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Disrupting Heritage

A Qualitative Study of how Luxury Fashion Heritage Brands are Perceived by
Brand Public Members During a Rebranding

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Abstract

- Title:** Disrupting Heritage: A Qualitative Study of how Luxury Fashion Heritage Brands are Perceived by Brand Public Members During a Rebranding
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- Keywords:** Heritage Brands; Brand Publics; Evolutionary and Revolutionary Rebranding; Burberry; Gucci
- Thesis Purpose:** The aim of this study was to determine in what manner a luxury fashion heritage brand can rebrand from the perspective of brand public members.
- Methodology:** In line with the relativist and social constructivist stance taken in this study, a netnography of posts and belonging comments on the Instagram accounts of this study's two example companies, Burberry and Gucci, was conducted. A thematic analysis was applied in order to extract meaning from the brand public members' perceptions from the comments retrieved.
- Theoretical Perspective:** Using theories about brand identity, brand image, consumer perceptions, consumer attitudes, brand heritage and heritage brands, rebranding, consumers' adaptation to change and brand publics, a general understanding of aspects connected to rebranding a luxury fashion heritage brand was developed. In order to analyse the empirical material and add new insight to the research field, key theories were selected and included in a conceptual framework. Some of these theories were challenged as current actions in the luxury fashion industry indicated that further knowledge could be added.
- Empirical Data:** The netnography was conducted through an in-depth examination of posts and belonging comments on the Instagram accounts of Burberry and Gucci.
- Conclusion:** It was found that a luxury fashion heritage brand can be perceived in a number of ways during the process of a rebranding. Both Burberry's and Gucci's rebrandings withheld both critique and praise, but were eventually and seemingly accepted by the brand

public members on their Instagram accounts. In contradiction to existing theories, it was further found that small changes to a brand's identity can render large reactions. Moreover, consistency might not be as vital for heritage brands as previously proposed. These insights indicated that luxury fashion heritage brands can act more boldly from the perspective of brand public members. This conclusion was connected to the digital environment of brand publics, which seemingly allows for an increased ability for heritage brands to undertake changes and for brand public members to share their opinions.

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1.0 Introduction and Problematisation

The marketplace today is a battlefield for brands and strategic priorities are thus constantly changing. In order for brands to sustain their appeal and stay relevant in this dynamic environment, they need to renew themselves once in a while (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007). Stuart and Muzellec (2004) state that this renewal of brands is called rebranding, which is a strategy used by companies to alter their identity and thereby image.

Rebrandings have been particularly evident in the luxury fashion industry lately, where famous brands such as Burberry, Celine, Rimowa, Saint Laurent, Diane Von Furstenberg and Gucci have adopted a more modernised look (Ma & Theodosi, 2018; Walker, 2018; Royce-Greensill, 2016). Ma and Theodosi (2018) report that the newly rebranded fashion brands increasingly reject their past. Moreover, the current rebrandings of luxury fashion brands have further revolved around targeting millennials and thus adopting a more digitalised strategy (Petey, 2016; Danziger, 2017). In addition to an enhanced digital presence, a renewal of overall style and design is also evident in the recent rebrandings (Royce-Greensill, 2016; Richardson, 2018). Walker (2018) reports that luxury fashion brands are increasingly adopting a more similar look, which has been evident in the recent rebrandings. Brands such as Burberry, Rimowa, Saint Laurent and Diane Von Furstenberg have all altered their logo within the past few years. The previous logos were in italics and differed in the use of fonts, whereas the new logos are heavier and bold with similar fonts (Walker, 2018). Ma and Theodosi (2018) support the reasonings of Walker (2018) by concluding that a homogeneous look is dominating the luxury fashion industry today.

The recent rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry have mainly revolved around heritage brands (Walker, 2018). Heritage brands hold a prominent position within the luxury fashion sector as those kinds of brands top the lists of the most successful brands in the industry (CorD, 2017). Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) state that heritage brands are brands that not only have heritage and history, but also incorporate it into their current brand identity and positioning. Heritage brands are further characterised by their continuous strive for consistency in terms of brand elements and timelessness (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). Heritage brands more specifically consist of five elements: *track record*, *longevity*, *use of symbols*, *history as important for identity* and *use of symbols*, which together constitute 'brand stewardship' (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). Brand stewardship is a manner of steering and maintaining brand heritage and the concept unites all of the five heritage brand elements. As the five elements of heritage brands reveal, heritage brands should be maintained through consistent use of recognisable symbols and the incorporation of history. With the characteristics of heritage

brands in mind it is strange that many heritage brands within the luxury fashion industry seem to do exactly the opposite of what Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) are proposing in terms of maintaining a heritage brand.

However, there are differing views as to how a brand should manage their heritage over time. Some state that brands need to change their identity as time passes in order to keep up with competitors (Wiedmann, Hennigs, Schmidt & Wuestefeld, 2014). Wiedmann et al. (2014) further argue that a brand can alter its core values, brand identity and brand meaning. Nonetheless, Wiedmann et al. (2014) also mention that it is important for a brand who's success rely on their heritage that the heritage is preserved. A heritage brand should however keep up with trends and innovations in order not to be perceived as 'old' (Wiedmann et al., 2014). Here, the question can be raised of how much of the heritage that remains if the brand has changed all of these aspects. On the other hand, Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) state that the product or its positioning can benefit from modification in order to remain relevant, however, only to the extent that the underlying values of the brand meaning stay the same. When discussing consistency for heritage brands, Hakala, Lätti and Sandberg (2011) stress how the core values included in the brand identity should never be changed, even though it can seemingly appear as beneficial due to market influence or trends.

In addition to luxury fashion heritage brands neglecting consistency in their recent rebrandings, they further seem to go against some of the traditional fundamental ideas of branding, for example in terms of brand equity. Keller (1993) defines brand equity as the marketing effects uniquely attributable to the brand, meaning that the outcomes occur due to marketing from a certain brand name. If the same product or service was marketed but by another brand, the effects would be different. Moreover, Netemeyer et al. (2004) further elaborate on brand equity by stating that one of its core facets is uniqueness. Uniqueness is concerned with the degree to which consumers perceive a brand as different from competing brands. If a brand is regarded as unique, a price premium can be charged in the marketplace (Netemeyer et al., 2004). In the current fashion climate, the reasonings of Keller (1993) and Netemeyer et al. (2004) concerning uniqueness seem to be disregarded since many of the recent rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry seem to involve brands looking the 'same' at first glance, as mentioned by Walker (2018).

The recent rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry can be described by the reasonings of Stuart and Muzellec (2004) who state that the overall motivation of a rebranding is for a brand to send a signal to the marketplace communicating that something has changed about the organisation. With this in mind, the changes made to various luxury fashion heritage brands

recently can all be categorised as rebrandings (Petey, 2016; Danziger, 2017). Change of name, logo and slogan are the three elements evident in corporate rebranding (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). There are further different kinds of rebranding, revolutionary and evolutionary rebranding, which are evident on a continuum (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). These are decided upon in regard to how many of the three elements name, logo and slogan, that are changed (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). When only one element is changed it is an evolutionary rebranding whereas a revolutionary rebranding is the result of all elements being changed simultaneously (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). What further distinguishes evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding is that evolutionary rebranding, in contrast to revolutionary rebranding, rarely get noticed by outside observers as it, according to Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), involves fairly minor developments. The recent rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry have not involved changes of all brand symbols in terms of name, logo and slogan. Nevertheless, these rebrandings have generated a lot of attention (Armin, 2018; Hope, 2017; Petey, 2016).

As the climate for luxury fashion heritage brands seems to be changing, this indicates that there is a need for further research. More specifically, it would be of interest to investigate the viewpoint of people dedicated to the brand as they are the receivers of the rebrandings. Thereby, this study's research gap is partly concerned with the need to gain insight into the seemingly odd behaviour of luxury fashion heritage brands, from the perspective of receivers. In this research, the receivers are defined as members of a 'brand public', an online media space where people post individual expressions instead of forming a common identity as in brand communities (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). The members of a brand public are a relevant focus of research as they express their individual reactions online. As they tend to share individual expressions online, which is of absolute importance to take account of today, their perceptions can be of interest to study when researching opinions about a luxury fashion heritage rebranding. The research gap in this study is further established with influence from the reasonings of Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), who state that by questioning already existing theories, and thus identify something 'strange', it is possible to not only fill a theoretical gap but to provide new perspectives on a phenomenon. Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) further mean that finding a gap in literature can be a part of constructing a research question, but in order to contribute with interesting points, one must challenge the underlying assumptions of existing theories. This study challenges the theories regarding heritage brands, presented by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007), and more specifically the brand stewardship model in terms of the demand for consistency. As mentioned, the elements in brand stewardship model are permeated

by consistency and the recent rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry seem to increasingly break consistency across these elements. Moreover, we acknowledge the fact that it is proposed by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) that modifications to products might be needed in order to stay relevant but only to the extent that the underlying values of the brand meaning remain the same. However, this study investigates whether the brand meaning actually can be changed due to the alternations of products but also more important brand symbols such as logo, as it is evident that the recent luxury fashion heritage brand rebrandings have involved such changes and received a lot of attention. There must be a reason for all of these heritage brands to suddenly feel the urge to alter their brand identity, and more specifically, their brand symbols and overall styles. This study further questions whether the reasonings made by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) concerning the fact that evolutionary rebrandings often go unnoticed by the public, as it seems as if those kinds of rebrandings cause a lot of attention from various stakeholders. In order to investigate the paradoxical fact that luxury fashion heritage brands urge for changes despite the alleged importance of consistency, as well as to see if minor changes as in evolutionary rebrandings might have larger consequences than believed today, the perceptions shared in a brand public about rebrandings of heritage luxury fashion brands hence need to be studied.

1.1 Research Question and Purpose

This research means to investigate what kind of perceptions in a brand public that can arise when a luxury fashion heritage brand rebrands. The aim of this study is to determine in what manner a luxury fashion heritage brand can rebrand from the perspective of brand public members. In order to fulfil the aim of this study, the meanings derived from perceptions shared in a brand public about rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands must be reached. By reaching these meanings, a deep understanding can be generated of brand public members' acceptance towards the rebranding of luxury fashion heritage brands and more specifically whether these individuals find value in innovativeness or if the brand is perceived more negatively due to the increasing removal of heritage. The following research question was constructed in order to investigate this research phenomenon further: *How is a luxury fashion heritage brand perceived by brand public members during a rebranding?*

1.2 Limitations

Since this research means to investigate the perceptions shared in a brand public when a luxury fashion heritage brand rebrands, the decision was made to investigate comments on social media where individuals can express themselves openly and explicitly. Moreover, social media is an accessible platform for us as researchers and can further provide rich content due to its vital role regarding self-expression in today's society (Boyd, 2010; Dugan, 2012). However, this has also limited this study as it only considers reactions online and does not involve offline environments where questions are posed to individuals, as in the case of interviews for example. Moreover, the research only investigates the perceptions of brand public members at the time of the rebrandings, rendering future perceptions, opinions and loyalty towards the brands uncertain. Furthermore, this study only investigates heritage brands in the luxury fashion industry since the phenomenon of rebranded heritage brands is highly apparent in this particular industry. Nevertheless, as visuals, designs and symbols are highly important in this industry, it was considered to be an industry of relevance due to the previously mentioned elements of brand heritage. In addition to limiting our selection to brands in the luxury fashion industry, only two brands were selected for analysis. While this decision might have limited our wide understanding of the research phenomenon, it was simultaneously possible to derive deeper meanings from fewer examples.

1.3 Aimed Contribution

By investigating perceptions shared in a brand public about rebranding luxury fashion heritage brands, there are a number of aimed contributions. This study aims to contribute with new knowledge to previously mentioned challenged theories presented by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007), Stuart and Muzellec (2004) and Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), as well as to the notion of brand publics by investigating perceptions regarding luxury fashion heritage brands' rebrandings. Moreover, the concept of heritage brands is a fairly under-researched area as well as existing research of heritage brands mainly being from a managerial perspective and does not consider the perceptions and perspectives of outside publics (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007; Banerjee, 2008). Nevertheless, some research exists regarding heritage brands and brand heritage from a consumer perspective but these are mainly quantitative studies (Hakala, Lähti & Sandberg, 2011; Wiedmann et al., 2014; Rose, Merchant, Orth & Horstmann, 2016; Pecot, Merchant, Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2018). By fulfilling the purpose of this study, we aim to contribute to existing theories concerning heritage brands and rebranding through

providing deep insights regarding how brand public members perceive rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands.

Secondly, this research also aims to provide managerial contributions. As previously stated, a great number of the most successful clothing brands in the world are luxury fashion heritage brands (CorD, 2017). Due to the rising trend of rebranding such brands, it could be of benefit for companies and managers of heritage brands to be aware of how brand public members perceive this type of rebrandings. Moreover, it is important to investigate what implications it could bring for their brand image as brand public members are highly visible on brands' online platforms. This research could also add knowledge as to how companies and managers can manage brand heritage in relation to rejuvenating their brand. Hence, this research aims to provide insight into the perceptions shared in a brand public, enabling companies and managers to consider these when formulating rebranding strategies for heritage brands.

2.0 Theory

The following section presents the theories that constitute the theory chapter and backbone of this research. The theories included concern brand identity, brand image, consumer perceptions, consumer attitudes, brand heritage and heritage brands, rebranding, consumers' adaptation to change and brand publics, as they reveal the foundations and the complexity of rebranding a heritage brand. Theories exploring the consumer perspective are incorporated due to them being highly linked to the notion of brand publics. These consumer theories can provide a perspective useful for understanding the behaviour of individuals in a brand public environment. In the last section, a conceptual framework is presented where it is accounted for which key theories that are used when analysing the empirical material.

2.1 Brand Identity

In the recent rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry, it is evident that these rebrandings have made alterations to one or several aspects of the brand. The subject of brand identity must be investigated further in order to comprehend what aspects of the brands that have been changed and what that could mean for a brand's identity.

According to Kapferer (2012) there has been a major shift from brands only focusing on their brand image, to also acknowledging the importance of having a strong brand identity. In today's turbulent and competitive market, a powerful identity is what truly can separate a brand from others; the identity can thus function as a brand's DNA. The brand identity is also where the brand can deliver its brand meaning, self-image and aim (Kapferer, 2012); this definition of brand identity is what will constitute the view on brand identity for this research. Kay (2006) states that it is important to stay consistent in order not to create different meanings of the brand amongst consumers. Moreover, all marketing and communication meanings as well as tactics must reinforce the meanings of the brand's identity to remain consistent (Kay, 2006). Nonetheless, Keller (1999) means that marketing activities should evolve and stay creative, but similar to the view of Kay (2006), that the brand meanings should always shine through. There are a number of definitions of the elements that a brand identity consists of (Burmman, Riley, Halaszovic & Schade, 2017; Kapferer, 2012); even if they differ, they usually involve aspects such as brand values, personality and internal competencies. However, none of these definitions regarding brand identity will be elaborated on further in this study, since the focus of this research relies on identity aspects more specifically connected to heritage brands. However, as this study adopts a view of brand identity as concerned with delivering brand meaning, self-image and aim, brand identity needs to be considered when discussing rebranding as the brand

meaning can change during such a process. In this research, the concept of brand identity will be used for gaining a greater understanding of consistency and how it is perceived by members in a brand public.

2.2 Brand Image

In the rebrandings of the previously mentioned luxury fashion heritage brands, there are clear indicators that these brands altered aspects of their brand identity. However, in order to further understand how this was perceived by brand public members and how that later reflected on brand image, the concept of brand image needs to be further explored.

Brand image is by Keller (1993) defined as “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory” (p. 3). These associations are further built upon three pillars: attributes, attitudes, and benefits (Keller, 1993). Biel (1992) means that there are both soft and hard associations to brands. Hard associations might relate to more functional and tangible aspects, such as user-friendliness or quality. Meanwhile, soft associations involve more emotional elements, meaning for example trustworthiness or enjoyment (Biel, 1992). Moreover, a brand’s image can be divided into three categories, labelled subimages by Biel (1992). One aspect of a brand’s image is the corporate image, which can be further explained as the image of the provider of the product or service. Another aspect of a brand’s image is the image of the user, meaning the customer consuming the product or service. The final subimage of brand image is the image of the product or service (Biel, 1992). Hence, brand image is about how the signals that the brand exhibits are interpreted and decoded by consumers (Kapferer, 2012). These various elaborations on brand image provide insight into consumers not only perceiving one aspect of a brand, but several. This is relevant for this study as the recent rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry have made different changes to their brands, which thus can have various outcomes for how the brand is perceived by brand public members.

It is further stressed by Keller (1993) that a brand image needs to be cohesive in order for consumers to form solid associations about the brand, and that inconsistent associations can lead to confusion and the formation of alternative and weaker associations of the brand. According to Keller (1993), there are a number of benefits related to having a strong brand image. If a consumer holds positive attitudes towards a brand on behalf of its image, it is more likely that the consumer would pay a premium price for that brand. Also, due to a positive brand image, consumers would be more likely to seek out the brand as well as be more receptive to marketing communications from that brand (Keller, 1993). As theories regarding brand image clearly state that having a positive brand image is beneficial for a brand, it is of absolute essence

for a brand to continuously keep track of how a brand is perceived. It might be even more vital to do so after changes are made to a brand since perceptions may have changed, which further strengthens the importance of investigating perceptions shared in a brand public after a rebranding.

