

INFLUENCER MARKETING CAMPAIGNS DECODED.

Jessica Maria Disch

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Abstract

With the world amid the evolution of the digital age and the rise of social networking, it is more than evident that consumer behaviour has changed, and social media platforms like Instagram are used extensively for Marketing communications. This change has led to an expanding number of opportunities and challenges. Both academics and practitioners have acknowledged the increasing importance of social media influencers (SMI's). Nevertheless, due to its contemporaneousness, the academic literature regarding this subject faces some limitations. To expand knowledge in this field, the present study explores marketing professionals' knowledge towards SMI's and SMI marketing campaigns on Instagram, respecting existing literature and identifying the most recent issues. A qualitative approach with purposive sampling is followed to achieve the study objectives. The research includes a two-phased approach and comprises eleven semi-structured interviews with luxury brand industry professionals, who have already executed SMI marketing campaigns. Thematic analysis helps to identify and analyse relevant factors of these interviews, where axial codes are defined, and selective themes clustered. The findings of this study highlight the importance of SMI's, also in light of the somewhat quixotic challenge of the luxury social paradox. The principal value of this study is that it introduces a new Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC) framework, documenting all stages of an SMI campaign process and highlighting success characteristics.

Keywords: Marketing Strategy, Luxury Social Paradox, Luxury Industry, Social Media, Social Media Influencer (SMI) Marketing, SMI Campaign

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Dedication

*My humble effort I dedicate to my loving
mother, Christine Maria Disch,
whose affection, encouragement, guidance, and unconditional love
make me able to get success and honour.*

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Conventions

In the context of this work, the following conventions are introduced to standardise the presentation and increase clarity.

Introduction of new terms: To better understand the present work, the terms necessary for the understanding are introduced step by step. Terms defined or described in more detail are printed in italics at the first introduction for better identification.

Dealing with German-language literature: Since the author of this work is German, the analysis of German-language sources is highly relevant in the detailed analysis of existing literature. German language sources have been translated into English.

Citation: The sources used are referenced by the abbreviation (author's short form, year) according to the APA 7 guidelines as of August 2020.

Nomenclature

4 P's	Product, Price, Place, Promotion
B2B	Business-to-Business
B2C	Business-to-Customer
e-WOM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
RD6	Research Development Six
RFID	Radio Frequency Identification
ROI	Return on Investments
SM	Social Media
SMI	Social Media Influencer
UGC	User-Generated Content
WOM	Word-of-Mouth

Chapter 1 Introduction

“Studies show that social media makes you happy. No, wait. Actually, social media makes you depressed. Have we mentioned that social media can drive you crazy? Well, maybe not, but it probably drives researchers crazy.” – Todd Leopold, CNN (2015)

The first chapter of this thesis provides some theoretical background to the work related to the development of Web 2.0, social media marketing, social media influencer marketing, as well as the successful campaign process on Instagram for luxury brands (1.2) and describes the focus of the thesis (1.3). In addition, it explains why the thesis has been created (1.4). Subsequently, the research is placed in context, and the research questions (1.5) and research design approach are presented (1.6). Then, some limitations of the study are elaborated (1.7). In the end, the overall structure and brief chapter contents are outlined (1.8) and a conclusion drawn (1.9).

1.1 Overview of the Chapter

The subject of this chapter is the use of influencer marketing on social media platforms as a growing trend for promoting luxury brand campaigns in the online context. A particular emphasis is set on the research focus as well as aims and objectives, namely the examination of success characteristics of social media campaigns on Instagram and whether specific process steps in the execution of social media campaigns within the luxury brand industry can be identified.

1.2 Research Background

The research explores the success characteristics and process of campaigning with social media influencers within the luxury industry. Firstly, it focuses on Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) and the development of Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (e-WOM). Some researchers consider WOM the most valuable, influential, and persuasive form of Marketing in business and academic communities (Kiss & Bichler, 2008; Mayzlin & Godes, 2002). With the rise of the Internet and Web 2.0, traditional WOM has been extended to e-WOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012), which sets the foundation of Web 2.0 and the growth of the social media phenomenon (Tuten et al., 2020).

There is evidence that social media and Web 2.0 are often used interchangeably (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Pitt et al., 2012). However, Web 2.0 can be viewed as the technical infrastructure that enables the social phenomenon of collective media and facilitates customer-generated content. In contrast, social media focuses on content and customer generation on the content creators, i.e., as “co-producers” (Pitt et al., 2012).

Primarily through social media, marketing activities nowadays can be executed with much less effort and cost than in former times (Kim & Ko, 2012). However, social media is not a substitute for traditional marketing but rather seen as complementary (Tuten et al., 2020).

Within social media marketing, influencer marketing has become one of the significant trends in strategic communications practice in recent years. Forming strategic alliances with influencers is a way of using credible third parties rather than using the brand as the primary sender (De Veirman et al., 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lisichkova & Othman, 2017). Meanwhile, companies use new influencer stars' creative skills and reach (further explained in chapter 2.4) to advertise products and spread messages and content through the campaign process.

The interest of companies in social media influencers (SMI's) is high. In 2016, 84 per cent of US companies said they were planning an influencer campaign within the next 12 months (Enke & Borchers, 2018).

When focusing on campaigning, by adopting success characteristics while working with influencers, the collaboration has a more substantial probability of campaigns succeeding and presenting effectively (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

Especially the platform Instagram is a reasonable basis for SMI Marketing campaigns. Images increase interaction "between 120 and 180 per cent" (Pein, 2015, p 400), which explains the general trend for imagery in social media channels. This is a reasonable basis for the photo and video sharing community on Instagram.

With its one billion users, the platform is now one of the most widely used social media platforms (oberlo.com, 2021). Instagram is right after Facebook (2,4 billion users), YouTube (2,0 billion users), Whatsapp (1,6 billion users), Facebook Messenger (1,3 billion users), and the Chinese platform WeChat with 1,1 billion users. The Instagram platform is rated the highest by users, but 78 per cent of marketers believe Instagram posts are the most effective format for SMI marketing, followed by Instagram stories (Statista, 2019).

Particularly for luxury brands, Instagram is a great marketing tool (Godey et al., 2016; Okonkwo, 2009). Since only one image and one text are shown at a time, focusing on aesthetics and a particular brand image requires a less cognitive effort from the users (Brandung, 2017). This is understood as a picture-superiority effect. The content has an emotional and activating effect that increases attention and engagement (Brandung, 2017).

Yet, concerning luxury brands, there is an absence of consensus regarding the definition (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008). According to Kapferer (1998), the luxury concept is continuously evolving and very subjective. Its meaning differs between person, time or places (Hudders et al., 2013; Michman et al., 2006; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). Today, despite this subjectivism, the concept of luxury has become increasingly integrated by the move towards social media platforms,

spreading the idea through mass media were formerly exclusive has become commonplace (Garland, 2008; Hudders et al., 2013). More customers can be reached, allowing those of lower classes to become potential customers while, at the same time, maintaining a luxury brand's prestige. Thus, social media embrace not only democracy but also diversity, which allows users to be treated equally (Albus & Sharma, 2017). Today, the concept of luxury is reachable to a broader audience, who may become potential buyers (Ingrid, 2018).

Accordingly, the luxury market has grown with a more extensive potential consumer base in the past 20 years (Tsai, 2005; Tynan et al., 2010; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). For instance, this rise is supported by emerging markets' more robust demand (e.g., China and India) and luxury brands' product portfolio extension. A more comprehensive range of consumers is targeted (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003).

The fact that social media accounts for luxury to become more accessible and attractive to everyday customers partly explains why influencer marketing, especially on social media, has become a domineering component of the business strategies of some of the largest luxury brands in the world (Ingrid, 2018).

Social media has forced companies to adopt new approaches to customer communication (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Information reaches many people very quickly and causes a buzz that may be forgotten tomorrow, which results in unpredictability (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Nevertheless, since influencer marketing promises eleven times higher annual sales than classic digital advertising (TapInfluence, 2021), luxury brands need to consider this relatively new marketing channel. On the one hand, advertising agencies have recognised the potential and are looking for suitable influencers for their customers. On the other hand, marketing decision-makers see this as a promising instrument and restructure their advertising budgets accordingly (ZAW, 2018).

Consequently, this quickly expanding marketing channel forces companies, including luxury brands, to seek new interactive ways to reach and engage with their customers (Gallaughier & Ransbotham, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2010). By moving to this digital

sphere described above, several luxury brands have shown that they did not lose their exclusivity by becoming more democratised through social media (Albus & Sharma, 2017). According to the authors, influencers have become important mediators between high-end brands and ordinary consumers (Albus & Sharma, 2017).

However, research examining social media marketing effects from a luxury branding perspective is often exploratory and lacks empirical studies (Hollebeek et al., 2014). To date, social media marketing efforts by luxury brands have mainly been researched concerning brand equity, customer equity, and customer behaviour (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012). This field of research determines such effects with a strong focus on the brand itself rather than on the SMI campaign process to promote them (Ingrid, 2018). Therefore, the proposed research builds on the work by Carter (2016), Uzunoglu & Kip (2014), and Santiago & Castelo (2020). These researchers are also curious about what influencer factors are essential for an influencer campaign to succeed. Then, it becomes interesting to research how luxury influencers re-define the concept of luxury branding on the visual social media platform Instagram.

The proposed research adds knowledge to Instagram influencer marketing concerning luxury branding, a relatively new topic of study. It can help academics and practitioners understand the luxury industry's contemporary essence in the context to social media marketing, the success characteristics, and steps in the campaign process on the platform Instagram. Moreover, it also adds new insights into explaining luxury in economics, primarily based on only high prices.

Choosing the right influencer is crucial for making a campaign successful (Santiago & Castelo, 2020). Thus, the dominant question of this study is whether success characteristics can be identified when running a SMI campaign and what steps are involved in the campaign process for luxury brands. However, research findings on this topic, considering the somewhat paradoxical exclusivity of luxury products on a mass media platform, are limited (Kluge & Fassnacht, 2015; Okonkwo, 2009).

Concerning the social relevance, the loss of elite status and the extension of the target market bring complexity (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). To reduce this

complexity, this thesis aims to identify influencer success characteristics to positively convey the concept of luxury to a broader, more social audience and analyse the factors determining influencer marketing campaigns on Instagram.

Finally, from a methodological standpoint, De Veirman et al. (2017) focus on what characteristics affect the success of influencers on Instagram and find that it is primarily achieved by the way they present a brand. Such findings help luxury brands to choose the right influencers with whom they want to collaborate. In distinction to this study, De Veirman et al. (2017) conduct their data from a positivist viewpoint. In contrast, this research seeks to determine the luxury social paradox and the success characteristics and steps involved in the campaign process through qualitative interviews from an interpretivist stance (this will be further justified in chapter 3). This complements previous research by assessing the collaboration between luxury brands and social media influencers qualitatively. A contribution to knowledge is achieved by developing an Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC) framework attributed to influencer marketing and luxury brands on Instagram.

1.3 Research Gaps

In recent years, the luxury industry has experienced democratisation through mass media. There is a paradox between luxury inaccessibility and social media tools (Hamzaoui et al., 2019). Through such means, it is argued that luxury is not restricted to the wealthy anymore (Roper et al., 2013). As the group of luxury customers is expanding, luxury brands must adapt to new marketing strategies to satisfy the needs of this new target audience. This is where SMI marketing comes into place. This relatively new marketing discipline promotes products or brand awareness through social media users considered influential by spreading content online (Carter, 2016). Carter (2016) emphasises that this marketing channel is a reaction to consumers' lack of interest in classic advertising.

Today, about one-third of the world's population uses social media (Shah et al., 2019). Indeed, it has become an integral part of everyday life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Generally, the influence of Instagram is an understated topic for research focused on the luxury industry (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Despite the success of online influencer marketing strategies, moderately little academic work has examined who influencers are, how they work, and how they cooperate with companies (for noteworthy exclusions, see Biran et al. (2012), Subramani & Rajagopalan (2003), and Trammell & Keshelashvili (2005)).

Academic work on luxury brands is even more limited. The characterisation of luxury brands marketing online has been restricted to a narrow aspect of the whole spectrum (Okonkwo, 2009).

The literature lacks a successful and profound process of SMI Marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram to the best of the author's knowledge to date. The knowledge about the planning process of an SMI marketing campaign is still limited, given that it is a current practice (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017).

This dissertation seeks to fill this gap and bridge between the topics of SMI Marketing campaigns and luxury brands. By doing so, this thesis aims to help brands in the luxury industry better reach and attract their audience by implementing successful SMI Marketing campaigns in the future and sustaining their success. Moreover, it helps SMI's to better understand a successful campaign process when working with brands in the luxury industry. To achieve this, the author of this work has defined three research questions (RQs). Each of these research questions will focus on the subsequently outlined research project and links to the aim and objectives of the study.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to explore and critically analyse the success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry.

Re-framed as research objectives, the work aims for the following four research objectives:

- *O1: To explore the characterisation of marketing luxury brands online.*
- *O2: To identify the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram.*
- *O3: To explore social media managers perceptions on a successful process of creating an influencer marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram and develop an integrative framework.*
- *O4: To provide recommendations to marketing, brand, or social media managers on how to introduce an effective SMI campaign process on Instagram.*

1.5 Research Questions

The achievement of these objectives gives answers to the following research questions derived from the critical discussion of this phenomenon in the literature review:

RQ1: What characterises the marketing of luxury brands online?

RQ2: What are the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram?

RQ3: What steps involve a successful process of creating an influencer marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram?

RQ4: How can marketing, brand, or social media managers introduce an effective SMI campaign process on Instagram?

The answers to these questions are the subject of this thesis's findings, discussion, and conclusion chapters.

1.6 Research Design

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), ontology is how the researcher considers the nature of existence and reality. This study seeks to identify the success characteristics of SMI campaigns and steps involved in the campaign process on Instagram. It implies an ontological and epistemological philosophy of interpretivism, meaning there is a belief that reality is socially constructed (Takhar-Lail & Ghorbani, 2015). The investigation of this world is manifested in the used research method and techniques of the interpretive design (Takhar-Lail & Ghorbani, 2015), which are interviews to interpret the social media managers' feelings and inner thoughts of specific success characteristics of SMI campaigns and steps involved in the campaign process.

Qualitative research allows researchers to gain much information from their participants to understand the research topic in-depth. Mutch (2013) explains that a qualitative methodology will enable researchers to gather rich knowledge of interest. Subsequently, this research uses qualitative methods (Jackson et al., 2007) to explore the topic of identifying social media campaign success characteristics for luxury brands. The data collection process occurs over two stages (from July to September 2019 and a follow-up agreed for 2020) and involves collaboration with the research participants through a two-staged interview process. The goal of the investigation is to understand, describe and discover with a relatively small sample size (Bell et al., 2018). Primary data is conducted by interviewing six social media managers via Skype throughout 11 interviews, working in luxury firms within Europe. The mode of the analysis is inductive (Takhar-Lail & Ghorbani, 2015) because the research aims to discover how the participants construct success characteristics of social media campaigns.

The decision is made between participant observation and qualitative interviews (Cacciattolo, 2015). Since observational participation in the numerous potential marketing initiatives in the luxury industry can be seen as unrealistic during the

COVID-19 pandemic and highly time-consuming, an in-depth interview strategy is pursued.

Thematic analysis help to identify and analyse relevant factors of these interviews, to synthesis, categorise and draw out from the data (Bell et al., 2018). As such, to identify and analyse factors to determine successful SMI marketing campaigns on Instagram.

An open coding method is chosen to interpret the data to be generated with the view to determine axial and selective themes through the use of manual analysis (Collins, 2010). The initial point in the analytic process is to make sense and meaning of the data collected through interviews (Given, 2008). This method helps give meaning to this study to successfully answer the defined research questions.

In the end, more than 100 pages of data are gathered. The next step is to repeat and refine the data analysis. Taylor et al. (2015) point out that researchers gain a deeper understanding of the meanings of the data by continually refining their interpretations throughout the data analysis process.

However, the findings of this study must be seen in light of some potential limitations, which are presented in the following chapter.

1.7 Limitations

According to Theofanidis & Fountouki (2018), limitations concern potential weaknesses out of the researcher's control. Although the research is planned and set up thoughtfully, it must be acknowledged that every study and human interaction has its limitations, and this piece of research is no exception.

The luxury industry is a highly competitive market (Haslam et al., 2017; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). This research minds that the data are all based on the effort and responses of the research participants, which might be biased or find themselves in a personal conflict.

Also, the focus on the social media platform Instagram and the relatively small sample size (11 interviews) limit extrapolating the data to the population.

Likewise, there is a lack of previous studies in the same field. The existing literature on SMI marketing is limited (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017), restricting the references' quality.

Social media marketing is constantly evolving. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, which broke during this study, recent statistics show a general increase in media consumption, which accelerated and changed social media usage (Keutelian, 2022; Statista, 2021a). Thus, these changes might have already influenced social media marketers and outdated the collected data of this research.

1.8 Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis is based on the sequence of the research steps carried out. Figure 1 shows an overview of the chapters of this thesis.

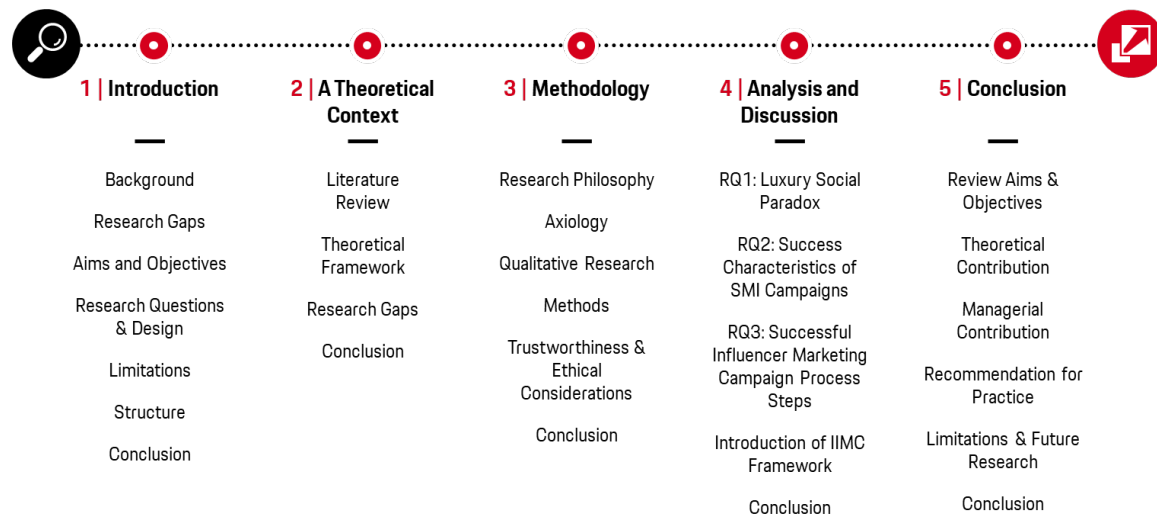


Figure 1: Structure of Thesis

Source: Developed by the present author.

The work consists of five chapters and an appendix.

Chapter one introduces and outlines the focus of the thesis. It presents the background of the research and explains why the analysis of SMI's in the luxury industry is selected, and the research questions are introduced. The academic and social relevance of the research is justified.

Chapter two is within the framework of literature analysis. Relevant databases are searched for predefined search terms, and up to today, 304 articles have been identified. The relevant publications are used to answer the research questions. The analysis provides a comprehensive record of previous studies. It identifies research gaps and questions for the present work and future research regarding influencer marketing and luxury branding, focusing on the social media platform Instagram.

Chapter three outlines the qualitative research methods adopted in the research. The chapter looks at the theory behind interpretative research methods and how the data is analysed. The process of recruiting the research participants and the ethical considerations throughout the research process are also discussed.

In *chapter four*, after a detailed description of the research context, the results of the data analysis are presented, and the process of axial coding and selective themes are explained. The chapter rounds off the work by bringing together the results of the studies and discussing the necessary implications for research and practice in an aggregated way. It introduces an Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC) framework attributed to influencer marketing and luxury brands on Instagram.

Finally, *chapter five* discusses the theoretical and managerial contributions of this study's Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC) framework. Emphasis is set on precise recommendations for practice. Possible limitations, as well as potential future research suggestions, are presented.

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the focus of this research is highlighted. The background of the study is introduced and established. The rationale for the research draws attention to the argument in this research; namely, one of the persistent challenges, despite growing scholarly interest, is the difficulty in identifying the right SMI for luxury brands and set up an successful campaign process accordingly. The inquiry process is introduced, as are the data collection methods adopted in the research, to explore the participants' constructions on the success characteristics of SMI campaigns and steps involved in the campaign process on Instagram. Also, conventions are explained, which standardise the thesis presentation and increase standardising the thesis presentation and increasing clarity. Finally, the thesis structure is outlined, summarising what can be found in each of the five chapters.

Through this, the study contributes to the existing research in this area to include both social media marketing, SMI marketing, and the process of executing successful campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry.

Chapter 2 A Theoretical Context

“Social Media is about the people!
Not about your business.”
– Goulart (2021)

This chapter looks at existing literature to combine three theoretical building blocks for this study: (2.2) Web 2.0, (2.3) Social media marketing, (2.4) SMI Marketing taking a closer look on success characteristics of SMI campaigns and steps in the campaign process, introducing the platform Instagram (2.5) and combining it with luxury brands (2.6). Then the research gaps are identified (2.7), and a conclusion and research framework drawn upon (2.8).

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

The present chapter focuses on two of the main concepts of this research – social media marketing on the one hand and luxury on the other hand. To approach the defined research question, clarifications regarding the terms used and the description of the current state of research in the three areas are required: the deduction of the term Web 2.0, Social Media Marketing and SMI Marketing. A particular emphasis is set on the luxury industry on the social media platform Instagram, which concludes the chapter, leading to the derivation of a research framework and a summary of the presented results.

2.2 Web 2.0

The term *Web 2.0* was originally proposed by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty in the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in 2004 (Graham, 2005). The term Web 2.0 is not considered an update of any technical features. Instead, it is about how websites are designed and used compared to Web 1.0 or the initial generation of the World Wide Web (Tuten et al., 2020). While Web 1.0 is based on a market approach, Web 2.0 focuses on people and communication (Wilson et al., 2011). The most important recent change is the degree of interactivity (Tuten et al., 2020). Companies have always created their messages, but the communication process with Web 2.0 is very different. Web 2.0 allows companies to manage customer relationships online (Payne & Frow, 2005). Consumers are now responding and sharing their perspectives on brands, advertising, products and services or consumption experience. As a result, corporate values are changing.

In this sense, consumers have become “co-producers” together with the companies themselves (Tapscott & Williams, 2008) and, thus, are increasingly gaining power (Tuten et al., 2020). This development from Word-of-Mouth communication toward an electronic Word-of-Mouth communication (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013) will be shown in detail in the following.

2.2.1 Word-Of-Mouth and Electronic Word-Of-Mouth

According to Mangold et al. (1999), current research indicates that *Word-Of-Mouth communication (WOM)* has a substantial effect on consumer purchasing behaviour. Studies conducted by the US Office of Consumer Affairs show that one dissatisfied customer can be expected to tell nine other people about their unsatisfactory experiences (Knauer, 1992). On the other hand, satisfied customers tell their stories to an average of five other people (Knauer, 1992). Thus, WOM is informally sharing experiences and spreading information among people whenever they are satisfied, dissatisfied or neutral with specific products or services (Anderson, 1998; Mangold et al., 1999). Such communication strongly influences consumer purchasing behaviour,

influencing both short-term and long-term decisions (Bone, 1995; Burzynski & Bayer, 1977). Studies show that WOM is the most trusted source of information and the form of marketing communication to which customers are most likely to respond (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Gilfoil et al., 2014; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Silverman (2011) describes WOM marketing as a way of doing business that is difficult to integrate into the usual marketing mix.

However, the digital age takes this marketing tool to a new level. Consumers are overwhelmed with impressions due to the (digital) overload. The consumer decision-making process has grown more complex and is characterised by uncertainty. As such, WOM Marketing offers an effective approach to simplify this process and help the customer make the right decisions (Silverman, 2011). This marketing technique uses the customers to increase brand awareness through self-replication and message diffusion (Kiss & Bichler, 2008). It limits the risk of customers' decision-making processes (Mayzlin & Godes, 2002).

Nielsen's (2015) global trust in advertising report, for instance, has shown that 83 per cent of customers trust recommendations from friends and family over all forms of advertising. Therefore, WOM seems especially important to marketing products or services (Mangold et al., 1999). Even to date, WOM is considered the most valuable, influential, and persuasive form of marketing in business and academic communities (Kiss & Bichler, 2008; Mayzlin & Godes, 2002; Silverman, 2011).

With the rise of the Internet and Web 2.0, traditional WOM has been extended to *electronic Word-Of-Mouth (e-WOM)*, which is a more persistent and accessible (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Newly formed media channels – such as social media – offer rich ground for e-WOM and could be considered as new parts of e-WOM marketing (Duan et al., 2011).

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2013, p. 39) define e-WOM communication as:

“Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet.”

Furthermore, these researchers note that e-WOM is very powerful since it is immediate, has a significant reach and is accessible by many. However, it may be less personal as it is not face-to-face (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013).

The difference between traditional WOM and the current e-WOM can be seen in Table 1.





WOM	e-WOM
The receiver of the information knows the communicator (positive influence on credibility)	Credibility 
Conversation is private, interpersonal (via dialogs), & conducted in real-time	Privacy 
Messages spread slowly. Users must be present when the information is being shared	Diffusion speed 
Less accessible	Accessibility 
	Anonymity between the communicator and the receiver (negative influence on credibility)
	Shared information is not private (it is written down, can sometimes be viewed by anyone at any time)
	Messages can be conveyed faster between users and over the Internet at any time
	Easily accessible

Table 1: Difference between WOM and e-WOM

Source: Developed by the present author, following Huete-Alcocer (2017).

The first difference is credibility as an information source (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Hussain et al., 2017; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Credibility can influence consumers' attitudes toward products or services (Veasna et al., 2013). E-WOM tends to be more credible when the consumer using it has previous experience (Soteriades & Van Zyl, 2013).

Message privacy is another difference between WOM and e-WOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Traditional WOM shares information through private, real-time, face-to-face dialogues and conversations. In contrast, information shared through e-WOM is not confidential and can be seen by anonymous unrelated people (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Also, reviews can be viewed at various points in time, which stands in contrast to traditional WOM, where the message disappears when the receiver reaches (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

The speed of message diffusion, which can be seen in Table 1, is another feature that sets the two media apart (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). E-WOM statements spread much faster than WOM statements because of the publication location, i.e., online platforms for sharing information, such as social media sites, websites and blogs (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Gupta & Harris, 2010). They not only make the reviews accessible to more consumers (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Soteriades & Van Zyl, 2013), but they also persist over time due to their written nature (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013).

The emerge has led to a fundamental change in the traditional marketing communication models. Traditional marketing media follows a one-to-many communication model, whereas the Internet introduced a many-to-many communication model: interactive dialogue instead of monologue (Hoffman & Novak, 1998). Table 2 lays out such a typology (Jensen & Helles, 2011).

			
	One-to-One	One-to-Many	Many-to-Many
Asynchronous such as ...	e-Mail	Book	Web 2.0
	Text message	Newspaper	...
	...	Audio/video recording	
		Web 1.0	
Synchronous such as ...	Voice	Broadcast radio	Online chatrooms
	Instant messenger	Broadcast television	...
	

Table 2: (e-)WOM communication typology

Source: Developed by the present author, following Jensen & Helles (2011).

Synchronous communication in Table 2 means an immediate response, such as chatting on the phone. On the other hand, an email is asynchronous because the receiver responds conveniently (Jensen & Helles, 2011).

As stated above, Web 2.0 enables new forms of communication platforms that further empower brands and customers to share information and opinions, both from those offered to individual consumers (B2C Marketing) and those that are part of business-to-business marketing (B2B Marketing). The former tends to be conducted through popular social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, which is also the focus of this research). In contrast, the latter tends to be through specialist sites to which professionals are attracted (Kim & Ko, 2012).

This study focuses on B2C marketing, the execution through social media platforms and SMI Marketing in the luxury industry. The following discussion focuses on the term *social media*, which is introduced in the next section.

2.2.2 Social Media

Social media are applications, platforms, or media to facilitate interaction, cooperation, and content exchange (Richter & Koch, 2007). It takes various forms, including weblogs, social blogs, wikis, podcasts, images, and video (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Several authors argue that social media and Web 2.0 are often used interchangeably, as they are related and, most notably, interdependent (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Pitt et al., 2012). However, the two elements can be differentiated in focus. Web 2.0 can be considered the technical infrastructure that enables the social phenomenon of collective media and facilitates customer-generated content. In contrast, social media focuses on content and customer generation of the content creators. In other words, Web 2.0 enables the creation and allocation of content via social media (Pitt et al., 2012).

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) explain that the roots of social media go back to 1979 when Usenet, a worldwide discussion forum, was created. Internet users could post pictures or public messages on this platform. However, the authors further claim that social media, as people know it today, began about 20 years ago, when the first blog forum was created. The increased availability of high-speed Internet access in the early 2000s led to many new social networking sites (e.g. Facebook in 2004), creating social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Current numbers show and can be seen in Figure 2: About one-third of the world's population uses social media (Qureshi & Syed, 2017), which has become an integral part of everyday life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Figure 2 also outlines that these numbers are expected to grow further until 2025.

