Brand personality and its impact on brand trust and brand commitment: An empirical study of luxury fashion brands

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Abstract:

This study employed Aaker's methodology to empirically investigate the personality of luxury fashion brands and explored the impact of brand personality on brand trust and brand commitment based on a sample of American consumers. Results of Study 1 revealed that American consumers perceive six distinct personality dimensions and 37 personality traits in luxury fashion brands. Study 2 validated the results from Study 1 and further clearly indicated that brand personality has a significant effect on both brand trust and brand commitment. The findings provide insights into the underlying values that consumers seek from luxury fashion consumption and lend a theoretical guidance to practitioners in the luxury fashion industry in their efforts to win customers' brand commitment and loyalty.

Article:

1. Introduction

In contemporary consumer societies, people purchase products not only for what they can do (physical attributes and functional benefits) but also for what they symbolise, and the symbolic qualities of products are often the primary reasons for consumers' purchase (Maehle, Otnes, & Supphellen, 2011). Because of changing market conditions and consumer preferences, the focus of marketers and brand managers shifts increasingly to symbolic benefits of brands. This leads to an increased interest in the concept of brand personality, which offers a systematic approach to create symbolic benefits (Heine, 2009). For marketers facing today's global consumer markets, brand personality is an efficient way of creating and building a connection with consumers worldwide. A well-established brand personality is thought to impact consumer purchase decisions (Freling, Crosno, & Henard, 2011; Sirgy, 1982) and increase emotions in consumers (Aaker, 1997; Biel, 1993; Swaminathan, Stilley, & Ahluwalia, 2009).

This study focuses on luxury fashion brands as luxury fashion goods industry accounts for the largest proportion of luxury goods sales and the strongest product category growth in recent years (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Under the influence of globalised luxury brand consumption and the ideal of prestigious lifestyles created by transnational companies' global

marketing efforts, consumers around the world are increasingly sharing and valuing the symbolic and emotional meanings of well-known luxury fashion brands (Kim, Ko, Xu, & Han, 2012). Despite the significance and the growth of the luxury fashion goods sector, the investigation into contemporary brand management strategies and practices associated with luxury fashion brands has received limited empirical exploration within the research literature (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Kim et al., 2012). Although luxury fashion brands are characterized with strong symbolic benefits that often even exceed their functional benefits and refer to a large extent human personality traits (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), the symbolic meaning of luxury remains largely unexplored and there exists no integrated personality concept for luxury fashion brands within the academic literature. Previous studies have suggested that personality perceptions may vary by product category and that specific brand personality dimensions are associated with particular product categories (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Cui, Albanese, Jewell, & Hu, 2008; Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010; Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013). Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research on the consequences of brand personality in the luxury fashion context.

This research takes a consumer perspective to examine the personalities that are specifically associated with luxury fashion brands and tests the applicability of Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework in the context of luxury fashion brands. It also further investigates the consequences of luxury fashion brand personality. More specifically, it aims to answer two research questions:

Q1. Are luxury fashion brands perceived to possess personalities as posited by Aaker (1997)? If so, what are the underlying personality dimensions of luxury fashion brands?

Q2. Does the personality of luxury fashion brands impact consumer brand trust and brand commitment?

The paper is structured as follows. In the following section, we provide the relevant literature review on brand personality and global luxury fashion brand market. Then, we present the two studies conducted to answer the above research questions. Study 1 identifies brand personality dimensions within the luxury fashion brands category by using the brand personality framework developed by Aaker (1997). Study 2 validates the results from Study 1 and tests the relationships between brand personality and two dependent variables, brand trust and brand commitment, within the luxury fashion brands context. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and substantive implications of the results and findings of both studies.

2. Literature review

2.1. Brand personality in brand management

Anthropomorphic theory and the theory of the 'extended self' developed by Belk (1988) offer an explanation for why people tend to grant human qualities to brands (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Maehle et al., 2011; Sung & Kim, 2010). Anthropomorphising non-human objects, and a brand in particular, is a natural tendency, because people try to explain objects in terms of their own experiences and conceptions (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). Anthropomorphising makes non-human products seem more human-like and more familiar; thus, consumers gain comfort and reassurance when interacting with products they have anthropomorphised. Previous studies

asserted that consumers find it natural to build relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998) and to imbue them with different personality characteristics, such as 'elegant' or 'confident'; thus, brand personality serves the symbolic and emotional function (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 2000). The most widely cited definition of brand personality, 'the set of human characteristics associated with a brand' (Aaker, 1997, p. 347), outlines who a brand is as a 'personage' and/or 'character'. The theory of the 'extended self' developed by Belk (1988) maintains that 'possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities' (p. 139). Brand personality enables consumers to identify themselves with a brand and to express their own personality through the brand, as individuals tend to consider possessions to be part of their 'self' (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Belk, 1988). Brand personality serves a symbolic or self-expressive function, and the symbolic meaning and emotional ties help create and build meaningful consumer–brand relationships (Aaker, 1999; Sung & Kim, 2010). Consumers purchase and use brands to meet their needs, to create, reinforce, and communicate their personalities, and to form their self–brand connections which facilitate consumer's expression of their actual or ideal dimensions of the self (Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Sung, 2011; Sung & Kim, 2010; Sung & Tinkham, 2005).

