LUXURY FASHION BRAND INNOVATORS

AND IMITATORS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

by

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<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

According to Karl Lagerfeld, "Fashion is a language that creates itself in clothes" (Lagerfeld). But why is clothing significant? Clothing is important to society because it serves three purposes: (1) as a covering, (2) as a protection from the elements, and (3) as a way of adornment (Tortona & Eubank, 2010). The first two purposes of clothing are functional for warmth and safety. The third purpose of clothing serves the function of displaying status, position and identity. For example, Princess Diana wore a crown to show she was royalty just as a nurse wears a uniform to show her occupation. Clothing can also show whom someone desires to be such as when people wear suits to interviews to project a successful image, or as someone might wear workout apparel to show they desire to be athletic.

The fashion industry is large and includes retailers from Wal-Mart to Louis Vuitton. But, when most people think about the fashion industry they think of luxury products. Luxury fashion propels the rest of the industry as it sets the trends and styles, which change every six months. After the luxury fashion brands have adopted a trend, all other levels of fashion, designer, better, bridge, moderate, and budget clothing, adopt it too. Therefore, as leaders in the industry, luxury fashion brands must remain highly visible and maintain strong brand equity. While traditional magazine advertising and promotion techniques used to be enough to persuade consumers to purchase these expensive products and follow luxury fashion trends, they no longer suffice in this quick-paced, ever-changing market. To survive, brands must look for ways to maintain customer relationships and attract new customers in a visible way. One new way luxury fashion brands have been promoting their brand is through social media.

Social media offer a relatively inexpensive way for brands to interact with and connect with a wide range of consumers (Kim & Ko, 2011). However, not all brands participate equally in social media. Brands that are aggressively pursuing social media as the best way to reach consumers are the brand innovators. Conversely, brands that are maintaining a presence on social media, but not becoming aggressive with it, letting others test different techniques on social media and then following in their footsteps are brand imitators.

<u>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</u>

**The Past and Present of Luxury Fashion**

The concept of clothing as more than a covering or a protection from the elements, but rather as a way of adornment or display has been around for a long time. The Romans had strict social classes with different dress worn by each different class. Only Roman citizens could wear the traditional toga, *toga praetexta*, and only the senators or people with high status in society could wear purple bands, *clavi*, on their togas (Tortora & Eubank 2010). In Etruscan society, women wore embellished clothing to show their wealth, status, and power. (Tortora & Eubank 2010). In the fifteenth century, Charles VII thought fashion and dressing were so important that he established the Ministry of Fashion to oversee all issues related to dressing and fashion (Fang et al., 2012). Dressing for status continued and intensified with Louis XIV when dress told a person's socioeconomic status and strict dress laws limited the clothes to be worn by non-royalty (Tortora & Eubank 2010). Louis XIV even established laws governing what his courtiers could wear and how often they could wear each item (Tortora & Eubank 2010).

Traditional luxury fashion, however, officially developed in the nineteenth century when Charles Fredrick Worth arose as "the father of haute couture." He differed from other designers in that he created garments and sold them in different colors and fabrics to famous courtiers and royalty based on his ideas (Tortora & Eubank 2010). Worth's garments were the most expensive, hardest to obtain, and most acclaimed. He also implemented the concept of the fashion model and created the first fashion show to display his designs (Tortora & Eubank 2010).

Today, though the luxury fashion industry has reached maturity, it still flourishes. The fashion market and the number of customers it reaches continue to increase year after year (Kim & Ko, 2011). The designers still create clothing based on their ideas and inspiration rather than the wants of customers, and there are still fashion models and fashion shows, which have a big influence on what people buy. The trends, while often exaggerated at these fashion shows, show the upcoming style for the season. Additionally, luxury fashion consumers still buy luxury as a way to fulfill needs related to a real or aspirational identity, personality and lifestyle (Okonkwo, 2007). France is still the center of luxury fashion, with most of the handmade couture items coming from Paris and the ateliers or workshops there. Lastly, luxury fashion items continue to signal status and people still crave the status, recognition, and well-made products that luxury fashion items offer.

The industry, however, has changed, as there are now more luxury brands than ever before (Han, Nunes & Drèze, 2010). With the addition of many different brand extensions and the proliferation of new designers, this market has become saturated. This changed the way brands operate as they can no longer simply rely on their strong brand

assets to maintain a regular set of customers. Brands must now specialize in something, focus on their brand legacy, maintain customer relationships and produce high quality, innovative products to succeed (Kim & Ko, 2011). Luxury brands specialize in every type of merchandise - from clothes to jewelry to accessories. The largest and most well known couture luxury brands are Louis Vuitton, famous for its global appeal and strong price premium; Hermes a small, elite, private luxury brand, and Chanel, the classic brand popular with an aging population ("Luxury brands," 2010). These major players in this industry have distinguished themselves with a niche product or concept, differentiating their products to stay a viable part of this industry.

## Research Question:

In today's changing market, how do luxury fashion brands effectively use social media to engage their consumers? And when and why would a brand choose to be a brand innovator or brand imitator with social media?

## Luxury Consumers:

There are two types of luxury consumers: (1) those who purchase predominantly luxury goods, and (2) those who save to afford just one luxury item. Both types of consumers are important to brands. Major fashion houses need the high spending reliable customer to give their brand credibility, and the saver to promote their brand to his or her peers and further increase sales. Both groups share the desire to adopt fashion trends. As such, scholars characterize them as adventurous, well educated, extraverted, and higher in social status (Fang et al., 2012). Many designers have realized the potential of both groups, and try to reach them both. While maintaining their strategies to reach the elite, designers from Coach to Gucci are making some of their products "accessible luxury"

with the ability to reach the masses (Fang et al., 2012).  In order to reach the masses, these brands produce shoes, handbags and accessories in addition to clothes, lowering the price of luxury. Brands know that the average consumer cannot spend $20,000+ on a gown or handbag, but they might be able to spend $25 on lipstick or $120 on shoes (Thomas, 2007). Therefore, the piece of luxury most often bought by the masses is the handbag. The average American woman purchases four handbags per year (Fang et al., 2012). One designer who has realized the potential of the handbag is Louis Vuitton, which offers an estimated 200 different styled handbags (Fang et al., 2012). This introduction of lower priced products led to an expanded customer base, and a new way to wear luxury.

The elite, or those earning more than $150,000 annually, are spending more than pre-recession times (Ortved, 2001). These elite consumers are a viable part of the luxury fashion business, and this consumer base is growing. Millennials are also now participating in luxury fashion consumption that was previously directed more towards older generations. There are currently 11.8 million millennials, ages 18-30, living in households with an annual income exceeding $100,000, according to the Ipsos Mendelssohn Affluent Survey (Faw, 2012). Members of this large group are looking for ways to spend their money and are purchasing luxury products more than ever before, increasing their spending on luxury fashion by 33% since 2011 (Halpert, 2012).  In addition, more women are in high power positions in the workforce, so they now have more discretionary income than ever before. As a result, the number of luxury clothing and accessory items women buy today has doubled in the past ten years ago (Tungate, 2008). This trend demonstrates the importance of this elite consumer base, as it continues

to grow with more millennials and women entering its socioeconomic bracket. With the growth of both the savers and elite consumers, the industry continues to expand.

