

A New Fashion Consumer Typology: Dealing for Luxury via Electronic Markets

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Abstract

Once only being sold in exclusive retail stores at high prices, luxury fashion brands have begun to appear in online private shopping clubs. As a growing electronic market alternative, private shopping clubs provide daily deals to their consumers and attract discount shoppers. This is a new dynamic of luxury fashion consumption that brand managers and academics must observe. This study introduces a survey, conducted with 294 fashion consumers of online private shopping clubs in Turkey, to discover the impact of “materialism”, “deal proneness”, “orientations of electronic shopping”, and “perceived devaluation of luxury in online discount fashion shopping” on “discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets.” The results show that once being an issue of shame, hunting for the best luxury deal via private shopping clubs has now become an admired attribute of a consumer.

Keywords: Electronic Markets, Online Shopping, Private Shopping Clubs, Luxury Fashion, Deal Proneness, Materialism

Introduction

Private shopping clubs, as a rising form of electronic marketing, provide daily deals just for fashion brands and have become widespread in many countries. As defined by Baybars and Ustundagli (2011: 201), “private shopping is one of the concepts that serve as a members-only online shopping platform with big discounts and well-known brands.” The function of private shopping clubs is similar to that of the more common daily deal sites. The US’ most famous clubs are Rue La La, and Gilt.com, while Secretsales.com serves customers actively in the UK, Vente-Privée operates in France, and Brands4friends.de has customers in Germany. Buyvip.com is active around Western Europe, in countries such as Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria, Portugal, Poland, and the Netherlands. Additionally, Stilago.com is active in Central and Eastern Europe, including Belarus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Ukraine. Furthermore, Sukar.com is popular in such Middle Eastern countries as GCC, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt. Turkey’s leading private shopping clubs include Markafoni, Limango, Trendyol among others (Baybars and Ustundagli 2011).

Today, there is a big expansion in the luxury market covering fashion, watches and jewellery, perfumes and cosmetics, accessories and other items. This market reached \$840 billion in 2004 (Fiske and Silverstein 2004), and hit the \$1 trillion mark in 2010 (Truong 2010: 653), in which fashion and clothing had the biggest share of sales in 2007, standing at more than 44.3 % (Verdict Global Luxury Retailing Report 2007). Many people all over the world aspire to luxury and are familiar with a variety of luxury brands particularly in fashion. Research conducted in the US reveals that the Internet is an effective marketing communication media via luxury purchasers (Unity Marketing 2003). Now the luxury fashion brands have greater access to people around the globe since they have begun to appear on the Internet over the last decade. In recent years, luxury fashion brands have increased their presence in social media, as most of them now own at least one Facebook page (Phan 2011).

Also electronic markets became a strategic choice for the distribution and communication of these brands due to the easier access of consumers to the Internet as the Internet provides a long-term interaction and commitment between the consumers and the brand, along with lower costs relative to the on-site stores, (Nyeck 2004; Otim and Grover 2010). In Turkey luxury fashion brands like Gucci, Prada, Calvin Klein, Armani, or Versace show up in the main three private shopping clubs generally with their side products such as bags, watches, and shoes.

On the other hand, many well-known luxury brands have resisted appearing online and many still do. The appearance of the luxury fashion brands in electronic markets stirred the debate about how luxury fashion brands will be affected in terms of their perceived brand image when they appear in private shopping clubs. Drawing on the literature, this study has four research questions in order to understand the paradoxical dynamics of luxury fashion consumption of this new typology of consumers dealing for luxury online. The paper introduces a field research analysing the impacts of two personality traits “materialism” that explains the pursuit of luxury, “deal proneness” to probe the reason for following discounts, along with “orientation to electronic shopping” to explain the motivations of online shopping and “perceived devaluation of luxury in online discount fashion shopping” on rising “discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets.”

