Perceptions of Luxury and the Country-of-Origin Effect:

An Empirical Study on Danish Luxury Consumers and the Case of Shanghai Tang

By Lena Marianne Coy Jørgensen

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I cannot end without thanking my family, on whose constant encouragement I have relied throughout my time at Aalborg University. I dedicate this work to them.

Abstract

This thesis investigates consumer perceptions and experiences of luxury brands. Data are collected from in-depth interviews with female luxury consumers in Denmark. The study provides evidence of both personal and non-personal aspects of luxury consumption. Moreover, the impact of country-of-origin in terms of perceptions of quality and prestige is examined. The thesis ends with a discussion of the perspectives for the Chinese luxury brand, Shanghai Tang, to be successful on the Danish luxury market.

Introduction

"The dream is not to own a crown. It is to be a king"
Gian Luigi Longinotti Buitoni

This thesis is about luxury brand consumption and the attached perceptions and attitudes of luxury among young Danish women. The thesis also treats the impact of country-of-origin in the luxury brand context.

Luxury.
The word itself invokes powerful imagery and hedonistic feelings.
It may be a holiday in an exclusive hotel, it may be the fine mechanical details on a Swiss watch, or it can be the elegance and stylishness of an Italian haute-couture dress.

In a marketplace dominated by a wide range of goods and more rapid change than ever, what creates that particular sense of "specialness"? What distinguishes high luxury brands from those that are low on luxury?

Researchers have pointed out some of the basic principles of luxury brands. By definition, the key concepts of a luxury brand are a strong element of human involvement, very limited supply and the recognition of others[1]. Practitioners view luxury as a main factor to differentiate a brand in a product category as a central driver of consumer preference and usage, and as a common denominator that can be used to define consumption across cultures[2].

The concept of luxury has been defined within several disciplines.

1   Vigneron & Johnson 2004:485
2   Vigneron & Johnson 2004:485

In 1997 Kapferer defined the sociological reference of luxury as follows:

> *"Luxury defines beauty; it is art applied to functional items. Like light, luxury is enlightening. (…) They [luxury products] offer more than mere objects: they provide reference of good taste. (…) Luxury items provide extra pleasure and flatter all senses at once…Luxury is the appendage of ruling classes."*[3]

Thus, the sociological reference defines luxury as something beyond any functional utility where the simple use or display of a particular luxury product brings esteem to the consumer due to its signal value. Hence, luxury products are in this definition understood as products, which enable consumers to satisfy psychological needs.

From an economic perspective, a luxury good is similarly perceived, but from a more concrete price viewpoint. Nueno and Quelch present luxury *"as those whose ratio of functionality to price is low, while the ratio of intangible and situational utility to price is high."*[4]

This definition is comparable to the sociological definition. The economic definition underlines that luxury products not alone are consumed for their functionality, as their price is significantly greater than the price of products with similar tangible features. On the other hand, luxury is in high degree consumed because of a luxury product's added value and its psychological benefits.

Nevertheless, researchers have recognized that luxury is particularly slippery to define, as the perception of what is and is not a luxury brand, as well as the amount of luxury contained in a brand, can be dependent on the context and the people concerned.

3   Kapferer, J.-N. 1997: 253
4   Nueno & Quelch 1998: 61-68

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The luxury brand literature builds on the assumption that a strong country-of-origin (COO) connection is a constituting element of a luxury brand. It is therefore an important element in the study of luxury brands to take into consideration how the country-of-origin information influences consumer attitudes towards luxury brands. The country of origin literature puts attention to the fact that a country's image can have an influential effect on how consumers perceive its products as well as the success of its products in foreign markets.[5]

It is suggested in country-of-origin literature that the country-of-origin of a product affects consumers' purchase decisions, as they tend to deduce the quality of a country's products from its national image.[6] It is thereby said that consumers are willing to pay more for products from countries that they perceive favorably or as having an expertise in producing specific products.

France and French brands are good examples to illustrate this interaction. In the international arena, France is known as a romantic and culturally inclined nation due to e.g. the Eiffel Tower, the language, French perfume and the gastronomy. Equally, French luxury brands as Dom Perignon, Louis Vuitton and Chanel all complement and define the nation brand.

China, on the other hand, does not benefit from a strong national image in terms of luxury.

The history of precious China brands goes back to Chinese silk and Chinese porcelain about 2000 years ago. Both products have been unique, high priced, and fascinated Europeans for centuries.
However, these days China is a good example of a country, whose products are being combined with poor quality in the global marketplace due to its reputation as a low cost producer.
Since Deng Xiao Ping's Open Door policy in 1978, China has recognized its role as the global economy's low-cost manufacturer[7].

5   Loo and Davies 2006:199
6   Jaffe and Nebenzahl 2001
7   Loo and Davies 2006:198

The perceptions of Chinese brands on a global marketplace have been measured in a survey carried out by Interbrand. The survey recounts that the "Made in China"-label is not a seal of approval when it comes to quality and prestige. In 2008 Interbrand surveyed over 700 non-Chinese business professionals on their perceptions of products made in China. According to Interbrand, cheap and low quality are the top associations for products made in China. Likewise, the perceptions of Chinese brands as luxurious, fashionable and of high quality are very low among the respondents.[8]

How well do the following attributes describe products made in China?

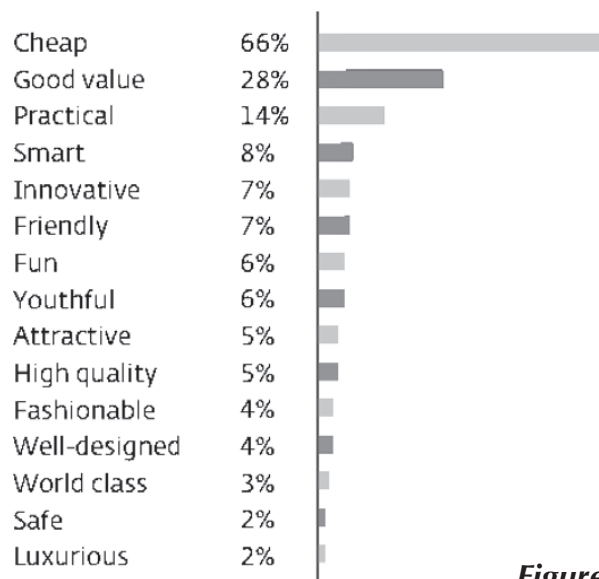| Attribute	Percentage
Cheap	66%
Good value	28%
Practical	14%
Smart	8%
Innovative	7%
Friendly	7%
Fun	6%
Youthful	6%
Attractive	5%
High quality	5%
Fashionable	4%
Well-designed	4%
World class	3%
Safe	2%
Luxurious	2%

Figure 1: Interbrand 2008

The majority of respondents in Interbrand's survey believed that a "Made in China"-tag hurts Chinese brands while only 4% believe the label helps.

Do you believe the Made in China label helps or hurts Chinese brands today?
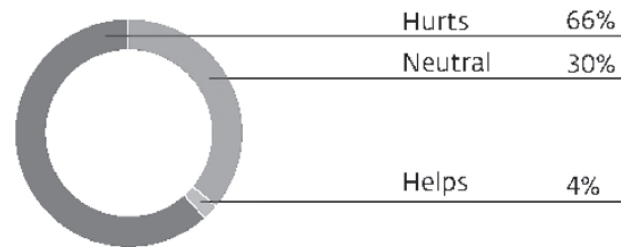
Total sample 2008
n=776

Hurts	66%
Neutral	30%
Helps	4%

Figure 2: Interbrand 2008

A cheap and low quality image is consequently the primary challenge for those Chinese brands with the ambition to go global and who are aiming for global luxury brand consumers.
Hence, Chinese brands have not been popular among the high demanding quality conscious western customers.

Shanghai Tang has, however, challenged these pre-conceived notions about Chinese brands.

Shanghai Tang is a Chinese fashion and accessories brand. The vision of the brand's founder was to create the first global Chinese lifestyle and luxury brand by revitalizing traditional Chinese designs, which intertwine with the 21st century. The founder of the brand wishes to establish Shanghai Tang on the Western markets and has already opened shops in New York, Paris, London and Madrid.[9]

The success of Shanghai Tang will depend on its ability to differentiate their products from other Chinese brands and their rather negative perceptions.

Motivation

The inspiration for this thesis derives from the current renewed interest in young peoples' increasing luxury brand consumption and the recent attention on this tendency. The tendency is that the global luxury market is going young and young affluents are becoming the key target market for luxury goods marketers. According to consumption specialist, Pamela N. Danziger young affluents have a big appetite to enhance their lifestyles through luxury goods. Danziger points out one key difference between the generation of 40-and-under consumers, or the so-called "Want-it-all" generation, and the older generation of luxury consumers:

> *"One key difference that distinguishes the young affluents from the older generation of luxury consumers is their dedication to expressing their luxury lifestyles by acquiring more luxury goods. Older luxury consumers, by contrast, are more focused on acquiring new life experiences and are less materialistic in their consumer orientation."*[10]

A research conducted by American Unity Marketing showed that in 2006 the most vibrant segment in the luxury market was the young affluents which are spending 31.9% more on luxury goods than the over 40 years old.

In Denmark, there is likewise a predisposition of young big-spending consumers. Mads Christensen, Danish fashion and lifestyle expert, discusses how young consumers in Denmark use high-priced fashion brands to create an identity and lifestyle. Christensen argues that luxury clothes and accessories are important outlets in expressing and defining who they are.[11] However, due to the fact that Mads Christensen describes this trend of young luxury consumers in a newspaper article and not in an academic journal, one may discuss the degree of validity and the level of accuracy in the portrayals of these young consumers. Nevertheless, based on the above-mentioned research conducted by American Unity Marketing, Mads Christensens portrayal of young Danish big-spenders may recount of an international tendency.

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10 http://ezinearticles.com/?Meet-the-New-Luxury-Target-Market-The-Young-Affluents&id=623737 (10/04/09)
11 http://www.bt.dk/article/20080919/nyheder/709200004/ (10/04/09)

However, this thesis only focuses on the young female luxury consumers as a particular consumption culture in this segment can be traced. Global cult television shows like Sex and The City and movies like The Devil Wears Prada and Confessions of A Shopaholic, which have fashion undertones, have become reference for young affluent female consumers.

In a study, O'Cass (2000) found that the consumer involvement in fashion clothing was much higher among the young female respondents than among the young male respondents.[12]

This renewed interest in the trend of young women's luxury consumption, is the incentive for this thesis and has motivated me to assess the Danish consumer perceptions toward luxury.

Accordingly, a study conducted by Auty & Elliott (1998) on fashion involvement found that young women are most positive about their trendiness.[13]

According to Bakewell & Mitchell, this contemporary tendency can be explained by the fact that young female consumers have been influenced by several environmental factors that separate them from older generations. Young females have been conditioned into consuming earlier than previous generations and have been socializing into shopping as a form of leisure. They have developed in surroundings that provide more reasons and opportunities to shop, and the young females are more likely to have become familiarized to media that depict affluent and luxurious lifestyles.[14]

12 O'Cass 2000: 545-576
13 Auty & Elliott 1998: 109-123
14 Bakewell & Mitchell 2003: 95-106

A current example on how the media has glorified the luxurious lifestyle is the American TV series (and later on the movie) Sex and the City, which has become an international phenomenon.   As the show's main character and narrator, Carrie Bradshaw functions as Sex and the City's bourgeois hero. In a typical episode, Carrie will shop at expensive boutiques, dine in fancy restaurants, sip expensive wines, and receive dazzling gifts. While many female viewers might see themselves in Carrie's various character nuances, they might also be envious of her great quantity of expensive obsessions. Due to the series huge popularity among women all over the world, Sex and the City has, therefore, been a prominent trendsetter in the world of fashion. Many of the main characters' clothing, shoes, and various accessories have exploded in real-life as trendy commodities among upper-class women.

It is this particular segment of luxury consumers, which is of interest in this thesis as the young women represent a great part of the global luxury market in the field of clothing, shoes and accessories.

In addition to this, the launching of Shanghai Tang in Western countries has motivated me to investigate whether the Chinese luxury brand can live up to Danish luxury consumers' ideas of a luxury brand, or whether it is still haunted by perceptions of low quality in the same way as other Chinese products. It is therefore essential to post the research question how country-of-origin information influences consumer attitudes of luxury brands.

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Problem Formulation

In seeking to expand the understanding and knowledge of luxury brand consumption, this thesis examines young Danish women's attitudes and perceptions towards luxury brands.

Firstly, this study is focused on understanding how the supposed luxury of a brand is assessed and how it enables the young consumers to express the self through the use of a brand. In this context, it is also central to examine the experience that luxury brands provide the young women.

Secondly, the thesis aims to analyze how the country-of-origin of luxury brands influences the young consumers' perceptions of a product's quality, value and their willingness to buy it. I will investigate whether young Danish women attach importance to the country where a product is manufactured when purchasing luxury brands with specific reference to Chinese products.

Lastly, I will estimate Shanghai Tang's possibilities to be successful on the market of young luxury consumers in Denmark based on the consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards luxury and country-of-origin.

To summarize, this thesis investigates the dilemma between the commonly perceived bad quality of Chinese products and the sense of exclusivity and quality of luxury, which Shanghai Tang wishes to be associated with. The aim of this thesis is thereby to look into this particular dilemma by investigating young Danish women's attitudes to luxury brands in general, and finally to Shanghai Tang as a Chinese luxury brand.

These research areas lead to the following problem formulation:

> **In which ways do young Danish female luxury consumers perceive, consume and experience luxury brands, and based on that what are the perspectives for Shanghai Tang on a Danish luxury market?**

Delimitation of the Problem

The way in which I wish to illuminate the luxury brand consumption of Danish consumers is through an empirical study where I conduct in-depth interviews with young women. This can be justified with the fact that luxury brands increasingly can be interpreted as an expression of individuality and as a personal experience. The in-depth interviews with the consumers can thereby be used as a means to carry out interpretive analysis of the consumers' perceptions, consumption and experiences of luxury.

The interviews will also be of use in the analysis of the country-of origin-effect on luxury purchases where the interpretation of the consumers' attitudes towards Chinese brands will be useful in my estimation of Shanghai Tang's prospects on a Danish market.

