



Department Business and Management
Chair Product and Brand Management

*How salesperson's soft skills influence purchase intention through
the brand warmth: A study in the luxury automotive industry*

SUPERVISOR

Antonella Buonomo

CO-SUPERVISOR

Ernesto Cardamone

CANDIDATE

Gianmarco Aliberti 750851

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Alla mia famiglia, ai miei amici, alla fase REM.

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on a topic that is becoming increasingly relevant in the working world: the use of soft skills by employees. More specifically how these can be used in the retail environment by the sales team.

This research promises to analyze the automotive market in the luxury niche. This particular sector was chosen to investigate how to best leverage the large investments being made by companies for sales teams as well as the theoretical framework on which this thesis was developed, namely the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) and the resulting BIAF Model. The SCM is a theoretical model designed to investigate a person's judgment of a given social group based on the perception of warmth and competence. The BIAF model applies the SCM theory to brands, verifying that luxury automotive brands are perceived to have high competence but low warmth.

This thesis aims to test whether the soft skills used by the salesperson can have a positive effect on purchase intention through the mediation of brand warmth, one of the two dimensions of the BIAF model. To test the hypotheses made, quantitative research was conducted.

The study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter discusses the relevance of the topic from a theoretical and managerial perspective. Next, research conducted in this area is highlighted, on which gap the research question of this thesis, presented at the end of the chapter, is founded.

The second chapter presents the previously collected literature of the variables considered in this study: soft skills, brand warmth, and purchase intention. These are introduced both in a general way and the relationships between them in previous research are presented. Based on the literature review collected, the hypotheses of the study are then formulated.

The third chapter presents the statistical analyses conducted to test the hypotheses made, presenting how they were carried out. More specifically the mode of data collection, of the creation of the questionnaire by listing the scales used and finally the type of statistical analysis conducted on the SPSS software are shown. The results obtained are presented at the end of the chapter.

Finally, the fourth chapter reports on the theoretical contributions and managerial implications derived from the results obtained. Limitations of this study are also outlined, offering the possibility of conducting future research in this area.

CHAPTER 1 – Relevance of the topic

1.1. How to sell today

The concept of the market understood as the sale of a product or service has ancient roots and a centuries-long history that begins almost concurrently with the concept of human need and desire. Over the years, sales methods have deeply changed, creating an increasingly complex and multifaceted system that involves the consumer before the act of sale and follows the consumer through subsequent stages. Concepts such as the customer engagement and customer retention are increasingly analysed by scholars and put into practice by firms to gain an advantage over their competitors. Anyway, in the sales context, the interaction between the salesman and the consumer has always been the most important touchpoint of the customer journey. Obviously, products/services' sales involve several steps, which entail to all the elements of the supply chain until the purchase before which the consumers are only prospects, and the salesmen have the important task to convince them that the product or service offered is the one that best meets their needs. As stated by Lent and Tour (2009) "if the sales ambassador fails, everything that has been done before has no meaning or purpose".

However, the aim of a company and consequently of a salesman, is not only related to selling their commodities but also to offering to the clients a pleasant customer experience. The traditional product/service value proposition is no longer sufficient for attracting customers or differentiating from competitors (Jain et al., 2017). Gronroos (2006) argues that "customer value is not created by one element alone, but by the total experience of all elements".

Excluding data from 2020, that are strongly influenced by Covid-19 pandemic, the number of businesses worldwide has been growing steadily since 2000 and the customers have an incredible amount of choice to satisfy their needs thus making it very easy to change their favourite brands (Statista, 2022), and they make their choice on the basis of the treatment received by the company. Data confirming this trend are astonishing: a study conducted by Forbes (2020), involving more than 1000 interviewees, states that 96% of customers decide to leave a brand that offers a bad service.

Moreover, the consumer who has a negative customer experience with a brand is not only likely to prefer a competitor but will also generate significant negative Word-of-Mouth (WOM) towards the company that offered that negative service (Lent and Tour, 2009). The power of WOM is constantly growing with the advent of social networks and internet reviews that gave

rise to the Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) phenomenon. Figures as social media influencers and bloggers have managed to create such a solid bond with their followers that they gain total confidence in their opinions and advice. By sharing their ideas and thoughts, they convey a strong sense of authenticity, the key factor why they are followed. (Loeb, 2022). When seeking advice, family and friends are always considered the most reliable source, but review websites (e.g., Google reviews, TripAdvisor) have reached a high level of credibility in the last few years.

The trust placed in a loved (family, friends), admired (S.M.I.) or disinterested person (reviewers) to sponsor a brand means that Word of Mouth leads to a much more significant number of sales than paid media, guaranteeing up to 5 times the revenue obtained through traditional advertising.

Moreover a company must bear in mind that there's also a hidden competitor that is the willingness to not buy anything. A brand, and consequently its sales ambassador, often underestimate the fact that sometimes potential customers are in no particular hurry to complete their purchase and they want only to evaluate the different proposals on the market. The salesman's ability lies not only in converting a prospect into a consumer but also in being able to create new potential consumers but often they are not able to do that. According to a recent survey, 44% of the sales representatives give up after the first customer's rejection showing a low level of resilience and they are not able to convert a prospect into a consumer (Luong, 2023).

In light of these findings, the companies need to focus a consistent part of their effort, both in terms of time and money, on creating a workable sales team that should create a brand more customer centric possible.

A clear example of this approach was theorised by Bernd H. Schmitt in 2003 in his book "Customer Experience Management: A Revolutionary Approach to Connecting with Your Customers", where he presents the theory of Customer Experience Management (CEM). This model, analysing 5 different types of experiences called "Strategic Experiential Model", defines the strategy of the company in order to maximise the customer experience and consequently bond a long-lasting relationship with the customer (Schmitt, 2003).

The CEM model has been adopted by several companies during the years becoming a pivotal factor to obtain great results as a company, as confirmed by a survey conducted by Pierre Auduin Consultants finding that 70% assessed good customer experience management as a central success factor for the company (Auduin Consultants, 2016).

The CEM has evolved in the monitoring systems of the variables, thanks to technological development, having an increasingly significant amount of data from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view. The advent of digitalization, however, doesn't influence only the way of working but also the way of purchasing and consequently the seller-buyer relationship. In addition to the exponential growth and power of word-of-mouth mentioned above, two other factors have completely revolutionised the consumer's approach to shopping: the opportunity to buy online with the emergence of ancillary phenomena such as showrooming and webrooming (Jing, 2018), and the increased product knowledge by consumers (Ferguson, et al. 2021).

In conjunction with these phenomena, the figure of the salesperson has necessarily had to change his/her approach. In the case of showrooming and webrooming, a sales representative must take into account that his/her role is greatly reduced: in the webrooming usually the consumer has already decided to buy the product, in the showrooming the customer wants only to physically see the product without buying it. (Flavián et al., 2020). The role of the salesman is to be part of a consistent multichannel strategy where the information told to the consumers are consistent with those available on the brand's website.

Moreover, the increasing consumer's product knowledge leads the sales associate to shift their skills from the more traditional hard skills to soft skills. Obviously, knowing the product (its features and characteristics) continues to be a fundamental skill for salespeople, but it is no longer sufficient considering the increasing amount of information regarding the features of each product that consumers can access (Sasaki et al., 2011). According to GE Capital Retail Bank's second annual Major Purchase Shopper Study (2019), 81% of the customers surf the internet looking for information about the product or service that they want to buy. Consumers often arrive at the time of purchase already knowing the product and also any alternatives to it. Considering this, the sales associates don't need more to convey the features of the goods but the brand behind them. Indeed, consumers are increasingly choosing a product because they know the brand rather than because of specific characteristics: concepts such as brand image and brand trust are key concepts for any company that wants to pursue satisfactory results (Büyükdag & Kitapci, 2021). In this environment, the role of the salesman has become even more important in the quality of the customer journey, having to make a bigger impact in less time (Wengler et al., 2021). 71% of customers expect to receive a tailored customer journey taking into consideration both the offline and the online touchpoints and 76% of them get frustrated if they don't receive it (McKinsey, 2021).

1.2 The luxury automotive industry

All these trends are confirmed and amplified in the automotive sector where the figure of the salesman is represented by the dealer. The purchase phase has accelerated vertiginously, considering that until a few years ago it took consumers 18 months to complete the purchase of a car, whereas in the most recent period it has been verified that 3 months is enough to complete the transaction (Deloitte, 2022).

This industry is one of the most influenced by digitalisation with several touchpoints that became totally digital, but maintaining as physical “the dealership visit” that is recognised as the most influential for the purchasing decision (McKinsey, 2020). Indeed, Deloitte’s 2022 Global Automotive Consumer Study found that 79% of respondents prefer to purchase the vehicles directly from the dealership.

Another very interesting finding that arose from this study concerns a change in purchase priorities among younger generations of consumers and confirms the relevance of the dealership meeting: Gen Y consumers value customer experience three times more than vehicle design as a factor influencing their final purchase decisions.

Nowadays the figure of the dealer has become replaceable by online tools at various stages of the purchasing process such as gathering information on specific features of the different car or bike models or configuring them on the company’s website or proposing an online quotation.

Looking at the source used along the car buying journey there’s a clear difference in the two different phases of the purchasing process: the information phase recorded a consistent increase (from 24% to 31%) in the period between 2013 and 2019 in the use of online sources, and it is likely that this trend has been growing steadily in recent years, also considering the impact that the pandemic period has had on the way people approach online shopping (McKinsey, 2021).

These data are confirmed by the perception of the customers: less than 50% of them believe that they can collect all the information needed from the dealer.

However, in the decision phase the dealer’s sources continue to be the most used with the step of physically seeing the car/motorbike that is seen as not replaceable. Indeed, 70% of customers see physical car experience as the main reason for dealership visits (McKinsey, 2020).

Other interesting data are related to the different buying approaches according to the country; for example, the sample of this research will be composed mainly by Italian respondents which are poorly inclined to buying a vehicle completely contactlessly, unlike the Chinese people who seem particularly inclined to this type of purchase (McKinsey, 2021).

The automotive industry covers all consumer groups, providing products for all the market but in recent years the niche that is having and will have the major exploit is luxury cars. Over the next 10 years, this sector is expected to have a growth rate between 8% and 14% annually. Industry leaders recognise growth opportunities on the customer experience proposition forecasting a 20% improvement in customer satisfaction and 10% to 15% increases in sales conversion performance (McKinsey, 2022).

Looking at the consumer preferences, the trends present in the automotive industry are confirmed also in the luxury sector. Customers are becoming more and more demanding about the service that is given to them, especially comparing the customer experience in the dealership with the ones received in the luxury stores of other industries (McKinsey, 2022).

