LUISS

Department of Business and Management

Master's Degree in Management

Chair of Advanced Marketing Management

The Aristocracy of the Masses: Exploring the Paradox of "Prestige for the Many" in Luxury-Mass Market Collaborations

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Academic Year 2024/2025

Acknowledgments

Every journey has its faces, its places, its silences and its voices. At the end of this chapter, I must take a break for a moment and give thanks. To the ones who believed in me, to the ones who inspired me, to those who, one way or another, made all of this achievable.

Thanks to Rome, the city that has welcomed, surprised, challenged and fascinated me for five years. A complex and contradictory city but imbued with magic. I wanted to pay homage to her through this thesis, because wherever I go, I will take with me a fragment of her enchanting chaos and her eternal heart.

A special thanks goes to my university, mamma Luiss, a second home that has nourished me not only with knowledge and skills, but also with deep human experiences. It is here that I learned to think big, to question myself, to work with passion. Every project, every lesson, every confrontation has made me more aware and determined.

With gratitude I thank my supervisor, Prof. Marco Francesco Mazzù, for believing in my thesis project, considering it worthy of further study, and for giving me the opportunity to consolidate my path through this research. I also thank him for transmitting to me the passion for this discipline, allowing me to grasp its different facets through the projects addressed during the course.
I also thank the co-supervisor, Prof. Carlo Fei, for being part of this work.

A heartfelt thanks to Prof. Angelo Baccelloni, for having carefully followed my drafting path and for his prompt suggestions and always oriented towards improving the work, accompanying me with valuable advice and encouragement.

Thanks also to all the people who participated in the interviews, for their availability and fundamental contribution to the realization of the research.

Finally, my biggest thanks go to my family, my roots. For giving me the opportunity to be here, for the constant and unconditional support, and for never stopping believing in me. Every goal achieved is also yours, and all my love goes to you.

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Abstract

Purpose - In this thesis research will be explored the contemporary paradox of collaborations between luxury fashion and fast fashion brands, investigating the long-term effects on the positioning and perception of the luxury brand. The research is primarily understanding how these collaborations affect the balance between exclusivity and accessibility, redefining the boundaries of prestige itself.

Design/methodology - To address this question, the Delphi method was employed in three iterative rounds and involving a panel of 16 consumers in the luxury sector. Through the three rounds, two experimental scenarios with different degrees of perceived exclusivity were presented, and the answers to ten questions structured on mixed formats (ranking, Likert scale, multiple choices) were analyzed.

Findings - The results reveal a dialectical tension between the desire for openness and the need to maintain the exclusive aura: while the increase in visibility is perceived positively by some consumers, many recognize a loss of quality and uniqueness as a real risk. Statistical analysis showed low agreement among participants, indicating the complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomenon. The study concludes that such collaborations can be successful only if carefully calibrated in terms of distribution, narrative and quality.

Originality/value - This research contributes to the literature on co-branding strategies in the luxury sector, proposing an updated and critical perspective of the concept of "prestige for the masses".

1. Introduction

Immersed in the beauty of Rome's avenues, each corner narrates millennia of history. Amongst Corinthian columns, Renaissance monuments and Baroque fountains, the soundscape of the city echoes, revealing its eternal contrast between ancient and modern. As each step follows one after the other to the rhythm of the city's energy, the beating heart of Roman shopping unveils itself, disclosing to the eye a well-known sign. H&M, the iconic fast fashion brand, its store windows bursting with trendy clothes at low prices, reflecting an ephemeral fashion that is accessible to all. An amnestic cycle of fleeting collections in which the transient turns into style, where individuality dissolves into trend, until fashion dictates a new identity.

A few steps further on, amidst gilded details and illuminated vitrines, Chanel asserts its presence. An emblem of timeless luxury, a *'coherent system of excellence'* (Corbellini & Saviolo, 2009): many dream of it, few touch it, none forget it. Tradition, exclusivity and craftsmanship: an oxymoron when compared with the swiftness and unbridled mass production of fast fashion. '*Whereas fashion is associated with changing trends, luxury has been considered timeless, because durable materials, fine craftsmanship and classic design signal wealth permanence'* (Diaz Ruiz & Cruz, 2023).

Two apparently irreconcilable universes, separated by values, strategies and target audiences. Yet, in recent years, they have intertwined through strategic collaborations, redefining the boundaries of the fashion industry. What happens when luxury and fast fashion intersect? What are the consequences of diluting the barriers of exclusivity for brand equity when a luxury brand opens the door for a dialogue with the masses? This thesis explores the practice of brand collaborations, focusing on luxury and fast fashion. In particular, the gap identified in the literature review concerns the long-term evolution of luxury brands' positioning in the market.

It consists of 5 sections. To begin, a literature review will be conducted, that seeks to explore the most important dynamics of the fashion industry in terms of collaborations with non-luxury brands from four perspectives. The analysis will initially be an exploration of how luxury brands establish their brand equity, followed by an examination of co-branding and marketing strategies, collaborations between luxury brands and fast fashion and, lastly, the consumer loyalty and perception dynamics. The second section will illustrate the methodologies adopted for the purposes of the research, followed by the third section, which will present the results that emerged from the study. The fourth section will cover a critical analysis and discussion of the collected data, while the fifth will provide the conclusions drawn from the research.

This present research intends to fill the existing gap in the literature and contribute to the academic debate, highlighting how the pursuit of exclusivity and mass accessibility can coexist, thereby redefining the boundaries of contemporary luxury. In this light, prestige is transforming into shared heritage, weaving a thin thread between the exclusivity of yesteryear and the accessibility of today. Thus luxury, once the domain of the elite, becomes a collective experience, a refined aristocracy of the masses.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Equity and Differentiation in Luxury

The brand equity of a luxury brand constitutes an indispensable intangible asset manifesting itself in revenues (Amatulli et al., 2016). It is based on four fundamental pillars: positive consumer perception, exclusivity, superior quality and heritage. These distinctive elements contribute to create a perceived value that positions the luxury brand above others (Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008). The sense of inimitability, a constituent and essential element of luxury, is transmitted through three dimensions: timelessness, inaccessibility and tradition (Diaz Ruiz & Cruz, 2023). Consumers purchase goods, aside from their utilitarian functions, primarily for their symbolic significance, which is associated with uniqueness and distinctive value (Okonkwo, 2007). In order to maintain the particular position of luxury and to enhance it even more, luxury brands need to adopt differentiation strategies that preserve their distinctiveness and set them apart from the competition. There are two principal directions: premium pricing aimed at reinforcing exclusivity (Fionda & Moore, 2009) and limited production that contribute to maintain a sense of scarcity and desirability (Joy et al., 2012 and Kapferer, 2004, cited in Amatulli et al., 2016). Therefore, a solid positioning strategy represents an essential lever to gain a competitive advantage, influencing the brand's performance and consolidating it in its target market (Yu et al., 2020).

Besides conventional approaches, co-branding emerges as an effective complementary strategic lever to strengthen brand equity, as it helps to amplify brand perception and generate positive outcomes concerning its overall value (Mrad et al., 2019). In this context, strategic alliances are at the core of defining the position of luxury brands: it is through this instrument that brands can enhance their visibility and attract new consumer segments without compromising their identity, preserving their distinctive value (Okonkwo, 2007).

2.2. Co-Branding and Marketing Strategies

In academic literature, co-branding is defined as a strategic reaction which unites two well-known brands to develop a joint project (Sreejesh, 2012, cited by Amatulli et el., 2016), allowing one brand to benefit from the other's *'halo of affection'* (Shen et al., 2014). Prevalent types of co-branding include joint ventures, brand alliances and ingredient branding (Mrad et al., 2019; Oeppen & Jamal, 2014). Besharat (2010), cited by Mrad et al. (2019), contends that a co-branding agreement should meet three critical conditions: 1) the partnership must be based on an estimated duration, 2) the main objective should be to enter a new or existing market through the development of a new product, and 3) both brand names should be prominently featured on the products.

There are several benefits linked to this approach. These advantages include increased visibility and access to new markets (Desai & Keller, 2002), direct positive effects on sales, brand awareness (Rollet et al., 2013), and customer traffic (Amatulli et al., 2016), in addition to the sharing of resources that stimulates innovation (Soni & Khan, 2024). Moreover, co-branding fosters increased brand equity and reputation for both brands involved (Amatulli et al., 2016; Okonkwo, 2007). Despite these benefits, various research presents potential risks associated with this practice, particularly for premium brands. The main ones include loss of control (Soni & Khan, 2024), the threat of image dilution and the possibility of more traditional consumers developing conflicting perceptions (Cheng-Hsui Chen & Chen, 2000). Table 1 presents a summary by Amatulli et al. (2016) of the key opportunities and issues associated with co-branding execution.

Table 1: Co-branding opportunities and threats

Author	Research Methodology	Opportunities/ Threats
Simonin and Ruth (1998)	Research paper	• Economies of Scale and Synergies
Washburn et al. (2000)	Research paper	• Brand Equity Improvement • Brand Equity Damage
Washburn et al. (2000)	Research paper	• Efficiency through Creation of New and Unique Consumer Perception of the Co-Branded Product
Vaidyanathan and Aggarwal (2000)	Research paper	• Sales Cannibalization of Existing Products • Product Recalls in Case of Failure
Uggla (2004)	Article	• Media Exposure and Word of Mouth
Uggla (2005)	Descriptive analysis	• Increase of Market • Penetration and Sales • Possible Harm to Brand • Image and Exclusivity
Kapferer (2009)	Descriptive analysis	• Outsourcing of specific responsibilities • Less Risks and Shared Costs
Okonkwo (2009)	Descriptive analysis	• Access to New Markets and Customers • Harm through Environmental Changes

Source: (Amatulli et al., 2016)

Indeed, it has been observed that high-end brands that avoid collaborations with fast fashion tend to be perceived as more exclusive and authentic than those that engage in such partnerships (Washburn et al., 2000). Furthermore, a scarce compatibility between brands can generate negative consumer perceptions (Helmig et al., 2008). Hence, to make a co-branding joint initiative successful, a positive *fit* between the collaborating brands (Amatulli et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2017) and no negative values related to one of the involved brands is essential (Mrad et al., 2019; Helmig et al., 2008).

2.3. Collaborations between Luxury and Fast Fashion

Luxury brands are distinguished by their ability to evoke rarity, artisanal heritage, exclusivity, premium prices and superior quality (Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008). These brands rely on the perception of their audience and how their image is experienced by consumers, the success of which depends on the positioning they occupy in customers' minds (Parrott et al., 2015).
On the other hand, fast fashion brands operate on an opposite realm, offering continuous assortment rotation, low prices and accessible variety, but emphasising strong aesthetic content inspired by luxury parallels (Byun & Sternquist, 2008; Gabrielli et al., 2013). In this way, they make trends more democratic and affordable for a wider audience. Originally, retailers used the term 'fast fashion' to refer to the phenomenon of rapidly changing styles and trends from the catwalk to the shops (Brooks, 2015). This difference in approach prompted fast fashion brands to adopt luxury strategies, such as launching limited edition products to position themselves as direct competitors to upscale brands. This creates a sense of scarcity and exclusivity in consumer' minds, stimulating them to purchase (Amatulli et al., 2016). Differently from luxury brands, which maintain scarcity through high prices (Okonkwo, 2007), exclusive sales channels (Yu et al., 2020), well-known brand identity (Amatulli et al., 2016), durable materials and fine craftsmanship (Diaz Ruiz & Cruz, 2023), in fast fashion brands scarcity is often linked to low assortment collections that sell out swiftly thus reducing the need for markdowns. This creates an appearance of exclusivity according to a 'buy now because you won't see this later' scarcity mentality (Amatulli et al., 2016). Both segments, while addressing different targets, attract consumers who share the same strong desire for uniqueness (Shen et al., 2014).
This strategy has driven the market to evolve, leading the two sides to no longer see themselves as mere competitors, but as new opportunities for collaboration. The trend was launched in 2004 by the renowned limited-edition collaboration between Karl Lagerfeld, creative director of Chanel and Fendi, and the Swedish fast fashion brand H&M (Amatulli et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2017). The collection was sold out in all H&M shops, with a 12% increase in sales (Business of Fashion, 2013, cited in Amatulli et al., 2016). This event marked the beginning of an innovative strategy of co-branding collections with high-end brands (Okonkwo, 2007), which has seen H&M continue to forge successful collaborations with numerous luxury brands, achieving extraordinary results such as queues of consumers willing to line up for an entire night to grab co-branded items, thus running out of product stock in a very short time (Shen et al., 2014). Even, in 2015 the queue of customers began three days before the launch of the collection Balmain X H&M (Brooks, 2015, cited in Mrad et al.,

2019). A phenomenon amplified by the use of well-known faces such as the famous top models Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid who promoted the collection on their Instagram profiles to a total audience of approximately 58 million followers (Lidbury, 2016, cited in Mrad et al., 2019).
Table 2 shows all collaborations between H&M and luxury brands, collected by Mrad et al. (2019), from 2004 to 2017, with their results in terms of sales, waiting lines, revenue growth and other metrics. The table has been extended to 2025, including the most recent collaborations.

Table 2: List of collaborations between H&M and designer luxury brands

Year	Designer luxury brand	Collaboration outcome	References
2004	Karl Lagerfeld	• 1500–2000 pieces sold/hour • Monthly revenue increased by 24%	Yotka (2017)
2005	Stella McCartney	• Collection sold out within hours • Revenues increased by 11%	Fashionunited (2018)
2006	Viktor & Rolf	• More than 200 people lining up prior to their opening	Weinstein (2007)
2007	Roberto Cavalli	• Shoppers lining up from 5 a.m. • Collection sold out within 20 min in Birmingham branch and within the first 40 min in Dublin • 14% sales growth	Ballinger (2007)
2008	Comme des Garçons	• 12-h line-up in Tokyo during the launching • 7% sales growth	Fashionunited (2018)
2009	Matthew Williamson	• Shoppers competing to bag the best buys	The Guardian (2009)
2009	Jimmy Choo	• Thousands of people line-up for 12 h • 1% sales growth	Collins (2009)
2009	Sonia Rykiel	• Mostly female’s queue	Schweitzer (2014)
2010	Sonia Rykiel	• Website crashing within an hour after selling out kids’ wear collection	Scandinavian Mum (2010)
2010	Lanvin	• Successful collaboration in all countries	Fashionunited (2018)
2011	Versace	• Collection sold out in Dubai and Beijing within 30 min	Wischhover (2011)
2012	Versace	• Hours of line-up during the launch	Cartner-Morley (2011)
2012	Maison Martin Margiela	• Collaboration resulted in unexpected poor sales	Alexander (2017)

2012	Marni	• Long line-up • 15% sales growth	Bearne (2012)
2013	Isabel Marant	• Shoppers lining up from 4 a.m. • 14% sales growth	Kirkova (2013) and Bloomberg (2013)
2014	Alexander Wang	• Long line-up • Website crash	Akbareian (2014)
2015	Balmain	• Most remarkable line-ups 3 days prior the launch • Most successful collaboration with millennial celebrities sharing awareness on social media platforms	Sherman (2015) and Brooks (2015)
2016	Kenzo	• Line-ups from 8 a.m. 1 day prior the launch • More than 350 people lined up	Woo (2016)
2017	Erdem	• Overnight line-up • Collection sold out • Overwhelming audience for online sales during the launch • Website crash within 2 min	Edmonds (2017) and Teather (2017)
2018	Moschino	• High-impact media event with fashion show in New York and extensive celebrity involvement • Many pieces sold out quickly after the launch	Tablang (2018) and H&M Group (2018)
2019	Giambattista Valli	• Most pieces sold out online within hours • Some items resold at higher prices on the secondary market • Less crowds in the shops, but still shoppers queuing since 4am.	Fashion Network (2019) and Bramley (2019)
2021	Simone Rocha	• Collection sold out	Cooper Hedges (2021)
2021	Toga Archives	• Collection sold out quickly, with pieces sold out almost instantly online	Salmon (2021)
2022	Mugler	• Long queues in front of the shops • Some pieces sold out within hours after opening	Burney (2023)
2023	Paco Rabanne	• Much of the collection quickly sold out • H&M accounts drove 1.8M $ EMV through 115 posts • #RabanneHM generated 4.1M $ EMV in 3 months	Wilson (2023) and Rawitz (2024)
2024	Rokh	• Collection sold out	Banks-Walker (2024)

Sources: (Mrad et al., 2019) and elaboration of the authors

These collaborations have given rise to what is referred to as the ‘democratization of luxury’ (Oeppen Hill & Jamal, 2014; Shukla et al., 2022; Scheuerle et al., 2023; Diaz Ruiz & Cruz, 2023), making luxury products both more accessible and more visible, yet at the same time also bringing with it the heightened risk of undermining perceived exclusivity (Shukla et al., 2022). There are studies that suggest that the process of democratization may be viewed negatively by traditionalist consumers, who may perceive an erosion of heritage and exclusivity (Cheng-Hsui Chen & Chen, 2000). The literature mentions numerous studies that acknowledge strategic congruence and similarity between collaborating brands as a vital factor in defining the success of such partnerships (Mrad et al., 2019; Soni & Khan, 2024). As previously mentioned, the perceived *fit* between the brands participating in the collaboration project is a primary driver of consumer attitudes (Ahn & Sung, 2012). The concept of *brand fit* refers to the extent to which two partner brands are perceived as congruent, similar, connected, and generally compatible (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Zdravkovic et al., 2010). To make a collaboration effective, it is vital that brands hold stable associations amongst each other; otherwise, the alliance can either be ineffective or even adversarial, leading to negative outcomes (Desai and Keller, 2002; Riley et al., 2015; Zdravkovic et al., 2010). Whenever consumers perceive an affirmative attitude toward the collaborating brands, then they are more inclined to assess the collaboration in a positive light as well (Yu et al., 2020). A favourable assessment of a shopping experience initiates a process through which the brands involved in the collaboration are also associated with good emotions, thus increasing their brand loyalty and encouraging repeat purchases (Soni & Khan, 2024).

