AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

NEW MEDIA MARKETING CHALLENGES IN A
MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT: LUXURY FASHION
BRANDS IN DUBAI

by
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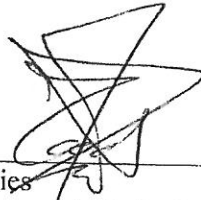at the American University of Beirut

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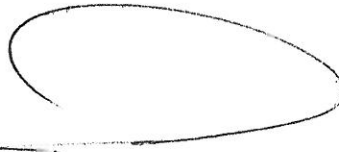
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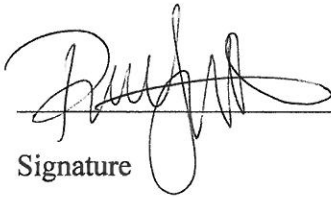   Last   First   Middle

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

<u>Rula Sawaf</u>   for   <u>Master of Arts</u>
<u>Major</u>: Media Studies

Title: <u>New Media Marketing Challenges in a Multicultural Environment: Luxury</u>
        <u>Fashion Brands in Dubai</u>

The purpose of this study is to present a critical analysis of luxury brand management in multicultural environments with an emphasis on new media. Digital communications and new media have changed the way people engage with brands, but with the advancement of media technology and rapid globalization, it is vital to adapt the best marketing approach for the luxury industry's target audience. Using qualitative interviews of luxury brand managers in the quintessential multicultural luxury fashion hub of Dubai, this study highlights the different marketing and new media strategies luxury companies utilize to target, sell, and spread brand awareness to the diverse audience. The study indicates that to be successful, luxury companies need to strengthen localized marketing, combine both traditional and modern media in their marketing strategy, and promote their luxury image with a cross cultural marketing approach to manage their exclusivity and accessibility. The research integrates well-known marketing challenges and dilemmas with hopes to clarify a better understanding of marketing in an increasing multicultural world.

Keywords: luxury marketing, cross-cultural marketing (CCM), multicultural marketing (MCM), new media, digital media, social media, diversity, Dubai, luxury fashion brands

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Digital communication technologies and new media changed the way consumers engage with brands and can offer a plethora of data on consumer behavior (Egol, Peterson, & Stroh, 2014). But with expanding digital innovation and globalization, it is increasingly more important for media companies to choose the right digital marketing model for their audience. In light of the growing interest of new media as a marketing tool for brands, this research explores the marketing challenges in a multicultural environment and the strategies for reaching a hyper-diverse audience. Moreover, this study explores trends and patterns in luxury brand marketing in the global city of Dubai, the perfect place to study luxury and hybridization of cultures, to further understand how new media can help ease marketing difficulties.

New media have been integrated into the daily lives of consumers and changed the way they connect with others to exchange ideas, information, and opinions (Choi, 2011). However, the power of new media doesn't come without legitimate challenges affecting marketing and brand managers today. Some scholars claim that this new media power proliferates an inequality stemming from diversity or "socially constructed differentiations" (Taylor, Walker, & Hoyler, 2002). Marketers are facing increasingly more diverse and multicultural marketplaces due to globalization of markets and international competition (Luna & Gupta, 2001). Furthermore, transnational communication media like satellite television and online platforms are exposing consumers to different wants and needs (Luna & Gupta, 2001). New media can have interesting effects on industries marketing to a multicultural audience.

1

A. Luxury Industry Today

In the beginning of the digital age, luxury brands were hesitant to adapt to new media because of the ubiquitous nature of social networks and the struggle to maintain exclusivity. However, luxury brands are actually using new media platforms to ease the tension between the need to keep the exclusivity vital to brand integrity and the inclusivity necessary to acquire new customers (MillwardBrown, 2013).

Luxury companies are forced to balance the use of mass marketing strategies while accentuating the exclusivity of their products *(*Hennigs, Wiedmann, & Klarmann, 2012). Brands are using new media to mediate this tension by becoming more innovative and collaborative in their marketing strategy. This study takes a deeper look into the management of these marketing challenges facing luxury fashion brands today and how they are strategically using new media specifically to sell, target, and spread brand awareness to a multicultural environment.

Despite marketing challenges, the luxury industry has a substantial and growing presence as a $220 billion global industry (Keller, 2009). The luxury goods and services sector continues to develop and profit with strong annual growth figures, despite the economic decline in recent years (Jin, 2012).

B. Dubai: The Multicultural Global City of the Middle East

Dubai is a specific area of interest because of its powerhouse personality and remarkable, unprecedented urbanization in the Arab region (Tolba & Saab, 2008). UAE shoppers rank among the highest in consumers of high-end brands, according to a Nielsen survey of 51 countries and global luxury brands (Butts & Pal, 2008). The

survey indicated that one in three UAE customers buy luxury fashion brands (Butts & Pal, 2008).

Dubai is also ranked as the number one destination for luxury shopping in the MENA region according to an American Express Middle East spending survey (Emirates 24/7, 2014). The survey also revealed that overall luxury spending in the region is projected to grow even more in 2015.

The UAE is a highly diverse country composed of multiple ethnic groups with their own heritage and sub-culture, making jobs for marketers more challenging when trying to convey the ideal brand image to the ideal target audience (Williams & Ashill, 2011). Marketing and media industries have to deal with the rapid urbanization and growing population on all cultural levels to achieve success (Saraf, 2014).

With a unique personality and position on the globe between the east and west, it is easy to see where Dubai receives a reputation as a multicultural, hybrid city. Emirati locals are a minority in their own country; the majority of residents are Arab, Asian, and western (Elsheshtawy, 2004). Approximately 92% of the Emirati population of just over two million people are expatriates or migrant workers (Globe Media Ltd., 2014).The population of immigrants is one of the highest in the world and nationals are outnumbered seven to one by non-Arab expatriates from India, Pakistan, Iran, and others (Elsheshtawy, 2004).

Furthermore, some research implicates globalization for the new challenges in advertising for multinational corporations because of how immigrant consumers view advertising in different contexts (Jimenez, Hadjimarcou, Barua, & Michie, 2013). The dichotomy between global and local advertising revolves around a system of self-regulation where the same advertisement will have different meanings in different

markets (Special Session World Marketing Congress, 2013). Another challenge in the struggle between local and global is that if a marketer is trying to please a global audience targeting everyone, does that render the advertisement ineffective by actually targeting nobody? Because of a globalized media landscape, there is always a risk when a message reaches an unintended audience (Special Session World Marketing Congress, 2013).

