OULU BUSINESS SCHOOL

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LUXURY BRANDS’ IN SOCIAL MEDIA
EXCLUSIVE CONTENT CREATING ENGAGEMENT

Master’s Thesis
Marketing
May 2018
ABSTRACT OF THE MASTER'S THESIS

University of Oulu

Oulu Business School

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<td>Luxury brands in social media – exclusive content creating engagement</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
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Abstract

Over the past decade, social media has changed the ways luxury brands communicate to their customers, market their products and build the brand image. This study’s theory examined the prior research of luxury brands’ social media marketing and social media content. As experiences are at the core of luxury brands’ marketing strategy, the theory concentrated on studying online experiences and customer engagement in social media context. The social media content, luxury experiences and customer engagement were included in the theoretical framework of the study and giving guidance for the empirical research.

The purpose of this study was to investigate luxury brands’ social media content to be able to identify effective content tactics to create online experiences and customer engagement. A content analysis was conducted to examine the content elements on social media posts and their impact on social media engagement. The posts of three Finnish luxury brands were analyzed in three major social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). After the visual content analysis was conducted, then the social media engagement represented by the number of likes, the number of shares and comments, was determined in the form of engagement rate percent.

The findings of the research emphasize that luxury brands’ social media content needs to be inspirational, innovative and creative. It must reflect the high quality of products and the prestige qualities of the brand. The research results revealed a set of luxury brands’ content elements which can be associated with high social media engagement. The most engaging content often includes cool, trendy and luxurious elements. A balanced and well-coordinated colour scheme helps the brand to build a harmonious social media feed which is hedonic and pleasant for the viewer. With inspiring visuals and evoking videos, luxury brands can boost emotions and entertain their followers. The key is to deliver content that provides a deep experience of the brand with the sense of exclusivity. The content analysis also revealed that different social media platforms may be effectively used in different ways by luxury brands. The findings revealed that Instagram allowed the greatest customer engagement rates and the highest customer feedback.

This research provides an insight into the luxury brands’ social media content and the effectiveness of content elements to create experiences, and thus customer engagement. The research results help the brands to design their social media content according the taste of luxury customers and achieve higher engagement and build personal relationships through social media. Being present on social media has effects on brand’s economic outcome, so therefore it is crucial for luxury brands to understand their audiences motives and needs to use social media. The studied companies are Finnish luxury brands operating in personal luxury category, so it needs to be acknowledged it brings limitations for generalization of the research findings for other industries and cultural settings.

Keywords

social media marketing, luxury experience, online experience

Additional information
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Consumption, particularly in terms of having a symbolic function operates at the individual and collective level (Fionda & Moore 2009). Choice to buy luxury products is a way to express own individuality, identity and uniqueness, and the same time a way to belong into a group (Alpat & Aksu 2014; Bian & Forsythe 2012; Ko & Meghee 2012). Through the luxury goods, we create an image of ourselves; make statements about how we see ourselves or what we would like to be. Nowadays, when social media is part of our everyday life, the social and self-presentation motivations are also reported (Pentina et al. 2018; Muntinga et al. 2011; Berthon et al. 2009) to independently influence the creation of luxury brand-related content in social media. As self-promotion is a major driver of uploading user-created content in social media (Berthon et al. 2009), luxury customers also acquire to gain recognition from those knowledgeable about the product and, as a result, obtain validation for their own taste (Pentina et al. 2018).

Luxury industry is a fascinating industry, which cannot be compared with any other sector. In addition, it is a highly competitive business sector and one of the most profitable industries. Luxury industry is a huge multi-billion business and the global luxury industry has seen steady growth for the last 20 years. Recently, one of the key forces of shaping the luxury industry is the explosion in the use of digital technology and social media (McCarthy et al. 2016; Kim et al. 2012). Brand awareness has spread through internet and new digital medias, and these days luxury brand awareness is an integral element of consumer culture. Luxury brands are among the most recognized and respected of consumer brands the world over (Fionda & Moore 2009).

Luxury marketing is everything but not easy. A luxury brand needs to make a potential tradeoff between exclusivity and accessibility, and at the same time give a positive brand association (Zheng 2012). This makes it challenging for luxury brands to manage their marketing and advertising. Luxury consumers have spread over the
world and there are several different kinds of target consumer groups with different kind of interests, requirements and needs. It is challenge for a luxury brand to reach their all market segments. Wrongly targeted marketing in the luxury industry might even have negative impacts on the brand value and image, and then many original customers would no longer purchase products from the brand (Zheng 2012; Matthiesen & Phau 2010).

For a long time, luxury brands were very skeptical about digital and social media marketing (Khelladi & Castellano 2016; Kim & Ko 2012; Okonkwo 2009b). In the past, communications between luxury brands and consumers were mainly made through traditional media channels, such as television or print (Okonkwo 2007). Well-known luxury fashion brands such as Versace and Prada didn’t even have corporate websites until 2005 and 2007 (Okonkwo 2009a). Luxury brands thought that social media could affect negatively their brand and make it more accessible for everyone. Brands were afraid of social media being preventing them from engaging and connecting with luxury customers.

When social media became popular among consumers of luxury products, the industry had to accept that luxury shoppers have one thing in common, a growing need and interest to connect more personally with their favorite brands (Minsker 2013). The “heavy-users” of luxury products are thoroughly connected in social media, and they are more social media and mobile savvy than ever (Ramey via Minsker 2013). Luxury consumers are online and their presence is crucial for marketers. These shoppers know how to use the internet, social media and mobile for shopping, and digital marketing is now the most effective way to reach them (Ramey via Minsker 2013).

The luxury market seems to be an example of market where opportunity of using social media can become risks especially in terms of branding but Matthiesen & Phau (2010) highlight that brand image inconsistencies can be avoided through consistent communication. The communicated brand image needs to be above all exclusive, elusive, consistent, and constantly recognizable. They continue that brand’s identity or its message must be delivered consistently to all publics, whether consumers, media or government. In order to successfully utilize social media, it is
important for a luxury brand to have a clear plan of social media marketing targets which are in line with the organizational long-term branding and marketing goals (Okonkwo 2007). Global luxury brands often have had excellent offline brand positioning strategies and they need to convert the same targets in to the digital and social world.

1.2 Luxury industry

During the past two decades, the consumption of luxury products has increased tremendously worldwide (Moon & Sprott 2016; Kim et al. 2012; Husic & Cicic 2009). The luxury goods market is significant, not only in terms of its market value of €1.2 trillion in 2017, but also in terms of its rate of growth which has in the past 15 years significantly outpaced that of other consumer goods categories (D’Arpizio et al. 2017). The growth of the luxury sector has been brought by the increase in the number of high-net-worth individuals with an appetite for luxury brand consumption, globalization, wealth-creation opportunities, new market segments, international travel, culture convergence and because of revolution of digital marketing and communications tools (D’Arpizio et al. 2016; Fionda&Moore 2009; Okonkwo 2009b).

The luxury market can be divided into ten segments. Personal luxury goods, which is the “core of the core” of luxury, was €262 billion in 2017. The personal luxury goods sales value has more than tripled over the past 20 years. In addition, the number of luxury consumers worldwide has more than tripled over the past twenty years, from roughly 90 million consumers in 1995 to 330 million at the end of 2013, according to Bain & Company’s extensive study of 10,000 luxury consumers in 2015 (D'Arpizio et al. 2016).

The luxury industry is huge business in terms of annual sales and has a major the influence in creating the best design, using the best materials, developing the best merchandising and packaging methods in the world (Zheng et al. 2012). The luxury industry is relatively small in terms of the number of companies, but punches far above its weight both in terms of sales and more importantly, influence (Ko & Megehee 2012). Luxury brands are also leading the way for the rest of the marketing
world with their big budgets and resources (Ko & Megehee 2012). After adopting
digital marketing tools, luxury brands are playing a pioneering role in the way they
use social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, in
their marketing (Schwedt et al. 2012).

1.3 Purpose of the study and the research questions

Luxury brands’ tools and approaches for communicating with customers have
changed greatly with the emergence of the social media. Prior researches show that
marketing communication through social media channels is a promising promotional
Yet, luxury brands were late adopters of social media for customer engagement
(Pentina et al. 2018; Dauriz et al. 2014). Engagement is a sense of involvement, of
being connected with something (Calder et al 2009) and engagement comes from
experiencing something in a certain way. In social media context, the content has a
crucial role when luxury brands are trying to engage with the current and potential
new customers.

Luxury brands’ marketing is commonly studied topic. In addition, social media
marketing has gained attention in the past decade. Yet, the most known luxury
industry studies in social media context are done from the perspective of branding
(Okonkwo 2007; Okonkwo 2009a; Okonkwo 2009b) and brand equity (Kim & Ko
2010; Kim & Ko 2012). Also, customer engagement has gained much attention in the
recent literature. Kim et al. (2016) has studied the importance of customer
engagement and luxury brand engagement process. While research exists on luxury
marketing, social media marketing and customer engagement, insights into how
luxury brands are able to create luxurious experiences in social media and build
engagement through social media content are needed. This is because increasing
engagement among their customers and building relationships in social media are
important motivations for luxury brands. Many of earlier studies have focused on
social media in general (e.g. Muntinga et al. 2009) or on one specific social media
platform when studying social media engagement (e.g. Pentina et al. 2018; Dhaoui
2014). There is a lack of studies that directly compare social media platforms. People
use and engage with the social media platforms differently based on the unique
characteristics that each offers in terms of functionalities, interactions and the content.

This research attempts to enhance understanding how luxury brands are able to create engagement in social media through the content and online experiences. Luxury brands social media content is examined and linked to the concepts of luxury experiences and customer engagement (see Figure 1.) The empirical research is conducted for finding the most effective content to create experiences for customers and engagement for luxury brands. The content analysis and research results of social media content will assist luxury brands, marketing managers and content producers, who are developing and planning social media activities how to create experiences and engagement through content.

![Figure 1. The research topic.](image)

The research questions for the thesis are represented as following. The study proposes a theoretical framework that which answers the research question 1 and the empirical research which answers the research question 2.

Research question 1: How luxury brands are creating experiences and engagement through social media content?

Research question 2: What kind of content is engaging luxury customers in social media?
1.4 The scope of the study

Within the luxury industry, there is an ever-expanding offer of luxury categories. At the beginning, luxury industry had four principal categories of luxury goods: fashion, perfumes and cosmetics, wines and spirits and watches and jewelry (Jackson 2004). More recently, extra categories of luxury segments have been added. These days, the global luxury market comprises 10 segments, including personal luxury goods, cars, luxury hospitality, luxury cruises, designer furniture, fine food, fine wines and spirits, yachts, private jets and fine art (D'Arpizio et al. 2015; Chevalier & Mazzalovo 2008).

This thesis concentrates on personal luxury goods category in three most relevant social media platforms to narrow down the research field. Personal luxury goods include fashion, accessories and small interior decoration pieces. This focus is justified on the basis that personal luxury goods accounts for the largest proportion of luxury sales, with nearly 22 percent share in 2017 and the annual market size of 262 billion euros (D’Arpizio et al. 2017).

These days, social media marketing is an internal part of luxury brands’ marketing strategy and the importance of social media will most likely only increase in the future. This thesis concentrates on three most important and powerful social media channels for luxury brands. The three key platforms for luxury brands are Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Pentina et al. 2018; Hope 2016; De Souza & Sharmila 2015; Heine & Berghaus 2014). Both the luxury brands and their customers broadly use these platforms within the luxury industry. Figure 2. presents the number of users worldwide for each three platforms by the end of September (Statista 2017).
Facebook is a market leader of social networks and currently numbering over 2,06 billion monthly active users globally. As a social media platform, Facebook highly focused on exchanges between users, and it is constantly pushing interaction through features like status sharing. Image sharing application Instagram has over 700 million monthly active accounts. Instagram is a social network that highlights and displays user-generated image and video content. Social network Twitter is all about rapid communication and termed as a microblog. Twitter has over 328 million users worldwide, and it is also a powerful tool for social networking. (Statista 2017)

This thesis concentrates on the social media content which is posted on the brands’ official social media platforms. If the brand posts user-generated content on the brand’s own social media wall or feed, then the user-generated content is included in the research. This choice is justified because thesis studies luxury brands’ marketing and the aim is to understand what kind of social media content posted by luxury brands is creating experiences and driving engagement in social media. This thesis utilizes the accepted social media engagement metrics used by brands as key performance indicators, such as likes, shares, comments and retweets (Dhaoui 2014; Brodie et al. 2013).
1.5 Research process

The research process started with choosing of a research topic. As luxury marketing is my personal interest, and social media relatively recent media, I chose to study luxury brands marketing in social media. Furthermore, I believe, the topic is important for my future professional career as social media is an internal part of marketing nowadays.

After the topic was chosen, I started by doing literature research and finding out more about luxury brands, luxury marketing and social media from available scientific literature. The literature for the study consists of academic journals, papers, reports and books. The international e-material service Oula-Finna is provided by Oulu University Library. The literature for the theoretical research was searched from Google Scholar and databases, such Ebsco, Elsevier, Emerald Journals and ProQuest Databases. The aim of preliminary research was to form a general picture how luxury brands do their social media marketing. After the research questions were decided, I explored the literature study to concern customer engagement, luxury experiences, the content of social media and how these areas are related. The search started broadly and quite quickly narrowed to focus on relevant information. The literature review was conducted for the purpose of establishing the theoretical framework, which is created based on current research of luxury brands’ marketing in social media, social media content, luxury experiences and customer engagement.

The literature review and theoretical framework was the basis for my own empirical research. The research process followed the generic process of the empirical research process (Maylor & Blackmon 2005):

1. Defining the aim of empirical research

2. Designing the research and data collection

3. Data collection and analyzation of the data

4. Interpreting and reporting the findings
The empirical part started by choosing the qualitative content analysis research method for the approach. The empirical research continued with planning the data collection. The process of data collection and data analysis are described in chapter 3.2. The empirical data was collected during three weeks period and the content analysis was conducted to examine the visual content of social media posts. The theoretical framework is utilized, when creating the codes and categories for collected data. The data was categorized according the social media content elements derived from the theoretical literature review.

The visual content of social media posts impacts on social media engagement as represented by the number of likes, the number of shares. As the aim of this research is also to find what sophisticated content tactics do marketers of luxury goods use to engage their fans, the generated consumer engagement is calculated for each post. The engagement rate is relative to follower base which allows to compare the content categories and the brands with different audience sizes.

