

APPLYING SEVERAL PERSONALITY TRAITS AS INDICATORS FOR LEBANESE  
CONSUMERS' PURCHASE PRACTICES TOWARDS LUXURY FASHION BRANDS

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Master of Arts in Media Studies - Advertising

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by  
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### Abstract

Since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the market of luxury goods has witnessed a steady growth globally. The brands' owners are giving greater attention to the phenomenon of luxury consumption. This thesis presents an insight into the determinants of the consumers' behavior and their purchasing targets and needs towards luxury fashion brands and products, such as Christian Dior, Chanel, Hermes, Yves Saint Laurent, Gucci, Versace, among others, and their relative importance. There are several studies that have tested the consumers' purchasing behavior, while only few studies surveyed and analyzed the consumers' behavior towards luxury fashion brands and products. Given that, the personality factors and characteristics were examined with a view to conceptualize the consumers' behavior towards high-end brands, namely; the 'self-identity, the need for conspicuousness, the need for status, the need for materialism, the need for acceptance and recognition, and the need for uniqueness and exclusivity'. Furthermore, surveys and interviews were conducted, using face-to-face questions to ascertain the participants' acquisition habits and feeling toward luxury brands, in order to study and analyze the motivations and barriers of these consumers. The findings showed that the personal factors that have the highest influence on consumers' behaviors when studying their orientation towards luxury brands were the self-identity and the uniqueness and exclusivity needs. As for the consumers' motivations and barriers in the same context, findings showed that the quality, price and the existing relation between both of these factors highly influence the consumers' decisions when it comes to buying related particular luxury brand product or not. The challenge of the brands' marketers should be to enhance the brand personality, while working more on the uniqueness and

exclusivity of the related luxury product or brand. In addition, they should focus their marketing campaigns on the exclusive and unique trait and personality of the targeted brand.

Keywords: Luxury; Brands; Fashion; Lebanese Consumers; Purchasing Factors; Consumer Behavior

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In 2014, I launched a new business and opened a new line for *Haute Couture* and *Prêt-à-Porter* (High Fashion and Ready-to-Wear) and started a new journey at "Atelier Chérine Keyrouz".

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master degree to, first, lead them by example not only by words, as well as teach them that a woman should fight in order to do what she thinks is right, even if what she's willing to do may be hard sometimes, or when it coincides with other responsibilities; like being pregnant with a third baby!

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“Luxury is a necessity that begins where necessity ends.” Coco Chanel

Nowadays, and everywhere around the world, we cannot but notice the presence of fashion in our daily lives. Whether on televisions, magazines, online media platforms, and social media, we can see beautiful people counting on their lifestyles and appearances to gain recognition, and to satisfy their ‘fashion needs’. In any advertisement, those people tell us that all we need to do is to buy the exact fashion designs by those renowned designers in an attempt to make the things we purchase become what we aim for. It is, hence; not surprising at all that people are becoming victims of these designs and trends, craving, for example, bags branded Hermes or glasses named Chanel. Moreover, they are sickened by the luxury fashion fever that they tend to call ‘brand loyalty’.

Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that ‘fashion’ is not a new concept. In fact, it has been prevailing for a long period of time as well as played a crucial role in the civilizations’ history. In several ancient societies, such as the Egyptian, Greek and Roman, fashion was the one and only factor that mirrored the uniqueness of the society through all types of accessories, clothing and cosmetics. (Graeff,1996 ,p.6) However, buying luxury items and products was kind of exclusively limited to a certain elite or a high class. It was not until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the luxury goods sector began to evolve, and over the years, led to the appearance of famous brands like Louis Vuitton, Hermes, and Cartier in France, and Burberry in England, among many others (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004 p.30). According to Okonkwo (2007, pp.226-227), this is about the “democratization of luxury”, or the fact that luxury products or the goods that seem to be luxurious are now accessible to more purchasers, which is highly associated to

the globalization and the internet invasion of a non-boundaries world. As a result, a wider sector of the population is currently able to have access to this luxurious world of fashion, whether to real luxury brands or to other similar luxury goods.

Today, the luxury fashion sector recorded a high growth in demand: it is the fourth largest revenue generator in France, and one of the most devoted in Italy, the USA, Spain and other emerging markets like in India, Russia and China (Dubois, & Laurent, 1994).

According to Okonkwo, 2007, the modern luxury fashion sector was developed in the 1990's and attracted global consumers. This sector was largely influenced by the fast growth of Louis Vuitton Mœt Hennessey (LVMH), which was the first corporate to bring together more than 50 brands, including Louis Vuitton and Christian Dior. LVMH was also able to lead to the emergence of a new luxury goods sub-sector and several other brands, such as Zara from Spain and H&M from Sweden that started to make low-priced style fashion items. Although it first started in Europe and then the United States, it is currently an international highly globalized industry with clothing designed in almost every country, and, for instance; Lebanon is a perfect example!

It is from this perspective that consumer behavior, which emerged in the 1960s, is considered strategic and essential for an efficient marketing planning. In fact, businesses today care more about the individual perceptions of their clients, and seek to gain higher customer loyalty. According to Kotler (2003, 26), several companies are shifting from the marketing concept to the customer's concept. The adoption by a business of various forms of customer concept related marketing objectives and philosophies helps them better serve their clients and typically increases their overall reputation and success. Therefore, in order to achieve a modern

understanding of a brand, the consumer and his/her identity should be focused on. Indeed, a brand reflects the mind of the consumer and other 'target groups' (Esch, 2010, p.22), and luxury brands are associated with their core products (Kapferer, 2008, p.193). Thus, the existing definitions of luxury brands refer to specific associations about product characteristics (Meffert & Lasslop, 2003, p.6; Büttner et al., 2006, p.12; Valtin, 2004, p.30). Luxury brands are, hence; "regarded as images in the minds of consumers that comprise associations about a high level of price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, exception and a high degree of non-functional associations' (cf. Heine, 2010).

It is noteworthy, in this scope, that any possible luxury brand should be evaluated through the following characteristics of luxury that can be listed as follows:

- Price: The brand offers a top-notch product whose price is the highest in its category;
- Quality: The brand offers a high level and eternal quality product that gains more value over time. Also, any defect that may happen to the product in the future won't exterminate it since it could be repaired to a like new state.
- Aesthetics: The brand embraces beauty and perfection in all situations and contexts; it is the type of things that could never make an appearance in less than perfection and style as much as it deserves to look like;
- Rarity: The brand is not available or accessible everywhere and every time just like any other 'mass-market' brand;
- Exception: The brand has a style of its own: it's unique, surprising and special;
- Symbolism: The brand is present and could not go unnoticed. It is undoubtedly unrivalled or second to none, and its charisma and outstanding presence fill the place with a remarkable and unique aura.

### **The Concept of Luxury**

The word 'luxury' cannot be easily defined. For instance, the perception behind this concept varies from a person to another; what may be considered as luxury for someone is not perceived the same way by someone else. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2011), defines the word luxury as "the enjoyment of special and expensive things, particularly food and drink, clothes and surroundings, as a pleasure or an advantage that you do not often have and as a thing that is expensive and enjoyable but not essential".

However, from an economic point of view, "luxury" seems easier to define: it is an object which price is the highest, and which quality is the best on the market (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993). Nevertheless, the economic angle is not enough to distinguish between what we call 'upper-range brand' and the 'luxury brand'. To elaborate, based on etymology, Kapferer (2009) states that "luxury comes from "lux" which means light in Latin. Luxury glitters. Like light, luxury is enlightening. Luxury is visible; it must be seen, by the consumer and by others. Luxury defines beauty."

It is also noteworthy that luxury is associated, on one hand, to the capacity to pay the price of the product, and on the second hand, to the capacity to appreciate the artistic extent of the same product. To add, Kapferer considers that "luxury brands are exemplifying the signs and attitudes of the former aristocracy: a restricted group bonds together and distances itself from the rest of society in terms of price and preferences" (1999, pp.78–79).

### **Luxury: New and Old**

Kapferer (2015), using Webster's Dictionary's definition of luxury, provides an interesting reminder of how this concept has changed: it is "anything that pleases the senses...and is costly or difficult to obtain: an expensive rarity."

The last decade has witnessed a remarkable growth of the luxury market. Such a considerable development could be attributed to a "democratization" trend: brands and goods that used to be exclusive are now more accessible and consumed by the public. This growth has created problems because "luxury is partly based on the notion of rarity and of access to a privilege life, to products of exception and to life of exception." (Kapferer, 2015, p.10)

Michael Silverstein explains "new luxury" as "products and services that possess higher levels of quality, taste, and aspiration than other goods in the category but are not so expensive as to be out of reach" (Silverstein & Fiske, 2008, pp.1-2).

In this context, the prices of the new luxury products are higher than that of conventional ones, bearing in mind, nevertheless, that these new luxury goods' volume is way bigger than that of the traditional luxury products; besides, their price is much lower than the price of traditional luxury products.

Thereupon, many luxury brands and products have nowadays "lower-priced versions", and include "lower-priced items"; cases in point are cosmetics, eyewear and other accessories. "Other aspects of the product extension include goods that reflect a "lifestyle" such as furniture, interior decorations, restaurants and hotels" (Okonkwo, 2007, p.237).

Therefore, new luxury products are disregarding the rule: "the higher the price, the lower the volume." In this framework, Silverstein et al. identify three main types of new luxury products: "Accessible super premium products" which prices are at or around the best out of their category; "Old Luxury brand extensions" which are the versions of the products that cost less and made for the well-off society, and "Mass prestige" products that are, according to

Silverstein, a link “between mass and class”, “priced premium over conventional middle-market products, but below super premium or old luxury goods” (Silverstein & Fiske, 2008, pp.4–6).

### **Luxury Brands**

Discussing luxury brands involves brand names. As defined by the American Marketing Association, a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them, intended to identify goods or services of one seller or groups of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (as cited in Kotler 2003, p.418). “The brand identifies the origin of an item. It has the key credibility factor: offers a guarantee, a source of confidence and is a sign of power, expertise and ethics. It is the mark on the product, but it is also the overall value conveyed with promises of tangible and intangible satisfaction” (Kapferer, 2001, 3, pp.10–11). Okonkwo (2007, 4–5) claims that in order to effectively manage a luxury brand, the process is way too long; besides, only a few existing brands occupy a status of luxury.