2.2. Measurement and dimensions of brand personality

In contemporary business environment, factors such as continuous branding innovation in marketing and the known effects of personality on behaviour in general serve to stimulate interest in the symbolic meaning of human traits that consumers attribute to brands as a result of the creation of consumer–brand relationship and emotional attachments. Aaker (1997) conducted an extensive research on brand personality by carefully selecting 37 brands from various product categories and adopting a lexical approach. In her research, by having 631 respondents rate each of the 37 brands on 114 personality traits, Aaker (1997) developed a 42-item measurement scale of brand personality. The brand personality scale of Aaker (1997) is a framework to describe and measure the 'personality' of a brand in five core dimensions, each divided into a set of facets. The five core dimensions and their facets are Sincerity (down-to earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful), Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date), Competence (reliable, intelligent, and successful), Sophistication (upper-class and charming), and Ruggedness (outdoorsy and tough). Furthermore, Aaker found that the framework of these five brand personality dimensions, as represented by the 42-item scale, is reliable, valid, and generalisable, and appears to best explain the way American consumers perceive brands across symbolic and utilitarian product and service categories. Aaker's (1997) work has been considered as widely applicable, widely cited, and arguably most influential research on brand personality scale (Cui et al., 2008; Kaplan et al., 2010).

Some studies have begun with Aaker's methodology and provided unique variations that were drawn from a particular market context. For example, adopting Aaker's framework, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) revealed that Aaker's methodology can be applied to tourism destinations. Kaplan et al. (2010) examined the applicability of Aaker's brand personality concept for city brands and concluded that brand personality dimensions are applicable to place brands. Kim, Baek, and Martin (2010) studied dimensions of news media brand personality, guided by Aaker's brand personality study. Tong and Su (2014) revealed that Aaker's methodology can be applied to sportswear brands.

While accepting the importance of Aaker's work, a few researchers have also sought to develop factor models of brand personality. For example, Bosnjak, Bochmann, and Hufschmidt (2007) developed a 20-item instrument and a 4-factor structure (including drive, conscientiousness, emotion, and superficiality) in the German cultural domain. Geuens, Weijters, and De Wulf (2009) developed a measure for brand personality which consists of 12 items and 5 factors (activity, responsibility, aggressiveness, simplicity, and emotionality).

All of the analyses by Aaker (1997) involving the brand personality framework were aggregated across a wide variety of product categories (Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003). Similarly, most of the studies after Aaker (1997) measured brand personality on an aggregate level across multiple brands of different product categories (Aaker, Benet-Martínez, & Garolera, 2001; Bosnjak et al., 2007; Geuens et al., 2009; Milas & Mlačić, 2007; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). However, studies suggested that personality perceptions may vary by product category and different settings, and that specific brand personality dimensions are associated with particular product categories (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Kaplan et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2010; Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013). Valette-Florence and De Barnier (2013) pointed out the advantages of focusing on a specific area of application in brand personality research: the more exact semantics of items, facets and dimensions, directly related to the area investigated. Motivated by the prior studies that justify creating an appropriate scale and specific personality traits in particular sectors (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Kaplan et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2010; Tong & Su, 2014; Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013), in this paper, we seek to define brand personality measurement scales adapted to a particular product category – luxury fashion brands.

2.3. Global luxury fashion brands

The global luxury brand market has been growing steadily during the last two decades, along with the gradual expansion of the scope of its market, the ever-expanding offer of luxury categories, a rapid growth in emerging markets, and the recent increasing young consumers' luxury consumption worldwide (Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Kang & Park, 2016; Shukla, Banerjee, & Singh, 2016). Luxury fashion goods comprise apparel, accessories, handbags, shoes, watches, jewellery, and perfume, for which just the mere use or display of a particular brand brings prestige to the owner and functional utility becomes a side issue (Amatulli & Guido, 2011). Luxury fashion sector counts for a major proportion of global luxury goods sales and is one of the product categories with the strongest growth during recent years (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Within the luxury fashion sector, there are many unique characteristics including the speed of change as well as the scale and number of fashion items that are marketed using a single luxury brand name. As such, the branding and marketing of luxury fashion brands are more complex and costly than other sectors (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Luxury fashion brand is distinctive, it invariably operates as an experiential brand, and it functions as a means of creating and communicating an identity for the brand user (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Kang & Park, 2016; Shukla et al., 2016).

Luxury can be defined from a consumer perspective or from a product/brand's point of view (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Vigneron and Johnson (2004) defined luxury goods as goods for which the simple use or display of a particular branded product brings esteem to the owner, apart from any functional utility. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) explored the presence of personal and interpersonal effects for the consumption of luxury brands. They identified five values (conspicuous, unique, social, emotional, and quality) of prestige combined with five relevant

motivations (veblenian, snob, bandwagon, hedonist, and perfectionism). From a consumer perspective, the key identifiers of luxury brands are high quality, expensive and non-essential products and services that appear to be rare, exclusive, prestigious, and authentic, and offer high levels of symbolic and emotional/hedonic values through customer experiences (Kang & Park, 2016; Shukla et al., 2016; Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010).