After the data collection and data analyzation, the next step was reporting the findings from the research. The discussion chapter is linking the empirical research findings to the findings from literature. In this phase, I went go back to the data and move opposite direction of the relationship between theory and data founded in qualitative research. As a final check, the I considered how the new findings correspond to the literature review and whether or not the result is reasonable and logical.

1.6 Structure of thesis

This study consists of five parts. In this first chapter of this study, the purpose and objectives of this research introduced, and research questions presented. The chapter also presents background information of luxury industry for the study and describes the research process.

The second chapter presents the literature review regarding luxury brands, luxury brands’ marketing and the social media in more detail. The chapter focuses on three topics regarding luxury brands’ social media marketing: 1) engagement, 2) luxury
experiences and 3) the content in social media. In the end of the second chapter, the findings from the literature review are summarized and the conceptual framework that guides the empirical part of the research is introduced.

The third chapter presents the methodology for the study. In the chapter, the chosen research methodology is presented and the empirical research process is described in more detail. Chapter three presents also the type of data collection, which is followed by the description of how the collected data is analyzed.

The fourth chapter is the empirical part of this study. The data analysis is performed for finding the answer for the research question two. The collected data is analyzed and discussed with concrete examples.

The fifth chapter concludes this research by summarizing the study and the findings. In the fifth chapter, the results and findings are discussed. The findings from the empirical research are compared to the findings from the literature. The research ends by introducing the managerial implications, presenting the limitations of the study and suggesting additional future research possibilities.
2 LUXURY BRANDS’ SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

In this chapter, luxury marketing and social media marketing will be approached in order to gain an understanding on how luxury brands are doing marketing in social media context. Luxury brands are focusing on relationships and engagement in social media, and these topics are presented in detail. Also, the luxury brands’ social media content, and the experiences that content is creating, are discussed. Finally, the theoretical framework is constructed around these themes in the end of the chapter to explain the process of customer engagement in social media for luxury brands.

2.1 Luxury world

2.1.1 Luxury brands’ marketing mix

Coco Chanel has said that luxury starts where necessity ends (Kautsy 2009). The word luxury derives from the Latin word “luxuria”, which means excess or extras of life (Danziger 2005). Kapferer & Bastien (2009) give a definition for a luxury brand as follows: ‘A luxury brand produces a very qualitative hedonistic experience or product made to last and offers this at a price that far exceeds what their mere functional value would command. The luxury brand is tied to a heritage, has unique know-how and a culture attached to the brand. The products or services of a luxury brand are available in purposefully restricted and controlled distribution and are offered with personalized services which represent a social marker and make the owner or beneficiary feel special, with a sense of privilege.’

Okonkwo (2009a) describes that luxury is rather an identity, a philosophy and a culture. Luxury products are essentially different from other types of goods such as daily consumer goods. Customers may purchase luxury brands to satisfy their social needs like social status or social affiliations (Nia & Zaichkowsky 2000). In the literature, it is well argued that customers are purchasing goods with the goal of satisfying the personal pleasure, sensual perception and the experience of luxury, but also for social needs such as prestige and self-image (Zheng 2012; Fionda & Moore 2009). Ownership of luxury goods can reflect the owner's social status as luxury
brands are universally recognized as a statement of good taste in a global economy (Nueno & Quelch 1998).

Luxury brands require a relevant, clear and defined marketing strategy. The strategy is formed to assist in developing the global reputation and presence of the brand and to leverage the brand identity and awareness (Fionda & Moore 2009). In the luxury industry, the concept of brand – specifically the brand name, image and identity – is considered fundamental (Fionda & Moore 2009; Okonkwo 2007; Jackson 2004). Powerful and effective marketing is considered as a key to build the luxury brand image (Elliot & Percy 2009). This is because marketing supports in establishing the brand image, which consequently assists in creating identity and attraction and generates awareness.

![Figure 3. Luxury brands marketing mix.](Adapted from Yookyung 2013; Fionda & Moore 2009; Okonkwo 2007)

In the core of luxury brands marketing mix (see Figure 3.) are the brand strength, differentiation by brand identity and culture, exclusivity and rarity, innovation, designer dominance and premium pricing (Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Yookyung 2013; Fionda & Moore 2009; Okonkwo 2007). Luxury brands also differ from other industries in terms of brand and marketing communications strategy, distribution strategy and the brand heritage (Fionda & Moore 2009). From a product perspective,
luxury products are frequently defined in terms of their excellent quality, high transaction value, distinctiveness, precision and craftsmanship (Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Fionda & Moore 2009).

Luxury brands have a unique and strong relationship with its customers. In luxury industry brands have a bottom-up affiliation with their customers where the customer has become as important as the product (Okonkwo 2009b). Loyalty programs, updating customer's information in real time, acknowledging customer birthdays with gifts, offering customized service and special experiences, to name a few, are luxury brands’ ways to build the brand image and maintain strong customer relationships (Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Kim et al 2012). Investments in high-quality customer service help luxury brands to build relationship with consumers in the long-term (Ko et al. 2009).

The luxury strategy commands to control the manufacturing and quality on one side, and customer retail experience on the other. Consumers’ past purchase experiences with luxury products are likely to result in repetition of their buying (Bamberg et al. 2003). Many studies have reported that past purchases of luxury fashion brands with favorable past purchase service results usually in future purchase intentions in the future (Yoo & Lee 2009). That is reason why customer service and the ceremony of purchase are so vital in the luxury consumption experience (Okonkwo 2007).

Luxury brands face a highly competitive and globalized market, and critical consumers with high demands for pleasure and creativity (Kapferer & Bastien 2009). This means that consumers are difficult to segment due to globalization and a general increase in wealth that has made luxury available for bigger audience (Okonkwo 2009b; Okonkwo 2007). Luxury brands’ marketing communications and advertising is significantly different from consumer goods marketing because they address different audiences. Marketing of luxury goods has become increasingly complex, being associated not only with conveying an image of quality, performance and authenticity, but also with attempting to sell experiences by relating it to the lifestyle constructs of customers (Atwal & Williams 2009).
Almost all consumers are brand conscious in our time since we are surrounded by thousands of different brands constantly. Today’s consumers are active and selective and they need a reason for prefer one clothes, style or brand over another one. They need a difference or a reason that makes them to buy an item or prefer a certain brand. These differences are symbolic value of an item or a brand. Luxury is a differentiated offering that delivers symbolic and experiential value besides functionality (Berthon et al. 2009) and the brands are that relying solely on marketing to communicate brand image and values to a specific target group of luxury customers. Brand identity is a very important indicator when evaluating products. And brand’s signature item can actually be attractive solely because it is a high-profile brand (Svendsen 2006).

Luxury brands marketing aim is not to create immediately sales, but instead of creating a long-term relationship with customers which provides income for a longer period of time (Fionda & Moore 2009; Ko et al. 2009). Luxury brands do not measure the success of marketing by direct effect on sales because there might not be much, says Kapferer and Bastien (2009). They continue, that the aim is the value that a luxury customer brings to a company is not limited to the profit from each transaction but is the total profit the customer provides over the duration of the relationship with the company.

2.1.2 Luxury brands’ marketing communications

Through marketing communications luxury brands communicate the message to their desired market. The brands want to create awareness, communicate the brand image and culture to the target customers. The aim of marketing communications is to create an air of exclusivity or prestige for the brand. Being exclusive does not mean targeting only the customer base that can afford to own the brand. Kapferer and Bastien (2009) emphasize that luxury brands have to make their story widely known and attract brand enthusiasts who are very passionate about it - exclusivity requires instant recognition.

Luxury brands marketing communications practices (see Figure 4.) consists of advertising, public relations (PR), sponsorships, event marketing, direct marketing,
fashion shows, celebrity endorsement and social media marketing (Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Yookyung 2013; Fionda & Moore 2009; Okonkwo 2007).

Figure 4. Luxury marketing communications.
(Adapted from Yookyung 2013; Fionda & Moore 2009)

Advertising is an important for reaching the mass audience. Brands want to promote their products and services, and announce new products, campaigns and collaborations (Aroche 2015; Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2014; Akar & Topsu 2013). Luxury fashion needs to be in the key magazines and broadsheets to ensure increasing awareness about the brand and the products. Luxury brands’ advertising aims to communicate brand’s story, starting from their history and development to their personality and image, products and services. Traditionally, advertisements of luxury brands are mostly featured in television, fashion magazines, business publications, airline in-flight magazines and other high-end publications (Fiona & Moore 2009; Okonkwo 2007).

Public relations involve the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill between the brand and its target audience. PR is very important and meaningful when it comes to luxury marketing. The aim of PR is to influence, and in some situations, change people’s knowledge and feelings regarding a brand and its offerings, including its identity and image. PR messages are often more credible than
paid advertising because they involve a story that frequently leaves a lasting impression with the public. They also create a continuous buzz around a brand or a product. This contributes to a positive image for the brand and fuels word-of-mouth publicity. In addition, PR can help to manage the press and walk the fine line between underexposure and overexposure, the latter something luxury brands are quite sensitive about. (Okonkwo 2007; Bulik 2001)

Sponsorships aim to achieve similar kinds of objectives than PR, such as providing a good image and reinforcing brand’s credibility. Sponsorships include the provision of financial support channeled towards funding an event, for example often relating to art initiatives, sports and goodwill. These actions generate a lasting positive impact among consumers and the public towards the brand. It is also a great source of brand loyalty especially among the consumers who have enjoyed the event or have an affinity with the specific activity that has been sponsored (Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Okonkwo 2007).

Luxury brands also arrange exclusive events to their customers and these kinds of differentiated experiences create satisfaction and loyalty to the brand (Mouradian 2015; Grigorian & Petersen 2014). Some luxury brands reward their existing top-customers with prestigious events (Heine & Berghaus 2014). These kinds of closed events possess the climate of exclusivity and help strengthen the close relationship with the participators (Fionda & Moore 2009). Direct marketing is also important for strengthening the relationships especially among existing customers. Direct marketing can be for example email marketing. Majority of luxury brands in reach and engage their clientele through email marketing which offers the opportunities for brands to receive large amount of traffic to websites and social media platforms (Solga & Grippo 2016).

The celebrity connection has been recognized as an important marketing tool for luxury brands. Influencing persons, such as musicians, sports personalities and royals, are highly important and valuable to brands, especially in the luxury fashion sector. Celebrities and it-persons have enormous power in fashion circles and they can contribute to making and breaking brands (Okonkwo 2007). In luxury fashion industry, also fashion shows are important for marketing purposes. Through internet,
fashion magazines and social media, brands compete whose shows gain the most attention. For that purpose, brands invite celebrities to the front rows and sometimes celebrities might even walk the runway. Celebrities promoting brand’s products and the appeal is creating credibility for the brand. Luxury brands often use celebrities also in advertising because they make brand’s message stand out from and from the offerings of competitors (Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Okonkwo 2007).

The rise of social media has truly changed the luxury marketing practices. Social media is disrupting the mass media industry as an advertising channel (L2 2015b). Through a rapid video innovation, social media platforms are providing the brands a platform, in which they can advertise videos instead of traditional TV model (L2 2015b) and build a brand community online. Brands’ PR actions and celebrity endorsement are also usually integrated to social media to boost the reach and leverage. In social media, celebrity endorsement can generate extensive PR leverage in very short period of time and hence opportunities for the brand (Dauriz et al. 2014). Besides, social media channels are also a good way of rewarding fans and followers by giving them access to these celebrities in the rise (Minsker 2013).

2.2 Social media marketing

2.2.1 Social media

Interactive digital platforms have really changed the landscape of marketing and the way in which marketing managers implement company’s marketing strategy (Samanta 2012). One of the significant effects of digital technology dominance is the explosion of social media, which due to its wide availability has become the more important approach to marketing communications (Seretny & Seretny 2012).

Social media includes social networks, blogs, communication forums, wikis, internet sites with videos and photos and mobile applications (Baruah 2012). Typically, social media platforms are highly accessible, scalable and reach large numbers of viewers. Internet is the platform for social media and the audience is global reaching the customers all over the world at the same (Berthon et al. 2012; Okonkwo 2007) Convenience is one of the most important advantages of digital and social media
marketing for the luxury brands. Online presence happens around the clock. Internet and social media are so extensive part of people’s everyday life and that is offering great opportunities for any company in any industry to do marketing and interact with their customers.

Within social media marketing, companies are aiming to promote themselves and their products in different social media channels (Akar & Topsu 2013). Social media marketing is direct marketing containing direct communication between a brand and a consumer. Direct marketing usually happens in real-time, and the goal of direct marketing is to lead consumer to interact with the brand and to generate a purchase behavioral response (Okonkwo 2007). Companies have an opportunity to engage with loyal customers and influence individuals’ perceptions about their products and spread information worldwide (L2 2017; Heine & Berghaus 2014; Brodie et al. 2013).

Bonson and Flores (2009) referred to social media as the “social dialogue” and firms gain benefits by providing to customers plenty of information. The flow of information is achieved through visual, written or emotional means (Alpat & Aksu 2014). Social media channels are used to learn more about a brand, to search product information and compare products, see newly launched products, comment about a brand or engage with other luxury customers (Chu et al. 2013; Hennings et al. 2012). Customers are spending quite a time online, so therefore brands need to provide the luxurious atmosphere to their customers also in social media. In addition, it is very important to be present in several medias because luxury consumers are multi-channel shoppers who might visit website and several social media platforms before making a purchase from the offline store or online store (Dauriz et al. 2014).

Internet has elevated customers’ product and brand expectations (Okonkwo 2007). Social media provide customers with instant information, and lower switching costs in terms of time, information, product comparison and purchase (Okonkwo 2007). As the result, the task of retaining the consumer attention and loyalty has become more challenging than it was before. Social media marketing should be integrated with a larger luxury strategy enriching marketer’s toolbox and aligns with the brand’s values (Heine & Berghaus 2014). Luxury marketing’s primary role is to
communicate the dream of luxury brand. Building the consistent brand image and mythology through social media, helps to make the brand desirable for customers, current and future.

