The Omnichannel Luxury Retail Experience: Building Mobile Trust and Technology Acceptance of Quick Response (QR) Codes

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By drawing upon Symbolic Self-Completion theory and the Technology Acceptance model, a theoretical model is developed for omnichannel luxury retailing. The theoretical model unifies the inner-directed, hedonic aspects of luxury consumption and the cognitive facets of technology acceptance and use. In order to test the model, an online survey is given to a convenience sample of affluent professionals (n = 425) and relevant hypotheses are developed. Respondents are shown prototypes of a luxury window display and mobile website. The prototypes are used to evaluate the respondents’ intentions to scan custom QR codes to browse, shop and search a luxury mobile website. Structural equation modeling is used to test the hypotheses. Findings suggest that self-identity and self-hedonism can increase luxury consumers’ technology acceptance of custom QR codes, while enhancing the visual appeal of a luxury window display. An interchannel transference of experiences is supported, whereby the visual appeal of the window display and technology acceptance of QR codes relates to mobile trust. Perceived usefulness and visual appeal appear to increase QR code scanning intentions, but mobile trust is not shown to significantly increase scanning intentions. Based upon these findings, implications are discussed and recommendations are provided for academicians and practitioners.

1. Introduction

Luxury firms recently have created a multitude of branded mobile apps, iPad catalogs and smartphone-optimized web sites in response to a rising number of technologically adept, luxury consumers (Lamb 2012; Quek 2011). During the past year, ecommerce revenue in the luxury sector has grown by 28 % worldwide and is expected to reach €15 bn, over the next four years (Warc 2012). However, academicians have frequently questioned the role of technology in selling luxury goods. It has often been pointed out that the Internet is best suited for selling mass-produced consumer goods, a goal which seems to be incompatible with the exclusivity and sensory aspects of luxury consumption (Okonkwo 2009). Researchers have also suggested that the Internet may be most effectively used as a tool for communications, but not for transacting with luxury consumers (Riley/Lacroix 2003). Yet, some researchers have argued that luxury consumption is not always a status-seeking endeavor, and exclusivity may represent only a single facet of luxury consumption. Luxury is a polysemous concept and may be subject to many different interpretations (Bauer/Walpach/Hemetsberger 2011; Cox 2008). Luxury consumption also can have underlying social and personal motivations (Vickers/Renand 2003; Wiedmann et al. 2009). Contrary to previous findings, self-directed and personally oriented motivations for luxury consumption may actually increase technology acceptance and online shopping among luxury consumers. Hence, there is not only a lack of scholarship on luxury consumers and technology acceptance, but prior research does not seem to reflect recent trends within the luxury marketplace. In the current study, we address this need for further theoretical development of the relationship between luxury consumption and technology acceptance. At the same time, we challenge the notion that luxury consumption should be limited to traditional, brick and mortar in-store shopping experiences.
Specifically, we examine the ways that luxury consumers may use custom quick response (QR) codes, to connect with luxury brands through smartphones and luxury window displays. A QR code is a 2-D bar code that shoppers can scan with any cell phone that is equipped with a camera and bar code scanning software. A custom QR code can be customized to include a full-color brand logo or other identity symbols. By testing a theoretical model drawn from the theory of Symbolic Self-Completion (Wicklund/Gollwitzer 1982), we consider how luxury consumers may rely upon their luxury self-identities, self-hedonism and the visual appeal of custom QR codes as props for enhancing their technology acceptance, mobile trust and QR code scanning. In doing so, we aim to explore how symbolic self-completion and visual appeal can foster the transference of values and experiences across physical and digital channels. Ostensibly, this can be referred to as a study on omnichannel retailing. Omnichannel retailing can be described as a “mashup of digital and physical experiences” (Rigby 2011, p. 65). Thus, the current study extends preexisting luxury consumer research beyond understanding the traditional aspects of conspicuous and status consumption to studying luxury consumption across physical and digital channels.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Luxury Value Perceptions

