

***How the development online of multi-sensory
strategies will enable luxury fashion brands to
create superior customer value, thus complementing
the in store experience provided?***

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ABSTRACT

The structure of luxury retail industry has disruptively changed with the booming of the technological era. Accordingly, clients have updated their traditional purchasing habits, starting to consult and buy both online and offline and expecting to receive uniformed brand experiences and customer services from both channels. Meaning so, luxury brands have been required to adjust their marketing strategies reproducing and aligning the sensorial experiences delivered in-store with their digital platforms. Observing that luxury brands have not put enough efforts on implementing sensory strategies online and acknowledging the relevance of the sensorial experiences delivered to luxury customers offline, this study intends to examine whether the implementation of multi-sensory techniques online would improve the overall customer experience. In order to gather the information needed for solving the marketing problem identified and due to the pertinence for the delivery of a superior customer experience, three main scientific propositions have been developed.

The method of this study will be a mix of exploratory and explanatory qualitative design, while for the analysis of the results obtained, researchers will follow an abductive reasoning. Researchers will conduct expert surveys and in depth interviews with a sample of 20 participants.

Major findings confirm that aligning sensorial experiences online and offline results into better customer experience, and that providing a richer sensory experience online is translated into superior customer value in terms of brand image and brand engagement. Considering that loyalty and increase in sales appeared to be not affected by the enhancement of online experiences, future researches are therefore recommended. A list of practical recommendations on how to implement multi-sensory strategies online will be provided at the end of the paper.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2017 there have been identified 20 megatrends, sharing common drivers with the strong power of transforming and disrupting entire categories (Euromonitor, 2017). Drivers identified are the following; the shift of economic power, technology, changes of the population, environmental shifts and changing values of the people. From the wide group of classified megatrends, the change in customers' values, due to innovation and new sensorial marketing techniques implemented, becomes the main topic to be addressed within this paper.

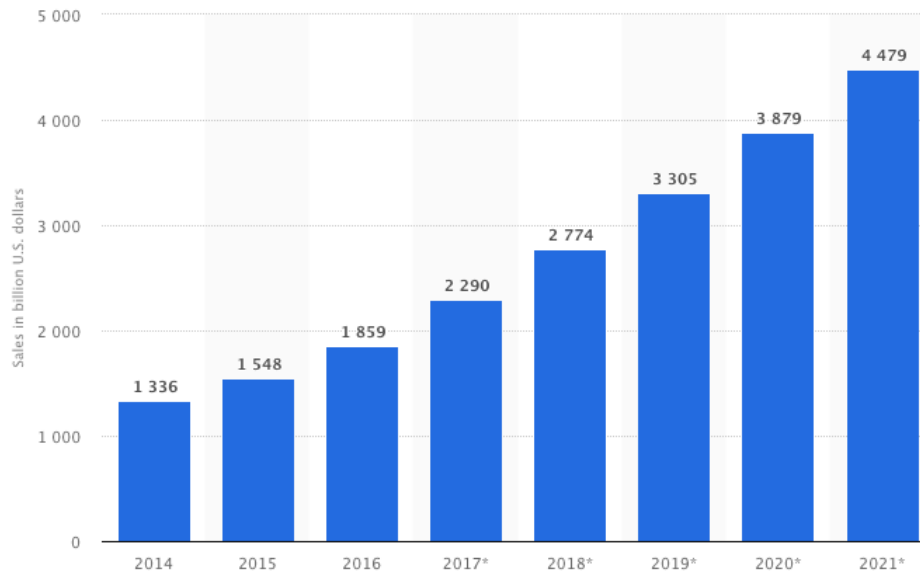
Especially in the field of luxury goods marketing, sophisticated concepts of emotional product and brand differentiation are required to create a holistic brand experience (Mascarenhas et al. 2006). Recently, consumer values have experienced a shift towards experiences over things, so that, by harnessing the power of senses, brands will be able to transform products and services into unique and unforgettable moments. As a matter of fact, due to our society's increasing experience-orientation with the claim for additional added value of products and services (Hultén 2011), more and more consumers act experience-oriented and adjust their shopping attitudes accordingly (Wiedmann, K. et al., 2013). It has already been demonstrated that a message is considerably stronger if multiple senses are stimulated simultaneously, therefore the targeted use of multi-sensory elements in strengthening marketing communication and distribution strategies becomes more and more evident (Lindstrom 2005). Besides that major luxury brands are already adopting these techniques in store and are turning into lighthouses within the field, they are also currently neglecting the digital world and the power of this channel. Indeed, it has been forecasted that by 2030, 75% of the world (6.4 billion people) will be connected online and brands will need to optimise the digital tools available. Example of technologies that will be integrated by that time into people' routines are; mobiles, augmented and virtual reality, as humans and machines will integrate further (Euromonitor, 2017). Considering a global population of 8.5 billion by 2030, brand survival will depend on putting the customer first and establishing emotional connections not only through offline interactions but also through online platforms. Nowadays, stores are becoming just one part of a larger more connected customer experience. And retailers are struggling with how to remain relevant, as environmental and societal pressures force them to rethink their operating model (Deloitte, 2011). The panorama described highlights both the importance of rich and unique

experiences delivered by luxury brand, and the continuously growing importance gained by digital platforms. It appears therefore important to start considering the convergence of physical and online worlds also in the luxury environment, where digital platforms started to be created but the strategies implemented do not include immersive and emotional experiences. It is within this domain that the study on hand will set its roots. The present paper will in fact outline key design approaches for online multi-sensory brand experiences in the area of luxury goods as a general basis for future researches and business practices in the luxury industry.

1.2 Problem formulation

The digitalization era has highly impacted the way customers purchase and what they expect from companies. The e-commerce sales are exponentially increasing (see *Figure 1*) and are foreseen to keep on growing during next years, further highlighting the importance of the online technology. These changes in how customers purchase have shown a major reason to highly invest and investigate on how to take the best out of the online potential. The digitalization revolution created new trends, meaning that they originated fundamental, lasting changes that reshape not just how people shop, but how they live (A. Orendoff, 2018). Enabled by technology, the continued year over year growth in online shopping has been fueled by a new generation of consumers who want greater convenience, value and options (W. Kruth, 2017). Indeed, customers do not only use online websites to purchase, but they rather see the web as an informative tool, a place where to browse before actually purchasing something (B. Ervin 2016 ; A.Orendoff, 2018).

Figure 1: Retail e-commerce sales worldwide from 2014 to 2021 (in billion U.S. dollars) - Statista 2018



It is therefore easy to understand that consumers demand more than just the possibility to purchase online, they look for richer experiences and greater convenience. Hence, retailers need to rethink their strategy, both online and in stores (W. Kruth, 2017). Having the right product mix is no longer sufficient to attract the new wave of consumers including millennials, who are entirely focused on one transaction—theirs. The shift to a customer-centric reality, where the customer is increasingly at the center of a perpetual shopping experience, entails that retailers need to be exceptionally sensitive and responsive to when and where their potential customers are making purchase decisions (both consciously and subconsciously) throughout their ‘always on’ shopping journey (P. Freedman & W. Kruth, June 2016). It seems therefore pivotal the necessity to understand and meet customer needs both today and tomorrow, across geographies and generations, therefore designing a sustainable strategy (W. Kruth, 2017). The current trends are thus suggesting the creation of an online shopping experience enhanced by technology such as augmented and virtual reality or 3D, parallel to the provision of convenient and personalized ordering, payment and delivery options (W. Kruth, 2017). The centrality of the shopping experience delivered online appears even more central, knowing that more than 65% of consumers research products online before stepping foot in a store (S. Skrovan, 2017).

People begin focusing more on intangible things and making memories, they are looking for an experience especially when dealing with luxury (Daniela Walker, Editor at LS:N Global). An increasing number of organizations are placing experiences at the core of their marketing strategy and, in luxury brand management, experiences are essential (Atwal and Williams, 2009; Berthon et al., 2009). Key characteristics of luxury brands are in fact the following: perceived high price, excellent quality, exclusivity and uniqueness in the sense of scarcity, aesthetics of form and colour, long history, reputation, brand presence and non-necessity (Dubois et al., 2009). With consumers less interested in 'stuff', and more conscious about the impact of their consumption patterns, the experience factor has become unmissable to luxury (Grigorian, V. & Peterson, 2014), and has therefore to be added to the list of the key characteristics previously listed. According to Schmitt (1999) an experience is something strictly personal that implies the involvement of the customer at different levels; rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual. Experiences occur when customers interact with one or more elements of the brand context and, as a result, extract sensations, emotions, or cognitions that will connect them to the brand in a personal, memorable way (Gupta & Vajic, 2000; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Keeping this in mind, it appears pivotal, especially in the luxury industry, to stress and focus on the inducement of emotions and experiences to customers, in order to gift them with personal memories about the brand itself. As a matter of fact, the elegance and high quality of a luxury good is not only represented by the product itself, but also from the service delivered with it. Part of the service offered in store is represented by a set of sensual emotions that are carried with the service itself. Habitually, product quality and originality are given for granted in the luxury world. What differentiates every brand, is the history behind it, the image that the brand delivers and the the signature of the brand itself. Especially in store all these information are constantly sent to the customer through the 5 senses: a specific smell for that brand (olfactory), a specific colour (visual), a selected music to tight the atmosphere with the world the brand stands for (auditory; fairytale world for Dior, empowering for Balenciaga, futuristic atmosphere for Burberry..), the skin contact related to the products, carpets of the store, etc (haptic) and the taste of offered beverages evoking other feelings within the luxury sector (gustatory). But why through the senses? The reason lies in the fact that multi-sensory experiences of luxury brands are proven to create a superior customer-perceived value (Wiednam et al., 2013), implying and forcing companies to take a multi-sensory experience in major consideration when approaching customers

especially for luxury. According to McKinsey & Co., global digital sales for women's luxury fashion are expected to grow from a current 3% to 17% by 2018 with a total market size of \$12 billion (Schmidt et al., 2015). Similarly, a recent market research report estimates that online sales could make up to 40% of luxury sales by 2020 (Gustafson, 2016). Nevertheless, luxury brands have been generally using their websites as promotional tools, not considering it to be a sales platform (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

The panorama depicted, highlights major implications for our future and underlines a major problem: the online world is in exponential increase in every sector and industry, representing one of the major sources for information collection. At the same time, luxury retailers are putting great effort in the provision of an offline sensual experience to create a superior customer-perceived value. If offline every luxury brand is engaging in personalised, emotional and sensorial activities, online the service that is now delivered (if delivered), appears more cold, detached and not luxurious at all, as all the attentions that a person can deliver offline are not replicated online. This means that the sensory marketing strategies that have been proved efficient offline, are not engaged online where most of future and current customers are researching and having a first contact with the luxury brand. Indeed, more than 65% of consumers conduct online product research before stepping foot into a store (S. Skrovan, 2017). The contrast highlighted by the information just reported, logically induces to the following problem statement: *the online experience offered by fashion luxury brand is lacking in terms of multi-sensoriality with respect to the sensory stimulating experience offered in stores*; thus, underlining a major practical gap between the importance of today's online world and the poor experience luxury brands are delivering on their digital platforms. The problem highlighted enabled researchers to formulate the following research question:

How the development online of multi-sensory strategies will enable luxury fashion brands to create superior customer value, thus complementing the in store experience provided?

1.3 Object of the study

Motivation is defined as the set of internal and external factors that stimulate desire and energy in people to be continually interested and committed to job, role or subject, or to make an effort to attain a goal (Business Dictionary, 2018). This definition represents the starting point to justify and analyse the subject and the objectives of the study on hand. The passion for the luxury environment and the contacts with the field are taken as foundation for the development of this paper, therefore constituting the base for the buildup of the following section.

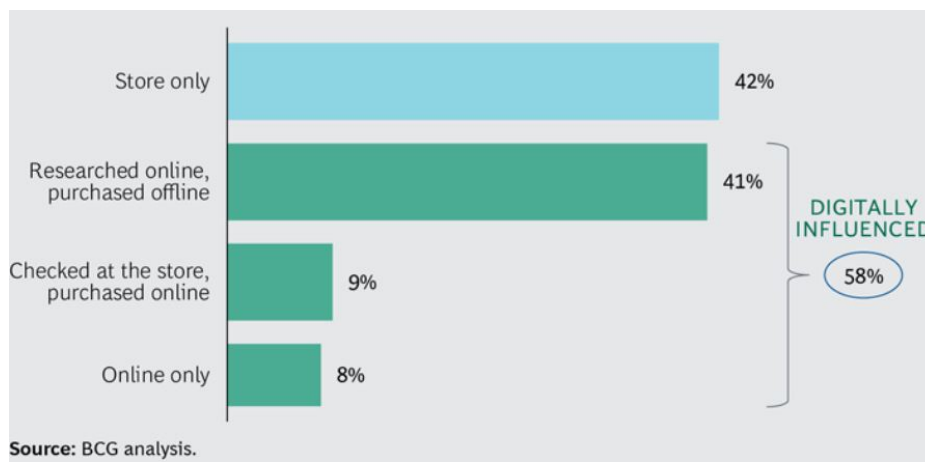
The rationale behind the choice of investigating and researching on the subject proposed, finds deep roots in the booming expansion of digitalization. As a matter of fact, by the year 2020, an entire generation, Generation C (for “connected”), will have grown up in a primarily digital world. Computers, the Internet, mobile phones, texting, social networking — all are second nature to members of this group (Strategy&, 2017). The advent of this generation emphasizes the necessity to explore and progressively enlarge the current knowledge of the digital world; and at the same time stresses the importance to analyse and suggest online strategies enabling companies to capture and maintain this new type of customer’s interest and loyalty.

The luxury sector in particular, has always had a conceptual barrier against the implementation of digital and online strategies, which have been for a long period of time considered as detrimental to their business image. Chanel, for example, only started selling online in 2015 having previously stated that ‘to be able to wear Chanel clothes, you needed to try them on’. Online presence was and is still seen as confronting the traditional world of exclusivity tight to the luxury sector, due to the web world of access for everyone (Abtan,O., et al., 2016). Anyway, the speed of technology development was endangering their business models, therefore most of major maisons¹ joined the digital world only recently as the issue was do or die (Abtan,O., et al., 2016). The opportunities provided by the possibility to create personalized offers and to grant bespoke services to many more customers, together with the widening of distribution channels enabled by the online world, moved the playing

¹ The fashion houses or fashion designers that create exclusive and often trend-setting fashions or to the fashions created (Wikipedia, 2018)

field for luxury brands to the digital world (Abtan,O., et al., 2016). Moreover, brands cannot delay the move toward more virtualized interactions with consumers. Indeed, although consumers will still want to interact physically with luxury products, they see virtual experiences as a path to more immediate gratification. So brands should likewise value digital technologies as a way to extend and individualize their services far beyond the store (ibid). Luxury goods and services are now sought, sampled, and purchased in very different ways than they were in the past; consumers expect efficient e-commerce, engaging and exciting interactions on social media, and multiple channels through which to interact with brands. The importance and strong influence on customers' attitude and habits of the digital world is continuously increasing and highlighted by the fact that almost six out of ten luxury sales are digitally influenced (see *Figure 2*).

Figure 2: LUXURY CUSTOMER DIGITAL INFLUENCE - BCG analysis 2016



Luxury brands have excelled at creating special experiences for customers in-store to differentiate themselves from the 'average' retailer. This includes factors such as beautiful store design, great personal service and advice from store staff, and maybe a glass of Veuve Clicquot on arrival (Charlton, G., 2017). To keep up with technological and digital trends, luxury brands are increasing digital presence by offering a digital experience within the store. Neiman Marcus, for example, has launched an app which uses sensors to track the customer's progress throughout the store updating them with product promotions, store events, and connects customers and sales associates by letting the customer know about the preferred sales associates present in store. Burberry has been revolutionizing the customer's in-store experience by implementing smart mirrors which display a catwalk version of the

item that is in front of the mirror as well as newly launching in-Tweet purchasing.² The technological improvement developed offline is used as a primary tool to differentiate the in store luxury experience from the one provided by mass market shops, further enlarging the different experiences offered by the Maisons. This gap is almost absent when considering the online experience offered. The main objective of this paper is therefore to start enlarging the distinction between these two worlds also online. Connected with this ambitious goal, the intervention of the study proposed also aims at enlarging the scientific knowledge gathered within this field. As a matter of fact, a parallel aim is to improve brand image, which is a core element especially in luxury. Indeed, it is important for researchers to test that the online multi-sensory brand experience offered will be the basis for brand building and brand identity, with the aim of contributing to the theoretical knowledge of the field. The secondary and consequent purpose of the research proposed, is to strengthen the convergence between technological world and luxury, therefore enriching both fields. Moreover, the technological and digital advent, together with globalization and generational changes, brought about a revolution also in academic fields especially linked to marketing. As a matter of fact, the new possibilities of promotion and communication arising from the digital world and the new capabilities earned thanks to innovation, enabled academics to study and formulate marketing theories, among which we can mention for importance and efficiency: neuromarketing, emotional marketing and sensorial marketing. Especially during 2014, a rush of interest in the subject of sensory marketing permeated the academic sector. Since then, research suggests the birth of an era in which many more consumer products companies will take advantage of sense-based marketing strategy (Harvard Business Review, 2015). Aradhna Krishna, director of the Sensory Marketing Laboratory at the University of Michigan and considered the foremost expert in the sensory marketing field stated “In the past, communications with customers were essentially monologues—companies just talked at consumers, then they evolved into dialogues, with customers providing feedback. Now they’re becoming multidimensional conversations, with products finding their own voices and consumers responding viscerally and subconsciously to them.”. Apart from experts, many companies are just starting to recognize how strongly the senses affect the deepest parts of our brains; senses affect attitude, mood, and even memory more profoundly than

² Information and examples retrieved from <http://blog.wide-eyes.it/2016/08/17/luxury-brands-retail-innovation/> (August 2016)

words ever could (Harvard Business Review, 2015). If offline the luxury world has been a pioneer of the implementation of sensory marketing, online there has been no conversion of sensual techniques. The major goal of this paper is to gather sensual marketing techniques to support and infuse also online the luxury emotions and sensations present offline.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

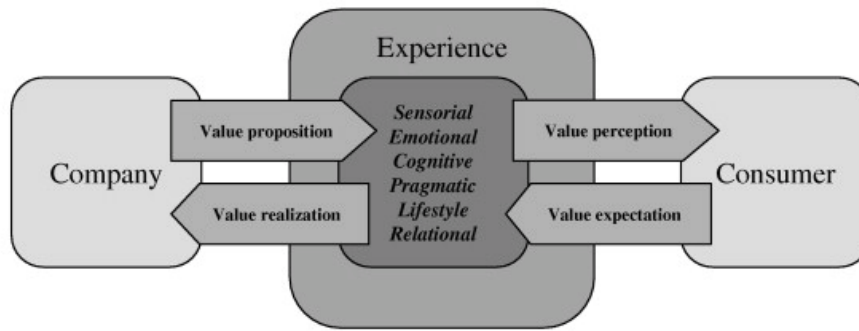
The following section presents the relevant literature to the research on hand, with the aim of setting up the background on what has been previously found out on the research topic. The final purpose of the literature review is to increase the knowledge in the area of research, thus allowing to provide the context of the study.

2.1 Literature Review

Traditional marketing used to describe consumers as rational decision-makers focussed on the functional benefits of products, whereas experiential marketing observed consumers as emotional beings focussed on achieving pleasurable experiences (Atwal and Williams, 2009). The phenomenon of experiential marketing was already mentioned by Pine and Gilmore (1998) as following; “when a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf, but when somebody buys an experience, the company is offering a series of unique events with the aim of engaging the customer in a personal way”. This difference demonstrates the transition that marketing has gone through along these years: not just offering functional and tangible products to the customers, but trying to go further, emotionally connecting them across tangible and intangible attributes. The model proposed by Gentile et al. (2007) presents the term experience as the main interaction between the customer and the company, connected by the notion of value creation to both sides (see *Figure 3*). From a company perspective, the experience of senses, emotions, relations, lifestyle, etc., is used to create a value proposition and perception to customers. On the other hand, consumers utilize their value expectations to push and require the companies to create the experiences they desire. The value creation from the company's perspective can be measured by indicators such as sales, market share, brand equity or customer equity (Ferraseri and Schmitt, 2006), whereas consumer's value resides on

maximizing utilitarian and hedonistic values (Holbrook 1999; Addis and Holbrook 2001). Acknowledging this, sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle and relational experiences are developed to match customers' expectations with the proposition of value of the companies.

Figure 3: How to sustain the customer experience - General Framework source Gentile et al. (2007)



Resulting from the sum of tangible and intangible elements, brands have therefore become essential components of the buying process (Wiedmann et al., 2009), competing on the ability to evoke exclusivity, brand identity, brand awareness and perceived quality from the consumer's perspective (Phau & Prendergast, 2000). Thanks to them, customers have been able to quickly learn about the deep-rooted characteristics of products and/or services, and the quality of producers. Moreover, using a selected set of symbols and elements, owners have managed to communicate and transmit the non-tangible attributes of the brand while provoking certain emotions on customers (Ciappei & Surchi, 2011). Therefore so, the term “*brand equity*” refers to the strategic value of the brand, improving customer experience, enhancing the ability to interpret and process information and reinforcing confidence in the purchase decision (Aaker, 1992). On the other hand, *visual identity* refers to the recognition and association abilities of stakeholders, to ally and experience within a specific brand and to develop a perception of the organization's reputation over time (Abbratt & Kleyn, 2012). Both classifications of brands, heighten the importance of creating emotional connections between brands and customers, by associating brands with certain experiences and allowing customers to rekindle the memories that each brand transmits at the decision-making process.

Especially in the field of luxury goods, the concepts of emotional product and brand differentiation are required for creating holistic brand experiences (Mascarenhas, et al. 2006). This ability to emotionally engage products or services with customers, has been possible to transmit, thanks to multi-sensory

marketing strategies. According to Lindstrom (2005), the approach of using a combination of external stimuli such as images, sounds, skin contact, smell and taste, aims to influence the consumer's experience as to holistic experiences. By ensuring the creation of total experiences, the consumer-perceived value will be enhanced in terms of financial, functional, individual and social dimension, thus optimizing the final positioning of luxury brands (Wiedmann et al., 2013). In turn, key value dimensions of luxury brands (high price, excellent quality, exclusivity, uniqueness in the sense of scarcity, etc.) become useful basis for the development of complementary offline and online strategies to create true luxury experiences (Wiedmann et al., 2013). However, considering that the process of purchasing luxury goods and that the transferability of multi-sensory elements differs from one channel to another, it is of relevance to examine the specific characteristics of the industry of luxury fashion and in particular, the similarities and differences between current purchasing experience of luxury goods in-store and online.

2.2 Industry of luxury fashion

For what concerns the structure, the industry of luxury fashion has started to suffer a transformation at varied levels. Small and medium-sized enterprises originally founded the industry of luxe, though a new format of luxe has been created and distributed through few large luxury conglomerates (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). In spite of the fact that some brands, in response to the new trend, have been pushed to develop strategies for the transition to e-commerce channels (Okonkwo, 2009, 2010), the overexposure of the luxury brands online and the risks implied (lose of exclusiveness and risk of replicability), are dragging out the transition of the rest of brands to e-commerce. In addition, the phenomenon of adding new retail channels while maintaining the exclusivity of brands, together with the extensions to foreign markets, has been seen by some customers as commoditization of the service (Okonkwo, 2009) which at a certain point, are contradicting some of the values of luxury (scarcity & uniqueness).

Normally, luxury brands have excelled at examining contemporary retail trends and rework them into unique and original retail experiences with the combination of aesthetic atmospheres, interactive technological devices, artworks, etc. (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). Nevertheless, until few years ago, websites were just used by the brands as promotional tools without been considered as platforms (Jin & Cedrola, 2017). Yet, some luxury brands such as Burberry, Prada, Hermès and Gucci, have already started

selling products directly from their websites, or developing apps for mobile devices (Louis Vuitton, Cartier, and Chanel, among others), but none of them is providing online the luxury sensations and feelings awoke inside their boutiques.

2.3 Purchasing experience of luxury goods

With no doubt, Internet has become the primary search and purchase environment for all kind of customers due to its shopping convenience and product accessibility (Hennings et al., 2012). The growth of online retailers, especially in the fashion sector, constituted 60% of online purchases in the European Union in 2015 (Eurostat, 2015), however the increasing number of luxury brands selling online was less known (Jin & Cedrola, 2017).

In recent years, multichannel retailing strategies have developed at some pace (Beck & Rygl, 2015; Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015). Nowadays, retailers do not just aim at simply offering their products or services, but rather to provide customers a seamless shopping experience integrating the different retail channels available. As a consequence, the switch between channels during the purchasing (online-offline) has become easier for customers who interface with different formats and media such as stores, computers, mobile devices, tables, etc. (Verhoef et al., 2015).

The process of retailing that operates across more than one retail channel is called multi-channel, cross-channel and omni-channel retailing, (Beck & Rygl, 2015) categorised according to the degree of customer interaction and the degree of company integration. This degree of channel integration will depend on to which extent the retailer is able to provide a continuous customer experience between offline and online shops. From this statement an unanswered question is presented “*The more integrated the channel in the luxury industry is, the better the customer experience becomes?*”. The following subsections (2.3.1 and 2.3.2) are created in order to understand the characteristics of purchasing of the different channels (in store and online), to further examine whether the integration of both could improve the overall customer experience.

2.3.1 In store purchasing experience

Luxury brands are characterized by features such as excellent quality, scarcity, uniqueness, ancestral heritage, personal history, etc. (Dubois, Laurent, & Czellar, 2001). Clients usually demand more

meaning from luxury brands than transcend products, services and brand names (Okonkwo, 2010). Moreover, it is well known that perfection is usually expected by the truly luxurious brands. This perfection is not just linked to the creation of products and services, but also to the optimal experiences provided to clients.

Through in-store design, atmosphere, product merchandising, packaging, and sales interaction, the experience is supposed to become the main component in the luxury mix (Okonkwo, 2010). The action of providing unique events in the physical environment is played out through human contact and all the features composing the atmosphere and the ambience of the store (ibid). For instance, when a customer enters into a Burberry store, it will be immersed into the delightful world enhanced by the style, colours, forms, lighting and display of the products in the boutique. Consequently, the mood of the client is likely to be altered by this unique environment and atmosphere created (Okonkwo, 2010), acknowledging a clear difference between the purchasing experience in f.i. Burberry and the rest of luxury brands everytime the client steps into the store. This experience reinforces the visual identity of the brand.

