



Impact of self on attitudes toward luxury brands among teens [☆]

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to increase understanding of teenagers' self perception on attitudes toward luxury brands. The study investigates how social consumption motivations affect teenagers' attitudes toward luxury brands, how teens' self concepts can influence social consumption motivations, and whether peer pressure affects this relationship. The study also examines the effects of materialism on teenagers' social consumption motivations and attitudes toward luxury brands. The total sample consisted of 558 teenagers between the ages of 12 and 19 (grades 7 through 12). Hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. This study demonstrates that materialistic orientation is a powerful force in developing positive attitudes toward luxury brands. Teenagers who have clear versus cloudy self-beliefs have a strong tendency to resist social motivations to consume because the clearer they are about themselves, the less they attend to external sources and stimuli.

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is usually a complex, transitory period that includes rapid biological, social, and cognitive growth. Teens deal with a contradictory ideology; they want to create an individual identity but at the same time, still connect with their own group of friends (Gulland, 2006). In this phase, teenagers are continually learning how to behave appropriately in a new situation or phase of their lives (Steinberg, 1993). Not surprisingly, periods of transition are often accompanied by the need for a variety of products or services to ease the transition (Hartman, Shim, Barber, & O'Brien, 2006).

Not much is known about the spending motivations of this young group of powerful consumers, who just a decade ago, were not perceived to be particularly economically important (LaFerle, Edwards, & Lee, 2000). While teens do not earn large salaries, they have more disposable income than adults because most adolescents do not have to pay health insurance, credit card bills, mortgages/rent, supermarket or even utilities (Zollo, 1999). Consequently, teens' consumer behavior gained importance as a research topic due to teenagers' amount of disposable income.

Teens experience role requirements that often require different behaviors (Hopson & Adams, 1976). According to Moses (2000), teenagers' spending focuses on specific brands that their peers use, sometimes called "the right brands." Teens are shaping their identities, so having the "right" brands is a way to fit into the right group (Moses, 2000). Due to the growing spending power of teenagers, global marketers are trying to understand teenagers' wishes and needs in order to relate to reach this attractive consumer base.

Brand loyalty is widespread in teenagers than in adults and teens often avoid taking risks in appearance-related products given the importance of these products to their perceptions of self (Zollo, 1999). Branded products are less risky because they are easily recognizable and they serve as a status symbol; this combination makes them a safe choice for teens (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Wooten, 2006). Appealing to teenagers is an attractive business strategy because branded product companies hope that teens choose their products as lifetime brands.

Earlier studies explore self as a predictor of a variety of human behaviors, such as motivation, purchase intention, cognition, brand and advertising attitude (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2008; Tsai, 2006). Adolescents often pass through a stage of identity crisis (Erikson, 1959). Adolescents seek self identity by acquiring and accumulating selections of consumption objects (Belk, 1988).

Peer pressure may play an important role in a teenager's life, leading to a series of specific behaviors, such as what to eat, how to dress and how to speak. Teens create shared meanings with their friends, so their interpretation of reality is reasonably consistent with that of their peers (Solomon, 1983). Teenagers use their peers to align their values, discussing their personal reflections with friends, while looking

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for support and mutual understanding (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Therefore, consumer behavior research on teens should investigate the influence of peers.

In seeking to explain how teens' view of themselves and how the impact of peer pressure affect interest in and attitudes toward luxury brands, consumers' social motivation and materialism are important factors in making purchasing decisions (Heaney, Goldsmith, & Jusoh, 2005). In addition, the level of materialism among adolescents is very high (Bristol & Mangleburg, 2005; Larsen, Sirgy, & Wright, 1999; Roedder-John, 1999). Given that consumers attempt to gain acceptance into social groups through the products that they purchase (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), findings relating to materialism might explain why the luxury brand market has become increasingly important to teens.

The study here investigates how perceptions of the self impact teens' attitudes toward luxury brands. Using a framework that represents a sum of interrelated fields such as consumer psychology, sociology and marketing, the objectives of this study are (1) to increase our understanding of teenagers' attitudes toward luxury brands, (2) to understand the impact of self on social consumption motivations among teenagers, (3) to investigate how peer pressure affects teenagers' consumption motivations, (4) to analyze how social consumption motivations affect teenagers' attitudes toward luxury brands, and (5) to examine how materialism influences teenagers' motivations and attitudes toward luxury brands.

2. Hypothesis development

Conventionally, marketers segment luxury consumers in terms of demographic characteristics (e.g., social class)—variables that are not strong descriptors of the differences among luxury consumers (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993). Marketers need to understand the impact of social and personal influences on individual tastes and preferences in order to describe luxury consumers more richly. The current study proposes a framework intending to investigate the areas of reference group (peers and social groups in general), self, and materialism that are relevant for influencing teenagers' attitudes toward luxury brands. Fig. 1 depicts the conceptual model.

