Dump It Out - a Study on the Handbag

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Handbags are a key accessory in the world of fashion. Their market value is significant and continues to rise. For young people, a handbag is more than an accessory or fashion item. Young people can spend a lot of money on a designer handbag. Inside a handbag, they are carrying objects/signifiers of who they were/are/want to be. Further to a conventional interpretive study for thick description, a new research method – dump it out, is introduced. The authors would like to forward our sincerest gratitude to the Hong Kong Polytechnic University for the funding of this research.

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Dump it out - A Study on the Handbag
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ABSTRACT
The handbag is a key accessory in the world of fashion. Its market value is significant and continues to rise. In the luxury market, the handbag is not only a major profit center in the whole business portfolio of a company, but is also strategically critical in that context. In this study, the handbag was found to be more than an accessory or fashion item for youngsters. Young people can spend a great deal of money on a designer handbag. Inside a handbag, they are carrying objects/signifiers of who they were/are/will be. Further to a conventional interpretive study for thick description, a new research method – dump it out, is planned for this study.

INTRODUCTION
In response to the question, “Is there anything that you want to buy at this moment?”, “a handbag” was the most popular answer among the female youngsters in Hong Kong. In a study conducted by MINTEL (2008) in the U.K., it was discovered that sales of handbags in that country grew 146% between 2000 and 2005 to reach a value of 350 million pounds. MINTEL predicted that, in 2010, the handbag sector will amount to 72% of the market value of women's accessories as a whole in the U.K. In another report on the world market, Koncept Analytics (2009) asserted that “handbags are one of the key accessories driving the fashion world.” Strategically, luxury brands are using handbags to enter new markets. Recent examples of this are Cole Haan, Coach, and others. Furthermore, many luxury brands sell more accessories and handbags than ready-to-wear clothing (Chevalier and Mazzalovo 2008).

Academics in the field of marketing have noted the importance of symbols in shaping needs. It has been argued that consumers today are consuming the symbolic meaning of goods in the grand project of constructing and expressing the self (e.g., Elliott 1991, Featherstone 1991, Levy 1959). Baudrillard (1988) held that consumption is a “play of symbols.” In view of its visual nature, the saliency of the symbolic nature of consumption is even more pronounced in fashion (Barnard 1996). The fashions around us have transcended functional attributes, as is evidenced in our overflowing wardrobes. This superfluity can be explained by the saturated/fragmented nature of identities/selves in the postmodern ethos (e.g., Gergen 1991, Giddens 1991). Belk’s seminal study (Belk 1988) has drawn attention to possessions as they relate to selves, not only to the notion that “we are what we have.” Our possessions can tell something about our relationship with the other, our connection with the past, our sense of control and mastery (Weisz et al. 1984), and our extended selves. Along this line of thinking, given the limited capacity of a handbag, the things inside it epitomize the self/ves at a moment in time.

HANDBAGS IN POSTMODERNITY – A CARRIER OF SELF/VES
“I don’t change my handbag very often, as I have to sort everything out and put them all in a new one – that’s too much trouble for me.” Researcher’s notes

In a postmodern world, we face the dilemma of an identity crisis (Giddens 1991: 201). The world is running too fast for us to catch up with it (Giddens 2002). Our saturated/fragmented selves and the hyperreality of it has been described as liquid. We might be liberated, yet we can feel an ensuring loss of control and confusion. Allport (1937) suggested that, when we awaken every morning, we need something to remind us of who we are that we were the same person as the night before. This something, as Allport (1937) avowed, exists in our personality. Belk (1988), however, argued that, in this context, our belongings and possessions could play a major role. Belk wrote, “our possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities” (p. 139). Collins Concise Dictionary Plus (1984) defines the handbag as “a woman’s small bag carried to contain personal articles” (p. 564). In line with the argument of Belk (1988), in postmodernity, the handbag is not just a carrier of our possessions; inside, it contains our “selves”. This includes the “selves” we have probably forgotten (long hidden in one of the compartments), about who we were are/wanted to be (e.g., ID card(s), a brochure of our dream college, etc.). Relative to the malleable self, the handbag is probably more stable, for the reason of inertia. It is something people don’t want to change very often, as it is too much trouble to keep sorting through things in their handbags.