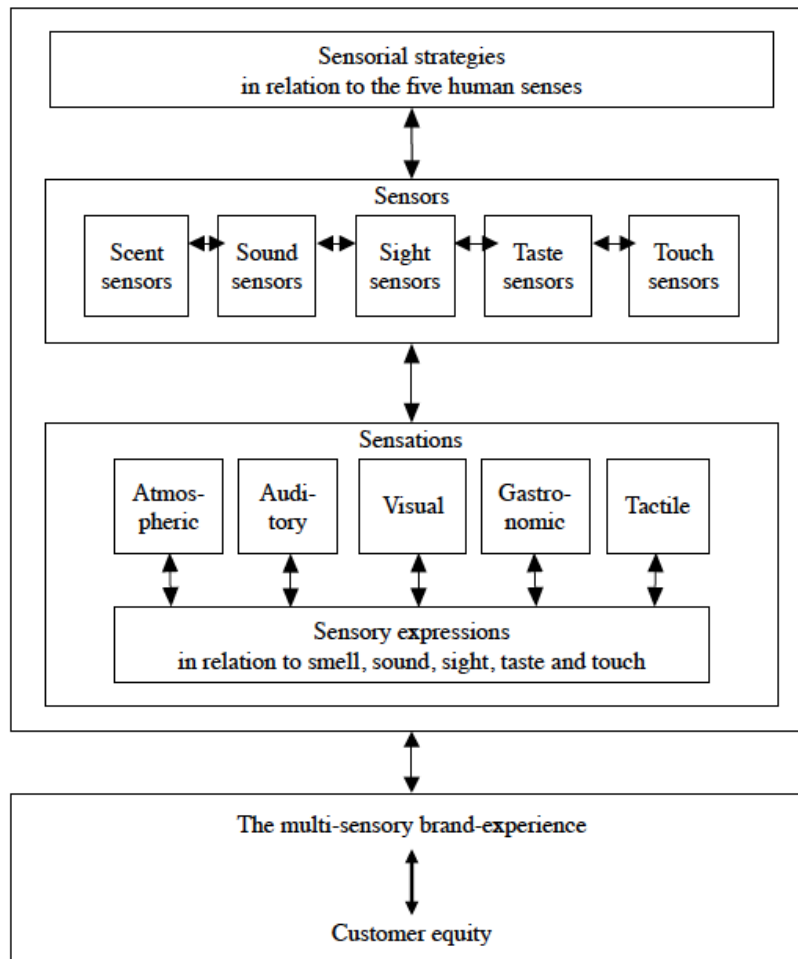
Thus, the simple goal of the companies is to make a positive client's experience through the creation of sensations that ensure that clients feel unique and that they continue to associate the brand with good and positive feelings leading them to return to the store. This set of brand associations that customers develop in their minds corresponds to the term brand identity (Hulten, 2011). It doesn't matter whether the associations are tangible, emotional or symbolic (Anselm and Kosteljik, 2008), they will involve a value-proposition with functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits (Hulten, 2011).

According to Hulten et al., (2009), a multi-sensory brand experience takes place when more than one of the five human senses contribute to the perception of sensory experiences. Another element that provides value to the creation of significant effects for setting emotional connections, is the environmental context in which a service takes place. This environment is composed by the physical and relational characteristics of the setting in which the service is provided, as well as the set of elements interacting with the customer (Gupta and Vajic, 1999). In one hand, the sights, sounds, textures and smells of the environment will generate the stimuli of the physical context; on the other hand, the stimuli of the relational context will emerge from the relation between people and their

behaviour (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994). Therefore, multi-sensory brand-experience refers to how individuals react when a firm interacts, and supports their purchase and consumption processes, through the involvement of the five human senses in generating customer value, experiences and brand as image (Hulten, 2011). This sensory, emotional and cognitive process of the human brain is also related to neuromarketing, explaining and enhancing the understanding of consumer behaviour (Fugate, 2007; Plassman et al., 2007), however this belongs to a different research field.

Likewise, it is essential to recognize the impact on customer value of changing value systems in contemporary society, experiences and the brand as an image (Hulten, 2011). Usually Sensory Marketing (SM) models, represent to firms the opportunity to differentiate and express brands as image through sensorial strategies, including sensors, sensations and sensory expressions, based on cognitive, emotional, or value-based elements in relation to human minds and senses (ibid). So that, SM models, such as the one developed by Hulten (2009), highlight the significance of the human senses in reaching the customer's mind at deeper levels (see Figure 4). For this reason, the main purpose of the sensorial strategies of retailers is to facilitate this multi-sensory brand-experience to their customers.

Figure 4: Sensorial Marketing model, developed by Hultén et al. (2009)



Each of the five sensors composing the sensorial strategies, is characterized by specific contributions and applications, and thanks to the combination of more than one, luxury fashion retailers are able to implement multi-sensory marketing strategies that reinforce their brand equity and their positioning in the market.

The **visual sense** is the most powerful and common one, discovering changes and differences in the environment, and in perceiving goods or services (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). Nowadays, fashion luxury brands are able to encapsulate their values and translate them into visual language. For instance, Louis Vuitton's belief in art is represented by its close collaboration with the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama

for the creation of limited edition products easily recognizable by luxury customers (Petersen, F.E., Nov., 2014). Another brand strongly symbolizing the power of the visual sense is Chanel. Thinking on black and white, the n° 5, the camellias, pearls, or a little black dress, reproduces the image of Chanel (Petersen, F.E., Nov., 2014) in every person's mind. The same happens for the turquoise boxes of Tiffany's, the red soles of Louboutins heels and the iconic Burberry's check. This occurs as a result that, when consumers think of a true luxury brand, they are likely to think of a whole set of visual icons (monograms, brand symbols, logos, colours, patterns, images and even concepts) rather than just one single logo (Petersen, F.E., Nov., 2014). Moreover, the elements of the physical environment have also been central to luxury brands. Luxury brands have curated the customer experience with exclusive locations and beautifully designed interiors e.g. Viktor & Rolf's upside-down store in Milan and the Armani flagship³ store in New York with its unique staircase (SO, Feb., 2015). All in all, luxury brands are carefully choosing the visual elements that stick to the customer's minds to easily evoke an appreciable difference from the rest of the brands.

The **auditory sense** is linked to emotions and feelings, impacting brand experiences and interpretations (Garlin & Owen, 2006). Sounds become a multi-sensory communication and a holistic corporate model which drives perception and creates attention along with a familiar association (Roumeliotis J.D., Jul., 2013). The fashion designer icon Karl Lagerfeld said "fashion and music are the same, because music express its period too" (Roumeliotis J.D., Jul., 2013). So that, luxury brands aim to produce desirable ambiances that best suits their target, to emotionally anchor the sounds attached to the brand with the customers. Furthermore, it is essential to choose a musical mood that reflects the brand and creates a consistent experience for the store. Luxury boutiques reflect their brand philosophy through the elegance of the music broadcasted from tailor-made playlists. This tailor-made musical selection, also differentiates the brand from competitors, since it is proven that music influences clients's choices while they are in the store (Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990). The tempo, music sound level and the style, have direct impact on consumers behavior (Stream Z., May., 2017) pushing them to stay longer or buying more expensive products if the right selection of playlist is achieved.

³ According to the distribution formats, a flagship store is characterized by a wide exposure area, located in the most prestigious zones and with a wide range of brand products, including unique and highly specialized pieces (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011).

Some businesses have even conducted own experiments to be able to apply their own music strategy, having understood that music has to fit the store status and potential. The study of Areni and Kim (1993) aimed to find out whether classical music could make people spend more money in a wine shop and results showed that an atmosphere of wealth whilst shopping, lead the customer to increase the spending, in line with the shopping environment. Thus, sounds must be based on what lifestyle image the brand wants to portray in the mind of the customers. Classical music or jazz, renders a high-end and sophisticated atmosphere, therefore may infer quality and luxury in consumer's mind, that consequently will be translated in their in-store shopping behaviour.

The **olfactory sense** is associated to pleasure and well-being and closely connected to emotions and memories (Goldkuhl & Styfven, 2007). Scientists estimate that 75% of our emotions are generated by what we smell (Bell and Bell 2007), therefore, in order to evoke this feelings, luxury brands have been implementing strategies with the purpose of activating the olfactory sense. For example, the Harrods Senses promotion pumped out uplifting fragrances scented the store with the finality of giving the clients a warm reception and the feeling of having Harrods fragrance with them along the path. Rolls Royce and the luxury Swedish shirtmaker Eton, also tap into the power of scent by impregnating its products with appropriate smells: the luxury car brand captured the feeling of older models in every new car by diffusing a blend of mahogany wood, leather and oil. While the Swedish brand used the smell of freshly laundered cotton in each item they produce (SO, Feb., 2015). And this is owing to the close relation existing between fashion and fragrances. The launching of the seven fragrances *Les Parfums* of Louis Vuitton, received the following evaluation from the Adrien Ng⁴ “ I like the leather tones in Dans la Peau fragrance, they remind me of the posh leather used in luxury products. There is also that raw animalistic smell that could maybe trigger some subconscious caveman instincts and moods” (Tee K., Dec., 2016). From the moment this person enters into a Louis Vuitton store scented by the fragrance of Dans la Peau, his mind will be unconsciously activated to purchase posh leather and

⁴ Dr. Adrien Ng is considered by Louis Vuitton as one of the society's most seasoned globetrotters. He is used to assist to luxury galas, such as the Chopard High Jewelry Gala Singapore and provide opinions about products or events.
<http://www.luxury-insider.com/luxury-news/2012/11/in-living-color-chopard-high-jewelry-gala-singapore>
<http://prestigeonline.com/sg/travel/features/tales-of-a-jet-setter/>

luxury item. The same purpose is settled by the rest of luxury brands; to transmit the value of the brand through the fragrances scented in the store.

The **gustatory sense** appears to be as the most distinct emotional sense and usually requires the interaction of other senses (Biedekarken & Henneberg, 2006). Some luxury fashion retailers, such as, Burberry, Gucci and Ralph Lauren are staging food experiences in their boutiques consisting of offering some delicatesses, afternoon tea or a glass of champagne. The reason behind this initiative is to “build a full luxury shopping experience for the customer” (Bearne, S. Aug., 2015), as the Managing director Vicente Castellano affirmed for their gentlemen’s club-style gin bar for Hackett London. By increasing the browsing time of the customers in the store, they ultimately expect an increase in sales. Also Giorgio Armani affirmed that restaurants and cafés near their boutiques seemed a logical expansion for the brand “I’ve always wanted to create a complete Armani lifestyle that reflects my ideas and can be applied to different areas, not just fashion”(Bearne, S. Aug., 2015). Nevertheless, Lorna Hall, head of market intelligence at the agency WGSN, shared a different opinion for the reasons to associate beverages and fashion: “now that customers are increasingly shopping online, retailers need to create a destination, to give the customers a reason to come and to increase dwell time”(Bearne, S. Aug., 2015). According to this statement, the classical strategy of offering a glass of champagne in store will still be a method for facing the advantages of purchasing in the online channel. Finally, Joe Pine, co-author of The Experience Economy, believes that “customers are more and more looking for engaging and memorable shopping experiences. If retailers can captive them with elements like cafes and restaurants, the dwell time will be increased, and inevitably boost sales” (Bearne, S. Aug., 2015).

To conclude, the **haptic sense** translates information and feelings about a product through physical and psychological interactions (Peck & Wiggins, 2006). In spite of the fact that some researches have been already conducted studies to prove the importance of the visual aesthetics of products in customer's evaluation, the contribution that haptic quality makes to the user experience, has been less investigated (Wellings et al. 2010). In some luxury industries, like the automotive industry and the electronic, the haptic feedback of customers is of fundamental importance. Haptic sense is composed by two

elements; the kinesthetic and the tactile feeling (Tappeiner, Aug., 2013). For example, the feeling of touching with the fingers the leather of a Michael Kors bag will activate the tactile sense of the customer. And the natural feeling of carefully walking through a soft carpet in a luxury store will unconsciously activate the kinesthetic sense. New advances in technology have enabled designers to create haptic clothing. This is the case of the US design lab, and the creation of the garment “mood sweater”, interpreting the wearer's mood, monitoring body temperature and communicating them via multicolor LEDs. All in all, the haptic sense experience in store is going further and further, thanks to the combination of new systems of technology in the materials, therefore creating a more complete experience for customers.

Having gone through the different five senses and their characteristics, probably one of the biggest multi-sensorial branding activity to date that could summarize the advantages of a multi-sensory marketing strategy will be the 8-minute movie clip with full soundtrack of Ralph Lauren outside their Bond Street store in London, to showcase the latest collection (SO, Oct., 2011). The video projection plus the new fragrance pumped into the street, induced the feeling of being inside the store. Along the duration of the play and thanks to the visual effects, the sounds and the fragrance scented in front of the store, people were able to embrace with an almost total experience, the luxurious value of the new collection of Ralph Lauren. A different but also unique multi-sensory experience, was offered by Le Labo brand to create hand-blended and individually prepared perfumes in front of their customers (Petersen, F.E., Nov., 2014). The glass decanters were dated and printed with the name of the customer on the label, and after taking the product back home, the client had to let it marinate in the fridge for a week before using it. With this strategy Le Labo benefited from the combination of visual, tactile and olfactory senses also providing a multi-sensory marketing experience to their customers.

All in all, current in-store purchasing experiences offered by the most prestigious fashion luxury brands (Chanel, Burberry, Louis Vuitton, Dior, etc.) are developed and based on the main components of multi-sensory marketing. Moreover, it has been proven that each of the five human senses are vulnerable to sensory expressions (Hulten, 2009), consequently affecting consumers behaviour in relation to brands. By enhancing and empowering the effects that multi-sensory marketing produces in

consumers, luxury brands are proven to create superior customer-perceived value (Wiedmann et al., 2013), thus increasing brand equity and positioning in the market.

2.3.2 Online purchasing experience

Despite the ever growing interest in digital media communication among luxury companies, the need for a real integration of online and offline channels in creating and delivering unique seamless customer experiences, is still weak (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). In actuality, luxury brands should be able to create prestigious universes and memorable experiences as the backbone of their value creation process (Atwal and Williams, 2009). In order to provide satisfactory user experiences, luxury companies have now the need to ensure brand consistency and value proposition through different touchpoints (Basini, 2001). Those luxury brands opting to implement multi-channel distribution strategies, have the necessity to address the challenges posed by the creation of multi-sensory experiences of luxe on digital platforms (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017).

Whereas the physical in store experience of luxury boutiques is designed to magnify product aesthetics and provide customers a huge display of multi-sensory stimuli, digital touchpoints seem to be unable to convey the look and feel of luxury in store materials (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). Generally, the luxury industry has been decried for being late in adopting the Internet and its accompanying digital technologies in marketing and overall business strategies (Okonkwo, 2010). After all the technological movement, the way luxury presents itself, as well as the way it is perceived, has been challenged. Ideas, concepts, attitudes, behaviors, expectations etc, have the commitment to be evolved and adapted to the new trends (Okonkwo, 2010). The crux of the issue resides in the fact that the integration of online and offline touchpoints plays an increasingly significant role in the consumer's shopping and purchasing experience, reshaping the way luxury retailers and the brands can create value for customers (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). A survey conducted by Digital LBI (2014) found out that 88% of smartphone users searched products online before buying offline and that 72% of customers were looking up information on their mobile devices while shopping in stores (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). In addition, a recent market research report estimated that online sales could make up to 40% of luxury sales by 2020 (Gustafson, 2016). This new approach to the digital channels, has created a huge

opportunity to the new touchpoints for enriching customer experiences (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017).

As mentioned in previous sections, the purchase experience of offline customers usually derive from the sensations, feelings, moods, perceptions and emotions arouse during the activity of seeking for a product, touching it, trying it on, etc. (Okonkwo, 2010). These emotions connect that deeply with the individuals, that they remain on their memory after time (ibid), awakening a desire to come back to the store for reliving this experience. Therefore, this same principle might be applied to the way luxury is represented online. It is not only the question of being present on the Internet through a website, but about creating an exceptional online experience for every consumer visiting it (Okonkwo, 2010). It is also about appealing all the senses and arising a deep desire associated with the brand (ibid). Accordingly, the only mission for the luxury companies that want to implement or improve their online strategies is to focus on providing and ensuring the best possible web experience (Okonkwo, 2010).

The term 10Cs of luxury fashion e-marketing, developed by Okonkwo (2007), consists on the group of elements that an online webpage should contain or provide; customer value, convenience, cost, communication, computing⁵, customer franchise⁶, customer care, community, content and customisation. Acknowledging these elements, Dior website appears as an example of a luxury page that captures the brand essence through its design and functionality features. Nevertheless, a question emerges when trying to understand the gap in the poor multi-sensory experience offered by luxury brands online with respect to the offline service gifted.

The overexposure of the brands online, the risks of losing exclusiveness and replicability, plus the image of commoditization of the service have constituted some of the main motives that are dragging out the movement of luxury brands to e-commerce (Okonkwo, 2010). However, finding out customers feelings about the experiences currently delivered online will permit researchers to establish specific recommendations that will fit into the omnichannel philosophy of the brands. Omnichannel marketing aims at closing gaps in experiences across channels to offer a seamless, unified brand experience across devices and physical touchpoints (Weiners, P., 2017). Being the case of Chanel, Céline and Hermes,

⁵ Computing deals with the technology, programs, systems, applications, and other tools that make up the back office of a website, which is required for effective functioning (Okonkwo, 2010).

⁶ A customer franchise refers to the cumulative image of a product, held by the consumer, resulting from long exposure to the product or marketing of the product (Wikipedia, 2018).

among others, these brands still demand their customers to go physically to the stores for purchasing their products (Mau, D., Mar 2014). The fact that some of the main luxury fashion websites are either content-free and flash-heavy⁷ or are just displaying brand information, is because some of the luxury clients are still invulnerable to the current online experiences and that their major objective for checking the sites, is to save time (Okonkwo, 2010). The mere presence of a luxury brand website does not guarantee that the clients will be interested in the brand, neither it will ensure an increase in sales or in loyalty. However the digital initiatives for some of the brands have been simply developed to incentivize the customers to visit their boutiques (Okonkwo, 2010). According to Venkatesan et al. (2007), the real behaviour of customers is to surf from a digital touchpoint to a physical one. Further, Bruno Pavlovsky, Chanel president of global fashion, added that “Fashion is about clothing, and clothing you need to see it, to feel it and to understand it” (Mau, D., Mar 2014), supporting the need of physically visiting stores. The same opinion is shared by the CEO of Céline, Marco Gobetti, telling to WWD that the company prefers to engage with customers in the way they like to be engaged, that is, in the store (Mau, D., Mar 2014). Nevertheless, other luxury brands that have been pioneers in the application of online marketing strategies (like Burberry or Dior) expect that customers will transfer their experiences from the Internet to their offline expectations and vice versa (Okonkwo, 2010). In addition to this, an aspect that cannot be forgotten is the fear that some brands expose to the risk of cannibalizing sales (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). Although, this is rarely presented, since luxury brands are not usually concerned on setting goals to increase sales, but rather to preserve the quality and exclusiveness of the business model.

According to Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., (2011) the online web page of a luxury brand should offer the same full experience of a brick-and-mortar format, in order to guide the visitor toward the full discovery of the brand. In order to achieve this, the authors propose not just to show brochures, catalogs, product descriptions and information about the know-how on the website, but also to insert elements such as the brand philosophy, values and beliefs. In the design of an online boutique, two guidelines must be considered; concept and design coherence (ibid). The concept will consist of the model chosen for creating the online atmosphere and driving the choice of all the visual elements such

⁷ By content-free and flash-heavy Okonkwo (2010) refers to luxury websites as endless pages of online catalogues full of graphics and creative ideas and animations, not strengthening on the fact of providing information about the products.

as layout, colours and navigation. On the other hand, the design coherence composes the aesthetics and ethics linked to the concept throughout the website (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). Furthermore, the layout of the site, will distinguish a luxury website from a general one. This is possible thanks to the welcome page, that becomes like the entry door of a prestigious physical retail location, allowing the immersion to the unique universe of the brand (ibid). As soon as the individual enters inside the brand world, it is of high importance to do everything possible to make the client feel at ease and to discover everything about the brand (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011), so that, the multi-sensory experience that creates the ambience of an offline store, must be replicated online.

Following the Sensory marketing Model of Hulten (2009), the multi-sensory experience will be achieved through the activation of more than one of the five senses of the individual. Different methods currently used online for pushing the products into the market and for activating customer's sensors, are directly linked to technology. Being the most advanced ones classified as; visuals, direct interaction and augmented reality. In order to enhance the visuals of the webpage, retailers are benefiting from the use of 3D views, zoom and product colour selection (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). For example, the fashion company Net-A-Porter, offers to customers a site with unique content, an exclusive site magazine and even insightful fashion videos (Kaufman, Jul, 2017). Furthermore, the luxury hotels and resorts Jumeirah provide a "360 degrees of luxury" on their site <http://inside.jumeirah.com>, enabling 3D views of the facilities and characteristics of their hotels, zoom options and even detailed descriptions of the objects and people appearing in the screen. At the time the visitor explores the hotel online, he receives information about how the in store experience will be performed. For instance, when clicking at the welcome desk, it is described that the guest will receive refreshing cold towels, rose water, dates, Bakhoor and Arabic coffee upon arrival, so that the experience of searching on the webpage is complemented by plenty of details. On the other hand, the method of direct interaction is in charge of captivating the offline interaction to the net, offering 24/7 assistance to the shopping experience through chats, telephone support and in some cases, video assistance (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). According to the survey conducted by StellaService to identify the retailers with best online customer service and support, brands such as Net-a-porter and Burberry, were at the top for being the best ones at solving customer's inquiries

(Schlossberg, Nov, 2015). Finally, augmented reality represents the most advanced method. Augmented reality is defined as interactive, real-time and 3D combination of real and virtual elements (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). Thanks to this technology, visitors have the chance to try on products virtually and see how the garments would fit if worn or used by the person (e.g. Girard-Perregaux application for watches), see further details on the *next section 2.4*.

The major purpose for utilizing the methods previously described; visuals, direct interaction and A.R., is to provide online, a sensual experience close to the one offered offline to customers. Being luxury brands capable of providing online a visual, tactile, auditory and olfactory sensorial stimulation, will potentially evoke on customers the same emotions, feelings and perceptions felt offline. Herefrom the visual sense of an e-luxury page is targeted through the colours, size and decoration utilized (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). The colours of a webpage are usually linked to the brand personality, trying to combine white backgrounds with texts in dark colours to obtain a major refinement (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). In relation to the size of a site, Hoffmann & Coste-Manière (2011) cite that an impressive home page is comparable to the ground floor of a luxury boutique, hence the importance of leaving the right first impression. Moreover, images and decoration displayed in the site, help in communicating the brand identity. Analysing the visual elements of several luxury web pages, it has been observed that Chanel is currently implementing a white background with black texts (following the colours of the brand). In line with the theory of communicating brand identity, its welcoming page is based on a automatic display of Chanel models wearing the upcoming collections. The same is replicated by Hermes Paris, utilizing the white background layout with orange and black colours of the logo. However, Hermes welcoming page appears to be less luxurious than other brands webpages. In fact, despite having a big composition of pictures of products, catwalks and models available, Hermes's webpage lacks luxury animation and more sumptuous layouts on their images and texts.

What resembles to be something commonly shared between each luxury webpage is the aesthetic visual display of the elements, trying to replicate the aspect of fashion magazines that usually customers are familiar with. In line with an offline sensorial strategy, the hearing and sounds senses must also be coherently stimulated in line with the brand personality (preferably ad-hoc compositions) by playing

different melodies in different sections of the website (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). However, a limited amount of research has been conducted on the effects that sound produces on luxury purchasing habits online. For what concerns, the tactile sense, in actuality, it cannot be fully reproduced online yet it can be stimulated. Videos, 3D views, multiple-size zoom and flipping pages, become some of the online methods that luxury brands are trying to use to stimulate haptic sensations. Finally, the olfactory sense represents another of the sensory challenges for the provision of online multisensory experiences (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). Even if digital scents have started to be developed through a sequence of notes emitted by computer devices trying to replicate the same effect of a smell (as it happens to the app Onotes), there is still room for improvement in the application of that technology to electronic devices. As for the tactile and olfactory sensations, the taste represents another barrier for the provision of a luxurious multi-sensory online experience. Although it is not possible for online visitors to directly taste products, detailed descriptions, videos and images of people tasting food or beverages, act as powerful evocative techniques to render the same effect (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011).

To better explain an e-luxury sensorial experience it is possible to have a look at Watch Avenue, a revolutionary provision of immersive virtual 3D experience in the watchmaking world. Visitors of their website (<https://www.watchavenue.co.uk>) are able to enjoy a full journey through interactive features that replicate a real luxury experience. Their digital platform is becoming a breakthrough on how an e-boutique can deliver an exceptional branding experience in the virtual world. This has been possible thanks to mobile channels that offer great opportunities for interaction with customers, increasing the quality of the experience, merging physical and virtual reality in a single interaction and, at the same time, capturing real-time data. Through the use of augmented reality apps, customers are able to receive 360-degree product descriptions. By adding layers of virtual content to the physical environment these technological apps enable the customization of the shopping experience, turning boutiques into personalized spaces containing information and suggestions based on customers tastes and previous experiences with the brand (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). Although benefiting from technological tools might enrich current online purchasing experiences, content and method of delivering sensor

experiences, might be adapted to the service delivered offline, especially for the most challenging ones, i.e. haptic, gustatory and olfactory sense.

2.4 Technology in the Luxury fashion industry

In 2009 total investments in Fashion Tech reached \$50 million; by 2014 the number had risen to \$2.8 billion (Gutierrez, C., 2017). Yet, while great focus has been placed on the disruptive impact e-commerce and other technologies have had on traditional fashion industry, less focus has been placed on the complementary role technology has played to streamline processes, to develop more efficient systems, and to modernize operations within the fashion and retailing industry (Gutierrez, C., 2017). From supply chain modernization technology to streamline⁸, to the use of data analytics and artificial intelligence to help guide business decisions, or to the incorporation of social media tools and platforms to impact purchasing decisions, new technologies are not only changing how the modern fashion enterprise functions, but also how its products interact with a consumer whose purchasing behavior is constantly “being radically reshaped by new technologies” (Gutierrez, C., 2017). Especially in the luxury sector, new disruptive technologies have started to shape the panorama, by specifically addressing those exceptional standards on both service and quality necessities. As a matter of fact, luxury marketers, long seen as resistant to change, have benefited from the progress made in augmented reality, virtual reality and artificial intelligence during the first half of 2017 (King, J., July 2017). The general trend shows that brands in the luxury industry are mainly using technology in stores. Even if the success of ventures such as Net-A-Porter and the success of brands like Burberry, Dior, Ray Ban, etc. has shown that consumers are indeed willing to buy luxury products online and at full prices (Novoseltseva, K., Nov. 2016). Now it is a matter of creating digital experiences, driving emotions and building this bridge between online and offline worlds (ibid).

It is possible to sort the current harmony between the technological and the luxury worlds into five major trends:

Use of advanced material; Nanomaterials technology, designed to possess superior attributes such as incredible strength, impressively low weight, or electric conductivity, could have a promising impact

⁸ To improve the efficiency of a process, business or organization by simplifying or eliminating unnecessary steps, using modernizing techniques, or taking other approaches (Business Dictionary, 2018 Feb).

on the production of luxury garments and accessories. It is the case of the American brand ODO Denim, which has invented the first self-cleaning and odor-repelling denim. Another example was Marchesa and IBM's color-changing light dress worn by model Karolina Kurkova during the 2016 Met Gala. A combination of advanced materials technology and connected objects (Ventura, P., 2017).

Artificial intelligence and advanced reality; from a simple intelligent information interface to robots replacing the physical presence of salespeople, the possibilities for the retailing industry are yet to be explored. Anyway human touch and personalisation remain key characteristics of the luxury industry, therefore complicating the implementation of robotics or pure artificial intelligence in store. Moreover, with the latest developments seen such as chatbots, online customer support could rapidly enter a new era. Luxury brands are already testing this new way of connecting with their younger audience (Ventura, P., 2017). Notably, Tommy Hilfiger was the first brand to profit from a Facebook Messenger bot during NYFW 2016 with the ambitious end goal to drive sales. Another example is the action undertaken by the online retailer Yoox, enabling the creation of shoppable selfies with the help of augmented reality. Yoox has partnered with augmented reality application Lumyer to animate its followers' selfies. Applicable for both photos and videos, the Lumyer app, adds unique effects through the use of lenses, similar to the interactive filters available on Snapchat. Nevertheless, the retailer has already developed a number of fashion filters on the Lumyer app, allowing the users to browse a selection of sunglasses, bags and other accessories, applying them to their selfie or video and if inclined, purchase the goods seen in-app (King, J., July 2017).

