



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ACTIVITIES ON CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE: THE CASE OF LUXURY BRANDS

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List of Abbreviations

CX	Customer Experience
EXQ	Customer Experience Quality
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
SMMA	Social Media Marketing Activities
SNS	Social Networking Site
UGC	User Generated Content
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WOM	Word-of-Mouth

Abstract

The rise of social media platforms' popularity around the world has reshaped the way individuals communicate and interact. In an era marked by the widespread adoption of digital technologies and an online presence, this new level of interconnectedness now goes beyond person-to-person intercommunication (Kim & Ko, 2010). Social media platforms have changed the way marketing activities were originally performed by companies from all sectors and provided marketers with new opportunities to reach out to customers (Godey & al, 2016). Social media marketing has not only enhanced the connectivity between customers and brands, it has enabled the latter to co-create the marketing content together, empowering social media users to co-shape the image of the brands (Arrigo, 2018).

After an initial fear that a social media presence would negatively impact their brand image, luxury brands have now embraced the marketing opportunities that practicing social media marketing activities have provided them with (Bazi & al, 2020). Nevertheless, this late adoption of an online presence has left luxury brands trailing behind other sectors in terms of expertise on social media marketing. Furthermore, luxury companies still need to figure how to transpose one fundamental aspect of their strategy and brand image from their physical stores to their online presence, i.e., the luxury experience (Creevey & al, 2022). Customer experience management has been recognized as a priority for companies of all sizes and sectors (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) but especially plays a crucial role in a luxury strategy context as impeccable customer experience is one of the catalysts for luxury consumption (Grigorian & Espinoza Petersen, 2014).

In light of those considerations, the objective of this research thesis is to explore the impact of social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands on customer experience. This study adopts a quantitative approach, analyzing the answers of 87 surveys collected from luxury customers who followed at least one luxury brand that they have purchased from in the last five years on at least social media platform. The study investigates the correlation and relationship between social media marketing activities and customer experience to determine if the different types of customer experience, i.e. *sense*, *think*, *feel*, *act* and *relate*, are positively related to social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands.

The managerial and theoretical motivations behind this quantitative research are to investigate the role that social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands plays on customer experience to provide marketers and managers from the luxury sector with actionable insights enabling them to transpose the luxury experience from their physical stores to their online presence without compromising their brand image. Moreover, this research assumes the role of filling the existing gaps in scientific literature on social media marketing, luxury brands and customer experience as well as starting a discussion on the role that social media marketing plays in customer experience management.

The results of this research thesis provide new insights to luxury brands on which dimensions of social media marketing should be utilized in order to enhance the five different levels of customer experience in their marketing strategy. Furthermore, this research acknowledges the several limitations of the research faced along the way and provides several new leads for further research on the matter.

Key words: social media, social media marketing, social media marketing activities, luxury, luxury brands, luxury sector, luxury consumption, luxury customers, customer experience, customer experience management, entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth, trendiness, sense, feel, think, act, relate

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context

“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other it is.” (Scott Cook, Intuit co-founder and Ebay director). With 4.76 billion active social media users around the world as of July 2023, brands can only hope that what consumers tell each other on there is positive (Kepios, 2023).

In an era that is marked by the widespread adoption of digital technologies and the proliferation of online platforms, brands have increasingly turned to social media as a strategic tool to engage with their customers and target audience (Saravanakumar & al, 2012). However, when the core value of a business is centered around exclusivity and heritage, one can only wonder if it is really desirable to have 10 billion eyes staring at them through their screen? This dilemma held luxury brands back from adopting a social media presence for a long time (Kim & Ko, 2010). Nonetheless, they eventually recognized the necessity to move past this initial reluctance and adopt an online presence to engage with a wider and more digitally experienced audience (Bazi & al, 2020). Nonetheless, this belated entry into the social media landscape has placed luxury brands in a tricky position, trailing behind other industries in terms of expertise. Moreover, luxury brands have to practice social media marketing with caution given the crucial importance of maintaining a carefully cultivated brand image (Kim & Ko, 2010).

Despite the growing interest in this domain within scholarly discourse, the distinct context of luxury brands, marked by their cautious and delayed entry into the social media sphere, underscores the existence of substantial research gaps. One of those centers on the imperative for luxury brands to transfer the essence of the in-store luxury experience to social media platforms (Liu & al, 2021). This challenge is crucial as seamless and high-quality customer experience constitutes one of the fundamentals of luxury brand identity (Grigorian & al, 2014). As luxury brands strive to maintain their exclusivity and sophistication in an increasingly digital world, the task of crafting an online presence while conserving their core values remains a topic that calls for further investigations.

In light of these considerations, this research thesis aims at addressing the aforementioned research gap by investigating the impact of social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands on customer experience. This study adopts a quantitative approach to analyze the relationship between social media strategies and the perceptions, attitudes and behavioral intentions of luxury customers. The end goal is to contribute to the scientific literature by providing empirical insights on the matter while also providing guidance to luxury brands on the way to navigate the complex landscape of social media marketing.

1.2 Research Motivations

1.2.1 Managerial Motivations

From a managerial standpoint, this quantitative research assumes the role of equipping luxury brands with essential insights to effectively navigate the complexity that is the social media marketing landscape.

The objective of this thesis is to provide luxury brands with the necessary tools and knowledge required to seamlessly transfer the luxury experience traditionally found within their physical stores to their social media presence. By quantitatively investigating the connection between social media marketing activities and customer experience, this study seeks to discover the key elements that contribute to the successful translation of luxury experience across social media platforms.

Moreover, this thesis aims at providing luxury brands with actionable insights that will eventually enable them to strategically tailor their social media marketing activities to enhance the customer experience while maintaining their brand image.

1.2.2 Academic Motivations

From a theoretical standpoint, this research is driven by the purpose of addressing the gaps in scientific literature in regards to the domain of luxury social media marketing activities and its consequential impact on customer experience.

Building upon prior research on customer experience and social media marketing activities, this study extends its focus to the market of luxury brands which is characterized by the crucial importance of impeccable customer experience. Moreover, the drive to investigate the intersection of those two concepts is marked by the role of the luxury sector as a pioneer in shaping marketing strategies and behavior for other sectors. By delving into this topic, this research not only fills a gap within the scientific literature on luxury brands but contributes to the broader landscape of social media research, rectifying the lack of scholarly attention given to the luxury sector compared to other industries.

Moreover, this quantitative research serves as a pioneering connection between customer experience and social media marketing activities. This thesis starts a conversation on the impact that social media marketing activities have on customer experience. By choosing to investigate this issue in the context of a market characterized by the importance of impeccable customer experience, this research aims at encouraging further research on the topic to better grasp the implications that social media marketing activities have on customer experience.

1.2.3 Research question statement

In consideration of those research motivations, this thesis aims at answering the following research question:

What impact do social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands have on customer experience?

1.3 Contributions

By adopting a quantitative research design whose purpose is to study the relationship that links the independent variable that is social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands on the dependent variable that is customer experience, this research thesis aims at contributing to what is currently known on the topic thus far in the scientific literature. By investigating this issue, the research contributes to the literature by filling the existing gaps.

Moreover, this study aims at providing managers and marketers from the luxury sector with the necessary tools to navigate the social media landscape. To that end, this thesis lays out the foundation on how luxury brands should perform social media marketing activities in order to adequately transfer the luxury experience from their physical stores to the digital sphere while preserving their prestigious brand image.

1.4 Approach

The structure of this thesis is organized to provide a comprehensive exploration of the impact of social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands on customer experience. The first chapter introduces the research by establishing the contextual backdrop, explaining the managerial and theoretical motivations driving this study and explaining the anticipated contributions from both a managerial and theoretical standpoint. The second chapter delves into the extensive literature review, assimilating existing scholarship and culminating in the formulation of the hypotheses that will guide the subsequent analyses. The third chapter then details the research design by going over the methodology, data collection process and the different variables.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the statistical results. Building upon those findings, the fifth chapter engages into the discussions on those, offering a nuanced interpretation of the statistical outcomes and contextualizing them in light of the current scientific literature. At last, the sixth chapter of this research thesis gathers insights gained through the study by highlighting both the managerial and theoretical implications. Additionally, the limitations inherent to the study are acknowledged, paving the way for future research to address and expand upon those constraints.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Despite the abundance of research on the luxury industry and the growing interest on the impact that social media has had on the sector, the literature lacks research on how the latter impacts the customer experience in the luxury industry (Arrigo, 2018). This second chapter aims at providing an overview of the main topics of this master's thesis as well as identifying the gaps in the literature by following a funnel structure (Toracco, 2005). Concretely, this chapter first defines the main topics of this master's thesis, elaborating the existing contributions and gaps existing in the literature. From there, links between the topics are developed following the same pattern culminating, at last, to the statement of the research question and its respective hypotheses and sub-hypotheses that will shape the research model.

2.1 Social Media Marketing

2.1.1 Social media

The term "social media" was first coined in 1944 during the early days of the Internet to refer to an online Japanese platform called "Matsise" with the first other social media being mainly developed for commercial purposes (Aichner & al, 2021). As of today, the number of platforms available as well as their diversity has considerably increased. Furthermore, this topic is subject to numerous changes and innovations, changing the landscape of what we know as social media (Carr & al, 2015). As a consequence of this rapid evolution, literature so far has been unsuccessful in coming to an agreement on a common definition of the term "social media" (Carr & al, 2015). What platforms should actually be referred to as a social medium represent another issue (Kaplan et al, 2010). This divergence of opinions on what are social media leads to several issues. Namely, there is a struggle to agree on what platforms should be referred to as such and incoherence in literature on the use of the correct terminology. Indeed, social media can refer to different features from paper to paper (Aichner & al, 2021). Furthermore, the evolution of the sector and the entrance of new players challenge scholars to elaborate a definition that will remain relevant for the following decades (Carr & al, 2015).

Nevertheless, several attempts at aggregating existing knowledge on the matter to come up with a definitive definition have been made in recent years. We can quote as an example the definition elaborated by Car & Hayes (2015) in their literature review as an attempt to combine knowledge and research on the topic made so far. Car & Hayes thus formally define social media as "Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others" (p.50). This interpretation highlights several characteristics of social media which have been commonly agreed on in literature which enables us to grasp the main features that make social media what they are (Obar & al, 2015).

First and foremost, a social medium is Internet-based (Obar & al, 2015). They are online devices that are accessible through the Internet. Furthermore, social media are related to Web 2.0. As opposed to Web 1.0, which refers to the first generation of the World Wide Web and is characterized by static content, one-way communication and limited personalization, the Web 2.0 enables users to continuously interact, modify and create the content in a collaborative and participatory manner (Constantinides & al, 2008). This ability to create content is an essential aspect of social media as it relates to the second key property: user-generated content (UGC) (Boyd & al, 2007).

User-generated content refers to content, which can take various forms, that is created and published by individuals as opposed to content being produced by professional content creators or companies (Obar & al, 2015). The contribution of the user is thus an essential part of UGC (Naad & al, 2017). This component of the definition represents the core value of social media as a medium

enabling any individual to create, publish and share its own content as well as interacting with other content creators on the platform (Carr & al, 2015). This concept is opposed to traditional media channels which are one-directional and static and do not enable media consumers to interact, i.e., television or newspapers (Saravanakumar & al, 2012).

The third characteristic refers to the perceived interactivity of a social medium (Carr & al, 2015). One should therefore facilitate social interactions among its users. Those interactions can take many forms such as conversations between individuals, group discussions or solitary users interacting with content or other aspects of the platform. Regardless of the specific type of interaction, the important factor is that the user feels a sense of connection and/or engagement with others while using the social medium (Obar et al, 2015).

The channels of a social medium should also be dis-entrained and persistent (Carr & al, 2015). Channel dis-entrainment refers to communication that is facilitated by a particular channel, such as social media, in which the user can participate at their own convenience, rather than requiring both parties to be present at the same time as in face-to-face communication. This allows for asynchronous communication, which can avoid the issue of "scarcity of temporal resources" (McGrath, 1991, p. 162). This is in contrast to synchronous communication, which requires both parties to be present at the same time (Carr & al, 2015).

The final component refers to mass personal communication (Carr & al, 2015). Mass personal communication occurs when individuals use mass communication channels, such as social media, for interpersonal communication, or when they use interpersonal channels, such as phone calls or text messages, for mass communication. It can also refer to situations where individuals are simultaneously engaging in both types of communication (Carr & al, 2015.)

However, not all social media are equals and do not offer the same opportunities for the end user. Namely, different social media platforms may be distinguished from each other based on the degree of social presence which pertains to the media-related component of social media (Kaplan & al, 2010). Social presence theory suggests that different media have varying levels of social presence, i.e., the amount of acoustic, visual and physical contact achievable between two communication partners (Kaplan & al 2010). Social media can also be differentiated on the basis of their varying level of "richness". According to the "media richness theory" elaborated by Daft & Lengel in 1986, this concept posits that the purpose of communication is to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty. Therefore, a social medium may be considered richer than others according to its aptitude at resolving ambiguity and uncertainty (Kaplan & al, 2015). The eight most popular forms of social media are blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, media-sharing sites, social bookmarking/selection sites, analysis sites forums and effective Worlds (Saravanakumar & al, 2012).

As hinted at earlier, there is a general confusion in the literature when it comes to determining what platforms are actually social media or not (Kaplan et al, 2010). A common mistake that is made among researchers is the confusion between the term "social medium" and "social networking site" (SNS) (Aichner & al, 2021). This distinction, however, is very important as a social networking site falls under the realm of social media but not all social media are social networking sites. As stated in the beginning of this paragraph, social media is a web-based technology that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content as well as the ability to interact with and share content with other users (Boyd & al, 2007). This interpretation of social media thus englobes a wide panel of platforms and technologies, namely social networking sites (SNS), blogs, podcasts, video sharing sites among others. A social networking site, on the other hand, is a specific type of social media platform which enables users to create a public or semi-public profile, connect with other users, and view and traverse their connections and the connections of others within the platform. The attractiveness of social networking sites therefore resides in their ability to facilitate relationships and connections between

users (Boyd & al, 2007). Social networking sites are commonly what comes to mind when people think of social media platforms; some mainstream examples being Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Vineran, 2019).

In the present research, when referring to social media marketing, we refer indeed to the textbook definition and scope of a social medium thus including marketing activities on social networking sites and on other platforms that cannot be considered as such, i.e., blogs and microblogs, video sharing platforms and so on.

2.1.2 Social Media Marketing

Given the lack of commonly validated definition of social media, it should not come as a surprise that, so far, literature has not yet agreed on a definitive definition on social media marketing (Pham & al, 2015). In their quantitative study on the impact of social media marketing and customer experience on customer behaviors, Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin; Ma & Ruangkanjanases (2020) define social media marketing as “an organization’s integrated activities that turn social media communication (networks) and interactions (influences) into useful strategic means to achieve desired marketing results” (p.2). Moreover, Pham & Gammoh refer to social media marketing as “a company’s process of creating and promoting online marketing-related activities on social media platforms that offer values to its stakeholders “(p.325).

While those two definitions are relevant, the second one does not highlight one fundamental aspect of social media marketing which is the participation and interaction of the customer with the social media marketing content (Kim & al, 2010). Social media has thus changed the way that marketing is performed by empowering customers and giving them the means to not be passive anymore and have influence over brands (Bazi & al, 2020). The consumer now has the capacity to co-create the marketing content that is being put out and can even take part in behaviors originally performed solely by organizations (Liu & al, 2021).

This participatory content creation and interaction have the means to create long-term high-quality relationships between the firm and the user (Wibowo & al, 2020). However, the benefits of social media marketing go far beyond maintaining a qualitative relationship with consumers. So far, literature has determined that social media marketing activities can impact brand equity and brand reputation, increase brand awareness, trust, relationship and loyalty as well as creating positive word-of-mouth (Pham & al, 2015). Moreover, social media data such as customer personal information, market offerings and customer opinion are seen as valuable resources to guide marketers’ decisions. By exploiting those, companies can gain a more holistic understanding of the market which, in return, can guide their marketing strategies to make more informed decisions (Arrigo, 2018). Other benefits of social media marketing include encouraging purchase intention (Bazi & al, 2020), fostering engagement (Koivisto & al, 2020), achieving integrated marketing activities with less costs and less efforts as well as boosting revenue and earnings (Kim & al, 2010).

In spite of the numerous opportunities provided by social media marketing activities, firms must exercise caution when considering their social media marketing strategies. Not only do those practices require in-depth planning and top-level management (Creevey & al, 2022), the use of social media for marketing purposes presents several risks for businesses (Bjørn-Andersen, 2011). Many of those challenges are linked to the interactive nature of social media, generating a shift of power from the firms to the customers (Bjørn-Andersen, 2011). This transfer of influence from top to bottom leads firms to not having complete control over their brand image anymore and having to co-create it with their customers (Pham & al, 2015). Another potential downside of this interactivity between companies and social media users is the ability of the latter to leave negative feedback and comments

about the firm, therefore fostering negative word-of-mouth (Saravanakumar & al, 2012). To avoid the impairment of brand image and dissatisfied customers nurturing negative word-of-mouth, it is highly advised that firms ensure that their social media marketing aligns with their global marketing strategy (Saravanakumar & al, 2012).

Besides, so far, we have not yet touched on the definite variables that encompass social media marketing. In their empirical study on the impact of social media marketing activities on customer equity, Kim & Ko (2012) identify five constructs that comprise social media marketing activities; namely: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word of mouth (p.1484).

The first variable, *entertainment*, refers to a firm's use of social media to provide their audience with engaging and enjoyable content. Entertainment is a key factor that drives customers to create and share user-generated content on social media and participate in brand communities of the firms. Additionally, information that consumers perceive as entertaining and exciting is more likely to be widely shared online (Liu & al, 2021).

The second attribute refers to a firm's ability to facilitate the exchange of information with others on social media and is known as *interactivity* (Liu & al, 2021). Social media platforms are designed to foster participation and allow for the collaboration and sharing of various types of content such as information, videos and pictures (Vinerean, 2019). The interactive nature of a company's social media posts is significant as it encourages customer engagement (Pentina & al, 2018).

The third construct, *trendiness*, or the ability to stay current and relevant, is a key aspect of a brand's image (Kim & al, 2012). In today's digital age, customers expect easy and immediate access to information about a brand, particularly through social media. As such, it is important for firms to keep their customers informed about the latest trends and updates within the brand, as this can influence purchasing decisions (Lui & al, 2021). By effectively disseminating timely and relevant information about the brand, companies can enhance their trendiness and appeal to their target audience (Wibowo & al, 2020).

The fourth attribute, *customization*, refers to the degree of personalization of the social media content that is being put out by a company, thus being adapted to fit different customers segments and target audience (Liu & al, 2021). Customization is a valuable strategy for marketers as it enables them to reduce the amount of information being put on customers and, instead, focuses on providing them with content fitting their needs or expectations thus focusing on quality and fit of the content rather than quantity (Ansari & al, 2003). In the specific realm of social media, customized content has been shown to elicit greater responses from target audience compared to standardized content thus improving overall commitment (Liu & al, 2021).

At last, *word-of-mouth* (WOM) implies the act of customers sharing information about a brand with others, typically through social media or personal conversation (Wibowo & al, 2020). This behavior reflects the customer's level of engagement with the brand and their willingness to promote it with others. While the other dimensions mentioned are features that brands may act on in their social media strategies, WOM is a result of the firm's social media marketing efforts (Liu & al, 2021). In other words, WOM could be seen as a measure of the success of the marketing actions. WOM is a powerful tool that brands can foster to enhance purchase intentions and spread awareness about the brand (Heine et al, 2014). To go further, a distinction can be made between traditional WOM and eWOM. In her literature review on WOM, Huete-Alcocer (2017) argues that, while seemingly similar concepts, the distinction between WOM and eWOM should not be underscored as the apparition of the latter has not only expended WOM beyond person-to-person interaction, it is considered the most powerful source of pre-purchase information for customers (p.3). The concept of the different purchasing stages is elaborated in the "Customer Experience" section of this literature review.

A key metric when it comes to measuring the effectiveness of social media marketing is the customer's engagement. Generally speaking, customer engagement refers to the behavior of the customer towards a specific brand on a cognitive, emotional and behavioral level which elicit different degrees of state of mind from a motivational perspective depending on the context (Dhaoui, 2014). In the context of social media, Mollen and Wilson (2010) define engagement as a "cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value" (p.923). Content being put out by a specific brand can thus enable different behaviors from the customer with varying degrees of engagement. In their study using big data collection on Facebook, Liu, Shin & Burns (2021), identify three types of behavior from social media content consumers (p.816). The first one, passive consumption, elicits the smallest amount of engagement from consumers with typical actions being reading and watching the content put out by companies. Next, contribution fosters a greater amount of engagement as the consumer likes, shares or comments the said content. The maximum amount of engagement is from creation. This type of behavior is related to the above-mentioned concept of user-generated content. In this instance, the consumer can partake in the creation of the content of the brand by delivering their own social media content (Liu & al, 2014).

Given the growing dominance of social media in today's society, there is a general consensus throughout social media and social media marketing literature agreeing that participating in social media marketing practices is no longer a strategic choice that brands can choose to partake in or not but a necessity (Pham & al, 2015). Therefore, the question is not whether firms should develop social media marketing strategies or not but how they need to do so (Kaplan & al, 2010). Social media marketing practices are now present in almost all companies regardless of their size or sector of activity (Saravanakumar & al, 2012).

2.2 Luxury Brands

2.2.1 Luxury Brands

Notwithstanding the rise in research papers and growing interest on the subject in recent years (Ko & al, 2019), there is so far no consensus on a definitive definition of luxury brands (Creevey & al, 2022). There are several roots to the complexity of elaborating on a common definition, the first being that luxury is a relative concept (Ko et al, 2019). What makes a luxury brand what is in the eyes of either customers, firms or between different members of those groups is above all subjective (Creevey & al, 2022). Moreover, what is considered luxurious according to one's opinion might not hold true for another (Chevalier et al, 2008). The definition of a luxury brand can also vary depending on the context the expression is used in, whether it is from a social or economic perspective (Van der Veen, 2003). An additional motive behind the complex nature of defining a luxury brand lies in the way its nature has been evolving over time (Tungate, 2009). In his book "Luxury World: The Past, Present and Future of Luxury Brands", Mark Tungate (2009) highlights that the "democratization of luxury" has changed the exclusive nature that was so often associated with luxury brands, dividing them into two separate categories: luxury brands accessible for the mass public and the ones remaining inaccessible (p.2). Moreover, this fading of exclusivity is reinforced in light of Michel Chevalier & Gérald Mazzalovo's book, "*Luxury Brand Management*" (2008), where they posit a paradox existing in "contemporary luxury" (p.2). According to Chevalier & Mazzalovo, luxury brands in present time persists as a sign of social distinction reserved for a small elite of persons while, simultaneously, being produced and distributed following a high-volume strategy (p.2).

Throughout the years and the numerous attempts at defining them, however, several common characteristics keep resurfacing in most definitions, offering a general idea of what makes luxury brands what they are (Ko & al, 2019). In their literature review and attempt at defining luxury brands,

Ko, Costello & Taylor (2019) observe four common factors across most definitions; viz, high quality, rarity, premium price points and high level of aesthetics (p.406). Ko, Costello & Taylor (2019) thus define a luxury brand as *“a branded product or service that consumers perceive to be high quality; offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional; have prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality; be worthy of commanding a premium price; and be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with consumer”* (p.406). Through this definition, the subjective nature of luxury brands becomes even more apparent. The attributes outlined in this study are relative in nature and no universal consensus exists to assess them. Whether or not a brand possesses these criteria, and to which extent, depends on the appreciation of each individual according to their cultural and socio-economic background, and so on (Ko & al, 2019). Luxury brands thus appear as a socially constructed concept where intangible and experiential dimensions play a part just as crucial in the mind of the customer as the tangible and functional dimensions (Grigorian & al, 2014).

