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Research-Thesis: Digital customization and consumer empowerment in the luxury sector: a self-determination theory perspective.

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DIGITAL CUSTOMIZATION AND CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT IN THE LUXURY SECTOR: A SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

As luxury brands navigate an era of technological disruption and shifting consumer expectations, digital customization has emerged as a strategic lever for brands. This thesis investigates the psychological and behavioral effects of digitally enabled product customization options in the luxury sector, using Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a conceptual framework for consumer perceived empowerment. Through a controlled experiment in which participants were randomly exposed to three levels of customization offered by Louis Vuitton (ranging from none to maximal) this study examines how varying degrees of customization affect consumers' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and how these perceptions subsequently shape behavioral responses. While most hypothesis could not be supported by the model, the findings still contribute to a growing body of literature on luxury digitalization by offering a nuanced understanding of how empowerment is constructed and mediated in digital customization contexts. Additionally, the study explores moderating variables such as brand familiarity and age, and addresses inherent tensions between customization, luxury signaling value, and choice paralysis. Practical implications for luxury brand managers are discussed, alongside avenues for future research.

List of abbreviations

SDT: Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)
ACR: Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness (the three components of the SDT)
AM: Autonomy (mean of the items)
CM: Competence (mean of the items)
RM: Relatedness (mean of the items)
LM: Familiarity with Louis Vuitton (mean of the items)
LuxM: Familiarity with luxury sector (mean of the items)
PIM: Purchase intention (mean of the items)
WM: Word-of-mouth intention (mean of the items)
RAND01: Randomly assigned customization condition (1 = no customization to 3 = maximal customization)
MAN01: Customization as perceived by the respondents (from 1 to 5)
P02: Respondents' age
DSE: Digital self-efficacy

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Context

In recent years, the luxury industry has undergone deep transformations driven by digitalization, evolving consumer expectations, and changing market dynamics. While luxury brands were initially reluctant to adopt digital technologies due to concerns regarding exclusivity and brand image, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated this transition (Massi et al., 2025). This transformation has become even more critical with the growing importance of younger consumers, particularly Generations Y, Z, and Alpha, who are expected to represent approximately 80% of global luxury purchases by 2030 (Cardoso et al., 2024). This audience demonstrates stronger expectations regarding experience, interactivity, and digital engagement (D'Arpizio et al., 2025).

The 2025 Bain & Company report emphasizes that future luxury growth will mostly depend on brands' ability to combine traditional luxury values, such as craftsmanship, creativity, and exclusivity, with technologically enabled customer experiences. The report also highlights a shift in luxury consumption from material goods towards more experiential offerings, where consumers are progressively taking a more active role in shaping their own luxury experience. In this context, technology has become a major driver of transformation in the luxury industry, allowing brands to create more meaningful experiences for their customers (D'Arpizio et al., 2025).[1]

This evolution is notably visible through the rise of product customization, which allows consumers to co-create and personalize their purchases (Choi et al., 2022) in ways that were previously reserved for a privileged few. Far from being a simple commercial strategy, customization in the luxury context raises deeper questions about consumer empowerment, particularly in a sector where brands have traditionally held authority over aesthetic codes and consumer experience, and where digitalization and new technologies are now fundamentally reshaping this dynamic (Pires et al., 2006; Zhang et al., 2018).

1.2 Problem statement

As consumer demand for unique and memorable experiences continues to grow, luxury brands are increasingly leveraging digital technologies to enhance customer experience (Tam & Lung, 2025). Among the various digital touchpoints available, product customization has emerged as a particularly promising strategic opportunity, as it actively involves consumers in the co-creation of luxury products and experiences, positioning them as agents rather than passive recipients (Choi et al., 2022).

This participatory dimension makes customization especially relevant to the growing discussion around consumer empowerment in both luxury and digital marketing literature. Luxury consumption has long been associated with consumers' desire to assert their identity and sense of agency, while the rise of digital tools has given way to a more informed and influential consumer. Yet, at the intersection of these observations lies an underexplored gap: despite the growing adoption of digital technologies in luxury contexts, limited research has examined how digitally enabled customization influences consumers' perceived empowerment, and what behavioral outcomes this sense of empowerment may generate.

