



Master's Thesis

Social media marketing: a gateway to consumers' wardrobe?

A study based on high-street fashion brands

Zara, H&M and River Island



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Abstract

Social media has revolutionised the way brands and consumers interact: from a monologue to creating active conversations and engagement through a variety of platforms. Thus, social media allows brands and consumers to connect on a more intimate level by humanising the communication and by satisfying the functional and emotional needs of the consumers. In this aspect, the following question surfaces: How do high-street fashion brands use social media platforms to further develop personal relationships with consumers?

High-street fashion brands such as H&M, Zara and River Island use social media as a natural fit: the clothes consumers wear are a representation of their selves; sharing it on social media is an authentic way of presenting their passion for fashion. In this process, a number of brands are used, as the likelihood for a brand to satisfy a consumer's needs in this fashion context is minimal. Thus, self-brands congruency is a new concept defined in this paper as the match between an individual's self-concept and the image of different fashion brands. In this aspect, this thesis will focus on establishing a connection between offline and online consumer brand concepts.

Through the use of netnography and a survey, the social media marketing properties of the selected high-street fashion brands were identified. A principal component analysis using varimax rotation in SPSS was conducted. These components are as follows: personal relevance, word of mouth and fashion trends. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the effects of social media marketing on customer relationship concepts– intimacy and trust. There is a direct relationship between social media marketing and intimacy and trust, in particular personal relevance and fashion trends had a significant positive effect on both intimacy and trust.

The research also focused on establishing if social media marketing positively influences the relationships between self-brands congruency and intimacy and trust. A macro developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) was used to test multiple

mediators using bootstrapping in SPSS. Self-brands congruency had both a direct and indirect effect through social media marketing on intimacy and trust.

When incorporating these findings, greater use of social media marketing can be gained for brands and consumers alike. This study extends previous findings and highlights the complex nature of the social jungle from a new and different perspective: as a gateway to consumers' wardrobe.

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, brands are continuously assessing their resources and capabilities to adapt to the ever-changing needs of consumers, who are becoming more and more indifferent to traditional marketing, as they are comparing products or services offline as well as online in order to choose the right product or service which offers them the most utilitarian value.

In order to differentiate among competitors, brands need to break the mould to escape out of the vicious cycle of competitive benchmarking and imitation (Chan and Mauborgne 2003). Brands are dynamic forces that have to continuously reinvent and re-evaluate their value offerings in order to deliver the benefits the consumers truly desire.

This is where social media comes into the marketing mix. Social media has existed since the development of the World Wide Web in different forms such as newsgroups but only early adopters of technology adoption lifecycle used it (Ryan and Jones 2009) to allow the exchange of content (Kaplan and Haelein 2010). As the interfaces have been simplified, social media crossed the chasm to the mainstream markets.

Social media is defined as a group of application that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan and Haelein 2010). In other words, social media integrates technology and social interaction, allowing brands to connect with consumers on a more intimate level. Examples of social media platforms include: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Google+ and Pinterest (Turner 2010). On one hand, consumers can help, support and reshape giving a new dynamic and creative social identity to the brand as a community, which brings them together (Stern 2010). On the other hand, there is lack of control in terms of what is being communicated about the brand (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Thus, social media creates both an opportunity and a huge challenge.

The advantages of using social media include the fact that brands can create conversations that engage on a 1-1 basis, which add value for the consumer along the process on a functional, experiential and psychological level (Pine and Gilmore 2011). This distinctive approach actively enriches the consumer's experience with the brand establishing an emotional connection and ultimately integrating the brand as part of their lifestyle (Pine and Gilmore 2011). The key role in building and developing relationships with consumers across different social media platforms is communication–engaging, entertaining and triggering responses from consumers.

One industry in particular has made great use of social media platforms. The fashion industry has been revolutionised by the disruptive innovation caused by the Internet bubble, receiving an extreme makeover on how brands interact with customers. For example, only the elite of this industry participated at any fashion show, whereas nowadays, everybody with an Internet connection can be part of the action (Bencic 2014). This Internet revolution posed a challenge to the traditional fashion retailers as it allowed customers re-evaluate their attitude towards value and shopping habits, researching their purchases before they actually buy them.

Thus, the online channel has become a vital channel to ensure the lifeline of the brands. Nowadays, all fashion brands have websites, many of the offering e-commerce feature as well as using social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Bencic 2014). According to a quote of Tommy Hilfiger presented in Bencic (2014), the Internet has propagated the speed to which trends reach consumer: "Long gone are the days when it took six months for the catwalk shows to reach the consumer. Our digital initiatives underscore the differences between how runway shows used to be done and how they are organised today". Thus, the fashion industry uses social media as it a natural fit: what consumers wear is a representation of their selves, sharing it on social media is an authentic way of influencing their friends and subtly promoting the brands.

There are different categories of fashion brands such as luxury brands (e.g. Burberry and Louis Vuitton) and high-street fashion brands (e.g. H&M, Zara and River Island). Luxury brands are not affordable for the average consumer whereas on the other side of the price point spectrum, high street brands are. In other words, the high-street fashion brands such as Zara, River Island and H&M utilise modern and innovative technology to streamline production in order to create the latest fashion trends in their own unique signature style at affordable prices.

The fashion industry is one of the largest in the world: in 2012, retail spending on clothing reached approximately € 1.7 trillion worldwide, Western Europe accounting for € 266 billion (Euromonitor 2012). Luxury fashion accounts for only € 318 billion worldwide (Euromonitor 2012), Western Europe being a clear leader with more than 33% of all the luxury spending (Euromonitor 2012). On the other hand, high-street fashion accounts for the rest of the retail spending. The leaders in Western Europe for high-street fashion brands as identified by Euromonitor (2012) are H&M (€ 12 billion), C&A (€ 7 billion) and Zara (€ 5 billion).

The high-street fashion industry heavily relies on all forms of marketing in order to be successful, as the consumer consumption patterns and spending behaviour have changed, leading to a strong pressure to reduce prices by streamlining the supply chain to provide with the latest trends. Thus, high-street fashion brands are interesting to study because of the short lifecycle of each seasonal collection, strong competition, cultural influences that have to be taken into account, highly sophisticated taste in consumer preferences and difficult economic conditions after recession leading to lower purchasing power. According to a Nielsen report published in 2013, consumers still believe they are in recession, leading to fewer shopping trips by almost 10% (across 2008 and 2009, the average number was 158 whereas in 2013, it is 144) (Nielsen 2013). This decrease in number of shopping trips provided with a threat but also an opportunity for brands to embrace social media marketing.

From the social media marketing perspective, the rapid speed of change in the high-street fashion industry generated the need to create, adapt and integrate conversations that will allow bridging the gaps between the brand and consumers. This is done by communicating, engaging, entertaining and triggering response through social media content to ultimately stage and develop a customer experience that will ensure the development a long-term relationship and immersing the brand in the consumer's lifestyle. Thus, content adds value to the products and trigger emotional responses from the consumers, creating a stronger bond between the consumer and the brand that can in time lead to loyalty. On the other hand, consumers have become highly in control, having greater access to information (Foux 2006). This new power offers opportunities for brands to provide with immediate access to information for the consumer's convenience, enabling a better-informed decision on the offered products or services (Mangold and Faulds 2009).

Every consumer can participate in conversations and serve as creators and disseminators of the social media content. Brands are empowering the consumers to create their own personalised experience and providing venues via which they can share content with like-minded friends (Fournier and Avery 2011). Social media is perceived as a trustworthy source of information in regards to researching products and services as it offers real-life experiences expressed through word of mouth of other users (Foux 2006). This influences certain aspects of consumer behaviour from acquiring the product or service to expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction post purchase (Foux 2006). This change required marketing strategies to bridge the gaps between brands and consumers by taking into consideration consumer preferences and expectations and conveying them through social media as part of the brand experience (Kassaei 2011).

In order to adapt to these conditions and to differentiate themselves, brands have started using social media as an interactive way to engage with customers and consumers alike. The advantages of using social media include the fact that there are no time and place restrictions, encouraging participation from people all

around the globe. The social media uptake in the recent years is evidenced in Facebook and Twitter users –for Facebook –from 845 million at the end of 2011 to 1.06 billion at the end of 2012 (New York Times 2013), whereas for Twitter there were 200 million at the end of 2011 to over 500 million at the end of 2012 (AOL Inc. 2012). Due to this rapid evolution of social media, there is a limited amount of literature on the topic. In addition, social media is the most common activity consumers pursue online (Cooper 2013). Thus, social media carries more weight than ever, being a catalyst for progressing with the consumer-brand relationship from an offline to the online environment. In other words, social media humanises the communication between the brand and consumer, offering the possibility of developing personal relationships. Hence, the following question arises: How do high-street fashion brands use social media platforms to further develop personal relationships with consumers?

Surprisingly, research about social media for the fashion industry has only been conducted through Facebook on luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton (Kim and Ko 2010) and Burberry (Phan, Thomas and Heine 2011) whereas high-street fashion brands such as Zara, H&M and River Island were not studied in this context. This thesis will examine social media for high-street fashion brands through Facebook and Twitter and attempt in providing with recommendations for academics and practitioners alike in regards to best practices for social media in order to further develop personal relationships between brands and consumers.

It will be the first study that encompasses how a number of high-street fashion brands use social media platforms Facebook and Twitter in order to progress consumer-brand relationships. In addition, it will attempt to extend the customer relationship concepts used in Kim and Ko (2010) to incorporate self-brands congruency as a driver for customer relationships as well as for social media.

The reasoning behind these assumption is the following: social media pertains to building blocks 3 and 4 in the Customer-Based Brand Equity as the brand awareness and brand association have already been established in an offline

context through traditional marketing. In terms, social media can influence brand attitude and brand resonance.

On the other hand, from the consumer's perspective- consumer's judgements, feelings and resonance with the brand can be influenced through social media. Clothes have a certain kind of power as it allows the consumer to present how he is to the world and how he/she will subsequently behave. In their self-representation, a number of brands are used, as there is minimal probability of a consumer satisfying his/her needs with only one brand. Thus, this idea of self-brands congruency has emerged. In this piece of research, self-brands congruency is defined as the similarity or match between an individual's self-concept and the images of different brands. This is in line with self-congruity theory that reinforces the idea that the preferences and choices a consumer makes in terms of high-street fashion validate and reinforce their perception of themselves. Assuming that the consumer already Like and/or follow the high-street fashion brand on Facebook and/or Twitter, there is an indication of self-brand congruency but as stated earlier, this connection exists with a number of brands, thus enabling the possibility to calculate self-brands congruency at an aggregate level.

1.1 Research objectives

The main research objective is to investigate how high-street fashion brands use social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter in order to develop customer relationships and thus create personal relationships between the brands and consumers. Moreover, the study will provide answers in regards to the properties of high-street fashion brands' social media marketing in regards to platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and how these affect customer relationship constructs such as intimacy and trust. In addition, it will attempt to establish if self-brands congruency influences social media and what is the impact on customer relationships constructs, trust and intimacy.

Consumers can use social media in a multitude of ways, being a perfect medium to research products and services, find out more information about the latest news

and gain exclusive access to exclusive content and special offers. Therefore, the main aim of this research is to determine the purpose for which high-street fashion brands use Facebook and Twitter. This will provide insight into the type of content used and the social interaction between the brand and consumers.

Secondly, the social media marketing properties of the chosen high-street fashion brands for the selected platforms (Facebook and Twitter) will be explored in a broader context. In this aspect, this thesis will complement Kim and Ko (2010) study on social media and luxury brands by addressing the high-street fashion brands. It will investigate the impact that social media marketing properties of the high-street fashion brands have on customer relationship constructs (i.e. intimacy and trust). In addition to Kim and Ko (2010) study, which focused only on Facebook, it will encompass Twitter as well for a more holistic overview of the brands' social media marketing. Lastly, the relationship between self-brands congruency will be examined in terms on how it impacts on the social media marketing properties identified and if it has any effect on customer relationships constructs (i.e. intimacy and trust).