The city of Dubai promotes a friendly, open-minded business environment and fosters a service industry that encourages tourism and investments from around the world (Bundhun, 2011). The service industry employees make up an estimated 78% of the workforce (CIA World Factbook, 2011). Dubai hopes to establish itself as the worldwide hub for leisure, service, and commerce (Bundhun, 2011).

The Arab world is experiencing the fastest adoption rates of social media in the world especially with a growing population of youths under the age of 25 making up two thirds of the Arab population (Ferris-Lay, 2011). New digital media is a dominant media on the rise in the UAE (Epps & Demangeot, 2013). There is a growing potential for digital media in multicultural communities that marketers can utilize to help "increase brand awareness, create brand loyalty, and establish long-term relationships with global consumers" (Kamal & Chu, 2012).

Marketing managers navigate to where their consumers are, and in the UAE, that is online. The UAE has the second highest internet penetration in the Arab world at 95.7%, according to Internet World Stats (2014), an internet usage tracking organization, indicating 8.8 million people out of the 9.2 million population are using the internet (Bahrain ranked first). Further, the number of internet users in the Arab world is expected to grow to over 400 million by 2015 (Kattan, 2013)**.**

Similarly, mobile phone penetration and the popularity of smartphones are also substantial in the UAE at 200% – significantly more that the more populous Egypt and Saudi Arabia (Ferris-Lay, 2011). Middle East consumer internet traffic on mobile devices is expected to grow from 10% in 2012 to 31% by 2017 (Kattan, 2013).

The rising internet penetration rates and the growing population attract western advertising and marketing campaigns to the region (Ferris-Lay, 2011). It is easy to see why luxury brands aim to successfully market to the Dubai audience. Over two-thirds of firms in the Arab world increased their digital marketing budget since 2010 indicating a trend of using new media tools in the Middle East (Yousafi, 2012).

The rise in new, social, and interactive media in the Middle East transforms consumer and marketing habits (Epps & Demangeot, 2013). Brands are more engaged in an interactive communication system to work together with their consumers to build new products, services, business models, and values (Kim & Ko, 2012).

C. Cross Cultural Approach and Multicultural Approach

With great diversity come great marketing challenges when targeting a highly segmented audience. New media in particular struggle to market to the multicultural audience of Dubai and luxury fashion and lifestyle companies need the optimal approach for their consumers. Marketers navigate this ethnic marketing with two main approaches called multicultural and cross-cultural. Multicultural marketing (MCM) describes using separate strategies for separate ethnic segments thereby differentiating segments based on culture. Cross-cultural marketing (CCM) approaches strategies by reaching all ethnic segments and increasing the diversity and hybridization of cultures (Villa, 2014; Epps & Demangeot, 2013).

Marketing theorists consider the two approaches as "the great debate" (Sagers, 2012) since it is still unclear as to which strategy is superior in hyper-diverse environments. This study attempts to compare both approaches and examine which strategy best suits luxury brand marketing. Further, because this dilemma occurs in other increasingly diversifying regions like the United States (Sagers, 2012), this study can contribute to marketing theories and applications in similar markets.

Using qualitative interviews with prominent luxury marketers and media managers in Dubai, this research project divulges how companies utilize new media to cater to the vast diversity and multiculturalism in Dubai. By conducting in-depth interviews with the people experiencing these challenges first-hand, this research reveals what initiatives have worked or failed in the attempt to reach the extremely diverse audience in Dubai. The implications will help guide researchers and marketers to the best approach when using new media for luxury fashion brands in a global city.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review analyzes previous studies and research about the challenges facing marketers in a highly diverse environment and examines luxury brand management with new media. The section elaborates on the challenges and opportunities of ethnic marketing and targeting a diverse audience; how luxury companies today use new media to market their brands while maintaining their exclusivity and other luxury traits; and the demographic profile of Dubai and why it is an ideal environment for studying both the luxury industry and ethnic marketing strategies.

A. Ethnic Marketing Challenges

Marketers have to be highly strategic when targeting consumers in highly diverse markets. The consumer base cannot be analyzed as one single section of customers with the same spending habits (Saraf, 2014). Saraf outlines how "ethnic marketing" can help businesses target different ethnicities by understanding the specific drivers that shape their identity. For example, a jewelry company may use a famous Bollywood Actress in their advertising campaign to reach the large Indian population in Dubai – a clear example of MCM.

The multiculturalism of the Gulf is increasingly difficult to manage because cultural differences can impair the specific message from reaching a specific target audience. Similarly, it is also challenging to market premium products to niche subgroups since most of the media in the UAE are generated for the masses (Saraf, 2014). Media in the UAE generally lack custom, regional communication outlets that can be leveraged for specific ethnic groups which may be an indicator that the CCM approach is more effective (Saraf, 2014).

Another challenge Saraf notes is the Middle East region includes small, scattered segments, spread over separate markets making custom, highly-targeted marketing efforts pricey and time-consuming. The Arab consumer is exposed to various international brands, therefore Saraf recommends marketers to branch out of the conventional marketing strategies. Saraf recommends that marketers keep their standards at par with international brand strategies and reiterates that implementing a consistent brand strategy will be a more successful communication plan.

In social media, a user's cultural background plays a significant role in determining their buying patterns and preferences (Kamal & Chu, 2012). Social networking sites are rapidly growing into a multibillion dollar industry with the power to cross geographic and cultural boundaries. The beliefs and attitudes toward advertising on social media can help marketers understand the behavior of culturally diverse users (Kamal & Chu, 2012). The authors in this study used an online survey to collect data that help media managers develop effective communication strategies to target highly diverse, cultural groups. Research revealed that the main purpose of new media (like social networks) is the ability to better target audiences with very diverse compositions.

