

Effects of luxury brand attachment and perceived envy on schadenfreude: Does need for uniqueness moderate?

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This research investigates how luxury brand attachment and perceived envy may influence schadenfreude. In addition, the moderating influence of consumers' need for uniqueness and private vs public consumption is examined.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from a consumer panel in Australia. A total of 365 valid and useable responses were analysed through Structural Equation Modelling in AMOS 26.

Findings – The results show that luxury brand attachment has a significant impact on perceived envy. Consumers' perceived envy also results in schadenfreude. However, luxury brand attachment did not have any significant impact on schadenfreude. The moderating influence of consumers' need for uniqueness is partially supported. This research further confirms that consumers' public consumption has more relevance to visible social comparison and potential feeling of malicious envy toward others.

Implications – The research model may work as a strategic tool to identify which group of consumers (e.g. high vs low attachment) displays stronger envy and schadenfreude. Brand managers can also explore the personality traits and psychological dynamics that influence the consumers to express emotional bond and malicious joy within the context of consumer-brand relationships.

Originality/value – This is one of the first few studies that have examined the relationships among consumers' brand attachment, perceived envy, schadenfreude and need for uniqueness within a luxury branding context.

Keywords Luxury brand attachment, Perceived Envy, Schadenfreude, Need for uniqueness, private and public consumption.

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INTRODUCTION

United Airlines faced scathing criticisms when it forcefully removed a passenger from an overbooked flight in April 2017 (Victor and Stevens, 2017). Amidst the dark cloud of reputation crisis, several rival brands – including Emirates Airlines, Qatar Airways, and Royal Jordanian - released sarcastic tweets indicating the United's miserable customer service (Jahng, and Hong, 2017; Lazzaro, 2017; Abramson, 2017; Farber, 2017). Experts in branding strategy note that brands not only enjoy guilty pleasure but also enhance self-image by attacking the downfalling competitors (e.g., Theodore, 2019). The feeling of being happy from the misfortune of others, popularly known as *schadenfreude*, has been researched in the field of psychology since 1970s (e.g., Preston, 1978; Kubie, 1971). *Schadenfreude* has become evident in popular press (Smith, 2013; Dorfman, 2013; Lihoreau, 2012) and marketing literature over the last three decades (e.g., Pritchitt, 1992; Sundie et al., 2009; Marticotte and Arcand, 2017; Wei and Liu, 2020).

Extant marketing research explains *schadenfreude* as the consumers' negative feeling toward the rival brand (e.g., Melancon and Dalakas, 2014; Sesen and Erturk, 2016). Consumers' strong affection toward a brand may stimulate rivalry and *schadenfreude* towards the competing brands (e.g., Apple vs. Microsoft). When consumers build an emotional connection (i.e., brand attachment) with a brand, they consider the brand as a part of their self-concept (e.g., Park et al., 2010; Malär et al., 2011). Thus, an appreciation of the attached brand is often regarded as a personal compliment by the consumers (e.g., Zhou et al., 2012). Subsequently, consumers tend to promote the success of their beloved brand as well as celebrate the misfortune of the rival brand (Belk and Tumbat, 2005). The phenomenon of *schadenfreude* has also been linked with envy in the field of social psychology (Smith et al., 1996; Van Dijk et al., 2006; Smith, 2013). A positive relationship between envy and attachment has also been evident in the literature (e.g., Smith and Kim, 2007).

The relevance of attachment, perceived envy and *schadenfreude* seems pertinent to the context of luxury branding for several reasons. First, perceived envy in conjunction with *schadenfreude* can be high when consumers do not possess the disposable income to purchase a luxury product (e.g., Crusius and Mussweiler, 2012; van de Ven et al., 2010). Second, the consumers who are emotionally attached to a particular luxury brand may feel envy when other consumers buy an exclusive (e.g., limited edition) luxury product (Wang and John, 2019). Third, luxury brands are known to signal membership into the wealthy elite, a desirable social group that can elicit feelings of envy (Cannon and Rucker, 2019; Kervyn et al., 2012). This mentality reinforces the social identity theory in which individuals categorise other consumers based on socio economic status, whereby lower socioeconomic consumers often despise and stereotype privileged consumers who have the means of purchasing luxury products (Grohs et al., 2015). Unfortunately, past literature does not provide a strong evidence how *schadenfreude* operates within the indicators of luxury consumer-brand relationship. The scant literature on luxury consumption and *schadenfreude* has mostly focused on the consumer brand identification, intra-sexual competition situation, and counterfeit brand purchase (e.g., Yucel-Aybal and Kramers, 2018; Marticotte and Arcand, 2017; Hennighausen et al., 2016). Although few past studies have referred to the individual's intergroup emotions and inferiority threat, very little is known whether wealthy consumers' need for uniqueness has any impact on the relationships among brand attachment, perceived envy and *schadenfreude* (Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Hennighausen et al., 2016).

This research aims to fulfil the aforementioned gaps through an empirical examination on the relationships among perceived envy, brand attachment, and *schadenfreude*. In addition, the moderating influence of consumers' need for uniqueness is tested. Referring to the signalling function of conspicuous consumption, this research further argues that consumers' perceived envy and *schadenfreude* might have a differential effect based on the private and public context of consumption. The insights from this research are expected to provide implications for the marketers in segmenting the market, understanding the consumers' situational attitude, setting premium pricing, and

implementing relevant communication campaigns to promote the consumers' association with the polarised brand's positioning.

