

**Facebook and luxury fashion: self-congruent posts and luxury
purchase intentions**

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study explores consumers' self-congruence with luxury fashion brands they mention on Facebook. It investigates the extent to which those brands are congruent with the actual self (ASC) or the ideal self (ISC), and whether ASC or ISC of luxury fashion brands on Facebook predicts purchase intention. It also examines trait antecedents of both ASC and ISC Facebook mentions of luxury fashion brands, specifically materialism, self-monitoring, and self-esteem.

Design/methodology/approach: Findings are presented from a survey of Facebook users who mention luxury fashion brands on the social medium.

Findings: Self-esteem was revealed as an antecedent of ASC luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook, while materialism and high self-monitoring predicted ISC luxury fashion brands. Only ASC luxury fashion brands mentioned online were positively associated with purchase intention.

Research limitations/implications: Results are exploratory and they are limited to those who are active Facebook users, and who mention a luxury fashion brand on Facebook.

Practical implications: The study offers implications for managers of luxury fashion brands seeking to utilise Facebook to enhance the purchase intention for their brands or to increase the idealization of the brand.

Originality/value: The paper provides new insights into the relationship between self-congruent mentions of luxury fashion brands on Facebook and purchase intention of

those brands, distinguishing between ISC and ASC. This research also offers valuable and useful insights into ISC and ASC antecedents.

Keywords: Luxury Fashion, Facebook, Self-congruence, Materialism, the Self, Purchase Intention.

Article Classification: Research paper.

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1. Introduction

Do Facebook posts about fashion reflect consumers' reality? Extant literature is divided on the relationship between the virtual and the actual. For instance, Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) suggest that social media such as Facebook offer a means for individuals to continue offline relationships, and so there is little difference between the 'real' self, and the ideal or actual self that is presented on Facebook. Similarly, Back *et al.* (2010) argue that false, idealised identities are difficult to present on Facebook, as Facebook friends would question the validity of the post, given their knowledge of the 'real' person. On the other hand, Schau and Gilly (2003) assert that the Facebook post reflects an idealised self and online posts may not reflect the person's material reality. In other words, when someone posts about a brand, such as luxury fashion, on Facebook, this may be for the purpose of self-expression and impression management, and have little relation to their intention to purchase that brand offline.

This study seeks to address the gap in knowledge about online and offline self-presentation through brands, by exploring consumers' self-congruence with brands they mention on Facebook, and investigating the extent to which those brands are congruent with the actual self (who they are) or the ideal self (the expansion of the self). In addition, it examines the relationship between actual self-congruence (ASC) and ideal self-congruence (ISC) Facebook mentions and purchase intention, and it investigates trait antecedents of both ASC and ISC mentions.

Drawing on theories of conspicuous consumption, this study focuses specifically on Facebook mentions about luxury fashion brands. Despite the extensive literature on luxury branding, there is still no consensus definition of luxury brand (Ko, Costello and Taylor, 2019). As noted by Kapferer (1997, p. 251), ‘the problem with the word ‘luxury’ is that it is at once a concept (a category), a subjective impression and a polemical term, often subjected to moral criticism’. According to Heine (2012, p. 60), luxury brands are those with ‘a high level of price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinariness, and a high degree of non-functional associations’. More recently, Ko *et al.* (2019, p. 40) propose that a luxury brand is:

‘a branded product or service that consumers perceive to: 1) be high quality; 2) offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional; 3) have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality; 4) be worthy of commanding a premium price; and 5) be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer’.

Common to the definitions is the idea that luxury brands have a strong connection with the consumer. These brands ‘go beyond functionality and emphasise the status and image of an individual’ (Liu, Mizerski and Soh, 2012, p. 924). Indeed, luxury brands are particularly helpful in shaping identity through self-expression (Belk, 2013). While much of the extant literature on luxury branding focuses on the brand in the offline, physical reality, Facebook posts about luxury fashion brands are also a form of conspicuous consumption, because conspicuous consumption is defined as ‘the social and public visibility surrounding the consumption of a product’ (Piron, 2000, p. 209). Given the highly visible nature of Facebook, and the opportunity it provides for self-

presentation (Hollenbeck and Kaikiti, 2012), luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook are an ideal focus for this study.

Due to its network structure, Facebook offers unique advantages for those who love luxury fashion brands. First, when a consumer ‘Likes’ a luxury brand’s Facebook page, that brand’s new posts appear directly on the consumer’s newsfeed on their personal Facebook page (Pentina, Guilloux and Micu, 2018). This presents opportunities for self-presentation through ‘Liking’ the luxury brand, as the luxury brand becomes part of the consumer’s virtual identity, and the brand persona is linked to the individual (Hollenbeck and Kaikiti, 2012). Second, unlike other social media, Facebook is a reciprocal network. That is, when person A befriends person B on Facebook, person B automatically becomes friends with person A too, and receives updates from Person A’s newsfeed (Trusov, Bodapati and Bucklin, 2010). Therefore, luxury brands that appears on Person A’s newsfeed will be visible to Person B. In this way, Facebook presents a unique opportunity to associate with brands that become part of one’s profile, where that profile is visible to all one’s friends on the social network.