2.4. Customer Loyalty and Perception

Brand loyalty, conceptualized as an emotional attachment and deep commitment to the brand, is a significant impetus for luxury brands (Oliver, 1999, cited in Shen et al. 2014). Loyal consumers tend to be less price-sensitive and are often willing to pay more for the products of the brand they are devoted to (Villas-Boas, 2004), and therefore it is important not to jeopardize losing this segment of the audience. Strategic partnerships, when well implemented, can enhance brand loyalty by rewarding repeat purchases and ongoing customer engagement (Mrad et al., 2019; Soni & Khan, 2024). They enable the creation of a feeling of exclusivity due to the distinctive and difficult-to-duplicate offer achieved through the union of the two brands. This generates a sense of urgency within consumers prompting them to buy, hence playing a role in the creation of brand loyalty (Soni & Khan, 2024).

'Consumers of luxury designer fashion brands use the brands to classify themselves or to distinguish themselves from others' (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004, cited in Shen et al., 2014). They are in fact less price-sensitive, as what they seek in a brand is *'a complete package of experiences, feelings, and identities'* (Amatulli et al., 2016). The impression of a consumer while interfacing with a brand is governed by his or her awareness level and desire for uniqueness arising from self-experience (Keller, 2001 cited in Shen et al., 2014). This need for uniqueness translates into the search for what distinguishes him from others to pursue and fortify his self-image and social image (Tian et al., 2001). Indeed, the motivations that drive the consumption of luxury goods are connected, on the one hand, with the need for expression of personal style and individuality, yet on the other hand with the profound desire to communicate one's success and social prestige through what is perceived as a symbol of status (Kapferer & Bastien, 2017; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012). Furthermore, according to Amatulli & Guido (2012), luxury consumption can be interpreted in two modes: the 'internalized' and the 'externalized'. The first one relies on the aim of expressing an individual style and thus the focus is on personal pleasure, the latter, instead, is connected to social demonstration, which produces ostentation and need to impress.
Co-branding is among the strategies that can have a significant influence on the consumer's perception towards a luxury brand. It contributes to increase luxury brand's awareness among mass consumers, thus making their audience larger (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). In a study conducted by Amatulli et al. (2016) 71% of mass consumers and 57% of luxury consumers perceive brand collaborations in a positive manner. This result is justified by the fact that such partnerships make non-luxury consumers feel more special and distinctive, as they have the opportunity to get in contact with brands that they would otherwise be unable to afford. In this system, this approach is useful to non-luxury fashion brands as it repositions them in a way that not only fuels the desire to own their goods but also allows them to identify with the brand (Okonkwo, 2007). However, there has been some research that contradicts this positive view in the case of luxury consumers, citing that they might consider such collaborations a threat to the luxury brand's exclusivity and heritage, doubting their positive effect on high-end audiences (Cheng-Hsui Chen & Chen, 2000). Indeed, research conducted by Mrad et al. (2019) reveals that the *brand fit* between H&M and the luxury brands was viewed negatively by the respondents, as they indicated towards absence of complementarity on attributes, quality, price and target market. The brand alignment proved inconsistent, generating skepticism about the validity of such collaborations. H&M, while appreciated for affordable and trendy fashion, was deemed to be devoid of exclusivity, and it was questionable what the luxury brands would gain from a collaboration with a lower-status brand and incongruent targets. But past studies had already suggested a different perspective. Amatulli et al. (2016) argued that co-branding

will not damage luxury brands or the beliefs of their loyal consumers, as the activities involved in collaborations are not perceived as luxury. As a result, they will still purchase products from the core lines of their preferred brands since they do not associate co-branding with luxury.

2.5. Uniqueness as a Driver of Luxury Value

As Keller (1993) argues, the uniqueness, intrinsic value of the brand, is an effective incentive to customers to pay premium prices, justifying its central role building brand equity. This perspective is also enriched by the classification proposed by Tian et al. (2001), which identifies three types of need for uniqueness: creative choice counter-conformity, by which consumers to seek unique products but socially accepted by others; the avoidance of similarity, by which they reject overly popular products in an effort to differentiate themselves; and the unpopular choice counter-conformity, where consumers choose those products that deviate from the group norms. The literature review fully attests that uniqueness is not merely an aesthetic value, but a real strategic driver that influences the perception, loyalty and positioning of luxury brands. These partnerships, if properly managed, could be an opportunity to expand the market and reach new groups of consumers, without modifying the exclusive and inimitable essence of luxury. Thus, brands must adopt meticulously calibrated co-branding strategies that preserve and reinforce the aura of uniqueness without running the risk of image and cultural heritage dilution.

2.6. Research Implications

Although several studies have examined the short-term effects of such collaborations, there is still a significant gap in the literature regarding the long-term consequences on the positioning of luxury brands. It is into this background that the research question of this thesis is placed:

RQ: *"In what way do collaborations between luxury brands and fast fashion companies affect the long-term perception of luxury brands and, if they change, how does their market positioning evolve?"*

A table summarising the authors covered in this literature review and their contribution to the existing literature on the subject of collaborations between luxury brands and fast fashion is presented below.

Table 3: Summary of authors and their contribution to research

Source	Research contribution
Ahn & Sung, 2012	• Recognizes the fit between the brands as a key driver of consumer attitudes
Amatulli & Guido, 2011	• Identifies the attributes of luxury goods

	• Highlights the distinctive characteristics of luxury brands, such as craftsmanship, exclusivity and superior quality
Amatulli & Guido, 2012	• Distinguishes luxury in two modes: ‘internalised’ (expression of personal style) and ‘external’ (ostentation to impress others)
Amatulli et al., 2016	• Defines brand equity in the luxury sector as an intangible asset • Analyses the benefits and risks of co-branding for luxury brands • Summarizes key opportunities and threats of co-branding • Emphasizes how ha positive fit between the brands is fundamental • Examines consumer behaviour in relation to perceived scarcity in fashion brands, proposing that scarcity stimulates purchases • Contributes to the understanding of how a well-known brand identity influences perceived scarcity • Analyses the scarcity mentality of the fast fashion consumer • Explores the collaboration between H&M and Karl Lagerfeld in 2004 • Describes luxury as a quest for unique experiences • Analyses the positive effect of brand collaborations on consumer perception, indicating that such collaborations can make non-luxury consumers feel more special and distinctive • Proposes that co-branding does not harm luxury brands, as the activities involved are not perceived as ‘luxury’ by loyal consumers
Besharat, 2010 (cited in Mrad et al., 2019)	• Identifies three basic conditions for effective co-branding: defined duration, clear objective and visibility of brand partners
Brooks, 2015	• Explores the origins of the term fast fashion

	• Provides data on the H&M X Balmain collaboration, such as queues of consumers outside the shops
Business of Fashion, 2013, cited in Amatulli et al., 2016	• Provides data on increased sales and the success of the H&M-Karl Lagerfeld collaboration
Byun & Sternquist, 2008	• Examines the business model of fast fashion
Cheng-Hsui Chen & Chen, 2000	• Underlines the risks of co-branding, such as loss of control and the possibility of negative perceptions among traditional consumers • It contributes to the understanding of the risk of erosion of exclusivity in luxury brands as a result of collaborations • Examines how luxury consumers might view collaborations with mass-market brands as a threat to luxury brand exclusivity, reducing the positive perception of collaborations
Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2008	• Identifies the distinctive elements of brand equity in luxury and the perceived value that positions brands above the competition
Desai & Keller, 2002	• Analyses the benefits of co-branding, including increased visibility and access to new markets • Explains how consistency between brands influences the success of collaborations otherwise it has negative effects
Diaz Ruiz & Cruz, 2023	• Highlight how the inimitability of luxury is conveyed through the dimensions of timelessness, inaccessibility and tradition • Affirms how durable materials and fine craftsmanship impact perceived scarcity • Introduces the concept of ‘democratisation of luxury’
Fionda & Moore, 2009	• Explores premium pricing and limited production strategies as tools to reinforce luxury brand exclusivity

Gabrielli et al., 2013	• Analyses the strategy of fast fashion and how it adopts elements of luxury to attract consumers
Helmig et al., 2008	• Analyses the risk of negative perceptions in consumers when co-branding lacks appropriate brand compatibility • Demonstrate that no negative values should be reconducted to the brands
Joy et al., 2012 and Kapferer, 2004 (cited in Amatulli et al., 2016)	• Emphasise the importance of scarcity as a key element in maintaining the desire for luxury brands
Kapferer & Bastien, 2017 and Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012	• Analyses the motivations of luxury consumers related to the expression of their personal style and the desire to communicate their success and social prestige through luxury
Keller, 1993	• Argues that uniqueness is a key incentive to justify premium prices, crucial in building brand equity
Keller, 2001 cited in Shen et al., 2014	• Argues that consumer interaction with a brand is influenced by its level of awareness and desire for uniqueness
Lidbury, 2016, cited in Mrad et al., 2019	• Explains the media impact of the Balmain X H&M collaboration
Mrad et al., 2019	• Defines co-branding as a strategic lever to strengthen brand equity • Describes the main types of co-branding • Emphasizes that no negative values should be associated to the brands • Lists the collaborations between H&M and luxury brands • Asserts that strategic congruence and similarity between collaborating brands define their success • Examines how strategic partnerships, if well implemented, can strengthen brand loyalty, rewarding repeat purchases and continuous consumer engagement

	• Analyses the negative reactions towards the collaboration between H&M and luxury brands, highlighting the lack of complementarity in quality, price and target market
Oeppen & Jamal, 2014	• Delves into different types of co-branding, including joint ventures, brand alliances and ingredient branding • Introduces the concept of democratization of luxury
Okonkwo, 2007	• Analyses the symbolic meaning of luxury products and their role in differentiating themselves from consumer goods based on mere functionality • Highlights how strategic alliances are key to strengthening the position of luxury brands • It provides insight into luxury strategies, such as maintaining scarcity through high prices • Argues that co-branding can reposition non-luxury brands, fuelling the desire to own their products and improving consumer identification with the brand
Oliver, 1999, cited in Shen et al. 2014	• Defines brand loyalty as an emotional attachment and deep commitment
Parrott et al., 2015	• Emphasises the importance of brand positioning in consumer perception
Riley et al.	• Illustrate how coherence between brands influences the success of collaborations otherwise it has negative outcomes
Rollet et al., 2013	• Examines the positive impact of co-branding on sales and brand awareness
Scheuerle et al., 2023	• Introduces the concept of 'democratisation of luxury'
Shen et al., 2014	• Introduces the concept of 'halo of affection' • Underlines the importance of a positive fit between the brands

	• Explains that what unites the buying decision in luxury and fast fashion is the desire for uniqueness • H&M and Karl Lagerfeld's collaboration in 2004 is explained • Provides data on the H&M-Karl Lagerfeld collaboration, such as sold out and queues of consumers outside the shops
Shukla et al., 2022	• Analyses how the democratisation of luxury can adversely affect perceived exclusivity, a concern for mainstream consumers
Simonin & Ruth, 1998	• It provides a framework for brand fit, analysing how the perceived compatibility between two brands influences the success of collaborations • Examines how co-branding can increase luxury brand awareness among mass consumers, broadening the audience
Soni & Khan, 2024	• Identifies innovation and resource sharing as a key benefit of co-branding • Denotes the loss of control as potential risk of co-branding • Recognises the strategic congruence and similarity between collaborating brands as a vital factor • Analyses how a favourable evaluation of the shopping experience promotes positive emotions towards collaborating brands, enhancing loyalty and encouraging repeat purchases • Deepens the concept of exclusivity in brand collaborations, creating a distinctive and hard-to-replicate offering that stimulates consumers to buy and reinforces brand loyalty.
Sreejesh, 2012 (cited in Amatulli et al., 2016)	• Describes co-branding as a strategy that brings two brands together to develop a joint project

Tian et al., 2001	• Explains that the need for uniqueness results in the search for what distinguishes him from others It classifies the motivations behind the need for uniqueness: creative choice counter-conformity, avoidance of similarity and unpopular choice counter-conformity.
Vigneron and Johnson, 2004, cited in Shen et al., 2014	• Examines how consumers of luxury brands use these brands to classify themselves and distinguish themselves from others
Villas-Boas, 2004	• Shows how brand-loyal consumers tend not to be price-sensitive
Washburn et al., 2000	• Shows that luxury brands that avoid collaborations with fast fashion maintain a more exclusive and authentic image
Yu et al., 2020	• Examines the impact of strategic positioning on the performance of luxury brands • Analyses how exclusive sales channels in luxury brands contribute to maintaining scarcity • Examines how a positive attitude towards collaborating brands increases the positive evaluation of the collaboration itself
Zdravkovic et al., 2010	• It elaborates on the brand fit theory, indicating that incompatibility between brands can lead to negative outcomes

Sources: elaboration of the authors

In the context of the existing literature, most studies have largely focused on the short-term effects of collaborations between luxury brands and fast fashion, mainly analysing the perspective of the fast fashion consumer. Consequently, there has been a lack of investigations on the medium to long term effects on the positioning of luxury brands involved in such alliances, as well as on the perceptions of the luxury public. This is where the present research is positioned to fill this gap, by systematically investigating how such collaborations influence perception and brand equity among luxury consumers over time.

3. Methodology

In accordance with the research question, an analysis was conducted to draw a picture of the impact that collaborations between luxury brands and fast fashion companies have in terms of long-term brand perception and possible changes in strategic positioning within the market. The aim of the research was therefore to observe how these synergies influence the construction of the brand image and its evolution over time, in the light of the behaviour and expectations of contemporary luxury consumers, purposefully excluding from the focus the fast fashion consumers, already widely treated in the existing literature.

3.1. The Delphi Method

The methodology employed in this study is the Delphi Method, a structured qualitative tool with the objective of obtaining a consensus among experts on a certain epistemic issue (Niederberger & Spranger, 2020). Respondents are not selected randomly, but for their knowledge about the topic examined, which is the main quality guarantee of this method (Stone Fish & Busby, 2005). It assumes that the combination of different perspectives provided by a group of experts generates a more valid result than the judgement of a single specialist, even if highly qualified (Niederberger & Spranger, 2020). A Delphi study involves a series of iterative cycles, usually two or three, during which priorities are identified and refined until a convergence of opinions among experts is reached (Bashar et al., 2025). This approach allows for structured and iterative feedback, starting with a qualitative input that is then subject to classification and grouping of responses (Mazzù et al., 2022).

According to this method, the interviews are involved in several successive interactions. In order to develop a progressive consensus, at the end of each round the responses are processed and resubmitted in a controlled manner to stimulate their re-evaluation (Mazzù et al., 2022). In this study, three rounds of interviews were conducted, in line with research on the Delphi Method (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Mazzù et al., 2022). Specifically, it was observed that after a few rounds, the benefits of the process begin to diminish. It has been agreed that three rounds are sufficient to ensure stability of responses, as beyond this limit, changes are minimal, to the detriment of respondents' tolerance due to repetitiveness (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, cited in Stone Fish & Busby, 2005). Following the development and administration of the open-ended questionnaire, the responses are collated and sent back to the panellists to stimulate a reassessment of their opinions in light of the collective responses (Stone Fish & Busby, 2005). Through the identification of areas of agreement and disagreement, consensus begins to form and will be reached during the last stage (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). According to Dalkey (1972), cited in Stone Fish & Busby (2005), the Delphi Panel overcame several critical issues typical of traditional opinion-sharing methods: 1) anonymity reduces the influence of dominant individuals; 2) controlled feedback reduces irrelevant and biased communication; 3) the use of statistical procedures reduces group pressure for compliance.