2.2.2 Social media platforms

2.46 billion internet users are using social media and these figures are still expected to grow as mobile device usage and mobile social networks increasingly gain traction (Statista 2018; Dauriz et al. 2014). The most popular social media platforms usually display a high number of user accounts and strong user engagement. The leading social media platforms are available in multiple languages and enable users to connect with friends or people across geographical, political or economic borders (Baruah 2015).

Social media content includes usually text, images and videos. Text was the first social media content, which was initially primarily in the form of blogs. Blogs are websites written by individuals who maintain regular commentaries and diaries that may include text, graphics, videos, and links to other blogs and websites. These days, social networks are so much more than just text, pictures, and videos; there is a shift from the individual to the collective, as social networks leverage the power of relationships and the collective wisdom of many. (Berthon et al. 2012)

Each social media platform reaches a different audience (Aroche 2015) and each platform is effectively used different ways by luxury brands (De Souza & Sharmila 2015). Each social media platform also allows customers different ways to interact with the brand (see Figure 5.). Facebook is the most popular social media network in the world with 2,06 billion monthly active users (Statista 2017). The Facebook usage penetration among all internet users in leading markets is above 80 percent (Statista 2017). In Facebook, users can find and add friends and contacts, send messages to friends and update personal profiles. For luxury customers Facebook is also an important source of information (Dauriz et al. 2014). Facebook allows image, video and text, and it is an important channel for luxury brands because of its broad reach and versatile opportunities content-wise (L2 2015a). Of all the social media channels,
Facebook reaches a more mature age group which is seen less on other platforms (Aroche 2015).

![Platform Interactions Table]

**Figure 5. Social Media Platforms and Interactions (L2 2017).**

Luxury brands are trying to turn their Facebook presence from a one-way communication channel into a community in which they interact, initiate user participation and reply to user comments (Heine & Berghaus 2014). Study by De Souza and Sharmila (2015) demonstrated that Facebook allows for the greatest connection with brand’s customers. By having a built-in audience, luxury brands want to attract as big and consistent a viewing audience as they can. Facebook also offers an opportunity to customize messages to specific target groups and that is why for most of the luxury brands Facebook marketing is a priority. Luxury brands are active on Facebook daily (L2 2015b). For example, Gucci updates its Facebook site as often as three times a day (Kim & Ko 2012). Luxury brands’ Facebook content activates the followers to like, comment and share. Facebook also has a live feature; it lets people, public figures and company pages share live video with their followers and friends on Facebook (Facebook Live 2017).

Instagram, which has over 600 million monthly active accounts (Statista 2017), is a photo sharing platform that functions as a virtual gallery, online meeting space and pictorial narrative that is accessible from mobile. Instagram has become the social network of choice for luxury brands and their followers because of its photo- and video-friendly layout that allows visual storytelling, high engagement rates and appeals to an attractive demographic (Sherman 2015). In Instagram, the followers can like and comment the posts. Due to Instagram’s visual nature and its 70% female user base, luxury brands have gained attention and success among its users (Buquid 2013). Instagram is a social media channel for editorial and curated content (L2
2017) and the advantages as a marketing tool are obvious; pictures can be uploaded for free or as an advertisement, posted in seconds, and then seen by potential customers all over the world (Colapinto 2015). Instagram is the most engaging social media platform (Aroche 2015; Sherman 2015; L2 2014), in addition, it is also a great tool to listen the customers: customer feedback is highest on Instagram (De Souza & Sharmila 2015).

Instagram is also a key platform to build community (L2 2015b) since Instagram as a prime medium for luxury brands to increase reach and boost brand awareness. The organic increase in followers and engagement on the posts are the reasons for many brands to keep committing time and resources to enhancing their Instagram feeds (Sherman 2015). On average luxury brands are posting 10 times each week on Instagram (L2 2017). Instagram is strongest in reaching the wide global audience and getting posts and the brand noticed due to its successful hashtag culture (Aroche 2015). According to L2 report (2014), 80% of brand posts contain at least one hashtag and the average brand post will have three. Most brands use popular hashtags for the industry so their brand will come up often in people’s searches, and that way they are able to gain awareness among Instagram users (Gillett 2014).

In addition to Facebook and Instagram, luxury brands use Twitter to promote the brand, their popular promotional initiatives and the campaigns. As a platform, Twitter is a micro-blog, a social networking service that enables users to send and read very short message, restricted to 140 characters in the message (Twitter 2017). Twitter followers can add the post on their favourites and/or retweet on their own feed. Luxury brands update their Twitter page regularly, displaying an awareness of the importance of multimedia by including either a video or an image.

Twitter is a great medium for luxury brands to share relevant and timely news, particularly during key events and when fans need real-time information. It is important to tweet before, during and after key events, and post highly shareable and video and photo content. Because luxury brands are more interested in building a lasting relationship than promoting their products, they use Twitter to rather promote the brand and building their brand image (Minsker 2013). Of these three social media channels, Twitter allows for the largest volume of posts (De Souza & Sharmila 2015).
and luxury brands are constantly tweeting on Twitter (Kim & Ko 2012). Luxury customer use Twitter as a way to learn about or comment on live events in real time (Dauriz et al. 2014) and therefore Twitter is an important digital tool for companies wanting to connect with luxury customers.

2.2.3 Luxury brands entering the social media

Before the era of social media, luxury brands’ marketing was more restricted. When luxury brands wanted to improve effective communication with their customers, luxury brands looked their eyes toward social media. Marketing communications using social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have already been evaluated as business takeoff tools for luxury brands (Kim & Ko 2012). Social media allows luxury brands to spread marketing content such images, videos and information all over the world instantly creating awareness - which 76% of luxury brands social media marketers cite to be a top social media goal for them (L2 2017).

Luxury brands opened up to social media use within the operations that maintained their exclusive reputation (Ben 2011). In the beginning, luxury brands started to use social media by collaborating with carefully chosen handful of bloggers. These selected bloggers began to receive regular invitations to try products before they were launched and share their experiences via their social media channels and blogs (Ben 2011). These days, all luxury brands invite fashion bloggers to the front seats of its fashion shows, and the bloggers instantly upload feedback from the show on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. In that way, customers get to see their favorite brand modeled directly without the involvement of fashion editors or merchandisers, and the brand is able to build purchase intentions right away (Kim & Ko 2012).

Luxury brands' use of social media exploded during the 2009. Gucci created a multicultural social network site, “Guccieyeweb.com”, as Gucci launched a new sunglasses collection targeting digital generation customers (Kim & Ko 2012). Burberry was an another early player to turn user-generated content into its own social media platform “Artofthetrench.com” which was launched in 2009 (Milnes 2015). The site invited people to submit images of themselves wearing a Burberry signature trench (Minsker 2013) and the purpose was to create a platform in which
they would gain admiration for their iconic trench coat design, and same time create new Burberry fans while communicating the brand culture with customers (Kim & Ko 2012). Online sales increased after the site was launched and the participation of customers online resulted in broadened insights for Burberry as Burberry creates more stories of the brand and reflects the personal style from across the globe (Heine & Berghaus 2014; Kim & Ko 2012).

For almost a decade, Burberry has been among the first luxury brands to test new social media channels and developments: it jumped on Snapchat and Periscope, it is using Instagram’s video ads and Twitter’s buy buttons (Milnes 2015). In 2016, Burberry went beyond live streaming and shared shots of the entire collection on Snapchat before it premiered on the runway and got over 100 million impressions (Milnes 2015). These days, majority of the traditional designer houses provide live broadcasting fashion shows on Facebook page and give all fans the opportunity to enjoy the show real-time (Kapferer 2012; Kim & Ko 2012).

In 2012, Balmain’s designer Oliver Rousteig became one of the first creative directors of a luxury brands to launch a personal Instagram feed, which allowed him to reach out directly to the Balmain fans who follow him in social media. Rousteig’s photos gained tens of thousands likes and the response is multiplied when a photo included one of the stars of Kardashians, reality and social media super stars, and especially if she posts the picture to her own Instagram, with a comment about how much she loves Balmain (Colapinto 2015). Luxury brands’ designers and employees are nowadays public figures in social media. Many designers have their own profiles and they have become brands by themselves and gaining more attention to their work in the luxury company. By being active in social media they are also able to open the hidden doors of luxury brand to bigger audience and give them a peek into work behind the scenes.
2.3 Luxury brands balancing with accessibility and exclusivity

2.3.1 Focus on relationships and customer engagement

In addition to creating instant awareness in social media, luxury brands’ aim is to build and develop relationships, and maintain and improve existing customer relationships (Pentina et al. 2018; Kim & Ko 2010). 34% of luxury brands social media marketers cite creating loyalty among customers as their top social media goal (L2 2017) as the customer relationships have always been the key to the success of luxury brands (Chabot 2014).

The concept of relationship marketing is applied also into social media marketing by luxury brands. In relationship marketing, the strong individual customer-brand relationship is at the very center of the company’s strategic goal (Matthiesen & Phau 2010; Svensson 2001). Social media marketing is very customer-oriented technique rather than a product-oriented method to do marketing (Okonkwo 2007). Relationship marketing aims to build customer loyalty, which is the overall goal of luxury brands’ marketing activities (Minsker 2013; Guo-Feng & Xiao-Wen 2006).

Shani and Chalasani (1992) describe that relationship marketing is an integrated effort at identifying, maintaining and building a relationship with individual customers and continuously reinforcing that connection through direct communication and interactive contacts. The direct communication in social media platforms is an effective way to ensure that a relationship has potential to be developed (Kelly et al. 2010; Fionda & Moore 2009). There’s no rule about how much of social media content should be about brand, but De Beule (2013) found out that typically the consensus seems to be to apply the 80/20 rule. This means only 20 percent of social content is about the brand and the rest of it is focusing on building relationships with followers (Barger et al. 2016; Sachs 2016). Every brand possesses the characteristics of identity, promise, value and differentiation, and when communicated in social media, these are also the features that create the relationship between the consumer and the brand (Okonkwo 2007). Social media marketing is also an effective way to enrich the relationship to already existing luxury customers (Heine & Berghaus 2014). The two-way communication and conversation with
consumers has the major role in improving the knowledge of brands and its reputation as well as strengthening the relationship between brand and customers (Kim & Ko 2012; Kelly et al. 2010; Kim & Ko 2010; Indvik 2010).

The aim of relationship marketing is to create engagement (van Tonder & Petzer 2018). Not surprisingly, much of this brand engagement occurs online through social media (Malthouse & Hofacker 2010) since social media facilitate relationships and helps to build and strengthen customer engagement (Dhaoui 2014; Sashi 2012). Customer engagement requires the establishment of trust and commitment in buyer-seller relationships (Sashi 2012), and according Kim and Ko (2010), social media marketing is a prime channel to enhance consumer trust and intimacy with brand.

Chaffey (2007) describes customer engagement as “repeated interactions between a customer and brand that strengthen the emotional, psychological or physical investment a customer has in that brand”. Since social media facilitate relationships and helps to build and strengthen customer engagement (Dhaoui 2014; Sashi 2012). Usually engagement refers to individual’s commitment and connection to an active relationship with various marketing offers such as social media content (Abdul-Ghani et al. 2011). However, in their research Calder et al. (2009) identify two types of engagement with respect to online media: personal engagement and social-interactive engagement.

Personal engagement is individual’s connection to the brand. It can be stimulating and inspirational, social facilitative, temporal, self-esteeming and civic mindedness; intrinsic enjoyment (Kim et al 2016). In social media, personal engagement occurs in exchanges between luxury consumers and the brand through the tools provided by social media platforms (likes, shares, comments) with the goal to stay current on the brand's updates (Pentina et al. 2018). Other consumer–brand interactions involve asking and answering questions and posting textual comments and visuals on the brand's wall (Pentina et al. 2018).

Social-interactive engagement is described to be utilitarian, participative and sociating (Kim et al 2016). Social-interactive engagement occurs in social media based brand communities, in which consumer engagement consists of not only the
communications and interactions between consumers and the brand but also between other consumers of the same community. Customers engaged with brand communities online feel more connected to their brands, trust their preferred brands more, have higher brand satisfaction, and are more brand loyal (Harrigan et al. 2016; Brodie et al. 2013; Jahn & Kunz 2012).

It is important for luxury brands to understand how to create engagement through social media. In social media content, luxury brands’ marketing is not about campaigning - it is about building long-term and personal relationships resulting engagement. Many researchers (Pentina 2018; Brodie et al. 2013; Hollebeek 2011; Calder et al. 2009) commonly agree that social media engagement develops from experiencing in social media (Calder et al. 2009). The engagement generates in the process of customer interactions with the brand and during experiences in social media.

Customer engagement is crucial for luxury brands. Customer engagement drive purchase decisions, interaction frequency, involvement and participation over time (Sashi 2012) and engaged customers contribute to greater firm revenue (Kumar & Pansari 2016; Shevlin 2007). Engaged customers are also likely to recommend products to others by word-of-mouth, blogs, social networking, commenting on websites, and even add value by providing user-generated content (Sashi 2012). Active consumer engagement can lead to increase in feelings of, trust, satisfaction, connection and loyalty to the brand (Brodie et al. 2013). When customers share their delight or loyalty in interactions with others in their social networks and become advocates for the brand (Sashi 2012).

Customer engagement expands the role of customers by including them in the value adding process as co-creators of value. In many ways customer engagement expands the traditional role played by customers and includes them in the value-adding process by helping sellers understand customer needs, participating in the product development process, providing feedback on strategies and products (Sashi 2012; Hanna et al. 2011; Shevlin 2007).
2.3.2 Luxury brands creating experiences

One of the goals of social media marketing is to enhance the brand’s perception in customers’ mind. Social media marketing can be an indispensable brand power booster, when expertly executed and managed. These days, customers have exceptionally high expectations for luxury brands on social media. One way to satisfy these needs is to offer customers luxury experiences.

Experiences are at the core of luxury brands’ marketing strategy (Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Atwal & Williams 2009; Berthon et al. 2009; Frow & Payne 2007). Experiences engage customers and connect them emotionally to the brand (Calder et al. 2009; Pine & Gilmore 1998). Traditionally experiences are linked to many aspects of luxury brands, such as customer service, in-store experiences and purchasing rituals. But engagement also develops from digital experiences when luxury brands are able to offer experiences for their customers in social media as well (Calder et al. 2009; Higgins 2006).

