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**Theme:** Building and sustaining high performance organisations during uncertain times: challenges and opportunities

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to shed more light on the conceptualisation of Consumer Engagement (CE) and its antecedents, and consequences, in relation to social media brand content. A behavioural, consumer-centric perspective framework is proposed based on the COBRA model of online brand content engagement. The uniqueness of the proposed framework lies within a cross-country comparison between Russia and the UK, both at different stages of social media brand development. In order to achieve the objectives of the research, a mixed-methods approach will be adopted using social media content analysis and an online survey. From a theoretical perspective, this research extends the application of the COBRA on Consumer Engagement behaviour in social media. From a managerial perspective, this research recommends a model of antecedents and consequences of engagement to enable an effective relationship between consumers and the luxury jewellery brands on social media.

## **Research context**

### **Luxury jewellery segment**

Luxury is a global and subjective concept with no generally accepted definition; nonetheless, the majority of proposed luxury brand definitions agree on attributes such as high quality, authentic value, prestigious image, being worthy of the premium price, inspiring a deep connection with consumers (Ko et al., 2017). The global market for personal luxury goods reached €262 billion in 2017 and is forecast to achieve € 305 billion by 2020 (Bain and Company, 2017). Customised brand content online corresponds to the emergence of the new luxury goods consumer who expects digital experience and personalisation (Deloitte, 2017). Research on luxury goods and services is extremely limited. Most of the present research in a luxury goods context focus on the fashion industry (Lee and Watkins, 2016).

### **Social media**

Social media is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User-Generated-Content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Social media encourages the establishment of a deeper level of attachment with consumers, allowing the brand to see greater consumer value beyond monetary returns (Venkatesan, 2017). Social media empowers consumers by providing them with an engagement platform transparent to all social media users (Clark et al., 2017). This research examines consumer engagement on Instagram, a photo-based (visual) social media site (Cohen et al., 2017). Instagram is one of the most effective and fastest-growing social media platform to encourage consumer-brand engagement (Phua et al., 2017); nonetheless, academic research related to Instagram in a luxury brand context is limited (Khan, 2018). Furthermore, a big proportion of Instagram users is Millennials, who are forecasted to represent 45% of the global luxury market by 2025 with spending of over \$65 billion annually (Shin, Eastman, and Mothersbaugh, 2017).

### **Cross-country comparison**

Two distinctive countries UK and Russia are chosen to test whether country-specific characteristics impact consumer engagement with social media content. Russia has experienced growth in the luxury goods sector, now worth €3.5 billion, created by the acceptance of and a rapid development of consumerism, together with a growing middle-class population (Orlov, 2017). An economic downturn in 2016 has not impacted negatively on luxury jewellery consumption among higher income individuals and 85% of experts forecast luxury goods market growth in the next three years (Gigovskaya et al., 2018). The UK, in contrast, is a mature luxury goods market. The market has a global presence and, as a result, is affected by external factors, political, cultural, and economical in particular. A current political regulation change, Brexit, is projected to make an impact on the luxury goods market. No previous study has looked into comparing and contrasting these two distinctive markets with particular reference to customer engagement with social media brand content.

## Literature review and framework development

Consumer engagement is a complex multidimensional phenomenon (Oh et al., 2017). There is no universally accepted definition of consumer engagement; however, scholars and practitioners mutually agree on the benefits of consumer engagement, (Maslowska et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2016) and that it is context-dependent (Brodie et al., 2013). Mollen and Wilson (2010, p.5) define consumer engagement within an online context as “the cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value”. Furthermore, consumer engagement can be seen as both a behavioural (Harmeling et al., 2017) or a psychological process (Hapsari et al., 2017).

Behavioural customer engagement, defined as “*behavioural manifestations toward the brand or firm, beyond purchase*” (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 253) lies at the heart of the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1). The conceptual framework is informed by COBRA (Consumers’ online brand-related activities) model (Muntinga et al., 2011). The COBRA model is an umbrella behavioural framework (Schivinski et al., 2016) which distinguishes three levels of consumer engagement: consuming, contributing and creating. The COBRA model was adopted because it views consumer engagement as a behavioural concept.