In line with Belk's (1988) work on the extended self, which addresses the importance of possessions in contemporary consumption and consumers' feelings about possessions as a key contributor and reflection of their identities, previous research on luxury brands recognizes that consumers can derive subjective intangible benefits from luxury goods beyond their functional utility, while additional motivations to purchase them include their higher levels of quality and authenticity (Kang & Park, 2016; Shukla et al., 2016; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Similar to the situation with other consumer goods and brands, perceptions of the personality traits of luxury fashion brands can be formed and influenced by the direct and/or indirect contact that the consumer may have had with luxury fashion brands. Personality traits can be associated with brands in a direct way, through corporate reputation, product quality, shopping, and usage experience (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 1985). In an indirect manner, personality traits can be attributed to brands through marketing programmes such as advertising, fashion shows, public relations, direct marketing, and celebrity endorsement. Keller (2009) highlighted the need and significance of managing luxury brand equity by developing and strengthening luxury brands' distinctive personality. Keller indicated that 'many luxury brands have association of sophistication as part of their positioning, but also often competence or even excitement' (2009, p. 296). Therefore, identifying the personality associated with luxury fashion brands is imperative to understand the consumer–brand relationship within luxury fashion brands context.

3. Study 1: identification of personality of luxury fashion brands

The aim of Study 1 is to identify personality dimensions for luxury fashion brands. This study follows the approach employed by Aaker (1997) in her study of brand personality framework.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Selection of brand personality attributes

The selection of brand personality attributes followed a three-step process, guided by Aaker's (1997) brand personality study. In the first step, to ensure familiarity and relevance, a free-association task was conducted to generate a list of personality attributes for luxury fashion brands. Eighty-two undergraduate students at a large US university were invited to participate in this free-association activity. Although college students are not traditionally the target market for luxury products, young consumers, including college students, are gaining more attention from luxury brands due to their strong spending power and their recent spending on luxury items (Giovannini, Xu, & Thomas, 2015; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). These students were asked to use words to describe the human characteristics associated with one of the luxury fashion brands that they are familiar with. To assist the students in identifying a luxury fashion brand and also to avoid using a non-luxury brand for this exercise, a list of 12 luxury fashion brands was provided to the students to choose from. This top luxury fashion brand list was compiled by referring to several sources including Bloomberg Businessweek, Pinterest, fashion websites, and students'

inputs. The following brands were on the list: Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Rolex, Chanel, Gucci, Prada, Cartier, Burberry, Christian Dior, Versace, Armani, and Fendi. A total of 197 personality attributes were generated as a result of this free-association exercise.

The second step involved incorporating the 42 original personality traits proposed by Aaker (1997) into this 197-trait list. The 42 attributes were compiled and developed from diverse sources such as the Big Five personality factors and other refined scales used by academics and practitioners (Sung & Tinkham, 2005). Finally, from this list of 239 personality attributes, the researchers checked for and deleted items that were redundant, ambiguous, or irrelevant to fashion brands. This resulted in a final set of 67 traits used to examine luxury fashion brands' personality.

3.1.2. Sample and procedure

As the aim of Study 1 is to investigate personality characteristics associated with luxury fashion brands and is exploratory in nature, a generalisable sample is not required (Yin, 1989). A convenience sample of students enrolled at three large universities in the US (one from the North, one from the Southeast, and one from the South) was used for this study.

In the luxury market, there is evidence that the 'luxury newcomers' (mainly Generation Y) represent a big opportunity for luxury retailers to grow their business, due to their large population and growing purchasing power (Giovannini et al., 2015). These young consumers are less brand loyal, but they are willing to experiment with luxury brands (Jay, 2012). While these young aspirational consumers may not be able to afford all of the luxury they want, they are familiar with the brands and have developed a taste for the luxury. A total of 421 students participated in the survey. The majority of participants were between the ages of 19–21 (96%), were female (67%), and had purchased luxury fashion products before (69%). The most prevalent ethnic group was Caucasian (72%), followed by African-American (14%), Asian (9%), and Hispanic or Latino (2%).

At the beginning of the survey, the same group of luxury fashion brands (12 brands) used in the brand personality attributes selection process were provided for the participants to choose the one that they were most familiar with. If the participant was not familiar with any of the provided brands, he/she could list one that he/she was familiar with. The ones that were not on the list but were referred to in the survey by the participants included Michael Kors, Vera Wang, Kate Spade, Tory Burch, Coach, and a few others that were not considered as luxury fashion brands, such as Nike, American Apparel, and Express. Eight surveys were removed from the data-set due to referring to a non-luxury fashion brand. This resulted in a total of 413 surveys included for further data analysis. After identifying a familiar luxury fashion brand, the participants were asked to rate the extent to which each personality trait described their most familiar luxury fashion brand on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all descriptive and 5 = extremely descriptive). The following instructions were given to the participants before they answered questions regarding the personality of the chosen familiar brand:

In this section, we are interested in finding out your perception of human personalities associated with your most familiar luxury fashion brand as identified in Question 1. While evaluating the following set of attributes, please ask yourself, 'If this luxury fashion brand was a person, how would I describe him/her?'

