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**Rationalizing social media opportunities and
customer relationships in the luxury fashion
industry**

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Abstract

The internet is a conventional means of customer communication for all types of business. However, luxury companies are still in the experimental phase of utilizing social media to generate customer relationships. The marketing literature discloses insights into the advantages of social media customer relationships, although there is limited information on how online luxury customers pursue satisfactory social media relationships. Drawing on social identity theory, this paper extends understanding of luxury customers' conceptualization of their social media relationships. Three constituents of company–

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customer online relationships are identified: visualization, status, and intrinsic influence. Our results suggest that social impact conceals perceptions of the online relationship with luxury brands.

Key words: luxury products, online customer relationship, customer satisfaction, social media

Introduction

Luxury brands are steadily increasing their engagement with the internet as an environment of customer acquisition. A report by Luxe Digital revealed that the ‘online sales of luxury items...accounted for 8 per cent of the \$313 billion USD global luxury market at the end of 2016’ (Woodworth, 2019). Luxury companies seem to have focused their core efforts on customer acquisition solely on websites, albeit it has been acknowledged that the integration of social media encourages purchasing (Micu et al., 2017; Chu and Chen, 2019). Social media supports the construction of an online company–customer relationship, diminishing the cognitive doubt customers experience across the pre- to post-purchasing continuum. A critical review of literature implies that online attention, impression, and online recovery experiences help maintain a satisfactory company–customer online

collaboration (Azemi and Ozuem, 2019; Mellema et al., 2019). Customer online attention refers to the extent to which organizations successfully grasp customer interest online in a way that is more effective than their competitors, whereas impression refers to the ‘consumers view[ing of] a communication’ (Kotler and Keller, 2016, p. 6). The online recovery experience refers to any failure to meet a customer’s expectations and the subsequent attempts to address this (Ozuem and Lancaster, 2014; Wolter et al., 2019). A growing number of scholars have examined these three constituents although insight and analysis is typically limited to specific constituents (Bonifield and Cole, 2008; Roggeveen et al., 2015; Herhausen et al., 2019). For example, Mellema et al. (2019) examined the influence that elements such as ‘picture/no picture’ of targeted Facebook ads have on attention generation; they endorsed the utilization of ads with more text than pictures (p. 54). Tellis et al. (2019) explored YouTube as a form of online media ‘which viewers voluntarily view’ (p. 8) - this provides the construct behind the impression. In contrast, scholars have identified that service failure can lead to the inclusion of customers in online Negative Word-of-Mouth (nWOM) exchanges; a prompt response, third party replies, and compensation are the dominant recovery strategies effective in such cases (Azemi et al., 2019).

Recently, Felix et al. (2017) developed a four-fold construct as a guideline to potential organizational positioning in social media usage. These four constructs are: social media scope, culture, structure, and governance. Although their study provided substantial conceptual insight into the extent of social media strategies that companies could apply it provided no rationale for how the selection of one form of positioning over another generates a satisfactory online customer relationship. The present study proposes that a satisfactory online customer relationship is reached when the retailer's assembly of attention, impression, and recovery experience is in line with the customers' expectations. This has traditionally been acknowledged in the marketing literature, although the digital marketing literature invites further conceptualization of specificities that guide the construct of customer expectations of social media communication (Parsons and Conroy, 2006; Kim and Kim, 2016). Such information can prevent potential misalignment between the company and its customers in their online customer relationship. The present study uses social identity theory to decode how customers construe online relationships with companies. Social identification is 'the perception of oneness with or belonging to some human aggregate'; it informs the influence that one has over others in terms of how they view and experience events (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 21). The influence of others in shaping perceptions

is particularly prominent amongst customers of industries where purchasing behavior is mainly psychologically driven; this is certainly the case with luxury branding (Hennigs et al., 2012; Ferrell and Hartline, 2014).

Luxury products have traditionally been identified as exclusive, and affordable only to a ‘selected clientele’ (Kapferer, 2015, p. 716). The purchasing of luxury products is regarded as ‘the visible result’ that one has met the norms of the social status set by the group (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009, p. 313). However, social media has redefined the luxury industry, expanding its accessibility beyond only the few (Ozuem et al., 2019). This expanded the number of potential pressing social forces that shape luxury customers’ decision making. ‘How an individual thinks, feels, and behaves’ originates in the ‘multiple distinct category memberships and social identities that vary in their relative importance’ to the individual (Chattaraman et al., 2010, p. 265). Thus, it is important that luxury companies understand that inferences, which are greatly shaped by others, direct and shape perceptions of their luxury branding relationship.

