



## Marketing Intelligence & Planning

Typology of social media followers: the case of luxury brands

Zahy Ramadan, Maya F. Farah, Armig Dukenjian,

### Article information:

To cite this document:

Zahy Ramadan, Maya F. Farah, Armig Dukenjian, (2018) "Typology of social media followers: the case of luxury brands", Marketing Intelligence & Planning, <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-01-2018-0039>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-01-2018-0039>

Downloaded on: 12 May 2018, At: 09:58 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 52 other documents.

To copy this document: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 26 times since 2018\*

### Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2018), "The gamification of trust: the case of China's "social credit"", Marketing Intelligence & Planning, Vol. 36 Iss 1 pp. 93-107 <a href="https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-06-2017-0100">https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-06-2017-0100</a>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:178665 []

### For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit [www.emeraldinsight.com/authors](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/authors) for more information.

### About Emerald [www.emeraldinsight.com](http://www.emeraldinsight.com)

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

\*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

# Typology of social media followers: the case of luxury brands

Typology of  
social media  
followers

Zahy Ramadan

*Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon, and*

Maya F. Farah and Armig Dukenjian

*Lebanese American University School of Business, Beirut, Lebanon*

Received 30 January 2018

Revised 30 January 2018

10 March 2018

13 March 2018

Accepted 14 March 2018

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Luxury brands tend to be hesitant in adopting social media. This matter has created an imminent need to understand the different types of online luxury followers so as to help luxury brands communicate effectively with their consumers, while maintaining the “luxe” image and experience. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to provide luxury brands with a deeper understanding of their online audience and the strategies needed to engage with them through the different social media platforms.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative approach was utilized in which 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with Lebanese followers of an online luxury brand’s social media pages.

**Findings** – The study identifies the presence of six main categories of online luxury followers: pragmatists, bystanders, trend hunters, image seekers, passionate owners, and prime consumers. Each group has a specific engagement and propensity to buy levels.

**Research limitations/implications** – Understanding the different segments of luxury brand followers provides a framework for marketing managers that allows them to correctly target their marketing and communication strategies in order to maximize consumer engagement and purchasing behaviors.

**Originality/value** – A significant gap exists in the extant literature which offers no understanding of the different luxury brand followers and their different characteristics. This study is the first to offer an exploratory typology of the various luxury brand followers on social media platforms.

**Keywords** Luxury, Internet marketing, Brands, Social network, Community

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

A digital revolution has been shaping the marketing world, making it highly entrenched in the social media platforms and dependent on the online social relationship between consumers and a given brand (Hughes *et al.*, 2016; Ramadan, 2017). The latter can be attributed to the fact that social media has become an inseparable element from the daily lives of consumers. As a result, today’s social media plays a major role in the branding and communication strategies of companies, ranging from fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) to luxury brands. Nevertheless, luxury brands tend to show a degree of hesitance with regard to their adoption of social media (Hughes *et al.*, 2016; Jin, 2012) due to the fact that luxury brands have been built around the image of exclusivity and individuality whereas social media is readily available to the masses and can, in turn, generate a sense of brand overexposure (Okonkwo, 2009). Moreover, social media has facilitated the formation of online communities and social platforms that can simultaneously serve as virtual brand and anti-brand communities, thereby possibly leading to the creation of either positive or negative consumer sentiments (Ramadan and Farah, 2017). This issue has created an imminent need to understand the different types of online luxury consumers and their respective intentions and behaviors as this would allow luxury brands to successfully communicate with their consumers while maintaining the “luxe” image and experience.

Nonetheless, a thorough review of the literature indicates the existence of a significant research gap regarding the social media marketing and consumer behavior of high-end



luxury brands (Hughes *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, the majority of studies on the subject focus mainly on luxury brand websites, features, and users, with little attention being dedicated to these brands' social media pages (Hughes *et al.*, 2016). In addition, although a few recent studies have examined the marketing potential of social media for luxury brand management (Hennigs *et al.*, 2012; Jin, 2012), the literature still lacks a categorization of the latter brands' followers and the methods to communicate with each of these segments. Indeed, the extant literature depicts a dearth in studies analyzing the different typologies and social characteristics that define luxury brand consumers and their behaviors (Tak *et al.*, 2017; Zhang and Kim, 2013). Accordingly, this study aims to address this gap and offer an exploratory topology of the various consumer categories that are active on these brands' social media pages in order to provide luxury brands with a better understanding of their online audience and the strategies needed to engage with them through the different luxury social media platforms.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 *The social media era*

The internet has become an important tool in facilitating information-sharing and communication to the extent that the daily reach of online platforms has greatly surpassed that of traditional offline media channels (Dimmick *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, with differentiation becoming the main aim of every marketer in light of the growing competition, the most precious asset of any company becomes its relationship with its consumers. Interestingly, social media facilitates this relationship by providing a means for more effective two-way communication, a deeper understanding, as well as a sustainable and trustworthy interaction (Ramadan *et al.*, 2017).

Social media allows users to move from being passive observers of content to becoming active participants in the conversation, both creating and influencing content (Jin, 2012). This has remarkably augmented the popularity of social media, with more than 2.789 billion individuals actively using it on a daily basis, showcasing an approximate growth rate of 21 percent between 2016 and 2017 (Chaffey, 2017). In fact, modern-day consumers are becoming highly dependent on social media, increasingly utilizing the various platforms of this ecosystem (Hanna *et al.*, 2011), which enable them to gather information about brands and subsequently shape their purchase intentions (Sharma and Sheth, 2010).