1.2 Academic and Managerial Relevance

Social media is a contemporary topic of research, which emerged in recent years, thus there is a limited amount of literature (Table 1). In this aspect, this thesis will try to validate customer relationship constructs from offline to online. This will enable describing how the consumers evaluate social media and what effects it has on customer relationship constructs. This is important from both a theoretical and practical perspective.

This research will contribute to the existing knowledge base and attempt to expand Kim and Ko's (2010) research for the social media of high-street fashion brands. High-street fashion brands were chosen, as their social media was never studied before. Therefore, this research will further develop the existing knowledge base of the social media literature being explanatory in nature.

Another contribution of this research is the fact that it will extend both theoretical implications and recommendations for social media, as it will provide effective insights about consumers' evaluation of social media, enabling a better use of resources and a distinctive approach that will increase engagement.

Lastly, it will try to establish whether or not self-brands congruency have an impact on the social media properties and the extent this affects customer relationship constructs (i.e. trust and intimacy). In all cases, recommendations will be offered into how to leverage these findings for effective use.

Overall, this thesis will offer valuable insight about social media. Consumers are becoming more and more dependent on social media as it is being used to work, play and socialize (Ogbevoen 2012). Ogbevoen (2012) stated that Facebook and Twitter are an addiction, being comparable with smoking. This is due to the fact that social media platforms provide with added value such as an increase in functionality and convenience, thus becoming an integral part in the consumers' life, magnifying social behaviour. Thus, social media can be considered as a catalyst to create personal relationships between the brands and consumer, in order to ultimately embed the brand in their lifestyle.

2. Literature review

This study focuses on investigating the impact that social media marketing has on customer relationships concepts. This literature will comprise of identifying the theories and the research related to social media and consumer brand relationships already conducted. Thus, a comprehensive basis for the research topic will be presented in order to develop testable hypotheses (Table 1).

Table 1 Relevant research

Study	Context	Findings	Methods	Contribution
Escalas and Bettman (2003)	Meaningful brands to the population	Self-brand connections lead to brand attitudes that are not very susceptible to change.	Experiments	This article focused on conceptualizing reference groups in terms of self-brand connections.
Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence (2010)	Favourite brands of each participant	The congruence between brand and consumer personality or values is crucial in the creation of brand passion. Brand passion has a positive influence on word-of-mouth.	Online panel	This research focuses on constructing the antecedents and consequences on brand passion.
Kim and Ko (2010)	Luxury fashion brands social media	Entertainment and word of mouth influence consumer intimacy. Entertainment influences consumer trust.	Questionnaires	It studied the effect of luxury brands' social media marketing on customer relationships and purchase intentions.
Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeek (2011)	Consumer engagement in an virtual brand community	Consumer engagement is an interactive and experiential process being context dependent. Engagement leads to trust and commitment.	Netnography	The research focused on revealing the complexity and dynamic nature of consumer engagement.
Cheung, Lee and Jin (2011)	Research in progress	Online loyalty is dependent upon consumer trust.	Surveys	It focused on establishing the role of trust in online service dynamics and the sequence for loyalty- cognitive-affective-conative-action.
Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite (2012)	Online game	Stages of consumer engagement on social media are: watching, sharing, commenting, producing and curating.	Case study	This research provides with insights about consumer engagement on social media.

2.1 Social media and Customer Relationship Management

Social media enables consumers to talk to the brand and to each other through a multitude of platforms (Woodcock, Green and Starkey 2011). Similar to any conversation, the content on social media platforms varies for each brand (Woodcock et al. 2011).

The main focus of these platforms is to enhance the consumer experience, thus brand marketing on social media is becoming less and less about pushing messages out to consumers and more and more about being part of a dynamic conversation – listening and creating relevant content to earn their trust (Woodcock et al. 2011).

Brands need to understand how consumers behave offline and online in order to engage with their target consumers and develop online brand experiences (Woodcock et al. 2011). As such, social media platforms provide with the rare opportunities for the brand to listen to consumers and respond. In addition, it allows the collection of in depth information about consumer preferences and lifestyles, enabling customised content to ultimately embed the brand in cultural conversation (Fournier and Avery 2011). If the content engages the consumer, the consumer may do nothing, buy the product directly or interact in another way (Woodcock et al. 2011).

Thus, social media offers the prospect of consumer engagement but it also presents a progress to traditional Customer Relationship Management (CRM). This is due to social media providing with an increased understanding of the consumer that traditional CRM channels cannot provide. Using a combination of CRM and social media has given birth to the new term of Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM). However, Baird and Parasnins (2011) state that using social as a channel for customer engagement poses interesting challenges for traditional CRM, as customer are in control of these relationships, driving the conversation and shaping the brand. As social media allows the customer to be the centre of attention, the brand will provide with the atmosphere where the discussion should take place (Huba 2013).

SCRM is a term coined by Greenberg (2010) and is defined as such: “SCRM is the business strategy of engaging customers through social media with the goals of building trust and brand loyalty”. In other words, the brand on social media has to focus on facilitating collaborative experience and dialogue that customer value (Baird and Parasnins 2011). The advantages of using a SCRM programme include creating and cultivating customer advocates for the brand whereas not implementing such a programme will lead to customer churn (Greenberg 2010). Woodcock et al. (2011) present P&G as an example. P&G started using social media

platforms in order to create one-on-one relationship with consumers with the end-goal of enabling customising their offerings (Woodcock et al. 2011).

2.2 Social media content

As can be seen above, social media platforms can be used to create and develop relationships between the brand and the consumer that enriches their experience with the brand. Pine and Gilmore (2011) state that generating an emotional connection is vital, as there is a transition from a knowledge economy to an experience economy. These experiences have to engage all senses to create an emotional high and immerse the consumers with the brand (Pine and Gilmore 2011). In this instance, brands should not follow or use existing social media content used by other brands but create their own with their specific personality that will extend the user's experience from offline to online (Huba 2013).

Consumers use social media in order to communicate among themselves and occasionally with companies (Baer 2013). This communication focuses on building and strengthening connection through participation, which can influence behaviour through content (Baer 2013). In other words, content drive social media. Content has to be interesting and engaging in order to drive results (Totka 2014). According to Totka (2014) the post types that can help in delivering the results are: funny or clever content, thoughtful or inspirational content, educational content, conversational content and promotional content.

Funny or clever content does not work for certain types of brands as humour is subjective, but in general, Totka (2014) states that people easily remember this type of content as it will cause them to laugh or even smile. An example of brands using this type of content is Taco Bell and Old Spice, in which humour is the main basis for making their commercials viral (Totka 2014).

Inspirational content is a great way of grabbing the attention of the consumers, leaving a good impression (Melnik 2014). The main examples for this type of content are inspirational quotes or motivational stories. Educational content is

another great way to get interest or appreciation (Totka 2014). This type of content encompasses step-by-step articles or how to videos that is relevant for consumers.

Conversational content focuses on engaging with the audience directly by connecting with people on an individual level (Totka 2014). The consumer will feel that he/she is part of the conversation. Some examples include replying to posts, answering questions and joining discussion.

Promotional content focuses on self-promotion of the brand (Totka 2014). In this regards, Baird and Parasnins (2011) research reveals that most consumers do not engage with brands on social media to connect per say, instead they are more pragmatic as they are seeking in obtaining tangible value. By offering promotions on social media, brands can satisfy consumer desire for recognition through exclusive discounts (Baird and Parasnins 2011).

Brands must identify and understand the nature of the relationship the consumers' desire with them on social media or they could misjudge what content to add. Thus, brands have to be holistic in understanding consumer needs by talking, interacting and building relationships and receiving feedback online (Baird and Parasnins 2011). The brand is dynamic and will continuously transform to become what the consumer would like for it to become (Huba 2013).

Social media has to incorporate this aspect in order to engage with the emotional and conative aspect of consumer behaviour that will stimulate conversation, share opinions and experiences. Wigand, Wood and Mande (2010) considers that social media creates and develops communities by the provision of compelling content.

Haven (2007) recommends three tactics for creating desirable online experiences by providing engaging content with embedded functionality, focusing on aesthetics and incorporating elements of game design. In other words, Haven (2007)

recommends the creation of content with a narrative in mind that focuses on providing with functional and hedonic value.

Firstly, the content has to convey that the brand genuinely cares about the consumers by starting a conversation not focused on selling but on active listening, emphatic and proactive participation (Social Media Today 2013). Thus, the content will be meaningful and share worthy, being a self-expression of the consumers. This will make the content appealing, attractive to the consumers, being liked and shared.

When the content is relevant and interesting it has a differential effect on consumer behaviour eliciting response and active engagement (Berger and Milkman 2012). Consumers share practical and useful content such as discount coupons or information about good restaurants for altruistic reasons or self-enhancement purposes (Berger and Milkman 2012).

Also, the emotional aspect of content will impact whether if it is shared or not. Consumers will share emotionally charged content to make sense of their own experiences, reduce dissonance or deepen social connections (Berger and Milkman 2012). Another important component for sharing content identified by Berger (2013) is social currency. Social currency refers to the psychological tendency of sharing personal content or information that makes the individual look good or better than others in their social circle (Berger 2013). This information is highly emotional and it has to be leveraged as it provides status by associations, eliciting positive emotions such as increasing self-esteem and approval from peers. This pressure from our peer group not only affects our judgement but also our perception.

According to the Asch experiment (1958) there are two reasons for which people conform: normative influence—they want to fit with the group and informational influence— they believe that the group is better informed. Also, conformity means going with the group for the fear of being ridiculed or thought peculiar. This herd

behaviour describes how individuals act in a group, which tends to mimic the rational and irrational actions or behaviour.

There are innumerable social and economic situations in which individuals are influenced in their decision-making by what others around them are doing. As Aristotle stated, the human being is by nature a social animal. Individuals tend to live in groups, which are created based on the members' interests. Living in these groups means sharing the same beliefs and more or less the same opinions.

It is impossible not to be influenced by the opinion of others in these circumstances as the relationships are based on understanding and trust (Berger 2013). This situation can be compared to listening to your best friend and taking up on their advice. An advantage of using herd mentality is the fact that members are more efficient when talking about the usage of resources at hand (Halpern 2013). In contrast, a disadvantage to using herd mentality is the lack of personal satisfaction as it can be seen as a sign of weakness due to the incapability of taking responsibility for their own actions (Halpern 2013).

Returning to the social media concept, every person wants to belong to a group, which share the same interest. In this respect, social currency can be leveraged by discovering the inner-remarkability or the points of difference of the brand and by offering an insider's perspective through the use of an exclusive club (discounts, competitions or loyalty cards) (Berger 2013). This triggers emotions for the consumers by involving them in the story telling and by offering practical value.

From a psychological perspective, attractiveness or lust is reflected also physiological through the 'wet mouth' syndrome. A person's mouth literally waters when they see what they want (Hogshead 2013). This means that social media content can be manipulated to create a more pleasurable experience by using more adjectives, more videos, more descriptive cues that will make the messages more human, in order to draw people closer together (Hogshead 2013).

Also, mystique is essential as it keeps consumers guessing. This through provocative messages as they provide with distinct and inimitable experiences (Hogshead 2013). Lastly, it is important to build brand trust by setting a stable pattern of expectation on the social media content (Hogshead 2013). According to the encoding variability principle as presented in Keller et al. (2006), suggests presenting information in varied contexts causes information to be encoded in slightly different ways. By using a number of different platforms on social media with consistent content, several retrieval routes are formed in memory, enhancing brand recall.