Therefore, the present study is guided by the following research questions: (1) *How do luxury customers evaluate attention, impression, and recovery in their social media experiences?* (2) *How does social identity shape luxury customers’*

perception of a satisfactory social media relationship? The insights generated position the present study as the first to advance the social media literature with a theoretical understanding of online luxury company–customer relationships from an aggregate perspective. In addition, the present study introduces social identity theory to the context of social media luxury customer relationship literature, deciphering the rationale of how online customer relationships in social media are constructed. Our approach ensures that crucial information on luxury customers’ perceptions of satisfactory online customer relationships is retrieved. This information was used to assemble a social media customer relationship conceptual model, which is a practical guideline for luxury retailers to create satisfactory social media customer relationships.

Theoretical review

While commodity businesses have penetrated e-commerce, luxury brands are still struggling to conceptualize marketing constituents that lead to a satisfactory online customer relationship (Ozuem and Azemi, 2018). Luxury products are defined as products that ‘offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional...capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer’ (Ko et al., 2019, p. 406). An online environment supports mass selling, and it is accepted that mass

marketing does not permit an intimate connection with the customer (Ozuem et al., 2008; Lamb et al. 2019). Luxury products are presented as 'exclusive', implying their accessibility 'only...to a few' (Hennigs et al., 2012, p. 31). The internet generates intense competition for all, directing even companies of commodity products to position themselves as exclusive. The internet has effectively redefined the genuine meaning of exclusivity and product accessibility. For luxury products this translates into a potential loss of customers, many of whom lose the perception that they are gaining access to genuine exclusiveness (Ozuem et al., 2019). The contemporary digital marketing literature has identified that an established online customer's relationship with a company's adequate website is explained primarily by the user's experience (Yousafzai et al., 2005; Seckler et al., 2015; Ong et al., 2015). However, a luxury company's satisfactory tie-in with customers can no longer be achieved if its online presence is limited to a mere website. This is currently dictated by social media, which, from a holistic point of view, emphasizes the three constituents that generate a satisfactory online company-customer relationship. These constituents are customer attention, customer impression, and customer failure-recovery experience.

A stream of research has provided conceptual insight into social media content that generates

customer attention. Parsons and Conroy (2006) posited that the aural and visual stimuli of online messages attract customers. This indicates that online messages should embrace verbal and sound components. The authors suggest that ‘fast tempo, high pitch and average-volume’ and ‘bright, colorful store, with quite a lot of animation and video’ were the aural and visual stimuli for the entertainment business (Parsons and Conroy, 2006, pp. 76–77). The intention of these authors was not to generalize their insight to all business types, as was the case with Kim and Lennon’s (2008) study. Kim and Lennon (2008) stated that when customers view one online message as superior to another, this judgement is based on the verbal content that they are presented with. Roggeveen et al. (2015) recognized that presentational format has an effect on customer attention. They suggest that dynamic messages (i.e., video) appeal more to customers than static messages such as images. Roggeveen et al. (2015) argue that ‘the dynamic presentation format automatically causes customers to imagine the experience’ (p. 43). This potentially creates an emotional attachment between the customer and the product/service prior to the purchase.

Customer impressions determine the selection of one business over another in the set of available choices (Kotler and Keller, 2016). The mainstream doctrine holds that a company’s silence will help customers forget about it. Conversely, it is evident

that exposing a customer to too many social media messages is irritating. Risks from dissatisfied online customers go beyond switching behavior and can sometimes manifest as revenge through online nWOM. This potentially stimulates wider awareness of customer dissatisfaction which could negatively impact on the purchasing behaviors of many (Wetzer et al., 2007; Azemi and Ozuem, 2019). As Herhausen et al. (2019) stated, ‘electronic word of mouth...receives substantial support from other customers in a short period of time’, implying an almost instant awareness of the failure that affects other customers, which is not the case with offline word-of-mouth (WOM) (p. 1). Researchers have identified multiple consequences of online nWOM. Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) discussed the engagement of the public in nWOM and noted the mass criticism that this attracted. Weitzl and Hutzinger (2017) revealed that nWOM reaches bystanders who do not participate in negative content, but who consider such information when switching to another provider. Rauschnabel et al. (2019) explained how customers use hashtags – ‘a # symbol before a relevant keyword, which allows users to link their postings to other content around the same topic’ (p. 473) – implying a substantially enlarged reach of audience with hashtag nWOM. Furthermore, Lima et al. (2019) demonstrated the strong bonding of members of brand communities in social media, indicating that group thinking directs customers’ evaluation of a company; this

