

Gay Male Consumers Seeking Identity in Luxury Consumption: The Self-Concept.

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Abstract: *This study presents a conceptual framework that examines the drivers that lead gay males to consume luxury goods in order to enhance or build their identity. Thus, the framework relates the self-concept to the consumption of luxury goods among gay males. Another important aspect discussed broadly in this paper is self-congruency and its impact on luxury goods purchases. The framework is built on three propositions described as follows: The first proposition explains the impact of the four intrinsic factors, uniqueness, self-confidence, success and pride, on gay male luxury consumption. The second proposition discusses two extrinsic factors, sub-culture and social status, and their impact on the desire for luxury consumption among gay males. The third proposition describes how appropriate celebrity endorsement moderates the impact on the luxury consumption desire of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.*

I. Introduction

Past research (Berthon et al, 2009; Tsai, 2005; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004) has examined luxury consumer behavior. Despite the fact that they used different expressions and terms in their research, they all addressed the impact of the self and others on luxury consumption. Nonetheless, few researchers have constructed empirical models of luxury goods consumption investigating the personal and social factors effecting male consumers (Jain et al, 2015; Hung et al, 2011; Tsai, 2005). In recent years, gay males have started to come out and they have been stereotyped for having a fancy and luxurious lifestyle. We could find little research on the subject of gay male luxury consumption. Therefore, this conceptual piece proposes intrinsic and extrinsic traits that lead to gay males' purchase behavior.

Rigdon (1991) used the term "Dream Market" to define the gay market. Rudd (1996) articulates that the size of the male homosexual market segment is estimated to be between 14 and 25 million consumers in the USA. These statements can be a valid indication that gay males are seen to be "affluent, with expensive taste and a hedonic lifestyle" hence being described as the "typical homosexual" (Braun et al, 2015 p. 446). Being known as such, marketers have been interested in the gay market and that they "had gone after gay men because the stereotype was so attractive" (Johnson, 1993 p.34).

In the same context, luxury brands are one of the most profitable and fastest-growing brand segments. Hence, some luxury has been associated with the attributes of quality, exclusivity, uniqueness, high price and beauty (Berthon et al, 2009). Luxury brands have been defined as products and services that have a superior quality and aspiration than other brands. Such products give an exclusive experience to the consumers evoked by the desire to impress others (Atwal & Williams, 2009). Berger & Ward (2010) talk about conspicuous consumption and its role in enhancing one's prestige by impressing others. Hence, consumers can signal their wealth, power and ability to spend in the community and the society. On the other hand, Melika & Muris (2009) relate the consumption of luxury products to the context of psychological determinants. Luxury consumption can be related to both intrinsic and extrinsic motives. A difference exists between the two previous categories, as for extrinsic motives they induce luxury consumption to demonstrate success and are a social marker. On the other hand, the intrinsic factors evoke the desire to access pleasure, distinguished by a strong personal reason. Therefore, luxury products can be consumed for social recognition, status and the aspiration for exclusivity and superiority or for a personal and hedonic purpose. On one hand, luxury products can be purchased for the want to belong to a group and have a social status, and on the other hand, for the satisfaction of personal needs (Amatulli & Guido, 2012).

This paper presents a conceptual framework that looks at the intrinsic factors that drive luxury consumption among gay male consumers. The intrinsic factors look at the different elements of purchase intentions by which gay male consumers try to shape, integrate and reinforce their identity. We also consider the extrinsic factors that could be the reason for gay male consumers to purchase luxury goods. In addition, this research allocates an importance to celebrity endorsement and its effect on the gay consumers purchase decision through their influence on the gay consumers' personality trait.

II. Literature review

II. I Definition of luxury

The topic of luxury has been a field of interest for early research starting from the work of John Rae in 1834, Thorstein Veblen in 1899 and Keasbey in 1903. However, the term luxury takes different forms for many different people and is dependent on the experience of the consumer (Wiedmann et al, 2009). Kapferer and Bastien (2009, p. 314) say that luxury is a social market which leads to a need of brands – “the DNA of luxury is the symbolic desire to belong to a superior class”

The literature defines the term luxury in several different ways. The Romans assigned the word luxury with a possibly negative meaning. The term luxury is originated from the Latin word *luxus*, which is defined as “soft or extravagant living, overindulgence” and “sumptuousness, comfort, abundance” (Christodoulides et al, 2009, p.397). In accordance, this definition has a lot in common with the *luxuria* which means everything that is extra and related to negative self-indulgence (Dubois et al, 2005). However, the concept of luxury has evolved and the term gained new definitions, hence the term started to be associated with the Latin term *lux*, which means light. Thus, this association referred to precious objects that were made for the wealthy and high status people such as kings and princes (Brun & Castelli, 2013).

Defining luxury is a challenging task since it is a relative concept, meaning what luxury is for some is not the same for another. Twitchell (2003, p. 43) defines luxury as “things you have that I think you shouldn't have”. Therefore, defining the term luxury varies according to the socioeconomic class of each individual, and it is usually associated with different elements such as motivation and lifestyle. Therefore, one author or person can have contradictory thoughts about luxury, thus making luxury a complex concept and context specific (Dubois et al, 2001). Nonetheless, Kapferer has summarized the range of luxury definitions as follows:

“There is no single definition of luxury. Most of them do refer to well crafted, hedonistic and aesthetic objects, priced excessively above their functional utility, sold in exclusive stores delivering personal service and unique consumer experience, most often from a brand with history, heritage, the whole delivering a rare feeling of exclusivity” (Kapferer, 2015, p. 88).