There should always be a connection between brand identity and brand image according to Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000). Thus, if a gap is detected between the meanings that a brand wants to convey and the associations that consumers get when being exposed to the brand, this gap needs to be closed. Here, two possible solutions would be either to alter brand identity, or try to change the 'faulty' brand image that reflects upon consumer associations (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000). The concept of brand image is vital in this study as the focus of this research is concerned with the perceptions of brand public members. Moreover, the theories regarding brand image and an unwanted brand image could provide insight into how brand public members perceive alterations to a brand and if there is a gap between a previous and a new brand image.

2.3 Consumer Perceptions

In order to comprehend brand public members' viewpoints on rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands, it is necessary to first investigate the foundations of consumer perceptions as members of a brand public often are consumers according to Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016). According to Kotler and Keller's (2008) model of consumer behaviour, perceptions belong to the consumer psychology category. Perceptions are defined as "the process by which we select, organize, and interpret information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world" (Kotler & Keller, 2008, p. 104). It is further argued that in marketing, the way consumers perceive the brand is more important than how the brand sees itself, as the consumer perceptions lay the base for consumer actions. Kotler and Keller (2008) present three processes of perceptions. Firstly, *selective attention* regards the stimuli that people choose to see and the stimuli that are ruled out. It is impossible to have everything in mind that we are exposed to every day; therefore, the mind excludes certain things. This also implies that brands need to catch the attention of consumers in order not to be excluded. Another way to process perceptions is by *selective distortion*, where people use their previous or current perceptions in order to interpret new things. For example, a consumer perceiving new information about a brand would tend to fit the already established image of that brand; a commercial can seem more positive to a consumer if they already like the brand. Lastly, Kotler and Keller (2008) present *selective retention* as the final process of perception. This process is about what information is kept in

memory and what tends to be forgotten. Like selective distortion, selective retention enables a person to reinforce the already perceived image of a brand by remembering positive things about that brand (Kotler & Keller, 2008). The theories regarding consumer perceptions are vital to involve in this study as they revolve around how people interpret new information about a brand, and especially in relation to what they have perceived before about said brand. Therefore, these theories about consumer perceptions are of interest in this research as they are useful when investigating perceptions shared in a brand public during rebrandings where brands alter brand elements. Moreover, the theories regarding perceptions play a role for understanding the later developed attitudes towards brands.

2.4 Consumer Attitudes

In order to comprehend the opinions that brand public members form about brands, there is a need to also incorporate the notion of consumer attitudes in this research. These opinions can be called attitudes, which are described as “a person’s relatively consistent evaluations, feelings and tendencies towards an object or idea” by Kotler, Armstrong and Parment (2011, p. 149). According to Fill (2013), attitudes are often formed as a result of previous perceptions and experiences and can be regarded as the action of one’s thoughts. Attitudes can be divided into three components: the *cognitive* component, *affective* component, and the *conative* component. The *cognitive* component involves the way in which a person learns about a product and what beliefs they initially form about that product and brand. The *affective* involves what affective reactions that a product or brand causes, for example emotions or sentiments. Consumers can form preferences for brands, for example by becoming emotionally attached to a product or brand or because of past experiences. Lastly, the *conative* component revolves around the intended or actual behaviour of the consumer. Out of these three components, the affective component seems to be the most significant for forming attitudes according to Fill (2013). Attitudes can also be formed against not only products and brands, but the message itself. Attitudes towards a message can later also reflect on the overall attitude about the brand (Fill, 2013). Moreover, it can be very difficult for a consumer to change attitudes, and in particular for marketers to change the attitudes of consumers (Kotler, Armstrong & Parment, 2011). Kotler, Armstrong and Parment (2011) therefore suggest that companies do not try to change the attitudes of consumers, but adapt to the attitudes that already exist. In this research, these studies concerning consumer attitudes contribute to the understanding of forming opinions. However, since these opinions are retrieved from a specific point in time, the time of the rebrandings, they can be considered to be more linked to consumer perceptions as they might

not be fine-grained attitudes yet. On the other hand, the notion of consumer attitudes is beneficial to incorporate in this study as individuals might hold attitudes about the brand before the rebranding, which are more permanent and thus might affect their opinion of the rebranding.

2.5 Brand Heritage and Heritage Brands

In this study, heritage brands and its related concept of brand stewardship are important aspects to involve since they can function as tools for understanding the core of luxury fashion heritage brands today. Aaker (2004) recommends that companies go back to their roots and acknowledge their history and what that history has meant for their future success and positioning; this is called brand heritage. Furthermore, it is stressed that corporate brands often have more brand heritage than product brands, and that it is an important asset for those companies (Aaker, 2004).

A heritage brand is a brand that not only has history and heritage, but has chosen to involve that heritage into their current brand identity and positioning (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). History and heritage are differentiated as history being concerned with the past, and heritage regarding the past as relevant for both the current and the future. Thus, heritage brands are “about both history and history in the making” (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007, p. 7). Another term related to heritage brands is brand stewardship, which is considered to be a manner of steering and maintaining brand heritage, as well as a sort of measurement of the brand’s quotient of heritage. There are five components on which a heritage brand is built and by which it can be recognised: *core values*, *track record*, *use of symbols*, *history important to identity*, and *longevity*. These components constitute what Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) call brand stewardship. *Core values* is an aspect that is highly important for heritage brands since it is firstly important for brand identity (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). Moreover, a company’s core values can function as promises to its customers, and also lead their position both internally and externally. A company’s *track record* is the actions of the company that reflects how well they have kept said promises over time. This is vital for a heritage brand as they aim for consistency, but also to gain trust from their customers. The *use of symbols* can be in terms of logos or styles in order to reflect the brand identity of a company. These symbols do not only signal what brand is behind the symbol, but can also reflect the values and mission of the company (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). In a study by Pecot et al. (2018) it is stated that the logo of the heritage brand can have great meaning for how the brand is perceived by customers. Since a great number of the luxury fashion heritage brands have altered their symbols during their rebrandings, it is further interesting to investigate what kind of perceptions

that can arise when altering the logo or another symbol important to the brand. The fourth component of brand stewardship concerns history. All brands have history; however, heritage brands also consider *history important to identity* in the past, present and future (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). Their history and heritage are part of their brand identity and positioning, which can also be visible in a potential product. The final key element for a heritage brand is *longevity*, which is considered by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) as a measurement of the consistency of the other elements of brand stewardship. According to the authors, even though a heritage brand does not have to be older than two generations, timelessness is still of essence for a heritage brand (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). In this research, brand stewardship plays a vital role in our view of what constitutes a heritage brand. As previously stated, a lot of rebrandings have taken place in the luxury fashion industry. The brand stewardship model functions as a tool in this research for identifying which rebranded brands that are heritage brands.

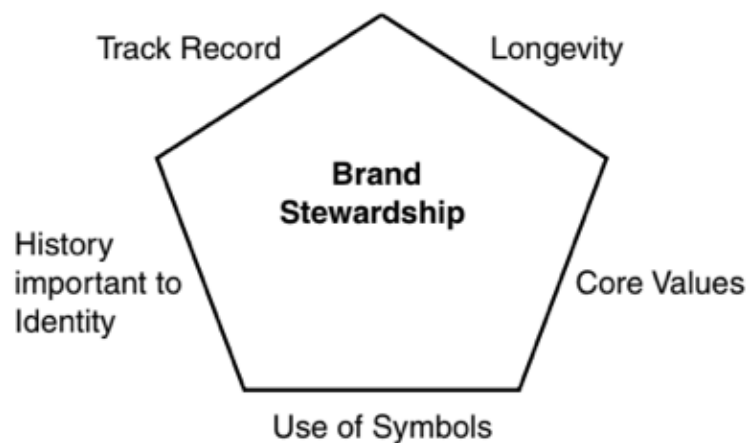


Figure 1: The Brand Stewardship Model (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007, p. 9)

According to Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007), there are a number of benefits connected to embracing a brand's heritage. Firstly, being a heritage brand can increase the brand value, since it can provide, for example, a feeling of credibility for the customer. Secondly, to incorporate heritage into the brand identity can also provide a more unique positioning compared to competitors. According to Hakala, Lätti and Sandberg (2011), a brand stressing their heritage can function as a safe point in life for consumers that experience fragmentation or uncertainty. Finally, a heritage brand can also display legitimacy in terms of relationships, for example with employees or stakeholders, who would allegedly support the company (Urde, Greyser &

Balmer, 2007). In contrast to these stated benefits, it can be argued that a heritage brand, by emphasising heritage, might not be modern. As previously mentioned, there are a number of different views on how much a heritage brand can change. According to Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007), there is no rule stating that a heritage brand cannot both embrace heritage and aim to be up to date, but changes should not affect the underlying values of the brand meaning. Since there are contrasting views in terms of how much a heritage brand can alter in terms of important brand elements in order to remain consistent in incorporating their heritage as well as stay up to date, this study attempts to further investigate in what manner a heritage brand can rebrand from the perspective of brand publics.

Despite the large role of the steering of branding elements in heritage brand literature, this is not the focus of this research as we are not taking a brand management perspective. As stated by the heritage brand theories, being perceived as a heritage brand holds a number of benefits. Regardless of this fact, the current rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry involve some of the elements of heritage brands being altered. Since the aim of this research is to determine in what manner a luxury fashion heritage brand can rebrand from the perspective of brand public members, these theories are of essence for understanding aspects of heritage brands and how members of a brand public react to their alterations.

2.6 Rebranding

In order to understand how brand public members might react to rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands, the concept of rebranding, and more specifically evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding, must be scrutinised as these theories reveal the foundation and different forms of rebranding. Stuart and Muzellec (2004) state that rebranding is a strategy used by companies to change their image. Rebrandings can be the result of different shifts internally in the organisation, or of various turns in the marketplace or in society. Stuart and Muzellec (2004) further explain that the overall motivation for corporate rebranding is concerned with sending a signal to the marketplace and thus communicate to stakeholders that something about the organisation has changed. Corporate rebranding is more specifically concerned with three elements, which are change of name, logo and slogan (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). These three elements are further evident on a continuum, ranging from a revolutionary to an evolutionary rebranding. An evolutionary rebranding is the result of when only one of the elements is changed, whereas a revolutionary rebranding is concerned with all the elements being changed simultaneously (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) provide a different definition of rebranding by stating that a rebranding concerns when an

organisation creates a new name, term, symbol, design or combination of them with the aim to develop a differentiated position in the minds of stakeholders and competitors. Moreover, a rebranding can be triggered by four broad categories of changes: a change in ownership structure, in corporate strategy, in competitive conditions, or in the external environment (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) also elaborate on the concepts of evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding. According to Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), evolutionary and revolutionary are the two fundamental dimensions of rebranding. By focusing on the degree of change in positioning and marketing aesthetics, Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) provide a model as seen below, demonstrating the scope of evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding.

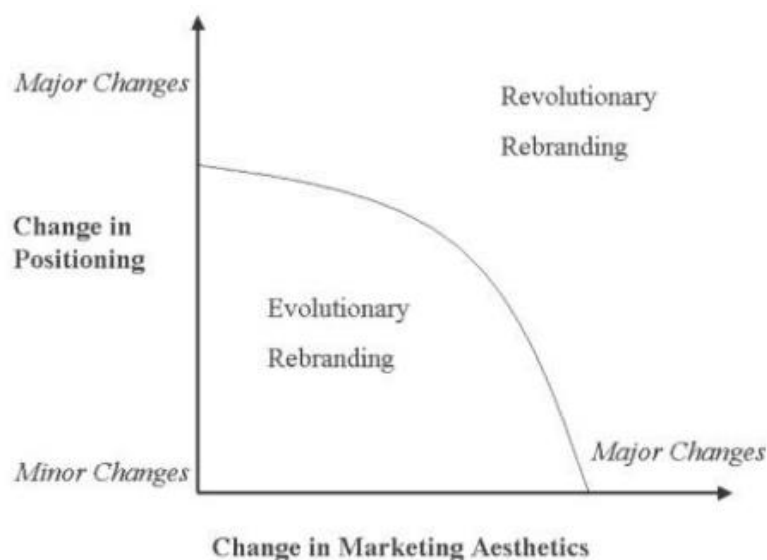


Figure 2: Evolutionary and Revolutionary Rebranding (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 805).

According to Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), evolutionary rebranding is hardly perceptible to outside observers as it concerns fairly minor developments that take place gradually in a company's positioning and aesthetics. Revolutionary rebrandings on the other hand fundamentally redefine the brand due to major, identifiable changes in positioning and aesthetics (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). As the recent rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry have been different, it is of relevance in this study to understand them further by using the concepts evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding. Moreover, regardless of rebranding type, the recent changes made to luxury fashion heritage brands have caused a lot of attention from stakeholders, and we thereby want to further investigate whether both evolutionary and

revolutionary rebrandings might get noticed by brand public members. This since visual elements are especially important in the luxury fashion industry, 'simple' changes might also have a large impact on the perceptions of brand public members.

The two concepts of evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding have a prominent role in this study as they involve different manners of rebrandings, as in the case of the earlier mentioned luxury fashion heritage brands. Thereby, these two concepts can function as a tool to identify what kinds of rebrandings that have been evident in the luxury fashion industry. Regardless of the degree of a rebranding, rebrandings always involve change and as this study is concerned with brand public members' perceptions, it is of importance to not only be aware of how these kind of rebrandings are defined according to these theories, but also how brand public members perceive and adapt to them.

2.7 Consumers' Adaptation to Change

As previously mentioned, rebrandings involve changes (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Therefore, it is of essence to investigate how people can adapt to change and innovation. Harvey and Broyles (2010) state that change is concerned with the movement from one state to another, to become or do something different. There are endless motivations and circumstances that drive change; nevertheless, change rarely happens spontaneously. Change has since the beginning of time been inevitable. However, in the twenty-first century it seems as if the intervals of relative stability are getting shorter and the frequency and duration of periods of change are increasing (Harvey & Broyles, 2010). Harvey and Broyles (2010) further state that the natural response to change is resistance. In regard to resistance, Rogers (1995) states, in accordance with Harvey and Broyles (2010), that it is difficult to get new ideas adopted, regardless of obvious advantages. This notion of adopting change might help the understanding of the various perceptions shared in a brand public, as they might hold different prerequisites for accepting change. Rogers (1995) more specifically elaborates on innovations; these are described to be ideas, practices or objects that are perceived as new by individuals, which have been apparent in the recent rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry. When an innovation becomes available, a long period of time is often required until it is widely adopted as the perceived newness of an innovation determines an individual's reaction to it. Thus, individuals do not adopt an innovation at the same time (Rogers, 1995). There are five adopter categories that reflect the differences in individuals' rates of adoption. The five adopter categories are: *innovators*, *early adopters*, *early majority*, *late majority* and *laggards*. These categories range from individuals most adoptive to individuals least adoptive to change where *innovators* are the ones with the

lowest rate of adoption. As these five adopter categories emphasise that consumers adapt differently to change, they might be of importance in evaluating whether perceptions are constant or evolving during a rebranding. Furthermore, it would be of interest to investigate if these perceptions evolve in order to deeply understand the perceptions of shared in a brand public in relation to rebranding luxury fashion heritage brands.

The theories presented by Rogers (1995) has traditionally in the marketing literature been applied to consumer adoption of products. However, as Rogers (1995) state an innovation is not only concerned with products but also new ideas and practices. As mentioned, rebrandings involve something new, for example a new idea or practice. Rogers (1995) notion of adopting change is therefore relevant in this study despite its past connection to new products. Since this study aims to deeply understand the perceptions of brand public members during a rebranding of a luxury fashion heritage brand, we must be aware of the prerequisites that can be held when being exposed to something new, which Rogers (1995) theory allows for. Moreover, the theories regarding adaptation to change further guide this research in terms of understanding how brand public members can react to rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands. To take part of those reactions, it is necessary to know where brand public members share their opinions about the rebrandings and as well as to further examine their behaviour.

2.8 Brand Publics

The concept of brand publics is of great importance for this study as it can contribute to an understanding of the behaviours of individuals in an online context. In today's society, most companies and brands have social media accounts as they mobilise consumers (Gendron, 2017). As these online accounts drive attention and interaction, it is a natural place to look for individual perceptions and attitudes. To succeed with one's marketing and deliver brand meanings it seems to be necessary to be present and established on social media (Dugan, 2012). Furthermore, Boyd (2010) stresses that it can be beneficial in these times when social media becomes more and more important in the everyday life of people, that the dynamics and expressions of publics online can give insight into how and why people choose to engage themselves.

According to Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016), the concept of brand communities can be present online in the forms of organised groups connected to brands on, for example, chat rooms, forums, or websites. The concept of brand communities is defined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (p. 412). These groups share common

rituals, a shared idea of knowledge and thinking, and a moral responsibility towards other brand community group members (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In contrast to the overall goal of a brand community, which is concerned with a shared identity, most people are nowadays using social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter both to post own content but also view and participate in material that others post (Dugan, 2012; Boyd, 2010; Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). To be present on social media does thus not however mean that all visitors on a brand's social media channel are part of the same brand community, but that they can create value around brands individually (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). On social media, the aim does not have to be to form a commonly and socially constructed identity around a brand, but to do so individually through individual expressions and opinions (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). This behaviour of self-expression belongs to brand public members, where the motives for this type of communication can be seen as affective and not interactive (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016; Zappavigna, 2011).

