

Exploring the personality of luxury fashion brands: Evidence from young US consumers

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Abstract:

This study aims to identify personality characteristics that are associated with luxury fashion brands and test the applicability of Aaker's brand personality framework in the context of luxury fashion brands. It employed Aaker's brand personality framework to empirically investigate the personality of luxury fashion brands based on data collected from 413 American young consumers. This research developed a valid and reliable scale that measures personality for luxury fashion products and confirms that consumers do associate particular brand personality dimensions with luxury fashion brands. Results revealed that young consumers perceive six distinct personality dimensions and 37 personality traits in luxury fashion brands: Prestigious, Competent, Sociable, Creative, Snobby, and Romantic. The findings not only provide insights into the underlying values that consumers are seeking from luxury fashion consumption, but also offer a theoretical guidance to the practitioners in the luxury goods industry in their effort of brand equity building.

Keywords: brand personality | brand personality dimensions | luxury fashion brands

Article:

6.1 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 symbolize; and the symbolic qualities of products are often the primary reasons for consumer's purchase (Maehle et al. 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 brand personality concept, which offers a systematic approach to create symbolic benefits (Heine 2009).

Brand personality is a central driving force of consumer's positive attitude and preference for a brand (Biel 1993). A well-established brand personality is thought to impact consumer purchase decision (Freling et al. 2011; Sirgy 1982) and increase emotions in consumers (Biel 1993; Swaminathan et al. 2009). For marketers facing today's globalization of markets, brand personality is an efficient way of creating and building a connection with consumers worldwide.

Young consumers have been shown in the literature to have an affinity for luxury brands (Doss and Robinson 2013). The growing population of young upwardly mobile consumers ensures a steadily growing customer base for luxury fashion retailers, and guarantees a potentially large market in the future. They will continue to support the future growth of global luxury fashion brands as their purchasing power will grow, as they get older (Park et al. 2008). Young consumers are an important consumer market for luxury fashion brands (Kim et al. 2012) and companies which can make a connection with this potentially lucrative market segment may develop lifelong customers. Young consumers are willing to try, to experience luxury brands and they think that owning luxury fashion products is the best way to show their own style (Kim et al. 2012).

This study focuses on luxury fashion brands for the following reasons. Firstly, luxury fashion goods industry accounts for the largest proportion of luxury goods sales and the strongest product category growth in recent years (Fionda and Moore 2009). Under the influence of globalized 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 et al. 2012). Despite the significance and the growth of the luxury fashion goods sector, the investigation into contemporary brand management strategies and practices associated with the luxury fashion brands has received limited empirical exploration within the research literature (Fionda and Moore 2009; Kim et al. 2012). Secondly, although luxury fashion brands are characterized with strong symbolic benefits that often even exceed their functional benefits and that refer to a large extent human personality traits (Vigneron and 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. Thirdly, although many studies have been conducted on brand personality, and existing brand personality dimensions and scales are well-established, most research is mainly based on a set of brands across various product categories (Aaker 1997; Aaker et al. 2001). 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 and Stoner 2009; Cui et al. 2008; Kaplan et al. 2010; Valette-Florence and De Barnier 2013).

This research takes a young consumer's perspective to examine the personalities that are specifically associated with luxury fashion brands and tests the applicability of Aaker's brand personality framework in the context of luxury fashion brands. More specifically, it aims to answer two research questions: first, do luxury fashion brands possess a personality, as posited by Aaker (1997), and if so, what are the underlying dimensions of the personality of luxury fashion brands? Second, although it appears that the brand personality framework of Aaker (1997) has proven to be widely applicable, little is known about its applicability in the luxury fashion brands context. Hence, this study also aims to test that.

6.2 Literature Review

6.2.1 Brand Personality in Brand Management

The concept of personality is usually attributable to humans; however, this notion can also be used to define the characteristics of a non-human being, such as fashion brands.

Anthropomorphic theory offers an explanation for why people tend to grant human qualities to brands (Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Maehle et al. 2011). Anthropomorphizing 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 and McGill 2007). By ascribing human characteristics to products, consumers decrease their uncertainty in a complex, ambiguous purchasing and consumption environment. 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 concept of brand personality offered in the literature recognizes the use of human descriptors to portray brands (Freling and Forbes 2005; Geuens et al. 2009; Maehle et al. 2011; 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) helps explain why brands are provided with personality. Belk (1988) maintained 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 and Kapferer 2003; Belk 1988). 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 and Bettman 2005; Sung 2011; Sung and Kim 2010; Sung and Tinkham 2005).

