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# **The Influence of Luxury Brand Personality on Digital Interaction Evaluations: A Focus on European and North-American Markets**

**Running Head: The Influence of Luxury Brand Personality on Digital Interaction Evaluations**

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# **The Influence of Luxury Brand Personality on Digital Interaction Evaluations: A Focus on European and North-American Markets**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** Do luxury consumers negatively evaluate digital interactions (website and social media) by international luxury brands? The topic has received much debate. We argue that luxury brand personality (modern vs. traditional), which encompasses a more stable form of brand identity in global markets, affects evaluations of digital interactions. We further investigate the role of self-brand connection in this process.

**Design:** Three experiments on Prolific use a European sample and manipulate a single factor between subjects (Modernity: Less vs. More; Traditionality: Less vs. More) of French luxury brands and measure evaluations as the dependent variable. Two studies assess self-brand connection (continuous) as a moderator (Study 2a, 2b). Study 2b rules out some alternative explanations, with culture (Individualist vs. Collectivist) as an independent variable. A fourth study, using a North-American sample on CloudResearch, assesses the effect of Personality manipulation (More Modernity vs. More Traditionality) on consumer evaluations of an Italian brand, and assesses ubiquity perceptions as a mediator.

**Findings:** Consumers evaluate digital interactions of international luxury brands less favorably when luxury brand personality exhibits more (vs. less) modernity or less (vs. more) traditionality. Perceptions of ubiquity mediate these relationships. When self-brand connection is high, this effect is attenuated.

**Originality:** The research sheds light on the debate on whether luxury brands should create digital interactions in international markets, given that these global brands operate in multiple channels. Findings show that luxury brands can develop strategies based on aspects of their brand identity, a less malleable feature of brand identity within global markets. Additionally, the research contributes to the conversation about a global luxury market. In short, the

findings offer evidence in favor of brand identity (personality) influencing the digital channel strategy a brand should undertake in international markets, first, followed by consumer needs.

**Keywords:** International Luxury Strategy; Brand Personality; e-commerce; Social Media; Self-Brand Connection; Modernity

## 1. Introduction

Digital channels are important for global brand strategy (Wang and He, 2023) and can influence consumers' brand image (Septianto et al., 2023). For luxury brands in particular, digital channel management is critical in global identity management (Donze and Wubs, 2019; Milanesi *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, digital channels present a less expensive opportunity to expand internationally (İpek, 2021), gather intelligence, sell and distribute products efficiently in new markets, and evaluate market potential (Kaynak *et al.*, 2005; Veloutsou *et al.*, 2021). Digital interactions, specifically, encompass brand-generated online touchpoints accessible to both non-consumers and consumers of luxury, including social media and brand e-commerce. Digital channel management could represent a complex decision, though.

Using digital interactions in international markets is complicated by the idea of luxury itself. Subjectively defined, luxury reflects a triangulation of desire where consumers are acutely aware of a brand and aspire to own it, while the brand itself imposes limitations on accessibility (Girard, 2005). A recent meta-analysis reveals that the pursuit of uniqueness remains a key driver of luxury consumption, rendering ubiquity perceptions problematic (Bharti *et al.*, 2022; Xie and Lou, 2020). Digital interactions, whether through social media or e-commerce, could signal ubiquity, undermining perceptions of exclusivity (Athwal *et al.*, 2019; Holmqvist *et al.*, 2020; Hudson *et al.*, 2016; Park *et al.*, 2020; Pentina *et al.*, 2018).

Some researchers, however, suggest that exclusivity needs may no longer be central to luxury, and perhaps only exists in certain markets (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2018). Aligned with this side of the debate, research suggests that digital interactions enhance consumer responses (e.g., Godey *et al.*, 2016; Klaus, 2020; Okonkwo, 2009). For instance, Liu *et al.* (2019) show that, in China, social media channels enhance loyalty, although demographic differences exist (see Chen *et al.*, 2021). While, in practice, certain luxury brands embrace digital interactions (e.g., Burberry), others hesitate (e.g., Chanel) and

emphasize rarity (Blasco-Arcas *et al.*, 2016; Creevey *et al.*, 2021; Díaz *et al.*, 2016; Kapferer and Bastien, 2012; Ko *et al.*, 2019; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009).

In an attempt to reconcile this debate, some argue that there is no ‘right’ approach for all luxury brands. Instead, ubiquity cues might impact luxury brands differently (Dauriz *et al.*, 2014). Recent research demonstrates that luxury retailer’s strategy should align with their brand identity (Pantano *et al.*, 2022). Brand identity reflects visual and non-visual associations consumers hold toward a brand (Aaker, 2010). Considering that digital channels are vital for building luxury brands’ identities (Godey *et al.*, 2016; Peng and Chen, 2012), if exclusivity plays a salient role in a luxury brand’s identity, digital interactions can alter exclusivity perceptions. One feature of brand identity is brand personality, ‘the set of human characteristics associated with a brand’ (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Importantly, Peng and Chen (2012) argue that luxury brand personality is important in international markets, as brand personality (vs. culture and other brand identity aspects) is less susceptible to brand meaning re-negotiations (e.g., Holmqvist *et al.* (2023).

One luxury brand personality trait relevant for the digitalization debate is brand modernity (vs. traditionality, see Heine *et al.*, 2009; 2018). The modernity (vs. traditionality) trait reflects brand’s temporal perspective. Luxury brands with an emphasis on modernity redefine norms and introduce progressive changes; traditional brands are conservative, classic, and old-fashioned (c.f.: Pantano *et al.*, 2022; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Although it might seem that highly modern brands would embrace digital interactions due to associations with being ‘modern’ (Khan, 2020), consumers who prefer more modern brands also desire exclusivity and might see digital interactions as signaling ubiquity (Berthon *et al.*, 2009; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009). As such, does luxury brand personality influence evaluations of digital interactions? If so, do ubiquity perceptions explain this effect?

The issue of digitalization is pertinent amidst the recent calls to investigate strategies luxury brands can implement globally when serving international markets (e.g., Christodoulides & Michaelidou, 2022; Ko *et al.*, 2019; Veloutsou *et al.*, 2021). A decades-long debate in international marketing compares the benefits of standardization vs. adaptation (Agrawal, 1995; Vrontis *et al.*, 2009). In line with this, international luxury brands can select to standardize their digitalization approach (e.g., avoid digital channels for all of their markets) or adapt to each market. As brand personality might vary across different markets (Davies *et al.*, 2018), it can impact the optimal digitalization approach for these markets.

Moreover, if such ubiquity effects exist, self-brand connection has potential to mitigate them. Self-brand connection occurs when consumers integrate a brand into their self-concept (Dwivedi, 2013). High self-brand connection represents opportunities to self-express (Escalas and Betman, 2005), a strong motivation for luxury brand consumption (Bharti *et al.*, 2022). When individuals have strong self-brand connection, they hold stable attitudes toward a brand, and defend it when threatened (Khalifa and Shukla, 2017; Sarkar *et al.*, 2021; Song and Kim, 2020). In fact, self-brand connection can overcome cultural barriers when operating in international markets (Banerjee *et al.*, 2022) and leads to increased luxury brand engagement on social media (De Vries and Carlson, 2014; Oliveira and Fernandes, 2022). Finally, for international brands, self-brand connection represents an important part of global brand identity building, enhancing consumer perceptions (Han, 2022; Salehi *et al.*, 2021). Thus, can self-brand connection attenuate ubiquity perceptions?

