

## Mothers, daughters, and luxury brands: a love triangle

Roberta Dias Campos<sup>1</sup>

Tammy Maria Soares de Lima Avila<sup>2</sup>

To understand the collective dimension of consumer-brand relationships, formed between luxury fashion brands and female dyads within a family, we analyzed the link between family identity and consumer-brand relationships. A qualitative approach was chosen to investigate 5 different families using in-depth interviews with mother-daughter dyads. The main results consist of the extension of the consumer-brand relationship construct, providing a triangulated perspective on the topic, and proposing an initial typology composed of three emerging forms of collective consumer-brand relationship: sorority initiation, prom queen friendship and in-law relationship. This study inaugurates a collective approach to consumer-brand relationship studies, especially in the luxury context, using an intergenerational female family bundle as the unit of analysis (mother-daughter-brand), whereas research has traditionally focused on individual relationships (consumer-brand). By understanding how brands navigate the family territory - building collective relationships with brands - marketing managers can fine-tune branding strategy and positioning, according to the role they wish their brands to exert inside the family or other collective contexts, thus resulting in higher loyalty levels..

**Keywords:** consumer-brand relationship (CBR); family identity; luxury brands; intergenerational influence; collective CBR.

### Mães, filhas e marcas de luxo: um triângulo amoroso

Para entender a dimensão coletiva do relacionamento entre marca e consumidor, analisamos a relação entre identidade familiar e relacionamento entre marcas de luxo e díades femininas em uma mesma família. Foi adotada uma abordagem qualitativa para investigar 5 famílias, com entrevistas em profundidade com as duplas de mãe e filha. Os resultados contribuem para a extensão do construto relacionamento consumidor-marca, acrescentando uma perspectiva triangular. Propomos uma tipologia composta por três formas emergentes de relacionamento coletivo consumidor-marca: iniciação da irmandade, amizade com a rainha do baile e relações familiares aparentadas. Este estudo inaugura uma abordagem coletiva dos estudos de relacionamento marca-consumidor, posto que a literatura tradicionalmente se concentrou na relação entre um indivíduo e uma marca. Ao entender como marcas navegam no território familiar, os gerentes de marketing podem ajustar a estratégia e o posicionamento da marca, de acordo com o papel que desejam que suas marcas exerçam dentro da família ou em outros contextos coletivos, resultando em níveis mais altos de lealdade.

**Palavras-chave:** relacionamento consumidor-marca (RCM); identidade familiar; marcas de luxo; influência intergeracional; relacionamento consumidor-marca coletivo.

### 1. Introduction

This paper explores the dynamics related to consumer-brand relationships and family identity, specifically targeting intergenerational transfers between mother and daughter in the context of luxury fashion brands and thus bringing a new perspective to the consumer-brand relationship domain. In doing so, the aim is to analyze triangulated relationships formed between mothers, daughters and different luxury brands in the collective territory of family.

<sup>1</sup> Doutora em Administração pela Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro e professora do Instituto Coppead de Administração da UFRJ. E-mail roberta.campos@coppead.ufrj.br. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7091-7901>

<sup>2</sup> Mestre pelo Instituto Coppead de Administração da UFRJ. E-mail: tammy.avila@gmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6498-4251>.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.21714/2237-51392020v24n1p096114>.

Artigo recebido em 02/05/2020 e aprovado em 12/06/2020. Artigo avaliado em *double blind review*.

Editora responsável: Cecília Lima de Queirós Mattoso



The concept of consumer-brand relationship (hereafter CBR) was proposed by Fournier (1998) as a metaphor for consumer attachment to brands, given similarities to an interpersonal relationship. The topic gave birth to a significant stream of research (FOURNIER, 1998; KATES, 2000; KIM; JIN, 2011; FOURNIER; BREAZEALE; FETSCHERIN, 2012; FETSCHERIN; HEILMANN, 2015). Nevertheless, the focus of this theoretical effort was restricted to a dyadic interaction (consumer-brand), without being capable of fully explaining the broader perspective of collective relationships and networks. As stated by O'Guinn and Muñiz (2014), "brand relationships are made through social forces" and are therefore not individual by nature, despite the approach fostered by traditional dyadic (consumer-brand) research.

The context is luxury consumption among Brazil's emergent consumers. The Brazilian market is ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in the world, with sales of over US\$3 billion, even in the middle of an economic downturn (Euromonitor International, 2016). The size and growth of this market have been attracting research interest (TYNAN; MCKECHNIE; CHUON, 2010). Additionally, the growing global handbag market is led by luxury brands and was worth over US\$48 billion in 2013 (Euromonitor International, 2014). More than a fashion accessory, the handbag is an icon of identity and social status (KAUFMANN, 2011), as well as a lifestyle prop, and is used to communicate desired impressions (BERGER, 2010).

Building on its expressive aspects, and seeking to explore its sharing potential (EISMAN, 2010; KAUFMANN, 2011) inside the family, the handbag is the focal point of discussion in this research, which investigates CBRs in the luxury fashion arena and contributes by providing a sociocultural perspective on the CBR theme. In addition, research on CBR in the luxury context (e.g. KIM; JIN, 2011; HANSLIN; RINDELL, 2014; HODGE et al. 2015) is still limited and has not yet tackled the family scenario. Also, the focus on emerging consumers enriches the analysis by investigating status consumption from a rarely studied social mobility standpoint (ROCHA; ROCHA; ROCHA, 2016).

This study seeks to position luxury fashion good consumption in the family field, in an attempt to understand its relational capacities and interaction with family identity. The main connection between these parts is the symbolic use of brands that is enabled by the increasing need of regarding and relating to brands as human characters (FOURNIER, 1998) and the symbolism that characterizes the consumption of luxury products (HODGE et al., 2015). This involves analyzing the interplay of different dimensions of collectivity-individuality, examining CBR and family bundle-related dynamics, scrutinizing the applicability of Fournier's typology (1998) and its further extensions (e.g. KATES, 2000; JI, 2002; ZAYER; NEIER, 2011; HANSLIN; RINDELL, 2014), while trying to identify new relationship forms. It thus supports the growing body of CBR literature, using the family to investigate the CBR in less dyadic terms, and extending its reach to the sociocultural sphere where relationships are embedded in complex networks. This approach also reinforces the suitability and potential contribution of Consumer Culture Theory (hereafter "CCT") (ARNOULD; THOMPSON, 2005) and its symbolic and sociocultural perspective in the CBR arena.

Hence, the objective of this research is to *identify the forms and characteristics of collective triangulated consumer-brand relationships formed between mothers and daughters and luxury fashion brands*. We conducted long in-depth in-home interviews with mother-

daughter dyads of five families. The main findings consist of the extension of the CBR construct, providing a triangulated perspective on the topic, and proposing an initial typology of collective CBRs with three emerging forms that exercise different roles inside the family unit.

## **2. Literature Review**

The following sections undertake a review of the CBR literature and examine the concept's connections with family identity and the luxury fashion context.

### **2.1 Consumer-Brand Relationship**

The CBR construct has inspired a consistent stream of research in marketing (e.g. BENGTSSON, 2003; AAKER; FOURNIER; BRASEL, 2004; AGGARWAL, 2004; FOURNIER; BREAZEALE; FETSCHERIN, 2012; FETSCHERIN; HEILMANN, 2015) and even though different angles seem to emerge and there is no clear consensus regarding a definition of the term in academia (VELOUTSOU, 2007), all authors acknowledge the existence of bonds between consumers and brands.