While the elite has maintained their spending, the saver has found ways to obtain their luxury items too. Saver consumers like to mix and match luxury and non-luxury items. They wear both designer and fast fashion apparel, from stores such as Forever21 or H&M, in the same outfit. One day these consumers might be wearing two different designers, and the next day, none at all. This attitude change has arisen as consumers are becoming their own stylists; basing their outfits on their individual styles and preferences (Tungate, 2008). In order to include more luxury in their everyday outfits and effectively keep up with the elite consumers, these savers have also changed the way they spend their money. Some consumers are buying smaller priced "accessible luxury" items to own a piece of the brand, while not spending more than they can, while others, have started saving money on everything they can. Whether by dining in restaurants less frequently or buying less expensive groceries, consumers are saving in order to purchase a piece of luxury. (Okonkwo, 2007). Both of these techniques allow consumers to purchase luxury products and feel like the affluent luxury consumers.

The luxury fashion industry as a whole is no small industry. Rapid economic growth in developed countries has changed consumer's traditional theory of thriftiness and value to one of conspicuous consumption (Fang et al., 2012). Thorstein Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* first introduced this concept in 1899. His theory explains that people often buy luxury or high status products to demonstrate their wealth to others (Veblen, 1899). He states that while they appreciate the high quality product, they often buy it for the satisfaction of impressing those around them. He labeled this phenomenon

"conspicuous consumption," a concept that still describes the excessive purchasing habits of high status goods (Veblen, 1899). This concept applies to both the elite, who have maintained or increased their spending on luxury, and the masses, which recently started participating in the luxury fashion industry. This increase spending has produced one of the largest industries in the world. The luxury fashion industry is currently a $450 billion industry and it continues to grow every year (Tungate, 2008). This continued growth has caused the fashion industry to outpace other industries in the world as the only industry to maintain a 20% annual growth rate (Okonkwo, 2007). This growth is due to an expanding consumer base and effective promotion techniques from the luxury fashion brands.

One way that luxury brands promote its image and name to the masses and the elite simultaneously, is through fashion shows. Fashion shows display the luxury products, upcoming trends, and an ideal lifestyle a consumer could have with the purchase of a piece of the brand. This gives the runways shows cache and highlights their exclusivity (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). The elite and ultra rich attend these high status fashion shows, while the masses follow the shows through the media, blogs, and magazines (Fang et al., 2012). The more frequently items are promoted in magazines, shown in advertisements, and worn by celebrities, the more this industry continues to grow. Mass media promotes this growth by continuing to demonstrate what fashion is, how to like a luxury lifestyle, what people should purchase, and how to stand out in a desired group (Fang et al., 2012). Thus, fashion shows encourage consumers to spend and consume more, thus allowing people's identities to form based on the goods they purchase (Fang et al., 2012). Aside from the fashion show, another prominent way brands are now promoting their products is through social media.

**Social Media and Luxury Fashion:**

Social media are online applications and platforms through which brands can reach, communicate, connect, and engage their consumers (Kowitt, 2012). Having gained in popularity since its inception, social media now provide over 1 billion people information, advice and entertainment (Gilbreth, 2013). Fashion brands have realized social media's immense potential and have started investing heavily in it (Phan, 2011). Social media is especially important to luxury fashion brands, as consumers are visually oriented and consider their luxury products a part of who they are through the impact the goods have on consumer's social status. By utilizing this deep consumer connection with the product, luxury fashion brands can enrich consumer's experiences and allow consumers to express their love of brands on social media ("Luxury daily webinar, 2013). One of the first to examine social media, prominent luxury fashion designer Diane Von Furstenberg said, "Ignoring the Internet is madness. Being active on the Internet is indispensible to growth and for being relevant. It helps your business to be truly global and multigenerational" (Stephensen & Strugatz, 2010, pg 1). She knew the Internet is the only thing that truly unites the largest number of people regardless of geographic location, culture, age, time, or gender (Kim & Ko, 2011). Social media allow brands to move past the one-way communication model of the past towards a direct two-way communication model, where brands can interact with consumers and strengthen relationships with existing customers while gaining exposure to new customers (Kim & Ko, 2011). The *mere ownership effect* explains the importance of social media. It states that personal, prior interactions with a strong brand can cause liking and increased involvement in the future. So, brands are harnessing social media, to give consumers that personal

interaction they crave (Volckner & Sattler, 2006; Hadjicharalambous, 2010). It is important to note, though, that social media are not replacing traditional media.  As the Vice President of Marketing at Juicy Couture, Frances Pennington said, "Social media are another way to take our advertising 360 degrees. We still believe in print media. It [social media] expands our advertising, but it does not replace it. It's just another platform." (Corcoran, 2009). As he said, social media are the next big thing marketers must now take on in addition to traditional media.

Brands know consumers are turning to social media for information, and pleasure, therefore, luxury fashion brands must be able to reach out to them effectively (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Upon studying this, Quan-Hasse and Young (2010) found two unique trends that occur with social media. First, users embrace multiple platforms. Second, they found that consumers use different sites for different purposes. Each site then provides unique communication tools and rewards for the consumer (Innis, 1951; McLuhan 1964; McLuhan & Powers, 1989). *The Uses and Gratifications Theory* further explores and explains this, stating consumers have a lot of choices for media, but chose the appropriate one based on psychological needs (information, convenience, entertainment, relaxation and engagement) and needs fulfillment (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005). Brands must then realize this and effectively satisfy these needs to get repeat visitors on its sites. These consumers utilizing different social media sites for different purposes are (1) the affluent, (2) millennials, and (3) the social influencers. These groups are all a part of the elite and saver luxury fashion consumer profiles. The affluent are the past and present luxury fashion consumers, the millennials make up a large part of the

saver shopper, and the social influencers fall into both categories. However, each group looks for something different on social media, and brands must be aware of what it is.

The first group is the affluent. Members of this group have become accustomed to using social media to interact with their friends and expect the same interaction from brands. Brands must communicate and engage them in order to gain a share of voice (Ortved, 2011). Additionally, Forty-six percent of households earning $100,000 or more a year own at least one iPad and 53% own at least one iPhone ("L2 digital iq," 2012). So, these luxury fashion consumers have access to social media at their fingertips and use social media more than the general population (Carr, 2011). Regardless of what brands are on social media, consumers continue to go online craving relationships and engagement from brands. Consumers spend a lot on these expensive products, thus they expect them to be worth the money. This expectation gives brands the opportunity to reach these consumers on social media showing the luxury lifestyle and high status of the brand ("L2 digital iq," 2012). When luxury fashion brands go online to participate in social media, they cannot downscale their image. They must find a way to exude the high class, elegant lifestyle they do in all brand communications ("L2 digital iq," 2012). Luxury brands must show celebrities and exotic experiences to inspire their customer to join the luxury lifestyle and purchase the brand's products as a way to get there. Affluent customers want to see the luxury lifestyle they could live with the product, and they want to be inspired by the brand on social media.

