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**Sustainable Luxury and Consumer Behavior:
A Study on the Role of Luxury Aesthetics**

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Abstract

Throughout the years, the luxury sector has seen substantial growth, leading to an increasing interest among researchers. Nevertheless, limited research has looked into the relationship between luxury fashion and sustainability with reference to consumer behaviors. Therefore, this research goes a step further and contributes to previous studies by delving into the function of aesthetics in the design of a luxury product. Further, this research examines sustainable practices that luxury companies in the luxury sector should consider when developing their products. In particular, this study looks at the impact of the level of contrast (high vs. low) in aesthetics on the planned length of use. Moreover, it explores the mediating effect of perceived authenticity. The analysis reveals that an ordered pattern (lower level of contrast) presented on a luxury fashion t-shirt has a positive effect on consumers' planned length of use as it enhances the consumer's perception of the luxury product's authenticity.

Keywords: aesthetics, authenticity, contrast, durability, luxury consumption, sustainable consumption, sustainable luxury

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INTRODUCTION

During the last few years, the luxury fashion industry has been criticized for not implementing sustainable business practices. This has led to a growing consumer awareness and concerns about sustainable and ethical consequences within the luxury fashion industry (De Angelis et al., 2017). In this regard, Kapferer and Michaut (2015) stated that there is a growing expectation among a broader customer base that luxury brands should incorporate sustainable approaches. In response, the luxury industry has acknowledged its responsibilities and shifted its attention towards green strategies (Amatulli et al., 2017; De Angelis et al., 2017) in supporting sustainability through sourcing, production, and marketing (Athwal et al., 2019). However, prior studies have shown that the use of recycled materials in the products has an adverse effect in terms of consumer preferences (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). This is in view of the fact that luxury fashion products are often associated with the exclusivity of rare, and unique materials (Amatulli et al., 2018; Cabigiosu, 2020; Kapferer, 2010; Kapferer, 2015). As a result, previous researchers proposed that luxury fashion companies must take into consideration the traditional design elements of luxury goods. This is to maintain the familiarity of their existing products to appeal to consumers (De Angelis et al., 2017). Along with that, “luxury is about high quality products that are objectively rare because they employ rare materials and unique craftsmanship skills” and “sustainable development is about preserving natural resources by limiting the excessive use of materials that can exceed the world's recycling capabilities” (Amatulli et al., 2018, p. 278). Therefore, luxury brands could incorporate sustainable practices to ensure the preservation of natural resources while upholding their commitment to high quality craftsmanship and rare materials.

However, despite these efforts, luxury brands continue to be face growing skepticism from luxury consumers (De Angelis et al., 2017). This is regarding whether the actions are genuine, real, or true. Previous research on the academic domain of sustainable luxury has been scarce, with a focus on product functionality (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013), design (De Angelis et al., 2017), art influence (De Angelis et al., 2020), and emotional appeals (Septianto et al., 2021). However, there has been limited exploration of the intersection between sustainability and aesthetics. This research aims to fill this gap by suggesting that aesthetics of luxury fashion products play a central role in addressing these concerns. Indeed, luxury goods have extraordinary aesthetics and technical excellence (Dion & Arnould, 2011; Heine, 2012). By exploiting this evidence, this research improves the understanding of luxury companies' actions and behaviors in relation to sustainability practices, as well as how they can enhance consumers' attitudes towards more environmentally sustainable practices. The research will further delve into the fundamental principles, such as the pursuit of beauty and form (Carroll, 2001; Charters, 2006) and product excellence (Kapferer, 2015), and necessitate expertise and attention to detail in line with luxury and aesthetics.

The following section focuses on the interplay between luxury and sustainability. This study seeks to enrich the current literature on this subject, improve market understanding, and contribute to filling the existing literature gap. Furthermore, this study looks into the consumer responses to the luxury product contrast (a chaotic pattern versus an ordered pattern) on the planned length of use. To test this effect, the presented research adopted an experimental study design. Moreover, this research tested the hypothesized effect whereby of consumers' perception of luxury aesthetics (level of contrast). The research explored the potential mediation factor of the relevance of perceived authenticity in the context of the connection between contrast and planned length of use. In addition, the results suggest that when a luxury t-shirt is presented with an ordered pattern (vs. chaotic pattern), a lower level of contrast in aesthetics, the perceived authenticity of the luxury t-shirt is greater, and the consumer is more likely to have the product for a longer period of time. Finally, the research presents a detailed discussion of theoretical contributions and managerial implications. In addition, the research addresses some limitations and gives some suggestions for upcoming future research.

CHAPTER 1 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 The Luxury Industry

1.1.1 The Origins of Luxury

Luxury has received much attention in research papers and books over the years. The concept of luxury has deep theoretical and historical roots. The expression “luxury” can be associated back to the Latin word “luxus”. Luxus means “excess” (Cabigiosu, 2020, p. 9; Kapferer, 2010, p. 43) or “a display of wealth” (Cabigiosu, 2020, p. 9). Throughout history, luxury has been characterized by several defining features, such as “high-quality product, brand heritage, unique knowledge, exclusivity, personalization of service and bespoke communication” (Kapferer, 2015, p. 716). Previous researchers emphasized that “luxury is both a concept and a very prosperous industry” (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015, p. 9) and “an idea” (Kapferer, 2015, p. 717). The concept of luxury goes back to civilization, where individuals who owned luxury products were often signaled with power or wealth (Brun & Castelli, 2013; Cabigiosu, 2020).

Furthermore, as society has become wealthier and luxury has become more accessible, many researchers find luxury difficult to define (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999; Yeoman, 2010). Prior research defined luxury as “anything that is desirable and more than necessary and ordinary” (Heine 2012, p. 42), which captures the essence of luxury. Okonkwo (2009), on the other hand, argued that “luxury is neither a product, an object, a service nor is it a concept or a lifestyle. It is an identity, a philosophy and a culture” (p. 302). Vigneron and Johnson (2004) further discussed luxury as “goods for which the simple use of display of a particular branded product brings esteem on the owner, apart from any functional utility” (p. 486). This suggests that, besides durability and high quality, owning a luxury product is seen as having high status. Additionally, luxury has historically been linked to social status, where individuals held a specific place in the social hierarchy (Han et al., 2010). The people in this social class got this place through birth or ordainment (Han et al., 2010, p. 18).

However, in recent years the traditional concept of luxury has been challenged (Yeoman, 2010), by going from the traditional luxury to affordable luxury (Han et al., 2010). Nowadays, we can find luxury everywhere, and luxury brands are attracting a broader customer base. This access has led to changes in consumer behavior and market strategies within the luxury industry. As a result of this, luxury products are no longer exclusive to a small percentage of the society (Wang, 2022; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). This shift has caused changes within the luxury sector and challenged the traditional concept of luxury.

1.1.2 The Luxury Market

The luxury industry was once a relatively quiet and exclusive industry (Kapferer, 2015), where the products on the market were only accessible to a select few. These people were in possession of the

necessary financial means, taste, and power (Kapferer, 2010; Kapferer, 2015). The industry was, first and for the most, associated with the elite and was viewed as a symbol of prestige and exclusivity. In fact, the luxury industry was so exclusive that only a small range of the society could afford it (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). The luxury goods were once personalized and handmade, and the products went from generation to generation (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). However, as time passed by, the luxury market has expanded caused by as society has become wealthier. Today, luxury products have become more available to a broader range of people (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2014), which can also be referred to as accessible luxury (Han et al., 2010). As a result of this, more and more people are able to enjoy these luxury goods and services (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006), and the luxury customer base nowadays goes from the elite to the middle class (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2014). Additionally, consumers are also showing an increasing interest in luxury goods, and the market is expanding rapidly (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004). Despite the broadening market appeal, luxury brands maintain their exclusivity, ensuring that their products are rare and unique, and that selectivity applies to customers (Cabigiosu, 2020). In addition, Ko et al. (2019) argued that “a luxury brand is a branded product or service that consumers perceive to: 1) be high quality; 2) offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional; 3) have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality; 4) be worthy of commanding a premium price; 5) and be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer” (p. 406).

