Online consumers' perspective on digital fashion branding magazines

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - The study is focused on investigating the effectiveness of digital fashion branding magazines through the perspective of various types of online fashion consumers.

Theoretical framework - The classification of online fashion consumers is based on the motives of shopping behavior. Factors regarding positive online shopping experiences were employed in order to identify perceptions and preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines.

Research design - The study is implemented by the means of digital fashion branding magazines’ analysis, a focus group and individual interviews.

Findings - The results of the research makes it possible to identify various ways of presenting branding magazines. The study further demonstrates differences in how various types of online fashion consumers perceive digital fashion branding magazines. The types of consumers who are attracted by the branding magazines are considered as well. Digital fashion branding magazines are regarded to be an effective marketing tool which requires further improvements by all the identified consumer types.

Keywords: digital fashion branding magazines, online consumers, shopping motives.
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1. INTRODUCTION

When online technologies once emerged they changed the way of doing business in every industry forever. Their successful presence can be observed even in the apparel sector for which sensory experience is of high importance (Kim and Kim, 2004). Online fashion retailing is flourishing nowadays and according to the Euromonitor, its global growth in 2011 is reported to be 10% (Gillan, 2012). Even apparel companies that do not consider the Internet as their main retailing channel try hard to establish their online presence (Shang et al., 2005). They are motivated by the notion that the Internet is a powerful tool for building relationships with customers (Rowley, 2004; Voorveld et al., 2013). Thus, the cyber space gave rise to new business processes such as online marketing and in a more narrow sense to online branding. Ability to incorporate digital branding techniques and use them to the full extent is especially important for the players of fashion industry that is known by its tough competition. Online marketing and online branding in the fashion business segment constitute research area for the present study.

1.1. Studies on online marketing and online branding

A significant number of articles that were written recently cover the concepts of online marketing and online branding. According to Simmons, the Internet can play an important role in communicating companies’ values and gaining brand equity (Simmons et al., 2010). Furthermore, it can offer a wide range of activities for customers that enhance their brand experience (Harridge-March, 2004; Riley and Lacroix, 2003; Rowley, 2004). Thus, online branding is considered to be an important tool for further development of the company. The Internet caused significant number of changes in the field of marketing communication (Gurau, 2008; Rubinstein, 2002; Coviello et al., 2003; Riondino and Chiara, 2001). Online presence enabled companies to create a dialogue with their customers that contributes not only into trust towards the brand but also allows consumers to be seen as individuals (Vernuccio et al., 2012; Simmons, 2008; Riondino and Chiara, 2001). Furthermore, the more online interaction customers have with the brand the more intense their commitment to the company become. As a result, customers tend to engage with the brand that increases their loyalty (Jang et al., 2008). Online branding has the power to rebuild and refresh the image of the brand and acts as a force which can drive the strategy of a business into success (Rubinstein and Griffiths, 2001; Christodoulides, 2009; De Chernatony, 2001; Alrawi, 2007). Moreover, the Internet provides opportunities of globalization for the companies. The democratized character of the Web offers a competitive advantage to companies by providing an easy access to information in different national markets (López and Boluda, 2006; Varadarajan and Yadav, 2002; Ainscough and Luckett, 1996; Chiagouris and Wansley, 2000; Rowley, 2004; Alrawi, 2007).

Core elements of the brand experience in the online environment are considered to be: promised experience, emotional and rational values (De Chernatony and Christodoulides, 2004) as well as marketing communication, understanding customers, content and interactivity (Simmons, 2007).

Social media is a new tool of online marketing that is often considered to be more important than traditional channels due to the viral presence of the Web (Hill,
Social media allows spreading the information extremely fast which enables digital marketing to always stay in trend. The use of social media can help companies to learn about specific needs that exist on the market and to gain information about customers’ decision journey (Edelman, 2010). Moreover, digital marketing is an effective communication tool that attracts attention of a new generation that takes advantage of new technologies (Smith, 2011).

One of the possible approaches towards investigating online retailing and marketing is from the perspective of the customers. Some of the studies are focused on motivation of consumers to shop online (Shang et al., 2005) and characteristics of websites that stimulate purchasing behavior (Bamasoud et al., 2012). The surveys show the importance of entertainment in the context of online retailing. Perceived website interactivity is also one of the core characteristics that create a positive brand image and quality relationships between the brand and its customers, especially when they had no or little previous experience with the brand (Voorveld et al., 2013). Interactivity was emphasized in the research of key customers’ attitudes towards online brands (Vernuccio et al., 2012). Customers’ trust towards the brand that can be achieved by consistence of offline and online branding strategies is also a subject of the studies (Hahn and Kim, 2009).

Other investigations are focused on strategies and stages of online branding (Weltevreden and Boschma, 2008; Rowley, 2004; Jacksic and Liinanki, 2010). They underline the importance of information, entertainment and extra services. These factors create online experience that is essential for successful online performance. A study, regarding application of integrated marketing communication online, illustrates that characteristics of the Internet, such as transparency, interactivity and memory, force organizations to “combine consistency and continuity with flexibility and customization” (Gurau, 2008).

1.2. Studies on online marketing and online branding in the fashion segment

Online fashion retailing was considered to be an unsuccessful business until recent years due to the importance of shopping experience (Rettori, 2010) and involving all the human senses in apparel purchasing (Kim and Kim, 2004). However, nowadays there is a rapid growth in online fashion retail that involves between 25% and 30% per year (Rowley, 2009). Thus, this phenomenon attracts more and more attention of researchers.

Some of the studies in the field are focused on predictors for purchasing clothes online by investigating the topic from the consumers’ perspective (Kim and Kim, 2004; Ashman and Vazquez, 2012; Jones and Kim, 2010; McCormick and Livett, 2012). Their results show that the design of the fashion retailers’ web sites plays a significant role. However, the researchers state different reasons for its importance. Design of the web page can be a tool of creating hedonic experience (Kim and Kim, 2004; McCormick and Livett, 2012), trust (Jones and Kim, 2010) or loyalty (Ashman and Vazquez, 2012). McCormick and Livett (2012) identified two main factors that create a positive experience of online fashion shopping: product viewing and aesthetic fashion information (“advice and information about the
products”) (McCormick and Livett, 2012, p.14). Study of mobile marketing strategies also considers “trend information” to be one of the main elements of the app design (Magrath and McCormick, 2013). “Style advice” is the most important part of aesthetic fashion information. It creates emotional involvement, provides inspiration and hedonic experience (Magrath and McCormick, 2013). Digital magazines such as brand ASOS has can be a tool of providing style advice (McCormick and Livett, 2012).

Fiore (2008) stresses the importance of a pleasurable online experience to only a particular digital customer type that he refers to as “digital experience seeker” (Fiore, 2008). Other research show that it is different people who shop in online and offline stores. Thus, online shops broaden the companies’ customer base and brand awareness (Ashworth et al., 2006).

Another approach towards investigating the online fashion marketing is observing web pages of retailers and brands in order to identify if their online performance is up-to-date (Park and Stoel, 2002; Seringhaus, 2005; Marciniak and Bruce, 2004; Rettori, 2010; Rowley, 2009; Zalicki, 2012; Ashworth et al., 2006). According to the results, fashion retailers do not take advantage of all the opportunities that the Internet provides. Information that aims to address the human senses and create a shopping experience is underused by fashion companies that operate online (Park and Stoel, 2002). Interactive potential of the Internet also is not used to the full extent by apparel retailers (Marciniak and Bruce, 2004; Rettori, 2010). There are unimproved opportunities online for brand’s communication of values and relationships development (Rowley, 2009). Online presence is a big challenge especially for luxury brands (Jones and Kim, 2010) due to the conflict between their exclusivity and the inclusivity of the Internet (Jewkes, 2000). At the same time, the Internet provides luxury brands with enormous opportunities (Zalicki, 2012). However, luxury brands tend just to replicate offline marketing strategy online. Due to the fact that now customers have more freedom and choice (Zalicki, 2012), luxury brands need to find a way of maintaining a luxurious atmosphere online and making their online and offline messages cohesive (Jones and Kim, 2010).

In spite of the opportunities that the Internet provides “consumer expectations in product and services online are not met by fashion web sites” (Siddiqui et al., 2003, p.353). Fashion brands and retailers need to understand the importance of added value and brand image for online shopping (Siddiqui et al., 2003). There is also a deficiency of studies regarding online retailing. Thus, there are considerable opportunities for investigation in the field both from the perspective of customers and companies (Moore and Doyle, 2010).

1.3. The problem area of the study

The importance of online presence for fashion brands and a wide variety of tools and methods of doing so contradict to the insufficient fulfillment of the opportunities provided by the Internet by apparel companies. This inconsistency gives rise to a call for scientific studies aiming to investigate new ways of online branding that can help to bring consumers’ needs and companies’ visions together.
Due to the extensiveness of such research area as online branding it is possible to focus only on one of its segments in the present study. The choice was made in favor of digital fashion branding magazines. This preference is motivated by the novelty and insufficient representation of the subject in academic literature.

The knowledge about branding magazines can currently be obtained predominantly through the corporate perspective on the phenomenon. According to the business point of view, digital fashion branding magazines are online publications financed by a certain brand and can be found on its official webpage. They are a relatively new tool of online marketing that has emerged during the last decade (Pfeiffer, 2012). Online branding magazines are used by fashion companies in order to promote their products and lifestyle in a new and attractive way (Baker, 2011). The content, managed by professionals, enables the brand to create a story behind it (Content Marketing Association, 2011). Digital fashion branding magazines provide an interactive environment which helps to enhance customers’ brand experience (Goodwin, 2013). Being available through multiple channels (official brand’s website, applications for smartphones and social media) they are considered to be an alternative way of delivering the brand’s message. The magazines encourage customers’ engagement by offering a wide variety of content and functions. They contribute into establishing digital communities by creating personalized experience for loyal customers which they consist of. (Amir and Palmer-Jeffery, 2002). Digital fashion branding magazines can be an instrument of providing fashion information that contributes into communication between consumers and fashion products in cyberspace (McCormick and Livett, 2012). Thus, the magazines can contain significant potential for creating brand loyalty. However, there are many other tools with the same function such as blogs or pages in social media. Due to the lack of scientifically proved data regarding digital fashion branding magazines it is difficult to assess their real effectiveness. Nevertheless, representatives of the corporate world have a rather positive point of view on this type of online content presenting.

A substantial number of fashion brands made great efforts to create their own digital branding magazines (Goodwin, 2013). They expressed their ambition to convey their lifestyle rather than simply supply commodities. Fashion companies regard digital branding magazines to be helpful in reaching this goal (Content Marketing Association, 2011). According to the founder of the fashion brand J. Linderberg, the editorial content “indirectly gives texture to a brand, creates a feeling, an environment” (Pfeiffer, 2012). The richness of experience through a fascinating combination of text and visuals aims to engage the reader to a great extent and, consequently, enables to raise brand awareness (Pfeiffer, 2012).

Another advantage of digital branding magazines is that the companies can use it as a tool of direct communication with the customers. From the companies’ point of view, the magazine possesses the power that connects the willingness of customers to read and to purchase at the same time (Greene, 2010).

From the corporate perspective, online publications can act as profitable business alterations. According to the marketing director of the brand BLK DNM: “It is much harder to differentiate a brand through product than through advertising today, which is why we are investing in new ways of ‘advertising’” (Pfeiffer,
Therefore, the digital branding magazine is treated by companies as a new, alternative tool of advertising which can save money as well. In line with this position, instead of investing substantial amount of the capital into an advertisement in conventional magazines, companies prefer launching a branding digital magazine that displays their own products (Pfeiffer, 2012).