3.2. Sample of Respondents

According to Delbecq et al. (1975), cited in Mazzù et al., 2022, the optimal panel size is between 10 and 15 respondents. In the case of this study, it consists of 16 consumers of luxury brands, selected on the basis of their familiarity with the sector and their direct experience in buying and experiencing luxury products. The choice to focus on luxury consumers stems from the fact that they represent the primary target of high-end brands. As regular buyers, these individuals have a consolidated experience with luxury, developing particularly high expectations and a strong orientation towards exclusivity. Their opinions therefore offer crucial insights into how brand positioning and prestige can be influenced by involvement with fast fashion, allowing us to assess the extent to which such collaborations affect or strengthen brand image.

The primary objective is to include people capable of consciously assessing the perception of exclusivity and prestige linked to luxury brands, as well as the impact that possible collaborations with fast fashion brands may have on the positioning and perceived value of these brands. The interviews were conducted both face-to-face, for those who were able to participate directly, and through instant messaging for interviews unable to physically participate, a modality chosen to favour direct and informal communication, in line with the exploratory tone of the research and the digital habits of the selected target. In both cases, clarity was ensured in the presentation of scenarios and questions, offering participants the opportunity to provide detailed feedback and reconsider their positions in light of the collective responses. For the second round, the respondents' data were collected by means of a survey administered through the Qualtrics platform in order to collect opinions in a more structured manner and converge consensus.

3.3. Research Design and Data Collection

3.3.1. Variable manipulated

The research question of this study requires the exploration of two fundamental aspects regarding collaborations between luxury brands and fast fashion brands: the perception of the luxury brand in the long term and its market positioning. In order to thoroughly examine these two aspects, it is necessary to manipulate a variable that directly impacts on them. In this study, the variable manipulated is the level of perceived exclusivity of the collaboration, a key element for luxury brands and their consumers, as will emerge from interviews.

This variable plays an important role because if a collaboration is too accessible, it could damage the positioning of the luxury brand; on the contrary, if perceived as selective and exclusive, could preserve or even enhance its prestige. For this reason, the choice of the manipulated variable responds to the logic of evaluating the degree of exclusivity of the collaboration and its impact on the brand's perception and positioning.

It has been operationalised by analysing the ways in which products resulting from collaboration are communicated and distributed, two elements that can influence both the long-term perception of the luxury brand and its positioning on the market. In particular, two factors were modulated: the distribution channels, that is the difference between an exclusive distribution in selected shops and an omni-channel distribution and the communicative message, which can emphasize craftsmanship, heritage and uniqueness or be oriented towards mass and accessibility.

3.3.2. Delphi survey

The survey was structured in three rounds, each of which guaranteed the anonymity of the interviews. The experimental design of the first round involves the presentation to respondents of two scenarios constructed from real collaborations, differentiated only by the level of the variable manipulated. Two distinct collaborations of about 10 years ago have been selected to be able to analyse long term perceptions: in the first, the collection has a conceptual character, is sold exclusively in selected stores and the communicative message emphasizes craftsmanship, heritage and uniqueness of the product; in the second, instead, It focuses on hype and wide demand, with an extended distribution to numerous points of sale.

Scenario 1: Medium exclusivity (Maison Margiela x H&M, 2012)

In 2012, Maison Margiela worked with H&M by launching a conceptual collection priced above the fast fashion average and distributed exclusively in selected H&M shops. The collection incorporated the brand's iconic pieces while maintaining a strong artistic and conceptual character. Some experts argued that this strategy preserved Margiela's exclusivity, while others believe it made the brand more accessible to the wider public.

Sources: H&M Group (2012), Calabrese (2023), Alexander (2012), Chilvers (2012).

Question 1.1: *Do you feel that this collaboration has maintained or reinforced the exclusivity of Maison Margiela, or made it more accessible?*

Question 1.2: In which way has this perception influenced your attitude towards the brand over time?

Question 2: If you had to describe Maison Margiela's identity today, would you say that it has remained consistent with its positioning as a niche and conceptual brand, or do you feel that this collaboration with H&M has helped change its perception, bringing it closer to the image of a commercial and accessible brand?

Scenario 2: Low exclusivity (Balmain x H&M, 2015)

In 2015, Balmain x H&M was one of the most anticipated collaborations, with very high demand and products sold out within minutes online and in H&M shops, generating queues outside shops for as many as three days before the launch. The advertising campaign featured high profile celebrities and influencers (Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid), generating huge media exposure. While the collaboration increased brand awareness among a young audience, it was debated whether this strengthened or compromised Balmain's exclusivity in the long term.

Sources: Balmain (2015), Vogue Italia (2015), H&M Group (2015), Mrad et al. (2019), Teather (2016), Lidbury (2016), Sherman (2015), Andrews (2015).

Question 3.1: *After the collaboration with H&M, did you perceive Balmain as a more accessible or still exclusive brand?*

Question 3.2: If you bought a Balmain product after this collaboration, what factors influenced your decision?

Question 4: After the collaboration with H&M, Balmain gained notoriety among a younger audience. In your opinion, did this strategy strengthen your perception of Balmain as a luxury brand or did it turn it more into an accessible and desirable brand, while remaining below pure luxury?

The first round, submitted between 2 and 13 April, thus provided for the administration of the previous open questions, contextualised in real scenarios and designed to stimulate a long-term reflection. The questions were developed in coherence with the objectives of the study, to fill the gap in existing literature and investigate how the level of perceived exclusivity influences brand identity and positioning.

The objective of Round 2, administered on 18 April through Qualtrics, is to validate and deepen the results that emerged in Round 1 by means of a structured survey, aimed at verifying the consistency and robustness of the perceptions expressed by the participants and initiating a process of convergence of the opinions that emerged. Respondents were shown the main trends identified in Round 1 during the administration of Round 2 questions, which were then elaborated into closed-ended statements. The questions had different formats. The first four and the sixth questions were in a rank order format with text boxes in which participants were asked to rank three predefined statements in order of perceived relevance (1 = very relevant, 2 = moderately relevant, 3 = not very relevant). In question 5, participants were asked to select which elements were perceived to be most compromised in their perception of luxury from those given, also having an open-ended box. Questions 7 and 8 were formulated using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree). Questions 9 and 10 were formatted in order of classification with text boxes but, unlike the first questions, three predefined sentences had to be classified according to 5 options (from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree). The decision to diversify the format of the questions was motivated by the desire to avoid automatic response bias and to stimulate a greater cognitive involvement of the participants, so as to return a more complete view of the perceptions that emerged in the first round. The overall objective of the second round was to quantify the level of consensus regarding the perceived effects of collaboration.

In round three (29 April), the results were presented to participants to promote consensus and confirm or revise key findings.

3.3.3. Analysis

At the end of the first round, each answer was collected and subjected to a qualitative coding process by transcribing the answers on an Excel table. For each question, lexical recurrences, convergent opinions and the most frequent patterns of meaning were identified. This process made it possible to map emerging trends among the participants, particularly regarding the perception of exclusivity maintained or compromised by the brand after the collaboration, the impact on perceived positioning and the evolution of attitudes towards the brand over time. For each question, two or three main recurring qualitative trends were identified in participants' responses, such as maintaining exclusivity versus increasing accessibility. These trends were supported by quantitative evidence (e.g. '12 out of 16 responses indicate that...') and were subsequently used to define the questions in round two.

In the second round of the Delphi study, R was used to rigorously manage and analyse the four different question formats administered to the 16 participants. The *tidyverse* ecosystem (specifically *dplyr*, *purrr*, *tidyr* and *ggplot2*) was used, which provided the tools to restructure and visualize the results (Appendix 1). For questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6, in which each expert had to rank three variants (1 = very relevant; 3 = not very relevant), the average rank and percentage of first places were calculated, and Kendall's concordance coefficient was applied to assess the degree of agreement between subjects, supplemented by Friedman's non-parametric test that allowed us to compare the averages of the variables related to perceptions of accessibility and exclusivity across multiple groups to test the significance of differences between variants. Questions 7 and 8, structured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree), were pivoted into a single column of scores, allowing the calculation of mean, standard deviation and agreement/disagreement percentages (scores ≤ 2 and ≥ 4). The same descriptive statistics were calculated for questions 9 and 10, again on a 1-5 scale but repeated on three variants. Finally, question 5, an open-ended multiple-choice type, was broken down into rows to obtain the absolute frequency and percentage of each item cited as 'compromising' the perception of luxury.

This mixed quantitative-qualitative workflow was supported by visualisations made with the R Studio programme to allow a clear visualisation of the data. Barplots and stacked barplots were selected to visualise the distribution of responses on categorical variables; boxplots and violin plots to analyse the dispersion and distribution of numerical variables; the heatmap was adopted to highlight correlations between variables; the mosaic plot, used in the questions with the three-variant classification, allowed the study of associations between categorical variables; and finally, the treemap was used in the fifth question for a hierarchical visualisation of the data. These tools provided useful visual support for interpreting the participants' responses and delving into the dynamics related to the variables under study, and made it possible to identify not only which drivers (exclusivity, authenticity, perceived value) are considered most relevant by the participants, but also to measure to what extent and in which direction collaborations with fast fashion influence the long-term perception and market positioning of luxury brands.

4. Results

Below are the results for each question.

4.1. Round 1

Question 1.1

The first question aimed to understand whether Maison Margiela was perceived as being more accessible post collaboration or whether it had maintained or even strengthened its exclusivity as a result on the partnership. The results showed a predominant trend towards a perception of greater accessibility: 12 out of 16 respondents stated that the alliance had made the brand more accessible, without necessarily compromising its identity. A minority (4 responses), however, emphasised the maintenance of exclusivity.

Question 1.2

The second question aimed to assess the impact of this perception on personal attitudes towards the brand. In 10 out of 16 cases, an unchanged attitude emerged, a sign that the collaboration has not significantly modified the individual's bond with Maison Margiela in the long term. In 3 responses, however, there was a negative impact linked to a decrease in the perception of exclusivity or desirability. Conversely, 2 participants described a positive effect, reporting increased curiosity or involvement with the brand.

Question 2

The third question focused on the evolution of brand identity over time, asking whether Maison Margiela was still perceived as consistent with its niche positioning. The answers reveal an articulated picture: 9 participants (56%) believe that the brand identity has remained consistent, mainly due to the maintenance of a conceptual image. However, 5 responses expressed doubts about consistency, highlighting a perception of increasing commercialisation. Another 2 interviews offered more nuanced reflections, arguing that, while maintaining a certain conceptual rigour, the brand had lost some of its aura of mystery in favour of a more 'pop' presence.

Question 3.1

The fourth question aimed to detect whether, after the collaboration, Balmain was perceived as a more accessible brand or had maintained an exclusive aura. Again, the perception of greater accessibility prevailed (10 responses), while 4 respondents stated that the exclusivity of the brand had been preserved, partly due to the use of celebrities as an image-building element. The remaining 2 responses were neutral or disinterested in the brand and therefore do not contribute to outline a precise trend.

Question 3.2

The fifth question was aimed at understanding whether the partnership had influenced the purchase decision. The majority (13 interviews) stated that they had not made any brand-related purchases after the partnership, showing a lack of interest in the brand. Only 3 responses offered reasons related to elements such as distinctive design, perceived quality and stylistic values.

Question 4

The sixth question aimed to investigate whether the Balmain x H&M collaboration had influenced Balmain's positioning by moving it towards greater accessibility or conversely by reinforcing its status as a luxury brand. The largest segment of respondents (8 out of 16) believed that the collaboration had made Balmain more accessible and desirable, especially for a young audience not accustomed to luxury. Among them, they report that the partnership has broadened brand awareness and made the brand 'knowable and recognisable' among consumers who previously did not consider luxury brands. A group of 5 interviews claims that Balmain has maintained its aura of luxury. According to these respondents, the communicative action and the selection of celebrities have confirmed the exclusive appeal of the brand, enhancing its desire without detracting from its prestige. A minority of 3 interviews recognise a dual effect: while the collaboration has increased Balmain's appeal and visibility, it has also partially shifted the perception towards a more 'commercial' image, less linked to pure luxury, while remaining desirable overall.

4.2. Round 2

Three variant classifications

In question 1, variant *b* (*the collaboration compromised exclusivity, making Maison Margiela significantly less desirable for traditional luxury consumers*) obtains the lowest average rank (1.62), indicating that the majority of respondents considered it as the most significant (Appendix 2). Furthermore, looking at the boxplot it is possible to visualize how the median of option *a* is lower than the others, indicating a higher perception of relevance by the interviews (Figure 3). On the contrary, the variant *a* (*the collaboration has made the brand more accessible, while maintaining some distinctive elements that partially preserve its luxury identity*) is the least relevant (mean rank = 2.31) (Appendix 2). The relatively high standard deviation for *b* (0.885) suggests some variability in opinions, although 55.6% of participants placed it first, confirming the clear preference for this variant (Appendix 2 and 3). However, the concordance between the participants is very low, as evidenced by Kendall's W = 0.0358, indicating poor agreement between the responses, and its p-value = 1.00, which indicates no agreement (Appendix 4). Furthermore, the Friedman's test is not significant (p = 0.138), suggesting that the differences between the rankings of the three variants are not statistically significant (Appendix 4). This means that even if option b is the most popular, the variability in preferences and lack of statistical significance impose caution in drawing strong conclusions.

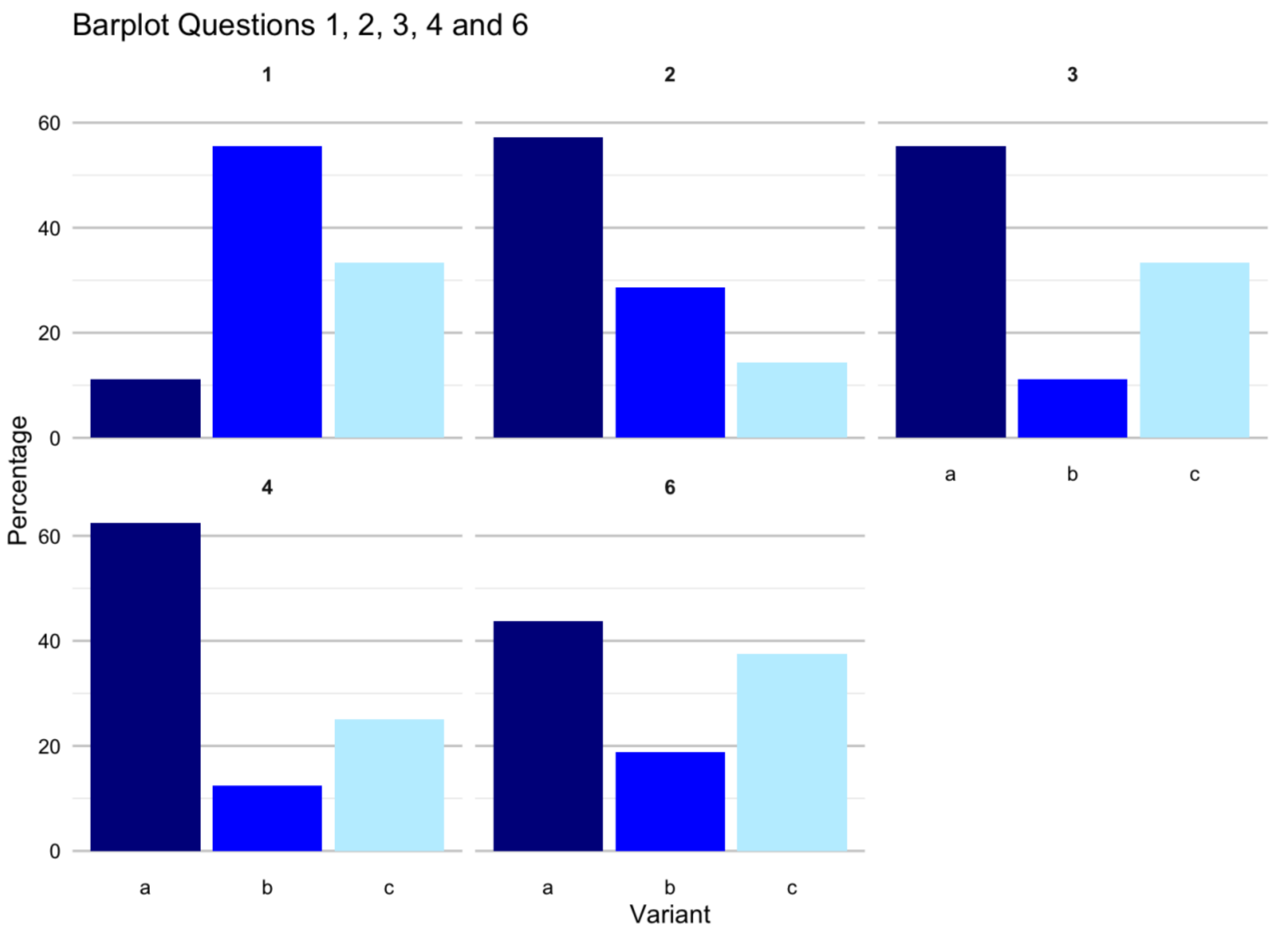
Even in the second question a clear preference for one of the options emerges, in fact the variant *a* (*Maison Margiela's identity has remained consistent, confirming its positioning as a niche brand while becoming better known*) obtained the lowest average position (1.62) with a standard deviation of 0.719, the highest percentage of first place (57.1%) and a low median, while variant *c* (*the effect of collaboration on brand identity was minimal, with no significant changes in the long run*) was less relevant (mean rank = 2.62) (Appendix 2 and 3). The concordance between the participants is still low (Kendall's W = 0.106), but unlike the first question, here the Friedman's test is significant (p = 0.00978) (Appendix 4). This means that the differences in rankings are statistically significant, even if the participants are not entirely in agreement with each other. In this case, it can be stated with greater certainty that variant *a* was overall more convincing than the others.