The second consumer group is the millennials and they are different from the affluent in that millennials are digital natives (Phan, 2011). Many have no idea of what life was like before smart phones, tablets, and laptops. This group is important as there

are currently more millennials than baby boomers and millennials will be spending more than baby boomers by 2017 (Finocchiaro, 2010). These digitally minded consumers are comfortable using social media for luxury purchases and they will be the next big wave of consumers for brands (Ortved, 2011). The Luxury Institute reported, "Six out of ten millennials read user-generated product reviews when shopping for luxury goods and 18% of millennials recommend luxury brand purchases on social network sites" (Faw, 2012). Social media are the preferred mode of communication and information gathering for these consumers. This group is looking for quick, easy to find information. They are savvy with technology and don't want to work hard to find what they are looking for. They also want access. Lastly, they want to be entertained. They are the generation of entertainment and short attention spans, so brands must cater to this mindset.

Social influencers, while they also seek entertainment, want a unique experience. This group is constantly trying new things, and wants novelty from luxury fashion brands on social media. The average social influencer is more travelled and educated that ever before (Thomas, 2007). As such, features that previously would have dazzled consumers are no longer spectacular. For instance, a trip to a New York fashion show during Fashion Week used to be the highest honor for a fashion enthusiast. However, trips to fashion shows have lost their allure, as brands now live-stream their runways shows on social media. Brands must now look to intensify their customer engagement in other ways. On social media brands can accomplish this through dynamic conversations with social influencers who want to post opinions and be heard. These influencers have a large following that look to them for advice, so they must know what is going on in order to respond. This group is important to brands, as the social influencers can serve as brand

advocates to their followers. This advocacy is especially important for luxury fashion

brands in the saturated market where the social opinion of a brand often drives purchases.

In order to reach out to these social influencers, brands must allow them to see more than

the average consumer and reward them for interaction through response to their

comments. These brands must deliver personal attention and experiences their customers

want, or lose this group and their followers to brands that fulfill their needs (Okonkwo,

2007).

Brands know consumers are familiar with social media and look first to social

media for product and brand information ("L'Oreal Luxury Brand Case Study", 2010).

However, all three of the above consumer groups are very different. Brands must

consider how they can interact with and satisfy the desires of each group as shown in the

table below. Additionally, not all social media platforms are the same; brand must know

how to use each effectively to reach the target consumer for that platform.

*Table 1: Social Media Consumer Profiles*

| Customer Profile | Social Media Desires | Best Platforms |
|---|---|---|
| Affluent | - Brand relationships<br>- Luxury lifestyle lived out | - Facebook<br>- Instagram<br>- Pinterest |
| Millennials | - Easy to find information<br>- Entertainment from brand | - Facebook<br>- Twitter<br>- Instagram |
| Social influencers | - Unique experiences<br>- Rewards for interaction | - Facebook<br>- Twitter<br>- Instagram<br>- Pinterest |

**Social Media Platforms:**

CEO of Abrams Research Dan Abrams said, "Whether they like it or not, luxury

brands now must engage in social media on different platforms; they must take more care

in determining exactly how to engage on each platform" (Carr, 2012). Rachel Lewis,

senior strategist at iProspect gives insight into engaging on each platform when she says,

> The most important factor luxury brands must consider when engaging in social media is the adherence to the brand's identity. Social media platforms allow brands to directly communicate with consumers, and in doing so, those brands must stay true to the heritage of the brand (Lewis, 2013).

It is not enough to have great information on social media; all tactics and campaigns

should stick to the brand's identity no matter what platform they are on. The message

should be the same across all platforms, but repackaged as each platform has different

features and consumers have different desires for each site (Carr, 2012).

There are many social media sites for brands to engage consumers with, however

there are four sites consumers are currently attracted to: (1) Facebook, (2) Twitter, (3)

Pinterest and (4) Instagram. Each of these sites allows the brand to be more candid and

creative than an advertisement and allows consumers to fully experience the core essence

of a brand. It is important, though, that brands use each site correctly. Bandura's *Social*

*Cognitive Theory* states that people learn about outcomes through experiences and,

therefore, choose to do things based on past interactions both negative and positive

(1986). This mode of learning means people remember their experiences, if they are

pleasurable they will do them again, but if they are not they will do something else. In

order for social media to be effective, it must be a long- term relationship with multiple

interactions. In order for a relationship to occur, these interactions must be pleasurable or,

as Bandura warns, consumers will look elsewhere for the pleasurable interactions they

crave.  Therefore, when creating engagement with consumers, brands must give

consumers a stimulating, enjoyable experience so they will want to come back to the site.

**Facebook**

Facebook is no longer solely used for personal networking, as brands have realized its immense potential. When polling social media usage, Business2community found "80% of social media users like to connect with brands on Facebook" (Honigman, 2012). To communicate with consumers, brands are building brand-generated pages rather than the traditional personal page on Facebook (Jorgenson, 2012). Brands have found that these "pages" are making a difference. Seventy-seven percent of companies who have a brand-generated page on Facebook have acquired customers from their Facebook presence (Honigman, 2013). In addition, by creating a page on social networking sites, brands eliminate the need to segment demographically. They no longer have to push ads to multiple sources, but rather they can focus their attention on social media and reach a majority of their target market. Luxury brands have grown over 200% by investing in social media. However, many companies still have not realized and utilized the "social" aspect in social media ("L2 Facebook iq," 2012). L2 is an annual Facebook IQ index created by Scott Galloway of NYU and Buddy Media. He found community growth is up across luxury fashion brands. However, engagement has declined with liking and commenting posts declining 50% year after year (Shelton, 2012). Surprisingly, more than 20% of prestige brands still do not engage in a two-way conversation with their consumers (Shelton, 2012). Luxury fashion consumers want to be coddled, tantalized, and captivated. Brands must act accordingly (Okonkwo, 2007). Consumers want relationships and Facebook is the perfect platform for brands to help foster these relationships ("Luxury daily webinar", 2013). Without allowing for a two-way interaction, and enabling their voice to be heard, brands will never give consumers

what they desire. Facebook should be a dialogue between brand and consumer, rather than a monologue, a cocktail party rather than a lecture ("Luxury daily webinar", 2013).

**Twitter**

Twitter is a social networking site that caters to the younger generation. Every second, eleven people create a new Twitter account (Okonkwo, 2007). To put this figure in perspective, there are about four births per second ("How often," 2013), meaning there are more people creating Twitter accounts every second than there are children being born in the world. One should note that this is a high period of growth for Twitter and user numbers are not expected to continue to expand at such a rapid rate. Marketing Land, a marketing blog, has also found "32% of all Internet users are using Twitter" (Mcgee, 2012). By participating in this platform, brands are reaching large numbers of consumers. Twitter has also proven profitable for brands, as 34% of companies with brand oriented Twitter accounts have generated leads from their Twitter accounts (Mcgee, 2012). This platform is a powerful tool for brands as it is a relatively inexpensive and easy to use. However, since each tweet can only consist of 140 characters, brands must be precise yet entertaining enough to stand out (Lamb, 2011). These short tweets are a highly effective way for brands to quickly communicate to consumers, share information on trends, and stay culturally relevant and are usually fully read ("Luxury daily webinar", 2013). Additionally, Twitter is a great launching point for other platforms and sites as brands can attach links for consumers to learn more and further interact with the brand.

