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## What is the Effectiveness of Public Relations Tactics being Utilized by High Street Fashion Brands to Encourage Consumer Knowledge of their Brand Identity?

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OF THEIR BRAND IDENTITY ?

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M.A. IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND NEW MEDIA  
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2012



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**LYNN FERRARI**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment on the programme of study  
learning to the award of master's Degree (MA) in Public Relations with New  
Media

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Supervised by Emmett Coffey

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**Cork Institute of Technology**

## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of

### **Master's Degree (MA) in Public Relations with New Media**

Is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfillment for the stated above.

Signed ..... (Student)

Date .....

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## Abstract

### **What is the effectiveness of public relations tactics being utilized by high street fashion brands to encourage consumer knowledge of their brand identity?**

This thesis looks to discover if high street fashion brands are utilizing effective public relations. It attempts to identify if the PR tools being utilized by high street fashion brands are evident to the consumer and if they contribute to purchasing power, the model of communication that is being employed by high street fashion brands and if age contributes to the knowledge and effectiveness of public relation tactics and communication tools.

**Approach:** The research involved a two-stage study with the first phase focusing on an extensive literature review of the key sources of secondary research including reports, articles and publications. The second stage of the study was conducted through qualitative research, which involved a set of interviews and focus groups. A semi structured interview was utilized in order to discover an insight into the thoughts and opinions of professionals working in the fashion industry from a PR, journalistic and fashion brands point of view. The interviews were supported with two focus groups where participants were selected based on their age and if they are active consumers in the high street fashion industry.

**Results:** The results indicate that high street fashion brands that utilize effective public relations have a stronger brand identity in the opinion of the high street fashion consumer. Online PR is a powerful tool for communicating with a brands publics. If a brand has no online presence it falls behind its competitors in the high street fashion industry and is viewed as old fashioned according to results in this study. This study demonstrates that effective PR tactics can have a positive effect on consumer opinions of a high street fashion brand. Findings conclude that social media facilitate two-way communication and show that social media is a necessary tool when communicating with a new generation of consumers in their 20's and 30's.

In analyzing these findings the researcher found that age did have an effect on the knowledge of public relations tactics and also the effectiveness of the tactics on particular consumer target markets.

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CHAPTER 1:  
INTRODUCTION

# Chapter One Introduction

## 1.1 Rational

Recognizing the role of public relations for any organisation or industry is wide and varied especially for the high street fashion industry. Fashion trends suffocate the high street fashion market with little differentiation between each store in terms of garments. With a saturated market how do these fashion brands differentiate themselves and gain consumer loyalty? Although there is many publications available dealing with branding, marketing, public relations and consumerism in the fashion industry there is a lack of sources that investigate the effectiveness of public relation tactics when it comes to brand differentiation between similar high street fashion stores.

The first area that the author will address is to discover if high street fashion brands are utilizing effective public relations to communicate their brand to the public and ultimately the consumer. Following this the author will further investigate if the PR tactics that are being utilized by the high street fashion brand are evident to the consumer and do they contribute to the consumers opinion and loyalty to that brand.

The public relations industry is evolving all the time especially with the emergence of new media and web 2.0. The Internet has provided access to a number of different platforms for people to communicate and connect with one another. With the advent of social media, both high street fashion brands and consumers now have the chance to build and develop relationships online. Social media has become an important development for the public relations industry, the high street fashion industry and the media. Relationships are changing; there has been a change in the role that public relations plays within the high street fashion industry and a change in the consumer's role. The author aims to identify if high street fashion brands are utilizing the development of the Internet to communicate their brand with high street fashion

consumers and the public. Is the two-way symmetrical model of communication being adopted by high street fashion brands?

*“The development of new kinds of interactivity and participation has... altered the balance of power between the producer and the consumer” (Turner, 2010).*

The author will finally investigate whether age is an underlying factor when it comes to the recognition of high street fashion brands and the PR tactics they are utilizing. The author will address if high street fashion brands differentiate their PR tactics depending on the age of their target market. The author will determine if it is more manageable for a high street fashion brand to communicate with a younger demographic of consumers as they dominate social media platforms and also to discover if they are more easily influenced by PR tactics.

## **1.2 Research Question**

There are numerous questions that form the basis of the research question. They are:

- 1 What is the importance of brand identity to a high street fashion store from a public relations perspective?
- 2 Are the PR tools being utilized by high street fashion brands evident to the consumer and do they contribute to purchasing power?
- 3 What model of communication is being employed by high street fashion brands?
- 4 Does age contribute to the knowledge and effectiveness of public relation tools and communication?

In exploring these questions the author expects to determine:

**What is the effectiveness of public relations tactics being utilized by high street fashion brands to encourage consumer knowledge of their brand identity?**

Once this research has been undertaken it will be of interest to PR students, fashion students, PR professional, those who teach public relations and those in business. It



will give them an understanding of how PR tactics may or may not affect the brand identity of high street fashion store. It aims to give them the tools to find what PR tactics are effective to the high street fashion consumer and an insight into the consumers opinions about PR tactics being utilized by these brands.

There may be certain restrictions to this research including:

- 1 The small sample of high street fashion consumers included in the focus group may affect the validity of the research.
- 2 All professionals interviewed are from a modern generation and below the age of 40. This may affect the findings.

### **1.3 Context Review**

*Fashion is too prevalent to be considered trivial. Even when you say you're not interested in fashion, you've been forced to confront it. Fashion is everywhere. What you choose to wear or not to wear has become a political statement. You don't buy clothes – You buy an identity. (Tungate, 2004: 2)*

The U.K. fashion market is a leading industry and is heavily situated in the Irish fashion market. It is well known for key players such as Marks & Spencer, Next, Topshop, Asos, Mulberry, River Island and French Connection. For the purpose of this study the researcher looked at statics to show the scale and size of the high street fashion industry. These static's are based on UK figures, as British companies own most high street brands. Great Britain remains a leading center for the manufacturing of clothing and high- quality fabrics, with the clothing and textile industries combined producing £8.5 billion worth of goods and employing 150,000 people according to a Fashion United survey conducted in 2007.

The UK high street fashion industry is worth an estimated £44.5 billion. A total UK household consumption on clothing and footwear is € 59 billion per year. Thus, British consumers spent about € 900 on fashion, slightly above the EU-27 average of € 700 per year (Fashion United, accessed on the 09/09/2012). Employment in UK

fashion retail remains stable over time; approximately 435 thousand people are active in the retail of textile, clothing and footwear in the UK.

According to a study conducted by Fashion United in 2009 the overall size of economic activities of the Clothing & Textile sector (textile, apparel, footwear and leather goods) in the EU-27 represents a turnover of €562 billion. Despite a strong downward trend, in 2009 the Clothing & Textile sector still employed 2.2 million people who are active in the manufacturing of textiles, clothing and leather goods. EU-27 household consumption slowed down or even reduced in 2009 as a response to the global economic recession and lowered consumer confidence (fashion United, 2009).

According to this study conducted by Fashion United (2009) in 2009 the consumers made effective use the Internet in order to seek out bargains and compare prices at the click of a button. However, in 2009 retailers were more cautious about entering Internet retailing. Most apparel companies based in the UK opted either to offer only a portion of their products online, or sold goods via an established online retailer (Fashion United 2009). As household penetration for Internet retailing grows with the emergence of new media, non-store retailing will contribute most to new profitable growth in the high street fashion industry. Shopping 'on the go', as a result of iPhone applications and hand held PDA's, will also drive growth in this sector towards online retailing.

According to an article by Living East, the retailers that are making the most profits recently are those online boutiques that trade solely online (Living East, 2012). This study continues to analysis the reasons for this. The main reasons that online stores are growing in success are for the following reasons according to Living East (2012):

- The discounts online stores can offered compared to shops solely on the high street, give an advantage as consumers want the best price, this is due to the fact online stores do not have the same overheads such as rent, wages etc.
- Consumers can shop on the go with the development of computing technologies.

### **1.3.1 Topshop**

Emerging on the fashion scene in 1964 in the basement of a department Topshop has grown to enormously and now has over 300 stores worldwide. Owned by Philip Green and a subsidiary of the Arcadia fashion retailing group. Topshop have developed an individual brand identity. Their fashion style encompasses an 'eclectic British' style.

In 2002 Topshop joined forces with NEWGEN, a scheme which allows them to foster new talent and provide a global platform for the fashion scene's upcoming designers. Topshop are the only high street brand to show on schedule at London Fashion Week with their Unique collection. Topshop have a history of collaborating with well known fashion designers such as Christopher Kane, Kate Moss, JW Anderson, Louise Gray, Pixie Lott and Jonathan Saunders.

Currently Topshop are working with charity organisation CentrePoint, who are working to give homeless young people a future. Topshop workers are urged to get involved in any charity associations with Topshop. In 2011 Topshop workers from their UK base flagship store in Oxford Circus, London, took part in a sleepout organised by CentrePoint. In 2011 Topshop also held a fashion show in Northampton in the UK, to support MacMillan Cancer support. The corporate social responsibility being employed by Topshop is long standing. In 2007 Topshop launched a charity bottled water to provide funding for a charity called Charity:Water, who provide water for people in Africa.

According to the Topshop website the brand is spread across seven online platforms and social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and YouTube. Topshop have over 2.5 million fans on their Facebook page and nearly 500,000 followers on Twitter.

### **1.3.2 Wallis**

The high street fashion brand first opened in 1923. The brand operates 134 stores in

126 countries across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Wallis is part of the long standing retailing group Arcadia and is also one of the companies owned under Philip Green, a large British retail owner.

Wallis works closely with Cancer research and launched a charity charm bracelet in 2005 and a charm necklace in 2007. These charms were designed by international designers and celebrities such as Scarlett Johansson and Kate Moss to raise funds for the cancer research charity.

In 2009 Wallis joined with supermodel Yasmin Le Bon to collaborate on a collection of women's clothing and jewellery called YLB.

Wallis utilizes social media in the form of a blog, which is connected to their website, a Facebook, Twitter page and a Pinterest account. Wallis have around 22,000 fans on Facebook and 3000 followers on Twitter.

CHAPTER 2:  
LITERATURE REVIEW

## Chapter Two Literature Review

### 2: 1 Defining Public Relations

The term 'Public Relations' is still yet to be collated into one universally agreed definition although communication techniques have been around for centuries. Examples include cave drawings, the Bible and The Book of Kells, each informing and educating. The Vikings invented the corporate logo as they painted the sails of their ships to communicate their identity.

However public relations as a profession is a relatively new. According to Gunning "the person generally credited with founding modern day public relations is Ivy Ledbetter Lee (1877-1934)"(Gunning Ellen, 2003, 3). Undertaking the role of a press officer in 1906 for the coal industry in the United States, Lee soon became at the forefront of the industry. He issued a declaration of principles most importantly declaring, "The public could not be ignored, or fooled, or put off by lies" and how he would only deal with top management (Gunning Ellen, 2003, 3). This was revolutionary at the time. It was unprecedented that a public relations practitioner would deal with top management only. Lee was the first person to put respect for the public on the agenda.

Edward Bernays (1891-1995) was soon to follow in the footsteps of Lee and became one of the key influences on the practice of public relations. Well-known for his use of persuasion and propaganda, Bernays taught the first course in Public Relations at New York University (1923) (Gunning Ellen, 2003, 4).

Harlow (1976) found 472 different definitions of PR coined between 1900 and 1976. He built his own definition from these findings offering that:

*Public Relations is a distinct management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and*

*cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinions; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning systems to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principle tools. (Harlow, quoted in Wilcox et al. 2003: 7)*

This definition describes what PR does rather than what it is. There have been many attempts to capture the essence of what public relations is. Wilcox *et al* (Theaker, 2008: 4) looks at one attempt of defining PR by the 1978 World Assembly of Public Relations in Mexico and how it was suggested that public relations is an 'art and social science'. Theaker (2008: 5) explains how this attempt can be useful; "The words 'art' and 'social science' are helpful in explaining the continuing tension between understanding PR as a measurable, science based application of communication tools, and the affection of many practitioners for the looser, more creative, aspects of the work".

Grunig and Hunt (1984), devised a definition that was more concise than Harlow's long, interminable statement and summed up PR in one sentence as 'the management of communications between an organisation and its publics' (T&Y 2009: 5)

In 1948 The Charter Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) was established. The CIPR is the UK's leading professional body for public relations practitioners and it gained Chartered status in 2005. A well-devised definition framed by the IPR in 1987 is still useful today: 'Public Relations is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics' (Theaker 2008: 4). Planned and sustained are two words that must be acknowledged in this definition by the CIPR. Public Relations is not a spontaneous activity. The relationship built between a company and its publics is not effortless. They are established and maintain through cohesive and sustained communication strategies.

Most definitions of public relations contain two components: communications and management. Public relation practices are planned and stringently managed. Hunt and

Grunig (1984) define public relations as the: “*managed communication between an organisation and its public*”. Public relations draws on theories and practices from many different fields, such as management, media, communication and psychology. Many people find it difficult to define public relations in one sentence. It is a complex and hybrid subject.

No managers or businesses should look upon PR as a spin. It is vital to the expertise of planning and strategic communications, a necessary grasp of reputation management and a calm and practical approach to crisis management. PR can be used as strategic planning by managers. It’s a way for businesses to control their environment and prepare for change.

## **2.2 Propaganda V’s Publicity**

Public Relations is often confused with propaganda or publicity. According to Gunning (2008: 4)

*“Propaganda is the deliberate effort to gain support for an opinion, creed or belief. Propaganda denies, or fails to recognise, the existence of, or merits in, alternative opinions. Propaganda makes an emotional appeal to the heart: ‘Believe because I believe’. It is, by nature, biased. Propagandists are prejudiced in favor of their topic, and therefore their concentration is on winning your support – not necessarily on being totally truthful with you.”*

In contrast to propaganda, public relations is based on the truth. As Ivy Ledbetter Lee prescribed in his declaration of principles, “The public could not be ignored, or fooled, or put off by lies” (Gunning 2008: 3). The aim of public relations activity is not solely demand a change in attitudes. The information is delivered to ones public and they can develop their own opinions. Public relations is also about listening. In most cases it’s a two way model of communication as will be discussed later in this chapter.



