

Log on for luxury



This Gucci handbag can be bought from www.gucci.com

■ Tasneem Nashrulla

At www.jimmychoo.com you can flip through a glossy brochure, pick out a pair of sexy stilettos and slip them into your shopping cart. With the internet reaching 70 per cent of people in North America and 42 per cent in Europe, the demand for global luxury online sales is rising. Will India, recent destination of a clutch of top international brands, soon hitch a ride on the online luxury bandwagon?

People have already started. 24-year-old Mumbai-based garment exporter Amit Maghani has been shopping on the Internet for the past five years. He has an online quarterly budget of Rs 1 lakh. "I started shopping online because many of the international brands I wear like Dolce & Gabbana, Morphine Generation, Diesel, Emporio Armani, Stone Island etc have not yet come to India."

It's not merely about availability; online shopping offers exclusivity as well. Kazim Amin, a 23-year-old trainee pilot from Mumbai, logs on every two months to buy products from Tommy Hilfinger, Juicy Couture, Dior Homme and Nice Collective. "An online portal offers each and every product that may or may not be stocked at the store, thereby provid-

No time to zip over to the nearest luxury boutique? Join the growing tribe of luxury online customers

ing exclusivity," he says.

Unsurprisingly, more and more people across the world feel this is the way to be different. "Online luxury shopping has exploded in the last five years and is steadily growing", says Uche Okonkwo, director of Luxe E.t.c., a Paris-based business management consultancy for the luxury sector, through an email interview. According to US market research company Forrester, luxury sales online fetched \$12 billion in 2005. The figure is growing.

Brands like Gucci, Dior and Louis Vuitton are expanding their online deliveries to reach many countries. India is yet to figure on their maps. Maghani finds it tedious to provide his American relative's credit card number and mailing address every time he orders online while dreading the exorbitant import duty on the goods.

All that, feels, Rucheta Bhardwaj, a trend spotter and luxury consultant, will change soon enough. "Firstly, high-end brands will generate greater revenues if they consider the Indian market as a potential player in luxury e-retail. Secondly, if luxury brands need to be understood by the Indian consumer, they need an online portal to do so," she says.

"I think the online portal will soon be as good as brick and mortar for luxe brands all over the world," Bhardwaj says. For some, that's already more than true.

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ONLINE SHOPPING – Luxury brands vs. Ordinary products

- Luxury goods are sensory and require a physical appreciation of their aesthetic value.
- Products like books, toys are not sensory and do not require the online shopper to see, touch or try them.
- Prestigious locations and elevated services of a luxury brand store have to be replicated on its website.
- Books, consumer durables etc are not high-end and replication of the exclusivity or service of a physical location is unnecessary.
- Online shopping is associated with saving time, money and getting a good bargain especially for books, consumer goods etc.
- Luxury brands never want to be associated with bargains.