Calder (2009) describes experiences as “the thoughts and feelings consumers get about what is happening when they are doing something “. Experiencing something positively feeling of attraction towards the brand. Through social media customers are able to experience i.e. entertainment, self-expression, self-empowerment, deep connection and feel of uniqueness (Pentina et al. 2018; Hope 2016; Woolley 2013). These experiences stimulate higher levels of customer–brand-related communication and create engagement between the customer and the brand (Pentina et al. 2018). Okonkwo (2009) also writes about hedonic and emotional experiences, which commonly linked to specifically luxury brands’ social media marketing (Okonkwo 2009). The hedonic experience can be pleasure or pain (Calder 2008). Higgins (2006) writes about the experience of a motivational force to make something happen (experienced as a force of attraction). In social media platforms, the motivational force experience leads to interaction, such as like, share, tweet or commenting.

One of the challenges that luxury brands face in social media marketing is the retention of the exclusivity and prestige qualities while pushing products
commercial-wise (Okonkwo 2007). Social media channel needs to maintain brand integrity and image, and therefore the exclusive content is a must (Brandwatch 2015). Luxury customers need to feel special, and the way to reinforce that feeling is to provide them exclusive content in an exclusive space. That way luxury customer can feel very connected to the brand, and because of that, they feel as if the brand is personalized to them. One of the core reasons people to prefer luxury brands is because they like to feel unique. When the content is created specially to desired target customer, the content creates powerful experience of uniqueness, a deeper feeling of connection and singularity to the luxury customer (Woolley 2013).

In Facebook pages and Instagram, luxury brands are able to give the fans a closer look at the brand in the form of a more personal and authentic content than what the formal advertising campaigns convey (Hope 2016). Examples of this kind of content are videos and pictures from behind-the-scenes or the making-of certain product videos. The idea is to create the feeling of intimacy and to make the viewer feel special, as the content is exclusive to the users of the site (Hope 2016; Gillett 2014; Ikeler & Jackson 2010). According to Hope (2016), the appeal to the consumers is evident: “they think they’re getting a peek inside a famously exclusive and private world”. In reality, everything they see on luxury brands’ social media is highly thought through and controlled.

Social media platforms allow luxury brands to create own communities and to offer selective content for the community members. Luxury brands can, for example, provide exclusive content to their fans in Facebook. In 2011 Burberry released a new fragrance and shared samples with its Facebook community before the scent was available for purchase. This kind of selective content is driving the brand’s sense of exclusivity. The closed communities possess the climate of intimacy and help strengthen the close relationships with the participators (Heine & Berghaus 2014). Shared special experiences among fellow luxury customers can also strengthen the brand community by facilitating shared customer experiences in ways that alter dynamic characteristics and the richness of social context in a brand community (McAlexander et al 2002). In addition, these prestigious experiences also create satisfaction and loyalty to the brand (Mouradian 2015; Grigorian & Petersen 2014).
One way to support the exclusive quality of the luxury brand, is through expert customer service experience in social media. High-touch, expert service is extremely important in the perception of luxury (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2014; Ko et al. 2009; Okonkwo 2007). 17% of luxury brands social media marketers even cite customer service a top social media goal (L2 2017). Brands need to make the luxury customers to feel like their customer service experience in social media happens in real time and is always unique. Good customer service experiences can also lead to motivational force to interact and spread positive word-of mouth in customer communities and other consumer-to-consumer channels.

2.3.3 The content reflecting luxury qualities

In addition to creating experiences and engaging with the current and potential new customers, the content has a crucial role when luxury brands are trying to find the balance between accessibility and exclusivity in social media. Luxury marketers can preserve their unique positioning in social media by offering top-quality visual content reinforcing the desired brand associations. By creating premium and aesthetically inspiring social media content, luxury brands will encourage more mindful appreciation on the part of their customers and avoid negative and brand-irrelevant associations. By offering quality and best-of-class visual content, luxury brands also evoke emotional interactions, such comments and sharing, and the viral spread of their own messages (Pentina et al. 2018). It is important that the content includes a visual element since posts with only are poor for generating customer engagement (Barker et al. 2016; Kim et al. 2015).

The cool and trendy yet luxurious elements of the brand should be visible also in social media platforms. If the brand presence doesn’t reflect superior luxury quality, it might even do more harm than good for a brand. Top performers on social media marketing emphasize quality over quantity, ensuring each post is carefully crafted and timed for maximum impact (Albane 2017; Heine & Berghaus 2014; Okonkwo 2007). Study by Pentina et al (2018) confirms that to support perceptions of exclusivity and premium quality, luxury brands should limit their social media feeds and post infrequently, with an emphasis on perfection.
The content is playing a key role in sustaining luxury brand’s image in social media. The content elements, including colour scheme, text, images, graphics, sound and video, are expected to be well coordinated. In luxury marketing experiences are essential, and differentiated experiences are possibility to strengthen the brand in social media (Grigorian & Petersen 2014). It is important for a luxury brand also provide other pleasant features that contribute to an enhanced customer experience. The pleasant cognitions will connect customers to the brand in a personal, memorable way (Gupta & Vajik 2000) and form emotional connection between the brand and the customers (Lindström 2005). As luxury brands are frequently positioned as works of art, the hedonic and aesthetic experiences may uniquely characterize engagement with luxury brands’ social media content (Pentina et al. 2018)

Brand communication usually focuses on two senses – sight and sound. The colour scheme is very important visual element of social media marketing. The coordinated colour scheme in all digital channels helps the brand to acquire for a balanced result. The colour scheme decision is important and with the colour branding the brand can convey information and the desired brand identity for customers (Gobe 2009). High quality images and pictures are usually accompanied by text, which should ideally be short and in suitable format. The text font size, style, clarity of language and the tone of voice should be applied with consistency according to the taste of luxury customers. Language should be clear, concise, and consistent in its tone through all the digital presentation and social media channels. The communication style needs to go well with the general image of the luxury industry that tries to highlight the unique and exclusive nature of the products. The sound is also an effective tool to use in digital marketing. The sound can evoke and stimulate different feelings in luxury customers. Influence on customer’s mood can be achieved by using different kinds of music type, tempo, volume pitch and other elements. Sound effects can entertain, motivate or even irritate the luxury customer, and therefore it is important that the sound is applied with the focus on the brand personality and should be in line with the key associations of the brand and its customer expectations. (Albane 2017; Okonkwo 2007; Lindström 2005)
One of the most important visual elements in the digital world is the video. Especially in the luxury industry, the leading luxury brands are investing in video as their main source of content (Aliferis 2017). The use of short and relevant video clips adds colour and excitement to the digital luxury atmosphere. Video clips also contribute to the stickiness, memory recollection and repeat visits; they create a feeling of presence and interaction (Okonkwo 2007). Video content can be, for example, the introduction of brand’s product manufacturing process or videos from brand’s ambassadors. Louis Vuitton has an animation starring their current season products in their websites and Gucci has introduced an animated picture story of their production. Popular video content among luxury brands are videos from fashion shows, behind-the-scenes clips from the show backstage, and interviews with the creative directors and employees at different times.

Luxury brands need to figure out the way to present their brand on social media in interesting and innovative way through the content. Innovativeness and creativity are the core characterises of luxury brands, and the more the content reflects these qualities the more participation and stronger associations the brand achieves. One way to demonstrate the innovation, is to share the videos of the behind-the-scenes creative processes and thus luxury brands are able to convey the spirit of invention in social media and show the logic of their collections’ creation. (Pentina et al. 2018)

2.3.4 Storytelling in social media

The most important element for luxury brands on social media seems to be their storytelling abilities when it comes to their products and brand heritage, rather than the number of social media posts (Albane 2017; Kim et al. 2016; Ikeler & Jackson 2010; Megehee & Woodside 2010). Storytelling is not just about telling the story behind the brand but also behind the creation process or the designer. The winning concept of social media use in brand’s marketing strategy is to tell a great story and thus create engagement. Social media is an excellent platform for innovative storytelling and articulating the mood of the brand (Sherman 2015; Ikeler & Jackson 2010). It is possible to go beyond aesthetics to create marketing campaigns that add value, such as entertainment, education and utility, for luxury customers (Ikeler & Jackson 2010).
Luxury brands are frequently illustrating their brand history and story to help contribute to the sense of craft. They are providing social media users with a story about what makes the brand special which makes the purchase decision more tempting and compelling (Ikeler & Jackson 2010). In the current market, brands have an opportunity to focus on their history, the fundamental brand values, that make them a luxury brand (Kautsy 2009). They don’t push consumers to buy products, but rather communicate the legends associated with the brand (Grigorian & Petersen 2014), giving their customers a reason to engage with the brand even deeper (Ikeler & Jackson 2010).

Perfume advertisements are good examples of how storytelling has always been a part of selling the glamour behind a luxury brand (Ben 2011). Social media offers an opportunity for the luxury experience to be even richer and more multidimensional. A brand may choose to create a mix of virtual and real experiences to create a story, intertwining the information relayed on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube (Ben 2011). Chanel’s “Chanel Inside” video series is a good example of powerful brand storytelling done via social media. These videos teach viewers about the history and identity of the brand; they are entertaining and – almost like art – they captivate users by their beauty and sophistication (Heine & Berghaus 2014).

Luxury brands need the content and stories for successful social media marketing (Heine & Berghaus 2014; Ikeler & Jackson 2010). Luxury is all about storytelling and social media accomplishes that by allowing the brand to convey its story in a two-way conversation with consumers (Indvik 2010). Myth telling is an integral component of luxury brands storytelling. Myth telling is a subtle narration of the story and heritage of the brand. Luxury brands often do this by inducing a certain degree of mystery, or by making a connection with art to tell the myths in an elevated way (Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Hagtvedt & Patrick 2008). To emphasize their uniqueness, luxury brands’ social media content should highlight the unique manufacturing know-how and the method of production with a shade of mystery. References to the past and glorious brand history and heritage will then underscore the desired brand meaning (Pentina et al 2018).
2.4 Theoretical framework

The expansion of digital marketing tools has totally changed the landscape of consumer behavior and the way the luxury business is conducted. At first, luxury companies were highly resistant because accessibility through internet and social media could have a strong negative impact on the innate attributes of luxury such as prestige and exclusivity (Khelladi & Castellano 2016; Kim & Ko 2012; Okonkwo 2007). Brands needed to find the right balance between exclusivity and accessibility within social media marketing (Brandwatch 2015; Zheng 2012; Okonkwo 2007), because in the luxury sector, social media plays a key role in a brand's success (Phan et al. 2011).

Rather than focusing on the product and advertising aspect of a brand’s offerings, the brands have a strong concentration on the customer experience and relationship building through social media marketing. Luxury is about exclusivity, product excellence, high quality service and fundamentally a brand promise. Luxury brands should replicate the unique identity, image, and signature style that the brand uses in its offline existence into their social media presence.

Luxury brands’ social media marketing is about of creating exceptional experiences in the social media platforms. Luxury brands are able to create experiences by producing high quality content which reflects the prestige qualities of luxury. Luxurious content consists of high quality photos and pictures, videos and animations, and coordinated and harmonious colour scheme. The communications with the customers should be made with a clear and concise tone of voice. The literature also revealed that luxury brands often use heavy storytelling and myth telling techniques in their social media marketing (Albane 2017; Kim et al. 2016; Megehee & Woodside 2010). In addition, through beautiful customer service experiences, the brands are able to maintain the customer service experience also in social media, and thus strengthening the engagement.

Only a few luxury customers used to get an invitation to the fashion shows. Social media now make it possible for luxury brands to send live stream and allow the fans to enjoy the fashion show. Luxury brands can also create memorable experiences in
social media by posting behind the scenes material which allows the viewer get a sneak peek behind the closed doors of the brand. Then the customer can feel privileged and learn, for example, about the designer and the manufacturing process. The exclusive content in exclusive space, like closed social media community, makes the community member to feel unique and connected to the brand and also to other community members.

The developed framework model draws on the literature discussed on the previous chapters and answers the research question 1: How luxury brands are creating experiences and engagement through social media content? The theoretical framework (see Figure 6.) presents how the social media content is linked to online luxury experiences and customer engagement. The framework suggests that digital engagement develops from digital experiences and the social media content is creating experiences for the customers. Luxury brands’ social media marketing is about creating a virtual environment that appeals to the senses and results in experiences which will further create engagement to the brand and the brand community. The rich and luxurious content will evoke hedonic and empowering emotions, which will eventually translate into engagement and loyalty to the brand. The literature also revealed that the engagement, further, has a direct correlation to the performance and the economic status of the brand. The brands who are utilizing social media marketing have a higher turnover because of the social media engagement has a direct influence on both online and in-store sales (Aroche 2015; Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2014; Samanta 2012; Bonson & Flores 2009).
Figure 6. Theoretical Framework. Luxury brands creating luxury experiences and customer engagement through social media content.

Social Media Content

- Aesthetically inspiring visuals
- Top-quality photos & pictures
- Cool, trendy & luxurious elements
- Videos & animations
- Live streaming
- Behind the scenes material
- Coordinated colour scheme
- Clear, concise & consistent language
- Evoking & stimulating sound
- Storytelling & Myth telling

Luxury Experiences

- Entertainment
- Self-expression
- Self-empowerment
- Connection & singularity
- Feeling of uniqueness
- Hedonic and emotional experiences
- Motivational force
- Feeling of intimacy
- Customer service
- Learning

Customer Engagement
3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology of the study. The aim of the empirical research is to analyze the visual content of the chosen social media platforms and find the kind of content luxury brands are producing in order to engage in social media. To answer the second research question of the study, a qualitative content analysis approach has been chosen. Below, the methodological choices for the data collection and analysis are presented.

3.1 Research method

3.1.1 Content Analysis

In the previous chapter, the literature review presented how luxury brands are able to create customer engagement in social media. Combining the content, luxury experiences and customer engagement in social media, the chapter provided a theoretical framework for this study. The purpose of the research is to put the theory into perspective and investigate luxury brands’ social media content, and then identify the content elements creating luxury experiences and driving customer engagement in social media platforms.

In order to analyze the social media content and to find the success factors of luxury brands’ social media content, the qualitative research is performed. A qualitative study aims at gathering in-depth understanding the why and how questions associated with the given phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). The aim of data collection is to access and collect the primary data which is relevant to the study and the research problem. Qualitative research contributes to an understanding of the phenomena of the study and the human condition in different contexts and of a perceived situation (Bengtsson 2015). Qualitative method’s advantage is the closeness to data.