To understand marketing to diverse audiences, Epps and Demangeot (2013) implemented a study about diversity versus fragmentation in the multicultural UAE market. Using focus groups and workshops featuring managers of advertising and marketing campaigns in the UAE, they tracked the Emirati identity alongside multiculturalism trends and analyzed the challenges and opportunities for marketers in the UAE. They noted the greatest challenges to be cultural diversity, sensitivity of consumers, and the conflict of a highly diversified marketplace with a wide range of nonhomogeneous consumers (Epps & Demangeot, 2013). The most successful marketing projects honored and celebrated differences and cultural diversity. The authors revealed two main approaches to help marketers navigate the Emirati market:

1. The *cross-cultural approach* combines cultures in a segment and increases the diversity within each segment and addresses globalization and how gradually people are exposed and responding to more ideas and products from different cultures so marketers must consider hybridization of cultures (Epps & Demangeot, 2013).

2. The *multicultural approach* differentiates consumers by their cultures into different segments and focuses on the importance of understanding different attitudes and behaviors unique to each culture and being careful not to offend or alienate groups by using a specific language.

The cross-cultural approach is more productive according to the authors because it identifies the cultural pluralism, resulting in the country's growth and success. With this approach, business competition will prosper yielding a new "generation of wealth, new resources, improved infrastructures, and creation of more economic and social opportunities" (Epps & Demangeot, 2013).

Lastly, the authors affirm social media as a necessary tool for media marketers in the UAE. The Dubai customer is very tech-savvy and more social media literate than anywhere else in the region (Epps & Demangeot, 2013). Marketing firms should not consider social media something they can control but a medium to observe and use to establish relationships and dialogue with customers. To summarize, new digital media give marketers the opportunity to leverage communications for their brands in a globalized environment.

B. New Media in Business Today

New media as defined by Terry Flew (2008) is a type of technology that is digital, capable of manipulation, networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive. Some examples include but are not limited to the internet, websites, blogs, video games, web advertising, or social media like Facebook where users are also participants and content-generators (Flew, 2008). New media marketing is a relatively new resource for businesses to harness the power of online communities for a two-way communication

link with their consumers instead of the static, one-way, traditional advertising (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Perhaps the most popular form of new media is the social network. This new mediascape, combined with the promotion of an ideal life, encourages brand recognition and drives consumers to purchase, subsequently fulfilling the purpose of advertising (Saadeghvaziri, Dehdashti, & Reza, 2013). Social types of communication platforms provide companies with multiple opportunities like building awareness, increasing traffic to brand sites, building relationships with customers, obtaining their loyalty, and developing a brand community environment for the development of new ideas and innovation (Boitor et al., 2011). Social networks have created an entirely new marketing environment where the consumer is in control and generating brand content with the brand itself (Boitor et al., 2011). Approximately 88% of the Middle East online population uses a social networking site every day (Kattan, 2013).

New online ways of advertising via social networks have an impact on marketers and consumers alike. By effectively using social media as part of a sound marketing strategy, companies can promote and advertise their products and services to better defined customer segments (Boitor, Bratucu, Boscor, & Talpau, 2011). Today, consumers are connected, informed, and empowered more than ever before (Choi, 2011).

It's no surprise that new media integration is at the top of every marketing agenda because companies know that the effective utilization of social engagement can enhance their competitive advantage in the marketplace (Choi, 2011). It is important to study luxury branding within the new media context because of the vast potential and growing magnitude of both concepts. Brands that are not engaging in new media are

missing opportunities to reach audiences with very high percentages of people passing along information to others via social media (Kim & Ko, 2012). Today, it has never been more important for luxury brand managers to be skilled and informed about new media because of increasing globalization, innovative technologies, and shifting consumer cultures (Keller, 2009).

C. Luxury Brand Management with New Media

Luxury branding and new media have been topics of interest for management professionals and scholars alike. Keller (2009) presented challenges and opportunities facing marketers in the luxury industry. He described characteristics to define luxury branding and then placed particular emphasis on the importance of brand equity measurement and brand architecture as growth strategies for luxury brands. Luxury businesses in particular face an interesting paradox with social media and managing specific growth "tradeoffs". Keller (2009) defines these three main tradeoffs as:

1. Exclusive vs. accessible: luxury brands have to remain aspirational and special but also relevant to grow their customer base and increase sales.

2. Classic vs. contemporary: luxury brands are proud of their heritage and cherish their history but must also appeal to younger, potential future customers by being contemporary.

3. Retention vs. acquisition: luxury brands must balance their marketing strategy to maintain their loyal, existing customers but also target prospective, new customers.

Further research on these growth tradeoffs through new media usage can help marketing managers design better brand architecture and execute smart digital marketing programs.

The core of this research project is to discover how luxury brands are harnessing the power of new media for brand management. Jin (2012) used functional theories of attitude to explore the marketing potential of luxury brands using social media. The author conducted a survey prompting participants to access Louis Vuitton's Facebook page and to then complete a questionnaire that measured variables such as: satisfaction with the brand, overall perception of the brand, and behavioral intentions to use social media for online research. The value of this study is a comprehensive understanding of how a luxury brand can promote user-generated (or consumer-generated) branding in social media while also maintain brand integrity and an exclusive reputation on a mass scale.

Hennigs et al. (2012) studied luxury brands like Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Burberry to demonstrate the effectiveness of an international social media campaign for a luxury brand. The study used these luxury examples in the digital age and analyzed the dilemma between exclusivity and ubiquity. Through an analysis of "high class with mass class" the authors questioned how a democratic, universal medium like the internet can help luxury brands maintain their vital exclusivity. After discussing the importance of exclusivity as a defining characteristic of luxury, the study proved that the internet is the perfect environment to create a "sense of desirability with the distribution of content that appeals to existing and potential consumers but to remain exclusive in terms of selective distribution of the actual product" (Hennigs et al., 2012).

This study also used four luxury value perceptions to demonstrate the power of social media to reach global audiences while simultaneously maintaining their exclusivity: financial value, functional value, individual value, and social value. The financial value signifies the importance of a premium price being associated with, "unique and exclusive products, superb quality, handmade craftsmanship, and impeccable service" (Hennigs et al., 2012). The functional value of luxury in an online environment, indicates how brands must show usability, quality, and uniqueness of a luxury product or service. The individual value emphasizes the importance of how a luxury brand appeals to the emotional needs of consumers and how the products must give the consumers a sense of individual identity that matches the qualities of the luxury product. And lastly, the social value of luxury incorporates the power of social media for a luxury brand and the notion that an individual's social group may not all be customers but can be advocates and successful promoters if the right marketing strategy is utilized (Hennigs et al., 2012).

