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What role does Instagram have on the purchase intention of luxury fashion in the Irish context?

Abstract

This research is based on the luxury fashion purchase intention of an Irish millennial and the impact that the social media platform Instagram has regarding their purchase intentions. This research first explores the current academic landscape of the luxury fashion industry, Instagram, hedonic consumption and social influences. The main purpose of this research is to gain an insight into how millennials use Instagram, if Instagram is the best and most effective platform to market to this age bracket and finally to understand why an Irish millennial decides to purchase a luxury fashion item. This research adopted a phenomenological approach in the research philosophy and conducted four semi-structured interviews for data collection. The research found that Instagram advertisements are the beginning of the marketing journey which prompt the consumer to begin considering a luxurious purchase. The consideration is then confirmed by social influences.

Keywords: Irish consumer, millennial, social media, purchase intention and luxury fashion.

Contents

Introduction	5
1.1 Objectives.....	7
1.2 Research question.....	8
Literature review	9
2.1 Social media marketing	9
2.1.1 Luxury brands	11
2.1.2 Experiential consumption.....	12
2.2 Hedonic consumption	13
2.2.1 Purchase intention & social media.....	13
2.2.2 Purchase intention & entertainment.....	17
2.3 Class & social influences	18
2.3.1 Culture	19
2.3.2 Influencers.....	20
2.3.3 Purchase intention & social media influencers	23
2.3.4 Para-social relationships.....	24
Research Question and Methodology	26
3.1 Research question.....	26
3.2 Methodology	27
3.2.1 Research philosophy.....	27
3.2.2 Sampling	28
3.3 Research location & participants	29
3.4 Justification for choosing Instagram.....	30
3.5 Protocol for data collection.....	31
3.6 Data collection	33
Findings & Analysis	36
4.1 Demographics	36
4.2 Purchase motivator.....	36
4.2.1 Initial motivator.....	37
4.3 The purchase as an investment.....	38
4.4 Purchase decision and consumer satisfaction	39
4.5 Social Media Influencers.....	40
Discussion	41
Conclusion	44
6.1 Empirical findings	44
6.2 Theoretical implications	44

6.3 Further research 45

6.4 Limitations 45

Appendix A 46

Appendix B 47

References 49

Introduction

This study is based upon the idea that Instagram has a significant influence on Irish millennial consumers when it comes to influencing their purchase decisions of luxury fashion. This research was inspired by previous journal articles that are centred around the ideas that Instagram has an influence on their purchase intentions of luxury fashion as well as the increase in popularity of the social media platform. Those articles include “A structural model of the antecedents and consequences of Generation Y luxury fashion goods purchase decisions” (Ying Soh, Rezaei and Gu (2017) and “Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and para-social interaction influence purchase intentions” (Sokolova, and Kefi, 2020) along with many more that will be discussed in detail in the literature review. For the purposes of this research luxury fashion will include clothing, shoes, handbags, accessories jewellery and watches.

The luxury fashion industry has been continuously growing since 1996 (Value of the global luxury goods market 2019 | Statista, 2019), steadily increasing in popularity each year. The industry is now worth a total of €281 billion (Value of the global luxury goods market 2019 | Statista, 2019). This study will explore how the industry was impacted by the social media platform Instagram. Social media is still relatively new and can have a massive impact on a consumer’s purchase intention. Because of this, the researcher believes that it is important to understand how to market to consumers effectively for the most successful results, be it sales, better brand perception or resonating and building a relationship with that consumer. Differing cultures, generations and societies all have an impact on the purchase intention of products which is why this research was narrowed down into examining the impact that Instagram has on the purchase intention of Irish millennials in relation to luxury fashion. This study is important as there is not a vast amount of research conducted exploring this research question and sub question in an Irish context. There is also a lack of research of para-social relationships, culture, societal influences and hedonic consumption in relation to an Irish context. Thus, this research aims to bring new evidence to the academic landscape that is luxury fashion branding and the deciding factors of purchasing a luxury branded item. This research will explore the relationship between luxury brands and the Irish millennial consumer and the factors influencing their purchase intention.

The Irish consumer and the impact that social media has on the purchase intention of luxury fashion is a topic that has been widely researched in a global context. However, as technology is rapidly changing, the way millennials use Instagram now is not the same way consumers used Instagram at its early stages in 2013.

Thus, this research will hold value for luxury brands targeting their market audience in Ireland via social media. Different cultures have a huge role to play when it comes to marketing, a campaign that is successful and well received in one county could be a total disaster in another county.

Some advertisements or campaigns may not resonate as well in different countries, for example, Paddy Power's marketing would only resonate with Irish people, there is no way their advertising would be successful in the US or Germany for example. These advertisements would not resonate in these countries because of the differing cultural norms that marketing takes advantage of. Another example is, the US company Ben & Jerry's, this company launched an ice cream flavour in Ireland called "Black & Tans" that for obvious reasons, did not go down well with any Irish person. Businesses need to conduct research on a country's background and culture before attempting to market to their target audience in that country. Culture plays a key role in advertising and marketing which will be discussed later in further detail.

The luxury market has continued to grow over recent years with the aid of social media platform Instagram. Instagram is one of the most influential online platforms when it comes to luxury goods. 58% of consumers use Instagram to stay on top of the latest trends, style and to be knowledgeable about the luxury fashion industry (Experience Luxury on Instagram, 2020). Additionally, 49% of consumers follow brands on the platform as the consumer perceives to be further connected and associated with the brand by following them on social media (Experience Luxury on Instagram, 2020). A total of 51% of consumers follow their favoured celebrities to know what luxury brands that celebrity owns or is wearing (Experience Luxury on Instagram, 2020). Along with 56% of consumers are following brands to see their latest collection (Experience Luxury on Instagram, 2020). Thus, this proves, Instagram is a highly regarded platform when it comes to the engagement between brands and their consumers.

This qualitative research is constructed in several sections beginning with a research topic, then a brief introduction to the topic, followed by a literature review about luxury

fashion, purchase intention and the influence of social media and social media influencers. This study will also attempt to understand the reasoning behind why consumers purchase luxury fashion goods. Investigating the research gap this research aims to fulfil and finally discussing the research methodology, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research. The researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews in order to gain an understanding of the purchase decisions of an Irish millennial. The interviews will also allow the researcher to gain an understanding on how Irish millennials use social media and the impact that social media influencers have on one's purchase intention.

1.1 Objectives

The researcher is constructing a case study based on the social media platforms Instagram, and the impact these platforms have on the purchase intentions of luxury fashion in the Irish millennial market. The running themes throughout this research will be social media, luxury fashion and the purchase intentions of the Irish consumer. The reason behind choosing Instagram as the only online platform being investigated in this piece of research due to the vast number of daily users (500 million (Experience Luxury on Instagram, 2020)) on the platform most of which are millennials. This research aims to:

- Identify factors that influence consumers to purchase luxury fashion good in relation to Instagram.
- Determine factors that impact a consumer's luxury fashion purchase intention.
- Asses the relationship between consumer's purchase intention and the consumer's ideal self.
- Evaluating the influence that the social media platform Instagram has on millennials luxury fashion purchase intention in the Irish context.

This research is based upon the luxury fashion industry alongside the social media platform Instagram and endeavours to discover the impact Instagram has on an Irish millennial's purchase intention of luxury fashion. The first section in this research will be the literature review which lays the foundations for the study discussing the topics of social media marketing, luxury brands, experiential consumption, hedonic consumption, purchase intention, class and social influences and finally influencers. The following section will be labelled as research question and methodology which

delves into detail about the above research question, the research philosophy, reasoning behind choosing Instagram, the sampling method and data collection. Later in the study the findings of the research interviews will be examined and discussed. The final piece of the research will discuss the limitations of the study as well as empirical findings and further research. This research aims to enlighten the reader on the topic of luxury fashion purchase intentions along with answering the following research question. What role does Instagram have on the purchase intention of luxury fashion in the Irish context?

1.2 Research question

What role does Instagram have on the purchase intention of luxury fashion in the Irish context? The research question originally stemmed from a personal interest of the luxury fashion industry followed by briefly researching the topics in an academic context. Additionally, the luxury industry has been continuously growing in Ireland which is why the researcher thought that this topic would be interesting as the market is expanding. Along with the social media platform Instagram which has seen a surge in popularity in recent years. The research question was inspired by previous research on the luxury fashion industry. Thus, this research aims to continue in exploring the mind of luxury fashion consumers, understanding the influence that Instagram, their culture, social influence and the impact these factors have on their purchase intention of luxury fashion. The sub questions of this research are expected to be the following:

- What impact does social media marketing on Instagram have on a luxury fashion consumer?
- Explain a social media influencers role in impacting a consumer's hedonic consumption purchase intention.
- What are the motivating factors for a consumer to purchase or want to purchase luxury fashion products?

Literature review

Over the last decade social media has begun to surge in popularity, where consumers can create and share online content. In 1997, the first social media platform was created, known as Six Degree (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). It wasn't until the early 2000's when social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube emerged (Samur, 2018), which we now know has paved the way for social media in today's modern era. As a result of the emergence of social media people began to connect with others on a global scale.

