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The Artification of Luxury: How Art Can Affect Perceived Durability and Purchase Intention of Luxury Products

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Introduction

While for decades luxury has been the privilege of the “happy few”, globalization and the rise of the middle class in many emerging countries all over the world has contributed to the rise of the “happy many”. As a consequence, luxury brands are currently addressing the issues arising from the “democratization” of luxury consumption – namely, the risk of élite’s withdrawal and the increase of moral criticism – by looking for new ways to reinforce their aesthetic, moral and symbolic value. Along with this challenge, luxury brands are facing the growing concern coming from luxury consumers about the social and environmental impact that luxury brands’ activities bring forth. In this study, we propose that associating luxury products and brands with the concept of art and artworks might help luxury companies tackle the above-mentioned issues. Indeed, luxury and art share some important elements, such as the inherent strong emotional value, the relevance of craftsmanship and savoir-faire, and, above all, the idea of durability (defined as the ability of a product to maintain its quality and value over time), which characterizes both luxury products and artworks. Building on this premise as well as on previous studies documenting the existence of the so-called *art infusion effect* – defined as the general positive effect that the presence of art in product advertising has on product evaluation and perception – we propose that the relevance of the artist’s craftsmanship in the process of the artwork creation positively influences consumers’ perceived durability of the product advertised, which, in turn, positively affects consumers’ purchase intention.

The study is organized in three sections. The first chapter focuses on explaining the complexity of the luxury phenomenon under a sociological, behavioral, managerial and economical perspective. The attempt to provide a comprehensive definition of luxury is followed by an extensive overview of the personal and interpersonal drivers of luxury consumption, as well as by a concise review of the singular practices which characterize the management of luxury brands. Then, three issues are addressed: the growth of luxury as a business sector, the process of luxury *artification* and the relationship between luxury and sustainability. The second chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the so called *art infusion effect*, as well as to the formulation of the above mentioned hypotheses. The current work concludes with the third chapter, where the experimental study is exposed and results discussed under both a theoretical and managerial perspective. Limitations of the study and future research direction are also exposed.

Chapter 1

1.1. What is Luxury?

1.1.1. *Defining Luxury*

Several scholars, managers and actors operating in the luxury industry have attempted to provide a definition of what luxury is. However, the complexity of the luxury phenomenon is such to make the search for a unique and comprehensive definition a still open question (Vickers and Renand, 2003; Fionda and Moore, 2009). In fact, as highlighted by Belk (1999), the classification of a product or service as luxury is fluid and subjected to significant changes, since the perception of luxury is “specific to a particular time and place and is always socially constructed” (p. 41). For example, in the economically-developed countries many products and services previously considered luxuries – such as mobile phones, foreign travel and computers – are today perceived as necessities (Belk, 1999). However, while strong arguments exist about the fact luxury products cannot be categorized as such by their appearance or intrinsic qualities (Vickers and Renand, 2003), many contributions have been provided in the attempt to categorize luxuries and identify their peculiar characteristics.

Firstly, it is questionable to what extent product expensiveness defines luxury. In economic terms, luxury brands are those which have constantly been able to justify a high price: a price significantly higher than the price of products with comparable characteristics (McKinsey, 1990). Despite the prominence of price as a discriminant element of luxury products, this definition does not seem to be comprehensive enough to cover all features of luxury items, since it implies that the luxury status can be gained to goods having a price differential with other goods in the same category, included the upper-range brands (Kapferer, 1997).

A more comprehensive view of luxury has been provided by Ko et al. (2019), who have highlighted three criteria to reach a thorough definition of luxuries: the existence of a sound conceptual foundation, the applicability to every product category and the measurability of the construct. Considering them all together, authors have agreed to theoretically define a luxury brand as “a branded product or service that consumers perceive to: be high quality; offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional; have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality; be worthy of commanding a premium price; and be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer” (p. 406). Along this line, Vickers and Renand (2003) argue that luxury goods can be “usefully defined in terms of a mix of components of functionalism, experientialism and symbolic interactionism” (p. 472), in which the role of social and individual (psychological) cues is significantly more relevant than in the context of non-luxury products. Mortelmans (2005) has gone even further, defining luxury products as those “that have a sign-value on top of (or in substitution of) their functional or economical meaning” (p. 510) or, in other words, as objects to which the consumer society attaches additional and undetermined meanings that are independent from any functional and economical logic.

To conclude, although many authors have attempted to account for the multidimensionality of luxury, the fluidity and the complexity of the notion of luxury has made it difficult to come up with a comprehensive definition. A deeper discussion about the personal and interpersonal role played by luxury, whose distinctiveness lies in its psychological value (Amatulli and Guido, 2011), can thus help to clarify.

1.1.2. Luxury Consumption: Personal versus Interpersonal Motives

Pointing out the dichotomy of luxury consumption, Amatulli and Guido (2012) argue that externalized and internalized luxury can be distinguished, since individuals purchase luxury goods under the influence of both interpersonal and personal motives. In fact, luxury purchase can be driven by the interaction with other people, as well as by individual emotions and sensations.

Externalised luxury is a social statement and refers to individuals' tendency to purchase luxury under the influence of others with the aim to socially position themselves (Amatulli and Guido, 2012). In this regard, Bastien and Kapferer (2008) provide an interesting overview about how the interpersonal function of luxury has changed over time. Historically, luxury has always been used to highlight social hierarchy and stratification. Indeed, luxury ostentation was considered a social obligation for aristocrats, who needed to show their higher social rank and to preserve social distance from commoners. The coming of Enlightenment philosophy and of the Eighteenth-century rational thought challenged the social structure and weakened the legitimacy of aristocracy, laying the foundation for the western democratic society. The ultimate blow to social stratification has been given by the gradual process of Globalization, which led to a fluid and open society ruled by meritocracy rather than aristocracy: men and women have become more and more in control of their own destiny, being it increasingly linked to their hard work. Despite that, the inner human need for social stratification has not disappeared. In an almost-classless society, individuals feel the need to understand and show their position in a society ruled by social uncertainty. For this reason, new hierarchical codes have been developed and luxury consumption as a mean for social stratification has been rediscovered. As the same authors claim (Bastien and Kapferer, 2008), luxury is today a social signifier that is freely used to symbolically satisfy the desire to ascend to a superior social class.

Conversely, internalised luxury is an individually-embedded construct as it refers to the purchase of luxury goods for the satisfaction of consumers' personal needs and tastes (Amatulli and Guido, 2012). In this case, consumers go "beyond externally imposed criteria" (Amatulli and Guido, 2011, p. 125) and are driven by personal lifestyle, emotions/hedonism and culture (Amatulli and Guido, 2012), as well as by the need to transform their identities into an ideal self and to find support for their own individual identity (Bauer et al., 2011). Finally, the experiential and multi-sensorial nature of luxury consumption also enables consumers to satisfy their need to "escape from the profanity of everyday life" (Bauer et al., 2011, p. 64) and thus indulge in a break from their lives.

All the above-mentioned considerations regarding the interpersonal and personal function of luxury consumption find their foundation on the long process of research carried on over time by several authoritative

scholars. The most prominent theories at the basis of the reference conceptual framework have been collected and harmonised by Ko et al. (2019), whose comprehensive yet concise theoretical retrospective will be here reported and extended.

The oldest theory is the one built off the idea of conspicuous consumption. In 1899, Veblen introduced this label to define to individuals' tendency to consume goods in a high visible way in order to impress others and make them infer their wealth and power, particularly in contexts of high socio-economic mobility. Mauss (1925) resumed Veblen's reflections to explore their application in the gift-giving social dynamics, arguing that conspicuous and costly generosity is the most powerful means to signal status. The author anticipated what would have been lately conceptualized as the signaling theory, which states that the individual's disposal of sufficient personal resources can be inferred by his or her engagement in generous or wasteful behaviors that, perhaps paradoxically, are too costly to be fake (Bliege Bird and Smith, 2005).

Defined as "the behavioural tendency to value status and acquire and consume products that provide status to the individual" (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004, p. 34), status consumption is strictly related to, yet still separate from conspicuous consumption. In other words, status consumption relies on the desire to enhance social status by owning luxury goods (which may or may not be publicly displayed), while conspicuous consumption focuses more on the overt display of luxury and wealth. Building on extant studies, Eastman and Eastman (2015) focused on the identification of internal and external motivations for status consumption. External motivations are interpersonal and extrinsic, focusing on the social effects that the ownership of luxury goods produces. They include the above-mentioned need for conspicuous consumption, exclusivity (snob luxury purchase behavior) and social identity (bandwagon luxury purchase behavior). Conversely, internal motivations are personal and intrinsic, focusing on the expression of inner values and tastes. They include hedonism, self-reward and perfectionism. Indeed, status consumption can be motivated by the search for emotional and sensorial gratification, by the desire to reinforce the self-concept through self-reward and by the search for high quality. With regard to the latter construct, authors argue that some consumers are motivated for status not because of social motives, but rather because "they want the very best for themselves and do not care if others are aware of their purchases" (p. 5).

Another relevant contribution has been provided by social comparison theory, according to which individuals tend to evaluate themselves through objective and non-social means that, if not available, will be replaced by the comparison to other people (Festinger, 1954). Since this theory also states that individuals tend to conform to the prevalent opinion of the social groups they belong to, Wiedemann et al. (2009) have argued that luxury goods, by enclosing prestigious values, may be used to conform to social standards.

According to self-concept theory, moreover, self-concept is defined as the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7), i.e. how the individual cognitively and emotionally perceives himself or herself. Since general agreement exists regarding the expressive and symbolic value of luxury – defined as the ability of the product to convey a psychological meaning (Smith and Colgate, 2007) – self-concept can be a motivator for luxury consumption. Moreover,

Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) have provided evidences of the fact that differences in self-concept orientation can lead to differences in luxury consumption: for example, bandwagon luxury consumption is more likely to occur among consumers with an interdependent self-concept than among those with an independent self-concept.

The concept of extended-self can be extremely useful to understand luxury consumption motivations as well. Conceptualized for the first time by Belk (1988), the extended-self refers to the phenomenon according to which individuals define themselves not only through what it is seen as “me”, but also through what is seen as “mine”. Specifically, individuals perceive their possessions as part of their self-concept and use them to get closer to their ideal self, that is to whom they hope to be. In this perspective, the luxury symbolic value previously mentioned may play a fundamental role in making luxury consumption an effective tool for self-extension.

Last is the theory of uniqueness. Developed by Snyder and Fromkin (1977), it states that although people sometimes feel the need to conform, they may tend to engage in nonconformist behaviors and to differentiate themselves when the degree of similarity relative to others is perceived as excessively high. This need for uniqueness can be fulfilled by the consumption of luxury goods, which are by definition scarce and rare (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).

<i>Interpersonal motives</i>		
Conspicuous consumption	Individuals' tendency to consume goods in a high visible way in order to impress others and make them infer a condition of wealth and power	Veblen (1899)
Status consumption	Behavioural tendency to value status and acquire and consume products that provide status to the individual	O'Cass & McEwen (2004)
Social comparison	Individuals' tendency to evaluate themselves through objective and non-social means that, if not available, will be replaced by the comparison to other people	Festinger (1954)
Uniqueness	Individuals' tendency to engage in nonconformist behaviors and to differentiate themselves when the degree of similarity relative to others is perceived as excessively high	Snyder & Fromkin (1977)
<i>Personal motives</i>		
Self-concept	Individuals' cognitive and emotional perception of themselves	Rosenberg (1979)
Extended-self	Individuals' tendency to consider their possession as part of their self-concept	Belk (1988)

Table 1. Most relevant theories explaining luxury consumption

1.1.3. *The Luxury Dream and Scarcity*

The basic law of economics states that when demand exceeds supply, price increases. This imbalance is the *sine qua non* condition for luxury to exist, since scarcity represents the core of luxury brands' DNA. Indeed, luxury goods need to be admired by all and owned by few to be properly considered as such (Kapferer, 1997). Their power relies on their magical aura of unattainability, which is psychologically evoked by their incorporation in the lifestyle of extraordinary people and practically fostered by physical rarity. As argued by Dubois and Paternault (1995), the deeper the gap between awareness and penetration of the luxury brand the stronger its desirability, since "awareness feeds the dream but purchase makes the dream come true and therefore contributes to destroy it" (p. 73). However, differences in the applicability of Dubois and Paternault's "dream equation" among western and eastern consumers has been proven to exist, also in the light of the above-mentioned susceptibility of luxury perception to the social and cultural context (Belk, 1988). In fact, consistently with Wong and Zaichkowsky's study (1999), Phau and Prendergast (2000) argue that the "dream equation", developed through a study among US consumers, is not able to predict Asian consumers' luxury purchase intention. Conversely, they have demonstrated how the rarity principle is overturned among Asian consumers, whose luxury purchase intention is encouraged by brand awareness. Authors explain this phenomenon through three main reasons. Firstly, Asian individuals tend to consumer commodities in order to secure their own status in society rather than to differentiate themselves. Secondly, Asians have a consensual and collective orientation as well as a tendency to accept those in power, thus they tend to prefer dominant brands. Thirdly, Asian individuals are animated by a strong need to conform to the ones belonging to the same social class of reference group. These reasons combined explain why the rarity principle is not only ineffective, but even overturned among Asian societies.

Without prejudice to the general validity of what mentioned above, Kapferer (2012) offers interesting insights regarding the concept of rarity and its different applications in the luxury context. The first and most intuitive type of rarity is the objective rarity, that is the outcome of the material limitation imposed to the production and commercialization of luxury goods, achieved through high prices and limited production. As an example, Lamborghini's CEO Stefano Domenicali has recently stated that no more than 8000 vehicles per year will be sold from 2020 onwards (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2019), demonstrating the company will to reinforce its exclusivity. However, it is worth mentioning that physical scarcity clearly places a limit to luxury brands' growth and consequently risks compromising both company's wellbeing and shareholders' expectations. Therefore, a shift in what the author defines "virtual rarity" is currently taking place in the luxury sector. It represents an ephemeral and artificially induced type of rarity, which makes the perceptions of exclusivity and privilege arise without sacrificing sales. The means through this type of rarity is achieved are many: the regular launch of limited editions, the adoption of an exclusive distribution strategy and the careful selection of the messages to be communicated. As an example, Louis Vuitton has recently partnered with six of the world's most renowned artists to create the limited edition ArtyCapucines collection (Haute Living, 2019). The company has thus renewed a well established habit of its, namely that of partnering with leading creative

figures to produce highly coveted products alongside its most popular ones. With regard to the strategic role of communication in feeding the dream of luxury, Amatulli et al. (2018) have highlighted the luxury tendency to foster consumers' aspirational desires through imagery rather than text, since the use of images "leaves more room, compared to plain text, for consumers to interpret the message conveyed, thus making them more likely to travel with their imagination – to dream" (p. 75). In other terms, luxury "silent advertising" is extremely useful in order to trigger consumers' fascination as long as a sound imagery architecture is provided and a semiotic logic followed.

