

**TITLE: WHAT WOMEN WANT... GROUND SETTING OF FASHION  
BRAND EQUITY**

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## **WHAT WOMEN WANT...**

### **GROUND SETTING OF FASHION BRAND EQUITY**

This article proposes a new approach to fashion and brand equity, integrating the new concept of fashion brand equity. This concept is currently not defined in the major scales of brand equity, such as Lehmann *et al.*'s (2008) and Yoo and Donthu's (2001). Supported by a triangulation approach, using different qualitative methods encompassing the expectations of consumers towards their preferred fashion brands, we highlight the missing dimensions of brand equity for fashion brands and suggest a new scale to measure fashion brand equity.

**Key words: fashion, brand equity, preferred brand**

## **CE QUE VEULENT LES FEMMES...**

### **FONDATIONS DU CAPITAL MODE DES MARQUES**

Cet article propose une nouvelle approche de la mode et du capital marque, en intégrant le nouveau concept de capital mode des marques. En effet, ce concept n'est aujourd'hui pas présent dans les échelles de capital marque existantes, telle que celle de Lehmann *et al.* (2008) ou encore celle de Yoo et Donthu (2001). En utilisant une approche de triangulation au travers de différentes méthodes qualitatives, afin de mieux appréhender les attentes des consommateurs par rapport à leurs marques de mode préférées, nous mettons à jour les éléments manquants au capital marque pour les marques de mode et suggérons une nouvelle échelle de mesure pour le capital mode des marques.

**Mots clés : Mode, capital marque, marques préférées**

# WHAT WOMEN WANT...

## GROUND SETTING OF FASHION BRAND EQUITY

### 1. Introduction

What do women want? Be fashionable? This is a broad question often raised, especially by brands from a variety of industries. When we look to fashion from a wide perspective, it operates in diverse areas and group of life (Robinson, 1961). Indeed fashion-oriented behaviour has been identified with intellectual pursuits of science, literature, arts, and education” (Sproles, 1981).

Looking at the definitions of fashion in the literature, we can regroup them into anthropologist and sociological definitions. The first, focuses on the “product” and especially apparels, and depicts fashion as a concept “embraced globally, consisting of styles that originate from cultures all over the world”, and is described as “the changing styles of dress and appearance that are adopted by a group of people at any given time” (Welters, Lilletun, 2011).

The second aspect and definition of fashion encompasses a more social perspective (Loschek (2009), Sproles (1979), Reynolds (1968)), which stems to a certain extent, from Simmel’s (1904) pioneering analysis. He defines fashion as the “imitation of a model that satisfies the need for a social support...but satisfies as well a need for difference and differentiation”. Therefore those two different aspects help to provide a global perspective of the definition of fashion on which this article is based.

Based on those definitions the concept of fashion brand emerges. As stated by Crewe (2001) « the branding of fashion goods is a relatively new phenomenon », it is defined as “an identity concept associated with a person or a company” (Welters, Lillethun, 2011). In fashion, “brand value is highly related to identity and therein some level of exclusivity: the feeling of the special/exclusive connection the consumer shares with the brand” (Power, Hauge, 2004).

Associated to this concept is the concept of fashion trend described as “a direction in which fashion maybe heading” (Welters, Lilletun, 2011). Furthermore, “there is not one fashion trend but many delocalized and contrary trends driven by a whole host of groups organized around the opinion leaders.”(Vernette , 2004).

This paper focuses on fashion apparels. With an estimated US \$ 1 trillion spent on clothing and footwear around the world (Tungate, 2008), fashion apparels represent a strong interest among consumers and companies. As a result, “it would be foolish [...] to underestimate the importance of fashion [apparel] in society” (Tungate, 2008). Moreover, we associate here fashion apparels with the exclusive analysis of women; as from its history to nowadays, fashion has always been linked to women. Indeed from the early theory of Simmel (1957/1904) relating fashion to the social position of women, to our post-industrial era, masculine clothing are more identified to activities (business, leisure) than women (Kawamura, 2005). Furthemore, from the NPD Reports on the U.S. Apparel Market (2011), women are buying twice more than men. Therefore women represent a strong potential for fashion brand apparels.

Concerning the signification of clothes, they had “historically” the propriety to cover and protect the body, but there is nowadays more to it. Veblen (1953, originally published in 1899), Tardes (1903) and Flugel (1950) were among the first authors to suggest that apparel can be seen as conspicuous consumption, signaling the social status of the owner. Argyle (1975) demonstrates that clothes convey information about the personality of the woman wearing them, including her social status and the group to which she belongs. Further, Gibbins (1969) emphasizes that clothes determine a more or less favorable evaluation of one person by another. Consistent with this idea, Sissons (1970) also notes that clothes represent an important characteristic of social class. Therefore, apparel is associated primarily with body protection and secondarily with social status and mirrors people desire of being “fashionable”.

If we focus more in depth to studies on social identity, they support the conceptualization of the self as composed of both a personal identity and a group identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In the same vein, Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) demonstrate that attachments to objects are “signs of one’s connection to, or differentiation from other members of society”. This notion is consistent with Baudrillard’s conception of the meaning of consumption as a system of signs and codes (1970) and illustrates a double mechanism of social conformity and individual differentiation. Lipovetsky (1987, 2003) calls this mechanism as marginal differentiation: according to the fashion system, people want to be like the other members of their social group (conformity), but not exactly the same (individual differentiation, even though small details). Therefore, we suggest that the need for group conformity and the desire for uniqueness are partly fulfilled through fashion apparel, as a mean of expressing oneself, from group belonging as well as to group difference (Brewer, 1991; Fromkin and Snyder, 1980). Studies acknowledge the importance of fashion apparel, but what is the role of brands, and what is expected from them?