Publicity is the other area that is most confused with public relations. Publicity is in fact an aspect of PR, however it is only a small element within the broad term. Publicity is drawing attention to something or highlighting the issue, event or occasion in the media. This form of public relations is most commonly used in celebrity PR. In 1959 the US Celebrity Register was quoted saying ‘... you can judge a man as a celebrity – all you have to do is weigh his press clippings’ (T&Y 2009: 623). Publicity is something that is forced in the eye of the public through media sources. “You see it in newspapers, magazines and on television; you hear it on the radio; you notice it in bus shelters and on poster sites” (Gunning 2008: 5). Publicity can be secured by buying advertising. Public relation tactics such as issuing a press release, pitching an idea for a feature article or calling a press conference, can also achieve publicity hence why publicists are often referred to as press agents. Max Clifford in the UK is probably one of the best know publicists.

*“Publicity can be secured by public relations means, but it is not the sole object of any public relations activity. It may be an end result (which is achieved from giving information), or it may be a selected tool used to reach a particular audience, but it is never the primary aim of any public relations campaign”* (Gunning 2008: 6).

### **2.3 Models of Communication**

A main focus of this study was to examine how high-street fashion brands communicate with their target market and examine how public relations techniques are used in this effort to communicate. It is therefore necessary to provide an explanation of the basic theories of public relations. In 1984 two of the earliest system theorists, James Grunig and Todd Hunt, suggested four models of communications based on public relations practice observations in the United States. These theories can be found in their seminal work, *Managing Public Relations* (1984) and have been carried throughout the decades as the most influential models of communications affecting public relations. These became known as *Grunig and Hunts four models of communication*. The four models are called: the press agency/publicity model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetric model and the two-way

symmetric model. Each of these four models were subject to debate, mainly Grunig and Hunt's ideal model the two way communications model. In recent years conducting two-way communication between a company and its public has become crucial, as people as well as companies want to have a voice and share their opinions. The emergence of Web 2.0 has made the two-way models of communication more customary within the public relations industry.

### **2.3.1 Press agency/publicity model**

According to Theaker (2008: 29) this kind of activity is what most people associate with public relations. A press agent or publicist aims to secure media exposure for a brand, person or cause and truth is not an absolute requirement. Grunig and Hunt point out that 'practitioners in these organisations concern themselves most with getting attention in the media for their clients' (Theaker 2008: 29). This model is one-way communication. There is no dialogue with the recipient. This model is most commonly used in celebrity PR. Press agency "emphasizes generation of media coverage of an organisation or individual by any means necessary, including deception and trickery" (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, quoted in Ciara Murphy 2011: 14). Max Clifford is a modern day advocate of the press agency model. Clifford is well known for his front-page exclusives and works with some of the most successful personalities in the world. "This model emphasizes the benefit to the sender rather than the receiver," (Theaker 2008: 29).

### **2.3.2 Public Information Model**

This model differs to the press agency model as it is based on true and accurate information. This model does not seek to change attitudes, behavior or persuade an audience. Its role is to deliver information to those who need it. "The main aim is to inform, rather than persuade" (T&Y 2009: 150). This communication is still one-way, from sender to the receiver, but it is more relevant to the receiver than the press agency model. "Ivy Leadbetter Lee was one of the first public relations practitioners in the US who persuaded businesses to be less secretive about their work and release more accurate information," (Theaker 2008: 29).

### **2.3.3 Two-way Asymmetric Model**

This model introduces the idea of two-way communication or feedback. This model is however imbalances as the intended changes lay within the behavioral attitude of the audience rather than the organisations customs. According to Theaker (2008: 29) it is also described as persuasive communications and can be demonstrated in health campaigns, for example. In this kind of public relations planning and research is important as persuasive communication relies on understanding the attitudes and behavior of the target publics. "Feedback from publics is used to adapt communications strategies to be more persuasive, not to alter the organisations position" (T&Y 2009: 150). The information received from the publics is not used to change the organisations practices; it is merely used as research into the behavior of the targeted publics. As cited by Theaker, Edward Bernays was a pioneer for this model. Bernays came of prominence in the US Committee for First World War propaganda. He was also the nephew of Sigmund Freud's who was the founding father of psychoanalysis, and used psychological insights to increase the persuasive content of a message. In recent years propaganda has become known as an undesirable communication method and persuasion is seen as suspicious. This has lead to some distrust in the field of public relations. Theaker (2008: 31) notes there has been a major debate about the tensions between propaganda, persuasion and public relations, with some denying any link and other accusing PR of being nothing but propaganda.

### **2.3.4 Two-way Symmetric Model**

In public relations this model is often referred to as the 'ideal model'. According to Theaker (2008: 31) "it describes a level of equality of communication not often found in real life, where each party is willing to alter their behavior to accommodate the needs of each other". This model proposes the concept of dialogue, whereas the other three models are characterized by a monologue-type communication. The two-way symmetrical model is also seen as the most ethical and most effective of the four models. Building a mutual understanding between the organisation and its public is

the main aim. The practitioner acts as a mediator between the conflicting interests of the public and the organisation and attempts to achieve a balance. "The term 'sender' and 'receiver' are not applicable in such a communication process, where the aim is mutual understanding (Windahl *et al.* 1992 quoted by Theaker 2008: 31). However, persuasion still plays a part in the two-way symmetrical model, where both the public and the organisation endeavor to influence on another (Grunig and Hunt, 1984 quoted by Glynis Dennehy 2011).

*"For Grunig PR is essentially symmetric communication. Information does not only runs from organisations to their relevant groups, but these groups also supply the organisation with information on what they aspire and what their interests are. This opens up the loops of feedback"* (van Es, Meijlink, 2001: 70).

As noted by Theaker (2008 31) critics such as Priczka 2006; Moloney 200 and 2006a, for example argue that it is so rarely practiced as to be helpful. Grunig (2001) has since updated his model to emphasize the mixed motives that may be involved in any PR communication.

There has been much criticism of the symmetric and asymmetric communication models, with critics arguing that it is an idealistic model, which misrepresents the communication process in reality (L'Etang 1996). "All Dialogue might involve two-way communication, but not all two-way communication is dialogue" (Kelleher, 2007: 49).

To explore the communication tactics employed by high street fashion brands it was necessary to explore each models of communication. For the purpose of this study it is important to analysis whether these brands are practicing two-way communication with their publics and if this is a PR tactics used to build their brand identity.

## **2.4 PR and New Media**

"The emergence of new digital technologies signals a potentially radical shift of who is in control of information, experience and resources" (Shapiro in Croteau and

Hoynes 2003 quoted by Dennehy 2011: 15).

To explore the term 'New Media' one needs to investigate the distinctions between new media and mainstream mass media. "Mainstream mass media are typically highly centralized, require significant investment and resources and can be heavily influenced by governments through various mechanisms and forms of control (Banerjee, 2008, quoted by Salman *et al.* 2011: 4).

*"The new or alternative media on the other hand have radically different characteristics. The new media such as the Internet can be used for both points to mass communications as well as point-to-point and mass to point message distribution. They are also extremely de-centralized, require very low investment, provide greater interactivity and public participation and are much more difficult to control.*

New media is a term used to describe the convergence of electronic communication forms that are made possible through the use of computed technologies. The most important of these technologies is the Internet. Tench and Yeomans (2009: 641) explains how technology has transformed the way we communicate in recent years and this has specific effects on the practice of PR. How and where we work, how we communicate with colleagues, clients and media stakeholders have all be influenced by technology and its evolution. The web allows for a new communication sphere where people are interacting online. New methods include Facebook, blogs, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn and online discussion forums. These new methods have been categorized as social networking sites and are quickly becoming the main location for interacting and communicating.

New media has had a large impact on traditional media. According to Jenkins (2006: 5) the traditional media industry is going through another paradigm shift much like the one it went through in the 1990's.

*"In the 1990's, rhetoric about a coming digital revolution contained an implicit and often explicit assumption that new media was going to push aside*

*old media, that the internet was going to displace broadcast, and that all of this would enable consumers to more easily access media content that was personally meaningful to them” (Jenkins, 2007: 5).*

Although traditional media is still prevalent according to the 2009 Joint National Readership Survey (JNRS), over the past century market penetration by daily newspapers dropped from 120 percent to 50 percent (Dennehy 2011: 16). The report also noted that prospects for growth are low with no scope for price increases to compensate for losses in advertising revenue. Traditional media is losing its readership through the fact that the current generation of young people are part of the ‘Generation Y’ era. Another name for ‘Generation Y’ is the Internet Generation.

*“Gen Y was socialized in a digital world. It is more than technically literate; it is continually wired, plugged in, and connected to digitally streaming information, entertainment, and contacts. It has so mastered technology that multitasking is a habit it takes into the workplace, where it tends to instant message its contacts while doing work” (Lewis, 2003). (Eisner 2005)*

A recent study found Gen Y consuming 31 hours of media (through multi-tasking) within a 24-hour period (Weiss, 2003).

Dewdney (2006) describes how his working definition of new media is neither about the current moment in time, nor about media as the latest technologies. Instead as he applies the term ‘new’ to media, it refers to what people do with technologies and is, therefore about the possibilities for, and realization of, human thinking, feeling and communication in a new medium (Dewdney 2006: 4).

#### **2.4.1 Web 2.0**

Web 2.0 is a concept that takes the network as a platform for information sharing, communication, user-centered interface design and collaboration on the World Wide Web (WWW) (Solomon, Schrum, 2007: 12). A Web 2.0 site allows users to interact and collaborate in a social media dialogue and create content. Web 1.0 sites allowed

users to view content online but not create or interact with other users on a virtual sphere.

Social media is the term used to describe the website and applications that are being used to create and share this content. The foundation of Web 2.0 and social media is communication. There are many applications that are dominating the web 2.0 spheres. These include Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Wiki, Bebo, Myspace, Flickr and blogs. These are all user-friendly sites where anyone can create content and share it with the WWW and for the most part they are free. Social media tools now allow PR practitioners to have the ability to influence and persuade their publics.

As the material is so easily shared and travels faster than any traditional media content, there are consequences that need to be monitored and addressed. However if monitored and addressed these risks can be subsided through the development of policies and continually engaging in learning and developing an understanding of the term. Public relation practitioners need to understand the benefits and consequences that coincide with the term Web 2.0 in order to fully utilize the communication advantages that it has over traditional media sources in reaching its publics.

#### **2.4.2 PR 2.0**

In the late 1990's, Brian Solis (Solis and Breakeyridge 2009) coined the term PR 2.0. PR 2.0 uses a combination of social media tools that are available to communication professionals to reach and better communicate directly with influencers and consumer audiences (Dennehy 2011: 17).

In 1995, Warren Newman, an ex-president of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), commented: "the internet is public relations" – but at the time the Internet was ranked seventh as an issue of importance by public relations professionals. (Theaker 2008: 352). "Today, in view of its audience reach, potential for propagating information and convergence with other media (consider webcasting, internet, radio, internet protocol TV (IPTV), wireless application protocol (WAP), wikis, blogging, podcasting) the Internet provides many new tools for the PR industry" (Theaker 2008: 353). The development of the Internet increases the role of

public opinion in the behavior of organisations. While the public relations profession has always been aware of its obligations to all its stakeholder groups it is the growth of new media that is allowing for the stakeholders to voice their opinions on a larger platform (Oliver, 2007: 15).

For communication professionals, a key issue concerning the Internet is the interactivity between users and the fact that anyone can voice their opinions without constraint. The Internet allows two way and many-to-many communication. "As well as searching for 'digital dirt', PR practitioners need to have a strategy for dealing with what they find" (Theaker 2008: 368).

With the development of web2.0 and PR2.0 two-way communication must be utilized by the PR practitioner. Social media represents a shift for public relation professionals to practice the two-way symmetrical model of communication. A PR professional must utilize the web to build relationships and increasing loyalty between an organisation and its publics. The process shifts to conversation-based interaction, which cultivated relationships, strengthens customer service and increases brand recognition and loyalty (Solis et al, 2009: 92). In order to gain success, PR practitioners need to understand the audience they wish to reach and also the platform to reach that audience. Gillin (2009) says that social media has not only ended the age of one-way messaging but also put pressure on business and PR practitioners to engage the public in unprecedented ways.

PR practitioners have to learn a whole new range of media skills like social networking, blogging and podcasting. Even traditional new media are abandoning old rules and practices, using tools like blogs and podcasts to constantly engage their readers (Yuan, 2006).

## **2.5 Reputation and Brand Management**

Public Relations is often defined as 'reputation management' by practitioners and journalists. For example, PR consultancy Fleishman-Hillard state that they:



*“provide reputation management council. ... We know that reputation is a corporation’s most important asset. Strong and durable reputations are built over time by doing the right things across the organisation and by taking appropriate credit for achievements”* (Fleishman-Hillard, accessed 10 August 2012). <http://fleishmanhillard.com/point-of-view/>

Reputation is one of a number of linked concepts, which form the basis of public relations work. L’Etang (2008: 48) explains how Dr Eisenegger, from the university of Zurich, argued that the concept of reputation nurturing is the central function of public relations:

*“The primary function of public relations is the long-term assurance of the survival of the agents involved. The presupposes that these agents can be positioned as positively as possible in their field of action, and also distinguished from any competitors. This is precisely the function performed by reputation: it is the product of the social process that assigns agents their ranking in society. To this extent, PR can at its core be understood as reputation nurturing. (Eisenegger, 2005: 1)*

## **2.6 Brand/Corporate Identity**

Oliver (2007: 48) defines Identity as; *“A state of having unique identifying or individual characteristics by which a person or thing recognizes or defines him/her/itself”*. The nature of corporate image remains a growth area of public relations productivity, which, in combination with a growing body of knowledge about stakeholder expectation and cultural diversity remains a popular focus of interest (Oliver 2007: 49).

The term ‘corporate identity’ and ‘corporate image’ are sometimes confused with each other. According to Theaker (2008: 105) corporate identity is what the organisation communicates (either intentionally or unintentionally) via various cues, whereas image is how its publics actually view it. An image is an identity and exists only in the mind of the receiver. To formulate an image, publics interpret an identity in a wider context with broader frames of reference.

Many approaches to corporate identity management are informed by the concept of corporate personality.

*“Corporate personality is made up of the organization’s history, culture, values and beliefs (which drives its philosophy, mission and strategies) as realized through its staff, structures systems, its products and or services.”*

(Gregory 1999: 1)

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Theaker (2008: 105) discusses how the aim of a corporate identity plan is to determine and communicate a corporate identity to meet future strategic objectives. However a number of thinkers in this area, most notable Grunig, would argue that the corporate identity management process should not just be designed to help implement a predetermined strategy. Instead, strategy should be formulated partly in response to stakeholders’ needs and views (Theaker 2008: 106).

A corporate identity should be instantly recognizable by all. It is the physical manifestation of the company – its offices, showrooms, staff uniforms, company vans, letterheads, logo’s etc (Gunning 2003: 242). Corporate identity is most obviously created by corporate logos and branding.