The aim of the study is to find what content tactics marketers of luxury brands use to engage their fans. As presented in the introduction of the thesis, the empirical
research aims to answer the research question 2: What kind of content is engaging luxury customers in social media?.

The main purpose of content analysis is to evaluate what kind of content luxury brands produce in order to create experiences in social media for the customers, and thus generate brand engagement. To address the research question, a content analysis is performed to gain information of the content. Content analysis is especially suitable method for studying interactive media, such websites, social (networking) media, e-commerce, blogs and other microblogs, other online activities and topics related to video gaming (Neuendorf 2017; Ashley & Tuten 2015). Content analysis a method of identifying, coding, and categorizing the qualitative data and primary tool for making sense of the content because the methodology itself strictly examines the content of messages.

The research is carried out as an empirical study on a sample of posts, created by three different luxury brands in three different social media platforms. In qualitative content analysis, data is handled as units, then coded and after that categorized. For categorizing the data, each social media posts is investigated as one unit. Because this research analyses the visual posts by Balmuir, Minna Parikka and Sarpaneva Watches, the visual presentation of data is coded. Coding followed open coding method in which the data are handled analytically. The open coding method is suitable for inductive and deductive processes understanding and translating visual images in to text (Flick et al. 2004). Both inductive and deductive content analysis processes involve three main phases: preparation, organization, and reporting of results (Elo et al. 2014).

In open coding method, first the data units are shortly described textually (Flick et al. 2004). In this stage posts were individually analyzed and codes were created for each post according to what is seen in the in the post. For open coding it mostly dependent on literally stating what is seen in the visual posts (Rose 2001). The codes were based on the theoretical literature research and therefore are also relevant to the research question. When the data is presented in words, then it is possible to draw some interpretation of the results (Bengtsson 2015). After the coding, the data was categorized under the themes derived from theory review.
The content analysis is conducted to Balmuir’s, Minna Parikka’s and Sarpaneva Watches’ Facebook pages, their Instagram accounts and Twitter accounts. These three Finnish luxury brands are presented in chapter 3.3. In each of these platforms, images, photos or videos are featured with textual descriptions so each post on Facebook page, Instagram and Twitter accounts exemplifies how the content embodies and how it resonates with its audience. This study also focuses on customers engagement with the posts represented by the number of likes, the number of comments and the number of shares/retweets in each post. The engagement rates of each posts are compared in order to find social media posts with the highest engagement rates. The research also allows to investigate the engagement rates in different social media platforms because earlier studies (i.e. Voorveld et al. 2018; Brodie et al. 2011) has shown that on social media, the context and the platform (not the content) is in a key role determining marketing effectiveness.

3.1.2 Measuring engagement

The content shared on social media platforms can take various forms, such as text, pictures, photos, videos or links. The content that appears on the brand’s timeline to create engagement among the followers and the brand community (Dhaou 2014). Numbers of likes, comments and shares, are effective metrics of social media marketing performance (Peters et al. 2013). The main purpose of the research is to study the relationship between different types and characteristics of social media posts and the degree of user engagement they generate. In social media, customer engagement can be measured as actions that customers take on social media in response to brand-related content (see Figure 7.): reacting to content (e.g. likes), commenting on content (e.g. Facebook and Instagram comments, Twitter replies) and sharing content with others (e.g. Facebook shares, Twitter retweets).
Customer Engagement

![Diagram showing Reacting to Content, Commenting on Content, and Sharing Content]

Figure 7. Customer engagement on social media platforms.

Visiting the social media platform is not engagement (Pentina et al. 2018), it only means that customer consumed online content but did not visibly engaged with it. Liking, commenting and sharing are visible interactions to others, thus impacting the consumer's virtual identity, and as such, can be qualified as engagement behavior and represents a certain level of commitment to the brand.

Liking is low effort customer engagement behavior. Liking can increase brand awareness and popularity but do not appear to present a risk of augmenting brand associations to a large degree. Commenting is a slightly more active engagement behavior, directed toward the brand, and consists of leaving comments on the brand's post in social media. Customers interact with the brand in a textual format to respond to the brand's posts, exchange information or contribute their opinions, knowing that their actions are also visible to other social media community members. Sharing is more stronger engagement than liking and commenting. By sharing the content, the person also share his or her interest with others, often with like-minded luxury fans. (Pentina et al. 2018)

Engagement rate is a measure of quality and efficiency of social media efforts and it is calculated as engagement volume divided by the number of users that could have triggered the action (Yamakuchi 2014; Smitha 2013). The base volume represent the
audience, the number of followers, who get direct exposure to posted content. This calculation for engagement rate can also be referred to as engagement as a percentage of total fans (Smitha 2013).

\[
Engagement \text{ Rate} = \frac{Engagement \text{ Volume}}{Base \text{ Volume}}
\]

Engagement/followers represents engagement per follower or fan. It has advantages and drawbacks (see Table 1). It has the benefit of being easy to calculate, even for competitive properties where reach information is unavailable. Engagement rate/follower is useful for measure of directional success and how much the social media efforts are resonating with the audience. Engagement rate/followers also allows to draw meaningful insights and conclusions and the comparison between brands because it is relative to total follower base (Yamakuchi 2014; Smitha 2013).

Table 1. Benefits and drawbacks of engagement rate metrics per follower (Yamakuchi 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Post-level reach data is unavailable</td>
<td>o Relatively stable metric for measuring engagement activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Measuring engagement rate specifically with respect to followers</td>
<td>o Useful for assessing “quality” of follower base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drawbacks</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Does not take into account viral reach (non-follower engagement)</td>
<td>o Should be viewed in conjunction with growth in number of followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Not very different from measuring engagement for short timescales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problem with engagement rate/follower is that the reach of a post can extend beyond the follower base via viral amplification. However, only the brands’ own marketing personnel has an access to data of the total reach of the posts. In this research, when measuring the engagement rate, the organic activity is separated from paid activity. Since paid promotions greatly impact the engagement and the reach of a post, combining paid activity with organic engagement would produce misleading results (Yamakuchi 2014).

In order to ensure similar conditions for storing the data and measuring each post’s engagement rate, the data collection was made daily around the same time in the late evening. This is because, the reach of a social media post is high right after posting and drops rapidly after couple of hours. Wisemetrics (2013) published a study that
found in 2 hours and 30 minutes, a Facebook post usually hit 75% of its maximum impressions, and 75% of engagement happens within the first 5 hours. A median tweet reaches this 75% mark in less than 3 hours (Wisemetrics 2014). In Instagram, 50% of all Instagram post engagement happens in the first hour, and 75% of engagement is reached in 8 hours (Takumi 2016).

3.2 Research process and data collection

The empirical research process started after choosing the suitable research method and planning the data collection. The data collection included collecting and storing all the social media posts from three Finnish luxury brands: Balmuir, Minna Parikka and Sarpaneva watches. The posts were collected from brands' Facebook pages, Instagram feeds and Twitter feeds in the evening around the same time each day. The data collection was made from 26th March 2018 to 15th May 2018. Altogether 88 posts were collected. The data was stored in Excel sheets and included the all content posted, such picture or video, textual content, links and hashtags. In addition, the following customer engagement actions were collected:

- The number of likes = The number of likes was measured by counting the number of likes as indicated in each post
- The number of comments = The number of shares was measured by counting the number of shares as indicated in each post
- The number of shares = The number of shares was measured by counting the number of shares as indicated in each post

These customers’ actions together represent the engagement volume for measuring the engagement rate. Also, the amount of base volume (number of followers) was collected and stored each day. When the data was collected, firstly the form of the post (text, picture, photo, video or link) was defined. Then a description of every posts was made and the engagement rate calculated. After that the data was categorized according to typical luxury social media content elements derived from literature review (see Figure 8). The attention was paid into post type, type of appeal,
type of emotion/experience, type of information, tone of voice and the presence of a link. Each brand’s data was handled separately on different Excel sheets.

Figure 8. Social media content elements.

After the data was categorized, engagement rates comparison between the platforms and different type of content could be made. Because engagement rate is relative to follower base and was calculated in a similar way, direct comparison between posts, categories, brands and could be made in a valid way.

3.3 Introduction of studied brands

The studied companies were chosen for the research because they all are Finnish luxury brands operating in personal luxury category. The Finnish luxury brands’ marketing activities in social media is rarely studied previously. In addition, all the studied brands have a recognizable brand personality that is reflected throughout their marketing and social media presence.

Balmuir Wheslyn Group Oy is Finnish family owned company, founded by Heidi and Juha Jaara in 2007 in Oulu. Balmuir is a lifestyle brand offering interior decoration items and fashion accessories made from the finest natural materials. Balmuir’s most important values are the passion for genuine materials and appreciation for traditional and fine craftsmanship. Balmuir highlights, as a luxury brand, that their corner stones of the whole business are the product quality, excellent customer service, joy of doing and the innovation and the creation process. Balmuir’s
products are sold in their flagship stores in Oulu, Helsinki and Stockholm. In addition, products are sold in luxury department stores in over 70 countries and in several webstores. The products are widely used also in high end hotels and restaurant projects. (Balmuir.com)

Currently company has 25 employees. Balmuir doesn’t manufacture its products, but instead uses suppliers for the production, so the company doesn’t have its own factory or production personnel. All Balmuir products are manufactured by family run companies. The main criteria for choosing the supplier are the highest quality craftsmanship, ability and history of processing the chosen raw material and reputation of the company. Balmuir follows and controls the entire production chain starting from the source of the raw material. Balmuir has been growing strongly during the past eleven years and spreading to the new markets. In 2016, Balmuir recorded around 5 million euros turnover. (Balmuir.com)

Minna Parikka Shoes Oy is company founded in 2005 in Helsinki by Minna Parikka. Minna knew already at the age of 15 that she wanted to became shoe designer. She moved to England at 19 and pursued a degree in footwear design. After returning to Helsinki, she launched her own shoe brand Minna Parikka. Minna sees that shoes make miracles - shoes can change how a person looks, feels and is seen by others. Minna says that shoes aren’t just symbols of power – they’re the Holy Grail. The shoes are crafted in Spain from the finest materials and are manufactured using Italian and Spanish leathers and all the components from sole to shoe lace come from European suppliers. (Minnaparikka.com)

Minna Parikka’s flagship store called Minna Parikka Universum opened in 2012 in Helsinki. Her designs are sold in 25 different countries in some of the best fashion retailers, such as Harrods, Selfridges, Liberty London, Le Bon Marché, Galeries Lafayette and Harvey Nichols. In addition, 27 webstores are carrying Minna’s shoes in their assortment. The brand’s iconic bunny-eared styles have been spotted on world famous celebrities, such Cara Delevingne, Taylor Swift, Kylie Jenner and Lady Gaga. In 2016, Minna Parikka launched an own line for children. The company has grown rapidly during the last few years and is currently employing 22 people with over 3.5 million euro turnover. (Minnaparikka.com)
Sarpaneva Watches is Finnish luxury watch brand founded by the designer Stepan Sarpaneva in 2003. Sarpaneva is a Finnish family with a long heritage of craftsmanship. Stepan Sarpaneva graduated from the Finnish School of Watchmaking and then moved to Switzerland to further his studies at watchmaking institution WOSTEP. He has worked for several prestigious watchmakers including Piaget, Parmigiani, Vianney Halter and Christophe Claret before establishing his own brand. (Sarpanevawatches.com)

Sarpaneva has specialized in the crafting of complicated timepieces. Sarpaneva has his own work studio in Helsinki, where he individually handcrafts each watch at the workshop. Sarpaneva’s value is superior quality combined with unique design which ensures that every watch will last a lifetime. Sarpaneva Watches has grown year after year, and the turnover was around 0.7 million euros in 2016. (Sarpanevawatches.com)
4 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this section the data analysis and the findings of the study will be presented. According to the theoretical findings, luxury brands are creating luxury experiences for their customers through the social media content. Furthermore, through the experiences, brands are able to engage the customers to the brand and develop loyalty and the relationships. The aim of the empirical research is to find the answer to the research question 2: What kind of content is engaging luxury customers in social media?

In this chapter, social media content and the content elements from the empirical data collection will be presented. The collected data was coded according the categories derived from theoretical literature review. The collected data will be analyzed and discussed with concrete content examples. After that, the comparison of engagement rates for each platforms and content categories is performed. This is done for finding the form of the post and the content elements efficiently generating engagement, and on the other hand, what kind of content is not.

4.1 Balmuir in social media

Balmuir has an official profile in each three research platforms. The number of followers in platforms are presented in Table 3. Balmuir’s followers increased by 55 persons in Facebook (from 21475 to 21530) and around 100 peoples in Instagram (from 19500 to 19600) in three weeks. In Twitter the number of followers remained the same.

During the three weeks data collection, Balmuir posted 15 times in Facebook. 13 posts included a photo and two posts were video. In Instagram, Balmuir posted 18 posts: 16 photos and two videos. In three weeks, Balmuir tweeted twice and both tweets were retweets from others.
Table 2. Balmuir’s social media followers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile name</th>
<th>Balmuir</th>
<th>balmuir</th>
<th>Balmuir</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Followers 26.3. 2018</td>
<td>21475</td>
<td>19500</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers 15.4. 2018</td>
<td>21530</td>
<td>19600</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase of Followers</td>
<td>+55</td>
<td>+100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts 26.3.-15.4. 2018</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to Balmuir brand’ official social media profiles, Balmuir has many additional profiles. All three flagship stores have their own profiles in Facebook: Balmuir Brands Store Oulu Facebook page has 2436 followers, Balmuir Brand Store Helsinki Facebook page 1707 followers and Balmuir Brand Store Stockholm Facebook page 79 followers. Balmuir has also own profile for international customers in Facebook: Balmuir International Facebook page with 1154 followers. In Instagram, Balmuir has the official brand account, and accounts for Helsinki’s and Stockholm’s flagship stores: Balmuir Brand Store Helsinki (1098 followers) and Balmuir Brands store Stockholm (53 followers). These additional profiles shares same material as the official profile, and in addition, relevant posts for the store (discounts, opening hours etc.)