As social media is a two-way communication platform people can connect with friends and family, allowing a horizontal network of communication where people can join together digitally and create groups with other individuals using that platform. In essence, social media gives people the opportunity to communicate to many individuals both privately and publicly.

Social media gives consumer's the opportunity to instantly critique, rate or praise brands. Online platforms enable consumers to keep up to date on a brand's every move if the brand wishes to engage in social media in such a manner. Thus, social media is now a key element of any marketing strategy.

Most millennials were young children when social media came about, millennials went through iterations of both software and hardware before social media emerged. According to Yamawaki, and Sarfati (2019) millennial consumers are three times more likely to use social media to gain knowledge about a product or service, share opinions online or create online content that other generations are interested in. Millennials also seek the opinions of others online including; key opinion leaders, influencers, friends and family about brands or branded goods that they are interested in purchasing. Thus, this research aims to understand the role in which Instagram has on the purchase intention of luxury fashion in the Irish context.

2.1 Social media marketing

As technology and social media platforms advance, a business's marketing strategy must do the same in order to stay relevant and reach their target audience. Traditional marketing refers to advertisements in newspapers, on billboards, TV and radio. Whereas, recently digital marketing has emerged, which refers to companies

advertising on websites, social media platforms and email marketing. Companies have switched from solely producing traditional marketing to using a mixture of both, for example, The Bonnington Hotel Dublin advertise both on Instagram and the Irish Sun's "TV Mag", combining both print marketing and digital marketing.

Social media users have been continually increasing with a substantial two billion users at the time of Woods research in 2016 (Woods, 2016). According to Woods (2016), 28% percent of total online activity is consumers engaging in online social platforms (Woods, 2016). A huge 74% of these consumers use social media to aid their purchasing decisions (Woods, 2016). However, as the online world is so cluttered with both good and bad marketing, marketers need to be creative in order to break through the clutter and resonate with their ideal consumers. Therefore, if marketing campaigns are carried out correctly this can have a significantly positive impact on consumer's purchase intention and brand likability. According to Woods (2016) influencer marketing can be extremely effective for a brand aiming to influence consumers purchasing decisions. Taking the above information into account it is evident that Instagram is important as consumers use the platform for brand and product research and helps consumers when deciding what brands to purchase. With such a vast number of consumers using social media it is a prominent platform to market to consumers on therefore a brand collaborating with influencers can increase a brand's awareness as well as likeability and sales.

Associating a brand with a particular influencer can encourage consumers to resonate with particular brands. For example, the influencer Suzi, known on Instagram as "crueltyfreekitty", who is extremely passionate about animal rights and cruelty free beauty, both luxury and drugstore. Suzi's followers would be most likely willing to trust that she has done her research on brands she collaborates with and purchases products from. Thus, Suzi's followers would make purchasing decisions of beauty products based on recommendations or content shared by Suzi. It wouldn't be appropriate for Suzi to collaborate with brands like L'Oréal or Estee Lauder who test their products on animals in the beauty industry. Nor, would it be appropriate for Suzi to partner with a company selling power tools and building supplies because it would be obvious that this isn't authentic.

Influencer marketing aims to spread awareness about a product or service. Depending on the relationship between the influencer and their followers, consumers who favour the influencer will perceive the paid advertising on the influencer's page (brand and influencer collaboration) in a positive more optimistic light in comparison to if the brand was to advertise to the consumer directly (Woods, 2016). For instance, some consumers may get frustrated with a brand if they are constantly showing up on their social media newsfeed with sponsored ads, over-exposing the customer to the brand. Social media influencers who are honest and authentic have worked hard to gain the trust of their online following. Thus, by the influencer recommending, discussing or endorsing the product the viewers would be more likely to believe the influencer before believing the words of an advert. As consumers may have the perception that adverts produced by the brand only highlight the positives about the brand and its products. Whereas, authentic influencers will give their honest opinion and discuss both the good and bad aspects of the product.

2.1.1 Luxury brands

The luxury fashion industry is estimated to be worth \$240 billion US dollars (Theng So, et al., 2013). However, many luxury fashion brands are not generating substantial profit (Theng So, et al., 2013). This is believed to be since luxury brands have faced increased competition in recent years due to the advancements in technology and the rise in usage of social media and other online platforms. Consumer's now have access to a vast array of luxury brands both online and offline. Social media aids consumers in gaining knowledge about a product and therefore giving customers a vast amount of options to choose from in the luxury fashion industry.

For the purposes of this research luxury fashion products include; clothing, handbags, accessories, fragrance, shoes, jewellery and watches that are branded with prestigious brands that is reflected in the purchase price of the product. There are four main conglomerates in the luxury fashion industry which are LVMH, Gucci Group NV, Prada and the Richemont Group. The reasoning behind their success is due to their strong brand identity, which is clear, relevant to their target audience and having a well thought-out and defined branding strategy. It could also be argued that these luxury brands have built up a broad and deep customer loyalty. Brand loyalty indicates the attachment a consumer has with a brand (Liu, et a., 2012). This attachment can be

created through the use of imagery and Jennifer Aaker's brand personality types (Liu, et al., 2012).

To successfully create a strong brand identity, the brand will need to accomplish a powerful brand image with perfect product manufacturing, creativity and being a 'first mover' in their industry, identifiable style (i.e. Burberry tartan plaid), exclusivity (i.e. Hermes Birkin handbag) and/or adopting premium pricing strategies (Theng So, et al., 2013). Agreeing with below authors Jain, Kahn and Mishra (2017) Theng So, et al., (2013) state that luxury brands can give consumers hedonic benefits such as identity, affirmation and sense of belonging. Successfully maintaining a strong brand identity will lead to brand favourability from consumers as well as brand loyalty.

2.1.2 Experiential consumption

It has been known for decades that consumers seek and desire to escape from everyday life, and experience something different, something that they would not normally encounter. Thus, marketers want to involve consumers in incredible experiences. Experiential consumption is vital for hedonic purchases such a luxury fashion, or in the case of Taheri et al. (2015)'s research nightclubbing. Creating a pleasure filled environment is what a consumer will recall - how the experience felt to them personally. Taheri et al. (2015) researched experiential consumption in relation to nightclubs and based the research on Turner's (1974) concept of the limonoid which Taheri et al. (2015) investigates in their research, could be applied to the luxury fashion industry when it comes to fashion shows or the purchasing process of buying a luxury good. This would create a deep, extraordinary state of pleasure in the customer's mind.

Kim and Ko (2010) also discovered that there is a strong correlation between trust and purchase intention, and therefore it is vital to provide a customer with honest and reliable information from a luxury brand. The authors also discovered that the use of social media is highly effective for retaining customers and attracting new customers who are already customers of other luxury retail brands (Kim and Ko, 2010).

Similarly to Kim and Ko (2010) Pham, Valette-Florence and Vigneron (2018) believe that equity in the fashion industry is extremely important as it has the capability to keep brands as a highly profitable and fashionable brand for both short periods of time (i.e.

Barbour) and long periods of time (i.e. Chanel No. 5) (Phan et al, 2018). Fashion equity is critical for a brand to retain their current customers and increase their commitment and loyalty. If a brand is viewed as fashionable, which is deemed by society, be it locally or online this increases the desirability levels a customer has for that brand (Pham et al, 2018).

2.2 Hedonic consumption

Hedonic consumption originated in the 1950's when products began to hold symbolic value (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). As Levy stated in 1959 "people buy products not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean" (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982).

A hedonic purchase is one that involves emotion, tapping into an ideal self, purchasing social status and class rather than just a product. If hedonic purchases didn't exist neither would luxury brands. A luxury branded handbag has the same functionality as a plastic Tesco shopping bag; however, a plastic Tesco shopping bag does not symbolise wealth, status or luxury whereas this is exactly what a 'Lady Dior Bag' would represent along with sophistication, luxury and style. Hedonic purchases often create a thrill or excitement within the customer, thus when purchasing a luxury product consumer experience an ecstatic state of mind therefore the consumer will continue to associate luxury brands with emotions of joy, delight, satisfaction and happiness.

Kim and Jang (2013) investigated the presence of price placebo effect in hedonic consumption. The authors found the relationship between hedonic consumption and the price placebo effect to be incredibly predominant in the hospitality sector. Thus, consumers associate a higher price with higher quality and an enhanced lifestyle, which is what was referred to earlier as escaping reality.

2.2.1 Purchase intention & social media

Wang (2009) investigated the levels of engagement consumers had with advertisements when brands used a cross-channel approach. Wang (2009) discovered that consumers pay more attention to advertisements that feature a product or brand that relates to the consumer. Therefore, increasing the engagement online between a brand and their consumers and employing good targeted marketing techniques. Wang (2009) suggests that marketers should be continually aiming to

improve the effectiveness of their advertising campaigns. Wang (2009) also indicates that consumers consume and process an advertisements' core message better if they have a personal involvement with the product or brand. Integrated marketing communications and a cross channel approach to marketing can aid the consumer in processing the information with a higher chance of comprehension and retention as well as encouraging positive attitudes towards the brand (Wang, 2009).