Beyond the essence of luxury brands, the sole motive for the purchasing of luxury goods and services is substantially different in contrast to non-luxury ones (Bazi & al, 2020). The purchase intention of a luxury brand’s offering is viewed as hedonistic, meaning that it does not stem from the necessity of fulfilling a basic need but rather from the desire to partake in pleasurable experiences, procuring psychological and emotional value to the consumer (Loureiro & al, 2018). The act of luxury purchasing therefore raises the self-worth of the consumer. In accordance with the above-mentioned dimensions of luxury brands, price premium is viewed as a catalyst for the act of luxury purchasing. Individuals are willing to pay an extensive amount of money in order to consume a certain brand rather than another (Godey & al, 2016). Hence, those involved in the procurement of luxury goods and services may pretend to belong to a certain elite, a restrained circle of individuals possessing a superior social status (Bazi & al, 2020). The ability to afford this consumption style acts as a signal of one’s social standing (Vinerean, 2019). Nevertheless, the luxury market is evolving and the apparition of new customer segments challenges the social stratification aspect of luxury brands (Creevey & al, 2022). Moreover, literature demonstrates that the motives for the consumption of luxury brands differ across age, gender and nationality, along with the cultural environment of the person (Ko & al, 2019).

The fundamental elements constituting a luxury brand also differ from non-luxury brands. To that regard, luxury brands possess a set of characteristics, both tangible and intangible, serving as recognizable signals for consumers to identify them as such (Grigorian & al, 2014). Some tangible elements include a set of symbols associated with the brand such as a monogram, a pattern, an image, etc. One crucial tangible asset is the store itself which acts not only as a selling place for the luxury brand’s offering but also a vehicle to transmit the brand’s image and beliefs. Intangible aspects of a luxury brand include, among others, the philosophy of the brand, the rituals associated with it as well as the way of life endorsed by the brand. One key intangible characteristic of luxury brands is linked to their elitism aspect mentioned previously. The main barrier to entrance being put by luxury brand’s is their price premium (Ko & al, 2019). However, it is not the only dissuasion method used to create a selection among potential customers. In the spirit of protecting the exclusive image of the brand, luxury brands can adopt behaviors disabling customers from purchasing from them (Grigorian & al). This denial of access to certain potential clients further reinforces the sense that purchasing from luxury brands is a privilege only few can afford (Bazi & al, 2020). The list of elements described in the paragraph, while not aiming to be exhaustive, highlights a key feature of luxury brands and luxury consumption which is that luxury brands aim to create memorable experiences to their customers (Koivisto & al, 2020). This subject is further elaborated on in the section “Customer Experience for Luxury Brands”.

2.2.2 Luxury Brand Marketing

Despite its small size in terms of number of companies (Koivisto & al, 2020), the luxury market has also been an extremely powerful and influential player in the economy (Ko & al, 2012). Besides its outstanding economic power in terms of monetary value, deemed one of the most lucrative along with one of the fastest growth rates (Koivisto & al, 2020), the luxury sector has often paved the way for the best marketing practices, spilling over to other industries despite its distinctive strategic approach (Ko & al, 2012). As above-mentioned, luxury goods and services are purchased and consumed distinctly from non-luxury ones and, consequently, require specific marketing needs (Bazi & al, 2020).

As mentioned in the previous section, luxury brands and the customers' desire to consume those go beyond the material offering of the brands (Grigorian & al, 2014). The key objective of luxury marketing is thus to convey memorable experiences to customers (Koivisto & al, 2020) while protecting and maintaining their brand image (Heine & al, 2014). In order to build this brand image, luxury brands use different tools such as the authenticity of the brand, their heritage and pedigree, their stylistic consistency and quality commitment, their icons and symbols and the emotional aspects of the brand (Vineran, 2019).

In her study on the effectiveness of luxury brand marketing and its impact on customer engagement on Facebook using big data analysis, C. Dhaoui (2014) highlights a framework for luxury brand marketing (p.212). This theoretical framework named "The eight Ps of luxury marketing" was elaborated by Rohit Arora (2012) in his article "The eight pillars of luxury brand marketing" in the IDEX Magazine. The eight pillars identified are performance, pedigree, paucity, persona, public figures, placement, public relations and pricing.

The first pillar, performance, touches both on the utilitarian and experiential value of a luxury brand and its offering and highlights that, in order to perform well, a luxury brand must focus on both the quality of its offering and on the experiences provided to the customers (Dhaoui, 2014). Pedigree refers to two important intangible attributes mentioned in the previous section which are the history and the culture of the brand and are key elements in the marketing strategy of luxury companies (Grigorian & al, 2014). The next pillar, paucity, links to the above-mentioned control that luxury brands exercise over the entrance of new customers in order to preserve their exclusivity (Dhaoui, 2014). Persona refers to the culture, symbolisms and way of life conveyed by the brand. Public figures are linked to the often-employed celebrity endorsers of a luxury brand (Dhaoui, 2014). Placement, where the customer is in contact with the brand, goes beyond the realm of the stores and retail's locations but extends to all the touchpoints when the two meet (Dhaoui, 2014). The notion of touchpoints is expanded on in the "Customer Experience" section of this literature review. The next pillar, public relations, is a key tool in the marketing strategy of a luxury brand to influence public opinion (Dhaoui, 2014). Finally, pricing refers to the price premium of luxury brands which cultivates brands exclusivity (Ko & al, 2019) but also the challenges that comes with it such as the differences between promotions for non-luxury and luxury brands as well as the dangers of reducing the prices at the risk of damaging the brand image (Dhaoui, 2014).

2.3 Customer experience

Customers have for long been viewed as rational decision makers, seeking the best possible choice outcome according to their needs through the resources they have access to (Helkkula & Kelleher, 2010). However, throughout what we have exposed so far regarding the decision-making process of luxury consumers, what becomes apparent is that experiential intangible elements play a role just as important, if not more, as functional tangible elements in customers' decision-making process (Loureiro et al, 2018). Following this logic, researchers have begun to put the idea of the

customer as a rational decision-maker under scrutiny in the last four decades and highlighted the subjective nature of their decision-making journey. Nowadays, customers are no longer viewed as passive rational buyers but as emotion-driven beings whose choices are guided by experiential, symbolic, aesthetic and hedonic criteria (Helkkula & Kelleher, 2010). It is an experiential view of consumption. Moreover, the shift of power from the firm to the consumer as well as the increased volume of interactions between those through multiple channels and touchpoints has added layers of complexity to the management of the customer journey for companies. The improvement of the customer experience (CX) has thus become the first major priority for managers (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

But what exactly is customer experience (CX) and, to begin with, what is an experience? Bernard H. Schmitt is considered to be one of the first scholars to have brought light on the importance of customer experience at the very end of the 20th century (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In his book, “A framework for managing customer experiences” (2008), B.H Schmitt defines experiences as “private events that occur in response to some stimulation” that “involve the entire living being” and that “often results from direct observation and/or participation in events – whether they are real, dream-like or virtual” (p.114).

However, the complexity increases when it comes to defining the customer experience. In their qualitative study on the cyclical inter-relationship between the customer service experience and the customer perceived value, Anu Helkkula and Carol Kelleher (2010) describe customer experience as “among the most ill-defined and debated concepts in service marketing research” (p.38). In their qualitative study on the monitoring of customer experience, Christopher Meyer and Andre Schwager (2007) define customer experience as “internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company” (p.2). While this definition provides a rough understanding of customer experience, it is rather incomplete and lacks multiple dimensions that are inherent to the concept. In their literature review on the origins and current knowledge on customer experience, K. Lemon and P. Verhoef (2016) define the term as “a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm’s offering during the customer’s entire purchase journey” (p.71). This definition englobes two essential components of CX which are: (1) the different kinds of CX and (2), the different stages at which CX occurs. R. Jain, J. Aagja & S. Bagdare provide a more robust definition in their literature review of customer experience (2017) where they describe customer experience as “the aggregate of feelings, perceptions and attitudes formed during the entire process of decision making and consumption chain involving an integrated series of interaction with people, objects, processes and environment, leading to cognitive, emotional, sensorial and behavioral responses” (p.649).

As above-mentioned, Schmitt was among the pioneers that brought interest to the notion of customer experiences (Wibowo & al, 2020). In his approach on defining the latter, Schmitt identifies five distinct categories of CX: *sense, feel, think, act, and relate* (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The first category, *sense*, is linked to the stimulation of the five senses of the customer which influences their perception of a brand or an offering through visual, audio, olfactive, tangible or gustative stimuli (Gentile & al, 2007).

The second type of CX, *feel*, is the emotional component of the CX. The “feel” component of CX involves the feelings and emotions that the customer feels toward a brand, a product or a service (Gentile & al, 2007). This emotional response can be triggered by multiple elements and events controlled by the company or not which will result in the creation of either positive or negative emotions from the customer (Wibowo & al, 2020).

The *think* type of CX enables the customer to use their cognitive capacities in various ways and in multiple situations. A company can thus stimulate the creativity of customers and/or their capacity

at problem solving through different stimuli. This can also affect the mental associations that the customer creates around a brand's image or their offering (Gentile & al, 2007). This kind of cognitive customer experience mostly aims at engaging consumers in an innovative manner as well as creating positive mental associations (Wibowo & al, 2020).

The fourth type of CX, *act*, relates to how a company's various stimuli impact the behavior of the customer (Wibowo & al, 2020). In their quantitative/qualitative study attempting at formalizing existing concepts on customer experience, C. Gentile, N. Spille and G. Noci (2007) break this form of CX into two distinct categories which are the "pragmatic component" and the "lifestyle component" (p.398). On one hand, the pragmatic component focuses on the concept of performing a concrete action whether it is before, during or after the purchasing phase in the customer journey. On the other hand, the lifestyle component emphasizes behavioral actions related to the specific lifestyle of the customer (Gentile & al, 2007).

The final component, named *relate* is the deepest level of customer experience that a company can aim for as it transcends emotional and behavioral involvement to reach the creation of a relationship with the customer (Wibowo & al, 2007). The "relate" dimension of CX can occur between the customer and the company by building a trust and loyalty bond between the two but companies can also aim at creating relationships, networks and communities between their customers (Gentile et al, 2007).

As hinted at in the two previous paragraphs, CX can also be split according to the different purchasing stages that an individual goes through during the entire customer journey as he or she comes in contact with multiple touchpoints (Jain & al, 2017) (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The three stages are: pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. The first stage, "pre-purchase", encompasses all the actions and events an individual will go through before performing a purchase action. The pre-purchase stage of the CX thus covers the period from which they first become aware of a specific need to the consideration of the different options available to satisfy it (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The second one, "purchase", is the shortest one in terms of temporal duration as it solely covers the actual purchase of a company's product or service. This step in the customer journey thus includes elements such as the choice of the customer, the payment phase as well as the eventual order placement and delivery of the product or services depending on the settings of the purchase (Jain & al, 2017). The final stage, "post-purchase", will cover all the interactions that the individual will have with a company after the purchase. This can relate to the actual usage or consumption experience of the purchase itself but also covers after-sales customer care and service quality (Jain & al, 2017).

It is important to note that the customer journey is more of an iterative process than a linear journey and, thus, external factors such as an individual's past purchase experiences will affect the customer journey. As a matter of fact, different categories of touchpoints exist; only a subpart of which are actually under the firm's control (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In their literature review on customer experience, K. Lemon and P. Verhoef (2016) highlight three categories of touchpoints (p.654): Brand-owned, which are the ones that a company actually has control over and can design themselves. Partner-owned, which are touchpoints that a company designs in collaboration with its multiple partners. Those can be distribution channels or resellers of a brand's offering, communication channel associates and so on. These types of touchpoints as well as the previous one belongs on a spectrum and, thus, it may be complex to decide whether some touchpoints are actually brand-owned or partner-owned. Finally, customer-owned touchpoints are the ones that a company has no influence over. It is important to mention that customer experience is highly influenced by the customer itself through variables such as their socio-cultural background, economic status, demographic group and so on (Jain & al, 2017). In order to deliver the highest level of customer experience possible to the end customer, a company has to gain a clear and deep understanding of their customer, their entire

journey as well all the touchpoints that they will go through during each stage in order to manage the ones that the company has actual control over (Jain & al, 2017).

Managing CX efficiently and providing positive experience to the end customer is crucial for companies as hedonic characteristics score just as high as functional ones in terms of importance in the customer's mind. In return, those positive experiences support the creation of emotional ties and loyalty between the customer and the firm (Gentile & al, 2007). Moreover, customer experience represents a valuable long term competitive advantage for a company as it is difficult for competitors to replicate (Jain & al, 2017). Schmitt proposes a five-steps framework to build efficient CX for companies: study the experiential environment of the customer, develop the experiential platform, create the brand experience, frame the experience interface and provide continuous innovation for the customer (Jain & al, 2017). In their attempt at formalizing customer experience management, C. Gentile, N. Spiller and G. Noci (2007) propose four additional recommendations to provide positive customer experience which are "develop experience-driven innovations", "consider the functional features of the commercial offer in order to create sustainable competitive advantage with respect to competitors", "provide a venue for integrated CX according to the position in the consuming experience continuum where the customer experience is being provided" and finally, "keep in mind that the different components of the customer experience depend on the characteristics of a given product" (p.405). However, it is worth mentioning that those guidelines lack proper validation and therefore do not allow generalization.

While it is agreed that organizations from any size and industry benefit from proper customer experience management, the specific way in which it should be dealt with varies according to the specific sector and structure of the company (Jain & al, 2017). Hence, the specificities linked to the CX management in the luxury industry will be further elaborated on in the section "Customer experience for luxury brands".

2.4 Luxury brands' social media marketing activities

Social media and social media marketing activities have proven to be essential elements of the marketing mix for companies of all sizes and sectors, providing them with new opportunities and competitive advantages. It is thus commonly agreed on nowadays that participating in social media marketing activities is not a question of whether or not companies should hop on the trend or not but, rather, how they should do so (Kaplan & al, 2010).

Nevertheless, the luxury industry has first experienced an adoption rate much slower in comparison to other sectors (Arrigo, 2018). This delay finds its roots in the initial fear from luxury brands that adopting a social media presence would put their prestigious brand image at risk (Kim & Ko, 2010). With reference to the section on social media of this literature review, some characteristics described were user-generated content, i.e., social media content derived from social interactions between users as opposed to organization-generated content, and mass personal communication, i.e., the act of engaging in interpersonal communication through mass communication channels (Carr & Hayes, 2015). On the other hand, however, a key characteristic of luxury branding is the elitism and rarity component (Bazi & al, 2020). A paradox between the two notions becomes apparent as social media require mass participation from users and luxury brands thrive through exclusivity and social status. The adoption of social media marketing activities thus challenges the usual business model of luxury brands (Arrigo, 2018). Furthermore, luxury brands have long feared that their social media presence would harm their brand image as social media interactions between firms and customers lead to a shift of power from top to bottom (Kim & Ko, 2010). However, past this initial fear, most luxury brands nowadays have recognized the inevitability of social media marketing activities adoption

and are now experienced and consumed in significantly different ways than in the past, especially for younger customer segments such as Millennials and Gen Z (Bazi & al, 2020).

Whilst social media still represent a threat for luxury brands' image and does not substitute the importance of traditional marketing and in-store experience, SMMA have nonetheless proven to be valuable assets in the marketing mix of luxury brands, offering them new opportunities to leverage on (Creevey & al, 2022). In their quantitative study on the impact of social media marketing efforts from luxury brands on brand equity and customer behavior, B. Godey, A. Manthiou, D. Pederzoli, J. Rokka, G. Aiello, R. Donvito and R. Singh (2016) have found that social media marketing efforts in the luxury sector have a significant positive impact on both brand awareness, brand image and brand equity as well as on customers' preference, loyalty towards the brand and, at last, willingness to pay a price premium (p.5836-5837). Other researchers have also found that social media marketing activities from luxury brands has a positive influence on customer trust, customer intimacy and purchase intention (Bazi & al, 2020).

A focal question on the matter is how luxury brands should concretely implement their social media presence and strategy as to experience the actual benefits mentioned earlier while still having control over their crucial brand image (Creevey & al, 2022). Furthermore, the elaboration of such online presence requires a high skill-level of management (Creevey & al, 2022). Luxury brands also need to understand the actual reasons why their clients would want to engage with them on social media platforms as those motivations differ from those of non-luxury brands (Bazi & al, 2020). In their qualitative study on the drivers for engagement on social media from luxury consumers, S. Bazi, R. Filieri and M. Gorton (2020) identify thirteen motivations that drive luxury customers to engage with luxury brands through social media (p.227). Some of them are common with those of non-luxury brands; namely: brand news, perceived brand equity and entertainment. The remaining ten's specific to luxury consumers are thus post quality, celebrity endorsement, brand love, brand ethereality, design appeal, hedonic motives, actual self-congruence, status signaling, enhance/maintain face and ease of use and convenience (Bazi & al, 2020).

In their quantitative study on the impact of social media marketing on customer relationship and purchase intention for luxury brands, A.J. Kim and E. Ko (2010) identify five dimensions that constitute social media marketing efforts in the context of the luxury sector, namely: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word-of-mouth (p.170).

The first one, *entertainment*, refers to the ability of the brand to deliver enjoyable content to the customer through social media platforms (Liu & al, 2021). This component is very important as content that is perceived as entertaining has a higher chance at being interacted with through user-generated content but also shared and spread on a wider scale. The second one, *interaction*, is the extent to which the social media content has the capacity to elicit sharing behaviors from social media content consumers with other users of the platform through actions such as liking, commenting or sharing the content (Kim & Ko, 2010). The *trendiness* dimension is the capacity of the brand to deliver content that is relevant to the current trends going on at the moment (Arrigo, 2018). The second to last component, *customization*, is the degree of content personalization for either a specific customer, customer segment, targeted demographic and so on. This dimension is positive for companies which practice customization of content because it plays on the idea of intimacy between the firm and the customer which helps to strengthen the bond between the two (Lui & al, 2021). Finally, *word-of-mouth* refers to the customer taking the role of an intermediary for information from luxury brands to other customers or non-customers and can be viewed as one of the several responses resulting from brand engagement (Kim & Ko, 2010).

Nevertheless, social media marketing and luxury brands are two dimensions that have a lot of room for future research with scientific literature actively calling for further investigation on the topic.

In their big data analysis on the impact of social media marketing on customer engagement for the luxury sector, X. Liu, H. Shin and A.C. Burns (2021) highlight the importance of further research on how luxury brands can transfer and communicate the traditional in-store luxury experience on social media platforms (p.824). To better understand what actually constitutes traditional luxury experience, the following section will elaborate on the dimension “customer experience” and “luxury brands” as a common theme.

2.5 Customer experience for luxury brand

The motivation of luxury consumption goes beyond the acquisition of the product itself. That is the conclusion that we can quickly come to in light of the different parts dedicated to exploring luxury brands in this literature review thus far. An adjective that keeps coming back when trying to understand those additional motives is “hedonic” (Bazi & al, 2020). Hedonic consumption motives refer to the consumer’s motivation to consume a product and/or a service outside of the utilitarian benefits that the latter can bring such as experience-driven and sensory-driven motives (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Those hedonic motives are thus tightly linked to the notion of consumer experience discussed above.

Managing the luxury experience efficiently is essential for luxury brands. In their qualitative study aimed at understanding the similarities and differences between traditional consumer experience and luxury experience, V. Grigorian, P. Ricard and F. Espinoza (2014) even argue that brands failing to deliver adequate luxury experience to the customer cannot truly be viewed as such (p.15). In spite of this argument, they state that little is actually known about how to properly design the luxury experience and that the latter goes beyond the traditional customer experience for non-luxury brands.

Through interviews and field observations, they propose a framework for luxury brands to manage the luxury experience through seven characteristics (Grigorian & al, 2014). The first one, *brand beliefs*, is linked to the traditional brand values but extends beyond the latter as the beliefs connected to a luxury brand should not aim at attracting the mass market but rather customers who identify with those. The second criterion, *the brand’s icons*, designates the recognizable tangible elements of a specific luxury brand and that are not the logo. Those are features that are memorable enough to help the consumer immediately identify the brand. Those elements can be the monogram, a specific shade, a design pattern and so on. Next, *rituals*, designates practices that go beyond the scope of traditional customer service. In a traditional in-store experience, this can encompass all the special attentions performed by the salesperson towards the customer and the skill-level of the sales person itself (Wirtz & al, 2020). On the topic of in-store experience, *the point of sale* itself represents an element that luxury brands have to manage carefully. Even referred to in the article as a *religious temple*, the physical stores, events, exhibitions and so on of a luxury brand have the function to communicate the luxury experience but also to perform a sorting through the customers (Grigorian & al).

As previously explained in the section on luxury brands, the objective is not to attract the mass market as they have to retain a sense of elitism and rarity (Bazi et al, 2020). This aspect of luxury, *access to a parish*, represents the fifth element that constitutes the luxury experience (Grigorian & al, 2014). In order to maintain such status, luxury brands use different barriers to prevent certain customers from entering the group; the first obvious one being the price premium of luxury goods and services (Godey & al, 2016). However, luxury brands use other strategies in order to keep this elitist status and can deny access for certain segments of the market with the means to buy luxury goods. A fitting example is the coveted Birkin bag by Hermès which requires potential customers to join a waitlist in hopes of being able to buy one which makes it one of the most expensive and exclusive luxury bags on the market (Newson, 2016). The second to last component, *myths*, refers to the narrative that a luxury brand communicates and can be linked to the traditional brand values. Those myths should carefully

communicate the heritage and specific story of a luxury brand (Grigorian & al, 2014). Finally, luxury brands should communicate a *way of life* that resonates with its offering but that goes beyond consumption. Advertising a way of life that customers of the brand can implement is the ultimate way to deliver a luxury experience to the end customer (Grigorian & al, 2014).

It is important to mention that while this framework is targeted towards luxury brands, non-luxury ones can and should implement some of those strategies as well in order to deliver an exceptional customer service quality (Grigorian & al, 2014).

2.6 The impact of social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands on customer experience

The research material investigating social media marketing activities and customer experience together is rather sparse to this day. In their quantitative study on the customer behavior as an outcome of social media marketing and customer experience, A. Wibowo, S.C. Chen, U. Wiangin, Y. MA & A. Ruangkanjanases (2020), state that, while the two concepts are being investigated separately, no research had been conducted to investigate the two concepts together at the time of their study (p.2).

Their research investigates the impact of social media marketing activities and customer experience on customer's behavior. Namely, customer's loyalty, participation and purchase intention. Through surveys gathered between January and July 2020 from Indonesian social media users who had experience in using social networking sites as a buying platform, the results of their study indicate that customer experience and social media marketing activities have indeed a significant influence on customer's relationship quality and customer's behavior (Wibowo & al, 2020).

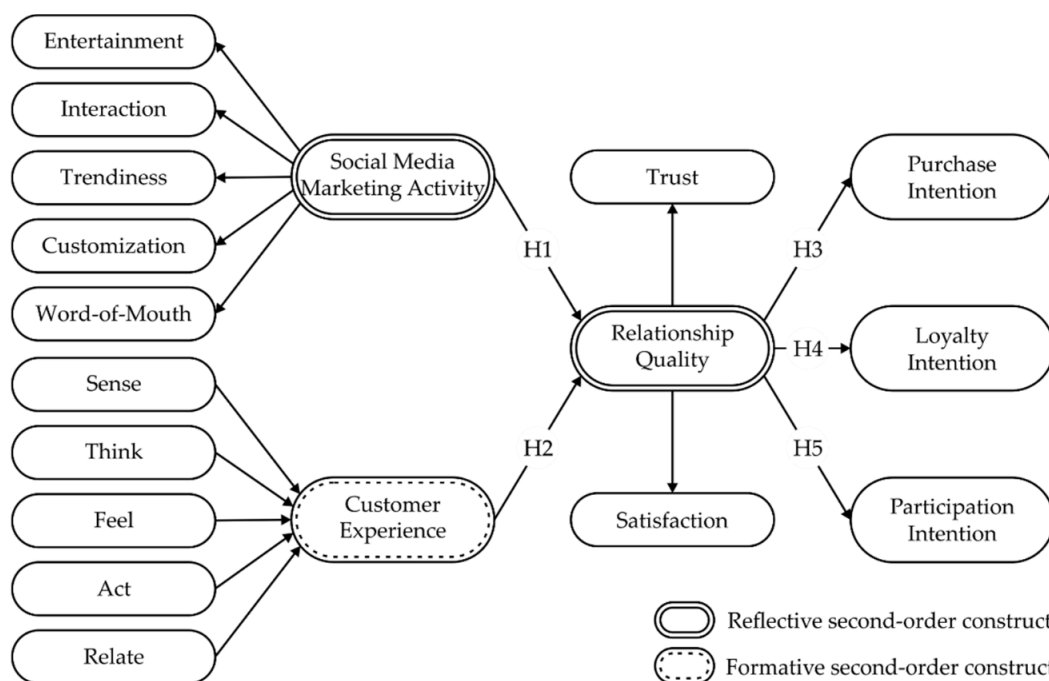


Figure 1. Research model from Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma & Ruangkanjanases's study on customer behavior as an outcome of social media marketing (2020)

One limitation of the study is that it does not focus on a specific market. However, while customer experience management is important for companies of all sizes and sectors, its nature and specificities change depending on the industry (Jain & al, 2017). As an effort to attest the validity of

the study, it would make sense to apply it to a sector where those constructs play a crucial role, such as the luxury industry. Furthermore, the study by Wibowo & al focuses on the impact of both social media marketing activities and customer experience on customer behavior but does not consider the effect that social media marketing activities can have on customer experience itself. However, literature has shown that customer experience management is crucial for luxury brands as luxury consumption strongly stems from hedonic motives. It thus appears as relevant to investigate the role that social media marketing activities from luxury brands have on the experience of customers.