To conclude, it is worth to mention that the inevitable progressive growth of luxury customer base – fostered by the shift from physical to virtual rarity implemented by several brands – undoubtedly makes it necessary for luxury firms to adopt effective strategies to protect their beating heart: the *élite's* approval. As highlighted by Kapferer (2012), the *élite* represents the reference group for the mass of consumers and its belief in the luxury dream need to be preserved. This is the reason why luxury brands have started to offer what the author defines as "invisible luxury", that is a sublimed form of luxury whose offer is extremely private, exclusive and definitely inaccessible for anyone outside the *élite*.

1.2. Managing Luxury Brands

1.2.1. *The Anti-Laws of Marketing*

Altagamma and Comité Colbert are the luxury industry foundations that gather almost all the luxury brands of their countries (Italy and France, respectively). What is surprising is that, besides a well established set of luxury firms, they also include among their members brands known to be excellence in their market sector, but that could be hardly defined as luxury. Top brands such as Lacoste, Moleskine and Pomellato, misleadingly acknowledged as luxury brands, should be rather defined as premium ones. Bastien and Kapferer (2013) have contributed to clarify this distinction. On the one hand, luxury brands pursue a strategy of non-comparability with other brands by leveraging on intangible elements (such as heritage, country of origin and craftsmanship). On the other hand, premium brands are completely focused on proving their superiority over their competitors by leveraging on tangible dimensions of value that can be objectively measured. In other terms, while premium consumption is driven by a rational equation between price and quantity, luxury consumption can be rather defined as an “act of faith”. Closer to but still different from luxury brands, also masstige brands represent an additional category of interest. These brands combine a distinctive prestige positioning with prices that are slightly above those of comparable middle-range products, resulting both prestigious and affordable for the masses (Truong et al., 2009). It is not uncommon to observe the adoption of this strategy by luxury firms themselves, who often enlarge their offer with more accessible products (Truong et al., 2009).

In the light of what has been said so far, luxury sector clearly represents what we could define a business singularity. None of the most classic marketing pillars inherited by P&G experience and successfully adopted by all the world’s biggest companies seem to fit the needs of luxury firms, whose business model is apparently ruled by completely opposite principles. Bastien and Kapferer (2013) refer to them as the anti-laws of marketing, the main concepts of which will be investigated below.

One of the key points is about positioning. Defined as “the act of designing the company’s offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market” (Kotler and Keller, 2006, p. 310), positioning loses its meaning in the luxury context, since luxury pursue a superlative rather than a comparative approach to the market and its image is nourished by its inimitable creative force rather than by the search for a profitable market niche to conquer. This reflection directly connects to another relevant rule, that is the one according to which luxury advertising does not have to assume a selling function. Indeed, as highlighted by Freire (2014), luxury advertising is mainly focused on communicating identity values through the use of symbolic images and identity narratives. Another interesting point of reflection concerns the imperfection of luxury, that must be guaranteed through the existence of some sort of flaw in the otherwise perfect appearance of the luxury product. In fact, besides being a cue of craftsmanship and long handwork, imperfection is also considered, particularly in eastern cultures, as a cue of authentic beauty (Buetow and Wallis, 2017) and as the highest form of art (Juniper, 2003). Moreover, many of Bastien and Kapferer’s (2013) anti-principles revolve around the need of luxury to keep the right distance from its customers. Indeed, key

element of the luxury-consumers relationship is psychological distance, which is further intensified by the temporal and spatial distance artificially generated by specific managerial decisions (Hansen and Wänke, 2011). Avoiding relocation is a major recommendation too. In fact, as argued by Collins and Weiss (2015), provenance – defined as “the source of origin or birthplace of a product” (p. 1031) – deeply influence luxury brand identity and purchase intention because it is strictly related to some of the elements defining luxury itself, that is craftsmanship, heritage and rarity. Finally, Bastien and Kapferer (2013) dedicates in their list considerable space to the need to keep prices high as well as to control sales growth. Indeed, luxury firms must manage carefully the trade-off between exclusivity and accessibility in order to avoid compromising their aspirational nature (Keller, 2008).

1.2.2. Principles of Luxury Management

Understanding luxury firms’ business model is particularly useful in order to acquire knowledge about how they practically behave to protect their brand equity – namely, the set of assets linked to the brand which shape the value of its offer (Aaker, 1991). Thus, now that the most relevant issues driving the management of luxury brands have been briefly listed, an overview about the main managerial practices adopted by luxury firms is needed. To this end, we can resort to Nueno and Quelch’s work (1998), in which they identify four distinct circles of practices (design and communication, product line, services, channels) that must be simultaneously managed in order to guarantee the luxury brand’s success in the marketplace.

- *Design and communication management.* Given the high dependence of luxury firms from the personality and image of their creators, the development of a solid design community able to respect and promote the brand’s heritage is highly needed. Moreover, the success of the luxury brand also depends on its ability to implement a worldwide communication, that can be achieved through the careful coordination of fashion shows, special events and public relations. Finally, luxury brands’ communication must be also characterized by the adoption of a homogeneous set of properties (in terms of fabrics, colors and shapes) that makes the brand recognizable.
- *Product line management.* To preserve margins and deal with the competition of new products launches, successful luxury firms build a balanced product portfolio by combining “risky and perishable ready-to-wear offering with sales of less fashion-intensive items, such as leather accessories, in legible designs and classic colors” (p. 64). Furthermore, the narrowness of the assortment is also recommended: it provides a coherent image of the brand, fosters demand, delivers higher markups and reduces production as well as storage costs.
- *Service management.* Luxury brands need to “become experts in customer service, relationship building, and database management” (p. 65) in order to provide excellent and customized services, as well as to improve the number of contact opportunities with customers and cross-product sales. In fact, the mass

marketing of luxury requires to partially shift the emphasis from physical rarity (achieved through selective distribution and limited assortments) to customer service excellence.

- *Channel management.* Luxury firms rely on an exclusive distribution, even if the gradual “democratization” of luxury has brought some of them to slightly modify their distribution strategies. Mono-brand stores help the brand to build its prestige and establish its image. However, duty-free shops are also used to follow customers as they travel, while department stores and multibrand independent specialty stores allow luxury brands to reach those mass consumers who are willing to pay a premium price for a luxury product.

1.3. Luxury Growth and “*Artification*”

1.3.1. *The Growth of Luxury Market*

Except for the years encompassing the last financial crisis, occurred between 2007 and 2009, the luxury market never stopped growing since the nineties (Bain & Company, 2018). The overall value of luxury market has been estimated at about € 920 billion in 2018 and a 4-5% annual growth is expected until 2025 (Boston Consulting Group, 2019). Valued € 330 billion in 2018, the personal luxury sector will enjoy a 3% annual growth until 2025, driven by accessories and cosmetics. The experiential luxury sector, valued € 590 billion in 2018, is supposed to grow even faster, enjoying a 5% annual growth until 2025 (Boston Consulting Group, 2019). Data clearly shows that the luxury sector has never been as prosperous as it is today. Its success appears to be driven by two main forces. On the one hand, the impressive growth of digital channels, that covers today around 10% of total sales in the personal luxury sector. On the other hand, the huge increase of luxury consumption among Chinese consumers, that today account for about 33% of global luxury purchases (Bain & Company, 2018).

It is now interesting to reflect on the dynamics and reasons underlying the luxury growth phenomenon. As highlighted by Kapferer (2014), in the past luxury was a prerogative of the happy few, namely a small circle of powerful individuals who used to leverage on luxury consumption in order to show their taste and impress crowds (Dubois et al., 2005). In the 19th century, the rapid rise of a new middle class has led to the fast expansion of luxury customer base and to the gradual “democratization” of luxury desire. As illustrated by McNeil and Riello (2016), this phenomenon, firstly emerged in Europe, has later happened in several emerging countries, which entered into the luxury market just at the time when saturation was being reached. In particular, in the 2000s China has gone from being a “virgin land for luxury” (McNeil and Riello, 2016, p. 245) to being the motherland of those consumers “who have made the fortune of those European luxury brands that today account for the lion’s share of the market” (McNeil and Riello, 2016, p. 247). Indeed, luxury brands started having a great appeal especially to young middle-class Chinese consumers, “who have no personal recollection of China under the duress of strict communism” (McNeil and Riello, 2016, p. 247). Strong growth in the middle class has also characterized BRIC countries (McNeil and Riello, 2016). In particular, luxury has recently become the symbol of wealth for those Russian who have “accumulated enormous fortunes since the fall of communism in the early 1990s” (McNeil and Riello, 2016, p. 250), while the rise of Brazilian middle-class has made the country the second largest market for several luxury services (Diniz et al., 2014).

From a sociological point of view, Kapferer (2014) has identified four main reasons underlying the phenomenon of luxury growth in the emerging countries. Firstly, the process of urbanization recently occurred in the emerging countries has led people to live closer and to consequently develop a stronger spirit of competition. Secondly, the cultural and economic changes occurred in recent history has made the social hierarchy more volatile, bringing individuals to start looking for clear social markers to show “how high they stand or wish to be perceived” (p. 372). Thirdly, Asian culture attributes to luxury consumption a social role

which is pretty different from the one assigned by Western culture. In fact, Asian consumers purchase luxury brands not to differentiate themselves from others, but rather to avoid being considered socially lower than others. In such a highly competitive society, luxury consumption is a norm that must be respected by everyone, proportionally to their social position. This also explains the flourishing of counterfeit consumption, that represents the luxury of poorer consumers. Finally, luxury consumption is also positively affected by the optimism arisen by economic growth. In these contexts, consumers are eager to affirm their right to consume luxury and consequently prefer to spend their financial resources for status symbol products rather than saving them for retirement (Kapferer, 2012).

1.3.2. The Challenges Posed by Luxury Growth and the Resolutive Role of Art

While growth and product diffusion are not an issue for premium brands, which indeed benefit from the increase of their market share, they conversely may represent an obstacle for luxury brands' wellbeing. In fact, besides the unquestionable short-term economic benefit, sales growth can also cause the exposure of luxury firms to the risk of losing their exclusive appeal and their narrative-meaning (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2014). In other words, the extension of luxury customer base from the happy few (the powerful élite) to the happy many (the wealthy middle-class), thus the transformation of luxury "from the ordinary of the extraordinary people to the extraordinary of the ordinary people" is likely to distance the élite itself, which is populated by those individuals who "ensure the long-term desirability of the brand" (Kapferer, 2014, p. 373). Moreover, the expansion of luxury has created a condition of overexposure of luxury brands, which have invaded individuals' everyday life by massively resorting to generic media channels such as television, newspapers, magazines and Internet (McNeil and Riello, 2016). This phenomenon has exacerbated the moral criticisms that always existed around luxury, blamed to foster social inequality. Such arguments call into question the reputation of the luxury sector, and even its right to exist (Kapferer 2014).

Aware about the above-mentioned issues, Kapferer (2012, 2014) claimed the centrality of art in the resolution of the problems posed by the growth of luxury. Able to provide a powerful aesthetic and moral endorsement, art can strengthen luxury symbolical authority and offer new segmentation criteria beyond price (such as cultural and humanistic sensitivity), establishing a dialogue with a new, creative and post-materialistic élite populated by those "extraordinary people" who are destined to shape the future. The involvement of art, therefore, not only guarantees the loyalty of the happy few, but also defuses the moral criticisms related to luxury consumption by taking it to a higher and unquestionable level of meaning. Moreover, associating luxury with art may also help discouraging new potential competitors from entering the luxury market. Indeed, competitors may have difficulty decoding and imitating this source of competitive advantage, since the art-business collaborations are usually complex to define, highly specific and tacit (Chailan, 2018). Kastner (2014) identified three benefits stemming from the associations between art and luxury brands. Firstly, this association "entrenches in the consumer's mind the perceptions of originality, ingenuity and inventiveness" (p. 45) and enshrines the aesthetic sensitivity of the brand. Secondly, it enriches brand content and invigorates the

aspirational storytelling typical of luxury brands. Thirdly, the art-luxury association elevates luxury brands above the purely commercial dimension.

As reported by Kastner (2014), the relationship between art and luxury experienced relevant evolutions over the Twentieth century. In the 1930s, the Surrealist painters Salvador Dali and Jean Cocteau partnered with the Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli in order to bring their creativity in her clothing designs (Gibson, 2003), while the Italian shoe manufacturer Ferragamo launched an advertising campaign realized in collaboration with the Futurist painter Lucio Venna (Luxury Society, 2009). In the 1960s, Yves Saint Laurent launched its haute couture collection taking explicit inspiration from Piet Mondrian's artworks (Kim, 1998). In the 1980s, longer-term forms of collaboration were introduced, such as the creation of the art museum Foundation Cartier in Paris (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2012). Finally, the huge commercial success of the high-profile artistic collaborations initiated by Louis Vuitton's artistic director Marco Jacobs in the late 1990s made this phenomenon definitely popular among luxury brands.

Today, *artification* – defined as the process in which “something that is not regarded as art in the traditional sense of the word is changed into something art-like or into something that takes influences from artistic ways of thinking and acting” (Naukkarinen, 2012) – involves several short-term and long-term elements of luxury brand management. Chailan (2018) has provided an overview of the main long-term activities that luxury brands undertake to link themselves with art. Taking into consideration both the intensity of the engagement and the time perspective of the relationship, the author has identified four types of links: artistic mentoring, artistic collaboration, foundations and patronage.

Long-term forms of art-luxury collaboration (Chailan, 2018)

Artistic mentoring	This relationship occurs when the luxury brand decides to aid new artists to emerge by supporting them in the process of artistic creation.
Artistic collaboration	It consists in a classical business relationship between the artist and the brand, which assign him or her the task to create a new product or line receiving back a remuneration.
Foundations	They are non-profit organizations which are committed to finance project of particular relevance for its own charitable purposes. In this particular case, the foundation is usually linked to the luxury brand and finance artistic projects.
Patronage	It is a particular kind of sponsorship in which the luxury brand commissions an artist to produce an artwork.

