How fashion brands learned to click – a longitudinal study of the adoption of online interactive and social media by luxury fashion brands.

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Abstract. Most luxury fashion brands have yet to develop a clear and focused integrated online strategy, as they have struggled with the dilemma of interacting with fans and customers online. We observed how 35 luxury fashion brands utilized social and interactive online technologies since 2006 by formulating a framework for assessing fashion websites and brand controlled social media sites. Our findings illustrate that the observed luxury brands have increased their adoption of social and interactive digital technologies since 2006, and that with the help of Web 2.0 technologies fashion brands can create an immersing and innovative environment online.The findings also have relevance for practitioners, as the developed 8C framework can function as a checklist for fashion brand website creation.

Keywords: e-commerce, interactive, social media, Web 2.0, 8C framework, branding, fashion, technology,

1 Introduction

More than twenty years after the birth of the Internet and more than ten years after the launch of successful online multibrand fashion retailers such as Net-a-Porter, ASOS and YOOX, many luxury fashion brands themselves are still lagging behind in the online game, with brands such as Prada not having a functioning website until 2007. Nevertheless, the online fashion market is worth billions, and the before mentioned online fashion retailers were each turning over £120M, £223M and £138M respectively in 2009 [1][2][3]. Moreover, apparel and accessories account for one of the largest categories sold online and enjoys double digit growth rates year on year [4][5][6].

Still, established fashion brands struggle to rethink their traditional sales and marketing strategy to include the digital channels and hence make the brands fit for the future. They are hesitant due to the dilemma of maintaining exclusivity and brand control, and therefore fear implementing interactive elements on their websites where customers and fans can interact or customizing products. This attitude is now slowly

changing, as the majority of fashion brands have realised the importance of Internet presence. Especially forced by recent declining sales in the physical stores, due to the economic downturn, fashion brands have turned their attention online where e-commerce still promises double-digit growth [7].

Interacting and shopping across channels is however exactly what the customers expect from brands. Previous research in the context of online fashion show that customers want a website experience that is engaging, memorable and interactive; a website that can offer social interaction, two-way communication and a personalized relationship with the brand [8][9][10]. Moreover, the interactive and collaborative aspects are also what industry reports from McKinsey and the Economist business surveys point out as opportunities for increasing a company's revenue and/or margins [11][12][13].

However, selling and branding fashion brands online requires a different set of tools than selling and branding any other commodity product online. Fashion brands combine emotion, image and perception. Hence the challenge is how to convey these characteristics of intangibility, tangibility, and multi-sensory experiences online using Internet technologies [14][8].

With the help of Web 2.0 technologies fashion brands can create an immersing and innovative store environment online [7]. Cartier (www.cartier.com) created a visual tour of their brick-and-mortar store which you can navigate and click through online. It is entertaining, keeps the visitor involved and creates emotional hooks by the use of videos and engagement [15]. According to Jennings [15], an e-business that does not provide an experience will not thrive. However there is to date no luxury website or community which allows the visitor to navigate through the store, see the current collection on the shelves and drag and drop them into the basket while being advised by a real time e-shopping assistant.

2   Problem

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview and an assessment of the extent to which luxury fashion brands have adopted interactive and social technologies since 2006.

We have addressed this problem through the following research activities:

- A series of in-depth interviews with key informants to understand the why, how and what of luxury fashion brands using different Internet branding activities (here called *categories*)
- A formulation of a framework for characterizing the different types of branding interface categories
- Three empirical studies in 2006, 2008 and 2010 of around 30 of the most well-known brands in order to identify a sample of 15, which could be compared over the four years
- A set of more detailed examples of 'best-business practice' using these categories

The paper will conclude with some recommendations for further development in the way fashion brands might further exploit the opportunities of online interactive and social media.

3 Methodology

16 in-depth, unstructured and open-ended interviews were conducted to support the website observations. In 2006 four interviews with brand managers (Burberry, Mulberry, Tanner Krolle, Jean Muir) were conducted face-to-face and over the telephone. In 2008 nine interviews included brand managers (Fabergé, MCM, Richemont), internet professionals (Limestone, FAST, Microsoft), and fashion website professionals (Skywire, Galle, Winkreative) were conducted face-to-face or over the telephone. In 2010 three interviews were conducted face-to-face with brand managers (Faberge, Chanel, Boucheron). The interviews were conducted to evoke attitudes and opinion of luxury brand professionals in order to collect information based on insider experience and privileged insights. This helped understand the why, how and what of luxury fashion brands using different Internet branding activities [16].

For the framework, the development of categories and subcategories were inspired by observation of actual application of technologies adopted on websites and in parallel checked and validated by comparing with previous observations of fashion brand websites in the literature [9][8][10. The observation of luxury fashion websites were as such not guided by a predefined framework in 2006, but was found to fit into Yang et al. (2008) 8C framework when studies were repeated in 2008 and 2010. Accordingly, we used the 8C framework to inspire a framework for assessing luxury fashion brand websites. In 2010 the subcategories were extended further according to recent advances in technologies including *augmented reality* and *3D* in the category 'Context', as well as *social shopping* and *shopable videos* in the category 'Commerce'. Also, one observation field code was changed, namely the subcategory *syndication* in the category 'connection'. In order to observe syndication in 2008, the two sites shopstyle.com and vogue.tv were selected due to their luxury fashion target market. However in 2010 the syndication phenomenon had exploded, so instead a general measure was used; measuring the brand on www.vitrue.com's social media index, which is an index score comprised of various mentions from blogs, sites, and social network sites.

Longitudinal observations of luxury fashion brand websites were conducted over a two week period in 2006 (of 25 brands), in 2008 (of 30 brands) and in 2010 (of 33 brands, which was validated by a research assistant who initially found a 12% inconsistency in the observation, mainly due to subjective interpretations of the websites and degree of interaction with the site). Following 15 brands were included in all three observations: Burberry, Chanel, Chloé, Dior, Donna Karan, Gucci, Hermes, Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs, Mulberry, Paul Smith, Prada, Ralph Lauren, Valentino, and Versace. The comparison of observations for this study will hence include these 15 brands only. The current study will use relative frequencies of the different 8C categories, but since the total sample size is only 15, we are obviously not going to do any quantitative analysis. Contrary, we shall try to identify especially

relevant and potentially very effective types of categories by giving some 'best-business practice' examples.

