YouTube vloggers' influence on consumer luxury brand perceptions and intentions

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how video blogs (vlogs) influence consumer perceptions of luxury brands. Using para-social interaction (PSI) and social comparison theory, this study proposes a model that assesses the influence of physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, and attitude homophily of video blogger (vlogger) on PSI; and PSI effects on luxury brand perceptions (i.e., brand luxury, luxury brand value, and brand-user-imagery fit) and luxury brand purchase intentions. Study 1 tests the hypothesized model using structural equation modeling (SEM). Results supported the proposed model. Using within-subject design by comparing pre- and post-luxury perceptions, Study 2 finds luxury brand perceptions were significantly increased after watching vlog and increases were moderated by PSI with the vlogger. Study 3 investigated vlog effects on luxury brand perceptions and purchase intentions using between-subject design. Results show that luxury brand perceptions and purchase intentions for the experimental groups, who watched vlogs reviewing luxury products, were higher than control group, who did not watch vlog. Overall, the findings generally support for PSI as a brand management tool and the use of YouTube for positive perceptions of luxury brands.

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1. Introduction

Social media provides marketers with an expansive set of tools that enable them to reach consumers directly. The specificity of individual platforms allows for creative and innovative social media marketing strategies. Using the defining characteristics of social media platforms, marketers can tailor content to fit the needs of the audience; therefore, it is important for researchers to study social media platforms individually, with a focus on what makes the platform unique for marketing and branding. This study focuses on YouTube, the video-sharing website, that allows users to create and upload videos that are viewed and shared by hundreds of millions of viewers (Freeman & Chapman, 2007).

YouTube users create vlogs and some have amassed a large following, with some vloggers having upwards of 100 million subscribers. Vloggers upload videos about products they use or their personal life, thereby increasing traffic from subscribers and anonymous viewers. Consequently, vloggers become what is referred to as YouTube celebrities. The emergence of the vlog and the success of "YouTube celebrities" have provided luxury brands with a marketing tool to connect with consumers. For example, L'Oréal launched a new makeup line inspired by Guru Michelle Phan, a YouTube beauty vlogger with more than 4.5 million subscribers (Lacy, 2013).

Research on the use of social media for luxury fashion marketing is limited (Mike, 2014). This study investigates the potential of fashion vloggers as luxury brands ambassadors. PSI and social comparison theory provide the theoretical framework for this investigation. PSI has been studied extensively in communication and provides a foundation for understanding the one-way relationship between media personalities and viewers. The relationship between consumers and vloggers, even though it is a one-way relationship, has potential to influence consumer perceptions of luxury brand products. Social comparison theory is used to explain the effect of PSI on consumers' luxury brand perceptions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Defining luxury

Tynan, McKechnie, and Chhuon (2010) defined luxury brands as "high quality, expensive, and non-essential products and services that appear to be rare, exclusive, prestigious, and authentic and offer high levels of symbolic and emotional/hedonic values through consumer experiences" (p. 1158). Vigneron and Johnson (2004) defined luxury brands as a prestige brand that has high levels of non-personal-oriented perceptions (i.e., conspicuousness, uniqueness, and quality) and personal-oriented perceptions (i.e., hedonism and extended self). Essentially, for brands to be considered as luxury, they must have luxury

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features (e.g., prestige, high quality, high price exclusivity, and uniqueness) and provide psychological and emotional values including conspicuous and hedonic values.

Product category is a significant criterion to define luxury products. Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2008) identified eight luxury product categories: fashion, jewelry, cosmetics, wine, automobile, hotel, tourism, and private banking. In particular, fashion products have been recognized by scholars to have high aesthetic and hedonic values (Eckman, Damhorst, & Kadolph, 1990). Consumers perceive fashion merchandise to have high social value and symbolic value (Kim, 2005). Consequently, fashion products can create psychological and emotional values, which are likely to be categorized as luxury products when they are expensive, high quality, and rare.

2.2. Social media marketing and luxury fashion brands

The traditional concept of luxury has changed in the fashion industry over several decades (Ansarin & Ozuem, 2014; Yeoman, 2011). Increasing wealth has provided consumers with access luxury products, thus altering its perception. As a result, luxury fashion products are not exclusively consumed by people in high society, but are now accessible to more consumers (Ansarin & Ozuem, 2014).

Since exclusivity of luxury brands can be diluted through online marketing where mass audiences can access information, luxury marketers delayed employing social media marketing (Heine & Berghaus, 2014; Okonkwo, 2009). However, luxury fashion brands including Chanel, Dior, Burberry, and Prada have implemented social media marketing strategies to engage with consumers (Dhaoui, 2014; Mike, 2014; Park, Song, & Ko, 2011). For example, Burberry was the first luxury fashion brand to use social media marketing, and as a result saw profits increased by 40% (Phan, Thomas, & Heine, 2011). Luxury brand marketing on social media has been found to increase consumers' favorable luxury perceptions, desire for luxury, and purchase intentions (Chu, Kamal, & Kim, 2013; Kim & Ko, 2012; Phan et al., 2011).