The social media ecosystem is based on the consumer experience (Hanna *et al.*, 2011). Indeed social networks are purely about experiences that integrate reach, intimacy, and engagement in a combined marketing strategy. Despite the fact that companies are exploring the usage of this ecosystem to reach billions of people and their related connections on a daily basis (Williams *et al.*, 2012), a large number of these organizations are tackling the different social media platforms in silos (Hanna *et al.*, 2011). This inherently affects the ultimate consumer-brand relationship and experience.

### 2.2 *Importance of social media in consumer-brand relationships*

The growing importance of social media has shifted the power and value production processes from companies to consumers (Berthon *et al.*, 2012). In fact, it has become impossible to ignore the influence of social media on brand-consumer relationships (Ramadan, 2017). Actually, such platforms not only act as marketing channels, but also significantly enable and influence consumer e-word-of-mouth (WOM) and reviews (Ramadan, 2018). Statistics indicate that only 14 percent of consumers trust traditional brand advertisements, with only 18 percent of traditional TV campaigns resulting in a positive return on investment (Qualman, 2010). Also, approximately 68 percent of consumers exhibit trust in online reviews and information, which results in positive behavioral intentions (Nielsen Global Company, 2013). In addition, Fisher (2009) advanced

the idea that approximately 70 percent of consumers visit a brand's social media pages to receive more information about a product, of which roughly 49 percent will make a purchase decision based on the online information, while 60 percent will share the content they find with others (Miller and Lammas, 2010).

Consumer trust in social media accompanied by this medium's ability to influence consumer behavior has encouraged brands to invest in their online social pages (Kim and Ko, 2012). In fact, social media platforms have totally re-shaped and enhanced brands' marketing and communication strategies. Undeniably, these channels have facilitated the brands' ability to locate consumers, reach out to potential clients, understand consumer behavior, and create powerful relationships with customers (Qualman, 2010). Moreover, social media has not only enabled brands to communicate with customers, but also encouraged consumer engagement, learning, and expressions of loyalty and commitment (Keller, 2009). Customer engagement is used as a basis for segmenting the different profiles of social media users. It is a cycle that starts with social media users connecting with the brand, interacting, feeling satisfied and retained, becoming loyal, and finally becoming advocates of the brand (Sashi, 2012). When engaging with a brand on social media, a customer could be at any of these stages, while full customer engagement requires the cycle to be completed. Customers' position within the cycle dictates their corresponding engagement level with the brand. These levels categorize customers as follows: transactional customers, delighted customers, loyal customers, and fans (Sashi, 2012). In addition, customers' engagement as a concept can be categorized into three types of engagement; affective engagement, cognitive engagement, and behavioral engagement (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Affective engagement is characterized by enthusiasm and enjoyment; cognitive engagement by attention and absorption; and behavioral engagement by sharing, learning, and endorsing (Dessart *et al.*, 2015).

### 2.3 *The case of luxury brands*

Despite the aforementioned advantages, luxury brands have generally been reluctant in their adoption of social media and have been slower to accept this trend when compared to their non-luxury counterparts (Hughes *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, luxury brands and products have long been perceived as a privilege reserved only for royalty, world leaders, and the ultra-rich members of society (Chandon *et al.*, 2016). Luxury products are items perceived to be unique, exclusive, and/or precious (Hung *et al.*, 2011). In addition, such brands are commonly associated with the superior quality and are expected to offer consumers emotional and symbolic advantages, such as status, prestige, and affluence (Seo and Buchanan-Oliver, 2015). Modern luxury brands are considered premium mediums of self-expression (Chandon *et al.*, 2016). These brands offer an external symbol of a person's internal desires, such as identity affirmation, status aspiration, individual conspicuousness, and/or group belongingness (Hung *et al.*, 2011).

Nonetheless, luxury brands face many challenges as they try to maintain their brand value and uniqueness in light of the uncontrollable nature of social networking sites and user-generated content (Okonkwo, 2009). The latter brands were slow adopters of social media platforms because they feared losing their sense of exclusivity, which is considered one of their defining characteristics (Hughes *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, luxury brands focus on a limited number of niche markets whereas social media, in direct contrast, encompasses the concept of easy accessibility and global availability (Hughes *et al.*, 2016). Despite their many concerns, luxury brands have finally recognized the added value of social media, with most brands adopting online pages within the past few years (Hennigs *et al.*, 2012).

Brands making use of online pages tend to utilize social media within more deliberate marketing and communication guidelines in order to maintain their image and refinement (Mohr, 2013). Accordingly, luxury brands employ social media in a sense that creates

desirability and appeal through their online communication to the masses, while retaining offline exclusive distribution (Hennigs *et al.*, 2012). Social media is used as a medium to communicate the dream offered by the “luxe” brand instead of employing direct advertising methods that aim to ensure a sale (Chandon *et al.*, 2016; Mohr, 2013). In this way, the aforementioned brands develop an indirect brand experience that can generate high levels of WOM and viral online content (Mohr, 2013). Accordingly, such brands can preserve their overall brand integrity, while simultaneously reaching a wide variety of current and prospective luxury brand consumers and enthusiasts (Kim and Ko, 2012).