Pauliene and Sedneva (2019) identify the capabilities social media has in terms of shaping how a customer behaves. Pauliene and Sedneva (2019) researched "The Influence of Recommendations in Social Media on Purchase Intentions of Generations Y and Z". Their research findings have solidified that recommendations via social media are important and have leverage in relation to a customer's purchase intention. Thus, there is no essential requirement for a brand to invest heavily in creating content for the brand's social media platform. Pauliene and Sedneva (2019) also found that depending on age, gender and interests' consumers may absorb content differently.

Millennials both male and female born between 1981 and 1996 spend a lot of time online, as demonstrated by Statista in their recent report stating that millennials spend on average 211 minutes online per day (Topic: Internet usage of Millennials in the United States, 2019). This age bracket consumes their news and current affairs online via social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Hyrkin, 2015). A large majority of millennials also turn to social media for information on a product, service or brand, which is why if a brands target market is millennials, the brand must first understand where consumers are searching for the brand as well as the type of content they enjoy. Alternatively, the consumer may dismiss the content completely due to the lack of relevance to the consumer – a marketer would be fault here as the targeting would not be accurate. Millennials do not want to be fixated on one idea, they crave inner growth and change while they evolve in their lifetime. Brands must understand this and allow millennials to grow, develop and evolve with the content.

The researcher is of the opinion that Pauliene and Sedneva (2019) had some vital limitations in their study, one major limitation was that the research was carried out primarily in the restaurant industry. The findings of Pauliene and Sedneva's (2019) research could be deemed inaccurate if the research was carried out based on another industry. The research carried out by Pauliene and Sedneva (2019) was exclusively

for the restaurant industry therefore the results may be different when the idea of online recommendations is in relation to luxury fashion, often a high involvement purchase. Purchasing a meal in a restaurant is commonly viewed as a low involvement purchase, as food is a utilitarian need in comparison to a luxury good which is considered a high involvement purchase and a hedonic purchase.

Phan (2011) agrees with Pauliene and Sedneva (2019) in many ways, arguing that at that time in 2011 it was not a necessity for a brand to be on social media. While some platforms were created as early as 2004 the ability to use them on capable mobile hardware did not come into practice until Apple created the first iPhone in 2007. Even then the power of these new mobile devices could not keep up with the requirements that the apps needed to run smoothly, there was also the issue of national infrastructures – 4g wasn't launched in Ireland until 2013. These external factors are considered issues that would prohibit a smoother running of social media platforms and the ability of these platforms to be used as we understand them today. Phan (2011) determined that luxury brands investing in social media did not obtain an optimal return on investment. Successful brands such as Gucci were not seeing a strong relationship between social media marketing and customer's perception and purchase intention. This study was however conducted in a short time period, whereas if the research had been stretched over a longer time period the results could have been extremely different. As consumers and the brand's social media followers could have had the opportunity to build trust with the brand online if the research was conducted long term, and again in 2011 Instagram was released in 2013 meaning was not developed and released to the public yet. Whereas now Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms there is.

Furthermore, this study was conducted in 2011 and therefore one could suggest that in today's modern era and technological advancements, this is unusual considering that wealthy people have the means and access to adopt new technologies – such as Instagram – before it becomes mainstream. Furthermore, a report released in 2012 by "Digital Differences" states that just 62% of people living in households that make less than \$30,000 annually use the internet, in comparison to 90% of people living in households of the income bracket between \$50,000-\$74,999 use the internet (Digital differences, 2020).

At the time of Phan's research, Phan (2011) found that investing in social media marketing did not positively affect the brands profits, image perceptions or customer relationship with the brand. Phan (2011) found that Burberry, despite their best efforts at trying to transform the brand into a modern and particularly active on social media at this time, the brand was still perceived by 35% of research participants as an old-fashioned luxury brand. If the luxury pricing were not a factor in the purchase intention Phan's participants stated that they still would not purchase such an old-style brand like Burberry. Another issue Burberry had in the past was fakes, with the Burberry monogram it was simple for counterfeit manufactures to copy and sell the print. Since then Burberry have dropped the classic monogram print to avoid this issue. However, this could also be another factor as to why Phan's participants would not purchase this luxury designer brand. Hermes also had a similar issue of continuing to be perceived as an old-fashioned brand as the brand is extremely traditional and has been in the luxury market since 1837. Therefore, this demonstrates a strong relationship between liking a brand and the customer's purchase intention.

With the example of Burberry in mind, Phan (2011) believes that it was not worth while at that time for a luxury brand to invest capital into social media. However, Phan (2011) does mention that this could be the start of something wholly different regarding social media but was unsure what the future would hold for luxury brands and their presence on social media.

Nonetheless, as this research was conducted in 2011, it may be outdated and incorrect in today's modern era where technology is everywhere in almost every aspect of our lives. We have since replaced many traditional careers and jobs such as a teller in a bank branch with a banking kiosk or online banking. Technology and social media have developed and enhanced immensely since 2011. Instagram has since updated their software and added other features to the application such as Instagram stories, reactions and livestreams. With technology continuing to change there may be a shift in usage for the consumer. For example, in 2011 when this study was consulted Instagram had approximately 5 million users according to Protalinski (2012), Ha (2011) and Siegler (2011), whereas in the year 2020 Instagram has over 1 billion users, 500 million of which use the social media platform every day. Instagram is now the most popular social media platform therefore conducting this piece of research on

how the platform influences consumers purchase intention of luxury goods will inevitably have quite different results to Phan in 2011.

Social media is continuously changing, there has been a spike in users of the video social media application TikTok and the demographic this platform is aimed at is teens and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24. According to Reuters 60% of TikTok's monthly users are between the ages of 16 and 24 making up over half of the platform's 26.6 million users (Roumeliotis, et al., 2019). The nature of social media is evolving as we know it, previously it was mainly text, this has completely shifted to video as 92% of online users watch video content online monthly. Thus, the sudden popularity of TikTok in comparison to "Vine", a similar mobile application that was possibly released before it's time. Vine was released in 2013, the same year as Instagram, consumers were ready for an online photography platform but possibly not for an online videography platform. Social media has become ubiquitous within society with the vast majority of the population using at least one form of online social media platform.

Phan (2011) acknowledges that we were at the beginning of an era with social media in 2011, Phan also felt that there was more to come and opportunities to be gained by luxury brands via social media in the future. This research aims to prove Phan's beliefs that the luxury market does have extraordinary opportunities when it comes to influencing customer perception and purchase intention via social media

Phan (2011) at that time believed that devoting time money and effort to social media will not pay off for a brand, whereas, Kim and Ko (2010) found that social media investment was extremely beneficial for a brand a year previous.

2.2.2 Purchase intention & entertainment

Kim and Ko (2010) wrote about the impact social media has on the customer relationship and purchase intention. The authors proclaim that every aspects of a luxury brand's social media marketing strategy have the capacity to impact a customer's purchase intention and relationship with the brand (Kim and Ko, 2010). This can effectively benefit both the brand and the customer. Brands should use social media to educate, inform, entertain and sell, all four aspects should be evenly spread across all their online platforms.

However, Kim and Ko (2010) believe that luxury brands should focus considerably more on the entertainment aspect in order to create a strong relationship between the brand and their customers or potential customers showcasing regular activities in relation to the luxury brand. One may suggest that entertainment is a new aspect of online marketing that brands can utilize to build a relationship with their consumers digitally. For example; honest information, developing a relationship with followers and providing free entertainment via social media will all result in increased power and influence on purchase intention and flourish personal relationships with customers via this two-way communication marketing tool we know as social media. This is similar to what was mentioned above about online influencers, the more honest and genuine one is with their followers, the more trust their followers will have in them. Social media now enables marketers to gain instant feedback from consumers and gathering data on what aspects consumers do and do not like about their targeted marketing, campaigns or any other online activity from the brand. The poll feature on Instagram as well as the answer box can also be an excellent, quick, cost effective and easy way to conduct market research. Allowing marketers to interact with consumers and building a relationship between the brand and their consumers.

2.3 Class & social influences

Jain, Khan and Mishra (2017) predicts that the demand for luxury consumption will soon originate from the upper-middle class proportion of society that desire to purchase luxury items and climb the "consumption ladder" - which would begin at utilitarian purchases and end on hedonic luxury consumption. Thus, luxury brands often symbolise wealth, and social status. Luxury branding is a strategy based on perception often tapping into a consumer's desire for their ideal self which leads to aspirational consumption.

Consumer's purchase luxury fashion goods in order to satisfy their needs, wants and desires and are motivated both internally and externally (Jain, Khan and Mishra, 2017). External motivators include; exhibit and symbolise wealth, social status as mentioned above and finally their social position (Jain, Khan and Mishra, 2017). In addition to the above external motivators' consumers are commonly motivated by internal motivators involving appealing to their ideal self, personal enjoyment, inner

satisfaction and originality or to differentiate themselves (Jain, Khan and Mishra, 2017). Purchasing luxury goods aids in fulfilling one's socio-psychological needs.

