



How do Millennials define luxury?

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Background. The Millennial consumer group has stimulated a dramatic change in consumer shopping behavior and as a result, luxury department stores unequivocally have struggled to find relevancy with this consumer group. Therefore, since luxury department stores are finding it difficult to attract/retain the Millennial consumer, the largest living adult consumer group in the market today (Fry, 2020) with major purchasing power (Donnelly & Scaff, 2013), it is imperative for business survival that luxury department stores find a way to tap into this consumer group. If luxury department stores want to grow their market share with the Millennial consumer, they first need to have a better understanding of what luxury means to this consumer group. After a review of extant literature, it is apparent that a concise definition of luxury, as well as luxury brands, is lacking in the literature (i.e., Wiedmann et al., 2009). Therefore, the aim of the current study is to determine and define what luxury means to Millennial luxury consumers.

Theoretical Framework. For this study, the authors drew from a systems theory perspective (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The current study similarly employed systems theory to provide a means for conceptualization of the Millennial luxury consumer and their interactions with the luxury department store in the context of the changing retail environment. Particularly, this study used a modified version of Bubolz et al's (1980) human ecosystem. This model embeds the Millennial luxury consumer, human behavioral environment, and the human constructed environment all within the context of the natural environment.

Methods. To explore the Millennial luxury consumer and develop a more concise definition of luxury, an exploratory mixed method approach was utilized. The researchers used semi-structured, in-depth interviews to collect data for the qualitative procedure. A purposive, snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit participants for interviews to collect relevant data (Esterberg, 2002). Data collection concluded when no new concepts emerged, and the purpose of the study had been satisfied (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A phenomenological interpretive approach was used to analyze the data. After the analysis of the qualitative data, a quantitative survey was developed to further determine how relevant certain words - that were obtained from the qualitative interviews - were at defining "luxury" based on a Millennial consumer's perspective. This survey, generated in Qualtrics, was given to a sample of undergraduate merchandising students born between 1980 and 2000 at two large US universities. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics, frequencies, and measures of central tendency (i.e., mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) were employed using SPSS.

Results. Twelve participants took part in the qualitative interviews: seven female (58%) and five male (42%), all of which came from diverse backgrounds, were in various parts of the United States, and all had at least a bachelor's degree. When determining that luxury means to Millennial luxury shoppers, interpretative analysis of the qualitative interviews resulted in 11

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, minimums, and maximums of luxury defining themes.

Luxury Theme	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Quality	4.62	0.603	3	5
Self-Pleasure	4.25	0.947	1	5
Price	4.22	0.807	2	5
Aesthetics	4.15	0.961	2	5
Designer/Brand	4.14	1.021	1	5
Taste	4.02	0.989	1	5
Shopping Experience	4.00	0.866	2	5
Specific Product or Service	3.95	0.928	2	5
Expressiveness	3.93	1.003	1	5
Status	3.81	1.024	2	5
Best	3.81	1.140	1	5
Elegance	3.73	1.026	1	5
Success	3.72	1.170	1	5
Exclusive	3.62	1.159	1	5
High Class/Wealth	3.57	1.274	1	5
Symbolic Interaction	3.31	0.894	1	5
Functional	3.27	1.186	1	5
Emotional Connection	3.23	1.046	1	5
History	3.00	1.051	1	5
Superfluous	2.61	0.995	1	5

major themes. These themes included quality, status, shopping experience, price, designer/brand, exclusive, high class/wealth, emotional connection, history, elegance, and best. To further develop a more concise definition of "luxury", a total of 125 undergraduate students participated in a quantitative, online survey; of which, ninety-seven surveys were usable (77.6%). Most respondents (73.0%) were between 18-25 years of age, white (48.6%), and had an income between \$0 - \$50,000 (73.5%). The online survey asked participants to rate how relevant a list of 20 words/themes were to their definition of luxury. Eleven of these words/themes were identified during the results of the aforementioned qualitative interviews, and the following nine words derived from previous literature regarding luxury: *success* (Brewer, 1991), *aesthetics* (De Barnier et al., 2006; Dubois et al., 2001), *superfluous* (Dubois et al., 2001), *functional* (Vickers & Renand, 2003), *symbolic interaction* (Vickers & Renand, 2003), *expressiveness* (De Barnier et al., 2006), *self-pleasure* (De Barnier et al., 2006), *taste* (Pierre et al., 2009), and *specific product or service* (Brun & Castelli, 2013). Interestingly, the top five relevant words in defining luxury included *quality*, *self-pleasure*, *price*, *aesthetics*, and *designer/brand*, while the least relevant words were *superfluous*, *history*, *emotional connection*, *functional*, and *symbolic interaction* (See Table 1).

Conclusions. To date, there are many definitions of luxury available in the literature, yet there is no current definition based on the perspective of a Millennial luxury consumer, a consumer cited to be dynamic and a major influence in the luxury sector (Danziger, 2019). Based on the findings of the current study, a working definition for "luxury" according to the perceptions of the Millennial luxury consumer is as follows: *Luxury is the characteristics of the products itself, including quality, price, aesthetics, designer/brand, and specific products or service, addresses the consumer's personal needs, including self-pleasure and overall shopping experience, and addresses the consumer's social needs, including impeccable taste, expressiveness, and social status.* According to Danziger (2019), Millennials are radically transforming the luxury market. While this generation is young in the workforce, they are very interested in luxury (Jay, 2012) and luxury has become not exclusive to the elite (Wiedmann et al., 2009); thus, justifying the need for a study such as this. Millennials have major purchasing power and impact on the economy; a segment retailers will need to capture for future success (Donnelly & Scaff, 2013).

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