According to previous research, the fashion industry has seen significant growth in its luxury sector (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Kapferer, 2015), which has attracted new brands seeking both volume and substantial profit margins (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). Brun and Castelli (2013) further stated that “the luxury industry encompasses companies producing and selling such goods as cars, yachts, wines and spirits, clothing, leather goods, shoes, accessories, watches, jewellery, cosmetics and perfumes, but also services including luxury hospitality and spas” (p. 823). Historically, the luxury industry was dominated by small family businesses, where all the products were handmade. During the 1980s, new luxury companies emerged in the market (Kapferer, 2015). As a result of this, the luxury industry saw a shift. Today, the luxury market is controlled by three major players. These major players are Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH), Richemont, and Kering Group (Donzé, 2017). For instance, Gucci, Saint Laurent, and Bottega Veneta are some luxury brands that have become a part of the Kering Group, and the luxury companies Fendi, Christian Dior, and Loewe, moreover, have become a part of LVMH. Richemont has a portfolio of luxury companies such as Cartier, Chloé, and Peter Millar (Kapferer, 2015). As a result of market growth, companies in the luxury market are seeking higher volumes to meet the increasing demand for their products. In 2022, LVMH had a record year, with nearly US \$60 billion in sales of personal luxury goods and significant revenue growth (Deloitte, 2024). LVMH’s competitor, Kering Group, on the other hand, also had a great year in 2022, with €20 billion in net sales of luxury goods, which is a 15.3% increase from the previous year (Deloitte, 2024).

However, of the three major players, Richemont showed the strongest growth in 2022. Richemont revealed an increase in sales of 50,1% within the category “luxury goods sales growth” (Deloitte, 2024, p. 17).

However, besides the remarkable growth the luxury companies had experienced for years, the luxury industry faced an unexpected challenge in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic (Pang et al., 2022). The pandemic resulted in a 20% to 22% reduction in exchange rates from 2019 to 2020 in the overall market for luxury goods and experiences (Bain & Company, 2021, p. 8). As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many brands in the luxury market experienced a significant decrease in sales. Building from the pandemic in 2020, the luxury market saw an exceptional growth in sales across the world in 2023. The report by Bain & Company (2024) highlighted that the luxury sector held a value of €1.5 trillion in 2023. Compared to 2022, this represented an increase in current exchange rates of 8% to 10% (Bain & Company, 2024, p. 8). Furthermore, the Bain & Company report (2024) stated that “the growth in total spending was consistent with the growth rate in 2022 and translated to a nearly €160 billion increment in spending across all luxury segments” (p. 2). Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the luxury sector has shown its ability to adapt and recover to regain its position in the market.

1.1.3 Luxury Marketing

According to Atwal and Williams (2009), “experience is everything” (p. 338) in luxury brand marketing. However, previous researchers have argued that the original function of luxury differs significantly from that of other sectors of products or services (Okonkwo, 2009). This has led to luxury brands being skeptical about adopting marketing. Since 1985, the luxury sector has been influenced by new technology (Kapferer, 2015). However, during the early days of the digital age, luxury brands resisted adopting the Internet technology due to challenges, such as their focus on exclusivity and fear of losing control over their brand image, as well as a lack of understanding of the Internet’s multidimensional nature (Okonkwo, 2009). Consequently, with the increased digital technology, luxury companies have adapted to the digital age and recognized the need to use the Internet to interact with their customers.

Today, people are increasingly searching for information on the Internet (Wang, 2022). Wang (2022) stated that luxury consumers “may learn through social media, advertising, interactions with sales staff, communicating with other consumers, and actual product experience” (p. 791). As a result of this, luxury companies have started welcoming digital technology into their business model as it has become an important communication tool. Especially, in view of the fact that consumers more and more are turning to social media platforms, the Internet, or digital advertisements for information (Bazi et al., 2020). In this regard, Choi et al. (2020) stated that “75% of all luxury shoppers use social media, most luxury brands must now use social media marketing to engage with their consumers, in order to increase

brand awareness, preference, and behavioral intentions” (p. 520). In addition, Atwal and Williams (2009) suggested that brands on the luxury market should focus on experiential marketing. Experiential marketing “describes marketing initiatives that give consumers in-depth, tangible experiences in order to provide them with sufficient information to make a purchase decision” (Atwal & Williams, 2009, p. 341). This marketing initiative gives luxury brands an opportunity to create unique brand experiences to differentiate themselves from their competitors and connect with their target audience (Atwal & Williams, 2009). Additionally, luxury brands are adapting innovative marketing strategies to expand their reach and elevate brand recognition (Atwal & Williams, 2009). As a result of this, luxury brands nowadays use social media and the Internet to tell their stories, vision, and mission and connect with their customers on a deeper level (Mandler et al., 2019).

1.2 Luxury and Sustainability

1.2.1 Sustainability and Green Marketing

The concept of sustainable development has obtained much attention in various research papers and books, over the past years. Being environmentally sustainable involves taking several measures to reduce the adverse effects on the environment (Glavič & Lukman, 2007; Moldan et al., 2012). In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published a report. This report was one of the first to introduce the concept of sustainable development and defined it as “the ability to ... [meet] the [needs] of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission Report, 1987, as cited in Amatulli et al., 2017, p. 39). In addition, Costanza and Patten (1995) argued that “a sustainable system is one which survives or persists” (p. 193). As time has passed by, the definition of sustainability has expanded. This broader interpretation of sustainable development includes preserving natural resources, supporting human resources, and responsibly using financial resources (Moldan et al., 2012; Ruggerio, 2021; Virtanen et al., 2020). On the one hand, it means that making smart investments that eventually strengthen the economy and society in the long run. While on the other hand, supporting human resources by ensuring they have access to the basic needs in life (Moldan et al., 2012; Ruggerio, 2021; Virtanen et al., 2020). In line with this, Kumar et al. (2012) proposed that “sustainability is that area which is being explored by companies for growth and development” (p. 483). In essence, sustainability nowadays is recognized as an important component for both companies and society to grow and succeed together.

The “Triple Bottom Line” approach was first presented by John Elkington in 1994. This framework suggests that companies should consider three dimensions when pursuing sustainable development. These three dimensions focus on the three Ps: profit, people, and planet (Amatulli et al., 2017; De Angelis et al., 2020; Sheth et al., 2011). The “Triple Bottom Line” approach can be linked to the concept of “The Three Pillars”, a multi-pillar framework for assessing business performance. The

model includes dimensions such as social (people), economic (planet), and environmental (planet) (Farley & Smith, 2020; Moldan et al., 2012). The first dimension, the economic, points to the capacity of a company to generate profits and ensure employee stability while minimizing environmental impact. The second dimension, the ecological, addresses the impact humans have on the environment. Our action is to take part in reducing waste and pollution. Finally, social aims to enhance collective well-being and promote cultural heritage (Amatulli et al., 2017; De Angelis et al., 2020; Moldan et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the adoption of green marketing strategies allows companies to engage with their customers while promoting sustainable business practices (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Throughout history, there have been different definitions of the expression green marketing. Henion and Kinnear, in 1976, highlighted the fact that ecological marketing had been “concerned with all marketing activities that have served to help cause environmental problems and that may serve to provide a remedy for environmental problems” (Henion & Kinnear, 1976, as cited in Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017, 2013, p. 1264). Since then, the concept of green marketing has made progress, reflecting the growing importance of environmental sustainability. Lampe and Gazda (1995) further argued that green marketing is “the marketing response to the environmental effects of the design, production, packaging, labeling, use, and disposal of goods or services” (p. 303). The research discovered that the majority part of green marketing initiatives focus on product or promotion (Lampe & Gazda, 1995). Further on, Fuller (1999) defined sustainable marketing as “the process of planning, implementing, and controlling the development, pricing, promotion, and distribution of products in a manner that satisfies the following three criteria: (1) consumer needs are met, (2) organizational goals are attained, and (3) the process is compatible with ecosystems” (p. 4). In simpler terms, sustainable marketing is about meeting consumer needs, achieving business goals, and preserving ecosystems. As time has passed by, researchers have discovered that green marketing has expanded from the traditional concept of marketing to a full business strategy (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Today, the concept of green marketing is impacting the whole company. As a result of this, companies have acknowledged their responsibilities and are slowly implementing global sustainability practices that drive the whole market (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017).

However, the adoption of green marketing strategies does not come without challenges. In the past, companies have taken a limited approach to environmental sustainability considerations in their marketing strategies (Kumar et al., 2012). This is in view of the fact that, marketing luxury goods requires a comprehensive understanding of market dynamics and consumer perceptions (Atwal & Williams, 2009). In addition, luxury houses such as, LVMH and Kering Group have made sustainable practices a main priority in their business models. They have adapted sustainable sourcing, manufacturing, and marketing strategies, showing their commitment towards the environment (Amatulli et al., 2017; Athwal et al., 2019). For instance, companies such as Stella McCartney have a strong commitment to the environment. The luxury brand has taken sustainable practices and ethical standards into its business model and are fronting this highly on their website (Amatulli et al., 2017; Stella

McCartney, 2024). Stella McCartney has integrated sustainable marketing communications into its overall marketing strategy.