3.2. Data analysis and results

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with maximum likelihood extraction and varimax rotation method was conducted to identify the dimensions that capture the personality traits of luxury fashion brands. The results of the EFA (n = 413) indicated that there were 16 factors with eigenvalues larger than 1. However, the variance explained by each additional factor was dramatically dropped after the first eight factors. The scree plot also flattened out after the first eight factors. For each of the eight factors, items were selected if their communalities were greater than 0.30 and factor loadings were greater than 0.40 (Churchill, 1979; Hair, Black, Barry, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Items loaded on more than one factor at 0.40 or greater were assigned to the factor with the highest loading. All the items loaded on the factors were checked for meaningfulness and fit with the remaining items on the same factor (Aaker, 1997; Kim et al., 2010). Two items were removed from the factor that they had greater than 0.40 loading on due to 'not fitting with the remaining items on the factor in meaning'. Two factors were removed from the final model as the items loaded on the factor did not seem to go together meaningfully. As a result, 37 items were included in the six-factor model. The resulted six factors accounted for approximately 35% of the total variance. The following is a list of the six factors measuring the personality of luxury fashion brands. Table 1 shows the EFA results of the six factors extracted and the items loaded on each factor.

(1) Prestigious: this is the most important personality dimension for luxury fashion brands including items such as wealthy, upscale, and superior.
(2) Competent: this personality dimension suggests that luxury fashion brands are associated with expertise and quality including traits such as reliable, refined, and authentic.
(3) Sociable: this personality dimension refers to characteristics such as friendly, spirited, and sociable.
(4) Unique: this personality dimension emphasises the importance of creative excellence in luxury fashion products including traits such as artistic, adventurous, and creative.
(5) Snobby: this is the negative personality dimension for luxury fashion brands including items such as greedy, haughty, and snobby.
(6) Romantic: this personality dimension suggests that luxury fashion brands are associated with romance and love including attributes such as sensual, sexy, and secure.

Aaker (1997) argued that personality dimension may contain sub-dimensions, called facets. Following the process used by Costa and McCrae (1992), a facet identification step was also included in this study. Identification of facets within the six factors was carried out by means of EFA with maximum likelihood extraction and varimax rotation, performed separately for each dimension (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001). The analysis revealed that the Prestigious factor has two facets (elegant and prestigious). No sub-dimensions were found for the remaining factors, indicating a one-dimensional structure. Figure 1 depicts the extracted brand personality traits and their corresponding facets and dimensions

Traits	Prestigious	Competent	Sociable	Unique	Snobby	Romantic
Wealthy	**0.83**	0.08	0.04	0.06	0.15	−0.04
Upscale	**0.77**	0.13	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.02
Expensive	**0.65**	0.15	−0.08	0.10	0.15	0.03
Elite	**0.61**	0.24	−0.02	−0.07	−0.03	0.07
Fashionable	**0.54**	0.38	0.15	0.14	−0.11	0.16
Superior	**0.53**	0.25	0.16	0.04	0.13	0.28
Elegant	**0.53**	0.19	0.03	0.09	0.09	0.07
Lavish	**0.52**	0.20	0.13	0.16	0.37	0.14
Sophisticated	**0.50**	0.32	0.26	0.09	0.02	0.08
Successful	**0.47**	0.38	0.34	0.11	0.03	0.11
Exclusive	**0.46**	0.15	0.08	0.13	0.17	0.17
Glamorous	**0.45**	0.30	0.07	0.11	0.11	0.17
Prestigious	**0.45**	0.35	−0.13	0.09	0.15	0.18
Powerful	**0.44**	0.30	0.11	0.12	0.14	0.30
Sleek	**0.43**	0.11	0.13	0.09	0.01	0.11
Quality	0.34	**0.75**	0.04	0.07	−0.04	0.08
Professional	0.26	**0.55**	0.21	−0.01	0.02	0.10
Refined	0.20	**0.53**	0.09	0.18	0.08	0.10
Confident	0.36	**0.52**	0.04	0.19	0.04	0.17
Reliable	0.14	**0.47**	0.16	0.14	−0.09	0.12
Composed	0.19	**0.43**	0.04	0.04	−0.06	−0.01
Mature	0.36	**0.42**	0.00	0.04	−0.05	0.09
Authentic	0.33	**0.42**	−0.02	0.37	0.02	0.04
Sociable	0.19	0.14	**0.58**	−0.03	0.05	0.26
Young	0.02	0.00	**0.53**	0.05	−0.02	0.00
Spirited	0.00	0.09	**0.52**	0.26	−0.01	0.06
Unique	0.28	0.01	0.45	**0.45**	0.12	0.12
Friendly	0.10	0.09	**0.42**	0.00	−0.10	0.06
Sincere	0.03	0.13	**0.42**	0.10	0.00	0.09
Artistic	0.16	0.13	0.15	**0.64**	0.00	0.06
Adventurous	0.00	0.04	0.07	**0.59**	−0.01	0.20
Ambitious	0.20	0.20	0.05	**0.52**	0.01	0.11
Creative	0.13	0.14	0.38	**0.49**	−0.03	0.15
Greedy	0.11	−0.08	−0.02	0.02	**0.79**	0.07
Haughty	0.00	0.03	0.04	0.06	**0.73**	0.04
Snobby	0.21	−0.03	−0.04	−0.02	**0.66**	−0.01
Unapproachable	0.09	0.04	0.00	−0.04	**0.65**	0.02
Sensual	0.07	0.16	0.10	0.15	0.08	**0.78**
Sexy	0.22	0.04	0.13	0.26	0.13	**0.46**
Secure	0.11	0.25	0.25	0.17	−0.03	**0.46**
Romantic	0.21	0.32	0.27	0.13	0.06	**0.44**
Eigenvalues	18.68	4.57	3.31	2.91	2.11	1.50
% of variance	10.51	7.28	4.69	4.68	4.48	3.69
Cumulative %	10.51	17.79	22.48	27.17	31.65	35.34

Note: Factor loadings that are 0.4 or larger are set in bold.