As Person A may associate with brands simply because they are aware of the ability to impress Person B, it is possible that those brands are congruent with an ideal, rather than an actual self. More generally, self-congruity with brands is thought to enhance marketing effectiveness (Close, Krishnen and LaTour, 2009), and brand loyalty (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006). However, less is known about the effect of self-congruence of Facebook mentions on brand purchase intention. In recognition that Facebook posts may bear little resemblance to an individual’s offline reality (Schau and Gilly, 2003), this research explores the relationship between ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook, and purchase intention of those luxury brands. To the best of authors’ knowledge, this is the first study to investigate this issue.

Moreover, this study explores antecedents of ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook. Common to the literature on conspicuous consumption, luxury brand consumption, and self-congruence are the traits materialism (Rhee and Johnson, 2012), self-esteem (Pounders, Kowalczyk and Stowers, 2016; Sirgy, 1985) and self-monitoring (Bian and Forsythe, 2012; Hung *et al.*, 2011; Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2018; Rhee and Johnson, 2012). Therefore, this research investigates these traits as antecedents of ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook.

This study makes a number of important theoretical contributions. First, drawing on self-congruence theory, it provides new support for the role of social media in fostering purchase intention. In previous research, Hutter *et al.* (2013) identified the positive effect of social media use and purchase intention. This study advances this knowledge as it is shown that ASC luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook are significantly associated with purchase intention for those brands, whereas ISC luxury brands mentioned are not. Second, this research shows that trait antecedents influence the self-congruence of luxury fashion brand mentions on Facebook. Specifically, higher materialism and higher self-monitoring are associated with posts about ISC luxury goods. When self-esteem is high, individuals will post about ASC luxury goods.

The paper is structured as follows. It opens with the literature review, which presents the theoretical grounding for the hypotheses and the conceptual framework. Then, the methodology is described. The results of the study are provided and the discussion examines those results in relation to the literature. The paper provides guidance for brand managers of luxury fashion brands. Recommendations for further research are presented, and conclusions are drawn.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1 Facebook and the self-concept

Self-congruence, also referred to as self-image congruence, is ‘the match between consumers’ self-concept (actual self, ideal self, etc.) and the user image (or ‘personality’) of a given product, brand, store, etc.’ (Kressmann *et al.*, 2009, p. 955). Self-congruence can pertain to the ‘real’ actual self of consumers (Mälar *et al.*, 2011) or the ‘ideal’ self, which represents an aspiration or a means of self-improvement (Mälar *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, self-congruence with a brand may be reflected as ‘this brand’s personality is like who I really am’ (actual self) (Mälar *et al.*, 2011, p. 36), or ‘this brand’s personality is like who I would like to be’ (ideal self) (Mälar *et al.*, 2011, p. 36).

Extant literature (such as Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy, 2012; Graeff, 1996; Kaufmann *et al.*, 2016; Mälar *et al.*, 2011) has explored the influence of both ASC and ISC on consumer behaviour and brand outcomes. The literature has also suggested that congruity theory can be extended to studying consumer behaviour on social media. Facebook is a highly conspicuous medium where items mentioned form part of a virtual self (Belk, 2013). Consumers may wish to attain status through Facebook, because their mentions of luxury brands may signal something about their taste and status to others (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). On the other hand, mentions of luxury brands may provide a virtual means of fitting in socially (Liebenstein, 1950), and a signal of membership of one group, and disassociation with another (Christodoulides, Michaelidou and Ching Hsing, 2009). Thus, individuals may choose to represent an ideal or an actual self on Facebook, cognisant of their social network (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012).

In Belk’s (1988) conceptualisation of levels of self, the symbolic meaning of possessions as consumption objects may differ. When individuals acquire products such

as clothing that extend the self, these items become a ‘second skin’, in which others see them (Belk, 1988, p. 151). Similarly, when individuals mention brands on their social media profiles, they do so, at least in part, cognisant of the impression this makes on others. A Facebook mention includes any Likes, comments, shares of photographs or video of the brand that appears in the individual’s Facebook profile. People often mention brands in this way, to maintain and enhance their sense of self on social media (Strizhakova, Coulter and Price, 2011). In line with extant research (e.g., Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012), this study acknowledges that, on Facebook, the presentation of the self may represent the actual self or ideal self. However, to date, little quantitative research has been conducted on the ASC and ISC of Facebook posts.

2.2 Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1. The proposed model considers antecedents of ASC and ISC on Facebook posts about luxury fashion brands. It also investigates whether ASC or ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook predict purchase intention in the ‘real’ world. The theoretical support for the hypotheses is outlined below.

Figure 1 here.

2.2.1 Trait antecedents of self-congruent mentions of luxury fashion brands

2.2.1.1 Materialism

First, this study investigated the relationship between materialism and both ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook. Belk (1984, p. 291) defines materialism as ‘the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions’. As an extrinsic goal (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002), materialism is concerned with ‘making material possessions a central value in life, a sign of success, and a source of

satisfaction' (Rhee and Johnson, 2012, p. 257). Cohen and Cohen (1996) found that materialism is associated with traits such as narcissism, especially among younger consumers. Materialism also has long been associated with conspicuous consumption behaviours (Chaudhuri, Mazumdar and Ghosal, 2011). Therefore, on social media, it is likely that those high in materialism would take great care in their presentation of the self, as a form of conspicuous consumption. Schau and Gilly (2003) also assert that people use possessions to forge a narrative of the self on social media. The relationship between materialism and the self-congruent nature of such posts clearly merits further investigation.