However, my analysis of Shanghai Tang's perspectives on a Danish market will not be the supporting element of this thesis, but will be a final and evaluating analysis based on the analysis of the consumer interviews. On the other hand, I wish to focus on the meanings and understandings that these young Danish luxury consumers attribute to the world of luxury. This fact does also mean that I will not affect a thorough analysis of Shanghai Tang's marketing strategies on the Western marketplace, but instead "measure the temperature" for Shanghai Tang on a potential Danish market.

In my analysis of luxury consumption, I wish to only focus on the fashion section of luxury, such as clothing, accessories, handbags and shoes as Shanghai Tang handles these items. Furthermore, these specific product categories are interesting to investigate in relation to my consumer segment, as clothing is one of the most expressive product categories.[15] In addition to this, the consumption of these particular product categories is of great relevance for young affluent women as they represent a certain lifestyle and a material representation in the social world.

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15 McCracken 1988: 57

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Photo taken outside of a Shanghai Tang store in Dubai Mall, Dubai.

Shanghai Tang

Shanghai Tang is an international clothing chain company, founded in 1994 by Hong Kong businessman, David Tang Wing Cheung, and now controlled by the Swiss luxury goods group, Richemont. Setting out to create the first Chinese luxury brand, David Tang interweaves traditional Chinese elements to a vibrant and dynamic creation meant for the 21st century.

Shanghai Tang has now more than 23 stores worldwide and it is aiming to push more heavily into the Western market. However, the brand's message is clear and remarkable: Shanghai Tang creates luxurious, modern Chinese fashion with themes deeply rooted in ancient and authentic Chinese culture, from calligraphy to The Silk Road to Chinese contemporary art.[16]

China is more often associated in modern consumer minds with cheap manufacturing than luxury, but Shanghai Tang has been inspired by the success of Japanese luxury brands, such as Kenzo, and is hoping to spread its Chinese-influenced brand of style around the globe. Raphael le Masne de Chermont, executive chairman of Shanghai Tang, argues for that development: *"It would be very myopic to think that China - with 5,000 years of history - will remain the factory of the world forever."* He adds that China is ready to export its skills and design prowess back to the West. *"We are the ambassadors of modern China ... clothes that are inspired by Chinese culture but could be worn by anyone,"* he states.[17]

Shanghai Tang's product offer includes a full range of clothing for men, women and children as well as home furnishing, accessories and gifts. The brand conforms to the standard luxury brand with regard to price. A typical dress in the Dubai store retails for around 4000 DKK, a jacket for around 10.000 DKK, and a handbag for 3000 DKK.

16 http://www.shanghaitang.com/aboutus.jsp (09/04/09)
17 Brand Strategy 2007 (Appendix 4)

Methodological Considerations

In this chapter, I will enlighten my methodological approach and give details about the concrete procedure of the thesis. To begin with, I will express the philosophy of science, which is the basic approach to the understanding of symbolic consumption. Thereupon, I will explain the role of my chosen theories and their relation to my research area. Finally, this chapter will contain a description of my empirical work and my argumentation for choosing this approach in preference to others.

Symbolic Interactionism

The term "symbolic interactionism" has come into use as a relatively distinctive approach to the study of human group life and human conduct. Symbolic interactionism came into existence primarily through the work of two theorists: George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and Herbert Blumer (1900-1987). Symbolic interactionism is rooted in the philosophy of pragmatism. For the pragmatist, true reality does not exist "out there" in the real world, but is actively created as we act in and toward the world. In other words, the "truth" of any idea or moral is not found in any ultimate reality. Truth, on the other hand, can only be found in the actions of people[18].

Understanding pragmatism is a way of understanding the basis for the symbolic interactionist view on meaning, self, and society.

Symbolic interactionists focus on the subjective aspect of social life, rather than objective, macro-structural aspects of social systems. One reason for this focus is that symbolic interactionists base their theoretical perspective on their image of humans, rather than on their image of society.[19] Interactionists view humans as pragmatic actors who repeatedly must alter their behavior to the actions of other actors. Humans can adjust to these actions only because they are able to interpret them as symbolic objects. This process of adjustment is aided by our ability to think about and to react to our own actions and even our selves as symbolic objects. Hence, symbolic interactionism sees humans as active, creative participants who construct their social world, not as passive, conforming objects of socialization[20].

18 Allan 2006: 8-9
19 Ritzer 2008: 363
20 Allan 2006:10

Meanings and Symbols

Symbolic interactionists, following Mead, define meaning as something that is conveyed, denoted, or signified by acts, words, or objects. Thus, meaning derives from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. Blumer explains how the meanings of things are formed in the context of social interaction:

> *"The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person. Thus, symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact."*[21]

In linkage to this, humans organize their behaviors based on meaning. Meaning, then, becomes a tool for action, which facilitates behavior[22].

As well as meanings, people learn symbols in social interaction. According to symbolic interactionism, symbols are crucial in allowing people to act in distinctive ways, as symbols are social objects used to represent whatever people assent they shall represent. Symbols can be words, physical objects, and physical actions, which people often use to communicate something about themselves.[23] For instance, they wear a Burberry trench coat to communicate a certain style of life.

In contrast to animals, humans have the ability to use symbols, which can be abstract and arbitrary. With natural signs, the relationship between the sign and its referent is natural, for instance as with smoke and fire. Symbolic meaning, on the other hand, is verbal and nonverbal signals that require interpretation and convey meaning. So the meaning of an object is defined in terms of the way we call attention to it, name it, and attach legitimate lines of behavior to it.[24]

21 Blumer 1986: 4-5
22 Allan 2006: 11
23 Ritzer 2008:367
24 Allan 2006: 12-13

Symbolic interactionists consider language as a vast system of symbols, because words are used to stand for things. Objects and acts exist and have meaning only because they can be described through the use of words. Symbols allow humans to attach meaning to the material and social world by permitting them to name, categorize, and remember the objects they encounter through language.[25]

Because of the ability to handle meanings and symbols, people can make choices in the actions in which they engage on the basis of their own interpretation of the situation.[26]

The Self

Along with meaning, symbols and interaction, the self is a basic concept in Mead's thinking in symbolic interactionism. The essential aspects of the self are that it is developed in social processes and is a reflexive phenomenon. Reflexivity enables humans to act toward themselves as objects, reflect on, and evaluate themselves. This human attribute based on the social character of human language, enables individuals to see themselves from the perspective of others, and thereby to form a conception of themselves, a self-concept.[27] Just like others are social objects, the self too is a social object and thereby makes it possible to relate and understand ourselves.[28]

The importance of others in the formation of self-concept is captured in the idea of the *looking-glass self* developed by Charles Horton Cooley. Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self proposes that to some extent individuals see themselves as they think others see them. Self-conceptions and self-feelings are a result of how people imagine others perceive and evaluate them.[29]

The emphasis on the social construction of the self has lead symbolic interactionists to an interest in the roles people play. Stryker proposes that

commitment to various role-identities provides much of the structure and organization of self-concepts. Individuals' commitment to a specific role

25 Ritzer 2008:367
26 Ritzer 2008:368
27 Reynolds & Herman-Kinney 2003: 267-276
28 Allan 2006:14
29 Ritzer 2008:369-370

motivates them to act according to their conception of the identity and to maintain and protect it. In role-making, individuals actively construct, interpret and express their roles. Stryker underlines that much socialization involves learning social roles and associated values, attitudes and beliefs.[30]

Symbolic Interactionist Relevance in the Thesis

In my study on luxury consumption, I have chosen to integrate concepts from symbolic interactionism. This can be justified with the fact that the subjective experience in the consumption of many products can be regarded as a contribution to the consumer's structuring of social reality, self-concept and behavior.[31] The notion that most products possess symbolic features and that consumption of goods may have more social meaning than a functional utility is a significant one in the field of consumer research. The field has for a long time acknowledged the importance of intangible attributes and researchers have shared the basic premise that the symbolic meanings of products are often determinants of product estimation and purchase.

Hence, the use of symbolic interactionism as a perspective will be functional in my analysis and can be used to investigate how the young luxury consumers attribute symbolic meaning to the luxury products they consume. Moreover, a symbolic interactionist perspective can enlighten whether the consumers rely upon the social meanings in luxury brands as a mediator for self-definition and role performance. As luxury brands above all can be considered as symbolic rather than functional, this interactionist perspective focuses on the consumers' relationships with the luxury goods they produce and purchase.

However, a social constructivist approach will not provide me with any concrete tools that I will take in use in my analysis, but it will, as previous mentioned, offer me a perspective of the social meanings of consumption.

30 Stryker 1980: 69
31 Solomon 1983: 319

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Choices of Theories

As a preliminary approach to luxury consumer culture, I will take in the direct links between consumer culture and postmodernism. Therefore, my theory chapter will initially contain a description of the postmodern consumer based on Anthony Giddens' work on modernity and self-identity. Thereupon, in order to answer my problem formulation, I have chosen theories within two disciplines of research. That is consumption studies with a specific focus on luxury and country-of-origin studies.

To begin with, the theory chapter will introduce studies, which have been developed on luxury consumption focusing on the meanings of consumption. This literature review aims to review the existing knowledge in this field and to synthesize the basic ideas of luxury consumption. The literature review will provide the context of my own research, which will focus on young Danish women's perceptions on luxury brands, and the impact of country-of-origin.

Secondly, to look into the ways young Danes consume the luxury brands and attribute meanings to them, I will utilize Vigneron and Johnson's framework of "brand luxury index". The framework includes both interpersonal and personal motives to explain consumer behavior in relation to luxury brands. The framework proposes that luxury consumption involves purchasing a product that represents value to both the individual and vis à vis significant others. The framework will provide me with an instrument to categorize the young Danes' consumption into non-personal and personal perceptions. Likewise, the framework can be instrumental in examining the role-making aspects and the social value of luxury brands.

With exceptions from Vigneron and Johnson and few others, the sources of the literature review on luxury consumption are primarily based on American studies. Firstly, because many of the most important luxury consumption studies have been carried out in U.S by American researchers. Secondly, the perceptions of luxury and prestige may be strongly culture-bound, and it will therefore be useful to take in sources originating from a

Western cultural context, which may have common points with the Danish culture. This can be justified by the fact that the perception of what is and is not a luxury brand, as well as the amount of luxury contained in a brand, may be dependent on the context and the culture concerned. For instance, a television may in some countries be perceived as luxury, while it in other countries is considered a necessity.

Lastly, the theoretical chapter will look into the country-of-origin effect, and how it may possibly influence young Danish consumers' perception and purchase intentions when evaluating a luxury brand. The specific purpose of including country-of-origin theory to this study is to examine the effect of the COO on the consumers' perception of product quality and prestige.

The country-of-origin section in the theory chapter provides an overview of the COO literature by compiling findings regarding the factors influencing the values and beliefs of a product's origin. The COO literature overview contributes to my understanding of the effect an image of a country has on brands or products related with the country. In this context, my thesis has practical implications for filling a gap in the literature by focusing particularly on the attitudes of luxury seeking young female consumers in Denmark.

To summarize, the implicated theory aims to analyze the perception on the COO and luxury brands and their influence on consumer behavior of young Danish women. The framework underlying the exploratory analysis of relations between COO and brands can be illustrated as follows:
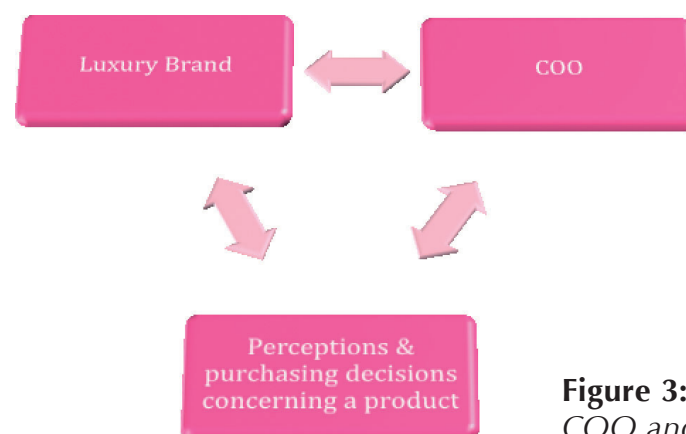

Figure 3: *Relations between COO and Brands*

Empirical Approach
The Semi-Structured Interview

In social research, various kinds of interviews can be used. One main differentiator between the interview types is the degree of structure within an interview. One can distinguish between unstructured interviews, semi-structured and fully structured interviews. The first two are used in qualitative studies while the third one is typically used in quantitative research. Semi-structured interviews are a kind of compromise between the two extreme forms of interviews and combine advantages from both. The advantages of using semi-structured will appear in the following.

As my thesis aims to create knowledge based upon the consumers' point of views and perceptions, I have chosen the semi-structured interview as a methodological approach for collecting data. The purpose of the qualitative research interview is to obtain qualitative descriptions of the life world of the consumers with respect to an interpretation of their meaning. Spradley expresses an approach to learning from the interviewee:

> *"I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?"*[32]

In order to conduct a semi-structured interview, a set of questions has to be prepared (the interview guide). There are no predefined answer categories in semi-structured interviews (as for instance in an interview for quantitative research) so that the range of possible answers is not limited. Also, the interviewer is supposed to roughly follow a predefined order. But the interviewer may ask additional questions on interesting points or deviate from the guideline if the flow of the interview makes this necessary.[33] This flexibility is one of the advantages of a semi-structured interview, as it becomes an open-ended interview type.

32 Kvale 1996:125
33 Bryman 2004: 321

Another advantage of this type of interview is that the answers are recorded in the respondent's own words, hence, in harmony with the symbolic interactionist approach, the language is the respondent's own system of symbols, and not squeezed into the researcher's language pattern.

Who are the Interviewees?

One of the first and most important considerations in regards of semi-structured interviews is dealing with the selection of interviewees. This is due to the small selection of participants in qualitative research as opposite to quantitative. That means that the sampling of interviewees cannot be based on coincidental selections, but on the other hand, must be analytical selective. In this connection, it is crucial to have important features of the problem formulation represented in the selection.

Since my thesis studies luxury brand consumers, the social class of the interview participants can already be restricted to being part of the upper class as they accordingly have the economical basis for purchasing luxury brands.

