

Social media and luxury: A systematic literature review

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Abstract

Luxury, historically an exclusive, rare and elitist phenomenon, is changing. This is predominantly driven by technological developments, particularly social media, and the rising level of consumer empowerment in the marketplace. A maturing stream of research has emerged assessing the effects of social media platforms on luxury brands, offerings and consumers. However, there has been no comprehensive analysis of this extant literature synthesizing the current state of knowledge and postulating future research directions. This paper addresses this gap by utilizing a systematic literature review approach. A total of 115 articles were collected and analysed and five core themes were identified, examining (1) luxury brand strategy, (2) luxury brand social media communications, (3) luxury consumer attitudes and perceptions, (4) engagement and (5) social media's influence on brand performance-related outcomes. These themes are comprehensively explored to understand the myriad impacts of social media on luxury businesses before conceptualizing the themes as a holistic framework explaining social media's role within luxury. The framework developed highlights the fragmented yet progressive nature of research on the confluence of social media and luxury, and signals fruitful avenues for further inquiry. It is proposed that scholarly attention is directed towards multiple lines of inquiry, including social media's role in luxury brand construction online, social media's role in facilitating 'moments of luxury', younger consumers' luxury consumption, as well as the integration of both future innovative technological developments and novel social media platforms within luxury branding.

INTRODUCTION

The continued growth of social media has altered the fabric of business. Change has occurred not only in the format of business communication, but also in consumers' capacity to construct, distribute and consume brand-related messages. This presents a wealth of opportunities and challenges for businesses, particularly the luxury industry. The

democratization of the creation and distribution of business communication, fuelled by the ubiquity of social media, continues to pose pertinent questions for luxury brands striving to preserve a reputation grounded in exclusivity, rarity and uniqueness. To date, a comprehensive review on the role of social media within a luxury context has yet to be conducted. It is the purpose of this paper to synthesize the contributions of scholars within this field,

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explore the current lines of inquiry and propose avenues for future research. We begin with a brief examination of both luxury and social media within academic discourse before describing the review methodology, outlining the article collection process and inclusion criteria. This is followed by a critical analysis and discussion of the scholarly work in the field surrounding five distinct themes: (1) *luxury brand strategy*, (2) *luxury brand social media communications*, (3) *luxury consumer attitudes and perceptions*, (4) *engagement* and (5) *social media's influence on brand performance-related outcomes*. We conclude with proposed research avenues for the advancement of this important topic.

BACKGROUND

Luxury

Definitions of luxury abound and vary in focus between economic and social perspectives (van der Veen, 2003). As a result, there exists a lack of consensus as to what luxury means in both commercial and non-commercial settings, predominantly due to its subjective nature (Kapferer, 1997, 2012; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). Luxury research, including brand use of online technologies (Baker et al., 2018), remains in relative infancy, despite an increase in volume over recent years (Aliyev et al., 2017; Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2017; Stephen, 2020). Extant definitions of luxury have adopted multiple perspectives. For example, a luxury brand has been defined as a branded product or service which is of 'high quality', providing 'authentic value... whether functional or emotional', has 'a prestigious image within the market', is 'worthy of commanding a premium price' and can inspire a 'deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer' (Ko et al., 2019, p. 406). From a consumer perspective, luxury has been defined as a subjective contextual interpretation of a lived experience, as opposed to being embedded within the offering itself (Bauer et al., 2011; Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019). This has led to luxury brand research shifting from a traditional features and benefits approach towards a more emotionally driven paradigm (Atwal & Williams, 2009) congruent with social media, which is driven by similar experiential imperatives (Huang et al., 2018).

Social media

The term *social media* has taken on multiple meanings and remains open to interpretation, given the dynamic nature of these online environments; however, in a broad sense it refers to online platforms which facilitate inter-

action among users, including the creation and distribution of information, content and ideas (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A stream of research investigating social media's role within business, particularly marketing and management, has since emerged (Alves et al., 2016; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). These platforms have accentuated a disruption in the power relations between brands and consumers, due in no small part to the velocity at which information can be exchanged among individuals (Pantano, 2021), constituting a profound challenge to traditional branding theory and practice (Leitch & Merlot, 2017). Social media research remains inherently susceptible to the ever-changing technological environment, given the accelerated rate of innovation and user adoption; however, an incongruity exists as the volume of empirical studies across the branding literature is low (Hollebeek et al., 2014), a surprising discrepancy given previous calls that the novel complexities of these new technologies warrant investigation (Felix et al., 2017).

Research has adopted both a consumer perspective, through the investigation of consumer attitudes and behaviour towards brands' social media activities, and a firm-level perspective, in proposing how brands can extract the maximum value from these platforms (Alves et al., 2016). Prior studies demonstrate social media's ability to satisfy brand objectives, such as growing sales, increasing brand awareness, enhancing brand image, stimulating traffic to brand websites and fostering communication and interactivity through the creation and sharing of user-generated content (UGC) (Felix et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2016; Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Some brands seek to utilize social media to create and nurture relationships with customers, employees, communities and other stakeholders, while others may simply employ such platforms as additional information push outlets, with comparatively little relationship building (Felix et al., 2017). Such varied approaches may be attributed to a lack of understanding of the most effective ways to utilize these platforms (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). This reality seems to have transferred to academic research, given the relatively low volume of studies taking a managerial perspective into the impact of digital communications on firm performance (Alves et al., 2016; Leeftang et al., 2014).

Within a non-luxury setting, magazine readers exhibited more positive reactions to advertisements once they also found the stories contained within the magazine engaging (Malthouse et al., 2007). Similarly, TV viewers were found to have more positive feelings towards the advertisements shown during a commercial break once they also had positive feelings about the programme itself (Coulter, 1998). These findings raise interesting questions in examining the effectiveness of embedding social media marketing content within the broader advertising environment.

Social media and luxury

Early luxury brand research portrays the internet as an unavoidable evolution, posing both threats and opportunities for organizations. For example, while social media platforms offer increased opportunities for brand–consumer interaction, they are not seen as a substitute for the on-site purchasing experience within stores or ‘temples of luxury’ (Riley & Lacroix, 2003, p. 103). Given assertions that luxury communication remains more emotional than informational (Okonkwo, 2010), effective communication via social media poses a challenge (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015). Early adoption examples include Louis Vuitton’s utilization of Facebook as a means of sharing its catwalk presentations with fans (Kapferer, 2012), while Perrey and Spillecke (2012) discussed Burberry’s venture into the Chinese social media sphere via the launch of a 24-h customer service facility through online instant messaging services. Such efforts remain especially pertinent, given the predominantly young demographic of social media usage (Liu et al., 2019b; We Are Social, 2021) and the importance of this market in maintaining luxury brand equity, even if they currently do not yet have the means to purchase luxury products or services (Kapferer, 1998).

APPROACH TO THE REVIEW

The objective of this review is to investigate existing scholarship, develop a conceptual framework and identify directions for future research in the luxury and social media domain (Jones & Gatrell, 2014). We employ a systematic review approach (Tranfield et al., 2003) in collecting and analysing the prominent research themes across the literature pertaining to these areas. The collection of literature consisted of two stages. Firstly, in October 2019, multiple academic databases were searched using the string < ‘luxury’ AND ‘social media’ > within the *title*, *abstract* and *keyword* fields (Bocconcelli et al., 2018). These relatively broad terms were chosen to identify as many potentially relevant articles as possible within the initial search results, before a manual removal process of non-relevant literature was conducted. No specific timeframe for publication was applied, due to the relative novelty of social media research. Further filters, where applicable, were applied to limit search results to English-language, peer-reviewed academic journal articles, excluding books, chapters, conference proceedings and non-refereed publications (Calabrò et al., 2019). Only full-length articles which offered original conceptual or empirical insights were deemed suitable for the study (Keupp et al., 2011; López-Duarte et al., 2015), omitting editorials or special issue introductions. Additionally, only publications listed

within either the Australian Business Deans Council Journal List (ABDC, 2018) or the Chartered Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Guide (AJG, 2018) were included in the review, to further ensure relevance to the business discipline (Nguyen et al., 2016; Ott & Michailova, 2018).

The second stage of the collection process involved a consultation of the articles’ abstracts to confirm suitability for the review, before a more thorough analysis of the article was conducted. To further ensure comprehensiveness of the review, one final consultation with the reference lists within the accepted articles enabled identification of any literature not initially gathered via the database search process (Baldacchino et al., 2015; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). This was supplemented by an online search of articles which had cited the chosen articles, to locate more recent research which may also have been missed. This process was then repeated in January 2021 to check for any articles which had been published since the original literature search, to ensure the review was as current as possible and to update the publication dates of articles in press. A final total of 115 articles are included in this review, identified in the References by an asterisk (Soundararajan et al., 2018). Table 1 illustrates the final number of articles collected from the various databases, with their publication title and year depicted in Table 2. This volume of articles is indicative of the recent rise in academic attention paid to these literature streams; Alves et al.’s (2016) analysis of social media research totalled 44 articles, while a recent review into sustainable luxury marketing totals 46 articles (Athwal et al., 2019b). Key points of information from all articles were then entered into an Excel spreadsheet to quickly identify and remove any duplicate results and to carry out a descriptive analysis of the accepted articles (see Tables 4–7 later in the Discussion).

The methodologies and sampling strategies employed were quite varied. Given the somewhat predictable coupling of both online and offline-based data collection methods across the literature, it is prudent to divide this discussion into subsections examining each of the most prominent methodologies in turn and how they were implemented.

METHODOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Survey methods

The most common data collection method (31% of articles) was the use of survey methods. While the vast majority of these (86%) were conducted online, there were some which used intercept methods. Such an approach facilitates a

TABLE 1 Number of publications on social media and luxury

| Database | Results from query | Duplicates/rejected articles | Accepted articles |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| EBSCOhost* | 288 | 235 | 53 |
| Scopus | 213 | 171 | 42 |
| Web of Science | 219 | 212 | 7 |
| ScienceDirect | 34 | 27 | 7 |
| Manual inclusion | – | – | 6 |
| Total | 754 | 645 | 115 |

*List of individual databases searched within EBSCOhost is included in Appendix A.