There are different types of luxury fashion consumers; collectivists often believe that purchasing luxury goods is to signify wealth and social status (Jain, Khan and Mishra, 2017). Whereas, individualists believe that the most important factor in purchasing a luxury product are the experience (Jain, Khan and Mishra, 2017) they receive from the brand, staff and products as well as gaining gratitude for their possessions.

High quality in the luxury brands products and services has a positive impact on the purchase intention of collectivist consumers, but this is not the case for individualists. Collectivises also value salience and price when it comes to luxury consumption (Aliyev and Wagner, 2018). However, hedonism plays a vital role for individualists, this means that individual's enjoy self-indulgence and pleasure (Aliyev and Wagner, 2018). For example, Ugg Australia slippers would appeal to the individualist consumer as the consumer will be wearing them around their home rather than out in public attempting to signify their wealth and social status. The consumer will enjoy the comfort of the product while experiencing walking in luxury at home. The two types of luxury consumers are both purchasing the brands for different reasons although both value different aspects of the brand, and all consumers are different which is why brands should leave some advertising campaigns open to interpretation rather than telling the consumer what to think.

2.3.1 Culture

As well as internal and external factors having an impact on a consumer purchase intention (i.e. social media influencers) the consumer is also influenced by their culture. According to Hung et al. (2011) social context plays a significant role when it comes to the purchase intention of luxury goods. However, the study also presents findings that showed the symbolic value that luxury branding represents is not as important to the Chinese consumer as it is to a Western consumer. Thus, culture has a strong impact on the purchase intention and buyer behaviour of a consumer.

Yamawaki and Sarfati (2019) investigates the culture of both Brazil and Italy to identify if their national cultures have an impact on customer's brand engagement on social media. Their research showed that the most effective way to advertise and

communicate with their target audience in Brazil is through the video platform YouTube, in contrast the most effective way to communicate a brands message to their Italian target audience is via the social media platforms Facebook and LinkedIn (Yamawaki and Sarfati, 2019).

The research results uncovered that consumer respond and engage better with key opinion leaders rather than posts published by a brand in the luxury fashion industry (Yamawaki and Sarfati, 2019). The reasoning behind the different ways to target the two countries target audience via different platforms is established by the authors that Facebook and LinkedIn are seen as medias to share content among socially established equals, in comparison to YouTube where people expect to be shown content from other users rather than a two-way communication media (Yamawaki and Sarfati, 2019). The authors believe the main difference here between the two countries is that Italy is less hierarchical than Brazil and the Italian customer is willing to build a relationship with luxury brands as appose to Brazilian customers (Yamawaki and Sarfati, 2019).

With the above research in mind this could be an opportunity for companies trying to market, sell, grow their target market or increase their brand awareness in Ireland. This research will aim to identify if Instagram is the most effective platform to use when marketing to the Irish customers, if Instagram impact and influence their purchase decisions. In this study the researcher focuses on the social media platform Instagram to further understand the complexities of millennial consumers and how culture, social class and their aspirations have an impact on their purchase intentions.

2.3.2 Influencers

As influencer marketing has taken a surge in popularity Lim Sanny et al. (2020) has found that social media marketing has a major role to play in the impact of influencing consumers purchasing decisions.

Charoennan and Huang (2018) discuss the ideology that key opinion leaders have a major impact of conspicuous consumption which refers to the unnecessary (luxury) purchases people make in order to portray themselves in a specific social class. The congruence theory employed by Charoennan and Huang (2018) indicates that the purchases a customer makes align with their core values and beliefs. Materialists are

motivated by perceiving themselves in a high-class social status, they are heavily influenced by key personalities on social media which they use as inspiration to keep their public image at that aspired high class. For example, an individual who aspires to live a life similar to one of the Kardashian sisters may observe the Kardashians and begin to pick up on the type of language used by the family as well as the different brands the sisters own and wear. And ultimately, copy their lifestyle in order to be perceived in such a wealthy, prestigious light by others around them.

While consumers may be sceptical about advertisements and question the honesty in some campaigns and statements made by brands, consumers have started to trust and perceive influencers as more credible in recent years. In a recent report produced by Convenience Convert it states that 63% of individuals trust the message of an influencer more than messages from the brand themselves (Baer, 2020). This is likely to be because of the relationship built by the influencer with their following. Along with this, people resonate with online personas often believing that they are both similar, making it easier for the viewer to trust the influencer.

However, in the year 2020 the internet and social media platforms seem to be saturated with social media influencers with a large following and often multiple brand deals. Which in turn leads consumers back to being sceptical and questioning the honesty behind statements made by such popular influencers (Eroglu and Kose, 2019). Rosie Connolly, a popular fashion, beauty and lifestyle influencer on Instagram was discovered to be filtering and photoshopping images in a Rimmel advert to promote their new “Lasting Finish Breathable” foundation and concealer featuring on Rosie’s Facebook and Instagram pages (Hilliard, 2018). This had a seriously negative impact on Rimmel and the faith that followers had in this influencer. This leads consumers to question the honesty, integrity and credibility of both the influencer and the brand.

Influencers on Instagram, or any other social media platform are sent samples of products or given an opportunity to experience a service with the aim of the influencer promoting the brand, product or service across their platforms. Alternatively, influencers are given a fee by a brand to speak positively about products or services that are sold by that brand (Eroglu and Kose, 2019). This may falsely represent the brand to the consumer and consumers may purchase a product or service with particular expectations and unfortunately

be faced with a different reality that the influencer portrayed online. For example, an influencer such as Kourtney Kardashian, Khloe Kardashian and Kylie Jenner all promoted the brand “Fit Tea” on their Instagram pages. With neither sister fully disclosing that the posts were sponsored, all posts lacked the hashtag #ad or #sponsored (The Fashion Law, 2017). “Fit Tea” Consumers may be under the impression that not only these posts were voluntary and genuine, but that this product will help them in their weight loss journey. The National Advertising Division (NAD) decided that “while the diet and exercise program that Fit Tea promotes to customers who purchase Fit Tea might result in weight loss or other weight-related health improvements, there was no evidence in the record that drinking Fit Tea by itself will boost metabolism, boost immunity, burn fat or otherwise result in weight loss” (The Fashion Law, 2017). This makes the viewers or followers of those influencers see them as ingenuine, dishonest, greedy and careless when it comes to their followers.

Micro-influencers are smaller influencers who are more commonly perceived by viewers as relatable and down to earth individuals who usually focus on a niche market or personal passion of theirs (Eroglu and Kose, 2019), resonating with their followers. Micro-influencers are perceived as favourable by brand managers for these reasons. Micro-influencers may relate to people in an abundance of ways, they may be individuals who base their target market around the local area. For example, the micro-influencer Sarah, known as “BallymunHun” on Instagram posts regularly about local shops, restaurants, cafes, salons and other small businesses. Sarah relates to her viewers because they are in the same social setting, social class and share similar life experiences as well as culture.

Therefore, micro-influencers, the influencers with lesser opportunity for brand collaborations are commonly seen as entirely credible since they are not getting paid to talk about certain brands, products or services. Usually, micro-influencers are part-time influencers and do it as a hobby as well as having another job that is their primary source of income.

Online influencers share so much of their personal life online that their followers often feel as though they know the influencer personally rather than viewing them as just merely an online personality. Viewers often trust online influencers when they have

been following them for a while and often viewers hold great value in the influencer's thoughts, feelings and opinions.

2.3.3 Purchase intention & social media influencers

Alam and Khan (2019) agrees with the authors Phan (2011) and Pauliene and Sedneva (2019) that a brands social media content has no significant impact on the purchase intentions of customers. Phan (2011) however, does not mention online recommendations unlike Pauliene and Sedneva (2019) and Alam and Khan (2019).

Alam and Khan (2019) revealed that content created and published by a brand on social media has no major influence on customer's perception of the brand's image. Nevertheless, user generated content like reviews and shares of personal anecdotes has a greater impact on how a customer views the brand. Alam and Khan (2019) believe the reasoning behind this to be, people trust other people, and people are more intrigued to hear about what others are saying about the brand, rather than what the brand have to say about themselves. Thus, if customers are both aware of the brand and have a good perception of the brand image it would be highly likely that their attitudes towards that brand are optimistic and advantageous for that specific brand (Alam and Khan, 2019). Alam and Khan (2019) continue with stating that brand attitudes and purchase intention have a strong correlating relationship.

People build relationships with other consumers online who review a brand, product or service and that is why micro-influencers are becoming very important within the social media marketing space. People who follow these micro-influencers see them as normal consumers who are sharing opinions and experiences about a certain brand, product or service. While celebrities are known to have endorsements, micro-Influencers are reliant on the following that they build up. In turn a community of people built around the thoughts and opinions of the micro-influencer. Depending on the size of the community, consumers are also bought into having their opinion heard by both the micro-influencer and others in the community. It could be argued that marketing is looked at as a largescale operation, rather than looking at it as a communal small-scale operation that is built through the use of more reliable and relatable sources such as micro-influencers.

