

**LUXURY AGENCING PRACTICES IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZE FASHION  
ENTERPRISES: CLOTHING EXPLORATORY RESEARCH**

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## Introduction

Fashion comprises several sectors, and its dynamics is the object of study in various areas of knowledge. Bruggeman, and Van de Peer (2016) claim that fashion allows sectorial coverage, entangling behavior and ideals, fashion arrange a series of concepts linked to the material sphere. As a large and complex market, it is also used by individuals and society to communicate tastes and lifestyles. Thus, fashion as a market is multidimensional, heterogeneous, dynamic (Oswick and Noon, 2014) and socially materialized in calculative models (Egels-Zandén and Hansson, 2016).

Based on calculation devices, e.g. practices, different forms of organization based on agencies, determine the capacity of hybrid collectives (human beings and material devices) to give meaning to action and to act. Through practices that agencing markets (agencing practices), the construction of markets is entangled, that is, steeped in specific values and meanings (Cochoy, 2020).

Looking at the fashion markets, several aspects are entangled, such as elements that afford luxury (Truong *et al.*, 2008; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Duguay, 2016; Okonkwo, 2016; Charters *et al.*, 2017; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2020; Turunen *et al.*, 2020). The elements which luxury manifests itself in markets correspond to those that promote, for example, the perception of exclusivity, quality and premium price (Danziger, 2004; Kapferer *et al.*, 2014; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2020).

Based on the assumptions of market agency (Cochoy *et al.*, 2016; Hagberg, 2016), and using fashion as a case, this article aims to describe how luxury is framed in the small and medium-size fashion enterprises (SMFEs). In this sense, it focuses on the demand for knowledge of luxury markets in emerging economies, highlighted by Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2019), exploring the dynamism of the markets, this work depicts luxury agent practices in the fashion market. For this, the Brazilian fashion market is used, specifically the clothing sector, a sector that plays a relevant role in economic development (Pinheiro *et al.* 2019).

In this sense, this article aims to contribute to Luxury Studies. By analyzing the socio-material agencing in the luxury market, using the less studied actors present in luxury markets, the SMFEs). Thus, this article also contributes by shedding lights on SMFEs present in luxury market, showing their possible opportunities and barriers.

In addition, this work explores the perspective of agencing, seeking to present contents that allow extending the conceptual limits for the analysis of luxury in the markets. Still, it explores the luxury levels and the multidimensional proposition of the fashion market.

The paper is organized as follows. After this introduction, there is the literature review, that was carried out to recognize the fashion luxury market as a process of agencing. Subsequently, the research method was discretion based on multi-case studies. Then, the results, a discussion and implications are presented.

## Theoretical review

Fashion is conceived from its materialities, that is, from its capacity to act and performativity structure (Schöps *et al.*, 2020), assembled by the socio-technical elements modus of organization. From this perspective Fowler, Muncy and Iyer (2017) explain that the fashion market has adopted several meanings, however, it often continues impacting and being impacted by the social elements and other material entangled in this market, as well as, other markets.

Accompanying the market malleable (Kindström *et al.*, 2018), the agencing has in it meaning the specificity and movement of agencies, with its emphasis placed on “collective and open procedures of market agencing activities and the processes they set in motion” (Cochoy *et al.*, 2016, p.6). Onyas and Ryan (2015), highlighting the market movement, referring to Çaliskan and Callon (2010), who point to the market dynamics, clarify that the continuous agency, depending on the agency context (agencement configuration), guides the different capacities to action. Thus, agencing is assumed on the “continuous arranging of the elements of practices, accompanied by continuous adjusting of these elements in relation to other elements” (Hagberg, 2016, p.112).

From this notion, socio-material elements are endowed with routines and functions that make markets manageable and endue them with capacities that influence the shaping of several everyday actions (Fuentes and Sörum, 2019). Agencing, as specific states of the world, is mobilized by human concepts and articulated material objects (Cochoy, 2020), that, once established, may incur disputes and controversies, supported by differences and symmetries produced by them (Chimenti, 2020).

Observing the perspective of agency and agencing, Fuentes *et al.* (2017) point out that agencing arrangements can be constituted and formatted by/in practice. Thus, Hagberg (2016) demonstrated that a good is integrated to different practices and interacts with these practices that integrate it, allowing goods to cause changes in such practices, as well as practices in goods, i.e. the arrangement consists of goods entangle with other elements in multiple practices and, through it, contributes to the shaping of these practices.

