

## Degree Program in BI-LUISS Joint Msc in Marketing

Course of Brand Management/Topics in Digital Marketing

# How to Develop more Sustainable Luxury Brands: The Role of Aesthetics

Prof. Cesare Amatulli

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SUPERVISOR

Prof. Matteo De Angelis

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CO-SUPERVISOR

Hedda Grindheim (772441)

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CANDIDATE

## **Abstract**

The evolving trends and high consumption levels encouraged by the fashion industry describe an industry thriving on constant change. In the literature, sustainable luxury has been recognized for its timelessness and durability. This study aims to examine the role of aesthetics in sustainable luxury. This study will investigate if a higher level of product symmetry, as a component of aesthetics, impacts consumers' planned length of use. In addition, this study proposes that perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between aesthetics and planned length of use. Results showed that higher (vs. lower) levels of product symmetry lead to a longer planned length of use by consumers, and that perceived authenticity significantly mediates this relationship. Finally, this research provides valuable insights for managers to implement actionable strategies that contribute to sustainability goals and a circular economy.

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

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## Introduction

In today's fashion landscape, the fashion industry is characterized by its rapid pace and ever-evolving trends. Instead of keeping to the traditional seasons of fashion trends such as fall and winter, brands in the mass market have challenged the seasons and operate with more than 26 collections each year (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). Consequently, there have been dramatic changes in how consumers engage in fashion consumption as consumers see clothing items as disposable items. Moreover, numbers from 2017 indicate that some clothing items will be considered discarded after wearing them only seven to ten times (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2017). These statistics represent a fashion industry thriving on constant change, promoting high consumption levels and a throwaway society. The urge to buy the most trending fashion items leaves environmental and sustainability concerns the least priority (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013). Despite this, consumer interest in sustainable options is rising, prompting companies to rethink their sustainability efforts (McKinsey & Company, 2023). A report from 2021 on the European Green Deal highlights the push towards a circular economy, emphasizing the importance of recycling, reusing, and repairing to extend the lifecycle of a product and create durable products (European Environment Agency, 2021).

The role of luxury consumption in achieving sustainability goals has received contradicting views during the last decades. While luxury consumption is often associated with status consumption and materialism, luxury demonstrates sustainability by emphasizing high-quality products and durability (Kapferer, 2010; De Angelis et al., 2020). Several luxury brands, such as Stella McCartney and Bottega Veneta, have set sustainability standards, and thereby becoming leaders in promoting sustainable luxury (Armitage et al., 2017). A report from Deloitte acknowledges that luxury brands are actively implementing strategies to participate in achieving a circular economy (Deloitte, 2023).

In a business context, aesthetics has been recognized as a competitive advantage that allows companies to differentiate themselves and shape positive customer impressions of a brand (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). Previous research has investigated consumers' attitudes toward sustainable luxury, while few researchers have considered aesthetics as a component of the relationship between luxury and sustainability. Researchers have found that the aesthetic design of a product can impact the perceptions of the functional performance of non-luxury goods (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005; Bloch, 1995; Hoegg & Alba, 2011). In this regard, Sun et al. (2021) found that while consumers believe more expensive products last longer, this belief does not significantly influence their purchasing decisions when choosing between luxury and cheaper options. In the luxury industry, aesthetics has been investigated concerning its power to change what is considered trendy, beautiful, and unique (Cesareo et al., 2023; Zanette et al., 2022). Moreover, research shows that product design should be considered when a luxury brand creates a strategy for introducing new green products (De Angelis et al., 2017). Despite these findings, no studies have investigated these concepts together, related to a component of aesthetics. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of aesthetics in the relationship between luxury and sustainability, which will be limited to the luxury fashion industry. Building on findings from previous studies, this study suggests that aesthetics influence consumers' planned length of use of a

luxury fashion product. While there are several components of the aesthetics dimension, this study will use the component of symmetry. Notably, high levels of product symmetry will refer to symmetry, while low levels of product symmetry will refer to asymmetry. Moreover, this research aims to answer the following research question:

*How does the level of product symmetry in luxury products influence consumers' perceptions of their planned length of use, and to what extent is this relationship mediated by perceived authenticity?*

In addition to using perceived authenticity as a mediator, emotional attachment will be a potential mediator, while status consumption and conspicuous consumption will be potential moderators. The findings of this study showed that higher levels of product symmetry lead to a longer planned length of use by consumers, implying that incorporating symmetry in the design and marketing of luxury products can promote sustainable consumption.

The structure of this research is organized in four sections. The first chapter reviews the current literature, focusing on explaining the concepts of luxury, sustainable luxury, and aesthetics. In addition, the hypothesis and conceptual framework are introduced in the first chapter. The second chapter outlines the methodology section which carefully explains the method and experiment, and the third chapter presents the results. Finally, the last chapter discusses theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and future research.

## **1.0 Literature Review**

### **1.1 The Luxury Market**

The luxury industry is a global phenomenon that has been affected by crises and changes in society during its history. In 2021, during the pandemic, Bain & Company expected the industry to be “drastically transformed” by 2030 (Bain & Company, 2021, p. 3). In Bain & Company’s report from 2024, the company unveiled that the luxury market reached a value of €1,5 trillion in 2023, marking consistent growth from the preceding years. Indeed, this number is the highest that has been measured. The luxury market can be separated into nine segments: personal luxury goods, fine art, luxury hospitality, gourmet food and fine dining, fine wines and spirits, high-end furniture and housewares, luxury cars, luxury cruises, private jets, and yachts (Bain & Company, 2024). Among these, the personal luxury goods segment stands out with €362 billion in 2023, indicating a 4% growth from 2022. At a global level, Europe became the leading region in sales for personal luxury goods, surpassing the United States, which has shifted to second place, followed by China. The personal luxury segment includes product categories such as apparel, beauty, and accessories, implying that fashion is a part of this segment (Bain & Company, 2024). The company LVMH Moët Hennessy-Louis Vuitton SE achieved a market value surpassing US\$500 billion, marking a milestone as the first European company to reach such a significant share of the market (Deloitte, 2023). Despite the promising numbers, the luxury industry is undergoing several changes to keep up with global trends and expectations. In recent years, the

luxury industry has been one of the most innovative in terms of experimenting with technology and digitalization. This includes the implementation of artificial technology through, for example, enhanced personalization, customer profiling, and product innovation (Deloitte, 2023).

Several definitions of the term luxury exist in the marketing literature. Luxury is usually described by its exclusivity and uniqueness (O’Cass & Frost, 2002; Kapferer, 2001). The founder of the Armani group, Giorgio Armani, stated that “luxury is about the absence of vulgarity” (Brun & Castelli, 2013, p. 828). Furthermore, Hagtvedt and Patrick (2009) characterize luxury by stating that “luxury brands offer premium products, provide pleasure as a central benefit, and connect with consumers emotionally” (p. 609). Phau and Prendergast (2000) conceptualize that luxury brands compete in the market based on their capability to (1) evoke exclusivity, (2) a recognized brand identity, (3) increase brand awareness and quality, and (4) maintain sales levels and customer loyalty. Moreover, Turunen (2017) claims that exclusive traits may serve to separate brands, but they do not constitute the feeling of luxury. The reasoning for this is that not all costly, premium quality goods sold exclusively are observed as luxury.

Kapferer (1998) categorized luxury brands into four groups adopting a consumer-based perspective. The first group shares a high score in the following attributes: beauty of object, excellency of products, magic, and uniqueness. Such brands are recognized to be Hermes and Cartier. Further, the second group values creativity and product sensuality, followed by beauty and magic. Moreover, this group does not emphasize product excellence and uniqueness as much as the previous group. Examples of brands in this category are Gucci and Hugo Boss. The third group emphasizes the beauty of the product and the magic observed in the brand. Brands in this category shall be classic and timeless brands that will never be outdated, such as Louis Vuitton and Porsche. Lastly, the fourth group values exclusivity as the most influential attribute. Brands in this category should be recognized as having a limited customer base, where customers can signal their wealth to others. Two examples are Mercedes and Chivas (Kapferer, 1998).

Along with excellent performance and a tradition of craftsmanship, luxury products are often identified by a powerful brand name and logo (Quelch, 1987). Vickers and Renand (2003) have described luxury goods as distinct from non-luxury items due to their unique combination of three critical aspects of instrumental performance: functionalism, experientialism, and symbolic interactionism. They describe a functional product as one that meets external consumption needs. Next, the experimental dimension represents the ability to meet internal requirements for variety and stimulation, stressing the importance of sensory pleasure. Further, symbolic interaction refers to the desire for objects that satisfy internally generated needs, such as group membership, role position, self-enhancement, and ego-identification (Vickers & Renand, 2003).

When comparing luxury items with mass-market products, luxury goods stand out due to their rarity, superior craftsmanship, slower pace of production, and reliance on high-quality raw materials and traditional handmade techniques (Kapferer, 2010). Nevertheless, several brands in the luxury industry have experienced significant transformations in their production and supply chain management. Thus, not all companies in the luxury market adhere to the traditional principles of luxury strategy anymore (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

Burberry is an example of a luxury brand that decided to outsource its production, which later led them to reshore the production back to the UK for competitive advantage. This reshoring effort aimed to reinforce the authenticity and country of origin of their products in response to increasing consumer demand for British-made fashion (Robinson et al., 2016).