1. Consumption of Luxury Fashion Brands through Electronic Private Shopping Clubs

According to Seringhaus' (2005) classification of luxury products, there are eight categories; fashion and leather, perfumes and cosmetics, watches and jewellery, cars and yachts and aircraft, wine and spirits, hotels and travel, luxury retail, and others. Fionda and Moore, however, suggest four main categories for luxury products: fashion, perfumes and cosmetics, wines and spirits, and watches and jewellery. They have added seven more categories to this classification, which are luxury automobiles, hotels, tourism, private banking, home furnishing and airlines (Fionda and Moore 2008). The brand managers of these categories abstained from appearing online until they decided that it was a necessity to meet the changing needs of consumers. They now presumably pursue high profits of electronic markets while preserving the brand's exclusivity. Studies indicate that private shopping clubs enhance the awareness of brands that are not very famous (Dholakia 2010; Edelman et al. 2011) while also offering well-known luxury brands. More importantly, the daily deals offered have the potential to distort the perception of luxury and in turn the perceived images of brands that reach their customers via private shopping clubs. Since luxury fashion brands, the focus of this study, have become more accessible through private shopping clubs with more affordable prices, this new form of electronic markets and their users gained significance as a newly emerging subject in the marketing literature (Kim and Martinez 2013).

1.1. Changing Perception of Luxury

The concept of luxury has been present in various forms since the beginning of human civilization. Luxury has always been used as a separator between social classes throughout history and still has a role in determining the codes of social distinction. The idea of owning exclusive, unique items from a luxury brand is both an aspirational dream and a desire (Joy et al. 2012). Consuming luxury items is different from consuming for basic human needs such as nutrition or shelter. Adam Smith (1776) was the pioneer to conceptualize luxury when he divided consumption into four categories as necessary (to maintain life), basic (for normal growth and prosperity of people and communities), affluence (goods that are not essential for growth and prosperity), and luxury (goods that are in limited supply, difficult to procure and/or very expensive) (cited in: Berthon et al. 2009: 46). For a long time there was a common belief that people consumed luxury products in order to impress others, and used them as a symbol of status, and self-esteem (Vigneron and Johnson 2004; Tsai 2005). Before the seventeenth century, the word “luxury” used to have a negative connotation, such as “extravagance” or “vicious indulgence.” Today, luxury is mostly used to define a struggle to improve (Berthon et al. 2009), and is associated with a desired lifestyle (Nyeck 2004). Okonkwo (2009a: 302) suggests that luxury is ‘a culture, and a philosophy, instead of a lifestyle.’

The common characteristics of luxury brands are their high price (Dubois et. al. 2001; Vigneron and Johnson 2004; Seringhaus 2005). Indeed, luxury brands are combinations of emotion, image and personality and that they correspond to self-concept congruency and reflect these values through the usage of particular symbols (Alleres 1997; Seringhaus 2005).

Therefore, it is fair to suggest that when it comes to luxury, the concept is more important than the material (Berthon et al. 2009) as uniqueness (Dubois et al. 2001; Vigneron and Johnson 2004), distinguishing style, global reputation, and strong heritage of expertise (Christodoulides et al. 2009), aesthetics and polysensuality, heritage and superfluous (Dubois et al. 2001), high quality, exclusivity, originality, creativity, craftsmanship, emotional appeal, enhanced brand image, premium pricing, and limited access (Phau and Prendergast 2000; Fionda and Moore 2008; Okonkwo 2009a). Vigneron and Johnson (2004: 489-491) state that overall luxury offers the consumers; conspicuousness, perceived uniqueness, extended self, hedonism and quality.

Empirical research suggests that the perceived value of a luxury brand changes through time, as well as varies by differences among consumers in terms of demographic and personality factors as well as their motivation (Christodoulides et al. 2009). Some researchers have analysed socio-economic target groups to differentiate between luxury and non-luxury (Christodoulides et al. 2009). Recent research has shown that the target of luxury is not only the wealthiest consumers anymore, there is a new expanded target market composed of the young and well educated middle class (Nyeck and Houde 1997; Nyeck 2004; Vigneron and Johnson 2004; Tsai 2005). The main reasons for the growth in luxury consumption are the increase in household incomes, a decrease in unemployment, an increase in the number of single people, and an increase in female employment besides the expanding suburban middle class (Fiske and Silverstein 2004). Another reason for the changing perception of luxury is the luxury brands' online presence that Porter (2001) emphasizes as a necessary strategic step to become prominent among competitors. Being characterized by mass access and mass appeal, what is now offered in electronic markets has the potential to contradict with the traditional perceptions about luxury.