suggests an increased risk for the company if the online nWOM is generated within the community. Services marketing literature revealed various strategies to recover from nWOM, such as apology, explanation, empathy compensation, customer recovery and co-creation (Ozuem and Lancaster, 2014; Abney et al., 2017; Azemi et al., 2019). This enhances theoretical interpretations of such strategies, albeit there is evidence that businesses still struggle to satisfactorily utilize them. It also invites scholars to take an all-embracing social media approach across its constituents, namely online customer attention, online customer impression, and online recovery to stem potential obstructions in company–online customer relationships.

Currently, there are only theoretical insights into specific social constituents; the lack of established guidelines leaves luxury companies with a potential gray area in their approach to social media. Recently, Felix et al. (2017) developed a social media marketing framework with four components:

- scope (i.e., ‘use [of] social media marketing...for communication [vs.] a one-way communication to entertain consumers’);
- culture (i.e., ‘traditional [vs.] a more permeable, open, and flexible social media culture’);

- structure (i.e., ‘a centralized approach with a clearly defined social media marketing assignee [vs. inclusion of] all employees...[in] social media marketing’); and
- governance (i.e., ‘rules and guideline...[to] control social media marketing responsibilities [vs.] without such rules or guidelines’) (p. 120).

These components represent the extent of multiple social media positionings available for companies to construct online customer relationships. However, the framework overlooks the customers’ viewpoint – constituting a potential discrepancy between the company’s usage of social media marketing and customer expectations. Further, the four-fold framework does not specify how online customer attention, customer impressions, and satisfactory failure-recovery experiences are achieved. However, these are a prerequisite to a successful online customer relationship. To address this theoretical gap, the present study proposes that a satisfactory online company–customer relationship is reached upon the construction of social media marketing strategies focused on three online constituents: customer attention, customer impression, and customer failure-recovery experience. This provides insight into customer perceptions of social media relationships. Understanding such perceptions is

crucial to decipher the detailed information necessary for the construction of online customer relationship structures.

Social identity theory can be applied to understand customer perceptions. A central premise of social identity theory is that ‘people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories as a means of determining self-identity and belongingness to some larger human aggregate’ (Ambrose et al., 2018, p. 271). That is, ‘the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications’ (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 224). Having said that, through social identity theory, an understanding of customer perceptions goes beyond merely describing customer perceptions to effectively identify the rationale behind these perceptions relative to other social actors. Ambrose et al. (2018) highlighted that demographic characteristics, such as gender and age, determine one’s ability to identify with a specific group. For digital marketing scholars, social media activates psychological utility, such as a feeling versus the need for an online product, to determine one’s affinity (Azemi et al., 2019).

The present study studies millennials as a source of new insight. There does not appear to be a fixed definition for the term millennials; however, the

present study considers millennials to be the generation ‘born between 1979 and 1994’ (Lamb et al., 2019, p. 55). A study of the millennial generation enables understanding of the diverse scenarios of customers’ relationships with the social media platforms of luxury companies. As Lucero-Romero and Arias-Bolzmann (2019) stated, ‘there are differences within ... [millennial] population’ (p. 366). An inclusive millennial cohort permits an enhanced understanding of the diverse traits present within the group; these traits influence millennials’ development of beliefs (Civera et al. 2018). Millennials are in an age group with an increased inclination to share their viewpoints (Woo, 2018), implying that one person’s viewpoint can be the foundation of another’s belief.

Further, millennials are the principal buyers of luxury products. For example, in 2017 they accounted for an increase of 48.7% in sales revenue for Gucci (Primo, 2018). Hence, millennials have amplified exposure to social media experiences, which should lead to improved theoretical insight into online luxury company–customer relationships with practical implications for satisfactory online luxury brands–customer tie-ups.

Methodology and methods

The present study utilizes social constructivism as a paradigm of inquiry. Social constructivism suggests ‘that individuals develop and give meaning to the world’ (Howell, 2013, p. 89); that is, reality is an outcome of social construction (Azemi and Ozuem, 2019; Appiah et al. 2019; Azemi et al. 2019). This does not mean that individuals assign identical meanings to experiences, rather, ‘each is free to judge the work of others and to accept it or reject it if it does not communicate something meaningful about the world; and what is meaningful for one person is not necessarily meaningful for another’ (Vidich and Lyman, 2000, p. 39). This is in line with the principles of social identity theory, which indicate that there is some potential similarity across the particular inferences made by individuals. Agreement is reached when similar inferences dominate one’s disposition. As such, social constructivism enables researchers to decipher important inferences that shape customer perceptions of social media (customer attention, customer impression, and customer failure-recovery experience) from a stand-alone perspective, and in the context of other online customers.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, acknowledged to stem unintended ignorance of participants’ insight (Robson, 2013; Appiah et al. 2019; Azemi et al.