Oliver (2007: 51) looks at what an identity means to a business and others:

*“If an organisation is unclear about its identity, then it will not be able to access its image as perceived by the different stakeholders, nor how these perceptions should be prioritized in terms of strategic planning, policy and practice. For any business strategy to be effective, it must be comprehended accurately by the target publics, or at least in the way that the corporate vision and mission determine.”*

Cork Institute of Technology

## 2.7 Corporate Image

The term image is derived from ‘imitari’ meaning imitation or reproduction (Bromley, 1993, L’Etang, 2008: 54). L’Etang (2008: 54) elucidates that the PR role may be defined as the projection of an organisation. Projects, however, are consumed

and interpreted by many individuals who construct various 'images' in their head about organisations. "Image is in the mind. It is closely linked with what is often called corporate personality. The image of a company is that instant reaction in the mind when the company is named" (Gunning 2003: 238).

A company's image is based on what we know about it, how it presents itself, how management deals with crises, what relationships with staff are like, the layout of the company, the corporate graphic identity. "The image is mental, but is formed, at least in part, by physical elements of the company (Gunning 2003: 238). The task of the public relations professional is to increase people's knowledge of this identity.

Theaker (2008: 109) discusses the notion of a corporate portrait "In terms of trying to effect a particular corporate image, however, the notion of a corporate portrait (not an actual personality but a carefully constructed replica of a personality) is useful".

Marken (1995: 47) believes that the public, overloaded with too much information and too many "new" products, is beginning to look more closely at the company behind the brand rather than the specific product when making purchasing decisions.

As a result public relations professionals need to focus on the company's integrity, attention to quality, and concern in consumer satisfaction. Ways in which PR professionals can create a stronger consumer-to-consumer bond should be discussed Marken feels. .

## **2.8 Consumer and Marketing PR**

The Chartered Institute of Marketing in the UK defines marketing as the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably (The Chartered Institute of Marketing, <http://tiny.cc/a0hbkw> accessed on the 14/08/2012). Public relations draws on expertise and experience from many fields and it frequently overlaps with other disciplines, including marketing. Public relations in the field of consumer relations is often referred to as marketing communications or marketing PR (MPR). Marketing, as we have seen, is the identification of the needs of consumers and how to satisfy those needs profitably (Theaker 2008: 304). Moloney (2006) states that markets are one of the oldest of human institutions, where goods and services are distributed from supplier to buyers. According to Theaker (2008:

304) within the field of consumer PR, several further specialisms exist. Each has to deal with the particular media within its area, and the specifics of the market.

In 1989 marketing expert, Philip Kotler saw public relations as one of the most cost-effective components of marketing communications. The role of public relations in the marketing mix is to communicate key messages to defined target audience within the marketing chain to influence purchasing behavior (Gregory 2004: 21). Gregory (2004:21) also explains: *“The key difference between PR and all other forms of marketing communications is the element of external or third-party endorsement, such as positive media comment, a satisfied customer testimonial or independent research carried out by a respected body like Consumers Association. The third-party endorsement arguably has more impact on the audience in terms of its credibility.”*

*“Marketing practitioners are very likely to increase their appreciation of public relations’ potential contribution to marketing the product because they are facing a real decline in the productivity of their other promotional tools.”*  
(Gregory 2004: 16)

Today those words are still relevant. Kotler adds: “The creative use of news events, publications, social investments, community relations and so on offers companies a way to distinguish themselves and their products from their competitors” (Gregory 2004: 18).

## **2.9 Intergraded Marketing Communications**

Hart Norman (1996: 25) defines marketing communications as *‘across-the-board communications to help move a potential customer from a state of ignorance towards a position of decision and action’*. Hart suggests that customers do not buy a product but rather satisfaction, so they buy holes rather than drills (Theaker 2008: 307).

How does PR fit into marketing Communications? According to Theaker (2008:307) Done Schultz coined the phrase integrated marketing in 1993, promoting the value of PR alongside other marketing disciplines (Jardine 2006). The traditional elements to the marketing mix are the four P’s – product, price, place and promotion. Promotion

refers to the media and the messages used to influence buyers. It is here that PR contributes most.

## **2.10 Public Relations and the Fashion Industry**

*“The fashion world is dependent on creating trends that attract and retain the attention of a clothes-conscious public. The role of a public relations representative in this industry is critical because it puts the face of their client companies out in the world. This person is responsible for marketing the latest fashions in a creative way, creating a buzz among influential journalists and bloggers”* (Mooney, accessed on 16/08/2012).

### **2.10.1 Identity of a Fashion Brand**

The first fashion brand was founded in Paris at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Charles Fredrick Worth was the first person to design a garment from a designer’s perspective without the clients input. Before Worth dressmakers did not create styles or dictate fashion: they were suppliers, who ran up copies of gowns that their wealthy clients had seen illustrated in journals (Borreskov and Knudsen, 2010: 9).

Genevieve Flaven, co-founder of Style vision, a company that specializes in monitoring and predicting consumer behavior believes “Every consumer can now decrypt advertising messages, so traditional marketing has become less significant. Consumers want to know what’s behind the brand” (Borreskov and Knudsen, 2010: 26). Jackson and Shaw (2009: 30) describe the difference between high-end fashion and high street fashion. In high-end fashion the designer is the brand, whereas in high street fashion the brand is about marketing, advertisements and celebrity endorsements.

According to an article by Eliza Williams in Creative Review branding concerns have over taken the expression of ideas in haute couture fashion shows. Designers are enforcing luxury goods businesses who make the most out of their revenue from handbags, sunglasses and perfumes, the suggestion is that these over the top couture

shows are as much about brand communication as showcasing contemporary design (2006).

### **2.10.2 Celebrity Endorsements**

In the early 1960's Armani utilized the presence of Richard Gere, an international actor, to transfer the designs from the fashion press to the public. Since then, by nurturing a close working relationship with the film industry in Hollywood, Armani has provided the wardrobe for more than 300 movies, always ensuring that his name appears in the credits. (Borreskov and Knudsen, 2010, 119). Borreskov and Knudsen (2010: 26) further describe in the era of the supermodel, nobody was concerned with the fashion brand. Naomi Campbell and Claudia Schiffer were the brands: the clothes were immaterial.

*“The benefits are as blinding as a spotlight: stars give brands a well-defined personality for a minimum of effort, and bring with them a rich fantasy world to which consumers aspire. In addition, consumers have a ‘history’ with stars. Even though they’ve only seen them on screen or in the pages of a magazine, they form a n attachment to celebrities, regarding them as friendly faces and reliable arbiters of taste. (Borreskov and Knudsen, 2010: 120)*

### **2.10.3 Fashion and Corporate Social Responsibility**

Borreskov and Knudsen (2010) explain: *“The social responsibility of a business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organisations at any given time. Borreskov and Knudsen (2010: 8) argue that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is being increasingly implemented into company’s business strategies, and companies are being scrutinized now more than ever. Especially companies with low cost products, such as those within the high street fashion industry, are often scrutinized by non-governmental organisations (NGO) in order to reveal whether companies live up to current laws in the country that they operate. It is, therefore becoming increasingly important for large clothing brands to show that they are socially responsible in order to maintain a healthy*

relationship with consumers and other stakeholders (Borreskov and Knudsen 2010: 11).

According to the Fiber2Fashion the concept of social responsibility is gaining popularity in today's times. Fashion companies are becoming increasingly aware of their responsibilities towards the various stakeholders associated with them. More and more fashion brands are trying to work in a way that protects the interests of the employees, customers, suppliers and other parties and the society at large. The concept of a business firm working only with the motive of earning profit is gradually becoming outdated website (<http://tiny.cc/1pwbkw>, accessed 10/08/2012).

Grunig and Hunt summaries how companies must stay in harmony with society and communicate to the public about their efforts to keep as much freedom as possible to behave as they want in order to achieve profitable goals. Hence, PR and CSR are intertwined because CSR without PR does not cast of the potential benefits of CSR (1984: 52).

#### **2.10.4 The Fashion Industry and Web 2.0**

In order to attract a younger and more global consumers, who communicate and share information in a digital world, one needs to develop a comprehensive technology strategy, one that utilizes obvious tools such as Facebook and Twitter, and also incorporates enterprise software from the likes of Sales force and SAP (Kowitt, 2012). This approach has been adopted by Burberry to allow them to stand out in the luxury business, which has historically shied away from technology for fear of eroding its aura of exclusivity. "What they've done, that no other organization in the fashion industry has done, is put a relentless focus on digital innovation," describes Kowitt (2012).

*"Technology is changing the role of the designer as the arbiter of fashion. "It's making fashion a democracy" (Messina 2011).*

CHAPTER 3:  
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



## Chapter Three Research Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology that was deployed to address the research objectives stated in chapter one. This chapter begins by defining what the purpose of research is. Research defines the studies purpose (Krizman 2011: 2). The chapter discusses the two methods that were adopted for the purpose of this research and examines their characteristics. The research methods that are chosen are then explained in detail and their selection is justified.

### 3.2 Research

*“Artists and writers, however, may present their single case, ignore the scientific (and even the popular) literature, and be unconcerned with the “truth” or “reality”, however that might be conceived. Researchers do not have such freedom and cannot dodge their responsibilities to their participants while still expecting to be taken seriously and be considered to do research. Again there are no shortcuts.”(Morse, 2004, p. 888)*

Tench and Yeomans (2009:199) acknowledge how research can have different purposes and origins. The primary purpose of research is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of PR, even if such research does not deal with the real problems of practice (‘basic research’).

The process of putting together a piece of good research is not something that can be done by slavishly following a set of edicts about what is right and wrong. In practice, the social researcher is faced with a variety of options and alternatives and has to make strategic decisions about which to choose (Denscombe, 2007: 3).

Krizman (2011:2) illuminates how research methodologies range from objective, scientific (quantitative) research style to subjective, interpretive, more constructive

(qualitative). Research methods are the data collection techniques, which refers to specific procedures. The research question derived from theory observation and literature review leads to specific hypotheses and construct where appropriate methodology and methods are employed (Kirzman 2011:2).

Tench and Yeomans (2009:199) propose six steps to guide research by:

1. Defining a research problem.
2. Choosing a general research approach (qualitative or quantitative)
3. Deciding on a research strategy (primary or secondary research).
4. Selecting the research method (survey, content analysis, focus group, etc.).
5. Deciding on the research instruments (questions in a questionnaire or categories in a content analysis).
6. Analyzing the data

### **3.3 Qualitative Vs. Quantitative Research**

The simplest way to compare qualitative and quantitative research is to say that qualitative methods involve a researcher gathering certain characteristics of a person without them being measurable or countable. On the other hand quantitative methods focus their attention on measurable amounts.

Thomas. R. M (2003, p. 1) proposes “Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. The means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings of people bring to them.” A researcher would use qualitative research in order to gain a personal understanding of a subject. This may be an opinion, experience or an idea. Quantitative research uses numbers and statistical methods. The researcher’s role is to observe and measure.

For any study, the research strategy relates to the research question being explored. Selecting the research approach between qualitative and quantitative research depends on the data being collected and explored. To address this research question a

qualitative research method was employed to examine the thoughts of subjects working and consuming in the fashion industry.

### 3.4 Qualitative Research Attributes

For the purpose of this study the author selected qualitative research as the best method concerning the research question and objectives as stated in chapter one.

*“Qualitative research is all about exploring issues, understanding phenomena, and answering questions. Focus groups, in-dept. interviews, content analysis, ethnography, evaluation and semiotics are among the many approaches that are used, but qualitative research in its most basic form involves the analysis of any unstructured data, including: open ended survey responses, literature reviews, audio recordings, pictures and web pages”*  
(<http://tiny.cc/vhxajw> accessed 14/08/2012)

Silverman (2006:11) argues that main strength of qualitative research is its ability to study phenomena, which is simply unavailable elsewhere. Quantitative researchers are concerned to establish correlations between variables. However, while their approach can tell us a lot about inputs and outputs to some phenomenon (eg. counseling), has to be satisfied with a purely ‘operational’ definition of the phenomenon and does not have the resources to describe how that phenomenon is locally constituted. As a result, its contribution to the social sciences is necessarily limited. Edward Bernays, one of the first and most prolific writers about public relations, was an advocate of the notion that public relations should be considered a science. More specifically, he called it “an applied social science’ and equated it with other applied sciences in his landmark book *The Engineering of Consent* and many other publications (Turney, 2009, <http://tiny.cc/9gxajw> accessed on the 13/08/12). The researcher of this thesis took this material into consideration when choosing the appropriate research method.

Qualitative research is interpretive: therefore, the researcher needs to collect in-depth information to be able to answer the research question. The strength of qualitative

research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. The Family Health International Qualitative Research Methods Overview publication (<http://tiny.cc/agxajw>, accessed on the 15/08/2012) explains how qualitative research provides information about the human side of an issue – that is, the often-contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions and emotions, and relationships of individuals.

In order for the researcher to investigate the PR tactics that are used to build brand differentiation in high street fashion, qualitative research was deemed the most appropriate method. As there is little research done on this topic from a PR perspective the researcher's main aims were to gather thoughts and experiences from subjects that would address the thesis objectives.

### **3.5 Data Gathering Methods**

The data used for the purpose of this research came from two sources, primary research and secondary research. As stated previously qualitative research was deemed the most effective and appropriate research method to address this thesis. In conducting the qualitative approach methodology the researcher choose semi-structured interviews and focus groups as the most befitting methods of primary research.

#### **3.5.1 Secondary Research**

A review of all relative secondary data is fundamental for any research. According to Gregory (2005: 62) secondary research is often called desk research and entails collecting information from already published sources. The secondary research that was utilized for the purpose of this thesis was academic writings on corporate branding, corporate identity and sources relating to the fashion industry. The researcher explored articles, journals, academic books and the Internet for publications on brand awareness and brand identify from a public relations perspective and also relating to the high street fashion industry. By using these books and articles it allows the research to address opinions and beliefs set by peers in the

subject of corporate identity and branding which will generate research of richer quality.

### **3.5.2 Primary Research**

Primary data is directly retrieved ('in the field') from the research object through empirical research methods – interview, focus groups, survey, content analysis or observation (Wimmer and Dominick 2006).

A qualitative approach was chosen in obtaining primary data. This approach was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were the primary research methods prescribed in this exploratory study. Interviews and focus groups were deemed most appropriate to discover people's thoughts and opinions on the PR tactics used in high street fashion stores to build brand identity and awareness. As the researcher wanted to discover thoughts and opinions a quantitative method of research would not have been appropriate. The nature of this phenomenon, as evidence stated above, is more suited to qualitative data, in order to gain rich material. Secondly the theoretical perspectives selected to guide this thesis suggest the use of a largely qualitative paradigm when dealing with the area of public relations.

