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The Impact of Luxury Brand Mentions on Consumer Culture: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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The Impact of Luxury Brand Mentions on Consumer Culture: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Dedication

It is an honor and privilege to complete this dissertation during the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Thus, this body of work is dedicated to the ancestors and elders who labored and sacrificed tremendously for future generations. I am very grateful for their fearless determination to shatter walls of injustice that enabled me to pursue a quality and equitable education. I recognize I stand on the shoulders of great giants. For that alone I am indebted to my elders, ancestors, and my community. As a fifth-generation educator, I will continue to honor the efforts of my elders by fostering the same values and inspiring the next generation of greatness.

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The Impact of Luxury Brand Mentions on Consumer Culture: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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The current research explores how luxury brand mentions impacts consumer culture. Specifically, the social, cultural, and economic implications of such mentions when integrated in reality television is investigated. Exploring this phenomenon is important as consumers are afforded several options to skip or avoid advertising when viewing television. Hence, consumers are now exposed to brand mentions that are integrated in media by advertisers who aim to combat the advertising avoidance. Generally, brand mentions are depicted in media as inexpensive, convenient products, such as household goods or food products. But with the emergence and popularity of reality television, consumers are now exposed to those brands, in addition to luxury brands. This is true as brand mentions financially support production costs for many reality television programs and also serve as aspirational props.

Luxury brand mentions are worthy of study as they exude exclusivity and status and are traditionally targeted to a niche, elite market. As luxury brands are integrated in reality television, a broader, more diverse consumer audience is exposed to such mentions. This research is one of the first to specifically explore how luxury brand mentions appear in reality television. Using the consumer culture theory framework, two studies were conducted to understand the nuanced meanings of such mentions among consumers. Study One explored the integration of luxury brand mentions using a content assessment. Study Two used depth interviews to gauge consumer response to such mentions. Study One results indicate luxury brand mentions are highly prominent in affluent-lifestyle reality television shows. Five of the most frequently mentioned luxury brands represent the automobile, entertainment/technology, and hospitality product categories. Overall, the promotion of materialism, aspiration, and elitism were messages consumers were exposed to. Study One results were supported by findings in Study Two which revealed informants' race, class, and gender as strong influencers of their interpretations of luxury brand mentions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Consumers may be exposed to nearly 3,000 advertisements daily in broadcast, print, outdoor, and online media (Henke & Fontenot, 2011; Speck & Elliott, 1997). Many consumers may experience fatigue when they are inundated by large volumes of advertising (Henke & Fontenot 2011; Speck & Elliott, 1997). Such advertising clutter encourages a phenomenon known as consumer advertising avoidance, which involves consumers proactively filtering unwanted or irrelevant advertisements (Rumbo, 2002). Advertising avoidance efforts reflect technological conveniences allowing consumers to skip commercials on television. While consumers attempt to avoid commercials, they are still exposed to brands that are subtly featured in television programs. The increasing integration of aspirational goods such as luxury brands may impact consumers as such brands are commonly featured in marketing communications (Belk, 2011).

Brand mentions consist of disguised verbal and visual brand messages in media that may conceal both promotional intent and brand sponsorship (Ferguson, 2008). For example, visual brand mentions of Apple products are commonly featured in *E!* reality television show, *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. The integration is disguised without obvious promotional intent. Of particular interest for this dissertation research is the integration of, and consumer response to, luxury brand mentions in television programming, which is understudied in the marketing communications field.

First, studying luxury brand mentions is important because of their status and exclusivity. Consumers are frequently exposed to ambiguous luxury brand mentions while viewing television although they may practice consumer advertising avoidance

when skipping commercials. Elite consumers are the primary targets of luxury brands, not the mass market. However, when luxury brand mentions are exposed to the general market, the brand becomes more conspicuous. This investigation will reveal how such brands are integrated in television. The positioning and types of luxury brands, will be specifically studied. Luxury brands are sometimes a predominant feature in television shows as verbal and visual mentions may attract consumers.

Secondly, consumer response to marketed luxury brands in television is important due to the potential impact such brands may have on consumers. The investigation demonstrates how consumers find meanings from brands that reflect their individual identities and self-concept. Consumer exposure to brand mentions may be enhanced because many television shows feature brand mentions, which warrants studying the influence of brand mentions on consumer culture (La Ferle & Edwards, 2006).

A consumer culture theory approach is appropriate to guide the proposed research investigation to explore social and cultural factors, in addition to economic implications of the placement of luxury brands in television. Consumer culture theory is a research approach that "refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868). Exploring the social and cultural implications of luxury brand mentions is important to understand how such brands influence consumption patterns that may reflect consumer norms in their daily lives. Economic implications include social class factors that may influence purchase intentions. The framework offers a broader lens

and value to study such mentions associated meanings rather than exploring the effectiveness of brands (brand recall, brand attitude or brand memory) from the advertiser perspective (Berger, 2010; Holt 2002; La Ferle & Edwards, 2006; Russell, 2002; Sung & de Gregorio, 2008). These effectiveness measures only reveal the functional value of brand mentions, and not consumer reaction to such brands in television programs.

This dissertation research makes two contributions to marketing communications: conceptually – introducing the study of luxury brand mentions in a new television context; and theoretically – advancing theoretical frameworks (perceptual and conceptual fluency theories and the meaning-transfer model) to enhance understandings of mentions. Thus, this is the first research project to explore the social, cultural, and economic implications of brand mentions in television, which is the primary aim of this dissertation. Understanding luxury brand prominence and consumer reaction to such brands will inform scholarship and demonstrate the significance of cultural capital of such mentions and its influences on consumers.

The process of studying the social, cultural, and economic implications of luxury brand mentions began with exploring the integration of the mentions in reality television, which is unscripted programming, depicting the ordinary lives of people in their home or work settings (Bignell, 2005; Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003). Reality television consists of programming featuring non-professional actors with little to no production direction. Further theorizing is necessary to broadly examine luxury brand mentions integrated in reality television. Prior studies were conducted with less depth and either focused on one brand mention segment, a specific brand, or one central brand in a show

(Kowalczyk & Royne, 2012; Sherman & Arthur, 2012; Sheehan & Guo, 2005). Exploring luxury brand mentions more broadly enhances knowledge about such integration and provides a better understanding of the types, frequency, and prominence of brand mentions. Hence, the research sample consisted of *E!* network's *Kourtney & Kim Take Miami Season 3*. The show represented a reality sitcom subgenre following the lives of two sisters and offered a new context to study the structure of luxury brand mentions (Murray & Ouellette, 2004; Nabi, 2007).

Since this research aimed to understand the impact of luxury brand mentions on consumer culture, this dissertation research consisted of two studies: a content assessment and depth interviews. Study One, the content assessment, explored how the mentions were integrated into a television show across an entire season. Prior research studied brand mentions across multiple channels and television genres over the course of one week or in one brand mention segment using content assessments in prime-television (La Ferle & Edwards, 2006; Avery & Ferraro, 2000; Ferraro & Avery, 2000). Unlike a content analysis that only quantifies a unit of analysis, the content assessment is a more interpretive approach to examine specific advertising elements at the individual episode level for themes to emerge (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2002; Spears & Germain, 2007). Narratives and meta-narratives were assessed to determine common stories and themes depicted at the episode and season level (Lyotard, 1979). Examining both narrative types reveals the predominant messaging and social construction of branding consumers may be exposed two when viewing *Kourtney & Kim Take Miami Season 3*.

Using depth interviews in Study Two, frequently mentioned luxury brands from Study One were used as stimuli to probe consumer reaction to featured luxury brand mention segments. Conducting depth interviews explored consumer reaction to the social, cultural, and economic implications of luxury brand mentions in reality television and its influence on the lives of consumers. This method adds value to brand mention literature as quantitative methods have been primarily used to measure effectiveness of brand mentions. The content assessment also captures the impact of contextual factors, such as specific elements that are unique to reality television, to explore its presence in the study. However, DeLorme & Reid (1999) measured reactions to brand mentions in movies using consumer focus groups and interviews. Other researchers broadly explored consumer response to reality television programming, consumption depiction, and its influence on consumers, but did not study specific brands (Narsey & Russell, 2011). Further theorizing is necessary to explore consumer understandings, feelings, and reactions to luxury brand mentions in reality television. Research questions were deliberately broad in scope which is necessary for exploratory research. The primary research questions under investigation were as follows:

1. How are luxury brand mentions integrated into the lifestyle-oriented reality television sub-genre?

2. How do luxury brand mentions provide support of narratives and meta-narratives of reality television shows that depict affluence and materialism?

3. What are the social, cultural, and economic implications of luxury brand mentions? How do consumers react to those mentions?

Next, Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature on prior research in the field of non-traditional advertising, brand mentions, and luxury brands. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4

introduce Study One and Study Two and includes a discussion of the method, research design, and results. Chapter 5 concludes this research and provides a discussion of results, including intellectual contributions, summarized findings, limitations, marketing implications, and future research direction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Consumers are mobile and remain abreast of media in real-time using advanced technology (Dahlen, Granlund, & Grenros, 2009). With expanded media options, consumers may be exposed to more advertisements, making it difficult for consumers to process advertising (Rumbo, 2002). Some consumers may practice advertising avoidance to deliberately filter unwanted advertisements. This practice enables consumers to manage the overload by skipping television channels, muting advertising, or by using digital video recorder advertisement removal functions (Rumbo, 2002).

While consumers desire to avoid advertising in commercials, they still are exposed to brand messages, but through non-traditional advertising forms, such as brand mentions, interactive marketing or guerilla marketing. Non-traditional advertising formats have a long history in the marketplace; however, the level of sophistication and frequency has dramatically increased to reach more consumers. Brand mentions emerged as an alternative for consumers to gain brand information while viewing television programs which has been triggered because of the expansion of cable television networks. Brand mentions includes assorted brands that are both luxury and non-luxury brands that consumers may prefer. The remainder of Chapter 2 provides an overview of non-traditional advertising that also includes the emergence and influence of luxury brand mentions on consumer behavior.

NON-TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING

Non-traditional advertising emerged because of technology advances and offers new ways for consumers to encounter brands (Wilson & Till, 2012). Consumers have

increased access to multiple media devices and are exposed to several types of non-traditional advertising forms. Brand mentions, wireless text messaging on phones, and Quick Response (QR) code posters, among others, represent alternative ways consumers are exposed to brands. However, the increased use of technology also affects traditional television advertising. Technological services, such as the digital video recorder (DVR) and Video on Demand (VOD), which allow consumers to access and/or digitally record television shows and playback at a later date, are two of the most common advertising deterrents. Consumers may fast-forward through advertising as a form of consumer activism to deliberately boycott large corporate brands that promote high consumption (Kozinets & Handleman, 2004).

Consumers fast-forward through commercials using VOD options online, such as Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Instant Video, and Apple iTunes. Consumers also use VOD options offered by cable television providers, such as Time Warner's On Demand, and Comcast's XFinity (Greenfield, 2010). Television broadcast networks, including NBC and ABC.go.com, also provide VOD services to consumers. Consumers may use VOD services through TiVo and the Dish Hopper ™ offered through a DVR device. Dish Hopper ™ allows consumers to virtually skip advertisements with little efforts. VOD enables consumers to buy media content (e.g., movies, sports, and music) without any or fewer commercials. As consumers continue to use VOD services to view television shows, consumers have greater potential to encounter integrated brand mentions in the shows. The frequency of brand mentions increases when consumers engage in binge

television watching using VOD services. Binge television viewing describes the act of watching one single television series for an extended time span.

Non-traditional advertising is broad and includes both emerging new media options, such as mobile advertising or digital billboards, and innovative uses of traditional advertising, including brand mentions (Wilson & Till, 2012). The inundation of brand mentions in media has rapidly grown and enables consumers to engage with and learn more about brand benefits (van Reijmersdal, Neijens, & Smit, 2007). Moreover, the rapid growth of brand mentions demonstrates the complexity and diversity of brand mentions and how consumers may be exposed to brands.

BRAND MENTIONS OVERVIEW

Throughout marketing communications scholarship, product placement is widely researched without a clear distinction between it and brand mentions. Hence the two terms are interchangeably used. The interchangeable use is troublesome and undermines the distinction of each term. When some brands are featured ambiguously in television, brand mentions is the best term to describe incidental brand exposures. Neither consumers, nor I as the investigator, are privy to contractual agreements that may exist between brand sponsors and television producers. In most cases, these two elements generally suggest brand mentions are product placements. All product placements may be brand mentions. However, not all brand mentions are product placements because of contractual agreement uncertainties. Television show credits include brand sponsorships, but consumers may skip that information just as they skip commercials. Instead, brand

mentions captures the vague nature of brand exposures that consumers may be exposed to when watching television. More importantly, the uncertainty of brand mentions also demonstrates the vulnerability of consumers who may not recognize brand messages and may believe that a product placement is actually part of the plot. The depiction of brand mentions is unclear and broad in nature. Therefore, studying the social, cultural, and economic implications of brand mentions is necessary to explore the depth and breadth of its structure and influence on consumer culture.

For purposes of this dissertation research, brand mentions, instead of product placement, is appropriate to describe and study consumer misunderstanding of the commercial intentions of placements of brands in television programming. Brand mentions loosely occur in many art forms including music, visual arts, in television, or film productions, without a pronounced business arrangement (Ferguson, 2008). For example, rap music features frequent brand mentions. Alcohol brands, Patrón, Hennessy, Grey Goose, and Jack Daniels, represented more than half of the alcohol brand mentions in Billboards most popular song lists between 2009 and 2011 (Siegel, Johnson, Tyagi, Power, Lohsen, Ayers, & Jernigan, 2013). When consumers heard frequent alcohol brand mentions, they were unaware of the brand sponsorship and in many cases may not have cared otherwise. Therefore, brand mentions in music may indirectly influence consumers. Although the aim of this dissertation research focuses on brand mentions, an overview of product placement follows to discuss previous literature.

Product Placement Overview

Product placement, a non-traditional advertising form, differs from traditional advertising as it is disguised paid brand inclusions (Sheehan & Guo 2005). Product placements are the intentional influence of movie, video game, music, and television audiences through indirect placements of brands in those media (Balasubramanian, 1994). Moreover, product placements in all media, but particularly in television, are important because of the repeated brand exposure consumers may encounter when viewing television program (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2012).

Several researchers discussed the types of product placements consumers may be exposed to when watching television (Hudson & Hudson, 2006; Sheehan & Guo, 2005). Of particular importance are the four-categorization types of product placement that include: traditional, enhanced, product integration, and product assimilation (Sheehan & Guo, 2005). The framework identifies product placement types, integration levels, and its influence on consumers as illustrated in Figure 1.

Reality television show, *Survivor,* featured traditional placement using the integration of a Mountain Dew wooden barrel. The brand is a prop used to support the characters' role in the show. Traditional placement types have the least amount of integration and are less influential among consumers (Sheehan & Guo, 2005). However, when the brand moves beyond the use as a prop to an integral part of the storyline, it is referred to as an enhanced placement (Sheehan & Guo, 2005). The brand still has low integration, but consumers are likely to perceive the brand as more visible. Coca Cola's enhanced placement in *American Idol* is a vivid example as featured in Figure 1. Another type of product placement, product integration, occurs when the brand is a central part of

the story plot and is continually visible throughout the show. The product integration of the 24 Hour Fitness brand in *The Biggest Loser*, exemplifies this example best. Several *Biggest Loser* episodes included both verbal and visual brand mentions of 24 Hour Fitness. The high level of the 24 Hour Fitness brand integration was particularly suitable as it supported the overall focus of the show: weight loss and fitness promotion. Finally, when the product becomes the super star of the show, the product placement is product assimilation (Sheehan & Guo, 2005). For example, the Southwest Airlines brand became the primary subject in reality television show, *Airline*, wherein the entire show was about the daily operations of the brand. The high integration of the Southwest Airline brand was more influential among consumers because the brand played a vital role within the show.

Brand Mention Positions

Brand mentions are also integrated in reality television in different positions. Prominent brand mentions are fully visible and centered within the production for enhanced consumer exposure. However, not all brands are highly visible. Some incidental brand mentions appear in the margins of the show and are less prominent as unintentional brand appearance (LaFerle & Edwards, 2006). Many reality television shows also include concealed or disguised brands with blurred, discolored, pixilated, or digitally-altered logos. Digitally-altered logos are brands concealed by production teams through imposed digital black boxes masking brand identity. Although the actual brand logo is concealed, consumers may recognize the trade dress of brands. Trade dress refers to a legal term describing the distinctive packaging and appearance of products, such as

color or logo that indicates the brand name to consumers (Merges, Menell, Lemley, 2007). For purposes of the current research, such perceived incidental concealed brand mentions are referred to as blurred brand mentions. Conspicuous blurred brand mentions may be just as influential to consumers as prominent brands because of the mysterious depiction, and may even heighten consumer interest more based on the resource-matching hypothesis. This means that consumers will invest the same amount of effort to decode inconspicuous brands just as they would brands that are more visible. The same mental resources allocated to process the messages are matched with the actual effort to complete the task, as suggested by the resource-matching hypothesis (Sternthal & Anand, 1988). Brand mention prominence varies. This dissertation research will investigate the prominence levels of brand mentions and consumer reaction to them.

Brand Mention Processing

Much of the research on brand mentions has only broadly explained how the placement of brands in television programming works. Very few researchers studied the intricate details of how consumers process brand mentions (Hudson & Hudson, 2006; Sheehan & Guo, 2005). One notable exception is the research of Cristel Russell who introduced the Three-Dimensional Construct of Product Placement framework to explain how consumers process verbal, visual, and plot brand mentions in television, which is displayed in Figure 2 (Russell, 1998). The framework does not explicitly suggest brand sponsorship as a requirement for placements although Russell (1998) used the term product placement rather than brand mentions.

Within this framework, brand mentions fall along two main dimensions: visual and verbal. Visual or screen mentions, are integrated in television shows through on-set (i.e., physically placed in the show) or digitally altered placements (i.e., brands creatively placed on screens such as in sports events). Visual mentions are more commonly integrated in media among the other mention types. The Apple laptop was a highly integrated visual mention in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*, therefore consumers were repeatedly exposed to the brand. However, when cast members audibly mention brands during the dialogue of shows, it is known as a script mention. Verbal brand mentions reflect the context of the show and may be emphasized using voice inflections. Consumers may identify the verbal brand mention of Apple because it is used or referenced in the show. In contrast, plot mentions describe verbal and visual brand mentions that become a central part of the show (Hudson & Hudson, 2006; Sheehan & Guo, 2005). If the Apple brand is consistently mentioned verbally and visually in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*, the Apple brand is likely to be more prominent and consumers are able to draw a connection between the brand and the show (Russell, 1998; 2002).

The most significant outcomes of brand mentions highlight how consumers process and recall brands integrated into television (Russell, 1998). The coding redundancy hypothesis, which states "memory increases directly with the number of alternative memory codes available for an item," supports how consumers process brand mentions (Paivio, 1971, p. 81). For example, when the Apple brand is depicted as a screen, visual, and plot mention in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*, the mentions offers

both verbal and visual code processing of Apple for consumers (Russell, 1998). Consumers may likely recall the brand after viewing the show. Repeated brand mentions in one episode are suggested to ease consumer information processing and memory of brands (Pavio, 1971).

Brand Mentions in Reality Television

Little research has investigated brand mentions in reality television. Thus far, three studies have, but on a broad scale. Only one brand was studied in each of the reality television shows by scholars. For instance, consumer attitude towards Orville Redenbacher's 100 Calorie SmartPop! and Southwest Airlines was measured in NBC's *Biggest Loser* and A&E's show, *Airline* (Kowalczyk & Royne 2012; Sheehan & Guo, 2006). In *Australia's' Next Top Model*, the Napoleon Perdis Cosmetics brand was used as stimuli for consumer evaluation of fashion consciousness, brand appeal, brand familiarity, product involvement, and cultivation effect, was measured (Sherman & Arthur, 2012). All of this research is of merit, because the studies recognize the difference in mention placements, which is relevant to reality television. The findings are also important as it suggests consumers have positive attitudes towards a specific brand mention segment and towards the brand, Orville Redenbacher's 100 Calorie SmartPop! (Kowalczyk & Royne 2012).

Sheehan & Guo (2006) discovered consumers viewing *Airline* had a positive effect on the attitude towards Southwest Airlines brand. Thus, brand assimilation, which is the process in which a brand, such as *Airline*, becomes the star of the show, has a

stronger effect than simply verbal or visual brand mentions (2006). These findings are important because the results demonstrate how brand mentions functions as a mini commercial when integrated in reality television shows. Consumers' favorable attitudes reflect the multi-modality of the mentions and its product use of cast members, which deems it effective. These studies confirmed the effectiveness of brand mentions in reality television, which certainly affirms findings in this dissertation research. However, a gap exists in the literature to reveal how brands mentions are integrated in reality television and how brand messages are transmitted to consumers.

Brand Mention Transformational Advertising Experience

Brands integrated in reality television may offer consumers a transformational advertising experience that vividly demonstrates brand use for consumers. Four dimensions describe the transformational experience of brand mentions which include: personal relevance, experiential/empathy, informational, and executional (Puto, 1986). The typology demonstrates how brand mentions transform brands and draw connections with consumers.

Personal relevance refers to the degree to which consumers connect with media. This dimension is most evident in reality television shows which tend to project ordinary life events where the setting and plot have a strong relevance to the lives of consumers (Russell, 1998). Consumers may draw connections with featured brands when integrated in reality television shows because of the pseudo-real depictions, product use, and personal relevance of the brands. Further, some consumers may personally identify with

the emotion expressed by characters when engaging with products and experience empathy. Empathy is suggested to offer brand mentions a transformative experience for consumers to process brand messages (Russell, 1998). Unlike traditional advertising, brand mentions are more indirect and do not offer explicit product benefits. Brand mentions depict functional brand use in television, which is informative, symbolically significant, and facilitates consumer processing of brand messages (Russell, 1998). A good fit between the brand, plot, and character is necessary for mentions to offer transformational advertising experiences, which is similar to the match-up hypothesis (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Russell, 1998). The brand depiction is more effective for consumer information processing when the brand connects with the image conveyed by the main character in the show (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Russell, 1998).

Brand Mention Effectiveness – Consumer Perspective

Consumers evaluate brand mentions using cognitive, affective, and behavioral measures (Russell, 2002). When a brand mention is depicted in the plot of a television show and is incongruent with the visual and verbal mention, consumer memory of the brand increases because the mention is more obvious (Russell, 2002). However, the incongruence does not aid in the brand message persuasion (Russell, 2002). When plot mentions and the visual and audio mentions are congruent, the brand message is persuasive (Russell, 2002).

Consumer affect levels toward brand mentions in reality television are highly salient (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2012). A significant favorable relationship exists between

consumer attitude toward the specific brand mention segment and attitudes toward the brand mention in a reality television show (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2012). However, no significant favorable relationship exists between consumer general attitudes to brand mentions in reality television and attitudes toward the brand featured in the show (Russell, 2002). Therefore, brand mentions appear to be effective and beneficial to consumers with more favorable attitudes toward specific brand mentions. The specific brand mention is more informative to consumers because the brand mention demonstrates practical use (Russell, 2002). Consumer attitude toward brand mentions develops through time. Brand mentions strengthen brand recognition and positioning in the minds of consumers (DeLorme & Reid, 1999).

Research indicated consumers express favorable attitudes toward prominent (foreground) brand mentions for shows that they perceived to be less interesting (Cowley & Barron, 2008). In contrast, when consumers watch their favorite shows, they express disinterest in prominent brand mentions, because of its obvious commercial appeal (Cowley & Barron, 2008). Consumer attitude toward brand mentions reflect their preference for the television show and not the brand mention prominence. When consumer attitudes toward a brand mention segment and the brand mention are both significant, consumers are more likely to consider purchasing brands featured in the mention (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2012).