2019). In line with the purpose of the current research, such interviews ‘reveal the cognitive world and daily situated practices of the individual’ (Malefyt, 2015, p. 2497). A theoretical sampling approach was utilized which led to 7 in-depth interviews with online luxury customers. Such a sample size is well supported by qualitative researchers, who aim for in-depth conceptualization of phenomena (Ozuem et al., 2016; Lopez and Rodriguez, 2018). Researcher networking led to the recruitment of the first interviewees and the snowballing technique was used to recruit the rest of the participants. Interviewees were asked five questions about each constituent of the online customer relationship, namely customer attention, customer impression, and customer failure-recovery experience. The construction of the questions was guided mostly by the contemporary exploratory approach and Gergen and Gergen’s (2000) overview of exploratory inquiry through ‘societal critique’ (p. 1025). This generated insight into actual and desired customer experiences, which was essential to decipher the rationale of the perception construct. ‘*How did you hear about the online company that you have purchased from?*’ and ‘*What should an online luxury company do to make you purchase from them?*’ are examples of the former and the latter question types.

**Table 1: Themes: visualization, status, and
intrinsic influence**

THEMES	CODES	WORDS
Visualization	Deliverer	Guru Fashionista Celebrity Happy Admire Associate myself to
	Appearance	Bright Picture Less words Large letters Flashing Call for urgency
	Frequency	Friend's reaction Once or twice per day per week Die down for a week Irritated
Status	Source	Attendees Family Husband Friends of my friends
	Content	A storyteller

		Showcase the benefit
		Relatable
		Natural setting
		Prestigious
Intrinsic influence	Acknowledgement	Incentive Gift card Monetary resolution A new product
	Understanding	Reviews Other people

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using the conventional content analytical approach, which necessitates the coding of narrative generated from interviews (Ryan and Bernard, 2000; Azemi and Ozuem, 2019). The coding originated in the ‘patterns of meanings’ throughout interviews (Appiah et al. 2019, p. 465). Patterns of similar meanings were organized into themes (Azemi et al., 2019; Ozuem et al., 2019). This led to the emergence of three themes: (1) visualization, (2), status, and (3) intrinsic influence (Table 1).

Visualization refers to the constituents of a company’s online message that captures the customer’s attention (Huang, 2018; Mellema et al., 2019). It refers to the customer’s quick imagination in terms of how he/she might look

while using a product following exposure to a company's online message. Imagination seems to be influenced by the customer's evaluation of self in the context of others. The constituents that trigger visualization include extrinsic undertakings, such as the deliverer of the message, and the message content provided by the company. In the following quote, a marketing manager highlights that it was the deliverer of a message that grasped his immediate attention.

'An online message has my attention if it is delivered by an individual that I am familiar with, such as a guru of fashion or even a celebrity that I like. Just the idea that I might buy the product makes me happy...for a second, I put myself in the place of the fashionista or the celebrity.... I associate myself to them. The message from a person that you admire gets your attention as soon as you're exposed to it.'

The appearance of a message seems to be of paramount importance when it comes to winning the customer's attention. This seems to support customers' imagination of friends' reaction to the luxury product. A female student elaborated on this point as follows:

'Messages that stand out have pictures and less wording. Pictures should give me a clear idea of how the luxury product would look like on me if I had bought the product. Luxury products are

expensive and I do not want to buy something that my friends would not like. Great pictures help visualize myself with the product on, and to imagine the reaction of friends when they see that.'

Further, the look of a company's message can convey a state of urgency. A female secretary interpreted this as follows:

'The commercial should be bright, have large letters that flash. That gives me the feeling of urgency to buy the product.'

Customer perceptions of message visualization seem to be mediated by the frequency of their exposure to the message. This was noted by a female assessment representative as follows:

'Commercials that show up on my page once or twice per day for about a week get my attention. However, they should then die for a week; otherwise, I get irritated, and feel that the company is desperate to sell.'