Hagberg (2016), using the case of shopping bags, describes them as agencies that impact and are impacted by the market configurations of which they are part. It can be argued that the material element interaction with various practices and other elements is what determines their capacity to act. Shopping bags originated and contributed to different practices: shopping, transportation, advertising, disposal and sale (Hagberg, 2016). Thus, the process of agencing is about continuously organizing elements by adjusting them to each other (Hagberg, 2016), concerning with performative constitutions of reality in the broadest sense (Von Wallpach *et al.*, 2017). Thus, it is understood that different objects and subjects are formed by different elements that are integrated by different agencing practices.

As mentioned by Hagberg (2016), objects and subjects in their individuality are not able to act and form assemblies. For there to be performativity and for action to be practiced, it is necessary for fashion to be entangled in socio-material dimensions and characteristics that allow it to critical factors as a luxury market (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Nueno and Quelch, 1998; Hilton *et al.*, 2004; Kapferer and Denizeau, 2014; Chandon *et al.*, 2016; Blancheton and Hlady-Rispal, 2020).

Emphasizing the entanglement perspective, it is described that luxury, as a market, drives the framing of aspects that prioritize satisfaction of non-basic necessities (Brun *et al.*, 2008). In this context, authors who analyzed the factors that are critical to the manifestation of luxury (Nueno and Quelch, 1998; Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Brun and Castelli, 2013; Okonkwo, 2016; Atwal and Williams, 2017; Keller, 2017), presented some aspects that are crucial for the framing of brands in luxury markets. Through a process of filtering and categorization (see Miles and Huberman) common themes emerge, which made it possible to create a frame of reference for this article. Six events considered: premium image, marketing program, premium quality, premium price, exclusivity and brand protection.

The brand image (manifestation 1) is one of the instruments through which luxury can manifest itself in the fashion market, guiding how agents perceive and understand the brand (Aarker, 1996). Through this aspect, it is possible to frame and overflow (transformation or regeneration of the brand) the markets. Meanwhile, the second

manifestation of luxury encompasses all aspects of the marketing program, highlighting purchase perspectives and consumption experience (Keller, 2017).

Checking how the brand builds superior quality concerns the third manifestation of luxury Kapferer and Denizeau (2014) point out that quality can be defined as superiority or excellence. Thus, when purchasing a luxury product, the consumer understands that it is differentiated, produced with greater concern, and consequently with greater care. The fourth market manifestation concerns the verification of how the price of products practiced in the company is constructed. In fact, customers choose luxury products because they associate high prices with high quality, and with the values of exclusivity and scarcity (Rosenbaum et al. (2020).

Among the manifestations of luxury, one returns to the idea of rarity. This informs that the agents participating in the arrangements demand exclusivity. Material and social agents intertwine to generate exclusive environments (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). The last manifestation of luxury observed in the fashion market was brand protection. This dimension encompasses activities that evidence the protection of brands in all senses, specifically counterfeiting (Brun and Castelli, 2013). Understanding that fashion is a market, it interacts and develops from new content and trends, supported by high levels of innovation.

## Method

Exploring how luxury is framed in the fashion market, specifically, depicting luxury agencing practices in SMFEs and understanding why these practices occur, it was developed a multi-case study using a method that allows describing the process through *following the actors*, as indicates in Latour (1996). To perform the exploratory research, it was used as a procedure the monitoring of the socio-material agents that constitute the arrangement of SMFEs in clothing luxury market.

### *The multi-case*

This article is a multi-case study (Yin, 2003) that, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), it has benefits adding confidence to the results that, point out similarities and differences between the studied cases. The cases analysed in this study are three enterprises, and were selected through the Maximum Variation Sampling Method category, as in Solér *et al.*, (2015), who studied three Swedish fashion enterprises.

The choice of three fashion enterprises (Table I) were supported by a variety of features that included size, fashion division, and orientation, indicating the agency of luxury in different aspects. The chosen enterprises represent three core types of luxury agencies, classic fashion, sustainable fashion and contemporary fashion. All three types of business engage in luxury practices and are visually identified in corporate stores, advertisements, and websites. Classic fashion, often referred to as slow, determines brands with more durable pieces, classic designs, reduced number of items and associated high prices (Fletcher, 2010). Sustainability typology refers to fashion that is based on reducing environmental impact, encompassing conception, manufacturing, disposal and engaging in sustainable, inclusive design, social justice and social responsibility (Thomas, 2008). Contemporary fashion or “new fashion” refers to the market where, despite premium prices, the items production volume is relatively higher than that identified in classic fashion (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003).