There are three major differences between brand communities and brand publics. Firstly, members of brand publics do not need to interact with each other such as brand community members do; they only participate in commonly mediated messages and mirror the evident themes in discourse. Secondly, brand publics care more for mediation than communication in terms of messages. The members can respond to a post or message by, for example, retweeting it, but not responding to the original post. Thus, brand publics involve individual expressions and not primarily interaction with other members. Finally, brand public members do not share a common identity, such as in the case of brand communities. In contrast, they contribute with a number of identities and share own perspectives where the aim is not to form a mutual identity or equal values (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). The theories regarding brand publics motivate the relevance of researching the rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands by retrieving comments on social media. By investigating the perceptions and individual expressions in a brand public, this can potentially provide answers to how these people react to the rebrandings and what the rebrandings mean to them. Since this study concerns the individual perceptions shared in brand publics on social media where individual opinions are expressed in contrast to a shared discourse, these individuals are not considered to be part of a brand community. Moreover, the interaction between members in brand publics is of less importance as this study is concerned with the investigation of individual perceptions and emotions. Thereby, the researched individuals are defined as members of a brand public and not members of a brand community.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

As previously mentioned, the aim of this study is to determine in what manner a luxury fashion heritage brand can rebrand from the perspective of brand public members. Some of the presented theories are included due to them providing a greater understanding of the different aspects of rebranding a luxury fashion heritage brand. Firstly, theories about brand identity and brand image are included in order to comprehend how brands portray themselves, but also to understand how brand public members perceive the associated brand meanings, especially during a rebranding when alterations of these brand meanings might have been done. Secondly, theories about consumer perceptions and consumer attitudes are of importance to understand as they could reveal how a brand can be perceived during a rebranding, in relation to previous brand perceptions and attitudes. Thirdly, the stated general theories about heritage brands and brand heritage function as a tool in this research as a manner of understanding the core of heritage brands, and more specifically luxury fashion heritage brands in today's market. Moreover, these theories provide guidance for identifying luxury fashion heritage brands whose rebrandings can be used for retrieving perceptions shared in a brand public. Lastly, the elaboration regarding what constitutes a rebranding provides the reader with an understanding of what the motivations behind a rebranding might be. Hence, these mentioned theories are not further elaborated on in the analysis as they solely serve the purpose of providing an understanding of the research phenomenon and all of its aspects. However, in order to analyse the gathered empirical material, key theories are included in a conceptual framework (see figure 3). By using these key theories in the analysis of the empirical material, it is possible to add new insights to the research field. Moreover, these theories and thus the conceptual framework is put in a digital context, as that is where brand public members operate, in order to understand how this environment might play a role for the perceptions about and acceptance towards the rebrandings as well as the function of the key theories in such a context.

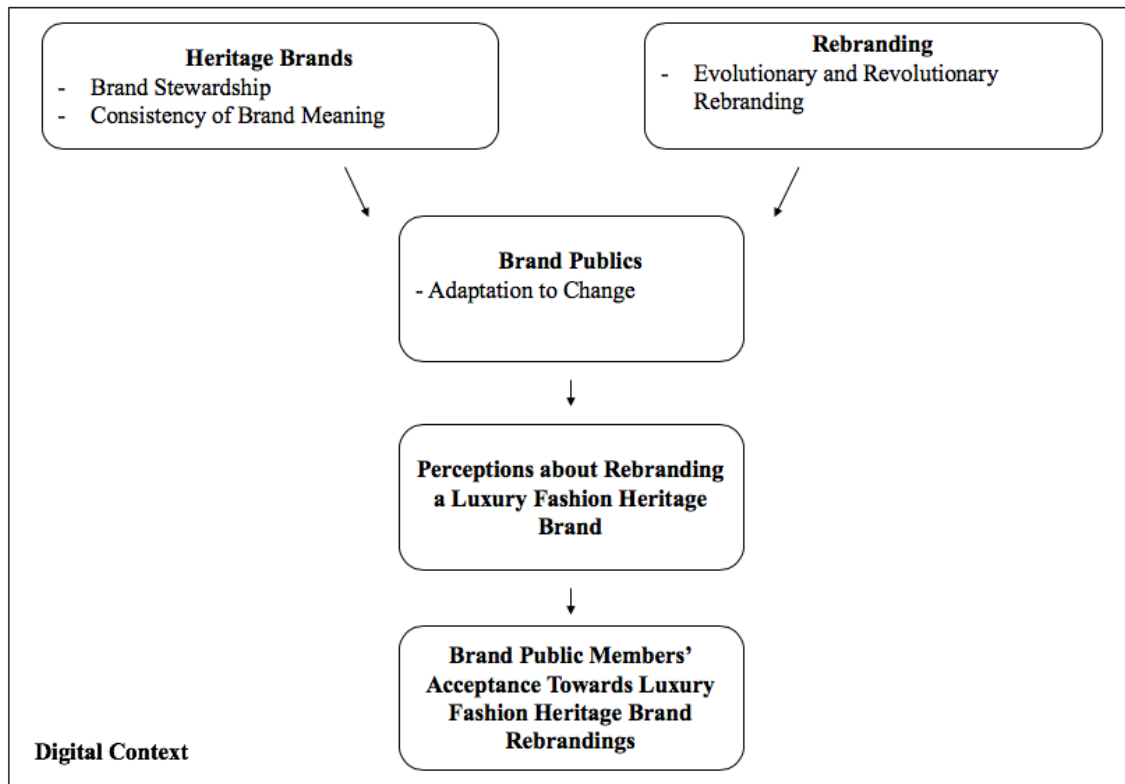


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

Firstly, the specific model of brand stewardship presented by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007), as well as the notion of a heritage brand keeping a consistent brand meaning during changes of their products, are as previously stated challenged in this study due to the changing behaviour of luxury fashion heritage brands. In addition, the theories about evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding discussed by Stuart and Muzellec (2004) as well as Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), are also challenged because of the different market behaviours in the luxury fashion heritage brand industry. These theories are not only a part of the conceptual framework due to them being challenged, but also as aspects of them concern the topic of discussion in the empirical material. Secondly, in order to retrieve relevant perceptions, theories about brand publics are included as brand public members tend to express individual opinions about brands and not involve themselves in a shared discourse or a commonly created identity. It is further of essence to investigate how brand public members adapt to change as the topics in the empirical material of this study is associated with change and perceptions during a rebranding process, which leads to the two last parts of the conceptual framework. The third step involves the perceptions which are the unit of analysis and thus viewed from the perspectives of the previously mentioned key theories in the conceptual framework. These perceptions generate an understanding of how luxury fashion heritage brand rebrandings can be perceived and thus leads to the last step. The

final step is the stage where this study contributes to the research field, as it accounts for what can be learned from investigating the perceptions of brand public members in connection to rebranding a luxury fashion heritage brand. In conclusion, with support from the earlier stages of the conceptual framework, the brand public members' acceptance towards these kinds of rebrandings adds to existing theory as they help to determine in what manner a luxury fashion heritage brand can rebrand from the perspective of brand public members.

3.0 Method

In this section, the methods used in this research are accounted for. Firstly, our scientific approach and methodological stance are presented. Secondly, the method for collecting the empirical material, netnography, is described and motivated. The next part regards different selections made in this study: the selection of examples of luxury fashion heritage brand rebrandings, selection of online platform, and selection of empirical material. Fourthly, the method of analysis and its process in this research is accounted for. Furthermore, in the next section we discuss the quality criteria as well as ethical concerns. Finally, the limitations of the applied method are elaborated on.

3.1 Scientific Approach

This research emphasises the value of people's interpretations and different perspectives. Therefore, this study is in line with a relativist ontology and a social constructivist epistemology. In a relativist ontology, reality can be viewed from a number of perspectives where no single truth exists (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), which was especially apparent in this study by the choice of including examples of luxury fashion heritage brand rebrandings (see section 3.4.1) where a number of perspectives are evident. Moreover, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) state that knowledge is generated through different experiences between individuals, as well as various perspectives of individuals within a social constructivist epistemology. This study was conducted in accordance with these scientific stances by putting emphasis on the various perspectives of different individuals and through that generate knowledge. The research process was guided by the acknowledgement of various truths and that these truths are socially constructed and given meaning by individuals' discourse. This is evident by our analysis of the gathered empirical material where brand public members' perceptions serve as the source for the reached conclusions.

3.2 Qualitative Studies

In line with the scientific approach of this study, a qualitative approach was adopted. Moreover, the qualitative approach further enables this study's ambition, which is to gain a deep understanding of the perceptions held by brand public members in relation to the rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands. A qualitative approach is characterised by its generation of rich data about a certain phenomenon (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), which is suitable for this study as it seeks to contribute with deep rather than generalisable knowledge. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) further state that the researchers are more visible

in qualitative research than in quantitative. Our voice as researchers permeates the whole study but is particularly evident in the analysis, as this part of the thesis is guided by our interpretations of the empirical material. This is appropriate in qualitative studies where rich material is gathered, because it is necessary that the researchers add their own interpretations in order for the data to generate as much meaning as possible (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Furthermore, Eksell and Thelander (2014) state that an abductive stance indicates that both theoretical and empirical material is used to reach a conclusion. This study has applied an abductive stance through the constant alternation between theory and empirical material in order to explore the phenomenon of brand public members' acceptance towards rebranding luxury fashion heritage brands. As stated in the last part of the theory section, the presented theories are used for different purposes. In relation to our abductive stance, some theories are more present than others for generating a conclusion. The theories that are used for the analysis of the empirical material are, as seen in the conceptual framework (see section 2.9), theories about heritage brands rebranding, adaptation to change, and brand publics. By viewing the empirical material through the perspective of these theories, the theories work as tools for the generation of new knowledge regarding the perceptions shared in a brand public about rebranding luxury fashion heritage brands and from this determine in what manner a luxury fashion heritage brand can rebrand. The constant alternation between theory and the empirical material is further evident by our challenging of the theories concerning brand stewardship, the importance of keeping brand meaning, and evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding.

3.3 Netnography

Netnography is similar to ethnography but adapted to the study of online communities (Kozinets, 2002). The method enables the observation of people and their social and cultural lives by using the internet as a tool (Berg, 2015). Kozinets (2002) states that netnography is suitable for getting insight into naturally occurring behaviours. The method is further characterised by being naturalistic and unobtrusive, and allows for continuous access to individuals in a specific online context. The continuous access to individuals' expressions is made possible by the material being publicly available on online platforms (Kozinets, 2002). Consumers are increasingly using online platforms to share ideas, build communities, and interact with each other (Kozinets, 2002). As this research is concerned with capturing, and through that investigating, perceptions shared in a brand public online, netnography is an

appropriate method since the use of this method allowed us as researchers to get a natural access into individuals' expressions online.

However, conducting a netnographic study involves challenges. Berg (2015) brings up the complexity of navigating through these forums as they hold endless amounts of information. Due to this, it might be difficult to find relevant and rich material (Berg, 2015). Nonetheless, this challenge was during our research mitigated through a careful selection of online platform and empirical material, which is further motivated in sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3. Other methods, such as interviews for example, would involve the participants being aware of them being studied. This knowledge might result in inauthentic responses from the participants, which is why interviews and similar methods would be less appropriate for the aim of gaining natural and candid responses, as this study seeks. The use of netnography eliminated these challenges as it is concerned with researching accessible online contexts where individuals share their honest opinions. As we were operating as complete observers, which Bertilsson (2014) describes as researchers only interpreting online material without revealing themselves, it was possible to retrieve the perceptions of brand public members without affecting their opinions about the rebrandings. In order to retrieve the perceptions it was necessary to find an appropriate context where individuals in a brand public were discussing ongoing events, which was made possible through the examples described below.

3.4 Selection

3.4.1 The Selection of Examples of Luxury Fashion Heritage Brand Rebrandings

As previously mentioned, examples of luxury fashion heritage brand rebrandings must be reviewed in order to retrieve perceptions shared in a brand public. It was vital for the aim of this research to not only review theoretical material, but also real happenings. Therefore, the two rebrandings of Burberry and Gucci were selected as examples where brand public members' perceptions of rebranding luxury fashion heritage brands could be retrieved. To use examples of such rebrandings was a suitable manner in which it would be possible to see what perceptions that can arise during the rebranding of a luxury fashion heritage brand. Moreover, these specific examples were chosen due to them firstly being concerned with specific events, and secondly due to them shedding light on the rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands and thus having a strong importance for the posed research question. The events of the rebrandings, along with the companies' perspectives of the rebrandings, are presented in the below section in order to provide the reader with a background and an understanding of the rebranding processes.

3.4.1.1 The Background of Burberry's Rebranding

The English luxury fashion heritage brand Burberry was founded by Thomas Burberry in 1856 (Burberry, n.d.). During the 1920s, their classic and legendary check lining was introduced (Burberry, n.d.). At the beginning of the 2000s, the brand experienced trouble due to Burberry being connected to the 'wrong' target group (Hope, 2017). This group of people referred to as 'chavs', which is a so-called lower-class person that wears designer clothes, real or fake. The company responded by hiring Christopher Bailey as creative director. Bailey wanted to make the quite conservative brand sexier and succeeded in innovating the brand, giving it a fresher and younger look. In the spur of their success, they experienced new issues in 2006 where they discovered that their products were copied and sold all over the world, which was harmful for both brand image and revenues. This became the starting point for Burberry's new journey to turn things around (Hope, 2017). In order to increase their performance, Burberry applied a digital strategy in 2006 in order to innovate the brand, as well as to attract younger people (Petey, 2016). Firstly, they started to focus on appearing on social media and using digital marketing, for example by live streaming fashion shows and providing inspiring content (Hope, 2017; Petey, 2016). Secondly, they digitalised their stores in order for the customer to get the whole Burberry experience by combining the physical and digital (Petey, 2016). However, they incorporated their heritage along the way, not losing the core of the brand and what made them initially successful (Hope, 2017).

The above-mentioned alterations of the brand were successful in terms of innovating the brand. However, in 2018 Burberry decided to make more dramatic changes to the core of the Burberry brand (Richardson, 2018). New designs of both logo and pattern were created by Peter Saville, and were revealed to the public in August 2018. These brand symbols differed greatly from the previous, adopting a more clean and modern style (Richardson, 2018). According to Peter Saville "the new logotype is a complete step-change, an identity that taps into the heritage of the company in a way that suggests the twenty-first-century cultural coordinates of what Burberry could be" (Block, 2018). For this study, the rebranding of the logo and pattern in 2018 were considered to be the most interesting to investigate, due to its altering of strong brand symbols and thus brand track record connected to the brand's heritage and identity.

BURBERRY
London, England

Figure 4: Burberry's Logo Before the Rebranding (Armin, 2018)



Figure 5: Burberry Logo and Monogram After the Rebranding (Tay, 2018)

3.4.1.2 The Background of Gucci's Rebranding

Gucci is an Italian luxury fashion heritage brand which was founded in 1921 in Florence (Kering, n.d.). The brand is defined by its Italian tailorship, focus on detail, design and quality (Kering, n.d.). In recent years, Gucci wanted to aim for millennials and thereby had to reinvent the brand to some extent (Danziger, 2017). Like Burberry, Gucci also adopted a more digital approach that incorporated, for example, e-commerce, social media and digital marketing in their business. Even though the digital turn had a large role in the innovation of the brand, the largest influence was according to Danziger (2017) firstly the new CEO Marco Bizzarri who entered the company in late 2014. However, the largest influence was the hiring of the new creative director Alessandro Michele in early 2015. Along with having Alessandro Michele as creative director, some vast changes were made by his team in order to innovate in 2015. Gucci switched their past style icons and symbols of the brand such as Grace Kelly and Jacqueline Kennedy to present celebrities relatable for millennials, like Blake Lively and Rihanna (Danziger, 2017). The decision to get new inspiration was argued by Bizzarri who stated that “if you are constantly inspired by the past, how can you do something modern?” (Royce-Greensill, 2016).

Alessandro Michele made changes to the style and design of Gucci, by Royce-Greensill (2016) called a maximalist and flamboyant approach. He went against the previous trend amongst luxury fashion brands of sticking to clean and minimalist styles; this new collection and future style was the opposite of that and what Gucci's previous track record (Royce-Greensill, 2016). Gucci describes the Autumn/Winter collection of 2015's style as poetic and magical, romantic and colourful (Kering, n.d.). One of the new elements in the new collection was the resurrection of an old version of the Gucci logo from the '80s, called the double G monogram (Royce-Greensill, 2016). Alessandro Michele's choice to incorporate this logo was as such: "In the past, Gucci has been a bit ashamed of its logo, but it should be proud of it as an emblem of 95 years of history. The logo is an incredibly powerful asset for Gucci and it should become as desirable as a leather bag" (Royce-Greensill, 2016).

Due to the aim of this study, focus will be put on the revealing of the new style of Gucci in the collections by Alessandro Michele launched in 2015, since they represent a clear example of a heritage brand undergoing an extravagant rebranding. The investigated collections involve the Autumn/Winter Collection of 2015, and the Spring/Summer Collections of 2016. In contrast to Burberry, Gucci did not alter their logo or classic pattern. However, they attempted to change their positioning by changing their style and designs and thus reaching millennials. The alterations were highly acknowledged by the media (Danziger, 2017; Royce-Greensill, 2016), indicating that it is a rebranding worth investigating from the perspective of brand publics.