The editor in chief of the men’s magazine of online retailer Net-a-Porter underlines another fact about digital branding magazines that he considers important. He points out: “We can see how much a reader lingered on a page, what he skipped, and then what he bought” (Pfeiffer, 2012). Thus, digital branding magazines can provide companies with valuable information that enables brands to acquire better knowledge of their target audience (Pfeiffer, 2012).

Some of the digital branding magazines present information about new clothing trends and suggest fashion and beauty tips (Baker, 2011). Therefore, according to the corporate point of view, digital fashion branding magazines can provide content that raise brand equity and induce customers’ purchases.

However, the shortage of scientific studies on the topic prevents from considering whether the business perspective of the magazines is legitimate or not. There is no evidence that proves effectiveness of digital fashion branding magazines as a tool of online branding. It is not clear how consumers perceive them, to what extent they are aware of this type of magazines, appreciate and use them. Finally, it is indistinct if digital fashion branding magazines are worth significant investments and how this tool can be developed. Thus, lack of research data that can support the corporate perspective is the core problem the present study is focused on.

1.4. Purpose and research questions of the study

The research is designed in order to capture the consumers’ point of view on digital fashion branding magazines. However, due to the diverse nature of the market it is problematic to observe perspectives that can be universal for the majority of consumers. Moreover, the offline and online market are represented by different people (Ashworth et al., 2006) who are likely to hold various opinions regarding online branding tools. For obtaining more accurate evidence it was decided to treat the data in connection with various types of online consumers. Thus, the present study is aimed to investigate the effectiveness of digital fashion branding magazines through the perspective of various types of online consumers. The investigation is focused on providing a variety of views on digital fashion branding magazines hold by different clusters of online consumers in order to present the whole picture of ideas regarding this online branding tool from the angle of the clients.

The study has practical implications. The obtained data can be used by fashion companies as a basis of decisions regarding digital fashion branding magazines. The results of the study enable to understand differences in perceptions among various types of online consumers. Thus, the research provides basis for the further improvements of the tool that should be done in order to correspond to the users’ needs.

The study enables to contribute to research society. Due to the novelty of the research subject the paper can serve as an incentive of further studies in the area.
Moreover, it provides a new perspective on classification of online fashion consumers. It is regarded important for the reason of shortage of studies on segmentation of online market (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004).

The purpose of the study has been operationalized by the following research questions:

1. What are the different ways of presenting digital fashion branding magazines?
2. What are the differences in perceptions of digital fashion branding magazines and preferences towards them between various types of online fashion consumers?
3. For which types of online fashion consumers are digital fashion branding magazines attractive?

In order to fulfill the purpose of the study and answer the research questions the research process was structured in the following way. The second chapter provides theoretical basis of the study by presenting approaches regarding classifications of online consumers and investigations of factors that induce positive shopping experiences on the Internet. The third chapter focuses on the methodological framework of the research by describing and justifying the choice of participants as well as the methods of gathering and analyzing the data. The forth chapter presents results regarding the observations of digital fashion branding magazines. It sheds light on the various ways of implementing the publications. The fifth chapter provides an analysis of the data obtained by means of a focus group and interviews. It illustrates different perspectives on digital fashion branding magazines in connection with the identified types of online fashion consumers. The sixth and last chapter of the report presents general conclusions and reflections regarding the findings, theoretical and practical implications of the research and possible directions for future studies.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical ground of the research is constituted by studies focused on classifications of online consumers. The typologies are based on shopping motives (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004), individual characteristics of personality and factors of purchasing behavior (Barnes, 2007), decision-making styles of consumers (Cowart and Goldsmith, 2007; Song et al., 2011) and features of digital experience (Fiore, 2008). These models provide an insight into possible ways of approaching the problems of online customers’ classifications. The given research is also supported by models that focus on factors that attract online consumers and induce online purchasing. They identify attributes of online experience and content that are regarded important and appreciated by online consumers. The models are based on determinants of e-brand attitude (Vernuccio et al., 2012), shopping attributes (Kim and Kim, 2004), the web experience elements (McCormick and Livett, 2012), communication mediums (Ashman and Vazquez, 2012) which underlay online consumers’ perception of digital experience. These models form theoretical base for the analysis of the empirical data of the given study.

2.1. Online consumers’ classifications

Due to the significant expansion of online retailing as well as types of goods sold online the number of studies concerning differences in consumer behavior in cyberspace has raised. However, they are still in deficiency (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). From the practitioners’ perspective there is a call for classifications of online customers that can help companies address the diverse needs of their clients more effectively (Barnes, 2007). Online consumers are defined as people who not only use the Internet for purchasing products but also for searching for information about them (Solomon and Rabolt, 2007).

The research of Rohm and Swaminathan (2004) is aimed to offer typology of online consumers by investigating shopping motives. Their study is based on the claim according to which cognitive and affective motives that are intended for gaining personal gratification and satisfaction can be employed to explain mechanisms of shopping behavior. The authors selected from the studies on shopping behavior six motives that they used as criterion for classifying online consumers. The motives of online shopping are: shopping convenience, information seeking, immediate possession, social interaction, the retail shopping experience and variety seeking (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). The results of the research enabled the authors to identify four clusters of online consumers. “Variety seekers” are the largest group among investigated respondents. The other three groups included: “the balanced buyers” (are motivated by variety of goods and convenience), “store-oriented shoppers” (are motivated by social interaction and immediate possession) and “the convenience shoppers” (are motivated by efforts and time savings) (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004).

In his study Barnes et al. (2007) addressed the problem of online customers’ segmentation by focusing on individual characteristics of personality and factors of purchasing behavior. Partially, the research was based on the NEO-Five-Factor-Inventory model offered by John and Srivastava (Barnes, 2007). It is a model of personality structure that can be measured by means of the five dimensions
(extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience). All the dimensions are integral parts of a personality. However, according to the previous studies, only two of them can be significant for the online consumer behavior: extraversion (tendency to gain gratification from social interaction) and neuroticism (tendency to feel anxiety and guiltiness). These two factors together with factors that predict purchasing behavior (trust, perceived risk, attitude towards online shopping, shopping enjoyment and willingness to buy) comprised criteria for the online customers’ typology. The results of the survey revealed three types of online consumers. “Open-minded online shoppers” search for new experience in the Internet. “Risk-averse doubters” are quite incredulous and therefore may avoid purchasing online. The “reserved information-seekers” represent the majority of respondents; they are careful and demonstrate high perceived risk regarding purchasing online (Barnes, 2007).

Cowart and Goldsmith (2007) addressed the topic by investigating predominant consumer decision-making styles of online apparel purchasers. For this purpose they employed a model and the measuring tool (the Consumer Styles Inventory) developed by Sproles and Kendall. According to this concept, one or a combination of several of eight basic decision-making styles motivates various strategies of consumer behavior. The styles include: perfectionism, high-quality consciousness; brand consciousness, novelty-apparel consciousness; hedonistic, recreational shopping consciousness; ‘value for money’ shopping consciousness; impulsiveness; confusion from over-choice and habitual, brand-loyal orientation (Cowart and Goldsmith, 2007). Although there are many factors that affect consumer behavior, Sproles and Kendall claimed that consumers enter the market with “certain basic cognitions” (Cowart and Goldsmith, 2007). All the eight decision-making styles contribute to behavior of a certain consumer. However, people have dominant styles that make their consumer behavior unique. According to the results of the research, there are more consumers with hedonistic, recreational and impulsive decision-making styles then ones with ‘value for money’ consciousness among people who purchase apparel online (Cowart and Goldsmith, 2007).

Model of Sproles and Kendall was used by Song et al. (2011) to investigate types of online apparel consumers in China. By combining it with Technology Acceptance Model they revealed three major types of apparel consumers that have different purchasing decision-making styles and various representation online. Consumers of the “vogue pursuing type” (importance of price, style and brand) tend to shop fashion items online more than ones of “confusion type” (impulsive consumers) and “quality assurance type” (importance of quality, brand and familiar stores) who purchase apparel online the least (Song et al., 2011).

Fiore (2008) investigated types of digital consumers in apparel sector by focusing on human-computer interface experience. It represents the reactions of consumers regarding the information, layout and functions of a web page. The author detected four types of digital consumers of fashion items: digital shopper, digital content creators, digital personalized product creator and digital experience seeker. These types can also be perceived as characteristics that are represented in different proportions in every digital consumer. Each type of digital consumer can be a
valuable resource of inspiration for apparel companies that can create products and services that correspond to its needs (Fiore, 2008).

2.2. Factors of positive online shopping experience

The study of Vernuccio et al. (2012) aims to investigate the core factors that influence consumers’ attitudes towards online brands. Using results of previous studies the authors identified three variables that can affect e-brand attitude: *interactivity*, *personalization* and *e-trust*. E-brand attitude is considered to be “learnt predisposition to respond in a constantly favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given e-brand” (Vernuccio et al., 2012, p.502). *Interactivity* is defined as “a communication that offers individuals active control and allows them to communicate both reciprocally and synchronously” (Vernuccio et al., 2012, p.502). Reciprocity stands for both-ways communication. Synchrony represents how often feedback is obtained. *Personalization* is considered to be a perception of the content and services as customized for each consumer. *E-trust* is defined as a tendency to “accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions of behaviors of another” in cyberspace (Vernuccio et al., 2012). The identified factors comprised conceptual model that was used in the study (figure 1). The model illustrates relationships between the variables.

**Fig. 1: Model of determinants of user’s e-brand attitude (Vernuccio et al., 2012, p. 505)**

The results of the survey showed that the most important determinants of e-brand attitude are *interactivity* and *personalization*. *E-trust* has less impact, however it is still considered to be a significant factor (Vernuccio et al., 2012).

Research conducted by Kim and Kim (2004) is focused on predictors of online fashion items purchasing. By means of analyzing previous studies on the topic the authors identified four online shopping attributes: “aspects of online transaction service including security or privacy, cost (price, time savings), delivery and return policy, site design for virtual experiences, incentive programs with respect to online membership, visit point and give-aways and interactivity between buyer and seller” (Kim and Kim, 2004, p.887). According to the results of the research, there are four factors that induce online purchasing: *transaction/cost, incentive programs, site design* and *interactivity*. *Cost/transaction* was proved to be the most influential factor among the other. Intention to purchase fashion items online is influenced by *cost/transactions* factor and *incentive programs* as well as by demographic variables such as gender, age, educational background and number of children (Kim and Kim, 2004).
McCormick and Livett (2012) were interested in factors that induce online purchasing in apparel sector as well. The study was aimed to investigate influence of webpage elements on interaction between consumers and fashion items which has positive effect on a decision to purchase apparel online. McCormick and Livett (2012) applied to the Stimulus-Organism-Response paradigm and Theory of Reasoned Action (including Technology Acceptance model and Theory of Planned Behavior). According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response paradigm the online environment enable consumers to create a certain point of view, induces their reaction and emotional response that creates experience (McCormick and Livett, 2012). The Theory of Reasoned Action explains how the attitude towards online shopping and thus the behavior are influenced by “functional, experiential, social and consumer traits” (McCormick and Livett, 2012, p.23). By means of previous studies’ observations the authors identified product viewing and fashion information as the core elements of a website that contribute into interaction between consumer and fashion products online. Product viewing can include ability to zoom and rotate an item. Fashion information can be presented by means of blogs, digital magazines, fashion tips and pages in social media channels (McCormick and Livett, 2012). The results of the study revealed that the functional aspect of product viewing can enhance brand experience and make it more personal. Up-to-date fashion content with advice about style and beauty create a hedonic environment for consumers and can thus improve relationships between customers and the brand (McCormick and Livett, 2012).

