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**LUXURY FASHION BRAND EQUITY :
A NEW APPROACH
APPLIED TO LUXURY BRANDS**

*Mélanie PHAM**
*Pierre VALETTE-FLORENCE***

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**Doctorante, CERGAM (EA 4225), IAE Aix-en-Provence, Aix Marseille Université, Clos Guiot, Chemin de la Quille, CS 30063, 13540 PUYRICARD Cedex, France.*

***Professeur, CERAG IAE de Grenoble, Université Pierre Mendès France, 525 Avenue Centrale, Domaine Universitaire, 38400 Saint Martin d'Hères.*

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13089 Aix-en-Provence Cedex 2, France
Tel. : 04 42 28 08 08.- Fax : 04 42 28 08 00

Luxury fashion brand equity: A new approach applied to luxury brands

Abstract

This article based on luxury brands, proposes a new conceptual approach linking the brand equity fundamental brand management concept, to two key consumer needs, the need for conformity and the need for uniqueness, putting in light the new concept of luxury fashion brand equity.

Key words

Brand management, brand equity, luxury, fashion, need for conformity, need for uniqueness

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LUXURY FASHION BRAND EQUITY: A NEW APPROACH APPLIED TO LUXURY BRANDS

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, a fashion luxury brand is a profit generator. As a matter of fact, there is a strong attraction from consumers and companies for luxury brands. With a global luxury industry of 212 billion euros, growing by 10% in 2012, the demand stays on top with Asian and Emerging markets eager for luxury products (Bain & Company, 2012).

Concerning fashion, in the literature definitions can be grouped in two categories: anthropologist and sociological definitions. The first, focuses on the “product” and depicts fashion as a concept “consisting of styles that originate from cultures all over the world” (Welters, Lilletun, 2011, pXXV), and is described as “the changing styles of dress and appearance that are adopted by a group of people at any given time” (Welters, Lilletun, 2011, p21). The second aspect and definition of fashion encompasses a more social perspective (Loschek, 2009; Sproles, 1979; Reynolds, 1968), which stems to a certain extent from Simmel’s (1904) pioneering analysis. He defines fashion as the imitation of a model that satisfies the need for a social support as well as a need for difference and differentiation (Simmel, 1904, p543). Those different aspects help to provide a global perspective about the definition of fashion, which leads to the concept of fashion brands. As stated by Power and Hauge (2006, p12) “the branding of fashion goods is a relatively new phenomenon”, it is defined as “an identity concept associated with a person or a company” (Welters, Lillethun, 2011, pXXV). In fashion, “brand value is highly related to identity and therein some level of exclusivity, [like] the feeling of the special/exclusive connection the consumer shares with the brand” (Power, Hauge, 2008, p137).

Therefore, being perceived as a fashion brand in the luxury industry is a must, as from a brand management perspective, marketers are looking to build, acquire, maintain and strengthen this perception. However how do consumers perceive a luxury brand as fashion? Today there is a lack of knowledge in the literature to answer this question. Indeed, the measurement of brand equity does not include the measurement of fashion, and even if Le

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Bon (2011) recently explored the concept of fashion equity, her model only measures the fashion equity of products but not the fashion equity of brands in the luxury sector.

The objective of this research is to examine the existence of luxury fashion brand equity relying on luxury brands. Our aim is to add to the existing brand equity researches a complementary equity definition and scale. We will focus the analysis on women who are key consumers of luxury apparels, as in 2012 they represent an estimated 59% sales of the luxury good market, even if there is more and more an interest from men (Bain & Company, 2012). In the first section, we review the importance of fashion in luxury through conformity and uniqueness needs, and the concept of brand equity to provide the base of luxury fashion brand equity definition. In the second section, we present our research methodology. In the third section, we develop the analysis and discuss results and conclusions of the different dimensions emerging from this study. Finally we discuss the study's present limitations and propose further avenues of research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature focuses on three key elements. The first two elements are consumer based and concentrate on conformity and uniqueness needs, playing significant roles in luxury consumer behavior. The third element is brand based, and explores the brand equity concept to identify the gaps in research and confirm the need for luxury fashion brand equity.

2.1. The need for conformity

As Miller *et al.* (1993) suggest, humans have a natural tendency to form groups. Conformity can be defined as the tendency for individuals to comply with group norms (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). Groups have an important power over the individual, and Asch's (1951) "conformity study" clearly identifies the importance of group influence on consumer behavior. This study demonstrates that in the context of an unstructured situation, subjects tend to comply with the group that sets the norms. Socially, people are perceived as members of groups that they are respected by, and they are not members of groups that they are disdained by. This is even stronger when it comes to luxury brands: consumers look to communicate a status and a lifestyle projected by brands (Husic & Cicic, 2009), and luxury brands provide this status, offering consumer the possibility to communicate their desire to be associated with the people also consuming the brand (Phau & Prendergast, 2000).

