Internship Report: Act

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## Table with internship description

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1 Introduction

In order to achieve my Subsequent Master diploma in Multilingual Business Communication, I was required to complete an internship covering a period of minimum five weeks. I interned at Act, a branding and communications agency located in Antwerp. For 10 weeks I joined the company as a junior account manager, making it my first professional working experience.

In this report, I will first describe the company Act: when and by whom it was founded, its philosophy, and the main clients and activities. The second part of this report will comprise an overview of my tasks and assignments. I will relate what my daily activities consisted of, as well as the practical experience I acquired after the 10 weeks.
2 Company description

Act is a relatively new branding and communications agency in Belgium. It combines brand strategy, design and communication to support business, conversation and community. Act was founded in 2010 by two partners, Alison Agresti and Werner Van Reck. As an American, Alison has worked in New York, San Francisco and Antwerp as a brand strategist and account director for multinational companies such as Intel, Adobe, Symantec, Sony, Exact Software, Materialise and more. Werner van Reck has built his career of 30 years as creative director for award-winning agencies, including LDV/United, where he was co-founder and creative director for 17 years. His clients included Stad Antwerpen, Mercedes, Ikea, De Standaard, and Randstad.

The philosophy of Act centres around the belief that every action, reaction and interaction matters. The agency believes that the relationship between people and brands has never been more direct and, often, more intense. Today, strong brands not only have customers, they have ambassadors. They are the people who are emotionally linked to a brand and who talk about their experiences, even in a B2B or non-profit environment. Therefore, Act believes that today, brands must be clearer than ever about what they stand for and what value they can offer their audiences, so that these audiences can share their experience with their network.

To help their clients reach these important goals, Act works in a 4-phased methodology that has proven to be successful in reaching results. The approach starts with a well defined brand strategy including Brand DNA definition and Brand Architecture, translated into an inspiring identity and brought alive in the market through communications that reach customers at all points of interaction - from offline to online. The result is a total brand experience that builds trust and loyalty.

Although Act was only recently founded, it already has an impressive portfolio of clients. Among others, Act is responsible for the communications for the Gazet Van Antwerpen, Xerius, Ceval, Handelsbeurs, Serax, and Manexco. Projects for these clients range from creating brand toolkits to conceptualizing and designing packaging and advertisements.

Since the agency was only founded at the end of 2010, the company structure of Act is not very complex. Next to the two managing partners, it employs one account manager and one graphic designer. Next to this core team, Act works together with freelance copyrighters, graphic designers and desktop publishers. The number of freelancers working for the agency varies, as this entirely depends on the amount of projects clients assign to Act.
3 My assignments
During my internship at Act, I held the position of junior account manager. In this position, I was the assistant of the agency’s account manager. My responsibilities consisted of co-managing the accounts, maintaining a good relationship with the clients and making sure the communication between client and agency ran smoothly, doing research for various projects, co-creating presentations for client meetings, contacting and briefing the graphic designer and the necessary freelancer(s), co-writing copy for brochures and ads, and co-conceptualizing the strategies behind advertising and communications. In the following paragraphs, I will list my assignments and activities for each client I worked for. This way, it will become more clear in detail what was exactly expected of me each day during my internship.

3.1 Gazet Van Antwerpen
As Gazet Van Antwerpen is one of Act’s main clients, I often worked on this account. During my period at the agency, there were two main projects of the paper going on: the ‘Boldercampagne’ and the redesigning and screening of the logos the paper uses.

3.1.1 Boldercampagne
The ‘Boldercampagne’ centres around the bollards one can find in abundance in and around the city of Antwerp. Gazet Van Antwerpen wants to put this Antwerp icon in the spotlight, and celebrate the bollards together with the people of Antwerp. The ‘Boldercampagne’ runs from September 2011 until the end of October 2011, and comprises activities such as ‘bollard painting’, a special ‘Antwerp bollard walk’, and an action via the paper through which people can buy their own mini-bollard at a discount price.

Act was asked by Gazet Van Antwerpen to develop the whole campaign. First we created an umbrella concept and name for the ‘Boldercampagne’, which united all the activities and formed the consistent thread of the campaign. After the focus and concept of the campaign was determined, we elaborated each specific activity of the campaign, and designed the necessary ads (both print and media) to support and promote the activities.

My role in this project was first to co-conceptualize the main direction and focus of the campaign. Once this was determined, I assisted the account executive in coordinating the necessary steps for developing the different activities: communicating and meeting with the client about the strategic and creative ideas we conceptualized, briefing and monitoring the copyrighter and graphic designer about the copy and design of the ads and the radio clip, and briefing the directors about the tv commercial. Overall, I was expected to co-manage the development of the project, and to make sure the main focus of the campaign was preserved in the execution by the creatives.

3.1.2 Logo
Over the years, Gazet Van Antwerpen has accumulated a large number of different logos and logo styles, a collection in which all consistency is lost.
Act was asked to map out all the logos the paper employs, both in-paper and for external use. In-paper, there is the main logo with the name of the paper, the logos of the different paper sections, the logos of the weekend inserts and specials, and the logos used in ads and announcements in the paper. Next to this logo usage in the paper, Gazet Van Antwerpen also employs a number of different logos for other occasions and means: iPhone and iPad app, promotion materials, and events they sponsor.

For this project, I had to collect all the logos the paper uses in- and ex-paper, and structure them as much as possible. That way, the strategic director had a starting point on which she could found arguments to rethink and reconceptualise the logo usage. The main objective of this project was to create more consistency in the logos the paper uses, in order to communicate a clearer and stronger brand to readers and potential readers.

3.2 Handelsbeurs
The Antwerp Handelsbeurs is a 16th century building, constructed to house the city’s trade activities. Now, the grandeur of the late-gothic building will be restored, as the venue will be renovated and turned into an event hall, complete with four-star hotel and restaurant.

For the Handelsbeurs event hall, Act was asked to develop a brochure conveying the identity of the venue. This included the creation of the venue’s logo, vision, mission, and tone of communication. During this project, I was responsible for the research of best practices of other event halls in historical settings, both national and international.

For the hotel, which will be called Hotel Handelsbeurs, Act developed a brochure and a PowerPoint presentation to present to and attract potential investors. In the brochure, the whole Handelsbeurs project is presented in terms of facts and figures, with a focus on the hotel. My initial job in this project was to write the first version of the copy. This text was then used as a base for the freelance copyrighter, who edited the first draft that I wrote. I, together with the account director, also briefed the designer about the expected look and feel of the brochure, and worked closely with him during the designing process. Overall, I managed the creation of this brochure from start to finish, when the brochures where printed and delivered to the client. The PowerPoint was also created by me, again in close cooperation with the designer for the requested lay-out.

