

Is Your Perception of “Luxury” Similar to Mine? A Concept Made of Absolute and Relative Features

Taylan Urkmez
Ralf Wagner

ABSTRACT. Luxury is a relative feature of goods and services. Despite the many empirical studies that have been conducted, marketing scholars have not agreed on a common definition or interpretation of the term “luxury” so far. This deficit causes improper interpretations and, thus, evokes a kind of growing conceptual confusion. Additionally, the increasing interest in luxury in recent years has contributed unintentionally to the ambiguity of the term. Advertising agencies consciously or unconsciously aim to take advantage of the confusion around the concept and propose the “attribute” of luxury for all kinds of trading up purposes. This article aims to contribute to a clarification of the concept of luxury by going deep into the relativity of this attribute and the related characteristics of luxury products. We present a scheme summarizing previous conceptual contributions.

KEYWORDS. Relativity, inaccessible luxury, intermediate luxury, accessible luxury, perception

INTRODUCTION

A fresh look at the perspective of luxury is given by Heine (2011), who argues that luxury is a relative concept, depending upon who we get the subjective perception from. Despite substantial empirical research efforts, academic discussion has not agreed on a common definition of the concept of luxury. The ambiguity in the definition might be traced back to distinct perceptions in consumers’ minds. Clearly, both luxury products and luxurious images are unlikely to be the same for all consumers. Although France and Italy are the two prominent luxury source countries,

we can see luxury production almost in all countries (Seringhaus, 2005). Notably, this ambiguity in the definitions of “luxury” and “luxurious” cause vendors and consumers to refer to the term “luxury” even for some irrelevant products. “Luxury” is an integrative term that arouses someone’s appetite and makes them envious of others. Some consumers aspire to associate themselves with the term “luxury” and to make use of its lustrous aspect. In this vein, Silverstein and Fiske (2003) as well as Truong, McColl, and Kitchen (2009) have stated that some non-luxury brands use the concept of luxury in naming their products, and in this way take advantage of the confusion around the concept. Kapferer

Taylan Urkmez is a Ph.D. student at the SVI Endowed Chair for International Direct Marketing, DMCC- Dialog Marketing Competence Center, the University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany. Ralf Wagner, Ph.D., is Professor of Marketing at the SVI Endowed Chair for International Direct Marketing, DMCC- Dialog Marketing Competence Center at the University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany.

Address correspondence to Taylan Urkmez, Chair for International Direct Marketing, DMCC- Dialog Marketing Competence Center at the University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany. E-mail: uerkmez@wirtschaft.uni-kassel.de

and Bastien (2010) suggested that the term “luxury” appears in all sectors and nearly every type of product claims to be luxurious or strives to be a “true luxury” for customers who are willing to pay for it.

Related terms such as “deluxe,” “premium,” “ultra-premium,” “grand,” “exclusive,” “opuluxe,” and “hyper-luxury” are used by practitioners in the business world for attaching their products to the luxury concept. However, this practice contributes to the complexity of the term “luxury” (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

Resolving the current confusion related to the concept requires a clear distinction of interpretations that emphasize the relativity of luxury. Everyone understands the term “luxury,” but almost nobody agrees on the explicit description or implications of it. This uncertainty in the meaning and existence of ever-increasing analogous terms for the concept of luxury damages the leverage effect in product positioning. A clarification might become essential, especially for business practitioners, because non-luxury products are unlikely to be dealt in the same way as luxury products (Kapferer & Bastien, 2010). To promote the discussion around the concept of luxury, this study provides a scheme that researchers might use to understand the different types of luxury.

In this paper, we will work along two paths in order to reach our goal. In the next section we describe and summarize the criteria discussed in previous scientific studies. In the second section, we focus on the relativity of criteria used for characterizing consumption. In the third section, we review the criteria characterizing luxury goods and services. In the fourth section, we wrap up this discussion by focusing on people’s perceptions and suggest a classification scheme.

Based on this, in the fifth section we take the second path by adding the consumers’ perspectives. We outline the procedure for conducting qualitative interviews and the results

of these. A discussion of the results, implications, and conclusions are presented in the sixth section.

RELATIVITY OF LUXURY

The authors’ understanding of the relativity of luxury is based on the distinction between quantitative and qualitative luxury. Luxury has been defined as something expensive and excessive (Sombart, 1913, as cited in Heine, 2011). However, Berry (1994) argued that the distinction between quantity and quality clarifies the concept, and the confusion with regard to luxury and superfluity is solved. Berry provides the example of screws to secure a shelf. If six is the optimum number to fix it, then the seventh screw would not be seen as a luxury but as superfluity. However, the decision of what is excessive or more than necessary alters depending upon the point of view. Luxury by itself is a relative and subjective term (Büttner, Huber, Regier, & Vollhardt, 2006). At this point, the relativity of perceptions becomes effective. The relativity of luxury is captured by five exhaustive categories: regional, temporal, economic, cultural, and situational.

Regional Relativity

Some items referred to as luxury depending upon their local availability. Rarity contributes to the conversion of some specific items to luxury items. Some goods are easily available in some parts of the world where they are either free of charge or worth little, but they may be appraised as luxurious because of their rarity in another part of the world. A sunny day is a luxury in some parts of the world; however, it is quite ordinary for people living in Mediterranean countries. Goods are called luxury if they are rare in some locations (Heine, 2011; Merki, 2002; Reith & Meyer, 2003). For example, prawns are a luxury in some parts of the world, and

customers need to pay much money to eat them at restaurants, while in Turkey they are mostly used as a fishing bait by local fishers.

Temporal Relativity

Temporal relativity refers to changes in the perception of products or services over the course of time. Some perceptions cannot resist the ever-changing effect of time and lose their validity: What is luxury today might not be a luxury in future. Industrial developments, the changing structure of societies, or changing conditions of demand might be determinants in this change (Kapferer & Bastien, 2010). A luxurious model of a car brand manufactured ten years ago is no longer a luxurious model today in the perception of most people. Additionally, the positioning of a luxury brand might be affected by erosion because of brand extensions or the enlargement of the customer portfolio to include groups with a lower social status.