Fournier (1998) introduced the interpersonal relationship metaphor to the branding arena by arguing for the "legitimacy of the brand as an active relationship partner" (FOURNIER 1998, p. 344) according to Hinde's (1995 apud FOURNIER, 1998, p. 344) principles that qualify an interpersonal relationship: reciprocal exchange between partners, purposive actions involving provision of meanings, several cross-dimensional forms and ranges and a process phenomenon. Fournier (1998) shows that consumers relate to brands, building up their meanings in a truly active way, not only borrowing from what is intended by marketers but actually producing the modern culture and assembling these relationships themselves. As she states: "consumers do not choose brands, they choose lives" (FOURNIER 1998, p. 367) and for that matter each brand has a role in their lives, where brands' meanings are created, negotiated and reinforced in a way that fits individual life projects and identities.

The author develops a typology of meaningful relationship forms that people cultivate with brands, all of which refer to human relationships, but restricted to a dyadic dimension, and therefore without being capable of fully explaining the broader perspective of collective relationships which are the topic of this study and will be illustrated below. Additionally, the fact that this typology is restricted to specific context of women's consumption of supermarket goods (SWEENEY; CHEW, 2002) and that "relationships both affect, and are affected by, the contexts in which they are embedded" (FOURNIER 1998, p. 346) stresses the importance of understanding CBR among different settings.

This endeavor is pursued by several studies that extend Fournier's proposition. Interesting cases in point are the studies by Kates (2000) that analyzes the gay community, and Ji (2002) that seeks to understand the relationships between children and brands. Sweeney and Chew (2002) base their investigations on Fournier (1998) and its suitability to the services domain, while Zayer and Neier (2011) study male consumers of fashion and grooming products. Another example is Hanslin and Rindell's article (2014) which explores the extensions provided by these previous studies and is able to identify new relationship forms in the context of the luxury fashion industry.

However, apart from Kates (2000), which deals with a subculture, no collective perspective is presented in the above studies. Although there is research on brand communities, the focus shifts from the relationship itself to the brand relationship as a means of forming social links (FOURNIER, 2014). The study by McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002), for example, builds on Fournier (1998) and Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) ideas, contributing the notion that both consumer-brand relationships and consumer-consumer-brand relationships (depicted by brand communities) are situated within a relationship mosaic. The latter also incorporates consumer-product and consumer-brand relationships - reinforcing the network perspective provided by Epp and Price (2008) - but once again concentrates on admirers of a brand instead of a neutral collective environment, such as the family territory.

In a more recent study, O'Guinn and Muñiz (2014) stress the importance of acknowledging the socially constructed nature of brands and, therefore, of understanding "brand relations as meaningful because they are social" (O'GUINN; MUÑIZ 2014, p. 191). This reaffirms the relevance of collectiveness evidencing the research opportunity in investigating a family relational bundle and its interplay with CBR - considering both individual and communal aspects - and which leads to a novel perspective.

### **2.3 Family identity**

A collective approach to relationships is also provided by the family identity construct. Price and Epp (2005) show that studies of family identity explain how objects and services are built into the family identity and transferred across generations, as in the case of the diffusion of consumption patterns and relationships with brands. The authors introduce a network approach to family (2008) that presents the family unit as a complex system of relationships with individual, relational (e.g. couple, parent-child) and collective dimensions in which family members are embedded, thus problematizing the understanding of family dynamics. This perspective highlights that different bundles (individual, relational, and collective) are in constant interaction and negotiation and that family identity is a continuous mutually constructed process (EPP; PRICE, 2008).

The framework provided by Epp and Price (2008) that exploits the network approach demonstrates how families use consumption to manage interplays between the different dimensions of family identity, drawing on varied communications forms and marketplace resources in which potential moderators act to build, change or even weaken family identity bundles. By doing this, the authors (2008) change the unit of analysis from the individual to the interplay of identity bundles in which products and brands are nested, directly impacting the understanding of family decision-making, consumer socialization and person-object relations.

Specifically regarding the person-object relations matter, Epp and Price (2008, p. 61) acknowledge that, although previous studies (e.g. BELK, 1992; GENTRY; BAKER; KRAFT, 1995) recognize "objects as representative of identity states at particular points in time (...), this does not uncover the dynamic interplay of the biography of objects with the identity practices of families over time". An example would be how a particular object, such as a handbag and also its brand, interact with family identity bundles (EPP; PRICE, 2008). The latter is precisely the focus of this study, which extends the person-object relation spectrum to CBRs, while seeking an understanding of meanings and uses through the cultural biographies of objects proposed by Kopytoff (1986). The network perspective (EPP; PRICE, 2008) is therefore reinforced and

illustrated by the cultural biography of objects' theory (KOPYTOFF, 1986), as it reveals how inanimate objects can be active in family identity enactment processes (EPP; PRICE, 2008).

## 2.4 Luxury

Even though research interest in luxury has been growing in recent years (TYNAN; MCKECHNIE; CHHUON, 2010), there is still a confusing and acknowledged lack of consensus regarding concepts of luxury and luxury brands in academia (CIORNEA et al. 2012; CHANDON; LAURENT; VALETTE-FLORENCE, 2016; VICKERS; RENAND, 2003). However, there are some basic and recurrent characteristics that several scholars have associated with luxury in various disciplines (e.g. VEBLEN, 1899; KAPFERER, 2004; CASTARÈDE, 2005; LIPOVETSKY; ROUX; MACHADO, 2008; CORBELLINI; SAVIOLO, 2014; CYPRIANO, 2015), such as: superiority, distinction, high prices, prestige, exclusivity and quality. For the purpose of the present research, luxury entails indulgence of the senses, regardless of cost, this definition clearly illustrates that luxury is highly subjective and has different meanings to different people (MONKHOUSE; BARNES; STEPHAN, 2012). Although their opinions differ some scholars (TYNAN; MCKECHNIE; CHHUON, 2010; MILLER; MILLS, 2012; KAPFERER; BASTIEN, 2009) agree on the existence of a continuum that goes from necessity or mass consumer goods at one end to high-end luxury goods at the other, and where luxury starts must be determined by consumers (TYNAN; MCKECHNIE; CHHUON, 2010), this underlines the intrinsic subjectivity of the construct and the importance of the sociocultural perspective provided by CCT, which relies on the idea that consumption is embedded in culture and thus shaped by it (ARNOULD; THOMPSON, 2005). Building on this idea, some scholars (BRAUN; ZOLFAGHARIAN; BELK, 2016) seek to understand the process whereby a product goes from the luxury end to the necessity one, like the product category in this study - the handbag -, which was once a superfluous item and is nowadays a must in women's daily life (KAUFMANN, 2011; STOCKLEY, 2012).

Moreover, the motivations that drive people to consume luxury are also plentiful, but can be grouped, as proposed by Vickers and Renand (2003), into: functional, experiential (e.g. quest for pleasure/hedonism), and symbolic interaction (e.g. connection to a group/affirmation of social status). The symbolism is one of the key characteristics that differentiate luxury products from ordinary ones defining that luxury brands are brands that go beyond functionality (ESMAEILPOUR, 2015), they are impressions in the minds of consumers that comprehend associations with high levels of price, quality, aesthetics and singularity (HODGE et al. 2015) which highlight their importance as status symbols (OKONKWO, 2007; TRUONG; MCCOLL, 2011) and identity builders (WANG; GRISKEVICIUS, 2014; ESMAEILPOUR, 2015). As stated by Twitchell (2001, p. 60), "you are not *what* you wear but *who* you wear" and what each brand stands for matters greatly in the luxury fashion context (ESMAEILPOUR, 2015), where brand relationships are largely influenced by brands' images (HANSLIN; RINDELL, 2014). There is considerable evidence of the importance of brands as meaning providers and the fashion industry is central to the circulation of meanings in society (ALLEN; FOURNIER; MILLER, 2008). Corbellini and Saviolo's (2014) present a segmentation model of the luxury industry that underscores this symbolic and status dimension. The authors divide the industry into three different levels: supreme luxury, lifestyle luxury and accessible luxury. Differences are mostly related to price ranges and design exclusiveness.