TABLE 2 Number of publications by journal and year of publication

| Journal | Articles | Year | Articles |
|---|------------|--------------|------------|
| <i>Journal of Business Research</i> | 20 | 2021 | 5 |
| <i>Journal of Global Fashion Marketing</i> | 14 | 2020 | 41 |
| <i>Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management</i> | 6 | 2019 | 23 |
| <i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i> | 5 | 2018 | 10 |
| <i>Journal of Product & Brand Management</i> | 4 | 2017 | 9 |
| <i>Journal of Interactive Advertising</i> | 4 | 2016 | 8 |
| <i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i> | 4 | 2015 | 4 |
| <i>Marketing Intelligence and Planning</i> | 4 | 2014 | 7 |
| <i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i> | 4 | 2013 | 2 |
| <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> | 3 | 2012 | 3 |
| <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> | 3 | 2011 | 2 |
| <i>Journal of Marketing Communications</i> | 2 | 2010 | 1 |
| <i>Psychology & Marketing</i> | 2 | – | – |
| <i>Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing</i> | 2 | – | – |
| <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics</i> | 2 | – | – |
| <i>Cornell Hospitality Quarterly</i> | 2 | – | – |
| <i>Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management</i> | 2 | – | – |
| <i>Journal of Strategic Marketing</i> | 2 | – | – |
| <i>Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal</i> | 2 | – | – |
| Other* | 28 | – | – |
| Total | 115 | Total | 115 |

*For convenience, 'Other' represents publications contributing a single article to the review.

quantitative exploration of factors such as social media usage and behaviour (e.g. Chen et al., 2021b; Ha et al., 2019; Martín-Consuegra et al., 2019), attitudes towards social media marketing and advertising (e.g. Chu et al., 2013; Godey et al., 2016; Xie & Lou, 2020), brand perception (e.g. Farrag, 2017; Park et al., 2020), brand–consumer relationships (e.g. Bazi et al., 2020; Kefi & Maar, 2020) and purchase intention (e.g. Kim & Lee, 2019; Morra et al., 2017; Mou et al., 2019).

Netnography

Given the vast array of data publicly available on social media, netnographic techniques (Kozinets, 2010) were predictably prominent throughout the reviewed articles. A key advantage in adopting such techniques includes convenience of access, with the significant volume of existing online data providing ample research opportunities for scholars. Further, it eliminates the partial element of bias

in providing an overview of actual approaches taken by luxury brands on social media, rather than a reliance on reported practices and anecdotal evidence from practitioners and consumers. A popular subset, especially among more recent publications, was an analysis of brand attitudes through social media content (e.g. Blasi et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021a), as well as user reviews and subsequent response strategies by management on related platforms (e.g. Chang et al., 2020; Jang & Moutinho, 2019; Schuckert et al., 2019), particularly in the hospitality industry.

Experimental design

Studies incorporating experimental designs were primarily concerned with consumer attitudes and behaviour towards branded social media content under specific conditions. For example, multiple studies employed either genuine, amended or fictitious social media content in investigating constructs such as brand attitudes (e.g. Park et al., 2020), attitudes towards social media advertising (e.g. Choi et al., 2020; Venus Jin et al., 2019), consumer attention (e.g. Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014), advocacy behaviours (e.g. Kwon et al., 2017) and users' experience-sharing habits (e.g. Liu et al., 2019b).

Interviews

Studies adopting interviews as their primary data collection method incorporated both managerial and consumer perspectives. Lines of inquiry included exploration of the nature of consumers' relationships with luxury brands on social media, including brand co-creation and destruction (Quach & Thaichon, 2017), brand satisfaction (Athwal et al., 2019a), purchasing behaviour (Jain & Schultz, 2019) and social media engagement (Leban et al., 2020; Pentina et al., 2018; Ramadan et al., 2018).

From a managerial perspective, interviews provided exploratory insights into luxury brand use of social media marketing (Taylor et al., 2015) and inquiry into the management of the luxury consumer purchase process (Jain & Schultz, 2019). Further types of informants also included influencers who can occupy a form of middle ground between brand and consumer and seek to reconcile both luxury consumption and an ethical lifestyle (Leban et al., 2021). Overall, interviews are a relatively underutilized method of data collection among studies in this area.

Case studies

Case studies facilitate a deeper dive into the complex nature of luxury brands rather than mere surface-level

observations (Beverland, 2005) and are a commonly used method for exploration of an underdeveloped topic (Annie Jin, 2012; Essamri et al., 2019). In terms of industries, the fashion sector has proven the most popular, with brands such as Louis Vuitton (Annie Jin, 2012), Coach (Ng, 2014), Dolce & Gabbana (Atwal et al., 2020; Pantano, 2021), Burberry (Phan et al., 2011; Straker & Wrigley, 2016), Calvin Klein and DKNY (Kontu & Vecchi, 2014) all being examined, although the luxury hospitality and motor industries are also included (Essamri et al., 2019; Qian et al., 2020).

Sampling

As Table 3 illustrates, most studies (88%) have been conducted across North America, Europe and Asia, predominantly (77%) based within either the fashion or tourism/hospitality sectors, illustrating a rather narrow industry focus of inquiry to date. While this indicates a growing maturity of luxury research within these industrial and geographical contexts, it also illuminates some underexplored areas which may be of interest to scholars moving forward.

An interesting context underpinning the research themes was the examination of younger Millennial and/or Generation Z consumers as the research sample. While there seem to be differing opinions on the start and end points for the birth of the Millennial generation, Bolton et al. (2013) adopt the criteria of being born between 1981 and 1999, with Generation Z consumers being born thereafter. Millennial consumers have been steady buyers of luxury, accounting for 35% of consumption in 2019, set to rise to 45% by 2025 (D'Arpizio et al., 2020). This generation has been described as 'online community builders' (Salman et al., 2016, p. 138), with a strong predisposition to use social media to create, consume and distribute content (Maz-zucchelli et al., 2018; Zollo et al., 2020). Multiple studies included university student participants, due to their level of access to online technologies (Kamal et al., 2013), heavy social media usage (Morra et al., 2017) and the influence such platforms can have on their purchasing behaviours (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). Some studies did not explicitly target university students, however they were aimed at the Millennial age group; for example Quach and Thaichon (2017) described two-thirds of their sample as being aged between 23 and 35, while over half of the respondents in Prentice and Loureiro's (2018) study were 18–35 years old. This generation is now approaching a point in their lives whereby they are seeking affordable upgrades from conventional brands, as well as tastefulness and youthfulness (Wang & Qiao, 2020), signifying their importance to the future direction of the industry.

TABLE 3 Location of research and industry contexts

| Location | Articles | Industry | Articles |
|--------------------|------------|---------------------|------------|
| Europe | 36 | Fashion | 62 |
| Asia | 33 | Tourism/hospitality | 26 |
| North America | 32 | General | 16 |
| Multiple locations | 10 | Multiple industries | 5 |
| Australia | 4 | Jewellery/beauty | 4 |
| Not disclosed | 2 | Vehicles | 1 |
| – | – | Wine | 1 |
| Total | 115 | Total | 115 |

INDUCTIVE ANALYSIS

Once the articles to be included in the review were finalized, a thematic analysis facilitated the grouping of the examined studies into categories depending on their central focus of inquiry and contribution (Clarke et al., 2012). The objective of this process was to inductively identify themes which depict the role of social media within the luxury domain for the purposes of developing a conceptual model to position social media within luxury brand strategy (Wood & McKelvie, 2015). This involved the authors individually consulting each of the articles in their entirety and compiling notes on their findings and contributions, eliminating potential bias (Athwal et al., 2019b). The goal of a general inductive analysis approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the dominant themes inherent in raw data and to establish clear and transparent links to such themes, with the end goal to develop a model about the underlying structure of experiences or processes evident in the data (Thomas, 2006). The authors remained in regular consultation and thoroughly discussed the examined articles, before arriving at a consensus regarding the major over-arching themes (Baron et al., 2014).

FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

A total of five distinct themes were identified pertaining to the organizational contexts in which luxury and social media were being investigated through the literature, which serve as the central pillars for our conceptual framework: *brand strategy*, *luxury brand social media communications*, *luxury consumer attitudes and perceptions*, *engagement* and *social media's influence on brand performance-related outcomes*. Among the articles examined, it became apparent that several studies' central focus and contribution permeated throughout multiple themes, thus our proposal of an integrative, holistic framework of

social media and luxury, demonstrating each theme's level of maturation within the literature. These factors are visually represented by the interlocking gears between each theme, while the size of the gears represents the volume of studies primarily pertinent to each theme (Figure 1).

As Figure 2 shows, the volume of research examining social media and luxury has been steadily increasing from a flat level in the early 2010s to a rising trend from 2017 onwards across all emergent themes. While the volume of social media-centric research continues to rise generally (Alves et al., 2016; Voorveld, 2019), its role within a luxury context is becoming a particularly popular avenue of academic inquiry (Arrigo, 2018), further emphasizing the need for our conceptual framework of social media's role within luxury brand management. As only five 2021 articles were published at the time of this review, these were omitted from Figure 2 due to incomplete data, although they are included in the tabular depictions of themes in the Discussion section.

We posit, as our following discussion will elaborate, that the brand's overall strategy will inform and guide the subsequent integration of social media communications in the overall media mix (Voorveld, 2019), while also contributing to consumer attitudes and behaviours towards the brand (Choi et al., 2020). These factors will act as antecedents of sustained levels of engagement with consumers (Liu et al., 2021), impacting brand performance-related outcomes (Jang & Moutinho, 2019). Our discussion will critically analyse these individual theoretical elements, as well as explore the existing *linkages* bridging the individual themes collectively informing the luxury and social media literature.