Ashman and Vazquez (2012) investigated the ways of raising consumers’ attachment to the websites of online retailers. The model of communication suggested by Shannon and Weaver was used to achieve the goal of the study. It conceptualizes the journey of a message between a source and a receiver that includes a medium and a resulting effect. In the framework of the study, the online retailer plays the role of the source and the message is its fashion products. The effects are represented by trust, loyalty and purchase intentions. The medium is static image, moving image and combination of text and image. The results of the study showed that static images contribute into trust and induce purchase intention and moving images are related to loyalty (Ashman and Vazquez, 2012).

2.3. Theoretical ground of the study

Motivation theories, NEO-Five-Factor-Inventory model, the Consumer Styles Inventory model and human-computer interface experience model provide appropriate theoretical ground for developing online consumers’ typologies. From the perspective of the present research, the approach employed by Rohm and Swaminathan (2004) is relevant to the purpose of the study. Most of the classical consumers’ typologies developed before the Internet was invented were based on motivational theories. According to this approach, psychological motives can be used to explain mechanisms of shopping behavior (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004).

Detailed analysis of the research literature allowed Rohm and Swaminathan (2004) to identify six core motives that effect consumers’ behavior. Observations of a significant number of scientific resources and empirical verification were conducted by Rohm and Swaminathan (2004), which enables the consideration of the six motives to be a reliable and appropriate basis for development of online
customers’ typology of the present study. The motives of shopping behavior include shopping convenience, information seeking, immediate possession, social interaction, the retail shopping experience and variety seeking. Shopping convenience is a drive to save time and efforts. Information seeking is a motive of gathering information about products. Immediate possession is a wish to have goods or services right away after purchasing. Social interaction is a motive to communicate with others and be supported by the reference group. The retail shopping experience includes enjoyment of the process of buying. Variety seeking represents “intrapersonal motive for novelty, complexity, or change” (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004, p.750).

Studies regarding the factors of online shopping experience are focused on the determinants of e-brand attitude (interactivity, personalization, e-trust), the shopping attributes (transaction service, cost, delivery and return policy, site design, incentive programs, interactivity), the web experience elements (product viewing and fashion information) and communication mediums (static image, moving image and combination of text and image). Together these factors form the whole picture of the elements that have positive impact on the intention to purchase online and thus create theoretical basis for studying consumers’ perspective on digital fashion branding magazines.

According to the emphasis of the given study on information search as a component of online shopping behavior relevant factors were selected, which were used to categorize consumers’ perceptions and preferences. Interactivity, e-trust, site design, incentive programs, product viewing, fashion information, static image, moving image and combination of text and image create theoretical ground for the present study. Interactivity is understood as “a communication that offers individuals active control, allows them to communicate” in a two-way manner and obtain rapid feedback (Vernuccio et al., 2012, p. 502). In terms of online shopping it includes communication between consumers and sellers that enables buyers to assess products, access and evaluate and updated information about them and chose whether the company can get customers’ personal information (Kim and Kim, 2004). E-trust is defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of another” in the online environment (Vernuccio et al., 2012, p. 503). Site design represents layout of the online store. Incentive programs include “give-aways, frequent visitor points, free-trial, entertainment, online club membership benefits and coupons redeemable online” (Kim and Kim, 2004, p. 889). Product viewing is ability to manipulate images of the products including zoom and rotation in order to view items from various angles (McCormick and Livett, 2012). Fashion information is defined as information about fashion trends (McCormick and Livett, 2012). In the framework of online shopping, static image can be used for static product presentation that includes “elements such as 2D or 3D view, back view, viewing a product on a model or a mannequin and zoom capabilities” (Ashman and Vazquez, 2012, p. 979). Moving image can be used for moving product presentation that includes videos. Combination of text and image can be used for product recommendations.

Thus, the theoretical ground of the study is based on the notion according to which psychological motives underlay differences in shopping behavior on the Internet.
The six motives of shopping behavior comprise the base for the classification of online fashion consumers. Factors of positive online shopping experience are employed for interpretation of online consumers’ perceptions and preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines. Relations between motives of shopping behavior and factors of positive online shopping experience underlay differences in perceptions of digital fashion branding magazines and preferences towards them between various types of online fashion consumers.
3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to provide data regarding the effectiveness of digital fashion branding magazines empirical research focused on the perspective of various types of online fashion consumers was conducted. The study was carried out according to the cross-sectional design. This research design enables to observe several cases, as well as variation between them. It also makes it possible to examine relationships between variables (Bryman, 2012). Thus, the characteristics of the design correspond to the purpose of the study and enable to answer the research questions. The cross-sectional design allows observation of different types of online fashion consumers in order to reveal connections between them and their perceptions and preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines. It is also an appropriate research design due to our interest in respondents’ previous experiences concerning the subject of the study.

The cross-sectional design of the investigation was implemented by means of qualitative, deductive approach. The decision to conduct a qualitative study was partly made for the reason of the novelty of the subject (Bryman, 2012). There are no studies that directly address online branding tools such as digital fashion branding magazines. Thus, the research can be described as explorative and it is aimed to adumbrate the area and give an impulse to subsequent studies. Due to the explorative nature of the research, limitation of generalization harms the results of the study to a lesser degree. Moreover, qualitative approach allows being more flexible towards directions of the research which is significant while studying a relatively new area. It also enables to follow the process and ways of interpreting social reality by respondents (Bryman, 2012), which is crucial for detecting differences in online apparel consumer behavior that is underrepresented in scientific studies and lacks accurate measuring instruments (Cowart and Goldsmith, 2007). Deductive reasoning was employed in order to formulate research questions and design the study on the basis of the theoretical background (Bryman, 2012).

3.1. Research design

The first stage of the research consists of the observation of digital fashion branding magazines which were treated as a source of data (Bryman, 2012). This phase of the investigation was motivated by the lack of information about the magazines from previous studies. The observation was aimed to provide general knowledge about the phenomenon and its core features and thus, reveal the ways digital fashion branding magazines were used as an online branding tool. The first stage of the research also enabled to select elicitation materials for the further investigation taking into consideration the variety of the observed magazines.

The second stage of the study was implemented by means of one focus group and two individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. The novelty of the research object motivated the choice of the focus group as the method of the study. The method enables to generate new notions about the concept and approaches to its further investigation (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). The data obtained by means of the focus group provided insights about how to structure the individual interviews. Moreover, communication between participants of a focus group
enables to capture how the perception and meaning of the object is constructed collectively (Bryman, 2012). This aspect of the method is important because fashion is considered to be a social phenomenon and a product of interaction (Nakayama and Nakamura, 2004). Semi-structured interview was considered as an appropriate method which enables to investigate respondents’ perceptions of an object (Harvey-Jordan and Long, 2001). It is a flexible tool that made it possible to adjust focus of the study to the obtained data (Bryman, 2012). Due to the inability to meet one of the respondents (because of her residence in another city), the interview was conducted by phone. Another interview was conducted in a face-to-face manner. Audio telephone interview was carried out by means of computer software “Skype for Windows”, on a free basis both for us and the participant. However, audio telephone interview also could affect length of the respondent’s answer and cause limitations towards observing her body language (Bryman, 2012). Visual elicitation materials were used both for the focus group and the interviews. Three examples of digital fashion branding magazines were shown to respondents in order to make them acquainted with the subject of the study, “direct participants’ interest” and encourage discussion (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006).

3.2. Sampling

The sampling includes selection of the websites of fashion brands for digital fashion branding magazines’ observation and recruitment of participants for the focus group and the interviews.

3.2.1. Selection of the fashion brands’ websites

In order to define the scope of the web pages that can contain digital fashion branding magazines generic purposive sampling according to sequential and priory approach was employed. Criteria for the websites’ selection were established before the observation. Belonging of the web pages to fashion brands is the core criterion for the sample. Interface of the websites in English language is the second criterion that enabled analyzing the data. The web pages of fashion companies were checked for presence of digital fashion branding magazines. Number of the websites being observed was not fixed before the research. New cases were constantly being added to the observation due to the fact that a rather limited number of the websites possessed digital fashion branding magazines. The online content was identified as “magazines” in accordance with the way it was named by its developers. The observation was terminated when high rate of similar digital fashion branding magazines occurred and consequently the data saturation was achieved. Overall, 13 digital fashion branding magazines were selected.

3.2.2. Participants’ recruitment

Generic purposive sampling along with snowball sampling according to sequential, contingent approach was employed in the focus group and the interviews. The criteria for the sampling and participants for the focus group were chosen before conducting the research. Primary analysis of the obtained data showed that one of the target groups for the digital fashion branding magazines are considered to be persons who is highly interested in fashion. In order to carry out a more profound analysis of the research object two individual semi-structured in-depth interviews were decided to conduct with representatives of the target group. One of the
intended participants of the interviews could not take part in the research. Due to this snowball sampling was employed. The participant of the first individual interview was asked to suggest a person who could be relevant to the research and interested in taking part in it.

Six respondents of the focus group and two respondents of the individual semi-structured in-depth interviews participated in the research. One focus group was considered to be enough to explore the opinions regarding digital fashion branding magazines. The number of participants was chosen in accordance to the opinion that smaller focus groups provide more opportunities to express diverse opinions (Bryman, 2012). The focus group was followed by two individual semi-structured interviews with respondents other then the participants of the focus group. Thorough answers of the interview respondents provided us with sufficient data for the analysis.

The key criterion for the selection of the focus group’s participants was their interest in fashion. Enrollment in studies connected with fashion and textiles management was chosen as the indicator of the criterion. As from the date of the research the participants of the focus group were obtaining education in the Swedish School of Textiles of the University of Borås. Three of the respondents were enrolled in the master program “Textile management with specialization in fashion management”, two of the respondents were enrolled in the master program “Fashion management with specialization in fashion marketing and retailing” and one respondent studied the master program “Applied textile management”. Moreover, the participants’ interest in fashion and in fashion magazines particularly is indicated by positive answers of four out of six respondents to the question “Do you buy printed fashion magazines?” One of the participants is subscribed to various digital magazines and one of the respondents “read them frequently”.

Participants of the focus group are members of a natural group (Bryman, 2012). Although they are enrolled in different programs they know each other and had common courses during the previous academic year. The selection of the “pre-existing group” where participants are aware of the each others’ interest in fashion enabled to maintain natural atmosphere of the discussion that encouraged free expression of the opinions and thus, thorough answers.

Participants of the individual interviews were chosen according to their high interest in fashion that constitutes significant part of their personal and professional life. They can be described as fashion conscious respondents. The first participant is enrolled in the program “Textile management with specialization in fashion management” at the Swedish School of Textiles of the University of Borås. Moreover, she designs clothes and accessorize under her own fashion brand. She spends one hour per day on fashion web sites and blogs and 30 % of her monthly expenses on clothing. The second participant is an art professor and writer. She buys printed fashion magazines twice a month, spends one hour per day on fashion web sites and blogs and 30 % of her monthly expenses on clothing.

