

Department of Business and Management Master's  
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# **Cultural Congruence and Adaptation in Luxury Brand Communication: Effects on Perceived Authenticity and Purchase Intention in the Scandinavian Market**

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*To those who believed,  
even when I could not.  
To those who shared it together.  
To everything I have experienced,  
and that I will bring with me.*

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# Abstract

In the context of globalized luxury branding, the ability of international brands to engage with a multicultural diversity of consumers has become at once a strategic necessity and a major opportunity. This study explores the role of luxury brand cultural congruence, that is the degree to which brand communication resonates with different local cultures values, on perceived authenticity and purchase intention in the specific Scandinavian market. Drawing on theories of cultural adaptation and brand authenticity, a quantitative experiment was conducted using an experimental between-subjects design. Four brand scenarios were created by manipulating level of brand's cultural congruity and communication style. Research data were collected from 219 Nordic consumers. Results show that cultural congruence has a significantly positive effect on perceived authenticity in scenarios aligned with Scandinavian values. Furthermore, perceived authenticity is a mediator for the relationship between brand congruence and purchase intention, a result hypothesized especially within value-based societies like Scandinavian ones, where honesty and simplicity are core cultural traits. Internal brand consistency is also a major predictor of authenticity. Findings indicate that adaptation can be efficient to connect with Scandinavian consumers, cultural congruity has a positive impact on their perceptions of authenticity, that in turn greatly impact purchase intention. The research finding underline theoretical contributions by clarifying the factors that link cultural alignment with consumer behavioral intentions in Scandinavia, while also advancing the understanding of adaptation strategies for luxury worldwide brands.

# 1. Introduction

In today's global and competitive landscape, brand management is a complex challenge, especially for luxury brands. These brands not only want to sell high-end products, but take care of consumer relations, creating experiences, and building symbolic and emotional value. Indeed, luxury brands are characterized by "experience marketing", meaning that it is not only the functional aspect that attracts consumers, but also the psychological and narrative dimensions that contribute to the perception of value, delivering an emotional experience through theatricality and exclusivity (Kapferer et al., 2017). Luxury brands are different from general brands, the 8P described by Som, A. & Blanckaert, C., (2015) highlights the main characteristics: performance, provenance, paucity, persona, personage, position publicity, pricing. The Kapferer triangle further emphasizes how luxury brands management is different, luxury goods are distinct from premium and fashion goods, and the aim is to "not be comparable to anyone", recalling exclusivity and rarity (Kapferer, J. N., 2008). Global luxury goods have distinctive aspects that make them globally desirable and prestigious, such as high quality, "point-of-sale theatricalization," excess production, and lavish communication. Luxury communicates social distinction; those who own luxury goods are characterized by social elevation (Kapferer, J. N., 2008). One of the main challenges for a brand is choosing between globalization and local cultural adaptation. They need to decide the extent of cultural adaptation globally, as regional differences remain significant (Berghaus et al., 2018). As much as consumers buy global luxury products, attitudes, consumption style varies significantly across markets, for economic, social, and cultural reasons (Seo et al., 2015). Consumers remain local, there is a growing demand for adaptation and customization based on local tastes, consumer habits rooted in culture are an important barrier to uniform globalization (Kapferer, J. N., 2008). Brands need to find a balance between globalization and location of products. In this setting, cultural brand congruence refers to the level by which the values and communication behavior of the luxury brand match the values of any given cultural congruence (Diantaris, M., 2024). To adapt effectively without seeming too detached from local consumers, it is very important to implement marketing strategies that create contact with them (Kapferer, J. N., 2008). However, for positive brand evaluations, the brand needs to maintain its internal consistency, because it could be perceived inconsistent across markets. A brand must define its own recognizable identity that remains consistent even when adapting (i.e. different advertisements are created for different markets), often recalled by common symbols (Kapferer, J. N., 2008). Although the creation of a single marketing campaign may be more cost-effective, the focus should be on sustainable brand growth and on the creation of better relationships. Success lies in this balance between globalization and localization, also called "hybrid approach", by understanding local specificities and adopting a global strategy that nonetheless has cultural relevance in different markets (Kapferer et al., 2017; Liu, H., 2023). Brand consistency depends on a clearly defined image that builds a true and emotional relationship with the consumer, especially in culturally sensitive countries (Seo et al., 2015). In the context of the Scandinavian environment, the situation offers a particularly interesting case for the cultural adaptation of luxury brands,

as it is shaped by Nordic culture, which is at odds with the general ideology of luxury branding worldwide. In this context, Scandinavian luxury branding focuses exclusively on providing different consumer experiences, but with a specific stance that avoids opulence, remaining rather focused on usability, utility, and integrity (Modica, M., 2023). The Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland) have a culture based on simplicity, functionality, honesty, sustainability, and the concept of “*lagom*”, which embodies the idea of “just the right amount” and promotes balance and moderation (Carl Friedrik, n.d). A culture such as Scandinavian one would therefore be an interesting case study of how luxury brands could adapt their excessive communicative approach to fit this sober environment and whether an adaptation could increase the perceived authenticity and purchase intention of consumers. Thus, the aim of this study is to fill a gap in the literature by investigating whether cultural adaptation strategies, meant to increase cultural brand congruence, lead to more favorable consumer responses in the Scandinavian market. It analyzes how the “Scandi” minimalism could influence people’s perceptions of luxury brands. Hence, central question is: To what extent does the cultural congruence between luxury brand’s communication style and Scandinavian values increase perceived authenticity and purchase intention of Nordic people? This level of congruence is usually achieved through adaptation at the cultural level, enabling global brands to reach local audiences in a meaningful way. Existing literature has discussed this relationship highlighting how consumers are positive engaged in front of brands that reflect their values, when they have the possibility to choose multiple products (Morhart et al., 2015; Rodrigues et al., 2024). Authenticity is an increasingly important value that plays a key role in the choice of products to purchase (Goldstein et al., 2022). Despite the previous literature, few studies have explored these dynamics in the case of adaptation in the Scandinavian context, where simple and basic values, different from the average luxury brand approach, predominate. To test the four hypotheses, explored in the next section, quantitative research was conducted through experimental design. Specifically, Scandinavian people were exposed to four scenarios developed manipulating the cultural brand congruence (high vs low) with Scandinavian culture and the communication style (simple vs opulent) in Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian markets of a fictitious brand. The aim was to create real scenarios, with real brand practices such as full congruence, full incongruence and mixed strategies (adaptation in one market and vice versa) to investigate how consumers in Scandinavia react in terms of perceived authenticity and purchase intention, assessing how they vary across different cultural alignments. The results show that cultural congruence in the Scandinavian context plays a strategic role on perceived authenticity, and authenticity not only directly impacts purchase intention, but also has a psychological role in such a culture-based context, mediating congruence on behavior intentions. Brand consistency is as well fundamental along with cultural congruence. In so doing, there is a contribution to the literature by exploring the possible cultural fit in the Scandinavian context and understanding the product decisions of Nordic consumers. In addition, the findings also offer practical insights for luxury brands, demonstrating that cultural alignment in this target market can impact trust and brand connection. The structure of this thesis is organized as follows: the next section reviews relevant literature and develops hypotheses. This is followed by clear description of methodology

and statistical analysis; scenarios design being included. The chapter of results presents empirical findings, which are then discussed in the next section using relevant literature, specifying limitations and opportunities for further investigation. Conclusion is then followed by summary of findings and consideration of theoretical and managerial implications.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Scandinavian minimalism

This study is focused on the Nordic setting and wants to understand how the possible culture alignment of global luxury brand in this specific context can impact the perceived authenticity of local people. Starting from the definition of the Scandinavian culture, it is possible to highlight consumers' desire. Scandinavian minimalism and Nordic design extend beyond interior and fashion aesthetics, they reflect a broader culture and people lifestyle aspect. Those underlying cultural values are rooted in learning to live in an excellent manner, in harmony with nature, and in pursuit of peacefulness (What is Scandinavian Design? s.d.). Widely described in terms of its cleanliness, elegance, and neutrality, this design language is focused on a balanced harmony between functionality and beauty, as reflected in its clarity, understated lines, and refined simplicity (Edwards, C., 2007). Developed in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Iceland in the 20th century, it later became widely known internationally as "*a restrained form of modernism linked with a form of functionalism*" (Edwards, C., 2007). At the heart of the Scandinavian philosophy are *hygge*, expressing warmth and a feeling of home, and *lagom*, a Danish philosophy that reflects a harmony with moderation while adopting the principle of "the right amount" (Wiśnicka, A., 2022). Other core principles include honesty, craftsmanship, well-being and equality. Unlike the traditional notion of luxury as inaccessible and opulent, Scandinavian perspective promotes the idea of making luxury accessible and a more democratic approach (Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V., 2016). Products embody refined taste, quality and timelessness, and reflect preferences of a society with a high quality of life, which promotes the development of a better world and is among the happiest population in the ranking (Gonzalez Rodriguez, M. F., 2019). The term "minimalist logic" refers to the use of minimal ornamentation, which focuses consumers' attention on other factors like form, material, and shape, hence affecting both visual perception and emotional value (Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V., 2016). This experience can be seen in marketing where there is an emphasis on quality over quantity and simplicity over extravagance, with the functional aspect coming out as an important feature, providing utility in lieu of showy features, with improved consumer preference towards luxury products that are affordable yet long-lasting (Makin, S., 2023). This view is referred to the concept of "quiet" luxury, which took place in the Scandinavian context, and places importance on moral consumption over flashiness and image logos, storytelling, long-term values and honest communication to the audience (Modica, M., 2023). This approach is translated also in interior design, characterized by essential items, functional spaces without unnecessary objects, neutral light, clean shapes, and monochromatic palette, highlighting the concept "*hygge*" described before (Scandinavian Minimalism: A Comprehensive Guide - Hip Digs., n.d.). Moreover, these principles are reflected in several Scandinavian luxury brands. They give great emphasis on sustainability, ethical work and eco-friendly materials, demonstrating social responsibility and environmental consciousness (Scandinavian Minimalism: A Comprehensive Guide - Hip Digs., n.d.). Acne Studios, Cecilie Bahnsen, Filippa K, are popular Scandinavian brands that exemplify these values, through

functional marketing strategies, premium quality, attention to detail and more sustainable practices. Totême merges the minimalism with classic shapes, it uses neutral colors and creates essential clothes. Similarly, Envelope 1976 wants to mix functionality with elegance, while Fjällräven and Aesop use storytelling to create an emotional connection with consumers, rather than lots of information. Other brands like Almada Label and GANNI want to merge natural beauty, comfort, and elegance (Modica, M., 2023; Makin, S., 2023; Chouliaraki Milner, D., 2023.).

Briefly, Scandinavian cultural philosophy is implemented in every field of the Nordic way of life, including branding. Brands reflect balance, being a paradigm of understated luxury, combining sophistication without pretentiousness and a good social and environmental responsibility sense. Therefore, this cultural background providing a foundation to understand the perception of luxury in this context.