Theme 1: Brand strategy

The first thematic area examines social media platforms' integration into luxury brand strategy, consisting of 15 articles (Table 4). Of these 15 articles, 5 relate purely to

TABLE 4 Brand strategy overview

| # | Reference | Focus of inquiry | Theme links | Industry | Methodology | Sample |
|----|------------------------------------|--|-------------|------------------|---|---|
| 1 | Phan et al. (2011) | Re-branding strategy | – | Fashion | Case study | Burberry |
| 2 | Reyneke et al. (2011) | Brand visibility | – | Wine | Secondary data | Social media presences |
| 3 | Rishi and Gaur (2012) | Strategic challenges faced by brands | – | Hotels | Focus groups, interviews, netnographic (net) content analysis | Management, academics, consumer reviews |
| 4 | Heine and Berghaus (2014) | Brand strategy and communications | COM | Fashion | Semi-structured interviews | Management |
| 5 | Gibbs et al. (2015) | HR strategy | – | Hotels | Online survey | HR management |
| 6 | Lee and Watkins (2016) | Vlog strategies and perception | CAP | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 7 | Chen and Wang (2017) | Social media (SM) strategy and consumer perception | CAP | Fashion | Net content analysis, interviews | Brands' WeChat accounts, consumers |
| 8 | Slivar and Bayer (2017) | Referral and affiliate marketing strategies | – | Hotels | Netnographic content analysis | Websites, consumer reviews |
| 9 | Baker et al. (2018) | Digital adoption strategy | COM | Five categories* | Net content analysis | Online presences |
| 10 | Proctor and Kitchen (2019) | Celebrity endorsement strategy | COM | Jewellery | Literature review | N/A |
| 11 | Yu et al. (2019) | Branding strategies | – | Fashion | Case study | Aimer Group |
| 12 | Yu and Hu (2020) | Celebrity endorsement strategy and consumer perception | CAP | Fashion | Net content analysis, experiment | Social media presences, consumers |
| 13 | Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) | Strategic success factors of influencers | CAP | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 14 | Song and Kim (2020) | Effectiveness of celebrity endorsements | CAP | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 15 | Leban et al. (2021) | Influencer personas and brand identity strategy | COM | General | Interviews, net content analysis | High-net-worth influencers |

*Baker et al. (2018, p. 37) examined luxury brands across the categories of 'automobiles, fashion, jewellery, watches, and yachts'.

COM indicates linkage with Theme 2: *social media communications*.

CAP indicates linkage with Theme 3: *consumer attitudes and perceptions*.

FIGURE 1 Theoretical framework

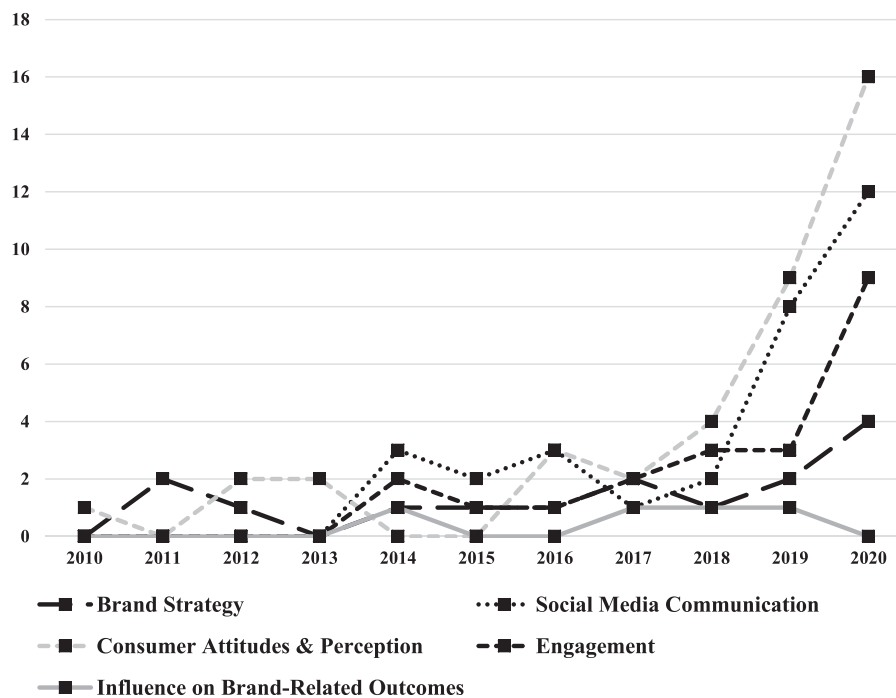
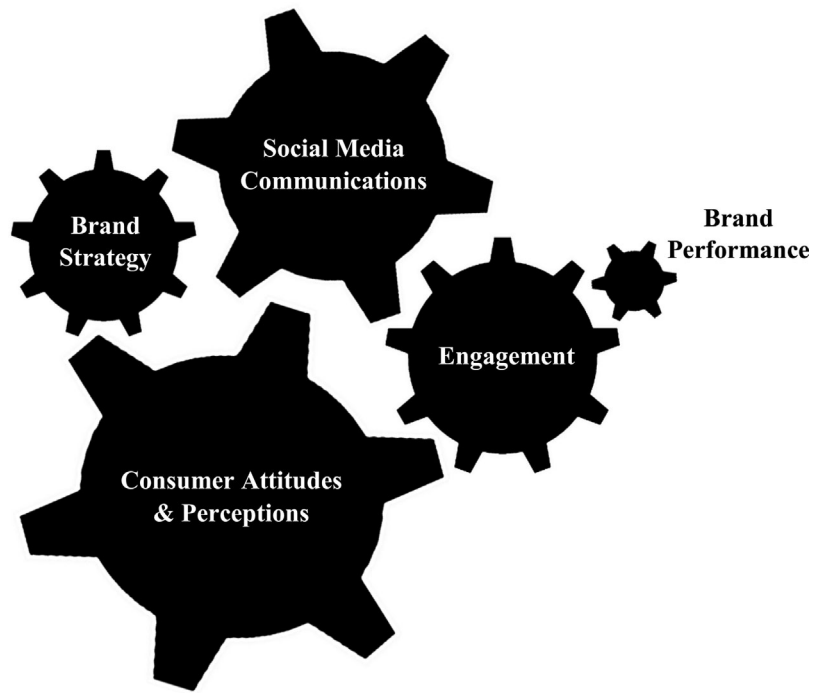


FIGURE 2 Number of publications across themes by year

brand strategy, while 10 demonstrate linkage or interplay with other emergent themes, as noted. Integration of online platforms into the overall strategy of a luxury brand requires the involvement of top-level management (Heine & Berghaus, 2014) and thus far they have been relatively slow, even fearful, adopters (Kapferer, 2015; Okonkwo, 2009), as questions remain on exactly how such technologies may be used to preserve a luxurious brand aura and

offer a reflective customer service experience (Baker et al., 2018). Existing research in the field points towards a lack of coherent and clearly defined social media strategies from luxury brands (Reyneke et al., 2011), as well as an absence of in-depth case studies examining luxury branding strategy in emerging markets (Yu et al., 2019). Social media provides brands with the means to engage with consumers directly, with the specificities of each platform

facilitating innovative brand-building approaches online (Chen & Wang, 2017; Lee & Watkins, 2016), with the goal for luxury brands being to drive offline consumer activities (Chen & Wang, 2017). However, television remains the dominant segment in terms of media spend for luxury brands (30.2% of total budget) (Statista, 2018). The optimal traditional/digital media spending mix is generally taken to be 3:1 in favour of traditional media channels, with strong potential for synergistic benefits being accrued from effective utilization of both formats (Findley et al., 2020). In terms of quality of exposure, television advertising is as effective today as it was 30 years ago; however, obtaining that quality exposure is more challenging. This is coupled with the increase in multi-device usage and 'distracted viewing' (Findley et al., 2020), emphasizing brands' need for omnichannel approaches to harness the reciprocal nature of contemporary luxury brand-consumer relationships (Anido Freire, 2014).

Online branding strategies can encompass both tangible and intangible dimensions, with tangible dimensions encompassing product integrity, brand signature and premium pricing, coupled with intangible qualities including exclusivity, experience and stakeholder commitment (Yu et al., 2019). Global brand-building strategies online often necessitate the promotion of a lifestyle, rather than simply selling a product (Yu et al., 2019), a task made easier by already-established brand recognizability and awareness (Slivar & Bayer, 2017). Luxury products embody either technical or symbolic luxury, depending on their representation of either high-class performance or hedonistic elements (Reddy & Terblanche, 2005). The quality of a luxury brand's online presence should reflect its products, ensuring brand consistency (Phan et al., 2011), especially across diverse cultures (Yu & Hu, 2020).

There seems to be conflicting evidence as to whether luxury brands should engage in highly interactive, community-building approaches on social media or else seek to maintain a sense of psychological distance from consumers to preserve an aura of exclusivity. The nature of luxury offerings acts as a key determining factor in the level of relationship-building adopted by luxury brands on social media. As Athwal et al. (2019a) suggest, Millennials are the first generation to utilize technology across the entire customer journey, which has been a motivating factor behind luxury brands' adoption of social media and in developing innovative strategies (Chu et al., 2013; Kim & Ko, 2010). However, perhaps contradicting the inherent sociable and interactive nature of these platforms, Millennial users have been found to be widely accepting of the more distant approach taken by luxury brands on social media, such as publishing content without seeking interaction with users (Athwal et al., 2019a). In fact, value perceptions can decrease if psychological distance

is not maintained and if the brand is viewed as being too accessible (Park et al., 2020). Instead, luxury brand social media strategy must be to portray an 'aspirational dream', incorporating exclusive behind-the-scenes access and content through their social media presences. It is this perceived accessibility, rather than actual interaction, which fulfils the affective and cognitive needs of Millennials (Athwal et al., 2019a; Xie & Lou, 2020). The next subsection explores our second theme, *social media communications*, which is followed by another subsection where the interplay between these themes is explored.

Theme 2: Social media communications

The second theme adopts a *brand communications* perspective to luxury and social media, a generally underutilized approach in the literature (Zhou et al., 2020). Table 5 provides an overview of the 31 articles in this theme. Social media marketing activities are segmented into five dimensions: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word-of-mouth (WOM) (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012), although this conceptualization has been challenged based on WOM being categorized as a behavioural outcome and therefore omitted from recent work (Cheung et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). Studies have highlighted the role of these five dimensions in generating brand and customer equity (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012) and predicting user interaction (Cheung et al., 2021), although effective customization efforts prove especially challenging in such public fora (Liu et al., 2021). Social media research often focuses more on content, rather than message, driven by factors such as channel, source and message characteristics (Voorveld, 2019; Wang & Chen, 2020), with luxury brand recognition and trust shaped by both content attributes and consumer characteristics (Venus Jin & Ryu, 2020). For example, 'classical' aesthetics, such as symmetry and clarity, are more frequently utilized by luxury fashion brands over 'expressive' aesthetics, which are more creative and complex in nature. However, user interactions were more numerous among content adopting expressive aesthetics (Kusumasondjaja, 2020).