**Instagram**

Instagram is the perfect mixture of Facebook and Twitter, growing 45% in community growth based on the number of likes, followers, uploads, and views per

month ("L2 digital iq," 2012). Instagram allows subscribers to view short posts on one homepage like Twitter and the ability to like and comment on photos. Instagram shows the power of images and illustrates the notion that a picture is worth 1000 words (Carr, 2012). According to the Digital Buzz Blog, "Instagram gains a new member every second and to date there have been over one billion photos added to the app" (Daniells, 2012). This platform obviously has a huge potential for brands to use. Luxury fashion brands with an Instagram account average just over 50,000 followers. Brands can post a photograph and engage with consumers through comments or judge consumer opinion in the number of likes they may or may not receive.

**Pinterest**

Pinterest is another social media site that reaches out to the affluent luxury fashion consumers who have time to look online, be inspired, and make purchases from their pins. Pinterest is rapidly gaining popularity with fashion brands and female consumers. Eighty percent of fashion brands have a presence on Pinterest with luxury fashion brands claiming 4,000 followers each, ("L2 digital iq," 2012). Currently, women make up sixty-eight percent of the members on Pinterest (Honigman, 2013). Of those women, ninety-seven percent use Pinterest it to find inspiration (Carr, 2012). Additionally, Pinterest is about intrigue. It allows for inspiration, sharing and imagination. ("Luxury daily webinar", 2013). Therefore, it is the perfect place for brands to post photos of their apparel and accessories to inspire outfits in women. This platform also allows brands to go beyond its promotional materials to express the designer's personality and effectively tells the brand's story. Pinterest currently estimates that it has received over 17 million brand engagements and of those 15% occurs on the brand's

boards and 85% somewhere else on Pinterest (Honigman, 2013). From this, it can be noted that while people are looking at the brand's pages, more people are looking at pins from their friends. Repins are a powerful way to source information as people can pass images on to their friend - based on what they know their friend will like. Therefore, Pinterest allows brands to use the power of influencers to convey their message about products to their friends.

<u>METHODOLOGY</u>

Information gathered for this paper has been compiled though first-hand experience over eleven weeks at luxury fashion brand Michael Kors in the public relations (PR) department in New York City.

While the PR department did not set the social media campaigns, the department has seen the effects of the campaigns and social media initiatives. As the department was in charge of sending samples and placements to magazines, celebrities, and special events, the department needed to know what consumers were talking about online and what was gaining attention through social media. Fashion magazines and stylists requested products with social media buzz for photo shoots and celebrity appearances, knowing these products would help generate press. The number of product requests also directly related to the amount of product buzz and increased brand recognition created online through social media. While at Michael Kors, the author had multiple conversations with Farryn Weiner, social media director, Kate Mack, integrated social media & digital communications manager, Andrew Carrol social media intern and Mary Fontamillas the Vice President of PR. They each provided various insights into the social media process and strategy at Michael Kors, which were helpful in compiling this paper. Lauren

Davenport, accessories coordinator at Vogue also proved helpful in providing an industry insider's opinion on the social media presence of Kate Spade and Michael Kors. Additionally, Rachel Lewis, a senior strategist and member of the Luxe Group at iProspect provided insight into consumer behavior, and insights into the luxury industry.

Additionally, the author utilized secondary research through peer reviewed literary articles, business journals, and fashion publications. The author observed social media outlets for all brands mentioned based on number of followers, uniqueness of posts, amount of engagement in posts (number of likes, comments and shares), as well as complete usage of platforms and integrated message across all platforms.

<u>RESULTS</u>

Through research, observation and conversations with industry experts the author realized luxury fashion brands take different approaches to social media. Some brands like to have the first mover advantage, innovating and utilizing the space to further the brand, take risks, and engage with consumers. These brands will be called the Brand Innovators throughout this paper. Then, there are those luxury fashion brands that prefer to stay conservative with social media, not wanting to take risks and potentially lose brand exclusivity or image. These brands, therefore, take the fast follow approach, constantly watching the Brand Innovators and adopting social media strategies after proven successful for others. These brands will be called the Brand Imitators.

**Brand Innovator:**

Proposition 1: Brand Innovators are brands willing to take a risk and pave the way for the industry. As social media evolved, many luxury fashion brands worried that

participating in it would damage its brand image, while others joined anyway and blazed a trail for the industry. One such brand innovator is Michael Kors.

Michael Kors is a rapidly growing, luxury lifestyle fashion brand ("Michael Kors holding," 2012). Founded 30 years ago by designer Michael Kors, the brand focuses on the jet set lifestyle, producing clothes and accessories for men and women on the go ("Michael Kors holding," 2012). The Michael Kors customer is "fabulous yet functional, sexy yet comfortable" and is a "true juggler of all of life's challenges" ("Michael Kors holding," 2012). Michael Kors combines stylish elegance and a sporty attitude to create an iconic American lifestyle brand with three trademark brands under the Michael Kors label: Michael Kors Collection, MICHAEL Michael Kors and KORS Michael Kors. Michael Kors also has licensing contracts for furs, shoes, swimwear and watches. His Collection brand contains tailored, couture pieces while his MICHAEL and KORS lines are more accessible luxury for the masses at lower price points ("Michael Kors holding," 2012). Through two successful IPO's and many awards for Michael Kors, the company is one of the fastest growing brands in the industry ("Michael Kors holding," 2012).

Michael Kors strives to excel on social media, knowing the importance of taking risks and engaging with consumers to grow its social media presence, and the brand. Mary Fontamillas, VP of Public Relations at Michael Kors states, "Social media is important as it drives online sales as well as in-store sales though increased awareness and customer relationships" (Fontamillas, 2012). As a luxury fashion brand, Michael Kors tries to keep the content luxury, but accessible and relatable for everyone (Weiner, 2012). In this way Michael Kors can effectively target both groups of luxury consumers at once. After releasing its second IPO, Michael Kors strived to build its customer

engagement through social media. The company has done so by utilizing social media platforms in new ways to connect with the three main consumer groups on social media: the affluent, the millennials, and the social influencers. In order to measure the effectiveness of each campaign, Michal Kors has created analytical frameworks to measure consumer engagement and responsiveness which allows the brand to implement the most effective campaigns on each platform (Carrol, 2012). One of the brands most successful platforms is Facebook

**Facebook**

Michael Kors uses Facebook to engage consumers, link followers to other social media sites, host contests, show upcoming collections, and share brand information. First the company tries to engage all consumers on a personal level, though unique country pages to specifically geo target consumers. This way, Michael Kors' posts and content are relevant to those who will be viewing them ("Michael Kors holding," 2012). From this, Michael Kors has branded itself as a global brand with only 49% of its Facebook engagement coming from the United States and the rest from its other markets around the world (Socialbakers, 2013). It is easy to see that people both domestically and internationally are feeling personally connected and engaged to the brand as there are currently over five million followers with most posts receive upwards of 20,000 likes and 100 shares, showing engagement is truly occurring. Furthermore, Michael Kors uses Facebook as a launching point for other social media platforms. For example, when it offered the #MKTimeless Watch campaign on Instagram the rules for the contest were on the Facebook page. Michael Kors had over 19,000 consumers like the rules on Facebook, and participate in the contest ("Digitally Gifted: Michael," 2012). Furthermore, Michael