Going back to the five constructs elaborated by Schmitt to capture the different dimensions of customer experience, this thesis aims to understand the impact that social media marketing activities have on each of those constructs, i.e., **sense, think, feel, act and relate**.

The first one, *sense*, is related to the five senses which are the sense of smell, sight, hearing, taste and touch. Although social media content cannot stimulate each of those five senses such as taste, smell and touch, it can however attempt to engage the customer by providing visually and audibly stimulating content through several social media platforms and types of content. We thus propose the first hypothesis:

H1: The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.

SMMA are considered a reflective second-order constructs whose related constructs are **entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth and trendiness** (Wibowo & al, 2020). Therefore, we formulate the five secondary hypotheses:

H1a: *The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to entertainment.*

H1b: *The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to customization.*

H1c: *The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to interactivity.*

H1d: *The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to word-of-mouth.*

H1e: *The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to trendiness.*

The second construct, *think*, is linked to the cognitive stimulation of a person. That stimulation can either be through the person using their cognitive capacities for problem-solving or by having them engage in activities boosting their creativity. Nowadays, social media content takes many forms and allows the customer to use their creativity through means such as user-generated content. Luxury brands can therefore improve the experience of customers by inciting them to create user-generated content or propose highly interactive content that stimulates their cognitive capacities. We thus formulate the second hypothesis as:

H2: The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.

The related sub-hypotheses are thus:

H2a: *The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to entertainment.*

H2b: *The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to customization.*

H2c: *The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to interactivity.*

H2d: *The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to word-of-mouth.*

H2E: *The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to trendiness.*

The *feel* dimension of customer experience relates to the emotions that a person feels towards a brand or a product in the context of customer experience. Understanding and managing this

dimension is crucial for brands as those emotional responses can be triggered by company-owned elements or outside elements that can result in either positive or negative response from the customer. Therefore, in the context of social media marketing activities, luxury brands have to pay attention to their social media presence and to the content that they put out in a way that elicits positive feelings from customers. Furthermore, social media platforms facilitate the spreading of negative word-of-mouth. Therefore, minimizing the number of negative feelings as a response to social media content is crucial for luxury brands. We formulate the fourth hypothesis as:

H3: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.

The secondary hypotheses are thus:

H3a: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to entertainment.

H3b: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to customization.

H3c: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to interactivity.

H3d: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to word-of-mouth.

H3e: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to trendiness.

The second to last component, *act*, is linked to the various concrete behavioral responses that the customers might have as a reaction to the triggers put out by a company or outside elements. This dimension is closely linked to the previous one as it can be seen as the consequence of the latter. An example of action is the spreading of negative word-of-mouth as a response to the negative emotions that the customer is feeling because of a certain trigger. However, in their study on customer experience and social media, Wibowo & al consider the “act” dimension as a way that a brand can influence the customer to partake in activities and advertise a certain lifestyle rather than a way of influencing behaviors (Wibowo & al, 2020). This can be considered in light of the qualitative research on customer experience for luxury brands conducted by Grigorian, V., & Espinoza Petersen, F. in 2014. In their study, they develop a framework to manage luxury experiences and one of those elements is a luxury “way of life” that should be advertised by brands. Taking into consideration both of those elements, we write the fourth hypothesis of this research as:

H4: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.

With the respective sub hypotheses:

H4a: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to entertainment.

H4b: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to customization.

H4c: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to interactivity.

H4d: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to word-of-mouth.

H4e: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to trendiness.

The final dimension, *relate*, is the most complex form of customer experience. It is linked to the creation of a bond or a relationship between the person and, in the context of this research, a luxury brand. The goal is to investigate if the social media content put out by luxury brands has a positive impact on the creation of a bond between the customer and the brand. We thus formulate our final hypothesis as:

H5: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.

With the respective secondary hypotheses:

H5a: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to entertainment.

H5b: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to customization.

H5c: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to interactivity.

H5d: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to word-of-mouth.

H5e: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to trendiness.

The research model designed for this thesis that is based on the above-mentioned hypotheses draws inspiration from the research model from Wibowo & al but was adapted in a way that transforms the variable *customer experience* from an independent variable to a dependent variable whose components are impacted by *social media marketing activities*.

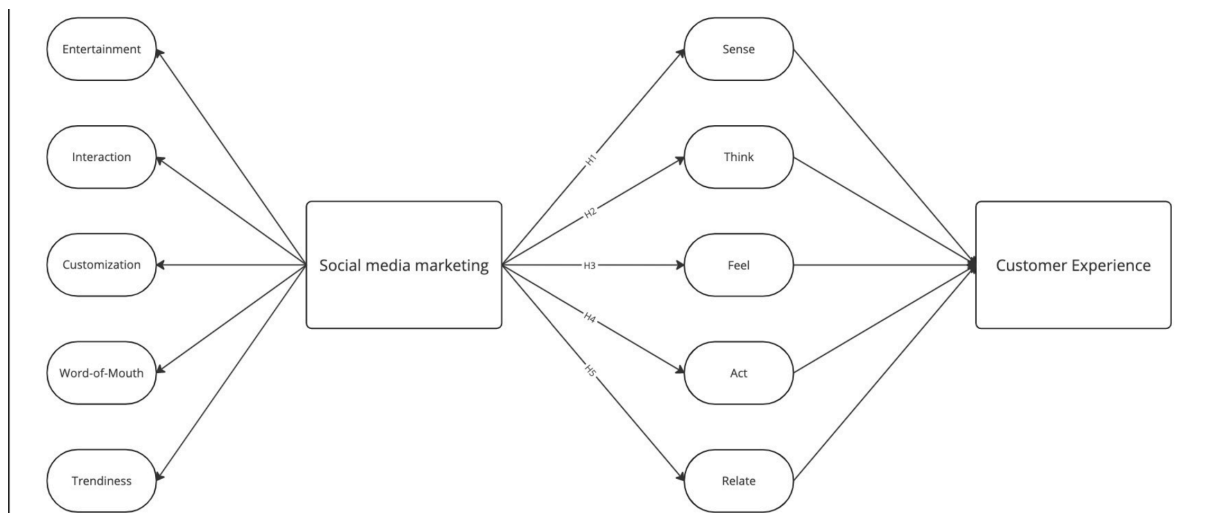


Figure 2. Conceptual Research Model

Source: Original work and research

Chapter 3: Research Design

The third chapter of this research thesis is devoted to the development of the research design that has been elaborated in order to conduct this study. The first subsection of this chapter will go over the methodology chosen to carry out the research. The second subsection will provide a thorough analysis of the sample. Finally, the last section of this chapter will explain the measurement items used to conduct the statistical analysis.

3.1 Methodology

In order to investigate the impact that social media marketing activities from luxury brands have on the several components that constitute customer experience, a conclusive research design has been chosen. The latter is a subcategory of causal research. In their book "Marketing research: An introduction to theory and research", Malhotra, Nunan and Birks (2017) define the purpose of conclusive research design as "to describe specific phenomena, to test specific hypotheses and to examine specific relationships" (p.72) and the purpose of a causal research design as "to obtain evidence of cause-and-effect (causal) relationships" (p.79).

In the context of this research, the final objective is to analyze how customer experience is impacted by the social media marketing activities from luxury brands. We thus define the independent variable as the social media marketing activities put out by luxury brands and the dependent variable as the customer experience. Moreover, social media marketing activities involves five different variables which are *entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word-of-mouth* (Wibowo & al). On the other hand, the dependent variable, customer experience, consist of five different dimensions which are *sense, feel, think, act and relate* (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Those five variables represent the five different hypotheses of this study.

3.2 Sample

Data collection for the study took place between the 19th of June 2023 and the 16th of July 2023. Due to time-restriction, a simple random sampling design has been chosen as it includes every individual in the population which all have an equal chance at being included (Burns & al, 2008). The survey was mostly distributed through social media, word-of-mouth and SurveySwap which is a website dedicated to facilitating the collection of data through surveys by exchanging surveys between users. While the distribution through social media was mainly out of simplicity and time-efficiency, this sharing method had the advantage of ensuring that those respondents were somewhat familiar with the usage of social media platforms and thus more likely to fit the criteria of the study.

By the end of the 27-day period where the survey remained available to answer, 280 people had answered the survey in total. However, due to the two preliminary conditions to make sure that the respondents actually fitted the criteria of the study, only 95 questionnaires were fully answered in total. Out of those, 84 questionnaires did not contain any missing values. The following tables describe the frequencies for each demographic variable of the sample. Out of the 84 participants (N = 84), the vast majority of respondents were female (88.1%) with only 9 male participants and only one preferring not to say (see table 1). A bit less than half of the sample was aged between 18 and 24 years old (41.7%), about a quarter between 25 and 34 years old (26.2%) with the remainder of the sample being more or less equally distributed between the remaining age brackets (see table 2). The vast majority of the sample was either employed full time (44%) or students (48.8%) (see table 3). About half of the sample had a master's degree (41.7%) and another third of the sample had a bachelor's degree (36.9%) (see table 4). In terms of yearly income bracket, about half of the sample earns less than €10,000 per year (44%) which roughly corresponds to the percentage of the sample that identified

as students which would explain the lower yearly salary. The other half of the sample, on the other hand, is distributed in a more scattered manner (see table 5). Regarding their frequency of luxury consumption, a bit less than half of the respondents buy from luxury brands once a year (41.7%) and a third of the sample buys less than once a year. The sample still includes 18 respondents who buy from luxury brands a least once every trimester (see table 6). Regarding the time spent by the sample on social media, more than half of the respondents go on social media at least once a day (65.5%) which ensures that the sample is familiar with it. However, the second response with the highest frequency is respondents who answered that they use social media less than once a week (15.5%). The responses for this question orbit towards the two extremes (see table 7). Finally, out of the total time spent on social media, more than half of the respondents allocate less than 10% of that time to the consumption of social media content from luxury brands (56%) and about 20% do not consume luxury social media content even though they follow some brands on social media (see table 8).

Table 1. Participants' gender

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	Male	9	10.7	10.7	10.7
	Female	74	88.1	88.1	98.8
	Prefer not to say	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Source: Analysis output on SPSS

Table 2. Participants' age

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	18 - 24	35	41.7	41.7	41.7
	25 - 34	22	26.2	26.2	67.9
	35 - 44	7	8.3	8.3	76.2
	45 - 54	9	10.7	10.7	86.9
	55 - 64	9	10.7	10.7	97.6
	65 - 74	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Source: Analysis output on SPSS

Table 3. Participants' professional status

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	Employed full time	37	44.0	44.0	44.0
	Employed part time	4	4.8	4.8	48.8
	Retired	2	2.4	2.4	51.2
	Student	41	48.8	48.8	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Source: Analysis output on SPSS

Table 4. Participants' education level

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	Secondary school	5	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Bachelor's degree	31	36.9	36.9	42.9
	Master's degree	35	41.7	41.7	84.5
	Professional degree	2	2.4	2.4	86.9
	Doctorate	11	13.1	13.1	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Source: Analysis output on SPSS

Table 5. Participants' yearly income brackets

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	Less than €10,000	37	44.0	44.0	44.0
	€10,000 - €19,999	6	7.1	7.1	51.2
	€20,000 - €29,999	5	6.0	6.0	57.1
	€30,000 - €39,999	7	8.3	8.3	65.5
	€40,000 - €49,999	9	10.7	10.7	76.2
	€50,000 - €59,999	4	4.8	4.8	81.0
	€60,000 - €69,999	2	2.4	2.4	83.3
	€70,000 - €79,999	3	3.6	3.6	86.9
	€80,000 - €89,999	1	1.2	1.2	88.1
	€90,000 - €99,999	1	1.2	1.2	89.3
	€100,000 - €149,999	5	6.0	6.0	95.2
	More than €150,000	4	4.8	4.8	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Source: Analysis output on SPSS

Table 6. Participants' frequency of luxury consumption

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	Less than once a year	25	29.8	29.8	29.8
	Once a year	35	41.7	41.7	71.4
	Once every trimester	18	21.4	21.4	92.9
	Once a month	4	4.8	4.8	97.6
	More than once a month	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Analysis output on SPSS

Table 7. Time spent on social media per week

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	Less than once a week	13	15.5	15.5	15.5
	Once a week	4	4.8	4.8	20.2
	2 times per week	5	6.0	6.0	26.2
	3 times per week	7	8.3	8.3	34.5
	At least once per day	55	65.5	65.5	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Analysis output on SPSS

Table 8. Percentage of time spent on social media allocated to luxury brand's social media content

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	I don't consume luxury brands' social media content even though I follow them.	16	19.0	19.0	19.0
	Less than 10 percent of the time I spend on social media.	47	56.0	56.0	75.0
	About a quarter of the time I spend on social media.	13	15.5	15.5	90.5
	About half of the total time I spend on social media.	6	7.1	7.1	97.6
	More than half of the total time I spend on social media.	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Analysis output on SPSS

Table 9. Social media platform picked by participants

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Valide	Facebook	19	22.6	22.6	22.6
	Youtube	1	1.2	1.2	23.8
	Instagram	63	75.0	75.0	98.8
	Pinterest	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Source: Analysis output on SPSS

3.3 Research Instrument

With the purpose of carrying out this quantitative research and collecting reliable and unbiased data, the preferred research instrument for this study is a self-administered survey (Burns & al, 2008). The latter has been created through Qualtrics' online survey tool. The language chosen for the survey is English as it is the most widely spoken language which ensured that the survey could be answered by as many respondents as possible. However, some help from the investigator could be provided to translate the questionnaire for some participants who were less familiar with English. The design and formulation of the questions are based on the quantitative study on the impact of social media and customer experience on customer behavior by Wibowo & al as well as Kim & Ko's quantitative study on the impact of luxury fashion brand's social media marketing on customer relationship and purchase intention. The survey was pre-tested on a sample of 10 respondents before being publicly published. The objective of pre-testing a survey is to ensure that the interpretation of the questions by the respondents is consistent and is the one intended by the investigator (Burns & al, 2008). Through that process, ambiguous questions can be reviewed and reformulated to ensure the good comprehension by the respondents. By the end of the pre-testing phase, eleven questions had to be reformulated in total.

Once reviewed, the final version of the survey was shared online to start the data collection. As mentioned in the previous section, the questionnaire was primarily shared through social media. The platform that gathered the highest number of participants is Instagram. The survey link was shared through Instagram stories and remained available for people to access through a link in the investigator's bio. As previously mentioned, sharing the survey through social media ensured that the respondents directly accessing the survey through the Instagram stories and the link in bio had an Instagram account beforehand; thus, increasing their chance of fitting the criteria of the studies. Furthermore, the networking aspect of Instagram made it convenient to have the survey shared by other users. Moreover, the questionnaire was shared by friends and family members through Facebook groups and Facebook posts. It is worth mentioning that, while those two means allowed to collect a significant amount of data in a short amount of time, they mainly focused on the close circle of the investigator at the expense of having a very diverse sample. The last means that the survey was shared through is the website Surveyswap. The latter is an online service which enables users to post their survey to have them answered by other users either by paying a certain amount of money or by answering other users' surveys. The sample gathered through this platform is however quite small as most of the respondents did not fit the preliminary criteria of the study.

The survey was divided into nine different parts. The first section of the survey contains the privacy policy which informs the participants on what kind of data and personal information are being collected in the context of the study as well as how and in which context those will be used and, finally,

with whom their responses will be shared. All the respondents were obligated to mark their consent to having their personal information and answers being used before being able to access the rest of the questionnaire. Otherwise, the respondents are thanked for the time taken to attempt to participate in the study.

The second section consists of an explanatory text whose objective is to inform the participants of the overall context and goal of the study as a good comprehension of the topic would also ensure a better comprehension of the questions in the seven following segments. Furthermore, this text specifies that the participants need to carefully acknowledge the two lists displayed in the following questions regarding the type of luxury goods and social media platforms that fit the scope of the study. This part concludes by thanking the participants for taking the time to answer the survey.

The next two sections were created to ensure that the participants fitted the scope of the research. Indeed, the objective is to study the impact that social media marketing activities have on the experience of customers that actively consume luxury brands. There were therefore two necessary criteria that the participants had to meet in order to participate in the study.

First of all, the respondents had to have purchased at least one good from a luxury brand in the last five years. Given the difficulty of finding a population that actively consumes luxury goods, the scope was purposely made as inclusive as possible regarding the type of luxury goods considered. The products listed in the questionnaire are clothing items, shoes, bags, accessories, jewelry, cosmetics which consists of make-up and skincare products and, finally, perfume. Hence, the third part of the questionnaire first presents that list of items in a bullet point format and concludes by a question asking the participants if they have indeed bought a product from a luxury brand in the last five years with reference to the list. The participants have to answer YES to the question in order to access the rest of the questionnaire. In the opposite case, the respondents will be met with an error message informing them that they unfortunately do not fit the scope of the study but that they are thanked nonetheless for taking the time to participate.

The second criterion to fit the scope of the study is that the participants have to actively follow one of the luxury brands they have purchased from in the last five years on at least one social media platforms. This condition ensures that the participants have indeed been confronted with social media content from the brand to evaluate whether those interactions have impacted their customer experience or not. The fourth section of the questionnaire thus displays the list of social media platforms that fit the scope of the study. This list is based on a Statista ranking of the ten most popular social networks ranked by number of monthly active users as of January 2023 and is comprised of **Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat, TikTok, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat and Douyin** (Statista, 2023). The text then proceeds to ask the participants, assuming that they have answered YES to the previous question, if they actively follow one of the brands that they have purchased from on at least one social media platform mentioned above. Only participants that answer YES to that question can access the rest of the questionnaire. Otherwise, they will be met with the same error message as the previous question.

The fifth section of the questionnaire asks the participants to pick one luxury brand that they have purchased from in the last five years and that they actively follow on social media. The question is under an open-handed format. The following section then asks them to choose one social media platform that they actively follow the brand on. The question is under a fixed answers format with the choices available corresponding to the list of social media platforms provided in section 4.

The seventh part of the survey measures the independent variable **social media marketing activities** and its five respective components, i.e., **entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word-of-mouth** (Kim & Ko,2010). This portion of the form consists of sixteen

measurement items that are based on the quantitative research by Kim & Ko from 2010 whose purpose was to understand the impact of luxury fashion brand's social media marketing on customer relationship and purchase intention (p.168). Similarly, the present research measures the measurement items with a seven-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree). In their study, Kim & Ko use one of Louis Vuitton's social media posts as a visual stimulus and then have the respondents review the measurement statements accordingly (Kim & Ko, 2010). As the present study adopts different research methodology, the original formulations of the measurement items were adapted to better accommodate the research framework.

The second to last section of the questionnaire measures the dependent variable **customer experience** and its five respective components, i.e., **sense, feel, think, act and relate** (Jain & al, 2017). This segment of the survey covers ten measurement items stemming from the quantitative study from 2020 by Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma & Ruangkanjanases whose objective was to study customer behavior as an outcome of social media marketing and customer experience (p.8). The research design for their study was self-assessment online questionnaires whose participants were Indonesian social media users who had experience in using social media as a buying platform (Wibowo & al, 2020). The measurement items are measured with a seven-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree). While the overall methodology closely resembles the one used in the present study, the target population and specific research goal of the two studies differ. Indeed, the present one focuses solely on luxury brands consumers. Furthermore, this study investigates social media content put out by luxury brands but does not focus on social media as a buying platform. Hence, the overall formulation of the measurement items was adapted to better fit the scope of the study.

The last section of the survey is dedicated to the collection of demographic data about the participants. The data collected here focuses on the gender, age, country of residence, education level, employment status and yearly income brackets of the participants. Moreover, this segment of the questionnaire also asks the participants at which frequency they consume luxury products. This section concludes with two questions on their social media usage habits asking the participants how much time they spend on social media per week and what percentage of that time is dedicated to the consumption of luxury brands' social media content.

3.4 Measures

This section focuses on the specific structure, measurement items and scale used in the survey with the purpose of studying the impact of the independent variable **social media marketing activities** on the dependent variable **customer experience**. All the questions that are in the nine sections of the questionnaire are fixed-response alternative questions with the exception of the fifth section which is under the format of an open-ended question. Fixed-response alternative questions are a form of multiple-choice questions or statements which require that participants choose from a predetermined list of choices (Johnstone & Ambusaidi, 2000). The questions in sections 1, 2, 3, 4 and 9 are classic multiple-choice questions and all the questions require that the participants choose only one answer. All the measurement items included in section 7 to measure the independent variable, **social media marketing activities**, and in section 8 to measure the dependent variable, **customer experience**, use a seven-point Likert scale consisting of seven choices ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree.

The section seven which measures the independent variable **social media marketing activities** which itself is made up of the five independent variables **entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization** and **word-of-mouth** is measured through sixteen measurement items adapted from the quantitative research from 2010 by Kim & Ko. This study is the original work where the questionnaire used by Wibowo & al was adapted from and is the study used as a point of reference for the present

research. As mentioned in the research instrument section, the overall formulation of the measurement items was adapted in order to better fit the goal of the study. As such, the measurement items in section 8 are redesigned as follows. The first three statements measure the independent variable **entertainment**. The statements 4 to 8 measure the independent variable **customization**. The statements 9 to 11 measure the independent variable **interaction**. The statements 12 to 14 measure the independent variable **word-of-mouth**. The statements 15 and 16 measure the independent variable **trendiness**.

The section eight which measures the dependent variable **customer experience** which itself is made up of the five variables **sense, feel, think, act** and **relate** is measured through ten measurement items adapted from the quantitative study from 2020 by Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma & Ruangkanjanases whose objective was to study customer behavior as an outcome of social media marketing and customer experience (p.8). The measurement items used in their study are adapted from the original work by Chen & Lin in their quantitative study from 2015 on the impact of customer experience and perceived value on sustainable social relationships in blogs (p.41) and Hsu and Tsou's study from 2011 on customer experience in online blog environments (p.511). Similar to section 7, the phrasing of the measurement items was adapted in order to have them better fit the scope of the research. As such, the measurement items in section 8 are redesigned as follows. The first two statements measure the dependent variable **sense**. The statements 3 and 4 measure the dependent variable **feel**. The statements 5 and 6 measure the dependent variable **think**. The statements 7 and 8 measure the dependent variable **act**. The statements 9 and 10 measure the dependent variable **relate**. The complete table for all the measurement items is found in **Table 10** below.

Table 10. Measurement items

Variable	Author	Code	Items
Entertainment	Adapted from Kim & Ko (2010)	ENT1	The content found on brand X's social media seems interesting.
		ENT2	It is exciting to use brand X's social media.
		ENT3	It is fun to collect information on brands and fashion through brand X's social media.
Customization	Adapted from Kim & Ko (2010)	CUST1	It is possible to have access to personalized information on brand X's social media.
		CUST2	Brand X's social media provides customized services.
		CUST3	Brand X's social media shows me personalized feed content that I am interested in.
		CUST4	It is easy to use brand X's social media.
		CUST5	Brand X's social media can be used anytime, anywhere.
Interaction	Adapted from Kim & Ko (2010)	INT1	It is easy to convey my opinion through brand X's social media.