Table 1. EFA results on personality dimensions for luxury fashion brands

Figure 1. Luxury fashion brand personality dimensions and their facets

4. Study 2: the relationships among brand personality, brand trust, and brand commitment

The aim of Study 2 is to validate the results from the EFA of Study 1 and test the impact of brand personality on consumers' brand behaviour towards luxury fashion products. Specifically, two brand behaviours were investigated in this study: brand trust and brand commitment.

4.1. Brand trust

The research of trust in the context of brands is based on the theory of brand personality (Belaid & Behi, 2011). The anthropomorphisation of brands implies that they possess certain personal characteristics and, as a result, we can trust a set of brands in the same way that we can trust some people (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998). The concept of brand trust shows that the relationship between a consumer and a brand could go beyond satisfaction of functional performance (Belaid & Behi, 2011). In the brand domain, trust is a feeling of security held by the consumer that the brand will meet his/her consumption expectations. Brand trust transforms a positive transactional orientation toward a brand into an enduring, close, and personal – even committed – relationship with a brand. Entrenched relationships characterised by feelings of personal connection depend largely on trust. Morgan and Hunt (1994) theorised that trust is one component of consumers' relationships with brands, and trust, along with commitment, is a key characteristic required for relationship marketing success. Inspired by previous literature, Delgado-Ballester (2004) conceptualized brand trust as 'The confident expectations of the brand's reliability and intentions in situations entailing risk to the consumer' (p. 574). This definition of brand trust reflects two distinct components: brand reliability, which is based on the extent to which the consumer believes that the brand accomplishes its value promise, and brand intentions, which is based on the extent to which the consumer believes that the brand would hold consumers' interests ahead of its self-interest when unexpected problems with the consumption of the product arise (Delgado-Ballester, 2004).

The conceptualisation of brand trust in Belaid and Behi's (2011) study highlights the fact that it has both a cognitive and an affective nature. The cognitive component of trust refers to credibility, which is related to the perceived reliability of the information on the brand, the performance of the brand, and its aptitude to satisfy consumer needs (Belaid & Behi, 2011). The affective component of trust is integrity. The brand is considered honourable when it respects its promises and puts the consumer's long-term interests foremost. In summary, brand credibility results from a rational and cognitive process based on the assessment of brand performance and reputation, whereas integrity is an affective and social trust outcome built on consumer perception of brand orientation and intentions towards the consumer (Belaid & Behi, 2011).

Previous research indicates that trust develops through experience over time (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001). The process by which an individual attributes a trust image to the brand is based on his/her experience with that brand. Therefore, as an experience attribute, trust will be influenced by the consumer's evaluation of any direct (e.g. trial, usage, and satisfaction in the consumption) and indirect contact (advertising, word of mouth, and brand reputation) with the brand (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001). Among all of these different contacts with the brand, the consumer's consumption experience gains more relevance and importance as a source of trust, because it generates associations and feelings that are more self-relevant and held with more certainty (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001).

4.2. Brand commitment

Commitment, a fundamental and powerful concept, refers to consumers' ultimate relationship disposition, encompassing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours toward the brand and their relationship with that brand (Hess & Story, 2005). Commitment derives from a combination of personal and functional characteristics of developing consumer–brand relationships. Commitment has generally been conceptualised as an intention and a desire for continuity in the relationship. In the brand context, commitment is defined as the consumer's strong willingness to maintain a lasting relationship with the brand (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment has a significant role in cultivating attitudinal loyalty, since commitment reflects the customers' self-evaluation of the consumption context and the active decision to engage in a long-term relationship with a brand or a firm (Evanschitzky, Iyer, Plassmann, Niessing, & Meffert, 2006).

Brand commitment refers more to the economic, emotional, and/or psychological attachments that the customer may have toward the brand (Evanschitzky et al., 2006). Some researchers acknowledge two distinct types of commitment – one that is more emotional in nature and another that is more economic in its structure (Belaid & Behi, 2011; Evanschitzky et al., 2006). The emotional type is labelled affective commitment, and the economic type is labelled calculative commitment. The consumer's belief in the superiority of the brand, the perception of the differences between brands, and notably a high perceived risk during the purchase are the major motivations of calculative commitment (Belaid & Behi, 2011). Affective commitment is based on the pleasure of maintaining a relationship with a brand and on the development of an emotional attachment. Affective commitment refers to consumers' devotion and their identification with the brand without any material consideration (Belaid & Behi, 2011; Evanschitzky et al., 2006).