Mixed reality; from online, mobile and in-store experience enhancement to creating new consumer-to-consumer and brand-to-consumer interactions, there is a great potential for the use of AR and VR in the luxury industry. Indeed, they represent real opportunities to connect with consumers on another level and nurture "the dream" surrounding luxury brands (Ventura, P., 2017). As a matter of fact, virtual reality probably turned into the major tool used by luxury fashion companies with the aim of enriching customer experience, mainly in store. Christian Dior, for example, incorporated virtual reality glasses with the aim of giving their customers an extra incentive to visit their stores. The Maison also developed Dior Eyes, allowing viewers to explore behind the scenes at their ready-to-wear fashion shows (Novoseltseva, K., Nov. 2016). Another example is the Prada x Prada virtual reality experience unveiled in December 2016. The online 360° platform invites visitors to a sensorial journey and to the

exploration of the abstract world of Prada Fragrances (Ventura, P., 2017). The path is really booming in this direction where major luxury conglomerates are investing a lot. For example, during Paris' Viva Technology 2016 LVMH awarded French startup Heuritech⁹ with the inaugural LVMH Innovation Award¹⁰ (King, J., July 2017).

The Internet of things (IoT); IoT advances include services such as automated checkout, real-time promotions powered thanks to beacon technologies, and layout and inventory optimization. Digitalised brand Burberry has been doing this for years in its London Regent Street flagship store, connecting seamlessly their online and offline experience (Ventura, P., 2017), becoming the leader of luxury digitalization.

In store digitalization; Some of the technological innovation in luxury fashion relates to Radio-frequency identification (RFID), or the electronic tags used for an evolved Customer relationship management (CRM), aiming to replace the bar codes. RFID are intended to be an interface between the brand and the customer who can use to search for more information from a website. Prada implemented this innovation in 2002, and it can thus ensure a highly customized shopping experience, interacting with the customer, enabling to create personal virtual closet, or ask for more information (RFID Journal, 2002). Other innovations introduced within Prada stores involve dressing rooms, Kiosks, and the Peep Shows. The dressing rooms allow the customers to be part of the shopping experience, being able to check the inventory, control the lighting of the dressing areas or even adjust the transparency of the room walls (Prada, 2009). On the other hand, Kiosks and Peep Shows are interactive spaces where the customer can seek the website or other channels, looking for additional information of the products (Prada, 2009). Many other brands followed Prada, as a matter of fact in 2016 the NYFW designer Rebecca Minkoff teamed up with Zeekit, a B2C mobile app that is promising the most advanced virtual fitting room for consumers and retailers alike. Customers could view runway styles either on-site at the Rebecca Minkoff show, online at the Rebecca Minkoff website, or through the Zeekit app to be able to tap the product, virtually try it on, share it with friends and purchase it (Adegeest, D., 2016). Also Ralph Lauren's Fifth Avenue flagship store in Manhattan is home to connected fitting rooms that

⁹ Founded in 2013, Heuritech leverages artificial intelligence to detect trends online. Heuritech's technology understands consumer tastes, which can be useful for online retailers working to push appropriate product and content on their sites.

¹⁰ Award launched in 2016 by LVMH to help move the luxury industry forward by financially supporting young companies

merge digital technology with in store retail, meant to both remove friction from the customer experience and help the retailer make smarter merchandising decisions (Milnes, H., 2016; Ralph Lauren Website). Chanel recently joined the mashup between the digital and luxury world, by improving the instore digitalization. Indeed, in March 2018, it opened the Chanel Beauty House in California, “the world's most Instagram-friendly pop-up store in LA to celebrate the launch of the new user-generated Instagram page @WeLoveCoco”. Inside the house on Sunset Blvd. is every Insta-lovers dreamworld full of Chanel makeup and quirky Boomerang opportunities (Harper Bazaar Staff, 2018).

Especially during last years, a convergence of digital physical worlds, is reshaping the panorama of luxury fashion. Anyway what appears evident, especially in luxury, is that digitalization is mainly driven inside stores. Leaving an open question and room for improvement for online platforms that are not presenting any enhancement with respect to mass market digital platforms.

2.5 Scientific Propositions development

The thorough theoretical framework presented in previous sections and subsections is meant to provide a solid background to the research conducted. The need of investigating in deep in the sector and especially to potentially demonstrate the effectiveness and importance of the online implementation of sensorial marketing techniques, results as a logical necessity. As a matter of fact, the new marketing goal to emotionally connect customers to the brand through tangible and intangible elements, is further stressed in the luxury world. There is indeed, a major urgency for the development of complementary offline and online strategies to create luxury experiences. In this scenario, the key value dimensions of luxury brands can represent a useful base. Veritably, the in store purchasing experience is highly looked after by all major conglomerates and private Maisons. Multi-sensory brand experiences are carefully studied and granted for every customer, through the involvement of the five human senses to generate customer value, experiences and brand image. Thanks to these strategies, luxury brands are able to reinforce their brand equity and positioning in the market. Despite this intensive attention offline, the boost of multichannel businesses highlight the necessity to offer seamless shopping experiences integrating the different channels available, and not only inside stores. If until few years ago the matter was about being or not being present online, nowadays it is about creating an exceptional online experience for every customer also on the website. By the way, online luxury

retailers are facing flows and challenges in showcasing luxury, due to the highly sensually stimulated in store design and the care dedicated to it. In this framework the continuous technological developments should be highly taken into consideration as providers of solutions; currently the major trend is driven to in store implementations of high-tech solutions.

Previous sections (see *Section 2.4*) highlighted five trends melting the luxury and the digital world, namely the use of advanced material, the increasing employment of artificial intelligence, the boom of advanced and mixed reality, the development of the Internet of Things and the strong in store digitalization. As previously highlighted, every trend is mainly meant to increase the in store digitalization, while there is no significant evidence of websites improvement as meant to ameliorate the online experience of customers. The attention dedicated to in store design and experience, is continuously widening the gap between what customers can sensually experience offline and on websites. There is therefore a primary need to create digital experiences to drive emotions and build a bridge between online and offline worlds. Based on the theoretical framework built, this paragraph will deal with the profiling of some theoretical propositions, helping researchers answering the research question on how with the development of multi-sensory strategies fashion brands will be able to create superior customer value thus complementing the in in store experience provided.

The domain of the present study has been poorly explored, therefore leaving a lot of open questions and gaps in literature and strategy. As anticipated in previous sections, the scope of the paper is to understand the effects of the development of online sensory marketing strategies inside luxury digital platforms. Discovering the effects on customers of the development of these strategies, appears logical and pivotal in the analysis of empirical data answering the research question proposed. As it has been highlighted, luxury brands are faced with the challenge of adapting to an increasingly omnichannel world, where each channel interacts with and supports the others, resulting in a singular brand presence. Indeed, customers do not only use online websites to purchase, therefore changing how retailers sell, but they rather see the web as an informative tool, a place where to browse before actually purchasing something (B. Ervin 2016 ; A.Orendoff, 2018). Consumer and marketing research has shown that experiences occur when consumers search for products, when they shop for them and receive the service, and when they consume them (Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan 2002; Brakus, Schmitt, and Zhang 2008; Holbrook 2000). Thus, it is possible to conceptualize brand experience as subjective,

internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments (Brakus et al. 2009). The combination of these discoveries funneled the development of the first proposition to test. Researchers aim to test that providing customers in the luxury sector with a similar experience offline and online will enrich customer experience.

P1: Aligning the online and offline experience provided by luxury brands will result into a better customer experience

The verb “Aligning” has to be considered in relation with the structural inequalities linked to the offline and online channels. In this sense, the term is selected to underline the importance of carefully providing online and in store, a similar service and to stimulate similar emotions and feelings to customers. This does not mean that the two channels will be able to instill the same emotions, image and sensations nor adopting the same techniques. The focus has to be on the similarity of the experience customers will be faced with in terms of feelings and sensations. In this sense, the aim is to test that the online experience has to represent the closest experience possible to the offline offer. Therefore aligning the sensations, emotions and expectations of customers, increasing brand coherence and presumably enriching customers' experience. Experiential marketing views consumers as emotional beings, focussed on achieving pleasurable experiences (Atwal, G. and Williams, A.,2009). The focus has thus to be on customer experiences and lifestyles, which provide sensory, emotional, cognitive and relational values to the consumer. Furthermore, it is important to create synergies among meaning, perception, consumption and brand loyalty. Finally, it has been proved that customers are not rational decision-makers, but are rather driven by rationality and emotion (Atwal, G. and Williams, A.,2009). Purchase intention is a combination of consumers' interest in and possibility of buying a product. As a result of many studies, it strongly relates to attitude and preference toward a brand or a product (Kim, Kim & Johnson, 2010; Kim & Ko, 2010; Kim & Lee, 2009) highlighting the importance of the analysis and interpretation of the statement proposition presented.

To further understand the dynamics shaping customer online sensorial experience, therefore enabling researchers to answer the research question proposed, a second proposition has been developed. To underline and better understand the importance of the development of sensorial strategies online in the

fashion luxury sector, researchers aims at testing the effects of the development of these strategies on customers perception about the brand. This proposition find roots in the already established knowledge about the effects of multi-sensorial strategies in store. In particular it has already been tested that the emergence of the sensory marketing approach enhances customer experience (Ganda, 2012; Hulten, 2011; Hult ´ en, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009; ´ Krishna, 2010, 2012, 2013; Lindstrom, 2005a, 2005b; Soars, 2009; Spence, 2002). Grewal and his colleagues (Grewal & Baker, 1994; Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994) provided evidence of significant interactive effects of ambience and design factors on consumers' perceptions of retailer image and price acceptability. Store atmospherics seek to make retail environments more enjoyable for shoppers (Brand, 1963), thus encouraging them to stay longer, and, ultimately, to spend more, and/or return more frequently. The effects of sensorial strategies highlighted a big impact on customers' behaviour toward the brand when implemented offline. The impact of these strategies offline could be translated also online therefore shaping the following proposition:

P2: Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will translate into superior customer value.

Since the customer value currently provided is linked to a multi-sensory online experience mainly based on visuals and sounds, it is aimed to test, that both improving this experience with complementary senses (haptic, olfactory and gustatory) or with similar ones produced by modern technology and focusing more on sound and sight, will translate into a superior and enriched customer value. Customer value refers to the difference between what a customer gets from a product, and what he or she has to give in order to get it (Business Dictionary, 2018). In this specific context "superior customer value" entails the provision of a richer, more complete and more appealing service and experience to customers so that what the customer will have to give to get the product will be perceived as in line and justified by the experience lived. In order to better understand in which way a "superior customer value" will shape and modify customers' attitude toward the brand, the following list of sub-propositions has been formulated.

P2a: Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will incentivize customers to buy more.

P2b: Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will positively impact customer loyalty.

P2c: Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will positively impact brand image.

P2d: Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will increase customer engagement with the brand.

This list of scientific statement proposal is meant to identify in which sense customers will perceive the development of multi-sensory marketing strategies online as delivering superior customer-value. The test of them will further highlight how brands could use these strategies to positively impact sales, loyalty, brand image and engagement.

The third statement proposal developed is only based on researchers logical assumptions and knowledge within the field. There has been a strong development of technological tools aimed at enriching the in store experience provided by luxury brands (see *Section 2.3*). Despite the different ways brands chose to ameliorate the in store experience provided, the common denominator appears to be the willingness to stimulate customers, enrich their experience and embrace the technological boom permeating this century. Some luxury brands decided to “turn in store tech to boost fashion retail” (Williams, R., 2016). As a matter of fact, tech start-ups and luxury retail consultants say that top brands across the luxury sector are quietly pushing to bring the advantages of the web into their retail stores (Ibid). “A lot of brands want to break down the barriers between their digital and physical presence,” says Clémence Dehaene, co-founder of Retail & Digital 2.0, a start-up that integrates motion sensors, screens, and other high-tech elements in luxury retail displays. The reason for this strong convergence between these two worlds lies in the efficiency of technology in providing feedbacks to brands on their retail efforts, and in their help with the creation of fine-tune promotions in real time (Williams, R., 2016). The barrier and the risk linked to the implementation of those kind of tools and sensors, able to identify customer preferences and behaviours in store by observing and analyzing their actions, is mainly one. “The respect of privacy is a key aspect of the luxury business,” says George-Edouard Dias, a former L’Oréal executive. If customers receive too many messages from a store, or the messages become too precisely targeted, they may feel like a brand has been spying on them, he says.

Furthermore, if customers already accepted online retailers collecting a lot of information about them on their websites, when these activities are implemented in store customers would not be prepared and would miss the feeling of anonymity (Williams, R., 2016). Anyway, luxury brands are now scrambling to bolster their digital strategy and capabilities to take advantage of double-digit online luxury sales growth over the next 5 years (Beeson, M., 2017). Plus, they're starting to realize that if they don't act, they stand to lose their digitally savvy customers to online luxury multi-brand retailers that offer much more sophisticated digital experiences (ibid). Despite the resistance of luxury brands for the offering of a complete digital experience also online, it turns out that luxury consumers are among the first to adopt new technology, engage with social media, and shop across multiple online and offline touchpoints. (Beeson, M., et al.(1), 2017). What further highlights the necessity of a thorough investment in digital platforms, is the existence of thriving online multi-brand powerhouses, like Net-a-Porter and Farfetch coupling luxury merchandise with online shopping. Their business model is not only profitable, but also attractive to the luxury consumer. Numerous luxury brands appear to be unaware of how quickly customers have become digitally fluent and now expect their favorite brands to be equally digitally nimble. (Beeson, M., et al. (2), 2017). Executed correctly, digital touchpoints complement and enhance the in store experience, rather than detract from it. Luxury firms that neglect to connect their stores with digital touchpoints miss out on strengthening how they engage with customers (ibid.).

The reality depicted, highlights the importance of not only enriching the in store connection between the digital and non-digital world, but also the necessity to improve the performance of online websites. Luxury consumers will lose patience with brands that do not effectively cater to them with rich, relevant offerings across online touchpoints too (Beeson, M., et al.(1), 2017). The literature presented has been the basis for the formulation of the following proposition:

P3: Broadening the convergence between technology and luxury online will improve customer experience.

The objective of P3 lies in the necessity to test the reaction of customers when luxury brands implement also in their online platforms technological advancements. The necessity to understand the effects of the online conversion of technology and luxury, appears as direct consequence of the improvements generated in customer experience by this cohesion. Therefore, to provide more specific

recommendations and to thoroughly answer to the research question proposed the necessity of collecting data on this statement proposal has been considered pivotal.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH APPROACH

The fundamental relationship existing between theory and the approach the researchers undertake in the pursuit of knowledge advancement (Johnston, A., 2014) justifies the necessity of evaluating which role theory plays in different research approaches. Along this paper, researchers will seek to use theory as a sharp instrument for interacting with data at a level beyond mere description (Walshaw, 2012, p.56), therefore underlining the necessity of recognising the interconnectedness between research and theory (Johnston, A., 2014).

The final purpose of every research is to find out causal relationships (Matthews and Ross, 2010) between occurrences, tending to be effective and useful in solving organisational or operational problems. So that, a research becomes a conscious activity aimed at demonstrating the link between variables (Johnston, A., 2014). Additionally, the role researches play in the research (active or passive participation) (Walshaw, 2012) and the nature of the individual's reality (rational thinking or inductive reasoning) influence the acquisition of knowledge and the outputs of the research. As a result, the way both theory and research relate through interpretation or scientific application in this paper, will be further explained in the *sub-sections 3.1 and 3.2*.

3.1 Research philosophy

Fundamentally, every research starts with an understanding of the philosophical stance taken by the researchers (Johnston, A., 2014). According to Foster (2004), a general philosophy of science seeks to describe how science works within a wide range of sciences. It becomes a study of the normative conception of scientific knowledge responding to the question of what criteria should research and knowledge fulfil in order to count as scientific research and knowledge (Rolin K., 2012). Therefore, the main purpose of considering which philosophy of science should be followed along the research, is to understand which ideology will underpin the choices and decisions to be made in staking a research position (Carson et al., 2001). In relation to this position, there will be implications on what, how and

why the research is carried out. Moreover, the consideration of a specific philosophy will help in contributing a deeper and wider perspective of the research conducted (Carson et al., 2001). The philosophy of science chosen for this paper will be explained at three different levels: philosophical, ontological and epistemological. Furthermore, methodological details will be provided in the next *Section 3.2*.

As previously mentioned, it is important to appreciate an individual's position of reality (ontology) and its appreciation of what it is considered acceptable knowledge (epistemology), in order to be able to identify the rationale for the research approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011) and understand the reasons for carrying out the research. On one hand, ontology is in charge of describing a reality identifying what types of identities are taken to have existence (Mingers, 2003). On the other hand, epistemology determines the relationship between the reality and the researchers (Writepass Journal, Aug 2017), the forms of knowledge and knowledge creation the method uses (Mingers, 2003). This is realised in terms of where the model comes from and the form is represented i.e. is the world objective?, does it come from someone's beliefs or is it an abstract viewpoint? (Mingers, 2003). According to Pizam and Mansfeld (2009), differences between philosophies are determined by the focus of interest, knowledge generated, subject-researcher philosophy, nature of reality and the goal of the research. Whilst positivist and post-positivist philosophies aim to explain causal relationships by means of objective facts and statistical analysis (Carson et al., 2001), interpretivists use a more personal process to understand a reality, concluding that the world is open to interpretation and is socially constructed by people who may be regarded as social actors (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

Considering that this research aims to investigate whether the development of multi-sensory strategies online enable luxury brands to create superior online customer experiences, thus complementing the in store perceived value, researchers observe a reality in which the world is objective but filtered through the experience of individuals. For this reason, the current paper will be founded on the post-positivism philosophy.

A post-positivist approach shares the same assumptions as positivism but from a more relativistic perspective (Writepass Journal, Aug 2017). By definition, a positivism philosophy aims to mirror

scientific method, using deductive reasoning, empirical evidence and hypothesis¹¹ testing (Writepass Journal, Aug 2017) however, the fact of analysing the behavior of luxury fashion brands and sensorial experiences of clients, enable the researchers to acknowledge that the reality might be biased by the context and cultural differences of respondents, thus suiting better to choose a post-positivist philosophy. Because all measurement is fallible, the post-positivism emphasizes the importance of multiple measures and observations to try to get a better bead on what's happening in reality (Trochim, 2006). Obtaining a realistic and representative sample of participants for the research will enable researchers to reduce the biases produced from the analysis of persona's profiles and their different behaviours. Post-positivism also believes that all observations are theory-laden (Writepass Journal, Aug 2017). So in order to determine what is accepted as theory and knowledge and the way to go about collecting evidence that supports or challenges existing research, there is the need to identify the details of epistemological post-positivism beliefs. In terms of ontology, positivism considered that an external reality exists and it can be discovered and understood (Howell, 2012). Nevertheless, the fact of aiming to uncover the human behaviour through the analysis of its emotions and feelings, results in opposition to positivism beliefs, hence, leaving ontology to a combination between the post-positivism and interpretivism of how people behave. In this research, interpretivism will just be taken as a complement to the post-positivism approach, implicating a personal approach of the researchers to the understanding of the reality. Furthermore, the positivist epistemological position defends that the researcher and the external world (or what can be discovered) are totally separated and objectivity sought through scientific procedure. Nevertheless, post-positivist approach argues that reality or truth exists, but it can only be understood imperfectly or probabilistically, so the relation of the researchers with the reality will be based on beliefs and the world studied will be subjective.

3.2 Methodology

The following section aims at defining the way researchers will proceed to answer the research question proposed and obtain the information needed. Methodology is in fact defined as the researchers' strategic approach, rather than the set of techniques and tools for data analysis (this will

¹¹ The paper on hand will deal with the acceptance and analysis of "propositions" that are considered as comparable to hypothesis testing. This need arouse from the fact that the research type selected does not allow researchers to test hypotheses through statistics due to the sample approached and the nature of the study.

be covered in *Chapter 4*) (Wainwright, D. 1997). The methodology used along the project will be designed upon post-positivism, therefore mirroring the scientific method, but at the same time taking into consideration that the reality might be biased by the context and the cultural differences of respondents. The research approach undertaken within the paper will be abductive. Abductive reasoning refers to the logical connection made by researchers between data and theory, often used for theorizing about surprising “events” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 89). The research process starts with surprising facts or puzzles and it is devoted to their explanation (Saunders, m et al., 2012). The context under analysis and the nature of the study itself adheres to the characteristics generally attached to a mixed approach. As a matter of fact, a broader selection of scientific material concerning sensory marketing, digitalization and their efficiency in the luxury field has been already provided by researchers offline. The same is true for the effects linked to the development of these strategies offline (see *Chapter 2*). Despite this, the downturn of the situation arises when considering these three elements online. Indeed, there is no relevant research on the effects of the development of technological and sensually stimulating tools inside digital platforms, originating a gap in the literature. In line with Dudovskiy (2010) definition, an abductive research approach, arises from a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. In fact it deals with the arising of a “puzzle” that may emerge when researchers encounters with an empirical phenomena that cannot be explained by the existing range of theories (ibid). Inductive reasoning begins with detailed observations of the world, moving towards more abstract generalisations and ideas (Neuman, W.L., 2003). As a matter of fact inductive reasoning is often referred to as a “bottom-up” approach to knowing, in which way the researcher uses observations to build an abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomenon that is being studied (Lodico, M.G. et al., 2010). On the other hand deductive means reasoning from the particular to the general. If a causal relationship or link seems to be implied by a particular theory or case example, it might be true in many cases. A deductive design might test to see if this relationship or link did obtain on more general circumstances (Gulati, PM, 2009). In addition, a deductive approach is concerned with developing an hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on existing theory, and then designing a research strategy to test the hypothesis (Wilson, J.,2010). The case proposed appears to be a mix between the two approaches generally adopted. Indeed, the research conducted is limited to a specific industry, therefore generalizations will be provided, but bounded to the field under analysis, therefore

challenging the deductive approach testing the propositions on general circumstances. At the same time, the propositions developed will be based on the existing theory and redesigned for the purpose of the paper.

The chosen research approach enables researchers to structure a mixed research type. Therefore, the paper applies an explorative, as well as an explanatory approach in investigating the multi-sensory brand experience online. The combination of two approaches has proven a fruitful way to explore and explain this research domain (Hultén, B., 2009). Adopting an explorative approach in the first stage of the research facilitated an investigation of a research domain that has been relatively unexplored. As a matter of fact, the improvement of online sensory experience has been hardly researched by experts, and consequently there is no real application of this sensory marketing on digital platforms. After the research question formulation an explanatory approach was adopted. It is clear that an explanatory approach offers opportunities to develop a model that can explain a current phenomenon in a scientific way (Hunt, 2002, p. 86). In both the exploratory and explanatory stages of the present work, the research process was of an iterative character, allowing the researcher to work back and forth between data and theory (Hultén, B., 2009).

3.2.1 Consequences of research philosophies and methodology

The point of departure of the research on hand arises from a lack of empirical data in the field under analysis. As it has already been stated, a poor knowledge of online sensory marketing strategies meant to improve the brand performance, has been both studied and implemented by brands, which appears surprising due to the efficiency of those techniques offline especially in luxury. Anyway it has been possible to build up the research thanks to a priori knowledge, emerging from connected studies, gaps in literature, researchers' background and trend analysis. A priori (or non-empirical) is knowledge which is possible independently of, or prior to, any experience, and requires only the use of reason (e.g. knowledge of logical truths and of abstract claims) (Flynn et al, 1990). From this knowledge posteriori (or empirical), knowledge will be obtained only subsequent to certain experiences and world observations (Flynn et al., 1990), i.e. the results obtained. In addition, the use of reason will be necessary, in order to determine the effects on luxury brands of the development of online sensory

marketing strategy, through the analysis and interpretation of the data collected in relation to the three propositions drafted. Additionally, a posteriori empirical knowledge will then be generated after the testing of the propositions.

The abductive research approach followed, enables researchers to build premises that can be used to generate testable conclusions (Saunders, M., 2009). Therefore, enabling the consultation of literature linked to the research question proposed and the building of propositions based on those premises. Indeed, the necessity to build testable propositions within a domain almost unexplored, is pivotal for the achievement of empirical results, therefore justifying the approach selected. As a matter of fact the scientific propositions that will be developed will be based on empirical generalisations applicable within the same sector, i.e. luxury fashion, implemented through the same marketing strategies, i.e. sensory marketing, but within a different context, the online world. Through this approach, the paper will be able to build generalisations from the interaction between specific and the general (Saunders, M., 2009). In fact, the exploration of the effects of the online development of sensory marketing strategies within the fashion luxury sector, is taken as a base for analysis. Anyway, the results obtained could be easily adopted also in different sectors both in the luxury and non-luxury industries. The philosophy of science permeating the study further stresses the importance of the selection of a flexible research approach, enabling researchers to explore and test new areas of expertise. Post-positivism emphasizes the importance of multiple measures and observations to try to get a better bead on what's happening in reality (Trochim, 2006), therefore further implying the necessity to adopt different research types (see *Chapter 4*). Methodologies and research philosophies adopted, are all meant to ensure the verifiability of the results obtained.