Creating compelling content on social media allows the brands to better relate with consumers and facilitate the creation of a stronger relationship, which Twitter and Facebook enables (Tuten 2008). On the other hand, customer coma refers to the coping survival mechanism due to bad content, which pushes the customer away from the brand. There are three things that put customers in a coma according to Halpern (2013): tuning it down, losing the brand's personality, being boring or failing to open the information gap. The information gap refers to the gap between what customers know and what they want to know. There is a psychological need to close the gap. An inability to minimise this gap can lead to negative feelings, thus building a strong social media content should ensure that customers have the right type of experience (Halpern 2013).

2.3 Social media metrics

There are two types of social media metrics organic reach and paid reach. Facebook (2013) defines organic reach as “the number of unique people who saw the brand's posts”. In contrast, paid reach is “the number of unique people who saw the brand's post through an ad” (Facebook 2013). In other words, the content on Facebook and Twitter can be boosted in order to increase consumer judgements, feelings and resonance with the brand.

Organic reach

In terms of metrics on social media platforms, Facebook has Like, Comment and Share buttons, which enable consumers to like, comment and share the content

with their Facebook friends. In addition, these buttons have an added functionality by showing the live count of the number of times the current content has been shared (Facebook 2014). This enables measuring the effectiveness of social media by using Share analytics provided by Facebook (Facebook 2014). Twitter on the other hand, has Tweet, Favourite and Retweet buttons, which allow consumers to engage in response and share the content provided (Twitter 2014).

Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite (2012) pointed out in their research that brands have to measure and analyse communication in social media. The social media metrics indicated above are not sufficient to suggest customer engagement. Facebook has introduced a new metric “Talking about this” that measures the unique users that have shared stories about the page. These stories include: Likes, Comments, Shares of the posts, Answers to a question that the user posed, responses to an Event created by the Page, Mentions of the Page, Tags in a photo and Check-ins or Recommendations (Loomer 2013). On Twitter, customer engagement is calculated by summing up three components: Replies- when a fan send a Tweet directly to the brand, Retweets- when a fan shares your tweets to his or her followers and Mentions- when a Twitter user includes the Twitter brand handler in a tweet (SimplyMeasured 2013). This sum is after that divided to the number of followers and multiplied by 100 (SimplyMeasured 2013).

Paid reach

There are three components of paid metrics on Facebook, which are: ads, mobile ads or sponsored stories (SimplyMeasured 2013). As for Twitter, promoted Tweets are used in order to reach current and potential followers (Twitter 2013). The paid metrics for both platforms can be easily adapted in order to suit the desired target market. In this instance, keywords, interests, gender, geography, device and similarity to existing fans or followers can be utilised (Twitter 2013). This will allow access to more in-depth analytics such as reach, engagement and conversion rate.

2.4 Word of mouth

Consumers are using various types of social media platforms to conduct their information searches and make their purchasing decision as it is perceived as a more trustworthy source of information regarding products and services (Mangould and Fauld 2009). In this aspect, social media enables brands to talk to their customers and it enables customers to talk to one another, being an extension of traditional word-of-mouth-communication (Mangould and Fauld 2009). As brands cannot control the conversation on social media per say, they do have the ability to influence the conversations that consumers have with one another (Mangould and Fauld 2009).

Consumers share opinion and experiences on social media. In their research Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004) introduced the concept of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a positive or negative statement by a potential, actual and former customer made available via the Internet. Thus, social media allows consumer to contribute with their opinion and research for trustworthy information on products and services. eWOM has been examined to have numerous effects on consumer behaviour constructs such as: purchasing decision (Hennig-Thuray et al. 2004, Cheung et al. 2008) and customer loyalty (Kim et al. 2008).

2.5 Intimacy and trust

Passion is defined as the primary affective, extremely positive attitude toward the brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behaviour factors (Bauer, Heinrich and Martin 2007). In other words, passion is an intense and positive feeling towards a brand. But Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence (2010) provide with a more comprehensive definition for passion as enthusiasm or the infatuation or even the obsession of a consumer for a brand.

Intimacy is defined as feeling of being closer and connected (Sternberg 1997). The perception of intimacy is required before the consumers make an emotional connection and investment in the brand and develop perceptions of trust (Elliot

and Yannoupoulau 2007). In other words, intimacy is a matter of knowledge that accumulates over time and lasts longer than other emotional relationships (Kim and Ko 2010).

Trust on the other hand, refers to the degree of the tendency to believe in a certain brand's ability to perform a promised function, being the key component to enhance relationship between a consumer and a brand in the long term (Kim and Ko 2010). In terms, trust develops positive behaviour towards the brand such as intention to purchase and recommend (Kim and Ko 2010).

Consumer trust is built when the consumer uses that brand to gather data about brand reputation, predictability and competency (Afzal, Khan, Rehman, Ali and Wajahat 2010). Trust entails confidence in the successful transfer of the brand's reliability and integrity through consumer commitment and satisfaction with that particular brand (Afzal et al. 2010). Similarly, brand trust has cognitive and affective dimensions just as brand passion. Brand trust has a positive influence on brand affection, which predicts positive influence on brand commitment as confirmed by Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence (2010). In Kim and Ko (2010), trust and intimacy towards a brand was demonstrated to have a significant positive influence on purchase intentions of luxury brands.

Consumer passion has shown to be influenced by both consumers' and brand's characteristics, but mostly determined by the brand-consumer relationship which in terms influence brand trust, identification, commitment and positive word of mouth (Albert et al. 2010). There are four characteristics identified by Bauer et al. (2007) related to the brand: brand uniqueness, self-expressive, prestige and hedonic value. In terms of individual factors, passion is influenced by consumer personality, which in terms influences the level of brand identification that entails brand love and brand passion.

Albert et al. (2010) suggest that the brand passion construct is made of three dimensions: cognitive – through the idealisation of the brand and its presence in

the consumer's thoughts, emotional – through the consumer's attraction toward the brand and the desire to interact and behavioural – through the purchase of the brand and positive word of mouth. The congruence between brand and consumer personality or values seem to be crucial in the creation of brand passion (Albert et al 2010). Albert et al. (2010) also demonstrated that brand trust influence brand passion.

2.6 Consumer engagement

Overall, social media marketing is a way of brands to engage with consumers in their efforts of further developing consumer relationships. Thus, one important aspect is consumer engagement. Consumer engagement is a central concept in the social psychology literature as it explains how social relationships initiate, endure and develop being a higher-order construct, customer presenting themselves in a physical, emotional and cognitive presence in interacting with the brand (Nammir, Narane and Ali 2012).

In the online environment, consumer engagement is becoming more and more relevant since it is capable of influencing the final purchasing decision (Zailskaite-Jakste, Kuvykaite 2012). Thus, the concept of consumer engagement on social media was analysed in various aspects. Mollen and Wilson (2010) defined consumer engagement as including consumer experience as well as the interactive relationship between the brand and the consumer. In contrast Haven (2007) defined engagement on social media as the level of involvement, interaction, intimacy and influence that a person has with a brand over time. Haven's (2007) engagement framework of the 4 Is offers a more holistic appreciation of the consumers action, emphasising the importance of people's behaviour and influencing powers.

According to Brodie, Hollebeek, Ilic and Juric (2009), the engagement process is occurring through the interaction of the consumer and the brand, thus it can be analysed from both perspectives. From the consumer point of view, engagement depends on whether or not they are creatively motivated by a brand to get

involved or when he or she will be encourage by other consumer or when they will receive some benefits (Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite 2012).

Consumers are more engaged with the brands when they are able to submit feedback (Mangold and Faulds 2009), thus social media provides the perfect opportunity to ensure this aspect. In addition, Mangold and Faulds (2009) present social media as a hybrid element in the promotional mix, magnifying the brand's promotional efforts. In addition, Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite (2012) provided the stages of consumer engagement on social media, which are watching, sharing, commenting, producing and curating. Throughout this process, consumers are engaged by receiving cognitive and social benefits guaranteed through social interaction (Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite 2012).

Consumer engagement is seen as a strategic imperative for understanding their behaviour and co-creating interactive experiences on a cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspect (Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeek 2011). The whole customer experience of engagement should provide with additional value for the customer (Sashi 2012). In this aspect, consumer engagement is achieved by optimising the consumer's direct and indirect experience with the brand and by fulfilling their physical and emotional needs (Pringle and Field 2008). Thus, brands have to engage with consumers in communication and encourage them to become active and loyal consumers (Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite 2012).

In addition, consumers are more likely to talk about brand when they know a lot about the brand and when they feel special (Mangould and Fauld 2009). Enabling consumers to feel special is done by offering products, information and special deals that are available exclusively to a subset of consumers (e.g. Unilever's Dove "Campaign for Real Beauty" offered coupons on social media) and by the brand supporting causes that are important for consumers (Mangould and Fauld 2009).

2.7 Self-brands congruity

Escalas and Bettman (2003) linked brand and self-concept as an important part of consumers' construction of themselves. Sobh and Martin (2011) agree with this construct as consumers buy brands whose personality reflects their own self-image or their desired one (Sobh and Martin 2011). In this self-expression process, a relationship is formed between the brand and consumer (Sobh and Martin 2011).

This concept is highly relevant for the fashion industry. Adam and Galinsky (2012) introduced the term "enclothed cognition" which is defined as influence that clothes have on the wearer's psychological processes. Their research has demonstrated through multiple experiments that clothes that elicits a particular behaviour and worn (in their research a lab coat), corresponds to certain behaviour from the wearer (in their case increased attention).

Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak, Sirgy (2012) demonstrated that the self-congruity effect between the brand and consumers' self-concept produced favourable brand attitudes and purchase intentions. In Jamal and Goode (2001), self-congruency was a very strong predictor of consumers' brand preferences and satisfaction. Social media allows consumers express their self and associate brand to themselves. For example, liking a page on Facebook or following brands on Twitter implies a consumer associate with the brand.

Throughout all these studies, self-brands congruity is seen as the outcome of customer-brand relationships in an offline context. Brodie et al. (2011) states that in an online context, consumers engage with brands due to their self-concepts. Thus, it can be argued in an online context, in particular for the high-street fashion brands that consumers engage with more than one brand in order create their own personal style. In terms, this concept should be calculated on an aggregate level for the brands in this particular context of high-street fashion brands as each brand has its own style that the consumer mixes and matches in order to self-express themselves.

2.8 Hypotheses development and conceptual model

The conceptual model and hypotheses are elaborated from Kim and Ko's (2010) research, but in this case analysing high-street fashion brands (Figure 1). As in Kim and Ko (2010), hypotheses 1 and 2 will focus on the influence social media marketing through Facebook and Twitter has on customer relationship constructs. Determining the properties of the social media marketing for the selected high-street fashion brands will enable investigating the impact of each of them on customer relationship constructs (i.e. intimacy and trust).

In contrast, hypotheses 3 and 4 focus on social media having a mediating effect between self-brands congruency and intimacy and trust. As Brodie et al. (2011) stated consumers engage in online communities due to their self-concept thus, it is possible that social media has an effect on the relationship between self-brands congruency and intimacy and trust.

H1: Social media marketing will have a significant positive influence on intimacy.

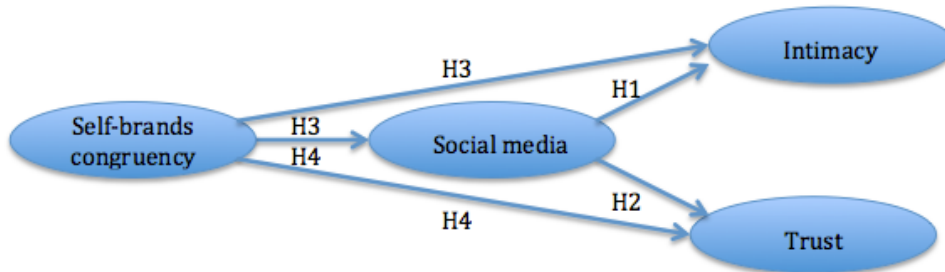
H2: Social media marketing will have a significant positive influence on trust.

