



A Pilot Study Exploring the Purchase Intention of Luxury Fashion Brands in Malaysia

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Abstract

A person might purchase luxury goods for various reasons, such as to flaunt their riches, prosperity, or success, to uphold their social status, or simply because it is thought to be of higher quality. Therefore, the focus of this study is to identify factors which influence customers' buying intention of luxury fashion brands. The framework incorporates status, acceptance, materialism, and a very crucial construct, i.e., income as the moderating variable for this study. By sharing the URL to the questionnaire on social networking sites, data was collected online using a survey tool. The sample under consideration for this pilot study constitutes 71 responses. The findings revealed that status significantly influences purchase intention of luxury fashion brands while acceptance and materialism do not. Furthermore, this study also proved income as a moderating factor among the relations of status, acceptance, materialism, and purchase intention. Overall, it will be beneficial to investigate the variables impacting buying intention of luxury fashion brands by customers in emerging countries, considering the expansion of these companies in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Luxury Fashion; Purchase Intention; Status; Acceptance; Materialism*

Introduction

The global luxury fashion industry has grown steadily over the decades at a rate of 5% annually (Hundekari, 2019), and is often considered one of the remarkably attractive and lucrative industries in the world (Young & Combs, 2016). At present, the luxury market is valued at a value of \$1.3 trillion dollars (Hundekari, 2019). Given the expansion of luxury fashion brands in Malaysia, it would be beneficial to look at the variables affecting consumers' intent to procure luxury fashion brands from developing nations. The appeal of luxury goods continues to win over Malaysians' hearts. One significant reason in the expansion of Malaysia's high-fashion sector is the establishment of independent retail stores like Tom Ford, Yves Saint Laurent, and Dior (Md Razak *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, it can be argued that emerging nations, particularly Malaysia, are responsible for the luxury market's explosive growth (Hung & Tse, 2020). The most recent research by financial services firm Klarna shows that in 2021, Gen Zers (63%) and Millennials (63%) spent more money on luxury products than their parents (45% Gen Xers and 25% baby boomers) (Free Malaysia Today, 2022). This remarkable progress has prompted many researchers to conduct research about the purchase of the luxury fashion brands (Hung & Tse, 2020; Marsasi & Yuanita, 2023).

Due to the high consumption of luxury fashion brands in Malaysia (Management Association, 2017), the luxury fashion brands marketers must ascertain what motivates Malaysian consumers to procure luxury fashion brands. Hence, it is interesting to analyze how luxury fashion brands should go about it in the future to succeed. Previous research on luxury fashion brands purchase intention such as Zhang and

Kim (2013); Chakraborty (2016); Young and Combs (2016) show that the research are mainly focus on the international outlook for purchase intention of luxury fashion brands. Although recent study such as Ing *et al.* (2021) examine consumers' purchase intention of luxury brands in Malaysia, where the structure only examines the social influence and value perceptions. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the problems and challenges faced by luxury industry to develop more in-depth understanding of this topic in Malaysia by incorporating status, acceptance, materialism, and income as the moderating variable. Besides, given the tremendous potential of the luxury fashion market, key factors relevant to consumers' luxury purchase intention need to be considered to broaden overall understanding of this markets and develop appropriate marketing strategies to improve business success (Zolkepli *et al.*, 2023).

This study seeks to such gap. As such, the research questions derived from this paper are, 1) Is there any significance impact of status, acceptance, materialism on buying intent of luxury fashion brands? 2) Does income effectively moderate the bond between status, acceptance, materialism, and buying intent of luxury fashion brands?

