage and have been around for decades. When asked what brands come to mind when thinking of luxury, participants stated the following:

“I think of brands like Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Hermes, these brands have such a strong history and heritage which I think is why they are the definition of luxury to me”

Meanwhile, when participants were asked if they could think of brands that lack the history and heritage that can still be considered “luxury” brands such as Acne Studios and Loewe were mentioned. The participants were thereafter asked to elaborate on what it is that makes them believe these brands are luxury, the response to this was a unanimous agreement that the price and image of the brand are the cause of this.

“Price. I think price is and the image that Acne Studios has made me feel like it's a luxury brand” Focus Group Participant

This can be tied back to the theoretical framework by drawing relevance to the financial value as a determiner of luxury value.

Another particularly relevant angle that was brought up by two interviewees working at two different luxury fashion brands, is the importance of the Asian market in the luxury fashion industry as a whole today. One of the interviewees had worked in the luxury fashion branch for eight years, thus this individual had witnessed market developments as they took place. To him, it was particularly interesting to see the Asian market is held responsible for a significantly larger share of wallets today than the previous years despite the brand's European origin. Similarly, the second interviewee to bring forward this matter works at a Scandinavian-based luxury fashion brand where the same observation was made.

4.1.2 Relevance of Influencer Marketing In Luxury Fashion

Upon carrying out industry interviews as well as the two focus groups, findings reveal the underlying reasons why influencer marketing is a relevant and necessary strategy for luxury fashion brands to implement.

Firstly, the relevance of media consumption in today's digital era is something that was repeatedly emphasized by a great majority of the interviewees. Though many of the interviewees showed anxiousness and discomfort with the idea of introducing influencer marketing to their brands, it was something that all interviewees unanimously deemed necessary to implement. In today's digital era, influencer marketing is becoming less of a choice and more of a mandatory measure for companies in order to stay relevant.

“It is impossible to swim against the current forever for the mere reason of maintaining a certain tradition” - Company Representative.

“On social media we used to rarely post, and now we post daily. We need new assets everyday because that’s what the consumer wants and if we do not deliver this, we would get lost”-

Company Representative.

While the literature review section proves that the use of influencer marketing in other industries is achieved mainly for driving sales and improving brand awareness, the empirical findings of this study indicate that the underlying reasons for introducing this marketing strategy into the luxury world are not to generate monetary returns. Instead, the purpose of this approach is to build on the storytelling elements of a brand and to create a stronger sense of community.

“The point is not to make more money in this way, instead it is more interesting to grow our community and use this way of marketing to tell stories” - Company Representative

One interviewee went so far as to say that adopting this approach for monetary returns is a monumental risk with very few chances of driving any significant sales. The luxury fashion customer appreciates uniqueness and individuality, therefore if the customer gets a feeling that a brand is being marketed in a certain way for the sole reason of boosting sales, this customer will lose respect for the brand altogether.

“Never follow the profitability route, consumers are intelligent and they are operating in a very noisy world so they can smell commercial incentives” - Company Representative

Another reason for implementing influencer marketing is to reposition a brand. One interviewee shed a light on this matter by highlighting that markets are constantly developing and new consumers become the focal point. Therefore some brands are left with the need for repositioning in order to appeal to the newer customer. Tying this back to the claims made on today’s luxury shoppers being notably young, this marketing approach is fundamental to capturing these emerging markets.

“This is an opportunity for some brands that are in need of repositioning themselves in the market.” - Company Representative

4.1.3 Influencers VS Celebrities

The empirical findings indicate that there is a negative stigma around the term “influencer”. This was revealed after conducting both focus groups where there was a general agreement on the negative associations to individuals that are labeled as such. The underlying reasons for this were mainly due to the general assumptions the participants had when it comes to influencers. The assumptions brought forward were that influencers are typically promoting overconsumption for self profitability.

“I hate influencer culture because it feeds into consumerism and overconsumption” - Focus Group Participant

This perception of influencers took a turn shortly after digging deeper into the discussions. It was revealed that despite having an initial negative reaction to the phenomenon, all focus group participants did follow at least one influencer. After elaborating on this, it became evident that there are different reasons why influencers are relevant to consumers. The most prominent reason for this was the extremely high level of relatability and similarity a consumer feels towards the influencer. This reasoning was agreed upon by all focus group participants in both sessions.

“Seeing a fun girl from your neighborhood in the public eye makes me feel seen which keeps me interested” - Focus Group Participant

This sense of relatability attributes a stronger sense of authenticity to the influencer which is another key reason why participants' negative associations were taking a turn throughout the discussions.

Celebrities on the other hand were deemed to have lost relevance when it comes to endorsing a brand. A great majority of the participants in both focus groups agreed that seeing a celebrity marketing a luxury fashion brand is nothing new and therefore nothing to be excited about.

“Seeing Emma Watson marketing some perfume has become quite boring, I can’t even remember the last time I saw a celebrity in a campaign because of how mundane that has become” - Focus Group Participant

Linking this claim back to what company representatives brought up in regards to the vitality of maintaining a certain level of mystery when competing in the luxury fashion sector, it is evident that celebrity endorsements in the traditional sense are no longer an “unexpected” approach. Furthermore, this finding can be supported by the evidence provided in the introduction section as well as the literature review section stating that celebrities are less similar to consumers and therefore there is an overall preference for influencers when it comes to endorsing a brand (Weinswig, 2016; Schouten et al, 2019).

On the contrary, one focus group participant disagreed with this claim by stating that celebrities are a traditional symbol of glamor and they belong in a luxury fashion context.

“Maybe I am more traditional, but I don’t care that I can’t relate to Monica Belluci on any level, I would still like to see her on billboards. Personally, I like traditional press and Hollywood glamor when it comes to luxury.” - Focus Group Participant

Though this claim was not agreed on by the remaining participants, it was worth considering as it provides an unfiltered view of the way people view influencers compared to celebrities in the luxury world today.