1.2.2 Sustainable Luxury

Throughout history, the luxury industry has been recognized for its unique business model. This model was characterized by the production of handmade products in small batches for a limited of people (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). Nevertheless, as time has passed by, the luxury industry has proven to be considered as wasteful and careless. However, on the other side, according to previous research, luxury companies have redefined their center of attention for the environment and society (Cervellon & Shammass, 2013), and luxury companies have created sustainable supply chains into their business model (Guercini & Ranfagni, 2013). For instance, the luxury fashion brand Stella McCartney has since 2001 taken sustainable luxury practices into its business model (Stella McCartney, 2024). Stella McCartney states, “we are on a conscious luxury mission to create fashion that does not compromise on desirability or sustainability and that holds us accountable to our targets” (Stella McCartney, 2024). Their mission is to motivate customers to make better decisions. In addition, Stella McCartney’s activities are driven by their strong values (Stella McCartney, 2024). As a result of its strong commitment to the environment, Stella McCartney is a noteworthy company that has integrated sustainable practices and ethical considerations into its business model.

Luxury products are made to provide long-lasting value (Amatulli et al., 2017). In addition, previous research argued that durability is an essential factor within the luxury industry for promoting sustainability practices (Amatulli et al., 2017; Kapferer, 2010; Sun et al., 2021). Sun et al. (2021), argued that luxury products are more sustainable as they fall under the high-end category and have a longer life cycle. In this regard, product durability leads to a longer lifecycle and reuse, which allows the products to be passed down from generation to generation (Amatulli et al., 2017; Kapferer, 2010; Sun et al., 2021; Wiedmann et al., 2007). This approach positively impacts the environment (Guercini & Ranfagni, 2013). Furthermore, Kapferer (2010) stated that “durability is at the heart of sustainable development as well as luxury” (p. 42). In addition, the research by Amatulli et al. (2017) demonstrated that “luxury is likewise “sustainable” by definition because for luxury brands, durability is a core business value: luxury is the business of lasting worth” (p. 36). Cervellon and Shammass (2013), furthermore, argued that consumers see durability as the foundation of sustainable luxury. They discovered that consumers consider luxury goods to be significant future investments, as consumers are searching for a product with a longer life cycle (Cervellon & Shammass, 2013). However, Kapferer and Michaut (2015) found that only a small percentage of all luxury consumers prioritize sustainability behaviors within their purchase decisions. In addition, Athwal et al. (2019) further argued that it is essential that companies

understand consumers' attitudes toward sustainable luxury, as consumers are increasingly becoming more and more aware of environmental concerns.

Moreover, according to previous research, the concepts of luxury and sustainable core values differ, making it challenging to bring them together (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). Furthermore, Kapferer and Michaut (2015) stated that "sustainability appears multi-faceted, luxury has multiple facets as well" (p. 5). They further argued that sustainable luxury faces a major challenge in convincing luxury consumers that sustainability can coexist with luxury. Their research highlighted the changing dynamics within the intersection of luxury consumption and sustainability (Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). Kapferer (2010), further, argued that the concepts of luxury and sustainability are compatible since "both focus on rarity and beauty" (p. 41). Furthermore, previous research stated that luxury brands distinguish themselves with elements such as exclusivity, high prices, and a focus on quality (Cabigiosu, 2020; Han et al., 2010; Heine, 2012; Kapferer, 2010; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006), while sustainable development emphasizes environmental and social responsibility (Amatulli et al., 2017; Glavič & Lukman, 2007). These two approaches might seem incompatible. Moreover, the research by Achabou and Dekhili (2013) explored the connection between sustainable development and luxury products where they looked at consumers' attitudes toward the use of recycled materials in luxury purchases. The research found that including recycled materials within luxury fashion products has a considerable adverse effect on consumer preferences (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013) due to their strong association with exclusivity and prestige linked with rare and unique materials (Amatulli et al., 2018; Cabigiosu, 2020; Kapferer, 2010; Kapferer, 2015). In addition, De Angelis et al. (2017) suggest that luxury fashion companies should design their new green products similarly to their previous products to maintain consumers' familiarity with the brand's features.

Table 1. Summary of Studies on Sustainable Luxury

Authors	Title	Source	Findings
Athwal et al. (2019)	Sustainable Luxury Marketing: A Synthesis and Research Agenda	International Journal of Management	Luxury brands must understand and align with consumer values that meet their expectations as they become more conscious of sustainable issues.

Kapferer and Michaut (2015)	Luxury and Sustainability: A Common Future? The Match Depends on How Consumers Define Luxury	Luxury Research Journal	Only a minority of luxury consumers consider sustainability as an essential factor in their purchase decisions.
Cervellon and Shammass (2013)	The Value of Sustainable Luxury in Mature Markets: A Customer-Based Approach	The Journal of Corporate Citizenship	Consumers value luxury goods that are long-lasting and can be considered as an investment.
Kapferer (2010)	All that Glitters is not Green: The Challenge of Sustainable Luxury	European Business Review	Luxury brands should incorporate sustainability demands into their operations while maintaining exclusivity and quality standards.
Sun et al. (2021)	Buy Less, Buy Luxury: Understanding and Overcoming Product Durability Neglect for Sustainable Consumption	Journal of Marketing	The researchers argued that luxury products are more sustainable due to their longer life cycles; however, consumers often overlook this aspect and purchase multiple ordinary products instead.
Achabou and Dekhili (2013)	Luxury and Sustainable Development: Is there a Match?	Journal of Business Research	Including recycled materials in luxury fashion goods has an adverse effect on consumer preferences.
De Angelis et al. (2017)	The Role of Design Similarity in Consumers' Evaluation of New Green Products: An Investigation of Luxury Fashion Brands.	Journal of Cleaner Production	Companies in the luxury sector should design new green products like their previous products to maintain consumer familiarity.

1.3 Luxury Consumption

1.3.1 Luxury Consumption Motivations

The research by Vigneron and Johnson (1999) argued that there are several motivational factors that can be connected with luxury consumption. These motivation factors are perceived conspicuous value, perceived unique value, perceived social value, perceived emotional value, and perceived quality value (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). In addition, according to Nia and Zaichkowsky (2000), the motivations behind purchasing luxury goods could vary depending on consumer preferences and needs. Previous research has found that consumers who purchase luxury goods want to signal wealth, status, and prestige (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; O’Cass & Frost, 2002; Veblen, 1899; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). However, other researchers have found that the motivation behind purchasing luxury goods is to express their individuality, create a unique identity, or satisfy their personal taste and style (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Han et al., 2010; Wang, 2022). Hudders (2012) further found that consumers purchase luxury products for the product’s excellent quality and for their sensory experience. Moreover, income and wealth have also been identified as positive factors that influence luxury consumption (Han et al., 2010). However, the decision to purchase luxury goods can vary depending on a consumer’s personal characteristics and the level of economic development in the market (Pino et al., 2019; Üstüner & Holt, 2010). Additionally, the research by Dubois and Duquesne (1993) found that people who have a higher income, have a higher probability of purchasing luxury goods. Furthermore, Jung et al. (2023) argued that consumers who wear luxury products are often perceived negatively. This is because, according to the researchers, they are thought to prioritize maintaining a certain image and managing how others perceive them rather than being authentic (Jung et al., 2023). The research by Husic and Cicic (2009) on the other hand, stated that individuals “are more concerned about physical appearance and fashion, and are more likely to use different strategies to gain approval from others” (p. 234). This is in view of the fact that people are often concerned about how they come across to other people (Husic & Cicic, 2009). Nevertheless, these perceptions, people choose luxury goods for a variety of reasons.

Status Consumption

Luxury goods have for long been associated with the desire for elevated status or dominance. Han et al. (2010) found that status holds considerable influence on the motivations behind purchasing luxury goods. However, nowadays, luxury might be less associated with high status, and luxury is considered less exclusive (Wang, 2022). This is in view of the fact that status today is something that can be earned. As a result of this, the motivations behind the purchase of luxury goods are constantly evolving and changing with the times. Eastman et al. (1999) furthermore defined status consumption as “the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through the conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer and symbolize status both for the individual

and surrounding significant others” (p. 42). Building upon this definition, Eastman and Eastman (2015) stated that “status consumption is the interest a consumer has to improve one’s social and/or self-standing through consumption of consumer products that may be conspicuous and that confer and symbolize status for the individual and surrounding significant others” (p. 3). Moreover, according to O’Cass and McEwen (2004), status consumption is “the behavioural tendency to value status and acquire and consume products that provide status to the individual” (p. 34). These definitions, in other words, highlight the role that luxury goods play in the communication of social status and the way consumers use them to shape their social identities to others. Moreover, as luxury goods have lost their traditional signal value, luxury consumers are seeking new signals to maintain distinctiveness (Bellezza, 2023).