		INT2	It is possible to exchange opinions or conversation with other users through brand X's social media.
		INT3	It is possible to share information with other users through brand X's social media.
Word-of-mouth	Adapted from Kim & Ko (2010)	WOM1	I would like to pass out information on brands, products or services from brand X's social media to my friends.
		WOM2	I would like to upload content from brand X's social media on my own social media account.
		WOM3	I would like to share opinions on brands, items, or services acquired from brand X's social media with my acquaintances.
Trendiness	Adapted from Kim & Ko (2010)	TREN1	Brand X's social media content provides me with information about the latest trends.
		TREN2	Content found on brand X's social media is frequently updated.
Sense	Adapted from Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma & Ruangkanjanases (2020)	SEN1	Brand X's social media content tries to engage my senses.
		SEN2	Participating (e.g., like, commenting, sharing) on Brand X's social media is very interesting.
Feel	Adapted from Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma & Ruangkanjanases (2020)	FEL1	Brand X's social media content tries to make me feel positive emotions.
		FEL2	Brand X's social media content tries to make me respond emotionally.
Think	Adapted from Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma & Ruangkanjanases (2020)	THK1	Brand X's social media content tries to stimulate my capacities at problem solving.
		THK2	Brand X's social media tries to stimulate my creativity.
Act	Adapted from Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma & Ruangkanjanases (2020)	ACT1	Brand X's social media tries to influence my lifestyle choices.
		ACT2	Brand X's social media content tries to push me to take concrete actions to change my lifestyle.

Relate	Adapted from Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma & Ruangkanjanases (2020)	REL1	Brand X tries to create a relationship with me through their social media content.
		REL2	I can relate to other customers through brand X's social media.

Source: Original work and research

Chapter 4: Results

In this fourth chapter of the research thesis, the author presents the results of statistical analyses used to verify the assumptions formulated and validate the underlying model. As such, the first section goes over the preliminary check of the measuring instrument and is then followed by a descriptive analysis of the data. From there, a correlation analysis is performed to identify which variables are correlated to each other. The last section will be dedicated to the hypotheses testing through multiple regression analyses. The statistical software used to perform all the statistical analyses is SPSS.

4.1 Data Cleansing

Before importing the data into SPSS and starting to test the hypotheses, a preliminary cleanse of the data was performed into Excel after exporting the data from Qualtrics. The raw number of respondents as counted by Qualtrics is 280 in total. However, this number includes the participants that did not meet the two preliminary criteria exposed in the previous chapter. Hence, the actual number of respondents comes to 95 in total. Out of those 95 surveys, eleven of them contained missing values mostly due to respondents abandoning the survey before reaching the end of it. Those incomplete questionnaires were removed from the sample, which results in a final sample of 84 in total (N = 84). Moreover, all the variables of the model were renamed according to the code of their measurement items. All of which can be found in **table 10**. For measurement items that were linked to the same variable, an extra column containing the mean of the different measurement items was computed to use that mean to perform the following analyses. Finally, unnecessary columns automatically generated by Qualtrics were deleted from the Excel file.

4.2 Normality of Measuring Instruments

A skewness and Kurtosis analyses were performed in SPSS to test the normality of the measuring instrument. The preliminary condition for the measuring instrument to be assumed as normally distributed is that all the variables considered range between -2 and 2. The following **table 11** displays the details for all variables.

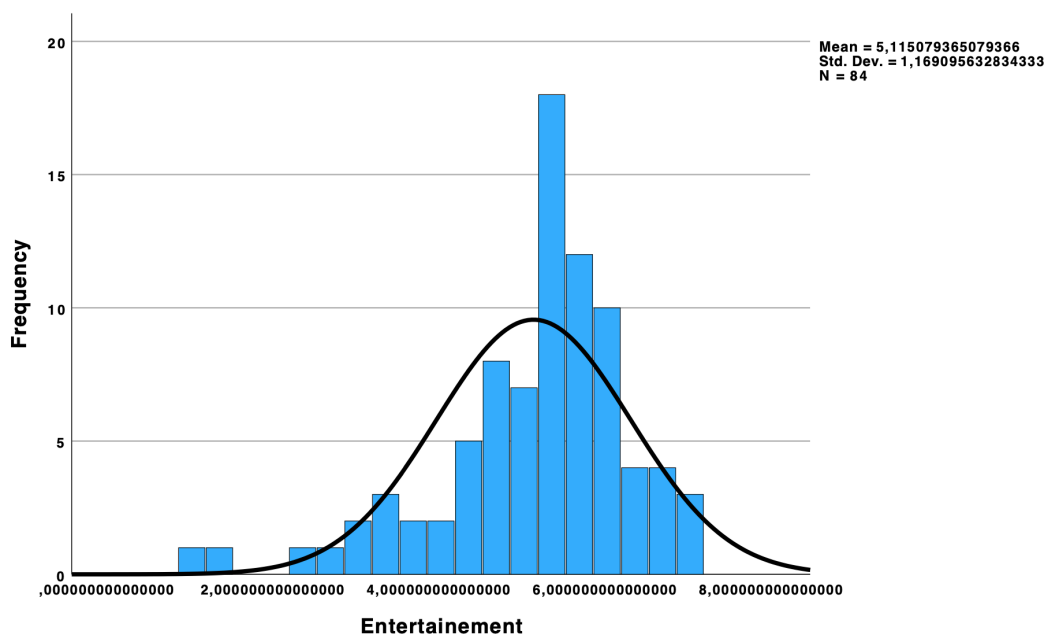
Table 11. Skewness and Kurtosis analyses

	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Entertainment	-1,208	,263	2,078	,520
Customization	-,980	,263	2,294	,520
Interactivity	-,402	,263	-,323	,520
Word-of-mouth	-,021	,263	-,194	,520
Trendiness	-1,061	,263	1,973	,520
Sense	-,712	,263	,784	,520
Feel	-,701	,263	,304	,520
Think	-,004	,263	-,052	,520
Relate	-,272	,263	-,667	,520
Valid N (listwise)				

Source: Analyses results in SPSS

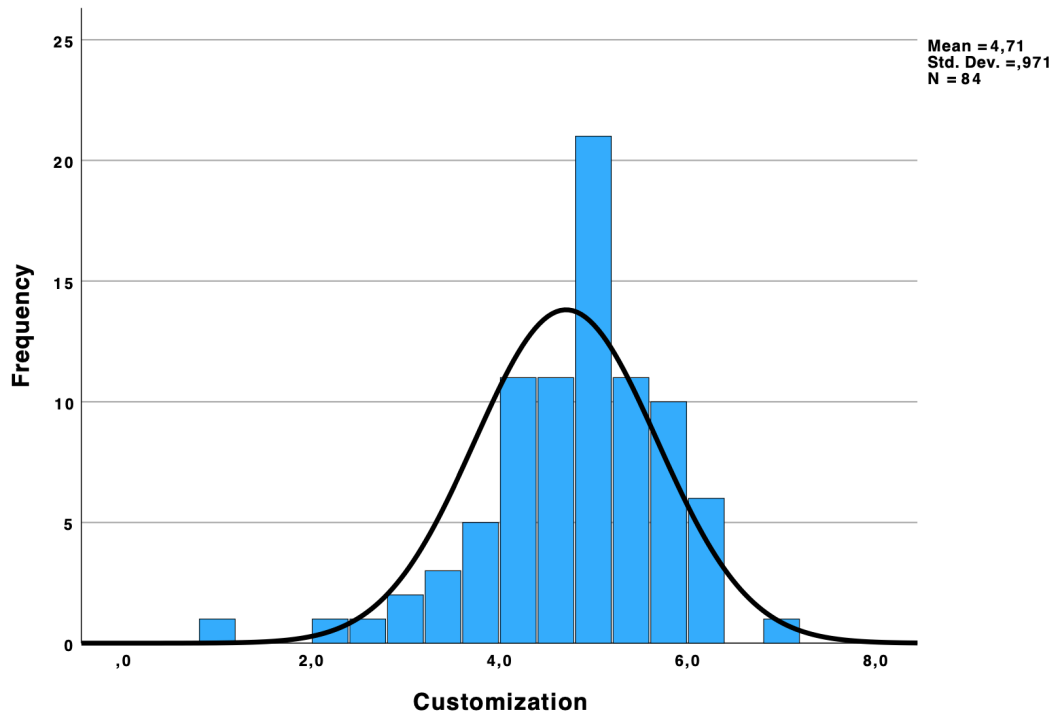
With reference to **table 11**, the results indicate that, out of the nine variables considered in this research, two of them present a Kurtosis higher than 2. Therefore, the variables *entertainment* and *customization* present a leptokurtic distribution which indicates a concentration of data in the tails that is higher than normal. **Figure 3** and **figure 4** display the histograms for both variables to provide a clearer understanding of the data distribution. Regarding the independent variable *entertainment*, the outliers apply to a very small number of extreme values at the left tail of the graph. The same case scenario applies to the independent variable *customization*, with the addition of one extreme variable on the right tail of the histogram. Given the low number of outliers and the context where the sample is quite small due to time restriction to begin with, the extreme values were not removed from the dataset. Moreover, the histograms for both variables display that they are both trending towards normality. Therefore, we assume that the normality condition is indeed met for all variables.

Figure 3. Entertainment Histogram



Source: Analyses results in SPSS

Figure 4. Customization Histogram



Source: Analyses results in SPSS

4.3 Reliability of Measuring Instruments

This section will focus on the test of the reliability of all the measurement items used for each variable adapted from the literature. Here, Cronbach’s Alpha was used for all the measurement items. In order to pass the reliability test, all measurement items should obtain a score higher than 0.70. **Table 12** displays the detail for all measurement items.

Table 12. Cronbach’s Alpha

Variable	Measurement item	Means	Standard deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Entertainment	ENT1	5,33	1,329	0,854
	ENT2	4,82	1,346	
	ENT3	5,19	1,312	
Customization	CUST1	4,05	1,488	0,707
	CUST2	3,77	1,616	
	CUST3	4,39	1,552	
	CUST4	5,63	1,2	
	CUST5	5,7	1,249	
Interaction	INT1	4,42	1,644	0,781
	INT2	4,13	1,699	
	INT3	4,67	1,601	
Word-of-Mouth	WOM1	4,38	1,635	0,726

	WOM2	3,46	1,571	
	WOM3	3,79	1,606	
Trendiness	TREN1	5,31	1,362	0,627
	TREN2	5,61	1,28	
Sense	SEN1	4,99	1,435	0,595
	SEN2	4,05	1,544	
Feel	FEL1	4,95	1,488	0,799
	FEL2	4,75	1,59	
Think	THK1	3,11	1,679	0,543
	THK2	4,71	1,647	
Act	ACT1	5,08	1,355	0,729
	ACT2	3,94	1,623	
Relate	REL1	4,45	1,738	0,765
	REL2	4,15	1,632	

Source: Analyses results in SPSS

With reference to the results displayed in **table 12**, the measurement items for seven of the ten variables in the model pass the reliability test as they score higher than 0.70 for Cronbach Alpha. Indeed, *entertainment* scores 0.854, *customization* scores 0.707, *interaction* scores 0.781, *word-of-mouth* scores 0.726, **feel** scores 0.799, *act* scores 0.729 and *relate* scores 0.765. However, three of the ten variables considered in the model score under the 0.70 threshold recommended for Cronbach Alpha; namely, *trendiness*, *sense* and *think*. A Cronbach Alpha below 0.7 can indicate several underlying issues. In the present case, the cause for the lower Cronbach Alpha may be due to the small number of measurement items for the impacted variables. Indeed, by looking at **table 12**, it can be seen that all of them only consist of two measurement items. Furthermore, two of the impacted variables are linked to the dependent variable *customer experience*. As the literature review has shown, customer experience is a dimension particularly hard to measure with scientific literature still debating on a proper scale to accurately grasp the complexity of this dimension (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In this context and given that Cronbach Alpha never goes below 0.543 for all variables, the reliability of the measurement items is still assumed correct for this research. However, it highlights the need for a better scale internally and externally validated to measure *customer experience*.

4.4 Validity of Measuring Instruments

A factor analysis was performed to test the validity of the measurement items and determine whether the latter are measuring the intended construct efficiently. To perform the analysis for each variable, the principal Component analysis method has been chosen. The Varimax method has been chosen for the factor rotation for each variable. The detailed tables for the factor analysis for each variable can be found in **Appendix 2**. With reference to the results displayed in **Appendix 2**, the factor analysis for the ten variables shows that validity can be assumed for all of them. Indeed, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure exceeds 0.5 for all of them with a p-value below 0.05, ensuring statistical significance.

4.5 Descriptive Statistics

The following **table 13** presents the descriptive statistics for all the variables.

Table 13. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Entertainment	5,11	1,17
Customization	4,71	0,97
Interactivity	4,4	1,37
Word-of-mouth	3,88	1,29
Trendiness	5,46	1,13
Sense	4,51	1,26
Feel	4,85	1,41
Think	3,91	1,38
Act	4,51	1,33
Relate	4,3	1,52

Source: Analyses results in SPSS

When considering the independent variable **social media marketing activities** which involves the variables *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness*, we can see that the variable that scores the highest is *trendiness* ($M = 5,46$, $SD = 1,26$) followed by *entertainment* ($M = 5,11$, $SD = 1,17$) and then *customization* ($M = 4,71$, $SD = 0,97$). The second to last variable is *interactivity* ($M = 4,4$, $SD = 1,37$) and, finally, *word-of-mouth* ($M = 3,88$, $SD = 1,29$). Generally speaking, all the independent variables score above the neutrality point of the scale ($4 =$ *neither agree nor disagree*) to the exception of the variable *word-of-mouth* which scores slightly below neutrality.

Concerning the dependent variable **customer experience** which is composed of the variables *sense*, *feel*, *think*, *act* and *relate*, the variable that scores the highest is *feel* ($M = 4,85$, $SD = 1,41$). The means for the two following variables are equal at 4,51 for *sense* ($M = 4,51$, $SD = 1,26$) and *act* ($M = 4,51$, $SD = 1,33$) with *relate* coming after ($M = 4,3$, $SD = 1,52$). Finally, the dependent variable, *think*, has a mean of 3,91 and a standard deviation of 1,38. The means for the dependent variables gravitate closer to the neutrality point while still being above it to the exception of the variable *think* which scores just below it.

4.6 Correlation Analysis

The results of the correlations between the variables of the model developed within the framework of this research thesis are displayed in **table 14**.

Table 14. Correlation Analysis

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Entertainment	Pearson Correlation	1									
	Sig. (2-tailed)										
2. Customization	Pearson Correlation	0,630**	1								
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001									
3. Interactivity	Pearson Correlation	0,463**	0,534**	1							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001								

4. Word-of-mouth	Pearson										
	Correlation	0,485**	0,379**	0,441**	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001							
5. Trendiness	Pearson										
	Correlation	0,561**	0,471**	0,364**	0,309**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	0,004						
6. Sense	Pearson										
	Correlation	0,608**	0,574**	0,518**	0,468**	0,396**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001					
7. Feel	Pearson										
	Correlation	0,561**	0,516**	0,436**	0,33**	0,367**	0,692**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	0,002	<,001	<,001				
8. Think	Pearson										
	Correlation	0,570**	0,52**	0,519**	0,582**	0,23**	0,669**	0,525**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	0,035	<,001	<,001			
9. Act	Pearson										
	Correlation	0,363**	0,36**	0,333**	0,265**	0,292**	0,486**	0,644**	0,523**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	0,002	0,015	0,007	<,001	<,001	<,001		
10. Relate	Pearson										
	Correlation	0,341**	0,324**	0,433**	0,298**	0,31**	0,393**	0,544**	0,428**	0,471**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,001	0,003	<,001	0,006	0,004	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	

*The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Analysis output in SPSS

The first hypothesis of this research thesis states that the sensorial stimulation of customers (*sense*) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands with its respective sub-hypotheses H1a to H1e. With reference to the results provided by **table 14**, The Pearson correlation is positive and statistically significant between *sense* and *entertainment* ($r = 0,608$, $p = <0,001$), *sense* and *customization* ($r = 0,574$, $p = <0,001$), *sense* and *interactivity* ($r = 0,518$, $p = <0,001$), *sense* and *word-of-mouth* ($r = 0,468$, $p = <0,001$) and *sense* and *trendiness* ($r = 0,396$, $p = <0,001$). This supports H1a to H1d.

The second hypothesis proposes that the cognitive stimulation of customers (*think*) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands with its respective secondary hypotheses H2a to H2e. According to **table 14**, the correlations between *think* and the five variables that encompass SMMA, i.e., *entertainment* ($r = 0,570$, $p = <0,001$), *customization* ($r = 0,52$, $p = <0,001$), *interactivity* ($r = 0,519$, $p = <0,001$), *word-of-mouth* ($r = 0,582$, $p = <0,001$) and *trendiness* ($r = 0,23$, $p = 0,035$) are positive and significant at the level 0.01 to the exception of the variable *trendiness* which is significant at the level 0.05. H2a to H2e are also supported.

Hypothesis 3 and its respective sub-hypotheses H3a to H3e state that the emotional response from customers (*feel*) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands. The Pearson correlation is positive and significant between *feel* and *entertainment* ($r = 0,561$, $p = <0,001$), *feel* and *customization* ($r = 0,516$, $p = <0,001$), *feel* and *interactivity* ($r = 0,436$, $p = <0,001$), *feel* and *word-of-mouth* ($r = 0,33$, $p = 0,002$) and *feel* and *trendiness* ($r = 0,692$, $p = <0,001$) which supports H3a to H3e.

Hypothesis 4 and its respective secondary hypotheses H4a to H4e propose that the lifestyle choices of customers (*act*) are positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury

brands. With reference to **table 14**, the correlation is positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level between *act* and *entertainment* ($r = 0,363, p = <0,001$), *act* and *customization* ($r = 0,36, p = <0,001$), *act* and *interactivity* ($r = 0,333, p = 0,002$) and *act* and *trendiness* ($r = 0,292, p = 0,007$). The Pearson correlation between *act* and *word-of-mouth* is positive and significant at the level 0.05 ($r = 0,265, p = 0,015$). H4a to H4e are also supported.

Hypothesis 5 and its respective sub-hypotheses state that the creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (*relate*) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands. The results displayed in **table 14** attest that the Pearson correlation is positive and significant between *relate* and *entertainment* ($r = 0,341, p = 0,001$), *relate* and *customization* ($r = 0,324, p = 0,003$), *relate* and *interactivity* ($r = 0,433, p = <0,001$), *relate* and *word-of-mouth* ($r = 0,298, p = 0,006$) and *relate* and *trendiness* ($r = 0,31, p = 0,004$) which supports H5a to H5e.

4.7 Multiple Regression Analyses

4.7.1 Regression analysis between Entertainment, Customization, Interactivity, Word-of-mouth, Trendiness and Sense

A multiple regression was performed to test the relationship between the independent variables comprising SMMA, i.e., *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness* and the dependent variable, *sense*.

A preliminary check was performed to ensure that the conditions for applying a multiple regression are met, i.e., normality, linearity and no perfect multicollinearity. The normality condition has been demonstrated in the “Normality of measuring instrument” section of this research thesis. The **appendices 2 to 7** present the results of the check for linearity and multicollinearity. With reference to those, it can safely be assumed that the necessary conditions to perform a multiple regression are met. Indeed, all the variables follow a linear pattern and all the VIFs score under 10.

The stepwise method was chosen to perform the multiple regression with a pre-defined significance level of $p < 0.05$. A significant regression model containing *entertainment* and *interactivity* was found for $F(2; 100) = 31,951$ with $p = < 0.01$. With reference to **table 15**, the R Square for this regression is 0,441 which means that a change in the predictors is responsible for 44.1% of the changes in the sensorial stimulation of the customers. These results indicate that other variables are responsible for more than half of the changes in the variable *sense*. Moreover, the correlation between the two independent variables and *sense* is positive ($r = 0,664$). With reference to **table 16**, we obtain a p-value for this model of $< 0,001$ which indicates that the model is statistically significant.

According to the results in **table 17**, there is a significant link between *entertainment* ($p = < 0,001$), *interactivity* ($p = 0,002$) and the sensorial stimulation of customers. With reference to **table 17**, an increase by one unit in the independent variable *entertainment* results in an increase by 0,504 units in the dependent variable *sense*. The predicted score is thus $0,727 + 0,504$. Moreover, for every one unit increase in the variable *interactivity*, the sensorial stimulation of customers increases by 0,276 with a predicted score of $0,727 + 0,276$. The hypotheses H1a and H1c are thus supported.

However, the present model obtained through the multiple regression rejects three of the five variables, i.e., *customization*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness*. With reference to **table 17**, there is no significant link between *customization* ($p = 0,050$), *word-of-mouth* ($p = 0,121$), *trendiness* ($p = 0,335$) and the dependent variable; *sense*. The hypotheses H1b, H1d and H1e are thus rejected.

Table 15. Summary of the model between entertainment, interactivity and sense

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,608^a	,369	,362	1,0045
2	,664^b	,441	,427	,9516

a. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment, Interactivity

Source Analysis results in SPSS

Table 16. Anova table between entertainment, interactivity and sense

ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	48,481	1	48,481	48,046	<,001^b
	Residual	82,742	82	1,009		
	Total	131,223	83			
2	Regression	57,870	2	28,935	31,951	<,001^c
	Residual	73,354	81	,906		
	Total	131,223	83			

a. Dependent Variable: Sense

b. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment

c. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment, Interactivity

Source: Analysis results in SPSS

Table 17. Coefficients table between entertainment, interactivity and sense

Coefficients^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1,174	,495		2,373	,020
	Entertainment	,654	,094	,608	6,932	<,001
2	(Constant)	,727	,489		1,487	,141
	Entertainment	,504	,101	,468	4,995	<,001
	Interactivity	,276	,086	,302	3,220	,002

a. Dependent Variable: Sense

Source: Analysis results in SPSS

Table 18. Excluded variables between entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth, trendiness and sense

Excluded Variables ^a						
Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance
1	Customization	,317 ^b	2,931	,004	,310	,603
	Interactivity	,302 ^b	3,220	,002	,337	,786
	Word-of-mouth	,227 ^b	2,326	,023	,250	,765
	Trendiness	,080 ^b	,749	,456	,083	,685
2	Customization	,223 ^c	1,987	,050	,217	,528
	Word-of-mouth	,154 ^c	1,568	,121	,173	,705
	Trendiness	,034 ^c	,335	,739	,037	,671

a. Dependent Variable: Sense

b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Entertainment

c. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Entertainment, Interactivity

4.7.2 Regression analysis between Entertainment, Customization, Interactivity, Word-of-mouth, Trendiness and Think

A second set of multiple regressions was tested to study the relationship between the independent variables *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth*, *trendiness* and the cognitive stimulation of customers (*think*).

Appendices 8 to 13 present the results of the checks for the preliminary conditions to perform multiple regressions, i.e., normality, linearity and no perfect multicollinearity. According to those tables and graphs, the necessary assumptions to perform multiple regressions are all met. Indeed, all the scatter plots follow a linear trend and the score for the VIFs is below 10 for all the variables.

A multiple regression using the stepwise method with a predetermined significance level of $p < 0,005$ was performed between the independent variables, i.e., *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness* and the dependent variable; *think*. **Table 19** displays the model generated in SPSS. A statistically significant regression was found for a model containing the variables *entertainment*, *interactivity* and *word-of-mouth* for $F(3 ; 100) = 25,19$ with $p = < 0,001$. The R Square for this regression is 0,486, meaning that a change in the predictors results in 48.6% of the changes in the cognitive stimulation of the customers. Therefore, more than half of the changes for these variables are explained by other variables not taken into account in the model. The correlation between *entertainment*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *think* is positive ($r = 0,697$) with a p-value smaller than 0,05 ($p = < 0,001$), meaning that the results are statistically significant.

With reference to **table 21**, an increase by one unit in *entertainment* generates an increase by 0,354 units in the dependent variable *think* ($p = 0,003$) with a predicted score of $- 0,310 + 0,354$. Hypothesis H2a is therefore supported. An increase by one unit of the independent variable *interactivity* results in an increase by 0,233 units of the cognitive stimulation of customers ($p = 0,16$) with a predicted score of $- 0,310 + 0,233$ which supports H2c. Finally, an increase by one unit in *word-of-mouth* generates an increase by 0,356 units in *think* ($p = < 0,001$) with a predicted score of $-0,310 + 0,356$. The hypothesis H2d is also supported.

With reference to the results in **table 22**, two of the five independent variables were rejected from the model, i.e., *customization* ($p = 0,171$) and *trendiness* ($p = 0,054$). This indicates that no statistically significant link was found between those two variables and the cognitive stimulation of customers. The hypotheses H2b and H2e are therefore rejected.

