



Purchase Intention for Luxury Wellness Brands: Assessing the Predictive Value of Brand Awareness versus Brand Attachment

Key words: wellness, brand attachment, luxury, brand awareness

Introduction. According to Euromonitor International, the global market for health and wellness offerings reached \$686 billion in 2016 and it is expected to grow at a 3.5% CAGR, to \$815 billion, by 2021. Notably, wellness has become mainstream in the luxury sector (Forbes, 2017). However, despite consumers' pursuit of wellness in luxury consumption, little research has been done regarding the simultaneous impact of cognitive and relational variables on luxury buying behavior. As an attempt to address this void, this study is designed to investigate how brand awareness (cognitive) and brand attachment (relational) are interrelated and contribute to purchase intention for luxury wellness brands. Specifically, our study centered on the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** Does brand awareness predict purchase intention for luxury wellness brands? Does brand awareness explain a significant amount of the variance in purchase intention when controlling for the possible effects of demographic characteristics (i.e., age, education)?
- **RQ2:** Is brand attachment a necessary construct to explain purchase intention for luxury wellness brands? Do consumers intend to purchase a wellness luxury brand although they do not feel attached to it?

Background and Hypotheses. Several studies have been conducted to conceptualize the meaning of wellness. While the notion of wellbeing relates to the condition of specific aspects or domains of health/wellness, the notion of wellness serves as an umbrella term, and mainly describes changing one's lifestyle and adopting health promoting behaviors (Conrad, 1994). Besides, epidemiological researchers have concluded that self-rated perceptions of health are among the most powerful predictors of subsequent health outcomes, meaning that individual perceptions actually precede overt manifestation of illness or wellness (Adams, Bezner, & Steinhardt, 1997). Overall, wellness is a higher order construct integrating these domains, and necessarily draws on the level of individual self-perception (Schuster, et al, 2004). Therefore, both cognitive (brand awareness) and relational (brand attachment) aspects of perceptions are expected to contribute to purchase intention of luxury wellness brands.

Methods and Results: In the United States, online survey data were collected. Measurement items of research variables were adapted from previous studies. A total of 315 complete responses were collected through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were shown a luxury wellness brand (e.g., Tory Burch Sports) and completed the questionnaire. The respondents were all female (100%) who are mainly white (78.7%), younger than 30 years old (60%), with household income over \$35K (70.5%). Hierarchical regression was used to examine our research questions. The dependent variable first tested was purchase intention. The independent variables were entered in blocks in a predetermined order. In the first block (Model 1), the two demographic variables (i.e., age, income) were forced into the analysis. This had the effect of statistically controlling for these variables. In the second step, brand awareness was entered into

the equation (Model 2). In so doing, the possible effect of the demographic variables was removed, and brand awareness was able to explain some of the remaining variance in purchase intention. In the third step, brand attachment was entered into the equation as a dependent variable (Model 3). This enabled us to test the mediation effect of brand attachment between brand awareness and purchase intention. Finally, in the fourth step, brand attachment was added into Model 2 as an independent variable (Model 4). Model 4 revealed that: (a) brand awareness was significant ($\beta = .16, p < .01$) and brand attachment ($\beta = .39, p < .001$). However, the strength of the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention was reduced when brand attachment was added to Model 2. The change in R^2 is a way to evaluate how much predictive power was added to the model by the addition of brand attachment. The percent of variability accounted for went up substantially (14.5% increase). This finding indicates that brand attachment had a strong effect above and beyond the effect of brand awareness. Finally, brand awareness was a significant determinant of brand attachment ($\beta = .19, p < .01$).

Discussion and Implications: In the brand management domain, brand awareness is considered one of the key variables that can ensure the effectiveness of marketing strategies. However, our results show that it is not sufficient to focus only on this “awareness” variable, especially when brands are luxury wellness brands. For this new emerging brand category, brand relationship variables such as brand attachment play an important role in buying behavior. Therefore, brand managers should pay attention to consumers’ brand attachment in addition to their brand awareness. They should also develop experiential marketing strategies that ensure that consumers feel attached to their brands. There are several limitations that need to be addressed in future research. While our research employed a relatively small number of simple scale items that can easily be used by practitioners, future research should test subcomponents of each construct using more scale items and perhaps additional constructs. Also, we have tested our model with one existing brand. Future research should corroborate the study in additional fashion goods categories (e.g., cosmetics).

Reference

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