Literature Review

Definition of "Luxury"

Researchers have examined luxury brands from a variety of angles over the years. Luxury brands may be defined differently among cultures, despite their widespread use. The Latin term "luxus," which signifies superabundance, excess in lifestyle, or a display of wealth intended to satiate wants that go beyond actual requirements, is where the word luxury originates (Cabigiosu, 2020). Grossman and Shapiro (1988) describe luxury goods by their social value. They define luxury goods as commodities that wealthy individual utilized for the purpose of displaying or show off their prestige or social rank without functional purposes. From their perspective, luxury products are generally utilized in support of social functions. From an economic viewpoint, "luxury goods" refers to goods that individuals purchased by spending a larger proportion of their income (Vickers & Renand, 2003).

Moore and Birtwistle (2005) characterized luxury brands according to factors such as exclusivity, a notable brand individuality, customer loyalty, high brand perception and recognized quality. Other than that, Quelch (2007) describe luxury products as brands "whose ratio of functional utility to price is low while the ratio of intangible and situational utility to price is high." According to a KPMG survey by Debnam and Svinos (2007), due to the unique attributes of luxury commodities for instance craftsmanship, quality, identifiability, exclusivity, and reputation, many people presumably paid a huge price difference just to buy these luxury goods.

The Theory of the Leisure Class

In the early days of study on consumer behaviour toward luxury fashion brands, characteristics including a sense of uniqueness, high price, and boasting were attributed for the purchase of luxury fashion brands. Veblen's (1899) Theory of The Leisure Class reveals how individuals make use of their wealth and goods to go up against each other and strengthen their social status.

In the book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen (1899) describes wealth accumulation does not exactly bestow status. Instead, what bestows status is the proof of wealth, which entails extravagant spending behavior Veblen portrayed as evident spending. Veblen argues that evident spending is based on two different motives. One of the motives is that higher classes individuals tend to show off their wealth; while another motive is that individuals in lower classes have the desire to imitate a high-end lifestyle. According to Veblen (1899), individuals tend to buy fine silverware not to convey food into their mouths, but to show off that they are able to purchase such things. Therefore, individuals are trying to surpass the wealth of others through the accumulation of luxury goods.

Theory of Reasoned Action

Individuals regularly think of what their behavior will produce before they decide to perform some action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). By evaluating one's attitude toward a certain conduct as well as

the subjective norms of significant individuals and groups that influence one's attitude, it is certain that the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is used to predict a person's behavioural intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This theory is critical in a person's decision-making process. For instance, a person's intention to directly carry out a behaviour, such as purchasing luxury fashion labels, can indicate a decision to engage in that behaviour. Here, subjective norm can be considered as one of the variables of this study, which is the need of acceptance of an individual that will determine whether that individual intend to procure luxury fashion brands. Besides, it is noteworthy to observe how this could help identify the factors responsible for influencing intentions of a consumer towards purchasing luxury products.

Status

Living in a materialist society, people will continue to procure luxury fashion brands to characterize their status. Eastman, Goldsmith and Flynn (1999) identified status as the means which individuals purchase luxury goods to enhance their social profile. Wilcox, Kim and Sen (2009) suggested that customers procure luxury fashion brands mainly because of symbolic reasons to express their personal or social goals. Besides, researcher such as Vigneron and Johnson (2004), likewise published the same research study conclusion by which Western and Eastern culture individuals are looking to buy luxury fashion brands to portray their personality and/or status. This means that many peoples are prone to allocate a large percentage of their disposable incomes for status related products. The social-oriented customers are inspired to own luxury fashion brands to show their prestige and achievement to the target community (Tsai, 2005).

Simultaneously, Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009) posits that social status effect on customers' luxury brand buying intention was deliberated and empirically supported. Also, individuals usually purchase products correspond to what the product means to them and members from the individual's social groups. Other than that, Shukla (2010) debates that one of the most important drivers of widespread customers purchase intention is the wish to obtain more prestige or stature from the purchase of such luxury fashion brands products. That is, if investing in luxury fashion brands is considered socially acceptable, many people may have to take this step with the intention of meeting the social status requirements. Given how crucial it is for people today to be judged on their performance and accomplishments, many customers purchase luxuries in an effort to get respect from others and express their social standing (Tan *et al.*, 2013; Jain, 2019).