### **2.1.1 Cultural congruence and the impact on perceived authenticity**

As shown, although there are roughly similar attitudes among consumers globally, perceptions of luxury brands still vary across cultures (Seo et al., 2015). Several studies describe the importance of cultural adaptation, luxury brand strategy need to be redesigned to reflect cultural differences, whether in communication style or products design to respect local needs and aesthetics (Douglas et al., 2011). Cultural congruence can be described as the extent to which values, identity, and communication channels of a brand align with the underlying values of a given culture (Diantaris, M., 2024). Empirical research has shown that values alignment substantially improves consumer perceptions, especially with respects to authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015; Rodrigues et al., 2024). When it comes to adaptation, creating an integrated knowledge of the diverse cultural sensitivities, consumer orientations, and their respective brand image perceptions is crucial for effectively reaching target markets (Park et al., 2009; Chen, X., 2022). Authenticity is not only objective, for it may also relate to symbolic and emotional value, which is thus shaped by the social reality that people undergo and experience (Berghaus et al., 2018). When a brand's communication is culturally aligned with the local context, it is perceived as more credible and relevant, consumers evaluate adapted advertising meaningful and resonant (Judijanto et al., 2023). In a globalized market with an abundance of standardized products, consumers tend to prefer brands that reflect their cultural identity (Rodrigues et al., 2024). An example is the Chinese market, where adaptation of brands is preferred; for brands to be successful, they need to meet market needs while also delivering a feeling of uniqueness. In fact, made in Italy brands that want to adapt in the Chinese market must customize their products, to increase consumer trust. This could be an example of culture influencing choices and preference for products in line with one's own country (Mazzù, M. F., Plateo, E., Baccelloni, A., Lavini, L., & Finistauri, P., 2022). It is interesting to analyze these dynamics in the Scandinavian context, which is inherently defined by honesty, curability, modesty and functionality, embedded in consumer behavior and design preferences, and have a different approach to luxury compared to international brands. The objects produced by Scandinavian brands are not only consumer items but also represent the "Scandi" lifestyle leading to a symbolic meaning, sensitivity, and

identification by Nordic people (Gonzalez Rodriguez, M. F., 2019). The minimalist Scandinavian aesthetic is tied to authenticity concepts; countries that manage to reflect such principles can seem culturally relevant while, at the same time, presenting an intrinsic authenticity despite the overall upscale image they have globally (Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V., 2016). In addition, Morhart et al. (2015) have found symbolism to be an essential element of authenticity where they described an authentic brand as one that identifies with the values consumers value and stimulates emotions. Historical examples show how Louis Vuitton product lines have adapted according to the needs of the marketplace, with the introduction of limited editions observed in Dubai drawing from the local cultural environment. So too, the communication style of Chanel has been updated through the introduction of Arabian elements in products tailored particularly for Middle Eastern consumers, where symbolic value is very significant. Prada too, has incorporated traditionally Brazilian hues into products. These examples show the commonality of identity adaptation through symbolic means intended to connect with different environments. Louis Vuitton's popularity among the customers in Japan further enunciates this strategy as collaborations with designers there involved the use of local sensibilities in products. By the same token, Gucci too has utilized Chinese celebrities to promote products effectively and incorporated symbols derived from Chinese iconography into products. (Adapting luxury brands to diverse cultural contexts., n.d.). In addition, advertising plays the central function; research carried out by Bain & Company explores the advertising that is likely to appeal to Chinese consumers since the aim goes beyond the promotion of the product and strives to achieve relevance in the social environment (Chen, X., 2022). Thus, an international luxury brand can adapt the image to suit the unique values of the target audience using selected features such as colors, symbols, or ornaments (Mazzù, M. F., Plateo, E., Baccelloni, A., Lavini, L., & Finistauri, P., 2022). In this specific scenario, it would prove beneficial to use unique Nordic symbols and linguistic features relevant to the region, its history, and customs, such as the use of letters from the alphabets of Scandinavian countries like Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden (Rodriguez et al., 2024). Although there has not been explicit research clarifying the causal relationship between a brand's cultural fit—more particularly, with one of an international luxury brand in the Scandinavian environment—and perceived authenticity, theoretical frameworks seem to indicate an empirical association among these factors. Considering that the Nordic consumers have shown elevated sensitivity to cultural cues, an authentic luxury brand that addresses these sensitivities is likely to be perceived to hold greater authenticity. This can be attributed not only to the perceived linkage with values, but also because the values promoted by luxury brands act as an important authenticity indicator. Based on these factors considered, the positioning of the luxury brand with Scandinavian values becomes an important dimension in building authenticity, emotional ties, and further supporting external relationships with consumers. Thus, the research hypotheses are formulated as:

*H1a: There is an association between cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity, and this association is stronger in scenarios<sup>1</sup> more aligned with Scandinavian culture values.*

*H1b: Where the scenario is more aligned with Scandinavian culture, cultural brand congruence has a positive impact on perceived authenticity.*

## **2.2 The impact of brand authenticity on purchase intention**

Brand authenticity is a complex and multifaced concept; commonly associated with the dimensions of genuineness, truth and reality but often stemming from symbolic and emotional values (Goldstein et al., 2022; Alhosseiny, H., & Nabih, A. A., 2024). In the luxury sector, authenticity is a consumer-value dimension that is sometimes overlooked by firms and, according to some scholars, even surpasses rarity in importance (Goldstein et al., 2022; Zhiqing et al.). Gilmore and Pine (Morhart et al., 2015) states that *“authenticity has overtaken quality as the prevailing purchasing criterion, just as quality overtook cost, and as cost overtook availability”*. As a crucial aspect for consumers, perceived authenticity encompasses several dimensions, is based on continuity, credibility, integrity and symbolism of the brand; moreover, it plays an important role on the consumers’ choice because it creates a better self-congruence (Morhart et al., 2015). It may stem from the brand’s heritage, it’s founder or notable user, the conformity between the brand and a set of norms, the consistency between the brand's internal values and its external actions but is also associated to the connection between the brand and a person or place (Goldstein et al., 2022). Authenticity strengthens emotional and symbolic connection with the audience, this leads to a positive attitude and intention, with consumers that want to visit the store, consider future purchase of the products, and recommend them to others (Oh, H). Many studies have confirmed the positive relationship between perceived authenticity and purchasing intention, pointing out that the relationship is largely a subjective affair influenced by the environment of the consumer rather than being a natural attribute of the product itself. However, there has been a lack of research that specifically examines this phenomenon when placed within the context of luxury brand cultural adoption within the Scandinavian marketplace, where societal admiration for honesty, simplicity, and sustainability is extremely prevalent. Authentic perceived brands within this specific context are likely to generate trust and increase the purchasing intention (Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V., 2016). It is recorded that consumers from Nordic countries expect ethical, transparent, and authentic brands that represent shared views and consistent actions (Scandinavia Edition-Brand Trust in the Age of Information Overload, 2023). Building further upon this, this study argues that embracing Scandinavian values of simplicity, transparency, and honesty as part of luxury brands increases their perceived authenticity.

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<sup>1</sup> Scenario refers to the four stimuli created through the manipulation of the two variables (cultural brand congruence and communication style). It is present in the third block of the questionnaire, randomly assigned to participants.

Conformity of luxury brand offerings with ideas such as coziness or *hygge*, or modesty or *lagom*, can create an even greater sense of belonging, thus promoting higher emotional engagement among consumers towards these luxury concepts. Such alignment with cultural concepts can increase the perceived authenticity of luxury brand, hence positively affecting purchase intentions (Gonzalez Rodriguez, M. F., 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2024). Also, functional value, product quality, and design simplicity may help improve brand credibility (Morhart et al., 2015). Thus, authenticity with regards to purchase intention is not only determined by objective standards but can also be derived by how much a brand fulfills "the perceived Scandinavian ideal" for Scandinavian consumers. Trust, ethical values, and cultural proximity are foundational to purchase intention in this context (Wiśnicka, A., 2022; Scandinavia Edition-Brand Trust in the Age of Information Overload., 2023). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H2a: There is an association between perceived authenticity and purchase intention, and this association is stronger in scenarios more aligned with Scandinavian culture values.*

*H2b: Where the scenario is more aligned with Scandinavian culture, perceived authenticity has a more positive impact on purchase intention.*

## **2.3 Brand authenticity as a mediating role**

Brand authenticity can effectively impact purchasing intentions but may also act as a mediator for cultural congruence and behavioral outcomes, as a psychological process explaining how cultural fit can lead to behavioral outcomes (Al-Meshal et al., 2020). As extensively mentioned, authenticity is also something subjective, derived from its symbolic and affective value (Goldstein et al., 2022). When consumers equate their cultural landscape with brand communication, certain psychological associations are evoked, resulting in a sense of belonging and a greater consumer-brand relationship, who feel respected and valued. This can generate symbolic connection, which enhance authenticity and in turn increase purchase intention (Diantaris, M., 2024, Mar. 5; Al-Meshal et al., 2020). Very often, especially in the luxury sector, consumers choose brands that reflect their self-concept, which are close to their personality and values. The closer the proximity between the brand image and the consumer's personality, the greater the emotional alignment that can be created between them, especially for luxury goods rich in symbolism (Shetty, K., & Fitzsimmons, J. R., 2022; Kim, H. S., & Cho, E., 2022). Another area is related to the impression that the brand is valuable of multi-cultural diversity. (Arantes, L., & Barbosa Costa, S., 2024). Cultural elements are important in influencing consumer behavior, not just in terms of purchases, but also in responding to advertising and brand ideology, and in judgments of product characteristics (Judijanto et al., 2023). Studies carried out by Park et al. (2009) and Morhart et al. (2015), highlight that authenticity perceptions, to a certain degree, depend upon an individual's surrounding culture and expected standards. In addition, the underlying reasons for buying products of luxury brands are conditioned by culture; as proven, luxury is perceived differently

in different markets, with consumers often buying symbolically, to attain aspirations, and to signify their selves. The intentional choice of cultural elements can enhance the authenticity perception considerably, create customer loyalty, and shape the behavior of consumers (Bian, Q., & Forsythe, S., 2012; Ko et al., 2019). Cultural alignment is an essential precept for enhancing perceived authenticity, which in turn impacts the reputation of the brand and the extent of consumer trust. These factors are key determinants in the formation of purchasing intent, specifically about luxury items, as consumers seek not just products but also the related experiences (Alhosseiny, H., & Nabih, A. A., 2024; Erdem, T., & Swait, J., 2004; Oh, H.). The formation of brand trust and alignment develops brand attachment, which denotes a strong emotional connection that leads consumers to make repeat purchases and tolerate premium prices (Zafar et al., 2025). The Scandinavian culture, which is highly perceptive to cultural nuances, follows the "less is more" policy and appreciates sincere communications, qualities that resonates with consumers who are attracted to those kinds of brands. A brand that remains true to those principles is likely to build emotional congruity and perceived authenticity, which has a subsequent effect on consumer choice (Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V., 2016). Recent studies show that 30% of Scandinavian consumers prefer personalized marketing campaigns and are more responsive, especially when delivers values and comply with their expectations (Scandinavia Edition-Brand Trust in the Age of Information Overload., 2023). Hence, authenticity is expected to play the role of a mediator between the brand's congruence with Scandinavian principles and consumers' purchase intention. When congruence leads to authenticity, this in turn explains why consumers are more willing to buy. Based on this, it is hypothesized that in the reference background:

*H3: Where the scenario is more aligned with Scandinavian culture, perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between cultural brand congruence and purchase intention.*

## **2.4 Brand consistency as a moderating role**

As already stated, the cultural brand congruence with the Scandinavian values can positively impact consumer brand evaluation and preferences (Bajac et al., 2018). However, congruence may not be sufficient to foster perceived authenticity. It is a complex paradigm, and it can be influenced by several dimensions. An important element to consider is the internal brand consistency, which concerns the ability of the brand to maintain its values and a clear image through the different tools used to communicate with customers, such as advertising or product design, and to interact with them in an authentic manner, still maintaining the coherence even while adapting to different market conditions (Brand congruence The Importance of Brand Congruence in Building Customer Trust – FasterCapital, n.d.). The consistency factor stands out as the most important one in building recognizability and trust, which in turn leads to the building of customer loyalty. Visual factors, such as logos and color schemes, are important for building memory. For luxury brand identities, the importance of consistency and recognizability is further emphasized, especially in the light of the trend towards localization, which is meant to ensure authenticity. Every point of contact between the

brand and the customer, whether it is the product, the store, the advertisement, need to unambiguously express the values that distinguish it; with this consistency, the overall message and brand identity is reinforced, even when the brand adapts locally (Kapferer, J. N., 2008). Additionally, the brand builds the trust of the customer base due to consistency in communication and marketing in different cultures; however, when the brand goes against its core values, it becomes difficult to maintain its credible image (Erdem, T., & Swait, J., 2004; Deng et al., 2024). In this specific case, a brand can adapt its communication style with consumer preferences, a more minimal and neutral style, while still maintaining a recognizability and internal consistency, so that it can be seen as authentic. This includes aligning product design, with local preferences, marketing communication in culturally sensitive ways, and pursuing social responsibility by demonstrating social long-term commitment (Brand congruence The Importance of Brand Congruence in Building Customer Trust - FasterCapital, n.d.). Brand consistency can be considered as an aspect of continuity, a dimension that is part of perceived authenticity (PBA), so a brand that conveys continuity in its values, heritage and image can be perceived as more authentic, with long-term commitment and honesty (Morhart et al., 2015). Goldstein et al., (2022) argued how authenticity derives precisely from the consistency between the brand's values and its external actions; an inconsistency in this relationship could invalidate perceived authenticity. Consistency and brand identity can be considered key values in the Scandinavian contest, about 28% of Scandinavians value ethics and 30% value brand identity (Scandinavia Edition-Brand Trust in the Age of Information Overload., 2023). Within the Scandinavian market, a consistent brand identity may strengthen the effect of congruence on perceptions of authenticity among consumers. Thus, consumers are bound to hold a positive perception of a culturally aligned brand, but a lack of internal consistency can reduce perceived authenticity, making the brand appear manipulative and insincere. The Chinese market, for instance, illustrates this, with buyers there strongly favoring product customization. However, it is essential that the brand's core is retained, as although incorporating the new can be acceptable, where the brand comes from is still extremely important. (Mazzù, M. F., Plateo, E., Baccelloni, A., Lavini, L., & Finistauri, P., 2022). Thus, have discussed importance of coherence in addition to authenticity, especially in an atmosphere of carefulness with details, it is expected that the moderating power of brand consistency would override the direct effects of cultural brand congruence towards consumers' perceptions of authenticity. Thus, when consumers identify with a brand as being consistent with their inherent values and experience, the possible positive contribution of cultural congruence towards consumers' perceptions of authenticity is expected to strengthen. (Brand congruence The Importance of Brand Congruence in Building Customer Trust - FasterCapital, n.d.). Being on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: Where the scenario is more aligned with Scandinavian culture, perceived internal brand consistency moderate the relationship between cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity.*