Research on CBR in the luxury context (e.g. KIM; JIN, 2011; HANSLIN; RINDELL, 2014; HODGE et al., 2015) is scant and has not addressed this issue in a family context. Apart from

Hanslin and Rindell's (2014) project, studies have simply examined relationships in the light of Fournier's (1998) study, with no ambition of identifying novel relationship forms. It is interesting to comment that although research has been conducted in specific contexts, such as the luxury cosmetics luxury (HODGE et al. 2015) or luxury retail brands (KIM; JIN, 2011), these studies contribute to the growing body of research by supporting Fournier's (1998) findings and expressing the emergent relevance of the luxury context in the CBR domain.

### 3. Method

Consistent with the study's exploratory nature and the CCT mindset (ARNOULD; THOMPSON, 2005), a qualitative methodology was adopted to recognize the CBRs created between mothers, daughters, and luxury fashion brands and to analyze the family influence by triangulating data within the same family.

Ten individual in-depth interviews were conducted with Brazilian female family members (5 mothers and 5 daughters), who were over 18 years old and consumers of luxury fashion handbags (Table 1). A total of 9 triangulated relationships were identified, with both mother and daughter considering them to be important in the family social environment. Only female dyads were chosen in order to reduce gender variations (FOURNIER, 1998). The mother-daughter family identity bundle was selected as unit of analysis to depict the family environment and explore possible intergenerational transfers (EPP; PRICE, 2008).

Similarly, the specific luxury fashion item 'handbag' was chosen mainly because of its capacity to express women's individual identity (BERGER, 2010; KAUFMANN, 2011; EISMAN, 2010) and consequent higher brand involvement. As personal objects, handbags may or may not be shared inside a family, but they are an entrance space for brands and their meanings. As luxury is a very complex concept the list of brands (Appendix 1) covered by a global project called The World Handbag Report (THE DIGITAL LUXURY GROUP, 2012) - a study that provides an analysis of consumer demand for luxury handbags worldwide - was used as a reference to determine the luxury fashion brands.

Recruitment of informants was made through purposeful sampling based on the author's acquaintance network, and they each had at least one of those brands' handbags

**Table 1 – Interviewees' Profiles**

<b>FAMILY</b>	<b>BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION</b>
<b>Daughter 01</b>	Woman, 28yo, single, living with her sister in Rio de Janeiro, medical doctor
<b>Mother 01</b>	Woman, 57yo, married, mother of 2, living with her husband in Manaus/AM, lawyer
<b>Daughter 02</b>	Woman, 39yo, married, mother of 1, living with her husband and son in São Paulo, lawyer not currently working
<b>Mother 02</b>	Woman, 66yo, married, mother of 2, living with her husband in São Paulo, retired
<b>Daughter 03</b>	Woman, 29yo, engaged, living with her fiancée in São Paulo, medical doctor
<b>Mother 03</b>	Woman, 55yo, married, mother of 2, living with her husband and a daughter in Manaus/AM, entrepreneur
<b>Daughter 04</b>	Woman, 33yo, married, living with her husband in São Paulo, master's student
<b>Mother 04</b>	Woman, 65yo, married, mother of 2, living with her husband in Campos dos Goytacazes/RJ, psychoanalyst and college professor
<b>Daughter 05</b>	Woman, 29yo, single, living alone in Rio de Janeiro/RJ, medical doctor
<b>Mother 05</b>	Woman, 57yo, married, mother of 2, living with her husband and daughter in Manaus/AM, working as manager in her husband's company

Data collection was based on in-depth interview (MCCRACKEN, 1988), associated with projective techniques (ROOK, 2006), and supplemented by photos of products and storage space, and additional follow-up questions. The interview investigated informants' life stories, preferences and opinions about fashion, and luxury consumption practices. The biography of each luxury bag was also explored (KOPYTOFF, 1986). All interviews were conducted in the informants' homes, between June and August 2016. They were audio-recorded and transcribed, generating more than 9 hours of audio and 204 transcribed pages.

Data analysis started with a full review of the data, together with an initial coding process, for context description. The material was then organized by family unit. Finally, the analysis concentrated on triangulated relationships where mother-daughter-brand ties created a meaningful relationship (FOURNIER, 1998). 21 of the 27 different handbag brands cited corresponded to luxury ones, and 43 meaningful individual CBRs were identified among them. Further analysis then led to the identification of 9 triangulated relationships, from which 3 conceptual relationship types emerged as a theoretical contribution.

## 4. Findings

To effectively identify the forms and characteristics of the triangulated collective CBRs, it was necessary to understand the dynamics of interviewed families and their socioeconomic context, while also comprehending their perceptions regarding luxury brands and the luxury market.

### 4.1 Families

Interviewed families were upper middle class or upper class, where the older cohort has acquired wealth within their own generation rather than through inheritance, characterizing emergent consumers who developed preferences and practices in their original social groups, but had also the opportunity to emulate the lifestyle of their new peers (ROCHA; ROCHA; ROCHA, 2016). In addition, Brazil had a closed market until 1994, with most families thus having no access to international luxury brands, which could only be bought on trips abroad – a rare occurrence in the case of middle class consumers during that unstable economic period (GIAMBIAGI et al. 2011; YACCOUB, 2011). Consequently, these mothers had broad access only to the Victor Hugo brand<sup>3</sup>, which was heavily inspired by international competitors but constituted a Brazilian luxury alternative (MOHERDAUI, 2000). When foreign brands started to flood into the Brazilian market, import duties were so high that an ordinary middle class consumer could not afford this type of product (FAVARO, 2015; GIAMBIAGI et al. 2011). Hence, the growth of the economy and broad access to international tourism over the past 10-15 years has enabled Brazilians to increase their international purchases. This is especially so in the case of the luxury segment - with Brazilians buying 80% of their luxury products

---

<sup>3</sup> Victor Hugo is a Brazilian leather goods brand. It was created by a Uruguayan designer of the same name in the 70's, when Brazil's ports were closed to imports and this brand, inspired by international luxury brands, was the only alternative for Brazilians in general.

abroad (MAZZA, 2014) - and has completely changed emerging consumers' habits (ROCHA; ROCHA; ROCHA, 2016). Deep-rooted in the economic background, the families interviewed concentrate their luxury consumption during international trips, which holds a value of achievement.

Shared collective handbag consumption was determined by two factors: mother-daughter intimacy level and degree of interest in luxury fashion. Families where relationships are close and both mother and daughter are interested in luxury fashion constitute a co-ownership system, where bags represent a shared space with no individual property, and both parties are willing to learn from each other. This excerpt from Daughter 1's interview is a good illustration of this analysis: "We share everything, there's no ownership. As these items are expensive, we tend to buy them as a group (daughters and mother). That's why our handbags are always on the move, sometimes in Rio, other times in Manaus".