LUXURY BRANDS

Brand mentions represent a variety of brands from different product categories and price points. In some instances, luxury brands may be more suitable for television integration because the mentions represent or support the plot of the show, the featured characters, or the lifestyle of featured characters on the show (Vigernon & Johnson, 2004). Luxury brands tend to attract consumers based on the brand's strong reputation or appealing presentation. Due to various meanings associated with luxury brands, researchers have long debated the best definition to describe them (Beverland, 2004). For example, consumer perception of a car in one country may be considered luxury to consumers in developing countries. Expensive products do not always reflect luxury. For purposes of this dissertation research, luxury brands are defined as brands that "evoke exclusivity, [have] a well-known brand identity, [enjoy high] brand awareness and perceived quality, and retain sales levels and customer loyalty" (Phau & Pendergast, 2000, p. 123-124). This definition is suitable to describe luxury brands because it suggests consumers may perceive luxury brands as more aspirational because of their exclusivity, which is independent of price. Thus, luxury brands were the focus of this dissertation research because of their novelty and symbolic value.

The luxury goods market has experienced significant growth as a result of changes in consumer lifestyles and income. The increased frequency of luxury depiction in media is also a contributing factor (Christodoulides, Michaelidon, & Hsing, 2009; Phau & Teah, 2009). The impact is reflected in the global luxury market, which represents 330 million luxury consumers worldwide, while the United States luxury consumer base spent $300 billion in 2013 (Lawrence, 2014). The rapid growth of the

luxury market demonstrates the strong economic implications associated with luxury goods and consumer culture.

French and Italian luxury designers of fashion and accessories are some of the most notable figures in the luxury market. Although several prevalent luxury brands exist, brands such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Giorgio Armani, and Hermes, are most common among consumers on a global scale (Wendlandt & Wahba, 2013). However, Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH) and Pinault-Printemps-Redoute (PPR), currently known as Kerring, are the number one and number three luxury groups in the world, with the highest growth rate of sales in the United States (Wendlandt & Wahba, 2013).

Cost is generally a key indicator of luxury for consumers of luxury brands. Luxury marketers promote brand offerings by retaining the luxury pedigree, but through varying price points to meet consumer needs. Alleres (1990) developed a hierarchy to highlight three different luxury brand levels: inaccessible, intermediate, and accessible as displayed in Table 1. For example, Ralph Lauren is a well-known apparel merchandiser offering multiple internal brands to reach consumers at each luxury level. The highest level includes inaccessible luxury which refers to brands with premium retail prices and higher brand quality. Ralph Lauren Purple Label men's shirt collection is the highest price premium within the brand portfolio and starts at $395 per shirt. Affluent consumers who value status and inconspicuous consumption generally buy inaccessible luxury brands. Working professionals or mid-management employees are inclined to purchase intermediate luxury goods because of the affordable, yet exclusive pricing. Ralph Lauren Black Label men's shirt collection represents intermediate luxury, as the price points are

still expensive, but start at $195 per shirt. The first entry point into the luxury goods market begins with accessible luxury. Generally, these brands are suitable for middle-class consumers who are status-seeking and may have professional careers. The Polo Ralph Lauren men's shirt line represents the least-expensive collection and exemplifies accessible luxury. The starting price point for these shirts begins at $85 per shirt and is quite popular among male consumers.

Authenticity of Luxury Brands

One of the key determinants of luxury brands is authenticity. Historically, brands represent a "cultural marker of legitimacy and authenticity" that attracts consumers to brands, but specifically, luxury brands (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003, p. 19). Authenticity is described as indexical; meaning brands "have a factual and spatio-temporal link" with the brand name and its historical origin (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 298). The authentic marker of luxury brands is distinguished from replicated or similar brands based on the original design, customized craftsmanship, and country of origin of luxury brands. The unique nature of luxury brands highlights both the symbolic qualities and authenticity of the brands. Even when comparing two similarly designed brands, the authentic object possesses more value and importance within society as consumers recognize the brand as the original (Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

Luxury brand authenticity strongly resonates with consumers as a salient product benefit when promoted in the marketplace (Beverland, 2006; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Six attributes of luxury brand authenticity were developed to reflect consumer

preferences: heritage and pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, relationship to place, method of production, and downplaying commercial motives (Beverland, 2006). Each of these attributes legitimize and distinguish luxury brands from non-luxury brands.

A prominent distinction of luxury brands is the historical narrative associated with the heritage and pedigree of the brands. Luxury brands offer rich stories that reflect the success of brands based on performance or quality (Beverland, 2006). Luxury marketers draw links between luxury brands and its history to attract consumers. For example, automotive maker BMW hosts annual experiential events connecting consumers to its established brand benefits by offering test drives, activities, and competitions.

Stylistic consistency and quality commitments are very important to consumers when assessing the authenticity of luxury brands (Beverland, 2006). Consumers prefer brands that deliver the same values across the entire product line. Moreover, consumers also prefer durable luxury brands manufactured with quality precision (Beverland, 2006). The rich ties that luxury fashion house, Louis Vuitton, has with its place of origin Paris, France, resonate strongly with consumers and demonstrate its authenticity (Beverland, 2006). Place of origin is very important in the brand life of Louis Vuitton, largely because Paris symbolizes the epicenter of fashion and authenticates the identity of the brand.

Although some consumers actively avoid luxury brands, luxury-seeking consumers are very interested in learning about the production method of luxury brands. These consumers recognize the authenticity of luxury brands when manufacturers share

the connection between the conceptual development and final product of the brands (Beverland, 2006). Lastly, downplaying of commercial motives is another attribute of luxury brand authenticity. Consumers are disinterested in the use of commercial messages to promote luxury brands. They believe the broad promotion reduces the allure and undermines the value of luxury brands. Instead, some consumers prefer manipulated versions of reality, which resonates more with consumers and preserves the authenticity of luxury brands (Beverland, 2006).

Perceived Values of Luxury Brands

Luxury-seeking consumers expect luxury brands to offer more compelling benefits than non-luxury brands (Velben, 1899). Vigernon & Johnson (2004) developed a framework to describe five perceived values consumers gain from luxury brands, which include: conspicuousness, uniqueness, quality, hedonism, and extended-self. Conspicuousness refers to public consumption of luxury goods to display status and prestige. Luxury purchases alone are not a sign of status. However, the public display of luxury brands demonstrates conspicuous consumption (Velben, 1899). Luxury consumers enjoy the status of conspicuous luxury goods and may be disinterested in the tangible benefits provided by the goods (Vigernon & Johnson, 2004). Further, the uniqueness of luxury brands is attractive to consumers because the brands project exclusivity to others (Vigernon & Johnson, 2004).

Quality is a perceived value and high expectation that consumers desire when purchasing luxury goods (Bian & Forsythe, 2011). Consumers expect superior

performance of luxury brands in comparison to non-luxury brands because of the higher price, craftsmanship, and established longevity (Vigernon & Johnson, 2004; Bian & Forsythe, 2011). The fourth perceived value of luxury brands is hedonism. Consumer luxury consumption reflects a desire for sensual pleasure, fantasies, feelings, and the experience of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Thus, luxury brands offer consumers satisfaction and are pleasing, rather than only resolving a consumer need.

The extended-self perceived value refers to consumer preference for luxury goods that reflect their personal identities (Belk, 1988). According to the extended-self framework, consumers desire to associate with specific reference groups that represent their identities and dissociate with those that do not (Belk, 1988). For example, some marginalized consumers represent low-income people of color who may use luxury brand consumption as a coping mechanism to combat their stigmatized social status (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). Their luxury brand consumption is an extension of their identities and projects to others their status for possible in-group acceptance. Thus, luxury consumption reflects social norms that may be commonly practiced by consumers.

Social Norms of Luxury Brands

Aside from perceived values, luxury brand consumption also consists of social normative behavior that is common among consumers. Highlighting the following social norms – materialism, social comparison, benign envy, inconspicuous consumption, and unexpected outcomes – demonstrate the substantial influence luxury brands have on consumers. Furthermore, the influence of luxury brands on consumers also supports the

need to study luxury brand mentions in reality television because marketing communications drives the suggested social norms (Belk, 2011).

Materialism

Over the last 100 years, the growth of high consumption has become socially acceptable and trendy among consumers because they desire happiness and success (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Persistent advertising and excessive public consumption are contributing factors to consumer material pursuits (Belk & Pollay, 1985). But limited research has explored the relationship between luxury brand mentions and materialism. Studying luxury brand mentions featured in reality television is an appropriate context to investigate the promotion of materialism as it is unknown how such mentions may impact consumers.

Materialism is defined as "the importance a person attaches to material possessions and the belief that certain possessions are the primary source of happiness" (Belk, 1985; Belk, 2001, p. 293). While one researcher argued materialism inspires consumers to work harder and pursue professional goals, another research team suggested otherwise (Belk, 2001). Materialism is also considered counterproductive with collective-oriented values such as family cohesion, community ties, and religious fulfillment (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). When consumers become preoccupied with material items, research suggests they are likely to be self-centered and may also experience financial ruin (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Wooten, Harrison, & Mitchell, 2011). Material consumption erodes important values of collectivism for community

improvement (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). A contributing factor to collectivism erosion may reflect social comparisons among consumers and their peers.

Social Comparison

The public display of luxury brands signal consumer desire for approval from reference groups. However, consumers also evaluate their status using social comparison, which is an assessment of one's talents and abilities based on the success of others (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison is more than judging one's value with individuals they may know. The behavior also includes evaluations of others whom one may not know. When consumers compare themselves to a perceived similar other with the same social class whom they see in the media, consumers are inclined to share similar luxury brand preferences (Mandel, Petrova, & Cialdini, 2006). Further, they also believe the preferences are attainable in the future (Mandel, Petrova, & Cialdini, 2006). While sharing the same social class is a prerequisite for social comparison with strangers, research is needed to explore potential social comparisons between strangers with different social class statuses. Social comparisons between consumers and reality television cast members may exist because of luxury brand mentions featured in the programs that evoke emotions.

Benign Envy

The level of aspiration consumers feel when viewing others through an upward social comparison defines benign envy (Belk, 2011). Unlike envy proper, which involves

unpleasant, destructive emotions when people compare unfavorably with others, benign envy includes feelings of admiration of someone else who is deserving of high status (Smith & Kim, 2007). More importantly, the envy emotion is a behavior reflecting consumer desire to level up with the envied other based on the display of luxury brands (Belk, 2011). Conspicuous luxury consumption signals to others that consumers may achieve the same status by purchasing the same brands. Marketing communications of luxury brands has driven consumer benign envy (Belk, 2011). It is unknown how luxury brand mentions featured in reality television encourages benign envy. This dissertation research will investigate possible emotions of consumers when viewing reality television cast members consume luxury brands.

Inconspicuous Consumption

While some consumers prefer conspicuous consumption, other consumers wear more subtle brands for social class distinctions (Berger & Ward, 2010). "Bandwagon" and "snobs" describe two different consumer groups who engage in luxury consumption (Leibenstein, 1950; Ghosh & Varshney, 2013, p. 152). "Snobs," or insiders, generally prefer higher-end brands for exclusivity to distinguish themselves from marginalized consumers (Ghosh & Varshney, 2013, p. 152). This outcome may be apparent as luxury brands are promoted to the mass market through mentions in reality television programs. However, when "bandwagon" consumers desire acceptance from the "snobs", the "bandwagon" consumers misperceive the inconspicuous brand as lower quality and

becomes disinterested in the brand because of its subtle appearance (Berger & Ward, 2010; Ghosh & Varshney, 2013, p. 152).

Unexpected Outcome

Luxury brands are generally targeted to a specific audience. However, unexpected and unconventional business practices have proven to be successful in introducing new consumers to luxury brands. Counterfeit purse parties, a modified version of private Tupperware-like parties where replicated luxury brands are sold (e.g., handbags, wallets, watches, etc.), has emerged with popularity. Counterfeit purse parties introduce luxury brands to consumers who may not otherwise purchase authentic Louis Vuitton purses (Goseline, 2009). Some consumers may attend purse parties to purchase similar, but counterfeit, luxury brands featured in the media. However, inferior counterfeit products purchased at purse parties during product trials encourage consumers to buy authentic luxury brands later. Consumers are willing to buy authentic luxury brands at retailers because they seek both status and durability in luxury products (Goseline, 2009).

CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY FRAMEWORK

The broad nature of luxury brand mentions in television suggests further research is necessary to examine the social, cultural, and economic implications of luxury brand mentions on consumer culture. A consumer culture theory approach is a suitable theoretical framework to research this phenomenon because it "refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the relationship between consumer actions, the

marketplace, and cultural meanings" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868). Instead of studying consumption habits within one group based on values shared by society, consumer culture theory “explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader socio-historic frame of globalization and market capitalism” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869).

The major contribution of consumer culture theory research acknowledges other important influences, social and cultural, and not just economic influences that impacts consumption. Many marketing scholars implement a consumer culture theory approach in research to address the social and cultural nature of specific consumption. For example, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) used consumer culture theory to study social views associated with authenticity of objects by exploring factors impacting consumer decision-making process based on identity benefits. Similarly, the consumer culture theory lens also offered insight about shifting social capital and gender roles among stay-at-home fathers (Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013). These scholars, among others, used consumer culture theory to best understand the lived social and cultural experiences of consumers in varying contexts. Therefore, applying a consumer culture theory approach to this research is appropriate because prior studies only examined the functional and economic influences of brand mentions. The social and cultural implications of luxury brand mentions that may impact consumers, suggest a lack of research in marketing communication scholarship. Using a consumer culture theory approach in this dissertation research will explore how luxury brand mentions in reality television influence the daily lives, identities, and buying habits of consumers.

Chapter 3: Study One: Content Assessment

Using two distinctive studies addressed two different inquiries to unfold the impact of luxury brand mentions on consumer culture. Study One examined luxury brand prominence and frequency using a content assessment. Data collected during Study One revealed how luxury brand mentions were featured in reality television and served as stimuli in Study Two to gauge consumer reaction to such mentions using depth interviews. Study Two also explored how luxury brand mentions influence consumer identity, brand perceptions, and purchase intentions. The depth nature of the phenomenological inquiries warranted a dual-method approach to capture the broad cultural phenomenon of luxury brand mentions. Additionally, the distinctiveness of both studies integrated together offered a richer analysis of the data. Therefore, this research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are luxury brand mentions integrated into the lifestyle-oriented reality television sub-genre?

2. How do luxury brand mentions provide support of narratives and meta-narratives of reality television shows that depict affluence and materialism?

3. What are the social, cultural, and economic implications of luxury brand mentions? How do consumers react to those mentions?

Next, a discussion of the context, reality television, and its role in this dissertation is addressed. That discussion is followed by the introduction of Study One, which reviews the research method, design, procedures, analysis, and results.

REALITY TELEVISION CONTEXT

Recall that the dissertation research focus was investigated using the context of reality television. Most brand mentions have been studied within scripted television and less frequently in reality television programs, with the exception of one study. The cultivation of fashion consumption was examined in an Australian reality television show featuring prominent fashion brands (Sherman & Arthur, 2012). But only one cosmetic brand mention integrated in the show was used as stimuli to gauge cultivation effects. Thus, a deeper inquiry is necessary to broadly investigate the impact of such mentions using more stimuli.

The cultural nature of reality television differs from traditional television because it gives the perception of being scripted and more natural. Reality television also features non-professional actors in natural living environments with heavy brand messages (Nabi, 2007). Multiple sub-genres exist within reality television programming, but this research explored reality sitcoms. These sitcoms are similar to traditional television sitcoms, but are presented as unscripted and follow the lives of cast members. The distinctions of both television genres and how brand mentions may exist presents a gap in knowledge and warrants further investigation. This dissertation research aimed to determine how luxury brand mentions appear in reality television sitcoms and its influence on consumer culture. No extant research exists on luxury brand mentions or multiple brand mentions featured in a reality television context. This dissertation research is the first to explore both integrated elements to better understand the importance of such mentions and to distinguish its differences from features in traditional television.

Reality television attracts millions of viewers and flourishes due to its low-budget programming (Deery, 2012). The number, frequency, and presence of luxury brand exposures consumers may view while watching reality television is unknown. Therefore, this dissertation research was necessary to expand knowledge and determine how the social, cultural, and economic implications of such mentions in reality television impacts consumers. This dissertation research explored how luxury brand mentions are depicted differently within the reality television genre based on the lived experience of consumers. Studying how consumers react to luxury brand mentions in reality television was significant because results demonstrate the prominence and influence of luxury brands in society, which may present more compelling results than non-luxury brands integrated in traditional television programs.

METHOD: CONTENT ASSESSMENT

Using a content assessment, research question one was addressed by investigating how luxury brand mentions were integrated in Season 3 *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami on E!* network. A content assessment is not a content analysis, but is a "discovery-oriented procedure" that takes "an open-ended look at advertisements" and extensively reads large quantities of media (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2002, p. 3). A content assessment "allows an integrated perspective, based on all of the elements of an ad, to emerge" as themes from the data (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2002, p. 3). In contrast, content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description" of communication (Berelson, 1952, p. 55). Conducting a traditional content analysis only

notates the frequency, positioning, and product categories of brand mentions found in a show. Recording only the quantitative measures of media content alone will not reveal the complex story of luxury brand mentions. Marketing communications researchers have used content assessments to direct their investigations (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2002; Spears & Germain, 2007; Thomas, 2013). For example, a content assessment identified rhetorical strategies and other ad elements including metaphors or rhymes of magazine advertisement copy, which had not been studied previously in research on advertising style (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2002). In another content assessment study, Thomas (2013) investigated product types, ad appeals, and creative elements found in magazine advertisements.

Similar to the content assessment used in this current dissertation research, a few researchers conducted content analyses on brand mentions featured in television (Avery & Ferraro, 2000; LaFerle & Edwards, 2006; van Reijmersdal, Neijens & Smith, 2007). Their research offered insight about brand appearances, but more knowledge is warranted to reveal specific details about brands. For instance, Avery & Ferraro (2000) did not include product types or categories in their study. However, LaFerle & Edwards (2006) included the frequency count of the number of product mentions per product categories. Studying the types of brands integrated in television is important because it reveals consumer exposure to brand messages. But a gap exists that does not address the types of brands and specific brand names integrated as brand mentions. Hence, the content assessment is a valuable contribution to study these important units of analysis.

Data Sample

The data sample consisted of 12, one-hour episodes of reality television show, *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami Season 3*. The series aired January 21, 2013 through April 7, 2013 on cable network *E!*. *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* was selected for several reasons beginning first with its reality television genre style. While several types of reality television genres exist, gamedocs (e.g., *Survivor*, *Fear Factor*), talent competitions (e.g., *American Idol*), docusoaps (e.g., *The Real World*), *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*, was classified as a reality television sitcom (Nabi, 2007). Reality television sitcoms follow the lives of cast members and offer viewers a peek into their personal lives (Ouellette & Murray, 2004; Nabi, 2007). The sample selected for this study trails sisters, Kourtney and Kim Kardashian, as they share their daily lives while living in Miami.

Further, it is understood that neither Kim nor Kourtney are professional actresses, which are key dimensions of reality television. However, they occupy an emerging space in pop culture as contemporary celebrities, meaning they are well-known, for being well-known, and not for performance talents (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). Current media trends, such as social media, provide visibility and distribution of contemporary celebrities which propels Kourtney and Kim's notoriety. Their rise to celebrity status presents new implications of reality television cast members and their influence on consumer culture.

Additionally, *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* depicted luxury brands that became a persistent third cast member in the program. Prominent luxury brand mentions integrated in the show reflected the unique culture of reality television and its potential

influence on consumers. The inclusion of such mentions were unique because luxury brands possess more aesthetic social values than standard goods. Also, the Kardashian family reality television franchise has been successful. *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* was the third spin-off show that originated with the 2007 launch of *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, which consisted of nine seasons. Kim garnered independent success as the highest-paid television star earning $18 million in one year in 2010 (Streib, 2010). Kim's pop culture status also suggested *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* was a suitable data sample to investigate luxury brand mentions as she was the leading cast member in the program.

Data Collection and Coding

The investigator digitally-recorded each of the 12 one-hour episodes using a Time Warner DVR device. Luxury brand mentions were coded by the investigator using emergent coding categories to closely assess brands and examine differences and similarities of mentions. Coding categories were created based on the inquiry of this research and adopted from similar content assessment and analysis studies (Thomas, 2013; Harrison & Thomas, 2013; LaFerle & Edwards, 2006; Avery Ferraro, 2000). The coding categories were pre-tested by the investigator and a research assistant who coded luxury brand mentions in a reality television show. Coding categories included atmospherics, brand mention appeal, target audience, celebrity endorser, prominence, product category, age group, and product class. The investigator used a customized data-coding sheet, Individual Episode Code sheet in Appendix A, which was similar to coding

assessments conducted by several marketing scholars (Harrison & Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2013; LaFerle & Edwards, 2006; Avery & Ferraro, 2000). The data coding sheet was organized and labeled by show name, season, episode, and airing date, in addition to each ad element that served as unit of analyses.

Data collection consisted of two data coding steps to maintain the rigor, value, and consistency of the data. The investigator first coded for luxury brand mentions featured in each show while viewing the pre-recorded episodes using the DVR playback feature. Luxury brand mentions included unique mentions, the first visual or verbal appearance of a brand, and complete mentions, which accounted for each subsequent appearance. Data collection and coding for each brand and episode took approximately one to two hours. Specifically, luxury brands prominently, incidentally, or sometimes inconspicuously depicted in both verbal and visual formats, were coded using the prominence category. The coding sheets were dated and individually labeled using each episode name (e.g., Episode 1: "Welcome to Miami") and brand. Luxury brand mentions featured more than once were recorded each time within the same coding sheet for each brand using one tally mark or more if necessary. Additional critical assessments of brand mentions were coded on a needed basis.

Each unit of analysis was assigned a nominal code for each category option. For example, the atmospherics individual code referred to the brand mention location, and was recorded as indoor (IN), outdoor (OD), or both (B). This nominal coding assignment continued throughout the coding process for the other categories. Upon completion of data collection in step one, the data was transferred to the master coding sheet for the

second step. For coding validity, a research assistant was hired to validate coding consistency for two episodes.

To assess how luxury brand mentions supported both narratives and meta-narratives in reality television, the second step consisted of interesting data collected during the content assessment. Meta-narratives refers to a grand story that provides a total, comprehensive understanding of a specific account of historical events, experiences, or a cultural phenomenon (Lyotard, 1979). Narratives represent smaller accounts of individual stories that are combined together to compile meta-narratives. Luxury brand mentions were assessed across the entire season at the meta-narrative level, while narratives were assessed at the episode level. The meta-narrative assessment was a necessary second step to develop a broad assessment of the entire series. Each data entry was recorded and organized by episode date and brand. Executing step two provided an assessment of brand mention frequencies, product categories, and the most prominent brand mentions reflected from data entered in the master coding sheet.

Data Analysis

The first step of the data analysis included a simple counting of the number of brands, product types, positioning, and celebrity endorsements found in each episode. Assessments were conducted at both the episode and complete season levels within the context the brands were viewed. Culminating data from the episode level offered a thoughtful assessment of luxury brand mentions and reality television show meta-narratives. The analysis only enhanced the final assessment when each episode was

studied across the entire season. Examining the overall product types, brand positions and other related featured elements in the show, was compared to the broader discussions of consumption patterns, materialism, and brand symbolism.

STUDY ONE RESULTS

In following the research aim of this study, Study One addressed research question one and explored how luxury brand mentions were integrated in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* reality television series. Recall luxury brands are defined as brands that "evoke exclusivity, [have] a well-known brand identity, [enjoy high] brand awareness and perceived quality, and retain sales levels and customer loyalty" (Phau & Pendergast, 2000, p. 123-124). Price is not exclusively a measure of luxury. In some instances, less expensive brands, such as the Chevrolet Suburban, is deemed luxury because of its exclusivity and social status as a high-profile transportation option. Thus, luxury brands featured in the series that met the defining criteria above were identified and coded as such.

Content Assessment Overview

Results are presented at both the episode and season levels as reflected in the master coding sheet. Luxury brand mentions were quite apparent in the series; they represented 71% of the mentions. Specifically, 198 unique mentions appeared, of which 142 were unique luxury brand mentions. Out of the 130 brands featured in the show, 60% were luxury brands. The first appearance of a brand mention was coded as unique mentions. Each subsequent mention of the same brand was coded as a complete mention.