CHAPTER 4. METHOD

This section will define the context of the research approached, how the research design has been chosen, and it will provide the answers to the “w” questions of how, why, what, where and when the study is carried out. At this stage of the process, one of the main decisions to take will be whether to use qualitative, quantitative techniques, or a combined approach (WritePass Journal, 2017). The choice

for selecting the method of the research, will determine in parallel, the approach for gathering the data needed. However, some factors should be present when selecting the research approach. This includes: the philosophy of science (See *section 3.1*), the nature of the research question, and the availability of resources (Leacock et al., 2009). In line with the post-positivism philosophy described in the previous chapter, researchers will be looking at broad areas of interest, aiming to generate knowledge about the investigated area, therefore adopting a qualitative method to build their research design. Qualitative research in organizational change situations¹², will be mainly used in areas of research such as theory development, theory testing, construct validation, and the uncovering of new emerging phenomena (Garcia, D., & Gluesing, J. C., 2013). While back, concurrent scholar's have been opting for more qualitative research (Bartunek and Seo, 2002; Edmondson and McManus, 2007; Jones and Khanna, 2006; Shapiro et al., 2007) to be used for answering appropriate questions, such as those that deal with process, uncovering new phenomena, and testing empirically proposed relationships between constructs and variables (Garcia, D., & Gluesing, J. C., 2013). Moreover, the framework for conducting the research project will be represented by the research design classification (Malhotra et al., 2010) further developed in the next section. After the reasoning on which techniques will be utilized for collecting data, upon which circumstances the sample will be chosen, and how all this information will contribute towards answering the research question, the questionnaire design will be built up (See *Section 4.2*). Then, a preliminary plan for guiding the researchers in improving the research integrity and quality (Banks et al., 2013) will be presented (*Section 4.3*). Finally, and in order to underline the quality of the research conducted, a validity and reliability section will be developed. All in all, this section becomes an overall framework to help the researchers in deciding what approach to adopt, who will be the participants of the study, how to collect and analyse data and how to report the findings. Following the post-positivism philosophy and in order to provide the best answer to the research question on how the development of multi-sensory strategies will enable luxury fashion brands to create superior customer value, thus complementing the in store experience provided, a mix of exploratory and explanatory approaches will be applied. In order to understand how to choose the optimal research techniques, three aspects should be considered: the context or the environment where

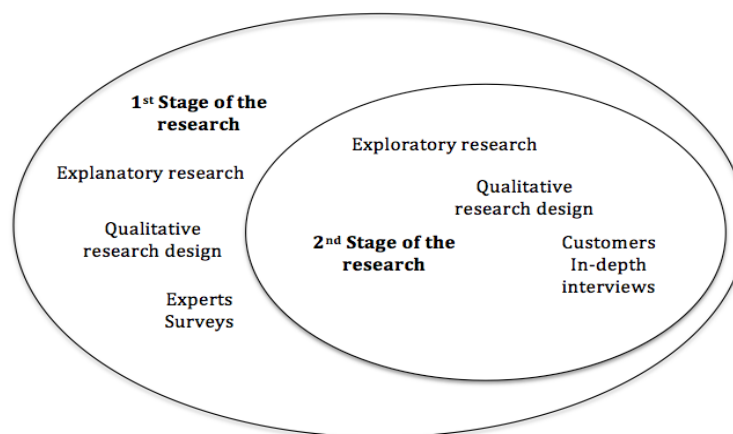
¹² Organisational change research involves a rich subfield of organization studies, been responsive to the dynamics of contemporary workplace demands (Garcia, D., & Gluesing, J. C., 2013).

the participant is interviewed, the nature of the participant and the nature of the issue under investigation as perceived by the participant (Malhotra et al., 2010). In relation to these aspects, the sample population addressed for the research, comprised both luxury customers and experts of the field (see next *Section 4.1.* for further details), thus holding an ordinary, normal and common relation to the nature of the study carried out, due to their luxury purchasing attitudes and their knowledge of the industry. Furthermore, acknowledging that the nature of the issue investigated belongs to something ordinary for the participants, the combination of both approaches (exploratory and explanatory) results as the best option for investigating the matter on hand. As already underlined in *Section 3.2*, adopting an explanatory approach at the first stage of the study, will enable the researchers to investigate and explore an aspect of the online sensory experience that has been rarely investigated, which is, the room for improvement in terms of multi-sensory experiences, that luxury brands have left on their online webpages. This illustrates how researchers can use qualitative methods to help building better theory by taking into consideration new elements heretofore not included in theory, or by building new theories for new phenomena (Garcia, D., & Gluesing, J. C., 2013). Qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world. Therefore so, utilizing qualitative research methods, is better to obtain testimony or responses from participants in unobtrusive and relaxed environments (McCracken, 1998, 21), avoiding too direct approaches and enabling the collection of deep thoughts. After the observation and understanding of the reasons that have led luxury brands to follow the ongoing strategies, an exploratory approach will be adopted to explain the phenomenon of purchasing behaviour that customers are recreating in-store and in online boutiques. On one hand, explanatory studies are usually conducted to help in finding out the reasons of problems that have not been studied in-depth before (Yousaf, M., 2018). By providing deep insights into a specific subject that hasn't been investigated beforehand, it gives also birth to more opportunities of research (Yousaf, M., 2018). Additionally, the intensive study of a concrete subject, results into the development of critical thinking, creating a cycle of questions that lead to more paths of study for the researchers (ibid). Having in mind the objectives for each of the methods; namely to build the pillar of the research giving a specific and concrete idea of the unexplored field, thus giving to the survey and research design a better focus, in case of explanatory research (Yousaf, M., 2018). And to provide insights and

understanding of the nature of a phenomena, in this case the purchasing behaviour of the customers towards online and offline experiences, for the exploratory approach (Malhotra et al., 2012).

In conclusion, the research method for this study will be built at two different levels, one for the explanatory approach and a different one for the explanatory. In order to collect data with the use of an explanatory approach, whose main objective will be to understand the logic of the ongoing strategies of luxury brands in providing experiences online and in store, the method that best fits, will be the use of experts surveys¹³. By norm, expert surveys are useful methods for measuring concepts that would be difficult or impossible to measure through alternative strategies, and permit researchers to create indicators that are comparable across diverse contextual settings (Atkeson & Alvarez, 2016). This qualitative conversations with industry experts and individuals with broad knowledge about the firms and industry, can help in diagnosing the nature of the marketing and research problem (Malhotra et al., 2012). On the other hand, in order to be able to implement exploratory techniques for collecting the data at the second level of the study, in-depth qualitative interviews with customers will be conducted. The main motivation behind the use of in-depth interviews, is to uncover underlying beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic (Malhotra et al., 2012). The emphasis should be upon the understanding of the meaning of participant's experiences and life worlds (ibid). In order to summarize the framework designed for the method approach in this study, the following figure has been created:

Figure 5: Method framework - Own elaboration



¹³ Expert surveys will be considered during the paper as qualitative method to gather high-quality information from well-informed sources.

4.1 Research design classification

A research design specifies the details of the procedures necessary for obtaining the information needed to structure and solve marketing research problems (Malhotra et al., 2012), providing the specific framework for conducting the research study. In addition, a good research design will ensure that the research project is conducted effectively and efficiently (ibid). Despite the initial analysis of the experiential strategies that luxury brands are applying in the fashion industry, when looking at the principal reasons that the study aims to examine (customer's attitudes towards the purchasing of luxury online and offline) the research design presents clear characteristics of an exploratory research. Moreover, the flexibility and evolving approach for the understanding of marketing phenomena that are inherently difficult to measure, shows the need classifying the method in general terms, as explanatory. At the first stage of the study, we will thus conduct an explanatory research with a group of field experts. For this study, an expert will be considered as a professional academic, manager or manager of a product category (International Marketing Trends Conference, 2018) working within the field of luxury. Each expert will be identified by having a considerable influence in the discussion of sensorial marketing in the luxury industry. In order to obtain the expertise and knowledge demanded with qualitative insights about the problem presented, four expert surveys will be conducted. Typically, expert information is obtained by unstructured interviews, however it is recommended to prepare a list of topics to be covered during the surveys (Malhotra et al., 2012). The order in which the topics are covered and the questions to ask should not be predetermined, and rather, decided as the interview progresses, allowing greater flexibility in capturing the insights of the experts (ibid). It is important to remember that the main purpose of interviewing experts is to explore ideas, make new connections between subjects, and create new perspectives in defining the marketing research problem. Therefore so, it is of vital significance to use the knowledge and reasoning perspectives of these marketing and academics experts, towards the field under exploration.

For the second stage of the study, researchers want to identify the purchasing attitudes that luxury customers have in store and in the online channel of fashion luxury brands. In pursuance of obtaining once again qualitative data, in-depth qualitative interviews will be carried out. In-depth interviews can be defined as a technique or procedure used to collect data, allowing researchers to gather the reflections of the interviewee, constituting a fundamental tool for generating empirical knowledge

through asking people to talk about certain themes (della Porta 2010). Interviews become therefore, a particular type of conversation (usually structured and guided by the researcher) with a view in stimulating the provision of certain information (della Porta 2010). For this type of qualitative interviews, the respondent provides information while the interviewer, as a representative of the study, is responsible for directing the respondent to the topic that matter to the study (Weiss, 1994). The advantage for making use of in-depth interviews will be the flexibility linked to the typology of the technique.

Regarding the approach of both methods - expert surveys and in-depth interviews - a direct approach will be implemented with participants, being clear about which type of information researchers want to obtain from each question or group of questions while leaving room for open answers without losing the scope of the research (Malhotra et al., 2012). More details about the method utilized for collecting the data, the final sample of participants to analyse and how the expert surveys and in-depth interviews contribute towards answering the research question and the testing of the propositions, will be explained in the next section.

4.2 Survey design

Methods are not just seemingly mechanical techniques such as observing, writing, counting, and transcribing; methods also include cognitive and affective processes such as inferring, intuiting, empathizing and evaluating (Saldaña, 2011). So that, the data collection method for interviewing participants, becomes an effective way of requesting and documenting, with own words, an individual's or group's perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes and beliefs about personal experiences and the social world (Saldaña, 2011). The research topic, the interviews and expert survey questions, form the basis for the subjects to cover and types of questions to ask during the data collection process. However, improvised conversation with the participants, may also generate unexpected areas and insights for further inquiry (ibid). According to the interview format, this study will be based on a prearranged format, where questions are prepared and can also happen spontaneously. The interviews will be conducted with single individuals in both cases, for customers and for experts. One of the

reasons for choosing this individualistic approach instead of groupal sessions, is to avoid dominant personalities influencing others opinions.

In order to determine the research sample, researchers will need to decide which specific persons are appropriate for interviews, and the most likely to provide substantive answers and responses for the inquiries (Saldaña, 2011). To achieve this, researchers will need to consider whose perspectives will best represent the diverse landscape of social and cultural setting (ibid). Nevertheless, limited time and budget will potentially unable the researchers to interview everyone involved with the culture of study. Thus, sampling - the strategic, referred, random and/or serendipitous selection of participants - can be used for relevant research purposes to collect a representatively broad to tightly focused overview of perspectives (Saldaña, 2011). For the elaboration of the sample, a referred selection of participants have been contacted during 6 weeks. With the aim of capturing customer's insights about fashion luxury purchasing experiences online and offline, a group of 16 customers of fashion luxury brands were interviewed to participate in the study in addition to the set of 4 experts approached. The population selected was chosen with independency of their age, sex or nationality, however participants were asked to own a particular interest in fashion, not just for buying the products, but for looking for unique luxury experiences. In order to give an answer to the scientific propositions formulated and the research question addressed, different options can be utilized; according to Saldaña (2011), a small group of three to six people, provides a broad spectrum of data for analysis, however, for other selected methodologies, a minimum of ten to twenty participants is needed to insure more credible and trustworthy findings. Therefore so, our sample population of 16 participants, according to theory, might be considered as sufficient number of answers to collect reliable results. For the sample of experts, the objective is to obtain a broad vision on the effectiveness and potential of current multi-sensory strategies delivered to customers offline and in store. The insights of the field experts are considered of great importance due to the poor amount of researches previously conducted within the field. Furthermore, all the thoughts and opinions provided, will help the researchers in the testing of the propositions developed and in the formulation of the interviews with customers, since having expert's insights might be useful to understand the market in general, namely; what they think about the industry and what customers are asking for. Additionally, the challenge for reaching field experts have resulted into a reduced sample population of four. All in all, Saldaña (2011) discussed that the optimal

choice for creating a valid sample, is to research people never met before, or those whom are merely acquainted for the researchers, in specific locations not visited or studied in depth. According to the topic of study, the design of the customers interview and experts survey differ in content and objective. The main part of the questions designed in the method (*see Appendix 1 and 2* for a draft of the questions asked) will generate extended responses, while others will need a back-and-forth exchange with the interviewers. Moreover it is important to keep in mind the research question proposed considering that in a qualitative interview. Good questions should be open-ended (ie, require more than a yes/no answer), neutral, sensitive and understandable (Britten, N., 1999). In line with theory, interviews will start with questions enabling participants to easily answer, and then proceed to more difficult or sensitive topics (Britten, N., 1999). Researchers will avoid interpreting those questions that are not meant to test the research question proposed and the propositions developed, so that to provide readers with information directly relevant to the scientific field approached. The following *Table 1* and *Table 2*, display the questions prepared and proposed along the interviewing process to the customers and experts. Table 1, dedicated to questions posed to the experts, reveals the reasoning behind the creation of each question in the column “aim”.

The main topics addressed in the conversation with the experts are; which elements are the most important for providing unique experiences to customers, which senses brands are currently activating with their services, which are the effects on customer loyalty and brand image, and whether any of the experiences currently provided can be potentially improved.

Table 1: Experts survey questions and their objectives

QUESTIONS FOR EXPERTS	AIM
1. Which element do you consider the most important for the provision of a unique luxury experience?	The expertise and knowledge of experts is considered of pivotal importance to delineate the actual panorama in terms of experience gifted to customers and sensory marketing techniques applied. Posing introductory questions is meant to create a solid base to understand the market situation and to answer the research question proposed.
2. Which senses do you think are actively stimulated in store? Which brands are the best ones in	The understanding of what is the current situation online and which brands are stronger in the provision of these experiences will be taken as benchmark to provide recommendations.

implementing this kind of strategies?	
3. Do you believe the in store experience provided in luxury is enough or do you rather sustain that it can be improved? If it can be improved please make suggestions	As for all the introductory questions an understanding of current strategies and potential improvements is essential to delineate the market situation especially in store where luxury brands are already applying sensorial marketing strategies. These information are considered as important to solidly answer the research question proposed.
4. Do you think that providing customers with sensory experiences will enhance the emotional connection between the brand and the customer himself?	Diving inside experts thoughts concerning the provision of a superior customer experience is mainly meant at giving insights on Proposition 2. Experts thoughts are considered as important to drive conclusions and recommendations and to increase also the reliability of the results obtained.
5. Do you consider all the 5 senses equally important for the provision of a superior customer experience? If not which ones are more important for fashion luxury?	Understanding the elements on which brands should push to enrich the experience provided online. Experts have to be considered not only as lighthouses within the field but also as active buyers. Having this information is considered useful for the testing of Proposition 2.
6. Would you state that customer loyalty could be affected by the stimulation of sensations associated with purchasing luxury brands?	Information arising from questions similar to the one proposed are meant to the testing of Proposition 2B, where a connection between a better multi-sensory online experience is proposed to positively impact customer loyalty.
7. Which experiences luxury brands are currently providing in relation to the five senses?	Depicting the current situation in terms of sensory marketing for luxury brands. It is also important as a way to understand how the current sensory stimulating strategy is structured and valued so that it is possible to understand how it is perceived and consider whether it would be smart to mirror it online too, as proposed by Proposition 1
8. Do you support the online presence of fashion luxury brands?	Understanding the barriers and opinions of experts concerning the online presence of luxury brands, so that to enable researchers to provide detailed recommendations

9. For which reason luxury brands should be present online? Which should be the scope of their online presence?	Understanding the barriers and opinions of experts concerning the online presence of luxury brands, so that to enable researchers to provide detailed recommendations. This type of questions are meant to understand the reasoning behind luxury online presence so that to provide solutions directly linked to the objective posed
10. Which challenges do you perceive for luxury fashion online presence? And for luxury fashion brands selling online?	Understanding the online goals for luxury brands with a focus on challenges so that to enable researchers to answer the research question proposed and at the same time proposing solutions benefiting not only customers but also solving luxury brands challenges.
11. Why do you think some fashion luxury brands are selling online? Which are the pros?	Understanding the online goals for luxury brands with a focus on the strengths of an online strategy, so that to enable researchers to answer the research question proposed and at the same time proposing solutions benefiting not only customers but also enhancing luxury strategies.
12. Do you think that aligning the online and offline experience provided by fashion luxury brands will positively affect customers perceived value?	Allows researchers to collect information and insights coming from experts in order to collect opinions on Propositions 1 and 2 so that to potentially validate both propositions.
13. Do you think it is important to mirror online the strategies applied offline? Or do you rather consider these two platforms as independent?	Allows researchers to gather information and insights coming from experts in order to collect opinions on Proposition 1. It is meant as a tool for researchers to validate or contrast the answers collected during the interviews with customers.
14. Which sensory experiences are currently provided online? Do you think they are enough or they can be ameliorated? In that case how would you ameliorated them?	Allow researchers to understand the perception of experts on the third proposition formulated. It is meant as a tool for researchers to validate or contrast the answers collected during the interviews with customers.
15. Do you think that ameliorating the sensory service currently	Allows researchers to gather information and insights coming from experts in order to collect opinions on Proposition 2A. It is meant as a tool for

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provided online would incentivize customer purchase?	researchers to validate or contrast the answers collected during the interviews with customers.
16. Would you say that customer loyalty could be strengthened by the improvement of the online sensory experience?	Allows researchers to gather information and insights coming from experts in order to collect opinions on Proposition 2B. It is meant as a tool for researchers to validate or contrast the answers collected during the interviews with customers
17. Do you think luxury brand image is affected by the brand online presence? And by the fact of selling online? How?	Allows researchers to gather information and insights coming from experts in order to collect opinions on Proposition 2C. It is meant as a tool for researchers to validate or contrast the answers collected during the interviews with customers
18. How should luxury brands behave online in order to ameliorate the brand image?	Allows researchers to gather information and insights coming from experts in order to collect opinions on Proposition 2C. It is meant as a tool for researchers to validate or contrast the answers collected during the interviews with customers. Furthermore it allows researchers to give foundation to the Recommendation section.
19. Do you think that innovative technological tools can improve the sensory service provided online?	Allows researchers to gather information and insights coming from experts in order to collect opinions on Proposition 3. It is meant as a tool for researchers to validate or contrast the answers collected during the interviews with customers.
20. Can you mention any technological tool to improve the online experience and the effects on customers?	Allows researchers to gather information and insights coming from experts in order to collect opinions on Propositions 3. It is meant as a tool for researchers to validate or contrast the answers collected during the interviews with customers. Furthermore it allows researchers to give foundation to the Recommendation section.
21. Would you positively rate a broader sensory experience online?	It is meant to understand if experts would appreciate and consider as potentially relevant and interesting the implementation of a broader multi-sensory experience online, therefore potentially validating the research question proposed.

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The next table, summarizes a set of questions that are necessarily going to be addressed to customers, revealing again the reasoning behind each question in the column “aim”. Since the aim of this interview is to obtain the most deep feelings, thoughts and opinions that customers have towards the service and experiences fashion luxury brands provide online and in store, the subjects addressed are; whether customers buy or not luxury online, how they perceive the experience they receive from brands, how a better service could affect their perceptions and relation to the brands, and whether they perceive technological tools as potentially stimulating and improving the delivery of unique experiences.

Table 2: Customers in-depth-interview questions and their objectives

QUESTIONS FOR CUSTOMERS	AIM
1. Do you usually look for fashion luxury brands online? Can you give any example?	These first questions are meant for researchers to set the frame of the interview. First generic questions are asked to customers to gather information about their current habits and impressions. Asking for examples is considered as a way to enable the customer to build in his mind an image and a benchmark.
2. Do you like buying luxury products online? For which reason?	These first questions are meant for researchers to set the frame of the interview. First generic questions are asked to customers to gather information about their current habits and impressions. Asking for examples is considered as a way to enable the customer to build in his mind an image and a benchmark.
3. Do you usually consult luxury online websites before purchasing luxury products?	These first questions are meant for researchers to set the frame of the interview. First generic questions are asked to customers to gather information about their current habits and impressions. Asking for examples is considered as a way to enable the customer to build in his mind an image and a benchmark.
4. Does the online website influence your purchasing behaviour both in store and online? In which way?	This type of question is preliminary, as it starts going a bit more in deep within customers habits. It enable researchers to gather some information directly linked to the scientific statements proposed. In this specific case this question is settling the ground for the testing of

	Proposition 1 and Proposition 2C, indeed it aims at understanding how customers are currently influenced by online and offline strategies and the way in which this happens.
5. Do you consider luxury brands online presence as a positive or negative sign? Why?	This type of question is preliminary, as it starts going a bit more in deep within customers habits. It enable researchers to gather some information directly linked to the scientific statements proposed. In this specific case this question is settling the ground for the testing of Proposition 2C. The brand image is directly tacked through this question therefore forcing customer to explain how they perceive the online presence of luxury brands
6. Do you prefer buying luxury brands online or offline? Why?	Understanding customer behaviour is considered as essential for the answering of the research question and the validation of the propositions. This question is meant to leave customers free to express their behaviour and justify it, therefore highlight for researchers the strengths of the two channels depending on the answer given. Again it helps in the creation of a basis of information considered essential for the success of the results obtained.
7. Are you satisfied with the online experience provided by luxury brands? Do you consider it as luxurious as the one offered online? Why?	Answers to this questions are meant as collecting information aimed at testing Proposition 1. The design of the research aims at diving into customer perceptions and impressions therefore questions are posed generically to allow customers to liberally provide their feelings to researchers.
8. What would push you to buy online rather than in store?	This type of question is preliminary, as it starts going a bit more in deep within customers habits. It enables researchers to gather some information directly linked to the scientific statements proposed. In this specific case this question is settling the ground for the testing of Proposition 1 and Proposition 2A. Grouping a list of these information will help researchers in the understanding of flows in the online strategies provided, potentially understanding the strength of

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	the offline points of purchase and gather information on potential ways to incentivize customers to buy online
9. What do you miss more in terms of service when purchasing online?	Answers to this question are essential to collect information on the potential truthfulness of Proposition 1. Together with questions similar to Q7 the answers to this type of question will be used to confirm or deny the first Proposition.
10. If luxury brands were able to provide online rich experiences and elegant services (similar to the one offered in store) would you buy online or in store? Would you be more satisfied with the brand and feel closer to it?	Answers to this question are essential to collect information on the potential truthfulness of Proposition 1 and partially Proposition 2. Together with questions similar to Q7 and Q9 the answers to this type of question will be used to confirm or deny the first and the second propositions.
11. In case a luxury brand provides a better online experience, would this lessen your willingness to leave the brand? Why?	Answers to this question are essential to collect information on the potential truthfulness of Propositions 2, especially 2B. Indirectly asking about loyalty is considered as a better strategy to obtain information about customer attitude toward brands that they appreciate. As a matter of fact appreciating a brand and buying it regularly in customer mind cannot be considered as a loyal attitude. Brands would define this attitude as loyalty therefore it is considered more relevant for the purpose of the research asking about what would "lessen the willingness to stop buying a specific brand" so that to avoid deteriorating "customer loyalty" by accident.
12. How do you think luxury brands can improve their online service in relation to the 5 senses? In case of implementation of these improvements would you appreciate more the brand?	Answers to this question are essential to collect information on the potential truthfulness of Proposition 2, especially 2C. This question not only helps in finding an answer to the second proposition formulated, but also allows customers to collect information on what consumers consider important when dealing with luxury brands, so together with the information collected with the experts interviews, drafting more precise and valid recommendations for the future

13. Would you increase your interaction with brand in case of the implementation of sensory stimulating activities online? (ex. Virtual reality implementation, ability to smell and touch materials, a more elegant delivery pack, ad hoc product description, curiosities about the brand product, ...)	Answers to this question are essential to collect information on the potential truthfulness of Proposition 2, especially 2D.
14. How would you feel about the presence of a virtual world in luxury where you could discover, touch and smell all products? Would you be more satisfied with the brand performance?	Answers to this question are essential to collect information on the potential truthfulness of Proposition 2, and specifically 2C and 2D and partially Proposition 3. Collecting impressions on innovations is considered as a particularly sensitive field where customers need to be helped in the imagination of improvements especially when dealing with technologies that are not known to them or part of their everyday life.
15. Would you be attracted by the presence of technological tools capable of gifting you a complete luxurious experience online? Would you feel more at ease with the brand and more attached to it? What would be your suggestion for the implementation of those tools?	Answers to this question are essential to collect information on the potential truthfulness of Proposition 2 and Proposition 3. Collecting impressions on innovations is considered as a particularly sensitive field where customers need to be asked more than one generic question, it is also important to understand their reactions especially to validate the positivity of the implementation of these tools.
16. Do you feel more stimulated when browsing inside a luxury brand website with respect to any other one? Why?	Answers to this question are considered as important to deeply understand the flows of the online experience gifted, at the same time is helps in the creation of the recommendation section.

4.3 Preliminary plan of data analysis

Data analysis is one of the essential processes in qualitative research. A Data Analysis Plan (DAP) is about putting thoughts into a plan of action (Banks et al., 2013). It guides the data integrity process and it is formulated within the research design phase (Malhotra, 2009). The chief intent of the data analysis

process is to reveal concepts, patterns, themes and insights from a given set of data (Patton, 2002). At the same time, it is useful since it helps researchers in improving the research integrity and quality, allowing the analysis to be reproduced (Banks et al., 2013). As it has been explained in Section 4.1 and 4.2, the research will be structured in surveys with experts and in in-depth-interviews conducted with customers. Interviews can lead to generation of a vast array of complex data. Thus, the researchers must remain open to multiple ways of analyzing data (Patton, 2002). Image 6 and 7 have been created with the aim of clearly structure the interviews to conduct and of ensuring alignment between the questions asked and the propositions formulated. The existence of this plan is considered of pivotal importance for researchers during the interviews development; as a matter of fact it will be used to outline the topics to address. In this way, the schema will also ensure interviewers to collect from different interviewees the same information. The preliminary plan of data analysis will outline the path of the interviews conducted. In fact, a planned draft of the questions to be asked, will affect the quality, validity and reliability of the final questionnaire (Brace, 2008). Even if in this specific case researchers are dealing with interviews, where it is hardly possible to follow the same type of questions and order, the plan proposed is shaped such that interviewers will have a base of topics and potential questions to pose in a specific order. The preliminary plan proposed in Image 6 and 7 provides a map of the analysis and by developing this map, researchers work through, step-by-step, important pieces of information without getting lost (Banks et al., 2013). In order to ensure the collection of the correct information from customers and experts, it is considered pivotal the definition of an ideal sequence of the different topics that have to be covered within each interview, and the type of questions to pose. So as to provide a clear overview of the interviews, it has been decided to create a map-flow, including both the ideal stream of the questions asked and the rationale behind every question. Due to the research structure two different map-flows will be presented one referring to the interview conducted with experts of the field (see Image 6) and a second one building the framework for the interviews with customers (see Image 7).

Figure 6 is made with the aim of helping researchers in the analysis of the results that will be obtained. The schema, presents the ideal order of questions that have to be posed to experts. The order is not casual, but rather defined in line with the abductive methodology selected. Three different macro categories of questions have been defined.

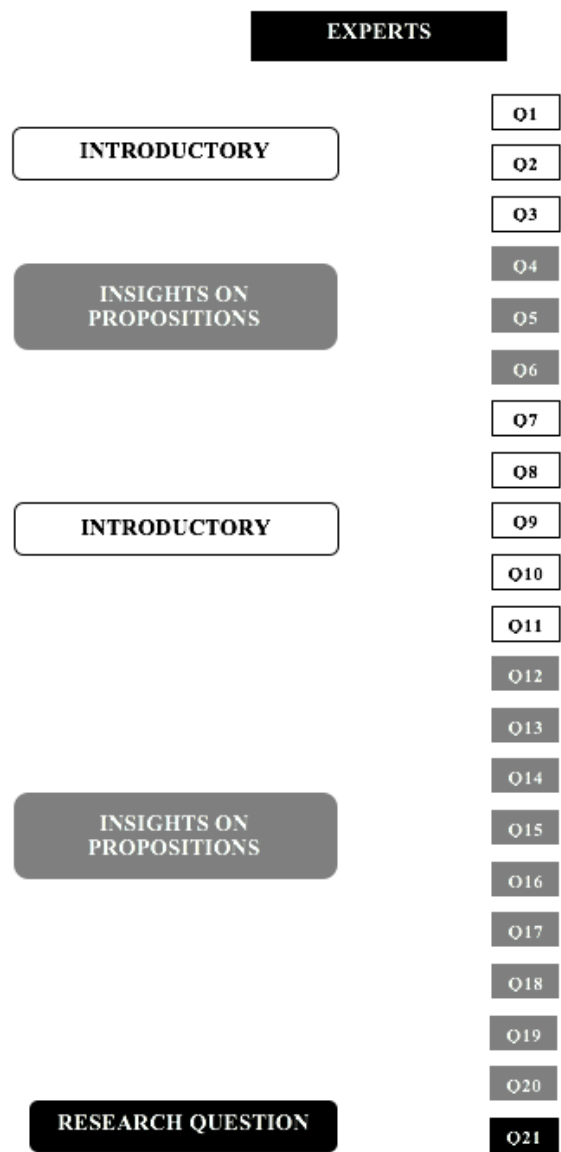
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Introductory Questions groups those questions meant at the understanding of perceptions on experiences provided online and offline in terms of sensory marketing. The point of a qualitative interview is to let respondents tell their own story on their own terms (Edwards, R. and Holland, J., 2013). In line with this, this macro category aims at allowing respondents to express personal opinions within the field of the research conducted and enabling researchers to collect information about the current market situation. All the questions pertaining to this category are also formulated to prepare the set for the following ones therefore building a logical framework also in respondents mind.