Accordingly, the following research question guides this study: *To what extent does the availability of digitally enabled customization options enhance consumers' perceived empowerment, and how does this influence their behavioral intentions, namely purchase intention and word-of-mouth, in a luxury context?* This question holds both theoretical and managerial relevance, discussed in the following sections.

[1] Appendix A provides visual data on the current state of the luxury market.

1.3 Research motivations

On a managerial level, this research holds significant practical relevance. Luxury brands operate in an increasingly competitive and digitally saturated environment, where consumers expect seamless, personalized, and meaningful interactions. Although customization has been presented as a strategic option for brands, decision-makers might struggle to determine what level of customization to implement and lack a clear understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer responses. As a result, luxury brand managers lack actionable guidance on how to design digital customization experiences that genuinely foster consumer empowerment while preserving the exclusivity and symbolic value associated with luxury brands.

From an academic standpoint, this thesis seeks to address existing knowledge gaps at the intersection of luxury, digitalization, and consumer empowerment, an area that remains relatively underexplored in the literature. Although the digitalization of the luxury sector has attracted increasing academic attention, prior research was mostly focused on issues related to the preservation of authenticity and exclusivity. As a result, the relationship between digital innovation and consumer empowerment in the luxury context has received comparatively limited attention. Yet, as digital technologies continue to reshape consumer behavior at an unprecedented pace, theoretical frameworks developed in offline or non-luxury contexts may not fully capture the specific dynamics of luxury consumption, highlighting the need for further investigation within this setting. In this regard, customization represents a particularly relevant phenomenon (compared to other digital touchpoints), as it also raises fundamental questions about the very essence of luxury and its enduring tension between modernity and authenticity.

1.4 Contributions

In response to the gaps identified above, this thesis provides actionable insights for luxury brand managers. Rather than presenting luxury product customization as an unconditionally beneficial strategic tool, this research encourages managers to approach it with intentionality and caution. In particular, it raises the question of whether all levels and options of customization are equally effective in fostering consumer empowerment and enhancing the overall experience, or whether some implementations may be ineffective or even counterproductive. Additionally, age is explored as a moderating variable in the relationship between customization and perceived competence.

Moreover, this study contributes to a better understanding of how consumers' behavioral responses are shaped by the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, highlighting the importance for brands to cultivate these feelings, whether through customization strategies or alternative experiential mechanisms. In this regard, brand familiarity is examined as a moderator of the relationship between perceived relatedness and behavioral outcomes, underscoring the role of prior consumer-brand relationships in shaping responses to digital experiences.

Furthermore, crucial issues such as the erosion of signaling value and the paradox of choice are briefly discussed, thereby offering to brand managers a more nuanced perspective on the implementation of customization within the luxury sector.

Beyond its managerial contributions, this thesis aims to make several contributions to the existing literature. First, by explicitly linking digital touchpoints (customization, here), consumer empowerment, and luxury consumption within a single integrative framework, it addresses an intersection that has been underexplored. By doing so, this work responds to calls for more integrative frameworks in luxury and digital marketing (Ye, 2026), as well as to Choi et al.'s (2022) call for a deeper understanding of how customized services influence consumers in luxury branding.

Second, by operationalizing consumer empowerment through the lens of the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and its three core components of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, this thesis

offers a theoretically grounded and nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which digital customization may (or may not) resonate with consumers.

Third, by connecting psychological need satisfaction to concrete behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention and word-of-mouth, and by examining the moderating role of brand familiarity in the relationship between relatedness and these outcomes, this thesis provides empirical evidence of the behavioral consequences of SDT dimensions in a luxury digital context.

Overall, this work contributes to the growing body of research investigating how digital touchpoints shape consumer responses in luxury contexts.