In past times, even in the rich societies, the majority struggled for sustenance. However, today most basic needs are assured for the majority. Some former luxuries, like durable goods, entertainment, and recreation are judged to be personal necessities and are assured for a remarkable part of the population in today's world. These changes are part of a luxury–necessity continuum. Some electronic gadgets, including tools such as vacuum cleaners and washing machines are regarded as household necessities for daily life by people on many continents today, while they were regarded as luxuries less than hundred years ago over the whole world (Matsuyama, 2002).

Economic Relativity

This quality refers to peoples' potential to access the resources. When people are capable of accessing the resources, it might not be a luxury for them; however, they stay a luxury for people who are not capable of accessing

the same resources because they are highly priced (Heine, 2011).

It may be evident that even today the notions of luxury and necessity for the items mentioned above are linked to the wealth status of the households, and they may not be a necessity in all societies. Still, for some minorities, some basic needs are not so easy to acquire and they are still considered luxuries. As the income in a household increases, the notion of a consumer good is transformed from a luxury to an amenity and then to a necessity (Matsuyama, 2002). For example, the same car which might be considered a luxurious car in an underdeveloped or developing country might be considered a basic, regular model in a developed country (Matsuyama, 2002; Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Li, 2009).

Cultural Relativity

Cultural relativity is the way the desirability of some goods to people depends upon their culture; while some goods or tastes are quite fashionable in some cultures, they might be seen useless, undesirable, or even disgusting in another culture (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). For instance, champagne can be a luxurious product in European countries; however, it is not in Islamic countries. The same is valid for a Lamborghini racing car for someone from an Amazonian tribe (Berthon, Pitt, Parent, & Bertho, 2009). As Heine (2011) argued, every society has its own notions of luxury. These notions can show changes over time. Some subcultures in every society have different notions of luxury according to their members' beliefs. Gold teeth were a symbol of richness and luxury in Turkey in the 1980s. However, this notion later transformed, and gold teeth have become something that is undesirable, while they might still be a luxury among some subcultures or on the margins of society. On the other hand, gold teeth are still a luxury in some countries like Tajikistan or

India. For some specific product categories, the effect of culture is less relevant and for the most prominent luxury categories we are close to reaching an independency of culture. Fashion and cars might be examples of such almost culturally independent product groups. On the other hand, in some specific product segments, such as food products, the effect of culture is more visible and demand is sharply defined by the culture (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2007).

Situational Relativity

Situational relativity refers to the ever changing characteristics of relativity depending upon the conditions and the situations people are in. Kemp (1998) argued that the same good can be classified as necessary, ordinary, or luxurious depending upon the situation. For a better understanding, we can exemplify this by caviar, which is regarded as a luxurious food for most people. If it were to be given as the only option to eat, then it would no longer be regarded as a luxury but as something ordinary after few days. The opposite case is also possible. For instance, an ordinary food might become a luxury if it has not been eaten for a long time or for years.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LUXURY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

One of the most prominent studies to define the perception of luxury on a cross-cultural basis was that by Dubois, Laurent, and Czellar (2001). They conducted cross-cultural consumer-based studies in three different areas of Western Europe, the Asia-Pacific Region, and USA. They came up with a general definition of luxury as a combination of six different dimensions: price, quality, aesthetics, uniqueness, extraordinariness, and symbolism. Heine (2011) stated that consumers identify luxury products as having six

characteristics: price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinariness, and symbolism. Luxury products to some degree embody these six characteristics, termed constitutive characteristics, in their content.

The characteristics of luxury are intertwined with each other, as each characteristic is logically linked to others. All six items as a whole contribute to the definition and the existence of luxury. If a product is not produced in large volumes it is rare, and it is this characteristic of rarity which brings the characteristic price with it. It is natural to assess a product as highly-priced because of its scarcity. Also, it has been proven that if something is expensive, consumers mostly associate the product with high quality (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991; Dubois et al., 2001; Mortelmans, 2005; Trommsdorff, 2009; Wiedmann et al., 2007).

Luxury products contain both consequences like prestige and characteristics such as rarity (De Barnier, Rodina, Valette-Florence, 2006; Kapferer, 2001; Königs & Schierech, 2006; Lipovetsy & Roux, 2003, as cited in Heine, 2011; Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000; Mc Kinsey, 1990, as cited in Wiedmann et al., 2007). The view of Lombard (1989, as cited in Heine, 2011) as well as Nueono and Quelch (1998), which has been shared by Alleres in recent years (2003, as cited in Heine, 2011), is that the characteristics are not always clearly defined, and it may not be easy to understand what is meant by high product quality

LUXURY PERCEPTIONS

Luxury is not a stable concept by itself, and it is subject to continuous change, like life itself. It is important to see that something that used to be luxurious in the past in a specific country may no longer express such a meaning to people living in that country or to people visiting the country regularly. This change is related to the relativity of luxury. Furthermore, it is closely connected to the

Table 1. Characteristics of Luxury Products

| Characteristics | Definition | In Practice |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Price | Most investigated and mostly uttered characteristic of luxury products among the all characteristics (Heine, 2011, p. 48; Kwan Li, Monroe, & Chan, 1994, p. 449; Meffert & Lasslop, 2003, p. 5). | Even a Starbucks coffee is luxurious for someone who is not able to afford to pay double price instead of a regular coffee from any other shop. |
| Quality | Consumers perceive pricey products as high quality, hence it is always considered that luxury products have been manufactured to a high standart and great effort has been put into production, especially if there is craftsmanship involved (Heine, 2011, p. 95; Nueno & Quelch, 1998, p.65). Material is the second important aspect of the quality issue (Jeine, 2011, p. 65). | Lange & Söhne wristwatches require a lot of effort and handcrafting and it takes more than a year to manufacture a watch. Plastic has always less quality than any other metal in people's perception. |
| Aesthetics | It signifies the taste of upper class consumers and connects to cultural relativity (Kapferer, 2001, p. 322). It is an important differentiation point of luxury product manufacturers from other mass market manufacturers (Dubois, 2001, p. 13). | Luxury cars have always different designs. Expensive work of arts address tastes of luxury consumers. |
| Rarity | Rarity is a highly desired characteristics by most consumers, who feel more satisfied when they use or own a rare item and who usually justify high payment for the item by reason of rarity. Two types of rarity exist: By limiting the production and natural limitation arising from availability of the material. | Limited edition production of companies Saffron spice is rare in nature. Noble metals are not easily found in nature. |
| Extraordinariness | Luxury products should be different from ordinary items. This extraordinariness is mostly associated with design or construction (Goody, 2006, p. 344). | Specialized designers and experts work for the luxury companies and create some unusual items to differentiate them from others. |
| Symbolism | A clear distinction between mass-market and luxury products is between the functional and non-functional. Mortelmans (2005, p. 505) and Heine (2011, p. 99) argued that the luxury industry is the main one where symbolism has more meaning for consumers than functionality. | The perfume brand „Chanel 5“ has a symbolic value for women (Weifang, 2011). Passengers's impulse shopping behaviour is determined by the airport influences on impulse shopping and airport retailing environmental conditions (Omar, 2005). |

perception of luxury. We expect that different sets of people have perceptions and understandings of luxury that might be different in Germany, Turkey, or the US.