In terms of demographic data the focus group consisted of four female and two male participants, between 22 and 28 years old. Two female respondents of 27 and 34 years old took part in the individual interviews. These gender and age
proportions were chosen due to the fact that “young women constitute a major market for online apparel shopping” (Jones and Kim, 2010, p.630) and online customers tend to be under 44 years old (Kim and Kim, 2004). Representatives of Romanian, Pakistani, Brazilian, Greek and Dutch nationalities took part in the focus group. The respondents of the individual interviews are from China and Sweden. Participants from various countries were selected for the reason that online marketing provides the opportunity for companies to enter different national markets (López and Boluda, 2006; Varadarajan and Yadav, 2002). For the reasons of confidentiality the respondents’ names were changed. Participants of the study were named as Diana, Farid, Gabriela, Jason, Lisa, Maria (the focus group), Lian and Susan (the interviews).

3.3. Chronology of the study

The first stage of the research is represented by observation of digital fashion branding magazines. Analysis of the obtained data enabled to create general a overview of the phenomenon and select elicitation materials for the further phases of the study. The focus group and the interviews constituted the second stage of the research. First, the focus group was conducted.

The interview guide was prepared in advance and edited according to the suggestions of the scientific supervisor. In the beginning of the session visual elicitation materials were shown to the participants by means of the projector. Three digital fashion branding magazines by Melissa (“Plastic dreams”) (Melissa, 2013), BCBG Max Azria (BCBGMAXAZRIA, 2013) and Dolce&Gabbana (“Swide”) (Dolce & Gabbana , 2013) as representatives of various virtual locations, content, layout, levels of connection with social media and usage of special tools were chosen.

The interview guide consisted of the four core topics: “target audience”, “functions”, “effectiveness and values of digital fashion branding magazines”. The first topic involved questions regarding actual and intended readers of digital fashion branding magazines, personal experience of respondents towards these magazines (if they use them, in what circumstances). The second topic included questions concerning actual and intended functions of digital fashion branding magazines and personal preferences towards them. The third topic involved questions regarding usefulness of digital fashion branding magazines. The forth topic included questions concerning perceived importance of digital fashion branding magazines. Additional questions regarded connection between digital fashion branding magazines and social media, similarities and differences between the magazines that were used as visual elicitation materials and possibility of substitution printed magazines by digital fashion branding ones. In the end of the focus group its participants were asked to fill in a short questionnaire. It contained questions regarding demographic data (gender, age, occupation) and information about the use of printed and digital fashion magazines.

The individual interviews were conducted after the primary analysis of the data obtained by the focus group according to which the participants were selected. The focus group’s interview guide was adjusted and elaborated. The same visual elicitation materials were presented in the beginning of the face-to-face interview.
In the case of telephone interview the Internet links were sent to the respondent in advance.

The interview guide consisted of the four topics: “resources of inspiration and fashion information”, “functions”, “effectiveness” and “preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines”. The first topic involved questions regarding the respondents’ resources of inspiration for personal style and information about the latest fashion trends. The second topic included questions concerning actual and intended functions of digital fashion branding magazines. The third topic involved questions regarding usefulness of digital fashion branding magazines. The fourth topic included questions regarding suggestions about improvement of digital fashion branding magazines. In the end of the each interview the participants were asked to fill in a short questionnaire. It contained questions regarding demographic data (gender, age, occupation), information about the use of printed and digital fashion magazines, data about the expenses of fashion in terms of time and money.

The focus group and the interviews were conducted by the two authors simultaneously. All the discussions during the focus group and the individual interviews were recorded and transcribed.

3.4. Data analysis

A qualitative content analysis was employed to interpret the data gained by observing digital fashion branding magazines. Thematic analysis was used for the prior interpretation of the information obtained by the focus group in order to identify the main directions of the discussion. However, the further analysis of the focus group and the interviews’ data was inspired by the grounded theory approach and followed the procedure of analytic induction. In spite of the fact that the analysis was not conducted totally according to the grounded theory, the core principles of the approach were considered to be appropriate for defining categories such as various types of online fashion consumers (Bryman, 2012). The procedure of analytic induction enabled to formulate research questions that are relevant to the obtained results (Bryman, 2012).
4. DIGITAL FASHION BRANDING MAGAZINES

The analysis is based on the 13 examples of digital fashion branding magazines. The magazines were investigated by means of qualitative content analysis. It allowed identifying five core themes of the obtained data. They include: virtual location, content, layout, connection with social media and special tools. They shed light on the various features of the phenomenon. The five themes can be treated as dimensions that provide insights into differences and similarities of presenting digital fashion branding magazines by their creators. Table 1 (see appendix 1) presents variation of the digital fashion branding magazines by different brands among the five dimensions. Detailed description of each dimension is presented below.

4.1. Virtual location

All the digital fashion branding magazines are available online through the official web sites of the fashion brands. However, there are four different ways of locating the magazines virtually.

The digital fashion branding magazines of the first type can be found and looked through directly on the brands’ official web pages. Thus, this virtual location is named the site of the brand. In this case digital magazines can be accessed by clicking the button “magazine” or “magazines” on the main tool bar of the official webpage. That is the case with the magazines by BCBG Max Azria, Mango, Playlife, COS, Melissa, Maje. Previous issues of the magazines as well as current ones are also available sometimes. The magazines can be also available in one of the subsections on the main toolbar. For example, Hugo Boss’ digital magazine can be found in the section “lifestyle” and RL magazine by Ralph Lauren in the section called “world of Ralph Lauren”. Due to the fact that ASOS magazine targets only female audience, it is placed in the section “women” (subsection “fashion edits”) on the main toolbar.

Fig. 2: Location of the digital fashion magazine on Ralph Lauren’s official web site

The digital fashion branding magazines of the second type have their own separate web pages. Thus, this virtual location is named separate site. The digital magazine
by Dolce&Gabbana which name is “Swide” has its own webpage which is available at www.swide.com. The magazine is linked to the official webpage of Dolce&Gabbana and customers have an access to it by clicking the button “Swide” on the main toolbar. E-magazine by Steve Madden is located on its own webpage. Nevertheless, the button that links www.magazine.stevemadden.com with the official website of Steve Madden can be found on its main toolbar.

The magazines of the third type are available only as applications for smart phones (the name of the third virtual location type is application). Links for downloading the applications can be found on the official web pages of fashion brands or retailers. For instance, Gucci offers iphone / ipad magazine application “Gucci style”.

“Plastic Dreams” by Mellissa or ‘ED Zine’ by Edwin represent the fourth type of the magazines’ virtual location named digital publishing platform. In this case the magazines are available not only on the official web pages of the brands but also through the web site www.issuu.com. It is one of the Internet resources that enable to browse and share publications. By means of this digital publishing platform users can create a list of their favorite magazines and follow them in order to be updated about new issues.

Thus, there are different ways of locating digital fashion branding magazines. Some of them can be found in the most visible places of the web sites such as on toolbars. However, it takes time to search for other ones which links are located in subsections or on separate web sites. Moreover, there are magazines that are available by means of digital publishing platforms or applications for smart phones.

4.2. Content

Two types of the digital fashion branding magazines can be distinguished on the basis of their content. The magazines of the first type are focused primarily on presenting products that the companies produce and retail. Thus they were named “product information magazines”. Clothes and accessories are shown in relation to the latest fashion trends, high and street fashion. ASOS magazine provides collages of the products that can be purchased online. Each collage presents one of the latest trends. There are pictures of eye-catching street styles in Mango’s magazine. They show clothes that resemble products of the brand. Product information magazines also provide advice of how to wear apparel of the brands they promote (combinations and appropriate occasions). It can be achieved by means of pictures of the models’ outlooks (including photo shoots) or significant fashion figures such as bloggers, musicians or actresses.
Product information magazines have issues related to different themes such as “The wedding boutique” by BCBG Max Azria or to famous persons such as “Nicole Warne issue” of Mango’s magazine. Overall, this kind of magazine is characterized by a significant amount of colorful pictures and less amount of text that is usually written in fonts of a big size.

The digital fashion branding magazines of the second type have emphasis on communicating values of the brand and conveying its lifestyle to the customers. They were named “lifestyle magazines”. These magazines cover a significant number of topics. Themes regarding fashion, style, trends in relation with the brand’s products can be found in many digital magazines such as Steve Madden’s magazine or Swide by Dolce&Gabbana. However, lifestyle magazines also include topics that are just indirectly connected with fashion. For instance, there is information about sport, celebrities, food, travel, art and culture in Swide magazine. RL magazine by Ralph Lauren in addition to fashion, art and design covers topics regarding philanthropic initiatives, travel tips, literature, prominent figures and events. Overall, topics regarding travel, events, home design and architecture are quite popular among digital magazines of the second type (e-publications by COS, Melissa, Playlife).

Certain lifestyle magazines are focused more on the brands and the products they promote. For example, the content can be about features of the production, history of the company, information about founders and designers, events in which the company took part. That is the case with Hugo Boss’s and Lacoste’s digital publications. However, these topics are put into relation with outer environment, cultural and art trends that the society faces.
In general, lifestyle magazines target both women and men. They can have editorial letter, table of contents and information about editors and authors. They contain more text than visual information like pictures. These magazines resemble real printed publications.

Thus, two types of digital fashion branding magazines were identified on the basis of their content. Product information magazines focus on displaying and promoting products of the brands to which they belong. By using lifestyle magazines fashion companies convey their values to the customers.

4.3. Layout

There are two main types of presenting content of digital fashion branding magazines. The choice of layout connected with the content of the magazine.

The magazines of the first type provide sense of printed ones (“printed publications’ layout”). Pictures and illustrations that can be found in this kind of magazines are of good quality and often cover the page-spreads just like in glossy publications. These magazines usually have the same structure as the printed ones including the cover, editor’s letter, table of contents and articles covering various topics. The content of these magazines is updated by creating new issue monthly or once in a season which articles usually have a common theme. The magazines of the printed publications’ layout provide options that are easy to use. For instance, readers can click on the arrows in order to move forward or go back looking through BCBGMaxAzria’s magazine. Turning pages in Lacoste’s magazine resembles an experience of thumbing a book. Many of the magazines of the printed publications’ layout provide an opportunity to go directly to the preferable page by clicking on its number on the table of contexts placed on the toolbar. Pages in the ASOS magazine can be zoomed by clicking on any of its parts. Moreover, there is an opportunity to see the magazine of the size of the full screen. Easy and fast access to the specific content can be achieved by using a search line on the toolbar. The magazine “Plastic Dreams” by Melissa can be downloaded in the pdf format.

The magazines of the second type of the layout are presented as blogs (“blogs’ layout”). Dolce&Gabbana’s, Ralph Lauren’s, Playlife’s, Cos’s and Maje’s magazines can be referred to the second type. The headings and visual representation of all the articles are available on the first page of the magazines. The background of magazines of the blogs’ layout is rather simple, in a white color. These magazines have a “cover” picture on the top of the page that changes depending on the main article of the issue. The text and the pictures of all the articles have the same width and are arrayed either vertically or horizontally. In order to see the end of articles a reader need to scroll the page down. “Swide” magazine by Dolce&Gabbana has a toolbar on the top of the page which contains main topics of the magazine and the search line placed above it that make the navigation for the reader easier. The content of the magazines of blogs’ layout is updated constantly by introducing new articles.

Thus, presentation of digital fashion branding magazines in terms of form can resemble printed publications or blogs. Magazines of the printed publications’ layout resemble glossy magazines, have the same structure and use visual materials in the same way. They also have special functions to make it possible to use them
on electronic devices. Magazines of the blogs’ layout have all the articles available on the same page.