Table 2. Long-term forms of art-luxury collaboration (Chailan, 2018)

Given their long-term nature, all these strategies fall outside the ordinary management of luxury brands and thus represent exceptional activities which require both managerial and financial extra-efforts. But also the most ordinary elements of the luxury marketing mix – such as retailing, merchandising and advertising – are actively involved in the process of *artification*. In this respect, as highlighted by Joy et al. (2014) through an

ethnographic study about consumers' experience in Louis Vuitton flagship stores, luxury retailing is rapidly changing by turning stores into hybrid institutions embodying elements of both museums and art galleries. This is achieved by leveraging interior design, effective lighting, artisanal merchandising and suggestive product display, all managed together with curatorial attention.

Advertising is another element of the marketing mix of luxury brands which is deeply involved in the process of *artification*. The effect that the introduction of artistic elements in product advertisement has on product perception and evaluation – named the *art infusion effect* – has been extensively explored by several scholars. This subject, which is at the core of the present study, will be discussed later.

1.4. Luxury and Sustainability

1.4.1. Sustainability: An Overview

Historically, the dominant economic model adopted by firms has been the one built on profit maximization, pursued through the efficient exploitation of resources (Goodland, 1995; Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008). However, the increasing social awareness regarding ecological deterioration and the consequent regulatory intervention from national and international institutions have led companies to reconsider both their business models and priorities. While the way towards a fully sustainable system is still long, first and concrete steps have been taken in the business ecosystem. In fact, as shown by Global 100 – the list of the 100 most sustainable corporations in the world drafted by Corporate Knights (2019) – many widely known multinational companies are in the middle of an important journey towards new models of sustainable development. The French luxury group Kering S.A., ranked second in the list, uses certified sustainable sources for more than 40% of its products and is actually working to improve this percentage (Forbes, 2019). Siemens AG, ranked 23th, uses renewables to cover about 80% of the electricity consumption of its German sites (Siemens, 2019). Ranked 65th, the giant of consumer goods production Unilever has committed itself and is actually working to halve the footprint of the making and use of its products within 2030 (Unilever, 2019).

Strictly related to the concept of “maintenance”, sustainability can be declined at different levels (Goodland, 1995): social, economic and environmental. Social sustainability refers to the maintenance and replenishment of the “moral capital” (which can be roughly defined as a mix of heterogeneous elements and values such as social cohesion and diversity, pluralism, tolerance and cultural identity). Economic sustainability refers to the maintenance of capital in the strictest sense, as well as of the opportunity to consume over time. Finally, environmental sustainability refers to the maintenance of natural capital, that is the natural ecosystem. In the light of this, pursuing a sustainable business development means to make managerial decisions that, while preserving the competitiveness of the company on the market, do not compromise the social, economic and environmental context. In this respect, Goodland (1995) highlights the substantial difference between the concepts of “growth” and “development”: while the former “implies quantitative physical or material increase”, the latter “implies qualitative improvement or at least change” (p. 9). It follows that, if sustainability is to be approached, a new set of metrics needs to be adopted in order to assess the company success.

As argued by Bansal and DesJardine (2014), embracing sustainability means for companies to deal with trade-offs, especially across time. This is a huge difference between Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility, since the former relies on a continuous dialogue with the macro-system, while the latter is simply represented by a set of ethical corporate behaviors that carry inside themselves a positive moral value independently from the macro-system. The main choice companies that aim to be sustainable are called to do is between short-term “exploitation” and long-term “exploration”: it has to be decided whether to invest less for sooner and smaller profits (i.e. marketing and selling products and services)

or to invest more for later and greater profits (i.e. fostering research & development). If the ability to balance short and long term is the key of sustainable development, “short-termism” is its greatest threat (Bansal and DesJardine, 2014). In fact, the desire for immediate gratification can lead to suboptimal outcomes for both society and the firm, since it implies the lack of strategic investments and the risk of profit volatility.

1.4.2. Is Luxury Sustainable?

It is highly debated whether luxury sector can be considered sustainable. The subject is particularly topical for two main reasons. On the one hand, consumers’ values are “transitioning from having to being, from extrinsic to intrinsic and from conspicuous to meaningful” (Luxury Daily, 2013), driving them to an increasing sensitivity towards sustainability. On the other hand, a certain contradiction between the values associated with luxury and the ones promoted by sustainability is perceived (Amatulli et al., 2017). In fact, while sustainability resounds with concepts such as altruism, sobriety and morality, luxury is usually associated with excess, ostentation and superficiality (Carrier and Luetchford, 2012). However, many scholars support the idea that the luxury sector have a high potential in terms of sustainable development (Kapferer, 2010; Hennigs et al., 2013). De Angelis and Amatulli (2018) even promote the idea that luxury should be considered naturally sustainable, since the distinctive characteristics of luxury goods are by definition compatible with the concept of sustainability. In fact, authors argue that high quality, durability, rarity and craftsmanship – which represent the foundation of luxury production – have the potential to provide a positive contribution to customers, society and the environment. This theme will be further discussed later, and a special focus will be provided about the concept of durability.

Chapter 2

The present chapter pursue different objectives. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive overview of the most relevant contributions made to frame the phenomenon of the *art infusion effect* – namely, the general positive effect that art can generate on product evaluation and perception when used to advertise or promote it. Secondly, it aims to illustrate a new perceptual model that includes new, unexplored variables that will be empirically tested later. Finally, it provides a theoretical framework to contextualize and support the above-mentioned new model.

2.1. The *Art Infusion Effect*

2.1.1. *A Definition of Art*

Since defining art has proved to be a difficult task that is beyond the scope of this line of research, authors who have so far contributed to enrich the current issue have decided to adopt a consumer-perspective approach: art is that which viewers categorize as such (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2008a). The adoption of this perspective has turned to be not only functional to the research scope, but also in line with the beliefs of those scholars who state the existence of an emerging cultural hierarchy that “extends between two poles – variously labeled as highbrow/lowbrow, elite or high culture/mass or pop culture, art/entertainment or legitimate taste/popular taste” (Holbrook, 1999, p. 144) and who consequently admit the flexibility and extendibility of the notion of art. In any case, most studies conducted so far have made use of what we could call high art – namely, well-established and commonly regarded as valuable. Furthermore, most of research has been conducted considering the effects of visual art, despite the relationship between brands and other forms of artistic expression have been also explored (Koronaki et al., 2018; Logkizidou et al., 2019).

2.1.2. *The Art Infusion Effect: A Special Type of Spillover*

Despite the general awareness that marketers and scholars have shown regarding the positive effect that the introduction of artistic elements can have on consumers evaluations (Crader and Zaichkowsky, 2007), neither empirical evidence nor theoretical conceptualization existed until Hagtvedt and Patrick’s studies (2008a). They proved the existence of the *art infusion effect*, which is the general and positive “influence of the presence of art on consumer perceptions and evaluations of products with which it is associated” (p. 379). Authors theorize it represents a special kind of *spillover effect*, since the “perceptions of luxury associated with visual art spill over from the artwork onto products with which it is associated, leading to more favorable evaluations of these products” (p. 379). The *spillover effect* – namely, the transfer of properties from one object to another, linked to the previous one (Lee et al., 2015) - is the impact that information provided in product-related messages has on beliefs about attributes that are not mentioned in the messages (Ahluwalia et al., 2001) and has proved to be more influential in terms of attitude changes than the message itself (Lutz, 1975). The effect

is explained by consumers' tendency to infer missing attribute information relying on their intuitive notions of inter-attribute correlations and on the correlational information gathered from the message (Ahluwalia et al., 2001).

Without any prejudice to the role that the mechanism of *spillover* definitely plays in the *art infusion effect*, other theories have been taken into consideration in order to explain its functioning. The positive influence that the artwork associated to the product has on product evaluation and perception can be interpreted as the extension of the general feeling carried by the artwork to the associated object, which in turn will arouse the same general feeling (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2008a). It represents a special display of the halo effect, that can manifest itself in two ways (Balzer and Sulsky, 1992). On the one hand, the general impression halo can be defined as a “general impression bias whereby a rater’s overall evaluation or impression of a ratee leads the rater to evaluate all aspects of performance in a manner consistent with this general evaluation or impression” (p. 976) and is based on the human tendency to rely on global impressions, especially when specific information is forgotten over time. On the other hand, dimensional similarity halo can in turn be described as the “rater’s tendency to rate similarly dimensions he or she perceives as conceptually similar or logically related” (p. 976) and involves a spreading activation process based on semantic priming, according to which the impression on one dimension spreads to semantically related ones.

The positive influence of art on product evaluation and perception can also be explained resorting to the theories related to the law of contagion, which states that two objects can influence each other through direct or indirect contact by transferring their properties or “essence”, that doesn’t need to be visible and can permanently remain in the other object even after the contact is over (Rozin et al., 1986).

2.1.3. *Luxury-Based and Emotion-Based Models: A Comparison*

Once explained the different psychological mechanisms that literature considers as underlying the *art infusion effect*, a deeper understanding of the relationship between art-related messages and product evaluation and perception should be acquired. In this regard, two different yet not contrasting conceptual models can be highlighted. As mentioned before, Hagtvedt and Patrick (2008a) demonstrated that the perception of luxury evoked by the artwork spills over onto the product, leading to more positive product evaluation. In other terms, they gave evidence of the mediating role of luxury perception. These findings have been challenged by further studies, which expanded the just mentioned theoretical framework by proving the mediating role of emotions (Estes et al., 2018). In particular, authors supported prior findings regarding the mediating role of luxury perception and also demonstrated across three studies the mediating role of brand affect - namely, the positive emotional response to the brand (Holbrook and Batra, 1987), arguing that emotion represents “the lower-level mechanism driving the higher-level effect of perceived luxury on product evaluations” (p. 403). Results fully supported assumptions: when introduced as additional mediator, brand affect significantly and fully mediated the *art infusion effect*, while perceived luxury became nonsignificant.

2.1.4. How Product Type Affects the Art Infusion Effect

Hypothetically, artwork can be included in the communication of any type of product. This is the reason why several scholars have tried to assess if any differences in the *art infusion* mechanism exist among different product types. The most significant distinction among products is drawn taking into consideration the needs they are aimed to satisfy. Hedonic goods are the ones whose consumption is sensorial and both affectively and aesthetically driven, being linked to sensual pleasure, fantasy and fun (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Conversely, utilitarian goods are the ones whose consumption is cognitively driven, goal-oriented and linked to the completion of a functional task (Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998). Although products can embody both hedonic and utilitarian dimensions to varying degrees, a primary classification of them among the two categories can usually be drawn by consumers (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000).

Despite some evidences about the effectiveness of the *art infusion effect* among hedonic and utilitarian goods diverge, most of the studies prove the use of art better fits with hedonic products.

Taking inspiration from the semantic matching process theorized by Collins and Loftus (1975), Huettl and Gierl (2012) claim that a positive *art infusion effect* on luxury perception exists only for hedonic products, since their distinctive attributes (such as sensory pleasure, exclusivity, sophistication and luxury) are consistently linked to the ones that characterize the mental category of art. On the contrary, the contradiction between utilitarian attributes and art attributes – that is the lack of logical connection between them – is “likely to cognitively control the transfer of luxury connotations” (p. 895).

Hüttl-Maack (2018) further extended existing knowledge by testing whether ambiguous and only moderately hedonic product differ from hedonic ones in terms of *art infusion* efficacy. Evidences show that, while in the highly hedonic condition “uniformly beneficial effect of art are found” (p. 271), in the more ambiguous condition the effect of art presence is influenced by consumer’s interest in art. In particular, the presence of art has a positive effect among art-interested consumers and no effect on non-interested ones: while the former individuals “are motivated to engage in processing to make sense of this combination”, the latter ones “seem to be not motivated for this step” (p. 271).

As mentioned before, moderate disagreement exists among studies. Estes et al. (2018), who argue the mediating role of emotions in the *art infusion effect*, counter-intuitively state that the presence of art increases brand affect more for utilitarian products than for hedonic ones, due to a phenomenon of diminishing return. Since “hedonic products primarily possess emotional attributes, the additional affect induced by an artwork has a smaller influence on evaluations. And contrarily, because utilitarian products tend to possess functional attributes, increasing affect via art has a relatively large effect on evaluations” (p. 404).

To conclude, product type has proved to significantly influence the *art infusion* mechanism. Despite the lack of full agreement on the subject, the most of contributions seem to confirm that the successfulness of the *art infusion effect* is more likely among hedonic goods.

2.1.5. *How Price Affects the Art Infusion Effect*

Some scholars investigated the role that price difference and price information play in the *art infusion effect*, and particularly on perceived prestige of the advertised product.

The acceptable price range is the consumer-specific and product category-specific price region, delimited by upper and lower thresholds, in which price changes have no effect on product perception. Lee et al. (2015) investigated the interaction effect of price differences and art presence on perceived prestige. They demonstrated that the presence of art in the product advertisement has a positive effect on perceived prestige, regardless of the product price. Conversely, in the non-art condition a moderate higher price difference (i.e. 125% price difference) has proved to affect perceived prestige more than a non-price-difference strategy. In fact, while the presence of art itself enhances perceived prestige and weakens the effect of price difference, the absence of art makes the price more relevant, given its role in signaling customer's status, indicating product quality and enhancing perceived product exclusivity. Surprisingly, authors have also observed that, in the non-art condition, price difference has no effect on perceived prestige when too high (i.e. 150% price difference). Despite the lack of full clarity on the non-art condition, the research definitely confirms that "products could benefit from artwork to increase their price above their regular price" (p. 602).

Some scholars (Huettl and Gierl, 2012) have also questioned whether the positive effect elicited by the association of art to the product can be undermined by the increase of perceived expensiveness that is likely to be aroused by this association, and whether the mentioned interference mechanism is affected by price information. In fact, artwork scarcity and uniqueness can elicit perceptions of expensiveness, that may spill over onto the product in the same way luxury perceptions do. However, this effect can be mitigated or even neutralized by providing information about the product price within the message. Findings have sustained authors' hypothesis, proving the coexistence of interfering effects caused by the *spillover* of both luxury and expensiveness perceptions and the inhibiting role that price information play on the negative expensiveness-related effect.

2.1.6. *Beyond Product Evaluation: How Art Affects Consumers' WTP and Brand Extendibility*

Different authors contributed to better understand what the presence of art in product advertising can affect, exploring other variables besides product evaluation and perception.

Hüttl-Maack (2018) contributed to this goal by giving evidences of the fact that, besides product evaluation and perception, the use of art in product communication is also able to affect consumers' willingness to pay (WTP), being the former a key determinant of the latter (Simonson and Drolet, 2004). This research not only "extends the prior findings conceptually by showing that not only expensiveness but also the perceived value behind it is increased" (p. 271), but also highlights how art can affect consumer's behavioral response, being the WTP a much closer measure of it compared to product evaluation.

