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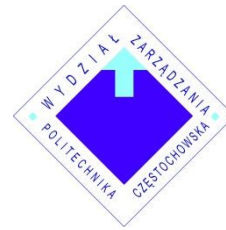
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Edited by:

Małgorzata Okręglika
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Anna Lemańska-Majdzik
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46. CHANDLER'S EFFECT IN LUXURY BRANDS CONSUMPTION

Abstract: In this paper, we are introducing the term “Chandler’s Effect” which is borrowed from American classical literature and applied to marketing related subjects. The term “Chandler’s Effect” derives from O. Henry’s famous short story “Lost on Dress Parade”. Bernard Dubois wrote about the segment of luxury brands consumers and identified them as excursionists (Dubois, 1996). Excursionists consume luxury brands only in rare, specific situations. The term “Chandler’s Effect” is more distinct and narrow. It refers to a situation when young, educated people (22-27 y.o.) who are not very wealthy, yet are ready to hold the purse strings, and save some money for luxury consumption with the intention to be closer to the wealthy upper class. Although “Chandlers” pretend to be someone else – wealthier and aristocratic, they never consume fakes, as the atmosphere accompanying authentic luxury purchasing is very important to them. These “Chandlers” are represented mainly in big cities where luxury brand consumption can be one of the motives for being successful and hard-working. The study allowed us to describe the specifics of contemporary Russian Chandlers. Although these Chandlers never consume fakes, they can allow themselves to buy second-hand luxury brands. They have good knowledge about brands and trends, but, in most cases, their choices are very famous and fashionable luxury brands. Russian Chandlers are ready to save money to visit popular places at least once per month and they are sensitive to images created by glamorous posters.

Key words: authenticity, atmosphere, Chandler’s effect, luxury brands

JEL Classification: M31, M37

1. Introduction

O’Henry wrote his story “Lost on Dress Parade” in 1906. It has been more than 100 years since the story was published. The main hero, 22-year-old architect Chandler, set aside \$1 each week to have an opportunity at the end of every ten weeks to spend an evening at the luxurious New York restaurant. “He arrayed himself in the regalia of millionaires and presidents; he took himself to the quarter where life is brightest and showiest, and there dined with taste and luxury. With ten dollars a man may, for a few hours, play the wealthy idler to perfection. The sum is ample for a well-considered meal, a bottle bearing a respectable label, commensurate tips, a smoke, cab fare and the ordinary etceteras” (O’Henry, 1906). In fact, Mr. Towers Chandler is a so-called “composite character”, representing the whole segment of the young, ambitious self-made people striving to plunge into an atmosphere of luxury and prosperity under condition of an austerity budget.

In this paper, the term “Chandlers” is used to describe the young educated people (22-27 y.o.) who are not affluent yet, and have to hold the purse strings, saving some money for luxury consumption with the intention to be closer to the upper wealthy class. “Chandler’s Effect” demonstrates the situation when these Chandlers consume luxury items or services with a key motive which combines both self-pleasure and conspicuousness.

In O’Henry’s time, luxury consumption was more exclusive and in most cases only the elite could afford to experience this magical world. From the 20th century, the luxury world has been democratized (Kapferer, Bastien, 2011). Luxury brands are now available for an increasing number of people, and more and more products are categorized as luxury brands (Hudders et al., 2013). Even the café Starbucks, which has become a “third place” between home and work, identifies itself as affordable luxury². Moreover, nowadays it is not necessary to be affluent to buy luxury brands, and most can afford at least one item per year. Dubois wrote about “excursionists” who buy and consume luxury goods only in particular circumstances (Dubois, 1996). “Chandlers” represent a specific

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² Starbucks, reinvented: a seven-year study on Schultz, strategy and reinventing a brilliant brand, <http://www.forbes.com/>, 25 August 2014.

segment of young and ambitious excursionists who strive to belong to the upper class and pretend to be someone who they are not at the moment.

In this study, we check whether “Chandler’s Effect” still takes place or how it has been transformed, nowadays. The in-depth interviews and an online survey with people from “Chandler’s segment” have been conducted. The sampling includes recent graduates of famous universities who work hard and have no additional financial support. We started the study in the city of Moscow and we plan to cover other big cities in different countries, specifically, those that also experienced communism like Russia.