The present research sets to investigate these questions via four experiments conducted with international samples from Europe and North America. This research offers the following contributions. First, it reconciles divergences in the existing literature concerning luxury brands' digital interactions in international markets by investigating them through the lens of brand personality (cf: Leban *et al.*, 2020; Park *et al.*, 2020; Pentina *et al.*,

2018). Second, this study contributes to a clearer conceptualization of luxury brand personality by empirically disentangling the role of brand modernity versus traditionality (Heine, 2009). Third, the research responds to calls to investigate how luxury brands might operate globally, and whether they should standardize or adapt their approach to each market (see Christodoulides & Michaelidou, 2022; Veloutsou *et al.*, 2021). Fourth, the research highlights the role of self-brand connection in attenuating the potential negative effects of perceiving luxury brands as ubiquitous. Lastly, this research provides implications for luxury brands employing digital interactions in international markets.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Drawing on extant research, this literature review argues that luxury brands characterized by a more modern and less traditional personality are susceptible to receiving negative consumer evaluations of their digital interactions, such as social media and e-commerce. This stems from the perception of ubiquity that arises as a consequence of these interactions. However, prior research hints that the detrimental impact of ubiquity perceptions can be mitigated through self-brand connection, as consumers who possess a strong self-brand connection are more likely to maintain enduring and positive perceptions of a brand (Sarkar *et al.*, 2021). Focusing on prominent Western luxury markets, we present our conceptual framework in Figure 1, which outlines the key concepts under investigation. These key concepts are further introduced in the following sections.

*Insert Figure 1 about here*

### *2.1 Digital Interactions with Luxury Brands and Ubiquity Perceptions*

The use of digital channels represents an important and often-used approach for all brands entering international markets (Puthusserry *et al.*, 2018). In fact, Oliveira *et al.* (2023)



highlight brand entry (e.g., channel) as a substantive international marketing decision, affecting international marketing success. Channel choices and digital options can affect brand perceptions for all brands that enter international markets (Septianto *et al.*, 2023). For luxury brands in international markets, digital channel decisions are more complicated. Specifically, Lawry (2022, p. 796) argues, “The question of how to maintain allure and exclusivity while digitizing luxury brands is a pressing issue.” By enabling digital interactions, such as generating and sharing content on social media, brands allow consumers to actively participate in defining the meaning of luxury, potentially shifting control away from the brand itself (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2020, 2023; Pentina *et al.*, 2018). This challenge stems from the inherent contradiction between accessibility offered by digital channels and the exclusivity associated with luxury. Consequently, there is considerable debate surrounding whether digital interactions, including e-commerce and social media, pose a threat or enhance the value of luxury (see: Creevey *et al.*, 2021). There is limited research available to reconcile the ongoing debate and identify the circumstances under which digital interactions can more (or less) successful for luxury brands.

In evaluating digital interactions, specifically, we focus on the brand e-commerce site and social media (Pantano *et al.*, 2018). For both, we consider only the content emanating from the brand, and exclude the content created by other users. We discuss each in turn next.

### *2.1.1 Brand e-commerce site*

Luxury brands’ websites, an interactive digital channel (see Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021), exert a significant influence on consumer decision-making, as the quality of the website, customer experience, and satisfaction all shape how consumers engage with the brand and acquire knowledge about it (Darley *et al.*, 2010). When evaluating a brand's online presence, consumers are guided by three key factors: functionality (e.g., navigation), psychological factors (e.g., trust and feelings of reliability), and content (e.g., design, imagery;

Constantinides, 2004). These factors contribute to perceptions of the brand through presentation style and the relationships established with customers (Kim *et al.*, 2015). Research shows that website interactivity (Beuckels and Hudders, 2016) and "web atmospherics" (Kim *et al.*, 2015; Okonkwo, 2009) shape perceptions of brand luxuriousness. Importantly, these factors impact consumer evaluations of brand interactions, influencing overall impressions formed from website exposure (Constantinides, 2004).

A content analysis of luxury brand websites reveals that luxury brands adopt different approaches, potentially impacting consumers' online brand connection (Díaz *et al.*, 2016). Some luxury websites focus on conveying brand identity and providing informative content to consumers (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012). Conversely, advocates of e-commerce argue that luxury brand websites should prioritize product sales (Okonkwo, 2009). While using a website as an informational platform does not necessarily threaten perceptions of rarity (and can reinforce them through specific features), e-commerce functionality may give rise to ubiquity perceptions. Specifically, e-commerce can compromise exclusivity by reducing the effort required to access luxury goods (Duong and Sung, 2021). Diminishing exclusivity can lower luxury brand's digital interaction evaluations.

### *2.1.2 Social media*

For the purpose of this study, social media refers to the official social media pages of luxury brands that feature content generated by the brand. While previous research has explored the use of social media influencers (e.g., Qian and Park, 2021) and user-generated content (e.g., Heine and Berghaus, 2014), this study focuses solely on social media interactions initiated by the luxury brand itself. Overall, social media interactions can contribute to brand awareness (Rambourg, 2014), trust building, and relationship development (Kim and Ko, 2010), as well as increased consumer engagement (Pentina *et al.*, 2018). Social media platforms provide opportunities for luxury brands to manage consumer

relationships and establish connections with their audience (Kim and Ko, 2010). However, Wang and Chen (2021) argue that luxury brands should prioritize maintaining a strong brand identity on social media rather than solely focusing on building consumer relationships. This is because a luxury brand may experience a decline in perceived luxuriousness, purchase intention, and word-of-mouth recommendations when the emphasis is primarily on consumer relationships (Qian and Park, 2021). In fact, a luxury brand's direct engagement with its Facebook followers can lead to perceptions of increased ubiquity (Park *et al.*, 2020).

The presence of luxury brands on social media platforms can contribute to the perception of these brands as more commonplace, considering the large number of active users who can signal their association with a brand through actions such as liking, following, or commenting. This aligns with recent agentic luxury perspectives, which highlights consumers are active participants in luxury brand experiences (see Holmqvist *et al.*, 2023). Leban *et al.* (2020) suggest that followers of luxury brands engage with the brand virtually but may not necessarily purchase. This 'virtual consumption' could diminish exclusivity perceptions among genuine luxury brand consumers (Duong and Sung, 2021; Lee and Youn, 2021). Additionally, social media platforms are commonly used by non-luxury and masstige brands (Chandon *et al.*, 2016), which employ different marketing strategies. Luxury brands employ tactics to enhance status, elitism, and aspiration through social distance and symbolic exclusion (Grigorian and Petersen, 2014). On the other hand, non-luxury and masstige brands are more relatable. Given that social media creates a sense of closeness and friendship among users (Hudson *et al.*, 2016), this closeness can diminish the perceived value of luxury brands (Park *et al.*, 2020). Thus, ubiquity signals emanating from luxury brands' social media can influence consumer judgments, lowering evaluations.

To address the ongoing debate and advance the literature on the topic, our study builds on recent work that promotes an international marketing approach to the luxury

industry and emphasizes the exploration of consumer motives and global brand strategies (Veloutsou *et al.*, 2021). This perspective encourages researchers to move beyond a cross-cultural perspective and consider the influence of brand identity on responses to digital interactions in international markets (Gutsatz and Heine, 2018; Halwani, 2019; Tsai *et al.*, 2013). While acknowledging cultural differences within Western luxury markets (c.f.: Le Monkhouse *et al.*, 2012; Savitt, 1998), our study contributes to the debate by examining this topic through the lens of brand identity, and personality specifically. By adopting this approach, we can better understand the nuances and dynamics of digital interactions in the Western luxury context and provide valuable insights for both practitioners and researchers.