Using social media, consumers can quickly and easily access user-generated content that often includes product reviews and information. Previous studies found user-generated content has significant influence on consumers' brand perceptions, brand choices (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006), and new consumer acquisition (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). User-generated content is also considered trustworthy (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012). Although user-generated content has potential power to influence consumer luxury brand purchasing behavior (Blackshaw, 2006), studies have instead focused on company-generated content (Kim & Ko, 2012; Phan et al., 2011). Prior studies investigate social networking sites (e.g., Facebook; Kim & Ko, 2012; Phan et al., 2011), but do not examine video-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube) in the context of luxury fashion brands. Therefore, this study examines this unexplored area of luxury brand marketing, as luxury marketers should pay attention to user-generated content on video-sharing sites and find an appropriate way to participate in this communication.

2.3. Para-social interaction (PSI) and social media

PSI explains the relationship between media personalities and media users (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985, pp. 156-157) conceptualize PSI as "interpersonal involvement of the media user with what he or she consumes," this involvement includes "seeking guidance from a media persona, seeing media personalities as friends, imagining being part of a favorite program's social world, and desiring to meet media performers." For marketing, Labrecque (2014) defines PSI as, "an illusionary experience, such that consumers interact with personas (i.e., mediated representations of presenters, celebrities, or characters) as if they are present and engaged in a reciprocal relationship" (p. 135).

PSI is considered a "friendship" with a media personality (Perse & Rubin, 1989) and media users seek advice from media personalities as

if they were friends (Rubin et al., 1985). Perse and Rubin (1989) describe the experience as individuals "feel that they know and understand the persona in the same intimate way they know and understand flesh and blood friends" (p. 60; also cited in Labrecque, 2014, pp. 137). PSI develops in ways similar to interpersonal relationships and can be a functional alternative to interpersonal relationships (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Characteristics of PSI resemble interpersonal friendships—they are voluntary, provide companionship, and social attractiveness is a factor in establishing relationships (Ballantine & Martin, 2005). Similar to interpersonal relationships, PSI develops over time as media users reduces uncertainty and perceives similarities with a media personality (Eyal & Rubin, 2003).

The emergence of connecting with media personalities through social networks has sparked a new area of academic research on PSI. Social media has potential for two-way communication and a more balanced relationship between media personalities and media users (Stever & Lawson, 2013), but to date research has indicated that interactions are still mostly one-way. Even though social media sites, like YouTube, allow fans more access to the personal life of the media personality, the personality still controls reciprocation in the relationship (Stever & Lawson, 2013). This is consistent with PSI, in that the relationship is mostly one-sided (Frederick et al., 2012).

Stever and Lawson (2013) argued that PSI is an appropriate theoretical framework for studying the one-sided relationship between celebrities and fans; therefore this same argument can be extended to YouTube personalities or vloggers. Fans feel as if they "know" celebrities through their exposure in the media. Repeated exposure to a vlogger can elicit similar feelings of relationship enhancement as traditional media. As this "relationship" continues to develop, the viewer will start to see the vlogger as a trusted source of information and seek out their advice (Rubin et al., 1985). In a study examining the influence of PSI on consumer-brand relationships, Labrecque (2014) report that PSI enhanced feelings of connectedness with brands resulting in increased brand loyalty and willingness to share personal information with the brand. In this study, the authors propose that vloggers, acting as brand ambassadors, can elicit positive outcomes for luxury brands including increased value for the luxury brand, brand-user imagery fit, and perceived luxury of the brand.

2.4. Antecedents of PSI

PSI research has sought to determine variables that influenced PSI. In one of the earliest studies of PSI and local news viewing, Rubin et al. (1985) found news affinity, perceived news realism, and the information viewing motive were positive predictors of PSI between viewers and local news personalities. Research on traditional media has identified several factors that influence the PSI. Rubin et al. (1985) suggest that the perceived realism, frequency of viewing, and attractiveness enhances PSI between viewers and media personalities. Turner (1993) found that attitude homophily was a predictor of PSI. Frederick et al. (2012) applied several of these constructs to examine the interaction between professional athletes and fans on Twitter. Results of their study indicated attraction, attitude homophily, time spent with the medium, and perceived realism were significantly correlated with PSI. Since this study examines the influence of vloggers, the attractiveness variables (physical and social attractiveness) and attitude homophily are proposed to have a positive influence on PSI.

2.4.1. Attractiveness
Attraction to a media personality, both social and physical, has been found to be a predictor of PSI (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Attraction to a media personality increases as the number of rewarding "interactions" or repeat viewing increases (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Rubin and McHugh (1987) found media personalities who were socially attractive, as social or work partners, provided a better context for PSI. The more a media user perceives the media personality to be similar to themselves

and others in their interpersonal network, then the more likely PSI will occur (Ballantine & Martin, 2005).