In their study of apparel brands and adolescents, Rhee and Johnson (2012) found that, offline, materialistic individuals were more likely to prefer brands that linked to the ideal self, rather than to the actual self. On social media, one is less constrained by the need to consume the good in the 'real' world, in order to display the good online and enhance the virtual self-image (Schau and Gilly, 2003). In interviews with consumers of Facebook brand pages, Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) found that participants tended to self-report that brands that represented aspects of their ideal selves. Yet the study also found some evidence of blending of the two identities (ASC and ISC), when consumers found 'harmony between their ideal and actual selves' (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012, p. 401). However, their research did not investigate materialism as an antecedent of self-congruent Facebook mentions.

To authors' knowledge, no study has fully investigated the relationship between materialism and ASC or ISC of posts about luxury fashion goods. Therefore, to allow for the possible influence of materialism on both ASC and ISC, and also consider the influence of ASC and ISC as separate aspects of self-congruence, it is hypothesised:

H1a: Greater materialism will be positively associated with the ASC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook.

H1b: Greater materialism will be positively associated with the ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook.

2.2.1.2 Self-monitoring

Offline, extant literature identifies self-monitoring as an antecedent of behaviour in the context of luxury brands (Bian and Forsythe, 2012) and status consumption (Lertwannawit and Mandhachitara, 2012). Therefore self-monitoring is of interest to this study. Self-monitoring is ‘the self-observation and self-control guided by situational cues to social appropriateness’ (Snyder, 1974, p. 526). Individuals can be high or low self-monitors. While low self-monitors maintain a consistent presentation of the self in all situations (Rose and DeJesus, 2007), high self-monitors are concerned with the situational appropriateness of behaviour (Gangstead and Snyder, 2000), using surrounding cues to modify their behaviour. High self-monitors are therefore ‘people with a knack for presenting themselves in whatever way seems best for the social situation’ (Rose and DeJesus, 2007, p. 96).

On Facebook, individuals seek to create friendships under a high degree of visibility (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012), with high self-monitors more likely to take care in self-presentation, to avoid censure, and to achieve approval from others. Just as those who are concerned about social disapproval will believe that others judge them by their purchases (Kim *et al.*, 2016), they may be more likely to worry about their posts about products on social media. Will high self-monitors be willing to present their actual, or their ideal selves on Facebook? If high self-monitoring individuals wish to present the self which achieves most approval from others, they are likely to post about

brands congruent with their ideal selves, but perhaps less likely to seek to represent their actual selves. In order to fully investigate the relationship between self-monitoring and self-congruence, it is hypothesised:

H2a: High self-monitoring will have a non-significant effect on the ASC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook.

H2b: High self-monitoring will be positively associated with the ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook.

2.2.1.3 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is ones' evaluation of their self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). People with high self-esteem 'like, value and accept themselves, imperfections and all', and strive to confirm their self-views (Mälar *et al.*, 2011, p. 37). People try to maintain positive self-esteem, and one way to achieve this is through consumption of brands that are ASC or ISC (Sirgy, 1982). Self-esteem has long been discussed in relation to self-congruence (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006; Sirgy, 1982; Tuškej, Golob and Podnar, 2013), self-association and luxury brands on social media (Walker-Naylor, Lamberton and West, 2012), and self-congruence on Facebook (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). Therefore, self-esteem is relevant to this study.

Huber, Eisele and Meyer (2018) assert that both ASC and ISC are desired end states and are therefore connected to self-esteem. Sirgy (2018) observed that consumers seek to consume goods and services to help them realise their ideal selves, thereby boosting their self-esteem. He asserts that 'actual self-congruity is motivated by a need for self-constancy', whereas 'ideal self-congruity (ISC) is motivated by a need for self-esteem' (Sirgy, 2018, p. 200). In their research on brand attachment, Mälar *et al.* (2011, p. 45) suggested that consumers with high self-esteem prefer ASC brands, 'because of a

self-verification process’, while consumers with low self-esteem prefer ISC brands, for self-enhancement. In summary, extant literature would suggest that higher self-esteem would predict preference for ASC brands.

Yet extant research is limited in relation to virtual conspicuous consumption via brands mentioned on Facebook, where consumption is virtual. In line with the literature regarding offline brand preferences, Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) found that Facebook users with higher self-esteem were more likely to link to ASC brands, because they were sufficiently confident to reveal their true selves on Facebook. These findings contribute substantially to understanding self-congruence on social media. However, their study was qualitative in nature and relationships between self-esteem and ASC and ISC require further testing. Drawing on extant literature, it is hypothesised that greater self-esteem will predict ASC brands, but will not be significant in predicting ISC brands.

H3a: High self-esteem will be positively associated with the ASC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook.

H3b: High self-esteem will have a non-significant effect on the ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook.

2.2.2 Outcomes of ASC and ISC luxury fashion brand mentions: Luxury fashion brand purchase intention

Consistent with extant literature on luxury brands (for example Eastman *et al.*, 2018; Giovannini, Xu and Thomas, 2015; Hung *et al.*, 2011), this study also investigates purchase intention of luxury fashion brands. As Hung *et al.* (2011, p. 458) noted ‘much remains to be understood behind the motivating factors behind the purchase intention for luxury brands’. They assert that purchase intention ‘has wider implications and will

often have a positive effect on an individual's actions' (Hung *et al.*, 2011, p. 458). This study sought to understand purchase intention as behavioural effect (Fritz, Schoenmueller and Bruhn, 2017), as it has been suggested by the literature that Facebook mentions may not match ones' actions offline (Schau and Gilly, 2003).