Kors uses Facebook to live stream the fashion shows during fashion week and post back stage pictures with links to interviews. Michael Kors started doing this in 2009 and saw an 111% increase in live stream viewers from the Spring 2009 show to the Fall 2009 show (Stephensen & Strugatz, 2010). Michael Kors also has a blog consumers can access from the Facebook Page. "Living the Kors Life" is the name of the blog and the campaign, which gives the consumer an inside look at the brand. The campaign focused on showcasing people who worked at Michael Kors. The first video debut stared Savannah Engel, the PR coordinator for Michael Kors. She showed fans where she lives and works and tells how she wears Michael Kors clothing and what she enjoys about it. This campaign gave consumers an authentic experience and look at the brand, allowing them to comment and interact with Savannah. On the campaign Savannah said, " It was such a fun experience, I loved being able to show viewers my life and Michael Kors style. It was also fun interacting with consumers to see what their style was like or how they wear their Michael Kors" (Engel, 2012). Michael Kors hosted another contest on Facebook exclusively, which centered on the launch of Michael Kors's sneakers line. There were 5,000 pairs of zebra sneakers for sale that were only available for purchase online for those with the sneaker code from the Facebook page. These shoes sold out quickly and drew consumers to the Facebook page. Lastly, Michael Kors has many pages and posts about the brand in general. These pages give basic information on the brand, link to the brand website, and host articles about the brand to inform consumers and keep them up to date on all things Michael Kors.

For its efforts on Facebook, Michael Kors has received the highest title of Facebook Genius by L2 Think Tank, a digital innovation company that compiles a

ranking of brands based on their social media presence ("L2 Facebook iq," 2012). This Genius ranking shows the brand has a competence in this area to the point of a competitive advantage or point of differentiation ("L2 Facebook iq," 2012). Of the 100 fashion, specialty retail, beauty, and jewelry companies surveyed, Michael Kors was the highest fashion brand and the third highest brand surveyed overall. While Michael Kors does not let consumers directly post on the Facebook, consumers can share posts, comment on posts, and like posts opening up the platform for two-way communication.

With its easy to find, entertaining information, and contests with rewards for interaction, Michael Kors' Facebook page effectively engages all three categories of social media users: the affluent, millennials, and social influencers.

**Twitter**

Michael Kors uses Twitter like an advice column to friends on topics such as style, trends, products to buy, industry news, and how to break into the industry (Time Staff, 2013). Twitter is a friendly, informative format that the brand uses to share information, offer new experiences or ideas to aspiring fashionistas. The account is set in Michael's voice as a way for consumers to get to know him outside of his designs. Kate Mack, integrated social media & digital communications manager, said, " There are two things we push with social media, product and Michael. Twitter is a great way to really sell Michael and allow consumers to see who he really is" (Mack, 2012). When Michael Kors himself tweets he alerts consumers by signing his tweets "–xxMK" meaning "kiss, kiss Michael Kors." Additionally, the brand gives product information and tips based on the product's season, so consumers can track it. For example when giving advice on spring and the spring collection, the company will tag #MKSpring. When followers click on this

tag, they can see all of the tweets regarding that season. Last Valentine's Day, Michael

Kors decided to engage his followers by starting the hash tag #FallingInLoveWith and

allowing his followers to share what they were falling in love with. Michael Kors then

posted what the brand loved at the moment and sent emails to followers about the 10

things worth falling in love with. While some of these ten items with were fashion related,

there were other items on the list to engage consumers beyond Michael Kors products

(Lamb, 2012). As a result of its successful, informal tweets, Michael Kors reaches out to

the social media groups it should be targeting: the millennials and the social influencers

with all of its efforts. Due to this success on Twitter, in *Time Tech Magazine's* rankings

of the 140 best Twitter accounts of 2013, Michael Kors ranked 3rd in the fashion and

beauty section (Time Staff, 2013).

**Instagram**

Michael Kors uses its Instagram account to interact with followers, host contests

and promotions, and show products ("Digitally Gifted: Michael," 2012). The first way

Michael Kors engages its followers is by asking for user-generated comments, images

and contest participation. One of the company's latest successful contests was its watch

campaign. From Aug 15-Aug. 27, 2012, the brand encouraged consumers to upload a

picture of themselves wearing their Michael Kors Watch and showing off their style

while tagging #MKTimeless ("Digitally Gifted: Michael," 2012). The brand then voted

on its favorite entries and gave away its New York limited edition runway watch to lucky

contestants who demonstrated the essence of the Michael Kors brand with their photos.

This contest had 3,000 uploads the first day, utilized different social media platforms

(with the contest rules on Facebook), and had a total of 6,800 user-generated images

("Digitally Gifted: Michael," 2012). This contest allowed consumers to participate in a contest, and gave a new fun experience. Lastly, it allowed Michael Kors to learn the style of its consumers, see how they were wearing Michael Kors's watches and see which styles its followers liked. On a day-to-day basis, Michael Kors uses Instagram as a way to show its products. The company has a product of the week where they will show only purses or only shoes to demonstrate the breadth of its products. The easy scrolling potential of instagram allows consumers to see a lot of Michal Kors products easily. Michael Kors's Instagram effectively reaches out to and engages millennials and social influencers with its contests and campaigns.

**Pinterest**

Michael Kors uses Pinterest to provide inspiration for its users. Michael Kors has many different boards featuring color inspiration, style tips, nostalgic images from the brand, fashion show pictures, and spots for future vacations. Not all of these boards feature Michael Kors branded images, but they all fit within the brand essence by inspiring the jet set lifestyle in the consumer. Recently, Michael Kors had a campaign on Pinterest called #CelebrateWith, which the brand posted pictures of things they thought were worth celebrating and invited followers to pin their own as well. The brand posted things such as #CelebrateWith an event, #CelebrateWith Hollywood, #CelelbrateWith boots and #CelelbrateWith pancakes. These pins help the brand show followers who it is, and lets the brand see who its followers are and what they enjoy. Additionally, the company has a weekly color edit, with the company pinning pictures of products, nature, or anything in the color of the week. As Michael Kors is a bright, vibrant brand, the weekly color edit fits well with Michael Kors's brand image and inspires consumers to

step out of their comfort zone allowing bright colors in their life. The brand is authentic and uses this site to share with its followers all about the brand and its personality and inspiration. It provides unique experiences for its followers and shows the luxurious lifestyle it sells, thereby attracting the affluent and social influencers to its boards.

Michael Kors has created many different campaigns throughout all the above-mentioned platforms. Below is a timeline with these campaigns and platforms listed in chronological order. From the timeline below it is easy to see that the company is spreading out campaigns throughout the year and each campaign is very different playing got the strengths of the platform.

