An Empirical Investigation of the Perceived Value of Luxury Fashion Brand Consumption in the UAE and the UK

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ABSTRACT

Marketing has long been interested in the impact of luxury fashion consumption and why it is that consumers are prepared to pay premium prices for designer brands. In this thesis the suggestion is made that our understanding of consumers' perceptions of the value that lay in such products is limited by the fact that the broader cultural context in which luxury fashion consumption takes place has not been fully explored and that the cross-cultural complexities of this have been under-estimated. The thesis seeks to compare luxury fashion consumption in the United Arab Emirates with that in the United Kingdom as a means of developing a more nuanced understanding of luxury fashion consumption. By exploring seven key concepts: materialism, psychological ownership, self-enhancement, self-identity, cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness, a theoretically-informed conception of the key influences on a consumers' perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption is presented and, on this basis, a five factor model is offered. The thesis goes on to present cross-cultural data gleaned from a *Luxury fashion* questionnaire with consumers recruited online, as well as one-to-one interviews with luxury fashion brand consumers, retail sales associates and a social media influencer. The contention is made that luxury fashion consumption is fundamentally a psychosocial process that is as much about the cultural context in which a luxury fashion consumer operates than it is about their individual choices. By way of conclusion recommendations are made as to how both the academic literature and marketing professionals might be best informed as regards to best practice around luxury fashion consumption.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0.0 Introduction

Luxury fashion consumption has emerged in recent decades as a major area of investigation in marketing studies and yet marketing scholars have not explicitly clarified the underlying influences on how consumers perceive a value towards consuming luxury fashion brands. In this light, this thesis identifies the key underlying concepts that are influential on a luxury fashion consumers perceived value. In addition to identifying these concepts the study measures the influence of each concept on the perceived value of luxury fashion brands. This research emerges in a context in which there are fairly established studies associated with value perceptions in the luxury market (Berthon et al., 2009; Wiedmann et al., 2007). It seeks to build upon these works in order to primarily focus on the luxury *fashion* market and addressing concepts that these studies paid little or no attention to, whilst exploring luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK with a comparative cross-cultural nature. By doing so, a theoretical model that demonstrates the formative underlying influences on luxury fashion brand value perceptions has been developed.

There are three key elements of the pre-existing literature to critically consider and in presenting these, this present research demonstrates how it contributes to the field. First, these studies consider dimensions that from a psychological, social and cultural standpoint, lie on the surface of luxury consumption for example the individual, the social, the financial and the functional factors (Wiedmann et al., 2007), whereas in this study psychological, social and cultural factors underlie these dimensions are identified. Second, these studies engage with the luxury market. However, the luxury market is huge and includes a wide variety of

goods and services including food, cars and hotels for example. The particular focus of this thesis is on the consumption of luxury fashion brands including Burberry, Dolce Gabbana, Gucci and Emporio Armani. The consumption of luxury fashion products in recent years has helped brands such as Gucci to achieve an annual growth rates close to 50 percent, surpassing €6 billion in sales for the first time in 2017 according to businessoffashion.com (2017). This huge financial success puts the spotlight on why it is consumers value these brands to the extent they are prepared to pay premium prices for fabrics and materials. From a Marxist point of view, it could be argued that such goods are not so much consumed for their use value, but for their symbolic (and by implication their exchange) value (Marx, 1990). However, what remains unclear are the factors that influence how consumers perceive that exchange value. The third issue is concerned with how the value of luxury fashion brands are perceived differently and/or similarly in a cross-cultural context. Since the influence of factors determining the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption may vary across different cultures (Wiedmann et al., 2007). The central question here revolves around what role an individual's cultural background and geographical location play in shaping a consumers' perception of value towards luxury fashion goods. To investigate this further, a comparative study was designed to look at the similarities and differences in the perception of value towards these goods amongst luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK.

One of the arguments made throughout this thesis is that the meanings that consumers attach to consumption, and specifically to luxury fashion are often culturally specific. In this context, the challenge resides in capturing the broad spectrum of cultural influences that could influence consumers across nations in order to perceive a value towards luxury fashion goods differently. Herein lies the importance of bearing in mind the debates associated with

consumer culture that developed as a major focus of research in and since the 1990's (Kravets et al., 2018). In recent decades, the international consumer marketing studies examining cultural influences on luxury value perceptions from a comparative perspective, have tended to make a comparison between Western and Eastern consumers (e.g. Aliyev and Wagner, 2018: Weidmann and Hennings, 2007) but in doing so they have paid scant attention to the above debates.

To this end, this study aims to critically investigate the perceievd value of luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK; and establish a theoretical model that informs both scholarly and marketing fields. To accomplish this aim, there are three fundamental questions that in turn form the research questions of my thesis:

1) What are the underlying constructs behind the perception of value in luxury fashion consumption?

2) How does such influences affect individuals in the UAE and the UK differently or similarly?

3) How effective are marketing strategies on the perception of value towards luxury fashion brands?

Henceforth, in order to best address the research questions above this study had six objectives:

1- To identify the underlying constructs behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption.

2- To measure the influence of materialism, psychological ownership, self-identity and self-enhancement on as an underlying construct behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption.

3- To measure the influence of cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness as an underlying construct behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption.'

4- To explore through a comparative study of luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK the similarities and differences in perception of value towards these goods.

5- To explore the effectiveness of branding strategies on luxury fashion consumers' perception of value in the UAE and the UK.

6- To develop a theoretical model of factors influencing the underlying perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumers.

In the present globalised capitalist world an increase in the value of materialism has arguably dominated the life experience of individuals, and it is therefore vital to be more conscious about why consumers pay premium prices for the 'necessities' created by luxury fashion brand experts. This is a core concern and although we might accept the suggestion that we live in a world that is gradually becoming more environmentally aware and thus more thoughtful about how and why it might consume, luxury fashion consumption appears to remain an arena capable of continued expansion. The concern then is with "the why" and the "how" consumers are so attracted to what it is that luxury fashion consumption can offer.

At a deeper level, beneath the surface of the financial, functional, individual and social dimensions of luxury value perception identified by Wiedmann et al. 2007, it is the influential power of capitalist ideology that underpins consumers compulsion to consume products that do more than fulfil basic needs. What I am suggesting in this work is that the contemporary

capitalist world could be imagined to have a profound impact on luxury fashion consumption as it is the principles of this system that impinge upon what it is a consumer seeks to gain from consuming such products. Through the consumption of these goods individuals can reap their desired status or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). With the given capitalist narrative, luxury fashion consumption could be said to provide its consumers with some form of satisfaction. In a way, 'capitalism obliges consumers to work towards the satisfactions that consumption provides...' (Miles, 2018:4), 'since in our world it is money which in most cases 'mediates' between desire and its satisfaction' (Bauman, 2005:23).

It is in light of such discussions that a consideration of the sociological underpinnings of the value perceptions towards luxury fashion brand consumption could enhance our understanding on the fundamental impact of capitalist ideology on the consumption of luxury fashion branded goods, since the previous studies mentioned above are primarily concerned with luxury value perceptions viewed the phenomena from a marketing standpoint. On this basis, this research also asserts that in order to best understand the nature of luxury fashion consumption research should transcend disciplinary boundaries with a particular focus on the broader sociological context in which the perceived values of consumption are constructed. Having discussed this I do not claim that in this work crossing disciplinary boundaries is what contributes to the originality of my project, however, adopting a broader sociological approach, rather supplements our understanding in the perception of value towards the consumption of luxury fashion branded goods.

As it stands, in the context of luxury value perceptions of luxury fashion brand consumption few research projects have focused on how it is that consumers in the UAE invest meanings in luxury fashion brand consumption. This research focus on comparing the impact of underlying constructs behind the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption in the

UAE and the UK. It must be pointed out that the key intention here is to develop a new model in the context of luxury fashion brand consumption that presents the key influential factors that underlie a luxury fashion consumer's perception of value. With an eye to the current luxury value perception models, this research takes a step towards untangling the psychological, social, and cultural complexities that the previous studies have steered away from. Having introduced what the thesis aspires to investigate, the following section breaks down the chapters deployed in order to achieve this.

1.1.0 Layout of the thesis

The remainder of this introduction outlines how each of the seven chapters presented in this thesis contributes to the fulfilment of the aim. Chapter 2 outlines why it is important to identify the underlying influences on the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption. In doing so, it identifies these influences by discussing seven key psychological, social and cultural concepts that appear to be influential on the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption, namely: materialism, psychological ownership, self-enhancement, self-identity, cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness. From these concepts, psychological ownership has not been addressed at all in the context of luxury fashion brand consumption and introducing the potential influence of this concept is therefore important. Prior to discussing the significance of these concepts, I will first reflect on key contributions to the literature that help us understand the sociological context in which consumption operates, but have nonetheless received less attention in marketing studies concerned with luxury value perceptions.

In Chapter 3 (methodology), I discuss the thinking behind my deployment of a mixed methods approach and the rationale behind choosing the UAE and the UK as sample countries to

investigate the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption. At this point, it is worth briefly identifying the methods undertaken in this research. My *Luxury fashion* questionnaire was concerned with measuring the influence of each of the concepts that is highlighted in Chapter 2 as indicating the potential underlying influences on the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK. The qualitative element of my mixed method approach involves one-to-one interviews with luxury fashion brand consumers, retail sales associates and a social media influencer (in the UAE) in the UAE and the UK in order to provide my research with data that could aid a better understanding of luxury fashion consumption through the lenses of different categories of participants. Techniques used to analyse data in both the methods is elaborated in Chapter 3.

Having analysed the results of my *Luxury fashion* questionnaire in Chapter 4, the influence of each of the underlying concepts on the perceived value of luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK, are demonstrated through my statistical findings. I then compare how these concepts influence luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK in different and/or similar ways. Furthermore, my *Luxury fashion* questionnaire includes open-ended questions, which serve to broaden the questionnaire findings in order to obtain more insights on why is it that luxury fashion goods are desirable from the viewpoint of consumers. My *Luxury fashion* interviews as discussed in Chapter 5, provide insights that address the contemporary climate of the luxury fashion market. It is indeed fascinating to explore luxury fashion consumption from the standpoint of the consumer and from the point of view of the retail sales associate that is trained to serve those consumers by providing a memorable experience.

In Chapter 6, findings from my *Luxury fashion* questionnaire and *Luxury fashion* interviews are brought together in order to address the study's main aim. In doing so, findings explicitly

suggest what underlies the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK and how these perceptions of value are different and/or similar among these consumers. I further discuss those issues that must be considered whilst studying luxury fashion brand consumption in regards to our understanding of the term culture, and how crossing disciplinary boundaries can help us to grasp a broader range of possible influences on a consumers' perceived value in the context of luxury fashion consumption. To conclude the study, Chapter 7 points out how my findings shed new light on our understanding of luxury fashion consumption in both theory and practice.

The intention of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of the underlying influences that trigger luxury fashion consumption. In effect, what I suggest throughout this thesis is that luxury fashion brand consumption amounts to an important psychological, social and cultural influence on a consumer's life. However, most of these influences are unseen, and it is through invisible signs and symbols that luxury fashion consumers communicate. As such, what is intriguing here are the key influential elements that form a perceived value towards luxury fashion branded products that, arguably in the lives of certain consumers, have become an overriding goal. What is more important here is that in the present day, the dominance of such material goals diverting in such a way that there is often a possibility that a luxury fashion shopping experience as a leisure activity may be prioritised over any form of human self-development. This view in effect, is somewhat parallel, perhaps surprisingly, to what Adorno (1963) describes as toxic leisure time as one of the ways that the capitalistic world degrades us. But that is not the concern here, this thesis's overall emphasis then is on the construction of theoretically informed conception of the underlying factors as key influences on a consumers' perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption. In gaining this knowledge, the fundamental reasons behind the value that consumers place

on luxury fashion consumption and how these perceived values are mediated by the market

and the extent to which they constitute the conscious autonomous choice of the consumer

are unravelled and thus presented as a focus for future discussion.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.0.0 Perceived value in Luxury fashion brand consumption

The key to my research centres on identifying the underlying constructs that influence the perceived value in luxury fashion brand consumption. In order to establish the foundations upon which I seek to develop this thesis, this Chapter will discuss the psychological, social and cultural influences on luxury value perceptions in related literature. In this context, there has been a proliferation of marketing literature dealing with value perceptions in the luxury market in the past decades. The work of authors such as Vingeron and Johnson (2004), Wiedmann et al. (2007), Berthon et al. (2009) provide key insights the nature of luxury value perceptions. Following the insights provided by these researchers, marketing studies such as Shukla (2012), Shukla et al. (2015) and Aliyev and Wagner (2018) attempt to expand on such findings by applying existing models and frameworks to examine the differences in luxury value perceptions in a cross-cultural context. As such, I will first discuss the theoretical developments in the context of luxury value perceptions and then go on to discuss the potential underlying constructs behind the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption that these studies have tended to neglect.

One of the most important and often discussed studies concerned with perceptions toward luxury brands is the work of Vigneron and Johnson (2004) in which they develop a Five Dimensional Framework in which three dimensions influenced by *non-personal* factors namely conspicuous perception, uniqueness perception and quality perceptions, followed by two *personal* dimensions that are hedonic perceptions and extended-self perceptions. However, the contributions of Vigneron and Johnson focuses on the degree to which a brand

is perceived as luxurious in comparison to another luxury brand and not the perceived value of luxury fashion brands. In respect to luxury value perceptions, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, the work of Wiedmann et al. (2007) is important as their model extends the five-dimension framework by adding four latent luxury value dimensions in relation to consumer's perception that are presented as financial, functional, individual and social dimensions of luxury value perceptions (Wiedman et al., 2007). In Wiedman et al's model, the first dimension which is financial value is underpinned by price value, the second dimension that is the functional value is under the influence of usability value, quality value and uniqueness value, the third dimension that is the individual value is influenced by self-identity value, hedonic value and materialistic value and finally the fourth dimension is concerned with social value and is supported by conspicuousness value and prestige value. As far as luxury value perceptions are concerned, the work of Berthon et al. (2009) is of particular interest since they argued the full dimensionality to understand luxury brands is captured through the *functional*, the *experiential,* and the *symbolic* values. In exploring the value of luxury brands, Berthon et al. (2009) reflected upon *the three worlds* hypothesis of Karl Popper in which World One is the physical realm of objects, World Two involves the human perception and the psychological processes of experience and World Three essentially revolves around the products of the human mind (Popper, 1978). It is in this sense that Berthon et al. (2009) argue that functional (world 1), experiential (world 2) and symbolic (world 3) are three dimensions that luxury brands have.

In the literature above researchers have covered a range of dimensions in luxury value perceptions, nevertheless, the dimensions that Vingeron and Johnson (2004), Wiedmann et al. (2007), and Berthon et al. (2009) have established are very much on the surface. What I

am arguing here is that *"perception is subjective; individuals tend to interpret information according to their existing beliefs, attitudes and general disposition. Messages may be distorted by sharpening i.e adding new elements to make them fit in with existing predispositions and value systems" (Chinsall, 1994:28)*. In effect in order to clearly address the way in which individuals interpret the dimensions identified by previous efforts, research must identify the underlying constructs that lie behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption. Put simply, for example Berthon et al. (2009) have identified the symbolic dimension of luxury brands as an element that consumers place value on.

What remains unclear here are the influences that underlie a consumer's perceived value towards the symbols that luxury brands represent. Since both Wiedmann et al. (2007) and Bethon et al. (2009) include the functional value of luxury brands in common in their model and framework, the central insight required is the realisation that luxury fashion consumers may not so much seek satisfaction from the physical product, as desire for the consumption of these goods could be said to stem from the value which they construct from their perception. In this light, this chapter attempts to break down the key potential underlying influences on the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption. In the following sections I will, therefore, explain each concept in detail. These concepts include materialism, psychological ownership, self-identity, self-enhancement, culture, self-construal, and self-consciousness. Prior to illustrating such points, I will reflect upon the central role of perception in how consumers value luxury fashion brands for a preliminary overview, and hence the reason why underlying perceptions of consumers are worthy of special attention in this context.

Schwartz et al. (2001) suggest that "values are organized by a common structure of motivational oppositions and congruities for most literate adults across cultures.' Value is also defined as the "matter of social convention; it is by nature invisible (Newell, 2012:180)". It therefore depends on the fulfilment of consumer's personal expectations (Schechter, 1984). Moreover, Gilbreath (2010) points out that value is generated when the brand offer meets the consumers' demands according to their perception. In this context value is defined as the desired, situational goals each individual places on their life (Schwartz et al., 2001). Newell (2012) argues that clothing has retained a real value insofar as it allows people to signify the degree of their wealth. Accordingly, the demand for satisfaction seems to be a product of the consumer's feeling of entitlement to the sense of social importance that luxury fashion products represent. As such, from the perspective of the luxury fashion, the luxury fashion market offers in helping consumers express a sense of belonging, and it appears to satisfy the status or prestige seeking demands of consumers (Atwal and Williams, 2009; Latter et al., 2010).

In this context, the motive behind consumers' aspirations to fit in and the external reason for craving status remains insufficient. Payne et al. (2008) argue that consumers' emotional, cognitive and behavioural experiences give 'value' a meaning according to their impressions and identifications. Atwal and Williams, (2009) and Vigneron and Johnson, (2004) agree that luxury brands provide hedonic rewards by fulfilling consumers' status seeking intentions. It could further be argued that research has tended to undervalue the ways in which the need for such distinction is played out in consumers' lives. The tension here is centred on the role that the perceived value of a luxury fashion brand plays on a consumer's desire to signal distinction and/or identify with a certain social group. Given as much, it is vital for brands to stand by their core values in order to enhance and maintain their brand image. As evidence

shows even established luxury fashion brands have the potential to collapse when individuals feel a change in the brands value (Mesure, 2004). For instance, in the late 90's Burberry faced a decrease in their sales revenue due to a process of outsourcing which eventually resulted in the heritage of their brand image being undermined. It is interesting to note that there is a significant cultural dimension to this decline. So, for example, Burberry items became popular among "Chavs" in such a way that in the gaze of older Burberry consumers the power of the Burberry brand was diluted (Mesure, 2004). Perceptions of social class are important here (Mesure, 2004). Burberry nonetheless went on to re-establish their strategies by reiterating a strong commitment to their core values that resulted in a boost in revenues and values for the brand (Robinson and Linda, 2016).

Robins (2016) the global director of Interbrands reports that, "as luxury businesses continue to work through the reset and evolve their growth strategies, a single quest remains constant. Everything begins and ends with driving brand value." In this sense, Jin et al. (2015) argue that the parameter of these brand values are set through mainstream sociocultural norms, which encourage individuals to engage in a consumer culture. In effect, "the signalling value of the products is the core of consumption behaviour because the multifaceted signalling values influence individuals in our consumer society" (Jin et al., 2015:885). This argument is consistent with the suggestion that Kasser and Ryan (1996) make that objects are intentionally purchased in order to satisfy the extrinsic motives of individuals with the purpose of gaining social recognition. However, Maria et al. (2018) suggests otherwise. They argue that the wearing luxury items embraces some form of an intrinsic value, not just for the consumer, but also for observers. Such a realisation necessitates a broader psychosocial approach that should ideally seek to understand the space in which the psychological and sociological coalesce. It is important to address this space since the desire for luxury fashion

consumption itself concerns the individuals' psychological state of mind that can be said to be under the influence of an individual's social environment.

In the context of luxury fashion brand consumption, prior marketing studies have not sufficiently addressed the issue of *perception* and the importance of psychological, social and cultural influences on how perception towards luxury fashion brand consumption takes shape. However, recent articles have nonetheless documented several aspects concerned with luxury fashion brand consumption, not least in the work of Flynn et al. (2016), Ko and Megehee (2012), Wu et al.(2015), Wu and Chen (2015), Lertwannawit and Mandhachitara (2012), Janssen et al. (2017), Fionda and Moore (2009), Makkar and Yap (2018), Yoo and Park (2016). In this regard, the aforementioned studies have assessed the impact of cross-cultural differences (between the Far East and the West), perceived value, self-consciousness, materialism and consumer perceptions on luxury fashion consumption. In addition, Leung et al. (2015) explore fashion consciousness in the luxury fashion market and in doing so they consider the psychological and social factors of luxury consumption in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, these respective studies have failed to identify the broader psychosocial context that is likely to impact upon consumers' *perception* towards luxury fashion brand consumption. To this date, the marketing literature lacks a study that assembles the combined psychological, social and cultural factors that may influence how it is that consumers construct their perception of values through luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK.

Agu and Ounuha (2016) identify the key psychological factors influencing fashion consumption. However, they neglect to stress the social dimensions that influence luxury fashion consumption. This suggestion is based on Stenner's (2017) claim that we cannot

separate the psychological from the social, since we function psychologically while our experiences are social, therefore the social and the psychological must be considered to be inseparable. In this context, Newell (2012:128) further defines society as "a potential audience, the totality of those people whose assumptions matter to the social actor." Shedding light on Newell's (2012) definition, whilst considering the functional and symbolic benefits of luxury fashion branded products it is fair to argue that the consumption of luxury fashion brands are often perceived by the potential audience as a vehicle to impress others. This argument stems from 'having an effect on audience' which is demonstrated in Newell's' (2012) work in which the potential audience refers to those social groups that seek to understand the meanings constructed through the *bluffeurs. Bluffeurs* are a group in the Ivory Coast whose consumption habits are often motivated by misleading intentions. Newell discusses how the *bluffeur's* use the consumption of branded items to present a false perceived image in order to impress their audience. However, the issue here is not that luxury fashion consumers are necessarily inauthentic. The key point for the purposes of my research here is that consumers appear to use luxury fashion as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In this respect, Bauman (2005) suggests that the way in which individuals express their belonging is through their role as consumers, so much so that a lack of belonging is less to do with being unemployed as it may have been in the past and more to do with the inability to consume. From this point of view, luxury fashion branded products become something of a necessity in brand conscious social groups. A thorough understanding of the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption is essential in a cultural and geographical context in which brands are highly sort after as symbols of belonging, not least in the UAE and the UK.

In light of the paragraph above, consumers' psychological demands emerge from an urge to express themselves in their social groups and to establish a sense of belonging through those

groups. As such, the consumption of luxury fashion items may offer consumers an enhanced state of mind: they may feel better about themselves when they purchase these brands. From this point of view, psychological factors are essential considerations when seeking to understand the consumption of luxury fashion brands, but they must be understood within a broader cultural context.

Of those studies that do exist, fashion consumption behaviour was studied by Homber and Ohfeldt's (2010) and focused on the Swedish fashion market. Meanwhile, the Thai market was studied by Apawan and Ardipon (2013), and the market in Pakistan was looked at by Rahid et al. (2013). Meanwhile, Perez (2003) developed a theoretical model of shopping behaviour in apparel. The concern here, however, is that none of these fashion industry studies provide adequate insight on how it is that consumers perceive a value towards luxury fashion branded goods. I am not criticising these studies for what they were not designed to achieve, what I am trying to highlight here is rather the critical gap that exists is understanding perceived value specifically in the luxury fashion industry in two current major markets.

Fujiwara and Nagasawa (2015) study the impact of psychological factors influencing the preference for luxury food and cars and in doing so consider seven key elements: self-expression, sense of superiority, anti-conformity, popularity, avoiding deviation from the norm, avoiding cognitive dissonance and quality evaluation. One of the key findings of their study suggests that, "differentiation from others is a significant factor in developing purchase intentions for both food and car luxury brands and is a particularly important factor for cars" (Fujiwara and Nagasawa, 2015:1). Their research also stresses the importance of *perception*, insofar as the perception of others, in a lived cultural context, is an important factor in influencing Japanese luxury consumers' preferences in the food and car industries. Such an argument supports the underlying position of this thesis since questions of selfhood are so

directly implicated by our human need to feel like we belong. However, the research by Fujiwara and Nagasawa (2015) only analyses the psychological factors that influence preference in the food and car industry not the luxury fashion brand industry and this is a concern.

McGowan et al. (2017) assess the importance of affective social identity as the moderator through which cognitive social identity influences the purchase intentions of consumers by way of their emotional and social value. Social identity is associated with an individual's self-concept, which originates from being a part of a social group as a member that includes attachments such as emotional significance and values within the membership group, whereas these values may not as important in other social groups (McGowan et al., 2017). The work of McGowan et al. (2017) looks at the influence of social and psychological factors on a brand's value *perception*. However, this effort mainly places emphasis on social identity with no focus on an applied marketing context. In spite of the above contributions to marketing research, there remains limited research concerned with *perceptions* towards luxury fashion brand consumption, which might contribute to broader debates around where social science and marketing debates interface, and it is in this context that this thesis seeks to make a contribution. To this end, I will focus later in this Chapter, on the potential influence of key underlying constructs that impact upon the perception of value towards luxury fashion goods such as materialism, psychological ownership, self-enhancement, self-identity, cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness. In doing so, I will consider in the coming sections why each of these concepts require further attention in investigating the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption.

2.1.0 Key classical contributions to contemporary luxury fashion consumption

Before I go on to discuss each of the potential underlying constructs behind the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption, I will briefly reflect upon the broader context in which the key contributions of the works of authors such as Marx and Engels (2000), Marx (2013), Simmel (1957), Bourdieu (1986), Baudrillard (1968), Veblen (1994) have served to influence the underpinning of sociological debates around consumption and hence my thesis. With the exception of Veblen (1994), limited attention has been paid to the consumption of luxury fashion materials in these works. However, the intention here is not to criticise these classic efforts for being constrained by the limitations of the time and place in which their work was undertaken. The intention of this section is rather to provide insight on why it is that the luxury fashion branded materials are perceived to be appropriate indicators of wealth and why the display of such wealth is deemed so essential.

In contemporary society, the social experience of human life is arguably not a straightforward representation of reality; it is rather arguably a reflection of the institutional structures of society (Marx and Engels, 2000) and how these are interpreted. The perceived structures of society are built on the grounds of the ideological principles of capitalism that divides individuals into different social classes. Consequently, what determines the social class of individuals is in line with their accumulated capital which Bourdieu (1986) perceives as being manifested in three essential forms of capital: economic, cultural and social capital. In the present day, a human's psychological, social and cultural experience is dominated by a capitalist ideology that in turn constitutes a demand for individuals to distinguish and/or classify themselves in the perceived social hierarchy (Simmel, 1957: Veblen, 1994). In this light, Simmel's contention that "two social tendencies are essential to the establishment of fashion, namely the need of union on the one hand and the need of isolation on the other" is

highly pertinent to debates in this thesis (Simmel, 1957:546). In a sense then, in his work *Fashion,* Simmel provides a lucid demonstration of two apparently paradoxical psychological and social forces that drive consumers towards fashion consumption, which in turn highlights the benefit of having a two-pronged psychosocial approach towards unravelling the contradictory elements that underpin the consumption experience.

Drawing attention towards the issues associated with social structure described above, every individual is likely to perceive himself or herself as a part of a hierarchal social system, and this perception results in individuals identifying themselves with a certain class structure and, further, a social group within that class structure. Herein lies the importance of ownership, since, the ownership of materials, to a high degree, classifies or distinguishes an individual with or from a social group. In this context, Veblen's (1994) work is of particular interest. According to Veblen, to own materials is to have status and a position of esteem: to own no materials is, effectively, to have no status. Veblen (1994) further argues that it is through leisure activities and consumption that individuals display their pecuniary status and wealth. "Status derives from the judgments that other members of society make of an individual's position in society, and for this position to be established there must be a display of wealth" (Veblen 1994: 29). The point here is that luxury fashion goods are perceived as symbols of wealth and status and it is this perception of value that, partially at least, consumers buy into. On this basis, the consumption of luxury fashion goods could be an attempt for a symbolic exchange within social groups. The role which symbolic exchange seems to play in the consumption of luxury fashion consumption is a fascinating issue, which perhaps could be resolved by untangling the miracle in how consumer perception is blurred by images of reality. Put simply, it is through consumers' perceptions of these symbols that luxury materials are almost magically imbued with fulfilment. The importance of luxury fashion brand

consumption requires a deeper understanding underpinning of questions of perception and some Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) commentators suggest that consumers' perception is somewhat mediated by sophisticated marketing techniques that channel consumer desires through brands (Holt, 2002). In regards to Holt's contestations here consumption of luxury fashion goods amounts to very complex dimensions in a sense that market forces seem to direct consumers to buy into the image of a brand that its consumers are perceived as stylish and prestigious. In this way the desire to be perceived unique is perhaps a perception that the luxury fashion brands channel through the image of their brands.

The case above resonates with what Baudrillard (1998) refers to as image consumption. Baudrillard (1998) puts forward an argument suggesting that, the consumer society offers its consumer's a range of images and that to him these images constitute myths and fables that keep consumers in their place in their pursuit of happiness. Ultimately, however, this is a pursuit that can never realistically be fulfilled through consumption, as these images do not actually exist. Baudrillard (1998) thus claims that we live in a system of signs that's overtaken our so-called reality: so that images of consumption become that reality. It is in this sense that Lacan (1959-1960) highlights the point that in a system of signs, an individual is constituted in a symbolic order and signs that individuals are subjected to social meanings. Underpinning what Baudrillard and Lacan argue, "Althusser was particularly insistent that individuals have no essential unity, and derive whatever sense of meaning and value they have in their lives from the signs and social practices which go on around them" (Elliot, 2014:122). What we do know is how it is that consumers engaged with forms of consumption, may be more complex than it appears on the surface. In order to identify the underlying constructs behind how it is that consumers perceive a value for these symbols, images and

signs that represent luxury fashion brands, we can thus reasonably conclude that research must be suitably pliable in order to incorporate the bigger picture.

In this thesis, I aspire to reflect on the conceptions above by placing particular emphasis on the consumption of luxury fashion goods as signifiers of wealth and status. The issue here is that luxury fashion goods would be of little value deprived of the signs they represent. It is in this sense that I seek to understand the underlying constructs that play a formative role in the way *signs* are perceived and decoded in the mind of consumers. Through a marketing lens, the notion of *image* consumption is essential; my suggestion is that the perception of value endowed in the images attached to luxury brands does not merely flow out of a consumers' desire to consume a product, as in the art of marketing, which is responsible for creating and maintaining an image that keeps luxury fashion branded items desirable for consumers. In effect, the marketing of luxury fashion goods, grants its consumers with a set of images of reality that effectively prime their psyche to conform to a system where self-worth is, at least to a degree, displayed through forms of material consumption. From this standpoint, luxury fashion goods are perceived as objects of desire, since it is via these goods that consumers endeavour to exhibit a particular image, as they imagine themselves through the gaze of others.

Having reviewed the literature above, it is necessary to highlight the strong influence of Karl Marx on such debates since his works have received major attention in the sociology of consumption despite consumption not actually being at the centre of his analysis. In Marx's view (2013) capitalism is a system of commodity production. From this point of view, marketing effectively becomes a tool for the promotion of commodity consumption. This, in effect, has triggered certain disciplinary contradictions in the literature between sociology

and marketing. From a marketing perspective, the encouragement of consumption is the ultimate objective, whereas in discourses associated with consumption from a sociological perspective, marketing strategies are considered to be ideological: they are designed to oil the wheels of capitalism. To speak from a Marxist perspective, luxury fashion goods could perhaps be perceived as products that impart inequality and which legitimise the existence of social classes, given that luxury products are perceived as markers of distinction. Henceforth, through this lens, luxury fashion consumption could be said to be a by-product of false-consciousness as a misperception of an individual's position in a society. The notion of false-consciousness refers to what Marx and Engels (2000) claim to be a function of capitalist ideology that endorses the material state of the world. As such, the symbols that luxury fashion goods represent, as mentioned above, enable consumers to communicate through an ideological language via materials (Barthes, 1990). In this respect, luxury fashion goods, as materials, seem to play an important and inflated role in how it is individuals navigate today's world. Whether luxury fashion consumption is a consequence of false consciousness from a misperception of reality or not is not the issue here. As far as my thesis is concerned, I have two contentions: first, the concept of consciousness is potentially an influential factor in how an individual perceives a value in luxury fashion brands and is therefore a concept that requires attention. Consequently, I will discuss the potential impact of consciousness as an underlying construct behind the perception of value in the latter section of this Chapter. The second issue that emerges from Marx and Engels (2000) that concerns my research is the concept of *materialism* that I will discuss in detail in the following section.

2.2.0 Materialism

Marx and Engels (2000) claim that social structures rely on a process of material interaction in which the living conditions of human life are dictated by material conditions thus by the need for a particular standard of living. As such, there exists a materialistic dimension to an individual's personal identity so that their identity is often projected onto the materials they own. At this point, I must point out that the concept of *materialism* for Marx and Engels (2000) primarily concerns concrete conditions that exist outside the human consciousness. In the contemporary world, the term *materialism* has not transformed completely in regards to meaning, yet it has become a dominant part of human life in the way it apparently determines interaction. In this sense, the findings of Fitsmaurice and Comegys (2006) are pertinent, since they reveal that materialists are highly dependent on the social acceptability and communicative ability of branded products. Herein lies the significance of placing an emphasis on the concept of 'materialism' as an underlying construct behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion materials.

In the context of marketing and consumer research, in which *materialism* is often described as a trait associated with excessive obsessions towards owning materials, the obsession with owning materials, stems from a belief in materialistic individuals that, acquisitions of possession will contribute to their satisfaction and happiness in life (Sirgy et al., 2011). Sirgy et al. (2011) identify a contraction in the literature, insofar as in the economics literature, 'materialism' is viewed as a concept that plays an important role in the life quality of individuals, whereas studies associated with quality of life have found that materialism contributes negatively to the quality of life. Belk (1983) describes this two-sided coin best by suggesting that "at the highest levels of materialism possessions assume a central place in a

person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction" (Belk, 1983:291). However, whether materialism contributes positively or negatively to an individual's life is not what this section seeks to establish, what concerns my thesis is that materialism could be an influential factor on luxury fashion brand consumption. Mason (1981) argues that material consumption provides its consumers with a chance to seek out a form of psychological well-being. As such, there appears to be a connection between the ownership of materials and psychological well-being that I will discuss in the next section. Perhaps what would be more appropriate here in regards to psychological well-being is to reflect further on the work of Belk (1983) as he suggests materialism concerns both personal and societal well-being. This reminds us that there are psychological, social and cultural dimensions that require further attention. Belk (1985) questions the contribution of materialism towards the enhancement and maintenance of a positive self-identity. In this light, I seek to explore whether the consumption of luxury fashion materials contributes to an individual's self-enhancement and self-identity. In the following sections I will therefore go on to consider the potential impact of self-enhancement and self-identity as underlying constructs behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion materials. At this stage, it is necessary to point out that the extent of materialism may or may not be different in the UAE and the UK given that individuals in these geographical locations have the likelihood of adopting dissimilar cultural backgrounds. On this note, Richins and Dawson (1992) suggest, "it is often useful to treat materialism as a cultural or structural variable for purposes of comparing cultures" (Richins and Dawson, 1992: 303).

2.3.0 Psychological ownership

In the previous sections, my discussion revolved around the ownership of materials. As such, there appears to be a link between a sense of ownership, psychological well-being and the

consumption of luxury fashion goods. An existing concept that embodies these links is psychological ownership. However, the potential significance of this concept in the context of luxury fashion brand consumption has yet to be explored in the marketing literature. The intentions of this Section is therefore to draw attention towards the question of psychological ownership as a potential underlying construct behind the perception of value towards the consumption of luxury fashion products. 'Psychological ownership is both cognitive and affective. In other words, it reflects on an individuals' awareness, thoughts, beliefs regarding the target of possession and the associated personal meaning and emotion, or affect' (Jussila et al., 2015: 123).

A cultural, emotional, aspirational expression all combined in one can be displayed through fashion, since it represents an individual's lifestyle, stature and inspirations (Perna, 1987). The engagement between a person and object has been the key focus amongst authors who focused on psychological ownership (Beggan and Brown, 1994). Individuals tend to be attached to objects that form part of them psychologically and develop a sense of ownership towards objects. Furby (1978) also indicates that the relationship between the object and individual occurs when an individual experiences a connection with an object. On this note, Pierce et al. (2001, 2003) suggest that, a sense of possession of an object best present the core of this concept construes.

According to prior research on psychological ownership discussed above, this notion is associated with a sense of the possession of objects. In the case of my research, 'object' is a general term and it could be referred to as any form of a product. Pierce et al. (2001) suggest that individuals connect themselves with certain objects and get close to them while developing feelings of ownership, and as such individuals invest themselves into a product.

On this basis, Jussila et al. (2015) argue that psychological ownership is a vital factor to consider in understanding consumers' motivations, attitudes and behaviour. Yet, in the context of luxury fashion consumption, the potential influence of psychological ownership is underestimated as the studies mentioned do not place emphasis on incorporating the importance of understanding this concept.

In the modern marketing today, the co-creation of value is perceived as way that consumers invest into products as an attempt to present a part of themselves (Jussila et al., 2015). There are potentially psychological elements to how consumers perceive a value towards luxury fashion goods. What is intriguing here is that humans are fundamentally narrative-driven creatures, in a sense that our cognitive abilities interpret information in the form of stories and that is how the human brain is organised (Peterson, 2019). The suggestion is that consumers are not just the owner of material objects itself but the owner of the story behind the product (Baudrillad, 1968). This is where marketing plays a key role between the relationship of psychological ownership and the likelihood of its influence on luxury fashion consumption. Hence, the story behind a luxury fashion branded good makes a statement about the owner of the product in society more broadly.

Elliot and Yanapouluo (2007) state that marketing experts are advised to create a sense of intimacy between the product and the consumer through storytelling. It is in line with such strategies that, consumers can then feel a connection with the story that the product communicates that may influence them to buy into luxury goods. Taking into consideration the discussions in this section it is possible that through the ownership of luxury fashion goods consumers seek a well-being as discussed in the literature concerned with materialism. In the following section, I will explore the literature associated with the concept of self-enhancement.