Sirgy’s self-congruity theory (1982) also provides conceptual linkages relevant to brand personality. The self-congruity theory holds that consumers compare their self-concept with the image that a brand projects and, in turn, prefer brands that are consistent with their self-concept. Studies have found support for the notion that consumers choose products and services that they feel possess personalities that are similar to (congruent with) their own (Arora and Stoner 2009; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Phau and Lau 2001; Sirgy 1982). Brands reflect the complete experience that customers have with products.

6.2.2 Measurement and Dimensions of Brand Personality

In contemporary business environment, the factors such as continuous branding innovation in marketing and the known effects of personality on behavior 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 extensive research by carefully selecting 37 brands from various product categories and adopting a lexical approach. Aaker (1997) developed a 42-item measurement scale called the Brand Personality Scale which is a framework to describe and measure the “personality” of a brand in five core dimensions, each divided into 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 generalizable, 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).

Following Aaker's (1997) seminal work, other researchers have attempted to apply Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework and scale in different contexts. For example, Aaker et al. (2001) specifically studied the extent to which Aaker's (1997) structure of personality attributes associated with commercial brands differs across cultural contexts. Sung and Tinkham (2005) examined brand personality structures in the United States and Korea based on Aaker's (1997) framework and they concluded that several brand personality dimensions have similar meaning in both Korea and the United States, whereas other dimensions are culture-specific. Some studies have begun with Aaker's brand personality framework and provided unique variations that were drawn from a particular market context. For example, adopting Aaker's framework, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) revealed that the brand personality scale 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 et al. (2010) studied dimensions of news media brand personality, guided by Aaker's brand personality study.

While accepting the importance of Aaker's work, a few researchers have also sought to develop factor models of brand personality. For example, Bosnjak et al. (2007) developed a 20-item instrument and a four-factor structure (including drive, conscientiousness, emotion, and superficiality) in the German cultural domain. Geuens et al. (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) were aggregated across a wide variety of product categories (Austin et al. 2003). Similarly, most of the brand personality studies after Aaker (1997) (Aaker et al. 2001; Bosnjak et al. 2007; Geuens et al. 2009; Milas and Mlačić 2007; Sung and Tinkham 2005) measure brand personality on an aggregate level across multiple brands of different product categories. However, recent studies have 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 and Stoner 2009; Kaplan et al. 2010; Kim et al. 2010; Valette-Florence and De Barnier 2013). Valette-Florence and De Barnier (2013) pointed out that measurement of brand personality depends on the area of application, and their study results show 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 which justify creating an appropriate scale and specific personality traits in particular sectors (Arora and Stoner 2009; Kaplan et al. 2010; Kim et al. 2010; Valette-Florence and De Barnier 2013), in this

paper we seek to define brand personality measurement scales adapted to a particular product category and sector—luxury fashion brands.

6.2.3 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 and a rapid growth in emerging markets, which created “the new rich” (Amatulli and Guido 2011). Luxury fashion goods are comprised of apparel, accessories, handbags, shoes, watches, jewelry, 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 and Guido 2011). Luxury fashion sector counts for the major proportion of global luxury goods sales and is one of the strongest product category growth during recent years (Fionda and 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 and Moore 2009).

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 (Vigneron and Johnson 1999). This perspective is reinforced by Jackson (2004) who defines the luxury fashion brand as characterized by exclusivity, premium prices, image and status, which combine to make them desirable for reasons other than function. Specifically, Fionda and Moore (2009) identified nine key components that are inherent to the creation of a luxury fashion brand, including clear brand identity, marketing communications, product integrity, design signature, premium price, exclusivity, heritage, environment and service, and culture.

Young consumers are an important consumer market for luxury fashion brands (Kim et al. 2012). Established luxury brands have reached out to young luxury consumers. Young luxury consumers, the fastest growing segment of the luxury market, demand fashion-driven luxury product offerings (Doss and Robinson 2013). Park et al. (2008) reported that Korean young consumers are rapidly replacing middle-aged consumers as the main consumers of global luxury brands. Younger generations in Korea want to buy luxury fashion in which they could express themselves to make them unique in a rather uniform society (Park et al. 2008).