In light of this, luxury car manufacturers are setting up stores that are brand experience centers usually located in exclusive locations and designed to convey the brand image, also changing the popular perception of it (Deloitte, 2022).

The traditional sales system that used to take place in dealerships is no longer sellable to the public, especially in a niche like luxury where the customer experience offered usually represents the benchmark to which the entire industry refers.

Technological innovations to strengthen the customer journey are certainly a goal for companies to achieve, but it must necessarily be taken into account how the offline phase is still of paramount importance in the purchase phase. For this reason, it becomes of crucial relevance to investigate what characteristics must necessarily be present in the figure of the modern salesperson.

1.3 Research gap & Research question

To measure purchase intention the role of the salesperson has always been one of the elements of major investigation by researchers.

In general, the literature on the techniques a salesperson needs to develop in order to have a high level of efficiency is quite broad, having been analysed from both the consumer and manager sides.

The salesperson skills can be divided into two different categories: hard skills that represent the level of expertise and the product knowledge of an employee and soft skills that can be defined as the human characteristics enhancing the individual's ability to relate with other people (Bhatnagar, 2011).

In the previous years, the literature was mainly focused on the importance of hard skills. As mentioned before, due to the limited amount of information a consumer could access, the level of product knowledge was the only parameter by which to measure the quality of a salesman and their competence leads to a higher level of trust and satisfaction (Kennedy M.S. , 2001).

During the years this trend has changed and more and more importance has been given to soft skills and on interactions between shoppers and sales associates that can take the form of verbal and non-verbal communication (Argo and Dahl, 2020).

Creating a positive buyer-seller connection is a key factor to improve consumers' purchase intention, as shown by a research conducted by Jiang et al. (2010) which stated that an incidental similarity shared between the two figures involved in the sales experience can lead to a higher intention to purchase.

The purchase intention can be divided into several subgroups and consequently so can the analyses done on it. Katakam et al (2021) analysed how the interaction with the salesperson and the store environment can influence the impulse purchase behavior that represents the unanticipated act of purchase.

The psychological factor plays a very important role in purchase intention: putting the consumer at ease and creating a positive mood at the interaction stage definitely brings a better predisposition to purchase. It has been verified that even the distance between the two actors can have a direct effect on purchase intention (Otterbring et al., 2021), but there is a lack of studies investigating how to create a positive mood through the salesperson's attitude.

Putting the consumers in their own comfort zone is the basic step to have a good purchase intention, delighting them leads to optimal results as verified by Meyer et al. (2017). The

authors incentivize, however, to test what techniques to use to achieve this condition. In their research the salesperson expertise has a positive effect on customer delight and customer satisfaction and consequently on purchase intention. Therefore, this study focuses more on how developing good hard skills can benefit the retailer but leaves open a box for future research on how to have positive effects using other salesman characteristics.

The existing literature provides some findings on which are the winning tactics to create a strong relationship between the salesman and the consumer by increasing his or her purchase intention, but they are focused on a B2B context, where both the negotiations and the approach of the seller and the buyer are different. Considering this, the authors invite researchers to investigate possible tactics in a B2C context (Hartmann et al, 2020).

Focusing on the automotive industry, research conducted in this area is not particularly extensive. Babin et al (1999) investigated the different consumers attitudes and the effect on purchase intention. More specifically, it has been demonstrated that if the customer values the salesman's appearance and communication style, the customer will therefore be more likely to buy the product the salesperson is promoting.

The other research that took into consideration the automotive industry analyses the role of salesperson and the influence on purchase intention in the luxury domain but the data collected belong to a sample from Germany and the US. The authors incentivize doing similar studies by considering a sample consisting of inhabitants of other countries, so that they can subsequently understand whether or not the cultural factor may be a mediating factor in this type of research (Alavi et al., 2021).

It is precisely by analysing the world of luxury that it has been verified how the emotions felt during the sales process are fundamental to improving the purchase intention of these products. The consumer must perceive the purchase of a luxury product as something unique that differentiates it from others, and to make this happen, the salespeople should not limit themselves to selling the product, already unique in itself, but they should try to offer a unique experience to the consumer.

The techniques to achieve this result are constantly being investigated, and firms need as much research as possible in this field to always offer the best possible proposition to their clients (Bian & Forsythe, 2012).

According to these findings it can be inferred that the research lacks a study that tests what techniques, which differ from salesperson expertise, a sales associate may use to increase purchase intention, especially in a market niche such as the luxury automotive where trying to understand the more efficient strategies can represent an important advantage over competitors.

To try to understand what might be a technique that can be used by salespeople will be investigated whether soft skills can help increase a company's perceived brand warmth. In fact, according to Fiske and her colleagues (2012), a high level of brand warmth leads to a consequent high level of purchase intention, but how this brand warmth can be increased in a sales context has not yet been investigated.

The aim of this research is to be able to offer luxury automotive companies scientific 'evidence on how they can better leverage the potential of their salespeople and consequently improve the consumer experience, turning the dealership into a more upscale boutique.

More precisely, the objective of this study is to find out whether in the automotive luxury sector a salesman using soft skills can have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention using the lens of stereotype content model thus investigating whether the brand warmth can mediate this relationship.

Starting from this theoretical model helps to not limit the purpose of the research to offering a possible solution to deliver a better customer experience. As will be explained more extensively in the next sections, the stereototype content model is also strongly linked to consumers' perceptions of a brand. Filling this gap in the literatures thus offers theoretical input not only to the customer experience line of research but also to the brand management one.

Summing up, the research question of this study is:

RQ: How do salesperson's soft skills affect consumers' purchase intention toward luxury automotive products? Is brand warmth playing a mediating role in the relationship between salesperson's soft skills and consumers' purchase intention toward luxury automotive products?

CHAPTER 2 – Literature review

2.1 Soft Skills in the sales context

As mentioned before, the literature of soft skills is more concentrated in the last few years where research started to investigate the importance of these human characteristics that are now considered the keys to achieve great results in terms of organisation and effectiveness in a company (Krawczyk-Sokolowska et al., 2019).

The salesman and professional service providers should now possess in their wealth of knowledge skills such as the ability to listen and to create a friendly and empathic conversation with the customer or the trustworthiness (Bahadur et al., 2020).

Looking at the previous literature, the term soft skills has had and continues to have different shades of interpretation depending on the research context in which they are analysed. Some authors used the terms as a synonym of competencies (Wesley et al. 2017) or emotional competencies (Fernandes et al., 2018) but these definitions turn out to be a bit too general to define this variable.

To better clarify what soft skills are, it is first necessary to clarify one aspect: the soft skills can't replace the hard skills but they enhance them. They are used as a tool that helps to convey better human knowledge and consequently, in sales context, the product knowledge (hard skills) to the customer. Hurrell et al. (2012) described in a proper way this concept defining soft skills as “non-technical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular contexts”.

Recently a systematic review of previous literature has been conducted by Marín-Zapata et al. (2021) with the aim of shedding light on soft skills definition and meaning in business and scientific literature. The result showed that the term “soft skills” falls into two macro categories: intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills. Intrapersonal skills, also defined as personal skills, are the human traits which help to manage oneself (e.g. independence or self actualisation). On the other hand, interpersonal skills are the human features that facilitate the relationship with other people such as communication skills, conflict resolution and empathy.

This research analyses the soft skills variable in a sales context during the purchase phase of customer journey, where the salesman interfaces with prospect/consumer. In light of this, soft skills will be taken into consideration as interpersonal skills.

In sales literature, interpersonal skills are already defined as one of the group of skills, with salesmanship skills and technical skills, that a good salesman needs to have and develop in order to propose a pleasant customer experience.

According to previous findings, interpersonal skills can be divided into communication skills, listening skills and empathy skills (Warner, 2020; Rentz et al., 2002).

To get a more specific overview of these three categories attributable to interpersonal selling skills, some of the most significant findings are briefly presented.

Communication skills can be defined as the abilities to show adequate and efficient verbal (e.g. quality of speech, clarity in expressing ideas) and nonverbal communication (e.g. body language, eye contact) in a social context (Rubin, 1990). In the sales context, a qualitative style of communication has always been considered an effective tool to improve the sales performance: an elite level in communication skills leads to a higher repurchase intention and a powerful word of mouth. (Williams and Spiro, 1985; Baumann and Meunier-fitzhugh 2015). Moreover it has been verified that during the relationship with the buyer, salesperson communication skills can contribute to enhancing the value of co-creation of the brand (Hossain and Gilbert, 2021).

Listening is a cognitive process that consists of hearing, determining meaning, and understanding a verbal or non verbal message (Sered 1978; Gross 1982; Coakley 1988). In the sales context, Castleberry and Shepherd (1993) defined the listening skills as “the cognitive process of actively sensing, interpreting, evaluating and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages of present or potential customers”.

Indeed, according to some researchers, listening is considered as a valuable feature of communication skills. The scientific literature verified that salesperson listening abilities improve the sales performances, upgrading the relationship quality and consequently the consumer trust (Comer and Drollinger 2013).

Empathy has always been considered as one of the fundamental items to offer a high level of service quality to customers, indeed it was also included as one of the dimensions of SERVQUAL, a scale containing 22 pairs of items that measure the expectation and the resulting perception of the level of service proposed by a company (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In the sales context empathy has been defined as the care and attention the company gives to its consumers (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Empathetic behaviors include inquiring about matters that are personally relevant to the customer, offering support and encouragement when others are having difficulties, and offering help when others encounter problems (e.g., Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985).

To create a good level of empathy, it is necessary to demonstrate good communication and listening skills. In light of this, it can be said that these three variables are strongly related to each other. Indeed, the literature related to empathy in the sales context verifies findings similar to those presented in the soft skills previously analyzed.

For example, a sales representative with a good level of empathy leads to an improvement in the buyer-seller relationship and to a higher customer trust (Mangus et al., 2020).

Analysing the literature it can be said that soft skills are mainly studied analysing their effect on the relationship with the customer and on related factors such as the customer loyalty. Moreover, different studies emphasize how good use of these soft skills can have a positive effect on business performance.

2.2 Soft Skills and Purchase Intention

According to Kotler and Keller (2016) a purchase intention is the willingness of a customer to buy a specific product or service based on the needs, experience of use and desire for a product.

Regardless of the sector in which they operate, all companies are interested in verifying the purchase intention of a product or service as it is a parameter that can help them maximise their cost-revenue ratio. Indeed, according to Palmatier et al. (2007), positive purchase intention leads to increased sales and customer share, increasing the revenue and reducing the costs with efficient effort in terms of relationship marketing.