For the third question, option *a* (*the collaboration has made Balmain more accessible, especially for young audiences, slightly compromising the exclusive image of the brand*) clearly dominates, with a median tending to the minimum, an average ranking of 1.38 and a very low standard deviation (0.5), a sign of great consistency in the answers (Appendix 2). The percentage of first place assigned to *a* is 55.6%, confirming the clear preference (Appendix 3). Again, the absolute agreement between participants is low (Kendall's W = 0.0371), but the Friedman's test is significant (p = 0.00609), so the differences between the three options are not random (Appendix 4). Variant *b* (*Balmain's positioning as a luxury brand has remained intact and, indeed, has been strengthened by the notoriety obtained, despite the collaboration*) is the least preferred (mean rank = 2.56) (Appendix 2). Therefore, despite the low cohesion, there is a clear and significant trend in favour of variant *a*.

The fourth question presents a similar situation to the previous one: option *a* (*the strategy has increased Balmain's notoriety, making it more accessible and attractive to young consumers*) is clearly preferred, with a mean rank of 1.38, a very small standard deviation (0.5), and the highest first place percentage (62.5%) among all the questions analyzed, bringing with it a median that tends to the minimum (Appendix 2 and 3). Option b (*over time, the collaboration has made the brand less desirable, eroding the exclusive aura that characterized it*) is the least preferred, with an average position of 2.50 (Appendix 2). Concordance remains low (Kendall's W = 0.103), but the Friedman's test is highly significant (p = 0.000638), confirming that the difference between the alternatives is statistically solid (Appendix 4).

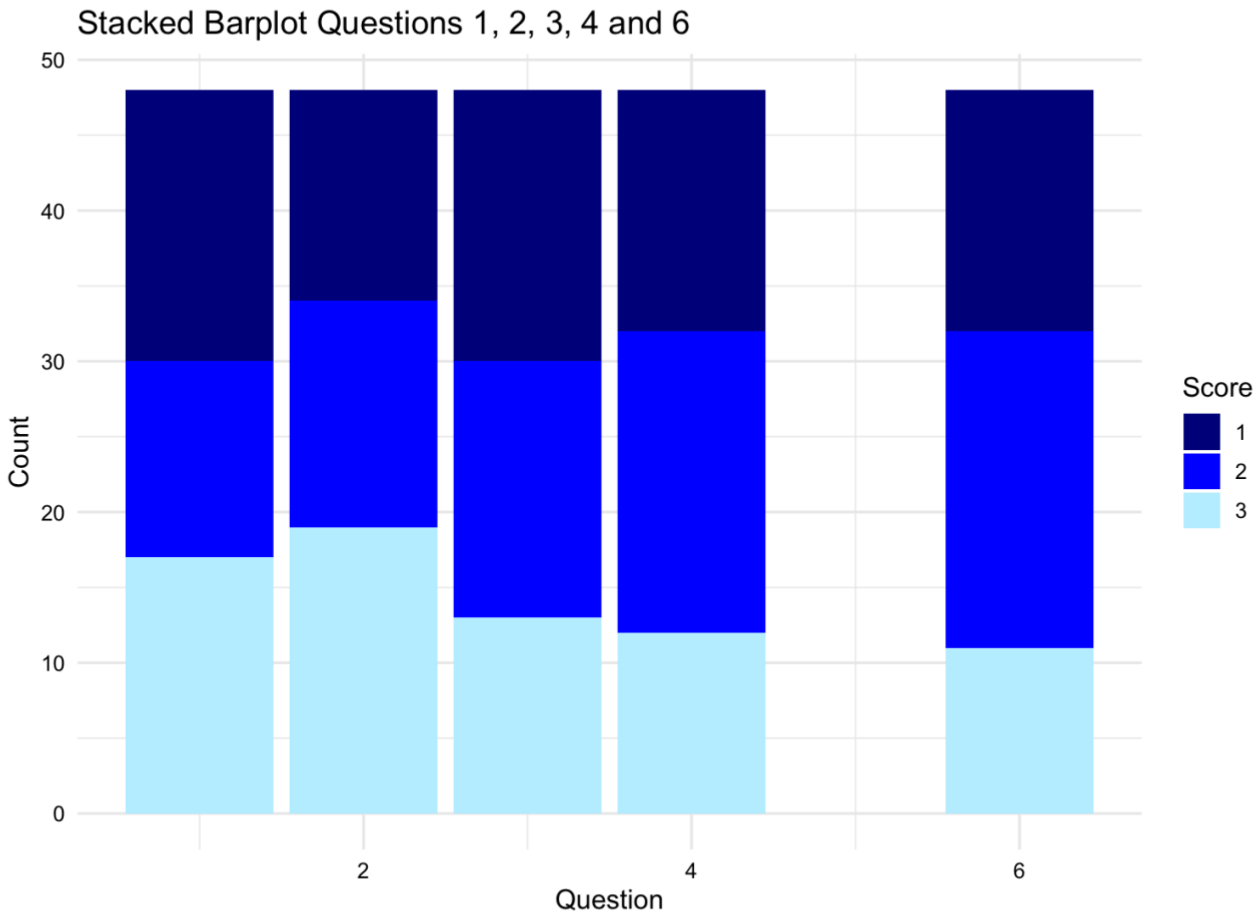
In question 6 the results are less clear-cut, in fact, the three options obtain very similar media ranks: *a* (*exclusivity is the main driver of the perception of luxury; therefore, a collaboration with a mass brand necessarily compromises positioning*) and *b* (*it is possible to attract new consumer segments without sacrificing partial exclusivity, if the brand maintains high quality and innovative standards*) both at 1.94, *c* (*product quality, innovation and design are factors that, in the current context, can weigh more than traditional exclusivity in the definition of luxury*) slightly better at 1.81 (Appendix 2). First place percentages are also distributed: *a* with 43.8%, *c* with 37.5%, *b* with 18.8% (Appendix 3). However, both the Kendall agreement is very low (W = 0.0239), and the Friedman's test is non-significant (p = 0.888) (Appendix 4). This suggests that there is no clear preference or real consensus among participants, and that responses are likely influenced by highly variable personal assessments. Variants *b* and *c* have similar medians, while variant a shows greater variability in the assigned ranks.

Figure 1: Barplot for questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6



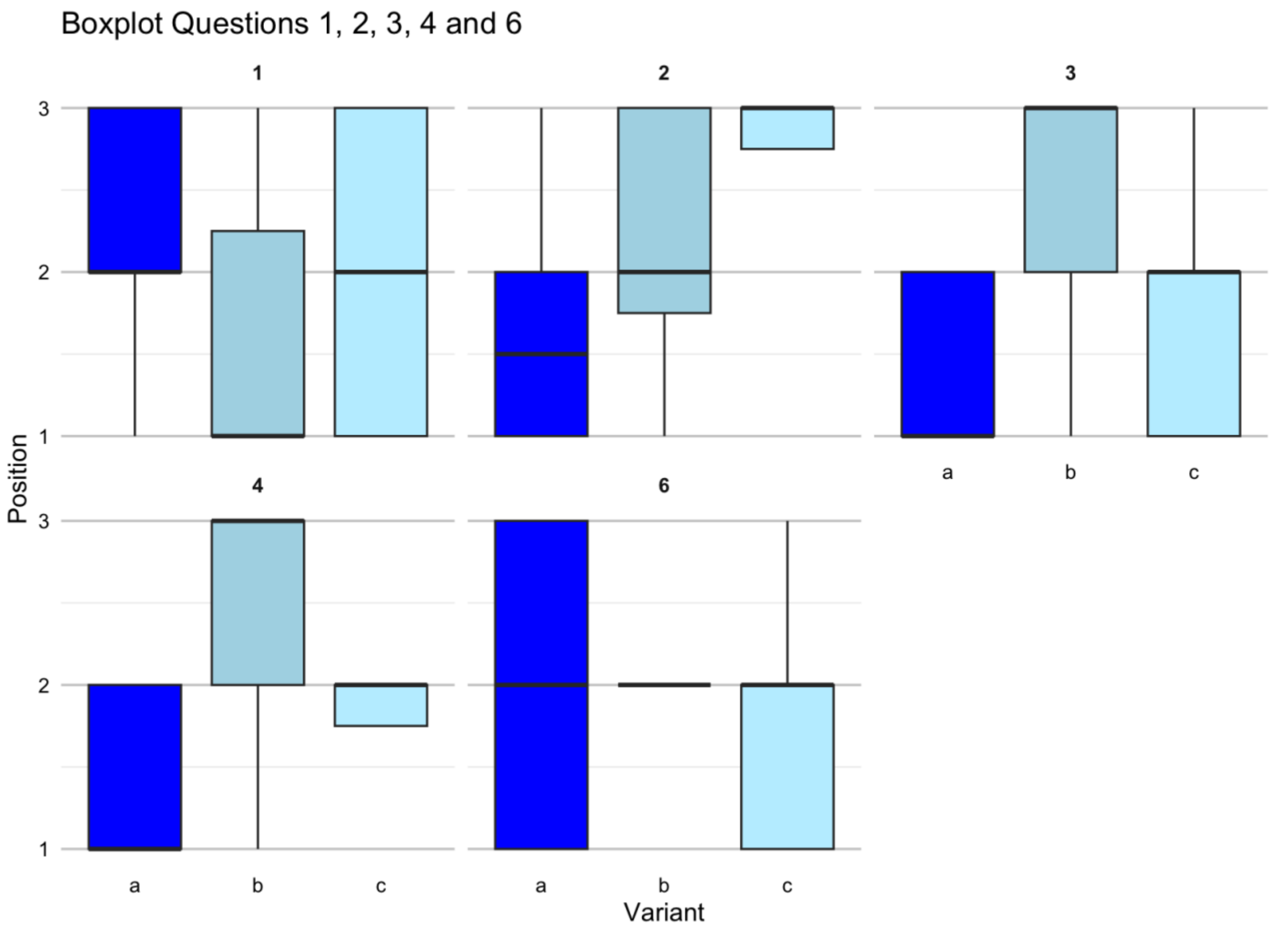
Note: This barplot visually shows how participants' perceptions focus on options that signal a compromise of exclusivity as a result of collaborations. The convergence on option *a* in questions 2, 3 and 4 is indicative: these are the variants that recognize greater brand accessibility after collaboration, while maintaining elements of recognizability. This reinforces the idea that participants are sensitive to the trade-off between openness and identity continuity. The analysis suggests that exclusivity is still the backbone of the perceived value of luxury, and any deviation is intuitively read as a risk.

Figure 2: Stacked barplot for questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6



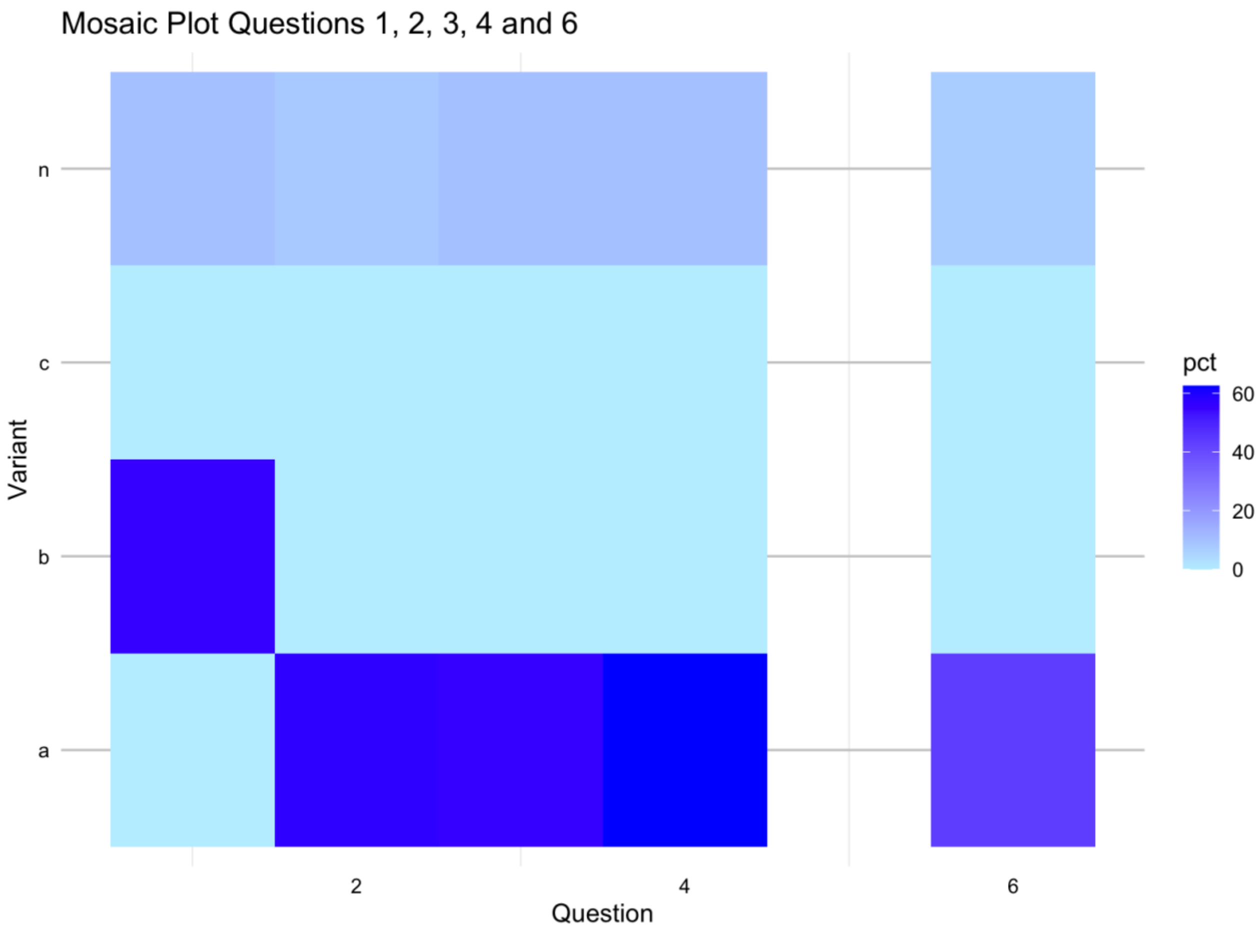
Note: This stacked graph reinforces the idea of a bifurcated narrative: on the one hand, a part of the sample welcomes hybridization with openness; on the other, a visible concern about homologation emerges. Options *a* and *b* are clearly more selected, while options *c* often remain marginal: this suggests that participants tend to avoid neutral or minimizing positions, preferring instead to express a clear judgment, both critical and favorable, on the effects of collaborations. This layered trend perfectly reflects the paradox of "prestige for the many".

Figure 3: Boxplot for questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6



Note: The boxplot above illustrates the variability of the positions expressed by the participants: more polarizing options (with high interquartile amplitude) and others more shared are observed. In particular, options *a* in questions 3 and 4 show not only the lowest average but also the lowest dropout, confirming a shared perception of increased accessibility. Option *b*, on the other hand, shows greater variability, a sign of uncertainty about the strengthening of luxury positioning.