RELEVANT LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

Social identity theory (SIT)

Social identity refers to the aspect of self-concept which is derived from an individual's membership to a group, or groups, and the emotional significance of that membership (Tajfel, 1982). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity formation follows a three-step process. Individuals first engage in social categorisation, where they assign others to different groups based on whatever social identifiers are available or salient. This process often involves stereotyping the out-group, and assuming characteristics of out-group members are relatively homogenous. Following this, individuals decide which social group they wish to align with and characterise themselves as a member of their chosen in-group. This is referred to as social identification. Consumers often use product consumption to align themselves with their ideal in-group, and thus indicate their group membership to others (Han et al., 2010; Ratner and Kahn, 2002). Finally, individuals make social comparisons between their in-group and out-groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Downward social comparisons are used to increase feelings of pride; however, self-relevant upward social comparisons lead to feelings of envy (Crusius and Mussweiler, 2012).

Having a social identity gives people a sense of pride, which is protected using tactics to bring down out-group members while elevating the status of the in-group (Cialdini, 2009). In-group members seek out negative traits of out-group members, enhancing their own self-esteem through downward social comparison (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). If this is not successful and individuals are instead faced with upward social comparisons, envy occurs in response to a status threat (Crusius and Mussweiler, 2012). Also, between-group status differences lead individuals to stereotype out-group members as less warm and more competent, fostering feelings of envy. Following on from this, envy has been associated with hostility toward others (Salovey and Rodin, 1984), socially undermining others (Duffy et al., 2012), and schadenfreude (Van de Ven et al., 2015).

Indeed, research has shown that consumers will acquire luxury brands used by and associated with their in-groups and avoid those associated with an out-group (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). For example, wealthy (in-group) consumers who have a need for status use recognisable, prominently branded (or 'loud') luxury goods to signal their wealth to less affluent out-group members (Han et al., 2010). Furthermore, consumers who perceive themselves as highly prototypical in-group members are more likely to stereotype out-group brand consumers and engage in negative word of mouth about out-group brands (Hickman and Ward, 2012).

Schadenfreude

Schadenfreude, originated from German language, is defined as a social hostility derived from the malicious pleasure gained from observing failures of others (Van Dijk and Ouwerkerk, 2014; Leach, et al. 2003; Smith et al., 1996; Van Dijk et al., 2005). For instance, individuals with a greater interest in international football felt the greatest pleasure from and therefore schadenfreude toward a rival country's downfall in football (Leach et al., 2003). Such comparative perception aligns with the social identity theory, categorising and stereotyping people into distinct groups, where conflicting views are held across opposing parties (Grohs and Woisetschläger, 2015). Schadenfreude may also reflect the deliverance of justice, when satisfaction is gained after the intended has been punished (Smith and Kim, 2007). Conversely, the aggressive feelings may stem from an unfair advantage, where schadenfreude symbolises a reversal of fortune (Sundie et al., 2009). Consumers who lack a symbol of status may experience envy toward those that possess the coveted symbols. In turn, the envy resulting from an upward social comparison has been found to result in schadenfreude following a loss of this social

status and subsequent downward social comparison towards the less fortunate consumer (Sundie et al., 2009).

The luxury industry is, by its very nature, highly exclusive to those who can afford it. Therefore, those who do not possess the necessary disposable income may never attain luxurious items (Marticotte and Arcand, 2017). This inability to afford such prestige and status can manifest envious thoughts to those belonging to wealthier classes (Doss and Robinson, 2013). Research found this perception of inferiority to influence the effect of schadenfreude (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, envious feelings of discontent aligned with the happiness gained through other's demise. In both perceived envy and schadenfreude, consumers are the targets of another's vicarious emotion. Subsequently, the antecedent of envy used in conjunction with schadenfreude has been garnering attention (e.g., Japutra et al., 2014).

Envy

Envy is explained as the phenomenon "when a person lacks another's superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes the other lacked it" (Parrott and Smith, 1993, p. 906). Two major veins of envy have been evident in literature: dispositional and situational envy (for a review, see Neufeld and Johnson, 2016). The effects of envy are presumed to function similar to that of schadenfreude (Sundie et al., 2009). While envy typically refers to negative feelings of discontent, schadenfreude encompasses positive emotions of satisfaction. To help elucidate this difference, it must be acknowledged that research has established two forms of envy which differ in their relationship to schadenfreude: benign envy and malicious envy (Van de Ven et al., 2009).

Benign envy and schadenfreude

Benign envy (BE) occurs when an individual perceives someone else as superior in some way and thus produces the motivation to move oneself up to the superior position, using the superior position as a benchmark or goal (Van de Ven et al., 2009). Early research examining benign envy has determined that it was a positive antecedent of schadenfreude (Van Dijk et al., 2006). Other research, however, has found a lesser link between benign envy and schadenfreude (Feather et al., 2013), or has argued that an individual who is envied benignly is seen as a means to improve oneself (Lange et al., 2018). Regardless, benign envy has been confirmed to follow an upward social comparison, entailing emotions of inferiority and activating a motivation to level the difference with a superior other (Van den Ven, 2010). Further, these envious strive to become as/more successful than the designated superior individual (Lange and Crusius, 2015). Overall, envy often causes depression, unhappiness and low self-esteem among people who subsequently, in line with the social identity theory, would feel good about these out-group members' bad events (Fiske, 2010). Even though benign envy is not denigrating the advantage of another, it is still maintaining a comparative mentality similar to that of schadenfreude (Grohs et al., 2015). Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H_{1a}: Benign envy has a significant positive impact on schadenfreude.