According to Wiedmann et al. (2009), luxury consumer research often derives support from traditional theories of status and conspicuous consumption. Such theories assume that most people purchase luxury goods in order to be conspicuous, seek status and climb social ladders (e. g. Bourdieu 1979; Dubois/Dussquene 1993; Goffman 1951; Leibenstein 1950; Veblen 1889). However, empirical findings indicate that consumers may purchase luxury goods for personal fulfillment, too. According to Cox (2008), a contemporary perspective of luxury consumption should take into account the democratization of luxury goods and analyze new consumption motives like inner-growth and self-perceptions of life quality and well-being. Luxury goods have been shown to fulfill intrinsic needs such as self-enhancement and egoism more than extrinsic needs such as prestige and conspicuousness (Vickers/Renand 2003). For example, an inner-directed luxury customer might derive pleasure from the texture of new luxury purchases and personal identity symbols. By developing a luxury value perceptions scale, they revealed that higher income luxury consumers often prefer subtler signals of status and enjoy self-indulging more than being recognized within social networks (Berger/Ward 2010). Thus, the extant literature suggests that luxury consumption is likely to be comprised of both social and personal dimensions.

In order to empirically test these assumptions, Wiedmann et al. (2009) conducted a global study of luxury consumers and modeled the set of value perceptions that underlie luxury consumption. The authors describe luxury value perceptions as “the dimensions of luxury consumption that influence [consumers’] perceptions of value and consumption” (Wiedmann et al. 2009, p. 626). By developing a luxury value perceptions scale, they found that luxury value and consumption contains four dimensions: financial, functional, individual (personally-oriented) and social (socially-oriented). The luxury value perceptions scale (Wiedmann et al. 2009) has demonstrated strong predictive power across several research studies, in addition to, determining luxury market segmentation. Empirical studies have used luxury value perceptions to compare consumers across national and cultural contexts (Shukla et al. 2011) and to study country-of-origin effects (Aiello/Donvito/Godey 2009). Luxury value perceptions can increase brand loyalty, vanity and purchase intentions (Stokburger-Sauer/Teichmann 2011; Hung et al. 2011). The success of the luxury value perceptions scale, which contains both personally-oriented and socially-oriented dimensions, supports the emergence of new luxury consumers who are equally concerned about traditional notions of status-seeking and conspicuous consumption as much as individualistic notions of self-enhancement and egoism. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the different ways that consumers may experience luxury brands. In order to further probe the experiential aspects of luxury consumption, we will next review the experiential value literature, as it relates to the luxury marketplace.

2.2. Experiential Value

Traditionally, researchers have defined consumer value as a balance between “what is received vs. what is given” to customers (Zeithaml 1998). To the contrary, experiential value research has conjectured that there are different types of value for different types of consumption (Holbrook 1999). Experiential value can shape consumers’ perceptions and preferences, and fulfill their desires for affectivity, self-gratification and personalization within store and non-store settings (Lavie/Tractinsky 2004; Mathwick/Malhotra/Rigdon 2001). According to Holbrook’s typology (1999), there are three ways to categorize experiential value: extrinsic/intrinsic, self-oriented/other-oriented and active/reactive. Holbrook (1999) extrapolated from these categories the primary types of value that he believed could stem from consumption experiences: excellence, play, aesthetics, status, esteem, ethics and spirituality. By drawing upon Holbrook’s typology and qualitative case studies, Tyram/McKechnie/Chauhun (2010) developed a symbolic/expressive dimension of...
experiential value specifically for luxury marketing. Their findings suggested that outer-directed and inner-directed sources of experiential value are co-created between luxury firms and consumers. According to Tynan/McKechnie/Chu (2010), outer-directed experiential value can be delivered through aesthetics, senses of scarcity or status. Inner-directed experiential value, on the other hand, can be delivered through feelings of self-indulgence, pleasure and the delight of consuming luxury goods.