4   The 7C's Framework

One of the most recognised frameworks for evaluating brand websites is Rayport and Jaworski's [23] 7C framework. The 7C framework was chosen for this research, as it emphasises the specific role of interface elements as a communication and sales channel between retailers and the customers. In other words, the 7C's are the interface components through which retailers communicate with their customers to deliver the core value proposition the company wants to convey [24].

Rayport and Jaworski's [23] 7C's framework encompasses seven elements that enable the implementation of an effective framework for the online customer interface; context, content, community, customisation, communication, connection and commerce. Each of the seven elements represents a specific component of a web-based system. The authors claim that the success of a business depends on the extent of how well the Cs work together to support the value proposition of the business. The below table outlines the 7C's and their definitions.

Table 1.   The 7C Framework

Interface element	Description
Context	The context of the web site captures its aesthetic and functional look-and-feel.
Content	All the digital subject matter on the web site
Community	The interaction that occurs between web site users
Customisation	The ability of the web site or interface to tailor itself or to be tailored to each individual
Communication	The dialogue that unfolds between the web site and its users.
Connection	The extent of the formal linkages between the web site and other web sites
Commerce	The various aspects of e-commerce, such as shopping carts, security, order tracking etc

Source: Rayport and Jaworski (2001)

Researchers have applied, adapted or extended the 7C framework in several interesting ways. Lee and Benbasat [24] used the 7C framework as a reference framework for their conceptual paper on interfaces for mobile commerce. They proposed an extended framework of 7C to cover the important issues pertaining to m-commerce interfaces: the 2M's and the 7C's.

Georgiadis and Athanasios [25] used the 7C framework to evaluate ecommerce and mcommerce user interfaces. Their paper focused predominantly on five C's: customisation, content, context, community and commerce.

Begalli, Codurri and Gaeta [26] analysed 272 high quality winery websites through an adapted version of the 7C framework: Content, Choice, Context, Comfort, Convenience, Customer services, and Community.

Yang *et al* [27] evaluated how the 7C framework could be updated to include Web 2.0 applications and hence extended the 7C framework with an 8th C, 'Collaboration', and created a reference model for evaluating and designing effective Web 2.0 applications.

Sabouri and Jalali[28] evaluated Web 2.0 application technologies based on the 7C framework and Yang *et al's* [27] 8C framework.

Our aim is to develop Yang *et al's* [27] 8C framework for assessing fashion luxury brands' websites and brand controlled social media platforms.

5 Luxury Fashion Brands' Use of Web 2.0 According to Previous Empirical Research

Empirical research conducted by Siddiqui *et al*.[8], Lacroix and Riley [9], and Seringhaus [10] show that most luxury brands do not have interactive, entertaining or engaging websites and are thereby not meeting consumer's expectations.

Siddiqui *et al* [8] evaluated 14 fashion websites and conducted two in-depth interviews with store personnel. Their research emphasise that consumers express a need for social interaction, two-way communication and a greater level of interactivity online which are not met by luxury brands. They found from consumer interviews and focus groups that visitors are disappointed by the low level of interactivity presented by the websites and further pointed out that *'it is evident that consumer's experience and expectations far exceed the retailer's ability to understand and satisfy consumer need online'* (p4). Siddiqui *et al* [8] concluded that here is a lack of human and social interaction online and that consumer expectations in product and services online are not met by fashion websites.

Lacroix& Riley [9] evaluated 26 fashion websites and conducted 5 in-depth interviews. Their research argued that internet presence is both an opportunity and threat, and recognised that consumers miss the opportunity to be involved in a relationship with a brand. They recommended that the degree of control over the brand may need relaxing so that unmoderated communities are built within the brand's website. *'This would enable the companies to engage in a more unfiltered dialogue with their publics'* (p2). Lacroix& Riley [9] concluded that websites' interactivity features are crucial to internet marketing success, but less likely to be used as a tool for commerce. The reason being, that the Internet would not be able to provide the pleasure experience and social experience of entering the physical store, together with the human contact and service offered.

Seringhaus [10] evaluated 190 luxury brand websites; wherefrom 45 were fashion and leather goods brands. The paper questions the feasibility of recreating the brick-and-mortar store online and recommends that luxury marketers must find a way to use the web to maintain a sense of drama. "*They should innovate not recreate store atmospherics online, but create a seamless integration of on and offline into a complementary experience*" (p16). Seringhaus [10] concluded that differentiation

from competitors online are more difficult as critical points of distinction such as showrooms and store displays, personal selling and service and the experiential touch and feel are currently lacking.

More recently, Kapferer and Bastien [14] stated that luxury fashion brands are facing the Internet dilemma: *"A luxury product can communicate via the Internet, but should not be sold there"* (p207). Their viewpoint is that an Internet strategy is indispensable for luxury brands in the means of communications, advertising and as an experiential tool. But if a luxury product is placed for sale on the Internet, is no longer a luxury product.

6   The 8C Framework

The 7C framework is fundamental in the sense that it can be applied to any type and generation of Web applications whether it is Web 1.0 or Web 2.0 [27]. However Yang *et al* [27] states that collaboration and user-generated content are two closely related elements and two important features in Web 2.0 and therefore updated the 7 C's framework for Web 2.0 applications and added 'Collaborations' as the 8th C. They argue that the 'Community' element is close to their 8th C 'Collaboration', but where 'Community' defines a set of methods and is not related to a specific task or goal, 'Collaboration' is task specific. By extending the 7C's framework Yang *et al* [27] created a reference model for evaluating and designing effective Web 2.0 applications

### 6.1   8C framework applied to luxury fashion brand websites

Table 2 which is adapted from Rayport and Jaworski [23] and Yang *et al* [27] sum up the relevance of the 8C's for assessing luxury fashion brands websites.

