Gay Men In Brazil: Do Luxury Brands Extend Their Selves?

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Abstract
The consumption domain is where an individual and objects are put in contact, pursuing sense, producing social meanings and distinctions. Concerning symbolisms and consumption meanings, products have been an excellent source of information about their consumers. At the same time, consumers’ choices are made through a great variety of reasons, not easy to be predicted or understood. But frequently, consumers rely on the social meaning of products to mold their own image and talk about themselves through the customized goods that are consumed. The present study aims at understanding the relation between the extended self construct and the consumption of luxury branded clothing among male homosexuals. In other words, it aims at figuring out how specific products, herein the luxury clothing market, may be considered in the extended self composition of such consumers. In this way, an exploratory qualitative survey was carried out. A bibliographic review over the related topics pointed out significant particularities within the market for luxurious products as well as showed a review over marketing principles linked to brands, focusing in its image and identity aspects. Finally, it brought back the theory of the extended self and its application to the consumer behavior. Following that, 12 in-depth-interviews took place with representative individuals within this subculture, aiming at picking up and analyzing their perception towards the focused matter. Qualitative information has been added, with deep analysis of the interviewees’ perceptions, through the application of form with the Likert scale. Such approach aimed at evaluating the incorporation of clothing items to their extended self. Items which they have pointed out as relevant in their consumption of brands considered luxurious. At the end a conclusion is presented, showing that luxury brands clothing may have both a central or peripheral role in the composition of male homosexuals extended self.

KEY WORDS: Extended self; Homosexual Consumer; Luxury; Consumer Behaviour; Brand.

Área Temática: Marketing
1 Introduction

Consumption is a continuous process which goes far beyond the exchange of a money amount into goods or services. It implies issues that influence consumers before, during and after the purchasing, as well as the complete process of looking for, choosing and taking the decision on acquiring a product. It involves the experience during the consumption, the goods performance after the purchase and the consequences that such decision brings (HIRSCHMAN; HOLBROOK, 1982).

When talking about consumption, not only tangible goods are involved, but also experiences, ideas, as well as intangible characteristics (SOLOMON, 2002). According to Holbrook, Block and Fitzsimmons. (1996), many consumption experiences, such as fantasies, feelings and fun are present in the purchasing decisions, being significant for the consumption phenomenon. Consumption, previously a symbolic act than an economic one (ROCHA, 1995), “[...] is the virtual totality of all objects and messages composed in a more and more coherent speech. It is an activity of systematic manipulation of symbol” (BAUDRILLARD, 1973, p. 66).

In the course of time, intrinsic differences among products lost ground to their symbolic differences, and their brand (ROCHA, 1995). From the moment an object starts to represent something more than its materiality, it gains a character of symbol, with coherence and sense as well as an abstract relation with other symbolic objects (BAUDRILLARD, 1973). Then, acquired objects turned out to have differentiated value among people.

The consumption domain is where an individual and objects are put in contact, pursuing sense, producing social meanings and distinctions (ROCHA, 1984). It is this sociology of the difference that translates an objective social search for signs and differences, which found consumption, not as an individual satisfaction function, but as a social activity (BAUDRILLARD, 1981). Concerning symbolisms and consumption meanings, products have been an excellent source of information about their consumers (BELK, 1988). At the same time, consumers’ choices are made through a great variety of reasons, not easy to be predicted or understood (CAMPOS; SUAREZ; CASOTTI, 2006). But frequently, consumers rely on the social meaning of products to mold their own image (SOLOMON, 1983) and talk about themselves through the customized goods that are consumed (MCCRACKEN, 1986).

It is within this context that the study of the modern homosexual consumer behavior turns out to be interesting. The identity emergence has been favored by the social, economical and psychological conditions generated through capitalism (NUNAN, 2003). This has allowed homosexuals, among other individuals that shift from the traditional accepted patterns of society, to feel free to express their identity through products and services. And has permitted the market addressed to meet the specific needs of such consumer, to become one of the basis of this consumption subculture, defined by Hawkins, Mothebaugh and Best (2007, p. 73) as “[...] a distinct subgroup in society whose members select themselves based in a shared commitment towards a consumption class, brand or specific consumption activity”.