2.4.0 Self-enhancement

Individuals often use clothes as objects to make statements about an enhanced self-consciousness (Davis, 1992). This reflects on the effect of clothing psychological well-being, "Self-enhancement has been identified as underlying people's tendency to believe that they have improved relative to the past and that their personal improvement has been greater than other people's" (Leary, 2006:320). Previously, psychologists such as James et al. (1990) found that motives that affect individuals' self- thoughts, a person's self-image is strongly related to their emotions (Leary,2006). Similarly, Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1992) demonstrated that motives and emotions are closely linked, and the fulfilment of these motives thus arouses emotional reactions. Moreover, Jansen et al. (2017) listed self-enhancement as one of the motivational values that express and serve goals.

The findings of Murphy and Dweck (2016) highlight that by using prestigious brands mind-sets play an essential role in self-enhancement. Their findings further demonstrate that glamorous or prestigious brands such as Victoria's Secret enables consumers to display attractiveness. For the intentions of my research, the suggestion here is that the above studies have not tended to reflect upon the luxury sector of clothing and brands. Although Murphy and Dweck (2016) reflected upon *prestigious* brands, the scope of their study was limited to *Victoria's Secret*, which is not generally considered to be a luxury fashion brand. A recent study has pointed out that luxury fashion items are consumed with the intention to *enhance* an individual's self-image (Maria et al., 2018). However, research concerned with consumer behaviour in the luxury fashion industry is yet to discern the concept of self-enhancement as a potential influence on the consumption of luxury fashion brands. This gap in the marketing literature proffers an opportunity to consider the perceived quality of luxury

fashion products in enhancing a consumer's physical style, which is likely to have positive psychological impact. This emanates from an individual's need for social approval, which is driven by motives determined with the urge to self-enhance (Leary, 2006). Torelli et al. (2016) found a link between self-enhancement and branding by identifying a motivational effect that is associated with asserting dominance over people. In effect, "self-enhancement stems from social identity theory, which focuses on group membership and favouritism through an individual's desire for increased status and positive self-concept" (Wolter and Cronin, 2016:400). This is a potential reason that luxury fashion consumption is desirable: it constitutes an attempt towards enhancing oneself. Such arguments are further strengthened given that, "self-enhancement involves the desire to maintain the positivity of one's self-concept, and self-verification is the desire to confirm one's existing self-views" (Leary, 2006:319). Luxury fashion brands could therefore be said to enhance the perceived self-image of consumers, which in itself represents a fundamental reason for why they are valuable (Parka et al., 2018). All such debates are important in identifying the potential influence of self-enhancement as an underlying construct on the perception of value towards luxury fashion goods.

People's social well-being seems to be affected by motives and emotions such as self-enhancement, self-verification, self-expansion as well as self-conscious emotions such as guilt, shame, pride, social anxiety, and embarrassment (Leary, 2006). The point is that consumers might set about pursuing well-being in a social context influenced by these emotions. When you consider the symbolic images that luxury branded goods represent, these brands are likely to provide their consumers with social approval, or at least individuals might perceive themselves to be accepted in a social group. This may or may not result in an enhanced psychological state. However, the existing literature to date, does not specifically

draw attention to the likelihood of such influences on luxury fashion consumption. In this regard, I propose to explore the impact of self-enhancement as one of the potential underlying constructs that encourage an individual consumer to consume luxury fashion brands in order to feel better about himself or herself as a member of a brand conscious community. It is through an understanding of such social and psychological tensions that the intricacies of the relationship between luxury fashion brand consumption and its perception of value may become more complete. Wolter and Cronin (2016) recognise self-enhancement to be a key principle of identification. In this essence, consumers are encouraged to reinforce the core aspect of their identity through the self-enhancement that branded items provide (Murphy and Dwerk, 2016). In the next section I will turn to the potential role of identity in luxury fashion consumption.

2.5.0 Self-Identity

As I established in the previous sections in this Chapter, given its symbolic qualities branding is a key means by which consumers identify with luxury fashion products and with the society that produces them. There is a significant psychosocial dimension to this insofar as many commentators have suggested that fashion plays some kind of a role in how it is consumers construct their sense of self-identity. It is important to recognise that identity is not free-flowing: in other words, it is psychologically, socially and culturally dependant.

As Wiley (2016) suggests, the rise of globalization actively challenges how it is that identities are constructed. Brands play a role in positioning consumers (see McGowan et al.,2017) both as regards to the elements of social change in which they are implicated, and as a means of differentiating themselves amongst peers who find themselves in the same position (see Park

et al., 2013). Identity-signalling is defined as the extent to which an individual believes that the luxury brand for which he/she aspires signals their self-identity in the immediate social environment (Sreejesh et al.,2016). Sreejesh et al. (2016) found that the prestige provided by luxury brands enhances the perceived social status of its consumers. For the purposes of my research, it is interesting to note that Sreejesh's research focuses on luxury brands in general and not on luxury *fashion* brands which have the potential to offer particular identity-bearing qualities and which thus demand further research. Some commentators have suggested that brands are capable of signalling an identity through the display of a logo, not dissimilar to how the ancient Chinese used the dragon as a symbol of imperial power (Park et al.,2013). Of course, the ability of the brand to do so will depend on the individual consumer and how he or she perceives such a brand, but the key point here is that this is not solely a matter for self-identity but also of *social* identity. The individual is a product of how he or she sees themselves, but this is in turn the product of how he or she is seen and in what social context he or she is seen. For this reason, and because the self is effectively a product of the self's relationship to social change, this can be described as a *psychosocial* process. The way in which people identify with branding is referred to as identity signalling. These issues are hinted in the work of Lacan (1959-1960), as he goes on to argue that it is the societal pressure to be *yourself,* that has mediated an individual's imagination, through advertising, music and the entertainment industry as a whole, that gives consumers the impression that they can express and produce their identity through consumption.

Signalling an identity is extremely important for individuals in brand conscious societies such as the UAE and the UK. Wu et al. (2017) support this statement when they point out that demographic factors influence the construction of identity and the forms of consumption in which people partake. Nevertheless, the existing literature is yet to discuss the potential

underlying influence of factors such as self-identity on the consumption of luxury fashion brands in brand conscious societies. What the research has established is that luxury consumption is not purely conspicuous: it is not solely about locating the individual amongst other consumers; it is equally driven by elements of self-presentation and self-expression (Tsai, 2005; Wiedmann et al,. 2007). In other words, the two sides of this equation cannot be understood independently. The current research is not concerned with whether luxury fashion consumption is conspicuous or inconspicuous, but rather with the extent to which what and how people consume luxury fashion brands is the product of a combination of self-presentation and self-expression in a broader cultural context (Wu et al., 2017).

Style is an important aspect of the fashion brand experience. It is interesting to note that sociologists have long been interested in the way in which style allows an individual to feel unique and yet to denote a relationship, or perhaps an opposition, to the status quo (e.g. Hebdige, 1979). More recently, it has been suggested that luxury fashion brands are deeply implicated by questions of class, so that by wearing a particular brand the consumer can demonstrate a sense of belonging (McGowan et al., 2017). Burberry, as discussed earlier, provides an interesting example of a brand that has struggled to protect its class credentials in the face of consumers that have effectively hijacked the meanings that underpin its brand (Robinson and Linda, 2016). None of the above is a covertly conscious process. And herein lies its fascination. How consumers engage with luxury brands is a product of an internal psychological process *and* an external social one. The urge to consume is in part a short-term fantasy informed by desires and anxieties of the unconscious variety (Gabriel, 2014).

Of course, many approaches, such as Identity Based Motivation (IBM) Theory (Oyserman et al., 2007; Oyserman, 2009) have sought to understand the social cognition that lies behind

the consumer experience (Johe and Bhullar, 2016), in this case in the context of the organic food industry. However, there is a suspicion that such approaches underestimate the social conditions and stimulations that underpin such cognitive responses. This leaves a significant gap in the literature: the degree to which the individual's negotiation of structure and agency is played out through the luxury fashion brands that they consume remains unexplored territory. Gabriel (2014:26) argues that identity "can be viewed as psychological and social defence uniquely attuned to some of the challenges that contemporary societies place on individuals, and, as all defences, they create anxieties and inhibitions of their own."

The above quotation constitutes a significant point of departure for my thesis. This study aims to explore the significance of luxury fashion brands as 'objects' that place the individual along a continuum of self/social identity. A crucial concern for my research then is how it is that the value of luxury fashion consumption, specifically in the UAE and the UK, is manifested by consumers and how what they consume positions them, as individuals are capable of balancing the psychosocial demands that social change demands of them on an everyday basis.

2.6.0 Cultural background

In exploring the issues raised by attempts to identify the underlying perceptions behind luxury fashion consumption it has become apparent that internal and external forces can simultaneously be influential in this context. Thus, the main concern here is related to the relationship between those forces that revolve around the individual and their cultural background given the geographical location in which they reside. The notion of culture, in luxury fashion brand consumption, can be viewed from two perspectives. One, that of the culture of consumption: from this standpoint, 'culture' refers to the 'tendency for more and

more aspects of human life to be made available through the market (Lury, 2011:1). Two, the cultural background of consumers can be based on their geographical environments. In this respect, an individual's culture is formed by influences from different social environments, family members, peers/friends and public pressures (Wu et al., 2015). As such, a country's economic and social values could also serve to differentiate collective ideas of consumers among brands (Jung et al., 2014). To avoid confusion in this regard, the emphasis in this section is placed on the geographical cultural differences that could potentially influence consumers to have a different perception of value towards luxury fashion brands.

The work of Robert David Sack provides a particularly insightful way of understanding the geographical dimensions of consumption. For Sack places of consumption (such as a designer store for example) and advertisements sell the "good life". The omnipresence of this worldview places the consumer, at least symbolically, at the centre of a world of prosperity and ease. For the consumer consumption creates a paradise: a world of excitement that provides us with a readymade way of expressing ourselves publicly that simultaneously makes us feel we reside at the centre of that world. According to Sack then, what consumption does, and luxury fashion can be seen to be an extreme example of this, is de-stabilise our geography. Indeed, "The consumer's world portrays itself as a context, a frontstage within a backstage. In short, it is geographically destabilising. (Sack, 1992: 201)"

Consumption thus has an incredible power to build place in a very particular way: in a distorted way that gives consumers the sense of control: it puts us at the very heart of our own geographies. For Sack (1992) then consumption, and by implication the consumption of luxury fashion brands, is a meaning-making activity: the place in which we consume distracts us from the monotony of everyday life while cutting us off from the responsibilities that we

otherwise endure. It is in this way that a consumer buys into the escape that the Gucci logo represents, and it is in this way that the brand logo is powerful enough to effectively individualise one's geography. The effect of all this is, of course, not uniform: there are local cultural influences and norms that might affect how it is a consumer relates to the symbolic world of consumption and escape that luxury consumption represents. There may be differences in how cultural norms influence the ways in which a consumer engages, or is expected to engage, in luxury fashion brands. However, what is common about this process is that the symbolic world of consumption allows us to create and experience our own sense of place: a place in which what we consume defines who we are and how we sit in the complex world that surrounds us (Sack, 1992).

In the work of Hofstede (1980), culture is analysed from five different dimensions that include power distance versus high power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, low uncertainty avoidance versus high uncertainty avoidance and short-term orientation versus long-term orientation. In the context of cross-cultural comparison in consumer behaviour the individuality dimension has attracted considerable attention, I will therefore reflect upon relevant literature concerned with this matter. In the case of countries that my research seeks to explore, the level of individualism is rated 89 in the UK and 25 in United Arab Emirates. The relatively high individualism rate of the population in United Kingdom indicates that it is an individualist society contrary to the society in United Arab Emirates, which is collectivist. In a collectivist culture, individuals have particularly strong family relations, social harmony and a respect for tradition (Janelli, 1993; Kang, 2004; Kim, 2009). In contrast, individualism relates to societies in which ties are arguably less immediate: people in the society are expected to look after themselves on a more individual basis (Beilmann, et al., 2017). This over-simplified categorisation of Western and Eastern

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individuals has reoccurred commonly in the literature. For instance, He and Zhang, 2012; Gul, 2010; Gao et al., 2009; Grouzet et al. 2005; Eastman et al. 1999; Dubois and Laurent, 1994; Dubois and Duquesne, 1993). Grossman and Shapiro (1988) concentrate on comparing the US as a Western country with far East Asian countries. Indeed, most cross -cultural comparisons in the luxury fashion industry have concentrated on Eastern Asian countries such as South Korea with the U.S (Alden et al., 2006); China with U.S (Bian and Forsythe, 2012). The findings of these studies suggest that demand for luxury goods in Asia is increasing compared to other parts of the world due to their higher proportion of aspirational consumers (Curtin, 2009; Degen, 2009; Smith, 2009).

Cross-cultural comparisons that specifically focused on value perceptions in the luxury market, often suggest that variations in psychological elements of luxury consumption adopted in one society may not be accepted in another culture (Belk, 1999). In this regard, researchers argue that consumers' perception of value is significantly influenced by culture that leads to differences in the consumption behaviour of consumers between Eastern and Western countries that are categorised as collectivistic (East) and individualistic (West) cultures (Shukla 2010, Sharma 2011). Shukla (2012) studied the influence of value perceptions in luxury purchase intentions by comparing developed and emerging markets. In Shukla's work consumers from the UK and US are representative of Western consumers in a developed country and consumers in India and Malaysia represent Eastern consumers from emerging markets. I must also highlight the fact that Shukla (2012) considered social value perceptions (i.e. status and conspicuousness); personal value perceptions (i.e. materialism and hedonism); and functional value perceptions (i.e. of uniqueness and price-quality perceptions) in comparing value perceptions in the luxury market between the developed and emerging markets. Shukla et al. (2015) also conducted a study by particularly focusing on

collectivist luxury consumers with an attempt to demonstrate the variations in luxury value perceptions among Asian consumer in China, India and Indonesia. Moreover, Aliyev and Wagner (2018) focused on cultural influence on luxury value perceptions by exploring luxury perceptions in Azerbaijan as an Eastern and collectivist culture and Germany as a Western individualistic culture. Two issues emerge here: first, the perception of value towards luxury fashion brands influenced by an individual's cultural background, may or may not be entirely covered in by categorising Western consumers as Individualists and Eastern consumers as collectivists. Second, there is not enough research in investigating and comparing value perceptions in major luxury fashion markets such as the UAE and the UK. There are insufficient cross-cultural studies in consumer behaviour that have compared the Western and Middle Eastern consumers in luxury fashion industry.

In the studies mentioned above, Asia is generally associated with a collectivist culture, while individualism is assumed to be more common in the West (Wu et al., 2015). In effect, Wiley (2016) suggests that a formal judgement between the Western and non-Western moral values is required. Since findings imply that 'meaning embedded in consumption symbols, such as commercial brands, can represent and institutionalize the values and beliefs of a culture' (McCracken 1986; Richins, 1994). Escalas and Bettman (2005) argue that in Eastern countries such as Taiwan individuals pay specific attention to the social self, in respect to how they are perceived by others. Whereas Westerners think of themselves as having a more inward-looking personal trait that places less emphasis on how others perceive them. Results from Li and Zhang (2011) and Wong and Ahuvia (1998) demonstrate that Asian consumers are more materialistic than Western consumers are. Hofstede (1980) emphasises materialism, background social status, values, personal reputation and relationships as key factors and these may be especially pertinent in the context of Dubai's collectivist

communities. Indeed, appearance in general could be said to be of more importance in the UAE if we accept the theoretical categorisation of Eastern consumers as collectivists. In this sense, shopping appears to be a fundamental part of lifestyle in the UAE and as time passes, Dubai is aiming to have the greatest number of shopping malls per square metre in the world (Jacobs, 2018). Currently, Dubai is the home for latest international fashion brands to meet the requirements of its image conscious residents as well as tourists, as it is known for being a major shopping destination (Vel and Rodrigues, 2013). Evidence suggests that Dubai is a major market in the Middle East with huge malls containing a wide variety of luxury fashion stores. The Dubai Mall located in heart of the city is reported to have the most luxury fashion brands under one roof in Asia (Gupta, 2015). Dubai ranks second falling behind London in terms of being the city with the highest luxury fashion retailers represented (Zaidan, 2016). Despite these reports, the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption in Dubai UAE has not been compared to a major luxury fashion market in the West.

In light of the debates above, Bizzari the current CEO Gucci argues that, 'culture eats strategy for breakfast, because you can try the best strategy possible but if the culture doesn't support it will fail no doubt' (Salesforce, 2019). Given that luxury fashion brands operate with a consumer base that has a different set of values and perceived values, cultural insight is crucial to identify the constructs that influence consumers perceptions towards luxury fashion brands (Wiley, 2016). To this end, my research aims to find the extent to which cultural background influences luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK. In addition, I will explore if there are any significant similarities and differences among luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK.

2.7.0 Self-construal

"The concept of self-construal relates to the way in which an individual perceives himself or herself to be connected with others in the community (Chu et al., 2015:572)."

As I pointed out throughout this Chapter, perception is one of the central elements underpinning the concept of self as cultural norms and values are powerful forces in its construction (Singelis, 1994). Markus and Kitanna (1991) focus on self-constural as the core topic of their project; their findings indicate that this concept is better understood when individuals are categoresid into two types: independent and interdepentent. In this sense, individuals with strong independent self-construal have a higher probability of independence compared to those with a dominant interdependent self-construal. Individuals with independent self-construal are bounded and stable. Therefore, the self-expression of an independent relies on self-endorsing goals (Singelis, 1994). In this discourse, Chun et al. (2015) suggest that the way in which that interdependent self-construal individuals see themselves reflects on their separation or connection with others, and in effect the extent to which they feel separated or connected to others. This stems from the duality of the self as a variable between culture and individual behaviour (Triandis, 1989). As I mentioned in Section 2.1 Simmel's (1957) work has thoroughly addressed this issue, with a particular emphasis on fashion, he points out that "within the social embodiments of these contrasts, one side is generally maintained by the psychological tendency towards imitation" (Simmel, 1957:542). On this note, commentators concerned with the notion of self-construal such as Markus and Kitayama, (1991), and Rhee et al. (1995) focus on external cultural influences, since the extent to which individuals are amenable towards external influences seems different. According to the aforementioned studies, there is a prominent distinction between western cultures and eastern cultures in this regard. The fundamental element that distinguishes these cultures

revolves around the idea that, Western populations as individualists are categorised as independents, whereas individuals in Eastern cultures are categorised as interdependent category as collectivists (Hofstede, 1980).

In the context of luxury fashion consumption, people with independent self-construal may seek brands that contribute to the expression of their uniqueness and individuality. In contrast, individuals with interdependent self-construal are likely to represent individuals who pursue branded items in order to fit in with their social groups. Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) acknowledge that psychological factors have an impact on "bandwagon" luxury consumption, which refers to luxury consumption caused by an increase in demand of a product due to the consumption patterns of others (Ko and Megehee, 2011). Such consumption effects emanate from a conformity to group norms associated with the acquaintance behaviour of consumers, when their decision is influenced by brands popular among their social circles. Fujiwara and Nagasawa (2015) add that an individual's attitude, lifestyle and self-concept is under the influence of peer pressure by reference groups, which impinges upon consumers choice: a factor that luxury fashion brands benefit from through the perception of their '*luxury*' value. Prior to addressing how such debates are essential in my research, I should note that in the latter parts of the thesis I aim to challenge the concept of individuality with an emphasis on the role that the culture of luxury fashion consumption plays in the society of the UAE and the UK from a more holistic perspective.

Bearing in mind the literature discussed, self-construal appears to be an important concept in the context of luxury fashion consumption, since the consumption of symbolic goods plays a pivotal role in how consumers socialise in a given culture. I therefore seek to find out if self-

construal is an influential underlying construct on the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption.

2.8.0 Self-Consciousness

Towards the end of Section 2.2, I pointed out that given Marx and Engels' (2000) work, consciousness appears to be an important concept in the context of consumption. The consumption of luxury fashion brands is in a sense a reaction by individuals to the psychological, social and cultural demands of modern life. The influence of peer pressure appears to have become an issue for the perceived self as social values through family and peers are an external motivation driven by the self-consciousness of luxury fashion consumers (Maria, et al. 2018). Consciousness 'involves the combination of both knowledge-based and emotion-based components' (Liu and Macdonald, 2016:326). Self-consciousness is a strong force in predicting self-presentation behaviours, it is an effect of both public and the private self (Shim et al. 2016). Private self-consciousness is associated with personal beliefs concentrated on feelings and thoughts in an individuals' inner world (Falewickz and Bak, 2016) while, 'public self-consciousness is defined as the tendency to be aware of oneself as a social object' (Fenigstein et al., 1975:128).

Luxury fashion brand consumers are both publicly and privately self-conscious and this consciousness effects the way consumers perceive themselves (Maria et al.,2018). Such a perception of self demands that research considers an outlook that evaluates both the internal and external psychological and sociological factors that potentially influence luxury fashion consumers. In this sense, Agu and Ounuha (2016: 38) who study the psychological influences of fashion suggest that, "The age-long saying that *how you dress determines how you would be addressed* seems to have taken major toll on the fashion consciousness, sensitivity and awareness." Consciousness can thus be said to play a key role in the

consumption of luxury fashion brands given the intangible assets and values endowed with these goods. However, research is yet to discover the influence of social groups on the perceived image of the self in viewpoint of others and the self. This can be identified as a psychosocial influence that has not been addressed directly in the context of luxury fashion brand consumption.

Bearing in mind the literature discussed thus far, luxury fashion branded products are presumed to be an echo of emotions sparked by self-conscious thoughts. In strengthening this argument, Cabanstonguay et al. (2013) argue that self-consciousness involves emotions such as pride, shame and guilt that come to mind by self-reflection and self-evaluation. Falewickz and Bak (2016:59) point out that 'self-consciousness relates to focusing attention on oneself, social anxiety is associated with the reaction to this process and is, in a way, by a product of attention being thus focused". Moreover, Feinstein and Zuckerman et al. (1983) suggest that seeking attention from others is a characteristic motivated by self-consciousness. Nunes et al. (2011) contend that consumers pay high prices because they crave for the status that material expressions of wealth can give them. They refer to the work of Richins (1994) which focuses on materialism and outlines that people make assumptions about the success of others partly based on part of the things they own. Previous studies including that of Webb et al. (2016) indicate that the experience of success is an underlying motive that drives individuals to express pride. This expression communicates to an audience that the individual uttering pride is worthy of high levels of status. Herein lies the potential contribution of luxury fashion consumption towards self-conscious emotions. In this discourse, Kim et al. (2016) found that pride is one of the three emotional factors influencing consumers while browsing in luxury retail stores. Cheng et al. (2010); Shariff and Tracy, (2009); Tiedens et al., (2000); Williams and DeSteno, (2009), Izard (1997) found that pride is a positive emotion with a direct

impact on happiness that communicates the enrichment of the ego and which transmits credit to oneself. Feelings such as confidence, self-worth and productivity are thus suggested to be positively related to extravert characteristics such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability; self-esteem and authentic pride is driven by an individual's developed skill-based status and prestige (Robins, 2007). In contrast, Cheng et al. (2010) suggest that acquiring forced based status and dominance are uniquely linked with hubristic pride which also involves global acknowledgement (Web et al.,2016).

Researchers describe embarrassment as a negative emotional response driven by a danger to appear in public in front of or an imaginary viewer (Metts and Cupach, 1989; Miller and Leary, 1992; Schlenker, 1980). Consumers will take great risks and go to great lengths in order to escape the feeling of embarrassment (Goodwin, 1992; Sabini et al. 2001b; White, 2004; White and Dahl, 2006; Wooten and Reed, 2000). The key point that concerns my research here is that as Gesk and Drolet (2008) suggest, the consumption of a product could potentially compensate the psychological cost of being embarrassed. If this is the case, luxury fashion consumption can be a product of the consumers' self-conscious thought processes. It is worthwhile here to shed light on a famous quote by Emerson (1841) *"You are what you think..,"* that concisely explains the potential link between self-consciousness and luxury fashion consumption. It is in line with this reasoning and given the symbolic benefits of luxury fashion items that the consumption of these goods may enable consumers to avoid conscious feelings of embarrassment. Given the above, self-consciousness is a concept that needs particular attention when reflecting upon the perception of value towards luxury fashion brands.

2.9.0 Summary of the literature review Chapter

The major issue that this chapter has consistently highlighted is the importance of understanding the underlying perceptions behind luxury fashion brand consumption. In doing so, in this chapter I reflected upon the relevant key literature with the intention of indicating why is it that these luxury fashion brands are fundamentally perceived as symbols of wealth and status. I have attempted to identify the underlying constructs that influence a consumers' perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption. In this regard, concepts such as materialism, psychological ownership, self-enhancement, self-identity, cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness appear to play a particularly significant role. The complex nature of the relationships between all the concepts identified in this chapter requires a clear blueprint in developing a fuller understanding of the underlying constructs that shape an individual's perception of value towards luxury fashion consumption. It is in this sense that my objective is to develop a theoretical model demonstrating the underlying psychological, social and cultural elements that revolve around the perception of value of luxury fashion goods. At this stage of the thesis, I propose the thematic factors in luxury fashion consumption (Figure 2.3) dependent on my analysis of the reviewed literature that is displayed below. Since this thematic framework is based on secondary information, I will therefore go on to conduct primary data collection in the UAE and the UK by means of developing further an original theoretical model in order to shed new light in understanding luxury fashion brand consumption. As such, in Chapter 3 I will discuss the potential methods that could provide me with flexible techniques in obtaining and analysing primary data in what I aspire to establish.
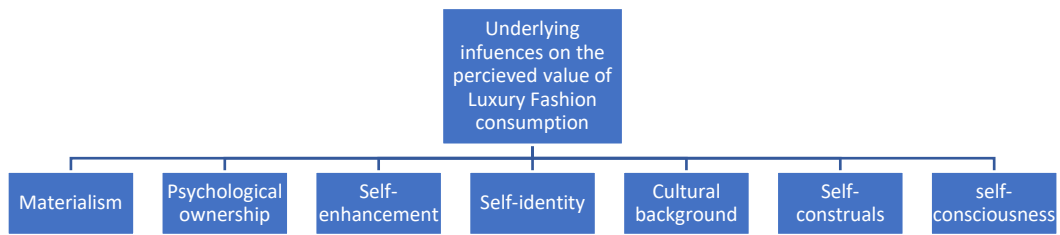
Figure 2.3 Thematic factors on luxury fashion consumption

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.0.0 Introduction

As I indicated in Chapter 1 and 2, this study aims to investigate the perceievd value of luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK. The intention of this Chapter is thus to demonstrate the research design I deployed in order to meet the aim and objectives of the research. In Chapter two, the importance of seven psychological, social and cultural influences were highlighted as potentially significant in helping us to understand the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption. The objective in Chapter 2 was to identify these influences, while reviewing the literature pertient to my research, and drawing attention towards key concepts such as materialism, psychological ownership, self-identity, self-enhancement, cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness as elements. I furthermore argued that these elements require further exploration in the context of identifying the underlying constructs behind the perception of value in luxury fashion brand consumption.

In order to best address my research objectives, I adopt a mixed method approach. This Chapter will discuss the methododological and philosophical practices, in addition to analytical techniques, stages of data analysis that underpin the purposes of my research. The key focus here is unravelling the complexities in perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK. This Chapter therefore, demonstrates the procedures that were used to acquire this knowledge (O'Shaughnessy, 1992). To this end, at this point I will specificly outline the objectives of this thesis as a whole.

Objectives

1- To identify the underlying constructs behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption.

2- To measure the influence of materialism, psychological ownership, self-identity and self-enhancement on as an underlying construct behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption.

3- To measure the influence of cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness as an underlying construct behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption.'

4- To explore through a comparative study of luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK the similarities and differences in perception of value towards these goods.

5- To explore the effectiveness of branding strategies on luxury fashion consumers' perception of value in the UAE and the UK.

6- To develop a theoretical model of factors influencing the underlying perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumers.

3.1.0 Motivation behind exploring luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK

The UAE and the UK were the countries chosen as sample locations for my primary data collection. This choice was inspired by my experience residing in both countries. Before I go on to reflect on the failure to understand the significance of luxury fashion consumption in the contemporary life in the UAE and the UK, it is worth explaining how my personal life journey has led me to explore the research questions that I will discuss in this section.

At this point, I must acknowledge that the inspiration behind this study was initially sparked by my experience of associating with social groups that had luxury fashion consumption as a

life priority that appeared to often dominate their thoughts and in turn social group conversations and lifestyles. In addition, in the early stages of my research, I spent extensive hours on a weekly basis both in the UAE and in the UK, observing luxury fashion consumers in shopping malls and streets where luxury fashion stores were located. During my observations, I observed that consumers appeared to seem uplifted by their luxury fashion consumption. Of course, the nature of what I gleaned from such observations was subjective and did not amount to actual data, but it provided me with an insight that I wanted to explore further through research. The way in which individuals in different social groups perceive a value in their consumption of luxury fashion brands appeared to be a complex matter with a range of psychological, social and cultural influences and it was something I wanted to explore further. The root of these complexities appeared to relate to an individual's 'perception', the fascinating point here, in the context of luxury fashion brand consumption being how individuals consume a similar luxury fashion branded product with a different perceived value. To this end, there were questions that required an answer or perhaps a problem that required a solution and these formed the basis of my main research questions:

1) What are the underlying constructs behind the perception of value in luxury fashion consumption?

2) How does such influences affect individuals in the UAE and the UK differently or similarly?

3) How effective are marketing strategies on the perception of value towards luxury fashion brands?

In light of the research questions above, I aspired to seek logical conclusions as to what element lies beneath how consumers perceive particular value in luxury fashion goods that are at a basic level in fact simply fabrics, designs and tangible materials that seem to play a prominent role in the life of luxury fashion consumers.

3.2.0 Rationale behind exploring luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK

The first issue to consider in framing the overall research question centres on the issue of perception. Put simply, how is the perception of value towards luxury fashion brands constructed? In this sense, bearing in mind the studies I discussed in Chapter 2, the literature has neglected to address this problem by not paying attention to the underlying constructs that may influence the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption sufficient attention. The present study therefore aims to explore what is a gap in the literature by placing emphasis on the UAE and the UK as countries to conduct this study, since to date, these countries have not been compared in the context of luxury fashion consumption and its underlying constructs in respect to perception of value. Highlighting the discussions in Chapter 2, the implication here is that an individual's perception does not take shape in isolation: there are psychological, social and cultural influences that surround him or her as to what is valued to what extent. In effect, these influences may or may not be different in different geographical locations with diverse cultural backgrounds. Since existing studies have not concentrated on such present-day important luxury fashion markets this gap constitutes a demand for my thesis to deliver original contributions to research by exploring the UAE and the UK as countries with different cultural backgrounds and geographical locations.

Before I go on to discuss the rationale for choosing the UAE and the UK as countries to investigate the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption, I must point out that age and gender are not the focus of this research, as it was the concept of value perceptions in the luxury fashion industry that initiated a spark for further research in this field. This reasoning is in line with the essence of my research that is concerned with understanding perception and how it is that a human's experience and choice under the influence of their perception of value in the context of luxury fashion brand consumption. As such the focus of my research

centres around psychological, social and cultural influences on the human mind and in effect how the impact of these influences are interpreted and in turn perceived by consumers. I thus made the decision to focus on the perceptions constructed around luxury fashion by consumers in general, without structuring the project around gender or age, as I felt this would allow me to frame the project in such a way as to make the project manageable and in order for me to provide the most open basis upon which I could make a contribution to the literature. Furthermore, I made the decision to structure the scope of the project around the four luxury fashion brands identified. If I had decided to delineate my sample any further it would have effectively distracted me from my core task: namely to identify the underlying constructs behind luxury fashion consumption among samples from two countries. My intention then was for the data to speak for itself in this regard.

3.3.0 Why the UAE?

The rationale behind choosing the UAE as a sample country was due to the relatively high luxury fashion brand consumption in this country. In the recent years the world has witnessed a fashion evolution in Dubai alongside the development of a very dynamic retail environment which, according to Vogue fashion (2015), makes it the new 'fashion capital' of the world. Dubai is also present as a top city market for luxury goods as indicated by Figure 3.1. Moreover, according to realbusiness.co.uk (2014), teenagers in the UAE spend six times more than global average on clothes and accessories compared to their overseas counterparts. Additionally, "Gulf Cooperation Councils nationals are also high spenders, both at home and abroad. Locally, they spend an average of US$1,300 a month on clothing and accessories of which $700 is on ready-to-wear and $300 on shoes, compared with $120 and $15 respectively for UK shoppers in the UK" (realbusiness.co.uk, 2014:1). This is due to the UAE's standard of living which as reports suggest have one of the highest in the world: "the UAE has maintained

its steady upward trajectory for the last 5 years" (Luxury society, 2016). Luxury fashion brands have been successful in the Middle East according to Fashionista (2016) the consumption of luxury fashion brands by Arabs totalled 320 US dollars in 2016. Meanwhile, Dubai is the 21st most expensive city in the world based on quality of living (Fashionista, 2016). Consequently, luxury fashion brands have demonstrated their success and popularity in Dubai. This popularity increases awareness, and familiarity of luxury fashion brands among individuals in the city, which in turn makes Dubai an appropriate city to conduct a study associated with luxury fashion brand consumption. Having presented Dubai as a major market for luxury fashion brand consumption, I must also add that after London ranking first and Bangkok second, Dubai is the third city in global ranking for luxury store openings (Nazir, 2019). Bearing in mind the discussions concerned with cross cultural comparisons in Chapter 2, marketing research has paid less attention to Middle Eastern cultures compared to other Eastern cultures that are also major luxury markets which is why my research focuses on Dubai UAE.

3.4.0 Why the UK?

London has consistently topped the global ranking for luxury store openings, which makes it an important player in the global luxury market (Nazir,2019). Hammer et al. (2015) reported an almost 11% increase in the UK's clothing manufacturing industries between 2008 and 2012. The elegant Bond Street in London has evolved from a street with boutiques into a whole neighbourhood with some of the world's top high-end brands. London's luxury quarter is largely responsible for growing the city's luxury goods market to €10 billion. Moreover, it is estimated that 1.1 million people are within range of 30 minutes distance to Bond Street on public transport: 225,000 passenger a day are predicted to use Bond Street station. London has also become an attraction for luxury fashion consumption by gathering all the popular

luxury fashion brands under one roof in places such as Harrods and Selfridges which have become brands in their own right. In this respect, London is evidently an appropriate city to conduct a primary data collection associated with luxury fashion brands. The Financial Times (2016) published an article associated with London being the 'go-to destination for luxury goods' which also included a consumer expressing her feeling about luxury fashion consumption in central London by saying "I love Harrods because it has all the clothes I could want, and other things too," she says. "I wouldn't shop anywhere else for my clothes". Additionally, Bain and company (2015) reported that London is ranked third in the world's luxury market by earning 10 billion Euros (in the same report Dubai is ranked 13th). Accordingly, London appears to be a suitable city to explore the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption and its underlying influences.

3.5.0 Research strategy

After reflecting on the UAE and the UK as countries that I chose to investigate the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption, in this Section I will discuss my research strategy and research philosophies that I considered in developing this project. Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that there are four groups of research philosophies in social research, namely: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Guba and Lincoln (1994) further suggest that ontology, epistemology and methodology are three schools of thought that these four philosophies can be categorised into. In this sense, ontology is concerned with the phenomenon examined, the relationship of the problems to be researched is associated with epistemology that makes us ask how we know what we know and the methodology embodies the strategy through which data will be analysed, and the outcomes and explanations will be developed (Guta and Lincoln, 1994). According to Saunders et al. (2007) three main research philosophies that function on various epistemological and ontological

assumptions are namely: positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism that often provide a decent blueprint in capturing the spectrum of philosophies.

For the purposes of my research, I have selected a pragmatic method that is associated with mixed method research involving a quantitative and a qualitative approach. Although scholars such as Biesta (2010) argue pragmatism does not necessarily deliver the rationale for mixed methods, some scholars argue otherwise. In this debate, Teddlie and Tashakori (2003) draw attention towards thirteen authors that have undertaken a pragmatist approach to mixed method design. In this respect, Morgan (2014) suggests that the requirements of mixed-method research are directly linked with the paradigm of pragmatism. This is appropriate in the context of my research because the quantitative elements will aid in measuring the influence of each of the seven underlying constructs on how it is that consumers perceive value in their consumption of luxury fashion goods as presented in Chapter 2. Second, it is through statistical findings that a theoretical model could be established in order to produce original findings in the context of luxury fashion brand value perceptions. As I mentioned in the earlier stage of this chapter, one of the objectives of this research is to explore the effectiveness of marketing strategies on luxury fashion brand consumption. In this light the qualitative elements will enable me to interpret information concerned with this matter and in addition supplement my quantitative findings in regards to value perceptions towards luxury fashion brand consumption. Having justified my reasons for deploying this approach I will now go on to discuss in more detail why I have chosen a mixed method approach.

3.5.1 Mixed Methods

This research is underpinned by mixed methods since this approach enabled me to explore and address the issue around luxury fashion consumption from a variety of perspectives. In recent years, mixed-method technique has been a familiar method in finding solutions to consumption related issues in marketing studies. Denscomb (2008) states that mixed methods have developed from the so-called third paradigm of social research which seeks to establish a viable alternative to quantitative and qualitative paradigms. In this respect, Saunders et al. (2009) suggest that a mixed method has become the go-to form of research to collect data in a textual and numeric form. This reflects the recognition that Statistical data is not sufficient alone. Obtaining information using qualitative data is of equal importance, as the present study requires detailed insights concerned with the consumption of luxury fashion brands and its influences on consumers' perceptions that can only be understood fully if interpretability is developed through complementary approaches. Attaining statistical data using a quantitative approach is crucial in order to measure the potential influences behind luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK as mentioned above. The data collection process in a mixed method approach can take place in two different forms: one is the parallel form, the other is the sequential form. In the case of this research, quantitative questionnaire distribution was the first stage of the mixed method followed by qualitative interviews that were conducted after the questionnaire data collection. In adopting a mixed method approach including questionnaires and interviews, this pragmatic approach facilitates the validation and reliability of results not by primary depending on a single basis of analysis, but through the validation provided by diverse sources. Simply put, mixed methods provide a means of validating the conclusions reached by the researcher via mutual confirmation of both approaches.