4.1.4 Negative Correlation Between The Influencer’s Popularity & Perceived Authenticity

The findings of this study indicate that there is a negative correlation between an influencer’s level of fame and their perceived authenticity. One participant in focus group number one brings

forward this issue by arguing that the more popular an influencer is, the less genuine their claims towards a brand become. This statement was agreed upon by the rest of the focus group participants.

“If they do it for a living and it becomes a job they just need to do for the money, they become just walking mannequins that can’t be trusted” - Focus Group Participant

This assumption can be linked back to the claims made by company representatives regarding the importance of embracing the mysteriousness and anonymity elements. The more popular an influencer is, the less mysterious and anonymous the marketed brand appears to be. It is necessary to highlight that the mere indication found requires further evidence to establish the significance of this correlation.

4.2 Adapting Influencer Marketing in Luxury Fashion

4.2.1 Finding Fit

The findings of this study indicate that the absolute most necessary aspect to consider when selecting an influencer to endorse a luxury fashion brand is the perceived fit between the influencer and the brand being endorsed. This was highlighted numerous times by both company representatives as well as both focus groups. The reasoning for this ties back to the authenticity aspect. Findings indicate that an optimum fit can reduce the chance of consumers misinterpreting the collaboration for a sales attempt. This can be backed up by the match-up hypothesis discussed in the literature review (Kamins 1990).

“Yes, influencer marketing is growing within luxury fashion, but you would rarely ever see the clothes pushed by mainstream people. We are not looking for the most popular influencers or ones with the most number of following, we are after a creative image that is in line with our story” - Company Representative

Furthermore, this reasoning was backed up by unanimous agreement in both focus groups that fit is absolutely fundamental in order for this marketing phenomenon to succeed in the luxury fashion market.

“I don’t mind seeing influencers in a luxury fashion campaign as long as it’s seamless. I don’t even need to know who the influencer is from before, as long as the collaboration looks natural”

Focus Group Participant

Furthermore, a number of interviewees illustrated the vitality of having strong cohesiveness within the business as a whole, and the implementation of influencer marketing is no exception to this. Therefore the selected influencer needs to be in line with the company’s values, history, design, art, and the overall essence of the brand.

“Influencer marketing needs to be in line with the business as a whole, we communicate our brand in everything from where we have the stores, what the stores look like, the product we create, classic elements of advertising, where we advertise, and where we don’t advertise. Influencer marketing needs to be in line with the overall brand” - Company Representative

Past Collaborations

Upon elaborating on the idea of “fit”, it became evident that an influencer’s past collaborations play a massive role in setting the tone for the influencer, which is one of the key determiners of whether this influencer is a good fit for a luxury brand or not.

“If you are a luxury brand you can’t work with a girl that pushed Asos” - Company Representative

Participants in focus group number two expanded on this by arguing that not only does the influencer’s brand need to be within the same sector as the endorsed brand (I.e fashion), but also within this sector, the influencer needs to have the same culture and associations as the endorsed

brand. Therefore, an influencer that was involved in past collaborations that deviated from this would not be a good fit for the brand.

The Influencer's Audience

Similar to an influencer's past collaborations, the type of audience an influencer has is another key determiner of how suited an influencer is to endorsing a brand. There was an agreement amongst the majority of the company representatives that the audience was a necessary measure to analyze. Due to the subjective nature of having to determine whether an influencer is a good fit for a brand or not, checking the type of audience the influencer has in terms of general characteristics and traits is greatly useful in better understanding the influencers' own personal brand.

“The type of audience is key, it is important that the majority of the influencer's followers are people that would also see this collaboration as a seamless act” - Company representative

4.2.4 The Frequency Of Influencer Marketing

Another dimension to implementing this strategy in a luxury fashion context sheds a light on the frequency of using this approach to market the brand. The findings of the study reveal that excessive use of influencer marketing, even in cases where the influencer was deemed to be a perfect fit for the brand, is largely counterproductive. It was argued that having a new influencer endorsing the brand every few months can result in a negative effect and diminish the consumers' trust in the brand's authenticity.

“If I see the same brand with another influencer every few months, I would really think they're just trying to sell more which makes them look cheap and unoriginal” Focus Group Participant

This finding illustrates that frequent use of influencer marketing can harm the perceived luxury value of the brand which in turn would harm the overall image of the brand.

4.3 Impact on Brand Identity, Brand Image, and Perceived Luxury Value

4.3.1 Impact on Perceived Luxury Value

The findings derived from both focus groups provide indications of the extent to which influencer marketing impacts brand identity, brand image, and perceived luxury value. One core finding in this area is the presumed negative correlation between the brand's existing luxury value and the likelihood of this value diminishing due to the use of influencer marketing.

Participants in focus group number one highlighted this by suggesting that a brand that has a strong sense of identity, a well-known heritage, and has been well established for decades such as Chanel and Louis Vuitton, can experiment with influencer marketing without putting their brand's perceptions at great risk. The reasoning for this was illustrated by another participant within the focus group where it was suggested that the decades it took to secure a strong brand identity and to be perceived as a luxury brand simply can not be harmed easily by implementing influencer marketing, even if the fit was not achieved in an optimum way.

"I think established luxury brands are much more difficult to dilute. Even if the fit was not perfect, I will always think Louis Vuitton is a luxury brand" - Focus Group Participant

It was suggested that brands that have the privilege to rely on their history and well-established position in the market have more freedom to experiment with influencer marketing and implement it in different ways than other luxury fashion brands that lack the strong heritage aspect.