Emotions are relevant to luxury companies for creating a perception of luxury in the consumers. That is why they use similar messaging in the advertisements or in their public relations campaigns. Ward and Chiari (2008) emphasized the contribution of emotions in purchases of luxury products by highlighting

that customers are willing to pay more to enhance their positive emotions. This instinctively directs them to genuine luxury products rather than fake or counterfeit ones. These customers aspire to the experience itself, not the logo. Luxury as a concept is inclined to be an experience of genuineness (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Visconti, 2010).

Catry (2003) argued that consumers distinguish themselves from others by purchasing luxury products, and in this way they have the

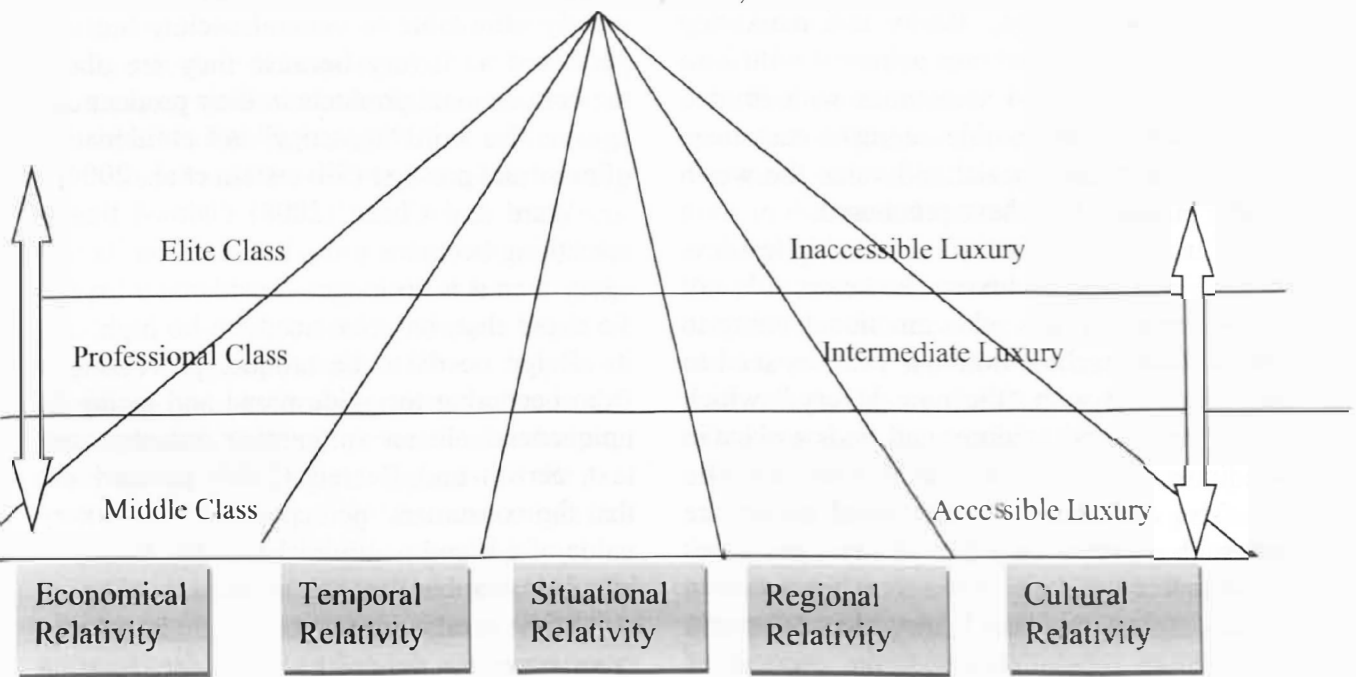
emotional value of owning “a well-crafted and rare object” (p. 11). Luxury is between two opposite poles: At one end it is a feeling of being a part of something, a community; at the other end, it is a feeling of being detached and feeling different from others. Ward and Farmaki (2006) indicated that luxury is sometimes social inclusion and sometimes exclusion.

The driving feature of the traditional luxury product is its inaccessibility. The more the product is inaccessible, the more people will dream of owning it. Obstacles and inaccessibility help create the increasing desire for

the luxury product. Massifying brands while simultaneously making access to the products easier increases sales and causes brands to be trivialized and lose their brand exclusiveness (Bastien & Kapferer, 2009; Dubois & Czellar, 2002).

Alleres (as cited in Vickers & Renand, 2003) built on a system of hierarchy and defined the accessibility of luxury goods to consumers on different socio-economic levels. Inaccessible luxury, intermediate luxury, and accessible luxury are the elements which build up the hierarchical framework (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. A Hierarchy of Luxury Goods Products (modified from Alleres, 1990 and Vickers & Renand, 2003)



Although Alleres suggested a restricted accessibility and no transition between levels, a recent study (Granot et al., 2013) improved the model one step further and introduced the existence of transition ability shown with the arrows. Here we bring a significant modification to Alleres’ model; we add dimensions of relativity basing the triangle of Alleres which signifies interconnection of five relativity concepts and hierarchy of luxury. Without taking

the relativity dimensions into consideration, even different levels of luxury would not be well defined. What we propose is that relativity of luxury should be considered together while defining the levels of luxury.

Consumers have started to trade up and are willing to pay more for products introducing individually perceived value (Silverstein, Fiske, & Butman, 2004). Tartaglia and Marinuzzi (as cited in Ward & Chiari, 2008) con-

tributed the concept of *three key luxury domains* after several new luxury firms appeared in the market. For inaccessible luxury, the emphasis is on maintaining the impulsive tendencies; for intermediary luxury, it is on belonging to a luxury world and keeping up with an exclusive lifestyle; for accessible luxury, it is to differentiate accessible products from superior products and claim that they are the gateway to the luxury world (Ward & Chiari, 2008).