The literature on fashion recognizes that adopting the symbols of a respected group is a way of communicating membership in the group, whereas avoiding the symbols of a disliked group indicates distance from the group (Simmel, 1904; Sapir, 1931; Leibenstein, 1950; Veblen, 1953; Robinson, 1961). Thus, fashion brands can symbolize group membership. However, the need for conformity is not a need that people fully encompass in their behavior. Venkatesan (1966, p385) hypothesizes that “few individuals would care to be complete conformists in their consumption pattern”. Therefore, conformity is present in a social group and the need for uniqueness means that “marginal differentiation” is always in consumers’ minds. In the next section, we examine the importance of consumer need for uniqueness, or counterformity motivation, in the context of fashion.

2.2. The need for uniqueness

Snyder and Fromkin (1977) originate the theory of the need for uniqueness. Individuals’ need to be different is driven by a threat to their self-perception of uniqueness and the desire to regain their distinctiveness. However, the need for uniqueness can also result from different motivational processes (Nail, 1986; Tepper, 1997). It can be a primary need involving “the intended outcome of a person’s actions ...driven by the need to feel different from others” (Tepper *et al.*, 2001, p1), an “incidental or secondary outcome from attempts to satisfy various motivations or drives” (Tepper *et al.*, 2001, p1), or “counterformity” motivation (Nail, 1986, p197). Those behaviors occur when individuals perceive that their identity is very similar to others (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977) and orient their behavior towards the “pursuit of differentness relative to others...achieved through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one’s personal and social identity” (Tepper and McKenzie, 2001, p172).

Studies show that an individual’s desire for uniqueness or conformity, defined as self-esteem, is directed by the need, more or less moderated, to maintain a distinction within a social group (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977). Ames & Iyengar (2005) and Tepper *et al.* (2001) also demonstrate that individuals who have a strong need for uniqueness prefer a unique product, in opposition to individuals who have less desire for uniqueness. When buying luxury brands, consumers’ with a strong need for uniqueness purchase items at high price with hidden brand labels, in contrast with status consumers who tend to buy products with visible logos to display their status and wealth (Husic & Cicic, 2009).

The theory of the fashion adoption process (Miller *et al.*, 1993) suggests that consumers with a strong need for uniqueness will continue to observe styles adopted by

others, even after having selected products. Thus, fashion brands play an important role in answering the need for uniqueness.

Therefore, when it comes to fashion brands, individuals seek both group conformity and uniqueness, according to the level of the needs, and this situation lights the present status of the luxury segment, as consumers are looking to distinguish themselves on one side and imitate trendsetters on the other side (Latter *et al.*, 2010). Fashion plays a significant role meeting both needs, but how do these needs affect brands? Does brand equity consider those needs?

2.3. Brand equity

There is an extensive body of literature on brand equity. Srinivasan's (1979) research originates the concept of brand equity, and his work was the first to separate the brand from the product. However, there is no consensus on a single definition of brand equity. Current definitions focus on two approaches. The first one is a financial and accounting approach, and the second one is a more strategic approach, oriented towards improving marketing productivity. In the marketing approach, on which this article focuses, brand equity definition is initially proposed by Jones (1986, p15) as "the non-functional benefits of a product". Shocker and Weitz (1988, p89) developed this definition to include "... the aggregation of all accumulated attitudes and behavior patterns in the extended minds of consumers, distribution channels and influence agents, which will enhance future profits and long term cash flow". Aaker (1991) and Keller's (1993, 1998) contributions continue to be foundational. Keller (1993, p1) defines brand equity as "the marketing effect uniquely attributed to the brand" and finds a differential effect between brand knowledge and consumer response. Therefore, he separates "brand knowledge", into "brand awareness" and "brand image". Numerous scales have been developed to measure brand equity, including those by Yoo and Donthu (2001), Lassar, Mittal and Sharma (1995), Vasquez, Del Rio and Iglesias (2002), Netmeyer *et al.* (2004) and Pappu *et al.* (2005). However, there is no agreement on these scales. For this study, we select three of them in order to analyze their relevance against the need of uniqueness and conformity through fashion.