However, luxury in the marketing field is defined as a source that offers a product or service with quality, aesthetics, and brand image which are superior to those offered by conventional products or services. Luxury goods can be defined as a specific product that brings esteem to the person and enables psychological satisfaction. These psychological benefits can be considered as the main element that distinguishes luxury from non-luxury products (Arghavan & Zaichkowsky, 2000). Luxury brands are perceived to have the highest price and quality relationship in the market. Despite the fact that the functionality and price relationship can be low, the intangible and distinguished experience is high in comparison to the price (Nueno & Quelch, 1998). Hence, the market is witnessing a high competition among luxury brands to induce exclusivity, brand identity, and perceived quality (Phau & Prendergast, 2000). Thus, luxury is a subjective and multidimensional construct (Wiedmann et al, 2007).

Much research has viewed at luxury as being consumed for what it means and the motives for buying luxury goes beyond what the products are. The research referred to luxury as being items that provide recognition to their users and fulfil psychological needs (Nueno & Quelch, 1998; Kapferer, 1998; Dubois & Paternault, 1995). The major characteristics of luxury have been described as being “a strong element of human involvement, very limited supply and the recognition of value by others” (Wiedmann et al, 2009, p. 626).

Ghosh & Varshney (2013) said that luxury in the past recent years has been seen to go mass market and became popular in different countries. But the traditional concept of luxury as being exclusive did not merge

within this phenomenon of mass-luxury. Thus, luxury has been divided into four categories: 1. True luxury, 2. Traditional luxury, 3. Modern luxury living, 4. Life's little luxuries. The relevant category for this research is the true luxury category which is allocated to the ultra-rich people. It shows that when money does not present a problem, exclusivity becomes the most important factor for consuming luxury. But, it is not enough that a product is not available to everyone. The luxury item has to be "subjectively rare" (Mortelmans, 2005 p. 505).

Consequently, luxury is considered as an exclusive thing. The high price is something related to exclusivity, whereas if the luxury product is affordable, it loses its exclusivity and uniqueness. Therefore, controlling the availability of the product, it gives it more value and certainly adds the rarity element to the brand (Quelch, 1987; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

II.II Identity and the self-concept

In the psychology literature self-concept has two meanings. The first meaning is the self-esteem which is defined as how a person considers him/herself as a valued and worthy person. The second meaning is more about particular attributes or traits a person assigns to himself/herself such as handsome, caring and successful (Mittal, 2015).

Previous study (Marsh et al, 2006) have had theories that self-concept is a multidimensional construct that enables consumers to evaluate themselves in many different social situations. Four dimensions of self-concept are identified in the marketing literature to explicate behaviour: (1) actual self-concept (me as I am), how an individual sees himself or herself, (2) ideal-self-concept, how an individual wishes to see himself or herself, (3) social self-concept, how an individual sees how others see him or her, (4) ideal social self-concept, how an individual would like to be seen by others (Hosany & Martin, 2012).

Possessions represent a fundamental part of a person's identity. They present a way for a person to demonstrate his/her extended self, and participate as an important and significant factor in the construction of personal identity and facilitate the creation of a specific culture of consumption (Belk, 1988). O'Cass and Frost (2002) depict that brands are increasingly perceived as powerful means in creating and maintaining a sense of identity and achievement. Consequently, Eastman and Goldsmith (1999, p. 42) argue that consumers "acquire, own, use and display certain goods and services to enhance their sense of self, to present an image of what they are like, to represent what they feel and think, and to bring about the types of social relationships they wish to have".

Consumers seek intrinsic benefits to the self in buying those luxury goods, as these luxury products can provide a better sense of self and boost a person's self-esteem. In addition, what consumers want to buy the most is identity rather than just tangible products (Belk, 1988). Marketers have been using consumer identity as a means to target consumers. Identity represents particular characteristics of the self that varies across time and context, which consumers use to socially differ themselves from others. These characteristics define who consumers are and shape the motivation of their behaviour (Americus et al, 2009).

The personal identity is a factor relating to the inside image depending on the way the person perceives himself (Mehta, 1999). In the theory of the consumer's behaviour it is accepted that the consistency of the person's personal image of oneself changes the relation between the image that the person has of himself and the image he/she has of the product (Belk, 1988).

In regards to luxury goods, it shows that the congruence of the self has an important impact on the purchase of a luxury product (Puntoni, 2001). Accordingly, the purchase of luxury items can be a means by which consumers try to integrate the symbolic meaning of these particular items into their own identities (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Association between the self-concept and luxury brands

Consumers are perceived by others to consume and buy luxury goods just for the want to impress others. The theory of impression management states that consumers' internal motive to impress others and create a favourable social image is just an outcome of their purchase behaviour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). On the other hand, research demonstrates that consumers have different motives to consume luxury items. Therefore, luxury

consumption is not driven by only factors which are to impress others or to be socially acceptable and get a favourable image. Broader research demonstrates that several motives help in the process of buying and consuming luxury. Aside from the factor that the purchase of a high priced item enhances someone's ego, the fact of luxury consumption represents a value to the individual and the reference group. That leads to the proposition that individuals consume luxury products for a personal want. In contrast to the social factor, self-identity is the internal factor of one's self that characterizes the way an individual perceives himself or herself. It has been confirmed by Puntoni (2001) that self-congruity has a significant impact on luxury-brand purchase. According to this, consumers' usage of luxury items may be a way for them to integrate the symbolic meaning of the products into their own identity (Holt, 1995).