One way such brands can take advantage of this security is to do the complete opposite of what would be advised. In other words, these brands can choose an influencer that is a complete misfit for their brand and while this contradicts the reasoning provided earlier, it would benefit this type of brand in another sense as it would create a conversation on the matter thus increasing the noise around the brand.

“To me seeing Emma Chamberlain becoming a brand ambassador for Louis Vuitton, my initial reaction was thinking ‘this is weird’, I did not think the brand was any less luxurious and I did not like Emma any less either, it just took me by surprise” - Focus Group Participant

This participant expands on this by emphasizing how relatable the influencer is to him by putting himself in her shoes. This goes on to highlight the importance of the genuineness and authenticity the influencer brings forward.

“If I was her, I’d think ‘wow Louis Vuitton, that must be fun!’” - Focus Group Participant

4.3.2 Impact On Brand Identity

When assessing the impacts influencer marketing has on brand identity, findings demonstrate that when done strategically, a brand’s identity becomes stronger and more established. Brand identity is built up from everything a brand does and is rooted in the brand’s core values. For this reason, implementing influencer marketing in a cohesive manner as suggested earlier would result in stronger and more defined brand identity. Not only this but for brands aiming to reach newer segments, this approach can be utilized to establish the brand within new markets and amongst newer consumers.

“A younger consumer would know about Louis Vuitton because they know Emma not because they know the brand, and it’s terrifying to think that people think of Vuitton as the brand Emma Chamberlain is face of” - Company representative

This finding can be linked back to the brand identity part of the theoretical framework where the brand in this sense is classified as a person. Furthermore, one interview described a brand’s social media as a shop window, its purpose is to be attention-grabbing and communicate the brand’s visions in a direct and clear manner. The use of influencers is meant to enhance those virtual shop windows further and better clarify the message communicated.

“I think of social media as a shop window. In today’s digital world, this is the way to attract customers” - Company representative

4.3.2 Impact On Brand Image

In regards to brand image and how luxury fashion brands are viewed by consumers when influencer marketing is used, it was indicated that consumers have neutral to positive impressions towards this approach. While some participants in focus group number two showed some resistance to seeing influencer marketing, an overall agreement was reached that in most cases consumers would either be happy to see a well-suited influencer endorsing the brand, and if this was not the case, they would likely completely see past the advertisement altogether thus resulting in minimal harm to the brand’s image.

“I wouldn't think less of a luxury brand that I know of despite collaboration with an influencer that is not a perfect match, I would likely ignore it and move on” - Focus Group Participant

While this claim highlights the low chances of brand image being harmed due to false utilization of implementing influencer marketing, it is necessary to highlight that this refers to luxury fashion brands that are already recognized from the start. When the group was asked a follow-up question that examined whether impressions would be the same if the luxury brand in question was not one they recognized from before, answers differed slightly. The group agreed that in this case there is a chance that they would miss-understand the brand for being a luxury fashion brand, however, they would likely not appreciate the brand any less for the mere reason of utilizing a misfit influencer. This further validates the aforementioned finding that luxury value is sensitive to the use of poorly selected influencers when the brand is not well-renowned. Meanwhile, brand image is unlikely to be affected negatively.

“I might think it’s a fast-fashion brand, so I would maybe just categorize the brand differently but since I would not have known the brand from before, I would probably not develop negative impressions upfront, no” - Focus Group Participant

5. Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the empirical findings by firstly providing suggestions and implications for marketers in the field, and secondly providing an adjusted combined theoretical framework based on the findings.

5.1 Suggestions and Implications

The empirical findings of this study lead to a number of suggestions and implications for companies to consider when integrating influencer marketing into their business. Given that findings demonstrate that brands that are not yet established in the luxury fashion market are at higher risk of suffering from negative brand perceptions, it is suggested that such brands avoid the use of influencer marketing altogether for the time being.

In contrast to this, brands that are classified as semi-renowned in the market are advised to integrate the use of influencer marketing as a communication approach in order to strengthen the existing brand identity and grow the brand's community. Finally, brands that are characterized as well-renowned in the market are advised to use the use of influencer marketing for purposes of positioning their brand and becoming relevant for newer segments.

To better visualize the parameters necessary to consider when deciding on whether integrating influencer marketing is suitable for a particular brand, the below decision tree is aimed to aid as a guide for making such a decision.

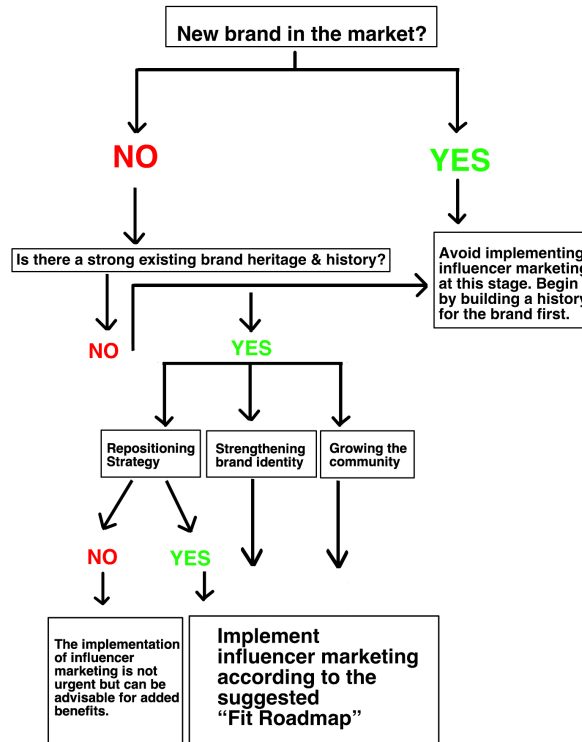


Figure 4- Decision Tree for Influencer Marketing Decision Making

The purpose of the proposed decision tree is to provide a visual summary of what aspects marketers ought to think about when assessing the relevance of influencer marketing for their brand. It is essential to note that the intended extent of using this decision tree is merely to act as a first step in the evaluation process.