## 2.5 Research gap

While the theories of cultural adaptation and perceived authenticity in international markets has been widely explored, little research has focused on how the cultural alignment between international luxury brand and Scandinavian culture, with different approach to luxury, could impact consumers' authenticity perception and willingness to buy. This target market is characterized by a minimalist, sustainable aesthetic that is not ostentatious, so it is a unique environment that in a way contrasts the average approach of the more glitzy and exclusive luxury brands. It remains unexplored how a luxury brand can adapt to this context, creating congruence with Nordic consumers, without affecting its identity and consistency, and how the adaptation can be perceived by Scandinavian consumers. However, the question remains whether this single dimension of brand congruence is enough, or whether the perceived internal consistency of the brand has a specifically important function in enhancing credibility, especially in a highly trusting environment. The focus, therefore, is also on investigating the moderator function of internal brand cohesiveness, of the extent to which it will strengthen or dilute the impact of cultural congruence on authenticity. In addition, although authenticity has been recognized as a predictor of positive consumer feedback, increasing emotional connections, and intention to accurate, it is interesting to analyze also its psychological role in such a sensitive context. The aim is to fill a gap in the existing literature by focusing on the impact of cultural adaptation of luxury brands on perceived authenticity and purchase intention in the specific Scandinavian context, as a little explored area. This research addresses the gap through an experiment, that is testing how variations in brand congruence with Scandinavian culture and different configurations of communication style, go on to impact consumer perceptions. Using four scenarios, carefully constructed, each effect is isolated and evaluated to see how Scandinavian consumers interpret authenticity and how these interpretations shape their behavioral responses.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

To test the hypotheses stated in the literature review section, a quantitative experimental survey targeting Scandinavian consumers was defined and implemented. The survey, experimental in form, involved the collection of questionnaires using CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) methodology, which allows for the collection of online information that would have been difficult to collect given the geographic reference context. The questionnaire was computerized through the Qualtrics XM platform and targeted groups of Erasmus students (who were resident in the country between 6 months and 1 year) and Scandinavian citizens. Data collection was conveyed through social media (Facebook, Reddit, Instagram) and by employing the Prolific platform. The survey, structured so that there were 4 different experimental groups (as will be described in the following sections), had an initial sampling plan of 200 respondents (50 for each scenario) targeting individuals between 18 and 65 years of age, who have resided for at least 6 months or are citizens of the following Northern European countries: Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The closing of the survey (which took place between April 4 and 14, 2025) saw a total of 228 interviews collected, with 219 cases of completed interviews. All data, as well as analyses, were conducted using SPSS statistical software.

#### **3.2 Sample and data collection**

To collect data, the questionnaire was forwarded via anonymous links to:

- WhatsApp groups: formed by Erasmus students (who were residents of the country between 6 months and 1 year), along with citizens residing in one of the four Scandinavian countries.
- Facebook and Reddit groups: populated by Erasmus students, Scandinavian residents, and groups specifically for recruiting individuals to respond to online surveys.

To reach the established sample size in the shortest possible time and attempt to ensure that the sample was more representative, respecting the criteria for its selection and avoiding selection bias (i.e., that subjects via Facebook and WhatsApp groups might be predominantly young people or students), of the 228 questionnaires collected, 172 were completed via Prolific. Prolific is a notable web survey platform, used by academics and students to get true answers in a short time for a fee. Prolific it is validated by academic studies for survey implementation; indeed, it is considered a reliable data collection platforms (Palan, S., & Schitter, C., 2018; Douglas et al., 2023) and it allows to select respondents by sociodemographic information like countries of origin, age, and other variable used to defined research sample and target selection.

Once the data collection phase was completed (April 14) 228 questionnaires were gathered and 9 of them were dropped from the dataset, as they were not fully completed by respondents. Thus, the analytical sample includes 219 cases.

### 3.3 Questionnaire structures and measures

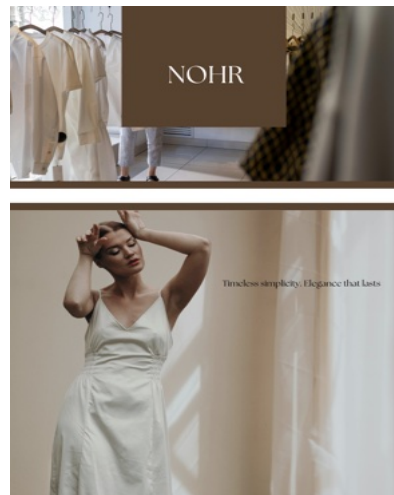
The research questionnaire (see appendix for details) is structured in 4 main sections. In Section 1, we presented the research goals and objectives, along with an expression of gratitude to the respondents for their collaboration. Section 2 was focused on interest in luxury products and frequency of purchase by respondents. In Section 3, the experimental section, interviewees were randomly invited to analyze one of the four different scenarios. These were created according to a 2x2 between-subjects design in which two variables are manipulated. The first is the brand's cultural congruence with Scandinavian values (high vs. low), the second is the brand's communication style (simple vs. conspicuous), either same globally or varying between Scandinavia and other markets. Each scenario (or stimulus) was presented both visually, through an image created on Canva<sup>2</sup> with a brief description presented under the visual stimulus. The four experimental random scenarios are defined as follows:

- Brand congruence with Scandinavian culture high and communication style simple: the style of the brand is simple both in the Scandinavian context and globally. This scenario aimed to assess the effect of full cultural congruence with the same minimalist style across markets.
- Brand congruence with Scandinavian culture low and communication style opulent: the style of the brand is opulent both in the Scandinavian context and globally. This scenario reflects a condition of full cultural incongruence, the aim is to test whether the perceived authenticity and purchase intention could still emerge.
- Brand congruence with Scandinavian culture high and communication style opulent: it means that the style of the brand is opulent in international markets, but it adapts to Scandinavian culture with a minimalist style. This scenario tests the market-specific cultural alignment.
- Brand congruence with Scandinavian culture low and communication style simple: it means that the style of the brand is simple abroad, but it adopts an opulent style in Scandinavian markets. The aim is to test the effect of this strategic “inconsistency” in a sensitive market like this.

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<sup>2</sup> Canva is an online graphic design platform that allows users to create a wide range of visual content, such as presentations, posters, videos, and more.

*Figure 1: Brand congruence with Scandinavian culture high and communication style simple; visual representation experiment setting (Scenario 1)*



*Figure 2: Brand congruence with Scandinavian culture low and communication style opulent; visual representation experiment setting (Scenario 2)*



Figure 3: Brand congruence with Scandinavian culture high and communication style opulent; visual representation experiment setting (Scenario 3)

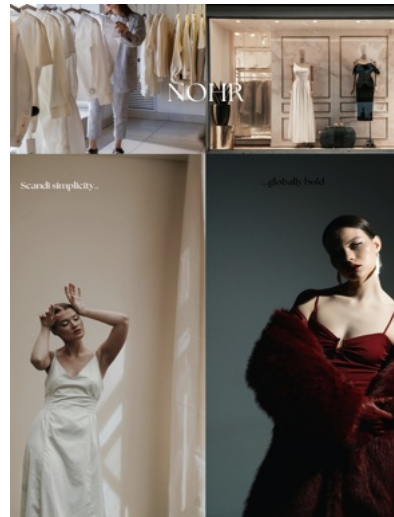
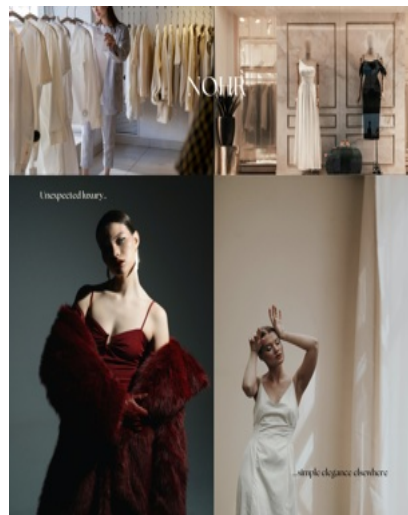


Figure 4: Brand congruence with Scandinavian culture low and communication style simple; visual representation experiment setting (Scenario 4)



They were created trying to minimize the bias for consumers, just showing the photo with a model wearing different dresses and accessories, to make a distinction between the two typologies of design (to represent the different marketing approach) and trying to represent little changes in the brand communication style, which wants to remain globally recognizable. Also, the brand's communication style description under the image was concise and neutral (see the appendix). Thus, manipulating these two variables (brand congruence and communication style), which characterize a fictional brand (named Nohr), the main objective is to analyze how consumer perception changes across the four experimental scenarios, trying to represent the different brand approach used in real life. As said previously, the only thing that changes in this third block is the stimulus, while the questions are the same for all four groups. Specifically, the four main constructs involve a series of Likert Scale questions from 1 to 7 (1= Completely disagree, 7= Completely agree); they

were analyzed within each scenario and useful for testing the main hypotheses. Here a short description of them:

- Cultural brand congruence: the alignment of a brand's identity, values and communication style with the cultural values and expectations of its target audience (Diantaris, M., 2024). Scale inspired by the study of Bajac et al., (2018). The cultural brand congruence is detected with four Likert Scale questions from 1 to 7 (1= Completely disagree, 7= Completely agree): (e.g., “The brand reflects the values of Scandinavian culture”). The last of the four questions is a reverse item, so to align it with the rest of the scale, reverse coding was applied. The Likert response was inverted before the Factor analysis, to ensure the validity of the examination.
- Perceived brand authenticity (PBA): the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be true to itself and its consumers (Morhart et al., 2015 and Napoli et al., 2014). The scale was inspired from that developed by Morhart et al., (2015) and Napoli et al., (2014). Perceived brand authenticity is detected with eight Likert Scale questions from 1 to 7 (1= Completely disagree, 7= Completely agree): (e.g., “The brand maintains its tradition and essence”). Moreover, three questions directly referred to Scandinavian culture, and here the last question is the reverse one as well. So, before Factor analysis the last Likert scale was inverted to make it same to other items.
- Internal brand consistency: the alignment and harmony between a brand's core values, mission, identity, and internal culture, and how these are met in its external operations (Wei, Y., 2022). Scale inspired from the identity of scale created by Aaker, J. L., (1997). For this construct the scale was formed by four Likert Scale questions from 1 to 7 (1= Completely disagree, 7= Completely agree): (e.g., “The brand is recognizable in different cultural contexts”). Last item is the reverse one and adjusted with reverse coding before the Factor analysis as well.
- Purchase intention: the likelihood that a consumer or buyer will choose to make a specific purchase in the future (Fishbein, Martin & Icek Ajzen, 1975). It is an antecedent that helps motivate customers to purchase and creates intention. Scale inspired by Dodds et al., (1991) and Fishbein, Martin & Icek Ajzen, (1975). Purchase intention was surveyed through four Likert Scale questions from 1 to 7 (1= Completely disagree, 7= Completely agree): (e.g., “It is probable that I will buy products of this brand”).

Finally, the fourth section includes questions on the socio-demographic information of the respondents (age, gender, educational qualification and income).

The questionnaire was administered in English, as it is an internationally used language in market and opinion surveys as well as respondents' second language. Before data collection began, a pre-test was conducted to make the questionnaire more reliable on a group of 10 Italian university colleagues to test if the questionnaire, and especially the scenarios setting, was fully intelligible to respondents.