Furthermore, Eastman and Eastman (2015) point out that “while there are consumers who attribute their social motivations for status to be quality concerns, there are also consumers motivated for status not because of the external (social) implications of their purchase, but rather because they want the very best for themselves and do not care if others are aware of their purchases” (p. 5). The research suggested that consumers consumption behaviors are motivated by external (social) and internal (personal) factors (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). In addition, previous research also aimed to determine the internal and external motivations behind luxury consumption (Amatulli & Guido, 2012). Externalized luxury refers to the tendency of individuals to purchase luxury goods for the purpose of establish their social status. Internalized luxury, on the other hand, makes reference to one intention to purchase luxury goods for one’s own taste and satisfaction (Amatulli & Guido, 2012). This distinction highlights how both personal preferences and societal influence shapes consumer behavior.

Conspicuous Consumption

The oldest theory based on the concept of conspicuous consumption was first presented in 1899 by researcher Thorstein Veblen (Veblen, 1992). Additionally, within the research by Bagwell and Bernheim (1996), they stated that “Thorstein Veblen (1899) argued that wealthy individuals often consume highly conspicuous goods and services in order to advertise their wealth, thereby achieving greater social status” (p. 349). In addition, Eckhardt et al. (2015) further followed Veblen’s perspective on conspicuous consumption and defined it as “the purchase of expensive goods to wastefully display wealth rather than to attempt to satisfy more utilitarian needs of the consumer, for the sole objective of gaining or maintaining higher social status” (p. 807). Moreover, Corneo and Jeanne (1997) expanded on Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption and identified two types of this consumer characteristic. The first type is known as the “snob effect”, which involves purchasing luxury goods as a means of distinguishing oneself from others. The second type is the “bandwagon effect”, which refers to purchasing luxury goods because other consumers do (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997).

Furthermore, as time has passed by, the definition of conspicuous consumption has been defined differently by different researchers. Conspicuous consumption can be defined as “the tendency for individuals to enhance their image, through overt consumption of possessions, which communicates status to others” (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004, p. 34). In addition, Grace and Griffin (2009), defined conspicuous consumption as “the visible consumption of goods as a mechanism to enhance one’s social standing” (p. 15). Expanding on this, Chaudhuri et al. (2011) further defined it as “conspicuous consumption is a deliberate engagement in symbolic and visible purchase, possession and usage of products and services imbued with scarce economic and cultural capital with the motivation to communicate a distinctive self-image to others” (p. 217). Consequently, conspicuous consumption is often seen as a way to show off goods to raise one’s social status. Previous researchers found that some individuals purchase luxury goods to display their wealth and communicate affluence to others, a behavior that is often perceived as conspicuous (Chaudhuri et al., 2011; Ki et al., 2017; O’Cass & McEwen, 2004; Shao et al., 2019). In addition, the theory of conspicuous consumption suggests that wealthy individuals tend to purchase goods that are apparent and can display their status, thereby elevating their societal standing (Chaudhuri et al., 2011; Han et al., 2010; O’Cass & Frost, 2002; Shao et al., 2019). This aligns with Hudders’ (2012) findings that the motives behind purchasing luxury brands can vary depending on the conspicuousness of the products. However, there is no need to believe that purchasing expensive and conspicuous goods is the best way to display wealth. On the one hand, one could prefer to purchase more affordable conspicuous goods, and on the other hand, higher quality conspicuous goods for a higher price (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996).

1.3.2 The Role of Aesthetics in Luxury Consumption

Aesthetics has a long history and is becoming a growing area of marketing research. This is largely due to its important role in product design. The expression “aesthetics” can be associated back to the Greek word “aisthanesthai”. Aesthetics means “to perceive” (Berthon et al., 2009, p. 51), and is a broad concept that defines beauty and form (Carroll, 2001). It encompasses a variety of elements such as color, emotions, harmony, imagery, order, taste, symbolism, and symmetry (Carroll, 2001; Hagtvedt, 2022; Kim, 2006). In addition, aesthetics includes the “sensory experience that involve interest, pleasure, meaning, or emotional responses” (Hagtvedt, 2022, p. 426). Visual aesthetics also holds a pivotal position in the field of design and aesthetics. Visual aesthetics can be referred to as the balance in the middle of design elements (e.g., color, form, shape, shade, texture, and tone) and the concept (e.g., balance, contrast, composition, proportion, and harmony) (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004).

Aesthetics extends to the broader realm of consumption. Previous researchers defined aesthetic consumption as “those aspects of sensory experiences that are made manifest in the consumption of everyday objects that are presumed to have aesthetic qualities, as well as those experiences relating to

art and art-like objects and artistic events” (Venkatesh & Meamber 2008, p. 48). Moreover, aesthetic consumption involves using a product mainly to appreciate its beauty or expressive features, along with other forms of value (Charters, 2006). A study from Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) showed that consumers intentionally incorporate aesthetic values in their daily consumption experiences, with aesthetic consumption contributing to identity formation, preferences, and the blending of boundaries between art and everyday aesthetics. Moving into the realm of luxury consumption, high aesthetic appeal has long been associated with it (Wang, 2022). In the past, the focus of traditional luxury was primarily on the durability of goods (Berthon et al., 2009). However, Dion and Arnould (2011), argued that luxury goods exhibit exceptional aesthetics and technical excellence, indicating a shift in focus. As a result, previous studies have discovered that consumers typically favor products with high aesthetics (Page & Herr, 2002; Reimann et al., 2010). Further, the unique design and exceptional aesthetics of luxury products have always been a substantial element in their popularity, where brands in the luxury market are often characterized by “a high level of price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinariness and a high degree of non-functional associations” (Heine, 2012, p. 62).

However, previous researchers have seen a shift in the luxury market, and poor aesthetic design is no longer the only factor that has led to market failure in the past. According to previous research, consumers typically tend to avoid unappealing luxury products in favor of attractive products. However, certain luxury brands have managed to sell products that are considered ugly by a certain amount of people. Because of this, the rise of consumer trends is a departure from traditional luxury beauty (Bellezza, 2023). Moreover, in today’s world of luxury fashion, a phenomenon referred to as “ugly luxury” exists (Zanette et al., 2022). The research by Cesareo et al. (2023) proposes that consumers perceive unique ugliness in luxury brands as a sign of exclusivity and uniqueness. Thus, consumers are just as likely to choose distinctively unattractive goods as they are to choose traditionally appealing ones. In contrast, Bloch (1995) suggests that products considered unattractive are usually viewed negatively and evoke feelings of distaste. However, in the context of luxury consumption, aesthetics can take on various forms, and consumers tend to select luxury products that are distinctively unattractive and attractive (Cesareo et al., 2023). This is because the ugliness of the products signals their luxury status. Moreover, according to Bellezza (2023), “a defining characteristic of traditional luxury goods is their level of visibility and conspicuousness” (p. 330). Consequently, in the changing world of luxury goods, consumers are attracted to traditional aesthetics of beauty that appeal to consumers, as well as the distinctiveness and exclusivity signaled by “ugly luxury”. This change challenges researchers’ understanding of aesthetics, which was previously a broad concept to describe beauty.

Previous research considered symmetry (vs. asymmetry) as an important element of aesthetics. Treder (2010) argued that an object could be described as symmetrical if “there is at least one symmetry axis that splits the object into two identical but mirror-inverted halves” (p. 1512), which could also be known as reflection. Furthermore, Hermann Weyl (Hermann Weyl, 1952, as cited in McManus, 2005)

discussed that symmetry is something that is “well-proportioned, well-balanced, and symmetry denotes that sort of concordance of several parts by which they integrate into a whole” (p. 157). On the other hand, we have asymmetry, which refers to the lack of symmetry or balance in an object, and it is often associated with a more dynamic and less predictable aesthetics (McManus, 2005). Furthermore, marketing research has shown an increased focus on brand logo symmetry (vs. asymmetry). They argued that a logo is an important element in design within the field of symmetry (Bajaj & Bond, 2018; Bettels & Wiedmann, 2019). Logos are often the first thing people notice when they come across a brand (Bettels & Wiedmann, 2019). Previous research stated that a logo is a graphic design that typically includes an icon, such as an image, an illustration, or a symbol (Bajaj & Bond, 2018; Bettels & Wiedmann, 2019). According to prior research, there has been shown that there is an observed positive correlation among brand excitement and the level of symmetry in the positioning of the logo of the product, where less symmetrical logos was perceived as more exciting (Bajaj & Bond, 2018; Bettels & Wiedmann, 2019; Luffarelli et al., 2019).

Harmony is another element of aesthetics, which refers to the visual elements in a product design (Kim, 2006). Kumar and Garg’s (2010) research explored the relationship between aesthetics principles, such as harmony in product design, and consumers’ emotional evaluations. They showed that people prefer designs that are visually appealing and harmonious (Kumar & Garg, 2010). Furthermore, the combination of colors has been referred to as harmony (Burchett, 2002; Ou & Luo, 2006; Schloss & Palmer, 2011). Color harmony could be defined as “colors seen together to produce a pleasing affective response are said to be in harmony” (Burchett, 2002, p. 28). This concept of color harmony plays a vital role in people’s aesthetics perception. Previous research suggested that colors can be harmonized when they are combined to produce a pleasing effect and have a certain color space relationship (Burchett, 2002; Schloss & Palmer, 2011), as well as if they are of the same hue (Ou & Luo, 2006).