3.3 Serax
Serax is a Belgian company, founded by brothers Axel and Serge Van den Bossche in 1989, which produces accessories and furniture to decorate your home and garden. Their collections are sold in more than 4000 stores in 60 countries.

In the fall of 2011, Serax will launch three service sets created through the collaboration of a star chef and a ceramist. The chefs in question are Peter Goossens, Wout Bru and Michel Bras. Act was asked to outline the communications for the service sets, from designing the boxes to writing the texts for the brochures.

I worked on this project from start to finish. First, I co-conceptualized the propositions of each chef for the brochures, together with the creative director and brand strategy director, so that the copyrighter could be briefed about the main focus of the brochures’ contents. Following this first step, I
co-managed the execution of this project with the account executive: briefing the graphic designer and following up the creative process, meeting with the client for feedback sessions about the designs, and communicating with the printer about the correct print guidelines for the boxes and brochures. This project was rather challenging, because so many parties needed to be involved and give their feedback and approval for each design: the client, the three chefs and the three ceramists.

3.4 Manexco
Manexco is a Belgian company responsible for the distribution of various international shoe brands. For two of those, Hush Puppies and Le Routard shoes, Act is responsible for all the communications. This involves establishing the brands’ communications toolkit, creating print ads and tv commercials from start to finish, and designing POS materials.

My input on these accounts was rather big, as, during my period at Act, we had new projects for these two accounts almost every week. For Hush Puppies, I was responsible for editing the toolkit and complementary toolkit Keynote presentation. In addition, I co-managed the creation and production of various print ads and Point of Sale (henceforth: POS) materials: I briefed the copywriter and graphic designer, monitored the creative process, and communicated with the printer about the print requirements. For Le Routard, I was also responsible for editing the toolkit and complementary toolkit Keynote presentation. Next to the toolkit, Manexco also asked Act to create an animated tv commercial to announce the launch of Le Routard shoes in Belgian stores. I co-managed this project with the account director, from the first creative brainstorm to the briefing of the animator and the coordination of the creation.

3.5 Ceval
Ceval is a Belgian company producing healthy foods, such as sugarfree biscuits and organic juices. Their products are mainly sold in health food stores and organic supermarkets. Act was contacted by Ceval to redesign the logo and packaging.

The redesigning of the logo was already completed before my internship at Act, so I did not participate in that project. I, however, co-managed the redesigning of the packages. After testing out different drafts of packaging designs at test panels, we discussed the gathered input with the client, who then choose a final draft. With this information, the graphic designer was briefed so that the packages could be created. In between the selection of the draft packages and the presentation of the final designs, there were several other feedback sessions with the client to add small alterations, if necessary.

3.6 Xerius
Xerius is an Antwerp-based insurance company, which mainly counts free professions and independents amongst its clients.

Act’s first project with Xerius was the creation of a brand book, which was finished before my internship. During my internship at Act, Xerius contacted us for another project: the creation of a radio commercial and complementary print ads. I co-managed this project with the account executive and creative director, all the way from the start to the selection of the concept for the campaign. The
production phase was started when I had already left the agency. After we were briefed by Xerius about the main purpose of the campaign (increasing name and brand awareness) and the main target group (starters), we briefed the copyrighters about the project. They came up with various ideas, out of which we selected two directions which best connected the values of Xerius with the campaign goals. The copy of these two ideas was then elaborated in a presentation by the creative director and graphic designer, and presented to the Xerius management so that they could select the final concept.
4 Conclusion: what I gained from this internship

My internship at Act was my first real work experience, and it was like nothing I had ever done before. In those ten weeks I learned many essential working skills, both through working closely with my colleagues and by meeting with the clients.

I was lucky to be surrounded by very experienced people at Act Agency, who all have enjoyed many years of experience in the business. Added to that was the fact that Act Agency is a small but growing business, which allowed me to be involved with all projects and every co-worker, from the managing partner to the freelance copyrighter. This also meant that I could attend almost every client meeting, giving me a unique insight in this quintessential facet of business.

Practically, I can state that I acquired many useful skills which are necessary in the communication business. It is difficult to skim them, but the top three things I learned were: structure, interacting with people in professional settings, and functioning in a team. As junior account manager, I learned to structure every project carefully, and to make sure I was on top of every task that needed to be executed for each project. I am already a structured person in nature, but at Act I learned to juggle many projects at the same time. Secondly, I found that I have become more confident in my work in professional settings. At Act, I was actively present at client meetings, and interacted with the clients on the phone and via mail, which was frightening in the beginning. However, towards the end of my internship I had gained the confidence and assurance to engage with important people at a professional level. Finally, I found that I really experienced first-hand what it is to work in a team. At school I have already completed many group projects, but at the agency the group work was of another level. Everybody, from the creative director to the graphic designer, has their specific tasks. As junior account director, I had to coordinate everybody’s work and closely work together with them to ensure projects were progressing swiftly and deadlines were met. This required the mastering of pro-activeness and cooperation skills, qualities which will certainly be of essence in future jobs.

I was given time to grow and learn at Act, so that at the end of my internship I was ready to prove myself. The account director was away on holiday during my last week, so I covered her position and became the agency’s account director for a week. I was able to showcase everything that I learned before, and, judging by my colleagues’ opinions, it was a job well done. I am very glad to be given this opportunity, and it was truly a great way to end my internship.
Social media and branding: 
the effective integration of social media in branding activities

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Promotor: Dr. Ellen Van Praet

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Relevance of the research paper for Act

The incentive to write this research paper was provided by Act, the branding and communications company where I completed my internship. Act engages with brands on a daily basis, and is responsible for conceptualizing and executing their branding and communication strategies. Act is aware of the new reality brought about by social media, but welcomes every opportunity to learn more about it. The goal of Act is namely to consult its client with the best advice possible.

Recently, Act has worked on projects which also integrated social media in one way or another. The agency realizes that this will increase even more in the future, and does not rule out the possibility of a future project entirely consisting of social media. Therefore, Act wants to understand better what the advantages of social media are for brands, and how these applications can be included in branding activities.

Concretely, I was asked to draw up a literature overview on the subject, complemented with a relevant case study of a best practice. Act Agency hopes that this approach will be beneficial on two levels: the theoretical overview should allow them to better explain and justify a certain social media approach to the client, while the best practices of the case study should provide them with useful insights and inspiration.
1 Introduction

In recent years, social media have increasingly acquired a firm spot in our daily lives. Social media applications are everywhere, and many cannot imagine life without it. We are constantly checking Facebook, updating our Twitter account, or browsing new job opportunities via LinkedIn. Communication via social media has become a new reality and has created a new mode of interaction.