Belk (1988 p. 160) states that "we learn, define and remind ourselves who we are by our possessions". Furthermore, individuals have an actual self which is a realistic view of the person and how they perceived themselves and other ideal self that is the definition of how the person wishes to be (Sirgy, 1982). Individuals wishing to achieve the ideal self, use consumption as a means. This can be explained by the fact that brands and products hold a symbolic meaning that can enhance a consumer's self-concept by the transfer of certain product or brand meaning to the self (Hemetsberger et al, 2012).

Reference groups are mainly the reason behind the association of individuals to certain brands. These individuals are usually influenced by their reference groups' use of luxury brands. Therefore, brands serve as a means by which individuals create and communicate their self-concept, and this is how they create a link between the self and the brand. Consumers integrate the brands' personal traits and characteristics into their self-concept. They try to identify products or brands that match their self-image (Chaplin & John, 2005). In the same context, consumers try to find brands that present the higher similarity to their actual or desired self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

Luxury items are therefore bought by consumers for what they mean to them. In this context, symbolic consumption is another concept that explains the relation between self-concept and consumption. The symbolic consumption is purchasing the product not for the functional benefits, rather for the meaning it presents to the person. Hence, it serves as a way of communication between the consumer and his/herself. The consumption therefore, plays the role of giving consumers intangible attributes through interpretation or emotions. Consumption is a way for consumers to construct individual meanings relatable to their identities, life circumstances and aspirations. Items reflect the qualities of the self, how a person thinks, feels and lives (Millan & Reynolds, 2014).

III. Gay market

Gay people are now *coming out of the closet* and revealing their identities. They are supported by many and the niche market is growing and achieving even more interest from different brands. Marketing to gay people could only happen when the gays and lesbians began to come out of the closet and hence the gay and lesbian lifestyles would begin to appear more and more in a clear and obvious way to the straight world. In the early 2000s an increasing presence of gay and lesbian people was shown, and marketers' interest in these consumers had grown (Whitaker, 1999).

In Australia, surveys conducted by Roy Morgan Research between 2006-2014 on a sample of 180,000 Australians (aged 14+) was asking these people to agree or disagree if they consider themselves homosexual. In the years 2006-2008, around 1 in 42 (2.4%) people agreed. In 2009-2011, 1 in 32 people agreed (3.1%). In 2012-2014, it had risen to 1 in 29 people agreeing (3.4%). It is a significant matter for the marketers, with the rise of the gay coming out of the closet more opportunity is opened for the Australian luxury market by targeting this niche segment.

With the gay consumption behaviour previously mentioned and the survey results conducted by Roy Morgan Research, Australia is facing a different future where the gay community will be coming out. The society is being more and more embracing of the gay community and, as a result Australia's marketers can see an opportunity for growth in the luxury segment (Roy Morgan, 2015).

IV. Gay consumption

Acting in accordance with the cognitive consistency theory, individuals value congruence among their thoughts, feelings and behaviour and are willing to conserve this consistency between those factors through their

consumption behaviour. Gay individuals use certain products and brands that have symbolic possessions that are congruent with their self-concept (Oakenfull, 2012). The gay subculture is characterized by their consumption lifestyles, this consumption maintains identity functions among the gay group members such as self-concept. Thus, gay men are affected by the group they belong to. It is particularly known that gay male lifestyles and consumption behaviour are to a certain extent related to how the community as a whole is behaving. Gay men are stereotyped to be part of the consumers that look for quality in the brands and they look to purchase the items or services that matches their thoughts and the community they belong to as a whole. As an implication, companies can exploit this opportunity with marketing to the niche market. By doing so, they are not only gaining particular consumers of the community but the gay community will be reached as well.

Kates' (2002) study shows how consumption holds a bigger meaning to gay men than straight men because it is considered as a way for them to define the boundaries of their subculture. A product of a certain brand can have a meaning for the gay group as a whole and by using the same product, individuals assure their belonging to the group. This way, individuals differentiate themselves from the straight culture and declare their identity.

The study of gay population has been a debatable topic. The issue of how to reach this gay niche market is of growing importance to marketers. The gay male luxury consumption in the fashion industry shows that gays care much more about image, appearance and fashion than heterosexuals (Pereira et al, 2006).