When families are intimate, but one of the parties does not care about fashion, consumption is more individualized, and sharing is occasional, limited to physical proximity. They develop a provisional joint collection during these periods in which "what's mine is ours when we're together" (Daughter 5). Furthermore, when the mother-daughter relationship is distant, they develop separate individual private collections which may have little in common. This aspect is exemplified in the following extract "one time my mom asked to borrow my Gucci for a wedding, I told her that the Chanel is for wedding, not the Gucci. My mom is so outdated. We're the opposite" (Daughter 2).

#### **4.2 Brands: hierarchy and meanings**

Based on the interviewees' discourse, a perceptual map (Figure 1) was produced to illustrate a consumer perceptual brand hierarchy, ranging from (a) 'basic' luxury (the entry level), divided into two sublevels where the lowest is not real luxury, only the access segment, and the highest characterizes the actual entry point, with brands such as Louis Vuitton and Burberry that are not cheap, but represent the fundamentals of luxury; to a second stage which is higher in status perception, (b) 'self-expression' luxury, which is more trend-related and season-focused, exemplified by Prada and Fendi; and finally to (c) 'iconic' luxury, a more inaccessible and aspirational-driven segment, which is deeply rooted in heritage and tradition, embodied by brands like Chanel and Hermès. This map can be redesigned as a scale and directly connected to the continuum concept (TYNAN; MCKECHNIE; CHUON, 2010; MILLER; MILLS, 2012; KAPFERER; BASTIEN; 2009) - ranging from an absolute necessity to an absolute luxury. In our data, basic luxury is where luxury starts, followed by self-expression luxury and ending at iconic high-end luxury, all of which are subjectively defined by each individual. This classification is similar to the one used in Corbellini and Saviolo's (2014) model.

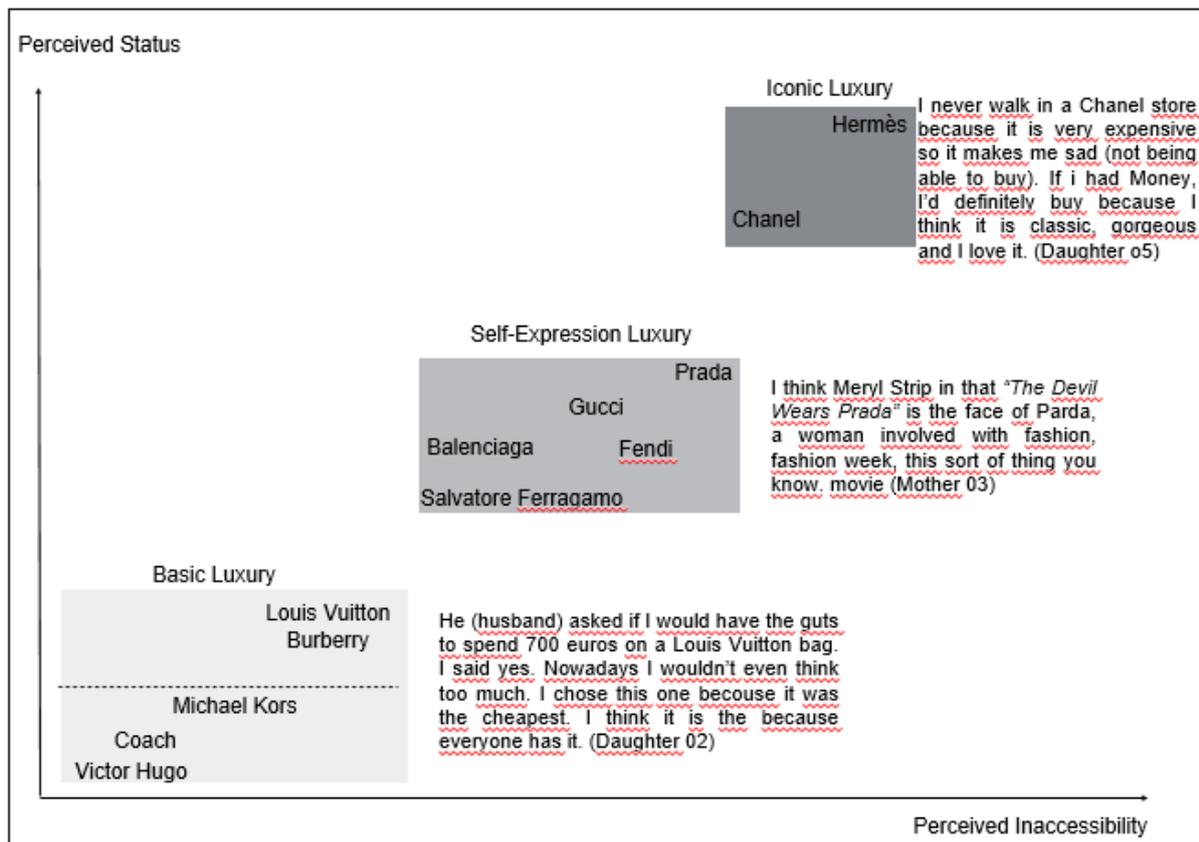


Figure 1 – Brand perceptual map according to interviewees’ opinions

Source: author’s own elaboration

### 4.3 Triangulated relationships

The triangulated manifestations of CBRs substantiated the outline of three conceptual collective types that are proposed as an initial typology of collective CBR forms: sorority initiation, prom queen friendship and in-law relationship. They represent a difference of involvement among the human parties, where one plays a role of influencer (important source of influence who generally has more brand involvement) while another plays the role of influenced. It is these influence dynamics that seem to enable the triangulations, evidencing that relationships perform different functions inside the family.

#### Sorority initiation

This collective relationship is bounded by the initiation of one member into a luxury segment, facilitated by another member. Using the sorority initiation ritual as a parallel and considering that “being affiliated with a fraternity or [sorority] means belonging to a group of ‘brothers’ or [‘sisters’] who care about one another” (WHIPPLE, 1998, p. 1), the brand can be placed as an active and prominent sorority alumnus, an entity representative of that group, respected but also accessible, while the influencer guides the influenced initiation process, just like a sorority sister (current sorority member) plays the influencer’s role inviting the pledge (candidate to enter the sorority) to participate in this new relationship, reinforcing their personal bonds. This type of relationship is more common in the case of accessible luxury

brands (CORBELLINI; SAVIOLO, 2014), which are considered to be an entry to a new world and establishing new consumption patterns. The main purpose of this relationship is to bring mother and daughter closer together by creating a bridge of affinity through this consumption, which may be a conscious or unconscious goal of one of the parties. Both mother and daughter develop positive ties with the brand, but the emphasis is on their personal relationship and the handbag in this case is instrumental.

In this relationship the initiation occurs to equalize a difference formed when one of the parties started a new type of consumption, which created a process of differentiation within the female mother-daughter bundle. The triangulated CBR offers a realignment of their relations, by adapting communication forms and symbols, now that luxury consumption has been incorporated into family identity practices (EPP; PRICE, 2008).

Co-owner families revealed that mothers and daughters began the initiation process by both using the Louis Vuitton brand, reinforcing their similarity and perception of the brand as elementary for luxury consumers. The families with provisional joint collections exhibited, through Fendi and Louis Vuitton, a combination of the willingness to enter the fashion and luxury consumption market and the desire to create a closer mother-daughter relationship. They also developed a strong emotional attachment to the brands. Finally, the private collectors used Burberry mostly as a bridge between mother and daughter, attempting to produce closeness through consumption. There is no special affection for the brand because its function is to connect mother and daughter (FOURNIER, 2014).