2. Theoretical background. Luxury and its contemporary meaning

The meaning of luxury is multifaceted. In olden days, luxury was characterized as something which is very expensive, superfluous and unnecessary (Chevalier, Mazzalovo, 2012). Luxury was both criticized and admired. Berthon Pierre noted that for some social commentators, luxury brands are considered a betrayal of community values; and to others, the antidote to the mundane (Berthon et al., 2009). Breckman and Warren mentioned in his paper a German art historian Wilhelm von Bode who wrote an article about luxury in 1906 (Breckman, 1991). Bode claimed that “the splendid king Luxus has a philistine face. His father is philistine spirit, his mother egotism” (Breckman, 1991; Bode, 1906). The dictionary defines a philistine as a person who is guided by materialism and is usually disdainful of intellectual or artistic values (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>). According to Bode, luxury consumption was based on egoistic motives.

Luxury is not only criticized but it has also received praise. The Romanian Queen Elizabeth at the beginning of 20th century was involved in debates about the role of luxury in society, where she expressed that “the decline of a nation starts with the luxury. However, you cannot apply the same rule to all nations... A man of status, who spends on various luxury items, gives a certain number of persons something to do and therefore he offers them bread” (Petcu, 2014). Thus, she described the positive effect from luxury on society.

In any case, at any time, a lot of people want to possess luxurious items for a variety of reasons. Creators of luxury items and brands have their own understanding of this phenomenon which sometimes differs from an academic point of view. Coco Chanel insisted that luxury lies not in richness and ornateness but in the absence of vulgarity. Jil Sander, a contemporary designer from Germany, states that luxury is in simplicity. Arnault, the head of LVMH, stresses the importance of heritage in the luxury business (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>).

Nowadays, luxury has been transforming from material possessions to non-material, providing its consumers with a unique experience. This unique experience must be accompanied by beauty, comfort, positive emotions and memories. Luxury consumption does not depend on economic level, it is determined as a cultural phenomenon. In developing countries (like China, Russia), people can buy brands which hardly suit their pocket. Some of them have to save money for very long time to finally purchase something luxurious (Ochkovskaya, 2015).

Berthon Pierre wrote about 3 values of luxury brands: functional, symbolic and experiential values (Berthon et al., 2009). The experiential value is very close in its meaning to the emotional dimension of luxury brands. The emotional value deals with the emotions which the consumer experiences buying and possessing the luxury brand. The symbolic value is about other people’s opinion and serves to translate information about one’s personality into the outer world (Ochkovskaya, 2015). Luxury brands can express the individuality of their consumers. Valentino represents femininity, Alexander McQueen – savage beauty, and Comme des Garçons – nonconformity.

Bastien and Kapferer (2013) introduced the term “my luxury”. “My luxury” refers to a rare moment or a dreamed experience. Self-pleasure in luxury consumption fills life with enjoyment and makes it more interesting spiritually and intellectually (Barnier, Valette-Florence, 2013). These rare luxury moments can be experienced, for example, through visits to the Vienna State Opera House or Teatro Alla Scala in Milan, as well as dinner in luxury restaurants with an unforgettable atmosphere, live music, haute cuisine, white tablecloths and silver cutlery. Luxury teaches people how to be sophisticated and refines their internal and external world (Barnier, Valette-Florence, 2013).

It is very important to stress that luxury is not only about money. Sometimes luxury is not afforded from an intellectual perspective (Ricca, Robins, 2012). Ricca and Robbins wrote about the type of luxury identified as meta-luxury. Meta-luxury contains four pillars: craftsmanship, focus, history and rarity (Ricca, Robins, 2012). One of the examples of meta-luxury is dining in the atmosphere of art.

The Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna organizes gourmet evenings every Thursday that cost 44 euro⁵. This offer is considered as luxury which can be easily affordable from an economic point of view. However, people should have a high cultural and intellectual level to be able to enjoy and appreciate this dinner in an atmosphere of immortal masterpieces.

In many cases, luxury consumption is conspicuous. The high level of aesthetics and quality makes luxury clearly visible and attracts attention. Thus, some luxury items have no opportunity to be inconspicuous.

3. Segments of luxury brands consumers. Chandlers.

Today, it is not obligatory to be extremely wealthy to buy luxury brands. Kapferer gave an example of the two groups of consumers who are not necessarily affluent: “the ordinary of extraordinary” and “the extraordinary of ordinary people” (Kapferer, 2013). The first group is constituted by creative elite i.e., famous musicians, actors, politicians, sportsmen, scientists and others. The second segment is represented by “average” people who want to feel very special about themselves and become closer to the first group (Ochkovskaya, 2015). Our Chandlers constitute the latter segment.