This article has eight parts: introduction; information concerning male homosexual consumers, highlighting their economic potential and some specific behavior characteristics; definitions and measurements for luxury market; aspects related to brand which are applied to the consumer behavior, notably concerned to image and identity aspects; the extended self concept; methodology; the results of the interviews with 12 male homosexuals; the conclusion.
2 The Male Gay Consumer

Studying the gay consumer, not only the male one, is relevant when taking into account the size of this niche in economic terms. Since the 2007 Census, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) has included a question to respondents concerning sexual orientation. As a result, it has been estimated that gays account for 10% of the Brazilian population, or about 18 million people. In spite of this, local public organisms and commercial entities are not interested in learning about gays (CONSTÂNCIO, 2007).

Despite its size, few studies have been carried out in Brazil aiming at profiling the homosexual public, either by its composition angle or by its preferences. Moreover, the majority of such studies are not developed by official research organisms, being restricted in universe and publics surveyed: they happen in different environments and situations, such as on internet sites intended to gays, lesbians and supporters (known by the acronym GLS), or during popular expressions such as parades organized by the gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals (known by the acronym GLBT) which take place throughout the country. It is not a surprise, then, that no consistent information has been so far disclosed in Brazil concerning its gay population size and purchasing power.

In spite of these restrictions, according to Constâncio (2007), by similarity of data obtained in each one of the isolated surveys, it has been possible to figure out a rough profile as far as the gay public composition in Brazil is concerned. Nevertheless, in the absence of data for the country as a whole, the results of a survey by Paulista University from 2007 in São Paulo, commissioned by SPTuris (SPTURIS, 2007), would illustrate such profile: 34% of all gays belong to the upper classes, 50% to the medium and 16% to the lower classes; 92% usually travel; 63% subscribe to major newspapers; 91% read magazines; and 31% claimed to have a credit card.

Another survey commissioned to the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics – IBOPE by the Brazilian Ministry of Health in 2003 profiled the gay segment, based on data from 1,200 interviews during the three major gay parades in the country, in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Salvador: 57% were white, 11% black, and 32% were mulatto, brown and dark brown; 48% were from the upper classes, 35% from the middle and 18% from the lower classes; 47% were aged 24 or less and 53% aged 24 or more; 16% had studied up to the elementary school, 48% up to the high school and 35% had a college degree; 15% had an income up to two minimum wages, 27% between more than two to five, 23% between more than five to 10, and 20% between more than 10 to 20 minimum wages; 60% had a full time job, 20% a part time one, and 19% did not work.

Therefore, data allows a conclusion that gays who assume their sexual orientation would represent not only a considerable portion in the Brazilian population. They would be a relevant contingent with high consumption power as well as having a cultural level above average, accounting for an important consumer niche. Also, in accordance to the surveys, gay consumers have a specific profile: they are demanding and many times establish relation with products or brands when there is added social value.

Moreover, in spite of recent improvements in the initiative to adopting children by Brazilian gay couples, many do not have kids. Then, they would have more available income towards immediate consumption. In this way, their differential is to be sophisticated consumers, willing to have quality products and services, supposedly of higher value, and long lasting.

It is to be mentioned though, that such conclusions have to be taken cautiously due to the lack of confidence in many of the surveys that study the number of gays in the general population. Three reasons are to be mentioned. First, possibly by fearing prejudice and
stigmatization, many gays do not reveal their sexual orientation or lie about aspects related to it, even when responding anonymously, which infer a higher number of gays than the one shown in the surveys. Second, it can be deduced that the gay assumption could be higher among those of higher education, due to their ability to better accept the differences towards heterosexuality. This suggests that any censuses or surveys concerning this subculture would naturally be biased. Third, criterion to define what is to be gay vary according to the characteristics of each study.

In spite of these restrictions, to understand the reasons why this market niche consumes specific product categories is of great importance to companies willing to work with attractive profiled publics as consumers. One of the first related information can be obtained in Soares (2000): no matter the social class, Brazilian gays would give much more value to image, to appearance and to fashion than heterosexuals, regardless the style of clothing - some gays would dress in a classical way, while others would adopt an extravagant way.

Nunan (2003), when referring to homosexual consumption patterns in Brazil, highlighted that gays – both men and women - would spend more money than heterosexuals in luxury goods and services such as trips, cars, credit cards, restaurants, clothing, perfumes and electronics, among others. Moreover, the same author emphasizes that, if compared to the heterosexual population, such consumers would be younger, better socially and politically informed, more concerned with fashion, and more loyal to some brands. She also adds that, as gays greatly value friendship, they enjoy giving gifts to the loved ones, which increases their consumption potential, therefore positioning them as an even more interesting public for the marketing.