Malicious envy and schadenfreude

Malicious envy (ME) tends to produce actions aimed at dragging a superior other down (Van de Ven et al., 2009) and is characterized as having overtones of ill-will and "negative affective reactions to the superior fortunes of others" (Smith and Kim, 2007, p. 47). This type of envy hurts the value of market items because it can produce a desire to demean products previously considered valuable (Schimmel, 1993), hence producing similar hostile desires to schadenfreude. Research in envy hinges on social identity theory to posit that people enhance themselves through in-group pride that strengthen the group which is often manifested by devaluing out-groups (e.g., Fiske, 2010). Studies further consider malicious envy as a predictor of schadenfreude, because it produces the motivation to decrease superior others' status (Van de Ven et al., 2010; Van Dijk et al., 2005). This is consistent with SIT, which posits that consumers will seek to devalue the status of the out-group in order to improve their own group's relative position (and thus their individual self-esteem; Cialdini, 2009). Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H_{1b}: Malicious envy has a significant positive impact on schadenfreude.

Luxury brand attachment and schadenfreude

Research conceptualised attachment as a bond between an object and a person (e.g., Bowlby, 1979). Brand attachment encompasses a sense of resemblance between the personality of a brand and a consumer's concept of one's self (Malär et al., 2011; Park et al., 2010). Luxury brand attachment (LBA) is the emotional bond that connects a consumer to the luxury brand and develops deep feelings within the consumer toward the luxury brand (Shimul et al., 2019). Companies strive to optimise customer satisfaction with the intention of building brand attachment, and this is particularly evident in the luxury industry where success hinges on the degree of luxury brand attachment (Bahri-Ammari et al., 2016). The strength of luxury brand attachment is seen to correspond with schadenfreude, due to the emotionally invested relationship. Research found that consumers demonstrating high levels of brand attachment also exhibited high levels of schadenfreude toward rivals within the industry (Melancon and Dalakas, 2014). Thus, the affective and cognitive relationships established with consumers have increased the influence of schadenfreude based on the attachment evoked converting towards hostility towards competitors (Sundie et al., 2009). Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H₂: Luxury brand attachment has a significant positive impact on schadenfreude.

Luxury brand attachment and envy

Brand attachment creates feelings of envy, whereas the relationship with brands can create both feelings of respect toward competitors as well as resentment (Portal et al., 2018). Research has suggested brands that are not perceived with positive affect – but that are seen as being competent – tend to elicit envy among consumers, because they (brands) are deemed as rivals (Portal et al., 2018). These findings reinforce the emotional and competitive relationship with a brand that can be fostered through brand attachment. Individuals attached to luxury brands may exhibit notions of respect and even admiration to brand rivals (Feather et al., 2013). Specifically, benign envy has been documented within luxury brand markets (Marticotte et al., 2016). For example, in fashion industry, consumers attached to brands such as Prada, may develop positive feelings to direct competitors such as Gucci after luxurious handbags were released. Further, this respect is formed from the direct competitor raising the benchmark of quality, where the emotionally attached consumers believe their brand will respond by releasing a handbag of their own. This underlying feeling of envy is derived from brand attachment that significantly influences the relationship (Feather et al., 2013). Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H_{3a}: Luxury brand attachment has a significant positive impact on benign envy.

Research has also identified that consumers attached to brands demonstrate feelings of resentment to competitors (Smith and Kim, 2007). When a competitor has developed superiority, loyal consumers will often defend their brand by ridiculing or undermining stipulated product of service offerings (Melancon and Delakas, 2014). This phenomenon can be explained with the social identity theory, whereby people cluster themselves into groups through social categorisation and the identities of the groups are perceived and adopted through the social identification process (e.g., Tajfel, 1982). This in-group feeling has been evident in the realm of innovation whereby loyal Apple consumers would aggressively target the flaws of Microsoft's products (Leach et al., 2003; Sundie et al., 2009; Melancon and Delakas, 2014). Therefore, it can be stipulated that brand attachment impacts the degree in which malicious envy is evident in consumer behaviour. Thus, the following is hypothesised:

H_{3b}: Luxury brand attachment has a significant positive impact on malicious envy.

Consumers' need for uniqueness

The need for uniqueness theorises that individuals have a need to see themselves as being different from others, and try to achieve this through self-distinguishing behaviours (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977). However, expressions of uniqueness are preferred in ways that do not carry a great social penalty for being different. Luxury brands ensure product differentiation through premium pricing, exclusive value

and limited availability (Han et al., 2008; Butcher et al., 2017). If a product is available and attainable by numerous consumers, by definition, uniqueness will be lost and lose its perception of luxury (e.g., Wiedmann et al., 2009). The three dimensions of CNFU are: creative choice counter conformity (CCCC), unpopular choice counter conformity (UCCC) and avoidance similarity (AS) (for a review, see – Tian et al. 2001; Ruvio et al., 2008).

Past studies have documented a positive relationship between envy and consumers' need for uniqueness (e.g., Schroeder et al., 1995). It has been found that envious individuals show a greater desire to distance themselves from an envied target to improve their self-worth. This mentality has also been evident within the realm of brand attachment (Melancon and Dalakas, 2014). The sense of belonging to a brand greatly influence the underlying feelings of envy (Smith and Kim, 2007). Thus, the need to be unique through brand attachment creates direct social comparisons with consumers affiliated with brand rivals (Leach, 2008). Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H₄: Consumers' need for uniqueness: (a) CCCC (b) UCCC, and (c) AS will strengthen the positive relationship between luxury brand attachment and envy (malicious and benign).