## *2.2 Luxury Brand Identity, Personality, and Digital Interactions*

Brand identity serves as the foundation for luxury brands, encompassing their values, beliefs, and vision. In the realm of luxury, brand identity is not a competitive advantage but rather a commonality shared by luxury brands, including quality, price, symbolism, aesthetics, rarity, and extraordinariness (Heine and Phan, 2010). While different approaches exist for establishing brand identity (e.g., Aaker, 2010; Kapferer, 2012), they converge on several key elements. Developing brand identity entails meticulous planning of the brand's benefits, culture, user imagery, consumer relationships (e.g., exclusivity), and personality. Luxury brands, in particular, craft strategies that align with their brand identities (Pantano *et al.*, 2022). Consistency between the brand identity elements and strategy is crucial as it fosters customer engagement (Hsieh, 2023; Eigenraam *et al.*, 2021) while inconsistency can lead to negative evaluations due to insincerity impression (Eigenraam *et al.*, 2021). For luxury brands that prioritize exclusivity as a defining aspect of their brand identity and personality, more specifically, digital interactions might be viewed more negatively.

Importantly, of all the brand identity elements, brand personality is more stable than that of other brand identity elements, like culture, and so is less prone to consumer renegotiations of the larger brand identity (Peng and Cheng, 2012). Additionally, emphasizing other brand identity elements like culture or user imagery could be problematic, as global issues can affect brands originating from offending countries or with specific users (Mandler *et al.*, 2023). Brand personality holds significant importance in shaping a strong luxury identity as it plays a fundamental role in the symbolic meanings attributed to brands (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Consumers derive personality traits from every decision a brand makes and the way it presents itself through various channels, including digital (Chen and Wang, 2017). Consequently, they evaluate the brand based on their perception of its personality. Therefore, whether digital interactions with a luxury brand tarnish perceptions of exclusivity depends on the interplay between exclusivity and that brand's personality.

Brand personality helps define the intangible aspects of the brand (Sung *et al.*, 2015) and remains consistent over time (Peng and Cheng, 2012; Sweeney and Brandon, 2006). Heine's (2009) model of luxury brand personality encompasses traits traditional/modern, decent/eccentric, discreet/opulent, democratic/elitist, and soft/strong. These traits align with consumers' perception of their own actual or ideal personality (Roxana-Denisa *et al.*, 2016). For instance, "opulence" mirrors a hedonic-oriented personality, while "strength" and "elitism" correspond to self-enhancement/transcendence, and "eccentricity" and "modernity" reflect a preference for conservation (Roxana-Denisa *et al.*, 2016). Psychological research suggests that modernity is intricately linked to fundamental and pervasive structures of human personality, playing a role in societal functioning. Its development is believed to be influenced by education and subsequent socialization (Goldberg, 1990; Suzman, 1973).

For luxury brands, modernity emphasizes the present and future, fostering an inclination to challenge norms and drive progressive transformations (Heine *et al.* 2009;

2018). These brands evoke associations with "contemporary" and "trendy" (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). A noteworthy example is the mission of Celine, which states: "Rooted in the present, Celine writes its history day after day: exploration, creative energy, and committed choices lie at the heart of its culture" (LVMH group, 2017). In contrast, brands less modern (or more traditional) uphold longstanding traditions, preserving heritage and culture (Heine, 2009). Such brands are characterized as conservative, classic, and imbued with a sense of old-fashioned charm (Halwani, 2019; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). They position themselves around physique and culture, score high in craftsmanship and expertise, and symbolize aesthetic possession (Berthon *et al.*, 2009).

While Heine *et al.* (2018) employ a bipolar measurement scale to assess brand modernity, where the brand is described as either modern or traditional, this approach may not accurately capture the strategies employed by luxury brands in the marketplace. Chanel, for example, is known for its forward-thinking approach while also cherishing its strong French heritage and maintaining iconic elements created by Coco Chanel. Thus, Chanel simultaneously exhibits characteristics of both modernity and traditionality. Similarly, Burberry embraces a personality high on traditionality rooted in classic British heritage, yet it takes bold and innovative steps such as being the first luxury brand to livestream a fashion show and enabling immediate purchase of showcased items. Furthermore, Burberry embraces technology in its marketing communications, incorporating imaginative storytelling and digital games (Straker and Wrigley, 2016). In these instances and others alike, it becomes challenging to classify brands solely on a continuum from modern to traditional. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to conceptualize modernity/traditionality as two distinct traits: modernity (ranging from high to low) and traditionality (also ranging from high to low). Importantly, both modernity and traditionality can play a crucial role in consumers'

evaluations of luxury brands' digital interactions (see Appendices 1 for a list of brands tested and Appendix 2 for additional empirical evidence supporting these assertions).

Research highlights the importance of distinguishing between modern and traditional luxury brands in addressing contemporary marketing challenges (Wang, 2022). Consumers motivated by self-expression or status are particularly drawn to modern brands (Berthon *et al.*, 2009). Given that individuals seeking self-expression desire unique, rare, and exclusive brands, as these attributes contribute to 'specialness' (Bharti *et al.*, 2022; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009; Tsai *et al.*, 2013; Xie and Lou, 2020), ubiquity cues can undermine these motives. Consistent with this reasoning, studies find a negative association between uniqueness, self-expressiveness, and digital interaction with luxury brands (Duong and Sung, 2021).

Alternatively, previous research has emphasized the significance of psychological distance for brands seeking to cultivate an aura of exclusivity (De Barnier *et al.*, 2012; Kim, 2018). Traditional brands, with their deep-rooted heritage and historical associations, psychologically create a greater distance from consumers. In contrast, modern brands, being more focused on the present, start with a closer psychological distance. Consequently, it can be inferred that modern brands are more vulnerable to marketing activities that diminish this psychological distance further, such as digital interactions with consumers. Given the theoretical connection between self-expression and modernity as well as psychological distance, we hypothesize:

**H1:** Luxury brand personality will affect evaluations, such that digital interactions of more (vs. less) modern brands will be evaluated more negatively.

Simultaneously, brands with a high degree of traditionality are unlikely to receive negative evaluations of their digital interactions. Traditionality signifies a brand's heritage and connection to the past (Heine *et al.*, 2018; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Effective

strategies for cultivating a sense of luxury for brands with traditional personalities often involve accentuating craftsmanship and aesthetics (Berthon *et al.*, 2009; Halwani, 2019). Relevantly, heritage is a pillar of a strong global brand, and can create positive perceptions in international markets (Goldstein and Carpenter, 2012). These brands are sought after for the hedonic pleasure of owning impeccably crafted, high-quality products. Consumers who gravitate towards such brands are motivated by connoisseurship rather than status signaling (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2018). Consistent with this perspective, emphasizing quality and craftsmanship in digital interactions enhances consumers' perception of vividness (Mandler *et al.*, 2020). Because self-expression motives, which emphasize uniqueness, do not tend to align with traditionality, if highly traditional brands appear more ubiquitous and accessible to the masses, consumer responses should not be negatively affected by perceptions of ubiquity. Formally,

**H2:** Luxury brand personality will affect evaluations, such that digital interactions of more (vs. less) traditional brands will be evaluated less negatively.

**H3:** Luxury brand personality's effect on evaluations of digital interactions will be mediated by perceived ubiquity cues.