1.2. New Luxury Consumer via Electronic Markets

There is a great debate about the online presence of luxury brands. According to Okonkwo (2009a), while some of the studies emphasize the incongruity of the Internet and luxury brands, some of them propose strategic marketing methods for enhancing the online success of luxury brands. The study done by Nyeck (2004), which was conducted with managers of French luxury consumption goods, finds out three types of perspectives are observed in terms of the online presence of luxury brands: conservative, sceptic, and open-minded. Conservatives believe that the Internet is not an appropriate medium for the marketing of luxury goods; sceptics think that the Internet can be used if its advantage is ensured; and open minded ones consider the Internet as a new method which adds value to the brand. Online luxury marketing is still in its infancy but seems to have high growth potential. Not only being on the web or selling on the web, a luxury brand's marketing activity using electronic platforms entertains customers as a social network activity while at the same time enabling customized information searching (Kim and Ko 2012). Brand managers have to seek new ways of making good use of the Internet aiming to satisfy the new clusters of luxury seekers that make their purchases online.

According to Nyeck (2004), luxury consumption serves personal motivations such as the pursuit of pleasure, beauty, and perfection, thus the perceived value may change depending on personality factors. Kasser and Ryan's (1993) two dimensional classification of extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations points out that consumers motivated by external factors generally tend to buy luxury goods in relation to conspicuous consumption behaviour, rather than an internal search for quality or self-directed pleasure. In parallel, Tsai (2005) believes that it is now possible to analyse motivations of luxury consumption on two bases: socially oriented and personally oriented. Personal orientation is about intrinsic self-fulfilment whereas social orientation is about the extrinsic impressing of others (Truong 2010). New luxury consumers are more personally oriented when compared to socially oriented status seekers of the past (Tsai 2005). This new target of luxury is individualistic, creative, aspired intrinsically, and expressing himself/herself through his/her choices (Atwal and Williams 2008).

The reason why luxury brands are thought to be inadaptable to the Internet is actually all about the gist of the luxury brand in the perceptions of consumers. Okonkwo (2009a), states that the Internet as a retail arena is not a suitable place for luxury goods. Thus the expectations of luxury consumers for interactivity can be satisfied on-site rather than online as that may result in the distortion of the luxury perception. On the other hand, the 2009-2011 study of Dholakia conducted with 324 firms has revealed that the private shopping clubs attract the attention of deal seekers and only 19.9% of the daily deal customers returned to the offline store after their online purchase (Dholakia 2011b). This is a unique choice for luxury consumers that is worth being probed further. This new consumer does not pursue exclusive on-site service and atmosphere while they also do not value price as an indicator of luxury, thus deal for price.

According to Baybars and Ustundagli (2011), when selling luxury goods, private shopping clubs have to serve the consumers' need for uniqueness which seems to be controversial since these clubs sell unique products but at cheaper prices. Thus, the Internet makes the luxury brands encounter the dilemma of limitedness and being ubiquitous (Vigneron and Johnson 2004). Besides, the Internet lacks physical contact, is much faster and more practical, has more product variety and is thus accessible irrespective of time and location, which overall are contrary to the nature of luxury. Online consumption continues to rise and it is expected that the followers of daily deals on private shopping clubs would become full price shoppers when they are pleased with the brand that they have bought (Blattberg and Neslin, 1990; Dholakia, 2011a).

RQ1: How is “deal proneness” associated with “discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets?”

RQ2: How are “orientations of electronic shopping (hedonic & utilitarian) motivation” associated with “discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets?”

RQ3: How is “perceived devaluation of luxury in online discount fashion shopping” associated with “discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets?”