Similarly, this aligns with the relationship between envy and schadenfreude, whereby consumers who believe themselves to be inferior to another will seek uniqueness to improve their social standing (Japutra et al., 2014). The desire to be unique enhances the feelings of envy in relation to schadenfreude. Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H₅: Consumers' need for uniqueness: (a) CCCC (b) UCCC, and (c) AS will strengthen the positive relationship between envy (malicious and benign) and schadenfreude.

The need for uniqueness will reinforce the relationship between luxury brand attachment and schadenfreude, based on the emotionally invested relationship (Sundie et al., 2009). Specifically, consumers who exhibit high levels of brand attachment will differentiate themselves from other consumers due to their unwavering support to the brand (Melancon and Dalakas, 2014). Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H₆: Consumers' need for uniqueness: (a) CCCC (b) UCCC, and (c) AS will strengthen the positive relationship between luxury brand attachment and schadenfreude.

Private versus public consumption of goods

Extant research has examined whether the purchase or consumption of goods is open to public scrutiny or does not affect the choices that consumers make (Ratner and Kahn, 2002; Clingingsmith and Sheremeta, 2018). When consumers' choices are scrutinised publicly, they are deemed to be public consumption. By contrast, when a product is consumed privately and away from the gaze of others, research has categorised this to be private consumption (Ratner and Kahn, 2002).

When consuming products publicly, individuals express to others that they make creative and interesting choices in order to align with an ideal self-image (Ratner and Kahn, 2002). Consumers also use public consumption to signify their alignment a particular social in-group, or an ideal social group (Han et al., 2010; Ratner and Kahn, 2002). Therefore, consumers are subject to the environment in which consumption is undertaken, influencing their choices and tendencies in the process. Kulviwat et al. (2014) reinforced these findings by demonstrating that individuals would feel more socially pressured to adopt new technologies when these were consumed in public, rather than in private. To examine the effects of public consumption more clearly, Clingingsmith and Sheremeta (2018) studied the role of social status on consumption. Their findings demonstrated that public consumption of a good was more likely to signal social status.

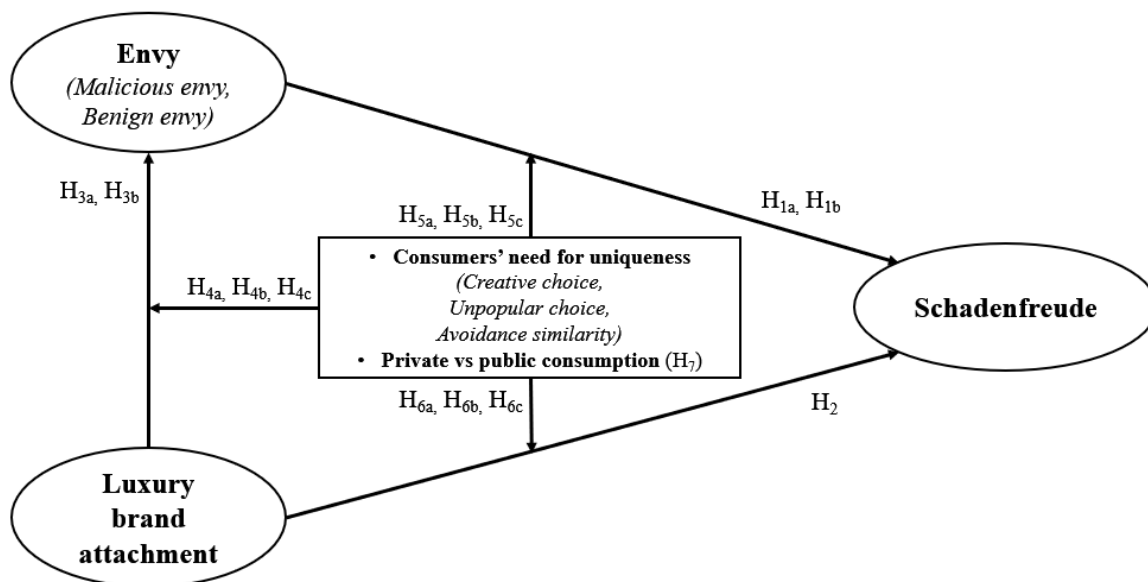
Further, private consumption delivers a more accurate response into how consumers digest information and products (Ratner and Kahn, 2002). Research reinforced such findings, identifying higher levels of

criticism exhibited from consumers when products are consumed in isolation (Kulviwat et al., 2014). When consumers are not in a social environment, there is no opportunity for a social categorisation and comparison, thus their choices reflect personal preferences instead of group preferences. For this reason, it is hypothesised that the personal relationships involving luxury brand attachment, envy and subsequent schadenfreude will be strengthened by private consumption versus public consumption of goods. Therefore, the following is hypothesised:

H7: The relationships hypothesised in H₁ to H₃ will be different across the context of private and public consumption.

The hypothesised relationships are presented in the Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research model



METHOD

An exploratory method was applied to test the hypothesised relationships. A self-administered online survey questionnaire was used to collect the data through a consumer panel. Through a pre-test, Godiva chocolate (Truffes Légendaires 6 pieces, priced AUD \$37) was selected as an accessible (M = 5.97, SD = 0.97) and gender neutral (M = 5.83, SD = 0.93) luxury brand to be used as the stimulus in the survey. For examining schadenfreude in this research, Lindt was chosen as one of the key competitors of Godiva. In this regard, following the analysis of Atkins (2016), a list of nine brands (as well as one open-ended option) was provided to the respondents who were asked to choose the key competitor of Godiva. Of the collected 410 responses, 384 selected Lindt as the key competitor, and were considered for further analyses. Next, 19 responses were excluded as they failed in the attention trap question. Thus, 365 responses deemed valid and useable for the final analyses. Table 1 summarises the respondents' demographic profile.