Different studies have found that sales representatives have a decisive impact on customer journey, increasing the level of purchase intention thanks to different sales techniques. (Katakam et al. 2021; Argo and Dahl, 2020). One of them is to create a good communicative interaction with the customer using both listening and communication skills, as previously mentioned (Baumann and Meunier-fitzhugh 2015).

However, the consumers' purchase intention can be influenced also by external factors that don't depend solely on the seller's approach, for instance a consumer may be in a negative personal mood when buying a product. Nevertheless, the salesperson can, through his or her ability to relate to the consumer, have a positive influence on the initial intentions. In a study that wanted to investigate what effect a salesperson's use of presentation skills might have on purchase intention, it was verified that efficient use of these skills leads to an increase in the salesperson's purchase intention regardless of the consumer's mood being positive or negative. (De Carlo and Barone, 2013).

A similar effect is achieved by listening skills: if a salesperson demonstrates the ability to actively listen to the consumer's needs and requests, the consumer will have a more favorable approach toward the salesperson and consequently toward the brand, increasing the purchase intention of the product (Itani et al., 2019).

Moreover, wise use of communication and listening skills can lead to creating a more truthful and authentic relationship between consumer and salesman. In order to measure the level of purchase intention several studies analysed the impact of service employees looking at the authenticity perceived by the consumer during the purchasing phase.

The authenticity perceived increases when a closer relationship is created between the salesman and the customer. To do it, a sales representative can adopt a customer orientation approach

that usually leads to an improvement on purchase or repurchase intention. In general authenticity is perceived as a tool to increase the purchase intention, especially when a brand is perceived as not really authentic. (Matthews et al., 2020).

Authenticity, however, must be conveyed in the correct way to consumers. If communicated excessively, it turns out to be inauthentic, having negative effects on purchase intention (Beeler et al., 2021).

Thus, it can be inferred that even in this case, a feeling such as authenticity that allows for binding strong social relationships requires a high level of interpersonal skills in order to reach the consumer in the most functional way.

Looking at the literature related to the car sales context, it has been confirmed that the way to communicate greatly influences customers perception and consequently their willingness to purchase the product.

A salesperson who presents the product too quickly is negatively perceived by customers.

Providing a great amount of information in a little span of time makes the customer confused and consequently uncomfortable, reducing the purchase intention (Wang, 2019).

The same effect is obtained with a monotone tone of speech that makes the purchase phase, an exciting experience, boring. Vice versa, the salesman's ability to change the tone of speech during the purchase phase increases the purchase intention (Lee and Kang, 2017).

In the luxury context, it has been verified that the purchase intention increases when the customer perceives a strong social relationship with the salesperson (Kim et al., 2010).

Lent and Tour (2009) conducted some field experiments in luxury boutiques aiming to understand what are the reactions of a consumer who goes to the store for a special occasion (e.g., birthday, wedding) based on the treatment received by the sales ambassador. Looking at the results, the consumers don't appreciate a type of conversation exclusively geared toward selling the product, especially when the purchase is linked to a special occasion. It should be kept in mind that the purchase of a luxury item, given its exclusivity, in several cases can only be made on certain occasions that have a strong symbolic value in the person's life. The ability of the salesperson to empathise at these moments can prove decisive in the purchase intention. Moreover, the salesman should understand what kind of customer he is dealing with and act accordingly: in the luxury market, a salesperson may be dealing with a consumer who is totally unfamiliar with the product but at the same time a very knowledgeable consumer. The capacity to be able to find the right communication channels is the key to a successful sale. Otherwise, the risk of being perceived negatively as a person and consequently decreasing the brand's purchase intention is high (Merk and Michel, 2019).

According to these findings it can be hypothesised that:

H1: *Customers' purchase intention of an automotive luxury product is higher when the salesman uses soft skills during the selling stage than when the salesman does not.*

The findings above are already exhaustive for testing hypothesis 1 but to better frame the conceptual framework that will be presented next, it is necessary to take into consideration the niche of market referred to in this research, the automotive luxury.

According to different research, the automotive luxury brands are perceived as a competent brand but not really warm (Aaker et al., 2012). The next section will present the concepts of brand warmth and brand competence and how the improvement of brand warmth can positively affect the level of purchase intention.

2.3. Stereotype Content Model and BIAF Model

As previously stated, the aim of a company is not just to offer a customer an excellent customer journey but to create a solid relationship with the consumer. To do that, the firms have tried over the years to anthropomorphize their brands as much as possible, comparing the brand features to human features and consequently trying to convey through their brand precise feelings and emotions to customers (Fournier, 2009).

In the sociological literature, since there are many human-like personality traits, researchers maintain that sorting people into a few general groups provides a manageable and methodical way to pinpoint similarities and differences among them (MacInnis and Folkes, 2017).

At the beginning of the century, it was theorised the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) that defines two evaluative criteria that prevail in people's categorizations and judgments of others: warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002). These two dimensions are respectively associated to intention and ability that are the mental stimuli that make humans differ from other living things (Fiske, 2018).

Warmth, which relates to the characteristics of an individual (e.g., warm, friendly, sincere, trustworthy, moral), is important because the intention predicts human behaviours. Warmth is associated with benevolent intentions (i.e., a warm entity is more likely to have my best interests at heart). Warmth is the first dimension judged because it is based on trust: If a person feels they are dealing with a potential liar, it is meaningless to judge their level of skill.

On the other hand, competence represents what are the skills through which those intents are enacted. This dimension includes features such as intelligence, skill, creativity and efficacy (Fiske, 2018; Malone and Fiske, 2013).

Starting from these two dimensions, Fiske and colleagues (Cuddy et al., 2008) created the Behaviors from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes (BIAS) Map, that develops in 4 quadrants the emotions and consequent behaviors that arise according to different levels of warmth and competence.

The quadrant where the most hostile personalities are categorized is the one formed by low levels of both warmth and competence. This group of people provokes contempt.

As previously mentioned, by increasing the level of warmth, people are able to empathize with their fellows. If a person, however, associates a high level of warmth with a low level of competence, it is not viewed positively but causes a sense of pity in the fellow man who empathizes with his/her difficulty in enacting his/her desired intentions.

On the other hand, people with high levels of competence and low levels of warmth are generally perceived as people with good qualities but they are not appreciated because it's difficult to empathise with them. People would like to possess their characteristics but would not like to be them. More generally it can be said that this category provokes envy.

The last quadrant represents people who exhibit the best characteristics and provoke the most favorable emotions. A person with high levels of both competence and warmth not only has the best intentions but is also able to put them into action. This category of people is inevitably admired by the rest of society.

Using sociological studies on people's views as a starting point, some researchers examined whether there might potentially be a connection between individuals and brands.

Fournier was the first to state that people relate to brands similarly to how they relate to other people, analysing some in-depth interviews conducted by himself that aimed to investigate how a consumer's mind reasoned (1998; 2009). An example of these interviews is the story of Karen, a working divorced mother reported having negative feelings toward several companies because they made her think of her ex-husband. The literature regarding the social relevance of brands has also been enriched by Mark and Pearson (2001), who in their book entitled "*The*

Hero and the Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands Through the Power of Archetypes” assert that a key to building a successful brand is to create an archetype with well-defined human characteristics that society can refer to.

Starting from the Stereotype Content Model and from the sociological studies conducted by Fournier, Fiske et al. (2012) theorised the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF).

Taking into consideration the four emotions highlighted in the BIAS Model, the BIAF categorises brands into four different categories (*Appendix A1*) :

1. brands that provoke contempt are called “troubled brands”;
2. brands that provoke pity are called “paternalized brands”;
3. brands that provoke envy are called “envied brands”;
4. brands that provoke admiration are called “popular brands”

Starting from this categorisation, Fiske and her colleagues (2012) decided to test their theoretical model using real brands. To do so, they conducted a survey targeting a sample of US respondents. The researchers selected 16 brands, 4 for each quadrant, that they felt might belong to that quadrant (*Appendix A2*). The luxury brands (Mercedes, Rolls Royce, Porsche, Rolex) are expected to belong to the “envied brands” quadrant, where the brands should be below the grand mean on intention and above the grand mean on ability. Rolex and Porsche complied with these predictions while Rolls Royce’s intention score was below the mean and the ability score was equal to the mean. Mercedes’ intention rate was not different from the mean and its ability score was higher than the mean. All the luxury brands, as assumed, have an envy rate higher than the envy’s grand mean.

As pointed out in the paper, the cluster analyzed includes a general audience, not luxury consumers, so it should take into consideration that these brands were perceived as envied for “the general public” but consumers who are accustomed to buying luxury consumers might have a different perception.

Two years before, Aaker et al. (2010) analysing the firm stereotypes and its relationship with the concept of competence and warmth, defined the so-called “golden quadrant”, a state of mind in which consumers can coexist with both perceptions of competence and warmth regarding the evaluation of a company. This study highlighted how usually consumers stereotype companies as competent or warm, but companies that can convey both warmth and competence lead to increased consumer purchase intention. Based on this study, Aaker and her colleagues (2012) applied the concept of golden quadrant to the BIAF model, identifying the golden quadrant in the “admired brand” quadrant (competence and warmth above the mean).

By collecting through a survey the consumers' opinions on a number of famous brands from different industries (gasoline, fast food, painkillers, fruit juice), researchers confirmed that brands that possess both dimensions have a higher purchase intention than those who possess only one. This statement was also later confirmed by a study conducted by MacInnis and Folkes (2017).

Moreover Kervin and colleagues (2021) verified that high levels in warmth and competence increases brand purchase intention.

All brands should therefore desire to move toward the "golden quadrant" including the automotive luxury brands that are in the "envied brands" quadrant. In order to do that, they need to adopt strategies aimed to increase the dimension where they lack.

2.4. Soft skills and Brand Warmth

There are different items that can contribute to creating the dimension of brand competence and brand warmth, one of them is surely the salesperson.

As stated before, the salesman is the first ambassador of the brand (Lent and Tour, 2009), the customer wants to associate the abstract concept of the brand with some concrete features that they can experience in the real world and the interaction with the sales associate is surely one of them. The brand perception is a social phenomenon not only because brands frequently rely on human characteristics (Kervyn et al., 2022), making them become social objects that consumers may bond with, but also because consumers see in the brand the people behind it such as managers and employees (Zeitoun et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2020; Centeno et al., 2020). For this reason, salesmen can help to enhance the warmth and competence perception of a brand (Portal et al., 2018).

As previously stated, the sales skills can be divided in two macro categories: hard skills and soft skills (Bhatnagar, 2011). Hard skills are used by a worker primarily to demonstrate his or her competence and ability in a particular area, soft skills are used to demonstrate empathy toward the person with whom one is dealing by trying to create a warm connection where the intention of wanting to create a relationship is perceived (Bhatnagar, 2011).