### *2.3 The Moderating Role of Self-Brand Connection*

Conceptually, self-brand connection refers to the extent to which consumers identify themselves with a brand and incorporate it into their self-concept (Dwivedi, 2013). It is closely related to brand love and represents a more modest form of emotional attachment (Batra *et al.*, 2012). Importantly, consumers motivated by self-expression seek brands with high self-brand connection (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). In the context of our study, self-brand connection is relevant as it can help overcome cultural barriers that brands may encounter when operating in international markets (Banerjee *et al.*, 2022; Han, 2022). Rather



than connecting to a national identity, consumers tend to relate to global brands based on their ability to self-express (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2007). Ultimately, self-brand connection is important for global brands entering foreign markets (Salehi *et al.*, 2021). When consumers have a strong self-brand connection, they tend to hold less fleeting attitudes and more enduring perceptions toward the brand (Sarkar *et al.*, 2021). Interestingly, individuals with high self-brand connection to a luxury brand exhibit higher engagement with social media posts, purchase intentions (Song and Kim, 2020), and brand value (Aw *et al.*, 2021).

Self-brand connection can play a crucial role in mitigating the issues related to ubiquity perceptions arising from a luxury brand's digital interactions. When individuals strongly identify with a brand, they are more likely to defend it in the face of threats because negative cues pose a challenge to their self-concept (Cheng *et al.*, 2012; Khalifa and Shukla, 2017). Furthermore, for consumers with low self-esteem, self-brand connection enhances their preference for conspicuous luxury signals (Song *et al.*, 2017). In the context of our study, we propose that digital interactions of brands low in traditionality will not receive more negative evaluations when consumers have a high self-brand connection. Instead, self-brand connection will serve as a buffer, attenuating the negative effect. Formally,

**H4:** In case of low self-brand connection, digital interactions of less (vs. more) traditional brands will be evaluated more negatively. However, no such relationship will exist in case of high self-brand connection.

### **3. Methodology**

Across four experiments, the findings suggest that luxury brands higher in modernity (Study 1) and lower in traditionality (Study 2a, 2b) receive lower evaluations of their digital interactions (i.e., social media page; brand e-commerce website). Moreover, this relationship is mediated by ubiquity perceptions (Study 3) and moderated by self-brand connection (Study

2a, 2b). Specifically, when self-brand connection to the luxury brand is high, the negative impact of a less traditional personality on evaluations is attenuated.

### *3.1 Study 1: More vs. Less Modern Brands*

The goal of study 1 was to assess H1. Based on a pre-test (see Appendix 1 for a list of brands pre-tested and Appendix 2 for full results of the pre-test) conducted with European students qualified as luxury consumers via screening questions (e.g., Amatulli *et al.*, 2021; Mainolfi, 2022), two French brands (Hermes and Chanel) exhibiting a similar degree of traditionality were selected<sup>2</sup>. Paired sample t-tests suggested that these two brands differ only in modernity (Chanel:  $M = 4.75$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ; Hermes:  $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ ;  $t = -1.97$ ;  $p = .05$ ).

#### *3.1.1 Participants and study procedure*

For the main study, European consumers were recruited via Prolific. To ensure that the sample reflected actual luxury consumers, we recruited participants in two stages. In the first stage, 514 ( $M_{age} = 31.71$ ; 55.8% women) English-speaking European individuals who used social media and were self-proclaimed luxury consumers (Prolific custom qualification) were asked to indicate the items that they had purchased or planned to purchase in the next year using a list with prices. The procedure closely followed that of Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2022) and Wang *et al.* (2022). For example, the list contained “lipstick (>35 Euros)”, “a jacket (>400 Euros)”, “shoes (>350 Euros)”, and more. A total of 491 (95.5%) were qualified as luxury consumers given their purchase history, including individuals in Austria (.1%), Belgium (.5%), Finland (.1%), France (4.3%), Germany (8.3%), Greece (2.5%), Ireland (4.5%), Italy (20.3%), Luxembourg (.4%), Portugal (22.8%), Slovenia (.1%), Spain (10.2%), Switzerland (.9%), and the United Kingdom (24.3%).

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<sup>2</sup> Selected for Study 1, both Hermes and Chanel belong to the “more traditional” cluster, thereby controlling for traditionality

In the second stage of the study, these pre-qualified Prolific users were invited to participate, with the goal of obtaining 120 responses on Prolific. After removing responses that indicated technical issues, speeding and inattentive responses (Wood *et al.*, 2017)<sup>3</sup>, the final usable sample comprised 111 participants ( $M_{age} = 35.18$ ; 50.5% men). European countries represented included: Italy (25%), Portugal (31.6%), Spain (16.2%), the United Kingdom (9.6%), Ireland (6.6%), Germany (5.1%), France (3.7%), Switzerland (1.5%), and Greece (.7%).

This experiment adopted a brand *modernity* (*less vs. more modern*) between-subjects design. Prior to the manipulation, participants rated a randomized list of five luxury brands (1 = very unfavorable, 7 = very favorable), including the focal brands (Hermes and Chanel). Participants were then randomly assigned to view a real e-commerce website for one of the two focal brands<sup>4</sup>. Aside from the French participants ( $n = 3$  citizen residents), these represented international consumers from European market for these French luxury brands. Participants were instructed to imagine that they were shopping online, and to explore the products offered for sale on the brand's website<sup>5</sup>. Participants were not allowed to move onto the questionnaire for at least 2 minutes, with the average participants spending 150 seconds on the website ( $SD = 60$  seconds). This approach allowed perceptions of ubiquity resulting from the brands' e-commerce digital interactions. In doing so, the ubiquity cues were kept constant across conditions. Following this, participants answered questions measuring website evaluations on a 3-item 7-point scale ("How would you rate this website on the

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<sup>3</sup> One participant reported an issue with the website. Six responses were removed for failing speed checks. Two participants failed attention checks embedded in the questionnaire.

<sup>4</sup> A pre-test using a snowball sample of European consumers ( $N = 128$ ;  $M_{age} = 21$ ; 60% women) assessed the website of one of the two brands, randomly assigned. To ensure that both sites contained similar features, participants assessed the extent of interactive features (1 – not at all interactive, 7 – very interactive), number of pages and details (1 – had few, 7 – had many), and aesthetic features (1 – minimal, 7 – ornate). Independent t-tests provided evidence that the websites were equally interactive ( $p = .98$ ), detailed ( $p = .76$ ), and ornate ( $p = .15$ ).

<sup>5</sup> Feedback from two European luxury brand experts supported the selection of these brands and affirmed that both websites reflected equivalent online strategies.

following features: design, navigation, and professionalism”, 1 - very negative and 7 - very positive;  $\alpha = .77$ ; Constantinides, 2004). Lastly, demographics were captured.

### *3.1.2 Study results and discussion*

An ANCOVA with luxury brand modernity (0 – less, 1 – more) as the independent variable, favorability of Chanel and Hermes as covariates, and website evaluations as the dependent variable yielded a significant effect ( $F(1, 110) = 5.82$ ;  $p = .018$ ). Specifically, website evaluations were more negative for the more modern ( $M = 5.75$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) than the less modern brand ( $M = 6.12$ ,  $SD = .70$ ). Neither of the covariates was significant ( $p$ 's  $> .15$ ). These significant effects remained when excluding French nationals ( $F(1, 108) = 5.17$ ;  $p = .025$ ).

These results lend support to H1: digital interactions with more (vs. less) modern international brands lead consumers to evaluate these interactions less favorably. Both luxury brands possessed a similar degree of traditionality, yet different modernity, which negatively influenced consumer evaluations. To build on these results, the following studies compare two brands that exhibit similar modernity, yet differ in traditionality, to test H2. Additionally, study 1 focused on one form of digital interactions: e-commerce websites. Yet, as highlighted earlier, various forms of digital interactions can generate ubiquity cues. Therefore, the following studies use social media (as opposed to the brand website) interactions and explore self-brand connection as a possible moderator (H4).