Insights on Propositions groups the set of questions meant at enabling researchers to unveil details on the strategies currently adopted online. The aim of these questions is to fill in the gap discovered in literature concerning the offerings of sensory marketing techniques online, therefore impacting the experience offered to customers online and offline. Questions collected within this section will be used also to provide more specific recommendations when driving conclusions.

Research Question refers to question posed to directly address the research question formulated. The aim is to validate with experts within the field the research proposed, so that to further highlight the importance of the results obtained.

Figure 6: Preliminary Plan of Data Analysis - Experts Interviews



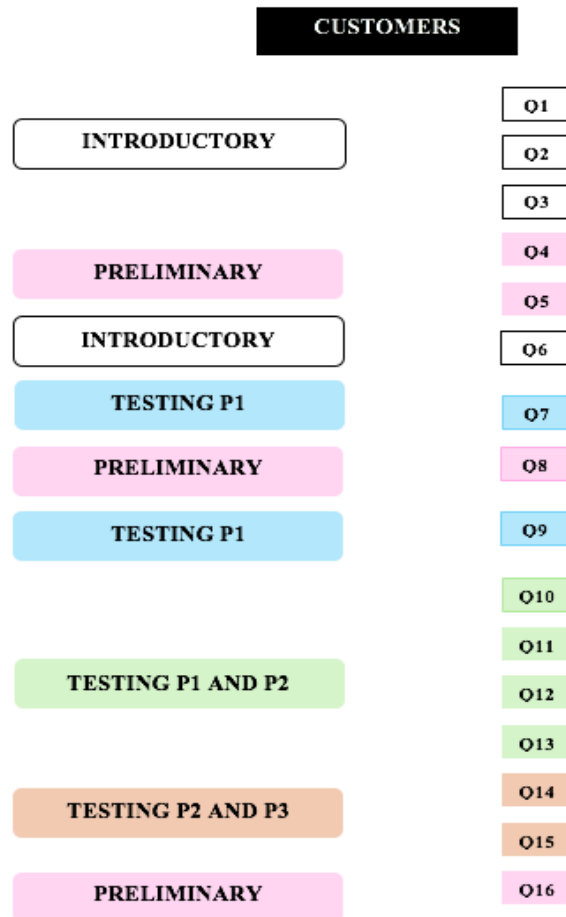
On the other hand, *Figure 7* has been created to directly help interviewers during the interaction with customers, which is considered of pivotal importance for the answering of the statements proposed and consequently to answer the research question formulated. As it has been already explained, the schema presents the ideal order of the questions that have to be posed to fulfill the objective settled. The order is not casual, but rather defined in line with the abductive methodology selected. Five different macro categories of questions have been defined, that are now going to be explained.

Introductory Questions section has already been explained for the experts interviews. The scope with customers is mirrored. Therefore, within this category are posed those questions meant at enabling customers to describe current opinions and experiences in relation with online and offline services in the fashion luxury field. All the questions grouped within this category are posed to introduce customers to the object of the study and put them in the mental condition to be ready to answer to future questions.

Preliminary Questions categorizes those questions meant at introducing customers to questions closely linked to the propositions researches will have to discuss. This section is created as a way to introduce customers to more profound and personal questions, mostly linked to potential experiences that they have not lived yet.

The other three groups highlighted: *Testing P1*, *Testing P1 and P2* and *Testing P2 and P3*, despite being different categories have been created to fulfill the same objective. Within these sections are grouped those questions directly tackling the proposal statements created by researchers. The interdependence between the scientific propositions originated within *Section 2.5* enables interviewers to pose questions meant at testing multiple propositions, as it is the case for P2 and P3.

Figure 7: Preliminary Plan of Data Analysis - Customer Interviews



4.4 Validity and reliability

The following section is considered as really relevant for the assessment of the results obtained.

Validity of research can be explained as an extent to which requirements of scientific research method have been followed during the process of generating research findings (Dudovskiy, J., 2010). It is considered a compulsory requirement for all types of studies (Oliver, V., 2010). It is important to highlight that obtaining complete accurate data is almost impossible in researches where respondents are asked to talk about behaviours or attitudes (Brace, 2008). Thus, considering that the research proposed investigates human behaviours, it is assumed that a small level of inaccuracy during the data

analysis is acceptable. Supporting this statement, Saunders (2011) explains that the design of the research has an effect on the response rate, the reliability and the validity of the data collected. In order to maximize the response rate, validity and reliability, it is essential to be attentive along the designing of the questions. Concerning the case on hand, the interviews conducted with experts to delineate the current market situation and to collect insights on the field of study, enabling researchers to focus on the type of questions to ask and to address to customers, ensures the validity of the interviews. A research achieves validity when the survey represents what it intends and claims to represent (Wiersma, 2013). This validity can be achieved, internally and externally. Internal validity refers to how the research findings match reality, while external validity refers to the extent to which the research findings can be replicated to other environments (Pelissier, 2008, p.12). External validity refers to the validity of the survey beyond the study: it is usually generalizable to population and across contexts (Wiersma, 2013). In the case of the research proposed, our interviews will have external validity if the results can be generalized to average luxury customers in other countries and in different contexts. On the other side, internal validity refers to the rigor of measurement, in other words, what it is intended to be measure is really measured (ibid.). If after the analysis of the answers, researchers are able to reply the research question and verify the scientific statements proposed, they would also be able to guarantee internal validity (Wiersma, 2013). The research proposed ensures construct validity, which relates to the assessment of suitability of measurement tool to measure the phenomenon being studied. The application of construct validity can be effectively facilitated with the involvement of a panel of 'experts' closely familiar with the measure and the phenomenon (Dudovskiy, J., 2010). The first set of interviews conducted with experts is therefore also meant at ensuring validity of the study on hand. Furthermore, formative validity is assessed. It refers to the assessment of effectiveness of the measure in terms of providing information that can be used to improve specific aspects of the phenomenon (ibid.). For both interviews proposed, researchers planned and posed questions not only meant at the testing of propositions, but also aimed at collecting findings on weakness in the current market situation. Those answers will then be used as basis for the provision of recommendations and they can be assessed as adequate, for being based on weaknesses highlighted not only by researchers, but also by experts and customers.

According to Wiersma (2013), validity usually presupposes reliability, in the sense that if the questions are not reliable indicators of what they try to measure, it cannot be guaranteed to obtain a measurement of what was planned to be analysed. Reliability refers to the extent to which the same answers can be obtained using the same instruments more than one time (Dudovskiy, J., 2010). Reliability is shown when a study is able to give stable results across trials (Wiersma, 2013). It refers to the consistency, stability and repeatability of results. It is a concern every time a single observer is the source of data, because there is no certain guard against the impact of that observer's subjectivity (Babbie, 2010, p.158). Indeed, according to Wilson (2010) reliability issues are most of the time closely associated with subjectivity and once a researcher adopts a subjective approach towards the study, then the level of reliability of the work is going to be compromised. Especially when dealing with interviews the interviewer attitude, questions asked and behaviour, tend to subjectively impact respondents. In order to limit this risk the map-flows previously depicted have been created so that to ensure the replicability of the study proposed. When testing reliability consistent results have to be ensured in identical situations on different occasions (Twycross et al., 2004), consequently highlighting the importance of the map-flow proposed. During the analysis of data, some problems can arise from the design itself (i.e. ambiguity of the questions, order of the questions, wrong questions and incomprehensive list of possible answers). Also, an inadequate coding of the results can affect the quality of the data. (Wiersma, 2013). The qualitative nature of the study eases the process of understanding the questions, as it enable researchers to re-formulate questions or to better explain to respondents, the kind of answer they are looking for. Anyway it has to be kept in mind that sometimes, respondents can answer in the way they think interviewers could be pleased or in the way they believe that is more socially desirable (Dillman, 2011). To avoid that risk, the sensibility of interviewers in detecting that kind of answers is considered essential. As not only one person will be entitled to conduct the interviews but rather the two researchers, inter-rater reliability is ensured. As the name indicates, it relates to the measure of sets of results obtained by different assessors using same methods (Dudovskiy, J., 2010). The benefits and importance of assessing inter-rater reliability can be explained by referring to subjectivity of assessments (ibid.).

To sum up, and in order to ensure good quality of the interviews and of results, it is important to obtain as much accurate data as possible, while taking into consideration that the research is related to human

behaviours. It is considered important to validate internally and externally the data, and be reliable, consistent and stable with the results.

CHAPTER 5. ANALYSIS

Qualitative research techniques generate a mass of words through interviews or observational data that need to be described and summarised. The question may require the researchers to seek relationships between various themes that have been identified, or to relate behaviour or ideas to biographical characteristics of respondents such as age or gender (Lacey, A. and Luff, D., 2009).

The analysis of the data collected needs to begin with the data in its raw state, each piece of data, then, needs to be approached in its own terms, and meaning extracted (Emerald Publishing, 2018). Within this section, a detailed explanation of the procedures used to collect the data is given. Furthermore, a thorough examination of the results emerged from the interviews conducted will be carried out, in order to enable researchers to test the propositions formulated and to provide a solid foundation to the *Recommendation Section*.

Every process of qualitative data analysis starts with a generic process of data analysis and follows with different perspectives depending on the theoretical approach derived from the study (Malhotra, 2012). Usually the stages to adopt during the process of data analysis are; data collection, data assembly, data reduction or coding, data display and data verification.

5.1 Data Collection

As it has already been revealed, data will be collected in two different ways: through a survey sent to field experts and through in-depth interviews conducted with luxury customers. In both cases the research approach adopted will be of a qualitative type. Doing qualitative research is about putting oneself in another person's shoes and seeing the world from that person's perspective. The most important part of data analysis and management is to be true to the participants (Sutton, J., & Austin, Z., 2015). In line with theory, participants have been previously told about the objective of the interviews conducted and about their belonging to a research paper on online sensory marketing implementation in fashion luxury. During the interview process researchers tried to avoid impacting the

results or shaping customers answers by sticking as close as possible to the set of questions proposed within *Chapter 4*. This caution was meant to preserve the reliability and validity of the results obtained, therefore enabling potential generalisations of results. By the way it has to be kept in mind that the collection and analysis of qualitative data, is dominated by the ethnographic paradigm. Ethnographers are concerned to interpret data according to the social world of their participants (Emerald Publishing, 2018). A phenomenological approach was adopted both during the interview process and will be maintained during the analytical process. In line with Sutton, J., & Austin, Z. definition of phenomenological approach, the reason for this choice lies in the willingness to understand how the participant lives the luxury online and offline experience and researchers wanted to try to see the experience from that person's perspective. *Appendix 3* and *Appendix 4* contain a short description of every expert and customer interviewed, in this way it will be possible also for readers to take into consideration the social profile of participants. Personal history therefore forms the filter through which the data will be examined. This filter does not diminish the quality or significance of the analysis, since every researcher has his or her own filters; however, by explicitly stating and acknowledging what these filters are, the researcher makes it easier for readers to contextualize the work (Sutton, J., & Austin, Z., 2015). Researchers conducted a total of 4 survey interviews with field experts and 16 in depth interviews with luxury customers. The sample addressed is considered as broad enough for the scope of the research for the reasons highlighted in previous sections.

5.1.1 Data assembly

The data assembly process aims to gather the data available from a variety of sources (Malhotra, 2012). For this specific study, the data will be formed by the theoretical support of the different literature sources, the notes of researchers taken during the in-depth interviews, and the documents produced and sourced from participants. Considering that researchers's position during the data analysis process aims to be as much objective as possible, in order to not influence the final results of the study, reflections and observations of researchers will not be assembled to the data.

5.1.2 Data reduction and coding

The data reduction and coding process involves the organisation and structuring of the data collected and assembled (Malhotra, 2012). Coding refers to the identification of topics, issues, similarities, and differences that are revealed through the participants' narratives and interpreted by researchers. This process enables the researcher to begin to understand the world from each participant's perspective (Sutton & Austin, 2015) becoming a vital part of coping with qualitative data analysis (Malhotra, 2012). Therefore, researchers need to be able to organise, manage and retrieve the most meaningful bits of qualitative data collected (Malhotra, 2012). Initially, the data retrieved from the customers and experts will be already transcribed into texts. The coding process for this data will consist on bringing together participants's responses marking up the different transcripts, attaching references or labels to main ideas that form bigger categories, and looking at emergent themes and subthemes that enable researchers to build connections between the data coded and the theory selected. Main ideas and themes have been highlighted in black to simplify the lecture and association of ideas into categories. Themes and subthemes have been colored in green when important and positive insights for answering our propositions were provided. Answers coded in red associate negative insights for answering our propositions. Finally, orange labels were utilised for coding dubitative answers of participants or feelings of not been able to reproduce what the question suggests in participant's minds.

The following *figure 8* exemplifies how the process of coding has been developed for the experts data. The elements *brand, product, and arouse of emotions*, appear to be the most important elements for the provision of a unique luxury experience. At the same time, data like *alignment across the multiple channels and make customers dream* are also highlighted as relevant insights for the analysis of data.

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Figure 8: Expert's data coding of *question 1 Which element do you consider the most important for the provision of a unique luxury experience? - Own creation*

Questions/ Participants	Angela Bermudez Carrasco	Sandra Bravo Durán
1. Which element do you consider the most important for the provision of a unique luxury experience? (Some examples; the product, the human contact, the boutique, the price segmentation...)	In order to get the ultimate luxury experience, in my opinion, the most important part is that the brand and its history is aligned across the multiple channels as well as their social media exposure . Nowadays we are so connected that the luxury brands need to constantly deliver the experience they want to project into their clientele constantly. Also the luxury experience will be linked to the care and detail that the brand offers to their customers.	Without a good product , the luxury experience wouldn't be as attractive to the customers as it is, so it becomes fundamental. Brands must aim to make customers dream, looking for creativity, arose of emotions and the best service and purchasing experiences during the customer journey.

The same coding process is applied for the customer's answers (See *Figure 9*). For the first respondent (left chart) the categories **yes**, **attractiveness of the website** with the subthemes beautiful appearance, product placement and editorial pictures and **increase of purchase**, are underlined. For the respondent of the right, **yes**, **products display** and **easier and faster to check physically afterwards**, are labeled.

Figure 9: Customers's data coding of *question 4 Does the online website influence your purchasing behaviour both in store and online? - Own creation*

Questions/ Participants	Angela Bermudez Carrasco	Sandra Bravo Durán
4. Does the online website influence your purchasing behaviour both in store and online? In which way?	I think yes . In terms of online purchasing more attractive website (beautiful appearance, nice editorial pictures, great product placement) with more information about products makes me more interested in items , makes me want to buy more. In terms of offline shopping it makes me want to go to the store to discover more items. Moreover, online websites makes it easier for me to make purchasing decision.	Yes , because I can see other products and compare them with competitors . It is easier and faster to get an idea about all the product range of the company, and to pick the favourites to check physically.

Thanks to the coding process, researchers will be able to identify what they see as meaningful and set the stage to draw conclusions and interpret meaning (Malhotra, 2012). All in all, the process of coding followed during this study has involved the following stages: set up coding categories, work through the data to uncover, underline, or highlight main categories, review the descriptions given to the codes, examine differences between participants and to end up, set interconnectivity among coded categories of participants.

5.2. Data display and analysis

The data display process consist on organising, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action (Malhotra, 2012). The data display for this study will be represented in a graphical format with box summarising issues that have emerged and interconnecting the codes and labels creating to identify main categories. The verbatim quotes mentioned in the section coding (e.g. attractiveness of the website or increase of the purchase) are used to illustrate the issues and interconnections among participants's answers. According to Malhotra (2012) one of the simplests means to display data, and the one selected for this study, is the use of a spreadsheet (available in the appendixes). Moreover, the following subsections will provide the results of the data collected through the interviews with both field experts and customers. A comparison between what respondents answered to similar or same questions will be provided for those questions directly addressing the research question proposed and the scientific propositions formulated.

5.3. Field Expert Surveys

An analysis of the data collected from the surveys conducted with experts will now be displayed. A profile of the field experts interviewed is provided within *Appendix 3*.

The first field expert addressed was Angela Bermudez Carrasco, whose vision concerning the uniqueness of luxury experiences finds roots in the conviction that the most important part of their offer is represented by the brand history and the alignment across multiple channels about the brand image. In this sense she sustains that in luxury, every sense should be stimulated through the experience the brand gifts, as they are all elements adding details and memories to the experience lived. She highlights that if in stores the provision of a complete sensual experience is already provided, room for improvement is left when considering the omnichannel experience granted. Moreover, she strongly believes that sensory experiences are the only one enabling brands to increase customers contact with the brand, identifying consumers more with brands values and enriching the experience customers live. In this sense those techniques are certainly enhancing the emotional connection between the brand and the customer. Pivotal in this process are the visual and tactile senses, considered as the most relevant in the provision of a superior customer experience. Furthermore, Angela defends the fact that sensory marketing techniques will impact customer loyalty: "the more the customer relates to the brand the

more loyal he will become”. During the interview she highlighted that currently luxury brands are already moving substantial steps toward the implementation of these techniques in store. In this sense, brands are using the technology to their advantage to enrich customer experience offline. Despite not being a real user of online luxury platforms, she considers online luxury brands presence as important especially for Millennials and future buyers. Furthermore, she stated that “if you are not present online as a brand, you don’t exist to the public”. The expert considers this platform as a really powerful tool as it allows brands to tell their story, their craftsmanship, what makes them special and awake the excitement and curiosity that will drag people inside their stores. Although, miss Carrasco underlines the challenge of online platforms as being the difficulty for luxury brands to deliver the same attention to detail and experience as inside stores, being absent any form of human contact. By the way, she sustains that the experiences gifted online and offline should be aligned “otherwise the message sent to the customer is not clear and might cause confusion”, even if she recognizes the difficulties implied in this mirroring process. In her opinion, technological improvements will be the way to ameliorate the online sensory experience provided, and these improvements would incentivize customer purchases. In terms of loyalty she does not perceive the implementation of online sensory techniques as impacting it, while she sees the connection of loyalty and sensory techniques when implemented offline. When asked about how to ameliorate luxury brand image online her advice is the one of being transparent and consistent with stores, legacy and craftsmanship.

The second field expert addressed has been Sandra Bravo Duràn. From the first questions asked, she highlighted the importance of the product that luxury brands are offering, sustaining at the same time, the importance of tackling customers’ dreams, arising emotions and offering the best service and the best purchasing experiences during every interaction with consumers. According to her personal point of view, the visual is the most important sense to be stimulated by luxury brands, since first impressions are created through what we perceive with eyes. In order of relevance, also the tactile and olfactory senses are considered as important when in line with brand values. The implementation of technological tools in store to enrich the sensory experience, despite leaving room for improvement, is setting the luxury fashion industry as one of the most disruptive of the market in her opinion. She strongly values the implementation of innovative tools, as she strongly believes that awakening

customers' emotions through sensory experiences, will make customers feel exclusive and maintain a memorable souvenir of the brand, therefore enhancing the emotional connection between the brand and the customer himself. In this sense, a bond between the brand and customers is instituted, and in case of a good memory these techniques are considered as a good manner to build loyalty. "Not being present online is not an opinion" according to her. She suggests improvements of the omnichannel experience in order to attract customers in the same way in all the channels, in this way coherence and consistency will be ensured across all platforms, therefore providing a better experience. To justify her conviction she underlined the estimate for 2025 of a 40% of luxury sales targeting generation Z and millennials. Further stressing this statement the emergence of the convenience era created a need to demand everything with a click 24/7, therefore making indispensable brands presence online. Major challenges in this sense are represented in her opinion by ease of replication, which is why in her vision, luxury brands through online channels need to create the need of bringing the customer to their physical stores. What she highly values in terms of luxury experience provided is the alignment of online and offline platforms to be sure to positively affect brand positioning and customers' perceived value. In this sense she sustains that all the strategies of a luxury brand should be aligned across all the channels, sharing the same values and storytelling: "there should be cohesion between what is displayed online and the in store experience". What she highlighted as positive, in terms of experiences offered online, was the trend of some brands playing with momentary and temporary circumstances to create and enhance the exclusivity sensations. Anyway, there is a wide space for improvement, especially if big data are driven in. She does not believe that customer loyalty would be strengthened by the improvement of online sensory experiences, and she added that in case loyalty is increased, it can be even worse. In fact, if the online presence has coherence with brand values, the image cannot be worsening, rather the opposite, it will need to progress to have more presence and visibility. In these terms, luxury brand presence online is really important only when a good marketing content, highly attractive and generating interest, is displayed. To do this, the best brands are offering innovative services online; such as Louis Vuitton chatbots enabling customers to purchase online through Facebook or the digital showroom of Tommy Hilfiger. Implementing this will enable brands to capture customers attention and improve the experience of purchasing online. She concluded stating that the best way to establish a link with customers and attract them to physical stores is the implementation of

technological tools offline. Working in this way is the best option to obtain a competitive advantage. To further enrich the experience offered, brands should implement richer experiences online and allow customers to be gifted with a more sensually stimulating experience, according to the expert.

The third field expert addressed has been Monica Benzi. When talking about luxury she considers the product at the center of the experience, but only if connected with a strong brand image. She highlighted the tendency of luxury brands to apply multisensorial strategies in store, with a special attention to visual and tactile senses. She considers these techniques as definitely enhancing the emotional connection between the brand and the customer. She also estimates that customer loyalty could be affected by the stimulation of sensations associated with purchasing luxury brands, as it can enhance the emotional connection with the brand. As other experts sustained, luxury brands cannot really avoid to have an online presence today. Currently, the main objective lies in the possibility to connect with young customers which are expecting fashion luxury brands to provide them digital experience. Anyway, challenges in her opinion are due to the difficulty to stay truthful to themselves and their identity online, and avoiding to become copycats of other brands' strategies. When asked about the pros of an e-commerce platform, she stated that it is a really powerful tool, representing a supplementary channel to reach customers and a way to create a community around brand values, history and identity. In this sense she advises an alignment of online and offline platforms as a must strategy. By the way, with this sentence she does not mean that the two platforms should be mirroring each other, but rather offering different services. In terms of improvements of online experiences her thoughts are vague, she sustains that technology will certainly allow a lot of improvements, even though she does not consider this one as being the point. In fact, she stated: "The point is content and what story appeals to customers, how emotions are mirrored through a community and into the brands' history and storytelling". She considers multi-sensoriality as a card to play mainly in store, therefore she does not consider online sensory experiences as impacting loyalty. As she had already highlighted, professor Benzi considers the emotions, namely the story, the values and so on, as being the key to impact customers' loyalty. By the way, the online experience provided, will have an impact on luxury brands image, meaning that a bad experience online or a poor one will have a direct effect on brand perception and vice versa. Furthermore, in order to ameliorate brand perception through online

channels, the expert suggests to be consistent online and offline, trying to engage in a conversation with their customers and connecting with them through emotions. In line with her thoughts she does not really perceive technological improvements online as the way to enrich the sensory service provided. She feels that emotions are the key. In general she thinks that a richer online sensory experience could not be comparable with an immersive shopping experience in store.

The last expert approached has been Monica Grosso, who believes that the most important element for the provision of a complete luxury experience is the attention paid to the client in all his contacts with the company, both online and offline. In terms of sensory experiences she believes luxury brands could improve a lot their offer. In fact, she envisions that the in store experience can be ameliorated to be more customer-centric and personalised, “this is what luxury clients expects” she stated, “the same experience for everybody entering the store is not exclusive”. She does not evaluate the implementation of sensory strategies as enough to enhance the brand-customer emotional connection, as several non-luxury stores are using the same techniques. Also in terms of loyalty, she does not believe customers would be influenced by the provision of a superior sensual experience “customers are currently overstimulated by companies and this can have a reverse effect”. Despite her vision, she believes online presence is compulsory nowadays, the focus should be on the keeping of luxury traits. Indeed, luxury clients are also online, and brands should be where their customers are. The attention, as she had already highlighted should be on avoiding copycatting non luxury online models, to keep their luxury appeal also digitally. Professor Grosso, strongly believes in the need to align digital and physical channels as impacting customers’ perceived value: “Considering the platforms as independent is a big error, the customer is the same online and offline, he expects the company to be the same”. In line with her previous statements, she does not see the importance of enriching online sensual experiences, she recognizes that they should be ameliorated, but she does not see the need to do so. In line with this, she does not conceive an improvement in the online sensory service as a way to boost customer purchases, nor as a tool to impact customer loyalty. On the other side she believes that luxury brand image is positively affected by the brand online presence if it is coherent with the offline one.

It is now considered important to sum up experts' views so that to enable researchers to prepare the field for the analysis of luxury customers in-depth interviews. As it has been already highlighted, the importance of the data collected from the surveys with experts lies in the importance of luxury specialists in relation to a research topic that has been poorly explored. From the four experts consulted for the scope of this research it is possible to drive the following results. The delivery of a unique luxury experience is considered as being provided through a valuable product, considered at the heart of the luxury experience, connected with a definite and strong brand image and with a close attention to clients. Ensuring a luxury service in fashion stores entails also offering a multisensory experience according to all the four experts addressed. As a matter of fact, despite being tactile and visual those senses that have to be stimulated more as being the ones mainly impacting our impressions toward the brand, all five should be awakened and taken into consideration. To ameliorate the experience offline three main suggestions have been offered; moving toward an aligned multisensory omnichannel experience, implement technological tools in store to offer innovative experiences and consider a more personalised, customer-centric service provision. The importance of the sensory experience provided lies in the convergence of experts' opinions toward their role in the enhancement of an emotional connection between the brand and its clients. By the way, it has been highlighted by professor Grosso that these sensory experiences, despite enhancing affiliation to the brand, might not be enough for luxury brands as several non-luxury stores are using the same sensory-based strategies. The professionals sustained in general, that customer loyalty can be affected by the stimulation of sensations associated with purchasing luxury brands. Indeed, it enhances the emotional connection with the brand, as the more the customer relates with the brand the more loyal he will become. Professor Grosso's, instead did not agree with this statement. In fact, in her opinion sensory stimulation would not be enough to influence customers' loyalty, as customers are currently overstimulated by brands, so this activity could lead to a reverse effect. When directly addressing online luxury presence, all the experts agreed on the essentiality of this platform, considered as mandatory for every brand. Main thoughts can be summarised by this statement: if you are not present online as a brand, you do not exist to the public. Digital existence rises brands visibility and allows brands to tell to every customer its story and values. Furthermore, it satisfies the convenience era needs of being reached with a click 24/7. Many challenges linked to this platform have been underlined, among all the ease of being copied by

competitors and parallel to this becoming copycats of competitors. Moreover, it has been stressed the difficulty to replicate the human contact and attention dedicated to customers in store and finally the challenge to stay truthful to their luxury appeal. Selling online is also perceived by experts as a positive strategy, as it represents a supplementary channel, enabling brands to reach new markets, especially in Asia, and serving Millennials. Digital platforms are considered necessary, but their strategy must be aligned with the one adopted offline, in this way it will enable companies to positively affect customers' perceived value. Experts sustain that strategies should be aligned and that the two platforms should be considered as interdependent. Moreover, they all highlighted the importance of a cohesion between what is displayed online and the offline offer. In fact, customers are the same in both channels, so they expect the company to be the same too, but offering different services. At this point of the interview, researchers started directly tackling the effects of the online implementation of sensory techniques. These kind of questions originated two different visions; one sustaining the importance of enriching the online sensual adventure offered, the other one considering it as non relevant, but rather valuing digital platforms as meant to awaken customer emotions, values and content display. In line with this visions there has been a rift in the answers collected. Some experts believe that online sensory techniques would incentivize purchases, the second group does not suppose this, as they perceive multi-sensoriality as a card to play in store. Despite the different "schools of thought" the four experts agreed on the fact that customer loyalty would not be strengthened by the improvement of online sensory experiences. Two main justifications arouse; first of all, online platforms should be used to improve storytelling and value communication to the public; plus, if the online presence has coherence with brand values, brand image cannot get worse or better, it will need to progress for having more presence and visibility. In terms of impacts on brand image, experts concurred on the impact that online presence entails. This means that brand perception is impacted by the strategies implemented online. Recommendations on how to positively affect brand image have been provided. Main suggestions from experts are linked to the ensuring of coherence with values and consistency with in store experience, generally meaning succeed in displaying consistency online and offline.