Figure 4: Mosaic plot for questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6

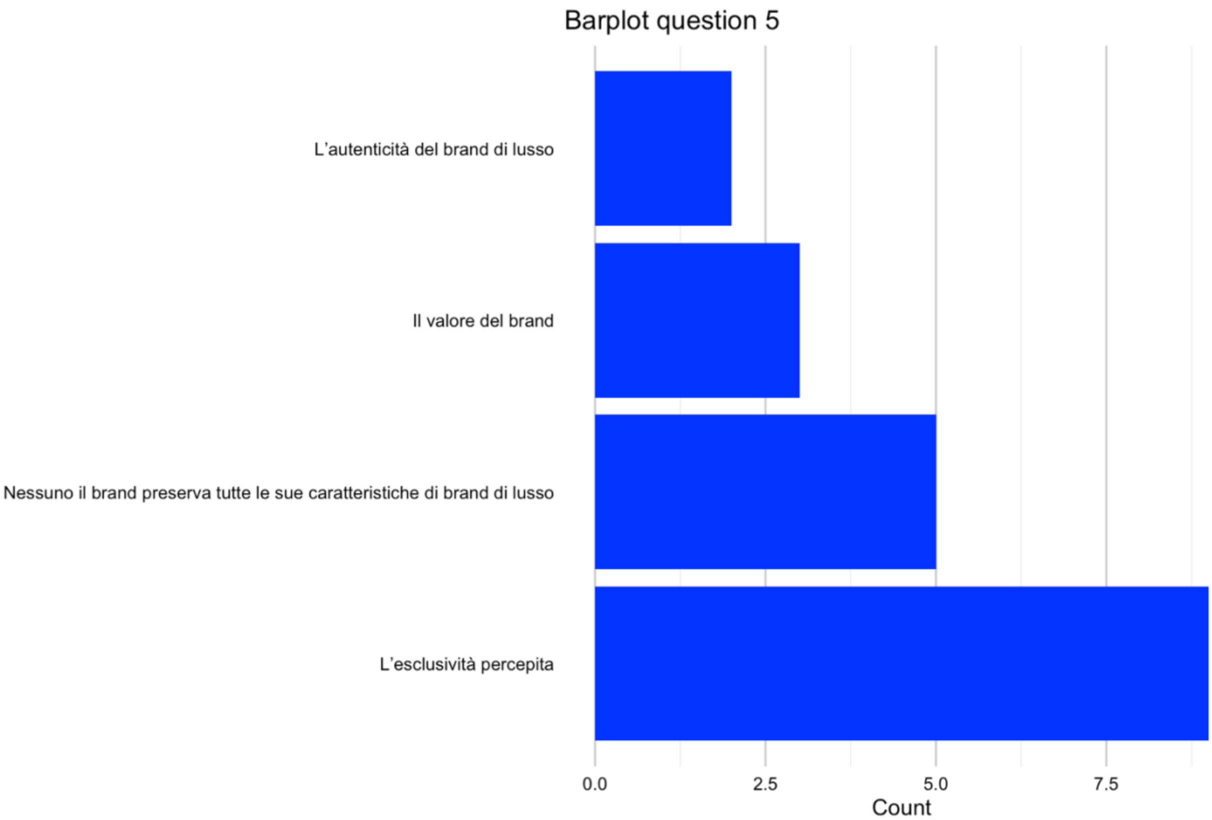


Note: The mosaic plot represents an interesting synthesis between frequencies and interconnections: it emerges that the respondents' choices are not isolated but follow consistent patterns along the different questions. Options *a* and *b* emerge visually with more surface area in question areas 2, 3, and 4, indicating a clear preference for more active and interpretive readings over the impact of collaborations. The *c*'s, on the other hand, occupy small spaces, suggesting a lower degree of consensus around neutral views.

Closed-ended multiple choice

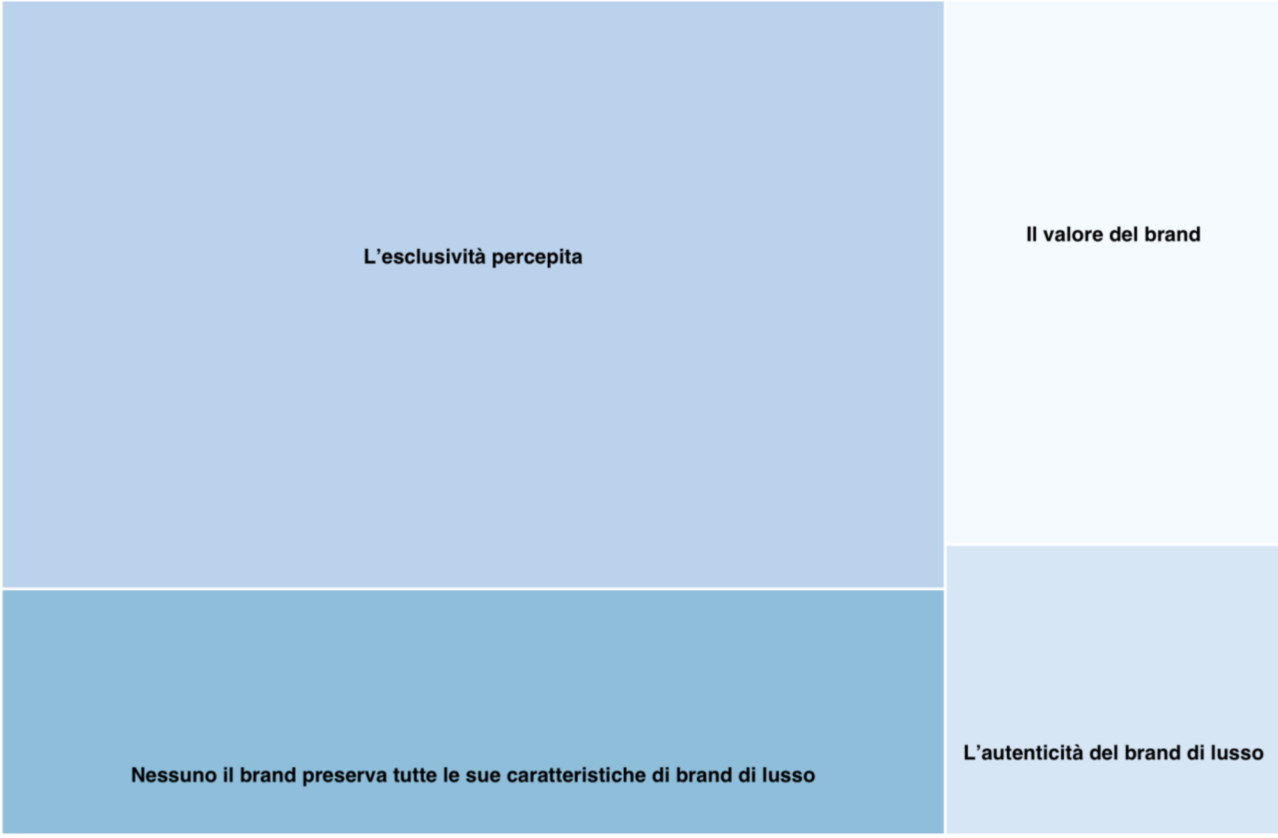
In question 5, the most frequently mentioned option in is *"perceived exclusivity"* (47.4%), followed by *"none, the brand preserves all its characteristics"* (26.3%). Less relevant are *"brand value"* (15.8%) and *"authenticity"* (10.5%) (Appendix 7). This indicates that exclusivity is perceived as the most fragile or most relevant element to be safeguarded in luxury brands, suggesting a reflection on the fact that when luxury becomes more accessible, it is precisely the perception of exclusivity that is the most at risk.

Figure 5: Barplot for question 5



Note: This graph clearly shows that *"perceived exclusivity"* is the element perceived as most at risk in collaborations. This confirms the crucial role of exclusivity in the positioning of luxury and the fear that democratization could compromise its essence. *"None"* in second place suggests that there is still a minority that considers brand identity intact, a sign of latent polarization.

Figure 6: Treemap for question 5



Note: The treemap reinforces the data of the previous barplot, offering an immediate visual representation of the most recurring words. The dominant visual dimension of the item *"perceived exclusivity"* graphically renders the asymmetry in the distribution of concerns: the distance with *"brand value"* and *"authenticity"* highlights their centrality in the positioning of luxury and its perceived vulnerability.

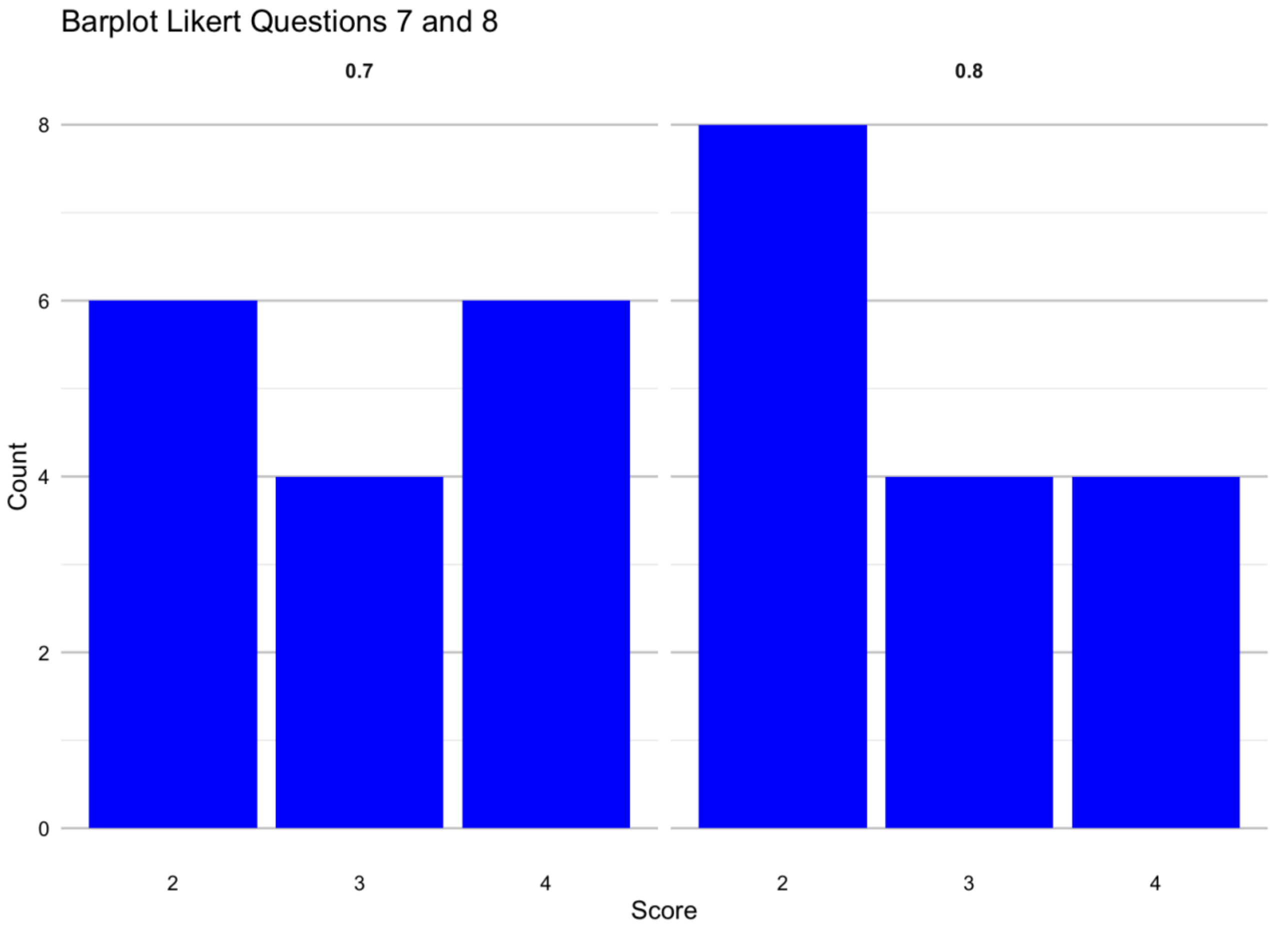
Five-variant Likert scale

On question 7 *"The perception of exclusivity of a luxury brand depends more on the distribution channel employed than on the selling price of the products"* the average of the scores stands at a neutral value (3 out of 5) with a standard deviation of 0.894, indicating a discrete variability in opinions (Appendix 5). The participants are divided in half between those who agree (37.5%) and those who disagree (37.5%), indicating that no clear trend emerges (Appendix 5). This split reflects a potentially controversial or ambivalent issue, on which people do not seem to have a shared view.

In question 8 *"Collaborations between luxury brands and fast fashion increase brand awareness without compromising the perception of luxury, as long as the brand maintains high quality standards"* the average rating (2.75) is slightly lower than neutral, suggesting a tendency to disagree, albeit slight (Appendix 5). However, 50% of participants agree, while only 25% disagree, and the standard deviation is contained (0.856) (Appendix 5). This shows greater convergence compared to question 7, but with still a segment of the respondents who are uncertain or neutral.

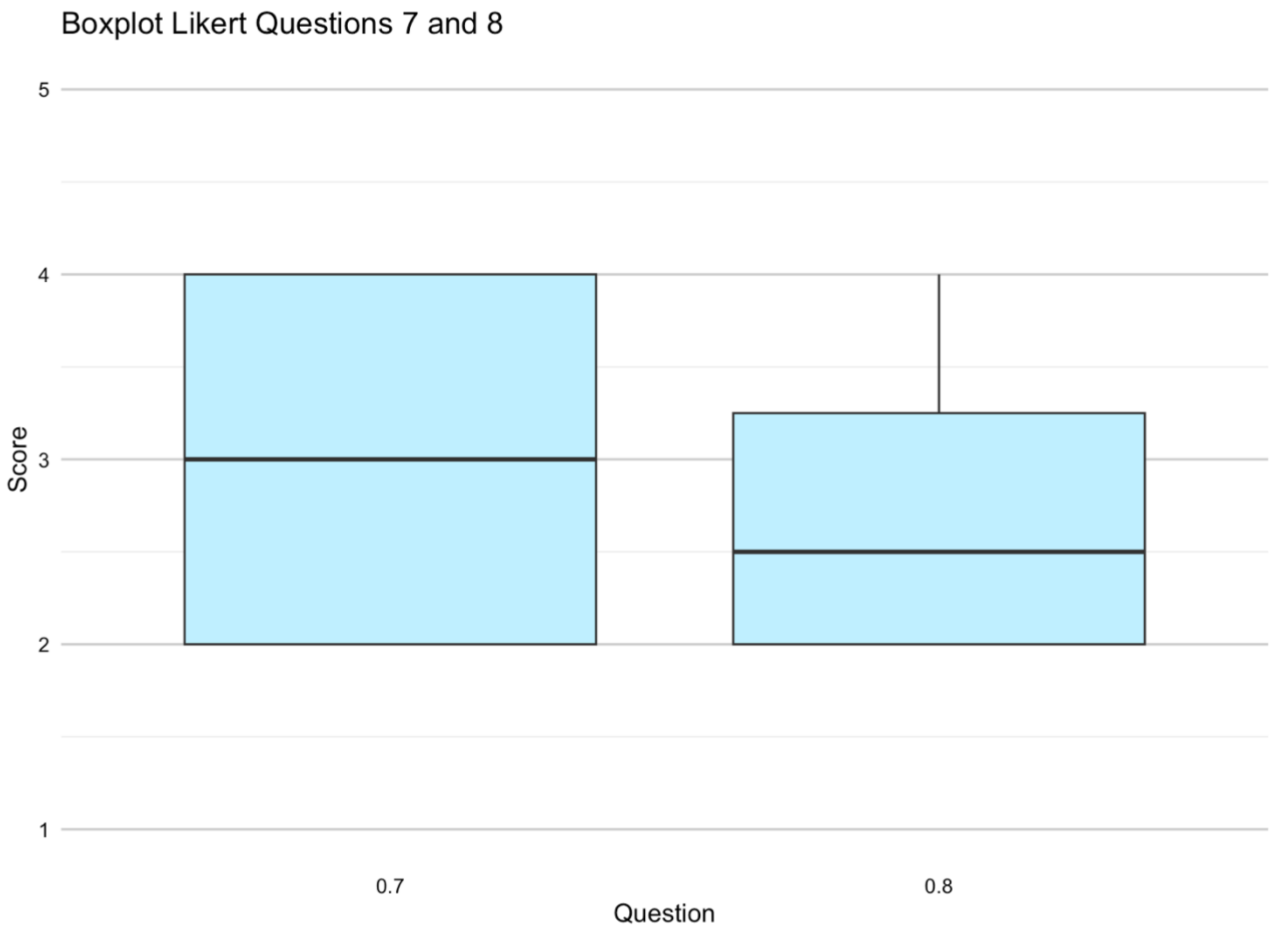
The majority tends to accept the proposed statement, although without a particularly strong or unanimous position.