Luxury marketing and retailing are highly contingent upon experiential value. Atwal/Williams (2009) asserted that, in order to be successful, luxury brands should intensify the aesthetic, escapist, and entertainment aspects of their brand identities and retail store images. For the retail environment, it has been shown that the success of a luxury brand typically depends upon experiences such as creatively staging the retail environment, generating awe and inculcating the charisma of a creative director’s aesthetic vision (Dion/Arnould 2012). Luxury store environments have been called temples of luxury (Riley/Lacroix 2003), evoking the awe-inspiring principles that firms use to produce luxury brands. What is more, Godfrey/Lagier/Pederzoli (2009) developed a scale that measures the aesthetic style of luxury retail environments, from the customer’s perspective. During their scale development, the factor loadings indicated that affective intensity is a vital part of shopping in a luxury retail store. Affective intensity refers to feelings of ecstasy, exuberance and flow. Due to these intense sensations, respondents were compelled towards seeking discovery, adventure and variety in luxury retail environments (Godfrey/Lagier/Pederzoli 2009). But, can a luxury brand successfully merge the experiential and affective aspects of luxury consumption with the cognitive and technical aspects of mobile technology use? In order to explore this question further, we now turn to the research literature on m-commerce, technology acceptance and mobile trust.

2.3. M-commerce, Technology Acceptance and Mobile Trust

Smartphone apps and mobile commerce have been recognized as hedonically fun and self-gratifying experiences. M-commerce research, in particular, has focused on the relationship between consumers’ self-perceptions, pleasures and affectivity during technology use. Li/Dong/Chen (2012) supported that hedonic factors such as media richness and emotion enhanced mobile technology use, but utilitarian factors detracted from the user experience. Researchers have sometimes operationalized the hedonic factors as “design aesthetics” and “visual orientation,” both of which appear to increase fun and enjoyment during mobile consumption experiences (Brunner/Kumar 2003; Cyr/Head/Ivanov 2006). Concomitantly, researchers have emphasized that technology acceptance is an important component to m-commerce. Davis (1989) developed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which is an extension of Fishbein and Ajzen’s Theory of Reasoned Action (1975), in order to explain user acceptance and usage of new technologies. TAM suggests that perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) variables can support attitude formation and predict actual technology use (Taylor/Todd 1995). Within m-commerce research, empirical findings have confirmed that PEOU and PU can increase loyalty to a branded mobile site (Cyr/Head/Ivanov 2006), satisfaction and actual use of mobile technologies (Lopez-Nicolas/Molina-Castillo/Bouwman 2008; Hong/Thong/Tam 2006; Wu/Wang 2005).

Mobile trust can also lead to technology acceptance. Mobile trust refers to a trusting relationship between a trader and trustee who derive mutual benefits from each other such as guarantees that reduce the uncertainty or risk of m-commerce (Siau/Shen 2003). Many researchers have pinpointed the utilitarian and cognitive predictors of mobile trust such as PEOU, PU, privacy policies, information architecture and wireless connection speed (Cho/Kwon/Lee 2007; Siau/Sheng/Nah 2003). By contrast, recent empirical studies have shown that affective and hedonic variables can also be predictors of mobile trust. Without the structural assurances that are typically added to a desktop website (McKnight/Choudhury/Kacmar 2002), mobile users may perceive interactivity, aesthetics and customization to be sound indicators of mobile website reliability and safety. Yeh/Li (2009) found that customization and brand image were the strongest predictors of mobile trust. In a later study, they further added that design aesthetics and customization could significantly increase mobile trust (Li/Yeh 2010). In a similar vein, Lee (2005) supported that interactivity is positively related to mobile trust and mobile technology acceptance. Interchannel transference of trust may even occur between online and mobile channels (Lin et al. 2011). Because loyal consumers are likely to develop strong in-store and online brand relationships, interchannel transfers may compel them to more easily trust a mobile website after using the brand’s desktop website or shopping in a physical store.

To the knowledge of the researchers, there have been no empirical studies to date that concern luxury consumers and their mobile technology acceptance. However, we can garner from the mobile technology acceptance and mobile trust research findings that the experiential and inner-directed facets of luxury consumption may be compatible with the hedonic and self-gratifying facets of m-commerce. Because technology use is relatively new to the luxury market, it is important to see how trust and technology acceptance relate to the affective and experiential aspects of luxury consumption. In an earlier study, Riley/Lacroix (2003) interviewed luxury consumers about e-commerce and they expressed a range of concerns that were both cognitive-technical and affective-hedonic in nature. Respondents indicated that their top concerns with luxury websites were related to navigation, security, self-gratification, aesthetics and brand...
communication. By incorporating the technology acceptance model and Symbolic Self-Completion theory into the theoretical model, we aim to address the cognitive-technical and affective-hedonic needs of luxury consumers during technology use.