The creation of meaning and desire remains pivotal in luxury communication for brands (Gurzki et al., 2019). Visual showcasing of classical non-personal luxury characteristics, including heritage and speciality, remain central to brands' social media communications (Lee & Youn, 2020; Maman Larraufie & Kourdoughli, 2014; Wang et al., 2020) and have been found to elicit a stronger consumer affect than personal dimensions such as hedonism and the extended self (Mandler et al., 2019). Conversely, communication of non-luxury elements such as sustainability, a growing element of luxury (Athwal et al., 2019b;

TABLE 5 Social media communication overview

| # | Reference | Focus of inquiry | Theme links | Industry | Methodology | Sample |
|----|--|--|-------------|---|----------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Daugherty and Hoffman (2014) | eWOM in SM communications | CAP | Cars and restaurants | Experiment | Consumers |
| 2 | Maman Larrauffe and Kourdoughli (2014) | Use of e-semiotics in SM communications | – | Fashion | Net analysis | Websites |
| 3 | Ng (2014) | Social media communications | CAP | Fashion | Case study | Coach |
| 4 | Cervellon and Galipienzo (2015) | Effect of different appeals in brands' SM communications | CAP | Hotels | Experiment | Facebook content |
| 5 | Taylor et al. (2015) | SM communications | CAP | Hotels | Interviews, online survey | Management, consumers |
| 6 | Salman et al. (2016) | Support for cause-related events | CAP | Fashion | Online survey and experiment | Consumers |
| 7 | Üçok Hughes et al. (2016) | Story-giving in communications | CAP | Jewellery | Case study | Tiffany & Co. |
| 8 | Wu et al. (2016) | SM communications | – | Hotels | Net content analysis | Twitter and Sina Weibo content |
| 9 | Gautam and Sharma (2017) | Impact of social media on purchase intentions | CAP | Fashion | Field survey | Consumer |
| 10 | Morra et al. (2017) | Impact of SM communications on purchase intent | CAP | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 11 | Huang et al. (2018) | Narrative persuasion in SM communications | CAP | Hotels | Online survey | Consumers |
| 12 | Atwal et al. (2019) | Consumer-generated communications | CAP | Restaurants | Diary research, focus group | Consumers |
| 13 | Alrawadieh and Dincer (2019) | Managerial response strategies | – | Hotels | Net content analysis | Consumer reviews |
| 14 | Athwal et al. (2019a) | Gratification sought by users from SM communications | CAP | Fashion | Net content analysis, interviews | Brands' social media accounts, consumers |
| 15 | Ha et al. (2019) | Effectiveness of SM communications | CAP | Fashion and hotels | Online survey | Consumers |
| 16 | Liu et al. (2019a) | SM communications and user perception | CAP | Fashion | Multiple case studies | Managers, consumers and brands' WeChat content |
| 17 | Schuckert et al. (2019) | Managerial review response strategies | CAP | Hotels | Net content analysis | Consumer reviews |
| 18 | Mandler et al. (2019) | Success drivers of luxury SM communications | CAP | Fashion, vehicles, cosmetics, champagne | Net content analysis, experiment | Brands' Facebook content, consumers |

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

| # | Reference | Focus of inquiry | Theme links | Industry | Methodology | Sample |
|----|--------------------------|--|-------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 19 | Mazzoli et al. (2019) | Brand associations in SM communications | - | Fashion | Net content analysis | Twitter content |
| 20 | Choi et al. (2020) | Consumer evaluation of SM communications | CAP | Fashion | Experiment | Consumers |
| 21 | Chung et al. (2020) | E-service and communications via chatbots | CAP | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 22 | Jiang et al. (2020) | Masculinity in luxury brand SM communications in China | CAP | Fashion | Net content analysis | Instagram and Weibo |
| 23 | Kusumasondjaja (2020) | Role of aesthetics and modality in responses to Instagram content | CAP | Fashion | Net content analysis | Instagram content |
| 24 | Kong et al. (2021) | Link sustainability communications to eWOM and purchase intent | CAP | Fashion | Experiment | Consumers |
| 25 | Lee and Youn (2020) | Effect of social distance embedded in SM content | CAP | Fashion | Experiment | Consumers |
| 26 | Passavant et al. (2020) | Use of digital channels for luxury brand marketing communications | - | Fashion, accessories, vehicles | Multi-case study | Five brands |
| 27 | Septianto et al. (2020) | Emotional appeals embedded in communications by sustainable brands | CAP | Fashion | Experiment | Consumers |
| 28 | Venus Jin and Ryu (2020) | Effectiveness of various forms of Instagram content | CAP | Fashion | Experiment | Consumers |
| 29 | Wang and Chen (2020) | Self-presentation and interactivity in SM communications | CAP | Fashion | Experiment | Consumers |
| 30 | Wang et al. (2020) | Luxury brand communications on Twitter vs. Weibo | - | Fashion | Net content analysis | Twitter and Weibo content |
| 31 | Zhou et al. (2020) | Narrative strategies by influencers in creating eWOM | CAP | Fashion | Net content analysis | Influencers' Weibo and WeChat content |
| 32 | Jiang et al. (2020) | Masculinity in luxury brand SM communications in China | CAP | Fashion | Net content analysis | Instagram and Weibo |

CAP indicates linkage with Theme 3: *consumer attitudes and perceptions*.

Septianto et al., 2020), could be perceived as deceptive if claims are made in vague and unverifiable ways in their content (Kong et al., 2021).

Communication and response strategies on review platforms, such as TripAdvisor, provide insights into the approaches of luxury brands online, although there seems to be no broadly applicable strategy to respond to online reviews. Luxury hotel guests seem to value more in-depth, lengthy responses rather than shorter, concise messages (Schuckert et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2017). Such findings would concur with the previously mentioned assertion by Phan et al. (2011) of an expectation from consumers of superior levels of quality across all aspects of the luxury brand experience, including online communications from both brands and clients, implying less emphasis on a sales-driven communication focus in favour of a social media strategy that emphasizes relationship building (Taylor et al., 2015).

Research surrounding luxury brand–consumer communications on social media remains fragmented, with limited guidance on how exactly luxury brands can design effective strategies (Mandler et al., 2019). While the premise of social media accentuates the role of the user at its core, luxury brands must strike a balance between fostering relationships with their online audiences while preserving control over the central message being communicated. Consumers expect high-quality content and communication from luxury brands, reflective of the quality and status of the brand itself (Chung et al., 2020). While some researchers have endeavoured to explore the effectiveness of the various dimensions of social media marketing (i.e. Cheung et al., 2021; Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Liu et al., 2021), there remains scope for further inquiry regarding the antecedents and anticipated outcomes for luxury brand communication on social media. The challenge therein for luxury brands remains developing an effective social media communications strategy which effectively resonates with the diverse segments of the audience, while also mirroring their strategic brand values and desired consumer image and perception. Further examination of luxury brand strategy and how it informs both social media communications and consumer perception is offered in the following *linking themes* section, to understand how social media can enhance brand–consumer relationships.

Linking brand strategy and social media communications

Discussion of the interplay between the theoretical implications of the review themes serves to further illustrate the integrative nature of our proposed framework and iden-

tify the most pertinent areas where future research can further contribute to its development. Brand–consumer dialogue on social media fosters personal relationships, with storytelling a key method in communicating brand vision and identity (Heine & Berghaus, 2014). An important consideration in online communications strategy is whether to engage in a branding-only approach online or to incorporate sales tactics; for example, highly seasonal luxury products are more suited to a direct sales-driven approach (Baker et al., 2018). However, reliance on a uni-directional model of branding is problematic, given the increased influence of contributions from consumers and online communities in luxury branding (Essamri et al., 2019; Phan et al., 2011). Conversely, products that experience lower sales volume and are less fashion-sensitive, such as yachts, benefit from a more brand-building, relationship approach (Baker et al., 2018).

In highlighting the inevitability of a co-created process of brand formulation and communication, Üçok Hughes et al. (2016) recommend that luxury brands foster and nurture connections with their online audience by encouraging consumers to share their own brand stories as a means of strengthening community engagement (cf. Essamri et al., 2019; discussed further in Theme 4). Social media facilitates such interactions, yet the diverse nature and normative structure of individual platforms, and cultural diversity of online communities, indicate a lack of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach for brand communications (Jiang et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2016). Marketers must understand users’ motivations for sharing brand-related stories and identify commonalities among these narratives to inform their own strategies (Üçok Hughes et al., 2016).

A recent trend in strategic social media communications has been the delegation by brands of transmission of their message to third parties, such as influencers. These individuals have created their own personal brand and garnered a following on social media, leading to opportunities for collaboration with luxury brands (Leban et al., 2021; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). Influencers utilize a variety of narrative strategies in their social media communications, characterized as advising, enthusing, educating, appraising, amusing and assembling (Zhou et al., 2020). This typology from Zhou et al. (2020) provides critical distinctions in influencer-driven eWOM generation strategies on social media, given that influencers command their own message, rather than just serve as vehicles for communications wholly controlled by the brand. User–influencer interaction increases luxury brand perception and purchase intention once the brand community feels a close association with the influencer (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Such strong associative ties are not felt by consumers towards the pairing of brands and more traditional celebrities, given their tendency to

endorse multiple brands and products (Song & Kim, 2020). Establishing closeness can be achieved through influencers' conspicuous displays of ethicality in their luxury consumption and lifestyle, thereby retaining legitimacy as positive role models (Leban et al., 2021). This feeds into the notion that trustworthiness and attractiveness are more important factors than actual expertise in determining the effectiveness of influencers (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). However, uncertainty still exists amongst practitioners about the use of influencers (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). For example, any negative perception of the influencer can also be transferred to the brand they are representing (Campbell & Warren, 2012). Therefore, luxury brands should ensure the appropriateness of the individual endorsing the brand (Proctor & Kitchen, 2019), as well as the narrative approach (Zhou et al., 2020), to maximize the effectiveness of influencer campaigns.

The next subsection will analyse our third theme, *consumer attitudes and perceptions*, before exploring linkages between the *brand strategy* and *consumer attitudes and perceptions* themes, followed by the linkages between the *social media communications* and *consumer attitudes and perceptions* themes.

Theme 3: Consumer attitudes and perceptions

The largest theme in this review (37% of total articles; see Table 6) examined the *attitudes and perceptions of consumers* towards luxury brands on social media, reflecting Anido Freire (2014), who notes that most researchers have focused on this area. While consumers' satisfaction with a social media presence is a positive predictor of a favourable brand attitude (Annie Jin, 2012; tom Dieck et al., 2017), marketers and consumers appear to be at an impasse regarding what constitutes luxury on social media, as not all content is interpreted equally across user groups (Castellano & Khelladi, 2016; Chen et al., 2021a). Luxury brands should not only adopt social media platforms in their branding activities, but also endeavour to understand the personal motivations of users in engaging with luxury brands' online communities to maximize the effectiveness of these efforts (Zollo et al., 2020) and avoid the aforementioned negative effects on value perception that a decrease in psychological distance can incur (Park et al., 2020). Social media platforms have been found to elicit positive effects on a variety of consumer outcomes, including perception (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Lee et al., 2018), reputation (Castellano & Khelladi, 2016), awareness, image, loyalty (Godey et al., 2016), exclusivity (Xie & Lou, 2020) and romance (Beig & Khan, 2020), but can also

foster negativity, even hate, towards brands (Atwal et al., 2020; Pantano, 2021).