4.3. The impact of brand personality on brand trust and brand commitment

Consumers in our changing social world consistently wish to satisfy their need for love, intimacy, and closeness to their own image. Companies strive to respond to this social development by attaching a distinctive brand personality to their products and services to meet their customers' personal needs. Thus, companies try to infuse their products with specific attributes that create a continuous brand image. It is thought that brand personality is one important component of brand image that can help build brand equity and consumers use brand personality dimensions as determinants of value added to the brand (Biel, 1993; Keller, 1993). Brand personality ensures consistent brand image over the time and allows consumers to express their personalities (Aaker, 1997). Building unique and desirable brand personality will have a great influence in the development of favourable attitudinal and behavioural brand-related outcomes (Su & Tong, 2016).

Brand personality is created and maintained in the mind of the consumer as a reflection of the perception of the brand; therefore, it can have a meaningful and significant impact on both brand trust and brand commitment. Brand personality impacts consumers' perceptual processing of product information and may create a basis for differentiation, which impacts what customers think and feel about brands particularly with regard to perceived quality and perceived value, and further impacts customers' attitude and behaviour (Su & Tong, 2016).

Brand personality is a means of differentiation within a product category and an important factor affecting preference (Su & Tong, 2016). It arouses feelings and raises the level

of brand trust and brand affect (Su & Tong, 2016; Sung & Kim, 2010). Research has shown that well-established brand personality can help consumers strengthen their brand emotional ties, boosts consumer preference, induces emotions in consumers, and has a positive relationship with levels of trust and loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Louis & Lombart, 2010; Su & Tong, 2016; Sung & Kim, 2010).

4.4. The relationship between brand trust and brand commitment

Most researchers agree that trust comes from a feeling of security that a brand will meet a consumer's expectations, and it represents the willingness of a consumer to accept vulnerability due to positive expectations (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Since commitment entails vulnerability, a consumer will only seek trustworthy brands (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Prior studies have shown that trust is a major determinant of relationship commitment and brand trust is a key variable in the development of an enduring desire to maintain a relationship in the long term with a brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Brand trust represents the recognition that brand value can be created and developed with the management of some aspects that go beyond consumer's satisfaction with the functional performance of the product and its attributes (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment has its roots in identification, shared values, attachment, and trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust would be the cardinal forerunner of consumer commitment; once consumers have established trust in a brand, they are willing to engage in a long-term relationship with it. Relationships characterised by trust are so highly valued that consumers will desire to commit themselves to such relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2001) affirmed the importance of trust in developing positive and favourable attitudes, and resulting in a commitment to a certain brand as the maximum expression of a successful relationship between the consumer and the brand.

4.5. Research model

For the purpose of this study, a conceptual framework was developed and is shown in Figure 2: brand personality is considered a latent-independent (exogenous) variable, while brand trust and brand commitment are considered latent-dependent (endogenous) variables. In our model, brand personality (whole personality) is conceived as a second-order factor that is determined and measured by six brand personality dimensions identified in this study.
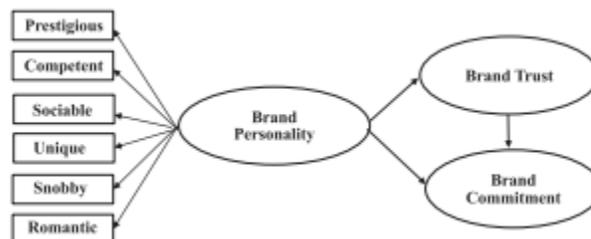

Figure 2. Conceptual framework

4.6. Method

4.6.1. Data collection and the sample

The research employed shopping centre intercept surveys to collect consumer information. Shopping centres were selected based on a marketing investigation. The choice criterion was whether some of the selected luxury fashion brands included in the study were available in the shopping centre. Two shopping centres were selected in two mid-sized cities in the US, one in each city. Respondents were selected from customers who were willing to complete a questionnaire while shopping in these two centres. An incentive (a small gift) was offered with each questionnaire to increase response rates, but participation was entirely voluntary.

A total of 270 respondents participated in the survey and 257 valid questionnaires were collected. The majority of the participants had purchased luxury fashion brands before (67%) and 60% of them were female. Of the respondents, about 52 % were under 25 years of age, 26 % were from 25 to 44 years old, and over 20 % were over 45 years old. The most prevalent ethnic group was Caucasian (60%), followed by African-American (30%). About 48 % of the respondents reported a family household annual income in 2014 between $75,000 and $150,000, and more than 15 % of respondents had a household annual income more than $150,000.

4.6.2. Measurement scale of dependent variables

Brand trust and brand commitment were measured by existing scales. The 11 items measuring brand trust were mainly borrowed from Delgado-Ballester (2004). Some of the sample items were 'I could rely on the brand name to solve the problem' and 'The brand name would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns'. Eight items measuring brand commitment were developed based on several previous studies (Beatty, Homer, & Kahle, 1988; Delgado-Ballester & MunueraAlemán, 2001; Louis & Lombart, 2010). Some of the sample items were 'I recommend buying the brand' and 'I have a lot of affection for this brand'. Each statement was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

4.7. Data analysis and results

4.7.1. Confirmatory factor analysis for luxury fashion brand personality scale

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out to validate the results from the EFA of Study 1. This approach was employed to avoid capitalising on chance in the sample data when both EFA and CFA are performed with the same samples (Byrne, Shavelson, & Muthén, 1989). CFA was conducted (n = 257) using Amos (the structural equation modelling package). The model fit criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) were used for the measurement model: $x2$ /df, Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Fit indices of the six-factor model were satisfactory overall: $x2$ /df = 1.85, GFI = 0.85, CFI = 0.90, and RMSEA = 0.06, suggesting that the model is adaptable and stable within the validation data-set.