Status is the prestigious positioning that a customer acquires at an event if using a luxury product (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Ozuem and Azemi, 2018). The source of the status consists of the attendees of a particular occasion/event. The attendee continuum includes reference family individuals such as parents and significant others, colleagues, and friends of friends.

A female business owner noted::

‘People at the event that I plan to attend are the source of my interest in viewing a commercial in social media. I want others and, in particular, my husband to wow when seeing me in the room. Also, I imagine what the audience, that I am not necessarily a close friend to, such as friends of friends, will look like and what impression I will make on them with my dress.’

The feeling that a product helps the customer reach a desired status pertains to the way in which the content of a message is presented. A female secretary stated the following:

‘I expect to see a commercial that gives me that feeling of owning a product that is prestigious. I have seen that many companies try to present products as being prestigious through fictional settings. I get convinced that a product will give me the true feeling of prestigious if the message is presented from a storyteller perspective in a natural setting – otherwise, I would associate the product to a fake one.’

Further, content that is based on a natural setting helps customers relate to the product. This natural setting allows for greater exposure to the product’s benefits. A female student commented:

‘Commercials with natural content help me relate to the product and acknowledge the benefits of the product.’

Intrinsic influence refers to a company’s acknowledgement of an incident (Azemi et al., 2019; Ozuem and Lancaster, 2014). Millennial luxury customers associate a company’s acknowledgement of responsibility for an incident and appreciation of the customer with monetary resolution. In this line of thought, a male Assistant Professor stated:

‘The company should provide a monetary resolution. I had already paid a lot for the product; I expect any type of incentive such as a gift card or even a free new product.’

The expectation of financial reward seems to be derived from other people’s reviews. A female student commented:

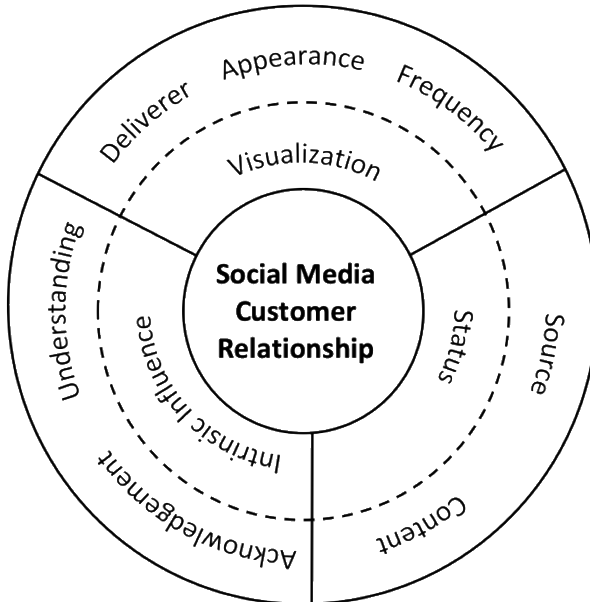
‘I make sure to read online reviews posted by other people; their experience helps me set the expectation.’

Discussion: the social media customer relationship model

The three emerged themes of visualization, status, and intrinsic influence generate customer attention, impression, and satisfactory failure recovery, respectively. An aggregate iteration of the themes supports the emergent social media customer relationship model (see Fig. 1). The model suggests that social media messages must meet customer expectations across the three constituents for a satisfactory customer relationship to occur. Visualization leads to a company's grasp of their customers' attention. Many scholars have acknowledged the struggle that companies experience to win the attention of customers (Mellema et al., 2019; Ozuem et al., 2019). The present study proposes that a customer's perceptions of an online message is mediated by (a) the deliverer of the online message that the customer associates the self to, (b) the appearance of the online message that trigger a prompt need for the product, and (c) the customer's exposure to the message no more than twice per day for one week followed by no exposure the following week. Such messages might go unnoticed in situations where the deliverer of the message does not trigger some sense of association and/or the potential of being

situated in the same reference group. The lack of a positive first impression hinders the customer's drive for the product, which in turn means the message fails to grasp the customer's attention. However, a customer's attention might still be gained if the company's online message is presented twice per day for one week. When customers are exposed to messages more frequently, they might quickly grow tired of it. Existing literature acknowledges that annoyed customers postpone purchasing and switching to competitors (Azemi et al., 2019). While the frequency of the company's message seems to be of paramount importance, frequency, deliverer, and appearance are not mutually exclusive components. For visualization to be achieved, a luxury company's online message should meet the criteria of all its three constituents.