### 3.4 Research hypotheses

Here is a summary of the four hypotheses, through them the aim was to study how the four scenarios influence consumers' perception of the brand, whether the variation of culture brand congruence between the brand and cultural values and brand communication style affect perceived authenticity and purchase intention, and if scenarios which reflect the local cultural values lead to a more positive consumer behavior:

*H1a: There is an association between cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity, and this association is stronger in scenarios more aligned with Scandinavian culture values.*

*H1b: Where the scenario is more aligned with Scandinavian culture, cultural brand congruence has a positive impact on perceived authenticity.*

*H2a: There is an association between perceived authenticity and purchase intention, and this association is stronger in scenarios more aligned with Scandinavian culture values.*

*H2b: Where the scenario is more aligned with Scandinavian culture, perceived authenticity has a more positive impact on purchase intention.*

*H3: Where the scenario is more aligned with Scandinavian culture, perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between cultural brand congruence and purchase intention.*

*H4: Where the scenario is more aligned with Scandinavian culture, perceived internal brand consistency moderate the relationship between cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity.*

It was hypothesized that in scenarios in which the fictitious brand (Nohr) is characterized by the high brand cultural alignment, this congruence positively impacts perceived authenticity, and that this authenticity in the same scenarios considered, is more significant and impacts purchase intention. In addition, authenticity is hypothesized to play a psychological role, that is, it explains how higher cultural congruence can increase purchase intention. Finally, with the last hypothesis, was tested the moderating role of internal brand consistency, if it reinforces the positive impact of brand congruence on perceived authenticity.

### 3.5 Analytical strategies

As described in the previous section, the survey presents 4 different latent constructs in each scenario. They are defined as latent constructs because they are derived, according to literature (Section 3.3), from a set of Likert scales that together are related to Cultural Brand Congruence, Perceived Authenticity, Internal Brand Consistency and Purchase Intention. Thus, to estimate the 4 latent constructs a Factor analysis (FA) was performed for each of the variables referred to the 4 constructs and within each scenario (see section 4.1 for

full FA analysis). This was done to detect as appropriately and consistently as possible the specific latent dimensions within each experimental setting. Once the latent construct was estimate it was possible to test the mainly hypothesis (Section 3.4) according to this analytical strategy which involves the following steps:

- Calculation and analysis of descriptive statistics for both whole samples and within each specific scenario.
- Correlations analysis to quantify the strength and direction of specific variables according to hypothesis. The hypothesis H1a, which tests an association between the cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity, and H2a that examines the association between the perceived authenticity and purchase intention.
- Linear regression models were used to estimate different impact, moderation and mediations. Were done for all the four hypotheses, more specifically to the test: H1b, which hypothesized the positive impact of cultural brand congruence on perceived authenticity; H2b, related to the positive impact of perceived authenticity on purchase intention; H3, which presents the mediating role of perceived authenticity between cultural brand congruence and purchase intention. Finally, H4, that hypothesized the moderating role of internal brand consistency between cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Factor analysis

Before proceeding with the FA, it was necessary to test the internal consistency and reliability of the different Likert scales using Cronbach's alpha. This index ensures that the items considered measure the same underlying construct. As is it possible to see in Table 1, showing the Cronbach's alpha for each dimension within each scenario, most of the values are near or above 0.8, highlighting the higher consistency measure of latent constructs. The only exceptions are values for Internal brand consistency in scenario 1 and 2, but this could be due to the small sample size or other elements that exogenously affect the estimation.

*Table 1: Estimate Cronbach's alpha value for each latent construct*

|                                   | <b>scenario 1</b> | <b>scenario 2</b> | <b>scenario 3</b> | <b>scenario 4</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Brand Congruence</b>           | 0,87              | 0,94              | 0,88              | 0,87              |
| <b>Perceived Authenticity</b>     | 0,87              | 0,79              | 0,83              | 0,84              |
| <b>Internal Brand Consistency</b> | 0,67              | 0,69              | 0,83              | 0,82              |
| <b>Purchase Intention</b>         | 0,93              | 0,95              | 0,96              | 0,95              |

Once ensuring the internal consistency of the variables related to the four latent constructs, it was possible to proceed with the estimation of the latent dimensions using the Factor analysis. According to both Kaiser Criterion and literature reviews, all the factors' eigenvalues (Table 2) are higher than 1 and, moreover, they explained at least more than 50% of the latent variance of constructs. Therefore, it is possible to confirm how a correct procedure was used to estimate our four latent dimensions within each experimental group.

Table 2: Estimate FA eigenvalues and explained variance in percentage

| Component Label                     | Eigenvalue | % explained variance |
|-------------------------------------|------------|----------------------|
| <b>Scenario 1</b>                   |            |                      |
| Brand Congruence (scen.1)           | 2,9        | 73,4                 |
| Perceived Authenticity (scen.1)     | 4,7        | 58,7                 |
| Internal Brand Consistency (scen.1) | 2,1        | 51,7                 |
| Purchase Intention (scen.1)         | 3,3        | 83,3                 |
| <b>Scenario 2</b>                   |            |                      |
| Brand Congruence (scen.2)           | 3,4        | 85,4                 |
| Perceived Authenticity (scen.2)     | 4,4        | 54,7                 |
| Internal Brand Consistency (scen.2) | 2,2        | 54,9                 |
| Purchase Intention (scen.2)         | 3,5        | 87,9                 |
| <b>Scenario 3</b>                   |            |                      |
| Brand Congruence (scen.3)           | 3,0        | 74,2                 |
| Perceived Authenticity (scen.3)     | 4,3        | 54,4                 |
| Internal Brand Consistency (scen.3) | 2,7        | 66,7                 |
| Purchase Intention (scen.3)         | 3,6        | 90,1                 |
| <b>Scenario 4</b>                   |            |                      |
| Brand Congruence (scen.4)           | 2,89       | 72,14                |
| Perceived Authenticity (scen.4)     | 4,49       | 56,09                |
| Internal Brand Consistency (scen.4) | 2,61       | 65,29                |
| Purchase Intention (scen.4)         | 3,46       | 86,43                |

Finally, Table 3 shows the latent dimension descriptive statistics. The factor procedure produces all standardized variables (mean=0 and SD=1). This is one of the strengths of Factor analysis, which makes it possible to obtain, even though the experimental groups have different characteristics (Table 4). Indeed, variables can be compared with each other.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of 4 groups. Percentage values

| Descriptive statistics        |    |         |         |      |                    |
|-------------------------------|----|---------|---------|------|--------------------|
|                               | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard deviation |
| Congruence Scenario 1         | 66 | -2,61   | 1,62    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Authenticity Scenario 1       | 66 | -2,62   | 2,07    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Internal Brand Scenario 1     | 66 | -2,41   | 2,22    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Purchase Intention Scenario 1 | 66 | -1,73   | 1,78    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Congruence Scenario 2         | 41 | -1,78   | 1,81    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Authenticity Scenario 2       | 41 | -2,86   | 1,58    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Internal Brand Scenario 2     | 41 | -2,10   | 2,03    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Purchase Intention Scenario 2 | 41 | -1,25   | 2,13    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Congruence Scenario 3         | 47 | -2,30   | 1,69    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Authenticity Scenario 3       | 47 | -2,10   | 1,65    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Internal Brand Scenario 3     | 47 | -2,26   | 2,28    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Purchase Intention Scenario 3 | 47 | -1,37   | 1,69    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Congruence Scenario 4         | 65 | -2,03   | 1,71    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Authenticity Scenario 4       | 65 | -2,31   | 2,42    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Internal Brand Scenario 4     | 65 | -2,14   | 2,23    | 0,00 | 1,00               |
| Purchase Intention Scenario 4 | 65 | -1,27   | 2,42    | 0,00 | 1,00               |

These descriptive values offer an important base before other analysis, ensuring that the correlation and regressions are performed using validated variables.

## 4.2 Descriptive statistics

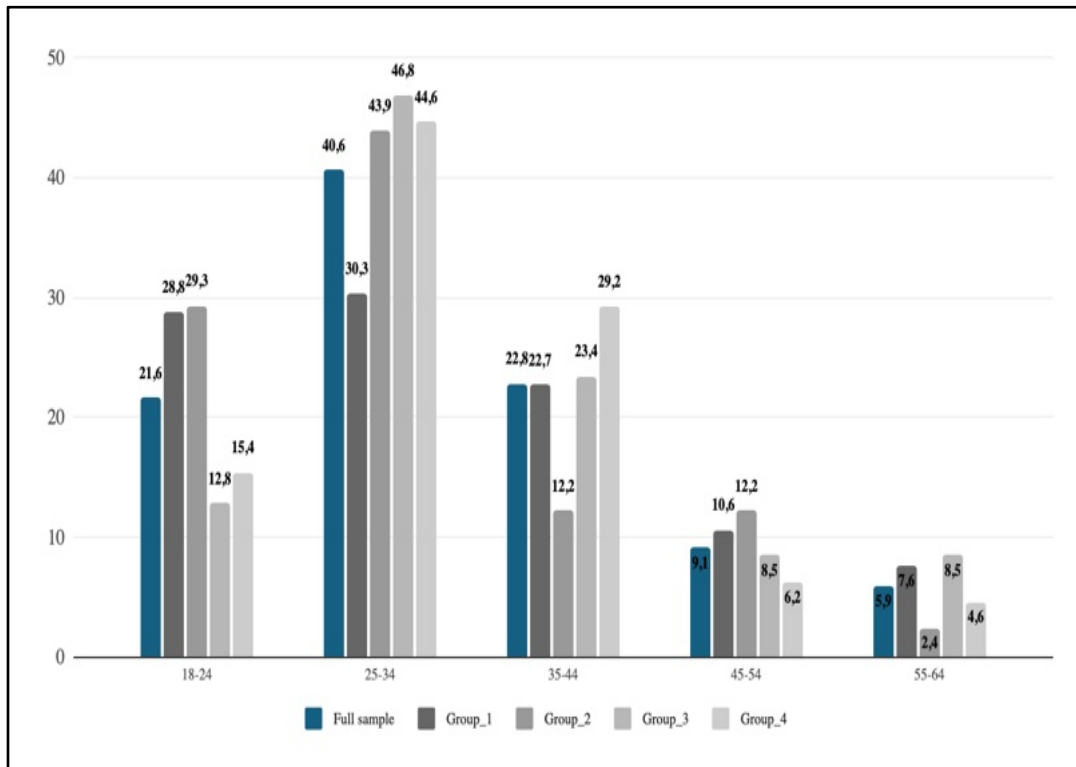
Table 1 reports the main sociodemographic descriptive statistics of the sample. As is possible to see, the full sample size is equal to 219. Group (referred to the number of respondents randomly assigned to each scenario) 1 and 4 have more than 60 cases (respectively 66 and 65) while group 2 and group 3 present from 40 to 50 cases (respectively 41 and 47).

Table 4 : Descriptive Statistics total sample and 4 groups. Percentage values

| Descriptive Statistics              | Full sample | Group 1   | Group 2   | Group 3   | Group 4   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Age</b>                          |             |           |           |           |           |
| 18-24                               | 21,6        | 28,8      | 29,3      | 12,8      | 15,4      |
| 25-34                               | 40,6        | 30,3      | 43,9      | 46,8      | 44,6      |
| 35-44                               | 22,8        | 22,7      | 12,2      | 23,4      | 29,2      |
| 45-54                               | 9,1         | 10,6      | 12,2      | 8,5       | 6,2       |
| 55-64                               | 5,9         | 7,6       | 2,4       | 8,5       | 4,6       |
| <b>Gender</b>                       |             |           |           |           |           |
| Male                                | 58,0        | 68,2      | 53,7      | 42,6      | 61,5      |
| Female                              | 40,2        | 30,3      | 41,5      | 57,4      | 36,9      |
| Non-binary / third gender           | 1,8         | 1,5       | 4,9       | 0,0       | 1,5       |
| <b>Annual Income</b>                |             |           |           |           |           |
| Less than 300.000 SEK               | 41,1        | 42,4      | 46,3      | 36,2      | 40,0      |
| Between 300.000 SEK and 400.000 SEK | 23,7        | 21,2      | 22,0      | 31,9      | 21,5      |
| Between 400.000 SEK and 500.000 SEK | 17,4        | 19,7      | 12,2      | 19,1      | 16,9      |
| More than 500.000 SEK               | 17,8        | 16,7      | 19,5      | 12,8      | 21,5      |
| <b>Educational level</b>            |             |           |           |           |           |
| At least upper secondary education  | 29,6        | 31,8      | 26,8      | 29,8      | 29,3      |
| Bachelor degree                     | 36,1        | 30,3      | 48,8      | 38,3      | 32,3      |
| Master degree                       | 30,6        | 37,9      | 19,5      | 25,5      | 33,8      |
| Phd or other                        | 3,7         | 0,0       | 4,9       | 6,4       | 4,6       |
| <b>Interested in luxury good</b>    |             |           |           |           |           |
| Not interested                      | 68,9        | 59,1      | 70,7      | 72,3      | 75,4      |
| Interested                          | 31,1        | 40,9      | 29,3      | 27,7      | 24,6      |
| <b>How often buy luxury</b>         |             |           |           |           |           |
| once/twice a year or lower          | 89,5        | 89,4      | 82,9      | 93,6      | 90,8      |
| several time a year or more         | 10,5        | 10,6      | 17,1      | 6,4       | 9,2       |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>219</b>  | <b>66</b> | <b>41</b> | <b>47</b> | <b>65</b> |