3. Symbolic Self-Completion Theory

According to the theory of Symbolic Self-Completion (SSC), individuals are in pursuit of self-definitions. Self-definitions are projects for achieving personal goals or a self-concept. In the pursuit of self-definitions, personal thoughts and self-reflections are purported to foster ego-involvement (Wickland/Gollwitzer 1982). Symbols are the foundation for self-definitions. These “building blocks” of self-completion include all the activities; choices, props and possessions that make a consumer feel closer to completing his or her self-definition (Wickland/Gollwitzer 1982, p. 31). Occasionally, symbols can fail to fulfill an individual’s self-definition and lead to a feeling of incompleteness. This failure is also known as a disruption, or a hindrance imposed upon an individual’s progress toward completeness (Wickland/Gollwitzer 1982). Wickland and Gollwitzer (1982) illustrated that a disruption may occur when an individual is surrounded by a social milieu of more successful individuals. The authors further contended that a disruption may occur when an individual feels deficient in the symbols s/he possesses, or when symbols are not supportive of his/her self-definitions (Wickland/Gollwitzer 1982). When an individual’s self-definition is under duress, s/he will resort to self-symbolizing.

Self-symbolizing is an individual’s conscious showcasing and expression of symbols that seem to reinforce the completeness of their self-definitions (Wickland/Gollwitzer 1982). The authors emphasized that, in an effort to support their self-definitions, individuals may resort to self-descriptions, fantasizing about their ideal self or consumption behaviors such as status projection or identity projects. For example, Carr/Vignoles (2011) found that young consumers whose families had experienced significant increases and decreases in wealth used products that they considered to be status symbols to self-symbolize and project their status within their new social settings. SSC, therefore, calls attention to the ways in which individuals strive to behave consistently with their self-definitions, and seek self-completeness through the acquisitions of symbols and the act of self-symbolizing.

When technology enables the acquisition of symbols, it can increase self-symbolizing and help consumers seek self-completeness. Mobile shopping may be a technology that helps luxury consumers acquire symbolic goods that provide them with self-gratification and pleasure, leading to a feeling of self-completeness. In the following section, we develop hypotheses that incorporate technology acceptance and self-completion into a single theoretical framework, in order to examine the relationship between luxury value perceptions, technology acceptance and mobile trust.

4. Hypotheses

4.1. Luxury Value Perceptions, Visual Appeal and Technology Acceptance

According to Wiedmann et al. (2009), self-identity and self-hedonism are the luxury value perceptions that encompass the personally-oriented values for luxury consumption. Self-identity refers to the extent that a consumer integrates luxury items and luxury brand purchases into their own self-identity. Self-hedonism includes the emotional triggers associated with luxury consumption including self-directed pleasure and self gift-giving, which have been shown to be integral to the inner-directedness and hedonic facets of luxury consumption (Vickers/Renand 2003). When a luxury window display is imbued with the symbolic value of a custom QR code (embedded with the luxury brand’s symbols), it may be seen as a “prop,” symbol or badge that is consistent with the self-definitions of luxury consumers (Wickland/Gollwitzer 1982). As self-identity and self-hedonism increase, a person should recognize these branded symbols, particularly in an effort to self-symbolize as a luxury consumer. As the consumer acquires pleasure from self-symbolizing, it should heighten his/her appreciation for the luxury window display. This appreciation should, overall, create a positive relationship between self-identity, self-hedonism and the perceived visual appeal of the luxury window display. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: A luxury consumer’s self-identity is positively related to the visual appeal of a luxury window display.

H2: A luxury consumer’s self-hedonism is positively related to the visual appeal of a luxury window display.