The dimension of warmth has been defined as the perceived intention of a person (Kervyn et al., 2012) or, in a business context, of a company and to convey that, the use of soft skills such as communication, listening and empathy can be useful tools. On the other hand, competence

has been defined as the ability to carry out this intention (Kervyn et al. 2012) that, in a sales context, are the specific need that a product can satisfy. To do that, product knowledge and consequently highly developed hard skills are really helpful.

Usually, the warmth is more associated with non profit organisations since their main business is helping people (Aaker et al., 2010), but as shown by data collected in different research that considered the perception of some of the world's most famous brands, even for-profit organisations can have high levels of brand warmth (Aaker et al., 2012; Kervyn et al., 2012).

To achieve this, companies can act through precise positioning in the market that aims to strongly publicise their commitment to sensitive issues in today's society such as sustainability (Antonetti and Maklan, 2016) or emphasise through their mission statement or motto the importance of the customer. A clear example is the pharmaceutical company Merck that has as a motto “Where patients come first” (Aaker et al., 2012).

Another option for increasing the levels of brand warmth might be to offer an experience where the consumers actually come first as quoted by the famous slogan.

According to the theory of brand anthropomorphism, brand warmth is associated to brand traits such as “benevolence”, “sincere” and “friendly” (Portal et al., 2018), all features that are strongly correlated to salesman-customer relationship and consequently easier to build through the use of soft skills. In fact, several studies state how the use of communication or listening techniques by a brand ambassador such as the salesperson lead to consequently increasing the level of brand trust (Kennedy et al., 2001; Ramsey et al., 1997).

In a study analyzing problem solving efficiency by FLE (Front Line Employees), Marinova et al. (2018) state that the psychological construct of competence can be traced back to hard skills, and the perception of competence increases as skills such as knowledge of the product/service or business reality increase.

On the other hand, the perception of warmth is correlated with the use of soft skills such as demonstrating empathy. A salesman can demonstrate warmth using verbal signals by taking advantage of communication skills or nonverbal cues using listening skills (Singh et al., 2018). Regarding the communicative aspect, greater warmth is perceived through the use of certain words that are perceived as empathic. (Goetz et al., 2010).

The effect that soft skills can have on brand warmth is also demonstrated by some processes in recruitment selection. In the tourism industry the willingness to convey a perceived high warmth to consumers is sought through the hiring of staff who demonstrate good soft skills (Nikbin et al., 2019).

This trend is also confirmed in the restaurant industry where the selection process should not be limited to observing technical skills but also soft skills, a strategy extended to all industries where customer care is a key part of the experience (Davidson, 2016).

It should be emphasized, however, that the presence of soft skills does not affect the level of technical knowledge. The goal in these industries is to improve perceived warmth without affecting the level of competence, which usually in for-profit companies is already considered high (Bufquin et al., 2017).

Different techniques are used to convey competence and warmth, but they are complementary to each other. The techniques used to be able to empathise with the customer and consequently portray the company as warm do not interfere with the techniques used to demonstrate employee's knowledge of the company's dynamics (competence). Brand competence impacts more on functional brand value while brand warmth impacts more on social and emotional value, but these values can be strengthened independently of each other (Kolbl et al., 2020). Indeed, a scenario where there is a high level of brand warmth and a high level of brand competence is laid out in several studies (Huang et al., 2020; Aaker et al., 2012).

The non-correlation between high levels of competence and low levels of warmth and viceversa is further confirmed by the results obtained in the BIAF model study (Kervin et al., 2012) where high-ability brands were rated higher on warmth than low-ability brands.

Also in the luxury sector this trend is confirmed: for luxury brands, competence is related to the concept of brand prestige that is achieved by telling the technical features of the product that make it unique from others (hard skills); on the other hand, warmth links to the concept of brand authenticity that is gained by creating a solid relationship of loyalty with the customer (soft skills) (Heine et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2018)

According to these findings it can therefore be assumed that:

H2: *During the selling stage, the customers' purchase intention of an automotive luxury product is higher when salesmen use soft skills than when they do not, due to customers' higher perceived brand warmth.*

CHAPTER 3 – Methodology and data analysis

3.1. Method and research design

Below it will be presented the experimental studies and the pre-test designed to test the hypotheses.

For the study it has been presented a scenario set in a dealership of a fictitious automotive luxury brand.

The first goal of the study is to examine how consumers' purchase intentions for the product are impacted by the salesperson's usage of soft skills during the sales phase.

In particular, it will be expected that a salesperson who takes full advantage of his or her soft skills in presenting the product will increase the customers' purchase intention on it.

H1: *Customers' purchase intention of an automotive luxury product is higher when the salesman uses soft skills during the selling stage than when the salesman does not.*

Secondly, the study had the objective to investigate the mediating effect of brand warmth. According to the literature cited in the previous chapter, a sales representative that employs soft skills such as communication skills, empathy or listening skills leads to a higher purchase intention, but in this research the objective is to test whether this relationship is greater thanks to the perceived brand warmth.

H2: *During the selling stage, the customers' purchase intention of an automotive luxury product is higher toward a brand where salespersons use soft skills techniques than toward a brand where salespersons do not use them. This is due to a higher perceived brand warmth by the consumer when the salesperson employs soft skills.*

To test the hypothesized effects previously cited, a single factor two level (soft skills used vs soft skills not used) between online experiment was conducted. This kind of research allows the testing of random effect relationships between the variables of interest.

More precisely, this study investigates customers' purchase intentions after exposing them to two different fictitious scenarios of selling stage in a dealership of an imaginary luxury automotive brand.

Participants were presented one of two stimuli with different types of sales approaches in the same dealership; the stimuli were submitted to the participants in a randomized manner.

To ensure that participants were not biased by other factors such as brand image (Chevalier and Mazzalovo, 2008) or brand equity (Yu et al., 2018) that may in themselves influence purchase intention, a fictitious brand was created. The imaginary luxury Italian automotive brand was called Orion. Even the car model included in the scenarios has a fictitious name reminiscent of the models of some cars in the luxury sector (Orion D3 Sport Hybrid).

Before presenting the two scenarios (*soft skills vs. no soft skills*), the respondent is given a brief explanation of the brand and the kind of purchase the consumer wishes to make so that he or she can relate to the sales context.

The description of the automotive luxury brand and the context in the dealership has written in Italian and it was as follows (*Appendix B2*):

Orion è un brand fondato in Italia che opera nel mercato dell' automotive di lusso. Fin dal suo ingresso nel mercato il brand si è sempre posizionato nella categoria lusso producendo un'ampia gamma di modelli che vanno dai SUV alle Supercar. L'azienda vende i suoi esclusivi modelli tramite concessionarie monomarca.

Per favore immagina ora che tu sia interessato a un modello del brand Orion ma non hai ancora un'idea precisa su quale modello acquistare. Per questo motivo, decidi di recarti in concessionaria a raccogliere informazioni sui vari modelli chiedendo aiuto a Giovanni, venditore della concessionaria Orion più vicina a casa tua.

After this brief description, respondents are shown a dialogue between salesman and customer. Respondents were randomly assigned the dialogue where the salesperson uses soft skills or the scenario where they do not. The sales scenario reproduces a dialogue between the salesperson and a potential customer who asks some questions related to some needs to satisfy with his new car. Requests are correlated with the environmental theme and family context, two issues to which a person may be particularly sensitive (Forbes, 2017; Thomson et al., 2007). Include two themes that particularly touch on consumer sensitivities have made it clearer to use soft skills through the features explained in the previous chapter, as opposed to not using.

The scripts of the two dialogues were written in Italian. They are presented below (*Appendix C*):

SCENE 1 SALESPERSON USES SOFT SKILLS

Salesman: *Buongiorno signore sono Giovanni, come posso aiutarla?*

Customer: *Buongiorno Giovanni, sono alla ricerca di un'auto di lusso ma vorrei qualcosa che fosse il più ecosostenibile possibile.*

Salesman: *Comprendo assolutamente le sue necessità. Unire il mondo del lusso alla sostenibilità è fondamentale per il nostro brand, salvare il pianeta è una nostra responsabilità. Abbiamo diverse opzioni che possono soddisfare la sua richiesta ma vorrei sapere qualcosa di più riguardo i suoi gusti e le sue necessità in modo da proporle la migliore soluzione.*

Customer: *Vorrei un'auto con un design elegante e con un motore potente. Inoltre necessito di un'auto spaziosa perché viaggio spesso con la mia famiglia.*

Salesman: *Capisco la sua situazione, ho due bambini. Tutti quanti devono essere comodi quando si affronta un viaggio in famiglia. Credo di avere il modello perfetto per lei: la Orion D3 SPORT Hybrid. Ha un'estetica raffinata e un gruppo propulsore ibrido che le consente di percorrere lunghe distanze in modalità completamente elettrica, riducendo le emissioni. Inoltre, il veicolo è dotato di un abitacolo spazioso e confortevole, con opzioni di configurazione dei sedili che si adattano alle esigenze della famiglia.*

SCENE 2 SALESPERSON DOES NOT USE SOFT SKILLS

Salesman: *Buongiorno signore sono Giovanni, come posso aiutarla?*

Customer: *Buongiorno Giovanni, sono alla ricerca di un'auto di lusso ma vorrei qualcosa che fosse il più ecosostenibile possibile.*

Salesman: *Abbiamo diverse opzioni che possono soddisfare la sua richiesta, ha altre necessità da soddisfare?*

Customer: *Vorrei un' auto con un design elegante e con un motore potente. Inoltre necessito di un' auto spaziosa perché viaggio spesso con la mia famiglia.*

Salesman: *Credo di avere il modello perfetto per lei: la Orion D3 SPORT Hybrid. Ha un'estetica raffinata e un gruppo propulsore ibrido che le consente di percorrere lunghe distanze in modalità completamente elettrica, riducendo le emissioni. Inoltre, il veicolo è dotato di un abitacolo spazioso e confortevole, con opzioni di configurazione dei sedili.*

3.2. Sample and data collection

Two different questionnaires were created: one for the manipulation check and one for the main study. Both shared the same introduction and scenarios but in the first one the respondents were asked whether they perceived soft skills whereas in the second one the respondents were asked the perceived warmth and the perceived competence and their purchase intention for a luxury product. The data were collected in August (manipulation check) and September (main study) 2023 through two between-subject experiments, which were created using Qualtrics Online Platform.