Purchase intention is at the end of the affective stage of the hierarchy of effects model (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961), and critical to understanding the relationship between social media activities and the goal of developing consumers' willingness to buy the product (Hutter *et al.*, 2013). Specifically, this research sought to consider the relationship between both ASC and ISC, and purchase intention of luxury fashion brands. In an offline context, Giovannini *et al.* (2015) asserted that, for luxury purchases of young adults, the social motivation of conspicuous consumption had a positive effect on purchase intention. Eastman *et al.* (2018) also found that status consumption affects the purchase intention for luxury fashion. Is this also true when the 'consumption' of the brand is through mentions on Facebook? Will individuals have greater purchase intention for luxury fashion brands that they perceive reflect the actual self, or the ideal self?

The concept of authenticity informs these hypotheses (Fritz *et al.*, 2017). As an attribute, self-authenticity implies that the self is 'independent, original'... 'free from strategic self-presentation' and the 'true self' (Fritz *et al.*, 2017, p. 326). Fritz *et al.* (2017) found that ASC had a positive influence on brand authenticity, while ISC was non-significant. In turn, brand authenticity ultimately enhanced purchase intention. To add insights to the extant literature, this study therefore considered the relationship between ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook, and purchase intention for those luxury brands. Drawing on the work by Fritz *et al.* (2017), and considering that individuals may mention brands on Facebook solely for the purpose of

impressing others, with little intention to purchase (Schau and Gilly, 2003), the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: ASC of a luxury fashion brand mentioned on Facebook will have a positive effect on purchase intention for the brand.

H5: ISC of a luxury fashion brand mentioned on Facebook will have a non-significant effect on purchase intention for the brand.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Sampling and research design

This study was based on a sample of University students in Ireland. Consistent with previous research on luxury brands, this research sought to understand the student's attitude because their perceptions tend to affect their long run behaviours, and because students are more homogeneous in terms of their age, intelligence, and income, which reduces potential effects of covariates in results (Liu *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, younger consumers tend to start purchasing luxury brands at a younger age than their parents, and their level of spend on luxury fashion goods alone is increasing (Giovannini *et al.*, 2015), therefore they are an interesting cohort for this study. In addition, previous research on luxury brands has focused on students (e.g., Doss and Robinson, 2013; Godey *et al.*, 2013; Eastman *et al.*, 2018).

Studies examining online methods of self-presentation have also focused on student samples (Pounders *et al.*, 2016), and Belk (2013) argued that younger consumers are more likely to see possessions as part of the extended self. Student samples and samples of young consumers are also commonly used in related studies such as self-congruence and brand preferences (Rhee and Johnson, 2012; Graeff 1996),

materialism and self-monitoring (Bearden and Rose, 1990; Rose and DeJesus, 2007), as well as luxury brands and Facebook (Kim and Ko, 2012). Therefore, a student sample was considered appropriate for this research.

As noted earlier, this study focuses on the Facebook social network in particular, due to its advantages as a reciprocal network (Trusov *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, items mentioned on Facebook are very visible to others on the network, and can be utilised to enhance the presentation of the self to Facebook friends (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). Furthermore, it acknowledges Tian and Belk's (2005) contention that persons outside of the home, such as in the workplace, reveal 'aspects of self', and may seek to extend the self by displaying personal possessions. It is suggested that an individual's Facebook page offers them a means to virtually display those 'aspects of self' in the out of home context.

To protect the respondents' identities, the study was distributed to all students at the Irish University, via a hyperlink within an email from the University's Students' Union. Respondents accessed the survey via the hyperlink which linked to the SurveyMonkey survey hosting site. As an incentive, participants who answered the survey in full were entered into a draw for an iPad mini 2. Two screening questions were included. First, participants were required to have an active Facebook account, accessed within the past month. Second, participants were required to have mentioned a luxury fashion brand on Facebook in the past year. To clarify the meaning of 'mention' in the study, respondents were told the following: 'For example you might have 'liked' the brand, or shared a photo of the product, or posted a selfie of you with the brand, or added a reaction emoticon to a post about the brand, or made a comment on your profile about the brand. These are all mentions of the brand'.

Following previous studies (e.g., Bian and Forsythe, 2012; Francis *et al.*, 2015; Shukla *et al.*, 2016), the students were allowed to identify a fashion clothing or accessories brand they classified as 'luxury'. By taking this approach we draw on Kapferer (1996, p. 252) who stated 'what is luxury for some is just ordinary for others'. The important point is that the individual who chose to mention the brand on Facebook perceived the brand to be a luxury brand, and mentioned the brand with this belief in mind. For them, the brand they mentioned served an expressive function as a luxury brand. Therefore, the survey stated: 'Luxury means different things to different people, so think about a brand that you would consider to be a luxury'.

In the survey, it was explained 'Clothing might include coats, shirts, sweaters, jeans, shoes or other clothing you might wear every day or on special occasions. Accessories might include sunglasses, wallets, headphones, scarves, bags, or watches'. Respondents were asked to answer all questions in the survey thinking about the brand they had mentioned on Facebook. Where more than one brand was mentioned on Facebook by a single respondent, participants were advised to 'think about the brand that comes to mind first' and to answer all questions thinking about that brand. In total, completed responses were received from 138 respondents who had both an active Facebook account, and had mentioned a luxury fashion brand on Facebook in the past year.

A profile of the survey respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 here.