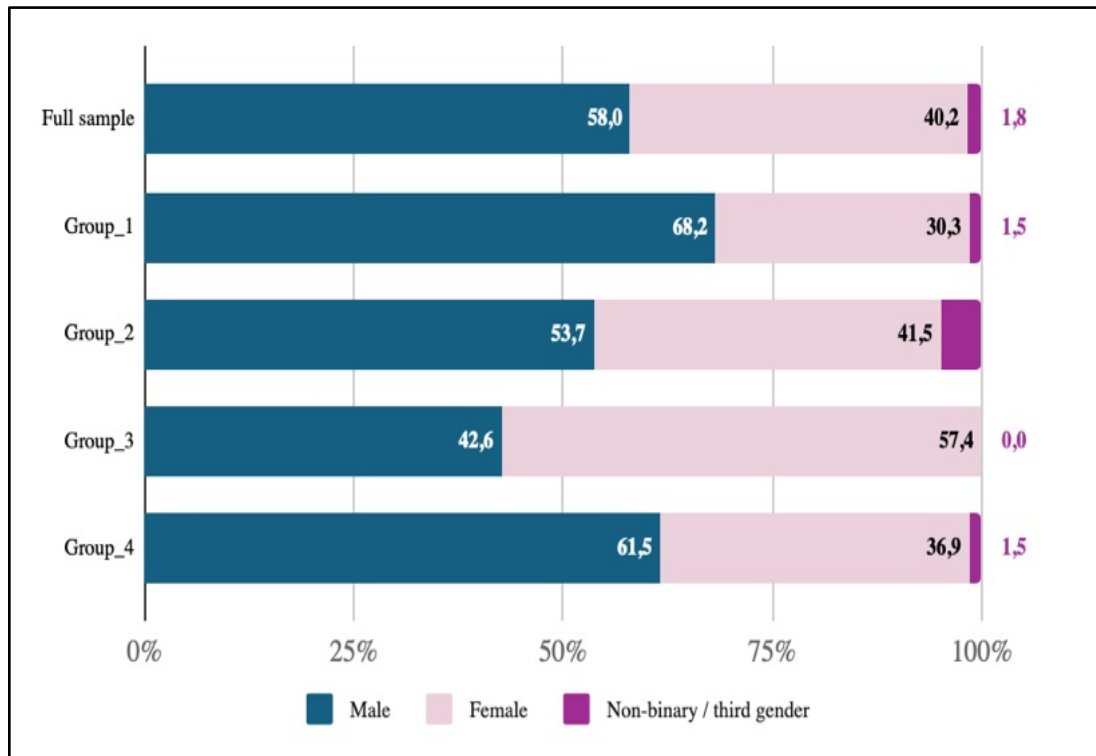
Considering age distribution (Fig.1), the sample is mainly composed by individuals' younger adults. Specifically, more than 6 out 10 individuals are from 25 to 44 years old, with only 21% of the full sample composed of young individuals from 18-24. Only 1 interview out of 10 is adult or older adults. Focusing on group differences, just group 1 and 2 present a slightly higher presence of individual age 45 or more compared to group 3 and 4.

Figure 5: Age class distribution; total sample and 4 groups; percentage values



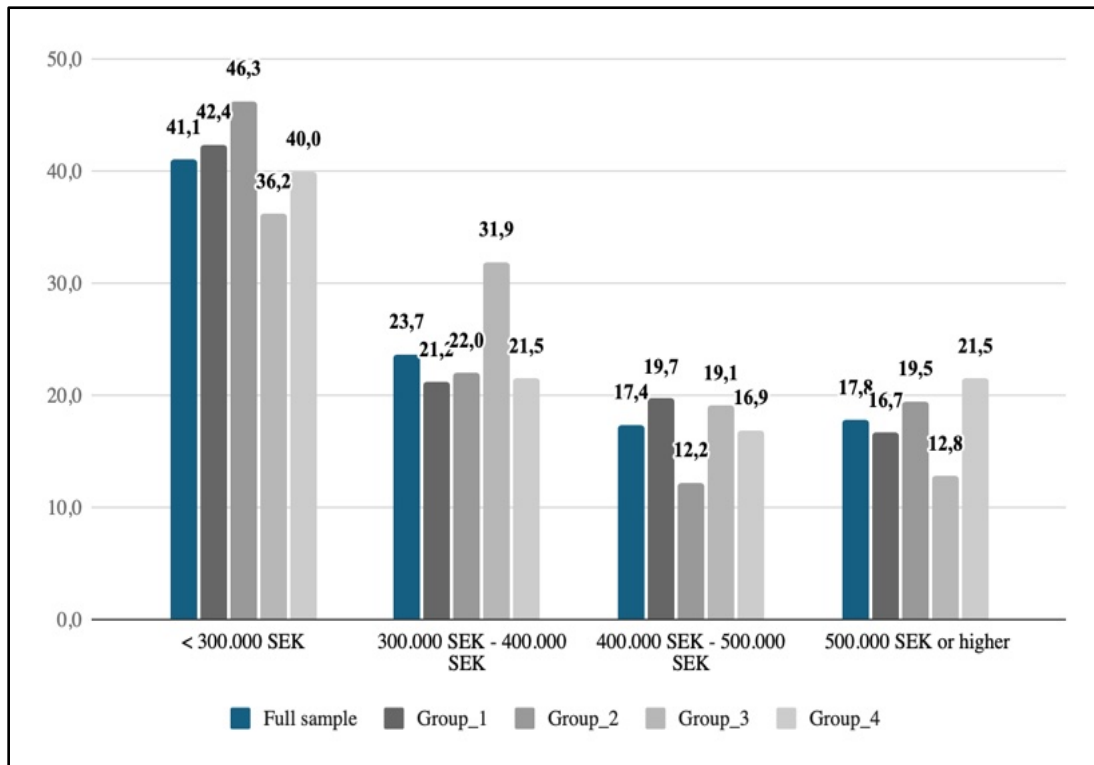
Considering gender composition (Fig.2) the sample is mainly composed by male individuals (58%), with only group 3 showing a higher presence of women (57.4%) compared to men (42.6%). Non-binary or third-gender individuals represent 1.8% of the total sample.

Figure 6: Gender distribution; total sample and 4 groups; percentage values



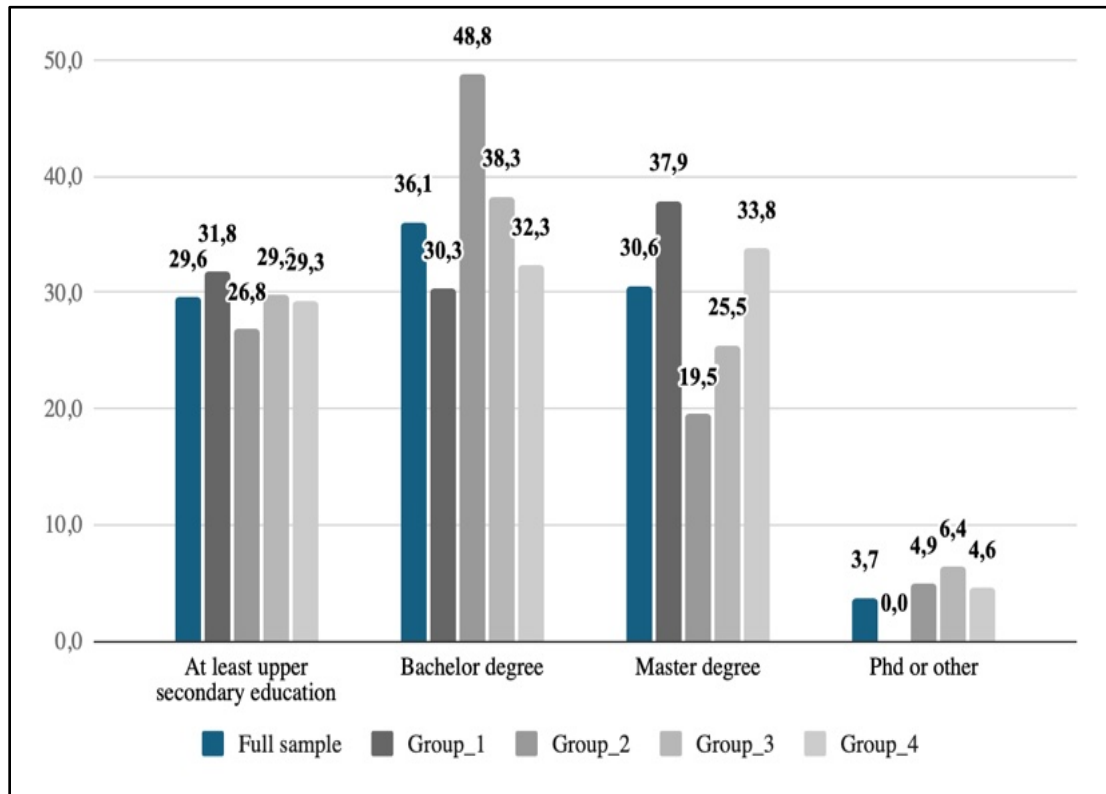
Considering annual income distribution (in SEK) it is possible to see how 6 out 10 subjects present an annual income that is at least equal to 400.000 SEK (that is approximately comparable to 35.000 euro). 41.4% of the sample earns less than 300.000 SEK annually, while an additional 23.7% falls between 300.000 and 400.000 SEK. A smaller portion of the population (17.8%) reports earnings above 500.000 SEK. There is a generally middle-to-lower income distribution across the sample.

Figure 7: Annual Income distribution; total sample and 4 groups; percentage values



For educational background (Fig. 4) the sample presents a higher percentage of individuals with at least a bachelor's degree (70.4%), specifically 36.1% have completed a bachelor's degree, and 30.6% hold a master's degree. Only group 3 presents no PHD or higher level of education, while group 2 presents the lowest percentage of individuals having a master or higher level of education (24.4%).

Figure 8: Educational level distribution; total sample and 4 groups; percentage values



Finally, when asked about interest in luxury products, only 31% of individuals expressed interest (Fig. 5). Group 1 shows the highest percentage of individuals interested in luxury goods (40.9%), followed by group 2 (29.3%), and group 4 has the lowest proportion of interest (24.6%).

Moreover, considering the purchase frequency (Fig. 6), 9 out of 10 of them buy these products at least once or twice a year. Group 1 again presents the highest percentage of individuals that buy luxury goods several times a year (17.1%), while group 3 the lowest ones (6.4%).