4.4. Connection with social media

Fashion digital branding magazines can be promoted by means of e-mail newsletters, display advertising or in the brick-and-mortar stores (Baker, 2011) as well via social media. Swide, the magazine by Dolce&Gabbana has its own Facebook and Twitter pages which are constantly being updated. Most of the other fashion digital branding magazines provide readers only with an opportunity to share their content via social media. For instance, the articles of Playlife’s magazine can be shared on Facebook, Tweetter, Pinterest and Google Plus.

4.5. Special tools

In addition to pictures and text there are various tools for presenting content that are used by fashion digital magazines. They are available only for online publications comparing with printed ones. Most of the branding e-magazines (such as ones by ASOS, Dolce&Gabbana and Mango) use videos of catwalks, advertisements, events, interviews and trips. Quickly changing pictures that are used in the digital magazine by Steve Madden create an illusion of motion. Swide magazine uses small opinion polls to reveal users’ points of view on different subjects, for example, if art should be free. Swide also provides readers with an opportunity to express their opinion regarding articles by leaving comments. These tools add an interactive aspect to the magazine. Furthermore, in BCBG Max Azria’s and ASOS magazines, readers have an opportunity to gain more information about the products (name of the item, price and composition) by placing the pointer on the picture. There are special links in these information boxes that customers can click on to go directly to the official web page and to do a purchase. These links are provided for faster navigation of the customers.

Fig. 4: Picture of BCBG Max Azria’s magazine showing information box of the items
4.6. Discussion

The analysis of digital fashion branding magazines enabled to answer the first research question “What are the different ways of representing digital fashion branding magazines?” The results of the first stage of the study provided a general overview of the phenomenon and detected key variations and tendencies of the ways the magazines are used by the companies.

Analysis of digital fashion branding magazines provided the knowledge about how companies apply this branding tool and adopt it to suit their aims. The five dimensions (virtual location, content, layout, connection with social media and special tools) that were identified by means of qualitative content analysis enable to reveal similarities and differences in the ways of presenting the magazines.

Digital fashion branding magazines differ in terms of virtual location. The magazines can be placed on the official websites of the brands, have their own web pages, be available as applications for smart phones or through digital publishing platforms. The focus of digital fashion branding magazines’ content can be made on displaying and promoting products or communicating lifestyle of the company. The magazines resemble either printed publications or blogs in terms of layout. Most of the magazines are connected to social media in terms of sharing the content or the whole publication. Special tools used in the magazines focus mainly on visual representation of the content, communication with the users and connection between the digital publication and the web store of the brand.

Thus, according to the analysis, digital fashion branding magazines vary to a great extent. The observed features of the magazines can be combined in different ways. At the same time, taking into consideration potential of digital technologies there is a space for new solutions regarding content, layout and functions of the magazines. The companies are free to create digital fashion branding magazines according to their aims. Thus, the magazines have a significant potential to be designed in a distinct way that enables the brand to stand out.

There are no consistent patterns of applying this branding tool. The dimensions identified in the study are aimed only to help revealing and describing similarities and differences between the existing magazines. They do not represent any rules of creating the magazines. However, the dimensions enabled to detect key tendencies in design of digital fashion branding magazines and their possible reasons.

In terms of virtual location the magazines can be closely connected with the webpage of the brand (placed on the same site) or separated from it (placed on the different page, available as an application or through digital publishing platforms). By locating the magazine on the brand’s site the company intends the brand and the magazine to be perceived together. The digital publication is aimed to serve directly to the brand’s purposes and be known as a part of it. Virtual location that is separate from the brand’s webpage may indicate the company’s intention to make the magazine disconnected from the brand. In this case the digital publication can attract readers that do not have loyalty to the brand and raise their brand awareness. Thus, they are intended to be perceived as independent publications (Pfeiffer, 2012). However, magazines which virtual location is separated from the brand’s one are underrepresented among all the analyzed publications. There are two
magazines that have their own site, one magazine that is available as an application and two that can be accessed through digital publishing platforms. This tendency might be connected with high investments that need to be done in order to create magazines that can compete with independent media.

The virtual location of the digital fashion branding magazines is connected with their content. All the observed magazines which are located separately from the brands’ web pages are focused on presenting the brands’ values and lifestyle through covering various topics as music, events or art (Pfeiffer, 2012). Cultural content enables to create magazines that can be perceived by readers as independent ones. However, this tendency cannot be observed in the opposite direction. Not all of the lifestyle magazines are separated from the brands’ webpages in the virtual space. Six out of ten lifestyle magazines are located on the same pages as the brands which own them. Thus, there is an opportunity to create digital fashion branding magazine that conveys values of the company with less efforts, by including them into the brand’s page. However, the lifestyle magazines are more independent from their brand, cover more topics and provide richer content than the lifestyle magazines that placed on the brand’s site.

The digital fashion branding magazines that are focused on the information about the products are virtually located on the brands’ web pages. It indicates positioning of these magazines in the direct connection to the brands. Their emphasis on displaying the products contributes to the factor of product viewing that makes the online experience more personal (McCormick and Livett, 2012).

The magazines can follow tradition of printed glossy magazines imitating their way of turning pages, combining visual materials and text (creating experience, touch and feel). They can also use new digital styles of presenting information such as blogs. Therefore, the two contrasting tendencies of the magazines’ form are represented by traditional and innovative ways of presenting information. Both of them contribute into the factor of positive online experience “site design” (Kim and Kim, 2004). Lifestyle magazines can be designed either in a traditional or in an innovative way. However, three out of four product information magazines are created with the use of traditional approach. Thus, they employ images of glossy magazines in their ways of displaying fashion items such as collages and photo spreads. It can be done in order to create an image (but not the content) of independent media with which consumer is more likely to be engaged (Pfeiffer, 2012). Thus, intention to design digital fashion branding magazines that can be perceived closer to independent media is embodied in the content of the publications through cultural perspective or in their form by using of a glossy magazine layout.

The factor of interactivity that contributes to positive e-brand attitude and predicts purchasing intentions is implemented by connecting digital fashion branding magazines with social media (Kim and Kim, 2004; Vernuccio et al., 2012). Moreover, this connection has hedonic effect on users and induces returns to the website (McCormick and Livett, 2012). However, usage of social media by the magazines is restricted to the options of sharing their content. In case of the magazines that have a printed publication’ layout the whole issue can be shared. Magazines that have a blog layout provide opportunity to share separate articles.
Only one of the observed publications has its own page on Facebook and Twitter. Unpopularity of this function can be explained by the intention to save time and funds that are required in order to be presented in social media. Having a page in social media also can contribute into separating the magazine and the brand by making the publication more independent.

Special tools are focused on visual information representation that contributes to the site design (Kim and Kim, 2004) and product viewing factors (McCormick and Livett, 2012). Various visual effects aim to attract attention of the users to the content of the magazines and the products of the brand. Product viewing is also implemented by the function that transfers the users from the magazine to online store where more details about the garments are available. All the product information magazines incorporated this function due to the fact that it makes interaction with the goods more personal and thus, encourages purchases (McCormick and Livett, 2012). Interactivity is represented by offering users an option of commenting the articles. This function is aimed to provide users with active control over the content and has positive influence on e-brand attitude (Vernuccio et al., 2012). However, only one magazine among the analyzed ones provides this function.
5. CONSUMERS’ PERSPECTIVE ON DIGITAL FASHION BRANDING MAGAZINES

Consumers’ perspective towards digital fashion branding magazines was investigated by means of the focus group and two semi-structured interviews. The study is focused on the respondents’ perception of the magazines that includes ideas about their functions, effectiveness and personal value. The preferences towards the magazines were also analyzed. They indicate features of the publications that participants find attractive or not and improvements they what to make. Respondents’ perceptions and preferences were investigated in connection with identified types of online consumers.

For the reasons of studying consumers’ perspective on digital fashion branding magazines three examples of the publications were used as elicitation materials. They represent various tendencies of the five dimensions’ application identified in the analysis of phenomenon. The magazine “Plastic dreams” by the brand Melissa (Melissa, 2013) can be found on the brand’s webpage and on the digital publishing platform. It presents the brand’s lifestyle, has layout that resembles printed publications and provides an option of sharing its issues in social media. The magazine by the brand BCBG Max Azria (BCBGMAXAZRIA, 2013) is virtually located on the brand’s webpage, presents information about the products, has layout that resembles printed publications. In terms of special tools it has information boxes about the items and links that transfer the reader directly to the web store. The magazine “Swide” by Dolce & Gabbana (Dolce & Gabbana, 2013) has its own website and pages in social media, It presents the brand’s lifestyle through cultural content, has a blog layout and provides with an opportunity to share its articles. Swide magazine uses videos, social pools and boxes that contain additional information about the products. The magazine is linked to the brand’s web store. Its readers have a chance to comment the publication’s content.

The results of the focus group and the interviews are presented according to the connection between participants’ characteristics of shopping behavior and their perceptions and preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines. Obtained information was analyzed with the use of core principals of analytical induction and grounded theory.

5.1. Characteristics of online consumers

Investigation of online consumers in the fashion segment provided with the information about their perceptions and preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines. The first participant (Maria) enjoys reading fashion magazines in her spare time. She is interested in gaining new, creative ideas and appreciates availability of wide variety of information. Maria gets tired easily of “the same big brands”. She uses “only digital magazines”. According to her, functions of digital fashion branding magazines include promoting of products of a certain brand, attracting existing customers and conveying lifestyle of the brand through the cultural perspective that is connected with fashion. She will not follow the magazines or share their content in social media because constant notifications irritate her and she prefers to see the whole issue instead of separate articles.
Maria considers the magazine by Melissa to be difficult to read. However, this magazine presents cultural content. The publication by BCBG Max Azria layout makes it easier to perceive information and interesting way of presenting visual materials. She also pointed out the function that enables “to click and buy at the same time”. According to Maria, the magazine by Dolce &Gabbana has more functions than the other examples and provides wide variety of cultural content. She emphasizes that “all of them [magazines] are active in social media”. In her opinion, to create a branding publication the balance between it and the brand should be considered. They should be “still connected, but somehow separated”, for example, by giving it a different name as in case of Swide. Otherwise, the magazine is perceived not as media but just as a part of the brand.

Overall, Maria regards digital fashion branding magazines to be a powerful tool. It has an opportunity to provide with experience that printed publication cannot offer: “on a click …you can have everything you want on your screen”. She considers availability of up-to-date information to be the biggest advantage of this kind of magazine. She sees potential in digital fashion branding magazines, however, they do not “work as much as they could”. The magazines can be improved in terms of content (that should be new and fresh), functions and layout. New ways of presenting content is important for the reasons of making it easier to perceive information in digital format through “the different ways of combining the text with videos and images”. Otherwise, that is too difficult to read digital magazines made in the same way as traditional ones. Innovative content, functions and ways of presenting information constitute new experience and thus significant advantage of digital fashion branding magazines. This kind of new experience Maria values to a great extent and wants to have personally. In terms of content and except from fashion and the brand’s products she would like to have fresh ideas and information about new designers, backstage of the collections (“how do they start the idea of the collection, how they end it up”) and corporate social responsibility of the company. Maria appreciated the option of Swide magazine to comment the articles that facilitates interaction and enable the editors to get the feedback from the readers. She also liked the availability of relevant cultural content provided by the digital fashion branding magazines.