The inaccessible luxury segment has quality and uniqueness as its main characteristics, and producers use the best materials in their production. The price is high enough to enable the product to be afforded by only an elite part of society, which gives the product exceptional social prestige. Rarity is a marketing strategy that is sometimes achieved with limited distribution and sometimes with limited production. Inaccessible segment customers feel that they are special and value the worth of the products they have purchased.

Customer satisfaction is at its highest level with this type of luxury; however, it is not known whether this adds emotional value to the product itself. Emotional value is seen to be associated with "the new luxury," which heeds customers' avidities and finds a place in the luxury market (Vickers & Renand, 2003).

The characteristics mentioned above are not such essential ones for intermediary luxury, which is one level down from inaccessible luxury. In intermediate luxury, the perception has a close relationship with the concept of product tangibility (Ward & Chiari, 2008). Consumers value intermediate luxury products and services that are not too expensive to be reached by the professional classes of society (Vickers & Renand, 2003).

However, this does not mean that these products do not offer quality, taste, and refinement. On the contrary, they possess these values more than other products in their product segment (Silverstein et al., 2004).

One level down from the intermediate luxury is mass luxury or accessible luxury. Here, what is important is the glamour rather than the product. The brand predominates over the characteristics unique to luxury products (Ward & Chiari, 2008). The consumers in this segment strive to be perceived as being in a higher segment and to be respected for their purchasing behaviour (Vickers & Renand, 2003). Mass luxuries are the low-priced versions of the high-priced older luxury products. BMW offers high-priced cars to its addicted customers; however, its relatively low-priced "1 series" is offered to middle class people who cannot afford an expensive car but who want to belong to the BMW world. "Masstige" products are a class of products mainly affordable to general society but still perceived as luxury because they are above the conventional products in their product category. The word "masstige" is a combination of mass and prestige (Silverstein et al., 2004).

Ward and Chiari (2008) claimed that if something becomes too widespread in its category then it is no longer considered a luxury. To avoid that, its price needs to be high, and its design needs to be unique, preventing it from becoming too widespread and losing its uniqueness. In an automotive industry context, Strach and Everett (2006) pointed out that the consumers' perceptions of the luxury value of a brand is diminished if the luxury is blended with mass-market brands.

Some goods, even water, might be a luxury or necessity depending upon the situation and the circumstances. This brings us to another dimension of the argument. The same goods under different circumstances sometimes become a necessity and sometimes a luxury. Vigneron and Johnson (2004) suggested that the perception of luxury and the level of luxury in a product or a brand are defined by the context and the people concerned. They introduced a scale to measure perception of luxury. This scale reveals the brands' luxury impression and enables the brands' relative

positions to be estimated. In the authors' case study, Cadillac and Lincoln car brands may be perceived as having the same level of luxury perceptions, but the scale may reveal "their overall brand-luxury perceptions are combinations of different evaluations of the same dimensions of luxury" (p. 485).

Relativity is a strong characteristic of the term "luxury" and assigns different meanings to the same products and services under different conditions. That is why the current study revealing clearly the different types of luxury and different types of relativity in different intersections might be helpful in explaining these concepts. The scheme in Table 2 makes it possible to see the interrelatedness between all types of relativity and three different types of luxury: Temporal relativity is mostly effective in transforming the inaccessible luxuries either to intermediate luxuries or to accessible luxuries; regional and situational relativities might be effective in transforming from a lower level to higher level; and, economic relativity is mostly related to social developments and the economic power of individuals. A necessity for rich people might be a luxury for poor people. This is helpful in signifying the sharp distinctions between different social classes. Situational relativity, different from the others, depends on the current situations people are in, and might involve the conversion of a simple item to a luxury or vice versa. In cultural relativity, the relativity is partial because some industries like the automobile or fashion industry are exempt from its effect, and the perceptions in many countries are independent of each other

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF LUXURY PERCEPTIONS

Methodology

In order to explore the meaning of luxury for people, we conducted in-depth interviews. This type of face-to-face interview method is

common practice in the gathering of data, especially in the marketing discipline (Polsa, 2007). It is an effective way of exploring the understanding of luxury from the consumers' point of view.

When recruiting participants, we focused on potential participants who had economic freedom, and thus were more appropriate to feed us with information of interest. Participants were personal contacts, and in addition to these we recruited close friends and some relatives because of easy accessibility. Consequently, the evidence obtained in this study does not represent the perception of a specific population, but it does support us in the category building process (Morrow, 2005). Grasping the rationale of the multiple interview procedure, Polkinghorne (2005) recommended interviewing each informant twice. The first interviews were made up of two open-ended questions. After analysing the responses, we asked them three more questions in the second interview to obtain a deeper insight into their experiences of luxury. We sharply limited the number of questions to get deeper into the meanings of the stories told and experiences shared (Morrow, 2005). The first two questions did not require such detailed answers; they merely tried to obtain an understanding of luxury to each participant and to come up with a few luxury products they could recall during the process of the interview. The latter three questions were adapted from a study taken as a reference for qualitative interviewing (Granot, Russell, & Brashear-Alejandro, 2013). We asked participants to discuss their luxury consumption, and while asking this, we did not limit them to structured responses to questions. We intended to elaborate their own comments and even to reveal their lived experiences with the products. As a subjective product category, we chose smart phones in one of the questions because smart phones are evaluated as a commonly used product category in recent years, which is common to both genders,