The researcher had to read a considerable amount of literature on the topics of public relations, brand identity and conduct a fashion industry review so the interview and focus group could be conducted to a high knowledgeable standard. It was hoped that this would allow the researcher to narrow down themes and questions and also that it would improve the credibility of the interviewer and help establish trust with the respondents (Saunders et al., 2003).

### **3.6 Interviews**

The main purpose of an interview is to explore attitudes and attitude-relevant contexts (Tench, Yeomans :205). Interviews yield rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings (O'Sullivan 2010:

30). In order to achieve this, however, researchers need to understand the dynamics of interviewing sharpen their own use of the method and understand the different methods of conducting and analyzing the data, together with an awareness of their strengths and limitations (May, 2011).

Some of the advantages of interviews are the validity of the information gained, the flexibility of the data collected and the valuable insight the researcher is likely to gain from conducting the interview. Interviews are particularly good at gathering data, which deals in depth with the topic being explored. The interviewing allows for a developing line of enquiry and in some cases adjustments are made to the direction of the research during the interview. The validity being one of the major advantages as direct contact at the point of interview means that data can be checked for accuracy and relevance, as they are collected.

Interviews involve a set of assumptions and understanding about the situation, which are not normally associated with casual conversation (Denscombe, 2003). To justify the decision to go for depth rather than scope in the material that the author collected, the data was based on personal opinions, experiences and feelings rather than more straightforward matter of fact answers. Also the data received from the interviews conducted were based on privileged information where the informants are able to give the information needed where others may not be able.

“Research interviews do not happen by chance; it is arranged. The discussion is not arbitrary or at the whim of one of the parties; it is dedicated to investigating a given topic. The flow of the discussion is rarely free form; it is normally monitored and follows an agenda set by the researcher” (Corbin, 2008).

### **3.6.1 Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are interviews that focus on a specific list of topics, while allowing the exploration of unexpected facts and attitudes through its open structure (Aaker et al., 1998: 91).

This style of interview allowed the researcher to be more flexible in terms of the order in which the topics were considered and it also let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more freely on the issues that were raised.

Tench and Yeomans (20: 205) illuminate the characteristics of an in-depth, semi-structured interview:

- Generally smaller samples of interviewees
- Open questions that probe the reasons why respondents give specific answers: they elaborate on data concerning respondents' opinions, values, motivations, experiences and feelings
- Being customized – or reactive – to individual respondents in so far as the order and/or wording of questions can be changes, or new questions added, during the interview depending on the answers given
- Non-verbal behavior of respondents being recorded and contributing to the results.

### **3.6.2 Gaining Access to Participants**

Several professionals working in the fashion industry as either a PR executive or a journalist were approached by email. The email provided a brief description of the purpose of the research project and described the role the researcher would like them to play (See Appendix A – Invitation to participate email). These subjects were chosen based on their understanding and experience in the fashion industry. Out of the several professionals that were approached and willing to partake, two fashion journalists and two fashion PR professional were chosen as samples to conduct semi-structured interviews with.

Times were scheduled with each of the participants and the researched decided to conduct two telephone interviews and two face-to-face interviews. All participants signed a consent form (See Appendix B – Consent form) and were informed at the onset they were entitled to anonymity. The researcher explained to each of the subjects that they had to right to withdrawal from the study at any stage. Introductory

emails were sent to each of the participant's outlining general information about the research subject and the significance of the candidate's participation (See Appendix C – Project description). The average length of each interview arranged was between 30 and 45 minutes in length. After completion of the interviews the candidates were asked if they would be available for follow up questions if necessary.

### **3.6.3 Conducting the Semi-Structured Interviews**

The researcher planned the questions prior to the interviews to ensure the topic of the project was covered. The researcher wanted to ask semi-structured questions that were appropriate to the subject of the research. The researcher was careful not to plan closed questions as opened ended questions can lead to more knowledge and a better understanding of the subject. If one needs to probe for information and to give respondents maximum flexibility in structuring their responses, then open-ended questions are most suitable (Aberback, Rockman 2002: 637).

The questions were carefully designed in consideration of the candidate i.e. Journalist or PR professional. There was, however, an overlap of questions and the topics of PR, high street fashion, brand identity and brand awareness remained the same, while other questions were targeted specifically to the professional. The questions varied in length and detail depending on the answers. The interview itself varied in length, depending on the candidate being addressed.

The semi-structured interviews took place between the months of July and August 2012. All interviews lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. The interviews were recorded via an iPhone recoding application. The recording application allowed the researcher to concentrate of the participant fully and engage in the conversation as much as possible. After each of the telephone and face-to-face interviews were conducted the date collected was transcribed (See Appendix D – Interview Transcriptions).



### **3.7 Focus Groups**

According to Tench and Yeomans (2009: 206) a focus group or a group interview is similar to intensive interview, with 6 to 10 respondents who interact with each other. Focus groups generate qualitative data. There is a moderately free discussion between the respondents and the interviewer acts as a moderator and keeps the conversation flowing. The interaction that is generated between the respondents can create a dynamic environment that can lead to further discussion about a topic. The researcher aims to find out opinions and attitudes towards a concept or an idea. In the world of marketing focus groups are important tools regarding feedback on new products, a campaign, packaging, as well as on various topics (Acquirements, 2008).

Lewis (1992) notes "Focus group interviews have several advantages over individual interviews. In particular, they help to reveal consensus views, may generate richer responses by allowing participants to challenge one another's views, may be used to verify research ideas of data gained through other methods and may enhance the reliability of ... responses." The researcher decided to use a focus group to explore topics that may not have come to light from a one to one interview.

The researcher examined if the respondents were aware of the public relation tactics used to create brand awareness, if the PR tactics used is a defining factor for brand differentiation and if the corporate social responsibility of a high street brand is a deciding factor for a consumer. The focus group conducted allowed the researcher to receive information from the people whom the fashion brands are aiming their marketing and PR at.

#### **3.7.1 Choosing the participants**

Focus groups are discussion groups comprising carefully selected individuals in most cases with the same profile (Gregory 2005: 65). Lewis (1992) notes "Focus group interviews have several advantages over individual interviews. In particular, they help to reveal consensus views, may generate richer responses by allowing participants to challenge one another's views, may be used to verify research ideas of data gained

through other methods and may enhance the reliability of ... responses.” The method of choosing participants for the focus group was based on purpose sampling. For the intention of this study the researcher carefully selected candidates for each of the focus groups that met the required characterizes. The candidates were chosen based on three things. One they had to be an active consumer within the high street fashion industry, two they had to fit into either one of two age brackets, over 40’s and under 30’s, finally they had to be female. In focus group one and two the researcher choose a variety of high street consumers with different shopping habits. The researcher decided to conduct two separate focus groups of different age groups. The researcher decided that this would be the most effective way of examining whether the consumers of the high street fashion industry were aware of PR tactics being utilized by the brands. The researcher wanted to discover if age was a deciding factor when recognizing these tactics. A total of six candidates were required for each focus group.

In order to avoid awkwardness between the subjects the researcher made sure that each of one was an acquaintance of one or more of the members in the group. No one person was present on her own. The research felt this would eliminate the issue of shyness and embarrassment and allow the subjects to speak more freely about themselves and their opinions.

The focus group was organized by telephone and email. The researcher chose a location that was accessible to all candidates and a time was arranged that was convenient for both the researcher and the subjects.

### **3.7.2 Conducting the Focus Group**

Before the focus group commenced each of the candidates were asked if they gave the researcher their permission to record the focus group. The researcher guided the group through the purpose of the research and explained the selection of each of the present candidates and their how they aided to the study. The researcher gave an overview of the topic and explained that to begin each of the candidates had to say their name and their favorite high street store clearly for the recorder to pick up. This was executed so

the researcher would be able to distinguish between voices on the recorder when analyzing the data.

Running a successful focus group is a highly skilled activity and requires a competent coordinator to guide discussion and to ensure all the relevant questions are asked (Gregory 2005: 65). The researcher had a total of ten questions prepared to guide the discussion. Open-ended questions were utilized, allowing the candidates to be more flexible with their answers and also to prompt further discussion within the boundaries of the topic.

### **3.8 Ethics**

“Ethical behavior helps to protect individuals” (Israel, Hay 2006: 2).

The researcher has the moral and professional responsibility to respect the rights, values and needs to the research participants. The researcher did not force any of the participants to participate in the study. All participants took part in the research voluntarily. The participants were emailed the research objectives and were informed of their contribution. The researcher asked each of the candidate’s permission to record the interview and focus group via email a week prior to and not on the day of the interview. The participants were sent a consent form that clearly stated what the interview and focus group would be used for and how it would be used. It also gave each of the participants of anonymity. The consent form asked permission from the candidates to quote from the interview and focus group and also if they would consent a follow up interview.

After the interviews were conducted a transcript was made available to the interviewees and they were given the option to change any of the copy. Israel and hay (2006:4) emphasize that “if we act honestly and honorably, people may rely on us to recognise their needs and sensitivities and consequently may be more willing to contribute openly and fully to the study”.

### 3.9 Data Gathering and Analysis

The object of analysis is to determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that inform the respondent's view of the world in general and the topic in particular (McCracken, 1988). Several candidates were approached and asked to partake in an interview. With the use of purpose sampling one public relation professional working in the lifestyle and fashion industry, two fashion journalists and one professional that worked within the high street fashion industry were selected. The interview participant's are as follows:

- Annemarie O'Connor – Fashion journalist for the Irish Examiner
- Freya Drohan – Freelance fashion journalist
- Ciara Lawless – Owner of Beauty Boutique and Ciara Lawless PR
- Andrea Donegan – Fashion buyer at Primark

Over twenty candidates were invited to participate in a focus group. Out of these candidates twelve participants were selected that met the focus group criteria. The candidates had to be active consumers in the high street fashion industry, be female and fit into the desired age brackets, over 40 and 16 – 35.

An analysis of the interview and focus groups was completed and transcribed from a recording to literate format. The researcher grouped the data into categories to form topics of similar ideas. This approach helped to link the data from the interviews and the focus groups together under specific topics relevant to the study of identifying the PR tactics used to build brand identity in the high street fashion industry.

Direct quotations are presented from the interviews and the focus groups in this study. Patton (1987) maintains that direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative evaluation. Patton also states that direct quotations can help to reveal the respondents' levels of emotions; the way in which they have organized their words; their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences; and their basic perceptions (1987).

### **3.10 Limitations to research Methods**

There were several limitations to the research methods selected by the researcher for the purpose of this thesis. The main disadvantage of interview is the reliability and validity. The impact that the interviewee can have on the respondent can mean the consistency and objectivity are hard to achieve. The data collected is unique owing to the specific context and the specific individuals involved. This can have an adverse effect on reliability. There is a chance that interviewees are prone to bias and not entirely truthful in their responses. According to Silverman (2005: 210) validity is another word for truth. He continues his argument by proposing that there may be a problem of anecdotalism with qualitative research and that the authors have to overcome that temptation and to genuinely base their research findings on the critical investigation of the data.

The problem faced with focus group interviews is the prospect of one individual drowning out the other participants especially the views of quieter people; this was acknowledged and monitored throughout the focus group interview. Another potential disadvantage of group interviews is that the opinions that are expressed are one's that are thought to be 'acceptable' within the group. Participants might be inclined to keep quiet about certain topics, or moderate their views somewhat. The reliability may be affected as the impact of the interviewer and the context means that consistency and objectivity are hard to achieve. Data from interviews are based on what people say rather than what they do. What people say they do, what they say they prefer and what they say they think cannot automatically be assumed to reflect the truth (Corbin, 2008). The researcher was aware of these limitations and disadvantages at all times and counter-balanced the strength and weaknesses of each method to gather richer data.

### **3.11 Discarding Alternative Research Methods**

When carrying out qualitative research there are other research methods at your disposal, which include action research. There were methods of quantitative research

that was discarded such as questionnaires. The researcher did not want to combine more than two methods of research. Due to the nature of this research carrying out in-depth interviews and focus groups was more fitting to gain the desirable results. The research chosen was very time consuming and it was thought that they would be sufficient in addressing the research strategy.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

The use of interviews and focus groups were particularly advantageous in the context of studying the awareness of the PR tactics used to build brand identity in high street fashion brands. Interviews were utilized because they provide in-depth information, the opportunity to probe and they offer more freedom in the answers given. All of these are required given the complexity of the research. Topic's such as new media, which was necessary to address in this study is relatively current and not much secondary data exists on this subject. Therefore the people who are using it on a daily basis were ideal candidates for the study. It was also necessary to develop an understanding of the high street fashion consumer's thoughts about the high street brands. This required the use focus groups to counter the time limitation of in-depth interview and to receive data from a generous number of candidates.

As a research technique, however, interviewing and organizing focus groups consume large amounts of gross and net times, arranging, actual interview time, transcribing, analyzing and collating overall findings (Miller, 1991). It is believed that the particular strengths of interviews and focus groups, however, far out-weigh any weaknesses.

CHAPTER 4:  
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

## Chapter Four Findings and Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis from the primary research in light of the research questions. The theme addressed in this section aims to identify the effectiveness of public relations tactics being used by high street fashion brands. The findings are supported by quotations taken from the transcribed interviews and findings from the focus groups. Data will be discussed in relation to theoretical constructs outlined in the literature review and organized according to each primary research question. The primary research objectives are:

- 5 What is the importance of brand identity to a high street fashion brand from a public relations perspective?
- 6 Are the PR tools being utilized by high street fashion brands evident to the consumer and do they contribute to purchasing power?
- 7 What model of communication is being employed by high street fashion brands?

The headings outline the research questions and themes extracted from the interviews and focus groups to develop the research findings.

The author uses Topshop and Wallis as examples of two high street fashion brands throughout the finding section. These brands have completely different market focus and consumer demographic but utilize the same manufacturer. This results in similar clothing and garments being produced by each of the brands but reaching out to a different consumer. By using these brands the author will be able to distinguish the importance of a brands engagement with effective public relations and also to discover which of these brands are using PR more advantageously.



## **4.2 Research question one: What is the importance of brand identity to a high street fashion brand from a public relations perspective.**

In order to address this research question the author must look at specific topics that will aid the answering of this question. The author will firstly address the theme of brand identity as a public relation tactic. The author will examine what makes an attractive high street fashion brand, if the image of the store is the underlying factor that contributes to purchasing power and if the visual identity of a brand has a positive or negative impact on current high street fashion consumers.