## **1.2 Luxury Marketing**

In a marketing context, what sets luxury brands apart from traditional brands is their emphasis on uniqueness and cultivating a distinct identity. While traditional brands invest significantly in positioning themselves and demonstrating their superiority over competitors to consumers, luxury brands prioritize establishing a unique brand identity over comparative positioning (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The perception of a luxury item can vary greatly over time, affected by the context and the consumers engaging with it. This forms a complex paradox at the heart of luxury branding, where the same high-end product may hold different meanings for the same person or among different individuals at various points in time (Berthon et al., 2009).

Bernard Dubois argues that the paradox of luxury-goods marketing consists of six key elements; craftsmanship, low promotional activity, limited distribution, high price, high cost and an advertising strategy with no possibility of being copied (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012). Traditional marketing tools such as the internet, mass distribution, and call centers have traditionally not been used by luxury brands for several reasons. These tools are used to provide easy access to the goods (Kapferer & Bastien, 2017). A crucial aspect of luxury is that it should not be available to all consumers; thus, consumers must overcome some barriers. Such barriers include financial barriers, cultural understanding, logistical challenges, and temporal constraints. The customer needs to afford the product (financial), understand how to use the product (cultural understanding), locate a store to purchase the product (logistical challenges), and be patient and wait for the product (temporal constraints). Therefore, the process of purchasing a luxury product is longer and this is a critical aspect of the luxury related to the brand/product (Kapferer & Bastien, 2017).

Atwal and Williams (2009) highlighted the impact of luxury retail aesthetics, noting the enjoyable and hedonically rich experiences that diverge from everyday moments. Moreover, luxury brands appeal to the hedonic desires of individuals, offering sensory, emotional, and psychological satisfaction. As a result, luxury possesses a significant proportion of intangible value relative to its price (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009; Kapferer, 1997; Nueno & Quelch, 1998; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). Okonkwo (2009) emphasizes that the luxury experience is crafted through all human senses- including visuals, touch, smell, and feel- each playing a critical role in defining the essence of luxury. Moreover, direct interaction with sellers and the tangible experience of visualizing luxury goods are essential in luxury sales (Okonkwo, 2009).

Following the traditional core components of luxury marketing, a notable shift can be observed in how luxury goods are marketed to consumers. The introduction of masstige luxury goods, which combine mass-market appeal with prestige, signifies a change from traditional marketing practices (Danziger, 2005). In the early 2000s, Silverstein and Fiske (2003) introduced a new category within luxury, emphasizing that

consumers regard the brand's image as more significant than the actual product. Moreover, they refer to new luxury or accessible luxury as goods that may not be scarce or produced in limited quantities. These products are considered luxury products due to their additional services, design, or the distinct aura associated with the brand (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). According to Truong et al. (2009), a degree of brand prestige can still be upheld, even when adopting a strategy aimed at mass targeting.

Furthermore, the rise of new luxury has made it more complicated to put luxury into one category as there now exist many categories of luxury. This shift highlights an essential challenge for luxury brands: finding the right balance between making their products more accessible while maintaining the exclusivity that sets them apart. Marketing managers aim to maximize the sales of their luxury brands to attain commercial success, however this can also spell the brand's downfall in the future. Consequently, a product that becomes too widely available can lose its luxury status (Chandon et al., 2016). Some luxury brands communicate their limited distribution to signal exclusivity by informing customers how many products will be sold in the future. An example of this from a few years back is the announcement by Stefano Domenicali (CEO of Lamborghini), referred to in De Angelis et al. (2020), who stated that the brand would have a limit on their annual sales. He committed to keeping the production volume under 8000 vehicles each year starting in 2020 (De Angelis et al., 2020).

Luxury brands found it difficult to adapt to the increased attention to the internet and e-commerce. A significant challenge for luxury brands is to cultivate and retain the sense of exclusivity and desire in the large field of brands that are present on the internet. Being present on the internet creates a possibility for overexposure which can hurt the brand image (Okonkwo, 2009). In an interview from 2017, referred to in Pentina et al. (2018), the president of L'Oréal Luxe, Nicolas Hieronimus acknowledged that the luxury sector is undergoing huge changes. Further, he explained that there is a need to balance the enduring nature of luxury goods, characterized by their heritage and craftsmanship, with the evolving landscape of new luxury, which leans heavily on digitalization and immediacy, thus reshaping traditional norms (Pentina et al., 2018).

Overall, the global luxury market has undergone a transformative shift due to technology, digital revolution, and the influence of generations, necessitating a change in the marketing strategies of luxury brands. Despite the technological shift initially perceived as a threat to the luxury industry, luxury brands have strategically embraced social media. Integrating social media as a tool has allowed luxury brands to engage with customers in a new way while cultivating a desire to purchase, ensuring their long-term success (Kim & Ko, 2010). Moreover, luxury brands are actively leveraging social media platforms to captivate Millennials and Generation Z, aiming to connect with younger audiences without compromising their brand's prestige. The ability of these brands to effectively communicate and market their products to the new generations who use and understand social media will be crucial for their future success (Deloitte, 2019).



### 1.3 Luxury Consumption

Several studies have been done to investigate the motivations for luxury consumption. Previous research has studied consumers' motivations for buying luxury brands for expressive and personal purposes (Han et al., 2010; Tsai, 2005). Kapferer and Bastien (2009) suggest that motivations behind luxury purchases can diverge into two categories: luxury for the self and luxury for others. Luxury for the self refers to the fact that there should be a strong hedonic and personal meaning behind the luxury product. Luxury for others focuses on the signal it sends to others, which includes demonstrating success to others. Amatulli and Guido (2012) provide a dichotomy where they categorize luxury consumption based on externalized and internalized consumption. The externalized luxury refers to how consumers purchase luxury goods based on ostentation, materialism, and superfluousness. More specifically, this includes how luxury consumers display their wealth (ostentation), find it essential to own many material objects (materialism), and symbolize that they buy luxury in terms of wanting something rather than needing it (superfluousness) (Amatulli & Guido, 2012).

On the other hand, internalized luxury refers to lifestyle, hedonism/emotions, and culture. Such reasoning can be based on buying luxury products because they align with personal lifestyle (lifestyle), providing pleasure (emotions/hedonism), and individual culture impacting the appreciation for luxury (culture) (Amatulli & Guido, 2012). Furthermore, Wiedmann et al. (2007, 2009) categorize four dimensions of consumers' perceptions of luxury value: financial, functional, individual, and social. Financial relates to the direct monetary aspects, which also involves resale price and investment evaluation. Next, functional value emphasizes the product's performance in terms of uniqueness and durability. Further, individual value highlights luxury consumption in the context of personal matters, such as materialism and self-identity. Lastly, the social aspect of luxury value pertains to the perceived benefits individuals gain from products or services that are esteemed within their social circle (Wiedmann et al., 2007, 2009).

The hedonic aspect of luxury consumption has been widely discussed in consumer behavior (Atwal & Williams, 2009; Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009). The theory of hedonic consumption relates to emotional, fantasy, and multisensory aspects of a consumption process. Moreover, it is a process mainly driven by emotions and feelings where consumers pay attention to the hedonic meaning instead of a utilitarian meaning in the purchasing process (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Tsai (2005) found that consumers buy luxury products for social confirmation. However, this doesn't reflect the whole process of luxury consumption. Moreover, he argued that the personal motivations such as self-gift giving and congruity with the internal self are crucial components. Indeed, he highlights that both social and personal motives should be evaluated when investigating motivations for luxury consumption (Tsai, 2005).

Researchers have distinguished types of consumers based on their expertise and knowledge to understand consumers' motivations for luxury consumption. When considering a luxury brand's traditional offerings, a consumer is likely to prefer a luxury product that reflects their personal meaning and benefits of luxury consumption. Moreover, *luxury excursionist* is a term that describes consumers with little experience in the luxury field who often prefer luxury products with more visible brand identity, such as brand logos

(Dubois et al., 2021). Purchases made by this type of consumer only happen in specific circumstances, which are considered a contrast from their normal lifestyle (Dubois & Laurent, 1996). On the other hand, consumers with more expertise within luxury products tend to choose products with minimal branding (Han et al., 2010; Berger & Ward, 2010). Greenberg et al. (2020) share similar findings, showing a preference for no logo on luxury products for those with high status, while lower-status consumers tend to choose brands with a more visible logo.

### **1.3.1 The Role of Conspicuous Consumption in Luxury**

Several studies have confirmed that individuals who buy products from luxury brands often do so primarily to conspicuously display their wealth as a means to signify or attain higher social status (Corneo & Jeanne, 1997; Mason, 1984). Eastman et al. (1999) define the term 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 for both the individual and surrounding significant others” (p.42). One of the most popular theories about status consumption, the theory of conspicuous consumption, states that people visibly consume luxury products to indicate their wealth as a sign of status and power. Veblen (1899) introduced the theory of conspicuous consumption which posits that wealthy consumers aim to differentiate themselves by visibly displaying their wealth through the purchase of luxury goods that are not affordable by the masses (Han et al., 2010). Veblen has presented two reasons for engaging in conspicuous consumption, referred to as invidious comparison and pecuniary emulation. The invidious comparison involves an individual from a higher social class engaging in conspicuous consumption to set themselves apart from those in a lower social class. Conversely, pecuniary emulation describes the behavior of someone from a lower social class who indulges in conspicuous consumption to be perceived as a member of a higher social class (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996). Moreover, Vickers and Renand (2003) found that the symbols conveyed by luxury products play a significant role in influencing consumer choice between different products.