3.5.2 Quantitative approach

This section focuses on the quantitative element of my research, which, was delivered in the form of a questionnaire. In Chapter 2, the findings from my literature review focused on the potential impact of psychological, social and cultural influences on consumers' perception of value towards luxury fashion brands. In this light, the numerical results were deemed straightforward in a sense that my quantitative results (see Chapter 4) illustrate the extent to which the sample population agree with the arguments made in Chapter 2. In this respect, a quantitative method which is commonly a key approach in marketing and the social sciences was used on the basis that it enables researchers to reach large number of participants in a relavantly economical manner over a relativewly short timespan. Furthermore, questionnaires are commonly used in order to provide researchers with a relatively simple means of understanding consumers' perspective associated with their attitudes, values, and beliefs. Such factors should clearly sit at the heart of any project concerned with the value perceptions of luxury fashion consumers.

Of course, questionnaires, are not without their limitations. Amaratunga et al.(2012) argue that questionnaires are a difficult method in terms of analysis and interpretation as it is challenging to draw meanings from numeric data. It was for this reason that I also conducted interviews as I will explain later in this chapter. Nevertheless, a key advantage of using questionnaires that outweighs its disadvantages lies in the fact that it allows for the collection of considerable quantities of data, which in turn, can be simply organised and compared using sophisticated statistical software such as SPSS.

3.5.3 Questionnaires

In this Section I will first elaborate on the logic behind choosing the questionnaire method. And second, the pilot study that was conducted prior to the final questionnaire. Finally, I will consider the advantages of collecting completed questionnaires online. I will also discuss why it is that Instagram is such an effective online platform for collecting questionnaires online, since, I used Instagram to collect my questionnaires online via a Google form link, that was shared with potential participants. Prior to messaging respondents online, their respective public profile on Instagram was observed to ensure that the potential respondents met the participant criteria and that they were luxury fashion consumers in the UAE or the UK. My observation of public Instagram profiles that are publicly accessible gave no rise to any ethical issues as the images were only observed in order to find the appropriate respondents for the survey. Furthermore, Instagram members have the option to set their respective profile on private to avoid privacy issues.

The eligibility of participants was determined according to the following:

1- Evidence of luxury fashion consumption posts on Instagram in the UAE and the UK.

2- Evidence of a location setting displaying that the Instagram post has been uploaded from the UAE or the UK.

The questionnaire method provided me with insights associated with the behaviours, attitudes and perceptions of individuals which are linked with my project's research questions (Johnson and Christensen, 2020). Furthermore, numeric results enabled the present research to examine and compare luxury fashion brand consumers' in the UAE and the UK. On this note, Saunders et al. (2009) suggest that there are two types of questionnaires, which includes self-administered questionnaire and the interviewer administered questionnaire. The questionnaire can be handed to the respondents in several ways, via the internet,

intranet, by post or by being hand-delivered and collected. Yet, such methods such as post are outdated as in the current modern world given that it is much less likely for participants to get involved in survey using the telephone and post. The internet provides a greater opportunity for data collection in the present age as people spend so much time on social media and are thus unphased by a request to complete a questionnaire this way. On this note, in section 3.4.4 I will explain in more detail why an online survey was preferable specifically in the case of collecting data from luxury fashion consumers that are found in stores.

3.5.3.1 Piloting questionnaires

Prior to the final online questionnaires, I collected 29 (15 the UAE, 14 the UK) completed pilot questionnaires in order to test the reliability of the questionnaire and to determine whether my questionnaire was sufficiently valid. The pilot questionnaire was conducted online using Instagram with participants who were luxury fashion consumers and were willing to participate based on their interest in luxury fashion brands. Therefore, the potential participants Instagram profile was checked in order to ensure that respondents meet the required participant criteria and that basis I would approach the consumers online by sending a direct message.

A research Information sheet and a consent form was included at the beginning of the pilot questionnaire survey stating that the research would not proceed without my participant's consent. The pilot questionnaire design consisted of three parts. First: a set of questions, mirrored susceptibility to normative influences developed by Bearden et al. (1989) used as a marketing scale, the "normative influence mentioned, reflects on individuals' and attempts to comply with the expectations of others to achieve rewards (Bearden et al.,1989)." Second, the Brand Luxury Index scale developed by Frank Vigneron and Lester Johnson (2004), and

the DomOwn scale developed by Gineikiene et al.(2016). The main purpose for conducting a pilot study prior to the final questionnaire was to ensure that the questionnaire was easy to understand and to avoid confusion among participants as much as possible. The feedback from the pilot studies informed me that the Brand Luxury Index scale (BLI) was found to be confusing for the by participants. Consquently, the Brand Luxury Index section in the questionnaire was removed for two reasons: first the pilot led me to the realisation that I am not measuring the level of luxury brands that consumers are consuming which is why BLI is essentially designed for. Second, there appeared to be misunderstadnings on the part of my participants as to what the questions required of them.

3.5.3.2 Justification of online questionnaire

My original intention was to hand out the questionnaires in physical form as I aimed to distribute questionnaires face-to-face by handing luxury fashion consumers with a hard copy. This process involved a 'Mall intercept' method where luxury fashion brand consumers were targeted to be approached when I had witnessed them make a purchase at a luxury fashion store to ensure that they were, in fact, luxury fashion consumers. However, the mall intercept approach was found to be extremely time-consuming in the UAE and the UK considering the modern fast-paced lifestyle it was very challenging to intercept people in shopping malls, since many businesses and charities undertake a similar approach to sell or promote their products and services. As a result, I decided to distribute the questionnaires online using Google form, which proved to be less time consuming compared to the face-to-face mall intercept questionnaire method. A shortcut link to the questionnaire was sent to luxury fashion consumers online based on their Instagram posts, where luxury fashion consumption was displayed on their Instagram profiles (see figures 8-11). This choice was also made due

to the high numbers of consumers on the streets which meant it was difficult for me to capture their attention making the collection of 300 questionnaires somewhat over-optimistic. In respect to such challenges, I withdrew the 'Mall intercept' method, as the alternative online approach was deemed more convenient, relevant and current in the digital age we live in. As such, the rationale behind choosing to distribute online questionnaires reflected the fact that today's consumers are just more comfortable with such an approach given their propensity to share their thoughts and feelings on Instagram, using captioned photos that includes both images and texts, in addition to comments engaged with the posts. In September 2016 and on March 2017 it was found that 8 million companies had used Instagram (Vassalo et al. 2018). Instagram had reached over 1 billion active members by June 2018, which makes it the most popular social media platform (Statista.com, 2021). This popularity has attracted luxury fashion brands and many other brands to invest time and money on Instagram digital marketing with strategised content. Currently, luxury fashion brands such as Gucci and Burberry post daily 2-3 times to maximise followers and engagement among their existing followers. Each of the luxury fashion brands considered in this research have over million Instagram followers, the screenshots below demonstrate the presence of luxury fashion brands on Instagram.
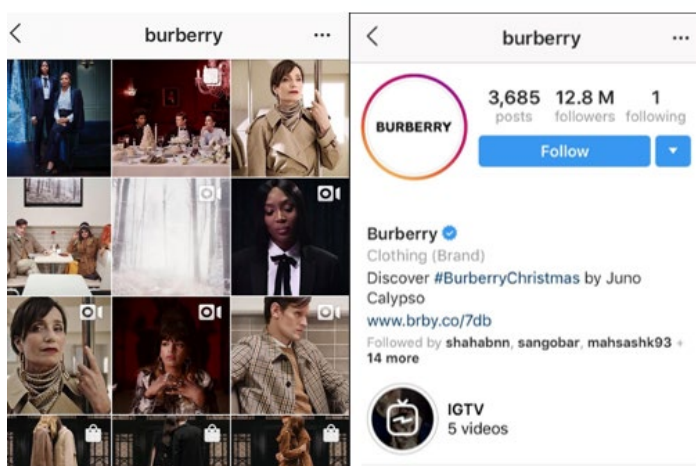
Figure 3.2 Burbery Instagram profile
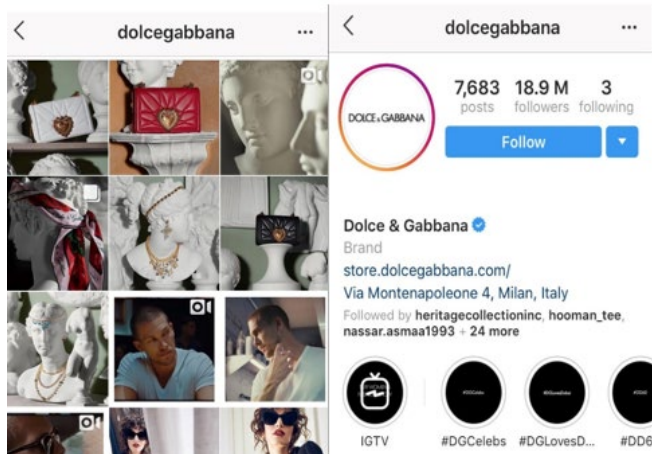
Figure 3.3 Dolce Gabbana Instagram profile
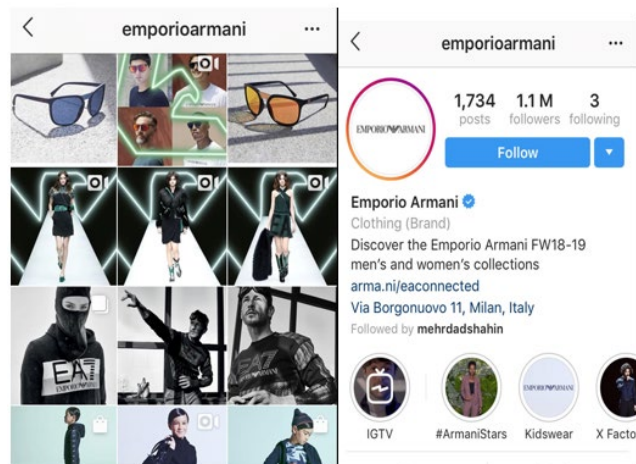
Figure 3.4 Emporio Armani Instagram profile
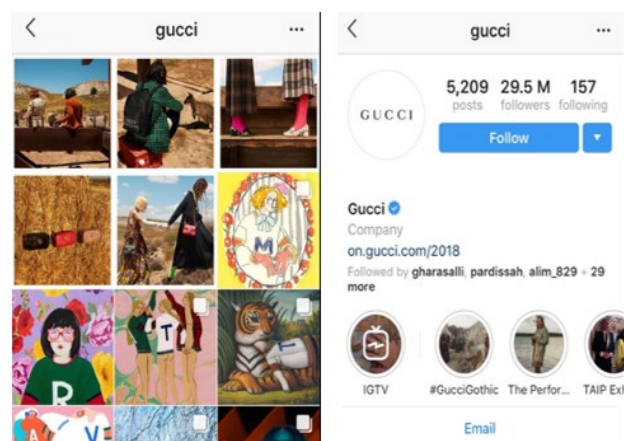
Figure 3.5 Gucci Instagram profile

Considering the discussion above, Instagram provides a useful platform upon which I was able to access luxury fashion brand consumers' in the UAE and the UK. This choice seemed logical as user-generated content on Instagram is an increasingly important means through which consumers express themselves and communicate with others online (Smith et al.2011) (see Figures 8,9,10 and 11). Figures 8 and 9 show that the Instagram user concerned had consumed luxury fashion branded products from the Dolce Gabbana store in the Mall of the Emirates, Dubai. The figures below are used to display how I identified, with the help of Instagram, luxury fashion brand consumers that were based in the UAE or the UK. I thus distributed questionnaires using a Google form online link, which provided a means of collecting and sorting data online. Considering that my study required participants from two different countries, it was more convenient and sensible to collect and store the data online.
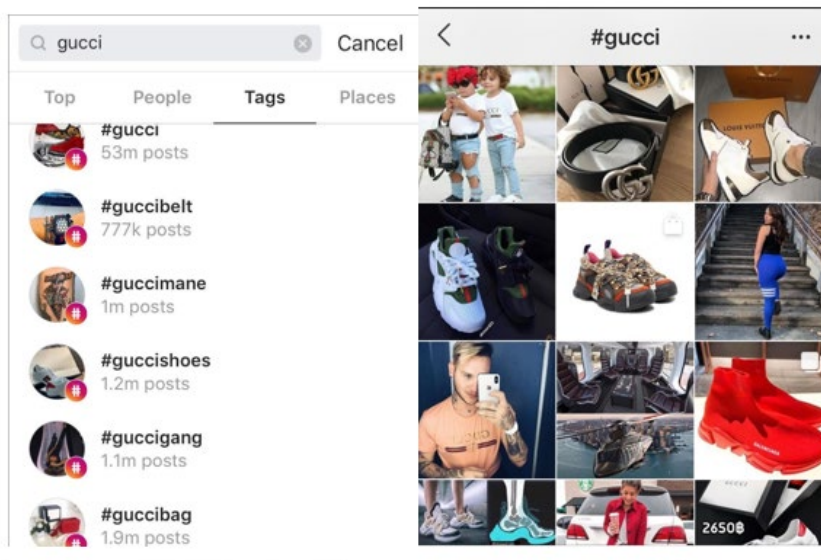
Figure 3.6 Hashtag Gucci
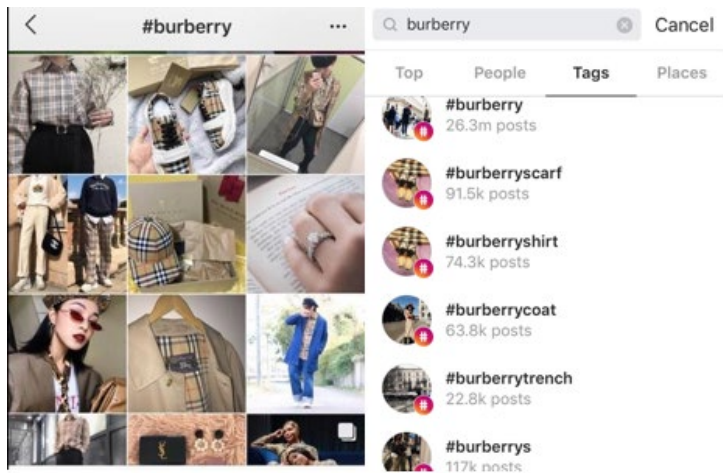
Figure 3.7 Hashtag Burberry

3.5.3.3 Sampling of questionnaire

As I have highlighted throughout this chapter, luxury fashion brand consumers residing in the UAE and the UK are the sample participants of this study. The questionnaire includes screening questions asking the participants to fill in their city of residents and their consent to participate in the study. Should the consumers I approached, turn out to be tourists they were not deemed be able to continue with the questionnaire, since consumers who were not residents of the UAE or the UK were excluded from the sample population. This choice was made in order to ensure that my data represented only luxury fashion consumers that live in in the UAE and the UK. In regards to the sample size of my study, I aimed at having a sample size of 300 participants for the questionnaire survey, bearing in mind that the sample size is dependent on two vital factors which are time and cost (Bryman and Bell, 2003). I sent the questionnaire via Google form link for luxury fashion consumers who were eligible to participate based on what I have discussed thus far, this process involved the following five steps below.

1-Luxury fashion brand hashtags were searched on Instagram.

2- The most relevant hashtags to the research participant criteria in the UAE and the UK were chosen.

3-Public Instagram profiles that met the participant criteria of research were approached using Instagram direct message based on their Instagram posts of luxury fashion consumption.

4- Potential participants were asked to confirm their city of residence and whether they were consumers of luxury fashion brands.

5- If the potential participants responded yes, they would be sent an online google form link using an Instagram direct message option.

The following images offer examples of the public profile of luxury fashion consumers who permitted their images to be screenshotted and used for research purposes.

Figure 3.8.Consumer content 1   Figure 3.9 Consumer content 2

Figure 3.10 Consumer content 3

The main aim of the mentioned five steps was to seek luxury fashion consumers online in the UAE and the UK. The hashtags that were searched on Instagram to find luxury fashion consumers included #guccidubai, #dubaigucci, #burberrylondon, #londonburberry, #guccilondon, #londongucci, #guccidubaimall, #gucciharrods,#gucciselfridges, #harrodslondon,#gucciharrods, #dolcegabannadubai, #dolcegabbanalondon, #emporioarmanidubai, #emrporioarmanilondon. The most relevant hashtags turned out to be #burberrylondon, #burberrydubai, #guccidubai, and #guccilondon. During this process, popular luxury fashion stores included in my research scope (Burberry, Dolce Gabbana, Gucci and Emporio Armani) were also explored via an Instagram search. This search resulted in my identifying luxury fashion consumers who enabled the location setting on their Instagram application. The hashtags that I searched for the mentioned locations were #dubaimall #guccidubaimall,#gucciburberry,#guccimallofemirates #harrodslondon, #londonharrods #gucciselfridges, #selfridgesgucci, and #selfridges. I considered these hashtags in relation to the research's brand scope (Burberry, Dolce Gabbana, Gucci and Emporio Armani). My choice in this regard was also based on the online evidence of luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK where Instagram members displayed images of their luxury fashion branded items on their profile.

3.5.3.4 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire in this study uses Likert scaling to evaluate perceptions behind luxury fashion consumptions. Oppenheim (1992) suggests that Likert scales benefit from a range of responses that enable participants to state their reaction relatively accurately. In the present study Likert scaling was used in the questionnaire in order to examine luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK in a statiscal form that would help to identify key trends. In this respect, Miller and Brewer (2003) note that Likert scales are usually used to measure

perceptions, behaviours and attitudes. Items included in the questionnaire were thus linked with the variables that were highlighted in Chapter 2 such as materialism, psychological ownership, self-enhancement, self-identity, cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness. In the following sections, I will explain how certain items in the questionnaire were modified according to the variables I was attempting to measure in this research.

3.5.3.4 i) Section 1 of the questionnaire

In the first part of the questionnaire, participants were asked basic questions such as their name, age gender, and city of residence. Additionally, respondents were provided with information associated with the purpose of this research and were informed that there is no right or wrong answer and that they were free to withdraw anytime from filling out the questionnaire. The final part of the information provided suggested that all the data would be analysed anonymously (questionnaires are available in appendix).

3.5.3.4 ii) Section 2 of the questionnaire

Susceptibility to normative influences is a scale of measurement that was developed by Bearden et al. (1989) and this relies on eight key items. The purpose of applying this scale was to measure the tendency of influential factors by others on individuals in making a purchase decision. This method is suitable to explore the normative influences that trigger a change in consumers' perception, in this respect Devellis (2012) argues that these items are comparable indicators of the underlying construct in measuring perspectives. Research that has deployed a similar approach include that of Batra et al. (2000), including research that looks at consumer confidence (Bearden et al., 1990), protective self-presentation efforts (Wooten and Reed 2004), the purchase of new products (Steenkamp and Gielens, 2003), and consumer boycotts (Sen et al., 2001) of brands (See Appendix).

3.5.3.4 iii) Section 3 of the questionnaire

In the third Section of the questionnaire, I adapted the statements included in the scale developed by Ginekiene et al. (2016) by rephrasing the questionnaire statements that would best align with the purposes of what my research seeks to explore, for example rephrasing 'domestic products' with 'luxury fashion products'. Additionally, Ginekiene et al. (2016) used 'we buy' in their questionnaire items, but in my questionnaire this phrase was changed to 'I consume' in order to align the questionnaire items with the broader context of my research. In effect, the format of part three in the questionnaire was taken from a study with a validated scale that concentrated on the psychological ownership of domestic products. This allowed me to formulate the items in my questionnaire statements in such a way is best in line with purposes of my research.

3.5.4 Tools used for quantitative data analysis

The quantitative analysis of my research included four statistical techniques, first, the Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of each item used in the questionnaire survey. Second, by using the frequency tables reported by SPSS I was able to calculate how many and what percentage of the respondents agreed or disagreed with the statements in the questionnaire. Next, I used an independent T-test method to compare the materialistic values of the two groups in order to check if there are significant statistical differences among my sample. Third, an exploratory factor analysis measured the potential influence of each element on underlying perceptions of luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK (materialism, psychological ownership, self-enhancement, self-identity, cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness). Finally, after this process, I used multiple regression in order to find out whether any of these factors has on impact on a how frequent consumers buy into luxury fashion goods.

During the process mentioned above, SPSS statistics software assisted my research in order to extract sensible meanings from its numeric findings. Since the questionnaires were stored online on Google form, all the responses were exported directly from Google form into an excel file and then imported into SPSS. After collecting all the questionnaires, the data cleaning process took place and the responses with missing data were removed. This resulted in 252 useable questionnaires. Overall, out of 252 useable questionnaires, 140 of these responses were from the UAE and 112 from the UK. In this section, I will explain how each of the aforementioned techniques contributed to my data collection. Thus sample size is sufficient to meet the objective of my research which is developing a theoretical model via factor analysis that I will explain in greater details in the paragraphs that follow bearing in mind that I have conducted interviews that underpin my quantitative findings

Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the items used in the questionnaire as the statements used in the questionnaire consisted of adapted scales and partially modified statements as discussed in section 3.5.8 (Norusis, 2005). The intention of the questionnaire items was to measure the extent to which luxury fashion consumers agreed or disagreed with the underlying constructs that appear to be influential a consumer's perception of value towards luxury fashion brands. In this respect, the previous scales derived from existing literature were concerned with similar concepts in consumer behaviour studies (William et al., 1989; Cheah et al.,2016; Gineikiene et al., 2017; Strizhakova et al., 2011; Kaufman et al., 2017; Lertwannawit, and Mandhachitara 2012; Reinecke et al., 2016): similar in a sense that these studies investigated either one or two of the concepts am investigating. In their study for example Lertwannawit, and Mandhachitara (2012) focused on the impact of materialism on fashion consciousness. A T-test was used in order to find out whether there were significant statistical differences or similarities among luxury fashion consumers in respect to

materialistic values in the UAE and the UK. On this note, there were ten items in the questionnaire designed to measure the concept of materialism. Independent T-tests thereby provided me with a set of appropriate statistical results which in turn allowed me to discern whether or not there are significant statistical differences among consumers in the UAE and the UK.

Factor analysis assisted my research by providing statistical tables and reports associated with the seven different variables and their interrelationship with consumption of luxury fashion brands in the UAE and the UK. In this context, the seven variables were the seven concepts I identified in Chapter 2 as being the key underlying constructs behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption (materialism, psychological ownership, self-identity, self-enhancement, cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness). I deployed factor analysis to investigate what my data suggests in respect to the important underlying influential factor(s) on the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption. In my questionnaire analysis, EFA was employed as I would like to develop the underlying construct of luxury fashion consumption. In effect, the purpose of undertaking exploratory factor analysis was to measure the potential influence of each factor on the underlying perception of luxury fashion brands, as well as informing the research which of these factors has a higher or lower influence on luxury fashion consumption in comparison to the other variables. The final part of the questionnaire included five open-ended questions analysed in Nvivo12 qualitatively that I will discuss in the following section.

3.5.5 Questionnaires open-ended analysis method

As I pointed out above, the online questionnaire survey that was conducted with luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK included five open-ended questions in its final

section. Since the data obtained from the open-ended questions were in the form of words, the results were analysed using NVivo 12. In the first step, I ran a word frequency query in order to organise the data and find the most repeated words that deemed significant to the respondents. The second step of this process involved coding the key words found from the previous step. Next, the coded questionnaire open-ended responses were read with the purpose of constructing meaning and potential interpretation from the data. The reason for the five open-ended questions in the latter part of the questionnaire was to provide the opportunity for my participants to express themselves in the context of their luxury fashion consumption in regards to what it is in luxury fashion goods that is valuable to them. Through this lens, I also conducted interviews to supplement the findings of my statistical and open-ended questions with deeper meanings that participants endow with luxury fashion consumption.

3.6.0 Qualitative approach

I have thus far discussed the reasons for adopting a quantitative approach as a part of the mixed method in my study. This section will explain the usefulness of interviews as a qualitative tool to meet the aim and objectives of this project that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter. A qualitative approach involves the collection of descriptive data in order to provide a better understanding of human behaviour and one that complements the quantitative insights I discussed above. Values and beliefs are fundamental human behaviours that can perhaps be best understood with the help of a qualititative approach (Cavana et al., 2001) which can also provide descriptive ways to explain why and how a phenomena occurs (Sharif, 2004; Sarantakos, 1993). On this note, it is important to note that in the context of this research, the use of questionnaires alone would perhaps be of limited significance. A

qualitative approach is complementary insofar as it helps me benefit from a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon I am researching from a more interpretive standpoint.

As Patton (2006) notes, qualitative insight serves researchers with the attitudes, feelings, preferences, and views of the participants. Nonetheless, a qualitative research is often criticised for its subjective nature and due to its lack of generalisability that is often difficult to replicate (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The argument made by Bryman and Bell, however, is not necessarily relevant in the case of understanding consumption in the luxury fashion industry. Indeed, information subjected to personal interpretations of participants may inform research as to how it is that individuals make sense of their luxury fashion brand consumption. In light of the arguments made in this section, I adopted interviews as a qualitative method in order to collect primary data. In the next section, I will elaborate further on why I specifically chose interviews to this end.

3.6.1 Interviews as a tool to explore luxury fashion consumption

A purposeful conversation between two or more people constituttes an interview (Alasaad,2012). Interviews contain questions designed by the researcher in order to collect information concerned with experiences and knowledge (Alasaad,2012). The interviewer must therefore pay close attention to the interviewees response in order to explore the responses further. Interviews are capable of producing valid and reliable findings. In the case of my project, the main purpose of conducting depth interviews was to attain the participants' perspective, perceived feelings, and expressions towards luxury fashion consumption, phenomena that cannot be illuminated by numbers or other forms of quantitative methods alone. This, in light of the fact that a purely quantitative approach does not provide enough details in regards to respondents' experiences, perceptions and interpretations associated

with luxury fashion consumption and lack of insightful information. More in-depth data obtained primarily from the perceptions of consumers and sales associates of luxury fashion brand stores could thus be seen to enrichen the findings of this research with a broader outlook compared to relying solely on numeric data. In this respect, Kyale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that interviews enable researchers to get a wide recognition of the interviewee's experience of the subject. Baker and Foy (2008:88) note that "an interview involves a personal exchange of information between an interviewer and one or more interviewees in which the interviewer seeks to obtain specific information on a topic with co-operation of the interviewee(s)". Interviews thus allow the research to gain insightful information, in this case allied with the underlying perceptions behind luxury fashion consumption, which is not the case with quantitative surveys. Qualitative findings also enable the research to critically evaluate the interview outcomes and to explore the potential diverse or similar perspectives of the respondents.

It is worth mentioning that I considered conducting focus groups as a qualitative method in the early stages of my research. However, in focus groups, the group members often comment and influence each other's responses. This may also cause informants to hesitate in sharing certain details due to peer pressure and disagreements during the focus groups in the context of luxury fashion consumption and its underlying perceptions. This is something I was minded to avoid given the data that was emerging from the quantitative phase of the research: there was a danger that a focus group might oblige participants to go along with what key figures in the interview might deem appropriate in order to 'save face'. In the case of this research, I felt that focus groups would be very challenging in terms of managing time and location considering that interviews take place in two different countries (the UAE and the UK) with three different groups of informants (Luxury fashion brand consumers, sales

associates and Instagram fashion influencers). This challenge included finding the right time that would suit the working shifts of sales associates as well as gathering them in a mutually convenient location. Considering these challenges, one-to-one interviews were deemed more convenient compared to focus groups as a qualitative tool considering circumstances of this study. In this sense, one of the key positive aspects of one-to-one interviews is that they allowed me to generate detailed information about the perceptions and experiences of luxury fashion brand consumers, sales associates and Instagram fashion influencers, while providing me with deeper insights thereof (Boyce and Neale, 2006).

3.6.2 Interview questions for luxury fashion

The questions aimed to identify the factors influencing luxury fashion brand consumption. My questions were therefore mainly concerned with respondents' experiences and perceptions which shed light on this matter from three perspectives of luxury fashion brand consumers', sales associates and one Instagram fashion influencer. The interview questions consisted of two sections. The first section investigated how luxury fashion consumers feel about themselves when consuming luxury fashion branded products. The second section explored the potential psychological, social and cultural influences on luxury fashion consumption. Furthermore, the information sheet and consent forms were sent to the participants prior to the interview questions. The interviews had two different sets of questions depending on the participant's role. The interview questions were structured, but there was room for flexibility during the natural process of the interview at points when I sensed that I required supplementary information. In the upcoming section, I will discuss the participant selection criteria for the interviews.

3.6.3 Interview participants

As I pointed out in the previous section and as indicated below, there were three types of respondents identified for the interviews, the intention of this section is thus to shed light on the process of finding the appropriate respondents that could potentially inform my study with implications concerned with perceptions of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption.

1-Luxury fashion frequent consumers (Monthly/Weekly basis)

The population targeted for the depth interviews were participants who provided their email via the questionnaire and chose the option of either monthly or weekly when asked 'how often do you consume luxury fashion brands?' Frequency is important here in order for me to focus on the extent to which these consumers take luxury fashion consumption seriously and how far is it part of their lifestyle. Since the more my respondents had experience of luxury fashion consumption, the more the possibility they would provide richer insights into my research questions.

These participants were contacted via Instagram and invited to an interview online or face-to-face if possible. I interviewed five luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and six in the UK, which is a total of eleven luxury fashion consumers.

2-Luxury fashion brand sales associates

The other group of individuals that were the interview respondents of this study were luxury fashion brand sales associates who worked in luxury fashion stores. Potential participants were either approached in luxury fashion brand stores physically and informed about the research and whom were asked if they were willing to participate if that was the case. Alternatively, they were messaged on LinkedIn (See appendix) based on their respective roles

in luxury fashion brand companies located in the UAE and the UK. Sales associates were directly messaged on LinkedIn and invited to an interview on WhatsApp or face-to-face, if possible, and based upon their preference. A total of eight sales associates confirmed their participation either on LinkedIn or in person to take part in the interviews, but did not respond to confirm the date, time and location of the interview. At this stage, conducting and chasing with luxury fashion brand associates became a time-consuming process. Thus, I revisited luxury fashion stores in order to identify additional potential participants. Consequently, I conducted three interviews in the UAE and six in the UK that totals nine interviews with luxury fashion brand sales associates.

3- Instagram Influencers in luxury fashion industry

Fashion influencers on Instagram are often invited by brands at fashion events to report the event online using the 'live' and 'story' option on Instagram. In addition, luxury fashion brands often provide Instagram fashion influencers with free products and in return, social influencers post images of these products in order to promote them to their large online database. Instagram fashion influencers were contacted via Instagram direct messaging and asked if they would like to share their experience and knowledge about luxury fashion brand consumption and why it is they think fashion consumers buy into luxury. It was a challenge to get responses from this particular sample, as they have a relatively high amount of social media followers and are more concentrated on meeting their needs than the needs of a researcher such as myself. It would indeed have been very optimistic to rely overly heavily on this group's contribution to my research. It is worth mentioning that Instagram influencers were often mentioned in my interviews. As such, I felt that conducting interviews with Instagram influencers in the fashion industry could potentially enrichen my findings. In this respect, Gay et. al (2006) suggest that qualitative sampling is associated with selecting

respondents whom are able to contribute to the research topic under investigation. Ultimately, I was able to recruit only one influencer. However, I decided to retain this element of the data collection in the project as it enabled me to access at least one example of the way social influencing works. This issue may be worthy of more sustained focus in future projects that may wish to build upon the insights provided by my own.

Hereby it is important to reassert that the primary data collection of this study was not just limited to interviews as I also collected 252 usable questionnaires responses. To conclude my explanation for my interview samples, Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that there are two key components that a correct sample relies on: the studies purpose and the nature of the target population being scrutinised. It is in this sense, that, by collecting interviews responses from luxury fashion consumers, sales associates and the Instagram fashion influencer I am able to contribute to a better understanding of the underlying perceptions behind the consumption of luxury fashion brands in the UAE and the UK. It's important to emphasise here that my priority in this element of the project was on the collection of quality data which I was able to collect as I hope to go on to demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5.

Taking the above discussions into consideration, it seemed entirely appropriate to interview consumers willing to express their perceptions and experiences associated with this matter. Moreover, reflecting back to my fifth research objective (see page 51) specifically and as, outlined at the beginning of this chapter (namely to explore the effectiveness of branding strategies on consumers' perception in the UAE and the UK) I attempted to grasp information that would enlighten my research associated branding strategies deployed by luxury fashion brands. To this end, I considered interviewing sales associates of luxury fashion brands for two reasons. First, due to their personal experience with the consumers and their availability for interviews compared to luxury fashion branding experts and second, due to their

willingness to share sincere information and indeed their direct interaction with the consumer on a regular basis.

3.6.4 The qualitative data analysis process

As I outlined in the previous section, the sample participants considered for interviews in this study included luxury fashion brand consumers in the UAE and the UK who consume on a weekly/monthly basis, luxury fashion brand sales associates in the UAE and the UK, in addition, to a luxury fashion Instagram influencer in the UAE. As indicated by my ethics form my respondents would remain anonymous. Hence, instead of their respective names, in the interview data analysis chapter, I refer to participants by their (role, and country of residents). All interviews were transcribed manually and then imported into NVivo12, software that assisted me in sorting, arranging and classifying my non-numeric data. First, frequency query in NVivo12 reported the most repeated words from the interview transcripts. Second, most frequent words were then used as keywords in order to provide some form of clarity for the data from twenty-one interview transcripts. As such, the interview transcripts were coded based on the keywords found. Next, the coded areas in the transcripts were read again thoroughly in order to identify potential themes that addressed my objectives. The coding process enabled me to assemble the most significant findings, and better understand meanings accordingly. After this process, I was able to develop the reoccurring phrases into a qualitative analysis driven by themes as the coding process supplemented insights derived from the data (Malterud,2001).

3.7.0 Ethical procedures

In this Section I will discuss the Ethical issues and process that I went through prior to distributing my questionnaire online and conducting interviews. Ethically-speaking the first

issue to touch upon is whether or not addressing personal point of views on an individual's luxury fashion brand consumption can cause any sort of harm to the participant. I as the researcher of this project did not perceive any aspect of this process to be morally or ethically questionable since the personal tensions that revolves around consumption of luxury fashion brands are not personal enough to cross any ethical or moral lines, whilst it could also be interesting for the participant to express their point of view in this context. In any case, during all stages of the research, ethical concerns were offset by anonymity and confidentiality.

As Silverman (2016) notes, three main issues must be considered by the researcher whilst undertaking a research project: codes and consent, confidentially and trust. Prior to my data collection, I went through the ethical process of the university twice since there were changes in the university's ethical procedure requirements. The completion of this process gave me the green light to start collecting data as I ensured my primary data collections met the ethical standard requirements of the Manchester Metropolitan University. Henceforth, since I was granted with the permission to conduct the research after the ethical review, I prepared formal, informative consents forms for my *Luxury fashion* questionnaire and interviews that described the purposes of my research and sent to the participants. In the case of the questionnaires all the details and information were given on a page prior to the screening questions. For the interviews, information sheets were emailed to the participants in advance. If the interview was conducted face-to-face, I would ask their consent for whether they approved/disapproved of being recorded. Interviews conducted on Whats app was done through back-and-forth voice notes so the interviewees consciously knew they were sending me voice notes. However, I made sure that they are aware that their identity and everything they shared with me remained confidential, that there were no right nor wrong answers and that their point of view was being asked for primarily so I could establish a better

understanding of perceived value towards luxury fashion brand consumption. Taking such issues into consideration, the names of the participants in all interviews were anonymously coded.

Overall, any research that involves consumer behaviour or more broadly human subjects requires some form of ethical consideration in its design, data collection and the use of its findings. In this sense, as I stated above, I thoroughly explored all potential ethical reviews in order to ensure that this project maintains the ethics necessary to conduct research.

3.8.0 Summary of the methodology Chapter

In conclusion, perhaps the key issue to consider is whether or not the methods that I as the researcher have adopted were effective in addressing the research questions and objectives of this thesis: namely, are my methods valid? From a methodological perspective, the fundamental theme of this thesis has been an attempt to explore the underlying perceptions behind luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK. In effect, underpinning the appropriate methods to address the research questions was an essential task. Furthermore, my chosen forms of data collection are reliable: insofar as in this chapter I have sought to provide sufficient detail to allow for other researchers to replicate and add to what it is I sought to achieve and how I went about achieving it. In this sense, the combination of questionnaires and interviews intended to aid in enriching the understanding of the underlying perceptions behind luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK. Since I deployed a mixed-method approach, the effectiveness of the methods combined neutralises the limitations concerned with the other method offering me a more triangulated view of my subject. As such, in the next chapter I will go on to present my results from the *Luxury fashion* questionnaire that includes both quantitative and qualitative elements.

CHAPTER 4

Luxury Fashion Questionnaire Results and Analysis

4.0.0 Introduction

This Chapter attempts to examine the potential underlying influences behind luxury fashion brand consumption. In effect, the statistical findings presented in this chapter will serve to evaluate the influence of potential factors that underlie the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK. This will be followed by an analysis of the similarities and differences between luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK in order to find out if there are any significant statistical differences between the two groups. Reflecting on the argument I presented from Sack (1992) in Chapter 2, that suggests it is through geographical space and time that the affect of our actions on nature, meanings and social relations are played out, it is important to consider how geographical differences between the two countries are influenced by materialistic values which in effect impinge upon luxury fashion consumption. I therefore compare the UAE and the UK in order to address if there are statistically significant differences between how materialism is valued. Furthermore, the quantitative approach is presumed to assist the research with identifying the important factors that influence an individual's underlying perception in the context of luxury fashion brand consumption. Focusing on the result of this process, my data is intended to develop a theoretical model which addresses the factors that underpin consumers' perception towards luxury fashion brands. In this light, the emerging theoretical model could perhaps underpin and/or re-establish the conceptual framework proposed from existing literature in Chapter 2 by primary data. As mentioned in Chapter 1 and 3, the latter part of the questionnaire included five open-ended questions that provides the research with brief qualitative data, this

data will be analysed in the final section of this chapter as it could serve to shed further light upon the reasons why participants of this study buy into luxury fashion brands. The usable sample population of this quantitative study included 252 participants in total from which, 140 participants took part from the UAE and 112 participated from the UK.