H3: Self-brands congruency will have a positive impact on intimacy through the mediating effect of social media.

H4: Self-brands congruency will have a positive impact on trust through the mediating effect of social media.

Social media for high-street fashion brands focuses on a combination of advertising and marketing through high quality content that adds value to the consumer in order to establish a personal relationship with consumers by positively impacting intimacy and trust. As stated earlier, social media marketing is believed to be a positive mediator between self-brands congruency and customer relationship concepts such as intimacy and trust. The stronger the self-brands congruency increases the probability of interacting and engaging on social media which in turns leads to the development of a more personal relationship that influences judgement and feelings to create resonance.

Figure 1 Conceptual map



3. Methodology

In this section information about the research type and data collection methods that aided the research to investigate the relationship between social media and consumer-brand relationships will be provided.

3.1 Research purpose and reasoning approach

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) in their book define the concepts of exploratory and explanatory research. Exploratory research focuses on conducting an analysis on a relatively new subject of study, discovering new ideas and insights throughout the process using a number of data collection methods whereas explanatory research studies the relationships between variables of a certain situation or problem by determining the cause and effect relationships which can lead to the generalisation of the research.

This research is an exploratory research as the topic in question is limited in the number of research conducted and it will aim to provide new insight on how it develops relationships with consumers. The exploratory research explains this new phenomenon in terms of how social media influences consumer relationship concepts.

There are two reasoning approaches in regards to research: deductive and inductive. Deductive reasoning also known as 'top-down' approach focuses on narrowing down from general to specific, with the conclusions emerging in a logical manner from the available facts (Bryman and Bell 2008). On the other hand, inductive research also known as 'bottom up' approach emphasises on specific observation that can be generalised more broadly as well as allowing the possibility of generating theories (Bryman and Bell 2008).

In this research, a deductive reasoning approach is used as the literature review reviewed the theoretical background of social media, which allowed the development of the hypothesis. The data collection methods focus on narrowing down the subject of social media marketing in order to test the developed hypothesis.

3.2 Data collection methods

Several methods were used in the collection of primary data in order to be as unobtrusive as possible and provide validity and reliability to the data. Mixed methods were used, which involves both collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data (Cresswell 2006). Using quantitative and qualitative methods helped in better supporting and testing the developed hypothesis as it provides with different aspects of the topic in question and it aids interpretation of the data. In order to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the problem being addressed, primary and secondary research was used.

3.2.1 Secondary research

The secondary research was focused on reviewing the relevant literature and gathering current information from academics on the topic of social media: online academic journals, textbooks, blogs and websites of marketing and management practitioners will be used to provide with the theoretical aspect of current research and information available.

3.2.2 Primary research

To conduct the primary research, a preliminary test was conducted among 30 Marketing Master students in order to reveal a representative sample the high-street brands. An informal poll was posted on Facebook where students had the opportunity to vote for their preferred from 5 high-street fashion brands (Primark, Zara, H&M, River Island and New Look). The brands were chosen according to the top three most preferred brands from the high-street brands. This selection was done in this manner in order to avoid personal bias and to ensure relevance to the current environment.

Table 2 Selected sample of high-street fashion brands

Primark	Zara	H&M	River Island	New Look
2	8	9	7	4

In general, these brands have a diversified product portfolio at affordable prices that cover target markets such as: men, women, children and teenagers that are segregated based on location according to different regional preferences. Thus, they try to be as comprehensive in taste and variety as possible in order to appeal to a large base of consumer.

H&M

Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) is a Swedish fashion retailer focused on designing and retailing high-street fashion apparel and accessories. They operate in Europe, North America and Asia being present in over 54 countries with over 3,200 stores all around the world (H&M 2013). H&M are continuously developing the collections in order to adapt to the ever-changing trends in fashion. In addition to their permanent collections, H&M teams up with top designers such as Stella McCartney, Madonna or Karl Lagerfeld or celebrities such as Beyonce, David Beckham or Lana del Rey.

Zara

Zara is a Spanish fashion retailer that operates in Europe, North America, Asia and Middle East, being present in over 73 countries with 1800 stores worldwide (Zara

2013). The main point of difference is providing with an environment that feels a lot more expensive and exclusive than it is. Instead of focusing on expensive ad campaigns and celebrity location, they pay attention to the location, opening strategically in heavy trafficked retail areas (Brandchannel 2004).

River Island

River Island is a British fashion retailer that operates throughout Europe (UK, Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium and Poland), Asia and Middle East. They are focused on providing with unique and original fashion, which is mostly designed in-house (River Island 2013). Last year, Rihanna started to design clothes for the brand being often seen wearing River Island clothes.

3.2.2.1. Netnography

Part of the research was based on netnography. Netnography is a research technique adapting ethnography to study online communities in an immersive unobtrusive manner (Kozinets 2010). It offers an insight in an objective and flexible manner, observing consumers and their interaction with brands in their natural environment (Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hellebeek 2011). This approach was chosen as it provides with understanding of something particular and specific (Kozinets 2010), in this case social media.

In addition, the research sought to understand social reality in its own setting with no interference; this naturalism being one of the traditions of qualitative research and it offers authenticity and realism to the research (Bryman and Bell 2008). This observation of the social media platforms consisted of an exploratory approach as no presumptions can be made in terms of discovery.

The advantage of using such an approach is that it provides unobtrusive access to the consumers' self-representation in a more accurate manner than in a manipulated research setting where the subject can be rationalising his/her opinions or answers (Kozinets 2010). In addition, it is inexpensive to conduct. However, a limitation is that the netnography can be subjective and findings can

be difficult to be generalised (Kozinets 2010). Encompassing additional data collection method such as a survey will reduce the above-mentioned limitation.

3.2.2.2 Survey

A survey was created in order to test the proposed model in regards to social media and customer relationships. The survey's items were developed according to the literature review and the scales adapted to fit the high-street fashion brand context (Table 3).

Table 3 Variable used in the survey construction

Construct/v variable	Source	Scale	Scale type
Social media related			
Social media marketing	Kim and Ko (2010) (Entertainment)	Q1: The content found on brand X's social media seems interesting. Q2: It is fun to collect information on fashion items through Brand X's social media. Q3: It is easy to lose track of time on brand X's social media.	5 point Likert scale (ordinal but mean assumed as metric)
	Cheun, Lee and Jin (2011) (Consumer engagement)	Q1: Brand X's social media inspires me. Q2: I find Brand X's social media full of meaning and purpose. Q3: Browsing brand X's social media is so absorbing that I forget about everything else.	
	<i>Self-constructed based on netnography</i>	Q1: <i>When I am curious about latest fashion trends or fashion news I check out Brand X's social media.</i> Q2: <i>Brand X's social media informs me on how I can dress like celebrities in an</i>	

affordable manner.

Q3: When I need fashion advice, I check out Brand X's social media for inspiration.

Q4: Before I go shopping, I first check Brand X's social media to see if they have any contests, discounts or exclusive offers.

Q5: I like, comment or share if Brand X's social media is relevant to me.

Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) (WOM)	Q1: I like to say positive things about brand X to other people. Q2: I like to recommend brand X products to my friends. Q3: I will encourage friends to buy.	7 point Likert scale (ordinal but mean assumed as metric)
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Customer-brand relationship

Brand intimacy	Kim and Ko (2010)	Q1: I a true fan of Brand X. Q2: I know Brand X better than I know about other brands. Q3: Brand X makes me feel comfortable and safe.	5 point Likert scale (ordinal but mean assumed as metric)
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Brand trust	Kim and Ko (2010)	Q1: I have a strong belief in Brand X. Q2: I know what to expect when I buy from Brand X. Q3: I am confident and certain about Brand X.	5 point Likert scale (ordinal but mean assumed as metric)
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Self-brands congruency (self-brand connections)	Escalas and Bettman (2003)	Q1: Brand X reflects who I am. Q2: I can identify with Brand X. Q3: I feel a personal connection to Brand X.	7 point Likert scale (ordinal but mean assumed as metric)
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Q4: I use Brand X to communicate who I am to other people.

Q5: I think Brand X helps me become the type of person I want to be.

Q6: I consider Brand X to reflect who I consider myself to be.

Q7: Brand X suits me well.

The survey (Appendix 1) was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of general questions about the participant and social media usage, and the following parts were questions in relations to social media and customer relationship constructs.

The general questions included demographic variables such as age and gender. In addition questions to assess the social media usage of Facebook (Q1: How often do you use Facebook? Q2: How much time do you spend on Facebook? Q3: How often do you post on Facebook? Q4: How many friends do you have on Facebook?) and Twitter (Q1: Do you have a Twitter account? Q2: How much time do you spend on Twitter? Q3: How often do you tweet? Q4: How many followers do you have on Twitter?).

The self-brands congruency (Escalas and Bettman 2003) were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

1. These high-street fashion brands reflect who I am.
2. I can identify with these high-street fashion brands.
3. I feel a personal connection to these high-street fashion brands.
4. I use these high-street fashion brands to communicate who I am to other people.
5. I think these high-street fashion brands help me become the type of person I want to be.
6. I consider these high-street fashion brands to reflect who I consider myself to be.
7. These high-street fashion brands suit me well.

The following part referred to rating the following statements about Zara/H&M/River Island Facebook and Twitter. It was posed as a matrix table with 14 statements measured on a 5 point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree Agree and Strongly Agree). This is in line with Kim and Ko (2010) research of social media marketing properties. The items that were measured were adapted to fit the high-street fashion circumstances with more emphasis added on the results from the netnography.

The statements were as follows:

1. When I am curious about the latest fashion trends or fashion news I check out one or more of these brands on social media.
2. These brands on social media inform me on how I can dress like celebrities in an affordable manner.
3. When I need fashion advice, I check out one or more of these brands on social media for inspiration.
4. Before I go shopping, I first check one or more of these brands on social media to see if they have any contests, discounts or exclusive offers.
5. The content found on one or more of these brands social media is interesting.
6. It is fun to collect information on fashion items through these brands on social media.
7. It is easy to lose track of time on social media for these brands because of the engaging content.
8. These brands on social media through their content inspire me.
9. I engage with the brand if their social media is relevant to me.
10. Browsing these brands on social media is so absorbing that I forget about everything else.
11. I find these brands on social media are full of meaning and purpose.
12. I like to say positive things about one or more of these brands' social media to other people.
13. I like to recommend fashion items from one or more of these brands' social media to my friends.
14. I will encourage friends to buy fashion items that I see on these brands social media that will suit them.

The intimacy and trust constructs were followed measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

1. I a true fan of these high-street fashion brands.
2. I know these high-street fashion brands better than I know about other brands.
3. These high-street fashion brands make me feel comfortable and safe.
4. I have a strong belief in these high-street fashion brands.
5. I know what to expect when I buy from these high-street fashion brands.
6. I am confident and certain about these high-street fashion brands.

The survey was conducted this way as the brands clearly reflect different styles, and thus aggregating them would provide with more accurate responses in terms of the impact that the social media for these high-street fashion brands have on customer relationships constructs and vice versa. In addition, fashion in relation to self-expression is a mixture and match of different items that most likely are from different brands. Thus, self-brands congruency was aggregated for the three brands- H&M, Zara and River Island.

As the variables were adapted from scales already verified in established research, there was no need for a pre-test. Instead, 10 participants and heavy users of the selected brands were asked to complete the survey in order to provide with feedback in regards understanding the items measured. As the participants did not have any trouble in completing the survey, their responses were incorporated in the overall results.

