



## Factors Influencing Purchase Intention toward Luxury Fashion Brands

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**Introduction.** Given the unique nature of luxury goods, investigating the underlying factors that influence purchase intention for luxury brands is important for luxury brand managers and communicators. Consumers' motivations are influenced by social factors which are associated with culture. For instance, Thorstein Veblen (1899) theorized that conspicuous consumption was based on two distinct motivations. One of these motivations is that people in higher classes have a tendency to display their wealth. The other motivation is that people in lower classes have a desire to emulate a high-end lifestyle. In addition, the rarity and exclusiveness of luxury goods may trigger different shopping motivations. Little research on luxury goods consumption has been conducted in social contexts with individualistic Western young adult consumers. Thus, this study aims to investigate relationships between influential factors and purchase intentions toward luxury fashion brands and to determine whether or not competitiveness as an individual trait moderates these relationships.

**Theoretical Framework.** While interacting with their environment, individuals tend to evaluate themselves. Festinger (1954) explored certain aspects of social structure to establish motivational conditions that predispose individuals to compare themselves with others. Consumer behaviors suggest that individuals' social comparisons may influence their purchase intentions toward luxury brands. Adopting the social comparison framework based on the theory of social comparison, the current study proposes a research model to examine the relationship between social comparisons and purchase intention toward luxury fashion brands. In addition, competitiveness as an individualistic trait is analyzed as a moderator. The hypotheses are as follows: Contingent self-esteem (H1a), peer pressure (H2a), media pressure (H3a), and brand consciousness (H4a) are associated with purchase intention for luxury fashion brands among female young adult consumers in the U.S. Because the rarity of luxury goods fosters competition in their consumption, we predict that competitiveness moderates the relationships: contingent self-esteem and purchase intention (H1b), peer pressure and purchase intention (H2b), media pressure and purchase intention (H3b), and brand consciousness and purchase intention (H4b).

**Method and Results.** Data were gathered using the survey method. Questionnaires were distributed in classes at a large state university in the southeastern U.S. A total of 151 usable responses were collected from undergraduate female students. Luxury fashion brand stores are accessible to students within a one-hour drive, and several specialty shops offer high-end brands in the area. A 7-point Likert-type scale was used to measure the six variables: contingent self-esteem (Paradise & Kernis, 1999), peer pressure (Bearden et al., 1989), media pressure (Thompson et al., 2004), brand consciousness (Nan & Heo, 2007), competitiveness (Singelis et al., 1995), and purchase intention (Schlosser et al., 2006). The data were analyzed using SPSS 18.0 to test hypotheses. The multiple regression analyses results revealed that media pressure ( $\beta$

= .237,  $p < .004$ ) and brand consciousness ( $\beta = .453$ ,  $p < .000$ ) were positively associated with purchase intention toward luxury fashion brands among Western female college students. However, contingent self-esteem ( $\beta = -.115$ ,  $p < .276$ ) and peer pressure ( $\beta = .024$ ,  $p < .780$ ) were not significantly associated with purchase intention toward luxury fashion brands. Results did not find any moderating effects (H1b:  $\beta = .073$ ,  $p < .297$ , H2b:  $\beta = .070$ ,  $p < .371$ , H3b:  $\beta = -.054$ ,  $p < .512$ , H4b:  $\beta = -.145$ ,  $p < .676$ ) of competitiveness on these relationships.

**Discussion and Implications.** Zhang and Kim (2013) viewed peer pressure as a social comparison and their results indicated that peer reference significantly affected Chinese consumers' attitudes towards purchasing luxury fashion brands. However, our results indicate that contingent self-esteem and peer pressure were not significant factors for purchase intention toward luxury fashion brands. This finding suggests that Western female college students are less affected by peers than their Asian counterparts and are more affected by brand and media influence when consuming luxury fashion brands. These results imply that individual evaluations of media figures and brand image in the social domain are main concerns rather than peers or others' evaluations of their impression. Even though we did not find the moderating effect of competitiveness, it would be possible to explore the effect from a cross-cultural approach in future research. We examined only individual level factors and did not include geographically based cultural criteria. For a more accurate application of market segmentation in the current luxury brand market, our results suggest that future research should examine both individual level factors and cultural level factors.

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