Figure 6: Gucci Before and After the Rebranding (The Fashion Supernova, 2014; Phelps, 2015)

3.4.1.3 Motivation for the Selection of Luxury Fashion Heritage Brand Rebrandings

According to Johansson, Jendel and Ottestig (2013), using one or more cases in research can provide a more holistic understanding of the studied phenomenon. Although the examples used in this research are not case studies, they contribute with a background of the rebrandings of the two brands and thus provide a greater understanding of rebranding luxury fashion heritage brands. For this study, the two examples regarding the rebrandings of the luxury fashion heritage brands, Burberry and Gucci, were selected as examples in order to generate a deep understanding of our research phenomenon. Two brands were chosen as they underwent different rebrandings, and could therefore possibly contribute with different insights of the phenomenon. For example, Burberry altered large brand symbols such as their logo and classic pattern, whereas Gucci not only changed their products but vastly altered their overall style of design as well as chose to involve old symbols into their new designs. These two different kinds of rebrandings were considered to possibly render a variety of perceptions amongst brand public members, shedding light upon how different actions from luxury fashion heritage brands can result in various perceptions and opinions. Thus, the two examples were investigated separately. However, some conclusions were drawn during the final stage of this research by comparing outcomes and thereby enabled us to answer our research question. Moreover, the rebrandings of both Burberry and Gucci have, as previously stated, been widely discussed and given a lot of attention by media (Danziger, 2017; Royce-Greensill, 2016; Richardson, 2018; Block, 2018). This further motivates the decision to investigate those two examples, as it implies that the rebrandings might have stirred a lot of emotion amongst brand public members as well. Furthermore, as Burberry and Gucci are amongst the world's ten most successful fashion brands (CorD, 2017), investigating their rebrandings could indicate something that could be regarded as important by the rest of the industry.

The two brands Burberry and Gucci have been regarded as heritage brands. Both Burberry and Gucci have been evaluated in accordance with the brand stewardship model developed by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007). After careful consideration of all elements of brand stewardship in relation to the two brands, it was determined by us as researchers that these luxury fashion brands were also heritage brands, and not only luxury fashion brands with a heritage. Both brands have in the past shown significant consideration of their heritage. The first example company, Burberry, was founded in 1856 in England (Burberry, n.d.). Since then they have shown a consistent track record of their actions, promises, as well as style and product quality. Moreover, in their designs and for the overall brand, they have shown a consistent adoption of brand symbols, for example logo and pattern. As they have always valued and

visualised their English heritage, this is a sign of their history being important for their brand identity. Overall, Burberry has a sense of longevity and thereby consistency in all elements of brand heritage, rendering it a luxury fashion heritage brand in line with the brand stewardship model.

The other example company involved in this study, Gucci, has since 1920 been known for their qualitative craftsmanship and Italian heritage (Pool, 2018). During their almost a century-long journey, they have developed and cherished widely known and significant brand symbols such as logo, patterns and garments. Moreover, their emphasis put on the connection to Italy and well-kept fine craftsmanship shows their dedication to their history (Pool, 2018), which also is an important aspect for steering a heritage brand (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). Furthermore, Gucci has since the beginning strived to achieve the highest quality of their products as well as kept their iconic style until the time of the rebranding, which is a sign of a consistent track record. Overall, longevity is highly apparent in the previous actions of Gucci, since they during almost a decade kept their iconic style, products, symbols, values and track record as important for their brand identity.

3.4.2 Selection of Online Platform

In order to gather relevant data for this research, the decision was made to study an online platform as the internet serves as a place where individuals tend to share their opinions in today's digital society (Kozinets, 2002). The online platform chosen for this research was Instagram as it was deemed suitable for the intention of investigating perceptions shared in a brand public. As mentioned in the theory chapter, the notion of brand publics expressed by Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016) is considered to be an appropriate space to study as the members tend to express individual opinions in an online context. Therefore, it was considered beneficial for this study to investigate comments on Instagram, where people tend to express this kind of individual expressions. The opinions expressed by brand public members are also often more affective than interactive, which suits the focus of this research as we are studying individual perceptions and opinions.

The chosen platform Instagram is a free online space where people and businesses can upload pictures, where followers or friends can view, like and comment on the posts (Instagram, n.d.). On the specific channels of Burberry and Gucci, there is no need for followers to send a following request to either of the companies. Therefore, they are open accounts where everyone can view and comment on the posts, also meaning that it is a platform where a lot of comments can be retrieved. Moreover, it is one of the largest social media platforms today, along with

Facebook and Youtube (Kallas, 2018). The decision to use Instagram instead of the larger platform Facebook, where the same content regarding the rebrandings was posted, was also due to the higher amount of reactions on Instagram in relation to Facebook. Using the example of a post where Burberry presented their new monogram, Facebook got 1,600 likes and 147 comments, in contrast to Instagram where the post with the exact same content received 70,422 likes and 715 comments. These factors lead to Instagram being chosen as the most appropriate platform to investigate the perceptions of brand public members, as it could provide rich material of individuals expressing themselves freely.

3.4.3 Selection of Empirical Material

In order to answer the stated research question, rich data needed to be gathered for us as researchers to generate deep meaning in terms of different brand public member perceptions. As Instagram was chosen as the researched online platform and as this study investigates comments posted by brand public members, it was possible to retrieve comments with rich, explicit and descriptive content as the individuals in the brand public tended to post highly individual and detailed expressions. This type of data was preferred in relation to, for example, gathering short answers in a survey. In order to maintain a high degree of relevance when evaluating posts and comments on Instagram, six criteria guided the selection of the empirical material:

- The posts where the comments were retrieved should contain initial expressions in English connected to the rebrandings of either Burberry in 2018 or Gucci in 2015.
- The posts should consist not only of an image, but should also include text-based communication concerning the rebrandings of either Burberry in 2018 or Gucci in 2015.
- The posts concerning Burberry's rebranding should be published on the official Instagram page of Burberry in August or September 2018.
- The comments concerning the rebranding of Burberry should be posted at approximately the same time as the post itself.
- The posts connected to the rebranding of Gucci should be posted on their official Instagram page in January-September 2015.
- The comments on the posts concerning the rebranding of Gucci should be posted at approximately the same time as the post itself.

There were a number of posts that fit these criteria. All posts connected to the two rebrandings were initially considered, after which a number of posts were selected as the most relevant for

this study. As seen in the descriptions of the selected posts below, the time span between the selected posts differs between Burberry and Gucci. As the two rebrandings differed in character, the decision to choose different time spans for the two brands was made to retrieve as relevant posts and comments as possible. In the case of Burberry, the selected posts are closer to each other as Burberry's rebranding mostly concerned the introduction of the new brand symbols in August of 2018. The posts that were deemed relevant for this study were all posted in relation to this revealing and the products released with the new logo and monogram. In contrast, the case of Gucci involved a rebranding which generally concerned a larger change of style and an introduction of old brand symbols. This resulted in a greater spread between the posts as they were posted in relation to specific collections.

All selected posts contained rich material in terms of comments and likes, indicating a large and varied content. However, the number of posts for analysis was limited to six for each brand, since these posts were considered to be the most relevant for the aim of this study with regard to the criteria, as well because of its richness in comments. As we are interested in researching the depth of perceptions instead of valuing a larger quantity of empirical material, six posts were further considered as a sufficient amount for retrieving empirical material and thus generating a rich analysis. A description of each of the selected posts is presented below:

Burberry

Post 1: 2 August 2018, 70,425 likes, 715 comments.

Post 2: 2 August 2018, 77,237 likes, 1,617 comments.

Post 3: 3 September 2018, 143,868 likes, 962 comments.

Post 4: 13 September 2018, 39,535 likes, 463 comments.

Post 5: 28 September 2018, 55,940 likes, 405 comments.

Post 6: 29 September 2018, 60,415 likes, 222 comments.

Gucci

Post 1: 18 January 2015, 49,237 likes, 318 comments.

Post 2: 21 January 2015, 26,702 likes, 336 comments.

Post 3: 25 February 2015, 26,750 likes, 71 comments.

Post 4: 8 August 2015, 69,992 likes, 1,353 comments.

Post 5: 24 September 2015, 32,344 likes, 328 comments.

Post 6: 26 September 2015, 32,788 likes, 161 comments.

All comments were initially considered as relevant for this study and its aim, and have contributed to the overall impression of what type of perceptions that exist. However, some comments were selected to function as quotes in the analysis section in this study as they were considered to be particularly interesting for the aim of this research. The selection of comments is further elaborated on in section 3.5.

3.5 Method for Analysis

When conducting qualitative studies, a thematic analysis can be a highly useful method due to its ability as a tool for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). Braun and Clarke (2006) further discuss that a thematic analysis can stand on its own as a method of analysing empirical material, without depending on another form of data analysis. Moreover, it can further render rich data for analysis since it is a highly flexible method due to its ability to see patterns in various kinds of empirical material (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research, a thematic analysis was conducted as it was deemed suitable for the aim of investigating the perceptions shared in a brand public regarding the rebranding of luxury fashion heritage brands. In order to fulfil the aim of this study, the themes in the thematic analysis were empirically derived as the research phenomenon is concerned with the perceptions of brand public members. These perceptions are the units of analysis in this study, and have thus guided the thematic analysis and serve as the source for the themes.

There are a number of different manners as to how the method can be used in qualitative research; however, in this research, six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used in order to identify, analyse and report relevant themes. Firstly, we reviewed all comments on the selected posts a number of times in order to familiarise ourselves with the material and look for deeper meaning in the comments. After having familiarised ourselves with the vast material, it was noted what seemed to be the most occurring kind of comments in terms of topic, as well as which comments that seemed most interesting and meaningful for the aim of this study. More specific codes were created for each of the collected comments, defining approximately what they involved and what possible meanings that could be extracted. The primarily selected quotes were chosen due to their perceived relevance in relation to the lingo connected to the theoretical framework of this research, for example comments regarding brand meanings or opinions about the rebrandings. In this step, the method of looking for repetitions mentioned by Ryan and Bernard (2003) was highly useful, as this helped the process in collecting comments which had a common discourse and that together could possibly form larger themes. In order to identify which comments that could be related to each other and form larger themes,

colour codes were created where the codes were given a specific colour used for every comment to notice similarities. In the third step, all seemingly relevant comments had received codes in order to later be able to sort these codes into larger sets of themes. Ryan and Bernard (2003) mean that a theme can be distinguished by answering the question: “What is this expression an example of?” (p. 87) which was applied in this thematic analysis when determining themes. Different codes were combined to a common theme that was a relevant ‘umbrella’ for the codes. Two large themes were created for each example brand, after which a number of subthemes were created in order to explore the complexity of each theme. When having formed a number of themes and subthemes based upon the selection of coded comments, these were reviewed in a fourth step of the process. Here, the established themes and subthemes were compared to each other and evaluated separately in order to determine their relevance for the analysis. Some subthemes were identified as too similar, as well as some not having enough power to stand on their own. In this case, these subthemes were either altered or combined with a similar subtheme. The next step in the process was to label the themes and determine their final meaning. In this step, it was important to consider the meaning of the content within the comments when naming the themes. In this stage, some previous names for the themes were not considered relevant or precise enough, resulting in an alteration of the theme name to fit the deeper meaning of the content as well as providing the reader with a clear idea of the topic. Finally, a number of themes and subthemes were thus established and incorporated in the analysis. The aim of the final step was to create a logical order for the themes in order for the ‘story’ to make sense. For each theme and subtheme, examples of comments were included in order to visualise the deeper meaning of each theme. This process of creating and analysing data is according to Braun and Clarke (2006) not linear, but should be used as guidelines where the researcher can jump back and forth in order to, eventually, determine a proper set of themes for analysis. Due to its flexible character, this method of analysis has allowed us as researchers to investigate and extract deeper meanings from perceptions shared in a brand public without the need for quantifying data and generalising results.

3.6 Ethics and Quality Criteria

3.6.1 Ethics in Netnographies

Research ethics in relation to netnography has long been a topic for debate (Kozinets, 2002). Kozinets (2002) outlines two questions that should be considered by researchers when undertaking a netnographic study: firstly, “Are online forums to be considered a private or a public site?” and secondly, “What constitutes informed consent in cyberspace?” (p. 65). Ethics

in netnography has become a debated issue due to the absent informed consent from participants in netnographic studies, in contrast to face-to-face methods such as ethnographies and interviews where consent is generally given (Kozinets, 2002). Eysenbach and Till (2001) share the same reasonings as Kozinets (2002) by stating that it can be difficult for a netnographic researcher, who is a hidden observer, to determine whether the subjects have given their consent for being used in the study. However, Eysenbach and Till (2001) conclude that if material is posted on a public space, it can be considered as a form of consent. Bertilsson (2014) further describes that it is not necessary with informed consent if the researcher conducts research in a public context online. An online forum is considered public if it does not require any membership or registration (Bertilsson, 2014). As mentioned, this study investigates Burberry's and Gucci's Instagram accounts. The Instagram accounts of these brands can be accessed without any membership or registration. Instagram can therefore be considered a public online platform and thus, in line with the reasonings of Bertilsson (2014) that no informed consent is needed from the individuals who have shared their opinions on the platform. Nevertheless, research subjects should always, in all contexts, be protected and respected (Thelander, 2014), therefore all of the usernames whose comments constitute the analysis of this research were anonymised.

3.6.2 Quality Criteria

Various quality criteria need to be considered when conducting a research in order to reach trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A study is trustworthy when the audience is convinced about the study being worth paying attention to and taking account of. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the traditional quality criteria validity, reliability and generalisability are not appropriate to use in a qualitative study due to their focus on one single reality. Since we as researchers adopt a relativist ontology and a social constructivist epistemology, other quality criteria were deemed to be more appropriate. As a reaction to the traditional quality criteria, Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced four alternative criteria that are more suitable in a qualitative context. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and have been adopted in this study as it is of qualitative nature.

The first criterion, credibility, is reached through the gathering of rich empirical material and having a high degree of transparency when the empirical material is analysed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We have incorporated this through selecting examples of rebrandings that have been widely recognised and thus generated a lot of information to take part of. The example

companies have firstly received a lot of attention from media, which was included in the background descriptions (see section 3.4.1). The rebrandings of the studied companies secondly received a lot of attention from their various stakeholders. As mentioned above, all the posts that met the criteria mentioned in section 3.4.3, were reviewed and thereby all belonging comments were initially examined. The overall recognition the studied rebrandings have received and the fact that all comments belonging to the relevant posts were reviewed, reveal the richness of this study's empirical material. Moreover, in terms of transparency, we have thoroughly accounted for how the empirical material was analysed by taking the reader through the analysis process described in the previous section (see section 3.5).

According to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) second criterion, transferability is achieved through a thick description of a case or unit of analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further state that it is unclear exactly what constitutes a thick description. However, one aspect which enables a rich description is to engage in purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Even though this study does not specifically involve a case study, the example companies were purposely chosen in order to establish the relevance of the rebrandings at an early stage. As we found the examples to be relevant in terms of their scope, we were able to provide a thorough description of them in the background descriptions. With that said, the rich description is not limited to the background descriptions but is continued throughout the study by the constant incorporation of our subjective thoughts regarding the whole research process as well as by providing the reader with the reviewed posts (see appendix A & B).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the next criterion, dependability, greatly relies on the credibility of the study, meaning that a study cannot be dependable if it is not credible. In order to produce a piece of research with sufficient dependability, a study can adopt techniques such as triangulation or having a third party investigate the stated expressions of the participants of the study. Moreover, at a later stage this third party would confirm these statements by contacting the participants. In this study, the dependability has been secured by gathering a rich empirical material and relevant theories. In addition, the comments have been taken directly from Instagram and their context has been described thoroughly. Therefore, there was no need to confirm the brand public members' statements, as they are accounted for properly in this research. Furthermore, with the aim to further provide a dependable study with accurate statements, the reader has been provided with the overall context of the rebrandings from a number of perspectives, creating a deeper understanding of the context in which the comments have been posted.

The final criterion, confirmability, relies on the outcome of how dependable the research is considered to be (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This criterion can also be fulfilled by the audit of a third party where the participants confirm their statements. Since this study was conducted without the direct consent of the participants, this technique was not relevant. However, Heide and Simonsson (2014) suggest that a triangulation of methods can be used in order to conduct a credible study. In this research, the example companies were presented in the background descriptions in order for the reader to fully be able to grasp the rebrandings from another perspective as well. However, this has not been regarded as a manner of triangulating the results, but rather as another perspective considered in the process of portraying the rebrandings. Although the last two criteria are not fulfilled in exact accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations, these criteria are still met through the rich description provided and the use of netnography where the empirical material was retrieved in its original form, without any edit by us as researchers during the collection of them. Moreover, dependability and confirmability are according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) concerned with respondents validating a researcher's material, analysis and conclusions. However, there are various opinions regarding what a respondent validation actually does to a study (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). Some argue that it is a manner of getting as close to "the truth" as possible, which according to Heide and Simonsson (2014) can be problematic with a social constructionist stance as well as in qualitative studies. We agree with Heide and Simonsson (2014) as we are not aiming to find one truth but several, and thereby the last two criteria are not vital for our purpose. With this in mind, we consider this research to be trustworthy.