5.4 Customer Interviews

An analysis of the data collected from the interviews conducted with fashion luxury customers will now be commented.

The first question addressed to customers is whether they look for luxury fashion brands online. As explained in *Table 2*, the aim of this question is to gather information about participants attitudes and behaviours when they have in mind to purchase luxury items. Analysing the answers obtained, 11 respondents out of the 16 interviewed (69% of the sample) positively responded to the fact of looking for luxury online, arguing that their main motivations for browsing on luxury websites is to *look for information* on prices and products. Moreover, social networks are mentioned in several answers and identified as platforms visited to get trending information about brands, such as; Barbour, Louis Vuitton, Christian Louboutin, DKNY and Burberry, all corresponding to luxury brands mentioned in the theory chapter of this project. On the contrary, those respondents who said that they do not usually look for luxury items online, argued that being the case of expensive items, they rather prefer to see them in store.

The second question posed, intends to find out whether the respondents usually go a step further not just looking for information on the sites, but purchasing the items. From the 11 respondents that affirmed to search luxury goods online, just 2 admitted to end up by buying the products online, which results into a small percentage of 18,2 % of the total sample. However, the remaining 9 participants looking for luxury fashion online would be pushed to purchase on digital platforms only if they would be able to obtain more interesting prices, to be able to check and compare all the collection of products and to acquire items that are not available in the stores of their area. In addition, the fact of buying expensive products is also feeding their need to demand the physical feeling of trying and seeing the articles in reality.

In order to continue gathering information about their purchasing behaviour, question 3 “Do you usually consult luxury online websites before purchasing luxury products?” was proposed. In line with the answers to the first question, respondents now confirm (12 individuals, so 75% of the sample) that they do search online before purchasing. Same reasons given for the questions before are exposed; price range, broader display of products, customer’s reviews, descriptions etc. On the other hand, those

that do not look online before purchasing luxury items in general, present a direct and certain attitude on completing their purchases at physical stores.

After these questions, researchers aimed to know if online searching is currently influencing consumers purchasing behaviour both online and in store. This question requires a deeper analysis with respect to the previous ones, since the investigation is now focused on the difference between two customers's positions; if they search online, and if this is influencing their purchasing behavior. After a deep analysis of the answers, researchers observed that participants have very well understood the goal and the meaning of the question proposed. Thus, 9 out of 16 participants admitted to be influenced on their purchasing (56,25%), by the experience brands provide online. Relative to this influence, participants mainly agreed on the fact that as much attractive is a brand website (in terms of appearance, editorial pictures, products display, content information, etc.) more positively they would be influenced, since they can see and compare the products among other luxury websites. However, the opposite result occurs if the experience of a website is poor; it would negatively influence their behaviour before purchasing. Those who admitted not being influenced (7 participants so 43,75%) also recognized that they do not consult luxury websites and do not buy luxury items online, or that even if they check the websites of some brands they just perceive an appreciable influence on their behavior when they step up in front of physical stores.

Once researchers gathered these information, the next step has been to investigate how the presence of luxury brands in the online channel, affects their image. In order to collect this, researchers asked whether customers considered the presence of luxury brands online as a positive or negative sign. Generally, most of the sample coincided on the thought that in 2018 a luxury brand must be present online because of the interconnectivity and technological advances in all the industries. Also, because customers demand evolve and so should brands do. Moreover, through online presence brands are expected to do more than offering their products, they should now show and share their value to the audience. According to Erik Francis if webpages are informative, display with exclusive designs, align product category with the design of the site and conveys with the mission and vision of the brand, their presence online becomes a very positive sign to customers. However, one person mentioned that brands should be careful in the way they display their collections, since an excessive display of products, might damage the their exclusiveness. Researchers also want to discover whether luxury customers

currently prefer buying luxury fashion online or in store, and which are the reasons for this preference. Besides one participant that prefers buying online (6 %), the rest, 94 % of the sample, prefers the feeling and experience of buying luxury items in physical boutiques. The possibility of having a better customer service, in terms of personnel assistance, that at the end, add value to the product, represents one of the reasons stated. The effect, sense and feeling of seeing, trying and touching the items, turned out to be the most mentioned cause. In addition to this, a customer mentioned that by purchasing at the store, the risks linked to size and delivery time are mainly avoided. Also, the sensorial experience of being in store, holding the products, getting them wrapped, having the door held at the entrance and exit of the boutique and being offered a glass of champagne, makes the overall experience incomparable to the online one. In general, the analysis of all the answers to this question enables researchers to state that brands are currently not making efforts on bringing the in store experiences to the online channel, since customers do not mention the online purchase as an experience itself.

The next question proposed during the interview, has been whether customers are satisfied with the online service provided by luxury brands and if they consider it as luxurious as the one offered online. Analysing first of all, the answers related to the satisfaction of the online experience, just 2 respondents affirmed to receive a satisfactory service. This data corresponds to the fact that in the previous questions, just 11 respondents out of 16 admitted to browse online for looking for luxury items and then just 2 finally buy. So it becomes normal to find out that the main part of the sample is not satisfied with the service provided and that just the 2 that buy, are satisfied. Despite some of the participants considered that the service provided online has been ameliorated during the last few years, 10 individuals (62,5 %) disagree on perceiving the online experience as luxurious as offline. Once again, the luxury personalisation and attention received in stores is considered as inimitable online. Finally, the interaction with the personnel is highly valued by luxury customers, and it seemed that they are missing that service online.

Then, and with the aim of discovering the consistency of the reasons and motivations previously proposed by customers, researchers asked what would push customer to buy online instead of in store. Availability of the items for those brands that currently do not even sell online, a more VIP service as the one experienced offline, technological tools such as, AR and VR, that enable customers to feel the products through the senses, price promotions since in store they feel they pay the service, and faster

deliveries and returns service, are the propositions retrieved from this question. Still, 3 people of the sample showed a resistance behaviour towards purchasing luxury online even if the online service would be improved.

Following the interview order, and analysing the data for question 9, the set of elements that customers are currently missing in the online service are: qualified sales assistants presence, faster deliveries and return service, customer experience in terms of human interaction, the sense of touching and trying on the items, tailored recommendations, more accurate size guides and the atmosphere of the store.

Once the researchers acquainted the actual motivations of customers for purchasing in store instead of online, it was important to know whether applying and providing online richer experiences would motivate customers to buy online, or whether they would still choose the offline channel for their purchases. The scope of this question was the understanding whether providing richer experiences online would increase the overall satisfaction and closeness to the brand. The insights received from these questions become very interesting for the ongoing study. Despite recognizing in general, that they would be more willing to buy luxury online or increase their purchases online if their experience becomes richer or if the improvements previously mentioned are applied, once again, a relevant part of the sample (60%) still prefers the in store experience. Actually, customers interviewed have difficulties in imagining that the current overall experience provided offline could ever be replicated online, maintaining the relation between buying in stores with the creation of luxury memories.

Loyalty is another of the categories that researchers aimed to talk about during the interviews, so the question related to this is presented as “in case a luxury brand provides a better online experience, would this lessen your willingness to leave the brand?”. Surprisingly for researchers, 11 participants of the sample (68,75 %) affirmed that receiving a better online experience would not lessen their willingness to leave a brand. For these individuals, the aspects that determine their loyalty to the brand are the products and the brand itself. On the other hand, 5 participants would be more reluctant to leave the brand if the online experience improves.

Moving to the specific study of the effects that sensory strategies evoke on the purchasing experiences, a question related to the way in which the five senses could contribute to the improvement of the online service, was proposed. From the answers obtained, the senses of visual, auditory and olfactory are the most enunciated. Customers believe that luxury brands can improve their service boosting activities

like virtual and augmented reality in order to be closer to the feeling of holding and touching the products, having live chats to directly address competent personnel, displaying 360 rotation of products, reproducing better music in websites, delivering scented packages and aligning the visual design with the brand image. Thus, if the previous suggestions were implemented and oriented towards the alignment of the online content with the offline, customers would appreciate much more the luxury brand.

Knowing these results, researchers aimed to find out whether applying the suggestions just delivered from the customers would increase their interaction with the brand. According to some customers, these elements would add more value to the purchase experience, strengthen the curiosity to meet the brand and increase their satisfaction. In addition, others also believed that their time spent browsing the web pages would be increased. From the entire sample, 11 individuals (68,75 %) affirmed that they would probably interact more with the brand, nevertheless, the remaining ones, still did not believe that even applying the suggestions recommended the in store experience could ever be replicated online.

In line with some of the customer's proposals related to technology, feelings about a possible presence of the virtual world in the luxury industry have been explored. After posing this question, researchers recognized the show up of feelings like curiosity and interest on the subject. Almost the totality of the sample 81,25 % (13 participants) agreed on perceiving that by applying these technologies, luxury brands would try to enhance the customer relationship by recreating the offline experiences. Besides, others had difficulties in imagining the effectiveness of technology in reproducing the same offline experiences.

In terms of attractiveness to the brand by the presence of the technological tools mentioned, 12 people confirmed that they would be more attracted to brands applying these tools, because technology usually helps in improving customer experiences. However, most of these twelve and two other respondents that were not sure about which response to give, explained that the application of these technological tools (like A.R. and V.R) should be realistic, accessible and easy to understand in order to be appealing and enrich the experience. If the implementation of these new gadgets results complicated to customers, the output can be the opposite, therefore worsening the experience. Usually, technology must bring the brand closer to the customer, not become something outstanding and futuristic. In

addition, some of the participants believed that the applicability of changes as such, will be possible just in the long term.

To end up, the last question approached to the sample has been whether customers feel more stimulated when browsing in some luxury websites with respect to others. A big part of the participants do not perceive a differentiation between luxury websites, acknowledging that they are more or less similar in terms of format and design to non-luxury ones. Nevertheless, comparing luxury brands websites with non-luxury websites, the “cleaner” layout of some luxury brands resulted as insufficient to compete with the online presence of brands like Asos or Na-kd, which in customer's eyes have more meaning to deliver a better online service.

In order to summarize the overall set of the data analysed from customer's interviews the following paragraph is developed. From the total sample of 16 fashion luxury customers interviewed, 11 participants (69 %) affirmed to browse on luxury websites, mainly for looking for information on prices and products. From them, just 2 usually finalise the process by purchasing, representing a 18,2% of the sample implicated. However the remaining 9 would be potentially motivated to buy if they find interesting prices, the entire collection of products is available and if they have the possibility to buy items that are not available in the stores of their territory. By the way, 75% of customers admitted to consult online sites before purchasing luxury (either online or in store). Main reasons are the ability of filtering by price range, the display of products and the presence of customer's reviews. Thus, the online searching influences the purchasing behaviour of 9 of the customers interviewed (56,2%). For them, as much attractive is a website, more positively the influence will result in their attitude, and the opposite is true if the website has a poor layout. The remaining 7 participants, are not influenced by the brand's online presence. Furthermore, it emerged that this online presence has an effect of the image of luxury brands. Despite a general agreement on the fact that luxury brands have to be present online, the overexposure of products display can act as contradictory to the exclusiveness of their image. In addition, the sample was constituted by a 6% of individuals that prefer to buy online and a 94% that prefer purchasing in store. The sensorial feeling and the customer service received are the main factors generating this behaviour. This is linked to the poor satisfaction of customers with respect to the service received online. From the 16 participants just 2 confirmed to be satisfied with the online

service, the small percentage is justified by the fact that customers do not consider luxury webpages as luxurious as a boutique is. The lack of attention, personalisation, and interaction with the personnel of the brand, represents an essential aspect of the service customers are missing online. Researchers identified 3 participants that would not be willing to modify their purchasing attitudes of buying in store even after the implementation of recommendations and improvements on digital platforms. The other 13 customers, instead suggested the following developments as potentially pushing them to buy online; availability of those brands or products that are currently not sold online, a VIP service as the one experienced offline, technological tools implementation enabling the feeling of getting closer to the products (AR and VR), price promotions and faster deliveries and return service. Interestingly, the applicability of these changes would potentially motivate customers to buy more online and satisfy them more with the overall brand service. By the way, for the moment customers show difficulties in imagining a broad luxury experience online, comparable to the one provided in store, even after the implementation of their suggestions. In terms of loyalty, a broader online experience would not positively influence customer's loyalty, in fact 11 out 16 participants (68,75 %) manifested that a better online experience would not lessen their willingness to leave a luxury brand. Following the analysis, the sensory experiences mainly appreciable and necessary online in customers's eyes, are the ones perceived by the visual, olfactory and auditory senses. Moreover, customers proposed to improve the service online with virtual and augmented reality in order to enable them to feel that they are holding and touching a product, chatbots to directly contact qualified personnel, 360 rotation display of products, better music in websites, delivery of scented packages and alignment of visual design with overall brand image. The application of measures as such, would result into a 68,75% of participants more interactive with luxury brands. Finally, new technology (specially V.R. and A.R) stimulates the curiosity of 13 of the participants (81,25 %), who believe that it could improve the service and experience offered online. In addition, they would feel more attracted to luxury brands, if the technological changes were realistic and easy to understand. The percentage of this analysis is not the totality of the sample, because the 3 remaining respondents do not believe in the complete effectiveness of new technologies for reproducing the in store experience online. To end up, the sample does not recognize any special stimulation for browsing in luxury brands digital platform with respect to non-luxury ones.

5.5. Data verification

One of the questions that arises about qualitative research relates to the reliability of the interpretation and representation of the participants' narratives. There are no statistical tests that can be used to check reliability and validity as there are in quantitative research. However, work by Lincoln and Guba suggests that there are other ways to “establish confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings” (p. 218). They call this confidence “trustworthiness” and suggest that there are 4 criteria of trustworthiness: credibility (confidence in the “truth” of the findings), transferability (showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts), dependability (showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated), and confirmability (the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest). In line with all these elements, researchers analyse and discuss the data collected keeping in mind the four criteria proposed. Credibility has to be considered as matched by the fact that no prize nor incentive was promised to respondents so that respondents can be considered as not biased in their answers. In this sense there was no reason to reply with false information, respondents have been singularly addressed so it is possible to assume that no answer was meant to impress other participants or to comply with what the majority of the sample was stating. Transferability is ensured by the broad spectrum of questions posed that could be applied also in contexts different from the research proposed. Indeed, the poor scientific data collected within this topic forced researchers to first pose broad questions just to unveil the current situation and then directly tackle the propositions developed. Dependability criteria is considered as matched due to the amount of detailed information linked to both the samples addressed, the questions posed and the description of the research conducted. Confirmability is ensured by the coding and data analysis conducted where no manipulation of responses has been applied.

5.6 Discussion

In a market environment where the internet of things, social media development, innovations and digitalizations are a must in every sector, researchers acknowledged the considerable importance of the potential application and scrutiny of those elements within one of the most resistant fields. As highlighted within *Section 1.3* the rationales and motivations tight to the research on hand are several

and spread among different fields. The new target that brands are going to approach in the short-term, Generation C, the speed of technology development, the continuously increasing necessity to reach customers everywhere in the world and the need to replicate the outstanding experience provided offline online are just a brief list of the motivations moving researchers toward that field of research. By the way, what is important to keep in mind throughout the following paragraph is the major goal of this paper: to gather current sensual marketing strategies and customers reactions to luxury brands to support and infuse online the luxury emotions and sensations present offline. The scientific panorama depicted within the theoretical framework pushed researchers to develop three propositions in order to give an answer to the research question proposed. What emerged from these sections appears to be the importance, nowadays, of creating digital experiences, drive emotions and build a bridge between offline and online worlds (Novoseltseva, K., 2016). To ensure validity of the method used for the acceptance or rejection of the propositions displayed the paragraph will be built up by taking into consideration; the aims of the questions posed, the analysis presented, the preliminary plan of data analysis drafted and the theory mentioned, in fact the interpretation of data will depend on the theoretical standpoint taken by researchers (Sutton, J., & Austin, Z, 2015).

A deep discussion on what experts forecast and on what customers approached think will be conducted. The sample reached has already been described and justified, and it is also possible to find a profile description of respondents interviewed within *Appendixes 3 and 4*. The internationality of the sample addressed will enable the generalization of results concerning the luxury fashion customer base. This section will be the foundation for the creation of recommendations on the strategies to apply.

With the aim of testing Proposition 1: *Aligning the online and offline experience provided by luxury brands will result into a better customer experience*, researchers addressed specific questions to both customers and experts in order to verify whether an alignment of sensations, emotions and expectations would enrich customers' experience. The four experts, all agreed on the importance of displaying online and offline similar strategies aiming at providing complementary sensations, transmitting the same values and keeping the prestige attached to the brand. In line with the theory presented, the potential represented by omnichannel marketing strategies, i.e. closing gaps in experiences across channels to offer a seamless, unified brand experience across devices and physical touchpoints

(Weiners, P., 2017), has been used as a redundant justification to sustain experts statements. Further highlighting experts point of view, Basini (2001) already sustained that in order to provide satisfactory user experiences, luxury companies needed to ensure brand consistency and value proposition through different touch points, thus complementing and sustaining the essentiality of coherence and consistency across all platforms suggested by the experts addressed. According to the answers collected from experts, the fact of considering the digital and physical platforms as independent would be a big error as customer are the same online and offline, and they expect the company to be the same as well. The scientific statement proposed aimed at collecting definitive results about the improvement in customer's experience. In fact, customers do not only use online websites to purchase, but also as informative tools or places where to gather an idea about the brand before physically going there (B. Ervin 2016 ; A.Orendoff, 2018). The situation depicted, pushed researchers to the formulation of Proposition 1. The interpretation of the data collected during the interviews with customers enables researchers to confirm the scientific Proposition 1. As a matter of fact, questions 7, 9, 10 and 12 (see *Method Chapter*) were all meant to find out a response to the interrogative aroused and directly related to the potential acceptance of P1. The majority of the sample stated that they were not satisfied with the service provided online when compared to the luxurious experience provided offline. In fact, the physical in store experience of luxury boutiques is designed to magnify product aesthetics and provide customers a huge display of multi-sensory stimuli, but digital touchpoints seem to be unable to convey the look and feel of luxury in store materials (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). Also theory highlights this lack therefore validating the results obtained. Directly linked to this question customers have been asked (question 9) what they were missing online in terms of service provision. This question was not posed in such a way to induce a comparison between the luxury service offered in store and online, but rather to induce customers to describe a set of elements that they are missing in online platforms in general. Despite that, when asked what they were missing online, the sample immediately thought of their experiences in the luxury sector. In general the question was posed in order to understand whether customers were expecting something radically different from the usual offline experience or if they were looking also online for an experience comparable or parallel to the one offered in store. From the responses collected it emerged that customers miss: qualified sales assistants, easy return service, human interaction, the possibility to touch and try pieces on and the store atmosphere. These

characteristics are the core elements that respondents mentioned when asked to justify where and why they preferred to buy luxury products. The answers collected list a set of elements that are core for the experience brands are gifting inside boutiques and customers are declaring to miss them when surfing in luxury websites. Theory presented in previous sections forecasted this behaviour; in fact, the purchase experience of offline customers usually derive from the sensations, feelings, moods, perceptions and emotions aroused during the activity of seeking for a product, touching it, trying it on, etc. (Okonkwo, 2010). These emotions connect that deeply with the individuals, that they remain on their memory after time (ibid), awakening a desire to come back to the store for reliving this experience. To further stress the importance of these elements, the majority of the sample again sustained in question 10 that in case the characteristics previously listed would be reproduced online, they would be more willing to buy luxury products through this channel as their online experience would become richer. The inter-validation ensured by the sequence and questions posed to customers, enables researchers to **accept Proposition one**. Customers in fact revealed that they are missing online a service that they could align or at least parallel to the one offered in stores, this possibility would increase their willingness to buy online and their appeal to the channel, therefore enriching their experience.

To go on with the interpretation of the data collected, the second scientific statement formulated is now going to be tested. As it has been done for the first proposition, the interview with experts will be taken into consideration at first in order to create a solid ground for the approval or rejection of proposition 2. It is important to keep in mind that experts have been approached on the the 4 sub-propositions:

P2a: Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will incentivize customers to buy more.

P2b: Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will positively impact customer loyalty.

P2c: Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will positively impact brand image.

P2d: Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will increase customers' engagement with the brand.

In general, two currents of thought emerged when addressing questions directly linked to experts' impressions on the online implementation of multi-sensory experiences. 50% of the sample believes that, in general, multi-sensory techniques should be implemented mainly offline. Experts are therefore recognizing the effectiveness of multi-sensory marketing techniques, where individuals, through the involvement of the five senses, react when firms interact, support customers' purchases and the entire consumption processes (Hulten, 2011). By the way, the importance of this sense awakening is limited to the offline world according to two experts, therefore envisioning the online channel as a platform to use, but for a different scope. The other half of the sample addressed, instead, demonstrated a positive feeling and recognized the importance of the implementation or improvement of sensory stimulating activities also online. Mainly agreeing with Rigaud-Lacresse and Pini (2017), experts recognized a growing interest in digital media communication among luxury companies and the need for a real integration of online and offline worlds in creating and delivering unique seamless customer experiences.

Coherently with these different schools of thought the results collected revealed that two experts out of four, considered that the implementation of online sensory techniques would incentivize customer purchases, therefore validating P2A. On the other hand the other half of the sample could not forecast this behaviour, sustaining that "multi-sensoriality is a card to play in store". It appears therefore pivotal to analyse customers' answers to validate or refuse the scientific statements proposed. From the total sample of the customers approached, 40% stated that in case of provision of a richer experience in terms of sensory-stimulating activities, they would be more willing to buy luxury online and would therefore increase the amount of purchases concluded on digital platforms. According to this percentage of the sample it is possible to conclude that multi-sensoriality online would incentivize sales. The remaining 60% admitted that it was hard for them to imagine a replication online of the current overall experience provided offline, therefore stating that no matter the improvements online luxury platforms provide they would still prefer the in store experience and would therefore keep on buying in store and not online. It is important to consider when analysing these responses the potential arising of cultural biases, namely assumptions about motivations and influences that are based on our

cultural lens (on the spectrum of ethnocentrism¹⁴ or cultural relativity¹⁵) (Sarniak, B., 2015). This potential bias requires careful consideration due to the nature of the questions posed. In fact we are dealing with topics that are far away from the “normal” behaviour customers are used to when thinking about luxury shopping. In statistical terms the proposition should be rejected as the majority of the sample negatively answered. By the way a relevant 40% of participants declared that they would increase their luxury purchase online, which represents in any case a relevant portion of the sample. In this sense it would be important to take into consideration a potential 40% increase in sales when evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation online of multi-sensorial strategies. Despite not having the majority of the sample declaring a potential increase in their consumption habits, especially in terms of online shopping, researchers consider that the data collected should be carefully taken into consideration and suggest a deeper research within this field to collect statistical data on this topic. By the way, in terms of practicality and objective matching the results obtained in relation to the increase of sales in case of online implementation of multi-sensory techniques, represent a really important data for all luxury companies. Indeed, an increase in sales of 40% is already a really relevant forecast. Further stressing the importance of going more in deep within this domain is the fact that the customer base has to think about its “comfort zone”, when approached about questions dealing with innovations that they have not been able to perceive as necessities nor to physically try. The notion of epistemological comfort zone is a useful one to conceptualise the kind of input that needs to be delivered to respondents. Such input should explicitly recognise the potential discomfort that may arise and focus upon offering challenges to existing mindsets (Cassell, C 2017). In this sense it is also important to take into consideration the fact that interviewed people has been approached on a topic that is not something that they are used to, therefore creating a barrier and generating an impulsive continuous comparison between what they know and what they have not experienced, creating a kind of bias in their answers.

The second sub-proposition created was meant at the understanding of how the implementation of sensory marketing techniques would impact customer loyalty. Researchers estimated that those

¹⁴ Ethnocentrism is judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture

¹⁵ Cultural relativism is the principle that an individual's beliefs and activities should be understood by others in terms of that individual's own culture

techniques would have a positive impact on loyalty, as creating emotions and memories in customer's mind therefore stimulating customers to relive this experience, therefore wondering to repeat it over time. Despite researchers forecasts, all experts approached defended that in their opinion customer loyalty would not be strengthened by the improvement of online sensory experiences. Due to the poor amount of scientific papers wrote concerning this field it has been difficult to determine scientifically proven reasons for the non-impact forecasted by the professors addressed. By the way the same result was confirmed by the customer sample. Indeed, 69% of respondents affirmed that they would not be more resistant to leave the brand in case of an improvement on digital platforms. For these individuals the aspect determining their loyalty to the brand is intrinsic to the brand itself and its products. The results obtained are forcing researchers to **reject P2b**. By the way it is important to take into consideration the way the question was posed and the intimacy of the question asked. A part from this, it is also relevant to recognize that answers become less generic and more accurate when users are thinking about a specific time in the past when that situation happened. They are more likely to give to the interviewers more genuine and detailed answers—and they will try pretty hard to remember that specific occasion (Teixeira, F., 2017). The research on hand does not allow respondents to recall a similar experience to the one suggested by interviewers, a part from what they experienced in store. In this sense it seems logical that the majority of respondents rejected the idea of feeling more loyal to a brand because of the implementation of multi-sensory techniques that they have never tried or found online. As a matter of fact, advertisements, color, design, lighting, logo, packaging, product design and websites are other visual stimuli that make it possible to differentiate products, enhance loyalty, prevent clutter and fend off competition (Hultén et al., 2009). Furthermore, material, surface, temperature, weight, form and steadiness can all contribute positively to the tactile experience of the brand and differentiate it from competitors, thus enhancing loyalty (Rodriguez, C. & Brito, C., 2011). This entails that multi-sensoriality has been proven as positively impacting customers' loyalty offline, therefore it seemed logical to assume it would have impacted loyalty also online. By the way the results obtained force researchers to reject this proposition, but it appears evident the importance of further investigating this matter. In general terms **proposition 2b has to be rejected**, but further research should be conducted in researchers opinion.

Advancing in the interpretation of the data collected, researchers are now going to discuss about the effects on customers' perception of the brand image in relation to an enriched online multi-sensory experience, testing P2c. Before approaching the results obtained from the in-depth interviews conducted with customers, experts opinion on the topic is going to be taken into consideration. The four professionals approached agreed on the impact that online multi-sensory marketing techniques would have on customers. In general, there has been a convergence of opinions sustaining that the strategies implemented online will have an impact on clients. It emerged that the main purpose of the online strategy should be that of capturing customers' attention and enhance the emotional connection with the brand, especially when multi-sensory strategies are taken into consideration on digital platforms. Indeed, "luxury brand image is positively affected by the brand online presence if it is coherent with the offline one" stated Professor Grosso. It is therefore possible to interpret experts answers as sustaining that aligning, in terms of sensoriality, the experience offered online and online, brand image will be positively impacted. Also theory demonstrated that all the elements of a business environment need to evolve and adapt to new trends (Okonkwo, 2010). This is something that the luxury world has always tried to do in physical channels. By the way, nowadays the crux in terms of strategy resides in the fact that the integration of online and offline touchpoints plays an increasingly significant role in the consumer's shopping and purchasing experience, reshaping the way luxury retailers and the brands can create value for customers (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017). Adopting this perspective, it is now important to drive conclusions on the testing of H2c by interpreting the data retrieved from the interviews conducted with luxury customers. To help customers in imagining and figuring out how they would react to improvements in digital platforms, researchers first posed questions concerning how the five senses could contribute to the improvement of the online service provided. Respondents provided different examples especially mentioning the visual, auditory and olfactory senses (further details about recommendations linked to improvements will be provided within *Section 6.1*). Aided by their imagination and by the suggestions they proposed, all the sample sustained that in case of implementation and orientation of digital techniques meant at improving multi-sensory techniques, therefore aligning the service provided offline and online, customers would appreciate way more the luxury brand itself. In this sense, it is possible to sustain that brand image would be positively impacted by the development of multi-sensory strategies online. The results

obtained are further highlighted by previous scientific researches demonstrating the positive impact of multi-sensory strategies implementation in store (see *Section 2*). In fact, most of the sample underlined the importance of aligning the experiences gifted by brands, also referring to the sensual feelings awakened through both channels, therefore foreseeing the same impact on brand perceptions offline and online. The proposition concerning brand image improvement will have to be considered as truthful therefore enabling researchers to sustain that the development of multi-sensory strategies in digital platforms will positively impact the brand image. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that this statement has to be considered truthful only if the strategies implemented in order to enrich the multi-sensory experience provided are effectively implemented and especially if they will keep the alignment of the experience customers usually link to specific luxury brands. Indeed, the importance of consistency between what is usually gifted offline in terms of experience and what is important to deliver through the online channels has already been highlighted and justified within this paragraph. This specification further underlines the importance and reliability of *Proposition 1* previously accepted.