Fig. 1. Social media customer relationship model



Analysis suggests that the message source and its content can lead to higher customer engagement with the company's online message. The present study associated the message source with the customer's sense that they are buying a prestigious product and it suggests the evaluation of the meaning of prestige as based on other people. A growing body of scholars have proposed that social media increases the influence of other people on decision making and customer perceptions of a company (Micu et al., 2017;

Azemi and Ozuem, 2019). While existing literature identified luxury branding with fancy and unique products (Hennigs et al., 2012; Ko et al., 2019), the present study suggests that the novelty of products is evaluated through its benefits. That is, customers should be able to relate to the benefits of the product. This happens in situations in which the content of a company's online message is presented by a storyteller and is cast in a natural setting. In line with existing literature, the emergent model reveals an increased risk of customer dissatisfaction in online luxury branding. While extant literature proposed non-monetary techniques to successfully address customer dissatisfaction (Ozuem and Lancaster, 2014; Azemi et al., 2019), the findings from this study reveal a luxury company's recovery approach is often limited to monetary benefits, such as incentives, gift cards, and/or new products. The existing literature seems to have provided suggestions that pertain to commodity products that require limited personal and monetary investment. In contrast, luxury products are placed within specialty goods that generally require a high level of customer involvement (Ferrell and Hartline, 2014). There is evidence that highly involved customers in purchasing decision-making evaluate the purchasing and the failure-recovery experiences on utility bases (Ozuem and Lancaster, 2014). It seems that the evaluation of online luxury customers originates from their financial and emotional investment in the

purchasing process. However, expectations of monetary benefits seem to be driven, in general, by other online luxury customers and their online reviews and recommendations.

Managerial implications and conclusion

The social media customer relationship model invites luxury companies to perceive social media as crucial to the construction of online customer relationships. Further, it suggests that customer relationship are developed across multiple online customer–company touchpoints (i.e., visualization, status, and intrinsic influence). Firstly, this calls for the development of online luxury messages that meet customers’ expectations in terms of both visualization and status. Visualization implies that an online message should be visually attractive and that the message deliverer should be someone with whom the customer can relate to. Further, it recommends that the customer should not be exposed to the company’s message for more than 14 times per week followed by no exposure for the following week. Status suggests that a message should trigger a feeling in a customer of owning a product that is prestigious, yet one that the customer can relate to. Further, the social media customer relationship model indicates that online luxury companies utilize monetary incentives, such as gift cards and new products, in cases of customer dissatisfaction.

The present study suggests that customer evaluations of visualization, status, and intrinsic influence (i.e., the company–customer relationship) are mediated by other social actors, such as family, friends, celebrities, and even other people with whom the customer is not familiar. This is in line with Wang and Griskevicius’s (2014) study that implied that luxury products make customers feel confident of their societal positioning relative to other societal members. The authors suggested that ‘pricey possessions... [are] signal[s] to other women that their romantic partners are devoted to them,’ and that luxury products ‘deter rivals from poaching their relationship partner’ (p. 846). Their study disclosed that luxury products increase female customers’ self-esteem. This experience does not seem to occur among customers of commodity markets. Sharma et al. (2020) revealed that luxury products ‘signal status’ (p. 35). Further, Sharma et al. (2020) associated ‘the scarcity’ of luxury products in the market with people’s perception of luxury products as products that enhance societal status (p. 35). As such, luxury companies should continuously analyze millennial customers in terms of the status of their reference groups regardless of their demographic background.

Finally, the social media customer relationship model posits that others’ online WOM directs online luxury customer evaluations of recovery

experiences. Hence, it is recommended that luxury companies should address all online inquiries. This could be perceived by customers as a sign of the company's attentiveness to their experience. Online inquiries could be facilitated by a digital marketing team within the marketing department that works closely with customer service. An online message is often followed up with a direct call to customer service; hence, training the representatives of these departments on regulations that pertain to the components of the emerged social media customer relationship model would diminish the risk of misaligned expectations.

Limitations and future research

The study sought to capture the data that is representative of all genders. However, more females took part in the study. It is recommended that future research examines the differences across female and male perceptions of social media customer relationships. This would ensure that luxury companies have a satisfactory relationship with customers of all gender types. Further, the social media customer relationship that emerged is inclusive of all luxury product industries. Further research that focuses on particular luxury brands should conceptualize specificities relevant to certain luxury product types. Finally, a future comparative study of customer perceptions of online customer

relationships across different age groups would develop an understanding of heterogeneity across online luxury customers. This would support luxury brands' construction of relationships with all customer types regardless of their positioning.

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