Luxury managers have adjusted their brand appeals to be more congruent with how consumers seek to express themselves (Choi et al., 2020), although the literature remains divided on the link between the individual's virtual and actual self on social media (Wallace et al., 2020). For example, social media use is a significant predictor of materialism (Kamal et al., 2013), which is associated with conspicuous consumption whereby individuals are more likely to display brands more aligned with their ideal self than their actual self on social media (Wallace et al., 2020). Conversely, in a collectivist Chinese context, consumers engage in more inconspicuous displays of luxury consumption in their own social media content. This contributes to the individual's self-image while preserving interpersonal relationships by avoiding ostentatious displays and possibly attracting negative comments (Chen et al., 2021b).

While most research has focused on the positive effects of social media on consumer perceptions of luxury brands, the proliferation of such platforms can inevitably lead to negative sentiment being shared online, although this is largely absent in the luxury brand literature (Pantano, 2021). Two papers by Atwal et al. (2020) and Pantano (2021) examine the negative consequences of Dolce & Gabbana's 2018 advertising campaign in China, which reinforced certain stereotypes about Chinese people and culture, leading to calls to boycott the brand and the cancellation of its impending fashion show (Atwal et al., 2020). While examining the same case, both studies offered novel contributions to the literature through an illustration of the potentially rapid diffusion of negative sentiment on social media (Pantano, 2021), as well as the anti-consumption behaviours, or brand hate, exhibited by social media users (Atwal et al., 2020).

Consumer attitudes are investigated by brands on social media through sentiment analysis of multiple forms of UGC, especially online reviews. While potentially costly, time-consuming and vulnerable to self-selection and recall bias, sentiment analysis provides naturalistic insights into brand performance (Philander & Zhong, 2016). It has been highlighted as an effective way of harnessing real-time information in evaluating client opinion and perception of brands (Philander & Zhong, 2016), as consumers perceive UGC and eWOM as trustworthy sources of information (tom Dieck et al., 2017). While early research investigated the informational value of online reviews for users, more recent inquiry has been directed to exploring the hedonic side of review evaluation (Hlee et al., 2019). Such content can also effectively capture the tangible elements of predominantly intangible luxury experiences, such as hotel amenities and dining (Giglio et al., 2020; Mou et al.,

TABLE 6 Consumer attitudes and perceptions overview

| # | Reference | Focus of inquiry | Theme links | Industry | Methodology | Sample |
|----|--------------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Kim and Ko (2010) | SM and customer relationships | COM | Fashion | Field survey | Consumers |
| 2 | Annie Jin (2012) | Consumer satisfaction with brands' SM presence | COM | Fashion | Online survey | Louis Vuitton |
| 3 | Kim and Ko (2012) | SM and customer relationships | COM | Fashion | Field survey | Consumers |
| 4 | Chu et al. (2013) | Consumer attitudes to SMM | COM | General | Online survey | Consumers |
| 5 | Kamal et al. (2013) | Materialism's impact on attitudes | COM | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 6 | Castellano and Khelladi (2016) | Influence of reputation, image and SM on e-reputation | STR | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 7 | Godey et al. (2016) | Influence of SM strategy on brand equity and response | COM | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 8 | Philander and Zhong (2016) | Sentiment on SM | – | Hotels | Net content analysis | Hotel tweets |
| 9 | Farrag (2017) | Brand attitudes, purchase intentions | – | Fashion | Interviews, field survey | Managers, consumers |
| 10 | tom Dieck et al. (2017) | Acceptance of SM | – | Hotels | Interviews, online survey | Consumers |
| 11 | Charoennan and Huang (2018) | Impact of conspicuous consumption on brand attitudes | – | Fashion | Literature review | N/A |
| 12 | Helal et al. (2018) | Impact of SM on brand perception | – | Fashion | Online survey, interviews | Consumers |
| 13 | Lee et al. (2018) | Effect of visual complexity on brand perceptions | STR | Fashion | Online experiment | Consumers |
| 14 | Mazzucchelli et al. (2018) | Consumer UGC's effect on loyalty | – | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 15 | Chu et al. (2019) | Attitudes and response to SM advertising | COM | General | Literature review | N/A |
| 16 | Gunasekar and Sudhakar (2019) | Attitudes towards online reviews | – | Hotels | Net content analysis | Consumer reviews |
| 17 | Hlee et al. (2019) | Impact of content richness and source credibility in reviews | – | Restaurants | Net content analysis | Consumer reviews |
| 18 | Jain and Schultz (2019) | Digital platform use across the purchasing cycle | – | General | Focus groups, observation, interviews | Consumers, managers |
| 19 | Kim and Lee (2019) | Brand community integration's effect on attitudes and loyalty | ENG | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |

(Continues)

TABLE 6 (Continued)

| # | Reference | Focus of inquiry | Theme links | Industry | Methodology | Sample |
|----|-------------------------|--|-------------|-----------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 20 | Liu et al. (2019b) | Sharing of experiences affecting intention | – | Tourism | Experiment | Consumers |
| 21 | Mou et al. (2019) | Role of SM on intention to purchase | – | Hotels | Online survey | Consumers |
| 22 | Venus Jin et al. (2019) | Consumer attitudes towards celebrity endorsements | – | Fashion | Experiment | Consumers, influencers |
| 23 | Atwal et al. (2020) | Development and spread of brand hate on SM | COM | Fashion | Case study | Dolce & Gabbana |
| 24 | Beig and Khan (2020) | Role of SM in building brand romance | COM | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 25 | Blasi et al. (2020) | Perceptions of eco-friendliness in fashion brands | COM | Fashion | Net content analysis | Twitter content |
| 26 | Chang et al. (2020) | Sentiment analysis via hotel reviews | – | Hotels | Net content analysis | Consumer reviews |
| 27 | Chung and Kim (2020) | Effects of mergers and acquisitions on luxury brand loyalty | STR | Fashion | Experiment | Consumers |
| 28 | Eastman et al. (2020) | Students' relationships with luxury brands | COM | General | Collage method, interviews | Consumers |
| 29 | Giglio et al. (2020) | Consumer perception of luxury hotel brands | STR | Hotels | Net content analysis | Consumer reviews |
| 30 | Kim and Phua (2020) | Consumer responses to empowerment hashtags | COM | Cosmetics | Experiment | Consumers |
| 31 | Qian et al. (2020) | Comparison of self-positioned vs. perceived image | STR | Hotels | Case study | Upper House Hotel |
| 32 | Wallace et al. (2020) | Conspicuous virtue signalling on SM | – | General | Online surveys | Consumers |
| 33 | Wallace et al. (2020) | Consumers' self-congruence with luxury fashion brands | – | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 34 | Wang and Qiao (2020) | Meaning and perception of luxury-lite brands | COM | General | Focus groups, net content analysis | Consumers, Sina Weibo content |
| 35 | Wu and Gao (2020) | Investigate emotional experiences within service interaction | – | Hotels | Net content analysis | Consumer reviews |
| 36 | Xie and Lou (2020) | Perceived value of luxury content | COM | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |

(Continues)

TABLE 6 (Continued)

| # | Reference | Focus of inquiry | Theme links | Industry | Methodology | Sample |
|----|----------------------|--|-------------|-----------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 37 | Zollo et al. (2020) | Role of brand communities in building brand equity | ENG | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 38 | Chen et al. (2021a) | Young male consumers' perception of luxury advertising | - | General | Interviews, net content analysis | Consumers, Sina Weibo content |
| 39 | Chen et al. (2021b) | Low-key behaviour on social media | COM | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 40 | Cheung et al. (2021) | SM driving brand-related activities | COM | Cosmetics | Online survey | Consumers |
| 41 | Feng et al. (2021) | Negative effects of positive reviews | - | Hotels | Online survey | Consumers |
| 42 | Pantano (2021) | Viral effect of negative stereotypes leading to brand hate | COM | Fashion | Case study | Dolce & Gabbana |

COM indicates linkage with Theme 2: social media communications.

ENG indicates linkage with Theme 4: engagement.

STR indicates linkage with Theme 1: brand strategy.

2019). Luxury brands should encourage and amplify positive reviews and comments (Gunasekar & Sudhakar, 2019; tom Dieck et al., 2017), especially given the role of reviews and subsequent interactions in the emotional experience of hotel guests (Wu & Gao, 2020). However, this should be encouraged on platforms with a lesser capacity for social comparison, such as TripAdvisor, rather than more personal platforms, such as Facebook. Due to the perceived similarity between peers on these more personal platforms, a review of a luxury hotel may trigger envious emotional and behavioural responses, resulting in decreased purchase intentions towards that hotel brand (Feng et al., 2021).

The following *linking themes* sections serve to synthesize how the literature has examined bridging luxury brand strategy and social media communications with the resultant impact on perception and attitudes.

Linking brand strategy and consumer attitudes and perceptions

Luxury brands have thus far struggled to transfer the luxury in-store experience online (Holmqvist et al., 2020b; Maman Larraufie & Kourdoughli, 2014), a critical factor in retail as the strength of the salesperson–customer relationship elicits a significant positive effect on both purchase decision and customer satisfaction with their purchase (Kim et al., 2010). When a luxury brand improves the quality of its social media activities, it increases brand equity and intention to purchase (Morra et al., 2017). While it could potentially represent a dilution or loss of brand identity, UGC presents an opportunity for the brand to evolve and adapt to changing market perceptions, tastes and preferences (Mazzoli et al., 2019).