**Table I - Enterprises description**

	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Business concept</b>	<b>Business type</b>	<b>Luxury level</b>

Enterprise L1	owner and the attendants	The story must go on	Classic Fashion	Old luxury (rare and international raw materials, high prices and unique items)
Enterprise L2	manager and the enterprise owner	Comfortable fashion, but with style	Contemporary fashion	Accessible luxury (available raw materials, lower prices and series manufacturing)
Enterprise L3	owner and the manager	Timeless apparel	Sustainable fashion	New luxury (exclusive and national raw materials, premium prices and limited items)

Still, the enterprises were chosen from the hierarchy proposed by Silverstein and Fiske (2003), expressing the categorization of old luxury, intermediate and accessible luxury. The old luxury is characterized by superior quality, rarity and high prices, featuring products that are used as a reference by third parties (brands and people). Likewise, the intermediate luxury market prioritizes high quality, however the raw materials are less exclusive and elaborate. In turn, the affordable market encompasses lower value, mass-produced items. In order to preserve brand identity, the following registration was used for identification: L1, L2 and L3.

#### *Data collection and analysis*

Multi-case studies demand a diversity of information that can be used for transferability within and between cases (Stavros and Westberg, 2009). When looking at this context, the multiple use of data sources favors broader and more complex information gathering. It is used to form themes and categories through a convergence between multiple and different sources of information (Creswell and Miller, 2000). In this sense, data collection was performed through non-participant observations, nonverbal behavioral notations following Maclean *et al.* (2004), and semi-structured interviews, elaborated from the adapted manifestations of frame of reference, that consists of six elements: premium image, marketing program, premium quality, premium price, exclusivity and brand protection.

Four interviews were conducted in L1, five in L2, and four in L3, and all interviews were recorded. The period of non-participatory observation and nonverbal behavioral notations was between August 15th and October 22th of 2018, with 1 month dedicated to each of the SMFEs.

Noting that qualitative research requires specific techniques for the analysis of the data, this study use the analysis based on a coding and categorization process, based on the principles of analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Drawing and verifying conclusions made possible to interpret code meanings, and associate them with other codes categorized to assign action to them and to create theoretical and practical conjunctures (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The verification was performed through Summative Content Analysis, aiming to “understanding the contextual use of the words or content” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p.1283). A summative approach aims to identify the frequency of words and the contexts associated with the use of terms and phrases, seeking alternative terms for meanings.

#### **Luxury manifestations in fashion Market**

The fashion market is understood as a constitution of multidimensionality and attributes (Bruggeman and Van de Peer, 2016). From this multidimensional structure, formed by integrated elements, one observes fashion as: 1) a field that contains multiple entities and

technologies; 2) a socio-spatial arrangement where specific practices are conducted; 3) a socio-technical atmosphere that connects with infrastructure such as electricity, clothing and furniture layout and; 4) A complex that connects agents with luxury practices. Thus, based on Stigzelius (2018), it is assumed that these various elements and attributes link with each other, creating particular arrangements.

The process of agencing is constituted as a movement process of different entities, generating the (re)arrangement of actors and the capacity to act (Cochoy *et al.*, 2016). In this sense, the luxury fashion market is understood as an interaction between various practices and entities.

#### *Brand image manifestations: agencing distinction, identity transmitted, support causes and preserve trends*

The distinction was identified as an agencing practice established in the brand image, being widely used to build luxury in the fashion market. Engagement in distinction is perceived in SMFEs, regardless of business model and luxury level. According to the representatives of the three enterprises, distinctive arrangements are undertaken to frame fashion in a specific market. It is understood that fashion comes in different formats and constructs different versions of distinctions.

In this sense, it is observed that the three SMFEs prioritize the understanding of the luxury product distinctive image: “*mainly in these luxury brands, this is already imbued. The person comes here already wishing. Because it's different*”. Thus, products, structure and scripts offer an aid to express in the markets. It is noted that the practice of distinction generates particular markets as it presents differences in discourses and representation (Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2007a). Preserving in common the practice of distinction, the three SMFEs present different ways of representing and communicating luxury. Thus, having differentiation as commonality, enterprises use several distinctive information to signal particularities in the market.

The second agencing practice is characterized by the transmission of personal identity. For Kapferer and Bastien (2009), the brand must preserve practices that preserve its identity. According to Von Wallpach *et al.* (2017), the identities of market actors construct brand identity, because their performance as a market is constituted by practices emerging from relationships between entities. Using Callon (1998) to emphasize that the brand identity is formed by the collective of socio-material devices, it is understood that this identity is constituted through the values of stakeholders, described by von Wallpach *et al.* (2017) as being some actors more influential than others, and this different levels of entities influence perform brand identities, generating a particular modes of market action.

Therefore, the results show that the luxury brand is constituted by specific market configurations. Kapferer and Bastien (2009) support this perspective based on two objectives: reality and desirability. Reality is associated with everyday fashion, on the other hand, desirability reflects the desire to acquire a luxury good (Turunen, 2018), implemented by rarity and uniqueness (Brun and Castelli, 2013).