Individuals accord importance to congruence among their thoughts, feelings and behaviour and are willing to sustain consistency between these elements through their consumption behaviour (Oakenfull, 2012). Relatively, consumption among gay males plays a role to resolve a pressure between the traditional gender conventions and those they experience in the gay community (Kates, 2003). In the fashion industry, gay men are seen to be more concentrated on their appearances and the way they look. Various studies attempted to discuss the relation between gay men and their behaviour towards fashion. Kates (2002) studied gay men behaviour in regards to their fashion purchases and in accordance the importance they allocate to their appearance. In his study, Kates was trying to study the difference between gay and straight men. He asked his informants to discuss consumption classifications between gay and straight men. Some analyses showed that gay men are stereotyped as more sartorially competent, and they are fashion conscious, attractive. On the other hand, straight men are stereotyped as sartorially challenged, demonstrate less personal grooming and are less fashionable. In this context, appearance can be related to the social identity that gay men are trying to construct (Reilly et al, 2008).

V. Propositions and Conceptual Framework

V.I First Proposition

Personal measures to enhance identity or create an ideal self

A brand's personality has much to do with the traits of the individuals who buy luxury brands. In this context, gay male consumers construct a set of feelings and emotions attached to a brand trait. Building on the self-congruity concept, gay male consumers search for the match between the self they are longing to construct and the brand personality or identity. The self-congruity can enhance the consumer reaction to the brand. Hence, consumers' purchase behaviour is related to the traits they desire to integrate in their ideal self (Mathews, 2015). The luxury brand possessions present more than just pricey, expensive high quality items, rather they hold traits that gay males as consumers perceive as a way to complete their perceived identity. Thus, they tend to define who they are and what they want to be by behaving the same way they perceive the brand, as a reflection to the image they are trying to achieve.

Sirgy (1982) depicts that symbolic consumption reflects the personality and lifestyle of consumers looking for social distinctions. Luxury products are the perfect example as they serve as a way of self-expression and the author illustrates that consumers chose products or brands perceptually consistent with their own self-concept. Self-image congruence plays a significant role in inducing consumer behaviours. Existing research focuses on the importance of the strong relationship between self-image congruence and satisfaction and building an identity. Self-congruity theory suggests that the congruence resulting from an association between the product-user image and the consumer's self-concept is the main reason affecting consumer behaviour. In their study, Hosany & Martin's (2012) results are consistent with the previous research suggesting

that ideal self-image congruity is much more important than actual image congruity. Hence, the ideal self-image is the main variable in consumer research.

Based on their findings, it can be suggested that gay male consumers in their luxury consumption are searching to reach the ideal self-image congruity on different aspects

According to Levy (1959), consumers do not look for functional elements in their purchases, rather their purchasing behaviour is influenced and oriented by the symbols of the products or brands.

Relying on Aaker's (1997) theory of the brand personality being considered as a set of human characteristics associated with the brand and in a relation with the consumers' behaviour, the discussion associates the brand traits with the ones that gay male consumers are trying to associate with themselves in order to build an identity. The following traits are suggested based on consumers that have experienced the same, and hence these suggestions could be related to what motivates gay male consumers to buy luxury brands. The following conceptual model in the self-concept has been proposed, based on four traits or measures.

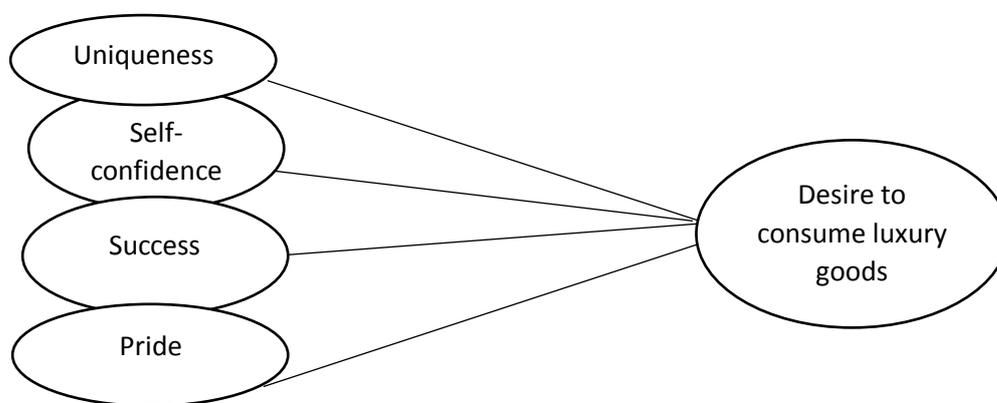


Figure 1. Intrinsic factors that impact the desire to consume luxury goods.

Following are proposed traits that gay male consumers search for in a luxury brand or possession in order to construct a satisfactory self.

Self-confidence: previous research (Bauer, 1970; Cast & Burke, 2002; Truong & McColl, 2011) has talked about the self-esteem to boost self-concept and identity. However, self-esteem relates directly to the self-confidence. Self-esteem is defined the feelings of the person in terms of self-liking, self-worth, and self-acceptance. Self-esteem can sustain and enhance self-worth that a significant component of self-esteem (Truong & McColl, 2011). Therefore, the proposition of the relationship between self-esteem and confidence.

Buying luxury goods highlights the desire to enhance the consumer's private sense of self-esteem. Hence, gay consumers consume luxury brands to feel themselves and therefore feel as a person of worth. Luxury products provide remedy to low self-esteem, and these consumptions are a way of self-satisfaction. Once gay consumer is feeling satisfied with a high self-esteem, it will have implications on his self-confidence. Cast and Burke (2002) state that identity is relevant to the self-esteem. Consequently, gay consumers will build an identity that is self-confident and that will be improved and enhanced by consuming the brands that hold the same identity. Luxury possessions have an impact on consumers' long term satisfaction. As such, consumers' would be responding to an internal stimuli that is linked towards the feeling of having a confident self-identity (Yajin & Griskevicius, 2014).