Luxury brand mentions encompassed several product categories and represented varying luxury levels. Table 2 displays total sums of luxury brands and mentions in comparison to non-luxury brands. Frequencies of luxury brand mentions were also reported across the entire season. Results indicated a high visibility of luxury brand mentions in the series, which was reflected by high integrations and prominence.

Coding and Intercoder Reliability

To measure consistency of the coding procedure, the investigator trained a coder to code luxury brand mentions integrated in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* to confirm intercoder reliability (See Appendix B). The trained coder was solicited to code for the frequency levels, positioning, and appearance of brand mentions in Episodes 1 ("Welcome to Miami") and Episode 7 ("We'll Always Love Paris"). These two episodes were selected to evaluate intercoder-reliability primarily because of the differences in volume of brand mentions depicted in each episode and its sequence in the series. Both the coder and the investigator coded independently. Thus, 1,127 units were coded by the coder during the intercoder reliability check. For Episode 1, agreement was reported for 96.2% of the cases, with an error rate of 3.8%. Intercoder reliability was also high for Episode 2 as well. Agreement was reported in 98% of the cases with an error rate of 2%. Both agreement percentages reported were acceptable because they were higher than the standard agreement rate of 80%, which is true for most content analyses (Neuendorf, 2002). High intercoder reliability was attributed to objective coding categories. Disagreements primarily occurred when coding the frequency levels and product class

status for brand mentions. When disagreements occurred, the coders revisited the episode to recount the frequency level of brands in question. Further, the coder struggled to distinguish between luxury and non-luxury products. The discrepancy was resolved as the investigator shared specific characteristics of luxury products which differentiates them from non-luxury products.

BROAD THEMES & UNIT OF ANALYSIS

While luxury brands were coded broadly using the Individual Episode Code Sheet (Appendix A), the focus of this dissertation research reflected the following broad themes that addresses the research aim: luxury brand prominence, luxury brand mention integrations, product categories, levels of luxury, and most frequently mentioned luxury brands. Luxury brand prominence refers to the positioning of brands featured in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Brand prominence is an important unit to measure because the integration indicates visibility and brand exposures consumers viewed. The following unit of analyses precisely captured the integration of luxury brands. Mentions that were depicted in the foreground were brands that were nearest in the camera view of viewers. The foreground position also represented mentions depicted with high prominence. Background mentions were less prominent, depicted further away, and may have been blocked by other images. Brands that were depicted in the foreground and in the middle of the screen were coded as centered mentions. Mentions coded in the margins of the screen were positioned further to the left or right, or near the top or bottom of the screen. Brand mentions that were featured for six to 10 seconds were coded as a

moderate flash, while brands that were featured from zero to five seconds were coded as a quick flash. The full shot code refers to brands that were completely visible in the mention, while partial shots, were brands that were not completely shown, only a part of the brand was visible. More specific operational definitions of the unit of analyses are addressed in Appendix C.

Brand mentions were also assessed by product categories and reflected the types of luxury products featured in the series which included the following: automobile, entertainment/technology, hospitality, food and beverage, retail, apparel, accessories, jewelry, luggage, service, health, media and other. Further, the data revealed luxury brands represented varying degrees of luxury that reflect not just price, but also social capital and status. Thus, the assessment of the luxury levels was necessary to demonstrate the variance in luxury brands depicted in the show. To investigate the volume of luxury brand exposures depicted, the frequency of mention integrations were assessed. This assessment revealed the five most frequently mentioned luxury brands consumers were exposed to when viewing the show. Collectively, the highlighted themes established a composite assessment of luxury brand mentions integrated in a reality television. The coding procedure was adapted from similar content assessments and analyses conducted by scholars who studied product placements or masculinity in television and print advertisements (Thomas, 2013; Harrison & Thomas, 2013; La Ferle & Edwards, 2006; Avery & Ferraro, 2000).

Luxury Brand Prominence

Study One primarily aimed to investigate how luxury brand mentions were integrated into reality television. Thus, luxury brand mention prominence was assessed based on four categories reflecting the positioning of the brands: foreground/background, center/margins, moderate flash/quick flash, full shot/partial shot (Thomas, 2013; Harrison & Thomas, 2013; LaFerle & Edwards, 2006; Avery & Ferraro, 2000). Each category represented two extreme units of visibility: prominence and subtleness. Luxury brands were more represented in the visible category in comparison to the less visible category for each prominence code, which is reflected in Figure 3. Thus, luxury brand mentions were highly depicted in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*.

Unique foreground luxury brand mentions appeared 86% of the time, while 14% appeared in the background. High visibility of luxury brands increases consumer exposure to brands. Further, this was also true for the actual position of the mention. Luxury brand mentions were centered 81% of the time, while 19% of the mentions were integrated in the margins of the screen. The type of video footage of the mentions also varied. Luxury brands portrayed with longer visibility for six to 10 seconds were moderately shown, which represented 71% of the mentions (LaFerle & Edwards, 2006). In contrast, 21% of the unique luxury brand mentions were quickly flashed to consumers. Brands that were quickly flashed on the screen were shown for zero to five seconds in a scene (LaFerle & Edwards, 2006). The Apple brand was always featured with a moderate flash even though the logo was blurred. Other brands, such as Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, Rolls Royce, and Chevrolet Suburban, were fully shown. The full shot prominence category represented 68% of unique luxury brand mentions. In contrast, 32%

of the unique luxury brand mentions were partially shown; meaning only part of the brand was visible to consumers. These results suggest luxury brand mentions were highly integrated in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Data also revealed consumers were exposed to more luxury brands than non-luxury brands.

Ironically, while luxury brand mentions were visibly prominent, so were incidental brand exposures. This form of brand mentions refers to advertising exposures that includes ad messages or images that are in the peripheral view, but are not the focus of attention (Shapiro, MacInnis, & Heckler, 1997). Such brands are commonly integrated in reality television and appear disguised, blurred, masked, or fuzzy to conceal the brand trade dress (Merges, Menell, Lemley, 2007). Eighty-one percent of the luxury brands integrated in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* were presented as blurred or obscured. Three of the most frequently mentioned luxury brands, Chevrolet Suburban, Apple iPhone, and Apple MacBook, were blurred in the series. Although the luxury brands were blurred out, parts of the trade dress was still visible including packaging, logo, or brand name.

Luxury Brand Mention Integrations

Aside from assessing the prominence of luxury brand integrations, the content assessment also provided the frequency of luxury brand mentions throughout the reality television series. Clear patterns of luxury integrations were apparent. The opening episode, “Welcome to Miami,” set the tone of the series through the integration of eight luxury brands as indicated in Table 3. But more importantly, each brand mention was a

luxury brand mention. Recall luxury brands are not only identified by price point, but other elements, such as social status and exclusivity, are also markers of such brands. Viewers were exposed to luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Chevrolet Suburban, Rolls Royce, and Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, which also represented the most frequently mentioned luxury brands in the series. Of the five most commonly featured luxury brands, the Chevrolet Suburban is a brand that is least likely to be identified as luxury. However, the price point of the sport-utility vehicle retails at $46,000 and is commonly driven by or for high-profile celebrities and dignitaries. More details regarding the most frequently mentioned luxury brands are discussed later.

Episode 6, "Bitch Slapped," displayed the highest number of luxury brand mentions--18-- in the season, which is quite high as the average number of mentions was 11. Theatrics were depicted as family dissension ensued, which may have presented rich integration opportunities to expose viewers to brand mentions. Further, Rolls Royce was integrated 11 times while the Apple MacBook laptop was featured eight times in the same episode. With the exception of one episode, luxury brand mentions represented 50% of the mentions in the series. The overwhelming integration of luxury brand mentions conveyed one important message about the reality television series – overt promotion of luxury brands.

Product Categories

Out of 12 product categories – automobile, entertainment/technology, and hospitality – represented the top three categories with the highest unique mentions of

luxury brands in the reality television series. Automobile luxury brands represented 27% of the mentions integrated in the show as displayed in Table 4. Exotic cars are associated with the Miami lifestyle. The strong presence of luxury automobiles, Chevrolet Suburban, Rolls Royce, Lamborghini, and Porsche, among others, promoted blatant messages of aspiration and status. Therefore, the mentions of luxury cars were a logical integration (Vigernon & Johnson, 2004). Also, the luxury car integration correlated with the Kardashian's public identity as high luxury consumers. Kim primarily, and sometimes Kourtney, were depicted driving luxury cars for business and leisure activities. The depiction of luxury car brands normalized its presence and use. Driving luxury cars was casually portrayed; yet still remained a constant throughout the series.

The entertainment/technology product category included electronic devices. Because the devices were used for entertainment, and obviously involved technology, the dual-category label was best suited to describe these luxury brands. Twenty percent of the luxury brand mentions integrated in the show represented electronic/technology devices. The volume of mentions in the series suggested entertainment/technology was a staple for the Kardashians, just as luxury cars. The product category included brands such as Apple, Blackberry, and Samsung, as the most prominent. However, Apple mentions were greatest because three different entertainment/technology products were featured: iPhone, MacBook laptop, and the iPad. Both Kim and Kourtney, in addition to secondary cast members, were depicted using one of the three Apple products throughout the series.

Lastly, the hospitality industry was represented by both hotels and parks and recreation venues. Hotel brands, including Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, represented 14% of luxury brand mentions integrated in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. The frequent integration suggested lavish accommodations were inherent and expected for the Kardashian family. Leisure activities were promoted through the use of these hospitality luxury brands. For example, Shangri-La luxury hotelier was featured during Kourtney's romantic rendezvous in Paris during Episode 7, "We'll Always Have Paris." The Kardashians also engaged in water activities at park and recreation venues that were considered a luxury brand. Miami Beach Marina was visually mentioned while Scott, Kourtney's companion, sailed a yacht with his affluent friend. The hospitality luxury brand mentions also conveyed the Kardashians' privileged status to consumers. Study One results revealed they have free time and flexible schedules enabling the Kardashian clan to enjoy such activities with ease. This is true as they were portrayed as non-traditional workers, not constrained by work obligations. Some luxury mentions were not brands used by the cast members. Instead, some hotels (Colony and Boulevard) luxury brand mentions were integrated as backdrops to signify a transition to South Beach scenes. The subtle mentions were integral to the reality television series to expose consumers to a luxury lifestyle.

Levels of Luxury

A variety of luxury brands were mentioned throughout the series. Findings indicated 72% of brands mentioned in the series were luxury, while 28% of brands were

non-luxury. The luxury brands represented different hierarchal levels of luxury – accessible, intermediate, and inaccessible (Alleres, 1990). Criteria for each level reflected price and accessibility to consumers, which is outlined in Table 5. For example, accessible luxury brands may also be considered entry brands to new luxury consumers because of their affordability.

Of the 142 luxury brands mentioned in the series, 61% were coded as accessible luxury brands. These brands included Chevrolet Suburban, Apple iPhone, Mirage Casino, Starbucks, and Makota Japanese Restaurant, among others. Some consumers may not consider accessible luxury brands as luxury. However, the brands were coded as luxury because of the price points relative to the product category.

For example, consumers may purchase a 30.6 oz. canister of Maxwell House coffee for approximately $6.50, or $3.25 per cup, which is affordable. In contrast, a Starbucks 12 oz. tall coffee, which is considered small, ranges from $1.60 to $4.00 per cup. The difference in price deems the Starbucks brand accessible luxury. It is affordable, but more expensive than a moderate brand. Consumers may purchase Starbucks coffee instead of Maxwell House because of the associated status linked to the brand. The Starbucks brand provides a destination to enjoy coffee and a social venue to meet with friends and colleagues. But most importantly, the contemporary coffee brand is generally publicly purchased and consumed, which transfers associated cultural capital from the Starbucks brand to consumers (Bourdieu, 1986). The same logic is true for the Chevrolet Suburban, which retails at $46,000 to $62,600. Although luxury may not be associated with the Chevrolet brand, the Suburban sport utility vehicle has a higher price

point than its competitor, the Ford Expedition, which ranges from $42,000 to $56,000 in price. Thus, luxury status is not simply linked to its high price point. Instead, the luxury status is linked to Chevrolet Suburban because of its use among high level government officials and celebrities.

Intermediate luxury brands represented brands that retail at higher price points and are targeted to higher income earners (Alleres, 1990). These brands represented 21% of luxury brands mentioned in the series. Mostly fashion retailers -- Neiman Marcus, Salvatore Ferragamo, and Sak's Fifth Avenue – and hotels – Eden Roc Miami Beach, Colony, and Boulevard hotels – were mentioned. Higher price points and exclusive shopping experiences at the fashion retailers, classified these brands as intermediate. These luxury retailers sell comparable intermediate luxury brands such as Michael Kors, Diane von Furstenberg, Tom Ford, Gucci and Fendi, among others, which are associated with middle luxury level, according to the typology. Also, some of the most common luxury brand categories (e.g. sunglasses, handbags, watches, and apparel) are sold at the intermediate luxury brand retailers (NeimanMarcus.com, 2014; SaksFifthAvenue.com, 2014).

The featured luxury hotels represented intermediate luxury because of their exclusivity and attraction of celebrity visits. Luxury brand mentions such as Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, Colony, and Boulevard hotels, are all located in the trendy SoBe area, also known as South Beach Miami. Colony and Boulevard hotels specifically represent iconic landmarks of the SoBe ArtDeco district which has been commonly featured as a backdrop in television and films. (NBCNew.com, 2006). Therefore, the

depictions of such brands are deemed as exclusive due to their association with the entertainment industry.

Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel's luxury status is elevated by its long-established history of celebrity guests. Since its origin in 1956, Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel has attracted many celebrities such as Elizabeth Taylor, Sammie Davis, Jr., Lena Horne, Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz, and others (Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, 2014). Further, as a hotel resort, Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel boasts the ELLE Spa, created by ELLE Magazine, which is the first ever and only of its kind (EdenRocMiami.com, 2014). The space provides luxury spa treatments such as Thai and Swedish massages to ELLE Spa VIP packages all ranging from $145-$1,000 (EdenRocMiami.com, 2014). A Starbucks coffee shop is also located in the hotel lobby. Although, this hotel is not located on Ocean Avenue, it still exists in a vibrant, trendy area, with other luxury hotels, such as the Fountaine Bleu, which was built by the same premiere architect (EdenRocMiami.com, 2014). Therefore, the associated social capital linked to the SoBe environment transfers to Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, suggests it is a prime production location for *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*.

Luxury automobiles and higher-end retailers represented inaccessible luxury and 18% of the total luxury brand mentions. Inaccessible luxury brands were casually mentioned and depicted a life of luxury and ease despite extremely high price points. The Rolls Royce, which retails at $260,000, epitomized inaccessible luxury. These brands are typically consumed by wealthy consumers who may own a fleet of exotic vehicles. Despite its exuberant price point, Rolls Royce was among the most frequently

mentioned luxury brands in the series. Not only was the brand mentioned throughout the series, but more than one model of the brand was mentioned– the Rolls Royce Phantom and Ghost. Thus, consumers were exposed to different models and colors which conveyed aspiration, status, and luxury.

Frequently Mentioned Luxury Brands

Following the purpose of this dissertation research, the content assessment also revealed the frequencies of luxury brand mentions. The frequency of luxury brand mentions was assessed at the episode and season levels. Out of the 130 brands mentioned in the reality television series, the five most frequently mentioned unique luxury brands included Chevrolet Suburban, Rolls Royce, Apple iPhone, MacBook laptop, and Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel. As expected, luxury brands were highly integrated in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Most may assume luxury apparel would be extremely visible in a reality television series featuring two sisters known for fashion couture and promoting family-owned boutique, D-A-S-H. But the product categories most mentioned did not reflect apparel or accessories. Instead, expensive automobiles, technology devices, and a hotel, were most frequently mentioned. See Table 6.

One apparent theme noted throughout the assessment and the series reflects the visibility of luxury brand mentions. Out of the five frequently mentioned luxury brands, only the Rolls Royce and Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel were unmasked in the integration. The Apple iPhone and MacBook, and the Chevrolet Suburban, were blurred. Neither boundaries nor conditions dictating the integration of masked and unmasked

brand mentions in media exist in the literature. As the investigator, I am not privy to that proprietary production strategy for reality television programs similar to *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. However, speculations may be drawn indicating neither Apple nor Chevrolet paid for brand inclusion and did not permit the producers to use their images. Conversely, it is also assumed perhaps Rolls Royce and Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel were contractually bound to be mentioned in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* series in exchange for brand promotion and greater visibility.

Chevrolet Suburban Accessible Luxury

Chevrolet Suburban was the most frequently mentioned luxury brands in the series. It was uniquely mentioned 10 times and completely mentioned 69 times throughout the season. See Figure 4. Chevrolet Suburban was the primary vehicle of choice for the cast members. The heavy integration suggested Chevrolet Suburban may be considered a third cast member as it was mentioned in all 12 episodes and generally at the start of the show. Criteria for third cast member status may include high brand mention integration and high visibility of transported brand experience. Automobile brands have performed as third cast members when integrated in traditional television shows as well, such as *Weeds* (Toyota Prius) and *Breaking Bad* (Aztec, Toyota Tercel, Dodge Challenger, among others) (Lindstrom, 2011; Autotrader.com, n.d.). Kourtney and Kim were depicted driving the Chevrolet Suburban when traveling for personal, business, and leisure activities. Despite the heavy integration, the Chevrolet Suburban logo was always blurred to disguise its trade dress. Viewers who may be familiar with

the brand body style, design, and trade dress, may likely recognize the brand name as well. Further, the disguise may warrant even more attention directed to Chevrolet, which still enhances the brand exposure for viewers. But brand awareness may not translate to favorable brand attitudes toward the Chevrolet Suburban. Research indicates consumers generally dislike generic or masked brands in films, which may also be true for reality television shows as well (Karrh, 1998). Such mentions are quite frequent in reality television programs like *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami.*

As stated earlier, Chevrolet is not always considered a luxury brand. But the aesthetics of the Chevrolet Suburban brand — high visibility, size, high integration, tinted windows, shiny black rims—all conveyed status and aspiration. Of course, the associated price point deemed Chevrolet Suburban as luxury as it is above average in price. Fuels costs are more expensive because of the larger engine size. Hence, the Chevrolet Suburban is not an economical vehicle by any means.

Rolls Royce – Inaccessible Luxury

The second most frequently mentioned luxury brand, Rolls Royce, was uniquely mentioned 10 times and completely mentioned 37 times in the series. See Figure 5. Undoubtedly, Rolls Royce epitomizes luxury. The high-end brand was considered inaccessible luxury because of its extremely expensive price point. It is safe to assume the two automobile makers most frequently mentioned in the series represent two extreme levels of luxury. Chevrolet Suburban offered an introduction to luxury for consumers, while Rolls Royce represented established luxury due to its long standing history and pedigree (Beverland, 2004). Rolls Royce mentions exposed consumers to

perhaps an unfamiliar, aspirational brand. The luxury brand appeared in the series at varying prominence levels. In some instances, the signature double R stitching was highly visible on all four car headrests as Kim drove. The hood ornament, which is an aesthetic exclusively associated with luxury cars, was also featured. Aesthetics highlighted and further conveyed luxury brand messages. Like the Chevrolet Suburban, the Rolls Royce car mentions were always black with black tinted windows. Prestige and mystique were also messages conveyed by the sleek body style of the Rolls Royce. However, the overt mention suggested Rolls Royce paid for inclusion of the brand in the show. Other conveyed messages regarding the unmasked inclusion may suggest Rolls Royce endorsed the Kardashian brand and lifestyle, aimed to reach a different demographic, provoked aspiration among consumers.

Mention modality was primarily consistent throughout Study One. The majority of the mentions were visual. However, 4.2 % of the luxury brand mentions were verbal mentions and included brands such as Rolls Royce Phantom, Bal Harbor Shops, Lamborghini, Jordan sneakers, Club LIV, and Ferrari. In the case of Rolls Royce, only one of the 37 mentions was verbal. During Episode 1, "Welcome Back to Miami," Kourtney shipped Scott's, white convertible Rolls Royce Phantom from Los Angeles to Miami. The vehicle was featured prominently as it was unloaded from a luxury transit carrier. Not only were consumers exposed to the luxury brand, but they also viewed luxury consumption. As a result, consumers were offered an inside view of affluent culture and status.

Recall multi-modality of mentions, both verbal and visual, signify plot placements. Research indicates when brands are integrated in shows, a discussion about the brand and its use plays a visible role in a scene; such plot placements convey stronger brand messages (Russell, 1998). Kourtney demonstrated her affluence by generously gifting Scott with his favorite car while in Miami. She explicitly stated the brand name and her desire to ship the luxury vehicle to Miami to acclimate Scott to a new environment. Scott expressed his appreciation for the kind gesture while mentioning the Rolls Royce model, Phantom. The entire scene exuded luxury as the brand was mentioned eight times in 75 seconds. This closing scene of the opening episode set the pace for the season. Luxury, materialism, and aspiration, were all messages conveyed to consumers through the explicit brand mentions.

Apple iPhone and MacBook laptop – Accessible Luxury

Broadly, electronics were highly integrated in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Apple iPhone was uniquely mentioned 8 times and completely mentioned 21 times, while the Apple MacBook laptop was mentioned 8 and 19 times respectively. The high integration suggested the depiction of electronics in the series may be convincing and legitimate to viewers. Consumers use electronics daily to communicate, operate business, and for entertainment. But more importantly, consumers also use Apple brands as status markers to convey to others. Apple is not just recognized for its productivity, but also the presentation of its usability, which is referred to as aesthetic performance (Alang, 2014). This term suggested Apple offered Kim and Kourtney a quality brand with great functionality, accompanied with a coolness appeal. Both the Apple iPhone

and MacBook laptop were used by Kourtney and Kim throughout the series. Kourtney and Kim were featured reading celebrity gossip blogs, checking social media accounts, hosting virtual chats, or conversing with each other, while using Apple products.

However, the integration of Apple products in the series was quite ironic. In total, the brand was mentioned 40 times across the season. Although the frequency level is quite high, the mention revealed a contrasting message. The Apple brand trade dress was blurred in every mention. While that may be true, consumers who are familiar with Apple brands are still likely to identify its logo regardless of the disguise. It may seem as if the cast was endorsing the brand. But in contrast, the brand logo was blurred. The contrasting depictions may have created ambiguity for consumers. This was true for several scenes. Scott, Kourtney's boyfriend was depicted using a concealed iPhone during an alligator hunting trip. The metallic plate of the phone and Apple logo were both visible, yet slightly blurry. Scott shifted the position of the phone multiple times, with the more disguised, visible position as most prominent. See Figure 6.

In another example, Kourtney was featured using her Apple MacBook laptop during a virtual chat session with her therapist. Her laptop was visually mentioned, but disguised with a purple cover. While the purple laptop cover was transparent, the signature Apple logo was still visible. The brand mention did not end there. Apple was still promoted as Kourtney's "MacBook Pro" was blurred, but was still visible. As noted earlier, masked brands are not always well-received by consumers (Karrh, 1998). Consequences such as disengagement may deter consumers from the Apple brand. See the blurred integration in Figure 7 and Figure 8.

The Apple brand mentions conveyed three messages. First, the high and frequent integration promoted status and aspiration to viewers. *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* depicted a desirable life and suggested to consumers what brands and products to buy. Research supports this finding as marking communications, brand mentions, promote idealized images of how life ought to be (Richins, 1995). Thus, the Kardashians' use of Apple products becomes a status symbol. Viewers are exposed to the brand use and how status is gained through the depiction, which is a common intention of consumers driven by technology consumption (Arbore, Soscia, & Bagozzi, 2014).

The popularity and frequent use of Apple products on the show and in society, may also convey the brand as widely accessible to all consumers, which classifies the product as accessible luxury. But the accessibility of Apple products may be relative to consumers' reference group and social class, as critics suggest the brand is not targeted to that demographic (Alang, 2014). Instead, Apple is considered to be primarily promoted to white, elite members of society (Alang, 2014). For example, college students attending elite universities are likely to use both Apple MacBooks and iPhones that they may have received from their parents. Thus, they may not consider the brand as luxury because of its ubiquity. But the Apple brand may not be a realistic product option for impoverished students and consumers who are bound by financial limitations. This is true as Apple has not been promoted as a mass market brand to all consumers, with the exception of the Apple iPod (Rajan, 2013). The impoverished may also perceive the brand as a luxury and cost-prohibited. Thus, such consumers are more likely to consider less expensive options. Apple is grossly considered an elitist brand by critics because of

its exuberant prices designed to maintain brand equity (Rajan, 2013). Apple MacBook laptops retail at nearly $2,000, while the iPhone price starts at $500 or more at the time this research was conducted. Neither products are necessities or considered economy goods. Many other inexpensive options exist with greater functionality, but the primary distinction is still status. The Apple brand projects quality and prestige, which was portrayed throughout the series.