2.4.2. Attitude homophily

The term "homophily" was used by Lazarsfeld and Merton to describe "a tendency for friendships to form between those who are alike in some designated respect," (as Turner, 1993, pp. 444, cites). Eyal and Rubin (2003, pp. 80) define homophily as, "the degree to which people who interact are similar in beliefs, education, social status, and the like." The more a person sees themselves as similar to others, then the more likely they interact frequently with the person. Through these interactions with others one can confirm their own beliefs (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). In terms of PSI, the more the user perceives similarities between their beliefs and the media personality, the more likely they will continue the interaction. PSI research has identified homophily as an antecedent to increased identification with a television character (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Turner, 1993). Since vloggers share similarities to television characters, this study proposes that attitude homophily will be a positive influence on PSI.

Based on the findings of previous research examining PSI, the study proposes following hypotheses identifying antecedents of PSI (see Fig. 1). H_1: Social attractiveness of the vlogger increases PSI. H_2: Physical attractiveness of the vlogger increases PSI. H_3: Attitude homophily with the vlogger increases PSI.

2.5. Effect of PSI on consumers' luxury brand perceptions

This study uses brand luxury, luxury brand value, and brand-user-imagery fit to measure consumers' perceptions of luxury brands. Brand luxury indicates consumers' perception of symbolic prestige. Brand-user-imagery fit is the "overall assessment of the compatibility or match between themselves and users of the brand" (Miller & Mills, 2012, pp. 1474). Brand value is the overall evaluation of the worth of a luxury brand (Miller & Mills, 2012).

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests individuals evaluate themselves by comparing what they possess and consume to others. Research has suggested that individuals can compare upward with someone who is better than them, or downward with someone who is worse than them. For consuming behavior, upward comparison is shown to elevate consumption intentions and a desire for possession, which leads to an increase in materialism value (Chan & Prendergast, 2008; Ogden & Venkat, 2001). Individuals are likely to compare themselves with significant others and peers who share a similar outlook and common values. Similarly, they compare their luxury possessions to that of vloggers as PSI increases. In the luxury brand context, through upward social comparison, viewers perceive higher value for luxury brands after watching the vlog, which, increases the desire to purchase luxury products. Consequently, we expect positive effects of PSI on brand luxury, luxury brand value, and brand-user-imagery fit. H_4: High PSI with a vlogger increases positive luxury brand perceptions: a) luxury brand value, b) brand-user-imagery fit, and c) brand luxury.

Literature reports consistently that positive brand attitudes and perceptions increase consumer purchase intentions (e.g., Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Kim & Ko, 2012; Zhang & Kim, 2013). Therefore, this study proposes H_5. H_5: Luxury brand purchase intentions are increased by positive luxury brand perceptions: luxury brand value, brand-user-imagery fit, and brand luxury.

3. Study 1: PSI effect on luxury brand perceptions

Study 1 tested effects of PSI antecedents on PSI with a vlogger followed by consumers' luxury fashion brand perceptions (H_1 to H_5).

3.1. Stimuli development

A pretest was conducted to select an appropriate fashion vlogger. First, we selected eight YouTube vloggers who frequently posted reviews of luxury fashion products. Then, we selected a video from each vlogger where they answered questions about themselves to avoid any confounding effect embedded in the context of the video. Participants were shown a video from each vlogger and were asked to answer five items to assess impressions of the vlogger (e.g., dislikable – likable, unpopular – popular; Forgas, 1992) and the three items for intentions to watch videos from the vlogger again. Responses were recorded on 5-point Likert scale.

A total of 33 undergraduate students participated in the pretest. All participants were female and between 20 and 28 years old. We selected the vlogger participants showed significantly higher impression ($F_{(7, 255)} = 5.71$, $p < 0.001$) and intentions to visit ($F_{(7, 255)} = 5.29$, $p < 0.001$).

3.2. Methods

Responses were collected via online surveys to simulate the environment of vlogs. First, participants were shown luxury brand A's handbag review video created by the selected vlogger. Respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of the vlogger and the luxury brand perceptions. We measured luxury shopping behaviors (e.g., "How many luxury fashion product(s) do you own?") and social media usage (i.e., "On average, how much time do you spend on social media per week for each social media network?").

Attitude homophily, social and physical attractiveness, PSI, luxury brand value, brand-user-imagery fit, brand luxury, and purchase intentions were measured using 5-point Likert scales. Eight items measured attitude homophily (McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006; McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975), five items measured social attractiveness (McCroskey & McCain, 1974), and another five items measured physical attractiveness (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). The 16 items for PSI were developed from Rubin et al. (1985) and modified for the vlogger context. The two items of brand luxury, five items of brand-user-imagery fit, and six items of luxury brand value were from Miller and Mills' (2012) study. Four items from Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal (1991) measured purchase intentions.
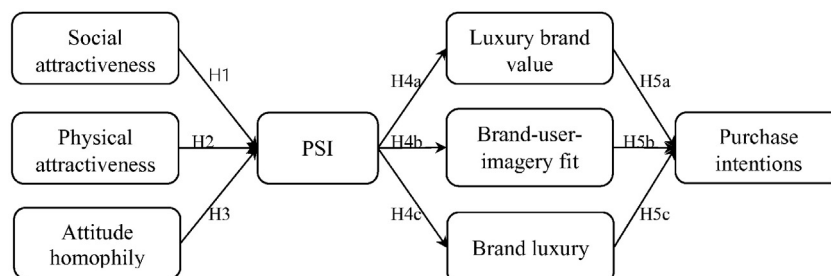

Fig. 1. Research Model.