The scale of Yoo and Donthu (2001) is taken as a reference, for several reasons. This scale contains 19 items; it has been validated for three categories of products (sport shoes, camera film, and color TVs), and it is based on Aaker's approach and Keller's (1993) conceptual model. It has also been validated in three cultural contexts, showing good ecological validity and a good measure of adjustment. However, these dimensions do not

encompass the needs for conformity and uniqueness that consumers seek through fashion. We reach the same conclusion with the scale developed by Lehmann *et al.* (2008): based on studies in the United States and China on soft drinks, toothpaste and fast food, and built with 82 items distributed in six dimensions, which does not include the above-mentioned feelings at a consumer level. Finally the scale of Pappu *et al.* (2005), based on Australian consumers and tested on two product categories (cars and TV screens) with 23 items and four dimensions, provides the same outcome. Therefore, the literature shows that there is currently no scale taking into account fashion through consumers' need for uniqueness and conformity. In Le Bon (2011, p50) work, fashion equity focuses on product and not brand and is defined as "the added value of fashion to a product in comparison of a product which will not be fashionable". In this article the definition is based on the brand, rather than the product and leverages the definition of Keller (1993). Therefore based on Keller's definition, this article defines luxury fashion brand equity as "the fashion effect uniquely attributed to the luxury brand – for example when some marketing characteristics of a product or a service arrive thanks to the fashionable perception of the luxury brand, and would not have happened if the product or the service would not have had this level of "fashionability". In other words, luxury fashion brand equity can also be defined as "the added value of fashion to a luxury brand, varying according to consumer's needs of uniqueness and conformity". To verify the relevance of this concept, exploratory researches are conducted on women's needs using luxury brands with a focus on women apparels, with a triangulation approach. In a first step, we investigate the importance of fashion through the need for uniqueness and conformity with luxury and non-luxury apparel brands, and then we use an Album on Line (AOL) analysis to confirm and complete the luxury brand dimensions. Lastly, we use experts to acknowledge the attributes, and finally we conclude by discussing the overall luxury fashion brand equity scale.

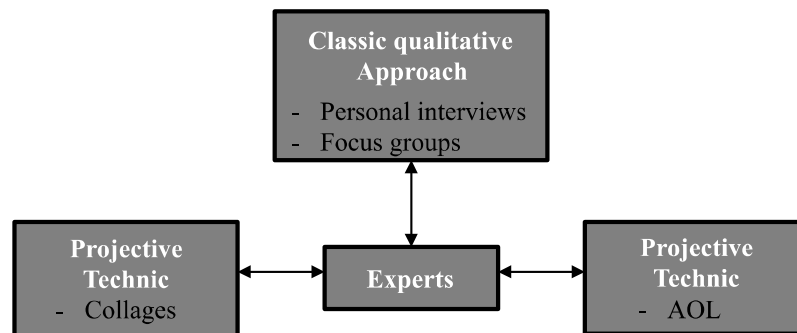
3. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The context of this research is exploratory, and we gathered information from different qualitative methods on women's fashion expectations, opinions on luxury and non-luxury brands. In the following section we present the research methodology, the recruitment of informants and the methodological path of the study.

3.1. The triangulation method

We use the triangulation method to enhance finding through different approaches and draw conclusions with strong validity (LeCompte, Preissle, 1993) (Figure 1). We conducted qualitative studies to understand the complex processes around those behaviors and collect primary data (Evrard, Pras, Roux, 2009) on the beliefs, opinions and emotions of individuals. “What consumers know and think consciously and unconsciously about a brand influences their attitudes and behaviors toward the brand” (Koll, Wallpach, Kreuzer, 2010, p584).

Figure 1: Triangulation approach



To identify those conscious and unconscious aspects, we used different qualitative methods: 1/ Focus groups, to gather data on the cultural norms of the group (here, women). This approach facilitates spontaneous and focalized exchanges and provides a collective and individual emulation (Leclerc *et al.* 2011); 2/ Personal interviews and projective techniques by way of collages, as these methods are considered to be the “best way to survey people” (Keller, 2009), with “responses, resulting from less misunderstanding in the questions” (Keller, 2009); 3/ Album-On-Line (AOL) approach to understand the representations associated to a consumption experience (Verette, 2008); 4/ Experts judgment to precisely select items to define the final dimensions of a new luxury fashion brand equity scale.

3.2. The recruitment

The focus group, personal interviews and the AOL studies have two different samples. The focus groups and personal interviews are conducted on a convenience sample of 11 women whose ages range from 20 to 53 years old. Participants include students, executives and employees in two French cities, Paris and Aix en Provence. An initial questionnaire sent to the interviewees, gathered socio-demographic information about their preferred apparel brands, their non-preferred apparel brands, and their clothing consumption habits. The AOL study is conducted on a convenience sample of 6 women with the following profile: aged

between 30 and 40 years old, executives and employees in Paris, Geneva and Annecy and who buy at least one luxury item, at least every year (Table 1).

