

# **Understanding Brand Equity and Trust in the Luxury Market: The Role of User-Generated Content and Brand Selfies on Instagram**

Student Name: Bianca Crul

Student Number: 667329

Supervisor: Niels Vink

Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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# Understanding Brand Equity and Trust in the Luxury Market: The Role of User-Generated Content and Brand Selfies on Instagram

## Abstract

The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies has revolutionised online interactions, with social media platforms becoming crucial venues for digital engagement and brand communication. Luxury brands face a unique challenge balancing the integrity of their exclusive image with the benefits of engaging their audience in content creation. This dilemma is particularly evident on image-centric platforms, like Instagram, where user-generated content can significantly affect brand perception. Hence, this study examines to what extent the different forms of brand communication and brand selfies influence brand equity and trust of luxury fashion brands. This is done with an online experiment.

Participants were randomly assigned to four different experimental conditions with one of four Instagram posts of a Dior bag, to isolate the effects of user-generated versus brand-generated content and consumer versus brand selfies on brand equity and trust. Data was collected online via social media, targeting fashion and luxury enthusiasts. Over five weeks, 155 valid responses were obtained.

Despite existing literature suggesting that user-generated content positively influences brand equity and trust, our findings indicate no significant differences between user-generated content and brand-generated content in the luxury sector. This suggests a potential blurring of boundaries between user and brand-generated content, making it harder for consumers to distinguish the two. Additionally, neither consumer selfies nor brand selfies significantly impacted brand equity or trust, contrary to previous research highlighting their effectiveness in enhancing brand engagement and credibility. The results imply that for luxury brands, the content of a single Instagram post may not be sufficient to influence brand equity or trust. Luxury brands may need to adopt more integrated and engaging social media strategies, focusing on the overall quality and authenticity of content rather than strictly categorising content.

**KEYWORDS:** User-generated content, brand selfies, social media marketing, brand equity, luxury branding

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## 1. Introduction

The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies has drastically transformed the landscape of online interactions, with social media platforms being the primary medium for digital engagement (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 33). These platforms represent a thriving venue where both brands and consumers can communicate and interact with each other (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 33). This resulted in consumers also generating content about brands, also known as user-generated content (Arrigo, 2018, p. 658-659). The transparent nature of the internet has paved the way for user-generated content to become a trusted voice that resonates with consumers, threatening the dominance of brand-generated content (Jin, 2012, p. 687). Consequently, there is a growing expectation among marketers that brand communication will turn towards relying more on user-generated social media content (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 33).

Social media can have a tremendous impact on a brand's reputation (Kim & Ko, 2010, p. 167), and implementing this correctly remains difficult, leading to sectors like the luxury market cautiously adopting these advancements (Arrigo, 2018, p. 658). Besides, luxury brands experience a dilemma when it comes to user-generated content. Luxury brands need to navigate between controlling their luxurious brand integrity or giving their audience the chance to co-create this brand integrity, with the risk of losing its exclusive appearance on social media (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 257; Arrigo, 2018, p. 658; Jin, 2012, p. 687-688).

Yet, a few pioneering luxury fashion brands actively have involved consumers in content creation, enhancing brand-consumer connections and benefitting from it (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61; Koivisto & Mattila, 2020, p. 570). One of these is Chanel, which was the first prestigious beauty brand to launch an Instagram platform solely dedicated to user-generated content (Levinson, 2018). This page reposts images and videos taken by consumers of Chanel beauty products, allowing their consumers to become a community (Levinson, 2018).

Research shows that social media marketing efforts significantly impact the brand equity of luxury brands (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 258; Godey et al., 2016, p. 5835), which occurs when consumers are familiar with the brand, holding strong and distinctive brand associations in memory (Keller, 1993, p. 2). This creates a strong consumer relationship fostering brand loyalty and perception, which are important elements of brand equity (Husain et al., 2022, p. 4). Especially on image-centric platforms, such as Instagram, user-generated content influences how brands are perceived (Yu & Ko, 2021, p. 953; Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106-107). This is because consumers resonate more with user-generated content over brand-generated content, as it is less intrusive, reduces scepticism, and resembles organic content, as it is made by users of social media (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106-107). Positive user-generated content also contributes to building consumer trust in a brand (Choi & Lee, 2017, p. 556; Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). Brand trust is crucial, as it directly impacts the credibility and relevance of a brand (Husain et al., 2022, p. 4).

With the rise of social media platforms, especially image-based ones like Instagram, brand-related selfies have emerged as a powerful form of non-verbal communication. This allows consumers to visually express their brand affiliations (Sung et al., 2017, p. 15). These selfies enable consumer to align themselves with brands and publicly express their identities, enhancing brand engagement (Hartmann et al., 2021, p. 1159). Moreover, they can either reinforce or challenge the marketer-constructed brand image (Kedzior et al., 2016, p. 1769), serving as crucial sources of information, enjoyment, and trust (Yu & Ko, 2021, p. 953). Therefore, this research aims to answer the question:

*To what extent do different forms of brand communication and selfies influence brand equity and trust of luxury fashion brands?*

### *Societal Relevance*

Marketers need to effectively leverage brand-related user-generated content to build consumer trust and positive brand equity. In an era where consumers increasingly turn to social media for product information and recommendations, the ability of brands to provoke brand equity and trust through authentic and engaging content is key (Choi & Lee, 2017, p. 556; Singh & Chakrabarti, 2020, p. 51). Hence, brand trust significantly boosts luxury consumption (Husain et al., 2022, p. 9).

By highlighting the effectiveness of different types of brand communication and brand-related selfies, this research aims to provide marketers with actionable insights to navigate the complexities of social media marketing and foster meaningful connections with their consumers. Especially for the luxury brand sector, in which brands need to maintain their unique position in the market. Hence, this research offers valuable insights for luxury brand managers who strive to maintain brand integrity while engaging with consumers online.

### *Academic Relevance*

This study contributes to improve our understanding of consumer behaviour and brand management in a digital era. By empirically investigating the influence of different forms of brand communication and selfies on brand equity and trust in the luxury sector, this research adds nuance to existing literature on user-generated content, selfies, and luxury social media marketing. The inclusion of selfies as a focal point of analysis offers a new perspective on the role of visual content in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes towards brands in relation to user-generated content.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Social Media Brand Communication**

Studies regarding Word of Mouth widely agree that online interactions between consumers are crucial for brands (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 34). Hence, companies are actively using social media to monitor what consumers are posting about their brand (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 34).

When examining how social media affects brands, it is important to differentiate between two main types of communication: (1) brand-generated brand communication, and (2) user-generated brand communication. This distinction is significant as companies control what they put on social media, but not what users post (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 34). User-generated social media brand communication has become popular among consumers due to online communities and social media networks (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 34). In this study, the term user-generated content is used to describe this phenomenon. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2007), user-generated content is defined as publicly available content on the internet that requires a level of creative input and is produced outside of professional contexts. This can manifest itself in various forms, such as social media posts, blogs, ratings, and reviews (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). This study focuses on brand-related content on Instagram and its impact on brand equity and trust. Brand-generated and user-generated social media communication are two of the four independent variables of this study.

In essence, user-generated content represents the collective output of individuals using social media platforms, which gained widespread recognition around 2005 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Users often create this content for the reasons of self-promotion, personal enjoyment, or the desire to influence public perceptions (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 34). Consuming this type of content plays a significant role in helping people decide what to buy (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 105). Since these types of posts are not created by brands, consumers tend to see them as more trustworthy and useful (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106). Marketeers know that user-generated content can significantly influence people's perceptions of brands, hence they are actively encouraging people to discuss their brand (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106-107). Which is a practice known as Word-of-Mouth marketing (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 107). Sometimes brands go as far to sponsor posts like those, which is beneficial as they do not intrude online experiences as much (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106).

### **2.2. Selfies**

On image-based social media networks, such as Instagram, brand-related selfies have become a significant form of non-verbal communication, enabling consumers to showcase their connections with brands (Sung et al., 2017, p. 15). These selfies allow consumers to voluntarily align themselves with brands, publicly expressing their identities through visual content (Sung et al., 2017, p. 15).

Contemporary marketing practices use the popularity of selfies to enhance brand engagement through brand-related selfies (Hartmann et al., 2021, p. 1159). For individuals with strong brand commitment and self-brand connections, brand-related selfies serve as a public endorsement, a defence of the brand, or a recommendation to others (Sung et al., 2017, p. 17). This phenomenon highlights the importance of brand-related content in consumer-brand relationships.

Hartmann et al. (2021, p. 1160) divides brand-related selfies into two categories: (1) consumer selfies, where the consumer's face is visible alongside the branded product, and (2) brand selfies, which are branded products displayed by an invisible consumer. In this research the term selfies is used to refer to brand-related selfies. Researchers suggest that the presence of brands in selfies can influence consumers' everyday experiences on social media, either reinforcing or challenging the brand image constructed by marketers (Kedzior et al., 2016, p. 1769). Both image types have different interaction effects and can serve as an important source of information, enjoyment, and trust (Yu & Ko, 2021, p. 953). It significantly influences consumer awareness, attitudes, and behavioural intentions (Yu & Ko, 2021, p. 953). This underlines the importance of strategically using selfies in modern marketing. Yet, there is a limited understanding of the effect on consumers in relation to selfies in branded content. Therefore, this study aims to understand the effects of selfies on brand equity and trust.