3.3. Sample characteristics

A total of 396 usable responses were collected through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Since the YouTube video was a review of a woman's handbag and the vlogger was female, females were recruited to control any confounding effect of gender. The participants were 18 to 82 years old and lived in the U.S., and the modal age group was 26–30 (21%), followed by 21–25 (20%). The majority of participants was Caucasian (69%) and had some college education or was a college graduate (71%).

Most participants owned 1 to 5 luxury fashion products (42%), followed by no luxury fashion product (37%). Most participants purchased luxury fashion products less than once a year (30%). For social media usage per week, 30% of participants indicated they spend 1 to 5 h on social networking sites, 31% of participants spend 1 to 5 h on video-sharing sites.

3.4. Results

To assess measurement of the constructs, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using the maximum likelihood estimation with oblimin rotation. The EFA result showed attitude homophily and social attractiveness were merged to one factor, resulting total seven factors accounting 60.93% of the total variance (Table 1).

The measurement model of the latent constructs was also analyzed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; Table 1). The measurement model includes seven latent variables: attitude homophily/social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, PSI, brand value, brand-user-imagery fit, brand luxury, and purchase intentions. Due to the small-standardized factor loading, two items from physical attractiveness, three items from social attractiveness, one item from purchase intention, and one item from brand value were deleted. In addition, eight items were removed from PSI measurement.

Convergent validity was established for all seven constructs based on the average variance extracted (AVE) values, which exceeded 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Composite reliabilities of all seven constructs were over 0.79, showing high reliabilities. Discriminant validity was confirmed; the square root of the AVE is larger than the corresponding correlation coefficient between factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Table 2). The goodness of fit statistics are: $\chi^2 = 1107.42$, $df = 567$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2 / df = 1.95$, CFI = 0.95 and RMSEA = 0.05. The final CFA model fits well to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 1
EFA and CFA results.

Factor/items	EFA			CFA		
	Factor loading	Variance%	Alpha	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Factor 1: Attitude homophily/social attractiveness		13.53	0.95		0.95	0.66
This YouTube blogger thinks like me.	0.89			0.89		
This YouTube blogger is similar to me.	0.86			0.82		
This YouTube blogger is like me.	0.85			0.83		
This YouTube blogger shares my values.	0.85			0.86		
This YouTube blogger has a lot in common with me.	0.83			0.84		
This YouTube blogger behaves like me.	0.82			0.83		
This YouTube blogger has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine.	0.81			0.84		
I think she could be a friend of mine.	0.77			0.76		
I would like to have a friendly chat with her.	0.71			0.73		
This YouTube blogger treats people like I do.	0.70			0.70		
Factor 2: Physical attractiveness		4.44	0.78		0.79	0.55
I find her very attractive physically.	0.88			0.77		
I think she is quite pretty.	0.72			0.78		
She is very sexy looking.	0.67			0.67		
Factor 3: PSI		12.23	0.92		0.92	0.60
I look forward to watching the YouTube blogger on her YouTube channel.	0.87			0.83		
If the YouTube blogger appeared on another YouTube channel, I would watch that video.	0.85			0.84		
When I'm watching the YouTube blogger, I feel as if I am part of her group.	0.80			0.81		
I think the YouTube blogger is like an old friend.	0.77			0.75		
I would like to meet the YouTube blogger in person.	0.74			0.75		
If there were a story about the YouTube blogger in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.	0.72			0.71		
The YouTube blogger makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.	0.72			0.73		
When the YouTube blogger shows me how she feels about the luxury brand, it helps me make up my own mind about the brand.	0.70			0.74		
Factor 4: Brand luxury		3.52	0.85		0.85	0.74
Brand A is a symbol of prestige.	0.99			0.88		
Brand A is a symbol of luxury.	0.76			0.85		
Factor 5: Brand-user-imagery fit		8.17	0.94		0.94	0.75
I am very much like the typical wearer/user of Brand A.	0.87			0.88		
I am similar to people who wear/use Brand A.	0.86			0.88		
I identify with people who prefer Brand A.	0.81			0.88		
I am very much like the typical person who prefers Brand A, rather than other brands.	0.80			0.84		
People think Brand A's image is more like my image than other brands.	0.78			0.84		
Factor 6: Brand value		11.18	0.93		0.92	0.70
Brand A is a good value for the money.	0.88			0.81		
All things considered, Brand A is a good buy.	0.85			0.82		
Brand A is of value because its benefits outweigh the costs.	0.84			0.86		
Brand A is worth it because it gives me more than other brands.	0.83			0.88		
Brand A is a better value for the money than other brands.	0.80			0.82		
Factor 7: Brand purchase intentions		7.86	0.92		0.92	0.78
My willingness to buy Brand A would be high if I were shopping for a luxury brand.	0.91			0.88		
If I were going to purchase a luxury product, I would consider buying Brand A.	0.87			0.89		
If I were shopping for a luxury brand, the likelihood I would purchase Brand A is high.	0.85			0.90		