Figure 7: Barplot for questions 7 and 8



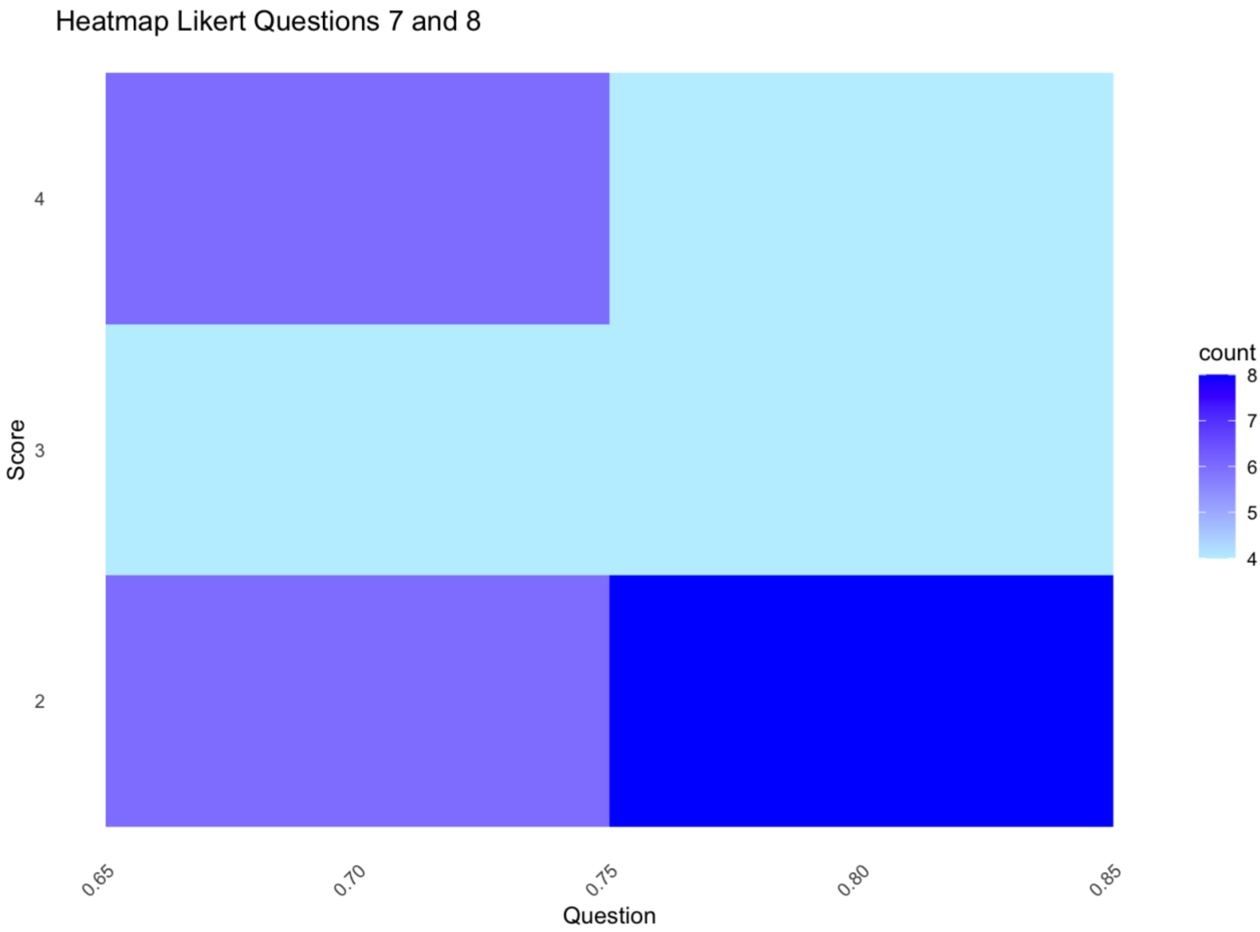
Note: The barplot highlights a division of opinions between those who welcome collaborations and those who fear the loss of the exclusive aura. In particular, the opinion on question 8 sees the option *"agree"* occupy 50% of the sample, while *"disagree"* remains more contained. This suggests a cautious openness to the positive potential of collaborations, but subject to compliance with high quality standards.

Figure 8: Boxplot for questions 7 and 8



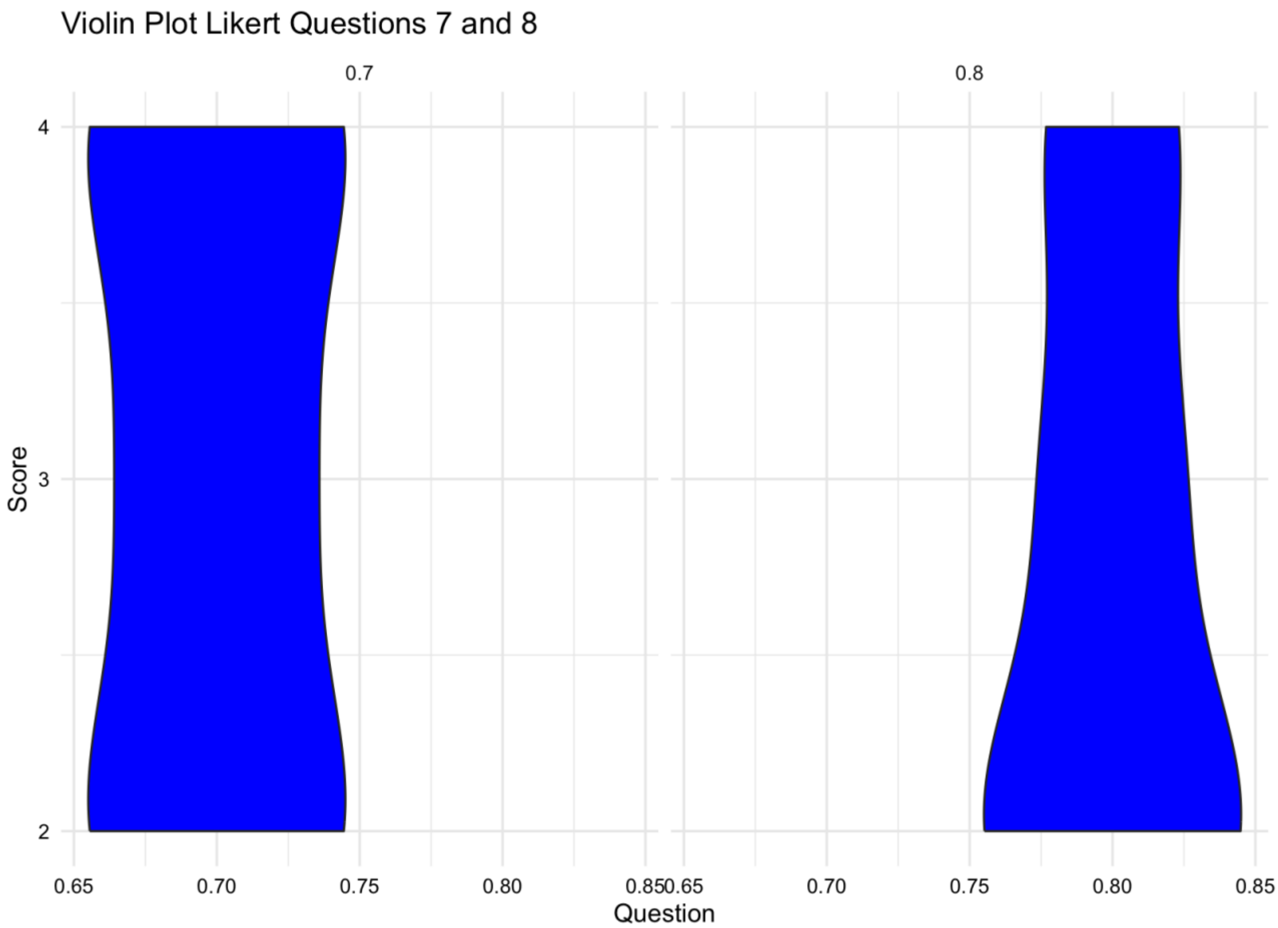
Note: The boxplot shows a relatively small dispersion, indicating that most participants are between partial agreement and neutrality. The answers to question 8 show a less dispersed distribution and a greater acceptance of the idea that quality preserves positioning. In contrast, question 7, which is more ambiguous in content, generates more variance, reflecting a lack of consensus on the priority between price and distribution channel.

Figure 9: Heatmap for questions 7 and 8



Note: The heatmap makes the response frequencies visible for each score, highlighting the trend towards central values and an absence of extremes. The density of responses on option 3 (neutral) for both questions it's a signal of a generalized prudence in taking a clear position: this suggests that the topics covered require a deeper analysis and that the judgment is conditioned by other interdependent factors.

Figure 10: Violin plot for questions 7 and 8



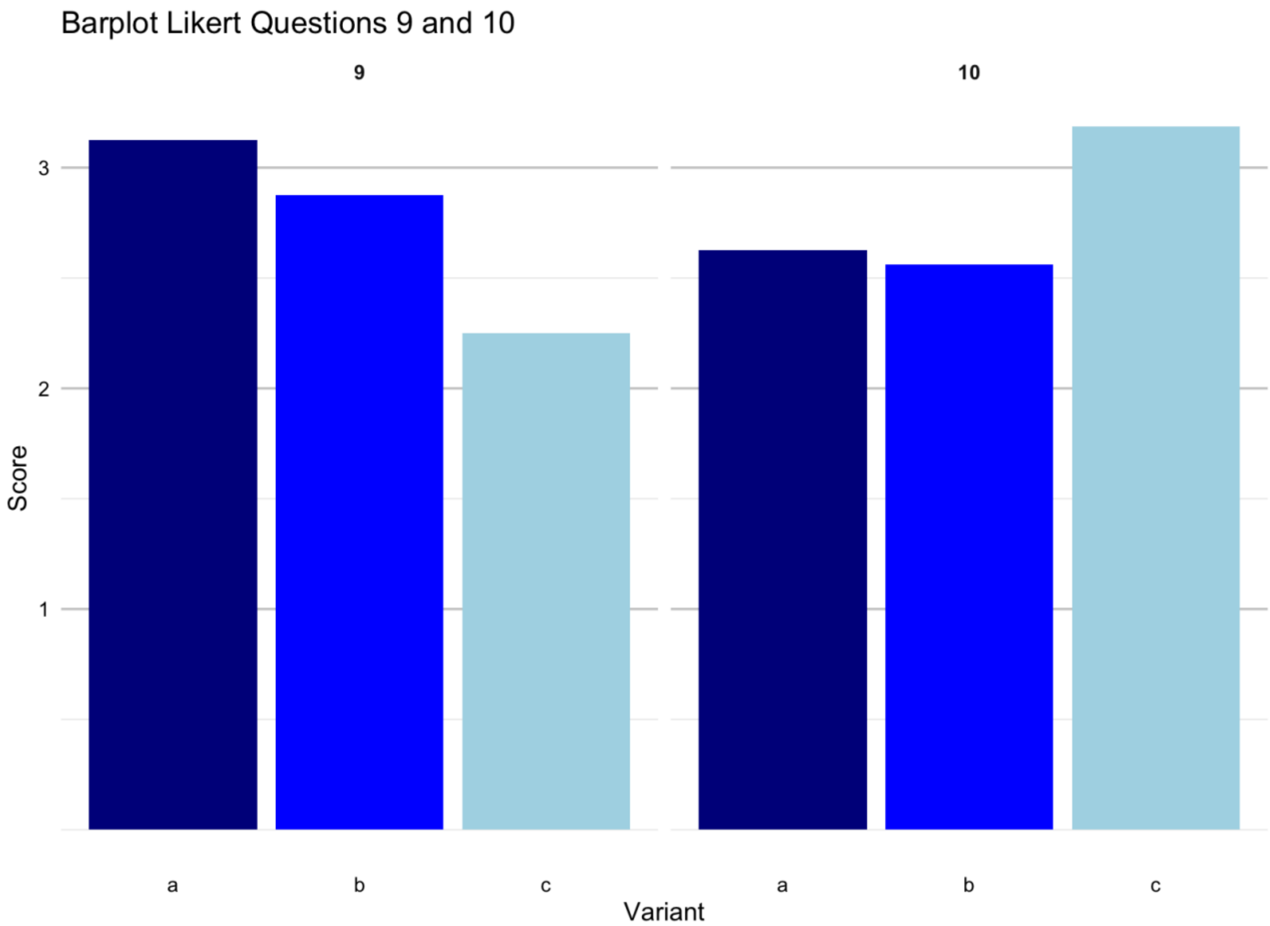
Note: The violin plot highlights the distribution of opinions in greater detail, showing the density of responses. In particular, the spike on value 2 for question 8 indicates that the audience tends to accept the trade-off if the quality is perceived as high. On the contrary, question 7 presents a more symmetrical distribution, an indication of indecision on the correlation between channel and perception of exclusivity.

Five-variant classification

Analysing the three variants of the ninth question, a clear preference emerges for option *c* (*luxury brands that collaborate with fast fashion offer lower quality products*), which has a lower mean score (2.25), signalling greater agreement, a low median that translates into a greater perceived agreement and a very high percentage of consent (75%), compared to only 12.5% disagreement (Appendix 6). Variant *a* (*luxury brands that do not collaborate with fast fashion offer higher quality products*), on the contrary, has a higher average score (3.12) and a higher percentage of disagreement than consensus (31.2% vs. 18.8%) (Appendix 6). Even variant *b* (*I don't see any difference in perceived quality between luxury brands that collaborate with fast fashion and those that don't*), despite having a slightly better average than *a* (2.88), gets a consensus of only 25% (Appendix 6). It is therefore evident that variant *c* is the most convincing and agreed upon, both in terms of average and percentage agreement, while the other two fail to generate the same level of adhesion.

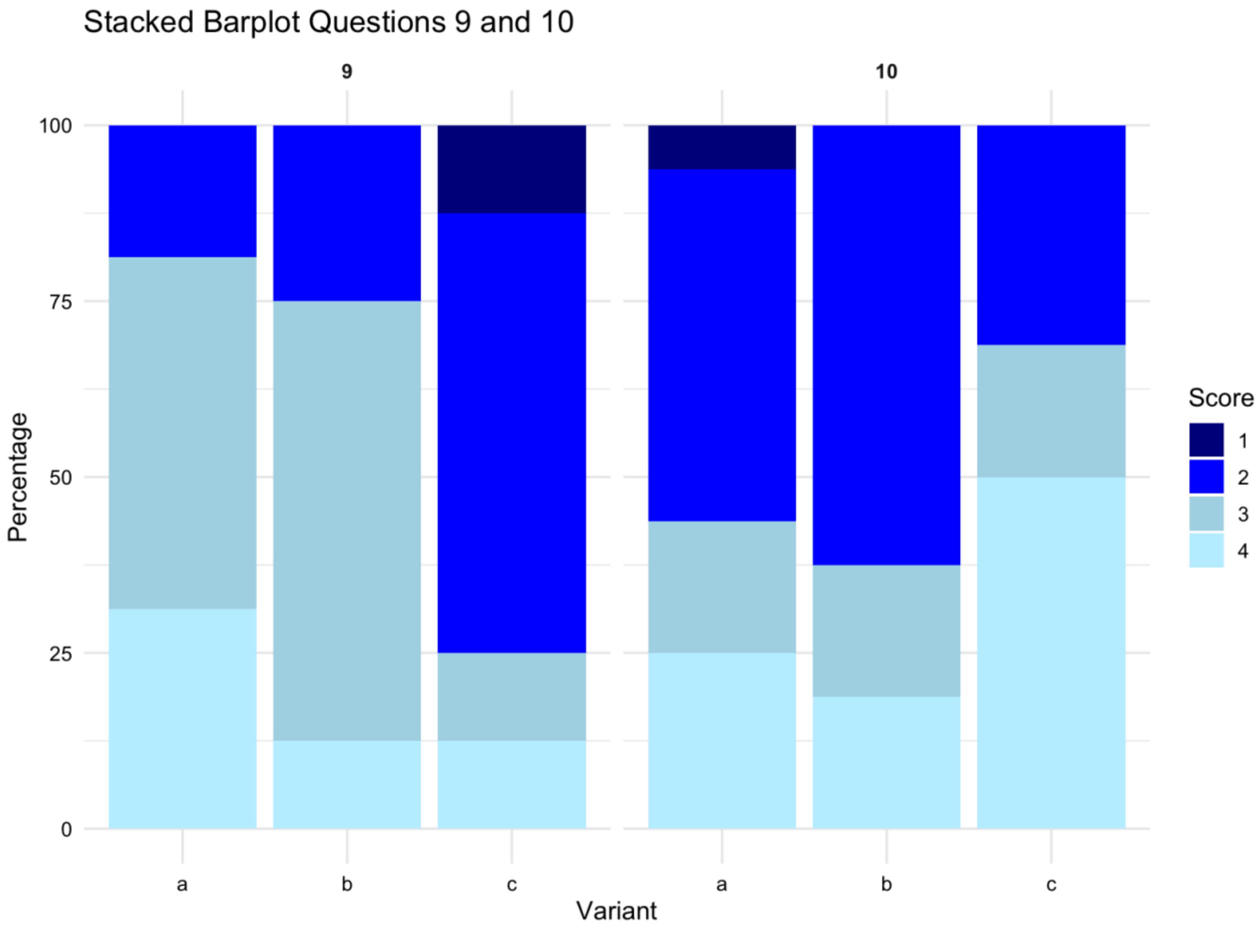
In question 10, variant *c* (*collaboration with fast fashion can make the luxury brand more visible without compromising its quality*) obtains the highest mean score (3.19), indicating greater disagreement, and in fact registers the highest percentage of disagreement (50%) (Appendix 6). In contrast, variants *a* (*collaboration with fast fashion causes the luxury brand to lose its exclusive position and diminish its perceived quality*) and *b* (*collaboration with fast fashion does not have a significant impact on the positioning of the luxury brand, as the quality remains unchanged*) show a more solid consensus, with 56.2% and 62.5% agree, respectively, a very low median and relatively low levels of disagreement (Appendix 6). This suggests that variant *c* has not been well accepted, while options *a* and *b* are both preferred, although not by striking margins. In particular, variant *b* seems to be the most balanced, with the best ratio between agreement and disagreement.

