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The mediating role of self-concept discrepancy in the relationship between values and personal based motivation of luxury products consumers

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Abstract

This study integrates existing streams of literature in luxury and self-concept theory in order to provide evidence of the mediating role of self-concept discrepancy in the relationship between values and personal based motivation of luxury product consumers. This study is the first to focus on this topic providing evidence of the role of personal values in driving luxury motives and incorporating the self-concept construct in the luxury literature.

Keywords: Luxury; values; motivation; self-concept discrepancy

1. Introduction

According to McKinsey & Co (1990) the luxury goods market was estimated to be more than 86$ billion whereas in 2005 the Boston Consulting Group estimated it to be 840$ billion worldwide (Fiske & Silverstein 2004). This market has seen spectacular growth over the last 20 years, and only recently in 2008 the total sales volume has suffered a decline by 2 percent in comparison with 2007 (Bain & Company 2009) due to the world economic slowdown. This decline in such a profitable market triggers luxury product companies to try even harder to differentiate from their market competitors.

The marketing of luxury products has received little attention from both academics and practitioners (Nueno and Quelch 1998). This can be explained by the difficulty in defining the luxury concept (Cornell 2002, p.47) and therefore to distinct luxury from non-luxury consumers. One main factor, which, distinguishes luxury from non-luxury products is the psychological benefit (Nia & Zaichkowsky) which may outweigh the functional one
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(Vingeron & Johnson 2004). Cornell (2002) states that ‘luxury is particularly slippery to define’ and that key components are ‘a strong element of human involvement, very limited supply and recognition of value by others’. Due to the lack of a single luxury definition, our study grounds on the aforementioned luxury definitions.

Veblen’s (1899) *Theory Of The Leisure Class* coined the term ‘Conspicuous consumption’ to define the behavior of consuming in order to signal wealth, power and status and Leibenstein (1950) based his research on this typology presenting the snob and the bandwagon effect. Since then, research is focused on these social-oriented motives and the motive of ‘impressing others’ serves as a basic strategic principle for the marketing management of luxury brands (Vigneron & Johnson 1999, 2004) although socially oriented motives are not sufficient to explain the luxury consumer behavior totally (e.g., Hansen 1998; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999, 2004). According to Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009, p.626) ‘a personal oriented type of consumption should also be considered in the marketing management of luxury brands’.

The understanding of how the perception of value affects the consumers’ buying behavior is critical for luxury researchers and marketers (Wiendmann, Hennigs and Siebels 2009). Although values can lead to different selection or evaluation of desirable behaviors or end states (Schultz & Zelezny 1999) and the symbolic meaning of luxury brands conveys personal values and personality traits (Vigneron and Johnson 2004), very little attention has been given to incorporate value-based positioning practices in the luxury consumer literature. Values influence on consumer behavior can be mediated or moderated by factors such as worldviews, personal norms, the self-concept, attitudes and situational or contextual influences (Rohan 2000). Vigneron and Johnson (1999) suggest that prestige products strongly relate to the person self-concept.

This study is based upon Higgins (1987, p.321) Self-Discrepancy Theory, which suggests that despite the peoples’ individual differences in motivation ‘we are motivated to reach a condition where our self-concept matches our personally relevant self-guides’. Taking into account the different decisions that managers have to take when managing a service compared to a product and that drivers regarding luxury consumers’ behavior remains unexplored, the authors fill a research gap by providing empirical evidence for Vigneron and Johnson’s (1999) framework for luxury consumers’ independent of interpersonal influence motivations inspired from the research of Dubois and Laurent (1994). Moreover, they are also the first to provide support for the mediating role of Ideal-Actual self-concept discrepancy in the relationship between values and personal motives shedding some more light on the under-explicated role of self-concept in the consumer behavior literature (Mittal, 2006) as well as in the luxury marketing. Our framework assumes that these values and motives are independent as Vigneron and Johnson (1999) proposed when presented in his framework five independent motives as a consequence of five independent motives, as well as Sheth et al (1991) did in their study of consumption values allowing us to examine the effect of a specific value on a specific motive.

