

Extending the Mind Online: How Digital Channels Reduce Luxury Brand Anxiety

SACHIN BANKER

GRACE FANG YU-BUCK

AUTHOR NOTE

Sachin Banker (sachin.banker@eccles.utah.edu) is Assistant Professor of Marketing at Eccles School of Business, University of Utah, and Grace Fang Yu-Buck (grace.yu@eccles.utah.edu) is a doctoral candidate in marketing at Eccles School of Business, University of Utah. This work was generously supported by the Eccles School of Business at the University of Utah.

ABSTRACT

As the modern marketplace rapidly evolves, consumers increasingly rely on digital channels to interact with brands and shop for products. In this work, we examine how the changing relationships between consumers and digital channels have important consequences for how consumers develop relationships with luxury brands online. While luxury brands often maintain a relational gap with consumers in order to manage perceptions of high-status, our findings demonstrate that digital channels can undermine this crucial aspect of luxury brand relationships. Building on theory of the extended mind, we posit that by repeatedly offloading their memories and cognitive functions to devices, consumers become increasingly coupled to these artifacts and conceptualize digital channels as being more integrated with the self. Consequently, when consumers access luxury brands through these devices, aspirational brands are less able to maintain a relational gap between consumer and brand, reducing luxury brand anxiety. Evidence from over ten studies supports this account; our findings further illustrate that these effects are attenuated among consumers who are not closely connected to their devices and that consumers may strategically manage luxury brand anxiety through their omnichannel behaviors. This work has broad implications for managing and studying consumer-brand relationships within an increasingly digital marketplace.

Keywords: luxury brands, digital marketing, omnichannel, extended self, consumer technology