Sorority initiation is the result of a combination of two individual forms of CBR (Figure 2) which, under the rules of family dynamics, consists of a new, collective, form of brand relationship. Examples of individual CBRs that could label the individual influencer-brand or the influenced-brand relationships are: committed partnerships (FOURNIER, 1998), best friendships (FOURNIER, 1998) and second best friendships (LINDHOLM, 2012 apud HANSLIN; RINDELL, 2014, p. 151). However, none of them independently fully explain the family's inner dynamics. In addition, in the sorority initiation relationship type the study identified a new form of individual CBR that had not been mapped by previous studies - the *polygamous marriage*, consisting of a, positive and intense, but not exclusive relationship, where both parties recognize that there are other partners with the same levels of commitment and there are no favorites. Loyalty in this case is directed towards luxury consumption and not to a single brand.

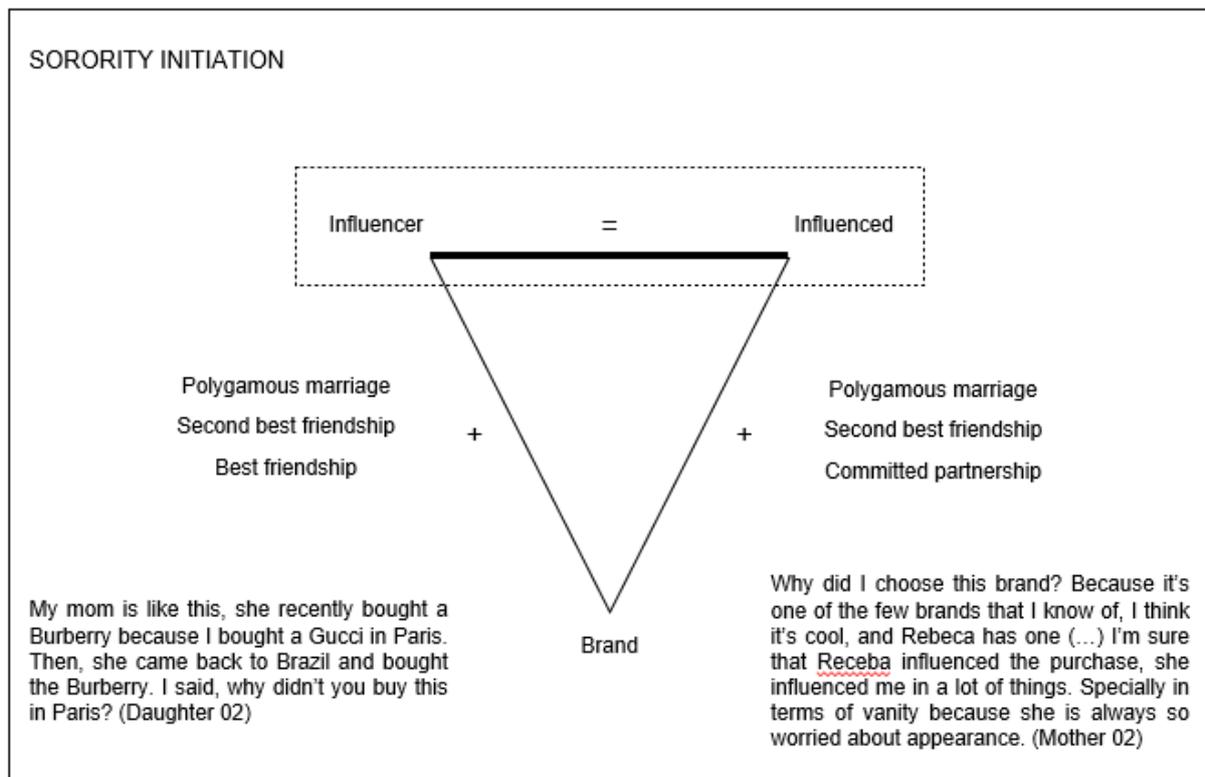


Figure 2 – Sorority initiation relationship scheme

Source: author's own elaboration

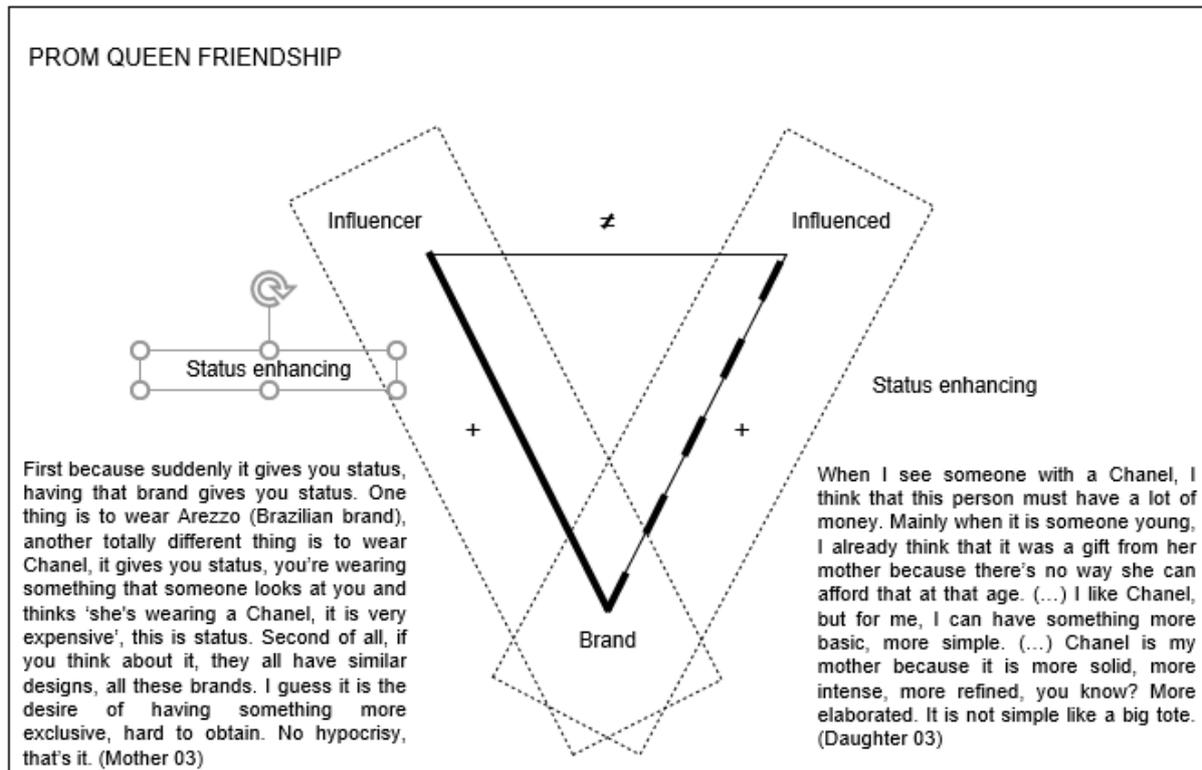
*Prom queen friendship*

The prom queen friendship (Figure 3) refers to a consumption context where the influencer is more emotionally committed to the brand than the influenced party, evidencing an asymmetry in the mother-daughter bundle, where the influencer displays her sophistication by introducing a new upscale brand into the family's consumption, while the influenced follows closely but at an earlier stage of luxury consumption.