*Table 2: Michael Kors' Social Media Campaigns Timeline*
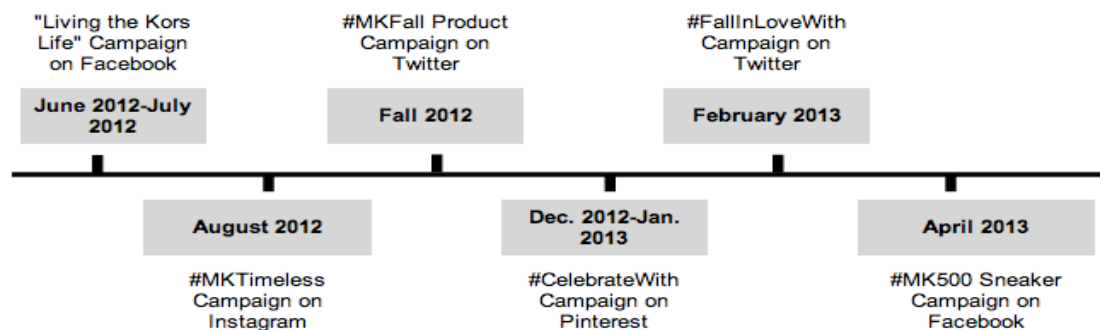


Overall, Michael Kors excels at social media. Michael Kors understands what the brand stands for and tells its story effectively. No matter what the platform, Michael Kors tries to reach out to consumers, giving them what they want from the brand, sharing the brand personality and engaging consumers in a dialogue. Michael Kors keeps everything interesting, up to date, entertaining and informative. Michael Kors is demonstrating a luxury lifestyle online with its images and content, and inviting consumers to be a part of it through sharing, liking, and commenting. Lastly, through contests and interlinked

platforms Michael Kors is presenting a unified image of the brand. This is allowing the brand to effectively reach the three target consumers groups on social media as show in the table below.

*Table 3: Michael Kors Social Media Target Audiences Reached per Platform*

| Platform | Target Audiences Reached |
|---|---|
| Facebook | - The Affluent<br>- Millennials<br>- Social Influencers |
| Twitter | - Millennials<br>- Social Influencers |
| Instagram | - The Affluent<br>- Millennials |
| Pinterest | - Affluent<br>- Social Influencers |

**Other Brand Innovators**

Louis Vuitton and Burberry are two other Brand Innovators on social media. Both are leading the industry in social media, taking risks, and pioneering new tactics on the space. As a result, their brands have maintained steady growth and have some of the highest brand equity in the luxury fashion industry as two of the most recognizable and well-respected brands.

Louis Vuitton has one of the highest numbers of followers on Facebook, with over 13 Million, proving consumers enjoy interacting with this brand on Facebook. With a mix of posts, consumers learn about the brand, feel like an insider, are entertained, and have a platform to communicate with the brand and other fellow Louis Vuitton fans. Additionally, the parent brand, LVMH, occasionally has a campaign called Les Journes Particulieres, which is a weekend trip in Europe for some Facebook fans during which they can visit the ateliers and workshops of LVMH's most prominent brands, one of

which is Louis Vuitton (Carr, 2013). This weekend has a Facebook application and is open to more than 100,000 people to visit 25 sites across Europe (Carr, 2013). This experience that Louis Vuitton provides for its Facebook fans allows the social influencers to engage with the brand and get a behind-the-scenes look. As this experience only occurs for a limited amount of consumers, it still maintains the brands exclusivity. Additionally, Louis Vuitton does a great job of making posts on Twitter elegant, fun, endearing, and friendly. The posts link to other social media sites or pages and usually include a picture to help the visual consumer. The Louis Vuitton Instagram has backstage images, and images of what the Louis Vuitton lifestyle is, inviting followers into the brand to see what the brand envisions. Louis Vuitton also has a Pinterst that features boards for Louis Vuitton events, fashion shows, purses and icons.

Burberry, like Louis Vuitton, has many Facebook followers at almost 15 million. The company's Facebook focuses on using images and videos with every post to engage consumers and start a conversation. Burberry strives to exude luxury and the Burberry brand in everything it does. Burberry also likes to post behind-the-scenes pictures and tips to fans so they can feel like a part of the brand. It is interesting to look at the comments on its posts and see that followers are conversing and commenting in multiple languages, showing the brand's international audience. Additionally, Burberry uses Twitter to give followers an inside look at the brand. The brand shows the making of ad campaigns, designing of merchandise, decorating of stores, and setting up of fashion shows. The brand's twitter is informal and offers consumers a chance to interact and learn more about the brand. Burberry has pictures of campaigns, models, Christopher Bailey and Burberry products on its Instagram. The brand uses Instagram to invite the

follower in and feel like a part of the brand. Furthermore, Burberry has an active role on Pinterest. They have 20 boards such as its latest ad campaigns, *Vogue* covers, and runway show coverage. They also have had many campaigns on Pinterest, including a festive gifts board where pinners could pin and see great gift ideas from Burberry for loved ones. Additionally, they have a campaign called "Burberry Acoustic" on its YouTube channel and Facebook page featuring up-and-coming bands in Britain. They have included a board on Pinterest dedicated to Burberry Acoustic contestants as well. Lastly, the brand has its "Art of the Trench" board featuring trench coats from its Art of the Trench blog, which allows consumers to post pictures of themselves in Burberry's trench coats for others to see and comment on.

**Brand Imitator:**

Proposition 2: Brand Imitators, in contrast to Brand Innovators, are risk averse. They like to stay at the forefront of ideas once others have tested them out. They enjoy waiting to make sure things are safe before doing them. One such social media brand imitator is Kate Spade.

Kate Spade started designing handbags because she could never find the perfect purse to fit her colorful personality. Through multiple licensing agreements Kate Spade New York has expanded to include accessories, shoes, clothing, eyewear, home goods, cosmetics and footwear (Lockwood, 2013). Kate Spade designs for three women: the teenager, the mom, and the career woman and provides accessible luxury products at a price point affordable to each age group (Lockwood, 2013). The Kate Spade customer tends to be bold, colorful, witty, fun, optimistic, and unafraid to stand out in a crowd ("Kate Spade new york announces," 2012). Kate Spade New York is a brand that creates

traditional designs with a twist to make them younger, more fun, and approachable for its customers ("Kate Spade new york announces," 2012). Currently under the Kate Spade label is Kate Spade New York, which satisfies all of women's needs, and Andy Spade, which is the label for men ("Kate Spade new york announces," 2012). While growth has remained steady for Kate Spade over the past few years, the brand has not made any major changes within the brand in the past 5 years. Typical of its conservative nature the brand is being cautious and not trying to outgrow themselves (Lockwood, 2013).

In terms of social media, Kate Spade has stayed conservative. Kate Spade has not taken any major risks and has focused on maintaining a presence on social media rather than actively engaging consumers. While Kate Spade has a presence on all four platforms examined, it is not a strong presence. Accessories coordinator at *Vogue,* Lauren Davenport, comments, "Kate Spade has been a successful brand for a long time, however, the brand has not poured its efforts into social media" (Davenport, 2012). As a result, Kate Spade has been labeled a social media brand imitator based on its performance on social media.