Based on the considerable literature and previous research, it is clear to see the dilemma between cross-cultural and multicultural marketing approaches for luxury brands. Businesses have to contrast different strategies with local and international standards to ensure a unified and effective marketing plan. The previous research also explains how Dubai as a global city is an ideal market to study these marketing trends and strategies but also outlines the challenges of a hyper-diverse market. This study examines the new and social types of communications used by local marketing and brand managers to successfully leverage their brand with their consumers and asks these experienced individuals exactly how they manage their luxury fashion brand in Dubai. The research question this study strives to address is: what marketing strategies are

luxury businesses using to target, sell, and spread brand awareness using new media in multicultural markets?

METHODOLOGY

In-depth qualitative interviews were used to answer the research question and gather insights from media and marketing executives working in Dubai and struggling with the aforementioned challenges. Qualitative research is about depth information and qualitative interviews give space and time for descriptive experiences and notions about the diversity in Dubai's media landscape today. The study uses the answers and findings to produce insight and trends for luxury marketers in diverse environments.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) defined the qualitative interview as "an event in which one person (the interviewer) encourages other to freely articulate their interests and experiences." This methodology will help adequately answer the proposed research question because of its ability to thoroughly understand a more subjective reality which is the most important consideration when studying communications and social sciences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

This research design was structured around a list of main questions and probes with room to follow-up for more details and flexibility to improvise based on the answers from the respondent. The purpose of the interview was to "understand the social actor's experience and perspective" and to "understand native conceptualizations of communication" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). For the topic of multicultural media audiences in Dubai, this method was ideal to validate previous research and to explore communication in a particular society and culture.

It is important to know when enough information has been collected. Merriam (2009) states that when there is an exhaustion of sources, saturation of categories, emergence of regularities/redundancies, and over-extension then enough data has been collected. Based on this assumption, 15 interviews were conducted to reach redundancy.

The subjects of this research project are highly experienced sources who have worked in the UAE media industry for a significant period of time. They each fit a list of criteria qualifying them for this study. They are executives who serve different communication-type roles and understand the infrastructure and interworking of the media industry in Dubai. The subjects work in marketing, public relations, sales, and publishing. They are well-respected within their fields and are "savvy social actors" as Lindlof and Taylor (2002) recommend for successful qualitative interviews.

A. Participant Recruitment

The participants include 15 senior managers and directors with active roles in fashion luxury brand management and marketing in Dubai. Luxury fashion brands were highlighted because of their willingness to experiment with new media and their ability to adapt to trends. Prestige fashion brands are highly competitive and set their own communication strategy as frequently as the fashion seasons.

A non-probability, purposive, sampling method was used to recruit participants. Non-probability sampling is the method most appropriate for qualitative interviews (Merriam, 2009). Purposive is also the most common of non-probability methods which is based on the assumption that the goal is to understand and gather information from the sources where the most insight can be learned (Merriam, 2009).

The selection criteria was as follows. Participants must work in public relations, marketing, advertising, sales, or business development. These subjects were able to explain in detail how they use media techniques and different marketing approaches to address the highly diverse audience of Dubai. Some criteria include significant experience in the market (over two years), and managers who work in the top international luxury fashion brands. A Nielsen survey of top luxury brands in the UAE market was used as a guide for the ideal companies and candidates to contact (Butts & Pal, 2008). Furthermore, a list of annually ranked luxury brands was also used to help guide the separate segments of the luxury industry (see Appendix A).

An application was approved by the American University of Beirut's Institutional Review Board to ensure ethical treatment of the participants in the study.

B. Interview Procedures

The interviews took place during the spring of 2015. An interview list of questions was used to guide the interview (see Appendix B). The interview guide included questions about the participant's work managing a luxury fashion brand and marketing that brand to the multicultural Dubai audience. The questions also divulged into the types of strategies the subjects use to target, sell, and spread brand awareness using new media.

The interview questioned and probed the interviewee about specific methods and tools the luxury fashion brand uses to effectively reach their audience in Dubai. The questions asked about new media usage, their target segment and how they approach it. Based on the questions, the participants successfully helped answer the research question and spot trends in the hyper-diverse UAE audience.

C. Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2009), the preferred way to analyze data in qualitative research is to do it simultaneously with data collection. The data was analyzed inductively and comparatively after each interview and direct quotes were taken from each interviewee as evidence and support. The researcher made sense of the data by "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting" the answers from the interview sessions (Merriam, 2009). Overlapping segments, strategies, and trends were identified to help answer the research question. Here, recurring themes in the data appeared and were analyzed and summarized.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) outline a six step data analysis process which were used in this study. First, to organize the data, the researcher read and re-read the data to become familiar with the content and then grouped similar answers to highlight trends for management and analysis.

Secondly, the researcher generated categories, themes and patterns by reading over the interviewee responses carefully and determine the factors that predominate. These categories or themes answered the main research question (Merriam, 2009).

The third step was the coding process which applied a specific coding scheme to each category/theme. Followed by the fourth step of testing the emergent categories. This step helped develop an understanding and formal examination of the data. It entailed an exhaustive search through the data where the researcher then incorporated the understandings into large constructs and evaluated them for their usefulness and centrality.

The fifth step searched for alternative explanations by moving from the specific, concrete, descriptive categories previously made into the more abstract, theoretical interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This step checked for alternative explanations and challenged the connections between categories by searching for other plausible links.

The final sixth step was the formal written report where the researcher summarized and reflected the complexity of the data. For this study in particular, the researcher used Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) approach of presenting the data gathered from in-depth interviews where personal views are presented in the structural framework of the report (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

D. Weaknesses and limitations

This qualitative research is not without weaknesses and limitations. Often with qualitative interviews the sample is small and may only represent a small sample of the population (Boeije, 2010). Similarly, because qualitative interviewing is open-ended, it can be difficult to compare groups or other settings of similar contexts (Boeije, 2010). And lastly, the results can be more influenced by the researcher and subject's personal biases and habits (Boeije, 2010). However, qualitative research aims to discover a phenomenon or breakthrough in the field and to notice trends that may not have existed before which indicated that qualitative interviews were the perfect way to help answer the research question.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The findings of the qualitative interviews highlight many trends, consistencies, and disputes from the previous literature on the subject of marketing a luxury brand to a multicultural environment. These results attempt to answer the research question of how luxury companies in Dubai share many similar marketing strategies when targeting, selling, and spreading awareness about their brand.