However, it is worth to mention that today the middle-class is trading up to higher levels of quality, taste and aspirations. By this means, that the luxury industry has known a wave of democratization. Luxury goods like perfumes and fashion are no longer restricted to the upper class, but are gradually consumed by a large audience.[34] An example on this is how the popular brand H&M has collaborated with designers from the luxury industry and have had campaigns designed by among others Karl Lagerfeld and Roberto Cavalli. Lagerfield is famous for his long-established role designing for Chanel, and a few years ago the prospect of Lagerfield designing for a low-priced fashion brand would have been unthinkable.[35] The democratization of luxury will be further explained in the theory chapter.

Nonetheless in this thesis, I am concentrating on the luxury consumption of the upper class, as I believe there still is a pronounced difference in relation to price and the quantity of luxury goods purchased between the middle class and the upper class. The young affluent women that I am focusing

34 Twitchell 2002
35 Jackson & Shaw 2006:59

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on in this thesis represent a top segment of the luxury market, and their consumption behavior and lifestyle involve frequent purchases of high-priced designer goods, which the middle class most likely cannot afford.

Furthermore, as I am examining young Danish consumers, I have chosen to select interviewees in the twenties as I have a supposition that this age group consumes more for themselves as opposite to consumers in the 30's who may prioritize family and children. At the same time, consumers in the twenties are economically independent in opposite to teens and may be active on the labor market. Hence, they have self-interested priorities and economic stability.

Thereupon, I have chosen female interviewees as I have a presupposition that women consume more luxury brands when it comes to clothing and accessories. This presupposition of mine is supported by the discussion previously mentioned in the introduction, which argued that a particular consumption trend among young women could be found.

Accordingly, I have made a purposeful sampling of five female interviewees within the above-mentioned criteria as participants for the individual interviews. This allows me to have information-rich cases of central importance to the purpose of the research. Demographically, I have chosen to interview women from both Copenhagen and Aalborg in order to get a more broad and varied sampling of female luxury consumers in Denmark.

As luxury consumers are a specific and limited consumer group, it is not evident to point them out. For that reason, the only way of tracing the suitable respondents is through the use of "snowball" sampling techniques. The snowball sample, which has been used to get in contact with young female luxury consumers, is an approach for locating information-rich key participants. In practical this means that the existing sample members have suggested new sample members, which are luxury brand consumers just like them.

To summarize, my interviewees are five women in the 20's. They belong to the upper classes. Three of them live in Copenhagen, and two of them in Aalborg.

However, the weaknesses of conducting only five interviews shall be mentioned. The knowledge produced through the interviews might not generalize to other luxury consumers, and the findings might be unique to the relatively few people included in the research study. On the other hand, because of the time limitation of this thesis, one can argue that using a limited number of interviewees allow me to go more into depth with the people involved than if I had chosen a larger number of interviewees.

Structure of the Interviews

An important aspect of the structure of the interviews is to make it clear for the interviewees that it is their experiences of the subject that are of interest and not their knowledge. This is first of all important because of the fact that not everybody is comfortable talking about his or her knowledge or attitude to a certain topic. On the other hand, most people like to recount their own stories. Secondly, when people give an account of their own experiences, it allows the interviewer to obtain their interpretations and attitudes as well.[36] An example of this from the interview guide is the following question:

"What was the last luxury product you bought?[37]
What was your motivation to buy that product?"[38]

Another important aspect of the interviews is to make sure that the questions keep the flow of the conversation going and motivate the interviewees to talk about their experiences, attitudes and feelings. Consequently, I have favored open-ended questions to try to understand the meanings attached to luxury consumption. For instance, the interviewees were encouraged to offer their own definition of a luxury brand:

According to you, what defines a luxury brand?
How do you distinguish between a non-luxury brand and a luxury brand?[39]

36 Halkier 2002:58
37 Appendix 1
38 Appendix 1
39 Appendix 1

The locations of the interviews were conducted in the respective private homes of the young women, which allowed me to assess certain aspects of the women's social world and milieu. This can be supported with Kvale's definition of qualitative research interview as

> "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations."[40]

At the same time, the fact that the interviews took place in their private homes, may have helped the interviewees to feel more comfortable in the environment and perhaps permitted them to feel safe enough to talk freely about their attitudes and feelings.

To ensure successful interviews in a friendly and relaxing environment, cakes and sweets were brought to the houses of the interviewees. At the most basic level, interviews are conversations between two partners[41], which is why I made sure that I as the interviewer sat at approximately right angles to the interviewee to facilitate eye contact and to create a natural interaction. In addition to this, I facilitated the communication and encouraged the interviewees to talk about their perceptions and feelings by imparting information, probing, clarifying, and paraphrasing.

In regards of ethical considerations, the interviewees were prior to the interviews informed of their rights to anonymity, confidentiality, and their freedom to end the interview at any time.

The interviews were audio-recorded, and subsequently transcribed into approximately 75 pages of text in Danish. Seeing that this thesis is written in English, the quotes used in the analysis will be translated into English.

40 Kvale 1996: 125
41 Kvale 1996:125

Method of Data Analysis

The qualitative data are structured using narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a term that covers quite a wide variety of approaches that are concerned with the search for and analysis of the stories that people employ to understand their lives and the world around them.[42] Mishler (1986) [43] outlines the many interpretative possibilities of treating interviews as narratives, emphasizing the social and the meaning structures of narratives. Narratives can then tell us about how the interviewees interpret their world. Narrative analysis aims to study what people say or do and how they make it meaningful. The assumption here is that social life, and narratives in particular, are shaped through a set of practices and conditions that make them meaningful.[44] To clarify what is understood by narratives, I base my definition on Alvarez and Urla (2002) who view a narrative as a discursive act in which the interviewer and the interviewee *"are engaged in creating the meaning of the questions and answers that constitute the narrative as they negotiate understanding through language"*.[45]

As a method to bringing order and structure to the mass of data collected from the interviews, and thereby arriving at an understanding of its meaning, I will make use of a thematic analysis, which is a method of narrative analysis. Analysis involves breaking data into bits, and then reorganizing these bits in a new analytic order. In this lies a twofold task: To select a bit of data, and assign it to a category or a theme, and thereupon to identify the units of meaning by carefully reading through the transcription.[46] A thematic analysis treats text as a window into human experience, and treats the language as a direct and unambiguous route to meaning.[47] However, when using narrative analysis it is important to go beyond the mere description and to interpret the language in conjunction with a theoretical framework that anchors the analytical claims that are made.

The thematic approach is useful for finding common thematic elements across the five interviewees and the way the young women perceive, experience and understand luxury consumption.

42 Bryman 2004: 412
43 Mishler 1986
44 Marvasti 2004: 97
45 Alvarez and Urla 2002:40
46 Shekedi 2005: 79
47 Riessman 2005 : 2

Theory
The Postmodern Consumer

In modern societies, self-identity has become an unavoidable concern. According to Giddens, the self is not something we are born with. Instead, the self is reflexively made and considerately constructed by the individual. Thus, everybody is inevitably obliged to make significant choices in their lives, from everyday concerns about appearance, clothing and leisure to more crucial decisions about beliefs, occupation and relationships. While in earlier societies, individuals' roles were clearly defined according to their social order and occupation; the modern society induces individuals to define their own roles[48]. Giddens puts it as follows:

> *"What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity - and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour."*[49]

If the self is "made", what is it that we make? According to Giddens, in a postmodern society, the self-identity becomes a reflexive project, which we continuously work and reflect on. By this means we create a story of who we are by maintaining and revising a set of biographical narratives.[50] Since social roles are no longer handed out to us by society, Giddens asserts that we have to choose a lifestyle. The implication is that we are living in a modern society where the adoptions of styles of lives (manifest in choice of clothes, leisure activities, consumer goods, bodily dispositions, etc.) are to be regarded as the individuality of taste and sense of style of the owner/consumer. The notion of lifestyle is often thought of in terms of consumption. Giddens argues that people define themselves through the goods that they possess and display and thereby create a self-identity. Consumption then becomes more than just the pursuit of use-values; it is also associated with the sense of self and personality.[51]

48 Gauntlett 2002: 97-98
49 Giddens 1991: 70
50 Gauntlett 2002: 99
51 Giddens 1991: 5-6

To explain the construction of identity through consumerism Giddens quotes Bauman:

> *"Individuals' needs of personal autonomy, self-definition, authentic life or personal perfection are all translated into the need to possess, and consume, market-offered goods."*[52]

Hence, self-identity projects can be translated into the world of luxury consumption, which I shall touch upon in the following sections.

Understandings of Luxury

Marketers, researchers and consumers regularly use the term luxury to refer to a wide variety of products, services and lifestyles. Although this term once referred primarily to a good's design, quality and durability, modern consumers generally lack consensus on the parameters of what constitutes a luxury good, especially as the market continues to evolve.[53]

A review of the literature regarding luxury consumption reflects these evolving concepts of luxury, and helps construct a solid framework for understanding what the term encompasses in modern society and how varying perceptions influence individual purchase decisions.

Even though a common and finite definition of luxury is elusive, luxury is being classified in a similar manner in traditional marketing research. Commonly, researchers agree upon the fact that luxury items must represent an indulgence rather than a necessity, it must be expensive, and it must be relatively rare or hard to obtain.[54]

The most intriguing shift underway in the definition of luxury in modern luxury literature may well be the changing nature of consumers. In the past, luxury goods were only available exclusively to the high-class, rich and famous. Today, the luxury industry has changed drastically to become democratic. According to Twitchell (2002), this democratization of luxury represents one of the most important marketing phenomenon of the modern era.[55] In particular, these changes in luxury consumption over time indicate that income and wealth no longer constitute the strongest deter-

52 Bauman 1989: 189
53 Dubois & Duquesne 1993
54 Vigneron & Johnson 1999
55 Twitchell 2002

minants for the acquisition of luxury goods. Instead, emerging cultural, social, and personal factors now play a significant role in influencing luxury consumption. Thus, to understand this development, one must first understand the differences between the "old luxury" and the "new luxury".

Luxury as we have known it, "old luxury" has been defined by snobbish, class oriented exclusivity-goods that only a small segment of the population can afford or is willing to purchase. "Old luxury" is the facilitator and result of conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1899).[56]

However, the "new luxury" democratizes high-quality products, making them available in many forms, at many price levels, and through a variety of retail channels. This means that the "new luxury" appeals to consumers across various income and social classes.[57]

In relation to the democratization of luxury, it may then seem contradictory that I have chosen to interview women from the upper classes when luxury is consumed in the middle classes as well. But as previous mentioned in the method chapter I believe that one can make a distinction between the types and the amounts of luxury goods, which are purchased in the upper classes and the middle classes. It is not a question of whether both social classes buy luxury brands, but how often, what they buy and whether they will insist on the real thing. For instance, most people in the middle class can afford a Lacoste polo, but not many can afford a Chanel handbag.

Nonetheless, despite the changes in both the type of luxury goods and luxury consumers since the nineteenth century, the values associated with luxury products remain an integral part of our social fabric. Such goods continue to affect how modern consumers define both themselves and others, how social groups interact, and how individual consumers decide to spend disposable income.[58] Thus, an understanding of luxury must take into account both traditional concepts as well as evolving perceptions.

Several researchers have therefore adopted a broader definition of luxury to better assess modern luxury consumption.

To take in evolving concepts of luxury, recent research (Kamakura & Russel 2003; Nueno & Quelch 1998) attempts to redefine luxury products

56 Veblen 1899
57 Silverstein & Fiske 2003
58 Mortelmans 2005

according to interpreted cultural or personal meanings. Luxury in the past has most often been defined on the basis of things, and the value people place on those things. But increasingly the modern consumer uses a range of social and personal factors to identify luxury and to make the decision to purchase a luxury product.[59] By this means, that the possession or association with "things" seems less important than how these "things" help create a sense of sense.

In the following section, I will incorporate relevant theoretical and empirical findings, which demonstrate how social and personal values associated with luxury goods represent the primary drivers of modern luxury consumption.

Buying to Impress Others

Research examining the motives for luxury consumption shows that consumers often buy luxury goods to impress others.[60] This phenomenon, also referred to as conspicuous consumption, suggests that a consumer's purchase behavior is highly affected by an internal drive to create a favorable social image through material possessions. In an early work on luxury consumption, Veblen (1899) argued that people spent lavishly on visible goods to prove that they were prosperous[61]. Thus, Veblen's study offers a solid foundation for understanding the motives that drive an individual's need to consumer luxury products. This means that the consumption of luxury brands may be important to individuals in search of social representation and position.[62] Using Veblen's work as a framework, later research made by Mason in the early 1990s has confirmed that consumers buy, use and display luxury goods to gain recognition or status.[63]

O'Cass & Frost (2004) have further studied the perceived status and conspicuous value of luxury goods. Their research consisted of a survey, which indicated that status-laden brands were purchased for status and conspicuous consumption and not for the functional characteristics of the product itself.[64]

Research thus clearly supports the theory that consumers purchase luxury to signify social or economic status and to make sure that others perceive them in a favorable way.

59 Vigneron & Johnson 2004: 484
60 Dittmar 1994: 561-585
61 Veblen 1899
62 Vigneron & Johnson 2004: 489
63 Mason 1992
64 O'Cass & Frost 2002: 67-88

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The Impact of Reference Groups

Recent research has shown that consumers choose luxury products as symbols of group membership according to lifestyle, cultural beliefs, age, gender, career, education, sexual orientation, and political and religious affiliation. According to Vigneron & Johnson (2004), the consumption of luxury goods involves purchasing a product that represents value to both the individual and its reference group. This means that consumers may regard luxury brands as a mean to reach social acceptance and conformity within reference groups.[65]

The impact of reference groups in terms of brand evaluations has also been studied by Bearden & Etzel (1982). The researchers studied how the influence of reference groups determines the consumption of particular products, including luxury products. With the help of a survey that measured the product and brand decisions of over 600 consumers, Bearden & Etzel found that reference group effects accounted for the strongest influence on a consumer's decision to buy luxury goods.[66]

Taken together, much research on the external influences on luxury consumption shows that the social value of luxury goods accounts for a large part of a consumer's decision to purchase luxury brands. However, socially oriented motives are not adequate to explain the whole picture of luxury consumption. A growing body of research indicates that the personal value of luxury goods might also influence luxury consumption.