Likewise, technology can serve as a prop for a luxury consumer’s ideal self, because it provides access to mobile sites, apps or symbolic goods that will help a person achieve his/her self-definition as a luxury consumer through mobile shopping. If the consumer recognizes the symbolic value of the custom QR code and believes that it may be useful towards his or her self-completion, the mobile technology should be perceived as easier to use and more useful. In prior studies, self-gratification and hedonism have been shown to improve mobile technology use (Li/Dong/Chen 2012). This leads to the following hypotheses:

H3: A luxury consumer’s self-identity is positively related to the perceived ease of use of a custom QR code.

H4: A luxury consumer’s self-hedonism is positively related to the perceived ease of use of a custom QR code.
H5: A luxury consumer’s self-identity is positively related to the perceived usefulness of a custom QR code.

H6: A luxury consumer’s self-hedonism is positively related to the perceived usefulness of a custom QR code.

4.2. Visual appeal, TAM and Mobile trust

A custom QR code can help develop symbolic/expressive and inner-directed sources of experiential value that luxury consumers may desire (Vickers/Renand 2003). Experience is “everything” for luxury consumers (Atwal/Williams 2009). The visual appeal of the retail window and custom QR code may act as a badge for self-completion and lead to mobile trust. When a retail window display is visually appealing and self-gratifying, there is likely to be an interchannel transference of experiences. As a luxury consumer self-symbolizes through the retail window, s/he may be more likely to trust the m-commerce site. Similarly, consumers have been shown to more easily trust a mobile website after visiting the physical store and/or desktop website (Lin et al. 2011). This leads us to:

H7: The visual appeal of a luxury window display is positively related to a luxury consumer’s trust in a mobile website.

According to the technology acceptance model (TAM), perceived ease of use increases perceived usefulness (Davis 1989). As empirical findings have suggested (Cho/Kwon/Lee 2007; Siau/Sheng/Nah 2003), perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness should also signal to the luxury consumer that s/he can trust the mobile website. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

H8: The perceived ease of use of a custom QR code is positively related to a luxury consumer’s trust in a mobile website.

H9: The perceived usefulness of a custom QR code is positively related to a luxury consumer’s trust in a mobile website.

H10: The perceived ease of use of a custom QR code is positively related to the perceived usefulness of a custom QR code.

4.3. Perceived Usefulness, M-Trust and QR Code Scanning (BI)

Visual appeal should increase luxury consumers’ intentions to scan the custom QR code because it will provide access to additional symbols via the mobile website (e.g. fashion apparel, brand imagery, etc.). Scanning the custom QR code offers luxury consumers the opportunity to self-symbolize by enabling them to fulfill their self-definitions through mobile shopping experiences. Lastly, in concert with previous research findings, mobile trust and perceived usefulness will increase behavioral intentions such as scanning custom QR codes (Lopez-Nicolas/Molina-Castillo/Bouwman 2008; Li/Yeh 2010). This leads to the following hypotheses:

H11: The visual appeal of a luxury window display is positively related to intentions to scan a custom QR code.

H12: The perceived usefulness of the custom QR code is positively related to intentions to scan a custom QR Code.

H13: A consumer’s trust in a mobile website is positively related to intentions to scan a custom QR code.

5. Empirical Study

5.1. Data Collection

A national sample of 425 affluent, working and retired professionals in the United States, with annual salaries from $100,000 to $500,000 USD, was recruited for the study. An online panel was purchased from Ask Your Target Market, a reputable market research firm that maintains online consumer panels. The respondents, on average, were 44 years old and the sample contained equal numbers of men and women. iPhone owners represented 33 % of the sample, Android phone owners represented 35 % and owners of other smartphone models represented 32 %. In exchange for their participation, panelists were compensated with redeemable online shopping credits. The time period of the data collection was from July to August 2012. During the first step of the survey, respondents were given a description of a fictitious luxury brand. The researchers decided upon a fictitious luxury brand in order to reduce positive loyalty biases. Brand loyalty towards luxury designers and brands could wash out the effects of technology acceptance, visual appeal and mobile trust. We acknowledge that it is impossible to exactly reproduce the authenticity and history of a real luxury brand. Thus, we chose to highlight the following traditional attributes of a luxury brand: high-end [1], European [2], founded at the turn of the century [3] and exclusive [4]. Respondents were given the following brand description:

Cote d’azur is a high-end [1], luxury brand that was founded on the French Riviera [2] during the 1920’s [3]. Cote d’azur designs classic, colorful and comfortable styles for men and women. They make clothing, accessories, jewelry and shoes that range from more casual to more formal. Currently, their products are sold in small, exclusive boutiques [4] throughout Europe and in major cities across the U.S., Latin America and Asia.