Fashion equity has been explored recently by Le Bon (2011), but her model does not measure the fashion equity of brands. Therefore the contribution of this article, is to examine the need for conformity and uniqueness to analyze women’s expectations toward fashion brands and their impact on brand equity. In fact, the measurement of brand equity does not include the measurement of fashion (Lehmann *et al.*, 2008).

The objective of this research is to provide an initial approach of fashion brand equity and to define its pertaining items. In the first section, we review the importance of fashion, with the need for conformity and uniqueness, and the concept of brand equity in order to help providing a basis of our fashion brand equity definition. In the second section, we present our research methodology. In the third section, we develop the analysis of our qualitative data. In the fourth section, we discuss results and conclusions of the different dimensions emerging

from this study. Finally we state the study's limitations and propose further avenues of research.

## **2. Literature Review**

Through the review of the literature, we consider how group conformity and the need for uniqueness play significant roles in fashion apparel consumer behavior, and we propose an overview of the brand equity concept to identify the gaps in research on fashion brand equity.

### **2.1. The need for conformity**

As Miller *et al.* (1993) suggest, humans have a natural tendency to form groups. Conformity can be defined as the tendency for opinions to fall within a group norm and the tendency for individuals to comply with those group norms (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). Groups have an important power over the individual, and Asch's (1951) "conformity study" clearly identifies the strength of group influence on consumer behavior. This study demonstrates that in the context of an unstructured situation, subjects tend to comply with the group that sets the norms. Socially, people are perceived as members of groups that they are respected by, and they are not members of groups that they are disdained by.

The literature on fashion recognizes that adopting the symbols of a respected group is a way of communicating membership in the group, whereas avoiding the symbols of a disliked group indicates distance from the group (Leibenstein, 1950; Simmel, 1904; Veblen, 1953; Sapir, 1931; Robinson, 1961). Thus, fashion brands can symbolize group membership. However, the need for conformity is not a need that people fully encompass in their behavior. Venkatesan (1966) hypothesizes that "few individuals would care to be complete conformists in their consumption pattern". For example, on the market, the same products in different colors, show that personalization helps maintaining individual independence.

Research shows that uniqueness and conformity are related to basic cultural values. People from individualist cultures tend to prefer to be unique or to stand out, while those from collectivist cultures prefer to conform or blend in (Kim and Markus, 1999).

Therefore, conformity is present in a social group and the need for uniqueness means that marginal differentiation is always on consumers' minds. In the next section, we will examine the strength of the need for uniqueness, or counter-conformity motivation, for consumers in the context of fashion.

## **2.2. The need for uniqueness**

Snyder and Fromkin (1977) originate the theory of the need for uniqueness. Individuals' need to be different is driven by a threat to their self-perception of uniqueness and the desire to regain their distinctiveness. However, the need for uniqueness can also result from different motivational processes (Nail, 1986; Tepper, 1997). They can be "incidental or secondary outcomes from attempts to satisfy various motivations or drives" (Tepper *et al.*, 2001) or primary needs involving "the intended outcome of a person's actions that are driven by the need to feel different from others" (Tepper *et al.*, 2001), or "counter-conformity motivation" (Nail, 1986). This behavior occurs when individuals perceive that their identity as very similar to others (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977) and orient their behavior towards the "pursuit of differentness relative to others, that is achieved through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's personal and social identity" (Tepper and McKenzie, 2001).

The need for uniqueness can vary among individuals. Studies show that an individual's desire for uniqueness or conformity, defined as self-esteem, is directed by the need, more or less moderated, to maintain a distinction within a social group (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977). Ames

and Iyengar (2005) and Tepper *et al.* (2001) also demonstrate that individuals who have a strong need for uniqueness prefer a unique product, in opposition to individuals who have less desire for uniqueness.

The need for uniqueness can be expressed in different ways. According to Tepper *et al.* (2001) there are three types of choices used to affirm counter-conformity:

- Creative choice counter-conformity: The consumer “seeks social differentness from most others, but consumer makes selections that are likely to be considered as good choices by others”.
- Unpopular choice counter-conformity: The consumer “breaks rules or customs or challenges existing consumer norms and risks social disapproval, including has accusations of poor taste”. This choice can also enhance self-image and social image as the consumer asserts his or her differences (Gross, 1977). As noted by Heckert (1989), if an unpopular choice gains social acceptance through others, the individual is then seen as an innovator or fashion leader.
- Avoidance of similarity: The behavior of “devaluing and avoiding the purchase of products or brands that are perceived to be commonplace”.

The theory of the fashion adoption process (Miller *et al.*, 1993) considers individual personality and motivation for counter-conformity and suggests that consumers with a stronger need for uniqueness will continue to observe styles adopted by others, even after having selected products. These consumers show a higher need for novelty to reach an optimal level of awareness of their purchasing choices. Thus, fashion brands play an important role in answering the need for uniqueness.

When it comes to fashion, individuals seek both group conformity and recognition of their uniqueness, according to the level of the needs. Brands play a significant role meeting both needs, but how do these needs affect brands? Does brand equity consider these needs?