Lastly, the blatant brand mention may also be perceived as endorsements. Because of the emergence of brand mentions in reality television with contemporary celebrities, celebrity endorsements perform differently. Typically, when celebrities promote brands integrated in advertising, or in film and television, the practice is referred to as celebrity endorsements (Karrh, 1998). But when contemporary celebrities use brands in reality television programs, the practice is considered informal celebrity endorsements, because it occurs outside of traditional advertising (Feinman, 2011). Consumers may be unaware if contemporary celebrities are paid to use brands, such as the Apple iPhone or Chevrolet Suburban, in reality television. They may likely assume the depicted use in reality television as authentic because the use occurs in the cast members' natural habitat (Feinman, 2011).

Aside from Kim and Kourtney using Apple products, D-A-S-H employees, friends, and Scott, were also depicted using them as well. The causal integration normalizes the luxury product and consumption. When Apple is integrated in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*, symbols of elitism and white privilege may also be conveyed and associated with the brand endorsements (Alang, 2014). Although, the Kardashians are

the by-products of Armenian immigrants, their racial identity and socio-economic class, signifies their privileged status of white – normal, superior, full access to resources and high quality brands – which are common descriptors of the Apple brand and its cultural position (Alang, 2014). Apple is perceived as the default brand in both the laptop and smart phone product category. Thus, both the Apple and Kardashian brand are normalized and presented as a desirable standard brand and lifestyle.

Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel – Intermediate Luxury

As the early primary film location, Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel was highly mentioned in the series and may be considered a third cast member. Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel was uniquely and visually mentioned five times. However, it was completely mentioned 17 times throughout the season. The series introduced Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel as the Kardashian family was shown entering the lobby during the first few minutes of Episode 1, "Welcome Back to Miami." Generally, the camera scanned the hotel signage to transition to the next scene filmed in the hotel condo. As seen in Figure 9, the hotel was highly visible. The prominence of the intermediate luxury brand would have continued. Recall Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel is considered intermediate luxury because of its broad price range and it allure as a frequent destination for celebrity visits. However, Kim purchased an opulent mansion and the filming shifted to her new home.

Secondly, Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel brand mentions were more substantive than the other frequently mentioned brands. This was true because hotel brands offer a

product and a service. Thus, the brand signage may have been featured outside the hotel, but the compelling brand experience was integrated inside the condos and guests rooms. Décor, lighting, furniture, and other home accents, all contributed to the allure of the hotel brand. Majority of the linen and furniture were white and quite contemporary. The extremely posh aesthetics and stainless steel appliances exuded chic and trendy styling. Hence, consumers were exposed to the full hotel brand experience in the show, and not just the brand alone.

NARRATIVES

To address research question two, narratives and meta-narratives were identified throughout the *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* season. Narratives represent smaller accounts of individual stories that are combined together to compile meta-narratives. The purpose of this inquiry served to understand emerging narratives per episode. Then, emerging meta-narratives of the entire season were also assessed and identified. Obvious patterns of narratives were apparent throughout the 12 episodes such as luxury brand introduction, self/brand promotion, and family ties. As stated earlier, materialism, aspiration, and elitism were identified as meta-narratives depicted throughout the series). Episodes 1 and 12, the beginning and end, both introduced and emphasized those suggested meta-narratives through luxury brand mention integration.

Luxury Brand Introduction

Luxury brands were highly promoted in the series. However, independently-owned or less familiar luxury brands were also reoccurring. A key narrative drawn from the series is luxury brand introduction. *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* featured and highlighted independently-owned luxury brands in the program. David Barton Gym, Bonpoint, Intermix, Sergio Rossi, and Eye Desire Eyecare among others, were just a few luxury brand mentions introduced to a national audience viewing the show. It is likely locals or those "in the know" would already be familiar with these brands. Unlike the more recognizable luxury brands, Apple or Rolls Royce, these less familiar luxury brands were more prominent. This is true as some of the brands were located exclusively in Miami or some in other large metropolitan cities, such as New York. Their prominence was highly visible due to unmasked trade dress. The conspicuous integration may suggest possible paid inclusion. It appeared the mentions were only integrated for promotional use. This speculation reflected insignificant plot scenes integrated into the show and to "indirectly" depict the brand.

For example, Kim and Kourtney completed a work-out at premiere boutique fitness facility, David Barton Gym, near the end of the season. While the fitness equipment was trendy and sleek, it is highly likely that the sisters could have completed the same work-out at home, in the family mansion. Due to their flamboyant lifestyles and high level of self-awareness, publicly exercising at David Barton Gym, was a more suitable decision aligned with their personal identities. Both Kourtney and Kim used the mention as an opportunity to align their personal human brand with another elite brand. They were also able to enhance their status through the transfer of cultural capital while

using the David Barton Gym (Belk, 1988). Secondly, visiting a gym also assigns a public commitment to meet fitness goals versus working out at home. Kim and Kourtney's visit at the upscale gym provided greater visibility for viewers. Multiple brand contact points of the gym were incorporated in the brand mention scene, such as several signs, the door entrance, décor, and more.

Kim and Kourtney's depicted luxury brand use is not only served as endorsements, but also provides brand experiences for viewers. Conspicuous consumption depictions in reality television may be considered a form of narrative advertising. Escalas (1998) defines narrative advertising as ads with "one or more episodes consisting of actors engaged in actions to achieve goals" and contains a "sequence initiated by some events and actions result[ing] in outcome(s)" and ultimately tells a story (p. 273). Reality television programs offer a rich medium to incorporate such advertising because of the vast volume of luxury brand mentions. Consumers can easily encode and process the narratives and brand consumption experiences through their imagination (Chang, 2012). Further consumers may also better learn more about brands through the visual events (Chang, 2012). Narrative advertising is an effective persuasive technique that offers more information and engagement about luxury brand mentions than traditional advertising.

Self/Brand-Promotion

Kim and her family are trending topics in media for a variety of reasons. But their efforts of self/brand promotion draw significant attention in media and elevates their notoriety. The entire Kardashian franchise has been founded on self/brand promotion.

Hence, the *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* series amplifies their brand promotion efforts. Managing the D-A-S-H boutique was Kim and Kourtney's purpose of moving to Miami. During the series, the D-A-S-H brand was uniquely mentioned two times in two different episodes. But the brand was subsequently mentioned 11 times in one episode and 23 times in the other episode, further reinforcing the self-brand promotion efforts. Additionally, the sisters continuously self-promote emerging brands in the Kardashian business empire. K-Doll and Kardashian Kollection are two brands the sisters promoted through media interviews, public appearances, and special events from Miami to Los Angeles to London. Brand promotion was further amplified with guest appearances of two of their other siblings, Khloe and Robert, whose appearances perform as human brands, as they closely connected with high-profile people whom are featured in marketing or media (Thomson, 2006; Rindova, Pollock, Hayward, 2006). The integration of Khloe and Robert's human brands in the series is supported by research. Consumer attachment to such brands strengthens levels of trust, satisfaction, and commitment to Khloe and Robert, but also the overall Kardashian brand as well (Thomson, 2006).

Not only did Khloe promote the family businesses with her sisters, her *X-Factor* role as judge was also integrated in the show. In one instance during the episode, *X-Factor* was mentioned 15 times. Several scenes depicted Khloe's selection and performance as the judge. Further, her husband's then NBA team, the LA Clippers, was also highly integrated. The Kardashians do not own the NBA team, but Khloe used the show to share her social capital and ties with the team by way of her husband, Lamar Odom. An episode opened with a discussion of Odom's performance with the Clippers

while Khloe wore the team's apparel. Also, Robert launched his sock line, Arthur George, in one episode, to keep up with his sister's many business ventures. The brand mention was featured on a backdrop and mentioned several times during a personal appearance event at Neiman Marcus. Viewers were exposed to Kourtney and Kim's lifestyle. But viewers were also exposed to the Kardashians many businesses through the self-brand promotion. Brand mention exposure may encourage brand awareness or potential purchase intentions. All of these frequent mentions of brands associated with the family business underscores their efforts of self/brand promotion.

Family Ties

Family ties, another noted prominent narrative, was depicted in nearly every episode of *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. The development and maintenance of the Kardashian family brand enterprise is credited to the efforts of mother and manager, Kris Jenner. She diligently built a highly successful empire through the brand promotion of her children in reality television and public appearances. Their luxurious lifestyle portrayed in media has deemed the clan the "royal family of reality television." From the opening episode featuring the Kardashian sisters moving into Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel with toddlers in tow, to Kim revealing her pregnancy and secretly spying on Scott's unfaithful behavior in the closing episode, family ties were apparent. The Kardashian family openly shared their collective successes and failures. Family ties were strengthened through their support of individual brand promotions and personal challenges. Further, the depiction of family ties demonstrated the incredible power of the Kardashian family. There's strength in numbers and profits, which is reflected in press

articles reporting their remarkable success. The Kardashians all support each other and reinforce the family's brand equity.

Viewers were afforded opportunities to peer in the lives of the Kardashians, to view their daily patterns and learn about their business ventures. But most importantly, they were able to become engaged with the family's luxurious lifestyles. Thus, emerging narratives – luxury brand introduction, self-brand promotion, and family ties – composed the greater meta-narratives – materialism, elitism, aspiration -- depicted in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*.

META-NARRATIVES

Recall meta-narratives refer to a grand story that provides a total, comprehensive understanding of a specific account of historical events, experiences, or a cultural phenomenon (Lyotard, 1979). As noted earlier and throughout Study Two findings, materialism, elitism, and aspiration, were the overall meta-narratives gleaned from *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. The high inclusion and prominence of luxury brand mentions in the series promoted these predominant brand messages to consumers. Discussions about each narrative follows below.

Materialism

The early footage of the show was filmed at Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, which exuded luxury and high status. But when Kim purchased a lavish mansion with excessive bedrooms and amenities, brand messages of materialism emerged. The family's original rented condo was quite posh and exclusive. However, Kim's mansion purchase demonstrates materialism as she placed more value on the mansion for hedonic pleasures

and not for utility needs. The additional space included multiple car garages to accommodate the Chevrolet Suburban and Rolls Royce vehicles, which further enhanced the sisters' materialistic interests. Because of the overall high luxury brand integration throughout the series, the entire show consistently promoted materialism. It demonstrated the sisters' vested efforts to been seen consuming or using luxury brands to enhance status. Kourtney and Kim appeared less interested in ethical behaviors in comparison to their materialistic values as they engaged in illicit activities throughout the series.

Elitism

The sisters exuded elitism in the show as they were depicted as members of the upperclass in society through luxury brand consumption. For example, Kim and Khloe meandered through a former crime scene in a dangerous inner-city Miami community. They approached the scene in a black Rolls Royce, which was a stark contrast in social class from the depicted community. When the sisters felt threatened, they were shown sprinting to their luxury car in signature red-bottom, Christian Louboutin shoes. Both the car and designer shoes, represent elite status and doubles as privilege as the sisters can easily enter and leave the impoverished community at any time. That reality is not true for marginalized groups who are bound by persistent poverty.

Aspiration

One of the predominant meta-narratives depicted in Kourtney and *Kim Take Miami* was aspiration. High luxury brand consumption conveyed aspiration to viewers by suggesting what luxury brands consumers should buy or use. For example, several designer retailers (Salvatore Ferragamo, Saks Fifth Avenue, Sergio Rossi) were depicted during Kim's leisure shopping activity. The depiction of Kim spending free time shopping, and not

actively working, presents the brand consumption as easily accessible and attainable by most people. However, that is not true for all consumers. Since such brand consumption is not realistically accessible for the average viewer of the show, it is apparent that feelings of aspiration is evoked among consumers. Some consumers may desire to acquire the same brands or lifestyle. Because the Kardashians represent a strong brand within pop culture, they inherently attract fans and viewers, which yields implications.

IMPLICATIONS

Heavy luxury brand mentions and active promotion in the series presented three predominant implications: aspiration, hyper-consumption, and false reality. Collectively, these implications reflect the meta-narratives found in the series, materialism, elitism, and aspiration. Reality television shows similar to *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* become a viable source of brand information for consumers. They view the introduction and use of brand mentions in the scenes both verbally and visually, which suggests effective brand processing of the mentions for consumers (Russell, 1998). Since materialism is highly evident in the series, it may encourage aspiration among consumers, and particularly marginalized consumers. This is as especially true as the majority of brands mentions were luxury.

Generally, luxury brands are promoted to exclusive markets only and not marginalized groups who may not be exposed to such brands. Therefore, Alleres (1990) luxury level typology stands to be challenged. The levels of luxury typology is loosely structured and provides opportunity for deeper theorizing. It seems the typology

promotes elitism, or middle-class status, as desirable and attainable as depicted in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. In fact, that discourse is not uncommon, as many members of society misrepresent their incomes, rather lower or higher, to fit middle-class status as the status quo (Strum & Slaughter, 2012). Conversely, marginalized people may strive for that status to purchase accessible luxury goods although the goods are unattainable. Other important factors should be considered to classify products at varying luxury levels.

First, accessibility is relative to social capital and access to resources. Some brands are extremely expensive and may be considered intermediate or inaccessible for one consumer, but may still be obtainable through alternate means that do not reflect one's socio-economic class. Further, some products will not precisely fit a specified level because the typology does not specifically assign prices to the levels. Conversely, purchasing Apple products for some may be perceived as inaccessible while it is completely accessible for others. Thus, the frequently mentioned luxury brands featured in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* challenges Alleres' (1990) current typology and advocates for a more stringent structure of luxury levels based on the classification of the mentions. This is particularly true as some of the brands featured in the series may not be perceived by consumers as luxury or the accessible brands are considered more inaccessible for most consumers. Also, hyper consumption is a potential implication of luxury brand mentions featured in the series. Consumer exposure to such extreme luxury brand mention may induce consumption. Consumers may be curious to experience

similar brands for both utility and hedonic pleasures. Materialistic values depicted in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* may heighten hyper consumption.

Perceived realism is a common term describing reality television programs such as *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. It is understood the series is an "unscripted" reality program, but vulnerable populations (e.g. teenage girls) may perceive it as truly real. Thus, the extreme integration may lead to a false sense of reality as the luxury brands are attained and used with such ease. Some viewers may experience poor self-evaluations because of the elitism depicted (Wooten, Harrison, & Mitchell, 2011). Kourtney and Kim are depicted consuming luxury brands easily, while the vast majority of viewers can only view the consumption in television. These potential implications were explored and addressed in Study Two.

SUMMARY

Overall, the content assessment offered insights about the integration of luxury brand mentions. This preliminary study is very important to the field of marketing communications as it is the first research effort to investigate luxury brand mentions in reality television. Because of novel values – status and exclusivity -- associated with luxury objects and its meaning to consumers, studying luxury brands provided new knowledge about its integration in television programming.

Results suggested the exaggerated use of luxury brands supported the meta-narratives of *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. For example, the Kardashian family is extremely wealthy. The integration of luxury brands in the show reinforces the overall luxury lifestyle of the cast members (Vigernon & Johnson, 2004). Luxury brand

mentions featured in the series explicitly promoted materialism, luxury brands, leisure life, self-awareness, and overt brand mentions. Of the themes highly portrayed in the series, materialism and elitism was the most predominant. The high materialism promotion in the form of luxury brand mentions is supported by research which suggests marketing communications promotes materialistic lifestyles to consumers (Belk, 2001; Belk, 2011).

Chapter 4: Study Two: Depth Interviews

Study Two addressed research question three to investigate consumer response to the social, cultural, and economic implications of luxury brand mentions in *Kourtney & Kim Take Miami*. Similar to other marketing scholars, a phenomenological approach was used to understand complex issues regarding human life and to "enlarge and deepen understandings of the range of immediate experiences" (Goulding, 2005, p. 302; Thompson et al., 1989; Thompson, 1997; Thompson, 1998; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). A phenomenological inquiry was most suited for this type of research to explore luxury brand mentions in reality television, because it reveals how consumers react to, and draw meanings from, brands in their daily lives using depth interviews.

Depth interviews were appropriate for three reasons. First, the method is best suited when the goal of research is to understand consumer perspectives, values and beliefs about a phenomenon instead of predicting behavior (Braybrooke, 1965). Qualitative research methods such as depth interviews are resourceful because of their ability to seek rich and detailed information in a flexible format.

Secondly, the focus of this dissertation research was to determine the social, cultural, and economic implications of luxury brands mentions from the consumer perspective. Very few studies explored brand mentions using depth interviews with the exception of two. Researchers explored consumer response to brand mentions in film, while other researchers broadly assess consumer response to brands integration (Narsey & Russell, 2011; DeLorme & Reid, 1999). But neither study investigated consumer reaction to specific brands integrated in a medium. Thus, the investigator deemed semi-

structured depth interviews as fitting for this research inquiry and conducted the study. Semi-structured depth interviews are guided by a predetermined list of questions, but allow informants to freely share depth insights without restrictions (Berger, 2000). It is important to note informants are not simply viewed as consumers. Instead, informants may also purchase featured brands, but their immediate reactions to luxury brand mentions may reflect their personal identities (e.g., mothers, teachers, students) or class status. Probing to best understand how consumers perceive such brands was the overall aim of this dissertation research.

Recall that this dissertation research is the first to investigate a specific brand mention type (luxury) integrated in reality television using depth interviews. Prior research explored the integration of standard, or non-luxury brands, mentioned in traditional television, video games, or films. But considering the social value and exclusivity of luxury brands, depth interviews are useful to investigate how consumers perceive such brands and other social implications. This is particularly important to explore because excessive consumption is depicted by contemporary celebrities in reality television shows, like *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Results in this study do not claim to offer a comprehensive record of women's' perception of luxury brands. Instead, it is one examination to establish the values and meanings of this unique branding phenomenon.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

A theoretical sample was used and describes participants who represent or are appropriate for a study based on their knowledge of the research topic (Charmaz, 2003). Using this approach, the investigator did not seek generalizability or representativeness, and therefore focused more on sample adequacy than sample size. Informants were recruited in several ways based on three points of criteria: interests in luxury brands, reality television, and pop culture. Some informants were solicited using campus announcements at the University of Texas-Austin. Others were recruited using a snowball sample, a non-probability sampling technique, where initial informants referred potential informants at the end interviews. Some informants were recruited through personal contacts of the investigator. Informants were compensated with $10 Target gift cards in exchange for their participation in the study.

DATA SAMPLE

Twenty women between the ages of 19 and 33 represented the data sample. The demographic of the sample, both age and gender, was selected because it was the same demographic group that viewed sister show, *Kourtney & Kim Take New York* (Nadaud, 2011). Also, the parent show, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, along with the *Real Housewives* franchise, were reported as the two most popular reality television shows among women (Hazlett, 2012). Theoretical saturation occurred, which implied additional data collection would not offer new insights, or new identified themes in this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This is true as one occurrence of data was sufficient to

understand the studied behavior, which is common in qualitative research (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003).

Out of the 20 informants, 14 of the informants self-identified as black or African-American. The sample consisted of 14 graduate and undergraduate students, five working professionals and one informant reported as unemployed. Predominantly, or 75% of informants, reported their socio-economic class as middle class, which ranged from lower to upper middle class. Upper-class status was represented by one informant or 0.05%, and 1.5% represented lower class informants. See Appendix F for more details about informant demographic information. Pseudonyms were assigned to each informant to maintain anonymity.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS & DATA COLLECTION

Two research instruments were used for data collection: a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D) and five video clips of frequently shown luxury brand mentions identified in Study One. In regards to the semi-structured interview protocol, two pretests were conducted with women who met the participation criteria for the study in March 2014. The cohesion, organization, and time allocated to conduct interviews were assessed. Adjustments were made to the organization of questions for enhanced interviewing flow.

Twenty depth interviews were privately conducted and audio-recorded at the convenience of informants during March 2014 and April 2014. Four of the interviews were conducted by phone and audio-recorded as some informants lived in different

locations. Following a semi-structured interview protocol, a broad list of questions reflecting common themes in the literature were asked such as brands, brand mentions, luxury consumption, authenticity, perceived realism, purchase intentions, and public policy issues. Inquiries reflected guided introspection, which refers to investigators asking informants to introspect or think verbally about themselves and interpersonal experiences with others related to a subject in an audio recorded format (Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993). Follow-up questions were prepared as well for further investigation when necessary.

The second research instrument included five video clips used as stimuli depicting the most frequently mentioned luxury brands: Chevrolet Suburban, Rolls Royce, Apple iPhone, Apple MacBook, and Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel. Video clips were extracted from the pre-recorded brand mention segments and edited into one minute clips. Each individual video clip was digitally shown during the interview using the investigator's personal computer. Informants interviewed by phone viewed the stimuli prior to the interview. Stimuli were included to elicit informant response to the brand mentions and perceptions of authenticity. Specifically, informants were probed to reveal how luxury brand mentions influence their personal lives, identity, and perceptions of self. Interviews were approximately 90 minutes and were professionally transcribed and labeled by identification numbers and pseudonyms. Notes were written during interviews to promptly capture informant insights.

DATA CODING

It is important to note data collection, coding and analysis involved an iterative process; continual reflection about the data occurred during each stage (Creswell, 2009). After data collection, the investigator read the interview transcripts several times to discern meanings and take notes (Spiggle, 1994). Then the investigator uploaded and converted the transcripts to primary documents in ATLAS.ti, one of the top-ranked qualitative data analysis programs that marketing researchers frequently use (Catterall, 1998; Kozinets, 2001; Pullig, Maxham, & Hair, 2002; Thomas, 2013). The investigator wrote analytic memos for each transcript to summarize the contents of transcripts after reviewing them (Drumwright, 1996; Strauss, 1987). Detailed information was included in the memos regarding the "informants, phenomena or process under investigation by thinking and thus writing and thus thinking even more" (Saldana, 2009, p. 32). Memos launched the first draft of the study findings. The memos started the process of open coding, where each line of data was closely examined, and initial coding categories and themes were developed (Drumwright, 1996; Strauss, 1997). Data coding included grounded theory, a common social science research approach which systematically categorizes codes in several coding cycles that ultimately leads to new theory development (Glaser & Straus, 1967). Thus, codes were assigned to specific texts within transcripts. Coding procedures included the following types: free (pre-existing coding scheme), open (coding without restrictions), axial coding (making connections between codes using inductive analysis), and selective coding (the selection of central codes that are consolidated to broader themes) (Catterall, 1998; Saldana, 2009; Valor, 2007; Glaser

& Straus, 1967). More details about developed theoretical contributions are addressed in Ch. 5 Discussion.

DATA ANALYSIS

The initial coding developed during the analytic memo writing began the data analysis process using a thematic analysis approach (Drumwright, 1996; Lehu, 2004). The emerging code categories that were developed during the content assessment yielded larger themes for analysis (Motley & Henderson, 2008). Quite similar to phenomenology, thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative research and defined as "a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon" (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997, p. 3). Thematic analysis involves an identification of themes through diligent reading and re-reading of data, which leads to pattern recognition within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lehu, 2004). For example, each transcript was critically analyzed. The analysis process included initial coding and a second round of coding that led to category and theme development (Drumwright, 1996; Spiggle, 1994). The identification of common themes were an expectation of the data collection and revealed the influence of luxury brand mentions in reality television on consumers (Spears & Germain, 2007). The themes were analyzed across the data for even broader themes to unfold. Ultimately, each code was built to a larger code and linked different segments of data across the data set together (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Lehu, 2004). Major and outstanding themes were gleaned from the data are discussed later.

Trustworthiness is a key tenet of qualitative research. It provides confidence of the findings and that the findings are legitimate to be applied to new or alternative experiences (Bowen, 2008). There are several ways to ensure trustworthiness or reliability in qualitative research. In this study, the investigator and research assistant shared and reviewed initial codes for accuracy (Creswell, 2009). Also, the investigator documented the steps for checking and rechecking the data; verified coding definitions by comparing data with codes and writing memos. Negatives instances of contradictory themes found in the data were identified and dismissed (Bowen, 2008; Gibbs, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2003). These steps all contributed to the trustworthiness and theoretical saturation of the study (Bowen, 2008).