The term conspicuous consumption has later become a synonym for luxury. However, with time, new perspectives have emerged. Inconspicuous consumption describes the preference to purchase goods or services that are not easily recognizable by others but still signal a certain level of wealth or social status to those who are aware (Eckhardt et al., 2015). Moreover, inconspicuous brands aim to send brand signals that are not easily observable to most consumers (Berger & Ward, 2010). As conspicuous consumption has become a complex concept, studies have demonstrated what this means in luxury consumption. A study found that those who belong to a higher class occasionally use items associated with low-status groups as a signal to differentiate themselves from middle-status people (Bellezza & Berger, 2020). This reflects how the theory of conspicuous consumption has developed as the luxury industry and consumption patterns have changed during the decades.

## 1.4 The Role of Sustainability in Marketing

Sustainability has become a concern that is widely discussed in the literature. Exploring sustainability's role in marketing is essential to explain shifting consumer preferences and behaviors. According to the report of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2002), sustainable consumption involves the use of products and services to satisfy demands while maintaining quality of life and without compromising the needs of future generations. At a broader level, Elkington (1998, 2004) introduced the concept of the triple bottom line, which encompasses economic, environmental, and social objectives within organizations (Carter & Rogers, 2008). This framework highlights initiatives companies can undertake to simultaneously generate positive outcomes for the environment, society, and their long-term economic prospects (Carter & Rogers, 2008).

During the decades, marketing objectives have changed as society has changed. In recent years, the focus has shifted towards the importance of businesses to adopt sustainable practices. This shift aims not only to enhance societal well-being but also to secure long-term benefits for companies (Kelleci & Yıldız, 2021). In the 1970s, the well-known Philip Kotler introduced a transformative idea to the marketing world with his societal marketing concept. This innovative approach proposed a shift in focus from merely satisfying consumer needs in the short term to prioritizing long-term consumer welfare. Kotler argued that by aligning marketing strategies with social responsibilities, producers could safeguard their long-term interests, which could be jeopardized if they neglected their broader societal obligations (Kotler, 1971).

Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) introduced the term sustainable marketing and argued that the modern marketing concept needed to take on more responsibility in terms of sustainability concerns. They addressed sustainable marketing as a term that involves marketing efforts that prove also to be ecologically sustainable, not only competitively sustainable. Moreover, they stress the importance of developing, generating and delivering solutions that are sustainable (Seth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Furthermore, Donald Fuller described sustainable marketing as an approach that meets three key objectives: satisfying customer needs, achieving organizational goals, and managing processes in a manner that aligns with ecosystem compatibility (Fuller, 1999). Definitions of the term have also been introduced more recently in the literature. According to Lunde (2018), sustainable marketing involves “the strategic creation, communication, delivery, and exchange of offerings that produce value through consumption behaviors, business practices, and the marketplace, while lowering harm to the environment and ethically and equitably increasing the quality of life (QOL) and well-being of consumers and global stakeholders, presently and for future generations” (p. 94). Pencarelli et al. (2019) investigated the impact of sustainable marketing on purchasing among Millennials and Generation Z in luxury consumption. While they found that sustainable marketing activities didn't directly impact consumer attitudes toward slow fashion, they noted a shift in consumer habits related to sustainability. The findings indicated that sustainable marketing could have a positive effect on attracting customers in this segment.

In the era of sustainability, green marketing has emerged in the literature as a modern concept. It can be described as an exchange process, including choices and decisions, with the condition that exchange

considers and reduces environmental harm. An important element in this approach is to focus on transformative change that provides value for individuals, society, and the natural environment (Polonsky, 2011). Peattie (1995) characterized green marketing as a holistic management approach dedicated to recognizing, anticipating, and fulfilling the needs of customers and society sustainably and profitably (Peattie, 2001). Moreover, Peattie (2001) recognized that ever since the focus on environmental and sustainable marketing started to become present in society in the 1970s, companies and governments have tried to set standards. Nonetheless, it has proven to be difficult to achieve a more sustainable field of marketing (Peattie, 2001). One of the challenges involves the basic principles of marketing, such as a focus on repeat purchasing and always trying to cover the customer's wants rather than needs. Therefore, Peattie (2001) demonstrated that implementing more radical changes is necessary to challenge lifestyle, production, marketing, and consumption habits. Along with a green marketing strategy, issues such as consumer confusion and cynicism contribute to a lack of green credibility. This leads to consumers finding it difficult to distinguish between companies that are genuinely committed to sustainability and those that are merely crafting a green brand image for favorable reasons (Carlson et al., 1993; Davis, 1993).

Turunen and Halme (2021) demonstrated that one of the main challenges for companies related to sustainability messages is to make them consumer-oriented and actionable. Moreover, they created an instrument for companies to use in the textile industry called Shades of Green to navigate sustainability efforts and to make it easier for consumers to understand a company's level of sustainability efforts. The main focus of the instrument is to communicate and be transparent regarding sustainability efforts. For instance, in the textile industry, the highest level of sustainability is reached by a garment's durability, both stylistic and physically. This means that design choices, materials, and support services help extend a product's life (Turunen & Halme, 2021).

## **1.5 Sustainable Luxury**

Several well-known traditional luxury brands have incorporated sustainability efforts into their business, such as Stella McCartney, Gucci, and Bottega Veneta. Both Bottega Veneta and Stella McCartney have set standards in the industry emphasizing and using recycled plastic and natural materials in their production (Armitage et al., 2017). Indeed, luxury companies are progressing in forming partnerships and alliances to set the bar higher for the industry as a whole. For instance, The Sustainable Luxury Working Group, including brands such as Chloé, Mulberry Group, and Tiffany & Co, strives to create a global platform where luxury businesses and other stakeholders will be able to pinpoint, understand, and assess solutions for new sustainability problems that arise in their value chain (Amatulli et al., 2017).

From a scientific standpoint, the concept of sustainable luxury has received several definitions. Some scholars argue that sustainable luxury is characterized by the enhanced quality of products, thereby being more durable (Sun et al., 2021; Kapferer, 2010). Athwal et al. (2019) proposed that sustainable luxury encompasses environmentally and/or ethically conscious practices in design, production, and consumption aimed at

addressing various issues prevalent within the luxury industry. These issues include animal cruelty, environmental harm, and human exploitation (Athwal et al., 2019). De Angelis et al. (2017) investigated different strategies to apply when introducing new green products in the luxury segment. Moreover, they found that the strategy depends on the type of consumer in terms of their brand knowledge and the type of product (i.e., if it was considered a durable product or a short-lived product). More specifically, the findings revealed that it was favorable to initiate a new green product, which is considered similar to past products. Indeed, this was specifically essential for the consumers who were considered to have a higher knowledge of the brand and related to more durable products (De Angelis et al., 2017).

Kunz et al. (2020) found that brands tend to communicate sustainability efforts to increase the brand value, not necessarily to convey any information regarding the actual impact of these activities. On the other hand, Achabou and Dekhili (2013) found that consumers' least important criterion in the decision-making process for luxury products was the environmental commitment of the brand. Moreover, brand reputation, price, and quality were perceived to be the most important factors. A relevant theory within sustainable luxury is the fallacy of clean luxuries, which suggests that consumers don't succeed in recognizing the ethical or sustainable aspects of luxury purchases (Davies et al., 2012). Furthermore, there is a lack of belief in the capability of luxuries to make a difference in regard to sustainability and ethical concerns, thereby consumers have a perception that luxury consumption has little or no impact (positive or negative) (Davies et al., 2012).

Kapferer (2010) implied that durability represents the intersection of sustainability and luxury. Further, he argued that the core of sustainability is conservation and using raw materials to produce sustainable products with high-quality standards (Kapferer, 2010). Durability is a concept that has emerged during the last decades, providing the idea of sustainable design (Fletcher, 2012). The durability of a product will be determined by its quality and performance. Moreover, many consumers also seek a level of visual durability, meaning that the product should not appear to be outdated before it is physically worn out (Kotler, 1971). Sun et al. (2021) emphasize that a product is considered durable if it provides both functional and stylistic benefits. This includes a product maintaining its quality after several washes (functional) and demonstrating a timeless clothing item that will not quickly go out of style (stylistic). Furthermore, Chapman (2012) introduced the term emotional durable design (EDD), which emphasizes that by creating an experimental and emotional relationship between a person and a product, consumers might want to keep a product longer. The concept includes psychological mechanisms, such as emotions, which in turn should make consumers more attached in their use of products. The challenge is to design something that customers will want to keep, overcoming their desire for novelty (Chapman, 2012). Fletcher (2012) discovered that consumers who maintain long-term relationships with clothing items do so due to an ideology of usage rather than the relationship between the product and owner. Indeed, Fletcher (2012) emphasized that durability is perceived as a user-related concept. However, the researcher also noted that the materials and product qualities play a significant role in facilitating this relationship.