One of the largest segments of luxury consumers today is excursionists. This term was introduced by Dubois. For excursionists buying and consuming luxury brands is an exceptional moment, contrasting with their daily lifestyle (Dubois, 1996). An excursionist can purchase a luxury item in a variety of situations related to a memorable and important event in the life of the excursionist and his/her family. Examples of excursionist behavior are when a husband purchases a diamond ring from the legendary Wellendorff brand for his wife on their 25th marriage anniversary or when parents decided to buy a watch from Tag Heuer for their son for his high school graduation.

“Chandlers” represent a specific segment of young and ambitious excursionists. Chandlers strive to belong to the upper class and pretend to be someone, who they are not at the moment. Their aspiration to attain a luxury lifestyle without having an appropriate budget, forces them to hold the purse strings: eat plain food and rent an apartment or even a room in the distant, cheaper districts or suburbs, as it allows them to keep some money for a luxury experience once per month.

Chandlers appreciate post-purchase positive emotions. These emotions can be caused by memories about visiting luxury restaurants or about using material artefacts which reflect their personality and has a positive effect on their self-esteem. Different people admire and strive to possess luxury for different reasons. One person appreciates visual symbols of success; another needs functionality and comfort; the third wants beauty and elegance; and the final person seeks strong positive emotions and memories. Some of these reasons can be mixed. Chandlers seek visual symbols of success, beauty with elegance and positive emotions with long memories. As O’Henry wrote: “This one delectable evening culled from each dull seventy was to Chandler a source of renescent bliss. ...to Chandler each ten weeks brought a joy as keen, as thrilling, as new as the first had been” (O’Henry, “Lost on dress parade”).

So the Chandlers’ motive for luxury consumption is a combination of self-pleasure and conspicuousness. Chandlers desperately want to identify themselves with the successful and affluent people. Moreover, they want to follow their lifestyle while not having an appropriate financial and social background for it. “For the next sixty-nine evenings he would be dining in cheviot and worsted at dubious table d’hote, at whirlwind lunch counters, on sandwiches and beer in his hall bedroom. He was willing to do that, for he was a true son of the great city of razzle-dazzle, and to him one evening in the limelight made up for many dark ones” (O’Henry. “Lost on dress parade”). As Chandlers dream about social recognition, only publicly consumed luxury brands matter for them.

Taking into account Dubois’ works and O’Henry story, we singled out the luxury effects that matter to Chandlers:

- 1) Self-pleasure;
- 2) Conspicuousness;
- 3) Atmosphere;
- 4) Aesthetics/beauty;
- 5) Exclusivity (affordability only for those who are wealthy).

⁵ An unforgettable experience at the museum, <https://www.khm.at/en/explore/offers/cafe-restaurant>.

Luxury brand consumption can be one of the motivations for young people to strive for good education and challenging, well-paid jobs (Wiedmann, Hennigs, 2013). The high income can allow the consumption of luxury brands without cutting down on other expenses. Luxury items and experience are able to provide more value and a better quality of life.

4. Methodology and research

In this study we analyzed the specifics of contemporary Russian Chandlers. The investigation consisted of two stages: the in-depth interviews and an online survey.

For the in-depth interviews we chose 7 potential “Chandlers” which meet the following requirements:

- 1) Young graduates from top Moscow Universities between the age of 22-27 y.o. Originally, they came to Moscow from smaller cities.
- 2) They earn money and live only on their own salary without parents’ (or someone else’s) financial support.
- 3) They have at least 3 authentic items belonging to luxury brands among the following different product categories: perfume, accessories (belt/cufflinks/scarf/tie), bags, ready to wear, and shoes.
- 4) They visit a place which has a status of being popular, fashionable and expensive, at least once per month. It can be a restaurant, café or night club which is frequented by famous people.

We interviewed these “Chandlers”, asking them about their luxury brand choice, attitude to fakes and about their favorite “status places” which they visit. As their average monthly salary is about \$1000 (\$1 = 76 Russian rubles), they were questioned about their income distribution and how they manage to consume items of luxury brands and visit fashionable, expensive places living with a rather limited budget and having to pay rent for their apartment. Finally, we asked “Chandlers” whether they pay attention to the images and taglines in glamour magazines and advertisement posters.

Taking into account the answers during the in-depth interviews, we formulated the following hypotheses about today's Russian Chandlers:

- 1) They never consume fakes but do not mind second-hand luxury brands.
- 2) Their choices are the most famous and fashionable luxury brands for products and services, which are called star brands (Nueno, 1998).
- 3) They are ready to sacrifice their lunches to save money for visiting “status places” at least once per month (a prestigious night club or a fashionable restaurant/café which the famous and wealthy visit).
- 4) They want to look like the successful stars from luxury brands advertisements.
- 5) They appreciate brand communications with the main idea of success and uniqueness.