These days, as the theoretical research revealed, it is popular that designers and directors have also their own personal profiles in social media. Balmuir’s founder and Managing Director Heidi Jaari is active in professional networking site Linkedin, in which she regularly posts about Balmuir. She has given her face for Balmuir in media, however her Facebook and Instagram profiles are not public.
4.2 Minna Parikka in social media

Minna Parikka has an official profile in Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The follower numbers for Minna Parikka in each platforms are presented in Table 5. During the three weeks period, the number of followers increased 106 persons in Facebook from 28668 to 28774 persons. In Instagram, Minna Parikka got a big increase to followers: 900 persons from 72500 to 73400 persons. In Twitter the number of followers increased by seven persons. In addition to official brand profiles, the flagship store has own page in Facebook: Minna Parikka Universum (637 likes).

During the data collection, Minna Parikka posted six posts in Facebook. Five of the posts were photo posts (with multiple photos at the same time) and one video. In Instagram, Minna Parikka posted 20 photos and two videos. Minna Parikka tweeted 5 times and these tweets included only text.

Table 3. Minna Parikka’s social media followers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile name</th>
<th>MINNA PARIKKA</th>
<th>minnaparikkashoes</th>
<th>Minna Parikka</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Followers 26.3.2018</td>
<td>28668</td>
<td>72500</td>
<td>2609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers 15.4.2018</td>
<td>28774</td>
<td>73400</td>
<td>2616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase of Followers</td>
<td>+106</td>
<td>+900</td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of posts 26.3.-15.4.2018</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Sarpaneva Watches in social media

Sarpaneva Watches has an official profile in Facebook and Instagram. Sarpaneva Watches brand doesn’t have a Twitter account. However, the designer Stephan
Sarpaneva has a Twitter account, in which he used to tweet about Sarpaneva Watches (last tweeted 26th October 2016). The numbers of followers for Facebook and Instagram are presented in Table 7. During the data collection, Sarpaneva Watches got 10 new followers in Facebook (from 12863 to 12873) and around 100 new followers in Instagram (from 19600 to 19700). In addition to Sarpaneva Watches profile in Instagram, Stephan Sarpaneva has own profile for SUF Helsinki (SarpanevaUhrenFabrik). It is a watch brand dedicated to Finland and the Finnish determination known as sisu. SUF Helsinki Instagram profile has 1726 followers.

During the data collection, Sarpaneva Watches posted 12 times in Facebook. Eight posts were photos, three posts were a share of a link and one post was a photo collection of a trade fair trip to Baselworld, which is a watch and jewelry trade show in Switzerland. In Instagram, Sarpaneva Watches posted eight photos in three weeks.

**Table 4. Sarpaneva Watches’ social media followers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile name</th>
<th>Sarpaneva Watches</th>
<th>Sarpaneva Watches</th>
<th>-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Followers 26.3. 2018</td>
<td>12863</td>
<td>19600</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers 15.4. 2018</td>
<td>12873</td>
<td>19700</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase of Followers</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>+100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of posts 26.3.-15.4. 2018</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.4 Social media content and luxury experiences**

Below, the collected data is analyzed according the content elements and categories derived from theory research findings. To demonstrate the content elements, also examples are presented. Luxury brands’ content and communicated brand image needs to be above all exclusive and constantly recognizable in all social media
platforms, and therefore, the way studied brands are communicating their values and how their personal characteristics are visible in the content, are also covered in the analysis.

4.4.1 Aesthetically inspiring visuals

When marketing luxury products, photos are one of the best mediums for evoking the aspirational emotions that are connected to wearing designer clothing or experiencing something exclusive. The style of each brands’ social media presence was mostly elegant by nature. Below (see Figure 9.) are the examples of inspiring visuals by Balmuir posted in Facebook and Instagram. In the photos, Balmuir’s products are presented in real life settings, from where the viewer can get inspiration and motivation how to use the products and how to create beautiful table setting in her or his own home. In Instagram, the brand can use its feed to represent a board of inspiration, and thus raise the engagement of Instagram community. At best, by posting evocating images and setting products into aspirational environments brands might able to express their mission through images to their customers.

![Figure 9. Examples of aesthetically inspiring photos by Balmuir.](image)

4.4.2 Top-quality photos & pictures

It is crucial for luxury brands, that they post high quality photos on social media platforms. The quality of photos and pictures must reflect the prestige qualities of the brand. The following examples (see Figure 10.) by Sarpaneva Watches are
presenting top-quality of photos in which every little detail of handmade watch can be observed.

The photos are reflecting the high value of the watches and the durable and luxurious quality. The viewer must be able to feel the time, the effort and the craftsmanship of the manufacturing process. Sarpaneva Watches presence in social media reflects the timeless and classic style as these watches are meant to last for a lifetime. Sarpaneva Watches has make a strategic decision that it mainly posts photos featuring the products, and in that case, the quality of closeup photos is emphasized. However, the luxurious elements such as the stylish suit of a business man or passport cover can be identified in the background which is enhancing luxury nature of the photos.

![Examples of high-quality photos by Sarpaneva Watches.](image)

4.4.3 Cool, trendy & luxurious elements

The following three posts (see Figure 11.) from Balmuir are examples of presence of luxurious elements. Champagne bottles in the photos makes them look luxurious, as bubbling champagne is a distinctive mark of joy and luxury. The photo from sunny resort reflects travelling and leisure, again a distinctive of luxurious lifestyle. The viewer can relate to the content and imagine herself or himself in that soft robe under
the sun. Balmuir often use also luxurious materials in their photos, such crystal, glass and leather, and thus is able to add a hint of luxury in the posts. The luxurious element are creating hedonic experiences for the viewer and allows him or her to dream and fantasize.

Figure 11. Examples of luxurious content elements by Balmuir.

The following three posts from Minna Parikka’s social media platforms (see Figure 12), posted in Facebook and Instagram, are examples of the prestigious and trendy colors. The photos represent glamour and elegance. Velvet, satin, leather and tulle are definite markers of luxury, material wealth and sophistication. The glamorous and feminine colours of emerald and ruby in the color psychology implies affluence. In addition, these bright colours and the powdery nude trendy colours at the moment. De Vries et al. (2012) describe that bright colours add vividness of the posts, which relates to how stimulating the posts are for the different senses. The stimulation of senses, furthermore, are developing different experiences such self-expression, self-empowerment, connection and singularity.
Figure 12. Examples of cool, trendy and luxurious content elements by Minna Parikka.

4.4.4 Videos & animations

Theory review highlighted that one of the most important element in the digital world is the video. Videos add colour and excitement to the digital luxury atmosphere: videos create a feeling of presence and interaction (Okonkwo 2007). Aliferis (2017) studied ten of the world’s leading luxury brands in personal luxury goods category and their commitment to video as a main source of content was clear. When comparing this theory finding to the empirical research data, it remarkable that the research brands are investing in photos as a content instead of videos. The Figure 13. presents the form of content and their percentage of the posts in each platform during the data collection period. In three weeks’ time, Balmuir posted two videos in Facebook and Instagram. Minna Parikka posted also two videos in Instagram and only one video in Facebook, which all were a short clip of animations. Sarpaneva Watches did not post any videos.
Videos are very effective for stimulating different senses. Theory suggested that at its best, the product creation video can be an artistic experience. This kind of inspiring video develops hedonic and emotional experiences. In addition, videos can educate, entertain, and create fun experiences for the viewers. Marketing works best when people can attribute it something memorable, something they experienced through the content.

The evoking and stimulating sound is also related to luxury brands’ video content. Luxury brands can use different music styles, tempos and volume which evoke different feelings. One of Balmuir’s videos had a sound in it. It was an introduction video of the summer collection shot in private suite in Greece. There was a chill music without lyrics on the background which was perfectly complementing the video. Other videos by Balmuir and Minna Parikka were mute.

4.4.5 Behind the scenes material & live streaming

Luxury brands post often behind the scenes material, in which they are able to open the hidden doors to the big audience and give them a peek into the luxury world. The idea is to create the feeling of intimacy and to make the viewer feel special and unique. Often this kind of behind the scenes videos are live streams from the backstage of fashion shows or from manufacturing process.

Balmuir, Minna Parikka or Sarpaneva Watches didn’t post behind the scenes material during the three weeks data collection on their official social media.
platforms. However, Balmuir flagship stores posted live photos and live streams in their own profiles using the Instagram Story feature. In Instagram Story, the profile can post photos, videos and even start sending live stream. The story stays at the top of followers’ feeds for 24 hours and will be erased after that for good. Also watch designer Sarpaneva’s other Instagram account SUF Helsinki posted Instagram stories. The viewer could follow how the SUF Helsinki’s watches are designed and manufactured handmade in the studio.

4.4.6 Coordinated colour scheme

Theory research revealed that the coordinated and harmonious colour scheme is very important element of luxury brands’ social media presence. The colour branding is a strategic decision of the brand concerning the information that a company wants to convey to consumers (Gobe 2009). The idea is that colours are able to evoke emotions and trigger thoughts, such as memories and perceptions (Gobe 2009). The harmonious colour scheme is hedonic, enjoyable and inspiring for the viewer. With using different types elements in social media content, luxury brands need to remember to keep the coherence among the different posts, in which a coordinated colour scheme is an important factor.

Balmuir use classic and fresh colours in their photos (see Figure 14.) The light colour scheme appears pleasant to the viewer. The soft appeal of tones, the light, gentle colours and the different settings for the products and other objects are building recognizable and sophisticated style for Balmuir and the coordinated colour scheme creates a balanced result in Balmuir’s social media feeds.

Figure 14. Example of coordinated colour scheme by Balmuir.
Also, Minna Parikka has invested in creating a harmonious and well-thought-out Instagram feed by using coordinated colour scheme (see Figure 15). The pink and light-yellow colour scheme is true to the playful brand identity. The through thought content is demonstrated well in the two last rows, in which single posts are formulating one bigger picture.

Figure 15. Example of coordinated colour scheme by Minna Parikka.

4.4.7 Clear, concise & consistent language

The brands use different language for communications depending on the social media platform. The languages are presented below in Table 5. All the brands use mainly English as a communication language, since their target group is international customers. Balmuir is the only brand who communicates Finnish in their official
Facebook page and Twitter. However, they have own profile for international customers in Facebook.

Table 5. Communication languages in social media platforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communications language</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balmuir</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minna Parikka</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarpaneva Watches</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall communications in social media consists of the communications style, clarity of language and the brand’s tone of voice. Theory research defined that the language should be applied with consistency according to the taste of luxury customers. Luxury brands’ communication language should be clear, concise, and consistent in its tone through all the digital presentation and social media channels. Okonkwo (2007) described that powerful and consistent tone of voice has the ability to produce emotional and psychological attachment with consumers. The right tone of voice cultivates an impression of exclusivity and mystique. By listening and answering the comments brands are also able to build positive perceptions among the brand community.

When the data collection was made, it is easy to observed that all of the brand have their personal tone of voice to talk to their customers. These certain traits and characteristics seemed to appear very often and could be identified. The examples of communications from each brands are shown in the Table 6. These examples demonstrate well the personal communication style and tone of voice of each brand.
Table 6. The examples of brand communications from Instagram.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balmuir</th>
<th>Minna Parikka</th>
<th>Sarpaneva Watches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>balmuir Crystal adds a touch of luxury into every dinner table setting. Piemonte wine glasses and Verona candle stands are classic Balmuir beauties. #balmuir #easter #tablesetting</td>
<td>minnaparikkahoes We heart bunnies! AIMEE MINI sneakers with bunny ears and glittery hearts for the little ones ♥ ♥ ♥ #minnaparikka #minnaparikkaminin #bunnyshoes #followthatbunny</td>
<td>sarpanevawatches Weather is Grey, Vetehinen Is Green, Steel Is Real, Stay Strong... It is Friday!!! #sarpaneva #sarpanevauhentaabrik #sufhelsinkilove #vetehinen #independentwatchmaking #helsinkilove #finland #notforeveryone #green #steelisreal #sarpanevawatches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balmuir Good morning! Soft Bellagio linen robe is a comfortable and breathable homewear for both women and men. The robe is lightweight and also easy to pack for a sunny holiday. #balmuir #linen #homewear</td>
<td>minnaparikkahoes AMELIA in emerald! ♥ #minnaparikka #satinbunnies #bunnyshoes #followthatbunny</td>
<td>sarpanevawatches Watch Your Black! NewMoon! BlackMoon!! #watchyourblack #newmoon #blackmoon #independentwatchmaking #helsinkilove #finland #sarpaneva #sarpanevawatches #notforeveryone #hautehorlogerie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balmuir Create your own home spa with soft materials and natural ingredients that pamper the skin and add scents that bring aromatherapeutic benefits. #balmuir #homesspa #naturalcosmetics #supima #scentedcandles</td>
<td>minnaparikkahoes Well hello sun! ☀️ We are all dressed up for you. #minnaparikka #satinbunnies #bunnyshoes #followthatbunny</td>
<td>sarpanevawatches Same, Same, but Different!!! #notforeveryone #sufhelsinki #sufhelsinki #sarpaneva #sarpanevawatches #notmonment #independentwatchmaking #helsinkilove #finland #hautehorlogerie #friday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Balmuir uses very polite, classical and descriptive language. For example, in these posts, Balmuir uses phrases or words, such as “touch of luxury”, “classic”, “comfortable” and “breathable”, when they describe their products. Minna Parikka’s tone of voice is playful, which is again in line with the brand’s identity. Minna Parikka is only one of the brands who uses emoji’s in written text. However, emoji’s are used only in Instagram. In Facebook and Twitter, the communication style is more formal and the texts are posted without emoji’s.

The theory review emphasized that the text should ideally be short and in suitable format. Sarpaneva Watches’ language is an example of short and straightforward communication style. The tone of voice is confident, which is demonstrated in hashtag “#notforeveryone”, as only a few can afford the watch worth of 25,000 euros. Those who can afford the watch, can experience self-empowerment while admiring the watches. The Sarpaneva Watches’ tone of voice seems to resonate with the target audience, according to the high engagement rate in Instagram (presented later in section 4.6). In fact, also the Swiss luxury watch brand Rolex has also chosen an aggressive and adventurous spirit for reaching the modern consumer. Rolex posts content that embodies these virtues when they reach the ambitious audience (Joy 2017).
Theory research highlighted that Instagram is the prime platform to increase the reach and boost brand awareness due to its hashtag culture (Aroche 2015). Through hashtags, the brands are able to get posts and the brand noticed and build a wider and more global audience. The Table 6. above shows the difference how these three brands use hashtags. In the theory part, it was reported that in luxury industry, 80% of brand posts contain at least one hashtag and the average brand post has three hashtags (L2 2014). Each of the brands use their own hashtags, such as #balmuir, #minnaparikka, #bunnyshoes, #followthebunny, #sarpaneva and #sarpanevawatches. This is a method to collect all the photos under one hashtag. In addition, when a customer posts user-generated content on his or her own feed and is using the same hashtag, the post appear under the hashtag. Balmuir and Minna Parikka usually use the average amount of 3-4 hashtags. Sarpaneva Watches has chosen a different style and they are using several hashtags in each posts, which is helping to boost the reach and gives more viewers to the posts.