Other relevant insights have been provided by Hagtvedt and Patrick (2008b), who further expanded the knowledge related to the *art infusion effect* by demonstrating how it can be used to enhance brand extendibility. As recalled by the authors, prior research about brand extendibility has identified two main factors affecting it, namely the parent brand image/quality and the category and conceptual fit between the new product and the parent brand (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Bottomley and Holden, 2001). They argued and demonstrated that both constructs can be positively influenced by the presence of art, leading to more favourable evaluations of brand extension. On the one hand, the presence of art enhances brand image through the *spillover* of luxury perception. On the other hand, it increases the perceptions of category and conceptual fit by intensifying consumer's cognitive flexibility: improving consumers' capacity to integrate information in non-obvious ways, art enables consumers to draw meaningful patterns among stimuli, even if divergent.

2.1.7. *The Content-Independent Influence of Visual Art*

Along with the founding demonstration of the *art infusion effect* existence, Hagtvedt and Patrick (2008a) provided evidences of its content-independent nature. In other words, they proved that the positive influence of art on product evaluations and perceptions does not depend on the content of the artwork used to advertise the product, but rather “on general connotations of luxury associated with visual art” (p. 379). If it did, the *art infusion effect* would not be generalizable, since the valence of product evaluation would depend on the positive or negative valence of the artwork content. The independence of the *art infusion effect* from artwork content is explained by the fact that art has “general connotations that are positive per se” (p. 381) and that make it intrinsically different from any other sensory phenomena that, in turn, can have positive or negative valence (such as odor, sound and non-art visual stimuli).

Neural responses to art images have also been investigated in order to test the content-independent nature of the *art infusion effect*. By performing an event-related functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study, Lacey et al. (2011) demonstrated that the exposure to art images, regardless of their content and style, activates regions of the brain (i.e. ventral striatum, hypothalamus and orbitofrontal cortex) related to reward circuitry, whose key function is to drive behavior and decision making under conditions of uncertainty (Schultz, 2006). The same regions did not appear to be engaged in presence of non-art images.

Deepening the comprehension of the role of the art content in the *art infusion effect*, Hagtvedt and Patrick (2011) investigated across three studies the distinction between art content and manner, providing evidences of the fact that, while “artwork as art” is context independent, “artwork as illustration” is context dependent. Content and manner represent two components of the artwork: while the former concerns “what is depicted” and conveys information, the latter concerns “how it is depicted” and distinguishes artworks from mere illustrations. This is the reason why the concretization of the content of the artwork makes the artwork be perceived as a mere illustration. Findings proved that, when the artwork content is not stressed, it doesn't affect product evaluation. Conversely, when the artwork is no longer perceived as art because of the shift of emphasis from manner to content, product evaluation is affected by the fit between the artwork content and

the product. Moreover, the third study conducted by the authors demonstrated that consumers' mindset can drive them to process the artwork as either art or mere illustration. Since abstract mindsets are "associated with higher-level construals and schematic, global processing" (p. 1628), they are more focused on the image category (i.e. visual art) and thus will be unaffected by artwork content. Conversely, since concrete mindsets are "associated with lower-level construals and attribute-level, local processing with a focus on contextualized features" (p. 1628), they are more focused on particulars of the image and will be affected by artwork content. To conclude, we can state that the *art infusion effect* is content-independent. However, the content of the artwork can become relevant if consumers' attention gets focused on it. Indeed, in this case the artwork will be no longer processed as belonging to the art category, being perceived as a mere illustration.

2.1.8. *The Moderating Role of the Art Infusion Effect on Regulatory Fit and Non-Fit Messages*

Further insights on the *art infusion* mechanism and its limitations are provided by the studies of Mantovani and Tazima (2016), who investigated how art images and verbal arguments interact. Focusing their research on the regulatory fit theory, they demonstrated that the *art infusion effect* is more persuasive when presented with regulatory fit messages, while regulatory non-fit messages are more persuasive in presence of non-art images. To demonstrate it, they primed the sample with a specific regulatory focus, exposed it to fit or non-fit ad messages associated to art or non-art images (2x2 design) and finally collected product evaluations.

Conceptualized by Higgins (1997, 2002) the Regulatory Focus Theory states that people pursue their goals following different guidelines. Specifically, promotion-focused and prevention-focused mechanisms can be distinguished. More sensitive towards positive results, promotion-focused individuals are motivated to fill the gap between the actual condition and the desired one and perceive success and failure as the achievement or the non-achievement of positive results. Being the promotion focus responsible for regulating nutrition needs, these individuals are concerned with growth, advance, and achievement, being guided by ideals, wishes and aspirations. On the contrary, prevention-focused individuals perceive success and failure as the avoidance or non-avoidance of negative results. Being the prevention focus responsible for regulating safety needs, prevention-focused individuals are more concerned with duties and responsibilities.

The Regulatory Fit Theory extends these assumptions by considering the effects of regulatory fit (non-fit), that is the consistency (inconsistency) between the individual's actual motivational orientation (promotion or prevention focused) and his or her way to achieve goals. In particular, in evaluating past decisions individuals will react more positively if regulatory fit occurred, since it "increases the perception that they have used the correct approach in their decision-making" (Mantovani and Tazima, 2016, p. 155). This feeling right effect is enhanced by the presence of art: triggering a more favorable assessment, art increases the positive effects of regulatory fit. Conversely, since art images are more difficult to process, they reinforce the perceptual disfluency that characterizes the regulatory non-fit condition and consequently lowers evaluations of individuals experiencing it. In this case, non-art images would be recommended, since they are easier to process and would reduce the negative feeling generated by the regulatory inconsistency.

2.1.9. *The Role of Art Saliency in the Art Infusion Effect*

As previously exposed, the independence of the *art infusion effect* from artwork content has been extensively discussed and proved by several scholars. However, the effect of some specific art-related aspects on product and brand evaluations and perceptions has been also investigated, challenging and enriching previous findings. Specifically, some authors questioned how product and brand evaluations and perceptions can be affected by two possible expressions of art saliency, namely artwork recognizability and artist's iconicity.

Peluso et al. (2017) examined the role that art recognizability play in the *art infusion* mechanism and how it is affected by consumers' characteristics and needs. Recognizable artworks are the ones that can be easily identified by most of individuals. Embodying the most recurrent colors, techniques and images used by the artist, they are able to "elicit the artist's image in people's minds" (p. 2194) and to conform to preconceived mental schemas (Moulard et al., 2014). Authors provided evidence of the fact that these artworks, compared with less recognizable ones by the same artists, increase the luxury perception of products advertised together with them, thus their evaluation. In fact, being high recognizable artworks usually perceived as more valuable and sold at a higher price than the less recognizable ones by the same artist, they are able to infuse a higher sense of prestige and exclusiveness, that spills over onto the related product.

As mentioned, authors also questioned if the needs which literature considers as main drivers of luxury consumption – namely, the desire to signal status and the desire of distinction – influence the above described findings. A consistent part of luxury consumers purchase luxury products that display easily recognizable luxury qualities because they use luxury consumption as a way to demonstrate their higher social standing and wealth to the ones that can't afford it. Authors demonstrated that these consumers, compared to the ones that show a lower desire to signal status, are "more interested in buying luxury products promoted in advertisements that feature recognizable artworks rather than non-recognizable artworks" (p. 2195). Conversely, other consumers purchase luxury products to differentiate themselves from the other luxury consumers and to convey their uniqueness. These consumers generally use uncommon signals of luxuriousness and thus prefer rare, special or non-conforming luxury products. Authors proved that these consumers, compared to the ones who are animated by a lower desire for distinction, are "more interested in buying luxury products promoted in advertisements featuring non-recognizable artworks rather than recognizable artworks" (p 2196).

To conclude, the positive effect of art recognizability on the *art infusion* mechanism has been demonstrated. Furthermore, it has been shown how consumer needs can change it: while the evaluations of consumers who aim at signaling their status are more positively influenced by highly recognizable artworks, evaluations of those who aim at differentiating from others are more positively influenced by hardly recognizable artworks.

Another issue that literature has explored is how the image of the artist who produced the art associated to the product advertised can affect product evaluation and perception. Specifically, Scarpaci et al. (2018)

investigated the effects that artist's iconicity has on the perception of national brands. Artists, who "may be viewed as uniquely positioned representatives of their culture" (p. 321), often serve as national icons by embodying national identity and values. Authors demonstrated through a qualitative study that their association to a national brand enables an "icon myth transfer effect", that is a mechanism of translation of "cultural and national values into brand associations" (p. 321). To do that, they distanced from the main characteristics of previous studies: taking into consideration two forms of artistic expression (dance and poetry) that do not have a visual display, they introduced the artistic element into the experiment by considering two products named after famous artists. This research has contributed to both enrich the knowledge of the *art infusion effect* and extend the boundaries of cultural branding. On the one hand, it demonstrated that the association of the product to art can generate positive effects because of the *spillover* not only of luxury perception, but also of cultural values. On the other hand, it challenged the most traditional views of cultural branding, in which "the brand is the myth, and the myth reflects characteristics of the myth market" (p. 330).

2.1.10. The Art Infusion Effect: A Summary Overview

To summarise, much has been written about the effects that the presence of art in product advertisement and promotion can have on product evaluation and perception, as well as on consumers' willingness to pay and brand extendibility.

Several evidences of the existence of an *art infusion effect* exist, as well as quite accurate explanations of it. Most scholars agree that it represents a special kind of *spillover effect*: the perceptions of luxury generally associated to art spill over onto the product associated to it, leading to more favorable product evaluations. Others challenge these theories by considering emotions as the main driver of the *art infusion effect* and arguing that emotions represent the lower-level mechanism driving the higher-level effect of perceived luxury. General agreement exists regarding the content-independent nature of the *art infusion effect*: product evaluations are not affected by the content of the artwork, that evokes positive feelings per se. Content becomes effective only when concretized: in this case, the artwork will be processed as a mere illustration rather than an art image, making the fit between product and artwork content become relevant.

The effect of product type and price on the *art infusion effect* has been also investigated. Despite the lack of full agreement, most of contributions state that hedonic goods – compared to utilitarian ones – enable a more powerful *art infusion effect*. Regarding price, some authors argue that, when art is present, price do not affect product evaluation. Others state that providing product-related price information can mitigate or even neutralize the negative effect that the association of the product to art can arise in terms of product expensiveness.

Some authors also explored the interaction between art images and verbal argument in the context of the *art infusion effect*. Taking the regulatory focus theory as a starting point, they argued that if the presence of art enhances the "feeling right effect" generated by regulatory fit, it also intensifies the "feeling wrong

effect” generated by regulatory non-fit, since art images reinforce the perceptual disfluency that characterizes this condition.

Finally, some art-related features have been investigated. Art recognizability has proved to affect the *art infusion* mechanism, that is more powerful when artwork can be easily recognized by a large number of people. The needs that drive luxury consumption – namely, the need for status signaling and the need for distinction – proved to moderate this relationship, that is stronger among people who desire to signal their status and inverted among people who desire to distinguish themselves, that will be more positively affected by less recognizable art. The role of the artist has been also explored and findings show how its association to national brands is able to enhance brand perception by conveying cultural values.

2.2. A New Theoretical Model

As described so far, many scholars have contributed to substantiate the role of art in shaping product evaluations. The purpose of the present work is not only to broaden the existing knowledge in this line of research, but also to provide evidences of the fact that art can effectively help the luxury sector to tackle its most compelling challenges – namely, the issues arising from the recent “democratization” of luxury consumption (such as the risk of élite’s withdrawal and the increase of moral criticism) and the growing concern about social and environmental impact of business activities. In fact, luxury, art and sustainability share some important elements: above all, the relevance of craftsmanship and savoir-faire and the idea of durability. Building on this premise as well as on previous studies documenting the existence of the *art infusion effect*, we argue that the intensity of artist’s craftsmanship in the artistic creation process positively influences consumers’ perceived durability of the product advertised, which, in turn, positively affects consumers’ purchase intention.

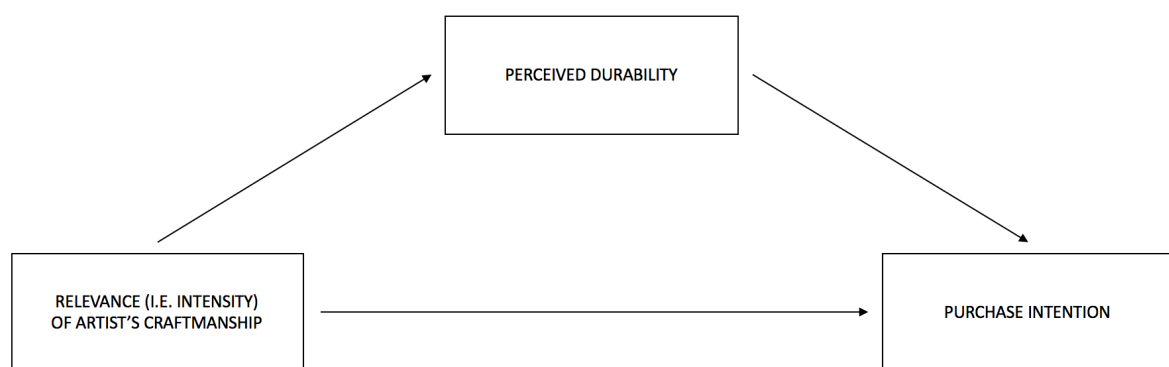


Figure 1. Conceptual model

2.2.1. Luxury Against the Throwaway Society

Defined as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) and after being underestimated for a long time, sustainable development is today a concrete issue concerning both individuals and companies. The urgency to find practical solutions to assure a sustainable growth has been fueled by the rise of a throwaway society that “relies on the relentless production of novelty by firms and the relentless consumption of novelty by households” (Cooper, 2010, p. xvi). Keen sociological insights regarding this phenomenon have been provided by Bauman (2005), who highlights the liquidity of postmodern times: in a society obsessed with appearance and individualism, individuals anxiously look for immediate gratification of their constantly evolving temporary identities, distancing themselves from the immobility imposed by traditional and heavy objects of consumption and embracing the liquification of goods. Solid

accumulation is replaced by elimination and substitution, that gratify individuals' need for fluidity. This trend has been both powered and exploited by product suppliers, who often take advantage of planned obsolescence in order to fuel consumption. The concept of planned obsolescence consists in producing goods which will be "no longer functional or desirable after a predetermined period" (Cooper, 2010, p. 4), by cutting production costs at the expense of quality and encouraging consumers to replace the product (sometimes leveraging on technological development). In this respect, absolute and relative obsolescence can be distinguished. Absolute obsolescence "occurs when a product reaches the end of its technical life because its durability is expended and it is no longer able to withstand wear and tear from use, perhaps because of material degradation"; differently, relative obsolescence "occurs when a functional product is discarded, at which point 'discretionary replacement' may take place" (Cooper, 2010, p. 16-17).