L1 conveys a personal style based on desirability. One of the aspects mentioned and evidenced by the interviewee was that “the brand itself would not be a brand that it would consume”. The products, the structure, and the entire market configuration determined by an old luxury are not in line with the consumption arrangement prioritized by the business owner. Thus, from the data, it was found that the L1 owner inserts her business in an old luxury agency, but engages its consumption in a lower luxury level.

For example, L3 established in sustainable fashion and intermediate luxury, similarly takes the perspective of desirability. As described in Turunen (2018), L3 confirms that non-

mass market configurations produce meanings and aspiration values. Thus, the practice of transmitting personal style results from the combination of the store's ability to act, the meanings of desirability, and market entities, to create a specific environment.

The third practice evidenced in brand image manifestation is to support causes. This practice refers to the ideal of social responsibility and describes agencies, where “as forms of inclusions and exclusions between human and non-human actors while contributing to address social and environmental issues” (Gond and Nyberg, 2017, p. 1135). L1 strongly demonstrates the perspective of sustainability, being a specific arrangement. Admitting old luxury, it retains entities (quality, product, price, uniqueness) and practices that support causes.

Kapferer and Denizeau (2014) report that most brands start small and remain family businesses, focusing on high quality and ethical working conditions. Thus, the interviewees, emphasizing the tastes of consumers, clarifies that “ethics and sustainability are very high values, high demanded. It then, comes perfectly in line with brand values”. From these notions, they realize the improbability of performing practices recognized as bad for society and the environment. It is emphasized that the sustainable practices performed by the enterprise direct agencies in the luxury fashion market. Confirming, Arrigo (2018, p.172) pointing out that, “sustainable business practices have been also recognized as a way of improving an existing luxury brand's image by increasing its perceived value and exclusivity, whilst achieving higher levels of sales”, all the SMFEs are entangled in supporting causes, with different causes and intensities.

Preserving trends is the fourth agencing practice revealed by the enterprise's manifestation. Although it remains the clothing life shortening perspective, Turunen *et al.* (2020) describes that in luxury fashion the trends obsolescence is subdued. In line with this proposition, in L1 there are activities and processes that conserve trends. L3, brokering around trend preservation, retains specific arrangements, such as the resale of second-hand items. Thus, highlighting the agency structure present in the practice of preserving trends, the interviewee narrates that it is “*working with something that is no longer the specific fad of this collection, right? But we can reinvent it, we can put it in vogue. And then we are also in the time, so everything is fashionable, right?*”

For L3, trend preservation is a practice that is part of brand communication and action. Trend-conserving activities and processes are based on image and how market actors will perceive the brand (Aarker, 1996). Thus, it is understood that the trend preservation should be a constant practice in any luxury brand. According to L3 representants, luxury fashion does not follow trend, it retains. Thus, the interviewee explicit: “*It's a cutting-edge audience, it's people who don't, who don't follow trends, they're more concerned with style*”.

#### *Marketing program manifestations: agencing generate knowledge and experience*

According to Roberts (2018), luxury is marketed from undefined qualities, mystery promotion and ambiguous references. Thus, Roberts (2018) highlights ignorance and emphasizes that lack of knowledge or information is implanted through the mystery of promotional activities. The information provided by the L2 and L3 corroborated with the perspective of ignorance, as they did not mention any information about the generation of knowledge. Communication of all brand practices and activities can interfere with brand construction, leading to decoupling, influencing the market commoditization entanglement, as described by Callon (1999).

However, L1 recognizes the relevance of knowledge generation for building luxury in the fashion market. Kapferer and Bastien (2009) point out that the knowledge generation and transmission through stories builds an identity and market agencing. Roper *et al.* (2013) describe that the construction of identity, meanings and market practices are formed by the

narratives of enterprises. Thus, the generation of knowledge is perceived as a key to the connection between enterprises and other actors (especially consumers).

The marketing program as the luxury manifestation arouses imagination, dreams, experiences and fantasy, communicating magic and hope to consumers. Through the interviewee of L1, it was noted that as a classic fashion enterprise, telling stories and transmitting information is presented as a way to generate value and structure a market. From various market devices and marketing programs (store layout, materials produced, brand communication), L1 manages market instruction, constructing a communication process consisting of entities that interact with practices.

The luxury market and its environment provide a capacity to act inscribed in pleasurable activities. In short, it is recognized and described by L1 that: *“this buying spirit is the most rewarding thing in the enterprise, because we really consider that we are not selling a product, we are providing an experience”*. Thus, practices that drive experiences are designed through devices that, as described by Callon (2016: 30) capture “customer’s attention and to arouse their desires, cravings, and passion”. Consequently, the luxury fashion market must represent a differentiated shopping experience, distinct from everyday fashion retail settings.