This relationship is the result of an effort to promote the family to the next level of luxury and is closely related to the individual status enhancing relationship identified by Hanslin and Rindell (2014), albeit with a collective approach, which positions the brand as a prom queen (popular girl that people want to be friends with) and the mother and daughter as friends who have achieved that spot which is out of reach for many people. The influencer is more comfortable and identifies more personally with the brand more personally, while the influenced, despite valuing the status enhancing function of the brand, can feel a little out of place amidst all the glamour. However, it is important to note that both parties are committed to, and admire, the prom queen brand that is the focus of this relationship. This is because it upgrades the family to a new luxury standard, re-signifying consumers through its expressive capacities to rebuild the collective dimension of family (or "the family's identity") identity (EPP; PRICE, 2008).

The families that usually display the prom queen friendship are the co-owners. Family 1 wears Prada as a symbol of sophistication and status and develops an intense, positive, and most of all public relationship with the brand. Family 3 consumes Chanel as sign of elegance,

prestige and financial achievement, although the daughter – due to her young age - express the feeling that her consumption is often perceived as slightly out-of-place since she cannot afford a Chanel bag on her own, even though she relates well to the brand.



**Figure 3 – Prom queen friendship relationship scheme**

Source: author's own elaboration

*In-law relationship*

In this relationship form the brand is placed as an in-law, very close to one of the family members and superficially related to the others, which is very similar to the kinship relationship form described by Fournier (1998). However, this dyadic relationship is portrayed as being involuntary, with family ties supporting just one side of the collective perspective. The in-law relationship is voluntary for one party and involuntary for the other because it symbolizes a form of individual differentiation in the collective family context, although not constituting a kind of segregation that blocks the relationship with other family members. The influencer projects the brand's personality onto her own individual identity more deeply, whereas the influenced develops a shallow connection which may be positive, negative or neutral. Although a conflict does not have to be explicit, there is a clear estrangement that creates a disparity between mother and daughter, evidencing the weakening of the mother-daughter identity bundle and a discord among individual and relational identities (EPP; PRICE, 2008).

Families with two distinct profiles exhibited this form of relationship. Private collectors consider Chanel a classic and sophisticated brand, so the daughter, seeking to add these features to her own personal identity, establishes an intense relationship with the brand in which there is a great deal of emotional attachment. On the other hand, these same qualities seem overwhelming to the mother who says she does not identify with the brand, but is willing to

live with it when necessary. She thus develops a superficial relationship linked to special occasions, while recognizing her daughter’s affinity with the brand. In this situation, the brand exerts agency by communicating the difference between mother and daughter and creating a bigger space between them.

The co-owners use Burberry as an in-law connected to the mother who decided to start the relationship because she connects with her perceptions of the brand in terms of style and design, while the daughter is a user who, despite having a very positive image of the brand, does not identify with it, always relating it to her mother. In this case the brand rebalances the mother’s position in the family hierarchy, pinpointing her progression in luxury consumption until reaching autonomy. Formerly influenced, now an influencer.

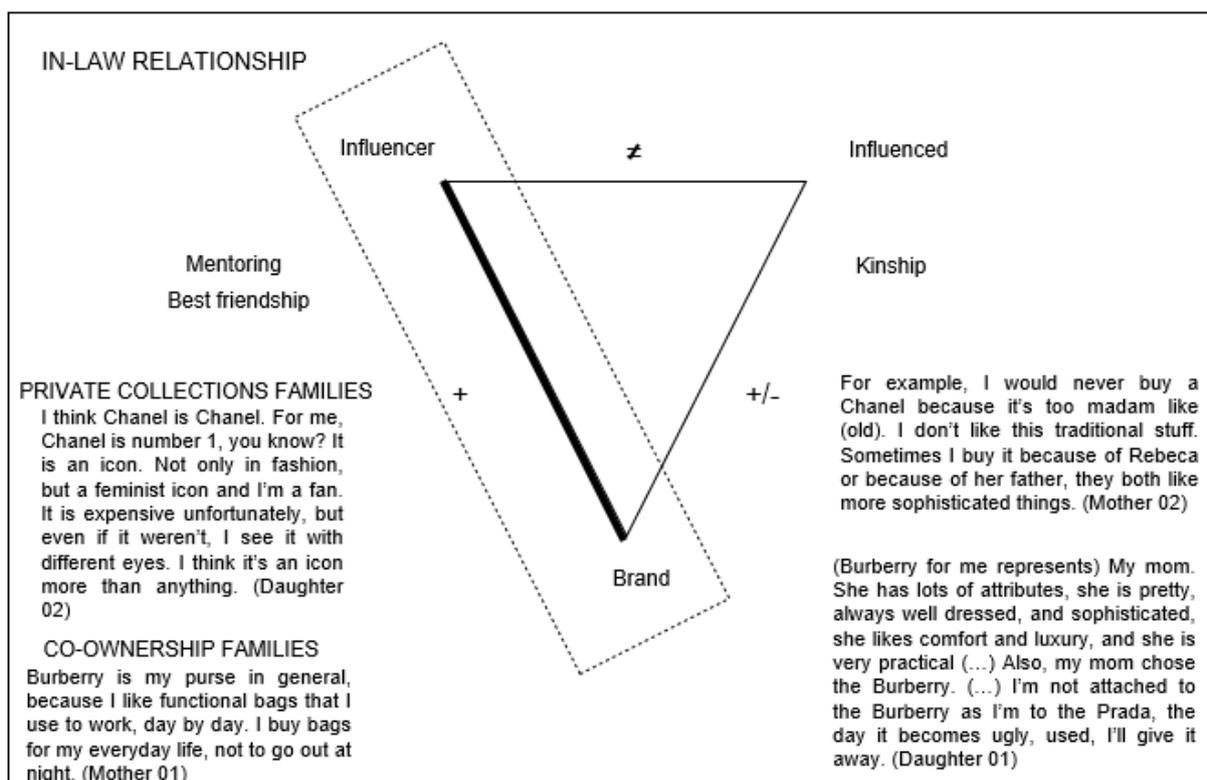


Figure 4 – In-law relationship scheme

Source: author’s own elaboration

## 5. Conclusion and further studies

As proposed earlier the aim of this paper was to understand the dynamics of collective CBRs. The luxury fashion market was used as research context and the family environment as the unit of analysis. This led to the identification of three different relationship patterns that exert agency within the families interviewed. Even though these relationships were identified in a specific context, they could probably arise in different luxury segments or even other markets, such as the sorority initiation form, which may emerge in environments characterized by the diffusion of new consumption habits.

In addition to the potentialities of extending these findings to different settings, the practical contribution of starting a categorization of collective brand relationships is that, by understanding how brands navigate in the family territory, marketing managers can better define their branding strategy and improve brand positioning according to the agency they wish their brands to exert inside the family or other collective contexts, thus resulting in higher loyalty levels which are key for fashion luxury brands (ESMAEILPOUR, 2015).

One example of the practicalities of these constructs is that brands wishing to be seen as prom queens should invest in status creation and in becoming iconic so that a network of meanings is available for the influencer to rely on when convincing the influenced and the family as a whole, thus transforming the brand into an aspirational gift that symbolizes love and conquest. By contrast, brands that have a very clear positioning and strong personality traits are more likely to turn into in-laws, which may or may not restrict their use inside the family but can create a statement that reinforces brand positioning strategies. In addition, brands that want to be perceived as luxury pillars should aim at growing into sorority representatives that consumers and their families will have to apply to when striving to enter the luxury fashion segment.