3.7 Limitations of the Applied Method

There were a number of limitations identified when using these methods for this research. Firstly, by conducting a netnography where the perceptions found in the brand public were 'gathered' and not explained to us by the members of the brand public themselves, it was not possible to further investigate their relation to the brand. It would have been highly interesting to know whether the members of the brand public who were present on the official accounts of Burberry and Gucci were loyal consumers or had other relationships to each of the brands. Another limitation is concerned with us as researchers only being familiar with comments posted in English. If comments were written in another language, Spanish for example, they did not meet the criteria for the selection of empirical material and were therefore not part of the analysis. Moreover, gathering the data as outsiders also render us as researchers highly subjective to the comments, since they cannot be elaborated on by the brand public members.

However, the aim of this study was to take part of the candid comments posted by members of a brand public, which would probably not have been available during, for example, an interview. Moreover, by only investigating the perceptions and reactions in the brand public at the time of the rebrandings, there is little indication of what long-term implications that could arise when rebranding a luxury fashion heritage brand. It could have been interesting to research if these kinds of rebrandings has resulted in a decrease in sales or customer loyalty. Also, by only looking at two examples of these types of rebrandings it can be difficult to know if the results can be applied to other examples of luxury fashion heritage brand rebrandings. However, we approach this limitation by our qualitative approach where the aim is not to generalise results. Finally, only considering one social media platform could be considered as a limitation as other social media platforms might reflect and generate other perspectives. Moreover, it can be discussed whether all comments were visible on the official Instagram accounts of both brands, as the example companies are in control over the comment section. However, this platform was still considered to be the most beneficial for this study, due to its rich data and accessibility as well as the varied content in the comments on both accounts.

4.0 Analysis

In this section, an analysis of the empirical material is presented connecting to the conceptual framework presented in section 2.9. The gathered empirical material, more specifically comments retrieved from Burberry and Gucci's Instagram accounts, is analysed through a thematic analysis. The analysis is divided into two sections, one regarding Burberry's rebranding and the other Gucci's rebranding. Each of the sections consists of two main themes and belonging subthemes with the aim to determine in what manner a luxury fashion heritage brand can rebrand from the perspective of brand public members.

4.1 Burberry's Rebranding

In this section, two main themes with belonging subthemes are presented in order to analyse the collected empirical material regarding Burberry's rebranding in 2018.

4.1.1 Burberry Losing its Heritage

One of the two prominent themes identified in the empirical material regarding Burberry's rebranding in 2018 is concerned with Burberry losing its heritage. This theme reflects a great number of individuals expressing sadness, disapproval as well as confusion towards the changes Burberry made to their brand core. The loss of specifically heritage was central due to many individuals voicing the lack of Britishness, class and elegance in Burberry's new brand symbols. Therefore, 'Burberry Losing its Heritage' serves as one of the main themes. However, subthemes are needed in order to demonstrate the complexity found in the perceptions shared in the brand public. The following subthemes were constructed: 'New Brand Symbols not Honouring the Heritage of Burberry', 'Burberry Copying the Symbols of Other Luxury Fashion Brands' and 'Burberry's Perceived New Target Group'.

4.1.1.1 New Brand Symbols not Honouring the Heritage of Burberry

It was evident when reviewing the comments of the chosen posts that the new brand symbols of Burberry introduced in August 2018 generated a lot of critique from the brand public members present on Burberry's Instagram account. Many individuals expressed disappointment in Burberry for not considering the heritage of Burberry when creating these new brand symbols, more specifically the new brand logo and the new monogram also used as a pattern for products. As seen in the quote below, this individual emphasises the loss of the classic feel of the previous brand symbols of Burberry. The comment concerns the launch of the new logo used for corporate branding as well as for products (see appendix A, post 2).

“Always open minded to change but you lost your brand identity, roots and years of brand building with this new logo. Not the timeless elegance you once were. You’ve lost a customer.” (2 August, 2018)

This quote clearly exemplifies the disappointment experienced by many in that the new logo seems to differ greatly from Burberry’s previous logo that seemingly honoured the heritage of the brand. As the individual perceives that the new logo differs too much from the previous logo and that the brand has lost much of its identity and heritage through this rebranding, they even want to abandon the brand due to the vast changes. The fact that this individual expresses that the changes make them want to leave the brand indicates that this rebranding caused a lot of negative emotion as well as seemingly made people take action. Another quote that clearly displays brand public members’ disappointment towards the new brand symbols is stated below.

“In my opinion this is exactly what Burberry should NOT be doing! Where is the classic sophisticated suave Burberry that we know and love? I’m interested to see the rest of the new collection but dubious! #sadtimes” (2 August, 2018)

This quote concerns the new monogram introduced by Burberry in August 2018 (see appendix A, post 1). In contrast to the previous quote, this individual does not feel as if the changes are so great that they want to abandon the brand. They still feel interested in the new products that will be released showcasing the new monogram, but is still sceptical towards the rebranding and the new brand symbols as they do not reflect the identity of Burberry according to this particular individual. Just as in the previous quote, it is apparent that the rebranding has caused disappointment for Burberry enthusiasts present on Instagram as some truly seemed to cherish the old Burberry and its heritage. Despite the expressed disappointment regarding both Burberry’s new logo and monogram, the following quote expresses a distinction between how Burberry can use the two. Apart from clearly stating the dislike of the new brand symbols, this individual showcases the opinion that the monogram can be used for products but that the old logo can never be replaced.

“This is modern and fresh look, but you know Burberry is was iconic, luxury, with this monogram you lost a luxury, iconic. You can make a new monogram for pocho or scarves whatever but this ICONIC LOGO, i don't think its sure. Your logo can give a

luxury, vintage burberry and iconic too. We love your old logo but not new modern fresh” (3 September, 2018)

This quote concerns the application of the new monogram on a large Burberry store in South Korea, nevertheless the individual also incorporates the notion of the new logo (see appendix A, post 3). This perception implies that there is an opinion that the logo is more important for the brand identity of Burberry than a monogram as this individual stresses that new monograms can be used more freely. Thus, it is clear that the individual, as well as apparent in many other comments in the brand public, thinks that the change of logo is highly problematic. A similar opinion was expressed by this next individual in the post regarding the revealing of the new logo (see appendix A, post 2).

“The previous logo was absolutely better. It was totally British, elegant and classy. The new one fails to represent all of Burberry's heritage. It reminds me the [@ysl](#) new logo. Something different. Not so classic. It's sad. Sorry Burberry” (2 August, 2018)

As a number of brand public members considered the new brand symbols not to represent the identity or heritage of Burberry and showcased strong reactions to the rebrandings, it is of relevance to revise the theories regarding evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding. As mentioned before, Stuart and Muzellec (2004) state that when all brand symbols, name, logo and slogan, are changed a revolutionary rebranding has taken place. In addition, according to Stuart and Muzellec (2004), if only one of the three brand symbol is changed as in the case of Burberry, it is an evolutionary rebranding. Moreover, Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) state that evolutionary rebrandings rarely gets noticed by the outside public as they involve minor changes. The change of Burberry's logo can according to these theories be seen as only involving minor changes as the main thing that is changed is the font, as well as the removal of a comma between ‘London’ and ‘England’. This following quote (see appendix A, post 1), discussing the new logo of Burberry, showcases how the changes to the logo by this individual are perceived as cheap.

“How to Ruin a Classic Heritage Brand, Step 2: cheapen logo.” (2 August, 2018)

Despite the logo being the only aspect out of name, logo and slogan that is changed as well as mainly involving a change of font, it seems like if people are certainly noticing the change and

expressing disappointment and sadness about it. The perceptions retrieved from brand public members on Burberry's Instagram account thus contradict the reasonings made by Stuart and Muzellec (2004) but especially Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) as the change of logo clearly upset the brand public members.

4.1.1.2 Burberry Copying the Symbols of Other Luxury Fashion Brands

In addition to the disappointment about the rebranding of Burberry and the loss of heritage, brand public members on the Instagram account of Burberry also stressed that the new logo and monogram lacked uniqueness. Many seemed to regard the new brand symbols as highly similar to the brand symbols of other luxury fashion brands who currently also rebranded themselves. This first quote reflects the opinion that the new logo looked very similar to other fashion brands.

“So copy paste! No heritage, seen, nothing special, no soul in it, actually anyone can make it with choosing fonts in word office! I feel sorry for all the hard work creators did for this brand in the past and worked hard to make it to the top... What a shame!” (2 August, 2018)

In this and in many other comments on the post revealing the new logo of Burberry (see appendix A, post 2), it was apparent that there is an opinion amongst members of the brand public that there was a disliking of the new logo as well the opinion that it no longer represented the heritage of Burberry. It was common amongst the comments to mention that the logo seemed to be ‘copy pasted’ and too similar to the look of other brands’ logos. This next quote is another example of an individual considering the change of logo to be negative due to it being too alike other logos in the industry.

“I don't like this new logo at all!! It reminds me of other brands.. doesn't look like Burberry.....” (3 September, 2018)

The comment belongs to the post regarding the large Burberry store in South Korea (see appendix A, post 3). Just as Burberry, several other luxury fashion heritage brands have rebranded where many also adopted a quite similar and simplistic look for their logos, as previously mentioned. As the main change made to Burberry's logo was the font, the change could be viewed as minor. However, in contrast to the theories stated by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), this seemingly small change caused a great deal of negative emotion amongst the brand

public members as seen in the quotes, indicating that even such a seemingly small change can have a large impact and thus affect how the brand is perceived. This next quote does not only reflect the opinion of how Burberry has moved on from their heritage by creating their new monogram, but also that they will lose their unique position on the market due to the changes.

“@xx you are absolutely right! #Burberry is moving from the classic British (and quite unique and good selling) style to the “I am doing whatever is on trend nos” style. Very sad thing. #Aquascutum is going to take all the market, I can see that” (2 August, 2018)

Concerning the post where Burberry reveals the new monogram (see appendix A, post 1), this individual stresses how Burberry used to be a classic British brand, but have now become more and more similar to other brands by only following trends on the market, and thus what other brands are doing in terms of brand symbols. The quote further reflects the opinion that brand symbols, such as the monogram, can be regarded as important for the brand identity and heritage of a brand. In addition, the next quote does not only involve Burberry’s rebranding but the overall changes in the industry in terms of altering brand symbols. The post where this comment was retrieved concerns the revealing of the new monogram of Burberry (see appendix A, post 1).

“People will say: This is revolutionary. But EVERY brand is going for this minimalist, streetwear, monogram look. There’s nothing creative, nor unique about it.” (2 August, 2018)

This individual further acknowledges the seemingly creative pattern combinations in Burberry’s new monogram and states that other enthusiasts probably will appreciate it but that it is not unique or creative as the whole industry is moving in the same direction. This quote further showcases the opinion, expressed by many, that several of the brand public members reacted to the homogeneity of similarly looking brand symbols and that this might lead to the loss of uniqueness. Moreover, brands such as Gucci, Balenciaga, Dior and Fendi are brands that Burberry was compared to in the comments. This next quote expressed on the post concerning the new Burberry store in South Korea (see appendix A, post 3) further showcases the comparisons to other brands and how it was not positively met.

“Im a huge Burberry fan/ buyer and I don’t like this at all. Poor choice. Too similar to other designer monogram.” (3 September, 2018)

Due to the many comments and negative responses as to where the market is headed in terms of homogeneity, the question can be raised whether these seemingly simple changes is destroying the uniqueness previously perceived in luxury fashion heritage brands.

4.1.1.3 Burberry’s Perceived New Target Group

Another factor present in many of the reviewed perceptions of the brand public members about the rebranding of Burberry, was the opinion that the new brand symbols had a modern feel and were directed towards millennials and younger audiences. Many individuals expressed that this approach contradicted the previous brand identity of Burberry as it used to be more timeless and adoptive of its brand heritage. The following quote was retrieved from the post regarding the revealing of the new monogram (see appendix A, post 1) and showcases an individual who perceives the new monogram as similar to what other luxury fashion heritage brands have been doing in terms of rebranding their brand symbols, as well as Burberry diverting from their previous brand identity and image.

“@xx i just don’t get why burberry would do something like this just to get to the new generations, i think about burberry like a classic and maybe more conservative brand. don’t get me wrong, the monogram is actually cute and ‘trendy’ but i just don’t see the 2018 hip influencer going trough all the classic trench coats looking for a piece with this design... leave that to gucci” (2 August, 2018)

This individual is seemingly perceiving the rebranding of the brand symbols as an attempt to target new generations and thus audiences. The quote further reflects the opinion that members of the brand public on Instagram could perceive the new monogram as trendy but still reacted against the fact that it did not ‘breathe’ Burberry due to its perceived direction towards millennials. Similar to this person, the next quote visualises one of the many examples of the negative emotions that were generated when products involving the new monogram were released (see appendix A, post 4).

“Millennial bs ☹️I can’t even believe this” (13 September, 2018)

The post visualises a man in a street wear outfit, unlike any product that Burberry has created before. The shirt he is wearing is a regular black T-shirt with a white large monogram. It is clear from the comment that this individual does not find the product or its style to be attractive as they call it ‘bs’, meaning bullshit. As previously mentioned, many of the brand public members seem to perceive this and other products involving the ‘TB’ monogram as directed towards millennials which they do not consider to be typical Burberry ‘behaviour’. This next quote also belongs to the post featuring the man in the monogram T-shirt (see appendix A, post 4) and further reflects the perceived new direction towards millennials as well as disappointment in the change of design and brand symbols.

“@xx it’s sad to see this great British icon shift its approach to a different demographic and target audience - it appears to be aiming its range to the youth. Burberry to me was about classic design, quality materials with exceptional craftsmanship and elegance. This new monogram and brand redesign doesn’t do it for me just yet.” (13 September, 2018)

As in the previous quotes, this individual perceives the new brand symbols as targeted towards millennials. Moreover, they stress that Burberry is not honouring their past and their previous designs by seemingly shifting their focus to new target groups. They also mention that they do not like the new brand symbols, but they also say the word ‘yet’ which implies that they are still open to the possibility of possibly accepting them one day. Since there were so many comments regarding negative emotions concerning the perceived new shifted focus to millennials, it can be pondered if such changes as changing the font of the logo and introducing a new monogram can alter brand public members’ perceptions of what target audience a brand has. In the case of Burberry, changes were made to their brand symbols that have seemingly altered how brand public members think about Burberry’s target group. Once again, the theories concerning evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding by Stuart and Muzellec (2004) and especially Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) are relevant as these kinds of changes seem to not only be noticed by their brand public members on Instagram but can also potentially alter greater aspects such as perceived positioning.

4.1.2 Brand Public Members Adapting to Burberry’s New Identity

‘Brand Public Members Adapting to Burberry’s New Identity’ is another important theme for understanding the perceptions shared in the brand public of Burberry’s Instagram account during the brand’s rebranding in 2018. This theme accounts for the somewhat contradicting

viewpoints in the previous theme as this coming theme mirrors a more positive outlook on the rebranding and the new brand symbols. Since there were a number of different perceptions related to this theme, the subthemes ‘Individuals Expressing Belief in Others’ Adaptation to the New Identity’, ‘Millennials Appreciating the New Identity of Burberry’, and ‘The New Brand Symbols of Burberry Gradually Getting Accepted’ were created in order to properly elaborate on the different perspectives of the brand public members.

4.1.2.1 Individuals Expressing Belief in Others’ Adaptation to the New Identity

Despite the great deal of negative perceptions and emotions regarding the rebranding of Burberry and the inclusion of new brand symbols, there were also a large number of positive perceptions about the rebranding. Some of these positive perceptions arose at the beginning of the rebranding process, but the majority of positive exclamations were showcased in the later stages of the rebranding when the brand symbols were incorporated in product designs. The next quote concerns the revealing of Burberry’s new monogram (see appendix A, post 1) where this individual is quite positive towards the designer Peter Saville’s work.

“Great job, Peter! People will understand in a while, especially if they see the smartness behind the combination with the patterns.” (2 August, 2018)

In addition to this individual liking the design of the new monogram, this quote showcases that this person feels optimism towards others’ adaptation to the changes made. The question can however be raised whether Burberry being a heritage brand matters for people’s adaptation to brand changes as Burberry has kept its track record as well as other aspects of brand stewardship consistent for a very long time. As previously mentioned, Rogers (1995) states that it can take time for people to properly adapt to change. Rogers (1995) also means that the time that it takes for a person to adapt to and accept change depends on the perceived newness of an innovation. In the case of Burberry’s rebranding, many members of the brand public on Instagram considered this rebranding to be far from Burberry’s previous identity, which indicates that the rebranding might be perceived as quite new and therefore might require a longer time of adaptation. However, as the quote indicates, the negative streams might change over time. In the next quote, the opinion is expressed that there is a possibility for luxury fashion heritage brands to profitably change.