4.4.8 Storytelling & Myth telling

Theory review emphasized that the storytelling ability might be the most important element for luxury brands on social media marketing. According the theory, storytelling is more important than the number of social media posts (Albane 2017; Kim et al. 2016; Ikeler & Jackson 2010; Megehee & Woodside 2010). Storytelling is not only telling the story behind the brand but also behind the creation process or the designer. Luxury brands’ social media content should highlight the manufacturing know-how with the help of storytelling to contribute to the sense of craft.

Sarpaneva Watches is established in 2003, Minna Parikka in 2005 and Balmuir 2007. For relatively young brands, social media provides a storytelling opportunity to articulate the mood of the brand to the customers (Sherman 2015; Ikeler & Jackson 2010). For example, Minna Parikka’s content marketing tactics seems to take the viewers into the dreamy world of Minna Parikka. As theory review described, it is possible to go beyond aesthetics to create content that add value, such as entertainment and utility. Minna Parikka is building her own beautiful world in social media platforms. In fact, the flagship store is even named Minna Parikka Universe, which is completing the online branding efforts of building Minna Parikka’s entity.
4.4.9 Online influencers

Theory review revealed that luxury brands often use celebrity endorsement as a marketing communication practise. In social media, one way for the luxury brands to capture the opportunities is to utilize online influencers. In the best situation, the online influencers became brand advocates in social media. Online influencers are able to create social media buzz, stretch the reach, and even engage their own followers to the brand.

Balmuir and Minna Parikka are using celebrity endorsement in their social media marketing. Both brands posted content where online influencers were wearing their products. Balmuir’s influencers are well-known Finnish bloggers (in Figure 16.) and Minna Parikka’s influencers are famous international bloggers (in Figure 17.). According the theory review, the influencers that brand works with are as important as the content and images they publish (Sherman 2015). The influencers should have a natural affinity towards the brand and share the similar values. The difference between bloggers and traditional press is that bloggers are often talking directly to a final consumes, and majority consumers say that they trust the opinion of an online influencer more than an advertisement (Weinswig 2016; Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Okonkwo 2007).

Figure 16. Examples of Balmuir’s online influencers.
4.5 Engagement rate comparisons

4.5.1 Engagement in different social media platforms

The theory review revealed that 80% of luxury brands’ social media marketing activities should be about building relationships and creating engagement (Barger et al. 2016; Sachs 2016; De Beule 2013). Therefore, it is important for the brands to understand what kind of content is driving customer engagement.

The effectiveness of social media marketing actions is measured of how much engagement they are generating. According to the theoretical findings (i.e. Voorveld et al. 2018; Brodie et al. 2011), the context and the platform, can be even more important for effective social media marketing, than the content. The empirical research findings supports the theory that Instagram is the most engaging social media platform. Table 7. below presents the engagement rates of each platform. For each three brands, Instagram is the most engaging platform. The first numbers are the range of measured engagement rate percent in each platforms. The latter number is the average engagement rate percent in that platform.
Table 7. Engagement rate percent per post in each social media platform.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min. – max. engagement rate</th>
<th>Average engagement rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balmuir</strong></td>
<td>0.12 – 1.95</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minna Parikka</strong></td>
<td>0.19 – 0.57</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sarpaneva Watches</strong></td>
<td>0.30 – 1.39</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instagram is a platform to build brand community (L2 2015b), and Minna Parikka and Sarpaneva Watches have the biggest audiences of platforms in Instagram. In addition to the highest engagement rates, also the customer feedback (comments) was highest on Instagram for each three brands. As theory research explained, this is because Instagram is a prime social media channel for visual and editorial content. The photo- and video-friendly layout that allows visual storytelling, and the hashtag culture boosts the reach and brand awareness, and the posts are seen by potential customers all over the world (Colapinto 2015).

Twitter is a great medium for luxury brands to share relevant news and real-time information, and according the theory research, major luxury brands are tweeting “all the time” (Kim & Ko 2012). During the data collection the brands’ were not active on Twitter and posted content consisting of information about the products and campaigns and retweets concerning the brand.

4.5.2 Content tactics for generating engagement

Customers’ engagement is a crucial objective and measure for leading luxury brands social media marketing. For making effective social media marketing decisions, brands need to understand how to engage customers on social media platforms, and how to publish content that resonates with the target group.
The high quality of the content is the core of luxury brands social media marketing. By offering high quality visual content, luxury brands also evoke emotional interactions, and this generates engagement among customers (Pentina et al. 2018). The empirical analysis reveals that aesthetically inspirational visual content is efficiently driving engagement in social media. The posts including different kind of table settings (in Figure 10.), were the most engaging content in Balmuir’s Facebook and Instagram during the data collection. Usually, several content element can be identified in one photo. The posts with cool, trendy or luxurious elements have often coordinated colour scheme, and thus the posts are pleasant for the viewers. The highly curated and flawless images are clearly liked by the followers and serves a source of inspiration. As de Vries (2012) described, the main requirement is that the posts stimulates different senses.

Online influencers are usually able to generate a great deal of emotional responses and comments among followers on Instagram. The empirical findings from data analysis mainly support this statement. In fact, the post with online influencers (see Figure 16. and 17.) have the significant high engagement rates. For Minna Parikka, the three photos (in Figure 16.) of influencers in Instagram, generated the greatest amount of engagement, with engagement rate percent of 7.29, 3.43 and 3.06, compared to the average engagement rate of 2.00. However, the presence of influencers did not generate as high rate of engagement for Balmuir. Balmuir’s three photos (in Figure 17.) with influencers in Instagram generated engagement rate percent (2.40, 1.92 and 1.60) just around the average of 2.05.

The theory findings highlighted importance of video as a content. The empirical findings confirm the significance of video. The analysis of engagement rates reveals that videos are well-performing social media content for the brands in Instagram. Minna Parikka’s two videos have both high engagement rate percentage (3.22 and 3.47) compared to an average engagement rate percent. The research by de Vries et al. (2012) explained that interactivity activates users to like or comment the brand post, which furthermore, is a result of the experiences that the interactive content has provided. The findings are in line with Okonkwo’s (2007) previous research that videos are effective for creating memorable experiences, such entertainment, and
create a feeling of presence and two-way interaction between the brand and the customer.

As important as knowing what is good social media content for luxury brands, it is important to know the kind of content that is not. Barker et al. (2016) point out that social media marketing for luxury brands should not be pushing communications out to customers. Luxury marketing should be about promoting exclusivity instead of the products (Minsker 2013) and the customers are more likely to engage with posts that aren’t overly commercial. The empirical analysis reports the same: posts promoting campaigns, e.g. communicating a sales promotion, generated engagement rates below the average in Facebook and Instagram.

Many researchers (e.g. Barker et al. 2016; Kim et al. 2015) have shown that posts with photos are more likely to receive likes, comments and shares, that posts without a visual element. Even though, the empirical didn’t provided much data of brands Twitter performance, this can be observed from Minna Parikka’s Twitter. All five tweets were posted without picture and they gained only a low level of engagement or not all.
5 CONCLUSIONS

The research conclusions are presented in this chapter. The chapter begins by discussing the research topic and answering to the research questions. Then the main findings and the theoretical contribution of the research are presented. This is followed by the managerial implications and the possible research limitations. Lastly the suggestions for future research are presented.

5.1 Discussion

The emergence of social media in 21st century has changed significantly the way of communication between companies and customers (Samanta 2012). For a long time, luxury industry was highly resistant and had very little interest to start use social media as a communication and marketing channel. Luxury brands faced a challenge in digital world, which is by its nature very opposite to luxury brands’ exclusivity. Social media has made it easy for luxury brands to reach a new class and a new generation of customers. At the same time, brands have to be a lot more aware when they expose themselves to the limitless expanse of internet. Internet, social media, mobiles and the new marketing channels are all areas largely known for accessibility. Unlike the first predictions, social media didn’t do against the positive reputation of brands (Kim & Ko 2012). Interaction with customers via social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter actually builds up friendly attention, even affection, toward brands and stimulates customers' desire for luxury (Kim & Ko 2012).

Social media marketing plays a critical role in a company’s branding. The earlier research (Matthiesen & Phau 2010) stated that opportunity of using social media can become risky in terms of branding if the brand image and the communications have inconsistencies. Therefore, social media branding should be about consistently using the right methods to engage with the target audience on the right social media platforms. All social media marketing activities should always base on the true brand identity and the marketing team should focus on producing content which is in line with the organizational long-term branding and marketing goals. Luxury brands’ brand image and identity needs to be above all exclusive, elusive and constantly recognizable. The brand can work on macro-themes and shift their core values to the
content. Thus, they are able to communicate a clear brand identity as, after all, the core of social media marketing is to be loyal to their core elements also in social media content.

According to Kim and Ko (2012), social media can have a dramatic impact on a luxury brand's reputation. Internet and new platforms provide a unique opportunity to access the huge market constituting of hundreds of millions of people as a global consumer group. Internet has also closed the information gap and consumers worldwide now have the same awareness of products and services in real-time. Luxury brands use social media platforms in order to reach their customers and maintain their loyalty to the company as well as develop their brand personality and presence in the global luxury industry. Within social media interactions, luxury brands are able to strengthen the existing relationships and thus brands can gain more exposure and awareness. Meanwhile, social media is also a new marketing and advertising platform that allows users to connect with one another and build a brand community.

This research was conducted to investigate luxury brands’ social media marketing and how brands should direct marketing efforts and investments in the right activities in order to create luxurious social media content, and thus gain customer engagement. Customer engagement with the published content plays a crucial role in word-of-mouth communications by propagating stimuli across the social network of friends, leading toward the goal of viral marketing (Dhaoui 2014). Over the time, the improvements of a luxury brand’s digital presence can translate to measurable gains in the number of people who interact with that brand.

Because of the evolution of social media, brands’ social media presence needs to become more and more focused on creating a conversation with users. In order to accomplish this, companies need to understand their audience’s motives for social media use and align their own motives for posting with the needs of the customers. At first, to be able to make effective marketing decisions, the brands need to understand how to engage consumers on social media platforms and how to measure success. The theory review was conducted for searching the answer for the research
question 1: How luxury brands are creating experiences and engagement through social media content?

Based on the earlier studies around the topic (Pentina et al. 2018; Albane 2017; Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Okonkwo 2007; Lindström 2005), the theoretical framework suggests that luxury brands social media content is able to create experiences for the viewers. Experiences are in the core of luxury brands’ social media marketing and including the interaction with the customers and telling the original story of the brand, luxury brands are able to create an experience with the tools provided by the internet and social media platforms. Therefore, it is important for a luxury brand to have a good understanding how to sell their brand and image with an experience to the customer.

The theoretical framework also suggests that the digital engagement develops from digital experiences, as many researchers (e.g. Pentina 2018; Brodie et al. 2013; Hollebeek 2011; Calder et al. 2009) commonly agree that social media engagement develops from social media experiences. Luxury brands aim to create compelling, memorable, enjoyable and positive customer experiences. Whether customers engage with content on social media is affected by how entertaining, educational and interesting the content is (Barger et al 2016). In social media, customer engagement is crucial for luxury brands as many researches has proven that it is resulting to increased customer satisfaction, loyalty, retention, customer lifetime value, and increases brand’s revenue and profitability (i.e. Solga & Grippo 2016; Cummins et al. 2014). Engaged and loyal customers in long-term relationships develop deep emotional bonds are will they likely become advocates for the brand (Sashi 2012).

To investigate luxury brands’ social media content, a content analysis was conducted. The empirical research of the study answered the research question 2: What kind of content is engaging luxury customers in social media?

The research results emphasized that luxury brands must be able replicate exclusivity on their social media presence. Luxury brands require strict attention to the qualities that make the brand what it is. They need to create quality content that equals their commitment in excellence and high quality. Luxury brands’ social media content
goes beyond the product to cater to the psyche of their target audience and serve them with aspirational value.

The empirical analysis reveals that aesthetically inspirational and creative visual content is efficiently driving engagement in social media. Also, the posts with cool, trendy or luxurious elements, usually with coordinated colour scheme, are well-liked and driving customer engagement. The highly curated and flawless images serve a source of inspiration for the viewers, and thus create emotional, hedonic and entertaining experiences. According to the empirical research, also video content is efficient to evoke emotional interactions and generate engagement among customers.

Based on the empirical research, luxury brands posts should be accompanied with a suitable textual message for the target group. The communication style should be personal, recognizable and tailored according to the taste of the brands’ customers. The tone of voice should be clear and consistent in all social media platforms. Social media is a prime channel to create two-way conversations with customers, offering luxury brands an opportunity to handle customer service issues real-time. In addition, brands should courage the followers to communicate with each other, and thus strengthen the spirit of the community.

5.2 Theoretical contribution

The empirical research was conducted for finding the most effective content elements to create experiences and engagement, because customers’ response and engagement are strong indicators of successful content. By analyzing the content and perceived reactions, it was possible to find the content which is ranking better than other. It is important for the brands to understand why certain content is driving more engagement, in order to strategically develop their social media marketing and digital footprint.

All the research brands used the same photos, visuals and videos in each platforms but the text was tailored differently according the platform. This is because the Facebook followers might be looking for in-depth and educational content, while Instagram followers are likely looking for engaging visual content and entertainment.
The findings are in line with previous theory, which suggested that each social channel needs to be treated as a separate entity and each platform reach a different audience (Aroche 2015; De Souza & Sharmila 2015). There can be content that is spread across all platforms, but the message must be tailored for the platform’s audience.