Acceptance

According to the notion on psychology of social, people are social creatures who adapt towards social conventions and forms, and their conduct is heavily influenced by other people in the group (Kotler, 1965). Here, acceptance happens when other people indicate that they want to include you in their group and relationship (Leary, 2010). Hence, according to Lekprayura (2012), decision by individuals on procuring a luxury fashion brand is a symbolic consumption to build acceptance rather than using the goods. Roll (2006) stated that Asians are more concerned with personal, social connections and acceptance. To adapt to the social circle, Asian young consumers owning at least one luxury fashion product before 21 years old has become a phenomenon (Tan *et al.*, 2013). The primary motivation for luxury fashion products ownership is to be respected and recognized by people around them (Tan *et al.*, 2013).

Buying high-priced luxury fashion brands is a way to scale the social rank and a tool to gain acceptance by these groups (Vel *et al.*, 2011). Vel *et al.*, (2011) also stated many individuals believe that the more expensive the luxury fashion brands they wear, the easier for the individuals in gaining approval and acceptance by others. Furthermore, individuals that own luxury fashion brands will be expected to associate with some of the most prestigious groups, increase their acceptance of these groups, and disrupt their relationships with the less-favored reference groups (Bilge, 2015). The findings of Nia and Zaichkowsky (2000) showed that the ownership of real luxury brands will make them feel admired, recognized, and accepted. Recent study by Sharma, Pradhan and Srivastava (2021) suggested that online acceptance and praise from others have also become significant predictors of

buying luxury goods. Respondents bought clothes because they wanted their users to feel "valued on social media," while others were content with their online friendships with other fans of luxury brands.

Materialism

By highlighting the ability to own material possessions and the variety and amount of goods bought, materialism acknowledges the value of possessions in life (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Wearing designer clothing, jewellery, and driving costly vehicles are traits of materialists. They perceived money as a symbol of success and will increase their value as an individual. Highly materialistic consumers often waste money to improve their social status (Mason, 1981). Because of such representational value, luxury fashion brands could fulfil such materialistic desires (Richins & Dawson, 1992). According to Peter and Olson (2008), materialist is convinced that the possession of luxury fashion brands determinant of representations of extravagance, personal satisfaction, bliss, a symbol of success and delight.

Under the influence of global marketing efforts of multinational corporations, consumers worldwide are progressively sharing the ideals of materialistic lifestyles and paying attention to well-known brands that embodies affluence (Solomon, 2004). Furthermore, Wong (1997) stated that individuals that encompass high need for materialism have high desire at owning luxurious products. Meanwhile, Chadha and Husband (2010) quoted "you are what you wear" today, this is exceptionally true for materialistic consumers in Asia because they perceived that by purchasing and wearing luxury fashion brands will redefine their identity and social status. The findings of Ali and Shafique (2015) suggested that materialism is clearly associated with attitude towards the procuring luxury fashion products. Lou and Kim (2019), who suggested that materialism positively correlates with buying intentions, also supported this. Buying luxury fashion products can be perceived as a response to a consumer own materialistic need. Hence, it can be argued that those who purchase luxury fashion brands have a stronger tendency to be materialistic.

Income

Income is the currency that business or individual obtains in exchange for the provision of goods or services or through the investment of capital (Fontinelle, 2017). Most people earn income by working or investing in financial assets like real estate, stocks and bonds (Fontinelle, 2017). Mo and Wong (2012) suggested that income is chosen as a moderator for consumer's buying intent for an automobile in the United States, which indicates that income did not affect buying intent of consumers. Thus, the adoption of income as moderator in this study is due to lack of previous research conducted in regards on luxury fashion brands buying intent.