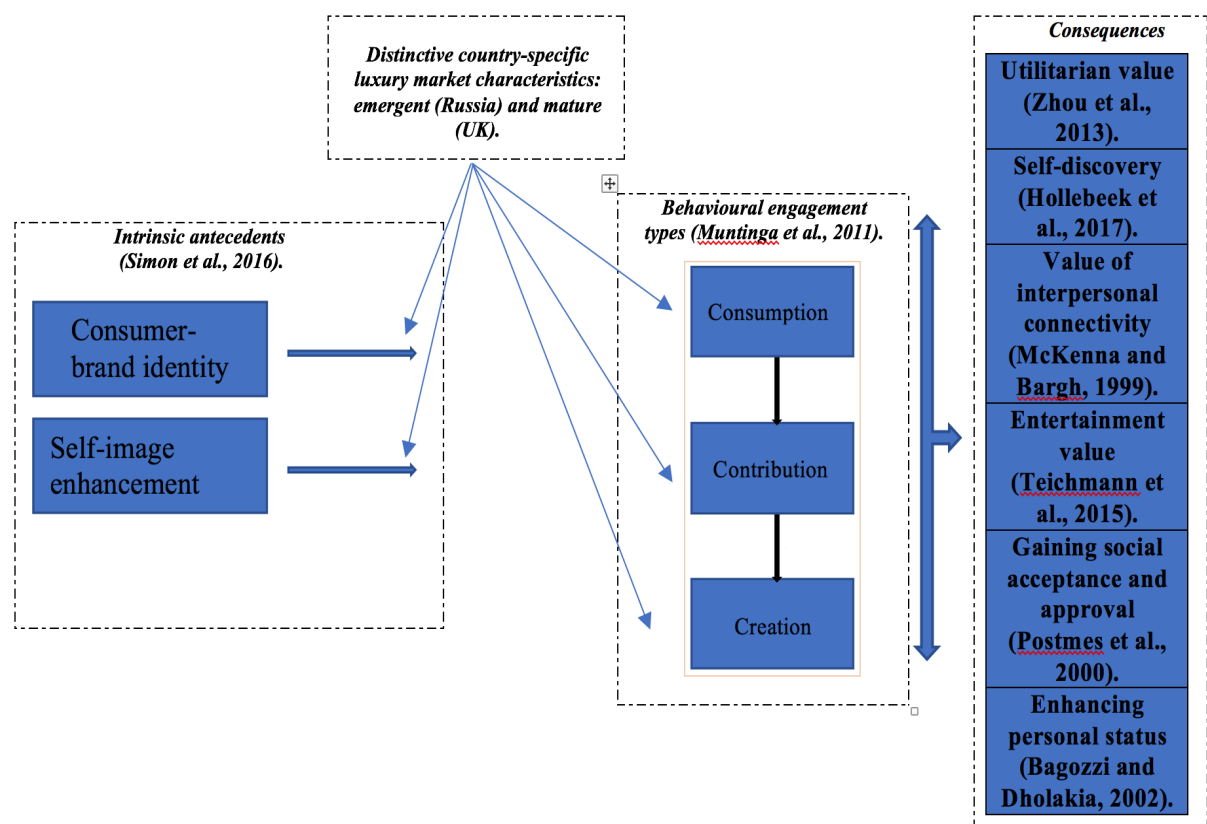


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## **Antecedents**

Simon et al. (2016) argue that external and internal factors impact consumer engagement; nevertheless, internal motivations are more significant. Consumer-brand identification and self-image enhancement value have adopted as antecedents that encourage consumer engagement (Simon et al., 2016).

**Consumer-brand identification** is “consumer’s psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his/her belongingness with a brand” (Lam et al., 2013, p.235). Consumer-brand identification happens when consumer perceives their personal identity overlapping a brand’s identity (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Studies have shown that consumers who identify themselves with the brand are more likely to be involved in brand related activities. Torres et al. (2017) confirm that identification with a brand encourages engagement.

**Self-image enhancement** occurs when a consumer perceives certain benefits from getting social acceptance when associated with a particular brand (Dholakia et al., 2004). Social media allows individuals to represent themselves on a public stage (Toubia and Stephen, 2013). Self-image enhancement is satisfied by the means of social interaction (Alexandrov et al., 2013); therefore, self-image enhancement positively influences customer engagement.

These antecedents can be especially applicable to explain brand-related engagement in the luxury goods context, as individuals may create and share brand-related content to display the status of a luxury goods consumer (Millan and Mittal, 2017).

## **Consequences**

Consequences outlined in the proposed framework highlight the importance of value generation triggered by engagement with brand-related content on social media. Hollebeek et al. (2017) claim that engagement behaviours are projected to create five broad categories of value.

**Utilitarian or purposive value** reflects rational motivation for consumer engagement such as information-seeking. Nowadays individuals use social media to get an insight into a brand they are curious about (Laroche et al., 2012).