1.3.3 The Role of Authenticity in Luxury

In the past years, brand authenticity has been a relevant focus in previous marketing research (Beverland, 2005; Beverland, 2006; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Hitzler & Müller-Stewens, 2017; Morhart & Malär, 2020; Morhart et al., 2015; Oh et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is important to mention that different consumers perceive authenticity in a different manner (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), and authenticity can mean different things to different people (Morhart & Malär, 2020). Moreover, on the one hand, authenticity can be referred to as “originality, heritage, craftsmanship, and iconicity” (Morhart & Malär, 2020, p. 190). On the other hand, the concept of authenticity can refer to something that is genuine, real, or true (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Morhart et al., 2015; Kennick, 1985).

Furthermore, prior research has shown that brand authenticity has a positive effect on consumers’ reactions and behavioral intentions (Oh et al., 2019). Morhart et al. (2015) defined brand authenticity as

“the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and its consumers, and to support consumers being true to themselves” (p. 202). They propose four dimensions of brand authenticity, which are “credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity” (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 200). By having a sense of history and being connected to traditional cultures, regions, and core beliefs, brands can create a unique identity and build a stronger connection with the consumer (Brown et al., 2003). Previous researchers argued that brand authenticity is an essential element in shaping the connection between consumers and brands (Hitzler & Müller-Stewens, 2017; Oh et al., 2019). Moreover, brand authenticity is strongly associated with brand trust (Eggers et al., 2013), and previous researchers argued that it is given thought to have a positive impact on it (Beverland, 2005; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Eggers et al., 2013). Moreover, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) defined brand trust as “the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function” (p. 82). Beverland and Farrelly’s (2010) research found that consumers tend to be more motivated to focus on specific cues in objects that convey the feeling of authenticity, such as what is genuine, honest, and trustworthy. Consequently, consumers may be more likely to reach a purchase decision based on a product’s perceived authenticity in preference to just its functional benefits (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Moreover, according to Beverland (2006), companies can create a sense of authenticity by upholding their customs, and pursuing quality in their manufacturing process, while keeping away from commercial appeals.

However, little research on authenticity has been conducted in the luxury market. According to previous research, one of the most significant challenges facing the luxury industry today is the question of authenticity (Hitzler & Müller-Stewens, 2017). In this regard, Hitzler and Müller-Stewens (2017), argued that authenticity holds an important part in the interaction that exists between luxury brands and their customers. Authenticity can also be seen as a guiding principle that upholds ethical, moral, and sustainability standards (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Hitzler & Müller-Stewens, 2017). As a result of the market change, maintaining brand authenticity has become a challenge for many luxury brands these days. For instance, the luxury fashion brand, Stella McCartney, is well-known for their commitment to sustainable practices, which is seen as a genuine and authentic representation of the brand’s strong environmental values (Morhart & Malär, 2020).

1.3.4 The Role of Emotions and Emotional Attachment in Luxury Sustainable Consumption

The understanding of sustainable consumption behaviors has attained remarkable observations from marketers and researchers in recent years. A majority of the research has explored this concept within the luxury market. Sustainable consumption can be defined as “the consumption of goods and services that meet the basic need and quality of life without jeopardizing the needs of future generations” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2002, p. 16). Furthermore, sustainable

consumption behaviors refer to a shift in consumer's purchase habits, which support citizen activities. This includes purchasing less frequent and longer lifespan products, reducing waste, conserving energy, and boycotting unethical brands (Septianto et al., 2021). In addition, Batat (2020) defined sustainable luxury consumption as "one's ability to consume luxury goods and services that fulfill a person's fundamental needs and improve his or her quality of life without adversely affecting the needs of future generations" (p. 2). Additionally, previous research has seen a shift in the luxury market, with a growing consumer interest in sustainable consumption behavior (Ki et al., 2017). Ki et al. (2017) observed that consumers are increasingly shifting their attention toward sustainable consumption practices. Moreover, behaviors related to sustainable consumption are thought to contribute to a variety of responsible societal initiatives (Septianto et al., 2021). However, the consumption of luxury goods is not without its complexity.

Previous research has put an expression to two types of emotions that influence the consumption decisions of consumers who value responsible and sustainable goods. These emotions are guilt and pride (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014; Ki et al., 2017). Moreover, Antonetti and Maklan (2014) stated that "pride is a positive emotion associated with a sense of achievement and self-worth" (p. 121). They further suggest that consumers who have experienced a sense of pride, have a higher likelihood to take a part in sustainable consumption practices (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014). On the other hand, consumers might experience guilt when they believe they are responsible or have caused an adverse outcome (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014; Ki et al., 2017). According to prior research, conspicuous consumption might lead to guilt due to perceived extravagance (Ki et al., 2017). Additionally, this aligns well with the affect balance theory developed by Bradburn in 1969 (Ki et al., 2017, p. 726). The affect balance theory suggests that individuals' overall satisfaction depends on the balance between positive and negative emotional experiences. Ki et al. (2017) further build on this theory, where they simplified it as "proposes both positive affect and negative affect as equally significant predictors of individuals' life satisfaction" (p. 723). Moreover, the researchers came to know that consumers who experience a great service from a luxury consumption are most likely to purchase again. In view of the fact that they might feel a sense of guilt after the purchase. This indicates that pleasure from luxury consumption can balance a guilty feeling (Ki et al., 2017).

Additionally, brand attachment makes mention of a strong emotional relationship between individuals and brands or individuals and objects (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). In line with this, some individuals might see the goods as part of their self-concept (Aboulnasr & Tran, 2020; Malär et al., 2011; Thomson et al., 2005). According to previous research, individuals can develop an emotional attachment to consumption goods and brands, where they can build long-lasting relationships (Park et al., 2010). Moreover, previous research argued that consumers only form strong emotional attachments to a small percentage of the products and brands they interact with during their lives (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), leading to affective memories and nostalgia, and separation from

these brands can cause distress (Aboulnasr & Tran, 2020). This brand attachment can be made distinctive by a self-brand link through memories and schema, encouraging commitment and loyalty (Aboulnasr & Tran, 2020; Japutra et al., 2014). Notably, emotional brand attachment affects both consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Moreover, according to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), engaging with consumers emotionally is an essential aspect of success in luxury fashion. This is considered that emotions play an important part in the consumer decision-making process (Makkar & Yap, 2018). Additionally, the level of emotional attachment an individual feels to a brand can lead to satisfaction, which in turn can strengthen the emotional attachment connection among the consumer and the brand (Thomson et al., 2005). Moreover, attachment has been stated as an “emotional-laden target-specific bond between a person and a specific object” (Thomson et al., 2005, p. 77-78). In addition, previous research has defined brand attachment as “the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self” (Park et al., 2010, p. 2). The researchers found that consumers that are strongly attached to a brand are leaning toward to invest in personal resources to uphold their relationship with the brand (Park et al., 2010). Within the context of consumer behavior, Malär et al. (2011) stated that emotional brand attachment “reflects the bond that connects a consumer with a specific brand and involves feelings toward the brand” (p. 36). In particular these feelings could be affection, connection, love, and passion (Malär et al., 2011; Thomson et al., 2005). Nevertheless, the strength regarding attachment can vary, and a stronger level of attachment is often associated with a stronger feeling of connection (Malär et al., 2011).

1.4 Hypothesis development

In response to the increased concerns about the environment, several luxury companies have implemented sustainable practices into their business model (Amatulli et al., 2017; De Angelis et al., 2017). However, in response to these actions, previous research has made known that luxury consumers are skeptical of green products (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013), in view of the fact that luxury product is perceived as to have high quality, with rare, and exclusive materials (Amatulli et al., 2018; Cabigiosu, 2020; Kapferer, 2010; Kapferer, 2015). Therefore, previous researchers argued that luxury fashion products should design new green products that maintain the consumers’ familiarity with the brand’s features (De Angelis et al., 2017).

Building on knowledge about the concept of sustainable luxury, this study argues that the aesthetic appeal of a luxury fashion goods significantly influences the evaluation of sustainable practices within the luxury sector, as luxury goods is seen by having an extraordinary aesthetics and technical excellence (Dion & Arnould, 2011; Heine, 2012). Specifically, the research examines how the aesthetics of a luxury product affects consumer behavior within the luxury market. In addition, the research provides insight into how aesthetics in luxury fashion can enhance the perceived sustainability of luxury

brands. The research argues that, in turn, perceived authenticity may mediate the effect on the planned length of use. This aligns with previous research indicating that authenticity positively strengthens the bond between luxury brands and their customers (Hitzler & Müller-Stewens, 2017). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1. A high (vs. low) level of contrast characterizing a luxury product increases the consumers' planned length of use of this product, and this effect is mediated by perceived authenticity.