### 2.3. Brand Equity

Brand equity represents the added value a brand has on a product, which is a concept acknowledged across different research streams (Farquhar, 1989, p. 1). There are two primary frameworks that dominate the literature on customer-based brand equity. The first being the framework of Keller (1993, p. 2), where brand equity is defined as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand." This conceptualisation emphasises the role of brand knowledge, comprising of brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 1993, p. 3). The second definition of brand equity by Aaker (1992, p. 28) describes it as the value that consumers link to a brand, which is reflected in the dimensions of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other proprietary brand assets. This research will follow the framework by Aaker (1992, p. 28), as it provides a more holistic view of brand equity. It captures aspects that influence consumers' perceptions and behaviour and focuses on the understanding of consumer behaviour.

Brand loyalty is a critical dimension of brand equity, as it ensures a steady profit stream (Aaker, 1992, p. 28). Evaluating brand value depends heavily on loyalty, which is demonstrated through customer satisfaction and repeat purchases (Aaker, 1992, pp. 28-29). Brand name awareness is essential for a brand's strength, as it supports the effectiveness of other brand equity dimensions (Aaker, 1992, p. 28). It forms the foundation of a successful brand (Aaker, 1992, p. 30). For many

companies, perceived brand quality has emerged as an essential focus and drives initiatives aimed at boosting brand equity (Aaker, 1992, p. 29). While brand associations include all mental connections and perceptions consumers have about a brand, extending beyond just perceived quality (Aaker, 1992, p. 28). Other proprietary brand assets include patents, trademarks, and channel relationships, though these typically have a less significant impact on brand equity (Aaker, 1992, p. 28). Understanding how these dimensions create value is vital for effective brand equity management and for making informed brand-building decisions (Aaker, 1992, p. 30).

Research shows that overall social media marketing activities are crucial to build strong brand equity (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 258; Godey et al., 2016, p. 5835). It also works the other way, as brand equity serves as a partial mediator for social media marketing efforts (Arrigo, 2018, p. 668). Consequently, investing in brand equity appears to enhance customer reactions to social media marketing activities, making it a continuous cycle.

Though, consumer responses vary across industries as consumers assess brands from different sectors and product categories differently (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). Consumers purchase luxury products primarily for personal enjoyment and as symbols of success and the future of luxury brands depends on balancing these two motivations (Godey et al., 2016, p. 5835). When purchasing luxury, the brand remains a crucial link to the consumer, hence, brands can influence consumer perceptions and attitudes through studying brand equity (Godey et al., 2016, p. 5835).

Zollo et al. (2020, p. 264) show that, specifically for luxury brands, social media marketing activities influence brand equity. Particularly when consumers have positive digital interactions with the brand and receive cognitive, social, and personal benefits from engaging with luxury brand communities online (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 259). Their findings indicate that social media marketing is most effective when it meets specific consumer needs and provides rewarding experiences (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 264).

Previous research by Schivinski & Dąbrowski (2015, p. 32) delves into the effects of brand-generated and user-generated social media brand communication on the metrics of consumer-based brand equity. Schivinski & Dąbrowski (2015, p. 45) found that user-generated content has a positive impact on most dimensions of brand equity: brand awareness, associations, loyalty, and perceived quality. Contrarily, brand-generated content only influences brand awareness and associations but does not directly impact brand loyalty or perceived quality (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 43). They also found that despite the increasing investments in social media marketing, consumers remain hesitant to fully embrace the value that firms are attempting to create (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 43), showing that user-generated content can be more impactful than brand-generated content.

Based on this discussion, it is anticipated that user-generated content has a stronger positive impact than brand generated posts do in the field of luxury fashion brands.



H1: User-generated posts have a stronger positive effect on brand equity than brand-generated posts do.

Yu and Ko (2021) investigated the effects of different types of selfies on luxury brand experiences. They find that brand selfies are more informative and more enjoyable (Yu & Ko, 2021, p. 959). However, consumer selfies showing the creator's face are perceived as more reliable by consumers (Yu & Ko, 2021, p.961). This builds on the research of Hartmann et al. (2021, p. 1174), which shows that faces are engaging on social media, receiving 49% more likes than brand selfies. However, they find that even though consumer selfies prompt interpersonal communication, they do not necessarily stimulate brand consumption, and thus, does not convert into genuine brand interest (Hartmann et al., 2021, p. 1174). Contrarily, brand selfies generate 78% more expressed purchase intentions (Hartmann et al., 2021, p. 1174).

Despite this, the personal touch of consumer selfies may have a stronger long-term impact on brand equity. Selfies combine various elements such as a person, a physical product, or a brand logo, and the background of the photo (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 111). These elements together create a narrative that reflects the individual's personal story and brand interaction (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 111). The primary goal of the consumer for sharing selfies is aligning themselves with specific brands and sharing their experiences on platforms like Instagram (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 116). This behaviour indicates a high degree of long-term brand loyalty, as users promote brands authentically and illustrate how these brands fit into their lifestyle (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 116).

As consumer selfies feature personal elements like faces and are seen as more trustworthy and engaging by consumers (Yu & Ko, 2021, p. 961; Hartmann et al., 2021, p. 1174), it is most likely to foster deeper connections which can influence brand equity. Therefore, this study hypothesises that consumer selfies have more effect on brand equity.

H2: Consumer selfies have a stronger positive effect on brand equity than brand selfies do.

#### 2.4. Brand Trust

Trust is a fundamental component of consumer-brand relationships characterised by the likelihood to believe in a brand's capability to fulfil its promises (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). As defined by Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992, p. 315) and Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 23), brand trust signifies the consumer's willingness to rely on a brand's ability to deliver on its promises, particularly in situations of uncertainty. This trust reduces consumer vulnerability by providing assurance amidst uncertainty, and is rooted in the brand's perceived reliability, safety, and honesty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). It involves a calculated assessment of the brand's ability to fulfil its obligations and align itself with shared goals and values (Chaudhuri & Holbrook,

2001, p. 82). Brand trust evolves from cumulative experiences and interactions over the consumer-brand journey, shaped by direct usage and encounters that influence perceptions of credibility and relevance (Husain et al., 2022, p. 4). Brand trust is also essential for fostering long-term connections with consumers and lays the foundation for positive behaviours such as purchase intention and advocacy (Demba et al., 2022, p. 145; Kim & Ko, 2010, p. 167). Research by Husain et al. (2022, p. 9) shows that brand trust has a significant positive influence on luxury consumption specifically.

Previous research shows that user-generated content has a stronger effect on trust than brand-generated content does (Choi & Lee, 2017, p. 556; Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). Consumers view user-generated content as trustworthy and reliable, reducing the likelihood of switching brands (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). Choi & Lee (2017, p. 556) found that user-generated content has a greater influence on consumer's cognitive trust compared to brand-generated content, which has a stronger impact on emotional trust. User-generated content credibility stems from various factors such as source expertise and trustworthiness (Singh & Chakrabarti, 2020, p. 51). Consumers typically place higher trust in information from fellow customers compared to information from brands (Singh & Chakrabarti, 2020, p. 51; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). Even though some of these posts may be sponsored by brands, they are still viewed favourably as they do not intrude individuals' online experiences as much (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106). Since these posts are not directly created by brands, consumers tend to place more trust in them when making purchase decisions (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106).

Schivinski & Dąbrowski (2015, p. 45) also show that consumers significantly rely on the opinions of family, friends, and other users about the quality of services offered by firms. This reliance highlights a key difference between brand-generated and user-generated social media content. Hence, consumers see user-generated content as more credible than brand-generated content (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). Therefore, this study expects that user-generated content will have the same effect on trust in the luxury sector.

H3: User-generated posts have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand-generated posts do.

Previous research shows that selfies significantly enhance the trustworthiness and engagement with brands (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 116; Lim, 2016, p. 1780). Research by Uzunboylu et al. (2020, p. 112) highlights that selfies play an important role in fostering consumer trust. As selfies provide authentic, real-time experiences that resonate more with other consumers compared to traditional advertising (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, pp. 116-117). Recommendations by consumers, which are perceived as sincere and trustworthy, effectively influence other consumers' attitudes and purchasing decisions (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 116).

Especially consumer selfies, which humanise marketing efforts, due to the presence of a person (Lim, 2016, p. 1780). Brands and products in consumer selfies often appear subtly alongside a

person, creating a non-commercial and authentic appeal (Lim, 2016, p. 1780). This subtle inclusion of a brand contributes to the likeability of consumer selfies among consumers, as the human element in selfies evokes emotions and leads to more engagement (Hartmann et al., 2021, p. 1174; Lim, 2016, p. 1780). The absence of a commercial agenda in consumer selfies creates an impression of authenticity and trustworthiness, which counters the negative perceptions often associated with traditional marketing strategies (Lim, 2016, p. 1780).

Consumer selfies bring forth consumer emotions, fosters greater brand engagement, and conveys authenticity, which reduces negative perceptions associated with commercial motives and facilitates genuine brand connections (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 116; Lim, 2016, p. 1780). Moreover, as images featuring human faces are generally perceived as more trustworthy (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 116; Lim, 2016, p. 1780), it is expected that consumer selfies will similarly be seen as more credible within the luxury market.