### **2.3. Brand equity**

There is an extensive body of literature on brand equity. Srinivasan's (1979) research originates the concept of brand equity, and his work was the first to separate the brand from the product.

However, there is no consensus on a single definition of brand equity. Current definitions focus on two approaches. The first one is a financial and accounting approach, and the second one is a more strategic approach, oriented towards improving marketing productivity.

In the financial approach, the value of a brand is defined as the intangible assets of the company. For Biel (1993), the brand represents "the economic value of the brand in addition to the intangible assets of the balance sheet, such as the production tools and the stocks". For Simon and Sullivan (1993), the brand is the differential measure of the cash flow provided by the brand.

In the marketing approach, on which this article focuses, brand equity was initially proposed by Jones (1986) as "the non-functional benefits of a product". Shocker and Weitz (1988) developed this definition to include "... the aggregation of all accumulated attitudes and behavior patterns in the extended minds of consumers, distribution channels and influence agents, which will enhance future profits and long term cash flow". Many studies have subsequently been conducted. Aaker (1991) and Keller's (1993, 1998) contributions continue to be foundational. Keller (1993) defines brand equity as "the marketing effect uniquely attributed to the brand – for example when some marketing results of a product or a service arrive thanks to the brand name, and would not have happened if the product or the service would not have had this name".

From a marketing perspective, better knowledge of the brand allows it to optimize leverage on the consumer and adapt strategies. Keller (1993) finds a differential effect between brand knowledge and consumer response. Therefore, he separates knowledge of a brand, “brand knowledge”, into “brand awareness” and “brand image”, which are then developed into 18 items.

Numerous scales have been developed to measure brand equity, including those by Yoo and Donthu (2001), Lassar, Mittal and Sharma (1995), Vasquez, Del Rio and Iglesias (2002) and Netmeyer *et al.* (2004). However, there is no agreement on these scales. For this study, we select two scales in order to analyze their relevance against the need of uniqueness and conformity through fashion.

The scale of Yoo and Donthu (2001) is taken as a reference, for several reasons. This scale contains 19 items (Table 1); it has been validated for three categories of products (sport shoes, camera film, and color TVs), and it is based on Aaker’s approach and Keller’s (1993) conceptual model. It has also been validated for three cultural contexts, showing good ecological validity and a good measure of adjustment.

**Table 1: Items of the Overall Brand Equity scale of Yoo and Donthu (2001)**

| Dimensions                 | Items  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Perceived quality          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-X is of high quality</li> <li>-The likely quality of X is extremely high</li> <li>-The likelihood that X would be functional is very high</li> <li>-The likelihood that X is reliable is very high*</li> <li>-X must be of very good quality*</li> <li>-X appears to be of very poor quality* (r)</li> </ul>                           |
| Brand loyalty              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-I consider myself to be loyal to X</li> <li>-X would be my first choice</li> <li>-I will not buy other brands if X is available at the store</li> </ul>  |
| Brand awareness            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-I know what X looks like*</li> <li>-I can recognize X among other competing brands</li> <li>-I am aware of X</li> </ul>  |
| Brand associations         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Some characteristics of X come to my mind quickly</li> <li>-I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of X</li> <li>-I have difficulty in imaging X in my mind</li> </ul>  |
| OBE (Overall Brand Equity) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It makes sense to buy X instead of any other brand, even if they are the same</li> <li>-Even if another brand has same features as X, I would prefer to buy X</li> <li>-If there is another brand as good as X, I prefer to buy X</li> <li>-I another brand is different from X in any way, it seems smarter to purchase X</li> </ul> |

\*d items were deleted from the 15-item to the 10-item model

However, these dimensions do not encompass the needs for conformity and uniqueness that consumers seek through fashion.

Concerning the scale developed by Lehmann *et al.* (2008), we reach the same conclusion. This scale, based on studies in the United States and China on soft drinks, toothpaste and fast food, provides a brand equity approach through 82 items in the six following dimensions: comprehension, comparative advantage, interpersonal relations, history, preference and attachment. However, even though the list of items is more exhaustive than Yoo and Donthu's (2001) scale, it does not include the above-mentioned feelings of uniqueness and conformity at a consumer level. Such dimensions seem to be essential for fashion apparel in the consumer mind. In fact, even if we can identify the dimension of "difference", this dimension relates to the brand rather than how the brand makes the consumer feel.

Below, we present a comparison of the Lehmann *et al.* scale (2008) and the Yoo and Donthu scale (2001) dimensions, demonstrating that only five dimensions overlap (Table 2).