In the light of the sociological and economic context described, an alternative new path must be urgently taken into consideration in order to re-establish the conditions for sustainable growth. Elkington's Triple Bottom Line model, proposed in 1994, identifies three main dimensions that should be taken into account by those companies that desire to pursue a sustainable development (De Angelis and Amatulli, 2018). The economic dimension refers to the ability of the company to generate enough profits to ensure business and technological development, as well as employees' stability over time. The ecological dimension refers to the ability of the company to minimize its environmental impact by optimizing its production processes. Finally, the social dimension refers to the commitment of the company to improving collective wellbeing and promoting the cultural heritage.

Contrary to what can be intuitively inferred, luxury is among the sectors that best fit with the conditions enabling sustainable development and that most distance themselves from the values of the throwaway society. Although traditionally associated to the waste and excess of a restricted number of individuals, luxury is actually deeply congenial with sustainability, as some scholars have pointed out.

According to Kapferer (2010), luxury and sustainable development converge because they both focus on rarity and durability. The objective rarity that fuels luxury value characterizes both materials and craftsmanship. On the one side, resources are precious and requires to be protected to guarantee the future of the sector itself. On the other side, the crafted nature of luxury products requires the involvement of rare savoir-faire and fine artisans, in contrast with the unskilled labor exploitation that characterizes the mass fashion industry. Durability is a key element too: being managed with a long-term perspective, products are built to preserve their aesthetic and functional value as long as possible.

Also De Angelis and Amatulli (2018) agree on the intrinsic sustainability of luxury products, endorsed just by those characteristics that distinguish them from any other kind of goods. Firstly, high quality: by ensuring materials safety and reliability, it certainly provides positive benefits to consumers. Secondly, durability and rarity: luxury products are by definition scarce and their longer life span prevents frequent purchase of alternative and more perishable products, with positive outcomes in terms of resources outflow and waste. Finally, craftsmanship: the employment of talented, highly skilled and experienced labor force by

luxury firms produces a positive social impact and ensures the preservation of traditions and heritage. To conclude, luxury goods stand for sustainable, long-term investments that are consistent with the concept of “circular economy”, which states the necessity to extend product life and circulation within the system in order to minimize waste and make the most of resources.

2.2.2. *Craftmanship and Durability*

To sum up, the rise of a throwaway society has made the need for new sustainable growth paths more relevant than ever. Many scholars have pointed out the intrinsic sustainability of luxury sector, whose main characteristics – in particular, craftmanship and durability – have the potential to positively affect all the dimensions of sustainable development (economic, ecological and social) and respond to the growing demand for environmental commitment. Moreover, emphasizing these key luxury characteristics through the use of effective means – such as art – can also help to restore luxury moral reputation and to re-affirm its distinctive value in front of the élite (in other words, to overcome the challenges arisen by the “democratization” of luxury): these the considerations that made us select craftmanship and durability as relevant variables to be further investigated.

Craftmanship – namely, the skill with which something is made by hand – is not only “synonymous with time and the specialized labor needed to produce an object of value, a symbol of tradition passed down from generation to generation, the fruit of manual know-how”, but also a “type of guarantee in terms of quality, duration and aesthetics” (Amatulli and Guido, 2011, p. 130). Thus consumers link the intensity of craftmanship to product durability, which literature considers as one of the main drivers of luxury value perception (Sheth et al., 1991). Resuming what has been said regarding the *art infusion effect* and its underlying *spillover* mechanism, we therefore argue that, in the context in which the product is advertised through the use of artistic elements, the intensity of artist’s craftmanship in the process of artwork creation may affect the perceived durability of the product, since the *savoir-faire* elicited by the artwork may spill over onto the product itself. We also argue that, in turn, perceived durability may affect consumers’ purchase intention, being it considered a relevant driver of luxury purchase. Specifically:

- H1. When a luxury product is advertised through an artwork, the intensity of artist’s craftmanship in the process of artistic creation positively affects perceived product durability.
- H2. When a luxury product is advertised through an artwork, perceived product durability mediates the relationship between the intensity of artist’s craftmanship in the process of artistic creation and consumer purchase intention.

Chapter 3

3.1. Empirical Study

In order to empirically test our formal hypotheses we conducted a quantitative study aimed at demonstrating that the intensity of artist's craftsmanship positively influences product durability, which in turn increases consumer purchase intention. Specifically, we conducted an experiment based on a two-conditions between-subjects design. Data has been collected through an online pull of prepaid respondents and analysed using SPSS statistical software.

3.1.1. Procedure and Sample

The survey, created through the Qualtrics platform, has been distributed online through different social media channels. Being destined to be completed by Italian respondents, it has been fully drafted in Italian. Once 270 observations have been collected, the questionnaire has been closed and data cleaned. Specifically, all the incomplete observations as well as the ones which have failed the attention check have been deleted in order to improve data quality and reliability, leading to a reduced sample of 215 respondents. The final sample was equally distributed by gender (51.2% female, 48.8% male) and composed of 39,1% students, 14.4% independent contractors, 34.0% employees, 9,8% executives and 1.8% pensioners or unemployed. Most of the respondents (61.9%) were aged between 18 and 34, while 20.4% were aged between 35 and 54, and finally 17,7% were 55 years old or older. The majority of respondents, about 77% of the sample, declared to have a Bachelor's Degree or a higher academic qualification.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents' attentiveness has been solicited by asking them to pay particular attention to the image and text they would have seen immediately after. Moreover, they have been informed that the following were fictional scenarios. Respondents were then randomly assigned to one of the two scenarios resulting from the manipulation of the independent variable, namely the intensity of craftsmanship involved in the creation process (102 respondents were exposed to the low intensity condition, 113 respondents were exposed to the high intensity condition). In order to avoid any potential influence coming from respondents' previous experience with the brand, we decided to resort to a fictional one created for the purpose, that is Kéntro. In both scenarios, it has been said to respondents that the brand Kéntro has decided to promote its new wallets collection by incorporating in its visual advertising the artwork of a famous artist. In the low intensity condition, the artist was Lucio Fontana, a major abstract artist. In the high intensity condition, the artist was Sandro Botticelli, a leading figure of Renaissance art. Moreover, we provided respondents with a brief overview about the art genre the displayed artwork was representative of, stressing the level of importance of the artist's craftsmanship (low in the abstract condition, high in the Renaissance condition). The above-described text has been paired with a figure showing the Kéntro's advertising. In both conditions, the visual stimuli have been realized showing the brand's logo, the artwork and the product

advertised, on a white background (see Figure 1). We decided to use a wallet in our stimuli because this product category is widely used by the majority of people in everyday life, thus to reduce the risk that the purchase intention could be affected by respondents' potentially low usage. Moreover, accessories seem to represent the most relevant product category in the luxury fashion sector. In addition, to avoid a potential effect of respondents' gender on purchase intention, we created two versions (one for male and one for female) for each of the two conditions (low vs. high intensity of craftsmanship). Thus, whatever the randomly assigned scenario was, respondents were in any case exposed to the version of the product compatible with their gender, which has been previously asked and operationalized through a screening question. Both wallets have been selected among the ones displayed on Prada's official website and have been slightly modified by substituting the original logo with Kéntro's one (see Figure 2). Once respondents have been exposed to the text and image stimuli, they were asked which artwork they have seen displayed. This question has been used as an attention check, whose failure implied the respondent's exclusion from the sample. Subsequently, perceived durability and purchase intention of the product advertised have been measured. Furthermore, the extent to which respondents consider themselves expert in the artistic field has also been measured. Lastly, socio-demographics information has been collected (see Appendix).

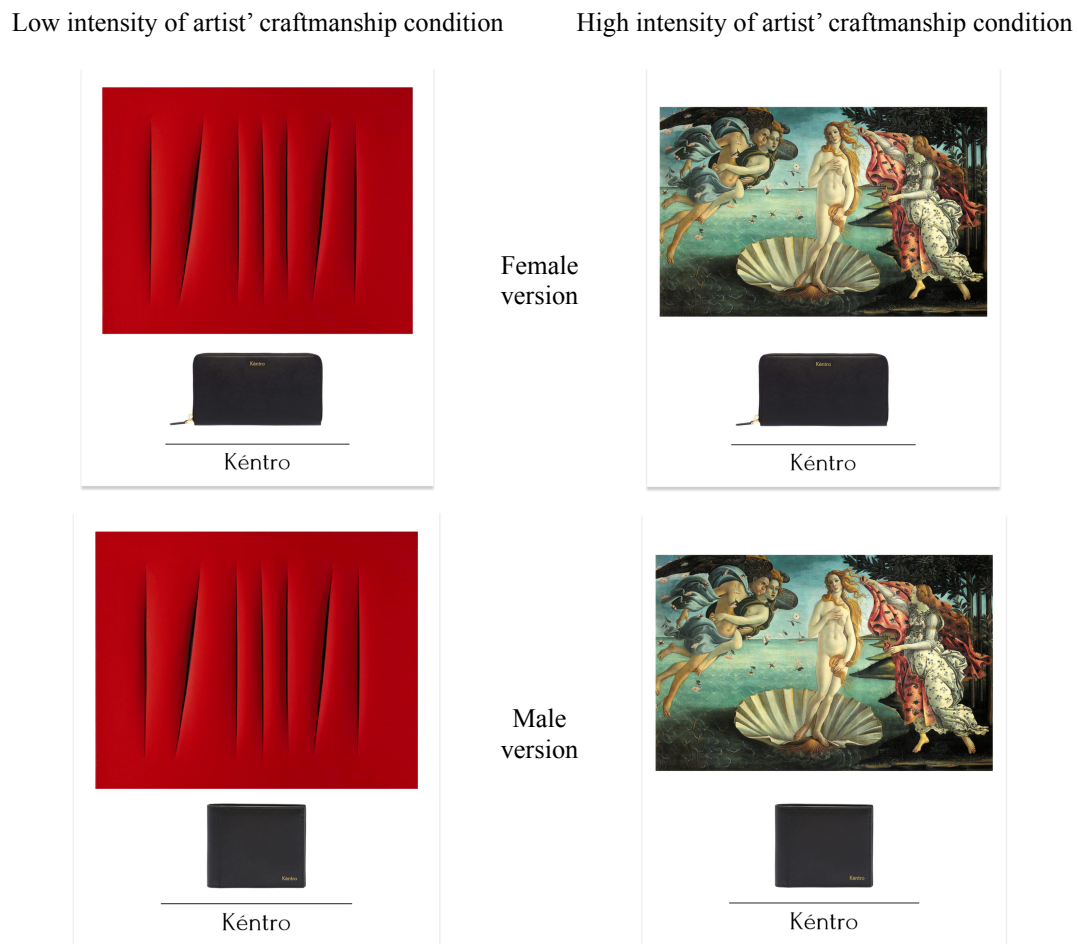


Fig. 2. Visual stimuli

Most of the constructs have been measured through pretested scales, coming from previous studies and duly translated in Italian. Perceived durability was measured recurring to Stone-Romero et al.'s (1997) semantic differential scale ($\alpha = .85$), measured on 7 points and composed of two pairs of adjectives (not durable/durable, not reliable/reliable). Respondents reported their willingness to buy by expressing their degree of agreement/disagreement (1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree") with three distinct statements ($\alpha = .95$) – "I would buy this product", "I would consider buying this product", "The probability that I would consider buying this product is high" – drawn by Dodds et al. (1991). Finally, by using two distinct 1-item 7-points scales (1 = "at all", 7 = "very much"), respondents were asked how confident they felt about art and about the specific art genre displayed.

3.1.2. Results

First of all, no significant difference between men's ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.51$) and women's ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.70$) purchase intention has been detected ($t(213) = -.97$, ns), confirming that differentiating the product advertised by gender has not produced a bias in terms of purchase intention, but has rather prevented it. The mediation model included intensity of artist's craftsmanship as the independent variable (high intensity condition = 1, low intensity condition = 0), purchase intention as the dependent variable and perceived durability as the mediating variable. First, we verified through a regression analysis that the overall effect, that is the positive effect of intensity of artist's craftsmanship on purchase intention, was positive and significant ($b = .85$, $t(213) = 3.99$, $p < 0.01$). Then, using the bootstrapping method as implemented in the PROCESS SPSS Macro by Hayes (2017, Model 4), WE performed the mediation analysis, which confirmed that perceived durability fully mediates the relationship between intensity of artist's craftsmanship and purchase intention. As expected, the effect of intensity of artist's craftsmanship on perceived durability is positive and significant ($b = 2.08$, $t(213) = 14.50$, $p < 0.01$), as well as the effect of perceived durability on purchase intention ($b = .37$, $t(213) = 3.73$, $p < 0.01$). As expected, the direct effect – that is the effect of intensity of artist's craftsmanship on purchase intention controlling perceived durability – is not significant ($b = .08$, $t(213) = .29$, ns). Thus, both H1 and H2 are supported. Data, however, also show a significant difference between the two scenarios in terms of respondents' knowledge about the art genre they have been exposed to ($t(213) = 3.68$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, the level of knowledge of Renaissance art expressed by respondents exposed to the Renaissance condition (high intensity condition) ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.32$) is significantly higher than the level of knowledge of abstract art expressed by respondents exposed to the abstract condition (low intensity condition) ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.37$).

In sum, the experimental study was conducted to show how, in the context in which a luxury product is advertised through the use of visual art, the level of craftsmanship involved in the process of artwork creation can affect consumers' purchase intention and how this effect is mediated by the perceived durability of the product itself. Mediation analysis confirmed these assumptions and demonstrated that perceived durability is

responsible for most of the underlying effect. In other words, the study has shown that, when a visual artwork is used to promote a luxury product, the intensity of artist's craftsmanship positively affect consumers' purchase intention mainly because it elicits a higher perception of product durability in consumers' mind.

3.2. General Discussion

The present work pursued two main objectives. On the one hand, it wanted to provide a comprehensive yet concise overview of the luxury phenomenon, looking further into its definition and evolution, as well as into the challenges it currently needs to deal with. On the other hand, it wanted to further investigate the *art infusion effect* under the lens of two luxury-related concepts – namely, craftsmanship and product durability – in order to enrich the existing theoretical knowledge and provide some relevant insights that could be used by luxury firms to tackle the above-mentioned challenges – namely, the ones arisen by luxury “democratization” and by individuals’ growing concern towards sustainability.