Prior to presenting and analysing the results, the reliability of the items used in the questionnaire had to be tested, as the undertaken statements consisted of adapted scales and partially modified statements according to the aim and objectives of my research (Norusis, 2008 P.425). My questionnaire was designed to find out the potential underlying factors that influence consumers' perception of luxury fashion brands as discussed in my Chapter 3. In this respect, seven different concepts were measured with modified scales in the questionnaire: self-construal, self-identity, psychological ownership, self-enhancement, self-consciousness, cultural background and materialism. Ideally, the Cronbach alpha coefficient should be greater than .7, for a scale to be considered reliable, and value below .3 indicates that it is not measuring what it intended to measure (Pallant, 2005). The results of this study indicate a consistent reliable scale in the case of self-construal .924, self-identity .883, psychological ownership .764, self-enhancement.900, self-consciousness 800, materialism .856 and overall variables .966. Although, the Cronbach's alpha for cultural background was .694, which is less than .7. Since it is not less than .3 it can still be considered to be an acceptable measurement (Pallant, 2005). The scale assessed can be reliably depended upon to quantify the underlying concepts behind luxury fashion consumption as constructs that influence the perceived value of my sample (Norusis 2005. P425). As results showed in Table 4.1, the scales assessed are also reliable in quantifying the underlying concepts behind luxury fashion consumption (Norusis 2005. P425), as is the questionnaire in general.

Table 4.1 Scale reliability underlying of concepts in perceived value of luxury fashion consumption

Concept	Statement	Alpha	Number of items
Self-construal	2.1.It is important that others like the products and brands I buy	**.924**	**7**
	2.2.I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them		
	2.3.I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase		
	2.4 .When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of		
	2.5.I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others		
	2.6.If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy		
	4.8.I consume luxury fashion brands products to get a higher social position		
Self-identity	2.7.I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase	**.883**	**5**
	2.10 .I consume luxury fashion products to belong to a reference group.		
	2.17. Luxury fashion brands help me demonstrate a superior identity		
	4.1.I consume luxury fashion brands to show the social group I belong to		
	4.6.I consume luxury fashion brands to display an identity		
Psychological ownership	2.8.I have sense of ownership when buying luxury fashion products.	**.762**	**5**
	2.9. Luxury fashion products that are seen with a higher value motivate my willingness to buy them		
	2.15. Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to express my success and leads to satisfaction		
	4.10. I consume luxury fashion brands for its functional benefit.		
	4.12 I consume luxury fashion brands due to its quality and performance		
Self-enhancement	2.13. Shopping and consuming luxury fashion products enhances my mental well-being	**.900**	**6**
	2.18. wearing Luxury fashion brands help me enhance my everyday confidence in the society		
	4.2.I consume luxury fashion brands to attain social status		
	4.4.I consume luxury fashion brands to fulfil my self-image		
	4.7.I consume luxury fashion brands to enhance my own self-confidence		
	4.11.I consume luxury fashion brands as a personal reward		
Self-consciousness	2.14. Wearing luxury fashion brands makes me feel proud	**.792**	**4**
	4.3.I consume luxury fashion brands to display uniqueness		
	4.5 .I consume luxury fashion brands to express my perceived image by the society.		
	2.11 I am attached to shopping luxury fashion brands for personal satisfaction		
Cultural background	2.12. I grew up wearing luxury fashion brands.	**.694**	**3**
	2.16. Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to display my background heritage		
	4.9 Luxury fashion brands enable me to be accepted better in social circles that I mix.		
Materialism	3.1 .I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes.	**.856**	**10**
	3.2. Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.		
	3.3. I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.		
	3.4.The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life		
	3.5 .I like to own things to impress people.		
	3.6. I don't pay much attention to material objects other people own		
	3.7.I would buy a product just because it has status		
	3.8.I consider my favourite brands to be a part of myself		
	3.9.Part of me is defined by important brands in my life		
	3.10.I like a lot of luxury in my life		
All variables	Cronbach alpha for the whole questionnaire	**.966**	**40**

4.1.0 Luxury fashion consumption and well-being

After checking the reliability of questionnaire items, the proportion of consumers' agreeableness towards each concept discussed in Chapter 2 as an underlying construct behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption was collectively analysed, and then analysed separately with regards to each country. The analysis intended to evaluate the potential impact of each underlying concept on luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK. The variables considered in this research were quantified by calculating the degree to which participants agreed with the questionnaire statements under each concept. In this way, we can measure the potential influence of these concepts identified on the perception of value toward luxury fashion consumers among the participants of my study.

Table 4.2 Overall population response towards underlying concept behind luxury fashion brand consumption.

Proportion of agreeableness to each Concept (N=252)	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Psychological ownership	71.8	73.8	39	25	21.8	20.6
Self-enhancement	59.7	68.3	44.8	27	28.2	29.7
Self-identity	28.6	54.8	40.6	29.6	43.6	54.8
Materialism	37.3	55.6	40.9	37.9	39.9	40.4
Cultural background	25	40.3	37	37.7	48	55
Self-Construal	32.6	43.71	29.14	31.71	47.57	60.24
Self-Consciousness	54.6	68.3	44	26	30.8	28.3

Table 4.3 Summary of agreeableness towards each concept on the overall sample.

Proportion of agreeableness to each Concept overall population N=252	Agree	Agree in percentage	Disagree	Disagree in percentage
Psychological ownership	184.6	73.3%	67.4	26.7%
Self-enhancement	172.8	68.6%	84.9	31.4%
Self-identity	124	49.2%	128	50.8%
Materialism	133.8	53.1%	118.2	46.9%
Cultural background	102	40.5%	140.7	59.5%
Self-construal	105.45	41.9%	143.52	58.1%
Self-consciousness	166.9	66.2%	85.1	33.7%

Table 4.3 displays the degree to which respondents agree with the impact of each underlying concept on their luxury fashion. On this note, psychological ownership (N=186,73.3%) and self-enhancement (N=172.8, 68.6%) appear to have a relatively significant impact on the luxury fashion brand consumption of participants who took part in this survey. The highest percentage of overall respondents are motivated by a sense of ownership due to their perceived value of luxury fashion brands. This outcome suggests that participants appear to be influenced by cognitive/affective constructs which provide them with the feeling that the product is theirs. In the context of luxury fashion consumption, psychological ownership would translate to the feeling that a product belongs to the owner, which is the consumer. Thus, the data seems to imply that the emotional bond that consumers create with a luxury item is deemed as the most relatively influential notion (see Table 4.3). In regards to self-enhancement, luxury fashion brand consumption could be said to contribute to the well-being of consumers as they buy into such products in order to enhance their confidence within their

social circles. Consumers effectively seek a sense of confidence by buying into luxury fashion items. Consumers may not be aware of their lack of confidence if there is any, yet they appear to be aware of seeking it or boosting it by consuming luxury fashion brands. In effect, being conscious of such perceptions behind consumption implies that consumers are somewhat aware of how they are seen by others, or at least they think they are, which is why they tend to express their perceived image using luxury fashion items. This assertion is based on the fact that 66.2% of the overall respondents took the notion of self-consciousness seriously.

In addition, the results show that the attainment of status is an essential factor for the sample population in this study. In this sense, agreeing with the statements related to materialism, which shows their level of materialism (N=133.8, 53.1%) had a slight impact considering that the outcome suggests materialistic features of the products are not as significant as feelings of ownership and enhancement. This suggests that the acquisition of luxury fashion products motivates materialistic consumers, at least to some extent to signal themselves and the surrounding others with how well they are doing in life. Thus far, the concepts I discussed in Chapter 2, can be said to have been deemed influential on luxury fashion consumption according to this study's informants. As reflected in Table 4.3, around half of the overall population did not seem to have the same salience for self-identity. This implies that luxury fashion brands are not necessarily consumed to display an individual's identity for all, despite the fact that 49% of the respondents thought it was the reason. Nonetheless, it could be argued that luxury fashion brands have been successful for so long because of their ability to identify items that align with their consumers' self-identity or aspired identity. Another issue that could be raised here is that consumers may not be aware of the marketing strategies behind these products. Thus, they perceive their consumption entirely self-oriented choice without being conscious of the potential impact of social media, advertising and promotions.

Marketing practice, perhaps self-consciously, creates a necessity for individuals to feel connected to a perceived unique group through luxury fashion consumption. The aim could be argued to be to ensure that consumers invest in products that they feel have the maximum impact or cultural capital within their social group. There is indeed the possibility that sophisticated marketing strategies may influence consumers' decision to buy into luxury products, without them being aware that their consumption and this potentially a direct or indirect outcome of a successful marketing campaign.

In respect to self-construal (42%), the results show that it is not very important for consumers to obtain approval from other members of their community using luxury fashion brands. It is essential to highlight that participants may not necessarily admit to the idea that attaining a sense of approval from others influences their luxury fashion consumption. Luxury fashion consumption is not simply associated with intrinsic needs as the data suggests. The fact of the matter is that whether consumers agree or not they are a part of a social system. Therefore, luxury fashion consumption is at least in part a social want, need or desire that enables consumers to communicate with the symbolic meanings embedded in such products within their social groups. If this is the case, then seeking approval or acceptance from others is an influential factor on the nature of luxury fashion consumption that participants dismiss. It is because of such subtleties that conducting interviews represent an appropriate choice to explore how consumers will respond to such issues in detail (See Chapter 5). Based on Table 4.3 cultural background (40.5%) is the least important factor according to my respondents as luxury fashion brand consumption is not considered to be a vehicle by which they demonstrate their background heritage. Furthermore, the transparency of responses could be questioned at this point taking into account that certain participants may or may not want to reveal that their families financially support them.

As a whole, Table 4.3 reveals some of the important issues this study is attempting to unravel. My respondents are apparently seeking a sense of well-being through the bond they perceive to create with a product. In effect, this connection contributes to how consumers go about feeling satisfied with themselves. The interesting point here is that consumers are willing to acknowledge how a luxury fashion item provides them with an enhanced feeling of confidence within their social groups. Participants suggest that luxury fashion brands are solely consumed in order to satisfy themselves, while disregarding the possibility that this might be about impressing those in their social circles. The question that remains here is that if consumers genuinely felt an internal sense of confidence, would they still seek to enhance their confidence by consuming a luxury fashion branded product? I am not suggesting that luxury fashion consumption primarily stems from a lack of confidence and satisfaction, however, consumers' claim that they do not buy into luxury fashion to impress others could and perhaps should be challenged because if they gain a sense of satisfaction from these symbolic products, there is a strong chance that there is a social dimension at play here. The point is that the symbolic features of luxury items communicate signs that help individuals to fill an intrinsic void through luxury materials. In other words, the need for luxury fashion consumption, could emanate from being conscious of how individuals are perceived by other members of their social circles, although this is not something a consumer of luxury brands is likely to admit.

Table 4.4 UAE consumers' response towards underlying concepts behind luxury fashion brand consumption.

Proportion of agreeableness to each Concept (N=140)	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Psychological ownership	34.6	34.2	23	19.2	13.2	15.8
Self-enhancement	25.7	29.3	23.5	19.3	18	24.12
Self-identity	13.6	22.4	23.8	19.2	24	37
Materialism	21.7	25.9	24	21.1	21.6	21
Cultural background	17.7	23.7	20.3	21.3	22.3	34.7
Self-Construal	15	19	22	23.14	24	36.85
Self-Consciousness	26	31.6	23	17.5	19	22.75

Table 4.5 UK consumers' response towards underlying concept behind luxury fashion brand consumption.

Proportion of agreeableness to each Concept (N=112)	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Psychological ownership	40.2	39	14.8	6	8.6	3.4
Self-enhancement	37	38.5	14.2	7.7	10.2	4.25
Self-identity	18.8	32.6	15	9.8	19.6	16.2
Materialism	18.8	29.1	16.3	16.5	17.7	14.6
Cultural background	10.7	17	16	15.3	25.7	27.3
Self-Construal	20.26	26.57	12.71	8.71	22.14	21.29
Self-Consciousness	33.3	37.6	17.25	7	12	5.25

Table 4.6 Summary of the UAE sample

Proportion of agreeableness to each Concept in UAE sample (UAE group N=140)	Agree	Percentage
Psychological ownership	91.8	65.6%
Self-enhancement	78.5	56.1%
Self-identity	59.8	42.7%
Materialism	71.6	51.1%
Cultural background	61.7	44.1%
Self-construal	56	40%
Self-consciousness	80.6	57.6%

Table 4.7. Summary of the UK sample

Proportion of agreeableness to concept in the UK (UK sample, N=112)	Agree	percentage
Psychological ownership	94	83.9%
Self-enhancement	89.7	80.1%
Self-identity	66.4	59.3%
Materialism	64.2	57.3%
Cultural background	43.7	39%
Self-construal	59.54	53.1%
Self-consciousness	88.15	78.7%

4.2.0 Relationship to social circles

Drawing attention towards Table 4.6, psychological ownership (65.6%) is the factor most agreed with, which is 25% more than the least agreed element, self-construal (40%). The data indicates that owning luxury fashion brands for its perceived quality is the most significant reason behind the consumption amongst the UAE group. Over half of my participants in the UAE agreed that being conscious about how they present themselves to others encourages them to consume luxury fashion brands, as 58% of this group thought self-consciousness is important in their consumption by agreeing with statements that measure this construct. Similarly, just over half of the respondents in the UAE (51%) agreed that material goods are an important part of their life. It is worth noting, however, that according to the proportion of agreeableness towards each concept, the importance of self-construal, self-identity and

cultural background is relatively less significant (40 to 45%) in comparison to the other factors mentioned above. In this respect, Table 4.4 and 4.6 imply that consumers in the UAE do not necessarily use luxury fashion brands to display a sense of belonging that concerns an individual's self-identity. However, we must consider the possibility that participants may be a little hesitant in acknowledging that their luxury fashion consumption is motivated by a sense of belonging to a reference group, which could be at the heart of satisfying an intrinsic psychological need using an external social force from peers. It is interesting to note that participants from the UAE display no hesitation in demonstrating that they *consume luxury fashion products due to its products quality and performance* as the results for this particular quoted statement from the questionnaire shows that 86.1% (48.3% strongly agree, 25.9 % agree, 11.9% slightly agree) of the participants agree with this item (See Appendix 1B p.41). According to the responses I've analysed buying into such brands in order to make a good impression on others, whilst presenting their background heritage with luxury products is less crucial. At this point, it is important to discuss the suggestion that perhaps, participants prefer not to admit the cultural and peer influences on their consumption if there are any, since the perception of consuming luxury fashion brands solely for the product and satisfaction of the self may seem more appealing to consumers. The reality is that the two cannot be separated.

According to my data participants seek a sense of satisfaction from the products based on the associated meanings they have personally constructed in their own mind: they just have good taste. This thought process may not involve the realisation of the possibility that a sense of satisfaction from a luxury fashion product is a state of mind and not necessarily an intrinsic fulfilment. In effect, luxury fashion consumption resembles virtues of confidence and a sense of satisfaction, while participants may themselves fail to discern the actual reason behind

their actions. It is likely that consumers would not acknowledge the indication that they consume luxury fashion brands in order to fit-in to their social circles. Based on the obtained results, it is fair to suggest that factors such as self-construal, self-identity and cultural background are of limited importance to the UAE sample considering the fact that the percentages that consumers agree with the influence of these elements range from 40% to 44%. In this regard, factors such as self-enhancement, self-consciousness and materialism are important, yet not very important as just over 50% of the consumers in the UAE agree with their influence. This range excludes psychological ownership (65.6%), which is more important. Such findings imply luxury fashion consumers in the UAE displayed a neutral approach to the questionnaire items, while attempting to display an immune attitude towards peer influence. The unexpected point that emerged from the UAE responses was the little emphasis placed on peer influence in respect to luxury fashion consumption as it was presumed otherwise, due to the collectivist nature of Arab countries such as the UAE (Hofstede, 1980).

Reflecting on the paragraph above, the participants from the UAE might ignore the positive experience of feeling confident and satisfied could be tied up to the social circles they belong to. It is worth viewing this issue from a marketing standpoint in order to have a deeper insight over the potential reason why participants appear immune towards peer influence in respect to luxury fashion consumption. Accordingly, the influence of marketing strategies on the perception of luxury fashion consumers should not be neglected, in the sense that luxury fashion brands undertake sophisticated marketing techniques that influence consumers' perception towards their brand (Holt, 2009). The argument here is that the perception of having a unique identity as an individual has been promoted by luxury fashion brands over the past century, which may have had an impact on why consumers ignore peer influence.

Consequently, the issue arising from this argument is that luxury fashion consumers buy into the idea of being unique as an individual, while they perceive their consumption to be concerned with satisfying themselves. In this respect, it could be argued that the sense of satisfaction stems from the urge to feel unique among the social groups consumers engage with. In effect, it is the feeling of being unique that provides consumers with confidence and a sense of satisfaction within their social circles. At this point, the issue is not how marketing techniques create a necessity for consumers to desire an unique individual identity; the key issue is concerned with the way in which consumers perceive an unique identity based on their own interpretation. Thus, luxury fashion consumption contributes to how consumers feel about themselves based on the perceived value that underlies an individual's consumption.

In the case of respondents from the UK, the impact of each underlying concept can fall into three distinct levels of influence. The first level includes 'significant influences' that comprises psychological ownership (83.9%), self-enhancement (80.1%) and self-consciousness (79%) (see Table 4.7). This shows that the UK participants are motivated to consume luxury fashion brands due to a sense of ownership and the personal rewards this entails. Moreover, consumers in the UK display a high sense of awareness on how important it is for them to present themselves with a unique fashion using luxury branded items. Second are the 'moderate influences' self-identity (59.3%), materialism (57.3%), and self-construal (53.1%) which indicates that a sense of belonging and social approval are less essential to the UK participants compared to their sense of ownership and achievement. Finally, the only relatively less important influence among the UK sample is cultural background (39%) implying that cultural upbringing and a display of background heritage is relatively less significant on the luxury fashion brand consumption of the UK respondents.

4.3.0 Cultural differences and similarities in luxury fashion consumption

The results illustrate both similarities and differences between the group of participants from the UAE as compared to the UK. Based on these results psychological ownership and self-enhancement are considered to influence the participants in the UK (83.9%; 80.1% agreed) more compared to responses from the UAE group of consumers (65.6%; 56.1%; agreed), suggesting that both of these concepts are deemed influential on luxury fashion consumption of both groups. However, these results also show that a sense of ownership and the enhancement of mental state using luxury fashion brands is a stronger driver when it comes to the perception of UK participants than it is for the UAE group. Similarly, informants from the UK (79%) seem to take self-consciousness more seriously compared to the group in the UAE (58%) which implies that consumers in the UK have a greater awareness of how they are addressed by others in respect to their perceived image.

In terms of materialism values and cultural background, the responses are somewhat similar, signifying that the materialism level and cultural background in both the UAE and the UK have a less significant impact on luxury fashion consumption of these two groups compared to the concepts discussed in the previous paragraph above. On this note, it has to be pointed out that materialistic values are influential on over half of the participants from both groups with the UK participants showing only 6% more importance in obtaining material goods due to its status. Placing emphasis on the responses concerned with cultural background, results reveal an interesting variation in factors of importance as this concept is the only element taken more seriously by the UAE respondents, although the difference, 5% is not significant. In this respect, it is interesting to point out that consumers who grew up wearing luxury fashion brands in the UAE are slightly more than the equivalent in the UK. This data refers directly to

a statement in the questionnaire *(I grew up wearing luxury fashion brands)* that intended to measure and compare the variation, if any, among luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK. Subsequently, the percentage of consumers that agreed with this statement in the UAE is 52.5% (14.7% strongly, 19.6% agree, agree, 18.2% slightly agree) and in the UK it is 33.7% (8% strongly agree, 14.2% agree, 11.5% slightly agree) (see appendix 1A p. 41). Respondents in the UK (59.3%) appear to be more influenced by the concept of self-identity in luxury fashion brand consumption compared to the UAE group (42.7%) where presenting a sense of belonging to a reference group had slightly less impact on their consumption. This data tells us that the statements that revolve around the concept of self-identity play a more important role on the consumption of luxury fashion goods in the UK as compared to the UAE. The least preponderant underlying concept among the UAE luxury fashion respondents was indeed self-construal as results report that 60% of this sample disagreed with the average of the items that measured this concept. Compared to the sample from the UAE, self-construal was a more important factor among participants based in the UK as the extent to which participants agreed with this element is 13% higher than the UAE informants.

As a whole, Table 4.6 and Table 4.7 illustrate that respondents from the UK are more susceptible to influence in respect to the underlying concepts behind luxury fashion brand consumption as compared to the UAE group. According to the proportion of agreeableness towards each concept, we can conclude that psychological ownership (84%) is the most significant factor in the UK, which tells us that individuals experience a connection and a relationship with luxury fashion products (Furby, 1978). This is followed by self-enhancement (80%) and self-consciousness (79%) which also play an important role in luxury fashion brand consumption of the UK participants. In the UAE the impact of all the factors had a maximum of 20% difference between the most and least significant factor. Results clearly demonstrate

that there are psychological, social and cultural aspects behind luxury fashion brand consumption and that these have a higher impact on the UK participants as compared to the UAE sample.

Luxury fashion consumers seem to be reasonably satisfied with the confidence that such products offers them. However, the majority of the participants and particularly those in the UAE deny the possibility of buying into luxury fashion brands in order to leave an impression on others. On this basis, the evidence suggests that the most important components in both groups are psychological ownership followed by self-enhancement, which suggests that overall luxury fashion brand consumption between the two groups are more concerned with a sense of ownership and inner satisfaction as opposed to impressing others. It is also important to note that most responses were associated with the tangible function of luxury fashion products compared to its perceived intangible symbolic benefits.

At this point, it is necessary to challenge the findings described above, as respondents disregard the possibility that their luxury fashion brand consumption, *satisfies* their demand for social adaptation (Simmel,1957). My argument is that feeling confident and obtaining a sense of satisfaction from luxury fashion consumption cannot be completely separated from 'fitting-in' to social groups. In effect, consumers may have the tendency for social acceptance with the desire to perceive themselves as a unique individual, which in turn justifies why they feel confident and satisfied by buying into luxury fashion brands. It is important, once again, to reinforce the contention that participants may or may not necessarily be aware of the actual reason they buy into such products. Nevertheless, whether they are aware or not the results clearly imply these consumers prioritise the functional benefits of luxury fashion items over their perceived symbolic benefits. A paradox can thus be said to lie in these responses,

in a sense that individuals claim to use luxury fashion items to feel confident in their social circles, while they neglect the effectiveness of its symbolic benefits. The key concern that arises from this paradox is how can the tangible function of a luxury fashion item play such a key role on an individuals' confidence in a social group? This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

4.4.0 Luxury fashion consumption and materialistic values

In this section, luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK are compared based on their materialistic values, in order to check if there are differences or similarities between the two samples. In order to test if the materialistic values among the UAE sample and the UK respondents were associated with statistically significant mean differences, an independent T-test was performed twice. In the first instance, items included in the materialism scale were tested individually (see Table 4.8) and in the second test, the overall mean differences were tested with all the items complied (see Table 4.9). The outcome of these results are displayed in Table 4.8 and Table 4.9.

able 4.8 Materialistic values individual items mean differences between the UAE and the UK.

Materialism Scale items	Mean UAE	Mean UK	T value	df	p value	Mean difference	Effect size
3.1 .I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes.	3.43	3.07	1.739	248.5	0.415	0.357	0.19
3.2. Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.	3.71	3.43	1.431	250	0.077	0.286	0.19
3.3. I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.	2.77	2.88	-0.533	250	0.297	-0.104	-0.1
3.4.The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life	3.61	2.97	3.082	250	0.001	0.634	0.41
3.5 .I like to own things to impress people.	4.16	3.47	3.139	250	0.001	0.684	0.41
3.6. I don't pay much attention to material objects other people own.	2.92	3.00	-0.386	250	0.350	-0.079	0.06
3.7.I would buy a product just because it has status	3.87	3.71	0.725	250	0.2345	0.166	0.11
3.8.I consider my favourite brands to be a part of myself	3.49	3.38	0.490	250	0.3125	0.102	0.05
3.9.Part of me is defined by important brands in my life	4.06	3.67	1.789	250	0.0375	0.395	0.33
3.10.I like a lot of luxury in my life	3.10	2.47	1.769	250	0.039	0.359	0.25

In this context, Richins (1987) described materialists as individuals that do not necessarily pursue happiness through social interactions, as they achieve satisfaction through the possession of and interaction with material goods. Nonetheless, it could be argued that buying into luxury fashion materials is a form of social interaction in itself, as consumers communicate their perceived social status using the meanings embedded in luxury fashion products. The satisfaction that is perceived to be attained from a material good is derived from signifying status in the social circles consumers in which consumers mix. My results show that significant differences are associated with four of the individual items out of ten according to the participant's materialistic values (See Table 4.8). Items 3.4 t(3.082), (p<0.001) and 3.5 t(3.139), (p<0.001) suggesting that luxury fashion brand consumers in the UAE sample

are more concerned with signifying success by consuming material objects, compared to the UK group (Richins and Dawson, 1992). This supports the argument made in Chapter 2 that luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE is more easily influenced by materialism as individuals use the symbolic values of such brands as a way to communicate success and wealth among their social groups, whereas this may not be the case in the UK to the same extent. Put simply, the extent to which consumers in the UAE own material things to signify *how well they are doing in life*, and *own things to impress people*, is more in connection with materialistic traits that they value compared to consumers in the UK. The other item where the results show a significant statistical difference with t (1.769) (p<0.039) is associated with the desire for luxury where the mean scores demonstrate participants from the UAE *like more luxury in their life* compared to the UK respondents (Richins and Dawson, 1992). A point that has remerged from this item in the questionnaire is that, on one hand, when the statements in the survey includes phrases such as *luxury, products, quality, functional benefit,* consumers from the UAE reveal their particular interest in products and the concept of luxury. On the other hand, when the items involve indulging with luxury fashion brands for acceptance and approval consumers disagree. As such, and as I have pointed out in the previous sections, respondents seem to dismiss the social dimensions of luxury fashion consumption.

After checking the mean differences and similarities between the participants from the UAE and the UK concerned with each individual item, I compared overall materialism levels between the two countries based on the materialism scale developed by Richins and Dawson (1992) that was included in the third section of the questionnaire. The results of this process suggest that, overall, materialistic values are not significantly different among luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK t (2.03) (p<0.43) (See Table 4.9)

Table 4.9 Overall, materialistic values mean differences between UAE and the UK

Mean UAE	Mean UK	T value	df	p value	Mean difference	Effect size
35.1214	32.3214	2.030	250	0.43	2.8	0.514

The results in this section raises two issues that need to be considered: first, unpacking the differences and/or similarities in devotion towards material need and desires between luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK may potentially provide fresh theoretical and managerial insights, at least from a consumer cross-cultural comparison perspective. The results imply that consumers in the UAE have a greater tendency towards acquiring material goods compared to consumers in the UK in four single items that measured materialistic values in the questionnaire. Although the overall materialistic values demonstrated that there are no significant statistical differences in this regard. Second, emphasis has to be placed on the questionnaire design and the wordings of the materialism scale, which was designed by Richins and Dawson (1992) to measure the extent to which consumers place value on materialism in their life. Finally, a key factor that has to be taken into account is the dynamics that concern the concept of materialism that revolves around displaying wealth, possession and status, which stems from the strive for the development of social standing. Such striving for social standing, is best manifested through materials and luxuries that feed the perceived value for material obsession. As such, through a psychosocial lens, the consumption of these goods is a material interaction that signifies the mentioned dynamics of materialism that in short centres around acquiring possessions (Fitzmaurice and Comegys, 2006). The key argument here is that the acquisition of luxury material goods is not detached or remote from

displaying or seeking to achieve social status which in turn involves communicating social standing to the specific others in social circles.

4.5.0 Underlying constructs behind the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption

As I explained in Chapter 3, I employed Exploratory Factor Analysis to explore the underlying construct (s) of consumers' perceived value towards luxury fashion brands (Majori et al.,2003). On this basis, in this section I attempt to find out the significance of the key factors measured in this study in order to inform the development of a theoretical model that includes the underlying influences behind luxury fashion brand consumption, an objective that I proposed to address through this research. In effect, it is necessary to perform the following analysis to identify such factors: the analysis explains the measure of how much variance is in the data from a particular variable. In this way, the Exploratory Factory Analysis (EFA) that follows will demonstrate how many factors are significant influencers on the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption. As far as the mechanics of this analysis are concerned, "in principal component analysis the initial communities are all equal to 1 (indicating that all of the variance is explained. The higher the value extraction communality is for a particular variable, the more of its variance has been explained by the extracted factors" (Brace et al., 2006:311-312). In this respect, results of communality values in my study range from 0.646 to 0.790 which is an acceptable level. The second part of the SPSS Exploratory Factor Analysis calculated the Eigenvalue of the 40 statements included in the questionnaire survey. According to the outcome (see Table 4.10), there are seven components greater than 1, Component One has a variance of 18.1 that is noticeably greater than the other six variables greater than one ranging from 2.73 to 1.02. This suggests that this factor has a much greater importance than other factors. Considering that the Eigenvalues in Table 4.10 indicate that there are seven variables greater than one, the scree

plot graph in Figure 4.1 is used to decide the number of underlying constructs that should be extracted and initially considered as a Factor (Brace et al., 2006). All the underlying concepts considered behind luxury fashion brand consumption were the observed factors in Exploratory Factor Analysis. In effect, considering the significant difference in Eigen values between one factor and the rest of the components extracted, the outcome of the scree plot indicates that there are seven factors to be considered.

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	18.149	45.373	45.373	18.149	45.373	45.373	8.024	20.059	20.059
2	2.726	6.816	52.188	2.726	6.816	52.188	7.073	17.683	37.741
3	1.981	4.954	57.142	1.981	4.954	57.142	5.246	13.116	50.858
4	1.826	4.564	61.706	1.826	4.564	61.706	2.197	5.492	56.350
5	1.355	3.387	65.094	1.355	3.387	65.094	2.107	5.268	61.617
6	1.125	2.812	67.906	1.125	2.812	67.906	1.974	4.935	66.552
7	1.020	2.549	70.455	1.020	2.549	70.455	1.561	3.903	70.455
8	.870	2.174	72.629						
9	.787	1.967	74.596						
10	.706	1.764	76.360						

Table 4.10 Eigen values

After assessing the scree plot (see Figure 4.1), the analysis produced a rotated component matrix (Table 4.11) in order to identify the loaded factors and their strength. The results of this process enabled me to point out the seven factors and the items that influence perceived value in luxury fashion brand consumption according to the data set of this study. Component matrix in Table 4.11 facilitates the findings of the underlying factors identified by the EFA in this research, by highlighting the highest value of each item, I can identify the seven underlying factors developed in this research. As illustrated in the Chapter 3, all 40 items are numbered according to the Sections in the questionnaire with the different concepts derived from literature review. However, as Table 4.11 shows, the items are grouped differently after conducting EFA. Given the changes, by regrouping items according to the new factors and by looking into the items within each factor, we can identify and name each factor. I will explain this process in greater detail in the following paragraph.
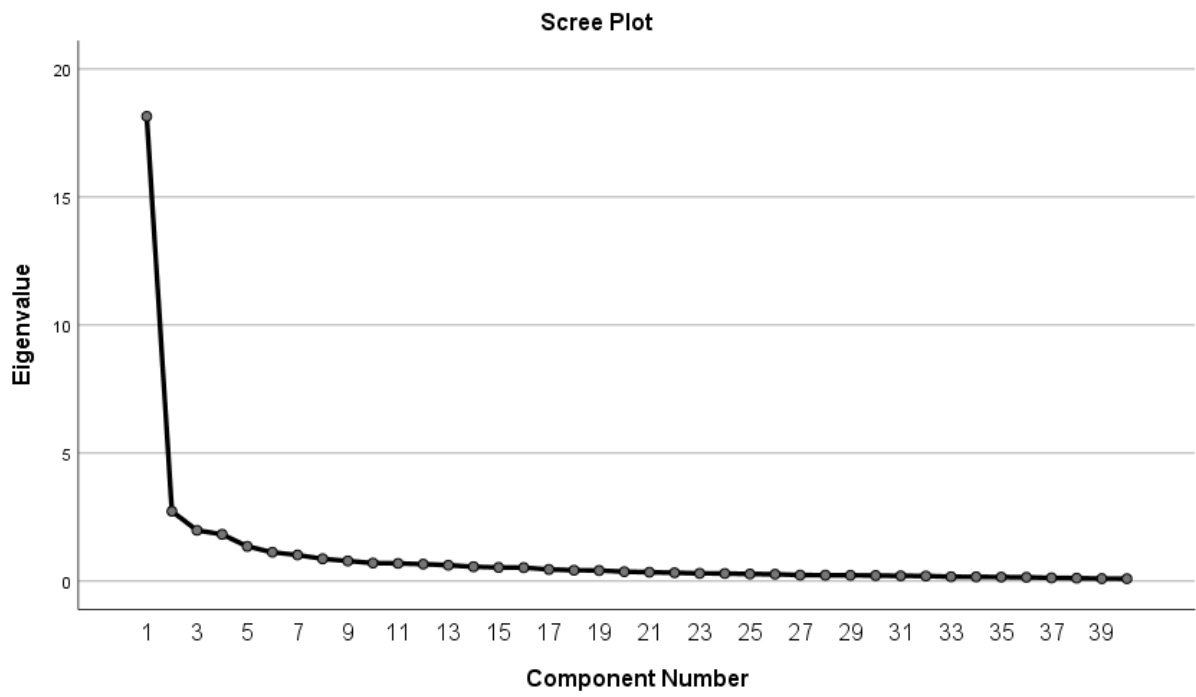
Figure 4.1 Scree plot

4.11 Rotated Component Matrix

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.1.It is important that others like the products and brands I buy	.210	.745	.192	.101	.137	.114	-.041
2.2.I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them	.333	.750	.085	.078	.089	.001	.044
2. 3.I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase	.165	.809	.086	.063	.181	.022	.059
2.4 .When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of	.230	.842	.168	.067	.085	-.030	.062
2.5.I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others	.215	.747	.306	.040	.147	.013	.139
2.6.If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy	.325	.737	.212	-.005	.076	.070	.120
2.7.I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase	.314	.684	.217	.008	.086	.111	.127
2.8.I have sense of ownership when buying luxury fashion products	.107	.526	.524	.122	.191	.152	.081
2.9 .Luxury fashion products that are seen with a higher value motivate my willingness to buy them	.250	.390	.623	-.007	.123	.035	-.010
2.10.I consume luxury fashion products to belong to a reference group	.310	.640	.280	-.086	-.020	.176	.006
2.11.I am attached to shopping luxury fashion brands for personal satisfaction	.023	.110	.672	.279	.140	.195	.062
2.12.I grew up wearing luxury fashion brands.	.084	.024	.088	.069	.115	.863	-.024
2.13.Shopping and consuming luxury fashion products enhances my mental well-being	.462	.219	.615	.171	.062	.096	.011
2.14.Wearing luxury fashion brands makes me feel proud	.347	.231	.695	.097	.111	.183	.052
2.15.Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to express my success and leads to satisfaction	.433	.213	.702	.126	.076	.087	.029
2.16.Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to display my background heritage.	.329	.243	.282	-.096	.020	.682	.127
2.17.Luxury fashion brands help me demonstrate a superior identity	.519	.399	.515	.004	.072	.124	.005
2.18.wearing Luxury fashion brands help me enhance my everyday confidence in the society	.512	.332	.587	.188	.099	.045	.060
3.1.I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes.	.359	.242	.179	.020	.628	.265	-.077
3.2.Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.	.457	.331	.053	.059	.635	.232	-.002
3.3.I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success	-.105	.074	.156	.100	.658	-.045	.288
3.4.The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	.431	.213	.150	.118	.564	.011	.140
3.5.I like to own things to impress people.	.668	.340	.215	-.008	.320	.124	.105
3.6. I don't pay much attention to material objects other people own	-.090	.043	.015	.085	.198	-.099	.792
3.7.I would buy a product just because it has status	.634	.265	.075	-.113	.124	.206	.253
3.8.I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself	.403	.214	.102	.094	-.008	.250	.615
3.9.Part of me is defined by important brands in my life	.608	.288	.098	.040	.153	.214	.446
3.10.I like a lot of luxury in my life	.522	.071	.167	.241	.259	.367	-.016
4.1I consume luxury fashion brands to show the social group I belong to	.651	.477	.234	.067	.095	.175	-.093
4.2.I consume luxury fashion brands to attain social status	.713	.445	.310	-.001	.101	.069	-.040
4.3.I consume luxury fashion brands to display uniqueness	.632	.204	.382	.228	.098	-.074	-.019
4.4.I consume luxury fashion brands to fulfill my self-image	.597	.279	.474	.107	.156	.016	.041
4.5.I consume luxury fashion brands to express my perceived image by the society.	.754	.361	.288	.123	.037	.079	.016
4.6.I consume luxury fashion brands to display an identity	.707	.285	.372	.142	.063	.116	.104
4.7.I consume luxury fashion brands to enhance my own self-confidence	.522	.237	.573	.240	.081	-.045	.019
4.8.I consume luxury fashion brands products to get a higher social position	.695	.368	.390	.094	.072	.024	-.095
4.9. Luxury fashion brands enable me to be accepted better in social circles that I mix.	.597	.441	.086	.038	.048	.240	-.038
4.10. I consume luxury fashion brands for its functional benefit.	.349	.094	.075	.763	.083	-.052	-.055
4.11.I consume luxury fashion brands as a personal reward	.093	.084	.507	.624	.047	-.016	.133
4.12.I consume luxury fashion brands due to its product quality and performance	-.062	-.005	.249	.841	.081	.105	.147

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a]

As I investigated the items of each factor, I allocated a name to each factor that best describes the items included. The label for each factor is based on the attributes linked with each of the factors measured. It is thus, essential to place emphasis on the important role that such

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factors play as an underlying perception of value behind luxury fashion brand consumption. I tried to identify realise if the concepts from literature review still exist with this regrouping of the items under different factors developed through EFA. The following paragraph will therefore touch upon the identified factors, while explaining how each of these factors play their part in influencing a consumers' perceived value in respect to luxury fashion consumption.