This development is especially challenging for brands as, with the arrival of social media, traditional brand-controlled communication focusing solely on advertising or POS activities is considered dated. Such an evolution is bad news for companies, because communication is the fuel of the branding process which allows brands to be build and develop – hopefully – into strong entities. As a result, in this day and age brand marketers have to rethink how they can connect with consumers. They should understand the benefits of social media, and how to efficiently incorporate them in the branding and marketing strategies. However, literature on the subject is not rife, as a consequence of the fairly recent nature of social media. The goal of this research paper is therefore to shed light on this issue and to formulate clear solutions.

This paper is structured in two parts: it comprises a literature study and a case study. In the literature study, I firstly aim to clarify what exactly the concepts of branding and social media are. Secondly, I turn to an investigation of how brands can successfully integrate social media in their branding approach. In the case study, I compare the social media campaigns of the Japanese clothing brand Uniqlo to the findings and methods gathered from the literature study. I selected Uniqlo, since this brand is generally perceived as a true innovator in creating a relationship between social media use and branding. The goal of this case study is to gain useful insights in how the theory of the literature study is put into practice.
2 Research question

As already articulated in the introduction, this paper aims to investigate how brands should deal with the relatively new phenomenon social media. For brands, good branding is essential in building and maintaining a healthy brand. Nevertheless, many brands are still uncertain on how to successfully engage with this new reality in branding activities.

Recently, more and more research has been conducted on the topic of social media in order to answer questions about what exactly this concept is, and how it came about. I found, however, that these sources focus more on the phenomenon itself than on the implications and consequences of social media. One of the consequences being, namely, that brands have to communicate differently with their consumers opposed to what was traditionally assumed and practiced. Therefore, it is crucial for brands to understand how they should effectively employ social media and at the same time still respect the rules and principles of successful branding.

The research conducted in this paper is twofold. First, the literature study will aim to answer two questions:

- What are the principles of successful branding?
- What is social media and how does it affect traditional branding strategies?

Once these questions are answered and the concepts ‘branding’ and ‘social media’ are clear, the literature study will aim to answer the third and main question:

- What are methods for brands to successfully engage in social media?

Finally, the validity of the answers provided by the literature study will be tested by examining the compatibility of the answers in the Uniqlo case study. Three social media campaigns of the brand Uniqlo, which successfully incorporates social media in its branding process, will be analyzed according to the answers provided by the literature study.
3 Literature study

3.1 Branding

The idea of branding is “a name, symbol, design, or some combination which identifies the product of a particular organization as having a substantial, differentiated advantage” (O’Malley, 1991; as cited by Rooney, 1995: p. 48). In other words, branding is the construction of a brand or product’s image, which will then in turn increase the brand value and influence the customer’s brand perception (Rooney, 1995). Branding done well creates brand equity, which is the sum of the consumer’s brand awareness, brand loyalty and positive quality perception (Seetharaman et al., 2001; Kotler et al., 2007). Through smart branding, successful products and brands create brand equity that differentiates them from the competition, as Stine remarks: “Branding is creating that individual niche in the consumer’s psyche and owning it” (Stine, 2002: p. 2).

In this overview, I first briefly explain the history of branding, before turning to a discussion of basic branding principles.

3.1.1 History of branding

Holt (2002) states that the first principles of branding were founded in the 20th century. This pioneering branding strategy centred around two principles: customers needed to be educated about the product benefits, and customers were ignorant enough to be easily influenced by hollow product claims. With the start and rise of advertising in the 1920’s, these principles evolved into a modern branding paradigm incorporating two main ideas: abstraction and cultural engineering. This modern branding paradigm focused more on the relationship between brand and product, and the customer’s moral and social ideals and aspirations, rather than solely emphasize the product’s advantages and benefits. Through this paternalistic approach, customers were in fact guided by brands and the branding process in what a desirable and perfect life consisted of, and what products helped to achieve these aspirations. The brands took on a role as “cultural authorities” supported by the impassiveness of the consumers (Holt, 2002: p. 81).

The modern branding paradigm lasted until the 1960’s, when a cultural revolution shook up many of the world’s institutes including branding: post-modern branding was born. Consumers no longer agreed to be dictated by brands, and individualism was the norm. This societal shift in moral stance forced brands to do away with former principles of paternalistic marketing, and to focus on creativity and brand/product authenticity instead.

The 1980’s, marked another shift with regards to brands and branding (Rooney, 1995). Around this period, many companies held the belief that brands were more important than the product itself. Hence, mergers and acquisitions were rife as many preferred to buy a successful brand instead of building one themselves. However, Rooney (1995) points out, the constant management changes actually weakened brands: due to the high management turnovers the brand image often became inconsistent. This trend lead to “generic marketing, look-alike advertisements, undistinctive products and the proliferation of promotions” (Rooney, 1995: p. 49).
According to Hankinson (2007), in the following decades up until now, companies realised that a return to the basis was necessary. This evolution was further fuelled by global phenomena such as growing globalisation, digitalization and the fragmentation of media. Companies re-established strong links between the company and products, and viewed these two aspects as connected forces rather than solely focusing on or the product, or the brand.

3.1.2 Principles of branding

According to Stine (2002), branding is about differentiation from competitors, whether one brands a brand, a product, a service, a person, or a place. A good branding strategy sets you apart from the rest, and gives the impression to the customer that no other product or brand can compare to yours (Stine, 2002; Rooney, 1995). In the following overview, I will discuss eight important branding principles Stine (2002) lists in his work. I complement these with remarks made in the work of Rooney (1995), and the branding principles listed by Foley (2010). I am aware that this list is not exhaustive, but I believe it gives a good general overview of what branding stands for.

3.1.2.1 Keep it simple

Consumers are constantly targeted with advertising messages, both on- and off-line (Stine, 2002). People can only process a certain amount of these, so in order to be noticed one needs to stand out. Stine (2002) states that this is done most effectively by keeping the message simple and focused, in order to attract attention and avoid losing a connection with what one is trying to sell. Stine (2002) further remarks that it is challenging for companies to select one element on which the advertising will focus, as many have the urge to include all the product or brand’s details.

3.1.2.2 Word of Mouth

A brand or company is not noticed through advertising alone, and this channel needs to be complemented by other communication facets in order to create Word of Mouth (Stine, 2002: Rooney, 1995).

According to Stine (2002), brands and companies can stimulate the generation of publicity and Word of Mouth (henceforth: WOM) by creating news. For example, any successful PR strategy should incorporate the frequent release of newsworthy facts about the company, in the hope they get picked up by media. It is cheaper and more effective than advertising, as ads tend to get skimmed during the reading process and because consumers seem to value the unbiased opinion of other consumers and articles more (Stine, 2002).