Sample

Non-probability sampling method was chosen, as it is unfeasible or impractical to conduct probability sampling. The type of non-probability sampling selected was volunteer sampling, as participants who care strongly about fashion were required to respond. Volunteers who like and/or follow Zara, H&M and River Island were asked to complete the survey.

The Qualtrics survey was promoted on Facebook and Twitter. In addition, the survey was posted on the selected high-street fashion brands' social media. 224 participants completed the survey anonymously on a voluntary basis as no form of compensation was offered. After carefully reviewing the data the incomplete surveys were removed, remaining with 154 complete responses.

The main age group that completed the survey was between 18-25 (76%) followed by the 26-34 age group (17%). There were preponderantly more female in comparison to male (68% versus 32%), which is mainly due to females being more interested in fashion than men as there are considerably more choices for them.

When asked how often they use Facebook, 37% of the respondents used it all the time, whereas 51% use it often. The time spent on Facebook varies between 1-2 hours every day (61%) and less than 1 hour per day (29%). This means that Facebook is an extremely relevant medium for brands to convey their messages in the current environment. Most respondents posted on Facebook 2-3 times a week (23%), followed by once a week (19%) and 2-3 times per month (19%). Surprisingly, the ones that post daily were only 14% of the sample size. As for the number of friends, the majority of the respondents had between 200 and 400 friends (38%), which is the average number (Digital Marketing 2013). This was followed by respondents between 400 and 600 friends (28%). The respondents with over 800 friends were only 7% of the sample.

As for Twitter, 55% of the population did not have an account. From the remaining 45%, 71% spent less than 1 hour per week on it. 35% tweeted 2-3 times a week, whereas 35% tweeted 2-3 times a month. As for the number of followers, the majority had less than 200 followers (93%), which means that their influence on Twitter is average (Digital Marketing 2013).

4. Results

4.1 Facebook and Twitter- General Observations

4.1.1 Facebook

Looking at the number of fans that Like the high-street fashion brands' Facebook page revealed that Zara had the most fans on Facebook, H&M were second and River Island was third (Table 4). However, as pointed out in the literature review, the number of fans or followers of a brand on a social platform cannot be assumed to be an indication of the levels of engagement. The researcher calculated the percentage from the number of fans who were engaging with the brand by mentioning and associating themselves with it through their comments. This was calculated by using the number of fans and the Facebook 'Talking About This' metric (Table 5).

H&M had the greatest percentage of their fans talking about them. It is interesting to point out that although River Island had the smallest number of fans on Facebook, their fans talked about the brand extensively and this gave them the second highest percentage for this measurement of engagement. River Island demonstrates through its interactions that it attempts to engage with customers by posting compelling content on Facebook for their fans to respond to.

Table 4 Facebook metrics

Brands	Likes	'Talking about this'	Percentage of fans talking about the brand
H&M 20 th June 2013	15,002,488	190,500	1.27%
H&M 11 th April 2014	18,352,590	174,082	0.95%
River Island 20 th June 2013	1,685,200	10,032	0.6%
River Island 11 th April 2014	2,005,497	6,833	0.34%
Zara 20 th June 2013	18,671,819	94,486	0.51%
Zara 11 th April 2014	20,834,788	61,940	0.30%

4.1.2 Twitter

Observing the Twitter accounts of the high-street fashion brands found that H&M had the greatest number of followers and the largest number of tweets, which is surprising considering the huge gap between them and Zara, which has the second largest number of followers and the lowest number of tweets (Table 5). River Island has the lowest number of followers but in terms of the numbers of tweets it ranks first. It has been observed that customer services enquiries are dealt with in two manners: H&M and River Island have derived a secondary Twitter account, whereas Zara re-directs its customers to the website (Figure 2).

In addition, there was a visual cue (blue badge), which meant whether the account was verified or not. This badge represents the authenticity and legitimacy of the source, helping users to discover high-quality sources of information (Twitter 2013), which enabled the creation of a user-friendly search engine. The source requires having the following characteristic such as being a highly sought user in music, acting, fashion, government, politics, religion, journalism, media, advertising, business and other key interest areas (Twitter 2013).

All of the analysed brands have this characteristic but only two of analysed brands have verified accounts (H&M and River Island), which can be observed through the presence of a blue verified badge on their Twitter profile (Twitter 2013). Twitter (2013) states that account verification is subjective to their availability and that patience is required, meaning that Zara's Twitter account will be verified in the near future (Figure 2).

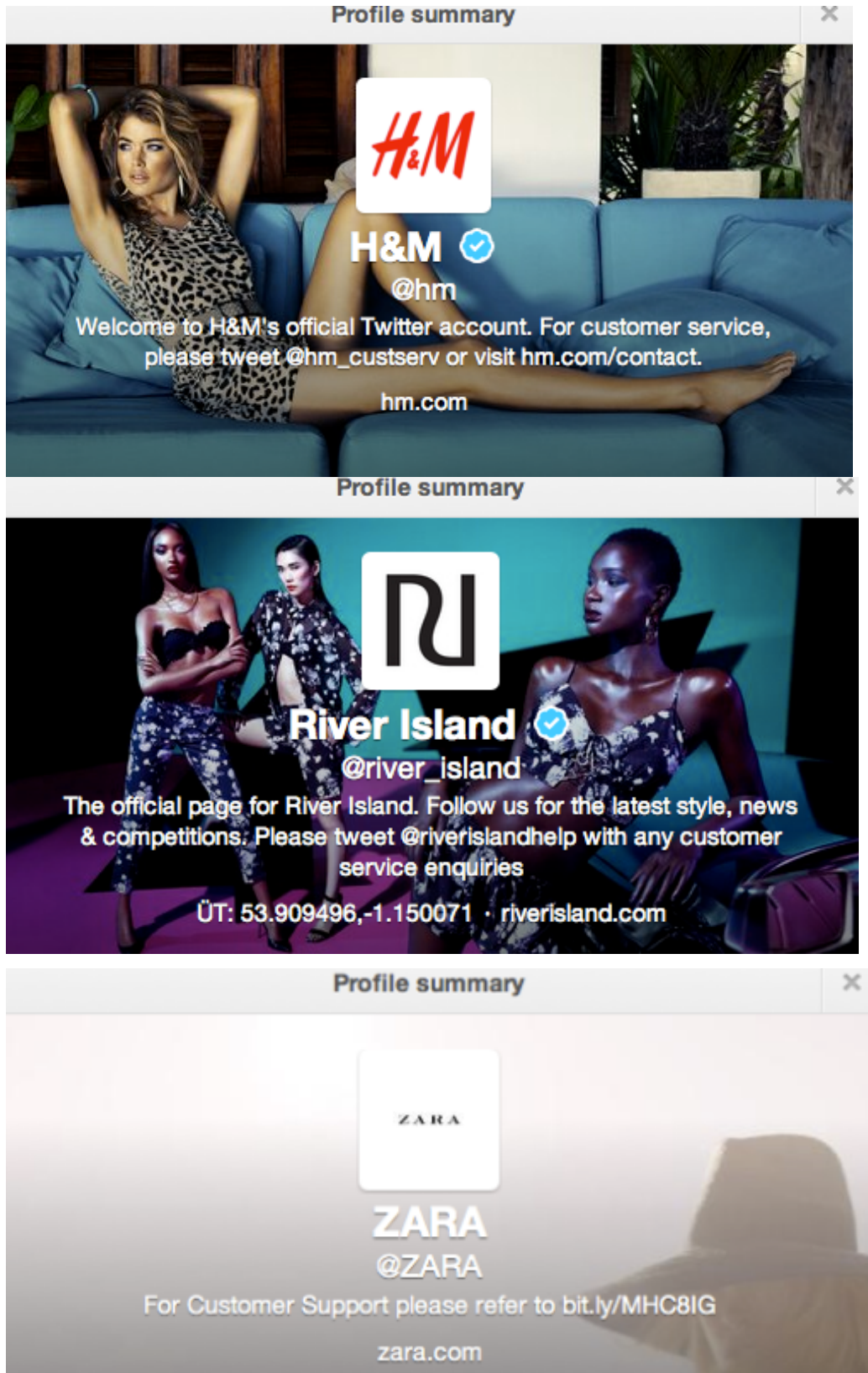
Examining the level of effectiveness of brands tweeting can be conducted as suggested by Burton and Soboleva (2011). By calculating the number of followers to the total number of tweets sent, the effectiveness of the communication can be analysed and compared. The results revealed that Zara was the most efficient communicator with over 1,000 followers for every tweet sent and River Island was the least efficient of the brands analysed with a result of approximately 30 followers to every tweet (Table 5). Other metrics to determine engagement on

Twitter cannot be calculated without being the handler of the account as the required data is private information (SimplyMeasured 2013).

Table 5 Twitter metrics

High-street fashion brand	Followers	Number of Tweets	Number of followers per tweet ever sent
H&M 20 th June 2013	2,179,232	6,527	334
H&M 11 th April 2014	3,350,000	8,006	418
River Island 20 th June 2013	146,200	5,559	26 (26.30)
River Island 11 th April 2014	223,000	8,476	26 (26.31)
Zara 20 th June 2013	242,303	217	1,117
Zara 11 th April 2014	400,000	294	1,361

Figure 2 Profile summary Twitter



4.2 Netnography

Social media has provided a variety of new types of interactions between brands and consumer. The social media platforms that were analysed are Facebook and Twitter, which can be used as a way to communicate with customers and consumers in a transparent manner. These social media platforms offer power to consumers, sharing and making the world more open and connected.

This part of the research was derived from observing and analysing the high-street fashion brands' behaviour- Zara, H&M and River Island on their Facebook pages and Twitter accounts to record the social interactions between the brands and the consumers. It was afterwards compared within each other to gain general insight. The observation took place over six weeks: 1st May 2013 to 16st June 2013. This was done in order to incorporate the last days of spring and also the start and the end of a month as consumers' behaviour may vary at different times of the month.

The social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter were investigating the global brands of Zara, H&M and River Island, where the official language is English. In addition, all these brands offer customised posts according to an individual's location and IP address, thus the posts in Dutch could not be quantified. In addition, when analysing the posts of consumers on the selected brands social media, some posts were disregarded as they were not in English.

The first remark that has to be made about the brands is in regards to the number of tabs. Facebook tabs are separate pages inside a page's profile, being similar to tabs in Internet browsers such as Chrome or Firefox (Say Media Inc. 2010). Looking at the number of tabs (Table 6) and considering the engagement rates (Table 5), River Island has to be mentioned as even though they do not have numerous tabs, the ones they have are generating discussion about the brand. In addition, it is worth stating the fact that Zara has a special tab where jobs are posted. In their instance, Facebook is used as a recruitment medium for potential employees.

Table 6 Facebook tabs

<i>H&M</i>	<i>River Island</i>	<i>Zara</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeline • About • Photos • Your H&M • Likes • Videos • Locations • YouTube • Events • Fashion Show 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeline • About • Photos • Likes • River Island INstyle • RI News and Offers • Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeline • About • Photos • Zara Lookbook • Jobs • Likes • This week • SS13 • Videos • Events
Total number of tabs: 10	Total number of tabs: 7	Total number of tabs: 10

In general, the high-street fashion brands interacted with customers on Facebook and Twitter by responding to comments, through advertising and promotions, competitions, asking questions, reporting problems and news. Facebook and Twitter were both used to handle customer complaints; all brands recommending emailing a complaint to their customer services or contacting their customer service Twitter account, especially River Island and H&M.

From this analysis of the high-street fashion brands posts on Twitter and Facebook it was interesting to note that all the high-street fashion brands appeared to engage more with users on Twitter than Facebook in personal conversations, especially River Island and H&M. Also, when the brands replied to fans on Facebook they would use their first name. This showed intimacy, which is one of the levels of engagement (Haven 2007).