Figure 9: Interested in luxury goods distribution; total sample and 4 groups; percentage values

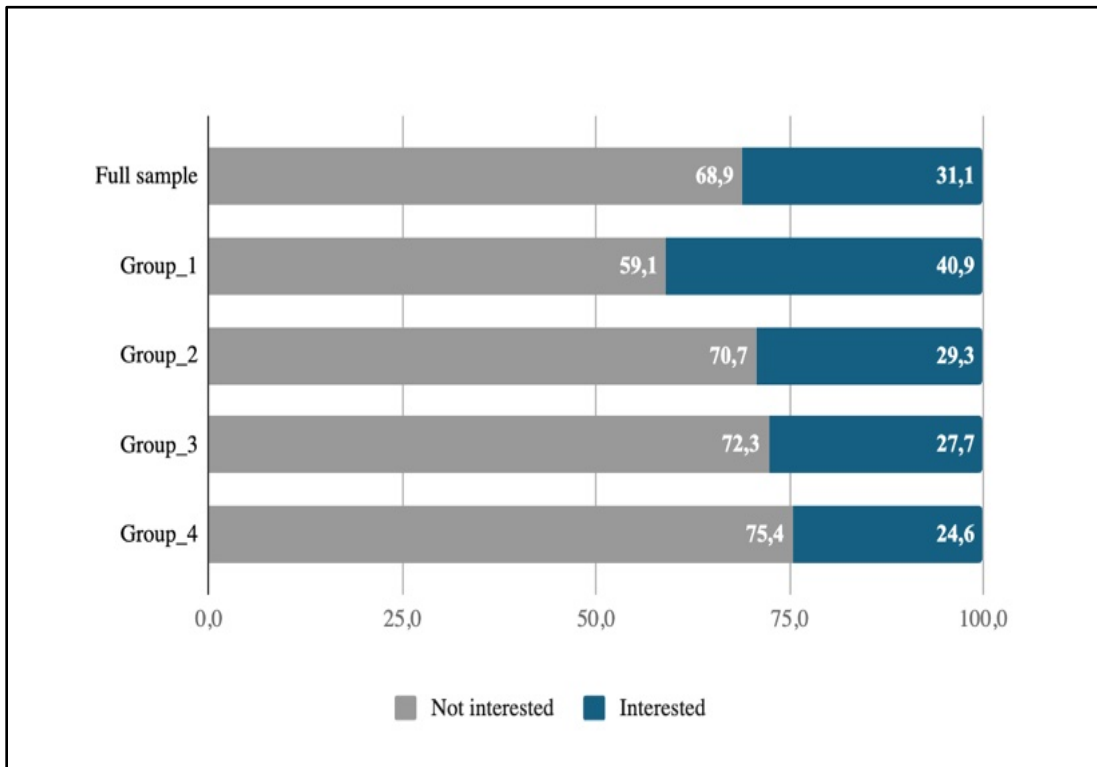
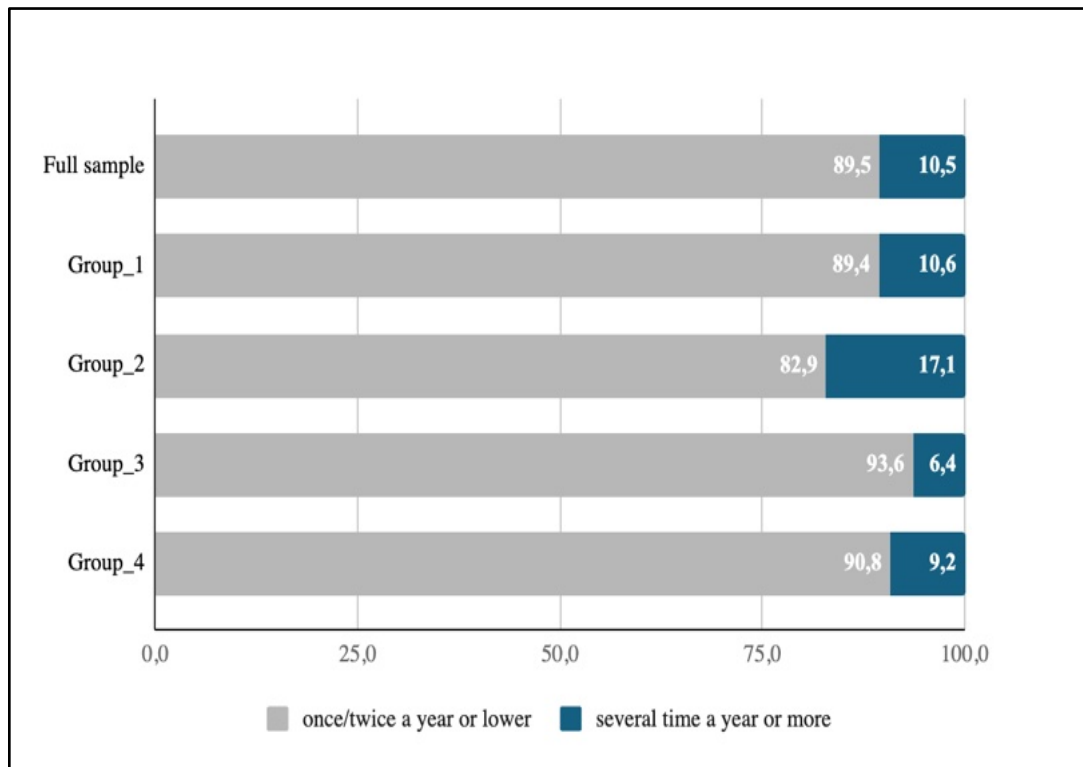


Figure 10: How often buy luxury goods distribution; total sample and 4 groups; percentage values



In summary, the sample of the present research is mainly composed of younger adults, with a middle-low annual income, mostly male, with relatively low interest in luxury goods and low frequency of purchases.

This demographic data reflects the relevant context for interpreting differences across experimental conditions.

## 4.2 Correlation analysis

In this section are present the results of the analysis of association a) between the cultural brand congruence and the perceived authenticity and b) between the perceived authenticity and the purchase intention.

Table 4 shows the correlation index of the cultural brand congruence and the perceived authenticity for each scenario. As shown, all correlations are positive and significant, but the strength of this relationship varies by scenario. More specifically:

- According to Scenario 1 (brand congruence with Scandinavian values high and simple communication style globally), the correlation is very strong ( $r = 0.84$ ).
- According to Scenario 3 (brand congruence with Scandinavian values high and simple communication style in Scandinavia but opulent in other markets), the correlation remains strong ( $r = 0.77$ )

Conversely:

- According to Scenario 2 (brand congruence with Scandinavian values low and opulent communication style globally), shows a weaker correlation, but still significant ( $r = 0.39$ )
- According to Scenario 4 (brand congruence with Scandinavian values, low and opulent communication style in Scandinavia but simple in other markets), also shows weaker associations between variables, but significant as well ( $r = 0.60$ ).

Table 5: Correlation matrix cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity

|            |        | Authenticity |        |        |        |
|------------|--------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|
|            |        | scen 1       | scen 2 | scen 3 | scen 4 |
| Congruence | scen 1 | 0,84**       |        |        |        |
|            | scen 2 |              | 0,39*  |        |        |
|            | scen 3 |              |        | 0,77** |        |
|            | scen 4 |              |        |        | 0,60** |

\*\* p-value < 0,01; \*value < 0,05

The fact that the correlations are stronger in scenarios 1 and 3, respectively, where the brand was set congruent with Scandinavian culture, better confirms the H1a hypothesis, i.e., of stronger correlation between the two variables where the fictitious brand is more aligned with the cultural values of the Scandinavian context.

Considering the H2a hypothesis, Table 5 shows the correlation index of the perceived authenticity and purchase intention for each scenario. It is noticeable how, in this case too, all the associations are positive and strongly significant (p-value <0.01). Specifically: scenario 3 presents the strongest correlation (r= 0.72), followed by scenario 2 (r= 0.67), scenario 1 demonstrates another solid relationship (r= 0.65), finally, scenario 4 shows the lowest score (r= 0.54).

Table 6: Correlation matrix perceived authenticity and purchase intention

|                    |        | Authenticity |        |        |        |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|
|                    |        | scen 1       | scen 2 | scen 3 | scen 4 |
| Purchase intention | scen 1 | 0,65**       |        |        |        |
|                    | scen 2 |              | 0,67** |        |        |
|                    | scen 3 |              |        | 0,72** |        |
|                    | scen 4 |              |        |        | 0,54** |

\*\* p-value< a 0,01; \*\*value< 0,05

H2a hypothesis is partially confirmed, results shows that authenticity is correlated to purchase intentions, but this is not stronger in scenarios more aligned with Scandinavian culture (Scenario 1 and 3), as not exclusively dependent on cultural brand congruence. Scenario 3 shows the highest correlation, but also Scenario 2 (in which brand congruence is lower) report a significant value slightly above Scenario 1.

### 4.3 Linear regression models

This section presents the results of the regression analysis to estimate the impact, mediation and moderation effects of the main interest variables related to H1b, H2b, H3 and H4, as outlined in section 3.4. Starting from H1b the aim was to test if cultural brand congruence as dependent variable has an impact on perceived authenticity as independent variable construct within each scenario (Table 6).

Table 7: Linear regression matrix between cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity

|                   | Scenario 1: | Scenario 2: | Scenario 3: | Scenario 4: |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Costant           | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           |
| congruence        | 0,84***     | 0,39*       | 0,77***     | 0,60        |
| R-square          | 0,70        | 0,16        | 0,59        | 0,36        |
| R-square adjusted | 0,70        | 0,13        | 0,58        | 0,35        |

\*\*\* p-value<0.001 \*\* p-value< a 0,01; \*\*value< 0,05

As it is noticeable above, cultural brand congruence has a strongest and more significant impact, on the dependent variable, in both scenario 1 (+0.84) and scenario 3 (+0.77), both of which represent high cultural congruence conditions. While it is not significant at all, in scenario 4, even if positive (+0.60) and significant but with a lower intensity in scenario 2 (+0.39). So, it can be assessed that in scenario 1 and 3 congruence has a stronger impact on authenticity compared to scenario 2 and 4. Another element that supports the hypothesis H1b is the R-square coefficient that evaluates the goodness of the model to explain the variability of the two variables. In other words, models in scenarios 1 and 3 explain more variances (respectively R= 0.70 and R= 0.59) compared to the ones in scenario 2 and 4 (respectively R= 0.16 and R= 0.36). Thus, because linear regression models are more capable to explain the relation in Scenario 1 and Scenario 3 and the congruence coefficient has a higher impact, it is possible to confirm the H1b hypothesis.

Considering the H2b hypothesis, the impact of perceived authenticity as dependent variable on purchase intention as independent variable, the table 7 below shows the regression model output.

*Table 8: Linear regression matrix between perceived authenticity and purchase intention*

|                   | Scenario 1: | Scenario 2: | Scenario 3: | Scenario 4: |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Costant           | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           |
| aut               | 0,65***     | 0,67***     | 0,72***     | 0,54***     |
|                   |             |             |             |             |
| R-square          | 0,42        | 0,45        | 0,52        | 0,29        |
| R-square adjusted | 0,41        | 0,44        | 0,51        | 0,28        |

\*\*\* p-value<0.001 \*\* p-value< a 0,01; \*\*value< 0,05

For all models the coefficient related to authenticity is positive and strongly significant in the 4 scenarios. Interestingly scenario 2 shows a stronger impact of authenticity (+0.67) on the dependent variable compared to scenario 1 (+0.65) but it is less strong compared to scenario 3 (+0.72). So, the H2b Hypothesis is partially confirmed because authenticity seems to have an impact on the purchase intention across all scenarios, but the expected patterns of stronger effects in high-congruence scenarios (1 and 3) does not emerge clearly. Indeed, Scenario 2 shows nearly the same impact of Scenario 1, so no differences emerge considering the pairing scenarios 1 and 3 vs scenarios 2 and 4. The perceived authenticity is a significant predictor but does not vary consistently according to cultural congruence.

To test hypothesis H3, a series of regression models were estimated to assess whether the perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between cultural brand congruence and purchase intention. Table 8 shows the mediation analysis, as it is known, if a variable mediates, firstly need to be considered a model that considers only one dependent variable (cultural brand congruence in model 1), and then considering the variable that is hypothesized mediates the analysis (perceived authenticity in model 2) within each scenario.

Table 9: Linear regression matrix with perceived authenticity as mediator between cultural brand congruence and purchase intention

|              | Scenario 1: |         | Scenario 2: |         | Scenario 3: |         | Scenario 4: |         |
|--------------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|
|              | Model 1     | Model 2 | Model 1     | Model 2 | Model 1     | Model 2 | Model 1     | Model 2 |
| Constant     | 0           | 0       | 0           | 0       | 0           | 0       | 0           | 0       |
| congruence   | 0,61***     | 0,22    | 0,1         | -0,2    | 0,61***     | 0,14    | 0,1         | -0,35** |
| auth         | -           | 0,46**  | -           | 0,75*** | -           | 0,62*** | -           | 0,75*** |
| R-square     | 0,37        | 0,43    | 0,01        | 0,48    | 0,38        | 0,53    | 0,1         | 0,4     |
| R-square adj | 0,36        | 0,42    | 0           | 0,46    | 0,36        | 0,51    | 0           | 0,4     |

Considering only the model 1 for all the scenarios, where only brand congruence is entered as independent variable, the results show a positive and significant impact of brand congruence on purchase intention only in scenario 1 and 3, with coefficients of +0.61 for both. While in scenario 2 and 4 congruence seems to have no significant impact on purchase intention at all, even if coefficients are positive<sup>3</sup>. When included in the model 2 authenticity index, across all four scenarios authenticity shows a positive stronger and statistically significant impact on the dependent variable purchase intention compared to congruence. Indeed, if scenario 1 and 3 (the only one that present in model 1 a significant impact of congruence) are considered, in model 2 the congruence is no more significant with the inclusion of perceived authenticity. The relation is only explained by authenticity, and this is also validated by the R-square adjusted index. It became higher passing from model 1 to model 2 in both scenario 1 and 3. In scenarios 2 and 4, even if brand congruence (model 1) was not a significant predictor, perceived authenticity is highly significant (model 2). So, the H3 hypothesis is confirmed, because in scenarios 1 and 3, with the introduction of perceived, cultural brand congruence is not significative anymore and perceived authenticity become stronger significant, moreover authenticity plays a crucial role even in less congruent conditions, but this is not a mediating role, it is more an independent explanatory role.