OBJECTIVES: – METHOD AND CONTENT
This study is intended to explore the handbag as a site for interpretive study; the symbolic significance of the handbag and the role of self/ves in the context.

METHOD
The seminal study of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) involved a survey of eight families in Chicago, who were interviewed on the subject of their feelings about common household objects. The study has a compelling conclusion: that the human capacity for the creation and redirection of meaning offer the only hope for survival. This study shed light on the consumer study of the kind (e.g., Fornier 1998, Belk 1988). Recently, Coupland (2005) used the kitchen pantry as a site for her ethnographic study for a brand that is considered “mundane and blends into the household environment” (p. 106). She argued that, consumers “do have the agency, but this agency lies not just in the ability to embrace or create new brand meanings but in the capacity to forget, minimize, and overlook brands that enter the home” (p. 116).

In this study, the handbag is used as the prime site for investigation. A handbag is something that many people will not change every day. Moreover, there are brands and objects inside it that people also “forget, minimize, and overlook,” although there are also objects/brands to which they have a strong attachment (Belk 1988) and that are also symbolically meaningful for their self/ves (Elliott 1999).

“Once in a while, when I clean out the stuff inside [my handbag], I feel reborn. The feeling before was so heavy, the experience is rather cleansing.”
(Researcher’s notes)

Because of the size of their bag, and because of the influence of fashion, most of the informants in this study...
PARTICIPANTS

Seventeen female informants were randomly recruited from a university campus in Hong Kong. Their handbags were searched by the first author. All of the informants are university students, who ranged in age from 20 to 23. The “handbag” profile of the informants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Handbag Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kayu</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceci</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queenie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTERVIEWS

The venues for the interviews were the university’s student canteen and, whenever possible, the informants’ home, for a relaxed environment that would stimulate references to the informants’ possessions. In the home, it was also possible to observe displays of objects that were of possible importance and meaning to the owners (Belk 1988), which and provided cues to understanding an informant’s lifestyle and personality (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981).

Each interview lasted for one and a half hours. The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. The flexibility of the format allowed the informants to express themselves freely, and interesting topics always came up.

The earlier stage of the interviews commenced with a ‘grand-tour’ of questions pertaining to the biography and general lifestyle of each informant (McCacken 1988). This was then followed by questions to obtain an understanding of patterns of consumption as they related to bags, such as the choice process, purchasing criteria, and consumption frequency. These provided extra information about the informants’ attitude towards their bags. Subsequently, the informants were asked to take out all of the things inside their bags, and were questioned about those items.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The handbags

Table 1: Sample of the objects found inside the handbags of the informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carman</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to price, the bags ranged from HK$200 to HK$10,000. The informants often owned several bags at a time, with one having as many as 22 bags. Owning six or seven bags seemed to be quite common. It was generally agreed among the girls that a handbag is a fashion item, which serves as a good reason for its premium price. as explicitly illustrated by Kayu.

Kayu: “... I always shop for the latest bags with my close friends. I think bags are important for me. It is a kind of fashion item on my body. ... Every one can see it and define what kind of bag you are wearing. ... Mostly I will spend over half of my part-time income to buy a bag ... since the fashionable bags are always expensive.”

However, unlike the items of apparel in the fashion system, the informants think that the fashion cycle for handbags is longer. A handbag can be used for several seasons, which is another justification for them to spend more money on a handbag than on an item of clothing. Some of the informants could pay three times their monthly income on a handbag (see Table 2).

Rachael: “I like shopping with friends for bags, since bags can be used in every season. ... Also, bags can easily match with clothes for different occasions. ... Therefore, I am willing to pay more for my dream bag.”

They have a common goal – luxury brands
Although the informants are all still university students, luxury brands play a very prominent role in their aspirations of what they would like to have and what they actually have. A few brands are well represented on the list of bags that they own. Although not all of these are luxury labels, the informants all have a few bags from luxury brands. All of them aspire to have even more luxurious handbags, with Hermes, Louis Vuitton, and Prada being the most notable brands.