Table 19. Summary of the model between word-of-mouth, interactivity, entertainment and think

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,582^a	,338	,330	1,1277
2	,668^b	,447	,433	1,0376
3	,697^c	,486	,466	1,0064

a. Predictors: (Constant), Word-of-mouth

b. Predictors: (Constant), Word-of-mouth, Entertainment

c. Predictors: (Constant), Word-of-mouth, Entertainment, Interactivity

Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Table 20. Anova table between word-of-mouth, entertainment, interactivity and think

ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	53,295	1	53,295	41,906	<,001^b
	Residual	104,286	82	1,272		
	Total	157,580	83			
2	Regression	70,381	2	35,190	32,689	<,001^c
	Residual	87,199	81	1,077		
	Total	157,580	83			
3	Regression	76,547	3	25,516	25,190	<,001^d
	Residual	81,034	80	1,013		
	Total	157,580	83			

a. Dependent Variable: Think

b. Predictors: (Constant), Word-of-mouth

c. Predictors: (Constant), Word-of-mouth, Entertainment

d. Predictors: (Constant), Word-of-mouth, Entertainment, Interactivity

Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Table 21. Coefficients table between entertainment, interactivity and word-of-mouth

		Coefficients^a				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1,501	,392		3,828	<,001
	Word-of-mouth	,622	,096	,582	6,473	<,001
2	(Constant)	-,012	,524		-,024	,981
	Word-of-mouth	,427	,101	,399	4,223	<,001
	Entertainment	,444	,111	,376	3,984	<,001
3	(Constant)	-,310	,522		-,593	,555
	Word-of-mouth	,356	,102	,333	3,492	<,001
	Entertainment	,354	,114	,301	3,112	,003
	Interactivity	,233	,094	,232	2,467	,016

Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Table 22. Excluded variable for the regression between entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth, trendiness and think

		Excluded Variables^a				Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Tolerance	VIF
						1	Customization
	Interactivity	,325^b	3,463	<,001	,359	,806	1,241
	Trendiness	,056^b	,591	,556	,066	,905	1,105
	Entertainment	,376^b	3,984	<,001	,405	,765	1,307
2	Customization	,221^c	2,103	,039	,229	,596	1,678
	Interactivity	,232^c	2,467	,016	,266	,725	1,380
	Trendiness	-,152^c	-1,537	,128	-,169	,684	1,463
3	Customization	,151^d	1,380	,171	,153	,528	1,893
	Trendiness	-,188^d	-1,954	,054	-,215	,671	1,490

Source: Analysis output in SPSS

4.7.3 Regression analysis between Entertainment, Customization, Interactivity, Word-of-mouth, Trendiness and Feel

A third regression was computed between the independent variables, *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness* and the dependent variable *feel* which corresponds to the emotional response of customers.

The results of the checks for the assumptions of linearity and multicollinearity are presented in the **appendices 14 to 19**. The assumption of normality has already been demonstrated in the “Normality of the measuring instrument” section of this thesis. With reference to the results in appendices 14 to 19, the linearity condition to perform multiple regressions is indeed fulfilled. Moreover, all the VIFs are under 10 which indicates no perfect multicollinearity between the variables.

Tables 23 to 26 present the detail of the results for the multiple regression. The method chosen is the stepwise method with a predefined significance level of $p < 0,005$. A statistically significant regression containing the independent variables *entertainment* and *customization* was found for $F(2 ; 100) = 22,584$ with $p = < 0,001$. The R Square for the regression is 0,358 which indicates that a change in the predictors is responsible for only 35,8% in the emotional response of the customers. This result indicates that other variables that are not taken into account in the model explain about 65% of the changes in the dependent variable *feel*. The correlation between the two independent variables and the dependent variable is positive ($r = 0,598$) with $p = < 0,001$.

Table 25 displays the coefficients table for the regression. With reference to those results, an increase by one unit in the independent variable, *entertainment*, generates an increase by 0,470 units in the emotional response of customers with a predicted score of $0,612 + 0,470$ with $p = < 0,001$. An increase by one unit in the variable *customization* results in an increase by 0,390 units in the dependent variable *feel* with $p = 0,021$ and a predicted score of $0,612 + 0,470$. The hypotheses H3a and H3b are therefore supported.

Table 26 displays the independent variables that were ruled out of the regression. These results indicate that no statistically significant relationship was found between the independent variables *interactivity* ($p = 0,133$), *word-of-mouth* ($p = 0,623$), *trendiness* ($p = 0,779$) and the dependent variable, *feel*. The hypotheses H3c to H3e are therefore rejected.

Table 23. Summary of the model between entertainment, customization and feel

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,561^a	,314	,306	1,1707
2	,598^b	,358	,342	1,1397

a. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment, Customization

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

Table 24. Anova table between entertainment, customization and feel

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	51,505	1	51,505	37,579	<,001 ^b
	Residual	112,385	82	1,371		
	Total	163,890	83			
2	Regression	58,673	2	29,336	22,584	<,001 ^c
	Residual	105,217	81	1,299		
	Total	163,890	83			

a. Dependent Variable: Feel

b. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment

c. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment, Customization

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

Table 25. Coefficients table between entertainment, customization and feel

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1,405	,577		2,436	,017
	Entertainment	,674	,110	,561	6,130	<,001
2	(Constant)	,612	,655		,934	,353
	Entertainment	,470	,138	,391	3,410	,001
	Customization	,390	,166	,269	2,349	,021

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

Table 26. Excluded variable for the regression between entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth, trendiness and feel

Excluded Variables^a

Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics	
						Tolerance	VIF
1	Customization	,269 ^b	2,349	,021	,253	,603	1,658
	Interactivity	,224 ^b	2,228	,029	,240	,786	1,273
	Word-of-mouth	,076 ^b	,727	,469	,081	,765	1,307
	Trendiness	,076 ^b	,686	,495	,076	,685	1,459
2	Interactivity	,161 ^c	1,516	,133	,167	,688	1,453
	Word-of-mouth	,051 ^c	,494	,623	,055	,756	1,323
	Trendiness	,031 ^c	,281	,779	,031	,662	1,510

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

4.7.4 Regression analysis between Entertainment, Customization, Interactivity, Word-of-mouth, Trendiness and Act

A multiple regression was tested between *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth*, *trendiness* and the dependent variables *act* which corresponds to the lifestyle choices of customers.

With reference to the **appendices 20 to 25**, the necessary assumptions to perform a multiple regression are met. Indeed, the scatter plot between the five dependent variables and the dependent variable follows a linear trend and all the VIFs for the five independent variables are below the threshold of 10. The normality assumption is demonstrated in the section on “Normality of the measurement item”.

The regression was performed using the stepwise method with a predefined significance level of $p < 0,05$. A statistically significant regression was found between the variable *entertainment* and the lifestyle choices of customers for $F(1; 100) = 12,447$ with $p = 0,001$. The R Square for this regression is 0,132, meaning that a change in the independent variable *entertainment* accounts for merely 13,2% of the changes in the lifestyle choices of the customers. This low result indicates that the model is not a good predictor for the dependent variable *act* as more than 85% of the changes are explained by other variables. Nonetheless, the correlation between the two variables is positive ($r = 0,363$) with a p-value smaller than 0,001.

With references to the coefficient table under **table 29**, an increase by one unit in *entertainment* spews an increase by 0,412 in the dependent variable ($p = < 0,001$) with a predicted score of $2,405 + 0,412$. H4a is therefore supported.

The rest of the independent variables were rejected for this multiple regression. According to the results under **table 30**, no statistically significant relationship was found between *customization* ($p = 0,10$), *interactivity* ($p = 0,70$), *word-of-mouth* ($p = 0,325$) and *trendiness* ($p = 0,301$). The hypotheses H4b to H4e are therefore rejected.

Table 27. Summary of the model between entertainment and act

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,363^a	,132	,121	1,2433

a. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

Table 28. Anova table between entertainment and act

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19,240	1	19,240	12,447	<,001 ^b
	Residual	126,749	82	1,546		
	Total	145,988	83			

a. Dependent Variable: Act

b. Predictors: (Constant), Entertainment

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

Table 29. Coefficients table between entertainment and act

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2,405	,612		3,929	<,001
	Entertainment	,412	,117	,363	3,528	<,001

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

Table 30. Excluded variable for the regression between entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth, trendiness and act

Excluded Variables^a

Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics	
						Tolerance	VIF
1	Customization	,218 ^b	1,664	,100	,182	,603	1,658
	Interactivity	,210 ^b	1,837	,070	,200	,786	1,273
	Word-of-mouth	,117 ^b	,991	,325	,109	,765	1,307
	Trendiness	,129 ^b	1,041	,301	,115	,685	1,459

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

4.7.5 Regression analysis between Entertainment, Customization, Interactivity, Word-of-mouth, Trendiness and Relate

A final regression was tested between the independent variables; *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth*, *trendiness* and the dependent variable, *relate*, which corresponds to the creation of a bond between the customer and the luxury brand.

Appendices 26 to 31 present the results of the checks for linearity and no perfect multicollinearity between the variables. With reference to those, the necessary assumptions to perform a multiple regression are met. Indeed, the relationships between the dependent variable and the five independent variables all follow a linear trend. Furthermore, the scores of the VIFs are all under 10 which confirms that there is no perfect multicollinearity between the independent variables.

The method used for this multiple regression is the stepwise method with a predefined significance level of $p < 0,05$. Running the regression resulted in one single statistically significant equation containing the variable *interactivity* for $F(1; 100) = 18,954$ with $P = < 0,001$. The obtained R Square for the multiple regression is 0,188 which means that merely 18,8% of the changes in the variable relate are begotten by a change in the predictor *interactivity*. Those results indicate that other variables that are not part of the model of this thesis are a better fit to predict the creation of a bond between the customers and the brand. We still obtain a statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0,433$) with a p-value smaller than 0,001.

The results in **table 33** present the coefficients for the multiple regression. With reference to this table, an increase by one unit in the variable *interactivity* results in an increase by 0,478 units in the variable *relate* ($p = < 0,001$) with a predicted score of $2,198 + 0,478$. Those results support hypothesis H5c.

The four other independent variables were thus excluded of the model which indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between *entertainment* ($p = 0,111$), *customization* ($p = 0,273$), *word-of-mouth* ($p = 0,235$), *trendiness* (0,101) and the creation of a bond between the customer and the luxury brand. Hypotheses H5a, H5b, H5d and H6e are therefore refuted.

Table 31. Summary of the model between interactivity and relate

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,433 ^a	,188	,178	1,3755

a. Predictors: (Constant), Interactivity

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

Table 32. Anova table between interactivity and relate

ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	35,861	1	35,861	18,954	<,001 ^b
	Residual	155,148	82	1,892		
	Total	191,009	83			

a. Dependent Variable: Relate

b. Predictors: (Constant), Interactivity

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

Table 33. Coefficients table between interactivity and relate

		Coefficients^a				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2,198	,506		4,340	<,001
	Interactivity	,478	,110	,433	4,354	<,001

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

Table 34. Excluded variable for the regression between entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth, trendiness and relate

		Excluded Variables^a					
Model		Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics	
						Tolerance	VIF
1	Entertainment	,179 ^b	1,610	,111	,176	,786	1,273
	Customization	,130 ^b	1,103	,273	,122	,715	1,399
	Word-of-mouth	,132 ^b	1,196	,235	,132	,806	1,241
	Trendiness	,176 ^b	1,661	,101	,181	,867	1,153

Source: Analysis Output in SPSS

4.8 Summary of Hypotheses Testing

The following **table 35** displays the summary of all the hypotheses and sub-hypotheses stated in the literature review of this research thesis. The main hypotheses H1 to H5 were classified as **partially supported** if the correlation analysis was statistically significant between all the independent variables and the dependent variable and at least three of the independent variables were part of a statistically significant model in the multiple regression analysis. However, the hypotheses were classified as **not supported** if the correlation analysis was statistically significant but that three or more independent variables were ruled out of the multiple regression analysis.

Table 35. Summary of hypotheses results

Hypotheses	Results
<i>H1: The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.</i>	Not supported
<i>H1a: The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to entertainment.</i>	Supported
<i>H1b: The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to customization.</i>	Not supported
<i>H1c: The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to interactivity.</i>	Supported
<i>H1d: The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to word-of-mouth.</i>	Not supported
<i>H1e: The sensorial stimulation of customers (sense) is positively related to trendiness.</i>	Not supported

H2: The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.	Partially supported
<i>H2a: The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to entertainment.</i>	Supported
<i>H2b: The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to customization.</i>	Not supported
<i>H2c: The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to interactivity.</i>	Supported
<i>H2d: The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to word-of-mouth.</i>	Supported
<i>H2E: The cognitive stimulation of customers (think) is positively related to trendiness.</i>	Not supported
H3: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.	Not supported
<i>H3a: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to entertainment.</i>	Supported
<i>H3b: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to customization.</i>	Supported
<i>H3c: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to interactivity.</i>	Not supported
<i>H3d: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to word-of-mouth.</i>	Not supported
<i>H3e: The emotional response from customers (feel) is positively related to trendiness.</i>	Not supported
H4: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.	Not supported
<i>H4a: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to entertainment.</i>	Supported
<i>H4b: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to customization.</i>	Not supported
<i>H4c: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to interactivity.</i>	Not supported
<i>H4d: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to word-of-mouth.</i>	Not supported
<i>H4e: The lifestyle choices of customers (act) are positively related to trendiness.</i>	Not supported
H5: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands.	Not supported
<i>H5a: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to entertainment.</i>	Not supported

<i>H5b: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related customization.</i>	Not supported
<i>H5c: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to interactivity.</i>	Supported
<i>H5d: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to word-of-mouth.</i>	Not supported
<i>H5e: The creation of a bond between the customer and luxury brands (relate) is positively related to trendiness.</i>	Not supported

Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Chapter 5: Discussion

The fifth chapter of this research thesis will go over the findings provided by chapter 4 and go deeper into their implications by considering them in light of the scientific literature and the findings of the research on which the research model was based on. The chapter is structured into five subsections that correspond to the five main hypotheses followed by a general discussion on the implications for customer experience at large.

5.1 Impact of Social Media Marketing activities performed by luxury brands on the sensorial stimulation of customers

The *sense* component of customer experience refers to the stimulation of the five senses of a person, i.e., the sense of touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell (Gentile & al, 2007). In the context of this research thesis, which aimed at investigating the impact of social media marketing activities from luxury brands on customer experience, we hypothesized that the sensorial stimulation of customers was positively related to those social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands.

However, while the correlation analysis supports this hypothesis, the results of the multiple regression reject three of the five independent variables that encompass SMMA, i.e., *customization*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness* (Liégeois, 2023). The variables that were indeed considered in the model being *entertainment* and *interactivity* (Liégeois, 2023).

With reference to the scientific literature, *entertainment* refers to the capacity of luxury brands to provide their customers with engaging and enjoyable content that should drive the latter to share the content and interact with it (Liu & al, 2021). Moreover, *interactivity* corresponds to the extent to which the users can actually engage with the content put out by luxury brands on their social media platforms (Pentina & al, 2018). With reference to the results presented in the previous section, those two variables were positively correlated to the sensorial stimulation of customers (Liégeois, 2023). Those results indicate that, if social media content put out by luxury brands is considered as highly entertaining and interactive by the customer, then their sensorial stimulation will improve as well (Liégeois, 2023). With reference to scientific literature, we can consider those results in light of the social presence theory which states that social media each have different degrees of social presence (Kaplan & al, 2010). Social presence refers to the amount of visual, acoustic and physical contact that is possible between two communication partners. If we consider the luxury brand and the customer to be communication partners, those results indicate that social media posts and platforms that are viewed as having high levels of social presence, thus being more interactive, will engage the senses of customers more. Furthermore, the model obtained through the multiple regression containing *interactivity* and *entertainment* explains 44.1% of the change in the sensorial stimulation of customers which indicates that, while there are other variables that need to be taken into account, they are still good predictors for the variable *sense* (Liégeois, 2023).

As of the variables that were excluded on the model, it can be deduced that, first and foremost, an increase in the *customization* of the social media content does not have a significant impact on the sensorial stimulation of customers (Liégeois, 2023). Meaning that, with reference to the literature, increasing the degree of the personalization of the social media content will not stimulate the senses of the customers more. Moreover, increasing the trendiness of the content, i.e., the capacity of luxury brands at providing current and relevant content (Liu & al, 2021) does not significantly improve the sensorial stimulation of customers. At last, *word-of-mouth* which refers to the act of sharing information with others does not have a significant impact on the sensorial stimulation of customers (Liégeois, 2023).

In conclusion, when trying to stimulate the senses of their customers, luxury brands partaking in social media marketing activities should prioritize putting out content that is highly interactive and viewed as highly entertaining.

5.2 Impact of Social Media Marketing activities performed by luxury brands on the cognitive stimulation of customers

The dependent variable *think*, i.e., the cognitive stimulation of the customer, refers to the type of customer experience that stimulates either the capacity at problem solving or the creativity of the customers by engaging the latter in innovative ways as well as creating positive mental associations (Wibowo & al, 2020). In the context of this research thesis, the goal was to investigate the impact of the independent variables, *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness* on the cognitive stimulation of customers.

With reference to the results of the correlation analysis, the cognitive stimulation of customers is indeed positively correlated to the five independent variables that comprise SMMA which supports hypothesis H2 (Liégeois, 2023). Furthermore, when performing a multiple regression, a statistically significant model containing the independent variables *entertainment*, *interactivity* and *word-of-mouth* was found (Liégeois, 2023). The model thus excluded the variables *customization* and *trendiness*. The model obtained through the multiple regression explains about half of the changes in the variable, *think*, which indicates that, even though the variables *entertainment*, *interactivity* and *word-of-mouth* are good predictors, other variables should be taken into account to obtain a model that is a better predictor (Liégeois, 2023).

On one hand, linking those results to the scientific literature, the model obtained indicates that, when attempting to stimulate the creativity and/or the capacity at problem solving of their customers, luxury brands should focus on social media content that is viewed as highly entertaining and interactive. Moreover, a significant relationship was found between the variable *think* and *word-of-mouth*. Going back to the literature, word-of-mouth refers to the act of sharing information about the brand with others either through social media or personal conversation which is closely linked to the degree of engagement of the user with the social media content (Liu & al, 2021). Therefore, we can conclude that social media content put out by luxury brands which elicits greater intentions at sharing and engaging from customers results in a greater cognitive stimulation of the latter. Furthermore, a distinction can be made between classic word-of-mouth and eWOM which refers to a broader notion of word-of-mouth that goes beyond person-to-person interactions (Huete-ALcover, 2017). This concept can be linked to the notion of user-generated content (UGC) which, according to literature, refers to content that is created and published by individuals in opposition to content put out by companies or professional content creators (Obar & al, 2015). One can therefore posit that social media marketing activities from luxury brands that results in a greater degree of UGC leads to higher levels of creativity stimulation in customers.

On the other hand, no statistically significant relationship was found between *customization*, *trendiness* and the variable *sense* (Liégeois, 2023). We can therefore conclude that social media content that is viewed as more personally tailored to the customer or trendier does not increase their creativity nor their capacity at problem solving.

5.3 Impact of Social Media Marketing activities performed by luxury brands on the emotional response of customers

The third hypothesis of this research thesis states that the emotional responses from customers is positively related to social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands. The dependent variable,

feel, refers to the type of customer experience that involves the feelings and emotions that the customer feels toward the luxury brand, their products or their services (Gentile & al, 2007).

The results of the correlation analysis indicates that the five variables that encompasses SMMA, i.e., *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness* all have a positive correlation to the emotional response of customers which supports the main hypothesis (Liégeois, 2023). However, when performing the multiple regression, a significant model was only found between *entertainment*, *customization* and the dependent variable (Liégeois, 2023). Moreover, the model obtained only predicts 35,8% of the changes in the dependent variable which indicates that other more important variables are not part of the model (Liégeois, 2023).

According to the results in chapter 4, the variables *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness*, while being positively correlated to the variable *feel*, are not good predictors for the variable (Liégeois, 2023). We can therefore conclude that, when trying to create positive emotional response from customers towards the luxury brand through their social media marketing activities, a higher degree of interactivity and trendiness of the content does not elicit more positive emotional associations. Moreover, social media content that elicits a higher level of word-of-mouth behavior from the customers does not significantly impact their emotional response.

Nonetheless, when attempting to create positive mental associations from customers, luxury brands should focus on social media content that is highly personalized and entertaining. Going back to the literature, a customization strategy in a social media marketing context has been shown to result in more positive response from users when compared to a standardized strategy (Liu & al, 2021). The results obtained are therefore consistent with the literature. Moreover, those results make even more sense when linking them to the literature on luxury brands as we have seen that the appeal of luxury consumption resides in a feeling of exclusivity and being part of a restrained circle (Bazi & al, 2020). Therefore, we can posit that customers that follow luxury brands that they purchase from on social media will have greater emotional response when confronted with entertaining content that they feel is tailored to them rather than with standardized content.

5.4 Impact of Social Media Marketing activities performed by luxury brands on the lifestyle choices of customers

The fourth hypothesis of this research thesis states that the lifestyle choices of customers is positively related to *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness*. The dependent variable, *act*, is a type of customer experience that can take two different meanings depending on research papers. It can first refer to eliciting a certain type of behavior that is linked to a purchase either at the pre-purchase, purchase or post-purchase stage and is referred to as the “pragmatic component” of the variable *act* (Gentile & al, 2007). The variable *act* can also refer to a “lifestyle component” which is linked to specific behaviors that are exclusively related to the lifestyle choices of the customers (Gentile & al, 2007). As stated in the hypothesis statement section of this thesis, the hypothesis H3 focuses on the lifestyle component.

The results in chapter 4 indicate that the lifestyle choices of customers are positively related to social media marketing activities from luxury brands as the variable is positively correlated to the five independent variables (Liégeois, 2023). However, a statistically significant relationship was only found between the dependent variable, *act*, and the independent variable *entertainment* with only 13,2% of the changes in the dependent variable explained by a change in the independent variables. *Entertainment* is therefore not a good predictor for the lifestyle choices of customers (Liégeois, 2023).

Moreover, the other independent variables for this model were rejected. Meaning that SMMA from luxury brands do not have a significant positive impact on the lifestyle choices of customers. In

conclusion, when trying to influence this specific type of customer experience, luxury brands should seek other approaches than through social media marketing activities (Liégeois, 2023).

5.5 Impact of Social Media Marketing activities performed by luxury brands on the creation of a bond between the customers and the luxury brands

The last hypothesis of this research posits that the creation of a bond between the customer and the luxury brand is positively related to the social media marketing activities from the luxury brand. Hence, the dependent variable, *relate*, should be positively related to the five independent variables, *entertainment*, *customization*, *interactivity*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness*. The type of customer experience *relate* represents the deepest form of CX out of the five and is described in scientific literature as the creation of a relationship between the customer and the luxury brands by building on trust and loyalty (Gentile & al, 2007).

With reference to the results in chapter 4, it appears that the variable *relate* is indeed positively related to the social media marketing activities from luxury brands which support H5 (Liégeois, 2023). However, the results of the multiple regression show that a significant positive relationship was only found between the dependent variable and the independent variable, *interactivity* (Liégeois, 2023). Furthermore, a change in this predictor merely explains 11% of the change in the creation of a bond between the luxury brand and the customer, meaning that other variables are more fitting to predict the dependent variable *relate*.

The four other independent variables, *entertainment*, *customization*, *word-of-mouth* and *trendiness* were ruled out of the model (Liégeois, 2023). Therefore, when attempting to create a deep relationship with their customers through loyalty and trust, performing social media marketing activities is not the most efficient way to do so. Luxury brands should therefore turn to other strategies to build a deep relationship between the customers and them.

5.6 General discussion on the impact of social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands on customer experience

The final section of this discussion chapter summarizes the general findings regarding the impact that social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands have on the experience of their customers.

Overall, the two types of customer experience that were the most impacted by social media marketing activities from luxury brands were the sensorial stimulation of customers and the cognitive stimulation of customers (Liégeois, 2023). Those results indicate that social media marketing is a valuable strategy for luxury brands when trying to engage the senses of their customers and/or to stimulate their creativity through entertaining and interactive content. The stimulation of creativity is particularly interesting in a social media strategy context as a very common performance indicator is the engagement of social media users which refers to the degree of interaction that the latter have with the social media content (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). Those results indicate that, when trying to foster engagement from customers, luxury brands should focus on entertaining and interactive content.

Nonetheless, the results in chapter 4 indicate that, while being positively correlated together, the impact that social media marketing activities from luxury brands have on customer experience overall is not statistically significant (Liégeois, 2023).