To address the needs of this new luxury customer population, luxury brands have aggressively adopted various strategies, including using up-market to down-market pricing strategies and introducing fashion-driven product offerings to expand access to their products (Doss and Robinson 2013). The traditional conspicuous consumption model for luxury brands has been transformed into an experiential luxury awareness shaped by a shift in how consumers define luxury (Doss and Robinson 2013).

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 (Plummer 1985). Personality traits can be associated with brands in a direct way, through corporate reputation, product quality, shopping, and usage experience (Aaker 1997). In an indirect manner, personality traits can be attributed to brands through marketing programs 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). Accordingly, the aim of this current study is to identify brand personality dimensions within the luxury fashion brands category by using the brand personality framework developed by Aaker (1997).

6.3 Research Design and Methodology

6.3.1 Selection of Brand Personality Attributes

The present study examines young American consumers' perceptions of luxury fashion brands. Literature shows that young consumers have an affinity for luxury brands and they are potentially lucrative market segment for luxury fashion brands (Doss and Robinson 2013; Kim et al. 2012). 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 U.S. university were invited to participate in this free association activity. Though college students were not traditionally the target market for luxury products, young consumers including college students are gaining more attention from the luxury brands due to their strong spending power and their recent spending on luxury items (Silverstein and 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 their using a non-luxury brand for this exercise, a list of 12 luxury fashion brands was provided for the students to choose from. This top luxury fashion brand list was compiled by referring to several sources including BloombergBusinessweek (Roberts 2012), Pinterest (Megginson 2013), 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, because those 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 and 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.

6.3.2 Sample and Procedure

As this study is to investigate personality characteristics associated with luxury fashion brands hence is exploratory in nature, a generalizable sample is not required (Yin 1989). A convenience sample of students enrolled at three large universities in the U.S. (one from the North, one from the Southeast, and one from the South) was used for this study. While these young aspirational consumers may not be able to afford all 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.

Majority of the participants were in the age from 19–21 (96 %), were female (67 %), and 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, a list of 12 brands was provided for the participants to choose the one that they are most familiar with. If the participant is not familiar with any of the provided brands, he/she can list one that he/she is 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 few others that were not considered as either luxury or fashion brands, such as Nike, American Apparel, and Express. Eight surveys were removed from the dataset due to referring to a non-luxury fashion brands. 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 answer questions regarding the personality of the chosen familiar brand:

In this section, we are interested in finding out your perception of human personalities associated to 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?”

6.4 Data Analysis and Results

6.4.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Following the procedures adopted in Aaker’s (1997) brand personality study, the data set was randomly split into two equal samples: an estimation sample and a validation sample. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with maximum likelihood extraction and varimax rotation method was conducted on the estimation sample to identify the dimensions that capture the personality traits for luxury fashion brands. A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out on the validation sample to validate the results from the EFA. This approach was employed to avoid capitalizing on chance in the sample data when both EFA and CFA are performed with the same samples (Byrne et al. 1989).

The results of the EFA on the estimation sample ($n = 204$) 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 et al. 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 well meaningfully. As a result, forty one 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:

1. Prestigious
2. Competent
3. Sociable
4. Creative
5. Snobby
6. Romantic

Determination of the factor labels followed a comparison of existing brand personality dimensions, which were identified in previous studies that use a similar methodology (Aaker 1997; Aaker et al. 2001; Hosany et al. 2006). Newly emerging factors, which were not present in the literature, were named after the representative attributes within the factor.

Table 6.1 shows the EFA results of the six factors extracted and the items loaded on each factor.

Table 6.1. EFA results on personality dimensions for luxury fashion brands

Traits	Prestigious	Competent	Sociable	Creative	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

Traits	Prestigious	Competent	Sociable	Creative	Snobby	Romantic
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