A pre-test was conducted on a small, randomly selected group of working professionals (n = 21) in order to determine whether respondents perceived the fictitious brand as a luxury brand. Three items were borrowed from the Brand Luxury Index (Vigneron/Johnson 2004), in order to measure the perceived expensiveness, exclusivity and
quality of the fictitious brand. The brand description and a photo of a fictitious retail window display were shown to the respondents. Then, the respondents were asked to assess their levels of agreement with the following statements, measured on a seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 7):

- Cote d’azur is probably very expensive.
- Cote d’azur is probably very exclusive.
- Cote d’azur is probably very expensive.

The results showed that the means were relatively high: Expensiveness (M = 5.28), Exclusivity (M = 4.94) and Quality (M = 5.02). The pre-test findings suggest that the fictitious brand may not be perceived as belonging to the top echelon of luxury brands, but falls within the range of newer luxury brands such as Dolce and Gabbana, Ralph Lauren, or Burberry, rather than older and rarefied brands such as Chanel, Dior or Louis Vuitton.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were shown an example of the fictitious brand’s identity symbol and were provided with a short description of QR codes. Then, the respondents were instructed to view an image of the fictitious, custom QR code bearing the luxury brand’s logo. Afterwards, they were shown a fictitious, physical storefront bearing the custom QR code in the window (Fig. A1). Respondents were directed, where appropriate, to use the image when answering questions related to PEOU, PU, visual appeal and behavioral intentions to scan the custom QR code. Next, respondents were shown an image of a fictitious mobile website that matched the look and feel of the luxury window display. They were instructed that the mobile website would appear after scanning the QR code (Fig. A2). Then, their levels of mobile trust towards the luxury mobile website were assessed with the survey instrument. Common method biases were addressed according to the guidelines set forth in Podsakoff et al. (2003). First, the survey was structured such that questions pertaining to the DV’s were asked prior to the IV’s, and a temporal lag was inserted between the measurement of the DV’s and IV’s. The QR code scanning (BI) items were given to respondents at the beginning of the survey and the independent variables were measured thereafter. Steps were also taken to counterbalance the order of the luxury value perceptions scales. Some of the items were placed in the middle of the survey and others were placed at the end of the survey.

Most of the measurement items were drawn from previously established scales within the research literature. According the Wiedmann et al. (2009), the personally-oriented dimension of the luxury value perceptions scale emphasizes “a customer’s personal orientation toward luxury consumption,” and it incorporates the subdimensions of materialism, life enrichment, self-hedonism (self-directed pleasure and self gift-giving) and self-identity. Because we examined the relationship between the hedonic and self-gratifying aspects of luxury consumption, self-identity and self-hedonism were most relevant for the current study. Three items were borrowed from Wiedmann et al. (2009) to develop the self-identity construct (α = .70) and five items were borrowed from Wiedmann et al. (2009) to develop the self-hedonism construct (α = .91). Three items were adapted from Mathwick/Malhotra/Rigdon (2001) to create the visual appeal construct (α = .95). Five items were adapted from Bart et al. (2005) to create the mobile trust construct (α = .92). Measurement items from Davis (1989) were used to create the TAM constructs: perceived ease of use (α = .92) and perceived usefulness (α = .92). The researchers developed the QR code scanning (BI) with three items: intention to scan in order to search for product information, intention to scan to see the entire collection and intention to scan to buy items from the mobile website (α = .93).