In the same spirit, Interbrand, a global branding consultancy, placed, in its “The Most Valuable Luxury Brands in the World (2010)” ranking list, “a brand value of 21,860M\$ on Louis Vuitton” making it the most valuable brand name in the luxury products industry and the sixteenth most valuable brand in any product category in the world.

It is worth noting that although mass fashion brands such as H&M, ZARA and L'ORÉAL are not luxury fashion brands, they have become real competitors of luxury brands. This renovation is of great interest, as it has had a direct influence on the segmentation of the global luxury market and the real luxury brands claiming this territory.

### **Youth and Luxury**

In the scope of this study, it is crucial to closely consider the youth attitude in Lebanon. Young people are perceived not just as a worthwhile current market for luxury products, but also as a vital future market. Nowadays, the concept of youth is no longer the same. This is due to the fact that youngsters have become independent adults who are responsible for their own choices and orientations, in a world full of risks and doubts. “The increase in the length of studies, especially through participation in higher education, combined with difficulties in getting the first job and access to affordable housing have increased the length of the transition from youth to independence” (EU Youth Report, 2009).

This transition is important for them to ensure their social integration and guarantee their positioning in the society. As such, adulthood is considered as the time when young people become financially self-sufficient. In the years to come, these teens will be a powerful force, whose tastes and priorities will be felt in fashion, popular culture, politics and marketing. This Lebanese generation is both brand-aware and brand-dismissive.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Fashion is the most rapidly evolving industry as compared to any other industry. What is trendy today, is offhand tomorrow. Originality becomes retro. Seasons change and brands' figures rise and fall. But most of these changes don't affect the consumer perception regarding brands.

People buy brands because, sometimes, they consider that buying clothing brands will help them gain a better social acceptance. This is unfortunately very true in fashion, and especially in the Lebanese market.

A consumer buys a fashion brand to have the feeling of accomplishment, snobbery, or pride. In other words, purchasers have different tastes when it comes to selecting a certain brand that can reflect their lifestyles. Sometimes, this factor can lead to an obsession and even to an addiction to obtain luxury brands especially when they cannot realistically afford them which actually is a main concern.

When making purchases, consumers have to regulate their expenditures and avoid additional debt no matter what impact the brand may have on them, or what factors could influence their decision to acquire such a product through endorsement ads by international celebrities or any other marketing strategy.

The physical appeal of luxurious products is irrefutable: the real leather is softer; the shoes are comfier but the price is usually upsetting. Unless you have a great job or big savings habits, these luxury consumer merchandise will sit on your credit cards statements for a long time.

It's well recognized that consumers don't behave wisely, and considering the huge consumer debt people have, they obviously don't always act in their best financial benefits.

Luxury products are a great model of how unreasonable people can be: a decent and well-built handbag can be bought for \$100, yet consumers will still spend thousands to buy a brand name.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand why people buy luxury fashion brands and their intention towards it. Do people have to wear brands to have a better trust in themselves, to impress others that they are rich, well established and have a great job?



This thesis will attempt to explore the concept of luxury brands, the image that it reflects and the lifestyle that it brings. It will also discuss the opinions of some TV presenters, actors, radio presenters and celebrities. Their point of view regarding luxury brands and how do they wear it and why, will give us a better vision on how do people under the spotlight think and act because they are the first influencers in the society and in their environment.

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

#### **1. The Concept of Luxury and Brand Names**

Nowadays, brands are found everywhere; the international market has, in fact, witnessed a growing competition that boosted the role of brands in the establishment of marketing structures and strategies. Brands can be defined as “a set of mental associations, held by the customer, which add to the perceived value of a product or service. These associations should be unique (exclusive), strong (salient), and positive (desirable)” (Kapferer, 2004, p.10).

Many people perceive a brand as a high-quality choice, while others consider it as a reaction of the targeted customer. “Brands are complex intangibles whose character is a property that emerges from a blend of attributes, some of them seemingly insignificant” (Kapferer, 2004).

Brands do not represent, therefore, a reputation.

Nevertheless, the objective of this research is not to test the consumer's intention to buy any brand. It mostly focuses on the fact that there are luxury fashion brands that made it to be the most luxury brands in the world, namely Gucci, Chanel, Calvin Klein, Louis Vuitton and Christian Dior. Moreover, the market perceives some other brands as very luxurious, such as Versace, Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren, Prada as well as Yves Saint Laurent.

## **2. Luxury Brands vs. Mass Brands**

There is a big difference when it comes to discussing luxury brands and mass brands; the difference mostly lies at the level of their brand identity, the brand building process and the target market, its positioning, etc... Besides, the applied marketing techniques to each concept vary also.

Mass Brands or Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) brands are basically designed with a view to sell more goods with the same basic concepts (promotions, products, pricing, etc.).

*“Luxury Brands are all about their brand universe, they have out sized their aura. They have rich brand heritage because there is always a story of their founder, an inspiration, their visual keys and language is very different from the mass brands, Luxury and life style brands are created around life style. They are like life style codes, so you want to identify with a specific type of lifestyle in that sense the brand universe is paramount. The consumer focus is the key.”*  
(Mannetti, Pierro & Livi, 2002, p.32)

It is worth mentioning that wealthy buyers' income is usually very high, which makes the plasticity high in return. In this scope, such buyers or shoppers won't be influenced by the unstable economic situation, and will keep on buying the same products and shopping within the same pace. Accordingly, competition among luxury brands seems less based on the product, and more dependent on the existing service and suitability, which implies that luxury brands could be, in this context, much more innovative while backing off more than mass brands.

### **3. Luxury Products and Brands: The Relationship**

For the luxury brands to be considered luxurious, they should provide consumers with luxury products and goods; this is crucial for the related brand to attain a luxury brand image. However, the product variety of a specific luxury brand does not only include luxury products (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.312). For example, the brand Mercedes has a range of luxury cars, namely the S-class and non-luxury cars namely the A-class (Belz 1994, p.649; Dubois & Laurent, 1995, p.71).

In this sense, it is obvious that non-luxury brands are usually related to non-luxury products. But several non-luxury brands can still provide consumers with luxury products, such as the Blohm+Voss luxury yachts, Bombardier private jets and first-class flights by Lufthansa.

Hence, the non-luxury brands that can still offer luxury products can be considered as 'luxury product brands'. It could thus be concluded from the aforesaid that considering a brand as luxury or non-luxury is intrinsically related to its brand image, rather than the assessment of its luxury aspect or the price of its products. In fact, a product could be highly expensive and luxurious without necessarily being affiliated to a luxury brand.

With this being said, the brand luxuriousness assessment should be made according to the product range or category to which the related brand is associated. Hence, a luxury brand that is clearly affiliated to the related features of luxury within its core product range or category can spread its product portfolio in a very successful way and attracts the target audience and consumers.

#### **4. Types of Luxury Brands per Levels**

As clearly stated in the section above, the level of luxuriousness of a specific brand is evaluated according to its luxury characteristics, which are considered as the main factors for differentiation of luxury brands (Esteve & Hieu-Dess, 2005). Accordingly, and based on the “World Luxury Brand Directory”, luxury brands fall within the below types:

- Entry-level luxury brands: Ranked above the ‘premium segment’ on the ‘lowest luxury level’, the entry-level luxury brands are not considered as part of the luxury sector; cases in point are representative brands such as Mercedes and Hugo Boss.
- Medium-level luxury brands: These brands are commonly acknowledged as part of the luxury segment, but are still behind the luxury lead. Dolce & Gabbana, Moschino and Escada are examples.
- Top-level luxury brands: These brands are certainly leading luxury brands, or top-level luxury brands, such as Armani, Louis Vuitton and Cartier.

- Elite-level luxury brands: It is the top of the top category of brands that have the highest quality and originality within their related category. For instance, Puiforcat is an elite-level luxury brand in the silverware industry (Marguier, 2007, p.42). These brands target the “*clientèle de connaisseurs*”, who do not only have the basic financial resources but also a “*culture intellectuelle*” (Lombard, 1989, p.16).

It is also important to note that the ranking of a specific luxury brand is made in comparison to other luxury brands. Yet, this ranking is not stable, and it could change over the time. To illustrate, some brands have witnessed a huge development towards the luxury industry; cases in point are the English fashion brands Asprey and Burberry since their repositioning a few years back (Phan et al., 2011), high-potential brands, like the German chocolatier Leysieffer, that is seen to be among the luxury brands in the future, and ‘once-upon-a-time luxury brands’, such as Calvin Klein, Pierre Cardin and Jaguar, that ruined their luxury image (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.312).

## **5. Awareness Luxury Brands**

Brand awareness is crucial for the consumer to be able to differentiate luxury brands. According to Nueono & Quelch (1998), luxury brands can be differentiated according to two categories: ‘connoisseur and star brands’. This differentiation is very important for brand management, given that these brand categories involve opposing marketing strategies.

Usually, Connoisseur brands, are ‘limited awareness brands’ that specialize in a specific market. They also do not seek a high-level awareness, and stick to their strict circle of target

audience; therefore, and in order for these brands to be well-known, their creators rely on 'word-of-mouth' among friends and colleagues (Belz 1994, p.647).

Star brands, unlike Connoisseur and mass-market brands, seek as much brand awareness as possible, going beyond the close circle of target audience. This category of brands is known by the majority of people, notwithstanding that only few buy their products only to show others, notably those who are not able to afford typical items, that they are so wealthy. These star brands, such as Rolex or Louis Vuitton, should also be discovered by non-target groups aiming to satisfy the need of their target group for 'demonstrative consumption'. To explain, if people do not recognize a Rolex wristwatch, for example, or even ignore it, a huge part of its value would be lost (Jean-Noel Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p. 319).

According to Nueno & Quelc (1998), star brands can be differentiated through their awareness level as per the types below:

- **Little stars brands:** they look for a high-level awareness, but are still not well-known.  
For example: Asprey, Brioni and Shanghai Tang.
- **Big stars brands:** they already have a high level of awareness, but are still behind the global stars, such as Chloé, Fendi and Moschino brands.
- **Global stars brands:** they are globally well-known, and they are Hugo Boss, Louis Vuitton and Rolex.



## 6. Luxury Brands by Business Volume

According to the “World Luxury Brands Directory” (2009), luxury brands need to be compared as per their business volume. This comparison leads to the following types of brands:

- Micro-scale brands: They are considered as luxury brands, namely ‘business ventures’. The personnel is limited to the boss and to modest revenues, particularly €10 Million. Examples: Julisis and Mont Charles de Monaco.
- Small-scale brands: It is about brands with little business volume, with revenues starting €10 to 100 Million. Example: Robbe & Berking.
- Medium-scale brands: It is the “mittelstand” of the luxury industry with revenues reaching more than €100 Million. Example: Poggenpohl.
- Large-scale brands: It is about very limited brands in the scope of the luxury industry, and about large-scale businesses with revenues that exceed €250 Million. Example: Escada.
- BIG player: They are the very few star brands that achieve revenues that surpass €1 Billion. Example: Hugo Boss.