3.2.1. Theoretical Contributions

The *art infusion effect* – namely, the positive influence that the presence of art has on consumers’ perceptions and evaluations of products with which it is associated – has been investigated by several authoritative scholars, who first proved its existence and then acquired a deeper understanding of it by exploring its underlying mechanisms, as well as its field of action. We joined this line of research by focusing our study in the luxury context and by exploring the effects of an art-related characteristic that has never been investigated so far – that is the intensity of the craftsmanship used by the artist in creating the artwork. We found that the intensity of artist’s craftsmanship is able to affect consumers’ perceived durability of the product advertised which, in turn, affects consumers’ purchase intention. We therefore believe that the current study can give two main contribution to the existing literature.

Firstly, most of the studies conducted so far have focused on the effects that art can produce in terms of consumers’ perceptions and evaluations rather than in terms of consumers’ behavioral response. As far as we know, only Hüttl-Maack (2018) have proved that the presence of art can produce behavioral effects as well, specifically on consumers’ willingness to pay. Our study goes one step further, proving that consumers’ behavior can be affected not only by the presence of art, but also by the manipulation of the artwork itself. Specifically, we proved that pairing products with artworks that have required a higher level of artist’s craftsmanship positively affects consumers’ intention to buy the product advertised.

Furthermore, general agreement exists regarding the fact that the *art infusion effect* occurs because of the *spillover* of positive properties – specifically, the perception of luxury and the positive emotions arisen by art – from the artwork onto the product advertised. Our study has proved that another property, that is perceived durability, may spill over from the artwork onto the product. In other words, we argue that besides the perception of luxury and the emotions evoked by art, also perceived durability may be transferred from the artwork to the product advertised, leading to positive effects in terms of consumers’ response.

3.2.2. Managerial Implications

The main findings of this research, combined with the knowledge acquired in the process of literature review, also provide interesting insights for the luxury sector overall as well as practical guidance for marketers who operate in the luxury business environment, which is currently facing important changes and that consequently needs to find new ways to preserve its value in the eyes of its customer base.

As proven by our study, leveraging on both art and craftsmanship means to elicit perceptions of product durability and thus enhance consumers' purchase intention. In the light of the previously mentioned issues affecting the luxury sector, we believe that these findings could be relevant for two main reasons. Firstly, as claimed by Kapferer (2012, 2014), art is per se able to restore luxury attractiveness in the eyes of the élite and to protect luxury from its "democratization". Stressing the craftsmanship inherent in the artwork and thus eliciting perceptions of product durability may even enhance this positive effect, since it recalls one of the founding principles of luxury – that is the eternity of its value, which the passing of time cannot affect. Secondly, eliciting perceptions of product durability can also help luxury firms to be perceived as more sustainable and to consequently defuse the moral criticism fuelled by the recent overexposure of luxury brands. Indeed, high product durability resounds with the concepts of "slow production" and "slow consumption", two practices that are known to be highly compatible with sustainable development because of their commitment in the protection of both natural and human resources.

From a strictly managerial perspective, it follows that it is firstly recommended to continue the ongoing process of *artification* undertaken by the luxury sector. The incorporation of artistic elements in luxury visual advertising is today more relevant than ever, given the increasing importance that visual communication has gained thanks to the dominant role of social networks. It is secondly recommended to carefully select the type of artwork to display, as well as to privilege the ones in which the intensity of artist's craftsmanship is higher, possibly making also use of claims recalling it. Lastly, given all the above-mentioned benefits related to product durability, we also recommend to luxury firms to leverage on all the means at their disposal besides art to communicate it (such as packaging and quality certifications).

3.2.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present work certainly features some limitations which open the way to further investigations. The most relevant criticality concerns the experiment itself, and specifically the stimuli used to manipulate the independent variable. Indeed, since the two levels of intensity of artist's craftsmanship (low vs high) have been simulated by resorting to two different types of visual art (abstract vs Renaissance art), findings may be affected by respondents' level of knowledge and liking of the type of visual art they have been exposed to. Indeed, among the two scenarios developed to manipulate the intensity of artist's craftsmanship, respondents showed significantly different levels of knowledge of the specific art genre they have been exposed to. In particular, respondents exposed to the Renaissance condition showed a higher level of knowledge of the art

displayed than the respondents exposed to the abstract condition. Consequently, we suggest to researchers who desire to further validate our findings to do that by controlling the above-mentioned external variables. Furthermore, the experiment has been conducted by taking into consideration only one product type, while it would be interesting to verify if any changes in the results occur for different types of products. Moreover, considering the strict link between product durability and sustainability, we also suggest to further investigate the effects that product durability may have on consumers' perceptions and behaviors, in order to substantiate the managerial implications we have inferred. Finally, given the consistent variety of tools today used by firms to convey their visual messages, we also recommend to further investigate how our findings may be affected by the use of different means of communication (i.e. billboards, social media, online banners, press, store merchandising).

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Appendix

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q2 Gentile rispondente,

Compilando questo breve questionario contribuirai ad una ricerca che sto conducendo nell'ambito della mia tesi magistrale. Per questo, voglio **ringraziarti sentitamente** per il tempo che gli dedicherai. Il questionario ha una durata di circa 3 minuti e i dati raccolti sono **completamente anonimi**. Ricorda, inoltre, di rispondere nel modo più sincero possibile: non esistono risposte giuste o sbagliate!

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Gender

Q1 Per favore, indica il tuo genere:

☐ Uomo (1)

☐ Donna (2)

End of Block: Gender

Start of Block: Introduction

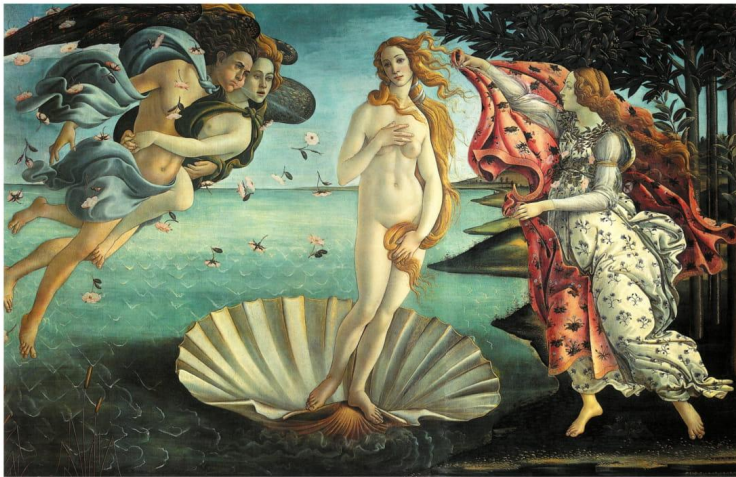
Q5 Nella prossima pagina ti verrà presentato uno **scenario di fantasia**. Ti chiedo di osservarlo e leggerlo **con attenzione**, in modo da poter successivamente rispondere ad alcune brevi domande.

End of Block: Introduction

Start of Block: ManBotticelli

Q7 Kéntro, nota firma del lusso, ha avviato una nuova campagna per promuovere la sua linea di portafogli e ha deciso di utilizzare a tal proposito un'opera dell'artista Sandro Botticelli, la *Nascita di Venere*.

L'opera è una delle più importanti espressioni di arte rinascimentale. Gli artisti rinascimentali, oltre ad essere attenti studiosi della linea e della forma, erano **abili artigiani** che utilizzavano la propria straordinaria abilità manuale per produrre opere destinate a **conservare il proprio valore** nel tempo.



Kéntro

End of Block: ManBotticelli

Start of Block: ManFontana

Q9 Kéntro, nota firma del lusso, ha avviato una nuova campagna per promuovere la sua linea di portafogli e ha deciso di utilizzare a tal proposito un'opera dell'artista Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale. Attese*.

L'opera è una delle più importanti espressioni di arte concettuale. Non più interessati ad esprimersi attraverso la propria abilità artigianale e manuale, questi artisti producono opere il cui **grande valore** risiede più nella **concettualizzazione intellettuale** che nella materialità, che spesso si manifesta solo attraverso un **gesto dimostrativo**.



End of Block: ManFontana

Start of Block: WomanBotticelli

Q6 Kéntro, nota firma del lusso, ha avviato una nuova campagna per promuovere la sua linea di portafogli e ha deciso di utilizzare a tal proposito un'opera dell'artista Sandro Botticelli, la *Nascita di Venere*.

L'opera è una delle più importanti espressioni di arte rinascimentale. Gli artisti rinascimentali, oltre ad essere attenti studiosi della linea e della forma, erano **abili artigiani** che utilizzavano la propria straordinaria abilità manuale per produrre opere destinate a **conservare il proprio valore** nel tempo.



Kéntro

End of Block: WomanBotticelli

Start of Block: WomanFontana

Q8 Kéntro, nota firma del lusso, ha avviato una nuova campagna per promuovere la sua linea di portafogli e ha deciso di utilizzare a tal proposito un'opera dell'artista Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale. Attese*.

L'opera è una delle più importanti espressioni di arte concettuale. Non più interessati ad esprimersi attraverso la propria abilità artigianale e manuale, questi artisti producono opere il cui **grande valore** risiede più nella **concettualizzazione intellettuale** che nella materialità, che spesso si manifesta solo attraverso un **gesto dimostrativo**.



End of Block: WomanFontana

Start of Block: Artwork

Q25 Quale opera hai visto nella pubblicità?

- ☐ "Concetto spaziale. Attese" di Lucio Fontana (1)
- ☐ "Nascita di Venere" di Sandro Botticelli (2)

End of Block: Artwork

Start of Block: Durability

Q10 Per favore, indica quanto credi che il prodotto pubblicizzato sia:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Non durevole	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Durevole
Non affidabile	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Affidabile

End of Block: Durability

Start of Block: PurchaseIntention

Q11 Per favore, pensa al prodotto pubblicizzato e indica quanto concordi con le seguenti affermazioni.

	1 Assolutamente in disaccordo (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 Assolutamente d'accordo (7)
Acquisterei il prodotto (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prenderei in considerazione l'acquisto del prodotto (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La probabilità che io prenda in considerazione l'acquisto del prodotto è alta (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: PurchaseIntention

Start of Block: Art

Q29

	1 niente	Per (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 Moltissimo (7)
Quanto ti ritieni esperto/a di arte in generale? (1)	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Art

Start of Block: Info

Q21 A quale fascia d'età appartieni?

- ☐ Under 18 (1)
 - ☐ 18 - 24 (2)
 - ☐ 25 - 34 (3)
 - ☐ 35 - 44 (4)
 - ☐ 45 - 54 (5)
 - ☐ 55 - 64 (6)
 - ☐ 65 - 74 (7)
 - ☐ 75 o più (8)
-

Q22 Qual è il tuo titolo di studio?

- ☐ Diploma (1)
 - ☐ Laurea di 1° livello (triennale) (2)
 - ☐ Laurea di 2° livello (magistrale o a ciclo unico) (3)
 - ☐ Master di 1° livello (post triennale) (4)
 - ☐ Master di 2° livello (post magistrale) (5)
 - ☐ Dottorato di ricerca (6)
-

Q23 Qual è la tua occupazione attuale?

- ☐ Studente (1)
 - ☐ Dipendente (2)
 - ☐ Quadro o dirigente (3)
 - ☐ Libero professionista (4)
 - ☐ Disoccupato (5)
 - ☐ Pensionato (6)
-

Q24 Qual è il tuo reddito medio annuo?

- ☐ 0 - 15.000 € (1)
- ☐ 16.000 - 25.000 € (2)
- ☐ 26.000 - 35.000 € (3)
- ☐ 36.000 - 45.000 € (4)
- ☐ 46.000 - 55.000 € (5)
- ☐ 56.000 - 100.000 € (6)
- ☐ Più di 100.000 € (7)

End of Block: Info

Thesis Summary

Building on the research work lately undertaken by many scholars, the present work aims to further investigate the relationship between art and luxury while adding new insights on the so called *art infusion effect*. Firstly, a general overview of luxury – defined in sociological, economical and behavioral terms – has been provided. Secondly, the phenomenon of luxury *artification* and its ability to tackle the most pressing issues currently troubling the luxury sector has been exposed. Finally, after a detailed overview of the existing literature regarding the *art infusion* mechanism, an experimental study been conducted in order to test new and still unexplored hypotheses.

Introduction

While for decades luxury has been the privilege of the “happy few”, globalization and the rise of the middle class in many emerging countries all over the world has contributed to the rise of the “happy many”. As a consequence, luxury brands are currently addressing the issues arising from the “democratization” of luxury consumption – namely, the risk of élite’s withdrawal and the increase of moral criticism – by looking for new ways to reinforce their aesthetic, moral and symbolic value. Along with this challenge, luxury brands are facing the growing concern coming from luxury consumers about the social and environmental impact that luxury brands’ activities bring forth. In this study, we propose that associating luxury products and brands with the concept of art and artworks might help luxury companies tackle the above-mentioned issues. Indeed, luxury and art share some important elements, such as the inherent strong emotional value, the relevance of craftsmanship and savoir-faire, and, above all, the idea of durability (defined as the ability of a product to maintain its quality and value over time), which characterizes both luxury products and artworks. Building on this premise as well as on previous studies documenting the existence of the so-called *art infusion effect* – defined as the general positive effect that the presence of art in product advertising has on product evaluation and perception – we propose that the relevance of the artist’s craftsmanship in the process of the artwork creation positively influences consumers’ perceived durability of the product advertised, which, in turn, positively affects consumers’ purchase intention. Both theoretical contributions of our study and managerial implications of our findings are discussed.