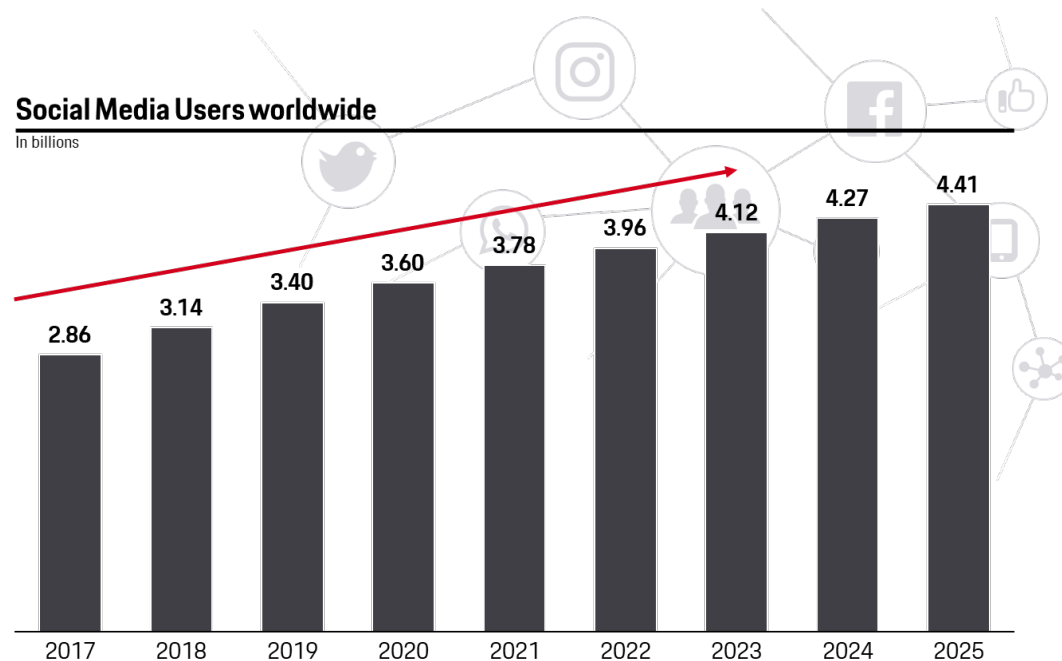


Figure 2: Global Social Media Users

Source: Developed by the present author, following Statista (2021).

The constant exchange of information that accompanied the growth of social media has had a profound impact on customer behaviour and purchasing decisions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013; Labrecque et al., 2013). Search algorithms, for example, control what kind of information customers can access (Labrecque et al., 2013). Opinion leaders can influence purchasing decisions through recommendations disseminated via social media. Labrecque et al. (2013) declare that the Internet can empower customers by improving access to information, choice, and options. Consequently, this leads to a power shift from the brand to the customer.

In line with this, Tapscott & Williams (2008) argue that the rise of Web 2.0 has the main consequence for marketers – the growth of social media. As already stated above, the central concept of Web 2.0 is many-to-many content. Social media is the essential ground needed to carry such content. Usually, the customer produces all the value-added content on social media for their connected friends, family, and associates that comprise the audience. This is known as *user-generated content (UGC)* (Pitt et al., 2012).

It is content in words, text, images, and videos, generated by millions of users or customers globally, which begins as informal discussions about products and services, and evolves to users creating structured reviews, suggestions and evaluations in texts or videos. Eventually, customers become involved in the up- or downgrade of brands (Pitt et al., 2012).

According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), Web 2.0, social media and UGC are three different concepts. These authors argue that Web 2.0 is a platform on which content and applications are not created and published by individuals but are continuously changed by all users in a participative and collaborative way. UGC consists of various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users. Social media includes Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and facilitate the creation and sharing of UGC (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kim & Lee, 2017). As researchers note, social networking satisfies the human need for socialising within communities (Ganley & Lampe, 2009). Consumers are not reluctant to share their experiences, videos, opinions and advice as members of such communities (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001).

This study focuses on the social media platform Instagram, with its social networks, which marketers use to collect information about customer behaviour and preferences. Consumers can become fans of a company and its proposed products or services on such networks. This is when social media is used by brands to influence the attitudes of online consumers (Bart et al., 2005; Schlosser et al., 2006), and social media becomes a marketing tool: *Social Media Marketing*.

2.3 Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing comprises the two terms social media and marketing. The previous chapter, 2.2.2 already explains the first of the two terms. Marketing comes directly from the English verb “to market” and ultimately means bringing products or services to the market. Companies or brands try to establish a relationship with the

end consumers, regardless of whether they already know the product or not (Bart et al., 2005; Schlosser et al., 2006).

Due to the high number of currently active or passive social media users worldwide, as shown in the previous chapter, and the expected growth for the following years to come, marketers try to benefit from this trend (VanMeter et al., 2015). The growing audience and the power of influence within this digital audience have convinced companies to increase social media marketing activities.

According to Labrecque et al. (2013, p. 134):

“Social media give marketers a means for direct interaction, which constitutes an ideal environment for creating brand communities (...), establishing and reinforcing relationships, and for gaining a better understanding of consumers (...).”

That is why social media has become an important advertising platform for companies, as they can reach a much greater target group on the Internet (Evans et al., 2017). Since most products in today's saturated markets are very similar, and the quality hardly differs, the target groups must be addressed more specifically in communication (Kroeber-Riel & Esch, 2011).

The relevance of Social Media Marketing is also reflected in the fact that traditional advertising spending is declining (-0.2 per cent) while Digital Marketing spending is rising (+14.3 per cent) (cmosurvey.org, 2021). Companies are investing 14.9 per cent of their marketing budget in social media (as of August 2021), and this figure is expected to rise to 24.5 per cent in the upcoming five years (cmosurvey.org, 2021).

Primarily through social media, marketing activities nowadays can be executed with much less effort and cost than in former times (Kim & Ko, 2012). However, as mentioned before, social media is not a substitute for traditional marketing but rather complementary (Tuten et al., 2020). The evolution from traditional to the intermediary stage, tradigital to social media, can be seen in Figure 3.

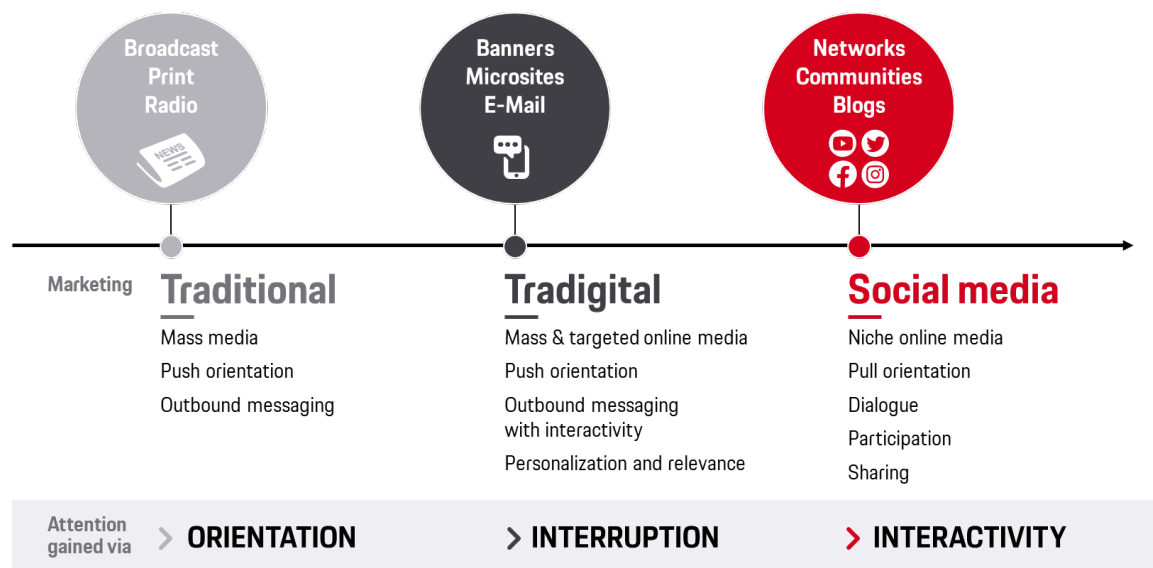


Figure 3: The Evolution of Marketing Communications

Source: Developed by the present author, following Tuten et al. (2020).

Figure 3 demonstrates the importance of social media today due to its broad reach (Kim & Ko, 2012). According to these researchers, social media can dramatically impact a brand's reputation. Their survey shows that participants published opinions about products and brands on the brand's blog, and 36 per cent rated companies with blogs more positively. This goes in line with another study by DEI-worldwide (2008), which shows that 70 per cent of consumers visit social media websites to obtain information. 49 per cent of these consumers make a purchase decision based on the information they find through social media sites. 60 per cent reinforce they would probably use social media sites to share information with others online, and 45 per cent of those who searched for information via social media sites engaged with WOM (Kim & Ko, 2012). The report states that companies that do not address social media as part of their online marketing strategy are missing the chance to reach consumers. With a significant per centage of people sharing information with others via social media, the value of a customer is far worth more than in former times. Consequently, today, companies and brands have to consider the value of the customers and the influence of social media on them in detail (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Through Social Media Marketing, companies of all sizes can connect with a diverse and broad audience, most of whom would not have been reached through traditional media. Traffic for the company website or social media presence and customers and brand awareness can be increased with the help of so-called multipliers, who play a significant role on the social web (Weinberg & Pahrman, 2011). A basic idea of Social Media Marketing is to build trust with consumers. This is achieved through personal interaction (Weber & Volz, 2011) and requires communication to be always honest, open and transparent. Because the aim of Social Media Marketing is primarily long-term, it can be seen as a form of public relations (Weinberg & Pahrman, 2011). This is where *Social Media Influencer Marketing* can offer great chances for an organisation.

2.4 Social Media Influencer Marketing

Various studies have shown that customers trust a third party more than the brand itself (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Gilfoil et al., 2014; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). WOM can be easily confused with SMI Marketing when a customer spreads a message through e-WOM. Therefore, SMI Marketing is the process, and e-WOM is often the medium (hubspot.com, 2017).

There is still a lack of academic definition of SMI Marketing because of its recent entry into the literature (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017). Generally, *Social Media Influencer (SMI) Marketing* is a term that refers to leveraging the ability of critical people to support a brand and spread the word to their followers. It has been established as a highly effective method for brands to build and engage with audiences on social media. This marketing technique requires the cooperation between the brand and an SMI (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

SMI Marketing is not an entirely new concept (Brown & Hayes, 2008). In former years, celebrities, athletes, and other leaders were the sole influencers in their fields. Brands would collaborate with them to promote their products or services (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Nowadays, the challenge is to exploit an SMI who can motivate their followers

to acquire user-generated images, including a brand's products or services (Freberg et al., 2011).

Real-life SMI's, everyday people passionate about the products they suggest, have a significant following and an enormous number of buying conversations and conversions. The way that social media communication has recently changed the scene has allowed everyone to share their voice, opinion, and content that makes SMI Marketing unique (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

To clarify the term SMI Marketing an indication of the term influencer itself is necessary. As mentioned above, these terms are fairly new. However, several definitions and points of view currently exist to date.

Payne et al. (1995, p. 9) define SMI's as:

"A range of third parties who exercise influence over the organization and its potential customers."

Brown & Hayes (2008, p. 50) published the book "Influencer Marketing: Who really influences your customers?" in which they define an SMI as:

"A third party who significantly shapes the customer's purchasing decision but may never be accountable for it."

Keller & Berry (2003) state that SMI's are well-connected activists who have an impact and an active mind and are trendsetters – all aligned specifically to customer markets.

These definitions refer to SMI's as friends who recommend something to each other. A more general definition has recently been given by Keller & Fay (2012, p. 60), who refer to an SMI as:

"A person who has a greater than average reach or impact through Word-Of-Mouth in a relevant marketplace" (Keller & Fay, 2012).

Overall, marketing agencies have also created definitions of this technique and how it reflects daily usage.

In the course of this study, the definition suggested by one of the leading SMI marketing companies Hamann is applicable as it is more specific and recent:

“A type of Marketing that focuses on using key leaders to drive your brand’s message to the larger market.” (Hamann.com, 2015).

SMI’s can decide to use different media channels based on their expertise and industry. For example, fashion on the platform Instagram is one of the most influential social platforms where SMI’s can promote products (Keller & Fay, 2012). According to e-Consultancy research Gilliland (2016), different channels vary in their influential potential (see Figure 4).

What platforms are influencers most influential on?

In million

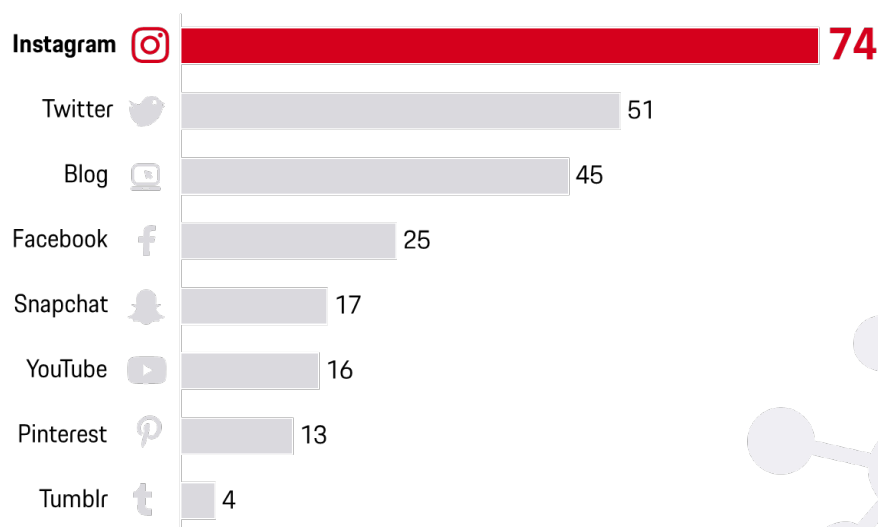


Figure 4: Most Influential Platforms for SMI's

Source: Developed by the present author, following Gilliland (2016).

In Figure 4, the social media platforms are ranked from highest to lowest exposure in terms of influence, which are Instagram (74 per cent), Twitter (51 per cent), Blog (45 per cent), Facebook (24 per cent), Snapchat (17 per cent), YouTube (16 per cent), Pinterest (13 per cent) and Tumblr (4 per cent) (Gilliland, 2016).

Independent of the specific platform, SMI Marketing is essentially about getting authentic, trustworthy and credible people to make positive public statements about a brand or company (Lammenett, 2018). According to Sudha & Sheena (2017), the value of SMI Marketing consists of the reach (network size, number of followers), as well as the relevance of the topic for the reader and the response, i.e. the number of interactions (likes, comments, shares) that an SMI generates with their content.

There are many more attributes to classify an SMI, which are further explained in the following chapter.

2.4.1 SMI Classification

Deges (2018) has typified SMI's according to various approaches, as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Typical Classification of SMI's

Source: Developed by the present author, following Deges (2018).

These SMI classifications are discussed in more detail in the following section to understand this phenomenon better.

Social Media Channels

The first category in Figure 5 relates to SMI's focus on the different channels to build a reputation. The platform determines content presentation, such as video, audio, text, and images (Deges, 2018).

As previously mentioned, a top-rated SMI network is Instagram (Deges, 2018), which is explained in more detail in chapter 2.5 and the focus of this study.

Communities on these social media channels are mainly composed of representatives of Generation Y or Millennials (born between 1980 and 1994) and Generation Z or Digital Natives (born between 1995 and 2010) (Deges, 2018). The younger generations have become increasingly active on the digital channels so that some of them can hardly be reached via conventional media. Moreover, they are sceptical about classical advertising (Nielsen, 2015). SMI's, on the other hand, have a special trust within their target group on different channels (Lammenett, 2018). This enables them to get involved in all aspects of the purchase decision process and thus exert indirect and direct influence (Lammenett, 2018).

Topics

The second category in Figure 5 refers to SMI topics. Most SMI's pursue a specific topic in their posts, such as lifestyle, fitness, food, travel, or beauty. They specialise in a niche topic within their theme, such as travel to a preferred region or unique training methods (Deges, 2018). This focus makes them experts in their field and increases the relevance for followers and companies, as they are closely related to their products (Deges, 2018). As a result, SMI's can achieve credibility within their target group, which is impossible with traditional media. They speak authentically about the brands and do not have to transmit ready-made texts to the masses. In addition, the news is more credible because the consumer chooses the SMI and is interested in their information and less in the brand (Childers et al., 2018).

This study focuses on luxury goods since mass and social media have made prospective customers progressively more aware of luxury offerings (Okonkwo, 2009).

Conventionally, luxury has been an industry that targets privileged consumers in terms of wealth and social status. However, the democratisation of luxury goods can be observed and give a chance to less affluent customers to participate (Hudders et al., 2013).

Impressions, Reach, and Engagement

The third category in Figure 5 relates to impressions, reach, and engagement of SMI's, where *impressions* describe:

“(...) paid flat fees to show their ads a fixed number of times (...)” (Minazzi, 2014, p. 114)

This kind of advertisement does not consider the number of clicks but only the number of impressions, meaning how many times the ad has been shown to the user (Deges, 2018).

Reach describes the number of followers and often indicates high popularity, but it also says something about commitment within the community (Deges, 2018).

For this study, the major types of SMI's are distinctly defined below (see Figure 6). (mediakix.com, 2020) distinguishes between celebrities (more than five million followers), mega-SMI's (one million to five million followers), macro-SMI's (500,000 to one million followers), mid-tier SMI's (50,000 and 500,000 followers), micro-SMI's (10,000-50,000 followers) and nano-SMI's (1,000 to 10,000 followers).

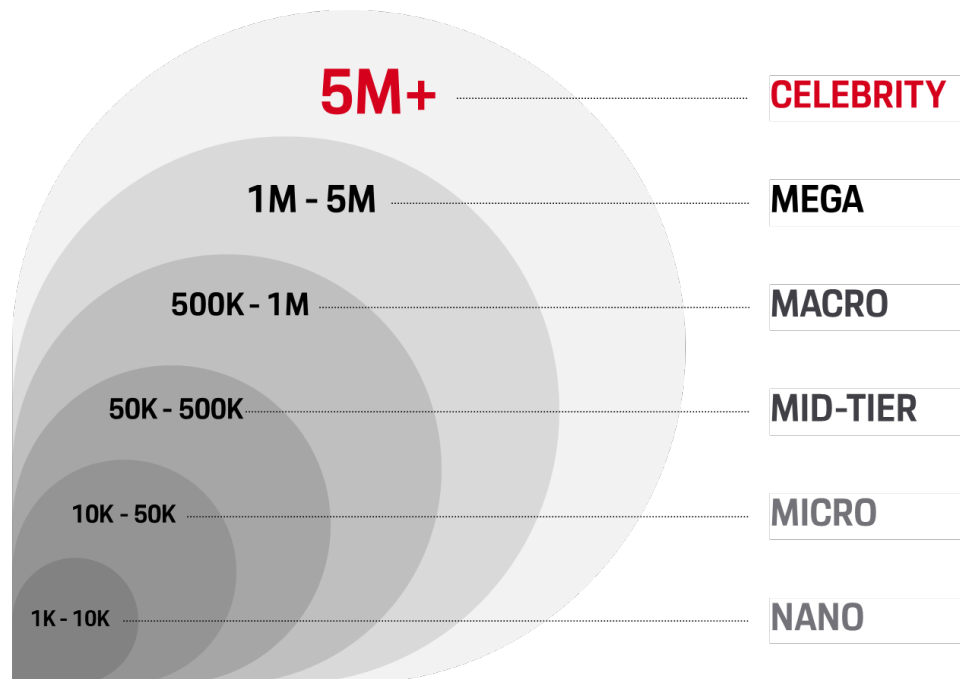


Figure 6: Levels of SMI's

Source: Developed by the present author, following mediakix.com (2020).

For instance, *mega-SMI's* have many followers and, thus, an enormous reach (Gottbrecht, 2016). Yet, according to Gottbrecht (2016), they drive to shallow engagement. This provides high topical relevance but low brand relevance. *Mega-SMI's* also have the most insufficient capability to drive the desired actions from the audience on behalf of a brand, even though they are best for impression and awareness.

Micro-SMI is defined as:

“A new style of online performance that involves people “boosting” their popularity over the Web using technologies like videos, blogs and social networking sites” (Senft, 2008, p. 25).

In contrast to familiar entertainment industry celebrities, which can be public idols with many followers, micro-SMI's are renowned to a niche group of people (Marwick, 2013) and involve creating a persona that feels authentic, trustworthy, and original to users. Unlike the traditional celebrities, micro-SMI's have a small audience that they strategically maintain through consistent communication (Pedroni, 2016). Micro-SMI's

are next door people described as successful, talented, and attractive with admiration, association and aspiration (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). According to Lv et al. (2015), they are highly capable of triggering consumers' desire for a brand. They can positively impact brand attitude and loyalty by passing on their recommendations to their large scale of followers. They are themselves everyday consumers, with the ability to drive high engagement and conversions (Gottbrecht, 2016). Although micro-SMI's have few reaches, they have very close contact with their followers (Rahmah & Ren, 2019).

The last subcategory focuses on *engagement* and means someone cares and interacts with a product, a brand or a person (Sterne & Scott, 2010). Related to Instagram, engagement means the sum of all likes and comments on an Instagram post (Gottbrecht, 2016).

For this study, all SMI levels (impressions, reach, and engagement) are considered.

Sociodemographic Characteristics

The fourth category in Figure 5 narrates to attributes related to the SMI's sociodemographic. Even though SMI Marketing is neither age nor gender-related, there are female and male-related differentiations. For example, fashion SMI appeals primarily to women, while technology SMI appeals more to men (Deges, 2018). The age of the SMI is usually reflected in the age group of the community as followers follow people who are alike. The language determines the range with which the target group is addressed (Deges, 2018).

Social Status

The fifth category in Figure 5 relates to the social status of the SMI. With increasing numbers of followers, SMI's can achieve celebrity status within their target group. The high reach and commitment of the users can influence consumers' buying decisions (Woods, 2016). Persuasiveness increases with expertise and appeal, and brand values are transferred from the SMI to the product (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). At the same time, SMI's communication has a more substantial influence on brand

awareness and willingness to buy than communication from the company itself (Amos et al., 2008; Braatz, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Muda et al., 2014).

However, if the SMI advertises too many different brands, this can lead to conflicts of interest, and the SMI loses trust and authenticity within the community (Deges, 2018). Only a long-term authentic engagement leads to trust, online and offline. Therefore, authentic stories of SMI's are significant in SMI Marketing (Gottbrecht, 2016).

Recommendation

The final category in Figure 5 relates to SMI recommendation types. According to Tuten et al. (2020), there are three types of SMI's: paid, earned and owned media (see Table 3).




	PAID 	EARNED 	OWNED 
Social communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ads • Native ads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations in communities • Shared content • Influence impressions • Likes, followers, fans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand-owned social networks
Social publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorsements • Branded channels in media sharing sties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embeds • Comments • Shares • Links • Search rankings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate blogs • Brand-controlled media sharing sites
Social entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ads in games or on social music sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-game interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advergames and branded ARGs
Social commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales promotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews and rating • Recommendations & referrals • Group buys • Social shopping interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social storefronts

Table 3: Types of Media

Source: Developed by the present author, following Tuten et al. (2020).

Paid media means monetary fees, including purchasing advertising space to distribute brand messages and secure endorsements. Paid media is traditionally the field of advertising, defined as the paid placement of advertising messages in channels that reach a mass audience (Tuten et al., 2020). There are several regulations regarding

such content, and the SMI must be transparent about what contributions are sponsored or paid (Evans et al., 2017). Marking posts as “paid partnerships” is now a feature that Instagram offers its users (Evans et al., 2017).

Boerman & Reijmersdal (2016) have found that customers who recognise advertising in sponsored social media posts respond with a reduced intention to buy and a more negative brand attitude. This finding was supported by Evans et al. (2017), who examined the disclosure of words in Instagram ads. The authors find that the disclosure language of “Paid Ad” and “Sponsored” conveys that the content is an advertisement. When such language is used, it clearly shows that a commercial agreement characterises the relationship between the SMI and the brand and that the advertising is persuasive (Evans et al., 2017). In situations where customers understand that an Instagram post is advertising, Evans et al. (2017) have found that this has a significant negative impact on brand perception, resulting in a challenge for brands.

Owned media are channels that the brand controls. Corporate websites and e-commerce sites or corporate blogs are all forms of proprietary media controlled by the organisation (Tuten et al., 2020).

Earned channels are distributed at no direct cost to the organisation and are beyond their control. As explained in chapter 2.2, e-WOM communications and publicity are essential forms of such media channels (Tuten et al., 2020). It has been shown that social media users have limited patience with advertising if they find it compelling (Bang & Lee, 2016) and with commercial content that appears without social connection (Ellison et al., 2007). According to Lee et al. (2016), brands use earned channels to minimise disruption to actual social media use to persuade customers without triggering such recognition and scepticism for advertising. According to the researchers, such Marketing attempts should resemble the surrounding social media content (Lee et al., 2016).

This thesis focuses on paid SMI's because brands actively collaborate with them as part of the marketing strategy, while earned SMI's are not directly part of the brand and are therefore difficult to integrate into an active marketing strategy.

Through this study's PR-oriented, paid media focus, companies often apply a marketing mix for the budget spend. A new SMI campaign process is currently emerging, replacing the traditional four P's (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) in marketing to some extent (Cohen, 2010), which will be further explained in the following chapter.

2.4.2 SMI Campaign Process

As technological capabilities have changed, marketing has also developed as a concept. Therefore more accurate theories are required to guide the newly established marketing activities such as SMI Marketing (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). The four M's of SMI Marketing to successfully manage social media marketing campaigns include making, managing, monitoring, and measuring.

By adopting these success characteristics, the collaboration has a more substantial probability of campaigns succeeding and presenting effectively (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). This concept is further explained in the following.

Make

The first step of the marketing roll-out to plan a campaign is selecting the appropriate SMI (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). An SMI is chosen to be responsible for the vitality of a campaign and reinforces and supports the campaign message. Decisive factors for the focus are often the reach, the community, the quality of the contributions and the specialisation on specific topics (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). When identifying the right SMI for the company, it is essential to know that the chosen name affects the purchase decision (Brown & Hayes, 2008). SMI's can be not visible in the extensive system but in the niche market where a brand tries to achieve high visibility (Gillin, 2007). Brands within the luxury industry need to understand what their community is looking for. A

multi-product brand should have different SMI's for each product, industry, and country (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

According to Booth & Matic (2011), SMI campaign impact assessment has a wide range of success characteristics, such as:

- number of followers per month,
- the number of links to or from a blog,
- frequency of posts,
- the amount and level of media quoting the SMI,
- industry score,
- level of participation in social sites,
- frequency of responses and observer comments,
- the amount and speed of topic-related posts, and a
- qualitative review of posted topics and comments/contributions.

According to Holly Hamann (Hamann, 2015), co-founder and CMO of TapInfluence.com, SMI's should be divided into popular areas such as food, fitness, fashion, and entertainment and be further subdivided to reach specific consumers such as animal lovers, marathon runners or organic chefs. There are five things to consider when identifying potential SMI's for brands: Relevance, commitment, reach, frequency, and authenticity (Hamann, 2015).

The first success characteristic is relevance, meaning how well the content of an SMI matches a brand's message (Watkins et al., 2020). The company looking for an SMI should read the SMI's posts to get a feel for what kind of customers they are and what they like. The second success characteristic a brand should look at is engagement, an indicator of how interactive an SMI's readers are with the content in the form of responses, comments, and approvals (Biaudet, 2017). The third success characteristic to think about is reach. By this, the researcher means that marketers should resist the urge to look at individual visitors only when measuring reach. Traffic and followers are only relevant if the SMI reaches the brand's target audience (Hamann, 2015). Frequency is the fourth success characteristic to keep in mind when

identifying potential SMI's as there is a direct correlation between the frequency of an SMI's posts and their traffic and the rate of returning visitors. Using just one exposure is not enough to get visitors to visit a brand's website, but often multiple exposures are required. If a publisher regularly publishes high-quality content, readers are more likely to return (Watkins et al., 2020). The last success characteristic to think about is authenticity. SMI's who have less sponsored content on their platform tend to be more trusted and authentic. A brand, service or product is more trustworthy if an SMI has a personal story about it rather than just using pure product reviews (Biaudet, 2017).

Other researchers claim that the top four "REAL" qualities for an SMI are namely: Relatedness, Engagement, Authenticity and Loyalty (Hettiarachchi et al., 2019).

According to Brown & Fiorella (2013), the current paradigm of SMI Marketing places the SMI at the centre of the marketing universe (see Figure 7). Another theory mentioned by Brown & Fiorella (2013) is setting the customer at the centre of the marketing universe (see Figure 8) and not the SMI because the customer ultimately makes the buying decisions. According to the researchers, brands and their marketing messages are planets circling the customer, competing for their attention.

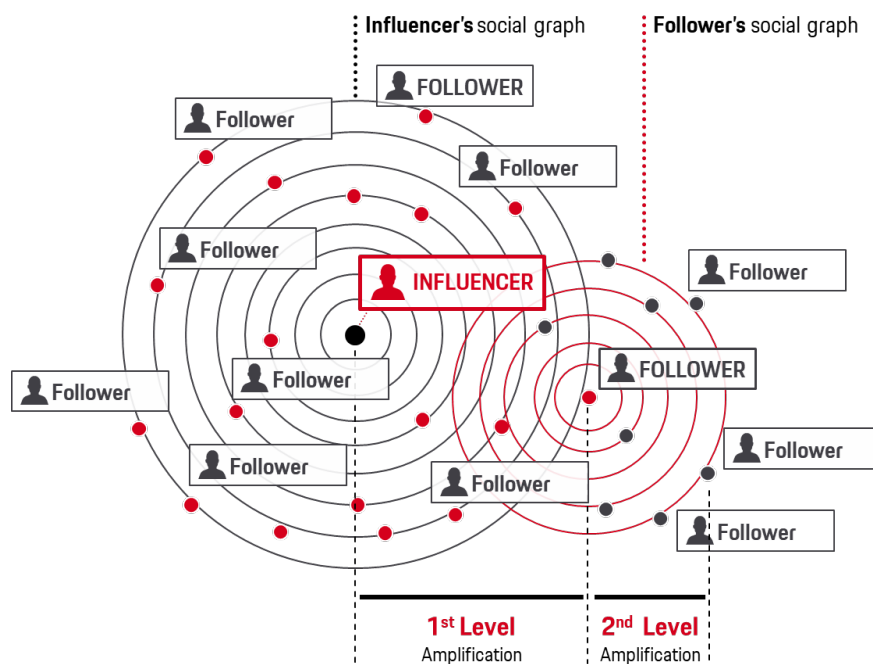


Figure 7: Fisherman's Influence Model

Source: Developed by the present author, following Brown & Fiorella (2013).

In the first theory, where the SMI is at the heart of the influencing marketing strategy model, marketers must identify individuals for a social media campaign with a broad reach within communities and focus on specific interests or keywords. The fisherman's influence model developed by Brown & Fiorella (2013) can help companies identify potential SMI's and their communities and can later be used as a basis for further research and analysis of these relationships. This model represents the use of those SMI's with the most significant following and reach among large social communities to achieve the most significant brand awareness (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

In the second theory, the customer is put at the centre of the cycle's centre, and an entirely new universe is opened (see Figure 8).