3.2 Measures

The study elicited attitudes using the following measures from the literature (see Table 2):

Materialism was measured using the Richins' (1987) scale. Items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree'; 7 = 'strongly agree'), in line with the literature.

Self-monitoring was measured using the attention to social comparison influence (ATSCI) scale by Lennox and Wolfe (1984). This scale was derived from the original self-monitoring scale (Snyder, 1974). In particular, the measure has a strong relationship with social anxiety (Bearden and Rose, 1990). Therefore it was considered appropriate for the study on Facebook mentions, as Facebook is socially visible. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'always false'; 5 = 'always true').

Self-esteem was measured using the scale by Rosenberg (1965). In line with the literature, items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = 'strongly disagree'; 5 = 'strongly agree').

Actual self-congruence (ASC) and *ideal self-congruence (ISC)* were measured using the direct measure of self-congruence, based on Sirgy *et al.* (1997). In line with the process outlined by Sirgy *et al.* (1997) the following statement was first presented: 'Think about the luxury clothing or accessories brand that you mentioned on Facebook. Take a moment to think about that brand as if it were a person. Describe this person in your own mind using personality characteristics such as reliable, cool, etc.' Both ASC and ISC were measured using 5-point Likert scales, in line with the literature (1 = 'strongly disagree'; 7 = 'strongly agree').

Luxury fashion brand purchase intention was measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree'; 7 = 'strongly agree') from Bian and Forsythe (2012).

3.3 Common method bias assessment

As this study relies on data from self-reported measures in a one-time survey, several techniques were used to address common method bias. Following Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), both procedural and statistical methods were employed. Regarding procedural methods, participation in the study was voluntary and the process guaranteed anonymity and data confidentiality. This reduced the possibility that participants responded artificially or in a dishonest way (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, the dependent and independent variables included in the questionnaire were introduced on different pages of the electronic survey, preventing respondents from inferring cause-effect relationships among the constructs. Regarding statistical procedures, a full collinearity test based on variance inflation factors (VIFs) was implemented. This test specifies that a VIF value greater than 3.3 suggests the existence of common method bias (Kock, 2015). Estimations showed that VIF values ranged from 1.071 to 1.181. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest the presence of common method bias in this research.

4. Analysis and results

To test the proposed model, Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with the software SmartPLS 3.0 was used (Ringle, Wende and Becker, 2015). PLS is more suitable when, as in this case, the sample size is lower than 250 (Reinartz, Haenlein and Henseler, 2009) and the conceptual model includes many indicators and latent variables (Chin, 2010; Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2011). The measurement and the structural model are described next.

4.1 Measurement model results

First, the measurement model was assessed. The indicator reliability was evaluated based on the criterion that loadings should be higher than 0.6. Results suggested the deletion of two items of the materialism measure, four items of the self-monitoring construct and one item of the self-esteem scale, because they had factor loadings lower than 0.6. Once these items were removed, all standardised factor loadings were above 0.6, which indicates that individual item reliability was adequate (see Table 2). Moreover, the composite reliabilities (CR) of the constructs were greater than 0.7, which suggests that they are internally consistent (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The average variance extracted (AVE) values were also above 0.5, which indicates that the constructs met the convergent validity criteria (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was also supported. In all cases, the square root of the AVE for any two constructs was greater than the correlation estimate for any two constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 here.

4.2. Structural model results

The analysis of the hypotheses was based on the examination of standardised paths. The path significance levels were estimated using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resampling iterations (Chin, 1998). The model accounted for 13.6% of the variation of ideal self, 10.1% of the variation of actual self, and 11.2% of the variation of brand purchase intention. The predictive relevance of the model was also assessed through the Stone-Geisser test. The results show that the Q^2 value for the dependent variables was positive.

As can be seen in Table 3, the results indicate materialism predicted ISC positively and significantly ($\beta = 0.275$, $t = 3.434$), providing support for H1b. However, H1a was not supported, as the relationship between materialism and ASC was not significant ($\beta = 0.149$, $t = 1.484$). Self-monitoring was positively and significantly associated with ISC ($\beta = 0.179$; $t = 2.347$), and non-significantly associated with ASC ($\beta = 0.055$; $t = 0.520$), supporting H2b and H2a respectively. Similarly, as proposed in H3a and H3b, self-esteem had a positive and significant influence on ASC ($\beta = 0.276$; $t = 2.996$), but had no impact on ISC ($\beta = 0.035$; $t = 0.362$).

Regarding the relationship between ASC and ISC, and purchase intention of luxury fashion brands, the results show that ASC positively influenced purchase intention for the brand mentioned on Facebook ($\beta = 0.238$; $t = 2.571$), supporting H4. Similarly, as hypothesised in H5, ISC did not have a significant effect on purchase intention for the brand ($\beta = 0.164$; $t = 1.690$).

Table 3 here.

5. Discussion

This study draws on theories of the self-concept and conspicuous consumption to investigate the self-congruence of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook, distinguishing between luxury fashion brands that are congruent with the actual self (ASC) and those that are congruent with the ideal self (ISC), to identify trait antecedents of ASC and ISC, and to explore the relationship between ASC and ISC luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook and purchase intention for those brands.