**Self-discovery** is “understanding and deepening salient aspects of one’s self through social interactions” (Dholakia et al., 2004, p. 244). Self-discovery is believed to possess two aspects: gaining access to social resources and discovering personal likes and preferences. It is linked to the concept of self-learning (Hollebeek et al., 2017). It can be argued that social media platforms such as Instagram educate the audience about what they like and what they dislike. Their preference is usually described by their engagement behaviours such as “likes”, sharing, advocating, creating positive brand content.

**Interpersonal connectivity** relates to “the social benefits derived from establishing and maintaining contact with other people such as social support, friendship, and intimacy” (Dholakia et al., 2004, p. 244). It expresses individuals’ desire to share time with like-minded individuals (McKenna and Bargh, 1999) and see the content they post or with which they engage.

**Entertainment value** can be defined as a level of enjoyment an individual receives while engaging with content and individuals (Teichmann et al., 2015). Nowadays luxury brands use art as a mean to recreate luxury brands' rarity and value (Chailan, 2018). Image-centric content on Instagram can be seen as a digital gallery with brand-specific content (Athwal et al., 2018).

**Social enhancement** refers to gaining social acceptance and approval through the process of enhancing personal status. Status signalling is particularly relevant to the context of luxury due to its symbolic value. In the era of selfie and narcissism individuals, millennials, in particular, attempt to portray self-concept as an Ideal-self rather than actual-self (Fox et al., 2018).

### Research hypotheses

H1	Consumer-brand identity is positively related to Consumer Engagement with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram.
H2	Self-image enhancement is positively related to Consumer Engagement with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram.
H3 a)	Consumer Engagement with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram is positively associated with the utilitarian value.
H3 b)	Consumer engagement with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram is positively associated with the self-discovery value.
H3 c)	Consumer engagement with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram is positively associated with the connectivity value.
H3 d)	Consumer engagement with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram is positively associated with an entertainment value.
H3 e)	Consumer engagement with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram is positively associated with the social enhancement value.
H4 a)	Distinctive country-specific luxury jewellery market characteristics impact consumer-brand identity with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram.
H4 b)	Distinctive country-specific luxury jewellery market characteristics impact self-image enhancement value when consumers engage with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram.
H4 c)	Distinctive country-specific luxury jewellery market characteristics impact Consumer Engagement with luxury jewellery brand-related content on Instagram.

## **Data collection methods**

### **Stage 1: COBRA framework analysis.**

Stage one carries exploratory research characteristics. It represents a qualitative content analysis of publicly available brand-related content on a social media platform, Instagram. Content analysis is conducted under the template analysis strategy. Template analysis can be defined as “a style of thematic analysis that balances a relatively high degree of structure in the process of analysing textual data with the flexibility to adapt it to the needs of the study” (King, 2012, p.426). COBRA framework serves as a basis for the data interpretation. A priori codes consumption, contribution, creation will be employed to identify key themes. Identified a priori codes are flexible and can be modified. The content will be retrieved manually by the means of ‘hashtags’. Relevant context-specific hashtags will be developed in order to extract raw data. Posts in both languages, Russian and English, will be analysed and evaluated in order to compare and contrast engagement styles. This stage is important as it will benefit the research by providing a deeper understanding of the concept of consumer engagement with brand-related content on social media; reveal under-researched types of consumer engagement behaviour with brand-related content; help to identify differences (if any) in a way brand follower engage with brand-related content on Instagram.

### **Stage 2: Online survey**

The second stage involves a quantitative online survey. **Qualtrics** is used to produce a **self-administrated online survey**. The questionnaire is based on existing and validated scales. The questionnaires are designed in both languages: English and Russian. Research sample characteristics for the second stage are: 1) over 18 years old; 2) Instagram user; 3) luxury jewellery brand follower; 4) representative of Russia or the UK. The sample will consist of 250 UK-based individuals and 250 Russia-centered participants. Participants will be recruited by the means of social media platforms. This stage is developed to test the proposed conceptual model statistically. Furthermore, it is developed to test potential country-specific differences of consumer engagement with brand-related content on social media in the luxury jewellery context.

## **Practical relevance of the research**

In a turbulent world of uncertainties, businesses face extreme challenges on daily basis. Social media revolutionises the way organisations tailor their strategies. Luxury jewellery brands are extremely reluctant to employ and integrate social media into their activities (Ramadan et al., 2018). This fear comes from a disagreement between a unique and prestigious image associated with luxury and mass availability of social media accessible to everyone around the world (Okonkwo, 2009). This research aims to provide a guidance on how luxury jewellery brands can establish and enhance consumer-brand engagement on social media by exploiting Instagram platform as a brand-awareness tool.

### **Current stage**

At the current stage, a literature review has been conducted. Initial publicly available content analysis on Instagram has been undertaken.

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