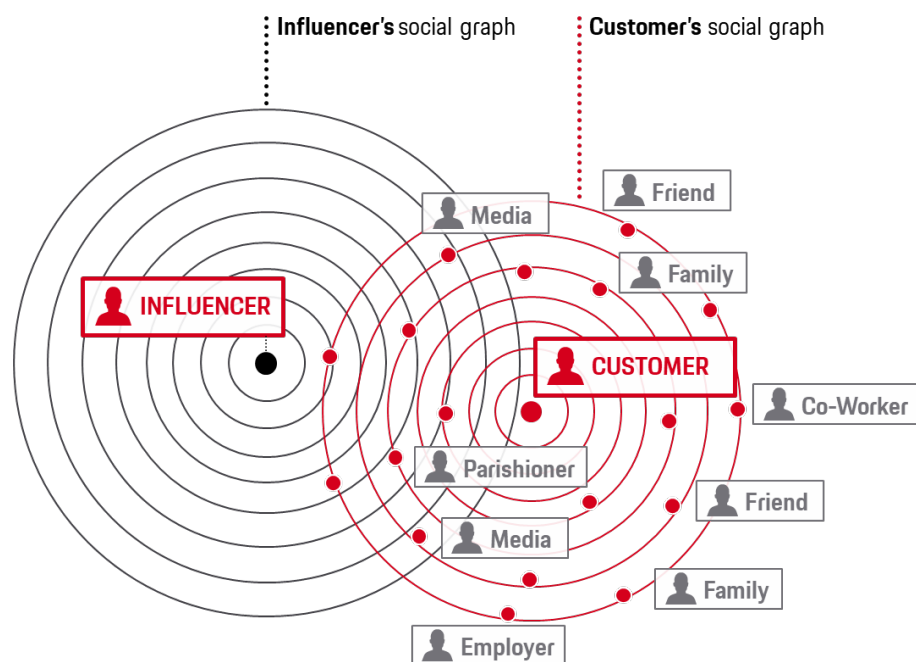


Figure 8: Customer-Centric Influence Model

Source: Developed by the present author, following Brown & Fiorella (2013).

Not the SMI with the circling planets being their various followers is central, but the people, institutions, technologies, and communities that influence the purchasing decisions that orbit the customer. Whether a company uses the fisherman-influenced marketing model or the customer-centric model, the first step is to identify the demographics of the focus audience and the communities in which they are most likely to be involved and then select the ideal SMI for a particular campaign. However, this is where the similarities between the two models end (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

In general, the SMI should stand behind the brand to promote it authentically and fit its target group and address them in the best possible way. It is essential to point out that the image of the SMI can be projected onto the company's image – both in a positive sense and in a negative connotation. The goal should be to establish long-term cooperation and a good relationship between the company and the SMI (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

Manage

The second aspect of the SMI campaign process is the step that follows the selection of a suitable SMI. Brown & Fiorella (2013, p. 155) describe the term manage with the following quote:

“Influencer marketing is like any other marketing tactic: to succeed truly, it needs to be managed from before the campaign starts to after the campaign ends and beyond.”

In doing so, consideration is given to the personality and own request of the SMI to maintain their authenticity. SMI Marketing is based on cooperation. Today, professional SMI's are brands in their own right (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). Only those who understand the SMI's in their actions and motivation and maintain contact with them will be successful (Pankka, 2019). The content should mainly be developed, prepared, and distributed by the SMI's themselves. Regular, personal contact, open and honest meetings, and a detailed briefing can positively influence this message and the resulting reports. The briefing should clearly define the framework conditions without restricting the creativity and individuality of the SMI's (futurebiz.de, 2021).

Although the relationships are always unique and should be managed differently, depending on the SMI, specific guidelines are set to assist with the process (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). The person's integration into the campaign should take place along the dimension's product promotion, calendar, message, platform, alternatives, and feedback.

Product promotion is as important as the brand message shared with the target audience. For example, a brand should be clear about the product's stage and provide the tools to do so, if necessary. This builds trust between all parties and guarantees no misunderstandings about the advertised product (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Pankka, 2019).

SMI's should be required to have particular knowledge at a certain level. SMI's need to understand and know the product or service of the brand they are promoting to their

followers. They need to know the product's features and, most importantly, why it is worth recommending to peers so they can act as a reliable source of information. For most products, the SMI should be given a sample to be featured on the promotional post image and have actual personal experience with that product (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Pankka, 2019).

By calendar, Brown & Fiorella (2013) recommend that the SMI Marketing activities are short-term yet contribute to a longer-term vision. This drives engagement between the brand and the SMI, between the SMI and their audience, and between the brand and their audience (Pankka, 2019; Shay, 2021). Regardless of the collaboration length, the activities should be set on a calendar and scheduled (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

The message should be appropriate within the campaign for all the parties involved. One of the most crucial drivers in accomplishing SMI Marketing activities is the content of the message provided. The key is to research the target audience's preferences and edit the message according. Often brands are not required to create the content themselves, but instead, the SMI produces it and later delivers it to the brand, which will accept or decline the form. However, the decision-makers of brands have to be aware of the SMI's typical and regular type of content (Hobbs, 2019; Pankka, 2019).

The proper platform selection is also crucial for an SMI Marketing campaign. The choice of the appropriate platform should be based on a careful research regarding the customer segment that the brand is willing to target (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Hobbs, 2019; Mason, 2019; Pankka, 2019).

Alternatives assist in case the activities take a negative turn: The option to mend the possible negative impression by changing the action plan. By applying the other options, the already caused damage usually cannot be fully repaired, but it can be assured that the ineffective activities will not continue to be used (Hobbs, 2019; Kobe, 2018; Mason, 2019; Pankka, 2019).

Feedback should be asked to learn from the past. As in every Marketing campaign, also in SMI Marketing, the activities conducted should receive feedback. In this case,

the feedback refers to the SMI's feelings and experiences regarding the collaboration (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Pankka, 2019).

Monitor

The third M of the SMI campaign process stands for monitor. This refers to the supervision of SMI's who influence the campaigns. Technical tools are used to examine and regularly record the SMIs' actions, such as Google Analytics or Facebook Business Manager (unitedinfluencers.com, 2021). If the process does not take the desired course, it is a function of the monitor to intervene in a controlling manner (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

Measure

According to Dorfman (2015), a company will not improve if the success or failure of the SMI marketing campaigns cannot be measured. Therefore, it is vital to measure and demonstrate the results of practices that enable strategies to be optimised to reach the next stage. If companies invest more in SMI Marketing, there is also a growing need to measure success (Dorfman, 2015).

The statement of Brown & Fiorella (2013), where they claim measurement is everything, and everything is measurement confirms the relevance of measurement in campaigns. Success measurements are taken both after and during campaigns to counteract harmful incidents early by constantly checking key figures and controlling or influencing the company's success. From an economic perspective, the goal of a marketing campaign is achieved when the ROI (return on investment, a key figure for calculating the profitability of an investment) is equal to or greater than zero so that no loss is made. For this to happen, the break-even point must be exceeded. The ROI describes the profit of an investment project in relation to the invested capital (Gilfoil & Jobs, 2012).

Although the SMI campaign process is relevant for almost all social media platforms which will influence the success characteristics of marketing campaigns, this study will focus purely on the platform *Instagram* in the following course of this study.

2.5 SMI Marketing on Instagram

Most studies refer to e-WOM written on the internet (Cheng & Zhou, 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013; Ismagilova et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018) and e-WOM on Facebook, followed by Twitter (Alalwan et al., 2017). The visual e-WOM (Ismagilova et al., 2017) and e-WOM on Instagram are less explored to date (Alalwan et al., 2017).

However, images increase interaction “between 120 and 180 per cent” (Pein, 2015, p. 400), which explains the general trend for imagery in social media channels. This is a reasonable basis for the photo and video sharing community Instagram, which launched in October 2010.

With its one billion users, the platform is one of the most widely used social media platforms (see Figure 9) (oberlo.com, 2021). Instagram is right after Facebook (2,4 billion users), YouTube (2,0 billion users), Whatsapp (1,6 billion users), Facebook Messenger (1,3 billion users), and the Chinese platform WeChat with 1,1 billion users.

Most popular social media platforms in 2019

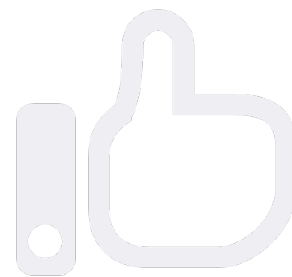
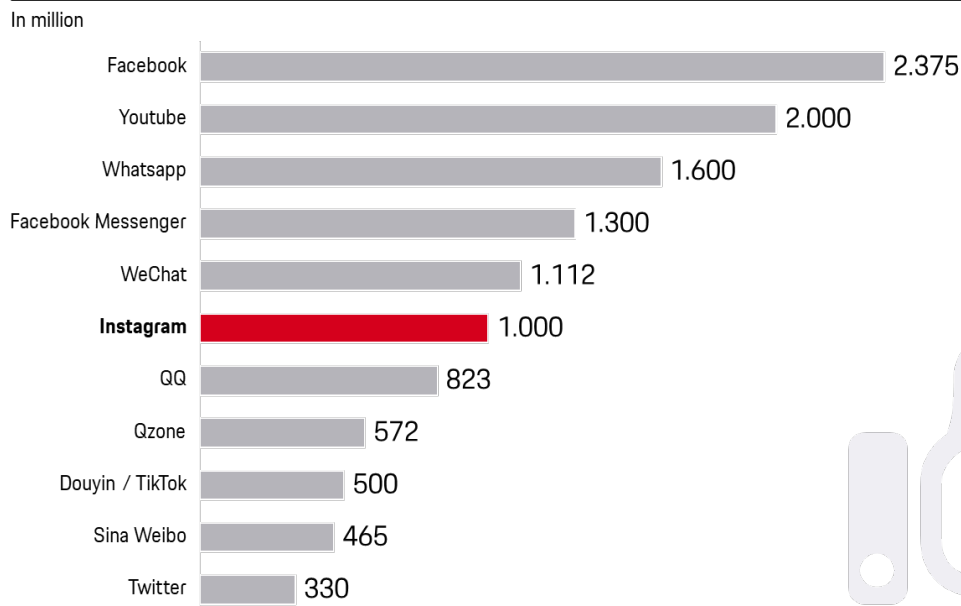


Figure 9: Most Popular Social Media Platforms in 2019

Source: Developed by the present author following oberlo.com (2021).

As stated on the Instagram Website:

“Instagram is a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures. Snap a photo with your mobile phone, then choose a filter to transform the image into a memory to keep around forever. We’re building Instagram to allow you to experience moments in your friends’ lives through pictures as they happen. We imagine a world more connected through photos.” (Instagram.com, 2019).

It was founded as a photo and video sharing platform and was purchased by Facebook in August 2012. Instagram has doubled its active users from 500 million to one billion between 2016 and 2018 (Statista, 2021b). The rapidly growing number of users illustrates the high relevance of this social media channel (Blazquez et al., 2019). This makes Instagram, next to Facebook, YouTube, Whatsapp and WeChat, one of the largest and most important social networks (Statista, 2021b). Although ranked sixth (oberlo.com, 2021), Instagram is the most used social media platform to follow SMI’s (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In an SMI study with 1,200 respondents, 76 per cent

of the SMI's questioned named Instagram the most crucial platform (Töpfer et al., 2018). The reasons for this are the high image quality through filter functions, the community's direct feedback, and the direct interface to other social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter (oberlo.com, 2021).

Instagram is a free app for smartphones and tablets that lets users take photos and short videos, edit them quickly, and publish them directly to the public (Grabs et al., 2014). Unlimited storage space is available for uploaded pictures and videos. It is also effortless to use, and the image editing options are easy to apply. This makes it possible even for unprofessional photographers to create attractive images in a short time (Weinberg & Pahrman, 2011). In addition to editing and sharing photos, it is possible to follow other users, like and comment on their pictures and videos (Grabs et al., 2014). Instagram thus combines classic image editing software with elements of social networks (Weinberg & Pahrman, 2011).

The word Instagram is a neologism composed of "instant" (direct, immediate) and "telegram" (Kobilke et al., 2015). This name expresses the meaning of the mobile character of the app. It shows that the aim is to be able to edit and share images while being on the move:

"It is the first significant social network built specifically to work on a mobile device. It is a pioneer in that regard. (...) Instagram is a mobile-native. (...) While Instagram recently added a website version of the app for user profiles, the functionality all resides on mobile devices. The website version allows for simple viewing of the content and not much more" (Miles, 2013, p. 4).

This mobility focus of the social network was a unique selling point that contributed much to the platforms' success (Miles, 2013).

So-called digital natives mainly use Instagram, focusing on the age group 14 to 35 (Brandung, 2017). The SMI study by Töpfer et al. (2018) shows that 62 per cent of SMI's and 77 per cent of followers are female. This is because women are interested in SMI's lifestyle and compare themselves with people similar to them (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Women are more influenced by other people's opinions than men.

Therefore, their buying behaviour is more biased by SMI Marketing (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Compared to Facebook and Twitter, Instagram is unique in perception (Lou & Yuan, 2018). Since only one image and one text is shown simultaneously, it requires less cognitive effort. This is understood as a picture-superiority effect. The content has an emotional and activating effect that increases attention and engagement (Brandung, 2017). The higher engagement – compared to Facebook – is mainly due to this effect. A high level of engagement can, in turn, be expressed in a higher willingness to buy (Yusuf et al., 2018).

As shown in Figure 10, not only is the platform Instagram top-rated among users, but also 78 per cent of marketers believe that Instagram posts are the effective format for SMI Marketing, followed by Instagram stories (73 per cent) (Statista, 2019).

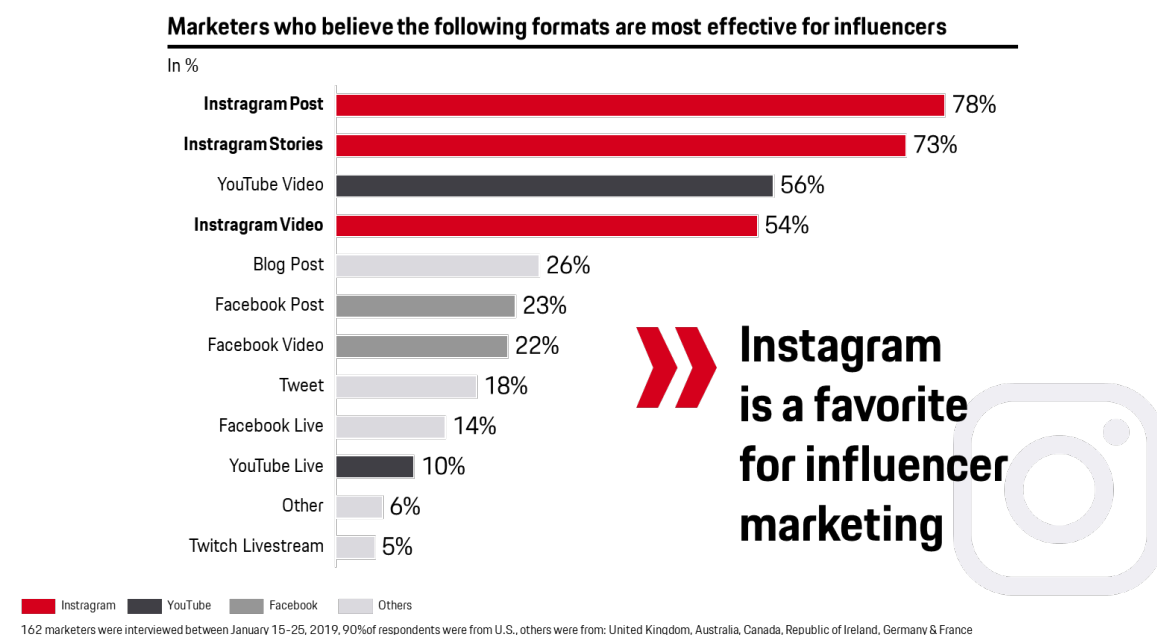


Figure 10: Most Popular Social Media Formats for Marketers

Source: Developed by the present author, following Statista (2019).

Marketers need to understand the specific motivations of customers concerning their Instagram usage, how a brand can satisfy customer needs and thereby strengthen the customer-brand relationship (Lee et al., 2018). Neher (2013) argues that visual content reinforces brand awareness and increases conversation, traffic, and distribution. In

addition, companies using Instagram can improve the brand's visual storytelling rather than just displaying textual information about the product or brand (Virtanen et al., 2017). Storytelling can give meaning to a brand and strengthen the customer's emotional connection to it (Singh, 2012). Krallman et al. (2016) have found that customers have the most significant level of brand involvement when interacting on Instagram compared to other social media platforms. Hence, marketers need to include Instagram in their social media marketing strategy if the brand wants to increase brand participation (Krallman et al., 2016).

SMI Marketing on Instagram is particularly valuable for building brand awareness (hubspot.com, 2017). The direct sale of products and services via social media is called *social commerce* and is a subcategory of e-commerce (Wang & Zhang, 2012). The new shopping feature makes Instagram even more attractive as a social commerce channel, as the consumer is directed straight to the product in the online store and does not have to leave the social media page (Blazquez et al., 2019). By measuring engagement, e.g. through comments, companies receive direct feedback on their product and can use it to improve the campaign (Lammenett, 2019).

Nevertheless, it is difficult for companies to identify the right SMI's, as there are now too many "professional SMI's" very similar. Therefore, a unique characteristic is lost (Lammenett, 2019). Without the proper selection criteria stated above in chapter 2.4, companies can quickly invest in the wrong SMI, as they may have a broad reach but, for instance, lack authenticity (Lammenett, 2019).

To be successful on Instagram, it is crucial to have many followers, comments and likes as people perceive such brands as more popular. Therefore, they are more prone to follow them than brands perceived as unpopular (Virtanen et al., 2017). Although (Miles, 2013) notes that it is vital for brands to balance those they follow and their followers. This is because a company that follows many users may be perceived as a spammer and therefore not authentic (Virtanen et al., 2017).

To successfully integrate Instagram into the marketing strategy of a social media brand, Kaplan & Haenlein (2012) recommend that brands take the lead and be

proactive. Otherwise, it is impossible to create the brand or its products or increase awareness. Taking the lead and being active goes beyond simply filling social media accounts with content (Fournier & Avery, 2011). It also means actively participating in customer feeds on the social media platform (Fournier & Avery, 2011) and thus actively using advertising behaviour (Virtanen et al., 2017). In other words, brands must be social to develop a successful social media strategy. In addition, the brand must find out what customers want to see as pleasant, valuable and the content they want to see on social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012).

To align their Marketing on Instagram, brands need to consider what type of SMI is suitable for their target group. Most SMI's on Instagram work in the fashion industry (61 per cent), followed by travel (8 per cent), food and drinks (7 per cent), apps (6 per cent) and beauty (5 per cent) (Töpfer et al., 2018).

The luxury goods sector can be applied to all the topics stated above. The focus of this study is the *SMI Marketing of luxury brands on Instagram* and will be elaborated explicitly in the following section.

2.6 SMI Marketing of Luxury Brands on Instagram

Depending on the SMI topics, which have been explained in chapter 2.4, SMI's can purely concentrate on cooperation with luxury brands. Since this study focuses on the impacts of such collaborations, the success characteristics of luxury and its social media marketing are explained in the following discussion.

2.6.1 A Brief Luxury Definition

Heine & Phan (2011) explain that while luxury products are typically treated very distinctively from characteristic consumer mass-market products, no consensus about the actual definition of luxury goods exists. The authors identify three core issues from which scientific literature on luxury and luxury goods typically suffers among the challenges. First, many authors do not contrast between different understandings of luxury (Heine & Phan, 2011). In this regard, it can be pointed out that different

branches and research approaches utilise and require different definitions of luxury. Furthermore, many researchers focus their definition of luxury on one specific luxury item or good, thus using only one perspective that might not apply to other fields or does not stand the test of time as the definition of luxury shifts.

In conclusion, Heine & Phan (2011) further explain that typical definitions of luxury goods focus on the goods themselves and their customers' motives for acquiring these goods. While there are distinct motives and reasons for purchasing luxury goods (Wang & Griskevicius, 2014), including the explanations themselves in the definition of luxury goods poses a scientific problem (Heine & Phan, 2011). In their approach to identifying one holistic definition of luxury, the authors explain that luxury research can be viewed from three perspectives: the philosophical-sociological, micro-economic, and managerial perspectives. Based on these perspectives and a subsequently conducted empirical analysis, Heine & Phan (2011, p. 30) present a definition of luxury:

“(...) anything that is desirable and more than necessary and ordinary”.

This definition, the authors conclude, contains the whole range of luxury products and services and is, therefore, an inclusive definition of the field while at the same time presenting a clear distinction from non-luxury goods (Heine & Phan, 2011).

This goes in line with Urkmez & Wagner (2015, p. 20), who state that luxury:

“(...) an integrative term that arouses someone's appetite and makes them envious of others.”

Heine & Phan (2011) and Urkmez & Wagner (2015) highlight that luxury always depends on perspective and is a relative and subjective concept. However, luxury has specific characteristics, such as high quality and price, rarity, exclusivity, particular aesthetics, and symbolic value (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Urkmez & Wagner, 2015). Okonkwo (2009) states that these characteristics and other aspects associated with luxuries, such as emotion, originality, and creativity, speak more to passion than reason. Consequently, luxury brands are viewed as images that contain associations

with these characteristics (Heine & Phan, 2011). Common categories for luxury products and services include, among others: Fashion, jewellery, cosmetics, wine, automotive, or tourism (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

The following chapter evaluates how luxury brands generally use SMI marketing on Instagram.

2.6.2 Luxury Marketing on Instagram

The market for luxury goods has developed rapidly over the last decades following changes in our society (Okonkwo, 2009; Pimentel, 2012). Nevertheless, research on how luxury brands use social media marketing is still limited (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

One reason for this is the initially contradicting notion of luxury marketing in an online environment. Central features of the digital world, such as lack of physical contact, mass access and mass attraction regardless of time and place, seem to contradict the essential concept of luxury (Okonkwo, 2009). The reality, however, is that luxury is successfully positioned online and that luxury brands are even playing a pioneering role in the use of social media (Godey et al., 2016; Okonkwo, 2009). For example, Burberry was one of the first luxury brands to successfully use social media marketing, resulting in a 40 per cent increase in profits (Dubois, 2017; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Kim & Ko (2012) and Godey et al. (2016) agree that the SMI marketing efforts of luxury brands encompass five content dimensions: entertainment, interaction, individualisation, trendiness and WOM. If these dimensions are successfully developed, SMI Marketing will significantly impact the brand's positive perception by consumers (Kim & Ko, 2012). As already mentioned in chapter 2.3, social media should no longer be viewed only as a way of reaching consumers and increasing brand awareness but also helps to intensify relationships with consumers and serves as a cost-effective tool for image building (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Social media marketing is significant for premium brands as status associations arise from discussions about promising trends in the digital community (Dubois, 2017).

More specifically, the new media marketing of luxury brands has been found to fuel consumer cravings and purchase intentions (Lee & Watkins, 2016). This is indeed remarkable as the paradox that lies in the creation of “desire” and “exclusivity” in the mass, and an egalitarian internet world is encouraged (Okonkwo, 2009). One possible explanation could be that social media channels like Instagram provide a visually appealing platform for portraying the lifestyle of the rich and famous (hubspot.com, 2017; Marwick, 2015). Marwick (2015) states that users like to dedicate themselves to the content they perceive as “aspirational”. This is marketing jargon for something that one would like to own but typically cannot.

Current research states that SMI's can help luxury brands on Instagram create content that arouses consumers' desires. These personalities appear as like-minded people or even trustworthy friends whom random users want to match (Marwick, 2015).

The previous discussion highlights the research gaps this study aims to fill at the intersection of the three discussed topics: Web 2.0, Social Media Marketing and SMI Marketing within the luxury industry on the social media platform Instagram. The specific research gaps are explained in the following.

2.7 Research Gap

This thesis addresses multiple objectives, highlighted in chapter 1, to enhance existing literature.

The basis for this study is the previously described and relatively new marketing discipline of SMI's to promote products or brand awareness through Instagram, which is considered influential by spreading content online (Carter, 2016).

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine the success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry. By doing so, this study aims to contribute to the closure of several research gaps.

In general, the influence of Instagram is an understudied topic for research focusing on the luxury industry (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Vinerean & Opreana, 2019). Despite the success of online influencer marketing strategies, moderately little academic work is executed on success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017; Santiago & Castelo, 2020; Vinerean & Opreana, 2019).

Often, the characterisation of luxury brands marketing online has only been restricted to a narrow aspect of the whole spectrum (Okonkwo, 2009). Previous academic research from Godey et al. (2016), Heine & Phan (2011), or Kim & Ko (2012) examined how luxury brands approached Instagram to develop closer relationships with customers and increase the brand awareness in digital settings. Yet, the academic literature lacks in the definition of success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry to the best of the author's knowledge to date.

This thesis aims to provide new perspectives on this topic and attempts to fill the gap and bridge between the topics of SMI marketing campaigns and luxury brands. In this way, this thesis aims to help brands in the luxury industry better reach and attract their audiences by executing successful SMI marketing campaigns in the future and sustaining their success. It also helps SMI's better understand a successful campaign process when working with brands in the luxury industry.

2.8 Conclusion and Research Framework

Firstly, this study's goal is to explore how marketing professionals see the marketing of luxury brands as unique, hence answering the question:

RQ1: What characterises the marketing of luxury brands online?

Secondly, this study aims to understand better the social media platform Instagram for luxury brands. In other words:

RQ2: What are the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram?

Aggregating the insights from the first two questions, this study derives overall insights for luxury brands on how to successfully approach SMI Marketing campaigns in the future when targeting their audience. The third sub-question is hence:

RQ3: What steps involve a successful process of creating an influencer marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram?

The conclusion of all the above answers the question:

RQ4: How can marketing, brand, or social media managers introduce an effective SMI campaign process on Instagram?

To answer the research questions above, this chapter explores and critically evaluates the literature about the theory of SMI Marketing of luxury brands on Instagram, which provides the theoretical framework used in this research. Some examples from previous research that have informed the development of this research are examined. This chapter also introduces the theoretical framework for this research (see Figure 11), which provides a structure that makes sense of this research and the collected and analysed data.

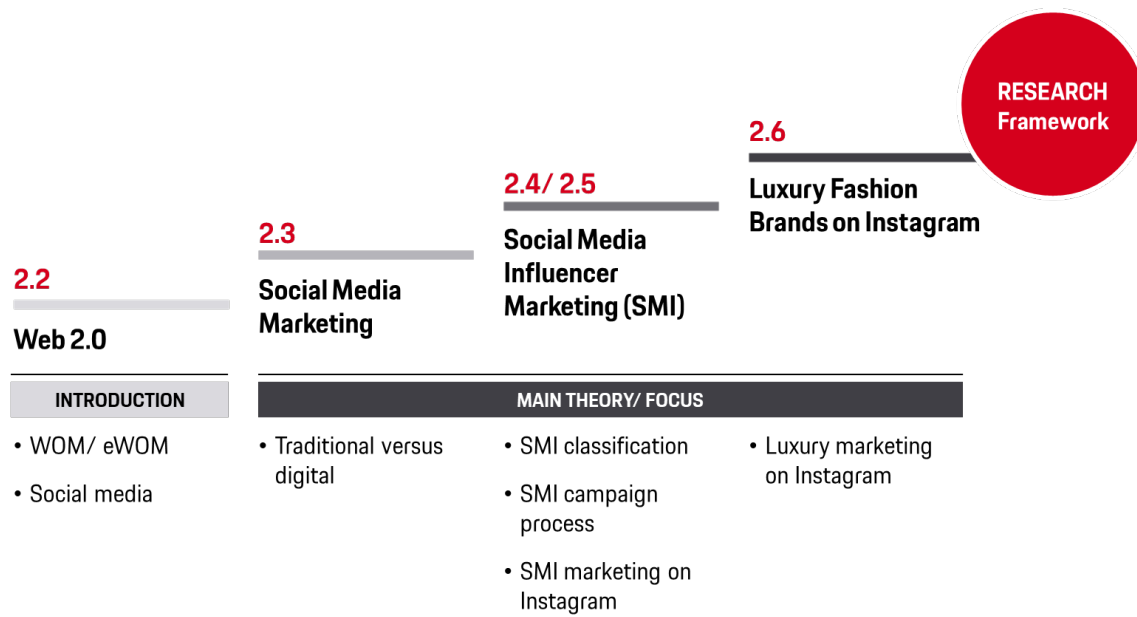


Figure 11: Theoretical Framework

Source: Developed by the present author.

Chapter 3 Methodology

“Your life is not a task or chore,
but the endless discovery and expression of your true and essential nature.”
– Vorhaus (2014)

This chapter outlines the research philosophy (3.2), axiological (3.3) and methodological (3.4) positions of this research. Then the study phases are discussed in detail, explaining the phases planning (3.5.1), development of research tools (3.5.2), data generation (3.5.3) and data analysis (3.5.4). It thus gives details on data collection methods and the process of conducting the semi-structured Skype interviews with experts within the luxury industry. It then discusses the trustworthiness of the data (3.6) and ethical issues relating to the research (3.7). This chapter sums up with concluding thoughts (3.8).

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

The previous chapter presents an overview of the relevant literature that informs this study and identifies the research gaps that this thesis aims to fill. This chapter presents the plan for the methods, including data collection methods, sampling, and data analysis methods, drawn up following the selected paradigm. A paradigm is fundamental beliefs based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions and premises (Lincoln et al., 2005). To ensure a robust research design, the following chapter explains the chosen paradigm congruent with the research beliefs about the nature of reality and the way of knowing it (Mills et al., 2006), including interpretivism, qualitative research, interviews and thematic analysis.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Ontology is a philosophy about being and existence. (McQueen & McQueen, 2010, p. 151) describe:

“It considers what types of things there are in the world and what “parts” or “substances” the world can be divided into.”

In other words, the theory deals with the essential nature of reality and theories of being and is concerned with what is real (Jupp, 2006). The epistemology of interpretivism frames this research. This position takes the view that things and meanings do not exist independently; instead, human beings must construct the meanings. Bryman (2016, p. 22) states that this:

“(...) asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision.”

Ontologically, it is the opposite position from objectivism, where social phenomena and their meanings exist independent of social actors (Bryman, 2016).

The research assumes that human reality and the individual who observes it cannot be separated from an ontological perspective. As the field research adopts a research design from a managerial perspective, it is argued that this is grounded in the interpretive paradigm (Ybema et al., 2009), where knowledge is socially constructed rather than discovered (Lee, 2011). This study seeks to investigate the success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry according to the human experience of selected Marketing managers.