According to Silverstein and Fiske (2005), the increase in materialistic personality in Western countries is one of the main reasons for the expansion of luxury products. The more materialistic consumers are, the more likely they have positive attitudes related to acquisition and assigning priority to material possessions (Wiedmann et al. 2009). Since materialism is found to be positively related to deal proneness (Mowen 2010), private shopping clubs have brought a new understanding to electronic shopping by targeting new luxury seeking consumers. Therefore, the suggestion of Atwal and Williams (2008) that although the Internet is perceived to damage the notion of luxury as the brand's exclusivity and limitedness inevitably withers in a massive and classless milieu, the daily deal sites offering discounts is a place of attraction for materialist people.

RQ4: How is “materialism” associated with “discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets?”

2. Method

2.1. Data Collection and Participants

The data for this study were collected through an online survey conducted with online luxury fashion brand shoppers via private shopping clubs in Turkey. The shoppers were chosen judgmentally from the users of three main private shopping clubs in Turkey selling luxury brands such as Prada, Versace, Calvin Klein, Armani and Gucci. These brands are described as “luxury brands” (Vigneron and Johnson 2004; Seringhaus 2005; Truong et al. 2008). They also adopt an exclusive distribution strategy in Turkey, and are sold only in districts and shopping malls hosting expensive and high-end brands.

Participants were recruited for the study via an e-mail that contained a summary of the study's goals and the URL for the online questionnaire. Following the removal of submissions with missing data, a total of 294 (59.2 % females) completed questionnaires remained for the main analysis. The mean age of the participants was 27.15 years (Std.dev. = 7.56). The consumers of luxury products are expected to be in the later stages of adulthood in general. On the other hand, since the focus of the study is luxury shopping via electronic markets, the participants are purposively young aged. The younger and well-educated populations have already integrated Internet usage extensively as a part of their personal and social lives (Meyen et al, 2010) and have also formed a new target of luxury by becoming involved in luxury consumption (Tsai, 2005). The sample is also highly educated (all high school and over) as expected. The income rates show that middle class consumers are also included in the sample. Demographic information of the participants is reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Age	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min Value	Max Value
	294	27.15	7.56	18	59
Sex	Frequency f	Percentage %	Income	Frequency f	Percentage %
Female	174	59.2	0-700 TL	50	17.0
Male	120	40.8	701-1200 TL	73	24.8
			1201-3000 TL	78	26.5
			3001-5000 TL	45	15.3
			5000 +TL	48	16.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>294</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>294</i>	<i>100</i>

2.2. Measures

This study utilized a cross-sectional design comprising several self-report measures. The data was collected by a structured online questionnaire that contained a six-item scale of “materialism” (Richins 1987), a three-item scale of “deal proneness” (Roy 1994), a five-item scale of “utilitarian orientation of electronic shopping,” a seven-item scale of “hedonic orientation of electronic shopping” (Delafrooz, Paim, and Kahatibi 2009), one-item of “perceived devaluation of luxury in online discount fashion shopping (i.e. when a luxury fashion brand is sold via private shopping clubs, my perception about the luxury of the brand is distorted)” and one-item of “discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets (i.e. I prefer to buy online rather than on-site when a luxury fashion brand is sold via private shopping clubs).” Aside from the demographic questions, all scaled questions were asked through a 6-point Likert scale (1: totally disagree – 6: totally agree). The wording in scales were processed by back-translation and pilot tested.

2.3. Findings

To assess the relative predictive value of independent variables, “materialism,” “deal proneness,” “utilitarian orientation of electronic shopping,” “hedonic orientation of electronic shopping,” “perceived devaluation of luxury in online discount fashion shopping” were entered into a multiple regression analysis with the dependent variable “discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets.” Multi-collinearity checks were done over the variance inflation factor (VIF). Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed generally moderate correlations between the six constructs (Table 2).

