

Social Psychological Motivation - a Theoretical Analysis of Motivation for Luxury Consumption

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to reveal the motivation for purchasing luxury product. By adopting the method of literature review and theoretical induction, this research further refines the motivation for luxury product into three, which are Social psychological motivation, Personal psychological motivation and Personal physiology. Furthermore, this research proposes the social psychological motivation is manipulatable due to the booming of social media resulted by the development of technology. Based on the finding, this research argues every product could use to "show-off". In other word, every product could possess part characteristic of luxury product. The businesses of luxury product could adopt the finding of this research to improve the strategy for their business to increase their market value.

Keywords - Luxury product, Purchasing motivation, Manipulation, Social media, Ordinary product

I. INTRODUCTION

The luxury market became a significant element of the global economy (Y. Wang, et al., 2011) due to its incomparable market value, superior image and its significant role and influence in globalization (Keller, 2009). Many scholars tried to resolve the issue that why people purchase luxury product. Psychology believes that human behavior is governed by motivation, which is determined by the basic needs of human being (Li, 1987). Therefore, the issue can be translated as what the motivation of people purchasing luxury goods is. Many scholars have put forward different arguments and it is generally believed that the motivation of purchasing luxury goods should include both social-oriented and personal-oriented motivations (Wiedmann et al., 2007). Based on the arguments of these two authors, the fundamental concern of this research is to further refine purchasing motivations of luxury goods and how these findings can be used in practice.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological and physiological needs

Abraham Maslow suggested in "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs", which classifies and ranks people's needs into five stages, with physiological the most fundamental needs at the bottom and the need for self-actualization at the top (Maslow, 1987). Zhao (2013) divided these five stages needs into two categories. He believed that the usage value or practical value of all tangible products met the physiological needs and safety needs. Meanwhile, the psychological value that satisfied the other three higher level needs. Zou (2007) suggested that luxury products not only met the usage needs of consumers with products of superior quality, but also brought people spiritual enjoyment.

Berthon (2009) suggested that in addition to usage value, luxury brands also had experiential value and symbolic value. Jiang (2013) defined luxury products as a relative concept, which referred to products and services that were rich in cultural connotation and brand prestige, scarcity, and high quality, in addition to people's basic usage needs, in order to satisfy consumers' psychological needs. Liu (2009) suggested that the value composition of luxury products consisted mainly of the usage value and spiritual added value. Furthermore, the spiritual added value is higher than the usage value of luxury goods themselves.

In general, this research believes that compared to satisfying physiological needs, the luxury products mostly satisfy people's psychological needs.

Social-oriented motivation and personal-oriented motivation

Leibenstein (1950) proposed the social-oriented motivation for luxury products. Dubois & Laurent (1994) put forward the viewpoint and proposed "hedonism" and "perfectionism" as two factors of personal-oriented motivation. Thereafter, Jin (2012) studied the function of luxury products, which included social-oriented function (self-expression and self-presentation) and personal-oriented function (Quality, hedonic value

and self-gift giving). Based on this idea, this research reviewed the literature on the motivation of purchasing luxury goods and screened the researches into these two categories, social-oriented and personal-oriented. The following table demonstrates the main functions that each author suggested to constitute the luxury products. This research selects several representative literatures and makes the following Table 1 to review the research on the motivation of luxury goods.

Table1: Generalization of existing literature

	Social-oriented	Personal-oriented
Veblen (2016)	Conspicuous consumption	
Leibenstein (1950)	Conspicuous consumption; Exclusivity; Bandwagon	
Vigneron and Johnson (1999)	Conspicuous consumption; Uniqueness; Bandwagon	Quality; Hedonic value
Vigneron (2004)	Conspicuous consumption; Uniqueness	Quality; Hedonic value
Tsai (2005)		Quality; Hedonic value; Self-gift giving; Congruity with internal self
Zhu (2006)	Conspicuous consumption; Bandwagon; Social interaction; Status	Quality; Hedonic value; Self-gift giving
Guo (2007)	Conspicuous consumption	Quality; Hedonic value; Self-gift giving
Brun (2013)	Uniqueness; Exclusivity	Quality; Hedonic value
Mundel (2017)	Conspicuous consumption; Exclusivity	Quality; Hedonic value

Research gap

According to statements above, two purchasing motivations, social-oriented motivation and personal-oriented motivation, have been examined. However, this research believes that purchasing motivations could be further refined into three segments: social psychology, personal psychology and personal physiology motivation. These correspond to the two needs mentioned above, which are psychological and physiological needs. Social psychology motivation is influenced by external environment, while personal psychology motivation is decided by the owner himself. Personal physiology motivation corresponds to the basic need for product functionality. Furthermore, as the developing of technology, people changed their way to communicate with others. Especially the introduction of social media is changing the way that people share information. This research believes the new method to share information will further affect social psychology motivation for purchasing luxury product. The following paragraph will further discuss this finding.

III. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IS MANIPULATABLE

This research further refines the social-oriented motivation and personal-oriented motivation into three motivations, Social psychological motivation, Personal psychological motivation and Personal physiology.