This dissertation aims to help brands in the luxury industry better reach and attract their audience by implementing successful SMI Marketing campaigns in the future and sustaining their success. To do so, qualitative interviews with social media managers

are conducted. The human experience of the selected Marketing managers is a process of interpretation of the interaction with the external world instead of merely its reception (Lather, 1986). Thus, this research believes that social reality cannot be separated from the participating Marketing managers or researchers (Thomas, 2013). Their knowledge is constructed from their understandings and interactions of meanings of the world and is, thus, a somewhat subjective opinion. The development contributes to knowledge and practice of an integrative framework attributed to SMI marketing and luxury brands on Instagram.

Epistemology is about how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) state two contrasting views on how research in social science should be conducted: Interpretivism and positivism. The latter's idea is that the social world exists externally and that objective methods are more effective in measuring this world than subjective methods such as attitudes, perceptions, reflection or intuition (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

In contrast, the main point about interpretivism is that:

“(...) we are interested in people and the way that they interrelate - what they think and how they form ideas about the world; how their worlds are constructed. (...) We have to immerse ourselves in the research contexts in which we are interested – for example talking to people in-depth, attending to every nuance of their behavior, every clue to the meanings that they are investing in something” (Thomas, 2013: 75).

This thesis's epistemological view of interpretivism is undertaken because several authors believe knowledge is built through social interpretation of the world (Burns et al., 2008; Easterby-Smith et al., 2018; Thomas, 2013). Interpretive research has always been used in qualitative research because it explores how people interpret, provide meanings about and understand the world around them (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). The paradigm focuses on how people make sense of the world by language and experience sharing (Burns et al., 2008; Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Interpretive research is vital to this research. The goal is to better understand the world

of human experience and practice from a managerial perspective through careful analysis and interpretation of data.

As the opinion of Marketing managers on how a successful process of creating an SMI Marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram is examined in this research, the aim is not to study the phenomenon as an absolute observable opinion but instead as a social construction. This research recognises that knowledge is derived from socially constructed concepts and meanings (Thomas, 2013), aiming to produce a world of life view of Marketing managers on success characteristics of SMI campaigns and steps involved in the campaign process on Instagram – through their knowledge, experiences, and contexts (Picardi & Masick, 2013). According to Burr (2015), people cannot separate themselves from what they know; it is not all about truth, prediction, and control. People develop their meanings and understandings of different concepts through social interactions.

Researchers, such as Coghlan (2019), highlight the Marketing managers' implicit and explicit knowledge of their organisations, their ability to see beyond the objective nature of critical realities and interpret what these events mean to their local setting. As such, in-depth interviews are adopted for the proposed research to understand the work environment better (Ekvall, 1996). The researcher's interpretation of the data itself should be made clear to other researchers at the end of the investigation.

Before the research design is discussed in more detail, it is necessary to outline this research's axiology as this also influences how this study is conducted (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.3 Axiology

As well as the aim and objectives of the research and the academic and methodological gaps highlighted within the literature, it is suggested that axiology plays a crucial role in how research is conducted (Saunders et al., 2009). Axiology studies judgements about value (Saunders et al., 2009); specifically, it is engaged with

assessing the role of the researcher's value in all stages of the research process (Li, 2015).

Axiology primarily refers to the "aims" of the research. This area of the research philosophy tries to clarify if the researcher is trying to explain or predict the world or only seeking to understand it (Lee & Lings, 2008). According to Blaikie (2009), the researcher needs to consider these philosophies since the researcher's values affect how the research is conducted and how the research findings are evaluated. The researcher's top ten core values, relevant for this study, include family, loyalty, stability, optimism, positivity, courage, creativity, enthusiasm, integrity and achievement.

Among the aspects described are the researcher's social position, personal experiences, and professional beliefs (Berger, 2013). As a management consultant in marketing, sales and services within the luxury industry and the interpretivism research philosophy, individual values are honoured and negotiated among individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher acknowledges that research is value-laden and that biases are present in relation to the researcher's role in the study context (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The author of this work stayed entirely anonymous and objective since the role as a researcher is put at centre. The researcher values open and honest opinions and seeks to understand a personal or social situation rather than an explanation or objective truth. Therefore, subjectivism and different views are essential to the researcher's life experiences and regulation and order (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Yet, the author acknowledges that the stories voiced representants an interpretation of the author as much as the subject of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The chosen research philosophy, interpretivism, the managerial perspective of this research, and the researchers' values led to suitable axiology for this study to be small samples or in-depth investigations (Saunders et al., 2009). In this study, in-depth interviews with marketing managers to investigate how a successful process of creating an SMI Marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram looks like are chosen. The study is value bound, and by using in-depth interviews, the researcher is

part of what is being researched. It cannot be separated, which leads to a particular subjectivity in some respect (Saunders et al., 2009).

Since, according to Saunders et al. (2009), there should be consistency between the ontological stance, the epistemological underpinnings and belief and the methodology applied. The qualitative research of this study will be further discussed.

3.4 Qualitative Research

The methodology is the “(...) strategy, plan of action, process or design” lying behind the choice and use of particular research methods (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). O'Leary (2009) describes methodology as the framework associated with a specific set of paradigmatic assumptions used to conduct research. (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005) insist that it should meet the following two criteria when running a research methodology: Firstly, the methodology should be the most suitable to achieve the research objectives. Secondly, it should be possible to replicate the methodology used in other research of the exact nature.

This research requires a *qualitative research methodology*. As Jackson et al. (2007) describe, the qualitative study aims to understand other people's experiences. This research gathers information about the Marketing manager's interpretations of successfully creating an SMI Marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram.

Mutch (2013, p. 45) explains that:

“Qualitative research aims to uncover the lived reality or constructed meanings of the research participants.”

The chosen epistemology interpretivism (explained in the previous chapter 3.2) is the theoretical basis for qualitative research. It always uses an inductive strategy that is based on interpretation and understanding (Mutch, 2013). These interpretations and understandings are the accounts of social life given by social actors (in this study, Marketing managers). Their everyday beliefs and practices are articulated to portray

a picture of their real world (Saunders et al., 2009). Thus, social scientists report participants' social life via fieldwork, such as observation and interviews (Mutch, 2013).

In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews are chosen – a method that requires interaction with the research participants themselves (Longhurst, 2009). This data collection method generates rich data, which, in turn, enables this research to better understand and then describe how a successful process of creating an SMI Marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram is completed. Since luxury itself can be regarded as highly subjective (Hennigs et al., 2012), this subjectivity is also part of the methodological stance. Also, exploratory research purely aims to discover specific aspects of the research area, in this study to generate general insights about how a successful process of creating an SMI Marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram looks like (Pride & Ferrell, 2016).

3.5 Methods

Crotty (1998, p. 3) defines research methods as “the techniques or procedures used to gather or analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis.” The following Table 4 summarises the *data collection methods* applied in detail.

Study Phases	Phase Focus
A – Plan Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Identify Data · Select · Reach Out · Plan Analysis
B – Develop Research Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Invite for Interviews · Develop Interview Question(s)
C – Generate Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Pilot · Define Medium · Conduct Interview(s)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Achieve Data Saturation · Post Processing Interview(s)
D – Analyse Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Transcribe · Code and Analyse

Table 4: Study Planning Phases

Source: Developed by the present author.

In the following, each phase is explained in more detail.

3.5.1 Phase A – Plan Data Collection

Initially, this study identifies which data is needed and derives which method is suitable for a successful data collection to answer the research question(s).

Identify Data: After the successful commitment to qualitative research, Lijphart (1975) argues that a comparative case study involves the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across two or more cases that share a similar emphasis or aim (Gustafsson, 2017). Since the validity of a comparative empirical study tends to be higher, and as in the present study, different cases are available, the strategy of a comparable study is chosen. A data collection method that facilitated human interactions is selected to investigate the participants' views: semi-structured, in-depth interviews with marketing managers. Reasons for this are given in the following sections.

The methodology of data collection and analysis is of significant importance for the outcome of an empirical study (Bell et al., 2018). The decision is made between participant observation and qualitative interviewing (Cacciattolo, 2015). Since observational participation in the numerous potential Marketing initiatives in the luxury industry can be seen as unrealistic and highly time-consuming during the COVID-19 pandemic, an interview strategy is pursued. Another advantage is that interviews allow the possibility to obtain broadly detailed primary data, which can directly be examined (Saunders et al., 2009). According to Boyce et al. (2006, p. 3), interviews include “(...)

conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation.”

Since interviews can again be carried out in numerous methodological variations, an interview method is appropriate. This study uses explanatory semi-structured interviews with marketing managers. According to Bell et al. (2018, p. 211), those are characterised by a guide of questions with the option to change their formulation and which can include “(...) further questions in response to what is seen as significant (...)” In comparison to alternative collection methods, semi-structured interviews promise the best outcome because the research questions also leave space for novelties (Bell et al., 2018). Thus, the possibility of investigating specific aspects developed during an interview is given. The typical framework of semi-structured interviews with an organised approach and a simultaneous openness for discovering new (Saunders et al., 2009) seems to be the ideal methodology for this study to answer the defined research questions.

The interview format enables dialogue and discussion between the author and the Marketing managers, although within the limited timeframe of an interview. Bogdan & Biklen (2007) explain that interviews produced rich data from the participants' perspectives. Therefore, the first-hand data from the interviews give insights into the participants' views about SMI's and how their practices support their views. Such rich insights would not be obtained through questions that invited simple “yes” or “no” closed answers, which generate only minimal data (Bell et al., 2018; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Taylor et al. (2015) describe some potential weaknesses in using interviews for data collection. Because interview questions are mainly semi-structured, conversations can quickly go off track and not be relevant to the research topic if the interviewer does not manage the interview situation. This is a limitation of using interviews for research, mainly if the interviews are conducted within a tight time frame. Another disadvantage is that the need for interviews in this research would limit the sample size while still ensuring robustness and credibility (Young et al., 2018). The researcher of this thesis is the interviewer and had to complete the data collection process within the planned

time frame. The proposed time frame of the interview is mentioned, so the participants understood the duration of the interview beforehand. The interview questions are sent via email upfront to the participants a few days before the interview, so they have time to prepare. The interviewer tried not to interrupt the conversations. Still, a few times, the participants had to be brought back on track by gently repeating the interview questions during the conversations.

Select: In the thesis, the interviewees consisted of large global organisations that use Instagram as a marketing channel. The organisations comprised the luxury industry. This industry is selected because of the critical role of high customisation and the complexity of the customer relationship (Kim & Ko, 2012). Although the research is conducted in Germany, it involves research participants from other countries within the European Union (Italy and France).

To choose individual cases from this population, a theoretical sampling approach, according to Glaser & Strauss (1967, p. 62), is selected. According to them, "(...) theoretical sampling is done to discover categories and their properties and to suggest the interrelationship into a theory." In contrast to a statistical sampling based on a random selection, the sample arises gradually while conducting and is controlled by emerging theory (Bell et al., 2018).

The total number of individual cases to be selected is previously not limited. Instead, the decision on the termination of the sample intake occurs during the investigation and, in principle, is based on the degree of data saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The concept of saturation is related to the number of interviews conducted in qualitative research. Saturation is the most common guiding principle for assessing the adequacy of purposive samples in qualitative research (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Glaser & Strauss (1967) developed the concept of saturation as theoretical saturation and was part of their effective grounded theory approach to qualitative research.

Although most qualitative research does not follow a grounded theory approach, the concept of saturation is widely used in other approaches to qualitative research, where it is typically called data or thematic saturation (Hennink et al., 2017). This broader

application of saturation focuses more on assessing sample size rather than the adequacy of data to develop a theory as in theoretical saturation. When used in the broader context, saturation refers to the point in data collection when no additional issues or insights are identified and data begin to repeat so that further data collection is redundant, signifying that adequate sample size is reached.

Saturation is an essential indicator that a sample is adequate for the phenomenon studied – that data collected have captured the diversity, depth, and nuances of the issues explored and demonstrate content validity (Francis et al., 2010). The sample is big enough to be representative to ensure the validity of the research. Through a two-step approach, the total interview number is eleven (Bell et al., 2018) when data saturation is reached.

In qualitative research, researchers can use various sampling techniques when recruiting participants (Patton, 2002). This research uses purposive sampling to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation (Arcury & Quandt, 1999). Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases for the most valuable use of limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2013; Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are particularly familiar with or have a particular knowledge of a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Palinkas et al., 2013). Despite knowledge and experience, availability, willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulated, expressive and reflective way are important (Bernard, 2000; Spradley, 2016).

There are several general criteria for this study, as shown in Figure 12: (a) must be an active social media Marketing manager and (b) must work within the luxury industry. Additionally, they (c) must have at least five years of work experience within this field to ensure participants have a similar foundation.

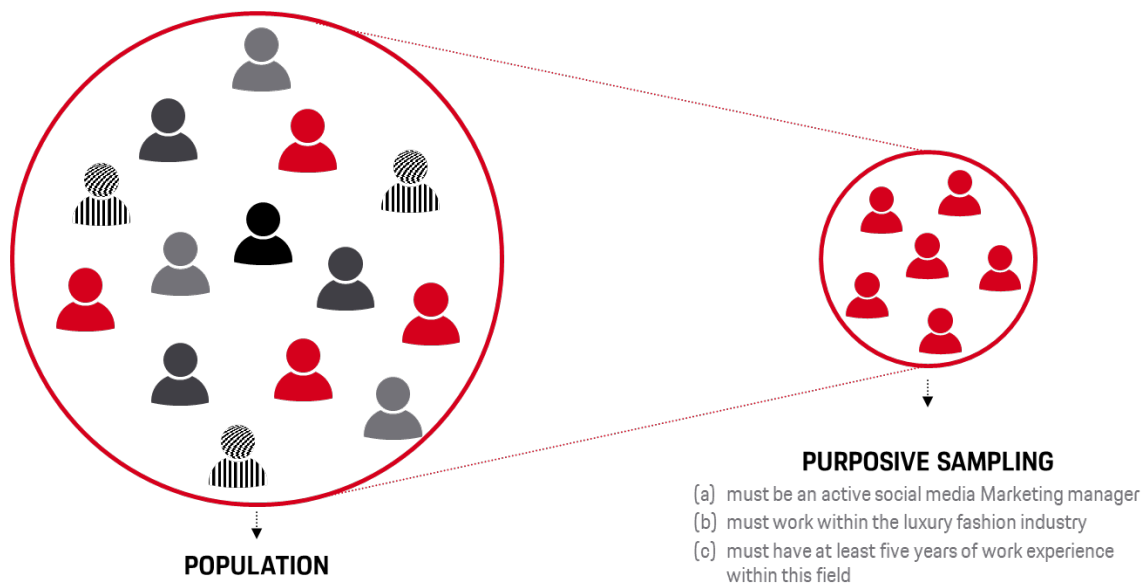


Figure 12: Purposive Sampling taken from the Population (Schematic Display)

Source: Developed by the present author.

Eleven semi-structured interviews are conducted with participants holding one or more of the following four roles: Social Media Manager, Marketing Manager, Social Media Senior Expert, and Marketing and Sales Manager. Typical tasks include analysing engagement and other key indicators, identifying trends in customer interactions, and planning digital campaigns (with SMI's) to build a community online.

Stage one – Six participants are interviewed formally once. Stage two – Five of the six interview experts are interviewed again one year later within the defined two-stage interview process relevant for this research. One of the six interviews could not be used during this study. Therefore, there are a total of eleven interviews. Table 5 illustrates the interviewees, their role, the length of interviews one and two, and the medium used for member checking.

#	Role(s)	Interview Length I	Interview Length II	Member Check
P1	Social Media Manager	0:56 hours	1:01 hours	email
P2	Marketing Manager	0:59 hours	0:57 hours	LinkedIn
P3	Social Media Manager	0:56 hours	0:46 hours	email
P4	Social Media Senior Expert	1:08 hours	0:53 hours	email
P5	Marketing and Sales Manager	0:58 hours	1:06 hours	email
P6	Marketing Manager	0:29 hours	-	LinkedIn

Table 5: Interview Participants

Source: Developed by the present author.

Reach Out: An invitation to participate in the research is sent to 21 different Marketing managers working in firms within the luxury industry. As described in the previous chapter, the central criterion here is an expert status concerning the research question (Bogner et al., 2014). In the initial phase, the response rate is 33 per cent as initially, seven contacted persons agreed. However, out of the seven who agreed, one disappeared. The one who disappeared agreed to an interview but never responded again when setting a date. The author tried to keep in contact and sent two follow-up emails, but the contacted person never came back to the author.

During a second interview conduction phase in 2020, the six interview partners are contacted again and asked for another in-depth interview with follow-on questions. This two-stage approach is chosen to derive deeper insights and answers to the research question(s). However, only five agreed to another in-depth interview out of the six. Therefore, two interviews were conducted with each of the five experts, leading to eleven interviews conducted for this research. This is a reciprocal process – not only are richer data and more significant insights obtained through these second conversations, but the interviewees can reflect on their practice, and the research gained some new insights and information.

Plan Analysis: An open coding method is chosen to interpret the generated data. This method helps give meaning to this study to successfully answer the defined research questions. The initial point in the analytic process is to make sense and meaning of the data collected through interviews (Given, 2008).

3.5.2 Phase B – Develop Research Tools

Several research tools are developed to facilitate the study, which started on January 10, 2019. The tools include the interview invitation(s), designing the interview question(s) and further developing the RD6. From April to July 2019, different companies are obtained for participation in the first attempt. The second phase started in July 2020, when the same participants are contacted again for another in-depth interview.

Invite for Interviews: Firstly, the researcher's network on the social media platform LinkedIn is contacted to receive contacts of marketing managers in the luxury industry. Furthermore, the researcher's initial supervisor supplied a list of luxury brands that could be reached. A message in English is transferred to the relevant contact people to participate in a DBA study on SMI's. It is vital in this message to give transparency about who the researcher is and the intent of the contact to get consent to allow further communication and agree on a procedure for how the interview can be conducted. Messages are mainly written in English, except for one contact to whom the message is conveyed in German.

Develop Interview Question(s): The basis of data collection is developing an interview guide based on the theoretical considerations. In preparing this guide, the conscious openness of the question style is essential. To assist the author in developing the interview guides, Bell et al. (2018) recommendations are used to achieve effective outcomes: open-ended questions and neutral, precise wording. This is to ensure that the participants speak freely and elaborate as much as possible. The questions are a good mixture of probing, specifying and direct questions. Also, concerning openness, the semi-structured questions allowed the interviewed experts

to improvise each topic by themselves and switch the focus on new or unexpected relevant aspects (Bell et al., 2018).

Moustakas (1994) suggested beginning with questions that guide the interview towards a fluid conversation. According to Josselson & Lieblich (1995), stories are better than reporting. Telling stories allows the interviewee to take responsibility for making the importance of the story known, where reporting is usually more a function of the researcher. Questions need to be asked to extract the interviewee's own real-life experiences. Josselson & Lieblich (1995, p. 234) state that this can often be done by shifting the responsibility for the "import of the talk" to the interviewee. The researcher went on to say the task of interviewers is to:

"Provide the interactional and discursive conditions that will arouse desire [in the interviewee] to embrace that responsibility. We are most likely to succeed when we orient our questions directly and simply to life experiences that the other seeks to make sense of and to communicate."

Eleven questions are designed that respond to the semi-structured interview aims. All questions are discussed with the thesis supervisor to ensure the questions are relevant to the research topic and can be quickly answered by the potential participants. The participants are expected to complete the interview in 45 to 60 minutes and are asked to answer all the questions.

A complete list of the two-staged interview questions can be found in Appendix A.2. After two background questions, the focus is set on answering the defined research questions.

A linkage between the literature identified vital authors, subject experts, and in-depth interview questions can be seen in the following Table 6.

Literature	Key Authors	In-depth Interview Question
Web 2.0	Cheung & Thadani (2012); Hennig-Thurau et al. (2013); Kaplan & Haenlein (2010, 2012); Lee et al. (2016); Tapscott & Williams (2006); Tuten et al. (2020)	3. How would you describe the effect of electronic Word-Of-Mouth on your company's brand?
Social Media Marketing	Kim & Ko (2012); Labrecque et al. (2013); Tuten et al. (2020)	4. Is social media your most important advertisement channel, and why?
Social Media Influencer (SMI) Marketing	Brown & Hayes (2008); Deges (2018); Lammenett (2018); Payne et al. (1995); Tuten et al. (2020)	5. What is your definition of an "influencer" on Instagram? 6. Why is your company working with social media influencers?
Luxury Brands on Instagram	Brown & Fiorella (2013); Heine & Phan (2011); Kim & Ko (2012); Okonkwo (2009); Urkmez & Wagner (2015)	7. What characterises the marketing of luxury brands online, and why? 8. What are success characteristics of SMI campaigns, and why? 9. What are the most essential influencer characteristics when selecting, and why? 10. What steps involve a successful campaign

		process on Instagram, and why?
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Table 6: Linkage Literature Review and In-Depth Interview Questions

Source: Developed by the present author.

The introduction to the interview consists of a consent declaration, the welcome of the expert, a short outline of the topic, a short description of the interview process and the approximate duration, and the signage of the privacy agreement and consent form (see Appendix A.1).

The first section of the research guide contains general questions, such as how long the participant has been working for their employers or their exact job title. These questions are necessary to ensure the data collected is from the desired target group and give a smooth entry into the conversation.

The second section of the research guide contains a set of critical questions for answering the research questions. This section helps make general conclusions about the respondents' opinion of the social media channel Instagram and the successful SMI marketing campaign.

A summary of what has been said is given and asked if the participants want to add anything else. Then a brief outlook is given, sharing information about the evaluation and results.

3.5.3 Phase C – Generate Data

To collect the data, a pilot is tested (Lavrakas, 2008). After completing this test and minor adjustments to the interview questions, people are contacted, and interviews are set up and conducted.

Pilot: After the final design of the interview questions, a pilot is set up for the first of the two-staged interview collection process. The pilot study aims to refine and provide a more detailed plan of the data collection methods and procedures for the full-scale research (Band, 2013). For this purpose, two marketing managers are invited to test

the questions. The pilot study aims to get as much feedback as possible about the proposed questions. Merriam & Tisdell (2015) points out that this can be seen as a “dress rehearsal” for the full-scale research. The pilot study also enabled to see whether the interview questions could be realistically completed within the 45 to 60-minute period. In particular, the pilot study is used to get a feel for the depth of subject knowledge that could be expected and the participant’s practical skills in the research area. Unfortunately, only one of the two contacted persons took their time for the test. The other person did not get back to the author, although one follow-up email is sent.

After the pilot testing with one participant, the questions are slightly modified. This is because some questions are not asked openly enough to get a profound question. After restructuring some of the questions, the semi-structured interview questionnaire is ready. As Edinburgh Napier University requires, an information letter is placed on the first page of the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A.1). Participants must sign an agreement to indicate that they are willing to participate in the research. The interview appointments are confirmed as soon as this consent is sent to the researcher via email before the interview appointment.

Define Medium: The contact person is primarily contacted via LinkedIn. After the first contact, an initial invitation email is sent to the contact person. In some cases, this contact person transferred the author further to the right social media Marketing Manager. A personal email is sent as soon as the relevant interviewee is found, and they are informed by the initial contact person that the author will contact them. After agreeing to participate in the research, an email invitation for a Skype appointment is sent.

Skype interviews are chosen due to the time and cost constraints of personally meeting with participants around Europe. Janghorban et al. (2014) explain that Skype interviews are equivalent to on-site interviews because Skype provides audio and video functions. The advantage of Skype interviewing is that this technique can reduce the time and financial constraints of conducting on-site interviews. The Skype interviews are recorded, and no information is asked of the interviewees that could be

used to identify them from the interview transcripts chosen to use semi-structured interview questions to collect data from the Marketing managers (Mutch, 2013).

Skype interviews are the only suitable medium for the second interview attempt due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the governmental restrictions on meeting other people from different households.

Conduct Interviews: As stated above, the proposed interview questions are discussed with the thesis supervisor, adjusted according to the pilot study results and executed. In the end, for the first phase of the research, six people are interviewed over a two-stage process.

The eleven interviews are conducted over three months, from July to September 2019, and a follow-up agreed for 2020. Due to the widespread distance, all the participants elected to be interviewed via Skype, rather than face-to-face or over the telephone. No other medium is possible in the year 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The two-stage interview process was necessary due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the further interest in this topic which needed clarification. This is supported by recent studies: between 2019 and 2021, Instagram achieved a monthly active user growth of 16 per cent worldwide (Statista, 2021a).

The author wanted to make sure that, due to the rising number of social media users, no changes to the questions asked in 2019 appeared. That is why a second interview attempt was agreed on with the participants from 2019. All participants are contacted again in April 2020 via their preferred medium (mainly Email) and the current situation and investigation purposes explained. After a total of 16 days, all participants respond to the Email and a follow-up meeting is agreed on. All follow-up interviews take place throughout July 2020.

During both interview rounds, each interview is set up at the most convenient time for the participants, and the interviews take place from the participants' offices or, especially in 2020, home offices.

Throughout each interview, the participants explore what successful SMI's meant to them. Taylor et al. (2015) explain that using interviews as a data collection method is particularly useful, as interviews enable the researcher to understand the meanings behind the participants' experiences. This study is aware of a potential challenge when conducting semi-structured interviews; those participants may wish to discuss areas that are not relevant to the interview questions. Fortunately, this problem is not experienced during any of the eleven interviews.

According to Menter et al. (2011), the attributes of a successful interviewer are shown in Table 7. This study tries to adhere to all these defined attributes during the data collection process.

Characteristic	Description
Knowledgeable	Is entirely familiar with the focus of the interview
Structured	Gives reason, rounds it off, asks for additional questions
Clear	Asks simple, easy, short questions; no jargon
Gentle	Let's people finish; enables time to think; accepts pauses
Sensitive	Listens carefully to what is said and how it is said, is compassionate in dealing with the interviewee
Open	Responds to what is essential to the interviewee and is flexible
Steering	Knows what they want to find out
Critical	Is prepared to argue with what is said, for example, dealing with inconsistencies in interviewees' replies
Remembering	Relates what is said to what has been said before
Interpreting	Explains and expands meanings of interviewees' statements, but without imposing meaning on them
Balanced	Does not talk too much, resulting in passiveness, or too little, resulting in the feeling that the interviewee is not talking along the right lines

Ethically sensitive	Is responsive to the ethical aspect of interviewing, ensuring the interviewee understands what the research is about, its aim, and that their answers will be treated in confidence
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Table 7: Attributes of a Successful Interviewer

Source: Developed by the present author, following (Menter et al., 2011).

Achieve Data Saturation: When designing qualitative research, it is questionable when data saturation is reached when interviewing study participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Failure to reach data saturation has an impact on the research quality and lowers validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In research, data saturation is accomplished when

- there is enough information to replicate the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012), when
- there cannot be any new information be obtained (Guest et al., 2006), and when
- additional coding is no longer possible (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2006).

Data saturation can be reached with Interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). According to Bernard (2013), the number of interviews needed to reach data saturation was a number not quantifiable, but that the researcher takes what he can get. In this study, data saturation is reached after eleven interviews; the number of new codes started to decrease at eight interviews. New codes become rarer beyond the eighth interview until they almost disappear at the eleventh interview. That is why this study, with its two-stage interview process and a total of eleven interviews, provides a robust and valid understanding of the study phenomenon (Guest et al., 2006).

Post Processing Interview(s): A follow-up to thank the participants after the interviews are sent. In addition, it must be acknowledged that the interview data could be interpreted in different ways. So, the transcripts are sent back to each participant to check that they are satisfied with the transcription and to enable them to give any feedback if they want to. None of the participants provided additional feedback.

3.5.4 Phase D – Analyse Data

Transcribe: Bell et al. (2018) state that transcription is necessary when conducting interviews. Each interview is transcribed immediately upon completion. Where this is not feasible, the interviews are transcribed two days after the conduction, at the latest. This is important to make sure that the interviewer is still familiar with the data collected. Each interview is transcribed in English word for word. A verbatim approach is used to get all words the participants said to form a sentence from them. Silence is shown with (...), laughter with (laughs).

All identity of the participants is removed from the transcripts, and their names are replaced with abbreviations (P1, ..., P5). As Potter (1996, p. 12) states: "Often some of the most revealing analytic insights come during transcription because a profound engagement with the material is needed to produce good transcript".

Code and Analyse: As discussed previously, qualitative research allows researchers to gain much information from their participants to develop an in-depth understanding of the research topic. Mutch (2013) explains that a qualitative methodology enables researchers to gather rich knowledge of interest. In the end, more than 70,000 words of data are supposed. The next step is to repeat and refine the data analysis. Bell et al. (2018) state that there are limited firm and widely accepted guidelines for qualitative data analysis. Taylor et al. (2015) point out that researchers gain a deeper understanding of the meanings of the data by continually refining their interpretations throughout the data analysis process.

There is agreement within the literature that thematic analysis is an excellent technique to synthesise, categorise and draw out themes from the data (Bell et al., 2018). Thus, a thematic analysis of these in-depth interviews is executed to identify and analyse factors determining SMI marketing campaigns on Instagram.

According to Auerbach & Silverstein (2003), there seems to be a prominent link to the themes and constructs using the manual analysis approach. The data is coded using printed copies of the transcripts and highlighter pens. Open coding is carried out

through all eleven interviews, then moved on to axial coding to connect categories and then selective coding to choose specific codes to develop ideas and thoughts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Several researchers argue that it is necessary to analyse the field notes and read and reread the written text in its whole to become familiar with the data to organise, manage and categorise the data through selective, open and axial coding (Band, 2013; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Selective themes are clustered after coding all transcribed material axially (Saldana, 2012). This means reviewing codes and merging types that seem analytically similar (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Eventually, themes are developed from the data analysis and subthemes and subcategories are derived from there. The researcher makes sense of the data identified within each theme and writes a comprehensive interpretation within the upcoming data analysis, findings and discussion chapter.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Lincoln & Guba (1985) posit that the trustworthiness of a research study is essential to evaluate its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing: Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which can be seen in Figure 13.