65   Vigneron & Johnson 2004: 490
66   Bearden & Etzel 1982: 183-194

Luxury Extends the Self

A review of the literature in this field shows that recent research addresses importance to the personal influences on luxury brand consumption. The researches have focused on how the luxury of a brand allows a consumer to express his or her own self, an ideal self, or specific dimensions of the self through the use of a brand. Dubois and Laurent (1994) were some of the first to recognize a luxury product's emotional value as an essential characteristic of its perceived utility. By conducting a survey research, Dubois and Laurent found that consumers often have hedonic motives when purchasing luxury goods such as sensory pleasure, aesthetic beauty, fun, fantasy or excitement.[67] This point is also expressed by Berry (1994), who argues that a characteristic of luxuries is that they please people. Most consumers thus describe their consumption of luxury as a highly hedonic experience that can engage all the senses.[68] Likewise, did data collected by Tsai (2006) across the regions of Asia Pacific, Western Europe and North America reveal that luxury brand consumption is strongly influenced by self-directed pleasure and self-gift giving.[69]

Luxury is increasingly defined as an expression of individuality through the unique and highly personal experiences that luxury helps provide. Belk (1988) has presented the concept of "extended self", which suggests that people view their possessions as part of their identity.[70] Thus, luxury con-sumers may use the perceived extended-self dimension of luxury brands to develop their self-concept.

To summarize, many consumers appear to purchase luxury products to meet emotional needs or to maintain an identity harmonizing with their self-image. By this means, that one should consider the importance of both the social and personal influences in order to obtain a more complete view of the influences on luxury acquisition.

67 Dubois & Laurent 1994: 273-278
68 Dubois, Laurent & Czellar 2001
69 Tsai 2005: 429-454
70 Belk 1988: 139-168

Brand Luxury Index

Vigneron & Johnson have developed a framework of "brand luxury index" proposing that the luxury-seeking consumer's decision-making process can be explained by five perceived values that differentiate luxury and non-luxury brands. Vigneron & Johnson argue that luxury is a multidimensional concept composed of five dimensions including personal perceptions (perceived extended self, perceived hedonism), as well as the more interpersonal perceptions (perceived conspicuousness, perceived uniqueness, perceived quality), as outlined below.
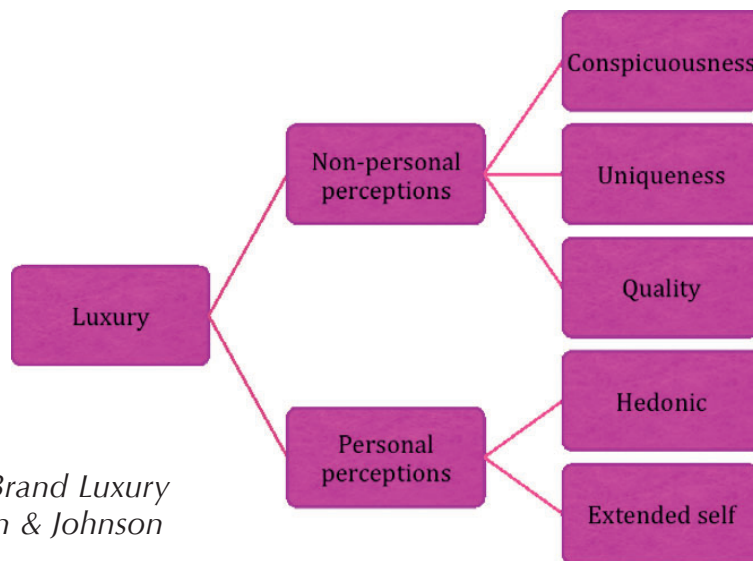

Figure 4: *The Brand Luxury Index (Vigneron & Johnson 2004)*

The framework called the Brand Luxury Index (BLI) is based on the results of previous research made by Mason (1992) and Dubois & Laurent (1994). However, the Brand Luxury Index establishes a balance between personal and non-personal oriented motives, which poles apart to past research on luxury consumption.[71] Until 1999, there were two schools of thought for defining the reasons for consuming luxury brands. One traditional viewpoint proposed that the consumption of luxury brands appears to have public and social functions, whereas another framework supported the rather private emotional value gained from this consumption. In summary, these frameworks focused either on interpersonal or on personal effects, but not on both.

Thus, the main contribution from Vigneron & Johnson was to establish a balance between personal and interpersonal oriented motives for luxury consumption, and to bring the two concepts together in a single framework.[72]

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71 Vigneron & Johnson 1999: 3-10
72 Vigneron & Johnson 1999: 2

As I previously have touched upon, most of the five perceived perceptions in the literature review above, I will only explain the dimensions of perceived uniqueness and perceived quality.

Perceived uniqueness:
Research shows that consumer perceptions of limited supply of a brand may lead to increased preference for that brand. This can be explained with the consumer's need for uniqueness. The need for uniqueness is defined as a way for the individual to differentiate from others through the acquisition and utilization of consumer goods, and thereby develop one's personal and social identity.[73]

Perceived quality:
Consumers expect, long before they consume a luxury brand, that it will show evidence of superior product characteristic compared with non-luxury brands. It is therefore highly predisposed for a luxury brand to maintain a high standard of product quality in order to obtain a luxury brand image.[74]

As the framework assumes the existence of luxury constructs influenced by personal and non-personal perceptions toward brands, it can be useful for conceptualizing and categorizing the young Danish women's luxury consumption into personal and non-personal perceptions. The framework will also be instrumental in examining whether some perceptions are more prominent and dominating than others in the interviews with the young Danish women. For instance, are the young female luxury consumers in Denmark more driven by a self-concept creation in their luxury brand consumption or is it more a social and collectivist creation?

In light of Vigneron & Johnson's research, this study aims to empirically investigate the five dimensions of the Brand Luxury Index. Although the researchers provide preliminary evidence of their five-dimensioned framework, their data were limited to responses from business students in Australia.[75] Consequently, Vigneron & Johnson call for replications of their study using different data sources such as actual consumers of luxury brands and thereby reinforce the validity of the scale.

73 Vigneron & Johnson 2004: 490
74 Vigneron & Johnson 2004: 491
75 Vigneron & Johnson 2004: 501

Hence, this research offers potential contributions to the past research on luxury clothing and accessories by linking it to the studies carried out by Vigneron & Johsnon (1999) on the perceptions of luxury. Using a sample of real luxury brand consumers in a new cultural context (Denmark), I believe that my research contributes to new knowledge and to the establishment of external validity by re-examining existing theories and concepts in a new context. The context also differentiates itself from Vigneron & Johnson's research by only focusing on young women's luxury consumption.

The Country-of-Origin Effect

For the purpose of this research, which also aims to investigate the impact of country-of-origin on luxury brand perceptions, I shall furthermore include concepts from the COO literature. In the following, I will outline the main theoretical contributions that have focused on the country-of-origin effect on consumer behavior.

Country-of-origin can be defined as the country, which a consumer associates with a certain product or brand as being its source, regardless of where the product is actually produced.[76]

Consumers use country-of-origin as a cue to make an evaluative judgment in their buying decisions. Since the mid-1960s, a considerable number of studies have been conducted on country image.[77] Country image is consumers' general perceptions of quality for products made in a given country.[78] Every nation has an image, either favorable or unfavorable, positive or negative. Some nations are viewed as benevolent and progressive in some countries, others as contemptible and repressive by other nationalities. Some are noted for cheap manufacturing, others for design skills. Whatever these views are, they affect consumers' perceptions of a country's image.[79]

Research has shown that consumers tend to evaluate products more favorably when the products originate from or are made in countries that enjoy a positive image or perceptions.[80] Consequently, this means that consumers are willing to pay more for products and services from countries that they perceive favorably or as having the expertise to produce those prod-

76 Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001: 27
77 Han 1990: 24-40
78 Bilkey & Nes 1982
79 Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001:7
80 Liu & Johnson 2005

ucts and services.[81] Accordingly, Nebenzahl & Jaffe (1996) point out that products originating from a country with a weak national image lead buyers to expect a greater price discount compared with products produced by a nation with a stronger image.

According to Kotler et al. (1993) people's notions of another nation and its products are based mostly on national stereotypes. These stereotypes grow out of the mental images of a nation received over time through sources such as education, media, and business dealings with its people etc. However, Kotler et al. (1993) stress that stereotypical images of a nation can be out of date, distorted and simplistic. Nonetheless, consumers tend to use these stereotypical images as information cues in judging products from different origins.[82]

Bannister & Saunders (1978) likewise argued that the country-of-origin effect involves more than the physical output itself, but also social and cultural factors. Consequently, they have defined the country-of-origin effect as

> *"generalized images created by variables such as representative products, economic and political maturity, historical events and relationships, traditions, industrialization and the degree of technological virtuosity, which will have effects upon consumer attitudes additional to those emanating from the significant elements of the products".*[83]

Roth & Romeo (1992) provide a more detailed account of this concept as they assert that the image of a country arises from a series of dimensions that positively qualify a nation in terms of its productions profile. Such dimensions include the following aspects: innovative approach (superiority, cutting-edge technology), design (style, elegance, balance), prestige (exclusiveness, status of the national brands), workmanship (reliability, durability, quality of national manufacts).[84]

Despite a large selection of country-of-origin literature, researchers have criticized the fact that many studies do not integrate theory and are overly limited by being static. Thus, Nebenzahl, Jaffe and Lampert (1997) have suggested a multidimensional and dynamic model that integrates what can be summarized from the past studies.

81 Nebenzahl & Jaffe 1996
82 Lots & Hu 2001
83 Bannister & Saunders 1978: 562-570
84 Roth & Romeo 1992

A Combined Halo and Summary Model of Country Image

Researchers have explained the country image effect (CIE) as either a halo or a summary construct (Erickson, Johansson and Chao 1984; Johansson 1989; Douglas and Nonaka 1985; Shimp, Samiee and Madden 1993).

The halo construct assumes that a consumer's perceptions of the Made-in-Country-Image (MCI) directly affect attitudes in situations where he/she knows little about a country's products. In this case, MCI is based on whatever knowledge that person has about the country, including its people, economics, politics and social factors. Han (1989) suggests that the halo construct signifies that MCI affects product attributes (beliefs), which in turn affect brand attitude (brand evaluation).[85] This construct can be illustrated as follows:

MCI=> beliefs about attributes => brand attitude

Nebenzahl & Jaffe (2001) have formulated the halo construct as a statement:

"Due to the need to evaluate products while having limited information, consumers utilize their perceived country images to formulate brand attitudes".[86]

The summary construct however assumes that MCI is based on experience with the products made in a given country and the resulted perceived attributes. The experience with the product is not necessarily personal, but can be influenced by the experiences of others and through the mass media. By generalizing these experiences to attributes of unfamiliar products originating from a given country, the country image affects consumers' attitudes toward the brand. Han presents the summary construct as:

Experience => beliefs => MCI => brand attitude

Nebenzahl & Jaffe (2001) express the summary construct as:

> *"Due to the need to evaluate unfamiliar products while having limited information, consumers utilize information about other products made in a certain country to form their perceived country images and, in turn, brand attitudes".*[87]

While past studies on the halo and the summary constructs have been static and one-dimensional, Nebenzahl & Jaffe have proposed a conceptual framework, which revises the independent and supposedly alternative two models into a single unified dynamic one. Based on empirical data from past studies, Nebenzahl & Jaffe have concluded that there is some evidence that country image may act as a summary as well as a halo effect and that both effects may operate simultaneously.[88]
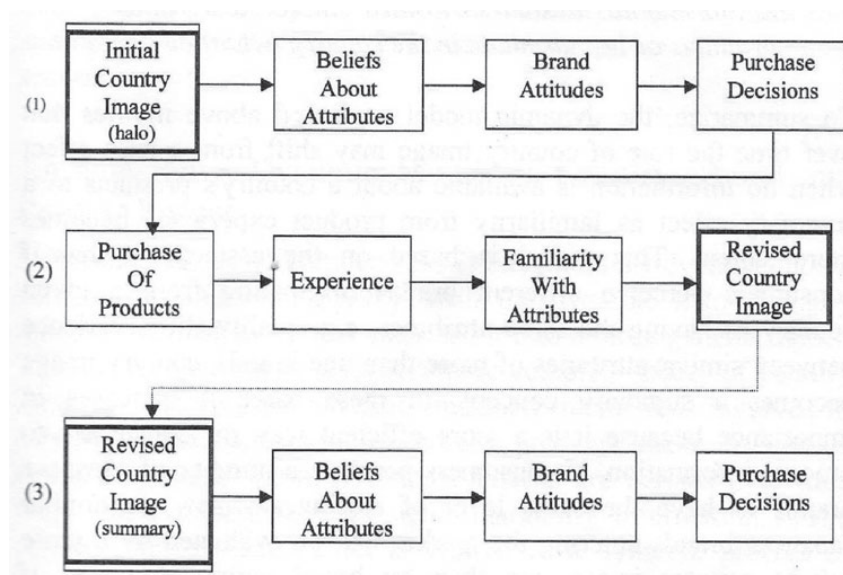

Figure 5: *A Combined Halo and Summary Model of Country Image (Nebenzahl et al. 1997)*

In the first level of the model, ahead of having meaningful experience, the image of a country acts as a halo in impacting beliefs about the expected attributes of products, which subsequently result in attitudes toward the brand or product.

In the second level, following purchase, experience is used to revise the knowledge about attributes of products that is followed by a revision of the country image.

Lastly, in the third level, the revised country image serves to form expectations (beliefs) about product attributes.

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87 Nebenzahl & Jaffe 2001: 43
88 Nebenzahl & Jaffe 2001: 45

To sum up, the dynamic model presented by Nebenzahl & Jaffe implies that over time a country's image may shift from a halo effect when no information about a country's products is accessible to a summary effect as familiarity from product experience becomes more salient.

This dynamic model may be useful in understanding how country image affects the young luxury consumers' brand attitudes and purchase decisions. In this correlation, it will be interesting to examine their brand attitudes in terms of halo and summary constructs. This will give an idea about how experiences and stereotypical mental images of countries have an effect on the young women's luxury consumption.