6.4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

To validate the results from EFA, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted on the validation data (n = 209) using Amos 19 (the structural equation modeling package). Anderson and Gerbing (1988) recommended the procedures for re-specification of a measurement model which involve: (1) making a problematic item relate to a different factor; (2) removing the item from the model; (3) connecting the item to multiple variables; or (4) correlating the error terms of two items. Accordingly, the initial measurement model was modified, by deleting four problematic items based on theoretical considerations as well as empirical examinations of the path coefficients, standardized residuals, and the modification indices. Model fit criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) were used for the measurement model: χ^2/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: $\chi^2/df = 1.63$, GFI = 0.81, CFI = 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.06, suggesting that the model is stable within the validation dataset.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the six factors varied from 0.71 to 0.92. Unidimensionality and convergent validity of the constructs were assessed by item-factor loadings, the composite reliability measure, and the average variance extracted (AVE) respectively. All factor loadings were significant and varied from 0.50 to 0.90, satisfying the convergent validity criteria. The

composite reliability coefficients varied from 0.68 to 0.93 and the AVE of each factor was greater than 0.5 (except for factor Creative which had 0.46 AVE). Therefore, the convergent validities for all the factors were confirmed (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Table 6.2 presents the factor loadings, Composite Reliability, AVE, and also the Cronbach's alpha for each factor.

Table 6.2. Confirmatory factor analysis and reliabilities

Constructs/indicators	Std. factor loading	Composite reliability (CR)	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>Prestigious</i>		<i>0.93</i>	<i>0.51</i>	<i>0.92</i>
Sophisticated	0.76			
Fashionable	0.77			
Upscale	0.74			
Prestigious	0.76			
Powerful	0.71			
Elite	0.69			
Wealthy	0.69			
Superior	0.68			
Lavish	0.68			
Elegant	0.64			
Sleek	0.63			
Successful	0.60			
Exclusive	0.57			
Glamorous	0.56			
<i>Competent</i>		<i>0.88</i>	<i>0.54</i>	<i>0.86</i>
Quality	0.81			
Professional	0.72			
Mature	0.70			
Confident	0.66			
Refined	0.66			
Authentic	0.63			
Reliable	0.60			
Composed	0.50			
<i>Sociable</i>		<i>0.68</i>	<i>0.51</i>	<i>0.71</i>
Sociable	0.77			
Spirited	0.64			
Friendly	0.52			
<i>Creative</i>		<i>0.76</i>	<i>0.46</i>	<i>0.79</i>
Creative	0.80			
Artistic	0.66			
Unique	0.65			
Ambitious	0.55			
Adventurous	0.52			
<i>Snobby</i>		<i>0.72</i>	<i>0.51</i>	<i>0.80</i>
Greedy	0.90			
Haughty	0.69			
Snobby	0.54			
<i>Romantic</i>		<i>0.78</i>	<i>0.56</i>	<i>0.76</i>
Secure	0.73			

Constructs/indicators	Std. factor loading	Composite reliability (CR)	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Sexy	0.72			
Romantic	0.71			
Sensual	0.70			

Aaker (1997) argued that personality dimension may contain sub-dimensions, called facets. Following the process used by Costa and McCrae (1992), Aaker (1997) found a distinct set of facets that provided a structure to justify which attributes to select to represent each dimension as well as texture to understand the dimensions in greater detail. For example, the American Sincerity dimension consists of four facets: Down-to-Earth, Honesty, Wholesomeness, and Cheerfulness (Aaker et al. 2001). Therefore, to represent each brand personality dimension accurately, a facet identification step was also included in this study. Identification of facets within the six factors was carried out on the estimation sample 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 had two facets (*elegant and prestigious*), explained 53.46 % of the variance. No sub dimensions were found for the remaining factors, indicating a one-dimension structure. Figure 6.1 depicts the extracted brand personality traits and their corresponding facets and dimensions.



Fig. 6.1. Luxury fashion personality dimensions and their facts

6.5 Discussion and Implications

This research aims to explore and identify the personalities associated with luxury fashion brands. To this purpose, a study focusing on luxury fashion brands and following the existing framework was conducted. To identify the brand personality dimensions for luxury fashion brands, a total of 413 subjects rated the top 12 luxury fashion brands on the 67 personality traits. The results of an exploratory principal components factor analysis suggested that young American consumers perceive that luxury fashion brands have six distinct personality dimensions and 41 personality traits (26 items were deleted during the exploratory factor analysis): *Prestigious, Competent, Sociable, Creative, Snobby, and Romantic*. The results of a

confirmatory factor analysis provided support for the stability of the six dimensions and 37 personality traits (4 more items were deleted in the CFA process).

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 Creative*), which reflects the clear image of luxury fashion brands in consumers' minds. The six dimensions identified in this study indicate that the personality of luxury fashion brands can be characterized in terms of the functional dimension (*Competent*), the experiential dimension (*Sociable, Creative, 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). In summary, luxury brands can deliver high levels of symbolic, experiential and functional value at the end of the utilitarian-luxury continuum (Berthon et al. 2009).