**Table 2: Dimensional comparison of Lehmann *et al.* (2008)  
and Yoo and Donthu's (2001) scales**

| LEHMANN & AL. (2008)   | YOO & DONTU (2001)            |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Presence (Millward Brown)                                       | -Brand awareness/associations |                               |
| 2. Awareness (Aaker)   |                               |                               |
| 3. Knowledge (BAV)   |                               |                               |
| 4. Relevance (BAV, Millward Brown)                                 |                               |                               |
| 5. Difference (BAV)  |                               |                               |
| 6. Esteem (BAV)  |                               |                               |
| 7. Performance (Millward Brown, Research International)            |                               |                               |
| 8. Advantage (Millward Brown)                                      |                               |                               |
| 9. Bonding (Millward Brown, Research International, Fournier 1998) |                               |                               |
| 10. Heritage (Research International)                              |                               |                               |
| 11. Trust (Research International)                                 | -Perceived quality            |                               |
| 12. Innovation (Research International, BAV)                       |                               |                               |
| 13. Caring (BAV)   |                               |                               |
| 14. Nostalgia (BAV)  |                               |                               |
| 15. Prestige (BAV)   |                               |                               |
| 16. Acceptability (BAV)  |                               |                               |
| 17. Endorsement (BAV)  |                               |                               |
| 18. Quality (Ambler 2003)  |                               |                               |
| 19. Ambiance (Ambler 2003)   |                               |                               |
| 20. Service (Ambler 2003)  |                               |                               |
| 21. Loyalty (Keller)   | -Brand loyalty                |                               |
| 22. Intention (Keller)   | -Purchase intention           |                               |
| 23. Value for Money (Keller)                                       | -Attitude toward brand        |                               |
| 24. Overall Attitude (Research International)                      |                               |                               |
| 25. Extension Potential (Keller and Lehmann 2003)                  |                               |                               |
| 26. Persistence (Fournier 1998)                                    |                               |                               |
| 27. Activity (Keller)  |                               |                               |
|  |                               | -Four-item OBE                |
|  |                               | -Product category involvement |

Therefore, the literature shows that there is currently no scale which takes into account consumers' need for uniqueness and conformity in fashion. In Le Bon work (2011), fashion equity is defined as “the added value of fashion to a product in comparison of a product which will not be fashionable”. In our case we will base our definition on the brand, rather than the product and leverage the definition of Keller. Therefore fashion brand equity can be defined as “the fashion effect uniquely attributed to the brand– for example when some marketing characteristics of a product or a service arrive thanks to the fashionable perception of the

brand, and would not have happened if the product or the service would not have had this level of fashionability”.

In other words, fashion brand equity can also be defined as “the added value of fashion to a brand, varying according to consumer’s needs of uniqueness and conformity”. To verify the relevance of this concept nurtured by these two needs, we conduct an exploratory research on women’s brand needs in fashion using a triangulation approach. In a first step, we investigate the importance of the need for uniqueness and conformity in fashion clothing, then we search for the attributes of fashion that emphasize those needs, and we use an experts approach to acknowledge the attributes, to conclude by discussing the overall fashion brand equity scale.

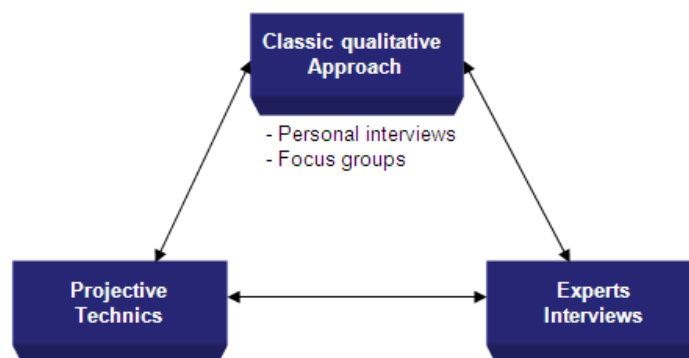
### 3. Methodology of the research

The context of this research is exploratory, and we gathered information from different qualitative methods on women’s expectations and opinions on their preferred fashion brands. In the following section we present the research methodology, the recruitment of informants and the methodological path of the study.

#### 3.1. The triangulation method

We use the triangulation method as it helps to enhance finding through different approaches and allows to draw conclusions with stronger validity (LeCompte, Preissle, 1993) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Triangulation approach**



We conducted qualitative studies to understand the complex processes around those behaviors and collect primary data (Evrard, Pras, Roux, 2009) on the beliefs, opinions and emotions of individuals. “What consumers know and think consciously and unconsciously about a brand influences their attitudes and behaviors towards the brand” (Koll, Wallpach, Kreuzer, 2010). To identify those conscious and unconscious aspects, we used the following qualitative methods:

- A focus group, to gather data on the cultural norms of the group (here, women). This approach facilitates spontaneous and focalized exchanges and provides a collective and individual emulation (Leclerc *et al.* 2011).
- Personal interviews and projective techniques by way of collages, to allow further understanding. These methods are considered to be the “best way to survey people” (Keller, 2009), facilitating the collection of more accurate data with “responses, resulting from less misunderstanding in the questions” (Keller, 2009).

Finally we used experts interviews helping to provide relevant definitions to the final dimensions and items of a new fashion brand equity scale.

### **3.2. The recruitment**

The qualitative interviews of consumers are conducted on a convenience sample of 11 women whose ages range from 20 to 53 years old. Participants include students, executives and employees in two French cities, Paris and Aix en Provence (Table 3). An initial questionnaire sent to the interviewees, gathered socio-demographic information about their preferred fashion brands, their non-preferred fashion brands, and their clothing consumption habits.