The last sub-proposition *P2d: Providing a better multisensory online experience for luxury customers will increase customer engagement with the brand* is meant to identify in which sense customers will perceive the enhancement of multi-sensory marketing strategies online as delivering superior customer-value, in terms of brand engagement. By definition, consumer brand engagement consists on emotional, cognitive and intentional states generated by interactive experiences underlying behavioural interactions (Apenes Solem, 2016). From the different classifications existing for the evaluation of customer-brand-engagement (CBE), the one that researchers are able to test through the questions posed to customers and experts in this study, represents the emotional consumer-brand-engagement. Concretely, emotional consumer brand engagement is considered to be the customer's degree of positive brand activity-related affect (Apenes Solem, 2016). In order to find out insights about the emotional CBE, question 4 addressed to field experts, directly requests the necessary outputs for accepting or rejecting H2d. After the analysis of data, a total acceptance of this H2d from experts' side results from the question on whether experts consider that providing customers with sensory experiences will enhance the emotional connection between the customers and the brand. According to the data retrieved, the more customers are able to identify themselves with brand value, the more

enriching the experience becomes to them. Moreover, the awakening of emotions from brands to customers plays a fundamental role in customer brand engagement, only seen as possible thanks to the development of multi-sensory experiences. From the customer's side, in case of amelioration of multi-sensory experiences online, in general, customers are not able to determine whether they would feel closer or be more engaged with the brand, therefore, deeper questions have to be approached. Normally, there is a connection between loyalty and customer brand engagement, which might motivate researchers to consider also loyalty data for the testing of P2d. Nevertheless, the nature of loyalty questions, strictly mentioning the applicability of multi-sensory experiences online, will potentially bias the acceptance or rejection of the proposition. So that, loyalty data will not be considered on the testing of P2d. However, when analysing in depth multi-sensory effects on customers behaviors, customers admit to develop a higher appreciation of luxury brands, if the online luxury experience is ameliorated in terms of sensory activities. By applying multi-sensory improvements in the online channel, a 70% of the customers sample affirmed that the interaction with luxury brands would increase. All in all, acknowledging that customer brand engagement is mainly based on interactive experiences of customers-brands, considering the positive vision of field experts towards customer brand engagement, and the confirmation of customers in the awakening of emotions and interaction with luxury brands, **proposition P2d is accepted.**

In general terms it is possible to state that both experts and customers when approached in relation to Proposition 2: *Providing a better multisensory online experience for luxury customers will translate into superior customer value*, in line with the current of thoughts previously unveiled, agreed on the validity of this statement. Experts sustained that awakening customers' emotions through sensory experiences, will make customers feel exclusive and enhance the emotional connection between the brand and the customer, therefore improving brand image. Indeed, also in line with the theory presented in previous sections, brands are starting to offer innovative services also online and following this lead they will be able to capture their attention and improve the experience of purchasing online. Also customers' answers revealed that as much more attractive is a brand website more positively they would be influenced in terms of brand image. The reasoning behind this turned out to be lying in the fact that aligning the online and offline experiences would enable them to better compare and evaluate the general experience lived with the brand. It is important to note that, in customers' opinion, brands

are not making real efforts in bringing the in store feelings and experiences gifted offline to the online channel, since customers do not even consider the online purchase as an experience, but rather as a tool. Being aware of this data it is possible to state that **Proposition 2 is valid and accepted**, but it is important to further analyse the impacts the implementation of these techniques will have on loyalty.

Finally, the objective of testing Proposition 3: *Broadening the convergence between technology and luxury online will improve customer experience*, lies in the necessity to identify the reaction of customers when luxury brands propose and/or implement in their online platforms a display of technological advancements. As mentioned in *Section 2.5*, the relation between the conversion of technology and the luxury industry is of high importance to examine, considering that the convergence appears as a result of the improvements generated in customer experience. Moreover, the discussion of proposition 3 results of high connotation, since its grounds are just based on researchers assumptions within the field, and not on a discovered gap within the literature consulted. In order to test the proposition developed, researchers addressed questions to field experts and customers, in relation to the effects technological improvements cause in the sensory services delivered online. Nowadays, new technologies are not only changing how the modern fashion enterprise functions, but also how its products interact with a consumer whose purchasing behavior is constantly “being radically reshaped by new technologies” (Gutierrez, C., 2017). As a consequence, a strong development of technological tools aimed at enriching the overall customer’s experience arises. This technological expansion mainly emerged as a result of the technological boom era started during the last century. Consequently, some luxury fashion brands have decided to embrace the change and adopt a more technological vision on their strategies with the aim of providing a better service to their customers. According to theory, some luxury brands have already decided to “turn instore tech to boost fashion retail” (Williams, R., 2016). In line with this, other luxury brands have determined to start breaking down the barriers between digital and physical presence, integrating motion sensors, screens and high-tech elements in luxury retail channels. In order to gather data in relation to the amelioration of the sensory experiences currently provided online and on how technology could contribute to the improvement of the service, questions 14, 19 and 20 have been posed to experts. These questions were meant to find response to the third proposition of the study. According to half of the sample, technology should be used as a tool to ameliorate the service currently provided online, creating and replicating the desire and exclusivity

sensation customers are able to find in traditional stores. Platforms as WeChat of Dior, and mobile apps, are some of the suggestions provided by the experts to enable a broader convergence between customers and online luxury brands. In addition, a Chatbot like the one of Louis Vuitton, facilitating online purchasing, the digital showroom of Tommy Hilfiger, and the online personalisation' tools to design products, are other exemplifications experts mentioned to support the importance of the conversion between technology and online customer experience. More concretely, augmented reality implemented by brands such as Burberry and the list of technological advantages previously mentioned, are seen as advantages to establish links among customers and luxury brands online. Supporting experts' point of view, theory states that luxury brands are now scrambling to bolster their digital strategy and capabilities, to take advantage of double-digit online luxury sales growth over the next 5 years (Beeson, M., 2017). Plus, luxury brands have started to realize that if they do not act and implement technology in their channels, they stand to lose their digitally savvy customers to online luxury multi-brand retailers that offer much more sophisticated digital experiences (ibid). On the other hand, technology online has been also considered as a complement to the technological improvements currently delivered offline, and as an advantage to drive people to physical stores. According to the data retrieved from questions 13, 14 and 15 posed to the customers, luxury brands would be able to improve the sensory experience delivered online by boosting activities like virtual and augmented reality in order to be closer to the feeling of holding and touching the products, having live chats to directly address competent personnel, displaying 360 rotation of products, reproducing better music in websites, delivering scented packages and aligning the visual design with the brand image. Aligned with theory, these methods directly linked to technology, are used online for activating customer's sensors (Hoffmann, J., & Coste-Manière, I., 2011). Furthermore, despite the resistance of some luxury brands for the offering of a complete digital experience also online, it turns out that luxury consumers are among the first to adopt new technology, engage with social media, and shop across multiple online and offline touchpoints (Beeson, M., et al. (1), 2017). By applying the technological solutions proposed by the customers interviewed, they believe that more value would be added to the overall purchase experience delivered. Hence, almost the totality of the customer's sample agreed on perceiving that technology will enable luxury brands to enhance the customer relationship by recreating offline experiences. This is because, executed correctly, digital touchpoints are able to complement and

enhance the in store experience, rather than detract from it. The results obtained highlight the necessity of broadening the convergence between technology and luxury online and how a correct execution and application of technological tools, as the ones proposed by customers, will improve the customer experience, therefore, resulting in the **acceptance of Proposition 3**.

Being the main objective of this paper to gather information on the current sensual marketing techniques and to find out customers' reactions supporting or not, the emotions and sensations that fashion luxury brands are currently delivering online, the following research question was initially developed: *How the development online of multi-sensory strategies will enable luxury fashion brands to create superior customer value, thus complementing the in store experience provided?*. In addition to the purpose of delivering a valid answer for the research question formulated, it resulted of high interest for researchers to understand what the customer base is missing online in terms of experience and sensory stimulation. For that reason, three propositions, addressing specific research categories, were formulated. The main reasoning behind the examination of the potential increase of purchases, the impact on customer loyalty, the effect on brand image, the influence on customer-brand-engagement and the relation to technology, is the correlation and repercussions they all have towards the creation of superior customer experiences. A relation between the enhancement of multi-sensory strategies online and the contribution to the delivering of superior customer experiences needed to be established. Moreover, these direct connections between sensors online and superior experiences might arise and would complement the in store value delivered to customers, therefore creating an aligned multi-sensory experience between online and offline channels. The first proposition created "*Aligning the online and offline experience provided by luxury brands will result into a better customer experience*" results accepted and supported by the participants of the study and the theory revised. On the one hand, experts defended the importance of aligning strategies aiming at providing complementary sensations, therefore transmitting the same brand values, supported by the theory of Basini (2001), highlighting the need of ensuring brand consistency across different touch points. Furthermore, customers highlighted the lack of provision of a luxurious experience in the online service, thus, demanding a set of sensorial elements corresponding to emotions usually stimulated in stores. From this proposition, researchers obtained that developing multi-sensory strategies online, will align the experience of different channels

and create superior customer value. Following the increase of interest in digital media communication among luxury companies and the need for a real integration of online and offline worlds in creating and delivering unique seamless customer experiences (Rigaud-Lacresse and Pini, 2017), researchers decided to develop a second proposition; *“Providing a better multisensory online experience for luxury customers will translate into superior customer value”*. Gathering data about this statement would allow researchers to provide an initial answer to the core of the research question formulated. As previously mentioned, specific categories would suggest to split the second proposition in sub-proposition, as for the influence and repercussion they have on the delivery of superior customer experiences. Related to the incentives of purchasing, the first sub-proposition *“Providing a better multisensory online experience for luxury customers will incentivize customers to buy more”* is addressed. This statement reported that a remarkable percentage of customers (40%) would potentially be incentivized to purchase more if better sensory experiences were implemented online. In spite of having a 60% of the sample that hardly imagine the final result of how multi-sensoriality will mirror the sensations they feel offline, the 40% represents the customer base that luxury brands will be firstly impacting with the implementation of new strategies. As well as the portion of customers that companies will need to pay special attention to retain and foster their loyalty. Mentioning the loyalty of customers, another sub-proposition directly connected to that category was created *“Providing a better multisensory online experience for luxury customers will positively impact customer loyalty”*. The creation of emotions and memories in customer’s mind is expected to stimulate customers in reliving experiences during their purchase activities. However, the application of strategies online results in not having any effect on luxury customers, being mainly affected by the brand and the characteristics of the luxury products itself. The lack of impact on customers loyalty represents an important finding for the ongoing study and enables researchers to answer the research question excluding the effects on loyalty. For what concerns brand image, the following sub-proposition was developed *“Providing a better multisensory online experience for luxury customers will positively impact brand image”*. It has been proved that by aligning the sensorial experience offered online and offline, the brand image will be positively impacted. By applying specific recommendations in relation to the five human senses, customers will therefore develop a closer attitude towards luxury brands. In addition, the more the customers identify themselves with brands, the more enriching the experience becomes to them. So

that, the awakening of emotions represents a fundamental role in customer brand engagement. The last sub-proposition formulated “*Providing a better multisensory online experience for luxury customers will increase customer engagement with the brand*” is linked to the previous propositions analysed. The only possibility to strengthen customer brand engagement with luxury brands, is through the implementation of multi-sensory experiences, that well utilised, will result into a full multi-sensory experience. Also, with the awakening of emotions, customers will feel more exclusive and enhance the emotional connection between customers and the brand, improving brand image. Other elements that contribute to the good image of luxury brands relate to the attractiveness of the website, being technology an important player for the contribution of multi-sensory effects. At this moment, customers consider luxury brand’s websites as informational or promotional tools, and it becomes the time for the brands to empower the new advanced technologies and bring the in store feelings and sensations also to the online platform. Broadening the existent relationship between luxury and technology is crucial, and so the last proposition is created accordingly “*Broadening the convergence between technology and luxury online will improve customer experience*”. Technology should be used as a tool to ameliorate the service delivered online and enrich the overall customer experience. Boosting activities like virtual reality and augmented reality will bring the offline emotions to online customers, enabling them to be nearer to the feeling of holding and touching the products, having live chats, displaying 360 rotation of products, reproducing better music, delivering scented packages and aligning the visual design with the brand image. This set of elements, required from customers and currently lacking online, adds more value to the overall experience delivered and impact the rest of categories previously analysed.

All in all, luxury brands will be able to create superior customer experiences if the development of multi-sensory strategies online is aligned with the experiences currently delivered in store, and if they are able to reproduce and awake similar emotions to the online customers as they do offline. By doing this, the image of luxury brands will be positively influenced and the engagement between customer and brands will be stronger. Using technology as the tool for broadening the conversion among all the sensory experiences will have a positive effect on the final perceived value of the brand and develop an unforgettable multi-sensory experience for luxury customers.

CHAPTER 6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The discussion section previously described interprets the results of a study that used qualitative report measures to identify how the development of multi-sensory strategies online is most positively or most negatively impacting the overall consumer behavior of luxury customers, as well as, uncovering the missing elements that luxury customers demand for perceiving superior customer experiences online. Results obtained will have implications for the luxury industry development, by contributing to the understanding of how luxury brands are behaving among different channels, as well as contributing to the body of knowledge for the subject matter. This chapter concludes with suggestions for practice and for future research that may foster the understanding of the topic investigated.

6.1 Contributions to the body of knowledge

Nowadays, professional people from all disciplines have come to understand the importance of information management (Bytheway, 2014) and so have done the researchers of this study. In general terms, the essence of every research paper, is either to find out knowledge that can be added to the existing body of knowledge of the subject under examination, or to create new knowledge that nobody has researched about before (Chidi, R., 2018). Furthermore, constant updates contributing to the solving of the new issues in the society are needed in every field of study. So that, among the main objectives of contribution to the current body of knowledge, the most important one is to enable other researchers in the future to rely on new data and theories generated. At the beginning of the research process, secondary data concerning multi-sensory strategies that luxury brands currently implement in their boutiques, established the body of knowledge on this field. However, a gap of knowledge concerning how the implementation of multi-sensoriality online would affect the luxury customer experience was uncovered. The fact of researching on the implementation of multi-sensorial improvements in the e-luxury industry, which firstly represents something innovative for the marketing industry and for which no previous data was collected, implies that the study itself is going to reveal new knowledge. By just studying the behaviour of a new research sample and/or in a new location, is enough to provide more data to the existent knowledge (Chidi, R., 2018) becoming a responsibility of the founders of the study

to demonstrate which contributions their findings apport to the body of knowledge. Additionally, not having previously contrasted data on the subject matter to use as a base for the development process of the research, gives freedom to researchers in solving the issues of the environment.

Other ways to add value to the existing knowledge base is by the methodology adopted during the study process. By reviewing previous studies, researchers can discover new methods of approach in tackling the same problem identified. Also, by changing the data collection method, sample size and the way the data is analyzed, a different approach to tackle the same problem and bringing new results can be established (Chidi, R., 2018). In the case of this research, and acknowledging that no previous studies have been conducted for the same topic, all the new knowledge generated will contribute to the formulation of the body of knowledge. In addition the the new knowledge produced in relation to specific topics, namely loyalty, brand image, customer brand engagement and customer experiences, among others, will complete (from a different perspective, with a different sample and utilising a different method of approach) the knowledge and theories already created for related fields of study.

Major contribution to knowledge will be the tackling of the research problem statement - *the online experience offered by fashion luxury brand is lacking in terms of multi-sensoriality with respect to the sensory stimulating experience offered in stores* - surviving the challenge of not having enough data to be based on. In order to overtake the downsides presented at the beginning of the process, researchers decided to conduct expert surveys with the aim of acquiring sufficient data that enabled an initial understanding of the phenomenon, therefore constituting the first contribution to the body of knowledge. Afterwards, the tested propositions (both the accepted and the rejected ones) determine the remaining contribution to the body of knowledge. From the propositions confirmed P1, P2c, P2d and P3, the following knowledge is created:

- *Aligning the online and offline experience provided by luxury brands will result into a better customer experience*
- *Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will positively impact brand image.*
- *Providing a better multi-sensory online experience for luxury customers will increase customer engagement with the brand.*

- *Broadening the convergence between technology and luxury online will improve customer experience.*

On the other hand, not being able to confirm the propositions P2a and P2b, adds also valuable information for the body of knowledge and opens an opportunity for researchers on the following fields (*See the section 6.3 for more details*):

Why providing a better multisensory online experience for luxury customers does not sufficiently incentivize customers to buy more?

Why providing a better multisensory online experience for luxury customers does not positively impact customer loyalty?

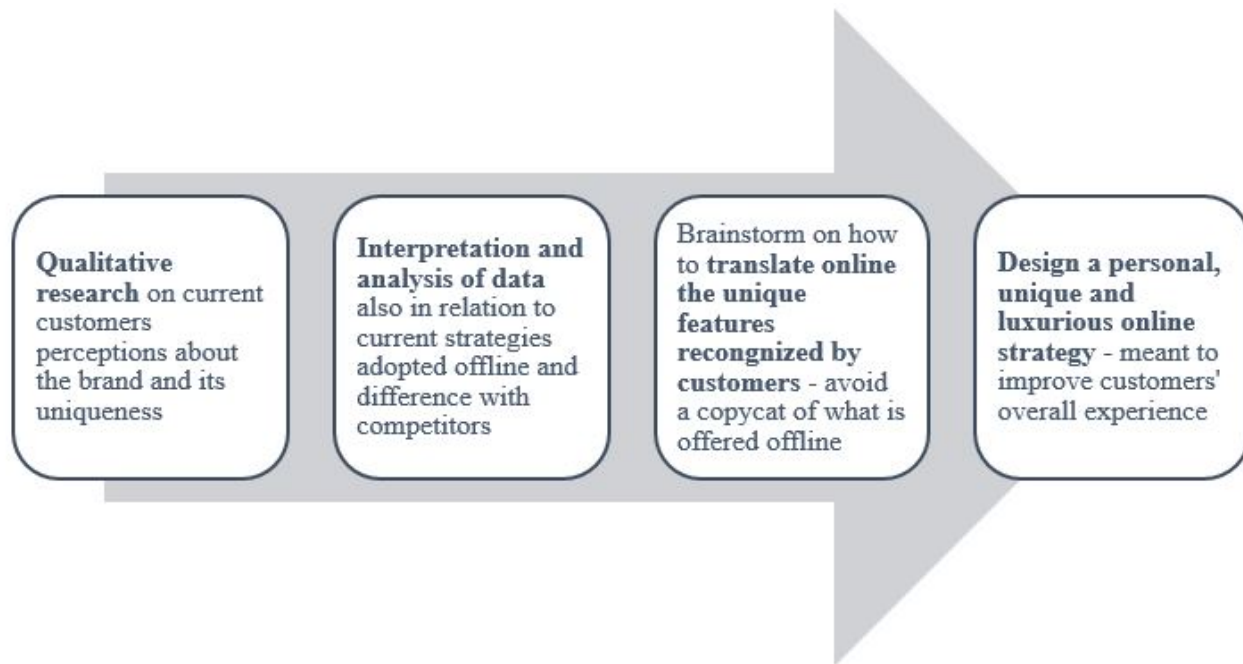
To sum up, the overall results contribute to the body of knowledge related to the development of multi-sensory strategies online and to the effects it produces on the online luxury customer experience. At the same time it opens up opportunities for future researches that can support the knowledge created from this paper and provide deeper insights on the non confirmed aspects of the study.

6.2 Strategic recommendations

The thorough analysis and interpretation of the data collected from experts and customers, together with the theoretical framework researched and the methodology devised, enable researchers to conceive a series of recommendations that are now going to be presented. The acceptance of the scientific propositions drafted within this paper and the information obtained from the in-depth interviews with customers and from the surveys conducted with field experts, allowed researchers to collect a rich amount of informations on how to ameliorate the digital channels strategies in terms of multi-sensoriality. Directly related with this, the first recommendation researchers suggest to the marketing department of luxury brands is to conduct in deep researches with most loyal customers to understand the reasons that are currently pushing them to be loyal, to keep the contact with the brand and to understand their current perceptions. These information would represent the basis for the strategic implementation of personalized techniques online, becoming essential information for the brand to keep their identity and discover how to attract customers. Indeed, the paper on hand strongly highlighted the importance of the digital channels. As evidence underlined, the opinion of most of the sample on digital platforms revealed that this channel, is considered a central part of the experience the

brand provides. As also other scientific papers discovered, despite the ever growing interest in digital media communication among luxury companies, the need for a real integration of online and offline in creating and delivering unique seamless customer experiences, is still weak (Rigaud-Lacresse & Pini, 2017); consequently highlighting the importance of ensuring brand consistency through different touchpoints, in order to provide satisfactory user experiences for luxury consumers (Basini, 2001). It is therefore further suggested to luxury companies to devise an ad hoc digital strategy, aligned with the experience delivered in store and especially transmitting the values and prestige of the brand. This recommendation finds roots in the suggestions provided by the experts and in the gap of alignment described by the customers interviewed. In researchers opinions every luxury brand should design digital strategies meant at the complementation of the service offered offline, therefore beginning with an analysis of what makes their luxury brand special and unique, what delivers prestige and what customers recognize as distinctive of the brand in terms of image and experience. The acceptance of the first proposition highlight the importance of all the elements previously listed as essential for the alignment process, when an improvement in terms of customers' experience is the objective. *Figure 10* shows the recommended flow to follow by each luxury brand in order to devise the strategy to implement in their digital channels and, in order to be able to take advantage of this channel in the best way possible, to support the general experience customers' live in fashion luxury.

Figure 10: Steps to devise a personalised online luxury strategy - Own creation

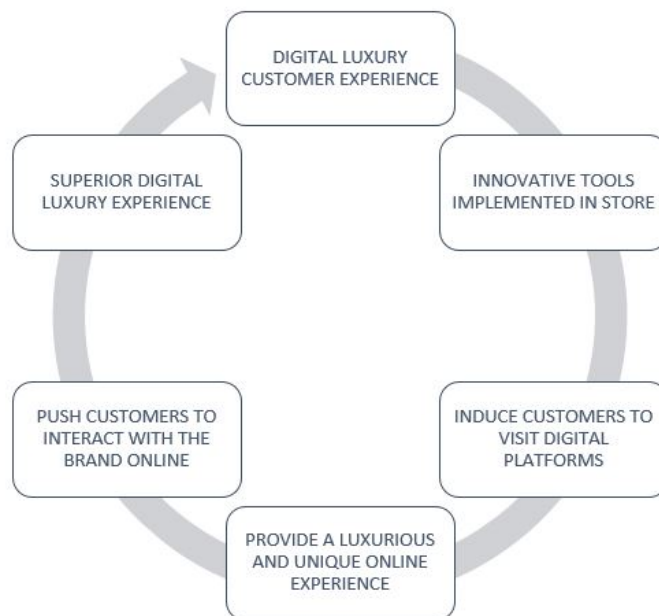


In this sense, researchers are advising luxury brands to align the experience provided online with the one gifted in store, but it is important to notice and underline that this does not mean that the two platforms should be offering the same experiences and provide the same services. They should rather transmit the same luxurious feelings, equivalent values and the unique brands' characteristics identifying the brand itself.

The results collected and the acceptance of the propositions developed, allow researchers to recommend luxury brands on how to behave in the market taking into consideration these discoveries and to start the alignment of the experiences provided in different channels. It has been revealed that the website and in general the digital platforms, play an important role and therefore have to be considered as significant tools to influence customers' perceptions about the brand and their engagement with it. Also previous researchers already emphasized the importance that online platforms are acquiring since their birth. As a matter of fact, a survey conducted by Digital LBI (2014) found out that 88% of smartphone users searched products online before buying offline and that 72% of customers were looking up information on their mobile devices while shopping in stores. Also, a market research report estimated that online sales could make up to 40% of luxury sales by 2020

(Gustafson, 2016), and the results collected within this research showed a potential increase in sales of 40% in case of enhancement of multi-sensory strategies. With these data on hand, it appears necessary and logical to induce to the creation of digital strategies meant at attracting customers to visit luxury brand pages offering multi-sensory marketing features. In fact, besides the importance of the content and strategy displayed, once customers land inside digital platforms it is important to stimulate them to visit brands' touchpoints. Especially when research shows a relevant increase also in online sales. In this sense, the first two recommendations proposed are strictly tight and stroke each other, being interdependent. *Figure 11* summarises the strategic digital moves suggested with the aim of delivering a richer customer experience. The image created highlights the interdependence between the elements that are considered as particularly relevant and as impacting customers' digital experience for each luxury brand. It is important to notice that *Figure 11* only groups those elements that have been taken into consideration and consequently have been studied and tested within the research on hand.

Figure 11: Interdependency of digital activities to deliver a richer digital luxury experience - own creation



From the results collected in terms of sensual stimulation, respondents highlighted the importance of especially three senses; namely visual, auditory and tactile. In fact, these three senses have been rated as the ones that are influencing more customers' perceptions. Indeed, the sense of sight is proved to be

the most powerful for discovering changes and differences in the environment and is the most common sense in perceiving goods or services (Hulten, B., 2011). For this reason, a visual strategy is considered as one of the most significant in expressing a brand's identity and value, as it also emphasizes the connotation of such sensory expressions as color, light, and theme, as well as graphics, exterior, and interior (ibid). Having these information and having tested the interest and positive feelings of both customers and experts about a closer relationship between technology and luxury, researchers suggest a series of improvements meant at enriching the visual experience provided online.

Suggestions start with basic improvements that will refine customers' experience. Displaying realistic pictures, is considered as being a pillar of the website interface. Indeed customers need to be able to see the garment and perfectly understand how it suits, and how it is made in every detail. Directly linked to this, a close up with 360 rotation should be present, linked with the possibility to zoom on every part of the picture. Despite appearing as really basic suggestions, the importance of these elements showed up to be essential for the provision of a rich experience and to obviate the possibility to touch the products offered. Therefore, it is considered essential to carefully design the website in this sense. To achieve the same objective, the implementation of live photos is also considered as a further improvement in the display of garments, additionally helping customers in figuring in their minds how the product would fit and would appear in reality. The three suggestions listed aim at the enhancement of the digital platforms to satisfy the visual necessities customers highlighted.