1.5 Approach

The methodology adopted for this study reflects the multifaceted nature of the research subject and was structured around two main stages. First, an extensive review of the academic literature was conducted to identify current trends, map existing contributions, and uncover relevant research gaps, providing the foundation for defining the study's potential contribution. The literature review offers a comprehensive overview of the three main concepts addressed (luxury, consumer empowerment, and digitalization) before adopting a cross-categorical perspective to explore their interrelationships. A synthesizing table mapping digital touchpoints, relevant authors, and the SDT components they are likely to trigger was developed, ultimately leading to the selection of customization as the digital touchpoint of interest. Building on this analysis, a theoretical framework and a set of empirically grounded hypotheses are proposed, providing a concrete direction for the empirical stage.

Building on the insights gathered from the literature review, a quantitative experimental design was identified as the most appropriate method to empirically test the proposed hypotheses, given the objective of examining how different levels of digitally enabled customization influence consumers' perceived empowerment across the three SDT components, as well as purchase intention and word-of-mouth in a luxury context.

The data was collected through LimeSurvey, imported to Excel for data cleaning, and analyzed using JASP for hypothesis testing. The results are presented and discussed in relation to the hypotheses, research objectives, and theoretical framework. Limitations are acknowledged to ensure transparent interpretation of the findings and to provide directions for future research at the intersection of digital customization and consumer empowerment in the luxury sector.

Finally, artificial intelligence tools, specifically ChatGPT and Claude, were used solely for reformulation, paraphrasing, translation, and grammar or spelling corrections, with no impact on the conceptual or analytical work underlying this thesis.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review

A) Luxury

Luxury is a multifaceted concept that encompasses several intertwined dimensions, as highlighted by Kapferer (2014): it refers simultaneously to a specific idea or concept, to an industry, and to a strategy or business model. Each of these dimensions offers a distinct perspective through which luxury can be analyzed and understood. While much of the academic literature since the late 1990s has focused on luxury as a concept (Kapferer, 2014), acknowledging its multi-dimensional nature is essential to fully appreciate its scope and complexity. Drawing on Kapferer's insights, this section explores the evolution of the term 'luxury', from its etymological origins to its economic, sociological, and cultural interpretations.

To gain a deeper understanding of luxury, it is useful to examine its etymology, as the Latin origins of the word remain complex and debated. While one might assume that luxury descends from *lux* (meaning light or enlightenment) (Kapferer, 2014), it is in fact closer to the Latin *luxus*, from which derive *luxuria* and the Old French *luxure,* meaning excess and extravagance (Académie française, 2024): these roots already hint at the ambivalence and tension that continue to define the concept today.

From an economic standpoint, Veblen's (1899) inverted price-demand curve shows how luxury consumption differs from other types of consumption. Indeed, this theory shows how the demand for luxury goods increases when the price goes up, since a high price conveys a sense of prestige (Holmqvist et al., 2020) when for regular goods, the relationship between price and demand is negative. This purely economic perspective from the late nineteenth century has since then been further explored and nuanced by a great variety of modern authors. However, if Veblen's curve remains quite simplistic and general, it still manages to capture how luxury differs from other business contexts and industries, which is a pillar of luxury research (Holmqvist et al., 2020; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009).

While the definitions of luxury may vary, most authors agree on certain characteristics, namely *savoir-faire* (know-how), heritage, artisanship and craftsmanship (handmade processes), timelessness, and human capital (Holmqvist et al., 2020; Pantano et al., 2022). Other scholars further highlight attributes such as a strong sense of uniqueness, reputation and innovation (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). Moreover, luxury goods and services are typically described as being of high-quality, high-price and limited in quantity (Tam & Lung, 2025), the latter reinforcing the notion of exclusivity and rarity. In terms of brand reputation, luxury brands tend to exhibit high brand awareness and strong reputation for quality (Tam & Lung, 2025). Baker et al (2018) share the same vision, although they further emphasize the emotional aspect of customer's relationship with a luxury brand: the notion of brand familiarity (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987) is especially strong in this context (Fournier, 1998) and will be further investigated in this study.