Income is a superior determinant of purchasing behavior (Roszkowska-Hołyś, 2013; de Brito Junior *et al.*, 2023). Mamat, Noor & Noor (2016) findings suggested that income of individuals does influence their luxury purchase intention. Therefore, the procurement of luxury fashion brands will depend on the consumer's income level (Torbati, Asadi & Mohammadzadeh, 2017). In other words, income can be used as an indicator of consumer purchasing behavior (Hawkins, Mothersbaugh & Best, 2007). Besides, Wang, Chan & Chen (2001) stated that income is the key factor that determines the purchasing power of consumers. This shows that individuals need sufficient disposable income to develop the buying intent of luxury fashion brands. Chawla and Sodhi (2011) further suggested, as income increases, the purchase intention of the product increases. This shows that people need enough disposable income to make the purchase of luxury fashion brands. Additionally, according to Ali and Shafique (2015), luxury products are typically pricey and are frequently bought by those with higher levels of wealth or those having above-average disposable income. Lastly, multiple regression model analysis results by Wekeza and Sibanda (2019) revealed that consumer monthly household income is statistically considerable and positively impact the consumer buying intent of organic grown products in Shelly Centre.

Conceptual Framework

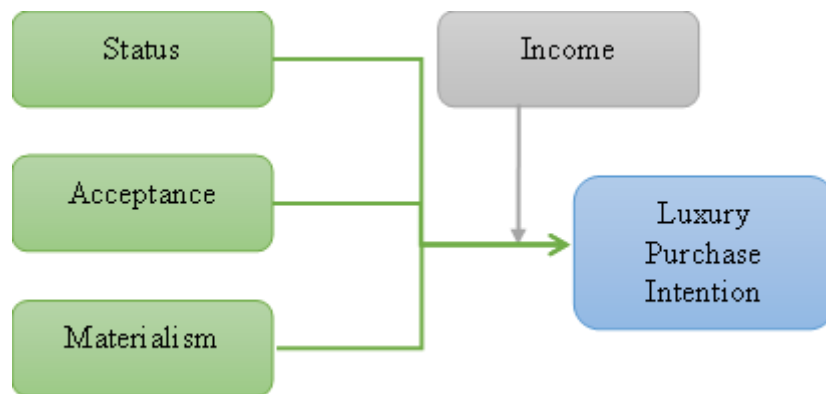


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Following are the fundamental hypotheses created based upon the knowledge of the studies in the related literature.

H1: Status positively impact intention to purchase luxury fashion brands in Malaysia.

H2: Acceptance positively impact intention to purchase luxury fashion brands in Malaysia.

H3: Materialism positively impact intention to purchase luxury fashion brands in Malaysia.

H4: Income effectively moderate the relationship between status, acceptance, materialism and intention to purchase of luxury fashion brands.

Methodology

Data Collection

The sample is drawn from the students and employees of UCSI University, which is located at Taman Connaught, Kuala Lumpur. Additionally, this study employs a non-probability sampling method. As a result, convenience sampling was selected as the research's methodology. The questionnaire is administered via online surveys, namely Google Forms. A sum of 71 samples have been gathered and analyzed. Finally, the information being gathered is examined and analyzed via IBM SSPSS version 29 to transform the data into useful information.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics, which includes their age, education, income, and gender, is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

		N	%
Respondents	Male	36	50.7
	Female	35	49.3
	Total	71	100.0
Age	21-30	43	60.6
	31-40	19	26.8

	41-50	4	5.6
	51 and over	5	7.0
Education	Foundation / Diploma	9	12.7
	Bachelor's Degree	32	45.1
	Master	25	35.2
	PhD / DBA	5	7.0
Income	RM2000 or less	19	26.8
	RM2001-RM4000	18	25.4
	RM4001-RM6000	13	18.3
	RM6001-RM8000	8	11.3
	RM8001 and more	13	18.3

Reliability Test

The scores for the negatively worded questions are reversed and the reliability is accepted because the value of all scales is 0.80 and above, based on Table 2.