Understanding Luxury and its Consumption

Several scholars, managers and actors operating in the luxury industry have attempted to provide a definition of what luxury is. However, the complexity of the luxury phenomenon is such to make the search for a unique and comprehensive definition a still open question (Vickers and Renand, 2003; Fionda and Moore, 2009). Firstly, it is questionable to what extent product expensiveness defines luxury. In economic terms, luxury

brands are those which have constantly been able to justify a high price: a price significantly higher than the price of products with comparable characteristics (McKinsey, 1990). Despite the prominence of price as a discriminant element of luxury products, this definition does not seem to be comprehensive enough to cover all features of luxury items, since it implies that the luxury status can be gained to goods having a price differential with other goods in the same category, included the upper-range brands (Kapferer, 1997). A more comprehensive view of luxury has been provided by Ko et al. (2019), who agreed to theoretically define a luxury brand as “a branded product or service that consumers perceive to: be high quality; offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional; have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality; be worthy of commanding a premium price; and be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer” (p. 406). Along this line, Vickers and Renand (2003) argue that luxury goods can be “usefully defined in terms of a mix of components of functionalism, experientialism and symbolic interactionism” (p. 472), in which the role of social and individual (psychological) cues is significantly more relevant than in the context of non-luxury products. To conclude, although many authors have attempted to account for the multidimensionality of luxury, the fluidity and the complexity of the notion of luxury has made it difficult to come up with a comprehensive definition. A deeper discussion about the personal and interpersonal role played by luxury, whose distinctiveness lies in its psychological value (Amatulli and Guido, 2011), can thus help to clarify.

Pointing out the dichotomy of luxury consumption, Amatulli and Guido (2012) argue that externalized and internalized luxury can be distinguished, since individuals purchase luxury goods under the influence of both interpersonal and personal motives. In fact, luxury purchase can be driven by the interaction with other people, as well as by individual emotions and sensations. These considerations find their foundation on the long process of research carried on over time by several authoritative scholars who contributed to enrich the current knowledge regarding luxury consumption. The oldest theory is the one built off the idea of conspicuous consumption. In 1899, Veblen introduced this label to define to individuals’ tendency to consume goods in a high visible way in order to impress others and make them infer their wealth and power, particularly in contexts of high socio-economic mobility. Mauss (1925) resumed Veblen’s reflections to explore their application in the gift-giving social dynamics, arguing that conspicuous and costly generosity is the most powerful means to signal status. The author anticipated what would have been lately conceptualized as the signaling theory, which states that the individual’s disposal of sufficient personal resources can be inferred by his or her engagement in generous or wasteful behaviors that, perhaps paradoxically, are too costly to be fake (Bliege Bird and Smith, 2005). Defined as “the behavioural tendency to value status and acquire and consume products that provide status to the individual” (O’Cass and McEwen, 2004, p. 34), status consumption is strictly related to, yet still separate from conspicuous consumption. In other words, status consumption relies on the desire to enhance social status by owning luxury goods (which may or may not be publicly displayed), while conspicuous consumption focuses more on the overt display of luxury and wealth. Another relevant contribution has been provided by social comparison theory, according to which individuals tend to evaluate themselves through

objective and non-social means that, if not available, will be replaced by the comparison to other people (Festinger, 1954). Since this theory also states that individuals tend to conform to the prevalent opinion of the social groups they belong to, Wiedemann et al. (2009) have argued that luxury goods, by enclosing prestigious values, may be used to conform to social standards. According to self-concept theory, moreover, self-concept is defined as the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7), i.e. how the individual cognitively and emotionally perceives himself or herself. Since general agreement exists regarding the expressive and symbolic value of luxury – defined as the ability of the product to convey a psychological meaning (Smith and Colgate, 2007) – self-concept can be a motivator for luxury consumption. Furthermore, Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) have provided evidences of the fact that differences in self-concept orientation can lead to differences in luxury consumption: for example, bandwagon luxury consumption is more likely to occur among consumers with an interdependent self-concept than among those with an independent self-concept. The concept of extended-self can be extremely useful to understand luxury consumption motivations as well. Conceptualized for the first time by Belk (1988), the extended-self refers to the phenomenon according to which individuals define themselves not only through what it is seen as “me”, but also through what is seen as “mine”. Specifically, individuals perceive their possessions as part of their self-concept and use them to get closer to their ideal self, that is to whom they hope to be. In this perspective, the luxury symbolic value previously mentioned may play a fundamental role in making luxury consumption an effective tool for self-extension. Last is the theory of uniqueness. Developed by Snyder and Fromkin (1977), it states that although people sometimes feel the need to conform, they may tend to engage in nonconformist behaviors and to differentiate themselves when the degree of similarity relative to others is perceived as excessively high. This need for uniqueness can be fulfilled by the consumption of luxury goods, which are by definition scarce and rare (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).

Luxury Growth and *Artificalion*

The basic law of economics states that when demand exceeds supply, price increases. This imbalance is the *sine qua non* condition for luxury to exist, since scarcity represents the core of luxury brands' DNA. Indeed, their power relies on their magical aura of unattainability, which is psychologically evoked by their incorporation in the lifestyle of extraordinary people and practically fostered by physical rarity. As argued by Dubois and Paternault (1995), the deeper the gap between awareness and penetration of the luxury brand the stronger its desirability, since “awareness feeds the dream but purchase makes the dream come true and therefore contributes to destroy it” (p. 73). However, except for the years encompassing the last financial crisis, occurred between 2007 and 2009, the luxury market never stopped growing since the nineties (Bain & Company, 2018). The overall value of luxury market has been estimated at about € 920 billion in 2018 and a 4-5% annual growth is expected until 2025 (Boston Consulting Group, 2019). It is now interesting to reflect on the dynamics and reasons underlying the luxury growth phenomenon. As highlighted by Kapferer (2014),

in the past luxury was a prerogative of the happy few, namely a small circle of powerful individuals who used to leverage on luxury consumption in order to show their taste and impress crowds (Dubois et al., 2005). In the 19th century, the rapid rise of a new middle class has led to the fast expansion of luxury customer base and to the gradual “democratization” of luxury desire. As illustrated by McNeil and Riello (2016), this phenomenon, firstly emerged in Europe, has later happened in several emerging countries, which entered into the luxury market just at the time when saturation was being reached.

As mentioned, while growth and product diffusion are not an issue for premium brands, which indeed benefit from the increase of their market share, they conversely may represent an obstacle for luxury brands’ wellbeing. In fact, besides the unquestionable short-term economic benefit, sales growth can also cause the exposure of luxury firms to the risk of losing their exclusive appeal and their narrative-meaning (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2014). In other words, the extension of luxury customer base from the happy few (the powerful *élite*) to the happy many (the wealthy middle-class), thus the transformation of luxury “from the ordinary of the extraordinary people to the extraordinary of the ordinary people” is likely to distance the *élite* itself, which is populated by those individuals who “ensure the long-term desirability of the brand” (Kapferer, 2014, p. 373). Moreover, the expansion of luxury has created a condition of overexposure of luxury brands, which have invaded individuals’ everyday life by massively resorting to generic media channels such as television, newspapers, magazines and Internet (McNeil and Riello, 2016). This phenomenon has exacerbated the moral criticisms that always existed around luxury, blamed to foster social inequality. Such arguments call into question the reputation of the luxury sector, and even its right to exist (Kapferer 2014).

Aware about the above-mentioned issues, Kapferer (2012, 2014) claimed the centrality of art in the resolution of the problems posed by the growth of luxury. Able to provide a powerful aesthetic and moral endorsement, art can strengthen luxury symbolical authority and offer new segmentation criteria beyond price (such as cultural and humanistic sensitivity), establishing a dialogue with a new, creative and post-materialistic *élite* populated by those “extraordinary people” who are destined to shape the future. The involvement of art, therefore, not only guarantees the loyalty of the happy few, but also defuses the moral criticisms related to luxury consumption by taking it to a higher and unquestionable level of meaning. Moreover, associating luxury with art may also help discouraging new potential competitors from entering the luxury market. Indeed, competitors may have difficulty decoding and imitating this source of competitive advantage, since the art-business collaborations are usually complex to define, highly specific and tacit (Chailan, 2018). Kastner (2014) identified three benefits stemming from the associations between art and luxury brands. Firstly, this association “entrenches in the consumer’s mind the perceptions of originality, ingenuity and inventiveness” (p. 45) and enshrines the aesthetic sensitivity of the brand. Secondly, it enriches brand content and invigorates the aspirational storytelling typical of luxury brands. Thirdly, the art-luxury association elevates luxury brands above the purely commercial dimension.

As reported by Kastner (2014), the relationship between art and luxury experienced relevant evolutions over the Twentieth century. In the 1930s, the Surrealist painters Salvador Dali and Jean Cocteau partnered

with the Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli in order to bring their creativity in her clothing designs (Gibson, 2003), while the Italian shoe manufacturer Ferragamo launched an advertising campaign realized in collaboration with the Futurist painter Lucio Venna (Luxury Society, 2009). In the 1960s, Yves Saint Laurent launched its haute couture collection taking explicit inspiration from Piet Mondrian's artworks (Kim, 1998). In the 1980s, longer-term forms of collaboration were introduced, such as the creation of the art museum Foundation Cartier in Paris (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2012). Finally, the huge commercial success of the high-profile artistic collaborations initiated by Louis Vuitton's artistic director Marco Jacobs in the late 1990s made this phenomenon definitely popular among luxury brands. Today, *artification* – defined as the process in which “something that is not regarded as art in the traditional sense of the word is changed into something art-like or into something that takes influences from artistic ways of thinking and acting” (Naukkarinen, 2012) – involves several short-term and long-term elements of luxury brand management. In fact, along with exceptional activities such as artistic mentoring and collaborations, foundations and patronage (Chailan, 2018), also the most ordinary elements of the luxury marketing mix are actively involved in the process of *artification*. In particular, the effect that the introduction of artistic elements in product advertisement has on product perception and evaluation – named the *art infusion effect* – has been extensively explored by several scholars.

Luxury and Sustainability

Historically, the dominant economic model adopted by firms has been the one built on profit maximization, pursued through the efficient exploitation of resources (Goodland, 1995; Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008). However, the increasing social awareness regarding ecological deterioration and the consequent regulatory intervention from national and international institutions have led companies to reconsider both their business models and priorities. While the way towards a fully sustainable system is still long, first and concrete steps have been taken in the business ecosystem. In fact, as shown by Global 100 – the list of the 100 most sustainable corporations in the world drafted by Corporate Knights (2019) – many widely known multinational companies are in the middle of an important journey towards new models of sustainable development.

It is highly debated whether luxury sector can be considered sustainable, that is whether they are able to make managerial decisions that, while preserving the competitiveness of the company on the market, do not compromise the social, economic and environmental context. The subject is particularly topical for two main reasons. On the one hand, consumers' values are “transitioning from having to being, from extrinsic to intrinsic and from conspicuous to meaningful” (Luxury Daily, 2013), driving them to an increasing sensitivity towards sustainability. On the other hand, a certain contradiction between the values associated with luxury and the ones promoted by sustainability is perceived (Amatulli et al., 2017). In fact, while sustainability resounds with concepts such as altruism, sobriety and morality, luxury is usually associated with excess, ostentation and superficiality (Carrier and Luetchford, 2012). However, many scholars support the idea that the luxury sector have a high potential in terms of sustainable development (Kapferer, 2010; Hennigs et al.,

2013). De Angelis and Amatulli (2018) even promote the idea that luxury should be considered naturally sustainable, since the distinctive characteristics of luxury goods are by definition compatible with the concept of sustainability. In fact, authors argue that high quality, durability, rarity and craftsmanship – which represent the foundation of luxury production – have the potential to provide a positive contribution to customers, society and the environment. This theme will be further discussed later, and a special focus will be provided about the concept of durability.

The *art infusion effect*

Despite the general awareness that marketers and scholars have shown regarding the positive effect that the introduction of artistic elements can have on consumers evaluations (Crader and Zaichkowsky, 2007), neither empirical evidence nor theoretical conceptualization existed until Hagtvedt and Patrick's studies (2008a). They proved the existence of the *art infusion effect*, which is the general and positive “influence of the presence of art on consumer perceptions and evaluations of products with which it is associated” (p. 379). Authors theorize it represents a special kind of *spillover effect*, since the “perceptions of luxury associated with visual art spill over from the artwork onto products with which it is associated, leading to more favorable evaluations of these products” (p. 379). The *spillover effect* – namely, the transfer of properties from one object to another, linked to the previous one (Lee et al., 2015) - is the impact that information provided in product-related messages has on beliefs about attributes that are not mentioned in the messages (Ahluwalia et al., 2001) and has proved to be more influential in terms of attitude changes than the message itself (Lutz, 1975). The effect is explained by consumers' tendency to infer missing attribute information relying on their intuitive notions of inter-attribute correlations and on the correlational information gathered from the message (Ahluwalia et al., 2001).

General agreement exists regarding the content-independent nature of the *art infusion effect*: product evaluations are not affected by the content of the artwork, that evokes positive feelings per se (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2008a; Lacey et al., 2011). Content becomes effective only when concretized (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2011): in this case, the artwork will be processed as a mere illustration rather than an art image, making the fit between product and artwork content become relevant.

The effect of product type and price on the *art infusion effect* has been also investigated. Despite the lack of full agreement (Estes et al., 2018), most of contributions state that hedonic goods – compared to utilitarian ones – enable a more powerful *art infusion effect* (Huettl and Gierl, 2012; Hüttl-Maack, 2018). Regarding price, some authors argue that, when art is present, price do not affect product evaluation (Lee et al., 2015). Others (Huettl and Gierl, 2012) state that providing product-related price information can mitigate or even neutralize the negative effect that the association of the product to art can arise in terms of product expensiveness.

Some authors also explored the interaction between art images and verbal argument in the context of the *art infusion effect* (Mantovani and Tazima, 2016). Taking the regulatory focus theory as a starting point, they argued that if the presence of art enhances the “feeling right effect” generated by regulatory fit, it also intensifies the “feeling wrong effect” generated by regulatory non-fit, since art images reinforce the perceptual disfluency that characterizes this condition.

Finally, some art-related features have been investigated. Art recognizability has proved to affect the *art infusion* mechanism, that is more powerful when artwork can be easily recognized by a large number of people (Peluso et al., 2017). The needs that drive luxury consumption – namely, the need for status signaling and the need for distinction – proved to moderate this relationship, that is stronger among people who desire to signal their status and inverted among people who desire to distinguish themselves, that will be more positively affected by less recognizable art ((Peluso et al., 2017). The role of the artist has been also explored and findings show how its association to national brands is able to enhance brand perception by conveying cultural values (Scarpaci et al., 2018).

A New Theoretical Model

As described so far, many scholars have contributed to substantiate the role of art in shaping product evaluations. The purpose of the present work is not only to broaden the existing knowledge in this line of research, but also to provide evidences of the fact that art can effectively help the luxury sector to tackle its most compelling challenges – namely, the issues arising from the recent “democratization” of luxury consumption (such as the risk of élite’s withdrawal and the increase of moral criticism) and the growing concern about social and environmental impact of business activities. In fact, luxury, art and sustainability share some important elements: above all, the relevance of craftsmanship and savoir-faire and the idea of durability. Building on this premise as well as on previous studies documenting the existence of the *art infusion effect*, we argue that the intensity of artist’s craftsmanship in the artistic creation process positively influences consumers’ perceived durability of the product advertised, which, in turn, positively affects consumers’ purchase intention.