The second participant (Gabriella) prefers to have information about a variety of brands. She wants to have information “that is … easy to get…in a fast way” and that corresponds to her interests. For this reasons she prefers blogs due to them presenting information in an easy, for perception, way. Gabriella uses social media to be transferred directly to the websites from the links in her news feed. She looks through some articles of branding publications in case if she comes across these magazines in a store. Overall, she prefers to read independent printed magazines.

In terms of functions Gabriella considers digital fashion branding magazines to be a way to transmitting brands’ identity, to experience the brand, to display the products and present fashion information like trends. Thus, according to her, it is a marketing tool that helps to compete with other companies. She would share and follow the magazines in social media because it enables her to see the articles she can be interested in and be directly transferred to this content instead of looking through the whole magazine. She sees the only chance to read digital fashion branding magazines via social media because usually she does not check them
online. Gabriella recognizes the intention of Melissa to make the digital magazines resemble real publications, however for this reason it is “impossible to read it”. In her opinion, Swide is “like a real magazine” due to the different name from the brand’ one and wide variety of cultural content.

Overall, Gabriella thinks that digital fashion branding magazines can be an effective tool for conveying a brand’s identity and making present customers of the brand more loyal to it. However, they can function better and be more connected to social media. The editors of the magazines can pay more attention to attracting new users because people who are not customers of the brand do not know about existence of these publications. Gabriella would like to have magazines as applications for smart phone because she can have an access to them anytime. For the same reason she would like to have a version of the magazines that can be downloaded and used without internet connection. She appreciated the fact that Swide magazine has information about its editors.

The third respondent (Jason) prefers not to spend time on searching for information that can be interesting for him in the Internet but to be transferred from the news feed in social media to pages which links seem to be attractive. He chooses the source of information that can appeal him from the first moment. Otherwise, he will not give it the second chance. Jason values up-to-date information. He does not buy printed magazines because he believes they cannot provide the latest news. He emphasizes importance of social media in branding: “you don’t need a page now just a facebook page”.

According to Jason, a company employs digital fashion branding magazines to promote its products by presenting lifestyle of the brand. He uses these magazines for professional reasons (as a retailer) or to be personally informed about fashion, to enjoy reading. Among all the shown magazines he prefers Swide by Dolce&Gabbana. He would like to have information about authors of the magazines’ content. For this reason he does not like blogs. In his opinion, it is very important for the magazines to have content that corresponds to the brand’s identity and preferences’ of the target audience. They should be cohesive and focused in their message.

The fourth respondent (Lisa) appreciates up-to-date and visual information which inspires her. She uses social media as a resource of information. According to her, everything she has in news feed feels more personal and actual to her because it reflects her interests and she has a chance to comment it. She prefers printed magazines to digital ones due to the fact that it is not convenient for her to read from a computer screen.

In terms of functions, Lisa thinks that digital fashion branding magazines introduce lifestyle and identity of the brand. They also provide readers with inspiration. Lisa would follow this kind of magazine in social media because “it makes it easier to keep up”, but she will not share their content. Social media also enables interaction between readers and the brand. Digital magazines provide more up-to-date information comparing with printed ones. Lisa would read branding magazines in case if she really interested in a certain brand, to know about its lifestyle and to get inspiration. In her opinion, the magazine by BCBG Max Azria has more visual information comparing with to the one by Melissa which has a lot of text. For this
reason, she prefers the first one. According to her, Swide magazine provides a wide variety of information, visuals and is well structured, which she appreciates.

In general, Lisa considers digital fashion branding magazines to be a good tool in terms of presenting a brand’s identity. She would like to see information about backstage of the brands, for example about designers, stylists and their work. She needs more “personal” information about the brand. She would like to see more visual information in the branding magazines and have them in paper. Lisa appreciates the option that enables to download a magazine because in this case she can use it without being distracted by other web pages and social media. She also likes the idea of having branding magazines as applications for smart phone due to the fact that she can access them even if she only has a little bit of free time.

It is important for the fifth respondent (Farid) that Internet resources manages to attract his attention at the first moment. They should “create a strong value” to make him a regular reader. Otherwise, he gets easily distracted and switches to other internet pages. He prefers printed magazines because he feels “more connected to” them.

As functions of digital fashion branding magazines Farid points out conveying the brand’s lifestyle. However, to do so the brand should have a certain level of power. He would use branding magazines in order to get inspiration and information about the latest trends. Now he uses look books for these reasons. In his point of view, the Facebook page of Swide magazine creates interactivity. Such functions as its own radio make the magazine different from other digital publications.

Farid considers the magazines to be an effective branding tool that helps to create awareness about the brand, induce desire for its products and as a result make consumers more loyal. Another advantage is the ability to “reach the wider target audience” because everyone can have an access to the magazines for free. Farid would like to see information about backstage of the brand and the magazine (peculiarities of photo shoots and creating content). He would prefer to have branding magazines as applications due to the fact that he wants to access them through the smart phone.

The sixth respondent (Diana) values cultural perspective on fashion. She appreciates information that is just indirectly connected to fashion, for instance about music, art or books. She prefers printed magazines. She considers providing inspiration and presenting products’ assortment to be core functions of digital fashion branding magazines. The magazines are aimed to make “customer more loyal to the brand but not necessary to the products” for people who cannot afford them. The tool is used to make the brand more accessible. However, it is just an impression of accessibility. At the same time, Diana emphasizes that the branding magazines’ experience “removes the aura of exclusivity which you have when you go to a store”. Branding magazines also can be used by companies to obtain data about the customers “depending on the clicks”. Diana uses social media to be transferred to other Internet resources but she a lot of notifications irritate her. She does not see big difference between the magazines that were shown as the examples. Among all of them she prefers Swide magazine which name is different from the brand’s one and thus makes it “more original”. She also stresses that fact that there is information about the authors in it.
In general, Diana thinks that digital magazines can provide with experience that printed ones cannot create. They can be an effective branding tool however if they are supposed to “increase sales … [they] could do better”. She would like to have cultural content in the digital fashion branding magazines that is disconnected with fashion. She likes the idea of an independent magazine sponsored by the brand and makes an example of “Acne Paper” which content is “mostly on art”. She would prefer to have two versions of the magazine: one that can be downloaded and used when there is no access to the Internet and one that has all the features that makes the experience interesting. She appreciates the option of the magazines that transfers uses directly to the web store. It is convenient in case if she wants to purchase a certain item.

5.2. Characteristics of fashion conscious online consumers

Investigation of fashion conscious online consumers demonstrated that their perceptions and preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines differ from perspective on the phenomenon by online consumers that have average interest in fashion. The first participant (Lian) is interested in the up-to-date information about fashion as a reflection of social processes. She also wants to know about fashion trends and news for professional reasons. Lian considers her contacts in social media to be the best way of obtaining the latest fashion news. She uses other resources such as blogs mostly if she finds their links in her friends’ pages in social media. Lian also shares links she finds interesting with her friends. She perceives social media as a natural and pleasant way of obtaining fashion information. Lian enjoys also visual aspect of fashion online experience to a high extent.

She considers digital fashion branding magazines to be aimed to present image of the brand. Lian uses these magazines in order to know more about the brand, trends that it follows and to get inspiration by means of visuals. She would read digital fashion branding magazines only if she can find them “linked” in social media, otherwise she would not “bump into them”. She would share articles of good quality and prefer the magazines to have their own page in social media.

Lian recognized Melissa’s attempt to create magazine that resembles printed publication. However, she did not like nor visual presentation of Melissa’s neither of Max Azria’s magazine. She also emphasized the fact that there was information about authors of Max Azria’s magazine. Lian prefers Swide magazine to all the other shown examples due to its better visual display. Besides of the elicitation materials she appreciates visual representation and focus on the values but not the products of COS magazine that she knew about before the interview. Lian found the function that links the magazine and the web store useful for obtaining information about products. However, she would not purchase directly from the magazines. She appreciated the key word search. She prefers to read digital fashion branding magazines instead of the printed ones because she can access them anytime she wants. Lian believes that the magazines can function even better on the iPad.

According to Lian, digital fashion branding magazines can work as a good branding tool but only in case they are implemented in a proper way. Fashion
conscious consumers today are already well informed and do not need extra information. That is why the emphasis should be done on improving the magazines’ visual presentation in order to “make them interesting and attractive”. Digital fashion branding magazines should “sell the brand image first and then to sell the products”. For this reason Lian would like to see cultural perspective that corresponds to the brand’s values. She also expects branding magazines of retailers such as H&M to provide readers with coupons and discounts for the products.

The second participant (Susan) values up-to-date fashion information due to the fact that changes in this industry occur very often. It is important for her to know about fashion trends for personal and professional reasons. Susan is very demanding towards information. She wants it to be fresh and surprising. Susan enjoys to a high extent looking through news of the fashion world. She obtains information from various resources including digital (blogs, magazines and sites) and printed ones from different countries. Social media is one of the most important resources for her. She believes it is a way of direct commutation with consumers. She exchanges information with friends by sharing links on her page.

According to Susan, digital fashion branding magazines are used in order to promote the brand, show its image and style of its products as well as establish relationships between the brand and the customers. The magazines that she perceives as an advertising tool provide the company with competitive advantage. She uses digital fashion branding magazines to get the latest news about the brand (for example, if it is “going to launch a new fabric”) that she finds more reliable since this information comes directly from the company. At the same time, the fact that these magazines represent only one brand makes her perceive them as subjective and “not authentic”. Susan appreciates connection of the branding magazines with social media. She would follow their pages and share articles, videos and photos with her friends through social media in case she likes the content.

Susan did not like layout of Melissa’s magazine. She negatively perceived the fact that previous issues of the magazine are located on the same page as the current one. This function is irrelevant to her because she associates fashion with future. Susan appreciated visual representation of BCBG Max Azria’s magazine, however she would like to have more functions for navigation in the content that can make the experience entertaining. Among all the examples she prefers Swide magazine due to the excellent structure, wide variety of functions and cultural content. However, she found it difficult to navigate in the information and search for the article she had read before. Susan liked the option of purchasing directly from the magazine. It enables her to gain information about the product but she would not use this function due to the security issues of purchasing online and wish to make more detailed research about the item she wants to buy.

Susan considers the magazines to be a good branding tool in case they are created in a professional way. The content should be updated constantly in order to attract consumers’ attention. However it is difficult for the audience to get to know about digital fashion branding magazines. In order to promote them bloggers and social media can be used.
5.3. Types of online consumers and their perspective on digital fashion branding magazines

The analysis of the obtained data enabled to identify types of online consumers in fashion segment and their perceptions and preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines. Consumers’ perspective on the magazines was studied in connection with motives of consumer behavior and factors of positive online shopping experience. Relations between results of the digital fashion branding magazines’ analysis and consumers’ perspective on them were observed.