#### 2.4 *Luxury brand consumers*

The 330 million current and potential luxury consumers are undeniably valuable as their total expenditures in 2014 amounted to more than 245 billion dollars, up from only 68 billion dollars in 2000 (D’Arpizio *et al.*, 2014; Husic and Cicic, 2009). The growth of luxury spending and the present-day increase in individual discretionary income are directly related, particularly among the upper-class members of society, who represent the primary target of luxury (Husic and Cicic, 2009). Recent studies indicate that luxury brands’ consumers are highly connected and more recently relying more on social media platforms to receive further information regarding their preferred brands (Escobar, 2016). More interestingly, statistics suggest that, in 2015, three out of every four luxury purchases were influenced by online interactions with the brand (Escobar, 2016). However, although past studies have profiled online shoppers and community members, the literature still lacks a thorough understanding of the different behavioral patterns of luxury brands’ followers, which could help companies devise a more appropriate approach on their social pages. To that end, this study aims to identify and define the different profiles of luxury brand followers on social media and map the identified profiles in relation to their value/importance to luxury brands.

### 3. Research methodology

Exploratory research such as this study aims to gain a perspective regarding a certain social phenomenon; this form of research is generally associated with an interpretivist, qualitative methodology due to the presence of no previous understanding or empirical research on the given topic. Accordingly, in-depth interviews were conducted with consumers following luxury brands on different social media platforms.

A total of 24 Lebanese respondents were interviewed for this study. The number of participants was determined based on data saturation guidelines, which indicate that a sample size between 5 and 25 is considered acceptable (Farah, 2017a). The sample was selected using a convenience sampling method and included pre-selection criteria to ensure that each respondent actively followed at least one luxury brand on social media. The interviewees’ gender split was equal, and their ages ranged from 23 to 46, with an average age of 32. The participants had different professional backgrounds, ranging from unemployed, salespersons, and junior- and mid-level managers up to senior managers. Respondents’ education level varied among high school graduates and undergraduate and graduate levels at the university. The duration of each interview was between 30 and 40 minutes. Before proceeding with the interview, the interviewees were each assured full anonymity and confidentiality. They were also informed that the interview would be recorded.

The researchers presented the interviewees with a series of open-ended questions concerning the following: the behavior of the participant on the different social media platforms, the phenomenon of following luxury brands on social media, the relationship of the interviewee with luxury brands in both the online and offline environments, and the level of satisfaction and expectations derived from luxury brands. The laddering technique was used, repeatedly, asking “why” questions in order to better understand the motivations behind every action taken by the interviewees. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and

analyzed using the NVivo 8 software. The data analysis used verbatim quotations. The grounded theory approach with no a-priory themes was used for the coding process.

The accuracy and validity of the findings were ensured following Gibbs' (2007) qualitative reliability procedures. Following key qualitative research approaches and recommendations (Creswell and Miller, 2000), validity was ensured through triangulation, member checking, exploration of respondents' personal experiences, and close collaboration with them.

To interpret the data, three researchers independently explored the different illustrative themes that emerged in the transcripts. The exploration followed the methodological principles of thematic analysis focusing on the common patterns of followers' behavior. Inter-coder reliability checks were conducted amongst the coders in order to validate individual findings.

Six different types of followers emerged. No single respondent within the sample expressed opinions that would entail his or her classification into more than one type of luxury brand follower; accordingly, the categories extracted in this specific study are assumed to be both exhaustive and mutually exclusive.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

##### 4.1 Identification and definition of luxury brand followers' profiles

The thorough thematic analysis conducted on interviewees' responses and the overall findings identified six different types of luxury brand followers (see Table I).

The first type of online luxury brand consumers identified was the "pragmatists," or people who do not care about owning luxury brands. These individuals possess the means to buy luxury items; however, they believe that luxury products are not among their priorities and would not necessarily improve their standard of life. As the participants explained:

Definitely I can buy luxury items, but since I have other priorities, I allocate that budget to other more important things. After all, what I need is the product and not the brand label, and I believe luxury is just in the label (Male, age 36).

Sometimes I consider buying from luxury brands, but it's not something that preoccupies me as I don't think it really affects my lifestyle (Female, age 39).

| Pragmatists  | Bystanders  | Trend hunters  | Image seekers   | Passionate owners  | Prime consumers   |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| Can afford luxury items but they are not on their priority list<br>Look upon luxury brands as show off and not necessities that complement their lives | Love luxury brands but cannot afford them<br>Watch the brands and stay updated without exerting extra effort to become part of the community<br>Do not develop significant relationships with luxury brands | Love luxury brands and follow them to stay updated about the latest trends<br>Take the trends from luxury brands and actively search for similar items in alternative/ more affordable brands or buy luxury brand counterfeits | Love luxury brands and put maximum effort to become part of the community even if they cannot easily afford them<br>Buy luxury brands for self-expressive benefits<br>Consider luxury brands as success statements and develop a feeling of self-confidence and pride when owning luxury products | Are very passionate about owning luxury brands and very selective in choosing the luxury items<br>Have a story/dream associated with luxury brands<br>Buy luxury brands for emotional benefits | Have higher income levels<br>Regularly buy and use luxury brands<br>Have developed loyalty connections with luxury brands |

**Table I.**  
Typology of followers of luxury brands

Pragmatists show no interest in buying luxury brands even though they follow them through online platforms:

Even if I don't want to buy luxury brands, I don't want to be ignorant about them. You might not travel the world, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't know about different countries (Male, age 30).

It's always good to stay updated [...] Some days, I spend time online checking the latest trends, but it doesn't mean I would run and buy what I saw (Female, age 41).