The first section of the survey questionnaire enquired about the respondents' brand familiarity (Ha and Perks, 2005) and past consumption experience. Next, the respondents' preferred private (i.e., I mostly eat chocolate at home or in private at some location) and public (i.e., I mostly eat chocolate in front of public outside my home) context of consumption was assessed. The second section of the survey

included measurement items for luxury brand attachment (Shimul et al., 2019). The third section included a hypothetical scenario that the respondents' friend posted on social media stating that he/she just purchased the exclusive Godiva anniversary collection (a limited-edition Anniversary Collection Truffles 12-piece assortment, priced AUD \$108). An image of the product was included next to the scenario and the respondents were asked to express their perceived benign and malicious envy (van de Ven et al., 2009). The fourth section measured the respondents' schadenfreude with six items adapted from Melancon and Dalakas (2014) to the context of Lindt (e.g., I would be pleased if Lindt faced financial troubles). The fifth section of the survey enquired consumers' need for uniqueness (Ruvio et al., 2008) and the final section asked basic demographic questions. The key constructs in the survey were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

Table 1: Respondents' profile

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	189	52
Male	176	48
Age (years)		
18-25	88	24
26-35	130	36
36-45	76	21
45-55	71	19
Education		
Primary	1	0.3
Secondary/High School	49	13
Diploma/Certificate	74	20
Undergraduate	205	56
Postgraduate	30	8
Other	6	1.7
Occupation		
Student	44	12
Self-employed	56	15
Professional	102	28
Unemployed	6	2
Skilled Worker	69	19
Homemaker	34	9
Other	54	15
Annual income (USD)		
0 - 20,000	21	6
20,001 - 40,000	37	10
40,001 - 60,000	88	24
60,001 - 80,000	59	16
80,001 - 100,000	73	20
100,001 - 120,000	48	13
120,001 - 140,000	25	7
140000+	14	4

Table 2: Measurement items with factor loading and composite reliability

Measurement constructs and items	Loading	CR*
Malicious envy (AVE = 0.745)		0.92
I would have liked to damage Godiva	0.75	
I wished that my friend would fail at something	0.94	
I would have liked to hurt my friend	0.92	
I had negative thoughts about my friend	0.84	
Benign envy (AVE = 0.683)		0.90
I wanted to try harder to obtain Godiva as well	0.88	
I felt inspired to also attain Godiva	0.91	
I wished to have Godiva too	0.77	
I wanted to be like my friend	0.75	
Luxury brand attachment (AVE = 0.669)		0.91
I am deeply passionate about Godiva	0.80	
I am deeply in love with Godiva	0.84	
I have a deep emotional connection to Godiva	0.90	
I feel Godiva helps me achieve what I want	0.83	
I would feel a sense of loss if Godiva is no longer available	0.71	
Schadenfreude (AVE = 0.811)		0.95
I would be pleased if Lindt went out of business	0.82	
I would be pleased if Lindt was involved in legal trouble	0.95	
I would be pleased if Lindt had a major public relations disaster	0.91	
I would be pleased if the CEO of Lindt faced legal troubles	0.91	
Creative choice counter conformity (AVE = 0.603)		0.86
I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated	0.62	
I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being original	0.71	
I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands	0.89	
Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image	0.86	
Unpopular choice counter conformity (AVE = 0.658)		0.85
When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them, I have broken customs and rules	0.79	
I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own	0.83	
I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used	0.81	
Avoidance similarity (AVE = 0.732)		0.732
When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less	0.77	
I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population	0.86	
As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone	0.90	
The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it	0.89	

*CR = Composite reliability

RESULTS

The unidimensionality of the constructs was ensured through an exploratory factor analysis. Thereafter structural equation modelling (SEM) with the AMOS 26.0 was used to test the proposed research model and hypotheses. The two-step procedure of data analysis (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) was followed to ensure the usage of reliable and valid measures in the model tested. The reliability and validity of each construct were tested by running the confirmatory factor analysis, optimizing the measurement model and purifying the scale items. Several assumptions of SEM (e.g., common method bias, outliers, multicollinearity and multivariate normality) were satisfied prior to further analysis.

Measurement model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted and the measurement model resulted good fit with $\chi^2 = 245.811$, $df = 112$, $\chi^2/df = 2.19$, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05, CFI = 0.97, and TLI = 0.97 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Few items were deleted due to low loading or high modification indices. The final scale items and loadings are presented in the Table 2. Convergent validity was assessed with all the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The discriminant validity was achieved as the pairwise inter-construct correlations were less than the square root of the AVE values (Table 3).

Table 3: Convergent and discriminant validity

	AVE	1	2	3	4
1. Schadenfreude	0.811	0.900			
2. Luxury brand attachment	0.669	0.211***	0.818		
3. Benign envy	0.683	0.272***	0.629***	0.826	
4. Malicious envy	0.745	0.363***	0.178**	0.136*	0.863

Note: Figures in the diagonal (values given in bold) are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE); those below the diagonal are the correlations between the constructs. CR = Composite reliability.