As Alam and Khan (2019) discussed that consumers now view influencer generated content as a more reliable source than the brand, thus why influencers have surged in popularity in recent years. Wang (2009) believes that if an advertisement released by a brand can relate to a consumer, they will pay more attention to said advertisement.

The difference between of the research conducted by Alam and Khan (2019) and this piece of research is that their research was based on an extremely broad topic and was not narrowed down to one specific field or market. This research will be looking predominantly at the luxury fashion market and identifying factors affecting a consumer's purchase intention in the Irish context. This research is based on the social media platform Instagram and the power it has to influencer millennials when deciding to buy a luxury brand. This research is specific to Ireland and will identify factors impacting consumer behaviours.

2.3.4 Para-social relationships

Consumers often build what is known as a para-social relationship with influencers online. Para-social relationships are one-sided relationships where one party invests feelings and emotions (may be positive or negative), attention, interest and time into the relationship though digital platforms (such as Instagram). While the other person in the relationship is not aware of the other's existence. Para-social relationships are most often developed with celebrities, influencers or brands.

Para-social relationships extend one's social network and minimises the risk of rejection. In addition to this, para-social relationships allow one person to identify with another online through social media and developing such relationships that naturally provoke an empathetic response to the online persona.

Para-social relationships are extremely common among influencers and their followers, as the internet and social media platforms such as Instagram have allowed viewers to engage with influencers 24 hours a day. Viewers or followers of social media personas/ key opinion leader/ influencers feel a connection with the influencer and convey feelings of affection, appreciation, support and loyalty towards that influencer.

Once a para-social relationship is developed with an influencer, that influencers has the power to persuade others and impact their purchase intentions. This is why influencers and micro-influencers are so successful and effective at impacting a consumer's purchase decision and influencing their opinion. Influencers tap into their viewer's ideal selves and viewers identify with particular influencers based on their online persona's. Influencers that are authentic are powerful because their followers have confidence in them and hold value in their opinions and recommendations. Marketing managers can take advantage of the trust an influencer following has in them to gain exposure for a new brand or product increasing awareness as well as increasing sales.

While para-social relationships can provide individuals with comfort, companionship and influence, it is also vital for individuals to maintain strong relationships with their friends and family that are not online.

This research will continue to discuss the impact Instagram has on the purchase intention of luxury brands. The next section is based on the research question and methodology, delving into detail about how the researcher aims to conduct the research in order to gain an answer to the above research question.

Research Question and Methodology

3.1 Research question

This chapter portrays the research question of this study and describes the methodology behind the research that was applied. This piece of research aims to investigate and understand the role that Instagram has on an Irish millennial's purchase intentions of luxury goods. By doing so and concentrating on different aspects of hedonic purchases this research will discuss different experiences each consumer has had with luxury consumption. Additionally, this chapter details the reasoning for the selection of research participants and research location as well as the data collection and analysis and the credibility of this research.

The intention of this research is to depict the influence Instagram has on Irish millennials' desire to purchase luxury fashion. This dissertation aims to present a comprehensive understanding of the consumer behaviour in Ireland among both genders between the ages of 24 and 39 (born between the years 1981 and 1996). This piece of research will discuss the below question:

1. What role does Instagram have on the purchase intention of luxury fashion in the Irish context?

This research will be subjective and focused on the experience of each research participant.

The effectiveness of the social media platform Instagram in influencing consumer's hedonic purchasing decisions. Hedonic consumption was discussed previously in the literature review as a process that was heavily influenced by emotion. However, hedonic purchases are not restricted to an emotional attachment and relative social class. Design is one of the most important aspects of visceral hedonic consumption. Hedonic consumption can be impacted visceral design which refers to; size, shape, colour, material, features, usability, profitability and novelty (Wrigley, et al., 2009). Wrigley et al., (2009) discovered that shape had the most prominent impact when it came to the visceral occurrence, in comparison to function, which obtained the lowest occurrence rate. Visceral design involves the initial opinion a product a consumer forms about a product, this occurs instantly. This opinion enables consumer to decide on what is positive, negative, safe or unsafe about a product (Wrigley, et al., 2009).

Therefore, the visceral features of a product must be perfect, because the consumers in any given situation only have the product packaging to judge the product or brand by, particularly if they have never heard of a brand or used any of the brands products previously.

This research is a case study research as marketing is classed as a social science, this study will examine the phenomenon of purchasing luxury fashion in the Irish context. This research will be focused on a group of luxury fashion consumers who enjoy engaging in conspicuous consumption. This case study research will be investigating and analysing this group of consumers in order to gain an understanding into their personal perspectives. As well as gaining an insight into their perspectives, this study will aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of their purchase intentions and the impact that the social media platform Instagram has on these individuals.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Research philosophy

This research will be phenomenological in nature, which aims to depict, understand and explain the significance of human experiences (Bloor and Wood, 2006), focusing on qualitative research methods to understand the purchasing process of an Irish millennial.

Phenomenology first came about in the twentieth century founded by a philosopher known as Edmund Husserl (Giorgi, and Giorgi, 2003). The main focus of Phenomenology was to define how individual's feel and interpret their surroundings and atmosphere (Giorgi, and Giorgi, 2003). Phenomenology refers to the visual appearance of objects, the conscious experience an individual has with an object or in the manner of which something is experienced. For example, a consumer may find when purchasing a luxury product or service the staff are extremely attentive, helpful and patient, thus the consumer thoroughly enjoying the experience. This consumer holds an opinion and perspective that may differ from each individual.

This study predominantly concerned and focused on the personal experience of the research participant both online and offline. Phenomenology research allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of what the research participants goes through and gaining an insight into how they feel without prejudice or judgement. With this in mind, this study will also consider hedonic consumption as discussed

above. Delving into detail on the reasoning behind this research's participants purchasing luxury goods and what hedonic features were fulfilled, be it emotional or visceral.

This research is a phenomenological piece of research as it is based on luxury consumers (the research participants) personal experiences that they have experienced when purchasing luxury fashion items. The personal experiences of the research participants will be the main findings of this study and the basis of the discussion. As each personal experience is different and varies from consumer to consumer this gave the research a wide range of perspectives and opinions on each experience that the researcher will be able to delve into detail in when conducting the in-depth interviews. Therefore, it is vital that this study is a phenomenological as it allows the research to discover varying experiences and uncover the participants personal opinions and finally allow the research to thoroughly explore all subjective findings.

3.2.2 Sampling

The use of purposive sampling was applied to this dissertation as phenomenological research is undergone through purposive sampling (Goulding, 2005). This research requires purposive sampling as this study is based on luxury consumers and their use of Instagram. If non-luxury consumers were to be involved as participants of this research the final results would be skewed as there would be no guarantee that the participants purchase or engage with luxury brands via Instagram. Purposive sampling is not confined to a certain number of participants however it does aid the researcher in finding the most suitable participants for the study by guiding the researcher to choose logical participants for the study.

As previously indicated, this type of sampling does not require a particular sample size as long as all aspects of the research was covered during the data collection and analysed in-depth by the researcher. Although a larger sample size may allow the researcher to gain a broader understanding of participants varying experiences and opinions there is no guarantee that the research will be any more accurate.

Participants were found via Instagram and personally contacted once they met the research criteria. The criteria involved the participants to have purchased a luxury fashion good in the last 6 years, level of income, age range and be an active user of

Instagram following latest fashion trends, influencers and luxury brands on the platform. The researcher reviewed their followers and following profile on Instagram and searched for individuals who were active on the app, following luxury brands and influencers and were in the millennial age bracket. When contacting potential research participants, the researcher asked if the potential participants would like to voluntarily participate in a study focused around luxury brands and the social media platform Instagram. The research also included the question “have you purchased a luxury fashion item within the last 6 years?”. When the participants agreed to be a part of the research, the researcher then planned with the participants to carry out the in-depth interviews either online or in-person, depending on the individual. Because of the small sample size, in-depth interviews were a practical choice and were all transcribed to enable the researcher to return to the analysis as needed.

3.3 Research location & participants

This dissertation is solely focusing on Irish millennials since this generation constitutes the future of luxury brand’s consumer. Although millennials may not be in a position to purchase vast amounts of luxury fashion, particularly when there is so much competition among fast fashion brands, millennials hold extensive knowledge on these luxury brands. As well as the ability to be able to gather information about a brand with the touch of a button in today’s digital era. Fast fashion brands are hugely discounted in comparison to luxury retail and massively more enticing to some consumers, particularly those with a tighter budget. Although luxury fashion is not as affordable as fast fashion there is of course a prestige and social status that comes with purchasing a luxury branded handbag such as Louis Vuitton in contrast to purchasing a fast fashion brand. 73% of Instagram’s luxury consumers read blogs, news articles, or magazines related to luxury (Experience Luxury on Instagram, 2020), this is likely to be an attempt at gathering information about the luxury market.