This category of consumers does not perceive luxury goods as a sign of fashion consciousness; as a result, they tend to display high levels of self-control and risk aversion with regard to the purchase of such products (He *et al.*, 2010). Indeed, pragmatic consumers are unlikely to buy luxury products unless they believe that these products will be of high practicality to them. Individuals in this cluster tend to evaluate the functional attributes of a product prior to making a rational purchase decision (He *et al.*, 2010); they place a high emphasis on the luxury brand's utilitarian value while attributing minimal attention to its hedonic or emotional characteristics (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, for these customers, the superior performance quality of specific brands that can guarantee longevity of product usage justify pragmatists' choice to buy such products (Eastman and Eastman, 2011).

The second type of luxury brands followers identified by the researchers is the "bystanders." Similar to the lurkers in online communities, these followers exhibit a passive interest toward luxury brands when following the latter's channels and pages. Although usually the majority in a given brand community, this type of follower typically remains silent most of the time:

My relationship with luxury is superficial because it's just visual. I'm not actually involved with the brand (Female, age 32).

Whenever I am online and I come across some interesting news and updates from luxury brands I usually read them, however I never actively engage or look for information related to these brands, as I can't afford buying these brands! (Male, age 37).

Bystanders do not exert any extra effort to become part of the luxury community because they cannot afford to buy luxury brands. This creates a somewhat distant relationship with the given brand:

The best way to describe my connection with luxury brands is "look but don't touch" (Female, age 28).

Even if I love the brands, I would never use a credit card or loan to buy certain brands that I am actually not able to afford (Male, age 31).

Although these customers admire luxury brands, they face a heightened sense of cognitive dissonance and guilt with regard to the purchase of such costly products (Wu *et al.*, 2015); consequently, the latter causes this segment of followers to display a low tendency to actually purchase such brands (Eastman and Eastman, 2011). Nevertheless, bystanders find satisfaction through their enthusiastic observation of these products from the sidelines despite their inability to follow through and buy them.

The third group, "trend hunters," represents a rather active type of luxury brand followers. These followers have a very high interest in luxury brands; they love trends and want to regularly adopt the latest styles. Trend hunters believe that luxury brands are trendsetters; hence, they follow these brands despite their inability to buy them. This group of consumers consistently hunts for similar, yet more affordable items. Interestingly, they exhibit a tendency to purchase tailor-made products with the same specifications and show no objection to buying brand imitations:

I follow brands on social media in order to get updated about the latest trends; then I buy similar imitated items. Those who are close to me know that I'm not buying the original product,

but those who are not won't know. All they will know is that I am wearing the latest trends (Female, age 34).

When it comes to luxury brands, I am very active and involved in following their news and trends; however, because I can get an excellent quality imitation at a much more reasonable price, I don't have any problem buying fake products [...] as long as they are good. Anyway who is going to know if it is an imitation or not? (Male, age 28).

This group of consumers associates a symbolic value with luxury brands, yet displays high levels of price sensitivity, indicating an unwillingness to pay the regular price for these items (Li *et al.*, 2013). For this reason, such individuals are likely to search for cheaper alternatives, portraying little to no loyalty for the actual brand itself. Indeed, this group of followers is the most likely to buy counterfeit products, because they aim to fulfill their status needs despite their high-price consciousness. Accordingly, trend hunters show a minimal regard for the actual brand quality, authenticity, and performance (Eastman and Eastman, 2011; Phau and Teah, 2009).

"Image seekers" are the fourth type of followers. This group of consumers displays a love for luxury brands and associates them with success and status. They are convinced that luxury brands are part of their self-improvement process; thus, they exert maximum efforts to buy them. These followers tend to enjoy looking for trends online and do not mind visiting the actual stores for the special treatment that they receive. They also value the overall retail experience in luxury brand stores and enjoy the social benefit that they get from using luxurious brands' products despite their price. Indeed, "image seekers" often treasure the intangible value of such brands as much as the functionality of the products purchased (Eastman and Eastman, 2011). They believe that owning luxury brands will enhance their image and elevate their social status:

[...] if I enter the Mercedes showroom wearing a Boss suit, they will directly notice it, and approach me differently than if I entered wearing something not branded (Male, age 33).

As a salesperson of luxury watches, I am on daily contact with wealthy people. I find their lifestyles very attractive. That's why I have gradually changed the brands that I buy, replacing them with higher-level brands (Female, age 35).

Moreover, self-expression and affirmation were identified as the dominant drivers of this category:

When I bought my KIA Cerato, it totally fit me. However, I now need something more luxurious, because I became someone more powerful and I want the car to reflect this change (Female, age 30).

These consumers believe that luxury brands are a statement of success and sophistication, and their purchase is generally accompanied with positive feelings of self-confidence and pride (He *et al.*, 2010). Indeed, this group of followers focuses on enhancing their image and obtaining respect from others through the continual consumption of such brands. They believe that the conspicuous consumption of high-price luxury items will elevate their standing in society (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Accordingly, image seekers are the group of consumers most concerned with displaying prestige and impressing their peers (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009).

The fifth category of luxury brand followers is the "passionate owners." The distinguishing characteristic of this segment is their very strong passion for specific luxury brands. They usually have stories with the brands they buy or wish to buy; in fact, some people dream about owning the product one day while others have it set at the top of their bucket list. Passionate owners enter into a relationship with the brand even before purchasing it and, as a result, purchase it to ensure self-satisfaction:

I post pictures of luxury items on social media with the caption "One day" (Female, age 23).