The significance level: * $p < 0.050$, ** $p < 0.010$, *** $p < 0.001$

Structural model and hypothesis testing

The structural model achieved excellent fit with $\chi^2 = 246.076$, $df = 113$, $\chi^2/df = 2.178$, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05, CFI = 0.98, and TLI = 0.97. At this stage, no further modification of the model was required and all items were retained. The result of the hypotheses testing showed that consumers' perceived benign and malicious envy had a significant positive impact on schadenfreude. Therefore, H_{1a} and H_{1b} are supported. Although the relationship between luxury brand attachment and schadenfreude (H_2) was statistically non-significant, luxury brand attachment had a significant positive impact (H_{3a} and H_{3b}) on both benign and malicious envy (Table 4). Thereafter, as an additional analysis, the potential mediating role of BE and ME on the relationship between LBA and schadenfreude was examined. To test the mediation, a bootstrapping analysis was conducted following the recommendation by Hayes (2013). The bootstrapping created a large sample (2,000 from the original data) with a sample replacement technique. It constituted a 90% confidence interval around the indirect effect and the interval did not contain a zero for the assumption of a significant indirect effect (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The mediation was positive and statistically significant for both BE ($\beta = 0.113$, SE = 0.04, $t = 2.825$, CI: 0.061, 0.187, $p < 0.001$) and ME ($\beta = .049$, SE = 0.02, $t = 2.45$, CI: 0.021, 0.086, $p = 0.005$).

Table 4: Summary of the hypothesis testing (H₁ – H₃)

Relationships				β	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p</i>
H_{1a}	Benign envy	→	Schadenfreude	0.22	3.09	.002
H_{1b}	Malicious envy	→	Schadenfreude	0.33	6.14	***
H₂	Luxury brand attachment	→	Schadenfreude	0.01	0.21	0.837
H_{3a}	Luxury brand attachment	→	Benign envy	0.63	10.28	***
H_{3b}	Luxury brand attachment	→	Malicious envy	0.18	3.20	0.001

The significance level: *** $p < 0.001$

Moderation of CNFU

A series of multi-group analyses were conducted in SEM to test the impact of consumers' need for uniqueness as hypothesised in H₄, H₅, and H₆. The multidimensionality of the constructs was evident in confirmatory factor analysis (Table 2). The convergent and discriminant validities of the dimensions were achieved through running a measurement model in AMOS 26 (Table 5). One item from the UCCC dimension (i.e., I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know by buying something they would not seem to accept) was removed due to low loading (<0.50).

Table 5: Convergent and discriminant validity for CNFU

	AVE	CCCC	UCCC	AS
Creative choice counter conformity (CCCC)	0.603	0.777		
Unpopular choice counter conformity (UCCC)	0.658	0.548***	0.811	
Avoidance similarity (AS)	0.732	0.308***	0.393***	0.856

Note: Figures in the diagonal (values given in bold) are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE); those below the diagonal are the correlations between the constructs. CR = Composite reliability.

The significance level: *** $p < 0.001$

To test the moderation, a median split was used along the three dimensions of the CNFU constructs to create two subsamples for each dimension (e.g., low CCCC, high CCCC). The median values were: 4.7 for CCCC, 3.75 for UCCC, and 3.00 for AS. Thereafter, the focal (unconstrained) model was compared with constrained (structural parameters to equality) model and chi-square difference tests were run to examine differences in model fit across groups, as well as differences in fit across individual paths (Gaskin and Lim, 2018).

Regarding the first moderator (CCCC), the structural model achieved good fit ($\chi^2 = 453.38$, $df = 226$, $\chi^2/df = 2.00$, RMSEA = 0.05, CFI = 0.96, and TLI = 0.95). The model was statistically different across high and low CCCC groups ($\Delta\chi^2 = 11.39$, $\Delta df = 5$, $p = 0.04$). A path level comparison shows that positive relationship between LBA and ME is stronger for high CCCC group ($\beta_{high_CCCC} = 0.298^{***}$, $\beta_{low_CCCC} = -0.018$, $\Delta\beta = 0.316$, $p = 0.003$).

For the second moderator (UCCC), the structural model achieved good fit ($\chi^2 = 453.37$, $df = 226$, $\chi^2/df = 2.00$, RMSEA = 0.05, CFI = 0.96, and TLI = 0.95). The model was not statistically different across high and low UCCC groups ($\Delta\chi^2 = 8.91$, $\Delta df = 5$, $p = 0.11$). A path level comparison shows that positive relationship between LBA and ME is stronger for high UCCC group ($\beta_{high_UCCC} = 0.247^{***}$, $\beta_{low_UCCC} = 0.049$, $\Delta\beta = 0.198$, $p = 0.02$).

For the third moderator (AS), the structural model achieved good fit ($\chi^2 = 354.00$, $df = 226$, $\chi^2/df = 1.57$, RMSEA = 0.04, CFI = 0.98, and TLI = 0.97). The positive relationship between LBA and ME is stronger for high AS group ($\beta_{high_AS} = 0.272^{***}$, $\beta_{low_AS} = -0.084$, $\Delta\beta = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, H₄ is partially supported. However, H₅ and H₆ are not supported. A summary of the moderation tests is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Moderation impact of consumer’s need for uniqueness (CNFU)