3.1.2.3 Focus your brand

Before a brand or product engages in communication activities such as advertising, it is advised to draw up the brand’s core qualities which define the uniqueness of a brand (Stine, 2002). This brand definition should then, consequently, be the focus of each communication and marketing activity. Otherwise, brands risk expressing scattered and diluted messages that lack the needed focus. Foley (2010) articulates this idea as well by stressing that brands should always express a certain claim and then stick to it in all communications.

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1 Anything can be branded nowadays (Kotler, 2007)
3.1.2.4 Differentiation is vital
When a brand defines its core qualities, one of the goals should be to differentiate from the competition (Stine, 2002: Foley, 2010). In order to be noted by consumers in the enormous supply and conquer a spot in the customer’s minds, brands need to set themselves apart in the branding process and position themselves clearly (Rooney, 1995). This can be through the highlighting of a unique functional quality, a remarkable design, a special taste, etc. Anything works as long as it is an asset the competition does not have or does not emphasizes yet in their brand communication.

3.1.2.5 The first brand advantage
According to Stine (2002), being the ‘first’ brand in the consumer’s mind is a huge advantage in the branding process. This does not necessarily imply that a brand in this position was the first to enter the market, as some brands beat the rest simply by employing better marketing strategies. The result is the same: occupying the consumers’ top-of-mind spot. Since many brands on the market will never possess this first brand advantage, Stine (2002) points out that occupying a solid second spot behind the market leader is also valuable as brands can be very successful in this second position.

However, in some markets, all the top spots are already occupied by strong brands with strong positions in the market. Stine (2002) suggests that in this case, companies should brand their products as a sub-category of the already existing market. An example Stine (2002) uses to illustrate is FedEx: since the parcel shipping market was already dominated by UPS, FedEx successfully focused on the new sub-market of overnight shipping.

3.1.2.6 Get emotional
According to Foley (2010), branding is not only about rational claims, as many consumers are connected to certain brands on an emotional level as well. People may prefer a certain brand because it reminds them of their childhood or certain people, or because they associate it with positive feelings. It is not easy for brands to acquire this emotional bond, as the reasons behind it are purely psychological and in fact irrational. However, good results can be achieved by playing on emotions in communication. Foley addresses the example of the motorcycle brand Harley Davidson, as in communications it often refers to its products emotionally instead of rationally: focus on the unforgettable and unique roar of the motor, the bond between the members of the Harley-community, the sense of freedom, etc. All these qualities have nothing to do with the vehicle itself but instead stimulate an emotional connection between consumer and product.

3.1.2.7 Perception vs. Quality
Producing and selling high quality goods and services alone does not guarantee great sales for a brand (Stine, 2002). Although high-quality products are of the essence, it is mainly the consumer’s perception of the quality that counts. And here is where the branding comes in: the brand quality needs to be branded, in order to align the consumer’s perception of the quality with the real quality of the product. The key ingredients to achieve a certain quality perception, according to Stine (2002), are price, design and great service. Rooney (1995) adds that companies should analyse the perceived value of their brands through various tracking methods, a technique which will reveal if the consumer’s perception is in tune with the company’s.
3.1.2.8 Be consistent

Good branding equals consistency. As a prime example, Stine (2002) cites the case of Quaker Oats, the US market leader in oats: the logo and look of the Quaker products is still consistent with the original packaging, save some minor design refreshments applied throughout the years. Through this consistent brand image, the Quaker brand has conquered a solid spot in the consumer’s mind.

In order to achieve a consistent brand image, Stine (2002) suggests companies to create a brand toolkit. In this document, a brand should map out guidelines concerning the tone of communications, lay-out for ads, typography, colours, logo use, packaging, etc. Such a tool facilitates the maintaining of a consistent brand image, and avoids unnecessary and unfounded tinkering with a brand’s core elements.

3.2 Social media

The concept ‘social media’ is everywhere nowadays, and rightly so. In a short time span social media has boomed, with the amount of joining users growing continuously: the measurement company Nielsen calculated that, in 2010, the amount of people using social media rose by 24% compared to 2009, and that time spent on social media also increased, by 66% (Armelini & Villanueva, 2011). These impressive numbers illustrate the importance of social media in this day and age.

This section is divided in two parts: first, a study of the concept social media will be presented, followed by a brief overview of social media applications relevant for this paper.

3.2.1 The concept of social media explained

Social or new media are online applications in which online users engage to share content such as images, video, audio, and words (Drury, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Safko & Brake, 2010). Kaplan & Haenlein (2009) further define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: p. 61). In other words, they allege that social media is a result from combining the principles of web 2.0 with the notion of User Generated Content.

Since the emergence of social media, the web has hosted a good many social media applications. Some are still around and popular today, while others have gradually gone off the radar. In the following overview, I made a selection out of these social applications. I selected the applications based on their relevance for the next chapter’s discussion about social media and marketing. I base my overview for the most part on the work of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), with additions from the work of Mangold and Faulds (2009) and Kwak et al. (2010).

3.2.1.1 Blogs

Blogs, or weblogs, are considered to be one of the earliest forms of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). A blog is a website which collects written entries, presented in a reversed chronological order. Mangold and Faulds (2009) further distinguish between user-sponsored blogs, and company-sponsored blogs. Blogs are usually created and monitored by an individual, or a company in the case of company-sponsored blogs, but interaction with other users is ensured through a comment section provided under each blog entry.
3.2.1.2 Micro-blog: twitter
The micro-blogging service Twitter was not included in the previous section about blogs as, albeit sharing characteristics with blogs, it differs on many levels. Kwak et al. (2010) explain that like blogs, twitter users can post entries or read entries of other twitter accounts they follow. However, they add that twitter entries (or ‘tweets’) are restricted to 140 characters only and that these tweets can be shared or ‘retweeted’ by followers. The service also makes use of other symbolic language such as the @-symbol which precedes each user’s twitter name, and the #-symbol followed by a word which signals a hashtag.

Twitter is growing fast, and can boast impressive numbers after merely three years online; in july 2009, the site counted already 41 million users (Kwak et al., 2010). Due to its rising popularity and quick but effective action, Twitter is favoured by many companies in their social media strategies.

3.2.1.3 Social networking sites
According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social networking sites are applications through which users can create profiles showcasing personal information and communicate with each other. Users can update these profiles with photos, text-based content, and audio and video files. People can befriend other users, an action which enables them to browse their online friends profiles and to communicate with them through comments, instant messages and in some cases even chatting services.