### **4.2.1 Importance of the brand identity and image of a high street fashion brands**

Oliver (2007: 48) defines Identity as; “*A state of having unique identifying or individual characteristics by which a person or thing recognizes or defines him/her/itself*”. The nature of corporate image remains a growth area of public relations productivity, which, in combination with a growing body of knowledge about stakeholder expectation and cultural diversity remains a popular focus of interest (Oliver 2007: 49). According to Theaker (2008: 105) brand image is how its publics view it. “Image is in the mind. It is closely linked with what is often called corporate personality. The image of a company is that instant reaction in the mind when the company is names” (Gunning 2003: 238).

*“The perception you have of a store that will matter to you and every consumer in fact. If you perceive the brand in a positive light you will gain store loyalty to that brand. This is so important for retailers. If I am looking for something to wear on a Friday night say, my first port of call would be to go to Zara, as I know that they will definitely have something to cater for my need. Their brand covers all aspects-casual, smart, and occasional. The way Zara have built their brand is amazing so you are not just shopping for the clothing, you’re buying into the brand and what you personally associate the brand to be,”* comments fashion buyer at Primark.

One fashion PR practitioner commented, “The brand image has a huge impact on buying clothes. A negative brand image is more influential than a positive brand image”. One fashion journalist with the Irish Examiner explained how “the clothes are always the determining factor but the brand image does drive awareness and create an audience so it would be a strong secondary factor.” Marken (1995: 47) believes that the public, overloaded with too much information and too many “new” products, is beginning to look more closely at the company behind the brand rather than the specific product when making purchasing decisions. A freelance Fashion journalist disagrees by commenting that the brand image would not affect purchasing behavior, “it is really just about the clothes”.

Four participants out of six in the focus group under the age of 35 agreed that the clothes were more important than the brand image of a high street store. One participant under 35 commented “the brand image is important, not necessarily the logo, but you don’t want to appear cheap by buying discount clothes”. Five out of the six participants over the age of 35 were of the same opinion that they would not shop in Pennys because it had a cheap brand image. The general consensus of the focus group over the age of 35 when talking about brand image was that as you get older the image of the brand becomes more important as you do not want to be associated with buying cheap, clothes that teenagers are wearing also.

Genevieve Flaven, co-founder of Style vision, a company that specializes in monitoring and predicting consumer behavior believes “Every consumer can now decrypt advertising messages, so traditional marketing has become less significant. Consumers want to know what is behind the brand.” (Borreskov and Knudsen, 2010: 26).

#### **4.2.2 Valuable characteristics of a high street fashion brand**

Jackson and Shaw (2009: 30) describe the difference between high-end fashion and high street fashion. In high-end fashion the designer is the brand, whereas in high street fashion the brand is about marketing, advertisements and celebrity endorsements.

One fashion journalist explains how she feels customer services are an integral characteristic of a high street fashion brand. Another fashion writer insists that individuality is important to her when choosing a high street brand. A high street fashion professional surmises the important characteristics she expects from a desirable high street brand;

*“There are a number of reasons, take Zara for example, they are continuously turning their stock over so you know that when you shop in there you will always pick up something new. They are affordable. They are miles ahead regarding trends and their clothes have an extremely good fit on my body. Their sizes don’t differ. Stores are well laid out too so you can browse in comfort.”*

Five out of the six focus group participants under the age of 35 agreed that the clothes are the main underlying characteristic of a high street store that would encourage them to purchase. The focus group participants over 35 had an alternative desirable characteristic they look for from a high street brand. The size of garments was the number one characteristic agreed by all participants over 35. These participants wanted bigger clothes sizes in current trends. The participants believed that high street brands did not offer trendy clothes for the older woman. The main consensus was that if the clothes being sold were trendy, available in larger size and accommodate different shapes this would persuade each of the participants’ to purchase there. One participant out of the six in the focus group under 35 was of the same belief that if more sizes were available in garments that would encourage their shopping behavior in that store.

Out of the four interviews conducted on professionals working in the fashion industry four said Zara is their favorite high street fashion brand. “I would have to say Zara. The brand is great at interpreting trends with everyday ease and at a reasonable price” comments one fashion journalist. Another PR practitioner favored Coast as her favorite high street fashion brand,

*“I love the design and quality of the clothes, which can be casual and dressy depending on what you are looking for. They are also online and I know the sizes will fit. Coast also has many concessions within larger department stores. You can create a whole look within one brand and the staff are excellent.”*

Zara appeared throughout both focus groups as favorite high street stores, for quality and pricing reasons. New Look was also a common desirable high street brand between the two focus groups.

#### **4.2.3 Consumer perception of Topshop**

In order to discover the perception the sample consumers have of Topshop as a high street brand the moderator needed to determine the words and associations that were connected with Topshop. The answers from the focus group under 35 were as follows:

- Teenage - mid thirties
- Fashion followers
- Quality
- Young
- Expensive
- British Style
- ‘Copy and paste’ fashion
- Trendy
- Colorful
- Casual

The answers from the focus group over 35 reminded similar,

- Teenage
- Young
- Trendy

- Slightly provocative

The fashion world professionals differed in answers when asked to describe Topshop as a brand. A high street fashion professional described Topshop as,

*“The forefront of fashion for the young fashion conscious consumers between the ages for 16-30. Topshop are ahead of the game in terms of color, prints and styling. Brand ambassadors are A List celebrities, Pixie Lott, Rita Ora, any style icons the youth culture seem to be following. Very Powerful brand, however, they are quite pricey”.*

One fashion journalist talked about Topshop being associated with London Fashion Week, designer collaboration, street style and the youth market.

The researcher generated the consensus that both fashion professionals and high street fashion consumers under and over the age of 35 were aware of the brand image Topshop was trying to communicate. As described by Gunning (2003: 238) company’s image is based on what we know about it, how it presents itself, how management deals with crises, what relationships with staff are like, the layout of the company, the corporate graphic identity. “The image is mental, but is formed, at least in part, by physical elements of the company”.

#### **4.2.4 Consumer perception of Wallis**

In order to discover the perception the sample consumers have of Wallis as a high street brand the moderator needed to determine the words and associations that were connected with the brand Wallis. The answers from the focus group under 35 were as follows:

- Old
- Out of date
- Mother of the bride

- Plain
- Dull
- Target audience of mature women
- Teachers

One Cork based fashion writer agreed with the general opinion of Wallis as set by the focus group under 35, “I am not really mad on this brand. I think it is quite outdated and old”. A fashion PR practitioner responded that she doesn’t really have an opinion on the brand. She continued by saying she feels the brand is “middle aged and frumpy”. A high street fashion professional describes Wallis as a “safe brand” who doesn’t take any risks when it comes to prints and styling.

In contrast to these opinions the focus group over 35 described Wallis as:

- Mature
- Classy
- Well made
- Structured
- Elegant

The research developed a shift in opinions about the brand Wallis between the age groups of interview participants and focus group participants. There was no crossover between the two sets of opinions bar the knowledge of the age of Wallis’s target market.

All candidates were unaware that Topshop and Wallis utilized the same manufacturer. 50% of the focus group under 35 were surprised that Topshop and Wallis use the same clothing manufacture. 50% of the group said it doesn’t surprise them as most of the high street fashion market come from the same sources. The focus group over the age of 35 was unaware and surprised that Topshop and Wallis was connected at all. A practitioner responded that “it does really surprise me; they are completely different in every way”. Another fashion journalist was the only person who was aware that both

brands had the same manufacture, “Yes, not surprised. Topshop is one of the most powerful and influential fashion brands in the world so why not have a copycat store when there is a gap in the market for older woman, professionals etc.”.

### **4.3 Research question two: Are the PR tools being utilized by high street fashion brands evident to the consumer and do they contribute to purchasing power?**

In order for the researcher to discover if the public relations tools being employed by high street fashion brands are evident, there is a need to address topics of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and celebrity endorsement. CSR and celebrity endorsements are two of the most recognized and effective PR tactics in the world of fashion. According to Borreskov and Knudsen (2010: 8) CSR is being increasingly implemented into company’s business strategies especially companies with low cost products, such as those within the high street fashion industry.

#### **4.3.1 High street fashion brands and corporate social responsibility**

Borreskov and Knudsen (2010) explain: *“The social responsibility of a business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organisations at any given time.*

Each of the interviewees and focus group participants were asked their opinions of corporate social responsibility. All samples were questioned as to what types of CSR that they felt high street fashion brands should be addressing. Some of the answers are as follows:

- Slave labor
- Child labor
- No real fur
- No cruelty to animals
- The brand should not promote unhealthy sized models

A Cork based fashion journalist enforces the role of CSR within a high street fashion brand. "I think public awareness of social responsibility has piqued and it is no longer acceptable for a retailer to merely buy into that aspect of retail as a badge". Another fashion writer explains that in theory a consumer would avoid a high street brand that doesn't practice good CSR but in reality they still end up buying their products". An interviewed professional in the high street fashion industry enforces how she is a big believer in CSR. "Especially in today's society when consumers are becoming a lot more ethical. They want to support the cause and increase awareness".

The moderator asked the participants of the focus group over the age of 35 if a high street fashion brand were participating in corporate social responsibility would this persuade them to buy from that brand. All participants responded that it would. The moderator then asked would it persuade them not to buy from a high street fashion brand was not participating in CSR. The response was no. One participant said unfortunately unless it is evident and in the news that a store was doing something unethical they would not know about it and therefore would still buy from a brand that is participating in unethical behavior.

In the focus group under the age of 35 one participant commented that they feel brands can get away with everything except child/slave labor and even then the impact is very short lived and quickly forgotten for example the Gap and Nike child labor scandal. One out of the six participant responded that they don't find size zero models particularly attractive but other than that CSR doesn't particularly resonate with them.

All six participants in the focus group over 35 agreed that if they were aware of unethical behavior from a high street fashion brand that they would not purchase from that store. Similar to the Fiber2Fashion concept of social responsibility that it is gaining popularity in today's times. Fashion companies are becoming increasingly aware of their responsibilities towards the various stakeholders associated with them. More and more fashion brands are trying to work in a way that protects the interests of the employees, customers, suppliers and other parties and the society at large. The



concept of a business firm working only with the motive of earning profit is gradually becoming outdated website (<http://tiny.cc/1pwbkw>, accessed 10/08/2012).

One participant in the focus group under 35 explains how she has not purchased Nike or Gap since the slave and child labor scandals that surfaced about the brand. A Dublin based fashion professional also said that she would not purchase from Nike as a result of the slave and child labor association with the brand.

One high street fashion professional discussed the types of CSR she expects to find in high street fashion brands;

*“Environmental protection, fair trade, ethical working conditions, fair wage, right to trade unions for employees in developing countries and giving back to the local areas in which they are working in. Pennys for example have set up a service in Bangladesh with a NGO called NUK to ensure factory workers and managers are working in the correct conditions and are teaching both managers and employees the necessary skills to improve there working practices.*

A dublin based fahsion journalist encounters how Zara were in the news recently for their workers conditions. “Although I do not agree with bad working conditions for laborers it did not stop me buying there.” One participant in the focus group under 35 said they would like to say yes that they would stop purchasing from a store not practicing good CSR but that they watched ‘The Devil wears Primark’ and they still shop in Pennys. Five out of the six participants under 35 agreed that CSR is not a factor they would investigate about a brand. One participant said they still don’t buy from Gap or Nike because of the child labor scandals. One of the participants over the age of 35 discussed the shoe brand Toms mission that with every pair of shoes purchased a pair of shoes will also be sent to a child in need.

#### **4.3.2 Celebrity Endorsements of High Street Fashion brands Topshop and Wallis**

*“The benefits are as blinding as a spotlight: stars give brands a well-defined*

*personality for a minimum of effort, and bring with them a rich fantasy world to which consumers aspire. In addition, consumers have a 'history' with stars. Even though they've only seen them on screen or in the pages of a magazine, they form an attachment to celebrities, regarding them as friendly faces and reliable arbiters of taste. (Borreskov and Knudsen, 2010: 120)*

All four of the interviewees and all six of the focus group under the age of 35 were aware of the connection between Kate Moss and Topshop. Annmaire O'Connor also describes how "Topshop works a lot with new upcoming designers. I think it's great that Topshop gives these new, young designers a platform to work from and build a presence. The hope is that these new designers will grow up to be celebrity endorsers".

The focus group over the age of 35 not one of the group members was aware of the connection between Kate Moss and Topshop. The six participants over the age of 35 also agreed that a celebrity endorsement would not affect or encourage them to purchase from a store. The only celebrity endorsement connection with a brand that was known by these participants was with Marks and Spencer's and Twiggy.

One Cork based fashion industry professional was the only person interviewed out of the focus group participants that was aware of collaboration with Yasmin Le Bon and Wallis. This was a design collaboration where Yasmin Le Bon designed a clothing range for Wallis, but this could also be described as an example as a celebrity endorsement.

### **4.3.3 Public relations tactics and high street fashion brands Wallis and Topshop**

Grunig and Hunt (1984) summed up PR in one sentence as 'the management of communications between an organisation and its publics' (T&Y 2009: 5). A well-devised definition framed by the IPR in 1987 is still useful today: 'Public Relations is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics' (Theaker 2008: 4). PR tactics allow a fashion brand to develop an understanding between the brand and its consumer.

The moderator asked the focus group over the age of 35 if they were aware of any public relation tactics being employed by either of Topshop or Wallis. Six out of the six participants responded that they were not aware of any PR tactics being utilized by these brands. The moderator then asked if the participants were aware of PR tactics being utilized by any high street fashion brand. The answers were as follows:

- Marks and Spencer's connection with Oxfam
- Marks and Spencer's brand ambassador Twiggy
- The shoe brand, Tom's, mission to give a pair of shoes to South America with every purchase

As stated above none of the group was aware of a connection between Kate Moss and Topshop.

The moderator also asked the focus group under the age of 35 if they were aware of any public relation tactics being employed by either Topshop or Wallis. All six of the participants were aware of the connection between Topshop and Kate Moss as it's celebrity ambassador. All six participants were aware of the student discount in Topshop. Two participants described a PR tactic utilized by Topshop where celebrities design clothing lines for them. Three participants talked about Facebook discount codes for purchasing from Topshop online. Only one participant could describe a PR tactic bring utilized by Wallis. This was that teachers receive a 20% discount in store. The participants agreed that the student discount is a strong factor that contributes to high street brand attractiveness. These participants were of the same belief that if a fashion brand is connected with a celebrity such as Kate Moss it influences their purchasing behavior and encourages them to shop more at that store. This is supported by the literature composed by Borreskov and Knudsen (2010: 26) that further describes how in the era of the supermodel, nobody was concerned with the fashion brand. Naomi Campbell and Claudia Schiffer were the brands: the clothes were immaterial. Unlike the focus group over the age of 35 who said a celebrity endorsement would have no influence over their decisions to purchase from a particular store.