Table 2
Measurement model assessment.

	PA	AH	BL	BPI	BV	PSI	BUIF
Physical attractiveness (PA)	0.74[a]						
Attitude homophily (AH)	0.42	0.81[a]					
Brand luxury (BL)	0.33	0.21	0.86[a]				
Brand purchase intentions (BPI)	0.27	0.58	0.56	0.89[a]			
Brand value (BV)	0.27	0.70	0.33	0.78	0.84[a]		
PSI	0.43	0.73	0.23	0.57	0.65	0.77[a]	
Brand-user-imagery fit (BUIF)	0.16	0.70	0.28	0.72	0.80	0.60	0.93[a]

[a] Square root of the AVE value for each construct.

After confirming the measurement model, SEM with maximum likelihood extraction was estimated to test Hypothesis 2 to 5. Since attitude homophily and social attractiveness merged to one factor based on EFA and CFA, H_1 was excluded from the analysis. The goodness-of-fit criteria of the model meets generally proposed thresholds in previous studies: $\chi^2 = 1226.75$, $df = 579$, $\chi^2 / df = 2.11$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.95 and RMSEA = 0.05 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The results showed physical attractiveness ($\beta = 0.08$, $t = 2.13$, $p = 0.03$) and attitude homophily/social attractiveness ($\beta = 0.84$, $t = 16.52$, $p < 0.001$) had a positive influence on PSI, thus supporting H_2 and H_3. Effects of PSI on brand value (H_{4a}; $\beta = 0.70$, $t = 12.78$, $p < 0.001$), brand-user-imagery fit (H_{4b}; $\beta = 0.65$, $t = 12.23$, $p < 0.001$), and brand luxury (H_{4c}; $\beta = 0.27$, $t = 4.57$, $p < 0.001$) were also significant. As expected, purchase intentions were positively impacted by brand value (H_{5a}; $\beta = 0.53$, $t = 6.51$, $p < 0.001$), brand-user-imagery fit (H_{5b}; $\beta = 0.20$, $t = 2.53$, $p = 0.01$), and brand luxury (H_{5c}; $\beta = 0.36$, $t = 8.88$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, all H_2–H_5 were supported (Table 3).

3.5. Discussion

Study 1 investigated the antecedents of PSI, and how PSI, as a measure of relationship between vloggers and viewers, influenced luxury brand perceptions and purchase intentions. According to the EFA and CFA results, the social attractiveness variable merged with attitude homophily. Social attractiveness and homophily are similar constructs; as homophily, or the belief that two people share similar beliefs, is grounded in social attractiveness between the parties (Turner, 1993).

SEM results indicated attitude homophily/social attractiveness to have a strong influence on PSI ($\beta = 0.84$). PSI research has found that the more attractive a media personality is, the more likely the viewer is to think they hold similar beliefs (Rubin & McHugh, 1987) leading to attitude homophily. In addition, while physical attractiveness

Table 3
Structural parameter estimates.

Hypothesized path	Std path coefficients	t-Value
H_2: physical attractiveness → PSI	0.08	2.13[*]
H_3: attitude homophily → PSI	0.84	16.52[***]
H_{4a}: PSI → brand value	0.70	12.78[***]
H_{4b}: PSI → brand-user-imagery fit	0.65	12.23[***]
H_{4c}: PSI → brand luxury	0.27	4.57[***]
H_{5a}: brand value → brand purchase intentions	0.53	6.51[***]
H_{5b}: brand-user-imagery fit → brand purchase intentions	0.20	2.53[**]
H_{5c}: brand luxury → brand purchase intentions	0.36	8.88[***]
	$\chi^2 = 1226.75$	
	$p < 0.001$	
	$df = 579$	
	$\chi^2 / df = 2.11$	
	CFI = 0.95	
	RMSEA = 0.05	

Note. CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.
[***] $p \leq 0.001$.
[**] $p \leq 0.01$.
[*] $p \leq 0.05$.

was found to have a significant influence on PSI ($\beta = 0.08$), its influence on PSI was weaker than homophily/social attractiveness. This conclusion is consistent with prior studies of PSI that indicate social attractiveness as more correlated with PSI than physical attractiveness (Frederick et al., 2012).