The single standard for participants in this study is having a purchasing experience with a luxury brand. The researcher has decided that this study will be limited to consumers who have previously bought luxury goods in the last six years. All participants must also be active users of the social media platform Instagram. Before the research participants will be asked to participate in this research, the volunteers will be screened online first. The researcher will ask questions to ensure that the participants are using Instagram and have purchased a luxury item in the last six years.

Ireland is the primary location of this study as the luxury brand market in this country continues to grow. Irelands luxury market is set to steadily increase by 10.1% yearly between 2020 and 2023 (Luxury Goods - Ireland | Statista Market Forecast, 2020). According to Statista (2020) Ireland's luxury market industry is estimated to be worth US\$960m in 2020.

Irelands economy was on the rise in 2019 and the beginning on 2020 therefore discretionary income was averaging at approximately €504 weekly (Income - CSO - Central Statistics Office, 2020). The unemployment rate in Ireland had also been at an all-time low in November of 2019 at 4.8% (Monthly Unemployment November 2019 - CSO - Central Statistics Office, 2020). Whereas the year previously, 2018 the unemployment rate was 5.6% that November (Monthly Unemployment November 2019 - CSO - Central Statistics Office, 2020). Furthermore, Ireland was in major economic growth during the years 1990's and early 2000's (Prendiville, 2013) and therefore large amounts of discretionary income and getting the opportunity to experience luxury brands during this time. And even though, Ireland was in a deep economic downturn ultimately leading to recession in 2009 and earnings were down by 0.6% in the final quarter on 2009 (Earnings and Labour Costs, 2010) there was still a market for luxury goods in Ireland. In saying this, by no means was the Irish luxury market flourishing, it was quite a small market, as detailed by Ruxton (2017) an Irish Times author, however in the same article it portrays a substantial increase post-recession. Although this article is based on luxury cars it still gives interpretative insight into the broader luxury market as well as economic trends.

Ireland has got a market for luxury fashion and this is clear from the above information, which is why this research is based on the Irish luxury fashion market. It is evident that Irish consumers favour the luxury branded market which is why the researcher decided to research the industry in the Irish context. Attempting, to gain a better understanding of the luxury market as well as the psyche of a luxury fashion consumer.

3.4 Justification for choosing Instagram

There may be certain time limits on the study of a certain platform such as Instagram and many other social platforms online. For example, Facebook, when it first launched was a social networking platform for friends and family to connect and interact with one another online. Although this has remained Facebook's fundamental purpose,

Facebook has continuously seen less teens joining the social media platform (Aboulhosn, 2020) due to newer social media platforms emerging that their parents and relatives are not active on, such as TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat. According to a study conducted by Pew Research Centre teens say that they use YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat with Facebook no longer dominating the social media platform industry (Anderson and Jiang, 2018). Just 51% of teens say that they use Facebook (Anderson and Jiang, 2018) in comparison to 2016 when 71% (Lenhart, 2015) of teens said they would regularly use Facebook, it is evident that the social media landscape is evolving as well as consumers.

Although Facebook has 2.5 billion monthly active users the most age range that the social platform is most popular with the age range 24 to 35 as this age bracket makes up a total of 32% of their monthly users (Statista, 2020), the largest percentage for one age bracket. Currently the age range of over 65 are the fastest increasing age range on the platform (Aboulhosn, 2020). Thus, Instagram would be a better more accurate social media platform to conduct such research on millennials on their purchase intention of luxury brands and the influence that social media, in particular Instagram has on their opinion, perspectives, purchase intention and buying behaviour.

3.5 Protocol for data collection

The researcher chose to gather data through semi-structured interviews face to face, in person. The questionnaire is provided in appendix 1. Although in-depth interviews are time consuming and sometimes vulnerable to bias (Boyce and Neale, 2006), the researcher decided in person interviews to be the best choice when it comes to understanding the rationale behind the luxury purchase intention and buying behaviour of Irish millennial consumers. This interpretivist type of research will aid the researcher in understanding differing factors that lead consumers and aspirational consumers to desire luxury fashion and their experiences with the industry. The differing factors include price, experience, choice of brand, relationship with social media and the participants relationship with online influencers.

In-depth interviews will give participants the opportunity to discuss their online activity on Instagram as well as their personal feeling and opinions towards luxury fashion ensuring a deeper understanding of the participants' consumer behaviour. Thus,

enabling the researcher to analyse the results on a deeper level picking up on both verbal and non-verbal language, therefore generating valuable information in relation to this piece of research. Regarding the answers the researcher receives from participants, the researcher will organise the answers given into themes as well as identifying differences between each participant and explore this further in their interviews. Thus, the researcher gains a broader knowledge as to why consumers purchase luxury goods and the impact social media has on millennial consumers.

The questions were cautiously developed in order to be neutral and open ended allowing the research participant to do most of the talking. The questions will be developed into groups that can be put into themes emanating from the literature review. There will be a set of questions that frame the experiential aspect of purchasing luxury goods, followed by a set of questions revolving around the social media platform Instagram and the relationship the participants have with online influencers. Another set of questions will be based around what the opinion of the research participant on culture, social status and social class of the influencers they follow on Instagram.

The interviews will take approximately one hour and will be conducted in a face to face manner in a quiet and peaceful environment with no interruptions. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. All interviewees will be voluntary participants and understand that they can revoke themselves from the research at any time. The participants understand that they would remain anonymous and their data will be kept confidential by the researcher.

To obtain the highest level of credibility and accuracy the researcher will practice neutral yet engaging body language, as well as not using any judgement throughout the interview process. Threading cautiously not to portray any negative opinions or assumptions. The researcher will not question the honesty or integrity of the participants during the interview. Each participant will be treated professionally and with great respect and gratitude, with no preliminary judgement and without assumptions. This will be all in an effort to obtain completely unbiased or unprejudiced findings. While the participants are answering the interview questions the researcher will maintain eye contact when appropriate as well as jot down any notes the researcher feels important and necessary.

The rigor of a study refers to the credibility or confidence in the data, analysis and the research methods utilized to conduct the study. The credibility of a piece of research is dependent on the logical fit of the research questions, research methodology and the research analysis (Eisner, 2017).

3.6 Data collection

The researcher will write notes during the interviews of any information the researcher deems as important and observations made of the participants. This allowed the researcher to record the experience from the researcher's point of view and ensure that no bias was introduced during the interview. Thus, the information should be reliable and trustworthy.

All interviews will be recorded via the mobile application "Otter." This app recorded the audio of the interview as well as transcribed the interview. The researcher read the interview transcriptions a total of three times before making further notes from the interview for analysis. The audio of the interview was listened back to by the researcher a total of twice before drawing any conclusions about the interview results. Thematic analysis was then applied by the researcher in order to distinguish similar or the same reoccurring themes within the different interviews. The interviews were then coded into different categories and sub-categories. The researcher was able to identify such themes after re-reading and repeatedly listening to both the interview's audio and transcription. In an effort to obtain the most accurate results, the interviews were analysed by the researcher soon after interviews had concluded.

Initially there were ten sub-categories that eventually were categorised into five main themes that will be discussed in detail below. The five themes are; demographics, purchase motivators, the purchase as an investment, purchase decision and customer satisfaction and social media influencers

The first stage of coding included new prominent codes. In order for there to be no bias or prejudice the researcher did not use pre-determined codes.

"it would [the luxury handbag] last you longer and wear better though-out the years, you know you'll get years of use out of it rather than maybe a year with a cheaper bag"

“I knew it [luxury handbag] was an investment to the same extent because of the good quality, because of the reasons I mentioned before [brand reputation and the material was Italian leather]”

Both extracts were taken from two separate interviews and coded into the categories of “quality”, “investment” and “frequency of use”.

The below diagram will demonstrate how the first stage of coding of categories and subcategories transformed into themes.