Table 2: Correlation Matrix (N=294)

Perceived Devaluation of Luxury in Online Fashion Shopping	Discount Luxury Fashion Shopping via Electronic Markets	Materialism	Deal Proneness	Hedonic Orientation of Electronic Shopping	Utilitarian Orientation of Electronic Shopping	Perceived Devaluation of Luxury in Online Discount Fashion Shopping
Discount Luxury Fashion Shopping via Electronic Markets	1					
Materialism ($\alpha=.815$)	.252**	1				
Deal Proneness ($\alpha=.787$)	.273**	.085	1			
Hedonic Orientation of Electronic Shopping ($\alpha=.924$)	.458**	.392**	.079	1		
Utilitarian Orientation of Electronic Shopping ($\alpha=.771$)	.382**	.220**	.101	.453**	1	
Perceived Devaluation of Luxury in Online Discount Fashion Shopping	-.119*	.250**	-.075	.124*	.016	1

Standardized beta-coefficients

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The results indicate that the relative ability of the model to explain variation in discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets is 32.9% ($F = 28.285$, $df = 293$, $p < 0.001$). Pearson Product-moment correlations (with pair-wise exclusion of missing cases) revealed that the dependent variable and the all independent variables aside from perceived devaluation of luxury in online discount fashion shopping are positively correlated. The β coefficients indicate the highest positive relationship to hedonic orientation of online shopping ($\beta = .403$, $t = 5.859$, $p < .001$), followed by deal proneness ($\beta = .290$, $t = 4.212$, $p < .001$), utilitarian orientation of online shopping ($\beta = .271$, $t = 3.447$, $p < .002$) and materialism ($\beta = .152$, $t = 1.939$, $p < .06$) are also found to moderately explain discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets. Besides, there is also a moderate correlation and a negative relationship between perceived devaluation of luxury in online discount fashion shopping and discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets ($\beta = -.173$, $t = -3.470$, $p < .001$). The change in luxury consumption dynamics show that the notion of uniqueness and expensiveness of luxury becomes vague when distributed online on a mass basis at a discount. The results are in line with recent literature emphasizing that consumers want something that enhances their luxury experience via a price deal even if it is a luxury brand. These changing values and consumption habits are driving not only the luxury brand management, but also the daily deal industry as well.

The negative relation of discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets with the perceived devaluation of luxury when shopping through private shopping clubs is an indication of the persistence of traditional luxury buying perceptions from the previous eras. Moreover, the positive correlation of personality trait materialism with the perceived devaluation of luxury in online discount fashion shopping is as expected. Christodoulides et al. (2009) emphasize that the perception of luxury shows variation among people. Richins (1994) found that people attaching importance to the materialism trait are more likely to value things that signal accomplishment and enhance the social status and appearance of the owners. Giving importance to material wealth rather than spiritual, emotional, and intellectual wealth is one of the most apparent indications of materialism (Workman and Lee 2011). In this study, on the other hand, materialism is also found to be positively correlated with discount luxury fashion shopping via electronic markets constructing a base for a new definition of the luxury consumer. This is a new electronic market segment searching for materialistic value through consuming luxury, but at a discount. The results indicate a new cognizance of a luxury consumer that satisfies their utilitarian motivations through dealing online and at the same time meeting the hedonic expectations of luxury of on-site retail shopping through online sites of private shopping clubs. They gratify themselves by accessing luxury through a deal. Clearly, consumers are actively redefining what luxury means to them and how they access luxury items.

3. Conclusion

A new luxury market arena, launched electronically, is observed in the discount economy of the global economic crisis: private shopping clubs. These electronic markets foster a new way of life for consumers and how they interact with luxury brands, while democratizing the markets through a wider reach of luxury. Being offered online and on a deal basis increases the spread of the luxury brands by making it accessible not only to the rich elite but also to the masses. Furthermore, electronic luxury markets are also attractive for middle class consumers, since luxury shopping on-site at lavishly decorated stores may cause discomfort.