Table 2. Interrelatedness of Relativity Types with Different Luxury Concepts

| Type of Relativity | Inaccessible Luxury | Intermediate Luxury | Accessible Luxury |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Temporal Relativity | Perception of inaccessibility at a specific time. Technology and industry determine this perception. It is the highest point and the initial point and the direction starts from here. Example: A private butler. | Change of perceptions in the course of time. Technology and industry determine changes. Effect of structural changes in society and demand. Direction of change is from inaccessible to intermediate luxury. Example: Cars were an inaccessible luxury for a few decades after they were invented. But no longer are an inaccessible luxury in any developed country. | Change of perceptions in the course of past times. Technology and industry determine changes. Structural changes in society and demand are effective. Direction of change mostly from intermediate to accessible luxury. Example: Mobile phones have over time transitioned from an inaccessible luxury to intermediate luxury, and then to accessible luxury, and nowadays a necessity. |
| Regional Relativity | Local availability is very scarce. Local availability defines its access level. Only elite class members can reach it by paying large amounts. Example: Real houses made of cement etc. are an inaccessible luxury for some people living in shacks. | Local availability is scarce. Local availability defines its access level. It can be reached by paying a large amount of money. It is afforded by the professional social classes and considered a luxury. Example: Italian White Alba truffles (referred to as White Diamond) are notoriously costly as they are difficult to raise. | Local availability is sufficient. Local availability defines its access level. It can be reached by paying a certain amount of money. It is usually accessible by middle class members. Example: A holiday in the sun is a luxury for some people living in specific countries. However, it is something ordinary for people living in Mediterranean countries. |
| Economic Relativity | Prices are prohibitively high and access is highly restricted. Only elite society members can buy it. Example: A camera costing 100 euro might be a luxury for some people; however, for most people it is quite a normal purchase. There are some people who do not consider a camera worth of 2000 euro as a luxurious item. | Access is restricted and items are highly priced. Members of newly enlarging professional class can buy. For members of elite/high society, products might be an amenity or necessity rather than a luxury. Example: Mercedes and BMW are luxury car manufacturers. However they have some specific models like the 1 series or A series for the professional social class. | Access is easy and items are affordable. Members of middle class can buy. For members of professional social class, this isn't considered as luxury but considered as amenity or necessity. Example: Starbucks coffee is luxury for some people with low income. Because it charges two times more than an ordinary coffee shop, so not everybody can afford it. |
| Cultural Relativity | Perception of luxury level does not depend on culture. Some industries, e.g. fashion and automobile, are more culturally independent. Example: Cigars and custom made shoes are seen as luxury in all countries. | Perception of luxury level depends on culture. Some specific sectors like food sector are more culturally dependent. Some industries like fashion and cars are more culturally independent. Example: champagne is an intermediate luxury/accessible luxury at most times for an European, but | Perception of luxury level depends on culture. Some specific sectors like the food sector are more culturally dependent. Some industries like fashion and cars are more culturally independent. Example: Prawns are a luxury for most people in Europe, but in some cultures, prawns aren't con- |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | | it is undrinkable and has no value for a Muslim. | sumed and have no high commercial value. |
| Situational Relativity | Relativity is ever-changing depending on people's circumstances. Even an inaccessible luxury product might be considered a worthless item, or a necessary product might be seen as an inaccessible luxury. Ex: Owning a private jet is inaccessible luxury in all situations. | Relativity is ever-changing, sometimes depending on the conditions people are in. Depending on the situation, even an inaccessible luxury product might be considered a worthless item or a necessary product might be seen as an inaccessible luxury. Ex: A sports car is a luxury but useless in the desert. | Relativity is not continuously ever-changing depending on the conditions people are in. Even an inaccessible luxury product might be considered a worthless item or a necessary product might be seen as an inaccessible in some cases. Ex: Water is a necessity in most cases; however, it may be a luxury in some cases. |

released by information technology companies. We searched for background information by asking about their usage of smart phones. Then, we asked them: "Tell me about a product you own that you would like to talk about," which is in accordance with the study of Granot et al. (2013). This question is likely to reveal prominent product categories used by the participants, and thus it was hoped to uncover experiences and interactions between the users and the products (Fournier & Mick, 1999). Granot et al. (2013) explained this as probing "their experiences with specific possessions and followed a phenomenological inquiry approach" (p. 35). In all the questions, the respondents chose the brands to talk about by themselves without placing product category restrictions on them. Interviews varied from 50 to 70 minutes in length; mostly, they were around 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted online using the Skype service, enabling a recording of the interviews to be made, in addition to the transcript.

Sample

The interviewees belonged to the new emerging class of upper middle class people with the purchasing power to buy any items they were interested in, and they represented an educated part of society. Luxury is not only purchased by the affluent class, but this

group of people includes a remarkable number of potential customers for luxury companies.

To secure the maximum possible variation, the selected interviewees differed with regard to age, educational background, professional life, and gender (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). We conducted purposeful sampling selecting highly educated persons with at least a bachelor degree; however, a large number of our informants had obtained a master's degree in Turkey. The number of informants is seven (5 females and 2 males from Turkey). The number was enough to reveal the understanding of luxury among emerging working people in the upper middle class in Turkey, and the decision about the number of interviewees was in accordance with what Kvale (1996, p. 102) suggested is "a point of saturation" the researcher reaches during the interview process.

We selected informants from Turkey because in the luxury industry, the importance of developing markets has been increasing and Turkey, with its economic success in the last decade, was a good candidate for our review.

Unlike the model study by Granot et al. (2013), we recruited both male and female informants because we thought that it was essential to observe luxury consumers as a whole. We cannot deny the influence of men in making luxury purchases, especially in developing countries and in patriarchal countries. In these countries, although women have been working and earning money, buy-

ing any luxury items is not a completely individualistic decision, especially over a certain amount.

Quality and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, there are paradigms closely related to the underpinnings of this particular research discipline. Ponterotto (2005) identified four different paradigms by reviewing 49 qualitative studies published in

Journal of Counseling Psychology from 1989 to 2003 (p. 128–129). Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated that criteria for trustworthiness in post positivist qualitative studies are associated with “internal validity (isomorphism of findings with reality), external validity (generalizability), reliability (in sense of stability), and objectivity (distanced and neutral observer)” (p. 114). (see Table 3).