Relationship	Moderator	β_{high_CCCC}	β_{low_CCCC}	$\Delta\beta$	<i>p</i>
LBA → ME	CCCC	0.298***	-0.018	0.316	0.003
LBA → BE	CCCC	0.646***	0.544***	0.102	0.095
LBA → Schadenfreude	CCCC	0.010	0.034	-0.024	0.893
ME → Schadenfreude	CCCC	0.329***	0.298***	0.031	0.540
BE → Schadenfreude	CCCC	0.202†	0.239*	-0.038	0.850
Relationship	Moderator	β_{high_UCCC}	β_{low_UCCC}	$\Delta\beta$	<i>p</i>
LBA → ME	UCCC	0.247**	0.049	0.198	0.019
LBA → BE	UCCC	0.597***	0.607***	-0.010	0.838
LBA → Schadenfreude	UCCC	0.030	-0.016	0.046	0.732
ME → Schadenfreude	UCCC	0.289***	0.338***	-0.049	0.690
BE → Schadenfreude	UCCC	0.229*	0.150	0.079	0.258
Relationship	Moderator	β_{high_AS}	β_{low_AS}	$\Delta\beta$	<i>p</i>
LBA → ME	AS	0.272***	-0.084	0.356	0.000
LBA → BE	AS	0.604***	0.638***	-0.034	0.806
LBA → Schadenfreude	AS	0.066	-0.043	0.109	0.438
ME → Schadenfreude	AS	0.327***	0.214*	0.113	0.899
BE → Schadenfreude	AS	0.186*	0.231*	-0.045	0.906

The significance level: † $p < 0.100$, * $p < 0.050$, *** $p < 0.001$

The impact of the context of consumption

To test the H₇, the structural model was tested across two subsamples: private vs public consumption. The *p*-value ($p = 0.016$) of the chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2 = 13.94$, $\Delta df = 5$) was significant, suggesting that the model differed across groups. The path level comparison showed that the positive relationship between ME and schadenfreude is stronger for the context of public consumption ($\beta_{private} = 0.166^\dagger$, $\beta_{public} = 0.412^{***}$, $\Delta\beta = -0.246$, $p = 0.002$). The other relationships were statistically non-significant (Table 7). Therefore, H₇ is partially supported.

Table 7: The impact of private and public consumption

Relationship	$\beta_{private}$	β_{public}	$\Delta\beta$	<i>p</i>
LBA → ME	0.190*	0.186*	0.005	0.944
LBA → BE	0.591***	0.587***	0.004	0.377
LBA → Schadenfreude	-0.025	0.090	-0.115	0.395
ME → Schadenfreude	0.166†	0.412***	-0.246	0.002
BE → Schadenfreude	0.174	0.162	0.012	0.852

The significance level: † $p < 0.100$, * $p < 0.050$, *** $p < 0.001$

DISCUSSION

This research provides empirical evidence to consumers' schadenfreude in relation to perceived envy, brand attachment, and need for uniqueness within luxury branding context. The results for H_{1a} and H_{1b} are consistent with past findings that upward social comparison, indicating either resentment or respect, creates a sense of hostile and disparaged feelings toward the counterpart (van de Ven et al., 2010). The results also indicate that benign envy has a stronger impact on consumers' schadenfreude than malicious envy. This finding adds to the literature that consumers may feel envious if they are unable to obtain a particular luxury brand but they hold a stronger desire to attain the status (e.g., through consuming/owning the product) than wishing the downfall of the competing brands or consumers.

However, non-significant results of H₂ is not only against the theoretical expectation but also contradicts with similar past studies (Japutra et al., 2018). The plausible explanation of this result perhaps lies within the psychographic characteristics of the consumers. The luxury consumers represent a niche market segment that is closely connected in terms of socio-psychological aspects (Shimul and Phau, 2018). Therefore, once they develop strong emotional connection with a particular luxury brand, they cultivate respect and desire for other brands as well. As a result, due to the in-group feelings, they do not demonstrate malicious joy from the downfall of the competing brands. In line with this, past studies posit that schadenfreude manifests from an individual's hostility to another or an individual identified to be an outgroup (Sundie et al., 2009).

The positive relationship between luxury brand attachment and envy has been consistent with the theoretical expectations (H₃). Research ascertains that consumers develop notions of status and prestige when purchasing luxury brands (Commuri, 2009). The luxury industry creates envy among consumers based on the discrimination between high society and everyone else (Juggessur and Cohen, 2009). For example, the fashion industry epitomises the effect envy and schadenfreude has on consumers (Loureiro et al., 2020). Such power of envy has been well established in this research as the additional analysis revealed the mediating role of envy on between the relationships of attachment and schadenfreude. This further illustrates that luxury brand attachment alone does not suggest consumers would feel schadenfreude toward the rival brand, unless there is a presence of envy among the consumers. The feeling of inferiority and subsequent schadenfreude have widely been documented in the luxury industry (Commuri, 2009), in part because attaining luxurious items may be perceived as a symbol of success (Kapferer and Bastien, 2008).

The results also show that the three dimensions of consumers' need for uniqueness strengthen the positive relationship between luxury brand attachment and malicious envy. By nature, luxury brands are exclusive and limited in supply and the consumers with high need for uniqueness hold a strong aspiration to acquire them. On the other hand, highly attached consumers expect that the luxury brand will maintain the uniqueness through exclusivity and rarity appeal. Therefore, the positive relationship between luxury brand attachment and malicious envy is stronger for the consumers who hold high need for uniqueness. This finding can be explained by the three dimensions of the CNFU constructs. First, CCC involves a consumer seeking social differentness by making choices that are still expected to be considered good selections (i.e., consuming luxury branded products) by others. Second, by breaking rules and risking social disapproval (UCCC) to assert differentness, consumers can affirm strong character and enhance their self-image, especially when unpopular choices (e.g., MB&F HM6 Space Pirate Watch) gain social approval and make the consumer an innovator (Heckert, 1989). Finally, AS can be described as the loss of interest in goods that become commonplace and motivation for individuals to move away from social norms and re-establish a consumer's social differentness (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2018). AS also involves devaluing and avoiding products that are perceived as common to maintain uniqueness, similar to the devaluing and differentiation resulting from malicious envy (van de Ven et al., 2010). Therefore, this research reinforces the linkage amongst brand attachment, envy and