Findings reveal that antecedents of ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook are different. The study indicated that materialism was

significant in predicting ISC, but not ASC. This finding adds to the existing materialism literature, as it is seen that if ‘making material possessions... a sign of success’ (Rhee and Johnson, 2012, p. 257) is important to the consumer, they are also more likely to show brands on Facebook that reflect their ideal self. Moreover, the finding supports the literature that suggests materialism is associated with conspicuous consumption (Chadhuri, Mazumdar and Ghosal, 2011), as the materialistic individual is choosing a brand that most reflects an ideal, rather than a brand that reflects the ‘true’ self. This result also empirically supports previous qualitative findings by Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) that individuals tend to express an ideal self on Facebook. This study finds that this is more likely when the individual is more materialistic.

Furthermore, as expected, findings show that high self-monitors are more likely to mention ISC luxury brands, but this relationship is not significant for ASC luxury fashion brands. In line with Rose and DeJesus (2007), the results show that participants on Facebook also wish to present themselves in a way that reflects them best, and therefore choose to reflect an ideal self, rather than their ‘true’ selves, when they mention luxury fashion brands on Facebook. It is suggested that the public nature of Facebook, and the high degree of visibility of ones’ choices to the social network, influences the selection of ISC luxury fashion brands by high self-monitors. The relationship between ISC luxury fashion brands mentions and actual purchase intention for those brands will be discussed later.

By contrast, this study found that high self-esteem predicted ASC luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook, but was not significant in predicting ISC luxury fashion brands mentioned. These findings show that people with a high self-worth are motivated by the same need for self-constancy on Facebook as they are offline (Sirgy, 2018). Again, the findings provide empirical support for the suggestions by Hollenbeck and

Kaikati (2012) that higher self-esteem would predict ASC posts on Facebook, because people are confident to reveal their true selves. In this research, this holds true for luxury fashion brand mentions.

These findings therefore show a distinction between antecedents of ASC luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook and antecedents of ISC luxury fashion brands mentioned, even when the brands mentioned are all luxury fashion brands. These results would suggest that some luxury can be considered 'real' to the self, and other luxury can be considered 'ideal'. Further research would investigate this distinction between ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands, both in terms of their use for self-presentation on social media, and offline.

Finally, this study sought to identify whether ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook resulted in purchase intention for those brands. By doing this, this research contributes to the extant understanding of motivating factors for the purchase of luxury brands (Hung *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, the study distinguished between ASC and ISC mentions of luxury fashion brands. The findings revealed that only ASC luxury fashion brands are positively associated with purchase intention for the brand. By contrast, the relationship between ISC luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook and purchase intention for those brands was not significant. These findings add insights to the contention by Schau and Gilly (2003) that individuals who post on Facebook may present brands that are outside of their material realities, with little intention to purchase them. Results show that those who post about luxury on Facebook will intend to purchase those brands only when the brand is congruent with the actual self. For young consumers with a more limited purchasing power, luxury brands can be seen as 'desirable and a sign of achievement' (Godey *et al.*, 2013, p. 235). Further longitudinal research should investigate whether the passage of time would influence

the relationship between ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook now, and purchase intention at a future date.

Moreover, O’Cass and McEwen (2004, p. 34) suggest that luxury good acquisition can be a form of status consumption which is private, to ‘value status and acquire products that provide status to the individual’. It is suggested that individuals who mention goods that reflect the actual self, are doing so to gain intrinsic benefits from displaying their choice. These brands may be more ‘quiet’ luxury goods (Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2018), which are more discreet or minimalistic. Further research would investigate whether ‘quiet’ luxury goods are more likely to lead to purchase intention.

6. Managerial implications

This study also has implications for managers of luxury fashion brands. Consistent with the findings of Hutter *et al.* (2013), it indicates the importance of achieving social media mentions in fostering purchase intention. Moreover, this research provides new insights in this area, as it is shown that managers should be aware that individuals who post about their brands may be reflecting their actual selves, or their ideal selves. Yet findings indicate that only the brands that reflect the actual self will lead to purchase intention. Earlier it was noted that brands that are ASC are considered to be more authentic (Fritz *et al.*, 2017). If managers wish to enhance consumers’ perception of ASC of luxury fashion brands, thereby enhancing purchase intention, they could focus on messages about the authenticity of the brand, with messages about the brand’s originality, and avoidance of strategic self-presentation.

By contrast, luxury fashion brand managers may wish to retain the exclusivity of the brand, focusing less on immediate purchase intention, but instead ensuring that the

majority of consumers perceive the brand's association with an ideal, not actual, self. The findings show that high self-monitoring and materialism predict ISC mentions of luxury fashion brands. To enhance ISC mentions, brand managers could ensure marketing communications strategies would appeal to these traits. For example, mentions of status, prestige, or social desirability associated with the brand may appeal to highly materialistic individuals, and messages about reference group approval may appeal to high self-monitors, leading them to post about those ISC luxury fashion brands.

Managers seeking to develop and build relationships with consumers can benefit from the insights of this study. First, findings show that ASC of luxury brands is associated with purchase intention. Therefore, managers seeking to build immediate consumption-based relationships with consumers should appeal to the 'actual self'. As self-esteem was found to be associated with high ASC, appealing to the consumer's self-esteem and self-worth could be a means to encourage them to think of the luxury brand as congruent of the actual self. That is, linking the luxury brand to self-belief, or to self-worth, could have a positive effect on ASC, thereby enhancing purchase intention. Second, managers may wish to improve long-term relationships with consumers, enhancing consumers' lifetime value. We advocate that luxury brands that are perceived to be aspirational and appeal to the ideal self may enhance the long-term appeal of the brand. As noted earlier, we suggest that mentions of exclusivity and social desirability may enhance the perception of the brand as appealing to the ideal self. Results indicate that an ISC brand may not be associated with purchase intention. However, this result may be because the brand is perceived to be unattainable in the short term, yet highly desirable. We note that our respondents are young consumers. We suggest that these young consumers may build a bond with the brand that develops over

their lifetime, perhaps moving from advocates of the brand on social media, to loyal consumers when older.