All factor loadings were significant and varied from 0.52 to 0.82, satisfying the convergent validity criteria. In addition, following the procedure described by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), discriminant validity was tested by conducting $\chi2$ difference tests between all possible pairs of constructs. The $\chi2$ difference tests confirmed significantly lower $\chi2$ values (P < .001) for the unconstrained model for all comparisons that were tested, implying the achievement of discriminant validity (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982). Thus, both convergent validity and

discriminant validity were considered to have been established for the brand personality scale identified in this study

4.7.2. Reliability and validity of measures

Analogous to the framework of Allport (1961), which introduces the concept of a 'whole personality', brand personality in this study was measured as a reflective second-order factor with the six sub-dimensions mentioned above, standing for a general evaluation of the anthropomorphic inferences that consumers develop toward a brand (Brakus et al., 2009; Su & Tong, 2015). An EFA was first done on the 19 items measuring brand trust and brand commitment with a varimax rotation. EFA produced two distinct factors among the items (brand trust and brand commitment). During the EFA, one item that was not related to any factor was excluded from the next steps of the analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were then used to examine the internal consistency of the items and items with adequate Cronbach's alphas were retained for the scales. The final Cronbach's alpha values for 'brand personality (whole personality)', 'brand trust', and 'brand commitment' were 0.75, 0.94, and 0.90, respectively, all of which were greater than the recommended cut-off value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Next, the convergent and discriminant validity were assessed. A CFA for the measurement model with three constructs was performed. The goodness-of-fit statistics indicated that all criteria met the recommended values in the measurement model ($\chi2$ /df = 1.92; GFI = 0.88; Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.84; CFI = 0.95; Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) = 0.08, and RMSEA = 0.06). The results confirmed convergent validity since all items loaded significantly ($P < .001$) on the underlying latent constructs (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Discriminant validity was tested by conducting $\chi2$ difference tests between all possible pairs of constructs (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The $\chi2$ difference tests confirmed significant lower $\chi2$ values ($P < .001$) for the unconstrained model for all comparisons that were tested, implying the achievement of discriminant validity (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982).

4.7.3. Results of the structural model

According to the purpose of this study, a structural equation model (see Figure 2) was developed with Amos to assess the statistical significance of the relationships among brand personality of luxury fashion brands, brand trust, and brand commitment. All of the fit measures indicated a good fit between the structural model and the data in the study ($\chi2$ /df = 1.91; GFI = 0.90; AGFI = 0.84; CFI = 0.95; RMR = 0.07, and RMSEA = 0.06). Therefore, it seems feasible to carry out the analysis of the results of the structural model. The statistical results obtained from this study clearly indicated that brand personality has a significant impact on both brand trust (β = 0.66, t = 7.95) and brand commitment (β = 0.54, t = 6.73). The results also show that brand trust has a significant impact on brand commitment (β = 0.40, t = 4.97). The values of the parameters and their degree of significance are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Standardised coefficients and *T*-values.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardised coefficient	T-value	P-value
Brand personality	Brand trust	0.66	7.95	≤0.001
Brand personality	Brand commitment	0.54	6.73	≤0.001
Brand trust	Brand commitment	0.40	4.97	≤0.001

5. Discussion and implications

This research aims to explore and identify the personalities associated with luxury fashion brands and their relationships to brand trust and brand commitment. This research provides both theoretical and practical contributions.

Theoretically, it makes four contributions. First, this research develops a new set of personality traits that marketers may utilise to assess personalities of luxury fashion brands. Second, the findings from this research confirm that consumers do associate particular brand personality dimensions with specific brand categories (such as luxury fashion brands). Third, this research identifies a negative personality characteristic associated with luxury fashion brands, namely Snobby. Revelation of this factor as a dimension of brand personality shows that the negative aspects of personality also deserve careful consideration, especially when subjects are evaluating the personality of another entity rather than themselves (Kaplan et al., 2010). Fourth, our empirical results confirm the positive and statistically significant effect of brand personality on brand trust and brand commitment.

The implications of this research also are of significance for marketers in the field of luxury brands. Development of a strong brand personality clearly fosters the success of branding activities. Thus, the scale and the distinctive brand personality dimensions identified in this research can be used as a practical marketing tool for brand managers in the luxury fashion market. Specifically, we believe that our findings could be specifically applied to create and build luxury brands, or to address issues such as how to maintain a luxury brand image once it is established. In summary, through identifying the dimensions of the personality for luxury fashion brands, this research provides insights into the underlying values that consumers are seeking from luxury fashion consumption: the utilitarian, experiential, and symbolic values. This finding lends a theoretical guidance to the practitioners in the industry in their effort to build brand trust and brand commitment. Below, the results as well as the key practical implications of the results were summarised.