Ultimately the last hypothesis H4 was focused to test how and if internal brand consistency moderates the relationship between cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity. So firstly, was estimated a new variable that is the interaction terms derived from a multiplicative process of internal brand consistency and cultural brand congruence for each of 4 scenarios.

To test the moderation effect there are two passages:

- Firstly, estimate two separate models:
  - model 1 in which the perceived authenticity is the dependent variable and brand congruence is the independent one

<sup>3</sup> If one of the variables is not significant it is required to not proceed with the mediation analysis, but for testing the hypothesis in this case the analysis of model 2 for both scenario 2 and 4 was done.

- model 2 in which the perceived authenticity is the dependent variable, but now the internal brand consistency is the independent one
- Secondly estimate a full model 3 with internal brand consistency, brand congruence and their interaction (internal brand consistency x brand congruence).

Table 10: Linear regression matrix with internal brand consistency as moderator between cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity

|                   | scenario1 |         |         | scenario2 |         |         | scenario3 |         |         | scenario4 |         |         |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|
|                   | model1    | mode2   | mode3   | model1    | mode2   | mode3   | model1    | mode2   | mode3   | model1    | mode2   | mode3   |
| Costant           | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0         | 0       | -0,33   | 0         | 0       | 0,07    | 0         | 0       | 0,16    |
| congruence        | 0,84***   | -       | 0,77*** | 0,39*     | -       | 0,6***  | 0,77***   | -       | 0,54*** | 0,60      | -       | 0,47*** |
| int               | -         | 0,55*** | 0,18*   | -         | 0,57*** | 0,59*** |           | 0,73*** | 0,49*** | -         | 0,73*** | 0,59*** |
| intxcong          | -         | -       | 0,06    | -         | -       | -0,17   |           | -       | -0,15*  |           |         | -0,07   |
| R-square          | 0,70      | 0,30    | 0,73    | 0,16      | 0,33    | 0,61    | 0,59      | 0,53    | 0,77    | 0,36      | 0,54    | 0,73    |
| R-square adjusted | 0,70      | 0,29    | 0,72    | 0,13      | 0,31    | 0,58    | 0,58      | 0,52    | 0,76    | 0,35      | 0,53    | 0,72    |

It is shown that in both model 1 and model 2 both congruence and internal consistency are significant across most scenarios, except for scenario 4 where congruence is not statistically significant. Considering scenario 1 and 3, the explanatory power R-square adjusted of model 1, having cultural brand congruence as independent variable is higher than model 2, having internal brand consistency as independent variable, this indicates that congruence better explains perceived authenticity than internal brand consistency. Vice versa in scenario 2 and 4 the R-square adjusted of model 2 are always higher compared to model 1, indicating a stronger impact of internal consistency in those less culturally aligned conditions.

Moreover:

- In scenario 1 congruence has a stronger effect than consistency: the values are respectively (+0.84) compared to (+0.55)
- In scenario 3 congruence is (+0.77) related to consistency (+ 0.73).
- In scenario 2 internal brand consistency has a stronger impact on perceived authenticity (+0.57) than brand congruence (+0.39)
- In scenario 4 congruence is not significant, while consistency (+ 0.73)

Finally, when examining the interaction term (model 3) the results suggest that there are no significant interaction effects of internal brand consistency and cultural congruence on perceived authenticity, or at least it states only for scenario 3 (-0.15), the others the values is closer to zero or slightly positive, but non statistically significant. Moreover, it is interesting to notice that even if the interaction effect is not significant for at least 3 scenarios its effect seems to be negative or slightly low positive (i.e. model 1), suggesting that they may not reinforce each other, possibly due to redundancy by consumers. So, when it is considered the interaction of internal brand consistency and cultural congruence on perceived authenticity, this is negative and not positive, so when they stay together in the model, they impact negatively one on each other.

Therefore, H4 is not supported, because the specific hypothesis of moderation of internal brand consistency is not confirmed, even if it is statistically significant alone.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Interpretation of results**

Starting from the research question about the impact of cultural congruence on perceived authenticity and purchase intention, this section will report the key findings, implications and alignment with prior literature, as well as the limits and the suggestion for further research. As is possible to see in Table 4 and 6 (section 4), both the hypothesis H1a and H1b were confirmed. The findings highlight that not only there is a stronger relationship between the brand congruence and authenticity constructs (H1a) in both situations where there is a congruence between the fictional brand and Scandinavian culture (scenarios 1 and 3), compared to situations where there isn't such congruence (scenarios 2 and 4), it can clearly be seen that this congruence makes it possible to use a linear regression model (H1b) to predict the effect of brand congruence on perceived authenticity. The evidence supports the idea that cultural brand congruence is not an abstract theory, but an actual driving force that affects consumers' perceptions (Diantaris, M., 2024; Morhart et al., 2015). The perception of brand congruence, that reflect the values of a specific national market (Scandinavia), can positively impact trust and authenticity (Judijanto et al., 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2024). In addition, this relationship is not only strong and significant in scenario 1, where the brand maintains a simple communication style in both Scandinavia and worldwide, but also in scenario 3 where the brand communication is more ostentatious, with a more minimalist style in the northern European market, showing that the brand by adapting manages to reflect local values can be perceived authentic. In contrast, in scenarios where the brand is found not to reflect Scandinavian culture, the correlation even if is statistically significant show lower coefficients; more specifically, in scenario 2 ( where the brand is opulent everywhere) the impact is significant but lower comparing to the first and third ones , and in Scenario 4 (where the brand is opulent in Scandinavia and simply elsewhere) is not significant even if positive, showing that the way individuals perceived the specific brand communication seems to contradict itself and more specifically alignment with Scandinavian culture. So, the hypotheses (H1a and H1b) are confirmed, as the correlation is stronger in culturally aligned conditions. What emerges is that the cultural framework of Scandinavian minimalism influences consumers' perception of authenticity; they respond favorably to brands that reflect these values; a brand that communicates in an aligned cultural way reflects more authenticity in Scandinavian consumers, in line with the idea that Scandinavian brands produce items that reflect Nordic lifestyle, therefore a perception of alignment could be favorable, as shown by results, in line with previous literature (Gonzalez Rodriguez, M. F., 2019; Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V., 2016). Consumers seem to value brands that are in tune with their unique characteristics and personalities while creating an atmosphere of open-mindedness and honesty. As such, when there is an open and honest attitude embedded in a brand, perceived authenticity

is reinforced (Rodrigues et al., 2024; Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V., 2016). However, the influence of perceived authenticity upon purchase intention was further investigated (H2a), while the positive relationship between perceived authenticity and tendency towards conducting purchasing behavior was also tested (H2b). These findings underline the importance of authenticity in all four settings, even when the congruence is low (Table 5 and 7). This corroborates findings of existing literature (Mazzù, M. F., Baccelloni, A., & Lavini, L., 2022; Goldstein et al., 2022) that has ranked authenticity among the most important values to consumers and hence is also a strong behavior driver. The highest correlation is found in scenario 3, may demonstrating that consumers respond positively when the brand fits local expectations while remaining flashy elsewhere, and the authenticity is not reduced. Also, the second highest value is found in scenario 2, where the congruence is low compared to more aligned scenarios, suggesting that authenticity can also be higher significant independently from cultural alignment, if consumers perceive quality and trust the authenticity and behavioral intention are correlated. These findings make this hypothesis (H2a and H2b) partially confirmed, suggesting that even in the absence of cultural brand congruence, authenticity can still have a higher impact on purchase intention. The fact that authenticity is significant with higher values in all four cases, first confirms its importance to Nordic consumers, and that even in cases where the brand has low cultural congruence, authenticity is a variable with power, once it is perceived it drives the behavioral intent regardless of cultural alignment. Authenticity, despite existing problems with cultural fit, can still exist, likely because of perceived consistency, heritage, and quality. This may call into question the hybrid model and the balance of globalization and localization, as already considered (Kapferer, J. N., 2008; Liu, H., 2023). However, the critical significance of congruence in terms of perceived authenticity (H1a and H1b) suggests that the hybrid model can work in the Scandinavian environment, because brands have the possibility to expand the relationships with consumers in different context, considering the positive culture impact. This does not, naturally, dismiss the evidence that when the brand is perceived as authentic, it will anyway increase the intention to buy. Then, hypothesis H3 aimed to test the psychological role of perceived authenticity in the Scandinavian context (Table 8). Many studies have pointed out that perceived brand congruence increases emotional alignment, perceived authenticity, and it then impacts purchase intention (Al-Meshal et al., 2020; Diantaris, M., 2024). The results confirm this hypothesis. Firstly, in model 1, in which the only dependent variable is the brand congruence (and the independent the purchase intention), it has a significant impact in both Scenario 1 and 3 (Table 8). When authenticity is included in model 2, congruence is no longer significant, and thus this reduction dictates that authenticity mediates the relationship between congruence and purchase intention, the explanatory power of authenticity in model 2 is higher than that in model 1 but for all scenarios, including those in which congruence was not significant (Scenario 2 and 4). However, the hypothesis is confirmed because in scenarios 1 and 3, where brand cultural congruence has a stronger impact, the mediating role of authenticity was more evident. This suggests that in scenarios with higher congruence, perceived authenticity has full explanatory value, and congruity influences outcomes through perceived authenticity. The fact that authenticity also has explanatory power in Scenario 2 and 4 (Table 8), where brand

congruence did not predict the purchase intention, meaning that the condition for mediation was not met, is because authenticity could act independently and not as a mediating value, especially in a sensitive market like Scandinavia. This also could confirm the discussion of Napoli et al. (2014) and Morhart et al. (2015), who affirmed that authenticity derives from multiple dimensions, not only the symbolism, but also consistency, sincerity or quality. The psychological role of authenticity is confirmed in the Scandinavian setting, as theorized by Al-Meshal et al. (2020) and Shetty, K., & Fitzsimmons, J. R., (2022), a brand can create self-congruence with consumers, who develop emotional alignment and are more likely to buy. In a culturally sensitive market such as Scandinavia, these results demonstrate that people feel aligned with the brand which has a higher cultural congruence and perceive it as authentic, increasing emotional connection and trust. Ultimately, it is this perception of shared values, embedded in authenticity, that in turn impacts purchase intention. This finding confirms and extent the mediating role of authenticity between cultural congruence and purchase intention, in the sector of luxury branding within the Scandinavian countries, supporting previous findings. More specifically, previous research identified authenticity as a psychological mechanism, but with a focus on art infusion and symbolic design elements (Seo et al., 2022). Finally, the last hypothesis H4 tested the moderating role of internal brand consistency on the relationship between brand congruence and authenticity. Findings show that there is no moderation effect, as it is notable in Table 9. Brand congruence and internal consistency, when considered independently, have a significant impact on perceived authenticity (model 1 and 2 in Table 9). In scenarios more aligned (scenario 1 and 3) the brand congruence is more significant, meaning that Scandinavian consumers give a lot of importance to local culture values in their perception of authenticity. In contrast, in scenarios less congruent (scenario 2 and 4), the internal consistency emerged as the stronger predictor, like a compensation for a less cultural fit, because the scenario may still be perceived authentic if it communicates with coherence and clarity, demonstrating real identity, suggesting that for Scandinavian consumers, brand consistency remains a foundational element. However, the interaction term (see model 3 in Table 9 for all the scenarios) did not appear significant in any scenario, indicating that internal brand consistency does not alter the strength of the relationship between brand congruence and authenticity. The fact that interaction terms are not significant in any models, does not imply that the net effect of brand congruence and internal consistency do not influence impact on the dependent variable. As argued in literature (Kapferer et al., 2017; Morhart et al., 2015) brand consistency increases brand trust, credibility, and perceived integrity. While the theoretical background suggests that internal brand consistency might moderate the relationship between cultural brand congruence and perceived authenticity, by reinforcing the effect when they are both together, especially in the case of Scandinavian context with values embedded in transparency and integrity (Gonzalez Rodriguez, M. F., 2019; Skou, N. P., & Munch, A. V., 2016), the result underlines that internal brand consistency and brand congruence have concurrently an independent effect on the perceived authenticity. This may suggest that if a brand adopts a style that is less flashy and more in line with the idea of “quiet luxury” this increases familiarity and in turn the perceived authenticity of local consumers. Internal brand consistency is a key variable as well,

statistically significant in all four cases. The findings of the present study supplement theoretical constructs in academic literature (e.g., Morhart et al., 2015; Kapferer, J. N., 2008), explaining that authenticity is a multifaceted construct that takes shape through several perceptual channels in the Scandinavian environment: alignment on the one hand, and coherence and consistency on the other. Previous literature has emphasized the importance of cultural alignment and brand coherence in increasing authenticity, but none tested their interaction in this specific context. So, this study tested the assumption of their interaction derived from theoretical or conceptual connections, showing that they are significant independently, not interacting. Overall, scenario 1 and 3 demonstrated that either full alignment or localized adaptation can enhance authenticity, because brand congruence can increase perceived authenticity. Moreover, scenario 2 shown that even if the brand is misaligned, authenticity can still emerge, through heritage or quality. Ultimately, scenario 4 shows that the misalignment in Scandinavia, while being “congruent” in other markets may appear contradictory and reduce authenticity perceived.