Linking social media communications and consumer attitudes and perceptions

Limits remain in our understanding of consumer attitudes towards luxury brands on social media, particularly negative attitudes. Different aspects of this theme have been investigated within the context of social media content and communication; however, the literature remains devoid of a holistic theory examining the effects of luxury brand communications on consumer attitudes, perceptions and behaviour. The mode of communication, including types of social media and content features, exhibit varying influences on consumer perceptions. Findings from Farrag (2017) indicate experiential needs as being the most important factor influencing attitude towards luxury brands, further emphasizing the need for a shift away from a

traditional to a more experiential luxury communications strategy (Batat, 2019), particularly when targeting younger consumers (Eastman et al., 2020). Within social media, this could equate to content offering backstage insights, legacy narratives or craftsmanship imagery (Xie & Lou, 2020), with image and video being more effective content forms in influencing reputation (Castellano & Khelladi, 2016). Although evidence has been found supporting multiple social media marketing dimensions' effectiveness in luxury brands' social media activities (Kim & Ko, 2012; Liu et al., 2021), entertainment has the highest influence in building and influencing luxury brands' social media presence (Beig & Khan, 2020). It is also the best predictor of social media users consuming and contributing to brand-related content, while interaction is the best predictor of users creating their own content for brands (Cheung et al., 2021).

If users are unfamiliar with a brand, a higher level of visual complexity in content has a greater effect on increasing luxury perception (Lee et al., 2018), while users already familiar with a brand perceive a simpler image as emitting a greater sense of luxury. This can be linked to findings within traditional media settings; in high-involvement contexts, a more novel and unexpected approach from advertisers results in increased encouragement to process advertising stimuli across TV and print (De Pelsmacker et al., 2002). As luxury goods are considered high involvement (Kim et al., 2010; Lin, 2012), this raises the question as to the appropriateness of simply translating traditional advertising techniques online rather than moulding the brand strategy to align with the contextual nuances of individual social media platforms. Benefit-based appeals in content have been found to have a greater effectiveness than attribute-based appeals, facilitating expression of user beliefs and values (Choi et al., 2020), whereas more luxury brand-conscious users are more likely to have favourable attitudes towards promotional content (Chu et al., 2013).

The following section examines Theme 4, *Engagement*, before exploring how the literature links luxury brand social media communications and customer attitudes and perceptions with engagement.

Theme 4: Engagement

Excellence and quality in luxury products are no longer sufficient in a contemporary context; luxury brands must also offer a rewarding and engaging customer experience, which social media can facilitate (Batat, 2019; Bazi et al., 2020). Research has taken an inconsistent approach to conceptualizing digital consumer engagement (Liu et al., 2021; Pentina et al., 2018), yet it remains a strategic imperative for brands (Quach & Thaichon, 2017) consisting of cognitive,

affective and behavioural dimensions (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Within a luxury and social media context, the topic shows a high rate of growth in publication volume among the themes examined in this study. While 20% of articles in this review occupied the engagement theme, 61% of these have been published since 2019 (Table 7). Recent evidence illustrates that social media marketing activities exhibit significant positive effects on engagement (Liu et al., 2021), highlighting a greater sense of psychological ownership of luxury brand interactions by consumers (Kim et al., 2016), which is more easily facilitated by social media over more traditional channels. Despite these trends, studies remain predominantly qualitative in nature and lack direct observation of resultant engagement behaviours (Liu et al., 2021). This is particularly significant as digital engagement remains highly dependent on the individual social media platform (Voorveld et al., 2018) and the distinctiveness of luxury brands implies it may be problematic to assume motivations for engagement remain the same as for non-luxury brands (Bazi et al., 2020).

Overall, the volume of research on consumer engagement continues to grow since its evolution into the brand- and consumer-related literatures (e.g. Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014) and, coupled with the opportunities for further social media-focused inquiry (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016), represents a potentially rich source of future research. Much of the current research surrounding social media and engagement is centred around the behavioural outcomes of social media strategies. This has led to the proposal of typologies of social media community members based on their capacity and motivation to interact with and contribute to the brand and the brand community (Ramadan et al., 2018), as well as development of process frameworks detailing the co-creation of luxury brand identity (Essamri et al., 2019). The following *linking themes* sections will further explore the bridging of the theoretical contributions of this theme with those of Theme 2: *social media communications* and Theme 3: *consumer attitudes and perceptions*.

Linking social media communications and engagement

While luxury brands may have originally seemed reluctant to embrace the democratization of online platforms (Oliveira & Fernandes, 2020), and some remain largely inactive (Aydin, 2020), others are now leading this process through engaging content marketing strategies (Kontu & Vecchi, 2014), creating an ongoing two-way dialogue with consumers (Quach & Thaichon, 2017). In fact, consumers who are more likely to talk about luxury brands on social media are also more likely to purchase them (Park et al.,

TABLE 7 Engagement overview

| # | Reference | Focus of inquiry | C, A, B* | Theme links | Industry | Methodology | Sample |
|----|--------------------------------|---|----------|-------------|----------|------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Dhaoui (2014) | Social media marketing as a driver of engagement | B | CAP | General | Content analysis | Brands' Facebook content |
| 2 | Kontu and Vecchi (2014) | Behavioural engagement with brand content | B | COM | Fashion | Case study | Burberry, Calvin Klein, DKNY |
| 3 | Parrott et al. (2015) | Engagement as a construct of advocacy | B | CAP | Fashion | Content analysis | Online forums |
| 4 | Straker and Wrigley (2016) | Building engagement through online experiences | C, A, B | COM | Fashion | Case study | Burberry |
| 5 | Kwon et al. (2017) | Brand advocacy behaviours | B | CAP | Fashion | Experiment | Female consumers |
| 6 | Quach and Thaichon (2017) | Engagement as a driver of co-creation | C, A, B | CAP | Fashion | Interviews | Consumers |
| 7 | Pentina et al. (2018) | Social media engagement behaviour's role in co-creation | B | – | Fashion | Interviews | Consumers |
| 8 | Prentice and Loureiro (2018) | Behavioural engagement as an antecedent of well-being | B | CAP | Fashion | Field survey | Consumers |
| 9 | Ramadan et al. (2018) | Understanding social media followers to build engagement | C, A, B | CAP | General | Interviews | Consumers |
| 10 | Burnasheva et al. (2019) | Impact of sense of community and identity on brand love | C, A, B | CAP | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 11 | Essamri et al. (2019) | Brand communities co-creating brand identity | C, A, B | STR | Vehicles | Case study | Aston Martin |
| 12 | Martín-Consuegra et al. (2019) | Relationship between involvement, interaction and behavioural intention | C, A, B | CAP | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |

(Continues)

TABLE 7 (Continued)

| # | Reference | Focus of inquiry | C, A, B* | Theme links | Industry | Methodology | Sample |
|----|-------------------------------|---|----------|-------------|----------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 13 | Aydin (2020) | Factors influencing engagement with brand content | B | COM | Hotels | Content analysis | Facebook content |
| 14 | Bazi et al. (2020) | Drivers of consumer engagement with luxury brands | C, A, B | CAP | General | Semi-structured interviews | Consumers |
| 15 | Giakoumaki and Krepapa (2020) | Influence of self-concept on engagement with brands' content | B | COM, CAP | General | Experiment | Consumers |
| 16 | Kefi and Maar (2020) | Influence of content forms on engagement | C, A, B | COM | Fashion | Online survey | Consumers |
| 17 | Koivisto and Mattila (2020) | Role of UGC in experiential marketing | B | CAP | Fashion | Content analysis | Louis Vuitton event |
| 18 | Leban et al. (2020) | SM users' lurking practices' impact on content consumption | B | COM | General | Interviews | Consumers |
| 19 | Nyadzayo et al. (2020) | Drivers of brand engagement that enhance loyalty and WOM | C, A, B | CAP | General | Online survey | Consumers |
| 20 | Oliveira and Fernandes (2020) | Drivers and outcomes of consumer engagement on Instagram | C, A, B | CAP | General | Online survey | Consumers |
| 21 | Park et al. (2020) | Impact of engagement on luxury value | C, A, B | CAP | Fashion | Experiments | Consumers |
| 22 | Liu et al. (2021) | Impact of social media marketing on behavioural engagement | B | COM | Fashion | Content analysis | Brands' Twitter content |
| 23 | Park et al. (2021) | Role of luxury perception in engagement in SM WOM and purchase intent | B | CAP | General | Online survey | Consumers |

*Engagement dimensions examined: C = cognitive; A = affective; B = behavioural.

STR indicates linkage with Theme 1: *brand strategy*.

COM indicates linkage with Theme 2: *social media communications*.

CAP indicates linkage with Theme 3: *consumer attitudes and perceptions*.

2021). Incorporating entertaining, interactive and trendy elements into social media communications has a significant positive effect on behavioural engagement (Liu et al., 2021), while similar conclusions have been drawn from the examination of hedonic, informative and celebratory dimensions in communications (Aydin, 2020; Kefi & Maar, 2020).

Brands are now strongly recommended to include greater interactivity as a central social media objective to not only increase engagement between brand and consumer, but also between consumers (Martín-Consuegra et al., 2019; Straker & Wrigley, 2016) who perceive luxury items as sources of self-differentiation (Parrott et al., 2015). Regardless of the level of interaction, luxury brands can still benefit from these user-to-user exchanges and facilitate these through providing content which provides value for users (Heine & Berghaus, 2014). These interactions can either help or hinder the brand, due to their potential virality and subsequent positive or negative associations (Pentina et al., 2018). These interactions add value by facilitating potential relationships among the online brand community (Phan et al., 2011). This experience of belonging has been found to enhance brand love within online communities (Burnasheva et al., 2019). This is of particular importance within a luxury context, as fulfilling an emotional experience for consumers relies not only on consumption of the offering itself, but all engagements (Straker & Wrigley, 2016).

Linking consumer attitudes and perceptions and engagement

Social media users have a propensity to include brands as a part of how they view themselves, affecting both their propensity to engage (Giakoumaki & Krepapa, 2020; Oliveira & Fernandes, 2020) as well as repurchase and advocacy behaviour (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). Consumer motivation for engaging with luxury brands on social media encompasses elements such as content relevancy, brand–customer relationships, hedonic, socio-psychological, brand equity and technological factors (Bazi et al., 2020). Straker and Wrigley (2016) discuss Burberry's use of digital channels in building engagement with consumers, stating that interactions facilitated online allow users to reflect on their own identities and engage in social integration (Giakoumaki & Krepapa, 2020). Luxury brands can even induce an ideal, dream-like state through their social media content, in what Bazi et al. (2020) term 'brand ethereality', bridging the imagination gap between brands and consumers.