Evidencing practices that generate luxury arrangements in the market, it was initially identified a rupture with the daily fashion model that highlights major global brands, considering that the luxury fashion model seeks to be based on authorial and local elements. Regardless of the luxury retail typologies, higher level of structural and spatial elements arranged have been identified, promoters of agencies that give experiential meanings to market actors. One interviewee report that: *“we provide the same happiness as she would have had gone to Vuitton to buy a new product. It's this experience that I think is valid for us, they leave here with cool packaging, with bow, accompany, every!”*.

All respondents recognized that the experience is fundamental to the luxury proposal signed by the enterprises. Highlighting the experience, L1 underscores involvement in construct customer engagement. The interviewee emphasizes the enterprise's involvement with this practice, but describes that improvements should be made. Being inserted in a second-hand market, the creation of a superior experience impacts the perception of enterprise differentiation, and, as the owner says: *“I think it is very important for the people, especially that they will buy second-hand products, feel like you are in the previously brand product store, you know? I like it a very much when people come in and say: ‘oh I just know that it's a thrift store when I look for the store board ”*.

An example of the experience as a way to create an interactive process with the consumer can be seen in L3 interviews: *“I think buying is the most rewarding thing in the enterprise, because we really consider that we are not selling a product, we are providing an experience”*. This statement is part of the entertainment formation highlighted by Atwal and Williams (2017).

#### *Premium quality manifestations: ageing ensure superiority and values traditions*

Kang and Park (2016) describe that luxury consumers often attribute dignity and superiority to high quality products, declining low quality and counterfeit goods. The practice of ensuring superiority led the L1 interviewee, to believe that the premium quality manifestation ensures a market distinction attributed to objective (raw) and abstract product qualities. Quality evokes the transmission of a symbolic meaning, adorned with a story that links it with the consumer's perception of luxury as described in Seo and Buchanan-Oliver (2015). Thus, it is understood that the qualification process generates particularities and superiorities, being “the qualities that can be attached to the emerging good depend crucially on the associations that are forged between the field and existing entities within the network



that constitutes the buyer” (Araújo *et al.*, 2008, p. 9). The L1’s owner explains that she does not want synthetic fabric in the store: “[...] and then I get it, but I like to work with pure silk, real cotton, real linen, so that's where I go, understood? These pieces will always be more expensive, you know what I mean?”.

For L2, quality assumes particularities oriented towards guaranteeing superiority based on abstract aspects. Through information presented by L2, it is possible, based on Parasuraman *et al.* (1985), understand that superiority is described by the perception of quality because, as emphasized by Danziger (2004), the superiority described by quality is derived from experience or feeling that delivers to the consumer. This aspect differs from the perspective of superiority presented by the L1.

L3 uses the same objectives and meanings prioritized by L1. This practice is agency as a way to evaluate and establish the quality of products, still relying on material devices as in the French online display advertising market detailed in Beuscart and Mellet (2013). Thus, the practice of superiority, employed by this enterprise, integrates exclusive and noble ingredients, incorporating intangibility (heritage) and rarity.

The other practice evidenced in the premium quality is the appreciation of traditions. The appreciation of tradition refers to the symbolic power and agencies that are appropriated by brands, generating specificities and differentiated markets. Including authenticity, it refers to objects, people, and places that carry and convey a story. Referring to the ideal of terroir, Charters *et al.* (2017) show the appreciation of tradition offers the potential to bring the characteristics and meanings of the place to the consumer.

Regarding the practice of valuing traditions, only L3 uses its own country specificities for brand capitalization. Traditions and associations with different countries are regularly used to generate value for market players, seeking to use meanings that interact with the brand. The owner tells us that: “*the brand has this Brazilianness, but also from Italy that was where the enterprise was born, where I studied, where I learned more about this part of fashion. And willy-nilly, even for my genetics, too, Japan*”.

#### *Premium price practice manifestations: ageing encourage justice and enable creativity*

In the present luxury manifestation, two ageing practices stood out, encourage justice and enable creativity. Encourage justice corresponds to fair remuneration paid to professionals working in the luxury fashion market. Enable creativity represents the luxury market where high values are invested in the creative sector and high technology.

Slave labor is an unethical and unfair activity that remains a viable management practice because underpayment fosters economic gains (Crane *et al.*, 2019). Observing the logic of encourage justice, it is understood that the items (mass) are associated with a profitability, that is capitalized by lower salaries, where the fashion market in some cases uses unfair labor in order to guarantee lower price and higher sales numbers.