The findings of the current study provide crucial managerial implications regarding luxury fashion brands, their presence in electronic markets, and the new luxury fashion brand consumers. Traditionally, despite a fragile economy, brand managers of luxury fashion brands used to be against any sort of discounting or promotions with the intuition and store experience that any kind of price decrease could cause great damage to the perceived value of these brands. These managers believed that benefiting from a discount was not a motivation for luxury consumers. Furthermore, grabbing a deal or a discount would seem to erode the branding efforts, given the extent to which the consumers associate price with quality.

Today, the point where a brand is perceived as luxury on the continuum that starts with ordinary goods and ends with luxury is being questioned by consumers more than ever before (Tynan et al. 2010). The notion of luxury is very subjective and varies substantially among consumers and over time. The millennium consumers are constantly looking to explore and experience more from everyday routine purchases which have its reflections over luxury shopping. Even the most affluent consumers search for a new type of value as a new symbol of status: being a smart consumer. Participating in a private shopping club does not mean only benefiting from a discount. The conspicuousness of carrying a luxury brand has shifted to the conspicuousness of getting a good deal.

Once being an issue of disgrace, deal hunting has become an admired fact of the day. There is now an emerging literature on new luxury consumption. These changing values and luxury consumption habits combined with a rapidly changing electronic environment means that brands will have to constantly innovate. Offering deals is a trend of today and the luxury brands cannot keep their distance from this popular trend. Luxury brands need to revise their retailing strategies to understand how their existing consumers prefer to shop. Brands must continuously pursue innovative ways in the hyper competitive environment to meet the changing consumers' expectations of discounts and deals. Some established components of brands still remain intact while some blur to an extent. The marketers must now redefine what "branding" means in the context of electronic marketing based on daily deals.

Luxury shopping on-site is by nature a gratifying sensory experience. Especially people who belong to upper classes, being the traditional consumers of luxury brands, highly value the shopping experience. Spending time in elegant spaces and living that experience at the physical store instead of shopping online is a significant motivation for traditional luxury consumers. The brand managers of luxury fashion brands have to discover how they can make the consumption experience more rewarding via electronic markets so that both the hedonic and utilitarian orientations of these consumers are satisfied. As long as luxury brands cannot offer such experience within online shopping, customers may persist in shopping on-site. The managers must find ways to attract, and to entertain the consumers while participating in private shopping clubs. They have to transmit the authentic luxury in-store experience to an electronic market where the consumers are attracted to shop. Consumers expect to be glorified by every interaction through the same perfection and level of service whether in a brand's store or in its electronic boutique. The brand must offer a total luxurious experience of shopping whether in stores or online. Appearing in private shopping clubs may even cause a devaluation of luxury in the minds of traditional upper class consumers which seems to be a crucial threat to luxury brands. The brands have to overcome this adverse perception and focus on creatively compensating the electronic sales ceremony by offering a rich experience of the brand. The electronic boutique of the brand must not only augment this experience, but also offer a similar distinct experience of the luxury brand heritage. If a separate luxury category exists in the private shopping club, the customer must be welcomed by a page that visually reflects the exclusivity of the on-site luxury store. Besides, in order to simulate the real shopping experience, a 3D try on option may be proffered as well. The user data must be effectively analysed and the offers must be customised. The daily deals must be backed by in advance personalised information via mailing or mobile messaging by the brand to integrate the whole brand communication. Since the products may be sold out in a short time, this kind of informing would make the consumer feel quite privileged. The luxury brands must be in cooperation with private shopping club managers to be categorised as a "premium offer." Premium credit card promotions like luxury vacations must be offered. These actions will underline the cohesiveness of brand efforts; will build stronger emotional relationships with their customers by reassuring the indulgence expected. By having an integrated on-site and electronic marketing strategy companies are better able to compete.

The luxury brands that are rich with history but lacking innovation that cannot adapt to the changing consumption realm will inevitably fade out in this electronic world. Refining the literature and presenting field research about consumption of fashion via private shopping clubs, this study has significant outcomes for the luxury fashion brands of today as well as the future, not only to successfully integrate an electronic boutique to their channel but also to complement their whole market offer. Since this study is based on Turkish customers, further studies to be conducted in countries with different demographic and cultural profiles, will make a significant contribution to follow up this major social and technological transformation.

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