Saraf (2014) recommended that marketers maintain international standards of brand strategy which can be confirmed by many of the answers provided in the interviews. Brand managers in Dubai are not only encouraged to keep their local marketing plans consistent with their international plan, but actually have little freedom to differ.

However, some results disputed Saraf's (2014) argument about understanding specific drivers that shape ethnic identities and segmenting the consumer base, but this difference may be due to the specificity and exclusivity of luxury fashion brands in this study and not all brands like his research represents.

Similarly, findings also disputed Kim and Ko's (2012) assessment that brands are using interactive social systems to work together with consumers to build new products and services. Results of the interviews actually demonstrated a restriction and burden on luxury brand managers in Dubai concerning anything new, tailored for the region and especially working solely with local consumers.

Furthermore, findings confirm Epps and Demangeot's (2013) claim about CCM being more productive for the country and that the Dubai customer is very tech-savvy and more social media literate then neighboring countries in the Middle East.

The luxury brand managers reiterated Boitor et al. (2011) that social types of communication are supporting their efforts for awareness-building, increased traffic,

19

customer relations, and brand content (much like the example of sharing season's greetings via a branded app).

The luxury image is about showcasing a lifestyle and sharing a story that matches the brand's DNA, according to many of the brand managers interviewed. Telling a story about their heritage gives the brand credibility and trust while also sells a life in a person-to-person market (public relations executive, personal communication, January 21, 2015).

Luxury brands strive to maintain their brand integrity but also try to be innovative and adapt to the transient customer base in Dubai with unique airport and mall campaigns (marketing executive, personal communication, February 8, 2015). In Dubai, bigger is better. Luxury managers are responsible for grasping the attention of the dynamic, unique, and on-the-go audience in Dubai (public relations executive, personal communication, January 21, 2014).

Most of the luxury brands cater to five main demographic segments: Chinese, Russian, Indian, Arab, and Western. Some firms have tools and software to interpret the best channels to reach their target and information about gender, nationality, income, etc. so they know exactly who is reading what (senior media planner, personal communication, January 12, 2015).

A. **The Dubai Advantage**

Marketing to the distinctive Dubai audience has many advantages. Firstly, "the purchasing power in Dubai is unprecedented and money is no issue," (senior public relations executive, personal communication, January 21, 2015). Tourists and affluent locals are willing to spend, have a good understanding of luxury brands, and aspire to

live a luxurious lifestyle (public relations executive, personal communication, January 21, 2014). This knowledgeable audience results in a uniformity of message delivery to the consumers because selling an international luxury lifestyle to them is easier when they are already knowledgeable about the trends and fashions (communications manager, personal communication, February 5, 2015). This "message uniformity" trend reiterates the popularity of the CCM approach of maintaining one consistent message for one diverse audience.

Not only do people from around the world come to Dubai to buy luxury brands, but as fashion hub of the Middle East, Arabs from neighboring countries look to Dubai to see what's hot and new and working, according to one luxury marketing executive (personal communication, February 8, 2015).

Another advantage of marketing in a multicultural environment like Dubai is the power of word of mouth among the community. The local cultures have strong family and friend relationships that help spread positive reinforcement about luxury brands (sales coordinator, personal communication, January 19, 2015). Word of mouth has significance because it generates a positive (or negative) message about a brand from an independent source and can help create buzz.

B. The Dubai Struggle

Dubai also has its share of marketing challenges for luxury brands. Firstly, the market is highly connected to tourism; if the tourism sector is down then sales are down. According to a luxury sales coordinator, the luxury industry is highly dependent on the tourism industry even though locals make up a large part of sales (personal communication, January 19, 2015). For example, the recent sanctions in Russia have

decreased the amount of Russian tourism to the UAE which negatively affected sales for the luxury brand.

Secondly, censorship laws can be difficult to manage and ensuring all local guidelines are respected can be challenging while maintaining an international vision with a local standard (communications manager, personal communication, February 5, 2015). The censorship challenge is especially difficult with advertising and creatives; ideally brands would like to use the internationally run creative but because of local guidelines they may be restricted and require changes or different creatives suitable to Dubai standards (marketing executive, personal communication, February 8, 2015). Examples include too much skin showing, women being intimately close, or provocative positions.

Thirdly, being a hub of luxury and retail can make it tough to stand out among competition. With an abundance of luxury brands competing for attention, luxury can seem ubiquitous and mainstream; luxury brands want to be trendy and current yet also traditional (public relations executive, personal communication, January 21, 2015). The classic vs. contemporary dilemma confirms one of the major tradeoffs cited by Keller's study (2009).

Lastly, the media channels and platforms in Dubai are not up to the same standards as the west. Online websites lack maturity and are incomparable to their western counterparts (senior media planner, personal communication, January 12, 2015). Consequently, because of unengaging brand and magazine websites without ecommerce platforms, luxury brands must be creative in their marketing strategies and deciding which media best suits their brand. Since brands are behind the west, many marketing initiatives are less about return on investment (ROI) and more about general

awareness and product placement (publishing director, personal communication, February 10, 2015).

C. Dominated by a CCM approach

The major trend among luxury brands interviewed is the consistent CCM approach among all brands interviewed. Even though each company uses minor strategies to cater to each ethnic group, the overall consensus is to use one marketing campaign for all local market segments. The minor strategies implemented include using Chinese social networks to reach that segment or to fill the boutiques with salespeople who speak the language of the visiting group. For example, during Russian holidays they will hire Russian-speaking sales associates and stock the stores with more furs which sell better to Russians living in the cold weather (public relations executive, personal communication, January 12, 2015). Consumer demand is predictable because of the tourist calendar, however, localized marketing does not extend beyond this scope (sales coordinator, personal communication, January 19, 2015).