“Sometimes changes are necessary in life for survive . Burberry was negative is sales since few years and with this new marketing strategy sales are already improved . Just talking by case : YSL versus SL : the first collection from Slimane no one like it and fashion press as well was very sceptical . Five years later SL is one of thé most désirable brand in thé world . Gucci : When Alessandro Michele first runway was out every one was very shocked. 3 years later Gucci become thé most copied brand from high luxury to low Street Marketing and thé ammount of moneys did were Enough for all rhe Kiering portfolio . Thé point today in fashion is not anymore like or deslike but if is going to sale or not . In any case this logo his going to catch those New Consumer - the new generation. Let’s see how Burberry will be in few years not only in terms of aestetichs but also in terms of turn over.” (3 September, 2018)

As seen in the quote retrieved from the post visualising the monogram on the large Burberry store in South Korea (see appendix A, post 3), this individual exemplifies other brands that have undergone rebrandings. The opinion raised in this comment reflects an optimism concerning rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands as some have been and others might become successful in terms of turnover and sales. The next quote retrieved from the post regarding the man in the monogram T-shirt (see appendix A, post 4) also revolves around sales and how they might be affected by the rebranding. This individual also perceives the situation as optimistic and, as other brand public members have shown in their comments, believes that people will adapt to the change.

“i predict sales will plummet before they head back up. This transition period will impact sales but long term the brand will come through this. Thank God they are not burning and wasting old unsold stock ☹” (13 September, 2018)

The first theme of this analysis, ‘Burberry Losing its Heritage’, centred around Burberry’s brand public members’ perceived disappointment and sadness regarding Burberry’s changed brand symbols. This is perhaps quite expected as Harvey and Broyles (2010) among others state that the natural response to change is resistance. However, the stated optimistic quotes contradict the quotes in the previous theme which is especially interesting in a heritage brand context as they might have the possibility to say something about in what manner a heritage brand can rebrand from the perspective of brand public members. Moreover, the various kinds of perceptions viewed on the Instagram posts show the complexity of brand publics, as they do not involve a common discourse but concern people expressing themselves individually as

mentioned by Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016). As emotional expressions are showcased in brand publics, which do not in any way regard a shared identity with other individuals on the Instagram account of Burberry, all perceptions might be personal and reflect what the individual experiences when finding out about the rebranding.

4.1.2.2 Millennials Appreciating the New Identity of Burberry

As previously mentioned, in the comments posted on the Instagram account of Burberry during their rebranding in 2018, many perceived that the new brand symbols as well as the products that they were applied on were aimed towards youths and millennials. In contrast to the previous section concerning millennials (4.1.1.3), there was a great deal of positive comments towards this perceived new target group and style. However, these positive comments were not as many as the negative opinions expressed on Instagram concerning the new target group. The quote below concerns the applying of the new brand monogram on the large Burberry store in South Korea (see appendix A, post 3).

“I just love it! Thomas Burberry represents the side of the brand that produces much more youth and casual items. This logo is perfect for me!♥” (3 September, 2018)

As previously mentioned, many individuals on the Instagram posts expressed that they considered the new perceived target group of Burberry as a negative direction and wrong for the brand. However, this quote showcases the opinion that this perceived new direction of Burberry was appreciated by some due to the younger and more casual feel of the brand and the new products. Moreover, this individual stresses that this new direction and monogram is representative of the Thomas Burberry, Burberry’s founder, aspect of the brand, which supposedly is connected to youth and a more casual style. It is interesting that this new side of the brand can still be considered to be a ‘true’ part of the Burberry brand as it is new as well as displays a new brand symbol. In addition, this next quote also considers the large Burberry store in South Korea (see appendix A, post 3) and further displays how the millennial part of Burberry’s brand public members seem to appreciate this perceived new direction.

“I love this. Your new branding is everything and the millennials are here for it ;)” (3 September, 2018)

This individual, like the previous quote showcased in this section, approves of the new brand monogram. Moreover, the individuals expressing this opinion seem to extract another brand meaning from Burberry's new brand symbols in contrast to the previously stated perceptions in earlier themes where individuals are more negative towards the lack of heritage in the new direction. This other brand meaning seems to involve a more youthful and casual look for the brand, as well as representing an alternative side of Burberry. According to the theories stated by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) the alteration of a product or its positioning can be relevant for staying up to date, but should still support the underlying values of the brand meaning. However, the perceptions extracted from Burberry's Instagram account during their rebranding indicates that these new products and the brand symbols applied onto them gives a new brand meaning, which is spoken about in a positive manner by the brand public members.

4.1.2.3 The New Brand Symbols of Burberry Gradually Getting Accepted

It was noticed during the review of the empirical material that the new brand symbols seemed to gradually be accepted by the brand public members on Burberry's Instagram account. In contrast to the mostly negative perceptions that arose in the initial stages of the rebranding, there was a clear indicator that the brand public members were adapting to the new brand symbols. This adaption was more apparent in the posts during the later stages of the rebranding process. This is highly visible in the quote below, where the individual is commenting on a post regarding a new bag displaying the new 'TB' monogram (see appendix A, post 5).

“The monogram is growing on me” (28 September, 2018)

This quote reflects the opinion that the monogram grew on many of the brand public members with time, as seen in a number of other comments. According to Rogers (1995), consumers tend to adapt to change with time, which is exactly what was seemingly happening amongst brand public members on Burberry's Instagram account. Several posted comments indicate that many of the brand public members were not initially fond of the new brand symbols as some did not think that it suited the brand identity of Burberry. However, since their opinions about the rebranding were seemingly changing, this implies that at least these individuals have adapted to the change and consider the new brand symbols as positive and suitable for the Burberry brand. This is further evident in the next two quotes where the individuals are commenting on a post showcasing the new collection of hair scarves displaying the new monogram (see appendix A, post 6).

“I would recognize that bun anywhere !!!! Love this shot” (29 September, 2018)

“Nice change👏👏👏” (29 September, 2018)

These quotes indicate that the new brand symbols, in this case the monogram, had already become strong symbols for the Burberry brand at this time and that the new direction was perceived as positive. Due to this perception, the increasing adaptation of the brand symbols might be a result of them being increasingly applied onto products. A similar positive opinion is expressed in the post regarding a bag showing the ‘TB’ monogram (see appendix A, post 5) where the individual expresses scepticism towards the general direction of Burberry, but still seems to like the use of the new brand symbols.

“Not a big fan of what Riccardo Tisci is doing with burberry but I have to admit that that first bag is a mesterpiece 😊” (28 September, 2018)

The fact that the brand public members on Burberry’s Instagram account seemed to gradually adapt to the change as well as found it positive and significant for the brand, contradicts the notion presented by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) as they mean that a heritage brand should not alter products in a manner that also changes the underlying values of brand meaning. Here, the underlying values of the brand meaning seem to be changed and are positively met by the brand public. This reasoning is further strengthened by another quote regarding the collection of hair scarves showing the new monogram (see appendix A, post 6).

“it grows on you!” (29 September, 2018)

Not only does the brand public members on Burberry’s Instagram account seem to consider that the monogram is suitable for bags as seen in the first quote, but also seem to perceive that the monogram is growing on them for all kinds of products. Moreover, the next individual is also positive about the new products, in this case the bag visualising the ‘TB’ monogram (see appendix A, post 5). In contrast to other positive comments, this individual brings up another dimension by expressing that Burberry still acknowledges its history but at the same time embraces a contemporary style.

“This collection is amazing; the perfect balance between the legacy of an historical fashion brand and a new and contemporary vision of its current director, not like other brands #ripceline” (28 September, 2018)

The combination of the traditional and modern style that Burberry has succeeded with according to this individual, makes it relevant to review Urde, Greyser and Balmer’s (2007) theory regarding brand stewardship, as they claim that consistency is needed through all aspects of steering a brand. As the individual states in their quote, Burberry is seemingly adding a new vision to its brand which is more contemporary and thus does not follow the old track record of Burberry. According to the model presented by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) regarding brand stewardship, consistent management of all aspects of steering brand heritage is of benefit as it results in a credible, trustworthy and unique brand. However, the perceptions retrieved from the brand public members on Burberry’s Instagram account indicate that some are positive towards the breaking of consistency, meaning that consistency might not always be essential for all aspects of brand heritage. It seems to be of essence however to find a balance between brand heritage and the new, as the perceptions also indicate that other heritage brands might not have been as successful in the combination of old and new.

4.2 Gucci’s Rebranding

In this section, two main themes with belonging subthemes are presented in order to analyse the collected empirical material regarding Gucci’s rebranding in 2015.

4.2.1 Where did Gucci’s Identity Go?

‘Where did Gucci’s Identity Go?’ is one of the two prominent themes that was constructed when gathering the empirical material related to Gucci’s rebranding in 2015. The theme accounts for the shared perceptions in the brand public on Gucci’s Instagram account holding a rather negative stance towards Gucci’s change in style as they express the absence of a connection to Gucci’s previous track record as well as a loss of uniqueness. Moreover, the negative voices also involved individuals expressing that Gucci copied other brands and that the new collections were too flamboyant to wear, especially for men. Therefore, the following analysis is divided into the following subthemes: ‘Brand Public Members Missing the Old Identity of Gucci’, ‘The New Gucci Style Resembling Other Fashion Brands’, ‘Brand Public Members not Approving the New Collections of Gucci’, and ‘The New Collections of Gucci Perceived as not Wearable’.

4.2.1.1 Brand Public Members Missing the Old Identity of Gucci

In the comments by the brand public members on Gucci's Instagram account, there was a great deal of reactions about the new collections not resembling what Gucci has previously done in terms of style. Some were generally positive about the collections as they liked the new style and its innovativeness, however, did not consider those collections and styles to be in line with Gucci's brand identity. This first quote reflects an individual that appreciates the Summer/Spring collection 2016 (see appendix B, post 5), but still considers it to be too far from Gucci's identity.

“I'm astonished at how innovative, youthful and fun this collection is. But isn't Alessandro pushing the boundaries a bit too much? I mean, it's a beautiful collection. Just not Gucci.” (24 September, 2015)

It was clear when investigating the perceptions shared in the brand public on Instagram that some considered that the new style of Gucci's new collections was not in line with the previous track record and identity of Gucci, as it was highly different from what they were previously known for in terms of design. The quote implies that the designs by Alessandro Michele might be too extravagant for the Gucci brand as this individual considers the collection to push the boundaries for what Gucci is. It was further discovered that a large part of missing the old Gucci was related to the previous creative designers Frida Giannini and Tom Ford; this following quote reflects this opinion found amongst the perceptions shared in the brand public.

“Gucci is not the same without Tom Ford and Frida Giannini” (26 September, 2015)

This quote concerned a post revealing the Spring/Summer collection of 2016 and more specifically four outfits (see appendix B, post 6). Giannini, Ford and their designs were according to a large number of brand public members more representative of the Gucci brand in contrast to the designs and collections by Alessandro Michele. As evident in this quote, this individual misses Giannini and Ford to the extent that they consider that the brand is not even the same anymore without them, indicating that the previous creative directors represented a great deal of Gucci's brand identity in their designs. It was apparent from the extent of comments regarding the loss of the previous creative directors that this was a loss for many members of the brand public. These next two quotes further display the importance of the old

creative directors, expressed in the post concerning the welcoming of Alessandro Michele (see appendix B, post 2).

“Frida isn't replaceable!!!!” (21 January, 2015)

“@gucci Return Frida Giannini please 🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏” (21 January, 2015)

Although this next quote is commenting on the post concerning one of the first new collections introduced by Gucci visualising a floral pattern and a man in a red suit (see appendix B, post 3) the previous creative designer is mentioned to stress the dislike of the new collection but also to further distinguish the new from the old, where the old seems to be preferred.

“hated the show , no glam no sexy no nothing !!! I so miss Frida 😞😞😞😞” (25 February, 2015)

These perceptions of the brand public members on Gucci’s Instagram account reflect a great deal of opinions and emotions displayed by different individuals regarding the rebranding of Gucci and more specifically the loss of the old Gucci. In all of these quotes it is evident that these individuals part of the brand public refer back to the Gucci that they know and have already formed strong perceptions about. The fact that they miss the old Gucci when discussing the rebranding indicates that the rebranding shows a side of Gucci that does not go in line with the previous perceptions that these individuals had about Gucci, rendering them negative towards the new designs.

4.2.1.2 The New Gucci Style Resembling Other Fashion Brands

Just as in the case of Burberry, the perceptions shared in the brand public on Gucci’s Instagram account connected Gucci to other brands in relation to Gucci’s rebranding in 2015. Many meant that the new style resembled the look of many other fashion brands. However, the comparison to other brands was not as extensive in Gucci’s case as in the case of Burberry’s rebranding. As Gucci was one of the first in line of luxury fashion heritage brand rebrandings, this might have resulted in them not receiving as much attention over their rebranding as other brands, for example Burberry, that rebranded at a later stage. Nevertheless, the decision to alter the style of Gucci still received a great deal of critique from the brand public members on Instagram as many considered the new style to resemble the style of other luxury fashion brands. As seen in this quote, this individual comments upon a post by Gucci visualising a floral pattern and a male model in a red suit (see appendix B, post 3).

“It's not my Gucci 😊 it's a mix of Prada and Marni..not feminine at all...sad 😞” (25 February, 2015)

This individual does not consider this style to be in line with their perceptions about Gucci as a brand or their previous styles. They express a sense of sadness in that the new collections do not look like the Gucci that they know. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous subtheme (4.2.1.1), some individuals liked the collections and designs but did not think that they were in line with the Gucci brand. The same kind of phenomenon concerns comments that were related to Gucci resembling other brands, for example these two following quotes.

“It works for Prada, I'm not sure about this look for Gucci. I love it but, I want to scream Prada.” (24 September, 2015)

“Gucci vs Prada vs mk” (24 September, 2015)

These particular quotes belong to the post where the Spring/Summer 2016 collection was revealed in its entity (see appendix B, post 5). Although the new collection is loved by the first individual, the impression of the new style being disconnected with the Gucci brand is greater than the positivity towards it. The fact that the collection, according to this individual, resembles Prada's designs also overrides the love for the collection that they feel. The second quote further showcases that the new Gucci collections resemble other brands. Moreover, there were also comments regarding individuals perceiving the new collections as resembling ‘cheaper’ brands and not only luxury fashion brands, indicating that the new designs in some cases were perceived as looking ‘cheap’. An example of this kind of comment regarding the comparison of the new style and designs of Gucci to a cheaper brand is demonstrated below.

“The collection looked like it came from TOPMAN! And that's not good for a brand like GUCCI...” (21 January, 2015)

This particular individual seems to consider the new style as a misfit for the Gucci brand and more belonging to other types of brands. The quote regards the presentation of the new creative director, Alessandro Michele, congratulating him on his new position (see appendix B, post 2). In general, many regarded that the new collections were too alike the collections of other brands and not in line with the Gucci core. Even though it was visible that many liked the designs, it

seemed like this disconnection still bothered the brand public members as the collections could not be connected to the previous brand identity and designs.

4.2.1.3 Brand Public Members not Approving the New Collections of Gucci

As previously mentioned, some members of the brand public on Gucci's Instagram account liked the new collections and the new style of Gucci, but did not consider it to be in line with the Gucci brand and previous style. In contrast to these individuals, some expressed that they love the Gucci brand but that they do not like the new look and design of the collections. This quote concerning the post congratulating Alessandro Michele as the new creative director (see appendix B, post 2) is an example of how some members of the brand public like the brand but dislike the new style.

“Love #Gucci but extremely hated this new line” (21 January, 2015)

It was apparent in a number of comments that many of the individuals on Gucci's Instagram account seemed to be strongly and emotionally connected to Gucci as a brand, and thus might have been previously devoted to it. As this new style does not seem to match previous adoration towards the brand, these individuals seemed highly disappointed in the brand's actions. Moreover, there were also a great deal of more specific comments about the new look. Many commented that the new monogram reminded them of pretzels, as seen in the following quote regarding the post revealing the old 'GG' monogram (see appendix B, post 1).

“I thought these were pretzels” (18 January, 2015)

Another detail that was not appreciated by some was the adding of florals, both in general but also as an addition to the classic patterns and pieces by Gucci. This next quote reflects the opinion that the adding of florals in the new collection is far away from the brand identity of Gucci.

“I love Gucci, however I don't like the idea of adding florals, it makes it look mediocre, when the name itself commands greatness, superior style and class.” (8 August, 2015)

This quote concerns the collection called 'GGBlooms' where florals were present on all products, including classic products such as bags and wallets (see appendix B, post 4). The

products were mainly dressed in Gucci's classic monogram, the 'GG' pattern, but now also included florals. The quote by this individual exemplifies the opinion of how the changes resulted in Gucci seemingly losing its old identity in combination with becoming less unique. As previously mentioned, many of the individuals in the brand public on Gucci's Instagram seemed to be highly emotionally connected to the brand, as well as very disappointed in the new direction. This next quote reflects the disapproval of parts of the brand public members as some consider the new approach to have ruined the brand.

“@gucci seriously? Congrats? For killing the brand? Read the comments! The vast majority hates the collection!!!” (21 January, 2015)

“He is destroying gucci 😞👎” (21 January, 2015)

“I'm more than skeptical” (21 January, 2015)

These individuals commented upon the post introducing Alessandro Michele (see appendix B, post 2). Moreover, these quotes indicate that a large part of the brand public members on Gucci's Instagram account disliked the new collections. These perceptions make the theories presented by Stuart and Muzellec (2004) and Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) relevant since Gucci's rebranding clearly has caused a lot of attention and emotion amongst brand public members. According to Stuart and Muzellec (2004), a brand has conducted a rebranding when the brand signals to the publics that something about the brand is about to change. This is often shown by the brand altering either name, logo or slogan. In Gucci's case, none of these were altered but the rebranding can still be distinguished as evolutionary as the brand clearly signalled that something was about to change, but did not include a rebranding of all three aspects as in a revolutionary rebranding. Despite Gucci's rebranding being an evolutionary in regard to the theories by Stuart and Muzellec (2004), the model of revolutionary and evolutionary rebranding presented by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) shows that a revolutionary rebranding involves fundamental and major changes to a brand's positioning and marketing aesthetics. It can be questioned how much Gucci has changed in consideration to positioning and aesthetics but in regard to our analysis, Gucci's rebranding can be defined as revolutionary as the brand clearly stated their intention of changing their positioning in terms by adapting their designs to a new 'era' as well as the major amount of attention the rebranding received from the brand public members on Gucci's Instagram account.