- **GIANT player:** It is about very high-turnover product categories such as cars. These products help very rare brands to generate revenues of more than €5 Billion. Example: Mercedes.

With these categories in mind, one should be aware that a relationship between them does exist. To clarify, high business volumes luxury brands could make it to the top luxury level. Similarly, elite-level brands could become connoisseur brands.

### **7. Contemporary Concept of Luxury Brands**

Before the development of the concept of luxury, the latter was defined according to its high-end quality, premium price, originality and uniqueness, and several other factors. However, other indicators have been added to this concept so as it currently relates to taste, design, and time, etc.

Contemporary studies, like that of Mackenzie which was made 10 years ago, proved that no luxury brand was considered as a lifestyle brand. A luxury fashion brand was, in fact, obvious in a specific area, and with a high level of expertise and know-how. Cases in point were watches or leather products. Yet, things have currently changed, and 14 out of 20 luxury fashion brands are now considered as lifestyle brands.

While the lifestyle concept was far from targeting, in the beginning luxury brands, this same concept has evolved later on to a lifestyle concept rather than being about American, French or English brands with international stores.

The connotation of luxury now exemplifies a more rounded and meaningful customer journey and relationship. Consumers seek to understand and relate to a brand's integral values,

dexterity, and expertise. It is simply not enough to have a high price tag to denote a luxury item, but consumers need to feel an emotional connection and an intellectual investment in the brand they buy.

## **8. Luxury Products and Brands: The Distinction between Them**

### **a. Premium Products and Brands**

The premium segment has always been distinguished from luxury products and brands. Truly, there are specific characteristics for these items, called 'constitutive characteristics' that are crucial dimensions starting from a minimum level that is not essential for non-luxury brands and products, to a maximum level touching the highest peak of luxury. In this context, premium brands' rates are higher, on these dimensions, than on medium-level brands, but are still well below luxury brands. Additionally, premium brands remain somehow low profile, while luxury brands are attaining acceptable levels in the major luxury dimensions, and some of them are even going towards the top-of-top luxury level. However, it is worth mentioning that the distinction between premium and luxury brands is not that evident, especially when it comes to differentiating between top premium brands and entry-level luxury brands.

Furthermore, premium brands revolve more around functional characteristics, while luxury brands are somewhat oriented towards a symbolic aspect. For example, Lexus integrated the United States' market, and aimed to attract Mercedes customers, which is its main competitor. Based on this challenge, Lexus developed a model very similar to Mercedes E Class at the design and technical features level; they sold it at half of the Mercedes price and recorded great growth rates in the US. Nonetheless, while giving more importance to functionality, Lexus got away from its vision, and lacked a story, positioning itself therefore as a non-luxury brand (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009, p.316).

b. Product Benefits

- **Comfort & Use:** It is about good and practical material that make out of the product use a nice and comfortable experience, whether the luxury product was something to wear, or a car to use. Such practicalities will definitely have a positive impact on the consumer, and will make him/her save more time and effort.
- **Durability & Value:** Respondents tend to think that a luxury product is mostly of “high and long-lasting value”, given that good materials were used. Durability is; therefore, a crucial feature and expectation when it comes to these brands, along with long-lasting products, that even after a long time of use could be repaired. (Dobni,& Zinkhan, 1990, p.10)

c. Aesthetics

According to the majority of respondents in the scope of this study, aesthetics is a separate and distinctive feature of luxury product. Kapferer & Bastien (2009, p.314) state that “money is not enough to define luxury products because it is not a measure of taste”. Moreover, the aesthetics of luxury products go hand in hand with the upper class orientation and taste, which is the ‘cultural relativity of luxury’ (Kapferer, 2001, p.322). Dubois et al. (2001, p.13), likewise, stress on the ‘polysensuality’ of luxury products as they “not only look beautiful but also are (and should be) pleasant to hear, smell, taste or touch” and hence offer a “source of sensual pleasure”. Consequently, it is noteworthy that aesthetic product design is considered to be one of the main characteristics of luxury products manufacturers that allow them to distinguish themselves from mass market manufacturers (Kapferer, 2001, p.321).

d. Rarity and Singularity

Kisabaka (2001), believes that luxury brands are not ordinary luxury products, but rare products. "Luxury companies ensure rarity through limiting production and the individualization of their products" (Catry, 2003, p.11 et seqq.; Kisabaka, 2001, p.103; Nueono & Quelch, 1998, p.63). Many individuals attach a big importance to their luxury goods in light of their rarity, and, for instance, they are among the very few to possess it. Others are bothered by the idea of the majority having a certain luxurious item when the former have previously bought it, which makes them want to get rid of it as soon as possible.

These luxury products are different from any other product, especially at the level of their limited availability components that are called 'natural limitations', such as 'noble metals'. In addition to that, a lot of luxury brands use 'artificial limitations' like special editions, that could be more developed to become a 'unique piece or item' through the concept of individualization. This happens through the involvement of hand-made manufacturing, and the use of natural materials or artificial variations. Hence, the personalization of products is there to complete this process, as per the consumers' needs and wishes (Kisabaka, 2001, p.97 et seqq.) As an example, the Guerlain "Kiss Kiss Or & Diamonds" lipstick purchasers can opt for jewels to personalize their lipstick cover, or mix it with their own lipstick color (Trommsdorff & Heine, 2008, p1669). Not to forget that this luxurious good is sold for €45,000!

e. Exception

The exceptional character, aspect or dimension of a luxury product is, sometimes, the result of only a 'different design'. Being the experts in the field, luxury producers often establish the trends that end up to be adopted by mass market manufacturers (Goody, 2006, p.344 et seqq.). Several examples given by the respondents showed that luxury goods have what we call an

'eccentric selling proposition'. In fact, they consider that their loyalty and attachment to a specific luxury product, allow them to expect something special in return even if it's a small detail, such as special options, buttons or styles.

However, the exceptional character of a luxury product could also be implemented through innovative features. A lot of innovative technologies are integrated in luxury products before reaching mass market products. Cases in point are technologies such as the Antilock Braking System (ABS) and the Airbag (Valtin, 2004, p.26).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the brand image could also contribute to the exception and extraordinariness of a specific luxury product, along with the product manufacturing history.

f. Symbolism

As mentioned in Mortelmans (2005, p.505), "every notion of functionality is reduced as far as possible." Certainly, the symbolic benefits of a luxury product go sometimes beyond its functional benefits.

The symbolic meaning of a product is largely affiliated to 'human values and lifestyles' (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004, p. 490), and is also related to the brand personality that was adapted to the luxury segment by Heine (2009). The main dimensions of the luxury brand personality are modernity, prestige, sensuality, understatement and eccentricity.

Even though luxury products cannot really symbolize something, they have to adapt to the taste and direction of the upper class. In this framework, Kapferer & Bastien (2009, p.314) argue that "the DNA of luxury is the symbolic desire to belong to a superior class".

g. Marketing Mix and its Luxury

Luxury brands do not always abide by the regular marketing rules and strategies; they actually have contradicting rules described by Dubois (1992) as the “paradoxes of the luxury marketing”. Kapferer & Bastien (2009, p.312), declare that “in order to enter the luxury market, to build a successful luxury brand and to make it remain a luxury brand, one has to forget the classical marketing rules”.



As a result, one can consider that it is highly vital for the luxury brands to have a high prestige level and to 'symbolize at least to some extent' (Keller, 2009, p.291).

The product design could be responsible for the symbolic aspect of a product (Kotler et al., 2007, p. 636; Valtin, 2004, p.116). Also, luxury products can be linked to popular celebrities, or luxurious events (Keller, 2009, p. 292). An oenophile daydreamed: "it is very fascinating to open a bottle of wine from 1912, which witnessed two World Wars – and when you imagine everything that has happened since that time..." Luxury products symbolism is definitely highly influenced as well by the related brands (Meffert & Lasslop, 2003, p.5; Nueono & Quelch, 1998, p.62).

## 9. **Brand image**

The concept of brand image is not new and was usually referred to as "brand identity". Brands are bought by consumers for different purposes; yet, a brand is always associated with a crucial factor that is called "brand image". "Brand image is defined as subjective, but reasoned or emotional perception consumers attach to specific brands" (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Therefore, a brand image is the one and only important feature consumers usually consider when buying a specific brand. Having clarified that the brand image is perceived by the consumer, the brand identity stems from the source or company.

Furthermore, the brand image of a luxury brand can also be symbolic, whereas luxury fashion brands represent something to the consumer, and go hand in hand with their taste and desire.

In this scope, Kapferer & Bastien (2009) describe the luxury consumption as "the symbolic desire to belong to a superior class". On that account, "luxury brands have to show a high amount of prestige, which they also have to symbolize to some extent" (Keller, 2009).

Additionally, Dubois & Duquesne (1993) argue that consumers look for images associated with a specific brand. They use it to express their own values and standards. Djelic & Ainamo (1999), consider that luxurious brands represent concrete or symbolic connotations which can be fulfilling for the consumers' desires and needs. They are actually bought for what they mean to them, not for what they effectively are. "Brand associations are the category of a brand's assets and liabilities that include anything "linked" in memory to a brand" (Aaker, 1997). Hence, "the more similar the brands image to the self-image, the more favorable the consumers' evaluations of the brand" (Graeff, 1996). Therefore, when a consumer prefers a luxury brand over another, and buys it, his choice reflects his self-identity, and shows that this brand is closer to his own perceptions (Zinkham & Hong, 1991).

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Framework

#### **Self-identity**

Smith, Terry, Manstead, Louis, Kotterman & Wolfs (2007) consider self-identity as the "salient part of an actor's self that relates to a particular behavior and can be thought of as the extent to which performing the behavior is an important component of the person's self-concept". In other studies, authors have used self-identity as an additional factor for the theory of planned behavior (Sparks & Guthrie, 1998; Terry, Hogg & White, 1999). Besides, self-identity helped in explaining consumers' purchase intentions of fake products (Arghavan & Judith, 2000).