### *3.2 Study 2: More vs. Less Traditional Brands*

Based on the same pre-test as in study 1, French brands Chanel and Celine were selected for the experimental manipulation. Paired sample t-tests revealed that Celine was lower on traditionality only ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ) compared to Chanel ( $M = 5.20$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ;

$t = 2.19; p = .03$ ), thereby controlling for brand modernity. The primary goal of these two studies was to test H2 and H4, with self-brand connection as a moderator.

### *3.2.1 Study 2a: European sample*

#### *3.2.1.1 Participants and study procedure*

Of the 491 pre-qualified Prolific panel established in Study 1, participants who did not partake in Study 1 were invited to participate in the new study, with a goal of obtaining 220 responses. Indeed, 220 participants completed the questionnaire ( $M_{age} = 32.3$ ; 63% women). A total of 208 responses were retained after cleaning the dataset based on the same criteria as in Study 1 (Wood *et al.*, 2017)<sup>6</sup>. These individuals represented the following European countries: United Kingdom (29.2%), Italy (22.4%), Portugal (15.1%), Germany (11%), Ireland (5.9%), Spain (6.8%), France (3.7%), Greece (3.2%), Switzerland (1.4%), Belgium (1%), and Luxembourg (.5%). Aside from the French participants ( $n = 6$  citizen residents), the stimuli presented an international marketing strategy from a foreign luxury brand. The experiment followed a 2 (Traditionality: less vs. more traditional) x Self-brand connection (continuous) between-subjects design. Study participants were randomly assigned to view the real social media page of one of the two brands, and a social media post featuring an outfit from the current collection. Both images were similar aside from the outfits (both outfits included a blazer and skirt), in that they featured an up-close photo of a single model looking downward. Then, participants responded to the same questionnaire items as in the previous study, including the dependent variable worded to reflect Instagram post evaluations rather than the website ( $\alpha = .87$ ; 1 – very negative and 7 - very positive). Additionally, they responded to five 7-point Likert items measuring self-brand connection (e.g., “The brand

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<sup>6</sup> Twelve participants failed an attention check embedded in the questionnaire. None of the participants reported issues with the social media page and none of the responses failed speed checks.

reflects who I am”;  $\alpha = .96$ ; adapted from Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Lastly, demographics were captured.

### *3.2.1.2 Study results and discussion*

A regression using PROCESS Model 1 with luxury brand traditionality (0 – less traditional, 1 – more traditional), self-brand connection, and their interaction term as the independent variables, favorability of both brands as covariates, and Instagram post evaluations as the dependent variable yielded a significant 2-way interaction ( $\beta = -.24$ ;  $t = -2.61$ ;  $p < .01$ ), with a main effect of self-brand connection ( $\beta = .24$ ;  $t = 3.47$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and also a main effect of traditionality ( $\beta = 1.42$ ;  $t = 4.30$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Importantly, neither covariate, prior favorability of Chanel ( $p = .14$ ) or prior favorability of Celine ( $p = .58$ ), was a significant predictor of the Instagram post evaluations. Spotlight analysis revealed that with low self-brand connection, Instagram post evaluations were higher for the more ( $M = 5.18$ ) versus less traditional brand ( $M = 4.16$ ;  $\beta = 1.02$ ;  $t = 5.06$ ;  $p < .001$ ). However, there was no difference in evaluations when self-brand connection was high ( $p > .31$ ), as illustrated in Figure 2 below. These significant effects remain when excluding the French participants (2-way interaction:  $\beta = .22$ ;  $t = 2.29$ ;  $p = .023$ ). These results lend support to H4, as well as H2, such that there was a main effect of brand traditionality (H2).

*Insert Figure 2 about Here*

Study 2a employed a mixed European sample highlighting the effects of luxury brand personality in the context of the whole European luxury market. However, given such sample’s heterogeneity, it is important to ascertain that cross-cultural differences do not drive consumer evaluations of digital interactions with luxury brands (e.g., Gutsatz and Heine, 2018; Halwani, 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Tsai et al., 2013). Therefore, Study 2b aims to replicate Study 2a yet focus on two European countries with distinct cultures: the United

Kingdom and Portugal. None of the participants in this study resided in France (thus representing an international market for the French brands used in study stimuli).

### 3.2.2 Study 2b: Cross-cultural sample

#### 3.2.2.1 Participants and study procedure

A total of 150 participants from each country were sought out using Prolific. All participants were pre-qualified using the same criteria as in Study 1 and Study 2a. While 285 participants (144 UK; 141 Portuguese;  $M_{age} = 30.4$ ; 50.5% men) completed the study, a total of 269 responses (140 UK; 129 Portuguese;  $M_{age} = 30.6$ ; 50.9% women) were retained after cleaning the dataset based on the same criteria as in the prior studies (Wood *et al.*, 2017)<sup>7</sup>. The experiment followed the same 2 (Traditionality: less vs. more traditional) x Self-brand connection (continuous) between-subjects design and replicated the procedure of Study 2a, including measures of social media interaction evaluations ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and self-brand connection ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Additionally, to establish whether brand personality impacts brand-level outcomes in the context of digital interactions, we also measured consumer trust using four 7-point Likert items (Dark *et al.*, 2016;  $\alpha = .94$ )<sup>8</sup>. Lastly, demographics were captured.

#### 3.2.2.2 Study results and discussion

A regression using PROCESS Model 1 with luxury brand traditionality (0 – less traditional, 1 – more traditional), self-brand connection, and their interaction term as the independent variables, favorability of both brands as covariates, and Instagram interaction evaluations as the dependent variable yielded a significant 2-way interaction ( $\beta = -.18$ ;  $t = -2.19$ ;  $p < .03$ ), with a main effect of self-brand connection ( $\beta = .42$ ;  $t = 7.34$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and also a main effect of traditionality ( $\beta = .91$ ;  $t = 2.89$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Importantly, neither covariate, prior favorability of Chanel ( $p = .26$ ) or prior favorability of Celine ( $p = .99$ ), was a

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<sup>7</sup> Fifteen participants failed an attention check embedded in the questionnaire. None of the participants reported issues with the social media page and none failed speed checks.

<sup>8</sup> We thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting we investigate this important brand-level outcome.

significant predictor of the Instagram interaction evaluations. Spotlight analysis revealed that with low self-brand connection, Instagram interaction evaluations were higher for the more (M = 5.01) versus less traditional brand (M = 4.46;  $\beta = .55$ ;  $t = 3.18$ ;  $p < .01$ ). However, there was no difference in evaluations when self-brand connection was high ( $p > .90$ ), as illustrated in Figure 3 below. These results again lend support to H2 and H4. The same PROCESS model with consumer trust as a dependent variable did not yield significant effects (see Appendix 3).

*Insert Figure 3 about Here*

To rule out cultural differences as a moderator, PROCESS Model 3 was employed and included country of residency (0 – UK, 1 – Portugal) as the second moderator. The results replicated the relationships from Process Model 1 yet did not reveal a significant 3-way interaction ( $p > .12$ ), a 2-way interaction with country and luxury brand traditionality ( $p > .25$ ), a 2-way interaction with country and self-brand connection ( $p > .34$ ), or a main effect of country of the participant ( $p > .48$ ). Taken together, these results indicate that cultural differences do not impact the relationship between luxury brand personality and digital interaction evaluations. Moreover, cultural differences do not affect the impact of self-brand connection as a moderator.