These findings not only extend Fournier's work (1998) but also touch the doings of Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001; 2014) and McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002), building a bridge between these research streams. At the same time, this research reinforces Price's (2015) beliefs in the relationship agency and the importance of the symbolism for luxury consumption (HODGE et al., 2015) besides the subjectivity of the construct (MONKHOUSE; BARNES; STEPHAN, 2012). This study also makes a significant contribution to the branding realm by showing that, in a collective environment, the combination of individual brand relationships may form different collective relationships.

Aside qualitative approach limitations related to the impossibility of generalizing results due to context restrictions (BELK; FISCHER; KOZINETS, 2012), another limitation of the study was the size of the sample, which, in addition to not covering all possible family arrangements and socioeconomic classes and being limited to the Brazilian context, was also narrowed down to two members per family. In addition, it is important to stress that the relationships identified occurred in a luxury consumption learning context. In other milieus, where luxury consumption is the "default mode" and consumers have higher cultural capital (HOLT, 1998), the nature of the relationships formed will possibly be different from the ones identified here, which suggests an opportunity for future research. Furthermore, other recommendations for research would be to enlarge the sample to understand the dynamics related to the male role and other female family members.

## References

- AAKER, J.; FOURNIER, S.; BRASEL, S.A. When good brands do bad. **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 31, n. 1, p. 1–16, 2004.
- AGGARWAL, P. The effects of brand relationship norms on consumer attitudes and behavior. **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 31, n. 1, p. 87–101, 2004.
- ALLEN, C.; FOURNIER, S.; MILLER, F. Brands and Their Meaning Makers. *In*: Haugtvedt, C. P.; HERR, P. M.; Kardes, F. R. (ed.). **Handbook of Consumer Psychology**. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008. p. 781–822.
- ARNOULD, E. J.; THOMPSON, C. J. Reflections Twenty Years of Research. **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 31, n. 4, p. 868–882, 2005.
- BELK, R. W. Moving possessions: An analysis based on personal documents from the 1847–1869 Mormon migration. **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 19, n. 3, p. 339–361, 1992.
- BELK, R. W.; FISCHER, E.; KOZINETS, R. **Qualitative consumer and marketing research**. London: Sage, 2012.
- BENGTSSON, A. Towards a critique of brand relationships. **Advances in Consumer Research**, v. 30, p. 154–158, 2003.
- BERGER, A. **The objects of affection: semiotics and consumer culture**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- BRAUN, J.; ZOLFAGHARIAN, M.; BELK, R. W. How Does a Product Gain the Status of a Necessity? An Analysis of Necessitation Narratives. **Psychology and Marketing**, v. 33, n. 3, p. 209–222, 2016.
- CASTARÈDE, J. **O Luxo: O segredo dos produtos mais desejados do mundo**, São Paulo: Barcarolla, 2005.
- CHANDON, J. L.; LAURENT, G.; VALETTE-FLORENCE, P. Pursuing the concept of luxury: Introduction to the JBR Special Issue on “Luxury Marketing from Tradition to Innovation.” **Journal of Business Research**, v. 69, n. 1, p. 299–303, 2016.
- CIORNEA, R. et al. Was luxury little researched? An exploration of studies and research trends in the area of marketing of luxury goods, before 2005. **Management and Marketing**, v. 10, n. 2, p. 325–340, 2012.
- CORBELLINI, E.; SAVIOLO, S. **Managing fashion and luxury companies**. Milan: Rizzoli Etas, 2014.
- CYPRIANO, I. **Consumidores brasileiros de marcas de luxo: Quem são e quais seus valores**. Tumburi/SP: Cia do eBook, 2015.
- EISMAN, K. **How to tell a woman by her handbag**. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2010.
- EPP, A. M.; PRICE, L. L. Family Identity: A Framework of Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices. **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 35, n. 1, p. 50–70, 2008.
- ESMAEILPOUR, F. The role of functional and symbolic brand associations on brand loyalty: A study on luxury brands. **Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management**, v. 19, n. 4, p. 467–484, 2015.
- EUROMONITOR INTERNATIONAL. **Passport Status: Luxury Goods Market**. 2016. Available at: <https://www.portal.euromonitor.com>. Accessed 16 June 2016.

- EUROMONITOR INTERNATIONAL. **International Report**. 2014. Available at: [https://www.euromonitor.com/medialibrary/PDF/pdf\\_handbags-v1.0.pdf](https://www.euromonitor.com/medialibrary/PDF/pdf_handbags-v1.0.pdf). Accessed 16 June 2016.
- FAVARO, P. **O Significado social do consumo e a experiência da marca no consumo de bolsas falsificadas**. 2015. Dissertação (Mestrado em Administração), Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2015.
- FETSCHERIN, M.; HEILMANN, T. (Ed.). **Consumer brand relationships: Meaning, measuring, managing**. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- FOURNIER, S. Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 24, n. 4, p. 343–353, 1998.
- FOURNIER, S. Lessons Learned About Consumers' Relationships with Their Brands. *In*: MACINNIS, D. J.; PARK, C. W.; PRIESTER, J. W. (ed.). **Handbook of Brand Relationships**. Abingdon: Routledge. 2014. p. 5–23.
- FOURNIER, S.; BREAZEALE, M.; FETSCHERIN, M. (ed.). **Consumer-brand relationships: theory and practice**. London; New York: Routledge, 2012.
- GENTRY, J. W.; BAKER, S.; KRAFT, F. The role of possessions in creating, maintaining, and preserving one's identity: Variation over the life course. **Advances in Consumer Research**, v. 22, p. 413–418, 1995.
- GIAMBIAGI, F. et al. (ed). **Economia Brasileira Contemporânea: 1945-2010**. 2 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Elsevier, 2011.
- HANSLIN, K.; RINDELL, A. Consumer-brand relationships in step-down line extensions of luxury and designer brands. **Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management**, v. 18, n. 2, p. 145–168, 2014.
- HODGE, A. C. et al. Consumer–brand relationships within the luxury cosmetic domain. **Journal of Brand Management**, v. 22, n. 8, p. 631–657, 2015.
- HOLT, D. B. Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption? **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 25, n. 1, p. 1–25, 1998.
- Jl, M. F. Children's Relationships with Brands: "True Love" or "One-Night" Stand? **Psychology and Marketing**, v. 19, n. 4, p. 369–387, 2002.
- KAPFERER, J.-N. **As marcas, capital da empresa**. Porto Alegre: Bookman, 2004.
- KAPFERER, J.-N.; BASTIEN, V. The specificity of luxury management: Turning marketing upside down. **Journal of Brand Management**, v. 16, n. 5/6, p. 311–322, 2009.
- KATES, S. M. Out of the Closet and Out on the Street! Gay Men and Their Brand Relationships. **Psychology and Marketing**, v. 17, n. 6, p. 493–513, 2000.
- KAUFMANN, J.-C. **Le sac: Un petit monde d'amour**. Paris: JC Lattès, 2011.
- KIM, H.-Y.; JIN, J. Soulmates, Best Friends, and Casual Buddies: The Relationship of U.S. College Students to Retailer Brands. **Clothing and Textiles Research Journal**, v. 29, n. 1, p. 67–82, 2011.
- KOPYTOFF, I. The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process. *In*: APPADURAI, A. (ed.). **The social life of things: Commodities in cultural Perspective**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. p. 64–92.
- LIPOVETSKY, G.; ROUX, E.; MACHADO, M. **O luxo eterno**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2008.
- MAZZA, M. (McKinsey). **Capturing the hearts of Brazil's luxury consumers**. 2014. Available at: [https://www.mckinseyonmarketingandsales.com/sites/default/files/pdf/CSI\\_Brazil\\_Luxury.pdf](https://www.mckinseyonmarketingandsales.com/sites/default/files/pdf/CSI_Brazil_Luxury.pdf). Accessed 19 January 2017.
- MCCRACKEN, G. **The long interview**. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1988.