Self-identity will; thus, be used in this thesis as an indicator for consumers' purchase intention to buy luxury brands in the fashion industry, given that this factor directly contributes to influencing consumers' purchase intentions (Terry, Hogg & White, 1999; Sparks & Guthrie, 1998). Furthermore, Mannetti, Pierro and Livi (2002) state that self-identity predicts infrequent behaviors such as the purchase of luxury fashion brands; which can be interpreted as consumers' behaviors are based on their individual and personal perceptions and beliefs, along with their social roles as they define it. Also, consumers, occasionally, buy luxury fashion brands in line with their self-identity (Wiedmann et. al, 2009).

In addition to that, Escalas & Bettmann (2003) found that buyers tend to establish their self-identity based on their brand choices as per the targeted brand image. Accordingly, the

consumers' association with a brand of their choice is most likely related to the way they mentally represent themselves (Krugman, 1965). By the same token, Sirgy (1982) defines "self-congruity" as the consumer's trial to assess a certain brand through matching it with his self-concept. This self-congruity, apparently, had an influence on consumers' choices of their products and their buying intentions (Ericksen, 1996).

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

### **a. Hypotheses:**

According to the aforementioned theory, the first hypothesis was developed:

**H1:** "A similar consumer self-identity to the brand's image (self-congruity) influences the purchase of luxury fashion brands".

O' Cass & McEwen (2004) define status consumption as "the behavioral tendency to value status and acquire consumer products that provide status to the individual" and conspicuous consumption as "the tendency for individuals to enhance their image through overt consumption of possessions that communicate status to others".

In other words, "conspicuous brands are those that are purely bought to signal wealth" (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005), while status brands can be explained as brands bought to impress others (Husic & Cicic, 2009). Wong (1997) found that materialistic consumers relate conspicuousness to social status. To add, Arghavan & Judith (2000) consider that self-conscious consumers give a great importance to their physical appearance; therefore, they are more likely to buy famous luxury brands no matter what the product is. Garfein (1989) suggests

that consumers who are capable of purchasing well-known luxury fashion brands feel different and special.

Riley, Lomax & Blunden (2006) affirm that the choice of consumers, when it comes to the brand, is intrinsically linked to how prestigious the brand is, rather than its use and price.

Consequently, a second hypothesis was deduced:

**H2:** "The higher the need for status and conspicuousness, the higher the purchase of luxury fashion brands".

The need for uniqueness and the need for recognition and acceptance:

There are two other purposes that can trigger the need to purchase luxury items and brands. They are: the need for exclusivity or uniqueness and the need for recognition and acceptance. According to Snyder & Fromkin (1977), some consumers feel the urge to be different than others, so they dress differently. Moreover, Tian & McKenzie (2001) demonstrate that consumers who always look for exclusivity go for unique and special items and brands, which leads to a third hypothesis:

**H3:** "The higher the need for uniqueness, exclusivity and acceptance, the higher the purchase of luxury fashion brands".

Nevertheless, consumers do not always feel the need to be different and unique, but want sometimes to be accepted in their society, and to impress others. Hence, Matherly (2009) clarifies that when consumers seek to impress other people, they are likely to choose brands that are reliable with their group targets. Furthermore, consumers often opt for brands that show their belongingness to their reference groups, leaving aside brands to which unwanted groups are loyal (White & Dahl, 2007).

To understand more the needs triggering luxury brands purchasing, one last factor shall be considered, namely materialism. The latter is defined as "a set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one's life" (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Richins (1994) concludes that people who are more oriented into materialistic value expensive items and goods, in light of their symbolic link and relation with prestige and success. In addition, Wong (1997) assert that materialistic consumers choose items that are very costly and high-status oriented. Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis has been formulated:

**H4:** "The higher the need for materialism, the higher the purchase of luxury fashion brands".

**b. Research Questions:**

**RQ1:** Are celebrities/public figures aware of what the brand they are wearing actually reflects, as in quality, history, purpose, touchpoints...?

**RQ2:** Do celebrities/public figures know the value of being trendsetters; hence, set trends responsibly?

**RQ3:** Are celebrities/public figures obsessed with buying the latest branded fashion styles or are they able to set spending limits?

## Chapter 4

### Research Methodology

This chapter explains the research design used for this study. It discusses what research methods are employed and how the techniques used will allow to gather data.

#### **4.1 Research Methods**

##### a. Quantitative Method: Survey

“Conducting survey is a relatively inexpensive way of obtaining information. You can ask a considerable number of questions, though you must be careful that you do not ask so many that your respondents become irritated,” (Berger, 1998, p.38). In addition, surveys should use simple language and be limited to less than fifteen minutes (Keyton, 2006).

Based on these recommendations, the research questionnaire (see Appendix A) consisted of twelve questions, excluding the introductory questions about gender, age and professional status. All questions dealt with the focus of the study about luxury fashion brands and the concept of wearing it. The questionnaire needed five minutes to be completed.

##### b. Qualitative Method: Interviews

Survey research is useful in describing large populations but is weak and invalid if used alone (Keytone, 2006).

Since the subject deals with fashion luxury brands, interviewing some media professionals, celebrities and fashion experts is needed.

While conducting interviews, the interviewer can collect a big amount of information. He or she can ask follow-up questions depending on the interviewees' answers (Berger, 1998, p.57).

Sigmund Freud argued that "slips of the tongue and the dreams people have can be useful sources of information about their mental states that other kinds of research cannot get at" (Ibid).

In the case of personal interviews conducted in the interviewee's home or office, the interviewer can control the data collection process (Gunter, 2000, p.26). However, one of the main problems related to interviews is the difficulty in handling and organizing the big amount of information they can generate and meaningless answers the interviewers could get (Berger, 1998, pp.57-58).

Another disadvantage of one on one interview is that respondents may not give honest answers because they may fear the interviewer's judgment in case they tell the truth (Ibid, p.39).

## **4.2. Procedure**

### **1. Survey: Sample Selection**

*(Refer to Appendix A for survey questions)* The survey was addressed to fashion lovers, young people, stylish ladies, media specialists, men in the fashion industry, people that are interested in fashion and have the potential to buy brands.

The questionnaire was distributed to approximately 150 people from different age groups, and academic, cultural and professional backgrounds. In a time saving measure, it was sent online on the website [www.freeonlinesurveys.com](http://www.freeonlinesurveys.com) . Overall, only 81 people answered.

### **2. Interviews:**



*(Refer to Appendix B-H for interview questions and answers)* In order to collect valuable data, the research conducted several interviews with different professionals in this field: (the transcripts of the interviews are all provided in the appendices)

- a. Wissam Hanna: Fiordelli's<sup>1</sup> brand image since 2004, Mr. Lebanon 2005, Mr. International 2006, actor and TV presenter.
- b. Jocelyne Chehwane: Assistant General Manager and Head of retail banking at Blom Bank.
- c. Diana Fakhoury: senior news anchor at MTV<sup>2</sup>
- d. Raja Nasr El Dine: host of "Al Maktab El Thani" show on MTV Lebanon.
- e. Rima Rahme: Radio presenter at Radio Liban Libre (RLL) and special events manager different artists such as Wael Kfoury, Kathem El Saher, etc...
- f. Victoria Bonya: International super model for Victoria Secret and a fashion influencer.

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<sup>1</sup> Fiordelli: An Italian fashion brand designed for men and funded in 1983.

<sup>2</sup> MTV: also known as Murr TV, is a Lebanese TV outlet

## Chapter 5

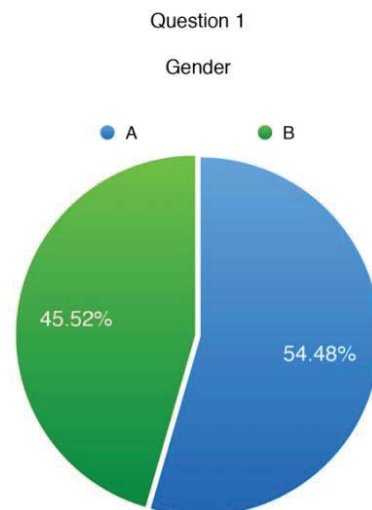
### Data Collection and Analysis

This section presents the findings in regards to the survey as well as the interviews conducted with different experts.

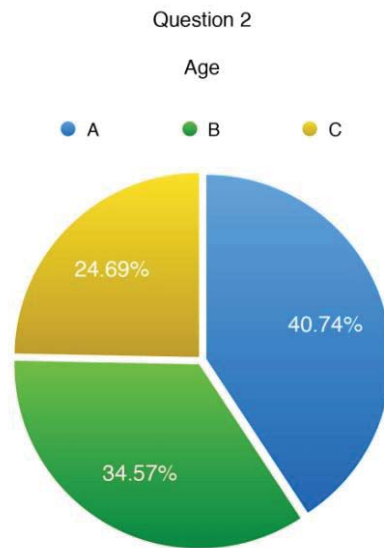
#### 1. Quantitative Method: Survey

A total of 81 media and fashion respondents from different cultural backgrounds answered the survey. While distributing the survey, people from different regions and profession were chosen.

The gender category was important to see how much men are now taking care of themselves and their look in comparison with women who surely are the most spenders in fashion. The chart below gives the percentages about the respondents.



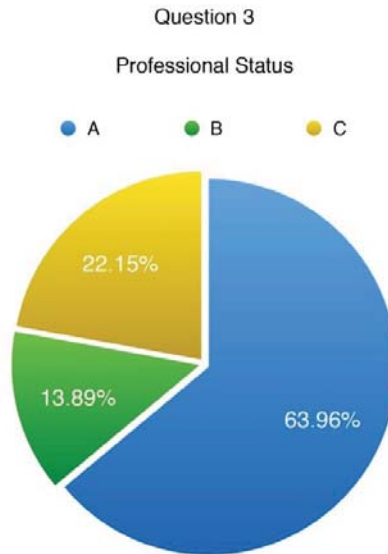
The age category was divided into three groups: A- between 18 and 26; B- between 26 and 36; B- over 36 years old. The details are in the chart below.



The biggest number of respondents turned out to be between 18 and 26 years old, mainly because they are the most active on the internet. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the survey was posted online and sent via e-mail or Facebook. Furthermore, as indicated in the graph, as the age increased, the number of respondents decreased.