Analysis

In harmony with the thematic analysis method, the analysis is divided into 7 themes. These themes constitute the most essential parts of the interviewees' narratives, and are significant in what concerns the young women's understandings of and attitudes to luxury.

Defining a Luxury Brand

From the many views and opinions given by the 5 interviewees on the definition and characteristics of luxury brands, a number of common facets could be traced among the young women's definitions. They are presented in turn below.

High Quality

The first idea is that of perceived quality. All of the interviewees join together luxury brands with high quality. The mental association between luxury and quality is so evident that for one of the interviewees, the two words are almost synonymous: *"For me luxury means quality."*[89]

In this context, the young women also view the nature of the materials and the expertise involved in manufacturing luxury brands as major indicators of quality: *"And then of course it has something to do with the quality – that the clothes and the shoes for instance are made of good materials."*[90] Another interviewee elaborates this statement:

89   Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 56
90   Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 45

> " (…) it is thank God often like that with luxury brands that they contain a bit of cashmere or mohair or silk or something like that."[91] The fact that she uses the expression thank God accentuates that good fabrics and quality in clothes are alpha omega for her.

As well as the good materials used in luxury brands, the excellence of the craftsmanship contributes to the perceived quality:

> "Well, it is more cool because they are designers who are educated or what do you say? Not educated but it is what they use all their time on to evolve and be avant-gardes, so it is the top of the top."[92]

As opposed to the high quality of the luxury brands, the interviewees weigh against the quality of high-street brands as for instance H&M. In this parallel, it is first of all the keeping qualities between them that are crucial. All of the young women recount of how luxury brands are lasting for many years – or even for a lifetime, while high-street brands can be thrown out after a short time. For instance, one of the interviewees describes the difference of the lifetime of an H&M blouse as opposed to luxury brands:

> "The difference is that if I buy a shirt in H&M I see myself use it… then it is because I found a shirt that is cool and then I can maybe wear it one time and then I don't find it amusing anymore, because after I have washed it I don't think the quality… then I think the quality shows that it is not the same and it is not something I see myself use in 3 years because often it will not last after being washed that many times."[93]

On the other hand, more than a few of the young women narrate of luxury products, which they have had for years. For instance:

> "I have things that are 5-6-7 years old. Really, one of my handbags is over 10 years old now and I still use it everyday. So that is one of the things characterizing luxury, I think. That it is not just use and throw out."[94]

Given such views, it is obvious that the interviewees expect that a luxury brand is long lasting, and the perceived quality of the used materials evokes reliability towards the luxury brands in the minds of the young women. As a final point, some of the interviewees pass on the quality component

91 Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 22
92 Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 47
93 Appendix 2, interviewee 1 page 6
94 Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 19

of luxury brands to luxury consumers (including themselves) as a sort of personal characteristic. One of the young women states: *"It is just a part of me … and I like good quality."*[95] By consuming quality products, consumers become refined persons. The perceived quality of luxury brands is then used as a means to single out from others and to give a feeling of well-being, or almost arrogance:

> *"A luxury brand differentiates itself from other brands by being exclusive and expensive and by being of really good exclusive quality. Thus, it is not Mr. and Mrs. Denmark's brand, but more for people who know fashion and want to signal that they are something special – something exclusive and stand by their own person and are not just mainstream."*[96]

Uniqueness

The second notion of luxury is that luxury brands are unique. Given the high price of luxury brands, the young women expect something extra beyond the excellent quality, something that distinguishes a luxury brand from other brands: *"Of course you pay a bit more other than the quality… so it has to have some sort of wow effect."*[97] The uniqueness of luxury brands is connected with the perception of a limited distribution of the products as opposite to mass-produced brands. In contrast to high-street shops, which offer a large assortment, a luxury shop is perceived to have a restricted selection. This fact allows the young women to feel unique and to break away from the mainstream fashion of the high-street brands:

> *"When you buy a new dress or a pair of shoes or a handbag from a luxury brand, you feel more unique because you don't meet 10 other girls on the street with same dress or handbag."*[98]

Likewise, one of the young women states:

> *"You don't want to be…we are in a modern society where it is difficult to stand out from everybody else because people have reached a certain level, so if you want to be different, you have to signal something exclusive."*[99]

95   Appendix 2, interviewee 1 page 5
96   Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 44
97   Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 18
98   Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 56
99   Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 46

Conversely, one of the interviewees explains how shopping in a high-street shop doesn't allow her to differentiate from other girls in the street:

> *"That's the thing about mass production (…) You know that there are 5 pieces of each size and most likely there is a refill on next Tuesday. So you know that the probability of meeting a young girl in the street in the same dress is pretty big, because it is a place where everybody can afford to buy clothes. It is obvious, that if you choose to buy clothes in there, you also choose to look like everybody else."*[100]

Hence, the young women's need for uniqueness can be viewed as an expression of individuality where their pursuit of differentness to others is achieved through the acquisition of luxury brands. When the young women consume brands, which are only available to a restricted clientele, the more valuable the brands are perceived as they enable the young women to feel exclusive and unique. The women's perceived notion of uniqueness in luxury brands is also connected with price as it is emphasized that luxury products are not affordable to an owned by everybody – otherwise it would not be regarded as a luxury product:

> *"In the world of fashion the class differences still are existing to the highest extent seeing that it is only reserved for the few who can afford the expensive things."*[101]

History

The last feature in defining a luxury brand is the importance of its history and traditions in the minds of the young consumers: *"A luxury brand is a brand with a certain history. You cannot become a luxury brand from one day to another."*[102] The interviewees use the luxury brands with a long history as a reference in the fashion industry and correlate their long history of "savoir faire" with recognition and authenticity. One interviewee notes how brands like Chanel and Louis Vuitton gain recognition due to the fact that these brands have had the same addresses in the fashionable neighborhoods of Paris for many years. Thus, luxury brands need to have a story to tell or even better a legend:

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100   Appendix 2, interviewee 1 page 6
101   Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 41
102   Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 17

> *"There is a story connected to a luxury brand… you can read about it and there is an exciting person that is… like for example Chanel… it is really exciting to read about Coco Mademoiselle. So it is just as much the story behind, I think. And you get an unbelievable respect for the brand and I think it often has something to do with the fact that you appreciate it and it gets that high status."*[103]

Accordingly, another interviewee points out that a designer personality tells a story to the consumer:

> *"A luxury brand also has got to have a certain story where the designer takes effect and represents the brand like for instance Coco Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent or Jean Paul Gaultier. So, a sort of story, which you as a consumer buys yourself into. Most people know for example Coco Chanel and they have also made a movie about her life etc."*[104]

Hence, the young women combine luxury brands with a long heritage with integrity and status making the brand desirable for reasons other than mere functionality. A pronounced personality of a brand that tells a story creates a relationship between the brand and the consumer. To use Chanel as an example, the brand represents implicit values and a story through the personality of Coco Chanel, which construct a sense of credibility and authenticity for the young women.

To sum up, the Danish luxury consumers' definition of a luxury brand corresponds, to a high degree, with researchers' definition of the concept, which was presented earlier in the theory. Correspondingly to the theory, the interviewees attach high quality to luxury products, and perceive them to be unique, high-priced and not accessible for everybody. However, a deficient notion in the luxury theory, which had a prevailing important role in the women's definition of luxury, is the notion of a luxury brand's history. It is in this respect first of all the heritage and the history of a luxury brand, which makes a luxury brand respected and gives it a high status in the consumers' conscious. Due to the significance of this notion, I suggest a modified model of Vigneron & Johnson's framework, which takes in the dimension of a luxury brand's history under the non-personal perceptions. The proposed revised model is outlined on the following page:
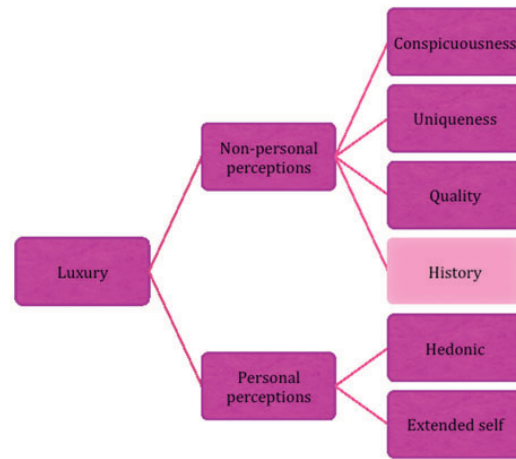
103 Appendix 2 interviewee 1 page 3
104 Appedix, interviewee 5 page 56

Figure 6: *Proposed revised framework of Vigneron & Johnson's Brand Luxury Index*

The additional dimension of history to the Brand Luxury Index may be indispensable due to the fact that the history of a luxury brand is a perceived value of luxury among the young consumers to the same extent as conspicuousness, uniqueness and quality. Hence, the history of a brand is an additional perceived value that defines a luxury brand, which may be necessary to address more explicitly in the framework.

Conspicuous Consumption

The young Danish women do, to a certain extent, purchase luxury products to make an impression on others. The material possession of luxury goods is then used as a means to signal a favorable social image. One interviewee recounts of the signal value of her luxury clothes: *"It has to signal to others that you have bought something expensive"*.[105] Another one states: *"You like to signal that you have financial excess."*[106] As pointed out earlier by Veblen, the young women's possessions and display of visible luxury brands can then be viewed as a way of proving prosperity to others. This means that the consumption of luxury brands may be important for the young women in terms of social representation. This assumption is enhanced with the following statement: *"It is also to signal to others that I have a certain class"*.[107]

Consequently, the term prestige is closely connected with the conspicuous consumption. When asked about prestige, all of the young women articulate that they find it prestigious being able to buy luxury brands as they witness of social status seeing that a person can afford them. Some of the girls also admit that they use clothing as a way to put a social etiquette on an individual when entering a room:

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105   Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 18
106   Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 41
107   Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 47

> *"(…) I think it gives a certain prestige. And I would like to say – you know you can't say that out loud – but when people enter a room and if I can recognize some items from some collections – if I can recognize that this is Prada's jacket from this and this collection or if they wear something from the Louis Vuitton American Cup collection, then I think it says extremely much about these persons – and that's terrible because it doesn't say anything about their professional capabilities or if they are good people, but I still think it sends a signal about who they are."*[108]

Nonetheless, the women have a tendency to play down their own degree of conspicuous consumption by moderating their statements. An example of that is the quote above, when the young woman first claims that she categorizes people according to their clothes, but afterwards adds up her moral reservations in doing so. Her moral reservations are expressed with the word terrible, which is used to moderate her rather politically incorrect statement and to express that she may not be proud of judging people from their clothes. Another example is when one of the interviewees is asked what she wishes to signal with her clothes, she answers: *"That I can afford it and I want to single out…not because I am a snob or anything."*[109] The snobbism of luxury is all in all something the interviewees dissociate themselves from. This can be viewed indirectly in the way they narrate snobbism in third person as opposed to first person. For instance: *"Some probably do it to impress others, so a sort of snobbism where they show off and can show that they are well off."*[110]

By saying so, the interviewee indicates that some use luxury products as a sort of snobbism, but not her. In a more direct way, some of the interviewees clearly point out that buying luxury products does not make them a better person. For instance, when talking about how people are judged on their clothes, one of the women states as follows: "In reali*ty it is completely stupid to do that because a person is much more than the clothes they are wearing."*[111]

This distance taking to snobbism can based on their narratives be understood as a way of not appearing materialistic or even shallow to others. Some of

108 Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 19
109 Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 47
110 Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 58
111 Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 57

the girls explain how they sometimes are left with that feeling when talking to their friends and how it makes them feel uncomfortable. Interviewee 2 narrates as follows:

> "I have some friends who are not at all in it [luxury brands] and sometimes they can make me feel slightly superficial by talking about it. It is like a sort of opposite snobbism, that I think they are good enough even though they clearly are not interested in it all, but they think that I seem a bit shallow or empty or what you call it. That there are children starving in Africa and you sit there and talk about Marc Jacobs new bag. Come on, Annette, right?"[112]

Interviewee 1 also brings this alleged opposite snobbism up:

> "(…) I think it is just as unfair that… just as much as people snob down, I think it is just as provoking when people snob it up." [113]

This suggests that some people in the women's acquaintances may find it morally wrong to spend that much money on oneself when there are more humanitarian alternatives to spend the money. In this sense, the interviewees may feel that others who may perceive the high price of luxury brands as indecent are morally judging them and making them feel guilty.

On the other hand, the interviewees indirectly or unconsciously are signaling a sort of snobbism or arrogance in some of their statements. This is the case with the following narrative:

> "(…)if you look at other people and look what clothes they are wearing, then you judge them really hard. So, if you see somebody who has a… if you know… have seen a dress in H&M and perhaps have it at home in your closet yourself, and then that day you are wearing an expensive fabulous thing, then you can feel a bit more on top compared to her."[114]

Hence, the women use to a certain degree clothing and brands as a key indicator to classify other people as well as to compare themselves to others.

A somewhat ironic notion about the young women's tendency of conspicuous consumption is that of discretion. All of the interviewees give emphasis to discreet luxury in lieu of drawing attention with dazzling logos. In fact, according to the young women the display of big shiny logos is considered

112   Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 23
113   Appendix 2, interviewee 1 page 8
114   Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 41

as an effort to try too much being something they are not. One of them even calls it tacky. An interviewees explains:

> *"When I was younger when I went to high school I could walk around with a Louis Vuitton chain around the neck or something where it was written Gucci with huge letters on the sun glasses. I really don't want that anymore. I couldn't dream of carrying a Louis Vuitton monogram handbag, then it would only be because of some nostalgia, because it does send the opposite signal. It shows that I have such a big need to show others that I wear this brand. Now it has to be discreet."[115]*

To give another example of this tendency:

> *"It shouldn't be too much and written with big letters and gold and glitter and scream from far away that this is Gucci or Prada. I think it becomes too flashy and in a way tasteless. It seems a bit as if you are desperate to show people that you wear designer clothes. I'm more into the elegant and discreet where you don't necessarily see what it is unless you are interested in it."[116]*

When faced with my questioning of whether it is not an ironic or even contradictory nature of luxury consumption, one of the women explains:

> *"No, because I know it myself and it makes me feel comfortable to wear it. But also people that are connoisseurs see what it is indeed."[117]*

Accordingly, one of them states:

> *"(…) and for me it isalso something that connoisseurs know what it is. It shouldn't be that you look at it right away and everybody can see that it is this brand."[118]*

Hence, the young women consider other connoisseurs as a reference group to whom they can identify themselves with as being part of the limited few knowing and recognizing exclusive luxury brands even when it is not evident.
This tendency among the young women can be viewed in the light of the democratization of luxury where the big luxury brands as Gucci, Prada, and Dior, etc. have become more accessible and well known in most people's consciousness. Thus, the young women's purchase of more discreet or less known luxury brands can be viewed as a resistance to own the same

115 Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 18
116 Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 58
117 Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 48
118 Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 31

products as everybody else as a reaction to luxury brands having become too accessible. That means that it becomes more exclusive and prestigious to wear brands, which only connoisseurs can recognize. This fact may also recount of a growing sense of individuality where the women are more confident in their own taste and less reliant in displaying the brand name.