As displayed in Table 4.12, Self-consciousness is Factor One, the most important factor that explains 45% of luxury fashion brand consumption and now has 13 items. Whereas in Table 4.1, there are only 4 items that belong to Self-consciousness based on literature review. As explained in Chapter 2, the concept of self-consciousness reflects the awareness of consumers and how they think they are perceived in the context of their social circles. However, this awareness does not necessarily mean that consumers are aware of the actual reason they buy into such products. In effect, consumers buy into luxury fashion brands precisely in order to improve their perceived self-image within their social groups. Whether luxury fashion consumption develops the perceived self-image of these consumers or not is not the issue here. The issue that concerns this study is that the results indicate that self-consciousness is the most significant underlying construct in the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption. In this sense, it is essentially an individuals' self-conscious thoughts that influences their consumption. This is clearly demonstrated in the results, as when we look into the details of items in the questionnaire that explain the Self-consciousness Factor, there are 13 items among these items that are worthy of a special attention in this context*: I consume luxury fashion brands to express my perceived image in the society* (0.754), *I consume luxury fashion brands to attain social status* (0.713), *I consume luxury fashion brands to display identity* (0.707), which tells us that luxury fashion consumers are conscious of how

they are perceived by members of their social group and use luxury fashion goods to enhance their perceived image, attain social status and display an identity that is signalled through the consumption of luxury fashion goods. In the items included in Self-consciousness Factor, it is interesting to note that the three items I highlighted above have the highest loading on this factor compared to the other ten items in this factor. What can be gleaned here is that these social dimensions of luxury fashion consumption are important in the consumption of luxury fashion brands and were further underpinned by Self-construal the second most important concept that explains nearly 7% of the consumption, which has 9 items now whereas in Table 4.1 is only 7 items. The need to feel accepted in social groups stems from how connected individuals perceive themselves to be within their community, which is associated with the concept of Self-construal. Examples that best illustrate what I am suggesting here can be viewed in items such as *I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase(0*.809) and *When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of (0.842).* I should point out the second item out of the two is the item that has the highest factor loading *(0.842)* out of all the items in the questionnaire, this in effect, supports my arguments in the earlier sections of this Chapter that centres around an individual's perceived self in the gaze of others. It is in line with such evidence that I argue that luxury fashion consumers attempt to enhance their image in the gaze of others through the consumption of luxury fashion goods.

Bearing the above paragraph in mind, the third significant factor is Self-enhancement: this underlying construct explains 5% of the perceived value in luxury fashion consumption which had 6 items in Table 4.1 and 7 items in Table 4.14. The most important item that revolves around the concept of Self-enhancement is associated with how *Luxury Fashion Brands enable* consumers *to express* their *success* that *leads to satisfaction (.*702). The implication

here is associated with the enhanced uplifting mood that luxury fashion consumers appear to experience when consuming these goods which enhances how consumers feel about themselves as they experience a degree of confidence and satisfaction. A central point that is common in all the items discussed thus far, is the dualistic nature of luxury fashion consumers that are fundamentally psychological and social influences embodied in these concepts. Within the psychological and social embodiments of these underlying constructs in the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption, the results indicate that luxury fashion consumption deals with the same fundamental form of duality that manifests the contrast between heredity and variation simultaneously (Simmel, 1957). Put simply, by shedding light upon the most important items loaded on the mentioned factors, whether the intention behind the consumption of luxury fashion goods is displaying success, social status or enhancing one's self-image, the bottom line implicates a social context that the individual aspires to belong to a community whilst simultaneously having the desire to stand out within that community or social group.

Moving forward with the factors identified, the fourth factor is ownership that also explains nearly 5% of the variance, in respect to this conception there are three items in Table 4.15 whereas there were five items in Table 4.1. In this context, the concept of *Ownership* of luxury fashion products relates to an individual's desire to own these materials triggered by the emotional bond that consumers create with the luxury fashion item itself. This bond is associated with the meanings attached to such products with respect to the intangible branding dimensions of it, and the perceived unique design of the tangible product itself. Finally, the fifth factor concerns the concept of Materialism that in Table 4.1 has ten items while in Table 4.16 there are a total of four items that explain 3% of the variance. In respect to materialism, whatever symbols luxury fashion items signify, the most important aspect is

the perceived value of these materials from a consumer's perspective. In other words, luxury fashion products are material goods. Consequently, the intention to attain status using material goods originates from an individual's perception of value towards that particular item which impinges upon luxury fashion consumption.

The five factors discussed are argued to lie behind the *perception* of what creates value for luxury fashion materials from a consumers' standpoint. This is important because identifying the underlying influences behind luxury fashion brand consumption was the fundamental reason for exploring such factors in the questionnaire. It is therefore necessary to highlight that out of the seven factors, two of the components had to be withdrawn since each factor should have at least three variables with high loadings (Norusis, 2008:409). Subsequently, factors such as '*cultural background* 'and '*brands'* (which emerged from the outcome of a rotated component matrix) were defined by only two variables. As a result, a five-factor model (see Figure 4.2) emerged from this process after the factors were purified, which is supported by the scree plot and the amount of variance explained by the five components (70.45% before purification and 68.5% after purification, see Appendix 2B p.44). The five factors suggested are as follows: Self-consciousness, Self-construal, Self-enhancement, Ownership and Materialism with self-consciousness as the most important factor accounting for 48.56% of the variance. In light of discussions and analysis in this Section, I propose a theoretical model which demonstrates the factors that underlie the perceptions behind luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK. Before I go on to present the five-factor model, Tables 4. 12- 4.16 will display the items and factor loadings on each of the underlying constructs explored in this analysis.

Table 4.12 Self-consciousness factor One

Table 4.13 Self-construal factor Two

Self-consciousness	
Luxury fashion brands help me demonstrate a superior identity	.519
I like to own things to impress people	.668
I would buy a product just because it has status	.634
Part of me is defined by important brands in my life	.608
I like a lot of luxury in my life	.522
I consume luxury fashion brands to show the social group I belong to	.651
I consume luxury fashion brands to attain social status	.713
I consume luxury fashion brands to display uniqueness	.632
I consume luxury fashion brands to fulfil my self-image	.597
I consume luxury fashion brands to express my perceived image by the society.	.754
I consume luxury fashion brands to display an identity	.707
I consume luxury fashion brands products to get a higher social position	.695
Luxury fashion brands enable me to be accepted better in social circles that I mix	.597
% of variance explained	45.37%
Total items	13

Self-construal	
.It is important that others like the products and brands I buy	.745
I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them	.750
I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase	.809
When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of	.842
I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others	.747
If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy	.737
I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase	.684
I have sense of ownership when buying luxury fashion products	.526
I consume luxury fashion products to belong to a reference group	.640
% of variance explained	6.82%
Total items	9

Table 4.14 Self-enhancement factor three

Self-enhancement	
Luxury fashion products that are seen with a higher value motivate my willingness to buy them	.623
I am attached to shopping luxury fashion brands for personal satisfaction	.672
Shopping and consuming luxury fashion products enhances my mental well-being	.615
Wearing luxury fashion brands makes me feel proud	.695
Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to express my success and leads to satisfaction	.702
wearing Luxury fashion brands help me enhance my everyday confidence in the society	.587
I consume luxury fashion brands to enhance my own self-confidence	.573
% of variance explained	4.95%
Total items	7

Table 4.15 Ownership factor four

ownership	
I consume luxury fashion brands for its functional benefit	.764
I consume luxury fashion brands as a personal reward	.624
I consume luxury fashion brands due to its product quality and performance	.841
% of variance explained	4.56%
Total items	3

Table 4.16. Materialism factor Five   Table 4.17. Cultural background factor Six

Materialism	
I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes	.628
2.Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.	.635
I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success	.658
4.The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life	.564
% of variance explained	3.39
Total items	4

Cultural background	
I grew up wearing luxury fashion brands	.863
Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to display my background heritage	.682
% of variance	2.81
Total items	2

Table 4.18 Brand factor Seven

Brands	
I don't pay much attention to material objects other people own	.792
I consider my favourite brands to be a part of myself	.615
% of variance	2.54%
Total items	2
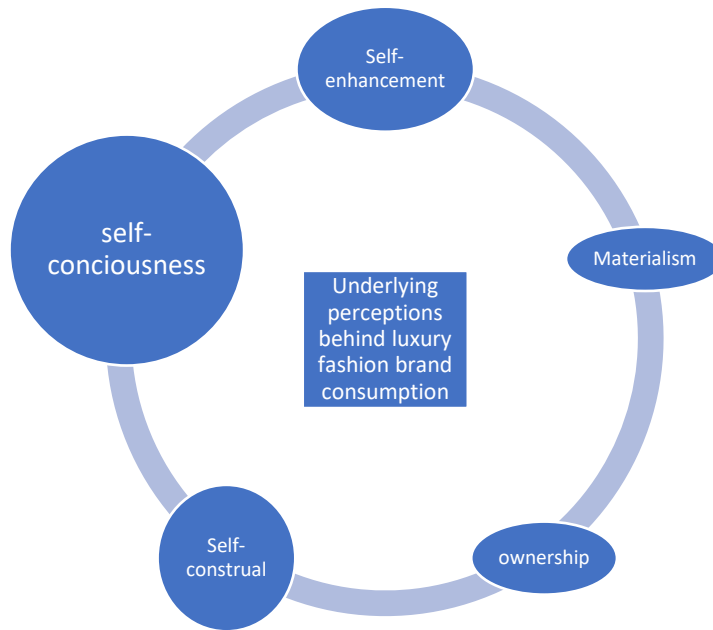
Figure 4.2 Underlying perceptions behind luxury fashion consumption five-factor model.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was conducted to examine the relationships between the five factors that emerged from the data. The outcome of this analysis demonstrates that all factors are positively significantly correlated. On this note, Grimm and Yarnold (1995) point out that 0.8 correlation is very high and requires attention, therefore, it is interesting to note that self-enhancement ($r=0.802**$) and self-construal ($r=0.741**$) are strongly correlated with self-consciousness whereas the rest of the correlations are moderate. This result indicates that the five factors that underlie the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption according to the present studies model are related. Subsequently, the combination of these factors influences consumers' perception of value. Self-consciousness is a strong force in predicting self-presentation behaviours; it is therefore highly related to self-construal as this concept refers to the way in which individuals perceive themselves in respect to their community. As such, since consumers are conscious of these matters, they tend to enhance

their perceived image, which justifies why self-enhancement is also statistically strongly correlated with self-consciousness.

	Self-Consciousness	Self-Construal	Self-Enhancement	Product	Materialism
Self-consciousness	1	0.741**	0.802**	0.397**	0.650**
Self-construal		1	0.669**	0.253**	0.544**
Self-enhancement			1	0.531**	0.559**
Ownership				1	0.330**
Materialism					1

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4.19 The relationship between factors influencing luxury fashion consumption

Since the correlations reported above are high, we need to look into the *multi-collinearity* impact that describes the state when high correlations between two or more predictor variables are detected (Brace et al., 2006). High levels of multi-collinearity may or may not cause problems in the model as the beta coefficients increase, hence high levels of beta coefficients often turn out to be statistically significant that is the case here (Field, 2005). Regarding issues concerned with multi-collinearity, Myers (1990) suggests that though there is no rule of thumb on the numeric values it is generally believed that VFI (Variance Inflation Factor) values less than ten indicate that there are no multi-collinearity problems. Therefore, according to Table 4.20, in the case of my results there are no multi-collinearity problems, since the maximum VIF value is 4.007 and the minimum tolerance value is .250.

4.6.0 Frequency of Luxury fashion purchase

After identifying the five key factors from my data, it is of particular interest to explore whether any of these factors had an impact on how frequent consumers would purchase luxury fashion branded items. A linear multiple regression was therefore conducted using the enter method with the following equation:

Multiple regression formula: $y = b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + ... + b_nx_n$

Model	B	Std. Error	Standard coefficients Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	2.226	.146		15.296	.000		
Ownership	.003	.016	.013	.187	.852	.695	1.439
Self-consciousness	.018	.005	.457	3.801	.000	.250	4.007
Self-construal	-.013	.005	-.239	-2.569	.011	.416	2.405
Self-enhancement	-.004	.008	-.057	-.515	.607	.290	3.451
Materialism	.011	.012	.077	.965	.336	.568	1.760

Table 4.20 Multiple regression model

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.334[a]	.112	.094	.673

a. Predictors: (Constant), Materialism, Ownership, Self-construal, Self-enhancement, Self-consciousness

Table 4.21 Multiple regression model summary

A significant model emerges from the above: F (5,246) = 6.181, p<0.000 B=457. The model explains 94% of the variance (Adjusted R= .94) which is a large size effect reported by the model. Self-consciousness (t=3.801, p=000, β.457), and self-construal (t=-2.569, p<.11, β=.-239) were statistically significant predictors, whereas the rest of the three variables were not statistically significant given the 0.05 criteria. An important factor that we can draw from this result is that self-consciousness impacts upon the consumers' frequency of purchase. In effect, as the slope co-efficient indicates (see Table 4.20), self-consciousness is a positive significant predictor, while self-construal has a negative relationship with how frequent consumers purchase luxury fashion items. As I mentioned above, self-consciousness is associated with the awareness of how consumers think they are perceived by others in their social groups. The issue that has to be addressed in this respect is that consumers probably buy into products more frequently as they prefer to display a brand-new item every time they engage with their social circles consciously. Therefore, as they are seen with a new product each time, this in turn motivates them to even shop more frequently which could be the reason that self-consciousness is a significant factor on the frequency of how often luxury fashion consumers' shop. From a marketing perspective, this finding implies that it is essential for marketers to reflect upon how it is self-conscious thoughts and emotions drive consumers to buy into the latest luxury fashion goods more frequently, something I will expand on in Chapter 7. The final predictor model to emerge from the enter method contains only two predictor variables as presented below.

Frequency of purchase= 2.226+ .18 (Self-consciousness)+ (-).13(Self-construal)

Predictor variable	Beta	P
Self-consciousness	.457	p=000
Self-construal	-239	. p<.11

Self-enhancement, Ownership and Materialism were not significant in this model.

Table 4. 22 Predictors of Purchase Frequency

4.7.0 Importance of quality and uniqueness in luxury fashion consumption

Having analysed the quantitative elements in my *Luxury Fashion* Questionnaire, in this section I will focus on the three themes: 1) importance of quality and uniqueness in luxury fashion consumption, 2) Attaining trust and sense of accomplishment 3)luxury fashion consumption as a personal reward that emerged from the qualitative findings of my questionnaire that is obtained from five open ended questions in the latter section of the Questionnaire. The qualitative data was useful in indicating the meanings consumers attached to their luxury consumption would suffice. The first theme that I will discuss in the next paragraph is concerned with the value my respondents placed on the importance of quality and uniqueness.

My data suggests that the actual reason that consumers rationalise the consumption of luxury fashion brands is the quality of the products. In this sense, according to the outcome, consumers take the perceived functional benefits of luxury fashion products more seriously than its perceived symbolic benefits. The interesting point that has to be highlighted here is

that consumers also stress a sense of ownership that of a quality item generates satisfaction. What remains unclear from the data however, is how could the quality of a tangible material object contribute to an individual's sense of satisfaction. In effect, what plays a reasonable role in this context is the underlying perception that influences consumers' mind to view a material object in such a way that provides him or her with a sense of satisfaction. The argument here is that, in the context of consumption, there is a strong possibility that tangible qualities of luxury fashion items are underpinned by the intangible qualities that in turn make the ownership of these goods satisfying. Nevertheless, the importance of tangible quality in luxury fashion consumption cannot be denied based on the qualitative results of the questionnaire. It could, however, be argued that discussing the role of quality is probably a response that maintains face, since participants may not necessarily acknowledge that they bought into luxury fashion brands to display status. To illustrate this point, there was one particular case worth quoting that emphasised on how he values, '*status*', '*wealth promotion*' whilst, expressing that paying premium prices makes him *'feel like a boss'(UAE,27 male).*

The quoted response seems sincere as the informant expresses how the status of such products enhances his feelings, which could potentially feed into a sense of confidence. In this regard, there are two responses that challenge the perception that revolves around the quality of luxury fashion items. These respondents completely ruled out the role of quality in their consumption as opposed to most of the responses. They mentioned that in actual fact it is the value-based pricing strategy and the brand name that drives them towards buying into such products as quoted below.

'Honestly speaking some luxury brands have bad quality so if someone says quality they're lying but I guess it makes you happy to have an expensive item that's yours.' UAE 24 Female

'The name of the brand. The quality is same as others.' UAE 26 Male

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What we can draw from the first response above is that as the respondent claims, "luxury brands have bad quality", it is the sense of ownership of having an expensive item that contributes to her well-being. The discussion concerned with whether luxury fashion brands are consumed due their functional, or symbolic benefits, was in fact addressed by one of the respondents that viewed the issue similarly as the responses quoted above, however, this participant did not dismiss the importance of quality in his luxury fashion consumption, whereas the other respondents did just that.

'I would say that it is 99% brand image and how the society perceives the brand. I wouldn't bang on the quality of the items, even though I think that the quality is great. It is more about status, power, show-off factor above all the rest that make a fashion item.' UK 24 male

In light of the first responses above, attention should be paid to the role that images play in contemporary social groups of luxury fashion consumers and the way in which they perceive what appears real to them is to an extent mediated by the images created by sophisticated marketing strategies. The suggestion here is not to disregard the functional quality of luxury fashion items, but rather that the quality of such products are exaggerated in proportion to the price point of these goods. I must also reassert that, the pricing point of luxury fashion goods is perhaps an influential force in how consumers desire a sense of ownership that emanates from luxury fashion consumption. On this basis, I argue, in this thesis that consumers buy into the perception of quality that I will discuss in detail in chapter 6. Focusing on the last of above quotations, there is a vital suggestion that underpins the core argument of this thesis. The respondents' emphasis on *'how society perceives the brand'.* What concerns my research here is that the tension lies in how the brand is perceived, in effect, the

key issue here is associated with perception and the underlying influences that constitute a consumer's perception towards how they value a luxury fashion brand.

An individual may have a particular understanding of how and why he or she consumes: but this is a perception and not an objective position on an objective reality. Furthermore, in spite of the perceived quality of products, luxury fashion items are also considered to be unique which in turn contributes to an individual's uniqueness according to the findings. Reflecting upon the essence of a luxury fashion item, uniqueness has often been a key feature of such products, respondents in considerable cases of the data acknowledged this feature of luxury fashion products.

Uniqueness. I Don't like to see what I wear on others. So, I buy higher priced products. 26, Male, UK.

The quality and its uniqueness. Also, it is not affordable for everyone to buy it. 43, Female, UAE

Unique and unusual design. 25, Male, UAE.

A pair of dolce and Gabbana sneakers because they stand out and make everyone stare at me. The uniqueness of item. 24, Male, UAE.

I like it to be unique, not very commercial. 24, Female, UK.

The above responses suggest that luxury fashion consumers buy into these goods as an attempt to stand out from the crowd, and indeed due to the product's particular design. Considering that respondents stress uniqueness, it is argued that uniqueness in this context stems from an intrinsic need to stand out, which is in essence a psychosocial desire. In fact, uniqueness is also a perception that it is not an objective reality, therefore, what is perceived

to be a unique product may provide the consumer with nothing more than a perception, an assumption on this basis, that he or she stands out from the crowd. This argument, does not imply that luxury fashion products are not uniquely designed, it rather suggests there are deeper layers beneath the physical aspects of a luxury fashion item.

At this point, it is indeed important to draw attention towards respondents' emphasis on the price and affordability of such items. Consumers stress that they prefer their items to be exclusive, which is one of the fundamental reasons that fashion consumers buy into luxury, as it is only accessible to limited members of society. The message that lies beneath the above quotations is that the demand for such unique products is influenced by an individual's social desire to be perceived to be unique. In effect, social desires, originate from social influences that create such intrinsic needs and external wants on the basis of how of individuals think they are perceived by themselves and others. This in turn, reflects upon the following theme that emerged from the data, namely that concerns consumers perceived image from the point of view of others, since the findings suggest that an individual that use luxury fashion brands portray a trustworthy image.

4.7.1 Attaining trust and a sense of accomplishment

This section focuses on a theme addressed by my participants through their answers to my open-ended questions. In the quantitative findings of the questionnaire, participants did not have the opportunity to share their thoughts about how they feel about luxury fashion consumption with respect to social influences on their perception, as their choice was limited to ticking a box. Underpinning the finding from EFA the following responses from my participants illustrate the importance of luxury fashion consumption in a social context. It is interesting to quote some of these responses.

In the society I live in, they tend to value your appearance and link it to your overall wellbeing of financial status. I find it important to use this as a tool specially in a work environment such as meeting etc.. you tend to leave a better impression and it seems like you are taken more seriously when using certain brands. (27, Female, UAE)

I think the typical Gucci or popular items are in general important because people can see it quickly and trust you easier both at work and private life. (26, Male, UAE.)

…we live in a society right now that people judge based on the things they see on social media or by the way you look. (27, Male, UAE)

Luxury brands have a symbolic meaning that is why when I wear them, I become more trust worthy in the eyes of my clients and people I meet for building work relationships. (37, Female, UK)

The findings demonstrate that consumers are highly conscious of how they are perceived by others. In this context, consumers display a strong awareness of the potential role of the symbolic benefits attached to luxury fashion items that enables them to attain trust from the individuals they associate with. However, the issue is that such symbols are dependent upon how the social meanings embedded with such brands are perceived. Luxury fashion branded products are perceived as symbols of wealth and status, therefore, especially in a professional environment and a potential business meeting with a client, luxury fashion materials assist an individual in gaining trust from clients. This trust is perhaps developed through luxury fashion goods as a signifier of success; for instance, it is a possibility is that a client might judge a professional individual based on how they appear. Thus, what makes an individual with a luxury fashion product trustworthy is not the actual product, it is the value or the meanings that such products exchange via the signals transferred by the meanings embedded with their

symbol. In effect, the symbolic benefits of luxury fashion brands are perhaps a reason why clients feel safe to trust their business relationships in this context. This is directly dependent on the consumer's career path, as this suggestion could only be valid if the respective role of the consumers involves securing trust of clients such as the cases demonstrated above. The other dimension we can look at this issue encompasses an individual's own admiration for the self, in respect to expressing pride as result of personal achievements. The suggestion here is that the consumption of luxury goods could fulfil such psychosocial needs. This justifies why consumers feel a sense of accomplishment by their financial ability to buy into luxury fashion products. As such, consumers stressed their sense of accomplishment when they were asked *what made the luxury fashion item valuable for them to pay premium prices*?

The fact that I am in a position to do so. 27, Male, UK.

The wallet that I bought is really valuable because it reminds that I am in a better place now that I can spend around 400 quid on an item. 28, Female, UK.

It gives me a sense of accomplishment that I am able to afford such items. 26 Male UAE.

It makes me feel proud that I could afford it. 27, Male, UAE.

As noted earlier, the financial means to consume luxury fashion items provide consumers with a sense of achievement. A clear example of this is illustrated in the second quote from the responses above since the participant suggests that the luxury fashion item she owns reminds her that *she is in a better place now.* This may or may not reflect on an individual's life journey, in a sense that there is perhaps a certain level of economic development that is linked with an existing sense of pride in owning a luxury wallet, at least in the case of my respondent. The element that seems to underlie this sense of accomplishment and ownership involves the

expression of pride, which is identified as a self-conscious emotion (Castonguayet et al., 2013). In effect, feeling a sense of accomplishment constitutes a strong human desire that seems to be fulfilled, at least partially, through luxury fashion brand consumption. It is interesting to note that since consumers find luxury fashion consumption helpful in expressing their sense of accomplishment, participants also highlight how these goods, to a degree, play a rewarding role in reflecting their achievements. Such findings demonstrate somewhat similar views from participants with their own interpretation.

4.7.2 Luxury fashion consumption as a personal reward

The final theme that emerged from the open-ended responses is concerned with how consumers reward themselves with luxury goods after a successful accomplishment in their life. The data may or may not imply that participants are currently at a stage that have the financial power to buy into such items whereas they could not invest into luxury fashion items prior to achieving their career goals. For a considerable amount of consumers, buying into luxury fashion products feels like a reward due to the hard work that individuals put into achieving their personal goals.

The issue that is clear from consumers' standpoint is that luxury fashion consumption is a self-rewarding act that reinforces the importance of the ownership element in luxury fashion consumption. The point here is that the ownership of a luxury fashion material is considered from the consumer's point of view to be a reward. However, what remains unclear is the actual reason behind why it is consumers feel rewarded while consuming luxury fashion products. In effect, there are two potential possibilities that lie beneath the surface of this data. First, the possibility that luxury fashion consumption feels rewarding for consumers because consumers attain a sense of satisfaction from developing their financial situation.

Hence, in the case of this possibility, the potential reason that consumers imply that luxury fashion consumption is a personal reward, is that they feel better about themselves since they have a stronger financial ability to consume compared to earlier stages of their life. Second, participants may have had the financial strength with support from their parents and bought into luxury goods and refuse to admit it. From this view, the feeling of relying on their parents to buy these good for them may not feel as rewarding, compared to a situation where a consumer has arrived in a certain point in life that is no longer financially dependent on their family. As such, the feeling of a personal reward through luxury fashion consumption potentially emanates from feeling financially independent. In this way it would be a mistake to neglect quoting the following response associated with a consumer suggesting why a *Dolce Gabbana bag* she consumed is important to her:

'It was the most expensive item I ever bought with my own personal money rather than my family's. I love it and the quality is great.'

The informant here points out that the luxury item was consumed with her personal income. This could imply that the satisfaction derived from luxury fashion consumption as personal reward is a way to signify individual success, at least based on the data obtained from this study. At this point, the rewarding role of luxury fashion consumption on how consumers feel about themselves as a successful individual cannot be disregarded. However, consumers claim that luxury fashion consumption is entirely a matter of personal reward and a matter of individuality, which cannot be the case, as consuming such items satisfies an individual need for acceptance within their respective social circles. This stems from how consumers think their peers view them, whether they are perceived as a successful individual or not. The suggestion here is that the social system is effectively designed in such a way as to encourage individuals to compete in order to enhance the economy. This social competition has

metaphorically manifested into a playground for individuals to compete and demonstrate their social standing in the hypothetical social order through luxury fashion consumption. Taking into account that the present world is driven by the ideology of capitalism, an individuals' success is to an extent determined by their economic wealth, which is a crucial form of capital. Considering that luxury fashion products are perceived as symbols of wealth, the consumption of such materials constitute an essential way to display an individual's success within their social groups. Hence, what may indeed provide consumers with a personal reward is the symbolic meanings of luxury fashion products that signify that these consumers are successful enough to wear luxury fashion items. As such, it is important to consider the following response that indicates why this participant consumes luxury fashion products in spite of premium price points. The question here is '*Based on your own purchase experience what made the luxury fashion brand/item valuable for you to pay premium prices?*'

'*Emotional perception of being visibly more successful.*' (Male, 33, UK)

There are two essential points that emerge from this response. The first issue is concerned with the stress on appearing successful as the informant mentioned '*visibly more successful*'. This phrase in particular, is a vivid illustration of consumers' tendency to appear successful within their social circles as discussed in the paragraph above. In effect, appearing successful enhances an individual's perceived image in his or her own mind, which in turn potentially leads to a genuine sense of satisfaction. Thus, the perception of being '*visibly more successful*' motivates consumers to buy into luxury fashion products as a personal reward. In this respect, individuals' use luxury fashion consumption as way of constructing a language in order to establish a perceived image of success in their social groups. If this is the case, this reinforces the contention that what may actually provide individuals with a perceived successful image

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is how other individuals interpret the meanings communicated by the symbols of luxury fashion brands centres around they way consumers perceived these symbols and the value they place on it.

that concerns an individual's perception.

The second issue, as far as this thesis is concerned, is that the respondents' emphasis on emotional perception, which suggests the respondent is conscious of the perception of being visibly more successful is not necessarily a logical point of view as it is emotional. From a marketing perspective, luxury fashion brands partake in marketing strategies to encourage consumers to be driven by their emotion while consumers create an emotional bond with the story behind the products they supply. The point here is not to judge consumers' choice or perception, rather it challenges the logic behind a consumer's choice while pointing out the potential influence of marketing techniques on that choice. At a deeper level, the issue is what components actually drive consumers' choice to be driven by emotions. A key factor that could be argued to drive consumers by such emotions is the underlying influences that constitute a perception for consumers to value a luxury fashion brand with such perceived symbolic and functional benefit discussed in this Chapter.

4.8.0 Summary of Luxury fashion questionnaire results and analysis Chapter

The data obtained from the *Luxury fashion questionnaire*, could be said to demonstrate that the issue of consumption in the industry of luxury fashion is far more complex than how it might appear on the surface. The statistical results of this chapter illustrate that there are five underlying factors that influence the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption. In light of this, I developed a theoretical model in order to shed new light on current debates associated with luxury fashion brand consumption. The five-factor model includes self-consciousness, self-construal, self-enhancement, ownership and materialism. This model

indicates that these factors are the underlying influences behind luxury fashion consumption. The statistical findings of the *Luxury fashion questionnaire* were followed by qualitative findings that established that the quality and uniqueness of the luxury fashion brands play an important role in luxury fashion consumption. In addition, these goods contribute to an individual's psychosocial needs based on the perception of value towards luxury fashion brands. This was demonstrated most forcibly through the qualitative questionnaire data where it became clear that luxury fashion consumption contributes to a consumer's well-being, as it plays a rewarding role whilst helping individuals with attaining trust and a sense of accomplishment in their life and career.

It is worth considering the contention that luxury fashion consumption through a psychosocial lens. Since no conclusion can be made at this stage as regards to this issue without a more detailed consideration of the qualitative data that further expresses how it is consumers directly engage or endow meaning with luxury brand. In light of this point, it was considered necessary to conduct interviews with luxury fashion consumers, luxury fashion sales associates and a luxury fashion social media influencer in order to provide the necessary insight into whether the underlying perceptions behind luxury fashion brand consumption could be best framed as a psychosocial matter and what implications this could have for future research.

CHAPTER 5

Luxury Fashion Interviews Results and Analysis

5.0.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the analysis of my interview findings primarily will consider the influential factors behind luxury fashion consumption from perspectives of luxury fashion brand retail associates, consumers and a social media influencer. One of the main concerns of this research is to explore the effectiveness of the role that marketing strategies play on such influences. Considering the quantitative findings in chapter 4, it is worth looking at luxury fashion consumption from a psychosocial standpoint at this point. Bearing this in mind, I will assess the information obtained without a predisposed perspective to find this in my data, rather I will unpack my data according to what I found to be the most reoccurring theme that is of importance in respect to what my research seeks to establish. The first Section of this Chapter consists of discussions of insights regarding the diverse types of luxury fashion consumers.

5.1.0 Luxury fashion consumers

The central discussion in the present theme revolves around the contradiction between two categories of luxury fashion consumers identified by the interviewees. I therefore, aim to unpack the findings concerning this matter, in an attempt to explore the potential reasons that underlie the importance of this issue. My finding demonstrates retail associates from both countries reflected upon the existence of two main types of luxury fashion consumers.

'I feel like sometimes there are like two separate consumers, most of the people have the branded on show they are the ones that take a picture and things like that. I would break this

down between people that can afford luxury and people that maybe can't afford luxury so much.' (Retail associate, UK)

The ability of people to afford luxury is a key factor that separates consumers in regards to their ability towards consumption. An associate that works at a Gucci store in Dubai reflected on this contention when she categorised consumers into two groups. She pointed out that on the one hand, that there are a category of individuals who shop luxurious items to put it *'on show'*, while on the other hand *'There is a second category of people who do not like to show off whereas they can afford it and just wear it because they find it interesting to them. So, we do have clients for example who buy luxury but, without branding they like it discrete.'* (Retail associate, UAE)

In light of this suggestion, we might conclude that wealthier consumers are less likely to be interested in overt demonstrations of branding: such subtlety may serve to separate them from the mass-market luxury fashion consumers (Wu et al.,2017). Moreover, the retail associate drew attention towards luxury fashion products that are discrete in showing the brand logo that may relate to *quiet* luxury fashion products which to most consumers the overt display of social status is not visible. In the context of luxury fashion items, according to Bagheri (2013) *quiet* products are associated with items that do not necessarily display the brand logo. These goods are prominently often consumed by individuals who prefer a quieter form of brand association that is in itself a source of status with a more discrete code. Whereas *loud* luxury items clearly displays the brand logo that is it is often linked with consumers who are keen to display their status via the brand's logo.

"They want to have that Gucci logo on the shirt everybody needs to know that" (Retail associate, UK)

Retail associates from both countries exhibited a strong awareness in respect to existence of two contrasting types of consumers. The characteristics of what my participants attempted to describe in the different types of individuals they encounter whether as social group members by consumers or as customers by retail associates is best identified in these theoretical notions that I will now discuss. My respondents effectively categorised consumers in two groups of conspicuous and inconspicuous consumers. Reflecting on Veblen's (1899) contention, conspicuous consumption derives from display of wealth through consumption of goods, in effect, conspicuous consumers seek to symbolise status and display wealth by buying into luxury fashion items. Categorising consumers as such by my respondent, appeared to be a reoccurring theme from the data.

*'I think old consumers, like older domestic (*British*) consumers kind of think more like the middle eastern consumers they buy into the brand because of certain price points or because of heritage or because they see that brand as being a certain way or a specific person that they aspire to be. So yea, I would say younger domestic consumers just buy luxury products to have luxury products and to say they have it. It is different I am going back to the point of having money or not having money.'* (Retail associate, UK)

The suggestion here is that wealthier consumers are less prone to buy into products that display the brand logo with high visibility, in contrast, younger consumers that presumably are not financially as strong, consume products with a clear display of brand logo in order to associate themselves with the symbolism they, ironically, see as denoting membership of the wealthier class. In addition to this, luxury goods are perceived to be social and cultural markers endowed with heritage. From a consumers' perspective, the motive behind luxury fashion consumption often lies in displaying uniqueness and status, or one of the two. Thus far, according to retail associates from both countries, the depth of someone's wealth and

what this implies about questions of cultural capital seems to be the reason that consumers are categorised in two main groups. There is clearly a class dimension to this perceptions as to an individual's wealth effectively serve as a proxy to that person's perceived social class. In this context, class refers to the constitution of structure by the distribution of economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Considering the price points of luxury goods, accessibility might be assumed limited to two classes of the society, namely the wealthy class and the upper middle class. There are, however, individuals in the lower classes of society that save their income in order to have the sufficient funds to consume luxury fashion products and it is in this way that the symbolic value of consumption feeds into the class system and its reproduction. In a broader context, the information gleaned here, embodies the tension in social structure that encapsulates a consumer society where the ability to consume or to be defined through consumption becomes crucial. "*There are different types of consumers like that, people that are used to buying luxury and people that have to save for luxury.*" *(Retail associate, UK)*

The key concern here is consumers' desire to perceive themselves in a higher social position than where they actually stand. Hereby, Veblen (1899: 42) suggests, "each social class tries to emulate the consumption behaviour of the class above it, to such an extent that even poorest people are subject to pressures to engage in conspicuous consumption".

On this note, consumers in the upper middle class consume products with highly visible logos to associate themselves with a wealthier class. In this light, from Veblen's (1899) perspective, the middles class used consumption as a means of asserting their social significance and it could be said that luxury fashion branded goods are a fair example in this context. Whereas the wealthier class prefer to disassociate themselves from the classes below them in the social hierarchy, as they tend to express a *sense of distinction* through luxury fashion consumption

(Bourdieu, 1984). Nevertheless, in the present day it seems as though the accessibility of *loud* products contradict the essence of luxury, which is perhaps why inconspicuous consumers are less likely to buy into those products. Inconspicuous consumers, seek the kernel feature of a luxury item that lies in the fundamental role of elitism (Kapferer and Florence, 2016). In this way, in order to maintain the desirability of *quiet* items access is limited to products by restricting its diffusion in a sense that the supply of these items must be controlled so that these products are not spread widely. Moreover, the price points of these items are often higher which also determines the category of consumer it targets. In terms of targeting audiences and maximising profit, this may be why luxury fashion brands produce two types of products (silent and loud) in order to meet the demands of both conspicuous and inconspicuous consumers.

Interviewees from the UAE demonstrated a higher awareness towards these two types of consumers compared to interviewees based in the UK. It was clear from the responses that the role of conspicuous consumption in shaping an overall assessment of luxury brand is different in intensity as compared to consumers in the UAE. On the one hand, inconspicuous consumers seemed a little judgmental about consumers that primarily buy into luxury due to the brand logo, as from their standpoint, luxury fashion is associated with the way in which items contribute to their style.

"If I see someone with head to toe luxury brand outfit umm again like it depends if it looks a bit unpolished and it's all like logo, logo, logo I feel like umm you know it's almost like they are trying to prove something, but I personally prefer people that are a lot more understated." (Consumer, UAE) On the other hand, conspicuous consumers claim *"most people who indulge in luxury fashion shopping do it more to impress others rather than buy the actual product for themselves."* (Consumer, UAE)

Since each type of luxury fashion products (*quiet and loud*) are designed to meet different demands, connecting and interacting with each item can create markedly different responses in consumers. In terms of geographical comparisons, the current theme did not seem to concern consumers from the UK as much. Responses indicate consumers from the UAE take the consumption of *silent* products more seriously. Additionally, consumers in the UAE demonstrated greater interest towards luxury fashion brands that produce items with higher price points. Hence, brands such as Hermes, Christian Louboutin, Dior and Chanel where often mentioned among this group of interviewees. These mentioned brands are often categorised at a higher luxury level compared to the brand scope that my research explores (Burberry, Dolce Gabbana, Gucci, Emporio Armani). Considering all the above discussions, it could be said that the consumption of luxury fashion is influenced by how consumers perceive the brand, regardless of the product and the consumer type. This thesis pays specific attention to understanding the factors that influence such perceptions.