STUDY TWO RESULTS

Depth Interview Overview

Recall the overall aim of this dissertation research was to explore how luxury brand mentions impacts consumer culture. The snowball sampling technique yielded a data sample representing predominantly self-reported middle class black women. Hence, the uniqueness of the sample influenced findings and addresses informant identity and consumption habits. Following the grounded theory approach, the investigator used the intersection of informants' race, class, and gender to analyze their views. Further, the intersection was also used as a sensitizing concept to organize and address ideas gleaned from data. Sensitizing concepts describe "a general sense of reference and guidance in

approaching empirical stances" when conducting research (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). Acknowledging the social identity of informants, establishes a foundation for data collected in Study Two. It also provides a lens to analyze their perceptions of luxury brand mentions.

Secondly, informants' distinctive views offered compelling insights about their lives as socially-excluded consumers, which greatly differs from their white peers and other informants. Race, class, and gender, tremendously shaped data results. Informants' racial identities varied from the Kardashians who are second-generation white immigrants. They were not all avid viewers of *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. However, informants reported their interest in luxury brands mentioned in the show for specific reasons. First, Kourtney and Kim are known for their interracial relationships with black men and shapely body images associated with black culture. They also identified with the sisters' hyper-feminine gender identity. Informants expressed identification through compliments of Kourtney and Kim's apparel, make-up, shape, and other beauty aesthetics. Further, informants admired Kourtney and Kim's social status, business acumen, and marketing success. They believed the brands used by Kourtney and Kim in the show elevated the status and quality of the brands.

It is important to note informants recognized that their marginalized experiences as black women greatly differed from Kourtney and Kim's depicted lifestyles. Marginalization describes systematic exclusion from economic, social, political, and cultural access among minorities that are normally available to other members of society (UNESCO, 2000; Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994). Minorities experience marginalization

based on their identities, associations, experiences, and environments (Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994). Specifically, informants discussed marginalized experiences and barriers to educational, employment, healthcare, and housing pursuits. Informants reported that the lifestyle presented on the show was not a legitimate reality for their life. However, they still perceived Kourtney and Kim's lifestyle as lavish and desirable although it may not be attainable. This was especially true as informants believed the sisters' success was inherited and not based on merit, which is uncommon among marginalized groups. As a result of the data results, three predominant themes emerged and are addressed next: Intersection of Marginalized Status & Consumption, Luxury Brand Consumption Mimicry, and Social Implications of Luxury Brand Mentions. Themes were established after reaching theoretical saturation and no new themes emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Intersection of Marginalized Status & Consumption

Majority of the informants discussed their consumption interests and habits relative to their socio-economic class, middle or low. Ninety-five percent of the informants were women of color, representing Asian, African-American, and Hispanic cultures as indicated in the Informant Table (Appendix E). Informants' gender, class, and racial identities, deemed the sample marginalized and represented intersectionality. Both people of color and women are considered marginalized because of the discrimination associated with those identities. Because women of color carry the burden of a dual marginalized status, their identity is referred to as intersectionality. This term, commonly

used in critical and feminist theories, describes the intersections of oppression and discrimination (e.g. racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism), which cannot be examined separately (Crenshaw, 1989).

Results indicated informant's racial and gender identities greatly influence their perceptions of brands, luxury, and consumption patterns. Further, intersectionality also presented broad consumption implications related to informant's marginalized status. Hyper consumption, which is a common practice among stigmatized groups, is considered a basic human need according to research (Velben, 1899). However, hyper consumption desires are elevated by the marginalized status of consumers, which shapes identity (Crockett, 2013; Crockett, 2008; Lamont & Molnar, 2001). This insight is highly apparent in this study as many informants shared their identity development and consumption experiences. Informants' identity development was driven by striving and aspirational efforts for equality in a privileged society.

While all but two African-American informants reported their income as lower-class, consumption patterns and motivations were similar for both lower and middle class groups. Informants who self-identified as middle class, in several cases misrepresented their socio-economic class. This is true as many Americans define themselves as middle-class due to varying criteria such as education, income, or career, which are all relative to one's geographical and cultural background (Shaprio, 2004; Mason & Sullivan, 2010). Both lower and upper class groups identify with a median income level because it is socially-acceptable (Strum & Slaughter, 2012). Middle-class designation reflects an ideal lifestyle that most Americans strive for: college education, home ownership, nice car,

progressive career, two children, and a dog (Shaprio, 2004; Newman, 2012; Fiske, 2011; Dollarhide, 2012). For example, one informant self-identified as middle class although she passionately expressed striving efforts and establishing a new foundation for future generations in her family. Striving for a better quality of life is a common experience for working-class groups, and especially true for the black working class (Patillo-McCoy, 1999). Thus, the informants' candid insights and social class designation, demonstrated why lower class blacks aspire for hyper consumption depicted in shows like *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*.

Informants' luxury interests and consumer habits may be contributed to combating their marginalized status in America, which is referred to as marketplace activism (Branchik & Davis, 2008). This form of activism appropriately describes consumption patterns promoting "social, economic, and political advancement" (2008, p. 38). Informants were compelled to assert their preferred status as privileged. They used their conspicuous consumption habits, which included goods such as luxury apparel and technology devices, to demonstrate their agency in society and the marketplace. Informants' desire to consume luxury brands offered them perceived economic power, which they believe was comparable to their white privileged peers (2008). The following quote is a characteristic of informants who recognized the signaling effects and benefits of public luxury brand use.

> Because if I wear a pair of flat shoes from Old Navy, it doesn't matter, [I] go through the airport. It can be a cute pair of flat shoes. Someone can assess me. They would never know it's an Old Navy pair of flat shoes. They probably just… think, 'she has on flat shoes, she's going through the airport, she's smart, and she

> has to be quick'. I have on a pair of Michael Kors shoes, people will move out the way a little quicker because 'she has on Michael Kors shoes.' (Ellen, 33).

Ellen's preparation for first-class travel includes luxury brand attire and no jeans by recommendation of her aunt, who is an airline professional. The Michael Kors luxury brand afforded Ellen cultural capital, or non-financial assets used to promote social mobility (Bourdieu, 1977). Ellen used the luxury brand to seamlessly navigate public spaces frequently occupied by the elite as "one of them" or the white majority (Newman, 2012). While she self-identified as middle-class, Ellen still recognized her status as underprivileged and socially-excluded. She used consumption to affirm her desired social membership in society and social identity (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). Ellen's decision to conform to a desirable dress code for her marginalized class status, demonstrated vested efforts to seek respect, acceptance, and status (Lamont & Molnar, 2001; White, 2010). Her approach to managing the stigmatization indicates her dissatisfaction with her current status. Further, Ellen also offered an astute assessment of class that reflects the ideology of, essentialism, "which focuses on what is believed to be universal, inherent, and unambiguous "essences" that distinguishes one group from other" (Newman, 2012, p. 35). She acknowledged blatant class differences and power structures that prohibit disenfranchised groups like herself from achieving privileged lives.

> You want to go certain places, you have to do certain things. If you want to make a big deal about it, then you won't get to certain places as quickly as you could if you just said, "Alright." I mean it wasn't a big deal. Don't wear jeans. That's the way I saw it. I didn't look at it like I'm a basketball player and they're telling me to cut off my braids. I wasn't super attached. Give me a reason to dress up, because

> I'm very curious about knowing what that other world looks like, that privileged world looks like…because no one wants to be poor or they shouldn't. If you don't know what a privileged lifestyle looks like, it matters. I mean, everyone might not want to – but it matters more to me because it seems like something that they (the White majority) want for black people to be kept in the dark about certain things. So as long as that line is still there – people (the White majority) like that line. People (the White majority) don't want you to know certain things. That's why certain schools are better. That's why certain people have more computers at their school…people like to be divided. The division creates superiority. If no one is better than somebody else, then no one can control the other person. (Ellen, 33)

Racialized Consumption

Ellen's overall thoughts of her marginalized status were both complex and troubling. She aspired to join the privileged class. However, through her efforts of striving, Ellen expressed interest in sacrificing her current social status by critiquing consumption patterns more aligned with her racial identity. Specifically, Ellen rejected a dissociative reference group because of stereotypical consumption habits that are common among lower-class blacks (White & Dahl, 2006). Researchers refer to this behavior as a race-inflected class critique (Jackson, 2001). Ellen's critique was underscored when she disregarded the Chevrolet Suburban as luxury after viewing the stimulus. Despite the blurred out Chevrolet brand on the Suburban, Ellen was still able to recognize it and racialize the brand. She associated the brand as black, hood, and urban. Racialization refers to the practice of ascribing racial identity to a group or brand although they do not identify with the classification (Omi & Winant, 1986). She considered Chevrolet consumers as an out-group or sub-culture that is not highly-regarded among the elite. Ellen also believed the sport utility vehicle to be masculine because of its size, boxy-shape, and black color. She reported she would not recommend

a Chevrolet purchase for her son, due to its heavy police surveillance. Because of the widespread accessibility of Chevrolets in her community, Ellen did not deem the brand exclusive. Her decision to dissociate with the Chevrolet brand demonstrated a shift and conflict with her preferred identity as an upwardly-mobile striver.

> My thoughts on the Chevy brand are urban. Black, hood, urban. When I think about Chevy, where I grew up, everybody could get a Chevy car, and when they got their Chevy car, they put rims on it. They accessorized it. That's why I was like throw in the hood part, the hood component to it. For me, looking at that clip, him (Scott, Kourtney's beau) driving a Chevy, doesn't impress me. The experiences around it (Chevy) for me are police officers pulling over young black men. (Ellen, 33)

When further probed regarding her thoughts on the Chevrolet brand mention, Ellen shared an interesting observation. She applied a racial lens and referenced discriminatory practices when describing the Chevrolet brand. Ellen drew an association between her community where black men appropriate Chevrolet cars, outfitted with flamboyant paint jobs and customized rims, with racial-profiling. This cultural norm demonstrates an identity of distinctiveness, which is a common motive for material consumption among stigmatized groups (Shrum, Wong, Arif, Chugani, Gunz, Lowrey, Narin, Pandalere, Ross, Ruvio, Scott, Sundie, 2013). By racializing the Chevrolet brand, Ellen believed the mention was strategic in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Further, she also considered the producers' integration of an "urban car" within a privileged family as clever. She believed the brand mention reflected the Kardashian dating preferences. Ellen also described the vehicle as masculine because of its size and color. Therefore, she was very disinterested in the brand mention. Ellen's views on the intersection of race

and class integrated the show was very telling. Additionally, it also further underscores her race-inflected class critique.

> They're (producers or advertisers) just trying to associate it (Chevy brand) with another color because technically, they are still in Miami Beach. Kim and Khloe date black men, and so– it's the same thing. They are just putting different faces on it (Chevy brand). It's still urban. In that depiction, it's (Chevy brand) not driven by black people. But the people that I know who drive that car are black. So when I say that police officers are pulling over the black men, that's because there's a dysfunction there, in the sense of they're not doing something right. That whole family (Kardashians) represents dysfunction to me. All they did was take the Chevy and put it with different faces. (Ellen, 33)

Other informants may not have racialized the Chevrolet brand like Ellen, but nor did they consider it a luxury vehicle either. For example, Ana recognized a distinctive class difference between the Chevrolet brand and the Kardashian family status. She believed producers aimed to connect the brand with an elite, high-status family, too. Ana's views reflected her marginalized status as a black middle class striver. Marc Jacobs and Dolce Gabbana were luxury brands Anna mentioned throughout the interview as "real luxury," and did not consider Chevrolet within the same category. She asserted a keen sense of luxury meaning. Ana's thoughts are supported by boundary theory, which suggests "social groups and categories are behaviorally constituted, given meaning, and even dissolved in interpersonal and intergroup interactions" (Crockett, 2013, p. 16; Lamont & Molnar, 2002). In this instance, the majority of informants were black and they characterized the Chevrolet brand as ordinary and achievable; they designated a boundary defining luxury and non-luxury based on their social and cultural networks. Ana describes her views below regarding the status and mention of Chevrolet in the show, which was also shared by most of the informants.

> When I think of Chevy, I definitely don't think luxury. The fact that they now have associated it with a family who everyone knows to be very well-off financially, I think that kind of ups their brand in a way because it takes it away from them. It's just a Chevy or like a hardy, practical car, everyday car that you see everywhere. I think by putting someone of maybe a higher status (Kim Kardashian), (who) is famous and all of that in the car, makes it, I don't know, it cooler almost, or more desirable maybe. (Ana, 23)

Striving & Self-identity

All 14 black informants indicated a need for striving for social mobility. They desired to enhance their self-identity through attractive self-presentations. This is particularly true for black women, who represent intersectionality based on their gender, race, and class status. Their expressed interest for striving was triggered while viewing *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* video clips. Although the informants only saw one minute clips of the shows, they inspired by the lavish lifestyle depicted by Kourtney and Kim. They were reminded about their appearance needs and desires to consume new clothes and accessories to enhance their looks.

Informants emphasized the importance of "looking good" and constructing their self through brand consumption (Schembri, Merrilees, & Kristiansen, 2010; Harris, 2013). Publicly projecting their personal identity included vested efforts in money and time in aesthetics, such as hair grooming, make-up application, apparel selection, accessories, and more. These practices are also closely aligned with Kourtney and Kim as their aesthetic habits are commonly mentioned in media. This practice is frequently referred to as "dressing to the 9s" in the black community (Harris, 2013). According to informants, vested efforts to enhance and maintain appearances were driven by a need for

attention, to elevate social status, pride, and potential mate acquisition. Luxury consumption has provided marginalized women, like the informants in this study, a channel to assert striving efforts and self-identity development.

For example, Xena demonstrated striving efforts through luxury consumption to elevate her social status and to be the object of envy. She self-identified as low-income and explored luxury brands as early as 11 years old while school shopping with more affluent friends. Although her budget was limited, Xena reported she purchased a $200 Louis Vuitton handbag at the luxury retailer, with less money available to buy school uniforms. The impulsive purchase demonstrated common consumption habits among marginalized blacks to enhance their in-group identification within the black community (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). Research supports Xena's consumption pattern as a form of materialism. Xena attempted to construct the self by purchasing luxury goods that offer symbolic value and meaning (Shrum et. al, 2013). While Xena enjoyed publicly consuming the luxury handbag among friends thereafter, she regretted the purchase because of the expensive price and harsh criticism from her mother. She realized the handbag actually failed to offer satisfaction and it was no longer of interest (Burroughs & Rindfleich, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1993). The handbag was no longer attractive to her. Xena found the shopping experience more gratifying because she purchased an aspirational product deemed unattainable because of her income. Her post-purchase experience is considered complaining behavior and it was an affective action emerging from dissatisfaction of a purchase (Santos & Boote, 2003). The following quote was typical among black informants who desired luxury brands as children.

> Middle school's a rough time cuz you're going through puberty, you're going through changes, you're gettin' to learn about yourself, you wanna be accepted, and I think that's really when your personality starts to kind of like develop and form in middle school and in middle school there's a lot of bullies. It's crazy like a jungle, so you wanna be on top I think. I grew up in a really low income neighborhood, so everyone in our school was pretty poor. So to us, if we had that bag, that put us on top, like, we were on top of the food chain, so like no one really would impact us in a sense (Xena, 21).

Xena's early consumption behavior represents the drastic shift of African American upward-mobility in the United States. Through legislation of civil rights and affirmative action, African-Americans have been afforded opportunities to pursue education, corporate careers, and entrepreneurial endeavors, such as hip hop and fashion careers. These more professional, white-collar career opportunities, significantly contributed to the rising black middle class over the last 50 years. During peak times of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, only 385,686 blacks in the U.S. were employed professionally or maintained a business and were deemed middle class (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Through striving efforts and mobility, the rates have dramatically increased over the last few decades. According to the 2012 American Community Survey, 5,772,103 blacks have achieved middle class status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Thus, a new wave of nouveau riche emerged who practice conspicuous consumption. They represent 17% of the "Affluent African American" segment and earn $75,000 or more annually (Burnett & Hoffman, 2010). Income is not a prerequisite for conspicuous consumption. Even lower-class blacks engage in luxury consumption to not only mitigate their stigmatized status, but also for social membership acceptance. Xena, like the other informants, exemplify this practice. Black-oriented media targeting blacks promote the importance of such consumption and the maintenance of personal appearance (Branchik & Davis,

2008). Thus, some marketing communications messages also heighten hyper consumption desire among poor blacks to consume more than necessary. All of the informants contributed the marketing ploy of materialism to the media.

Decent presentations ranged from neatly-pressed designer brand clothing, trendy hair styles for Monica, to weekly barber visits for her brothers (Harris, 2013). Many blacks, and women in particular, are encouraged by elders to make proper presentations in public. Their charge is grounded in respectability politics, which dictates appropriate standards of social grace, speech, and appearance for marginalized groups. Politics of respectability also emphasize good manners and morals. Expectations of the politics suggested "good black women to counter racist discourses that used negative stereotypes to portray all black women as innately inferior" (White, 2010, p. 36). Hence, designer brand clothes for Monica and her brothers signaled to others they were respectable, of value, and not stereotypical images of poverty. While working at Dillard's, Monica's mother purchased brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, using an employee discount for her children. Monica recounts her experiences of striving in the quote below.

> That's what I tell people all the time. I don't have a lot of money, but I spend my money on what I would like to. I save up for certain things. I like nice things and my mom does too. I get that from my mom. When I was younger, we lived with my grandmother and we went through a whole lot of struggles. We lived in the projects and all that stuff, but people wouldn't know that because me and my brothers looked so nice. My mom doesn't have nice things because she was trying to give that to us. My mom worked at Dillard's, because she didn't have a degree, so she had to work all these different jobs. She was a teacher's assistant, and also worked at Kyle Foley's back in the day. I'm thankful for my mom for that, but a lot of times, I'm upset and I'm like, "Oh, I don't want to get this. I don't want to have this because my mom doesn't have it." I definitely just want to work hard and be successful for my mom and just give her everything that she's given to us because she has given us a lot. I know my brothers feel the same way. (Monica, 24)

Although informants were asked to assess the integrated brand mentioned in the video clips, informants initially admired Kourtney and Kim's outward appearance. They were curious about her make-up application, beauty care products, and apparel. Informants also shared how viewing the sisters in their natural habitat sparked introspection about their appearance. Roxanne also reported investing in her outward appearance as a routine habit. She thoroughly enjoys the daily investment in make-up, clothing, and accessories. Roxanne demonstrated striving through her public self-presentation which is a deliberate and legitimate component of identity (Goffman, 1959). Research indicates Roxanne's efforts reflected interests in negotiating a projected ideal impression to others (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Receiving compliments from others on her appearance heightened Roxanne's self-esteem level. It also affirmed Roxanne's fashion expertise. Further, such high stakes are placed on her appearance that on some days Roxanne adjusted shopping schedules or work routes to avoid as many people as possible to "save face."

> Shit, I mean I've got to look good! Excuse me, I have to – all of that's part of me, you know what I mean? I like to be dressed up. I like to look stylish and then, after a while, if you dress a certain way or people always identify with you – 'hey, you know, I really like your style. You always look cute.' You can't have a day when you slip. Like not at all. And then on top of that, people see you or watch you when you don't know that they're watching you. Or, especially not so much here, but when I was living back home, you could see people out there (in public) you could potentially date; you know what I'm saying? Or you could see somebody that's a friend of a friend who may not care for you, that's looking for you to slip, so you don't want somebody to come back and be like, "well, I saw Roxanne. She looked a mess', you know what I mean? (Roxanne, 28)

Roxanne's quote highlighted her desire to strive and shape her identity through apparel consumption. Self-presentation and impression management were important to her for romantic attraction, career success, and making personal friends, (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). Establishing an identity reflected her active self-presentation efforts and how she believed others would perceive her. Roxanne aimed to be recognized as a well-dressed, well-groomed, attractive woman. These are efforts black women have historically taken to comply with respectability politics and counter mischaracterizations as unintelligent, unpolished, and less respectable (White, 2010). Beauty care and self-presentation management was a common practice among black women during the 1920's as they strived for agency and employment in an oppressive society (Walker, 2007). As is true then, it is still true now. Roxanne's current beauty care efforts and compliance with respectability politics, suggests black women remain marginalized today and will always face a burden of acceptance and respectability that white women do not experience.

LUXURY BRAND CONSUMPTION MIMICRY

Recall the five most frequently mentioned luxury brands identified in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* were used to probe informants in Study Two. After viewing the five stimuli, – Chevrolet Suburban, Rolls Royce, Apple iPhone, MacBook and Eden Roc Hotel Miami Beach -- informants were most attracted to or influenced by MacBook and Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel. Informants either expressed interest in researching more information about the brand, were willing to consume the same or similar brand, or felt brand validation after viewing its use. Considering marginalized groups, including

women and people of color, have historically remained underrepresented in technology or forbidden to consume public venues, this research provides ironic findings.

Apple MacBook

Specifically, 12 informants represented Apple MacBook owners. Despite the brand's expensive price point and informant's income level, they overwhelmingly consumed Apple products. Further, the Apple MacBook logo was blurred during its depicted use. Informants still easily recognized the brand because of its obvious trade dress – the apple inscription on laptop back. The blurred appearance did not deter their interest and preference for Apple MacBook. Quality, functionality, and social status, were all drivers of informant interest in the Apple MacBook. This finding further underscores the strong brand loyalty and need for hyper consumption within the black community (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). In contrast, the informants expressed very little interest in the car stimuli – Chevrolet Suburban and Rolls Royce.

As stated earlier, consuming similar or the same brands, like MacBook and Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, was evident among 13 informants. The practice of replicating consumption patterns of others depicted in media, is referred to as consumption mimicry. Consumption mimicry reflects consumer choice and preference for products within a social context and in the marketplace (Tanner, Ferraro, Chartrand, Bettman & Van Baaren, 2007). Tanner et. al (2007) found that source credibility of the mimicked (Kourtney & Kim) was important to mimickers (consumers) and influenced consumption. For example, consumers are less likely to simply mimic celebrities just because they are

featured in advertising. Informants spoke highly of the successful business endeavors the Kardashian family manages. Thus, informants expressed they were more likely to engage in similar consumption because of the Kardashians' perceived business acumen, and not because of their fame in popular culture. Informants perceived them as trustworthy and knowledgeable of the endorsed brands (Till & Busler, 1998). Therefore, since many of the informants perceived the Kardashians as favorable, they were more interested in mimicking the consumption of both brands mentioned in the show, not just because of the family's notoriety.

The integration of luxury brand mentions also attracted informants' interests to the brands. Sherman & Arthur (2012) found the cultivation of consumption-related values, such as materialism, encouraged reality television viewers' "desires for thematically congruent brands" in shows (p. 529). This finding was highly apparent in the current research as both the Apple MacBook and Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel brands were integrated in the show and promoted materialism. For example, the Apple MacBook mention demonstrated the functionality and ease of use through Kourtney's FaceTime session when speaking with her therapist. The Apple MacBook plot mention and use was thematically-congruent in a scene as Kourtney previously mentioned she needed to speak with her therapist in Los Angeles (Russell, 1998; Sherman & Arthur, 2012). Aside from functionality, quality and congruency were the primary reasons why informants were interested or considered purchasing the brand.

Mimicry

Both Zelda and Ellen were reminded they aspired to buy a Apple MacBook after viewing Kourtney's use. This was true as they identified with the brand mention scene, Kourtney's gender identity and her cultural capital. Kourtney was depicted chatting with a therapist regarding a strained romantic relationship. However, the expensive price point posed a limitation for both informants. Ellen believed the concealed Apple MacBook brand was integrated as a teaser to instruct viewers of what laptop they ought to purchase. Ellen's insight reflected her disadvantaged social class and was reinforced when viewing a brand she desired, but could not afford. Ellen aimed to purchase a Apple MacBook soon and eagerly reported the exact price. The integration of luxury brand mentions such as the Apple MacBook, enhanced brand awareness among potential consumers (Keller, 1993). Further, informants believed *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* producers integrated the brand mention as a teaser to evoke aspiration among less fortunate viewers who desire the same brands and lifestyles endorsed Kourtney and Kim.