**Facebook**

In the same L2 Facebook IQ survey mentioned above, Kate Spade ranked in the "Challenged" category. Overall they were ranked 75th out of 100 ("L2 Facebook iq," 2012). According to the survey, being ranked in the challenged category signified brands went through the motions of creating a Facebook presence but have not allocated enough financial resources, creativity, or time to fully engage consumers and serve as an effective campaign ("L2 Facebook iq," 2012). Facebook is a great platform in that brands can do so much in the space to effectively reach consumers. However, Kate Spade is not

currently doing so, as most of its posts are short blasts summarizing its blog posts. Thus, Kate Spade's Facebook page is being used more as a launch pad for its blog than as an actual platform. When the brand does post its own content, it usually focuses on a promotion they are running online or in store. As a result of its lack of engaging content on Facebook, the brand is not receiving many comments, likes or shares from its consumers and is missing the opportunity to engage them. This platform only has 783,000 followers, when most other luxury fashion brands have over one million. As a result of its poorly executed strategy, and one-way conversations on Facebook, Kate Spade is not reaching the groups it should be on Facebook.

**Twitter**

Kate Spade, however, is reaching consumers on Twitter. The brand tweets about the brand and life in New York City, which can be interesting to consumers who are not from or live in New York City (Lamb, 2011). As Kate Spade New York is the full brand name, it is fitting for the brand to utilize this technique. Kate Spade operates Twitter as a place to casually tweet to consumers (Lamb, 2011). Rather than posting formal pictures, the brand posts pictures of its employees and tags its employee's Twitter names. This way, consumers looking at the Twitter feed can feel like they are a part of the brand and know the people working there and posting (O'Regan, 2012). Furthermore, Kate Spade lets consumers feel like a part of the brand or like a friend by giving tips of new places in New York City, as well as, photos of executives at these hot spots. Occasionally, Kate Spade also posts gossip and current events taking place in NYC. As a promotion, Kate Spade often runs contests to give consumers shopping sprees with the brand's designers in NYC (Lamb, 2011). Lastly, the brand post links to its website for product information

and deals (Lamb, 2011). Overall, Kate Spade is reaching out to the millennials by offering easy-to-access information and entertainment and to the social influencers with rewards for participation. While the company provides a lot of good information on Twitter, it does so in a disorganized way, with mostly spur-of-the-moment posts. While these posts keep the informal friendly tone, it can get disorganized. Overall, Kate Spade New York's Twitter is effective and is reaching both millennials and social influencers.

**Instagram**

Kate Spade is using Instagram as a way to get branded images out to consumers (O'Regan, 2012). These images are of the same high-quality type photography as its advertisements, thereby displaying the luxury lifestyle consumers crave. Kate Spade is currently using Instagram to reach out to the affluent consumers who value the luxury lifestyle. They share a mix of branded images and other candid images that represent the brand. For example, there is a picture of a tray of cookies coming out of the oven to talk about the brand's new print featuring polka dots. While there are great images on Instagram, Kate Spade is not doing anything innovative with the space, but rather just maintaining its presence with a mix of branded photos and things someone would encounter everyday in New York.

**Pinterest**

Kate Spade is utilizing Pinterest to engage the affluent consumer. Kate Spade's designer, Peter Som, posts branded images, sketches, and pictures to Pinterest (O'Regan, 2012). Kate Spade is using Pinterest, like it uses instagram, to show the brand image and give the glossy, luxurious lifestyle feel to consumers when they visit Kate Spade's page (O'Regan, 2012). As Pinterest is all about inspiration, Kate Spade focuses on posting

pictures that will inspire its consumers to become more loyal fans. Kate Spade New York is different from other brands in that it only posts a few branded Kate Spade images or products on Pinterest. Most of the pictures on the boards are random images that fit the themes such as decorate colorfully, dress colorfully, or think colorfully. While these random images might be a nice change for the consumers, it is not engaging the consumer with the brand, promoting the brand or inspiring the consumer to buy more branded products, as the images are random. Due to the few branded images offered on Kate Spade's Pinterest, consumers are able to see and enjoy the luxurious lifestyle Kate Spade portrays, which is influencing and engaging the affluent.

Kate Spade has created campaigns throughout the above-mentioned platforms, as listed below. From this timeline, it is easy to see that all of the campaigns on the different platforms are relatively similar and occur at the same time of year. Therefore, maintaining a presence, but not necessarily deeply engaging its consumers.

*Table 4: Kate Spade's Social Media Campaigns Timeline*
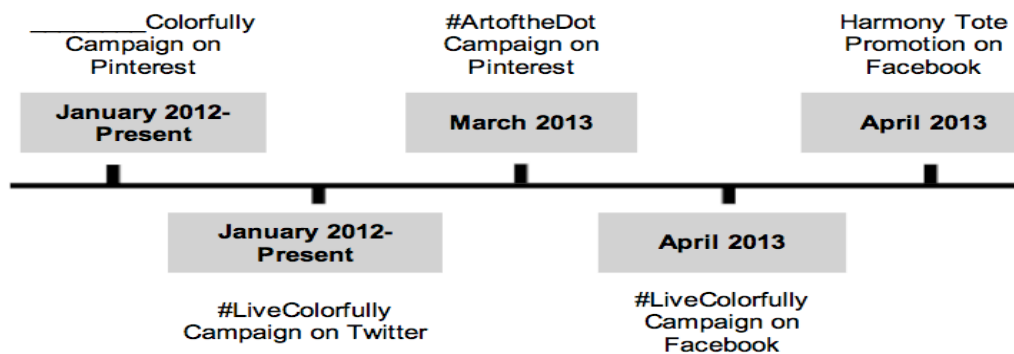


Overall, Kate Spade is a social media imitator as they are neither heavily investing on social media nor taking risks. Kate Spade is currently treating social media as another platform to share its campaigns on. The campaign is slightly altered per platform to fit the medium, however, the sites are not being effectively used to share

information in a new way. In addition, Kate Spade is not reaching all three types of

consumers, as shown below, and missing a huge opportunity. Many of the platforms are

underutilized by the brands and therefore by the consumers as well.

*Table 5: Kate Spade New York Social Media Target Audiences Reached per Platform*

| Platform | Target Audiences Reached |
|---|---|
| Facebook | - None |
| Twitter | - Millennials <br> - Social Influencers |
| Instagram | - The Affluent |
| Pinterest | - The Affluent |

**Other Brand Imitators**

Two other Brand Imitators are Calvin Klein and Yves Saint Laurent. Both, like

Kate Spade, have a presence on social media; however, it is not a strong presence. These

brands have stayed conservative and have not occupied the space to effectively reach

consumers. As a result, these conservative brands have not experienced significant

growth or change, positive or negative.

Calvin Klein has 6 million fans on Facebook. Its posts are engaging and get

consumers to start a conversation. The brand seems to be doing everything right on

Facebook to maintain its page; however, they are not doing anything different from other

brands and are not receiving anything more from its followers than any other brand is.