Studies that have investigated the consumption of luxury products indicate that, due to their higher cost and brand value, luxury items are typically retained for longer periods. When these products are replaced, they are often sold to other consumers instead of being thrown away (Sun et al., 2021). Moreover, luxury brands have been described as contributors to the circular economy. For instance, the luxury brand Viktor and Rolf used fabrics from their earlier collections when creating new clothing items for their 2016 Haute Couture collection (Moorhouse & Moorhouse, 2017). In the field of sustainable luxury, consumers hold contrasting views on the compatibility of luxury with sustainability. Recent studies have found that consumers possessing luxury items are perceived as less genuine and are more motivated by a desire to influence others' perceptions compared to those who don't own such goods (Cannon & Rucker, 2018; Ferraro et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2018; Goor et al. 2020). Sun et al. (2021) found that luxury shoppers, despite buying fewer products, are viewed as more wasteful and materialistic than those who spend the same amount on cheaper goods over the same period. This insight reveals the possibility of negative perceptions characterized by judgmental attitudes towards consumers of luxury products.

Previous studies have linked materialism with luxury consumption. In the literature, materialism is associated with the pursuit of unique products and status consumption (Lynn & Harris, 1997; Eastman et al., 1997). Talukdar and Yu (2020) have provided significant insights into the evolving understanding of materialism's relationship with sustainable consumer behaviors, challenging traditional views that often illustrate materialism as inherently at odds with environmental consciousness. These insights suggest that promoting the superior quality and functional benefits of sustainable luxury items can be a compelling way to attract materialistic consumers. Luxury brands like Tiffany & Co. and Gucci, which emphasize the high quality of their ethically sourced materials, serve as successful examples of how sustainability can be leveraged as a selling point to materialistic consumers (Talukdar and Yu, 2020). On the contrary, the phenomenon of minimalism has appeared as a trend in consumer culture where consumers pay attention to simple aesthetics, reduce their consumption, and strive to declutter (Wilson & Bellezza, 2022). Moreover, minimalists tend to favor purchasing fewer, but higher-quality goods over a greater quantity of lower-quality alternatives. Several luxury brands, such as Miju and Acne Studios promote the minimalist lifestyle and aesthetics, providing a limited selection of items while inspiring consumers to buy less (Wilson & Bellezza, 2022).

### **1.5.1 Aesthetics and Sustainable Luxury**

In today's crowded marketplace, consumers take quality and performance for granted in the products they buy. As a result, marketers are increasingly using aesthetics as a tool to differentiate their offerings and stand out (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). In previous consumer research, researchers have found that consumers substantially always prefer products that have high aesthetics (Page & Herr, 2002; Reimann et al., 2010; Veryzer & Hutchinson, 1998).

The terms aesthetics and product design are often used when describing the appearance of a product. However, the two terms need to be distinguished. Product design has been described based of three

dimensions; aesthetics, functionality, and symbolism (Homburg et al., 2015). Moreover, the aesthetics of a product relates to the possibility to evoke positive responses based on the sensory experience and design instead of the functional attributes or performance (Bloch, 1995). Furthermore, visual product aesthetics has been identified as the characteristics that shape the appearance of a product, which include proportion, shape, size, color, and materials (Bloch et al., 2003). Indeed, the aesthetics of certain products are so well-known that a consumer immediately would be able to recognize feelings and associations towards them. An example in the luxury industry is the Chanel No. 5 perfume, which has a very specific shape which in turn serves as an identity element (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997).

Historically, beauty has been linked to aesthetics, describing a sense of order, while contemporary interpretations associate beauty with the perception and delight it evokes in observers (Feagin & Maynard, 1997). A hedonic experience, which encompasses enjoyment or pleasure, represents a form of aesthetic reaction that engages the multisensory, imaginative, and emotional dimensions of experience (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008). Moreover, pleasure can be seen as an element of an aesthetic experience which indicates that hedonism and aesthetics are closely related but not identical. Furthermore, some products are primarily designed for aesthetic appeal, intended to be beautiful and provide a sensory experience. Meanwhile, others serve utilitarian purposes, with aesthetic qualities incorporated into their design (Charters, 2006). In addition, visual aesthetics play a symbolic role that affects the perception and assessment of a product. According to Forty (1986), the impressions of elegance, durability, youthfulness, innovation, and user-friendliness can all originate from the decisions marketers make when crafting the visual aspects of new products (Bloch et al., 2003).

Perceptions of a product's form can provoke various emotional reactions from consumers. In certain ways, these perceptions may result in a moderately positive reaction, such as simple appreciation, or they might trigger more powerful aesthetic responses related to those experienced with works of art (Bloch, 1995). Fashion designers often carefully consider the choice of color to control the noise in a product. For instance, the use of warm colors, intensive brightness, and light values could shape a product that is perceived as loud (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). Moreover, the combination of black and white or gold and silver is often used in combination due to its feeling of luxury and look of prestige (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997).

Aesthetics is also considered an important element for many fashion-oriented consumers; however, taste in fashion and apparel is a complex concept. Researchers have found that visual product aesthetics are especially crucial for products that are often seen as extensions of oneself and where the sensory system significantly influences identity expression (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). Although luxury items often are linked with superior aesthetic qualities, products considered less attractive in the luxury sector can still demand a higher price if they are seen as more unique, valuable, and ahead of current fashion trends (Dubois et al., 2021). Cesareo et al. (2023) found that while beauty is generally preferred, distinct ugliness from luxury brands can be as appealing because it signifies luxury. The authors suggest that the signaling value of luxury can

exceed the preference for beauty. In contrast, consumers tend to select the more visually appealing option and avoid the unattractive one when the products are from non-luxury brands (Cesareo et al., 2023).

Another study found that when luxury brands promote something that looks unusual or ugly, it can change what people think is stylish (Zanette et al., 2022). The authors used shoes with bold designs as unique items, which were found to challenge what consumers usually consider good taste. As people started seeing them as different in a positive way, they became trendy. Indeed, people learn how to wear these items from others who are seen as having good style, which makes these ugly luxury items become fashionable. This shows how luxury brands can influence what's considered stylish or good taste (Zanette et al., 2022). Moreover, recent studies indicate that visually appealing objects stimulate consumers' desires to engage in cognitive efforts to understand and appreciate the visual aspects of those objects (Kumar et al., 2018; Pengnate & Sarathy, 2017). Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) found that there's a strong link between aesthetics and emotions, with consumers reporting feelings of pleasure, stress relief, and a positive mindset from aesthetic experiences. This connection underlines the argument that aesthetic and emotional experiences should be valued alongside rational thought processes (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008).

In the literature, symmetry has been considered an essential factor in evaluating an object's visual appeal (Creusen et al., 2010). Symmetry can be recognized by the balance it provides in an object, face, or picture. Moreover, the evaluation of symmetry is often used when evaluating attractiveness (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). Murdoch and Flurscheim (1983) demonstrated that while symmetry reflects an arrangement of order, asymmetry may evoke more interest (Creusen et al., 2010). In general, researchers have found that it is easier to perceive symmetrical patterns compared to asymmetrical ones as they hold less information, leading to a more favorable reaction due to this perceived ease of processing (Attneave, 1954; Garner, 1974; Reber et al., 2004). Another research investigated how art experts (artists and art historians) and non-experts evaluated abstract elements related to the symmetry and complexity of the objects (Leder et al., 2019). The researchers found that art experts preferred asymmetrical objects and perceived them to be the most beautiful. On the other hand, non-experts found the symmetrical stimuli to be the most aesthetically pleasing. These findings indicate that factors such as expertise, context, culture, and knowledge can affect the perceptions of aesthetics in objects (Leder et al., 2019). Moreover, symmetry has been recognized as a distinctive aesthetic feature that significantly contributes in conveying the concept of premiumness (Pombo & Velasco, 2021).

Several researchers have found that the aesthetic design of a product (in traditional non-luxury goods) can impact perceptions of its quality and functional performance. Specifically, the researchers imply that an excellent aesthetic design may act as a signal, leading consumers to believe that the product is also superior in functional performance, which in turn boosts consumer confidence when considering the product (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005; Bloch, 1995; Hoegg & Alba, 2011). According to Crilly et al. (2004), the visual appearance of products significantly influences consumer response by fulfilling unspoken needs and indicating product qualities. In the study, they found that attractiveness judgments encompass aesthetics, functionality, and what it symbolizes about the owner (Crilly et al., 2004).



Despite the fact that asymmetrical products have the possibility of evoking more interest, symmetry often leads to a more favorable reaction (Creusen et al., 2010; Attneave, 1954; Garner, 1974; Reber et al., 2004). Moreover, consumers might favor simplicity due to its easy and direct appeal to the senses, achieved through the aesthetic principles of harmony, unity, and symmetry (Creusen et al., 2010; Patrick & Hagtvedt, 2011; Reber et al., 2004). Additionally, researchers have found that aesthetics is an essential component consumers evaluate when engaging in luxury consumption as it reflects what is considered as good taste, unique or ugly (Zanette et al., 2022; Dubois et al., 2021; Cesareo et al., 2023). Building on previous research, we predict that consumers will prefer to keep high symmetry products for a longer period compared to low symmetry products. Therefore, the hypothesis as follows is developed:

***H1:** A higher (vs. lower) level of product symmetry leads to a longer planned length of use by consumers*

## **1.6 Emotional Attachment in Luxury**

The influence of emotional attachment on brand performance has been receiving growing interest in the academic research field of marketing. Research has revealed that emotional attachment can foster greater brand loyalty, higher willingness to pay for premium products, and increased word of mouth (Jiménez & Voss, 2014; Karjaluoto et al., 2016; Park et al., 2010). In the literature, an attachment has been described as a target-specific and emotional bond between an individual and a particular object (Thomson et al., 2005). Moreover, the intensity of emotional attachment to an object can be linked to one's investment in that specific object, specifically, the willingness to set aside urgent self-interest to nurture the relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997).