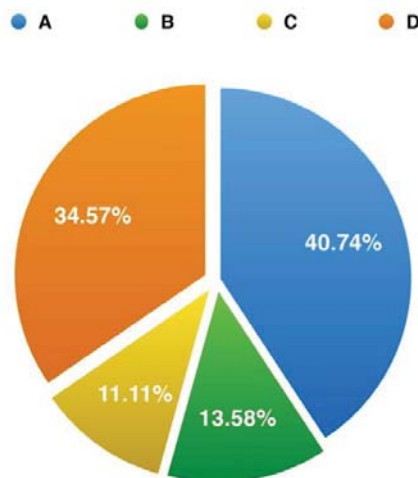
In question number 3, the professional status aimed at deducting whether people who purchase luxury goods are well-employed to be able to afford expensive items, or unemployed thus will maybe help us interpret if they are buying fake products or simply relying on other people to help them financially.

The data show that the biggest number (63.96%) are of the working force, so they are independent and responsible on their own spending.



When asked if they ever purchased a luxury fashion brand, most of the respondents (40.74%) answered “yes”. Surprisingly, many answered honestly: “yes but fake” (34.57%). As an assumption, one may predict that the reason 34.57% of the respondents answered “yes but fake” is that the survey was anonymous; thus, felt free to answer honestly.

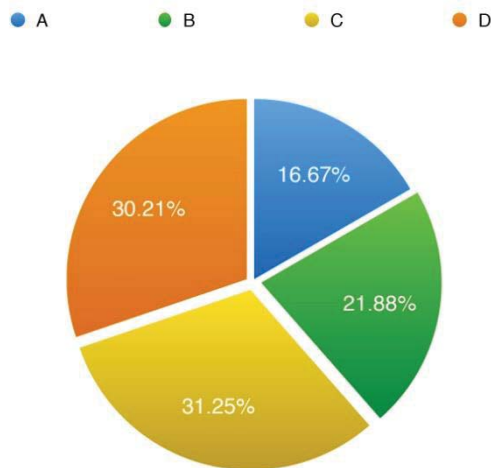
Question 4  
Have you ever purchased or intended to purchase a luxury fashion brand like Gucci, Versace, Chanel, Louis Vuitton or Prada?



As expected, 31.25% answered this question with “show off”, which is one of the worst things that our society is currently suffering from. This result justifies why, in the previous question, people confessed that they buy fake products.

However, the researcher found a slight difference with the second answer “to love the unique pieces, material and originality” which was 30.21% and which is very reasonable in case people can really afford it.

Question 5  
In your opinion, what are the most relevant factors/motivators when purchasing luxury fashion brands?



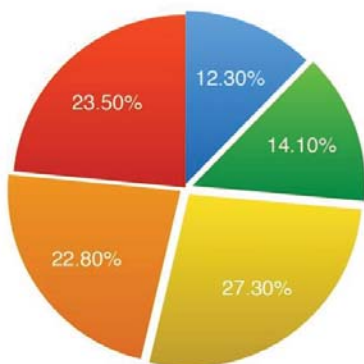
According to the survey's results, three answers were almost very similar. But most of all, 27.3% answered “for the love to be recognized in the society and feel distinctive” which, based on the data collected, appeared to be more important than loving what the brand does or for the lifestyle that it reflects. With these answers in mind, brands are nowadays working very hard on introducing new collections with new material and colors. On the other hand, it is clear that

the Lebanese market may be focusing, mainly, on how to “dress to impress” rather than looking for the real leather, for example, or perfect cut with amazing finishing.

Question 6

Would you consider yourself as a typical buyer of one of the named luxury fashion brands?

● A ● B ● C ● D ● E

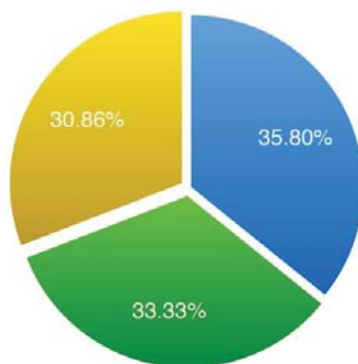


When asked if consumers agree with the statement “wearing luxury fashion brands represent who they are”, responses were, somehow, the same. Nearly 35% answered that they love to wear unique and expensive pieces, 33% want to show that they are rich and can afford wearing luxury brands, and 30% to show that they are different. To assume again, these three answers may reveal one truth: people love luxurious brands because they need to impress others, and give, to a certain extent, a fake image on their real personality, lifestyle, income and spending.

Question 7

Would you agree with the statement that wearing luxury fashion brand communicate/represent who you are?

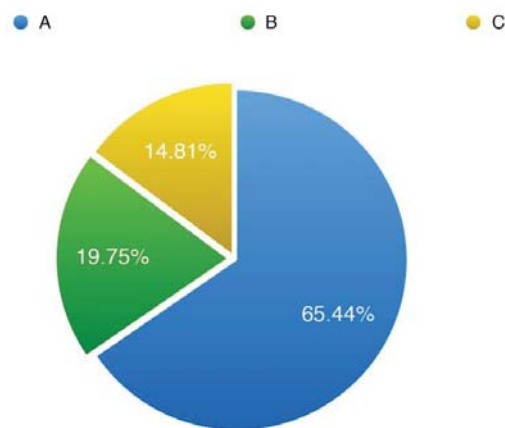
● A ● B ● C



As predicted, respondents with nearly 65.5% agreed that wearing luxury fashion brands reflect wealth, prestige and achievement. This image is true to nearly all respondents, mainly females aged between 18 and 26 years old. This means that this age group focuses more on the appearances and how they dress up and look among their friends more than the real value of luxury products.

Question 8

Would you say that wearing luxury fashion brands indicate wealth, prestige and achievement?

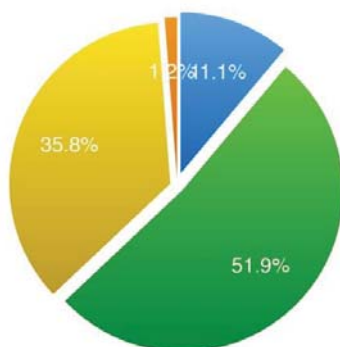


Only a minority of 11% of the respondents said that wearing luxury brands does not reflect that they are best off with the most money, most education and best jobs. People who think so, understand the real value of having a luxury product. Unfortunately, 51% of respondents believe that something luxurious reflects richness, education, high salaries; in other words, the mistaken definition of a finest person. Truth is, fashion is an art based on new creations with high standard production and execution, and people must be aware of that when making their purchases.

Question 9

Do you think that people who wear brands are people who are best off, those who have the most money, most education, and the best jobs?

● A ● B ● C ● D

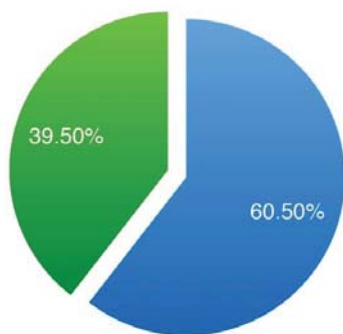


Question 10 tackles the subject straightforwardly. “Do you like to show what you have” contradict the real concept of brands and wearing great cuts with perfect finishing and exclusive material. 60% of respondents said Yes and 39% No.

Question 10

Do you like to show what you have?

● A ● B

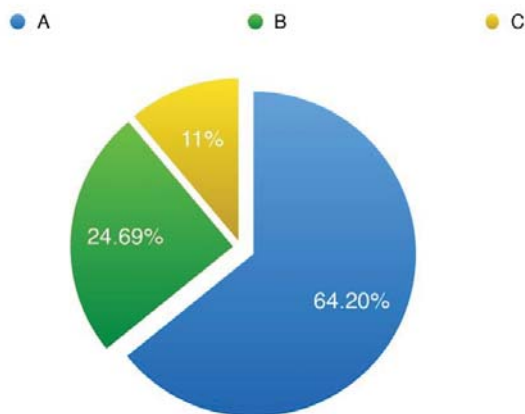


64% of respondents confirm that wearing luxury fashion brands will be immediately noticed by others and this shows how much our society rely on show off to describe or judge people whether they are rich, poor, or have a great lifestyle which is giving fake power and image to many.



Question 11

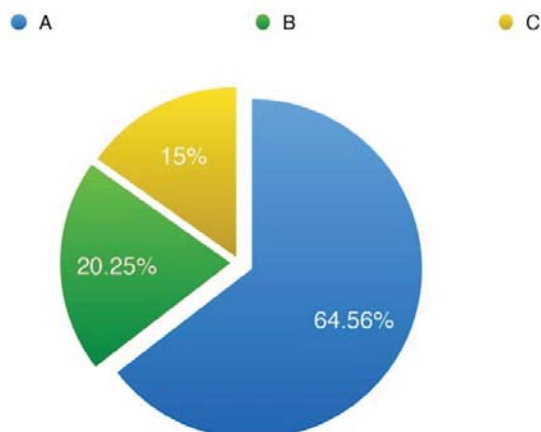
Would you say that wearing luxury fashion brands will be noticed by others?



Only the minority (15%) prefer to stay discrete even when buying a luxury product and try to find an item without showing the logo to show off among others. On the other hand, this survey is confirming that luxury fashion's main objective in Lebanon is to show off as 64% answered the opposite. This means that new generation is being built on unrealistic facts and power and they are somehow gaining confidence and credibility from the way they are dressed or what they own, instead of focusing on other important aspects like education, values, beliefs...

Question 12

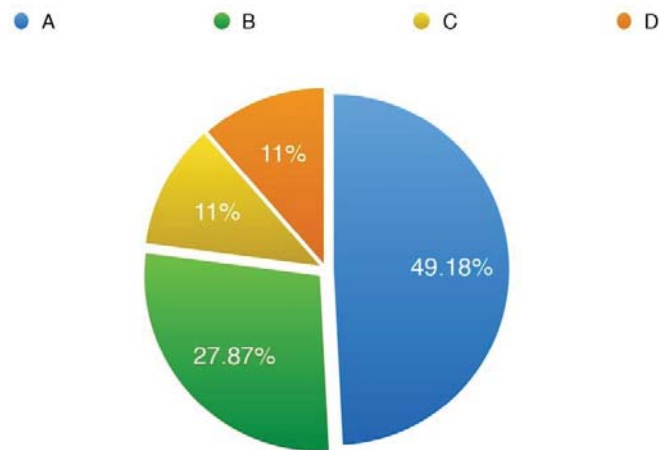
How important is the conspicuousness of a luxury fashion brand (logo) to you and why?



49% of the respondents are influenced by celebrities in ads and love to imitate them. They think wearing luxury brands will help them become equally famous. Whereas only 11% buy brands for their personal satisfaction and needs.