However, it is not just the content, but its intended audience as well as platform characteristics which are also key

to engagement (Pentina et al., 2018). Ramadan et al. (2018) propose six forms of social media follower: three customer and three non-customer groups. The non-customer groups, *pragmatists*, *bystanders* and *trend-hunters*, while lacking the means to purchase luxury brands, exert a varying level of willingness to interact with these brands on social media. Both active and passive participation represent key drivers of a strong brand–consumer relationship (Kefi & Maar, 2020), with various forms of lurking practices also posing opportunities for luxury brands to develop a desire for luxury products through these secondary audiences (Leban et al., 2020). Some users will remain passive, observing those who are more active, whereas others actively promote and defend the brand, acting as product experts (Parrott et al., 2015).

Users who feel that they will gain self-enhancement benefits from engaging in brand advocacy behaviours are more likely to do so (Kwon et al., 2017). The customer groups, *image seekers*, *passionate owners* and *prime consumers*, all purchase from luxury brands yet engage differently on social media (Ramadan et al., 2018). For example, *image-seekers* associate luxury brands with status, success and self-improvement, and therefore exert maximum effort to make luxury purchases. In contrast, *prime consumers*, while possessing the means to purchase from luxury brands, merely perceive such luxuries as part of their adopted lifestyle and would not view such purchases as being as luxurious or significant as other consumers might. From an active participation perspective, reciprocity of exchange has been found to be an influencing factor in consumer–brand interactions (Kefi & Maar, 2020). The most active brand advocates on social media seek to develop a deeper, long-term connection with the brand by engaging in behaviours such as incorporating a brand name into their online username (Parrott et al., 2015).

While the volume of studies within the current review adopting a service-dominant logic perspective (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) is low, it nonetheless provides insight into the shifting dynamic surrounding value creation within luxury (Holmqvist et al., 2020a). Many facets of brand value are no longer created solely by marketers, but increasingly are influenced and co-created by consumers (Grönroos, 2011). However, it remains the responsibility of the brand to understand and adhere to the norms of interaction, community rules and consumer needs on these platforms (Phan et al., 2011). Co-creation of the luxury brand experience encapsulates all interactions between a variety of parties, including the brand, staff, customers and other stakeholders, such as online communities; engagement remains key to value creation (Nyadzayo et al., 2020; Quach & Thaichon, 2017). Current literature outlines co-creative processes in luxury brand identity development. Essamri et al. (2019) posit *nurturing*, *bridging* and

TABLE 8 Brand performance-related outcomes overview

| # | Reference | Focus of inquiry | Theme links | Industry | Methodology | Sample |
|---|--------------------------|---|-------------|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Blal and Sturman (2014) | Review volume and valence's role on revenue | – | Hotels | Secondary data | STR Global data |
| 2 | Xie et al. (2017) | Review response impact on revenue | ENG | Hotels | Net content analysis | Consumer reviews |
| 3 | Kim and Chae (2018) | Social media's impact on revenue | ENG | Hotels | Secondary data, net content analysis | Annual reports, Twitter content |
| 4 | Jang and Moutinho (2019) | Promotions' effect on consumer spending | – | Hotels | Net content and revenue analysis | Consumer reviews, hotels' data |

ENG indicates linkage with Theme 4: *engagement*.

partnering as bi-directional identity co-creation processes which capture the symbiotic roles of brands and online communities. This experience of belonging, achieved through accumulation of a sense of community and social identity, can increase feelings of brand love among online users (Burnasheva et al., 2019). While nurturing aims to raise the desirability of the brand and encourage aspirations of ownership, bridging seeks to bring the internal and external sources of brand identity meanings together to generate synergistic value between these inputs. Partnering, finally, is demonstrated through ongoing coordination by brand and community, sharing this co-created brand identity and meaning through marketing activities and UGC (Essamri et al., 2019).

Theme 5: Brand performance-related outcomes

The final theme examines social media's influence across varying indicators of business performance (Table 8). Totalling just four articles, this branch of luxury social media research remains wholly underserved, limiting our understanding of the tangible benefits of social media for luxury brands. Despite the growing levels of social media adoption within the industry, questions remain as to the impact that such investment is having on actual business performance (Kim & Chae, 2018). Further inquiry is certainly warranted, given consumers' incorporation of social media at various stages of the luxury purchase cycle, yet consumer preference remains for luxury purchases to be made in-store (Jain & Schultz, 2019). Current research in the area remains largely fixed on the hospitality industry, perhaps due to the industry having a higher rate of social media usage (Kim & Chae, 2018). While it is generally acknowledged that positive reviews are important for hotel brands, the importance of such high ratings is even greater for luxury hotels (Blal & Sturman, 2014). A high volume of reviews may suggest to potential visitors that the

hotel's experience is not associated with exclusivity (Blal & Sturman, 2014). However, contradictory findings from Kim and Chae (2018) depict a positive association between both eWOM levels and customer engagement on revenue. Price promotions are also negatively perceived by luxury consumers, diminishing their consumption and damaging brand credibility (Jang & Moutinho, 2019).

Given that the current generation of consumers utilize digital platforms across multiple stages of the consumer journey (Athwal et al., 2019a; Jain & Schultz, 2019), our understanding of the most effective means of promoting such positive outcomes through social media content strategies remains limited. Future research can continue to bridge the findings discussed in previous themes regarding brand strategy, social media communications, consumer attitudes and behaviour, engagement and brand performance through a holistic examination of luxury brand social media strategies and the resultant outcomes for the brand and brand community.

Linking engagement and brand performance-related outcomes

Despite the low volume of research seeking to attribute social media activities to sales generation and consumer spending, there were a couple of instances linking Themes 4 and 5. Kim and Chae (2018) found a positive association between social media use (encompassing both eWOM and customer engagement dimensions) and hotel performance. Being a resource-intensive activity, building customer engagement through generation of original messages, responses to UGC and general sharing of relevant content will require more investment than simply relying on eWOM (Kim & Chae, 2018). Providing timely, lengthy responses to online reviews is important for luxury hotels, with responses specifically from front-line managers, rather than executive staff, being more effective (Xie et al., 2017). However, as previously mentioned, a high volume of

reviews can negatively impact perceived exclusivity (Blal & Sturman, 2014) while continuous interaction, by its nature, decreases psychological distance which can lessen value perceptions among consumers (Park et al., 2020). Further research into the diverse nature of luxury services (i.e. hospitality) and the effect of brand–consumer engagement for luxury product and luxury service brands on revenue generation and consumer spend can further strengthen this link between Theme 4: *engagement* and Theme 5: *brand performance-related outcomes* in our model.

FUTURE LUXURY AND SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH AGENDA

As represented by the upward trend in publication volume depicted in Figure 2, current gaps within the literature—as well as ongoing technological innovation and development and changing consumer preferences—paint luxury theory as a vibrant prospect for further inquiry (Aliyev et al., 2017; Chu et al., 2019; Cristini et al., 2017). Our theoretical framework and subsequent discussion outline the key contributions in this field to date, highlighting social media as a process, rather than an isolated activity, within a luxury context, encompassing multiple thematic elements. We propose the following areas of research to deepen our understanding of social media's role within luxury and further develop this theoretical framework.

Luxury brand strategy

The involvement of top-level management is required to successfully implement and manage digital channels in luxury brand strategy (Heine & Berghaus, 2014), particularly a participatory leadership style to effectively work with consumers and other stakeholders through the value co-creation process (Essamri et al., 2019). While luxury brand strategy is technically limited to their target market, the symbolic nature of luxury brands often permeates throughout wider society (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Future endeavours can build on the work of Üçok Hughes et al. (2016) and Essamri et al. (2019) where, due to the increased role of consumers in brand construction, the impact of democratization in content creation is ripe for further exploration in the context of contemporary luxury brands. For example, Gurzki et al. (2019) posit enrichment, distancing and abstraction as key factors for brands looking to construct luxury narratives through advertising and call for further inquiry to examine this typology's application to the social media context. However, the increased role of third parties, such as influencers, in this regard requires further inquiry (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2015). Contemporary luxury brand construction has been acknowledged to

involve multiple stakeholders rather than just the brand itself (Essamri et al., 2019), however, this remains an under-researched area, especially as 73% of luxury brands employed some form of influencer marketing in 2017 and a further 15% had plans to adopt influencer marketing over the subsequent 12 months (Statista, 2018). A review of social media communications also calls for an increased focus on influencers (Voorveld, 2019), who are more relatable than traditional celebrities as brand advocates in a social media setting (Venus Jin et al., 2019). Luxury brands need to shift the brand narrative to a more community-focused approach (Üçok Hughes et al., 2016), with current inquiry already investigating these narrative approaches by influencers (Zhou et al., 2020). Within a social media context, this evolving brand–consumer relationship dynamic and transfer of power provides an interesting avenue for further luxury research. Such an investigation could complement the typology of Ramadan et al. (2018), exploring in what ways and capacities each category of social media follower influences luxury brand construction.

Luxury services

Another stream of research warranting wider investigation across all elements of the framework is the marketing of luxury services on social media (Stephen, 2020; Wirtz et al., 2020). While the need for additional inquiry into luxury service perceptions and quality dimensions has already been highlighted (Aliyev et al., 2017), our review further amplifies this call for increased research into the social media marketing approaches of luxury service brands. Social media provides an environment where users can exchange service experiences with other users while also interacting with service brands directly (Swani et al., 2021), and further investigation into the luxury services context is warranted. As Table 3 depicts, nearly a quarter of the review articles examined luxury service brands, specifically within the tourism and hospitality sector, reflecting its status as a leading luxury industry sector. Luxury services are defined as 'extraordinary hedonic experiences that are exclusive whereby exclusivity can be monetary, social and hedonic in nature, and luxuriousness is jointly determined by objective service features and subjective customer perceptions' (Wirtz et al., 2020, p. 682). Luxury is derived from the experience of a luxurious service setting (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2019), yet further scope exists for scholars to examine how such luxury experiences may be embedded within social media strategies and the consequences on user perceptions and value co-creation (Holmqvist et al., 2020a).

Previous research in advertising has outlined the role of culture in the use of emotional or rational advertisement strategies in services marketing (Albers-Miller & Stafford,

1999), yet this remains under-researched in luxury services (Wirtz et al., 2020). A recent industry report outlines how nearly half of all consumers, including most Millennials, indicated a preference for luxury experiences over products (Boston Consulting Group, 2017; Eastman et al., 2020). One industry potentially well-suited to a growth in attention is luxury restaurants. While social media users posting food-related content has become a global phenomenon, the volume of research into the implications of such behaviour for luxury restaurant brands remains scant. Within a non-luxury setting, publication of food-related content can positively influence consumers' dining experiences and brand evaluations (Zhu et al., 2019), yet the extant literature remains largely devoid of investigations on such behaviours within a luxury setting.