All consumer segments are relevant because they share the same upscale taste for luxury goods, therefore there is no difference in positioning and no deliberate segmentation in communication and marketing strategies for different ethnic groups (public relations executive, personal communication, January 21, 2015). Luxury fashion and jewelry brands adhere to their brand identity and want to be viewed the same way internationally; more evidence that the CCM approach of communicating one message to one diverse audience is more successful for luxury brands.

Luxury brands are very careful to maintain their elite clientele and provide custom service for their frequent customers (public relations and marketing executive,

personal communication, February 10, 2015). "It is about maintaining VIP clientele, then acquiring new ones and our CRM is very important worldwide to take care of our clients," (public relations manager, personal communication, January 20, 2015). Their worldwide CRM (Customer Relationship Management) is one of their most valuable assets. One marketing executive said, "It can be challenging to acquire repeat customers with an inconsistent tourist audience," (personal communication, February 8, 2015).

D. Digital versus Print

According to most marketing and public relations managers, it is clear that new media has strong potential in Dubai. However, though new media are growing in the area, old media are still a core component of every campaign. For every launch or 360 degree marketing program, there is always an aggressive print plan and outdoor advertising plan included. People in Dubai are still actively reading newspapers and magazines because of its nostalgic feel (communications manager, personal communication, February 5, 2015), therefore it is crucial to communicate the brand message with new media alongside traditional media.

When it comes to creating buzz or awareness, social media are the top priority for luxury brand managers. Buzz marketing is ideal for promoting new products because it can spur excitement and publicity in eye-catching or unexpected ways. Social media provide more consumer engagement and target a younger demographic.

Social platforms are essential but having a thorough digital presence besides social networks is also important—online banners, interactive tablet executions, geo-targeting, and e-card mailers are key for a successful luxury marketing campaign (marketing executive, personal communication, February 8, 2015). One luxury brand

created a custom application that functioned on mobile and tablet platforms and allowed

users to send each other personalized greetings around the holiday season. A campaign

like this was successful because it involved the user to share the app while also

spreading the brand name and driving traffic to the brand's multiple social platforms.

Dubai is a leader in social media trends, and according to one interview, "the

fact that it is still an emerging market and growing faster than any other country but is

still considered a global hub of the luxury industry makes it a great place to be as a

luxury brand," (publishing director, personal communication, February 10, 2015).

E. The Instagram Blogger

Online platforms are very important for luxury management and not just a

brand's own website but custom content generation, across different media, plays an

active role in branding. The trend in the luxury industry is for all media content to be

accessible on a mobile device since the majority of online penetration is through mobile

phones (publishing director, personal communication, February 10, 2015). Media on

mobile is social, viral, and powerful and the UAE has one of the highest rates of

penetration and growth on Instagram (head of corporate communications, personal

communication, February 11, 2015).

The most consistent trend among luxury companies in Dubai is the extensive use

of Instagram as their preferred platform. Instagram is the best way to track trends or

generate buzz in the region, according to a marketing executive. The use of hashtags

and geo-tagging allows brand managers to track clients and successfully display new

launches (marketing executive, personal communication, February 8, 2015). The

bloggers in the region are not using actual blogs but instead rely on Instagram as the

vehicle to showcase their style to their followers. Consumers are attracted to their peers on the social platform that they are also using every single day.

One of the biggest trends in the luxury industry of Dubai is the prolific use of fashion bloggers on Instagram. Blogger endorsements in the Middle East are stronger than celebrity endorsements because consumers can relate to local fashionistas (senior media planner, personal communication, January 12, 2015). Followers aspire to be like the bloggers because they showcase a lifestyle and fashion sense in a creative, appealing way that seems attainable.

The most visible bloggers on Instagram are key components to any luxury brand's marketing and public relations strategy. A public relations director said, "People want a visual which is why Instagram is dominating our scope of work. In fashion, people are obsessed with social in the Middle East and what other people are wearing. We don't deal with celebrities but instead we want peers and contemporaries. Consumers want to see what is accessible to them and not necessarily what is accessible to Angelina Jolie," (personal communication, February 9, 2015).

Using different bloggers for different products allows for brands to display the right product in the right way. For example luxury brands may lend or gift a pair of sunglasses to a blogger who has a cost-conscience, mass audience but an expensive bag for a blogger who has a particularly high-spending audience (public relations executive, personal communication, January 12, 2015). Many of the managers work with bloggers who can deliver sales by posting one photo, which actually happened for a public relations executive when she had a blogger post a pair of shoes that weren't selling well. Within the next week, the shoes were sold out (public relations executive, personal communication, January 12, 2015).

F. Hands Tied by Headquarters

Another consistency among luxury brands in Dubai is the relationship to their brand headquarters. Firstly, the pricing structure in the Middle East differs greatly from Europe where most luxury brands are based. Many locals abstain from purchasing luxury goods in Dubai because they know they can buy the item for 30% cheaper when they travel to London or Paris. According a study by Booz & Company (Sabbagh, Mourad, Kabbara, Shehadi, & Samman, 2012), tariffs and duties can be costly, so it is cheaper to buy from the west indicating a "lack of economic integration that deters online shopping."

Secondly, local employees have strict guidelines and brand limitations they must obey. There is little freedom to execute their own strategies and initiatives without full approval from headquarters. Many marketers and brand managers miss good opportunities for customized, local marketing because of the arduous approval process they have to endure.

Even the brand's social media is completely managed by an international digital team with no local access. These brands are limited with who they can work with and have little space for local idea generation because their headquarters are either focused on bigger markets like the United States and China or because they do not understand their regional relevance. Every brand manager interviewed in the survey expressed stress with limited creativity and frustration because they know the market and are confident they can be influential. Subjects interviewed believed that in order to be successful, luxury brands must ease the strict and tense relationship with headquarters in Europe.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

These findings shine a light on the pros and cons of media marketing in the hyper-diverse and multicultural environment of Dubai, explain the power of Instagram bloggers for luxury brands, and recommend a sound balance between new and traditional media to be successful. There needs to be more freedom and room to make decisions based on the uniqueness of the Dubai audience.