5.2 Fit-Roadmap

After a brand is deemed prepared for introducing influencer marketing, it is crucial to assess the ways by which this can be achieved in the best way possible. As highlighted in the empirical findings, the fit is the most fundamental facet to consider when discussing semi-renowned luxury fashion brands. While the concept is highly dependent on the brand in question, an overall roadmap can be proposed for all brands to assess which influencer(s) would be deemed most

suitable for the brand. The below roadmap demonstrates the steps necessary for assessing the compatibility of an influencer with a particular brand.

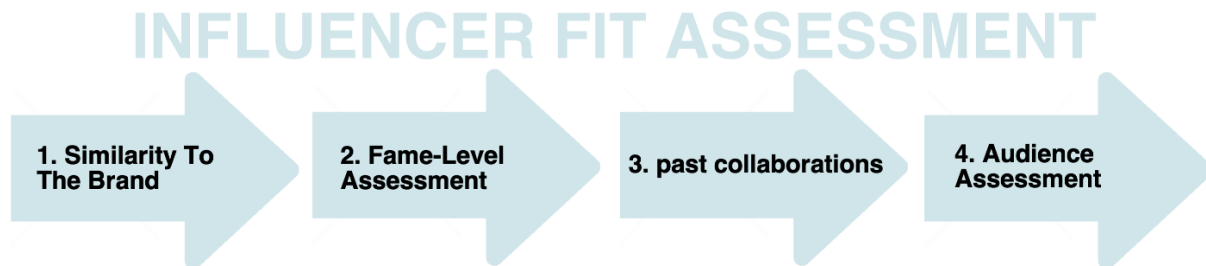


Figure 5- Fit-Roadmap

The fit roadmap suggests starting with assessing the influencer’s similarity to the brand in question. As the empirical findings reveal, the most fundamental determiner of an influencer’s fit with a brand is the extent to which the influencer is similar to the brand in terms of style, artistic expression, and overall identity. Secondly, due to the discovered negative correlation between the influencer’s popularity and perceived authenticity, the necessary next step is to assess the influencer’s fame level. It is necessary to select an influencer that is not “too popular” in order to not suffer from a lower level of authenticity and genuineness. The next necessary step is to assess the influencer’s past collaborations. In this step, it is crucial to ensure that the influencer’s previous collaborations entailed brands that are within the same industry and tier as the brand in question. Finally, the last step for assessing the influencer’s fit with the brand is to analyze the influencers’ followers and audience. As the empirical findings reveal, it is crucial to ensure that the influencer’s audience is a group of individuals that are either current or future customers of the brand.

The purpose of the suggested fit roadmap is to provide marketers with a guide on which measures to assess and in which order. It is necessary to highlight that the extent of this roadmap does not provide exact analysis methods for each suggested step. Further analysis within each step is required. The use of quantitative research can be utilized to analyze measures in the roadmap such as assessing the extent to which an influencer is similar to a brand (step one) and assessing the perceived fame level of an influencer (step two).

5.3 Adjusted Theoretical Framework

In order to maintain the abductive reasoning throughout this thesis, it was necessary to make changes to the proposed combined theoretical framework in accordance with the claims and statements proposed by the interviewees that were presented in the empirical findings. After conducting this study, it became evident that the circular effect proposed prior to conducting the study needed to be adjusted as each parameter of the model does not directly impact the other in the circular way proposed. There is a rather more complex relationship between the different parameters. As the findings demonstrate, celebrity/ influencer endorsement has the ability to strengthen brand identity. The initial integrated theoretical framework proposed that there is a general effect on celebrity/ influencer endorsement would have on brand identity. As previously discussed, earlier literature highlighted that brand identity plays a role in determining which means of communication a brand should use, which among many things entailed celebrity endorsements. However, no previous literature found a direct impact on brand identity caused by celebrity endorsements in a luxury fashion context. The findings of this study found strong indications that celebrity/ influencer endorsement can strengthen brand identity, this led to the first alteration in the combined theoretical framework. Furthermore, contrary to the initial model, findings reveal evidence that the luxury value of a brand is embedded within its brand identity thus it should not be considered a separate parameter on its own. The literature review section demonstrates that there is a strong relationship between perceived luxury value and brand identity, however, no evidence was found on the extent of this link. The findings of this study revealed that perceived luxury value and brand identity are not two independent variables, rather brand identity is the greater umbrella containing the perceived luxury value. Finally, as stated in the empirical findings, the impact celebrity/ influencer endorsement has on brand identity is capable of influencing brand image. This can be linked back to the brand image section in the literature review where it was illustrated that celebrity endorsements are capable of boosting brand image. The findings of this study expand on this by revealing that similar effects can be assumed for influencer endorsements. In order to comply with the adjustments found from carrying out this study, the integrated theoretical framework proposed is altered to the below version:

Celebrity/ influencer endorsement can strengthen brand identity

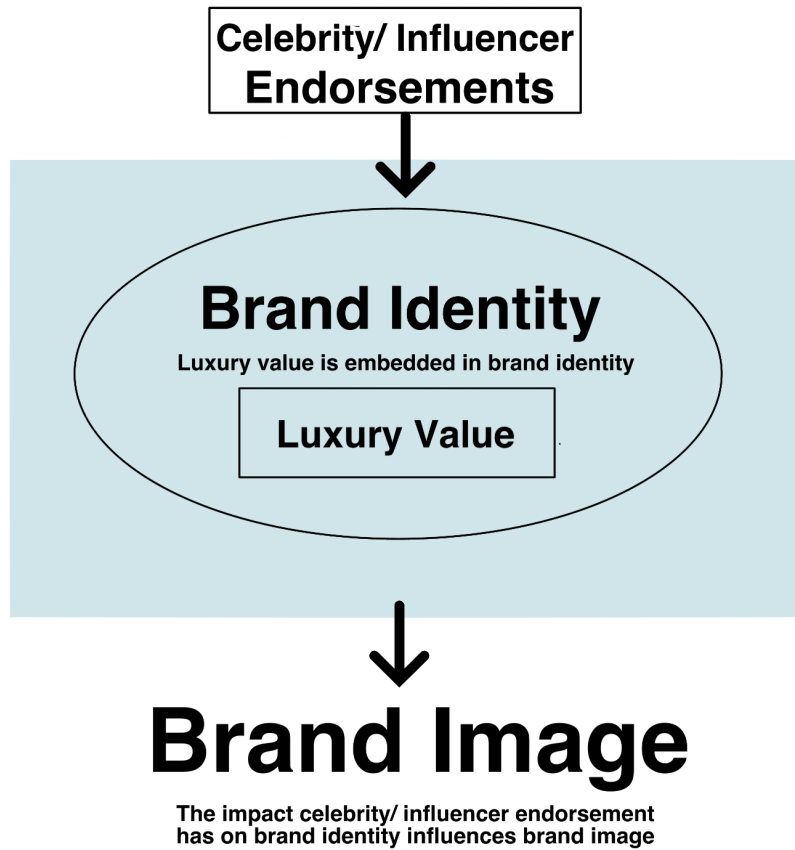


Figure 6- Adjusted Theoretical Framework

6. Conclusion

This section discusses the conclusions reached based on the empirical findings and analysis presented above. This is achieved through addressing the research question, discussing the theoretical contributions as well as addressing the limitations and opportunities for further research.

6.1 Addressing The Research Question

Through referring back to the research question for this thesis, it is evident that the findings provide answers to the questions which minimizes the aforementioned research gap. The question of “*How Can Luxury Fashion Brands Make Use of Influencer Marketing and What Implications Could This Have On Brand Identity, Brand Image, and Perceived Luxury Value?*” can be resolved using the analysis provided. Firstly, the question of “How” is tackled through providing a thorough analysis detailing the different parameters to consider for the different stages luxury fashion brands may exist. This analysis is backed up by empirical findings which are later presented in the form of a roadmap as well as a decision tree. The question regarding the implications this has on brand perceptions is addressed by providing evidence for the discovery of the negative correlation that exists between the brand’s existing luxury status and the likelihood for this perceived luxury to decrease due to influencer marketing. Similarly, the analysis provided demonstrates that implementing this marketing approach can be utilized for strengthening brand identity and growing a brand’s story and community. Finally, the findings reveal that this approach is unlikely to diminish a brand’s existing brand image as it was highlighted that if this approach was done poorly, it would more likely be ignored by the consumer than result in a compromised brand image.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

This study presented a number of theoretical contributions that can be deemed useful for both academics as well as marketers in the business. Firstly, this study showed evidence of the underlying reasons why companies are advised to integrate influencer marketing in the luxury

fashion field. This closes up the first identified research gap. This knowledge benefits the academic world as it contributes to the existing literature by adding newer dimensions that were lacking. Secondly, this knowledge was developed to provide marketers with a decision-making guide when it comes to assessing whether this marketing approach is suitable for a brand in which case, a suggested roadmap is proposed to further guide marketers in deciding on which influencer to consider. This guidance narrows the second research gap identified concerning the ways by which influencer marketing should be integrated into luxury fashion. Finally, this study provided insights on how this marketing approach is likely to influence brand perceptions. This addresses the final research gap identified regarding the unknown outcomes this marketing approach would have on brand identity, brand image, and luxury value.

6.3 Limitations and Further Research

This study includes a number of limitations and implications for future research. One limitation to this study is the compromised diversity observed in the focus group participants. Due to the minimal selection criteria set, a great majority of the participants ended up being amongst a similar age group and coming from the same country, Sweden. For this reason, it can be argued that the samples chosen within the focus groups are not a fully accurate representation of the wide array of people targeted by luxury fashion brands. Future research can tackle this issue by conducting a similar study involving a far more diverse group of individuals representing geographical and demographic diversity. Furthermore, this can be achieved through conducting a quantitative study as this approach would allow findings to be applied to a greater population.

As this study revealed that well-renowned luxury fashion brands have the capacity to experiment with evolving influencers that are not particularly a perfect fit in order to maintain an element of surprise, future research can expand on this finding by researching the exact ways this can be achieved. It is possible to use the findings from this study as the grounds for investigating the approaches by which well-renowned luxury fashion brands can collaborate with influencers from a mismatched niche as a repositioning strategy. Furthermore, this study showed evidence that the frequent use of influencer marketing can have a negative effect on brand perceptions. Future

research can investigate this correlation further by investigating what “frequent use” implies. Similarly, the study demonstrates a negative correlation between an influencer’s level of fame and their perceived authenticity, future research can expand on this by investigating what an optimum level of fame is and at what point this becomes detrimental to perceived authenticity. Finally, this study revealed findings on how brand perceptions are impacted by the use of influencer marketing, however little is known about the perceptions of brands that choose to avoid this approach altogether. As markets continue to evolve, it is relevant for future research to investigate what potential harm this could cause for brands that continue to neglect this marketing approach.