Figure 11: Barplot for questions 9 and 10



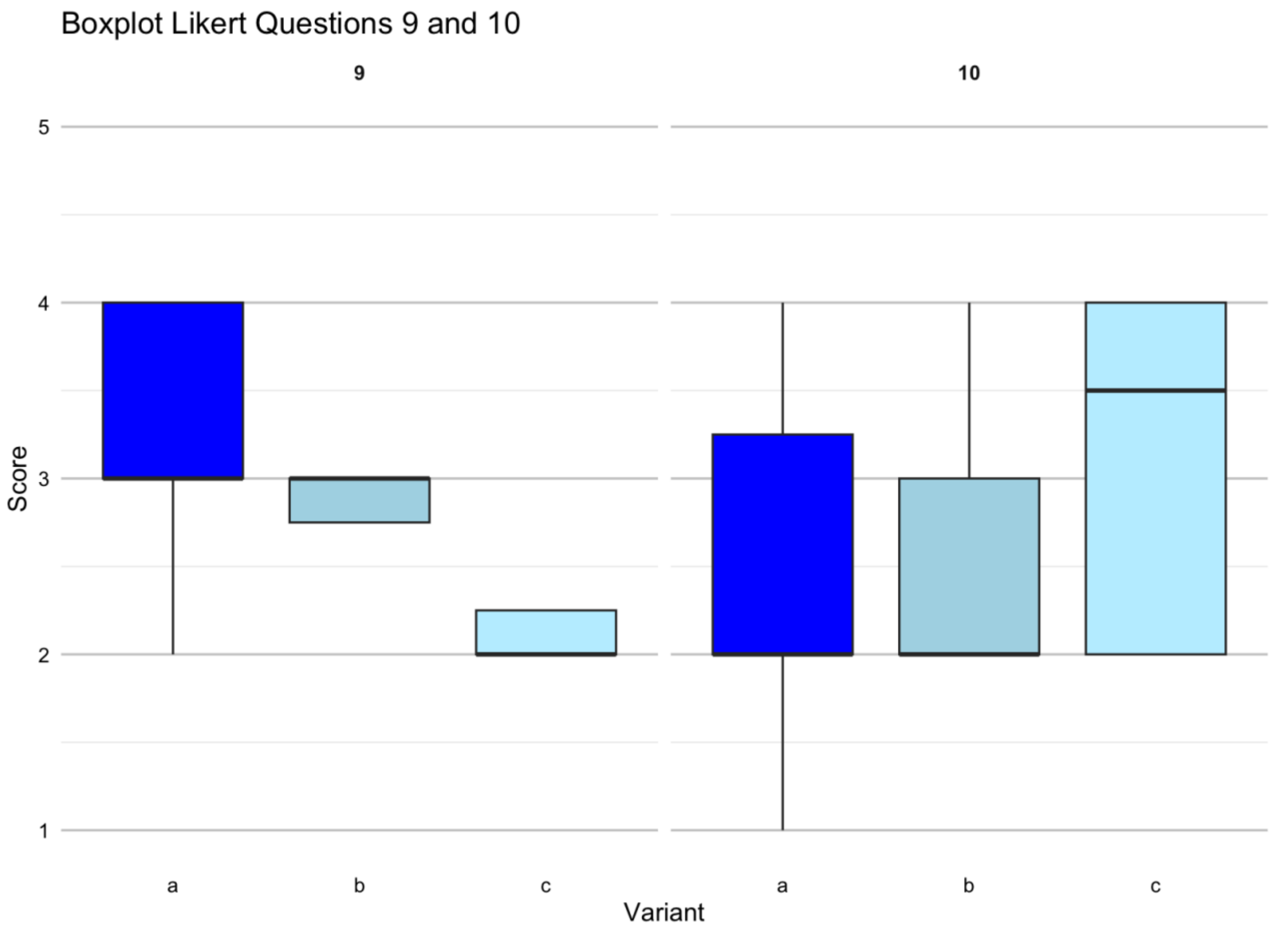
Note: The barplot shows how variants perceived as more critical (e.g. loss of quality) get lower average scores, suggesting more agreement. Option *c* to question 9 (*collaborating luxury brands offer lower quality products*) obtains the highest consensus with an average of 2.25 and 75% agreement: a key figure that signals a widespread distrust in the qualitative stability of these transactions. Options *a* and *b* garner limited consensus and more disagreement.

Figure 12: Stacked barplot for questions 9 and 10



Note: This chart visually confirms the preference for options that indicate a risk to brand quality and exclusivity. The overlaps show that options *a* and *b* of question 10 polarize the positions, but in reverse: both exceed 50% agreement. The high bars in agreement scores reinforce the reading that collaborations should be handled with caution.

Figure 13: Boxplot for questions 9 and 10



Note: The boxplot reveals that, even when there is disagreement, the variability is not excessive, indicating relatively consistent opinions. Options *a* and *b* to question 10 have similar means and low variance, suggesting two opposing but stable views: one part of the audience sees collaboration as a threat, another as a neutral opportunity. Option *c*, on the other hand, shows greater disagreement and dispersion, a sign that the "visibility without compromise" narrative is not convincing.

4.3. Round 3

In the third round, the aggregated results of the previous round were presented to participants with the aim of stimulating greater consensus and enabling confirmation or revision of key responses. A virtual session was organised in which participants were asked to reconsider or confirm the key evidence that emerged: in particular, the perceived accessibility of luxury brands after collaboration with fast fashion. 62.5% of participants maintain the opinion that such collaborations increase accessibility, while recognising the need to preserve high quality standards in order not to completely compromise exclusivity. 25% of the experts slightly revise their opinion, suggesting that the effect on exclusivity may depend on the communication and selection strategy of the celebrities involved. Only 12.5% confirm a critical view, believing that collaborations significantly dilute the perception of luxury.

5. Discussion

In a context where the luxury consumer no longer just visits the physical boutique but lives in an integrated omnichannel ecosystem of ecommerce, social media and personalised services such as video shopping and virtual consultations, collaborations between high-end brands and fast fashion chains acquire new strategic nuances. While widening access and visibility, they also risk eroding the exclusivity that is the soul of luxury branding. Data obtained from the use of the Delphi method confirmed this ambivalence: while some luxury consumers welcome the extension of prestige, others perceive a tearing away of the aura of mystery that fuels elitist desire. At the same time, a heterogeneity of segments clearly emerges, ranging from collectors willing to invest in limited editions to those who rigorously ponder each purchase, weighing quality and price.

It is acknowledged in the literature that, although collaborations between luxury and fast fashion brands can increase visibility and reach new audience segments (Amatulli et al., 2016; Desai & Keller, 2002), they risk eroding the dimension of exclusivity, a pillar of luxury branding (Cheng-Hsui Chen & Chen, 2000; Helmig et al., 2008). The results of the present study confirm this dual nature: 62.5 % of the Round 3 panelists reiterated that collaborations increase perceived accessibility, while emphasising the need to preserve high quality standards to mitigate the erosion of luxury. This data aligns with studies such as Amatulli & Guido (2011), which point out that the perception of exclusivity is the main driver of brand value, and with Shukla et al., 2022, which warns about the danger of brand 'dilution' in case of excessive democratisation.

Most research focuses on cross-sectional measurements right after the launch of the collaboration. This study, on the other hand, explored long-term brand memory by asking panelists to reflect on the evolution of attitude over time. Experimental categorisation into two scenarios (medium vs. low exclusivity) allowed us to quantify how subtle differences in operational levers affect perceptions of luxury and accessibility differently. The manipulation of the level of exclusivity occurred through the choice of distribution channels (selected vs. omnichannel shops) and communication message (artisanal heritage vs. accessibility orientation and massification). This experimental approach relates directly to the reflections of Yu et al., 2020 and Okonkwo, 2007, who emphasise that channel selectivity and narrative positioning are decisive levers in building or eroding the perceived value of a luxury brand. The results show that in cases where an emphasis on design and craftsmanship prevailed (Maison Margiela x H&M), luxury consumers perceived a lower risk of massification than in cases with messages focused on wide distribution and hype (Balmain x H&M). This confirms the importance of balancing distribution strategies and storytelling. Moreover, in the case of the Maison Margiela x H&M collection, the prevailing perception of increased accessibility suggests that the partnership has partly redefined the symbolic boundaries of exclusivity, confirming what Cheng-Hsui

Chen & Chen, 2000 indicated about the risk of trivialisation of luxury in collaborative contexts. However, the fact that Margiela's identity is still perceived as consistent (Question 2) signals a resilience of the brand's conceptual imagery, which may have acted as an identity anchor. In some responses, it was noted that although collaborating with a mass-market brand lowered prices and increased visibility, maintaining limited distribution and curated selection preserved the image of exclusivity. For example, one respondent noted that *"limited distribution and higher prices than in typical fast fashion"* helped to maintain the brand's high level despite the expansion of its consumer base. In the case of Balmain, the results are even more ambiguous. While there is a clear perception of greater accessibility and desirability (Question 4), there is no significant impact on the purchase decision (Question 3.2). This may suggest a misalignment between brand awareness and actual conversion, consistent with brand dilution models (Amatulli et al., 2016), but also with the hypothesis that the short-term effect generated by the campaign has not translated into lasting engagement.

Moving on to Round 2, despite the absence of strong agreement among the participants (Kendall's W always below 0.11), in 4 of the 5 questions with more polarized answers (questions 2, 3, 4 and 5) the Friedman test was significant, indicating that the differences between the rankings assigned to the variants are not random, but statistically significant. This means that, despite the presence of divergent opinions, some shared trends emerge with a certain coherence. For example, in questions 3 and 4, variants *a*, focused on Balmain's increased accessibility through to collaboration, especially among young people, not only obtain the lowest average rank (1.38 in both), but also the lowest standard deviations (0.5), a sign of greater cohesion in the responses. The strong significance of the Friedman test ($p = 0.00609$ and $p = 0.000638$) reinforces the idea that, at least on these aspects, the participants converge more than in other cases. Also in question 2, option *a* (consistent identity despite the increase in notoriety) is clearly preferred (average rank = 1.62, first position for 57.1% of participants), and in this case the Friedman test is significant ($p = 0.00978$), even with a low concordance value ($W = 0.106$). This suggests that, even if opinions diverge, there is a fairly shared perception about the identity of Maison Margiela. In question 1, although option *b* is the most frequently placed in first place (55.6%), neither the concordance between the participants (Kendall's $W = 0.0358$) nor the Friedman test ($p = 0.138$) reaches statistical significance. This indicates that while there is a tendency to consider the loss of exclusivity as the most critical aspect of collaboration, individual variability is too high to draw robust conclusions. Finally, question 6 is distinguished by a situation of equilibrium between the variants: the average rankings are very close to each other (around 1.9), the percentages of first place are distributed and both the concordance and the Friedman test are not significant ($W = 0.0239$; $p = 0.888$). This suggests that there is no dominance on the concept of exclusivity in contemporary luxury and that consumer opinions are fragmented and influenced by individual perspectives, so a case-by-case approach is necessary.

The usage of influencers and celebrities, such as Kendall Jenner for Balmain x H&M, generates a "halo" effect of desirability without affecting the brand's heritage. In the first round, 4 out of 16 panelists recognized a strengthening of Balmain's exclusivity thanks to this leverage, consistent with the cases analyzed in the existing literature (Mrad et al., 2019). However, the majority (10/16) perceived an increase in accessibility. This suggests that the media effect alone is not enough to compensate for mass market perception when collaboration becomes too "pop". 10 out of 16 luxury consumers reported that their attitude towards Maison Margiela remained unchanged, but 25% in Round 3 suggest that the impact on exclusivity may change depending on subsequent communication strategies. In question 9 it emerged that luxury brands working with fast fashion are perceived as inferior in quality by luxury consumers even in the long term, in line with studies by Washburn et al., 2000 that highlight how luxury brands that avoid collaborations with fast fashion maintain a more exclusive and authentic image.

5.1. Managerial implications

The results of this study offer concrete indications for managers who intend to design collaborations between luxury and fast fashion brands without compromising the integrity of their positioning. First of all, it is essential to conceive storytelling as a stratified experience: alongside global campaigns that expand awareness and involve a mass audience, private initiatives must be created, such as limited editions or exclusive events in selected boutiques, capable of preserving and renewing the sense of privilege that constitutes the DNA of luxury.

Secondly, the monitoring of perceptions must become a continuous and multidimensional process. In addition to traditional brand equity indicators, companies should use social sentiment analysis tools and advanced analytics to intercept any slippage in the perception of exclusivity in real time. Only in this way is it possible to intervene promptly with corrective actions, both communicative and product, before prestige dissolves into "mass" perceptions.

Finally, selective co-creation with its community of luxury consumers is a further differentiating factor. Involving ambassadors, collectors and enthusiasts in design or storytelling projects allows to generate micro-elites to a wider audience, strengthening the emotional bond and ensuring a circulation of authentic values. These exclusive groups can be translated into workshops, smart labs or capsule collections launched in preview to a small audience, acting as a lever to reaffirm the quality and heritage of the brand even within large-scale partnerships.

5.2. Limitations and Future research

The low concordance among the interviewees (Kendall's W values frequently below 0.1) indicates a rich heterogeneity of professional and cultural perspectives. This element of heterogeneity becomes even more evident if we observe how Friedman's tests give alternate results: where the p-value is significant (questions 2, 3 and 4) we can be confident that the differences in rankings are not random, but where the p-value remains high (questions 1 and 6) any trend emerges with statistical fragility. This reflects the multidimensional nature of the constructs "exclusivity" and "positioning", which include aspects of communication, distribution, heritage, quality and media visibility. The divergence of opinions underlines that there is no single recipe: luxury-fast fashion collaborations must be calibrated on a case-by-case basis, considering the history of the brand and the market context. Concepts such as "exclusivity" or "positioning" are not one-dimensional, but multifaceted: they include aspects of distribution, communicative message, heritage, perception of quality, etc. The low concordance means that experts give different weights to these dimensions: some focus on artisanal heritage, others on media visibility, others on price or access metrics. The variability reveals the multidimensionality of the phenomenon and signals areas where further specification or segmentation is needed.

Overall, the data from Round 2 reveal a picture of clearly oriented preferences, but without a solid consensus among experts. While on the one hand variants considered "winning" emerge, such as the idea that collaborations can make luxury brands more accessible or that perceived exclusivity is the element to be safeguarded at all costs, on the other hand the low concordances of Kendall's W and the fluctuating results of the Friedman test warn us that behind each result there is a significant margin of dissent. In practice, while trends such as the enhancement of the exclusive aura and the quality threshold in fast fashion partnerships are relatively clearly established, opinions remain sufficiently heterogeneous to require further qualitative analysis and segmentation to understand the roots of these divergences. This means that any strategy of co-branding or opening to new channels will need to be supported not only by more robust statistical analysis, but also by interviews, focus groups and market tests that help finely calibrate the balance between accessibility, visibility and maintenance of the luxury identity. Only in this way it will be possible to translate the mix of encouraging ideas and points of caution that emerged from the panel of experts into successful business decisions.