The consumption of luxury brands is oftentimes viewed as the symbol of social status and wealth (Vigneron and Johnson 1999). The most important personality dimension identified in this study is *Prestigious*, which consists of traits such as upscale, exclusive, wealthy, superior, and successful. 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 editions lines (Fionda and Moore 2009). Remarkably but not surprisingly, a negative personality dimension emerged in this study, namely *Snobby*. It encompasses negative items such as greedy, haughty and snobby. This dimension is the reflection of characteristics defining snob (or conspicuous) consumers on luxury fashion brands' personality. Conspicuous or luxury consumers can be categorized as snobs, who have higher socioeconomic status while refraining from products consumed by many (Corneo and Olivier 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 young 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 and Brashear 2008).

Luxury products are likely to provide subjective intangible benefits such as emotional and experiential values (Vigneron and Johnson 1999). The results of this study support the notion that the key element that differentiates luxury from other industries is the paramount importance of creativity (Nueno and Quelch 1998). The dimension of *Sociable* refers to characteristics such as friendly, spirited, and sociable. The dimension of *Creative* consists of traits such as artistic, adventurous, and creative. Both dimensions (*Sociable and Creative*) emphasize the importance of creative excellence in luxury fashion product development. The fashion design element within luxury fashion products 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 and Moore 2009; Nueno and Quelch 1998). This study also identified a very special dimension for luxury fashion brands is, namely *Romantic*. It includes characteristics such as sensual, sexy and 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 study indicates that luxury fashion brands have been successfully created the association of love and romance in consumers’ minds.

The functional dimension is where the luxury brand has its material embodiment. The dimension of *Competent* in this study 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 and Bastien 2009). Previous studies have suggested that prestige/luxury is derived partly from the technical superiority and the extreme care that takes place during the production process (Vigneron and Johnson 1999). Luxury fashion brands are often portrayed as using best materials, best craftsmanship, hand finished, and attention to detail characteristics (Fionda and Moore 2009; Kapferer 2008; Radon 2002). The history and heritage of a luxury brand, which is considered crucial for the brand, brings an element of authenticity to the brand.

This research has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it makes three contributions. *First*, the findings show that Aaker’s (1997) brand personality framework is applicable to luxury fashion brands, while the study develops a new set of personality traits that marketers may utilize to assess personalities of luxury fashion brands. *Second*, the findings from this study confirm that young American consumers do associate particular brand personality dimensions with specific brand categories (such as luxury fashion brands). *Third*, this study 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). The implications of this research also are of significance for marketers and scholars 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 study 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 study provides insights into the underlying values that young consumers are seeking from luxury fashion consumption: the utilitarian value, the experiential value, and the symbolic value. This finding lends a theoretical guidance to the practitioners in the industry in their effort of brand equity building.

In the luxury market, there is evidence that the “luxury newcomers” (consists largely Generation Y) represent a big opportunity for luxury retailers to grow their business due to their large population and growing purchasing power. These young consumers have a high percentage of disposable income, are less brand loyal, and willing to experiment with luxury brands (Hutzler 2012; Jay 2012). The results of this study are based on a sample of Generation Y college students—a sample of young consumers from the USA who tend to have the same

reference point and understanding of luxury. Therefore, the findings of our study would be especially useful to help luxury retailers understand how the luxury newcomers perceive their brands so they can adjust their marketing strategies to cater to these young consumers. One strategy for accomplishing this goal is for global luxury marketers to develop bridging lines with fashionable designs and relatively affordable prices to attract young customers with considerably potential purchasing power. Companies which can make a connection with this potentially lucrative market segment may develop lifelong customers.

6.6 Limitations and Future Research

Since this study was deliberately performed for a specific category (luxury fashion), our findings only reflect American young consumers' brand personality perception of luxury fashion brands. For this reason, the scale ought to be reassessed with other product categories and with consumers from different cultural backgrounds and in different age groups (Aaker et al. 2001). In addition, from both an academic and practical standpoint, it would also be interesting to examine the antecedents and consequences of brand personality in the luxury fashion industry. Therefore, future studies could examine how to create brand personality through a variety of marketing variables (such as advertising and sponsorship) and what impact of brand personality has on other variables such as consumer loyalty and purchase intention towards fashion luxury brands.

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