A fashion industry journalist talks about the PR tactics utilized by Topshop: “Topshop has a strong presence at London Fashion Week. Why all high street brands don’t make more of an effort to get involved with more fashion events beats me. Awear does a bit I suppose. Topshop are also great for discounts”. Another fashion writer also discusses the power of Topshop’s presence at London Fashion Week. “Topshop’s Unique collections at London Fashion weeks are always referenced and seem to be very influential”. This fashion journalist continues by explain how she is constantly seeing Topshop advertised in ‘glossy’ magazines but she announces that she has never seen or doesn’t remember seeing Wallis advertised in the ‘glossy’ magazine she reads.

#### **4.4 Research question number three: What model of communication is being employed by high street fashion brands?**

In order for the researcher to determine the model of communication that is being employed by the high street fashion brands Topshop and Wallis there is two questions that must be addressed prior to this determination. The first is to look at high street fashions brands interaction with social media. The second is to address if Topshop and Wallis are utilizing Web 2.0 and social media tools to engage with their consumers.

As described in the literature review chapter of this thesis, in 1984 two of the earliest system theorists, James Grunig and Todd Hunt, suggested four models of communications based on public relations practice observations in the United States. These four models included the press agency/publicity model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetric model and the two-way symmetric model.

The two-way symmetric model is often referred to as the ‘ideal model’. This model proposes the concept of dialogue, whereas the other three models are characterized by a monologue-type communication. The researcher wanted to discover if high street fashion brands were using the ‘ideal model’ of communication to engage with their customers.

#### 4.4.1 High street fashion brands and social media

In order to determine if high street fashion brands were utilizing social media the researcher had to discover if the samples choosing to take part in this research were social media users. All six participants of the focus group under the age of 35 were members of Facebook, three members of Twitter, and two were members of LinkedIn. Stores that were followed by these participants on Facebook included ASOS, River Island, Buffalo, Zara, New Look and Pennys and Topshop. The moderator questioned the participants in the focus group over 35 on social media. The moderator asked the group if any was a user of social media. A total of three participants out of six used social media. Three participants used Facebook and two participants out of the three social media users had a LinkedIn account. None of the Facebook users in the focus group over 35 followed any fashion brands.

One professional working in the fashion industry explained how she is an avid social media user and follows high street fashion brands on Twitter and Facebook. These brands include Topshop, Zara, H&M, Asos, Aqua, River Island, Divine, Shutterbug. This fashion professional continued by say “the list is too long, I follow too many”. A professional in the high street fashion industry also remarks how she follows “most of the high street fashion brands on Twitter and Facebook”.

The moderator asked the group if they believed high street fashion brands are utilizing social media effectively. The group agreed on the opinion of one participant. This participant believed that brands such as Topshop utilize the web and social media more because that is the position of their target market. This participant also believes that high-end brands should not utilize social media because they would lose their aura of exclusivity. “Asos use social media very well. This includes the use of flash sales, discount codes on their social media sites for followers, an interactive section on their online store for bloggers and outfits of the day on Instagram and Facebook” explains one Dublin based fashion writer.

One participant of the focus group under the age of 35 said Pennys comes up on their home page on Facebook every day and that the brands page is constantly active making it more interactive and engaging. One participant in this group also talked about Burberry using social media effectively than its competitors. This participant explained how Burberry has a common theme, which draws all of the social media channels together. Another participant under the age of 35 said that Mango.com is connected with their social media pages so it results in you purchasing more from their online store.

One high street fashion buyer explains how she is under the impression that high street fashion brands do not utilize web 2.0 and social media enough. "They need to increase their exposure on this. Internet shopping has increased over 320% this year alone and it is set to sky rocket so all retailers need to ensure that they are 100% utilizing social media and web 2.0." A Dublin based high street fashion professional feels that luxury brands utilize effective online resources. The top fashion brand in her opinion that uses effective online social media is Chanel, Topshop and DVF.

#### **4.4.2 Social media and Web 2.0 tools being employed by Topshop and Wallis**

"The emergence of new digital technologies signals a potentially radical shift of who is in control of information, experience and resources" (Shapiro in Croteau and Hoynes 2003 quoted by Dennehy 2011: 15). Fashion brands must realize where their market is. In the case of Topshop with a target market of 20's and 30's an effective online social media presence is a necessity. Lewis explains how the new generation of young people is shifting to online sources,

*"Gen Y was socialized in a digital world. It is more than technically literate; it is continually wired, plugged in, and connected to digitally streaming information, entertainment, and contacts. It has so mastered technology that multitasking is a habit it takes into the workplace, where it tends to instant message its contacts while doing work" (Lewis, 2003). (Eisner 2005)*

A recent study found Gen Y consuming 31 hours of media (through multi-tasting) within a 24-hour period (Weiss, 2003).

Five out of the six participants in the focus group under the age of 35 followed Topshop on Facebook. None of the participants followed Wallis or were aware if Wallis even had a social media presence. Five of these participants agreed that Topshop utilize social media well and interact with their consumers constantly. Three of the five participants under the age of 35 agreed that besides Topshop have an attractive social media presence. None of the focus group over the age of 35 follows any high street fashion brands on any social media site. A high street fashion buyer believes that “Topshop utilizes social media tools but Wallis does not”.

One fashion journalist comments on how she is aware that “Topshop has a blog, tumblr and Twitter feed. Another fashion journalist believes that Wallis should utilize social media tools more effectively.

#### **4.4.3 High street fashion brands and two-way symmetrical communication**

The two-way symmetrical model is also seen as the most ethical and most effective of the four models. Building a mutual understanding between the organisation and its public is the main aim. ). However, Grunig and Hunt (1984) explains how persuasion still plays a part in the two-way symmetrical model, where both the public and the organisation endeavor to influence on another.

One fashion journalist believes “Topshop are clever in that they collaborate with regarded street style bloggers to capture the looks on punters coming to their London Fashion Week shows”. She continues to explain how this is effective two-way symmetrical communication as “they are creating a dialogue without looking like they are selling which is quite clever”. A PR practitioner clarifies how she is not a “big fan of either brands” but she has heard Topshop have a good online presence; “I suppose they utilize social media as a way of engaging in two-way symmetrical communication”.

Five out of the six participants in the focus group under the age of 35 followed Topshop on Facebook. This give Topshop and the consumer a platform to create and communicate a dialogue, unlike Wallis were not one of the interviewees or focus group participants followed them on any social media website.



CHAPTER 5:  
CONCLUSION

## **Chapter Five Conclusion**

This chapter follows the logical reasoning in the analysis chapter. Clear conclusions will be made in relation to effectiveness of public relations tactics being utilized to encourage consumer knowledge of their brand identity. The conclusions and recommendations will be drawn from the primary and secondary data that was compared and contrasted in the previous chapter.

Recommendations will be given for future research as well as for the public relations professionals' and the professional working in the high street fashion industry; this will be based on knowledge developed during the research process.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The purpose of this dissertation was to assess the effectiveness of public relations tactics being employed by high street fashion brands to gain consumer knowledge of their brand identity. The ultimate conclusion of this research is that public relations tactics play an integral role in differentiating between high street fashion brands. The clothing and garments being sold in high street store still have the underlying factor for consumer purchasing decisions. The research also included that consumers have a more desirable opinion of a high street fashion brand when they are utilizing effective public relations. There is still a gap in the high street fashion industry and utilizing effective online PR such as social media and Web2.0. While some high street fashion brands are utilizing effective online PR other have failed to embrace the development of these new technologies.

High street fashion brands are experiencing positive outcomes of utilizing effective online PR and have developed a strong online presence as a result. Other high street fashion brands are utilizing more traditional methods of PR such as corporate social responsibility and celebrity endorsements and are reaching out to their consumers in different ways. Other more traditional high street fashion brands are failing behind in effective public relations and as a result the consumer opinions of these brands are low.

This study demonstrates that effective PR tactics can have a positive effect on consumer opinions of a high street fashion brand. Findings conclude that social media facilitate two-way communication and show that social media is a necessary tool when communicating with a new generation of consumers in their 20's and 30's.

In analyzing these findings the researcher found that age did have an effect on the knowledge of public relations tactics and also the effectiveness of the tactics on particular consumer target markets. The focus group under the age of 35 had more knowledge of public relations tactics being employed. These participants were more aware of high street fashion brands and were more concerned with the brands image. These participants also responded more to PR tactics being utilized by high street fashion brands such as Topshop.

The brand Wallis had only one knowledgeable PR tactic know to one of the interviewees. The other three interviewee and the two focus groups over and under the age of 35 were not aware of any PR tools being utilized by Wallis. Topshop had a desirable online presence with five of the six participants in the focus under the age of 35 and three of the four interviewees following the brand on social media websites.

In conclusion to this section the only PR tactics that were recognized active consumers practiced those by Topshop and little knowledge about PR tactics being employed by Wallis were recognized.

### **5.1.1 Research Question: What is the importance of brand identity to a high street fashion brand from a public relations perspective?**

From the research the following are the reasons why a good brand identity is an advantage to a high street fashion store.

- It allows consumers buy into a brand
- It gains consumer loyalty for a high street brand
- A positive brand image drives and creates awareness of a fashion brand

- A positive brand image drives and create an audience for that fashion brand
- A positive brand images gives a higher status to the brand in relation to pricing
- Traditional marketing has become less significant as consumers want to know the brand
- A positive brand image gives the brand credibility from the consumers perspective

However, some disadvantages were also noted; in particular, of the consumers sampled and the fashion industry professionals interviewed the clothes being sold in a high street fashion store is the most effective factor that contributes to consumers purchasing behavior. Brand image in many cases would not affect consumer opinion of a high street fashion brand, whereas the clothes in that store would affect the opinion. In addition the visual identity of a high street fashion brand on garments is an undesirable factor from a consumers point of view. Consumers do not want to be labeled with logos, mainly consumers over the age of 35. If a brand has an image of being a discount brand, the consumer is not confident wearing clothes from that shop. According to this study the focus group over the age of 35 all responded they would not buy clothes from Pennys if it was obvious they clothes were form that store.

### **5.1.2 Consumer's perception of the brand Topshop**

The consumers examined for the purpose of this these responded with the following opinions of the high street brand Topshop:

- Teenage - mid thirties
- Fashion followers
- Quality
- Young
- Expensive
- British Style
- 'Copy and paste' fashion
- Trendy

- Colorful
- Casual

In the high street fashion industry Topshop is at the forefront of the fashion industry for the young fashion conscious consumer between the ages of 16-30. It has gained a brand image associated with London Fashion Week and celebrities. Both consumer age groups over and under the age of 35 are aware of the brand image Topshop is trying to portray and both age groups are of the same opinion of the brand. The researcher generated the consensus that both fashion professionals and high street fashion consumers under and over the age of 35 were aware of the brand image Topshop was trying to communicate that was young and fashion focused on up to date trends.

### **5.1.3 Consumer's perception of the brand Wallis**

The consumers examined for the purpose of this responded with the following opinions of the high street brand Wallis:

- Old
- Out of date
- Mother of the bride
- Plain
- Dull
- Target audience of mature women
- Teachers

The consumer under the age of 35 and the professional working in the fashion industry were all of the same opinion about the brand Wallis. They felt that it was plain and boring and that it didn't stick out as a memorable brand that they would like to buy into. The general consensus was that Wallis was a safe brand that didn't take fashion risks.

In contrast to those opinions the consumer over the age of 35 was of the belief that Wallis was:

- Mature
- Classy
- Well made
- Structured
- Elegant

The research developed a shift in opinions about the brand Wallis between the age groups of interview participants and focus group participants. There was no crossover between the two sets of opinions bar the knowledge of the age of Wallis's target market.

#### **5.1.4 Research question: Are the PR tools being utilized by high street fashion brands evident to the consumer and do they contribute to purchasing power?**

For the purpose of this research the author looked at corporate social responsibility and celebrity endorsements as public relations tools that are employed by high street fashion brands.

All six of the focus group participants under the age of 35 were aware of the connection between Kate Moss and Topshop. All fashion professionals were aware of the connection between Kate Moss and Topshop. Out of the six participants in the focus group over the age of 35 not one was aware that Kate Moss is a Topshop brand ambassador. These participants also agreed that a celebrity endorsement would not attract them to a high street brand.

Only one person of the four interviewees and not one of either of the focus group could discuss a celebrity connection with Wallis.

The focus group under the age of 35 believes that the impact of unethical behavior by a high street fashion brand is short lived and quickly forgotten. In contrast the focus group over the age of 35 believe that CSR is a huge aspect contributing to the image and likability of a brand. All six participants in the focus group over 35 agreed that if they were aware of unethical behavior from a high street fashion brand that they would not purchase from that store.

Participants in the focus group under the age of 35 were aware of Topshop presence in London Fashion Week. The professionals working in the fashion environment were also aware of this presence. The focus group over the age of 35 in contrast was not. Those under the age of 35 were also knowledgeable of the student discount Topshop offers. One participant out of the two focus group and the interviewees was aware of a discount offered by Wallis to teachers. According to the rest of the participants under the age of 35 this discount is not widely known or advertised by Wallis.

#### **5.1.5 High street fashion brands and social media**

All six participants of the focus group under the age of 35 were members of Facebook, three members of Twitter, and two were members of LinkedIn. A total of three participants in the focus group over 35 used social media. None of these participants followed any fashion brands.

All interviewees were social media users that followed numerous high street fashion brands. Five of the six participants under the age of 35 followed Topshop on Facebook. Three of the four interviewees followed Topshop on Facebook. Not one of the focus group participants or the interviewees followed Wallis on any social media website. This leaves a huge gap in the communication line between Wallis and its consumer. Internet shopping has increased over 320% this year alone and it is set to sky rocket so all retailers need to ensure that they are 100% utilizing social media and web 2.0 as it is a direct link to their online stores through the convergence of online media sources.

The research shows that Topshop utilizes many social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, tumblr, Instagram and Pinterest. They are heavily situated on a platform that can hit their target market with ease. Wallis is not engaging in effective PR and is suffering. As a result the study shows that the generation of consumers under the age of 35 and professionals working in the fashion industry is seeing the brand as outdated and old and not recognizing it as a desirable brand.

#### **5.1.6 Research question: What model of communication is being employed by high street fashion brands?**

The two-way symmetrical model is also seen as the most ethical and most effective of the four models. Building a mutual understanding between the organisation and its public is the main aim. Topshop are clever in that they collaborate with street style bloggers. Bloggers are an effective way to communicate to the general public or fashion focused consumers and it also opens up a bridge way in two-way communication.