Other authors (Bowes, 1996; Delozier; Rodrigues, 1996) added that gays are autonomous workers who worry about their physical and psychological well being, suggesting a technology-directed consumer. The survey carried out by the Brazilian market research company Ipsos Marplan (2006) confirmed such supposition: according to it, in 2006, within the total Brazilian population, gays accounted for the highest consumption share for cell phones, digital cameras, computers and notebooks.

3 Luxury Market

Defining luxury product is not very simple. After all, this is a relative market or, in other words, what is luxury for some people might be absolutely common for others. Therefore, either the term definition or the product choice vary according to the social class of each individual, associated to psychological aspects such as motivation and lifestyle.

In Business Administration and Marketing studies, it is agreed to call luxurious those products or services endowed with quality, esthetics, price and brand image above the conventional. They may belong to various categories of goods, though some of them would naturally be more associated to such concept (D’Angelo, 2004), for example, jewelry, clothing, accessories and luxury cars. From the contribution of authors such as Castarède (2005), Allérès (2000), Haie (2002), Lipovetsky and Roux (2005) and Baudrillard (1981), the concept of luxury is considered here not restricted to social classes, and other characteristics have been taken into account. For many people, luxury means something expensive, not democratic and of restricted access. However, the definition of the term goes beyond.

Two visions about luxury have been defined by Castarède (2005). The first belongs to purists, treating luxury as high investment consumption, to a point of classifying such products as property. In the second vision, luxury is needless, a synonym of futility, totally unnecessary. D’Angelo (2004) pointed out the characteristics of such products, which are expensive (higher price when compared to products offering the same function), endowed with superior quality (technology, exceptional raw material and frequently handmade). They are also rare (exclusive
production and selective distribution), well-designed (particular appearance, inducing emotional and hedonistic consumption), and famous branded (renown image around the world). And they are acquired by a particular consumer (due to product appreciation or just high purchasing power), and “snobbish” (attracting small opinion maker groups to diffuse a product).

In this way, one can deduce that there is a connection among the categories of luxury products and their use through the different social strata. It is not surprising thus, that according to Allérès (2000), the so called intermediate and medium social classes have allied themselves to the wealthy class in the consumption of luxury goods.

D’Angelo (2004) pointed out another aspect for the consumption of these products, with regards to the flexibility as far as payment methods are concerned. In the case of Brazil, installment payment (usually via credit card) has contributed to changes in the consumption of luxury products, since it has made easier consumers’ access to these items.

4 Brand

In this study, the definition of brand presented by Aaker (1998) has been adopted, as follows:

A brand is a differentiated name and/or symbol (as a logo, trademark or packaging drawing) which identifies the goods or services of a seller or group of sellers as well as distinguishes them from those of the competition. In this way, a brand signalizes to the consumer the origin of the product and protects both consumer and producer, from competitors which offer products that look identical (p. 7).

For Churchill Jr. and Peter (2000), brands are one of the fundamental pieces of information that customers have to help in their decision making and to reduce the acquisition risks. The brand names assure customers that, in a future purchasing, they will pay for the same quality they received in the previous time. Through a strong name, consumers know the key characteristics of a specific good or service, and their quality. Products or services form, with the brand, higher or lower bonds, and this way granting them the consumer choice when buying.

Aaker (1998) said that “associations between products and brands are the base for decision making when purchasing or when building brand loyalty” (p. 16). Such associations may influence memory through previous information, especially during the decision making. Elements such as personality, image, value, positioning, brand equity and branding are interrelated and, directly or indirectly, reflect in the building of a brand. However, a point must be well defined: brand is different from product. The main purpose of a brand is to distinguish the product, in a way it can be easily identified and preferred.

For all this, the understanding of the brand is of fundamental importance in the study of marketing. After all, whenever brand added value comes into effect, there is a significant difference between the tangible value of a company and its market value. In the past, company values were essentially based in their property and revenues.