Hilton *et al.* (2004) stress that clothing retailers have large margins from low salary and unpaid workers' rights. By passing the everyday fashion market, it is identified that this activity is relevant for building a mass market with lower goods. Based on this perspective, it was found that the affordable luxury market represented by L2 does not clearly evoke engagement with this practice. Truong *et al.* (2008) clarify that low entry prices guides activities that concern the affordable luxury market.

In contrast, the perspective highlighted by the representative of intermediate luxury, L3, underscored the practice of encourage justice as a relevant activity for the ideal luxury market. The manifestation of the premium price is, therefore, an instrument that encourages justice, as it evokes the fair remuneration of all professionals working in the fashion sector and suppliers. Through this notion, it is understood that luxury emerges as a way to capture

fair values and wages. That is, luxury items are expensive because they can capitalize on justice.

The second practice identified is the enable creativity. This factor, according to Nueno and Quelch (1998), is the key element that differentiates the luxury market from other industries. It is noteworthy that through high values, the development of new ideas becomes possible. Thus, Kabukcu (2015), investigating the case of Vakko, emphasizes that creativity encompasses problem solving and opportunities emergence, standing out from the development of new ideas.

Results identified that the enable creativity practice encompasses activities that agency the generation of new thoughts. According to the L3's representative, through the high values makes possible the remuneration of creatives, that is, enables the breeding of creative centers. In this way, the interviewee recognizes the value of creativity, elucidating that: *“this appreciation, and the payment of creativity that enable to have the sensitivity to see trends, to see what is happening in the world, to create, to propose new aesthetics. So, it also comes with a high cost, because you know, creativity is the differential”*.

L1 and L2 did not evidence this practice when asked about the premium price manifestation. Although L1 does not point to practices that enable creativity, it can develop it implicitly, because unreachable luxury is made up of creative centers.

#### *Rarity manifestations: agencing value diversity*

Among the manifestations of luxury, comes the ideal of rarity. This informs that the agents participating in the arrangements demand exclusivity. Material and social agents get entangled in order to generate unique environments. Although relevant, the characteristics of products are matched and combined with other entities to build practices that embed the rarity in the market. Thus, based on Callon (1998), it is understood that the ability of agents to act and make sense of action decreases as the fashion market overflows and the number of material and social agents increases.

Cochoy *et al.* (2016), stress that the issues of alignment, coordination, and attachment are through the flow of different entities (body, bags, goods, inscriptions and money). In this sense, the representation of rarity manifestation consists of common understandings and a material infrastructure that determine various rarities.

In this sense, the manifestation of rarity has inserted in its context practices that show diversity. Diversity in fashion facilitates the integration of various social groups by worrying about inserting activities within fashion enterprises (Prasad *et al.*, 2011). Although this practice is recognized as an instrument that generates economic advantages, its adherence was not observed in L1 and L2.

Regarding the performance of this practice, only the enterprise L3 reported developing it. From the data, it was observed a high awareness of the enterprise regarding the appreciation of diversity in production, and specifically in commercialization. This practice is used as an instrument to generate economic advantages, and influence luxury in the performance of the L3 label in the fashion market. Prasad (2001) says that the concept of diversity are empowered by uses clothing to undertake demographic characteristics and various attributes that differentiate people. Thus, this practice, using the characteristics of fashion, promotes the agency of various entities (e.g., consumers, producers, merchants, apparel, web sites, app, manufacturing materials). Thus, diversity is used by this enterprise as a distinct activity and superior to equality, as reported in Oswick and Noon (2014).

#### *Brand protection manifestations: agencing authenticity and trends*

The last manifestation of luxury observed in the fashion market was brand protection. This dimension encompasses activities that highlight trademark protection in every way,

specifically counterfeiting. Understanding that fashion is a market in an ongoing process, that interacts with and develops from new content and trends, building on high levels of innovation, and also, in concerns. Thus, the results identified the emergence of two luxury practices: provide authenticity and provide trends.

According to Spiggle *et al.* (2012), provide authenticity describes the practice that implies the authority of its original creator. In this research, two meanings emerge: the brand is true with its essential core (internal consistency) and reflects what they are (external consistency). Duguay (2016) clarifies that authenticity is based on shared beliefs and interaction among market actors. Duguay (2016) also reports that through productive styles and historical processes, this practice is materialized.

Thus, analyzing this practice, it is observed that only L1 prioritized this agencing. This position may be justified by Turunen *et al.*, (2020), who emphasize that in luxury fashion, second-hand stores integrate uniqueness, history and authenticity as a distinctive appeal.

L2 and L3, in turn, do not fit into the contexts of authenticity. This is due to the non-insertion of these two organizations into agencies that value tradition and heredity. Contradicting this perspective, L2 and L3 turn their agencing to provide new trends and innovation.