CNFU within a luxury branding context. Previous research (e.g., Melancon and Delakas, 2014) suggests that consumer with high brand attachment tend to differentiate themselves from other consumers. Against this backdrop, the current research hypothesises that luxury consumer, especially those with high CFNU, may exhibit schadenfreude toward other luxury consumers purchasing other luxury brands. Contradictory to our hypotheses, CNFU was found to have no moderating effect between the predicted effect of LBA on schadenfreude. The current findings therefore extend prior studies by showing that the need for differentiation associated with brand attachment may not lead to socially hostile responses such as schadenfreude in luxury brand consumption. Specifically, after accounting for one's feeling-of-envy, schadenfreude appears to operate independently in relative to luxury consumers' desire to be different and unique to other consumers. In fact, the current research also demonstrates that CFNU does moderate the significant effect between envy and schadenfreude. This provides further support that the mechanism underlying luxury consumers' schadenfreude responses may not stem from their need of uniqueness. Instead, socially hostile responses such as schadenfreude is driven more by luxury consumers' social comparison and the accompanying emotional experience (i.e., envy).

This research further confirms that consumers' public consumption has more relevance to visible social comparison and categorisation which leads to a feeling of malicious envy toward others. Specifically, LBA increases the experience of envy when consumers tend to engage in public compared to private luxury consumption. However, private vs. public luxury consumption was not a significant moderator for the main effects of LBA and envy on schadenfreude. The non-significant moderation of consumption context on LBA and schadenfreude is unsurprising given that the main effect was not found. However, these findings suggest that the significant effect of envy on schadenfreude is robust for both private and public luxury consumption.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, underpinned with social identity theory, this research provides empirical supports toward consumers' brand attachment, envy and schadenfreude within a luxury branding context. In addition, investigating the moderating influence of consumers' need for uniqueness enhances the rigour of the findings. Examining the research model within the context of private and public consumption adds new insight into the luxury branding literature. In particular, the theoretical expectations and empirical findings provide a better understanding of luxury consumer-brand relationships both from affective and cognitive perspectives.

Managerially, the research model may work as a strategic tool to identify which group of consumers (e.g. high vs low attachment) displays stronger envy and schadenfreude. Brand managers can also explore the personality traits and psychological dynamics that influence the consumers to express emotional bond, jealousy and malicious joy within the context of consumer brand relationships. Consumers with a strong luxury brand attachment and envy may wish to interact with like-minded people to enjoy a continued schadenfreude toward the rival brand. Brands can take this opportunity to build and nurture a 'brand cult' through offline and online brand community and encourage consumer advocacy (Shimul and Phau, 2018). The intensity of consumers' envy and schadenfreude will also facilitate the pricing strategies for luxury brands. In particular, when the information is limited and there is an intense rivalry among brands, consumers show willingness to pay more and so luxury brands may have a higher percentage mark-up.

One of the key applications of envy and schadenfreude would be in the field of advertising and marketing communications. In this case, marketing practitioners have to be careful about choosing the appropriate brand to attack, framing the message regarding the misfortune of the competing brand as well as executing the storyline to resonate with consumers. For instance, while the US president Donald Trump's misspelled 'hamberders' tweet generated a series of memes over social media, Burger King took the opportunity to capitalise on the situation by twitting that "*due to a large order placed yesterday,*

we're all out of hamberders. just serving hamburgers today" (Peterson, 2019). The reaction post from Burger King received notable attention (over 400,000 likes) from the netizens that in practice enhanced the consumers' involvement and engagement with the brand. Within a luxury context, brands can enjoy subtle schadenfreude and demonstrate their differentiation in certain situations. For example, when Boodles, Cartier and Bulgari were fighting against the 'blood-diamond' scandal, Tiffany emphasised on its sustainability practices as well as ethical and responsible sourcing (e.g., Cumenal, 2017).

Brand practitioners have to be careful about the intensity of the consumers' envy and schadenfreude that may work as double-edged sword. For instance, once a brand fails to deliver the promises, the consumers who are highly attached to the brand may get involved in anti-brand action (Japutra et al., 2018). Thus, consumers' envy and schadenfreude may result in a backlash on the brand itself. Overall, utilising schadenfreude as a marketing tool requires strong strategic foresights on competition, consumer brand interaction, and a continuous social media monitoring for upticks in negativity and being nimble and ready to engage in timely conversation (Theodore, 2019).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has been conducted within the context of accessible high-end brands. However, the research model and hypothesised relationships need to be re-examined across inaccessible luxury brands (e.g., Rolls Royce vs Bentley) to generalise the findings. Notably, the measurement of envy in this research captured the respondent's envy toward the brand and the friend. It might be imperative to examine envy toward the brand discretely. In addition, it would be interesting to examine if perceived envy and schadenfreude are influenced by the consumers' personality traits (e.g., self-esteem, dark personality triad). Future research may also examine if consumers' brand love and hate as well as buying (in)ability have any impact on the malicious joy at the downfall of a particular brand. Further research is warranted to investigate whether advertising appeals, inducing envy and schadenfreude, may enhance consumers' desirability for the brand.

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