Table 2: Results of Reliability Test

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Status	6	0.823
Acceptance	5	0.931
Materialism	9	0.820
Purchase Intention	5	0.916
Income (Moderating Variable)	6	0.912

Descriptives of the Measurements

This study measured status by adapting 6 items from Lassar *et al.*, (1995) and Eastman, Goldsmith & Flynn (1999). Acceptance, which consists of 5 items are adapted from Sweeney and Soutar (2001). Table 3 presents the detailed items and their means. Materialism, which consists of 9 items are adapted from Richins and Dawson (1992). Meanwhile, 5 items measuring purchase intention are adapted from Putrevu and Lord (1994), Bian and Forsythe (2012) and Young and Combs (2016). Lastly, the moderating variable of income, which consists of 6 items are self-administered by referring to the studies by Mo and Wong (2012); Wang, Chan & Chen (2001) and Mamat, Noor & Noor (2016). On a 5-point scale, participants expressed their level of agreement with each of the assertions, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The comprehensive components and their process are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptives of the Measurements

Constructs	Items	Means	SD
Status	Status 1 : I would purchase luxury fashion brands just because it has status.	3.15	1.23
	Status 2 : I would pay more for luxury fashion brands if it has status.	3.06	1.21
	Status 3 : I would be proud to own a luxury fashion brand.	3.39	1.26
	Status 4 : I would not be proud to own a luxury fashion brand (negatively worded).	3.07	1.09
	Status 5 : The status of a luxury fashion brand is irrelevant to me (negatively worded).	2.79	1.07
	Status 6 : A luxury fashion brand is more valuable to me if it has 'high status' appeal.	3.24	1.15
Acceptance	Acceptance 1 : I purchase luxury fashion brands to help me to feel acceptable.	2.83	1.18
	Acceptance 2 : I purchase luxury fashion brands to improve the way I am perceived.	3.01	1.18
	Acceptance 3 : I purchase luxury fashion brands to make a good impression on other people.	3.17	1.23
	Acceptance 4 : I purchase luxury fashion brands to gain social approval.	2.93	1.26
	Acceptance 5 : I purchase luxury fashion brands to improve social connection.	3.08	1.23
Materialism	Materialism 1 : I admire people who own luxury fashion brands.	2.93	1.25
	Materialism 2 : I like to own things that impress people.	2.89	1.14
	Materialism 3 : The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	3.34	1.35
	Materialism 4 : Buying luxury fashion brands gives me a lot of pleasure.	3.00	1.26
	Materialism 5 : The things I own aren't all that important to me (negatively worded).	3.06	1.12
	Materialism 6 : I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know (negatively worded).	2.69	0.96
	Materialism 7 : My life would be better if i owned certain things I don't have.	3.24	1.20
	Materialism 8 : I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	3.79	1.05
	Materialism 9 : It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.	3.37	1.11
Purchase Intention	PI 1 : It is very likely that I will purchase luxury fashion brand.	3.17	1.13
	PI 2 : The probability that I would buy luxury fashion brands within the next 12 months is high.	3.17	1.28

	PI 3 : I anticipate purchasing a luxury fashion product in the near future.	3.23	1.41
	PI 4 : I will definitely try purchasing luxury fashion product.	3.37	1.28
	PI 5 : I say favourable things about luxury fashion product.	3.37	1.14
Income	Income 1 : Income will influence the relationship of status, luxury purchase intention and purchase decision.	4.15	0.71
	Income 2 : Income will influence the relationship of acceptance, luxury purchase intention and purchase decision.	4.04	0.71
	Income 3 : Income will influence the relationship of materialism, luxury purchase intention and purchase decision.	4.07	0.74
	Income 4 : Income will influence luxury purchase intention.	4.01	0.96
	Income5 : Income will influence purchase decision.	4.35	1.14
	Income 6 : Income will influence the relationship between luxury purchase intention and purchase decision.	4.21	0.75