As for the brand image, that is intrinsically related to the concept of brand value (TAVARES, 1998). According to Gardner and Levy (1955), the image concept in marketing literature emerged in 1955, attached to findings that consumers purchase products not only by their attributes and physical functions. Therefore, the meanings that are assigned to products by their brands are of extreme importance. Tavares (1998) reasoned that “image in this perspective means personality and products, like people, have personality” (p. 64). For this author, the image that is built towards a brand comes from positive, neutral or negative impressions which consumers develop from the contact with a brand and from its performance context.
5 The Extended Self

Belk (1988) has developed the extended self theory with the purpose of explaining why certain products pursue substantial meaning to an individual or why they are used to express particular important aspects of this person’s personality to others. For this author, individuals can be understood from a point of view of what they possess, having the term extended self related to everything we consider ours. Extending his thinking, he makes a distinction between self (“I”) and extended self (“mine”).

According to him, many objects can be framed into the self, such as personal possessions, people, places and group possessions. Moreover, as these possessions represent or help part of the consumer self formation or expression, they are part of their extended self (BELK, 1988; TIAN; BELK, 2005). This establishes an intimate relation between consumption and identity.

Hawkins et al. (2007) defined the extended self:

The extended self consists of the self added to possessions. People tend to define themselves partly through their possessions. In this way, some possessions are not only manifestations of the person’s self image, but they are part of their self identity (p. 229).

From the authors’ statements in which possessions are an intrinsic part of the individual self image, one can conclude that people are, to some extent, what they possess. In this way, if somebody loses his/her main possessions, this person becomes slightly different.

For Solomon (2002), the use of consumption activities as a way to express identity or definition of the self is often related to strong associations between products and social roles. The consumer has learned that different roles are followed by activities and products which either reinforce or help define the individuals.

For Valente (2006),

Many products are fundamental to the performance of roles and may be seen as an extension of the person’s identity (extended self concept) in the individual level which incorporates the personal objects. “You are what you consume” […] personal objects, or property, used to define social roles and used as part of the individual, make up the extended self and help compose the consumer identity (p. 67).

The main possessions can either be bigger items such as cars, properties or smaller, of exclusive use as cameras or clothing. After all, such objects have a greater meaning to the individual than the one conditioned to the market. Sayre (1996) illustrated this finding with examples of people that, after being stolen, purchased other objects without being satisfied due to the lack of meaning, found in the old ones: “Yes, we have bought better things but still they mean nothing to us. They are just things”, “It is not possible to replace what we had. It was too personal” (p. 328).

The reasons why a product becomes a part of the extended self are very diverse. They may be a memory or feelings (souvenirs), representations of a relationship (gifts), or objects of long use (an old car). Dodson (1996, apud HAWKINS et al., 2007) highlighted the fact that a single unique experience with a certain product, for example, in the case of practicing mountain bike, may impulse it to be included in the extended self of consumers.

Belk (1988) presented some functions related to the extended self: to have, to do and to be. The identity extension may be literal (to do) or symbolic (to be), and to have is a precondition to that. Some classical theories mentioned by Belk, such as works from Marx, Sartre
and Fromm, tried to reason why one of these functions should be considered more important than the others. However, without the purpose of answering such question, Belk (1988) indicates the three of them as being deeply interconnected.

6 The Association of the Extended Self to Luxury Branded Products

In the universe of luxury, consumption is very important for building the individual identity. Commonly, the consumer assumes a purchasing behavior which is in accordance to the upper classes’ lifestyle, rejecting the one towards the lower classes (VIGNERON; JOHNSON, 2004).

According to Belk (1988), the materialism concept becomes quite important once the identity is abstract. It requires evidence through concrete aspects which are, in priority, whatever is done and whatever is possessed. For Richins (1991), “Materialist consumers may see the luxury consumption as a way to achieve happiness and may use the same criterion to evaluate their success and others’ ” (p. 28). Confirming Richins (1991), Belk (1988) highlighted that despite the lack of positive relation between materialism and happiness, it is of fundamental importance that luxury products are represented in such a way that they seem to be the reason for living of the individual.

Belk (1988) also pointed out that characteristics such as possessiveness, jealousy and lack of generosity end up giving a very negative view to materialism. On the other hand, Twitchell (2000) went for a more positive vision concerning materialism when quoting “Buying things is not only the popular culture nowadays. It is the way we understand the world” (p. 8). Csikszentmihalyi (2000) reasoned that, up to a certain point, material resources contribute to quality of life.