Social media gives Topshop and the consumer a platform to create and communicate a dialogue, unlike Wallis were not one of the interviewees or focus group participants followed them on any social media website.



## **5.2 Recommendations**

A number of recommendations can be made as a result of this study. They are as follows.

### **5.2.1 First recommendation: Education**

High street fashion professionals including PR practitioners should continue to educate themselves on the effectiveness of public relations tactics to gain a positive brand identity of a high street fashion store. They should also try to stay abreast of technological advances, mainly those that have an impact on social media.

### **5.2.2 Second Recommendation: Have an online presence**

High street fashion brands and PR practitioners should start exploring social media as an effective way of communicating with their target publics. Social media should be seen effective online public relations as it is a fast and effective way of building a relationship with consumers. An online presence will also give a brand a current identity and keep it up to date with technological shifts.

### **5.2.3 Third Recommendation: Utilize traditional public relations**

High street fashion brands and public relations professionals working in the fashion environment should not underestimate the effectiveness of simple traditional PR tactics such as celebrity endorsements and corporate social responsibility. Brands that are seen practicing CSR will have a more positive brand image and those that are connected with a desirable celebrity or endorser will influence consumers and add to purchasing behavior.

### **5.3 Suggestions for further study**

Further research on the successful use of public relations tactics used to encourage consumer knowledge of a luxury brand may give PR practitioners and fashion industry professional a better incite into the opinions of fashion consumers.

There is scope for further research in relation to the use of social media as a main tool for building a desirable fashion brand identity.

Further study could be carried out on the role new media plays in the future of high street fashion brands when gaining a positive brand image.

CHAPTER 6:  
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## APPENDIX A

# Participant Consent Form

### Written Consent Agreement

*Please note that you may also complete this form digitally. Please leave only the yes or no answer you wish.*

### **Study Participation**

Are you interested in participating in this study? Yes/No

### **Consent to use name**

There are a number of reasons for which you may prefer that your true name be used in presentations and articles related to this research.

Would you mind if your true name was used in any oral presentations or written documents resulting from this research? Yes/No

Signature to agree to use of true name \_\_\_\_\_

### **Consent to record material**

May I record this interview? Yes/No

### **Consent to quote from interview**

I may wish to quote from this interview in the thesis resulting from this research. A pseudonym will be used in order to protect your identity, unless you specifically allow me to identify you by your true name, as specified above.

Do you agree to allow me to quote from this interview? Yes/No

### **Consent to follow-up interview**

I may wish to contact you in order to clarify items and ask for further information.. This may be done by phone or email.

Do you agree to allow me to contact you for a follow-up? Yes/No



Please read and initial the following statements:

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that this research is intended for the study of public relation tactics used to build brand differentiation in high street fashion stores, which is part of the research by Lynn Ferrari for the Masters Degree in Public Relations with New Media at the Cork Institute of Technology.

\_\_\_\_\_ Subject to the conditions stated above, I understand that Lynn Ferrari may keep and use my identifying information, as well as the content of the interview.

I approve of the use of my personal information as agreed upon with the above conditions.

Subject to the confidentiality conditions, I authorize Lynn Ferrari to use this interview for the purpose of research, which may be published.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

## APPENDIX B

# Interview Permissions And Project Description

Lynn Ferrari

**A study into the public relations tactics used to build brand differentiation in high street fashion stores.**

Masters Research for Cork Institute of Technology, Dept. of Media Communications

### Brief Project Description

This study aims to look at the public relations tactics that are used to build brand awareness and brand differentiation in high street fashion stores. The study will examine the brand identity of Topshop and Wallis as case studies to discover if they utilize PR tools to gain brand recognition in a saturated market and further look at which of these tools are more effective. The study will evaluate how the PR tactics differ from selling to different age brackets and the methods that work best to reach these target markets.

### Confidentiality and Use of Data

The data that I collect in the project will be used for my thesis. Depending on your wished, I will either hide your name and the name of your company or I will use it. While many people prefer to speak anonymously, you may find it advantageous to be named in the thesis, as it may be useful for publicity or other purposes.

### Reporting Results

If you are interested in hearing directly back from me with the results of the study please provide some contact information. Otherwise contact me personally.

## **Research Participant Information**

If you have any questions or queries, please feel free to contact me. Email will guarantee the quickest response.

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## APPENDIX C

### List of Reseach Participants

**Ciara Lawless – Ciara Lawless PR and Managing Director of BeautyBoutique.ie**

**Annmaire O'Connor – Fashion Journalist with the Irish Examiner and Blooger, IblogFashion**

**Freya Drohan – Freelance Fashion Journalist with CNN**

**Andrea Donegan – Fashion Buyer at Primark, Dublin**

### Focus Group Under 35

**Kiera O'Farrell – Active High Street Fashion Consumer**

**Gemma Hynes – Active High Street Fashion Consumer**

**Shone O'Dea - Active High Street Fashion Consumer**

**Frances O'Connell – Active High Street Fashion Consumer**

**Sharon Ferrari – Active High Street Fashion Consumer**

**Debra Murphy – Active High Street fashion Consumer**

### Focus Group Over 35

**Margaret Fagan – Active High Street Fashion Consumer**

**Ester Malloy – Active High Street Fashion Consumer**

**Patricia Ferrari – Active High Street Consumer**

**June O'Toole – Actice High Street Consumer**

**Brenda King – Active High Street Consumer**

**Margaret Kane – Active High Street Consumer**

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Transcripts/Focus Group Summaries

**Andrea Donegan**  
**Telephone Interview**  
**19/08/2012**

#### **1. What is your favorite high-street store? Why?**

*I have a number of key favorites, Zara for up to the minute fashion, Penney's for picking up key season pieces to finish off your outfit and basics and topshop for bright bold seasonal prints as well as accessories. River Island are also dominating the high street at the moment, they're really at the forefront of fashion trends and extremely affordable.*

#### **2. What is the main aspect of a high street brand that would encourage you to purchase from that store?**

*There are a number of reasons, take zara for example, they are continuously turning there stock over so you know that when you shop in there you will always pick up something new. They are affordable. They are miles ahead regarding trends and there clothes have an extremely good fit on my body. There sizes don't differ. Stores are well laid out too so you can browse in comfort.*

#### **3. Would the brand image of the high-street store be important to you or just the clothes?**

*Yes, it's the perception you have of a store that will matter to you and every consumer in fact. If you perceive the brand in a positive light you will gain store loyalty to that brand. This is so important for retailers. If I am looking for something to wear on a Friday night say, my first proto call would be to go to zara as I know that they will definitely have something to cater for my need. Their brand covers all aspects-casual, smart, and occasional. The way zara have built there brand is amazing so you are not just shopping for the clothing, you're buying into the brand and what you personally associate the brand to be.*

#### **4. What do you feel makes a good fashion brand?**

*A number of things, the fashionability of the brand, the shopping experience you have when shopping with that retailer, the people you associate with the brand. The more favourable this is to the consumer the higher regard you are going to have for the brand.*

## 5. Can you describe each of the following terms

### **Brand Awareness**

*How aware the brand/retailer is to its target market*

### **Brand Differentiation**

*How the retailer/brand stands out compared to its competitors, what sets it apart compared to retailers.*

### **Brand Identity**

*How you recognize, identify the brand, logos, signage, hand writing. Colours, symbols.*

### **Brand Personality**

*How the brand is emotionally perceived to the consumer, its characteristics, all emotional factors, never physical factors. The feeling and ideals you feel when you shp/recognize the brand*

## 6. How important do you think the visual identity of a brand is to the customer?

*Extremely important, regardless of what kind of product your selling, you need to entice the customer in to buy your product. Store windows are so important, ad campaigns, any promotion is going to benefit the retailer.*

## 7. As a consumer in the fashion industry what is a visual brand identity that you deem attractive or memorable?

*Staying true to the brand and constantly thinking of who your target market are and how to constantly satisfy their needs. Knowing your customer inside out and ensuring they will stay loyal to the brand. Ensuring the consumer has a pleasant shopping experience with you that will stay with them.*

*Divine Boutique and there customer service attributes makes them stand out. They use this and there unquie selling point and customers stay loyal to the store as they know they will always be well looked after.*

## 8. Do you think corporate social responsibility plays an important role when choosing a high street brand to purchase from? For example not using child labor, real fur etc

*Of course, especially in today's society when consumers are becoming a lot more ethical. They want to support the cause and increase awareness on the likes of child labour.*

## 9. What types of CSR would you find necessary for a fashion brand to be undertaking? For example the fur trade, slave labour, size 0 models)

*Environmental protection, fair trade, ethical working conditions, fair wage, right to trade unions for employees in developing countries, giving back to the local areas in which they are working in. Penneys for example have set up a service in Bangladesh with a NGO called NUK to ensure factory workers and managers are working in the correct conditions and are teaching both managers and employees the necessary skills to improve their working practices.*

**10. If a fashion brand was not partaking in the above CSR would this effect you purchasing behavior with that store?**

*Completely, to me after all the bad publicity with Nike, I will refuse to buy from that brand. They have tried to re-market themselves as being ethical yet they refuse to fully disclose the work environments in which their employees are working in.*

**11. When you think of the brand Topshop what comes to mind**

*Forefront of fashion for the young fashion conscious consumers between the ages of 16-30. At the forefront of colour, prints, styling. Brand ambassadors are A List celebrities, Pixie Lott, Rita Ora, any style icons the youth culture seem to be following. Very powerful brand, however, they are quite pricey.*

**12. When you think of the brand Wallis what comes to mind?**

*Target consumer that little bit older, I think they are a safe brand, won't take any risks when it comes to prints, styling. I don't think they stand out with regards to being fashion leaders, they're more fashion followers and so is their target market.*

**13. Are you aware that both of these brands use the same clothing and fabric manufacturer? Does this surprise you?**

*Doesn't really surprise me, all retailers usually use the same factories/suppliers. It's all down to in-house development/buying and to me, Wallis needs to drastically improve this.*

**14. Are you aware of any PR tactics utilized by these two brands?**

*Social media plays a big part, Topshop are pretty good at this. Sponsorship - No I can't think of anything.*

**15. Are you an avid user of social media?**

*Yes, I am indeed*

**16. Do you follow high street brands on Twitter or Facebook? Can you name them?**

*Yes, I follow most of the high street brands on twitter, facebook, lookbook and any other social media website I am a member.*

**17. Do you follow either Topshop or Wallis on any social media site?**

*I follow topshop on facebook, twitter and I am subscribed to emails.*

**18. Do you think either of these brands utilizes social media tools?**

I think Topshop does but In my personal opinion Wallis really doesnt

**19. Do you think fashion brands in general utilize web 2.0 and social media enough?**

No and they certainly need to increase there exposure on this. Internet shopping has increased over 320% this year alone and it set to sky rocket so all retailers need to ensure that they are 100% utilizing this.

**20. Finally can you name a fashion brand that you believe utilizes social media to the best of its ability?**

I think luxury brands do this extremely well utilizing social media. Brands that I have in mind are Chanel does, DVF, Topshop are getting better.

**Thanks a million Andrea,**

*No problem at all, anything else you need just give me a call.*



**Telephone Interview**  
**Ciara Lawless**  
**13<sup>th</sup> August 2012**

**1. What is your favorite high-street store? Why?**

*Defiantly Coast. I love the design and quality of the clothes, which can be casual and dressy depending on what you are looking for. They are also online and I know the sizes will fit! Coast also have many concessions within larger department stores. You can create a whole look within one brand and the staff are excellent. An other added bonus is the sales are genuine!*

**2. What is the main aspect of a high street brand that would encourage you to purchase from that store?**

*Definitely structuring one outfit or look from within the one store. Its so handy when you can walk into a store and know that you can get everything you need from that one place. Value for money is also important I think especially in a time of recession. Personal I look for classic looks rather than 'high fashion'. High Fashion only lasts a season and looks dated within a short period of time.*

**3. Would the brand image of the high-street store be important to you or just the clothes?**

*Yes as a negative brand image would impact on my brand choices. I really really don't agree with sweatshop workers. I like to see brands giving back to the people and the environment at a national and local level. I think all fashion brands should be practicing good corporate social responsibility.*

**4. What do you feel makes a good fashion brand?**

*Personally I feel a good fashion brand brings with it a certain style that will not date from one season to a next and thus creates a loyal customer base. It is very important that it ticks all the boxes with regards to price points, quality and style. Probably asking for allot (laughs).*

**5. Can you describe each of the following terms**

- **Brand Awareness** – marketing of a brand to ensure the consumer is aware of it.
- **Brand Differentiation** – Setting your brand apart from your competitors
- **Brand Identity** – the look of a brand from its visual appearance to trademarks
- **Brand Personality**- something that the consumer can identify with

**6. How important do you think brand personality is to public relations?**

*Oh god very Important. It gives the buying public and the consumer something to relate on a personal level. That is what we all look for without knowing. We want to think the brand suits us.*

**7. How important do you think the visual identity of a brand is to the customer?**

*Yes I would also say this is very Important. This is the brand differentiator and appeals to the brands target market. It really is a way to stand out in a crowd from your competitors.*

**8. Do you think corporate social responsibility plays an important role when choosing a high street brand to purchase from?**

*It does play a role gives a positive reflection of the brand however it is not the deciding factor for the buying public in general.*

**9. When you think of the brand Topshop what comes to mind? (e.g. target customer, style, ambassadors etc.)**

*Young, funky, kate moss.*

**10. When you think of the brand Wallis what comes to mind? (e.g. target customer, style, ambassadors etc.)**

*Middle aged, frumpy, can't think of anyone.*

**11. Where you aware that both of these brands use the same clothing and fabric manufacturer? Does this surprise you?**

*Really? no I was not aware, it really does surprise me. They are completely different.*

**12. Are you aware of any PR tactics utilized by these brands? (Sponsorship, ambassadors, events etc.)**

*Kate Moss range in Topshop*

**13. Finally are you aware of any two-way symmetrical communication Topshop or Wallis is partaking in?**

*I am not really a big fan of either of the brands so I am not sure how they communicate with their customer, as I am not one. I have heard Topshop have a good online presence on social media sites. I suppose they utilize social media as a way of engaging in two-way symmetrical communication.*

## **Focus Group Summary – Over the age of 35**

**8pm, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2012**

### **Residence of the author**

The purpose of this focus group was to:

1. Learn the participants' perception of high street fashion brands
2. Learn the participants fashion consumer attitudes, beliefs and opinions
3. Learn the participants' views on high street fashion brands and corporate social responsibility
4. Learn the participants' knowledge of public relations tactics that are being employed by high street fashion brands
5. Learn of the participants' awareness of social media

The major topics that were covered during the focus group:

1. Brand identity of High Street Fashion Labels and Consumer Behavior
2. Public Relation Tactics
3. Social Media

Some of the major findings of the focus group are highlighted below:

### **1. Brand identity of High Street Fashion Labels**

The moderator first asked the participants to name their favorite high street brands.