However, it is worth mentioning that the present study faces several limitations that might have an impact on the overall results obtained. Those will be elaborated on in the following chapter as well as some future research paths that would be worth exploring.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Summary

The purpose of this research thesis was to contribute to the scientific literature by crossing the bridge between what is known thus far on customer experience and the implications that social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands have on the latter. Through quantitative data gathered through surveys directed at luxury customers who were also luxury social media content consumers, the end goal of this quantitative research was to answer the question “*what is the impact of social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands on customer experience?*”. Moreover, this thesis is based on the previous quantitative research conducted in 2020 by Wibowo & al whose purpose was to investigate the impact of social media marketing activities and customer experience on customer behavior. The model of this present thesis thus borrows a similar structure by studying the impact that the five independent variables encompassing SMMA, i.e., *customization, entertainment, interactivity, word-of-mouth* and *trendiness* have on the five dependent variables that form CX, i.e., *sense, feel, think, act* and *relate*.

Through the statistical results obtained, however, the hypothesis that SMMA from luxury brands had a significant impact on customers was refuted as four of the main hypotheses were not supported and only one hypothesis being partially supported. Based on those results, the general conclusion that comes up is that the sensorial stimulation, the emotional response, the lifestyle choices and the creation of a bond between the customer and the luxury brand are not significantly impacted by the social media marketing activities from luxury brands. However, the results do indicate that the cognitive stimulation of customers is indeed positively related to those SMMA. Specifically, this cognitive stimulation is positively related to the entertainment, interactivity and word-of-mouth variables.

6.2 Managerial implications

From a management standpoint, the main driver for this research thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of the social media marketing landscape for luxury brands as those were initially reluctant to adopt a social media presence in fear of damaging their prestigious brand image with, therefore, a lot of room still for further research on how they should manage their social presence and the impact of the latter on customers. Moreover, customer experience has gained a growing interest from companies as this dimension has proven to be a crucial aspect to understand and manage in order to develop a long-lasting relationship with customers.

Customer experience is also shown to be one of the drivers for luxury consumptions as impeccable and astonishing customer service is the norm in luxury stores. However, the question remains for how luxury brands can actually transfer this service quality from their boutiques to their online presence. The purpose of this research was therefore to understand if the social media presence of luxury brands is capable of offering a similar customer experience.

Despite most of the main hypotheses being refuted by the results, some valuable conclusions can still be drawn in regards to luxury brands in order to improve the experience of their customer through SMMA. First and foremost, luxury brands should focus on providing highly entertaining and interactive social media content when trying to stimulate the sensory component of customer experience (*sense*). Furthermore, if luxury brands want to stimulate the creativity of their customers (*think*), they should again focus on content that is perceived as entertaining and interactive while also providing content that fosters word-of-mouth behaviors. Those results indicate that content that can generate UGC would be particularly suitable in this scenario. While there isn't a statistically significant relationship

between SMMA from luxury brands and the emotional response from customers (*feel*) overall, results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between providing customers with content that is highly personalized and interactive and the emotional response of customers. Hence, luxury companies providing social media content that is highly customized to users will elicit more positive emotional responses from the latter.

The final conclusion that we can draw is that, out of the five main hypotheses and their respective sub-hypotheses, no significant relationship was found between the independent variable *trendiness* and the dependent variables. Looking back at the literature, we can consider this in light of the quantitative research by Grigorian, V., & Espinoza Petersen, F. in 2014 which suggests that a crucial aspect of a luxury brand is the heritage and history of the brand. We could therefore hypothesize that providing customers with trendy content is not as relevant for luxury brands as most of them benefit from their long history and heritage.

6.3 Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, the purpose of this study is to fill the gap in scientific literature for social media marketing performed by luxury brands, for customer experience and link both concepts together.

Going back to the literature review, it appeared that those three subjects still have a lot of room for further research with scholars actively calling for investigation on those matters. When it comes to SMMA for luxury brands, the subject has gained a growing interest in recent years with many papers being published on the matter. However, the late entrance of luxury brands in the social media landscape results in fewer research compared to other markets. Furthermore, the long-term impact has still to be investigated.

Regarding customer experience, this topic has again gained a growing interest from researchers in recent years in light of the research proving the importance of service quality and customer experience for customer relationship management and for companies overall. Nonetheless, the research on how customer experience is being impacted by several variables has proven to be difficult as the scientific literature has not yet come to an agreement on a proper scale to measure CX. The scale used in the scope of this thesis is adapted from the quantitative research by Wibowo & al which itself was based on the original research from Chen & Lin's quantitative study from 2015 on the impact of customer experience and perceived value on sustainable social relationships in blogs and Hsu and Tsou's study from 2011 on customer experience in online blog environments. However, the relevance of this scale might be put under scrutiny in light of the failure of some of the validity tests performed. This point will be further elaborated on in the limitations section of this conclusion chapter.

Finally, the main purpose of this research was to enrich the scientific literature by bridging the concept of SMMA and CX in the case of luxury brands. Aside from Wibowo & al's paper, no other research had been conducted yet on those two subjects at the same time. Moreover, for the motives elaborated on in the previous sections, crossing those two concepts in the context of the luxury market was particularly relevant.

While no significant relationship was found between CX and SMMA for luxury brands, this research serves as a first attempt at trying to investigate together the two concepts with a lot of room for further investigations.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

This section will go over the several limitations that faced the present study in an attempt to better understand the outcome of the results. Furthermore, this section will elaborate on several leads for future research on the matter.

First and foremost, this quantitative research has faced a major limitation from the start due to the lack of a proper scale to measure the dependent variable *customer experience* and debates on the matter in the scientific literature. This struggle mostly comes from the nature of customer experience which is a concept fairly difficult to measure as it is both multidimensional and abstract. In the scope of this study, the chosen scale was the one used in Wibowo & al's 2020 quantitative study who was itself adapted from the original work by Chen & Lin in their quantitative study from 2015 on the impact of customer experience and perceived value on sustainable social relationships in blogs (p.41) and Hsu and Tsou's study from 2011 on customer experience in online blog environments (p.511). However, the use of a different scale to measure this variable might lead to a different result outcome in future research.

In their qualitative study from 2013 titled "Toward a better measure of customer experience", P. Klaus & S. Maklan introduce a new scale whose purpose is to provide a more modern conceptualization of customer experience by developing a new scale named the *customer experience quality* (EXQ) scale. The results of their study suggest that this scale is a better predictor of customer experience than other scales of customer satisfaction such as the SERVQUAL model. The SERVQUAL model is a multidimensional construct comprised of ten components, i.e., reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding and tangibles, conceptualized by Parasuraman & al in 1985 (Buttle, 1996). The purpose of this construct is to measure customer satisfaction regarding services based on the premise that the latter is equal to the gap between the expectations of the customer and their evaluation of the performance of the said service (Buttle, 1996). Moreover, scholars have suggested the SERVQUAL scale as an alternative to measure customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). However, the results of the study by Klaus & Maklan suggest that measuring CX with the EXQ scale might be a better alternative. We therefore encourage future research on this topic to use this scale rather than the one adapted from Wibowo & al's study in hopes of obtaining a different result outcome.

The second limitation encountered is linked to the size and the characteristics of the sample. The time restriction resulted in a much smaller sample size than originally intended. As a result, the statistical results run a higher risk of sampling error, reduced power, limited precision, limited generalizability, unstable means and proportions, an increased sensitivity of outliers, difficulty detecting patterns and bias. In the present case, the size of the sample gave more weight to outliers which compromised the normal distribution for the two independent variables; *entertainment* and *customization*. The small sample size is predominantly due to the two conditions that the participants had to meet, i.e., having purchased from a luxury brand in the past five years and following at least one of them on one social media platform.

This leads to the second sampling issue which are the demographic characteristics of the population. Indeed, the vast majority of the participants were linked to the inner circle of the writer of the thesis and were thus not the target population of luxury brands. Moreover, almost 90% of the sample identified as females which, again, compromises the diversity of the population studied. Regarding demographic characteristics that run the highest risk of compromising the results of the study, one should consider the yearly income brackets of respondents as almost half of the sample earns less than €10,000. However, given the price premium required to buy luxury goods, having a population characterized by lower incomes does not fit the scope of the research. Finally, regarding the social media consumption habits of participants, it should not be overlooked that, for half of the

sample, their consumption of luxury brands' social media marketing content only accounts for 10% of their total time spent on social media. Furthermore, 20% of the sample did not consume any luxury social media content even though they followed them on social media. One can therefore put under scrutiny the relevance of the sample's characteristics to perform this study. In light of those issues, we encourage future research to carry out this study on a larger sample that fits the criteria of the study better.

To conclude this limitation and future research section, the present study serves as a first attempt to investigate the concept of customer experience as the outcome of several marketing activities performed by companies and, in the present case, social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands. Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature on luxury brands by enriching what is already known about the impact that a social media presence has on them and their customers. While the study has faced several limitations that might have tempered the results down the line, we encourage future research on the matter as some interesting conclusions were still observed nonetheless between the two concepts.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Block 1. Privacy notice

Privacy notice

Please read the following statement before going further into the survey.

Before we ask you to take part in our research and answer our questionnaire, we want to highlight that the privacy and protection of personal data of the participants matters to us. We encourage you to read through the following content to understand the scope of the collected data for this research and in which context it will be used and shared.

The data collected by the student is strictly used for the purpose of completing their master's thesis and will not be shared with or sold to any person or organization outside of this scope. The data collected will not be shared with other students, teachers, or any other members of the University of Liège, Belgium. The data collected will not be stored after the completion of the research thesis.

The data collected for this study strictly limits itself to the answers provided to the questions. The following information will therefore not be collected nor shared:

The IP address of the participants.

The name, surname and personnel information of the participants.

The email address of the participants.

How do we use your personal data?

The data collected in the following questionnaire will be used for quantitative research purposes. The data collected will be filtered and analyzed through statistical software whose results will be shared in the master's thesis of the student and presented during the oral defence to the jury.

Please answer the following statements to mark your consent to the usage of your personal data to go further in the questionnaire.

- I agree with the privacy policy and give consent to having my personal data used in the context of this research.
- I do not agree with the privacy policy.

Block 2. Context of the study

Context of the study

As part of my master's degree curriculum in International Strategic Marketing, I am writing a quantitative research thesis on the topic of luxury brands. The objective of this research is to investigate the impact that social media marketing activities from luxury brands have on customer experience.

In order to investigate this issue, I am collecting quantitative data through self-assessed questionnaires. The questionnaire applies to participants who have consumed at least one product

from a luxury brand in the last 5 years and actively follow the brand on at least one social media platform.

Before going further into the questionnaire, please take the time to go through the two following lists to acknowledge the type of products and social media that fit the scope of this study.

As the author of this questionnaire and person carrying out this research, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the interest that you have for my master's thesis and for taking the time to answer this survey. (P.S.: This survey contains credits to get free survey responses at SurveySwap.io)

Block 3. List of products in the scope of this research

- Clothing items
- Shoes
- Bags
- Accessories
- Jewelry
- Cosmetics
 - Make-up
 - Skincare
- Perfume

With reference to the list above, did you buy any kind of products from a luxury brand in the last 5 years?

- Yes
- No

Block 4. List of social media platforms in the scope of this research

- Facebook
- YouTube
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- WeChat
- Tiktok
- Twitter
- Pinterest
- Snapchat
- Douyin

If you have answered YES to the previous question and with reference to the list above, do you actively follow one of the brands that you have made a purchase from on at least one of the social media platforms listed?

Block 5. If you have answered **YES** to the previous question, choose one luxury brand that you actively follow on at least one social media platform.

Block 6. Choose one social media platform on which you actively follow the luxury brand that you have picked for the previous question.

- Facebook
- YouTube
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- WeChat
- TikTok
- Twitter
- Pinterest
- Snapchat
- Douyin

Block 7. SMMA measurement

Using the luxury brand that you have picked as a reference, answer the following statements based on whether you agree with them or not on a scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Q1. The content found on brand X's social media seems interesting.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q2. It is exciting to use brand X's social media.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q3. It is fun to collect information on brands and fashion through brand X's social media.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q4. It is possible to have access to personalized information on brand X's social media.

- Strongly disagree

- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q5. Brand X's social media provides customized services.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q6. Brand X's social media shows me personalized feed content that I am interested in.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q7. It is easy to use brand X's social media.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q8. Brand X's social media can be used anytime, anywhere.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q9. It is easy to convey my opinion through brand X's social media.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q10. It is possible to exchange opinions or conversation with other users through brand X's social media.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q11. It is possible to share information with other users through brand X's social media.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q12. I would like to pass out information on brands, products or services from brand X's social media to my friends.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q13. I would like to upload content from brand X's social media on my own social media account.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q14. I would like to share opinions on brands, items, or services acquired from brand X's social media with my acquaintances.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree

- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q15. Brand X's social media content provides me with information about the latest trends.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q16. Content found on brand X's social media is frequently updated.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Block 8. Customer experience measurement

You have reached the second part of this survey. Please, keep the brand that you have picked for the first part of the questionnaire to answer the following statements. Answer based on whether you agree with them or not on a scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Q1. Brand X's social media content tries to engage my senses.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q2. Participating (e.g., like, commenting, sharing) on Brand X's social media is very interesting.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q3. Brand' X's social media content tries to make me feel positive emotions.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q4. Brand X's social media content tries to make me respond emotionally.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q5. Brand X's social media content tries to stimulate my capacities at problem solving.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q6. Brand X's social media tries to stimulate my creativity.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q7. Brand X's social media tries to influence my lifestyle choices.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q8. Brand X's social media content tries to push me to take concrete actions to change my lifestyle.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q9. Brand X tries to create a relationship with me through their social media content.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q10. I can relate to other customers through brand X's social media.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Block 9. Demographic questionnaire

You have reached the last part of this survey. Before completing the questionnaire and exiting the page, please answer the following questions:

Q1. What is your age

- Under 18
- 18 – 24
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 54
- 55 – 64
- 65 – 74
- 75 – 84
- 85 or older

Q2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

Q3. Where do you live?

Q4. What is your education level?

- Primary school
- Secondary school
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate

Q5. What is your professional status?

- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Unemployed looking for work
- Unemployed not looking for work
- Retired
- Student
- Disabled

Q6. Can you indicate your yearly income bracket?

- Less than €10,000
- €10,000 - €19,999
- €20,000 - €29,999
- €30,000 - €39,999
- €40,000 - €49,999
- €50,000 - €59,999
- €60,000 - €69,999
- €70,000 - €79,999
- €80,000 - €89,999
- €90,000 - €99,999
- €100,000 - €149,999
- More than €150,000

Q7. At which frequency do you shop from luxury brands?

- Less than once a year
- Once a year
- Once every trimester
- Once a month
- More than once a month

Q8. Choose how much time you spend on social media on average in a week from the options below

- Less than once a week
- Once a week
- 2 times per week

- 3 times per week
- At least once per day

Q9. Choose how much of that time is dedicated on average to the consumption of luxury brands' social media content from the options below

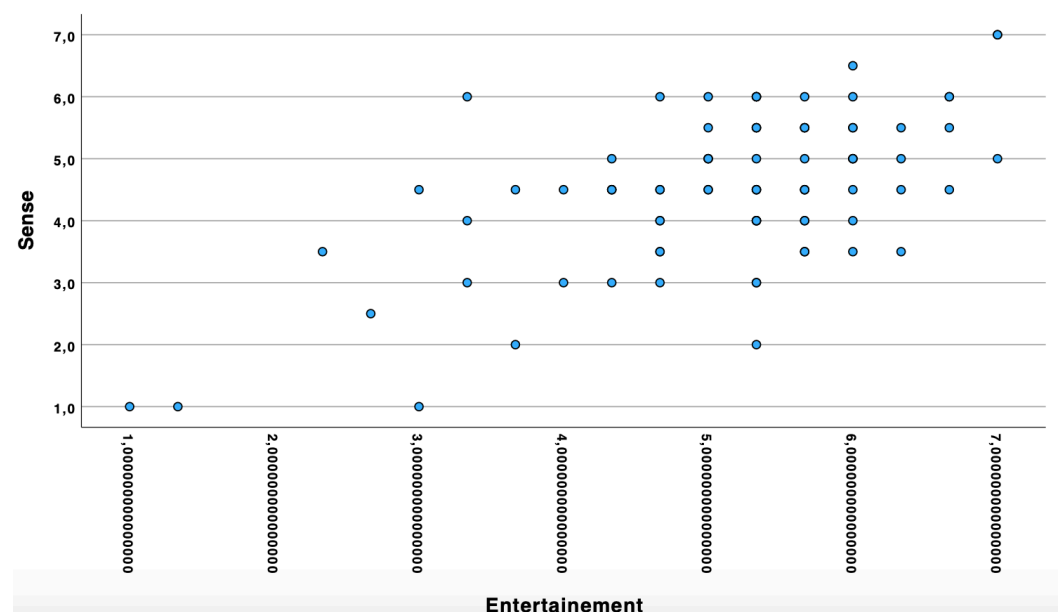
- I don't consume luxury brands' social media content even though I follow them.
- Less than 10 percent of the time I spend on social media.
- About a quarter of the time I spend on social media.
- About half of the total time I spend on social media.
- More than half of the total time I spend on social media.

Appendix 2. Factor Analysis

Variable	KMO	p-value
Entertainment	0,718	<0,001
Customization	0,6	<0,001
Interactivity	0,686	<0,001
Word-of-mouth	0,68	<0,001
Trendiness	0,5	<0,001
Sense	0,5	<0,001
Feel	0,5	<0,001
Think	0,5	<0,001
Act	0,5	<0,001
Relate	0,5	<0,001

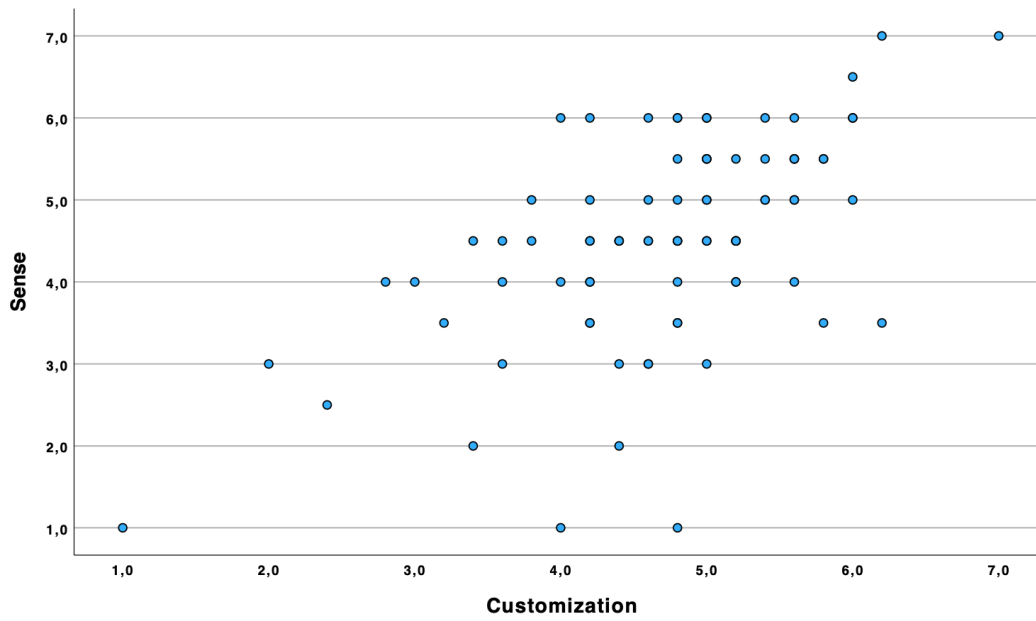
Source: Analysis results in SPSS

Appendix 2. Scatter plot Sense/Entertainment



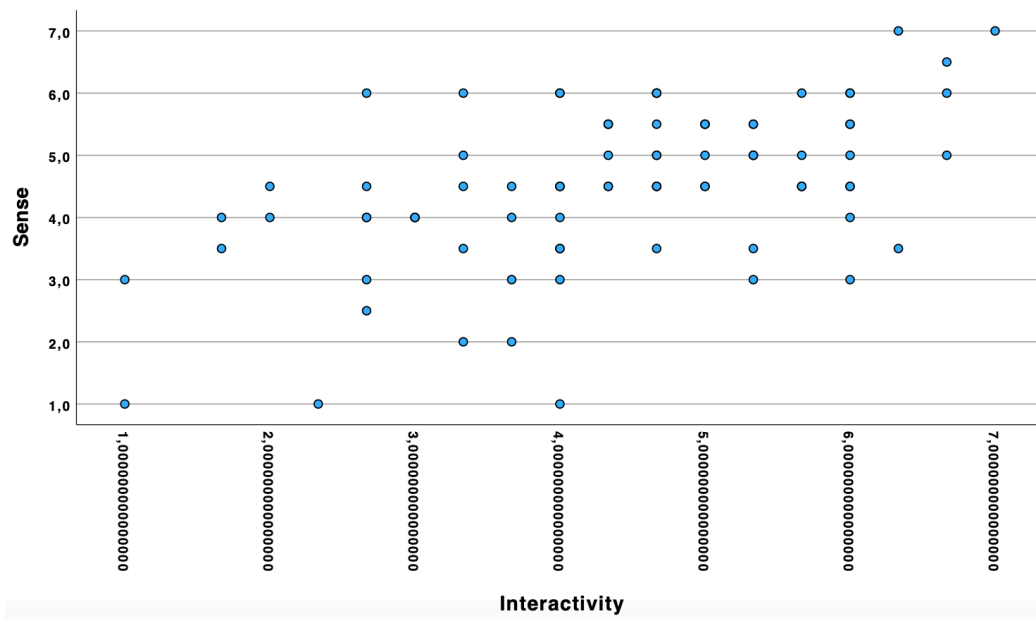
Source: Analysis results in SPSS

Appendix 3. Scatter plot Sense/Customization



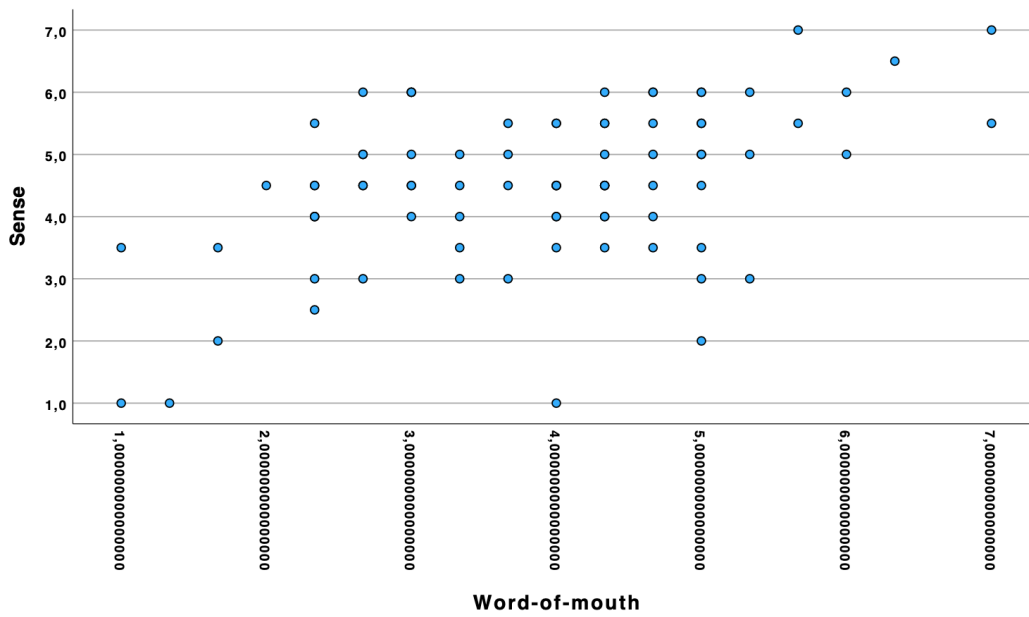
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Appendix 4. Scatter plot Sense/Interactivity