Uniqueness: different people show varying degrees of need for uniqueness and it could impact their purchase decisions. Gay consumers are seen to be individuals with high need for uniqueness and especially in the fashion industry. The need for uniqueness reflects the self-image and to represent who they are. Hence, consumers react emotionally to keep a level of uniqueness from others. Using luxury possessions is a way for gay male consumers to differentiate themselves from others (Belk, 1988). Tian, Bearden and Hunter (2001 p.52) depict that "the trait of pursuing differences relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image and social image". Thus,

uniqueness-seeking behaviour will enhance the consumer's self-image. Based on this, it could be said that gay consumers try to build their unique image through the luxury possessions. By demonstrating that the person is different from the others it reflects the person's freedom to express his or her own mind and it states that this individual is special (Ruvio, 2008).

The exclusivity that the luxury brand or item offers improves the gay consumers need for being unique and different. Therefore, by being not like the others, it enhances the self-concept and enhances their self-esteem. So, consumers tend to recover their self-esteem and decrease undesirable emotional impact through self-distinguishing behaviours. A unique brand or product is used to restore the consumer's self-view as one who is different from others. Hence, feeling unique and searching for a brand with a unique brand personality or characteristic will affect how as a gay consumer perceive himself in order to achieve the desired self-ideal image and achieve satisfaction (Tian et al, 2001).

Success: gay men individuals are stereotyped to be well educated and having a better income. Past studies has been interested in the level of education of the LGBT community and in particular gay men. Therefore, to build another part of their identity, gay men search for the luxury brand that holds the image of being a successful brand. To construct a solid identity, gay men consume the brand known to be strong, positive and prosperous. Given the fact that self-identity is not something that an individual enters the world with, the identity is created through constantly monitoring and adjusting the self through consumption practices (Schembri et al, 2010). Hence, gay male consumers assign personality characteristics to brands and look at these brands as if they were human characters.

Gay consumers use brands to define and communicate who they are, they chose the product they perceive to have a desirable personality as the one they are wishing to have. In this context, gay consumers are looking to consume the brands that have a strong successful image. By consuming the luxury brand with success as a recognized trait of the brand, they tend to construct the same characteristic in themselves (Schembri et al, 2010). In order to construct and reinforce a successful self, gay consumers choose the brand that symbolises affluence, wealth and prosperity. Gay men express who they are by consuming particular brands with certain characteristics to define and shape their ideal self. "That we are what we have...is perhaps the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior" (Belk, 1988 p.139), thus Belk's statement defines that self-identity issues are related to the brand consumption and that possessions are a part of the self.

Pride: in their study, McFerran et al, (2014), start their paper by a significant experience of one of the authors wearing a luxurious item. The author saw his friend's sunglasses as being attractive so he asked his colleague if he could wear them. The author continues his experience by saying that several individuals were looking at him the way people do when an attractive object catches their eye. Hence, the author felt a familiar emotion rising inside of him, which made him stand straight with an attitude and walk with confidence. The author stood in front of the mirror and admired how the glasses complimented his features. When the author returned the glasses, he could still sense the feeling of superiority and pleasure wearing those glasses. He finally reveals that the glasses were Prada. This experience of what the author than define as a feeling of Pride, is what gay men search to include in their identity. They are believed in this paper to look for that superior feeling when consuming a luxury product in any category. Hence, the feeling of pride makes the gay consumer recognize his own qualities, fulfilments which give him the feeling of being superior and self-satisfied. Therefore, luxury consumption is highly related to stimulate the feeling of Pride. Consuming luxury goods will have a positive impact on the gay consumer and hence his emotions might be intense when using the luxury brand. So conceptually, luxury brands make gay consumers buy these brands to signal their superiority rather than for their functional value. Therefore, individuals will experience a heightened feeling of pride from using a luxury brand, in comparison to the same product of a non-luxury brand (McFerran et al, 2014).

Conceptually, gay consumers add pride as a characteristic to build their identity. In this framework, pride is another trait that gay consumers search for in a luxury brand in order to accomplish their self. As the author in the beginning experiencing the consumption of a luxury item, he states that the feeling that a luxury item influence the individual consuming it, it enhances the personality and even more aid to create and construct an identity of superiority and gives the consumer a feeling of being special. On the other hand, pride is related to the feeling of success. Therefore, in this case a prediction could be said that the pride felt in wearing a luxury product can be directly related in this conceptualisation to the feeling of being "successful" discussed earlier. Hence, these two traits of personalities can be connected and both together aid the gay consumer to construct or reinforce his identity. Once again, the brand identity is directly related to the consumer's perception of consuming this particular item. In the author's experience, Prada is a well-known luxurious brand that has characteristics as being wealthy and its consumers are known to have a superior taste (Sokol, 2003).

The above suggests the first part of our conceptual model. As shown in figure 1, we propose that uniqueness, self-confidence, success and pride all impact desire to consume luxury goods in a positive manner. This is formally stated in proposition 1 as follows:

Intrinsic factors trigger the gay male consumer's need to buy luxury consumption in order to build their identity.