The experiments were conducted as a questionnaire, and they were offered in Italian since the participants were all native speakers of Italian. The aim was to have a portion of respondents who were accustomed to buying luxury cars so that it would be easier for them to get into the sales context presented. At the same time, since Fiske and her colleagues theorised the BIAF model (2012) considering a sample of unspecified social and economic class, it was also necessary to take as respondents' people who have not purchased products of this type who may also perceive more the concept of "envied brands" theorized in the BIAF, as opposed to people more accustomed to buying luxury products.

Therefore, a sample including both students and workers with the economic potential to purchase luxury products was considered.

The surveys were sent and shared to the respondents on social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and LinkedIn.

Since the car is a commodity that is not particularly attributable to a specific gender, the questionnaires were not aimed exclusively at a gender.

Regarding age, the questionnaires were addressed only to an audience of over 18 years of age, being the minimum European age to have a driver's license (the sample included only people living in the European territory).

Furthermore, the participants did not know the precise purpose of the study, neither any information of being exposed to one of the two different randomized scenarios. This decision was made to avoid influencing the survey's direction.

All responses of the survey were anonymous to make users answers as honest and truthful as possible without concern for judgement.

The pre-test required 2 minutes to complete, while the main study 3-4 minutes.

The questions were structured as follows:

- 1) in the pre-test it has been made a manipulation check in order to understand if the scenarios correctly represented respectively one sales stage with the use of soft skills and one without it;
- 2) in the main study respondents were asked whether they perceived the Orion brand to be warm and competent and whether or not their intention to purchase the Orion product was high. Moreover manipulation check was redone to check its validity in the main study as well.

3.3. Procedure

The objective of the investigation was to identify whether the use of soft skills by a salesperson in a sales stage, in the automotive luxury industry, influences consumers' purchase intention via perceived brand warmth.

The surveys made in Qualtrics XM platform, were divided into different block to provide a simple and uncomplicated structure and facilitate flow. The structure was the same for both the pre-test survey and the main study survey except for the section concerning the scales used to measure the variables.

In the first block there was an introduction where I thanked the respondent for participating, emphasizing how important their answers were. The rapidity of the duration was also

emphasized and reassured respondents about the anonymity of the survey so as to put them in the best position to approach the survey.

The introduction was as follows (*Appendix B1*):

Buongiorno, grazie mille per prendere parte a questo studio che sto conducendo per la mia tesi magistrale, il tuo contributo sarà fondamentale per la riuscita di questo studio.

Ti assicuro che le tue risposte rimarranno completamente anonime e verranno usate solo per questa ricerca.

Nella prossima pagina troverai un breve testo. Per favore, leggilo attentamente e successivamente rispondi ad alcune domande su di esso. Il questionario ti richiederà meno di 5 minuti. Quando rispondi ricorda che ciò che conta è la tua opinione, non ci sono risposte giuste o sbagliate!

In the second block there was a brief introduction of the fictitious brand Orion to make clear to respondents the type of company designed for this study. Through this brief description respondents can understand that the item in question is produced by a company that has been in the luxury industry for years. Next, respondents were asked to place themselves in a sales context where they as consumers had a desire to buy a car and needed to fulfill certain desires. The third block presented the sales scenarios randomly: the scenario with the salesperson using soft skills and the one where he does not use them. The randomization in this block was made necessary to allow the respondent to view only one of the two scenarios.

To prevent respondents from being biased in their evaluation of the scenarios and consequently in the responses given, the scenarios are presented in the same way from a visual and textural point of view. The only difference is in the two texts: in the scenario where soft skills are not present, the text is missing some sentences attributable to soft skills.

In the fourth block, structured questions were posed for participants to answer by selecting a score found in the multi-item scales. The scales will be explained in more detail in the next section.

Then, in the last block there are some demographic questions such as age, gender, nationality, income.

3.4. Measurements

Regarding the measurement of perceived brand warmth and perceived brand competence, a pre-validated scale from Xue et al., (2020) was chosen. This scale is a 4 item-7 Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree). The scales was then partially modified to better fit with the scenario presented and it consisted of the following items:

BRAND COMPETENCE (*Appendix B3.1*)

“Brand Orion is competent”

“Brand Orion is efficient”

“Brand Orion is skillful”

“Brand Orion is confident”

BRAND WARMTH (*Appendix B3.2*)

“Brand Orion is sincere”

“Brand Orion is friendly”

“Brand Orion is warm”

“Brand Orion is enthusiastic”

Regarding the variable of consumers purchase intention, given that the brand Orion is a luxury brand, a pre-validated scale measuring the willingness to buy in the luxury world was selected for this study.

The items were reshaped based on the type of luxury product sold and mentioning the brand name. The reference scale used to measure purchase intention is Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal's (1991) intention to purchase scale. This is a 4 item-7 Likert Scale (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree). The adapted items are as follows:

“If I were going to purchase a (automotive) luxury product, I would consider buying Orion”

“If I were shopping for a (automotive) luxury brand, the likelihood I would purchase Orion luxury brand is high”

“My willingness to buy Orion luxury brand would be high if I were shopping for a luxury brand”

“The probability I would consider buying Orion luxury brand is high”.

A 8 item-7 Likert scale was crafted to test the stimuli manipulations by including 5 soft skills items and 3 hard skills items created based on literature related to sales skills.

The scale was as follows:

“The salesman is understanding”

“The salesman is empathic”

“The salesman actively listens to the consumer's problems”

“The salesman shows concern for the consumer's needs”

“The salesman has friendly communication”

“The salesman competently meets the consumer's requirements”

“The salesman competently communicates the characteristics of the product”

“The salesman’s knowledge of the product is high”

After the analyses conducted in the pretest, only the soft skills items were retained for the manipulation check in the main study, removing the last three items from the scale.

3.5. Data analysis

After all respondent data were collected on Qualtrics XM, they were imported into SPSS statistical software in which all statistical analyses related to this study were conducted. For the pretest 50 responses were collected while for the main study there were 144 respondents, all of whom completed the questionnaire correctly making 100% of the collected responses valid. Focusing on data from the main study the sample consisted of individuals aged between 22 and 63 years old $M_{age} = 31$, the gender of the respondents was slightly male-dominated, more specifically 86 men and 58 women took part in the survey.

Regarding the scenarios randomly presented to participants, 80 respondents were exposed to the “no soft skills” condition and 64 respondents to the “soft skills” condition.

As previously stated, the people involved are partly accustomed to buying luxury products and partly not. To better frame the respondents' economic availability, they were asked to indicate their monthly income. There were 65 respondents who said they had a monthly income of 0

euros (students) while the other 79 said they earn a minimum of 900 to a maximum of 20000 euros per month ($M_{wage} = 3179,6$; $Min = 0$; $Max = 20000$).

Regarding scale analyses first a factor analysis was conducted on the self-crafted scale for the soft skills verifying that the 5 items loaded to a single factor (Eigenvalue >1 ; cumulative variances = 99,18%) (*Appendix D2*). Moreover KMO and Bartlett's test was conducted, verifying the good adequacy of the scale (KMO = 0,894 Bartlett's test is significant). Next a reliability analysis was conducted ($\alpha=0,998$), (*Appendix D 3.1*).

Since the other scales were already previously prevalidated, the factor analysis was not conducted; instead, the reliability analysis reported the following results: Brand Competence ($\alpha=0,954$); Brand Warmth ($\alpha=0,997$); Luxury Purchase Intention ($\alpha=0,993$), (*Appendix D 3.2*). As Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.9 for all the three scales, the scales' internal consistency is excellent.

Following this, statistical analyses were conducted on SPSS to test the hypotheses. In the next section methodology and results of the analyses will be presented in more detail.

3.5. Hypotheses test and Manipulation check

First of all, in the main study it was verified that respondents correctly perceived the stimuli (soft skills scenario vs no soft skills scenario) doing a manipulation check. To do this an independent sample t-test was conducted. As previously said, the respondents were shown only one of two scenarios, in particular 80 respondents were subjected to the no soft skills scenario, 64 respondents to the soft skills scenario. The results of the independent sample t-test confirmed the correct perception of stimuli. ($M_{soft_skills}=6,33$ $SD=1.18$; $M_{no_soft_skills}=2.14$; $SD=0.58$; $t(87)=-25.89$, $p<0,001$) (*Appendix D4.1*). Stimuli had already been tested in the pretest which had reported similar results. In the pretest the sample was 50 respondents (24 soft skills scenario, 26 no soft skills scenario) ($M_{soft_skills}=6,52$ $SD=1.14$; $M_{no_soft_skills}=2.32$; $SD=0.39$; $t(28.06)=-17.08$, $p<0,001$).

Returning to the analysis on the main study, another independent sample t test was conducted to test the effect of soft skills (X) on purchase intention (Y). As previously hypothesised, the average purchase intention for the respondents exposed to the *soft skills* scenario is higher than the average purchase intention for those exposed to the *no soft skills* scenario. ($M_{soft_skills} = 6.43$, $SD = 1.08$; $M_{no_soft_skills} = 3.92$, $SD = 0.92$; $t(123,5) = -14.72$, $p < .001$) (*Appendix D4.2*).

The first analysis confirmed that in a sales scenario a salesman who uses soft skills during the selling stage leads to a higher purchase intention of luxury product than a salesman who doesn't use them.

The first hypotheses (H1: *Customers' purchase intention of an automotive luxury product is higher when the salesman uses soft skills during the selling stage than when the salesman does not*) is therefore confirmed.

Subsequently, a statistical analysis was conducted to test the mediation effect of perceived brand warmth.

In order to do that a regression analysis was conducted using Model 4 with single mediator of the PROCESS (Hayes, 2022) assigning each variable to its own role:

IV: soft skills used by salesman during the selling stage (1=soft skills yes; 0=soft skills no)

DV: purchase intention

M: brand warmth

First of all it was verified the significance of the effect of the independent variable (IV) on mediating variable (M). To do this, it was necessary to check the confidence interval by verifying that there was no zero in the interval. This analysis is complementary to the pvalue, which is significant only if the lower bound and upper bound have the same sign. In this case all the conditions were met so the effect of the IV on the mediating variable was positively and statistically significant ($b = 4.02$, $se=0.15$, $t = 26.8$, $p = .0000$).

Theoretically, this means that in a sales context, a salesman's use of soft skills has a significant effect on the consumer's perception of brand warmth.

Next it has been observed the effect of the independent variable (IV) and the mediator variable (M) on the dependent variable (DV). Taking "purchase intention" as the outcome variable, the results indicated that the independent variables (IV) has no significant effect on the dependent variable (DV) when the mediator (M) is included, given that the p-value is not significant ($b = -0.57$, $se=0.3$, $t = -1.90$, $p = .058$).

However, it should be emphasized that the mediator (M) has a significant effect on the dependent variable (DV) ($b = 0.76$, $se=0.06$, $t = 11.23$, $p = .000$). On a theoretical level, this implies that the more perceived consumers' perceived brand warmth increases, the more their purchase intention for luxury products will grow.