I have been following Rolex, a brand that I love so much, and their latest products for some time now and I am saving to offer myself a Rolex watch, hopefully very soon (Male, age 44).



These consumers tend to be hedonic in nature, and they treat luxury products as sensory rewards that fulfill their needs and desires (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009). Such customers treat luxury products as symbols to be attained at times of certain life events and transitions, thereby depicting the fulfillment of a certain goal or aspiration (Wu *et al.*, 2015). Accordingly, passionate owners display an emotional and affective commitment to luxury brands and their happiness, pleasure, and overall success are directly related to their ability to purchase such products.

The sixth and final category of followers is the “prime consumers” of luxury brands. These followers have the means to afford luxury products to the extent they do not categorize these brands as “luxurious.” This group of followers regularly buys and uses luxury brands as part of their adopted lifestyle. As a result, these followers are satisfied with, and loyal to, the latter brands:

I feel connected to the brands. I have tried them, they totally fit my style, they represent me, and they are totally affordable to me so why would I change (Male, age 38).

When Carolina Herrera launches its newest collection, I am always among the first ones to explore the collection and buy a couple of items. It has become a habit and they know me by name as I am regular customer. I also have other brands that people may consider luxurious, but for me, they are just normal daily wear (Female, age 46).

This group of luxury brand consumers is the most likely to have consistently high levels of purchasing power, accompanied by a strong tendency to continuously purchase luxury brands, as such brands represent their “norm” (Park *et al.*, 2008). Such consumers feel reassured that luxury brands offer superior levels of performance and quality and therefore display low price consciousness accompanied by a long-term commitment to these products (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). This is due to the fact that they feel a sense of security and satisfaction when purchasing a familiar, high-functioning brand (Wu *et al.*, 2015):

For some, these brands may be something “wow” that they buy for specific occasions, I personally can’t think of buying other brands as these guarantee a certain quality that I got used to long time ago (Female, age 36).

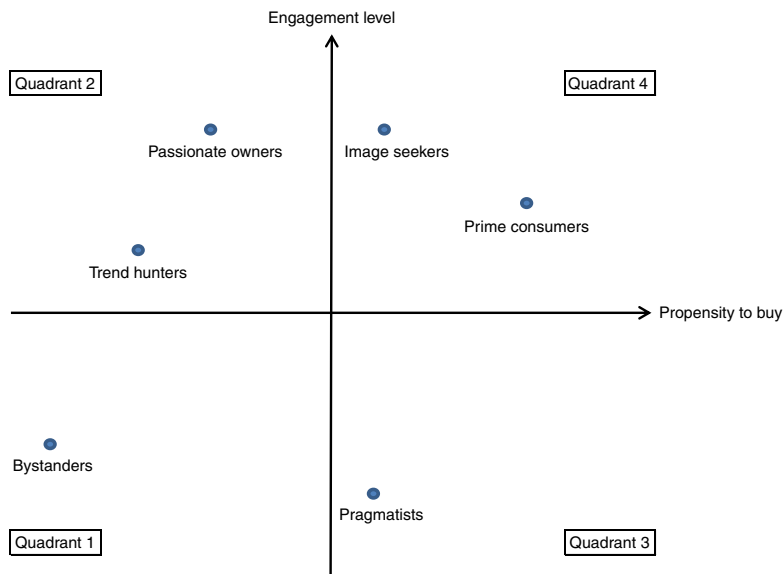
#### 4.2 Mapping the identified profiles in relation to their value

This study maps the six identified profiles according to the followers’ propensity to buy luxury brands and their varying engagement levels (see Figure 1).

Due to their very low involvement level with luxury brands, the pragmatists and the bystanders were mapped into quadrants 1 and 3, respectively. Bystanders are low on both engagement and propensity to buy levels, whereas pragmatists have the means to purchase luxury brands. The four other consumer profiles were characterized with higher-than-average online engagement despite their different buying inclinations; they were accordingly mapped into quadrants 2 and 4. Indeed, trend hunters display the least interest in buying original luxury brands whereas prime consumers are considered to be the most active buyers. On the other hand, both passionate owners and image seekers display a high propensity to buy.

### 5. Implications

Different studies have analyzed the value of social media and categorized online community members, yet the current research is the first to explore a typology in relation to the social media followers of luxury brands. From a theoretical perspective, the focus of this study on luxury brand followers provides a notable and pioneering contribution that addresses a significant gap in the extant literature (Zhang and Kim, 2013). Indeed, the interest in identifying the various categories of online luxury consumers and audiences stems from the



## Typology of social media followers

**Figure 1.**  
Profiles mapping

fact that multiple gains can be achieved by utilizing the characteristics of the different profiles in the creation of a tailored approach to social media marketing (Tak *et al.*, 2017). Scholarly work focusing on social media conversation between luxury brands and consumers can be developed based on the findings of this study. This can be done through the segmentation of the luxury market into micro audiences based on their social media usage behavior (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009). Thus, with the recent exponential growth of all things digital and social, this study adopts a theoretical viewpoint – through the different identified profiles of online luxury consumers – to demonstrate that one size does not fit all. Indeed, this study contends that a broad marketing strategy may fail to fulfill the needs and wishes of all the sets of audiences within the luxury consumer base.