Ellen also believed using high technology afforded to the privileged will inform her of new tech features, such as FaceTime. Research describes Ellen's technology interest as status gains, which are considered important symbolic drivers for technology consumption (Arbore, Soscia, & Bagozzi, 2014). Further, Ellen shared her potential Apple MacBook use will also avail her to new social networks and elevate her status (LaMont & Molnar, 2001). Ellen's desire to practice consumption mimicry of the MacBook empowered her self-identity and contributed to her desire to connect to an in-group (Belk, 1988). Her quote below represents striving informants who wish to purchase a MacBook too.

> Mac, they're always ahead on the technology curve and what you can be able to do with technology. That's what I mean about being in certain places where you can [learn from others] … I have FaceTime on my phone, but I have never necessarily tried it until I saw somebody – you know what I'm saying? Until I saw somebody else in an "exclusive area" doing it. … then you walk around somewhere, you sit down in the Starbucks, you pull out your Apple computer. There's people in there feeling like 'she's one of us… privileged and smart'. Then it might not make a difference, but there are those little hints that it's a certain reason why you're getting treated a certain way. (Ellen, 33)

The luxury brand mention triggered a desire for Becky and Ana to purchase an Apple accessory for their MacBooks. Prior to viewing the stimulus, Becky indicated she was considering the purchase for a while. Her desires for a potential purchase demonstrated how imagery of product consumption in narrative advertising, such as brand mentions in reality television, is transported to viewers. The communication process informants' experienced is supported by the Transportation-Imagery Model (Green & Brock, 2002). Transportation is the primary mechanism in narrative-based belief change in reality television. Viewers are characterized as "close-in observers" who vicariously engage in consumption through the perspective of celebrities in reality television (Zheng & Phelps, 2012). Becky's immediate thoughts indicated the impact of luxury brand mentions in media, which is consistent with the practice of consumption mimicry and represents the insights of other informants who are MacBook owners.

> I noticed her cover was purple, so it made me think of Apple accessories and how I never actually got any, but looking at that made me (think). It sparked up that memory that I need to go to Apple and get a cover for my laptop or a protector or something. That one (MacBook stimulus) did have an influence on me because I do have that item and I do have needs for that item, for my laptop, and so it did spark a memory, a reminder of that. 'You did want to look into a cover and you did want to look into accessories." That one (MacBook stimulus) did get me. (Becky, 28)

Brand Validation

Kelly was a current Apple MacBook user and raved about its functionality and quality. Social influence contributed to Kelly's interest and purchase of the Apple MacBook. She indicated her friends all had Apple MacBooks and then considered the purchase to experience the brand for herself. Viewing the stimuli of Kourtney using the brand validated her purchase decision. Kelly's observations reflect the concept brand validation. It refers to the confirmation consumers experience when viewing a brand or a similar brand they own in the media used by an authority. Because the brand mention was endorsed by the Kardashians, Kelly believed their endorsement enhanced the quality of Apple MacBook which is supported by the meaning transfer model because endorsements attract consumers to brands more (McCracken, 1989). Further, Kelly found the Apple MacBook especially helpful with her graduate studies. Her quote below is a testament to the quality of the Apple MacBook and also spoke to its functional uses in graduate school, which was shared by other informants.

> I need to use some software like Photoshop and In-design Tutor … the Mac Book has high resolution and a big screen so it makes every image look very vibrant. It kind of helps me with my classwork. Also, I like the system. It is simple…simpler than the Windows system. Also, since I use the iPhone, I can upload my information on my iPhone, like lots of pictures and information to the iCloud and this will like transfer to my MacBook. (Kelly, 24)

Kelly's shared thoughts about the Apple MacBook spoke directly to the product benefits that may be stated in a traditional advertisement. The one-minute Apple MacBook brand mention in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* performed as a narrative

advertisement as the Apple MacBook brand experience is shown to consumers (Escalas, 1998). Kelly's thoughts reflect the desired outcomes of brand mentions such as brand awareness, brand identification, and favorable attitudes (Balasubramanian, Karrh, Patwardhan, 2006). Such mentions depicting active use of brands informs viewers about brands and may encourage purchase intentions (Balasubramanian, Karrh, Patwardhan, 2006; Morton & Friedman, 2002). Considering most of the informants were Apple MacBook owners, purchase intentions were reported less. Instead, the mention triggered immediate thoughts and appraisals of the product among owners like Kelly. This is true due to the vivid Apple MacBook use and functionality depicted in the mention placement. Kelly easily recalled her personal experiences with the brand which was similar to Kourtney's use in the mention.

Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel

The second most commonly influenced brand mention among informants was Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel. The hotel was mentioned 13 times by informants as a brand of interest and or a potential vacation venue. Informant interest in the hotel brand was supported by socialization theory, which suggests human behavior is predicted by the socialization process and reflects gender identity expectations (Eagly & Wood, 1991). Thus, women, who identify as feminine, such as the informants in the study and depicted in the show, are expected to have interest in housing accommodations. Further, they also are expected to possess a greater ethic of care and compassion for others (McKercher, Pang, & Prideaux, 2011). It is assumed their socialized care-taking identities are centered

on hospitality. Therefore, the informants would be drawn to the Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel stimulus because of its depiction: an extended family, including both women and children, move into a condominium for an extended stay. Child care-taking responsibilities were shared by Kourtney's sisters, Khloe and Kim.

Research

Informants immediately marveled at the décor, scenic views, contemporary furniture, and large space featured in the Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel video clip. They consistently referred to the hotel as "nice." While none of the informants were familiar with the hotel brand, they all agreed they would research information about it. Thus, the mention in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* sparked an interest with an unfamiliar brand. Researching luxurious tourist locations is not uncommon for Becky. When she sought more information about price and amenities of a hotel resort featured in the *Real Housewives of Atlanta*, she researched it on Google. Becky discusses her investigation plans for Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel in the quote below, which also represents the sentiments of other informants who expressed interest in the brand.

> I would probably go online and Google it to see where it is and see what the price range is. 'Is that something that at some point in my life, I can do? I've done that before, seen things on television shows. Where is that hotel?' Go online and Google it. I haven't actually gone and stayed at these places yet, but that's something that I'm more likely to follow up on and be more influenced by than just a single product, especially if it has to do with vacation. (Becky, 28)

Research indicates women are more likely to read online reviews for convenience as they seek quality and safe hotel venues (Kim, Mattila & Baloglu, 2011). This finding is supported by a research study conducted by Hyatt Hotels & Resorts. Cleanliness, safety,

and comfort have all been noted as key attributes of women's hotel expectations, which was true in this study (Meng & Uysal, 2008; DeLollis, 2013). Thus, the majority of the informants suggested they would consider the hotel when visiting Miami.

Mimicry

Becky expressed more interest in Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel as opposed to the other luxury brands mentioned in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami.* Her justification was quite similar to the other informants – a greater interest in accommodations than tech devices and cars. For example, Becky indicated she was less interested in luxury goods and preferred luxury experience consumption instead. This research finding is supported by the fourth perceived value of luxury consumption, hedonism (Vigernon & Johnson, 2004). Emotions of sensual pleasures, fantasies, and feelings were felt by Becky and the informants when viewing the Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel brand mention stimulus (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Further, women are also more inclined to seek leisure vacations for cultural experiences, bonding, and prestige (McGehee, Loker-Murphy & Uysal, 1996). The quote below is indicative of the informants who shared similar insights.

> It seemed like it was a nice place, a little from the ocean, very leisurely, a place to go, and unwind, and relax, and lay on the beach, and shop, and live the luxurious life… I think you can get more – for me, I get more out of experiences than individual items, I guess, although you can have experiences with individual items every time you display them, but for me, there's a deeper satisfaction with having an all-around good experience. If I'm going to pay for something, I'd rather it be a very good vacation as opposed to just a pair of shoes. I guess I could, but it'd be a little strange to share an experience about shoes as opposed to 'I went here, and I ate this, and I drank that, and I saw this, and we went there'. I would prefer experiences because, those leave better memories and to me, are a better use of my money spent. (Becky, 28)

Similarly, Roxanne attributed her decision to consider the hotel to the brand mention and disinterest in the other brands. She also believed viewers would be drawn to Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel because of the integration with the Kardashian family. Roxanne's quote describes how she believed most viewers would respond to the Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel integration, which was also true for the other informants.

> I think you would consider it if you could scrounge up any type of money, especially because I had never heard of the hotel before as opposed to Rolls Royce or iPhone, which I already had, and they have a luxury kind of title attached to it. Yes as opposed to choosing something like the W or something like that, that (Eden Roc Hotel) would definitely be an option, especially if they (Kardashian family) stayed there, so it must be nice. (Roxanne, 28).

Social Class Influence on Consumption Mimicry

As indicated above in Roxanne's quote, limitations of finances and time were consistently mentioned when considering a visit to Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel. While they all expressed great interest in the hotel, informants' statements began with conditions such as, "If I had the money." Heavy-striver Roxanne indicated her interests in Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, but only if she had the financial means to actually consume it. Similar insights were also shared by other informants.

> Oh yeah, if I had had the money and money was not a question, then yeah, I would definitely stay some place like that. It looks nice. It was modern. The décor was nice. The pool area looked spacious, nice, right on the beach. I don't know. It looked comfortable, like a place if I didn't want to leave that day, that I could probably hang around the hotel, and meet some people. (Roxanne, 28)

Because of the overwhelming marginalized status of the informants, striving and privilege, were commonalities that emerged when discussing luxury brands. It is widely-known the Kardashian family is quite popular due to their lavish lifestyles. Most of the informants made value judgments of Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel based on the family's decision to stay at the venue, per the stimulus. Hence, viewing the Kardashian family moving into a condo at Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel for an extended period of time emphasized the family's elite status. But it also reminded informants of their marginalization as they all dreamed to just visit the hotel. None of the informants could imagine the Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel as a temporary residence. Further, informants were not familiar with the brand's name. When considering luxury hotel brands -- Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton or the Waldorf Astoria hotels -- were immediately recalled among the informants. Because Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel was not a part of their consideration set, informants quickly identified it as a hyper luxury hotel outside of their financial means. However, they also recognized it was a brand mention, too. It was extremely apparent to informants that Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel was not necessarily targeted to or for marginalized groups or poor people of color like themselves. However, their disenfranchisement did not inhibit their interest and desire to visit the hotel. Monica's statement captures the complication of her class status and relentless desires of aspiration after viewing the hotel stimulus. Her quote was typical of most informants.

> If I go to Miami, and somebody told me I could stay wherever I wanted, I'm going to say, "Eden Roc Hotel." Because I personally want to stay in a nice hotel, that's clearly nice, I'm familiar with it, I know what it looks like because I watched it on the show, and I feel like the Kardashians aren't going to stay anywhere crazy.

> Before watching the show, of course I don't know what Eden Roc Hotel is, but everybody that watched it afterwards, I'm sure several people are staying there now because it was promoted, I feel like, on the show. The way they (producers) did it, you could tell they (producers) were promoting it. It wasn't just like, "Oh, we showed the front of the hotel, or just the sign." It was like, "We showed the sign, the pool, the rooms and more." You're clearly watching the Kardashians, so you know it's obviously an expensive hotel… (Monica, 24)

When Monica was further probed about her specific interest in the hotel, she immediately compared her current hotel preferences, LaQuinta Inn and a regionally-based hotel in Texas, she patronizes, to Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel. Then she acknowledged the obvious difference in quality and price. Yet, Monica realized LaQuinta Inn is more appropriate for her budget at this time. Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel may not be affordable for Monica or her family, however she still maintained a standard when considering less-exclusive hotels. Monica recounts her comparison of both hotels and highlights the implications of her marginalized status.

> I guess I should kind of compare them to hotels I stay in now. It was large, it was definitely larger than any hotel I've stayed in. I like hotels, and I like resort and spas, but let's just say – for my 16th birthday, I had my sleepover at the Moody Gardens Hotel, Resort and Spa, in Galveston. It was so nice. I know that's probably a lower level hotel resort and spa versus, Eden Roc. I'm sure Eden Roc is better. I know what a resort and spa looks like, I know it has a spa in it. I know they have several pools– like the one I stayed in had the indoor pool and an outdoor pool, and the outdoor pool was a heated pool. The amenities were definitely better than the La Quinta. My mom comes down here, we stay in La Quintas. It's about how much money you have. With us, we can't afford to stay in Eden Roc, so we're not going to stay [there]– but if the La Quinta is clean – and I don't like outside hotels, I guess that's what motels are – if I can't walk into a hallway or a lobby, I'm not going to stay in it. (Monica, 24)

Brand Validation

Renee' expressed an extreme interest in Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel based on her enjoyment of hotel accommodations (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). She was intrigued by the luxury hotel because of its similar amenities and services she experienced during stays at West Gate Resort in Orlando. Research supports Renee's interest in the brand, as women select hotels because of personalized services and security features (McCleary, Weaver, & Lan, 1994). Viewing the Kardashian family enter the venue at ease in a pleasant environment evoked strong emotions and desires for Renee' to visit Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel. Although Renee' had not visited Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, she felt the stimulus validated her experiences at the West Gate Resort brand. Renee's experiences reflect brand validation. Immediately viewing the stimulus, Renee' expressed an identification with the brand and brand experience because she frequently visits similar hotels. She aspired to model and imitate the behaviors of the cast members which is behavior supported by social learning theory (Balasubramanian, Karrh, & Patwardhan, 2006; Bandura, 1976). Thus, it is a natural progression for Renee to visit a similar hotel like Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel.

> Well, just from the video – let's go from the very beginning when they checked in there the process, that's very important. It's like that first impression. The check-in process, getting your room, getting all the information, getting settled back, to me is very important. I saw that the lobby staff and area on the video were patient and clean, it just was very accommodating, which is what I experienced when I went to my resort – the same way… Then they (production crew) did (showed) the view – they (camera crew) did (showed) an ocean view on the video. My view was a lakefront kind of view where I could look from my patio, and it wasn't an ocean but it was a nice, I guess, a man-made lake. It was really nice where you could do like water events, water activities in the water. For me, it was very tranquil and so when I saw the ocean, I was like, "Wow, that's very tranquil right there." It had a lot of similarities. (Renee', 33)

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF LUXURY BRAND MENTIONS

After viewing the five stimuli of luxury brand mentions in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*, informants were probed about potential outcomes of the mentions and its impact on society. Of which, most of the outcomes mentioned yielded social implications reflecting disadvantages. Potential illicit behavior, materialism, social comparison, and financial ruin, were specifically mentioned by informants. Potential social deviant behavior, such as counterfeit consumption or theft, was reported by Zelda and Xena as an outcome of marginalized consumers viewing hyper consumption in the show. Their suggested behavioral outcomes reflect predominant norms of striving in American society. Consumers are socialized to achieve the American dream by merit -- hard work, education, and self-responsibility. That notion undermines one's social stratification in society, which is a key indicator of mobility and progress. In some cases, as was evident in the research findings, some consumers still fall short meeting the American dream of a successful career, beautiful home and car. Therefore a "dysfunction between cultural prescriptions and access to desired goals" may evoke a sense of strain on consumers when they fall short from meeting status expectations (Farnworth & Lieber, 1989, p. 264).

Potential Illicit Behavior

According to strain theory, consumers react to the dysfunction between their goals

and access to society's standards of achievement through socially-deviant behavior (Merton, 1938). People compensate for their state of loss attempting to achieve the same or similar status milestones by any means necessary. For example, Xena believed some viewers would engage in dire actions. She stated people will "do whatever it takes… fast money or quick money to do whatever it takes to get those nice things. Like I said, it (video stimulus) doesn't show them (Kim or Kourtney) workin' hard." The following quote captures how some informants believed strained resources may lead to criminal behavior among poor people in their environment. This opinion reflects the Kardashians' portrayed leisure lifestyle. The family was depicted consuming luxury brands and experiences with ease. However, they were not depicted working to achieve their wants.

Materialism & Social Comparison

As stated earlier, marketing communications is one of the primary drivers of materialism and luxury consumption (Belk, 2011). Study One reported the volume of luxury brand mentions in reality television. Luxury brand mentions offer idealized images of what life ought to be for consumers (Richins, 1995). Generally, idealized images depicted in media reflected three characteristics: highly desirable lifestyles that may only be achieved by the elite, presented as edited versions of real life, images are "perfected" by technology and effects, which accurately describes images mentioned in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* (Richins, 1995). Further, all of the informants identified the characteristics of idealized images when viewing the stimuli. Overwhelmingly, the informants all acknowledged the blatant attempts of both producers and advertisers to

promote stylized imagery of lavish lifestyles depicted in the show. However, Ellen vocalized her observations and interpretations of the idealized luxury brand mentions most. She used third-person effect to suggest idealized images featured in the series would likely impact others more than herself because of her maturity and life experience (Davison, 1983). Her quote below is indicative of how the informants described and believed the integration of luxury brand mentions impacted society.

> Once again, to me, it paints the picture of the haves and have-nots. The impact of that is, people just like to see (that life), like to imagine, it's like going to the movies. You get to see how other people are living. I don't know how much buying power or impact that it has. Maybe not for me and some of my peers, but I can see how maybe younger people might be influenced by it, because that's what they (younger people) want; they want fame and popularity. They (younger people) want to feel exclusive. I could see how that could work. (Ellen, 33)

Considering the structure and dynamics of reality television, luxury brand mentions in this medium can easily be considered idealized images. The promotion of materialism, hyper consumption, and envy, were identified as negative consequences to the idealized images of the mentions in reality television. Ironically, many consumers find such promotional messages appealing, despite the negative feelings evoked (Richins, 1995).

For example, Tammy considered the Rolls Royce stimulus as excessive and promoting materialism, which she found unappealing. Materialism was consistently mentioned by all informants as a highly prevalent theme in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Shrum, Burroughs & Rindfleisch (2005) found the cultivation of material values extended beyond identifying cast members as simply rich. Instead, high material consumption in television also affects viewers' material values, as well (2005). Tammy's

thoughts on the blatant messaging of the Rolls Royce mention follows. Most of the informants shared the same insights as Tammy and believed the vehicle was excessive and unattainable.

> It's the pinnacle of a really expensive car. I personally don't know anyone that can afford one. I feel like before, if you had a Rolls-Royce, you needed a driver. It wasn't a vehicle that you'd buy off the lot and that's your car that you drive everywhere. It was a car maybe you drive or maybe you get dropped off at the opera. It used to be associated with high-class events or something. Now she's just driving it around LA, like whatever, in a Rolls-Royce. I don't know. It still is classy…To tell you the truth, it's probably a little fancy for me. It's all black leather…. This car is too much. I can't. I'm sorry. (Tammy, 27)

Informants like Tammy also believed the integration of luxury brands in the show were excessive and problematic for consumers. This is true as luxury brand mentions in advertising exceeds goods that are available and affordable for middle-class consumers (Belk & Pollay, 1985). In fact, idealized images in media produce the most frequent social comparisons in America (Richins, 1995). This was most certainly true in this research as 71% of brand mentions were classified as luxury in *Kourtney and Kim Miami*. Zelda, Ana, Roxanne, Becky, and several other informants, all expressed that the imagery in the show informed consumers of desired lifestyles. But implications of consumer viewing of such luxury brands was troubling for most informants. Informants believed consumers may not detect stealth advertising efforts, or its "unscripted" programming. Research indicates consumer thought processes of social comparison and idealized images are vastly "unconscious and unsought." (Richins, 1995, p. 599). Therefore, the promotion of luxury brand mentions in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* may

unconsciously encourage consumers to draw social comparisons and assess their personal worth.

In particular, Roxanne shared the "portrayed perception of reality" of Kim is not realistic for consumers watching at home. False conclusions of luxury lifestyles are promoted as forms of happiness; which was also shared as a disadvantage to luxury brand mentions. Informants like Nicole and Tammy believed excessive promotion may produce negative feelings of envy, unworthiness, and insecurities, if consumers perform downward appraisals. Roxanne's views highlighted the emotions informants believed consumers experience when viewing luxury brand mentions in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*.

> [If they] see what a lot of people have and that [is] inspiring you, it could also make you feel sad and depressed about life if you don't have all that stuff, or if you feel like you should have that stuff because they do and you can't attain it. It also may make you feel that having that stuff is normal and that if you don't have it, it's not normal. Also, I guess just knowing how Kim and her family got on the map to begin with and seeing all of the success that they have achieved from that, might possibly make you take the same route.
> (Roxanne, 28)

Financial Ruin

Due to the high integration of luxury brand mentions in the show, informants believed it may also encourage financial ruin among consumers. It is understood consumption drives the economy, but consumers are overspending at alarming rates (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). They spend more than they did in the past and are not remotely aware. Consumers cannot afford the lifestyles and idealized images depicted in

marketing communications. Schor (1998) attributes overspending to the competitive consumption factor – "keeping up with the Jones" – in which the Kardashians are a prime exemplar for an idealized life. As consumers attempt competitive consumption motivated by benign envy, they may fall short. Literature supports the unintended consequence of benign envy which may lead to financial ruin (Wooten, Harrison, & Mitchell, 2011). This is particularly true for marginalized groups who may pursue like goods of others through extreme efforts by depleting their resources. Terry's thoughts on potential financial burdens are representative of the informants and are quoted below.

> I mean those reality shows, especially those who are trying to establish a luxury lifestyle, it may make people desire too much for those kind of lifestyles. They're going to buy expensive stuff and they're going to buy fancy things, but they may not be able to afford it … (Terry, 24)

INFERENCES & INTERPRETATIONS

Greater interpretation of the data was necessary to advance current research on brand mentions in the field of marketing communications. Additional inference was warranted for this research because of the context of the investigation. Interpreting relevant meanings from the data allows the investigator to explore how the social, cultural, and economic implications of luxury brand mentions in reality television influences consumer culture. After conducting data analysis, an etic analysis was conducted, which is a common research approach used in ethnographic studies that examines human behavior from the researcher perspective. Etic analysis involves the investigator's "abstractions or scientific explanations" of specific lived experiences of informants (Goulding, 1999, p. 300). The goal of an etic analysis is to holistically

interpret and examine the data across the entire data set, but from a higher level of inference. Specifically, the interpretation involves the "transfer of meaning across texts…" and to understand how others perceive the same phenomenon better (Spiggle, 1994, p. 497). Following the protocol for etic analysis, meanings were gleaned across the data set and supported by theories. Expanding and developing new theories from pre-existing theories follows common qualitative consumer research approaches (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). Chapter 5 provides a discussion of expanded theories in marketing communications.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The overall aim of this dissertation was to investigate how luxury brand mentions impacts consumer culture. A reality television show context was used to guide the research process and included two studies. To determine the impact of such mentions, it was important to first explore how luxury brand mentions appear in an affluent lifestyle-oriented reality television program, *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* in Study One. Results revealed luxury brand mentions were highly integrated in the show and the most frequently mentioned were Chevrolet Suburban, Rolls Royce, Apple iPhone, Apple MacBook, Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel. The depiction of luxury brand mentions appear with multi-modality, varying prominence levels, product categories, and markers of luxury appeal. Study Two revealed women's interpretations of such mentions, reality television, and their purchase intentions. Socio-economic class, racial identity, and gender were reported as key factors that influenced their perceptions of the mentions and purchase intentions. Collectively, new knowledge was gained through this dissertation research. Both studies revealed key insights about luxury brand mentions, their meanings, and inclusion when integrated in reality television.

It is also important to note findings from this dissertation research do not aim to suggest all luxury brands are presented in the same manner as in the selected sample. However, results imply how luxury brand mentions appear in similar reality television sitcoms depicting affluent lifestyles, like *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami.* Research findings established a foundation of knowledge to explain the integration and potential implications of such mentions.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY

Two themes emerged in the data that are addressed using the following theories: fluency theories and meaning-transfer model. These theories were expanded to address data results and yielded two theoretical contributions. The proposed contributions advance scholarship in two areas: consumer processing of blurred brand mentions and celebrity and brand meaning transfer. These two contributions help fill gaps in marketing communications literature and provide insights into how luxury brand mentions impacts consumer culture. Next, follows discussions about each contribution. Specifically, new knowledge is introduced to demonstrate the distinction between results from this dissertation research and present marketing research. The value added from the new intellectual contributions will also be discussed. This chapter concludes with a summary and discussion of limitations, marketing implications, and future research.