Baker et al. (2018), and many other modern authors, also highlight the social role of luxury consumption. Cardoso et al. (2024) suggest that, since its emergence, luxury has operated as a means of social distinction and class differentiation, arguing that luxury consumption has long been associated with prestige, wealth, status, and even elitism. Luxury consumption sends out signals about the consumer's status (Grossman & Shapiro, 1988; Han et al., 2010), which is why luxury brands are generally characterized by a low functionality-to-price ratio alongside a high intangible value (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024): a notion of conspicuous consumption that is echoed in the previously mentioned Veblen curve. Some scholars, however, perceive a recent shift in the socio-cultural meanings of luxury concept from the traditional materialistic connotations (i.e., signaling one's wealth and status) towards more experiential (D'Arpizio et al., 2025) and even transformational luxury moments (Leban et al., 2020). This perception highlights how luxury consumption is increasingly seen as an experience involving social interactions.

Finally, any definition of luxury would be incomplete without acknowledging its strong subjectivity and ever-evolving nature, as the concept is intrinsically relative to culture, perception, and individual practices of its consumers. As a human and social phenomenon shaped by its contextual environments, luxury remains an evolving and multidimensional concept, that adapts to collective and individual social changes (Cardoso et al., 2024). Rooted in consumers' perceptions, it is shaped by both personal and interpersonal motives and is strongly influenced by cultural frameworks (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

Following this holistic exploration of luxury across its various dimensions, it is relevant to propose a definition that captures the complexity and multifaceted nature of the term. As suggested by Baker et al (2018), *"Many different definitions of luxury exist (De Barnier et al., 2012; Kapferer and Bastien, 2012), but they share a common core of six criteria: (a) a very qualitative hedonistic experience, (b) offered at a price that far exceeds what the functional value would command, (c) tied to heritage, unique know-how and culture, (d) available in restricted and controlled distribution, (e) offered with personalized accompanying services and (f) representing a social marker, where the purchaser feels special with a sense of privilege (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). (…). By their very nature, luxury brands can be characterized as conspicuous, unique, social, emotional, and of very high quality. Ultimately, the concept of luxury is built on consumers' perceptions, and is determined by personal and interpersonal motives and is strongly influenced by culture (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).*" Beyond identifying the key attributes of luxury, this definition acknowledges its dynamic and multifaceted nature: an ever-evolving construct shaped by individual motives, perceptions, and subjective cultural meanings.

The traditional definition of luxury, however, has been deeply challenged by the fourth-industrial revolution and the development of various technologies, serving either the production, the service or both. The next section explores how the luxury sector is influenced by digitalization and the opportunities and challenges inherent to this disruption.

B) Digitalization in luxury

The field of luxury has been slow to adopt digitalization, as a luxury brand's primary asset lies in its heritage (Holmqvist et al., 2020) and exclusivity (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). Indeed, while researchers agree that technology is transforming retail and the consumer experience (Guha et al., 2021; Pantano et al., 2018), luxury retailing is a specific sector for which technology has not traditionally been a priority (Pantano et al., 2022). Recent studies, however, identify the COVID-19 crisis as the turning point of digitalization in luxury sector, or at least consider it as a catalyst (Massi et al., 2025). Hence, luxury researchers now widely recognize that luxury firms should embrace the Internet and social media platforms, but opinions differ on the strategies they should adopt (Baker et al., 2018). This section will present the typology of digital touchpoints in the luxury industry, and discuss the challenges and opportunities associated to technology adoption.

The existence of various forms of technologies present great opportunities for the luxury segment: recent financial data even show that technological innovation is a key differentiator between successful and struggling firms in the current luxury market (Gonzalo et al., 2020; Pantano et al., 2022) and, more precisely, luxury brands incorporating social media as part of their marketing strategy tend to get better results than brands that do not (Leban et al., 2020). According to Sanz-Lopez et al. (2024), the absence of technological innovation exposes companies to significant competitive disadvantage. Consistently, consumers perceive technology-enabled retail experiences more favorably: retailers that adopt omnichannel strategies are evaluated more positively and generate higher levels of trust, satisfaction, and purchase intention (Zhang et al., 2018).