Taking Study 2a and 2b together, empirical evidence suggests that digital interactions of luxury brands that have a personality characterized by less (vs. more) traditionality are evaluated more negatively in international markets. For brands that have lower traditionality (while maintaining the same degree of modernity), high self-brand connection attenuates this negative evaluation. However, a shortcoming of Studies 1, 2a, and 2b is the comparison of two different brands at a time. The observed effects could be attributed to other factors that differentiate the brands selected for this experimental manipulation, rather than to differences



in their modernity and traditionality traits. Therefore, building on the results of these studies, experimental procedure in Study 3 manipulated brand modernity and traditionality of a brand to establish the process.

### *3.3 Study 3: More Modern vs. More Traditional Brands*

The primary objective of this study was to test H1 and H2, while also replicating previous findings using a different experimental manipulation. Additionally, the study aimed to examine perceived ubiquity as a potential underlying process behind the observed effects (H3). Instead of creating a fictitious luxury brand for luxury consumers, where the digital interactions would not be pervasive, we opted to use an existing luxury brand and recruited participants who had lower familiarity with the brand. Manipulating brand personality effectively requires a sample of individuals who are not highly familiar with the brand and its personality, ensuring a convincing manipulation of the specific brand personality trait. Hence, the sample of consumers obtained for this study is appropriate for the purpose of testing the proposed process. This approach also provided a superior instance of a luxury brand implementing international channel strategies in a new market. In order to include another Western luxury market, we specifically sought to recruit participants from the North American market, aiming for a similar composition of luxury consumers.

#### *3.3.1 Participants and study procedure*

Social media users from the U.S. ( $N = 217$ ;  $M_{age} = 36.29$ ,  $SD_{age} = 9.54$ ; 65.9% men) were recruited via CloudResearch for an experiment with brand personality (more modern vs. more traditional) as a between-subjects factor. Berluti was selected for the experimental manipulation as a lesser-known brand on the North-American market.

First, participants read one of the separately pre-tested<sup>9</sup> descriptions of the brand (see Appendix 4). Then, they were prompted to view Berluti's Instagram page. Following this, they responded to items measuring Instagram page evaluations identical to those in Studies 2a and 2b ( $\alpha = .74$ ), four 7-point bipolar items measuring ubiquity perceptions (e.g., "Common: Rare", "Ordinary: Special";  $\alpha = .72$ ), two 7-point Likert-type items measuring general luxury brand knowledge ( $r = .82$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and one 7-point item measuring prior familiarity with Berluti brand ( $M = 1.15$ ,  $SD = .52$ ). Embedded in the luxury brand knowledge scale was the same attention check item used in all studies ("If you are reading this, do not answer this question", where missing data indicates a passed attention check). Lastly, demographics were collected. The same data cleaning procedures as in Studies 1, 2a, and 2b left a total of 194 usable responses (Wood *et al.*, 2017)<sup>10</sup>.

### 3.3.2 Study results and discussion

A regression using PROCESS Model 4 with luxury brand personality (0 –More Modern, 1 –More Traditional) as the independent variable, luxury brand knowledge ( $p > .1$ ) and brand familiarity ( $p > .1$ ) as covariates, perceptions of ubiquity as a mediator, and Instagram page evaluations as the dependent variable demonstrated indirect-only mediation (Zhao *et al.*, 2010). A significant regression coefficient was observed between perceptions of ubiquity and Instagram post evaluations ( $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The direct effect of brand personality on consumer evaluations was non-significant with the mediator included ( $p > .1$ ). The bootstrapped indirect effect of brand personality on consumer evaluations computed 5,000 samples was 0.21 ( $SE = .06$ ; 95% CI: .09, .34).

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<sup>9</sup> 104 participants on CloudResearch ( $M_{age} = 37.83$ ; 50.5% women). T-tests indicated that following a *More Modern* manipulation, Berluti was perceived as more modern ( $M = 5.57$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) and less traditional ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ); while the opposite was observed following a *More Traditional* manipulation ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ;  $t = -7.33$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $M = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ;  $t = 7.12$ ;  $p < .001$ , respectively).

<sup>10</sup> Four responses were incomplete. Ten responses were removed for failing speed checks. Nine responses were removed for failing the attention check.

Therefore, when the luxury brand was perceived as more traditional (vs. modern), following a digital interaction, perceptions of ubiquity were lower, and consumer evaluations of the Instagram page higher. Taken together, the analysis supports H1, H2, and H3.

#### **4. General Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicate that luxury brand international strategies involving digital interactions are generally received more favorably with a more traditional (vs. modern) brand personality. In study 1, it was observed that among luxury brands with similar levels of traditionality, webpages of less modern brands received more positive evaluations from consumers. Furthermore, in study 2a and 2b, it was found that when luxury brands with similar levels of modernity were compared, those with less traditional personalities received lower evaluations of their digital interactions. However, this effect was mitigated when individuals had a high self-brand connection. Study 3, which focused on manipulating perceived luxury brand personality, provided stronger evidence supporting the impact of brand modernity on evaluations of ubiquity and digital interactions.

##### *4.1 Theoretical Implications*

The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature in four key ways. First, our research offers new insights into the discussion surrounding luxury brands' digital interactions. Previous studies have primarily focused on factors such as conspicuousness when examining the success of a brand's digital interactions (Choi *et al.*, 2020). However, since luxury brands can offer both conspicuously and inconspicuously branded products, and digital interactions are typically approached from a brand-level perspective rather than at the product level (e.g., an e-commerce site), we argue that brand personality traits are more relevant for determining effective digitization strategies. Brand personality, being a more

enduring characteristic compared to the ever-changing designs of seasonal collections and also a more critical component of brand identity and strategy, provides a stable foundation for understanding consumer evaluations of luxury brands' digital interactions.

Second, our research makes a valuable contribution to the literature on luxury brand personality and identity. Given the significance of luxury brand personality (Halwani, 2019; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004), there is a need for empirical assessments of personality-driven marketing strategies. Our study conceptualizes modernity and traditionality as two non-mutually-exclusive traits, with modernity representing a crucial luxury brand personality dimension. Modernity is associated with a present-minded approach, encompassing attributes such as creativity and excitement. On the other hand, traditionality embodies a focus on the past, emphasizing craftsmanship and customs rooted in brand heritage (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). Our findings provide evidence that higher levels of modernity and lower levels of traditionality render brands more susceptible to perceptions of ubiquity resulting from digital interactions. This underscores the importance of considering brand personality traits in understanding the dynamics of luxury brand interactions in the digital realm.

Third, this work responds to calls to understand international marketing strategies of luxury brands (e.g., Ko *et al.*, 2019; Veloutsou *et al.*, 2021), in particular given the importance of technology in global branding (Wang and He, 2023). Current research contributes to a larger debate on standardization vs. adaptation in international markets by introducing an additional consideration for luxury brands working in international markets (i.e., luxury brand's personality; Agrawal, 1995; Vrontis *et al.*, 2009). While we only investigated North American and European luxury markets, this research provides a first step in this regards.

Finally, this research integrates self-brand connection into the debate on whether luxury brands should partake in digital interactions. Introducing self-brand connection as a

moderator, we theorize that self-brand connection attenuates the effect of more modern brands' digital interactions on consumer evaluations, buffering against the negative impact of ubiquity cues. After all, self-brand connection is important in influencing how consumers respond to global brands in international markets (Han, 2022). Importantly, when consumers feel higher self-brand connection, they report more stable brand perceptions (Sarkar *et al.*, 2021) and higher brand value (Aw *et al.*, 2021). For instance, when consumers experience other threats to brands, those with high self-brand connection defend the brand because any reduction in positive evaluations also transfers to consumers' self-concepts (Cheng *et al.*, 2012; Khalifa and Shukla, 2017). The research identifies the ability of self-brand connection to buffer against the potential for ubiquity threats. Self-brand connection could also contribute to differences in prior international luxury research.