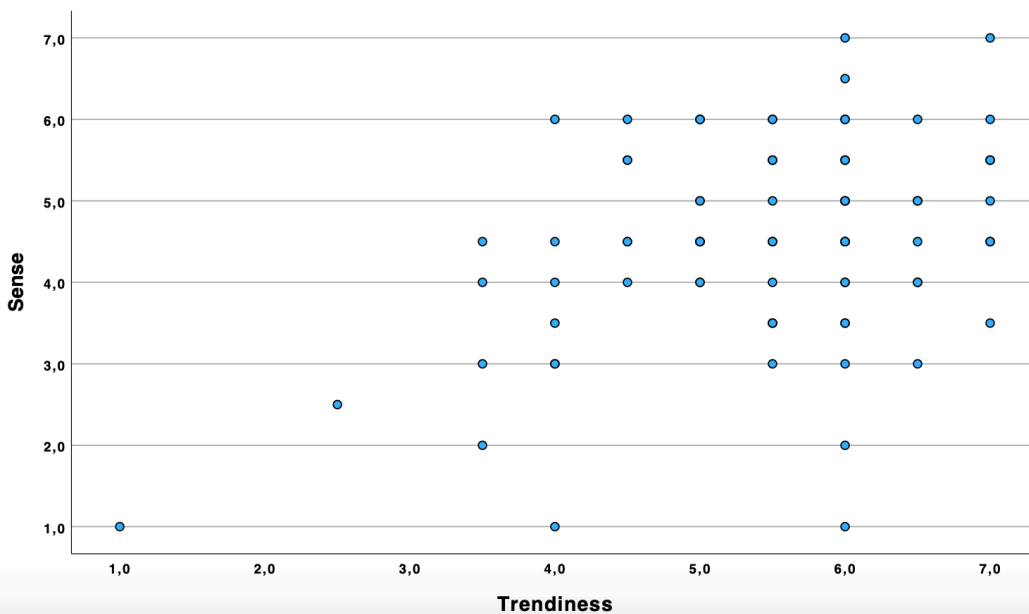
Source: Analysis results in SPSS

Appendix 5. Scatter plot Sense/Word-of-mouth



Source: Analysis results in SPSS

Appendix 6. Scatter plot Sense/Trendiness



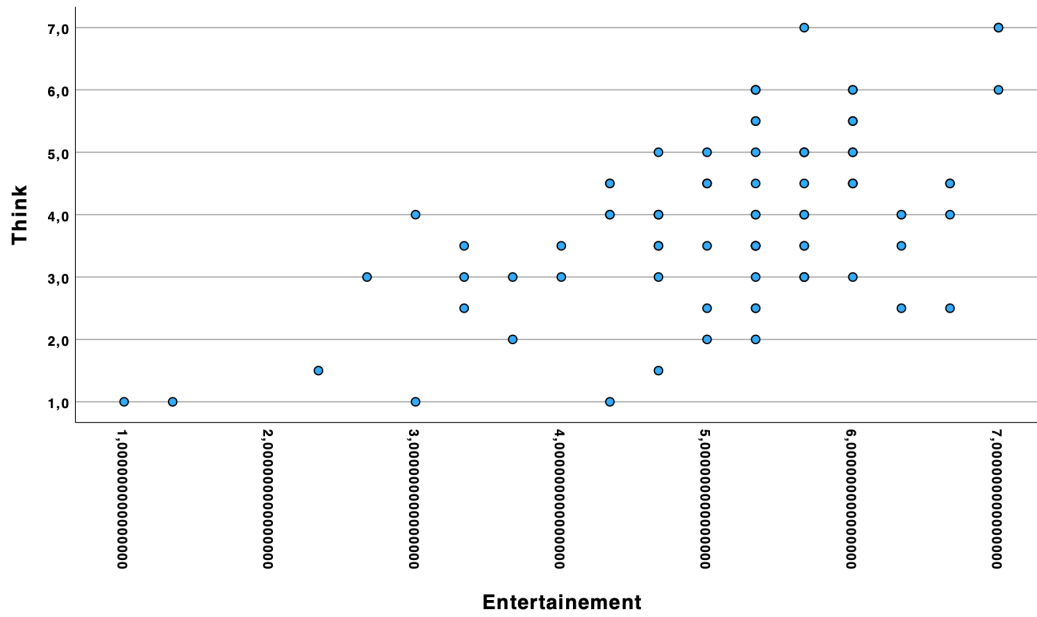
Source: Analysis results in SPSS

Appendix 7. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) for entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth and trendiness

Variable	VIFs
Entertainment	2,162
Customization	1,932
Interactivity	1,567
Word-of-mouth	1,418
Trendiness	1,521

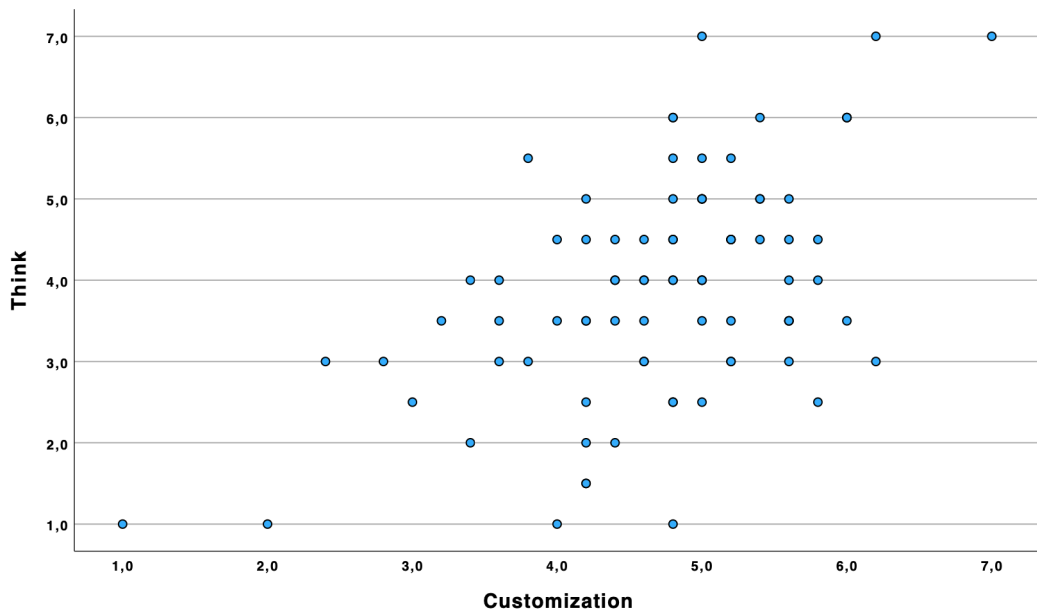
Source: Analysis results in SPSS

Appendix 8. Scatter plot Think/Entertainment



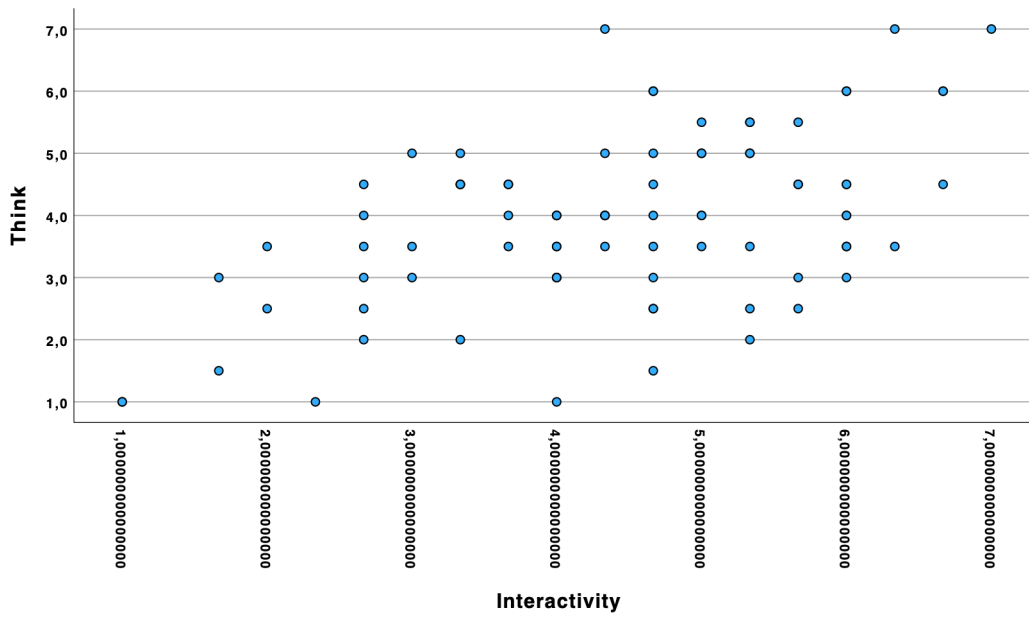
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 9. Scatter plot Think/Customization



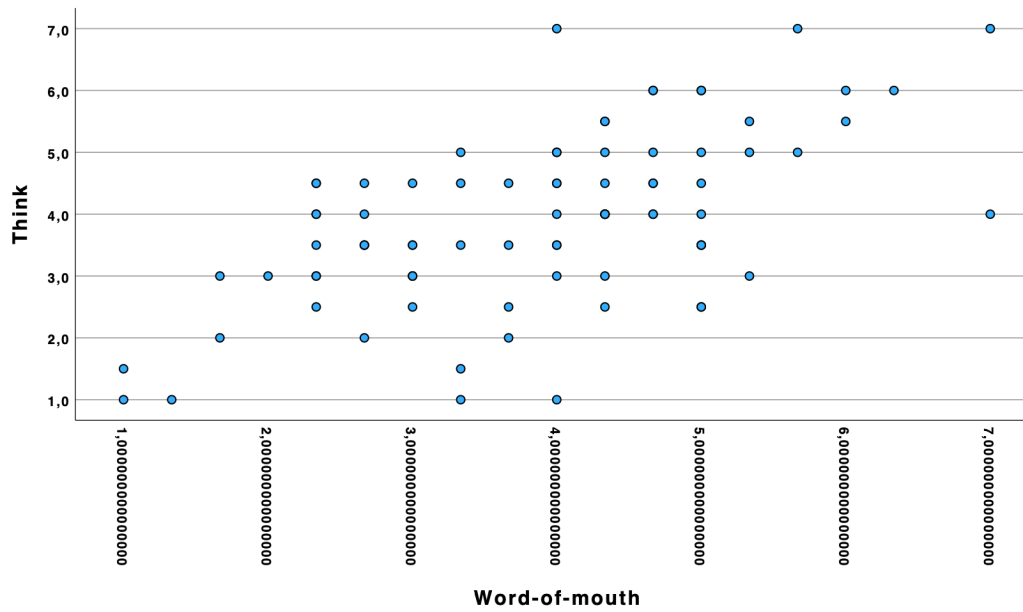
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Appendix 10. Scatter plot Think/Interactivity



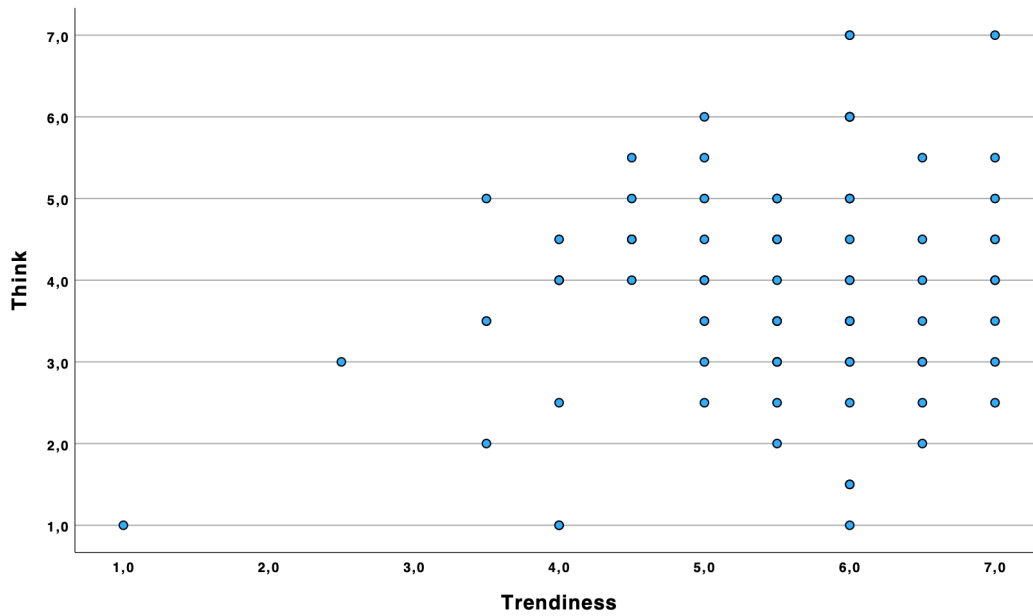
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 11. Scatter plot Think/Word-of-mouth



Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 12. Scatter plot Think/Trendiness



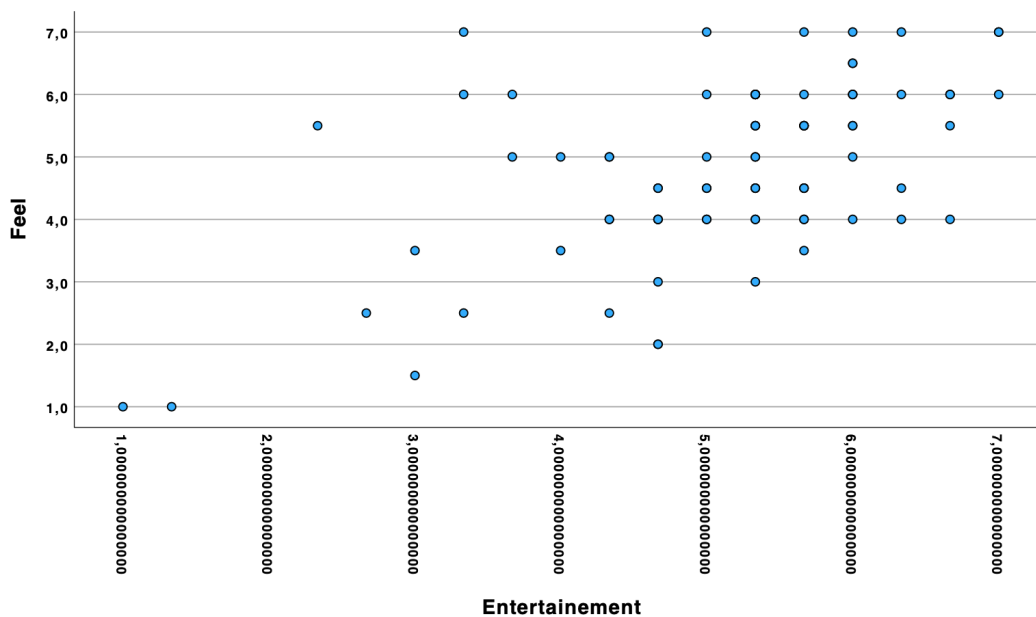
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 13. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) for entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth and trendiness

Variable	VIFs
Entertainment	1,454
Customization	1,893
Interactivity	1,38
Word-of-mouth	1,418
Trendiness	1,49

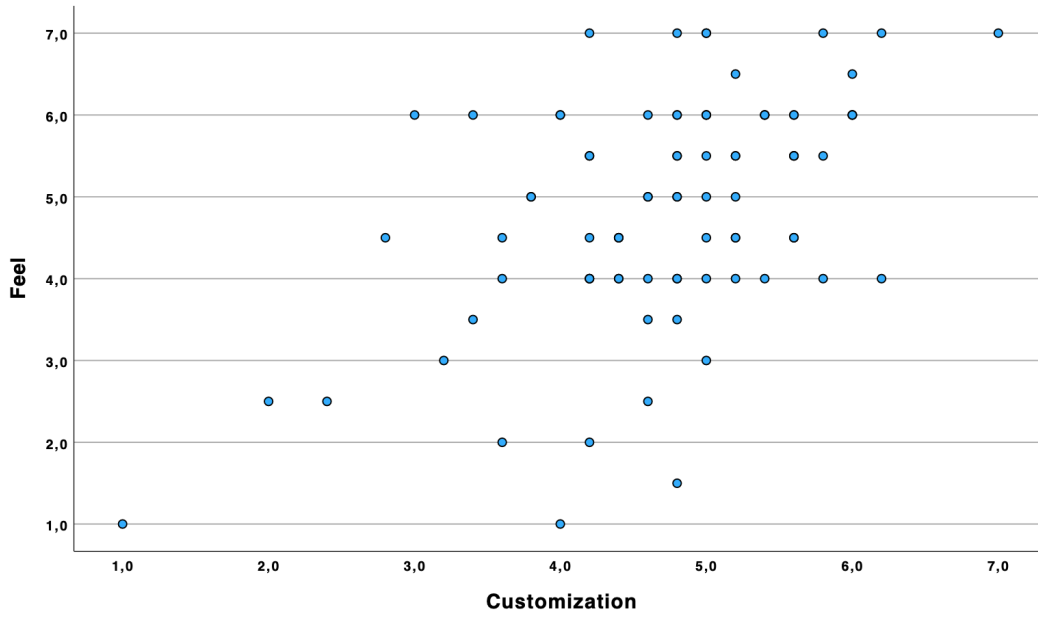
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 14. Scatter plot Feel/Entertainment



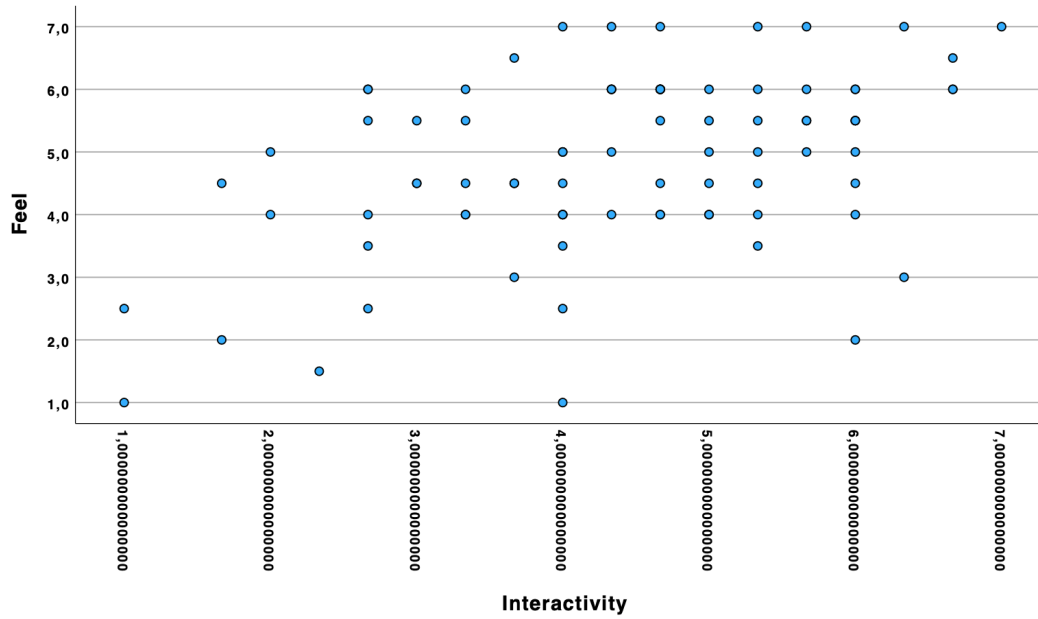
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Appendix 15. Scatter plot Feel/Customization



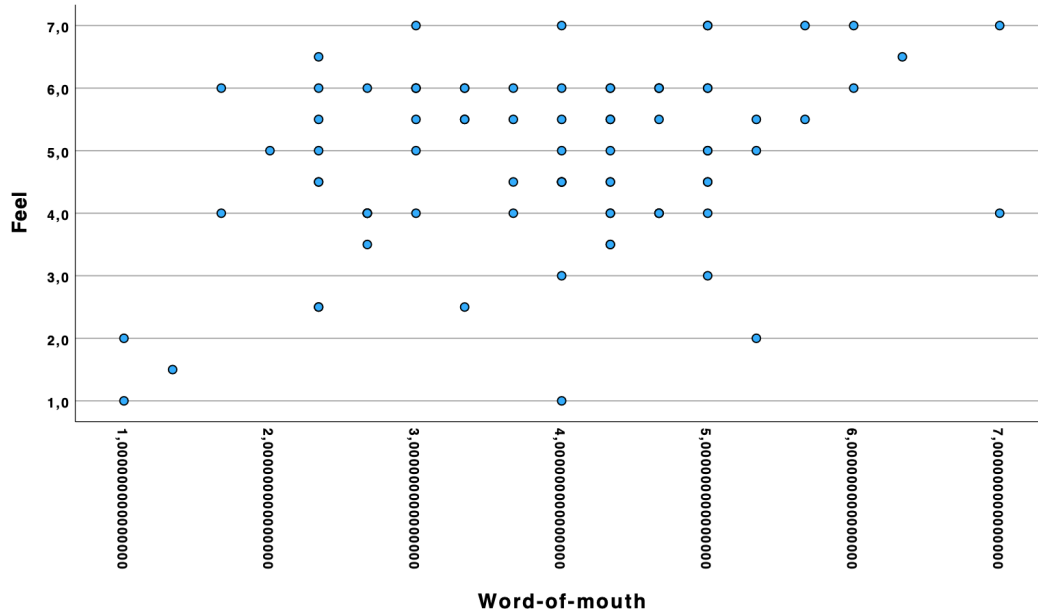
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 16. Scatter plot Feel/Interactivity



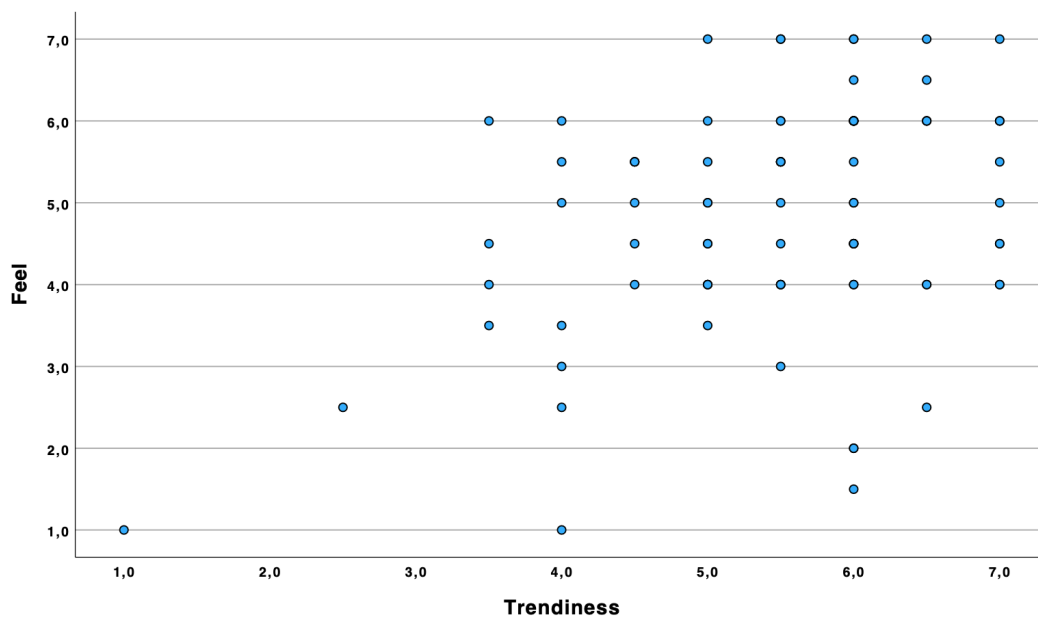
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 17. Scatter plot Feel/Word-of-mouth



Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 18. Scatter plot Feel/Trendiness



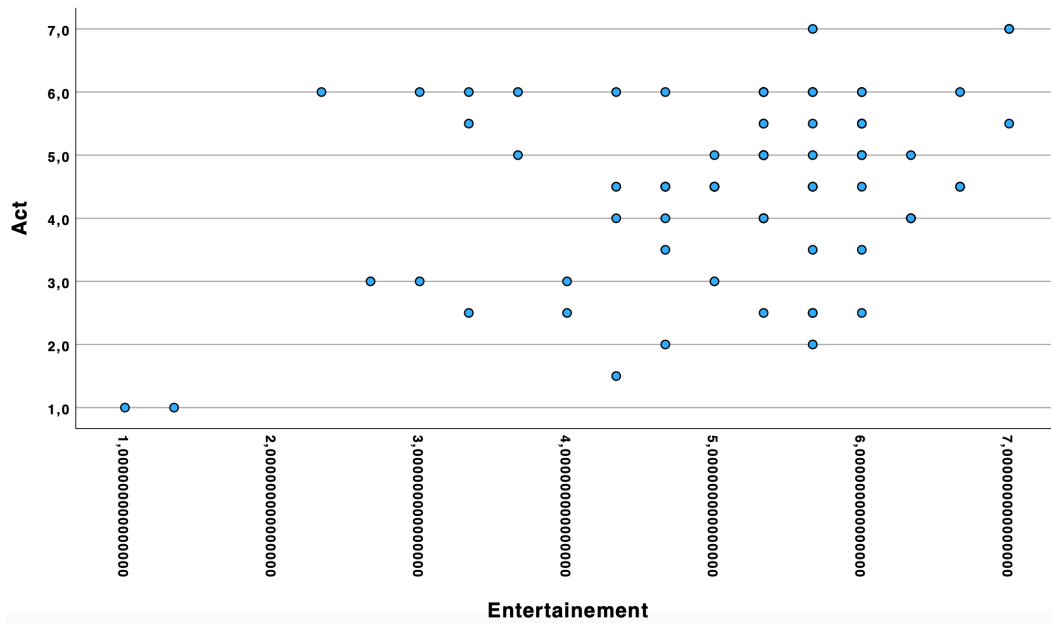
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 19. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) for entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth and trendiness