The largest and most popular social networking site nowadays is Facebook, the California-based online service invented by Mark Zuckerberg (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

3.2.1.4 Content communities
Content communities, or creativity works sharing sites as Mangold and Faulds (2009) name them, are social media applications through which users share content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Usually, each content community focuses on one type of media content that is shared, including video, music and photo. An advantage for content communities is that users do not need to create a profile page, increasing their accessibility.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) cite that the most widely known and successful content community is YouTube, broadcasting over 100 million videos a day to users.

3.2.1.5 Business networking sites
Papacharissi (2009) states that business networking sites allow users to create a profile page which discloses professional information. Through these networking services, users in fact provide a type of online CV which can connect them with others within their field of profession. The professional profiles are also a good tool for head-hunters looking for specific qualifications.

A well-known example of a business networking site is LinkedIn, which counts more than 100 million members as of March 2011 (LinkedIn Corporation, 2010).

3.3 The impact of social media on branding
In the final section of the literature overview, I discuss the implications of the rising popularity of social media for marketers outlining their branding and marketing strategies. First, I state the reasons why social media is a phenomenon marketers need to consider, followed by a comparison between the
traditional marketing mix and the new, hybrid marketing mix. Finally, I will conclude with an overview of methods to include social media in branding and marketing activities.

3.3.1 **A new reality**

Promoting your brand and products used to consist of investing in traditional media such as advertising, engaging in PR and POS activities, and monitoring online presence through Search Engine Marketing and Search Engine Optimization (Armelini & Villanueva, 2011). However, since the emergence of social media, brands are forced to reconsider their marketing strategies and to take social media into account as another communication channel (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The consequences are already visible in marketing budgets: the global advertising budget that will be spent on social media in 2011 is estimated to be $6 billion (eMarketer; as cited by Armelini & Villanueva, 2011). This new trend is mainly due to the power of social media, and how it changes the relationship between brand and consumer, and between consumers themselves.

One of the main characteristics of any social media type, as the overview of section 3.2.1 suggests, is that it gives people a way to connect with each other. Mangolds and Faulds (2009) posit that the term ‘people’ could be narrowed down to ‘consumer’ ‘and ‘company’, as social media enables companies to engage in direct conversation with their consumers and potential consumers. However, one of the most important effects of social media is that it in particular sparks consumer-to-consumer conversations (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Armelini & Villanueva, 20011). This unique role social media lends to consumers is in fact an updated version of traditional WOM. The only difference between traditional WOM and the updated e-WOM is the scale on which it operates: effects of traditional WOM usually did not exceed one’s circle of friends and acquaintances, while e-WOM has the ability to reach thousands of people with merely a 140-word tweet or a blog entry. Thus, the consequences – positive or negative – for a brand being the subject of e-WOM, can be more far-reaching compared to traditional WOM.

This global-reach capability of social media empowers consumers, and creates a more sceptical and demanding consumer who has a great deal of control (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Armelini & Villanueva, 20011). This is a big shift away from the heydays of traditional media when companies almost solely used to be in control about their brand communication. In addition, consumers tend to favour the opinions posted by other consumers on social media over company-created information, as the latter is perceived as more biased and therefore often untrue (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The researchers suggest that for brands, one of the only techniques to regain some of the lost control is to engage in these consumer conversations by talking along with the consumers. This is a drastic shift from traditional media which talked at consumers, but it seems to be one of the only ways to influence and shape the online discussions².

3.3.2 **The traditional marketing mix vs. social media**

Social media has taken up a more prominent space in many consumers’ lives. This new reality also seems to affect the process during which customers buy brands. According to Edelman (2010),

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² Shaping online discussions will be discussed in more detail in section 3.3.3, p. 24
companies often spend their marketing budgets in the wrong places, as consumers connect with brands in a different way than was traditionally assumed.

He asserts that marketers have long believed that before buying a brand, customers go through three phases: a stage where they have many brands still in mind, a second stage where the possibilities are narrowed down, a third stage during which one brand remains, and a final buying stage. After the purchase, their relationship with the brand was usually limited to the use of the product itself. Marketers would target their advertising on these phases, in order to build brand awareness and to stimulate the purchase in the best case scenario. This process was coined the funnel metaphor, due to its funnel-like shape (Edelman, 2010).

Figure 1: the funnel metaphor (source: http://abalancedlens.wordpress.com/2010/11/25/the-new-b2b-customer)

Edelman (2010) posits, however, that the emergence of social media has stimulated the development of a new purchase process: the consumer decision journey (henceforth: CDJ). Contrary to past beliefs about the funnel metaphor, consumers engage with and purchase brands in a different process. Opposed to the systematic procedure of narrowing down options, he alleges that with the CDJ, consumers take a more iterative path before purchase.

Figure 2: the consumer decision journey (source: http://abalancedlens.wordpress.com/2010/11/25/the-new-b2b-customer)

First, the consumer enters the consider stage. Similar to the first phase of the funnel metaphor, the consumer has a selection of brands in mind. This initial phase is followed by the evaluate stage, when the consumer in fact evaluates the options of the consider stage. Influenced by the input from friends, online reviews, shops and other stimuli, the consumer will then add and delete brands from the set of options. Edelman (2010) interestingly remarks here that consumers control this process as they are the ones seeking input. This is different from traditional marketing assumptions, where marketers were believed to almost solely influence the consumer and not vice versa. Thirdly, the consumer enters the buy stage, which differs from the funnel metaphor buying process: the researcher claims that consumers are less
decisive and may even change their purchase decision at the last moment. Unlike the funnel metaphor, the CDJ does not end after purchase as it marks the start of the enjoy and advocate stage. Edelman (2010) narrates how findings show that consumers, next to using the brand in the enjoy stage, often conduct online research about the purchased item during this advocate stage by posting reviews and other thoughts online. This creates positive or negative e-WOM for the brand—depending on the satisfaction level. When the consumer is satisfied, however, he or she finally enters the bond stage. When the bond with the brand is strong enough, the consumer enjoys a loyalty-loop with the brand. Edelman (2010) concludes that social media is particularly present in the evaluate and advocate stages, and emphasizes the importance for marketing strategies to pay attention to these new stages: “marketing investments that help consumers navigate the evaluation process and spread positive word of mouth about the brands they choose, can be as important as building awareness and driving purchase” (Edelman, 2010: p. 64).

It should be noted that he does not shun traditional media and marketing methods entirely, but that instead he pleas for a more integrated marketing approach including social media. Similarly, other researchers such as Armelini and Villanueva (2011) and Mangold and Faulds (2009) make a plea for an updated marketing mix, combining traditional and new media. The latter state that social media should be part of an entire marketing ecosystem, including traditional marketing channels as well.

3.3.3 Methods to successfully include social media in branding strategies
In this final section of the literature study, I outline several methods with which brands can include social media in their branding strategies.