According to Park et al. (2010), attachment concerns more than just emotions, stating that “it is reflected by mental representations (rich cognitive schemata) that include brand-self cognitions, thoughts, and autobiographical brand memories” (p. 3). Emotional attachment is often linked to commitment in the literature, as consumers who are highly attached tend to be more loyal. The most intense version of commitment can be characterized as fundamentally emotional, encompassing feelings of affection, devotion, and adoration (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011). Schifferstein and Zwartkruis-Pelgrim (2008) describe consumer-product attachment as the emotional connection users have with a product. The authors found that enjoyment and memories positively contribute to a higher degree of attachment. Grisaffe & Nguyen (2011) propose that customers experience strong emotional attachment when the characteristics of the brand align with customer needs/wants in unique, satisfying, and value-producing ways. Park et al. (2006) defined brand attachment as the “strength of the cognitive and emotional bond connecting the brand with the self” (p. 9).

In the literature, there are found different reasonings for emotional attachment. According to Park et al. (2006), people tend to form attachments to offerings that meet their functional requirements, experiential needs, and emotional needs. This involves creating a sense of efficacy, which depends on the consistent and reliable performance of product attributes. In addition, strong brand connections develop through brand aesthetics and hedonic qualities that provide sensory satisfaction (Park et al., 2006). A brand experience

encompasses subjective sensations, emotions, and evaluations that arise as internal responses to stimuli associated with the brand, such as its design, packaging, visual identity, communications, and other environmental factors (Brakus et al., 2009). Further, Brakus et al. (2009) conceptualized a brand experience based upon four dimensions including, behavioral, affective, sensory, and intellectual experiences. While a single brand experience may not immediately establish an emotional attachment, repeated positive experiences over time can result in emotional bonds.

Studies have investigated the relationship between luxury brands and emotional attachment. Butcher et al. (2016) found that emotional value has a positive influence on purchase intention in luxury consumption, indicating that emotional benefits and needs can motivate the consumption of status products. Furthermore, Thomson et al. (2005) discovered that brands associated with significant emotional connection mostly show higher involvement and were often symbolically or hedonically related. On the contrary, those who showed low involvement were related to functionality. Previous studies have also investigated emotions in relation to design. Baudrillard (1981), referred to in Ho and Siu (2012), explored the impact of emotions on human behavior concerning information processing in consumerism. He argued that shifts in emotions influence consumers' unconscious desires and that to maintain a product's competitive advantage, particularly in terms of design outcomes, enhancing the appeal of consumer products was considered essential to meet these unconscious desires (Ho & Siu, 2012).

Furthermore, textiles and clothing are considered self-expressive products that evoke emotions related to consumption, particularly right after purchase (Niinimäki & Koskinen, 2011). According to Mugge et al. (2008), a product's utilitarian level is related to the fulfillment of a consumer's need, however this does not necessarily lead to emotional attachment. To create a deep attachment to a product, there needs to be a special meaning attached to the product or the usage of it (Mugge et al., 2005; Mugge et al., 2008). Moreover, aesthetic features in clothing items have shown to have an emotional effect on the person who wears it, which indicates that individuals become attached to clothing items by experiencing their aesthetic beauty. In addition, attachment can further develop through experiences associated with beauty in social settings and positive and multisensorial usage experiences (Niinimäki & Koskinen, 2011). The aesthetic elements of brands have also been shown to play a role in emotions. For instance, while colors, typefaces, shapes, and designs typically evoke sensory experiences, they can also trigger emotions or provoke intellectual responses (as with designs featuring complex patterns) (Brakus et al., 2009).

### **1.7 Authenticity in Luxury**

The term brand authenticity has grown in importance over the last 25 years and is now considered to be a fundamental asset in mainstream marketing (Frank, 1997; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Potter, 2010). Erving Goffman has researched the concept of authenticity from a sociological view, and his research characterizes authenticity as both emotional and self-reflective (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). This approach tackles both the individuals' subjective understanding of their true self and their emotional experience of being authentic or

inauthentic to that self (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). Authenticity is perceived when an action is understood to be undertaken not out of social duty or obligation but rather from a place of genuine concern and deliberate reflection upon the object of said action (Kim & Lee, 2020).

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). Moreover, brand authenticity can be explained through four dimensions: credibility, symbolism, continuity, and integrity (Morhart et al., 2015). In the literature, the dimensions of consistency and continuity are often referred to the most (Bruhn et al., 2012; Eggers et al., 2013; Morhart et al., 2015; Schallehn et al., 2014). Continuity in branding involves maintaining a timeless appeal and the capability to outlive trends (Bruhn et al., 2012; Morhart et al., 2015). Consistency refers to consistent communication and customer experiences that align with the brand's vision, values, and identity (Eggers et al., 2013; Schallehn et al., 2014). Furthermore, consumers shape their perception of brand authenticity based on their personal definitions of genuineness, sincerity, and truthfulness (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Molleda, 2010; Pace, 2015).

Research in the field has found that brand authenticity has a positive impact on loyalty, trust, brand equity, and customer experience (Portal et al., 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020; Goulding & Derbaix, 2019). Furthermore, consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity and their engagement in acts of self-authentication are influenced as much by emotional and aesthetic factors (such as pleasure and beauty) as they are by rational and functional considerations (such as practicality and usefulness) (Södergren, 2021). Additionally, consumer insight revealed that Millennial shoppers prefer brands that are perceived as real, genuine, and authentic, as authenticity has overtaken quality as a criterion in decision-making, just as quality is dominant over cost (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Cinelli and LeBoeuf (2020) revealed that consumers rely on their perception of brand authenticity to make judgments about the attributes of a brand's product. In comparison to less authentic brands, consumers expected products from an authentic brand to match their brand image and assumed they had desirable, unadvertised qualities, influencing expectations of product quality. Furthermore, Portal et al. (2019) found that those brands that are likely to succeed are those that communicate human-like characteristics and are viewed as authentic by being genuine to themselves and to the customers they cater to.

Few studies have investigated authenticity related to luxury brands. Bruhn et al. (2012) studied consumers' perceived authenticity for certain brands. In this study, Porsche was considered a strong, authentic brand based on its long tradition, genuine brand image, high quality, and nostalgic design. Other luxury brands that were perceived as authentic were Gucci, Boss, Lacoste, and Tommy Hilfiger (Bruhn et al. 2012). Gilmore and Pine (2007) discuss how heritage, which includes origin and history, is vital for businesses striving for authenticity. They highlight that being true to oneself and communicating this authenticity to consumers are crucial components of achieving authenticity (Gilmore and Pine, 2007). For instance, Burberry enhances its storytelling by using new technologies to communicate its heritage and brand story effectively. The company aims to motivate customers to be a part of their story by bringing together the brand, customers, and culture (Straker, & Wrigley, 2016).

Bruhn et al. (2012) specify that to achieve authenticity, brands should strive to build and maintain a consistent brand perception through the use of all internal and external communication channels to reinforce its reliability. This includes focusing on formal integration which can be achieved through a uniform brand appearance. Furthermore, this requires fixed brand elements to be consistent such as logo, brand name, slogan, typography, colors, font, layout, and images (Bruhn et al. 2012). Luffarelli et al. (2019) discovered a relationship between perceived authenticity and ease of processing. More specifically, they found that a more descriptive logo, compared to a less descriptive one, tends to evoke stronger perceptions of authenticity because it is easier to process. In addition, Wang et al. (2023) revealed that the simplicity of package design influences how authentic a brand is perceived. The authors found that consumers view brands with visually simple packaging as more authentic compared to those with complex designs.

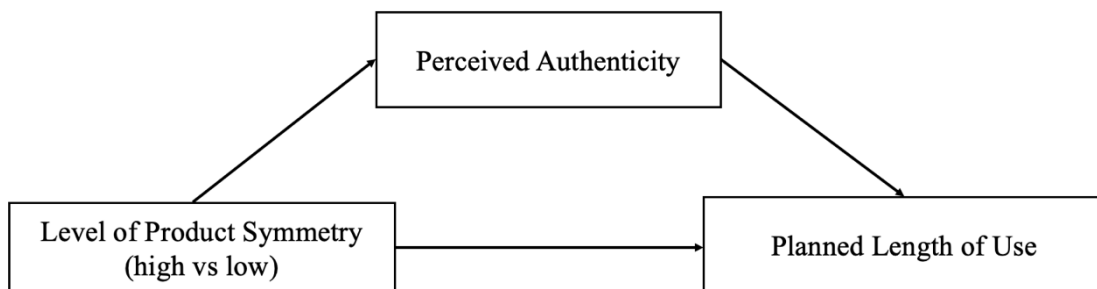
A shifting focus toward natural authenticity has been emerging across various industries, emphasizing a natural approach to design which include simple products, organic ingredients, and unpolished processes. In the fashion industry, this shift is evident through the appreciation of flaws on clothing items, which some consumers value more for their authenticity than for the quality of the material (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Recent research exploring the overlap between authenticity and sustainability have shown that dominant firms often face challenges in being perceived as authentic in their sustainability initiatives. This perception arises because consumers believe these efforts are primarily profit-driven (Wallach & Popovich, 2023). Indeed, consumers tend to be more skeptical of environmental claims made by large firms, especially in light of potential greenwashing practices (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020).