Yang *et al's* [27] table "The 7C Framework and the 8C Framework, in the contexts of Web 1.0 and 2.0", describes the meanings and types of Web 1.0 in the first column, and the meanings and types of Web 2.0 in the second column. We have further developed the framework and operationalized the different constructs of Rayport and Jaworski as well as Yang et al to achieve a precise framework appropriate for a direct observation of the luxury fashion brand websites. Hence we added a third column to the framework describing the 8C's applicability to luxury fashion brand websites. It describes via sub-categories how each of the 8C's are relevant to luxury fashion brands and how we can assess the adoption of Web 2.0 on brand websites and brand controlled social media platforms. The framework was applied to between 25 and 33 luxury brand websites in 2006-2010 in order to get 15 observations of the same websites in all three observations. This enables a comparison of how the websites have evolved and adopted interactive and social technologies since 2006.

The following section will evaluate the development of luxury fashion brands' adoption of Web 2.0 categories on their brand website and on brand controlled social media platforms. We shall also provide specific examples of noteworthy developments for each Web 2.0 category.

6.1.1 Context

Figure 1. Luxury Fashion Brands' use of the category 'Context' from 2006 -2010
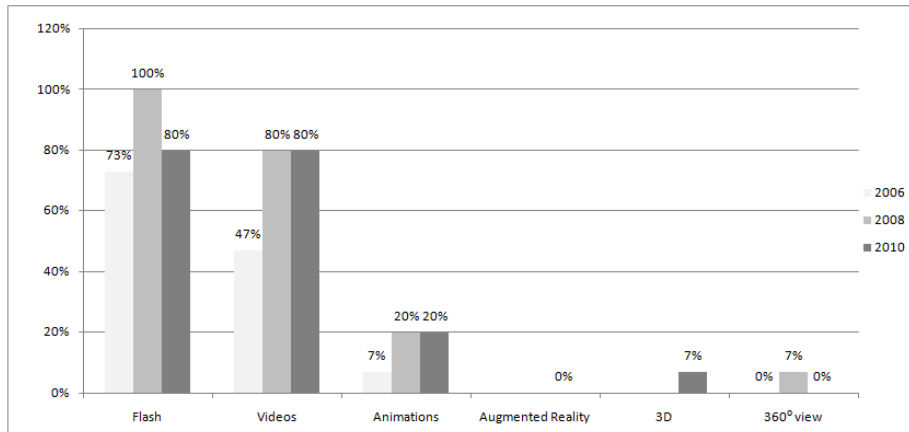
There was a significant change in the use of flash on luxury brand's websites. In 2006 nearly one quarter (73%) of the observed brands were using flash on their websites, and in 2008 all brands (100%) used flash, whereas in 2010 brands started to steer away from flash (80%) again. Flash was traditionally used because of its live and interactive qualities, but is not viewable on iPhones and iPads and are thereby prohibiting the viewer from accessing the sites on these increasingly popular and important devises [29].

About half of the observed brands used video features (fashion shows, brand or campaign videos) on their websites in 2006, whereas the majority of brands did in 2008 and 2010 (80%). The videos are all very stylised and controlled and inherently with no video posts, blogs or interactive videos where the brand can talk directly to fans and customers as examplified on social media platforms (i.e. Burberry's video posts to Likers on Facebook). Burberry furthermore utilised an interactive 3D video on its site where the user could drag the models and products in all directions on screen creating a very engaging and entertaining interaction.

Recently automobile and jewelry luxury brands like Faberge, Tissot, Boucheron and BMW have adopted augmented reality technologies in order to give the shopper the possibility of trying on products, getting a more real-live feel, and making the product come to live on screen. This adoption of technology has however not reached the luxury fashion brands yet. Berta de Pablos, Global Director of Marketing & Communications at Boucheron, talked about her experience with augmented reality, saying, *"You have to start with the brand, not the technology. You have to ask, how can we create the dream of the brand in the minds of the consumers? ..The Internet can be a catalyst of emotions. We experienced that people were intimidated going into our stores, but we wanted them to interact and connect with the brand. Augmented reality allowed for this."*

Photo technology like 3D scanning of products, which are displayed interactively on screen, thus enabling the visitor to turn the product around, as if she had it in their

own hand, is increasingly popular on ecommerce stores. Brands like Nike and Apple, as well as online fashion stores like ASOS and Net a Porter use this technology as it enhances the buying experience and hence conversion rate significantly [29]. None of the observed luxury fashion brands utilised the 3D technology in 2010 nor 360 degree views.

6.1.2   Content

**Figure 2.**   Luxury Fashion Brands' use of the category 'Content' from 2006 -2010
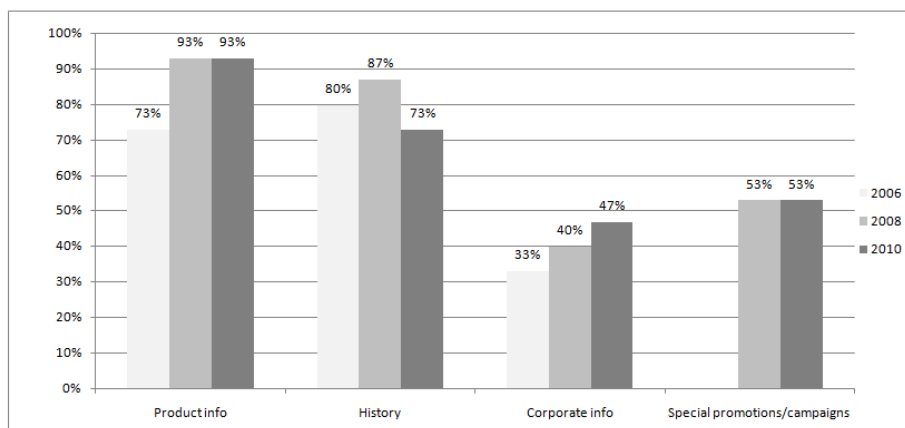
There has been a substantial development of the manner in which luxury fashion brands use product description. In 2006 brands offered very sparse descriptions, sometimes even just product codes. This has changed into a more descriptive lifestyle text where products at best are described as a sales assistant would when a customer enter a physical store; with feelings, atmosphere and a tone of voice which is characteristic to the brand. It is evident that brands with most developed descriptions (i.e. Burberry, Louis Vuitton, Mulberry and Smythson) have a greater digital focus and online turnover.