All the high-street fashion brands were responding to customer comments on Twitter and Facebook. The nature of the comments varied significantly from consumers pointing out problems with the brand's websites, general inquiries for information regarding availability of items and customers who like and love the brand.

In particular, Zara had had an overwhelming number of customers stating how much they loved and adored the brand on Facebook, River Island had a massive amount of participation from Facebook and Twitter followers in competitions, and H&M had received a huge number of likes and comments when presenting the latest collections with the aid of celebrities endorsers (e.g. Beyoncé (over 57,000 likes, 822 comments and 3,400 shares) and Doutzen Kroes (over 28,000 likes, 176 comments and 949 shares)).

There were significant differences in what each brand utilised Facebook and Twitter (Table 7 and Table 8). Facebook and Twitter were also used for advertising and promotion of their current collections by all the high-street fashion brands. However, as noted in the literature review, using social media purely as an advertising and promotion channel could lead to disengagement with consumers if the high-street fashion brands are not attempting to interact further (Haven 2007).

In return for interacting with the high-street fashion brands on their Facebook and Twitter accounts, fans received opportunities to enter competitions especially for River Island whereas H&M only posted competitions on Facebook and Zara did not make any competition for the period of investigation. As acknowledged in the literature review, consumers want something in return for their engagement (Baird and Parasnins 2012) and this demonstrates that high-street fashion brands are aware of this, except for Zara.

H&M's was the only Facebook page that managed its content, deleting negative posts after a period of time (approximately 1 month), maintaining only relevant

information. In contrast, Zara and River Island retained all content, storing all the good, the bad and the ugly posts.

In terms of content, H&M and River Island focused transformational creative strategies by showcasing typical or aspirational user situation or user of products with sex appeal. Famous endorsers such as Beyoncé, David Beckham (H&M), Rihanna (River Island) were used, whereas Zara avoided using celebrities. In an article in Reuters (2007), Zara executives explained that there is no need for celebrity endorsement as they are a substitute for speed, design and quality.

By using different approaches to interacting and engaging with consumers on social media was beneficial as it uses the encoding variable principle (Keller et al. 2006). In this way consumers can enhance their brand recall and prevent them becoming uninterested by using repetitive communications pattern.

Table 7 H&M, River Island and Zara's different uses for Facebook

H&M	River Island	Zara
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mostly for customer interaction responding to comments, questions and problems (e.g. Scandal-1st May onwards- Bangladesh workers are low paid- damage control as H&M directly responded and in a few days they signed the Bangladesh Safety Plan to ensure better working conditions) – correlated with Twitter; - Advertising and promoting their collections (16th May e.g. Doutzen Krous- High Summer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mostly for customer interaction, responding to comments, questions and problems (e.g. 2nd May); - Sneak peaks to future collections (e.g. Rihanna for River Island); - Collaborations with bloggers (e.g. 14th May Jordan Dunn); - Contests (e.g. on 30-31st May to win items from the collection making the #rihannaforriverisland trend); - Promoting their activities (e.g. 14-16th June- promoting their festival Wright Isle and their 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mostly users post how much they love Zara and their collections, posting links on how the combine the various items and inquiring about their orders or general knowledge (1st May-onwards); - Negative comments are also present as with the other brands about the Bangladesh workers (e.g. 16th May); - Suggestions and recommendations are offered (e.g 20th May- making smaller sizes for clothes to suit the

<p>Collection)- Correlated with Twitter;</p> <p>- News- (e.g. 11th June announcing their next celebrity designer-Isabel Marant)- Correlated with Twitter;</p> <p>- Fashion bloggers sharing their favourite items (e.g. 3rd June- Elodie Russo)- Correlated with Twitter;</p> <p>- Announcing Facebook winners (e.g. 31st May)- correlated with Twitter;</p> <p>- Offering suggestions for the latest trends (e.g. 28th May)- Correlated with Twitter;</p> <p>- Promoting different essential items for the summer (e.g. 24th May)- Correlated with Twitter.</p>	<p>promotional tent and activities karaoke)- Correlated with Twitter;</p> <p>- Advertising and promoting: essential items, photos on matching different styles, celebrities wearing the brand (e.g. 10th May- Great Gatsby inspired glamour)-correlated with Twitter;</p> <p>- Trend spotters (e.g. 12th of June Rihanna was spotted wearing her River Island collection)- correlated with Twitter.</p>	<p>Asian women);</p> <p>- Presenting the Zara Lookbooks which are present on Facebook which show different combination of items (e.g. 6th May)- correlated with Twitter;</p> <p>- News (opening of new store in Seoul 5th June);</p> <p>- Stating that the sales are starting in store (e.g. 21st June)- correlated with Twitter;</p> <p>- Taking advantage of local holidays such as 12th May Mother's Day – Hey Mum photo and 16th May Father's Day- Hey Dad photo to interact with consumers.</p>
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Table 8 H&M, River Island and Zara's different uses for Twitter

H&M	River Island	Zara
<p>-Mostly for customer interaction responding to comments, questions and problems (e.g. Scandal-1st May onwards- Bangladeshi workers are low paid- damage control as H&M directly responded and in a few days they signed the Bangladesh Safety Plan to ensure better</p>	<p>- Mostly for customer interaction, responding to comments, questions and problems (e.g. 2nd May);</p> <p>- Sneak peaks to future collections (e.g. Rihanna for River Island);</p> <p>- Collaborations with bloggers (e.g. 14th May Jourdan Dunn);</p> <p>- Contests (e.g. on 30-31st May to win items from the collection</p>	<p>- Presenting the Zara Lookbooks which are present on Facebook which show different combination of items (e.g 6th May);</p> <p>- News (opening of new store in Seoul 5th June);</p> <p>- Stating that the sales are starting in store (e.g. 21st June).</p>

working conditions);	making the #rihannaforriverisland
- Advertising and promoting their	trend);
collections (16 th May e.g. Doutzen	- Promoting their activities (e.g. 14-
Krous- High Summer Collection);	16 th June- promoting their festival
- News- 11 th June announcing	Wright Isle and their promotional
their next celebrity designer-	tent and activities such as karaoke);
Isabel Marant);	- Advertising and promoting:
- Fashion bloggers sharing their	essential items, photos on matching
favourite items (e.g. 3 rd June-	different styles, celebrities wearing
Elodie Russo);	the brand (e.g. 10 th May- Great
- Announcing Facebook winners	Gatsby inspired glamour);
on Twitter (e.g. 31 st May);	- Trend spotters (e.g. 12 th of June
- Offering suggestions for the	Rihanna was spotted wearing her
latest trends (e.g. 28 th May);	River Island collection).
- Promoting different essential	
items for the summer (e.g. 24 th	
May).	

4.3 Survey

4.3.1 Properties of social media marketing

SPSS 22.0 was used to conduct the analysis. Principal component analysis using varimax rotation was conducted in order to determine the properties of high-street fashion brands' social media marketing as presented in Kim and Ko (2010). This method was chosen in order to reduce the set of 14 items to a smaller number of variables. In order to proceed with this analysis, the assumptions were reviewed to ensure data reliability (Janssens, Wijnen, De Pelsmacker and Van Kenhove 2008). Firstly, the measurement level throughout the survey was standardised containing 5-point Likert scales, which are ordinal but are treated as interval scaled because of the assumption of equal appearing intervals (Janssens et al. 2008). In addition, the number of respondents present is at least 10 times the

number of variables (154 respondents > 10* 14 items), thus the data set contains enough respondents for the analysis to be performed.

In order to determine whether it is meaningful to perform this analysis, 'Bartlett's test of sphericity', the anti-image correlation matrix and 'Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy' were used. Bartlett's tries to determine whether there is a high enough degree of correlation between at least a number of the variables included (H_0 : correlation matrix= identity matrix) (Janssens et al. 2008).

The anti-image correlation matrix showcased the negative value for the partial correlations between variables; therefore this analysis is relevant if the partial correlations are close to 0 (Janssens et al. 2008). The values under and above the main diagonal were studied. The main diagonal was also examined, eliminating those values that were under .50. The global 'Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy' was (>.50) and therefore demonstrated that a principal component analysis may be carried out. The 'Kaiser criterion' was used, keeping only those factors for which the Eigenvalue is greater than 1.

When conducting the analysis, all the items mentioned above were checked. The null hypothesis was rejected (p -value<.001), therefore making this analysis meaningful. The general KMO general Statistic is .903, which is superb (above 0.9) (Field 2009), thus the sample size is adequate for this analysis.

In the anti-image correlation matrix, the values above and below the main diagonal were close to 0 and the values on the main diagonal are higher than .50. The lowest value was .802, thus no variable was excluded from the analysis.

Comparing the Component Matrix with the Rotated Component Matrix, most variables loaded highly onto the first factor. By conducting a Rotated Component Matrix, the component structure has been clarified. In terms that the distribution of the explanatory power of each component has changed (47.14%, 16.02% and 9.64% before rotation versus 33.99%, 22.69% and 16.12% after rotation) but the

total variance explained by the three factors (72.79%) is as large as it is in the non rotated case. The rotated component matrix was used to guarantee the exclusivity of the relationship between a variable and a component as presented in Janssen et al. (2008).

3 components have Eigenvalues above 1 as well as in the screen plot the point of inflexion occurs at the fourth data point, therefore there are three relevant factors. These factors explaining 72.79% of the total variance of the fourteen variables. Most variables have a component loading higher than .50. The only one that was lower than .50 was the variable (Contests: Before I go shopping, I first check one or more of these brands on social media to see if they have any contests, discounts or exclusive offers.), which will be dropped from subsequent analysis. The principal component analysis was performed once again on the remaining thirteen variables as component scores will be now retrieved from the final structure.

In the final component structure (Table 9), the first factor explains the largest part of the variance, namely 49.33%, the second factor 16.70% and the third factor 10.37%. Overall, these three factors explain 76.40% of the total variance. The KMO is .883 and $p < .0001$, which is great (Field 2009).

The Rotated Component Matrix presented a high loading on each component for each variable, thus being sufficiently exclusive to guarantee a pure definition for the three components (Janssen et al. 2008). After looking at the content of questions that load onto the same factors with component loadings, Component 1 can be labelled personal relevance, Component 2 word of mouth (WOM) and Component 3, fashion trends. Cronbach's Alpha was checked in order to make sure the items reliability.

Table 9 Components structure of social media marketing

Components	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha
	I find these brands on social media are full of		

	meaning and purpose.	.941	
	Browsing these brands on social media is so absorbing that I forget about everything else.	.939	
Personal relevance	It is easy to lose track of time on social media for these brands because of the engaging content.	.936	.92
	I engage with the content if their social media post is relevant to me.	.939	
	These brands on social media through their content inspire me.	.926	
	I like to recommend fashion items from one or more of these brands' social media to my friends.	.858	
	I like to say positive things about one or more of these brands' social media to other people.	.857	
WOM	I will encourage friends to buy fashion items that I see on these brands social media that will suit them.	.79	.88
	The content found on one or more of these brands social media is interesting.	.72	
	These brands on social media inform me on how I can dress like celebrities in an affordable manner.	.83	
Fashion trends	When I am curious about the latest fashion trends or fashion news I check out one or more of these brands on social media.	.74	.70
	When I need fashion advice, I check out one or more of these brands on social media for inspiration.	.63	
	It is fun to collect information on fashion items through these brands on social media.	.60	

Cronbach's Alpha for component 1 and 2 were larger than .80 for each item, making the result 'very good' (Janssen et al. 2008). For component 3, the Alpha value of .704, which indicated a 'good' result (Janssen et al. 2008). The elimination

of items was an option by deleting item 'Inform' (It is fun to collect information on fashion items through these brands on social media), which would have led to an increase in Alpha to .712. This elimination was not performed, as the increase in Alpha would be marginal.