Furthermore, consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity and their engagement in acts of self-authentication are influenced as much by emotional and aesthetic factors (such as pleasure and beauty) as they are by rational and functional considerations (such as practicality and usefulness) (Södergren, 2021). Additionally, authenticity has also been recognized as the position of a product regarding its quality and degree of trust (Van den Bosch, 2005). Moreover, research indicates that consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity, influenced by factors such as design simplicity and consistency, directly impact their expectations regarding a product's longevity and overall value (Wang et al., 2023; Luffarelli et al., 2019). Consequently, the relationship between aesthetics (level of product symmetry in this study) and planned length of use may be mediated by perceived authenticity. Therefore, this hypothesis is developed:

***H2: A higher (vs. lower) level of product symmetry leads to a longer planned length of use by consumers and this relationship is mediated by high perceived authenticity.***

## 1.8 Conceptual Model

The independent variable in this conceptual model is level of product symmetry (dimension of aesthetics). In this research, respondents will receive a high symmetry or low symmetry manipulation. The dependent variable is the planned length of use of a product. Perceived authenticity is the mediator in this relationship. In addition, this study has included one potential mediator and two potential moderators. Emotional attachment is the potential mediator while status consumption and conspicuous consumption are treated as potential moderators.



*Figure 1: Conceptual Model*

## 2.0 Methodology

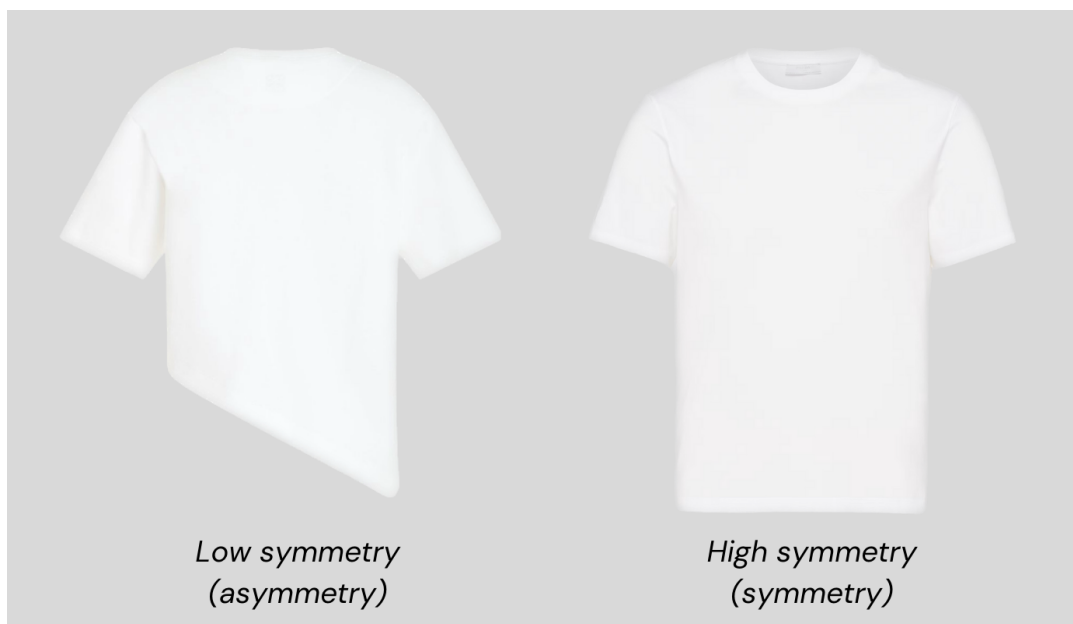
The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of product symmetry levels in luxury products on consumers' planned usage duration. The study aims to explore how varying levels of symmetry (independent variable) influence the length of planned use (dependent variable) of luxury products. Specifically, the researcher is interested in investigating which level of symmetry can lead to longer and more sustainable behavior. This relationship is hypothesized to be mediated by perceived authenticity.

## 2.1 Sampling and Procedure

This study has adopted a quantitative methodology. To ensure a broad range of participants, a survey format was selected. The questionnaire (see Appendix 1), built with the Qualtrics software, was distributed through Prolific. Using this platform, the researcher pre-paid each participant, allowing for efficient and quick data collection. This recruitment method facilitates greater diversity across demographics and preferences, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample. The sample consists of respondents worldwide (n=202), ensuring that different perceptions across cultures will be included. The study employs a 2x2 between-subjects experimental design, which is highly appropriate for examining the differential impact of high vs. low product symmetry on planned length of use of a product.

## 2.2 The Experiment

In the experiment, the independent variable (symmetry) has been manipulated into two conditions: high symmetry (symmetrical) and low symmetry (asymmetrical). Based on randomization, participants either received the condition with high symmetry or the one with low symmetry. The high symmetry condition features a picture of a white, simple t-shirt with symmetrical aesthetics. Moreover, participants were exposed to the picture with a description stating “This is a unisex luxury product which has a high standard of quality”. In this research, the description plays a crucial role as it communicates the message that the item is a luxurious and high-quality product. Additionally, it highlights the clothing item’s gender neutral design, making it a potential choice for any gender. No luxury brand names are used in this survey, to prevent any preconceived notions associated with known brands. This approach helps ensure that the participant's thoughts about the product are influenced solely by the image and description provided, rather than by existing brand associations. Likewise, the same description was included for the low symmetry condition when participants were exposed to the picture. However, the participants in the low symmetry condition were exposed to a picture of a white, simple t-shirt with an asymmetrical design. This randomization aimed to check if answers differ based on the condition. Directly after participants had been exposed to the t-shirt, they were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert Scale if they perceived the t-shirt as symmetrical (1) or asymmetrical (7).



**Figure 2:** Manipulation of independent variable

After that, they were asked to make some general evaluations about the t-shirt. Moreover, they were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert Scale (1=Not at all, 7= Extremely) to what extent they find the t-shirt to be: trendy, modern, urban, timeless, beautiful, and sustainable. Following the manipulation and the general evaluations, the questionnaire was designed to measure the following constructs: perceived authenticity, emotional attachment, length of use, status consumption, and conspicuous consumption. All of these constructs have been measured using a pre-validated 7-point Likert Scale where 1= strongly disagree and 7= strongly agree.

Moreover, using previous studies to develop the questionnaire increases its content validity. Thus, the 15-item scale developed by Morhart et al. (2015) was adopted to measure the perceived brand authenticity. Next, participants' emotional attachment was measured using a 10-item scale developed by Thomson et al. (2005). After the mediators were tested, the dependent variable (planned length of use) was tested by using a one-item scale developed by Sun et al. (2021).

Finally, to measure status consumption and conspicuous consumption, participants were presented with several statements about them and asked to indicate their disagreement/agreement. First, the 5-item scale by Eastman et al. (1999) for status consumption measured attitudes regarding status consumption. Next, the 12-item scale developed by Chaudhuri et al. (2011) measured conspicuous consumption. After the measurements of the moderators, a couple of questions regarding participants' luxury purchasing and attitudes were presented. Lastly, demographics including age, gender, nationality, and income were presented (see Appendix 2 for extended information on measurement items).

The survey was pretested on a small sample of 50 respondents to ensure the clarity and the goodness of the manipulation. Following the pretest, some minor adjustments were made to enhance the quality of the survey. This included using the “force respondents” function, as there were some missing values that were not valid. A randomization check was performed to ensure that the randomization procedure successfully assigned participants to the two different conditions. Furthermore, a manipulation check was done for the pretest. The results from the manipulation check indicated that the manipulation was indeed successful (see Appendix 3).