Traditionally luxury fashion brands focus on their history and timeline and most brands had a section on their website dedicated to history in 2006 and 2008. However in 2010, history did not necessarily have a separate section on the website any longer, it was instead integrated it in their overall communication. On the other hand, few brands offered corporate info in 2006 (33%), whereas it was increasingly offered in 2008 (40%) and 2010 (47%).

Around half of the observed brands from 2006 to 2010 gave space to special campaigns or seasonal campaigns; hence there was no real development in this subcategory. Alexander Galle, Director at Galle would though encourage brands to use the function as a shopping window update. "*Special promotions are what adds newness to the site and makes visitors come back regularly*".

6.1.3 Community

**Figure 3.** Luxury Fashion Brands' use of the category 'Community' from 2006 -2010
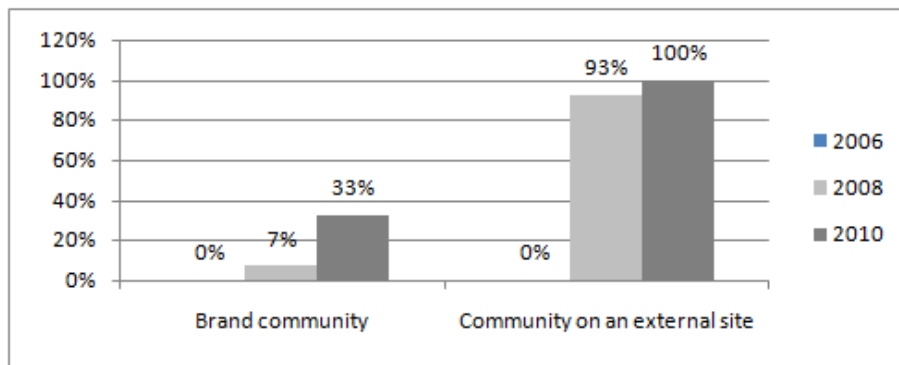
This is the category where there has been the greatest development within the last four years. In 2006 and 2008 there were no own branded community sites, but by 2010 Burberry had launched "Art of the Trench" (in Nov 2009). Gucci had launched "Eye Web" in 2009 and "Gucci Connect" in 2010. Hermes had launched "jaimemoncarre" ("I love my scarf") in 2010 and brands like Mulberry, Paul Smith and Smythson had launched blogs where readers could comment and interact with the brand. Contrary, Ralph Lauren, Louis Vuitton, Jimmy Choo, Dunhill, Donna Karan, Dolce Gabbana and Chanel had launched blogs and news channels without the possibility of commenting – which is inherently contradicting the whole point of blogs.

There were likewise a tremendous development in the way in which luxury fashion brands adopted social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. In 2006 none of these platforms were generally used. In 2008 all the observed brands had videos on Youtube, though not yet through branded Youtube channels, and most brands (90%) had a Facebook account. However these external sites were not managed and utilised very well. Most brands only had a logo as profile picture and nothing else developed in terms of content, pictures and features. Hermes did not even control their own Facebook profile, as there were 280 individuals pretending to be Hermes. Brands like Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren and Dolce Gabbana had around 100.000 Facebook fans, while brands like Burberry, Donna Karan and Mulberry only had around 1000 fans. Burberry had managed to grow this direct fanbase into 3,5million fans in 2010.

All but two (MiuMiu and Victor & Rolf) of the total number of brands observed, had a Facebook profile and nearly three quarters had a Twitter profile. Around half of the brands posted something on their community site every day and around one quarter posted something weekly. Contrastingly, Alexander McQueen, Prada, Tods and Valentino had not taken control of and/or utilised their external community site, leaving the profiles in the hand of spammers.

6.1.4 Customisation

Figure 4. Luxury Fashion Brands' use of the category 'Customisation' from 2006 -2010
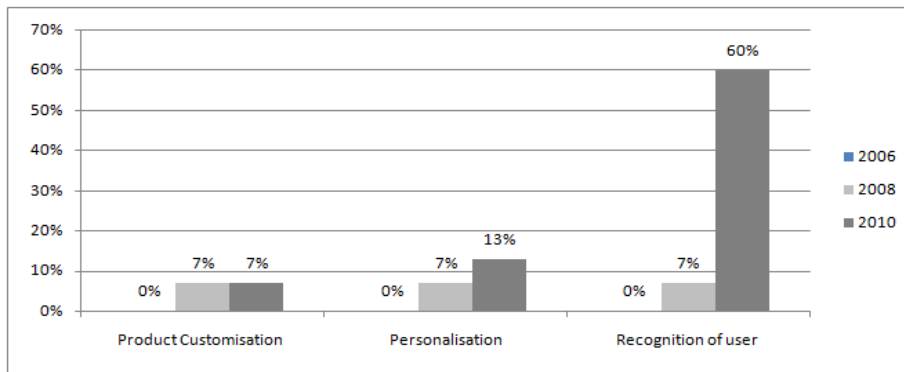

Product customisation and personalisation were the origin of luxury products; it was all about the individual and intimate relationship with the designer, craftsman and the customer. The internet offers the opportunity of connecting with the individual customer in this unique and intimate manner again. There are however very few luxury brands which make use of this opportunity. In 2008 only Smythson and Ralph Lauren offered customisation (where the customer is involved in the design of the product) and personalisation (where the customer can add their initials or personal mark). In 2010, Louis Vuitton also offered customisation on their website and on their Facebook profile.