The rise of a throwaway society that “relies on the relentless production of novelty by firms and the relentless consumption of novelty by households” (Cooper, 2010, p. xvi) has made the adoption of sustainable practice an urgent issue. Contrary to what can be intuitively inferred because of its frequent association to the waste and excess of a restricted number of individuals, luxury is among the sectors that best fit with the conditions enabling sustainable development. According to Kapferer (2010), luxury and sustainable development converge because they both focus on rarity and durability. The objective rarity that fuels luxury value characterizes both materials and craftsmanship. On the one side, resources are precious and requires to be protected to guarantee the future of the sector itself. On the other side, the crafted nature of luxury products

requires the involvement of rare *savoir-faire* and fine artisans, in contrast with the unskilled labor exploitation that characterizes the mass fashion industry. Durability is a key element too: being managed with a long-term perspective, products are built to preserve their aesthetic and functional value as long as possible. Also De Angelis and Amatulli (2018) agree on the intrinsic sustainability of luxury products, endorsed just by those characteristics that distinguish them from any other kind of goods. Firstly, high quality: by ensuring materials safety and reliability, it certainly provides positive benefits to consumers. Secondly, durability and rarity: luxury products are by definition scarce and their longer life span prevents frequent purchase of alternative and more perishable products, with positive outcomes in terms of resources outflow and waste. Finally, craftsmanship: the employment of talented, highly skilled and experienced labor force by luxury firms produces a positive social impact and ensures the preservation of traditions and heritage. To conclude, luxury goods stand for sustainable, long-term investments that are consistent with the concept of “circular economy”, which states the necessity to extend product life and circulation within the system in order to minimize waste and make the most of resources.

To sum up, the main characteristics of luxury – in particular, craftsmanship and durability – have the potential to positively affect all the dimensions of sustainable development (economic, ecological and social) and respond to the growing demand for environmental commitment. Moreover, emphasizing these key luxury characteristics through the use of effective means – such as art – can also help to restore luxury moral reputation and to re-affirm its distinctive value in front of the *élite* (in other words, to overcome the challenges arisen by the “democratization” of luxury): these the considerations that made us select craftsmanship and durability as relevant variables to be further investigated.

Craftsmanship – namely, the skill with which something is made by hand – is not only “synonymous with time and the specialized labor needed to produce an object of value, a symbol of tradition passed down from generation to generation, the fruit of manual know-how”, but also a “type of guarantee in terms of quality, duration and aesthetics” (Amatulli and Guido, 2011, p. 130). Thus, consumers link the intensity of craftsmanship to product durability, which literature considers as one of the main drivers of luxury value perception (Sheth et al., 1991). Resuming what has been said regarding the *art infusion effect* and its underlying *spillover* mechanism, we therefore argue that, in the context in which the product is advertised through the use of artistic elements, the intensity of artist’s craftsmanship in the process of artwork creation may affect the perceived durability of the product, since the *savoir-faire* elicited by the artwork may spill over onto the product itself. We also argue that, in turn, perceived durability may affect consumers’ purchase intention, being it considered a relevant driver of luxury purchase. Specifically:

- H1. When a luxury product is advertised through an artwork, the intensity of artist’s craftsmanship in the process of artistic creation positively affects perceived product durability.

- H2. When a luxury product is advertised through an artwork, perceived product durability mediates the relationship between the intensity of artist's craftsmanship in the process of artistic creation and consumer purchase intention.

Empirical Study

In order to empirically test our formal hypotheses we conducted a quantitative study aimed at demonstrating that the intensity of artist's craftsmanship positively influences product durability, which in turn increases consumer purchase intention. Specifically, we conducted an experiment based on a two-conditions between-subjects design. Data has been collected through an online pull of prepaid respondents and analysed using SPSS statistical software.

Procedure and Sample

The survey, created through the Qualtrics platform, has been distributed online through different social media channels. Being destined to be completed by Italian respondents, it has been fully drafted in Italian. Once 270 observations have been collected, the questionnaire has been closed and data cleaned. Specifically, all the incomplete observations as well as the ones which have failed the attention check have been deleted in order to improve data quality and reliability, leading to a reduced sample of 215 respondents. The final sample was equally distributed by gender (51.2% female, 48.8% male) and composed of 39,1% students, 14.4% independent contractors, 34.0% employees, 9,8% executives and 1.8% pensioners or unemployed. Most of the respondents (61.9%) were aged between 18 and 34, while 20.4% were aged between 35 and 54, and finally 17,7% were 55 years old or older. The majority of respondents, about 77% of the sample, declared to have a Bachelor's Degree or a higher academic qualification.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents' attentiveness has been solicited by asking them to pay particular attention to the image and text they would have seen immediately after. Moreover, they have been informed that the following were fictional scenarios. Respondents were then randomly assigned to one of the two scenarios resulting from the manipulation of the independent variable, namely the intensity of craftsmanship involved in the creation process (102 respondents were exposed to the low intensity condition, 113 respondents were exposed to the high intensity condition). In order to avoid any potential influence coming from respondents' previous experience with the brand, we decided to resort to a fictional one created for the purpose, that is Kéntro. In both scenarios, it has been said to respondents that the brand Kéntro has decided to promote its new wallets collection by incorporating in its visual advertising the artwork of a famous artist. In the low intensity condition, the artist was Lucio Fontana, a major abstract artist. In the high intensity condition, the artist was Sandro Botticelli, a leading figure of Renaissance art. Moreover, we provided respondents with a brief overview about the art genre the displayed artwork was representative of, stressing the level of importance of the artist's craftsmanship (low in the abstract condition, high in the Renaissance

condition). The above-described text has been paired with a figure showing the Kéntro's advertising. In both conditions, the visual stimuli have been realized showing the brand's logo, the artwork and the product advertised, on a white background (see Figure 1). We decided to use a wallet in our stimuli because this product category is widely used by the majority of people in everyday life, thus to reduce the risk that the purchase intention could be affected by respondents' potentially low usage. Moreover, accessories seem to represent the most relevant product category in the luxury fashion sector. In addition, to avoid a potential effect of respondents' gender on purchase intention, we created two versions (one for male and one for female) for each of the two conditions (low vs. high intensity of craftsmanship). Thus, whatever the randomly assigned scenario was, respondents were in any case exposed to the version of the product compatible with their gender, which has been previously asked and operationalized through a screening question. Both wallets have been selected among the ones displayed on Prada's official website and have been slightly modified by substituting the original logo with Kéntro's one (see Figure 1). Once respondents have been exposed to the text and image stimuli, they were asked which artwork they have seen displayed. This question has been used as an attention check, whose failure implied the respondent's exclusion from the sample. Subsequently, perceived durability and purchase intention of the product advertised have been measured. Furthermore, the extent to which respondents consider themselves expert in the artistic field has also been measured. Lastly, socio-demographics information has been collected.



Fig. 1. Visual stimuli

Most of the constructs have been measured through pretested scales, coming from previous studies and duly translated in Italian. Perceived durability was measured recurring to Stone-Romero et al.'s (1997) semantic differential scale ($\alpha = .85$), measured on 7 points and composed of two pairs of adjectives (not durable/durable, not reliable/reliable). Respondents reported their willingness to buy by expressing their degree of agreement/disagreement (1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree") with three distinct statements ($\alpha = .95$) – "I would buy this product", "I would consider buying this product", "The probability that I would

consider buying this product is high” – drawn by Dodds et al. (1991). Finally, by using two distinct 1-item 7-points scales (1 = “at all”, 7 = “very much”). respondents were asked how confident they felt about art and about the specific art genre displayed.

Results

First of all, no significant difference between men’s ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.51$) and women’s ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.70$) purchase intention has been detected ($t(213) = -.97$, ns), confirming that differentiating the product advertised by gender has not produced a bias in terms of purchase intention, but has rather prevented it. The mediation model included intensity of artist’s craftsmanship as the independent variable (high intensity condition = 1, low intensity condition = 0), purchase intention as the dependent variable and perceived durability as the mediating variable. First, we verified through a regression analysis that the overall effect, that is the positive effect of intensity of artist’s craftsmanship on purchase intention, was positive and significant ($b = .85$, $t(213) = 3.99$, $p < 0.01$). Then, using the bootstrapping method as implemented in the PROCESS SPSS Macro by Hayes (2017, Model 4), WE performed the mediation analysis, which confirmed that perceived durability fully mediates the relationship between intensity of artist’s craftsmanship and purchase intention. As expected, the effect of intensity of artist’s craftsmanship on perceived durability is positive and significant ($b = 2.08$, $t(213) = 14.50$, $p < 0.01$), as well as the effect of perceived durability on purchase intention ($b = .37$, $t(213) = 3.73$, $p < 0.01$). As expected, the direct effect – that is the effect of intensity of artist’s craftsmanship on purchase intention controlling perceived durability – is not significant ($b = .08$, $t(213) = .29$, ns). Thus, both H1 and H2 are supported. Data, however, also show a significant difference between the two scenarios in terms of respondents’ knowledge about the art genre they have been exposed to ($t(213) = 3.68$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, the level of knowledge of Renaissance art expressed by respondents exposed to the Renaissance condition (high intensity condition) ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.32$) is significantly higher than the level of knowledge of abstract art expressed by respondents exposed to the abstract condition (low intensity condition) ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.37$).

In sum, the experimental study was conducted to show how, in the context in which a luxury product is advertised through the use of visual art, the level of craftsmanship involved in the process of artwork creation can affect consumers’ purchase intention and how this effect is mediated by the perceived durability of the product itself. Mediation analysis confirmed these assumptions and demonstrated that perceived durability is responsible for most of the underlying effect. In other words, the study has shown that, when a visual artwork is used to promote a luxury product, the intensity of artist’s craftsmanship positively affect consumers’ purchase intention mainly because it elicits a higher perception of product durability in consumers’ mind.

Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications

The *art infusion effect* has been investigated by several authoritative scholars, who first proved its existence and then acquired a deeper understanding of it by exploring its underlying mechanisms, as well as its field of action. We joined this line of research by focusing our study in the luxury context and by exploring the effects of an art-related characteristic that has never been investigated so far – that is the intensity of the craftsmanship used by the artist in creating the artwork. We found that the intensity of artist's craftsmanship is able to affect consumers' perceived durability of the product advertised which, in turn, affects consumers' purchase intention. We therefore believe that the current study can give two main contribution to the existing literature.

Firstly, most of the studies conducted so far have focused on the effects that art can produce in terms of consumers' perceptions and evaluations rather than in terms of consumers' behavioral response. As far as we know, only Hüttl-Maack (2018) have proved that the presence of art can produce behavioral effects as well, specifically on consumers' willingness to pay. Our study goes one step further, proving that consumers' behavior can be affected not only by the presence of art, but also by the manipulation of the artwork itself. Specifically, we proved that pairing products with artworks that have required a higher level of artist's craftsmanship positively affects consumers' intention to buy the product advertised. Furthermore, general agreement exists regarding the fact that the *art infusion effect* occurs because of the *spillover* of positive properties – specifically, the perception of luxury and the positive emotions arisen by art – from the artwork onto the product advertised. Our study has proved that another property, that is perceived durability, may spill over from the artwork onto the product. In other words, we argue that besides the perception of luxury and the emotions evoked by art, also perceived durability may be transferred from the artwork to the product advertised, leading to positive effects in terms of consumers' response.

The main findings of this research, combined with the knowledge acquired in the process of literature review, also provide interesting insights for the luxury sector overall as well as practical guidance for marketers who operate in the luxury business environment, which is currently facing important changes and that consequently needs to find new ways to preserve its value in the eyes of its customer base.

As proven by our study, leveraging on both art and craftsmanship means to elicit perceptions of product durability and thus enhance consumers' purchase intention. In the light of the previously mentioned issues affecting the luxury sector, we believe that these findings could be relevant for two main reasons. Firstly, as claimed by Kapferer (2012, 2014), art is per se able to restore luxury attractiveness in the eyes of the élite and to protect luxury from its “democratization”. Stressing the craftsmanship inherent in the artwork and thus eliciting perceptions of product durability may even enhance this positive effect, since it recalls one of the founding principles of luxury – that is the eternity of its value, which the passing of time cannot affect. Secondly, eliciting perceptions of product durability can also help luxury firms to be perceived as more sustainable and to consequently defuse the moral criticism fuelled by the recent overexposure of luxury brands. Indeed, high product durability resounds with the concepts of “slow production” and “slow consumption”,

two practices that are known to be highly compatible with sustainable development because of their commitment in the protection of both natural and human resources.

From a strictly managerial perspective, it follows that it is firstly recommended to continue the ongoing process of *artification* undertaken by the luxury sector. The incorporation of artistic elements in luxury visual advertising is today more relevant than ever, given the increasing importance that visual communication has gained thanks to the dominant role of social networks. It is secondly recommended to carefully select the type of artwork to display, as well as to privilege the ones in which the intensity of artist's craftsmanship is higher, possibly making also use of claims recalling it. Lastly, given all the above-mentioned benefits related to product durability, we also recommend to luxury firms to leverage on all the means at their disposal besides art to communicate it (such as packaging and quality certifications).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present work certainly features some limitations which open the way to further investigations. The most relevant criticality concerns the experiment itself, and specifically the stimuli used to manipulate the independent variable. Indeed, since the two levels of intensity of artist's craftsmanship (low vs high) have been simulated by resorting to two different types of visual art (abstract vs Renaissance art), findings may be affected by respondents' level of knowledge and liking of the type of visual art they have been exposed to. Indeed, among the two scenarios developed to manipulate the intensity of artist's craftsmanship, respondents showed significantly different levels of knowledge of the specific art genre they have been exposed to. In particular, respondents exposed to the Renaissance condition showed a higher level of knowledge of the art displayed than the respondents exposed to the abstract condition. Consequently, we suggest to researchers who desire to further validate our findings to do that by controlling the above-mentioned external variables. Furthermore, the experiment has been conducted by taking into consideration only one product type, while it would be interesting to verify if any changes in the results occur for different types of products. Moreover, considering the strict link between product durability and sustainability, we also suggest to further investigate the effects that product durability may have on consumers' perceptions and behaviors, in order to substantiate the managerial implications we have inferred. Finally, given the consistent variety of tools today used by firms to convey their visual messages, we also recommend to further investigate how our findings may be affected by the use of different means of communication (i.e. billboards, social media, online banners, press, store merchandising).