The Social Aspect of Luxury Consumption

The consumption of luxury goods appears to have a strong social function for the interviewees. The social dimension refers to the perceived social affiliation the interviewees acquire by consuming products recognized within their own social group. As previously mentioned, other connoisseurs of luxury brands serve as a reference group for identification and segmentation of different types of luxury consumers. One of the young women points out the different types of luxury consumers:

> *"There are Louis Vuitton girls and Gucci girls and Mulberry girls, so it totally depends on a person's individual style. I think that Mulberry is raw elegance and discreet, but it is still luxury, whereas Louis Vuitton also is expensive and one knows what the quality stands for, but everybody can see that you bought a Louis Vuitton bag."*[119]

By dressing in the brand Mulberry, the interviewee belongs to a group; that is the group of discreet luxury. Those luxury consumers who dress in more dazzling brands like Louis Vuitton and Gucci do not conform to the accepted styles of her own reference group and are therefore assumed to belong to a different group with divergent ideas. Within her own social group, the acquisition of luxury brands is used as a sort of social activity for conformity. The interviewee narrates about how the purchase of new luxury products becomes a subject of conversation among her friends:

> *"It is [social] when we sit and talk and say "then I saw this cool bag" or "this cool pair of shoes" and "do you want to see what I just bought."…It is part of the social for us."*[120]

The social aspect of luxury product purchases is likewise important to the other interviewees. All of them assert that when they have bought a luxury

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119   Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 34
120   Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 35

product or have in mind to buy it, friends are used to talk about the product as a way of sharing the experience and gaining acknowledgment. As interviewee 4 puts it:

> "We talk a lot about fashion and clothes both before and after we buy. It is sort of "check out what I bought". The great part is to get the recognition from each other and that we share it together. Sometimes we also borrow each other's clothes and exchange clothes."[121]

Accordingly to the theory, this social aspect shows that the consumption of luxury goods involves an interest in purchasing a product that represents value to both the young women and their reference group. Hence, the opinions, interests and tastes of friends are important for the young women in order to reach social acceptance. This assumption can furthermore be traced in the following narrative:

> "If I am going somewhere with some very fashionable friends (…) then I would maybe wear my leather Marc Jacobs clutch (…) my fashionable friends would know that exactly this season this color has been made, so I am very modern by having this bag."[122]

Hence, the right clothing grants her access to the right places and the right people and thereby acceptance in her social group.
Furthermore, the young women stress that their friends influence them in terms of brand choice:

> "Of course one is very influenced by what one's friends say, if they come and say "hey there is a new brand – have you seen it? It's really cool." Or if they've got a new shirt from that brand and I think it's cool or is nice style, then I think… Then of course it opens someone's eye for it."[123]

This aspect can be compared to the theory, where it is stressed by Bearden & Etzel that the influence of reference groups determines the consumption of particular products.

Besides the influence of friends, celebrities as depicted in magazines are an important reference group with regard to purchasing or using selected goods. This identification may be based on admiration and recognition of a

121 Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 49
122 Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 22
123 Appendix 2, interviewee 1 page 7

celebrity. An example on this is when one of the women recounts of how articles in magazines help one to copy the style of a celebrity:

> "There are many articles where they for instance show what clothes a celebrity is wearing. It can be Nicole Richie or Lindsay Lohan where they write what style they have and what you can do to copy them."[124]

Likewise, interviewee 2 narrates about this influence:

> "There is no doubt at all that celebrities have an enormous impact because today it is on the top of my wish list to get a pair of Christian Louboutin stilettos, and the first place I saw them was in my gossip magazines from abroad. I read Hallo and Ok every week that have these huge photo reportages from the red carpet with Scarlett Johansson and so on, and they all have… also Victoria Beckham… Christian Louboutin stilettos."[125]

In this way, celebrities indirectly shape the style of the interviewee, and with a pair of Christian Louboutin stilettos she may get to feel how it would feel to be in Scarlett Johansson's shoes.

Similarly, an interviewee puts in plain words that she has bought a pair of Manolo Blahnik shoes after seeing them on the main character of the TV series Sex and the City. Thus, the celebrities may represent an idealization of life that the young women aspire to by identifying themselves with celebrities. In view of that, the concept of luxury fashion and its portrayal within certain aspects of popular culture, plays a key role in defining the women's social identities.

It has been affirmed above that interviewees acquire social affiliation within their own reference group among the different types of luxury consumers. Evidently, the luxury brands also serve as indicators of social position, conveying and expressing the women's place in the rest of the society. The class position is expressed through their conspicuous consumption, which was described above. Consumption practices may then serve to support the social order of the women. This can be exemplified with the following quote:

> "I'm going to a wedding soon and I'm not going to show up in…I have to find a designer dress, I will not show up in Vero Moda as many people do."[126]

124   Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 49
125   Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 23
126   Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 47

With this quote the woman defines her own social status within a hierarchical classification of products by opposing the low-priced Danish high street brand Vero Moda with high-priced designer brands. By comparing herself to "many people", she indirectly positions herself as one of the "happy few" who can afford a designer dress. Hence, in accordance with the theory, the woman demonstrates her social representation through material possessions.

Luxury as Self-Expression

Although there is a social need to be affiliated to a group and to share the experiences of the clothes they buy with their friends, the interviewees strive to assert their own personal identity through their consumption. The young women choose or avoid certain products in order to convey some messages about themselves. Interviewee 3 stresses how clothing reflects the individual, and how her stylish clothes mirror her behavior:

> *"I want to express that I am stylish and do not toss around with too low-necked tops. So, if you are wearing one you don't just jump over the bar desk and so on. So, it is also connected with the way you behave. You cannot separate the things from each other. Clothing and behavior and personality are definitely connected."*[127]

In addition to this, the interviewee classifies her personal style as being raw elegance, which reflects her personality:

> *"I know that I can take a lot personally, that's what it is. I'm not good for these small cute things because I am really clumsy, so small sweet pink dresses are just not for me. I'm more into black, then."*[128]

Hence, the raw elegance of her clothes expresses a feeling of personal pride towards her strong personality. Moreover, practical considerations about her style are used to fit her personality.

Interviewee 1 is likewise very reflective when it comes to her self-expression:

> *"It is also something I think about why I actually like to buy expensive brands. What does it mean to me? Then I feel that it is part of my identity. And I feel that I take part in deciding who I am."*[129]

127 Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 34
128 Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 34
129 Appendix 2, interviewee 1 page 4

When faced with the question of what she wishes to express about her self, she answers like this:

> "I like quality in everything. It is not just in clothing but it is also my home, everything from my chairs to the lamp over the table and so on. It is really not what other people think about what I buy… it is more for myself (…) It is just a part of me… and I like good quality."[130]

The statement can be put side by side with the concept of the extended self as presented in the theory seeing that the young woman views her possessions as part of her identity.

One of the women's acquisition and display of brands seems related to the search of self-esteem. In this regard, she narrates about her insecurities as a teenager:

> "It is because they [teenagers] are so insecure about who they are as a person and at that time they have not created a personality, which they rest in 100%, and then it is easier to hide behind these brands. I have definitely done it myself. I wore black clothes and then there was always some logo, logo, logo and then I could have been anybody, really, whereas today I think I can define myself and see myself in what I wear."[131]

Hence, where the interviewee in her teenage years used clothing to hide her own insecurities, she views her consumption in present times as a true reflection of her self. Nonetheless, her acquisition and display of luxury products can to a certain extent be regarded as a way to feel confident. This can for instance be viewed in the following narratives where she speaks about her latest purchase:

> "In reality I would probably not have bought the dress if it wasn't that brand – I'm not even sure if I even would have looked at it, but because it was this brand, it became interesting (…) and the brand also sends a signal that you know what is moving. There is something a bit cool in having it."[132]

Being seen by others to be conscious of this brand and to wear it provides her with a certain recognition, which promotes her self-esteem. As she puts it herself: "In reality, it promotes my self-esteem enormously."[133] To

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130   Appendix 2, interviewee 1 page 5
131   Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 20
132   Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 17
133   Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 21

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begin with, it was not the aesthetical aspect of the dress that attracted her seeing that she would not have noticed it in the shop if it had not been that particular brand. On the other hand, what attracted her was the signal value of the brand. Her strive to promote her self-esteem by purchasing a high-status product, has a somewhat narcissistic dimension seeing that she as consequence of wearing this brand may attain other's admiration.

Taken together, the slightly narcissistic dimension of consumption is something the interviewees have in common. The particular luxury brands that they choose to consume allow them to express their ideal self. In keeping with the project of the ideal self, all the women are very reflective in terms of what they want to convey about themselves. A common point between the interviewees is how their clothes serve as indicator of individuality or differentness by contrasting themselves with the people buying mainstream fashion. In this respect, the young women form a conception of themselves through the luxury brands they choose to wear, which enables them to create the self they want other people to see. To give an example:

> *"I try to express that I am a girl who cares about my looks, style and fashion. I do not just put on something random in the morning without thinking about it (…) I will say that I found my self stylistically and it reflects who I am as a person. Feminine, quality-conscious, simple and discreet."*[134]

From Giddens' point of view, the women's lifestyles choices can be viewed as ways of giving material form to the narratives that they create of their self-identity. In this context, the self-narratives are created and sustained through the women's consumption acts. The narratives they create are able to give meaning to their individual taste and sense of style. Some evidence for this is how they in their narratives tend to focus on emotional affiliation to perceived values of luxury and likes and dislikes.

Luxury as Pleasure

The young women's luxury brand consumption involves a strong aesthetic appeal. This aesthetic dimension is expressed with the use of adjectives such as gorgeous, elegant, attractive, beautiful and pretty, which somewhat

134 Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 58

personifies the products. Looking at them opens a world of beauty, which makes one dream:

> *"If I find something really pretty then I start to picture myself using the thing and create a little story inside of my head. For instance when I bought those Jimmy Choo sandals, I imagined how they would fit in to the perfect summer night in the south where I would wear a little dress and the sandals and just feel on top."*[135]

Similarly, interviewee 2 generates images within herself when she is about to buy a luxury product:

> *"I build on some sort of event course in my mind, a little story where I am going to wear this dress the next time I am going out where it will be this or that place and I will drink this or that cocktail. Really, it is completely nuts."*[136]

By pointing out at the end of her story that "it is completely nuts", she confesses a lack of common sense. Nonetheless, the dress and the sandals of the two women provide them an idyllic fantasy, which engages their senses. Hence, the emotional value of the products is an essential characteristic of their perceived utility. As a result, all the interviewees describe their consumption of luxury as a highly hedonic experience, which can touch all senses. Luxury products not only look beautiful but also are pleasant to touch and feel. One young woman draws an interesting picture of how the quality of a luxury product makes her feel:

> *"To touch and feel luxury products give me a sort of happiness because the quality is so delicious. If I try on some delicious silk blouse, then it just feels perfect on my skin. It is the same as reading a book, which is made of quality paper and with beautiful pictures in it instead of a cheap paperback. I just love that feeling."*[137]

Hence, the feeling of good materials gives her a sensory pleasure. Her comparison to a book made of quality paper refers to the feeling of a quality silk blouse, whereas the cheap paperback associates to a low-priced high street brand. Accordingly, the shopping of luxury products provides a holistic experience where every aspect of the purchase has a hedonic attribute:

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135   Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 57
136   Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 20
137   Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 57

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> *"I do not just go in and buy a pair of shoes, I go in and get a whole experience out of it (…) the whole package sort of has to be complete in order for me to get the perfect purchase. I like when there is a good service and you get it wrapped really lovely in silk paper and you get a lovely bag and stuff like that."*[138]

Thus, the motivation of shopping for the interviewee consists not simply of a desire to obtain the shoes but also derives from the pleasure of the whole atmosphere in the shop. An interviewee narrates that the experience of shopping is more satisfying than the product itself. She compares the purchase experience with eating at a restaurant:

> *"Just like when you sit at a good restaurant and wait for this huge tournedos steak you just ordered, and then from the moment it comes and it stands there and you didn't take a bite yet. That's really the best part of the whole restaurant experience when you can smell it and you are about to eat it (…) and it's a bit the same when I have bought clothes – it is not as much to try it on – it is the moment I buy the thing and it's in the bag."*[139]

Hence, an essential characteristic of the women's luxury consumption is the pursuit of a self-directed pleasure in the shopping experience. Some of them describe it as a kick while others compare it with feeling high or feeling in love.

While conversations about luxury products before and after the women buy them have a social nature, the shopping itself remains a highly personal experience. This also explains why most of the interviewees claim that they prefer to shop alone: "It is my personal experience of the product, that is what I go for."[140]

Allowing a multisensory pleasure, luxury products boost the women's self-feeling and when enjoying the products they feel good, beautiful and happy. In this context, the experience of shopping is used as sorts of self-gift giving to reward or comfort themselves:

> *"There is no doubt about that if I am in a bad mood or if I have done something where I think I have been skilful, then I also use it to either comfort myself or reward myself."*[141]

138 Appendix 2, interviewee1 page 3
139 Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 20
140 Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 36
141 Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 20

This is also the case with another interviewee:

> *"I shop when I am happy and I shop when I am sad and it gives me happiness. When I want to spoil myself I think of the feeling I had when I was standing with a bag for instance from a brand with a nice quality. That is what it gives me and I think about it every time I pull it over my shoulders."*[142]

The notion of self-gift giving can be understood as a way for the women to satisfy individual pleasure through consumption goods. The gift, in this concept, becomes a token that the women give themselves to satisfy needs for affection and self-reward. The giving and receiving of gifts, usually being an interpersonal communication phenomenon, then becomes an individualistic act. Hence, as claimed in the theory, the women's luxury consumption is strongly influenced by self-directed pleasure and satisfaction.