Marketers and brand managers in the multicultural Dubai market need to push boundaries and guidelines of their luxury brand. Luxury managers can achieve this by strengthening localized marketing. For example, many luxury brands lack a custom Arabic language website which could attract more locals to their websites and avoid a disconnection with the brand. Approximately 37% of Arabs are not satisfied with the availability of Arabic websites and feel they are lacking (Sabbagh, et al., 2012). Arabic language web content makes up only three percent of all websites (Khalaf, 2013).

Many interviewees expressed frustration with their headquarters and the lack of customization in the MENA region. Local luxury managers feel they have the experience and background to properly launch localized marketing campaigns and use ethnic marketing in a creative, innovative, and successful way. The interviewees expressed a desire for more balance, freedom, and leniency with marketing and promotional strategies that cater specifically to this market and reflect local taste and culture. If luxury brand headquarters become more open to implementing localized marketing initiatives, they can make a bigger splash with something new and edgy yet

traditional. Using new media can help manage this major tradeoff of classic versus contemporary.

Furthermore, luxury brands in Dubai lack a proper ecommerce platform to increase sales. The UAE struggles with ecommerce because of customs regulations but online shopping is especially necessary in a city of internet savvy customers with on-the-go lifestyles. To be successful, international luxury brands need to provide localized assets like a properly functioning ecommerce platform in the region to reach the spending multicultural audience of Dubai.

In conclusion, luxury marketers need to focus on mixing both traditional and modern media approaches in their strategy. Media in the Arab world have relied on non-digital media marketing for a long time and it is unlikely this will change completely, therefore marketing firms and brands need to leverage the strength of new media channels with the old. The excitement in Dubai is the capability and means of mixing new media like social networks with the traditional television, print, and outdoor media in modern, collaborative, and innovative ways.

There is a new generation of consumers rapidly growing in the Middle East and they are using digital and mobile technology in unprecedented ways. The luxury industry has the capability to reach the youth by harnessing new media to catch their attention and tap into their future buying potential. New media can help manage the tradeoff of retaining loyal customers and acquiring new ones with creative communication strategies.

These strategies fall within the framework of cross cultural marketing by using one 360 degree campaign for a continually-diversifying audience. By promoting and selling a luxury brand with a cross cultural marketing approach, managers can use new

media to spread an exclusive image while also being accessible on mass social platforms—another way new media is managing the luxury growth tradeoffs outlined by Keller (2009).

This study helps provide an in-depth understanding of how new media can be a tool for luxury brands targeting a multicultural environment. Yaprak (2008) argues that a more acute study of a diverse culture will lead to a stronger "understanding of targeting, segmentation, and positioning and strategy formulation by scholars and managers of international marketing." Further research is needed to comprehensively understand marketing in a multicultural environment but conducting a similar study in a city like London, New York, or Singapore would be interesting to see if similar trends emerge.

Technology has changed the luxury market. The internet endowed brands the power to be global and spread their message in new and innovative ways. Luxury brand managers need to continually adapt to new media trends and ensure their brand is expressed via traditional and modern methods of communication. Digital marketing should be effectively used to connect with consumers and combine the power of technology with the promise of the new generation (Sabbagh, et al., 2012).

This research gives a thorough analysis of the luxury industry as a whole and the future of media not only in the region, but in other growing multicultural environments as well. The findings could be extended to other cities in the Middle East like Qatar, Bahrain, etc. to properly assess how luxury brands are managed in the Arab world and how they can effectively use new media as the optimal marketing tool.

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APPENDIX A: TOP 100 LUXURY BRANDS

According to The World Luxury Association, a luxury brands research and management non-profit organization focusing on the international luxury market, the below list compiles the top 100 luxury brands in the world in 2012. The list is based on the brand's international influence, market share, consumer feedback, and other scores.

World Luxury Association Top 100 List:

WLA-World's TOP10 Fashion:
- Hermes
- Chanel
- Louis Vuitton
- Christian Dior
- Ferragamo
- Versace
- Prada
- Fendi
- Giorgio Armani
- Ermenegildo Zegna

WLA-World's TOP10 Aircraft:
- Gulfstream
- Bombardier
- Dassault
- Embraer
- Hawker Beech
- Cessna
- Cirrus
- Eurocopter
- Bellhelicopter
- Sikorsky

WLA-World's TOP10 Yachts:
- Azimut
- Sunseeker
- Ferretti
- Lurssen
- Riva
- Wally
- Princess
- Pershing
- Beneteau
- Itama

WLA-World's TOP10 Cars:
- Rolls-Royce
- Bentley
- Ferrari
- Lamborghini
- Maserati
- Aston Martin
- Bugatti
- Spyker
- Pagani
- Koenigsegg

WLA-World's TOP10 Jewelry:
- Cartier
- Van Cleef & Arpels
- Boucheron
- Harry Winston
- Chaumet
- Kloybateri
- Bvlgari
- Montblanc
- Tiffany&Co
- Mikimoto

WLA-World's TOP10 Watches:
- Patek Philippe
- Vacheron Constantin
- Piaget
- Jaeger-Le Coultre
- Audemars Piguet
- Blancpain
- Rolex
- Breguet
- IWC
- Franck Muller

WLA World's TOP10 Cosmetics:
- Chanel
- Christian Dior
- Guerlain
- Givenchy
- Helena Rubinstein
- Sisley

- La Prairie
- La Mer
- Lancome
- Biotherm

WLA-World's TOP10 Liquors:
- L'or De Jean Martell
- Louis XIII
- Richard Hennessy
- Chateau Petrus Wine
- Chateau Lafite Rothschild
- Macallan
- Meritage
- Ron Zacapa
- Dom Perignon
- Perrier Jouet

WLA-World's TOP10 Resorts:
- Wakaya Club
- North Island
- Hotel Turtle Island
- Fregate Island Private
- Hotel Le Toiny
- Burj Al-Arab
- Le Sirenuse
- Armani Hotel Dubai
- W-Hotel-Puerto Rico
- Amanruya

WLA-World's TOP10 Innovative Brands:
- Harley Davidson
- Bose
- Vertu
- Lotos
- Steinway
- Bluthner
- Segway PT
- Aurora
- Sun Valley Icewine
- ShangXia

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewer: Rula Sawaf
Principal Investigator: Rula Sawaf
Topic: What marketing strategies are luxury businesses using to target, sell, and spread brand awareness using new media in multicultural markets?
Interviewee Code: _____
Interview Date/Time: _____

I. Firstly, I'd like to make sure you are consenting to this voluntary interview and understand that it the information is both anonymous and confidential and you are free to discontinue the interview at any moment?