Moreover, possessing the same brands, objectives and consumption styles provide to the contemporary society a sense of community that would not exist without consumption (BELK, 1988). According to Csikszentmihalyi (2000), human beings have a need to belong to a group and to be accepted by its members. However, in many cases, they may not be able to play the role they would like. In situations where the social role is a new experience to the individual, the choice on products will be made through a stereotyped impression of such role. For instance, the “new rich” want to demonstrate their status through ostentation and wasteful consumption, whereas the “old rich” demand less help from goods to play this role (SOLOMON, 1983).

Then, analyzing the behavior of the social groups portrays a good way to explore the symbolic behavior of consumers (HIRSCHMAN, 1986). To understand consumption as a construction of a significant portion towards the creation and maintenance of our identities is used to position ourselves as social beings (SLATER, 2002; WATTANASUWAN, 2005). Moreover, consumption may be used as a way to social classification (BOURDIEU, 1983), to identity construction (BELK, 1988; SLATER, 2002; KATES, 1998), and to resist exclusion and social discrimination (KATES, 1998). So, through consumption behavior, one can better understand the behavior of individuals that seek to belong to a certain group, as in the case of male homosexuals.

7 Methodology

Brazilian men who assume their gay identity formed the universe of this survey, 12 of them having been purposefully selected, meaning that data that were obtained cannot be generalized to the whole gay population in Brazil. The small number of interviewees is based in Eisenhardt (1989), who stated that the ideal number of subjects in such a study ranges from 4 to
10, since less than 4 may imply distorted results due to its small size, and more than 10 can also imply bias, due to the high complexity meant by in-depth interviews analysis ii.

Considering Nunan´s (2003) warning that the gay identity is not easily measured due to its broad meaning and to its specificities, the interviewees´ choice followed predetermined criteria (GASKELL, 2004), aiming at a greater homogeneity:

1. All inhabit the southeastern part of Brazil. As Slater (2002) states, culture and subculture directly shape the person’s personality, constantly modifying his/her behavioural characteristics, and possibly impacting his/her values and consumer habits. In other words, it was assumed that the consumption pattern in a single geographical region would be more homogeneous than one referred to more than one region.

2. All have a minimum monthly income of R$ 6,000 (the equivalent to approximately US$ 3,400 iii), a value equal to the average for income classes A1 and A2 in Brazil, who, based in statistical data from Associação Nacional de Empresas de Pesquisa - Anep (2003) - an association of research companies in Brazil - and in the results of Casado and Horta´s (2001) study, support the luxury market in Brazil, that added to about US$ 1 billion in year 2000.

3. All have ages ranging from 25 to 50 years, since one suspected that older subjects would show a smaller relationship between their extended selves and their luxury clothing consumption, since they would supposedly be less interested in signaling aspects of their personality to other people, and/or have a different point of view as to what goods could be used for this signaling. In other words, luxury could be differently understood by older subjects, who could relate this concept to goods such as decoration and traveling, instead of clothing, biasing the research results. Belk’s (1988) studied supports this supposition: referring to Rochberg-Halton (1984), he said that, as a person grows older, there would be a broadening of the extended self boundaries.

4. All have professional activities not connected to assume posture as transsexuals, transvestites and drag queens. This restriction assured that the results of the research would not be biased by different understandings on what was meant by luxury clothing. In other words, it is intuitive that a gay whose work requires standard dressing (for instance, a doctor or an attorney) will interpret luxury clothing differently than, for instance, a gay who is a drag queen in the show business.

As for the way of selecting the interviewees, Rudd´s (1996) principle was followed when she says that, for a gay group to have statistical meaning, one needs to think creatively, since there is no possibility of a completely randomic pool for this subculture. She then mentions that one can count on the help of organizations that work with or that represent this group, and that may intermediate the contacts.

Another technique to access the pertinent subjects when these are relatively hidden is snowballing (AAKER; KUMAR; DAY, 2001; RUDD, 1996), where the interviewee recommends someone he/she personally knows and who is characteristically similar and so on, until one reaches the targeted number of interviewees. According to Nunan (2003), this technique only works in populations whose members know each other, as in the gay community. And Rudd (1996) pointed out that snowballing implies recruiting homogeneous individuals.