The technology, which recognises the user, is widely used by ecommerce sites like Amazon (books and consumer goods), Tesco (groceries), New Look and H&M (high street fashion), for offering a personal experience on the website, however it was not widely used by luxury fashion brands. In 2006 no brands offered a "sign in" feature. In 2008 a few of the observed brands offered the feature, whereas in 2010 more than half (60%) of brands offered a "sign up" feature enabling the brands to recognise the visitors who logged in.

6.1.5 Communication

Figure 5. Luxury Fashion Brands' use of the category 'Communication' from 2006 -2010
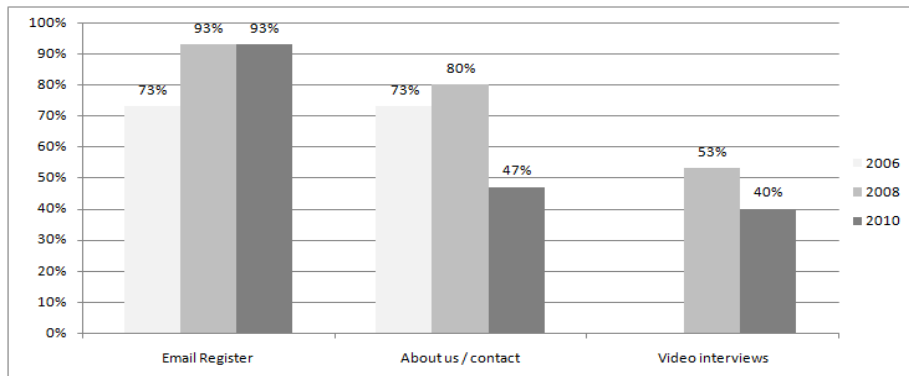

Nearly all observed brands from 2006 to 2010 offered the option of signing up for newsletters. Only Versace did not offer this option of direct communication, which counts for around 10% of traffic generation [30]. What has changed significantly over the four year period is the prominent placement of the "email register". In 2010 the important sign-up button was placed in the menu bar, meaning was clearly visible on all individual sites. Contrastingly, brands are not placing great effort in being transparent by sharing "about us" and contact details. In 2006 nearly three quarters (73%) of the observed brands shared contact details in the form of either phone number, email or postal address. In 2010 less than half (47%) of brands shared "about us" and contact details. Especially brands that didn't offer ecommerce, like Chanel and Fendi, didn't offer any contact details at all.

In 2008 half the brands (53%) used videos as a communication tool showcasing interviews with designers, craftsmen or celebrity ambassadors. Bally, BottegaVeneta, Donna Karan, Paul Smith, Tods, and Victor & Rolf had video interviews or messages from their designers. Ralph Lauren had interviews with celebrities telling about their favourite moments with the brand. Despite video content being hauled as the most important and compelling content in fashion [31][29]. (Okonkwo, 2010; the Retail Bulletin, 2010), the observation in 2010 indicated that fewer brands (40%) are utilising video interviews on their websites.

Martin Mason, CEO at MCM, explained that through video interviews you can get a unique feel for the brand and be invited into the world of the brand. "*Videos give you a different experience to reading; you are living in the visual experience and being entertained, i.e. seeing the way the designer moves, talks and what her personality is like. This is something that cannot be explained in words and something that is exclusive to the website and helps bring it to life*".

6.1.6   Connection

Figure 6.   Luxury Fashion Brands' use of the category 'Connection' from 2006 -2010
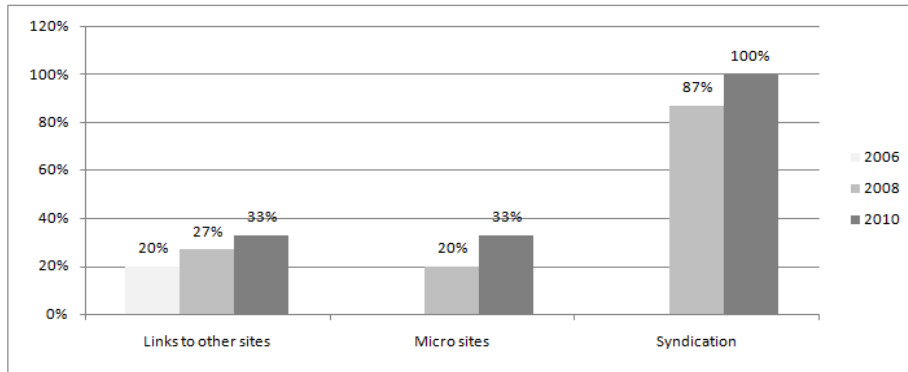

In 2010, brands were markedly linking traffic from their own site to their own social media platforms, increasingly integrating the brand platforms online. They were also increasingly taking control of their own sales channel online instead of linking to third party selling sites like eluxury, Net a Porter, and Neiman Marcus as they did in 2006.

The phenomenon of syndication (i.e. placing branded content or products from own site on other sites) had not emerged in the fashion industry in 2006, but in 2008 the majority (87%) of brands used syndication. However in 2010 the phenomenon had exploded with highest scores achieved by Gucci, Chanel and Burberry, whom also are more active on social media platforms and have many Facebook Likers – meaning many people and stakeholders spread the word of the brand and acted as online ambassadors.

6.1.7   Commerce

Figure 7.   Luxury Fashion Brands' use of the category 'Commerce' from 2006 -2010
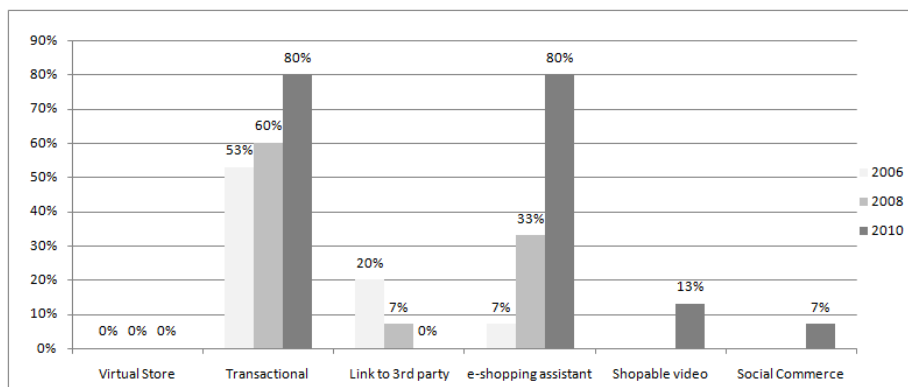
In 2006 a quarter of the brands observed offered ecommerce in the UK and half of the brands offered ecommerce in the US, though the majority only offered a small selection of accessories (only Paul Smith offered a selection of clothes as well). In 2008 more than half (60%) of the observed brands offered ecommerce on US commerce sites. Burberry, Hermes, Paul Smith and Mulberry were amongst the few brands that offered ecommerce to multiple countries. However in 2010 there was a significant difference; more than three quarters (80%) of the observed brands offered ecommerce to US, UK and most of EU. The majority of brands offered both accessories and clothes, except from Dior, Louis Vuitton and Prada who offered accessories only.