3.3.3.1 Performa a brand audit and set targets
Before engaging in social media activities, Armelini and Villanueva (2011) advice brands to execute a brand audit. The brand should be analyzed, and it should be determined if the target audience will be reached via social media. Will it spark conversations and generate positive e-WOM? If unsure, it is better to keep low profile at first and test social media sparingly, before giving it a more prominent place in the branding strategy.

The researchers also assert that brands should decide what they want to achieve with the use of social media, before actively using it. Possibilities include: gain customer insights, boost sales, launch promotions, stimulate e-WOM, etc.

3.3.3.2 Find the right social media application(s) for your brand
After a brand has decided what they want to achieve exactly with social media, the marketers will have to settle on the type of social media application. According to Armelini and Villanueva (2011), a brand can either select one of the more common types of platforms, such as creating a Twitter account or setting up a Facebook page, or opt for a multifaceted approach, where brands are present on more than one application. In the latter case prudence is in order, as a larger online presence signifies extended managing and a greater risk if anything goes wrong.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) add that brands can also design their own networking platform in order to create a brand community. They refer to the example of Unilever’s Dove, which launched a

3.3.3.3 Define the focus
Once the right social media application is selected, it is necessary for a brand to decide on the type of content that will be on display. In terms of content, brands could choose to include for example knowledge, games, comment sections, surveys etc. Both Armelini and Villanueva (2011) and Barwise and Meehan (2010) emphasize the importance of good content in social media, over its capability to boost sales. They stress that the goal of social media should be to engage and interact with consumers, and that sales come after. Generating good sales thanks to social media is a plus, but it should never be the focus.

3.3.3.4 Inform and engage consumers
Whatever content a brand decides on, it will often either inform and/or engage consumers. As previously discussed in section 3.3.1, the essence of social media is the way it empowers consumers and gives them an influential voice. Mangold and Faulds (2009) therefore stress that brands should strive to stimulate these consumer conversations, by allowing customers to provide feedback on products through polls, comment sections, like-buttons, etc. Important is that brands then join in on these discussions or give feedback on survey results, so that brands also engage with the consumers and not solely the other way around.

In the same context, the researchers add that it is of equal importance to inform consumers adequately on social media platforms. Not only by posting product information, but also for instance by adding interesting stories, videos and articles that relate to the brand and/or product. This approach is effective in two ways: first, chances are that it will create e-WOM, and secondly, by posting correct info brands can regain some of the control which is now mostly in the hands of the consumers.

It should be noted that both informing and engaging surfers should happen in a non-intrusive manner. Social media users will turn away from brands who only use social media for boosting sales, which may lead to negative e-WOM (Mangold and Faulds, 2009: Armelini and Villanueva, 2011).

3.3.3.5 Be outrageous, creative and surprising
On terms of the tone of the content, Mangold and Faulds (2009) point out that brands should try to present content from a creative and surprising angle. Chances are higher that content will be picked up - and even go viral – if it appears to be ‘outside the box’. Of course, the tone should still fit with what the brand stands for, but even more serious brands may benefit from stepping out of their comfort zone every once in a while.

3.3.3.6 Set up a social media crisis communication plan
Unfortunately, in some cases negative e-WOM spread by social media users may be damaging to a brand. Gaines-Ross (2010) warns for the effect a single displeased consumer or a fired employee may have in the fast-paced social media sphere. Therefore, she advises brands to always be prepared for the worst, and have a crisis communication plan for social media at the ready. That way, brands can act fast – an essential step in controlling the damage of a crisis.
3.3.3.7 Monitor and measure

It does not stop after the content is up, and the social media strategy is executed. According to Spence (2010), brands should hire a social media manager who is ideally skilled in not only social media, but also in marketing and customer relations. This manager should then monitor the brand's online activities, such as delivering fresh content and engaging with the consumers. Social media is a continuous process, and requires for brands to remain up to date.

The social media manager should not only monitor the social media applications itself, but also analyse the metrics behind it. Armelini and Villanueva (2011) claim that measuring the results of social media activity is essential for a brand. That way, brands can determine whether or not the results exceed the investments and meet the goals set up in the beginning. Depending on the outcome, brands can then decide to slightly alter the approach or redesign the social media strategy altogether.
4 Case Study

4.1 Method
In this case study, I will apply the methods of successful social media use, discussed in the literature, study to the Japanese clothing brand Uniqlo. Furthermore, I will analyse what the advantages are for the branding of the brand in question. Uniqlo is a good example to illustrate how new media should be approached by marketers nowadays, as the Japanese brand successfully employs social media applications in the branding process with inspiring and creative campaigns. Three Uniqlo campaigns are discussed in the case study: Lucky Counter, Lucky Line and Uniqlooks.

For the investigation, I first analyse the campaigns’ social media relevance by discussing how they applied the following methods from the literature study:\footnote{Section 3.3.3, p. 23}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Find the right social media application
  \item Define the focus
  \item Inform and engage
  \item Be creative and surprising
\end{itemize}

The other methods mentioned in section 3.3.3 are not included in the analysis, as they seem not relevant to the discussion. These methods were included in the literature study for completeness, and are more important for brands internally. It is assumed that they apply in a lesser extent to the consumer, compared to the four selected methods.

After analysing the successful application of social media in each campaign, the case study focuses on the consequences for the branding of Uniqlo. It is discussed how these social media campaigns influence Uniqlo’s branding process, based on the principles of branding covered in the literature study.\footnote{Section 3.1.2, p. 17}. That way, it can be investigated whether or not Uniqlo’s social media campaigns lead to satisfying branding results.

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Uniqlo
Uniqlo, founded in 1984, is a fast-fashion clothing brand, meaning that it adds new clothes to the shops weekly (Fast Retailing Co., 2011). Different from the philosophy of other fast-fashion brands such as Zara, the pieces at Uniqlo are not strictly fashion items but rather pieces of casual clothing which the customer can mix and match to create an individual style. On fastretailing.com, the website of Uniqlo’s mother company, the brand cites in its brand message that “it inspires the world to dress casual” (Fast Retailing Co., 2011). In addition, Uniqlo claims to be for all, as the clothes can be worn by everyone; there are no limitations based on age, race, gender or social status. The brand has its most stores in Japan and China,
but has conquered other parts of the world as well in the last decades, and is now also active in the UK, France and USA.