From a managerial perspective, this study provides significant insights for luxury brands, as it has identified and profiled the six main types of luxury brands' followers. This enables companies to target the identified segments in a more effective manner, creating an integrated communication approach specific to each group. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed. First, pragmatists are considered to be the most difficult group to work with. However, ignoring them is not an option because they are followers of the brand and they have a presence on social media; the latter automatically grants them the right to express their opinions publicly and, thus, contribute to the online WOM (Sharma and Baoku, 2013). Moreover, this group displays a greater tendency to disseminate negative WOM because its members view luxury brands as frivolous (East *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, brands have to be cautious in their communications with this segment. In addition, the aforementioned customers are not affected by the emotional appeal of luxury products and can instead be convinced through the use of logical propositions (Verma, 2009). Therefore, this group can be targeted by highlighting the functional benefits of these luxury brands (He *et al.*, 2010), which will, in turn, generate increased sales as this group has the means to afford luxury products.

The case is slightly different with regard to the bystanders' group. This group of consumers has more positive feelings toward luxury brands than pragmatists do, but face a major obstacle in that they are unable to afford them. Accordingly, their purchasing

behavior is unlikely to show any change, and categorizing this group as potential clients is inaccurate. Nevertheless, it is advised that luxury brand marketing managers target these followers in order to improve their overall engagement level as this will increase the brand's popularity. This segment will mainly be utilized to disseminate positive WOM, which would consequently enhance the brand image and attract more followers and potential clients. Hence, brands should take advantage of this category and tap into it in order to communicate positive WOM (Castronovo and Huang, 2012).

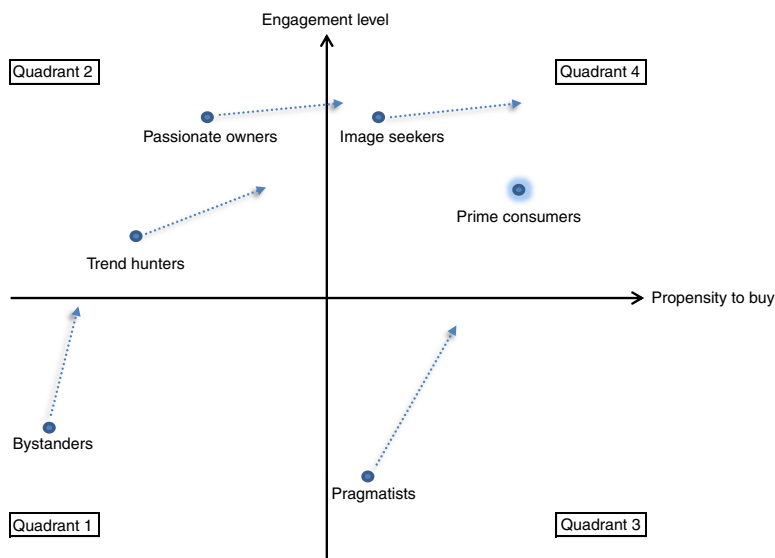
One of the most challenging groups identified is the trend hunters, despite their high brand involvement on online platforms, because they show a great propensity to buy counterfeit products. These consumers are not likely to be easily converted into buyers, as they are fulfilling their needs through the use of imitation brands (Phau and Teah, 2009). Consequently, trend hunters represent a threat to brands, although they might be promoting the original brand's style with their fake products (Gabrielli *et al.*, 2012). Ideally, this segment should be shifted toward Quadrant 4, signifying an increase in their tendency to buy the original luxury brands. One of the strategies that companies can adopt in order to facilitate this move is to design their online marketing campaigns in a manner that leads clients to their physical stores; this allows customers the chance to experience the brand environment and explore the product quality (Atwal and Williams, 2009). This experience might then limit one's search for counterfeit alternatives.

The next category, the image seekers, is deemed to be the easiest group to reach and communicate with. As admirers of luxury brands, this group perceives that anything related to the brand is something exceptional that reflects high social standards and success (He *et al.*, 2010). This group of followers perceives such brands as high-end products that suit the most successful, powerful, and influential people (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, it is very important for brands to keep this segment as close and engaged as possible. To this end, marketers should target this segment through the utilization of emotional product appeals that communicate the brand values and image (Ghodeswar, 2008). Moreover, brand communications through social media platforms must emphasize the brand's role as a statement of success and social status to further enhance the purchase intentions of this segment.

Although they have a very high level of involvement with the brands, passionate owners are a segment that must not be taken for granted. This group of followers perceives owning specific luxury brands as a dream that they strive to fulfill (Chandon *et al.*, 2016); however, this might be a one-time act. Therefore, brands should work on shifting these customers from one-time buyers to regular customers by establishing strong emotional ties and maintaining communications with them (Ghodeswar, 2008). This would make passionate owners feel that they are valuable to the brand, thereby increasing their tendency to repeat purchases (Verma, 2009). Hence, the focus should be on moving this segment to Quadrant 4 of the matrix.

Last but not least, prime consumers are deemed to be the most valuable assets of luxury brands. This segment has a strategic position in Quadrant 4, which should be maintained. Brand marketing managers must ensure that their prime clients are satisfied so that their buying patterns remain unchanged. The latter brands must ensure the proper implementation of CRM strategies so to retain successful relationships with this segment (Cailleux *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, as these consumers are recurrent buyers, the luxury brands will have a wealth of information regarding their buying behavior, allows them to cater to the needs of each client more efficiently and effectively (Faase *et al.*, 2011). Most importantly, luxury brands must continuously reaffirm their brands' value and quality in their communications with this segment (Castronovo and Huang, 2012).