H4: Consumer selfies have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand selfies do.

## 2.5 Effect of Brand Communication and Selfies on Brand Equity and Trust

This study aims to explore the impact of social media brand communication and selfies on brand equity and trust. In examining social media brand communication, it is noticeable that user-generated content significantly impacts brand equity (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). Similarly, consumer selfies, which are seen as more trustworthy and engaging (Yu & Ko, 2021, p. 961; Hartmann et al., 2021, p. 1174), are expected to foster deeper connections which can influence brand equity. When it comes to brand trust user-generated content is perceived as more credible than brand-generated content across social media platforms (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). Also, consumer selfies are particularly effective in enhancing trust (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 116; Lim, 2016, p. 1780). Table 2.1. provides an overview of the hypotheses of this study.

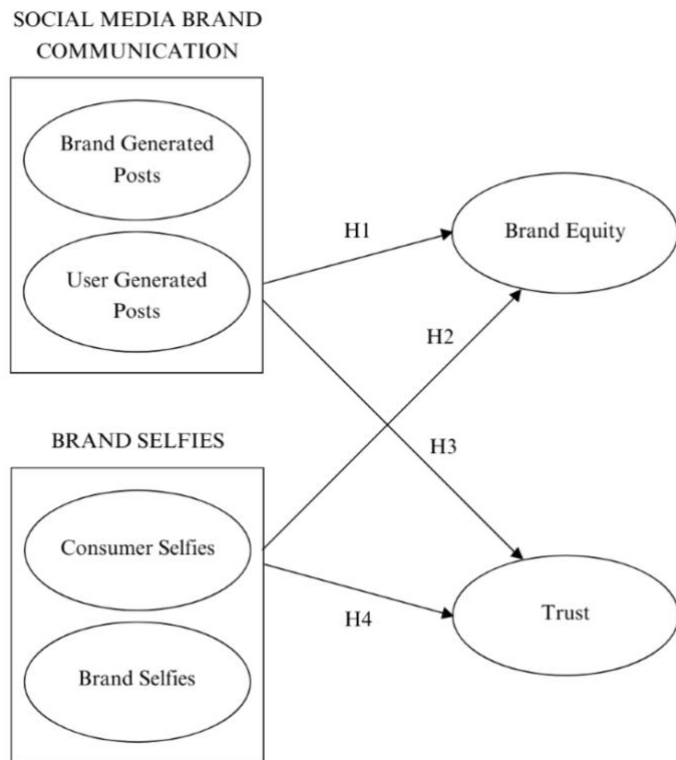
*Table 2.1. Summary of hypotheses.*

*Hypothesis Statement*

H1	User-generated posts have a stronger positive effect on brand equity than brand-generated posts do.
H2	Consumer selfies have a stronger positive effect on brand equity than brand selfies do.
H3	User-generated posts have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand-generated posts do.
H4	Consumer selfies have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand selfies do.

Throughout this study, social media brand communication and brand selfies are the independent variables. The conceptual model in Figure 1 illustrates the expected positive influence of user-generated posts and consumer selfies on brand equity and trust.

**Figure 1**  
*Conceptual Model*



### 3. Method

This section outlines the research design aimed at addressing the research questions outlined earlier. It includes a comprehensive description of the research method (3.1), research design (3.2), sample (3.3), materials (3.4), procedure (3.5), measurements (3.6), and research ethics (3.7).

#### 3.1. Research Method

To discover how social media brands communication and selfies influence brand equity and trust of luxury fashion brands on Instagram and test the hypotheses, an experiment was conducted within a survey framework. This offers the dual benefit of experimental causality and the broad applicability of large sample surveys (Mullinix et al., 2015, p. 125). This method is popular in social sciences due to its experimental focus, which aims to determine causation more precisely than traditional surveys. Establishing causation between study variables can be challenging, as correlation does not imply causation. Experimental designs like these help isolate confounding factors, enhancing the reliability of causal inferences (Holland, 1986, p. 959).

#### 3.2. Research Design

In an experiment, participants are randomly assigned to different conditions, ensuring that only the independent variable of interest varies across conditions. The research employs a 2x2 between-subjects design, where each participant experiences only one treatment condition. The independent variables of this study are social media brand communication and selfies, which are divided into factor A and B. Both factors have 2 levels, resulting in 4 experimental conditions (see Table 3.1). This approach is ideal given the survey's length, which could otherwise lead to respondent fatigue and lower quality responses (Wallander, 2009, p. 512). Limiting each participant to one condition also helps reduce social desirability bias.

Table 3.1. Visual representation of the 2x2 full factorial design.

	<b>Factor B:</b> social media brand communication <b>Level 1:</b> user-generated content (B1)	<b>Factor B:</b> social media brand communication <b>Level 2:</b> brand-generated content (B2)
<b>Factor A:</b> selfies Level 1: consumer selfie (A1)	User-generated content Consumer selfie (A1B1)	Brand-generated content Consumer selfie (A1B2)
<b>Factor A:</b> selfies Level 2: brand selfie (A2)	User-generated content Brand selfie (A2B1)	Brand-generated content Brand selfie (A2B2)

### 3.3. Sample

The survey was primarily shared on social media platforms (such as Facebook and Reddit) within communities of fashion, bag, and luxury enthusiasts. Convenience sampling was used by sharing the survey on various social media to direct circles of the researcher simultaneously. Later the outreach was expanded to more social platforms and wider communities to diversify and enlarge the respondent pool.

Within the respondent pool, females represented the majority, comprising 81.4% of the sample, while male participants numbered 28 and 1 non-binary participant. In terms of age distribution, the sample was relatively young ( $M = 29.05$ ). The average age of respondents was 29 years old ( $SD = 8.24$ ). The nationalities of the respondent added up to 41 different nationalities, from which the most common three were Dutch (20.5%), American (17.3%), and British (5.1%). In terms of educational attainment, the sample skewed towards higher education levels, with a predominant number of respondents holding a Bachelor's or college degree (59%) or above (master's degree: 19.9% and doctorate or professional degree: 7.1%). However, there was also 18 participants with a high school or other secondary education degree, comprising 11.5% of the sample. Table 3.2 describes the socio-economic demographics of the sample.

Table 3.2. Description of the sample.

<i>Demographics</i>		Total	
		Frequency / N	Valid percent / %
Gender	Male	28	17.9
	Female	127	81.4
	Non-binary	1	0.6
Age	18-24	65	41.7
	25-34	53	34
	35-44	26	16.7
	45-54	10	6.4
	55+	2	1.3
Nationality	American	27	17.3
	Argentinian	1	0.6
	Austrian	2	1.3
	Australian	1	0.6
	Bulgarian	5	3.2
	British	8	5.1
	Canadian	7	4.5
	Chinese	2	1.3
	Croatian	1	0.6
	Czech	2	1.3
	Danish	2	1.3
	Dutch	32	20.5
	Estonian	1	0.6
	Filipino	1	0.6
	Finnish	3	1.9
	French	1	0.6
	German	7	4.5
	Greek	6	3.8
	Hungarian	3	1.9
	Indian	6	3.8
Indonesian	1	0.6	
Iranian	1	0.6	
Italian	4	2.6	
Kazakh	1	0.6	
Latvian	4	2.6	

	Lithuanian	1	0.6
	Malaysian	2	1.3
	Montenegrin	2	1.3
	Moroccan	1	0.6
	New Zealander	1	0.6
	Norwegian	2	1.3
	Palestinian	2	1.3
	Polish	3	1.9
	Portuguese	1	0.6
	Russian	1	0.6
	Singaporean	1	0.6
	Slovenian	1	0.6
	Spanish	2	1.3
	Surinamese	2	1.3
	Thai	1	0.6
	Vietnamese	1	0.6
Level of education	Secondary education / High school	18	11.5
	Bachelor's / College	92	59
	Master's	31	19.9
	Doctorate or professional degree	11	7.1
	Other	4	2.6

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### 3.4. Materials

The stimuli consisted of four different sets of social media brand communication and selfies, which is consistent with the 2x2 factorial design. These stimuli were crafted to reflect realistic social media posts as much as possible.

Figure 2 represents the levels user-generated content and consumer selfie through the username of a consumer and the consumer's face being in the post.



## Figure 2

Experimental Condition A1B1: hongsozu consumer selfie



Figure 3 also shows the level user-generated content through the username of the consumer. It shows another level of selfies, being brand selfie, as the consumer's face has been removed in the post.

**Figure 3**

*Experimental Condition A2B1: hongsozu brand selfie*



Contrary to the previous posts, Figure 4 showcases the level brand-generated content through the username of the luxury fashion brand. It represents the level consumer selfie as the person's face is visible in the post.

**Figure 4**

*Experimental Condition A1B1: Dior consumer selfie*



Figure 5 represents the level brand-generated content through the username of the brand as well. However, it shows the other level of selfies, which is brand selfie, as the person's face has been removed in the Instagram post.

**Figure 5**

*Experimental Condition A2B2: Dior brand selfie*



### 3.5. Procedure

The procedure of this study was designed to ensure accurate and reliable results. This section covers the pre-testing phase, study context, and survey process.