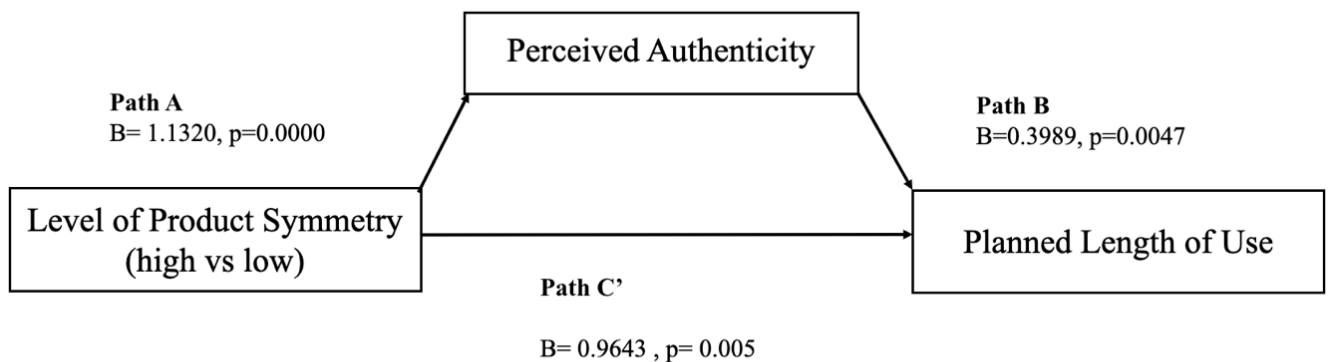
When preparing the data, this included cleaning and reviewing the data to ensure accuracy. The dataset had no missing values as the function of “force respondents” was applied to each question in Qualtrics. This ensured that each participant could not skip any questions. The final sample consist of 202 respondents of which 98 respondents are male (48.5%) and 104 are female (51.5%). Overall, this represents an equally distributed sample based on gender. The average age of the population is 30 years old. Moreover, the majority of respondents are full-time employees (58.9%), while the second largest group is students (18.8%). Some general questions about the participants' luxury purchase habits were also included in the survey. When asked about the frequency of purchase, the most frequent group was that in which individuals buy luxury rarely (47.5%), followed by those who indicated that they buy yearly (22.3 %). Only a small group of respondents indicated that they buy luxury products weekly (4.5%) or monthly (7.4%). When asked about the most important factors in their purchase decision, 61.9% indicated that quality is the most important factor in a luxury purchase, while 17.8% answered that design is the most important factor.

A reliability test was conducted on the mediating variable, perceived authenticity, using Cronbach's Alpha to assess internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0 to 1, with a value of 0.7 or above generally considered acceptable for demonstrating internal consistency reliability (Malhotra, 2010). With a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.944, the authenticity scale results to be reliable (see Appendix 4).

### 3.0 Results

The results of the manipulation check indicated that respondents in the high symmetry condition perceived higher symmetrical levels of the T-shirt than those in the low symmetry condition ( $M_{\text{LowSymmetry}}=5.99$ ,  $M_{\text{HighSymmetry}}=2.01$ ) (Appendix 5). Measured on a 7-point Likert Scale, 1 indicates symmetry (high symmetry) and 7 indicates asymmetry (low symmetry). To test H1, an independent samples T-test was performed. The results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between level of product symmetry and planned length of use ( $p<.001$ ) (see Appendix 6). Thus, there is a positive relationship between higher levels (vs. lower) of product symmetry and planned length of use, confirming H1. To test H2, a regression analysis using PROCESS was performed. Model 4 for simple mediation effect was used as H2 aims to test one mediator. Level of product symmetry was the independent variable (Low symmetry = 0, High symmetry = 1), planned length of use was the dependent variable and perceived authenticity was the mediator (see Appendix 7).

The results of the regression analysis provided useful insights into the relationship between the variables. The significant total effect on length of use revealed that there is a positive effect of high symmetry levels on consumers' planned length of use ( $b=1.4158$ ,  $t=4.6273$ ,  $p<.000$ ). Additionally, there is a significant direct effect on length of use ( $b=0.9643$ ,  $t=2.8401$ ,  $p<.0050$ ), which indicates the presence of a partial mediation. Furthermore, the results reveal that the level of product symmetry (IV) on perceived authenticity is significant ( $b=1.1320$ ,  $t=7.4243$ ,  $p<.0000$ ). The results also show that the effect of perceived authenticity on planned length of use is significant ( $b=0.3989$ ,  $t=2.8611$ ,  $p<.0047$ ). This indicates a significant effect, suggesting that authenticity does mediate the relationship between the condition and the length of use. Based on this, we can accept H2.



*Figure 3: Path diagram for mediator*

Overall, the analysis provides support for H1 and H2, which proposes that a higher (vs. lower) level of symmetry leads to longer planned usage, mediated by perceived authenticity. This study has included one potential mediator: emotional attachment, and two potential moderators: status consumption and conspicuous consumption. These have been included to investigate if there are any other potential variables that can explain



the relationship between the independent variable, mediator and dependent variable. While conspicuous consumption and status consumption are similar constructs, they have been measured with two different scales and therefore treated as different moderators. To test the potential mediator and the potential moderators, several tests have been done using PROCESS Model 4,7, and 14 separately. The outcome of the mediation test showed that emotional attachment, as a mediator, is not a significant predictor of planned length of use in this research. Therefore, the findings indicate that the level of emotional attachment does not mediate the relationship between level of symmetry (high vs. low) and planned length of use. However, the results do indicate that the independent variable is a significant predictor of emotional attachment. The results of the moderated mediation test reveal that status consumption and conspicuous consumption were not found to have any significant results in the relationship between the variables.

#### **4.0 General Discussion**

This study has investigated symmetry as a component of aesthetics and its effect on consumers' planned length of use of a luxury product. The intersection of sustainability, luxury, and aesthetics represents an undiscovered field of research, and this research aims to answer the following research question: *How does the level of product symmetry in luxury products influence consumers perceptions of their planned length of use, and to what extent is this relationship mediated by perceived authenticity?*

The findings of this study provide evidence that a higher (vs. lower) level of product symmetry contributes to a longer planned length of use from consumers' point of view, which confirmed the first hypothesis. Furthermore, this indicates that a higher level of product symmetry, as a component of aesthetics, extends the product's lifecycle. A possible explanation for this could be that consumers perceive highly symmetrical products as more timeless and less likely to be outdated or worn out. Ultimately, this contributes to sustainable consumption as consumers engage in longer usage periods and reduce the frequency of replacement. Sun et al. (2021) found that engaging in luxury consumption can be sustainable as luxury is more durable than ordinary goods. Indeed, the findings of this study imply that aesthetic components can affect how consumers consider a product to be durable.

It was assumed that perceived authenticity would mediate the relationship between the level of product symmetry and planned length of use. Moreover, authenticity was expected to be higher due to the simplicity and balanced look when there is a high level of product symmetry. With higher perceived authenticity, consumers were expected to have a longer planned length of use. The significant mediation explained that a higher level of product symmetry has a positive effect on the perceived authenticity of a product, which in turn lead to a longer planned length of use. Moreover, this confirmed the second hypothesis. This study demonstrates how aesthetics impact perceived authenticity and how authenticity increases the planned length of usage of a luxury product. These findings align with previous research investigating packaging design and

logo design, which revealed that simplicity and ease of understanding increase authenticity (Luffarelli et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023).

#### **4.1 Theoretical and Managerial Implications**

The current study presents a significant contribution to the existing literature on sustainable luxury. While few studies have investigated the role of aesthetics in sustainable luxury, this study demonstrates that aesthetics is related to sustainable consumption. It indicates that aesthetic components, particularly product symmetry, significantly impact consumer perceptions of product durability and planned length of use. This highlights a new dimension in understanding how luxury goods can contribute to sustainable consumption. Previous research has found that the aesthetics of a product may impact perceptions of functional performance and quality in a product (Creusen & Schoormans, 2005; Bloch, 1995; Hoegg & Alba, 2011). The current research has found this is also evident when considering luxury products, as consumers consider a longer usage period when a product has high symmetry. Moreover, Fletcher (2012) demonstrated durability as a user-related concept. This study advances the understanding of durability in luxury products based on consumer perception by integrating the concept of aesthetics.

Few studies have investigated consumers' planned length of use of luxury items, as most research has focused on the functional aspects of a product and its durability (Sun et al., 2021). Instead, this study investigated consumer perceptions of durability. The findings provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of luxury aesthetics, which is helpful in navigating consumer preferences. Building on existing knowledge in the field, the insights from this research can be used to understand how aesthetics affects consumer perceptions of durability. Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature on authenticity in luxury brands by showing that perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between product symmetry and planned length of use. This highlights the role of authenticity in enhancing consumer engagement with sustainable consumption. Moreover, this study significantly contributes to the literature related to aesthetics and luxury. While previous studies have focused on aspects such as ugliness and distinctiveness on consumer perceptions (Cesareo et al., 2023; Zanette et al., 2022), this study has provided information on how consumers evaluate the durability of luxury products based on the aesthetics of a product.

This study offers some relevant practical implications for luxury brands. First, by incorporating symmetrical designs into luxury products, brands can enhance their aesthetic appeal, which in turn will encourage longer usage periods. Managers can also use this insight to increase the authenticity of their offerings, as higher levels of symmetry are positively related to higher authenticity and the planned length of use. This strategic focus on aesthetics can serve as a competitive advantage, aligning with consumers' growing preference for sustainable and durable luxury products. As this study provides insight into consumer-related durability, it suggests how managers can understand consumers' attitudes and patterns. Previous research has linked luxury consumption to materialism and wastefulness. However, the practical implications of this study imply that managers should educate consumers and focus on communicating the durability of products.

Moreover, managers should focus on high symmetry design in product development, as it can be essential in creating luxury items perceived as timeless and durable. This approach can help luxury brands meet the rising consumer demand for sustainable and long-lasting products.

Furthermore, luxury marketers can actively contribute to the circular economy by focusing on aesthetics that contribute to more sustainable consumption. In this way, they can contribute to slowing down the fashion cycle by marketing timeless fashion items. Overall, the study provides insight for managers on handling the challenges associated with sustainable luxury based on the contradictions between luxury and sustainability. Moreover, by acting as a leader in sustainable luxury, brands can provide information about how aesthetic design contributes to product longevity, which in turn can enhance the market position of the brand and its brand image. The insights from this study can help luxury brands attract those customers who believe purchasing from luxury brands is not considered sustainable by leveraging durability and timelessness.