In an interview with businessandleadership.com (Corcoran, 2011), Uniqlo’s PR manager Daisuke Hase states that Uniqlo only makes use of traditional advertising, such as news and TV ads, in Japan and China - countries where store numbers are high. For their more modest markets, Uniqlo relies entirely on online marketing: next to a great website, the brand is activated on various social media applications. It has accounts on Twitter and Facebook, and has also created its own unique online platform Uniqlooks\(^5\). This strategy already implies that, next to relying on the most mainstream social media applications, the brand is not afraid to set up its own platform when no other application can host their specific marketing idea. Uniqlo’s accounts on Twitter and Facebook are actively updated which allows content to stay fresh and interesting. The accounts provide not only a means for consumers to reach out to Uniqlo: the brand also actively makes use of these tools to set up effective online campaigns in order to, in return, engage with its (possible) consumers. This shows that Uniqlo’s online presence is bi-directional, with input from both consumers and brand.

Through many successful online campaigns, Uniqlo has steadily created a respectable online presence and credibility, turning the brand into one of the top examples of good social media integration in branding.

4.2.2 Uniqlo Lucky Counter

In the fall of 2010, Uniqlo UK wanted to boost the relaunch of its e-commerce website with the Lucky Counter Campaign (Uniqlo Co., 2010). Via the Uniqlo UK website, people could access a page with 10 items of clothing, each marked with its actual retail price. Consumers could then click on an item, which resulted in a pre-written tweet being sent out from their account with the hashtag #LuckyCounter.

\[\text{Figure 3: Uniqlo Lucky Counter (source: http://www.jwtintelligence.com/2010/09/uniqlos-lucky-counter)}\]

\(^5\) This platform is explained in section 4.2.4 on p. 30
With each tweet send out, the price of that selected item would go down. Consequently, the more people clicked, the more an item would be discounted in price. According to Vaughn (2010), this campaign was cleverly inspired by the Groupon-trend of group buying. The campaign proved to be a huge success, and the brand’s name even appeared in the Twitter trending topic list as a result (Whitehead, 2010).

- **Find the right social media application**: Uniqlo created a mix between its website and Twitter, successfully combining the social media application with a regular website. In addition, they were clearly inspired by another application, namely Groupon. Understanding the recent successes of the trendy social shopping website, Uniqlo used its simple concept and applied it to their own merchandise.

- **Define the focus**: in terms of content, Uniqlo choose to create a website with an application representing an interactive game. They let the content speak for itself, and added nothing else (such as information about the clothes, for example). That way, the focus of the campaign was clear for the consumer.

- **Inform and engage**: Lucky Counter informed the consumer, in the sense that the campaign put the brand’s products on display. It also engaged the consumers, as they were actively invited to participate in the Lucky Counter game. Uniqlo understood that this method is key, as it provided the consumer with the power to influence the retail prices.

- **Be creative and surprising**: this campaign ticks all the right creative boxes. It is not only innovative, but also surprising in that it actually results in a tangible reward: the discounted piece of clothing.

**Conclusion**: this straightforward and simple campaign was an excellent step in Uniqlo’s branding process in the UK. From a relatively unknown and new clothing brand on the market, Uniqlo managed to become one of the trending topics on twitter and of e-WOM in general. Of course Uniqlo wanted to boost sales with the campaign, but this was clearly not the main focus. Mainly, Uniqlo’s goal was to create brand awareness and recognition, important steps for a new brand on the market in order to position itself. Furthermore, the brand wanted to actively engage the consumer by allowing them to influence retail prices. More importantly, Uniqlo did not use aggressive advertising techniques to reach this effect but merely relied on creativity, an achievement appreciated and respected by social media users. In addition, this campaign was meaningful as it provided a real result in the end for the social media user.

### 4.2.3 Uniqlo Lucky Line

In 2010 Uniqlo launched the viral campaign Uniqlo Lucky Line for its Japanese market to celebrate the brand’s 26th birthday in Japan (Wee, 2010). The idea was simple: Twitter users could enter the Lucky Line by sending out a tweet, which resulted in them entering the queue. Every 26th person entering the queue received a Uniqlo gift coupon. People could enter as much as they liked during the two days the
campaign was active. With Lucky Line, Uniqlo became the top trending topic on Twitter (Independent.co.uk, 2010).

![Figure 4: Uniqlo Lucky Line (source: http://www.pennolson.com/2010/05/26/uniqlo-lucky-line-twitter-viral-campaign)](http://www.pennolson.com/2010/05/26/uniqlo-lucky-line-twitter-viral-campaign)

- **Find the right social media application:** similar to the Lucky Counter campaign, Uniqlo created a unique platform via the mix between the social media application Twitter and a regular website especially designed for the occasion: people that queued could witness this action live on the Lucky Line website, and simultaneously sent out a tweet.

- **Define the focus:** Uniqlo again choose to create a website with an application representing an interactive game. However, unlike the Lucky Counter campaign, no items of clothing were displayed. The campaign only wanted to celebrate Uniqlo’s birthday, and smartly incorporated this in a virtual game. This link made the campaign meaningful and relevant, and showed clear focus.

![Figure 5: Uniqlo Lucky Line (source: http://www.pennolson.com/2010/05/26/uniqlo-lucky-line-twitter-viral-campaign)](http://www.pennolson.com/2010/05/26/uniqlo-lucky-line-twitter-viral-campaign)
Inform and engage: the Lucky Line campaign informed the consumer by providing company information – Uniqlo’s 26th birthday. Instead of leaving it at that, the campaign actively engaged the consumers by creating the Lucky Line queue.

Be creative and surprising: Lucky Line is turned a very basic and simple idea – a queue – into a creative and entertaining concept. By adding the gift voucher for every 26th tweet, again a real reward was incorporated. Also, the fact that Uniqlo unconventionally chose to highlight its 26th birthday – instead of more common birthday celebrations such as a 25th or a 50th – confirms the company’s creative and quirky image.

Conclusion: the brand did not want their birthday going by unannounced, so Uniqlo turned this occasion into a simple yet brilliant virtual campaign. The idea demonstrated meaningful focus, actively engaged and informed the consumer, and was incorporated in a creative framework. As Uniqlo is already a consolidated brand in Japan, the campaign’s intention was not about brand recognition. Instead, it was a successful attempt at bringing attention to Uniqlo, but with a viral campaign opposed to the standard TV, print or online advertisement. As a result, Lucky Line not only brought Uniqlo to the attention in Japan itself, but also created priceless global e-WOM for the brand, both from regular social media users and influential social media watchers applauding Uniqlo’s approach.

4.2.4 Uniqlooks

In a press report of Uniqlo dating from February 2011, Uniqlo announced the launch of Uniqlooks: “a website, social community and global communication platform that will make it simple for people around the world to share their Uniqlo style” (Uniqlo Co., 2011).