PSI with vloggers has a positive influence on luxury brand perceptions (i.e., brand value, brand-user-imagery fit, and brand luxury). These findings indicate PSI, or perceptions of friendship with a public figure; can have a positive impact on luxury brand perceptions. This is consistent with Labrecque (2014) who found that PSI resulted in positive relationship outcomes for consumer-brand relationships. While it is noted that consumer perceptions of brands are influenced by a variety of factors, the findings of this study indicate that relationship between viewers and vloggers, acting as a brand ambassador, can yield positive outcomes for luxury brands.

The results support the application of social comparison theory to explain the influence of vloggers on consumer brand perceptions. As consumers compare their consumption of luxury brands with that of vloggers they admire, that interaction increases positive brand perceptions for the consumer (Chan & Prendergast, 2008; Ogden & Venkat, 2001). In other words, consumers upward compare themselves to vloggers and seek to reach the same status as them by purchasing luxury brand products. Marketers, who want to tap into the influencer power of the YouTube vlogger, should seek out vloggers who the target consumer group would view as socially attractive and shares similar views.

Evaluations of brand perception were examined for influence on purchase intentions for luxury brands. Brand value, brand-user-imagery-fit, and brand luxury were all found to have a significant influence on purchase intentions. This is consistent with previous research that determined positive brand perceptions are important factors in making purchase decisions (e.g., Kim & Ko, 2012; Zhang & Kim, 2013).

4. Study 2: effect of vlog on luxury brand perceptions (within-subject design)

Although significant effects of PSI with the vlogger on luxury brand perceptions were found, a confounding effect may exist due to the use of existing luxury fashion brand in Study 1. Thus, a second study examined vlog effects on luxury perceptions using within-subject design by comparing pre- and post-luxury brand perceptions. We also proposed that the difference between pre- and post-luxury brand perceptions would be stronger when consumers have high PSI with the vlogger, proposing the moderating effect of PSI.

4.1. Method

A total of 88 responses were received from female undergraduate students in fashion classes. They received extra credit for participating in the study. To measure pre-luxury brand perceptions, participants were asked to indicate initial perceptions for luxury brand A: luxury brand value ($\alpha = 0.86$), brand-user-imagery fit ($\alpha = 0.89$), brand luxury ($\alpha = 0.82$), and purchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.93$). After a week, respondents watched a YouTube video from a vlogger explaining luxury brand A's handbag. Then, we measured respondents' post-luxury brand perceptions for luxury brand A, using the same items from pre-luxury perception measurements. Participants also answered 16 items measuring PSI considering with the vlogger. All items used in Study 2 are identical to Study 1 (see Table 1).

4.2. Sample characteristics

Participants were female, lived in the U.S., and were between ages 18 and 28, and 75% identified as Caucasian. Participants owned 1 to 5 luxury fashion items (60%), and spent 1–5 h per week (30%) and 6–10 h per

week (30%) on social networking sites. For video-sharing sites, 33% of participants spent 1–5 h per week and 32% spent less than 1 h per week.

4.3. Results

The difference between pre- and post-perceptions for the luxury brand was examined using a general linear model (GLM). The results showed post brand luxury was not significantly different between pre brand luxury ($F_{(1, 85)} = 3.73$, $p = 0.06$, $M_{pre} = 4.40$, $M_{post} = 4.52$). However, the luxury brand value, brand-user-imagery fit, and purchase intentions were significantly increased after watching the vlogger (value: $F_{(1, 85)} = 40.63$, $p < 0.001$, $M_{pre} = 3.05$, $M_{post} = 3.46$; brand-user-imagery fit: $F_{(1, 85)} = 35.83$, $p < 0.001$, $M_{pre} = 2.51$, $M_{post} = 2.89$; purchase intentions: $F_{(1, 85)} = 6.66$, $p = 0.01$, $M_{pre} = 3.59$, $M_{post} = 3.82$).

The moderating effect of PSI between pre and post-luxury brand perceptions was based on Judd, Kenny, and McClelland's (2001) study. First the differences between pre and post luxury brand perceptions were calculated and PSI was centered. Then, a regression analysis, where the independent variable was PSI and the dependent variable was the difference in luxury brand perceptions, was conducted. The effect of PSI on pre- and post-difference of luxury brand perception was not significant ($t = 0.77$, $p = 0.44$), while the effects of PSI on the difference of luxury brand value ($t = 2.12$, $t = 0.03$), brand-user imagery fit ($t = 2.63$, $p = 0.01$), and purchase intentions ($t = 2.98$, $p = 0.004$) were significant.

4.4. Discussion

Study 2 revealed vlog effects on perceptions of luxury brands by comparing pre- and post-perceptions of luxury brands. Although brand luxury was not significantly different before and after watching the vlog, other luxury perceptions including luxury brand value, brand-user imagery fit, and purchase intentions were increased significantly. In addition, the effect of vlog was stronger when participants perceive the vlogger as their friend (i.e., high PSI). Thus, overall results from Study 2 reinforced the positive effects of the vlogger on consumers' luxury brand perceptions.