Summing up, the total effect was found to be statistically significant ($b = 2.51$, 95% CI [2.18; 2.84]).

Importantly, and in line with H2, the indirect effect was found to be statistically significant ($b = 3.08$, 95% CI [2.08; 3.56]), but the direct effect was found to be not statistically significant ($b = -0.57$, $se = 0.3$, $t = -1.90$, $p = .058$). In light of this, it can be stated that the brand warmth fully mediates the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable.

To get further confirmation that it was brand warmth that explained the effect between soft skills and purchase intention, a mediation analysis was done by including both brand warmth and brand competence as mediators. First, as already predicted in previous literature, it was verified that brand competence had high values in both scenarios ($M_{\text{brand_competence_mean}} = 6.44$, $Me_{\text{brand_competence_mean}} = 6.12$).

Model 4 with double mediator of the PROCESS (Hayes, 2022) was used for this regression analysis. The variables are:

IV: soft skills used by salesman during the selling stage (1=soft skills yes; 0=soft skills no)

DV: purchase intention

M: brand warmth

M2: brand competence

With the dual mediator it was verified that brand competence as a mediator (M2) does not have a significant effect on dependent variable (DV) ($b = 0.75$, $se=0.06$, $t = 11.11$, $p = .000$) while brand warmth continues to do so ($b = 0.14$, $se=0.10$, $t = 1.34$, $p = .180$). The indirect effect mediated by brand competence (M2) is also found to be statistically non-significant ($b = 0.03$, 95% CI [-0.01; 0.10]) while the one mediated by brand warmth (M) continued to be significant ($b = 3.05$, 95% CI [1.98; 3.55]).

This finding demonstrates that in this study the relationship between the soft skills used by the salesperson and purchase intention regarding a luxury car is completely explained by the consumer's perceived brand warmth.

Therefore H2: *During the selling stage, the customers' purchase intention of an automotive luxury product is higher toward a brand where salespersons use soft skills techniques than toward a brand where salespersons do not use them. This is due to a higher perceived brand warmth by the consumer when the salesperson employs soft skills is confirmed.*

CHAPTER 4 – Conclusion

4.1. Conclusion

As previously stated, the objective of this thesis is to investigate how the figure of the salesperson can have an active influence in the luxury automotive industry. More specifically, whether in the sales phase, matching soft skills to hard skills by the salesperson could have a positive effect in the consumer's perception of a particular brand. The consumers see the salesman as the main sales ambassador of the brand and are therefore inclined to mentally connect the feelings and emotions they feel toward the salesperson with their personal perception of the brand. Already considered important generally for all brands, in the world of luxury the figure of the salesperson takes on a crucial aspect. Luxury brands base their communication and sales strategy on delighting the consumer not only through the quality and uniqueness of their products but also by offering an exclusive customer experience so much so that it becomes a distinctive feature of the company (Lent and Tour, 2009).

Therefore, this research aims to analyze how social relationships can have consequences for firm value. To do this, several social theories such as the antropomorphism and the Stereotype Content Model were analyzed, which consequently contributed to the development of the brand management research strand.

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) has been theorised to categorise social groups based on two dimensions: warmth, representing group's intentions and competence, representing group's ability to reach these intentions (Fiske et al., 2002).

The mental process of linking the sales associate to the brand is related to the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphism, which is the tendency to attribute human characteristics to a brand (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007).

Starting from SCM, the BIAF model (Kervin, Fiske et al., 2012) was theorized in which brands are categorized by consumers according to the level of perceived warmth and competence.

In the same year Aaker and colleagues (2012) located the brand with high levels of brand and competence in the “golden quadrant”.

Based on this previous investigation, the research question of this thesis was thus:

RQ: How do salesperson's soft skills affect consumers' purchase intention toward luxury automotive products? Is brand warmth playing a mediating role in the relationship between salesperson's soft skills and consumers' purchase intention toward luxury automotive products?

Two hypotheses were formulated to answer this question based on the literature review. The first was presented as follows:

H1 Customers' purchase intention of an automotive luxury product is higher when the salesman uses soft skills during the selling stage than when the salesman does not.

While the second one as follows:

H2 During the selling stage, the customers' purchase intention of an automotive luxury product is higher when salesmen use soft skills than when they do not, due to customers' higher perceived brand warmth.

As previously demonstrated in chapter 3, the theorized hypotheses were confirmed by statistical analysis. More specifically, an independent sample t test was performed to confirm hypothesis 1, while Process Model 4 was used to test the mediation theorized by the second hypothesis.

As a result of the results obtained, it can therefore be said that in a context such as that of a dealership that sells luxury cars, efficient use of soft skills by salespeople can lead to significant increases in brand warmth which, combined with high brand competence already present in this type of product, consequently leads to an increase in purchase intention.

The results obtained make it possible to offer a contribution at both the managerial and theoretical levels. In any case, this study also demonstrates some limitations that can be used as a starting point for future research on the topic. The next sections will present the above topics in more detail.

4.2. Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contributions of this thesis arise mainly from success in filling gaps in previous research. By analyzing the role of the salesman, this study has offered important contributions regarding how this figure can develop to its full potential by not focusing solely on developing hard skills, as has historically been the case, but also developing listening communication and empathic skills. Although the importance of the salesperson to a retail company had already been emphasized in several research papers this thesis offers insight regarding what techniques can be deployed by a salesperson in a B2C context to create a strong relationship with the customer.

Narrowing the field to the industry taken into consideration, other interesting theoretical aspects emerged.

First of all, this study confirmed previously made theories regarding the relationship between sales person and purchase intention in the automotive world (Alavi et al., 2021) by testing it through a sample of Italian-born respondents. This would seem to confirm how the cultural factor does not have an influence in the relationship between salesperson and purchase intention, at least as far as Western countries are concerned. Regarding the luxury sector, this research partially tried to answer the questions raised by Bian & Forsythe (2012) on what could be potential ways to provide an excellent customer experience in a luxury boutique. Building on the theories proposed by Lent and Tour (2009), this study verified how consumers in the luxury world positively perceive the ability of the salesperson to know how to “pamper” the customer, increasing their propensity to purchase the products offered by the company.

The most significant theoretical contribution of this research, however, is related to the advancement of theories based on the BIAF model (Kervyn, Fiske et al., 2012). As previously presented in Chapter 2, interviews conducted on consumers in order to confirm the BIAF model, presented luxury brands as brands with high levels of competence but low levels of warmth. This perception placed luxury brands in the category of envied brands. From the analyses it was confirmed that soft skills have a positive effect on perceived brand warmth and at the same time do not negatively affect perceived brand competence, which remains almost unchanged with the use or non-use of soft skills by the salesperson. Regardless of the scenarios presented both the mean and median relative to the scale on brand competence have values very close to the maximum value (strongly agree=7) ($M_{\text{brand_competence_mean}} = 6.44$, $Me_{\text{brand_competence_mean}} = 6.12$).

As presented in the golden quadrant theory brands with high levels of branding and competence are considered brands admired by consumers who have a higher propensity to purchase. The statistical results obtained from this research confirm this theory by showing higher purchase intention in the scenario where the salesperson conveys both competence and warmth.

While the positive relationship between brand warmth and purchase intention had already been proven, the ways in which a luxury brand could leverage its sales workforce to be able to increase the level of warmth with which the brand is perceived had not yet been investigated.

The theoretical contributions offered thus go to implement several areas of research, not only related to brand management but also to human resource management. The latter has even greater relevance in the managerial implications that will be presented in the next section.

4.3. Managerial Implications

One of the main goals of this study was to be able to offer managerial solutions not only aimed at the consumer but also related to human resource management.

The findings certainly offer useful insights to better manage the customer experience especially in automotive, an industry that struggles the most to create a meaningful difference in customer experience between luxury brands and the rest of the brands in the market.

Given also the expected growth in the automotive luxury market, acting efficiently in the coming years from a customer experience perspective could be crucial for even more prosperous development in the years to follow.

Working on one's sales forces can also be useful on image levels for a brand, especially taking into consideration how influential the word of mouth is in the luxury sector and how this can be positively affected by delighting the consumer.

Making the most of the sales phase becomes even more important in a market such as the automotive industry, which although highly digitalized still sees a great deal of consumer participation in seeing the product live.

In order to make the most of the idea of an admired brand, companies must surely also try to work on communication strategies aimed at emphasizing the ability of salespeople to listen to the customer's needs and offer him or her the best solution.

As mentioned earlier, this firm offers managerial solutions related to human resources. One solution that can be adopted by a company is definitely to place great emphasis on soft skills in the recruiting and hiring phase of the sales team. Therefore, it would be suitable to identify profiles that possess in their sales skills background not only product knowledge and the ability to be able to competently communicate its characteristics, but also the ability to know how to put the customer in the most favorable conditions and understand how to satisfy his demands and desires.

To get the most out of a sales team, a firm should start as early as through a meticulous recruitment phase, but to be able to build a team that demonstrates high soft skills you have to work on it periodically. In light of this, the findings demonstrate how training specifically aimed at improving soft skills can be of great benefit to automotive companies. Brands in this field are already accustomed to having periodic courses aimed at improving sales skills, but they are mostly aimed at hard skills such as updating courses on new model features. Broadening training to soft skills may be a winning choice for luxury automotive brands, also in light of their desire to want to get as close as possible to luxury brands in other industries such as jewelry, where training of this kind is already common.

Offering soft skills courses also can be perceived particularly positively by employees because they learn knowledge that can also be used in other business contexts. This can create a more purposeful atmosphere on the part of employees in dealing with work. They will be more likely to identify with the corporate culture, being able to more easily convey to consumers a brand image that is consistent with the company's values.

4.4. Limitations and Future Research

Although this thesis has made several theoretical contributions by succeeding in answering some research gaps, there are some limitations that offer room for future research. Limitations of this study relate to the sample considered and the type of research conducted. Working in future research from these aspects would help enrich the literature in this topic by providing an even more complete theoretical framework.

Looking more deeply into the characteristics and possible limitations of this study, it should be pointed out that the sample taken into consideration is limited to an Italian population. As mentioned in the first chapter, the relationship between salesperson and purchase intention had

already been analyzed by considering a sample of U.S. and German citizens. This study therefore certainly contributes to enriching the literature by analyzing an Italian sample, but it shows the limitations of having analyzed respondents from a single country.

As only Western countries have been analyzed for now, an interesting contribution to research could be to consider an Eastern population sample to test the reaction of a consumer from Asian countries who have a different approach to interpersonal relationships.