**Table 3: Sample characteristics**

| Interviewee  | Age   | City            | Favorite Brand  | Repulsive Brand | Annual clothes spending | Job/Activity | Salary         |
|--------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Interview 1  | 25-34 | Paris           | Les_composantes | Cop_Copine      | 500-1500€               | Executive    | 30 000-50 000€ |
| Interview 2  | 35-49 | Paris           | APC             | Cyrellus        | 1500-2500€              | Employee     | 30 000-50 000€ |
| Interview 3  | 25-34 | Paris           | American Retro  | Desigual        | 2500-3500€              | Executive    | 50 000-75 000€ |
| Interview 4  | 25-34 | Paris           | Maje            | Guess           | 2500-3500€              | Executive    | 30 000-50 000€ |
| Interview 5  | 25-34 | Paris           | Sandro          | Jennifer        | below 500€              | Employee     | below 10 000€  |
| Interview 6  | 25-34 | Paris           | Tatiana Lebedev | Guess           | 500-1500€               | Employee     | 30 000-50 000€ |
| Interview 7  | 18-24 | Aix en Provence | H&M             | Camaieu         | 500-1500€               | Student      | 30 000-50 000€ |
| Interview 8  | 18-24 | Aix en Provence | H&M             | Guess           | 2500-3500€              | Student      | below 10 000€  |
| Interview 9  | 18-24 | Aix en Provence | Zara            | The Kopples     | 500-1500€               | Student      | below 10 000€  |
| Interview 10 | 18-24 | Aix en Provence | Gap             | Pimkie          | 500-1500€               | Student      | below 10 000€  |
| Interview 11 | 50-64 | Aix en Provence | Zara            | Mim             | 2500-3500€              | Employee     | 30 000-50 000€ |

Two focus groups are also conducted, one in Paris and one in Aix en Provence, with an average interview time of three hours. Here, respondents are interviewed about their perception of fashion brands.

During the focus group, a projective technique with collages is used to overcome unconscious thinking (e.g., Barner, 2008; Costa *et al.* 2003; Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008). It is a way to detect information indirectly without making consumers uncomfortable (Koll, Wallpach and Kreuzer, 2010), as a major part of consumer brand knowledge and thoughts is image-based rather than word-based (Damasio, 1994; Kosslyn, 1994; Zaltman and Coulter, 1995). Thus, the projective technique provides a broad view of the important conscious or unconscious attributes that are desirable and undesirable to interviewees. After the focus group, nine participants are interviewed by phone, for approximately one hour about their collage. Before the interview, the interviewees are sent a picture of their collage by email to enable them to see their collage on their computer, while they comment on it during the call. As Koll, Wallpach and Kreuzer (2010) note, “a combination of collages with the interviewer probing for each collage element may therefore be the method to choose when breadth of knowledge is desirable”.

### **3.3 The methodological approach plan**

The interviews, as well as focus groups, had content analyzed separately in order to identify the relevant items pertaining to the fashion brand equity scale, firstly by generating items, then by structuring those items in a semantic space.

#### ***Generating items***

- The personal interviews describing the collages are analyzed through a classical and a lexical analysis in order to generate a list of items. The items that are similar in both cases are then selected.
- The focus group interviews are also analyzed through the same method of classical and the lexical content analysis to generate a second list of items. Using the same technique as above, the items similar in both cases are also selected.

In addition to the generation of items, the content analysis also helps identifying how the needs for uniqueness and conformity are integrated in the consumers' minds.

- In a third step, the total list of items collected and selected from both the personal and the focus group interviews are submitted to three experts who identify the most complete and detailed data as possible (Denzin, 1978). Using this method helps to clearly identify the items related to the fashion brand equity scale.

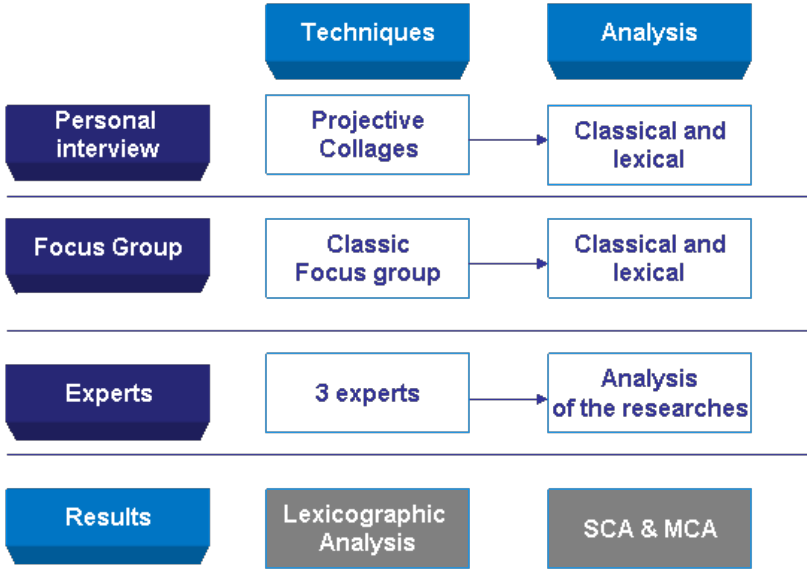
#### ***Structuring the semantic space***

After generating this list of items, the objective of the research is to structure the semantic space and reveal the dimensions of fashion. Therefore we use as a Simple Correspondence Analysis (SCA) and a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to obtain the key characteristics of fashion brands.



We sum up below our methodological analysis (Figure 2)

**Figure 2: Methodological approach plan**



**4. Qualitative Data analysis**

The focus group and the personal interview analysis are each analyzed separately and we use each time a classical analysis by themes and a lexical analysis. The lexical analysis provides a micro analysis of the corpus, by analyzing the words constituting it and not the text, thus reducing complexity and simplifying the analysis (Gavard-Perret, Moscarola, 1998).