FLUENCY THEORY

The first contribution addresses how consumers may process blurred brand mentions. Study One demonstrated the multi-modality of luxury brand mentions were highly integrated in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Blurred brands are a growing trend in brand mentions integrated in media. These mentions reflect brands that are not completely visible to viewers when integrated in media. Their logo, brand name, packaging are blurred. Of the five brand mentions from Study Two informants viewed, the Apple iPhone, Apple MacBook, and Chevrolet Suburban, brands were concealed

using a blurring effect. Recall concealed brand mentions, may be depicted as blurred, pixelated, discolored, or blocked by a digitally-integrated black box.

Blurred brands in reality television programs allow producers to avoid offering free advertisement to brands or possible infringement suits (Newman, 2008). To date, research regarding the inclusion and consumer response to blurred brand mentions is under explored; no published work addresses this phenomenon. A theoretical framework is advanced to address how consumers may process blurred brand mentions integrated in reality television.

Perceptual fluency explains how blurred luxury brand mentions may be perceived by consumers. Perceptual fluency refers to the ease of consumer processing of perceptual features of images (Jacoby & Kelley, 1987). Researchers have attributed the consumer processing of incidental ad exposures to perceptual fluency (Shapiro, MacInnis & Heckler, 1997; Janiszewski, 1993). When consumers view the features of a stimulus, their prior exposure creates a representation of the brand from memory, which includes distinguishable features. For each subsequent exposure to the brand, consumers refer to their memory of the features of the prior stimulus (Lee, Yoon & Mitchell, 2005). Although the Chevrolet Suburban was visually mentioned, each time the brand trade dress was disguised in Study Two, informants still identified the brand logo. They were able to identify the correct brand name by referring to prior exposures to the Chevrolet Suburban's features from their memory. Blurred brands featured in the stimuli attracted informants' attention, although the full brand was not displayed. Informants all mentioned a Suburban or Chevrolet reference point they experienced during their

socialization process as children. Vivid accounts of the memory of the Chevrolet Suburban enabled informants to identify the brand. However, their perceptual fluency of the brand did not also suggest an expressed interest.

The overall goal of this dissertation research was to explore how luxury brand mentions impacts consumer culture, as well as consumer interpretation and meanings of brand mentions. Specifically, findings revealed that blurred brand mentions attracted the attention of consumers and consumers were able to share the meanings of such mentions. Informants' ability to process the meaning of stimuli with ease is referred to as conceptual fluency (Whittlesea, 1993). However, conceptual fluency neglects to consider other factors such as antecedents that may influence the processing of stimuli meaning. Intersectionality provides additional insights that may reveal different meanings for different consumers. Recall intersectionality refers to inclusive interactions between race, class, and gender and the potential implications of those interactions for marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1989). In the current research, for example, one informant interpreted the Apple MacBook blurred brand mention as a teaser to evoke aspiration among marginalized blacks. The informants' views of the mention reflects her identity as a black woman, a striver, and desire to enhance her social status. Some of the meta-narratives revealed in this research – materialism, elitism, and aspiration – were meanings informants' extracted from the blurred luxury brand mentions. Although the informant did not own an Apple MacBook, she was reminded by the blurred brand that she should consider the brand because of the meanings she drew from the stimuli. In this instance, intersectionality influences the conceptual fluency of the brand as the informant

felt the blurred brand mention elicited meanings of striving that were directed to her because of her race and class. Hence, researchers and marketers should attend to antecedents, such race, gender, or class, which may influence consumer interpretations of blurred images when subtly integrated in reality television.

Thus, both perceptual and conceptual theories demonstrate the effectiveness of blurred brand exposures by supporting theories suggesting that inclusion of blurred brand mentions may have unintended consequences. First, consumers are drawn to blurred luxury brand mentions more often than not due to its blurred depictions. The blurred appearance of brands disrupts consumer viewing, but the trade dress is still identifiable to signify the brand's name. Research suggests people process easy fluent stimuli more intensely due to the cues and features linked to stimuli such as product packaging (Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008). In this research, blurred luxury brand mentions still had prominent features which facilitated fluency processing for informants. Further, perceptual fluency processing also shifted brands into the consideration set of informants, which is supported by research (Shapiro, 1999). For example, the Apple MacBook logo was concealed by a purple translucent case. While most informants owned Apple MacBooks, a few of them were reminded by the disguised brand mention to purchase a cover for their Apple MacBook. Research supports this finding as fluency is found to affect decision-making both directly and indirectly (Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008). Fluency serves as a basis to determine which cues, like the laptop cover, consumers will weigh more heavily.

MEANING-TRANSFER MODEL

The second contribution of this dissertation research is grounded in McCracken's (1989) meaning-transfer model. This theoretical framework helps to understand cultural meanings of luxury brand mentions and sources. Unique attributes of reality television, including brand mentions and celebrities, provides visual and verbal transfers of cultural meanings to consumers. Discussions follow that highlight the reciprocal relationships that exist between celebrities, brands, and consumers. Also, this model is extended to address the multi-directional relationships and cultural meanings transferred and magnified through the context of reality television.

The Meanings of Celebrity

Research indicates consumers are drawn to celebrity endorsed brands when celebrities are hired as spokespersons to promote them because of the three source credibility traits: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Ohanian, 1990). Source credibility traits of celebrities have been emphasized through media promotion. Thus, consumers are exposed to a diverse set of celebrities who are well-known for various reasons. Three types of celebrities exist in the media, some of which are more popular than others: achieved, ascribed, and contemporary (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). Achieved celebrity refers to celebrities who possess specific talents and skills including Michael Jordan or Celine Dion, who are athletes and entertainers. Ascribed celebrity describes individuals who are biologically descendants of notable families, such as Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge. One of the more evolving forms of celebrity, the

contemporary celebrity, includes individuals who are newsworthy for things unrelated to talents (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). Kourtney and Kim and other reality television cast members, are classified as such as they are famous for being famous. Despite a low Q-score of 4, which is a brand familiarity and appeal measurement for brands and celebrities, Kim is still frequently mentioned in the media (Heger, 2013). Thus, her media presence generates more publicity for her brand. Kourtney and Kim have garnered a lot of media attention through their on-screen and off-screen and lifestyles. Therefore, their success in the reality television business suggests their status as elite and aspirational celebrities among their following.

Informants believed Kourtney and Kim possessed traditional source credibility traits. However, when probed further to explain why they perceived the sisters as credible, attractive, or experts, more substantive cultural meanings were expressed. Because the show was filmed in Miami where Kourtney and Kim managed the family clothing boutique, D-A-S-H, informants found their use of Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel, logical. They believed the sisters possessed cultural capital and know-how about the hotel venues and the city because of their professional careers in Miami.

This finding is supported by research which indicates that when consumers develop attachments to human brands, they experience elevated levels of satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Thomson, 2006). Informants perceived the hotel (Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel) brand was aligned with the brand identity of the sisters. Both the human brand (the sisters) and product brand, are known to be hip, trendy, and frequently promoting aspiration and elitism.

Critique of Meaning-Transfer Model

To date, two models were developed to explain the relationships and meanings transferred through celebrity endorsements: meaning-transfer and reciprocal meaning transfer. However, while both models present a new perspective to interpret relationships between sources and brands, more theorizing is necessary. The meaning-transfer model describes how celebrities acquire symbolic meanings in culture and transfer those unique meanings to brands promoted in advertising to consumers (McCracken, 1989). Two limitations can be found in the meaning transfer model. First, it does not consider the variations of celebrities that exist in media. Secondly, the model suggests only a one-way transfer of meanings; which does not support the nuanced relationships and meanings that exist between celebrities, brands, and consumers.

Since the emergence of reality television and technology, more contemporary celebrities have emerged who are deemed newsworthy, such as Kourtney and Kim (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). While they do not possess notable skills or talent, the sisters still embody and promote cultural capital that projects meanings to brands and consumers. Per Bourdieu (1977), cultural capital is articulated in three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Institutionalized cultural capital refers to academic credentials or qualifications. Kourtney is a college graduate, while Kim is not. Their educational pursuits are not promoted as much in the media. Instead, the sisters display their cultural capital in the forms of embodiment of tastes and manners (e.g., style,

appearance, dating preferences) and through objectified cultural possessions (e.g., membership to elite establishments).

Kourtney and Kim's cultural capital was depicted through reported meta-narratives found in Study One, including materialism, elitism, and aspirational striving for enhanced status. Advancing the model with more substantive celebrity descriptors provides a richer framework to process the meaning transfer. Also more detailed nuances about celebrities cultural capital demonstrates the significance of their identities and meanings. This is particularly true as reality television is ripe with contemporary celebrities who rise to fame simply for their participation in one reality television series (Driessens, 2012).

CRITIQUE OF RECIPROCAL MEANING TRANSFER MODEL

Secondly, because the meaning-transfer model presents the transfers as a one-way process, it fails to effectively address the cultural meanings of both celebrities and brands that are exchanged both directions. Both celebrities and brands are solicited for celebrity endorsement campaigns because of their interdependent brand equity. Thus, Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta (2010) proposed a reciprocal meaning-transfer model suggesting meanings are transferred from the celebrity to the brand as the brand transfers meanings to the celebrity equally. A brand alliance is implied because of the joint relationship in promoting both celebrities and brands (2010). Advancing the meaning-transfer model was necessary considering advertisers have increasingly used celebrity endorsements for brand promotion, since the original meaning-transfer model was developed. However,

one key element -- consumers -- is still under explored and plays a vital role in the development of celebrities and meaning transfer.

The relationship that existed between Kourtney and Kim and Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel may be supported by the meaning-transfer and the reciprocal meaning transfer models. Research indicates several industries support celebrity endorsements and contribute to the proliferation of the phenomenon (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). Industries represent a "collection of people, materials, equipment, and processes that collectively produces an output that has values to market" (Rein, Kotler, & Stoller, 1997, p. 30). Consumers signify people within the industry who are powerful because they are involved in "the consumption, production, and promotion of celebrity content" (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010, p. 26). Just like brands and celebrities, consumers contribute to the meanings reflecting their perceptions. The media also enables consumers to directly communicate their meanings and perceptions of celebrities and brands while celebrities and brands can communicate meanings to the mass market. Findings in the current research are supported by the role consumers fill in promoting celebrities. One informant, a declared super fan, reported she frequently discussed the Kardashian family with friends using Twitter and Facebook platforms.

Also, the inclusion of luxury brand mentions in reality television is substantially different than the promotion of brands in traditional advertising. Luxury brand mentions offer more depth promotion through multi-modality mentions (verbal and visual) and usage to attract viewers, as revealed in Study One (Russell, 1998). Such mentions in reality television serve as a vehicle to transfer cultural meanings between product brands

and human brands in a subtle manner, which in turn is transferred to consumers. This research advances both models to demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between celebrities, brand mentions, and consumers. Celebrities, brands, and consumers, all contribute to the success of brands and celebrities and cannot be examined individually. Celebrities, brands, and consumers all transfer meanings in a recurring format as depicted in Figure 10.

Consumer Exposure to Transferred Brand Meanings

As noted earlier, consumers actively create and consume celebrity identities and brand meanings transferred in media. Habitual use of luxury brand mentions as props integrated in reality television helps facilitate the meaning transfer to consumers. Transferred meanings represent cultural capital as depicted by Kourtney and Kim in the series. Kourtney and Kim's habitus, which is "a set of unconscious and enduring dispositions, patterns of thinking, and ways of acting acquired through childhood" explains how the world works to them and is depicted in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* (Saatcioglu & Ozanne, 2013; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It also suggests spontaneous luxury shopping and mini-vacations to Paris should be perceived as a normalcy since their social status enables them to frequently enjoy lavish lifestyles. Informants' habitus drastically differed from Kourtney and Kim.

While viewing the stimuli, many informants expressed excitement to witness the causal consumption of such luxury brands, despite their marginalized status. Viewing such consumption provides an escape and is used as a coping strategy to negotiate one's disadvantaged status (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). Informants also immediately recognized

the luxury brand inclusions as brand mentions; but that did not deter their interest in Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel. For example, they evaluated the quality and aesthetics of the hotel based on the sisters' endorsement and vivid brand mentions featured in the show. Conversely, informants recognized their habitus prohibits them from consuming such brands, as many are deemed inaccessible, such as the Rolls Royce. Therefore, when consumers are exposed to such mentions, both the cultural meanings of the sisters and the luxury brands, are heightened. As one informant shared, a clear distinction of the haves and have nots were strongly promoted through the endorsement of such luxury brands in the reality show. However, they also know Kourtney and Kim display their specific tastes through the brands integrated in the show (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, advancing the meaning-transfer model to the study of luxury brand mentions is suggested because it addresses cultural meanings consumers are exposed to. The transfer of cultural meanings departs from traditional studies that focus on luxury brand mention effectiveness and purchase intentions, which is less aligned with consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Informants were exposed to brands that transferred cultural meanings of aspiration while challenging new meanings of luxury presented in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. For example, informants viewed the Apple iPhone and MacBook, and the Chevrolet Suburban brands in the show, which are brands widely accessible in the marketplace. Despite the accessibility of the brands, Kourtney and Kim's social status was transferred to the depicted brand mentions and elevated the luxury value of the brands. Kourtney was portrayed having a virtual counseling session with a therapist

using the Apple MacBook. Kim was depicted being driven in a sleek black Chevrolet Suburban, which is commonly a chauffeur-driven vehicle for high-profile dignitaries. Thus, one of the predominant meanings conveyed to consumers was the idea of new luxury or masstige brands.

Masstige brands, short for "mass prestige" – are neither at the top of their category in price nor related to other iterations of the brand" (Silverstein & Fiske, 2005, p. 5). Instead, such brands exist at a mid-way point and offer new luxury appeal to a broader audience. Several researchers argue contemporary consumers are eagerly "trading-up" their lifestyles and buying entry level luxury brands to enhance status (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Truong, McColl and Kitchen, 2009; Silverstein & Fiske, 2005). Similar to the depiction of the Chevrolet Suburban in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*, brands are offering more masstige products to meet customer demand. For example, Mercedes-Benz's entry-level C-class coupe sells for $29,900 (Silverstein & Fiske, 2005). The C-class coupe delivers affordable luxury to new luxury consumers. However, researchers have neglected to address the implications of such drastic lifestyle changes in society. Stylized meanings of desirable lifestyles depicted in advertising to broader audiences can be problematic (Richins, 1991). For some informants, the exposure to such extreme affluent brand meanings in the show evoked envy and poor self-evaluations (Belk, 2011). In sum, the meaning-transfer model is a resourceful tool to explain the multi-directional and reciprocal cultural meanings transferred in reality television. Transferred cultural meanings are likely to be more salient because of the inclusion of contemporary celebrities and luxury brand mentions. Thus, celebrities,

brands, and consumers, all contribute to the meaning transfer process indicating its high fluidity.

SUMMARY

In sum, the objective of this dissertation research was to explore how luxury brand mentions impacts consumer culture. Investigating this phenomenon was valuable because it revealed luxury brand prominence and that such mentions are highly integrated in one particular reality program according to this research. Secondly, findings also revealed how consumers draw meanings from such brands in their daily lives. Those meanings resonate with the social, cultural, and economic implications associated with luxury brands.

Informants reported they were most influenced by luxury boutique hotel, Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel and Apple MacBook, because the brands evoked aspiration and status, and also provided functionality to solve their computer needs. Results also indicated intersectionality of race, class, and gender, influences one's perception of luxury brand mentions, contemporary celebrities, and reality television shows such as *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Using an intersectional analysis approach provided deeper understandings of their lived experiences and interactions of brand exposures through a cultural lens. This approach is of merit as it shares greater context about luxury brand mentions and its influences on marginalized groups, which differs from privileged members of society. Perceptions of luxury brands integrated in the reality television series reportedly reminded informants' of their marginalized status, which reflected their

race, class, and gender. Findings also demonstrated the burdened lived experiences of people of color and how they navigate their status through consumption. For example, informants indicated their limited access to resources and experienced discrimination, induces high striving to acquire luxury brands as they desire similar brands as privileged others.

This dissertation research offers conceptual and theoretical contributions. First, it is important to note this dissertation research represents one of the first studies to investigate a specific brand mention type, luxury brands, which provides a conceptual contribution. Such mentions possess meanings that convey status and exclusivity, which differs from non-luxury brands. For those reasons, additional insights were needed to understand how luxury brand mentions appear and influence consumer culture.

Secondly, research on brand mentions integrated in reality television is under explored. Three research teams explored brand mentions depicted in reality television from different perspectives. One studied a specific brand mention, while another explored a brand mention segment (Kowalczyk & Royne 2012; Sherman & Arthur, 2012). Another group of researchers investigated one brand mention that was central to a show within reality television (Sheehan & Guo, 2006). Additional exploration was warranted because reality television provides a different context to study brands mentions due to its unique nature. Because of consumer advertising avoidance, which is a deterrent for traditional television advertising, this research provides key insights of the cultural impact of marketing communications for marketers to consider.

Two theoretical contributions were made to brand mentions literature. This research applied new theories to understand consumer perceptions of blurred luxury brand mentions featured in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Thus, this dissertation applied both perceptual and conceptual fluency theories to provide new knowledge to explain the perception process. Secondly, the meaning-transfer model, which describes how celebrity meanings transfer cultural capital to brands and then to consumers, was advanced to demonstrate the multi-directional and reciprocal relationship that exists among celebrities, brands, and consumers. This advancement is new and the first to acknowledge current operational definitions of celebrities. It also highlights how transferred cultural meanings are magnified in reality television over an extended period of time.

LIMITATIONS

As this dissertation research is one of the first to use a content assessment and measure a different form of brand mentions, limitations emerged. The content assessment used in Study One was a valuable method to broadly measure unique mentions of luxury brands in a reality television series. It established how such mentions appear and their varying prominence levels. However, coding could have been more nuanced to explore such mentions more in greater detail. For example, closely examining brand mentions for subsequent occurrences, in addition to unique mentions, would complement this study.

Secondly, the informant viewership and attitudes towards *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* series, were not controlled. The overall purpose of Study Two was to determine

consumer response to luxury brand mentions in an affluent-lifestyle reality television show. *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* was selected as the sample because of its success within the television genre. Exploring a diverse group of informants ranging from avid viewers to subtle viewers, to compare perceptions of brand messages depicted in the series, is suggested.

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

As the major findings of this dissertation research suggests, luxury brand mentions reportedly impacts consumer culture. Study Two revealed consumer interests and their interpretations of luxury integrated reality television. Thus, practitioners should consider the following marketing implications to enhance brand mention effectiveness. First, blurred brand mentions should be visibly featured. Consumers recognized the blurred and unblurred brands. They attributed the integration to advertising efforts promoted by the show or network. Despite attempts to conceal brand inclusions, consumers were still exposed to the brands and elicited meanings due to perceptual and conceptual fluency (Whittlesea, 1993; Jacoby & Kelley, 1987). While blurred brand mentions may attract consumer attention, marketers should caution against excessive use as it is distracting as well. It is also important for marketers to consider the cultural identity of viewers to successfully include brand mentions to attract interest.

Marketers should ensure brand mention integrations in reality television are congruent with the plot. Research suggests effective brand mention placement occurs when a good fit exists between the brand, plot, and cast members (Russell, 1998). This

triad connection yields a transformational advertising experience which offers a more persuasive brand message (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Russell, 1998). Informants did not find the Apple iPhone brand mention persuasive or necessary. The active use of the brand did not offer new brand information about functionality or benefits in life. Instead, informants believed it was strategically placed in the scene for brand promotions only.

Verbal mentions should be integrated more in the reality television to convey stronger brand messages. Only 4.2 % of the luxury brand mentions in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* were verbal mentions. Four of the brands were mentioned both verbally and visually. Research indicates multi-modality enhances brand promotion as it becomes a central part of the show (Hudson & Hudson, 2006; Sheehan & Guo, 2005). Marketers are suggested to include plot mentions, which are verbal and visual brand mentions that are deeply connected to the show in reality television programs.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation research is the first to investigate luxury brand mentions using a reality television context and a consumer culture theory approach. Thus, as stated earlier, research findings only reflect this specific phenomenon and are not a generalization of consumer culture in society. Key insights sparked interests to expand this dissertation research for future studies.

Based on the limited definition of luxury, which is described as exclusive, with a well-known brand identity, opportunities exist to further explore broader meanings of luxury. Findings from the current research challenge the conceptual definition of luxury.

Specifically, Chevrolet Suburban and Apple brands straddle a blurred line as luxury because the brands are ubiquitous with high price points and status. A follow-up study is recommended to compare and contrast ubiquity and exclusivity as some brands may represent both and still be considered luxury. Drawing the comparison between these two elements of luxury may provide greater understandings of the complexity of luxury brands. Further, dissecting these nuances may also influence consumer response to such brand mentions and their positioning in marketing.

Due to the intersectional status of informants in this current research, it is evident more research is needed to update the hierarchy of luxury levels. Alleres (1990) developed hierarchy levels of luxury that were grounded in middle class norms and accessibility. Specifically, the hierarchy suggests luxury brands are accessible to the middle, professional, and elite members of society. However, one's perception of luxury may be relative to many factors, such as socio-economic class, geography, cultural capital, or family upbringing. For example, a Toyota Corolla may be perceived as less exclusive to Kourtney and Kim. But for less fortunate members of society, the economy car may be considered as luxury or inaccessible. Further conceptualization is recommended to develop a luxury spectrum considering these economic, social, and cultural factors, to address the breadth and depth of luxury brands.

One of the predominant themes found in Study One highlighted the appearances of blurred brand mentions. As mentioned in the discussion section, this marketing phenomenon is under explored. More investigation is necessary to assess blurred mentions in reality television in a variety ways. Insights from future studies may develop

a typology to explain the hierarchy, boundaries, and conditions of blurred brand mentions. It may help inform scholarship to better understand how the brand mentions are integrated and the implications of the inclusions. A follow-up study using a content assessment of more than one reality television sitcom series to assess the blurred brand mentions is recommended. Assessing such mentions in more than one show will provide an equal comparison to best measure the mention appearance.

Secondly, more insights are necessary to understand consumer response to blurred luxury brand mentions. Limited research has explored these insights. As noted in this dissertation research, applying conceptual fluency theory will support and provide an understanding of consumer response to the meanings of such mentions (Whittlesea, 1993). These potential insights are valuable because they reveal how blurred brand mentions impacts one's life, which expands research in the consumer culture field. Applying the perceptual fluency theory will support the ease consumers perceive features of the blurred images (Jacoby & Kelley, 1987). It will also reveal the unintended consequences of the blurred mentions and potential purchase intentions.

Considering the similar racial and gender identities shared by informants and Kourtney and Kim, a follow-up study to explore how those dynamics influence luxury brand mentions when endorsed in reality television is warranted. Future research is needed to examine the influences of cast member identities on consumer response to luxury brand mentions. This future research will advance the Balance Model of Product Placement Effects to study a balance in attitudes towards reality television cast members and integrated brand mentions (Russell & Stern, 2006). Currently, the model suggests

attitude balance occurs between cast members and brand mentions (Russell & Stern, 2006). However, the model does not consider specific antecedents that may influence consumer attitudes towards cast members that may ultimately influence their attitudes towards luxury brand mentions. Advancing the model will explore potential cultural identities that may influence consumer attitudes (Russell & Stern, 2006).

The unexpected discussion of intersectionality found in Study Two suggests more investigation is necessary to explore how luxury brand mentions impacts this demographic. Conducting a focus group of black women would be ideal to investigate how luxury brand mentions integrated in reality television shows targeted to black women, specifically influences consumer culture. A collective dialogue will enable shared lived experiences to emerge to reveal consumption and identity differences and similarities. It will also identify troublesome imagery depicted in the show to explore how the meta-narratives --materialism, elitism, aspiration -- gleaned from this dissertation research impacts their daily lives.