2. Theoretical background and literature review

Values make a huge motivational impact on individuals (Vriens and Ter Hofstede 2000). Products tied to values will be experienced more favorable than products that deliver more mundane benefits (Kahle 1985) and in overcrowded markets with competing brands which are difficult to differentiate, consumers will choose based on value-expressive considerations (Reynolds and Gutman 1984). Additionally, values explain the individual’s purchase reasons and motivations for their use of a certain product (Sheth, Newman, & Gross 1991) and guide the evaluation or selection of desirable behavior or end states (Schultz and Zelezny, 1999). This research is based on Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991) theory of consumption values, which is applicable to services and proposes that consumer choice is a function of multiple consumption values which make different contributions but are axiomatically independent. Thus, our research presents two discrete conceptual frameworks:
Dubois and Duquesne (1993) suggested that value preferences can explain the luxury consumption. Research in semiotics of luxury identifies sensory pleasure, aesthetic beauty or excitement as emotional responses associated with consumption (Vingeron and Johnson 1999). Emotional value is defined as ‘the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity to arouse feelings of affective states’ (Sheth, Newman and Gross 1991, p.161) and Hedonists as ‘people who relate to personal values that depend upon the individual alone for fulfillment, such as self-respect and are not susceptible to interpersonal influence’ (Vigneron and Johnson 1999, p.8). Dubois and Laurent (1994, p.275) suggested that the emotional value of a luxury product is an essential characteristic and ‘a vast majority subscribes to the hedonic motive and refutes the snobbish argument’. Thus we hypothesize that the greater the emotional value, the higher the level of hedonist motivation of luxury consumers (H1). Functional value is defined as ‘the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity for functional, utilitarian, or physical performance’ (Sheth, Newman and Gross 1991, p.160) whereas Perfectionists as ‘people who relate to personal values, assess the value of prestige brands according to the value of reassurance expected from prestige brands’ and rely on their own perception of product quality (Vigneron and Johnson 1999, p.9). Leadership in quality is important to ensure the perception in luxury (Quelch 1987). Additionally, the assumption of perfectionist consumers that luxury brands have greater quality and reassurance leads them to perceive more value from such brands (Aaker 1991). Therefore, we hypothesize that the greater the functional value, the higher the level of perfectionist motivation of luxury consumers (H2).

Combs and Snygg (1959) defined the concepts of self as more or less discrete perceptions of his/her self which the person regards as part, or characteristic of his being. More specifically, actual self is defined as an individual’s perception of what is he/she like, while ideal self reflects how the individual would like to be. The motivational capability of self or ‘ego’, has been recognized many decades ago (e.g. Symonds 1951). Individuals become committed to identities and act in accordance with the values and norms that these identities imply (Foote 1951). Moreover, the motivational significance is greater the higher the salience of an identity with the self-concept is (Jackson 1981). According to the self-discrepancy theory, people are motivated to match their actual with the ideal state, so that their self-concept matches their self-guides, otherwise they experience discomfort (Higgins et al 1986). Thus, we hypothesize that ideal-actual self-concept discrepancy partially mediates the relationship between emotional value and hedonic motivation of luxury consumers (H3). Additionally, ideal-actual self-concept discrepancy partially mediates the relationship between functional value and perfectionist motivation of luxury consumers (H4).

3. Sampling and Data Collection

Research assistants conducted interviews at a random sample and Dubois and Duquesne (1993) identification approach was adopted in order to discriminate luxury from non-luxury consumers and exclude non-luxury consumers from our analyses. All respondents were shown a picture of a luxury watch and the questions followed. Totally 445 questionnaires were collected and the data cleaning led to a net sample of 393 after considering the respondents completeness and response. According to the screening definition, the sample included 286 luxury consumers (72.7%) and 107 non-luxury consumers (27.3%). The respondents tended to be
young (77.3% are below 30 years old) and well educated (87.2% had a university degree) whereas the portion of women was relatively higher (57.4%).