7. Reference list

- Aaker, D.A. (1996). Measuring Brand Equity Across Products and Markets. *California Management Review*, 38(3), pp.102–120. doi:10.2307/41165845.
- Abidin, C. (2016). Visibility labour: Engaging with Influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia*, 161(1), pp.86–100. doi:10.1177/1329878x16665177.
- Bergkvist, L. and Zhou, K.Q. (2016). Celebrity endorsements: a literature review and research agenda. *International Journal of Advertising*, [online] 35(4), pp.642–663. doi:10.1080/02650487.2015.1137537.
- Bhatt, N., Jayswal, R.M. and Patel, J.D. (2013). *Impact of Celebrity Endorser's Source Credibility on Attitude Towards Advertisements and Brands*. *South Asian Journal of Management*,.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V. and Terry, G. (2015). Thematic Analysis. *Qualitative Research in Clinical and Health Psychology*, pp.95–113. doi:10.1007/978-1-137-29105-9_7.
- Brooks, G., Drenten, J. and Piskorski, M.J. (2021). Influencer Celebrification: How Social Media Influencers Acquire Celebrity Capital. *Journal of Advertising*, 50(5), pp.1–20. doi:10.1080/00913367.2021.1977737.
- Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2011). *Business Research Methods*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Butte College (2019). *Deductive, Inductive and Abductive Reasoning - TIP Sheet - Butte College*. [online] www.butte.edu. Available at: <http://www.butte.edu/departments/cas/tipsheets/thinking/reasoning.html>.

Byberg, A., Hansen, J. and Basic, M. (2015). *Celebrity Endorsement's Impact on Brand Image and Sales -A Case Study on Volvo Cars Sweden*. [online] Available at: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:812912/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

Campbell, M.C. and Warren, C. (2012). A risk of meaning transfer: Are negative associations more likely to transfer than positive associations? *Social Influence*, 7(3), pp.172–192. doi:10.1080/15534510.2012.663740.

Caroline Tynan, A. and Drayton, J.L. (1988). CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS — A GUIDE FOR FIRST-TIME USERS. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 6(1), pp.5–9. doi:10.1108/eb045757.

Caulfield, J. (2019). *How To Do Thematic Analysis*. [online] Scribbr. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/>.

Chaffey, D. (2020). *Global social media research summary July 2020*. [online] Smart Insights. Available at: <https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/#:~:text=More%20than%20half%20of%20the>.

Dewi, I.C. and Hartono, J. (2019). THE IMPACT OF ADVERTISING TOWARDS BRAND IMAGE AND PURCHASE INTENTION: THE CASE STUDY OF MATAHARIMALL.COM. *Review of Management and Entrepreneurship*, 3(1), pp.47–76. doi:10.37715/rme.v3i1.1235.

Donawerth, S. (2020). *Influencer Marketing for Luxury Brands*. [online] Carro: Sell More, Together. Available at: <https://getcarro.com/blog/influencer-marketing-for-luxury-brands/>.

Edmondson, A.C. and Mcmanus, S.E. (2007). Methodological fit in management field research. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), pp.1155–1179. doi:10.5465/amr.2007.26586086.

Erdogan, B.Z. (1999). Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(4), pp.291–314. doi:10.1362/026725799784870379.

Ferina, N., Sri, G. and Putu, L. (2021). Does Influencer Marketing Really Improve Sustainable Brand Awareness and Sales? *Inovbiz: Jurnal Inovasi Bisnis*, 9(1), p.167.
doi:10.35314/inovbiz.v9i1.1889.

Geyser, W. (2021). *What is an influencer? - factors that define a social media influencer*.
[online] Influencer Marketing Hub. Available at:
<https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-an-influencer/>.

Ghodeswar, B.M. (2008). Building brand identity in competitive markets: a conceptual model. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 17(1), pp.4–12. doi:10.1108/10610420810856468.

Goldsmith, R.E., Lafferty, B.A. and Newell, S.J. (2000). The Impact of Corporate Credibility and Celebrity Credibility on Consumer Reaction to Advertisements and Brands. *Journal of Advertising*, 29(3), pp.43–54. doi:10.1080/00913367.2000.10673616.

HÖRNFELDT, L. (2015). *Därför ska influencer marketing finnas i din digitala marknadsmix*.
[online] Influencers of Sweden. Available at:
<https://influencersofsweden.se/influencer-marketing-digital-marknadsforing/> [Accessed 1 May 2022].

Howard, K. (2018). *Find Market Research Companies, Facilities, Jobs, Articles, More | Quirks.com*. [online] www.quirks.com. Available at:
<https://www.quirks.com/articles/gen-z-and-the-challenges-of-the-most-individualistic-generation-yet>.

Jain, V. and Roy, S. (2016). Understanding meaning transfer in celebrity endorsements: a qualitative exploration. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 19(3), pp.266–286. doi:10.1108/qmr-03-2015-0020.

Kaemingk, D. (2019). *What is Brand Image and how do you measure it?* [online] Qualtrics. Available at: <https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/brand-image/>.

- Kamins, M.A. (1990). An Investigation into the 'Match-up' Hypothesis in Celebrity Advertising: When Beauty May Be Only Skin Deep. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(1), pp.4–13. doi:10.1080/00913367.1990.10673175.
- Kamins, M.A. and Gupta, K. (1994). Congruence between spokesperson and product type: A matchup hypothesis perspective. *Psychology and Marketing*, 11(6), pp.569–586. doi:10.1002/mar.4220110605.
- Kapferer, J.-N. and Bastien, V. (2009). The specificity of luxury management: Turning marketing upside down. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(5-6), pp.311–322. doi:10.1057/bm.2008.51.
- Kulke, C. (2021). *Why Luxury Fashion Brands Need Influencer Marketing*. [online] www.creatoriq.com. Available at: <https://www.creatoriq.com/blog/why-luxury-fashion-brands-need-influencer-marketing>.
- kumara, V.P., Durai, DR.T. and Scholar, M.Phil. (2020). *Role of Influencer Marketing on Social Media. Test Engineering and Management*,.
- Lane, P., McKenna, H., Ryan, A.A. and Fleming, P. (2001). Focus group methodology. *Nurse Researcher*, 8(3), pp.45–59. doi:10.7748/nr2001.04.8.3.45.c6157.
- Langer, D. (2021). *Why Focusing on Gen Z Is A Matter Of Survival For Luxury Brands*. [online] Jing Daily. Available at: <https://jingdaily.com/luxury-brand-strategy-genz-dior-gucci/>.
- Lipscomb, M. (2012). Abductive reasoning and qualitative research. *Nursing Philosophy*, [online] 13(4), pp.244–256. doi:10.1111/j.1466-769x.2011.00532.x.
- MAHADEVAN, T.C. (2021). *Louis Vuitton Taps TikTok and YouTube Stars Emma Chamberlain and Charli D'Amelio for New Campaign*. [online] Complex. Available at: <https://www.complex.com/style/louis-vuitton-emma-chamberlain-charlie-damelio-fall-campaign/#:~:text=Louis%20Vuitton%20has%20tapped%20internet>.

McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(1), pp.71–84. doi:10.1086/209048.

Meyerson, R. (2019). *David Aaker's Brand Vision Model and how it works, part two*. [online] How Brands Are Built. Available at: <https://howbrandsarebuilt.com/blog/2019/11/07/david-aakers-brand-vision-model-and-how-it-works-part-two/#VisualMetaphors>.

Nascimento, L. de C.N., Souza, T.V. de, Oliveira, I.C. dos S., Moraes, J.R.M.M. de, Aguiar, R.C.B. de, Silva, L.F. da, Nascimento, L. de C.N., Souza, T.V. de, Oliveira, I.C. dos S., Moraes, J.R.M.M. de, Aguiar, R.C.B. de and Silva, L.F. da (2018). Theoretical saturation in qualitative research: an experience report in interview with schoolchildren. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, [online] 71(1), pp.228–233. doi:10.1590/0034-7167-2016-0616.

Newcomer, K.E., Hatry, H.P. and Wholey, J.S. (2015). *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*. 4th ed. Hoboken, New Jersey: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, pp.492–505.

O'Reilly, C.J. (2016). Creative Engineers: Is Abductive Reasoning Encouraged enough in Degree Project Work? *Procedia CIRP*, 50, pp.547–552. doi:10.1016/j.procir.2016.04.155.

Oxford Languages (2022). *Oxford Languages and Google - English*. [online] languages.oup.com. Available at: <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>.

Richardson, D. (2014). *In Praise of Small Focus Groups | Artemis Strategy Group*. [online] artemissg. Available at: <https://www.artemissg.com/2014/06/praise-small-focus-groups/>.

Richardson, E. (2022). *The Age of The Influencer | Influencer Matchmaker*. [online] influencermatchmaker.co.uk. Available at: <https://influencermatchmaker.co.uk/blog/age-influencer-how-it-all-began>.

Saarijärvi, M. and Bratt, E.-L. (2021). When face-to-face interviews are not possible: tips and tricks for video, telephone, online chat, and email interviews in qualitative research. *European Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing*, 20(4). doi:10.1093/eurjcn/zvab038.

Santora, J. (2017). *Key Influencer Marketing Statistics You Need to Know for 2022*. [online] Influencer Marketing Hub. Available at:
<https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-statistics/#:~:text=Influencer%20Marketing%20Industry%20to%20Reach>.

Schouten, A.P., Janssen, L. and Verspaget, M. (2019). Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: the role of identification, credibility, and Product-Endorser fit. *International Journal of Advertising*, [online] 39(2), pp.1–24. doi:10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898.

Sternbauer, M. (2022). *What Makes a Luxury Brand?* [online] blog.thatagency.com. Available at:
<https://blog.thatagency.com/luxury-brand-identity>.

Takaya, R. (2019). THE EFFECT OF CELEBRITY ENDORSMENT ON BRAND IMAGE AND TRUST BRAND AND IT'S IMPACT TO PURCHASE INTENTION CASE STUDY: OPPO SMARTPHONE. *Business and Entrepreneurial Review*, 17(2), p.183.
doi:10.25105/ber.v17i1.5228.

Urde, M. (2013). The corporate brand identity matrix. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(9), pp.742–761. doi:10.1057/bm.2013.12.

Weinswig, D. (2016). *Influencers Are The New Brands*. [online] Forbes. Available at:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahweinswig/2016/10/05/influencers-are-the-new-brands/?sh=10957f557919> [Accessed 1 May 2022].

Wiedmann, K.-P., Hennigs, N. and Siebels, A. (2007). *Measuring Consumers' Luxury Value Perception: A Cross-Cultural Framework*. *Academy of Marketing Science*,.

Wintermeier, N. (2021). *Who is the Luxury Consumer? A Guide to the Psychology of Luxury*. [online] blog.crobox.com. Available at:
<https://blog.crobox.com/article/luxury-consumer-psychology#:~:text=Compared%20to%20the%20traditional%20luxury> [Accessed 1 May 2022].

Yang, W. (2018). Star power: the evolution of celebrity endorsement research. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 30(1), pp.389–415.
doi:10.1108/ijchm-09-2016-0543.

Yeoman, I. (2010). The changing behaviours of luxury consumption. *Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management*, 10(1), pp.47–50. doi:10.1057/rpm.2010.43.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Industry-Interviews Questions Guide

Business & Target group:

1. How would you describe your customers?
2. How drastically did your customer base evolve over time? Or has it?
3. Has there been new developments in your target group that have influenced your operations? If so, do you have an example of how this affected business operations?
4. What is the most important group of customers you are attempting to win over? Why?
5. Have you changed the way you communicate with your customers through the years to adjust to new target segments?
6. Is there a particular campaign that you are thinking of?
7. Can you tell me about a particularly successful campaign that stands out?
8. Are you seeing challenges in appealing to the younger generation in terms of your brand's positioning?
9. What fears do you have concerning staying relevant for a newer target group, how are you planning to combat them?
10. At what point in time did you start seeing the vitality in shifting target groups?
11. How did you act quickly?
12. Has the "value" of the brand seen a shift due to presumably evolving target groups over the years? (Luxury value)
13. Have you seen any setbacks as a result of appealing to a younger/ new target group? If so, can you tell me about them?