V.II Second Proposition

Luxury consumption as impression management

Veblen (1899) was the first author to say that luxury goods are consumed not only for their intrinsic value but they have another purpose which is to impress others. Thus, luxury goods cannot be only defined by their high price.

Luxury consumption can be driven by the extrinsic factors as an indication to hint status to others. According to Veblen (1899), the extrinsic motivation can be categorised under the theory of conspicuous consumption, by which consumers try to consume luxury to display their accomplishments. Hence, it could be said that gay male consumers consume luxury goods as a way to show others of their achievements and to reinforcement their identity through showing their abilities and capabilities (Jain et al, 2015).

Traditionally, the purchase of luxury goods is seen as a way to try to impress others and generate a certain response that satisfies one's self. People use luxury consumption as a way to classify themselves and to connect with others. Consumption is a way for people to differentiate themselves from others, hence they use the consumption to create a fence or bridge that help them to shape and sustain symbolic boundaries between groups. Adding that it helps them to communicate and gain access to certain social networks and organisations. Attracting people's attention in the consumption of luxury is a significant factor. By wearing a well-known luxury brand, it triggers social recognition and the more visible the consumption is, the more others are willing to make desired implications (Berger & Ward, 2010). According to Veblen (1899), people consume products in a conspicuous way in order to show part of themselves to others.

Therefore, in this part we analyse the consumption of luxury products and brands on the social level that affects the gay male consumer's identity. These social factors act as a way of identification and they reinforce the gay male consumer's personality and characteristics that they are searching for. In this context, gay male consumers are seen to reinforce and construct a social status by the mean of luxury consumption. Adding that this consumption help them to shape their belonging to their community and sub-cultures to which they allocate great importance. These factors not only help gay male consumers to impress others but to reinforce their intrinsic factors previously mentioned to build and sustain a satisfying self. On the other hand, belonging to a certain social class strengthen, supports and builds the self that the gay male consumers attach a significant meaning to.

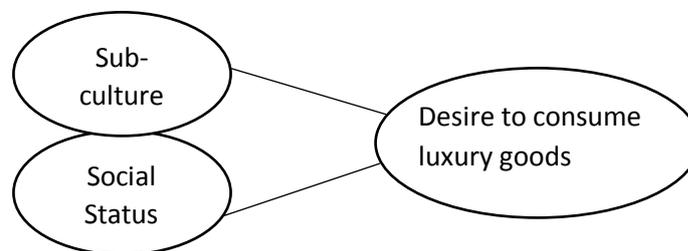


Figure 2. Extrinsic factors that impact the desire to consume luxury goods.

Sub-culture: members of a subculture tend to differentiate themselves from others by visible tangible differences such as clothing, and observable consumption of well-known brands. In the gay community it is very obvious to see that they have certain characteristics allocated to their community. This has been seen in different situations proving that individuals behaving and acting in a certain way can be perceived by others as belonging to the gay community.

Being a member or a certain group has great implications on the individual's behaviour, because individuals express their self in terms of "we" rather than "I", and thus they have the desire to act in accordance with the group behaviour. Consistent with this, being a certain group member helps create a self-categorization, hence individuals aim to differentiate themselves and try to be part of their group (Wei & Yu, 2012, pp. 41). Wei and Yu 2012, further state that the person belonging to a certain group might change self-identity to fit with the group's identity and hence act as a group member instead of acting as an individual. Consistent with this theory, gay male consumers belonging to their group and community will change identity to adopt the group's behaviours and actions. In this manner, the gay male subculture is being stereotyped as group of people looking for good quality and finer things, it could be said that members of this group triggers the individual to act the same way. Hence, they construct an identity that is shaped by the group and they look to reinforce it by the way they behave. Luxury consumption is the mean by which gay male consumers identity themselves as group members, and therefore by their consumption they reinforce the fact that their identity and self-concept are shaped by the norms of the group. For that reason, group members associate themselves with the brands that their group consume, and have a connection with these specific brands in order to form the self that has the similar traits, preferences and qualities.

The gay subculture can have a direct and strong impact on the individuals' brand attitude and choices.

The greater the brand serves as a sort of an identification, the greater that gay male consumers as individuals are willing to consumer luxury brands.

Social status: Veblen (1899) argues that the increase in the individual's wealth is not what communicates status to others. Therefore, as the author explains the "conspicuous consumption" is the factor that deliberates status. The author argues about his theory by giving examples such as the leisure class used silverware and high priced table linens at meals whereas the use of less expensive alternatives can function the same way or even better. Individuals belonging to that class did not buy these items for their functionality, rather to display an ability and status. Consumers would pay high price for items with the same functionality only for the reason to feel superior (Han et al, 2010). Individual can be driven by the social status and therefore to define who they are. The status signals what individuals are trying to communicate about themselves to others.