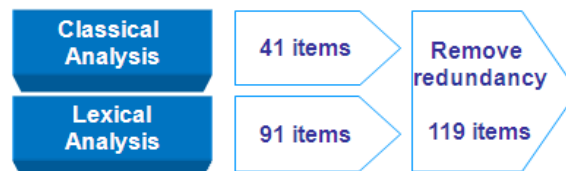
**4.1 The focus groups analysis**

The main objective of the focus groups is to understand the conscious aspect of interviewees around fashion, how important is a fashion brand, the perception of fashion brands, the difference between a trendy brand and a classical brand, and also if we can perceive a feeling of uniqueness and conformity to the group of reference. By using the classical and the lexical

method analysis we identify 41 items with the classical analysis and 91 items with the lexical analysis, with a repetition above 5.

By crossing those items and removing redundancy, we identify **119 items** (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Focus group analysis**



#### **4.2. The personal interviews analysis**

The main objective of the personal interviews is to identify what are the characteristics of a preferred brand. Interviewees are asked to create collages (during the focus group), using women’s magazines, to describe the characteristics of their preferred and non-preferred fashion brands. “Consumers have thoughts, desires, feelings, emotions, experiences, and fancies with regard to brands they cannot articulate” (Koll, Wallpach and Kreuzer, 2010), because they are either “too vague, too complex, or too intense for ordinary speech” (Siegelman, 1990) or because these thoughts are unconscious (Plutchik, 1993). Previous studies suggest that “articulating emotions such as joy, sadness, or anxiety can be difficult for individuals” (Koll, Wallpach and Kreuzer, 2010).

Below is an example of one collage. The left-hand side illustrates the characteristics of preferred brands, and the right-hand side illustrates the characteristics of non-preferred brands (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Collage of preferred and non-preferred fashion brands**



With the classical content analysis we generated 63 items, and with the lexical analysis 92 items with a repetition above 5. By crossing those items and removing redundancy, we can identify **77 items** (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Focus group analysis**



## 5. Results

In order to fine tune the items results, we finally select a group of three experts to increase the strength of the findings obtained by the two previous methods and select the final items defining fashion brand equity. Thanks to the experts selection, and the convergence method,

the three experts identified **60 items** in total. From those 60 items, 47 are similar to items already identified in the previous analysis and 13 are new (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Experts content analysis**



In order to identify the reliability of the experts’ judgment, we use the Ir indicator from Perreault and Leigh (1989). This indicator is calculated as shown below:

$$Ir = [(F/N-1/K) \times (K/K-1)]^{0,5}$$

- F= the number of agreement between each pair of judges
- N = number of items to classify (here we have 60 items)
- K = number of categories for the classification (in this case we have two categories, an item corresponding or not to a feature of the fashion brand equity).

The computation provided three coefficients, with values between 0.8 and 0.89, indicating that the data is reliable as those coefficients are close to one. The average coefficient by pair is 0.87, which defines that in average, 87% of the items are the same between each expert.

**Table 3: Experts reliability coefficients**

| Experts | J1   | J2   | J3   |
|---------|------|------|------|
| J1      | 1,00 | 88%  | 90%  |
| J2      | 0,88 | 1,00 | 82%  |
| J3      | 0,89 | 0,80 | 1,00 |

Rust and Cooil (1994) develop the PRL (Proportional Reduction in Loss) which provides a global agreement indicator between experts. By using the existing tables, the coefficient of 0.98, indicates that 98% of the results are reliable.

Therefore those three complementary analysis provide a strong reliability for the items chosen to describe fashion brand equity.

### **5.1. Content analysis**

We can also see that the need for conformity and uniqueness are associated to different brands in the content analysis. For example, we can identify the need for conformity for two brands, “Maje” and “Sandro”. One interviewee mentions that these brands reflect a special group, the “Thirties Parisian” woman, who “earns a good living and lives in Paris”. This interviewee states that she “tries and wants” to belong to this “little Parisian group which is trendy, even if the clothes do not fit” her. Another interviewee says that, “I am not original, I am basic, with the Parisian style, and if I buy clothes from Sandro or Maje, I cannot claim originality”. In these statements, we can identify the group conformity aspect.

However, if for some women those two brands are a way to belong to a group, for others they represent the group to which they do not want to belong and that does not support their need for uniqueness: “What is important for a fashion brand is that you do not feel that you see it on everybody, so I never go to Maje and Sandro”. We find this behavior in relation to another brand also: Guess which is spontaneously suggested in different collages and during focus group discussions as a repellent brand by nearly all the respondents. There is a clear message that this brand is disdained and that respondents do not want to be part of the group wearing such a brand: “Guess is a non-preferred brand”, “It is vulgar and ugly”, “The mix of material is of bad taste, bling-bling”, and “with Guess, I will be ashamed”.

Concerning the need for uniqueness, some of the interviewees indicate a strong need to be unique: “What would be ideal would be to be different and not to have the same things as

everyone” and “I am not looking for originality, but just to be a bit different than others”. Many interviewees also refer to the vintage aspect, going to second-hand shops or browsing on the internet to find “the” specific clothing.

Therefore, this content analysis demonstrates that fashion brands support consumer needs for conformity and uniqueness, according to the level of implication of consumer.

## **5.2. Lexicographic analysis**

After items definition, we use a Simple Correspondence Analysis (SCA) and a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to structure the semantic space.