To prove these hypotheses we conducted an online survey in which 189 respondents, who are university graduates between the age of 22-27 y.o., took part. It was decided to extend the online study and cover not only Moscow, but also the regional city Ufa which has more than 1 million inhabitants (SCO and BRICS summits were held there in July 2015). Covering 2 different places gave us the opportunity to compare Chandlers in the capital and in this regional city.

Among these 189, we chose 117 respondents who have a positive attitude to a luxury lifestyle and have at least 2 luxury brands items from the different product categories and visit fashionable, expensive places at least 1 per month. We had to limit our respondents with at least 2 luxury items instead of 3, as it was in the interviews because in the regional city Ufa, the income is less and access to luxury brands is very limited. A few luxury brands, e.g. Max Mara, are presented in Ufa. If people want to consume specific luxury brands, they have to go to Moscow, Saint Petersburg, abroad or use online shopping which is not popular in Ufa, specifically in the case of expensive items.

The young people from the sample were divided into 2 geographic groups. The first group was represented by young people from Moscow (72 respondents) and the second (45 respondents) – by the young people from Ufa.

During the survey, the key difference between these segments was revealed. On one hand, the regional respondents easily accept buying a fake for themselves, but, on the other hand, the consumption of second-hand authentic luxury brands is unacceptable for them. Otherwise, the young people from Moscow do not mind the idea of collective consumption of authentic luxury brands, as buying a second-hand item which is much cheaper than the new one or exchanging the artefacts from luxury brands. It can be explained that people living in Moscow have more knowledge about brands, can identify a fake and want an authentic item.

We assumed that Chandlers never purchase fakes, as they appreciate authenticity. So, we can make a preliminary conclusion that there are no Chandlers in Russian regional cities or they are met there rarely, and they are concentrated mainly in Moscow. The same situation took place at the beginning of the 20th century in O’Henry’s story: the main character who enjoyed the luxury atmosphere once every sixty-nine evenings lived also in the big city of New York. People from big cities are more sensitive to luxury items as megalopolises give more incentives for luxury consumption.

Although Moscow Chandlers have good knowledge about brands and trends, in most cases, their choices are famous and fashionable luxury brands as Armani, Burberry, Hugo Boss, Ralph Lauren, Gucci, and LV. Moscow Chandlers are ready to save money for visiting status popular places at least once per month. Living within a restricted budget, a majority of respondents use special lunch offers in luxury cafés and restaurants as the regular menu is beyond their means. A few respondents mentioned that it is a tradition for them to go for lunch at a famous, atmospheric café or restaurant on pay day.

Upon research completion, we created a potential luxury brands “portfolio” of Moscow Chandlers. A Ralph Lauren shirt, an Emporio Armani suit, a Louis Vuitton belt and/or purse, a Gucci bag and fashionable Italian shoes constitute the brand portfolio of Chandlers. They are sensitive to images created by marketing communications but trust word-of-mouth coming from the people which represent the environment which they want to be a part of. As Chandlers do not have enough money for a prestigious car, they use public transportation but in some special occasions do not mind using a VIP taxi service.

Although Mr. Towers Chandler from the city of New York was given birth to by O’Henry at the beginning of the 20th century, nowadays he has a lot of successors following his lifestyle who probably have no idea about this American writer – the father of the poor luxury connoisseur.

5. Conclusion and limitations

Luxury brand consumption can be one of the motivations for young people who have not inherited wealth to pursue a good education and then find a challenging, well-paid job. Chandlers seek a combination of self-pleasure and conspicuousness in their luxury experience. They desperately want to identify themselves with successful and affluent people. In our opinion, ambitious and hard-working Chandlers have a lot of chances to become affluent and follow a luxury lifestyle in the future. Luxury producers must take this segment of Chandlers into account and provide special offers for them without any fear to dilute the brand's luxury image. In future, they can become very valuable luxury consumers.

This study is only a first descriptive step to understanding the specifics of contemporary Chandlers: how they manage to consume luxury in the form of material artefacts and services, while living within a shoestring budget. The investigation revealed that today’s Chandlers do not mind the collective consumption luxury items and special offers such as business lunches in fashionable café/restaurants.

The research entails some limitations. The investigation covered only a limited numbers of the respondents from Russian cities like Moscow and Ufa (only 117). In future, we hope to continue the research and include more consumers in our sample, as well as to cover more cities in Russia and Eastern European countries (Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, and Ukraine).

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