Various types of online consumers that have average interest in fashion were identified. The first type of online consumers that are driven by information seeking motive is characterized by the interest in new ideas and cultural perspective on fashion that can be used in a shopping context (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). Online consumers of information seeking type appreciate lifestyle digital fashion branding magazines that are focused on conveying values of the brand. According to this type of consumers, lifestyle magazines resemble independent publications in terms of cultural content and are relatively disconnected with the brand and fashion. Value of lifestyle magazines by information seeking consumers can be explained by their desire to have general picture of the reality and not to be limited by fashion information (McCormick and Livett, 2012). They also appreciate interactive functions of the magazines that enable them to have control of the information (Kim and Kim, 2004). Information seeking consumers do not use social media in connection with digital fashion branding magazines. It is important for them to search and select ideas by themselves rather than using information suggested by friends or moderators of social media. Information seeking consumers also value product viewing options that the magazines provide by links that shows detailed information about products and transfer the users to the web store (McCormick and Livett, 2012). Despite of the fact that information seeking consumers consider digital fashion branding magazines to be an effective marketing tool they believe that their layout can be improved by introducing new styles of presenting information in digital environment. Thus, for them site design plays significant role due to its ability to make navigation in the information easier (Kim and Kim, 2004). At the same time, information seeking consumers prefer to be able to download the magazines to use them without Internet connection even if it causes restriction of visual information representation to static images (Ashman and Vazquez, 2012).

Fast information consumers that are driven by variety seeking and shopping convenience motives were identified as a second type. It is described by the value of information about various fashion brands which can be obtained with minimum time and efforts expenses (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). This type of consumer has a negative perception of digital fashion branding magazines with a printed magazine layout. They prefer site design that does not require additional time for navigation (Kim and Kim, 2004). Fast information consumers value lifestyle magazines that according to them resemble independent publications and thus, provide information not only about the brand that sponsors the magazine. Consumers of this type appreciate magazines’ connection with social media that enables them to access the content in an easier way. They see social media as an
opportunity for digital fashion branding magazines’ development in order to attract more readers. *Fast information consumers* would prefer *applications for smart phones*. This virtual location of the magazines to allows easy and fast access to the information.

*Communicative convenience consumers* represent the third type of online buyers that are driven by *shopping convenience* and *social interaction* motives. This type is defined by the tendency of choosing information resources that are attractive from the first sight. They allow saving efforts and time on information searching (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). Importance of interaction in the shopping context is attributed to *communicative convenience consumers* (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). Online consumers of this type appreciate to the high extent digital fashion branding magazines’ connection with social media that enables them to have fast and easy access to the publications’ content. They also prefer to have information about the authors and the process of creating the magazines. This kind of information and connection with social media contribute to the interactivity factor. It provides the opportunity to influence the publications’ content (Vernuccio et al., 2012). Consumers of the third type see digital fashion branding magazines as a source of fashion information that according to their preferences should correspond to the brand identity (McCormick and Livett, 2012). It allows narrowing the scope of information that they consume. *Communicative convenience consumers* appreciate the opportunity to have branding magazines as applications for smart phones that make the access to the content easier and faster.

The fourth type of online shoppers is represented by *communicative information seeking consumers*. They are derived by information seeking and social interaction motives (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). *Communicative information seeking consumers* are defined by the interest in up-to-date information and interaction by means of social media. Factor of interactivity represented by connection with social media is significant for this type of consumers. It enables to have control over information they consume (Vernuccio et al., 2012). Site design is also important for *communicative information seeking consumers*. They prefer static image to big amount of text (Ashman and Vazquez, 2012). Balanced combination of text and image enables to search and access information in a more effective way. For the same reason this type of consumers would like to have a version of the magazines that can be downloaded or accessed as *application for smart phones*. *Communicative information seeking consumers* appreciate lifestyle digital fashion branding magazines that provide information connected with the brand’s values.

Online consumers that belong to the fifth type are notable for their high level of interest in fashion. They were named *tough consumers*. They are driven by information seeking, retail shopping experience and social interaction motives (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). In order to gain positive shopping online experience all of these motives should be fulfilled. *Tough consumers* are identified by the value of up-to-date information about fashion from diverse resources that enables them to obtain more objective data. Interaction in the shopping context that they implement by means of social media is important for them. *Tough consumers* enjoy online shopping experience and prefer its visual aspect. Connection of digital fashion branding magazines with social media represents a factor of interactivity. It enables them to obtain the latest news by communicating and sharing information.
with other people (Vernuccio et al., 2012). Factor of *site design* plays crucial role for *tough consumers* (Kim and Kim, 2004). They appreciate to a great extant its visual element represented by *static* and *moving image* (Ashman and Vazquez, 2012). *Tough consumers* value innovative ways of presenting information. They prefer to read branding publications as applications for tablets and smart phones that make navigation in the magazines more effective (Magrath and McCormick, 2013). *Fashion information* is significant for this type of consumers (McCormick and Livett, 2012). However, they would like it to be presented by means of cultural content. The function that links branding magazines with the web store is used by *tough consumers* for *product viewing* and obtaining additional information about the garments (McCormick and Livett, 2012). It is not used for online purchasing due to the lack of *e-trust* connected with reveling information about personal account (Vernuccio et al., 2012). Focus of the magazines on only one brand creates skeptical attitude towards their content and leads to mistrust. Moreover, *tough consumers* expect providing of *incentive programs* by branding magazines (Kim and Kim, 2004).

**Fig. 5:** Visual representation of the identified types of online fashion consumers

In spite of the significant differences in the perceptions of digital fashion branding magazines and the online consumers’ type and level of interest in fashion there are common ideas about the publications. Shared opinions concern the core function of the branding publications. They are considered to be focused on presenting lifestyle of the brand. Thus, the respondents have a clear overview of the aim of these magazines. Moreover, all the participants of the study regarded digital fashion branding magazines to be an effective marketing tool. However, the decision to use this tool should be supported by proper implementation. Even the respondents driven by an *information seeking* motive, who pay efforts to gain relevant information, emphasized difficulties associated with accessing branding
magazines. Participants of the study did not have or only had limited information regarding the availability of this kind of magazine. Thus, digital fashion branding magazines should be promoted in a greater extent. Their promotion can be implemented by means of social media. The connection of the magazines to social media is important for four out of five online consumer types. However, various aspects were emphasizes.

Different types of online fashion consumers were reported to employ social media in connection with digital fashion branding magazines in various ways. It can be used for fulfilling the social interaction motive by sharing and commenting the content of the publications (Smith, 2011). At the same time, social media can be a tool of easy and fast information access. The magazine’s own page in social media helps to satisfy preferences of online fashion consumers driven by the convenience shopping motive. Subscribed users can see all the updates and follow the links shared by the magazine in their news feed without opening the brand’s or the publication’s webpage.

However, the obtained results show that one of the identified types of online fashion consumers does not appreciate the connection between digital fashion branding magazines and social media. This type is represented by information seeking consumers who prefer to select relevant information by themselves. At the same time, they are predominantly attracted by digital fashion branding magazines compared to the other types of online fashion consumers.

Thus, the results of the study demonstrate the effectiveness of digital fashion branding magazines and shed light on the perspective of various types of online fashion consumers on this kind of publications. The findings of the research have practical implications that will be presented in the following chapter.
6. CONCLUSIONS

The present study focuses on the consumer perspective regarding digital fashion branding magazines. It aims to examine the effectiveness of this marketing tool by investigating perceptions and preferences of various types of online fashion consumers.

In order to do so a qualitative content analysis of digital fashion branding magazines was conducted. Five dimensions that conceptualize variations of the magazines’ characteristics have been identified. They include virtual location, content, layout, connection with social media and special tools.

The analysis of the data provided by the focus group and individual interviews allowed investigating perceptions and preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines in connection with various types of online fashion consumers. Identified types include information seeking, fast information, communicative convenience, communicative information seeking and tough consumers. Consumers of different types demonstrate various perceptions and preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines in terms of virtual location, content, layout, connection with social media and special tools.

Similarities in perspective on the magazines among different types of online fashion consumers were observed as well. Respondents consider digital fashion branding magazines to be an effective marketing tool that enable brands to communicate values and lifestyle. However, branding publications should be implemented in a way that corresponds to the needs of the certain type of online consumer that the company targets. Among all the identified types digital fashion branding magazines are predominantly attractive for information seeking consumers.

6.1. Reflection on the results

The findings of the study encouraged further discussion regarding the relevance of the selection of participants. The obtained results demonstrate not only differences between online fashion consumers and their preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines but similarities as well. The ideas regarding the subject of the study shared by the participants can be explained by their common educational background. However, the design of the research that was partly implemented by means of the focus group is aimed to capture the process and results of collective construction of the knowledge about the phenomenon (Bryman, 2012). Thus, the collective aspect of the study can result in perceptions that are common for different types of online consumers.

Moreover, specific educational background of the respondents enabled to gain thorough understanding of their perspective regarding the digital fashion branding magazines. The participants’ knowledge about the fashion industry and interest in the area generated a high level of involvement in the research and allowed them to provide detailed, critical answers.
6.2. Theoretical implications

The given study provides an insight into consumer perspective regarding digital fashion branding magazines, which was not previously known. Thus, the research offers new knowledge of online marketing and branding. The wide variety of opportunities that the Internet provides for fashion industry supports the significance of studies which address their effective application.

The given research offers typology of online consumers based on motivation theory. This approach provides new opportunities for the classification of consumers in the fashion segment. The importance of conceptualizing differences in online consumer behavior is based on practical requirements of the fashion industry which seeks out new ways of satisfying various consumers’ needs (Barnes, 2007).

6.3. Implications for practitioners

In spite of the successful expansion of the fashion industry on the Internet there is still a gap between what consumers expect from the online shopping experience and what companies currently offer (Siddiqui et al., 2003). From a practical point of view, the given study provides fashion companies with guidelines that enable them to create digital fashion branding magazines that correspond to the preferences of various types of online consumers. Thus, by considering differences in the perspective of the consumers regarding branding magazines, companies have a chance to employ this marketing tool to its full potential.

Further development of the magazines should follow the preferences of the target audience, which this tool is supposed to reach. Digital fashion branding magazines that target fast information consumers can take advantage of providing connection with social media, availability of the publications as applications for smart phones, functions that enable easy navigation through the magazines and a wide variety of fashion information from different resources. Branding magazines targeting communicative convenience consumers should also be connected to social media. It is important to create pages for the publications in social media and update them constantly in order to attract the attention of consumers for whom the news feed is the main resource of information. In order to fulfill the needs of communicative information seeking consumers the options of sharing and commenting articles of the magazines in social media should be introduced. The content should also have cultural emphasis. Branding publications can gain the loyalty of the tough consumers when providing up-to-date content that covers various topics, paying attention on visual representation of the information and making it possible to share the articles in social media.

At the same time, identifying consumers who are attracted by digital fashion branding magazines enables brands to design this tool according to consumers’ needs. This approach provides an opportunity to use the magazines in the most effective way by addressing it to the consumers who appreciate them. According to the results of the study, digital fashion branding magazines are attractive predominantly for information seeking consumers. For them the magazines can become a valuable resource of information about the brand’s identity and its products. In order to be appreciated by the information seeking consumers the
magazines should be implemented with the use of innovative ways of presenting content and provide opportunities of interaction between the readers and the authors. The focus of digital fashion branding magazines should lie on cultural content. Relative disconcord between the magazine, the brand and fashion should be considered. This feature makes branding magazines resemble independent publication. It is valued by information seeking consumers because of the opportunity to obtain comparatively objective information.

Online consumers of all the identified types stressed the problem of a limited audience of digital fashion branding magazines. According to them, the main obstacle that prevents this marketing tool from functioning to its full potential is difficulties connected with getting to know that there is a magazine available on the brand’s webpage. Thus, it is important to promote the branding publications to a greater extent. In order to expand the audience social media can be used. Different opportunities that social media provides can be considered in accordance with the preferences of various types of online consumers. However, it should be taken into account that not all of the identified types appreciate connection of the magazines with social media. For this reason other ways of promoting digital fashion branding magazines such as e-mail newsletters or display advertising should be used as well (Backer, 2011).