There were no virtual flagship stores with immersive and engaging lifelike shopping, as in gaming environments. Though Cartier had a navigational virtual store with a shopping assistant showcasing and explaining the products in 2008, and Tod's had a tour of their Milan store, and Victor & Rolf had a navigational tour of the house, shows, library etc. None of these had the option to actually buy the products on display. In 2010 Gucci launched a "digital flagship store" (PPR, 2010), and Marc Jacobs launched a "virtual store", where the visitors were welcomed by a guy (a drawing), opening the door, and different shopping assistants (drawings), at each product station.

No brands offered a 24/7 real-time shopping assistant either in the form of online chat or video conferencing, as for example luxury jewelry brand Fabergé does. A third of the brands (33%) in 2008 claimed to have shopping assistance via phone, email or a fill-in form. In 2010 the majority (80%) claimed to have shopping assistance available, however when testing Gucci's contact form, it took more than two weeks getting a reply to a product question. It is worth noting that following completing the observation, Burberry did launch online 24/7 real-time chat and call function to their site in January 2011.

Mark Dunhill, CEO at Faberge, talked about bringing the human touch to the online platform, "*the online experience and service needs to be as special as in the physical store. Sales advisors can help retain the emotional and otherworldly experience of the brand and the product...Technology provides the opportunity to entertain and connect with your customer*".

Ralph Lauren offered a shopable video "RL Gang", an immersive storytelling video of kids going to school, where the viewer could click on the clothes in the video and be directed to the chosen product's url where it could be purchased. Many retailers like Barneys, Next and online fashion shops like ASOS sell their collections on Facebook, also called social commerce or Facebook commerce, but only one of the brands observed, Louis Vuitton, offered this function on their Facebook page with completion of sale on their own website. Nevertheless, A third of the observed brands utilised social shopping in a related manner; they added a "share button" next to products on their website enabling the visitor to share the product on his/her social media profiles.

6.1.8   Collaboration

Figure 8. Luxury Fashion Brands' use of the category 'Collaboration' from 2006 -2010
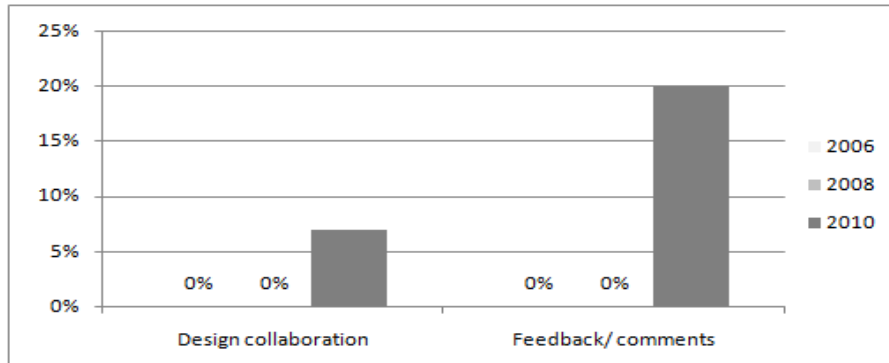
In 2006 and 2008 the luxury fashion brand websites had no elements of collaboration, whether related to design collaboration, co-creation or feedback and comments regarding product development. In 2010 Smythson and Ralph Lauren involved their customers in designing products on their site. At Ralph Lauren customers could design their own Polo shirt (shape, colour, initials, badges etc), and at Smythson customers could design their own stationary paper and have their initials or text engraved in the leather stationary items.

Fendi, Gucci and Marc Jacobs had a function on their websites where visitors could "like" the individual products, which consequently gathered a pool of "likes" and helped other visitors see which products were most popular amongst fellow visitors.

In 2010 the observation of the category *collaboration* was extended to Facebook and Twitter i.e. observing how brands open up for feedback, comments and collaboration on Facebook. All brands with a Facebook profile had posted something on their wall, however only one brand, Smythson, replied to comments on its own posts on Facebook and Twitter, and to customers' posts. Burberry's Creative Director, Christopher Baily, posted a video greeting once a month to Burberry's Facebook fans, wherein he replied to some of the comments, as well as telling the fans how much they meant to Burberry. Similarly, Marc Jacobs's CEO, Robert Duffy, took over the brand's tweets for a month leading up to their fashion show in the autumn 2010. He tweeted some very personal messages about the business, Marc and himself, and posted pictures of the seamstresses, designers, cutters and models, while answering all the tweets he got from followers. Marc Jacobs' Twitter profile grew from a few thousands followers to 75.000 followers in that period of time.

Julie, Internet Retail Development Manager at Chanel, however still had concerns about interacting with fans and allowing their unfiltered feedback: "*It's really difficult to control your brand in the social media. Brands are afraid of what people say and how they interact with the brand. You can only really control the brand on your own website*".

6.2 Key Findings of the empirical research and analysis

Contrary to the previous literature's research findings and recommendations, our findings show that the majority of luxury brands are selling online in 2010 and brands like Gucci, Burberry and Mulberry have full fletched ecommerce sites. Supporting this, Gucci Group recently announced that they are creating an ecommerce division and expect 10% of total turnover to come from online sales [32].