5. Study 3: vlog effect on luxury brand perceptions

Study 3 examined whether the vlog significantly influenced consumers' perceptions of luxury brands. To increase generalizability of the study, we tested two brands and used national samples from MTurk in Study 3. Unfortunately, within-subject manipulation used in Study 2 would result in problems of learning the questionnaire from repeatedly answering the same questions. To avoid learning effects, we used between-subject manipulation in Study 3.

5.1. Methods

Responses were collected via online surveys. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental groups: control group, luxury brand A, B, and C. To increase generalizability of results, this study used three actual luxury fashion brands. To control for the vlogger's influence on luxury brand perceptions, all three vlogs with brand A, B, and C were selected from the same vlogger (used in Study 1 and 2). The vlogs of brand A and C featured reviews of handbags, and the vlog of brand C was review of shoes. After watching the vlog, participants were asked to respond brand luxury ($\alpha = 0.80$), luxury brand value ($\alpha = 0.92$), brand-user-imagery fit ($\alpha = 0.93$), and purchase intention ($\alpha = 0.90$). For the control group, they were asked to respond to luxury brand perceptions for each brand (A, B, and C) without watching a video. All measures used in Study 3 were consistent with Study 1 (Table 1).

5.2. Sample characteristics

MTurk was used to collect data for Study 3. A total of 423 usable responses was collected from females only, because the products, vlogger, and video content were relevant to a female audience. Participants' characteristics were similar to Study 1: all participants lived in the U.S., and were between 18 and 75 years old. Most participants were between ages 21 and 30 (39%), followed by 31 and 40 (26%). The majority of respondents were Caucasian (70%) and had some college education (69%).

5.3. Results

One-way ANOVA was performed for each brand (Table 4). For brand A, participants who watched a vlog about brand A had significantly higher brand-user-imagery fit ($F = 9.54$, $p = 0.002$), luxury brand value ($F = 11.23$, $p = 0.001$), and brand purchase intentions ($F = 9.40$, $p = 0.003$) than the control group who did not watch a video. Brand-user-imagery fit and brand purchase intentions for brand B were significantly higher for the participants who watch a vlog than the control group (Brand-user-imagery fit: $F = 3.92$, $p = 0.04$; purchase intentions: $F = 4.24$, $p = 0.04$). The test also showed significant difference in brand luxury ($F = 13.84$, $p < 0.001$), brand value ($F = 5.47$, $p = 0.02$), and purchase intentions ($F = 5.74$, $p = 0.01$) for brand C between the group who watched the vlog and the control group. Levene's tests for homogeneity of variance were performed for each of the ANOVA models. All Levene's tests yielded non-significant statistics (the minimum $p = 0.08$), showing approximately equal variance between experimental and control groups.

5.4. Discussion

Study 3 focuses on the vlog and examined its influence on consumer's luxury brand perceptions. Overall, the analysis reveals the mean score for each variable to be higher in the experimental groups (i.e., the groups watched the vlog) than the control group, thus indicating that respondents exposed to the vlog had higher evaluations of the luxury brand than those who did not. However, the significance of these results was different across brands. This may be explained by different acquisition of the brand, and individual preference of the brand and products that were shown in the vlogs. For example, brand luxury for brand C was significantly different between control group and experimental group, but not for brand A and B. Consumers already have built high acquisition representing prestige for brand A and B, which does not make significant difference after watching the vlog. On the other hand, brand luxury for brand C was relatively low for the control

Table 4
ANOVA results.

		Mean		Mean square	F
		Control group	Experimental group		
Brand A	Brand luxury	4.09	4.21	0.79	1.23
	Brand-user-imagery fit	2.34	2.77	10.33	9.54[**]
	Brand value	2.77	3.24	11.55	11.23[***]
	Purchase intentions	3.35	3.76	9.40	9.15[**]
Brand B	Brand luxury	4.06	4.13	0.19	0.28
	Brand-user-imagery fit	2.20	2.50	4.40	3.92[*]
	Brand value	2.59	2.82	2.81	2.46
	Purchase intentions	3.04	3.36	5.04	4.24[*]
Brand C	Brand luxury	3.07	3.59	13.84	13.78[***]
	Brand-user-imagery fit	2.14	2.36	2.43	2.62
	Brand value	2.40	2.71	4.76	5.47[*]
	Purchase intentions	2.43	2.82	7.60	5.74[**]

[***] $p \leq 0.001$.
[**] $p \leq 0.01$.
[*] $p \leq 0.05$.

group, and the vlog is shown to have a significant increase on acquisition of the prestige of the brand. These findings indicate that for lesser known luxury brands, using vloggers can enable the brand to reach a broader audience and increase perceptions of the luxury brand.

Although the significance of the results for brand luxury, luxury brand value, and brand-user-imagery fit were different across the brands, exposure to the vlog indicated a significant difference in purchase intentions among those who were exposed to the vlog for all three brands.