Emphasizing the launch of innovative ideas, it was observed in the manifestation of brand protection, the practice of providing trends. This practice is presented as providing innovations to the fashion market, becoming a reference for several labels. Being an action that proves the launch of new styles, generating in the market in the arrangements and transformation in the vision of materiality as described in Solér *et al.* (2015). To paraphrase Kjellberg *et al.* (2015), these results reveal that the luxury fashion market is agencing from instability, where innovations create new markets, generate inspirations, overflows, appropriations and changes in already established markets.

Thus, by engaging in providing trends, enterprises L2 and L3 are concerned with the release of novelties that can serve as inspiration and be appropriated by third parties. The case presented in the article of Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007b) depicts the case of Swedish retail change, influenced by US retailers illustrates similar L2 and L3 concerns. According to Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007b), through the material framing of the exchange situations, redesigns of the store premises, merchandise and agencies of the actors involved, ie innovations produced in the United States, it was possible to reshape the Swedish retail market. Thus, this appropriation of ideas favored the introduction of self-service in the country.

#### *Discussion and implications: agencing luxury practice in SMFEs*

By conducting constructivist analysis, it was possible to understand how actors, agencing practices are able to build luxury in the SMFEs. Instead of show a unique orchestrated view of markets, and point out that the construction of the markets is dictated by traders, that, as engineers, design scripts that guide consumers, and the actionability of technical devices. It means, overcoming the perspective that prioritizes the construction of markets driven by a single agent, the results of this article highlight that the entanglement of several elements instructs the capacity to transform and shape SMFEs in luxury market.

Thus, the results are in line with the findings of Brun *et al.* (2008), regarding the supply chain in the luxury fashion market in Italy, primarily the small-medium business. Brun *et al.* (2008) determine that the goal is to provide a support for the definition of the suitable supply chain choices according to the competitive priorities of the supply chain. The results recognize that the construction of luxury, in small-medium enterprise studied, is provided by socio-material arrangements that unfold through market frame, and the

calculation structured in a list of entities, actions and expected results will only happen due to a framework. Thus, in order to build luxury markets, it is necessary to broker several practices. In the case of , Brun *et al.* (2008), the capacity for action is driven by actions: brand reputation and creation of lifestyle; product quality; country of origin; style and design and emotional appeal (and service level), aspects that correspond respectively to the following practices found here: provide trends; distinction; value traditions; preserve trends, generate superiority, provide authenticity, enable creativity and experience.

The results reveal that the luxury market presents a dialectic inscribed in uniqueness/heterogeneity. The unreachable luxury market is driven by tradition-brokering practices, often instituted by a mystery/unknowns leaning on uniqueness. That is, the construction of an unreachable luxury market implies power relations, where traders dictate part of the game rules. Thus, these agents design market scripts that guide consumers, devices, and their actions and meaning.

The results show that at all levels of luxury have a common set of agencing practices, that is, the luxury agencing glue is formed by distinction, transmit identity, experience and provide authenticity. In line with this results, Hlady-Ripal and Blancheton (2020) investigating on how value creation process takes place in luxury clusters, and how does it potentially influence the competitiveness of the regional economic actors, and find that luxury clusters are signed in an organization of elements and practices that influence the performativity of luxury. Thus, luxury is framed in a process of agencing based on tradition, know-how and quality.

Although Blancheton and Hlady-Rispal (2020) bring material entities to luxury studies, and in this article highlights the interaction between entities and practices, allowing them to transform the action of the arranged market. In this sense, from the analysis of SMFEs, it is observed that transmit identity, provide authenticity and provide trends is constituted as a practice, that according to Fuentes and Sörum (2019), concerning practices, have capacity to influence the shaping and perform everyday life.

Supporting the driving of markets concerned by actors, the affordable luxury enterprise, inscribed by precast market models (resale and further massification), introduces the creation of participation scripts led by other actors.

In contrast to a unique agencing, the luxury market dictates sustainable and equitable relationships, proposing interaction between agents, where consumers are able to influence the ability of producers and traders to act and vice versa. Thus, in addition to a mutual exchange between agents, the agent dynamism is depicted.

As in Karaosman *et al.* (2020), who studied fashion and leather footwear luxury chain, this study shows that the interaction between the different elements of the SMFEs in the luxury market arrangements, allows frameworks that determine the fundamentality of the heterogeneity of agents for the construction of the market. By emphasizing hybridity, this study ratifies the notes of von Wallpach *et al.* (2020), who emphasize how essential relationships and combinations are in luxury, guided by agents and characteristic goods with defined roles organized in different levels.