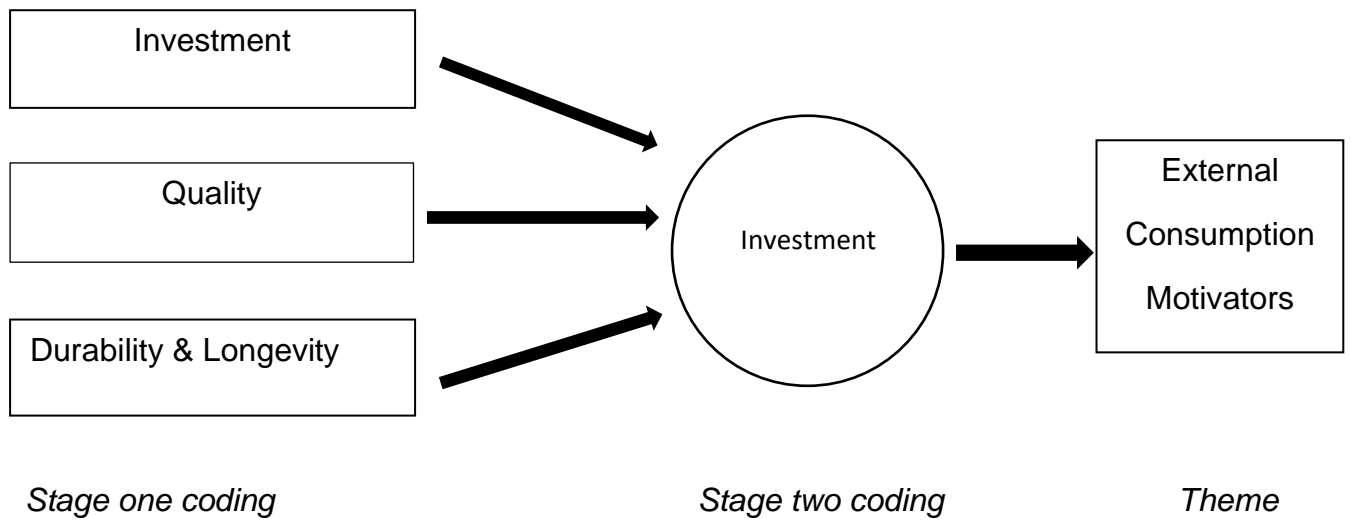


Figure 1: The above diagram is an example of the first and second stage of coding was used to analyse the interview transcripts into a theme for the findings of this research. There is a table of expected answers that the researcher hopes to receive in appendix 2.

This methodology chapter has presented the essential information to explore this research on a logical methodological basis. The focus of this research is on consumers of luxury brands and the influence that Instagram has on their purchase intention in an Irish context. Four semi-structured interviews should ensure this study will acquire the appropriate data. The findings section of this research will detail the importance of these findings.

Findings & Analysis

The main objective of this section is to uncover and delve deep into the results of the interviews and discuss the main outcomes that were found during the analysis of the interviews. Multiple reoccurring themes and sub-themes emerged though out all of the research interviews that were organised by the researcher into five main themes.

4.1 Demographics

This research was conducted with four research participants from Ireland. The mean age of these research participants is 25, which is perfect for this research as it is based upon millennials. The table below showcases additional information of the study's participants.

Participant	Purchase	Avg. Income	Employment status	Age
1	Michael Kors bag	€27k	Full-time employment	25
2	Charlotte Tilbury Foundation	€28k	Full-time employment	28
3	Tommy Hilfiger clothing item	€20k	Full-time employment	24
4	Furla handbag	€25k	Full-time employment	24

Figure 2: Data on the research participants which includes their luxury purchase, average income, employment status and age.

4.2 Purchase motivator

This section will explore the reasoning behind the purchase of the luxury fashion goods purchased by the research participants. The first thematic group is the initial motivator. This section includes the reasoning behind the participants choosing to purchase the luxury fashion items they have purchased and why.

Internal and external motivations were prominent in the research participants as the participants explained that they want to be seen as classy and expensive. The research participants in this study vary from individualists and collectivists.

4.2.1 Initial motivator

This first theme that became prominent during the interviews was the initial motivator that drove the consumer to purchase that luxury fashion product. For most of the research participants in this study they went to the retail store without the intention to purchase a specific product, thus the motivating factors for these participants happened in store. Two of the participants in the study had made their purchase while on holiday. Participant 1 was holidaying in New York and participant 4 was holidaying in Italy, both major fashion capitals of the world.

“I was in American at the time and you can get really good deals on some really luxury items in the outlet stores” (Participant 1)

“I bought a Furla handbag in Italy” (Participant 4)

Both participants were on holiday with an intention to purchase a luxury product but had not decided prior to arriving in store what product they wanted to purchase. Both participants said that they were willing to spend a little bit more than normal as they were on holiday and purchasing luxury fashion would not be a super regular occurrence in their everyday lives without having thought about it first.

For the other research participant's, they went in store with the intention of purchasing a particular product. Participant 3 had gone to an outlet store without the intention of purchasing a Tommy Hilfiger jumper but was open to purchasing a product from the bran. Participant 3 had not seen the dress prior to their shopping visit however Tommy Hilfiger was the first shop the participant went into. The individual was unsure if they wanted to purchase the item. Therefore, the individual decided to walk around the outlets for some time to consider the purchase before eventually deciding the jumper was worth the investment.

“I didn't know if I wanted it or not, so I took a walk around and about a half an hour later I went back and bough it.” (Participant 3)

In participant 2's case this was slightly different as they had seen the product prior to the purchase and went in store to purchase the item. Prior to purchasing the Charlotte

Tilbury foundation research participant 2 had seen various forms of social media marketing from both influencers and the brand.

“The Charlotte Tilbury foundation, I just seen loads of bloggers advertise it and it was constantly coming up on my Instagram ads and I thought the product looked really good.” (Participant 2)

All in all, there could be a multitude of reasons as to why consumers purchase luxury goods but the decision to purchase a luxury good was made much earlier than the actual purchase for research participant 2.

4.3 The purchase as an investment

The idea of the luxury purchase as an investment emerged in all 4 interviews. The participants all referred to purchasing a luxury product as an investment due to the impeccable manufacturing quality, high standards and high-quality material or ingredients the product is made from.

“I feel like it [Michael Kors bag] would last you a little bit longer and it would wear better throughout the years, you know you would get years of use out of it rather than maybe a year with a cheaper bag” (Participant 1)

“Charlotte Tilbury is a very big brand and it’s used a lot on runway” (Participant 2)

“If I was investing in anything that cost a bit more, I definitely look up reviews and even if I knew anybody who used the product before as well, I would ask for their opinions” (Participant 2)

“I knew it would be good quality, that it would wash well and it’s trendy” “The quality of the jumper is 10 times better [than a fast fashion brand]. (Participant 3)

As luxury items tend to be more expensive, if the participants know and feel confident that they will get value for their money, all participants are happy to pay a higher price for luxury good. The research participants also associate the brands they purchased with high quality, durable material, confidence and a high social class, which is essentially what they are purchasing when they purchase a luxury product.

Investing in a luxury product for these participants was similar to investing in a social status, trying to execute the idea of their ideal self. As touched on in the literature review some individuals are often attempting to escape their mundane everyday reality by purchasing a premium luxury fashion item that would not be a regular occurrence for some participants. Luxury brands often provide consumers with a sense of pleasure, satisfaction and fulfilment. Investing in not only the product but the benefits the product brings, i.e. social class, confidence and sophistication.

4.4 Purchase decision and consumer satisfaction

All of the research participants expressed that wearing a luxury product gives them more confidence both in themselves and the product. As well as this all participants agree that luxury brands make them feel better in themselves when wearing the items. Along with the way the items make the participants feel, they also all said that the customer service in each luxury retail store was second to none with all staff having an extensive knowledge on each of the products and the brand.

“The price was good for the quality” (Participant 3)

“The shop was quieter. It provided a better environment for the one to one interaction” “in other shops I don’t feel like I would get the same special attention that I got in Furla” (Participant 4)

The below quotes from the research interviews portray the feeling of confidence one has when wearing a luxury fashion product. Both Participants feel confident in themselves and in the products.

“you feel a bit more dressed up and that you have something really nice and expensive on you” (Participants 4)

“Flawless finish [of the Charlotte Tilbury foundation]” (Participant 2)

The confidence that luxury brands give consumers is usually solely based on brand associations and because both participants 2 and 4 like the brand they have purchased the associate the brands with positivity such as pleasure, beauty, social status, integrity, class and excellent quality.

Purchasing a luxury product, for all participants was not just purchasing the product itself, but the experience, the brand, the luxurious product and packaging as well as

social status and class. This in many ways more than one, fulfilled their hedonic needs and satisfied their desire for pleasure.

Participant 4 would be classed as an individualist consumer as the purchase of the luxury Furla handbag gave the individual a sense of importance and experienced a boost in confidence.

4.5 Social Media Influencers

The social media influencer landscape is completely saturated therefore consumers are often sceptical as to who to trust and who is authentic. Because the social media influencer is a relatively new career path people can now have and there was a grey area around advertisements and sponsorships for some time while the advertising regulations were trying to catch up, consumers may often ignore paid sponsorships or collaborations with brands and influencers.

“Rosie Connelly used it [Charlotte Tilbury foundation] and I have used other things she recommended in the past and I found them good, so I trusted her opinion on this” (Participant 2)

“Definitely some influencers I would like a little bit more and I would look at their stuff and say oh I like that. And sometimes if they have a link, I would click on it to have a look” “influencers would influence me to buy, especially makeup because if I see something looking well on someone, I want to try it” (Participant 1)

“I really like Terri McEvoy, I just think she’s funny and she’s sort of more relatable with her dog” “I follow some influencers but I wouldn’t really pay much heat to a lot of their sponsored content” “only particular influencers or brands with sponsorships” (Participant 4)

In participant 4’s case they really like influencers and engage with them on social media however they must have built trust in the influencer to purchase something recommended by them. Ignoring most sponsorships could also be a big issue for brands which is why it is so essential to work with credible influencers who have already built a trusting relationship with their followers. The sponsorship must also be relevant to the influencers target market otherwise the sponsorship is a waste of time, energy and capital.