In accordance with the theory, the three last chapters have shown that both social and personal aspects of luxury consumption are important for the interviewees. The social aspect is used to gain recognition from others and to feel affiliation to a specific social group. The personal dimension, on the other hand, provides sensory pleasure and satisfaction and is used to develop their self-concept through the signal value of their material possessions.

Country-of-Origin Matters

Country-of-origin does appear to affect the interviewees' judgments of quality, value and prestige in terms of luxury brands. Most of the young women straightforwardly express that they use the country-of-origin of a product as an indicator of the product characteristics. When asked if the country-of-origin of a luxury brand is important, one of the women answers:

> *"I must say yes that it is connected, especially in regard of fashion, I think (…) When it comes to fashion the country-of-origin has a great significance for me."*[143]

142   Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 32
143   Appendix 2, interviewee 1 page 9

Correspondingly, another interviewee recounts:

> "Yes, I think so because it sort of tells a story about the product, I think, and you associate it with some values from that country and the traditions they have."[144]

Hence, the women tend to evaluate the luxury products they buy according to social and cultural factors of the country-of-origin. In this context, the image of a nation has a crucial role in how the interviewees evaluate its products.

On the other hand, two of the interviewees claim that the country-of-origin of a luxury brand is of less importance for them. As interviewee 2 puts it:

> "I don't think that it's not a luxury brand if it's made in Thailand. It wouldn't have any significance. It doesn't mean that a brand wouldn't be able to get that value. No not at all."[145]

As a starting point, she expresses with the quote that the country-of-origin of a luxury brand has no limitations and that a brand can be considered as luxury regardless from where it is from. However, later on in the course of the interview the interviewee somewhat contradicts her own statement by uttering that if a product is made in China it is placed at the bottom of her ranking list: *"As soon as it writes made in China it ranks really low."*[146]

Thus, the interviewees provide ample evidence for the existence of national and cultural stereotypes, which affect the way they perceive a nation's product.

France and Italy as the Leaders of Fashion

When it comes to luxury brands, the interviewees have a common perception of the leading countries in this category. As the participants had to answer the question of which countries come up to their mind in regard of luxury, the interviewees only mention European countries with the exception of U.S. and Japan.

France and Italy are some of the first mentioned countries when the interviewees are asked which countries they associate with luxury:

> *"Definitely France and Italy, they are obligatory (…) France and Italy they are the answers to fashion, right?"*[147]

By using the word obligatory, the interviewee emphasizes on the two countries undeniable high position in the world of fashion and views the countries as the quintessence of fashion.

In this context, the interviewees use summary influences in their evaluations of French and Italian products based on their prior experiences and familiarity with luxury brands from these two countries. Having purchased French and Italian brands, as Louis Vuitton and Gucci, the interviewees tend to evaluate products from the two countries favorably based on the experiences they have had. In addition to the personal experiences, the familiarity with and the focus on French and Italian brands in the world of fashion have influenced the perceived attributes of their products. The undeniable position of French and Italian luxury brands is expressed when the young woman confirmable utters that France and Italy are the answers to fashion followed by a "right?" which shows a collective social understanding of fashion.

The stereotype of France, for example, includes the belief that French people are distinguished from many other countries by their rich culture and good taste. As one of the women puts it:

> *"The country has branded itself on those brands and the brands have branded themselves by being French. That is wine, luxury, good quality, old houses, old traditions – it's connected."*[148]

Another interviewee articulates as follows:

> *"France was where fashion started and then it is obvious that it affects you if you buy a bag that is made in France as opposite to if it was made in India."*[149]

Hence, the interviewee finds it more prestigious to buy a French bag than an Indian bag seeing that France is the pioneer of fashion and is renowned

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148   Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 37
149   Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 60

for its expertise in fashion. Accordingly, the young women regard France as the fashion capital of the world and French women as being chic and high-demanding in design and quality.

The stereotype of French culture is then being associated with a particular style of fashion:

> *"French people's culture and history and the way Danes perceive it results in that I have a specific idea of how their fashion is."*[150]

By this means the interviewees tend to favorably deduce the quality and characteristic of France's products from its national image.

Italy is considered to represent a different style and different characteristics than the French fashion: *"I put Italians in another category and another type of fashion."*[151] If France was about French chic, the Italian design is about elegance. One of the women conveys how she perceives Italian brands:

> *"I associate Italy with elegance and sophistication and it affects the way I perceive the Italian designer brands. I think a bit of la Dolce Vita and Sophia Loren and Italian shoes have always been known for being stylish and of good quality."*[152]

The quote above can be viewed as an indication of how the country-of-origin effect involves social and cultural factors besides the physical product itself. For the interviewee, Italian products call to mind the celebratory Italian lifestyle of the "sweet life", which was depicted in the famous Italian movie La Dolce Vita. Likewise, by referring to Sophia Loren, the consummate personification of Italian sensuality and elegance, the quote shows how stereotypes shape cultural understandings. In this manner, these stereotypical national representations have an effect on the way the interviewee perceives Italian products and the emotional value she attaches to them.

The Significance of the National Image

The national image of a country is used as a factor, which influences the women's perception of the style, reliability and quality standards of a product deriving from that country.

In this respect, the national image is clearly significant for the young women whether they communicate it directly or in a roundabout way. This postulation is exemplified with the following narration:

> "What if a brand originates from…let's say Turkey – then it would have a significance - even though I don't know why I still think it differs from my idea of fashion."[153]

Conversely to France and Italy, Turkey does not benefit from a strong national image in terms of luxury brands. The interviewee cannot explain why it would make a difference for her if a luxury product was Turkish, however, her reasoning may derive from the mental images of Turkey that she has received over time through different sources such as the media. Moreover, the many imitations of designer brands in Turkey may affect her overall perception of Turkish products. Another example on a country, which is not being associated with luxury, is the Czech Republic. An interviewee articulates like this:

> "For example, if something came from the Czech Republic then you might think that it isn't good because you think that they don't have the tradition of making quality and design and it's a bit cheap labor. After all it isn't Prague that is the capital of fashion. The classics are Rome, Milan, Paris, New York."[154]

The previous narratives indicate a dominant influence of halo constructs on their overall evaluation of the countries' products compared with the women's actual experiences with products from those countries. Seeing that Turkey and the Czech Republic are not renowned for luxury brands, the interviewees tend to link the national image to the countries' products. In this respect, the general knowledge that the women have about Turkey and the Czech Republic are used as a surrogate indicator to product quality and prestige.

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154   Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 50

Chinese is Not Luxury

As we have seen in a previous chapter, products made in China continue to have a "low quality" image in the eyes of the interviewees. For the purpose of this study, the interviewees were asked to express their immediate associations to Chinese products. The findings are anticipated seeing that the interviewees in particular associate Chinese products with cheap and mass manufacturing, poor quality and copy designs. The interviewees are very uniform in their impressions of Chinese brands and use almost the same formulations. As one interviewee puts it:

> *"I associate China with cheap manufacturing, copies, child labor, mass production and low quality."*[155]

Likewise, another interviewee narrates: *"Cheap. Strange. Colorful. Bad quality. Plastic."*[156]

It is clear from the answers of this very first question about Chinese products that China suffers from negative perceptions. The perceptions of Chinese products do not score well on many of the perceptions associated with luxury brands and are in fact perceived as completely opposites. That is to be exact, cheap instead of high-priced, mass-produced instead of unique, low in quality as an opposite to high quality, plastic against good fabrics and child labor versus the expertise of designers.

Accordingly, the interviewees believe that a "Made in China" tag degrades a Chinese product or brand. In this respect, one interviewee consciously avoids to buy a product that is made in China. She narrates as follows:

> *"You can say that it [a "Made in China" tag] is harmful if you look at the quality because you find it hard associating Made in China with quality and durability. I often found myself wanting to buy a product but then putting it back on the shelf after seeing that it writes Made in China because I just think of bad quality."*[157]

Hence, for the interviewee a "Made in China" tag on a product is viewed as a stamp of low quality. The "Made in China" tag is negatively perceived to such an extent that it has become a collective mode of speech to bring

155 Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 60
156 Appendix 2, interviewee 3 page 37
157 Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 61

up "Made in China" tags when referring to bad quality. One of the women explains:

> "You make a bit fun of it because it is made in Taiwan or made in China."[158]

Likewise, another interviewee goes more thoroughly into this social constructed cliché:

> "Saying that something is made in China it is something that people always say for fun. It has almost become a fixed expression to say that it is made in China…then you think of bad quality. Sometimes you also just say about clothes that it is made in china even though you don't know where it is from because it looks cheap."[159]

Thus, the phrase "Made in China" is regarded as a standard expression to denote cheap and low quality products. In light of the theory, the apparent existence of collective perceptions of the "Made in China" tag reflects socially learned mental images and stereotypes of China. In harmony with this, the interviewees evidently do not link Chinese brands with luxury. As an interviewee answers when she is asked whether she associates China with luxury: "No not at all. On the contrary I would say. It's a bit a pity for them."[160]

With this statement, the interviewee expresses the discouraging situation for Chinese brands to be considered as luxury, and by using the word pity she indirectly communicates her compassion towards the potential Chinese luxury brands that may suffer from a negative national image despite their efforts.
Accordingly, the interviewees believe that the negative perceptions of Chinese products are a general attitude among luxury consumers. This may indicate a general consensus on the parameters of what constitutes a luxury brand among luxury consumers. Hence, it is not considered prestigious to purchase Chinese products and brands.

The young women do to a certain extent acknowledge the fact that China has been recognized for its fine silk and tailoring and that the country must have products of good quality. However, all of the interviewees utter

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159   Appendix 2, interviewee 4 page 51
160   Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 61

that this attribute is overshadowed by the negative perceptions. This is explained by the fact that the cheap Chinese products of bad quality are the only ones they are faced with in their everyday lives. This has resulted in a specific image of China and its products in the West. The Chinese products of good quality, on the other hand, become something abstract that they cannot relate to seeing that they are not visible to them. An interviewee narrates:

> *"There is no small Chinese tailor with all his silk right on the corner. So I can't really relate to it (…) In reality I don't think that all products from China are of bad quality. It is just because the ones that are sold in the West are characterized by being of bad quality"*[161]

In harmony with Nebenzahl & Jaffe in the theory, the women's perceptions of China's country image contain both summary and halo characteristics, which are interconnected. The women's attitudes act as a halo effect seeing that given the little information they have about Chinese luxury brands tend to evaluate them according to the general knowledge they have of China. At the same time, their perceptions include summary effects as they are based on personal experiences with products made in China, which they are familiar with. In this manner, the interviewees generalize their overall attitudes to Chinese brands based on the cheap Chinese products that are visible in their everyday life and that they are familiar with. To summarize this chapter, the women have clearly specified perceptions of countries that have a tradition in luxury. In this respect, the national image of the country-of-origin of a luxury product is essential for the way they perceive the product and its signal value such as prestige and quality.

What About Shanghai Tang?

Despite the interviewees' negative perceptions of Chinese brands, they respond rather positive when introduced to the Chinese luxury brand, Shanghai Tang. Even though none of the women are familiar with the brand, it seems to connote quality and credibility in their eyes. When the women catch sight of Shanghai Tang's website they are surprised of how European the brand seems. This can be viewed in the following quote:

> *"My immediate impression is that it looks fine, I definitely think that. The style is actually very European, I think (…) I don't think that they are completely lost (…) The style could work in Europe and I don't think that it is that obvious that it comes from there. Often they have special patterns and fabrics, but it didn't seem that they have from what I could see. I think that is positive."*[162]

The quote indicates that the interviewee may have had specific expectations of how the clothes from a Chinese luxury brand would look like. In this respect, she had imagined it to be very Asian in its style, which from her formulation to judge would have been misplaced in the international fashion industry. Hence, the fact that the brand does not reflect its Chinese roots that much is considered as an advantage in the eyes of the interviewee.

Similarly, another interviewee comments upon Shanghai Tang's Western features:

> *"Not all of the models look Chinese either, so if it wasn't for the background of the website you wouldn't know that it was a Chinese brand."*[163]

The above-mentioned quotes could suggest that it is more desirable and prestigious for the majority of the interviewees to wear Westernized designs rather than Asian inspired ones. This can naturally be explained by the fact that most luxury clothing brands are Western and thereby dictate the fashion for luxury consumers. This means that the influence of the fashion industry and its connoisseurs determine the consumption of particular luxury products and styles. Seeing that the interviewees do not consider

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Shanghai Tang as typical Chinese designs, may then be an advantage for the brand on the Danish luxury market.

As we have seen in a previous chapter, the perception of quality is extremely important for the women when it comes to luxury products. In this context, Shanghai Tang does gain from a favorable perception of good quality among the interviewees. As it is expressed by one interviewee:

> *"My immediate impression when I enter the website is that it conveys exclusivity (…) It is classic, it is simple and not too flamboyant but at the same time you can see that it looks nice. The quality looks good and the website reflects that."*[164]

Another interviewee comments upon the quality of the fabrics:

> *"It looks like they have some very good materials with silk etc. (…) I can see that it is a luxury brand."*[165]

By this means, that Shanghai Tang manages to signal quality and exclusivity for the interviewees alone from the features of their website. As a result, all of the interviewees articulate that they would be open towards Shanghai Tang if they opened a flagship store in Denmark.

Nonetheless, the women give many contradictions in their utterances, which suggest that it may be challenging for Shanghai Tang to compete with other recognized luxury brands. Rather surprisingly from the previous chapter, where the findings showed that the country-of-origin matters for the interviewees, the fact that Shanghai Tang is Chinese seems not the be the biggest challenge. The interviewees do not necessarily consider it as a burden for Shanghai Tang to be Chinese. In this context, a parallel is made to Japan, which has made the evolution from perceived low quality to perceived high quality with the help of Japanese luxury brands. This parallel is narrated as follows:

> *"If they build up a brand as Kenzo for instance did, then they can probably compete. I don't think that it is a load for them that they are from China."*[166]

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165 Appendix 2, interviewee 5 page 62
166 Appendix 2, interviewee 2 page 27

Hence, the clear contradiction from the previous chapter that showed that Chinese products are perceived as low quality, may witness of a somewhat revised country image due to the good quality that Shanghai Tang signals. In this way, the impressions the women have of Shanghai Tang have revised their knowledge of Chinese products and thereby to a certain degree revised their country image.

