Mapping the luxury research landscape: A bibliometric citation analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a systematic review of the current state of luxury research by mapping the research landscape to identify key research clusters, publications, and journals that have relevance to the luxury subject across disciplines. Thereby, it contributes to the literature by providing a state-of-the-field review of the broader luxury research field. Using the ISI Web of Knowledge Core collection, this study conducts a document co-citation analysis of 49,139 cited references from 1,315 publications that study luxury. The combination of bibliometric methods and a systematic review allows this study to overcome barriers of traditional literature reviews by integrating a large set of publications across various disciplines and leveraging the insights of the larger scientific community. It identifies ten major research clusters that characterize the different research streams and discusses their intellectual foundations. Moreover, this research develops a conceptual framework that can be a valuable guide for researchers and practitioners.

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1. Introduction

Spanning a wide range of categories from fashion, accessories, and cars to art and luxury experiences, the global luxury market totals ~1.8 trillion US Dollar (Abtan et al., 2014). Research in the luxury field is increasing at a rapid pace. Publications of special journal issues focused on luxury consumption and the emergence of new journals in the field confirm luxury as an established area of study, fostering attention within the research communities as well as prompting new researchers to enter the field. But what is really known about the intellectual foundations of luxury research? While early sociological and economic research (Veblen, 1899) describe a number of phenomena associated with luxury consumption, the vast majority of studies in the business literature has been published since the early 2000s. The emerging research field focuses on the investigation of the luxury phenomenon and its implications for consumer behavior and marketing management (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). However, the multidisciplinary scope has resulted in a vast amount of literature, and presents a research challenge—particularly to those new to the field—to achieve an overview of the luxury research landscape and to keep pace with its evolution. Despite this growing body of literature, no study has yet investigated luxury research across disciplines to provide further insights into the intellectual base of this field. While some qualitative overviews of luxury exist, they are limited in scope—they are not interdisciplinary (such as Mason, 1993 study of the economic perspective of conspicuous consumption), are not up-to-date with recent developments in the research field (Reich, 2005; Valtin, 2005), or lack bibliometric methods (Berghaus, Müller-Stewens, & Reinecke, 2014).

This study addresses these limitations and provides a multidisciplinary, comprehensive, up-to-date, bibliometric overview of the current state of the luxury research field and its intellectual foundations. To broaden the perspective of luxury research beyond the domains of marketing and consumer behavior, this study includes related fields of research across the range of social sciences and humanities, including sociology, anthropology, economics, psychology, and cultural studies. This interdisciplinary approach supports discovery of the various intellectual bases of contemporary luxury research, providing further insights into the multifaceted nature of luxury. Using a combination of bibliometric analysis and a systematic review, this paper sets out to answer the following research questions:

Which research areas and journals dominate the luxury research field?

Which articles are most influential?

What are the dominant intellectual foundations, theories, and research clusters in the field of luxury research?

How has the research landscape evolved over time?

What are current evolving topics and promising areas for future contributions?

This study advances the luxury research domain in multiple ways. First, using a bibliometric citation analysis, the study contributes to a
definition of the interdisciplinary field of luxury research, and to a better understanding of its current state, by identifying the key publications and their interrelationships. Second, this study uses a cluster analysis to identify the various intellectual perspectives underlying luxury research and enhances the quantitative analysis with a qualitative interpretation. Third, based on these research clusters, this article develops a conceptual framework that integrates the findings and provides guidelines and directions for the emerging luxury research community, to prevent the inefficiency of repetitive research and to bridge disciplines in order to generate new findings.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 gives a brief introduction on bibliometric citation analysis to establish the approach and to discuss methodological considerations. Section 3 examines the intellectual base of the luxury research field through a network-analytical model, based on co-citation of references. Section 4 conducts a cluster analysis to identify research fields within the luxury domain and discusses the key contributions and views of each cluster. Section 5 develops a conceptual framework based on the literature review and cluster analysis. Section 6 discusses analysis findings, and concludes by discussing potential areas for further research contributions and practical implications.

2. Literature reviews and bibliometric citation analysis

In an information age that produces an ever-increasing number of publications, acquiring an overview of the relevant research and the interconnections between studies has become both increasingly challenging and valuable. Thus, a review of the current state-of-the-field that integrates previous findings can provide value to the field as it adopts a meta-perspective.