The mapping of each segment in relation to the suggested recommendation is presented in Figure 2.



## Typology of social media followers

**Figure 2.**  
Mapping of suggested strategies

## 6. Conclusion

In an age where brands have the privilege of using social media platforms to reach potential customers on a daily basis, it is important to note who is receiving this information and what their feedback is. This is especially crucial in the case of luxury brands, which are among the most popular brands on social media. These brands have a sizeable number of followers, yet they must be aware of the types of consumer segments that are present within these followers. Accordingly, this research is the first to identify and analyze the different profiles of luxury brand followers present on social media. By focusing on the values of each profile relative to the brand, this study is the first of its kind to provide a working framework for luxury brands' marketing managers.

However, it must be noted that this work is not without limitations. First, the study utilized a qualitative, face-to-face interview approach that may cause a social desirability bias (Farah, 2017b). Moreover, the analysis focuses solely on the case of Lebanese consumers, which might limit the generalizability of the findings. Despite these limitations, this study offers an initial framework for research endeavors to build upon in this stream of literature. It can be replicated in other countries and cultures to determine if cross-cultural differences impact online consumer segments and behavior in the context of luxury brands. Moreover, further work can empirically examine the impact of the different suggested strategies on brand performance.

## References

- Atwal, G. and Williams, A. (2009), "Luxury brand marketing – the experience is everything!", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 16 Nos 5/6, pp. 338-346.
- Berthon, P.R., Pitt, L.F., Plangger, K. and Shapiro, D. (2012), "Marketing meets Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers: implications for international marketing strategy", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 55 No. 3, pp. 261-271.
- Cailleux, H., Mignot, C. and Kapferer, J. (2009), "Is CRM for luxury brands?", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 16 Nos 5/6, pp. 406-412.

- Castronovo, C. and Huang, L. (2012), "Social media in an alternative marketing communication model", *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 117-131.
- Chaffey, D. (2017), "Global social media statistics summary 2017", available at: [www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/](http://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/) (accessed May 3, 2017).
- Chandon, J.L., Laurent, G. and Valette-Florence, P. (2016), "Pursuing the concept of luxury: introduction to the *JBR* special issue on luxury marketing from tradition to innovation", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 69 No. 1, pp. 299-303.
- Creswell, J.W. and Miller, D.L. (2000), "Determining validity in qualitative inquiry", *Theory into Practice*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 124-130.
- D'Arpizio, C., Levato, F., Zito, D. and de Montgolfier, J. (2014), "Luxury goods worldwide market study", available at: [www.bain.com/bainweb/PDFs/Bain\\_Worldwide\\_Luxury\\_Goods\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.bain.com/bainweb/PDFs/Bain_Worldwide_Luxury_Goods_Report_2014.pdf) (accessed May 6, 2017).
- Dessart, L., Veloutsou, C. and Morgan-Thomas, A. (2015), "Consumer engagement in online brand communities: a social media perspective", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 28-42.
- Dimmick, J., Chen, Y. and Li, Z. (2004), "Competition between the Internet and traditional news media: the gratification-opportunities niche dimension", *The Journal of Media Economics*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 19-33.
- East, R., Hammond, K. and Lomax, W. (2008), "Measuring the impact of positive and negative word of mouth on brand purchase probability", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 215-224.
- Eastman, J. and Eastman, K. (2011), "Perceptions of status consumption and the economy", *Journal of Business & Economics Research*, Vol. 9 No. 7, pp. 9-20.
- Escobar, A. (2016), "The impact of the digital revolution in the development of market and communication strategies for the luxury sector (fashion luxury)", *Central European Business Review*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 17-36.
- Faase, R., Helms, R. and Spruit, M. (2011), "Web 2.0 in the CRM domain: defining social CRM", *International Journal of Electronic Customer Relationship Management*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 1-22.
- Farah, M.F. (2017a), "Consumers' switching motivations and intention in the case of bank mergers: a cross-cultural study", *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 254-274.
- Farah, M.F. (2017b), "An application of the theory of planned behavior to customer switching intentions in the context of bank consolidations", *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 35 No. 1, pp. 147-172.
- Fisher, T. (2009), "ROI in social media: a look at the arguments", *Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 189-195.
- Gabrielli, V., Grappi, S. and Baghi, I. (2012), "Does counterfeiting affect luxury customer-based brand equity?", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 19 No. 7, pp. 567-580.
- Ghodeswar, B. (2008), "Building brand identity in competitive markets: a conceptual model", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 4-12.
- Gibbs, G.R. (2007), "Thematic coding and categorizing", in Flick, U. (Ed.), *The Sage Qualitative Data Kit*, Sage, London, pp. 38-56.
- Hanna, R., Rohm, A. and Crittenden, V.L. (2011), "We're all connected: the power of the social media ecosystem", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 54 No. 3, pp. 265-273.
- He, Y., Zou, D. and Jin, L. (2010), "Exploiting the goldmine: a lifestyle analysis of affluent Chinese consumers", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 27 No. 7, pp. 615-628.
- Hennigs, N., Wiedmann, K. and Klarmann, C. (2012), "Luxury brands in the digital age – exclusivity versus ubiquity", *Marketing Review*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 30-35.