The overall analysis revealed that the participants evaluated social media marketing on Facebook and Twitter on three subscales: personal relevance, word of mouth and fashion trends. Word of mouth and fashion trends have been demonstrated to have an impact on luxury brands' social media (Kim and Ko 2010). The distinction that this research provided is that personal relevance has importance in evaluating social media as well as including Twitter as a platform in the investigation.

4.3.2 The impact of social media marketing on intimacy and trust

A principal component analysis was done for both intimacy and trust, revealing only one component. Cronbach's Alpha was tested in order to ensure internal consistency for each set of items, which proved the reliability (intimacy .82 Cronbach's Alpha, trust Cronbach's Alpha .87). For these components Cronbach's Alpha is above .80, the result is deemed as 'very good' (Janssen et al. 2008).

After this stage, the assumptions were tested in order to run multiple regressions as in Janssen et al. (2008). The researcher would like to determine the effect of social media marketing on trust and intimacy, thus the use of forced entry method was required. The scatterplots were inspected in order to determine whether or not all variables can be included in the model. No patterns were found, suggesting that all relevant independent variables are part of the model (Janssen et al. 2008). The scales used are 5-point Likert scales, which are ordinal scales, but with the assumption of equal appearing intervals, the answers can be treated as interval scales (Janssen et al. 2008).

All participants voluntarily partook in the online Qualtrics survey. The researcher assumed that participants could not have been influenced by the way in which

others have filled the survey. The histograms of the standardized residuals were checked to ensure the normality of the distribution. There were a sufficient number of observations as parameters to be estimated (154 participants). In terms of multicollinearity, the condition index was examined and was less than 30 (12.64 and 6.44). The cases outliers (11) were deleted from the analysis, remaining 143 responses. The regression results can be found in the table below.

Table 10 The impact of social media marketing on intimacy and trust

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B value	t-value	R²	F
Personal relevance	Intimacy	.22	2.89**	.36	26.42***
WOM		-.014	-1.47		
Fashion trends		.53	5.58***		
Personal relevance	Trust	.19	2.78**	.42	33.89***
WOM		.08	.96		
Fashion trends		.46	5.50***		

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

As expected, social marketing has a positive impact on intimacy and trust, confirming hypothesis 1 and 2. When examining the impact that the social media marketing properties have on customer relationships constructs trust and intimacy, fashion trends and personal relevance had a strong positive impact on both of them. For intimacy, fashion trends (B=.53, t=5.58, p<.001) and personal relevance (B=.22, t=2.89, p<.01) had a positive impact, whereas word of mouth was not significant. Similarly for trust, fashion trends (B=.46, t=5.50, p<.001) and personal relevance (B=.19, t=2.78 and p<.01) had a positive impact, whereas word of mouth was not significant. Thus, it could be argued that intimacy and trust is mostly formed through repeated exposure on social media when presenting content that addressed fashion trends that is personally relevant.

4.3.3 Self-brands congruency impact on trust and intimacy

The self-brands congruency variable was considered as in Escalas and Bettman (2003). Cronbach's Alpha for this variable was .88. As Cronbach's Alpha is above .80, the result is considered 'very good' (Janssen et al. 2008).

This section refers to mediation hypotheses, which investigate how self-brands congruency (SBC) affects intimacy and trust through social media marketing. As social media marketing is constructed out of three components, multiple mediations analysis is required. Preacher and Hayes (2008) developed a macro for SPSS that estimates path coefficients in a multiple mediator model.

Table 11 Impact of self-brands congruity on intimacy

Impact of SBC on Intimacy (Total and Direct Effects)		B value	t-value
"a" path (SBC to SM)	a ₁ : Personal relevance	1.09	10.34***
	a ₂ : WOM	1.06	15.46***
	a ₃ : Fashion trends	.45	6.71***
"b" path (SM to Intimacy controlling for SBC)	b ₁ : Personal relevance	.21	2.7**
	b ₂ : WOM	-.16	-1.37
	b ₃ : Fashion trends	.47	4.86***
"c" path (SBC to Intimacy without SM) (Total effect)		.56	6.69***
"c'" path (SBC to Intimacy controlling for SM) (Direct effect)		.29	2.24*
Model summary: R²= .37, F=21.68***			

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Impact of SBC on Intimacy (Indirect Effects) (path a X path b)	Estimated effect (Boot)	Bias Corrected and Accelerated CIs	
		Lower	Upper
Personal relevance	.23	.06	.41
WOM	-.18	-.45	.14
Fashion trends	.21	.12	.33

Total	.26	.05	.54
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Table 12 Impact of self-brands congruity on trust

Impact of SBC on Trust (Total and Direct Effects)		B value	t-value
"a" path (SBC to SM)	a ₁ : Personal relevance	1.09	10.34***
	a ₂ : WOM	1.06	15.46***
	a ₃ : Fashion trends	.45	6.71***
"b" path (SM to Trust controlling for SBC)	b ₁ : Personal relevance	.14	.0015**
	b ₂ : WOM	-.42	-6.03
	b ₃ : Fashion trends	.26	4.42***
"c" path (SBC to Trust without SM) (Total effect)		.84	15.80***
"c'" path (SBC to Trust controlling for SM) (Direct effect)		1.02	12.97***
Model summary: R² = .73, F = 98.07***			

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Impact of SBC on Trust (Indirect Effects) (path a X path b)	Estimated effect (Boot)	Bias Corrected and Accelerated CIs	
		Lower	Upper
Personal relevance	.16	.05	.29
WOM	-.45	-.62	-.31
Fashion trends	.11	.06	.20
Total	-.18	-.32	-.04

The total and direct effects output provides the significance tests of the direct effects that the independent variable has on the dependent variable through the mediators (Table 11 and Table 12). Normal theory tests compute the standard errors using the delta method, which assumes that they are normally distributed, making the z-test and p-values not reliable (Preacher and Hayes 2008). As the

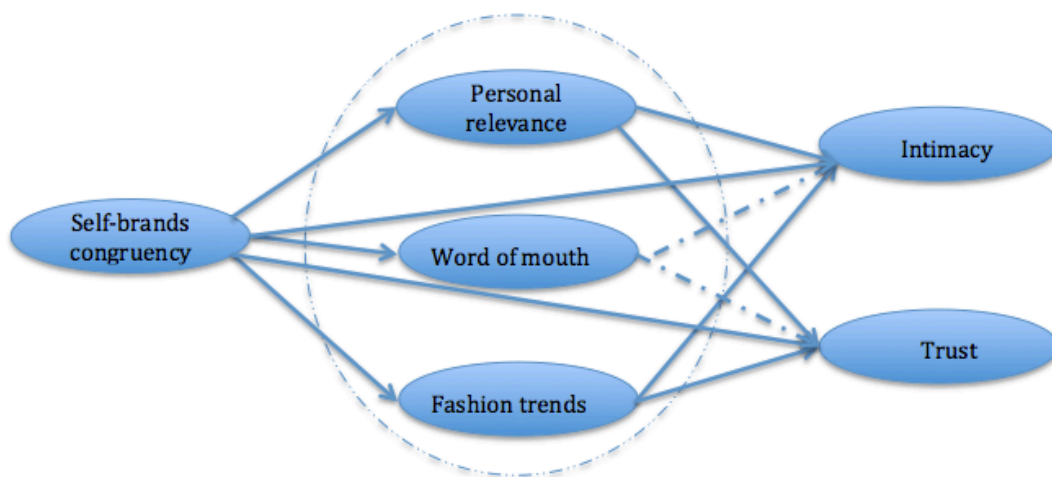
assumption of normality of total and indirect effects is questionable, bootstrapping (1000 bootstraps) was used to test the indirect effects.

Path a, which is the path from the independent variable (self-brands congruency) to the mediators (personal relevance, WOM and fashion trends), suggest that they are all significant ($p < .001$). Path b represents the path from the mediator variables to the dependent variable. When evaluating intimacy and trust (Table 10 and Table 11), personal relevance and fashion trends were significant ($p < .01$). Path c evaluates the total effect that the independent variable (self-brands congruency) has on the dependent variable (intimacy and trust respectively) without taking into account the mediators whereas path c' probes the direct effect that the independent has on the dependent variable controlling for the mediators. For both models, path c and c' was significant ($p < .01$). These models have met all the criteria for mediation according to Baron and Kenny (1986) (Preacher and Hayes 2008).

In multiple mediation models, the researcher is concern not only with the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent, but also with specific indirect effects (Preacher and Hayes 2008). The indirect effects output (Table 10 and Table 11), provides with insights that the indirect effects (path a X path b) for the total effect as a group and for each particular mediator within the 95% corrected bootstrapped confidence interval (Preacher and Hayes 2008). The main focus is placed on whether of not 0 lies within the interval of the lower limit and upper limit of the confidence interval. In other words, the question is if it is possible with 95% confidence that the true indirect effect would be 0 (basically no mediation). The total effect when examining intimacy, the total indirect effect is 95% likely to range between .05 to .54, whereas for trust it is likely to range between -.32 to -.04. The estimated effect for intimacy is .26, which lies between those two values, as is the estimated effect for trust, which is -.18. In this case, 0 does not occur between the lower limit and the upper limit, being safe to say that the total indirect effect is significant for both intimacy and trust.

When analysing the individual mediators and indirect effect the same logic as before applies. Thus, for intimacy, only personal relevance and fashion trends satisfy this condition, whereas for trust all mediators are significant, as 0 does not occur. Thus, hypothesis 3 and 4 in regards to social media mediating between self-brands congruency and intimacy and trust are partially supported, as there is a direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables: self-brands congruency had a direct effect on both intimacy and trust but also a significant relationship between the mediators and dependent variables: social media properties had an effect on intimacy and trust. The confirmed conceptual map can be found below (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Confirmed conceptual map



5. Conclusions

5.1 General discussion

This thesis has examined the impact of high-street fashion brands' social media on customer relationships by conducting a netnography and a survey.

The netnography identified how the high-street fashion brands used their Facebook pages and Twitter account for interactions and developing personal relationships with fans and followers. Facebook was used to respond to comments,

advertise and promote the latest collections, post competitions, ask questions and provide the latest fashion news. In contrast, Twitter was mostly used for handling complaints, replying to followers, tweeting about offers, promotions and competitions.

All brands (Zara, H&M and River Island) tried to respond to as many individual enquires on Facebook and Twitter as possible. When replying, the brands have used the customer's first name in order to personalise their response and to further develop the relationship. Twitter was used by H&M and River Island to handle complaints, whereas Zara just posted content that was associated with Facebook. However, Burton and Soboleva (2012) warn about this customer focus on Twitter, as it will lose relevance for a majority of the followers. The high-street fashion brands used Facebook and Twitter for advertising and promotions especially River Island and H&M. This related to the findings in the literature review, which suggested that participants expect something in return for their engagement.

As for the results of the survey in regards to the hypotheses (Table 13), social media is a significantly effective marketing medium that drives intimacy and trust for high-street fashion brands which complements Kim and Ko's (2010) findings for luxury brands. In addition, social media marketing was linked as a mediator between self-brands connections and intimacy and trust. The direct link between self-brands congruency and trust was already proven in a number of researches such as Escalas and Bettman (2003) and Brodie et al. (2011), whereas the direct link between self-brands congruency and intimacy was never attempted.

The findings from this study suggest that social media marketing is a significantly effective marketing medium that builds brand intimacy and trust directly and indirectly. Firstly, high-street fashion brands social media marketing comprises on three key properties, which are personal relevance, word of mouth and fashion trends. These properties are distinctive as they allow a customised interaction with the brands on social media. As they are high-street fashion brands, fashion

trends are an important component to be presented on social media. Whether it is presenting affordable ways of dressing like celebrities, latest trends or fashion advice, it can be concluded that social media is a fun way of collecting information as it is both entertaining and informing through hedonic and functional content. As the consumer is interested in fashion trends and these brands, it will immediately lead to positive word of mouth. Recommending items, saying positive things about the brands or encouraging purchase is achieved through interesting content. Lastly, social media can inspire being relevant and full of meaning and purpose that absorbs the consumer, extending their experience with the brand in an online context.