Social psychology motivation is an external driving force for the purpose of obtaining social recognition. It mainly focuses on "What the luxury goods mean to others". On the other hand, personal psychological motivation is the internal driving force for the purpose of pleasing oneself without external interference. And the consumer concerns about "What the luxury goods mean to himself". Personal physiology motivation corresponds to the physiological needs. The main consideration is "What physical attributes the luxury goods possess" (Berthon, 2009). Each segment has several main factors as Table 2 demonstrates.

Table 2: Further refine of existing literature

	Social psychology	Personal psychology	Personal physiology
Veblen (2016)	Conspicuous consumption		
Leibenstein (1950)	Conspicuous consumption; Exclusivity; Bandwagon		
Vigneron and Johnson (1999)	Conspicuous consumption; Uniqueness; Bandwagon	Hedonic value	Quality
Tsai (2005)		Hedonic value; Self-gift giving; Congruity with internal self	Quality
Zhu (2006)	Conspicuous consumption; Bandwagon; Social interaction; Status	Hedonic value Self-gift giving	Quality
Guo (2007)	Conspicuous consumption	Hedonic value; Self-gift giving	Quality
Vigneron (2004)	Conspicuous consumption Uniqueness	Hedonic value	Quality
Brun (2013)	Uniqueness; Exclusivity	Hedonic value	Quality
Mundel (2017)	Conspicuous consumption Exclusivity	Hedonic value	Quality

According to the new classification, the social psychology motivation mainly includes three factors, which are conspicuous consumption, bandwagon and uniqueness. The personal psychology motivation mainly includes hedonic value and self-gift giving. The personal physiology motivation is the superior quality. Apart from personal psychology and personal physiology motivation, this research believes the social psychology is manipulatable.

Social psychology and luxury goods

Conspicuous consumption can be described as the behavior whereby a man or a woman can display great wealth, by means of idleness—expending much time in the practice of leisure activities and spending much money to consume luxury goods and services (Trigg, 2001). Winkelmann (2012) believed that conspicuous consumption referred to any consumption activity literally “visible” to outsiders. The bandwagon effect represents the desire of people to purchase a commodity in order to appear to be “one of the boys” (Leibenstein, 1950). Furthermore, this research believes the bandwagon effect represents purchasing luxury product helps the owner to “fit into” the group who already possessed this certain luxury product. The need for uniqueness indicates consumers' requirement to differentiate with others (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977).

It can be seen that these factors all reveal the same psychology content that people want to show their superiority to others to gain satisfaction. This superiority feeling will drive the owner to show-off to certain group of people who don't have the resources to access this product, commodity, object even experience through certain channels. Meanwhile, as the developing of technology, the social media gets popular. People could deliver and show off the "experience". For example, tourism, workout, attending a special event could be a good topic to achieve this purpose. Furthermore, as the developing of market segmentation, the idea of "New luxury" introduced. The idea of "New luxury" refers to a category of goods or services that have better quality and taste than other products or services in the same category. These goods are expensive than ordinary goods. However, it is not as unaffordable as traditional luxury goods (Silverstein & Fiske & Burman, 2003). With the rise of new luxury goods, the substance and content of people's extravagant consumption have also changed, as the following Table 3 demonstrates.

Table 3: Compare between traditional luxury product and new luxury product

	Substance	Content of "showing off"
Traditional luxury	The product itself	Price
New luxury	The experience and connotation	Price, taste, lifestyle, channel, leisure, personality, knowledge

According to the table, this research finds that people have additional "elements" to show off, and that "taste" is one of them. This is mainly because people pay more attention to the connotation of products or services, and they are no longer simply "showing off their wealth."

In conclusion, superiority is the representative of social-orientation for people to purchase luxury. Social orientation explains that the purpose of luxury consumption is to embody its superiority, and to obtain superiority requires comparison with others.

Approaches to manipulate

Wei (2009) believed that relativity is one of the attributes of luxury goods. This argument agreed by Zhu and Zhou (2008) who further suggested luxury product may vary depending on income, times and phases. For example, an expensive handbag could be seen as a luxury product for a non-income university student but it may be a normal hand bag for millionaires; a painting by van Gogh was not luxury product until after decades of time. With the development of human beings, it is a trend for luxury goods to become mass-market goods. The concept of luxury goods exists in a stage of the development of the concept of commodity, and the concept of luxury is a relative phase relative to the concept of the whole commodity.

Due to the relativity of luxury product, with the development of technology, the social psychology for purchasing luxury products can be manipulated to some extent. For example, when purchasing a luxury product or having a wonderful trip, people tend to share photos and feelings through social media. People can choose the "audience" that she/he wants to "show-off".