To further ameliorate customers experience in terms of senses the implementation of virtual and augmented reality is perceived by researchers as a strategic move to influence not only the sight but also the tactile and auditory senses. As a matter of fact this technology is already starting to be used within different fields. In fact, customers are already coming to expect a seamless, consistent retail experience that includes mobile, web and in store technologies such as Virtual Reality. That's why Marxent created 3D Furniture Cloud™, the award-winning cloud-based content management system and suite of augmented and virtual reality retail solutions. 3D Furniture Cloud™ invites shoppers to experience stunning realism and cross-platform consistency that set the customer experience apart. Also Ikea already undertook this path with the launch of Ikea Place app, where customers, when using the app on their phones, will be able to select from a range of different sofas, armchairs, coffee tables and shelves and try it on for size. Also in fashion some steps have been made in this direction, it is the

case of virtual fashion shows, 3D avatars to help with clothes design or 3D fashion portfolios (Virtual reality Society). Due to the speed of technological improvements and to the openness toward these new technologies researchers suggest luxury brands to start going further with the implementation of virtual reality in their web pages. Many could be the employments of such a powerful technology especially within a field where sight and touch are elements considered pivotal for the selling of a product. For example it could be really relevant to start creating a new reality where customers would be able to virtually visit a luxury store, in this way they would have the perception of physically being there, they could be able to virtually touch the product and try it on. Of course this kind of suggestion has to be taken into consideration as a final objective for brands, but before reaching this step it is important to move toward a greater implementation of virtual and augmented realities through the technologies now available. The importance of working toward this direction has already been highlighted within the paper, indeed these technologies would enable companies to make customers live an experience also online, where now most of the sample interviewed did not even consider what is offered as an experience at all. Moreover, this technology would allow customers to see how garments would fit before purchasing them online, it would give them the perception of touching the product, therefore filling those gaps highlighted during the interviews conducted in relation to the touch sense..

To keep on suggesting strategies to ameliorate the stimulation of those senses that are considered as essential in the provision of a luxurious experience, studying and defining the music to be played inside the website should be a path to follow. As it has already been tested offline, a sensorial sound strategy is used to reinforce the identity and image of a brand. Sound, and especially music, as sensory expressions, attach meaning to people and is a source of inspiration. Music from a man's or a woman's youth are often used to create memories (Hult n, B., 2009). In this sense it is considered essential also online to deliver these feelings and to stimulate memories linked to the brand. For these reasons, researchers suggest luxury brands to carefully consider the auditory elements that they provide within every page, for example aligning them with the playlists offered in store in order to stimulate customers' memories linked to previous positive purchasing experiences. This recommendation is also important on a pure strategic level as it would allow the luxury brand to enlarge the amount of elements characterising it, indeed it should be seen also as another distinctive sign of the brand together with colours, logo and style.

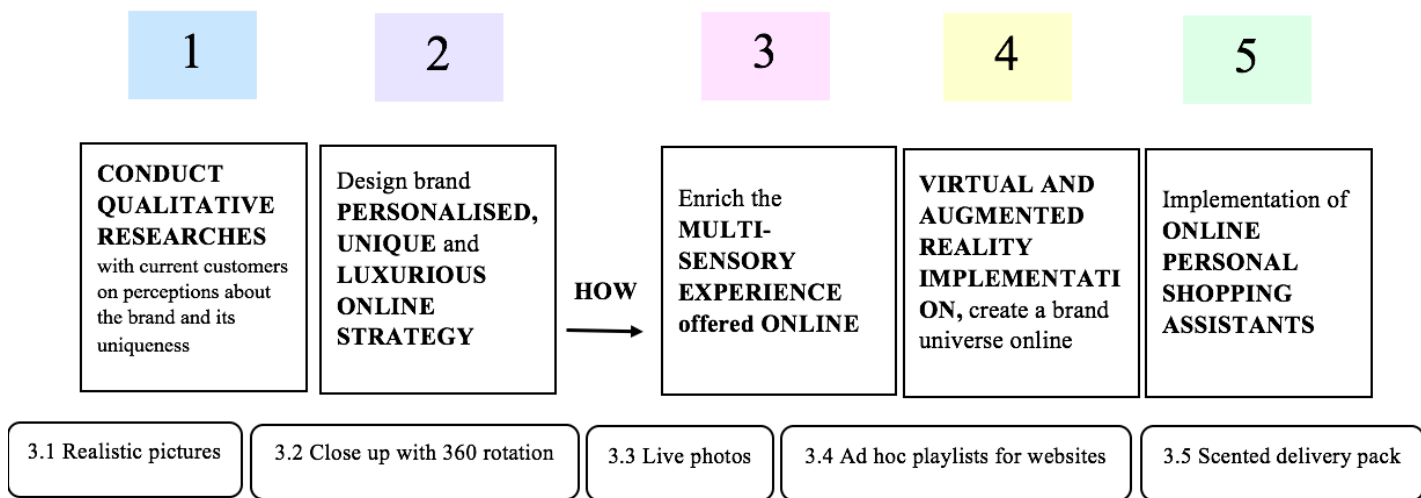
Another element that researchers considers important to ameliorate and to focus on to impact the brand image and to enrich the overall digital experience; is the delivery pack. As a matter of fact another point of difference with the offline purchasing experience arises when the customer actually buys the product. When purchasing online customers will receive after a few days a delivery box hardly different from the box they would get from any other brand. Also this moment has to be considered as part of the experience customers live when purchasing online, and should therefore be aligned with the prestige luxury brands are expected to meet. In this sense, researchers, in line with customers suggestions and impressions about the service, consider important to take care about the pack and be sure to deliver damage minimizing box but still appealing and similar to the wrapping provided in store, so that to lower the difference of the service gifted.

It is also considered important at this step to stimulate the olfactory sense, as it allows a scent to become an element of a brand's identity and image. Scents also contribute to creating memory pictures, a positive atmosphere and wellbeing among both customers and employees (Hult n, B, 2009). For this reason, and mainly to keep on providing a rich multi-sensory experience also online, it is considered important to deliver scented boxes. In this way, when the client receives the product ordered he/she will also smell the scent used in stores and consequently linked to the brand. Adding this simple element would enable brands to provide, also during the online purchasing experience, an olfactory memory of the brand therefore strengthening brand image and enhancing customers connection to the brand.

The last element that the results obtained allow researchers to focus on, is the lack of human contact that worsens the experience delivered online. Despite being aware that it will be hardly possible to replicate online the level of service achieved offline, the implementation of real personal assistants online could help in the improvement of this part of the offer. What researchers suggest is to enable digital users to contact personal shopping assistant helping them through the process of choice, by for example advising customer on what to combine with a pair of shoes or on how to take care of the product, how to wear it and in which occasions. The implementation of such a service would also increase the amount of personalisation delivered online, in fact every customer would be advised depending on his/her specific necessities, therefore feeling closer to the brand and to the usual in store experience.

In general terms the recommendations provided are all meant at enriching the experience brands deliver online so that to treat also this channel as primary and to stimulate purchases. In line with the domain of the research a consistent part of this paragraph deals with suggestions on how to strategically enrich the experience online in terms of senses. *Figure 12* was created with the aim of summing up the strategic suggestions researchers listed in relation to the data collected from the samples approached.

Figure 12: Recommendations - own creation



6.3 Limitations

The limitations of a study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impact or influence the interpretation of the findings (Price & Murnan, 2004). They are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings that are the result of the ways in which researchers initially chose to design the study and/or the method used to establish internal and external validity (Price & Murnan, 2004). Additionally, the acknowledgement of the study's limitations becomes an opportunity to make suggestions for future researches. This is because by understanding that the key objective of a research process is not only to discover new knowledge but also to confront assumptions and explore what is unknown, researchers have now the chance to develop a critical reflexion on the research problem exploring the limitations found along the process.

Starting by the methodological limitations, the sample of a research (meaning the units of analysis used to conduct the research on) will always be dictated by the type of research problem under investigation. In particular, the sample size and the demographics of the participants for this study configure the first of the limitations perceived. In total, researchers have been able to address their questions to a sample of 20 people from which 4 constitute a group of field experts and 16 a group of luxury customers. It is important to notice that when sample sizes are too small it is difficult to find significant relationships from the data, as statistical tests normally require a larger sample size to ensure a representative population to consider the results (Price & Murnan, 2004). Despite the fact that qualitative analysis typically requires a smaller sample size than quantitative, researchers believe that enlarging the sample of customers could provide a broader and most representative overview of the luxury customer's behaviour towards multi-sensoriality online. Even though there are no specific rules for determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research, Morse (1994) suggests a sampling of 30-50 participants for an ethnography research, Creswell (1998) suggests only 20-30 participants for grounded theory studies and 5-25 for phenomenological studies, whereas Morse (1994) suggests at least six. Patton (1990) stated that qualitative sample size may best be determined by the time allotted, resources available and study objectives. Being the objectives of this research to find insights on the motivations of luxury brands for avoiding the implementation of multi-sensory strategies online plus insights on consumer's behaviours, the sample utilized results in a limitation for the research.

Furthermore, the demography of the sample is limited to European countries, however, since the study analyses luxury brands in general terms and not specific brands, researchers do not consider this as a limitation that affects the interpretation of the results, but rather as a limitation in the opinion collected. In line with the previous sentence, the study is limited to the fashion luxury industry in general. Despite having utilised secondary data available on specific fashion luxury brands, the questions addressed to the sample were not specifying any brand in particular, and so during the analysis of results, researchers are assuming that customers would behave in the way for all the fashion luxury brands. This assumption becomes the second main limitation of the project, due to the fact that for specific categories approached (loyalty, customer brand engagement) the behavior of the luxury customers could differ from brand to brand.

The lack of prior research studies on the domain of e-luxury in terms of multi-sensory techniques due to the study of a completely new domain, becomes also a limitation for the research process and the understanding of the results. Citing prior research studies forms the basis of the literature review and lays a foundation for understanding the research problem investigated (Brutus, Stéphane et al., 2013), however, in cases where there is no specific prior research, an entirely new research typology needs to be developed. For this study, primary data on multi-sensorial strategies that luxury brands implement has been utilized for forming the bases of the theoretical framework, however, no previous researches concerning the implementation of these techniques online have been found. Nevertheless, researchers have used this limitation as an opportunity to identify the gaps in the literature and conduct the research on hand.

Finally, the last limitation observed during the research process, have been the impossibility of reproducing the digital sensual improvements described during the interviews. Customers were not able to visualize and feel the techniques discussed (such as as virtual reality or online scents) so researchers did not have enough resources to physically explain the differences between normal luxury websites and the ones enhanced in terms of digital sensory experiences. In order to overcome this limitation, researches described with a maximum of details how the digital experience would finally result.

6.4 Future Research Opportunities

The limitations developed in the previous section have not overcome the use of the method chosen to gather the data needed for the research, rather they have pointed out a need for addressing future researches. Analysing the first limitation addressed, the size of the research sample, researchers propose a future research enlarging the population of the study. In line with the theories of Morse (1994) and Creswell (1998), a sample of at least 20-30 customers and 10 field experts is recommended to be approached in order to ensure higher representativeness of the total population and more validity of the study. Moreover, after the analysis of the data obtained, the field studies on loyalty and on the impact on sales, have resulted as not being influenced by the implementation of online sensorial experiences. On one hand, results have proven that luxury customers are only loyal to products and its characteristics and to the brands, nor to the implementation of online techniques for enhancing the experience. As stated in the discussion, researchers do not know whether the results derive from a lack

of visualization of how the luxury websites ameliorated in terms of digital sensory experiences will look like, or if online sensory experiences have no impact at all on customer loyalty. The same happens for the increase in sales aimed to be confirmed by proposition 2a. Despite not being able to confirm the proposition, researchers obtained a relevant number of customers that would be willing to increase their purchase of luxury online, if the implementation of the online sensory techniques would be aligned with the offline experience. Therefore, in order to analyze more in depth the effects on loyalty and increase in sales when implementing multi-sensory online strategies a future research is proposed.

Furthermore and in line with another of the limitations highlighted, researchers suggest to develop future researches analysing the behaviour of specific luxury brands in relation to sensorial experiences online. Assuming that the results obtained would be applicable for all the luxury brands in the same way, enabled the generalisation of the findings, limiting the specificity of the results obtained. By addressing studies for specific luxury brands, researchers would be able to detect whether some categories are more relevant and result as being more impacted by the application of online sensory experiences, than others. Understanding that each luxury brand represents different values and that along time, not all luxury brands have been adapted to new changes, trends and demands of the market in the same manner, a specific brand research on the same field of study would provide deeper and more specific insights.

Finally, the last research recommended relates to the sample composition. In the case of this study, a vision from field experts's perspective and luxury customers's perspective, was essential for the objective of the research. However, by looking a step further it would be truly interesting for researchers to conduct the same investigation but implicating the three parts involved in the process: field experts, luxury customers and luxury brand marketing managers. Analysing the opinions of the three categories involved could potentially strengthen or completely change the outcome of the research. Besides, incorporating a more practical vision could possibly contrast the academical vision of the field experts with marketing managers. Furthermore, luxury managers opinion would also enable researchers to discover the reasons why multi-sensory strategies have been poorly implemented online.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS

The research paper on hand has been written with the aim of filling in a scientific and strategic gap within the field of multi-sensory marketing. The aim of the study was to answer the marketing problem defined, namely: *the online experience offered by fashion luxury brand is lacking in terms of multi-sensoriality with respect to the sensory stimulating experience offered in stores*. The scope of the study was in fact to contribute to the body of knowledge of multi-sensory marketing within the specific sector of fashion luxury. In order to succeed in research problem identified and in thoroughly answering the research question formulated: *How the development online of multi-sensory strategies will enable luxury fashion brands to create superior customer value, thus complementing the in store experience provided?* three propositions have been developed to enable researchers to collect exhaustive and valid information on the topic addressed and to provide reliable recommendations. To fulfill these objectives a sample of 20 individuals, between field experts and customers, has been addressed through qualitative interviews and in line with the methodology chosen. The analysis and discussion of the results obtained enabled researchers to confirm that an alignment between the online and offline experience provided by luxury brands will result into superior customer experience. Furthermore, results demonstrated that providing online better multi-sensory experiences will positively impact brand image, customer engagement with the brand and induce to a potential increase in sales. It turned out that the enhancement of multi-sensory strategies online will not have an impact on loyalty, but future researches are suggested within this domain. Finally, the study proved that a broader convergence between technology and fashion luxury online will improve customer experience.

These results enabled researchers to build up a series of strategic recommendations, all meant at the improvement of the online experience through an alignment with the in store offer and suggestions on the development of technologies boosting the multi-sensorial experience offered online. Implications of the research appear to be numerous, due to the poor amount of studies conducted within this field until now. The implementation of the suggestions listed, together with future detailed researches on the topic will enable fashion luxury brand to offer an immersive experience online. This improvement in the service offered will increase brand consistency and enrich brand image, therefore offering also online an outstanding experience.

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CHAPTER 9. APPENDIXES

Appendix 1 : QUESTIONS MODEL EXPERTS SURVEY

The aim of the interview is to understand the behavior of luxury brands in their decisions for being present and sell or don't sell online, or not being present. Researchers intend to obtain from the interviewees, their most deep thoughts and opinions about the field of fashion luxury.

In order to achieve this, we suggest the experts to use their knowledge and experience in the field, to reproduce in their minds the strategic and marketing decisions that some of the most famous luxury brands are currently using online and in-store.

1. Which element do you consider the most important for the provision of a unique luxury experience? (some examples, the product, the human contact, the boutique, the price segmentation)
2. Which senses (visual, tactile, olfactory, gustatory auditory) do you think are actively stimulated in-store? Which brands are the best ones in implementing this kind of strategies?
3. Do you believe the in-store experience provided in luxury is enough or do you rather sustain that it can be ameliorated? If it can be ameliorate please make some suggestions
4. Do you think that providing customers with sensory experiences will enhance the emotional connection between the brand and the customer himself?
5. Do you consider all the five senses (visual, tactile, olfactory, gustatory auditory) equally important for the provision of a superior customer experience? if not which ones are more important for fashion luxury?
6. Would you state that customer loyalty could be affected by the stimulation of sensations associated with purchasing luxury brands?
7. Which experiences luxury brands are currently providing in relation to the five senses visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory and olfactory?
8. Do you support the online presence of fashion luxury brands?
9. For which reason luxury brands should be present online? Which should be the scope of their online presence? (capture new customers, reach new segments, increase availability, share with

customers new collections, give extra customer support, provide a better and more competitive service..)

10. Which challenges do you perceive for luxury fashion online presence? And for luxury fashion brands selling online?
11. Why do you think some fashion luxury brands are selling online? Which are the pros?
12. Do you think that aligning the online and offline experience provided by fashion luxury brands will positively affect on customers perceived value?
13. Do you think it is important to mirror online the strategies applied offline? Or do you rather consider these platforms as independent?
14. Which sensory experiences are currently provided online? Do you think they are enough or they can be ameliorated? In that case, how would you ameliorate the sensory experience currently provided online?
15. Do you think that ameliorating the sensory service currently provided online would incentivize customer purchase?
16. Would you say that customer loyalty could be strengthened by the improvement of the online sensory experience?
17. Do you think luxury brand image is affected by the brand online presence? and by the fact of selling online? how?
18. How should brand behave online in order to ameliorate the brand image?
19. Do you think technological improvement can improve the sensory service provided online?
20. Can you mention any technological tool to improve the online experience and the effects on customers?
21. Would you positively rate a broader sensory experience online? (to understand if experts agree on a broader multi-sensory experience online)

Appendix 2: QUESTIONS MODEL CUSTOMERS' INTERVIEW

The aim of this interview is to obtain the most deep feelings, thoughts and opinions of fashion luxury customers, towards the service and experiences that fashion luxury brands provide online and in-store. In order to create the right environment before starting the interview, customers are suggested to

reproduce in their minds the situations they experience when being at the luxury boutiques and when they are searching across online luxury websites.

1. Do you usually look for fashion luxury brands online? can you give any example?
2. Do you like buying luxury products online? For which reason?
3. Do you usually consult luxury online websites before purchasing luxury products?
4. Does the online website influence your purchasing behaviour both in store and online? in which way?
5. Do you consider luxury brands online presence as a positive or negative sign? Why?
6. Do you prefer buying luxury goods online or offline? why?
7. Are you satisfied with the online experience provided by luxury brands? Do you consider it as luxurious as the one offered offline? Why?
8. What would push you to buy online rather than in store?
9. What do you miss more in term of service, when purchasing online?
10. If luxury brands were able to provide online rich experiences and elegant service (similar to the one offered in store) would you buy online or instore? Would you be more satisfied with the brand and feel closer to it?
11. In case a luxury brand provides a better online experience, would this lessen your willingness to leave the brand?
12. How do you think luxury brands can improve their online service in relation to the five senses? In case of implementation of these improvements would you appreciate more the brand?
13. Would you increase your interaction with the brand in case of the implementation of sensory stimulating activities online? (ex. virtual reality implementation, ability to smell and touch materials, a more elegant delivery pack, ad hoc product description, curiosities about the brand products ...)
14. How would you feel about the presence of a virtual world in luxury websites where you could discover, touch and smell all products? Would you be more satisfied with the brand performance?

15. Would you be attracted by the presence of technological tools capable of gifting you a complete luxurious experience online? Would you feel more at ease with brand and more attached to it? How would you react? What would be your suggestion for the implementation of those tools?
16. Do you feel more stimulated when browsing inside a luxury brand website with respect to any other one? Why?

Appendix 3: EXPERTS PARTICIPANTS PROFILE

Angela Bermudez Carrasco; Fashion Expert

Angela has always been in touch with the luxury industry with a long work experience in the design of luxury interiors. She holds an executive master in Fashion Business Administration at ISEM Fashion Business School. Currently working at PVH Europe for Tommy Hilfiger global and Calvin Klein Europe, she is particularly interested in luxury fashion brands and their global strategies, online and offline.

Monica Grosso; Assistant professor in Marketing. Markets and Innovation

Monica is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at EMLyon Business School. Her research interests focus on channel relationships both B2B (bargaining and collaborative relationships between manufacturers and retailers) and B2C (between retailers and their shoppers). Within this domain she investigated several specific topics like channel design, category management, trade marketing, private labels and retail branding, retail loyalty programs and others. Her teaching experience is rooted on retail/store management and channel design and management.

Monica Benzi; Marketing Department Coordinator & Head of Luxury Program at INSEEC Paris

The expertise of Monica in the luxury field is both practical and academic. During her career she worked for Versace, Etam and L'Oréal. She started teaching as a marketing professor for HEC, ESSEC and ESCP Europe in Paris in 2014 and she kept this role until 2017 when she was named Head of Luxury Program at INSEEC Paris. Her specific area of expertise lies within the field of luxury, brand management and strategy. She is particularly interested in sensorial marketing and luxury

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strategies, especially we dealing with the understanding of brand campaigns and heritage building within the field.

Sandra Bravo Duràn; Customer & Digital consultant at EVERIS.

She studied Economy and Sociology in the University of Salamanca (Spain). After living a year in Japan and another year in Polony, she achieved an MBA in Fashion Management in ISEM Fashion Business School. She started investigating fashion sociology, specializing in fashion trends and she is currently enrolled in a PHD in Applied Creativity in the University of Navarra. For her actual thesis, she is developing a theory concerning the “liquid society”. Additionally, she is an adjunct fashion professor of luxury fashion at Madrid School of Marketing, ISEM Fashion Business School and the University of Navarra, while working as a consumer & digital consultant at EVERIS. Her focus is based on digital transformation projects for fashion retailing in the luxury industry. Finally, she considers herself as an expert in consuming trends.

Appendix 4: Customer's participants profiles

1. Paulina Germanaite

She is a 24 years old, Lithuanian girl. She is finishing her master studies in International Marketing and Management. She worked as a model for some famous brands and she has always shown a profound interest for luxury fashion. She defines herself as a Shopaholic, and she mainly buy mastige or luxury products. She is currently working for a Vintage luxury online retailer: Resee.com and living in Paris. Her family is the owner of Crisis Research Center, who offers world wide acknowledged courses and provides solutions in emergency medicine to save human life and health.

2. Lorenzo Masini Battista

He is 24 years-old Italian guy, living in Monaco since many years. His family owns a multinational enterprise and one of the world's leading companies in the Pressure Sensitive Self Adhesive Tapes (PSA) and specialty Packaging Films industry (BOPP), where he is currently working. Profound interests in technology and IT, graduated at Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi and currently attending a Master of Science in International Management at the International University of Monaco.

3. Chiara Lauria

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She is 23 years-old Italian girl, currently living in Rome. She has a deep knowledge and crave for luxury products especially when dealing with luxury cosmetics and fashion. Currently working for the Business Development center of Mercedes-Benz Roma. She is graduating from her Master of Science in Strategic Marketing this year.

4. *Joyce Jagodzinski*

German, 28 years-old girl currently living in Stuttgart. She is a master student at the International School of Management of Dortmund and a Fashion writer. She published a book about Fashion Industry in 2015, specifically addressing Coco Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent and the 20's and 70's history. She lived and worked in Paris for Vide Dressing and for Ralph Lauren in Germany. Her interest for fashion and especially for luxury buying and trends appears evident.

5. *Sharon Groebe*

She is a 27 years-old German girl currently working for Hugo Boss in Germany. She writes a personal blog, whose main topics are fashion luxury, fashion industry innovation and everyday life. She is a real passionate about luxury in general, she also worked for some Outfittery and Edsior in Berlin. She loves luxury and the history behind every brand.

6. *Bianca Maria Bettazzoni*

She is a 25 Italian girl, currently working within the accounting office of a multinational company. She lives in Bologna where she studied Business and Economics and graduated in 2015. Her family owns a private company active in consultancy. She buys luxury since always and she is really into fashion.

7. *Wan Chen-Lin*

Winnie is a 33 year-old MBA student from Taiwan currently studying in Lyon (France) for her double degree. She has working experiences in public relations and sales/marketing in tech industry for 7 years. She's not a frequent luxury brand consumer, but she's still familiar with the big luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Dior. She's more interested in the story of the brands and their classic designs rather than the latest product itself. She only owns a few luxury brand items such as bag or purse, and good quality with reasonable price is the most important criteria to her.

8. *Anastasia Belinskaya*

Anastasia is 24 years old, russian girl living in Vienna. Currently finishing her masters in Strategy, Innovation and Management Control. She used to work in a multinational electronics company. In

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relation to fashion, Anastasia likes to buy luxury goods because she believe that quality of such products is better by far, however sometimes she also goes for vintage or mass market pieces if they really stand out.

9. Erik Francis L'Estrange

Erik is a 27 year old Norwegian master student living in Copenhagen. Finishing thesis in Service Management at Copenhagen Business School. He has little experience with and in the fashion industry, but he has the habit of buying expensive items.. In August he is planning to move to Oslo to work as a management consultant.

10. Giacomo Vanara

Giacomo is 23 years old and Italian. Hi is currently finishing his master studies in Strategy Organization and Leadership at Copenhagen Business School. He has previously worked as retail and market assistant for Eataly and he admits to have been always interested in retail; in fact, he will soon start a graduate program in this area. He has also been working for a fashion company named UNIQLO. He defined himself as a determined person who always works hard to achieve its goals. He sometimes buys luxury products but always trying to find his own style, so let's say he is not too concerned with the current trends that are in the market.

11. Isak Gustafsson

He is a 27 years old, swedish guy, about to finish his studies in Marketing and Consumption. Always been working beside his studies to afford his shopping expenses and enjoy what the luxury fashion industry have to offer. He is currently studying and living and Gothenburg.

11. Malin Tenfjord

Malin is 25 years old. Her nationality is Norwegian. She is currently enrolled at her last semester of Master in Finance at the Norwegian School of Economics (NHH). Recently she has been applying for jobs as an investment analytic in Private Equity or Venture Capital. In the past, she has also been former professional soccer player in the elite series in Norway. She loves going shopping, and she usually does it in Spain, where she owns a house. She prefers shopping in Spain over shopping in Norway, mostly because she thinks the clothes in Spain are cooler or more trendy. Shopping clothes is

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her favourite hobby! Her favourite stores are Zara, Bershka and Mango and her favourite luxury brand without any doubt is Louis Vuitton.

11. Rikke Diget Fuglsang

Rikke is a woman of 26 years old living in Copenhagen with her husband and 10 months old baby girl. She is am studying International Marketing & Management at Copenhagen Business School. She doesn't consider herself as a follower of fashion on the media however, she does love shopping. She tries to live up to one of her favorite quotes from Coco Chanel stating that; fashion fades only style remains the same, since is not a trends follower.

12. Thomas Bumi

Thomas is 32 years old. He is German and currently finishing his Master in Management in Vienna, with a recent exchange program at EMLYon Business School. He admits to have a profound interest in brands and fashion. He considers himself as a shopaholic with an above average spending for clothes and good nutrition. In the past he has worked for different international banks and financial institution, however, he would love to move to the fashion industry the soonest.

13. Mathias Friborg Madsen

Mathias is a danish male of 26 years old. He is currently finishing his master degree in International Marketing & Management in the Copenhagen Business School. At the same time he studies, he also works in the nordic bank Nordea, as a consultant. He loves shopping in general, both luxury and discount clothes, however, when it is about luxury, he usually follows the trends and the fashion catwalks he sees on the luxury brand websites.

14. Maria Bæksted Petersen

Maria is a 26 years old woman finishing a master degree in International Marketing & Management in the Copenhagen Business School. She has worked full time for a pharmaceutical company for five years prior to being a full time student. She usually buys clothes to her own taste without looking too much the most trending styles.. She has a love for quality, and prefers to buy timeless pieces. Moreover, she shops based on a budget without considering herself no shopaholic in any sense. She currently lives in Copenhagen, but she has a huge love for London, California and Walt Disney World.