- Hughes, M.U., Bandoni, W.K. and Pehlivan, E. (2016), "Story-giving as a co-creation tool for luxury brands in the age of the internet: a love story by Tiffany and thousands of lovers", *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 357-364.
- Hung, K.P., Huiling Chen, A., Peng, N., Hackley, C., Amy Tiwusakul, R. and Chou, C.L. (2011), "Antecedents of luxury brand purchase intention", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 20 No. 6, pp. 457-467.
- Husic, M. and Cacic, M. (2009), "Luxury consumption factors", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 231-245.
- Jin, S.A. (2012), "The potential of social media for luxury brand management", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 30 No. 7, pp. 687-699.
- Keller, K. (2009), "Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 139-155.
- Kim, A.J. and Ko, E. (2012), "Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 65 No. 10, pp. 1480-1486.
- Li, N., Robson, A. and Coates, N. (2013), "Chinese consumers' purchasing: impact of value and affect", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 486-508.
- Miller, R. and Lammas, N. (2010), "Social media and its implications for viral marketing", *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, Vol. 11, pp. 1-9.
- Mohr, I. (2013), "The impact of social media on the fashion industry", *Journal of Applied Business and Economics*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 17-21.
- Nielsen Global Company (2013), "Global trust in advertising and brand messages", available at: [www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2013/global-trust-in-advertising-and-brand-messages.html](http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2013/global-trust-in-advertising-and-brand-messages.html) (accessed May 4, 2017).
- Okonkwo, U. (2009), "Sustaining the luxury brand on the internet", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 16 Nos 5/6, pp. 302-310.
- Park, H., Rabolt, N. and Sook Jeon, K. (2008), "Purchasing global luxury brands among young Korean consumers", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 244-259.
- Phau, I. and Teah, M. (2009), "Devil wears (counterfeit) Prada: a study of antecedents and outcomes of attitudes towards counterfeits of luxury brands", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 15-27.
- Qualman, E. (2010), *Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and do Business*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY.
- Ramadan, Z. (2017), "Examining the dilution of the consumer-brand relationship on Facebook: the saturation issue", *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, Vol. 20 No. 3.
- Ramadan, Z. (2018), "The gamification of trust: the case of China's 'social credit'", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 93-107.
- Ramadan, Z. and Farah, M.F. (2017), "The advent of the 'social moment of truth' in online communities", *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 364-378.
- Ramadan, Z., Farah, M.F. and Mrad, M. (2017), "An adapted TPB approach to consumers' acceptance of service-delivery drones", *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, Vol. 29 No. 7, pp. 817-828.
- Sashi, C.M. (2012), "Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships, and social media", *Management Decision*, Vol. 50 No. 2, pp. 253-272.
- Seo, Y. and Buchanan-Oliver, M. (2015), "Luxury branding: the industry, trends, and future conceptualizations", *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 82-98.
- Sharma, A. and Sheth, J.N. (2010), "A framework of technology mediation in consumer selling: implications for firms and sales management", *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 121-130.

- 
- Sharma, G. and Baoku, L. (2013), "Customer satisfaction in Web 2.0 and information technology development", *Information Technology & People*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 347-367.
- Tak, P., Pareek, A. and Rishi, B. (2017), "Social comparison of luxury fashion brands: impact of ostentation and media habits", *IUP Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 29-46.
- Verma, S. (2009), "Do all advertising appeals influence consumer purchase decision", *Global Business Review*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 33-43.
- Vigneron, F. and Johnson, L.W. (2004), "Measuring perceptions of brand luxury", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 11 No. 6, pp. 484-506.
- Wiedmann, K., Hennigs, N. and Siebels, A. (2009), "Value-based segmentation of luxury consumption behavior", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 7, pp. 625-651.
- Williams, D.L., Crittenden, V.L., Keo, T. and McCarty, P. (2012), "The use of social media: an exploratory study of usage among digital natives", *Journal of Public Affairs*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 127-136.
- Wu, M.S., Chaney, I., Chen, C.S., Nguyen, B. and Melewar, T.C. (2015), "Luxury fashion brands: factors influencing young female consumers' luxury fashion purchasing in Taiwan", *Qualitative Market Research*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 298-319.
- Zhang, B. and Kim, J.H. (2013), "Luxury fashion consumption in China: factors affecting attitude and purchase intent", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 68-79.

#### About the authors

Dr Zahy Ramadan is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at the School of Business at the Lebanese American University. He holds a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) Degree from the University of Manchester, Manchester Business School. His research is focused on the omni-channel consumer journey, social media saturation, online brand-consumer relationships, retailing, and shopper marketing. Dr Ramadan is also a Chartered Marketer (Chartered Institute of Marketing) with 18 years of work experience covering the Near-East, Arabian Peninsula, and Asia-Pacific markets across several industries, namely FMCG, luxury goods, and consumer electronics. Dr Zahy Ramadan is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [zahy.ramadan@lau.edu.lb](mailto:zahy.ramadan@lau.edu.lb)

Dr Maya F. Farah is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Lebanese American University, Beirut. She is the Associate Chair of the Hospitality Management and Marketing Department at LAU. Maya has several years of undergraduate, graduate, and executive teaching experience at several AACSB accredited universities, including the American University of Beirut, Lebanon and the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce in Toulouse, France. Through the application of socio-cognitive theories, she enjoys an expanding research experience in the field of consumer behavior and Islamic marketing. Another key area of active research includes omni-channel marketing and online communities

Armig Dukenjian holds an MBA Degree and a BSc Degree in Business Administration from the Adnan Kassar School of Business, Lebanese American University. She has several years of work experience in the luxury goods industry. She is specialized in management, marketing and retail of international luxury brands, namely watches and jewelry.

---

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)