1.5 Conceptual Framework Model

The study framework examines the relationship between the role of contrast in aesthetics on a luxury t-shirt (high level of contrast vs. low level of contrast) and the planned length of use. In this conceptual framework model, the independent variable is the level of contrast (high vs. low). The participants in the experiment will be exposed to either a high or low level of contrast. The dependent variable is the planned length of use. Moreover, the framework includes perceived authenticity as a mediating variable. Perceived authenticity is hypothesized to mediate the relationship among the level of contrast and planned length of use. This means that the effect of contrast on the planned length of use is expected to be influenced by how authentic the participants perceive the luxury product to be. In addition, the model (as shown in Figure 1) outlined the hypothesized relationship between these variables, proposing that a lower level of contrast will lead to higher perceived authenticity, which in turn will increase the planned length of use.

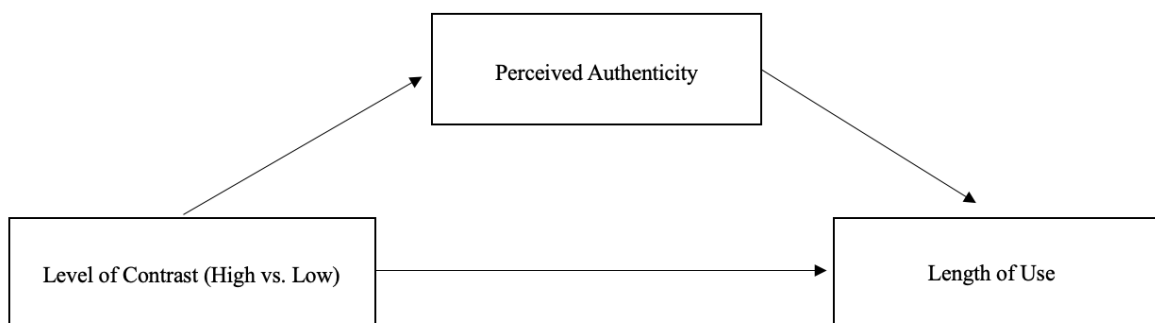


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Model

CHAPTER 2 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Empirical Study

The hypotheses have been tested by adopting a quantitative approach. The aim of the research is to display that the role of contrast (high level of contrast vs. low level of contrast) in aesthetics affects the length of product usage and that perceived authenticity mediates this effect. The study was implemented using the Qualtrics Survey software (Malhotra, 2010). More specifically, the experiment adopted a between-subject study design, according to which participants are randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. The data was gathered with both a random sampling through an online platform, Prolific, and a convenience sampling by distributing the survey to family and friends. Thereafter, the data was analyzed using SPSS software, a statistical software program that facilitated the drawing of conclusions.

Pre-Test

I performed a pre-test to check that the survey accurately measured what it was intended to measure (for extended pre-test results, see Appendix 2). The pre-test was conducted using Qualtrics Survey software. For the pre-test, I recruited 70 participants through an online survey uploaded on Prolific, where the participants were paid for their participation. Among the participants, 32 respondents were exposed to a high level of contrast conditions, while 38 respondents were exposed to the other condition, a low level of contrast. It was found that the survey was well-designed and had a great structure. Furthermore, I checked whether the independent variable, which was the level of contrast (high level of contrast condition = 0, low level of contrast condition = 1), worked as intended. However, it was found that participants skipped some questions, so a “force response” requirement was added to Qualtrics Survey software. This requirement will ensure that participants cannot skip any questions, thereby ensuring that complete and accurate data will be collected and analyzed.

2.1.1 Procedure and Participant Sampling

The study was conducted using the Qualtrics platform. Furthermore, the survey was sent out on various social media platforms, including Prolific. The questionnaire was designed for global respondents in English. After completing the questionnaire, the data were analyzed using SPSS software. The final sample size included 232 respondents (104 men, $M_{age} = 30.58$ years, $SD_{age} = 10.403$, and 128 women, $M_{age} = 32.08$ years, $SD_{age} = 11.439$). The sample consisted of 31% students, 50.4% employees, 7.3% freelancers, 4.7% entrepreneurs, and 6.5% unemployed. This survey showed that the greater part of the respondents, about 74.8% of the sample size, were aged between 20 and 35.

Furthermore, the participants in the research were randomly allocated to one of the two experimental conditions, which differed based on the level of contrast manipulation of the independent

variable. One group of respondents (111 individuals) was exposed to a high level of contrast, while the other group (121 individuals) was exposed to a low level of contrast. The high level of contrast condition was designed by a chaotic pattern, while the low level of contrast, on the other hand, has a more ordered pattern (Figure 2). In both scenarios, the participants were provided with a product description, which stated that “this is a luxury product of good quality”.

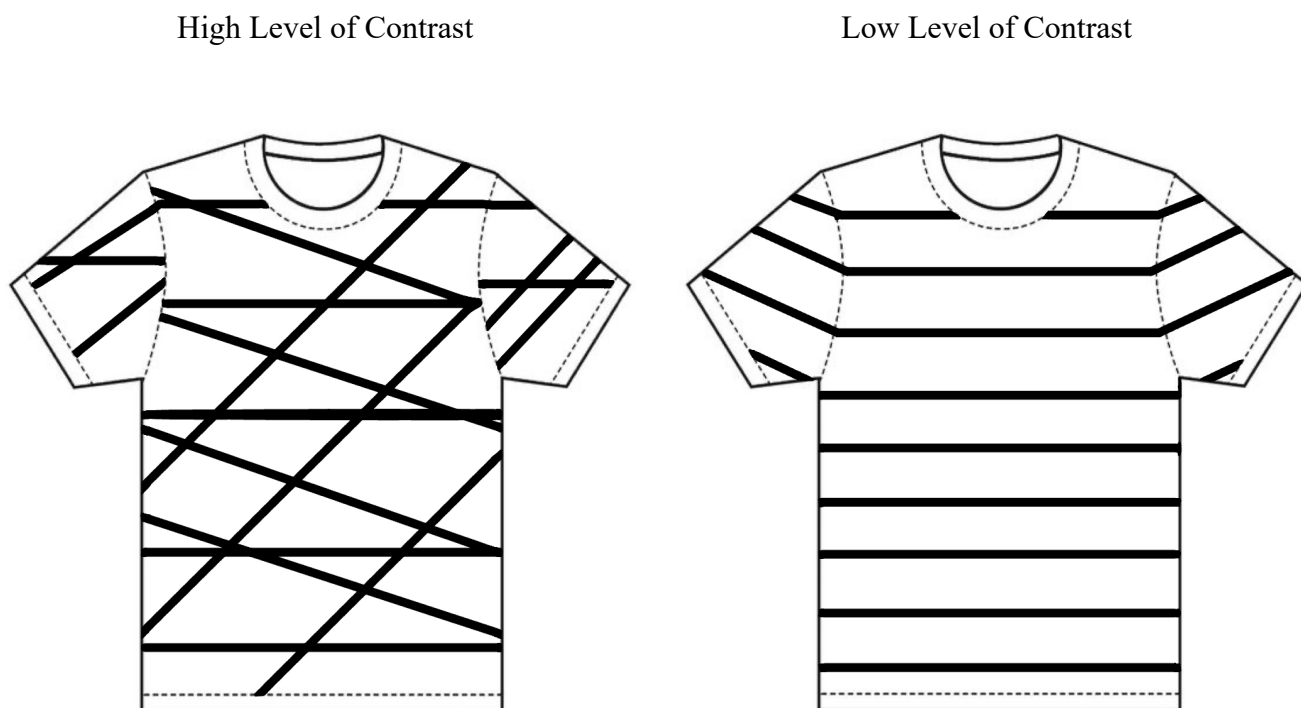


Figure 2. Level of Contrast

Furthermore, after viewing the luxury t-shirt, the participants were asked to rate the product on a scale developed by previous researchers from different studies. The measurements in this research are authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015), conspicuous consumption (Chaudhuri et al., 2011), emotional attachment (Thomson et al., 2005), length of use (Sun et al., 2021), and status consumption (Eastman et al., 1999). All statements on the scale in the questionnaire were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. The participants were asked to assess their extent of agreement with the statement presented in the survey. A score of 7 indicates a strong positive correlation (completely agree), while on the other hand, a score of 1 indicates a strong negative correlation (completely disagree). In addition, the participants were instructed to evaluate the statements based on their personal preferences and how they would relate to them. Thereafter, the participants were asked to provide some demographic information about themselves. This is information, specifically, their gender, age, occupation, and nationality. These demographic questions were included to acquire a better understanding of the participants who were

taking part in the survey, and to make sure that the data collected is representative of a diverse population.