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Research type	Interviewee	Age	City	Favorite Brand	Repulsive Brand	Annual clothes spending	Job/Activity	Salary
Focus Group & Individual Interview	Interviewee 1	25-34	Paris	Les composantes	Cop Copine	500-1500€	Executive	30 000-50 000€
	Interviewee 2	35-49	Paris	APC	Cyrrillus	1500-2500€	Employee	30 000-50 000€
	Interviewee 3	25-34	Paris	American Retro	Desigual	2500-3500€	Executive	50 000-75 000€
	Interviewee 4	25-34	Paris	Maje	Guess	2500-3500€	Executive	30 000-50 000€
	Interviewee 5	25-34	Paris	Sandro	Jennifer	below 500€	Employee	below 10 000€
	Interviewee 6	25-34	Paris	Tatiana Lebedev	Guess	500-1500€	Employee	30 000-50 000€
	Interviewee 7	18-24	Aix en Provence	H&M	Camaieu	500-1500€	Student	30 000-50 000€
	Interviewee 8	18-24	Aix en Provence	H&M	Guess	2500-3500€	Student	below 10 000€
	Interviewee 9	18-24	Aix en Provence	Zara	The Kopples	500-1500€	Student	below 10 000€
	Interviewee 10	18-24	Aix en Provence	Gap	Pimkie	500-1500€	Student	below 10 000€
	Interviewee 11	50-64	Aix en Provence	Zara	Mim	2500-3500€	Employee	30 000-50 000€
AOL	Interviewee 12	35-49	Annecy				Executive	30 000-50 000€
	Interviewee 13	35-49	Paris				Executive	30 000-50 000€
	Interviewee 14	35-49	Geneva				Executive	> 100 000€
	Interviewee 15	25-34	Paris				Executive	30 000-50 000€
	Interviewee 16	25-34	Geneva				Executive	50 000-100 000€
	Interviewee 17	35-49	Paris				Employee	30 000-50 000€

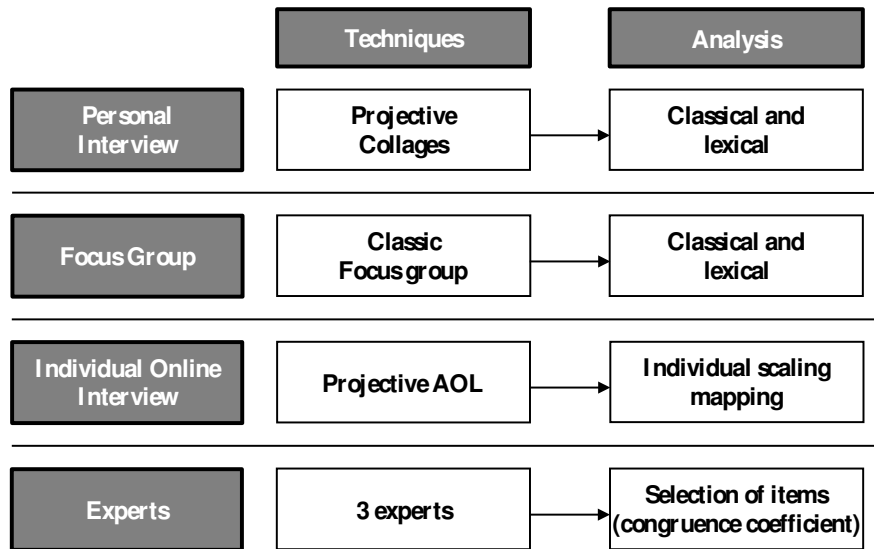
Concerning the luxury perspective, consumers buy luxury products for their non-functional aspects (Vigneron et Johnson, 2004) such as: the need to be seen, the need of uniqueness, the extended self, hedonism and quality. However, luxury perception can vary according to market segment and consumers' perception (Phau & Prendergast, 2000) therefore, some consumers might perceive a brand as being luxury when for others it is not. In this article, luxury brands are defined as brands which are perceived as expensive for consumers, but this can differ according to the consumers (Bian, 2010).

The qualitative interviews are divided in focus groups, personal interviews and AOL approach. First, two focus groups are conducted with an average interview time of three hours, where respondents are interviewed about their perception of apparel brands. The brands APC, Maje, Sandro are perceived as luxury brands, as they have a high price point compared to the other brands and are also perceived as "expensive" for interviewees. However in order to have a more global view, the data of all brands is explored to develop the analysis. Second, the personal interviews, with an average interview time of one hour, focus on the collage of the respondents done during the focus group. Third, the AOL is done separately to complete the findings of the other researches. Fourth, the experts valid the items of the new scale.