Table 3. Application of Quality Criteria

| Quality Criteria | Definition | Application in current study |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Internal validity | “How we ensure rigor in the research process and how we communicate to others that we have done so.” (Gasson, 2004, p. 95) | Provided checks of our participants and extended conversation (Geertz, 1983). |
| External validity | Deriving generalizations from the findings | We accomplished this by using samples from the middle and upper middle classes, all professionals and relatively well educated. |
| Reliability | Being unvarying in a research throughout a research period, and in the researchers and analysis methods used. | Interviews were first transcribed and then coded by the corresponding author, and then the first author reviewed the interview transcripts and peer discussions which helped to give a final touch before using them for the article. |
| Trustworthiness | Trustworthiness is accomplished with <i>authenticity</i> criteria, which include fairness and different authenticities such as ontological, catalytic, educative, and tactical authenticity. | We applied the fairness criterion to different constructs. In ontological authenticity, participants elaborate on their individual constructions to develop them to maturity; (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). |
| Researcher reflexivity | A further criteria dimension for presenting the interrelation between a researcher’s background and evaluation of the world around him/herself, including personal experiences and his/her research processes (Morrow, 2005). | We have been trying to be reflexive in our account by discussing false applications in daily life of the concept of luxury, to come up with effective managerial implications that may be helpful for luxury firms. |

Data Analysis

The authors conducted data analysis after collecting the data. First, the data collected was transcribed and then the content was coded by following a thematic analysis. Here the main aim was to identify similar parts of the text exemplifying the same descriptive and theoretical ideas (Gibbs, 2007). The analysis began with open coding technique which is a way of creating codes by asking questions like

Why? When? How? Thus, one is able to identify important parts of the text. From this analysis, the authors had around 200 different codes to use in the next step. Then, they grouped the codes into categories. Some of the categories were subsequently merged, interconnected, and refined by using the axial coding method (Gibbs, 2007). After this, the authors reached the final classified groups which were in several categories. Table 4 depicts profiles of respondents aged between 26

and 50 years. They have various backgrounds and live different lives in accordance with their family status.

Table 4. Respondents' Profiles

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Education | Marital Status | Occupation | Income Category* |
|-----------|--------|-----|-----------|----------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Deniz | Female | 45 | PhD | Never Married | Doctor | 40000-59999 |
| Ezel | Female | 42 | PhD | Divorced | Teaching Staff | 20000-39999 |
| Yesim | Female | 32 | PhD | Married | Researcher | 40000-59999 |
| Kader | Female | 50 | Master | Married | Engineer | 100000 and more |
| Fisun | Female | 26 | Bachelor | Married | Teacher (Currently not working) | 20000-39999 |
| Osman | Male | 37 | Master | Married | Engineer | 60000-79999 |
| Özkan | Male | 42 | PhD | Divorced | Musician | 60000-79999 |

*Income in Turkish Lira (annual). At the time of the study, 1 Turkish lira equalled roughly 0.50 US dollars.

RESULTS

In the first question, we asked participants about which products are luxurious in their understanding. It was interesting to see that each participant came up with a different product category except for two female participants who stated “jewellery” and one male participant who stated “Rolex watches.” The other answers varied and came from different categories including fashion, automobiles, yachts, and house furnishings. The second question was a more general question asked with the intention of getting participants to reveal their perceptions and knowledge of luxury. Another interesting point here is that participants expressed their perceptions by exemplifying different characteristics and relativities of luxury.

All of the interviewees, without any exception, emphasized the characteristic of price, which confirmed what we have already indicated, that price is the most striking characteristic of luxury, and for most people the first one to be uttered. This is also in accordance with previous researches (Heine, 2011). Rarity and aesthetics followed price and signified a greater meaning for three of our informants. They stressed two different aspects of products' rarity: firstly, being produced in lim-

ited numbers, and secondly, being used by few people. Three female interviewees explained that aesthetics might be the precedent value, especially for women. For example, one noted, “Even a car if spotless clean or if it shines, it is luxury for me. Because it shows the car is nice” (Fisun, personal communication, March 17, 2014).

It is interesting to see that, unlike the model study by Granot et al. (2013), not all of the interviewees stressed quality as a characteristic of luxury, explicitly; however, one of them mentioned this as an interrelated characteristic with high price, while a few others referred to the high quality features of smart phones. One participant stressed the characteristic of being extraordinary. She remarked:

Yesim: If a product has different features more than conventional ones, then it is a luxury. For instance, if an oven has radio within it and if people pay more than for a conventional product, then, it is a luxury.... For example, a vacuum cleaner because of the features it has is more than a conventional vacuum cleaner, and if it is sold for 3000 TL instead of 300 TL, this is a luxury for sure (Yesim, personal communication, March 17, 2014)

Classifications and Themes

Five main classification categories emerging from the interviews with both males and

females are summarized in Table 5. Each classification is illustrated with quotations revealing both the luxury perceptions and consumption profiles of informants.

Table 5. Process Coding Categories

| Classifications | Categories |
|--------------------------|---|
| Modern Life | Technology Awareness Technology Addiction Eminent Features Technology and Information |
| Social Communication | Socializing Connection to Outer World Social Respectability |
| Colligation of Opposites | Genuine & Counterfeit Economical & Expensive |
| Emotions and Feelings | Appraisal & Being Proud of Attention & Care Positive Moods Comfort Brand Love & Hate Freedom Safety |
| Conspicuousness | Brand Image Customer Profile Advertising |

Modern Life

Answers to all the interview questions revealed that the consumption habits of our seven informants showed parallels. All of them had smartphones, which is important for evaluating the technology adaptation of middle class people, especially when we consider that prices of smartphones are relatively high in Turkey. Regardless of gender, people were usually aware of newly released models of smartphones and used the various features of their phones for different purposes, ranging

from enjoying themselves to obtaining information, as the following quotation explains:

Kader: Even now I am talking with you via my phone. With this, I have been able to follow everything because I have my phone with me all the time in my hand. Previously I was checking my email by switching my computer on, but now I have my phone in my hand and I am in such a position that I can follow everything at any time. I was using online banking and, when I needed to make a transfer, I had to find a computer to complete transactions. However, now I am

able to do them all with my handheld. I am using it as a camera and camcorder, I am playing games, especially a very fantastic game, Scrabble, its Turkish version; we have downloaded it with my friends (Kader, personal communication, March 16, 2014)

Even in response to the next question, which concerned talking about any product owned regardless of product category, the participants mostly talked again about their technological tools; this time it was either tablet computers or notebooks.

Social Communication

Social contacts have always been important in people's lives. Although, in comparison to past decades, modern life has kept people away from spending time with each other, technology and social media have emerged as with new ways of communicating with friends. This theme can be summarized under four subheadings: socializing, connection to outer world, bandwagon effect, and being esteemed by others. All the participants stressed the importance of accessing social media from their smartphones and tablet computers: "Emails come to me instantly which is a very nice thing. And it operates all chat programs without any problems and deceleration at all. All kinds of messaging, skype, chat, etc." (Ozkan, March 17, 2014).