- MCALEXANDER, J. H.; SCHOUTEN, J. W.; KOENIG, H. F. Building Brand Community. **Journal of Marketing**, v. 38, n. 66, p. 38–54, 2002.
- MILLER, K. W.; MILLS, M. K. Contributing clarity by examining brand luxury in the fashion market. **Journal of Business Research**, v. 65, n. 10, p. 1471–1479, 2012.
- MOHERDAUI, B. Victor Hugo, o VH que se inspira em LV (de Louis Vuitton), prepara-se para expandir os negócios. **Revista Veja**. 2000. Available at: [http://veja.abril.com.br/011100/p\\_076.html](http://veja.abril.com.br/011100/p_076.html). Accessed 13 January 2017.
- MONKHOUSE, L.; BARNES, B.; STEPHAN, U. The influence of face and group orientation on the perception of luxury goods. **International Marketing Review**, v. 29, n. 6, p. 647–672, 2012.
- MUÑIZ, A. M.; O’GUINN, T. C. Brand Community. **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 27, n. 4, p. 412–432, 2001.
- O’GUINN, T. C.; MUÑIZ, A. M. Collective brand relationships. In: MacInnis, D. J.; Park, C. W.; Priester, J. W. (ed.). **Handbook of Brand Relationships**. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014. pp. 173–194.
- OKONKWO, U. **Luxury Fashion Branding: Trends, Tactics, Techniques**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- PRICE, L. L. Loyalty and brands in consumers’ assembled lives’. In: FOURNIER, S.; BREAZEALE, M.; AVERY, J. (ed.). **Strong brands, strong relationships**. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2015. p. 13–27.
- PRICE, L. L.; EPP, A. M. Special Session Summary - Finding Families: Family Identity in Consumption Venues. In: Menon, G.; RAO, A. R. (ed.). **Advances in Consumer Research**. Duluth, MN: Association for Consumer Research, 2005. p. 9–13.
- ROCHA, A. R.; ROCHA, A.; ROCHA, E. Classifying and classified: An interpretive study of the consumption of cruises by the “new” Brazilian middle class. **International Business Review**, v. 25, n. 3, p. 624–632, 2016.
- ROOK, D. Let’s pretend: projective methods reconsidered. In: BELK, R. W. (ed.). **Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing**. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006. p. 143–156.
- STOCKLEY, P. Yes, the contents mean a lot, but it’s the bag that matters most. **The Independent**. 2012. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/philippa-stockley-yes-the-contents-mean-a-lot-but-its-the-bag-that-matters-most-8100587.html>. Accessed 23 January 2017.
- SWEENEY, J. C.; CHEW, M. Understanding Consumer-Service Brand Relationships: A Case Study Approach. **Australasian Marketing Journal**, v. 10, n. 2, p. 26–43, 2002.
- THE DIGITAL LUXURY GROUP. **The World Handbag Report**. 2012. Available at: <http://www.digitalluxurygroup.com/intelligence/research/world-handbag-report-2012/>. Accessed 12 May 2016.
- TRUONG, Y.; MCCOLL, R. Intrinsic motivations, self-esteem, and luxury goods consumption. **Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services**, v. 18, n. 6, p. 555–561, 2011.
- TWITCHELL, J. B. **Living It up: Our Love Affair with Luxury**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- TYNAN, C.; MCKECHNIE, S.; CHHUON, C. Co-creating value for luxury brands. **Journal of Business Research**, v. 63, n. 11, p. 1156–1163, 2010.
- VEBLEN, T. **The Theory of the Leisure Class**. New York: Penguin Books, 1899.
- VELOUTSOU, C. Identifying the dimensions of the product-brand and consumer relationship.

**Journal of Marketing Management**, v. 23, n. 1/2, p. 7–26, 2007.

VICKERS, J.; RENAND, F. The Marketing of Luxury Goods: An exploratory study - three conceptual dimensions. **The Marketing Review**, v. 3, n. 4, p. 459–478, 2003.

WANG, Y.; GRISKEVICIUS, V. Conspicuous Consumption, Relationships, and Rivals: Women's Luxury Products as Signals to Other Women. **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 40, n. 5, p. 834–854, 2014.

WHIPPLE, E. G. **New challenges for Greek letter organizations**: Transforming fraternities and sororities into learning communities. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998.

YACCOUB, H. A chamada “nova classe média”: cultura material, inclusão e distinção social. **Horizontes Antropológicos**, v. 17, n. 36, p. 197–231, 2011.

ZAYER, L. T.; NEIER, S. An exploration of men's brand relationships. **Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal**, v. 14, n. 1, p. 83–104, 2011.

**Annex 1: List of brands used to filter interviewees**

Retrieved from The World Handbag Report (The Digital Luxury Group 2012)

<b>PREMIUM</b>	<b>PRESTIGE</b>	<b>HIGH-END</b>	<b>POWERHOUSE</b>
Aquascutum	3.1 Phillip Lim	Akris	Armani
Botkier	Alexander McQueen	Alfred Dunhill	Bottega Veneta
Calvin Klein	Alexander Wang	Anna Sui	Burberry
Coach	Ann Demeulemeester	Balenciaga	Chanel
Cole Haan	Anya Hindmarch	Balmain	Christian Dior
Lauren Merkin	Dsquared	Christian Louboutin	Ermenegildo Zegna
Diane von Furstenberg	Bally	Barbara Bui	Fendi
Furla	Carolina Herrera	Berluti	Gucci
Hackett	Chloé	Brunello Cucinelli	Hermès
Hugo Boss	Comme des Garçons	Bulgari	Louis Vuitton
Kate Spade	Dolce & Gabbana	Cartier	Prada
Kooba	Donna Karan	Céline	Salvatore Ferragamo
Lancel	Dries van Noten	Christian Lacroix	Tod's
Longchamp	Escada	Costume National	
Pollini	Fratelli Rossetti	Derek Lam	
Rafe	Gianfranco Ferré	Dunhill	
Rebecca Minkoff	Guy Laroche	Emilio Pucci	
Thierry Mugler	Helmut Lang	Etro	
Tory Burch	Hogan	Giuseppe Zanotti	
Vera Wang	Isabel Marant	Givenchy	
Vivienne Westwood	Issey Miyake	Goyard	
Zac Posen	Jil Sander	Hervé Lèger	
	Loewe	Jason Wu	
	Marc Jacobs	Jean Paul Gaultier	
	Marni	Jimmy Choo	
	Matthew Williamson	John Varvatos	
	Michael Kors	Judith Leiber	
	Moncler	Kenzo	
	Moschino	Lanvin	
		Loro Piana	
		Maison Martin Marghela	
		Manolo Blahnik	
		Marchesa	
		Max Mara	
		Missoni	
		Miu Miu	
		Nancy Gonzalez	
		Nina Ricci	
		Oscar de la Renta	
		Paco Rabanne	
		Pierre Hardy	
		Proenza Schouler	
		Reed Krakoff	
		Rick Owens	
		Rochas	
		Roger Vivier	
		Sergio Rossi	
		Smythson	
		Stella McCartney	
		The Row	
		Tom Ford	
		Trussardi	
		Valentino	
		Valextra	
		Versace	
		Viktor & Rolf	
		Yves Saint Laurent	