In general terms consumers’ perception corresponds to the corporate perspective on branding publications. Digital fashion branding magazines are worth investing in. According to one of the interview participants, online branding publications “definitely can cause huge success if the intentions of the ones who are using them are considered”.

6.4. Future research

The present research contributes into the knowledge about digital fashion branding magazines and provides basis for further studies of the phenomenon. The focus of the following explorations can be made on investigating various forms of presenting digital fashion branding magazines such as applications for smartphones and pages of the publications in social media. This perspective is considered promising due to the positive perception of these forms illustrated by the present study.

The given research is focused on the participants with similar background. Thus, it would be fruitful to explore the perspective on the subject hold by people with various education and areas of interests. The further research can be also based on the experience of online consumers. For this reason respondents that use digital fashion branding magazines in daily life and the publications they read can be chosen for investigation. It shifts the focus of the study from consumers’ notions about the phenomenon to the attributes of its real experience.

Overall, the study brings new perspective on online marketing and branding. It emphasizes importance of taking into account differences in consumers’ preferences. The results of the research show that the full potential of branding tools can be implemented by focusing on meeting expectations of exact consumers’ segment. The study provides basis for the further studies on classifications of online consumers in fashion industry. They can be implemented by means of
quantitative approach in order to provide with the results that can be generalized on major segment of population.

Moreover, the research stresses significance of interactions with the brand for consumers. Their willingness to participate actively in the process of obtaining information and to influence the content can be traced in the study. Thus, the future research can be focused on investigating marketing tools that enable effective communication between consumers and the brand.
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APPENDIX I

Table 1: Results of the qualitative content analysis of digital fashion branding magazines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digital fashion branding magazines</th>
<th>Virtual location</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Layout</th>
<th>Connection with social media</th>
<th>Special tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dolce&amp;Gabbana “Swide”</td>
<td>Separate site</td>
<td>Lifestyle Resembles blog</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter (its own page and option to share articles)</td>
<td>Videos, social pools, opportunity to leave a comment, links to the web store, information boxes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Madden</td>
<td>Separate site</td>
<td>Lifestyle Resembles blog</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google + (option to share articles)</td>
<td>Videos, changing pictures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCBG Max Azria</td>
<td>The site of the brand</td>
<td>Product inf. Resembles printed publication</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Information boxes, links to the web store</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mango</td>
<td>The site of the brand</td>
<td>Product inf. Resembles printed publication</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google + (option to share the magazine)</td>
<td>Videos, information boxes, links to the web store</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph Lauren “RL magazine”</td>
<td>The site of the brand</td>
<td>Lifestyle Resembles blog</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter (option to share articles)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gucci “Gucci Style”</td>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Lifestyle -</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter</td>
<td>Videos, Information boxes, links to the web store</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hugo Boss</td>
<td>The site of the brand</td>
<td>Lifestyle Resembles printed publication</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Google + (option to share articles)</td>
<td>Videos, links to the web store</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>The site of the brand</td>
<td>Product inf.</td>
<td>Resembles printed publication</td>
<td>Social Media (option to share)</td>
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<td>The site of the brand</td>
<td>Lifestyle Resembles blog</td>
<td>Facebook, Tweeter, Pinterest, Google +</td>
<td>Videos</td>
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<tr>
<td>COS</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cosstores.com/Magazine">http://www.cosstores.com/Magazine</a></td>
<td>The site of the brand</td>
<td>Lifestyle Resembles blog</td>
<td>Facebook, Tweeter (option to share articles)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lacoste</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lacoste.com/#/80/fashionspirit">http://www.lacoste.com/#/80/fashionspirit</a></td>
<td>The site of the brand</td>
<td>Lifestyle Resembles printed publication</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin “ED Zine”</td>
<td><a href="http://www.edwin-europe.com/ed_zine_v.html">http://www.edwin-europe.com/ed_zine_v.html</a></td>
<td>The site of the brand and on issue.com</td>
<td>Lifestyle Resembles printed publication</td>
<td>Facebook, Tweeter, Google + (option to share the magazine)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa “Plastic Dreams”</td>
<td><a href="http://www.melissa.com.br/en/magazine/cine-melissa">http://www.melissa.com.br/en/magazine/cine-melissa</a></td>
<td>The site of the brand and on issue.com</td>
<td>Lifestyle Resembles printed publication</td>
<td>Facebook, Tweeter, Google + (option to share the magazine)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maje</td>
<td><a href="http://magazine.maje.com/">http://magazine.maje.com/</a></td>
<td>The site of the brand</td>
<td>Product inf.</td>
<td>Resembles blog</td>
<td>Facebook, Tweeter, Pinterest, articles (option to share articles)</td>
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APPENDIX II

Interview guide for the focus group

1. Introduction

Hello! Thank you for your participation in the research! We are studying online fashion experience and we want to know your opinion about the topic.

Format of the focus group

The focus group will take approximately 1 hour and a half. First, we will tell you about important rules for the focus group that we would like you to follow. Then, we will show you some examples of fashion digital branding magazines and ask to discuss them by answering the questions. In the end we will ask you to fill in a short questionnaire.

Conventions

First of all, we want to inform you that the whole conversation will be recorded. We need to do it in order to be able to analyze the data. However, all the data that we will obtain during this session will be treated confidentially and anonymously. It is very important that one person speaks one at a time. Please, try not to interrupt each other or to speak simultaneously. Speaking over each other courses problems with recording of the discussion. It would be too difficult to understand what was said. The session is open and everybody’s views are important. Try to participate actively in the discussion!

2. Examples of digital fashion branding magazines

Now we will show you some examples of fashion digital branding magazines. These magazines you usually can find on the official web sites of fashion brands.

- The magazine of the brand Melissa:  
- The magazine of the brand BCBG Max Azria:  
  http://www.bcbg.com/SUMMER-II-2013/magazines-may-2013,default,sc.html
- The magazine (Swide) of the brand Dolce & Gabbana:  
  http://www.swide.com/

3. Questions for the focus group

3.1. Target audience of digital fashion branding magazines

- Who do you think the readers of digital fashion branding magazines are?
- Who are supposed to be the readers of digital fashion branding magazines? What kind of audience do the magazines target?
- Do you read these magazines? When? Where (for example, during traveling)?

3.2. Function of digital fashion branding magazines
• What do you think are the reasons for the brands to have digital fashion branding magazines? What is the purpose of digital fashion branding magazines?
• What would be the reason for you to read them?
• What kind of information can you get from digital fashion branding magazines?
• What kind of information do you want to see in these magazines?

3.3. Effectiveness of digital fashion branding magazines
• Do you think digital fashion branding magazines do what they are supposed to do? Do they work?
• Do you think it is a good tool for brands to use?

3.4. Values of digital fashion branding magazines
• What value do digital fashion branding magazines have for you?
• Why do you use (or would use) them? Why are they important for you?

3.5. Additional questions:
• Would you share digital fashion branding magazines that you like in facebook, twitter or any other social media channels if this function is available? Do you think it is a good idea for the branding magazines to have a separate page on facebook?
• Please, compare the three magazines that were shown to you in the beginning of the discussion. Are they different? What is the difference?
• Would you use digital fashion branding magazines instead of conventional glossy publications (such as Vogue, Elle, Harper's Bazaar, etc.)?

4. Socio-demographic data

Now, we want to ask you to fill in the questionnaire which we will hand out.

5. Closing

Thank you so much for your participation! You have helped us a lot! We will analyze the data we had gained. If you want to learn about the results feel free to contact us.
APPENDIX III

Questionnaire for the focus group

Please, answer the following questions:

1. Your gender:
   a. Female   b. Male

2. Your age: _______

3. Occupation (specify, please, what program you study or/and where you work):
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

4. Do you usually buy printed fashion magazines?
   a. Yes    b. No (if “no” go directly to the question 6)

5. How often do you buy printed fashion magazines (for example, one per month)?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

6. Are you subscribed to any fashion digital magazines?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time ☺ !!!
APPENDIX IV

Interview guide for the individual interviews

1. Introduction
Hello! Thank you for your participation in the research! We are studying online fashion experience and we want to know your opinion about the topic.

Format of the individual interview
The interview will take approximately 1 hour. First, we will ask you the questions about your online fashion experience. Feel free to answer.

Conventions
First of all, we want to inform you that the whole conversation will be recorded. We need to do it in order to be able to analyze the data. However, all the data that we will obtain during this session will be treated confidentially and anonymously. Your point of view is very important to us. We would like to hear detailed and explicit answers to the questions. It will enable us to obtain accurate results of the study.

2. Questions for the individual interview

2.1. Resources of inspiration and fashion information
- Where do you get inspiration for your personal image and style from?
- What kind of media do you prefer to get inspiration from?
- Why do you use the resources you just mentioned? What do you especially appreciate about them?
- Where do you usually get information about the latest trends?
- Do you usually use digital media? What do you like about it?
- Have you ever read digital magazines?

2.2. Examples of digital fashion branding magazines
Now we will show you some examples of fashion digital branding magazines. These magazines you usually can find on the official web sites of fashion brands.

- The magazine of the brand BCBG Max Azria: http://www.bcbg.com/SUMMER-II-2013/magazines-may-2013/default_sc.html
- The magazine (Swide) of the brand Dolce & Gabbana: http://www.swide.com/

2.3. Functions of digital fashion branding magazines
- Do you read digital fashion branding magazines? If not, please, explain why.
- What kind of information can you get from digital fashion branding magazines?
• Do you think that these magazines can help you to get inspiration and information about the latest trends?
• Do you think these magazines can be helpful as the conventional glossy publications? In which cases you would prefer to read these magazines instead of the traditional ones? Will you replace them with the traditional magazines and if not please explain why?
• Have you made/or will you make any purchases while reading digital fashion branding magazines?
• What do you think are the reasons for the brands to have digital fashion branding magazines? What is the purpose of digital fashion branding magazines?

2.4. Effectiveness of digital fashion branding magazines
• Do you think digital fashion branding magazines do what they are supposed to do? Do they work?
• Do you think it is a good tool for brands to use?

2.5. Preferences towards digital fashion branding magazines
• Do you like the way digital fashion branding magazines present their content? Do you like the content and the functions of these magazines?
• Is there something more you want to see in digital fashion branding magazines?
• Which one of the three magazines shown as examples you prefer more and why?
• Do/will you follow these magazines or share their content through social media?
• How much time would you spend on reading this kind of magazines?
• If your favorite fashion brand has its own digital branding magazine would you read it?

3. Socio-demographic data

Now, we want to ask you to fill in the questionnaire which we will hand out.

4. Closing

Thank you so much for your participation! You have helped us a lot! We will analyze the data we had gained. If you want to learn about the results feel free to contact us.
APPENDIX V

Questionnaire for the personal interview

Please, answer the following questions:

1. Your gender:
   a. Female       b. Male

2. Your age: ________

3. Occupation (specify, please, what program you study or/and where you work):
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________

4. Do you usually buy printed fashion magazines?
   a. Yes               b. No (if “no” go directly to the question 6)

5. How often do you buy printed fashion magazines (for example, one per month)?
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________

6. Are you subscribed to any fashion digital magazines?
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________

7. How much time do you spend per day on fashion websites or blogs?
   ___________________________________________________________________

8. How much money do you spent per month on clothes comparing to your monthly expenses? (approximate percentage)
   ___________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time ☺️ !!!