Overall, the findings illustrate that the observed luxury brands have increased their adoption of social and interactive digital technologies since 2006.

The greatest development is within the category 'Commerce' where subcategories *transactional* and *e-shopping assistant* have increased significantly and the new digital tools *shopable video* and *social commerce* have been adopted in 2010. The category 'Collaboration' was not utilised in 2006 and 2008, but have been adopted in 2010, remarkably not on the brand websites, but on the brand controlled social media platforms. Here some brands have started to interact, share, collaborate and receive feedback from consumers. The subcategory *brand community* within 'Community' also show a significant increase in brands' creation of their own communities like Burberry's Art of the Trench. Lastly, the increase of the subcategory *recognition of the user* within 'Customisation' indicates adoption of internet technology which recognises the visitors coming on to the site and the possibility to offer them a customised site experience.

The slowest development is associated with new technologies such as *augmented reality*, *3D*, (within the category 'Content') and *virtual stores* (within the category 'Commerce'). No luxury fashion brands have adopted these technologies, though luxury jewelry brands have. Luxury fashion brands do not either take full advantage of the 'Customisation' and 'Collaboration' categories.

Interestingly, the interviews show an intention to adopt interactive and social Web 2.0 tools even more. The interviewees expressed that there are great opportunities to be harvested in all the categories which will enhance the overall website experience and ultimately support brand experience and sales. Christopher Baily, Burberry's creative director, summed this up perfectly at the S/S 11 fashion show in September 2010 "*We are now just as much a media-content company as we are a design company, because it is part of the overall brand experience*" [33].

Lastly, one could argue that the lack of contact details on the websites and the lack of two-way interaction on websites and social media sites indicate that luxury fashion brands are still cautious and keen to continually control the images and messages they push out to their customers and fans. Interaction does not flow both ways; it is still predominantly a one-way communication, dictated by the brands that are afraid of what their customers and fans might say about them. This is in stark contrast to previous research findings on consumers wishes and wants [8][9] and to how consumers in general are empowered by interactive and social media. Here consumers are defining their own perspective on companies and brands, thus shifting the balance of power from company to customer [17]. Henceforth, luxury fashion brands have to continuously work on creating dream value by providing exceptional experiences online with the help of digital technologies and by interacting with consumers [31].

7   Conclusions

Our revised and extended version of Yang *et al's* 8C framework has proven useful to characterise and asses the development of luxury fashion brands' adoption of Web 2.0 technologies. The framework has been easy to use and there has been high reliability in ratings between the two observers. The highly including framework captures all interaction interfaces of a website; however it does not show the value of the interaction. Further research is needed in order to demonstrate the value and benefits of the different categories for fashion brands.

The study demonstrates a clear growth in adoption of Web 2.0 technologies by luxury fashion brands from 2006 to 2010 and is thereby challenging previous empirical research conducted by Siddiqui *et al.*[8], Lacroix and Riley [9], and Seringhaus [10] which showed that most luxury brands do not have interactive, entertaining or engaging websites. Some of the most interesting developments include the adoption of ecommerce, the establishment of brand communities, and the way in which luxury fashion brands are embracing social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. For example in 2006 Burberry didn't use Facebook, in 2008the brand had 2000 Facebook fans, and in 2010 3,5million Facebook Likers. The sheer volume of fans and consumers in direct contact with the brand has forced and inspired Burberry to put digital innovation and interaction at the heart of its brand strategy [34].

Key insights were also gained from the interviews with luxury brands, which were more digitally advanced. I.e. Berta de Pablos, Global Director of Marketing & Communications at Boucheron, explained that Boucheron had started suffering from being perceived as being old-fashioned, but were able to revive the brand with the aid of interactive and social technology. *"Boucheron is a 150 year old brand, but because of technology we can be a brand of today"*. Likewise Mark Dunhill, CEO at Fabergé, explained that interactive technology provided the brand opportunities to renew contacts with their customers and give them otherworldly experiences. *"Technology provides the opportunity to entertain and connect with your customer"*.

The findings have relevance for practitioners as the revised and extended 8C framework can function as a checklist for any assessment, development and use of fashion brand websites.

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Appendices

Table 2   The 8C framework applied to luxury fashion brand websites

Interface elements	Meaning/Types in Web 1.0(Rayport and Jaworski)	Meaning/Types in Web 2.0(Yang et al)	Applied to Luxury Fashion Brand Website Assessment
1. Context	How the site is organised and how the content is presented to the users. A: Functionalities: layout, performance B: Aesthetics (look and feel): colour schemes, visual themes, graphics	Web 2.0 sites have layouts that are more dynamic. The performance and dynamism increase greatly by the use of i.e. FLASH and AJAX technologies. Graphics and animations. Query and response on e-commerce pages.	Definition*: Importance of beautiful and aesthetically pleasing design. Thiscan be measured by:* **Flash.** Does the site use immersive Flash graphics or e.g. HTML? **Videos.** Does the site have videos of fashion shows, ofproducts, or any brand related material? **Animations.** Does the site use animations to convey the brand? **Augmented Reality.** Does the site offer augmented reality features which either allow to try on the products or offer extra brand experience? (Only for 2010) **3D.**Does the site offer any 3D technology, enabling

			engaging interaction with products, campaigns or other features? **360º view.** Does the site offer 360º view of the products, creating a 'live' and tangible feeling of the products through visuals and product rotation?

2. Content	What is offered by the site?
	    Offering mix is the mix of products and service information on a Web site
	    Appeal mix refers to promotional and communication messaging
	    Multimedia mix deals with the choice of media
	    Content type refers to the degree of time-sensitivity
		Collective Intelligence mix is the new addition which deals with all traditional three mixes with users participating in the generation of the content.
		    This is typical of Web 2.0 applications
			Definition: *Enticing and informative mix of product information and comprehensive brand information. This can be measured by:*
			    Product information. Does the site offer detailed and engaging product descriptions or only sparse information?
			    History. Does the site offer a history section about the brand?
			    Corporate information. Does the site offer corporate information related to the brand?
			    Special promotions / campaigns. Does the site have special campaigns or sections functioning like a shop window which is changed seasonally?