Analyzing the technical agents focused on clothing and the other diverse elements, it was observed that the material agents are active agents and, together with the social elements, they foster the capacity to act and also the sense of acting of the luxury fashion arrangements. As concluded by Hagberg (2016), in bag agencing, this study identified that in luxury, material elements have agencies that have their capacity to act guided by human entities. These results confirm the premises of Cochoy *et al.* (2016), that emphasise the involvement of technical devices (endowed with their own capacity to act and interact) as dynamic artifacts endowed with action. Luxury as a material element is able to change the way activities and tasks are performed.

Based on this, this article reveals the luxury clothing agency scenario presents heterogeneity in the elements that generate heterogeneity in the agencies, and reveals contradictions in the arrangements capable of acting, forming several contradictory practices. Still, they produce differences and asymmetries in the markets.

The luxury is agency, and agency (by) heterogeneous practices, and luxury has promoted multiple arrangements in the fashion market. From agencing practices and the construction of heterogeneity, it becomes possible to develop specificities and creating particular arrangements. Through agencing practices, it was observed that luxury levels are determined by specific scripts. The results also reveal that the luxury hierarchy influences practices, contributing to the fashion market configuration and more specifically to the construction of particular socio-material arrangements.

Evidencing the agencing identified in the results, it is observed that four practices frame the luxury market in general. However, at luxury levels, one observes specific practices agencing particular arrangements. Affordable Luxury generates particularity by entangling its performance in preserve trends, while old luxury agencing knowledge generation, valuing traditions, and provide authenticity. Intermediate Luxury, in turn, is part of encourage justice, enable creativity and value diversity.

Rescuing Cochoy *et al.* (2016), it is understood that the markets frame, that is, the construction of luxury levels is due to the alignment of the constituent actors of the arrangements. These agents, through their dynamism, foster the market frame, given the continuing character of the technical elements. Thus, market re-agencing is observed by changes in market practices.

## **6. Conclusions, limitations and future directions**

Luxury, in the SMFEs multi-case, presented the existence of thirteen practices. Regarding brand image, practices of distinction arise (distinctive image of the market), transmitted identity (disseminate owners' values), support causes (address social and environmental issues) and preserve trends (conserve activities and understandings). The marketing program manifestation provided the generation of knowledge (communicating practices) and experiencing (arrangements capture attention of actors).

Premium quality highlights the guarantee of superiority and values traditions (recognizing heredity). Premium pricing encourages justice (fair compensation of actors) and enables creativity (compensation of the creative sector). The rarity / exclusivity manifestation encompasses the following practice: valuing diversity (inserting an agent range). While brand protection provides authenticity, ensuring truth, and providing trends, generating innovation.

This article provides an agencing perspective to better understand how luxury is framed in the fashion market. The work corroborates previous research, recognizing that material elements are active agents in market agencing. This research also reveals that practices are an integral part of the luxury hierarchy, that is, of the luxury process of agencing in the fashion market.

Another contribution is to conduct research with local enterprises, because few studies address regional luxury brands, outside the axis of European or North American brands. Thus, the keys to the conclusions provided insights into academic studies and managerial operations in the luxury fashion markets, providing evidence to support SMFEs' strategies. As strategies, it is suggested that brands develop market arrangements that highlight the practices of the various luxury markets.

## **Theoretical and managerial implications**

This work contributes to the current literature about the construction of the luxury market, specifically the context of SMFEs. The present study explores, more specifically, the practices that enable the shaping of actions and market performativity. From a theoretical perspective, this article indicates that practices contribute to the functioning of the fashion markets. This study indicates that socio-material entities in their daily activities are able to change stocks and the market. In this way, the different practices, as agencies, interact with each other, contributing to the modeling of luxury fashion in hierarchy, that is, at various levels. The present study also made it possible to identify that the basilar configuration of the practices, through the SMFEs studied, is formed by four practices. Consequently, this research contributes to the literature about agencing practices, understanding how luxury, from an organizational basis, can be increased by other practices and generate new possibilities in the luxury market.

From a managerial point of view, in luxury market business scenario, the identified agencing practices must be considered in the implementation of luxury in SMFEs, showing multiple possible business models and strategies that can be used by SMFEs. In addition, SMFEs already established can use these same practices to reconfigure and adapt (in case of need) their existing structure. Therefore, from the categorization and the chosen level, enterprises can use a practice configuration specific to their context, directing the appropriate strategies to the fashion segments.

Finally, it is emphasized that new possibilities for studies arise with this article. The most direct are related to possible replication of the study in other luxury market contexts: i. SMFEs countries, ii. size (like big fashion enterprises) iii. sectors (beverage, writing instruments, footwear, watches, others); to explore how the agencing of luxury occurs in different contexts, stressing similarities and particularities in the agencing practices in the luxury market.

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