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Hedonic vs. Utilitarian luxury brands' communication

The attractiveness of luxury products and brands to consumers is mainly explained by their ability to instill dream and aspiration in consumers' life. Key to instill dream and aspiration are luxury brands' communication strategies and tactics. It is therefore crucial for luxury brands to understand how communication features might affect consumers' attitudes toward their products.

Research on luxury has indeed focused a great deal of attention to study key aspects of the communication strategy adopted by luxury brands. The article of Amatulli, De Angelis and Donato, forthcoming on *Psychology & Marketing*, studies the effect of using two alternative types of communication message appeals, mainly hedonic versus utilitarian appeals, and investigates how using one or the other type of message appeal affects product perceived luxuriousness and, in turn, product attitude and consumers' willingness to buy a luxury item. Indeed, luxury goods typically provide superior value compared with mass-market goods, in terms of both functional characteristics and of personal pleasure and intangible attributes. Therefore, marketers have the opportunity to use either hedonic or utilitarian appeals in their communication messages. As an example of hedonic appeals, Dolce & Gabbana highlights elements, such as "style, femininity, and elegance" in the message promoting its Sofia line of watches, while as an example of utilitarian appeals, Louis Vuitton highlights practicality in the message promoting its Zippy Wallet Vertical, presented as "practical way to carry essential cards and cash" and as a product that "has a secure zip-around design which features multiple credit card slots, a zipped pocket for coins and compartments for papers and banknotes."

The hedonic/utilitarian dichotomy has been widely investigated in consumer behavior research to categorize goods. Specifically, hedonic goods have been defined as those goods that provide more experiential consumption, fun, pleasure, and excitement (designer clothes, sports cars, luxury watches, etc.), whereas utilitarian goods are primarily instrumental and functional (microwaves, minivans, personal computers). The hedonic/utilitarian dichotomy had actually been also applied to the study of marketing communication supporting mass-market products. No research studies, however, had investigated the effect of using a hedonic versus utilitarian message appeal in the communication related to luxury products and services. The study of Amatulli et al. investigates whether and under what conditions using one or the other type of appeal increases consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions and offers three experimental studies, conducted on an online platforms typically used to recruit participants in behavioral studies (i.e., Amazon Mechanical Turk) to test its hypotheses.

In particular, Study 1 shows that the use of hedonic (vs. utilitarian) message appeal increases the perceived luxuriousness of the tested product (i.e., a fictitious luxury wallet marketed by a fictitious luxury brand named BrandLux) and, in turn, perceived luxuriousness increases consumers' attitude toward the luxury product. Study 2 shows that the effect occurred in Study 1 is moderated by consumers' conspicuous consumption orientation, which refers to

interpersonal influences, whereby individuals desire to get others' approval by consuming conspicuous products and overtly displaying them. In particular, results of Study 2 demonstrate that the positive effect of hedonic versus utilitarian message appeals on product perceived luxuriousness and, in turn, on consumers' willingness to buy the luxury product (which was, as in Study 1, a luxury wallet) is more likely to occur for consumers who are relatively lower, rather than higher, in conspicuous consumption orientation. Finally, Study 3 shows that the effect occurred in Study 1 is moderated by the product-related dimension of brand prominence, defined as the extent to which a product has visible markings that help ensure observers recognize the brand, whereby the increase in luxury product attitude caused by the use of hedonic (vs. utilitarian) message appeal is more likely to manifest for luxury products characterized by low rather than high brand prominence. Unlike Study 1 and Study 2, the product tested in Study 3 was a Louis Vuitton luxury scarf.

Overall, this study suggests luxury managers to use hedonic message appeals to increase their customers' perceptions of their products' luxuriousness, thereby improving customers' attitudes toward said products. Moreover, this study advises that luxury communication managers work in close contact with managers of marketing strategy, product design, product development, and merchandising planning.

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