Variable	VIFs
Entertainment	1,658
Customization	1,658
Interactivity	1,453
Word-of-mouth	1,323
Trendiness	1,51

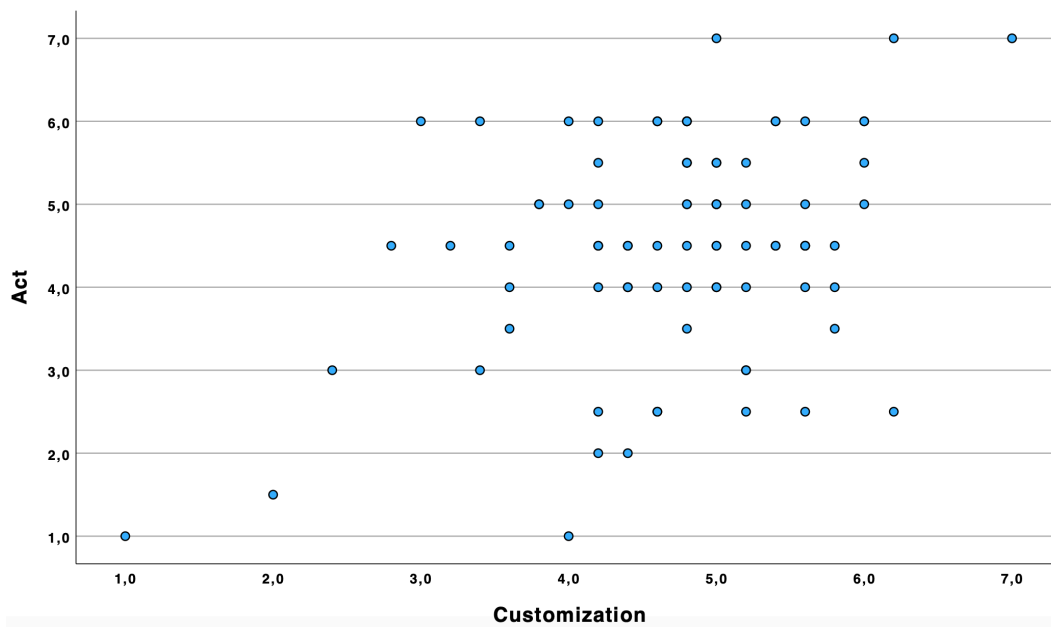
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 20. Scatter plot Act/Entertainment



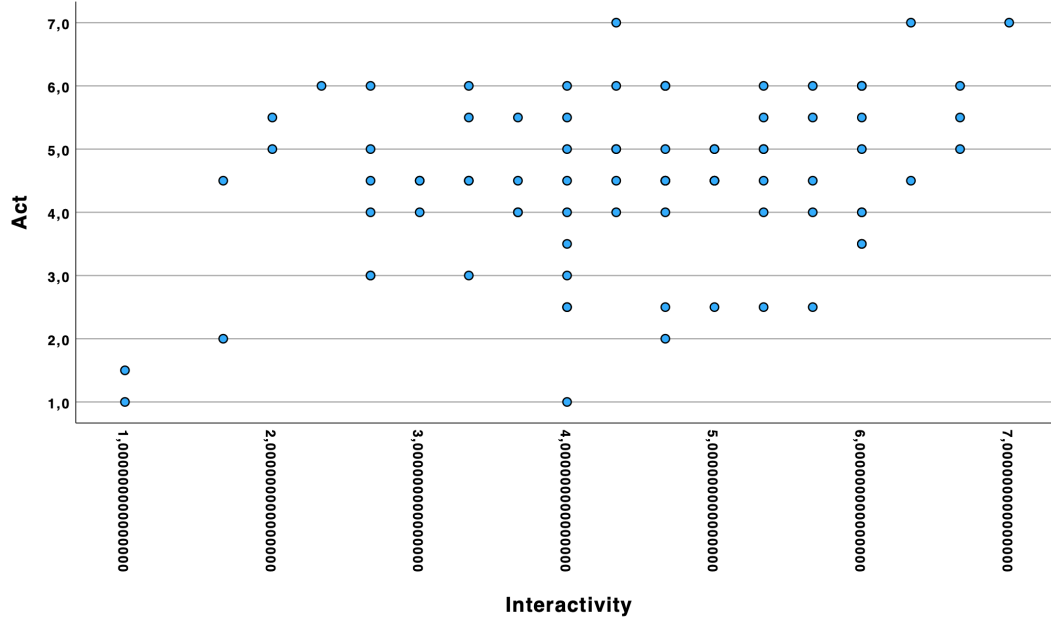
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Appendix 21. Scatter plot Act/Customization



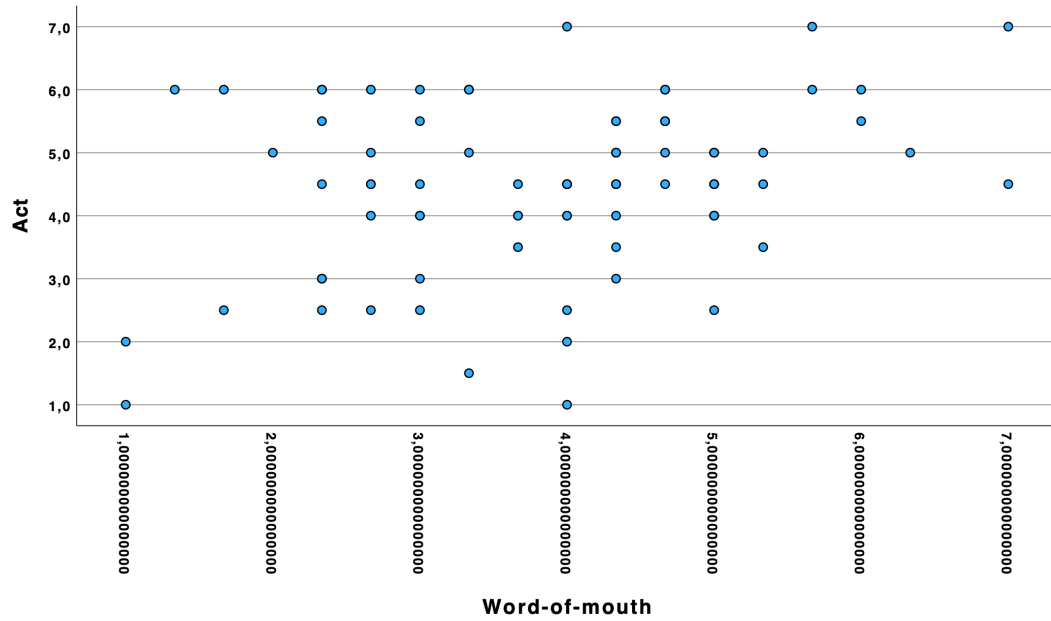
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 22. Scatter plot Act/Interactivity



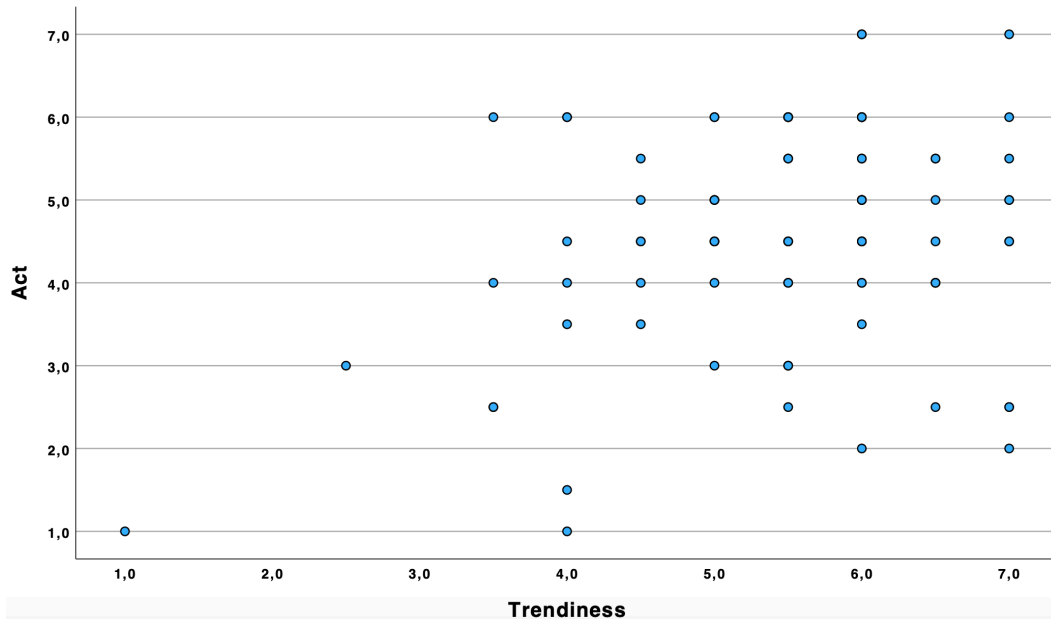
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 23. Scatter plot Act/Word-of-mouth



Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 24. Scatter plot Act/Trendiness



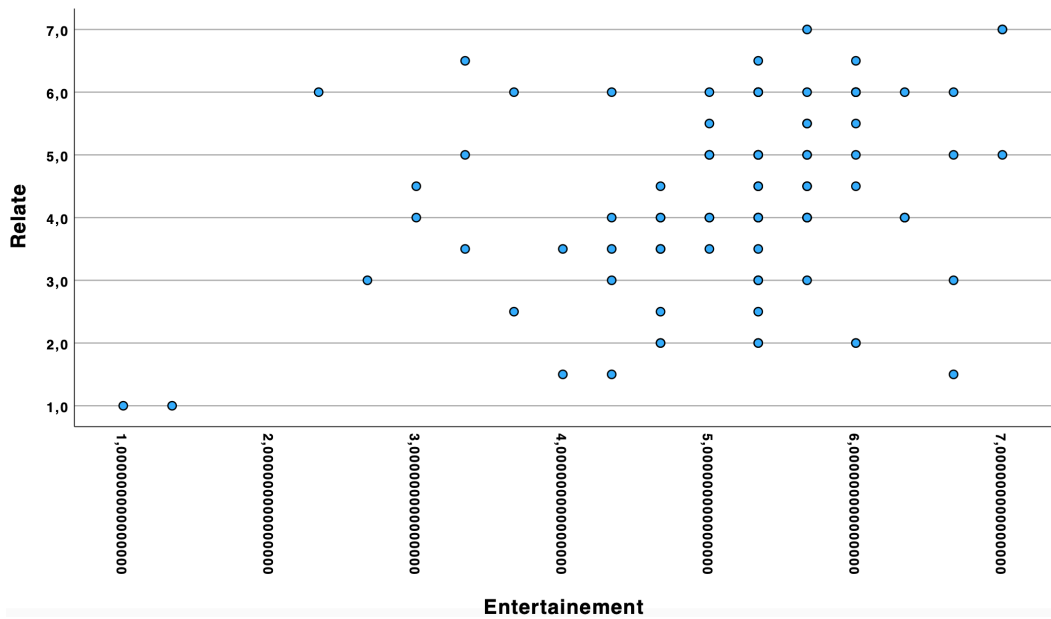
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 25. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) for entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth and trendiness

Variable	VIFs
Entertainment	1
Customization	1,658
Interactivity	1,273
Word-of-mouth	1,307
Trendiness	1,459

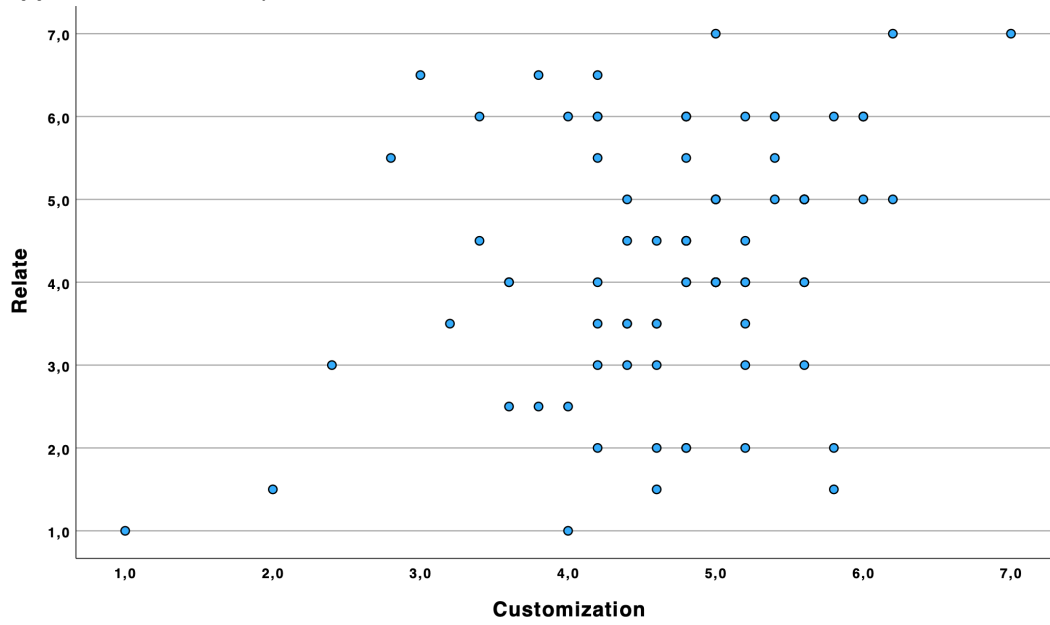
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 26. Scatter plot Relate/Entertainment



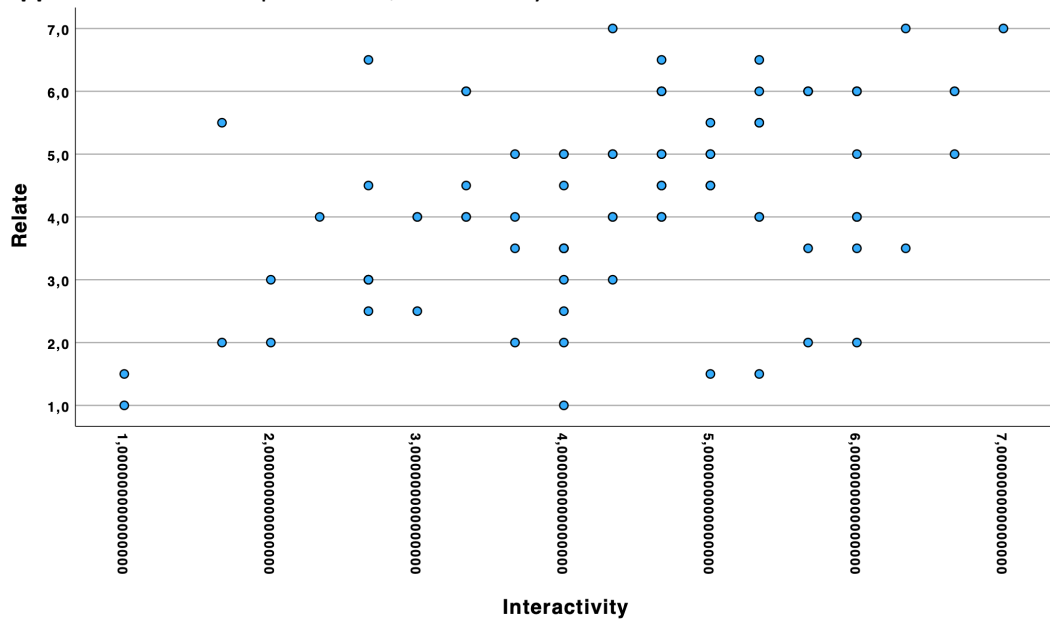
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 27. Scatter plot Relate/Customization



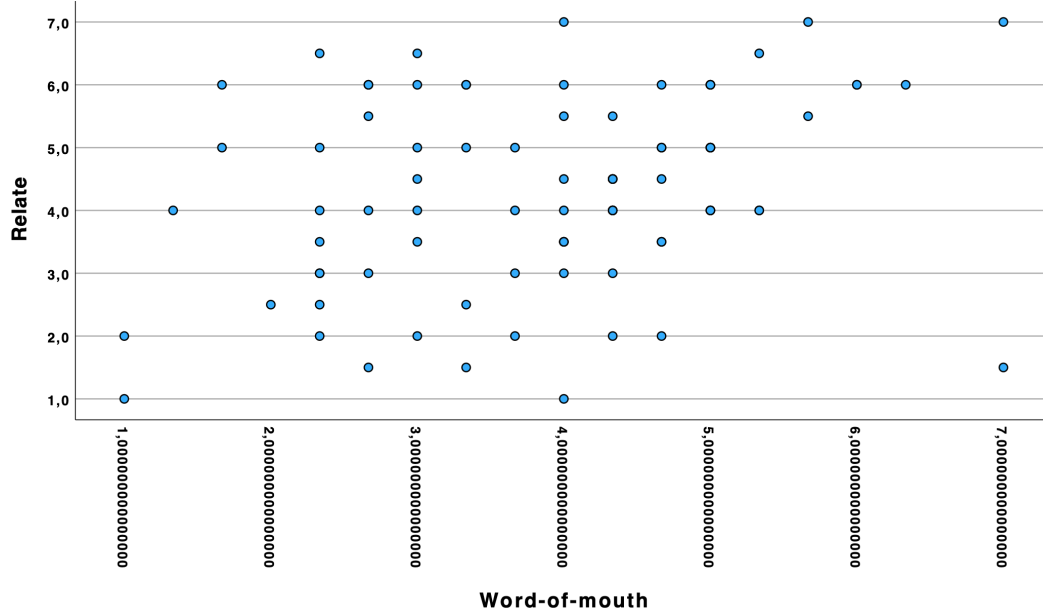
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Appendix 28. Scatter plot Relate/Interactivity



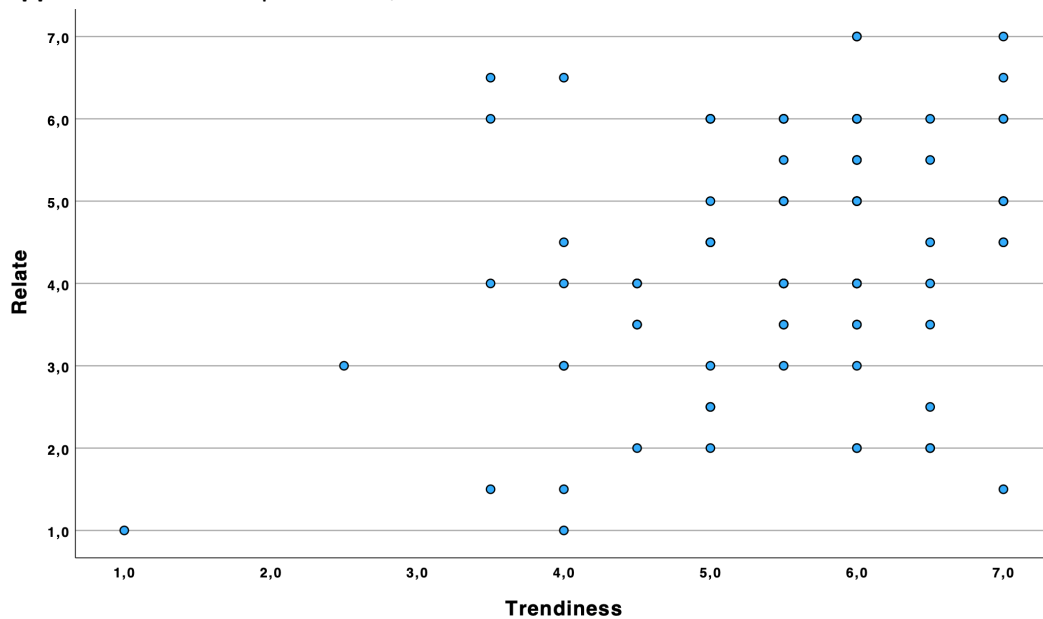
Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 29. Scatter plot Relate/Word-of-mouth



Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 30. Scatter plot Relate/Trendiness



Source: Analysis output in SPSS

Appendix 31. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) for entertainment, customization, interactivity, word-of-mouth and trendiness

Variable	VIFs
Entertainment	1,273
Customization	1,399
Interactivity	1
Word-of-mouth	1,241
Trendiness	1,153

Source: Analysis output in SPSS

List of Resource Persons

The completion of this research thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of several resource persons. First and foremost, the biggest contribution comes from Mrs. Anne-Christine Cadiat, my thesis supervisor and teacher at the university of H.E.C-Liège, who assisted me during the whole writing process. She guided me from the start by suggesting several approaches to perform my research through our investigation into scientific literature. Her expertise has then guided my choices regarding the proper research design to choose for this thesis. Moreover, she always took the time to plan calls with me to answer questions about my thesis while I was also working on my internship. Eventually, I was able to elaborate the research methodology by bringing together several previous relevant research and adapt it to fit the scope of this study thanks to her insights on the matter.

Michel Liégeois, my father, International Relationship teacher and researcher at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, was also of great help during the writing of this thesis. As he has himself assumed the role of master's thesis supervisor for several years, his insights were particularly helpful to advise me on the best writing practices along the way.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rise of social media platforms' popularity around the world has reshaped the way individuals communicate and interact. In an era marked by the widespread adoption of digital technologies and an online presence, this new level of interconnectedness now goes beyond person-to-person intercommunication (Kim & Ko, 2010). Social media platforms have changed the way marketing activities were originally performed by companies from all sectors and provided marketers with new opportunities to reach out to customers (Godey & al, 2016). Social media marketing has not only enhanced the connectivity between customers and brands, it has enabled the latter to co-create the marketing content together, empowering social media users to co-shape the image of the brands (Arrigo, 2018).

After an initial fear that a social media presence would negatively impact their brand image, luxury brands have now embraced the marketing opportunities that practicing social media marketing activities have provided them with (Bazi & al, 2020). Nevertheless, this late adoption of an online presence has left luxury brands trailing behind other sectors in terms of expertise on social media marketing. Furthermore, luxury companies still need to figure how to transpose one fundamental aspect of their strategy and brand image from their physical stores to their online presence, i.e., the luxury experience (Creevey & al, 2022). Customer experience management has been recognized as a priority for companies of all sizes and sectors (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) but especially plays a crucial role in a luxury strategy context as impeccable customer experience is one of the catalysts for luxury consumption (Grigorian & Espinoza Petersen, 2014).

In light of those considerations, the objective of this research thesis is to explore the impact of social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands on customer experience. This study adopts a quantitative approach, analyzing the answers of 87 surveys collected from luxury customers who followed at least one luxury brand that they have purchased from in the last five years on at least social media platform. The study investigates the correlation and relationship between social media marketing activities and customer experience to determine if the different types of customer experience, i.e. *sense, think, feel, act* and *relate*, are positively related to social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands.

The managerial and theoretical motivations behind this quantitative research are to investigate the role that social media marketing activities performed by luxury brands plays on customer experience to provide marketers and managers from the luxury sector with actionable insights enabling them to transpose the luxury experience from their physical stores to their online presence without compromising their brand image. Moreover, this research assumes the role of filling the existing gaps in scientific literature on social media marketing, luxury brands and customer experience as well as starting a discussion on the role that social media marketing plays in customer experience management.

The results of this research thesis provide new insights to luxury brands on which dimensions of social media marketing should be utilized in order to enhance the five different levels of customer experience in their marketing strategy. Furthermore, this research acknowledges the several limitations of the research faced along the way and provides several new leads for further research on the matter.

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