For future research, might be explored how consumer loyalty and brand performance are affected by the pricing adopted in collaborations. The price threshold from which a luxury brand loses part of its exclusive appeal can be analyzed, or how a fast fashion brand can be associated with high aesthetic and qualitative value practices. Post-collaboration practices can be another area of research: what actions luxury brands can take to adapt themselves by maintaining and consolidating contact with the new acquired audience. These research perspectives can potentially open new avenues for a deeper understanding of the competitive dynamics of an ever-evolving landscape.

6. Conclusion

At the heart of all authentic luxury lurks a dialectical tension: between the exclusive appeal of a knowledge reserved for the few and the democratising impulse that pushes towards an aperture to the many. The collaborations between high-end brands and fast fashion chains perfectly embody this dualism, staging the delicate balance between confidentiality and diffusion. On the one hand, they open the doors of desire to a wider audience, democratising access and visibility. On the other, such democratisation undermines the underlying differentiation on which the 'aristocracy of luxury' rested: that exclusivity that stems from the unprecedented, the rare, the unattainable.

The results of this study confirmed this profound ambivalence: while a part of luxury consumers welcomes the extension of prestige, a non-negligible quota feels, almost with a sense of betrayal, the dissolution of that aura of mystery and superiority that has always nourished the aspirations of the chosen few. The qualitative analysis of Round 1 highlighted the openness to accessibility, without, however, completely compromising brand identity; the data of Round 2 showed little agreement on many variants, except for a strong convergence on the risk to perceived quality; Round 3 finally confirmed, with a slight increase in consensus, the need for high standards to avoid the 'dilution' of luxury. This survey offers a significant contribution to both the theory and practice of luxury branding. On the one hand, it confirms and reinforces the existing evidence on the ambivalence of co-branding projects (Amatulli et al., 2016; Mrad et al., 2019). On the other hand, it introduces a longitudinal Delphi approach that captures the evolution of perceptions over time, revealing how prestige, once democratized, can lose its symbolic effectiveness.

There is an inherent paradox in this dynamic, which highlights the main challenge of contemporary luxury branding. If prestige extends indiscriminately, it risks losing its raison d'être, emptying itself of meaning. This reversal, in which prestige no longer arises from belonging to an elite, but from collective participation, dissolves the ancient hierarchies of desire. The aristocracy, once understood as the privilege of the few, overturns its nature: it becomes a soul that feeds on the energy of the crowds, but runs the risk of disappearing into a wide indistinct shadow. Yet, perhaps, it is precisely in this tension that an opportunity is hidden. In the game of openings and closures, of revealed mysteries and kept secrets, lies the possibility to rewrite the rules of luxury. It is no longer a question of defending immutable borders, but of weaving evocative plots that alternate opulence and confidentiality, personality and participation. Only in this way will prestige, even if offered to all, retain its charm: no longer as an inaccessible privilege, but as an experience capable of surprising, eternally, anyone who ventures into it.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1

```
# --- COMPLETE R SCRIPT ROUND 2 ---

# 0) Install and load packages
install.packages(c("openxlsx", "tidyverse", "irr", "stringr", "reshape2", "ggmosaic", "treemap",
"likert", "fmsb"), repos="https://cloud.r-project.org")
library(openxlsx)
library(tidyverse)
library(irr)
library(stringr)
library(reshape2)
library(ggmosaic)
library(treemap)
library(likert)
library(fmsb)

# 1) Import data
df <- read.xlsx("R2.xlsx", sheet = 1)

# 2) Define question types
rank_questions   <- c(1,2,3,4,6)
likert_q_multi   <- c(7,8)
likert_q_by_text <- c(9,10)
text_q           <- 5

# 3) Ranking analysis (questions 1,2,3,4,6)

# 3.1) Tidy ranking data
d_rank <- map_df(rank_questions, function(q) {
  pat  <- paste0("^Domanda\\.", q, "[abc]$")
  cols <- df %>% select(matches(pat))
  names(cols) <- c("a","b","c")
```

```
  tibble(id = df$`Intervistati/domande`, question = q) %>%
    bind_cols(cols) %>%
    pivot_longer(a:c, names_to="variant", values_to="rank")
})

# 3.2) Ranking statistics: mean rank and standard deviation
mean_rank <- d_rank %>%
  group_by(question, variant) %>%
  summarise(mean_rank = mean(rank), sd_rank = sd(rank), .groups="drop")
print(mean_rank)

# 3.3) First-place frequencies (rank == 1)
freq_first <- d_rank %>%
  filter(rank==1) %>%
  count(question, variant) %>%
  group_by(question) %>%
  mutate(pct = n/sum(n)*100) %>%
  ungroup()
print(freq_first)

# 3.4) Concordance (Kendall's W) and Friedman's test
tests_rank <- map_df(rank_questions, function(q) {
  mat <- df %>% select(matches(paste0("^Domanda\\.", q, "[abc]$"))) %>% as.matrix()
   kw  <- irr::kendall(mat)
  ft  <- friedman.test(mat)
  tibble(question=q,
         kendall_W=kw$value, kendall_p=kw$p.value,
         friedman_chisq=as.numeric(ft$statistic),
         friedman_df=ft$parameter, friedman_p=ft$p.value)
})
print(tests_rank)

# 4) Likert analysis  (questions 7 and 8)
d_likert_7_8 <- df %>%
```

```
  select(id = `Intervistati/domande`, paste0("Domanda.", likert_q_multi)) %>%
  pivot_longer(-id, names_to="question", values_to="score") %>%
  mutate(question = parse_number(question))

# 4.1) Summary statistics
likert_summary_7_8 <- d_likert_7_8 %>%
  group_by(question) %>%
  summarise(
    mean_score = mean(score),
    sd_score   = sd(score),
    pct_agree  = sum(score <= 2)/n()*100,
    pct_disagr = sum(score >= 4)/n()*100
  )
print(likert_summary_7_8)

# 5) Likert analysis (questions 9 and 10)
d_likert_9_10 <- map_df(likert_q_by_text, function(q) {
  pat  <- paste0("^Domanda\\.", q, "[abc]$")
  cols <- df %>% select(matches(pat))
  names(cols) <- c("a","b","c")
  tibble(id=df$`Intervistati/domande`, question=q) %>%
    bind_cols(cols) %>%
    pivot_longer(a:c, names_to="variant", values_to="score")
})

likert_summary_9_10 <- d_likert_9_10 %>%
  group_by(question, variant) %>%
  summarise(
    mean_score = mean(score),
    sd_score   = sd(score),
    pct_agree  = sum(score <= 2)/n()*100,
    pct_disagr = sum(score >= 4)/n()*100,
    .groups    = "drop"
  )
```

```
print(likert_summary_9_10)

# 6) Open-ended question 5: multiple responses
d_text5 <- df %>%
  select(id=`Intervistati/domande`, text=Domanda.5) %>%
  separate_rows(text, sep=“,”) %>%
  mutate(text = str_trim(text))

freq_text5 <- d_text5 %>%
  count(text) %>%
  mutate(pct = n/sum(n)*100)
print(freq_text5)

# 7) Plots

# 7.1) Questions 1 2 3 4 6
#Barplot
ggplot(freq_first, aes(variant, pct, fill=variant)) +
  geom_col(show.legend = FALSE) +
  facet_wrap(~ question) +
  labs(title = “Barplot Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6”, x = “Variant”, y = “Percentage”) +
  scale_fill_manual(values = c(“darkblue”, “blue”, “lightblue1”)) +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
    panel.grid.major.y = element_line(color = “grey80”),
    panel.grid.major.x = element_blank(),
    axis.text = element_text(color = “black”),
    strip.text = element_text(face = “bold”)
  )

#Boxplot
ggplot(d_rank, aes(variant, rank, fill=variant)) +
  geom_boxplot(outlier.shape = NA) +
  facet_wrap(~ question) +
```

```
  scale_y_continuous(breaks = 1:3) +
  scale_fill_manual(values = c("blue", "lightblue", "lightblue1")) +
  labs(title = "Boxplot Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6", x = "Variant", y = "Position") +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
    panel.grid.major.y = element_line(color = "grey80"),
    panel.grid.major.x = element_blank(),
    axis.text = element_text(color = "black"),
    strip.text = element_text(face = "bold"),
    legend.position = "none"
  )

#Mosaic plot
data_melted <- freq_first %>%
  spread(key = variant, value = pct, fill = 0) %>%
  gather(key = "variant", value = "pct", -question)
ggplot(data_melted, aes(x = question, y = variant, fill = pct)) +
  geom_tile() +
  scale_fill_gradient(low = "lightblue1", high = "blue") +
  labs(title = "Mosaic Plot Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6", x = "Question", y = "Variant") +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
    panel.grid.major.y = element_line(color = "grey80"),
    panel.grid.major.x = element_blank(),
    axis.text = element_text(color = "black"),
    strip.text = element_text(face = "bold")
  )

#Stacked barplot
ggplot(d_rank, aes(x = question, fill = factor(rank))) +
  geom_bar(position = "stack") +
  scale_fill_manual(
    name = "Score",
    values = c("darkblue", "blue", "lightblue1"),
```

```
    labels = c("1","2","3")
  ) +
  labs(title = "Stacked Barplot Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6",
       x = "Question", y = "Count") +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
    axis.text = element_text(color = "black"),
    strip.text = element_text(face = "bold")
  )

# 7.2) Question 5

#Barplot
ggplot(freq_text5, aes(x = reorder(text, -n), y = n)) +
  geom_col(fill = "blue") +
  coord_flip() +
  labs(title = "Barplot question 5", x = "", y = "Count") +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
    panel.grid.major.x = element_line(color = "grey80"),
    panel.grid.major.y = element_blank(),
    axis.text = element_text(color = "black"),
    strip.text = element_text(face = "bold")
  )

#Treemap
treemap(
  freq_text5,
  index = "text",
  vSize = "n",
  title = "Treemap question 5",
  palette = "Blues",
  border.col = "white"
)
```

7.3) Likert questions 7 and 8

```
#Barplot
ggplot(d_likert_7_8, aes(factor(score))) +
  geom_bar(fill = “blue”) +
  facet_wrap(~ question) +
  labs(title = “Barplot Likert Questions 7 and 8”, x = “Score”, y = “Count”) +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
    panel.grid.major.y = element_line(color = “grey80”),
    panel.grid.major.x = element_blank(),
    axis.text = element_text(color = “black”),
    strip.text = element_text(face = “bold”)
  )

#Boxplot
ggplot(d_likert_7_8, aes(x = factor(question), y = score)) +
  geom_boxplot(fill = “lightblue1”) +
  labs(title = “Boxplot Likert Questions 7 and 8”, x = “Question”, y = “Score”) +
  scale_y_continuous(breaks = 1:5, limits = c(1, 5)) +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
    panel.grid.major.y = element_line(color = “grey80”),
    panel.grid.major.x = element_blank(),
    axis.text = element_text(color = “black”),
    strip.text = element_text(face = “bold”)
  )

#Heatmap
data <- d_likert_7_8 %>%
  count(question, score) %>%
  spread(key = score, value = n, fill = 0)
```

```
data_long <- melt(data, id.vars = “question”, variable.name = “score”, value.name = “count”)
ggplot(data_long, aes(x = question, y = score, fill = count)) +
  geom_tile() +
  scale_fill_gradient(low = “lightblue1”, high = “blue”) +
  labs(title = “Heatmap Likert Questions 7 and 8”, x = “Question”, y = “Score”) +
  theme_minimal() +
  theme(
    panel.grid.major = element_blank(),
    panel.grid.minor = element_blank(),
    axis.text.x = element_text(angle = 45, hjust = 1),
    strip.text = element_text(face = “bold”)
  )

# Violin plot
ggplot(d_likert_7_8, aes(x = question, y = score, fill=factor(question))) +
  geom_violin(fill = “blue”) +
  facet_wrap(~question) +
  labs(title = “Violin Plot Likert Questions 7 and 8”, x = “Question”, y = “Score”) +
  scale_y_continuous(breaks=1:5, labels=c(“1”,”2”,”3”,”4”,”5”)) +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(axis.text = element_text(color = “black”))

# 7.4) Likert questons 9 and 10

#Barplot
ggplot(likert_summary_9_10, aes(x = variant, y = mean_score, fill = variant)) +
  geom_col(show.legend = FALSE) +
  facet_wrap(~ question) +
  labs(title = “Barplot Likert Questions 9 and 10”,
       x = “Variant”, y = “Score”) +
  scale_y_continuous(breaks = 1:5) +
  scale_fill_manual(values = c(“darkblue”, “blue”, “lightblue”)) +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
```

```
    panel.grid.major.y = element_line(color = “grey80”),
    panel.grid.major.x = element_blank(),
    axis.text = element_text(color = “black”),
    strip.text = element_text(face = “bold”)
  )

#Boxplot
ggplot(d_likert_9_10, aes(x = factor(variant), y = score, fill = variant)) +
  geom_boxplot(outlier.shape = NA) +
  facet_wrap(~ question) +
  scale_y_continuous(breaks = 1:5, limits = c(1, 5)) +
  scale_fill_manual(values = c(“blue”, “lightblue”, “lightblue1”)) +
  labs(title = “Boxplot Likert Questions 9 and 10”, x = “Variant”, y = “Score”) +
  theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
  theme(
    panel.grid.major.y = element_line(color = “grey80”),
    panel.grid.major.x = element_blank(),
    axis.text = element_text(color = “black”),
    strip.text = element_text(face = “bold”),
    legend.position = “none”
  )

# Stacked barplot
freq_9_10 <- d_likert_9_10 %>%
  count(question, variant, score) %>%
  group_by(question, variant) %>%
  mutate(pct = n / sum(n) * 100) %>%
  ungroup()
ggplot(freq_9_10, aes(x = variant, y = pct, fill = factor(score))) +
  geom_bar(stat=“identity”, position=“stack”) +
  facet_wrap(~ question) +
  scale_fill_manual(
    name=“Score”,
    values = c(“darkblue”,”blue”,”lightblue”,”lightblue1”,”white”)
```

```
) +
labs(title = "Stacked Barplot Questions 9 and 10", x = "Variant", y = "Percentage") +
theme_minimal(base_size = 12) +
theme(axis.text = element_text(color = "black"),
      strip.text = element_text(face="bold"))
```

Appendix 2

```
# A tibble: 15 × 4
   question variant mean_rank sd_rank
      <dbl> <chr>       <dbl>   <dbl>
 1        1 a            2.31   0.704
 2        1 b            1.62   0.885
 3        1 c            2      0.894
 4        2 a            1.62   0.719
 5        2 b            2.06   0.772
 6        2 c            2.62   0.719
 7        3 a            1.38   0.5
 8        3 b            2.56   0.727
 9        3 c            1.75   0.683
10        4 a            1.38   0.5
11        4 b            2.5    0.730
12        4 c            1.88   0.619
13        6 a            1.94   0.929
14        6 b            1.94   0.574
15        6 c            1.81   0.75
```

Appendix 3

```
# A tibble: 15 × 4
   question variant     n   pct
      <dbl> <chr>   <int> <dbl>
 1        1 a           2  11.1
 2        1 b          10  55.6
 3        1 c           6  33.3
 4        2 a           8  57.1
```

5	2	b	4	28.6
6	2	c	2	14.3
7	3	a	10	55.6
8	3	b	2	11.1
9	3	c	6	33.3
10	4	a	10	62.5
11	4	b	2	12.5
12	4	c	4	25
13	6	a	7	43.8
14	6	b	3	18.8
15	6	c	6	37.5

Appendix 4

A tibble: 5 × 6

	question	kendall_W	kendall_p	friedman_chisq	friedman_df	friedman_p
	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>
1	1	0.0358	1.00	3.97	2	0.138
2	2	0.106	0.994	9.25	2	0.00978
3	3	0.0371	1.00	10.2	2	0.00609
4	4	0.103	0.995	14.7	2	0.000638
5	6	0.0239	1.00	0.237	2	0.888

Appendix 5

A tibble: 2 × 5

	question	mean_score	sd_score	pct_agree	pct_disagr
	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>
1	0.7	3	0.894	37.5	37.5
2	0.8	2.75	0.856	50	25

Appendix 6

A tibble: 6 × 6

	question	variant	mean_score	sd_score	pct_agree	pct_disagr
	<dbl>	<chr>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>	<dbl>
1	9	a	3.12	0.719	18.8	31.2

2	9 b	2.88	0.619	25	12.5
3	9 c	2.25	0.856	75	12.5
4	10 a	2.62	0.957	56.2	25
5	10 b	2.56	0.814	62.5	18.8
6	10 c	3.19	0.911	31.2	50

Appendix 7

```
# A tibble: 4 × 3
  text                                                        n   pct
  <chr>                                                   <int> <dbl>
1 Il valore del brand                                         3  15.8
2 L’autenticità del brand di lusso                            2  10.5
3 L’esclusività percepita                                     9  47.4
4 Nessuno il brand preserva tutte le sue caratteristiche d…   5  26.3
```