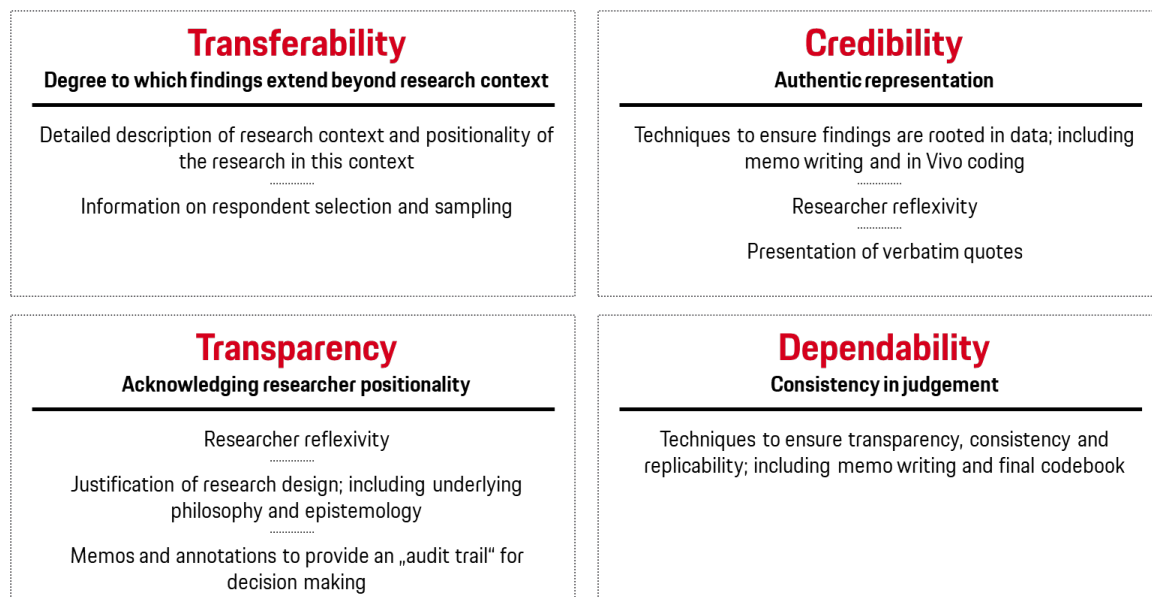


Figure 13: Strategies for Evaluating Research

Source: Developed by the present author, following Lincoln & Guba (1985).

Transferability is assured by showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts. Also, the database is published to enable others to reach conclusions or verify studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The internal validity of this study, the credibility in the truth of the findings is created by, e.g., checking the participant's status as a Marketing manager continuously, recording the in-depth interviews on tape and sharing thoughts with a cohort member, who critically evaluated my results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In this thesis, Marketing managers are approached professionally. The time and effort they took to complete the semi-structured interview are always appreciated. However, the subjective nature of the data needs to be acknowledged, given that they are based on the participants' opinions, experiences, and perspectives, and that this subjectivity can create a certain degree of bias. Thus, it cannot be said that the data is entirely valid. However, the author tries to maximise its validity by ensuring that the data are socially situated and culturally saturated. Information is collected and presented to participants as a researcher, not as a professional. Although the author did not agree

with some of the participants' comments, their understanding of the world is tried to be understood, contributing to the confirmability of this study. Through the researcher's high degree of neutrality, the findings of this study are shaped by the Marketing managers and not the researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Other researchers support Lincoln & Guba (1985) trustworthiness model by claiming that the qualitative researcher needs to replicate the analytical process of refining, generating, comparing and validating constructs (LeCompte et al., 1993; Mills & Morton, 2013). The method of inquiry is protocolled (how data is collected, how data is kept, the accuracy of data), and the notes and transcripts provide a true reflection of what happened, fulfilling the criterion of dependability. The findings are consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To ensure the research is conducted ethically, potential ethical problems and mitigating procedures are considered at every stage of the research process. A detailed discussion of the ethics in this research is presented in the following section.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

According to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 113), "access and ethics are critical aspects of conducting research." Although threats to validity and reliability can never be removed thoroughly, this thesis aims to minimise the level of these threats (Bell et al., 2018). To assure the reliability and validity of the interviews, the ten ethical principles of Bell et al. (2018) will be considered while developing the interview guide. After completing the preliminary interview guide, Bell et al. (2018) suggest that several pre-tests on its practicality should follow to review, revise, and adjust some aspects before the actual investigation starts.

Thus, sufficient time is planned to gain access to the required information, which means several months are scheduled for data collection. Since there can always be a late or no response, great care is taken before sending further information. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), at least four phone calls must be considered before sending any additional information.

Furthermore, since the author is working in a management consulting firm, existing contacts are used, and new ones developed. Since a management consulting firm generally has a wide range of different clients in different industries, the author aimed to use this portfolio to request access.

On the one side, the author thinks that working for a management consulting firm can be helpful in gaining access. However, it is also crucial to overcome organizational concerns when providing information. The author declares that the sensitive data is collected and stored anonymous and confidential. No information is further transmitted to the management consulting firm the author is working in (Bell et al., 2018).




Data collection phase	 01 Prior data collection	 02 While data collection	 03 After data collection
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants have the possibility to not participate • Participants are not contacted at unreasonable times or at home • Participants can determine when participation in the collection process takes place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview questions do not contain any degrading, discriminating or any other issues • Participants will be asked to grant permission to record the interview • An anonymous evaluation of the participants statements will be stored to ensure that sensible data cannot be assigned to a specific company • Participants have the possibility not to answer questions that create stress or discomfort • Data will not be transferred to a country outside the European Economic Area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants can trust in anonymity and confidentiality in relation to discussions with other organizational or research participants • Collected data is deleted from USB sticks, computer or other storages

Figure 14: Ethical Considerations

Source: Developed by the present author, following Bell et al. (2018).

In line with this are possible benefits for the organization, such as the applicability of the research results. To confirm the reliability and validity of the interviews, ethical principles are considered during the data collection process (see Figure 14).

Since the use of the Internet or email may generate ethical concerns, the author of the thesis ensures that data will not be transferred to a country outside the European Economic Area.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter shows that despite precise planning in qualitative research, it is essential to be flexible, reflective, and reflexive throughout the various stages. Approaches might be adjusted to specific target participants' needs and context. Methods for data collection and generation must be adjusted based on the needs of the target participants and the context.

The research model for this thesis can be seen in Figure 15.

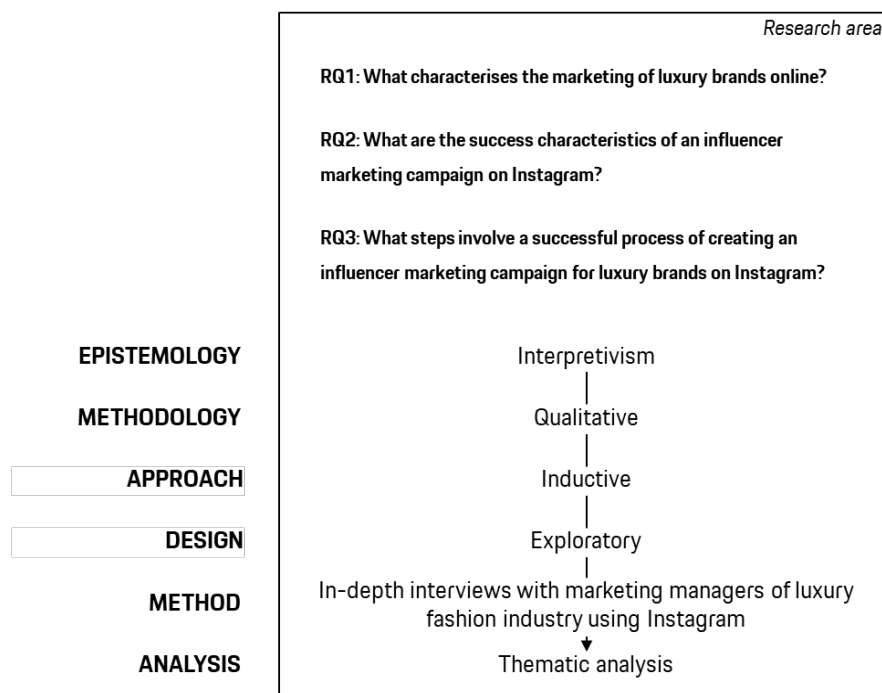


Figure 15: Research Model

Source: Developed by the present author.

This chapter presents and explains the processes behind the research development and aims to present the study's methodology. This thesis depends on qualitative research, with an inductive approach and in-depth interviews at heart (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Crotty, 1998).

In the first section, the research philosophy is outlined. The second section explains the four study phases: planning, developing the research tools, generating data, and

analysing the data. Then, in the fourth section, the validity and reliability of this study are described (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and ethical considerations are considered (Bell et al., 2018).

The following chapter presents the findings of the eleven conducted in-depth interviews.

Chapter 4 Analysis and Discussion

“In God we trust.
All others must bring data.”
– Deming (1986)

In the previous chapter, the methodology of this research is explained. This section presents the critical data interpretation collected from eleven in-depth interviews over a two-stage process. It aims to understand and discuss the findings further to answer what characterises the Marketing of luxury brands online (RQ1; 4.2), what the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram are (RQ2; 4.3), and what steps involve a successful process of creating an SMI marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram (RQ3; 4.4). At the end, an Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC) framework for a successful SMI marketing campaign model is presented (4.5) and a conclusion drawn (4.6).

4.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents findings from the two-stage in-depth interviews (11 interviews) and discusses the findings to create theory and meaning. Marketing experts' perspectives and reflections are used to expose critical themes linked to luxury brand-related activities on the social media platform Instagram.

This chapter focuses on the critical characterisations of luxury brands on Instagram, considering the somewhat paradoxical exclusivity of these products on a mass media platform. Moreover, it evolves and examines the success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry.

To keep the anonymity of the participants, all identifying characteristics are removed, and the participants are assigned numbers from one to five. While being analytically challenging, this data set provides a rich source for an in-depth investigation into key success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry. The data gathered in this study documents some previously unexamined influencing factors and, as such, provides a significant contribution to the current research debate.

Besides the findings, this chapter aims to critically evaluate the research findings, consider what is presented in the literature review, and assess what is newly learned. This chapter critically evaluates the research findings concerning key characterisations of luxury brands on Instagram, considering the somewhat paradoxical exclusivity of these products on a mass media platform. Moreover, it discusses how luxury brands influence consumers on this platform and the process involved in a successful online campaign in the luxury industry. As this research is guided by an interpretivist paradigm, the findings and frameworks guide the study to contribute to knowledge and practice in the form of an Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC) framework.

In the following part of the thesis, the researcher presents the study's results obtained from the material from the interviews. The outcomes are presented following the research questions and in line with the themes addressed in the interview(s). As such, the results are argued from the point of view of all three research questions (RQ's):

RQ1: What characterises the marketing of luxury brands online?

RQ2: What are the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram?

RQ3: What steps involve a successful process of creating an influencer marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram?

Quotations are used for the interviewee's statements. The analysis includes eleven interviews (P1-P5) conducted with respondents with the job role as Social Marketing

Managers or alike. Interviews are based on the research guide previously described in the Methodology section (Chapter 3) and are conducted as in-depth interviews to explore the different areas of the research guide. Every interviewee has Marketing knowledge or experience.

The data defines the axial codes and selective themes (Saldana, 2012) to which the respondents replied. An overview of the research question, the respective literature, and the coding process outcome (categories) and the construction of meanings (themes) can be seen in the following Table 8.

Research Question	Axial Codes: Categories	Selective: Themes
RQ1: What characterises the marketing of luxury brands online?	Non-democratic Subjective Rare Expensive	Luxury Social Paradox
RQ2: What are the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram?	Trustworthy Authentic Credible	Reliable
	Adjustable Entertaining Exclusive	Individual
	Measurable Professional Advanced	Assessable
RQ3: What steps involve a successful	Objective Target Audience	Analyse and Plan

process of creating an influencer marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram?	Role	
	Credible Attractive Trustworthy Expert Professional Stylish	Define and Select
	Contact Align Content Contract	Create and Align
	Communicate Motivation Support Pay	Motivate and Incentivise
	Report KPIs Evaluation Retention	Coordinate and Measure

Table 8: Creation of Theory and Meaning

Source: Developed by the present author.

4.2 Luxury Social Paradox

RQ1: What characterises the Marketing of luxury brands online?

In the next part, the luxury social paradox of marketing luxury brands, outlined in Table 8 as the first selective theme, is further evaluated since the characterization of luxury brands marketing online has been restricted to a narrow aspect of the whole spectrum (Okonkwo, 2009).

According to P1 and P4, especially subjectivity is the main characteristic of luxury brands online. According to these respondents, aesthetics, quality, uniqueness, sensuality are vital attributes that need to be combined with exclusivity, also online.

As described by P1:

“The perception of what is or is not a luxury brand is context-driven and people dependent”.

Other academic scholars support this, who note that luxury is subject to the ordinary (Phau & Prendergast, 2000). Another participant (P5) discusses:

“It may be hard to categorise products or brands as luxury or non-luxury and use Marketing tools accordingly”. Yet, “once such a decision is made, then specific actions are required to create and maintain this position.”

According to Keller (2009), a luxury position requires actions that will result in a premium image. In addition, P1 states:

“Central to the luxury brand position is a strong brand identity that must be marketed online.”

A central characteristic of exclusive brand Marketing according to P2:

“The whole package, starting from logos, symbols, packaging and consistent linking to prestigious communication mediums. (...) I think this is especially important in the luxury field. My brand needs to convey a message.”

This is emphasised by P1, who states:

“Especially the subjective higher quality or, let’s say, craftsmanship must be centred in our Marketing strategy. Thus, we have few discounts and markdowns compared to, let’s say, normal brands. And this is also true when it comes to digital sales channels, which we have expanded increasingly in the past years.”

It supports current scholars stating that luxury brands have shown a willingness to invest in Internet-based technologies and participate in online sales (Mosca, 2016). These companies have recognised the potential for increased (rather than decreased) online sales (Geerts, 2013) and have responded to consumers’ desire for convenient interaction at every stage of their decision-making process (Hughes & Barnes-Holmes, 2013).

Another participant (P1) remarks:

“It is this personal definition of luxury that makes Marketing luxury products and services so problematic. If we cannot agree on what is luxury, how do we know whom to we should market this to? How can we best portray luxury in our communications? Do you know what I mean? (laughs) This is the stuff me and my team think about every day.”

P5 deliberates:

“(...) to successfully market a luxury product, you have first to know whether your product actually is a luxury product. Because if you think your product is a luxury but your target does not agree, you have a problem of missed expectations.”

Other academic scholars have already examined this paradox between luxury inaccessibility and social media tools (Hamzaoui et al., 2019). Through such means, luxury is no longer restricted to the wealthy (Roper et al., 2013). The participants (P5) elaborate:

“I think luxury is not independent. It is rare, exclusive and maybe even limited, or it becomes a mass product. Luxury products aggressively restrict when, where and how they are made, sold and to whom. (...) This is a big challenge when it comes to online platforms since the internet is not limited to a specific group. Yet, the limited availability of our products adds to its desirability. In Marketing, it is especially crucial to transport this desirability to our customers. The same goes with quality, actually.”

As the group of luxury customers is expanding, luxury brands must adapt to new marketing strategies to satisfy the needs of this new target audience. This is where SMI marketing comes into place. This relatively new marketing discipline promotes products or brand awareness through social media users considered influential by spreading content online (Carter, 2016). This new marketing channel is regarded as a reaction to consumers' lack of interest in traditional advertising (Carter, 2016).

While online marketing has become distinctly conventional, luxury companies have been slower than many non-luxury companies to embrace the potential of the Internet. One reason for this reluctance is what some have called the “Internet dilemma” (Haslam et al., 2017). The Internet dilemma is a term created to pronounce the challenge luxury companies face in maintaining their brand's image, maintaining a personal relationship with their customers, and preserving an aura of exclusivity – while simultaneously offering their products and services to an increasingly technologically savvy customer (Haslam et al., 2017; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

P4 supports this by saying:

“It is the special story or even miracle we tell in Marketing. E-WOM helps us to know what our customers often want before they do it instinctively. We want everything to feel specifically designed and ultimately unique for each of our customers. It cannot be duplicated. It is simple. It does not try too hard. It attracts rather than shouts.”

Another participant (P3) remarks:

“We need to transfer experiences and not just objects. Technology helps us to do so; it is about the little things that leave a great impression. Do you know our flagship store in Paris, which uses RFID technology embedded in clothes? (...) I think it is important to transport such an experience, making our products pleasurable; you know whether rational or emotional. Technology in combination with e-WOM helps us to do so because people tell their relatives or so about the experience they have had with our brand.”

This is supported by several authors (Bronner & Hoog, 2010) by stating that consumers rely upon e-WOM to reduce avowed risk. A report conducted by Nielsen (2015) says that buyers significantly depend on the consumer views online before buying.

P2 adds: *“I think symbolism is key to defend luxury”*.

The participant (P2) goes on that a premium price is the essence of luxury for some customers and that the challenge is to convey this message also online:

“(...) Sort of defend those prices or, let's say, make them acceptable and understandable. (...) Just because a product is expensive does not mean it is a luxury product. But generally, all luxury products are expensive to show some sort of rarity or exclusiveness. For example, my company raises prices every year to stay some sort of luxury in the mind of our customers. E-WOM has made things like this more complicated since prices are more transparent online which can be communicated to others within seconds.”

MajlesiRad & Shoushtari (2020) support this by stating that electronic communication has enabled an immediate information flow to a much wider audience as a single message can affect all site visitors.

Thus, to better discuss the first research question and what characterises the marketing of luxury brands online, the division into the four identified axial code

categories leading up to the selective theme luxury social paradox seem to be helpful: non-democracy, subjective, rare and rare expensive (see Figure 16).

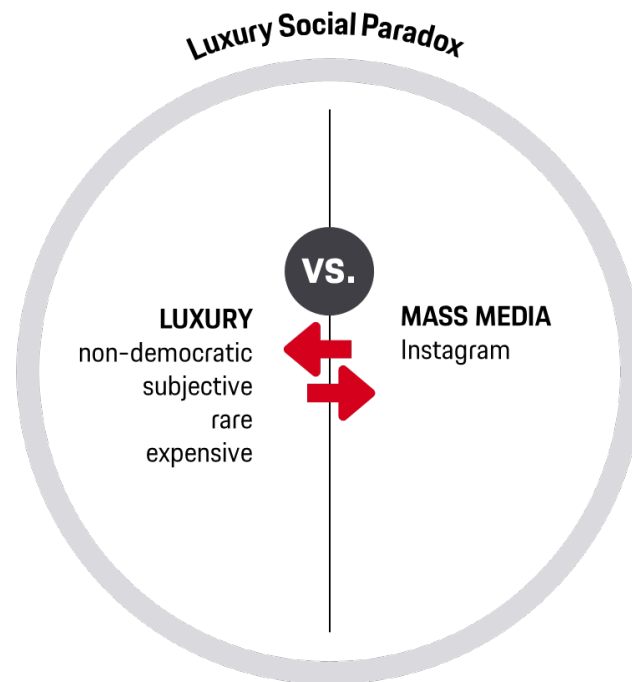


Figure 16: The Luxury Social Paradox

Source: Developed by the present author.

4.2.1 Non-democratic

The first axial code category leading to the *luxury social paradox* is non-democratic.

The concept of luxury has transformed dramatically over time (Lee et al., 2018; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Yeoman, 2010). In former years, luxury products were consumed only by the privileged to flaunt their superiority over ordinary citizens and maintain their distance (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). As elaborated in the previous chapters, consumers have become more mobile, and the middle classes' purchasing power has increased; luxury goods are no longer consumed only by the privileged (Lee et al., 2018).

After a slow start, luxury has earned its place in the digital universe. As Kluge & Fassnacht (2015) state, luxury goods manufacturers have long been hesitant to adopt the internet as a channel of distribution. A luxury brand's concept of exclusiveness is

seemingly incompatible with the global accessibility provided by the mass medium internet. However, according to study participants (P2, P3, P5), many luxury brands have overcome some of their initial reservations and concerns about exclusivity and control. They are now more comfortable selling and marketing online. Now that mainstream brands are also offering experience, luxury brands must elevate their digital experience that suits and conveys their exclusive allure.

Overcoming this non-democracy on mass media is the initial characterization of marketing luxury brands online.

4.2.2 Subjective

Another aspect discussed by participants is subjectivism.

Therefore, luxury brands must accomplish two incompatible goals: targeting mass consumers to expand their market share while not weakening the luxury, often subjective, values of exclusivity and rarity (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014; Lee et al., 2018).

This subjectivity is a constantly evolving and very individual concept (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Also, the subjective status of luxury brands gives the impression that not all consumers ascribe the same characteristics to luxuries (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Luxury consumers want and demand more. Thus, this study provides additional insights that providing outstanding in-store service is no longer enough for luxury brands to secure customers' loyalty.

To make this subjectivity of luxury brands visible to the consumer is another characterization of marketing their products or services online.

4.2.3 Rare

In addition, luxury must also be somewhat rare (Mortelmans, 2005), which has been discussed by participants of this study. A consumer of luxury brands must believe that these brands are exclusive, which others cannot afford (Hudders et al., 2013).

However, it is not apparent to maintain this narrow reference to rarity because luxury brands are now within reach of more and more individuals, and more and more products are categorised as luxury brands. Therefore, marketers must give consumers the impression of scarcity because luxury brands that are widely owned lose their luxury character (Dubois & Paternault, 1995; Hudders et al., 2013). Participants of this research (P5) point out that the limited availability of luxury products or services adds to its desirability. It is especially crucial to transport this desirability to customers in marketing, which is the same for quality.

As such, rarity is another characterization of marketing luxury brands online.

4.2.4 Expensive

The fourth axial code category is expensiveness. Participants of this study mention that a premium price is the essence of luxury for some customers and that the challenge is to convey this exclusiveness also online.

To remain expensive and exclusive, one participant (P4) mentions that luxury brands are raising prices each year to convey some sort of luxury in the mind of our customers. One challenge is that prices are more transparent online, communicating to others within seconds (P4). Another scholar also describes this challenge as the real threat, what economists call cost transparency, a condition made possible by the lack of accessible, easily obtained information on the Internet (Sinha, 2000).

Expensiveness is another characterization that needs to be of particular focus when marketing luxury brands online.

In conclusion, the findings of this study show that luxury brands now accept e-channels as mutually exclusive to their traditional channels as they address different shopping occasions and different consumer groups. The marketing of luxury brands online is characterised by non-democracy, subjectivity, rarity, and expensiveness. To answer the second research question (RQ2), this study claims that social media posts on Instagram can improve such marketing efforts of luxury brands online which are discussed in the next section.

To conclude, the following insight one relevant for further discussion can be derived.

Insight one: The online marketing of luxury brands is characterised by the luxury social paradox to include non-democratic, subjectivity, rarity, and expensiveness.

4.3 Success Characteristics of SMI Campaigns

RQ2: What are the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram?

The influence on the social media platform Instagram is an underrepresented topic for research focused on the luxury industry (Lee & Watkins, 2016). During the analysis and to better answer the actual influence on consumers through Instagram, the division into the selective themes seems beneficial for a better understanding.

Many scholars chose Instagram as the preferred social site to implement SMI Marketing campaigns (Geyser, 2021). According to this study, the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram include three main attributes for luxury brands: reliable, individual, and assessable, outlined in Table 8. Thus, this sub-chapter is divided into these three identified selective themes (see Figure 17).

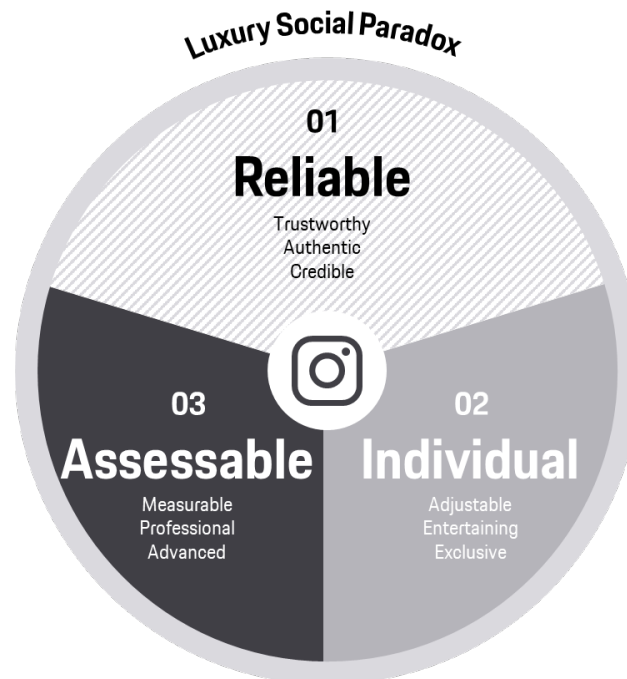


Figure 17: Selective Themes within the Luxury Social Paradox on Instagram

Source: Developed by the present author.

4.3.1 Reliable

The first selective sub-theme reliable, where the axial code categories are trustworthy, authentic, and credible, helps to answer what the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram are.

In responding to why and how luxury brands use SMI marketing on Instagram as a Marketing tool, P2 states:

“Buying online makes products accessible to a wide range of people, and I think on platforms such as Instagram, choices can be made properly before the actual purchase.”

P1 adds:

“Through online mediums, we can attract people who would not actually buy our products. I think many people have (...) some sort of (...) hem threshold to come in one of our stores because it is fancy and luxurious. I could imagine that

some of our clients feel intimidated by this. Thus, through online we can also make these customers happy and confident.”

Participants mention that traditional marketing methods (e.g., print or TV) do not work as well as in the past: *“because people do not spend as much time on these media as before”* (P1).

Indeed, digital media consumption is growing, and everything else is shrinking (Hoff, 2018; oasdom.com, 2020). Print media is no longer assumed as a media of the future. In this regard, people seem to have a more positive attitude towards the electronic media established (Hoff, 2018; oasdom.com, 2020). In addition, P2 supports this identified shift from offline to online mediums:

“People spend a lot of time on social media, and influencer Marketing sometimes seems like the most trustworthy marketing method.”

Trustworthiness can also be clustered in the selective sub-theme *reliable*, which is declared as an attribute of e-WOM, which can influence consumers' attitudes towards products or services (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Almost all participants mentioned that social media had become a trustworthy source for luxury brand-related products or services. This aligns with other researchers' opinions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Weber & Volz, 2011), while further research contradicts this opinion. A new report conducted by Pew Research Centre shows universal distrust in social media. This aspect is essential considering the challenges posed by online misinformation and fake news (Lazer et al., 2018). A basic idea of social media marketing is to build trust with consumers. This is achieved through personal interaction (Weber & Volz, 2011). Social media marketing requires that communication be always honest, open and transparent because the target of Social Media Marketing is mainly long-term and can be seen as a form of public relations (Weinberg & Pahrman, 2011).

P5 goes on:

“Influencer marketing has changed the way we look at promotional content. It has altered the way we look at our audiences. Likewise, even audiences now

have a drastically different approach to branded content. I think they no longer believe us easily. This also affects our Influencer Marketing approach, but I assume we will talk about that later. (...) This transformation in content consumption has also affected how influencer marketing is carried out by us as professionals. What is important here is that it is more than just unboxing the product and talking about it. But once figured out it offers nearly unlimited possibilities”.

P1 adds:

“Our customers get influenced to buy online when people in their circles endorse such a product. That is why we even use Influencers not just on the platform Instagram; we also do special campaigns with them for offline purposes such as advertisement in magazines. They are in some way our new models.”

In addition, as P1 indicates it, opinion leaders and referrals tend to impact consumers purchase intention (Chau & Xu, 2012). This is reflected in some studies previously conducted by other scholars, for instance, (Pemberton, 2016), who states that over 70 per cent of consumers make purchases through suggestions by others. According to the researcher, SMI's in niches such as significantly influence consumers who support those products. In effect, their recommendations and referrals will be wholly accepted, making the content *reliable*, contributing to consumers' purchase intent.

P1 references:

“I do believe that consumers get sometimes influenced if they notice the product they would like to have has been used by someone important. And important nowadays are not just classic celebrities but also normal people, people from next door, like influencers.”

Participants even support this by sharing their personal experience: *“Often, if I personally do not have experience with a product or somebody, I trust then I am more reluctant to buy the product you know.”* (P1)

P4 adds:

“Instagram is the new homepage to target our luxury shoppers. (...) In fact, we have done some analysis and found that more than 60 per cent of our customers use Instagram to stay up to date with our latest trends and styles.”

This goes in line with current research of other academic scholars: With 74 per cent, Instagram is the social media platform with the highest exposure in terms of influence (Gilliland, 2016). Participants of this study agree that Instagram plays a growing role, which other researchers already acknowledged (Deges, 2018).

P5 even states:

“Instagram is the new window shopping and a hub for inspiration when our customers are not sure yet whether to buy or not”.

The visual nature of Instagram makes it a place where branded content feels less intrusive, making it more *reliable*, and opportunities for exposure are virtually limitless (Sprung, 2013).

“Many of our customers want to get inspired by the latest trends. Our luxury house sets the trends, and thus it is a great way to convey these trends and messages to our customers to draw attention if you know what I mean”. The participant goes on: *“We use Instagram TV, for example, to showcase backstage access of the preparations for the newly launched collections. With new formats like this, we as a brand can much better connect and build a sustainable relationship with our customer base; before, during or after purchase.”* (P5).

The immediacy of the content is one of the reasons for the popularity of Instagram in the implementation of SMI marketing campaigns. The ability to share audio-visual content is highlighted by interviewees, confirming (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017) that image is vital, which justifies Instagram's popularity:

“(..) To me, Instagram is a great source of information for our brand lovers. We can tell stories easy and visual without clicking through complex websites. I even think, more and more, consumers use influencers to inspire their luxury choices.” (P2)

Regarding the question, why their brand is working with SMI's, P5 mentions:

“We noticed Influencer Marketing on Instagram is something that is booming, and actually working”.

Another attribute relevant for the selective sub-theme *reliable* is credibility. This is also supported by Pöyry et al. (2019) who states that SMI's have many credibilities because they are an expert in, for example, fashion. This is especially true for the younger audience. SMI Marketing on Instagram is a social media channel where especially young people like to spend their time (Trifiro & Gerson, 2019). Statista (2021b) states that Instagram has more than one billion monthly active users, with 72 per cent of teenagers using the platform every day, 59 per cent of those under 30, 39 per cent of women. To reach this target group, content on social media has proven more popular and influential than professional advertising (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019).

P4 has tried different kinds of marketing and observed that SMI Marketing on the platform Instagram works best; Instagram seems to be the most cost-effective way of marketing that supports the most positive reactions: *“People do nowadays rather follow influencers on Instagram than read blogs.”*

This is further enforced by P2, who adds:

“People are hectic and want a lot of information quickly, and Instagram is a great platform for that”.