The concept of this fashion community is simple: people upload a picture of themselves wearing an outfit with at least one Uniqlo item, allowing other users to vote on the outfit. The outfits with the most
votes are ranked highest on the page, and with the top-voted outfit being bombarded to the outfit of the week. These top-ranked outfits are also used by the brand as inspiration for looks displayed in-store. Visitors browsing through the Uniqlook website can not only rate the outfits, but can also click on the Uniqlo clothes in order to buy them.

This platform integrates the social media application Facebook, since members upload the outfit photos via their Facebook account. The uploaded outfits are also displayed on their account.

Figure 7: Uniqlooks (source: http://uniqlooks.uniqlo.com)

- **Find the right social media application:** for Uniqlooks, the brand again successfully integrated a social media application with a separate website: the social network site Facebook complements the Uniqlooks platform. As Uniqlooks is all about individuals posting and selecting visuals, a medium such as Facebook - where people already have personal profiles and in which pictures are featured heavily – appears to be a good choice. It makes the Uniqlooks platform also accessible, as most social media users know Facebook, which narrows the step towards Uniqlo.

- **Define the focus:** the focus of Uniqlooks is clear: the only content is input received from members – the outfit pictures- making it a fashion community by and for Uniqlooks members. Uniqlo is clever not to include other features such as surveys or comments sections: Uniqlooks is already a real treasure of customer insights and puts their clothes on display, so changing this formula would defeat the purpose and be unnecessary.

- **Inform and engage:** Similar to the other two actions, Uniqlooks also informs its users. Through the outfit pictures, the Uniqlo products are showcased and users are inspired on how to wear and combine the clothes. This is priceless information which is communicated
for free by the Uniqlo consumers, making it non-intrusive. The biggest advantage of Uniqlooks for Uniqlo, however, is the way it engages the members: they are invited to voluntarily participate as the brand’s models and stylists. Uniqlo again understands that the strength of social media lies in how it empowers the consumers.

- **Be creative and surprising:** there are plenty of fashion blogs and communities to be found online, but Uniqlo’s approach signals creativity and uniqueness. By shunning all texts and using only pictures, a strong visual is created focusing solely on the individual’s style. Also the peer-to-peer rating and the outfit of the week gives this fashion community a surprising and unexpected twist.

**Conclusion:** What makes Uniqlooks so special is the active engagement of its users. Uniqlooks illustrates how social media mainly centres around the interaction between people, and about a power shift to the advantage of consumers. Uniqlooks is a of course brand-sponsored initiative, but Uniqlo stays on the sidelines which is a correct and smart attitude: the attention is entirely focused on the consumers. Moreover, Uniqlooks is a great example of e-WOM. Positive e-WOM is what every brand dreams of, and Uniqlooks seems to be e-WOM at its best: what more could a brand ask for than consumers who become brand ambassadors on a voluntarily basis and communicate with other brand ambassadors about the brand’s products?

4.2.5 *The consequences for the branding of the brand ‘Uniqlo’*

After discussing the Uniqlo campaigns and their successful usage of social media, the analysis turns to the question whether or not they applied the branding principles effectively. In other words, did the good social media use influence the branding of Uniqlo?

- **WOM:** Uniqlo recognized the importance for a brand to generate positive WOM, and in this case e-WOM. For example, by launching Lucky Counter and Lucky Line via Twitter, they rightly counted on a chain reaction of people tweeting to lower the price or to enter the queue. An added, and maybe unexpected, bonus is that afterwards the attention did not fade out. Instead, many blog post and tweets applauded the campaigns – priceless e-WOM.

- **Differentiation is vital:** never before had a clothing brand launched similar campaigns. Uniqlo positively branded itself as different from other clothing brands, and became ‘that cool and original Japanese brand that successfully launches social media campaigns which are different and always surprising’.

- **Keep it simple:** the campaigns have simple and straightforward messages: tweet and there will be a discount, tweet and you can win a voucher, and upload a picture of an outfit. For instance, in none of the campaigns are there other assignments requested, such as filling in personal info in order to enter. Surfers are also not bugged with rational product claims or unwanted advertisements. Simple and clear messages are a staple of Uniqlo, which understands well that this technique attracts attention and allows them to stand out.
• **Get emotional:** With Lucky Line, the main ingredient is the clothes. However, instead of focusing on rational product claims, Uniqlo seduced consumers with a trusted attention-grabber: a discount. Undoubtedly, many people tweeting did not need a certain product at the time, but the mere suggestion of a reduced price was enough to engage them. Also with Lucky Line and Uniqlooks, Uniqlo gets emotional. For Lucky Line, the brand explains that the main incentive for the campaign is the company’s 26th birthday. The emotional element of Uniqlooks, on the other hand, consists of how the community turns its members in brand ambassadors.

• **Be consistent/ Focus:** Each campaign Uniqlo launches has some striking similarities which create consistency and suggest calculated focus: simple messages, engagement of the consumers, creative and artistic design, and a certain level of ‘coolness’ and uniqueness. Moreover, the campaigns all have a feel that can be described as avant-garde, innovative, and on the pulse of trends. Even though two of the three campaigns were for non-Japanese audiences (Lucky Counter, Uniqlooks) they also demonstrate typical Japanese quirkiness.

• **First brand advantage:** Uniqlo has the first brand advantage with its products. The market of budget-friendly fashion is dominated by chains such as Zara, so instead Uniqlo focuses on a sub-market: budget-friendly casual clothes that fit and can be worn by all. Also in the field of social media, the brand is perceived as being an innovator and having the first brand advantage: judging by the success and impact of its campaigns, Uniqlo seems to always be among the first to spot online trends and engage with them correctly.

**Conclusion:** thanks to the campaigns, Uniqlo is branded as a trendy and innovative casual clothing brand, which actively listens to and involves its customers. Through its Japanese roots, Uniqlo is also branded as a bit quirky and avant-garde.
5 Conclusion
The literature study and the consequent analysis of the three Uniqlo campaigns provided interesting insights in how a brand can engage in social media activities and, at the same time, be branded effectively.

The investigation revealed that Uniqlo successfully launched its campaigns by building each action carefully around the key social media guidelines. Every campaign had a clear message, was informative, engaged the consumer, and was an example of true creativity and innovation. More important for Uniqlo, the campaigns also fortified the Uniqlo brand. Analysis of the branding principles shows clearly that the Japanese company understands what good branding means, as the campaigns have put the brand on the map and in the mind of the consumer as a specific entity.

Although this paper can already serve as a tool for brands willing to incorporate social media actively in its branding activities, more research is needed. For instance, it would be interesting for future research to compare examples of brands from different sectors, as this paper only focused on a retail brand, or to contrast the social media campaigns of B-to-B and B-to-C brands. Another, and probably more challenging, necessity is constantly updated research: because of the continuously evolving nature of social media, trends in the social media spectrum can fade out as quickly as they arrived.
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