4.2.1.4 The New Collections of Gucci Perceived as not Wearable

As previously mentioned, a large part of the members in the brand public on the Instagram account of Gucci considered the new collections to be ugly as well as unsuitable for the Gucci brand. In addition to this, there were also perceptions about the new collections not being as wearable for the everyday person as the classic Gucci designs and collections. This first quote is an example of such an opinion and concerns the introduction of the floral pattern for the Fall/Winter collection of 2015 (see appendix B, post 3).

“WTF happened to Gucci? Fun show but who is going to wear it? Fashion is still a business. These pieces will not transition from runway to real life.” (25 February, 2015)

This individual clearly states that they acknowledge the fun in the collection, but that the designs do not match the identity of Gucci and that the changes are too vast. Many comments showcased the opinion that the new collections seemed hard to visualise in everyday life which indicates that the new collections, according to some, made Gucci a brand that is not an alternative for purchasing products from, but only for admiring on the runway. The next quote concerns the Spring/Summer collection 2015 where all pieces of the collection are visible (see appendix B, post 5).

“I've lost respect for gucci. Most of this garbage is not even wearable.” (24 September, 2015)

From what was understood when reviewing the empirical material, many expressed a dislike for the pieces in the new collections. Like the previous quote and other perceptions shared in the brand public, this individual does not think that the pieces would be wearable for everyday life. However, in contrast to others who enjoyed the show, this person thought that the pieces were ‘garbage’ as well as the collections making them lose respect for the brand. Furthermore, there were many perceptions shared in the brand public on Gucci’s Instagram account regarding the new collections and designs not only being unwearable, but also not suitable for men.

“Men's collection?... What MEN's collection? Freak show.” (21 January, 2015)

Some of the members of the brand public expressed disappointment concerning the collections in terms of them being too feminine for men to wear, and that this new style differed greatly

from the previous and classic men's collections by Gucci. This quote was posted in the previously mentioned post concerning Alessandro Michele (see appendix B, post 2). The quote exemplifies the perceptions of the new style as more of an extreme 'freak' show that is not wearable, as well as not suitable for men who like a classic style. Another perception showcasing the opinion that the collections were perceived as less masculine than before is this next comment concerning the inclusion of the old 'GG' monogram into the collections (see appendix B, post 1).

“I'm loving how everyone that's liking the Gucci collection is a woman, this is a man's collection, not St. Laurent!!!!!! Can we be men please!!!!” (18 January, 2015)

As seen in the presented quotes, some members of the brand public considered the new collections of Gucci to be less wearable for everyday use, as well as some considering them to be less masculine and more suitable for women and the runway.

4.2.2 The New Story of Gucci

‘The New Story of Gucci’ is another vital theme used in order to comprehend the brand public members’ perceptions of the new direction of Gucci in 2015. These perceptions were rather optimistic towards Gucci’s new style and design in terms of an intact brand identity or liking the new style more than the previous designs. There were a great number of positive perceptions in the comments by the brand public members on Instagram. However, in these positive perceptions there was an evident variation concerning opinions and focus of attention. The subthemes ‘The Perceived Match Between Gucci’s Brand Identity and the New Collections’, and ‘Brand Public Members’ Acceptance of the Rebranding and New Style of Gucci’ were therefore generated to demonstrate the different positive perspectives of the brand public members on Instagram regarding the rebranding.

4.2.2.1 The Perceived Match Between Gucci’s Brand Identity and the New Collections

In contrast to the previously presented perceptions about Gucci’s rebranding, there were also a large number of comments stating that the change of style was a positive direction for Gucci. This wide and various range of perceptions is as mentioned common amongst brand public members (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016), which was reflected in the varied comments about Gucci’s rebranding. A comment that revealed a contrast to perceptions previously mentioned was this quote, retrieved from the post concerning the Spring/Summer collection of 2016, revealing some of the designs included in the collection (see appendix B, post 6).

“Good transition !” (26 September, 2015)

Parts of the members of the brand public present on the Instagram account of Gucci considered the transition from the classic Gucci designs to the new, more romantic and expressive designs as a good development, as exemplified in this quote. In addition, some also considered this new direction of Gucci involving the new designs and collections to actually, in contrast to previously reviewed quotes, be in line with the Gucci brand; this was a rather dominant perception amongst the brand public members on Gucci’s Instagram account. These next quotes concern a variety of posts showing the new style and direction of Gucci (see appendix B, post 1; 4; 5).

“this is so Gucci” (18 January, 2015)

“OMG SO GUCCI” (18 January, 2015)

“#NowThatsGucci @gucci” (8 August, 2015)

“It's Gucci!!!!!! 🖐️👍” (24 September, 2015)

These quotes reflect the opinion held by a number of individuals that the new direction was suitable for the Gucci brand, although it differed greatly from the classic Gucci designs. As two of the presented quotes above concern the inclusion of the old ‘GG’ monogram into the new collections, it might play a role for the perceptions generated by this particular post that the ‘GG’ monogram is an old Gucci symbol. Even though the monogram has not been a part of the Gucci brand lately, it still might convey a Gucci ‘feeling’. The following quote is a further addition showing the acceptance of the new direction as it is favourable towards the new designs, and more specifically concerns positive perceptions about the Spring/Summer collection of 2016 (see appendix B, post 6).

“Obsessed - something so timeless, yet so ahead of trend, about Gucci” (26 September, 2015)

This quote represents the opinion of a great deal of individuals, as many regarded this new direction to be positive. Regardless of the highly different style and designs, many still considered that the new pieces matched the Gucci brand and that they conveyed a timeless feel. The new style was further appreciated due to it being perceived as trendy and innovative by a

large part of the brand public members. Another aspect that was especially valued amongst brand public members was how Gucci was perceived to combine trendiness and timelessness, rendering it still feeling like Gucci as exemplified in the above-mentioned quote. Not only did parts of the brand public members consider the rebranding of Gucci to be in line with the brand, but many also perceived the alterations to bring something back to the Gucci brand. Moreover, some perceived that the new designs made the brand ‘hot’ again, in terms of making it more relevant. As seen in the quotes below, the first individual expresses that they have forgotten about Gucci’s ability to impress. In addition, the second quote acknowledges that Gucci is making a ‘comeback’.

“I forgot how rich & imaginative Gucci could be. It’s like a retro resurrection with an ‘of the moment’ sensibility” (26 September, 2015)

“@gucci is back!!” (26 September, 2015)

These comments were expressed on the post concerning the Spring/Summer collection of 2016, showing some of the pieces belonging to that collection (see appendix B, post 6). The use of the word ‘resurrection’ in the first quote further implies that this individual considers the new collection to bring back something that Gucci has lost, which the second quote further strengthens. As in the theory by Rogers (1995), who mention that the perceived newness of a change can lengthen the time of adapting to the change, it might be so that these individuals mentioned in this section adapt to the change relatively quickly since they perhaps do not experience the new style as particularly new as it still ‘breathes’ Gucci.

4.2.2.2 Brand Public Members’ Acceptance of the Rebranding and New Style of Gucci

Despite the many negative comments posted by the brand public members on Gucci’s Instagram account about the rebranding in 2015, the positive comments regarding the rebranding were superior. The positiveness perceived by the brand public members was present during the whole rebranding process, in contrast to Burberry’s rebranding which was more gradually accepted by the brand public members on their Instagram account. As mentioned in the previous section, the incorporation of the ‘GG’ monogram was appreciated by many. This quote concerns an example of the many individuals being positive about the new direction and is retrieved from the post concerning the introduction of the monogram for the Fall/Winter 2015-2016 (see appendix B, post 1).

“Love the GG! ” (18 January, 2015)

The individual expresses their admiration for the ‘GG’ monogram at an early stage in the rebranding process, as this quote is retrieved from one of the first posts connected to the rebranding of Gucci. Rogers (1995) states that different individuals adapt to change at different times. Even though change is in most cases accepted gradually, change can in some cases be adapted to instantly. Adopter categories related to quick adaptation are by Rogers (1995) called ‘Innovators’ and ‘Early Adopters’ and are as the other adopter categories present in every social system and thus, amongst individuals in brand publics as well. In the case of Gucci, the perceptions of the brand public members did not gradually change throughout the rebranding, as in the case of Burberry where many members of the brand public had negative opinions at the beginning of the rebranding and more positive opinions during the later stages. Instead, various perceptions in the case of Gucci showed different opinions, both positive and negative, during the whole rebranding process. Quotes like the above-mentioned indicate that many individuals liked the new collections from the start. Many also expressed optimism and support for the new creative director Alessandro Michele and what he has contributed with to the brand as seen in the quote below.

“In love with what he's done @gucci!!! ” (21 January, 2015)

This quote was posted in connection to the post where the new creative director was congratulated for his new role at Gucci (see appendix B, post 2). At this stage, Alessandro Michele had just started his transformation of Gucci. Despite this, he already received a great amount of appreciation. These next comments concern two of Gucci’s new collections, ‘GGBlooms’ and the Spring/Summer collection of 2016, and show a great admiration for the new style and the design of the products (see appendix B, post 4; 6).

“Beautiful print!!!” (8 August, 2015)

“This collection is beautiful.” (26 September, 2015)

“I'm loving everything !!!!!” (26 September, 2015)

Not only did the new collections and the new style achieve praise for their look, but also because of their uniqueness and innovativeness. This following quote concerns the look of the different

pieces of the Spring/Summer collection of 2016 (see appendix B, post 5), where the individual states that they consider the new collection to stand out.

“Unique” (24 September, 2015)

The perception of the collection stated by the individual, also being an opinion shared by many members of the brand public, contradicts the reasonings made by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) concerning the loss of uniqueness when not incorporating heritage in a brand’s identity. Gucci did not seemingly incorporate a great deal of their heritage into their new style, except for the reintroduction of the ‘GG’ symbol and the use of the ‘GG’ monogram. This means that a great deal of the brand’s heritage was lost, as the new style was more romantic, innovative and colourful in contrast to the long track record of Gucci’s classic style. However, there were a number of expressions concerning the perceived uniqueness of the new style, and that the uniqueness of the collections also meant that this new direction now represented the Gucci brand. Thereby, the new style of Gucci had altered the brand meaning, which further challenges the theories by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) who claim that a heritage brand can only alter products if they do not change the underlying values of a brand’s meaning. These last two quotes reflect how the new direction is truly the start of Gucci’s new story and also how the brand is perceived by a great part of brand public members on Instagram.

“A great new era for Gucci 🍷🍷🍷@gucci” (25 February, 2015)

“You have done a brilliant job - I <3 this new story” (26 September, 2015)

In conclusion, the new collections and style created by Gucci mean that Gucci’s new direction was different from the old. Something had broken the consistency of Gucci, and the members of the brand public loved it.

5.0 Discussion

As previously mentioned, the aim of this study has been to determine in what manner a luxury fashion heritage brand can rebrand from the perspective of brand public members. This following discussion is based upon the analysis in the previous section and aims to elaborate on the posed research question: *How is a luxury fashion heritage brand perceived by brand public members during a rebranding?* A strong focus during this research has been to investigate whether it matters for the members of a brand public that a rebranding concerns not just any brand but a heritage brand, as it is of essence for heritage brands to honour its heritage as well as to keep a consistent steering in terms of brand stewardship elements. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, there has been a number of rebrandings in the luxury fashion industry where many of the rebrandings have concerned heritage brands. Since this seems to have been a trend within the industry, it was of essence to develop an understanding of what this might mean for how luxury fashion heritage brands are perceived during rebrandings.

5.1 Is it Evolutionary or Revolutionary?

A number of interesting insights were discovered during the analysis of the empirical material. Firstly, in regard to the challenging of the theories regarding evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding presented by Stuart and Muzellec (2004) and Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), this study has been able to contribute with some interesting new aspects. In the case of Burberry, the brand has seemingly undergone an evolutionary rebranding. The focus of their rebranding involved the altering of their logo as well as the introduction of a new monogram. According to the theories of Stuart and Muzellec (2004), an evolutionary rebranding is constituted when only one of the three aspects, logo, name and slogan, is changed. According to Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), an evolutionary rebranding would not be very visible for the outside public in contrast to revolutionary rebrandings which involve fundamental changes that redefine the brand. However, it was very clear in the analysis of the perceptions of the brand public members on Burberry's Instagram account that this rebranding did not go unnoticed, but was initially highly critiqued and discussed. These perceptions indicate that an evolutionary rebranding can cause a lot of attention of the outside public, contradicting the theories concerning evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) as they state that an evolutionary rebranding would most likely not gain much attention from outside publics.

Using the example of Gucci, another set of conclusions could be drawn concerning the theories by Stuart and Muzellec (2004) and Muzellec and Lambkin (2006). Even though Gucci did not change either logo, name or slogan which constitutes an evolutionary rebranding

according to the theories by Stuart and Muzellec (2004), the brand was clear with that something about the brand was about to change, still rendering it an evolutionary rebranding. Moreover, despite it seemingly being an evolutionary rebranding, it received a lot of attention from the brand public members, which contradicts the theory by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) who, as previously stated, mean that evolutionary rebrandings are not usually given attention. However, in contrast to Burberry, Gucci was clear about their intention with their rebranding which was concerned with a change of positioning. As mentioned, the theory by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) states that major changes, such as a change of positioning, that fundamentally redefines the brand results in a revolutionary rebranding. Our analysis showed that the perceptions shared in the brand public indicate that Gucci has changed due to major alterations concerning style and design of products. This can thus be seen as a revolutionary rebranding as Gucci repositioned themselves. However, since this is determined on a scale (see figure 2) by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), it is unclear where the limit is drawn between ‘minor and ‘major’ changes, but as the brand clearly expressed their intention of changing their positioning and that the rebranding generated a lot of attention, we see the rebranding of Gucci as revolutionary in regard to the theories of Muzellec and Lambkin (2006). This brings Burberry to mind again since Burberry also received a lot of attention from outside publics, in this case brand public members, that expressed their opinion that something had changed about the brand. Nevertheless, as Burberry themselves had not, to our knowledge, expressed their intention to change their positioning, the rebranding of Burberry is not seen as revolutionary in this research.

The question can be raised whether it matters that the theories formulated by Stuart and Muzellec (2004) and Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) were introduced a few years before the ‘boom’ of social media. Along with the development and extensive use of social media, brands are increasingly expected to show a high degree of transparency and continuously post a lot of content. Simultaneously as brands need to account for every action they take, outside publics have the ability and willingness to speak their mind regarding this kind of content. This might mean that, at the same time as brands need to share content, outside publics notice this and furthermore share their opinions. Supposedly minor changes, as Burberry changing the font of their logo for example, are thus shared on social media and thereby get noticed and commented upon. Due to this, the theories regarding evolutionary and revolutionary might need to be revised as they might not be applicable in a digital context where a great deal is given attention. It might be so that rebranding in a digital context has other prerequisites than rebrandings during the time of the studies by Stuart and Muzellec (2004) and Muzellec and Lambkin (2006). One

the one hand, brands today might be able to change more about their identity due to the fast pace of today's digital environment. On the other hand, there is a possibility that there is no such thing as an evolutionary or revolutionary rebranding, at least not in the sense of attention generated, as all kinds of changes to a brand are noticed by individuals.

5.2 Can the Brand Meaning be Altered?

As seen in the above discussion, the perceptions shared in the brand public on the accounts of both Burberry and Gucci show that it is clear that something has changed about each of the brands. Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) state that alterations to a product can benefit from modifications, but only if the underlying values of the brand meaning remain. In the case of both Burberry and Gucci, the individuals present in the brand public on each of the Instagram accounts perceived the brands as different in contrast to their image before the rebranding. Burberry encountered a lot of critique from brand public members in the initial stages of their rebranding process, but the brand public members gradually seemed to regard the changes made to Burberry's identity and products as positive. The brand meaning clearly changed due to the evident shift in the perceptions shared amongst the members of the brand public, where it was apparent that the Burberry brand and its products now involved a more young and modern look. So, from the start it was clear that the introduction of the new logo and monogram, as well as their application on products, made the perceptions about Burberry's brand meaning change for a number of brand public members. An important insight here is that, in contrast to Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) who state that the brand meaning should not change, is that it did and it turned out successfully. The same reasonings can be applied to Gucci where the members in the brand public present on the Instagram account of Gucci changed their opinions about the brand in connection to the rebranding. The new collections involving a number of new styles highly different from Gucci's previous design made the brand public members perceive Gucci and their products as more innovative and flamboyant. Thus, the brand meaning was changed and in contrast to the case of Burberry, the majority of the brand public members were positive about Gucci's alterations early on in the rebranding process. Due to the perceptions shared in the brand publics of both Burberry and Gucci concerning their rebrandings, it is apparent that the theories by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) stating that alterations to a product can benefit from modifications but only if the underlying values of the brand meaning remain, are not valid in these two example companies as new brand meanings were generated and positively met in both cases.