Another limitation is the difficulty in identifying whether the consumer was accustomed to buying luxury products. To overcome this problem in the demographic questions, the monthly income of each respondent was asked. This question while offering a meaningful figure does not necessarily offer a certain parameter in assessing the consumer's economic availability.

Ultimately, this thesis is quantitative research. Analyzing the influence the salesperson can have on the consumer through the use of soft skills through qualitative research conducted with in-depth interviews could offer new insights regarding this sales dynamic and gather more detailed information about the type of consumer surveyed.

A qualitative type of research, while less significant from a sample point of view would also have the potential to more comprehensively present all the soft skills that can be used by a salesperson and understand which are considered most efficient by consumers.

Therefore, for the reasons listed above, it is considered appropriate to encourage new research that can fill the gaps in this research.

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Appendix B – Survey

B1 Introduction

Intro

Buongiorno, grazie mille per prendere parte a questo studio che sto conducendo per la mia tesi magistrale, il tuo contributo sarà **fondamentale** per la riuscita di questo studio.

Ti assicuro che le tue risposte rimarranno completamente anonime e verranno usate solo per questa ricerca.

Page Break

Intro2

Nella prossima pagina troverai un breve testo.

Per favore, **leggilo attentamente** e successivamente **rispondi** ad alcune domande su di esso. Il questionario ti richiederà **meno** di 5 minuti. Quando rispondi ricorda che ciò che conta è la tua **opinione**, non ci sono risposte giuste o sbagliate!

B2 Brand Description

Brand description

Brand Orion

Orion è un brand fondato in Italia che opera nel mercato dell' **automotive di lusso**. Fin dal suo ingresso nel mercato il brand si è sempre posizionato nella categoria **lusso** producendo un'ampia gamma di modelli che vanno dai SUV alle Supercar. L'azienda vende i suoi esclusivi modelli tramite **concessionarie monomarca**.

Scenario

Per favore immagina ora che tu sia interessato a un modello del brand **Orion** ma non hai ancora un'idea precisa su quale modello acquistare. Per questo motivo, decidi di recarti in concessionaria a raccogliere informazioni sui vari modelli chiedendo aiuto a Giovanni, **venditore** della concessionaria Orion più vicina a casa tua.

Nella prossima pagina ti verrà presentato uno scenario che riproduce una vostra ipotetica conversazione. Per favore, **leggila attentamente** e **rispondi** alle successive domande che ti verranno mostrate.

B3.1 Brand Competence Scale

Brand competence



Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo)

	Fortemente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Parzialmente in disaccordo	Neutrale	Parzialmente d'accordo	D'accordo	Fortemente d'accordo
Il brand Orion è competente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il brand Orion è efficiente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il brand Orion è esperto	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il brand Orion è affidabile	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B3.2 Brand Warmth Scale

Brand warmth



Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo)

	Fortemente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Parzialmente in disaccordo	Neutrale	Parzialmente d'accordo	D'accordo	Fortemente d'accordo
Il brand Orion è sincero	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il brand Orion è caloroso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il brand Orion è amichevole	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il brand Orion trasmette passione	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B3.3 Purchase Intention Scale

Purchase intention



Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo)

	Fortemente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Parzialmente in disaccordo	Neutrale	Parzialmente d'accordo	D'accordo	Fortemente d'accordo
Se dovessi considerare l'acquisto di un'auto di lusso, considererei Orion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Se dovessi acquistare da un brand di auto di lusso la probabilità di acquistare dal brand Orion sarebbe alta	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La mia volontà ad acquistare il brand Orion sarebbe elevata se volessi acquistare da un brand di auto di lusso	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La probabilità che considererei di acquistare il brand di lusso Orion è alta	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B3.4 Soft Skills Pre-validated Scale (Manipulation Check)

Soft skills



Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo)

	Fortemente in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Parzialmente in disaccordo	Neutrale	Parzialmente d'accordo	D'accordo	Fortemente d'accordo
Il venditore è comprensivo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il venditore è empatico	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il venditore ascolta attentamente i problemi del consumatore	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il venditore mostra interesse per i bisogni del consumatore	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il venditore ha una comunicazione amichevole	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B4 Demographic

Q13



Quanti anni hai?

Q14



Qual è il tuo genere?

- Maschio
- Femmina
- Non binario/altro genere
- Preferisco non dirlo

Q16



Da dove vieni? (Nazione)

Q18



Qual è il tuo reddito mensile netto?

B5 Survey Flow

The screenshot displays a survey flow editor with several question blocks and a randomizer control. The blocks are:

- Show Block: Default Question Block (2 Questions)
- Show Block: Brand description (2 Questions)
- Randomizer (purple box): Randomly present 1 of the following elements Evenly Present Elements
- Show Block: Block Soft skills (1 Question)
- Show Block: Block no soft skills (1 Question)
- + Add a New Element Here
- Show Block: Block 4 (3 Questions)
- Show Block: Manipulation check (selling skills) (1 Question)
- Show Block: Info demo (4 Questions)

Each block has control buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, and Delete.

Appendix C – Stimuli

C1.1 Randomised Scenario Soft Skills

Venditore: Buongiorno signore sono Giovanni, come posso aiutarla?

Consumatore: Buongiorno Giovanni, sono alla ricerca di un' auto di lusso ma vorrei qualcosa che fosse il più ecosostenibile possibile.

Venditore: Comprendo assolutamente le sue necessità. Unire il mondo del lusso alla sostenibilità è fondamentale per il nostro brand, salvare il pianeta è una nostra responsabilità. Abbiamo diverse opzioni che possono soddisfare la sua richiesta ma vorrei sapere qualcosa di più riguardo i suoi gusti e le sue necessità in modo da proporle la migliore soluzione.

Consumatore: Vorrei un' auto con un design elegante e con un motore potente. Inoltre necessito di un' auto spaziosa perché viaggio spesso con la mia famiglia.

Venditore: Capisco la sua situazione, ho due bambini. Tutti quanti devono essere comodi quando si affronta un viaggio in famiglia. Credo di avere il modello perfetto per lei: la Orion D3 SPORT Hybrid. Ha un'estetica raffinata e un gruppo propulsore ibrido che le consente di percorrere lunghe distanze in modalità completamente elettrica, riducendo le emissioni. Inoltre, il veicolo è dotato di un abitacolo spazioso e confortevole, con opzioni di configurazione dei sedili che si adattano alle esigenze della famiglia.

C1.2 Randomised Scenario No Soft Skills

Venditore: Buongiorno signore sono Giovanni, come posso aiutarla?

Consumatore: Buongiorno Giovanni, sono alla ricerca di un' auto di lusso ma vorrei qualcosa che fosse il più ecosostenibile possibile.

Venditore: Abbiamo diverse opzioni che possono soddisfare la sua richiesta, ha altre necessità da soddisfare?

Consumatore: Vorrei un' auto con un design elegante e con un motore potente. Inoltre necessito di un' auto spaziosa perché viaggio spesso con la mia famiglia.

Venditore: Credo di avere il modello perfetto per lei: la Orion D3 SPORT Hybrid. Ha un'estetica raffinata e un gruppo propulsore ibrido che le consente di percorrere lunghe distanze in modalità completamente elettrica, riducendo le emissioni. Inoltre, il veicolo è dotato di un abitacolo spazioso e confortevole, con opzioni di configurazione dei sedili.

Appendix D – Data Analysis – Output SPSS

1. Descriptive statistics

1.1. Gender

Frequenze

Statistiche

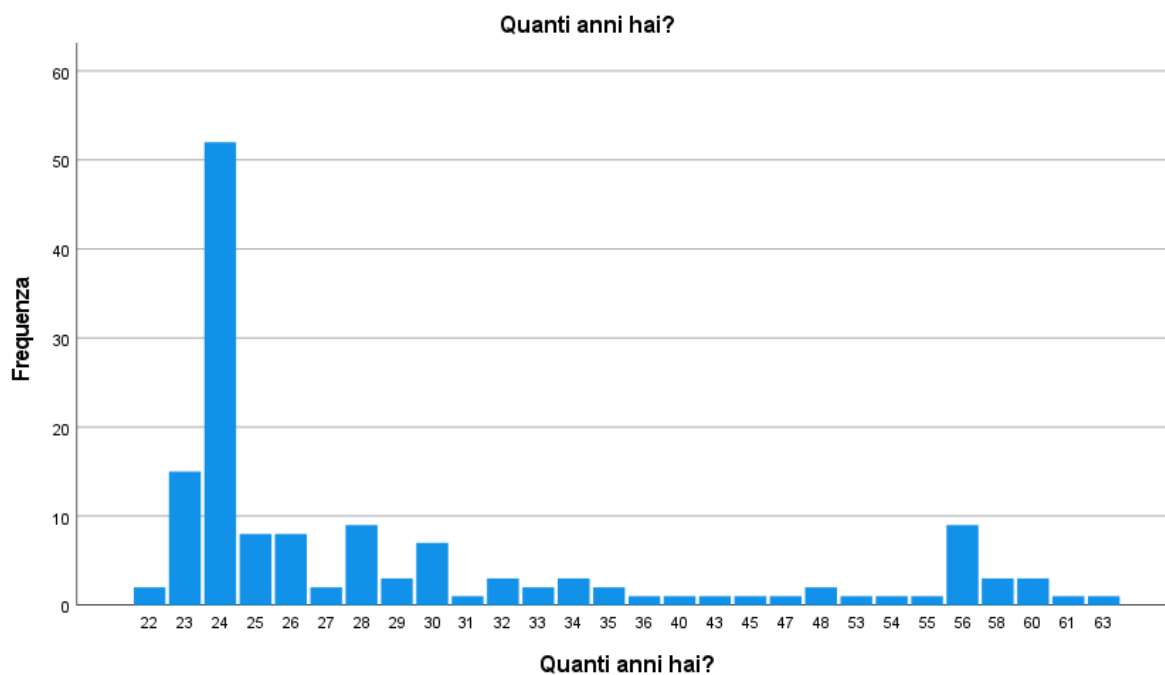
Qual è il tuo genere?

N	Valido	144
	Mancante	0

Qual è il tuo genere?

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Maschio	86	59,7	59,7	59,7
	Femmina	58	40,3	40,3	100,0
	Totale	144	100,0	100,0	

1.2 Bar Chart Age



1.3 Monthly Income

Qual è il tuo reddito mensile netto?