5.2.0 Factors influencing luxury fashion consumption

As discussed in the previous Section, the data indicates that luxury fashion consumption aids its consumers with expressing distinction and/ or belong with a social class. However, luxury fashion consumption is not solely about identifying with a social class. The evidence collected via interviews, highlighted five influential factors on luxury fashion consumption namely: the expression of feelings, product quality, social group membership, social media production and shopping experience. Within each of the sub-sections below the role of marketing strategies are discussed in order to evaluate how marketers take advantage of these influences in order to reinforce the culture of consumption. These findings underpin my questionnaire results by contributing deeper insights from the standpoint of consumers, retail associates and a social media influencer in the UAE and the UK. Reflecting on the points emerged from the

data that demonstrate how luxury fashion consumption encompasses a process that in itself psychological and social processes coexist, at this stage of the thesis, the complexity of luxury fashion consumption is better understood through a psychosocial lens. The essential element that underlies the influence of all of the above themes revolves around this notion. In effect, findings thus far, inform the research that consumers' perception is fundamentally constructed through psychosocial influences.

5.3.0 The expression of feelings

All categories of respondents from both countries, displayed a decent awareness on the contribution of luxury fashion towards how consumers feel about themselves after purchase. However, the expression of feelings using luxury fashion consumption seems to be different among individuals based on their personal goals and desires. Certain consumers buy into luxury fashion products based on how a product represents their identity. Whereas, certain consumers express their feelings of achievement by rewarding themselves with a luxury product that makes them feel better about themselves. This sense of satisfaction depends on the consumer's intentions behind their act of consumption. Some individuals may derive satisfaction from the ability to buy into such products, while there are consumers that feel satisfied by expressing their subjective fashion taste and style. Interestingly, in this regard, a consumer from the UK appeared to be an exception. The interviewee claimed luxury fashion consumption does not help him express his feelings, as he buys luxury fashion items to express his style.

"To be honest it doesn't help me express my feelings but it helps me express my style."(Consumer, UK)

The above quotation is challenged as the interviewee implies there is no relationship between expression of style and the expression of feelings: to this consumer luxury consumption speaks for itself. From this respondents' point of view style is self-evident, almost factual. More broadly, style enables consumers to reflect upon how they feel by its display. In the dynamics of fashion pattern adopting a style is also a mode of social conduct. In effect, expressing style is concerned with either marking superiority or distinctiveness, which is therefore an expression of such feelings through style (Gronow, 1993).

"Acquiring luxury fashion products help me with a sense of satisfaction on my success." (Consumer, UAE)

Considering the above example, it is fair to argue that luxury fashion consumption has provided the participants with a feeling of satisfaction. Luxury fashion items effectively play the role of a reward for the individual successes of the participants. Interviewees indicated that luxury products also spark motivation to strive for further achievements. The above interviewee also touched upon the point that obtaining a luxury fashion product is not necessarily due to its functional benefit as it could be used to enhance self-confidence and 'self-esteem'. Luxury fashion consumption can be seen to play a positive role as a motive for individuals to work harder, which in turn contributes to feelings of satisfaction. Such findings was also highlighted in the quantitative data attained from the 'luxury fashion' questionnaire.

"It is the reward of my hard work it's the fact that I have worked for my money and I have reached a certain financial status that I can afford these things that means a lot to me.." (Consumer, UK)

According to the participant's emphasis, the demonstration of wealth appears especially pertinent in this regard. However, such data does not imply that satisfaction is derived directly

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from luxury fashion consumption. It is argued that there are several deeper elements that underpin the motives behind getting a sense of satisfaction from luxury items. This issue is associated with the emergence of materialism in contemporary society, which plays its part in encouraging individuals towards buying into luxury fashion products as materials with values that signify symbols of wealth and status. Thus, what does appear to provide consumers with satisfaction is the financial ability to buy into luxury fashion goods. Therefore, the perceived sense of satisfaction attained from buying into a luxury fashion products may not last long, the feeling of belonging it engenders is transient. Luxury fashion consumption is an ideal source insofar as it allows the consumer to replenish his or her sense of self-satisfaction over and over again. In this way, consumers become dependent on the *sense* of security that luxury fashion consumption provides. The consequences of this issue are twofold. From an economic perspective, luxury fashion consumption motivates consumers towards financial growth. In contrast, relying on material consumption could contribute significantly to what could be said to be a negative quality of life (Sirgy, 2011). Two issues emerge here, first, what pressures consumers into sacrificing their quality of life in pursuit of economic advancement? Second, are consumers necessarily conscious of the negative effects of material consumption? The argument here is that individuals' prioritise the expression of their socio-economic achievement over well-being due to psychosocial influences. Correspondingly, Wood and Wood, (2012) use the concept of *capital identity projection* to describe this issue as a psychosocial malady. The question here is, does luxury fashion brand consumption, in actual fact, help consumers with expressing their feeling: or is it just a psychosocial perception that simply enables them to imagine as much? In this sense, luxury fashion consumption is not necessarily an autonomous form of satisfying the self, but rather a relief from psychosocial pressures that sit at the heart of what it means to be a consumer.

To a degree at least, luxury fashion consumption mirrors individuals' intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Based on the data obtained from interviews, it is argued that the ability of luxury fashion items to allow for the expression of moods has an impact on luxury fashion consumption. Consumers display a strong awareness in regards to how luxury fashion products fulfil their sense of satisfaction after a successful personal achievement. In considering these sorts of influences, it is also worth presenting respondents emphasis associated with the tangible product itself. Since the quality of luxury fashion products is a reoccurring theme that was also discussed by my respondents in the qualitative finding of my questionnaire.

5.3.1 Product quality

When it comes to quality, durability and the design of luxury fashion products consumers have high expectations. *"When you pay a premium for it you know that the product quality is good."* (Consumer, UAE) However, on one hand, some respondents argued that luxury fashion brands are overpriced and not necessarily consumed for their quality. On the other, there were participants whom perceived luxury fashion items with high quality products and as the main reason they buy into luxury fashion brands. *"It is very rare for me to buy a luxury product just because of the way it looks because in reality for me in terms of design I think Zara beats everything it is way more futuristic and their designs and much more better."* (Consumer, UK)

The above contention suggests that the interviewee does not necessarily buy into luxury fashion items solely due to its design. In contrast, other participants who discussed this issue, identified quality and design as one of the reasons they prefer buying into luxury fashion brands instead of options with lower price points:

"Since I started working at the Gucci store, I have trouble shopping at other fashion stores, for example even Zara, which is actually quite a nice brand I cannot find something that I would like to get. Because I feel like design is nothing special, the fabrics are not the quality that I am looking for. So, it makes it difficult. So, the quality does matter a lot and it does have a different quality." (Retail associate, UAE)

The response above indicates how the quality of luxury fashion products is an important factor in my respondents' consumption of luxury fashion brands as compared to non-luxury brands from the UK who claimed that Zara has better designs than luxury fashion brands. A retail associate from the UAE, pointed out that her experience working for a luxury fashion brand raised her awareness on the quality of materials used to make a fashion item as a consumer. The interviewee further stressed that the quality of luxury fashion products cannot be compared to non-luxury fashion brands such as Zara. It is interesting to note that Zara which is not a luxury fashion brand was mentioned often by the interviewees, either as a non-luxury fashion brand with better designs than luxury items, or vice versa, as a non-luxury brand that cannot match luxury fashion items in terms of design and quality. The issue here is not that which brand produces better designs as this matter is subjective and dependent upon consumers' individual preference. The key point here is concerned with the role that tangible qualities of a product plays in luxury fashion consumption.

"I think in terms of features and benefits of luxury products that the non-luxury products got I would say quality.." (Retail associate, UK)

Luxury fashion brands are perceived to have utilitarian attributes. In effect, producing high quality products is necessary. However, the quality of an item alone is not sufficient to be qualified as luxury. The point here is that the fundamental reason that distinguishes luxury

fashion products with non-luxury fashion products is the socially constructed meanings embedded with luxury goods. Such aspects should be taken into consideration, as these products are marks of social distinction. Thus, it is argued that consumers would not indulge in these products to the extent that they do, if it was not for the meanings that consumers apply to luxury items in a social context. Kant (1980) thus suggests that fashion has nothing to do with actual taste but stems only from human vanity and social competition and the thirst for social standing. This is a claim that resonates in my data insofar as it indicates that the quality of products appear very important to consumers. However, according to Kant fashion is limited to consumers getting the better out of each other. In this sense, through luxury fashion consumption, individuals compete by presenting their position in the social hierarchy. Hereby, luxury fashion products are simply signifiers of value, as a cultural capital that mirrors economical capital.

'"In Dubai and London as well both are very multicultural cities and a lot of wealthy individuals live there as well. So, basically a fashion war to be honest, basically who could wear the most expensive or the most you know fashionable clothing." (Consumer, UK)

In this case, what role does the utilitarian values of luxury fashion items play in consumption? Through the lens that Kant views fashion, fashion is an inherently social phenomenon. However, the design of the products also plays an important role. As the interviewee above indicated, social competition (what is in effect a fashion war*)*, involves how fashionable/stylish consumers present themselves, which is subjected to an individuals' taste. Whether consumers appear fashionable or not, luxury goods are commodities that symbolise the power of capital (Marx, 1990). It has to be mentioned that the above quotation, reflect the communities and social groups that are ubiquitous to the consumer concerned, since not

everyone in Dubai and London is necessarily wealthy. Such responses suggest that interviewees observe the whole city through their own experiences and interpretations, which are not necessarily either objective or true. In effect, luxury fashion consumption is found to be influenced by the more micro-0social groups that individual's surround themselves with. This debate centres the theme in the subsequent section.

5.3.2 Social groups

My data illustrates that my interviewees regard social groups as an important influence on luxury fashion consumption. In this respect, I should acknowledge that there was discernible divergence between retail associates and consumers in the UK in the material collected. Retail associates based in the UK mainly emphasised how consumers buy into luxury primarily to fit in with the normative influences exerted by their social groups.

"Consumers are seen a certain way and to be accepted into a certain friendship group or you know something like that. I think when they buy luxury, they buy it to almost like aspiration to look a certain way or to have a certain product just to say they have it rather than actually buying it because they like it or because they like the material used or manufacturing process. They buy it just to say I have got that bag I have got those shoes I have got that jumper." (Retail associate, UK)

The point here is that, luxury fashion consumption at a deeper level, can be said to offer a focus for interaction between the individual and members of his or her social group. Considering the established value of luxury fashion items, members of social groups communicate through symbolic cues. In effect, an individual's quest for genuine individuality requires attitude immune towards social forces. Hence, seeking out of individuality becomes challenging in the contemporary society. Despite this issue, some of my UK respondents

claimed that '*society*' has no influence on their luxury fashion consumption. It is important to consider that what my respondents view society as is subjective in its nature, but there are possibilities that respondents refer to social circles, groups and their perceived image of society.

"*Society doesn't really influence me as a person, because I always think smart like if I cannot afford something at the moment I simply do not buy it. I would not you know, go into debt or spend the money that I don't have in order to buy it for the sake of buying it and getting that society approval stamp, not my thing really umm society doesn't influence my luxury fashion consumption at all specially when it comes to clothing and items.*" (Consumer, UK)

The respondent seems to imply that luxury fashion goods are perceived as a legitimate social emblem that he does not subscribe to by claiming his luxury fashion consumption is not influenced by such perceptions. Thus, a question emerges here: is luxury fashion consumption in these cases an autonomous choice? The suggestion here is that consumers claim that society doesn't really influence them personally, cannot be true, at least through a psychosocial lens since humans are fundamentally social beings and our psychological experience is social, in effect we are influenced by our social groups and society without necessarily being aware of its impact (Stenner, 2017). To this end, some respondents demonstrate how it is that places and different social groups in different places influence the clothing choice of individuals in contrast to what my respondent above claimed.

 "*Something which may not look like my style is opera, so they only wear suits normally because they are really nice like black and white suits and I normally like to buy my suits from Burberry because the style and the material is different. Because I have not seen any other suit that has the material like with mad black and nail print and when I go to those places,*

those places encourage me to dress nice. However, when I am in University, not many people use expensive brands and that is the reason I just don't wear it around here. So, I don't see a point to wear it actually, and in terms of partying I don't like partying." (Consumer, UK)

Researcher: So, you mentioned you don't see a point wearing luxury fashion in University environment.

"No I don't, if you want to know why like I said because you don't see many other students wear expensive brands. So, in some ways it influences me, or it proves to me there is no point to wear expensive brands. However, when I go to theatre or opera or stuff like that they wear really nice outfits so of course you want to be on same level so yea." (Consumer, UK)

Researcher: So, you type of want to match the environment, so another question is that since you said no one wears luxury fashion brands in the university you don't feel like wearing it. So, if you wear it and no one wears it you would look unique. So, why you would not want to look unique?

"Because of my friends I don't want to wear something expensive yea? With like around my friends when some of them maybe struggling with money so I feel uncomfortable. I don't want to basically go around to display power in front of my friends or be different. However, in places like party or restaurants you want to feel different because you don't know the people, so you want to feel different but with my friends I want to feel the same." (Consumer, UK)

The interviewee expressed that he is aware of how other individuals feel in regards to his expensive luxury outfits. Therefore, he believes it really matters in what sort of environments he prefers wearing his luxury fashion items. This, in fact, involves social and psychological influences on a consumer's thinking processes, which results from the complex interplay

between an individuals' mind and social environment. Interviewees seem highly conscious of how to present themselves consistently while courting favour with the perceived favour of their social groups, in addition to the particular event or environment they visit. Consumers in the UK mentioned that it is not comfortable for them to wear their luxury items with the group of friends whom do not necessarily indulge with luxury fashion brands or may not be able to afford luxury products. Fashion is, in effect more than anything, contextual.

"You can't go in a poor area wearing luxury clothes you really feel bad about it why there is a gap between upper class and poor people. But obviously if you're going to a place that everyone is from the same class or nearly close class to you then it feels good that everyone is wearing premium quality and unique designs and styles." (Consumer, UK)

As the UK based consumers often suggested, on the one hand consuming luxury fashion brands among people with financial issues is a negative experience for them. On the other, displaying luxury fashion products among individuals that belong to a similar social class seems to motivate their luxury fashion consumption. Herein lies a psychosocial paradox. How can consumers relate to a social group while also being separate? Consequently, luxury fashion consumption is imbued by a contradictorily simultaneous operation between communal and individual meanings which are embedded in the consumer's mind without them necessarily being consciously aware of it? The tension here is that luxury fashion goods can be viewed as marks that enable consumers to display their belonging to a certain social class whilst distinguishing themselves from others that is in turn a psychosocial demand. Nevertheless, in reflecting upon the responses discussed in this section thus far, the display of luxury fashion products among people in a weaker financial situation makes individuals' uncomfortable according to the data in certain cases. Data implies that individuals feel the

need to align themselves with the individuals they associate with whether they are wealthy or not.

All categories of interviewees from the UAE reflected upon the existence of highly brand conscious social groups in Dubai. Social group influence was found to be a more consistent theme in the responses from the UAE respondents than in the case of their UAE counterparts. As such, a consumer from the UAE suggested that the country and the social groups he associates with really influences his consumption as he discussed certain countries that he visits for business trips have a different perception towards luxury fashion brands compared to Dubai.

"The society of Dubai you are portrayed, in order to wear luxury fashion brand or branded items. But, when you go to places like Tajikestan or Turkemenstan even if you wear those brands because of the status or the income they probably have never seen these brands and if you wear that it would probably have no meaning they will be like 'what is he wearing?' So, yeah it depends, it depends on the society and the country you are in, do they understand it? Do they have those brands in their country? In the city? So, yeah it is very important on country basis." (Consumer, UAE)

The interviewee emphasises how Dubai society plays its part in their consumption of luxury fashion brands. The point here is this respondent is more concerned with the awareness of the individuals that surround him as a consumer in respect to luxury fashion brands. Thus, maybe in local communities, or countries that people are not as brand conscious compared to his social groups in Dubai, wearing luxury branded items may or may not have the same perceived impact as it does in in Dubai. It is therefore argued, public consciousness among

social groups in respect to luxury fashion brands, influences its consumption as it seems to help consumers to fit in with their social groups.

"I live in Dubai, so Dubai is more like luxury place everyone has all the trendy stuff to date. Everyone is so updated with fashion, like people wearing stuff in Paris fashion week people will have it here. Because that is how consumers are here they want everything new something that just hit the runway they want it they want to wear it". (Social media influencer, UAE)

Social group influence in both countries was evident among the responses. In comparison to consumers from the UAE, consumers from the UK were more concerned with the influence of places, events and their inner circle, in respect to luxury fashion consumption. Whereas interviewees from the UAE indicated that, it is mainly their social groups and the social system in Dubai that makes luxury consumption a social norm in certain communities. The nuance that underlies such data implies that cultural forces in Dubai's environment impinges upon luxury fashion consumption as consumers feel pressured to present themselves through the prism that luxury goods provide, since they are conscious of the attention paid to what they are wearing by their social groups. Luxury fashion goods serve as means of marking a belonging to social groups. In effect, luxury fashion consumption becomes a thoroughly cultural phenomenon, as these brands represent an important arena of social life in these social groups. As such, the following quote, illustrates how the culture of consumption among different social groups in different cities of the UAE and the UK influences fashion consumption.

"I would say for example in Birmingham the whole idea was 'River Island' and 'TopMan' and everything depends on the crowd. But, if it is somewhere in Dubai it is extremely (repeats extremely) powerful. There you have to wear this luxury fashion brands as a minimum, as a

minimum to get by. Whereas if you do the same thing in the UK you stand out way more. In that way definitely influences the consumption. In London itself with advertising and everything it definitely helps, there is always new range products out. I think, although, places like Dubai have caught up but, in terms of influencing, when you see everyone around you in Dubai wearing it you feel like you probably have to shop more to maintain, to keep up with everyone else. Whereas in London you can buy something and relax for a certain while and wait a bit longer for something else." (Consumer, UK)

In light of discussions above, regardless of the geographical environment of a consumer, the fundamental issue concerns consumers' self-consciousness. Since in certain social groups' luxury fashion items are ubiquitous, it in turn raises a consumers' awareness and empowers the possibility of consumption in order to fit in with these groups. This occurs as consumer culture is ingrained in an individuals' consciousness.   As could be deduced by the responses I received, social influences play an important role in luxury fashion consumption both in the UAE and the UK. Considering the current digital age we live in, social influence is also generated through social media, which is the theme driving the following section.

5.3.3 Social media

In today's society where the habit of using mobile phone creates a high volume of electronic word of mouth, individuals are motivated to share their thoughts and feelings on Instagram, using captioned photos that includes images and texts. Online consumer content has been addressed as user generated content (Vassalo et al., 2018). 'User generated content is an increasingly important means through which consumers express themselves and communicate with others on social media (Smith et al., 2011).' In this sense, consumers use Instagram to display their luxury fashion items on their Instagram profiles. My respondents'

often highlighted that social media encourages luxury fashion consumption with the aid of sponsoring the appropriate popular names such as celebrities and social media influencers.

"If it is a new trend and they see them a lot in social media for example, a lot of people wear them the pattern the colour umm consumers are more likely to buy those." (Retail associate, UK)

Taking this point into consideration, social media can be said to have a key influence in the promotion of luxury fashion consumption. The interesting point here is the way in which luxury fashion brands are promoted and the contemporary fashion world is changing as marketing is becoming more dependent on social media and its influencers. In the present decade, Instagram could be said to play the role that *MTV* played in past decades as one of the most powerful cultural forces influencing the consumption of fashion (Jones, 2005). From a marketing perspective, in fact, what has altered is the platform, since whether it is MTV or Instagram, a considerable segment of consumers naturally gravitate towards products promoted by celebrities. Thus, the essential matter here is the human tendency to imitate, and all its sociological and psychological dimensions, since consumers aspire to buy into similar brands as popular public figures, motivated by the influence of social media.

"Nowadays social media platforms such as Instagram have a huge impact on consumers' mind-set I would say. But, the advertisements make a difference and also the influencers again because they for example in our industry there is a certain Chinese model who wears Gucci and then all the Chinese attack our store and they want that product" (Retail associate, UAE).

The above contention strengthens the argument that the rise of Instagram impinges upon the luxury fashion market today. The interviewee suggests that Instagram posts by models

and influencers are highly effective in sales. The interviewee referred to the Gucci 'Princetown' slippers with fur (displayed below) as an example of a product that sold particularly well as an outcome of a trend influenced by Instagram. This item became a popular trend and huge amount of consumers bought into it.

Figure 5.1. Gucci 'Prince town' slippers

What I am effectively arguing here is that in the culture of consumption, the effectiveness of trends lies in its psychosocial influences, namely the interface between the psychological and sociological. It is in this context that: the balance between an individual's determination to be an individual and the pressure he or she is under to feel part of something underpins the consumption of a trending product. In this sense, fashion trends could contribute to a consumers' social cohesion within their community. Social cohesion refers to the extent of connectedness between consumers and their social groups. Simmel's (1971) point, in regards to fashion being an act of imitation, seems to be the case with the example above. Accordingly, a consumers social self, takes cues from other members of his or her social group. Consequently, a luxury item, allows its consumers to imitate and belong, while perceiving themselves as fashionable and unique. If this were not the case, why would a large group of consumers buy into the same product? On this basis, the influence of trends in luxury fashion consumption emanates from a consumer's psychosocial perspective" they are more than isolated individuals. In effect, individuals seek to look like Instagram influencers and in turn

consume similar items. Consumers at times blindly imitate Instagram influencers and popular figures based on their *followers* and *likes*.

"I think it is popularity, it is something like if a few people are wearing it or few people that you look up too like the Kardashian's or Kylie Jenner had this trainer or had this Gucci star flash or whatever it is called. It will be sold out literally in two hours after they have posted it on Instagram." (Retail associate, UK)

The Instagram influencers mentioned above, have over 185 million Instagram followers each. Such influencers actively reinforce popular culture in luxury fashion consumption, since their posts heavily influence consumers as the data suggests. There are two issues here. First, whether it is the consumers taste to buy into such promoted goods, or is it to fit in with popular culture. The Second issue with Instagram as a contemporary cultural force in consumption is that, there are no gatekeepers to govern the merits of its influencers. In this sense, considering Wilde's (1883) contention that 'whatever popular is wrong', (which may not be necessarily true in all cases); the rationality of luxury fashion consumption should be questioned. The tension here lies in whether there is an actual sense of individuality resides in luxury fashion consumption, under the influence of popular culture. In this regard, I argue that consumers are conform towards psychosocial perceptions constructed in their mind, often aligned with the images portrayed by the popular culture. In effect, consumption influenced by Instagram does not necessarily have a positive impact on a consumers' mental wellbeing in the long term. The backlash of such influences seemingly affects an individuals' insecurity, as consumers feel less than adequate in their appearance when they compare themselves with Instagram influencers who own latest luxurious items. 'From this point of view, culture is bad simply because it is popular' (Miles, 2001:18).

An interviewee provided further elaboration concerning this matter.

"If you are not relevant on social media you are deemed as not relevant in this society. I just think it is quite interesting, relevancy is about how many 'followers' you have how many 'likes' you have on your pictures. You may not get a lot of pictures if you got something from Primark. But, if you got a Gucci bag or Louboutin heels you are more likely to get this confirmation from people that you are relevant. And you are important and a lot of this is tied up with what you got to buy luxury items for people to like you and see you as kind of up there. Sometimes I compare myself feeling a bit down, I'd be scrolling and I will be like oh this girl she has always got new outfits and I can't afford to do that and then you start to stress out and it is not realistic." (Retail associate, UK)

As such, it is worth shedding light upon a marketing formula in macro level sales. The process of this formula includes two stages: first, a problem is created to increase demand for a product or service, second, the solution is supplied via the product or service. In this way, a problem is generated by bombarding consumers through social media with latest luxury goods, to the extent that consumers feel the necessity to belong and appear *relevant* to their social groups. The suggestion here is that, when a product becomes a trend and ubiquitous in the gaze of its target market the consumers targeted will then be influenced by trends and feel the need to be a part of it this in itself, which in turn creates a demand for buying into the product. Hence, consumption becomes a solution to the problem created as an aftermath of this rational process**.** At this stage, it is interesting to view this problem through the lens of an Instagram influencer in the luxury fashion industry.

"It's a sad truth but it's true that people are very into their material. People think material can make them look nicer and give them inner confidence, which should not be the case. But,

materialistic people would want the best shoes, best handbags, the best clothes, that make them look better if they can't work on other things like their physique or etc. umm this is very common now everybody wants to look nice, luxury, and rich. Nowadays people would spend in luxury to make them feel better." (Social media influencer, UAE)

Godin (2020) puts forward the idea that consumers are products in the ecosystem of social media. These platforms have manufactured a regime to inject insecurity, and the only way to feel less insecure is to buy into luxury goods. This is why by posting photos with the latest luxury fashion products on Instagram consumers are more likely to receive *likes* and *followers.* Receiving *likes* and *followers* appears to be an important motive behind luxury fashion consumption especially among younger consumers who potentially spend more time on social media and are more likely to be influenced as they go about constructing their identities. My argument is that such negative influences stem from capitalism as a world order where the priority of large corporations such as luxury fashion brands and Instagram is to generate revenue. This, in fact, empowers the ideology of capitalism in extending its control. These companies make profit from an individual's insecurity and anxiety simply because consumption contributes to the economic machine that lies at the heart of this system.

From a marketing point of view, Instagram is a great opportunity to promote the culture of consumption in the luxury fashion industry. With the emergence of Instagram as a marketing tool, individuals are effectively becoming a product of the content they consume. The rise of social media and Instagram in particular has launched a platform with 1 billion active targets for luxury fashion brands to market their products. The findings imply that Instagram fashion influencers and celebrities play a crucial part in creating trends and luxury fashion brand consumption. Thus, sponsoring and working with a suitable public figure appears to be an

effective marketing strategy undertaken by luxury fashion brands. However, for marketers applying such strategies requires an insightful understanding of marketing and sociology in respect to fashion. The data also suggests that Instagram influencers often visit luxury fashion stores and inform their *followers*, thereby parking a motivation in the mind of their followers to visit the store as well. The following section provides deeper insights on how influential is the shopping experience on luxury fashion consumption.

5.3.4 Shopping experience

The present section draws attention to the shopping experience. The service that consumers get and the way they are treated by retail associates has been a noticeable theme in my data that both category of participants from both countries shared. Retail associates who took part in this research advised that they were not necessarily trained to sell products; they act as individuals who meet, greet and serve consumers from the moment they step in the store until the moment consumer is buying into a product. From the consumers' point of view, luxury fashion consumers express how they value their shopping experience and point out that service that they get at luxury stores is exceptional, and an important reason for their consumption in the modern day where the retail industry is not at its best with the emergence of online shopping**.**

 "First of all, it is all about the way we treat our every single client that steps in to our store, every single client is unique. Second place comes the bond that we create with that particular client. We share moments, we offer refreshments, the time we take to discover and meet our client needs. We are building a relationship with our clients that lasts in time based on trust and confidence. For instance on their birthday, we offer gifts or treats, which makes them feel special." (Retail associate, UK)

It appears that the bond that associates tend to create with their clients while consumers are shopping at the store enhances the shopping experience for consumers. The experience of walking to a luxury fashion store for an hour is not just limited to buying a product. It serves consumers with a whole package of shopping experience that includes, offering drinks, having conversations with the associates whom intend to serve and making customers feel special. Luxury fashion branding experts have provided appropriate training sessions for their associates to ensure consumers leave the store satisfied, which is a prime example of maintaining consumer satisfaction.

"You can spend an hour in there like chatting and different things and you do tend to come out happy. They want you to keep coming back and purchase off them it is almost like making this relationship. It is psychological even if you don't actually want to buy anything it very much gets you bought into this luxury shopping experience and how this makes you feel." (Retail associate, UK)

A consumer from the UAE expressed how essential the role of an associate was at the Gucci store when the interviewee made a purchase. The respondent did not have the intention to shop on that occasion, but the treatment that she received in the store, in addition to the story behind the product had a significant influence on her consumption in this particular case. The following quote illustrates a vivid example of such luxury fashion shopping experiences.

"I remember once I was in Gucci and this guy was an amazing sales man because I wasn't going to buy anything. As I was just looking around and he knew that, and he took the time to basically, talk to me about the collection he was showing me the bag and the story behind it and I love that because I really appreciate it when you tell me story behind that like the

inspiration. Because again you are showing me the amount of creativity and attention to detail and this guy was definitely inspired by some story book and then there was like a tiny version of that story book in the bag. It was amazing and then he sat me down with a coffee and I asked him is it ok for you to talk to me like that when you are working? He said "no! no! in Gucci we love to talk to our customers and building this relationship" and I love that because its true like it made go like I love this brand I want to come back again I love the way they treat me." (Consumer, UAE)

Luxury fashion consumers that took part in this research specified that the extra special service provided for them at the store is of importance as they pay premium prices for a luxury product and as such, they expect a luxury experience. The importance of the shopping experience at a luxury store was found to be more important than the quality of the item in the case of a consumer from the UK.

"Something which is really important for me is customer service because when I am spending so much money and the second I get through their door I like them when they are welcoming when they ask hello how are you because in my case customer service is really important, then it comes the quality of the product."(Consumer, UK)

The evidence collected, stresses the significance of the shopping experience, in the context of luxury fashion consumption. However, considering the response above, it of course cannot be concluded that the shopping experience is more important than the quality of products to all luxury fashion consumers, yet it seems to be an influential factor in luxury fashion consumption according to the findings of this study. The retail associate from the UAE added more about how consumers feel while having a shopping experience in Gucci.

"The service you get is different they make you feel like a queen you choose the item you want and the item you want is not something that not everyone could have again you are unique. They don't go to the normal stores because the service is better with ours." (Retail associate, UAE)

Maintaining a high level of customer service and providing clients with a good experience is key for brands to motivate consumption as an interviewee described without a doubt it is the experience that makes her prefer luxury fashion brands over non luxury ones, this is what she had to say in this regard *"Oh god a 1000% definitely the experience."* (Consumer, UAE)

From a marketing perspective the qualitative outcomes clearly suggest that, the way in which luxury fashion brands serve their customers within the store and the experience they deliver, contributes in making consumers feel special. Creating an extraordinary experience for customers is a marketing strategy in itself. Therefore, shopping experience is an additional luxury element that brands provide for their consumers.

5.4.0 Summary of luxury fashion interviews results and analysis Chapter

In this chapter, I established the principle that financial and cultural values are abstracted through luxury fashion consumption. In a world driven by capitalism, luxury fashion goods represent a value exchanged through the way individuals perceive it. In this sense, just like economic capital, luxury goods as signifiers of cultural capital represent a certain value. However, the exchange value for economic capital is objective, while the symbolic value exchanged through luxury fashion goods is a subjective matter, determined by the consumers' perceived value, and constituted by psychosocial influences. The question remains, would luxury fashion brands be of such value if there were no divisions in the structure of social classes? My argument here is that luxury fashion consumption, is a way in

which, the consumer culture validates the social divisions that consumer capitalism depends upon. In effect, consumers constitute a metaphorical multitude of drops that contribute to the ocean of capitalism with each and every transaction. From a marketing perspective, is the consumer culture in the luxury fashion industry actually contributing to its consumers' uniqueness and individuality? From a luxury fashion consumers' standpoint, are consumers keen on sophisticated marketing influences that offer what they perceive to desire through luxury fashion items? I therefore, attempt to address these questions in the following discussion chapter by integrating my questionnaire and interview findings that shed new light on understanding luxury fashion consumption from a psychosocial perspective.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion of findings

6.0.0 Introduction

After analysing the data in Chapters 4 and 5, it became clear that luxury fashion consumption requires a broader outlook to unravel the complexities that exist in how an individual perceives a value for luxury fashion goods. In an attempt to simplify such complexities, I have identified that self-consciousness, self-construal, self-enhancement, ownership and materialism are the underlying constructs that influence the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption. I have therefore, developed a theoretical model that demonstrates the simultaneous influence of these factors. Put simply, these findings indicate how luxury fashion consumers in both the UAE and the UK seek well-being and owning quality materials through the consumption of these goods. Furthermore, a fundamental issue that this chapter aims to reflect upon is that through a psychosocial lens research is better able to capture a wider spectrum of influences on the consumption of luxury fashion goods.

In respect to academic discipline, the intention here is to reinforce the contention that luxury fashion brand consumption, as far as the results are concerned, is better understood by more effectively combining the insights of a combined marketing and sociological approach. In this light, in the following section, I will explain how the term 'culture' has been interpreted differently in the past decades among Consumer Culture Theory debates and research associated with marketing and consumer behaviour studies that have attempted to compare luxury fashion consumers with diverse cultural backgrounds and geographical locations. As such, in the contemporary globalised world that is highly influenced by globalisation there is

no straightforward answer to the question as to what are the cultural influences on the consumption of luxury fashion goods whether it may be the cultural background, the social groups, the media or all the mentioned factors. What I want to suggest is that, as the world is becoming more and more globalised, what factors should be considered in order to have a deeper understanding of the term culture in regards to consumption of luxury fashion materials.

6.1.0 Cultural issues

The results in Chapter 4 demonstrate that more participants from the UK that are broadly categorised as 'individualists' who are subordinated to social group influence than is the case for participants from the UAE who are broadly better defined as collectivists (Hofstede, 1980). In regards to cross-cultural comparisons in consumer behaviour, this finding is consistent with the findings of Bian and Forsythe (2012) who found luxury brand consumers in China (collectivist) are less influenced by their social groups than the consumers in the United States (individualists). It is interesting to note that the hypothesis of Bian and Forsythe (2012), prior to conducting their primary research, was contrary to their finding. Such similar hypothesis and results reoccurred in Aliyev and Wagner's (2018) when they studied cultural influences on luxury value perceptions by primarily placing emphasis on the Hofstede's individuality dimension with consumers residing in Germany (Individualists), and Azerbaijan (Collectivist). It was found that the social group influence is stronger on German consumers (individualists). For this reason, I argue, categorising individuals as 'individualists' to represent western cultures and 'collectivists' to represent eastern cultures (Middle eastern in the case of my research) may not necessarily capture the complexity of how it is an individual consumer balances the demands on him or her to conform to social group influences. In the following

section, I further develop a case for arguing that understanding culture requires a more fluid approach in the context of luxury fashion consumption.

6.1.1 *Culture* in today's luxury fashion consumption

As I noted in Chapter 2, the over-simplification of categorising Western individuals as individualists and Eastern individuals as collectivists has reoccurred commonly in the literature (He and Zhang, 2012; Gul, 2010; Gao et al., 2009; Grouzet et al., 2005; Eastman et al., 1999; Dubois and Laurent, 1994; Dubois and Duquesne, 1993; Grossman and Shapiro, 1988). The suggestion in prior literature is that collectivist cultures have a greater tendency towards conforming to the expectations of others in their social groups compared to individualists. Hence, the literature has tended to simplify notions of individualism and collectivism, and by concentrating on Hofstede's (1980) dimension of individuality it discriminates between individualists and collectivists.

My argument is that this dualism is misleading in the context of contemporary luxury fashion consumption. Hofstede's (1980) study was conducted four decades ago, at the time the world was not as globalised as it is in the present day. Trandis (1982) raised his concerns by concluding that the suitability of cultural difference theory in a transition global economy needs further examination. Nevertheless, the intention here is not to undermine the contributions of Hofstede's study, since he considered 'individualism' and 'collectivism' as terms to explain the differences between national societies. The primary goal is to argue that the consensus of rigid classification of individuals based on Hofstede's dimension in the context of perceived value of luxury fashion consumption necessitates the incorporation of broader consumer culture theories, in order that a deeper level of understanding of cultural influences in the luxury fashion market can be developed. This discourse is underpinned by

a theme that emerged through the course of the interview discussed in Chapter 5, which draws attention to the impact of popular figures via social media on luxury fashion brand consumption. The implication here is that whether participants reside in the UAE or the UK, their perceived value is under the influence of popular celebrities, often Western, that demonstrate a sense of belonging through social media platforms, and promote it through their profession (e.g. Artists through music, Fashion influencers through Instagram). This redirects us to debates from Latouche (1993) who argued that material standards of living are accompanied by a repressive process of westernisation that continues to take place. In this sense, westernisation is a process whereby societies embrace western culture in such a way that consumers are obliged to follow similar norms, values and fashion trends.

A prime example of the above, that is a tiny part of westernisation in the context of this argument, can be found in the lyrics of many western popular hit singles in a music industry that promotes the culture of luxury fashion consumption, whether it is intentional or not. For instance, a song called 'Gucci Gang' by an American Artist (Lil Pump) with 1 billion views on YouTube alone since its release in 2017, the lyrics of this song repeats '*Gucci Gang*' 8 times in the chorus of the song. This number of YouTube views, may indicate these songs are receiving worldwide attention or are part of an agenda designed by the culture industry to receive such attention (Adorno,1963). The issue here concerns the strong possibility that popular music and the high cultural value attached to it, could symbolically permeate in terms of culture that promotes consumption of luxury fashion brands. Consequently, certain ''existing cultural meanings are shaped by social elites and opinion leaders such as pop stars, who disseminate cultural innovations and styles throughout society. Consumers with less influence imitate these appropriations. Finally, the fashion system radically reforms the cultural meanings invested in goods'' (Miles, 1998:92).

The emphasis here on western popular music is due to its potential global influence on the culture of luxury fashion consumption, and how the impact of popular music is a cultural influence that cannot be gleaned through categorising luxury fashion consumers into individualists and collectivists. It's important to consider the impact of such influences on the culture of luxury fashion consumption that affect consumers' perceived value all over the globe.

The fundamental issue I endeavour to raise above is that the perceived 'self', and how luxury fashion value is perceived is a manifestation of psychosocial and cultural influences combined. Bourdieu (1979) suggests it is almost impossible for an individual to avoid cultural influences through some unrealisable notion of his or her true nature; it plays a vital role in the constitution of how values are perceived in a social group. Hence, a core self could not actually exist as individuals adopt a broad spectrum of influences every moment they scroll through their phone while they explore social media platforms. As such, the influence of culture on a consumers' perception of value are less and less localised, whereas the global influences have become more and more intensified. The emergence of a digital world has created an online market that makes the impact of social media and globalisation go hand in hand on influencing consumers' perception of value. This is also bound up to the idea of modernity, that is, "the world is no longer governed by traditions, but rather by flux" (Slatter, 2000:8, 9).