To seize these opportunities, several categories of digital touchpoints emerge from the literature. First, hyper-personalization is widely regarded as a central benefit of digitalization in the luxury sector, enabling tailored recommendations, product customization, and highly personalized consumer experiences leveraging big data and artificial intelligence (Holmqvist et al., 2020; Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). Second, the expansion of e-commerce allows brands to reach the growing middle class, a segment historically difficult to access offline,

and particularly younger consumers (Generations Y, Z, and Alpha), who are expected to represent 80% of global luxury purchases by 2030 (Cardoso et al., 2024; D'Arpizio et al., 2024). Third, immersive technologies such as VR and 3D audio foster escapism and deeper emotional engagement, offering consumers experiential dimensions that go beyond traditional retail (Massi et al., 2025). Fourth, digital platforms enable new forms of social connection: exclusive brand communities facilitate interactions between like-minded consumers and enhance customer value (Holmqvist et al., 2020), while online environments also offer a degree of anonymity for those who seek discretion (Sanz-Lopez et al., 2024). Lastly, a key advantage of digitalization in the luxury sector is that it strengthens authenticity and trust, as the revolutionary blockchain technology enables the verification of product authenticity in digital environments (Cardoso et al., 2024).

While scholars agree that digital transformation represents great opportunities for luxury firms, most also acknowledge the challenges inherent to such disruption. A central concern is the preservation of exclusivity: wider digital availability may harm the sense of rarity that luxury brands are built upon (Pantano et al., 2022), and some authors have gone as far as arguing that a luxury product available broadly online can no longer be considered truly luxurious (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Beyond exclusivity, Cardoso et al. (2024) highlight the challenge of transposing the standards of excellence inherent to luxury services onto digital channels, where replicating the quality of face-to-face interactions remains difficult. Lastly, Leban et al. (2020) suggest that the content discovery possibilities offered by visual social media may ultimately stimulate aspirational consumption rather than actual purchasing behavior, raising questions about the real profitability of such technological investments.

Having established how digitalization is reshaping the luxury landscape, it is now worth turning to one of its key psychological consequences: the empowerment of the consumer.

C) Consumer empowerment

Empowerment

Before discussing the concept of consumer empowerment, it is pertinent to define the concept of empowerment on its broader aspect. Pires et al. (2006) make a distinction between empowerment as a process and as an outcome: as a process, it involves mechanisms through which individuals gain control over matters that concern them, while as an outcome, it relates to a more subjective sense of power and control. Beyond this notion of perceived relative power, Fuller et al. (2009) conceptualize empowerment as any means by which an individual's sense of self-determination and self-efficacy is strengthened, while conditions contributing to feelings of powerlessness are reduced. Taken together, these perspectives highlight empowerment as a multi-dimensional construct that ultimately shapes human judgment and behavior (Zhang et al., 2018) - an insight that guides this thesis.

Consumer empowerment [2]

In the literature, several approaches have been proposed to define consumer empowerment. A first perspective emphasizes the strengthening of consumers' abilities, rights, and authority to fulfill their objectives as marketplace actors, a view rooted in the concept of consumer sovereignty that emerged in the 1960s with the creation of institutions such as the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (Kozinets et al., 2021). A second approach centers on control: Wathieu et al. (2002) argue that consumers' ability to govern their own choices is central to the experience of empowerment, a perspective shared with other authors such as Wright et al. (2006) and, more recently, Zhang et al. (2018). A third perspective introduces the notion of enjoyment, suggesting that consumers feel empowered when they are able to derive pleasure from the consumption process itself, an experience that ultimately encourages them to stay longer and spend more (Wright et al., 2006). Finally, the informational perspective frames empowerment around access to

[2] In the following sections, the term *empowerment* is often used alone: it refers to *consumer empowerment* and serves as a shorthand for ease of reading.

knowledge: as Pires et al. (2006) note, consumer empowerment reflects an enhanced ability to access, understand, and share information, with market knowledge gradually shifting from suppliers toward consumers.