II. I'd like to start with a little background information on your experience with luxury brand marketing. Other than your current role with your company, what other experience do you have with marketing?
   a. When/where did you first start working in this industry?
   b. What interested you about marketing luxury brands?

III. Let's talk a little about your company's current marketing strategies. What tools or strategies do you find most effective for the Dubai audience?
   a. What is the core business model or strategy you implement when reaching your brand consumers?
   b. What actions or response did you want the audience members to take? Did they respond as you hoped they would?

IV. I'm curious about the challenges you face with your specific audience. What is your greatest marketing challenge?
   a. How do you tackle this challenge?
   b. Can you elaborate on the composition of your audience? How is the brand positioned for each ethnic group?
   c. What is the most effective way to reach this specific segment?

V. Let's discuss the role of new media (online, social, mobile, tablet, etc.) in your role. How do you use digital media tools to spread awareness about your brand?
   a. Any specific examples that have been successful? Unsuccessful?
   b. What specific social media do you find effective for luxury branding?

VI. I'm interested to learn what your company hopes to accomplish through luxury marketing. What main objectives do you hope to achieve with your brand?
   a. How did you determine which methods to use to achieve those objectives?
   b. Have you tried accomplishing these objectives through use of other communication strategies or tactics? If so, what were the results?
   c. How do you determine the success of a campaign?

VII. What are the benefits of your marketing strategy? Does anything surprise you about the results of your method?
   a. What are the pros and cons of marketing luxury to the Dubai audience?

VIII. If you work on more than one brand, what differences do you see across industries?

IX. If you could change anything about your company strategy what would you change?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM AND EMAIL TEMPLATE

New Media Marketing Challenges in a Multicultural Environment: Luxury Brands in Dubai
Principal investigator: Dr. Jad Melki
Student Investigator: Rula Sawaf

Hello. My name is Rula Sawaf and I am a graduate student in the Media Studies Department at the American University of Beirut. I am conducting research about marketing luxury brands in Dubai on behalf of Dr. Jad Melki. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study about luxury brand marketing in Dubai.
I would like to take a few minutes to explain why I am inviting you to participate and what will be done with the information you provide. You will be asked to participate in a short interview for insight about your experience in the field.

- I am doing this study as part of my MA studies at AUB. The purpose of the study is to understand what strategies luxury businesses are using to target, sell, and spread brand awareness using new media in multicultural markets.

- I will be interviewing around 20 luxury executives in Dubai and will use the information as the basis for my final project. I may also use this information in articles that might be published, as well as in academic presentations. Your individual privacy and confidentiality of the information you provide will be maintained in all published and written data analysis resulting from the study. The research will be confidential and anonymous and none of your personal information nor your company's name will be published individually. The data will be aggregated from multiple companies in Dubai.

- Your participation should take approximately 45-60 minutes. Please understand your participation is entirely on a voluntary basis and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The research has minimal risks since all information is anonymous and confidential. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are contribution to the literature and research on the subject and within the industry. Participation in this study will not be compensated with any form of financial payment. Records will be monitored and may be audited without violating confidentiality.

- If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to answer any questions, please feel free to let me know and we can skip those. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. We can take a break, stop and continue at a later date, or stop altogether. You will not be penalized for deciding to stop participation at any time. Refusal to participate or deciding to withdraw from the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to and neither will it affect your relationship with AUB. And participants will be provided with a copy of the consent form for personal records.

- I would like to voice record tape this interview so as to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will keep these recordings in the iPhone voice notes applications and on my personal laptop and they will only be used by myself. If you prefer not being taped we can do the interview that way.

39

If you have any questions, you are free to ask them. If you have questions later, you may contact me at:

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If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, you may contact the principal investigator at:

Jad Melki, Ph.D.
Asst. Professor of Journalism and Media Studies
Director, Media Studies Program
Nicely Bldg, Rm 203D
jm39@aub.edu.lb
Office: +961-1-350-000 Ext. 4380

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the Institutional Review Board Office at AUB:

AUB IRB
irb@aub.edu.lb
Gefinor Block B 5th floor
Tel: +961-1-738024 or +961-1-350000 ext: 5445

If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign below in consent:

_____   _____   _____
Signature   Name (printed)   Date

If you consent to being audio taped, please sign below:

_____   _____   _____
Signature   Name (printed)   Date

APPENDIX D: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

This notice is for an AUB-IRB Approved Research Study on behalf of Dr. Jad Melki, Ph.D., at AUB. It is not an Official Message from AUB.

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *"New Media Marketing Challenges in a Multicultural Environment: Luxury Brands in Dubai"* conducted by Dr. Jad Melki Faculty of Media Studies at the American University of Beirut. The conduct of this study will adhere to the IRB approved conditions and terms.

The IRB approved method for approaching subjects is *Qualitative Interviewing.* The purpose of the study is to *understand what strategies luxury businesses are using to target, sell, and spread brand awareness using new media in multicultural markets.*

This message invites you to:

1. Read the below and consider whether you want to be involved in the study.
2. Note the procedures, potential benefits, confidentiality, and participation/withdrawal options.

Procedures

- Participation is completely voluntary.
- If you agree to the consent form, completing the interview should take no more than 45-60 minutes and recorded to be used in a final project submitted to AUB. (alternate method available if you would not like to be audiotaped)
- Only the data you provide in the interview will be collected and analyzed.
- The results of the survey will be published in the form of a project report and will be available by the AUB Library in printed form and electronically.

Potential Benefits to Subjects and/or To Society

You will not receive payment for participation in this study. The results of the study will hopefully guide research and marketing managers in the future of luxury brand management in multicultural environments.

Potential risks for participating in the study: the risks of the study are minimal. The collected data will remain *confidential and anonymous.*

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and anonymous. Only you will know that you interviewed.

Participation and Withdrawal

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Agreement of Research Subject

If after reading the consent document and have any questions you might have answered to your satisfaction, you voluntarily agree to participate in this interview, please schedule a time to meet with the student investigator.

Otherwise please ignore this invitation to participate in the study.