## **5.2 Limitation of the study and further research**

The present work is not without limitations. In the first instance, the survey was accomplished exclusively through CAWI survey, that is, through the administration of questionnaires via web/platform/social. This survey methodology, although able to reach (as indicated in the methodological chapter) more easily subjects from different territorial contexts, and is in line with the experimental research, on the other hand may not allow reaching all that segment of the population who do not possess a high familiarity with new technologies. For example, particularly elderly subjects (i.e., over 70) or those with visual impairment are difficult to reach with such methodology. In such cases, a future survey could make use of a mixed CAWI/CATI (Computer Assistant Telephonic Interview) data collection methodology, or telephone interviews, increasing participation of all subjects. Despite the use of Prolific, to make the sample more representative, it was not statistically reflective of the Scandinavian population (Table 4), because the questionnaire was also conveyed among groups, friend networks and similar, composed mainly of young adults who have a high level of education. Future research needs to systematically deal with the different demographic categories of the population to maintain age, gender, and education quotas relevant to the country under study. Current research (Scandinavia Edition-Brand Trust in the Age of Information Overload, 2023) shows that interest in trust among Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish consumers tends to rise with age; this finding can partially account for the constraints with respect to the moderating effect of internal brand consistency. In addition, it is necessary to note that internal brand consistency is an important variable and that it acts as an effective predictor of intention to buy. Moreover, interest in luxury goods and purchase tendency reported low values in the sample, this may also have impacted the results. Also, the sample used might be small (a little more than 200 cases), in a trial with 4 or more groups, such numerosity (although not small in maximum terms) might depower the tests or the significance values of the variables included within

regression models, correlation matrices, etc. Future work should collect about twice as many cases, to have precisely also greater stratification by gender, age or educational qualification, and obtain potential robust results. It is relevant to observe that the character of the scenario typology is experimental. The products created by this project, especially during the series of tasks covering the construction of the survey, conducting the survey, and scenario designing and emulation, have the potential to develop further. For example, further research can consider presenting the different stimuli-scenarios over time, improving the respondents' experience of them. It can be considered also to show different clips to respondents, not only a static image. The experimental design it was also based on a single fictitious brand, going further in depth it is possible to involve a specific real brand, which could highlight different perception or consumers' behavior. Also, the research was focused on consumers from Scandinavian countries, making findings less generalizable, indeed it would be interesting to extend future research involving global consumers. Therefore, expanding the research, also considering other markets outside the Scandinavian one, could analyze more in depth how Scandinavian simplicity can be an opportunity for luxury brands in creating authentic and meaningful experiences for consumers. Another potential research could focus on a comparison between Scandinavia and other markets such as East Asia, Middle East, Latin America and see if the cultural values highlighted in the specific case of the Nordic countries, could also be found in other potentially similar contexts and how consumers in these other contexts might react to the stimuli. In addition, other dimensions of authenticity, such as the more functional or moral or symbolic dimensions, could also be analyzed in greater depth. An additional research idea is to analyze with more focus sustainability practices and how they impact consumers' perceived authenticity and purchase intention.

## 6. Conclusion and final implications

The aim of this research was to explore whether cultural congruence between the Scandinavian values and the international luxury brand can influence perceived authenticity and purchase behavior, considering the solid Scandinavian background of market values based on functionality, integrity, simplicity and minimalism. This thesis advances understanding on dynamics in a culturally sensitive market like Scandinavia, not deeply explored in previous research, combined with a multi-scenario experimental design that isolates the effects of cultural congruence and brand communication style. The findings highlight and confirms that cultural alignment is relevant for perceived authenticity. Authenticity, in turn, is perceived when the brand considers local values and brings to an intensified emotional relationship and mutual trust. Moreover, authenticity even in scenarios with lower congruence, still significantly impacts purchase intention, suggesting that other brand attributes, such as consistency, heritage or quality, can independently generate trust and emotional alignment. This supports the primary role of authenticity in such a conscious context; moreover, the study empirically tests perceived authenticity as a mediator, thereby enriching the theoretical framework by showing that authenticity operates not just as a direct predictor, but also as a psychological mechanism, that explain the effect of cultural congruence on purchase intention within the luxury sector of Scandinavian cultural context. Furthermore, by analyzing the moderating role of internal brand consistency, even though this variable does not interact with brand congruence, the findings show that consistency and congruence work conjointly in affecting authenticity. The results contribute to literature by showing that cultural and psychological factors play a key role in market like Scandinavian ones. It also reinforces the research that authenticity depends on cultural sensitivity, consistency, and alignment with the consumer. In addition, authenticity appears as a key element, the impact so strong on purchase intention, stems precisely from the Scandinavian background, which places great importance on the values of transparency and simplicity. Nonetheless, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on cultural adaptation in global branding, offering insights for global brand management. The creation of the four scenarios has tried to represent realistic manipulation of marketing strategies situations, filling the gap between theoretical assumptions and practical brand decisions. From a managerial perspective, brands may have the opportunity to create better relationships with consumers, because cultural brand congruence is a significant variable and a strategic tool, even if authenticity is stronger in all the four cases. Despite the many challenges and the complexity of understanding different cultures, successful alignment can increase the customer base and build stronger relationships, so brands should enter and adapt their communication style, to reflect local values, still maintaining core identity. Future research could use a larger and more demographically diverse sample, also exploring long-term consumer-brand relationship in culturally congruent environment. Further studies may also experiment with real brands, videos as stimuli, or questionnaire that reproduce the setting in multiple and different moments of time, to evaluate and analyze how individual brand or cultural perception could affect consumers' behaviors.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A: Questionnaire on Qualtrics

### Start of Block: Opening Sentence

Dear participant, I am a Master student at Luiss Guido Carli University, thank you for contributing to this academic study, which is my final thesis, it will take about 10 minutes to answer all questions. My objective with this questionnaire is to analyze consumer perceptions of luxury brands, the communication styles that characterize them in the Scandinavian minimalist cultural context, and the brands consistency. **Afterwards, you will be shown a short description of a fictitious brand with the attached image; then there will be questions in relation to your perception and purchase intention, take your time to read this short text and look at the image.** I remind you that there are no right or wrong answers, I ask you to answer truthfully, I am only interested in your opinion. Out of respect for your privacy, all answers are anonymous, and the data collected is used exclusively to conduct this research.

## Introduction Block

Q1 How much are you interested in luxury goods?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Slightly
- ☐ Lightly
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Fairly
- ☐ Very
- ☐ Extremely

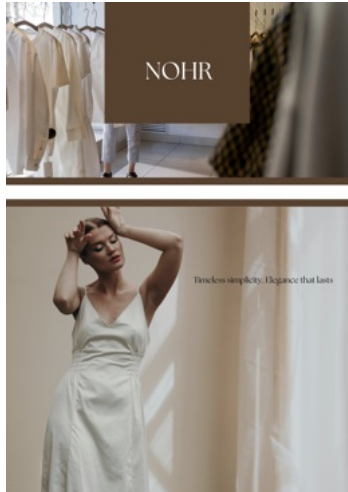
Q2 How often do you buy luxury products?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Very Rarely (less than once a year)
- ☐ Rarely (about once a year)
- ☐ Occasionally (once or twice a year)
- ☐ Often (several times a year)
- ☐ Very often (almost every month)
- ☐ Always (every month or more frequently)

## Randomly scenarios block:

### Scenario 1

The brand Nohr communicates with an essential and refined style in all markets. The design is clean and simple, with neutral colors and basic lines.



### Scenario 2

The brand Nohr communicates with an opulent and rich style in all markets. The design is elaborate and luxurious, with bold colors and extravagant elements.



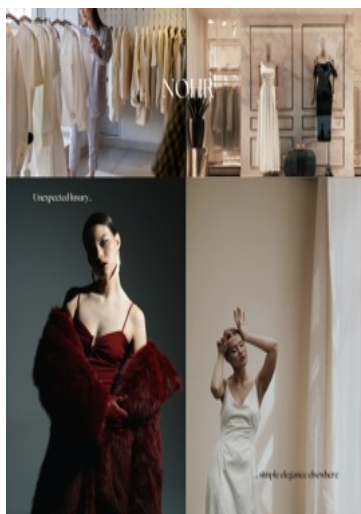
### Scenario 3

In Scandinavian countries the brand Nohr communicates with an essential and refined style, with clean and simple designs, neutral colors and basic lines. Elsewhere it adopts an opulent and rich communication style, with elaborate and luxurious design, bold colors and extravagant elements.



### Scenario 4

In Scandinavian countries the brand Nohr communicates with an opulent and rich style, with elaborate and luxurious designs, bold colors and extravagant elements. Elsewhere it adopts an essential and refined communication style with clean and simple designs, neutral colors and basic lines.



Q3 Considering the brand that you saw represented in the scenario, the communication style adopted in the Scandinavian market is minimalist

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

Q4 Considering the brand that you saw represented in the scenario, the communication style adopted in the Scandinavian market is opulent

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

Q5 Considering the brand that you saw represented in the scenario, the communication style adopted in international markets (outside Scandinavia) is minimalist

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

Q6 Considering the brand that you saw represented in the scenario, the communication style adopted in international markets (outside Scandinavia) is opulent

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

Q7 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

|                                                                                                | Strongly disagree     | Disagree              | Somewhat disagree     | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat agree        | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The brand reflects the values of Scandinavian culture.                                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand's design and communication are congruent with the Scandinavian minimalist aesthetic. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand fits well with Scandinavian consumer preferences.                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand does not reflect the values of Scandinavian culture                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q8 The communication style change in different markets

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

Q9 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

|                                                                                                   | Strongly disagree     | Disagree              | Somewhat disagree     | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat agree        | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The brand maintains its tradition and essence                                                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand communicates sincerely                                                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand seems to have natural identity                                                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand appears true to its values                                                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand is truly committed to quality and excellence                                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand appears authentic because it reflects the values of Scandinavian culture                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Authenticity is greater because the brand reflects the values of Scandinavian culture             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| If the brand does not reflect the values of Scandinavian culture, I perceive it as less authentic | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q10 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

|                                                                                                                      | Strongly disagree     | Disagree              | Somewhat disagree     | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat agree        | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The brand seen does not contradict itself in its underlying messages and values, regardless in which markets operate | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand is recognizable in different cultural contexts                                                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand maintains a coherent identity in different markets                                                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The brand changes its communication style too much in different markets                                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q11 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

|                                                               | Strongly disagree     | Disagree              | Somewhat disagree     | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat agree        | Agree                 | Strongly agree        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| It is probable that I will buy products of this brand         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would consider buying products of this brand in the future  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| If I saw products of this brand in the shop, I would buy them | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would recommend this brand to friends and family            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

### Demographic questions block:

Q12 Age

- ☒ 18-24
- ☒ 25-34
- ☒ 35-44
- ☒ 45-54
- ☒ 55-64
- ☒ 65+

### Q13 Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

### Q14 Annual income

- ☐ Less than 300.000 SEK
- ☐ Between 300.000 SEK and 400.000 SEK
- ☐ Between 400.000 SEK and 500.000 SEK
- ☐ More than 500.000 SEK

### Q15 Education level

- ☐ Primary school
- ☐ Secondary school
- ☐ Upper Secondary School
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Doctorate or Other