Luxury goods are often consumed by consumers who require to satisfy a need for status brought by material demonstrations of goods. Consistent with this, gay male consumers try to build traits and characteristics in their identity that want to signal to others. Therefore, the status factor has a significant implication on how gay male consumers construct themselves and reinforce the self-concept. Building on the survey done by GayWheels (2009) about gay male's preferences in purchasing a car, BMW was on the top three choices, and among the reasons why BMW is number one choice was because it signals "wealth". Not everyone can afford purchasing luxury items and at the same time not all individuals have the need to consume luxury brands or items. Accordingly, luxury consumption arises and increases relatively to the need and motives to indicate the ability of the individual. The individual choosing a certain brand over others have an influence on sending meaningful social signals to others about the type of person using the brand (Han et al, 2010).

Veblen (1899) argues that members of a high class purchase luxury products in order to dissociate themselves from the lower class, on the other hand, members of the lower class purchase the luxury products in order to associate themselves with the higher class (Han et al, 2010).

This discussion leads to the second part of our conceptual model as shown in figure 2, mainly that the two extrinsic factors, sub-culture and social status positively impact the desire to consume luxury goods among gay males. So our proposition 2 is stated below:

Extrinsic factors are a positive influence on gay male consumers' desire to consume luxury goods.

V.III Third Proposition

Celebrity endorsement effect on luxury consumption

Celebrities are defined as "the few, known by the many" (Evans & Hesmondhalgh, 2006 p.1). Another description of celebrity is the relationship built between the actor and the audience, instead of a characteristic of the actor himself/herself (Rindova et al, 2006).

The existing perspectives on celebrity endorsement have been built around two factors. The first one is that celebrity endorsement is based on communication theory, and the second factor says that it is built on cultural meaning transfer. Hence, communication theory defines celebrity endorsement as being a one way communication process whereas the characteristics of the endorser are seen to be vital. On the other hand, meaning transfer theory consists on the meanings that the endorser would transport to the endorsement process. These meanings could be transferred from other areas of the endorser's life (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010). As an example, the sports brand Nike when it chose the famous golfer Tiger Woods to be the celebrity endorser for the brand. Nike had no experience in golf before. It was generally considered that Nike would not be successful in the golf category. However, the brand chose the best golfer in the world and had him endorse the brand. As a result, Nike has been very successful and sales emerged (57% of Nike's investment in Woods was recovered just in US golf ball sales alone) (Chung et al, 2013). This example shows how a successful celebrity in a particular area would bring along characteristics from his/her life and transfer them to the brand. The celebrity would not only transfer meaning to the brand but actually lead consumers to purchase this particular brand based on the meaning transfer theory. As in Nike's example, Tiger Woods has brought along powerful meaning to the brand's golf category and hence led Nike to a complete success.

Celebrity endorsement is seen to be the process of transferring the characteristics of the endorser to the endorsed product or brand. Past studies (Seno and Lukas, 2007; White et al, 2009) have talked about the transfer of meanings from the brand to the celebrity. However, celebrity endorsers can transfer meaning to the brand and therefore create or strengthen the perception of the endorsed brand. The characteristics of the celebrity endorsed affect the brand and its image significantly. Positive meaning is an important factor to consider in celebrity endorsement. Positivity occurs when a celebrity transfers a good perception and meaning to the brand and therefore accepted by the consumer. Positive celebrity meaning is likely to strengthen consumers' reactions to an endorsed product "when the celebrity meaning is congruent with the meaning of the product". On the other hand, if the celebrity meaning is incongruent with the meaning of the product than this would drive consumers to generate a less likely positive response (Campbell & Warren, 2012 p. 175). In their research, Batra and Homer (2004) studied the effect of celebrity endorsement characteristics transfer to the brand, they found that a celebrity endorser's positive trait (classiness) would be more fitting to a congruent product (as in the research is the high-end cookies) than an incongruent product.

McCracken (1989) debated that to every class a celebrity endorser represents it. For example, class and status are represented by celebrities that have the characteristics that are associated with these categories. Therefore, celebrities endorsed in the luxury brands would transmit their traits to the brands and would be seen as interconnected with the brand. Thus, gay male consumers can be influenced by the fact that a celebrity, someone who is openly gay, endorsing a brand. The celebrity would be as a source of support for the gay male consumers and therefore would lead them to purchase the brand in order for them to assimilate the same traits.

Celebrity endorsement impact on intrinsic factors.

Gay male consumers are motivated by their intrinsic intentions to consume luxury brands. Thus, it would be proposed that they look for the same elements in the celebrity to reinforce their identity. The aspiration to be similar to the celebrity would trigger the motivation to purchase the product and therefore fulfil the wish to have same traits. Consumers could be seen to follow the same lifestyle as celebrities, and thus create a sort of a relationship with them (Hung, 2014). Based on this, gay male consumption could be directly related to the fact that they are longing to have the same personality, qualities and manage to live a similar lifestyle as celebrities. Particularly, relying on the fact that gay male are still not revealing their identity completely, celebrity endorsement would form an inspiration for them in order to open up. Hence, such a powerful inspiration would have a great impact on consumers purchasing products.