Above discussions revolve around my justification that, the extent to which consumers' culture is diverse in the present decade, it is not significant enough to simply categorise consumers as western and eastern and/or Individualist and collectivist. This much is particularly the case of the UAE and the UK which have become highly multicultural in the

process of globalisation. Shukla and Puranis' (2012) study is yet another example of a study that focuses on the luxury fashion market and compares British and Indian consumers by examining the culture of these consumers as individualist and collectivists. In this respect, Baurillard (2002) argues that globalization is irresistible and while it runs at the expense of everyone, culture remains irreducible and ungraspable. Thus, the globalised world we live in today requires the subtlety of a psychosocial approach to help us investigate how luxury fashion culture is consumed, rather than an over-simplification that focused on an individual's conformity to social group influence based on cultural background and geographical locations. Finally, in this debate, whether it is the cultural background of consumers, or the culture of luxury fashion consumption, the essence of the term *culture* is concerned with the shared meanings that represents consumers in a social group.

6.1.2 Materialism

Having raised issues associated with globalised consumer culture in the luxury fashion industry, it is necessary to highlight any insights my research might provide when it comes to comparing the materialistic values of luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK. In conducting this comparative analysis, in Chapter 4, I deployed a T-test and the results established that overall there are no significant statistical differences between consumers in the UAE and the UK as regards to the materialistic values that underpinned my argument in the previous section. However, geographical locations and environmental influences cannot be completely dismissed in respect to consumers' materialistic values, as there were 4 items out of the 10 items from the materialistic scale where significant statistical differences between luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK was found. These results suggest that in comparison to consumers from the UK, individuals in the UAE are more likely to signify

success or wealth through luxury fashion materials (See Chapter 4, Section 4.2). On this note, I must acknowledge that signifying success is an important issue that influences luxury fashion consumption that will return to this issue in more detail later in this chapter. The rationale for comparing luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK is ultimately that the differences in the extent of materialistic values can be beneficial for having a better understanding of luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK. In a marketing context, becoming aware of such international variations could assist in formulating strategies accordingly (See Chapter 7). The key insight here is that overall, based on the samples of my study, the difference of materialistic values among luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK is not statistically significant, yet, luxury fashion consumers in the UAE are more likely to communicate their wealth and success through materials compared to consumers in the UK.

6.1.3 Preference in luxury qualities

Findings in Chapter 5 suggest that luxury fashion consumers in the UAE are more likely to buy into luxury goods that are relatively discrete (quiet) as compared to consumers in the UK that seem to prefer products that display the brand logo more prominently (loud). What seems to impress consumers in the UAE more compared to the consumers in the UK is the functional dimension of luxury goods that relate to material embodiments, which reflects in turn the quality of material and its physical manifestations. To this end, it appears that consumers from the UAE are more concerned with the particularities of the design of the product, rather than simpler designs with an overt display of brand logos that imply wealth or belonging. Such findings are in line with what Makkar and Yap (2018) who studied inconspicuous luxury fashion experience in Dubai that suggest Brands such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton are becoming aware of the popularity of the low-key designs in the UAE by launching collections with

products that are more understated in regards to the branding logo. For example, within the design of certain products, Gucci has downplayed the 'G emblem' that is its famous signature among luxury fashion consumers. My findings also indicates that the brands that luxury fashion consumers in the UAE prefer are at a greater level of luxury as far as price points and prestige is concerned. For example, according to the data, brands such as Chanel and Dior were mentioned more frequently by my sample from the UAE. The price points of these brands are often higher than brands such as Burberry, Gucci and Balenciaga that seemed to be the most popular luxury fashion brands among participants from the UK. If we reflect back at the categorisation of consumers based on Hofstede's individuality dimension, this result parallels the findings of Aliev and Wagner (2018) where the participants in Germany (individualist) are more likely to buy into non-functional features of luxury goods whereas consumers in Azerbaijan (collectivist) were found to be more concerned with quality features. In other words, the results imply that, consumers in the UAE pay more attention to the functional attributes of luxury items compared to those in the UK. This does not necessarily suggest that buying into products that are more discrete in the display of brand logo with more emphasis on the design, quality and craft make such consumption any less conspicuous. Baudrillard (1970) refers to such discrete consumption to as super-conspicuous: the consumer moves from the excessive display of luxury goods as signs of distinction to relatively more cultural forms of distinction. If this is the case, it justifies why the extent of certain materialistic values in the UAE is higher (See Chapter 4, Section 4.2) than the UK. The point here is that, as discussed above, it appears that in the UAE the extent to which quality of life and success is determined by material improvement is higher than the UK. It is in this sense that luxury fashion consumers in the UAE are more gravitated towards luxury fashion brands that are at a higher luxury level compared to luxury fashion consumers in the UK. Simply put,

my findings indicate that consumers in the UAE are not necessarily satisfied by having the logo as a display sign of luxury fashion product, but the satisfaction rather sits in the sense of ownership towards perceived high quality products and in displaying their abilities to differentiate and own high quality products is what they what they derive their satisfaction from.

6.2.0 Luxury fashion consumption: a psychosocial perspective

The intention of this section is to point out the two central similarities found between the participants from the UAE and the UK. Considering the overall results of my thesis, from both the approaches deployed, the *luxury fashion questionnaire* in Chapter 4, and the *luxury fashion interview* in Chapter 5, it was clear that consumers from both locations tend to seek confidence by the consumption of luxury materials. Similarly, participants from both the UAE and the UK constantly acknowledge that luxury fashion consumption provides them with feelings of satisfaction and uniqueness. In effect, luxury fashion consumption is essentially effective on an individual's well-being. As far as a psychosocial perspective is concerned, I will go on to discuss the logic behind the effectiveness of luxury fashion consumption on well-being in detail. Another common factor between samples from both countries was the important role that the perceived quality of the products play on the consumption of luxury fashion materials. The importance of product quality on the consumption of these goods are often considered to be a vital element in the success of luxury fashion brands. However, considering the psychosocial complexities that my thesis aims to disentangle, such claims appear to exist on the surface of consumption. The intention of this thesis has thus been to dig beneath the surface and challenge steadfast perceptions that claim that the tangible product is the fundamental reason consumers buy into luxury fashion. In this sense, it is worth

quoting that 'people buy things for what they mean' (Levy, 1959:118). Overall, put simply, two central factors were common throughout both my questionnaire and interview findings in both countries, *well-being* and the *perception of product quality* and I will go on to discuss these in more detail now.

6.2.1 Well-being

According to my overall findings, luxury materials contribute to consumers' well-being. This finding cannot be a coincidence as it is also evidence for the effective role of sophisticated marketing techniques. The implication here is that, in order to increase capacity for consumption, the core role of marketing is to create necessities and aspirations for consumers that may not truly exist. However, these are entirely actualised to the extent that consumers have become dependent on luxury materials to help them feel confident, satisfied and unique. Thus, the luxury fashion market actively meet the needs of consumers through their own strategies. In the complex structure of particular conglomerates and corporate systems there are hidden commercial practises of prediction and sales that consumers may or may not be aware (Zuboff, 2019). All such complexities revolve around consumers' perception in ideological modes of viewing the world. The key point here is that, if individuals are consciously aware of the abstractions, exchanges and process that takes place in ideology, it is simply not ideology anymore (Zizek,2008).

In what follows I aim to discuss how the material force of ideology distorts consumers' perception in a way that consumers acknowledge luxury material consumption contributes to their well-being. In doing so, I will address the following underlying factors that stem from the capitalist ideology: social class, signifying success and the perception of uniqueness that

are essential elements in how consumers perceive luxury fashion consumption as an act towards well-being.

As Baudrillard (1970) puts it, status consumption is miraculous, the miracle in this context is that confidence issues are caused by images of reality that are in fact psychosocial perceptions. In this way, luxury fashion goods have a mystical quality. At the centre of this quality lies the symbolic value of those goods planted in the consumers' subconscious, which then comes through to influence conscious perception. In effect, symbolic values set the essential parameters in which consumers behave, perceive and communicate. Consequently, luxury fashion consumers commit to the domination of a cultivated consciousness into which perception has plunged them. This perception does not evolve on its own; it embodies conscious components concerning individuals residing in a society, following a definitive praxis (Giddens, 1971). The underlying cause of this problem is that consumer choice is limited in a society that humans take other humans at face value, in other words, by how they represent their perception of reality. This resonates with McDowell's (1994) argument that the definition of an individual is manifested through the brands he or she is wearing. Hence, the market offers an opportunity for consumers to utilise fashion in order to appear fashionable and wealthy, which is why consumers feel satisfied, confident and unique, based on the perceived image of themselves in the mind of others. This constitutes a broader psychosocial concern that human beings place such values in symbols located in material products. Mind you, it remains unclear whether consumers actually have a choice? In this light, James Duesenberry suggests "while in economics is about how people make choice, sociology is about how they don't have any choice to make. (Duesenberry 1960:233)."

Luxury fashion consumers may think or prefer to think that they have a choice. In fact, they do, but does the choice between Gucci and Burberry constitute any kind of a choice at all? At a deeper level, do they have a choice between feeling confident, satisfied and unique without the consumption of material goods? Large conglomerates that own companies like luxury fashion brands have enough capital to engineer a fashion trend by hiring the best designers, the most popular celebrities, and the most popular platform to advertise in order to make their target audience engage with their product. In behavioural economics, this process echoes libertarian paternalism or the 'nudge' concept that refers to choice architecture, under this concept, large conglomerates affect consumer behaviour while claiming to consider consumers freedom of choice (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). Contrary to this policy, it appears that consumers are somewhat forced to make their own choice (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). In a world driven by the ideology of capitalism, capital will dictate what choice consumers have. Thus, it is in the interest of this system that luxury fashion brands remain profitable as important contributors' to the global economy. The economic machine is central in the functioning process of a capitalist system that owes everything to the market. The intention here is not to criticise capitalism nor to suggest any other ideology could function better, but to suggest that individuals perceive such a value for luxury materials due to the social order inscribed in their mind based on social divisions and principles of capitalism (Bourdieu, 1979).

6.2.1.1 Social class

The perception of the value of luxury goods stems to a degree from the existence of social class that divides the society: in effect, in its relationship to mental health and well-being, it is very important for individuals to present where they stand in a hierarchal position with

regards to other individuals, whether the presentation is true or not (Peterson, 2019). As such, there is a natural human tendency to express distinction from lower classes and a belonging to higher classes displayed through luxury fashion consumption as symbols of wealth. In line with this reasoning, luxury fashion consumers appear to have the perception that their social standing is largely determined by economic advancement and by the demonstration of wealth via goods as marks of cultural capital (Miller and Volker, 1985). Luxury goods are perceived as a key form of cultural capital since premium-pricing points operate as an exchange for its economic value. The existence of different class structures initially causes the desire for distinction and belonging through luxury materials as marks of distinction. Henceforth, if there were no social class structures and all individuals were in the same social class, what was is the purpose of luxury fashion consumption? In effect, these luxury goods transmute themselves into a hierarchical privilege due to the inequality of wealth among social classes. It is therefore, intangible symbolic exchange that convinces consumers to buy into these goods. On this note, it is worth quoting that "all men are equal before the use value of objects and goods whereas they are unequal and divided before the exchange value (Baudrillard,1970:50)". In a society with equality in economic resources displaying wealth through materials would perhaps not be as desirable as it is. Nevertheless, the distribution of wealth is not equal in the UAE and the UK as the top 1% in the UAE acquire 22.8% of the country's total income and hold over 50% of the entire country's wealth (Bradbury,2020). In the case of the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2016, 44% of UK's wealth is acquired by the wealthiest 10% of households (The Equality Trust, 2017). Consequently, in regards to well-being, the existence of different social classes motivates consumers in signalling their wealth in order to feel good about themselves. In the

following section, I will discuss the invaluable role of luxury fashion consumption in relation to its exchange value concerned with economical spending power.

6.2.1.2 Luxury goods as signifiers of *'success'*

Reflecting on the themes that emerged through the qualitative section of my questionnaire results in Chapter 4 and the interviews in Chapter 5 participants placed considerable emphasis on attaining a sense of satisfaction through luxury fashion consumption. At a deeper level, this sense of satisfaction, according to my findings, reflects on the link between an individuals' professional success in regards to economical spending power and the rewarding role of luxury fashion consumption as a way to express feelings of success in social groups. Marketers are well aware of the sufficiently expressive feelings individuals experience in respect to their professional success triggered by pride as a self-conscious emotion Castonguay et al., (2013)**.** Hence, the perception of the link between luxury fashion brand consumption and economical spending power is asserted through mass media and popular culture. As such, popular celebrities often display their luxury fashion items on publicly broadcasted events and popular artists link luxury fashion consumption with their individual success and economic spending power, sometimes this acting as the main theme of their song. This debate is underpinned by findings in Chapter 5, as my participants regularly mentioned the influence of popular figures through social media during my interviews. The suggestion here is that, to a high degree individuals aspire to mirror popular figures. There were three reoccurring popular names in my data, Kim Kardashian, Kylie Jenner and Drake. I will go on attempt to address how marketers influence luxury fashion consumption via these popular figures.

Before I go on to explain how popular figures mentioned above are influential on luxury fashion consumption, I must shed light upon individuals that are perhaps the actual influencers in 'nudging' or directing consumers into consumption (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008).

The point here is that the effects of psychosocial influences in luxury fashion consumption may or may not be deliberately planned by particular individuals. The choices that consumers make are mediated by experts that are aware of fundamental human traits such as peer pressure and the desire for social approval. In effect, marketers' rely heavily on the bandwagon effect of luxury fashion consumption that is likely to be perpetuated as a social group consensus (Ko and Megehee, 2011). The bandwagon effect functions as a marketing strategy since consumers conform to luxury fashion consumption as they think individuals in their social groups are paying close attention to what they are wearing. In this sense, and from a marketing perspective, conformity to peer influence is key to the delivery of a successful product. The role of marketers here is to influence consumer choice indirectly, what I am trying to say here centres around the data that emerged from the interviews regarding the importance of influencers and popular celebrities. In Chapter 5 I highlighted the issues discussed by my participants, I will now go on to explain in more detail by unwrapping the potential underlying ideological dimensions of capitalism in the context of luxury fashion consumption. On the surface it appears that luxury fashion consumption is influenced by popular celebrities, whereas consumption is perhaps originally the result of calculated strategies of one person or few people that set the standards of what makes a content popular. As in the present digital age this the nature of how culture manifests its authority in subtle ways. In this way, popular celebrities and influencers are the means by which the pre-planned agenda of marketers on the perception of luxury fashion consumers can be injected. An individual's perceived value is intended to be influenced by reinforcing the fundamental components of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth through popular figures.

A popular artist named Drake won the Artist of the decade award in the Billboard Music Awards 2021, the content of his music associates thew consumption of high priced brands

with his own economic success. His lyrics illustrate this point vividly 'I can let you check the tag now, I'm rocking name brand, I'm chasing after bags now' that indicates he tends to demonstrate his spending power by displaying the branded tag on his clothing. Such content is a trending topic in today's music industry, which is arguably one of the strongest forces of influence on luxury fashion consumption. Another example that directly links spending power with luxury fashion consumption is found in a recent Drake song that clearly name drops the luxury fashion brands that are central to my thesis 'We can stop at Gucci, stop at Louis V, Come with me, Rolls Royce, in Hidden Hills, Bags full of hundred dollar bills'. The issue here is not concerned with the content produced in popular music; but rather draws attention to a broader marketing strategy that includes popular figures as marketing tools to promote the culture of luxury fashion consumption, while establishing these goods as signifiers of economic success. In this respect, luxury fashion goods have ultimately become one of the most important symbols in communicating economic success through style. On this note Zizek (2008) argues that symbolic order is ultimately a system of communication. Consequently, the symbolic display of success is a cultural norm manifested through luxury fashion brand consumption. Thus, individuals desire the perception of economic success or they are somewhat directed into avoiding disapproval from the peer pressure caused by such perceptions which in turn leaves consumers with little choice but to feel good about themselves. This benefits capitalism in two ways, first, luxury fashion consumers are motivated to work harder in the pursuit of economic advancement. Second, as previously mentioned in Chapter 5, luxury fashion consumption itself empowers this system as every transaction encapsulates the cash flow that underpins its economic machine. What is interesting here is that Artists may not be categorised as *'popstars'* if the content of their music does not echo the agenda of capitalistic consumer culture. For instance a song called

'*That's not me*' by a British Artist (Skepta) released in 2014 is clearly against the culture of luxury fashion consumption as it states '*I used to wear Gucci, I put that all in a bin cause that's not me, True I used to look like you, but dressing like a mess, NAH!, that's not me*'. Such content are published independently by Artists and get recognition through the Artists independent YouTube Chanel and not through corporate labels that control the music industry and the radio hits. What I am saying here is that, perhaps consumer capitalism controls what is popular and what should sell, and if produced content works against its agenda, it will not be promoted and therefore will not have an impact in the global music market.

6.2.1.4 Perception of uniqueness

A predominant factor that was deemed particularly important in contributing to consumers' well-being in Chapters 4 and 5 was the perception of uniqueness. Whether it is the unique design of products, or the element of uniqueness endowed with luxury fashion goods, according to my findings the consumption of these materials provides consumers with the perception of uniqueness. However, in the context of luxury fashion consumption, at least from a psychosocial perspective, I argue that uniqueness is a myth. Luxury fashion consumers appear to perceive themselves as autonomous individuals whilst subscribing to the idea that wearing luxury materials makes them unique. The point here is that uniqueness is a perception that consumers desire to pursue in order to feel better about themselves. However, what consumers may or may not be aware of is the marketing that takes place behind the scenes on social media. In effect, as social media members scroll through their phone, they are not immediately conscious of the fact that at the same time the attention they are giving to the content they consume on social media increases the possibility of their

consumption. My argument here is that social media is the present-day platform that transmits a reality that only exists in the perception of it. Because that content could be Kim Kardashian or Kylie Jenner popping up on a potential consumers explore page on Instagram with a Gucci item that will gradually cause slight, imperceptible change in their perception. This slight daily change, after a certain amount of time could influence and motivate the consumption of that very item Kim Kardashian, Kylie Jenner or any other popular figure is displaying. The desirable position of these popular figures as unique individuals is connected to the manner of luxury fashion consumption in the pursuit of uniqueness. Therefore, it is in fact the perceived desire and the aspiration to look unique that divorces reality from perception. From a psychosocial standpoint, the issue here is that, uniqueness is perceived according to appearance, material consumption and in the extent to which, perhaps for some consumers, it mirrors popular figures. In reality, popular figures are human beings themselves and can only exemplify such virtues of uniqueness based on how luxury fashion consumers perceive them. From a marketing perspective, celebrity endorsement is a successful strategy that can be used to influence consumers' perception.

6.2.1.4 Concluding discussion on well-being

As far as well-being is concerned, from a psychosocial point of view, the fundamental issue here is that consumers perceive luxury fashion consumption as a factor that contributes to their well-being in regards to feeling confident, satisfied and unique. While disregarding the possibilities that relying on luxury fashion consumption to feel as such is perhaps at the cost of their health for the display of their wealth often just to avoid peer pressure. The consumption of luxury materials for all their perceived virtues, exacerbates consumers rather than mitigates their frailty. Since large conglomerates invest in luxury fashion brands, marketers are obliged to return their investments with profits by eradicating consumers'

perception, instead of minimising the effects of remaining a luxury material consumer to feel well (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). Therefore, the effects of the existing capitalist ideology has materialised and economised the perception of value in human experience. Within a capitalist ideology, the economic order is prioritised over the quality of human life. As Marx (1867) stresses commodity production sits at the heart of capitalism. Luxury materials enable consumers to exchange such values through symbolic interactions. The way in which these symbols are perceived emanates from the ideology of capitalism. Through this lens, it appears that consumers buy into the symbolic features of these items rather than their tangible qualities. Herein lies the importance of unpacking the constructs that influence a consumers perceptions and recognising the impact of a mediated perception of value can blur reality that I will discuss in the following Section.

6.2.2 Perception of product quality

Having discussed the symbolic benefits of luxury fashion items in relation to consumers well-being, at this stage I refer back to results from Chapter 4, where participants claimed that they prioritise the tangible qualities of the product over its symbolic benefits while implying they seek to attain confidence in their social circles through the consumption of luxury fashion goods. It remains unclear how a tangible product can contribute to one's confidence in this way. The paradoxical claim from participants that I am seeking to grapple with, reflects the inherent biases in consumers perception of quality. As I have pointed out throughout this chapter, multiple forces exert their influence on consumers underlying perception. The theoretical model that I have developed from the results in Chapter 4, aids in understanding how and why these forces are fundamental in shaping a luxury fashion consumers' perceived value. Hence, it is crucial to be conscious of what constitutes a perception of value towards luxury fashion consumption as the impact of such influences challenges an individual's ability

to discern reality, or at least viewing luxury fashion materials for their actual functional value in proportion to their economic value (price). Within this scope, I argue that the logic of buying into a luxury fashion material is a product of the perception of quality rather than its actual tangible quality. From a purely psychosocial perspective, luxury fashion items are in fact materials, regardless of the fabric quality and creativity in design. Branding converts these goods into distinctive signs. Thus, the physical qualities of luxury products such as design, material and durability offer up perceptions that convince consumers to buy into luxury with premium price points. The intention here is not to dismiss the quality of luxury products the point is that such pricing points, to a high degree are due to the intangible attributes of these items. Hence, the consumers claim to prioritise the tangible qualities over symbolic benefits is a misleading one. Simply put, it makes little sense to invest £770 in Gucci Prince town leather slippers on the sole basis of their function (this was a trending item based on interview results in Chapter 5). With emphasis on the principles of economics, it is irrational to invest such amount on a use value of slippers whereas buying a Gucci slipper for its exchange value could be debatable. In this debate, use value refers to the direct satisfaction that a consumer could attain from a Gucci slipper, whereas its exchange value represents the symbolic benefits that communicates its value indirectly through the brand signal (Menger,1871). However, consumers may or may not be conscious of the effect of sophisticated marketing strategies that construct such perception of quality that could thrive beneath consciousness.

It is important to note in a broader marketing context, indeed from a neuro-marketing perspective, that with a thorough understanding of the human brain, consumers are not conscious of what it is that they truly demand that in turn assists marketers to create or at least influence their demand and allows brands to deliver products accordingly (Collard, 2012). Neuro-marketers have the infrastructure upon which they are able to access a detailed

scientific information concerned with the human brain (Suomala et al., 2012). The accuracy of this information has previously helped marketers to understand customers' emotional, cognitive, and neural activity (Suomala et al., 2012). In addition, consumers' reaction to certain stimuli are recorded and tested in order to reveal consumers' preferences. Marketing experts are well aware that every human has mirror neurons associated with social behaviours such as imitation (Suomala et al., 2012). On this basis, whether it is the arguments of Simmel (1971) or findings from neuro-marketing, consumption is primarily associated with imitation and not taste. Considering the influence of marketing and the way it bombards consumer perceptions, the idea of uniqueness and the perception of quality are romanticised stories that encourage individuals to consume luxury fashion products, and it is not ultimately the product quality that consumers buy into, but rather a *perception* of that quality. Therefore, it is vital to have an insightful understanding of the underlying constructs behind a consumers' perceived value and the psychosocial factors that influence perception in the context of luxury fashion consumption. Henceforth, the key contribution of my theoretical model lies in how these psychosocial influences are interpreted in the mind of consumers and how this in turn forms their perception of value towards luxury fashion brands. Subsequently, the following section, seeks to illustrate the way in which the theoretical model developed in Chapter 4 could contribute in understanding this issue.

6.3.0 Underlying constructs in perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption a theoretical model

Before I go on to discuss the theoretical model developed in Chapter 4, I will reflect on how the development process of this model initiated in Chapter 2, as I reviewed seven concepts that deemed to be influential on the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption

from the existing marketing literature. These concepts include materialism, psychological ownership, self-enhancement, self-identity, cultural background, self-construal and self-consciousness. Based on literature review, I proposed a conceptual framework that included all the seven concepts mentioned as potential underlying constructs behind the perceived value of luxury fashion brands from a consumers' perspective (See Chapter 2).
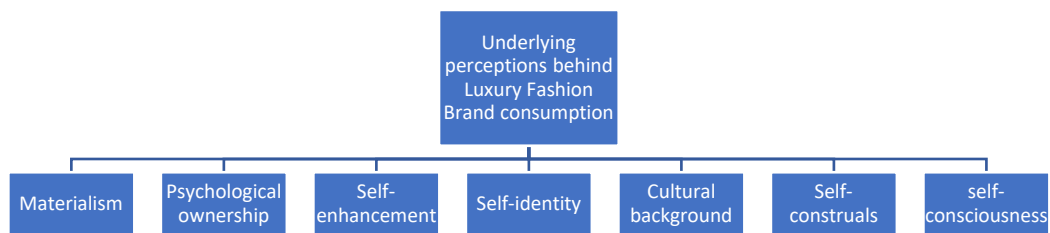
6.1- Thematic factors on Luxury fashion consumption

In Chapter 4, the seven concepts mentioned played a key role in the questionnaire design of the study, as it was designed to measure the influence of each concept on luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK. I measured the influence of each concept with EFA, which in turn contributed to a theoretical model concerned with the simultaneous performance of these concepts in a consumer's mind (See Figure 6.2 below). At this point, it is necessary to point out that two of these concepts (cultural background and self-identity) were removed due the results from the exploratory factor analysis in Chapter 4, leaving the five factors model with self-consciousness, self-construal, self-enhancement, materialism and ownership. Consequently, the primary research process led me to the realisation that the conceptual framework in Chapter 2 is incorrect and it was through the findings of my research that I developed the *Luxury fashion consumption* theoretical model. In the following

paragraph, I will explain the implication of this model and the way in which it facilitates in understanding luxury fashion consumers.

6.2 Perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption theoretical model

Given the theoretical model, 'consciousness' is a crucial element as it brings an individual's attention towards their social ties with peers in their community (public consciousness) or on the self (private consciousness). These underlying influences trigger self-conscious emotions such as shame and pride which drive consumers toward luxury fashion consumption. Individuals therefore feel that they are able to avoid shame, and simultaneously experience a sense of pride. Self-consciousness is a factor that requires particular attention, as it involves the interplay between how an individual actively forms the world he or she lives in whilst contemporaneously this world forms his or her perception. Thus, it is vital to consider self-consciousness as a psychosocial factor since the relation of a consumer to his or her material environment is driven by the particular characteristics of the social groups he or she associates with. Thus, in respect to luxury fashion brand consumption, self-consciousness is

an active psychosocial process which influences individuals to the extent that they ask themselves 'how am I perceived by members of my social group?' This procedure is parallel to the definition of self-construal which "relates to the way in which an individual perceives himself or herself to be connected with others in the community" (Chu et al.,2016:572). In effect, the concept of self-construal is significant as it entails the characteristic modes of thinking, feeling and acting.

Through a psychosocial lens, these thoughts, feelings and actions are predominantly influenced by the combination of an individuals' autonomous entity and social groups (Hewstone et al.,1990). As an individual becomes conscious of his or her interconnectedness with others in a social group, the need for self-enhancement is intensified. The concept of self-enhancement is concerned with an individual's tendency to seek out high levels of confidence. The results of this thesis clearly indicate that the consumption of luxury fashion items enable consumers to enhance their perceived image, or at least mitigate the peer pressure of such thoughts in social groups. In other words, luxury fashion consumption enhances an individuals' confidence in the broader context of a social groups, a process that stems from their self-conscious thoughts. Reflecting on Richins and Dawson's (1992) study, in regards to the concept of materialism, the acquisition of material possessions links with low levels of confidence, as such it is clear that the consumption of luxury fashion materials are motivated, at least in part, by an attempt to feel confident in social groups. The final underlying construct in the model is the ownership of a luxury fashion product: this sense of ownership manifests all the discussed intangible psychosocial perceptions in the physical realm through the ownership of the material product.

Taking the above discussions into consideration, this model demonstrates the underlying constructs in a consumer's perception of value towards luxury fashion brands that are

fundamental in the consumption of these goods. Drawing attention towards the key differences between consumers in the UAE and UK, these were concisely associated with the preference in the calibre of the luxury line of products concerned and in the differences in the extent of materialism between the two locations. The model consequently also includes materialism and ownership which further imply important differences between consumers in the UK and the UAE. The suggestion here is that the element of ownership embodies an individual's desired preference in relation to sensing a psychological ownership of a luxury fashion product, which in turn represents their perceived value towards that product. What is different here among consumers in the UAE and the UK is their perceived value towards owning a luxury fashion product, where consumers in the UAE are more likely to buy into silent luxury fashion products, and consumers in the UK have a higher possibility to consume *loud* luxury fashion items. I must also reassert that the extent of overall materialistic values among my research sample from the UAE and the UK is not significantly different. However, there are differences in certain materialistic values that involve, owning materials to impress others, having more luxury in one's life, defining oneself using branded goods and owning materials in order to signal wealth. It is in these mentioned materialistic values that my sample from the UAE are effectively more materialistic compared to my sample from the UK. Prior to this research, these concepts were not measured as underlying constructs behind the perception of value in luxury fashion consumption in one particular study. In addition to measuring these concepts I attempted to have a holistic approach towards this issue, the approach here is holistic in a sense that it is characterised by the interconnectedness of each underlying construct as an influential psychosocial factor on the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption. Existing luxury models such as, Wiedmann and Hennings (2007) measure consumers' luxury value perception in a cross-cultural framework

demonstrating that the combination of financial value, functional value, individual value and social value lead to a luxury value. Bian and Forsythe (2012) develop a conceptual model suggesting that the purchase intention for luxury brands consists of need for uniqueness and self-monitoring that lead to social function attitudes with affective attitude. Choi et al. (2016) propose a conceptual model in an attempt to demonstrate the constructs of luxury brand value co-creation in luxury fashion purchase intention where consumer values were abstracted in social conspicuousness, aesthetic self-impression, hedonic values and quality. Shukla and Purani (2012) placed their emphasis on five factors in luxury value perceptions such as a 1) self-directed symbolic/ expressive values; 2) other-directed symbolic/expressive values; 3) experiential/hedonic values; 4) utilitarian/functional values and

 5) cost/financial values. All the above represent significant contributions, however, none of the these authors have looked into deeper underlying constructs that shape an individual's perception of value towards luxury fashion goods.

In light of the above arguments, it is important to highlight the three main contributions of my research as related to the measurement of perceived value in luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK. First, I recognise the influential factors on the perception of value in luxury fashion consumption. Second, the geographical locations explored in this context have not up to now been examined in relation to these factors. Third, the findings of this thesis suggest we cannot completely understand an individuals' perceived value towards luxury fashion brand consumption by separating out the psychological process from social and cultural influences surrounding them since these influences are profoundly psychosocial. Whereas previous studies concerned with investigating such issues, have not displayed an interconnectedness between psychological and social influences, as if these influences are detached in understanding the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption. The

tension herein is that all five factors in the model that exist in the marketing literature have not up to now been evaluated from a psychosocial perspective, nor have they sufficiently explored luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK by incorporating consumer culture theory debates. Within this scope, the findings emerging from my research represents an attempt to fill this aforementioned gap in the disciplinary void that exists between marketing and sociology.

6.8.0 Summary of the discussion of the findings Chapter

The primary aim of this Chapter is to illustrate my contributions in investigating luxury fashion brand consumption from a psychosocial perspective with an emphasis on comparing the cultural issues that are central in this context between the UAE and the UK. During the course of my explorations, I found that the key differences between luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK, concern three factors. First, consumers in the UK are more likely to succumb to psychosocial influences. Second, consumers in the UAE have higher tendency to be materialistic compared to consumers in the UK. The third difference reflects upon the preference in luxury line of products where consumers in the UAE prefer luxury fashion goods that are more subtle in display of wealth or style compared to the consumers in the UK. Another implication of my thesis is concerned with a more broadly cultural matter, namely that the term culture in the context of luxury fashion consumption, cannot be simply understood by categorising consumers based on their geographical locations and Hofstede's (1980) individuality dimension: such an approach constitutes nothing less than a simplification.

The suggestion here is that the understanding of the impact of consumption as a cultural form in a globalised world requires a much more peripatetic approach to the breadth of factors reflection upon every potential factor that could influence an individual's perception that

constitutes shared meanings and values within a social group. In respect to comparison, there were two factors that were similar between consumers in the UAE and the UK that concerned well-being and the perception of quality. These factors are central in the consumption of luxury fashion brands; therefore, in this chapter. I discussed the role of marketing techniques underpinned by the ideological forces of capitalism on consumers' perceived well-being and quality. In view of identifying the underlying perceptions behind luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK, my objective was to develop a theoretical model that specifies the factors constructing the perception of value towards luxury fashion brand consumption. The critical point in the overall implication of this model is that the psychosocial complexities that revolved around luxury fashion consumption can be gleaned via the five underlying factors behind the perception of value towards luxury fashion consumption that are self-consciousness, self-construal, self-enhancement, materialism and ownership.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

7.0.0 Introduction

This thesis has critically investigated the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK. In delivering this investigation, it has identified the underlying constructs that shape a consumer's perceived value towards luxury fashion brand consumption. The identification of factors that construct the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption (self-consciousness, self-construal, self-enhancement, materialism and ownership) as undertaken in this research has led to the realisation that luxury materials are not purely consumed for their tangible material features or for to simply fulfil a need. These goods are essentially symbols of a perceived distinction that allows the individual to identify with a particular social group. In light of this, in this Chapter, the theoretical and industrial implications of the findings and the model presented in Chapter 4 and 6 are discussed. I should point out however, that this does not imply that the tangible material features are not important. The qualitative findings of the questionnaire discussed in Chapter 4 draw attention towards product quality and how it is that consumers perceived quality in relation to the uniqueness, the pride that is associated with the sense of ownership of a luxury fashion product and how it contributes to their well-being. The importance of product quality was reasserted by my participants during interviews discussed in Chapter 5, along with four other factors that influence fashion consumers to buy into luxury, namely: expressing feelings, social groups, social media and shopping experience. In addition to these factors, my interviews revealed that luxury fashion consumers could be categorised in two groups of conspicuous luxury fashion consumers and inconspicuous luxury fashion consumers. Such

findings enlightened this thesis with industrial implications that are discussed later in this Chapter.

Before I go on to discuss the theoretical and industrial implications of the findings, the sociological aspects of consumption in the luxury fashion industry are reflected upon. In Chapter 6, after combining findings from my *Luxury fashion* questionnaire and *Luxury fashion* interviews in Chapter 4 and 5, well-being and the perception of quality appeared to be the fundamental components that drive consumers towards the consumption of luxury fashion goods. These issues are discussed by incorporating the findings with those key contributions that remain highly pertinent in the contemporary social world. What these contributions offer to the debate is a sense that certain human needs around consumption are essentially contradictory and that this contradiction is underpinned by the dual need to be part of a community, while retaining a sense of individual autonomy. In the context of luxury fashion consumption, this paradox centres on the fact that while luxury items offer distinction from certain social groups; these goods simultaneously provide consumers with the dispositions and sensibilities that assist individuals to indicate a sense of belonging to their desired social groups. It is in this sense that I argue that a psychosocial approach provides new insights in understanding luxury fashion consumption in the UAE and the UK. As far as these complexities are concerned, results attained through this study address these complexities and thereby suggest that luxury fashion consumption is a symbolic psychosocial process. It is in line with this reasoning that a psychosocial perspective can help us to view the need to fit in and the need to stand out not necessarily as contradictory forces but as forces that are complementary to one another. Consequently, in order to better understand the broader psychological, social and cultural influences on a consumers' perceived value in the luxury fashion brand industry, the intention has been to provide fresh insights by adopting a

psychosocial approach. However, it is important to recognise that the originality of this thesis does not lie in my application of a psychosocial approach towards understanding luxury fashion brand consumption, the originality of the thesis rather rests on identifying how perceived values towards luxury fashion brand consumption is influenced by specific psychosocial factors namely, self-consciousness, self-construal, self-enhancement, materialism and ownership. In this respect, I will elaborate more on how these concepts facilitate theoretical and industrial implications in the sections that follow. Additionally, after identifying the above psychosocial factors through questionnaire data, the outcome of the interviews informed my research that influences such as expressing feelings, social groups, social media, shopping experience constitute psychosocial influences on how it is that consumers engage with luxury fashion brand consumption.

On the above basis, the suggestion is that marketing needs to engage more directly with a psychosocial lens in order to provide greater clarity on why is it that luxury fashion consumption is deemed by its consumers to be a necessity. The justification for this argument is that the inequalities reproduced by class structures intensifies the need for an individual to express his or her distinction and belonging.

In the case of luxury fashion goods, this is in parallel with the intangible elements of these products, such as a perceived exclusivity and uniqueness, which serves to rationalise why it is that these goods are consumed. Put simply, this thesis calls for a renewed focus on the need for the expression of an individual's social standing in a rigid perceived power hierarchy where power is signified through material possessions that reinforce the very system they reflect. The point here is that in a world that a human's conscious experience shapes their perception of value, which to a high degree is under the influence of capitalist ideology, symbolic exchange is a crucial way of communication. This may in one sense appear to be an obvious

point to make: but the subtlety of the point is not sufficiently explored in the literature, namely, an individual's psychosocial need for belonging and distinction apparently leaves consumers with no choice but to 'choose' consumption. Bearing in mind that consumer capitalism dictates the nature of choice (See Chapter 6) it is important to provide a holistic understanding of consumption in the luxury fashion brand industry which informs the consumer about how the luxury fashion system works. In past decades, the human experience could allegedly be encapsulated by the act of walking through a shopping mall: this being testament to the extent to which material goods play a significant role in forging an individual's life. In today's technologically-driven world, with the dominant force of digital marketing on social media, the *gates* of this *shopping mall* appear to have expanded and consumers arguably have no way out. This in turn, has apparently magnified the appeal of luxury fashion items: the digital world makes their appeal evermore prominent. Luxury signals wealth and indicates that consumers with the latest luxury goods are the ones who '*made it*' to the top of the consumer hierarchy by fulfilling their perceived purpose as the most eloquent consumer in this metaphoric shopping mall. From this standpoint, individuals are willing to pay premium prices for materials: this allows them to feel better about themselves. The truth is we do not live in a shopping mall, but in fact, it is the perception of value that has made acquiring material possessions the ultimate escape from reality. The intention of this thesis is not to argue whether it is worth paying premium prices for luxury fashion items or not, the implication here is that, from a fashion consumers' standpoint, luxury fashion consumption is an act in pursuit of well-being, but nonetheless an act that ultimately benefits the market, and not necessarily the consumer. As such, the consumer's claim that luxury fashion consumption contributes to their well-being is likely to be a transitory, almost momentary, experience that simply stems from their perceived value whether they want to

fit in a certain social group, or stand out from a certain social group. My argument here is that if the consumption of luxury fashion goods truly played a long-term fulfilling role on their well-being why would at least certain consumers frequently purchase luxury fashion goods on a weekly or monthly basis (see Chapter 4). This is the reasoning behind the suggestion that the act of seeking well-being through acquiring luxury fashion goods is perhaps a transitory experience since the satisfaction gained from consumption will not last and therefore consumers will remain consumers. I am not questioning the satisfying role of luxury fashion consumption here, rather I am questioning the longevity of its fulfilment from a holistic point of view.