3.3. The methodological approach framework

The interviews, the focus groups, as well as the AOL had been content analyzed separately in order to identify the relevant items pertaining to the luxury fashion brand equity scale, firstly by generating items, then by structuring those items in a semantic space. Below is the summary of the methodological analysis (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Methodological approach framework



Generating items

The personal and the focus group interviews are analyzed through a classical and a lexical analysis in order to generate a list of items. The items that are similar in both cases are then selected. In addition to the generation of items, the content analysis also helps identifying how the needs for uniqueness and conformity are integrated in the consumers' minds. In parallel the AOL study helps to define similar items and new ones, and to confirm the items attributed to a fashion luxury brand. Then, the overall list of items selected from the three methods is submitted to three experts who identify the most complete and detailed data as possible (Denzin, 1978). Using these methods helps to clearly identify the items related to the luxury fashion brand equity scale applied to fashion luxury brands.

Structuring the semantic space

After generating this list of items, the objective of the research is to structure the semantic space and reveal the dimensions of fashion. Therefore we use a Multiple

Correspondence Analysis (MCA) and an Individual Scaling Analysis (INDSCAL) to obtain the key characteristics of fashion luxury brands.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In a first step the focus group and the personal interviews are analyzed separately using a classical analysis by themes and in a second step a lexical analysis. The lexical analysis provides a microanalysis of the corpus, by analyzing the words constituting it and not the text, thus reducing complexity and simplifying the analysis (Gavard-Perret, Moscarola, 1998). In a third step, the AOL items are analyzed and in a fourth step, all items are run through experts, finally results and discussion are presented.

4.1. Qualitative data analysis

4.1.1. Focus groups analysis

The main objective of the focus groups is to understand, through apparel brands, the conscious aspect of interviewees around fashion, the importance and perception of fashion brands, and also if a feeling of uniqueness and conformity to the group of reference can be perceived. By using the classical and the lexical method analysis we identify 41 items with the classical analysis and 91 items with the lexical analysis, with a repetition above 5. By crossing those items and removing redundancy, we identify **119 items**.

4.1.2. The personal interviews analysis

The main objective of the personal interviews is to identify what are the characteristics of a preferred brand. Interviewees are asked to create collages (during the focus group), using women's magazines, to describe the characteristics of their preferred and non-preferred apparel brands. "Consumers have thoughts, desires, feelings, emotions, experiences, and fancies with regard to brands they cannot articulate" (Koll, Wallpach and Kreuzer, 2010, p589). Then participants were interviewed about their collage. Below is an example of one collage, where the left-hand side illustrates the characteristics of preferred apparel brands (including luxury brands such as Chloé, Yves Saint Laurent, Chanel), and the right-hand side illustrates characteristics of non-preferred apparel brands (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Collage of preferred and non-preferred apparel brands



With the classical content analysis we generate 63 items, and with the lexical analysis 92 items with a repetition above 5. By crossing those items and removing redundancy, we can identify **77 items**.

4.1.3. Projective AOL analysis

The AOL technic helps to understand the representations associated to the consumption experience of a group. Thanks to on-line images found on Internet, each individual provides its consumption scenario; then all the images are grouped together and each group member selects the most personal representative images. This methodology helps to build a final album with the most significant images for the group. All in all, **61 items** are identified to define fashion luxury brands and 29 best-rated items have been selected for the final mapping.

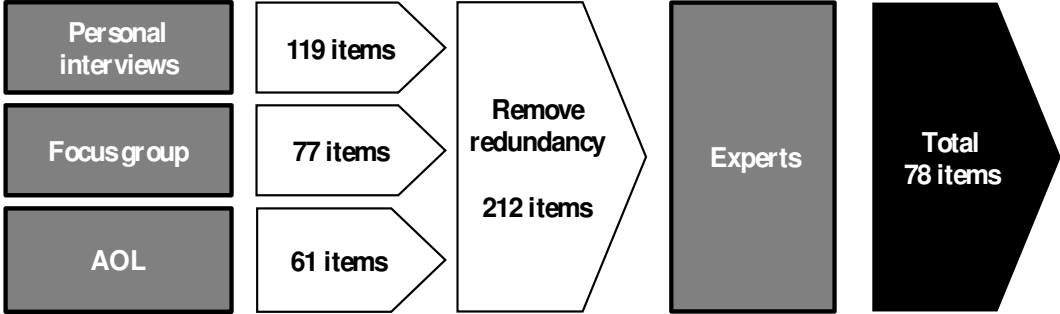
4.1.4. Experts

In order to fine tune the items results, we finally select a group of three experts to increase the strength of the findings obtained by the three previous methods and select the

final items defining luxury fashion brand equity. Thanks to the experts' selection, and the convergence method, in total **78 items** are identified (Figure 4).