The connotation of "manipulatable" can be understood from two aspects. Firstly, the way to "show off" becomes diverse with the development of social media. As Wang (2015) suggested, the network age has broken through the time and space limitations of traditional interpersonal communication. For example, in the past, the wealthy people had to display her/his luxury product to others face to face. But now, they can display it through new media and other approaches. Song (2014) defined the concept of "new media social network" as an approach that gives people more initiative in the virtual social space through writing, sharing, comment and communication on the platform of Internet technology. Secondly, People are willing to categorize contacts into groups with people who have similarities with themselves. They may have a similar background or a hobby. With the development of technology, people are able to publish information to some specific groups on social media platform to achieve superiority. At present, the ordinary people can deliver her/his information whenever and wherever possible and enjoy the value and response of showing off through social network such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and so on. When one shares the photos or writings, she/he is bound to pay attention to the comments or attitude of others. Therefore, the rise of new media makes it easier for people to achieve "showing off". Besides, people can choose the "group" that she/he shows, and sometimes this action needs to be done with social media.

Example for implementation

This research believes that people have the necessity to gain superiority, therefore, people are tending to demonstrate certain product to certain group of people. For example, in scenario A, people demonstrate a luxury hand bag to people who already got one. Meanwhile, she/he doesn't want to show she/he is superior than them. The bag only shows she/he is one of the groups. In scenario B, people demonstrate a luxury hand bag to those who may not have one. Meanwhile, she/he has the willing to show she/he is superior than them. In scenario C, people demonstrate a luxury hand bag to people who already got one. Meanwhile, she/he has the will to show she/he is superior than them. In this case, she/he could not gain any superiority. In scenario D, people demonstrate a luxury hand bag to people who may not have one. Meanwhile, she/he doesn't want to show she/he is superior than them. In scenario A, people can gain satisfaction and this behavior can be called "bandwagon", which means to behave like her/his fellows (Leibenstein, 1950). In scenario B, people can also gain satisfaction and this behavior is seen as "showing-off". Although scenario C has little chance to happen in real world, in this particular case, people can't gain satisfaction. In scenario D, people can't gain satisfaction because she/he doesn't want to show off, that's to say, her/his purpose of this behavior is not to gain superiority. In these scenarios, if people want to gain superiority and satisfaction through showing off luxury product they have to avert scenario C and D from happening. In other word, if the owners want to gain superiority through showing off their luxury product through social media they will post the information or picture but "don't show

to some or certain group of friend" or "only show to some or certain group of friends". These scenarios generalized as following Table4:

Table 4: Generalized of scenarios

	Do the audiences more likely possess similar luxury product which information spreader trying to show off?	Does the owner want to gain superiority?	Can the owner get psychological satisfaction?	The behavior is called what?
Scenario A	Yes	No	Yes	Bandwagon
Scenario B	No	Yes	Yes	Showing off
Scenario C	Yes	Yes	No	
Scenario D	No	No	No	

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

According to above, the motivations of luxury consumption can be refined to three segments, which are social psychology motivation, personal psychology motivation and personal physiology motivation. And the social psychology motivations of people purchasing luxury goods are manipulatable, that is to say, when one purchases luxury goods, she/he can choose to show off or not, and she/he can choose the "audience" who could receive. Based on these findings, this research proposes the following recommendations:

Suggestions for luxury products

The traditional luxury producers paid more attention to social psychology motivation, but according to research and analysis, it is found that social psychology motivation can be manipulatable. Therefore, this research believes that the traditional luxury producers should pay more attention to the other two motivations.

This research agrees with the views of authors that the development trend of luxury goods is changing from traditional luxury to new luxury goods. Luxury goods are no longer primarily for showing off but are more associated with deeper issues (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2011). Furthermore, luxury product needs to be given new significance. It is not just a symbol of the status and the wealth, but a kind of self-cultivation. Luxury companies can convey specific signs about their products to consumers through mass media. Different signals correspond to different consumer groups. The degree of consistency between consumer psychology and commodity symbols is focus for luxury companies (Su and Yin, 2016).

Social media is the main approach to manipulate the social psychology motivation for purchasing luxury products, while one of the defects of the social media is that it could only spreading intangible information. This makes experiential consumption become a new direction of luxury consumption. As the role of social psychological needs has been weakened, people have increasingly focused on personal psychological needs and personal physiological needs. People will pay more attention to their own feelings and needs, not to show off or to conform others. Therefore, people will attach more importance to the quality and the pleasure of purchasing luxury goods for themselves. Under these circumstances, there will be more development opportunities for experiential consumption which focuses on creating a memorable experience for consumers (Li, 2018).

Suggestions for ordinary products

This research believes that the range of things that can be shown off is expanded. Many things have a part of the attributes of luxury goods. This theory can be generalized to all things, as long as they are valuable. "Valuable" means that people need to pay a certain price in order to obtain this product.

Therefore, as an enterprise that produces ordinary products, the problem is how to make the ordinary products be shown off more easily. The producers should develop the product features and create unique products that have characteristics different from others. In this case, ordinary products become easier to be shown off because they have advantages over other products.

V. LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCH IN FUTURE

This research analyzed the motivation of consumers to purchase luxury goods from a theoretical perspective. The limitation of this research lies in the lack of empirical analysis, which is only derived from theoretical analysis. Future research can adopt quantitative analysis to verify this theory.

This research proposes the theory that “social psychological motivation is manipulatable”, but lacks a deeper analysis of it, such as the internal psychological factors to manipulate, the number of people purchasing luxury goods due to social psychological motivation, and so on.

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