3. Community	Non-interactive communication
	    Interactive communication (instant messaging, message boards, member to member emailing lists)
		Collaborative communication may be enabled via non-interactive and most likely interactive communication mechanisms	Definition: *Communities established by the brand where connoisseurs and fans discuss the brand. This can be measured by:*
			    Own brand community. Does the site have a community section launched and controlled by the brand itself?
			    Community on anexternal site. Does the brand have communities on external social sites such as Facebook, Youtube and Twitter? And how many fans have joined this community?

4. Customisation	Refers to the site's ability to tailor itself (tailoring) or to be tailored by each user (personalisation)	Web 2.0 enables the content of the site to be tailored in a collaborative manner, since the content will be user-generated. The customisation can be done in dynamic manners i.e. with a desktop-like feel	Definition: *Customising the site experience for the individual user. This can be measured by:*
			    Product customisation. Does the site offer the possibility of customising products?
			    Personalisation. Does the site offer the possibility of personalising products i.e. adding initials to a product?
			    Recognition of user. Does the site recognise the users? E.g. is there a "sign in option?"

5. Communication	Site to user communications: Broadcast, Interactive and Hybrid	Site to user communications: Broadcast, interactive, Hybrid and Push/Pull i.e. RSS	Definition: *News, details and communication about the brand including getting behind the scenes. Thiscan be measured by:*
			    Email register. Can the visitor sign up for newsletters on the site?
			    About us / Contact. Is there an "about us" section and contact details for the brand?
			    Video interviews. Does the site have video interviews with the designer, brand owner or perhaps fans of the brand?

6. Connection	Refers to the extent of formal linkages from one site to others: outsourced content, percent of home site content and pathways of connection	Lots of content of external sites may be pulled in the form of blogs, advertisements, mash-ups etc	Definition: *Connection to other complementing sites. This can be measured by:*
			    Links to other sites. Does the site have links to other sites and external sites?
			    Micro sites. Does the brand have sub-sites for i.e. campaigns or special collections?
			    Syndication. Does the brand have syndication of content (products, advertising etc) on other complementing sites? (in 2010 this was measured by Vitrue.com)

7. Commerce	Deals with the interface that supports the various aspects of e-commerce, such as shopping carts, security, order tracking etc	Deals with the interface that supports the various aspects of e-commerce, such as shopping carts, security, order tracking, affiliates and advertisements etc	Definition: *Shopping the brand's products on the website. This can be measured by:*
			    Transactional. Does the site offer ecommerce?
			    Virtual store. Does the site have a virtual store which customers can walk through and purchase from?
			    Link to third party. Does the site have links to other sites which sell the brand's products?
			    e-shopping assistant. Does the site have a shopping assistant in the form of live chat, telephone line or live video advice?
			    Shopable video. Does the site have videos where customers can shop from? (only in 2010)
			    Social commerce. Does the brand offer ecommerce on their social media platforms like Facebook or Youtube?

8. Collaboration	Generally in the form of feedback forms, forums, and bulletin boards	Refers to the sites ability to provide users with interface and services to carry out high degree of collaboration, such as collaborative editing, project management etc	Definition: *Collaborating and opening up for comments and feedback from fans and customers. This can be measured by:*
			    Design collaboration. Is it possible to collaborate with the brand on either the brand site or on Facebook?
			    Feedback & comments. Does the brand allow comments and does it interact with customers on brand site or on Facebook?

Source: Author

Table 3 The 8C framework 2006

Source: Author

Table 4 The 8C framework 2008

	The 8C's																								
	Context				Content				Community		Customisation			Communication			Connection			Commerce				Collaboration	
	Flash	Videos	Animations	360 view	Product info	History	Corporate info	Special promotions/campaigns	brand community	community external site	Product Customisation	Personalisation	Recognition of user	Email Register	About us / contact	Video interviews	links to other sites	micro sites	Syndication	Virtual Store	Transactional	link to 3rd party	e-shopping assistant	Design collaboration	Feedback/ comments
Burberry				3 photos						1 Youtube video 2 Facebook: 2000 fans									shopstyle		26 countries		shop from catwalk		
Chanel					Sparse			Mobile art		1 Youtube video 2 Facebook: 67,000 fans									incl RSS						
Chloé					Sparse	only pictures											NaP		vogue.tv shopstyle			NaP			
Dior		of product on catwalk		4 photos						Youtube video									vogue.tv				phone email		
Donna Karan					Sparse					1 Youtube video 2 Facebook: 350 fans						designer			vogue.tv shopstyle						
Gucci										Facebook: 71,000 fans						craftsman-ship/ inspiration	corporate site		vogue.tv shopstyle				email		
Hermes										Facebook: 4000 fans											selection				
Louis Vuitton				2 photos				soundwalk heritage etc		1 Youtube video 2 Facebook: 40,000 fans	video & text but cant order online								vogue.tv		UK & US		phone		
Marc Jacobs					Sparse			special items	employee travel photos	1 Youtube video 2 Facebook: 65,000 fans						employees			shopstyle						
Mulberry				3 photos				Kelsey		Facebook: 600 fans								Kelsey	vogue.tv shopstyle						
Paul Smith				3 photos						1 Youtube video 2 Facebook: 19,000 fans									shopstyle		US, UK, Japan				
Prada								Fallen Shadow		1 Youtube video 2 Facebook: 80,000 fans							Foundations		shopstyle						
Ralph Lauren				3 photos						1 Youtube video 2 Facebook: 155,000 fans	polo	monogram on polo	login			w celebrities	to micro sites	RL.TV style guide restaurants	vogue.tv shopstyle		US + Mcommerce		email and phone		
Valentino				3 photos			on corporate site	petale collection		Youtube video							corporate site		vogue.tv shopstyle		US		email		
Versace										1 Youtube video 2 Facebook: 32,000 fans									vogue.tv shopstyle						

Source: Author

Table 5 The 8C framework 2010

Source: Author