7. Limitations and directions for further research

As with all research, there are limitations to this study. First, the study was conducted with younger consumers. It is acknowledged that luxury brands may be unattainable to some of this age cohort. However, earlier it was explained that extant research has also sought to understand this age cohort in the context of luxury brands (Eastman *et al.*, 2018; Godey *et al.*, 2013) and younger consumers start purchasing luxury brands at a younger age, and their level of spend on luxury fashion goods is increasing (Giovannini *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, their views about ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands mentioned on Facebook have relevance for theory and practice. Related to this, the sample size is limited by the fact that respondents were required to 1) have an active Facebook account that they had used in the past month, and 2) have mentioned a luxury fashion brand on their Facebook account in the past year. However, by screening out other potential respondents, the study has provided solid insights about ASC and ISC of luxury fashion brands, among those who choose to mention them on Facebook.

Second, the study is limited to those who mention Fashion brands on Facebook. It is acknowledged that younger consumers may be likely to use many sources of social media, and it is recommended that further research would explore findings on SNS such as Instagram, which attracts young followers. However, as explained earlier, Facebook offers unique advantages for a study about self-expression as, when one ‘likes’ a brand, for example, it appears in one’s own news feed, potentially enhancing one’s image. Moreover, unlike some other social networks, Facebook is a reciprocal network, where friendships are dyadic. Therefore, one’s posts are visible to others one one’s network,

and the potential for self-expression is arguably greater in this structure than in an asymmetric network, where one follows a brand or individual, but that person or brand does not follow back.

Third, the study is cross-sectional and therefore does not consider the longitudinal effect of Facebook mentions. Longitudinal research would consider whether current Facebook mentions are affected by subsequent network response, and whether this influences purchase intention.

Fourth, respondents to the study are skewed female (62.2%). This may be because female participants were more likely to have mentioned a luxury fashion brand on Facebook, and those who did not mention a luxury fashion brand were excluded from the study. Further research would be conducted to investigate whether insights from a larger male sample who mention luxury fashion brands would provide new insights into our conceptual framework.

Fifth, the study did not consider brand evaluations post purchase. Graeff (1996) suggested that brand evaluation may be more strongly correlated with ISC than with ASC. Therefore, further research could consider brand evaluation following purchase intention, as a further outcome of ASC and ISC. This may inform cognitive dissonance, as consumers with greater ISC with a brand may feel more 'let down' if the evaluation of the brand does not meet with expectations.

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Figure 1. Conceptual framework

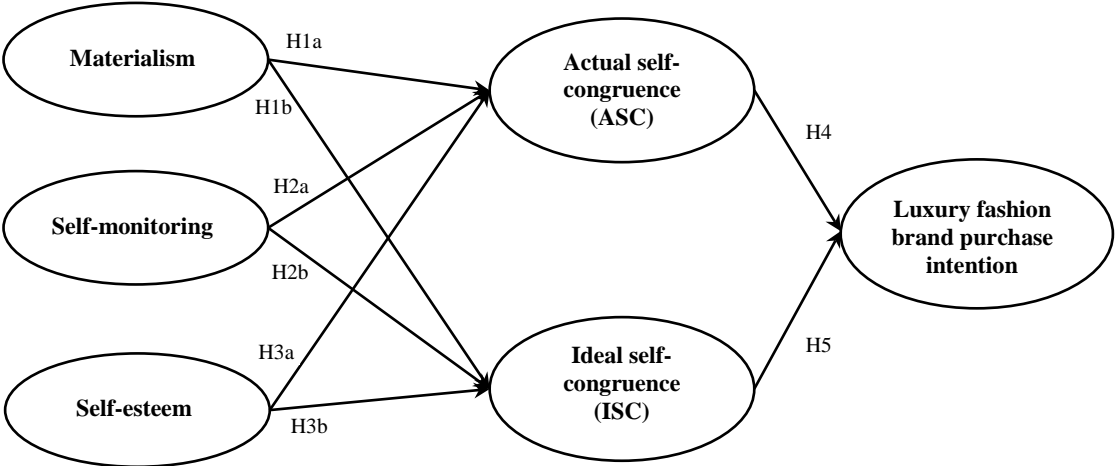


Table 1. Profile of survey respondents

| Category | N = 138 |
|---|---|
| Gender | 65.2% = Female 34.8% = Male |
| Age | Mean = 21.4 years SD = 4.55 |
| Nationality | 92% = Irish 8% = Other |
| Employment status | 52.2% = Yes 47.8% = No |
| Level of education | Current level of education: 84.8 % = Undergraduate Student 3.6 % = Higher Diploma 8 % = Masters student 3.6 % = Doctoral student |
| Has a Facebook account, accessed in past month | 100% = Yes |
| Has mentioned a luxury fashion brand on Facebook in the past year | 100% = Yes |
| Type of mention* | 17.4 % = Profile activities/interests 83.3 % = 'Liked' or reacted to a post or message about the brand 71.7 % = 'Liked' or reacted to a photo or video of the brand 34.1 % = 'Liked' or reacted to a photo or video about the brand from a celebrity 18.8 % = Shared stories about the brand from friends 8.7 % = Shared stories about the brand from the manufacturer 29.7 % = 'Liked' or reacted to stories about the brand from friends 15.9 % = 'Liked' or reacted to stories about the brand from the brand manufacturer 17.4 % = 'Liked' or reacted to stories about the brand from celebrities 22.5 % = Shared a photo or video of me with the brand 20.3 % = Shared a photo or video of the brand 35.5 % = Tagged a friend in a story or post about the brand 1.4 % = Other |
| Number of Facebook friends | Mean = 690,98 friends SD = 403.40 |
| How long do they spend on Facebook on a typical day? | Mean = 180.90 minutes SD = 116.10 |

Note: SD = Standard deviation from the mean. * Percentages sum to greater than 100, as some respondents engaged in more than one type of mention.