To identify the reliability of the experts' judgment, we use the Ir indicator from Perreault and Leigh (1989). The computation provided three coefficients, with values between 0.80 and 0.89, indicating that the data is reliable as those coefficients are close to one. The average coefficient by pair is 0.87, which defines that in average, 87% of the items are the same between each expert. Rust and Cooil (1994) develop the PRL (Proportional Reduction in Loss), which provides a global agreement indicator between experts. By using the existing tables, the coefficient of 0.98, indicates that 98% of the results are reliable. Therefore those three complementary analyses provide a strong reliability for the items chosen to describe luxury fashion brand equity.

Figure 4: Qualitative data analysis



4.1.5. Content analysis

We can also see that the need for conformity and uniqueness are associated to different brands in the content analysis run through the interviews and through the verbatim of the AOL method.

For example in the interviews analysis, the need for conformity is identified for two brands, perceived as luxury brands, “Maje” and “Sandro”. One interviewee mentions that these brands reflect a special group, the “Thirties Parisian” woman, who “earns a good living and lives in Paris”. This interviewee states that she “tries and wants” to belong to this “little Parisian group which is trendy, even if the clothes do not fit” her. Another interviewee says that, “I am not original, I am basic, with the Parisian style, and if I buy clothes from Sandro or Maje, I cannot claim originality”. In these statements, we can identify the group conformity aspect. However, if for some women those two brands are a way to belong to a group, for others they represent the group to which they do not want to belong and that does not support their need for uniqueness: “What is important for a fashion brand is that you do not feel that

you see it on everybody, so I never go to Maje and Sandro”. Furthermore, some of the interviewees indicate a strong need to be unique: “What would be ideal would be to be different and not to have the same things as everyone” and “I am not looking for originality, but just to be a bit different than others”. Many interviewees also refer to the vintage aspect, going to second-hand shops or browsing on the Internet to find “the” specific clothing.

In the verbatim of the AOL, the needs for conformity and uniqueness are clearly represented with verbatim for the conformity need such as : “Having Louboutin shoes makes you feel different from people wearing mass fashion brands such as André or Minelli shoes, it makes you part of the Louboutines’ group”, “Be part of a limited group owning this object”, “I am part of the happy few, the movie stars”, “Be part of the Apple community”; and for the uniqueness need: “ I feel different from others and I show my difference”, “I am looking for originality to show my individuality”, “Own an original and exclusive object that I will not see on everyone”.

Therefore, this content analysis demonstrates that fashion luxury brands support consumer needs for conformity and uniqueness, according to the level of implication of the consumer.

4.2. Lexicographic analysis

After items definition, we use two complementary approaches: the Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to structure the semantic space and define several categorical variables presenting a geometrical display of the variables in a low-dimensional space, and the Individual Scaling (INDSCAL) analysis to structure the space of the AOL pictures.