Table 2 - Original scale measurements

Measures	Scale item
<i>Emotional Attachment</i> (Thomson et al., 2005)	Affectionate Friendly Loved Peaceful Passionate Delighted Captivated Connected Bonded Attached
<i>Authenticity</i> (Morhart et al., 2015)	It is a product that connects people with what is really important It is a product that gives back to its customers It is an honest product It is a product with a history It is a product that survives times It is a product that cares about its consumers It is a timeless product It is a product that connects people with their real selves It is a product that reflects important values people care about It is a product true to a set of moral values It is a product that adds meaning to people's lives It is a product with moral principles It is a product that accomplishes its value promise It is a product that survives trends It is a product that will not betray you

Length of Use (Sun et al., 2021)

0-6 months
6 months - 1 year
1 year - 1 and 6 months
1 year and 6 years - 2 years
2 years - 2 years and 6 months
2 years and 6 months - 3 years
> 3 years – specify

Status Consumption (Eastman et al., 1999)

I would buy a product just because it has status
I am interested in new products with status
I would pay more for a product if it had status
The status of a product is relevant to me
A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal

Conspicuous Consumption (Chaudhuri et al., 2011)

It says something to people around me when I buy a high-priced brand
I buy some products because I want to show others that I am wealthy
I would be a member in a businessmen's posh club
Given a chance, I would hang a Hussain painting in drawing my room
I would buy an interesting and uncommon version of a product otherwise available with a plain design, to show others that I have an original taste
Others wish they could match my eyes for beauty and taste
By choosing a product having an exotic look and design, I show my friends that I am different
I choose products or brands to create my own style that everybody admires
I always buy top-of-the-line products

I often try to find a more interesting version of the run-of-the-mile product, because I want to show others that I enjoy being original

I show to others that I am sophisticated

I feel by having a piece of a rare antique I can get respect from others

2.1.2 Results

The findings displayed a significant difference ($p = .015$) in the variable planned length of use between the high level of contrast condition ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 2.442$), and the low level of contrast condition ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 2.282$). Moreover, a mediation model was gathered to examine the connection between the level of contrast (high level of contrast vs. low level of contrast) as the independent variable (high level of contrast condition = 0, low level of contrast condition = 1), and the planned length of use as the dependent variable. Perceived authenticity is the mediating variable. Further, regression analysis was initiated, revealing that the level of contrast (high vs. low) has a positive and significant effect on the planned length of use ($b = .761$, $t = 2.446$, $p = .015$). Then, utilizing the bootstrapping method following Hayes' PROCESS SPSS Macro (Model 4), a mediation analysis was conducted, which confirmed that the perceived authenticity operates as a thorough mediator in the connection between the level of contrast (high vs. low) and the planned length of use. As hypothesized, a significant and positive effect on the level of contrast (high vs. low) on perceived authenticity ($b = .5976$, $t = 3.9785$, $p < .0001$) was found. Additionally, in PROCESS SPSS (Model 4), a significant effect of perceived authenticity on the planned length of use ($b = .4543$, $t = 3.4030$, $p < .0008$) was also observed. Based on the observations in the analysis using SPSS software, it can be concluded that the hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, the analysis did not find a significant effect of emotional attachment on the interaction between the level of contrast and the planned length of use, which is seen as a perceived mediator in this research. Similarly, status consumption and conspicuous consumption, which were considered possible moderators, did not yield significant findings, indicating that neither of these significantly influenced the interplay between the level of contrast and the planned length of product usage.

To sum up, the objective of the presented research was to examine the way in which a luxury fashion product's contrast level (high vs. low), in this case, a t-shirt, affects how long consumers plan to use it. The research further looks into the manner in which this effect is mediated by the product's perceived authenticity. The analysis confirmed the hypothesis. Furthermore, it revealed that perceived authenticity presents a positive underlying effect on this relationship. In simple terms, the study found

that an ordered pattern (vs. chaotic pattern) presented on a luxury t-shirt positively influences consumers' planned length of use as it enhances the consumer's perception of the product's authenticity.

CHAPTER 3 - CONCLUSION

3.1 General Discussion

The study looked into consumer behavior in relation to sustainable luxury. Specifically, the research focused on the role of contrast in luxury aesthetic products. Furthermore, this research provided valuable information on the elements that guide consumers to make sustainable choices within the realm of luxury consumption. Firstly, the study provided an analysis of environmental sustainability practices within the luxury fashion industry. Secondly, the presented research explored the impact of aesthetics on luxury products. Building on previous research, the presented research aimed to address the following research hypothesis: *A high (vs. low) level of contrast characterizing a luxury product increases the consumers' planned length of use of this product, and this effect is mediated by perceived authenticity.*

Furthermore, the research shows that a luxury t-shirt presented with a more ordered pattern (vs. chaotic pattern) positively increases perceived authenticity. This again, leads to a longer planned length of use for the luxury product. The correlation in the presented research highlights the importance of authenticity in sustainability practices in the luxury fashion market. In addition, this research provides luxury fashion companies with new information to integrate into their design and marketing strategies. Furthermore, the study adds to the theoretical knowledge of how the contrast in aesthetics of a luxury product positively affects consumer behavior within the luxury goods market.

3.1.1 Theoretical Contributions

Theoretically, the presented research makes a noteworthy contribution to prior literature regarding sustainable luxury and consumer behavior (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013; De Angelis et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2021). In addition, the findings provide valuable insight and raise important considerations that can direct and influence future research in this field.

Previous research has highlighted two different perspectives regarding the complex connection among luxury and sustainability. Some scholars argue that luxury and sustainability are incompatible (e.g., Achabou & Dekhili, 2013), while others emphasize the relationship between them (e.g., Sun et al., 2021). Nevertheless, this research goes a step further and suggests a positive correlation between luxury and sustainability. The presented research is expanding the knowledge of aesthetics within marketing research. The results show that focusing on the role of contrast in aesthetics in the luxury fashion industry has a significant positive effect on product usage and sustainable consumer behavior. In addition, the product's duration (Sun et al., 2021). However, this research goes a step further and highlights the importance of consumers' perception of authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015) in determining the aesthetic appeal and the planned length of use of the luxury product. In addition, the results turned out that authenticity has a positive effect on this relationship, since it is often seen as more valuable and trustworthy, leading consumers to form a stronger connection (Hitzler & Müller-Stewens, 2017).

3.1.2 Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, the research provides valuable insights for luxury fashion companies that want to implement more sustainability practices into their business model. Even though the luxury fashion sector has shifted its attention toward sustainable practices (Amatulli et al., 2017; De Angelis et al., 2017), there is still room for improvement. According to the present research, contrast in aesthetics has a significant influence in consumers' attitudes towards sustainable luxury. Furthermore, the study looks into sustainable consumer behavior regarding the role of contrast in aesthetic luxury clothing. It is one of the few to address this from the perspective of sustainable development within the luxury fashion sector. In particular, the findings suggest that luxury companies should focus on the aesthetic appeal of the products, in response to increasing environmental concerns (Amatulli et al., 2017; De Angelis et al., 2017). The study additionally looks at the role of perceived authenticity as a mediator in the connection among contrast and planned length of use. The presented research highlighted the significance of authenticity in consumer perceptions. Finally, luxury companies should turn their attention towards brand authenticity as it has been shown that it is an important factor in shaping the relationship between consumers and brands (Hitzler & Müller-Stewens, 2017; Oh et al., 2019).

Additionally, managers should focus on design elements with a cleaner pattern. By getting a thorough understanding of product development and looking at environmentally sustainable practices, luxury companies can establish deeper connections with their customers, potentially leading to greater brand loyalty.

3.1.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The presented research features some limitations. These limitations provide guidance for upcoming future research. First, this research looked into two specific potential mediators. These mediators are authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015) and emotional attachment (Thomson et al., 2005). Moreover, future research could, however, delve into the possible effect of additional mediating factors, such as brand loyalty or consumer trust, which may impact the effect described in the presented research. On the other hand, the study looks at two potential moderators. The moderators are conspicuous consumption (Chaudhuri et al., 2011), and status consumption (Eastman et al., 1999). Future research could examine how these two consumer characteristics may influence consumer preferences and the aesthetic appeal of luxury products. Furthermore, future research could explore additional moderators, such as cultural differences or personal values. Secondly, the study was carried out on a global scale. Future research could recreate the experimental design on a smaller, more localized scale to get insight into regional variations and more specific consumer behavior. Moreover, future research could use alternative sampling while including a larger sample size. The presented research was also conducted online. To

attain a broader knowledge of the relationship between luxury aesthetics and consumer behavior, possible future extensions of this research could be used to assess the results of a qualitative study. This study could have participants representing customers of luxury goods. In addition, this study could conduct in-depth interviews or focus groups.