Calvin Klein posts everything on Twitter from people in Calvin Klein clothes, to

promotions the brand is running. Additionally, most of the brand's posts have links to

pictures or other sites, but the text is not intriguing and does not prompt the follower to

click on the link or continue reading. Calvin Klein does not have an official Instagram

account or a presence on Pinterest at this point in time. As a result, Calvin Klein is not

reaching any of the consumers that do use them and would like to engage with the brand on these sites.

With just over 1.4 Million fans on Facebook, Yves Saint Laurent is still trying to build its followers. One the major issues with its Facebook page is that all images are in black and white. This feature limits the imagination of the consumer and downplays the luxury of the brand. Additionally, there are not many interactive posts, but rather branded images the company wishes to push to the consumer. Like its Facebook page, the YSL page on Twitter is also in black and white. Furthermore, its tweets are in all caps, which make them hard to read. The tweets are about people in YSL clothes, YSL clothes in magazines or general product information, which is not what consumers expect from Twitter, especially when brand innovators are offering a friend-like experience with brands. YSL has an Instagram with pictures from the brand's runway shows, pictures of product and pictures of YSL clothes on models in a street style setting. YSL's Instagram is one of its best platforms, engaging and intriguing consumers to look further into the brand. Yves Saint Laurent does not have an active presence on Pinterest, with only 6 boards and 41 pins, it is easy to see this is not a priority for the brand, and consumers are not engaging with them on this platform.

<center>DISCUSSION</center>

Social media is extremely important to luxury fashion brands. While social media is not directly driving sales and the bottom line, it is indirectly affecting it. When consumers have a good relationship with a brand online, they will be more likely to talk about it with their friends who might have the capacity to purchase it. Additionally, consumers will have a good perception of the brand, which will be important if they do

ever have the ability to purchase it. Furthermore, this increased goodwill and brand image will help the overall view of the company by the public, which will increase sales. Lastly, with links to the website and social media contests, many are able to purchase through the website or contest increasing online sales. Moreover, this medium is proven to be a successful way of improving and maintaining a positive brand image, which can lead to sales down the road. Knowing the importance of social media to brands, it is important to know when it is appropriate to use the innovator or imitator strategy to maximize social media efforts.

## Social Media Brand Innovators

It is important to be a brand innovator if something new is occurring within the brand or the brand wants to expand. In the case of Michael Kors, who recently had an IPO, it was important to get the brand name out there to have a successful IPO and expand its brand. In addition, Louis Vuitton and Burberry have been luxury brands for over 100 years, and are fighting to stay relevant and attract a younger demographic with all of the new brands because millennials typically go on social media and typically look to younger, contemporary brands when purchasing luxury. By having an active presence on social media, these brands are able to stay relevant and continue its growth. Brands that are expanding into different countries, introducing a brand extension, or starting a new co-branding program can also benefit from being an innovator. However, to become a social media brand innovator, the brand must be willing to make a significant investment in social media. It also must stand behind its investment. That means taking risks and sticking with them no matter what the outcome. As social media is a newer concept there is no past data, case studies or trials to look back on and predict how

consumers will behave to certain things on social media. This is a risk the brand must be willing to take, as there is a lot of opportunity for them to explore new areas of social media, gain consumer loyalty and expand its brand. Social media, however, is also challenging in that innovation move so rapidly. These innovators must always be looking for the newest and best things to do on social media as platforms change, other brands catch up, and competitive advantages are lost quickly. One good campaign is no longer enough, brands must be constantly innovating and reinventing campaigns on social media to stay relevant.

**Social Media Brand Imitators**

However, it is not always a bad thing to be a social media brand imitator. It simply means that at that time the brands resources are being used elsewhere. An imitator does not take risks and maintains a presence, but does not excel on social media. Instead imitators let the innovators take the risks on social media and after seeing what is successful, implement the strategies that could work for its brand. This strategy can work for brands that have not or do not plan on making significant changes to its brand or significant investment in social media. For well-established, successful brands, it can be a successful technique to funnel the money elsewhere. Additionally, just because a brand is an imitator at one point in time, it does not mean they cannot become an innovator later on. The brand simply has to switch its social media strategy and be willing to give its followers a chance to adapt to the changed strategy. This strategy is also good for brands who are traditional, conservative, risk averse or have an older demographic for its clients. For example, Saint John's Knits mainly caters to an older demographic that might not be as prevalent on social media. So, it makes sense that this brand would not be as active on

social media as one like Juicy Couture who targets a younger demographic more involved with to social media.

## Recommendations for Michael Kors

As the IPO is complete and was one of the most successful IPO's in fashion history the Michael Kors technically does not need to be a social media innovator anymore. However, Michael Kors just had two of the most successful years in its brand's history. The brand has built a base of faithful followers on its social media and would be letting them down if it decided to step back to an imitator position. While things are going well, the best thing Michael Kors can do is continue to come up with creative campaigns on social media, stay at the forefront of new social media outlets and listen to its consumers in terms of what they want from brands on social media.

## Recommendations for Kate Spade

Kate Spade is planning on launching its new brand extension Kate Spade Saturday this spring. This new brand extension will have clothing, accessories, beauty products and home goods ("Kate Spade New York, 2012), and will be fun with bold, colorful prints that channel the Saturday feel seven days a week. As such, it will be for a younger consumer at a lower price point ("Kate Spade New York, 2012). Kate Spade New York also plans on incorporating social media in its launch and in-store shopping experiences to attract the younger consumer.  In order for this launch to be a success, Kate Spade is going to need to revamp its social media. It will need to move from a brand imitator to a brand innovator. The two areas Kate Spade needs to focus on are Facebook and Instagram. Currently, Kate Spade is not reaching any of the three target consumers with its Facebook. The brand needs to refocus the page, and find ways to interact with its

consumers. Additionally, the brand's Instagram is a compilation of pictures, but has no real campaigns or themes on it. As a result, followers do not know what to expect from it and do not turn to it as a preferred mode of brand communication.

**Further Research**

It will be interesting to see how Kate Spade reacts to the launch of Kate Spade Saturday on social media and whether the brand can incorporate picture sharing and social media into the in-store shopping experience. Additionally, it will be fascinating to see whether or not the brand innovators and imitators remain the same over the next few years and what the implications of each social media strategy will be on the brand.

CONCLUSION

Since luxury fashion brands have two different luxury consumers and three types of consumer preferences for social media usage, brands must make sure to engage all three to effectively obtain new customers and maintain current customer relationships. Furthermore, when a brand is expanding, hoping to grow or adding an additional line it should become a brand innovator on social media, taking risks and blazing a new trail on this communication platform. Conversely, when brands are already established and are not making any real changes to the brand, these brands can simply maintain its social media presence effectively as a brand imitator.

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the relationship of luxury fashion brands and social media, through delving into who the luxury fashion consumer, and the social media consumer are. It then examines the desires of these groups of consumer from luxury fashion brands on social media. Additionally, it examines the difference between brand innovators, risk takers, and brand imitators, fast followers, in the social media space specifically related to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. It specifically looks at the positioning on social media of Michael Kors, Louis Vuitton, and Burberry as brand innovators, and Kate Spade, Calvin Klein and Yves Saint Laurent as brand imitators. Lastly, it examines when it is appropriate for a luxury fashion brand to be a social media brand innovator or a brand imitator.