4. Measures and Reliability

All measures included in this research were obtained from previous studies in order to remain consistent with previous research in this field. A total of 44 items were generated. Eight items for value measuring were adapted from Ko and Sung (2007). Additionally, we adopted Ross (1971) ideal and actual self-concept scale, which consisted of 15 items each. The semantic differential technique was adopted involving repeated judgments of self-concept against bi-polar adjectival items. Furthermore, hedonist and perfectionist motives were measured with 3 items each adapted from Heine and Trommsdorff (2010). The absolute difference scores between ‘ideal’ and ‘actual’ self-ratings were calculated and averaged (Hoge & McCarthy 1983). The internal reliability of the measurement scales were examined by estimating Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. The alpha values exceeded 0.7 (Hair et al., 1995) whereas average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the 0.5 level (Fornell and Larcker 1981). CFI and TLI indices should exceed 0.90 while RMSEA values should be below 0.08.

Table 1. Reliability Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>Cronbach</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Value Quality</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.830</td>
<td>0.689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Self-Concept Hedonist Motive</td>
<td>0.954</td>
<td>0.974</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.793</td>
<td>0.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Value</td>
<td>0.912</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.832</td>
<td>0.756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Self-Concept Perfectionist Motive</td>
<td>0.984</td>
<td>0.975</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.789</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Data Analysis and Results

Structural equation modelling (SEM) using EQS 6.1 for windows was utilised to empirically test the proposed relationships. The fit of the proposed models for luxury consumers (Model I and Model II in Table II) was adequate following Byrne’s (2006) suggestions, thus the models appear to be a reasonable representation of data.

Table 2. Model Fits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>MODEL I</th>
<th>MODEL II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CFI</td>
<td>0.991</td>
<td>0.998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLI</td>
<td>0.954</td>
<td>0.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach</td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td>0.823</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H1 is supported by a positive estimate of 0.39 (t=6.14, p<0.01) indicating that the higher the emotional value, the higher the hedonist motivation. Emotional value explains 13.9 percent of the hedonist motivation variance. H2 is supported by the corresponding estimate of 0.44 (t=7.04, p<0.01) thus the higher the functional value the higher the perfectionist motivation. Functional value explains 14.6 percent of perfectionist motive variance. The mediation effect was examined according to the methodology suggested by Byron and Kenny (1986) and the Sobel Test. The Sobel statistic for hypothesis H3 and H4 was 4,052 (p<0.01) and 4,116 (p<0.01) respectively thus indicating that Ideal-Actual self concept discrepancy partially mediated the relationship between emotional value and hedonist motive and between functional value and perfectionist motive as well. The discrepancy input increases the motive variance percent explained to 14.1 and 20 respectively. Our study accounted for the impact of sex, age, education and income level and frequency of luxury services consuming. The analysis indicated that women had relatively higher hedonism and perfectionism motivations than men (t=-2.037, p<0.05 and t=-2.514,
Additionally, age moderates the relationship between values and motives in both models (t=2.529, p<0.05 and t=2.013, p<0.05) though with relatively low estimates of 0.029 and 0.026 respectively. Income level also moderates the aforementioned relationships in both models (t=4.096, p<0.05 and t=3.107, p<0.01) with low estimates of 0.033 and 0.03.

6. Discussion, Limitations and Future Research

This study aims to fill an important gap in the luxury consumers literature by providing some empirical findings regarding to luxury consumers motives and indicating that independent of interpersonal influence values can predict consumer motives. Moreover, this study highlights the role of self-concept theory in interpreting the relationship between personal values and the motives for luxury products consumption. Thus, we suggest the importance of actual and ideal self concept in the luxury consumers motivation by presenting the first study to indicate the mediating role of Ideal-Actual self concept discrepancy as defined by Higgins (1987) and highlighting the role of values in the motivation process consistent with the call of Hansen (1998) and Vigneron & Johnson (1999, 2004) to explore motives other than socially motivated.

Regarding to managerial implications, this research offers significant implications for marketing managers by identifying antecedents of luxury customer motivation. The results indicate that management can enhance customer motivations by increasing the perceived value and by taking into consideration the personal desire to meet the ideal self-concept, as well as implementing value-positioning practices.

Our study represents a relatively early attempt to approach the luxury consumers motivational antecedents. More exploratory research is required in order the luxury concept to be clearly defined. Additionally, more antecedents should be taken into consideration accounting for the effect of interpersonally related values effect on interpersonal motives and the behavior of non-luxury consumers must be examined as well. Moreover, our study is tempered by several limitations. First, higher income consumers must consist our sample. Second, the non luxury consumers were not examined. Third, more motive antecedents should have been taken into consideration.

References