## **4.2 Limitations and Future Research**

There are some limitations to be considered in this study. This study was conducted with a small sample, which included participants from different countries, indicating that cultural differences may play a role in the findings. Therefore, it would be interesting to compare different cultures. Furthermore, future studies could adapt qualitative techniques to receive more in-depth responses. As this study aimed to investigate consumer perceptions, it could be favorable with more in-depth answers to understand their decision-making process. A possible limitation of this research is that the study used a manipulated independent variable. It could be possible that the type of stimuli in the two different conditions has affected the findings, suggesting that findings could have been different with other stimuli. As this study only looked at one specific luxury product type, future research should investigate if aesthetics has the same impact across other luxury product categories. To gain more knowledge regarding consumer-related durability, future research could explore other variables which potentially can impact consumers planned length of use. In this study, the potential mediator emotional attachment did not reveal any effect on planned length of use, which could be tested in different circumstances in future studies. The potential moderators, status consumption and conspicuous consumption did not prove to be significant in this study, which also implies that it could be studied in a different setting in the future.

Future research should investigate if aesthetics has the same impact on sustainable consumption within other segments of the fashion industry, such as the fast-fashion industry. Future studies could also examine other components of aesthetics, such as color and harmony, and their potential to influence consumer behavior in the context of sustainability and luxury consumption. Overall, this study provides relevant insights into the role of aesthetics in sustainable luxury. Nonetheless, there are many possible areas to explore that could potentially build on this knowledge and elaborate on the findings.

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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix 1: Questionnaire**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. This research is carried out as a part of my master thesis at Luiss Guido Carli University. This is a study about understanding the patterns and intentions behind the usage of luxury products. The survey will take 7–8 minutes to complete.

Please be assured that all responses will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for academic purposes.

This is a unisex luxury product which has a high standard of quality

*Picture of high symmetry manipulation  
or  
low symmetry manipulation*

How would you evaluate the aesthetic characteristics of the t-shirt you just saw?

Symmetrical        Asymmetrical

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

	Not at all	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely
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"/>
Timeless	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Beautiful	<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"/>

Please indicate your level of disagreement/agreement with the following statements regarding the product described above

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly 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 customers	<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 accomplishes 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 do you feel about the product described above?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly 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"/>

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

- 0-6 months
- 6 months- 1 year
- 1 year- 1 year and 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-



Please indicate your degree of disagreement/agreement with the following statements about you

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly 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"/>

Now, please indicate your disagreement/agreement with the following statements about

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly 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

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-mill products, because I want to show others that I enjoy being original

I choose 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 rare antique that I can get respect from others

How often do you purchase luxury products?

- Monthly
- Every few weeks
- Yearly
- Rarely
- Never

What factors influence your decision to purchase a luxury item?

Brand reputation

Design

Quality

Exclusivity

Investment

Other

What is your age?

Gender:

Male

Female

Non-binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

Annual household income

Less than €18,000

€18,000 to €36,999

€37,000 to €54,999

€55,000 to €72,999

73,000 to €91,999

€92,000 and above

What is your occupation?

Student

Full-time employee

Part-time employee

Unemployed

What is your nationality?

## Appendix 2: Measurement items

Dimensions	Measuring items/statements	Source
Perceived authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is a product that connects people with what is really important</li> <li>- It is a product that gives back to its customers</li> <li>- It is an honest product</li> <li>- It is a product with history</li> <li>- It is a product that survives times</li> <li>- It is a product that cares about its customers</li> <li>- It is a timeless product</li> <li>- It is a product that connects people with their real selves</li> <li>- It is a product that reflects important values people care about</li> <li>- It is a product true to a set of moral values</li> <li>- It is a product that adds meaning to people`s lives</li> <li>- It is a product with moral principles</li> <li>- It is a product that accomplishes its value promise</li> <li>- It is a product that survives trends</li> <li>- It is a product that will not betray you</li> </ul>	Morhart et al. (2015)
Emotional attachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affectionate</li> <li>- Friendly</li> <li>- Loved</li> <li>- Peaceful</li> <li>- Passionate</li> <li>- Delighted</li> <li>- Captivated</li> <li>- Connected</li> <li>- Bonded</li> <li>- Attached</li> </ul>	Thomson et al. (2005)
Length of use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 0-6 months</li> <li>- 6 months- 1 year</li> <li>- 1 year- 1 year and 6 months</li> <li>- 1 year and 6 months - 2 years</li> <li>- 2 years- 2 years and 6 months</li> <li>- 2 years and 6 months- 3 years</li> <li>- &gt;3 years- specify</li> </ul>	Sun et al. (2021)
Status Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I would buy a product just because it has status</li> <li>- I am interested in new products with status</li> <li>- I would pay more for a product if it had status</li> <li>- The status of a product is relevant to me</li> <li>- A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal</li> </ul>	Eastman et al. (1999)

<p>Conspicuous consumption</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It says something to people around me when I buy a high-priced brand</li> <li>- I buy some products because I want to show others that I am wealthy</li> <li>- I would be a member in a businessmen`s posh club</li> <li>- Given a change, I would hang a Hussain painting in drawing room</li> <li>- 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</li> <li>- Others wish they could match my eyes for beauty and taste</li> <li>- By choosing a product having an exotic look and design, I show my friends that I am different</li> <li>- I choose products or brands to create my own style that everybody admires</li> <li>- I always buy top-of-the-line products</li> <li>- 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</li> <li>- I show others that I am sophisticated</li> <li>- I feel by having a piece of rare antique I can get respect from others</li> </ul>	<p>Chaudhuri et al. (2011)</p>
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**Appendix 3: Pretest manipulation check**

**Group Statistics**

	CONDITION	N	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	STD. ERROR MEAN
<b>PERCEPTION OF SYMMETRY</b>	Low symmetry	27	5.70	1.564	.301
	High symmetry	23	1.91	1.125	.235

Independent Samples T-test

	LEVENE'S TEST FOR EQUALITY OF VARIANCES		T-TEST FOR EQUALITY OF MEANS								
	F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					One Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper	
PERCEPTION OF SYMMETRY	Equal variances assumed	1.963	.168	9.678	48	<.001	<.001	3.791	.392	3.003	4.578
	Equal variances not assumed			9.933	46.772	<.001	<.001	3.791	.382	3.023	4.558

Appendix 4: Reliability test

Case Processing Summary

CASES	N	%
Valid	202	100.0
Excluded	0	.0
Total	202	100.0

Reliability Statistics

CRONBACH'S ALPHA	N OF ITEMS
.944	15

Appendix 5: Manipulation check

Group Statistics

	CONDITION	N	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	STD. ERROR MEAN
PERCEPTION OF SYMMETRY	Low symmetry	101	5.99	1.360	.135
	High symmetry	101	2.01	1.533	.153

Independent Samples T-test

	LEVENE'S TEST FOR EQUALITY OF VARIANCES		T-TEST FOR EQUALITY OF MEANS								
	F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					One Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper	
PERCEPTION OF SYMMETRY	Equal variances assumed	2.184	.141	19.519	200	<.001	<.001	3.980	.204	3.578	4.382
	Equal variances not assumed			19.519	197.205	<.001	<.001	3.980	.204	3.578	4.382

## Appendix 6: Independent Samples T-test

### Group Statistics

	CONDITION	N	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	STD. ERROR MEAN
LENGTH OF USE	Low symmetry	101	3.40	2.182	.217
	High symmetry	101	4.81	2.167	.216

### Independent Samples T-test

LENGTH OF USE	LEVENE'S TEST FOR EQUALITY OF VARIANCES				T-TEST FOR EQUALITY OF MEANS				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
					One Sided p	Two-Sided p					
	Equal variances assumed	.286	.594	-4.627	200	<.001	<.001	-1.416	.306	-2.019	-.812
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.627	199.990	<.001	<.001	-1.416	.306	-2.019	-.812

## Appendix 7: Mediation model

Run MATRIX procedure:

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

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

\*\*\*\*\*

Model : 4  
 Y : Use  
 X : COND  
 M : Auth

Sample  
 Size: 202

\*\*\*\*\*

OUTCOME VARIABLE:  
 Auth

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.4648	.2161	1.1741	55.1197	1.0000	200.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.1102	.1078	28.8476	.0000	2.8976	3.3228
COND	1.1320	.1525	7.4243	.0000	.8313	1.4327

\*\*\*\*\*

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

Use

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.3639	.1324	4.5639	15.1833	2.0000	199.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.1554	.4829	4.4634	.0000	1.2032	3.1077
COND	.9643	.3395	2.8401	.0050	.2948	1.6339
Auth	.3989	.1394	2.8611	.0047	.1240	.6738

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

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

Use

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.3110	.0967	4.7279	21.4117	1.0000	200.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.3960	.2164	15.6963	.0000	2.9694	3.8227
COND	1.4158	.3060	4.6273	.0000	.8125	2.0192

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

Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
1.4158	.3060	4.6273	.0000	.8125	2.0192

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.9643	.3395	2.8401	.0050	.2948	1.6339

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Auth	.4515	.1796	.1032	.8183



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

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:

95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:

5000

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