### *Pre-testing*

Pre-testing is a crucial phase in the development of any questionnaire (Presser et al., 2004, p. 2). It aims to eliminate misunderstandings, identify design issues, ensure the instruments' effectiveness, and confirm that respondents are comfortable with the survey. Interviews are the traditional method for pre-testing, and even a small number of respondents can reveal numerous issues (Presser et al., 2004, p. 2). One-on-one interviews and discussions with two high-educated friends and one non-educated friend were conducted to make sure that everyone will be able to respond to the questionnaire. Feedback included changing wording, adding clarification, enhancing questions.

### *Study Context*

The study was conducted entirely online using a survey. Conducting research on the internet offers numerous advantages, including the ability to gather large amounts of data conveniently and cost-effectively. Unlike traditional offline methods, online surveys are not limited by time or geographic location allowing for a broader reach and diverse participant demographics. The survey was mainly distributed on social media platforms, including Facebook and Reddit. Over a period of five weeks starting from March 13th, 230 responses were collected from which 155 were valid.

### *Survey Process*

Prior to filling out the survey, respondents were presented with an informed consent form with details of the overall study's purpose, procedure, and confidentiality (see Appendix A). Only the respondents who gave consent were able to participate in the experiment. The participants were then randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions using the randomisation feature in Qualtrics. This resulted in them being assigned to one social media post, corresponding to their experimental condition, which they needed to view attentively. Each experimental condition received comparable response numbers, between 73 and 82. This balanced distribution enables meaningful comparisons between conditions and robust inferences.

After carefully viewing the content, the participants proceeded to answer questions designed to measure the dependent variables, which are brand equity and trust. These survey questions were answered using a 5-point Likert scale. Afterwards, the participants were asked socio-economic questions and questions about their shopping habits. When completed, participants received a debriefing statement which explained the experiment's objectives more detailed and thanked the respondents for their participation (see Appendix B).

### 3.6. Measurement

This section describes the scales used in this study. We will address the reliability and validity of our measurements.

#### *Operationalisation*

In addition to the cover story and debriefing, the questionnaire comprises of five main sections: brand equity, trust, manipulation check, shopping habits, and socio-economic questions. The items of brand equity are based on the scale from Washburn and Plank (2002). The trust scale from Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) was used in the survey for the items about trust. Table 3.3 provides an overview of the structure, and the complete questionnaire is available in Appendix C.

Table 3.3. Questionnaire structure

#### *Questionnaire Structure*

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##### Brand equity (24 questions)

- (one out of four Instagram posts are randomly presented to each respondent)
- 5-point Likert-scale questions about brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty

##### Trust (11 questions)

- 5-point Likert-scale questions about fiability and intentionality

##### Manipulation check (2 questions)

- Selfie, sender of the Instagram post

##### Shopping habits (3 questions)

- Shop luxury items, luxury items owned, Dior fashion items bought

##### Socio-economic questions (4 questions)

- Age, gender, nationality, education
- 

#### *Brand Equity*

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was calculated for the scale of brand equity, resulting in a value of .86, surpassing the recommended minimum of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974, p. 35). Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2$  (df) = 1632.34,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that the item correlations were sufficiently strong for factor analysis (Bartlett, 1950). The same was computed for the trust scale resulting in a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy value of .85, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974, p. 35). Moreover, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2$  (df) = 692.51,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the correlations among items were adequate for the confirmatory factor analysis (Bartlett, 1950).

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to interpret the factors of brand equity and trust. Hence, Oblimin rotation was used as these are existing scales. For brand equity, the rotated

solution has four interpretable factors, accounting for 7.8% of the total variance. This is in line with the original scale, which also has four factors. These factor loadings are presented in Table 3.4. As for trust, the rotated factor analysis consists of two interpretable factors, collectively explaining 3.7% of the total variance. This aligns with the original trust scale, which also consists of two factors. The factor loadings for these are detailed in Table 3.5. Loadings under 0.3 were considered insignificant and were therefore omitted.

Table 3.4. Factor loadings, explained variance and reliability of the one factor found for the scale 'brand equity'.

Item	<i>Brand Value</i>	<i>Brand Image</i>	<i>Brand Reliability</i>	<i>Purchase Decision</i>
Considering what I would pay for the brand, I would get much more than my money's worth	.83			
The brand is well priced	.71			
I will not buy other brands, when this brand is available at the store	.70			
I will definitely buy this brand of product although its price is higher than the other brands of the product that offer similar benefits	.65			
I believe that this company is contributing to the society	.63			
I believe that this company and people who stand behind the brand are socially responsible	.54			
I believe that this company does not take advantage of consumers	.53			
This brand is better as compared to other brands of fashion products in term of appearance	.47			
I can recognise this brand among competing brands		.78		
I have difficulty imagining this brand in my mind		.77		
I can quickly recall the logo of this brand		.69		
I would be proud to own a product of this brand		.68		
In its status and style, this brand matches my personality		.57		
The brand is well regarded by my friends		.54		
During use the brand's fashion products are highly unlikely to be defective			-.74	



I consider the company and people who stand behind the brand to have expertise in producing the product	-0.71			
This brand is of good quality	-0.64			
This brand is very reliable	-0.63			
I can expect superior performance from this brand	-0.56			
The brand's fashion products are safe to use	-0.55			
I consider the company and people who stand behind the brand are very trustworthy	-0.42			
The brand's fashion products are made so as to work trouble free				.73
This brand comes up first in my mind when I need to make a purchase decision on the product				.69
This brand is the only brand recalled when I need to make a purchase decision on the product				.60

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<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	4.2%	0.1%	1.8%	1.7%
<i>Cronbach's α</i>	.84	.82	.81	.73

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Table 3.5. Factor loadings, explained variance and reliability of the one factor found for the scale ‘trust’.

Item	<i>Brand Expectations</i>	<i>Customer Satisfaction</i>
Dior is a brand that meets my expectations	.91	
I feel confidence in Dior	.89	
With Dior I obtain what I look for in a luxury fashion brand	.84	
Dior is a brand that never disappoints me	.70	
Dior would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns	.52	
Dior would compensate me in some way for the problem with their fashion product		.79
Dior would be interested in my satisfaction		.67
I could rely on Dior to solve the problem with their fashion product		.64
Dior would make any effort to satisfy me		.58
Dior would not be willing in solving the problem I could have with their fashion product		.36
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	1.6%	2.1%
<i>Cronbach's α</i>	.85	.74

### *Validity*

Regarding validity, one of the main advantages of experimental design is its high internal validity, as randomisation effectively isolates confounding factors. For the measurement validity of the scale, content validity was ensured through several steps: (1) consulting literature that measures similar constructs related to the dimensions under consideration, (2) pretesting the questionnaire with various types of people to gather feedback, and (3) refining the wording to minimise inter-observer inconsistency in the measurement items (Bryman, 2016, p. 275-276).

### 3.7. Research Ethics

To ensure valid responses, the study's true nature was temporarily disguised. An experiment raises ethical considerations, particularly regarding deception. Manipulation within experiments often involves some level of deception if respondents are not fully informed (Barrera & Simpson, 2012, p. 386). However, partial deception is necessary to avoid biased responses. To address ethical concerns, the start of the questionnaire included informed consent (see Appendix A), which provided a cover story that offered enough information without revealing the study's true purpose. Personal information security was assured, and participants were invited to take part if they were of legal age

and gave consent. The questionnaire's end consisted of a debriefing where the experimental design was clarified, and the study's true purpose was revealed.

Confidentiality was maintained by collecting all research data anonymously and keeping it entirely confidential. Participants faced no foreseeable risks or discomforts from participating in this study. The anonymity of the participants remained throughout the study, from data collection to the analysis. Moreover, the data were stored on secure servers with password protection, which is only accessible to the primary researcher.

#### **4. Results**

This section begins by providing the preliminary analyses (4.1), manipulation check (4.2), followed by a detailed analysis of the questionnaire responses regarding brand equity (4.3), brand trust (4.4), and additional analyses (4.5). The collected questionnaire data will be analysed in detail to test the hypotheses and find out which brand communication and selfie have more effect on brand equity and trust.

##### **4.1. Preliminary Analyses**

This subsection offers an overview of the collected preliminary analyses. It describes the data regarding the shopping habits of the respondents from the questionnaire. Respondents were asked questions about their shopping habits to understand whether they are potential consumers of the brand or brands like these. Table 4.1 outlines the sample's shopping habits

First, respondents were asked how many times they shop for luxury fashion items, from which 34% participants reported occasionally shopping for luxury fashion items. However, most of the participants skewed to not really shopping for luxury fashion items, with 53 (34%) rarely shopping for luxury fashion items, and 42 (26.9%) indicating that they never shop luxury fashion items.

Secondly, participants were questioned on how many luxury fashion items they own. These answers skewed towards only owning a few. A small percentage (8.4%, 13 individuals) own many or a lot of luxury fashion items. The majority (46.2%) of respondents reported having a few. Of the 156 respondents, 42 indicated owning no luxury fashion items.

Finally, the respondents were asked how many times they have bought Dior fashion items. The majority of 74.4% states to never have bought Dior fashion items. While 39 (25%) state having bought Dior fashion items (a lot of times, sometimes, and a few times) before.

Table 4.1. Description of the sample's shopping habits.