The brand names are listed below:

- Pamela Scott
- Wallis
- Zara
- Debenhams
- Marks and Spencers

- New Look
- Dunne's Stores
- Dorothy Perkins
- Next
- Monsoon

The moderator then asked the participants what are the main aspects of a high street fashion brand that they would look for. Answers included:

- Originality, something unusual that you would not find all over the high street
- Garment sizes, bigger clothes that are still trendy and not old fashioned
- Good quality, clothes that wont shrink after one wash
- Store layout, not cluttered and well spaced

All of the six participants agreed that many high street brands make nice desirable clothing but in very small sizes. The participants believed that high street brands didn't offer trendy clothes for the older woman. The main consensus was that if the clothes being sold were trendy, available in larger size and accommodate different shapes this would persuade each of the participants' to purchase there. One participant was of the opinion that they feel high street brands think you should dress differently after you reach 40. The participant responded that this was very annoying as the consumer should be able to purchase what makes them feel comfortable.

The moderator asked the participants if the image of the high street store would contribute to them purchasing from a particular store or not purchasing. One sample straight away said they would not purchase from Pennys. They felt it was ok for a younger person to purchase from there but they felt it would be embarrassing if a teenager was wearing the same clothes as them and it cost only a few euro. Six out of six participant's said that if they were attending a special occasion they would not wear Pennys incase someone recognized the item of clothing. All participants agreed this was purely because the image the brand gives off about being cheap and

affordable. Three out of the five participant's they would shop in Pennys said they would only wear basic clothes from pennies i.e. t-shirts and vest. Five out of the six participant's agreed it would be more embarrassing if someone was wearing the same outfit of you versus someone recognizing your outfit was from a lower price bracket high street brand.

The moderator questioned the participants' if they would purposely display a Brown Thomas bag if they purchased from there. Two participants said automatically that they would purposely display the bag. Five out of the six participants said they would reuse the Brown Thomas for giving gifts or for carrying items as it is good quality and attractive. One participant discussed how she would in fact hide a Brown Thomas bag after purchasing there in fear of someone stealing it. This question developed the opinion that packaging and presentation is an important factor that would contribute to the participants purchasing behavior. All six of the participants agreed if they was extra care in wrapping or even folding the garments at the cash desk this would cause them to return to the store to purchase again. One participant said this is one of the main reasons they don't like to shop in Pennys, the clothes are just thrown into the bag and there is little or no respect for the item of clothing. All participants were of the same opinion that customer services such as packing and wrapping can be a huge factor contributing to buyer attraction.

The moderator wanted to discover if the participants' had any knowledge of brand terminology. The group was asked what they believe the term 'brand identity' meant. One participant thought that the finish and quality of the clothes was the identity of a brand. One participant spoke about the logo of a brand and how this can lead of walking advertisements of consumers wearing the logo. This participant continued by commenting that she doesn't like buying into a brand and that is why she like high street labels. Three out of the six participants agreed with this comment and one participant said if she was buying a brand like Tommy Hilfiger she would want people to know therefore expose the logo. The question was address again to describes what the participants understood of the term 'brand identity'. One of the participants said she believe it is the overall image the brand portrays to the public, be it staff, logo, style of clothing. Two out of the six participants did not answer the

question. Secondly the term 'brand differentiation' was addressed. One participant responded that this means how brand differ themselves from other brands in the same market for example high street fashion brands. All participants nodded but no more comments or opinions were added.

## **2. Public Relation Tactics**

The moderator asked a set of questions to discover if public relation tactics where a factor for the participants to buy a brand that were using them. The moderator also wanted to address if the participants had knowledge of public relation tactics.

Firstly the moderator asked the participants types of corporate social responsibility that they felt high street fashion brands should be addressing.

Some of the answers are as follows:

- Slave labor
- Child labor
- No real fur
- No cruelty to animals
- The brand should not promote unhealthy sized models

The moderator asked the participants if a high street fashion brand were participating in corporate social responsibility would this persuade them to buy from them. All participants responded yes it would. The moderator then asked would it persuade you not to buy from a high street fashion brand was not participating in CSR. The response was no. One participant said unfortunately unless it is evident and in the news that a store was doing something unethical they would not know about it and therefore would still buy from a brand that is participating in unethical behavior. All participants agreed that although they feel strongly about topics such as child labor and cruelty to animals they would not investigate if a brand were ethically making clothes. One participant discussed that when clothes are very cheap a bell rings in their head and they ask themselves who is making these clothes for this price. All six

participants agreed that if they were aware of unethical behavior from a high street fashion brand that they would not purchase from that store.

The moderator asked the group what forms of CSR they personally deemed most important. One participant highlighted that the form of CSR they would find important would be selling appropriate style of clothing for younger girls. For example when Pennys were selling underwear for eight year olds that were for the older teenager or woman. Another participant declares that size zero models is something that she is against and if she saw imagery need a high street fashion store of an underweight model she would not purchase from there. All participants discussed the standard sizing issues of high street clothing. The participants felt that it was a fashion brands corporate social responsibility to ensure that sizing of clothes are standardized. The group participants all agreed that unstandardized clothing can lead to upset woman and girls thinking they have gone up a size and can contribute to eating disorders.

The moderator then asked the group to say the first words that come to mind when they hear the word Topshop. The words that were mentioned are as follows:

- Teenage
- Young
- Trendy
- Slightly provocative

The moderator followed this by asking the group the same question about the high street brand Wallis. The description of the brand is as follows:

- Mature
- Classy
- Well made
- Structured
- Elegant

The moderator asked the group if they were aware of any public relation tactics being employed by either of these stores, i.e. Sponsorship, brand ambassadors etc. Six out of the six participants responded that they were not aware of any PR tactics being utilized by these brands. The moderator then asked if the participants were aware of PR tactics being utilized by any high street fashion brand. The answers were as follows:

- Marks and Spenser's connection with Oxfam
- Marks and Spenser's brand ambassador Twiggy
- The shoe brand's Toms mission to give a pair of shoes to South America with every purchase
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Not one of the group was aware of the connection between Kate Moss and Topshop and none of the six participants were aware of any PR tactics being utilized by Wallis. One participant discussed how brand ambassadors and PR tactics would not be something that would encourage them to purchase.

#### **4. Social Media**

The moderator questioned the participants on social media. The moderator asked the group if any was a user of social media. A total of three participants out of six used social media. Three participants used Facebook and two participants out of the three social media users had a LinkedIn account. The moderator then asked the Facebook users if they followed any high street fashion brands on Facebook, all responded no.



**Focus group under 30**

**7pm, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2012**

**Residence of the author**

The purpose of this focus group was to:

6. Learn the participants' perception of high street fashion brands
7. Learn the participants fashion consumer attitudes, beliefs and opinions
8. Learn the participants' views on high street fashion brands and corporate social responsibility
9. Learn the participants' knowledge of public relations tactics that are being employed by high street fashion brands
10. Learn of the participants' awareness of social media

The major topics that were covered during the focus group:

4. Brand identity of High Street Fashion Labels and Consumer Behavior
5. Public Relation Tactics
6. Social Media

Some of the major findings of the focus group are highlighted below:

**1. Brand identity of High Street Fashion Labels**

The moderator first asked the participants to name their favorite high street brands.

The brand names are listed below:

- Zara
- H&M
- River Island
- COS
- Mango

- New Look

The moderator then asked the participants what the main aspects of a high street fashion brand they would look for. Answers included:

- A continuous all year round stock of black work clothes
- Long length garments to accommodate tall people
- A good selections of both casual and occasion clothes
- Clothes that don't fall apart after one wear and are at reasonable prices
- "High street brands whose products are in magazine that I read. It lets me know they're aimed at my age group"
- The style of clothes
- Store layout, easy shopping

Out of the six participants, four agreed that the store layout has a huge influence when choosing a high street brand to shop in. Five participants were of the same opinion that the store Penny's was too unorganized and the shopping experience is not enjoyable. Six out of six participants agreed that the clothes would be the main factor persuading them to purchase from that store. Four out of the six responded that it would be the image of the store that makes them want to purchase from it as it adds to ones personal fashion persona where clothes are purchased from.

The moderator asked the group if the image of a high street store would contribute to them purchasing from a particular store or not purchasing. Four out of the six reciprocated that they would purchase from a high street store depending on the clothes, not the image. Two participants agrees that the brand image of the high street store is more important. One participant commented that the brand image is important, not necessarily the logo but that you don't want to appear 'cheap' by buying discount clothes. The other commented on how a brands image would add to the perceived value the participant has for the clothes. Four of the participants said they would shop in Pennys only for garments that were plain and unrecognizable as being from there. Two

participants commented how they are recurrent Pennys customers because the clothes are cheap, they don't have a problem with the brand being recognized as a low cost fashion brand.

The Moderator questioned the participants as to what they feel makes a good high street fashion brand. Five out of the six participants agreed that variety in styles and clothing was a main factor. The general consensus was that a good high street fashion brand should follow trends in way that is unique to that brand. The participants agreed that Zara is a good fashion brand that follows current fashion trends without copying what is all over the high street. One participant commented that consistency of the brands clothing styles is also an important factor for a good brand image. The one participant continued by saying how some brands are only desirable in certain season for example.

The moderator wanted to discover if the participants' had any knowledge of brand terminology. The group was asked what they believe the term 'brand awareness' meant. Five out of the six had personal opinions about the terminology with responses including: the brands unique selling point, the image the brand tries to portray in public and thing that are associated with a brand for example red soles on Louboutins. One participant had no response to the question. All participants bar one had a good knowledge of branding terminology including brand differentiation, brand awareness and brand personality.

The participants were then asked their opinions on a brands visual identity. The moderator began by asking the group how important they felt an identity of a brand is to the consumer. One participant responded that it depends on how emotionally invested they are to the brand. For example not many people are concerned with Pennys visual identity, they shop there because it is cheap. The more upscale the brand becomes the more it matters because the brands have to convince consumers that they are worth the extra money. Four out of the six participant said they would not be concerned with a brands visual identity. Two said that the visual identity of a product in a fashion brand would be important as it is a way of informing the public where you purchase from.

Asking the participants a visual identity that they deem attractive followed up this question. One participant responded that they appreciate a more subtle visual identity like H&M. Two of the participants describes Chanel as a memorable attractive visual identity, one said Topshop, one said River Island and one participant could not think of any.

## **2. Public Relation Tactics**

The moderator asked a set of questions to discover if public relation tactics were a factor for the participants to buy a brand that were using them. The moderator also wanted to address if the participants had knowledge of public relation tactics.

Firstly the moderator asked the participants types of corporate social responsibility that they felt high street fashion brands should be addressing.

Some of the answers are as follows:

- No real fur should be used in garment design
- Child labor
- Slave labor
- Using real woman as models instead of photoshopping them

One participant comment how they feel brands can get away with everything except child/slave labor and even then the impact is very short lived and quickly forgotten for example the Gap and Nike child labor scandal. One out of the six participant responded that they don't find size zero models particularly attractive but other than that CSR doesn't particularly resonate with them.

The moderator asked the participants if a high street fashion brand were participating in corporate social responsibility would this persuade them to buy from them. Three participants responded yes it would. One participant said they would like to say yes but that they watched 'The Devil wears Primark' and they still shop in Pennys. Five out of the six participants agreed that CSR is not a factor they would investigate

about a brand. One participant said they still don't buy from Gap or Nike because of the child labor scandals.

The moderator then asked the group to say the first words that come to mind when they hear the word Topshop. The words that were mentioned are as follows:

- Teenage - mid thirties
- Fashion followers
- Quality
- Young
- Expensive
- British Style
- 'Copy and paste' fashion
- Trendy
- Colorful
- Casual

The moderator followed this by asking the group the same question about the high street brand Wallis. The description of the brand is as follows:

- Old
- Flowery
- Out of date
- Mother of the bride
- Work suits
- Mature woman
- Plain
- Middle ages
- Larger sized clothing
- Dull

The moderator asked the group if they were aware of any public relation tactics being employed by either of these stores, i.e. Sponsorship, brand ambassadors etc. All six of

the participants were aware of the connection between Topshop and Kate Moss as its celebrity ambassador. All six participants were aware of the student discount in Topshop. Two participants described a PR tactic utilized by Topshop where celebrities design clothing lines for them. Three participants talked about Facebook discount codes for purchasing from Topshop online. Only one participant could describe a PR tactic bring utilized by Wallis. This was that teachers receive a 20% discount in store. The participants agreed that the student discount is a strong factor that contributes to high street brand attractiveness. Also the connection with Kate Moss and other celebrities have influenced their purchasing behavior and encourage them to shop more at Topshop.

50% of the focus group were surprised that Topshop and Wallis use the same clothing manufacture. 50% of the group said it doesn't surprise them as most of the high street fashion market come from the same sources.

#### **4. Social Media**

The moderator questioned the participants on social media. The moderator asked the group if any was a user of social media. All six participants were members of Facebook, three members of Twitter, and two were members of LinkedIn. Five out of the six participants followed Topshop on Facebook. The other stores that were followed on Facebook included ASOS, River Island, Buffalo, Zara, New Look and Pennys. None of the participants followed Wallis or were aware if Wallis even had a social media presence. Five participants agreed that Topshop utilize social media well and interact with their consumers constantly. One participant commented how Topshop post interesting images everyday on their Facebook page. They feel this gives the brand a personality and likeability factor.

The moderator asked the group if they believed high street fashion brands are utilizing social media effectively. The group agreed on the opinion of one participant. This participant believed that brands such as Topshop utilize the web and social media more because that is the position of their target market. This participant also believes

that high-end brands should not utilize social media because they would lose their aura of exclusivity.

Finally the moderator asked the group of a brand they feel utilizes social media in their opinion. One participant said Pennys comes up on their home page on Facebook everyday and that the brands page is constantly active making it more interactive and engaging. One participant talked about Burberry using social media effectively then its competitors. This participant explained how Burberry has a common theme, which draws all of the social media channels together. One participant said that Mango.com is connected with their social media pages so it results in you purchasing more from their online store. Three of the five participants agreed that besides Topshop have an attractive social media presence. They could not think of any other fashion brand that is effective with their online communication.