From a marketing point of view, the perception of viewing the world as a shopping mall is what keeps consumers in their place, in effect, broadly, it is this perception of value that sells which is central to my thesis. This argument is in line with what the CEO of Gucci states in an interview "*we sell something that is not just a product, we sell a dream*" (SHOWbiz, 2018). Within this scope, key players in industries in the history of consumer society such as Gucci, and even Disney, offer dreams to their consumers, whether it is the luxury fashion industry or that of entertainment. The fact that consumers' pursuit of well-being impinges upon luxury fashion consumption in a way that it benefits the market and not the consumer, is underpinned by the statistical findings in Chapter 4 which I will discuss further in the industrial implications section in order to demonstrate how evidence found in this research informs the luxury fashion industry with new insights.

7.2.0 Theoretical implications

This thesis has sought to establish a model that demonstrates the factors impinging on the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption in the UAE and the UK. The model seeks to aid in understanding the influence and the extent of influence of underlying constructs behind the consumers' perceived value towards luxury fashion brand consumption. In Chapter 4, I developed a five-factor Model (Perceived Value of Luxury Fashion Brand Consumption) with Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and with multiple regression developed a predictive model of Frequency of Luxury Fashion Brand Consumption with the sampled data from the UAE and the UK, both models demonstrating that self-consciousness is the most important factor. In the first model (Perceived Value of Luxury Fashion Brand Consumption), the extent of each factor of the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption is showed by the extent of the size of the circle. In the section that follows the emphasis is on the industrial implications of this study. Therefore, it is in that section that the predictive model associated with significant factors on the frequency of luxury fashion purchase is discussed. By reflecting on the previously developed *Luxury Value perception* models and frameworks, in this section, I will highlight the theoretical contributions of my model that are as follows.

As I outlined in Chapter 1 and 2, there are existing models concerned with *Luxury Value Perceptions* that have recognised certain dimensions in this context. The model developed by Wiedmann et al. (2007) emphasises four key value dimensions, namely: *Financial, Functional, Individual and Social*. What my model addresses here concerns the *Individual* and *social* dimensions of Luxury Value Perceptions (Wiedmann et al.,2007). It is not suggested that the proposed model is an extension of the work that has been done previously, but

rather that my model simply serves a purpose in providing a deeper understanding of perceived value in luxury fashion brand consumption by identifying the layers that have not yet been identified in this context and therefore expand on what is already established in the field.

In the developed model, the concept of ownership indicates that one of the influential factors that contributes to an individual's well-being is the sense of ownership itself. This concept is an underlying construct behind the perceived value of luxury fashion brands since the sense of possession that consumers attain from consuming luxury fashion brands provides them with a rewarding satisfaction. The key point here is that the concept of *ownership* has not yet been investigated in the context of Luxury Value Perceptions. As such, from a consumers' standpoint, prior to all the dimensions identified by Wiedmann et. al (2007) the consumer initially desires owning a luxury fashion product and this desire essentially stems from an individual's self-conscious thoughts that reflect psychosocial influences on the consumers perceived value, as displayed in my model**.** These influences are psychosocial in the sense that the desire to own luxury fashion goods involves impressing the specific others in an individual's social group. However, in the *Luxury Value Perception* Model developed by Wiedmann et al. (2007) the social and individual dimensions of luxury consumption are independent of one another, which in itself creates complications in understanding luxury fashion consumption. The implication here is that the social and Individual dimensions in perceiving value towards luxury fashion brands are not necessarily detached since there is no dichotomy between the self and the society in the context of luxury fashion consumption (Crossley,2000). Hence, previous studies that focus on consumers' perceived value in the luxury industry have not explicitly addressed the psychosocial significance of luxury fashion brand consumption (Wiedmann et al., 2007: Berthon et al., 2009: Wagner and Aliyev, 2018).

In theory, Berthon et al. (2009) introduces the exterior factors that lie on the surface of value perceptions. But in order to provide fresh insights in understanding that on what basis consumers attach meanings to symbols represented by luxury fashion products we need to identify the underlying factors that influence consumers perception of value. My five-factor-model asserts that it is through psycho-social influences such as self-consciousness, self-construal, self-enhancement, ownership and materialism that values in symbols are fundamentally perceived. From this we can deduce that the evolved narrative signified by a luxury fashion brand symbol is perceived with value because of the fact that a luxury fashion consumer bears in mind two perspectives that of his or her own, and that of others (Carver, 2012; Fenigstein, 2009). Such perspectives occur due an individual's self-conscious thought which tells us why self-consciousness is the most important underlying construct behind the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption. The second most important underlying construct in the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption is self-construal which is associated with how individual's place value on self-expression and social connectedness through consumption of luxury fashion materials. The reason why luxury fashion goods enable consumers to express themselves while feeling socially connected are the meanings perceived in the symbolic value of luxury fashion brands. It is in the sense of such perceived value towards luxury fashion brands that the desire to increase or maintain positive feelings enables consumers to enhance how they feel about themselves. This lies at the heart of what exemplifies the *self-enhancement* concept which is the third most important underlying construct behind the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption. The fourth underlying construct in the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption is Ownership, a notion has not received any attention in previous models concerned with luxury value perceptions. This concept essentially reflects a sense of ownership for material that can be expressed by the

consumption of materials. In this connection, the fifth underlying construct is Materialism which is associated with an exaggerated belief in the role that material goods play in an individual's life, particularly in relation to luxury fashion goods which confer status (Flynn et al., 2016). The ownership of materials that in the case of luxury fashion goods, reflects the ownership of symbolic materials that become associated with the perceived value of luxury fashion brands. Consequently, material possessions, in other words the ownership of luxury fashion materials, can strengthen social ties to those social groups that perceive similar values towards the symbols that these goods represent (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). The tension herein lies in understanding the simultaneous psycho-social process that occurs in how it is that luxury fashion consumers perceive a value towards luxury fashion branded goods, that in turn leads to consumption. It is in line with this purpose that the model presented in this thesis demonstrates these five factors.

In light of cross-cultural consumer behaviour comparisons between the East and West, as argued in Chapter 6, the previous and present body of marketing literature concerned with the consumption of luxury fashion brands places considerable emphasis on Hofstede's (1980) individuality dimension in comparing consumer behaviour across cultures, but in doing so it fails to get beneath the surface. This research thus begins to move beyond such over-simplifications by placing emphasis on the importance of informing such a perspective through a more sociologically-informed meanings based approach. In effect, the term culture, in a cross-cultural context of consumer behaviour comparison is much less 'black and white' than as current marketing approaches tend to suggest, as there are broader potential influences on luxury fashion brand consumption than marketers are currently prepared to acknowledge, at least explicitly (Aliyev and Wagner, 2018). In investigating the perceived value of luxury fashion consumption across diverse cultures, the potential impact of

globalisation, westernisation, popular culture, celebrity endorsement, social media are all factors that could be influential on a consumer's perceived value, and as such it is important to comprehend how these influences are perceived by consumers in different cultures. For this reason, it is argued that in the contemporary digital world, the potential influence of all such factors must be considered in studies with a comparative nature that concentrate on perceived value in luxury fashion market. For example, in the case of the research I present here, and based on my interview findings in Chapter 5, whether the luxury fashion consumer is in the UAE or in the UK, there is evidence that consumers in different geographical locations are influenced by a popular cultural arena that endorses the same celebrities to promote luxury fashion goods through social media (See Chapter 5). In other words, we can begin to understand the diverse sets of influences that might be involved on what keeps luxury fashion goods desirable. And, of course, what we certainly cannot do is grasp the influential factors on a consumers' culture simply by their cultural background and geographical location. The key point here is the contention that a full comprehension of luxury fashion consumption demands a cross-disciplinary outlook that draws from diverse disciplines such as marketing, psychology and sociology. The focus here is not on committing to a discipline, but rather to a more flexible approach that enhances our understanding of luxury fashion consumption.

7.2.0 Industrial Implications

A knowledge of all relevant factors in consumer perception with a particular focus on the perceived value of luxury fashion brands across countries is clearly also significant for industrial practice. The theoretical model presented here indicates five underlying constructs on consumers' perceived value that may assist practitioners in the field by shedding new light upon five notions that embody psychosocial and cultural influences. Before I go on to point

out the potential industrial implications of my research, I should clarify the irony that may exist in my critique of capitalism whilst providing the ammunition for what I have been explicitly critiquing throughout this thesis in this section. I must acknowledge that this research initiated from a marketing perspective and it is the intellectual change that I went through during the process of understanding consumption by deeply engaging with authors such as Marx (1972), Baudrillard (1970) and Adorno (1963) for example. However, it remains entirely necessary to highlight the industrial implications that the findings of my research may implicate to the marketing world.

The findings of my study can offer insights through my identification of key psychosocial concepts that influence how it is that consumers perceive a value towards luxury fashion brands. In effect, the implication is that experts in the luxury fashion industry can focus on having a better understanding of essential concepts such as self-consciousness, self-construal, self-enhancement, materialism and ownership that are significant factors on how it is that consumers perceive a value towards luxury fashion goods. The developed model can be practically implemented by understanding how the influence of these notions play their part on a consumer's perceived value and by reflecting upon the influence of this notion, specific strategies can be developed.

By reflecting on the questionnaire items that were highlighted as important according to the Exploratory Factor Analysis results of my study, it is important to discuss how experts in the industry can consider each concept as an opportunity to benefit from such knowledge. The first and the most influential factor on the perceived value of a consumer that buys into luxury fashion brands is self-consciousness. Based on the statistical findings of my research what this implies for professionals in the field is that consumers aspire to attain social status and have

the perception that consuming luxury fashion brands enable them to express their perceived image whilst seeking acceptance in social circles that they mix. As such, the marketing strategies of luxury fashion retailers may either persuade consumers of the brand's social image to manoeuvre on the consumers self-conscious thoughts. Self-construal is the second most influential factor that tells us how consumers consume luxury fashion brands in order to regard themselves in relation to others. The essence of this concept in the context of luxury fashion consumption deals with the way in which these goods enable consumers to obtain approval from others. This factor reasserts how influential fashion trends actually are, as the data suggests that by purchasing the same luxury fashion products as other members of a social group individuals feel that others will approve their fashion style as they give the impression that they are following the latest fashion trends. It may seem that certain products are not going to be as popular as other products prior to launch. However sometimes consumer demand may prove to be unpredictable. This implication is underpinned by the data from the interviews discussed in Chapter 5 which indicate that consumers may buy into 'trendy' products simply because they are trending; an example here being the Gucci Princetown slipper that was so popular, retail could not keep up with demand. The third factor is self-enhancement which centres around consumers being able to enhance their mental state through the consumption of goods that serve them in displaying their success and which allow them to feel proud about themselves, whilst contributing to their confidence. This factor has important strategic implications for marketers of luxury fashion brands: for example, luxury fashion brand retailers can place an emphasis on the role that these brands play in assisting individuals to present themselves as successful. The fourth underlying influence on the perception value towards luxury fashion brand consumption is the concept of ownership. This centres on the sense of possession which consumers attain

after owing these items that are perceived as valuable in their social groups. In this respect, a key recommendation is that marketers should promote the idea that consumers can reward themselves after a certain achievement in their life, and that this sense of achievement may be fulfilled through ownership of luxury fashion goods. In the case of this particular factor, slogans that might trigger consumers to own these goods could provide a more desirable basis for consumers to pursue the ownership of these items. Given that materialistic values are, according to my findings, the fifth most important factor, marketers could cast light on how luxury fashion items constitute symbolic materials that communicate how well individuals are doing in life through style and fashion. As indicated in Chapter 4, these factors are related. Having reflected on the implications of self-consciousness, self-construal, and self-enhancement, it could be said that it is the ownership of these materials that contributes to how well individuals feel about themselves through consumption. Based on this, marketers should first explore the most important factor that influences consumers to value their brand in order to maintain it and enhance it. Since the perceived value of luxury fashion brands centres around how the brand is perceived, and according to that perception the value is assessed by consumers depending on how they engage with the symbolism that surrounds a product.

Before I go on to discuss the industrial implications concerned with differences and similarities between luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK, I will highlight the potential implications of the model that emerged from multiple regression which suggest that self-consciousness is the most important factor on a consumer's frequency of purchase. What can be implied from this finding is that marketing managers should concentrate on targeting frequent consumers since these consumers prefer to be seen with a brand new item at times when they associate with their social groups. The key point emerging from this evidence

suggests that due to consumers' self-conscious thoughts there is an increase in how frequently they purchase luxury fashion goods. This is fundamentally triggered by consumers' desire to be perceived by social groups as wearing a new luxury fashion item as often as possible. In addition, this cognitive process is essentially influenced by an individual's imagination. It is in this context that my research provides theoretical and industrial insights into the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption.

After combining the results of my *Luxury Fashion* interview findings with my Luxury fashion *questionnaire,* this thesis has established that luxury fashion consumers based in both the UAE and the UK seek well-being and product quality through their consumption of luxury fashion goods. The marketing implication here is that while marketing experts cannot, of course, control globalisation and how it influences consumer culture, regardless of consumers' geographical location, what marketers must bear in mind are the psychosocial and cultural factors that influence a consumers' perceived value and thus their demand for consumption. By integrating the knowledge of what underlying constructs shapes an individual's perceived value towards luxury fashion consumption, marketing practitioners may be able to develop new techniques in creating demand for the luxury fashion brands they seek to promote.

Having discussed the importance of considering the potential similarities among consumers in the UAE and the UK in a global consumer culture, I will now point out the differences between luxury fashion consumers in the UAE and the UK and how this might provide marketers with helpful intelligence. The findings underpinning this thesis demonstrate that luxury fashion consumers who reside in the UK are more likely to conform to the psychosocial influences mentioned above compared to consumers in the UAE. This could mean that

investment in celebrities and social media influencers in the UK might have a higher return on investment in the UK compared to the UAE. Furthermore, the data tells us that consumers in the UAE take certain materialistic values more seriously than consumers in the UK in the sense that consumers in the UAE are more likely to manifest their success, or quality of life through luxury fashion materials compared to consumers in the UK. The industrial implication that follows from this finding is that luxury fashion consumers in the UAE are more likely to spend their income on luxury fashion materials to reward themselves and to signal how successful they are in life.

Concerning the industrial implications of my research, in the UAE market the supply of goods offering luxury fashion designs appeal to inconspicuous luxury fashion consumers, with subtle signals in displaying luxury and identifiable only to the few expert luxury fashion consumers could enhance the experience of an inconspicuous luxury fashion consumer, in the sense that these consumers prefer goods that not a large segment of consumers have access to. In this regard, it is also a challenge for marketers to evaluate the limit of supply quantity, as inconspicuous luxury fashion consumers are conscious of a product's exclusivity as well as the craft involved and its perceived uniqueness. The suggestion here is that from a business point of view products the accessibility of a luxury fashion brand must be carefully considered. Marketers must ensure that the supply of products targeted towards inconspicuous consumers are regulated to the extent that these items remain exclusive or at least make consumers feel unique through the consumption of an 'unique' product.

According to my data, consumers in the UAE prefer brands that are in a higher level of luxury such as Dior and Chanel for example, as compared to their UK counterparts, as revealed in the qualitative data of my questionnaire and interviews. Whether or not this finding reflects

on the purchasing power in the respective territories or on regional preference, the data attained from my sample implicates an investment in Dior and Chanel in the UAE is more commercially viable compared to in the UK. However, I must draw attention to the point that retail sales associates in the UK contend that this is more common among younger consumers that are in their 20's. As such, marketers in the UK's luxury fashion brand industry can best respond to these demands by focusing on loud products that are clearly identifiable as luxury fashion branded goods and expect more profits from a brand like Gucci and Balenciaga, at least among younger consumers, than they might compared to Dior in the UK. This does not by any means imply that investing in Dior would not be financially viable in the UK, the suggestion here is that from what I gleaned from my sample in the UAE and the UK, consumers in the UAE seem to gravitate more towards Dior compared to consumers in the UK.

UK marketers can use the relatively low demand of quieter products among younger consumers as an opportunity to market these goods as ultra-luxurious and in order to sell the idea that access to these goods are rare in the UK. The promotion of these goods might well be through high-profile contemporary fashion influencers on Instagram who are followed by younger fashion consumers that desire luxury. Instagram provides the demographics of all followers to the social media influencer with a business account that includes age, gender, location and suchlike details that can help in navigating their target audience so that they can promote the product that best suit the demands of their followers. Hereby, the marketer can analyse which social media influencer best engages with their target audience. At this stage, it is important to note that according to my data, and as informed by retail associates, a celebrity endorsement strategy through social media appears to be considerably effective in promoting the consumption of luxury fashion brands. Since the emergence of social media,

digital marketing has become a top priority for marketers in sectors including luxury fashion brands. Furthermore, retail associates most especially in the UK, revealed that consumers are becoming more and more conscious of issues concerned with the sustainability of the fashion industry and that this could become a threat to a brand's image, at least for consumers conscious of such issues. In the luxury fashion industry today, the brand Chanel, and Selfridges as a major luxury retailer, have already taken action towards ensuring that their brands are sustainable by publicly announcing that they will stop selling exotic animal skins (The Guardian, 2019). As such, there are advantages for brands and retailers in taking responsibility for such issues. In this light, I also suggest that luxury fashion brands could at least produce a line of products that are branded as sustainable, particularly in the UK in order to target consumers concerned with sustainability issues. I must point out that, among consumers in the UAE the sustainability issue was not raised.

In respect to the contemporary taste of luxury fashion consumers, retail associates in both countries reported that in today's luxury fashion market in the UK and the UAE, there is a higher demand for Street wear style including items such as hoodies, T-shirts and trainers in which brands such as Gucci, Balenciaga and Off-White have been successful. However, the recommendation here is not necessarily for every luxury fashion brand to focus on streetwear, but to consider if this strategy could be adopted without having an adverse effect on a brand's heritage in the longer term. The implication here is that marketers must be aware of any potential threat that could harm a brand's image such as the question of sustainability, since the fundamental element that lies at the heart of a successful brand, is trust. Such threats must be taken seriously because if a brand image is damaged it will take years to recover and regain trust. I should therefore reassert the importance of perceived value in the context of luxury fashion brands, since the bottom line of all issues associated with a brand's

image reflects on how consumers perceive a value for these luxury fashion brands. It is in this sense that the symbolic power that luxury fashion brands endow is an intangible asset that must be protected by all means by ensuring how these brands are perceived in different geographical locations and therefore cater to consumers accordingly.

7.3.0 Limitations and recommendations

Of course, no research project is beyond criticism. I needed to overcome some challenging methodological hurdles in order to be able to deliver this project. The success of this thesis must in part be judged my ability to respond to these challenges and to develop the project accordingly. My face-to-face collection questionnaire method was simply not practicable in the digital age in which we live, at least not in Bond Street and Selfridges of London and Mall of the Emirates and Dubai Mall in the UAE. Consumers in these locations were usually too busy shopping or on their phone, and it was a huge challenge to first grab their attention and second to ask them to complete a short survey, meaning that I spent much of my time observing significant amounts of individuals constantly scrolling on their phone or taking pictures of their products after shopping. Given these limitations, I switched from the Mall intercept method, to finding luxury fashion consumers on Instagram where they appeared to be more amenable as I outlined in Chapter 3. In hindsight, the adaptation of a digital approach from an earlier stage would have mitigated the time lost in seeking participants in the malls or the streets with luxury fashion stores that could have enriched my sample size.

Prior to conducting interviews, the aim was to interview luxury fashion brand managers with the intention to better understand the strategies undertaken by luxury fashion brands. However, during the process, the rejections and obstacles faced in getting responses from managers who were too busy to respond or would respond and then not be available, drew

my attention towards the possibilities of interviewing consumers as well as interviewing the retail sales associates instead of managers in order to supplement my findings. The fact that retail sales associates encounter luxury fashion consumers face-to-face on a daily basis (and are trained by managers) served me with a rich fount of information. As such, through the data gleaned from retail sales associates I was able to grasp the strategies imposed by the managers above them in their organisational hierarchy. The perceived benefit of this apparent limitation was that sales associates participated in my project by expressing information in a very transparent manner during the course of my interviews. Additionally, in cases where consumers show particular interest in a certain product, retail sales associates are advised to share, if there are any, the story behind the product. In hindsight, after gleaning such information from sales associates in both the UAE and the UK, I would have prioritised interviewing retail sale associates and luxury fashion consumers from the initial stages of my interviews.

During the interviews conducted, I found that social media influencers play a vital role in the marketing strategies of luxury fashion brands. If I had this knowledge prior to primary data collection, I would have attempted to enrich my data by interviewing a cohort of social media influencers. My research may not be exhaustive in terms of incorporating input from all relevant stakeholders, however what it does do is provide original insights on the importance of understanding perceived value in the context of luxury fashion brand consumption through a psychosocial lens. The research also paves the way for further examinations into the similarities and differences of the luxury fashion consumer culture in the UAE and the UK. The key empirical recommendation for future research is thus to target brand managers, social media influencers and consumers in order to provide three diverse point of views in order to facilitate a more triangulated understanding of the marketing strategies behind luxury fashion

consumption. The emergence of social media influencers and their impact offers up research gaps that must be addressed as these influencers are often as effective as popular celebrities particularly in the fashion industry, whether in the context of the luxury segment or not.

Research concerned with luxury fashion brand consumption should further explore the benefits to be had from comparing the perception of value between different geographical locations. After debates concerned with Hofstede's (1980) individuality dimension, it would be interesting to compare consumer behaviour between different places with different markets with a similar collectivist background in the East and the Middle East, for example UAE with China, or Qatar with India, and Saudi Arabia with Malaysia. This would provide researchers with an opportunity to investigate the influence of globalization, westernisation and social media on Eastern cultures and its relationship to luxury fashion consumption. Henceforth, the researcher has the opportunity to explore whether or not these influences have had an impact upon the perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption in these countries, and if there are significant differences or similarities among them. Furthermore, consumers in the UAE can be compared with other Western countries that may not have been explored to date, for instance luxury fashion consumption in the UAE as compared to the luxury fashion brand consumption in the USA, Canada, and France. In order to find out the impact of a globalization and the popular culture on the perceived value of consumers in Eastern and Western cultures, future research could furthermore investigate the impact of the global pandemic on how consumers' well-being has been affected in relation to their shopping experience with luxury fashion brand consumption. This recommendation is underpinned by my interview results which suggest that the shopping experience is an influential factor impacting upon a luxury fashion consumers' intention to consume. It became clear that luxury fashion brands are well aware of the impact of the consumers

shopping experience and have trained their retail associates to act as servants of their consumers rather than pushing consumers towards making a purchase. Given such training the shopping experience of luxury fashion consumption seems to be therapeutic to certain consumers and it is in this therapeutic dimension that offers the potential of rich takings for the consumer researcher of the future.

7.4.0 Holistic impact

In writing this thesis, I have illustrated that the luxury fashion consumer buys into a perception of value manifested in an inherent tangible quality product. In doing so, my broader goal is to inform a more critical approach to the marketing of luxury. This does not by any means imply that I am adopting or indeed proposing a moralistic perspective on luxury fashion consumption nor that marketing or the sub-disciplines that inform it are entirely uncritical (Wiedmann et al .,2007: Aliyev and Wagner, 2018: Bethon et al .,2009). Indeed, the discussion presented here around the industrial implications of the research demonstrates a recognition that diverse audiences may benefit from engaging with this research. Above all, however, I aspire to a state of affairs in which a more sophisticated psycho-social lens might allow us to drill more effectively into what lies beneath the perception of value towards luxury fashion goods. My findings suggest that the pursuit of well-being plays a fundamental role in the consumption of luxury goods.

This thesis enhances our understanding of the well-being of modern, and potentially fragile, consumers who appear to feel more secure through accessing the symbolic acceptance that luxury fashion brands afford them. As such, issues associated with well-being, such as confidence, satisfaction and the desire to feel unique could be described to be psychosocial 'wounds' that are not so easily healed through the consumption of luxury fashion materials

while mirroring the lifestyles of popular celebrities. What I am suggesting here is that since the global capitalist system that governs the world benefits from individuals seeking well-being through material forms of consumption it is up to consumers themselves to critically engage with the potential limitations of the freedoms they seek. In this respect the, admittedly much criticised Adorno (1963), argues that our essential human wants are carefully shielded from us by the culture industry so that the consumer ends up forgetting what they need and settle instead for their desires being reinstated as necessities. The intention here is not to criticise popular figures nor luxury fashion products and its consumers, but rather to highlight the complexities involved in being a citizen of a consumer society. In this sense, in an era in which well-being is still achieved through material forms of consumption, a culture of profound imitation is perpetuated. In the contemporary world, in which almost everything is for sale, it is challenging to discern what is actually 'real'. As my perceived value of luxury fashion model has sought to demonstrate the most significant influence on a consumer's perceived value towards luxury fashion consumption is self-consciousness. I therefore argue that the more consumers become conscious of the rational and irrational reasons behind their consumption choices, the more the richness of the consumer society will become available to them. From this point of view, luxury brand consumption provides a way in to better understanding the complexities of what it means to be a consumer in a world of symbolism galore.

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Appendix One
Factor analysis communality values

Communality values

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
1.It is important that others like the products and brands I buy	1.000	.679
2.I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them	1.000	.696
3.I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase	1.000	.729
4 .When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of	1.000	.806
5.I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others	1.000	.740
6.If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy	1.000	.719
7.I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase	1.000	.649
8.I have sense of ownership when buying luxury fashion products	1.000	.643
9 .Luxury fashion products that are seen with a higher value motivate my willingness to buy them	1.000	.620
10.I consume luxury fashion products to belong to a reference group	1.000	.623

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Item		
11.I am attached to shopping luxury fashion brands for personal satisfaction	1.000	.604
12.I grew up wearing luxury fashion brands.	1.000	.779
13.Shopping and consuming luxury fashion products enhances my mental well-being	1.000	.682
14.Wearing luxury fashion brands makes me feel proud	1.000	.715
15.Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to express my success and leads to satisfaction	1.000	.755
16.Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to display my background heritage.	1.000	.737
17.Luxury fashion brands help me demonstrate a superior identity	1.000	.714
18.wearing Luxury fashion brands help me enhance my everyday confidence in the society	1.000	.767
1.I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes.	1.000	.690
2.Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.	1.000	.782
3.I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success	1.000	.569
4.The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	1.000	.605
5.I like to own things to impress people.	1.000	.737
6. I don't pay much attention to material objects other people own	1.000	.694
7.I would buy a product just because it has status	1.000	.612

8.I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself	1.000	.669
9.Part of me is defined by important brands in my life	1.000	.732
10.I like a lot of luxury in my life	1.000	.565
1.I consume luxury fashion brands to show the social group I belong to	1.000	.759
2.I consume luxury fashion brands to attain social status	1.000	.820
3.I consume luxury fashion brands to display uniqueness	1.000	.654
4.I consume luxury fashion brands to fulfill my self-image	1.000	.697
5.I consume luxury fashion brands to express my perceived image by the society.	1.000	.804
6.I consume luxury fashion brands to display an identity	1.000	.768
7.I consume luxury fashion brands to enhance my own self-confidence	1.000	.724
8.I consume luxury fashion brands products to get a higher social position	1.000	.795
9. Luxury fashion brands enable me to be accepted better in social circles that I mix.	1.000	.622
10. I consume luxury fashion brands for its functional benefit.	1.000	.730
11.I consume luxury fashion brands as a personal reward	1.000	.683
12.I consume luxury fashion brands due to its product quality and performance	1.000	.812

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Appendix two

Factor analysis post purification

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	17.482	48.560	48.560	17.482	48.560	48.560	8.260	22.944	22.944
2	2.716	7.544	56.104	2.716	7.544	56.104	6.792	18.868	41.811
3	1.836	5.099	61.203	1.836	5.099	61.203	4.961	13.782	55.593
4	1.524	4.234	65.437	1.524	4.234	65.437	2.355	6.542	62.135
5	1.098	3.049	68.486	1.098	3.049	68.486	2.286	6.351	68.486
6	.854	2.372	70.858						
7	.781	2.170	73.028						
8	.729	2.026	75.054						
9	.698	1.940	76.994						
10	.657	1.824	78.819						

Appendix three

Luxury fashion questionnaire

Please give us your consent of the above and put a tick in the box for YES and continue answering the questionnaire.

Age:

Gender:

City of residents:

Are you a luxury fashion brand consumer? If yes which?

What items do you usually purchase from those brands? (e.g.:- clothing, belts, accessories, shoes, handbags)

How often do you purchase luxury fashion brands?

Section 2

1.It is important that others like the products and brands I buy

2.I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them

3.I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase

4 .When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of

5.I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others

6.If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy

7.I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase

8.I have sense of ownership when buying luxury fashion products

9 .Luxury fashion products that are seen with a higher value motivate my willingness to buy them

10.I consume luxury fashion products to belong to a reference group

11.I am attached to shopping luxury fashion brands for personal satisfaction

12.I grew up wearing luxury fashion brands.

13.Shopping and consuming luxury fashion products enhances my mental well-being

14. Wearing luxury fashion brands makes me feel proud

15.Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to express   my success and leads to satisfaction

16.Luxury Fashion Brands enable me to display my background heritage.

17.Luxury fashion brands help me demonstrate a superior identity

18.wearing Luxury fashion brands help me enhance my everyday confidence in the society

Section 3

1.I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes.

2.Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.

3.I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success

4.The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.

5.I like to own things to impress people.

6. I don't pay much attention to material objects other people own

7.I would buy a product just because it has status

8.I consider my favorite brands to be a part of myself

9.Part of me is defined by important brands in my life

10.I like a lot of luxury in my life

Section 4

1-I consume luxury fashion brands to show the social group I belong to

2-I consume luxury fashion brands to attain social status

3-I consume luxury fashion brands to display uniqueness

4.I consume luxury fashion brands to fulfil my self-image

5.I consume luxury fashion brands to express my perceived image by the society.

6.I consume luxury fashion brands to display an identity

7.I consume luxury fashion brands to enhance my own self-confidence

8.I consume luxury fashion brands products to get a higher social position

9. Luxury fashion brands enable me to be accepted better in social circles that I mix.

10. I consume luxury fashion brands for its functional benefit.

11. I consume luxury fashion brands as a personal reward

Section 5

1- Please think of a luxury fashion item you purchased and tell us about the item and why is it important to you?

2- if luxury fashion brand items have a symbolic meaning to you please express your feelings about it. (if not please tell us your purchase purpose.)

3- Based on your own purchase experience what made the luxury fashion brand/item valuable for you to pay premium prices?

4- Do you feel more satisfied after a shopping experience with luxury fashion brands? if yes please tell us more

5- If there is anything you would like to add or feel it had to be asked please feel free to advise

6- If we require further help would you mind if we contact you again?

Appendix Four

Participant consent form

Participant Consent Form

Researcher: Darioush Yazdani Farabi
Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University
Department: Manchester Fashion Institute, Arts and Humanities
Programme: PhD Research
Date: 2019

Project Title: Perceived value of Luxury Fashion Brands

Information for Participants:

This study aims to seek the underlying influences on perceived value of luxury fashion brand consumption in UAE and UK.

The primary data collection process will involve a questionnaire survey amongst luxury fashion brand consumers', with online profiles; in-depth interviews with luxury fashion brand consumers, brand associates and social media influencers.

Participants have all the right to withdraw their contribution at any point without a given reason. The interviews would be audio recorded with the full consent of participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of the data is assured (where requested and required) during the research development and writing up of the thesis. As the data forms part of a doctoral thesis, it will be secured and may feature in future publications of the study.

1. I voluntarily take part in the above research project.

   ☐

2. I have read and understood the information sheet dated for the above project and have had the opportunity to clarify the relevant interview/focus group procedure.

   ☐
   ☐

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, even without providing a reason to the researcher.

   ☐
   ☐

4. I understand that my responses/participation will be recorded and used for analysis within this research project.

   ☐

5. I understand that my responses/record of participation may be included in future publications.

6. I understand that the data generated from this study will be secured and at my request a transcript of my responses/record of participation can be made available.

(please cross out as applies)
7. I give permission / I do not give permission for my interview recording to be stored and used as part of this research project.

_____ _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____ _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix Five

Interview Participant information sheet

Overview of the participant information sheet

This study aims to provide a better understanding on the impact of influences perceived value of luxury fashion brands.

Study title: Perceived value of luxury fashion brands

The purpose of this study

To enhance the understanding of psychosocial perceptions of luxury fashion brands in UAE and UK.

Your invitation reason

You are invited as you are luxury fashion brand consumers, or that you have a great experience dealing with luxury fashion consumers based on your job. Your perceptions are important for us to understand the underlying constructs behind perceptions of value towards luxury fashion brands. There is no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is important. Your participant is voluntarily and will be orally recorded. The depth interview will be around 45 minutes, and will ask for your opinion. No personal information required, just questions based on luxury fashion consumption**.**

Possible benefits

There is no monetary payment nor gifts giving out.   We cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from the study will help to increase the understanding of luxury fashion brand consumption in UAE and UK.

Possible disadvantages and risks

This research includes no risks or disadvantages since there are no mental/physical experiments.

What if there is a problem

If you have a concern about any aspect of the study, you should ask to speak to the Principal Investigator. Darioush Yazdani Farabi, Email, darioush.yazdanifarabi@gmail.com phone number 00447491233146.

If you do not wish to discuss your concern with the Principal investigator and remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can email the supervisory team Dr. Priscilla Chan, email address: p.chan@mmu.ac.uk.

There are no compensation/insurance/indemnity schemes in place for any harm arising from this research study, although no specific risks to participants have been identified above.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about your business will be kept strictly confidential, and any information collected will have your personal and company information and removed so that you cannot be recognised.

Your confidentiality will be safeguarded during and after the study. The procedures for handling, processing, storage and destruction of your data match the Cadicott principles and/or Data Protection Act 1998.

- Data will be collected using notes and a recording device.
- Data will be stored safely using the university's data storage, accessible only by the research team.
- The data will only be used for the purposes of the specified research. If the data could be incorporated into future studies your specific permission for this use will be sought.
- Identifiable data will only be available for view by authorised persons such as researchers within the team, supervisors, sponsors and for monitoring the quality, regulatory authorities /R&D audit.
- The data will be retained during the study and then it will be disposed of securely after completion of the study.

What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?

You may withdraw from the study at any time, without prior notification

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the study may be published in relevant journals or presented at conference but can be made available to you on request. A list of any publications they are included in can also be obtained from the researchers on request. You will not be identified in any report/publication unless you have given your consent.

Who is organising or sponsoring the research?

This research is self-funded.

Additional information:-. If you would like to know more about this research, you can contact the Principal Investigator first. Darioush Yazdani Farabi, Email, darioush.yazdanifarabi@gmail.com phone number 00447491233146.

Appendix six

Interview questions for Luxury Fashion Brand associates/Social Media Influencer

<u>**Section 1**</u>

1- Why do you think fashion consumers buy into luxury?

2- What features do you think luxury fashion consumers can find in luxury fashion products that they cannot find in non-luxury products?

3- Why luxury fashion consumers often buy the same products/brands as others?

4- To what extent do you think luxury fashion branded products contribute to how consumers' feel about themselves?

5- Fashion has always been a form of expression for some people, please share your point of view on how luxury fashion brands enable consumers to express themselves?

6- Do you think luxury fashion brand consumption can enhance consumers' mood? If yes, please express how? If you do not think so please explain why this is not the case?

<u>**Section 2**</u>

1- What factors do you think attracts luxury fashion consumers towards a favourite luxury fashion brand?

2- How do you expect luxury fashion consumers to feel when wearing luxury fashion brands?

3- What do you think is the key selling point of luxury fashion brands from the consumers' perspective?

4- What do you think luxury fashion brands today consider as their key selling point?

5- Do you think culture and social influences play a role on how consumers value luxury fashion brands? If yes, please explain how? If no please explain why?

Appendix

Interview questions for luxury fashion consumers

<u>**Section 1**</u>

    1- How would you define luxury?

    2- Why do you buy luxury fashion products?

    3- What features can you find in luxury fashion products that you cannot find in non-luxury products?

    4- What reasons convince you to pay premium prices for luxury fashion branded products when there are other fashion brands at a lower price?

    5- When you see someone with a luxury fashion product what conclusion you might come to about them?

    6- To what extent does the luxury fashion branded product contribute to how you feel about yourself?

    7- Fashion has always been a form of expression for some people. Please express how luxury fashion brands enable you to express yourself?

    8- When you are in a bad mood, do you think shopping among luxury fashion brands is a good means of enhancing it? If yes please express how? If no please explain why not?

Section 2

1- Do you have a favourite luxury fashion brand? If yes, please explain what attracts you to the luxury fashion brand? If not please share your feelings on what attracts you to every luxury fashion brand that you like? (with examples preferably)

2- What expectations do you have from a luxury fashion branded product? How are these expectations fulfilled after you have purchased your luxury fashion branded item?

3- If you saw someone else wearing your favourite luxury fashion brand what might you think about them?

4- Does the society that you live influence your luxury fashion consumption? If yes, please explain how? If not please tell us why?

5- In what way do you think places you go influence your luxury fashion consumption?

6- In what way do you think the people you meet influence your luxury fashion consumption?