<i>Shopping habits</i>		Total	
		Frequency / N	Valid percent / %
Shopping luxury fashion items	Regularly	10	6.4
	Occasionally	51	32.7
	Rarely	53	34
	Never	42	26.9
Owning luxury fashion items	A lot	4	2.6
	Many	9	5.8
	Some	29	18.6
	A few	72	46.2
Bought Dior fashion items	None	42	26.9
	A lot of times	1	0.6
	Sometimes	5	3.2
	A few times	33	21.2
	Never	116	74.4

#### 4.2. Manipulation Check

To confirm the effectiveness of the experimental manipulations, two manipulation check questions were asked. These checks evaluated whether it was noticeable for participants what the independent variables were, which are social media brand communication and selfies. This was done by asking the participants if they identified the main element in the Instagram post and the account that posted it.

First participants were asked about the identified social media brand communication. It is seen that the manipulation check was successful for most respondents. For the user-generated content, 73.5% of participants (n = 98) correctly identified that the post was from Hongsuzu. For the brand-generated content, 91.1% of participants (n = 56) correctly identified that the post was from Dior.

When it comes to selfies, it is seen that the manipulation check was also successful for most of the participants. For the brand selfie posts, 78.9% of participants (n = 57) correctly identified the post element as 'a picture of a bag'. For the consumer selfie post, 71.7% of participants (n = 99) correctly identified the post element as 'a picture of a woman holding a bag'.

However, if we look at the participants where both manipulation checks were successful, it is seen that this was only the case with 57.4% of the participants (n = 89).

### 4.3. Brand Equity

To determine which brand communication type and selfie type have more effect on brand equity, two-way ANOVAs were conducted. In the experiment, the independent variables brand communication and selfie both have two levels. The dependent variable that is analysed in this section is brand equity. The two-way ANOVAs were carried out on each found factor of brand equity, which are brand value, brand image, brand reliability, purchase decision.

#### *Brand Value*

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of the independent variables, brand communication and selfies, on the first factor of the dependent variable brand equity: brand value. The mean brand value scores are presented in Table 4.2.

*Table 4.2.* Means for ‘brand value’ by brand communication and selfies.

		Selfies	
		Consumer selfie (N = 82)	Brand selfie (N = 73)
Brand communication	Brand-generated (N = 78)	M = 2.51 (SD = .70)	M = 2.27 (SD = .67)
	User-generated (N = 77)	M = 2.25 (SD = .59)	M = 2.58 (SD = .77)

The two-way ANOVA results show that there was no significant effect of brand communication on brand value,  $F(1, 155) = .05, p = .82, \eta^2 = .03$ , which shows that there is no difference on brand value whether a post is user-generated nor brand-generated. This does not provide support for H1, as user-generated posts do not have a stronger positive effect on brand value than brand-generated posts do.

Additionally, there was no significant effect of selfies on brand value,  $F(1, 155) = .18, p = .67, \eta^2 = .08$ , indicating that there is no difference between consumer selfie posts and brand selfie posts on brand value. This does not support H2, as consumer selfies do not have a stronger positive effect on brand value than brand selfies do.

Contrarily, the interaction effect between selfies and brand communication was significant,  $F(1, 155) = 6.52, p = .01, \eta^2 = .08$ , suggesting that the effect of selfies on brand equity depends on the brand communication.

#### *Brand Image*

A two-way ANOVA was performed to investigate the effects of the independent variables, brand communication and selfies on the second factor of the dependent variable: brand image. Table 4.3 presents the mean statistics for brand image.

Table 4.3. Means for factor ‘brand image’ by brand communication and selfies.

		Selfies	
		Consumer selfie (N = 82)	Brand selfie (N = 73)
Brand communication	Brand-generated (N = 78)	M = 3.46 (SD = .63)	M = 3.44 (SD = .76)
	User-generated (N = 77)	M = 3.39 (SD = .83)	M = 3.44 (SD = .87)

The two-way ANOVA results indicate no significant effect of brand communication on brand image,  $F(1, 155) = .07, p = .79, \eta^2 = .04$ , suggesting no difference between user-generated and brand-generated posts. This does not support H1, as user-generated posts do not have a stronger positive effect on brand image than brand-generated posts do.

Similarly, selfie type did not significantly affect brand image,  $F(1, 155) = .01, p = .91, \eta^2 = .01$ , indicating no difference between consumer selfie and brand selfie posts. This does not provide support for H2, as consumer selfies do not have a stronger positive effect on brand image than brand selfies do.

The interaction effect between selfies and brand communication was also nonsignificant,  $F(1, 155) = .10, p = .75, \eta^2 = .06$ , implying that the impact of selfies on brand image does not depend on the type of brand communication.

#### Brand Reliability

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of the independent variables, brand communication and selfies, on the third factor of the dependent variable brand equity: brand reliability. The mean scores for brand reliability are shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Means for factor ‘brand reliability’ by brand communication and selfies.

		Selfies	
		Consumer selfie (N = 82)	Brand selfie (N = 73)
Brand communication	Brand-generated (N = 78)	M = 3.65 (SD = .44)	M = 3.49 (SD = .65)
	User-generated (N = 77)	M = 3.54 (SD = .57)	M = 3.66 (SD = .51)

The results of the two-way ANOVA show that brand communication type does not significantly influence brand reliability,  $F(1, 155) = .11, p = .74, \eta^2 = .03$ , hence there is no difference between user-generated and brand-generated posts. This finding does not support H1, as

user-generated posts do not show a stronger positive effect on brand reliability compared to brand-generated posts.

Likewise, selfies have no significant effect on brand reliability,  $F(1, 155) = .04, p = .84, \eta^2 = .01$ , indicating no difference between consumer selfie and brand selfie posts. This does not support H2, as consumer selfies do not show a stronger positive effect on brand reliability than brand selfies do.

Moreover, no significant interaction effect was found between selfies and brand communication,  $F(1, 155) = 2.67, p = .10, \eta^2 = .02$ , suggesting that the effect of selfies on brand reliability is not dependent upon the brand communication type.

### *Purchase Decision*

Another two-way ANOVA was conducted to analyse the impact of the independent variables, brand communication and selfies, on the fourth factor of the dependent variable brand equity: purchase decisions. The mean scores for purchase decision scores are provided in Table 4.5.

*Table 4.5.* Means for factor ‘purchase decision’ by brand communication and selfies.

		Selfies	
		Consumer selfie (N = 82)	Brand selfie (N = 73)
Brand communication	Brand-generated (N = 78)	M = 2.19 (SD = .69)	M = 2.34 (SD = .76)
	User-generated (N = 77)	M = 2.14 (SD = .73)	M = 2.38 (SD = .81)

The findings from the two-way ANOVA reveal that the type of brand communication does not significantly impact purchase decision,  $F(1, 155) = .01, p = .95, \eta^2 = .00$ , suggesting no difference between user-generated and brand-generated posts. This does not provide support for H1, as user-generated posts do not show a stronger positive effect on purchase decision compared to brand-generated posts.

Similarly, selfies do not have a significant influence on purchase decision,  $F(1, 155) = 2.58, p = .11, \eta^2 = .02$ , indicating there is no distinction between consumer selfie and brand selfie posts. H2 is not supported by these results, since consumer selfies do not have a greater positive influence on purchase decision than brand selfies do.

Additionally, there was no significant interaction effect between selfies and brand communication,  $F(1, 155) = .13, p = .72, \eta^2 = .00$ , indicating that the influence of selfies on purchase decision is not dependent upon the type of brand communication used.



### Summary for Brand Equity

None of the factors of brand equity show significant results, hence H1 and H2 are rejected. This indicates that user-generated posts do not have a stronger positive effect on brand equity compared to brand-generated posts. Moreover, consumer selfies do not have a stronger positive effect on brand equity than brand selfies do. However, an interaction effect between brand communication and selfies is observed in the factor brand value.

#### 4.4. Brand Trust

To evaluate the impact of brand communication type and selfie type on brand trust, two-way ANOVAs were performed. This experiment has two independent variables, brand communication and selfie, each with two levels. The dependent variable that will be analysed in this section is brand trust. The two-way ANOVAs were conducted for both identified factors of trust, which are brand expectations and customer satisfaction.

#### Brand Expectations

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of the independent variables, brand communication and selfies, on the first factor of the dependent variable brand trust: brand expectations. The means for brand expectations are provided in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6. Means for factor 'brand expectations' by brand communication and selfies.

		Selfies	
		Consumer selfie (N = 82)	Brand selfie (N = 73)
Brand communication	Brand-generated (N = 78)	M = 3.20 (SD = .61)	M = 2.98 (SD = .79)
	User-generated (N = 77)	M = 3.05 (SD = .74)	M = 3.18 (SD = .81)

The two-way ANOVA results show that the type of brand communication does not have a significant effect on brand expectations,  $F(1, 155) = .04$ ,  $p = .85$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ , showing no difference between user-generated and brand-generated posts. This does not support H3, as user-generated posts do not show a stronger positive effect on brand expectations than brand-generated posts do.

Likewise, selfies do not significantly influence brand expectations,  $F(1, 155) = .11$ ,  $p = .74$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ , indicating no difference between consumer selfie and brand selfie posts. This finding does not support H4, as consumer selfies do not have a stronger positive effect on brand expectations compared to brand selfies.