#### *4.2 Managerial Implications*

Relevantly, the debate on whether luxury brands should use digital interactions persists at a time when luxury brands are inherently more global and digital than ever. Digital interactions play increasingly important roles in brand storytelling (Mandler *et al.*, 2020; Xie and Lou, 2020) and creating luxury brand experiences (Klaus, 2021; Holmqvist *et al.*, 2020). Yet, selling luxury to different international markets can be further complicated by the fact that value perceptions and meanings of luxury might differ across markets (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2022; Shukla, 2012) and within individual markets (Seo *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, accessibility of luxury brands has led to confusion about the concept of 'luxury' in these international markets (Chandon *et al.*, 2016). Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2018).

Our results offer international luxury brand managers ways to achieve optimal digital interactions with consumers as ubiquity cues emanating from such digital interactions are only detrimental for luxury brands with more modern personalities. More traditional luxury

brands' personality allows them to engage in digital interactions in international markets without eliciting negative evaluations. Their online presence can aid in storytelling and narration of the brand's heritage without detracting from their luxury image and traditional identity. However, ubiquity cues can be a negative factor in the success of digital interactions for more modern luxury brands operating in international markets. If luxury brands that score high on modernity seek to integrate digital interactions in their strategies, it would be best to engage in such interactions rarely and capitalize on exclusivity. They may activate more exclusive digital channels, like Vacheron Constantin's Hour Lounge where consumers must register their watch when joining. Moreover, given differences in international marketplace perceptions of luxury and motivations to buy luxury (e.g., status versus heritage; Seo *et al.*, 2015), luxury brands could focus more on e-commerce and social media engagement in international markets where uniqueness is a less important attribute for the consumers.

Second, when entering new international markets or changing strategies within international markets, brand managers should assess brand personality perceptions and ensure that brands act in alignment with their personality. Luxury brands' approach to digitalization across different international markets (i.e., standardize vs. adapt) should be further informed by whether their brand's personality is the same across these markets, and to which extent this personality is modern/traditional.

Finally, the results suggest that building strong self-brand connection is more important for luxury brands that score high on modernity given that their consumers are more influenced by perceptions of ubiquity. Existing research has already demonstrated how to increase self-brand connection. For example, brands may encourage consumers to speak aloud versus write about the brand (Shen and Sengupta, 2018), or use more customized dialogue with consumers (Tan *et al.*, 2018). Likewise, more traditional brands that seek to increase their modernity must be cautious in how they pursue digital interactions in

international markets, to ensure they do not detract from consumers' evaluations. After all, for international brands, self-brand connection can do more than mitigate ubiquity perceptions, but can also lead to increases in quality perceptions (Salehi *et al.*, 2021).

#### *4.3 Limitations and Future Research*

This research has its limitations. First, all studies examined luxury brands within a fashion and accessories context, yet online representation of luxury industries differ. Although one of the largest luxury segments (D'Arpizio *et al.*, 2017), further research should investigate other industries (see also Veloutsou *et al.*, 2021). In particular, services imply limited availability as they cannot be saved. While aspirational luxury consumers were shown to 'consume' offerings virtually (e.g., Leban *et al.*, 2020), the effects of brand personality on digital interactions might be dissimilar for luxury services. Likewise, some brands included in our pre-test (Appendix 1) can be viewed as premium rather than luxury, including Hugo Boss, Moschino, and Viktor & Rolf. Inclusion of these brands, thus, represents a limitations of the current research and future research might compare the importance of exclusivity in luxury versus premium brands.

This research used European and North American consumer samples. It would be worthwhile to replicate the research comparing markets where status (vs. heritage) is more valued in luxury brands. For example, future research could explore how market-specific motivations for luxury might serve as a boundary condition to the current research. Additionally, while our studies reflect Europe and North America, not all countries within these continents were represented, and so we acknowledge this as a limitation. Future research should address this limitation by comparing luxury brand strategies across different countries and regions.

In addition, consumers' individual differences might impact the effect of luxury brand's digital interactions on consumer evaluations. Prior research suggests that consumers differ in their desire for exclusivity and self-expression, which might impact how they are affected by the ubiquity cues resulting from the luxury brand's digital interactions (Kim, 2018). Some studies, in fact, include both status and self-expression as traits and appeals from luxury brands and contend that these are also culturally relevant (e.g., Choi *et al.*, 2020). Thus, this line of inquiry could bridge luxury brand personality research with specific appeals that might attenuate the negative ubiquity effect or demonstrate how brands might be able to use digital interactions more strategically.

As another limitation, we measure ubiquity perceptions in study 3, and so were unable to fully test a model with self-brand connection as a moderator and ubiquity perceptions as a mediator. Figure 1 provides the conceptual model, but the specific moderated paths within this model remain untested. It was the goal of the research to investigate the role of digital interactions on ubiquity perceptions, and thus consumer evaluations of digital interactions, leaving many other relationships untested. In particular, it could be that digital interactions have a positive impact on awareness, engagement, and consumer relationships. As these were not assessed nor did we compare digital interactions versus control conditions, we invite researchers to examine the impacts of digital interactions on these outcomes.



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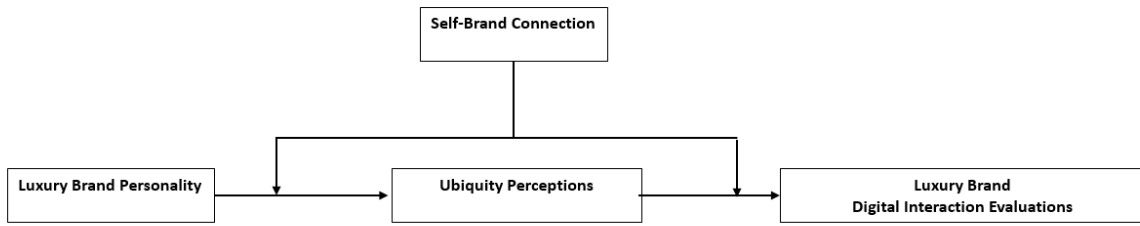
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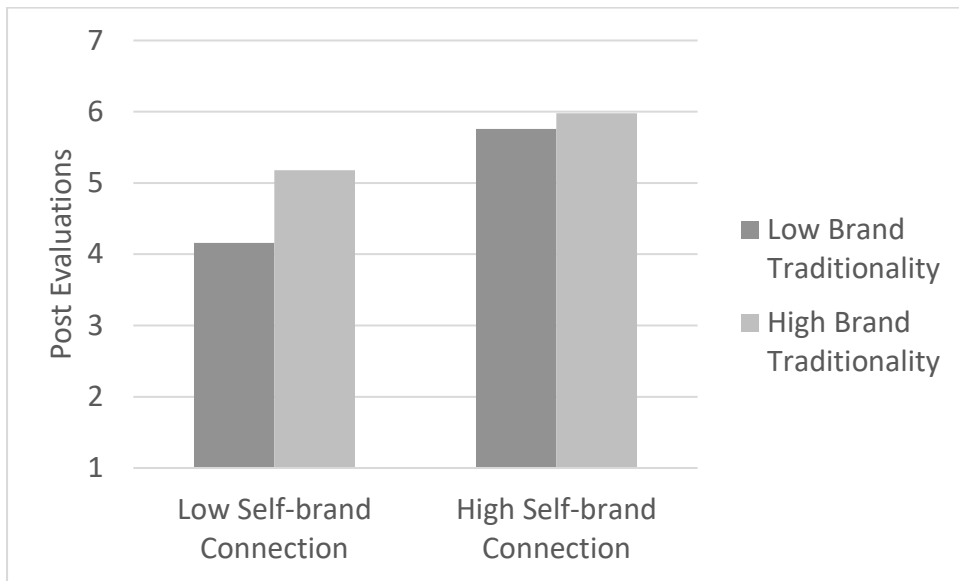
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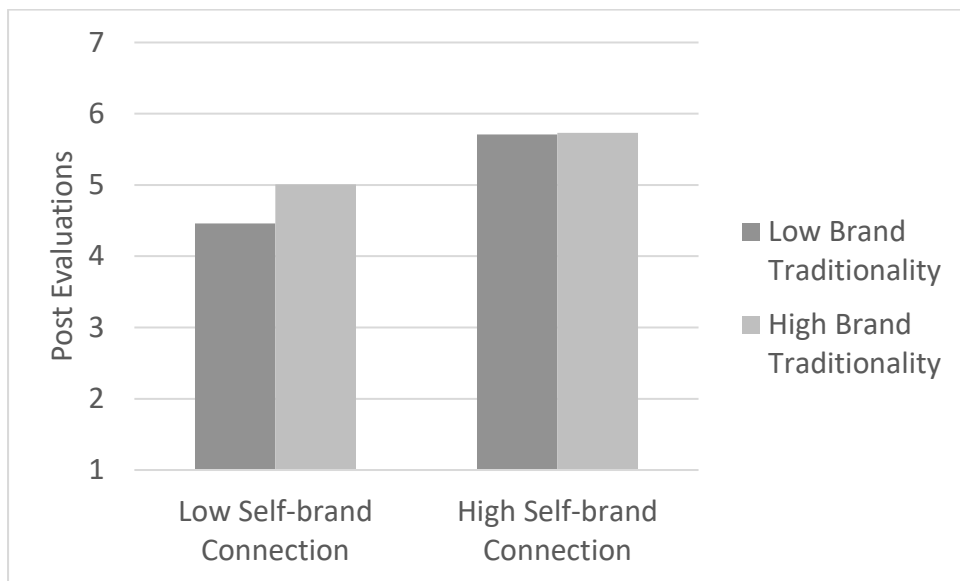
**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Research**