5.1. Personality of luxury fashion brands

Since luxury fashion brands are uniquely positioned between the fashion and the luxury industries, our results show that the personality of luxury fashion brands is a good combination of characteristics associated with luxury (Prestigious, Competent, Snobby, and Romantic) and characteristics associated with fashion (Sociable and Unique). This reflects the clear image of luxury fashion brands in consumers' minds. The six dimensions identified in this research indicate that the personality of luxury fashion brands can be characterised in terms of the functional dimension (Competent), the experiential dimension (Sociable, Unique, and Romantic), and the symbolic dimension (Prestigious and Snobby). This is similar to Keller's

(2003) general perspective on the benefits that brands provide for their consumers, 'the personal value and meaning that consumers attach to the brand's product attributes' (p. 596).

The consumption of luxury brands is oftentimes viewed as the symbol of social status and wealth (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). The most important personality dimension identified in this research is Prestigious. This finding is consistent with the luxury brand positioning strategies: they are built on the premise of offering high symbolic value to a very selective segment of consumers, who are more focused on high status associations than the underlying price. Managers of luxury brands create and sustain the image of prestige and exclusivity through advertising, celebrity endorsement, selective distribution, premium pricing, and producing limited edition lines (Fionda & Moore, 2009). Remarkably but not surprisingly, a negative personality dimension emerged in this research, namely Snobby. It encompasses negative items such as greedy, haughty, and snobby. This dimension is the reflection of characteristics that define snobby (or conspicuous) on luxury fashion brands' personality. Conspicuous or luxury consumers can be categorised as snobs, who have higher socioeconomic status and prefer limited edition products, while refraining from products consumed by many (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997). Although a new luxury paradigm (individualistic type of luxury consumption driven by new needs and desires for experiences) is radically different from the traditional 'old' luxury consumption (motivated primarily by the desire for prestige and the public display of social status), the finding confirms that those top luxury brands are still portrayed by consumers as snobbish, class-oriented exclusivity goods and services that only a small segment of the population can afford or is willing to purchase (Granot & Brashear, 2008).

The results of this research support the notion that the key element that differentiates luxury from other industries is the paramount importance of creativity (Nueno & Quelch, 1998). The dimension of Sociable refers to characteristics such as friendly, spirited, and sociable, and the dimension of Unique consists of traits such as artistic, adventurous, and creative. Both dimensions emphasise the importance of creative excellence in luxury fashion product development. The fashion design element within the luxury fashion product is derived from investment in innovation, creativity, and the appointment of an eminent fashion designer, which together allow a company to achieve legitimacy and fashion authority (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Nueno & Quelch, 1998). This research also identified a very special dimension for luxury fashion brands, namely Romantic. Luxury brands have been working hard to enhance the 'emotional connections' with discerning mindsets. For example, Tiffany launched whatmakeslovetrue.com to those who want to take their romantic relationship forward. The emergence of the Romantic dimension in this research indicates that luxury fashion brands have been successfully creating the association of love and romance in consumers' minds. The dimension Competent in this research depicts traits such as having superior quality, reliable, refined, and authentic. It supports the notion that 'product excellence' is the primary prerequisite of luxury (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Luxury fashion brands are often portrayed as using best materials, best craftsmanship, having hand finishing, and having great attention to detail characteristics (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Giovannini et al., 2015).

5.2. The impact of brand personality on brand trust and commitment

The research results are in line with previous studies, in which researchers have posited that brand personality has a positive impact on brand trust and brand commitment (Fournier, 1998; Fournier & Yao, 1997; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sirgy, 1982). From a managerial point of view,

these results imply that in order to enjoy the substantial competitive and economic advantages provided by a loyal customer base, luxury fashion brands should manage not only the customer satisfaction with the tangible/functional attributes of the brand but also intangible/symbolic attributes such as brand personality. Since American consumers seek luxury fashion brands that express some aspects of their own personality or image, personality traits should be used as a central driver in building trust and long-term relationship with their consumers. We believe the management need to focus on creating a strong, unique brand identity, and the positive brand personality traits identified in this study (Prestigious, Competent, Sociable, Unique, and Romantic) should be integrated in the positioning of the brand and communicated to targeted consumers.

This research has also identified the existing link between trust and commitment to the brand. It implies that consumer's commitment to a luxury brand would be the consequence of his/her trust in it. As symbol intensive brands, developing trust in luxury brands involves the development of a consumer–brand relationship that is largely based on personal experience with the brand (Elliott & Yannopoulou, 2007). This applies to any type of consumer interaction with the brand, from the actual product or service experience, the briefest communication with a company's representative, or a glance at a brand symbol to the brand's marketing communication approach. Thus, consistency in all aspects of the brand is essential in any brand strategy, and it requires the brand to engage in two-way communications with consumers in order to build a sense of intimacy. Recent research suggests that customers' trust in a luxury fashion brand can be strengthened via interaction with other users as well as the brand on social media sites (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012).

6. Limitations and future research

This research has a few limits, which constitutes areas for future research. First, our findings only reflect American consumers' brand personality perception of luxury fashion brands. For this reason, the scale ought to be reassessed with consumers from different cultural backgrounds, such as consumers in emerging markets (Aaker et al., 2001). Next, this study only examined the effect of whole personality on brand trust and brand commitment. Considering different dimensions of brand personality may exhibit different levels of influence on these two outcomes, future research may explore the effect of each dimension of brand personality identified in this research. Lastly, the influence of brand personality on other consequences should be studied in future research (e.g. brand attitude and willingness to pay a price premium).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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