Also, the significant interaction effect between selfies and brand expectations is not significant,  $F(1, 155) = 2.27, p = .13, \eta^2 = 1.23$ , suggesting that the influence of selfies on brand equity is not dependent on the type of brand communication.

### *Customer Satisfaction*

A two-way ANOVA was utilised to analyse the influence of the independent variables, brand communication and selfies, on the second factor of the dependent variable brand trust: customer satisfaction. Table 4.7 displays the means for the customer satisfaction scores.

*Table 4.7.* Means for factor ‘customer satisfaction’ by brand communication and selfies.

		Selfies	
		Consumer selfie (N = 82)	Brand selfie (N = 73)
Brand communication	Brand-generated (N = 78)	M = 3.25 (SD = .65)	M = 3.08 (SD = .72)
	User-generated (N = 77)	M = 3.01 (SD = .62)	M = 3.19 (SD = .68)

According to the two-way ANOVA results, brand communication does not significantly affect customer satisfaction,  $F(1, 155) = .41, p = .52, \eta^2 = .18$ , suggesting that there is no difference between posts generated by users and those generated by brands. H3 is not supported by this result, as user-generated posts do not show a more positive effect on customer satisfaction than brand-generated posts do.

Similarly, the type of content does not show a significant impact on customer satisfaction,  $F(1, 155) = .01, p = .93, \eta^2 = .00$ , indicating that there is no distinction between consumer selfie and brand selfie posts. This finding does not support H4, as consumer selfies do not show a stronger positive effect on customer satisfaction compared to brand selfies.

Moreover, the interaction effect between selfies and brand communication is also not significant,  $F(1, 155) = 2.64, p = .11, \eta^2 = 1.17$ , implying that the effect of selfies on customer satisfaction does not vary depending on brands communication.

### *Summary for Brand Trust*

Both factors of trust are shown to be non-significant. Therefore, H3 and H4 are rejected, as the results show that user-generated posts do not have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand-generated posts do, neither do consumer selfies have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand selfies do.

#### 4.5. Additional Analyses

As the hypotheses were all rejected, all two-way ANOVA were conducted again with participants where the manipulation check was successful ( $n = 89$ ). To examine whether the impact of brand communication and selfies influences brand equity and trust.

Most tests resulted in the same insignificant results. However, brand reliability, a factor of brand equity, showed a difference in the interaction effect. The means for brand reliability scores with select cases are presented in Table 4.8.

*Table 4.8* Means for factor ‘brand reliability’ by brand communication and selfies with select cases.

		Selfies	
		Consumer selfie (N = 55)	Brand selfie (N = 34)
Brand communication	Brand-generated (N = 34)	M = 3.66 (SD = .51)	M = 3.14 (SD = .72)
	User-generated (N = 55)	M = 3.52 (SD = .59)	M = 3.62 (SD = .58)

The results of the two-way ANOVA show that brand communication,  $F(1, 89) = 1.63$ ,  $p = .21$ ,  $\eta^2 = .56$ , and selfies,  $F(1, 89) = 2.47$ ,  $p = .12$ ,  $\eta^2 = .84$ , have no significant effect on brand reliability. This indicates that there is no difference between consumer selfie and brand selfie posts and no difference between user-generated and brand-generated posts, hence still showing no support for H1 and H2.

Yet, there is a significant interaction effect found between selfies and brand communication,  $F(1, 89) = 5.33$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta^2 = 1.82$ , suggesting that the effect of selfies on brand reliability is dependent upon the brand communication type.

As the analyses still showed no significant results after only including respondents where the manipulation check was successful, H1, H2, H3, and H4 hypotheses were rejected. Meaning that both levels of brand communication and selfies do not have an effect on brand equity and trust. However, another interaction effect is seen in brand reliability. Which shows that the type of brand communication and selfies have an interaction effect on brand reliability and brand value.

## 5. Discussion

This discussion section combines the findings from the research question and hypotheses, providing a comprehensive analysis before moving on to the conclusion. It also examines key aspects of the methodology, such as the scales, sample characteristics, and the manipulation check.

### 5.1. Main findings

Based on the results, this section delves into the comparative effects of user-generated versus brand-generated posts, and consumer selfies versus brand selfies, on both brand equity and trust.

*H1 User-generated posts have a stronger positive effect on brand equity than brand-generated posts do.*

As the results were insignificant, H1 has been rejected. This means that user-generated posts do not have a stronger positive effect on brand equity than brand-generated content. It also does not have a negative effect either. This is contrary to prior research, which states that user-generated content has a positive effect on brand equity (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). This might have occurred due to the slight nuance in the manipulation material. The respondent saw the Instagram post and might not have paid much attention to the username. Moreover, brands tend to repost user-generated content making it harder for users to differentiate them. The other instance could be that the content of a post is related to whether the viewer thinks it is user-generated or brand-generated. Therefore, only changing the sender of the message might not influence the way a consumer detects and differentiates user-generated and brand-generated content.

Moreover, the results show that both user-generated posts and brand-generated posts tend to not have a significant effect on brand equity. Which is also differs from previous research, which showcases that social media marketing efforts, regardless of the creator, influences brand equity (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 258; Godey et al., 2016, p. 5835). As stated before, this could also be since consumers might also determine based on the content whether a post is user-generated or brand-generated. Therefore, only changing the sender of the message will not solely influence how a consumer views the brand, but the content might too.

Even though research shows that user-generated content has the potential to influence people's perceptions of brand significantly (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106-107). Keller (1993, p. 1) also states that positive brand equity can be achieved once consumers can recall and recognise the brand with positive brand associations, which then lead to impact their purchasing behaviour. This indicates that only showcasing an Instagram post might not be engaging enough, hence, cannot impact brand equity sufficiently. Prior research shows that social media marketing activities are important for building strong brand equity (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 258; Godey et al., 2016, p. 5835), which can imply that other activities such as community engagement, liking, and following reinforce brand equity.

Zollo et al. (2020, p. 264) particularly shows that luxury social media marketing influences brand equity the most when consumer have positive digital interactions, showing that especially for luxury brands the level of engagement might be important to determine whether user-generated content or brand-generated content has a positive impact on brand equity.

*H2 Consumer selfies have a stronger positive effect on brand equity than brand selfies do.*

Even though prior research had shown that contemporary marketing makes use of selfies to stimulate brand engagement (Hartmann et al., 2021, p. 1159), the results of this study show that consumer selfies do not have a stronger positive effect than brand selfies on brand equity. As all dimensions of brand equity were observed to be insignificant, H2 has been rejected. This is in line with a prior study by Hartmann et al. (2021, p.1174) which showed that though consumer selfies cause interpersonal communication, they do not necessarily stimulate genuine brand interest. This shows that, even though consumer selfies might be more engaging, they will not necessarily have an impact on how a consumer perceives a brand.

However, selfies were also found to have an insignificant effect on brand equity. This is contrary to previous studies in which researchers state that showing a brand in these pictures influences the customers' everyday experience and interactions on social media, which in turn enhances or confronts brand equity and influences their behavioural intentions (Yu & Ko, 2021, p. 953; Kedzior et al., 2016, p. 1769). Uzunboylu et al. (2020, p. 111) found that overall brand selfies incorporate elements such as a person, product, brand logo, and the photo's background to create a narrative that reflects personal and brand interactions, thereby influencing brand equity. In this research, the manipulation material might not have had enough stimuli to influence brand equity, especially when it comes to a luxury brand segment. Luxury brands rely heavily on their brand equity to keep being perceived as something prestigious, making one Instagram post insignificant to see influences on brand equity.

The level of engagement might also explain why an interaction effect between brand communication and selfies on brand value and reliability was observed. This might be as one post might be more difficult to change a consumer's perception of overall brand image and purchase decision. While the combination of selfies and brand communication could influence brand value and brand reliability more easily.

*H3 User-generated posts have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand-generated posts do.*

Previous research had shown that user-generated content is more trustworthy, credible and reliable than brand-generated content (Choi & Lee, 2017, p. 556; Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). As consumers will find information from other consumers more trustworthy than information spread by brands (Singh & Chakrabarti, 2020, p. 51; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45). However, this research found that user-generated content does not have a

stronger positive effect on trust than brand-generated content, therefore, H3 was rejected. This might show that for luxury brands, it might be more difficult to establish trust through user-generated content. Since, consumers may struggle to develop trust in a luxury brand in the same manner as the brand can with its own product.

This study also shows that brand-generated posts also do not have a significant effect on trust. As discussed before, the quality of the content and the engagement level of the single Instagram posts might not have been enough to influence brand trust. This is because brand trust develops through accumulated experiences and interactions throughout the consumer-brand relationship (Husain et al., 2022, p. 4). It could also be that despite previous research showing that user-generated content is seen as more favourable than brand-generated content, even if sponsored (Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106), the distinction between the two are becoming less clear. Consumers rely heavily on the perceived credibility of a source when forming attitudes toward using user-generated content for decision-making (Demba et al., 2022, p. 144-145). Hence, consumers of luxury fashion goods might need more stimuli to decide whether an Instagram post is credible and, therefore, trustworthy.