### ***Simple correspondence analysis***

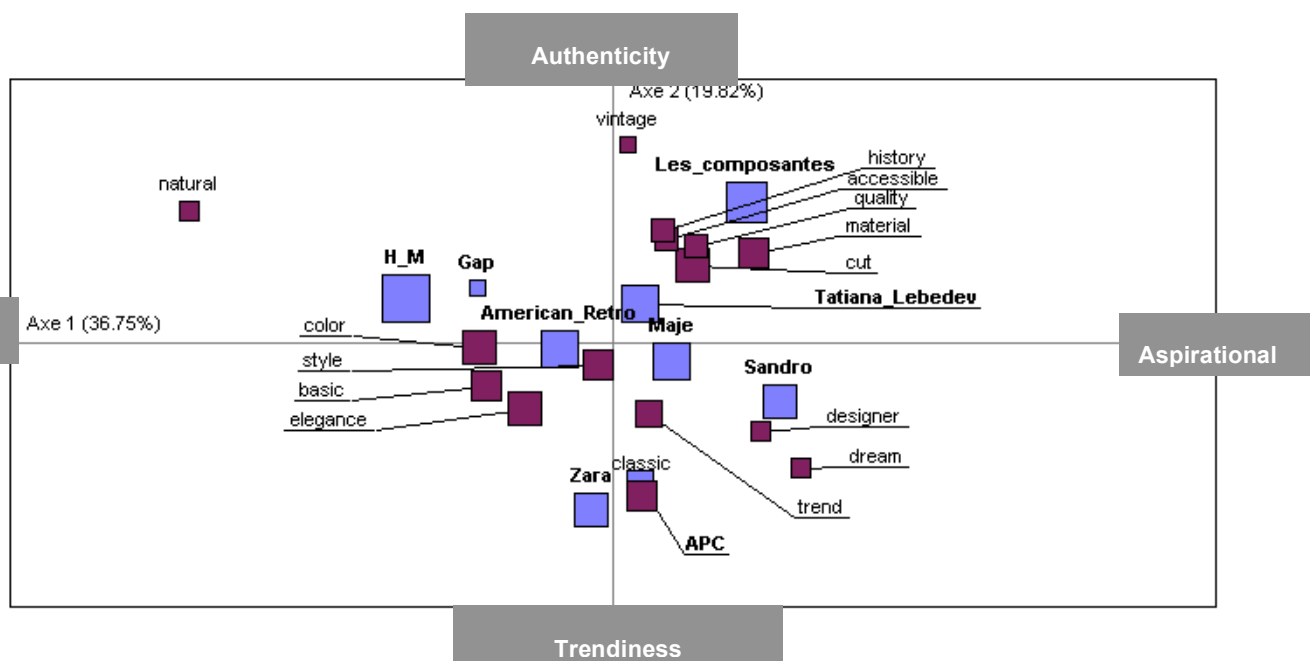
With this analysis we examine the relationship between variables. As this research is exploratory, we only keep the top 15 items of the 60 previously defined and cross them with preferred brands. This provides different axes of analysis, which show the emergence of different concepts.

By cross classifying the words with the interviewees’ preferred fashion brands, we obtain two axes that explain 56% of the variance (Figure 7) which can be defined with: “Authenticity/Trendiness” and “Aspirational/Utilitarian”. We note that the brand equity scale of Lehmann *et al.* (2008) is similar to two of these four dimensions:

- The “Authenticity” dimension can be associated with the “Heritage” dimension of Lehmann *et al.* (2008). However, in Lehmann *et al.* (2008) scale, the notion of “vintage” is not emphasized. From Tepper’s (1997) perspective, consumers resist conformity by buying and modifying handmade, personalized, vintage or antique clothes, thus creating an extension of the uniqueness of those products. Therefore, we could consider adding the item referring to “vintage”.

- The dimension of “Trendiness” can be associated with the notion of “Innovation” from Lehmann *et al.* (2008). However, the items mentioned in the scale do not correspond to the interviewees’ references that the brand has “often new products” that are “trendy” or “surprising”. Thus, it might be necessary to add these items as well.
- The concept of “Utilitarian” and “Aspirational” are not mentioned in the brand equity dimensions, therefore it should also be necessary to add them into the fashion brand equity scale.