Question 13

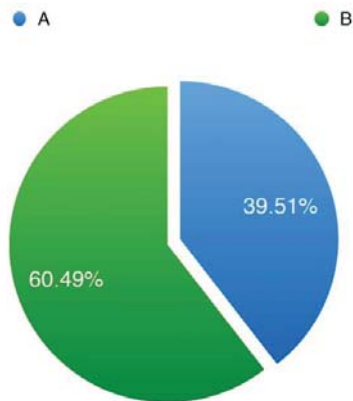
Who are the most influential people when deciding to purchase a luxury fashion brand?



Unpredictably, 60% answered that they prefer to be similar to their friends as a proof that, they also, can afford luxury. Real brand fans usually like to be distinct from the majority and that's why they differentiate themselves by buying special, exclusive items. Today, it seems that social pressure is "forcing" many people to "speak the same voice", in other words buy the same luxury products because society is afraid of negative criticism and judgements.

Question 14

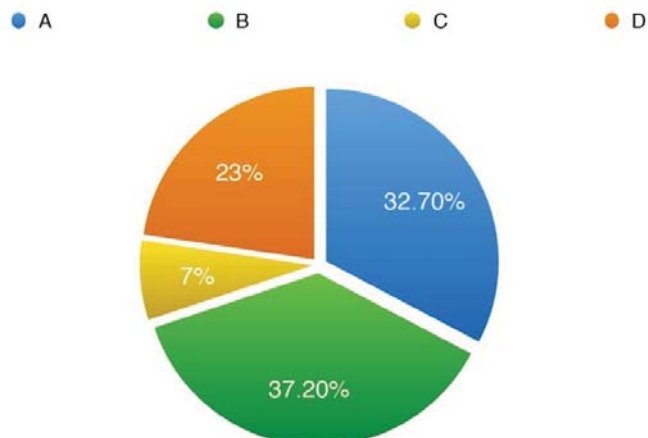
Would you rather look different or similar to friends and family members?



Only 7% of the respondents answered that the main factor that they rely on when buying a luxury brand is its practicality and usefulness, while 37% answered that the price is the most important aspect. By the same token, it is worth mentioning that many items are frequently being overpriced due to high demand. The graph below illustrates other details that the consumers take into consideration:

Question 15

If you had to choose, which of the below mentioned factors is the most important when deciding to purchase a luxury fashion brand?



## 2. Qualitative Method: Interviews

“There's no better place to look for outfit inspiration than the celebrities” (Di Pede, 2017).

It is not a secret that people tend to imitate public figures and follow the trends they set.

Nonetheless, have they ever thought of why do celebrities purchase luxurious products in the first place?

The interviews conducted with six public figures revealed that celebrities are mainly obliged to wear branded outfits to seem trendy and elegant, especially during their public appearances, as if it is a norm. Raja Nasr El Dine and Rima Rahme admit that this “is a must.” Nasr El Dine adds that, frequently, the things he wears are not always things that he really needs, but ‘forced’ to have. Furthermore, he justifies his claims by stating that celebrities do so because, usually, the things they wear can highly please their fans. Wissam Hanna, confesses that he sometimes sports outfits that he’s not convinced with; nonetheless, since this piece might create some controversy in the media, he wears it! “This is what I like most. I want people to always recognize me with my unique style and daring pieces” he concludes! Likewise, Victoria Bonya affirms that her job as a model requires that she wears from a designer “who makes his designs with so much love even if he is a fresh designer and still not known.” Hanna, as well, says that “fashion and style are my partners in my daily life and at work” since, as mentioned previously, he is a model and a TV host. Jocelyne Chahwane declares that she insists on wearing luxurious evening dresses, only, in an attempt to look unique, classy, and gorgeous. Yet, and unlike Nasr El Dine, Chahwane makes sure she hides or covers the brand name or logo for she hates to brag.

Although celebrities have to wear branded outfits, the majority picks only the pieces that suits them best. Indeed, Diana Fakhoury, Rima Rahme and Jocelyn Chahwane confirm that they buy

what looks good on them, is comfortable, convenient and special. As an example, Chahwane explains: "I buy from Escada, Max Mara or Boss (for work), and lately Blue Marine because I am tall and I need a special cut to fit me right, and only the German cut works with me. It is a need to buy these brands because when I buy any piece I don't have to make any alteration or fix anything. It is like it's made to measure my length, hips, everything."

On the other hand, only Hanna and Bonya consider that choosing branded, luxurious items is an art, not to forget that brand designs are pieces of art themselves. For instance, Bonya claims that she "appreciates the art behind the dress rather than wearing a luxury brand like anybody else." Also, Hanna confirms that he tends to buy clothes that reflect his personality. He furthers that the idea behind a certain design is what attracts his attention the most.

All of the interviewees, excepting Bonya, believe that people, particularly in Lebanon, buy luxury brands to show off, in the first place, that even those who cannot afford these brands either buy fake products, or, as mentioned by Chahwane and Nasr El Dine, takes loans to purchase original ones! The main reason is the belief that wearing luxurious attires means that one is wealthy and leads a high life. Fakhoury divulges that a person can easily look up-to-date, classy, elegant, attractive and beautiful by wearing reasonably priced wardrobes. Hanna, too, rejects the above 'rumor' by arguing that our market is filled with fake goods that people can buy at very low prices, which consequently means that owning a Chanel bag, for example, does not reflect prosperity. "We are living in a society [in which brands] reflect fake characters" he says. Hanna, Rahme, and Chahwane confirm that there is a relation between the urge of wearing branded clothes only to show off and psychological deficiencies. In fact, Chahwane asserts that those who are okay with themselves don't usually tend to brag about what they have, but are confident, true to themselves, and sure that they are loved for who they really are. Rahme furthers that these brands are used to cover these people's insecurities. Bonya, on the

contrary, think that people chase brands because they tend to look like everyone else: “it’s not a special thing but rather an appreciation of what the big designers are creating and for the love of the culture behind the brand and what it shows. In my environment, who wear brands are not best off, but rather are normal people with normal salaries but good taste and appreciate a lot the art behind luxury pieces.”

When asked about the barrier that may hinder a person from buying a luxurious product, all respondents except Victoria Bonya answered: “the price”. To clarify, most of the interlocutors affirms that the huge prices imposed on branded items are illogical, and sometimes not convincing at all. They also consider that these prices are basically set on the brand name, not on the item itself. Put another way, people are buying or paying for the brand name not for the shoe, or the dress, for example. Yet, Bonya finds that paying for the value of the brand rather than the product is so normal because “the designer spent lots of money and time to make a brand image and this is his investment.”

To solve the ‘problem’ of high-priced goods, one interviewee confessed that if she really likes a very unaffordable dress, she usually reproduces it; thus, obtains an almost very similar piece at a reduced price and, sometimes, a lessened quality. Since “counterfeiting is regarded as one of the ‘oldest crimes’ in history” (Hamelin, Nwankwo & El Hadouchi, 2012), Hanna suggests resorting to “light brands” such as Zara. Jocelyne Chahwane, a mother and a banker who thinks rationally, purchases “smart buys.” She elucidates that she prefers saving for her kids, building them houses, planning for their future... instead of “buying a watch for \$40,000!” Perhaps, the luxury fashion industry is currently seeking to solve this problem on its own by ‘redefining fashion’ or ‘reinventing high fashion’ in which one can realize that, today, “streetwear is the new luxury” particularly in the ‘era of hyper-sharing’ on social

media, which, as predicted, may lead to this generation's comprising 45% of the global luxury goods market by 2025, as mentioned in a study done by Brain & Company.

Contrarily, Bonya deem that she has no barriers when it comes to fashion; her decision is related to whether she likes the item or not: "I can simply wear full outfits from Zara and another day full outfit from a luxury brand. It's up to my taste and mood."

Knowing that the majority of the interlocutors claimed that they choose the brands that are perfectly matches their style and bodies, only Wissam Hanna and Victoria Bonya cherished brands that make them unique. Truly, Hanna focuses on the material, fabric and the finishing of the design that can make him seem special, even if that means going to the extreme or adding a "crazy touch", and Bonya prefers wearing whatever helps her feel herself by insisting on the fact that "not all luxury brands make me feel me". She adds: "since I live in many places in the world I am open to more cultures and mentalities. What I appreciate more is to wear something unique and special from the country I visit. I like to buy expensive items from any country even if it's not known, but it should be really nice, with good quality and show something different from all things we see on the runway or in the international markets."

In summary, this interview showed that celebrities think that people use brands as a 'bragging tool' to feed their egos to the extent that they are ready to either fake the item or take loans to afford this luxury. Finally, although most of the interviewees, in addition to the majority of the Lebanese, do not appreciate, or even have no clue about the art invested in every luxurious good, "Lebanese people are very up to date and stylish in all ways" avows Bonya!

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

Recently, many people began using luxury products and brands for many reasons like upgrading their lifestyle, modern trend between family and friends, and living a luxurious life. Still, consumers are facing some problems when buying luxury products, and this is mainly, related to price. One can still find price sensitivity in the market and this is the first barrier that confronts the end user. As a matter of fact, this thesis showed that it is highly recommended to know more about the product, the history of the brand and the style it reflects, its high quality and most of all make sure that one's income is suitable to buy a luxury product and when to buy it.

The concept of buying a luxury product is based on people's attitudes, their personal beliefs, feelings and purchase intentions towards luxury goods. Luxury, as a term, and what encourages one to buy it differs from one person to another especially among youngsters.

In the business of luxury, no one wears a Burberry trench coat simply to stay warm. No one buys Dom Perignon just because they feel thirsty. And no one forks over two hundred grands for a Bentley simply to get from point A to point B. No! luxury products exist for a much less rational reason. That's why their marketing must be much more emotional. In short, mass marketing is the business of selling reality. Luxury marketing is the business of selling dreams. Most of the people buy luxury products for a variety of reasons, all of which are related directly to the strong emotions and principles that they attach to expensive items. Whether they can financially afford it or not, they will frequently buy luxurious items to show off among their friends and relatives or to gain acceptance from others.



Now that one is aware of the psychology behind people's purchasing luxury goods, he/she can go a long way in increasing confidence or providing a sense of belonging rather than appreciating a very well-produced item with the best quality and handmade work. In addition to that, people have a desire to always fit in, whether in the university, at work or in their social groups. For this reason, they purchase brands because they are convinced that it will make them more socially accepted.