The social media marketing properties had positive impact on intimacy and trust. In particular, personal relevance and fashion trends were the main drivers of intimacy and trust as word of mouth was not significant. Fashion trends had a significant positive impact on intimacy and trust, as it is the basis of social media content and activities in order to further develop consumer relationships. As can be seen from the netnography, the high-street fashion brands revolve around the idea of providing with fashion trends' content and activities in order to enhance intimacy and trust.

Personal relevance is an important factor that changes and influences how people interact on social media. As in this case, only fashion conscious and heavy users of the brands were examined, which implies high personal relevance. In Petty and Cacioppo (1986) personal involvement is one factor that affected people's motivation to think about communication messages. In addition, Petty and Cacioppo (1986), as people are highly motivated and able to engage in social media attitudes are formed or changed via the central route. In this case, a longer and predictable relationship is formed between the consumer and the brand. Attitudes are more salient in memory, increasing confidence and willingness to act (Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

In contrast, word of mouth was not significant in influencing intimacy and trust. As stated earlier, the participants of this study were users of the brands, which signifies that the likelihood to recommend or talk about the brand does not influence the personal relationship that they have with the brand in terms of intimacy and trust. Thus, it can be argued that a strong relationship between the participants of the survey and the brands already exist.

When examining the impact of self-brands congruency on intimacy and trust through social media marketing, a direct and indirect effect can be noticed. Self-brand congruency had a positive effect on all social media marketing components, thus reinforcing the findings of Brodie et al. (2011). Social media stimulates consumers to act and think to sustain their self-concepts, which increases the likelihood to be perceived as a trustworthy source. As for the indirect effects, total indirect effect for social media marketing properties is significant when mediating between self-brands congruency and trust and intimacy. As for the individual indirect effects of each mediator, personal relevance and fashion trends are mediators for intimacy whereas for trust word of mouth is also relevant since their 95% CI do not contain 0.

It can be concluded that social media marketing mediates partially the effect between self-brands congruency and intimacy and trust. The greater the self-brands congruency leads to higher commitment in terms of personal relevance and fashion trends for social media, which in turn leads to greater intimacy and trust with the brands in question. Even though the effects of personal relevance and fashion trends on trust were positive, word of mouth had a negative effect on trust. As for the indirect effects, overall social media has an effect on intimacy and trust, all properties being significant except for word of mouth in the case of intimacy. This finding is interesting as the word of mouth is considered a trustworthy source of information (Mangold and Faulds 2009). It can be argued as word of mouth to trust is controlled for self-brands connections, that consumers are becoming more sceptical in terms of what is posted on in terms of recommending to others, which decreases the overall trust for the brand.

Table 13 Summary of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Expected effect	Findings
Social Media Marketing -> Intimacy	+	Fully supported
Social Media Marketing -> Trust	+	Fully supported
Social Media Marketing as a mediator between Self-brands congruency and Intimacy	+	Partially supported
Social Media Marketing as a mediator between Self-brands congruency and Trust	+	Partially supported

5.2 Academic Contribution

The subject of social media and consumer-brand relationships is highly relevant in the current environment. It is important for brands to embrace the social media change, as it will allow the brand to be more approachable by the consumer, social media increasing the reach, interaction and engagement with consumers and the public. In addition, social media can be used to receive feedback in real-time and address the issue instantly. Overall, social media can be used as a key strategic asset to strengthen the relationships between brand and consumers through content that develops intimacy and trust.

The major contribution of this research is firstly represented by the industry that has been analysed, which was high-street fashion and the methods used in order to meet the purpose of the study, which were netnography and survey. The netnography identified the main types of interaction in which social media (Facebook and Twitter) were used by high-street fashion brands. The survey presented the properties of these brands' social media marketing and the impact that it has on consumer brand relationships e.g. intimacy and trust. Lastly, it presented the idea that self-brands congruency has a direct and indirect relationship with intimacy and trust and that the indirect one is partially mediated

by social media marketing properties. It is the first study to present that self-brand connections influence intimacy.

The results from this study are interesting for high-street fashion brands and FMCG brands as it offers further understanding of social media to successfully to further develop consumer relationships. For marketers, this study provides valuable insights in order to measure the effectiveness of social media and to increase engagement with consumers.

5.3 Managerial Implications

Social media can be used to extend the consumer experience from an offline to an online context as it further develops the consumer-brand relationship in terms of engagement, intimacy and trust.

For companies that do not have a social media presence it is essential to start. Social media should be established at the beginning as a way of offering customer service. By listening and responding thoughtfully to consumers, it will enable the company to create positive feelings towards the relationship with the brand.

Firstly, the metrics to determine the effectiveness of Facebook and Twitter, which discussed throughout this research should be analysed and interpreted accordingly. In addition, Facebook Analytics can be used to provide more in depth information about the consumers who like the page and how they interact with the content that the brand provides. This should be done in concordance to understand in how does the brand use social media.

Secondly, social media can be used as a way to make customers feel special by offering exclusive content, special discounts sneak previews of upcoming projects and competitions that will deepen the relationship between the brand and consumer. This enhances consumer curiosity, waiting with anticipation for the content to be updated. In addition, the content provided should focus on what the consumer would like to see. This can be done by thinking from their perspective

and by taking into consideration the feedback that consumers provide. Overall, the content should have functional and hedonic properties, informing, entertaining and triggering responses that will develop the special special bond between the brand and consumer.

Thirdly, collaborating with consumers and celebrity influencers can help further develop relationships as it provides with a better understanding of consumer behaviour as well as promoting proactive problem solving. In terms, this will magnify the brands image by extending to the association of the endorsers.

Overall, social media marketing is medium for interacting and engaging with consumers and potential ones. In addition, it enables brands to better understand consumer behaviour as it enables determining who they are and what their preferences are. With these insights, the social media strategy can be easily adapted to better suit the needs of consumers and establish more personal relationship with them. Lastly, the social media is complementary to traditional marketing, offering a different aspect of consumer behaviour, which is essential in developing brand resonance.

These pieces of advice will strengthen the consumer-brand relationships and further develop intimacy and trust. As for high-street fashion brands, Facebook and Twitter has become a virtual boutique of inspiration for what clothes to wear and what combinations work best in terms of the latest fashion and celebrity trends. In addition, it was revealed in this research that social media marketing properties of these high-street fashion brands have a positive impact on intimacy and trust. In addition, the self-brands congruency had a direct and indirect effect on intimacy and trust, the indirect one being mediated by social media properties. In terms, it can be argued that social media for high-street fashion brands is an important medium that provides with features that enhance consumer-brand concepts such as intimacy, trust and self-brands congruency.

5.4 Limitations and directions for future research

There are some limitations that have to be considered. Firstly, as the research focuses on high-street brands, thus the results cannot guarantee success across different industries as they are context dependent. The empirical model cannot be generalised even though precautions were taken such as measuring the variables in an aggregated form. Thus, further testing in alternative settings is required. On another note, managerial implications were made to encompass a broad focus that can be applied for each brand in any setting.

The current research reframed Kim and Ko's study (2010) for high-street fashion brands as well encompassing Twitter in the social media marketing analysis. In this aspect, this research is more specific focusing only on items that apply in analysing what the brands actually do on social media. It would be interesting to further develop on the concept of self-brands congruency in the online context and to create a scale that encompasses it. This would enable determining the exact impact that social media has on consumer brand relationships. Future studies could consider focusing on the consequences of intimacy and trust such as loyalty and purchase behaviour.

In addition, as the majority of the respondents of the survey were female, it would be interesting to study the male perspective and observe if there are any significant differences as they are considered to not be preoccupied as much with fashion. A gender comparison will enable a better overview of the differences in the level of interaction and engagement on social media. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to incorporate the view of social media marketing from a mobile only perspective as more and more users are interacting and engaging with brands on social media through their smartphone. Lastly, cultural differences should be considered as an important variable that influences both self-brands congruency and social media marketing.

All in all, social media should be furthered explored as it is becoming more and more integrated in consumers' lifestyle, being the number one activity undertaken by consumers in the online environment. Thus, social media marketing enables the development of more personal relationships between the brand and the consumer by being a gateway into the consumer's lifestyle and personal wardrobe.

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Appendix 1-Qualtrics survey



Thank you for your help!

As part of the research for my Master's thesis at Erasmus School of Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam, I am interested in studying how the social media of high-street fashion brands such as Zara, H&M and River Island influences your behaviour. This survey is focused on users of these brands who are familiar with their Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. I would appreciate if you could complete this short survey.


The survey should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes of your time.

I would like to thank you again for your cooperation!

Daiana Tont

[>>](#)

0% 100%



Thank you for your help!

How old are you?

13-17

18-25

26-34

35-54

55-64

What is your gender?

Male

Female

How often do you use Facebook?

- All of the Time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

How much time do you spend on Facebook?

- 1-2 hours every day
- less than 1 hour every day
- 3-5 hours per week but not daily
- less than 3 hours per week
- Never

How often do you post on Facebook?

- Daily
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Once a Week
- 1-3 Times a Month
- Never

How many friends do you have on Facebook?

- less than 200 friends
- between 200 and 400 friends
- between 400 and 600 friends
- between 600 and 800 friends
- more than 800 friends

Do you have a Twitter account?

- Yes
- No

>>

0%  100%



Thank you for your help!

How much time do you spend on Twitter?

- 1-2 hours every day
- less than 1 hour every day
- 3-5 hours per week but not daily
- less than 3 hours per week
- Never

How often do you tweet?

- Daily
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Once a Week
- 1-3 Times a Month
- Never

How many followers do you have on Twitter?

- less than 200 followers
- between 200 and 400 followers
- between 400 and 600 followers
- between 600 and 800 followers
- between 800 and 1000 followers

These questions will evaluate your perception and interaction with the brands.

Please rate the following statements in regards to your relationship to Zara, H&M and River Island.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
These high-street fashion brands reflect who I am.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can identify with these high-street fashion brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel a personal connection to these high-street fashion brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use these high-street fashion brands to communicate who I am to other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think these high-street fashion brands help me become the type of person I want to be.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider these high-street fashion brands to reflect who I consider myself to be.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These high-street fashion brands suit me well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you rate the following statements about Zara/H&M/River Island's Facebook and Twitter:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
When I am curious about the latest fashion trends of fashion news I check out one or more of these brands on social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These brands on social media inform me on how I can dress like celebrities in an affordable manner.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I need fashion advice, I check out one or more of these brands on social media for inspiration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Before I go shopping, I first check one or more of these brands on social media to see if they have any contests, discounts or exclusive offers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The content found on one or more of these brands social media is interesting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is fun to collect information on fashion items through these brands on social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy to lose track of time on social media for these brands because of the engaging content.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These brands on social media through their content inspire me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I engage with the brand if their social media is relevant to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Browsing these brands on social media is so absorbing that I forget about everything else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find these brands on social media are full of meaning and purpose.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like to say positive things about one or more of these brands' social media to other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I like to recommend fashion items from one or more of these brands' social media to my friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will encourage friends to buy fashion items that I see on these brands social media that will suit them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you rate the following statements about Zara, H&M and River Island:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I a true fan of these high-street fashion brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know these high-street fashion brands better than I know about other brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
These high-street fashion brands make me feel comfortable and safe.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a strong belief in these high-street fashion brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know what to expect when I buy from these high-street fashion brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident and certain about these high-street fashion brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thank you for your response!

Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)