5.2. Confirmatory Factory Analysis

Structural equation modeling (MPlus 7.0) was used to analyze the data and test the hypothesized relationships. First, a confirmatory factor analysis (Kline 1998) was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement items (Tab. A1). Items with factor loadings that are greater than .60 indicate strong factor loadings (Anderson/Gerbing 1988). One item was dropped from the self-identity construct due to a .52 factor loading. After dropping the item, the model fit did not significantly improve. As a result, the item was retained. A composite reliability calculator was used in order to find the average variance extracted (AVE) from each latent construct. The average variance extracted from each latent construct was greater than the corresponding squared interconstruct correlation (Tab. A2), which conveys an acceptable level of discriminant validity (Fornell/Larcker 1981). The comparative fit index (CFI = .93), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI = .92), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = .075), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR = .060) indicated a good model fit (χ² = 868.41, df = 254) (Hu/Bentler 1999).

5.3. Findings

In order to test the hypothesized relationships, an SEM path analysis was carried out (Fig. A3). The fit indices, again, indicated an acceptable fit (χ² = 975.57, df = 300; CFI = .92, TLI = .91, RMSEA=.080, SRMR = .086) (Chen et al. 2008; Hu/Bentler 1999). All the hypotheses were supported except for H8 and H13 (Tab. A3). Self-identity is positively related to visual appeal (β = .15), PEOU (β = .20), and PU (β = .17), lending support to H1, H3 and H5. Self-hedonism is positively related to visual appeal (β = .26), PEOU (β = .24), and PU (β = .27), lending support to H2, H4 and H6. There also is a positive relationship between visual appeal and mobile trust (β = .36), which supports H7. Although PEOU was hypothesized to be positively related to mobile trust, the variables are not shown to be associated with each other (β = .02), which rejects H8. However, PU is positively
related to mobile trust ($\beta = .37$), supporting H9. The results also support that PEOU is positively related to PU, thereby confirming H10 ($\beta = .59$). Lastly, H11-H12 can be supported. Visual appeal ($\beta = .25$) and PU ($\beta = .58$) are positively related to intentions to scan custom QR codes. Yet, H13 is rejected. Mobile trust is not significantly related to intentions to scan custom QR codes ($\beta = .09$).

6. Discussion

The findings confirm that self-identity and self-hedonism among luxury consumers are significantly related to the perceived visual appeal of a luxury window display and the technology acceptance (PEOU and PU) of a custom QR code in the window. Beyond using a custom QR code and luxury window display to instill their self-definitions, luxury consumers may also perceive a window display that offers visual appeal to be evocative of mobile trust. This finding lends support to the notion that custom QR codes may foster an interchannel transference of experiences, from the physical store window to the mobile setting. Hence, the luxury window display and mobile website can serve as a medium for luxury consumers’ self-symbolizing and subsequent mobile trust. When comparing the beta coefficients, self-hedonism is generally a stronger predictor of visual appeal and technology acceptance than self-identity. This is a very notable observation. The strength of self-hedonism over self-identity suggests that self-symbolizing and the interchannel transference of experiences may depend upon pleasure-seeking and fantasizing, more than self-identification with luxury consumption. This finding challenges traditional concepts of luxury and lends further support to contemporary perspectives, which describe luxury consumption as more ephemeral and subjective in nature (Cox 2008; Bauer/Wallach/Hemeisberger 2011).

Perceived usefulness and visual appeal, however, contribute almost equally to mobile trust. Technology acceptance and visual appeal seem to unify the cognitive and affective needs of luxury consumers in an omnichannel setting via mobile trust. Paradoxically, mobile trust is not related to intentions to scan the custom QR code. It may be that the inflation of the customer’s ego through the visual appeal of a luxury window display provides him/her with sufficient reliance to scan a custom QR code. As previous studies have noted, prior experience in an e-commerce or physical setting may compel customers to trust mobile websites more easily than desktop websites (Lin et al. 2011). Perceived usefulness and visual appeal, however, are both linked to intentions to scan a custom QR code. Yet, perceived usefulness plays a more pivotal role in QR code scanning than visual appeal.