In the present research, both methods were used. In the first case, one obtained the support of the Movimento Gay de Minas iv, which indicated gay men that fit the necessary profile.
The 12 subjects were interviewed in depth and evaluated considering the extended self incorporation of the clothing item(s) pointed out as significant in their consumption of brands considered luxurious. This evaluation has been based on the methodology proposed by Sivadas and Machleit (1994), which uses the 7-point Likert scale, with consumers expressing their agreement level, from “I totally agree” to “I totally disagree”. Six statements were presented, each containing the luxury branded clothing item reference pointed out in the respective interview:

a) My _____ helps me achieve the identity I wish to have;
b) My _____ helps me reduce the gap between what I am and what I try to be;
c) My _____ is fundamental to my identity;
d) My _____ is part of who I am;
e) If my _____ is stolen, I will feel like losing my identity;
f) I pursue part of my identity with my _____.

The 12 interviews had their content thoroughly analyzed based on the methodology principle of speech analysis. The speech analysis method starts from the conception that the speech involves intra- and inter-discursive levels which, approached, allow the capturing of its total, once there is interdependence and complementary relation between these two dimensions (FARIA, 2001).

Through such technique, an attentive reading over the descriptions of each of the interviewees was possible, in seeking significance units, and in transcriptions of the principal parts of the interviews. They relate the extended self proposition as an influencing construct concerning the consumer behavior of luxury products.

The results from the six questions which evaluated the clothing item and its incorporation to the extended self were analyzed through the observation of the average of the answers of all interviewees to each of those questions, represented in individual figures. This representation aimed at allowing a quick view over the agreeing and disagreeing levels of the group as a whole.

8 Results

In evaluating the incorporation of the luxury branded consumption to the extended self, Figures 1 to 6 portray the answers. They are followed by selected interview extracts taken as relevant.
Figure 1
Answers of the 12 interviewees to statement "a"

Figure 2
Answers of the 12 interviewees to statement "b"
Figure 3
Answers of the 12 interviewees to statement "c"

Figure 4
Answers of the 12 interviewees to statement "d"

Figure 5
Answers of the 12 interviewees to statement "e"
It is to be pointed out that the Sivadas and Machleit (1994) methodology proposition implies that the closer the result is to the unit, the bigger is the agreeing to such incorporation. Opposite, the closer to 7, the bigger is the disagreeing. Because it is a central point, 4 may be seen as an indifference point for the interviewee.

It can be observed that:

1) Statement “a” (*My favorite clothing brand(s) help(s) me achieve the identity I wish to have*) had most of respondents tending to agree, with five of them showing complete agreement, once they have chosen the unit. Some speeches have supported this positioning:

   “You are what you dress” (Interviewee 2)
   “My favorite brands (*Dior and Borelli*) make me feel just the way I would like to be” (Interviewee 12)

2) Statement “b” (*My favorite clothing brand(s) help(s) me reduce the gap between what I am and what I try to be*) also showed a significant level of agreeing, with only three interviewees moving away from point number 2. That shows how clothing is considered to be of importance in the dichotomy reduction between what the interviewee is and what he wishes to be:

   “When I was younger, I was completely dependant on brands. I lived in São Paulo and would hate to say I come from upstate Minas Gerais (*a Brazilian state*). I suppose I wore brands which were very worn by the people originally from São Paulo, to fit within the group. I remember I liked to wear Lacoste. Nowadays, I hate it because I think whoever wears that brand lacks personality. Everyone looks the same.” (Interviewee 5)

   “Despite not giving so much importance to brands nowadays, there is one that gives me pleasure: Nike. Whenever I wear Nike, I feel strong, handsome and powerful. The brand makes me feel younger, you know.” (Interviewee 5)

3) Statement “c” (*My favorite clothing brand(s) happen(s) to be fundamental to my identity*) showed a variety of opinions: four respondents tended to clearly disagree, while five positioned themselves near the agreement. In fact, such lack of consensus has been...
evident in some of the speeches. Some have clearly highlighted that, even the brand not being fundamental, it supports the identity:

“I wear whatever I like. I have my own identity. I do not believe that a brand can be of central importance to my way of being, of seeing and of interpreting the world. I believe though, that whenever I wish to pass on a message, a specific brand does help me doing that. For example, if I am with my friends, I love wearing Aramis, as it reinforces my identity. They have classical wardrobe pieces, though having a modern touch. That is the way I am.” (Interviewee 11)

4) Statement “d” (My favorite clothing brand(s) is/are part of who I am) showed a big tendency to divergence among the respondents: one has totally disagreed, four had a neutral position and four completely agreed. Some examples illustrate such divergences:

“I have been through years of therapy and nowadays I do not need branded clothing to show who I am. I believe the brand does not change who I am…they merely complement me, in a subtle way” (Interviewee 1).