The participant goes on to state that:

“People who began with blogs now have Instagram accounts that have a larger following than the blog has, for example, Ciara Ferragni who started with the

blonde salad blog, maybe you know her; thus, this is of course also important to us (laughs).” (P2)

Nearly all participants declare that Instagram has proven effective in building relationships and engaging with luxury consumers:

“That is also why we focus on social media influencers to become at the centre of our Marketing strategy. I have been working for (...) 7 years now; when I started working there, I think this focus would have been unimaginable. Our budget was so limited, and my position was not really valued within the Marketing department. Well, this changed a lot (laugh)” (P5).

This statement goes in line with (Tomoson.com, 2019), which predicts that 59 per cent of marketing experts plan to improve their influencers’ marketing budgets year after year.

“Statistics also show that engagement on Instagram is 20-25 per cent more in comparison to Facebook or any other social media platform. (...) as consumers become increasingly digital-savvy and social media-driven, Instagram is not just more important but crucial to our brand.” (P2)

Instagram offers a great way to make proper decisions before the actual purchase or even before consumers visit one of their brick-and-mortar stores. This shift from offline to online mediums is essential for luxury brands is supported by the experts of this study (P1, P2) and somehow supported by other researchers: Online channels are seen as trustworthy, which is declared as an attribute of e-WOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Hussain et al., 2017; Veasna et al., 2013). As already stated in the previous chapter, almost all participants see trustworthiness as an attribute of Instagram for luxury brands. Other researchers have also noted this (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Weber & Volz, 2011). This study also supports the basic idea of social media marketing to build trust with consumers, which is achieved through personal interaction (Weber & Volz, 2011) and is also genuine for luxury brands. The experts of this study claim that SMI Marketing has altered the way luxury

brands look at their audience, yet once figured out, Instagram offers nearly unlimited possibilities.

According to this study, Instagram is also an excellent way for their customers to inform themselves about the latest trends and trust luxury brands. One participant even states that more than 60 per cent of their customers use Instagram to stay up to date with the brands newest styles and trends (P4). According to the experts of this study, Instagram serves as the new window shopping and destination for inspiration (P5).

This study also declares that Instagram advertising can be seen as a relatively new but effective medium than traditional marketing methods (e.g., TV or print). This is caused by the fact that people spend less time on such media as before. In observing these tendencies, some advertising specialists working within the luxury industry cautiously started to somewhat reject traditional media, such as print (P1, P2), to prefer online (and especially mobile) social media as advertising vehicles (Magrath & McCormick, 2013).

Instagram is stated to be a great way to connect with the audience better. With this, a sustainable relationship with the customer base of luxury brands can be built. This view is also supported by other studies, where researchers show that consumers tend to buy more often on Instagram when interacting with a brands' posts, and their level of engagement is far greater on this platform compared to others, like Twitter or Facebook (Ahmed, 2017; Casaló et al., 2020).

As an expert of this study, Instagram is booming, trending and working (P5), especially SMI Marketing have much credibility due to their expert status (Pöyry et al., 2019). This study claims that SMI Marketing for luxury brands works best on Instagram (P4) than other social media platforms. That is why this study argues that Instagram is not just important for luxury brands but crucial. In previous times, blogs were a source for SMI credibility, where it is now Instagram accounts. That is also why luxury firms nowadays focus on SMI's to centre their marketing strategies.

This study shows that the Marketing budget for SMI Marketing is rising (P2, P5). This statement goes in line with the previously mentioned statement of Tomoson.com

(2019) who predicts that marketers plan to further increase their influencers' marketing budgets in the upcoming years. This rise in funding for SMI Marketing supports the argument of this study that Instagram has high credibility for luxury brands.

The second selective sub-theme is *individual*, which will be further analysed in the following chapter.

4.3.2 Individual

The second identified selective theme is *individual*, where the axial code categories are adjustable, entertaining, and exclusive, helps to answer what the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram are.

Under the sub-theme of individual, Instagram provides a channel to show the characteristics of customers on its platform and participate in it, which in turn improves this individual connection, making it closer, meaningful and authentic (Sprung, 2013).

Instagram is stated explicitly as having:

"(...) a higher appeal among consumers because it offers them the possibility to take more activities, you know like follow brands or influencers or friends or also just visit the website when they see a brand, they like so basically adjust everything they want or not want" (P5)

P5 supports:

"Users are given visual, entertaining insight to the lifestyles of celebrities of internet personalities. Luxury is so subjective to the individual. Since Instagram is so individually adjustable to personal needs, it's a perfect medium within the luxury context, I think."

Existing studies show that if the advertisement can be some-what personal, it will target customers individually and improve the relationship with them (Saadeghvaziri & Khodadad Hosseini, 2011). But not only is the possibility for *individual* adjustments necessary but also is advertising the most effective when individuals give them more

attention, make more cognitive attempts to understand the advertising and focus on product-related learnings and information (Gordon et al., 1998).

According to a report on social media, SMI marketing campaigns have been found adequate by 94 per cent of marketers (Lou & Yuan, 2018):

“Influencer is a pro-consumer who transfer our brand's message to his or her very individual followers in his or her own way. This is especially important to us. (...) In comparison with traditional Marketing methods, Influencer Marketing is a marketing method that gives the customers the opportunity to respond to the message and ask questions, while there is not the same space for communication in traditional Marketing methods.” (P1)

In line with this, all participants agree that social media is the most critical advertisement channel to support the selective sub-theme individual:

“By having a prominent individual with millions of Instagram followers post a photo with our latest product, sales and engagement have proven to increase significantly.” (P2)

“Besides my professional work, I personally think it is a good practice having Marketing influencers advertise online because it allows our customers to know beforehand what is a trend, especially when they trust the influencer. This gives this tool the possibility for real exclusiveness.” (P3)

Regarding the question of why the interviewees companies choose to work with SMI marketing on Instagram, P5 replies:

“Instagram offers more and more great ways for us to sell, for example, the feature including in-app shopping if you are familiar with that. We or our hired influencers can now tag products in our or their posts with a direct link to shop. (...) In just a few easy taps, our customers can access pricing and product details and make a purchase. That is awesome and responds to the individual, I think.”

P3 mentions that:

“Overall, Instagram is beginning to show its impact as a serious sales channel to us. (...). It has a visual component that connects perfectly with luxury brands, I think. It has a lot of visual formats, including images, videos, and (...) live. All very entertaining to the individual.”

All the participants mention that Instagram is an essential platform for their brand:

“Instagram is a place for those who appreciate the finer things in life for every individual. I think its emphasis on visual storytelling has made it the perfect medium to share the world’s most privileged products – like the one of our brand (laughs).” (P2)

P4 explains that:

“Instagram is a platform with that we can communicate to our audience exclusively; we can tell them who we are, what we are about, our lifestyle and products or services. I think through that we increase engagement and increase sales.”

P1 remarks:

“At the end of the day, our brand lovers are visiting our Instagram page, engaging with our content, starting a conversation with us because we are entertaining them; we or well-hired influencers are telling them our story. I think we could not provide this kind of luxury entertainment on any other channel. So yes, Instagram is for the mass but still, in my view, for each and every individual.”

P2’s employer uses:

“Instagram (because it) suits our overall brand philosophy. Through the consistent presentation of rows in three, we can structure posts, keep them clean. We can have a consistency in our overall profile look, which we also want to demonstrate through our heritage.”

Interesting, P4 also talks about the importance of a minimal and specific look which can be instead clustered in the sub-theme *individual*:

“We focus on minimal looks for our Instagram posts; our product must be the focus of the post. Our customers understand the kind of content we want to convey. So, it is another great sales channel nowadays.” (P4)

There are few who better understand the appeal of images better than luxury brands. According to Hutton (1997), strong brands provide meaning and value for consumers. These are essential considerations for luxury brands as they depend on consumers who assign a high value to their products and are willing to pay high prices (Lee and Hur, 2018). It is hardly surprising that they are among those who use Instagram with the greatest enthusiasm and set visual standards for others to follow.

Instagram provides a channel for luxury brands to show the characteristics of customers on its platform, participate and adjust accordingly, which in turn improves this individual connection, making it closer, meaningful and authentic (Sprung, 2013). This existing literature is supported by this study, where Instagram is stated explicitly as having: *“(...) a higher interest among consumers because it offers them the opportunity to take more actions” (P5)*. This is especially important for luxury brands, as P5 claims: *“Luxury is so subjective to the individual.”* Existing research claims this particular importance of individuality in advertising since it is personal and improves the relationship with the target consumer (Saadeghvaziri & Khodadad Hosseini, 2011). Experts of this study even have proof that SMI Marketing on Instagram is a specifically good tool for luxury brands: *“By having a prominent individual (...) sales and engagement have proven to increase significantly” (P2)*.

Furthermore, Instagram is seen as exclusive for luxury brands, where one expert (P3) states that this gives this tool the possibility for absolute exclusiveness. The quixotic challenge of this luxury social paradox has been described in the previous chapter and examined by other academic scholars (Hamzaoui et al., 2019). According to one participant (P1), *“(…), Instagram is for the mass but still [...] for each and every individual.”*

As this study indicates, luxury brands are more and more getting access to the Instagram shopping feature and are currently using it already: *“In just a few easy taps, our customers can access pricing and product details and make a purchase. That is awesome and responds to the individual”* (P5). The Instagram community in Europe today is now able to buy products and experiences without leaving the platform. The feature was introduced in 2016 in the USA (Dougherty, 2015). Companies can use it in their photos to mark up to six products available for purchase. Nevertheless, this study claims that the feature is not used as frequently as it could due to the relatively new part of the platform since one expert only mentions it. To date, and according to this study, selling on Instagram is relatively unused; drawing attention to the product or service is at the centre of Marketing strategies of luxury brands. However, since the in-sale button of Instagram is relatively new in Europe, this might change in the years to come.

Also, Instagram seems to be seen as: *“(...) entertaining to the individual”* (P3). The experts go on: *“It has several visual formats, including images, videos, boomerangs, layout or stories.”* (P3). Another participant mentions that: *“At the end of the day, our brand lovers are visiting our Instagram page, engaging with our content, starting a conversation with us because we are entertaining them”* (P1). This is in line with other scholars who have found that visual content is a critical feature of SMI marketing and brand management (Magrath & McCormick, 2013) for luxury brands (Lee et al., 2018).

In this sense of individuality and entertainment, luxury brands frequently use the term “storytelling” (P1, P2). Instagram is individual in that the luxury brands combine the art of storytelling with factual scientific data that can precisely target their customers and create accurate results for them (Lee et al., 2018). Other scholars have considered this storytelling as crucial since visual sites, such as Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat, are among the fastest-growing social media sites (McNely, 2012)

As mentioned before, luxury brands must establish a brand identity (Lee et al., 2018). That is why they should provide consumers messages through advertising that communicate the brand’s individuality and uniqueness (Hussain & Ferdous, 2014; Nandan, 2005). In terms of exclusivity, this study shows that Instagram offers luxury

brands the possibility to: “(...) *communicate to [their] audience exclusively; [they] can tell them who [they] are, what [they] are about, [their] lifestyle and products or services.*” (P4).

But not only reliability and individuality are essential when discussing the success characteristics of SMI campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry, but also the final selective theme – assessability. This third selective theme is further explained in the following section.

4.3.3 Assessable

The third selective sub-theme assessable, where the axial code categories are measurable, professional, and advanced, helps to answer what the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram are.

One participant declares that there might be significant advantages of Social Media Marketing for professionals (P4), by saying:

“Social Media Marketing helps us to measure some important KPIs (key performance indicators). For example, the metrics on Instagram help us understand whether our Marketing strategy is doing any good for our brand. When I started within the Marketing field, we could only publish ads, for example, in magazines such as Vogue. It was hard to measure the true success of such campaigns.”

As explained in the previous chapter, other academic scholars have already examined this paradox between luxury inaccessibility and social media tools (Hamzaoui et al., 2019).

Each company can identify the KPIs that it judges are most relevant to its business. In many cases, this may be a process of trial and error (Geyser, 2021).

“Apart from telling us where we go right, social media marketing helps us to identify gaps in your overall strategy. With metrics on engagement and

interactions, we identify what is and what is not working in our favour. Then my team and I have a chance to react”, mentioned P2.

The consensus in the literature is that to be helpful, KPIs must have the following success characteristics: They must be measurable, achievable and available for a long time (Chaffey & Patron, 2012).

Another interesting fact, why luxury brands should use Social Media Marketing, according to this study, is mentioned by P1:

“What is great is that we can keep track of our competition. We see our competitors’ performance on social media or how consumers react to our competitors’ content compared to ours. This is the transparency we did not have before. So that is great, in my opinion.”

Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are examples of social media platforms with millions of daily users (Statista, 2021b). Social trends and technological growth have smoothed the permanent use of social media, with further growth predicted. Social media usage is increasing steadily in terms of the numbers of users and overall time spent on social media (Breves et al., 2019).

Participants of this study state that online channels offer great chances for luxury brands (P1, P2). Their products or services can be provided to a larger audience; even consumers who would feel intimidated to go personally in one of their brick-and-mortar stores can develop trust and access their products now through digital channels.

Instagram is seen as a visual storytelling medium with exclusive communication opportunities with the target audience. It helps brands in the luxury industry to understand whether a Marketing strategy and SMI campaign is a success or failure (P2, P4).

The success of a campaign may be reliant on how the influencers’ followers interact and engage with the sponsored content by commenting, sharing, or liking it. This will help gauge the follower’s interest in the luxury brand and its products and services. It will also suggest whether the influencers’ sponsored content echoes with their

audience and is tracked with metrics such as engagement or interactions (P2). This supports the study of Linqia (2021) who defines successful SMI Marketing measures as attributes such as conversions, traffic, engagement or reach, among others.

The study also shows that luxury brands on Instagram use technical tools to monitor and regularly record the actions of SMI's (P1, P2, P4). If the process does not take the desired course, it is a function of the monitor to intervene in a controlling manner. Monitoring, in this case, is to be understood as a particular form of categorization (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

This can be seen as a contribution to Dorfman (2015), who states that a company that does not measure the success of its own SMI Marketing practices will not be able to improve it. Therefore, it is essential to measure and demonstrate the results of practices that enable strategies to be optimised to reach the next stage. If companies invest more in SMI Marketing, there is also a growing need to measure success (Dorfman, 2015).

Success measurements are taken both after and during campaigns to counteract harmful incidents at an early stage by constantly checking key figures and controlling or influencing the company's success (P4), which supports the existing literature of Brown & Fiorella (2013).

As SMI marketing continues to grow, measuring the impact of an SMI campaign is critical for luxury brands. By setting a clear goal for SMI campaigns, the right campaign metrics can be identified. Results are used to evaluate the campaign's effectiveness and ultimately determine the return on investment (P1, P2).

This study supports existing scholars who claim that social media posts have the potential to improve marketing efforts for luxury brands (Hussain & Ferdous, 2014; Lee et al., 2018; Magrath & McCormick, 2013; McNely, 2012; Nandan, 2005) and makes it true for also brands within the luxury industry. Yet, there is a shortage of research on the Marketing campaign process on the social media platform Instagram for luxury brands, further discussed in the next section.

To conclude, the following insight two relevant for further discussion can be derived.

Insight 2: The success characteristics of a social media campaign for luxury brands on Instagram include individual, reliable, and assessable.

4.4 Successful Influencer Marketing Campaign Process Steps

RQ3: What steps involve a successful process of creating an influencer marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram?

Backaler & Shankman (2018) claim that SMI's are the future of marketing, and brands need them to stay in business. Yet, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is to date no defined marketing campaign process on the social media platform Instagram, which sets the pillars for successfully market luxury brands online.⁹

This becomes an issue which previous scholars have recognised. Wilson et al. (2013) observes a trend where social media practices have become an experimental free-for-all that very often do not result in the anticipated outcome.

Thus, understanding SMI's is critical for brand managers who want to achieve marketing campaign targets on Instagram. As such, an understanding may help guide their decisions regarding their social media engagement strategies.

In this section, this thesis introduces an *Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC)* framework towards a successful SMI marketing campaign which results from the analysis of the data collected for this study. From the previous discussion, a particular focus is set on discussing success characteristics for SMI selection.

The literature lacks a successful process of creating an SMI Marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram to the best of the author's knowledge to date. Given that it is a recent practice, the knowledge about the planning process of an SMI marketing campaign is still limited (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017; Santiago & Castelo, 2020). However, many things to consider when creating an SMI marketing campaign for luxury brands (Biaudet, 2017; Brown & Fiorella, 2013). The process of finding the most appropriate SMI's for the company, gaining a clear understanding of what things should be considered in the collaborations, finding a suitable influencer, knowing what needs to be communicated to the SMI and how this should be shared, coordinated and measured (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

Based on the information from the industry experts and thematic analysis of the results, the data reveals the first stage in the SMI campaign process is to analyse and plan, the next is to define and select, create and align, followed by motivating and incentivise and concluded by coordinate and measure. These stages are explained in more detail in the following.

4.4.1 Analyse and Plan

The first step in an SMI marketing campaign should serve to define the objectives of the campaign and target audience that must be consistent with the company's brand strategy (Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

Towards the question, how the luxury brand initially selects SMI's, P3 mentions:

“Well for marketing people kind of unsexy topics such as timetable, budget and metrics which are specific and measurable is the first thing we define”.

Booth & Matic (2011) and Lin et al. (2018) also define resources available as a starting point. Lin et al. (2018) state that this first step will serve as a strategic basis for the following decisions concerning selecting SMI's and the nature and duration of the relationship.

According to other academic scholars, the most common target of SMI campaigns is to create or increase awareness, drive sales, and create user-generated content (Geyser, 2021; Lin et al., 2018). New product launches are also a recurring scenario in which marketers use SMI Marketing campaigns (Launchmetrics.com, 2018).

“Before you start any new marketing campaign, it is important to set objectives, so you know how to measure your campaign's success. I mean, what are you hoping to get out of your influencer marketing campaign? I think especially important for us in the luxury industry here is brand reputation and build loyal customers.” (P4)

P5 agrees by stating:

“Well, if we start really with the first step, I would say it is planning the campaign. (...) We actually initially separate between different strategies, for example, if we want to raise the perception of our brand, so kind of awareness or simply just increase sales. Or if we want to increase engagement, leads, customer interactions, so increase conversion such as website clicks. This does not mean each goal is viewed separately or that they cannot be mixed and combined, you know. But the important thing I think is that we newly define this for each social media campaign.”

(Brown & Hayes, 2008) underpin the importance of initially knowing and understanding exactly what the community of a particular brand is looking for.

This is supported by P2, who states:

“When creating an influencer marketing campaign, we initially define the brand attributes of the campaign as well as the audience we want to reach. For instance, the age, gender, location of our target audience or also their top interests. (...) Once you have a strong understanding of your listeners, how they discover, evaluate, decide and buy, you can easily discover the top people they follow and trust. This keeps us focused when it comes to influencer selection.” (P2)

One participant (P1) did not say anything like the above and started directly with the potential SMI selection. The participant states:

“The first step of our campaigns would be choosing the right influencer, and actually, I think it is the most important one, I would say.”

According to most participants, the previous discussion highlights that SMI marketing starts by identifying a target customer for a specific campaign. Thus, this step can be identified as the first when creating an SMI marketing campaign (see Figure 18).

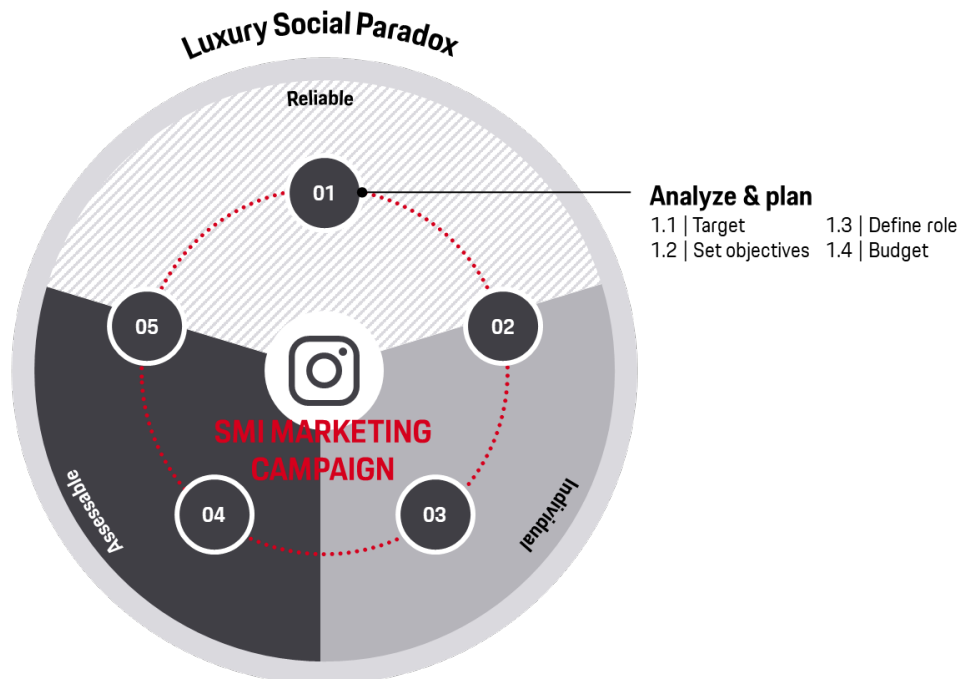


Figure 18: IIMC framework: Analyze & Plan

Source: Developed by the present author.

Analyse and plan consists of four areas – target, set objectives, define the role, and budget.

Understanding who affects such a target group discovers, evaluates, decides and buys needs to be made. It is essential to identify the basic demographics of the target audience, such as age, gender, location, or top interests (Patel, 2021). Defining the target audience is critical when the luxury brand starts recruiting SMI's and tailor the campaign messaging. According to this study, it is easier to discover the SMI they could follow and trust when the target audience is defined. Some other participants mention that setting the goals and objectives of the Marketing campaign is crucial initially. To build a solid SMI Marketing campaign, a luxury brand needs to define what they would like to achieve with their campaign. Clearly defined campaign goals will provide metrics that should be tracked to measure the success of a campaign (Santiago & Castello, 2020). According to the participants of this study, it is crucial to define how the success of the SMI campaign is measured and what the period for

measurement will be. In the analysis and planning stage, this study claims typical SMI marketing objectives to be:

- Raise brand awareness,
- increase engagement,
- generate more leads,
- drive more sales,
- brand reputation and loyal customers, or
- build backlinks to the brand's website.

According to existing literature, the most recurrent objectives associated with SMI marketing are creating or increasing awareness, increasing sales and creating UGC (Geyser, 2021; Lin et al., 2018; Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

As this study claims, it is difficult to measure the actual numbers to determine whether it is profitable for the company to use an SMI or not. While the objectives mentioned above are a good place to start, for a campaign of luxury brands to have real purpose and deliver tangible results, goals need to be “specific and measurable”, as one participant claims. According to other scholars, the defined metrics should be S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) (Bjerke & Renger, 2017).

The role of the SMI and resources available for the campaign should also be defined (Booth & Matic, 2011; Lin et al., 2018). These initial steps will serve as a strategic basis for the following decisions.

4.4.2 Define and Select

The second step is to identify brand-relevant SMI's and the match between the target audience of the defined campaign and the target audience of the SMI's (Lin et al., 2018). This turned out to be one of the most important part for the respondents and thus described in more detail. According to other researchers, the criteria for selecting SMI's include the brand-influencer fit, the tone of communication, the number of followers, the type of content produced, the credibility and popularity of the SMI and

the cost of collaboration (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Piskorski & Brooks, 2017; Santiago & Castelo, 2020; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

The axial themes to emerge under the selective theme of define and select include credibility, attractiveness, trustworthiness, expert-status, professional and stylish, and each is discussed in turn.

Regarding the “fit” between the brand and the SMI, P2 states:

“Well, then we would go and look for an influencer. We always seek influencers that are suitable for the collaboration.”

Also, the number of followers is recognised by P5 in the course of this study:

“When choosing the influencers, we start by deciding the amount of influencers that we want to involve, whether the influencers should have a smaller amount of followers, larger amount of followers or if we need a mix of both kinds.”

P3 adds:

“To achieve a win-win situation, the next step would be to select an influencer. We need to identify very early if an influencer would suit us; otherwise, potential costs would become too high.”

In contrast, according to De Veirman et al. (2017), the actual number of followers does not have to be an essential aspect, stating that the number of followers does not always indicate that the SMI will influence its followers. (Pöyry et al., 2019) note that if the cooperation is well done and the product and SMI are a good fit, the responses are positive.

This is endorsed by P1, who declares:

“We also had a bad experience with some influencers who were not a good match. So, this step is even more crucial to us, I guess, or even for all brands in my industry.”

As discussed in chapter 2.4.1, if the SMI advertises too many different brands, this can lead to conflicts of interest, and the SMI loses trust and authenticity within the community (Deges, 2018). Only a long-term authentic engagement leads to trust, online and offline. Therefore, authentic stories of SMI's are significant in SMI marketing (Pöyry et al., 2019).

Concerning the next question, what characteristics do the participants consider when choosing the right SMI's for their brand, a pattern of different attributes is identified.

The second step serves to identify SMI's relevance to the luxury brand and the match between the campaign's focus audience and the audience of the SMI (Lin et al., 2018).

Finding the right SMI for a luxury brand is the most crucial and time-consuming step of this proposed SMI Marketing framework. Thousands of different SMI's are available, offering different topical interests, numbers of followers or other characteristics (Swant, 2016). The difficult decision that brand managers must face is choosing the best-suited and most effective SMI (De Veirman et al., 2017). Regarding SMI selection, luxury brands need to consider their own SMI Marketing objectives and campaign goals (as defined in chapter 2.3).

According to Backaler & Shankman (2018), SMI's are the future of marketing due to their power over their followers. Several researchers consider the information provided by SMI's to be more credible, relatable, and authentic, compared with that offered by traditional celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), if the influencer is in line with the brand (Chahal, 2016) and the media user perceives the influencer as familiar (Breves et al., 2019; Gräve, 2017).

Yet, as stated in the previous section, it is difficult to measure the actual numbers to determine whether it is profitable for the company to use an SMI or not. On the other hand, the biggest challenge is finding the "perfect match" for a luxury brand in the luxury goods industry. When it comes to businesses, a robust SMI-brand fit increases consumers' brand attitudes and behavioural intentions, both directly and indirectly, through the SMI's supposed credibility. Advertising specialists should select SMI's that match the brands (Breves et al., 2019). As stated by a study participant, the influencer

must be a good fit for their brand in terms of goals and vision to achieve a win-win situation. Sometimes the desired SMI is not a good fit for a particular company, and companies need to recognise this early enough. Otherwise, the opposite scenario can happen – the SMI can also damage the brand image. This damage has been referred to as an unsuccessful SMI case study, and the general agreement in advertising is to choose matching SMI's (Sipka, 2017). Brands look for SMI's who positively impact people and are perceived as reliable, rather than just looking at the number of followers, as many followers can negatively affect reliability, which affects the uniqueness of the brand. The best thing to consider when looking for an SMI is follower engagement, as it shows how many people have responded to the content (De Veirman et al., 2017).

However, other characteristics have been identified in the course of the study. According to the participants of this study, to define and select, an SMI must be: Credible, Attractive, Trustworthy, Expert, Professional, and Stylish.

These defined attributes will be further evaluated and part of the proposed framework (see Figure 19).

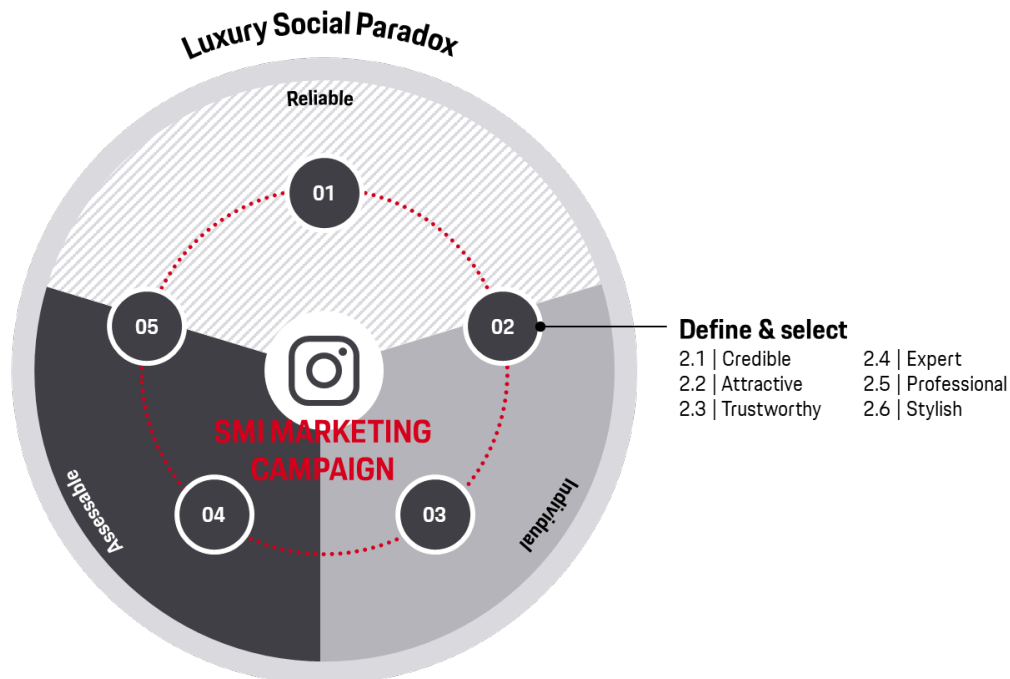


Figure 19: IIMC framework: Define & Select

Source: Developed by the present author.

Credible

The first define and select source attribute is *credibility*, which is the process of internalization. Credibility refers to the alignment of trust or capability to believe someone (Shimp & Andrews, 2013).

This attribute is supported by P1, who reasons:

“What comes first in my mind is actually credibility, because if the influencer is seen as let’s say a normal person like you and me, they are more effective to our brand in comparison to traditional paid advertising. I think it is a fact that people trust recommendations from people that they know. Thus, their words are considered credible, and their recommendations are often successful.”

P3 describes:

“Mainly, an influencer must be believable. People must believe what he or she says is true or at least trustable. We usually talk with the influencer about their

personal experience in advance and work on the campaign together. Like this, we sort of lend credibility to our brand's message."