6. General discussion and implication

This project set out to investigate the influence of social media on perceptions and purchase intentions for luxury fashion brands. The analysis was centered on the use of vlogs and the relationship between viewers and the vlogger. The vlog used in this study was created by an individual and posted on YouTube. Using PSI from mass communication literature, this study investigated the "relationship" developed between viewers and vloggers, and the subsequent influence of that perception on luxury fashion brand and purchase intentions. This was accomplished through three studies. Overall, results of these studies found support for PSI as a brand management tool and the use of YouTube lead to positive luxury brand perceptions.

Study 1 found significant antecedents of PSI, and subsequently, influence of PSI on brand perceptions and purchase intentions. In particular, social attractiveness/attitude homophily was stronger indicator of PSI than physical attractiveness. Based on these results, a vlogger who is viewed as similar to the viewer or exhibits traits the viewers finds desirable is more likely to lead to PSI. Brand managers seeking to incorporate vloggers into their branding strategy should consider the target audience – their values, beliefs, and desires – when choosing a vlogger to be a brand ambassador.

The results showed PSI with vloggers increased positive luxury brand perceptions (i.e., brand luxury, brand-user-imagery fit, and luxury brand value), followed by purchase intentions. This study supports the use of YouTube and fashion vloggers as an outlet for fashion brand managers to reach consumers outside of traditional marketing strategies.

Results support a relationship with a media personality can positively influence luxury fashion brand perceptions. This is consistent with relationship marketing literature, which suggests long-term relationships with consumers to be a viable marketing strategy (Berry, 1995). Relationship marketing strategies have been used primarily with service-sector brands, but luxury fashion brands, unlike other consumer goods, are not purchased daily – as evidenced in our sample. Therefore, establishing a relationship with consumers through online brand ambassadors should increase likelihood of future purchases.

Study 2 uses a within subject manipulation to compare pre- to post-luxury brand perceptions and confirmed luxury brand perceptions, particularly brand-user-imagery fit, brand value, and purchase intentions, were increased after watching a vlog about the brand. In cases of high PSI, the increase in luxury brand perceptions was higher. The more participants associate with the vlogger, then the stronger the effect of the vlog on increasing luxury brand perceptions.

Study 3 examines differences in brand perceptions between the control group (without watching vlog) and experimental groups (watching vlog) using three luxury fashion brands. Although the significance of the results was different depending on brands, mean values of the luxury brand perceptions were higher for experimental groups than control group. Purchase intentions were significant for all three brands. Since the vlogger had positive reviews for the luxury brand, then it is not surprising the respondent would also have a positive assessment of the brand. According to social comparison theory, consumers view themselves as sharing similar beliefs as the vlogger when they watch vlog and therefore, a positive review of the luxury brand from the vlogger can lead to a positive review from the consumer. This shows that consumers' opinions of brands, including luxury brands, can be influenced by media figures including vloggers. Brand managers should consider the spokesperson for the brand, whether the spokesperson is a paid model, celebrity, or a fashion vlogger — the viewer needs to find similarities with the media personality.

7. Conclusion

As evident in these studies, social media can be an important tool for luxury brand managers. In particular, it can be useful for establishing relationships with consumers. Consumers who view vloggers as similar to them will likely develop PSI with the vlogger and have the same positive brand evaluations as the vlogger. Unlike everyday consumer goods, luxury fashion brands are special and establishing a long-term relationship with the consumer is one way to increase the likelihood of repeat purchase behavior. This study supports the use of YouTube for developing such a relationship. In addition, this is part of a growing area that moves PSI from the realm of TV personalities to use as an actual branding tool.

7.1. Limitations

First, although the studies examine three luxury fashion brands to increase generalizability, generalizing and applying the findings to other luxury fashion brands may be difficult. Second, since the studies used actual YouTube videos created by a selected YouTube vlogger, confounding effects of other variables may have occurred such as product type and vlog content that this study was not able to control. Finally, even though we collected data through MTurk using national sample, caution needs to be used to generalize the results to U.S. population. This is because the accessible population was defined based on the respondents in the MTurk pool.

7.2. Future research

PSI is the development of relationships that occurs over time with media personalities. Support was found for PSI as a valuable construct in developing positive brand perceptions, but this study only accounts for a one-time exposure to the vlogger. Future research should take a longitudinal approach to studying the influence of PSI on brand management. PSI developed from mass media that included sustained, repeat viewing of a media personality. Studying the long-term exposure to a luxury brand vlogger will help the development of PSI and social media research and have important practical implications for brand managers.

Other social media platforms outside of YouTube need investigating. Photo-sharing sites, including Instagram and Snapchat, are a growing platform for would-be fashionistas to promote their fashion savvy. The accessibility of these platforms and the two-way communication capabilities of the platform make it an interesting context for studying the development of PSI and its influence on brand perceptions.

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