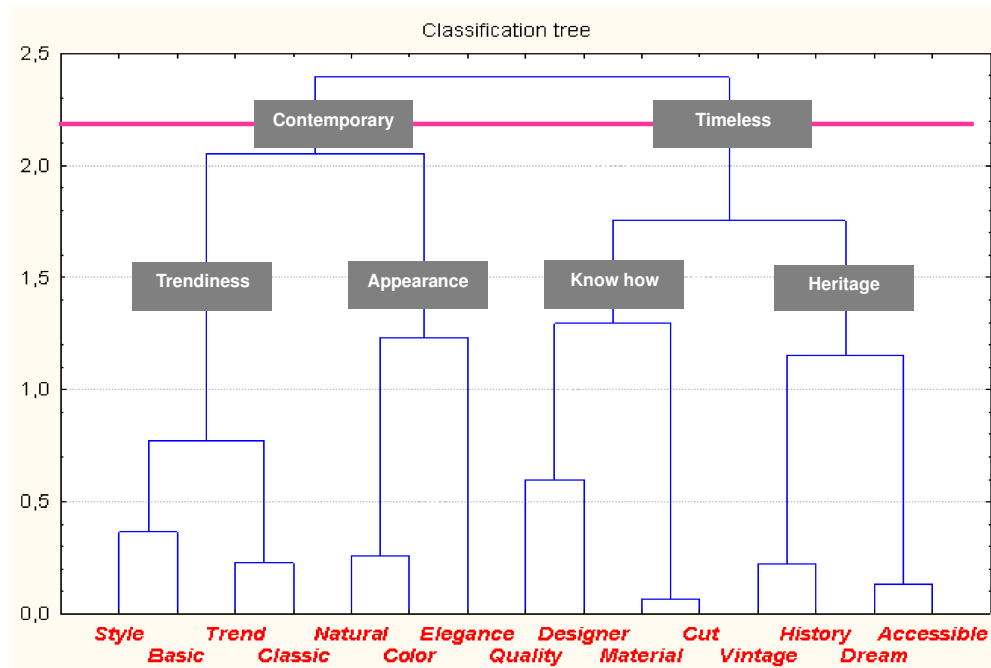
4.2.1. Multiple correspondence analysis

This analysis presents a geometrical display of the variables in a low-dimensional space (Figure 5). The method uses the 15 most selected items, describing general characteristics of apparel brands. According to a clear elbow displayed in a scree plot of the eigenvalues, the MCA leads to a solution with eight axes explaining 68,2 % of the total variance. As a result, each word is described by a vector of coordinates on eight axes, which enables us to cluster analyze the words in an effort to uncover groupings or dimensions.

Two dimensions appear and suggest what is important for women regarding fashion luxury brands. The dimensions are Contemporary (containing trendiness, appearance), and Timeless (containing know-how and heritage). From a luxury perspective, those dimensions

are in line with Fionda & Moore (2009) who highlight that for a product, luxury brands are defined in terms of high transaction value, distinctiveness, exclusivity (which can be linked to trendiness and appearance), excellent quality and craftsmanship (which can be linked to know-how and heritage).