Finally, the presented research provides valuable information for future research in the relationship of sustainable luxury and consumer behavior. By acknowledging the research's limitations, future research can expand these findings to attain a better comprehension of the involvement of aesthetic within the realm of sustainable luxury and customer behavior.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

What is your Prolific ID?

Please note that this response should auto-fill with the correct ID



Welcome!

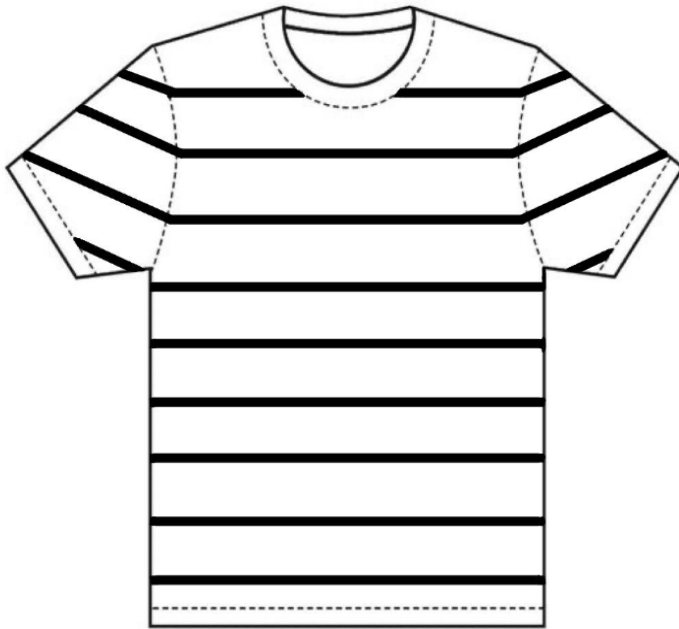
I am conducting a survey as a part of my master's thesis in Marketing at BI Norwegian Business School and Luiss Guido Carli University, and I would appreciate your participation. The survey should take no longer than 7 minutes to complete. Please note that all data collected from the survey will be kept strictly confidential and reported on an aggregate level.



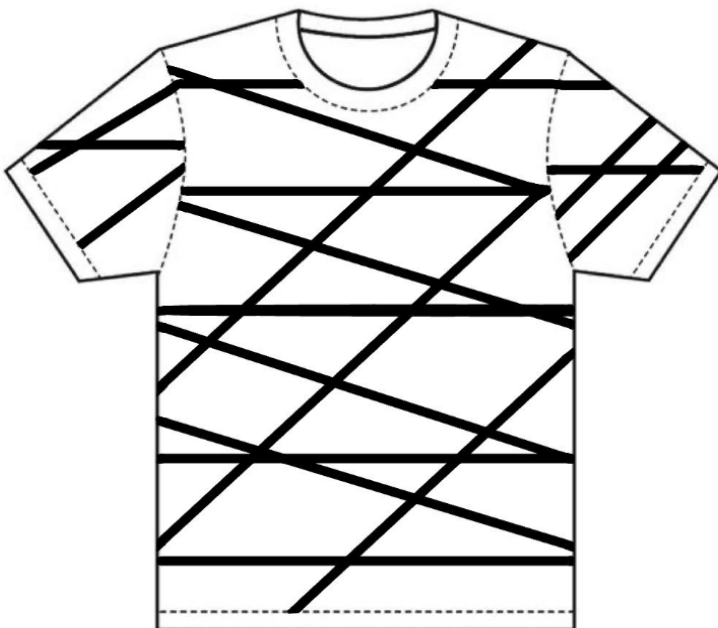
On the following page, you will find a description and a picture of a luxury t-shirt. Please read the description carefully.



This is a luxury product of good quality.



This is a luxury product of good quality.



How do you feel about the product described?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Whether agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agreee	Completely agree
Affectionate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loved	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Peaceful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Passionate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delighted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Captivated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connected	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bonded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attached	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the product described.

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Whether agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
It is a product that connects people with what is really important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product that gives back to its customers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is an honest product	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product with a history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product that survives times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product that cares about its consumers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a timeless product	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product that connects people with their real selves	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product that reflects important values people care about	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product true to a set of moral values	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product that adds meaning to people's lives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product with moral principles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product that will accomplish its value promise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product that survives trends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a product that will not betray you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



How long would you plan on using/owning the described product before you no longer want it?

0-6 months

6 months - 1 year

1 year - 1 year an 6 months

1 year and 6 months - 2 years

2 years - 2 years and 6 months

2 years and 6 months - 3 years

> 3 years -



The process to perceive the picture of the T-shirt was:

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

0 = extremely difficult; 100 = extremely easy

A horizontal slider bar with a blue circle at the right end, indicating a value of 100.

To what extent would you consider this T-shirt as:

	Not at all = 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely = 7
Environmental friendly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sustainable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Green product	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



To what extent do you think this T-shirt is:

	Not at all = 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely = 7
Trendy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Modern	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Urban	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Please indicate how you judge this t-shirt:

It is the same as others It is new and different

It is ordinary It is special

It is non-original It is original



Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement.

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
I would buy a product just because it has status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in new products with status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would pay more for a product if it had status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The status of a product is relevant for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Whether agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
It says something to people around me when I buy a high-priced brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I buy some products because I want to show others that I am wealthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be a member in a businessmen's posh club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Given a chance, I would hang a Hussain painting in drawing my room	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would buy an interesting and uncommon version of a product otherwise available with a plain design, to show others that I have an original taste.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others wish they could match my eyes for beauty and taste	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

By choosing a product having an exotic look and design, I show my friends that I am different

I choose products or brands to create my own style that everybody admires

I always buy top-of-the-line products

I often try to find a more interesting version of the run-of-the-mill products, because I want to show others that I enjoy being original

I show to others that I am sophisticated

I feel by having a piece of a rare antique I can get respect from others



What is your age?

How would you identify your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

Occupation?

Student

Employee

Freelancer

Entrepreneur

Unemployed

What is your nationality?



What is your Prolific ID?

Please note that this response should auto-fill with the correct ID'



Appendix 2 - Pre-test

T-Test

Group Statistics

CONDIT		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The process to perceive the picture of the T-shirt was: 0 = extremely difficult; 100 = extremely easy	High Level of Contrast	32	64.9375	31.24093	5.52267
	Low Level of contrast	35	82.8857	26.79088	4.52849

Independent Sample Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
		F	Sig.	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
The process to perceive the picture of the T-shirt was: 0 = extremely difficult; 100 = extremely easy	Equal variances assumed	4.467	.038	-2.531	65	.007	.014	-17.94821	7.09258	-32.11307	-3.78335
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.513	61.395	.007	.015	-17.94821	7.14192	-32.22751	-3.66892

Independent Sample Effect Size

		95% Confidence Interval			
		Standardizer ^a	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
The process to perceive the picture of the T-shirt was: 0 = extremely difficult; 100 = extremely easy	Cohen's d	28.99852	-.619	-1.108	-.126
	Hedges' correction	29.33857	-.612	-1.095	-.124
	Glass's delta	26.79088	-.670	-1.179	-.161

Appendix 3 - The Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Length of Use (Low Level of Contrast)	111	1	7	4.41	2.282
Length of Use (High Level of Contrast)	121	1	7	3.64	2.442

Coefficients^a

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1 (Constant)	3.645	.215		16.938	<.001
Level of Contrast (High vs. Low)	.761	.311	.159	2.446	.015

a. Dependent Variable: Length of Use

Descriptive Statistics

How would you identify your gender?	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	104	20	64	30.58	10.403
Female	128	19	70	32.08	11.439

PROCESS SPSS (Model 4)

Run MATRIX procedure:

*****PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2*****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022) . www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 4

Y : Length of Use

X : Level of Contrast (High Level of Contrast vs. Low Level of Contrast)

M : Authenticity

Sample

Size : 232

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

AUTHENTICITY

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.2537	.0644	1.3063	15.8285	1.0000	230.0000	.0001

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.1669	.1039	30.4800	.0000	2.9622	3.3717
CONTRAST	.5979	.1502	3.9785	.0001	.3017	.8936

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

LENGTH OF USE

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.2688	.0723	5.3557	8.9184	2.0000	229.0000	.0002

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.2057	.4723	4.6704	.0000	1.2752	3.1363
CONTRAST	.4892	.3144	1.5559	.1211	-.1303	1.1088
AUTHENTICITY	.4543	.1335	3.4030	.0008	.1913	.7174

***** DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT OF X ON Y *****

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.4892	.3144	1.5559	.1211	-.1303	1.1088

Indirect effect (s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
AUTHENTICITY	.2715	.1103	.0873	.5085

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:

5000

----- END MATRIX -----