Further research is warranted to explore luxury brand mentions from the producer perspective. Informants consistently shared their suspicions about the luxury brand integrations in reality television. As stated earlier, they all believed the producers or the Kardashian family were paid to endorse the products in the show. Some informants also critically analyzed brand positioning, aesthetics, and functionality, depicted in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*. Thus, conducting depth interviews with reality television producers will reveal the strategy and formula behind the mentions. New knowledge

regarding strategies for luxury brand mentions in reality television is a suitable complement to this dissertation research.

Based on this dissertation research, luxury brand mentions play important roles in promoting brand messages in consumer culture. In particular, such mentions were shown to reach broader audiences and influence marginalized black women's perspectives of luxury brands and their consumption habits. The significance of luxury brand mentions reflect growing trends of materialism and hyper consumption, which are commonly integrated in society. As marketing communications and reality television advances, it is likely luxury brand mentions will have continued prominence in consumer culture. The unique phenomenon provides a ripe area of context for future research direction.

Table 1: Hierarchy of Luxury Brand Levels

Inaccessible Luxury	The top level is inaccessible luxury and is associated with a more affluent class of consumers. Most luxury brands at this level are priced extremely high and exude exceptional status.
Intermediate Luxury	This level includes products that are economically-feasible for the professional socio-economic class consumers.
Accessible Luxury	The bottom level is the first entry into the luxury brand market. These products are attainable by the middle socioeconomic class who seek to increase their status level.

Alleres (1990)

Table 2: Summary of Brand Mentions

Total # of Mentions		%
# of Luxury Brands	77	60
# of Total Brands	130	-
# of Total Unique Brand Mentions	198	-
# of Unique Luxury Brand Mentions	142	71
Highest # of Unique Luxury Brand Mentions in One Episode	17	-
Lowest # of Unique Brand Mentions in One Episode	6	-
Average # of Unique Brand Mentions in One Episode	11	-

Table 3: Luxury Brand Mention Integrations

Episode	# of Unique Luxury Brand Mentions	# Unique Brand Mentions	Percentages
1	8	8	100.00%
2	9	12	75.00%
3	6	10	60.00%
4	9	16	56.25%
5	15	18	83.33%
6	18	27	66.67%
7	14	15	93.33%
8	13	24	54.17%
9	15	25	60.00%
10	7	14	50.00%
11	14	14	100.00%
12	8	20	40.00%

Table 4: Listing of Product Categories

Product Categories	# of Unique Mentions	Percentages
Automobile	38	27%
Entertainment/Technology	28	20%
Hospitality	20	14%
Food & Beverage	15	11%
Retail	16	11%
Apparel	9	6%
Services	5	4%
Accessories/Jewelry	4	3%
Health	4	3%
Luggage	3	2%
Media	1	1%
Other	1	1%

Table 5: Luxury Levels of Unique Mentions

Hierarchy Levels	**# of Unique Mentions**	**%**
Accessible Luxury	87	61%
Intermediate Luxury	30	21%
Inaccessible Luxury	25	18%

Table 6: Most Frequently Mentioned Luxury Brands

Brands	# of Unique Mentions	# of Complete Mentions	Luxury Level
Chevrolet Suburban	10	69	Accessible
Rolls Royce	10	37	Inaccessible
Apple iPhone	8	21	Accessible
Apple MacBook laptop	8	19	Accessible
Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel	5	17	Intermediate

Figure 1: Four Categorization Types of Product Placement

Traditional - *Survivor*

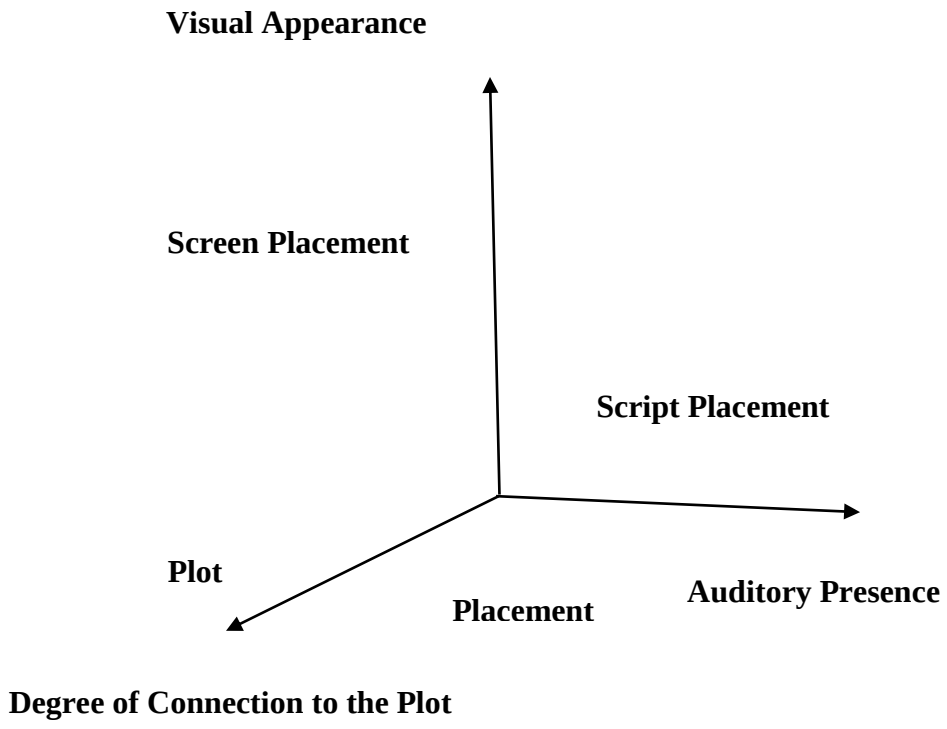
Enhanced – *American Idol*

Product Integration – *Biggest Loser*

Product Assimilation - *Airline*

Sheehan & Guo (2005)

Figure 2: A Three-Dimensional Construct of Product Placement



Russell (1998)

Figure 3: Luxury Brand Prominence

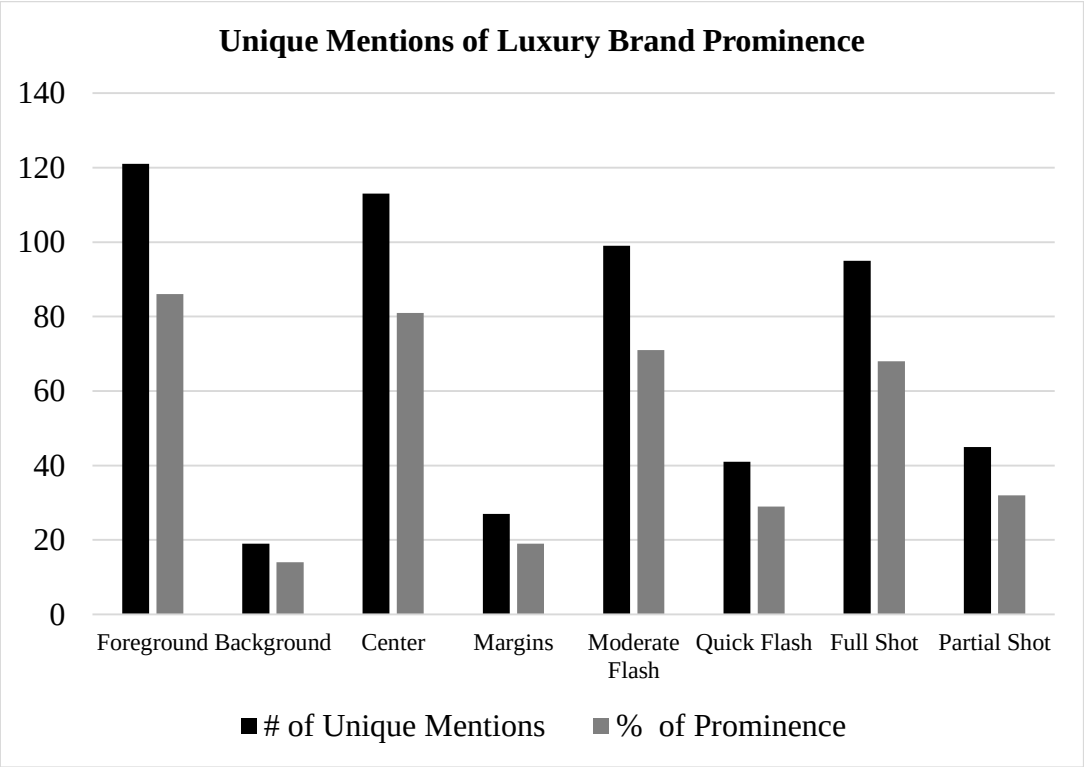


Figure 4: Chevrolet Suburban

Figure 5: Rolls Royce

Figure 6: Apple iPhone

Figure 7: Apple MacBook

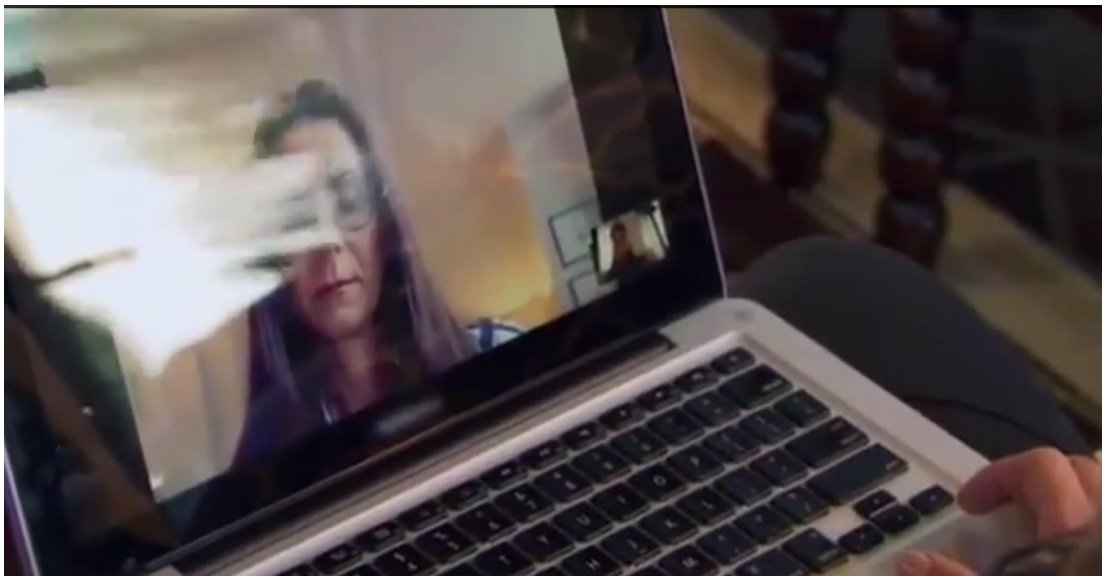


Figure 8: Apple MacBook

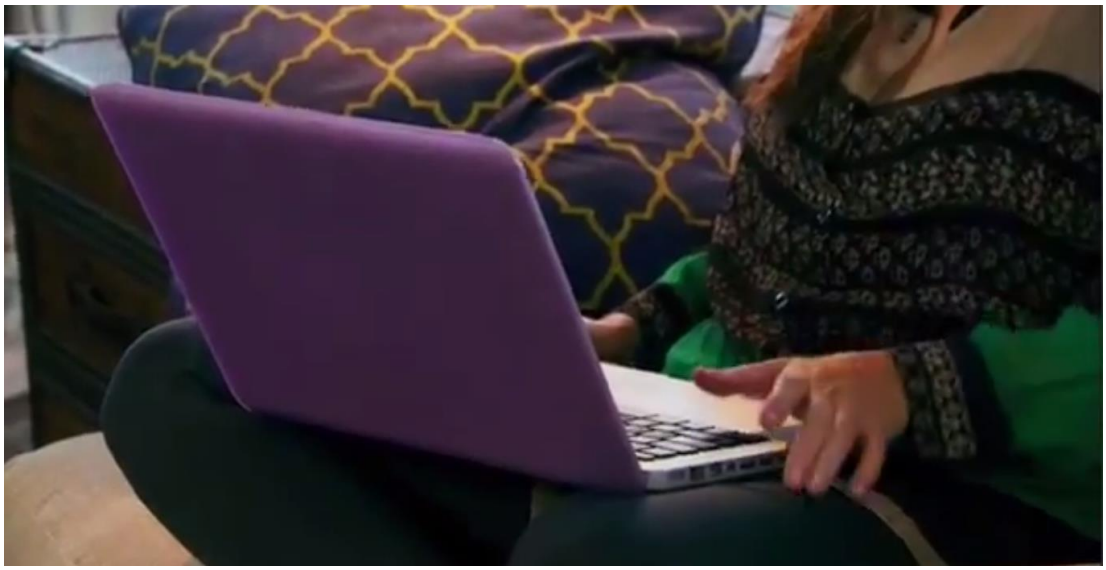
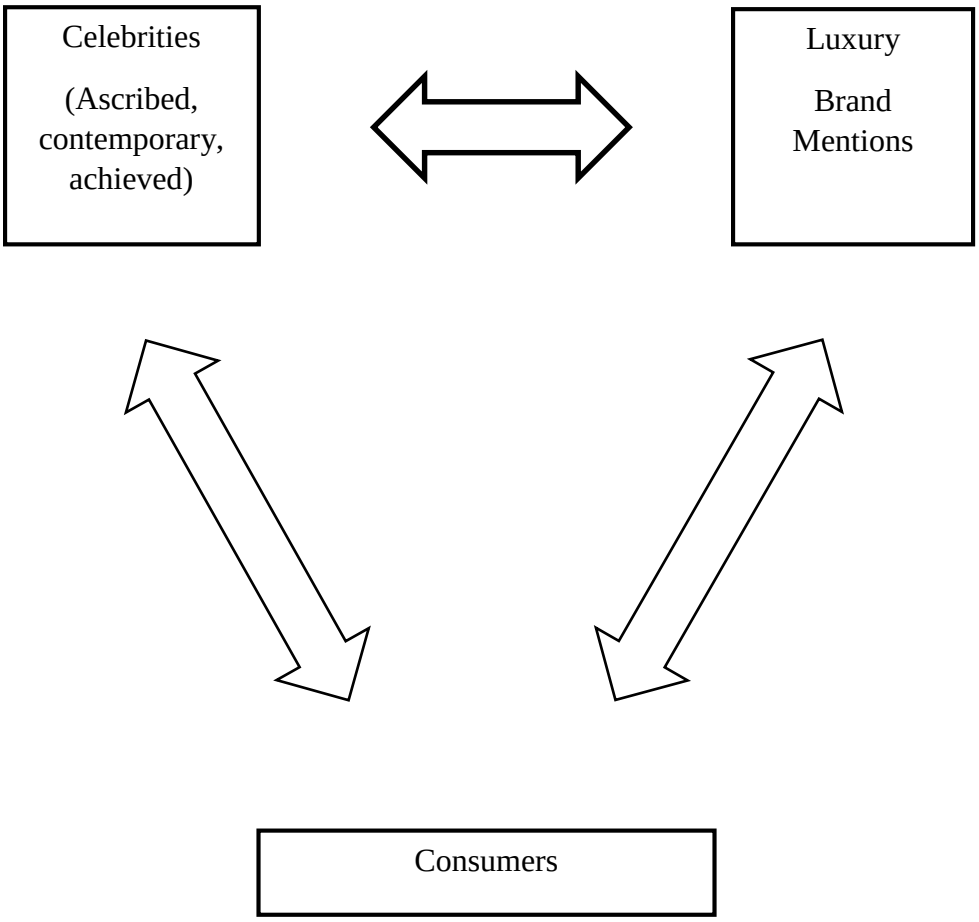


Figure 9: Eden Roc Miami Beach Hotel

Figure 10: Reciprocal Meaning-Transfer Model



Appendix A: Individual Episode Code Sheet

Air Date			
Episode Name			
Code Number			
Show Name			
Network			
Brand Name			
Brand Mention Frequency			
Atmospherics	Indoor	Outdoor	Both
	Realistic	Abstract	Both
	Home	Work	Neither
	Mundane	Celebratory	Neither
PPL Appeal	Sex	Humor	Aspirational
	Rational	Fear	Other
Target Audience	Male	Female	Both
Celebrity Endorser	Yes	No	
Prominence	Foreground	Background	Center
	Margins	Moderate Flash	Quick Flash
	Full Shot	Partial Shot	
Product Category	Automobile	Hospitality	Apparel
	Luggage	Accessories/Jewelry	Retail
	Entertainment Tech	Food & Beverage	Film
	Service	Beauty/Cosmetic	Health
Age Group	Child	Adolescent	Adult
Class of Product	Luxury	Standard	
Notes			

Appendix B: Intercoder Reliability

Episode	Coded Units	Cases in Disagreement	Agreement %	Error %
1	392	15	96.2%	3.80%
7	735	15	98%	2.0%

Appendix C: Operational Definitions

Code Category	Unit of Analysis	Definition
Prominence	Foreground	brands that were nearest in the camera view of viewers with high prominence
	Background	brands that were nearest in the camera view of viewers
	Center	brands that were depicted in the foreground and in the middle of the screen
	Margins	brands positioned further to the left or right, or near the top or bottom of the screen
	Moderate Flash	brand mentions that were featured for six to 10 seconds
	Quick Flash	brands that were featured from zero to five seconds
	Full Shot	brands that were completely visible in the mention
	Partial Shot	brands that were not completely shown, only a part of the brand was visible
Product Class	Luxury	brands that promote exclusivity and status, have high brand awareness and retail sales
	Standard	brands with lower price points and status (e.g. convenience products)

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Brand Mentions & Reality Television Interview Guide

I. Background Information | Ice Breaker

a. Thanks for joining me today. Before we start, I'd like to learn a little more about you.

b. If you could choose one brand to describe you, which brand would that be? Why?

c. What brands would your friends suggest to best describe you? Why?

d. Name ONE brand you MUST carry to an exotic island. Why?

II. Branding

a. Brands are promoted in the media and represent a series of consumer goods categories. Let's talk about brands that you use. What are your favorite brands? Why? Please share your earliest memory or encounter with that brand.

b. Describe your experiences with your favorite brands. What do those brands mean to you? Share both positive and negative experiences.

c. How often do you buy or use those brands? If you could recommend your favorite brand to a friend, what would you say? What factors, if any, would change your interest in that brand?

III. Luxury Brands

a. What are your thoughts on luxury brands? What is the first brand that comes to mind when luxury is mentioned? Why?

b. What messages do you believe luxury brands convey to you? How would you explain a luxury brand encounter to a friend?

c. How do you think luxury consumers are perceived by the world? When you see luxury consumers, what are your immediate thoughts?

d. Now, I would like to know more about your luxury brand consumption.

   i. Do you consume or use luxury brands? Why or why not?

   ii. Please share your personal experiences with these brands?

   iii. How do you feel when using these brands?

e. If money was no object, would you buy a luxury brand of choice? Why or why not? Please candidly walk me through your thought process.

IV. Reality Television

a. Now let's talk about Reality television. Do you watch Reality television? If so, why?
b. How often do you watch Reality television? What media do you use to view it?
    i. Prompts: Please share the types of Reality television shows you watch? For example, there are several types such as self-improvement (The Biggest Loser), talent shows (*America's Got Talent*), documentary-style (*Jersey Shor*e) genres? Why?
    ii. Which is your preference? How do you identify with that type of Reality television show?
c. Name three of your favorite Reality television shows. Why?
    i. Tell me a story recap of your favorite Reality television show? What attracted you to the show? Describe the message you believed the show conveyed.
    ii. Please explain a reason why you would STOP watching your favorite Reality television show?

V. Brand Mention in Reality Television (using video clips)

a. You will be shown a series of videos from Reality television show, *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* Season 3. Please answer the following questions regarding the videos clips.
b. What are your thoughts on the individual luxury brand just shown?
    i. What message does the brand convey to you?
    ii. How do you think luxury brand integration impacts the brands?
    iii. How would you and your friends be influenced by that brand?
c. What are your thoughts on luxury brand integration?
    i. What does the integration mean to you?
    ii. How does it appeal to you as a viewer?
    iii. How would you describe the integration to a friend?
    iv. How does the luxury brand integration influence the storyline of the show?
d. Of all the brand mentions, which three represent your favorites? (Discuss favorites one at a time.)
    i. What is it that you like about the brand mention?

ii. Tell me a story about the people and brand featured in the mention. What are they like? What about them do you believe is similar to yourself? What about them is dissimilar?

e. Of all the brand mentions, which three do you like the least? (Discuss leaked like one at a time.)
   i. What is it about the brand mention that you don't like?
   ii. Tell me a story about the people featured in the ad. What are they like? What brands do they use? What about them do you believe is similar to yourself? What about them is dissimilar?

VI. Authenticity/Realism (using video clips)

a. How realistic do you believe the luxury brand integration is featured in this scene?
   i. How does it fit into the scene? Does it make sense? Why or why not?
   ii. What elements about the integration makes it realistic?
   iii. What elements about the integration makes it unrealistic?
b. What role does the celebrity endorsement play on the realism of luxury brand mentions?
c. How does the realism depiction shape the storyline?
d. Please give your interpretation of realism in this scene.
e. Describe the realism messages that are conveyed if any?
f. How likely do you think people like you would be convinced?

VII. Consumption & Society (Public Policy)

a. How does luxury brand mentions in Reality television impact your personal brand views? Explain.
b. How does luxury brand mentions in Reality television impact your personal identity? Explain.
c. What actions, if any, are you motivated to do after watching *Kourtney & Kim Take Miami* video clips?
   i. How willing are you to purchase the *same* luxury brands featured in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami? Why?*
   ii. How willing are you to buy *similar* luxury brands featured in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*? Why?
d. How do you think your friends will be influenced by brands featured in *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*? Why?
   i. How do you think Reality television series *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* overall impacts our society?
   ii. What outcomes do you foresee?

e. Do you see any advantages or disadvantages of the *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* show? Why or why not?

Background Information

What is your age?

How would you describe your ethnic background?

What is your hometown?

What is your highest level of education?

What is your occupation?

How would you describe your socio-economic class? Low? middle? high?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix E: Informant Table

Name	Age	Race	Location	Edu	SES status	Occupation	Marital Status	Viewed *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*
Amy	23	B	Prince George's County, MD	B.S.	Upper Middle	Paralegal	Single	No
**Ana	23	B	Dallas, TX	B.S.	Middle class	Law student	Partnered	Yes
**Becky	28	B	Oxnard, CA	B.S.	Middle class	unemployed	Single	No
*Carlan	26	B (Nigerian-American)	Houston, TX	Pharm. D.	Middle class	Pharmacist/grad student	Single	Yes
*Denise	20	H	Houston, TX	H.S.	lower middle	college student	Single	No
**Ellen	33	B	Atlanta, GA	B.S.	Middle class	IT professional	Single	No
*Kelly	24	A	China	B.S.	Middle class	grad student	Partnered	No
**Lynn	20	B	San Antonio, TX	H.S.	Middle class	college student	Single	No
*Maria	21	W	Rowlett, TX	H.S.	lower class	college student	Partnered	
**Monica	24	B	Houston, TX	B.S.	lower class	grad student/retail	Single	Yes
**Nicole	26	B	St. Louis, MO/Atlanta, GA	B.S.	Middle class	grad student	Single	No
**Phoebe	19	A	Houston, TX	H.S.	Middle class	college student	Single	No
**Renee	33	B	Tampa, FL	B.S.	Middle class	Speech Language Pathology Asst.	Partnered	No
**Roxanne	28	B	Atlanta, GA	B.S.	Middle class	grad student	Single	Yes
Sabrina	32	B	Gasden, AL	Pharm. D., J.D.	Middle class	Pharmacist	Single	No
**Tammy	27	B	Gainesville, FL	B.S.	Middle class	Intern/grad student	Single	Yes
*Terry	24	A	China	B.S.	Upper Middle	grad student	Partnered	No
*Wendy	21	H	San Antonio, TX	H.S.	Upper Middle/Lower Higher class	college student	Partnered	Yes
**Xena	21	B	Orange Town, TX	H.S.	lower class	college student	Single	No
*Zelda	31	B	San Antonio, TX	B.S.	Middle class	Loan officer	Single	No

*Represents informants who are students and identified more with their hometown than their current location.

** Represents informants who are marginalized through educational, housing, and employment opportunities.

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