In an interdisciplinary field such as luxury marketing, traditional qualitative literature reviews are limited in the amount of data they handle and are reliant on the author’s subjective judgment (Jacoby, 1978). In contrast, a bibliometric citation analysis offers an approach that is able to handle large sets of data for quantitative analyses, and is able to prioritize and cluster existing publications based on the citation behavior of the overall research community (Zupic & Cater, 2015). Bibliometric methods have a long tradition in the study of the intellectual structure of science (Hood & Wilson, 2001), and are also used in the marketing domain (Baumgartner & Pieters, 2003; Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015; Huber, Kamakura, & Mela, 2014; Yadav, 2010). Because quantitative bibliometric methods rely on the judgment and citation behavior of the broader scientific community, this approach can help researchers avoid potential shortcomings of traditional methods, such as limited scope or an individual researcher’s selection bias (Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015). The meta-analytical and historical views of bibliometric analysis can help to identify the intellectual structure of a research field with its key works and research clusters (Seyedghorbani, Matanda, & LaPlaca, 2015). This study complements the quantitative approach by applying a qualitative systematic study of the key publications and clusters, further detailing the substantive contributions to the field (e.g., as proposed by Börner & Scharnhorst, 2009). Based on these findings, this study develops a conceptual model of luxury and the luxury research field.

2.1. Search strategy

Our study uses data from the ISI Web of Knowledge Core collection database. This database has previously been used across a wide range of scientometrics studies, and it provides broad coverage in the social sciences and in the arts and humanities (for example Arik, 2015; Baumgartner, 2010; Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015; Wang, Zhao, & Wang, 2015). A broad search strategy that maximizes coverage of relevant publications is ideal for this multidisciplinary study of the luxury domain. The sample includes publications that contain the keywords “luxury,” “conspicuous consumption,” “status consumption,” “prestige brand,” or “status brand,” and is derived from the fields of anthropology, philosophy, social sciences, history, literature, business and economics, psychology, and sociology, as categorized by the ISI Web of Science (data retrieved Nov. 14, 2015). The retrieval strategy thus extends beyond the term “luxury” to include related terms often used synonymously in academic publications—as, for example, the term “conspicuous consumption” in the field of economics (Mason, 1993; Veblen, 1899). The sample is limited to all available articles in English that comply with the criteria above. This approach generates the broadest sample possible that is still relevant to the research field. As we are primarily interested in recent developments in the field, this analysis focuses on publications since 2000, limiting potential issues arising from unsystematic coverage of earlier years. A timeline analysis of the 1,503 retrieved publications shows that 1,315 (87%) were published after 2000 (see Fig. 1). The number of publications has increased substantially, which is likely to be caused by multiple factors such as the growth of the luxury industry, growing interest from management and academia in luxury research, an increase in publication opportunities due to a larger research community with targeted journals. Our focus on publications within the broader luxury domain from 2000 to 2015 leads to a dataset with 1,315 records from 2,425 authors that were published in 533 journals, with 49,139 cited references and 5,028 retrieved keywords. The publications in the cited references are not limited to the time period from 2000 to 2015, but can take any value for the publication year.

2.2. Method and tools used

To analyze the key publications, research clusters, and development of the luxury research front and intellectual base, this study uses a document co-citation analysis (DCA) of 49,139 valid references from our sample that have been cited by the luxury publications in this sample (Boyack & Klavans, 2010). A research front represents the articles of the field in a given time period—that is the articles retrieved by the Web of Science search (Chen, Dubin, & Kim, 2014). The intellectual base consists of all articles cited by the research front—that is, all cited references (Chen et al., 2014). This study uses Citespace Version 4.0.R3 (Chen, 2006). The software tool is well accepted in the academic literature, freely available for download, relatively easy to use, and constantly updated (Chen et al., 2014; Cobo, López-Herrera, Herrera-Viedma, & Herrera, 2011; Kim & Chen, 2015). In addition to facilitating the analysis of descriptive statistics such as citation count for the individual papers, Citespace facilitates network analytic methods that allow mapping of the interrelationships between scientific publications (Chen, 2006).

Within the terminology of network analysis, we will use “node” to refer to individual papers in the network—the references cited by the papers in the sample—and the term “link” (the connection between two nodes) to refer to the co-citation of two papers—two publications that are cited together by another paper, both appearing in the paper’s list of cited references (Chen, 2006). The degree of relatedness of the co-cited papers is measured using their cosine-coefficient of co-citation, which measures how often the papers are cited together in relation to their overall citations (Chen, 2012).

To improve the interpretability of the network and to focus on the key publications, we set thresholds to include only papers with at least 5 citations, 5 co-citations, and a co-citation cosine coefficient of >0.15. In order to focus on content contributions, after applying the selection criteria we manually screened the resulting 133 nodes for methodological papers, which led to the exclusion of 15 highly cited methodological contributions from the network analysis. In order to focus on the most important interconnections between papers and to improve the clarity of the resulting network structure, we applied pathfinder pruning to the 1,646 links in the merged network, thereby retaining only the shortest paths between nodes (Chen, 2005, 2006). These simplification steps resulted in a final network with 118 nodes and 136 links.

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