Correlations

Table 4 shows that the variables are significant at level 0.01. According to the results shown, there is a strong correlation between status and purchase intention ($r = 0.626$, $p < 0.05$). According to Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebels (2009), the effect of social status influence on customers' luxury brand purchase intention was deliberated and empirically supported. Therefore, H1 is accepted. Other than that, there is also a strong correlation between acceptance and purchase intention ($r = 0.611$, $p < 0.05$). Sharma, Pradhan and Srivastava (2021) discovered that online acceptance and praise from others have grown to be important predictors of purchasing luxury products, therefore lends credence to the results of H1. Therefore, H2 is accepted. In addition, the correlation between materialism and purchase intention ($r = 0.644$, $p < 0.05$) is higher compared to status and acceptance. Based on the research by Ali and Shafique (2015), materialism is positively related to attitude towards the purchasing of luxury fashion brands. Therefore, H3 is accepted. Lastly, there is weak to moderate correlation between status, acceptance, materialism, purchase intention and income. The highest correlation is between income and purchase intention ($r = 0.482$, $p < 0.05$), while the lowest correlation is between income and acceptance ($r = 0.311$, $p < 0.05$). Mo and Wong (2012) and Mamat, Noor and Noor (2016) stated that income of individuals does influence their luxury purchase intention. Therefore, H4 is accepted, however income is not a strong moderator for this study.

Table 4: Correlations

	Status	Acceptance	Materialism	Purchase Intention	Income
Status					
Acceptance	0.600**				
Materialism	0.692**	0.838**			
Purchase Intention	0.626**	0.611**	0.644**		

Income	0.428**	0.311**	0.418**	0.482**
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Note: The variables are significant at level 0.01.

Regression Model Summary

The correlation between the dependent and independent variables is represented by the R-value. For further analysis, the number that is taken must be more than 0.4. In this case, the value is 0.646 for status, 0.635 for acceptance and 0.661 for materialism, which is good. R-square displays the overall variation for the dependent variable that the independent factors may account for. A number higher than 0.5 indicates that the model is capable of identifying the relationship. In this case, the value is 0.417 for status, 0.403 for acceptance and 0.437 for materialism, which is moderate. The R Square tends to value less than 50% when studying about the human behavior. This is due to the fact that forecasting people is more challenging than forecasting a physical process.

Table 5: Model Summary

Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Status	0.646	0.417	0.400	0.81152
Acceptance	0.635	0.403	0.386	0.82123
Materialism	0.661	0.437	0.420	0.79763

Discussion

The results indicated status, acceptance, and materialism are significant to consumers' luxury fashion brands purchase intention, with income acting as a moderator. This is consistent with the findings of Shukla (2010) study, which found that status (which comprises of obtaining fame and respect, getting people's attention, and displaying my identity) is significant to luxury consumption. Hence, luxury brands should develop marketing plans that emphasise their symbolic significance as a pride in accomplishment. Luxury brands could position their goods as aspirational or as dreams come true, as this can help consumers connect with them more deeply.

The results are also in accordance with Sharma, Pradhan and Srivastava (2021), which suggests that social media has a favourable influence on the consumption of luxury products, whereby online acceptance and approval from others have become a key factor in making such purchases. This study also reinforces the results of Lou and Kim (2019), which imply that materialism can increase adolescents' propensity to make purchases. Lastly, although income effectively moderates all relationships, however, is not a strong moderator in this study. Majority of the respondent for this study are earning RM6000 and below, therefore this is aligned with the study of Ali and Shafique (2015), which found that expensive luxury goods are frequently purchased by people who are more affluent or have more disposable income.

Conclusion

This work has some limitations, and those limits offer some ideas for potential future research directions. Future study should target wider geographical location such as other state in Malaysia other than Kuala Lumpur. Next, it is recommended to address the same research problem in a different setting that only focuses on the working population because respondents who are employed will have different purchasing power and behavior compares to university students. Lastly, variables other than status, acceptance, and materialism should be explored to gain deeper insights of luxury purchase intention.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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