Figure 5: Hierarchical decision tree



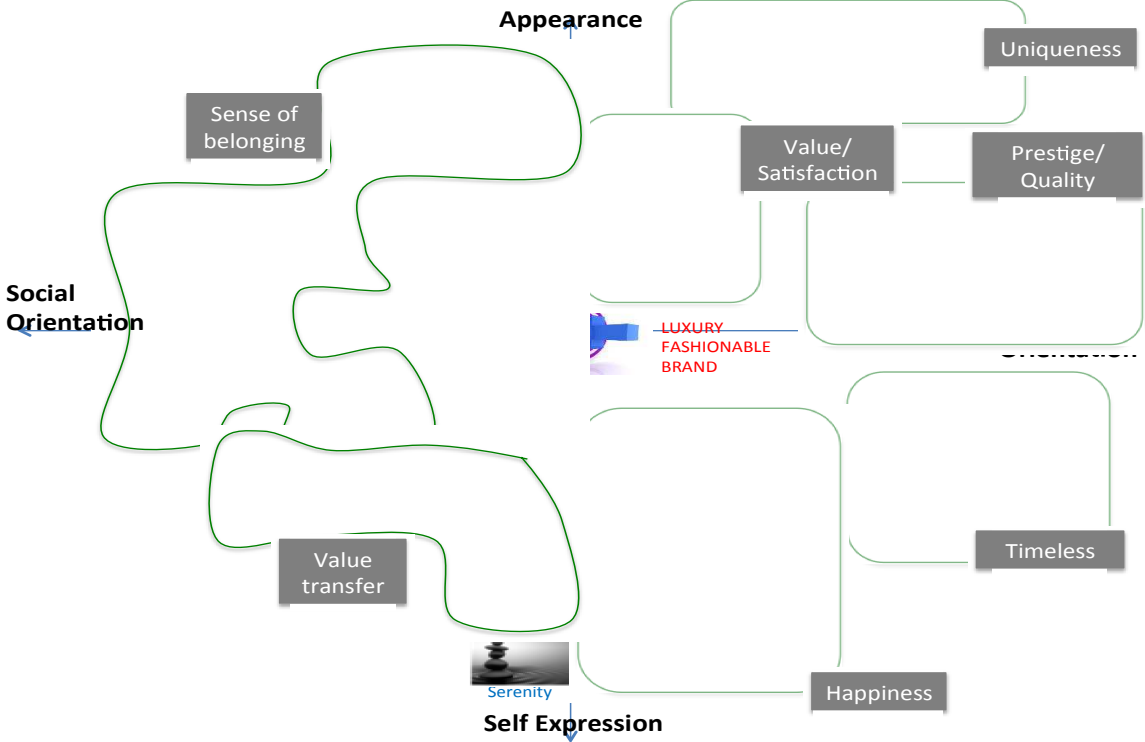
4.2.2. Individual Scaling Analysis

In the Individual Scaling Analysis (Stress index=0.092), we use the best-rated 29 items defining fashion luxury brands and examine the relationship between variables. This provides different axes of analysis, which shows the emergence of different concepts. We obtain two axes that explain 86% of the variance which can be defined with: “Social”/“Personal Orientation” and “Appearance”/“Self expression” (Figure 6). With this mapping, sub-dimensions are identified, such as “uniqueness”, “value satisfaction”, “prestige/quality”, “sense of belonging”, “value transfer”, “timeless”, “happiness” and are compared to the Lehmann *et al.* (2008) brand equity scale, as well as to the previous MCA.

Compared to the Lehmann *et al.* (2008) scale, some sub-dimensions are close but will need to be fine-tuned: “value for money” and “value satisfaction”, “prestige /quality”, “relevance” and “sense of belonging”; “heritage” and “timeless”. Concerning the other sub-

dimensions, the “uniqueness” is about the brand in the Lehmann *et al.* (2008) scale and not about the individual feeling, “value transfer” and “happiness” are not present.

Figure 6: Individual Scaling Analysis



The AOL analysis comfort and complete the MCA, as we can see that some dimensions of the decision tree such as “appearance”, “know how” and “heritage” are very close to the ones identified in the INDSCAL analysis and that news ones have appeared such as “social” and “personal orientation”, as well as “self expression”.

To conclude, those qualitative researches allow the identification of fashion luxury brands through women’s need for uniqueness and conformity, and even all the brands were not considered as luxury, the dimensions found are encompassing luxury characteristics.

4.3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This exploratory research examines how women describe and comprehend fashion through luxury brands, as well as how such dimensions are integrated or missing in the

existing brand equity scale models. The findings of these analyses suggest that women see fashion luxury brands through the six dimensions of “Contemporary”, “Timeless”, “Appearance”, “Self Expression”, “Social Orientation”, and “Personal Orientation”. Furthermore, it appears that some of these dimensions are part of the brand equity concept and some are not, suggesting that fashion can be an additional and complementary scale to brand equity. Taken together, these findings support a new approach to the luxury fashion brand equity, with various practical implications. From a managerial standpoint, integrating the luxury fashion brand equity into luxury brands in addition to the brand equity concept will allow marketers to optimize their marketing strategy in numerous ways. They will acquire knowledge to better position brands with global mapping, including brand equity and luxury fashion brand equity and fine-tune this positioning by integrating their competitors; also this will help them to improve the whole marketing mix of their brand, according to the positioning they wish to acquire. They will also be able to improve their communication means.

In further researches we will investigate the measure of such new scale. The next steps will be to test this scale in a quantitative research and validate its relevancy. Then we should balance the results of luxury fashion brand equity scale with the brand equity scale in order to define if there is a correlation between both: does having a strong brand equity helps to gain a strong fashion equity, or is a strong fashion equity providing a strong brand equity?

However, this research is not without limitations. The first limitation, is that interviewees were not exclusive high end luxury buyers, even if they were not looking for non-functional aspects of apparel brands when buying their clothes, thus fulfilling the same types of needs than luxury buyers. The brands used were not defined as luxury apparel brands; therefore, testing those fashion dimensions on exclusive luxury buyers will be a step to validate those dimensions. Moreover some of the brands are local brands and might not be available globally. When testing at a wider level, we need to take into account only global luxury brands. Another limitation is that, on average, the interviewees are between 20 and 53 years old and middle class. The interviewees are not representative of all French women, and vocabulary, expectations of brands and clothing habits may evolve with age and social class. Quantitative research could validate these findings by confirming or challenging the vocabulary used by these respondents. Moreover, French participants are not representative of all women’s fashion perceptions, which can differ across countries and cultures. Finally, the scales of Lehmann *et al.* (2008) and Yoo and Donthu (2001) have not been tested on French fashion luxury brands, which may limit the validity of these scales in the sector and country.

Several interesting extensions for future research will be to test the scale on other goods than luxury goods to confirm its validity. For example, tests on different industries, such as brands in the mass industry, or the car industry, where the need for uniqueness or conformity can be very strong, according to the category of products bought, would help to validate a global luxury fashion brand equity scale. Furthermore, testing the scale in different countries would provide better understanding of the difference in fashion brands perceptions: do the same brands offer the same luxury fashion brand equity, or is it different according to cultures? Finally, studies of men would provide information on the possible variations in perception in terms of clothing and brand attitudes according to gender.

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