Luxury brands should focus on integrating consumer experiences across channels. The physical setting provides cues about the mobile shopping experience and may have some bearing on whether luxury shoppers will use a custom QR code to connect with the mobile website. QR codes or other callouts to mobile websites should be given the same attention to visual appeal that other aspects of a physical, luxury storefront might receive. The findings also show that luxury consumers possess adeptness with technology, which may stem from their desire to self-identify as a luxury consumer and enhance their self-gratification. Mobile technology acceptance is quite strong among luxury consumers, which suggests that firms should continue developing smartphone applications and mobile websites. Not surprisingly, luxury consumers are likely to use mobile websites to browse, search and shop. Providing customers with an opportunity to browse, search and shop a designer’s collection through the luxury window display can help foster customer relationships 24/7. After the shop has closed, luxury consumers who work late or perhaps, entertain themselves after hours, can be given a peek into the store and enjoy a personal moment of self-gratification. This is an example of how luxury brands can use technology in order to heighten, rather than detract from exclusivity. Most importantly, luxury managers should not only focus on creating visually stunning window displays and custom QR codes. In order to encourage QR code scanning, managers also need to ensure that luxury shoppers understand why QR codes may be useful for pleasure-seeking, or even convenience. Brand communications should emphasize the exclusivity and accessibility that mobile technologies can offer to customers.

7. Limitations, Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

As is the case for all structural equation models, the tested relationships cannot be described as causal. When deriving hypotheses from an alternate theory, it may be that the associations between the independent and dependent variables can be switched. Another limitation of this study is that the analysis was drawn from a fictitious luxury brand. Although using a fictitious luxury brand permitted the researchers to rule out positive loyalty biases, the effect of self-identity appears to be somewhat weaker than the path coefficients might suggest. A respondent who self-identifies as a luxury consumer may find it difficult to relate to a fictitious luxury brand because it lacks the emotional value and high involvement of a real luxury brand. The relatively weak alpha coefficient for the self-identity scale ($\alpha = .70$) lends further support to this observation. Similarly, it is challenging to measure deeper levels of visual appeal and affect through a computer screen. An experimental design that employs a real luxury brand and manipulates the presence of QR codes in a retail window display may be useful in pinpointing the actual effects of self-identity and visual appeal. Alternatively, a study might employ a naturalistic setting in which actual QR code scanning can be measured at a real luxury window display. If future researchers replicate this study using real luxury brands, it is highly recommended to control for relevant variables such as brand...
loyalty and prior experience with the luxury brand’s websites and applications.

It can be ascertained that luxury consumers are innovative and seem willing to experiment with mobile technologies. At the same time, the omnichannel luxury retail experience cannot merely be a transposition of the traditional in-store experience. It must retain the traditionally awe-inspiring and visually appealing aspects of luxury shopping, but the technologies must be useful towards inflating consumers’ self-identity and self-hedonism, while fulfilling their affective and cognitive needs. There is a gray area between affect and cognition that must be further addressed in future technology research, particularly to yield a better understanding of luxury consumption. Perhaps, there should be a new model of technology acceptance that reconsiders the definition of perceived usefulness. Rather than usefulness or efficiency in completing tasks, it could be usefulness towards achieving independence and self-gratification. The definitions of luxury and affluence also warrant further attention, in the face of the democratization and consolidation of traditional luxury houses into megabrands. For better or worse, technological innovations have been pivotal in creating these sociocultural shifts in luxury consumption. On a much larger scale, mechanization and reproduction have increased the accessibility of goods that were once considered to be authentic and exclusive, depleting the aura that is thought to underscore fashion arts and handicrafts (Appadurai 1988; Benjamin 1968; Dion/Arnould 2011). Mass production impels consumers to find new ways to feel special and personalize their consumption experiences. The luxury market is no exception. This subjectivity speaks to the emerging, phenomenological transformation of luxury consumption and the ambiguity of consumer agency and cultural authorship, more generally (Holt 2002). As researchers, we should not avoid the issue of technology acceptance in the luxury market, but begin discovering how firms and consumers can recapture feelings of awe and exclusivity in an increasingly technocratic society.

The appendix of this article can be downloaded on www.marketing-zfp.de, Appendices.

Reference List


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Keywords

luxury, trust, mobile, technology acceptance, QR codes
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