“I do love (the brand) Forum, but if they go out of the market, what can I do? (laughs). I will simply purchase other brands. I adjust myself quite well... If I adapt myself to so many things, why shouldn’t I fit into another brand? They can steal everything from me (laughs) and it will not make a difference. I buy it again (laughs)”. (Interviewee 2)

5) Statement “e” (If my favorite clothing brand is stolen, I will feel like I have lost my identity) was the statement showing the biggest degree of complete disagreement. Here, it can be inferred that the respondents did not show big loyalty to the purchased clothing items, as in the extract from an interview that follows:

“When I was younger, I could even think this way, but not now. I believe more in myself and do not need a brand to feel more confident, let alone to affirm my identity. Back then, I was obsessed by brands, and I believe if I were robbed, I would feel a lack of personality. I remember to have had a Levis’ pair of jeans that was like an amulet. Nowadays, I do not care for that. I have other concerns…I think whoever needs brands to build up one’s identity is quite an empty person…very different from me”. (Interviewee 4).

6) Statement “f” (Part of my identity comes from my favorite clothing brands), had disagreeing, in different levels, from six respondents. A same number of interviewees agreed, two of them totally. Such divergence can be picked up in the following extracts:

“I think this question should be the opposite. It would be better like “The pieces of clothing I wear are part of my identity”. I don’t know. I got a little confused and prefer to disagree rather than to agree” (Interviewee 1).

“I do love (the brand) Hering clothing items. To me, Hering is luxury. It does not compete with me, and allows me to be who I am. The brand merely completes me. Many times, while wearing a plain Hering white T-shirt, people say it is beautiful. It is nothing but a white T-shirt....I am the one who highlights it. That is why I love Hering. If I were wearing a striking brand such as Calvin Klein, which is typically gay, they would be praising the shirt rather than me. You know what I mean?” (Interviewee 9).
9 Conclusion

Firstly, it must be stressed that the interviewed group was purposefully selected, meaning that data from this research may not be generalized to the whole Brazilian gay population. This research showed that there is no consensus among the interviewees as for the influence of luxury clothing in the composition of their extended self: depending on the homosexual consumer’s profile (age, profession), luxury brands clothing may have both a central or peripheral role in this composition.

It also showed that, in what refers to a better understanding of the fundamental values that guide luxury brand products consumption, for male gays – and probably for the general public – these values involve status, the perception of exclusivity through the use of products that are differentiated and that have high aggregated value, and the possibility of participating in specific groups through the acquisition of some products.

This confirms the propositions of Allérès (2000), of Amui (2006) and of Vigneron and Johnson (2004), when they stressed that luxury products are represented both by their objective and subjective qualities – respectively represented by funcionality and aesthetics – as well as by a symbolic dimension. Amui (2006) said that, more than any other product, luxurious items are bought not for what they are, but for what they mean, apart from having five dimensions: conspicuous, exclusivity, quality, hedonism, and the “me” extension.

The interviews also confirmed that there is no unanimity in the interviewees’ way of thinking how luxury clothing may contribute to the extended self construction, since this opinion may vary according to personalities, life moments and even sudden necessities.

This survey has contributed to the study on the behavior of male gay consumers in Brazil, specifically related to the understanding on how determined products, in this case the male branded clothing considered luxurious, may be used in the composition of their extended self.

These findings could certainly be used in the preparation of marketing strategies which are driven to this subgroup in Brazil, proven to be capable of consuming in a significant scale. In other words, at management levels, this work points out interesting inferences to professionals who are concerned with their brands positioning, as far as their brand personality is involved.

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1 SPturis is a tourism and events company in São Paulo. Among its activities is the survey on several issues related to the Brazilian population behavior, more specifically the population of that city
2 In this study, two more interviewees were added to the suggested number of 10; supposedly this would not imply a bias, considering the small addition, and considering the richness this brought to the qualitative results as work was in progress
3 It was assumed that the interviewees were honest as far as their income information
4 A non-profit NGO that supports the gay cause, based in the Brazilian state named Minas Gerais