Table 2 Informants’ current handbags and their ideal handbags

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>The maximum price range of the bags</th>
<th>Monthly Income</th>
<th>How many bags do you have</th>
<th>Frequency of purchasing bags</th>
<th>Brands of bags owned</th>
<th>Bags you want to buy at this moment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kayu</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$300-HK$1,500</td>
<td>HK$2,500</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>B+ ad, Agnes b</td>
<td>Miu Miu Prada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$300-HK$1,500</td>
<td>HK$2,100</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>OZOC I.T.</td>
<td>Chanel Louis Vuitton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$300-HK$3,500</td>
<td>HK$3,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Gucci H &amp; M</td>
<td>Chanel Louis Vuitton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$300-HK$9,000</td>
<td>HK$3,500</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Miu Miu Agnes b</td>
<td>Chanel Prada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$1,000-HK$9,000</td>
<td>HK$3,500</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Gucci Bottega Veneta</td>
<td>Louis Vuitton Miu Miu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$200-HK$500</td>
<td>HK$2,500</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Agnes b K-2 Beams Boy</td>
<td>Louis Vuitton Prada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$1,000-HK$30,000</td>
<td>HK$10,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Prada Gucci Bottega Veneta</td>
<td>Chanel Bottega Veneta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$250-HK$2,000</td>
<td>$2,800</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Dior Agnes b B+ ab</td>
<td>Louis Vuitton Gucci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$250-HK$1,500</td>
<td>$2,800</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Marc Jacobs Miu Miu</td>
<td>Louis Vuitton Bottega Veneta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$250-HK$2,000</td>
<td>$8,800</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Marc Jacobs YSL</td>
<td>Louis Vuitton Hermes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$200-HK$8,000</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Dior Gucci</td>
<td>Prada Hermes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$250-HK$3,000</td>
<td>$4,060</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Agnes b K-2</td>
<td>Chanel Louis Vuitton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceci</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$500-HK$10,000</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Agnes b Zara</td>
<td>Chanel Hermes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queenie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$300-HK$2,500</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Agnes b Zara</td>
<td>Chanel Louis Vuitton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carman</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$300-HK$4,000</td>
<td>$4,500</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Marc Jacobs K-2 Beams Boys</td>
<td>Chanel Hermes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$200-HK$1,500</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Marc Jacobs Muji Zara</td>
<td>Chanel Hermes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toby</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HK$200-HK$4,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Marc Jacobs K-2</td>
<td>Chanel Hermes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Things Inside

It is not unusual for monetary value of the items contained in a bag to be around HK$5,000 (excluding the price of the handbag itself). A brand-name wallet/s, a branded keyholder, NDS, iPod, mobile phone, cosmetics, digital cameras – many of these things are considered by the informants to be basic necessities. One of them described her mobile phone as “something I won’t leave home without.” Many of them agreed that they would feel very uncomfortable if they let home with any one of the above items. When one thinks also about the value of the bag itself, an informant could be carrying as much as HK$10,000 in goods.

Small bags as organizers

Inside the handbags, it is very common to see several small bags. Each small bag carries different things that have different functions. Some bags carry a fashionable label and some are simple in design. Joanne and Fiona claimed that small bags help them to categorize different items.
Joanne: “I have a total of three small bags in my bag; one is for putting my cosmetics in, one is for putting my pills (for menstruation) in, and the other is for other things. … I would like to buy a luxury brand small bag to store my cosmetics in, since I always use my cosmetics on campus and people will see my bag as well (laughs). For the other small bags, I would just randomly buy them.”

Fiona: “I have four small bags in my bag. They contain things with different functions. For example, I like to put the pens, cosmetics, personal stuff, and my MP3 in different bags. Also, the bag I used to store my cosmetics in is the most expensive one. … It matches my cosmetics (since they are all branded and relatively expensive as well).”

The informants like to bring several small bags with them in order to separate their possessions. Also, it seems that females are more willing to spend on such fashion items as a small bag that people will notice, as they are concerned about the perceptions of others. Therefore, they would like to buy a brand-name bag to store such highly visible things such as cosmetics. At the same time, it is very common to find in their handbags a small fabric drawstring bag, very often with a cartoon character on it.