Table 2. Constructs, items, and measurement model results

| Constructs and items | FL |
|--|-----------|
| Materialism (CR = 0.854; AVE = 0.595) | |
| MAT1. It is important to me to have really nice things | 0.796 |
| MAT2. I would like to be rich enough to buy anything I want | 0.792 |
| MAT3. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things | 0.796 |
| MAT4. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I want | 0.697 |
| MAT5. People place too much emphasis on material things (r) ^a | - |
| MAT6. It's really true that money can buy happiness ^a | - |
| Self-monitoring (CR = 0.916; AVE = 0.551) | |
| SM1. It is my feeling that if everyone else in a group is behaving in a certain manner, this must be the proper way to behave ^a | - |
| SM2. I try to make sure that I am wearing clothes that are in style ^a | - |
| SM3. At parties I usually try to behave in a manner that makes me fit in | 0.847 |
| SM4. When I am uncertain how to act in social situations, I look to the behaviour of others for cues | 0.767 |
| SM5. I try to pay attention to the reactions of others to my behaviour to avoid being out of place | 0.780 |
| SM6. I find that I tend to pick up slang expressions from others and use them as part of my own vocabulary ^a | - |
| SM7. I tend to pay attention to what others are wearing | 0.628 |
| SM8. The slightest look of disapproval in the eyes of a person with whom I am interacting is enough to make me change my approach | 0.685 |
| SM9. It's important for me to fit into the group I'm with | 0.806 |
| SM10. My behaviour often depends on how I feel others wish me to behave | 0.702 |
| SM11. If I am the least bit uncertain as to how to act in a social situation, I look to the behaviour of others for cues | 0.782 |
| SM12. I usually keep up with clothing style changes by watching what others wear | 0.656 |
| SM13. When in a social situation, I tend not to follow the crowd, but instead I behave in a manner that suits my mood at the time (r) ^a | - |
| Self-esteem (CR = 0.925; AVE = 0.608) | |
| SE1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself | 0.709 |
| SE2. At times I think I am no good at all (r) ^a | - |
| SE3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities | 0.761 |
| SE4. I am able to do things as well as most people | 0.771 |
| SE5. I feel that I have much to be proud of | 0.820 |
| SE6. I feel that I am a person of worth | 0.801 |
| SE7. I have a lot of respect for myself | 0.714 |
| SE8. All in all, I am inclined to think I am a success | 0.815 |
| SE9. I take a positive attitude toward myself | 0.838 |

| Constructs and items | FL |
|--|-----------|
| Ideal self congruence (ASC) (CR = 0.923; AVE = 0.857) | |
| IS1. The personality of this brand is consistent with how I would like to be (my ideal self) | 0.906 |
| IS2. The personality of the brand is a mirror image of who I would like to be (my ideal self) | 0.946 |
| Actual self congruence (ISC) (CR = 0.867; AVE = 0.766) | |
| AS1. The personality of this brand is consistent with how I see myself (my actual self). | 0.936 |
| AS2. The personality of this brand is a mirror image of me (my actual self) | 0.810 |
| Luxury fashion brand purchase intention (CR = 0.960; AVE = 0.857) | |
| BPI1. If I were going to purchase a luxury product, I would consider buying this brand | 0.909 |
| BPI2. If I were shopping for a luxury brand, the likelihood I would purchase this luxury brand is high | 0.951 |
| BPI3. My willingness to buy this brand would be high, if I were shopping for a luxury brand | 0.939 |
| BPI4. The probability I would consider buying this luxury brand is high | 0.904 |

Note: ^a Item deleted in the validation process. FL: factor loading; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted.

Table 3. Results of the structural model

| | β (t-value) | Expected result | Supported? |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|------------|
| H1a: Materialism \rightarrow ASC | 0.149 (1.484) | + Sig | No |
| H1b: Materialism \rightarrow ISC | 0.275** (3.434) | + Sig | Yes |
| H2a: Self-monitoring \rightarrow ASC | 0.055 (0.520) | NS | Yes |
| H2b: Self-monitoring \rightarrow ISC | 0.179** (2.347) | +Sig | Yes |
| H3a: Self-esteem \rightarrow ASC | 0.276** (2.996) | +Sig | Yes |
| H3b: Self-esteem \rightarrow ISC | 0.035 (0.362) | NS | Yes |
| H4: ASC \rightarrow LFB purchase intention | 0.238** (2.571) | +Sig | Yes |
| H5: ISC \rightarrow LFB purchase intention | 0.164 (1.690) | NS | Yes |

Note: ** $p < .05$; + Sig = positive and significant relationship; NS = non-significant relationship. LFB = Luxury Fashion Brand.