A few of the informants indicated that they used their smartphones to answer questions of some people around who did not have smart phones:

Fisun: Yes, everybody has but that does not mean that I should have one too. For example, I can reach urgent information quickly. There are people around me that do not have smart phones and I can give some information to them. They ask me to check some info on my phone. I check what they have asked me. In addition, there are websites I am following. When I

am out, waiting for a bus, I check websites and get informed about social media and what is happening. Actually, I know it is not so crucial; however, this is a really nice feeling. I follow social media to know what is going and to hear from people (Fisun, personal communication, March 17, 2014).

Colligation of Opposites

From the responses to the interviews, we have seen that brand awareness of technological products was admirably high. However, there are two prominent major brands of smartphones: the Apple iPhone and Samsung. It is interesting that the iPhone, which is actually a model name of the Apple brand, substitutes for the brand itself and is known among consumers as the iPhone. However, it was quite surprising to come across a replica smartphone during one of our interviews. It had been commonplace to see counterfeit fashion products, but not a technology product. The interviewee explained his reasoning as follows:

Ozkan: My reason for preferring counterfeits, but not the original because of their low prices, especially in Turkey. There is too much tax on the products and even though you bring it in from abroad, the state still demands extra tax, 150 TL just to allow the phone be used in Turkey. I reject paying this kind of silly, unmerited tax. Maybe, it is not exactly the same, but it is 80% the same. I do not care for fashion but, for example, instead of buying a Lacoste t-shirt counterfeit at 30 TL, I can buy an original by paying 150 TL. However, if the original is 650 TL then there is no other choice but to buy the counterfeit one. In my opinion, the big price difference between the counterfeit and the original leads people to buy counterfeit ones...I do not care about this functionality in a brand, so there is no need for me to

insist on buying Gucci or any other brand. However, I do this especially in electronics because you cannot find similar features on a regular phone. That's why I buy counterfeit electronics (Ozkan, personal communication, March 17, 2014).

Almost all the participants introduced themselves as individuals who preferred not to buy luxury goods, but actually, most of them did. They usually talked about their budgets being tight and not being capable of buying luxuries for financial reasons. They justified purchasing the mentioned goods by explaining that they were not luxury products but necessary ones, indispensable parts of daily life.

Emotions and Feelings

Praise for the products was one of the dominant characteristics among the responses of the participants. People were usually inclined to praise their own products or they explicitly showed pride in their products. Even though people sometimes regretted their shopping, human psychology is inclined to establish a kind of mechanism to consolidate the regret by coming up with reasoning or justification to show that it was not a bad idea. Moreover, all kinds of luxury items that people own make owners somehow happy, or in other words, give rise to a positive mood.

Kader: I currently drive an Opel Corsa. It is diesel and I am very pleased with its consumption. It is very economical car. It is 2010 model. I bought it brand new. My previous car was also a Corsa, however it was a 1999 model and I bought it second hand. It had been old enough. It was not diesel. Thus, fuel consumption was higher (Kader, personal communication, March 16, 2014).

Schmitt (1999, p. 58) stated that "while customers may frequently engage in rational choice, they are just as frequently driven by emotions because of consumption experiences." It is also possible to observe a kind of

emotional tie between the product and the person such as:

This is my first brand new car. So far, I have always used second-hand cars. That's why one has somehow a more emotional tie with it. For example, I was doing such a thing, but of course not anymore, because I have been using it for quite a while. I was seeing it as a daughter and I was satisfying my motherhood feelings with it, as my own daughter is already a young adult and not as close as she used to be. I was saying greetings to my car each morning and talking with it. However, I am not doing this anymore (Kader, personal communication, March 16, 2014).

In addition, a few informants talked about feeling of being safe, especially when these were their owned car or dreamed car. They clarified this feeling as follows:

Yesim: A Mercedes car is also nice. When you buy Mercedes I am sure that you will not think how much you will spend 5 years later for repair costs, also if I crash the car whether I will be alive or not. Probably Mercedes is the only car brand you can be sure about its safety. People in Turkey are high income if they use Mercedes cars. Nevertheless, this is not the case for other countries. In Germany, all types of people can use such a car (Yesim, personal communication, March 17, 2014).

Conspicuousness

The quotation above might be an example of brand image. Some brands have established images that differ from culture to culture. In this example, the informant sees the Mercedes as a very strong and highly safe. Another female participant explained her luxury product by giving the example of Audi cars:

Ezel: For example Audi cars are a luxury for me. Audi, in fact, for me is a symbol of richness. Especially in Turkey, not everyone can own this brand. . . . The people using it are in general rich people living in Turkey, businesspersons or high-income people use Audi cars and SUVs. Especially, the colour black is another luxury symbol for me (Ezel, personal communication, March 17, 2014).

Another male interviewee supported the idea by saying:

Osman: Luxury is Grand Cherokee Jeep for me. Why? Because it consumes 14 litres per 100 km. It has a 3000 engine and its tax, full insurance and petrol consumption is quite high. . . I have a close friend using a Grand Cherokee but his father has a factory. Doctors or other high-income level people use this type of car with high expenses. . . If you need to show you off then this type of car is the one for you. For example, if you go to construction sites, there are always luxury cars parking there during the day because this is a strategy for companies, because whoever goes there to visit that construction site, these luxury cars make an impression on people (Osman, personal communication, March 18, 2014).

Another informant stressed the characteristic peculiarity of Turkey with its profile of consumers using high technology products:

Here all Turkish people regardless of age, income level etc. use the latest versions of products and technology. For example, someone just selling Turkish bagels (I mean someone with a low-income level) has a latest model and pricey products, such as phones let's say. You know when Blackberries were first released in the market, they have been made especially for businesspersons, for the purpose of business solving devices, but in Turkey,

even low income guys like bagel selling guys were using this phone (Ozhan, personal communication, March 17, 2014).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Modern life has changed many luxury-related concepts, and technology adoption is one of these. The consumer research folklore claims males are more interested in technological gadgets and cars. However, the responses from the interviews do not confirm this traditional view. Our question inviting general views about any product they owned gave rise to surprising responses because, contrary to stereotypical expectations that women are supposed to talk about either fashion or beauty items, they preferred either their technology items or their cars as topics to have a conversation about.