The small items could be the most expensive and remarkable
Some small items could be the most expensive ones in the handbag, or were the first branded items that the informants had ever possessed and therefore could remember very well. From this very first experience owning an expensive with luxurious brand, their desire just kept growing. For example, Karen told me that her first experience with a designer label was a Vivienne Westwood cardholder she had bought a few years ago (she is still using it), since back then it was one of the few “affordable luxuries” for her. Since then, luxury brands have become more accessible to her, and she buys more designer labels. On the day of the interview, she was carrying a Prada handbag, which cost around HK$8,000.

Hello Kitty and cartoon characters
Some informants have items with Hello Kitty or other cartoon characters on them. Even if they think these cartoons are more suitable for children than adults, they do not want to replace the items. They claimed that their boyfriend likes them to be more girlish, and they use the cartoon products to enhance their girlish image.

Shirley: “I am not a fan of Hello Kitty, but the bag with kitty logo looks cute and girlish. When my boyfriend saw it, he said that it is suitable for me – we are both lovely. … That made me very happy.”

Joyce: “This mobile phone bag is really cute, and the “three-eyed monster” looks like me. When I saw it for the first time, I decided to buy it, and I still use it now.”

Strategic gift from a boyfriend
In the handbag of all of the informants who were dating someone, it was easy to find clues of that fact, normally in the form of a gift (a wallet or a keyholder) or a picture in the wallet, perhaps even the bag itself. There were interesting stories attached to the object. For Karen, a wallet with a window is an object for the confirmation of the relationship.

Karen: “This cardholder was bought by my boyfriend last year. I remember telling him to buy me a thicker one because I have so many cards to keep. However, when I opened it, I found that it is too thin and there is a window at the back. He said it is good to show our picture in the window, and has reminded me to bring it every day until now.”

To some, this rite of confirmation is sweet, so even though they do not like the gift, they keep it.

Rachel: “He bought me this cardholder that not suitable for me. I don’t like the color and the style. But he said it has two big windows, so I can keep many of our sticker photos and see him every day. Although I do not really like this stuff, I feel that it is quite sweet to bring it with me every day.”

Sometimes, it is a gift, yet with a twist
Yuki: “I have two wallets: one has no window and the smaller one has windows. The smaller one was a gift from my boyfriend. I don’t like it that much. I just use it for change. I have bought another one that I like better. I always carry both of them, since he (the boyfriend) loves to see me to carry the one he gave me.”

Past relationship
If a bag usually contains indications of a current relationship, a past relationship can have an influence on the bag and the things inside it.

Kayu: “I definitely do not bring my ex’s stuff in my bag. I do not want to remember his face or even the time I spent with him when looking at the things that belonged to him. … But I am not angry with him now.”

Cecilia: “I know my boyfriend will be angry. … I am still using this Miu Miu bag that was a gift from my ex-boyfriend. Although I do not love my ex, I like this bag. When my boyfriend noticed this, he suddenly he bought me the same type of Miu Miu bag in a different color. … He said he does not want to see the old bag again.”

That’s what makes her so popular – the VIP cards
Lury (1996) posited that it is through “things” that man has a “social life.” Young people are easily influenced emotionally by their peers (Willis 1990), from whom they seek recognition. In this study, we found that some informants always bring along their VIP cards (discount cards for different stores and brands). They believe that, with these cards, they can make new friends easily and also become very popular. Not only can the VIP cards help their friends to save money when shopping, they can be topics of conversation. Most important of all, the VIP cards (in
particular, the luxury brands) can enhance their own fashion image.

Joyce: “I have already collected over 50 VIP cards, membership cards for including for high-end brands and skin-care products. I feel more confident in front of my friends, since they like to shop with me as they know I can get a discount. It really helps to build up our relationship. We can share the latest fashion information and opinions. ... Sometimes, they inspired me to try new styles, and I enjoy shopping with them too much.”

Figure 1: Karen’s VIP cards

Karen: “I always goes shopping with my friends, because we have a similar character and we look for similar clothes.... Usually, I put all the VIP cards in my bag, so that we can shop at a better price, although I do not know when I will use them. This enhances me in communicating with my friends, and I think I look fashionable with these.”