Referring to the famous Allen DeGeneres, gay male consumers associate the same traits in the celebrity as their, regardless of the fact that the gay celebrity is a female or male, and therefore it would have an impact on their intrinsic factors (Ault, 2014). As proposed earlier in the research, gay male consumers could consume luxury products to project their success. Thus, DeGeneres is a successful person, whom is openly gay and she could be seen as a main reason for consumers to purchase her products. The products are associated with the celebrity, hence she transfers her own characteristics to the consumers purchasing her products. The concept of congruency shows that consumers purchase those products that are similar, fit and consistent with themselves. Accordingly, there must be a high fit between the celebrity and the product in order to create positive consumer responses (Arsena et al, 2014). Adding that celebrities can represent "competing representations of who we can be" (Shankar et al, 2009 p. 76) as such, gay male consumers would allocate their attention to the celebrity whose image matches their own in order to enhance their identity. As a result, they

would purchase the product, associated with this particular celebrity endorser, as a way to sustain their identity. The more the congruency between the celebrity traits and consumers' traits, most likely it would influence the purchase behaviour of the gay male consumers (Banister & Cocker, 2014).

Celebrity endorsement impact on extrinsic factors.

Apart from the intrinsic factors, celebrity endorsement could have an effect on the reinforcement of the extrinsic factors. Therefore, it could play an essential part as first signalling the sub-culture that one belongs to and second the social class of the individual. When the celebrity transfers the factors that gay male consumers wanting to have, it will affect their consumption for the simple reason to signal to others their belonging whether to their reference group or to a certain social class. The famous Ellen DeGeneres is one of the most preferred gay stars among both gay men and female (Pew Research Center, 2015). Therefore, she would have an impact on the gay male consumption. Buying the products endorsed by this celebrity, or even buying her product would signal to others that these consumers belong to the gay community and supporting it. Gay male consumers can associate themselves with the products and moreover with the celebrity. Thus, they try to achieve the same traits as the celebrity by which they want to construct or reinforce their identity (Arsena et al, 2014).

On the other hand, celebrity endorsement has an impact on telling others about the social class one belongs to. As example, Louis Vuitton endorses famous and rich celebrities. Thus, the celebrity endorsed will transfer the fact that this brand belongs to high social class, with the qualities of being wealthy and rich. As such, celebrities can be admired by the audience who borrow from such celebrities for their identity construction (Boon & Lomore, 2001).

As a summary, celebrities are considered as aspirational figures and often seen to be heroes, reflecting the high standards of achievement to which consumers aspire (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). A clear distinction has been proposed by Shuart (2007) between celebrities and heroes: being a celebrity is built on fame only, whereas being a hero involve particular qualities, such as being a distinguished person, liked for her/his bravery or noble qualities. As such, gay men will perceive gay celebrities as their model, or could their heroes for the reason that these celebrities draw the brave and courageous person. Consequently, following their model, gay celebrities would be the reason behind gay male consuming particular brands.

One important thing to reflect is the fact that celebrities can be considered as human brands. Building one more time on the example of DeGeneres, she can be considered as such, and therefore any gay men consumer who is supporting her would be sending a clear message about the sub-culture he supports. Eventually, celebrities as brands will appeal the gay consumers to consume the products. This could be seen true especially with the luxury brands whereas they could be consumed to signal to others the social class of gay consumers (Lunardo et al, 2015).

This leads us to our third proposition, mainly that appropriate celebrity endorsement moderates the impact of the various intrinsic and extrinsic factors on the desire to consume luxury goods among gay males. Therefore, proposition 3 is as follows:

Appropriate celebrity endorsement positively moderates the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic factors on the desire to consume luxury goods among gay males.

VI. Summary

The conceptual model developed in this paper can be used to explain the desire to consume luxury goods among gay men. Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors have been identified as factors that impact the desire. This model shed the lights on the motives that affect the gay males to buy luxury products.

The celebrity endorsement has been discussed as well as a moderator of the impact of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Hence, the celebrity endorsement if used in an appropriate way can have a positive effect on gay male consumption of luxury goods.

This paper adds to the knowledge of the work on luxury consumption but never associated with the gay male consumers separately. Therefore, this conceptual model serves to identify the reasons behind gay male consuming luxury goods.

VII. Measurement

In addition, to empirically test our propositions, all constants must be measured. To measure these proposed elements, the scale developed by Vigneron and Johnson (2004) can be used. Once adapted, this scale satisfies the purpose of this proposed research. The scale satisfies the personal perception and non-personal perception dimensions (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). This scale can be used to measure the five factors of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Also there is a need to measure the celebrity endorsement desire to consume luxury goods among gay male, but the scale for this proposition has not yet been identified.

VIII. Implication of this research

This research will develop the marketers' understanding of a very wealthy new target audience. The proposed conceptual framework is a step towards understanding how gay consumers perceive luxury brands and what they mean to them.

Academically

This research presents an opportunity to further investigate in this subject and uncover the very different factors that lead gay consumers to be stereotyped as already described in this paper. It presents new measures to understand more about how gay consumers behave towards luxury brands and why they allocate such importance to these brands. In addition, it represents a deeper understanding of how gay consumers are more interested in luxury brands rather than straight consumers.

Marketing

To the marketing perspective, this paper presents a conceptual framework that has not been done. It suggests the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that could be an important matter for the marketers in knowing what affects the gay males and thus know how to reach them. The drivers of luxury purchases are significant to know because they allow marketers to understand better the consumer behaviour.

On the other hand, celebrity endorsement as a positive impact on those factors can be used as a means to reach gay male consumers and thus direct their purchase decisions. By this model, marketers can achieve broader understanding of this segment which hasn't been investigated before.

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