		Frequen za	Percentu ale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valid	€250	1	,7	,7	,7
o	0	64	44,4	44,4	45,1
	1000	2	1,4	1,4	46,5
	10000	2	1,4	1,4	47,9
	1200	1	,7	,7	48,6
	12000	1	,7	,7	49,3
	14000	2	1,4	1,4	50,7
	1500	1	,7	,7	51,4
	16000	1	,7	,7	52,1
	1800	1	,7	,7	52,8
	20000	1	,7	,7	53,5

2200	1	,7	,7	54,2
2400	1	,7	,7	54,9
2600	1	,7	,7	55,6
3000	3	2,1	2,1	57,6
3200	2	1,4	1,4	59,0
3500	3	2,1	2,1	61,1
3600	4	2,8	2,8	63,9
3800	2	1,4	1,4	65,3
4000	8	5,6	5,6	70,8
4300	1	,7	,7	71,5
4400	1	,7	,7	72,2
4500	3	2,1	2,1	74,3
4600	2	1,4	1,4	75,7
5000	5	3,5	3,5	79,2
5400	1	,7	,7	79,9
5500	1	,7	,7	80,6
5600	1	,7	,7	81,3
6000	7	4,9	4,9	86,1
6200	1	,7	,7	86,8
6300	1	,7	,7	87,5
6400	2	1,4	1,4	88,9
6500	2	1,4	1,4	90,3
6800	1	,7	,7	91,0
7000	1	,7	,7	91,7
7200	1	,7	,7	92,4
7500	1	,7	,7	93,1
7800	1	,7	,7	93,8
8000	3	2,1	2,1	95,8
8200	1	,7	,7	96,5
8500	1	,7	,7	97,2
8600	1	,7	,7	97,9
900	1	,7	,7	98,6

9000	1	,7	,7	99,3
Student e	1	,7	,7	100,0
Totale	144	100,0	100,0	

2. Factor Analysis

Comunalità

	Iniziale	Estrazione
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore è comprensivo	1,000	,991
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore è empatico	1,000	,991
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore ascolta attivamente i problemi del consumatore	1,000	,993
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore mostra interesse per i bisogni del consumatore	1,000	,990
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore ha una comunicazione amichevole	1,000	,994

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

Varianza totale spiegata

Componente	Totale	Autovalori iniziali		Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
		% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	4,959	99,172	99,172	4,959	99,172	99,172
2	,018	,353	99,525			
3	,011	,218	99,742			
4	,009	,176	99,918			
5	,004	,082	100,000			

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

3. Reliability of the scales

3.1. Reliability Soft skills scale, KMO and Bartlett's Test

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	N. di elementi
,998	5

Statistiche degli elementi

	Media	Deviazione std.	N
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore è comprensivo	3,98	2,282	144
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore è empatico	3,99	2,276	144
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore ascolta attivamente i problemi del consumatore	4,01	2,298	144
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore mostra interesse per i bisogni del consumatore	4,03	2,285	144
Perfavore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti frasi da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il venditore ha una comunicazione amichevole	4,01	2,281	144

Test di KMO e Bartlett

Misura di Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin di adeguatezza del campionamento.		,894
Test della sfericità di Bartlett	Appross. Chi-quadrato	2415,217
	gl	10
	Sign.	,000

3.2 Reliability Pre-validated scale (Brand Competence, Brand Warmth, Luxury Purchase Intention)

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	N. di elementi
,954	4

Statistiche degli elementi

	Media	Deviazione std.	N
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il brand Orion è competente	6,45	,540	144
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il brand Orion è efficiente	6,44	,611	144
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il brand Orion è esperto	6,44	,656	144
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il brand Orion è affidabile	6,43	,706	144

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	N. di elementi
,997	4

Statistiche degli elementi

	Media	Deviazione std.	N
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il brand Orion è sincero	4,22	2,175	144
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il brand Orion è caloroso	4,16	2,208	144
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il brand Orion è amichevole	4,13	2,243	144
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Il brand Orion trasmette passione	4,15	2,203	144

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	N. di elementi
,993	4

Statistiche degli elementi

	Media	Deviazione std.	N
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Se dovessi considerare l'acquisto di un'auto di lusso, considererei Orion	5,07	1,598	144
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - Se dovessi acquistare da un brand di auto di lusso la probabilità di acquistare dal brand Orion sarebbe alta	5,03	1,619	144
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - La mia volontà ad acquistare il brand Orion sarebbe elevata se volessi acquistare da un brand di auto di lusso	5,01	1,641	144
Per favore valuta quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni da 1 a 7 (1=fortemente in disaccordo; 7=fortemente d'accordo) - La probabilità che considererei di acquistare il brand di lusso Orion è alta	5,03	1,604	144

4. Independent Sample T-test

4.1 Manipulation check (,00 = no soft skills; ,01 = soft skills)

Statistiche gruppo

	soft_skills_scenario	N	Media	Deviazione std.	Errore standard della media
soft_skills_MEAN	1,00	24	6,5250	1,14332	,23338
	,00	26	2,3231	,39629	,07772

Test campioni indipendenti

		Test di Levene per l'eguaglianza delle varianze				Test t per l'eguaglianza delle medie				Intervallo di confidenza della differenza di 95%	
		F	Sign.	t	gl	Significatività P unilaterale	Significatività P bilaterale	Differenza della media	Differenza errore std.	Inferiore	Superiore
soft_skills_MEAN	Varianze uguali presunte	1,606	,211	17,640	48	<,001	<,001	4,20192	,23821	3,72298	4,68087
	Varianze uguali non presunte			17,082	28,067	<,001	<,001	4,20192	,24598	3,69811	4,70573

4.1 Manipulation check (,00 = no soft skills; 1,00 = soft skills)

Statistiche gruppo

	Scenario	N	Media	Deviazione std.	Errore standard della media
Soft_skills_MEA	,00	80	2,1425	,58174	,06504
N	1,00	64	6,3344	1,18619	,14827

Test campioni indipendenti

		Test di Levene per l'eguaglianza delle varianze				Test t per l'eguaglianza delle medie				Intervallo di confidenza della differenza di 95%	
		F	Sign.	t	gl	Significatività P unilaterale	Significatività P bilaterale	Differenza della media	Differenza errore std.	Inferiore	Superiore
Soft_skills_MEAN	Varianze uguali presunte	7,195	,008	-27,729	142	<,001	<,001	-4,19187	,15117	-4,49071	-3,89304
	Varianze uguali non presunte			-25,890	87,008	<,001	<,001	-4,19187	,16191	-4,51369	-3,87006

4.2 Hypothesis 1 (,00 = no soft skills; 1,00 = soft skills)

Statistiche gruppo

	Scenario	N	Media	Deviazione std.	Errore standard della media
Purchase_Intention_MEAN	,00	80	3,9188	,92073	,10294
	1,00	64	6,4297	1,08787	,13598

Test campioni indipendenti

		Test di Levene per l'eguaglianza delle varianze				Test t per l'eguaglianza delle medie				Intervallo di confidenza della differenza di 95%	
		F	Sign.	t	gl	Significatività P unilaterale	Significatività P bilaterale	Differenza della media	Differenza errore std.	Inferiore	Superiore
Purchase_Intention_MEAN	Varianze uguali presunte	,023	,881	-14,997	142	<,001	<,001	-2,51094	,16743	-2,84191	-2,17996
	Varianze uguali non presunte			-14,722	123,541	<,001	<,001	-2,51094	,17055	-2,84852	-2,17335

5. Mediation with PROCESS

5.1 Mediator Brand Warmth

Model : 4
Y : Purchase
X : Soft_Ski
M : Brand_Wa

Sample
Size: 144

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
Brand_Wa

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,9137	,8349	,8026	718,2850	1,0000	142,0000	,0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2,3719	,1002	23,6808	,0000	2,1739	2,5699
Soft_Ski	4,0266	,1502	26,8008	,0000	3,7296	4,3236

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
Purchase

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,8920	,7957	,5298	274,6498	2,0000	141,0000	,0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2,1024	,1810	11,6131	,0000	1,7445	2,4603
Soft_Ski	-,5726	,3004	-1,9057	,0587	-1,1665	,0214
Brand_Wa	,7658	,0682	11,2318	,0000	,6310	,9006

***** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL *****

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
Purchase

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,7829	,6130	,9967	224,9146	1,0000	142,0000	,0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3,9188	,1116	35,1085	,0000	3,6981	4,1394
Soft_Ski	2,5109	,1674	14,9972	,0000	2,1800	2,8419

```

***** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****
Total effect of X on Y
  Effect      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI      c_ps
  2,5109     ,1674    14,9972  ,0000    2,1800    2,8419    1,5701

Direct effect of X on Y
  Effect      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI      c'_ps
  -,5726     ,3004   -1,9057  ,0587   -1,1665    ,0214    -,3580

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
      Effect    BootSE    BootLLCI    BootULCI
Brand_Wa    3,0835     ,3714     2,0830     3,5640

Partially standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
      Effect    BootSE    BootLLCI    BootULCI
Brand_Wa    1,9282     ,2055     1,3567     2,1959

```

5.2 Mediator Brand Warmth and Brand Competence

 OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Brand_Wa

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	,9137	,8349	,8026	718,2850	1,0000	142,0000	,0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2,3719	,1002	23,6808	,0000	2,1739	2,5699
Soft_Ski	4,0266	,1502	26,8008	,0000	3,7296	4,3236

 OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Brand_Co

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	,2079	,0432	,3377	6,4166	1,0000	142,0000	,0124

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	6,3313	,0650	97,4442	,0000	6,2028	6,4597
Soft_Ski	,2469	,0975	2,5331	,0124	,0542	,4395

 OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Purchase

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	,8935	,7984	,5267	184,7612	3,0000	140,0000	,0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1,2239	,6768	1,8084	,0727	-,1142	2,5620
Soft_Ski	-,5764	,2996	-1,9240	,0564	-1,1688	,0159
Brand_Wa	,7581	,0682	11,1111	,0000	,6232	,8930
Brand_Co	,1416	,1052	1,3468	,1802	-,0663	,3496

***** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL *****

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Purchase

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	,7829	,6130	,9967	224,9146	1,0000	142,0000	,0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3,9188	,1116	35,1085	,0000	3,6981	4,1394
Soft_Ski	2,5109	,1674	14,9972	,0000	2,1800	2,8419

***** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_ps
2,5109	,1674	14,9972	,0000	2,1800	2,8419	1,5701

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c'_ps
-,5764	,2996	-1,9240	,0564	-1,1688	,0159	-,3605

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
TOTAL	3,0874	,3792	2,0301	3,5834
Brand_Wa	3,0524	,3876	1,9828	3,5591
Brand_Co	,0350	,0321	-,0186	,1086

Partially standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
TOTAL	1,9306	,2097	1,3298	2,1951
Brand_Wa	1,9087	,2149	1,2939	2,1830
Brand_Co	,0219	,0204	-,0113	,0698