Most researchers also acknowledge this attribute as relevant for a successful influence Marketing campaign (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Piskorski & Brooks, 2017; Santiago & Castelo, 2020; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

P2 explains:

"Especially in the luxury industry, we need to create a certain desire. When a trusted personality recommends these desires, it helps our brand image. With high influencer credibility, this will, in reward, also help our brand to be credible and gain more audience trust. (...) Reliability, I think, is one main attribute. Not just for us as a brand in a professional manner but also with regard to their dedicated audience. When an influencer is credible, our offer is becoming credible for consumers as well, I think."

"What sets influencers really apart from other types of ambassadors is their relatability. Although they have achieved a kind of fame online, they are still perceived as normal", adds P4.

P1 agrees:

"Influencers often share the same age group, demographics, interests and behaviours of their target audience. They need to believe that what the influencer's shares on their platform is true and honest."

Existing research emphasises this point by stating that SMI's know better the language and content that works best with their audience (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017; Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

P5 adds an interesting point stating:

"Credibility is key. By this, I mean, for example, a contextual fit for our brand with their lifestyle. Or, for example, by agreeing on ultimate transparency. By this, I mean that trying to hide advertising tends to misinform the audience,

which could result in harm to our brand. That is why it is crucial for us to clearly mark sponsored posts to ensure that the influencer is perceived as credible.”

Monetary compensation for SMI's is a topic with little consensus among companies (Santiago & Castelo, 2020). Current studies show that while 29 per cent of companies say they frequently offer monetary compensation, only 12 per cent claim always to pay, 24.4 per cent admit to paying only occasionally, and 15 per cent say they never pay (Launchmetrics.com, 2018). Marking monetary compensation as a sponsored post is essential for trust (Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

The respondents discussed how important it is for them that the SMI suits their brand. When a person and their word is credible, people trust their recommendations. Sources with high credibility are supposed to impact consumer attitudes and behaviour positively, and these sources are desirable brand communicators (Erdogan, 1999). Another participant mentioned that people who are more like friends or related enjoy higher credibility within their audience. Sources with high credibility are supposed to impact consumer attitudes and behaviour positively, and these sources are desirable brand communicators (Erdogan, 1999). The experts of this study all agreed that adding credibility to their brand's message is crucial. This can imply that luxury firms try to generate honest collaborations. According to Childers et al. (2018), a message must be communicated genuinely. As some of the participants mentioned, honesty and well-thought content are essential aspects of credibility. According to Audrezet et al. (2018), it is necessary when SMI's express their preferences, which could be authenticity factors. According to another participant, the SMI should try to communicate to the audience about personal experiences and share more details in their style using their creativity. Luxury firms give out the key data about the campaign. Yet, to a certain degree, the SMI's must make it their own campaign, in line with their usual content style in order to be credible. This could be a contribution to the aspect of trying to be genuine in their content, which Childers et al. (2018) also addressed.

Another aspect discussed by participants is transparency. Hiding advertising tends to misinform the audience, which could result in harm to the brand. That is why it is crucial for luxury brands to clearly mark sponsored posts to ensure that the SMI is perceived

as credible. SMI's integrate brands into their feeds. Although they are legally required to mark the persuasive nature of their messages (e.g., using the hashtags "sponsored"), followers quickly accept their recommendations (Boerman et al., 2017). Thus, SMI's must stay transparent when it comes to their deals with brands because, according to Audrezet et al. (2018), if SMI's are honest about their business deals, they will be perceived as more credible.

Attractive

The second characteristic attribute of the selective theme define and select is *attractiveness*. According to Meier et al. (2010), there is a link between attractiveness and engagement; characteristics that make people appear more attractive increase engagement.

This statement is supported by this study when P5 mentions:

"Then there is attractiveness, I think (...) But not in the earlier sense. Today, it is not important to be pretty in the classical sense, if you know what I mean. Rather the image must be professional and attractive. It must be attractive what the influencer writes, what they inspire, what they create. (...) and because what they post do not make people feel like their privacy is being violated like other ads, what they offer followers is attractive."

All participants supported the statements mentioned above of P5.

Regarding attractiveness, P2 adds:

"In my opinion, the influencer also needs to be attractive. At least to their audience. That is why we do one campaign always with different influencers, to make sure we do not have just that one pretty face."

According to the literature, when recipients perceive a source as attractive, they identify with the source. They are thus more likely to adopt the source's attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, interests, or preferences. Yet, these beliefs and attitudes are not as enduring as those found under credibility (Shimp & Andrews, 2013).

However, P1 and P3 mention a more critical view on attractiveness:

“Well, the influencer does need to be attractive in some sort of way. Although this is, of course, highly subjective, but as is luxury too, you know. With this sort of subjectivity and opinions, attractiveness is only a factor in the mindset. But of course, we also take care that our products are looking good on the chosen influencer. Then attractiveness will come naturally.” (P1)

P3 mentions a pretty face, but in contrast, says:

“An influencer needs to have more than a pretty face. Rather an attractive and interesting character, I would say is key.”

In line with this argument, P4 states:

“(...) attractiveness is important, but having just an attractive face is just average. We seek for an attractive mind and soul to promote our campaigns (...) not the influencer must look good but rather our products or services if you know what I mean.”

It is discovered in the respondent's discussions how attractiveness plays a role in creating a successful SMI marketing campaign. (Dekavalla, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2018) highlight that physical attractiveness appears to have an essential impact on influencers' effect on consumers. Yet, the professionals in this study did not mention physical attractiveness, rather an attractiveness of content or character. Instead, this is in line with Huhn et al. (2018), who states that content plays a significant role in attracting the source, making the message more persuasive. If the content is tempting, the campaign seems to be relatively successful. It could therefore be seen to be beneficial for both the luxury brand and the SMI to make the content attractive to the consumer.

Although physical attractiveness is, without doubt, an essential factor in endorsement effectiveness as shown in past work (e.g., Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Eisend & Langner, 2010), the author of this study is unable to validate the empirical importance of physical attractiveness for luxury brands.

According to this study, taking professional and entertaining content with an interesting character makes an SMI attractive to luxury brands. An interesting character seems more important than physical attractiveness, simply having a “pretty face”. This statement is in line with what Huhn et al. (2018) discovered, according to which the content should also include entertainment for it to become attractive and engaging. This study supports this, which argues that the SMI must do more to their brand than simply looking good when presenting a product or service. They must instead make the product or services look good.

Trustworthy

This is the third aspect of the selective theme define and select. There are two essential aspects of source credibility in existing theory known as expertise and *trustworthiness* (Shimp & Andrews, 2013). Yet, in this study, the research participants have not interlinked these three attributes but instead mentioned them as stand-alone attributes.

As mentioned earlier in this study, creating trust from building personal relationships with customers is crucial for a successful marketing campaign within this digital world (Jabr & Zheng, 2014). All participants mentioned the trustworthiness of the SMI as necessary related to sponsored posts.

“We want to build long-enduring relationships, so that is why trust is actually key in my opinion”, P5 mentions.

P4 enhances:

“Then trust is important but also the kind of trickiest attribute. Our influencers need their audience relate to our brand, although they do not know their audience personally. So, they need to create trust.”

Shimp & Andrews (2013) notes that it is instead the topic that the SMI categorise itself within that matter when discussing trustworthiness.

In line with this is P5's comment:

"An influencer that has the capability with luxury brands and really embodies luxury is what creates trust in my view. Consumers want to hear from other consumers. That is why it is crucial for me that the influencer suits to our luxury story and lifestyle."

This view is supported by Wang & Close Scheinbaum (2017), who think that having experience with what the SMI promotes communicates trustworthiness.

"And also, that is why I mentioned before that it is crucial for me to build a relationship with the influencer. When an influencer would show products from our brand just once and never again, I think their followers would become sceptical", P5 goes on.

P2 remarks:

"Trust from their followers is important. In my opinion, this can be achieved by a general high-quality profile and Instagram content. By this is mean high-quality pictures or a certain lifestyle that suits our brand. I want to give you an example: when a top model is hired as an influencer for a fast-food chain, I think this would create more scepticism than trust. I think people value authenticity more. So yes, gaining trust, being credible is the key to authenticity, which is another important aspect I would say."

This is supported by Sharma et al. (2021), who states that SMI's who promote products or services imply trustworthiness. In addition, Lee & Koo (2012) findings claim that if a consumer perceives recommendations as biased or not authentic, the level of credibility decreases.

P1 enforces this characteristic even further:

"Trust is predominantly crucial. Well, I think it has even an unethical aspect to promote products our influencers would not use themselves. If a social media influencer violates their beliefs, they will lose the trust of their followers and will

lose their influence. Although our campaigns are paid, I think all our followers would actually use or wear our products. Not really hard to love our brand (laugh)."

P3 critically comments:

"Trust is essential, especially in these times. People seem to trust the information from media online less, especially when it involves any product placements. That is why we put as much time in creating an entire campaign as we put in selecting the right influencers for our brand." The participant goes on, *"people must understand our brand and lifestyle. For instance, we once promoted new headphone speakers in cooperation with a tech company, maybe you know them. It was crucial there that the influencer educate their or our audience about the key features of that product."*

According to scholars, consumers tend to trust SMI branded posts since they have a high value of content information (Lou & Yuan, 2018). In this, trustworthiness denotes the endorser's perceived honesty, believability, and integrity (Erdogan, 1999), which positively affects brand credibility and purchase intentions (Breves et al., 2019).

The participants of this study also touched upon this aspect. According to this study, SMI's with expertise with luxury brands that embody luxury create trust. In this regard, participants often talk about the so-called "lifestyle" an SMI should have to fit their specific luxury brand and be trustworthy. Otherwise, this can make consumers lose trust in the SMI and, thus, the brand cooperating with them in the future. This is also discussed by different researchers, who state the importance of an SMI having expertise in the products or services they promote to be an essential aspect of trustworthiness (Lou & Yuan, 2018).

Also, according to this study, an SMI should know the brand before starting a campaign or collaboration. According to Evans et al. (2017), an SMI lacking knowledge about the promoted product or service can lack credibility. This could influence consumer and their brand perception in a negative way. This aspect could indicate that trustworthiness is essential for luxury firms when selecting a suitable SMI for their

campaign. Creating trust from building personal relationships with customers is crucial for a successful Marketing plan within this digital world (Jabr & Zheng, 2014). Since the respondents discuss the importance of knowledge about the brand they are marketing, this could relate to expertise. Since being well prepared seems to be important to the participants of this study, this could indicate that this is a critical aspect for luxury brands when planning a marketing campaign on Instagram.

Concerning trustworthiness, participants also state that SMI's have to be nice persons, meaning to have a good and inspiring character. This can be seen as a contribution to Lou & Yuan (2018), who state that SMI's have an appealing online persona. This persona also needs to be inspiring to create trust from their audience (Kadekova & Holienčinová, 2018).

Expert

This is also a vital characteristic related to the select and define theme and refers to the perceived experience, knowledge, and skills that the source carries. If the source is perceived as an expert in their field, they are more likely to be perceived as more credible (Shimp & Andrews, 2013).

P1 indicates:

"(...) expertise is about actual subject matter. I would say that once someone has proven true topic expertise that is what makes them influential, that actually has an impact on our brand."

P5 claims:

"(...) knowledge about our brand is important, that is why we always sent detailed information about our brand to the influencer before a campaign. I think consumers want to know who has the most knowledge on a topic to identify for themselves and which influencers are the most credible sources. Well, here comes credibility, again. That is what impacts customers. And that is why we only collaborate with industry experts."

Although expertise and trustworthiness are not mutually exclusive, a particular source can often be considered highly reliable but not exceptionally expert (Shimp & Andrews, 2013).

“Working with influencers from our defined network has shown to be much easier actually. They are experts, and they usually detect trends and start creating content for this particular trend. For us, these experts are win-win since they can bring their own creativity in the campaign and still convey the exact message we want to achieve with the campaign”, P3 clarifies.

In line with this opinion goes the statement of P4:

“Then the influencer should know what he or she is talking about. In our campaigns, influencers do not just re-write what we give them but rather takes it over and brings in their own ideas. Otherwise, every paid campaign would look the same on different influencer profiles, which would be quite boring. I think this is important that it keeps some sort of authenticity. That they are loyal to their style.”

P2 claims: *“I think consistency is important in this respect that consistency generates an expert status because when an influencer consistently covers the luxury industry products or services regularly, they tend to have more followers who trust that they know what they are talking about.”*

As this study shows, educational content is also of importance for the audience of luxury brands. This refers to that the SMI helps members of society to understand different perspectives or features in a more apprehensive way. One participant has only mentioned this and, thus, a general pattern cannot be identified.

Professional

The sixth characteristic related to the select and define theme is *professionalism*. Only one participant (P5) thought that professionalism is also a key characteristic attribute of an SMI:

“I think some sort of business professionalism is obviously something that everyone should have. The key to success is always to stay professional and respectfully handle things while also giving the influencer our best advice.”

Participants state that the luxury brand should also look on the SMI's previous cooperation partners to find out if their history suits their brand.

Style

The final characteristic of SMI's related to the select and define theme is *style*. P3 mentions that the style of the SMI is also essential for their company:

“When we want to convey our kind of lifestyle of our brand to the audience, I guess being stylish is also a thing.”

P2 reinforces this by saying, *“being stylish comes naturally, I think.”*

There are many more characteristics existing in theory when selecting social media influencers, such as engagement rate, clicks, frequency of publications, visualizations and reach (Booth & Matic, 2011; Geyser, 2021; Launchmetrics.com, 2018), which have not been mentioned or extracted any further by the participants of this thesis.

The style of an SMI working for a luxury brand seems to be of great importance since some of the participants have mentioned this; especially when considering the findings of Huete-Alcocer (2017) that owning luxury items can make one feel more secure with their social status or simply serve as an expression of style. The importance of individualism and independence amongst Generation Z has led to the celebration of consumption at the cost of other values, and style has become increasingly important (Tudor, 2020).

4.4.3 Create and Align

The third area of the process consists of matching the selected SMI's with the products or services to be promoted (Lin et al., 2018). The development of SMI Marketing

campaigns can take different forms depending on the defined target and content of the brand messages (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

Initially, the SMI is contacted.

P5 explains the process as follows:

“We usually have kind of a portfolio of influencers we are working within our network tool, which is highly valuable to manage our influencer relationships. Usually, we choose our influencers through our influencer Marketing agency, with which we have been working together for years. But if we are interested in someone new, we briefly explain our company, the planned campaign and objectives as well as the timeframe.”

P3 clarifies:

“After initially contacting the influencer, mostly through email or directly on Instagram (...) when he or she shows interest in a cooperation, we provide more information and highlight the strategic approach of the campaign.”

“At the very beginning of our influencer strategy, we then contacted our selected influencer through an influencer marketing platform. Nowadays, our cooperating agency sends us possible fits for our brand”, P2 adds.

The third step consists of matching the selected SMI and the products or services promoted by the luxury brand (Lin et al., 2018). To do so, the study participants propose to connect with the chosen SMI as an initial step (see Figure 20).

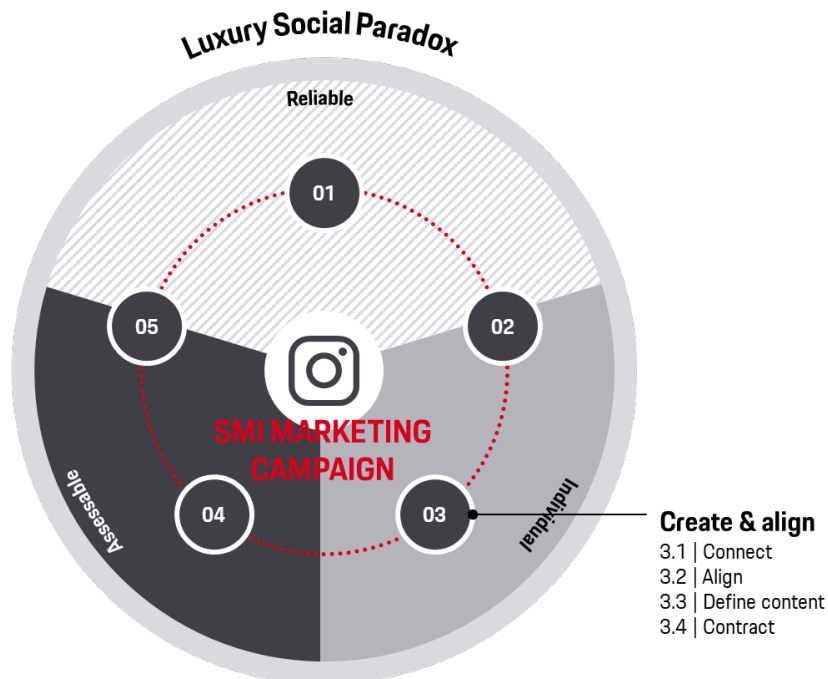


Figure 20: IIMC framework: Create & Align

Source: Developed by the present author.

According to the participants, some of the best ways to connect with them are Influencer Marketing Agency, emails, Social Media Messaging and Influencer Marketing Platforms.

The overall goal should be first to establish some kind of relationship with the SMI's. Once the luxury brand had some communication with the chosen SMI's, the basic idea of the campaign is pitched. According to Uzunoglu & Kip (2014), supporting luxury brands to activities organised by SMI's, such as workshops, is also a way to connect with SMI's.

The participants mention that a proper campaign brief is essential. It will help provide the correct information to the SMI's and can prevent a lot of back-and-forth communication. The campaign brief should start with introducing the brand and the overall campaign goals. In addition, some detailed KPIs that the luxury brand will use for this campaign will be shared. The next aspect to consider is the content guidelines. Although most SMI's prefer creative freedom when creating content for their social

media profiles, marketers need to ensure that the SMI-created content supports the brand's messaging and overall campaign strategy.

A luxury brand should provide a clear brief, which includes the following:

- Content-type (image post, boomerang, video etc.),
- any specific image style that is more suitable for the campaign (e.g., close-ups, collages etc.),
- any particular features of the product or service that should be emphasised,
- timeline to submit content for review or aspired posting-date,
- campaign-specific hashtags, and
- incentives.

After the luxury brand decides to collaborate, a contract is made. This makes the deliverables from both parties clear so that there “(...) *will be no misunderstanding at a later stage*” (P4).

A legally binding contract will also help explain the terms of the cooperation.

Participants all mentioned that it is necessary to give SMI's a certain degree of creative freedom. This will result in better performance of the SMI marketing campaigns, as the communication will be much more authentic and trustworthy, which is crucial.

4.4.4 Motivate and Incentivise

The fourth step includes the campaign brief, proposed timeline, content and plan of how the brand rewards the SMI's. Marketers must find ways to encourage and motivate SMI's to share positive content about the brand and/ or products or services (Lin et al., 2018; Piskorski & Brooks, 2017; Santiago & Castelo, 2020). According to participants of this study, an initial SMI campaign brief is set up.

P3 enforces:

“The details may include a timetable, incentives, content of post or terms of partnerships. I think the guidelines for making the posts shall not be too loose

because the influencers may get confused, but shall not be too strict either. In my experience, if the guidelines for the posts are too strict, the authenticity of the posts may be lost, and are not seen as trustworthy anymore.”

P4 complements:

“After we have chosen an influencer, well, a contract is set up so that there will be no misunderstanding at a later stage. The guidelines need to suit our overall brand image and campaign strategy. Part of our contract is then the type of content we are seeking, image style we want, outline again the feature that should be advertised and so on.”

P5 goes on:

“Part of the strategy is also the hashtags that should be used or also how the collaboration is communicated towards our target group is important. We always clearly define how a commercial collaboration should be stated in the influencers’ posts while giving enough room for personal ideas, you know. The right information is important to prevent a lot of back and forth.”

P1 states:

“An important part then is the salary; we always aim to build a deeper relationship with the influencer so that we choose adequate incentives.”

Maintaining long-term relationships can benefit the brand by guaranteeing the ability to build a consistent and cohesive connection with SMI’s, who may therefore share content about the brand on future occasions (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

P2 clarifies:

“A follow-up is done after sending out the guidelines if there are any concerns or questions. This is good feedback also for my team.”

How the brand will motivate the SMI during the campaign and reward afterwards is planned in the fourth step (see Figure 21). The SMI needs to be asked if anything is

unclear or any concerns related to the campaign brief. Effective communication and transparency can help build successful SMI marketing.

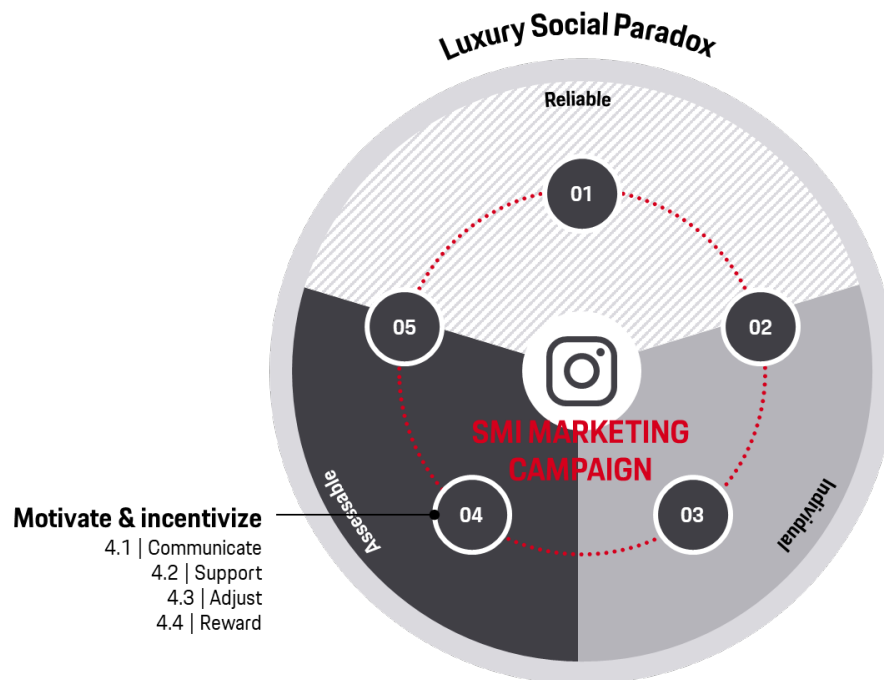


Figure 21: IIMC framework: Motivate & Incentivise

Source: Developed by the present author.

During the campaign execution, it can be seen as crucial to stay in touch with the SMI, offer support, or react when adjustments are necessary to ensure the campaign is a success. According to other scholars, Marketers must find ways to continue to motivate SMI's to share positive content about the brand and their products or services (Lin et al., 2018; Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

Participants of this study also mention that it is essential for the SMI to receive a good incentive. Reimbursement for SMI's is a topic with little agreement among companies (Launchmetrics.com, 2018) since SMI campaigns may or may not include monetary compensation for the activities of the SMI. Since this study focuses on paid media (see section 2.4.1), this is taken into the proposed Influencer Marketing Campaign process.

4.4.5 Coordinate and Measure

The fifth and final step includes reporting, support for SMI's during the campaign, evaluation, and retention (Lin et al., 2018; Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

About supporting SMI's during the campaign, P5 remarks:

“During the actual campaign execution, we make sure to keep close contact and stay current on the progress of the campaign.”

P2 goes in line with this:

“We always keep the relationship building in mind and offer support during the campaign. Also, we are open for requests of the cooperating influencers, for example.”

P1 states that they instead:

“Monitor the influencers publishing and content, so that it is, for example, on time and that it is in line with the signed contract and terms while giving them enough freedom to express their own personality. To be honest, the campaign execution gives us valuable insights. I mean, which influencers are easy to work with? Which ones follow our guidelines, who was rather difficult to handle?”

Other studies (Casaló et al., 2020; Piskorski & Brooks, 2017) show that to develop an effective and successful Influencer Marketing campaign, SMI's must be given creative freedom to create original content and the freedom to speak honestly about products. Otherwise, their authenticity and credibility may be compromised (Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

P3 points out:

“If there are some campaign changes, we contact the influencer directly to make those changes as quickly as possible. Luckily, we have advanced our planning so that this does not happen very often anymore (laugh).”

P4 states, *“then we execute the campaign.”*

Evaluating and measuring the return on investment (ROI) of SMI Marketing practice has been presented as difficult with campaigns (Launchmetrics.com, 2018; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

“Well, and then after executing a campaign, the work is not done yet. Of course, we want to know how the influencers performed and which value they added to our campaign. Especially in the negative case, the why is crucial for us”, P5 mentions.

Critically, scholars mention that brands cannot control the SMI's behaviour (Upadhyay & Singh, 2010) which means that specific influencer behaviour can lead to negative publicity and damage the influencer's reputation (Lee & Koo, 2012). Although these scandals are irreversible, they can affect the organizational outcomes of the endorsed brand, such as corporate reputation and purchase intention (Jung & Seock, 2016). Because these scandals can permanently damage organizational outcomes, this can be considered an SMI crisis.

P4 enhances:

“So then after the post, we look at defined KPIs such as follower growth or engagement or (...) the quality of comments. We need to make sure that our reputation is not damaged. So, we track if the defined strategy has been successful. (...) Sometimes this is rather tricky since we cannot for sure tell whether our website's traffic comes from the influencer followers or not. That is why we created some KPIs to work around that fact.”

Existing literature recommends that the metrics used to measure the success of an SMI Marketing campaign must be adapted to the specific goals of each campaign. Therefore, if a campaign is focused on awareness, the metrics must be visualization and reach. The metric should focus on clicks and engagement (Geyser, 2021; Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

P2 rather tracks:

“Return on Investment or Earned Media Value. But we combine this metric with many others to get a kind of fuller picture.”

A 2021 study by Geyser (2021) found that nearly 70 per cent of companies and agencies surveyed measure the return on investment (ROI) of SMI Marketing campaigns.

Yet, P3 reasonably points out:

“We ask for feedback from the influencer, to get a better knowledge of what they have liked or disliked and if there is something we can do better next time or also use Instagram tracking links to conclude.”

P1 did not mention this process of measuring in any kind but rather a report and mentions, *“then we do a report at the end of the campaign for management.”* Yet, for most of the participants, the process ends with this step.

Merely P5 mentions:

“Then, if an influencer created an extremely high value for us and really drove conversions during the campaign, we do not let the influencer go just because the campaign is over; we rather try to establish a relationship with her or him. I think it is key to retain highly valuable influencers.”

The fifth and final step includes reporting and evaluating the SMI marketing campaign and relationship-building, as shown in Figure 22.

As stated previously, the most critical factor to consider in SMI marketing is the target audience. The metric Return on Investment (ROI) can only be achieved if the campaign reaches the right people, and therefore, as mentioned in section 5.4.2, finding the right SMI is critical. Scholars commonly agree that the evaluation and measurement of the ROI of the practice of SMI marketing is a difficulty in SMI marketing campaigns (Launchmetrics.com, 2018; Linqia, 2021; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

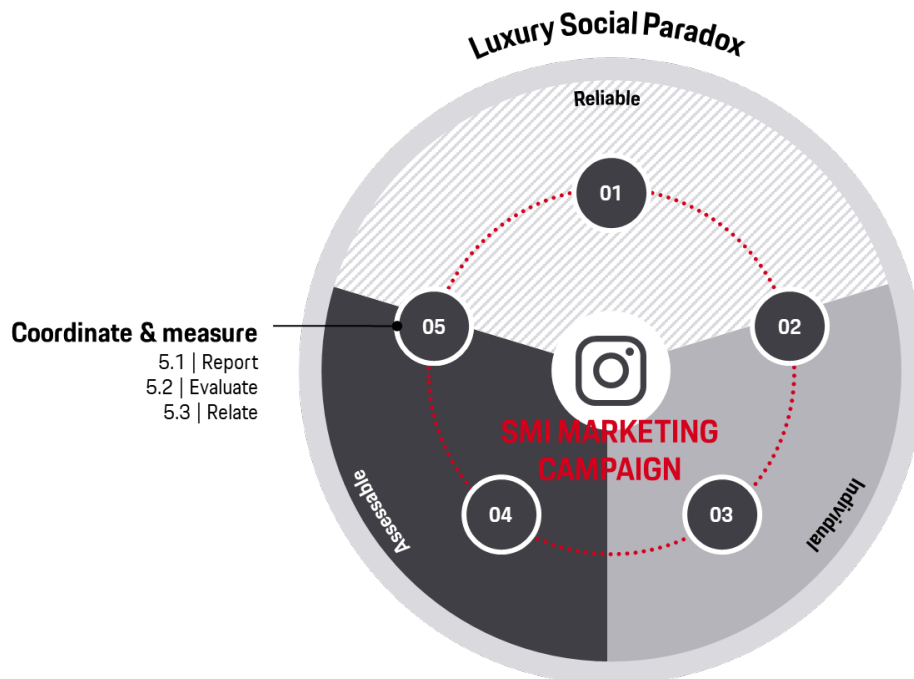


Figure 22: IIMC framework: Coordinate & Measure

Source: Developed by the present author.

As already mentioned, some metrics are mentioned by the participants. The success metrics used to measure an SMI marketing campaign must be adjusted to specific campaign aims (Santiago & Castelo, 2020). Furthermore, Instagram does provide a tracking link for paid posts which is mentioned as a valuable tool for SMI campaigns. One participant said that a report is then created for management.

After a successful SMI marketing campaign, as one participant states, relationship-building is the final step of an SMI marketing campaign process. Learning from previously run campaigns can be abbreviated and used for the next campaign. Thus, this presented SMI marketing campaign process for luxury brands can be seen as iterative.

To conclude, the following insight three relevant for further discussion can be derived.

Insight 3: A successful SMI Marketing campaign process includes analysing and planning, defining and selecting the right SMI according to defined attributes (credible, attractive, trustworthy, expert-status, professional, stylish), creating and aligning the campaign towards the selected SMI, motivating and incentivizing them and coordinating and measuring the success or failure of a campaign.

4.5 Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC) Framework

An Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC) framework of process steps on how luxury brands execute social media campaigns on Instagram, as presented in Figure 23, brings together the identified selective themes that are introduced in Table 8 (see pages 86-87) and links them with relevant success characteristics of SMI campaigns, both of which are previously discussed by the author in the earlier section of this chapter.

The critical characterisations of luxury brands on Instagram consider the somewhat paradoxical exclusivity of these products on a mass media platform. This so-called luxury social paradox forms the entire framework. Luxury brands in the luxury industry can influence consumers on this platform by considering reliable, individual, and assessable attributes. A typical process to run a successful social media marketing campaign online is to Analyse and Plan (01), Define and Select (02), Create and Align (03), Motivate and Incentivise (04) and Coordinate and Measure (05). On the right side and within the inner circle of the framework, there are six categories of factors that can influence the selection of an SMI (see Figure 23).