User-generated content

The role of UGC informing brand strategy across social media platforms continues to pose both an opportunity and a challenge for brands (Park et al., 2021; Yadav & Pavlou, 2014). How can such content be leveraged into existing strategies while still preserving that luxury aura surrounding the brand? Can amateur social media content help luxury brands through a more inclusive community structure which could improve brand–consumer relations and encourage further UGC creation? Or would it in fact hinder, even possibly dilute, luxury perceptions through a perceived loss of exclusivity brought about by such an approach? As outlined in this review, several studies (e.g. Heine & Berghaus, 2014; Huang et al., 2018; Schuckert et al., 2019) have endeavoured to investigate the current content marketing and communications approaches of luxury brands on social media and their effectiveness, yet a more concerted research focus into the most effective methods of incorporating luxury elements into the varying forms of digital content which appeal to online users warrants attention. Further comprehensive examination of the role and influence of social media platforms across the entire luxury purchasing cycle would provide invaluable insight for marketers and managers in maximizing the effectiveness of their communications strategy at the different touchpoints of the consumer journey (Jain & Schultz, 2019).

Technological development

Additionally, while the articles examined in this study highlight the absence to date of luxury research incorporating technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality and artificial intelligence, the growth of these areas within

marketing provides an interesting pathway for future luxury brand communications research (e.g. Morillo et al., 2019; Rauschnabel et al., 2019). The success of AI service agents, for example, is predicated on the customer feeling that they have received communication quality befitting a luxury brand (Chung et al., 2020). Luxury fashion brands, for instance, may utilize such technologies to convert events into purely virtual occasions for online consumption (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). Specific foci of interest may include ephemeral content, such as Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok stories, given their inherent perishability and therefore rarity and popularity among younger consumers. Posting purchases on social media significantly increases consumers' perceived impact of purchases on themselves and interpersonal relationships, which increases happiness (Duan & Dholakia, 2017). Such behaviour can be linked to Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899/1979), involving individuals' public display of wealth to accumulate status, however previous work has already highlighted a varied desire by users from diverse cultures to engage in such loud or discreet brand displays (Chen et al., 2021b; Wallace et al., 2020). Further research examining implications for the varying forms of luxury consumer (e.g. Han et al., 2010) and social media follower (Ramadan et al., 2018) is yet to be carried out.

Young consumers

A study by Statista (2018) describes that 42% of consumers aged 18 to 26 use social media as the leading source of new luxury brand discovery, while older cohorts rely more on word-of-mouth and print. Another segment of luxury consumers, slightly older than Millennials, are known as HENRYs (High-Earners-Not-Rich-Yet), who are aged, on average, 43 years old with an income above US\$100,000 and also exhibit high levels of digital literacy and as such are heavily influenced by modern technology in their purchasing decisions (Deloitte, 2019). Future research could investigate how online platforms and communities influence social comparison and stimulate luxury desirability among young consumers, in the same way as traditional media does for older consumers (Mandel et al., 2006).

Linked to the previous subsection, technological innovations will continue to facilitate consumers' identification and location of offerings most suited to their individual needs. However, some Generation Z consumers have indicated concern regarding the potential impact that such a reliance from brands on technology will have on interpersonal relationships and job security in the future (Priporas et al., 2017). While viewing themselves as critical actors in

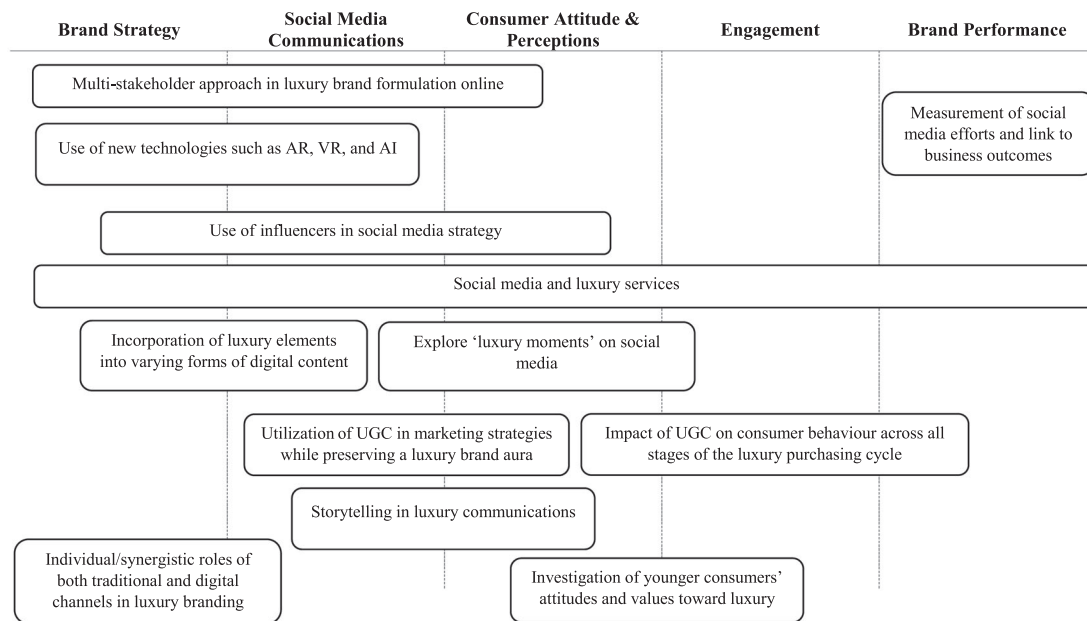


FIGURE 3 Avenues for future research

the co-creation of creativity and conversation with luxury brands, Generation Z consumers supplement online connections with in-store visits to engage on a more intimate and emotional level with luxury brands (D'Arpizio et al., 2020). Future research should seek to comprehensively understand consumer attitudes towards luxury brands' online presence, while more accurately tying these factors to subsequent offline intentions and behaviours. Inquiry into these generational cohorts remains limited generally (Priporas et al., 2020), and represents a predictable future path for research within the luxury social media context.

Storytelling

A recent stream of research examining the strategic role of storytelling in generating positive levels of engagement for brands on social media has emerged (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Specifically, this branch of the brand engagement literature has been extended to the online domain, examining the effects of brand content in creating the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of engagement. A luxury brand's value proposition is what drives the creation of visual marketing content on social media (Koivisto & Mattila, 2020), therefore deeper insights into the brand–consumer dynamics within the context of social media content marketing strategies could further inform both theory and practice. Elements of storytelling such as plot, characters, and verisimilitude have been found to play varying roles across all three engagement dimensions within a beauty brand context (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019), yet further inquiry may examine effects on luxury consumers on social media.

Moments of luxury

The concept of luxury 'moments' has recently begun to emerge within the literature, examining a temporal dimension to luxury consumption (Bauer et al., 2011; Holmqvist et al., 2020c; von Wallpach et al., 2020). Currently an underdeveloped topic, as luxury research has focused more on brand-controlled characteristics—such as quality and exclusivity—in conceptualizing luxury (Ko et al., 2019), there exists much scope for further research into these 'moments of luxury' being generated, experienced and shared on social media platforms. Von Wallpach et al. (2020, p. 500) posit luxuriousness as being embedded in small enjoyments or instances which facilitate 'temporal escapism from everyday mundane life', while escapism has also been linked to luxury experiences (Holmqvist et al., 2020c), as well as brands which have been described as 'the antidote to the mundane' (Berthon et al., 2009, p. 45). Escapism has also been linked to individuals' social media engagement (Athwal et al., 2019b; Hall-Phillips et al., 2016); however, future research should seek to bridge these two literature streams in investigating the characteristics of social media platforms, content and brand communications which generate such engaging moments of luxury for individuals, as well as their outcomes.

Attribution to business performance

The final theme examined studies which sought to attribute the influence of social media on brand performance. By virtue of it being the least populated theme, it is proposed to offer the widest avenue for future research.

Due to the limited availability of organization performance data, it does present the most challenges for researchers; however, it could also provide the most lucrative insights into the outcomes of all activities encased within the previously mentioned themes. For example, recent work has proposed luxury brands on a continuum (i.e. Cristini et al., 2017; Wirtz et al., 2020), depending on their quantity and level of luxury characteristics, while others have focused on luxury consumers and their motivations and intentions (i.e. Han et al., 2010). Future work should seek to connect these streams and investigate the resultant outcomes on brand performance. To conclude, we provide a graphical depiction of the future research avenues in Figure 3. This chart maps the future research directions across the five elements of the integrative conceptual framework developed in this paper, from our review of the extant literature. The future directions provide further evidence that the interlocking of the themes in the conceptual framework developed in this paper will continue to be a key focus of inquiry in the confluence of luxury and social media.

CONCLUSION

Research continues to aim at establishing the most effective modes of content for influencing consumer attitudes and social media behaviours towards luxury brands (Huang et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2016). Given the assertion by Chen and Wang (2017) of a discrepancy between how luxury brands approach social media and how users perceive brands on these platforms, further inquiry should be directed towards answering the question ‘what constitutes luxury on social media?’ While varying taxonomies of luxury and of luxury brands have been proposed within the literature, the dynamic social media environment has fundamentally altered the communications paradigm between luxury brands and consumers. This paper has developed a set of five interlocking themes which have been inductively developed from the literature into a comprehensive framework to understand current research and act as a guide upon which to build future research efforts. As luxury brands strive to provide superior quality offerings to consumers offline, the expectation will remain to offer similar quality content to social media users which represents the brand in the most appropriate fashion. The challenge, therefore, remains the democratization of both the luxury and social media environments and the oft-noted shift in power between brand and consumer.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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APPENDIX A

List of databases searched within EBSCOhost

Academic Search Complete, British Education Index, Business Abstracts with Full Text (H.W. Wilson), Business Source Complete, Communication & Mass Media Complete, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EconLit with Full Text, Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson), ERIC, General Science Full Text (H.W. Wilson), GreenFILE, Historical Abstracts, Humanities Full Text (H.W. Wilson), Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts, OmniFile Full Text Mega (H.W. Wilson), PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Readers' Guide Full Text Mega (H.W. Wilson), Regional Business News, Research Starters – Sociology, RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to present only), Social Sciences Full Text (H.W. Wilson), UK & Ireland Reference Centre, Teacher Reference Center, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials PLUS.