**Figure 2. Study 2a: Luxury Brand Traditionality x Self-Brand Connection on Instagram Post Evaluations**



**Figure 3. Study 2b: Luxury Brand Traditionality x Self-Brand Connection on Instagram Post Evaluations**



## Appendix 1 - Pre-tested Brands

Alexander McQueen

Armani

Balenciaga

Berluti

Bulgari

Burberry

Calvin Klein

Cartier

Celine

Chanel

Coach

Dior

Dolce & Gabbana

Ermenegildo Zegna

Fashion Nova

Fendi

Fossil

Givenchy

Gucci

Hermes

Hugo Boss

Jimmy Choo

Longchamp

Louis Vuitton

Manolo Blahnik

Marchesa

Michael Kors

Moschino

Mulberry

Prada

Ralph Lauren

Rolex

Salvatore Ferragamo

Supreme

Swarovski

Tiffany & Co.

Valentino

Versace

Viktor & Rolf

Yves Saint Laurent

## **Appendix 2 - Empirical evidence for Modernity and Traditionality as Two Distinct Traits (Pre-test)**

### *Participants and Study Procedure*

European business school students studying luxury branding (N = 43, M<sub>age</sub> = 23; 52.6% women) were recruited for this study. Studies highlight college students as interested in luxury, and with their earning potential growing, they represent a strategic consumer segment to marketers (Eastman *et al.*, 2020). Forty luxury brands, informed from several websites identifying the most well-known luxury brands in the world, were selected for this analysis. To make judgments of brand personality, it is important that consumers are familiar with a brand. To measure familiarity with brands, participants assessed whether a series of statements were true for each of the 40 brands: “I own products by this brand,” “My friends/family own products by this brand,” “I have visited this brand’s retail store,” “I have visited this brand’s website,” “I follow this brand on social media,” “I have bought this brand as a gift,” and “I have heard of this brand” (0 – false, 1 – true). Scores were summed, creating a familiarity index ranging from 0 to 7.

Next, participants were given a definition of traditional luxury brands, “defined by their image: classic, conservative, and timeless” and asked to score all brands (1- not traditional at all, 7- extremely traditional). Then, they were given the definition of modern luxury brands, “defined by being contemporary, trendy, and progressive,” and asked to score each brand (1- not modern at all, 7- extremely modern). Finally, participants provided demographic information.

### *Study Results and Discussion*

Only brands familiar to most respondents (equal or above the median for familiarity: 1.67) were retained for the analyses. If modernity and the traditionality are inversely related (as a bipolar measurement instrument would imply), “modern” vs. “traditional” scores for each brand would produce strong negative correlations. However, statistically significant negative correlations between “modern” vs. “traditional” score was detected for eight brands only (Burberry, Cartier, Gucci, Hugo, Longchamp, Ralph Lauren, Rolex, and Supreme), and indicated only moderate correlation, ranging from -0.32 to -0.52. For other brands, no significant correlation between “modern” vs. “traditional” score was detected.

Each brand personality was therefore characterized by both perceptions of modernity and perceptions of traditionality. Following analysis with a two-cluster solution, convergence emerged in three iterations. It indicated some brands as *more modern* ( $M_{modern} = 4.74$ ,  $SD_{modern} = .36$ ;  $M_{traditional} = 4.24$ ,  $SD_{traditional} = .61$ ; e.g. Celine and Calvin Klein) and other brands as *more traditional* ( $M_{traditional} = 5.08$ ,  $SD_{traditional} = .33$ ;  $M_{modern} = 4.21$ ,  $SD_{modern} = .65$ ; e.g. Hermes and Cartier).



### **Appendix 3 - PROCESS Model 1 Output on Trust**

A regression using PROCESS Model 1 with luxury brand traditionality (0 – less traditionality, 1 – more traditionality), self-brand connection, and their interaction term as the independent variables, favorability of both brands as covariates, and brand trust as the dependent variable yielded a non-significant 2-way interaction ( $p > .35$ ), main effect of self-brand connection ( $\beta = .36$ ;  $t = 5.70$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and non-significant main effect of traditionality ( $p > .79$ ). Prior favorability of Chanel was a significant covariate ( $\beta = .17$ ;  $t = 3.05$ ;  $p < .01$ ) though prior favorability of Celine was not ( $p > .91$ ).

These results suggest that luxury brand personality does not impact brand trust. On the other hand, self-brand connection influences brand trust, yet it does not interact with brand personality to affect brand trust.

#### **Appendix 4 – Study 3 stimuli**

“Berluti is an Italian brand that manufactures menswear. It makes shoes, belts, bags, and wallets, as well as bespoke and ready-to-wear garments.”

*More Modern manipulation:*

*Curiosity and innovation has always been at the heart of Berluti. They continually evolve by finding new doors to open. In 1980s Berluti was among the first to introduce men shoes in a wide array of colors, a style feature that has been a trademark of the House ever since. Vibrant with life, Berluti's new colorful materials permit all kinds of creative audacity!”*

*More Traditional manipulation:*

*“Talented bootmaker Alessandro Berluti put his name on the House’s first pair of shoes in 1865. With his aesthetic eye, he approached his work with a sensitivity of a sculptor. From the very beginning, Berluti has stood apart through its technical skill, firmly grounded in bespoke know-how. Today, that artisan spirit remains the same. For every chapter in the history of Berluti, it continues to challenge the boundaries of craftsmanship.”*