Based on the research conducted, this mentality is true especially in the Lebanese society. Consumers usually buy clothing brands and products that are mainly perceived as high class, stylish, trendy and unique, and can help to fit into a particular subculture or group.

Furthermore, when buying a luxury item, the brand usually reflects a certain image, lifestyle and perception in the consumers' mind to attract its part from the market. However, and according to this study, the real meaning of wearing brands among people is not very well clear and authentic, since the results proved that a big part of the consumers take advantage of wearing luxury brands to become accepted and admired without taking into consideration that the creators of these brands are taking advantage of this mentality to overprice their items and benefit from millions of dollars spent on a tiny item.

For each designer an identity, style and vision different from the other. Fans of each brand are usually having the identical or at least love the way this brand translates its language of fashion. But whenever this purpose changes, the brand's value decreases and loses its factual meaning and traits in the consumer's mind. This is true especially when social media invaded our life and our very small and personal moments and shaped a new perception and vision in the fashion and media circle.

*“The most important thing is to forecast where customers are moving and to be in front of them”. Philip Kotler*

### **6.1 Limitations:**

Getting a minimum of 81 people to take the survey was surprisingly the hardest part of this research. Two main reasons are: some did not take this survey seriously, maybe because it was first sent online and not through a personal message or a phone call, and some others do not check their emails regularly. Several people had to be asked twice to respond to a five-minute questionnaire, not to forget that it was hard to convince others to take this survey. It actually took one month and a half to reach the minimum number of respondents needed for the study.

It is true that only 81 respondents are not enough to base the generalize this research. Howbeit, this thesis focuses on respondents who are mainly into fashion and follow the latest trends; therefore, 81 individuals from different cultural and academic backgrounds and different age groups can be somewhat considered a representative sample of fashion-enthusiasts in Lebanon.

Social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter, were very helpful in getting a good number of contacts in a shorter period of time. Truly, in less than 24 hours, more than 15 people answered the questionnaire. But, reaching 81 respondents demanded crossing a longer path; hence, emails, and Facebook messages were sent to engage people in this study.

Since the desired number of respondents was unreachable ten days after sending the survey, e-mail and messages reminders were sent along with new appeals for responses. The 81<sup>st</sup> participant was successfully reached one month later!

Posting the survey online had many advantages, but it also had disadvantages. The researcher could not see the expression in the recipients' eyes; nor come up with additional questions or even and communicate deeply with the partakers.

“In conducting survey research, getting a representative sampling is often difficult and can be very expensive. Also, because surveys must have some focus, they must be limited in scope. The list of questions must be fixed, and there is no room for maneuver, as in the depth interview” (Berger, 1998, p.39).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Dear respondent,

As a part of my thesis research I have designed a questionnaire to find out the attitudes of young people towards luxury products. Your opinions are important and confidential. For questions or clarifications please do not hesitate to email me at [keyrouzcherine@gmail.com](mailto:keyrouzcherine@gmail.com)

Thank you for your participation.

1. Gender: female ( ) / male ( )
2. Age: between 18-26 years ( ) / between 26-36 years ( ) / over 36 years ( ) old
3. Professional status: working ( ) / unemployed ( ) / housewives ( )
4. Have you ever purchased or intended to purchase a luxury fashion brand like Gucci, Versace, Chanel, Louis Vuitton or Prada?

- a) Yes
  - b) No, I would love to but I can't afford it
  - c) No, I do not care
  - d) Yes but fake
5. In your opinion, what are the most relevant factors/motivators when purchasing luxury fashion brands?
- a) Wear like Celebrities
  - b) Have a Luxurious feeling and show that I am rich
  - c) To Show off
  - d) Love the unique pieces, material and originality
6. Would you consider yourself as a typical buyer of one of the named luxury fashion brands?
- a) I just love everything this brand does
  - b) I love the lifestyle it reflects
  - c) I love to be recognized in the society and feel distinctive
  - d) I love to wear daring and unique pieces
  - e) I don't want to wear like others
7. Would you agree with the statement that wearing luxury fashion brands

communicate/represent who you are?

- a) It says that I love to wear unique and expensive pieces
- b) It shows that I am rich and can afford wearing luxury brands
- c) It means that I want to show that I am different

8. Would you say that wearing luxury fashion brands indicate wealth, prestige and achievement?

- a) Yes for sure
- b) No not necessarily
- c) It also indicates that I am special

9. Do you think that people who wear brands are people who are best off, those who have the most money, most education, and the best jobs?

- a) Not at all
- b) Yes, This is what it reflects
- c) Yes but there are lots of people who fake it
- d) No, there are people who are shopaholic and can't control their expenses

10. Do you like to show what you have?

- a) Yes I like to be recognized
- b) No I wear luxury brands for my own satisfaction

11. Would you say that wearing luxury fashion brands will be noticed by others?

- a) Yes for sure, immediately
- b) It makes me stand out from the crowd
- c) Not necessarily

12. How important is the conspicuousness of a luxury fashion brand (logo) to you and why?

- a) It is very important to show how much I spent on my clothes
- b) It is important to show that I do not buy products like my friends
- c) I prefer to stay discrete and find a product without showing the logo even for luxury brands

13. Who are the most influential people when deciding to purchase a luxury fashion brand?

- a) Celebrity endorsement (celebrity showing in the ad)
- b) A member of my family
- c) My friends
- d) No one, if I like it I buy it

14. Would you rather look different or similar to friends and family members?

- a) Better to be different
- b) Like to be similar and that I can also afford luxury brands

15. If you had to choose, which of the below mentioned factors is the most important when deciding to purchase a luxury fashion brand?

- a) The material and high end quality
- b) The price if it convinced me even if I like it
- c) How much will I wear it and how practical it is
- d) Simply If I love it

### **Appendix B: Interviews Questions**

1. Have you ever purchased or intended to purchase a luxury fashion brand like Gucci, Versace, Chanel, Louis Vuitton or Prada?
2. In your opinion, what are the most relevant factors/motivators when purchasing luxury fashion brands?
3. How People stand in our society?
4. Do you think that people who wear brands are people who are best off, those who have the most money, most education, and the best jobs?

3. "Agreement of others does not matter to me". Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

4. "I would rather be just like everyone else rather than to be called a freak". Do you agree or disagree to this statement?

5. What are the most important barriers you might enter when intending to purchase luxury fashion brands? (income, etc.)

6. Do you think that when buying a fashion luxury brand, you will be paying for the value of the product or the value of the brand name?

7. Do you have any other motivations for purchasing luxury fashion brands that have not been discussed yet?



**Appendix C: Main ideas of the Interview with Mr. Raja Nasr El Dine / March 27, 2018.**

**TV presenter at MTV Lebanon, “Al Maktab El Thani” and influencer.**

- Yes sure I have purchased many brands.
- The most relevant motivators when purchasing luxury fashion brands is first something that I like or that I should buy just to wear it in this event and because it's a must not necessarily something I need. But maybe also to please people I might see in a specific event.
- People in our society forces you to buy brands.
- No people who wear brands are most of them fake, a hobby or even they take loans and pay debts each month just to wear brands.

- Agreement of others is the last thing that matters to me but only if I'm forced or obliged to buy brands for a specific invitation.
- Most wearable brands are Gucci and Prada.
- I like to be special in my looks and unique in my designs.
- For sure the price is the most important barriers before buying any item.
- The most important motivator to buy a luxury brand is if I really like it and feel I want to buy it like watches, t-shirts, small things that I can differentiate myself from the crowd.
- For sure when we buy a luxury brand we are paying for the name of the brand much more than the product itself.
- Our society is sick with brands, show off, fake people and most of all full of debts and credits.

**Appendix D: Main ideas of the Interview with Mr. Wissam Hanna / March 29, 2018.**

**Actor and TV presenter, image of Fiordelli since 2004, Mr. Lebanon 2005, Mr. International 2006.**

- Fashion and style are my partners in my daily life and at work
- The best factors I always look for in any product are the material, its finishing and the design.

Mostly, I search for the new idea in the luxury product and the new innovation in it especially if there were a similar design before a season.

- In the GCC and especially in Lebanon, people focus a lot about buying luxury products, influenced with brands because they love it. In our society, there is a dominant phenomenon now that is the Show off at all levels and mainly fashion.

They think that if they wear brands that will reflect a nice lifestyle and nice character.

There are 2 kinds of people: one of them who love the brand and that's why they buy it and the other kind of people wear brands even if it doesn't look a lot like their character.

- Wearing brands do not mean that those people are best off, with the most money, most education and the best jobs, but rather we are living in a society that it reflects fake characters.

And the phenomenon of fake brands is taking a big place in the market so you do not know if it's a real product or fake. So we can't say that they have the most money, most education and best job.

Moreover, we can find now light brands who copy big brands with very affordable prices and low quality but they reflect a great lifestyle and trend like Zara.

Also new small designers copy big brands with very good price

Before, fashion was well divided and you can easily recognize the aristocrat from the farmer. Now there is no more medium level in the society; fake items and cheating is everywhere.

There are people who intentionally wear fake brands to cover something in their life or are ashamed from something among their friends.

What is happening now with fashion, happened before with paintings. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings, drawings and sculpture were very famous, it was the era of Picasso and many famous painters and it wasn't easy to recognize the real from the fake one.

And so in fashion now.

Everybody wear brands (real and fake) and you cannot recognize it easily but you need a fashion expert to do so.

- For me, I eat and I dress up as I like not as the Lebanese quote says.

I buy the items that look identical to my character and don't harm anybody's eyes or feelings.

I always dress up as I see it fits me and as I love to see myself because I love daring items and styles. And at the end for sure not everybody will like everything I do because I also know that there will be jealousy.

- Most wearable brands among my friends are Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci and Louis Vuitton

- If there are only these 2 choices, I would rather be called freak.

Sometimes I wear things that I am not convinced with but it creates a debate in the media. And this is what I like most. I want people to always recognize me with my unique style and daring pieces.

My job is all about art. An artistic person has always a touch of craziness in everything he does. If not he won't be an artist and won't leave an original feeling in people's heart.

- The price is the first barrier when intending to purchase luxury fashion brand because sometimes I see it not logic and not convincing.

And even if the brand is very high and expensive I cannot buy it because also I can't forget that there are people who cannot afford to buy a sandwich. Then also I think of the economical crisis we are living and for our future. In my opinion, if people do not think this way, they will have problems in their life and they lead to irresponsible life.

We can see many shopaholic people wearing only each item one time and for me this is not fashion.