Furthermore, the crucial point to take into consideration is necessity and luxury differentiation. For working class people, technology and related items have been indispensable so everybody owns either smart phone or tablet PC. Although people consider themselves not as someone purchasing luxury products, they actually do so, and they justify their purchases by hiding behind the reason of it being a necessity of contemporary life.

Technology adoption has been so widespread that people say that their smartphones or tablet PCs are devices to do everything on from morning to night. Moreover, the informants usually considered their inner state as being happy or in another positive mood. They could not imagine themselves without their smart phones, which might be a reason for technology addiction.

The interviewees expressed the view that sometimes their friends asked for information from them, and they checked and supplied them with the information. This kind of action might create esteem among other members. All informants had smartphones, and it is interesting to see that only two brands existed

among the various answers: iPhone and Samsung. Furthermore, the responses about the brands they had been using revealed that there is a rivalry between these two brands: Brand love and brand hate are two opposite but at the same time close emotions.

While some products are a necessity for some people who have a higher income compared to others, it might not be the case for all people. This shows us the relativity of the concept of luxury. Luxury brands usually have a brand image that people associate with quality and with being expensive. Besides the brands, the owners or people purchasing them are associated with wealth. It was interesting to find that one of the informants saw Audi cars as a symbol of richness and the colour black as another additional luxury characteristic.

Managerial Implications

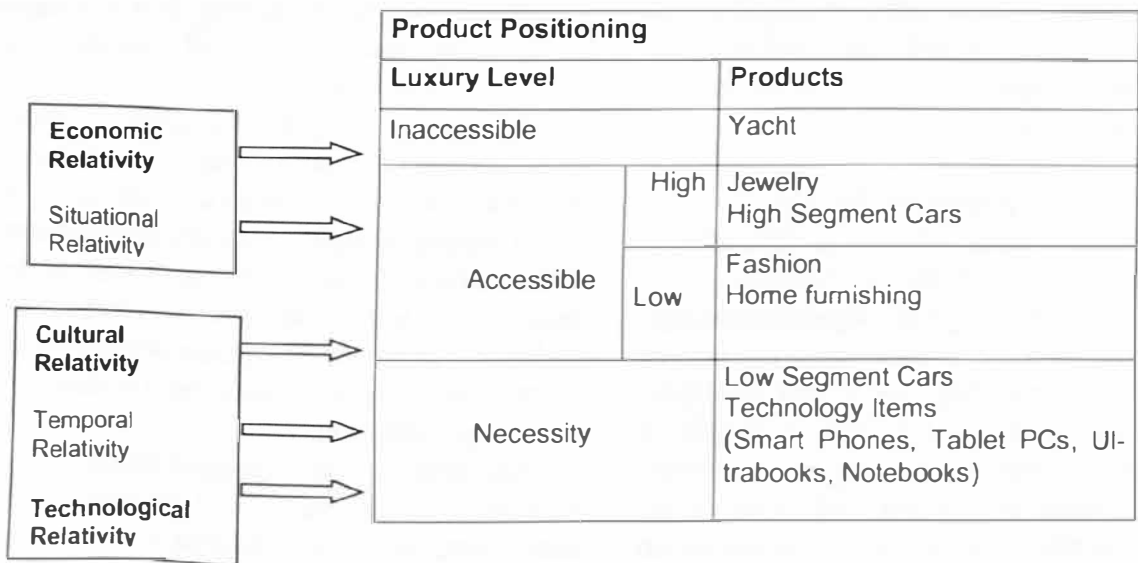
Modern life has changed the lifestyle of people, so people are looking forward to hav-

ing increasing levels of comfort each day. The products that promote that idea of comfort and make life easier for people have more chance of being in higher demand. The items that were used by people more often, for example, daily or a few times a week, were in higher demand than items used or worn only on special occasions. Consequently, marketing strategies might need to be changed.

For rarely used items such as jewellery, emotions dominate the perception. Just like the successful marketing slogan of "A Diamond Is Forever" by DeBeers, successful slogans emphasize the heirloom characteristic of jewellery. Middle aged and elderly people are encouraged to buy new jewellery by the idea of handing it on to the next generation.

The advantages of technology-related or comfort-related items make selling easier; it might be possible to add further elements of luxury to these items thus combine some luxury with comfort and technology. This might initiate a new stream of marketing.

Figure 2. Product Positioning of Luxury Goods by Interviewees



Because the price difference between authentic and counterfeit products is vast, people are directed to buy counterfeit items. Hence,

additional purchasing options and price differentiation might support the vendors in clarifying differences between inaccessible luxury

and accessible luxury. Thus, companies specializing in luxury goods might gain some of the purchasers of counterfeits. Diversifying payment options such as equal instalments help more people acquire the purchasing power to buy jewellery or similar products.

Research Implications

Emotions and experiential purchases turn us to drive luxury purchase decisions. Emotions drive the consumer towards broader shopping adventures. Although people sometimes regret their shopping, they compensate for their regret by creating an excuse for their behaviour, or by praising the product they have bought. This kind of approach might help increase happiness. For future research, it might be wise to investigate emotions enabling an increase in positive moods.

The concept of luxury plays an important role in today's product positioning, and luxury is something aspired to. Almost all marketers aim to take advantage of luxury-related attributes by using terms such as "premium," "deluxe," or "high class." They aim to meet the consumers' desire to have a kind of luxury in their lives or have a luxury product among their possessions. However, we are facing different usages of the term "luxury," which reduces the efficiency of the marketing communications. This article contributes to the conceptual clarification of the concept of luxury.

Counterfeit items are common especially in developing countries, and this causes an extensive use of such products. A further study might reveal the rate of preference for such counterfeit products and the differences in moods and behaviours of consumers.

Here in current study, we have proposed a new relativity concept besides the existing five different relativities: technological relativity. Due to what modern life offers us, technology has been an inevitable concept for

most of us, and for anyone living in an "enhanced part of the world" technology has a core interpretation by means of sense making in our life. In line with this, modern understanding of luxury is defined by technological knowledge, use of technology, and the emotions related to adoption of new technologies. However, this concept is not decisive for considering something as luxury just by itself because like the other five relativity concepts. Contemporary luxury research lacks links to the research stream of technology adaption and UTAUT2 (Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012). Following our results, this is likely to be a promising venue for further research.

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