Drawing on these complementary perspectives, Turnquist's (2004) definition offers a useful synthesis of the concept: "*consumer empowerment is about increasing consumer value by providing greater access, content, education, and commerce on the consumer's own terms — helping them choose what they want, when they want it.*"

Beyond these conceptual approaches, the actual degree of consumer empowerment depends on several interrelated factors on a given market: the number and quality of available value propositions; the consumers' market knowledge; their ability to search for new information; and their capacity to exploit alternative options (Pires et al., 2006). In practice, consumer empowerment can be enhanced through managerial actions such as creating pleasant atmospheres and providing relevant informational or entertaining content, collecting consumer narratives to act on preferences, maintaining accessible and up-to-date information, and offering assortment variety and flexible choice architectures (Botti & Iyengar, 2006; Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014; Markus & Schwartz, 2010; Wright et al., 2006). Channel integration in retailing has also been shown to strengthen empowerment by providing a seamless experience, increasing trust, satisfaction, and purchase intention (Cao & Li, 2015; Schramm-Klein & Morschett, 2006; Zhang et al., 2018), but this will be further developed in section D "Consumer empowerment & Digitalization". Together, these factors effectively enhance consumers' control over the shopping process and their overall sense of empowerment.

Scholars broadly agree that consumer empowerment generates numerous positive outcomes for both consumers and firms. Early work suggests that companies who ignore consumer empowerment do so at their own peril (Gritten, 2006; Sharp, 2006) as empowerment tends to produce beneficial effects on short- and long-term business performance (Wright et al., 2006). A central reason is that empowered consumers report higher perceived trust toward the retailer and greater satisfaction during the shopping experience (Zhang et al., 2018). These effects align with earlier findings showing that increased control leads to more positive consumption experiences and favorable emotions towards the retailer (Langer, 1983; Wathieu et al., 2002). The literature also emphasizes that empowerment directly influences intention to purchase and strengthens patronage and word-of-mouth intention (Henry, 2005; Hunter & Garnefeld, 2008; Pitt et al., 2002; Zhang et al., 2018). More recently, scholars have shown that heightened empowerment fosters stronger customer–brand relationships, increases willingness to pay a premium and encourages deeper engagement with content (Massi et al., 2025; Zha et al., 2023). Overall, consumers benefit from a reinforced sense of empowerment (Zhang et al., 2018).

Although consumer empowerment generally produces positive outcomes, several authors highlight its potential drawbacks. In particular, the two key factors of consumer empowerment, namely choice freedom and expansion of information - though seemingly positive - may create decision difficulty (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014), choice paralysis (Mick et al., 2004), and consumer confusion (Mitchell & Papavassiliou, 1999; Wathieu et al., 2002). As noted in more recent work, the very forces that empower consumers can simultaneously complicate their decision-making processes. However, these negative effects can be moderated by factors such as consumer knowledge, the organization of information, and consumers' mental representations (Broniarczyk et Griffin, 2014). Finally, scholars caution that consumer empowerment initiatives may sometimes be superficial, as firms keep control over the range of choices offered, creating only an *illusion of empowerment*: this can especially be true for customization processes (Pires et al., 2006).

Building on these insights, the following section examines how digitalization has been reshaping consumer empowerment since the rise of the internet and information technologies.

D) Consumer empowerment and digitalization

In the literature, there is a broad agreement that digital technologies are major enablers of consumer empowerment. Indeed, the rise of the internet has reshaped marketplace interactions, leading to a change in the power relationship between suppliers and customers (Pires et al., 2006). This change is driven, first, by the increased access to information, as the web has transformed *information scarcity* into *information democracy* (Pires et al., 2006), notably through the rise of online brand communities. Another factor mentioned is the rise of omnichannel retailing (Zhang et al., 2018). At a more individual level, digital tools allow consumers to make various experimentations with a lower psychological cost of failure than in an offline context, to reframe aspects of their identity and to develop greater self-efficacy and skills set (Fuller et al., 2009). This section deeper explores the mechanisms through which each of the factors mentioned above reshapes consumer empowerment in the digital era.