**Figure 7: 15 words crossed with preferred brands**



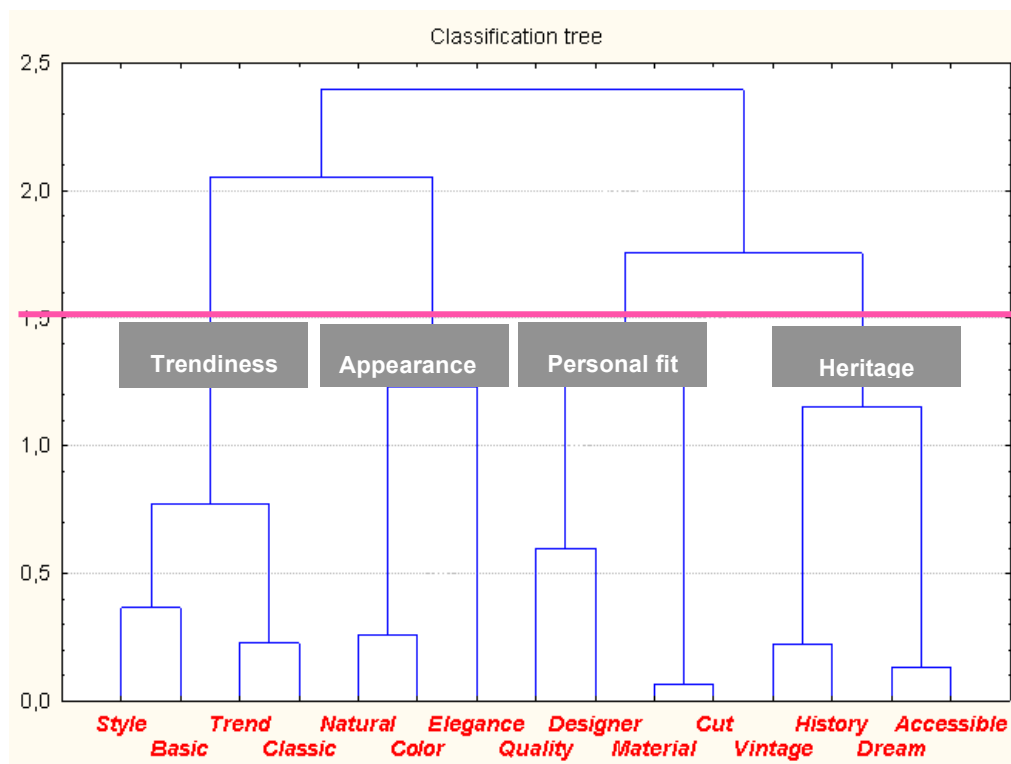
The positioning of the brands is consistent with their offerings: Gap and H&M are brands focusing their communication more on their products, as being utilitarian, whereas Maje and Sandro are more focusing their communication as being aspirational, “trendy”, making people “dream”.

### ***Multiple Correspondence Analysis***

A Multiple Correspondence Analysis is used to extend the concept of SCA to several categorical variables and present a geometrical display of the variables in a low-dimensional space. This method uses the 15 selected items, describing general characteristics of fashion brands, confirming the findings of the SCA.

According to a clear elbow displayed in a scree plot of the eigenvalues, the MCA leads to a solution with 8 axes explaining 68,2 % of the total variance. As a result, each word is described by a vector of coordinates on eight axes, which enables us to cluster analyze the words in an effort to uncover groupings or dimensions (see Figure 8 for the resulting hierarchical classification tree). Four dimensions appear and suggest what is important for women regarding fashion brands in general. The dimensions are Trendiness, Appearance, Personal Fit and Heritage.

**Figure 8: Hierarchical decision tree**





By mapping the different axes found in both analysis (Table 4), we can see that seven dimensions emerge from the SCA and the MCA.

**Table 4: Cross-mapping of the dimensions of the two analyses**

| SCA             | MCA          |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Preferred Brand | Brand        |
| Authenticity    | -            |
| Trendiness      | Trendiness   |
| Aspirational    | -            |
| Utilitarian     | -            |
| -               | Personal fit |
| -               | Appearance   |
| -               | Heritage     |

To conclude, this qualitative research allows to identify consumers’ need for uniqueness and conformity, as relevant moderators of fashion brand equity and suggests seven different dimensions: Authenticity, Trendiness, Utilitarian, Aspirational, Personal fit, Appearance and Heritage.

**Discussion**

This exploratory research examines how women describe and comprehend fashion brands, as well as how such dimensions are integrated or missing in the existing brand equity scale models.

The findings of these analyses suggest that women see their preferred fashion brands through the seven dimensions of “Authenticity”, “Trendiness”, “Aspirational”, “Utilitarian”, “Personal fit”, “Appearance” and “Heritage”. Furthermore, it appears that some of these dimensions are part of the brand equity concept such as “Authenticity”, “Heritage”, “Innovation” and some are not such as “Aspirational”, “Utilitarian”, “Personal fit” and “Appearance”, suggesting that fashion can be an additional and complementary scale to brand equity. In further researches we will investigate the measure of such new scale. The next steps will be to test this scale in a

quantitative research and validate its relevancy. Then we should balance the results of fashion brand equity scale with the brand equity in order to define if there is a correlation between both.

Taken together, these findings support a new approach to the fashion brand equity, with various practical implications. From a managerial standpoint, integrating the fashion brand equity in addition to the brand equity scale will allow marketers to optimize their marketing strategy in numerous ways. They will be able to better position brands with global mapping, including brand equity and fashion brand equity and fine-tune this positioning by integrating the positioning of their competitors; this will allow them to improve their communication through a better understanding of their perceived brand positioning.

This research is not without limitations. The first limitation is that, on average, the interviewees are between 20 and 53 years old and middle class. The interviewees are not representative of all French women, and vocabulary, expectations of brands and clothing habits may evolve with age and social class. Quantitative research could validate these findings by confirming or challenging the vocabulary used by these respondents. Moreover, French participants are not representative of all women's fashion perceptions, which can differ across countries and cultures. Finally, the scales of Lehmann *et al.* (2008) and Yoo and Donthu (2001) have not been tested on French fashion brands, which may limit the validity of these scales in the sector and country.

Several interesting extensions for future research will be to test it in different countries. This research would provide better understanding of the difference in perceptions of fashion brands. Furthermore, studies of men would provide information on the possible variations in perception in terms of clothing and brand attitudes according to gender.

Another interesting extension beyond fashion would be to test this new scale on different industries, such as brands in the mass industry, or the car industry, where the need for uniqueness can be very strong, according to the category of products bought.

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