The empirical research findings reveal that all the studied brands achieve the highest engagement rate in Instagram. This is in line with the several earlier researches (Aroche 2015; L2 2015b; Sherman 2015; L2 2014) of Instagram being the most engaging social media platform. Theory suggested that Instagram is strongest platform for reaching the global audience due to its hashtag culture (Aroche 2015). All the research brands used at least three but usually more hashtags in every post, while luxury industry’s average is three hashtags (L2 2014). In addition, the brands have created their own hashtags, so the brands’ content will come up in people’s searches and the hashtag creates a virtual gallery in Instagram.

The studied brands are not using Twitter or not fully utilizing it as a marketing and communication channel. The empirical findings are not supported by previous findings of Kim & Ko (2012), that luxury brands are constantly Tweeting in Twitter. However, this might be the consequence of the strategic decision of research brands to invest the resources in to their Facebook and Instagram presence, since those are proven to engage customers more efficiently. Although the brands’ participation on Twitter didn’t provided much data, the findings are in line with earlier research on Twitter as a dominant informational and news platform (Pentina et al. 2018). The collected samples of data from Twitter was brand-focused content, consisting information about the products and campaigns and retweets from other users concerning the brand.

All the luxurious content elements derived from theory review could be identified in the empirical research. Though the live streaming feature for posting behind the scenes material was posted on the brands’ additional social media profiles, not on the brands’ official profiles. In addition, almost all of the luxurious experiences founded from theory that the content is able to create could be assessed. However, the data didn’t provide the evidence that these research brands are handling customer service
though social media platforms, even though the earlier studies (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2014; Ko et al. 2009; Okonkwo 2007) has shown that expert service is important for luxury brands also in social media context.

All the brands posted only high quality photos and videos which is in line with the findings from theory review (Pentina et al. 2018; Albane 2017; Heine & Berghaus 2014; Okonkwo 2007). This research identified luxury brands’ content to include aesthetically inspiring elements from which the viewer can get inspiration and motivation for his or her own life. This is supported with the earlier studies (Pentina et al. 2018; Albane 2017; Higgins 2009; Okonkwo 2007; Lindström 2005) who emphasize that all the social media content need to be inspirational, innovative and creative, and must reflect the high quality and the prestige qualities of the brand.

The empirical research indicates that the posts including cool, trendy and luxurious elements are generating high engagement rates among customers. In the research, the brands often used luxurious materials such glass, leather, velvet, satin, silk and tulle in their posts. The research findings support the prior research (Albane 2017; Okonkwo 2007; Lindström 2005) that these elements should be visible in the social media content. The research brands also used trendy and bright colours in their content, which according De Vries et al. (2012), can be linked to how stimulating posts are for the different senses. The stimulation of senses, is furthermore, developing experiences such self-expression, self-empowerment, connection and singularity for the customers (Pentina et al. 2018; Hope 2016; Woolley 2013).

According to the content analysis, all the brands had paid attention to the colour scheme they use. The harmonious and consistent colour scheme is creating a balanced social media feed and thus, the feed is hedonic, enjoyable and inspiring for the viewer. This is supported by Pentina et al. (2018), who describe that Instagram following was mainly done for hedonic and emotional reasons due to the visual emphasis of the app. According to Gobe (2009) the colour scheme is a strategic decision of the brand and through the chosen colours company can do branding and decide what kind of emotions they want to evoke.
Luxury brands engage consumers through storytelling and utilizing their strong brand heritage (Albane 2017; Kim et al. 2016; Megehee & Woodside 2010). The storytelling and myth telling techniques were not used in empirical data as much as theory highlighted, probably because of the relatively short history of the brands. However, Minna Parikka is determinately creating an online world of Minna Parikka, which reflects the dreamy and playful characters of the brand. This is supported by the earlier studies: social media provides an opportunity to articulate the mood of the brand to the customers (Sherman 2015; Ikeler & Jackson 2010). As the theory described, the storytelling is efficiently adding value, such as entertainment and utility for customers (Ikeler & Jackson 2010).

The clear and consistent tone of voice could be identified from the empirical data and the findings are in line with prior research. All the brand had a concise and consistent way to talk to their customers. For example, Sarpaneva’s straightforward tone of voice resonated well with the target audience, creating a feeling of self-empowerment, uniqueness and the connection for the brand’s customers. This finding is supported by Okonkwo’s (2007) statement that maintaining a consistent tone of voice is a key in developing a loyal relationship between a luxury brand and its followers in the long-term.

The format and purpose of the content also affects consumer engagement. The empirical findings reported that videos and animations created efficiently engagement in Facebook and Instagram among the viewers. This finding is supported by the earlier research (De Vries et al. 2012) that multisensory and interactive posts are more likely to generate engagement than posts that lacked those elements. This is probably a result of the experiences provided by the video, such as entertainment and a feeling of presence and interaction (Heine & Berghaus 2014; Okonkwo 2007). The amount of video content in social media platforms in the empirical research, however, is not totally in line with the research by Aliferis (2017). His finding was that the video is the main source of content for the world’s leading luxury brands in personal luxury goods category. In the empirical research, the photos were the main source of content. Primarily, this is a resource matter for small luxury brands because video content production requires more time and efforts than photo production.
The empirical data shows that the use of online influencers can efficiently increase customer engagement and boost the reach. In addition, online influencers are able to generate a great deal of emotional responses and comments among followers on Instagram. These empirical findings are in line with theory that online influencers and personalities are driving the customer engagement (Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Okonkwo 2007).

In the empirical research, the customer feedback and amount of comments were highest on Instagram for each three brands. Tagging was very popular in the comments (@ followed by the name of the person to whom the post was shared). This indicates that there is a strong community of shoe fanatics and watch enthusiastic, who are admiring the brand’s products together. This empirical finding is in line with prior research, since the report by L2 (2015b) described that Instagram is the key platform to build community. The earlier research by Calder et al. (2009) identified social-interactive engagement with respect to online media. Social-interactive engagement arise in social media based brand communities, in which customer engagement consists of interactions between customer and the brand but also between the members of the community.

The brand communities are important for many reasons. Several studies have shown that customers engaged with brand communities online feel more connected to their brands, trust their preferred brands more, have higher brand satisfaction, and are more brand loyal customers (Harrigan et al. 2016; Brodie et al. 2013; Laroche et al. 2013; Jahn & Kunz 2012). There are many reasons and motivations why customers engage with brand communities in social media, such entertainment, information acquisition, socializing, and social influence. Shared experiences in communities create satisfaction (Mouradian 2015; Grigorian & Petersen 2014; Heine & Berghaus 2014) and when consumers are strongly integrated to a brand communities, they are also emotionally attached to the company and contribute to its success in long-term (McAlexander et al. 2002). Heine and Berghaus (2014) say that the most effective advertising is advertising that get people talk and according to their research, luxury communities encourage communication among luxury customers. Researches (Bruno et al. 2016; Kim & Ko 2012) have shown that the word-of-mouth is a powerful voice of customer and therefore the brand communities are also valuable tools for the
luxury brands to spread awareness. Digital word-of-mouth influences significantly customers’ willingness for purchasing, which further has an effect on the brand’s sales performance (Akar & Topsu 2013; Sandes & Urdan 2013). One reason for that is that luxury fans consider other customers’ opinions in the communities more objective and reliable compared with the information provided by the brand itself (Blackshaw & Nazzaro 2006).

5.3 Managerial implications

Over the years social media has become an essential part of brands’ digital strategy, with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram forming the main focus in luxury industry. Companies are most likely to make even more social media marketing in the future and the importance of social media communications will increase. From that viewpoint, the findings of the study are relevant from the managerial perspective, since it is important to create right kind of content for the target group.

This research attempts to provide insights into the luxury brands social media content and the effectiveness of content elements to create online experiences and generate customer engagement. Customer engagement is crucial for luxury brands and it is important to understand how to create engagement through social media and build long-term and personal relationships with the followers. From managerial point of view, the findings from the study are important because engagement drives customers’ purchase decisions, interaction frequency, involvement over the time and engaged customers contribute to greater firm revenue (Kumar & Pansari 2016; Sashi 2012; Shevlin 2007).

The key for successful social media marketing is to understand the audience’s motives and needs for social media use: customers’ desire for online experiences, acquiring information, communicate with the brand and socialize in luxury online communities, to name a few. The research insights helps brands to design their social media content according the taste of luxury customers and generate higher engagement on social media platforms. The luxury brands should invest in social media content production, such as making videos, since that is the way to effect on online experiences and customer engagement positively.
This research’s findings emphasize that social media provides luxury brands a prime opportunity to offer unique and exclusive experiences to their target group. If the brand has limited resources, in terms of budget and time, then it is better to identify social media platforms that best fit what and how the brand wants to communicate. That was the case with Sarpaneva Watches, they have chosen to use only Facebook and Instagram, but succeed to build a community which is engaged and eager to interact. Meaning that it is better to be excellent in one or two than an average in many social media platforms.

This research identified luxurious content elements which are likely to generate customer engagement which is helping brands to create content according the luxury customers’ interests. This research has deepened the understanding of how brands can make an influence by concentrating on right elements in their content production. At the first, brand must to identifies the essential qualities that define them as a luxury brand, then reflect those qualities into content and finally deliver it to their customers in right format in each channel.

Luxury brands face a highly competitive market and critical customers with high demands for pleasure and creativity (Kapferer & Bastien 2009). With inspiring visuals and evoking videos, luxury brands can boost emotions such hedonism and entertain their followers. Customers want also feel special and online empowerment comes from being given access and information. The key is to deliver content that provides a deeper experience of the brand with a sense of exclusivity.

Brands should also encourage the fans into two-way communication and to be more active in social media. According to this research, this would lead to increased customer engagement (likes, comments, shares and conversations). If the brand is able to managing these interactions, then the brand is even likely to stimulate brand-related discourse, potentially leading to renegotiating the brand's meaning and increasing the value of the brand (Pentina et al. 2018).
5.4 Limitations of the study

A reliability of a research can be reviewed through multiple different aspects. Because quantitative and qualitative research have a different methodological approach, also different criteria exist in regard to critiquing each (Cope 2014). The perspectives of quantitative research are rigor and validity and the perspectives of qualitative research are credibility and trustworthiness (Cope 2014). Credibility and trustworthiness are most commonly used criteria when interpreting the research implementation and findings. Furthermore, the trustworthiness of qualitative content analysis can be presented by using terms such as dependability, transferability and authenticity (Elo et al. 2014). Qualitative research emphasizes exploring experiences and aims at gathering in-depth understanding and describing the given phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). A qualitative research is subjective, anecdotal, subject to researcher bias and lacking generalizability (Koch & Harrington 1998), producing detailed information about a single, unique phenomenon or settings (Cope 2014).

Considering the lack of similar research done on social media platforms, it was difficult to find empirical studies to relate. It was a challenge to predict the needed sample size, and one limitation for the research is the limited amount of data collected especially from Twitter. One of the brands wasn’t using Twitter at all and two weren’t active during the data collection. This has an effect on credibility and the generalizability of the results.

Credibility refers to the truth of the data and the interpretation and representation of them by the researcher (Polit & Beck 2012). One limitations for this study concerns the data collection and analysis. The research is mostly focusing on associations and elements seen in images. The research analysis is self-reported and depends on the researcher’s judgment because of limited resources. It is possible that the personal beliefs and attitudes have affected the research process but the researcher has strived for the highest possible quality and there is confidence on the researcher’s objectivity and professionalism to conduct such study.

The majority of current luxury brands marketing literature is based on worlds’ biggest and leading luxury brands. However, the used literature in theory research
was concerning brands operating in personal luxury category like the research brands which increases the credibility of the theory research. Cope (2014) describes, the qualitative research produce detailed information about a single and unique phenomenon or settings. The empirical study was focusing on three Finnish globally very small and relatively young luxury brands. Transferability refers to findings that can be applied to other settings or groups (Polit & Beck 2012) and due the research settings, more research in different countries with another cultural setting is needed to be able to generalize the findings.

Moreover, this empirical research covered the brands in personal luxury goods category. For example, the hospitality category has a tendency to focus on different aspects, such customer service experiences in social media, while the personal luxury category clearly focuses on inspiration, innovation, self-expression and hedonic experiences. Thus, it is important to take a deeper look at different elements of social media content strategies that are specific to a particular luxury category. Therefore, the research result might not apply into other luxury categories which may have different engagement behavior and more research is needed to generalize the findings to cover the other categories.

5.5 Future research

This research focuses on to investigate luxury brands’ social media content and how it is generating online experiences and engagement. During the research process, the researcher identified some interesting opportunities for future studies.

The customer response to the social media content was expressing positive feelings, mainly adoration and the desire to the brand. This could indicate that the brands succeeded in communicating luxury, as Kapferer and Bastien (2012) describe that the emotional attachment towards a luxury brand is a sign of success. It would be interesting to continue the research and study the consequences that results from that engagement. It would be interesting to study and measure the generated benefits for the brand, such spread awareness, increased word-of-mouth communication or the brand loyalty.
Social media is an important source of information for the luxury brands of their customers (Mangold & Faulds 2009). As the study revealed, the brand communities and social media dialogue are important when the brand is monitoring the conversation between the followers. Comments are significant because they have an influence on others who view these comments since fans consider other fans’ opinions to be objective and reliable (Blackshaw & Nazzaro 2006). One opportunity for future research is to investigate and analyze the customer engagement which would provide valuable information about luxury customers and feedback from the fans. This is important because when carefully monitoring and analyzing conversations between the customers, the brands gain a deeper insights into who’s talking about the brand, what are the customers like, find their interests, and where they live (Ben 2010). Thus, by generating valuable consumer insights brands can better understand their audience for improved targeting, to match audience interests, and gain the edge on competition (Albaine 2017; Heine & Berghaus 2014; Ben 2010).

One interesting opportunity for the future search is to study user-generated content such photos, drawings, selfies and videos with hashtags soliciting comments from his or her followers. The user-generated content presents a highest level customer engagement in social media (Pentina et al. 2018), meaning that it requires more effort and time than just liking, commenting or sharing. It would be useful and interesting to understand what motivates and encourages the fans to produce user-generated content. Another possibility for studying the user-generated content, is to determinate the benefits of user-generated content for the brand and how the brand can make the best use of it in their own marketing, because earlier researches (e.g. Sashi 2012) has shown that user-generated content adds value for the brand.
REFERENCES