Brand Identity:

1. How would you define your brand's identity?
2. How has your brand identity been impacted since changing operations to attract a new target group?
3. Is the brand identity being threatened due to changing target groups?
4. When communicating with customers through marketing activities, what do you do to make sure that the brand identity is being considered?
5. Has your brand's identity changed to adapt to market trends/ new target segments? If so, how? (product, organization, person or symbol)

6. What do you do to convey the brand identity clearly to your customers? More particularly to the newer target group?
7. How are you ensuring that your brand identity is maintained throughout the years in spite of the growth of newer target groups?
8. Would you say your brand identity can “clash” with marketing activities that are likely to capture the new young customer base? If so, do you prioritize maintaining brand identity over taking those measures or vice versa?

Luxury value:

1. What makes your brand “luxury”?
2. When it comes to the luxury value of your brand, do you believe it is mainly financial, functional, individual, or social value? Has the way you place the luxury value of your brand changed when attempting to attract a new target group?
3. In the eyes of your customers, what do you think makes your brand luxury?
4. Do you think an older target group from years ago saw the luxury value of your brand differently than the way the current target group views it? If so, how did you overcome this miss-match?
5. How do you maintain your luxury value? What aspects do you need to consider in order for this value not to decrease? (financial aspects, eg lower sales,)
6. How do you ensure the luxury value ties in with your brand’s identity?

Celebrity/Influencer Endorsement:

1. The use of influencer marketing is on the rise, is this something you are or plan on implementing? Why?
2. What are your thoughts on influencer marketing?
3. Are you avoiding influencer marketing ? If so, why?
4. What are some significant internal discussions you had regarding influencer marketing?
5. What do you keep in mind when it comes to celebrity endorsements? (attractiveness, credibility, match up hypothesis, meaning transfer) why?
6. What decides whether an influencer is a good “fit” with your brand identity?
7. Is there a particular strategy when it comes to selecting celebrities to endorse the brand?
8. In general, is celebrity endorsement something you attribute a lot of weight to when marketing your brand?

9. How do you measure whether a celebrity endorsement strategy was successful?

Brand Image:

1. How do you think your brand is perceived by your newer target group?
2. What do you think your brand is associated with? (Some words)
3. What actions are taken to measure the way your brand is perceived?
4. Do you think you are in touch with the way consumers view your brand? Why yes/no?
5. Do you think your brand's image is different amongst different consumer groups? (older vs younger) How so?
6. Brand Image is defined by each individual but is greatly impacted by the brand's communication. When marketing the brand, do you prioritize maintaining a certain brand image amongst one particular target group more than the other?
7. Does maintaining a certain brand image go hand in hand with market development? If not, are you prioritizing one over the other? Why, is there a greater strategy than just following market development?
8. In regards to the challenges you mentioned earlier, how do you think this has (will) impact your brand image?
9. Can you tell me a bit about the development of your brand image through the years? How has this been impacted by changing customer bases?

Appendix 2: Focus Group Questions Guide

What is luxury to you:

1. What is it that interests you about luxury fashion?
2. What do you think makes a brand luxury or not?

Thoughts on influencers in General:

1. What are influencers in your opinion?
2. Do you think you are influenced by influencers generally in your life? Adapting habits or purchasing items because of them for insurance?
3. As a concept, how do you feel about influencers, do you have any positive/ negative associations when you hear the word influencer? Or are you completely neutral? Why?
4. Can you name an influencer that you like? Why do you like them? Is it because they are attractive, trustworthy, don't have any "ulterior motif" or have similar interests and personality to you? (Celebrity endorsements theories)
 - Now imagine this influencer in a luxury fashion campaign, would this make you like the brand more?
 - Maybe if this influencer was never interested in fashion and suddenly collaborates with luxury fashion brands they lose credibility? Or would this not bother you?
5. Can you remember a time where you were exposed to influencer marketing? How did you feel?
6. Have you ever purchased something because of an influencer? What was the nature of this product? Expensive/ cheap?
 - Do you think the nature of the product plays a role in whether you would like to see influencer marketing or not?

Influencers in Luxury Fashion:

1. Do you think influencers can be compatible with the concept of luxury fashion? Why yes, why no?
2. Do you associate influencer marketing with a younger audience?
 - Does this aspect of age play a role in determining how "luxury" a brand is?

3. Let's take the example of Louis Vuitton, how do you feel about the brand knowing that they assigned Emma Chamberlain to be their brand ambassador? How did you feel about the brand before this happened? Is there a difference in the way you perceive the brand?
4. If there is a chance that you would like to see influencer marketing in luxury fashion, what traits do you think the influencer needs to embody for you to appreciate it?
5. Can you name an influencer that you think can promote luxury fashion brands? Why do you think this influencer is capable of this?
6. Can you name a luxury fashion brand that you have loved for many years? Has this brand ever used any form of influencer marketing? If so, how did this make you feel, did it change the way you viewed the brand? If not, imagine this happens, how do you think your opinions on the brand would be affected?

Brand Identity & Luxury Value Associations:

1. Can you tell me a brand that you think has a very strong sense of brand identity? Why do you feel that way about this brand?
2. Can you tell me the first brand that comes to mind when you think about the word luxury? Why did you associate this brand with luxury?