*H4 Consumer selfies have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand selfies do.*

Due to the insignificant results, H4 was also rejected. Indicating that consumer selfies do not have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand selfies do. This is opposing previous studies that show that consumer selfies add a human touch to marketing endeavours, elevating the credibility and interaction with brands, especially when featuring individuals (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 116; Lim, 2016, p. 1780). However, while this is found to be the case in these studies, the luxury sector may work differently. Luxury brands rely on selling a prestigious image and lifestyle, this might be conveyed more effectively and trustworthy with only showing the product and not using the consumer's face that may challenge this brand image.

Yet, this research also shows that selfies have no significant effect on trust either. The trust consumers place in a brand reflects their confidence in the brand's ability to meet its commitments, shaping perceptions of reliability, safety, and honesty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). It emphasises consumers' readiness to depend on the capabilities of a brand (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23; Moorman et al., 1992, p. 315). This could explain why for luxury brands using selfies cannot easily influence the trust a consumer has in a brand. Especially, only after observing one Instagram post, as brand trust develops over time through accumulation of experiences and interactions throughout the consumer's journey with the brand (Husain et al., 2022, p. 4).

## 5.2. Limitations

This section delves into the critical aspects of the methodology, offering insights into the selection and refinement of measurement scales, an examination of sample characteristics, and the effectiveness of the manipulation check.

### *Scales*

The original scales of brand equity and trust were used to conduct the survey. After gathering the respondents, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. These resulted in non-identical factors, with some overlapping items. Differences may be found due to the characteristics of the sample population. To gather enough respondents in the given time, the questionnaire was also shared with individuals who are not necessarily interested in the consumption of luxury goods. After the factor analysis, it has become clear that the original scales were aimed at respondents who are somewhat familiar with the brand or the product. However, this was not the case for all respondents as seen in the shopping habits of the sample. Resulting in the new factors grouping other items together. The sample was also very diverse in nationalities, which also could have influenced the way respondents interpreted and responded to the original scale items.

Moreover, the original scales used to measure brand equity and trust might not have been sensitive enough to detect subtle differences. It might also be that the conceptualisation of brand equity and trust have evolved since the original scales were introduced. The original brand equity factors were brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty. However, this study found the factors brand value, brand image, brand reliability, purchase decision. Rather than consumers only having brand awareness and brand associations, they look at a brand in its entirety. Hence, the new factor brand image was found. As for the new factor brand value, this study shows that consumers look at the value for money and the value the brand provides to the world as one. Which is why several items from perceived quality and brand loyalty were combined into this new factor. The same happened for the new factor brand reliability. Which shows that consumer do not only assess brand equity through the value a brand provides, but also look at whether brands act in accordance with the value they claim to provide, proving their reliability. The final new factor purchase decision, showed that even though all other factors are important to brand equity, the willingness of the consumer to purchase from a brand is separate from the value, image, and reliability of a brand. Hence, should be observed separately to measure brand equity. As for the trust factors, reliability and intentionality were changed into brand expectations and customer satisfaction. Which shows that the original scale measures what consumers thought about the brand's reliability and intentionality, while the new factors mix the original items and measure trust based on what consumers expect from the brand and whether this is satisfied. Therefore, the new factors might be more relevant in the current society.

When it comes to the luxury sector, it could be that brand equity and trust are constructed differently as luxury marketing significantly differs from general marketing. The luxury brand sector might have unique characteristics that influence how brand equity and trust emerge. For example, luxury brand often use a strong emotional connection with their costumers to establish trust and brand equity, which is based on exclusivity and rarity (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 257; Arrigo, 2018, p. 658; Jin, 2012, p. 687-688). Moreover, luxury brands are always expected to deliver high quality craftsmanship, which can either make or break the brand equity and trust of a consumer. Luxury brands may also already have high levels of equity and trust, making it difficult to detect additional effects from social media content. Since luxury brands already have an exclusive appeal, which strengthens the perceived value of a brand (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 257; Arrigo, 2018, p. 658; Jin, 2012, p. 687-688).

### *Sample*

The sample could also explain why the overall results have been insignificant and show that there is no difference between the different types of brand communication and selfies on the influence of brand equity and trust.

As seen in the results section, around half of the sample consisted of people not frequently buying or owning luxury fashion goods. If the sample would have consisted of only luxury fashion buyers, there might have been other results. As luxury consumers would be familiar with luxury brands and their unique efforts in establishing brand equity and trust, they might perceive the value, image, reliability, purchase decision, expectations, and customer satisfaction of a brand differently.

Cultural differences could also have influenced the results of this study. As aimed for, this study included participants of a lot of different nationalities. However, this can lead to cultural factors influencing how the Instagram posts were perceived, influencing brand equity and trust. For some cultures, brand-generated posts might have more impact on brand equity and trust than user-generated posts do, and the other way around. As in some cultures, brands might have more authority over consumers than fellow consumers do. While in other cultures, consumers will rather base their perceptions on other consumers' opinion. Moreover, for some cultures, brand selfies might have more impact on brand equity and trust than consumer selfies do, and the other way around. In some cultures, one's appearance may positively influence how they perceive a brand, product, or service. While in other cultures, they might value only seeing products, as someone's appearance might negatively impact their perceptions of brand equity and trust. The varying perceptions could have led to the non-significant results. Still, 42.9% participants have one of the three most common nationalities in this study. The most common one being Dutch, as the study is taking place in the Netherlands. The second and third most common nationality was American and British, which could be explained through the fact that the experiment was shared in English and English-speaking nationals might be more comfortable answering questions that are in their native language. Though,



these three countries vary a lot in cultural perceptions and could still have led to the insignificant results.

### *Materials*

The manipulation was successful for 57% of the participants. This research aimed to have a higher success rate, even though the found results showed no major difference. Yet, it is good to discuss how the rate could have been higher and why the manipulation could have been unclear.

When the material was showcased, the sender of the message was highlighted in the instruction text to emphasise the importance of user-generated and brand-generated content. However, this might have been too difficult to understand. Hence, more information could have been given to instruct the respondent to make note of who has posted the picture and the selfie. This would have made the manipulation more distinct, so they could know that it was intended.

Despite having thorough pretesting, the wording of the manipulation check might have been too ambiguous. The difference between seeing a picture of a woman with a bag, or just a bag might have been hard to differentiate, as the picture of the bag included a hand holding the bag. This shows that the critical differences were not emphasised enough. Consequently, it is important to give extra attention to the manipulation check when doing pre-testing, and make sure the differences are recognisable.

The timing of the manipulation check could have also been the cause of the success rate. It might have appeared too late in the survey, as 35 questions were asked between the manipulation material and the manipulation check. During this time the unfortunate timing could have influenced its effectiveness. Therefore, this highlights the importance to also test this before running the survey, finding the right timing to ask the manipulation questions.

### 5.3 Implications

The findings have several implications for marketers in the luxury sector. First, the ineffectiveness of user-generated and brand-generated posts in influencing brand equity and trust suggests that luxury brands might need to adopt more integrated and engaging social media strategies. Marketers should consider incorporating multiple touchpoints and interactions to build a stronger brand presence online. For instance, integrating community engagement activities, interactive content, and personalised experiences may be better to influence brand equity and trust.

Second, the distinction between different types of content may be less critical than previously thought. Marketers should focus on the overall quality and engagement level of their content rather than categorising it as user-generated or brand-generated content, as the differences might be becoming obscure. This shift could lead to more effective social media strategies that prioritise content and relevance and authenticity.

The findings offer implications for academia as well. Firstly, the results show that luxury brands might need different tactics to build brand equity and trust. Contrary to other sectors, luxury brands might need more than a single social media post to impact brand equity and trust. Therefore, it shows how important it is to investigate consumer engagement and the quality of social media content when researching luxury brands and brand equity and trust.

Secondly, the found interaction effect between social media brand communication and selfies on brand value and brand reliability shows that mixed marketing strategies might have more effect than single strategies. Consequently, it might be more valuable to investigate combined marketing strategies when it comes to brand equity and trust.

#### 5.4 Future Research

For future research, it is recommended to explore the cumulative effects of multiple social media interactions on brand equity and trust over time. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how sustained engagement with social media content influences consumer perceptions and behaviours. Additionally, further research could examine the specific elements of social media content that contribute to its effectiveness in building brand equity and trust, such as the role of visual aesthetics and storytelling. As these are marketing strategies that create a certain narrative for a brand, which might have more impact on brand equity and trust than brand communication and selfies. Examining platform differences, such as the ways consumers interact with brands on Instagram versus other social media platforms, could provide more understanding of the best practices for luxury brand communication across different digital environments. Video formats on Tiktok or Youtube might provide more information to consumers, which might influence brand equity and trust more than a single visual on Instagram.

Moreover, investigating the impact of cultural differences on the perception of luxury brand content could offer valuable insights. Given the global nature of luxury brands, understanding how different cultural contexts influence consumer responses to social media marketing could help tailor more effective, culturally sensitive campaigns. The way people perceive social media brand communication and selfies can differ a lot based on cultural perceptions. In some cultures, brand selfies and brand-generated content might work better, but in other cultures the opposite or a mix of the two might work better. Hence, it is valuable to investigate one certain culture or nationality or comparing multiple cultures and nationalities with each other. Also including samples that are familiar with the luxury segment can accumulate more relevant insights, as these individuals might have different perceptions and engagement levels compared to a general audience.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This study aimed to determine to what extent different forms of brand communication and selfies influence brand equity and trust of luxury fashion brands. This was done through an analysis of user-generated versus brand-generated content and consumer selfies versus brand selfies. Moreover, this paper looked at the possible interaction effects between brand communication and selfies. The results show that the different forms of brand communication and selfies do not influence brand equity and trust of luxury brands. Yet, an interaction effect is found between brand communication and selfies on brand value and brand reliability. This shows that the combination of brand communication and selfies influences two out of four factors of brand equity.