As mentioned previously in the literature review the para-social relationship developed or experienced by the research participants play an important role in the influence the online influencer has on the individual. If this para-social relationship experienced by the individual was associated with honesty, integrity and authenticity, the online opinion leader would have a much more powerful influence over the individual.

Discussion

Considering, what is already know about the topic of luxury branding, social influence and Irish consumer behaviour, this research aimed to uncover the truth about how much Instagram really influences the Irish millennial to purchase luxury fashion. Although consumers may not like to admit that social media influencers and social media marketing has a part to play in their purchasing decisions, social media influencers hold power on impacting or persuading one's purchasing decision. However, in saying that if the influencer is inauthentic and not viewed as credible by the consumer this influencer has not got the influence over their following and it is a similar situation for brands. If a customer has a really bad experience with a brand or its products and it is not rectified that consumer will find it difficult to trust that brand and may even boycott that brand forever.

The purpose of this research was to understand how Instagram influences the purchase intention of luxury fashion in the Irish context. This was achieved as this research unveiled that Irish millennials, although sometimes without wanting to, are influenced by online social media influencers. As the market is extremely saturated now it is important for influencers to have followers who trust their opinions and recommendations. This is the reason for influencers to have the power to influence individuals "trust", if an influencers followers don't listen to their recommendations or sponsored content then it more often than not means their followers do not trust, or have faith in that influencer.

Irish consumers enjoy influencer or brand content when it entertains and informs them, which is first and foremost what a brand is supposed to do regardless of any other goals. Brands both personal and commercial must build and maintain a trusting relationship with their consumers in order to maintain a positive association, avoid negative word of mouth and finally to increase brand preference and create value for their consumers.

It was interesting that millennials, young and not as wealthy as the previous generation are still purchasing luxury goods as now, they are aware of the superior quality and are willing to sacrifice paying more for more value and better quality.

Irish millennial consumers are influenced by what they see on the Instagram platform as this platform is purely visual based that the appeal to luxury fashion goods can be portrayed in an image posted by an online influencer which creates the desire for the consumer. The research participants viewed their luxury purchase as an investment into a product due to the quality and durability along with the prestige of each brand.

Participant 2 purchased a luxury makeup product in the hope of having a flawless finish to last all day – which is exactly what they got. This participant invested not only money, but time and energy into this purchase as prior to entering the retail outlet the individual looked reviews, recommendations and consumed Charlotte Tilbury's targeted marketing via Instagram ads.

Instagram as a marketing platform can be effective when used by brand to target the correct target market and collaborate with the most relevant influencers for said target market.

Some research participants including participants 1, 3 and 4 did not plan their luxury purchase. Both participant 1 and 4 were on holiday, knowingly with extra money, were to be able to splurge on a luxury item.

Participant 4 was holidaying with family and was encouraged by their family to purchase the product as it was a stunning bag that they knew would be a great investment for the individual. Participant 4 did not see any online marketing for the brand Furla before purchasing however, the brand was known by their parent to be a luxurious, Italian designer brand which influenced the participant to purchase the bag.

Participant 3 has went shopping with an open mind and stuck to a brand they already know and love and have previously purchased from. This could be described as brand loyalty as the brand has already been marketing to this individual via email marketing and Instagram ads.

During the interview participant 1 stated that they have been following Michael Kors on Instagram for some time and have needed a new bag and always felt as though Michael Kors was a gorgeous designer brand with flawless handbags for every

occasion. Along with both Hadid sisters endorsing the brand participant 1 felt like Michael Kors is a more affordable luxury brand -in comparison to Hermes- that has a classic style which is elegant and never goes out of fashion.

Instagram, to an extent has an impact on the purchase intention of luxury fashion. More often than not, an Instagram advertisement will “plant the seed” in the mind of the customer of the brand, product or service. Meaning that the online platform will provoke thought, feeling and consideration into the purchase of a luxury product or service. However, the recommendation from a trusted influencer will solidify that brand, transforming the purchase intention into a purchase by creating a deeper desire for the brand, product or service from both the Instagram advertisement and influences from both family and friends and online personalities.

Conclusion

This phenomenological research had the sole objective to understand the role Instagram has in the purchase intention of luxury fashion among millennials in the Irish context. Although established and referred to as luxury consumers, the focus of this study was mainly on occasional luxury consumers. As millennials are increasing in age, their disposable income is likely to increase with them, therefore in the future there should be an increase in their luxury purchases and a higher prestige of brands. This dissertation investigated and examined the motivation behind conspicuous consumption and the impact Instagram has on the purchase intention.

6.1 Empirical findings

1. Motivations for consumption: The research respondents were internally motivated by self-identity; hedonic values were also very prevalent during the consideration of the purchase as well as the high quality which was an important aspect for each participant.
2. Purchase involvement: 3 out of 4 of the research participants did not spend time looking at reviews or researching the product before purchase. Rather they knew the brand, have seen it on social media or have purchased it before and had a present experience, liked the product and purchased it.
3. Investment: All research participants viewed their luxury purchase as an investment and quality was a major factor in considering the purchase.
4. Experiential consumption: The participant experience can be divided into two phases- phase one: the in-store purchase and phase two: the feeling of owning and wearing the product. Individualist consumers believe experiential consumption to be essential in the purchase of a luxury product and although the participants all enjoyed their experience at the luxury retail stores the experience of the purchase did not have as strong an impact as quality did on the purchase decision. Phase two where the participants are using and wearing the luxury product is important as all participants felt more confident and felt as though they belong to a prestigious social class.

6.2 Theoretical implications

This research has agreed and disagreed with different aspect of each academic journal discussed in the above literature review. This research disagrees with Phan

2011 as this study contains evidence of the influence social media can have on a consumer's purchase intention. However, this research does fall in line with both Kim and Ko (2010) and Pauline and Sedneva (2019) in relation to the relationship between trust and purchase intention as well as determining customer behaviour.

6.3 Further research

A suggestion for further research in the future would be to explore the relationship between brands and influencers and the impact that their relationship has on consumers in an Irish context.

6.4 Limitations

This study is confined to the Irish luxury fashion market among millennials who are active users of social media. Thus, overlooking the automobile, hospitality and other industries which may have portrayed alternative results. This research is based in Ireland, again overlooking a major portion of the population in terms of location, different nationalities and age. Individuals with varying demographics, interests and age may have completely changed the results of this research. However, the reasoning behind studying millennials who are active users of Instagram and purchase luxury fashion products have been justified, as millennials are an up and coming generation that are now or will soon be the target market for these luxury brands. Social media now plays a massive role in people's everyday lives as demonstrated above with an abundance of statistics portraying the popularity of Instagram and other online social platforms.

Appendix A

1. What influences you to purchase a luxury branded product?
2. Demographics of participant (age, gender, employment status & income)
3. Describe the most recent experience of purchasing a luxury fashion product.
4. How do you think Instagram influences your decisions to purchase products or your desire to want to purchase products?
5. What swayed your decisions towards that particular brand?
6. Could you describe how much time and research you put into purchasing luxury goods. What I would really like to know is whether luxury goods would be impulse purchases, or do you try to consider certain factors, if so, what might those factors be.
7. What were the expectations you held for the luxury product and was the purchasing experience different from purchasing a more affordable product?
8. Would you purchase more luxury fashion products?
9. What do you think your next luxury purchase will be and why?
10. Would you like to include anything that I have not asked into your interview answers?

Appendix B

Questions	Answers the researcher expects/hopes to receive
Q1. What influences you to purchase a luxury branded product?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instagram/ social media influencers • Brand perception • Social interactions • Friends & family
Q2. Demographics of participant (age, gender, employment status & income)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: 24-39 • Employed with average salary of €24,000
Q3. Describe your most recent experience of purchasing a luxury fashion product.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasurable & exciting experience • Well-mannered and friendly staff who had excellent product and brand knowledge • Clean & spacious environment
Q4. How do you think Instagram influences your decisions to purchase products or your desire to want to purchase products?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated recommendations from trusted influencer • Tapping into the ideal self & aspiring to be like an influencer
Q5. What swayed your decisions towards that particular brand?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate that brand with a credible influence • Positive brand image
Q6. Could you describe how much time and research you put into purchasing luxury goods. What I would really like to know is whether luxury goods would be impulse purchases, or do you try to consider certain factors, if so, what might those factors be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spent time reading & watching influencers recommendations of different brands and products on Instagram • Looked up the brand's website & read the product description • Watched reviews on YouTube
Q7. What were the expectations you held for the luxury product and was the purchasing experience different from purchasing a more affordable product?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalised experience with employees (i.e. more time & effort in the sale giving recommendations & product information) • Beautiful and perfect environment • Seamless customer journey

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes, the experience and in store décor was lavish
Q8. Would you purchase more luxury fashion products?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes
Q9. What do you think your next luxury purchase will be and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A brand an influencer has recommended
Q10. Would you like to include anything that I have not asked into your interview answers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• no

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