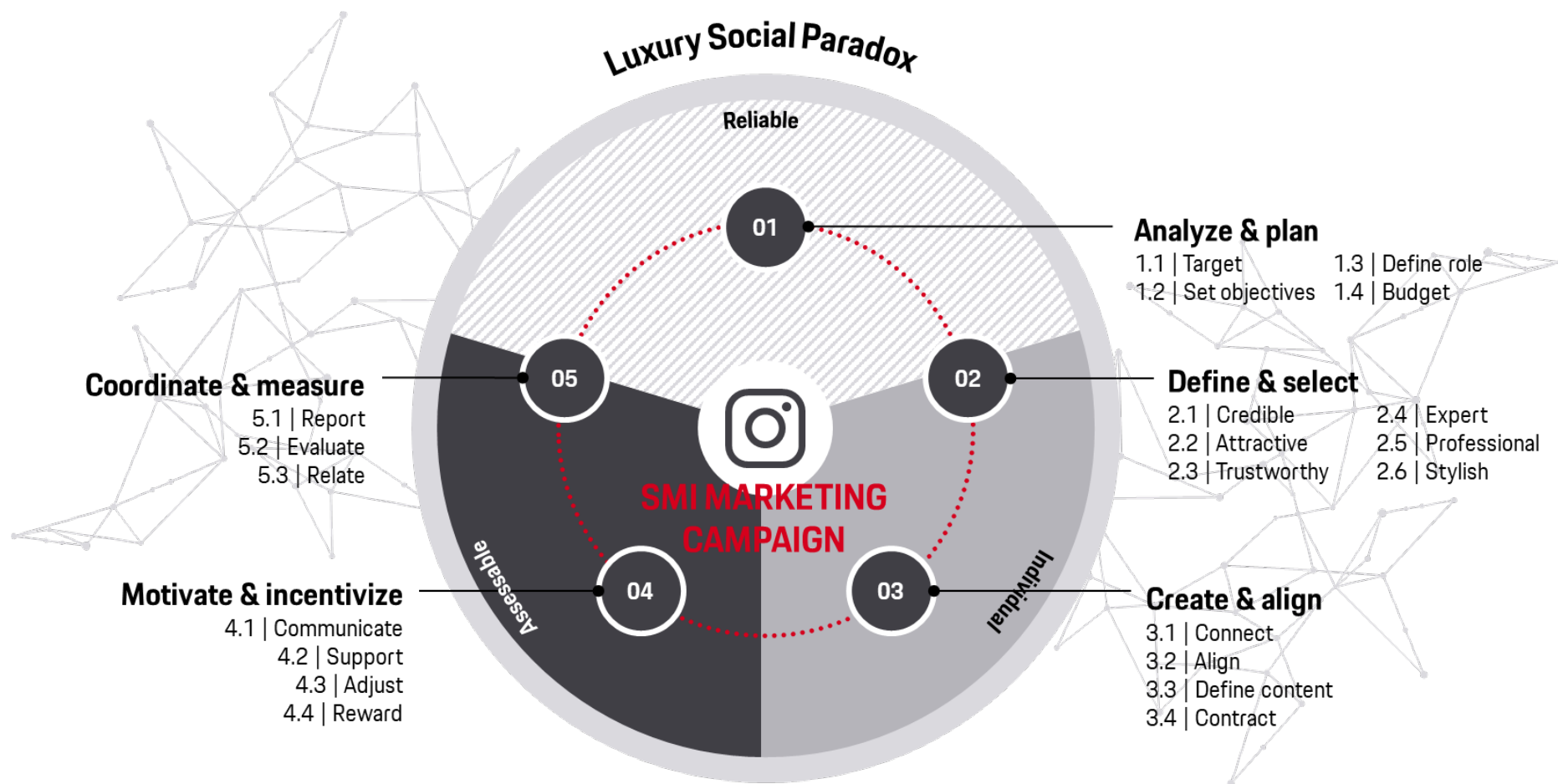


Figure 23: Integrative Influencer Marketing Campaign (IIMC) Framework

Source: Developed by the present author.

The framework is one of the first visual representations based on empirical data from a company perspective (luxury brands in the industry) dealing with brand-related social media marketing campaigns on Instagram.

It clearly demonstrates the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry, while taking into consideration the luxury social paradox as well as success characteristics of SMI campaigns.

The main implication of the IIMC framework is that it has direct practical relevance. Namely, it can help brand managers to understand how luxury brands can influence consumers on Instagram, allow them to adjust their social media practice accordingly and define a successful online marketing campaign process. While some of the process steps may be out of the organisation's control, others, such as "Define and Select", are controllable and easily changeable. For example, managers can find the right and suitable SMI for the specific brand, following the attributes proposed in this study. Further, this framework has yet again highlighted the role of content on Instagram. Therefore, social media brand managers should ensure that they provide their audience with valuable content that is reliable, individual, and assessable to cope with the luxury social paradox. Another significant implication of this framework is that it offers the theoretical basis for further investigation of the process involved in a successful online campaign and can be further tested from the consumer point of view, such as among different generations or across various social media contexts.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presents and explains the interpretation of the critical data collected from the two-stage in-depth interview process along with axial codes and selective themes, the respective literature, the coding process outcome (categories), and the construction of meanings (themes).

Then, the interview results are analysed along with the three defined research questions, which are

RQ1: What characterises the marketing of luxury brands online?

RQ2: What are the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram?

RQ3: What steps involve a successful process of creating an influencer marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram?

The generated data provide a significant contribution to the current research debate. This chapter has shown the critical characterisations of luxury brands on Instagram, considering the somewhat paradoxical exclusivity of these products on a mass media platform. Moreover, it documents some previously unexamined success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry, while taking into consideration the quixotic luxury social paradox.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

“To be deemed a contribution,
theory must be useful or somehow have utility in its application,
either for other organisational researchers or for practicing managers.” – Corley & Gioia (2011)

The whole thesis ends with this chapter. A conclusion is drawn and summarised (5.2), and the proposed aims and objectives are reviewed (5.3). A focus is set on the contribution of this study to theory (5.4) and practice (5.5), with a particular emphasis on direct recommendations for practice (5.6). It also contains some limitations of this study and a proposal for further research (5.7). In the end, a conclusion is drawn (5.8).

5.1 Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this final chapter of the thesis is to evaluate and conclude the research conducted for the purposes of this thesis. In this chapter, the aims and objectives established in the introductory chapter are revisited, and an indication is made on how they are achieved in various chapters of this thesis. In addition, a summary of the significant contributions to knowledge and practice is given. Later in this chapter, a discussion concerning the main limitations of this research is provided, and some directions for further research that other researchers who wish to study SMI marketing from a luxury perspective are elaborated. Finally, at the end of this chapter, some management recommendations that can be useful for social media managers who want to understand and set up an SMI marketing campaign process on the social media platform Instagram.

5.2 Research Summary

On the one hand, the development of the digital age and the rise of social networking sites changed consumer behaviour (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017b). On social media platforms, such as Instagram, physical and temporal barriers are disregarded, allowing every consumer to become an opinion leader (Booth & Matic, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014; Wang et al., 2012). The global and unlimited audience of such opinion leaders leads to the development of SMI (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017; Santiago & Castello, 2020; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Today, real-life SMI's are everyday people passionate about the products they promote, have a significant following, and have an enormous number of buying conversations with their peers (Chopra et al., 2020). SMI's have started to attract the interest of brand managers, who quickly integrated them into their marketing strategies (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

On the other hand, the luxury industry has experienced democratisation through mass media. A paradox between luxury inaccessibility and social media tools can be examined (Hamzaoui et al., 2019). Through social media, it is argued that luxury is not restricted to the affluent anymore (Roper et al., 2013). As the group of luxury customers is expanding, luxury brands must adapt to new marketing strategies to meet the needs of this new focus audience.

This study combines the two concepts of this luxury social paradox: the luxury market and SMI marketing campaigns on Instagram. The research explores the success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry.

This research followed a qualitative approach with purposive sampling. To achieve the objective of this research, semi-structured interviews are conducted with the professionals of the luxury industry who have already contributed to SMI marketing campaigns.

The results highlight the success characteristics of SMI campaigns and the process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry.

The proposed IIMC framework documents all steps of a successful SMI marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram.

5.3 Reviewing Proposed Aims and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine the success characteristics and process of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry.

In the literature review chapter of this thesis, the ever-changing environment of Web 2.0 and social media is introduced and discussed, and the underlying characteristics on Instagram are deliberated to answer the proposed research questions of this study. This is necessary to provide the reader with the background of this thesis and justify selecting the social media platform Instagram (see O1). Based on the relevant literature, this research also reviewed SMI success characteristics and their influence on luxury brands, which explains the sample selection. Also, the current debate related to luxury marketing campaigns on Instagram is discussed. At the end of the literature review, the research gaps related to the topic under study are identified, uncovering that there is still limited knowledge regarding

- success characteristics of SMI campaigns, and
- the process steps of executing social media campaigns on Instagram within the luxury brand industry.

Thereby providing further justification for research in this area (see O2).

The literature review also influences selecting the most suitable methods, as it identifies that most studies on the subject under investigation are primarily conceptual or quantitative. With this chapter, the first objective is accomplished.

The third chapter of this thesis introduces the interpretivist paradigm underlying this study. An overview and rationale for the in-depth interview method provided (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977) selected as the primary source for data retrieval for this study. The in-depth interview method allows accessing pervasive data that provides

excellent material for analysis. In this respect, this thesis claims that the selection of in-depth interviews helped to achieve the second objective of this thesis, being to explore the participants' constructions and meanings in choosing the right SMI's within a luxury brand to enhance customer engagement through their knowledge, experiences, and contexts.

The main findings from the two-staged in-depth interviews are identified in the fourth chapter of this thesis. The results chapter discusses the experts' views, opinions, insights, perspectives, judgments, and experiences about the participants' SMI marketing campaign process. Based on this, the main process steps are identified. Thus, this chapter identifies and analyses the factors determining SMI marketing campaigns on Instagram. The research findings related to the literature review are discussed, and what is newly discovered in this study is identified. In the analysis and discussion chapter, and based on the analysis, an IIMC-framework attributed to SMI marketing and luxury brands on Instagram is introduced (see O3). A focus is set on the SMI selection process and key characteristics influencing this process step.

The IIMC-framework contributes to practice and gives recommendations marketing, brand, or social media managers in SMI marketing on Instagram (see O4).

In the following chapter, the main contributions of this research will be discussed in detail.

5.4 Theoretical Contribution

This study addresses several objectives highlighted in the first chapter to improve the existing literature in the following areas:

RQ1: What characterises the marketing of luxury brands online?

RQ2: What are the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram?

RQ3: What steps involve a successful process of creating an influencer marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram?

RQ4: How can marketing, brand, or social media managers introduce an effective SMI campaign process on Instagram?

The basis for this study is the luxury sector, where social media strategies have been successfully used to reach customers and aspirational consumers. The academic work dedicated to the social media strategy of luxury brands is limited (Lee & Watkins, 2016). This research displays some of the challenges marketing professionals undertake when selecting the right SMI, measuring ROI, and rewarding. This study offers documentation of all steps of an SMI campaign process.

Previous academic research examined how high-end brands approached Instagram to build closer relationships with customers and increase brand awareness in the digital business environment (Godey et al., 2016; Heine & Phan, 2011; Kim & Ko, 2012). While traditional media have a more substantial impact on brand awareness, social media communication strongly influences brand image (Godey et al., 2016). Instagram targets luxury brands because of its visual extension, which allows brands to tell stories visually. Instagram is increasingly seen as a new destination for inspiration and a new “window shopping” form. Social media is an essential resource for consumers in their decision-making process and for marketers in developing and maintaining a close brand-customer relationship.

That is where the here proposed IIMC framework comes into place. Within this IIMC framework, an SMI marketing campaign process is presented to reach potential luxury brand audiences. The IIMC framework can be seen as a completely new contribution to theory with a focus on the luxury brand industry on Instagram, building upon

previous studies conducted by Piskorski & Brooks (2017), Lin et al. (2018), and Santiago & Castelo (2020) in other sectors or on other platforms.

RQ1 is intended to understand what characterises the marketing of luxury brands online. Within the integrative framework (IIMC), it can be concluded that specific key characteristics are leading to the proposed luxury social paradox, such as non-democratic, subjective, rare, and expensive. Concerning the RQ2, the success characteristics of a social media campaign for luxury brands on Instagram include individual, reliable, and assessable. Given RQ3 that considers the organisation of the SMI marketing campaign process, it is possible to confirm that it generally follows the model proposed by Lin et al. (2018) and Santiago & Castelo (2020). However, this study suggests a more depth approach and specific attributes are defined that go beyond existing literature. According to this study, a successful SMI Marketing campaign process includes analysing and planning, defining, and selecting the right SMI according to defined attributes (credible, attractive, trustworthy, expert-status, professional, stylish), creating and aligning the campaign towards the selected SMI, motivating and incentivizing them and coordinating and measuring the success or failure of a campaign.

Concluding, this study complements the current literature on SMI marketing. It contributes with guidelines for professionals who want to include SMI's in their strategies, which are evaluated in the next section 5.5.

5.5 Managerial Contribution

This study addresses several Instagram marketing practices that can be successfully implemented in the context of luxury brands. Through its social media efforts, an organisation can influence consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and preferences about their brand by following practices that aim to develop brand awareness and create a brand image that resonates with target customers. Godey et al. (2016) state that brands should no longer view social media marketing to reach consumers but also as an essential and cost-effective tool for image building.

5.5.1 Value for luxury brands

On Instagram, luxury brands need to be proactive in creating original attention-catching content that appeals to customers. In addition, original content can also be achieved through partnerships with SMI's. The content created aims to strengthen the brand's heritage, reinforce its uniqueness to potential and current customers, and lead to positive behaviours (Herrando et al., 2018).

From a practical perspective, when selecting an SMI, companies should ensure that they are above all credible, attractive, trustworthy, experts, professional and stylish, as these characteristics contribute most to a potential successful SMI marketing campaign.

Companies must identify SMI's who have commonalities with the luxury industry and thus have a meaningful connection to each other so that they are perceived as authentic. The goal is to transfer the positive image of the SMI to the brand.

SMI's are usually only known and competent within their niche, so luxury brands must define selection criteria for themselves as to which characteristics an SMI needs to represent their brand authentically. In return, SMI's offer them a targeted customer approach within their target group. The new scale supports marketing managers in identifying the right SMI's for their products or services.

Tools such as Instagram highlights, stories, filters, or purchases have proven to be interactive practices that provide brands with multiple creative options to promote luxury brand image, brand awareness, and engagement (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). Luxury brands approaching Instagram as a social media platform must focus on setting up a successful process to advertise campaigns (Santiago & Castelo, 2020).

Since conventional media are becoming less important for the younger generations, companies should place a stronger focus on SMI marketing on Instagram and integrate them into an online marketing concept (Lammenett, 2019).

Therefore, luxury brands need to use Instagram effectively to reach a target audience. The analysis and conclusions from this thesis may be of some value for companies that want to create successful marketing campaigns to increase positive brand awareness and subsequently increase sales. The value of this thesis lies in that it can be helpful for luxury brands that have not figured out what elements are needed to create such a successful SMI marketing campaign on Instagram.

The findings of this study have shown that establishing a standardised process and integrative framework (IIMC) is vital for a successful SMI marketing campaign. Based on the results, this study introduces categories of the most effective process steps on Instagram, which offer a range of guiding ideas for content development that can be used collectively and individually by social media brand managers who wish to increase their engagement with luxury brands consumers. Hence, this proposed process might help other researchers understand how luxury brands execute an SMI marketing campaign on the social media platform Instagram and what information to process.

The importance of valuable content cannot be stressed enough. This study believes that providing engaging content should be the priority when planning digital marketing campaigns.

5.5.2 Value for SMI's

SMI's could use the IIMC framework to get a profound overview of how luxury brands recruit and retain SMI's. Especially the phases "Define & Select", "Create & Align", and "Motivate & Incentivise" are interesting for SMI's to gain insights into how the Marketing of luxury brand campaigns on Instagram works.

Through the defined SMI characteristics, SMI could develop their Instagram profile and image accordingly. For instance, SMI's could ensure that they are perceived as credible within their community to increase interaction with their followers and thus increase the willingness to buy the advertised products. To be as attractive as possible

for luxury brands, SMI's should act in line with the proposed IIMC framework, to increase their chance to be a potential fit for a luxury brand.

5.6 Recommendations to Practice

Sector professionals reflect the effectiveness of relying on Instagram SMI's in branding campaigns, especially for luxury brands. This study shows the power of social media as a source of information and inspiration for marketing planning. From a perspective for practice, the current findings suggest that SMI's on Instagram are an integral part of an effective brand and marketing strategy.

Direct recommendations for practice aligned with the findings of this study can be seen in the following Table 9.

Selective Themes	Recommendations for Practice
Marketing Luxury Goods Online	
Luxury Social Paradox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Adapt to new marketing strategies to satisfy a new target audience (Carter, 2016). · Market a strong brand identity online (P1). · Limit the availability to add desirability (P5). · Transfer experience and not just objects (P3). · Keep products/ services expensive to show some sort of rarity and exclusiveness (P2).
Success Characteristics	
Reliable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Focus on SMI Marketing as a trustworthy marketing method (P2; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Hussain et al., 2017; Veasna et al., 2013). · Influence customers by people in their circles (P1; Chau & Xu, 2012). · Use Instagram as a destination for inspiration (P5).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Constantly develop new formats on Instagram, such as backstage content (P5). · Increase budget for SMI Marketing (P5, P2).
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Make Instagram profile adjustable to personal needs (P5). · Communicate exclusively (P4); Respond to a message and ask questions; make your customers engage (P1, P2). · Include and offer in-app sales (P5). · Entertain every individual (P3).
Assessable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Keep track of competition (P1). · Measure KPIs (P4, P2).
IIMC Framework	
Analyse & Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Define target audience, metrics and timetable (P2, P3). · Set objectives and define the role (P4, P5). · Define budget (P3).
Define & Select	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Chose SMI's suitable to the luxury brand (P2). · Define SMI's target impressions, reach, and engagement (P5). · Make sure the SMI is credible, attractive, trustworthy, expert, professional, and stylish.
Create & Align	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Connect with SMI and align objectives (P3). · Develop guidelines for SMI and content (P3). · Setup contract (P4).
Motivate & Incentivise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Communicate campaign brief (Santiago & Castelo, 2020). · Follow-up on concerns and questions, keep close contact and offer support (P2, P5).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Monitor SMI's created content online and make respective adjustments as quickly as possible (P1, P3). · Incentivise accordingly (P1).
Coordinate & Measure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Track and evaluate previously defined KPIs, especially ROI or Earned Media Value and report (P2, P4, P5). · Conduct feedback from SMI (P3). · Establish long-term relationships and relate (P5).

Table 9: Direct Recommendations for Practice

Source: Developed by the present author

When marketing luxury goods online, adapt to new marketing strategies to satisfy a new target audience (Carter, 2016). According to participants of this study, it is also essential to market a strong brand identity online. Desirability should be generated by product and service limitations. Additionally, a focus should be set on the overall Customer Experience instead of only selling objects. Crucial is to keep products/ services expensive to show some rarity and exclusiveness.

When it comes to success characteristics, it is crucial to focus on SMI Marketing as a trustworthy marketing method (P2; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Hussain et al., 2017; Veasna et al., 2013). Customers should be influenced by people in their circles (P1; Chau & Xu, 2012), and Instagram is used as a destination for inspiration. A luxury brand must constantly develop new formats on Instagram, such as backstage content. All this by increasing the overall budget for SMI Marketing.

Furthermore, a luxury brand should make Instagram profile adjustable to personal needs and communicate exclusively with its audience. While doing so, it is vital to respond to a message and ask questions to make (potential) customers of a luxury brand engage. A relatively new feature on Instagram is to include and offer in-app sales to entertain every individual.

To assess SMI marketing campaigns and activities, it is vital to keep track of competition and measure relevant KPIs regularly.

The developed IIMC Framework proposes the following steps for practice:

The target audience, metrics, and timetable must be defined within the IIMC process step “Analyse & Plan”. Objectives must be set, and roles, as well as budget targets, clearly explained.

Within the IIMC process step, “Define & Select”, a suitable SMI for the luxury brand must be defined and selected. The selection process starts by defining a potential SMI’s target impressions, reach, and engagement. Luxury brands need to make sure the SMI is credible, attractive, trustworthy, expert, professional, and stylish.

Within the IIMC process step, “Create & Align”, a luxury brand must connect with SMI and align objectives. Guidelines for SMI and content should be developed, and as the last step, a contract should be set up.

Within the IIMC process step, “Motivate & Incentive”, luxury brands must communicate a campaign brief with the chosen SMI. A follow-up on concerns and questions should be planned and executed as well as close contact kept with the SMI. Continuous support should be offered throughout the campaign. During a campaign the IIMC framework proposes to monitor the created content online and make respective adjustments as quickly as possible. Incentives must be transferred accordingly at the end of a campaign.

Within the IIMC process step, “Coordinate & Measure”, the IIMC framework proposes to practice tracking and evaluate previously defined KPIs, especially ROI or Earned Media Value and report. It is proposed to establish a long-term relationship. Feedback from SMI’s should be conducted and shared with the involved team.

Concluding, this study complements the existing literature on SMI marketing and contributes with a guideline for professionals who want to include SMI's in their marketing strategies. Doing so provides a better understanding of the organisation's perspective, which marketers provide an advantage.

5.7 Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study must be seen in light of some potential limitations. These could be addressed in future research, although every attempt is taken to minimise them (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

The first restraint concerns the lack of previous studies in the same field. Existing literature is still limited on SMI marketing, determining the references' quality (Piskorski & Brooks, 2017). Also, the study focuses on one social media platform only, which is Instagram, and its unique characteristics. Yet, Instagram is the most used social media platform to follow SMI's (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), defying this medium as the research focus.

Also, data or statistical limitations must be mentioned. The sample is not probabilistic and relatively small (11 interviews), preventing extrapolating the data to the population. It should also be noted that recent statistics on general social media usage, significantly accelerated through the COVID-19 pandemic, have shown that motivations for using social networks are changing (Keutelian, 2022; Statista, 2021a). Therefore, this study argues that regular research on this topic is necessary to keep abreast of changes in social media usage.

Also, this study is based on the interpretive paradigm, in which research findings are based on the subjective views of participants and the author. Therefore, this thesis does not aim for generalizability. In this respect, the interpretive nature of this research could also be seen as a limitation by scholars who support positivist criteria for research. Nevertheless, even scholars who subscribe to positivist research traditions may find the results of this study helpful in gaining insights and further investigating the phenomenon of SMI marketing campaigns on Instagram in the context of luxury brands.

The fourth limitation concerns the Skype interviews and the preference or insistence of two participants to interview without a video camera. This results in an inability to

draw from the visual aspects such as facial and body expressions that face-to-face interviews provide.

The luxury industry is a highly competitive market (Haslam et al., 2017; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), which leads to the fact that there are conflicts on biased views and personal issues. This might lead to the participants not elaborating their answers in detail and limiting the information given in some questions.

From all learnings, findings and limitations of this study, several cases for future research have been found. The interviewees are only women in this study, although the author did not focus on this gender. It would also be interesting to expand this research and conduct the survey on male employees and how it would affect the results compared to a female population. Males might have different needs to choosing SMI's. Although the here presented IIMC framework can be applied, disregarding gender. Nevertheless, the question could arise if a male chose the ideal SMI for the campaign using the same attributes? Are there any differences between male social marketing managers and women regarding creating an SMI marketing campaign on Instagram?

Another limitation of this research is the lack of empirical evidence to support the claims provided in this research. Future research might focus on developing quantitative marketing research with primary data to investigate the degree to which Instagram is used to influence luxury purchases in general and in the context of a specific high-end brand. Another idea to extend this study is to conduct qualitative research based on sentiment analysis to collect new data from users' notes about their use and perception of luxury brands' presence on Instagram. The study could also be expanded to develop a cross-cultural study to examine consumers' use of Instagram and their perceptions of luxury brands' social media marketing practices in different countries.

For this thesis, a small sample of eleven interviews is investigated, limiting the drawing of general conclusions. A more extensive demographic sample selection with other geographical areas or organisations could be included to examine SMI marketing

campaigns further. The focus of this thesis is on Europe. A more generalised conclusion could be drawn with a larger sample in a wider geographical area.

Another interesting finding that creates new areas for future research is to look at the consumer instead of the organisation. Further research is needed to explore how loyal luxury consumers react to today's luxury availability and overexposure. Especially when the phenomenon is expected to grow, and the SMI market will become more saturated. Thus, the author would argue that future studies should also focus on exploring SMI marketing campaign behaviours from a consumer perspective as such an investigation could provide new insights.

Future researchers could go beyond Instagram and explore SMI marketing campaigns in the luxury industry across other social platforms. A comparative study between different social networking sites might also be valuable, as such an investigation could bring light to differences between the key influencing factors. Such an understanding would help social media managers develop arguably more tailored and more effective practices for SMI marketing campaigns across social media.

5.8 Conclusion

This study complements the existing literature on SMI marketing. It interlinks the social luxury paradox and quixotic challenge with attributes especially relevant for luxury brands (reliable, individual, assessable). This study forms and introduces a new theoretical framework to research, namely the IIMC framework. This IIMC framework is applicable to practice by contributing to managerial knowledge regarding SMI campaigns on the social media platform Instagram. As such, it provides solid guidelines for professionals who want to include SMI Marketing on Instagram in their marketing strategies.

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Appendix A – Data Collection

A.1 Interviewees Consent Form

<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Edinburgh Napier University</p> </div> <p>Impact of Social Media Influencers on Brand Strategy in the Luxury Fashion Segment</p> <p>My name is Jessica Disch and I am a research student from the School of Business at Edinburgh Napier University. As part of my degree course, I am undertaking a research project for my dissertation. The title of my project is: <i>Impact of Social Media Influencers on Brand Strategy in the Luxury Fashion Segment</i>.</p> <p>This study will investigate success criteria of social media towards brand loyalty and trust in the luxury fashion goods sector. This will be done by collecting new data. To support this study, the research questions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the rapid adoption of social media influence brand loyalty and trust in the luxury fashion sector? • Can there be success criteria identified when using social media to develop or maintain brand loyalty and trust in the luxury fashion sector? • To what extent are platforms, such as bloggers, important to a positive brand experience? <p>I am looking for volunteers to participate in the project. There are no criteria (e.g. gender, age, or health) for being included or excluded. Yet, the central criterion here will be the presence of an expert status with respect to the research question. A minimum of five years working experience will be set.</p> <p>If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. Since research involves human participants and your personal data, I will consider ethical issues. The whole procedure should take no longer than 60 minutes. You will be free to withdraw from the study at any stage and would not have to give a reason.</p> <p>All data will be anonymised as much as possible, but you may be identifiable from tape recordings of your voice. Your name will be replaced with a participant number or a pseudonym, and it will not be possible for you to be identified in any reporting of the data gathered. Data will not be transferred to a country outside the European Economic Area. After data collection, participants can trust in anonymity and confidentiality in relation to discussions with other organizational or research participants. All data collected will be kept in a secure place (stored on a pc that is password protected) to which only the researcher, Jessica Disch, has access. These will be kept till the end of the examination process, following which all data that could identify you will be destroyed.</p> <p>The results may be published in a journal or presented at a conference.</p> <p>If you would like to contact an independent person, who knows about this project but is not involved in it, you are welcome to contact Dr Gerri Matthews-Smith. Her contact details are given below.</p> <p>Dr Gerri Matthews-Smith Business School, Edinburgh Napier University Edinburgh, EH14 1DJ Telephone: 0131 455 5615 Email: g.matthews-smith@napier.ac.uk</p> <p>If you have read and understood this information sheet, any questions you had have been answered, and you would like to be a participant in the study, please now see the consent form.</p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Edinburgh Napier University</p> </div> <p>Edinburgh Napier University Research Consent Form</p> <p>Impact of Social Media Influencers on Brand Strategy in the Luxury Fashion Segment</p> <p>Edinburgh Napier University requires that all persons who participate in research studies give their written consent to do so. Please read the following and sign it if you agree with what it says.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I freely and voluntarily consent to be a participant in the research project on the topic of the impact of Social Media Influences on Brand Strategy in the Luxury Fashion Segment to be conducted by Jessica Maria Disch, who is a researcher at Edinburgh Napier University. 2. The broad goal of this research study is to explore success criteria of social media towards brand loyalty and trust in the luxury fashion goods sector. Specifically, I have been asked to participate in a face-to-face interview, which should take no longer than 60 minutes to complete. 3. I have been told that my responses will be anonymised. My name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in any report subsequently produced by the researcher. 4. I also understand that if at any time during the interview I feel unable or unwilling to continue, I am free to leave. That is, my participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from it without negative consequences. However, after data has been anonymised or after publication of results it will not be possible for my data to be removed as it would be untraceable at this point. 5. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. 6. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the interview and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. 7. I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study. My signature is not a waiver of any legal rights. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to keep a copy of the informed consent form for my records. <div style="margin-top: 20px;"> <p>Participant's Signature _____ Date _____</p> <p>I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the respondent has consented to participate. Furthermore, I will retain one copy of the informed consent form for my records.</p> <p>Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____</p> </div>
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A.2 Interview Questionnaire for Experts

Introduction

- Signage of privacy agreement and consent form (previously send via Email)
- Welcome of expert
- Short outline of the topic
- Short description of the interview process and the approximate duration

Background Question

1. How long have you worked for [luxury firm] and what is your exact job title?
2. What are your daily tasks?

Key Questions

RQ 1: What characterises the marketing of luxury brands online?

3. How would you describe the effect of electronic Word-Of-Mouth on your company's brand?

RQ 2: What are the success characteristics of an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram?

4. Is social media your most important advertisement channel, and why?
5. What is your definition of an "influencer" on Instagram?
6. Why is your company working with social media influencers?

RQ 3: What steps involve a successful process of creating an influencer marketing campaign for luxury brands on Instagram?

7. What characterises the marketing of luxury brands online, and why?
8. What are success characteristics of SMI campaigns, and why?
9. What are the most essential influencer characteristics when selecting, and why?
10. What steps involve a successful campaign process on Instagram, and why?

Closing

- Brief summary of what has been said
- Anything to add
- Thank the expert for their time

Outlook

- Information about evaluation of results
- Goodbye