2.1. Self dimensions, social consumption motivation, and peer pressure

Self is a primary research topic in psychology (Brewer & Hewstone, 2004). Self-concept encapsulates personal traits and characteristics like personality and self-perceptions. Self-concept is what comes to mind when we think about ourselves (Neisser, 1993).

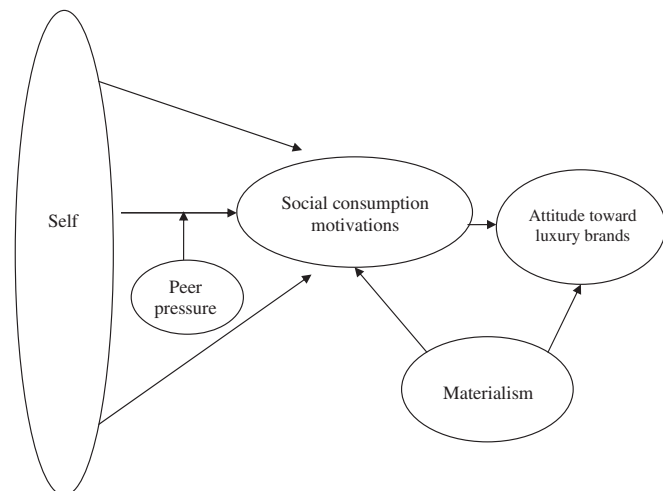


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

Self-concept comprises how a person perceives himself. Most prior studies about self are found in the arenas of psychology and sociology, and studies connecting self with consumer behavior are recent and not large in number (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). During adolescence, the process of building one's own character takes place. For that reason, examining self-concept assists in understanding how attitudes and consumption represent a way to express a teen's individual self to the outside world.

The stability of the self-concept can be gauged with the construct called self-concept clarity, which is the degree of consistency with which an individual perceives himself (Campbell et al., 1996). A well-developed self-concept is less susceptible to the influence of external factors. Individuals with a lucid self-concept deal better with stress and have healthier behaviors such as positive self-talk and better mental skills (Campbell, 1990; Campbell et al., 1996). Past research establishes a positive relationship between high self-concept clarity and some indices of psychological health and well-being such as high self-esteem and lack of mental problems (Campbell, 1990; Campbell et al., 1996). A poorly developed or ambiguous self-concept may direct people to rely on, and to be very affected by, external sources such as peer pressure, mass media, social consumption motivations, and other values such as materialism, which can influence individuals' attitudes and decision making processes (Kernis, Paradise, Whitaker, Wheatman, & Goldman, 2000).

Social consumption motivation increases with age and maturity (Churchill & Moschis, 1979) and plays a critical role in the development of teenagers' sense of self. Social consumption may be linked to self-concept clarity and has yet to be clarified by empirical research. Previous findings show that self-concept clarity is positively related to self-esteem (Campbell, 1990; Erikson, 1959) and individuals with high self-esteem are less influenced by external sources. Campbell (1990) finds that individuals with low self-concept clarity are more susceptible to and dependent on the social environment. The findings imply that teenagers with high self-concept clarity would construe their own behavior as separate from the social context.

H1. Self-concept clarity relates negatively with social consumption motivation.

Obtaining the support of reference groups (peers), from a popularity standpoint, depends largely upon the power of possessing specific luxury products (Wooten, 2006) and teenagers often feel social pressure to conform to peers with whom they socialize. Peer pressure to conform can influence how adolescents dress, what kind of music they listen to, and in what types of behavior they engage, including even risky behaviors such as using drugs, tobacco, alcohol, and engaging in sex (Robin & Johnson, 1996; Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000; Wells, 2006). Thus, peers can have a negative or positive influence on knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and behaviors. Meeus, Oosterwegel, and Vollebergh (2002) find that support from peers relates to a positive sense of identity, and that peer acceptance and academic performance relate to self-concept in early adolescence (Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992).

The intensity of peer pressure varies from situation to situation. Children and teenagers give in to peer pressure because they desire to be liked or because they are concerned that others may ridicule them if they do not go along with the group (Wooten, 2006). For instance, clothing is one of the most important status symbols for youth (Elliott & Leonard, 2004). For many consumers, the desire to impress others, including peers and those in different social or age groups, is very significant. Therefore, they will purchase specific brands of clothing to achieve the support of others (Prendergast & Wong, 2003).

Peer pressure is a powerful force among teenagers because of its power to change the way teens behave and care about external influences. Both peer pressure and self concept clarity emerge slowly from childhood to the teen years (Bachmann, John & Rao, 1993; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Peer pressure is a complex issue and

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