The informants stated that they feel more confident in front of their friends if they have more VIP cards. To some extent, VIP cards can help a person to establish a group identity, thus increasing one’s popularity.

A Superfluous Self

Contemporary consumption is characterized by waste and superfluity (e.g., Douglas and Isherwood 1979). A postmodern explanation for the nature of this consumption could be the number of selves (Kenneth 1991) that we have to negotiate today. Inside the handbags of the informants were such mundane items as tissue paper, candies, packs of chewing gum, and old receipts. Yet the one thing that they will carry with them that is branded and relatively expensive is cosmetics.

Jessica has more than 20 different kinds of cosmetics in bags, but they are seldom used.

Jessica: “In my bags there are over 20 kinds of cosmetics, some of them I never use on campus. ... My friends in class always motivate me to buy and try new cosmetics; thus, we have more topics to discuss during class. ... Somehow, I have more knowledge about cosmetics. This enhances me in communicating with my friends.”

Cary admitted that she is addicted to buying cosmetics:

Cary: “I like to shop for cosmetics with friends. Our taste in cosmetics is similar. ... Although I know I am already addicted to buying cosmetics, I am still willing to try new ones recommended by friends. ... When I shop with my friends, I feel content and our relationship is totally enhanced.”

Figure 2: Jessica’s cosmetics

Things with mythical power in a designer wallet

Inside their wallet, Janet, Ceci, and Fiona keep picture of the Buddha and lucky charms (see Table 1) from temples. These were given to them by their parents, with the aim of rendering them protection from above. Yet all of them claimed that they themselves do not have any particular religion. The mythical power of religion, however, seems to have been internalized. Religion might not be significant in their daily life, yet all of them admitted that they feel a bit uneasy when they leave home without these religious objects.

CONCLUSION

Thompson (1995) described the self as a symbolic project, which the individual must actively construct out of the available symbolic materials. The individual weaves these materials into a “coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self identity.” In this study, the handbag was used as a research site for “the symbolic project of self.” It provided good evidence of the high literacy of consumption and the significant role of consumption among a group of young girls. The handbag is not only a carrier of objects, it carries the self(ves), whether that/those of the past, present, and probably also the future.

It was found out that the handbag is more than a fashion accessory for the informants. Since it has a longer fashion cycle, it is more functional than a conventional fashion item, and this is a good reason for them to pay more for a handbag than for other fashion items. The price of the handbag could go as high as HK$10,000. Inside the handbag it is very usual to find such things as a mobile phone, branded cosmetics, a digital camera, NDS, branded wallets, and so forth. Taken as a whole, the monetary value of the items can be stunning. An expensive luxury handbag is very often considered something of a necessity for a woman, as every informant in this study has expressed a desire to buy such a handbag.

Inside the handbags are things of different symbolic value related to the self/ves of different contexts – past/present/future, friend/family/romantic other. There are wallets or small bags inside that act as organizers. The brands of the small things are themselves records of the informants’ consumption literacy. A small branded keyholder and a cardholder could be a mark for a first experience with luxury brands. Cartoon figures are a mediator for the girlish personal construct. Some of the
informants would keep something they did not like inside their handbag, simply because it was a gift from a romantic other. An informant, Karen, was so popular among her friends because she had a whole stack of VIP cards from different stores/brands. An abundance of cosmetics in a bag, though not often used, might enhance a young woman’s feeling of femininity and bolster her social self with others, since such items serve as a good topic for conversation. The items in a handbag are not all about fashion and brand literacy, however. A luxury designer wallet could contain a picture of the Buddha or a lucky charm from a temple. These are items that some will not leave home without.

All in all, in this study the handbag has proven to be a potential site for consumer research. We can catch glimpses of the symbolic project(s) of the self/ves in different dimensions: horizontally (at the same time) and vertically (through different points of the timeline). In the wake of postmodernity, our selves and identities are in a state of fragmentation, saturation, and flux. In this context, it is posited that brands and things play a strong role. In face of the fluidity of the postmodern world, a handbag and the things inside it are something we can hang on it for a more stable self/ves.

REFERENCES