However, they do mention that Shanghai Tang cannot brand itself on its country image, as it is the case with French and Italian luxury brands. On the other hand, Shanghai Tang has to build a strong brand identity in order to compete. According to the interviewees the biggest challenge lies in this, as the brand is still rather new and unknown. Once again, this shows the great importance of a brand's history and recognition in the eyes of the interviewees. The challenge of competing with recognized luxury brands is explained like this:

> "If they are competing with the big luxury brands, then I think they will have a really hard time…I think it is difficult to live up to because I do not think they have the history."[167]

As a contrast to Shanghai Tang, the interviewee speaks about the advantages of the recognized luxury brands:

> "What distinguishes them is that they have a long history and they have a lot to tell and it doesn't write "Made in China" in their clothes. I think that has a lot to say."[168]

With this quote the interviewee outlines the two-folded challenges of Shanghai Tang. Firstly, it is a considerable disadvantage when competing with other luxury brands to be Chinese. Secondly, if positive country-of-origin influences are not available, then Shanghai Tang needs to have a strong identity of its own. However, as Shanghai Tang does not have a long heritage or a strong identity, their position may be critical compared to other recognized brands.

Hence, this quote backs up the findings from a previous chapter where it was assessed that the women combine luxury brands with a long heritage.

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168   Appendix 2, interviewee 1 page 13

According to the interviewees, it is thereby crucial for Shanghai Tang's success to be recognized as a Chinese luxury brand. One interviewee explains:

> "It would definitely help if it was in fashion magazines. It is in a way a stamp of quality for them because they do not put everything in their magazines."[169]

By referring to a stamp of quality, the interviewee puts emphasis on the importance of reference groups and the fact that a brand represents value to both the interviewee and her reference group. Giving reference to the theory, this one more time confirms that luxury brands are used as a means for social acceptance. Hence, the meaning and values of products are formed in and through the social interaction of people.

Likewise, another of the interviewee gives evidence of the social aspect of luxury consumption:

> "If you started to see celebrities wearing their clothes or if it was more in magazines, then it would be more attractive to me and I would maybe buy Shanghai Tang instead of another luxury product. But as it looks right now, I wouldn't buy it in preference of the brands I usually buy."[170]

It can be evaluated from the findings that it is not sufficient for the interviewees that Shanghai Tang signals quality and exclusivity, it also has to be socially recognized by the connoisseurs of luxury such as celebrities and fashion magazines. Due to the brand's lack of recognition, the women would thereby prefer to purchase another luxury brand, which is recognized in the fashion industry and among luxury consumers. As a result, a long heritage and a strong recognized brand identity remains the key factor in the purchase of luxury brands.

To summarize this chapter, the young women have negative perceptions of Chinese products. Nonetheless, the positive responses towards Shanghai Tang as a brand conveying quality and exclusivity, have to a certain degree revised the interviewees' beliefs about Chinese product attributes. In this regard, they do not see it as an overriding obstacle for the brand to be made in China. However, seeing that Shanghai Tang does not benefit from

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a positive national image, it is put across by the women that the brand has to gain high recognition among connoisseurs of fashion in order to be successful. Purchasing recognized brands with a long heritage is essential for the interviewees in order to feel social conformity within their reference groups. Since Shanghai Tang has not yet reached this social recognition within the women's reference groups, the interviewees have preferences for other luxury brands.

Discussion

All in all, a lot of consensus can be observed between the 5 interviewees' narratives about their perceptions and experiences of luxury products. This may witness of a distinctive luxurious lifestyle among young female affluents in Denmark.

The analysis chapter has identified numerous facets of the women's attitudes towards luxury brands. In accordance with Vigneron & Johnson, these facets involve both personal and non-personal perceived values that distinguish luxury products from non-luxury products.

The non-personal perceptions comprise the interviewees' understanding of luxury and the perceived characteristics of luxury products and brands. These are high quality, conspicuousness, uniqueness and history.

The term conspicuousness can be applied to the women whose consumption patterns are utilized to show social status rather than any intrinsic utility. The women's luxury purchases are then useful for trying to impress others and for obtaining social affiliation, as pointed out earlier by Veblen. In this context, the interviewees view luxury as reserved for the few that can afford it and correlate it with exclusivity as a contrast to mass-production. Luxury then allows them to differentiate from the mainstream consumers. Accordingly, if a luxury product or a brand becomes too common or showy, it may lose its intended signal value. The women's disapproving attitudes to overexposed luxury brands give evidence of the democratization of luxury where it has become more and more common to purchase luxury brands among non-affluents. As a result, it is considered more prestigious for the women to purchase more exclusive and less showy luxury brands. This fact also enhances the uniqueness of the luxury brands they buy, seeing that it is only the connoisseurs of fashion that recognize the products, and thereby it becomes more prestigious.

Social influences from reference groups can then be viewed as affecting the interviewees' buyer behavior. The women's reference groups are conformed by the social networks they take part in and involve purchasing products that represent collective values. Hence, talking about luxury brands with friends is an important social dimension of the women's luxury

consumption in order to maintain group values. In light of a symbolic interactionist approach, the meanings that the women attach to the luxury products can be regarded as meanings arising out of the social interaction with their reference groups.

Another crucial social influence for the women is aspirational reference groups such as celebrities who are admired and whose styles are emulated.

In the analysis of the non-personal perceived values of the women's luxury consumption, it has been assessed that the history of a brand is determinant for its recognition and status. In this context, a long heritage or a distinctive brand personality creates emotional attachment to the women through the signs and symbols the brand conveys. A critic of Vigneron & Johnson's conceptual framework is the absence of perceived history as a non-personal perception of luxury. In the analysis of the women's narratives the perception of history has been evaluated as a particularly important factor of how they define luxury. As a result, the analysis has provided a revised framework of Vigneron & Johnsnon in order to cover all the perceived values of luxury brands.

Other facets than non-personal perceptions of luxury have to do with the women's personal rapport and experiences with luxury. These are perceptions of hedonism and the extended self.

In relation to luxury, products appear as highly pleasurable for the interviewees. In harmony with the theory, the findings have shown that the perception of a hedonic product attribute is considered as a holistic multi-sensory experience. It is particularly the experience of shopping luxury that has a hedonic attribute. For the women, shopping luxury reflects the value received from multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of the shopping experience. As opposite to utilitarian shopping, that is directed toward satisfying a functional need, hedonic shopping is motivated by an emotional need for reasons other than just functionality. In this regard, it is found that the notion of self-gift giving is significant for the women's hedonic experiences of shopping. The gifts they buy themselves are used in terms of re-

wards and therapeutic situations. This fact indicates that the purchase and consumption of luxury products is extremely self-orientated.

Consequently, the self is a basic concept in the women's consumption behavior. Following Mead's thinking in symbolic interactionism and Gidden's account of the postmodern consumer, the interviewees use their purchases as a way of self-expressing. In this way, their possessions are seen as a reflection of who they are. Hence, the women can be regarded as reflexive individuals who form a conception of themselves through their objects. It is in this connection important for the women to be viewed by others as stylish, elegant, quality-minded and fashionable in order to enhance their own self-concepts. The importance of others in the women's self-concepts can be understood with Cooley's concept of looking-glass self, where individuals see themselves as they think others see them. Hence, when the women choose to wear high-priced luxury brands, they may imagine that people perceive them as belonging to a specific social group.

The analysis of the impact of country-of-origin has shown that luxury brands benefit from an association with a positive national image. Particularly, France and Italy are a focal point for the women's expression of favorable country images in terms of luxury brands. The national perceptions of the two countries are based on the countries' heritage, culture, popular stereotypes shaped by the media, and the women's own experiences with products from the two countries. Hence, the perceptions and attitudes to French and Italian products are based on summary influences derived from prior experience.

The country-of-origin does clearly influence the interviewees' pre-conceptions of luxury products, and with the lack of familiarity with a country's products, the country-of-origin information influences perceptions of quality and prestige. That means that the women tend to use general stereotypes about countries as a surrogate indicator of the product attributes. Hence, in the absence of information or product familiarity, the women use halo influences as a short cut to product evaluations.

The country-of-origin of a product affects the women's purchase decisions as they correlate the quality of a country's product with national image. In this context, Chinese products are non-desirable for the interviewees due to their perceptions of low quality. As a result, the women do not combine China with luxury, more likely as the exact opposite. This can be viewed as a halo effect as the women ahead of having meaningful experience with Chinese luxury, use the image of China to form their beliefs about the expected attributes of their products.

Based on the many negative perceptions of Chinese products, a negative response to Shanghai Tang could have been anticipated. Nonetheless, the founder's vision of creating the first Chinese luxury brand has partially succeeded as it conveys luxury, quality and exclusiveness for the women. This can be considered a summary effect as the women use the experience they have of Shanghai Tang to revise their knowledge about the attributes of Chinese products.

In this view, the women do not consider it as a big obstacle for Shanghai Tang to be Chinese and the brand is put side by side with the Japanese luxury brand Kenzo, which has gained international recognition. The comparison gives evidence of the fact that national image dynamically can change over time as it was the case with Japan.

This means that Shanghai Tang represents new meaning for the women reflecting positive changes in China, and reflects a transition from a country largely viewed as a low-cost producer to one that also can have luxury brands. Hence, China's image as a low-cost manufacturer is not necessarily negative if it is positioned with other important brand attributes such as luxury in the minds of the consumers. This requires a broadening of the general perceptions of Chinese brands.

Shanghai Tang has somewhat broadened the women's general perceptions of Chinese brands to the extent that its quality and exclusiveness overshadow the fact that it is made in China.

In agreement with Nebenzahl and Jaffe's combined halo and summary model of country image, the interviewees' use of both halo and summary

influences can be viewed as a dynamic process. This dynamic process means that China's country image to a certain extent has been revised from a halo effect when the women had no knowledge about Chinese luxury brands to a summary effect as the women have become familiar with Shanghai Tang.

However, this transition is a long-term process, and the interviewees emphasize on the fact that Shanghai Tang does not have the possibility to brand itself on its country image as French and Italian brands.

On the other hand, recognition of the brand depends on a brand history and a strong brand identity. The interviewees consider Shanghai Tang as lacking these elements, and this fact thereby becomes an enormous weakness compared to other luxury brands. Seeing that heritage and a distinct brand personality were of particular importance for the women's perceived values of luxury, Shanghai Tang is at present time seen as a weak player on the international fashion market. Once again, this shows that social recognition within the women's reference groups plays a crucial role in their purchase behavior.

On a long term, Shanghai Tang may be successful on the Danish luxury market if it manages to create a strong brand identity and by gaining recognition and high status in the fashion industry and among celebrities. These are the social influences that would affect the women to buy Shanghai Tang clothes on equal terms with other recognized luxury brands.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate young Danish women's perceptions, experiences and attitudes towards luxury brands as well as the impact of country-of-origin, and based on that estimate Shanghai Tang's prospects on a Danish market.

The study confirms that the consumption of luxury goods involves both non-personal and personal aspects. The non-personal aspects are used to gain recognition from others and to feel affiliation to a specific reference group through the common values and meanings they attach to objects. The personal dimension, on the other hand, provides sensory pleasure and satisfaction and is used to form their self-concept through the signal value of their material possessions.

Furthermore, the study enriches Vigneron & Johnson's definition of the non-personal perceived values with the History dimension. The investigation of the understandings of luxury has shown that history is a perceived value of luxury along with the ones of quality and uniqueness. The notion of uniqueness shows itself very relevant and strived for due to the democratization of luxury. In this context, the purchase of exclusivity becomes significant as a means of differentiation. In relation to this, it has been found that the consumption of luxury brands, only recognized by a special niche, the connoisseurs of luxury, is considered more prestigious.

In terms of the country-of-origin effect, the study shows that national image is important in the evaluation of a country's product attributes. Mental images of a country image are shaped by social and cultural influences such as stereotypes. France and Italy are highly associated with luxury, whereas China still is regarded as the other extreme of luxury. China's image is to a large extent influenced by its performance as the world's low-cost manufacturer.

The study estimates that the prospects for Shanghai Tang on a Danish market are somewhat difficult, but not impossible on a long term. Shanghai Tang broadens the perspectives of Chinese product attributes in the eyes of the consumers as the brand signals quality and luxury. This fact has to some extent revised China's country image and the "Made in China"-tag is not considered an obstacle in the way of success. However, a pronounced obstacle for Shanghai Tang is the lack of recognition in the consumers' reference groups. Preferences for socially recognized luxury brands are well-defined. As a concluding point, the prospects of Shanghai Tang on a Danish market truly depend on social recognition and status in the eyes of fashion insiders.

Avenues for Future Research

In this thesis, the concept of luxury has been investigated for assessing the perspectives for a Chinese luxury brand to enter the Danish luxury market. In this context, the importance of a luxury brand's country-of-origin has been studied. However, this study has not gone beyond the concept of country-of-origin and examined the understandings the consumers have of a product's origin. A future research could then be to examine if consumers define country-of-origin as the country of production or as the country with which a country is associated. An interesting perspective is the fact that some Western luxury brands in fact are being manufactured in China. In this view, it could be interesting to explore consumer perceptions of Western luxury brands manufactured in China and Chinese luxury brands manufactured in China to see whether there still are distinguishing perceptions in terms of quality and prestige. This raises the following question: If Chinese manufacturers can produce good quality items for Western luxury brands, can China not become a recognized luxury brand producer itself? This further research could allow for a better understanding of the country-of-origin effect and of the socio-cultural norms of consumers' attitudes towards luxury.

Another proposition of further research is in terms of hedonistic aspects of luxury consumption. The study found that the shopping of luxury is linked to self-gift giving. Therefore, it would be of relevance to explore to a higher extent the dimensions of the self-giving orientation, on a broader international and multicultural level. It would in this regard be interesting to examine if some nationalities or ethnical groups are more self-oriented in their consumption behavior than others.

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