Despite previous research suggesting positive effects of user-generated content and brand equity and trust, the findings of this study revealed no significant differences. This suggests that the perceived boundaries between user-generated content and brand-generated content may be blurring, making it more difficult for consumers to distinguish between the two. Moreover, the results indicated that neither user-generated nor brand-generated content had a significant impact on brand equity. This is contrary to earlier research that highlighted the influence of social media marketing on brand equity (Zollo et al., 2020, p. 258; Godey et al., 2016, p. 5835). One potential explanation is that the content of a single Instagram post may not be engaging enough to impact brand equity, particularly in the luxury sector, in which brand image and consumer perceptions are crucial.

Similarly, consumer selfies did not show a stronger positive effect on brand equity compared to brand selfies. Previous studies indicated that consumer selfies could stimulate brand engagement (Hartmann et al., 2021, p. 1159), but our findings suggest that this engagement does not necessarily translate into enhanced brand equity. Selfies also did not significantly impact brand equity. This may be due to the luxury brand context, where maintaining a prestigious image might be more effectively achieved through more traditional brand efforts or specialised marketing for luxury brands rather than relying on selfies.

Regarding trust, the study found no significant difference between user-generated and brand-generated content. Previous research has shown that user-generated content is generally perceived as more trustworthy (Choi & Lee, 2017, p. 556; Kim & Song, 2017, p. 106; Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2015, p. 45), but this effect was not observed in the luxury sector. This suggests that consumers may find it harder to trust user-generated content related to luxury brands, which often rely on their own content to establish trust. Brand-generated posts also did not significantly affect trust, possibly due to the questionnaire design being insufficient to build trust, which typically develops through accumulated interactions and experiences (Husain et al., 2022, p. 4).

Furthermore, consumer selfies did not have a stronger positive effect on trust than brand selfies, contradicting studies that highlighted the humanising effect of consumer selfies on brand credibility (Uzunboylu et al., 2020, p. 116; Lim, 2016, p. 1780). The luxury sector may require

different strategies to build trust, relying more on the brand-controlled image and less on consumer-generated content.

All in all, it is seen that building brand equity and trust for luxury brands solely through brand communication types and different selfies is challenging. The content of a single Instagram post may not be engaging enough to influence brand perceptions, particularly in the luxury sector, where maintaining a prestigious image often relies on more traditional and controlled marketing efforts. Consequently, the luxury sector may require more comprehensive marketing strategies that emphasise brand-controlled content and lasting consumer interactions to effectively build brand equity and trust.

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## Appendix A

### *Cover Story of the Questionnaire*

Dear respondent,

Thank you for your interest in this research. I am inviting you to fill in a questionnaire. This questionnaire is focused on user-generated content on social media. The purpose of this study is to investigate which type of user-generated content has the most effect on brand equity and trust of luxury fashion brands on Instagram.

The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to fill in. Please answer each question carefully and honestly, as I am sincerely interested in your personal opinions. There are no right or wrong answers.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

All research data remains completely confidential and are collected in anonymous form. We will not be able to identify you. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this research.

#### VOLUNTARY

If you now decide not to participate in this research, this will not affect you. If you decide to cease your cooperation while filling in the questionnaire, this will in no way affect you either. You can cease your cooperation without giving reasons.

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have questions about this research, in advance or afterwards, you can contact the responsible researcher, Bianca Crul, email: [667329bc@eur.nl](mailto:667329bc@eur.nl). This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam. If you want to invoke your rights or if you have a question concerning privacy about this study, you can contact Erasmus University's DPO (Data Protection Officer) at [fg@eur.nl](mailto:fg@eur.nl).

\*If you understand the information above and freely consent to participate in this study, click on the "I agree" button below to start the questionnaire.

I agree

I do not agree



## **Appendix B**

### *Debriefing of the Questionnaire*

Thank you for participating in my study on user-generated content and its impact on brand equity and trust in luxury fashion brands on Instagram. Your valuable input has greatly contributed to my research efforts.

I would like to provide you with some additional information about the study. As part of the experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. Each condition involved exposure to either one type of user-generated content posted by the brand or the user, specifically focusing on selfies/nonselies. Participants in each group were presented with user-generated content featuring luxury fashion items from Dior.

Group A1 was presented with the original picture of a woman holding a Dior bag posted by @hongsuzu. Group A2 saw an edited picture of just an arm holding the same bag, also posted by @hongsuzu. Furthermore, Group B1 was presented with the same original picture of a woman holding a Dior bag, however it was posted by Dior. Group B2 saw the same edited picture of just an arm holding the bag, however it was also posted by Dior. This was done to understand whether selfie or nonselfie user-generated content influences perceptions of brand equity and trust more in luxury fashion brands on Instagram. Moreover, it was done to understand whether the perceptions of brand equity and trust vary whether they are posted by the user or by the brand.

The unedited image that is used is derived from and belongs to @hongsuzu on Instagram.

I sincerely value your participation in my study. If you have any further questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me. I would appreciate it if you could share this questionnaire with others, without spoiling the intention of this experiment.

Thank you,  
Bianca Crul  
667329bc@eur.nl

## Appendix C

### Main Body of the Questionnaire (the red R indicates reversed items)

You will be presented with 4 statements about brand awareness. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree) how much you agree with the statements related to the brand present in the Instagram post: Dior.

\*There are no right or wrong answers.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I have difficulty in imagining this brand in my mind. <b>R</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can recognise this brand among competing brands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand is the only brand recalled when I need to make a purchase decision on the product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand comes up first in my mind when I need to make a purchase decision on the product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

You will be presented with 7 statements about brand associations. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree) how much you agree with the statements related to the brand present in the Instagram post: Dior.

\*There are no right or wrong answers.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The brand's fashion products are made so as to work trouble free.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand's fashion products are safe to use.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During use, the brand's fashion products are highly unlikely to be defective.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can quickly recall the logo of this brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In its status and style, this brand matches my personality.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand is well regarded by my friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be proud to own a product of this brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

You will be presented with 7 statements about brand associations. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree) how much you agree with the statements related to the brand present in the Instagram post: Dior.

\*There are no right or wrong answers.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I consider the company and people who stand behind the brand are very trustworthy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand is well priced.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Considering what I would pay for the brand, I would get much more than my money's worth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider the company and people who stand behind the brand have the expertise in producing the product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this company and people who stand behind the brand are socially responsible.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this company does not take advantage of consumers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this company is contributing to the society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

You will be presented with 4 statements about perceived quality. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree) how much you agree with the statements related to the brand present in the Instagram post: Dior.

\*There are no right or wrong answers.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This brand is of good quality.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can expect superior performance from this brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand is very reliable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand is better as compared to other brands of fashion products in terms of the appearance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

You will be presented with 2 statements about brand loyalty. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree) how much you agree with the statements related to the brand present in the Instagram post: Dior.

\*There are no right or wrong answers.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I will definitely buy this brand of product although its price is higher than the other brands of the product that offer similar benefits.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will not buy other brands, when this brand is available at the store.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

You will be presented with 5 statements about reliability. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree) how much you agree with the statements related to the brand present in the Instagram post; Dior.

\*There are no right or wrong answers.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
With Dior I obtain what I look for in a luxury fashion brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dior is a brand that meets my expectations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confidence in Dior.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dior is a brand that never disappoints me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dior is not constant in satisfying my needs. <b>R</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

You will be presented with 6 statements about intentionality. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree) how much you agree with the statements related to the brand present in the Instagram post; Dior.

\*There are no right or wrong answers.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Dior would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dior would make any effort to satisfy me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could rely on Dior to solve the problem with their fashion product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dior would be interested in my satisfaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dior would compensate me in some way for the problem with their fashion product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dior would not be willing in solving the problem I could have with their fashion product. <b>R</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\*Reflecting on the Instagram post you viewed, please indicate what the predominant element in the Instagram post you viewed was.

- A picture of a bag
- A picture of a woman holding a bag

\*Reflecting on the Instagram post you viewed, please indicate who posted the Instagram post.

- @hongsuzu
- @dior

\*Do you shop for luxury fashion items?

- Yes, regularly
- Yes, occasionally
- No, rarely
- No, never

\*Approximately how many luxury fashion items do you own?

- None
- A few
- Some
- Many
- A lot

\*Have you ever bought a Dior fashion item?

- Never
- A few times
- Sometimes
- Many times
- A lot of times

\*Please indicate your age in whole numbers.

\*To what gender do you identify the most?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

\*What is your nationality?

\*What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Did not attend school
- Primary Education
- Secondary Education / High School
- BA / College
- MA
- Doctorate or professional degree
- Other (please specify)

If you would like to share any other optional comments about this topic, please share them with me in this text box.