

Chapter 5

Enhancing Consumer– Brand Relationships Through Luxury Brand Experiences

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ABSTRACT

The extant research highlights that the strength of consumer-brand relationships is very much shaped by consumers' experiences with brands. Given the inherent characteristics of luxury brands, it is no surprise that luxury consumers expect much more intense experiences, and thus the delivery of a superior brand experience is a necessity in the luxury market. Therefore, both marketing scholars and brand managers in the luxury market need to acknowledge the power of brand experiences as a way to strengthen consumer-brand relationships. However, despite the need for a deeper understanding of brand experience in the context of luxury brands, still much remains unknown regarding the factors that can be used to enhance brand experience. Building on this gap in the literature, this chapter investigates the relational outcomes of brand experience and subsequently discusses the various drivers that luxury brands can use to enhance luxury brand experience and thus develop stronger consumer-brand relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Building strong and long-term relationships with consumers is essential for the success of brands (Fournier, 1998); thus, research on consumer-brand relationships has flourished since the beginning of the 2000s. The importance of consumer-brand relationships is also widely acknowledged in the context of luxury brands (e.g., Eastman, Shin, & Ruhland, 2020; Rodrigues, Brandao, & Rodrigues, 2018). However, even if the luxury market is expected to grow further over the years, industry experts warn that today's luxury consumers are less loyal and more likely to shop around (Shimul, Phau, & Lwin, 2019). The intensifying competition accompanied by the proliferation of luxury brands in the market and consequent opportunities for consumers to switch necessitate both marketing scholars and brand managers to identify the factors that can enhance the development and maintenance of consumer-brand

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relationships (Shukla, Banerjee, & Singh, 2016). Within this respect, brand experience can play a highly critical role. The extant research highlights that the strength of consumer-brand relationships is very much shaped by consumers' experience with the brand (e.g., Prentice, Wang, & Loureiro, 2019). The importance of brand experience as a way to build strong relationships is also recognized in terms of managerial practice (e.g., Andreini, Pedeliento, Zarantonello, & Solerio, 2018).

A review of the literature reveals that many studies conducted in this stream of research (e.g., Dolbec & Chebat, 2013; van der Westhuizen, 2018) use the theoretical perspective provided by Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) in their discussions. This perspective is built on the experiential value of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999). Brakus et al. (2009, p. 53) define brand experience as "subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments." The effect of brand experience on consumer-brand relationships is studied across different product categories and markets (e.g., Japutra & Molinillo, 2019; Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014). However, such brand-related stimuli are particularly crucial for providing superior experiences in the luxury market (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019). This can be explained by the unique characteristics of luxury brands. Luxury brands are often defined in terms of their strong heritage, distinctive style, superior quality, exclusive and prestigious outlets, and high transaction value (Fionda & Moore, 2009; de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019). Given these characteristics, it is no surprise that consumers of luxury brands expect intense experiences; thus, the delivery of a superior brand experience is not merely an option but a necessity in this market (Chandon, Laurent, & Valette-Florence, 2017). As luxury consumption involves the search for enrichment through indulgent and recreational experiences (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019), both marketing scholars and brand managers in the luxury market need to acknowledge the power of brand experiences as a way to strengthen consumer-brand relationships. Despite this need for a deeper understanding of brand experience in the context of luxury brands (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2019), still much remains unknown regarding the factors that can be used to enhance brand experience and the mechanisms through which brand experience allows consumers to develop stronger relationships with luxury brands (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019). Building on this gap in the literature, this chapter aims to investigate the relational outcomes of brand experience and subsequently discuss the different drivers that luxury brand managers can use to enhance luxury brand experience and thus develop stronger consumer-brand relationships.

BRAND EXPERIENCE AND ITS DIMENSIONS

In the last decades, both the marketing theory and practice have started emphasizing the strategically important role that the experiential characteristics of brands can play in terms of creating more valuable experiences with consumers (e.g., Andreini et al., 2018; Dwivedi, Nayeem, & Murshed, 2018). The starting point referenced in most of these studies is the study by Brakus et al. (2009). Building on Schmitt's (1999) conceptual work, Brakus et al. (2009) conceptualize brand experience as consumer sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli and name its four dimensions as sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. The sensory dimension relates to consumers' five senses and captures the degree to which the consumers find the brand attractive in a sensory way (Brakus et al., 2009; Iglesias, Markovic, & Rialp, 2019). From this standpoint, all the tactile, visual, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory stimulations generated by brands during their purchase,

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