It might be of importance when discussing the relevance of the theories of Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) that these rebrandings took place in a digital context and in a digital age. As previously mentioned, brands share a great deal of content on social media today, and the brand public members available on those platforms are not afraid to comment and react to that content. Moreover, it might so that the brand meanings generated from the studied rebrandings are not eternal but might be replaced due to forthcoming changes to the brands. It seems as if luxury fashion heritage brands have adopted the notion of constant change in today's society due to the recent rebrandings. The brands might conduct these changes because outside publics require entertainment and constant change. It might also be of essence in this context that brand public members participating in content on social media might not be consumers, which means that they might have another relation to the brand than a consumer would and therefore might not hold the past of the brand as valuable as its future. This might also involve brand public members being more accepting towards changes as they might not be as invested in a brand as consumers, but also perhaps that they might even be more critical as brand public members tend to express themselves emotionally online. Even though these brand public members might not be consumers, they are most likely still a force worth reckoning with as they have power online which is of absolute essence today as what happens online is visible for everyone.

5.3 The Alleged Importance of Consistency

Another aspect challenged in this study is the claimed importance of consistency in all brand elements of the brand stewardship model presented by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007). It is apparent in the perceptions shared in the brand publics on the Instagram accounts of both Burberry and Gucci that consistency might not be needed for all elements of brand stewardship for successfully steering a heritage brand. Both Burberry and Gucci interrupted their consistent history by involving new brand symbols and designs. According to Urde, Greyer and Balmer (2007) this kind of breaking of consistency might decrease the uniqueness and credibility of a brand. As shown in the analysis, both Burberry and Gucci were perceived by the members of the brand publics as copying others due to both the logo change in Burberry's case and change of style in Gucci's case. In regard to these perceptions, Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) are correct as it seemed as both Gucci and Burberry lost their uniqueness. However, the perceptions regarding the brands copying others were not superior as there was a great deal of contrasting perceptions stating that the new directions of both brands were distinctive but also accepted as a part of the new brand meaning. Thus, the breaking of consistency, which was especially evident in the brand stewardship elements 'symbols', 'history as important to identity' and

'track record', was eventually accepted as a positive turn by many members of the brand publics. Nevertheless, the question can be raised whether it matters for the acceptance of the members of the brand publics that Burberry only introduced a new monogram and kept their classic monogram for some of their products. The same fact applies for Gucci, since they brought back an old symbol and continued to use their regular monogram and pattern on products. Moreover, Gucci preserved their old logo, which could also have meaning for the brand public members' adaptation to the changes as the perceived newness might be lower in the case of Gucci.

Although the fast pace of today's society eases the breaking of consistency as shown in the perceptions of both the Burberry and Gucci rebrandings, the recognition of brand symbols is still highly valued. Even though both Burberry and Gucci successfully introduced new brand symbols and overall style, their core identities were a main topic amongst the brand public members throughout the rebrandings. It might be so that changes are accepted faster today, leaving the brands with an increased ability to change, but that the keeping of fundamental parts of the brand during those changes might ease the process of change. As stated in this discussion, the rise of the digital era holds enormous implications for brands today. However, it does not change the fundamentals of branding. There might be a reason for so many brand public members getting involved in the rebranding of these brands. That reason might be the heritage of the established brands Burberry and Gucci, but the fact still remains that heritage can be steered differently today by luxury fashion heritage brands.

6.0 Conclusion

In this conclusion the research question of this study is answered: *How is a luxury fashion heritage brand perceived by brand public members during a rebranding?* The studied brands Burberry and Gucci were perceived in various ways by the brand public members during the process of the rebrandings. Although the perceptions differed in the two brand publics present on Instagram, the themes identified concerning the two rebrandings shared great similarities. The perceptions that were evident in the brand publics amongst the members present on the Instagram accounts of Burberry and Gucci mainly centred around the loss of identity, perceived new target groups but also an acceptance towards the new direction of the two brands. Even though the perceptions of the brand public members did not share the exact same pattern and pace of adapting to the changes across the two brands, it seems as if the perceptions eventually and overall showed an acceptance of the rebrandings, both evolutionary and revolutionary. What was considered as highly interesting was that the analysis showed that brand public

members seemed to accept the revolutionary rebranding of Gucci sooner than the brand public members of Burberry. This might concern the fact that Burberry altered an important brand symbol such as the logo, even though the changes can be viewed as fairly minor. This in contrast to Gucci that changed their overall style and positioning, but kept their important brand symbols intact, which was seemingly easier for brand public members to accept sooner in the rebranding process in contrast to Burberry. Although the pace of the brand public members' adaptation to the rebrandings of Burberry and Gucci differed, the perceptions amongst the brand public members were eventually positive, indicating that a luxury fashion heritage brand can successfully rebrand in a number of ways. The question can be raised what this means for rebranding heritage brands overall, as the luxury fashion industry has showcased that there is an increased ability for luxury fashion heritage brands to change and break consistency. In terms of the acceptance of brand public members, it seems like heritage brands might be able to act more boldly as these individuals might crave constant changes since they are part of the digital, ever-changing era and thus might also accept change quickly.

7.0 Contributions

As previously mentioned, this study has aimed to contribute with new knowledge to previously mentioned challenged theories and to the notion of brand publics by investigating perceptions regarding luxury fashion heritage brands' rebrandings. This research has generated a number of contributions, both theoretical and managerial.

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study has added to the challenged theories, namely the concept of evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding by Stuart and Muzellec (2004) and Muzellec and Lambkin (2006), as well as the theories regarding heritage brands and brand stewardship by Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007). By challenging these theories, new knowledge has been added in order to develop the theories by including them in a digital context as the digital aspect changes the fundamental assumptions of these theories. In regard to the theories regarding evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding, it has become evident that the line between these two is almost non-existent in a digital environment. Furthermore, the established theories regarding evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding propose that minor changes to a brand do not get noticed, which is not the case in a digital context amongst brand public members. Also, the proposed importance of keeping the underlying values of brand meaning as well as consistency across brand heritage elements has proven to be of less relevance amongst brand public members as they seem to value a dynamic feed over the incorporation of history. Through these insights, this study has added to the notions of heritage

brands, rebranding and brand publics, as well as pointed out where the existing theories need to be revised to function in a digital context.

Secondly, this research has also aimed to provide managerial contributions which are more of a general nature. All the luxury fashion heritage brands that recently underwent rebrandings have popular Instagram accounts where individuals post perceptions about the brand. Therefore, it seemed to be of high importance to provide the perspective of brand public members on this phenomenon. This research has shown that rebranding a luxury fashion heritage brand can be done in a number of ways with the support of brand public members. It seems as if heritage brands have the possibility to act more boldly and thus be able to rebrand quite freely. However, even though the degree of acceptance is high, heritage brands must be aware of the fact that even minor changes get noticed, indicating that a rebranding should still be conducted with caution. As mentioned, it was not possible to determine whether the brand public members were consumers or not. Nevertheless, this brings another dimension to understanding how outside publics can react to the rebranding of a luxury fashion heritage brand. Consumer or not, these individuals have a large voice on social media which managers should listen to when formulating rebranding strategies for heritage brands.

8.0 Limitations of the Findings

When conducting this study, there were a number of limitations of the findings. Firstly, the findings were derived from a thematic analysis of individual expressions shared by the brand public members on the two Instagram accounts. A different result might have been extracted by using another method for analysis, for example looking at the general discourse and specific use of language as in a discourse analysis. Secondly, the rebrandings were analysed in a digital context, resulting in conclusions regarding only this environment. Other conclusions might have been drawn if we had considered the physical environments of the rebrandings. Lastly, as the study only concerns two examples of luxury fashion heritage brands that have rebranded, the results might hold a limited degree of generalisability. However, as the focus of this research is not to generalise results, this was not considered to be an issue. Nevertheless, as it seems to be a trend for this type of brand to rebrand, this research can still provide important insights into the area of heritage brands and how they might attempt a rebranding in today's digital age.

9.0 Suggestions for Further Research

In addition to the conclusions drawn in this research, there is potential to further study the phenomenon concerning rebrandings of luxury fashion heritage brands. One question that was

raised during this research process was connected to the amount of heritage still present in the brands' identities after the rebrandings. It would be interesting to further study if a heritage brand, after having changed aspects concerning brand heritage in the brand identity, still is a heritage brand to the same extent as before. Moreover, we want to stress the importance of the continued exploration of the perspective of outside publics as heritage brand research is dominated by a managerial perspective. As this study concerns the perceptions of brand public members in a digital environment, where it cannot be determined whether they are consumers of the brand or not, it can be interesting to take the specific perspective of consumers and customers as well to understand the physical environment. Nevertheless, another suggestion for further research is concerned with investigating brand public members more closely, for example by interviews, in order to determine their relation to a heritage brand and thus truly understand their behaviour.

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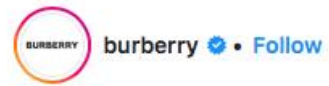
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Zappavigna, M. (2011). Ambient Affiliation: A Linguistic Perspective on Twitter. *New Media & Society*, Vol, 13, No. 5, pp. 788–806.

Appendices

Appendix A: Burberry

Post 1



burberry The #ThomasBurberryMonogram
August 2018

Load more comments

- ██████████ Flawless execution 🔥
- ██████████ Pretty cool :) ██████████
- ██████████ So ugly! ! !
- ██████████ 🍋



70,425 likes

AUGUST 2, 2018

Log in to like or comment.



Post 2

BURBERRY
LONDON ENGLAND



burberry • [Follow](#)

burberry The #Burberry Logo August 2018

'Peter is one of our generation's greatest design geniuses. I'm so happy to have collaborated together to reimagine the new visual language for the house.' – #RiccardoTisci

[Load more comments](#)

perfect place so cool
↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑
Don't Like It Anymore!
I prefer the old one



77,237 likes

AUGUST 2, 2018

[Log in](#) to like or comment.



Post 3



burberry • Follow
Burberry

burberry The #ThomasBurberryMonogram takes over our flagship store in Seoul, South Korea

Load more comments

[Redacted] I've been there lmao

[Redacted] I remember the pic you sent me looll

[Redacted] OMG!!!! 🤔👍



143,867 likes

SEPTEMBER 3, 2018

Log in to like or comment.



Post 4



burberry • Follow

burberry Tap to shop now on Instagram for 24 hours only

Milo and Alejandra wear the #ThomasBurberryMonogram T-Shirt, the first piece by @RiccardoTisci17 #TheBSeries

All other pieces their own

Photographed by @Lola.Pani

Load more comments

[redacted] @riccardotisci17 not gonna lie this is embarrassing

[redacted] @riccardotisci17 you made Burberry look like some low end streetwear brand that sits on Instagram with 10 follows

[redacted] great, Thanks for sharing



39,535 likes


SEPTEMBER 13, 2018

Log in to like or comment.



Post 5





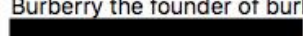
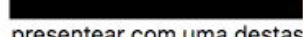
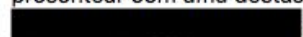
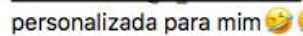


 burberry • Följ

burberry The TB bag for 'Kingdom', the Spring/Summer 2019 collection

Captured by @trinityellis

Visa fler kommentarer

-  Trash
-  TB = TrashBag
-  I agree.
-  TB means Thomas Burberry the founder of burberry
-  Bira tem que te presentear com uma destas!
-  praticamente personalizada para mim 😂😂😂
-  😂
-  the 1st one

55 941 gilla-markeringar

DEN 28 SEPTEMBER 2018

Logga in för att gilla eller kommentera. ...

Post 6



burberry The TB monogram silk scarf for 'Kingdom', the Spring/Summer 2019 collection

Captured by @trinityellis

Load more comments

[Redacted] 👍👍👍

[Redacted] 😡😡

[Redacted] Awful

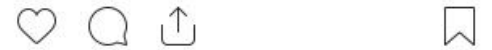
[Redacted] 🙄

[Redacted] Ugly, looks like a late 70's Liberty print and the crocodile is so boring. The lazy way to make your brand seen luxurious, make it in croc 🐊 so boring

[Redacted] ❤️❤️

[Redacted] 😏

... ..



60,415 likes

SEPTEMBER 29, 2018

Log in to like or comment.



Appendix B: Gucci

Post 1



gucci • Följ

gucci #GGLive: A sneak peek at a detail from our upcoming Men's Fall Winter 2015-16 runway collection. Watch the show live on Monday, Jan. 19th at 12:30 pm, CET on gucciconnect.com #gucci #fashion #backstage #mfw

220 v

+

199 v Svava

102 v Svava

49 237 gilla-markeringar

DEN 18 JANUARI 2015

Lägg till kommentar... Publicera

Post 2



gucci • Följ

gucci Congratulations to our new creative director Alessandro Michele. #gucci #AlessandroMichele

226 v

+

Wow

221 v Svava

Questo Signore non potrebbe fare quello che fa!!! A non meno di Gucci!!!

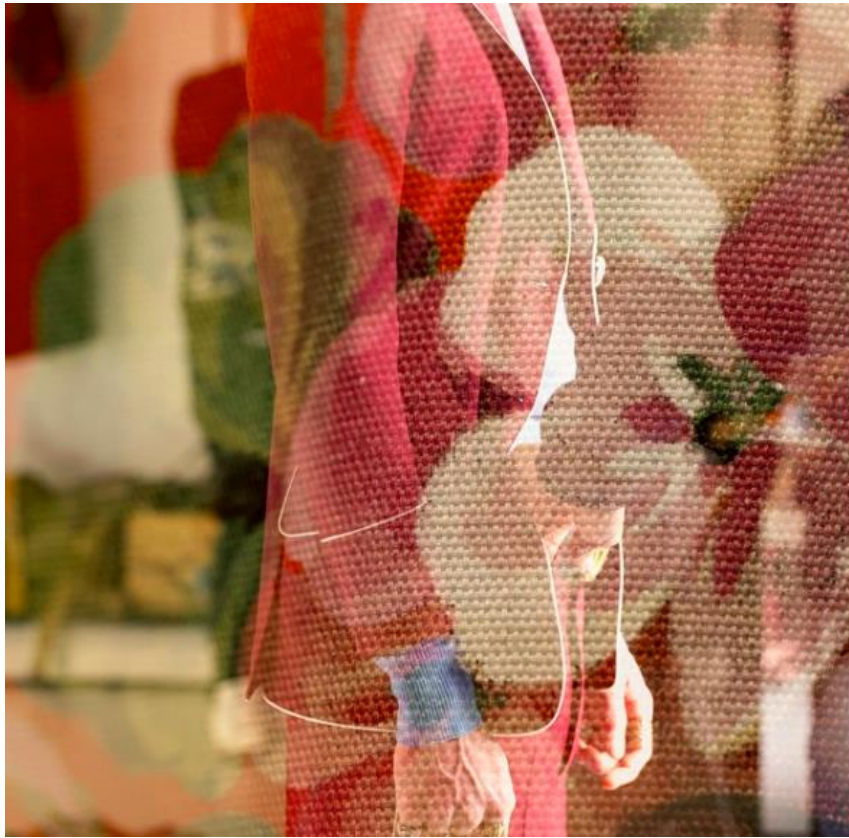
221 v Svava

Lucky bish!

26 665 gilla-markeringar

DEN 21 JANUARI 2015

Post 3



gucci • Följ

gucci "The contemporary is the untimely." And with that quote by R. Barthes the #Gucci #Womenswear #FW15 runway show begins now, live on gucciconnect.com. #GGLive #AlessandroMichele #mfw

214 v

+

[Redacted] jewelry for you 214 v Svava

[Redacted] I expected as much after the men's wear. Sad, I want to know more about the details

26 750 gilla-markeringar

DEN 25 FEBRUARI 2015

Lägg till kommentar... Publicera

Post 4



gucci • Följ

gucci From the new #GGBlooms collection, the season's backpack.

191 v

+

173 v Svava

172 v Svava

LMAO I'm dying

69 992 gilla-markeringar

DEN 8 AUGUSTI 2015

Lägg till kommentar... Publicera

Post 5



gucci • Följ

gucci "To me clothes are an atlas of emotions. For this collection I tried to map what was in my head," #AlessandroMichele on the Women's #GucciSS16 Collection presented in ex Scalo Farini, Milan on September 23, 2015. Click the link in bio to see the full video. #GGLive

191 v

+

It's Gucci

189 v Svara

Espectacular

♡ ◻ ◻

23 973 gilla-markeringar

DEN 24 SEPTEMBER 2015

Post 6



gucci • Följ



gucci "I always try to translate the beauty of this brand in another language. It's time for this brand to tell another story. I'm changing everything," #AlessandroMichele. A look at textures and accessories backstage at the #GucciSS16 Fashion Show. Structured bags feature #Gucci symbols with handles crafted from bamboo or chain and leather and worn with fingerless gloves and rings, a plush coat with a leaf intarsia design, a garden print linen double breasted suit, blooms print duchesse skirt and a silk blouse with rhomboid pattern.



184 v



32 788 gilla-markeringar

DEN 26 SEPTEMBER 2015

Lägg till kommentar...

Publicera