Sometimes I say I want to spend this budget on myself and I buy an expensive item but not always.

- I have one more thing since I also paint and I feel concerned in this field. I highly appreciate the creation behind the product itself of any brand. I take into consideration that there are people who spent hours and spent a huge budget to create a collection, I think this is a very nice thing to look for in the brand. Then we realize that another person take his model and copy it so here there is no creation.
- Well, I am paying for a new idea, for a very long process of hard work; I am paying for the creation in itself. If there isn't a new creation in the product I do not buy it and it should be also within my budget that I am willing to spend.

For example the phone "Vertu" for the price of 35000 euro even if there is inside it a new creation I do not buy it since it is not convincing for me and I do not spend for something that might change quickly.

**Appendix E: Main ideas of the Interview with Ms. Diana Fakhoury / April 04, 2018.**

**Senior news anchor at MTV Lebanon.**

- Yes sure as everybody I think I have tried luxurious brands.
- If I saw a new model on the internet and I like it and I think it might suits me I buy it for sure. The most things that counts for me is that if it's suitable for me or not especially that I am a classical person. If my friends are wearing brands I do not feel affected at

all, I can wear normal items without any brand and be more attractive and beautiful than the ones who wear luxurious brands. I am a little bit original, if I saw an actress wearing a brand I can also produce and copy the same item or I buy something very similar because nowadays they are not focusing on the quality like they used before, so I can produce an item with less quality and less price but looks very similar.

- With big regret I can tell you that people these days only look for brands and how to look classy and wow; this is the society. But for sure we should not judge people by what they are wearing and how much they are spending on their outfits. The style and character make things look nicer on us than the brands. As for me if I cannot afford buying a branded item I produce it but I don't like to wear fake brands because I won't feel comfortable.
- In Lebanon, everything is wrong, it's all about show off; they compete with each other and sometimes a person can borrow, or even take a loan and pay all his salary just to wear brands in front of people. Instead, there are lots of persons I know who are rich and can afford any item they wear normal things and I see them asking for more discounts!

Moreover, Burberry is the only brand that I don't like because they show a lot their logo in big size and in almost all pieces.

In the US they don't have the brand issue in their society.

- I like if others give me a compliment or agreement but this is not important to me because I know that I don't belong to our society. There are girls I know they only get dressed just to hear nice compliments and comments on their look and what they are wearing.

Politicians' wives and lots of well-known names wear brands and Nancy Ajram wears brands and real one not fake like many others.

- I don't like to wear something everybody has it I prefer to be normal like everybody.
- The most important barrier I might enter when intending to purchase a luxury fashion Brand is for sure the price otherwise if I'm like it and I'm convinced I buy it, but if I'm not convinced 100% I also don't buy it because I might not wear it.

- For sure when I'm buying a fashion luxury brand i will be paying for the value of the brand name more than the product or its quality. If it was gold its weight is known worldwide and cannot vary a lot.
- Other motivations for purchasing luxury fashion brands that have not been discussed is the designer behind the brand and if he is Lebanese I would like to talk about him but not about the product. I'm not fan of brands and not too much into fashion, I don't get dressed just to take pictures and post it on social media, I love to live my life in a simple and natural way.
- Regarding jewelry brands I love Cartier and Bulgari but I don't copy it. I only focus on nice things regardless if it was a brand or not. Shoes are the only item that is very important to me and love to be a brand. My best designer is Louboutin and I bought 4 of its designs but I've never wear it because most of the brands are not comfortable. But usually the comfortable ones since its made from very high quality and smooth on legs are Jimmy Choo, Prada and Moschino.
- For me luxury brand are: Louboutin, LV, Chanel, Versace and Prada.





**Appendix F: Main ideas of the Interview with Ms. Jocelyne Chahwane / April 05, 2018.**

**Assistant General Manager and Head of retail banking at Blom Bank.**

- Yes sure, especially in my position in the bank I have to be always in good & classy attire.
- For me luxury fashion brands are divided into 3 sections:
  - accessories
  - shoes
  - clothes

- For Shoes it means comfort and trendy and I only buy from Salvatore Ferragamo

And buying luxurious Shoes is a necessity for me because I have to feel comfortable all day with my shoes and especially having a nice image in the Bank.

I surely have sport shoes not always luxurious like Nike ...

- For clothes: I buy from Escada, Max Mara or Boss (for work), and lately Blue Marine because I'm tall and I need a special cut to fit me right and only the German cut works with me. It is a need to buy from these brands because when I buy any piece I don't need to make any alteration or fix anything. It is like made to measure for my length, hip and everything.
- For evening dresses I am obliged to buy luxury product and pay a lot since I do not want to find anybody else wearing like me. And the most important thing in the dress is to hide the brand. I don't like to show it.

- I am not an emotional person but rather rational.
- I can afford 4-5 suits per year to wear it all year long but it has to be luxury because first to fit me right, and to wear it several time at work all year long. Short or medium length has more chances then me to find nice suits with affordable prices.

-accessories: I have different personality

Scarf: Hermes & Gucci

Bag: Chanel & Gucci

LV & other brands for 7000\$ and more have never convinced me. Lately, my friends and housewives' friends are telling me that Gucci is trendy, stylish with good budget especially the belts. Lately, I found an LV bag, which is usually very expensive, for 2300\$ or 3200\$ I don't remember anymore but I found it a smart buy.

In luxury accessories, I don't believe in jewelry and watches for 30.000\$ because in my opinion with these budgets I can plan and buy a building and make business instead of spending on luxury brands. I usually don't buy diamond and all my spending should be under 2000\$.

Unless there is an exception!

- Because I'm a person who works in the bank and is exposed to all levels, I can tell you that Category A++ wear lots of brands and are convinced in paying big budgets.

I realized that main items for them are watches and bags.

They can wear a top from Zara but jeans, bag and watch they should definitely be a brand.

But nowadays, they are not spending like we used to see a top Armani for 400\$ instead Zara is very good but the accessories are out of question: They should be a brand.

Category A: they are still maintaining the mentality of wearing luxurious outfits from international brands.

Category B: We cannot talk about luxury here because they wear occasionally one time a brand and maximum in this category a bag from Michael Kors for 500\$.

- Not at all, usually the most rich people I see in the bank are the rarest people who wear brands because they have nothing to show and this way you can directly recognize if they are wearing brands. You feel that they don't need to prove anything to anyone and they are very simple.

People who are not rich they tend to show always the belts with the biggest name and sometimes very ugly.

As I'm a mother, I plan for my kids, for their future, I save money and I used to buy only the necessary in a lower budget. I chose by priority.

- I don't care at all, the most important thing is to be comfortable and relaxed.  
I should feel that I'm good and satisfied.
- So I'm a freak I'm not like anybody else because at work I only wear a costume which is a suit and in weddings I wear very decent and classical dresses since I'm a classic person.

I am satisfied and I am not like the crowd.

- In luxurious brands there is a maximum budget that I don't exceed. I feel that since I'm an educated person I don't find the real value of spending 30 or 40.000\$ on a watch.

- For bags for sure they are buying also the brand name. As for shoes and clothes it is more justified.
- No I don't think I have something to add.

**Appendix G: Main ideas of the Interview with Ms. Rima Rahme / April 06, 2018.**

**Radio presenter at Radio Liban Libre (RLL) and special events for Wael Kfoury,**

**Kathem El Saher and others.**

- For me it's important because I stand on the biggest theaters in the MENA region and I have to wear something nice and special to look classy and elegant, if I got a sponsor for sure.
- I buy expensive items when it's nice and real leather; I buy expensive shoes to feel comfortable and special not to show off but to be elegant. I'm not against expensive items and luxury products but I don't talk about it in a "funeral".
- People are fake and sick they like to show and talk about what they buy. They do not trust themselves, brands became like their cover. They cover themselves with it to forget their weaknesses. If you exclude these people from their cars and outfits then you can see clearly how silly and boring they are. It is a complex.
- Not at all, people who wear brands are not best off, today we are exposed to everything. Everybody travel and buy anything they want. There are people who wear real brands and look fake it has nothing to do with the item it's all about the person and the character. Usually rich people inside out know how to dress up and don't look like they need to wear luxury brands to be distinguished. They have self confidence.
- Agreement of others matter to me especially if they have a good taste and are honest with me. But the most important thing is to feel comfortable in myself even if I'm wearing normal items and not luxury brands.
- I would rather be like anyone else but in an elegant and classy way.
- The most important barrier is for sure the price and nothing else.

- For sure I am paying for the value of the brand name rather than the product. For me brand = show off.
- I have nothing to add, thank you.

**Appendix H: Main ideas of the Interview with Ms. Victoria Bonya / March 21, 2019.**

**International Super model with Victoria Secret & fashion influencer.**

- Since I have wear many international brands in my life the most important thing to me is to wear from a designer who makes his designs with so much love even if he is a fresh designer and still not known. I appreciate the art behind the dress rather than wearing a luxury brand like anybody else.
- I can buy anytime an expensive item but not all luxury brands make me feel “me”. I like LV and Prada but I buy these brands because I might feel something special in the item or I simply loved the product.
- Since I live in many places in the world I’m open to more cultures and mentalities. What I appreciate more is to wear something unique and special from the country I visit. I like to buy expensive items from any country even if it’s not known but it should be really nice, with good quality and show something different from all things we see on the runway or in the international markets.
- People In my society wear lots of brands because it’s like everybody else and it’s not a special thing but rather an appreciation of what the big designers are creating and for the love of the culture behind the brand and what it shows.
- In my environment, who wear brands are not best off, but rather are normal people with normal salaries but good taste and appreciate a lot the art behind luxury pieces.
- Agreement of others does not matter to me because first I am a super model I usually wear what the designer wants not what I like but in my personal life I feel that wearing

too many dresses and styles makes me a multiple style person since I like very expensive items and very low cost items but stylish and extravaganza.

- I cannot be like anyone else since my job doesn't give me this option. I am always under the spotlight even in my personal life. But I always wear what's comfortable and simple in my everyday's life.
- Well I do not have barriers but it's simply if I like it or not. I can simply wear full outfits from Zara and another day full outfit from a luxury brand. It's up to my taste and mood.
- For sure I am paying for the value of the brand name rather than the product. But it's normal since the designer spent lots of money and time to make a brand image and this is his investment.
- Thank you for thinking of me and for calling me from Lebanon that I visited last year and I hope I can visit you again very soon. Lebanese people are very up to date and stylish in all ways!