First, digitalization has significantly improved information access and transparency. By enabling peer-to-peer communication, user-generated content (UGC), customer reviews, and increasingly efficient search engines, digital tools have reduced uncertainty in consumer decision-making and brought consumers closer to conditions of near-perfect information (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014; Pires et al., 2006; Zhang et al., 2018). This unprecedented availability and diversity of information represents, in itself, a form of consumer empowerment. This has been further amplified by the rise of online brand communities, which facilitate peer-to-peer information exchange and position the consumer as an active actor in their own consumption experience (Baker et al., 2018; Dessart, 2025; Holmqvist et al., 2020).

A second enabler of consumer empowerment identified in the literature is omnichannel retailing. As early as 2006, Pires et al. observed that the growth of online sales was already reshaping the retail landscape by multiplying the number of e-commerce platforms and value propositions available to consumers. More recently, Zhang et al. (2018) argued that fully integrated omnichannel environments empower consumers more than ever, enhancing their satisfaction, trust, and purchase intention. By enabling price integration, better preference-matching, broader product assortments, and seamless transitions between online and offline channels, omnichannel retailing grants consumers a degree of autonomy that was previously unattainable, as they are no longer constrained to a single point of purchase or a single brand narrative. From this shift have emerged behaviors such as webrooming and showrooming, reflecting a fundamental inversion of the traditional retail dynamic: brands must now be present wherever their customers choose to engage, rather than the other way around (Dessart, 2025).

Lastly, digitalization reinforces consumer empowerment by enabling deeper forms of co-creation, customization, and personalization. In virtual environments, consumers can actively participate in new product development by generating ideas, refining concepts, and testing features through simulations, assuming the role of co-creators with a reduced fear of failure (Fuller et al., 2009). The decreasing cost of information technologies has facilitated this decentralization of decision-making. Customization further strengthens empowerment by allowing consumers to tailor products to their specific needs, generating feelings of uniqueness, pride of authorship, and hedonic value (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014). From these mechanisms emerged the notion of "customerization": a strategy combining mass customization with process personalization, offering consumers greater control over the exchange while allowing firms to strategically frame choice options (Pires et al., 2006). In turn, this higher sense of empowerment fosters trust and increases consumers' likelihood of re-engaging in branded co-creation activities (Fuller et al., 2009).

Having explored how digitalization reshapes consumer empowerment, the next section examines the mechanisms of empowerment at play in the context of luxury consumption.

E) Consumer empowerment and luxury

Although the term *empowerment* itself. is not broadly employed in the luxury literature, many related constructs have been studied, as luxury plays a key role in consumers' social and identity construction. This observation led to extending the literature review to concepts such as self-expression, self-representation (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2018), and self-promotion (Richards-Carpenter, 2025), ultimately directing this work towards the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The SDT proposes a particularly relevant framework for exploring empowerment-related phenomena through three core psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) that collectively and mutually drive individual behavior (Zha et al., 2023). From this perspective, luxury is not limited to ostentatious consumption: it contributes to self-construction, social recognition, and the affirmation of personal autonomy. All of these constitute, in essence, a form of empowerment. The following section details each of these three dimensions in detail, linking them to luxury consumption.

The first dimension of SDT, autonomy, refers to the need to act in accordance with one's own values and preferences, rather than under external pressure or constraint, and to perceive oneself as the origin of one's actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In a consumer context, this translates into a decisional form of empowerment. According to Kauppinen-Räisänen et al. (2018), this manifests through two complementary dynamics: the need for uniqueness (a core characteristic of luxury discussed earlier) and the need for self-monitoring, whereby consumers seek to retain control over their purchasing process. In this regard, Zha et al. (2023) highlight that overly insistent or commercially driven recommendations from sales assistants can make consumers feel disempowered, while objective and transparent guidance reinforces their perceived freedom of choice, ultimately fostering greater trust, brand attachment, and loyalty. This form of empowerment is closely linked to the concept of agency. This does not only refer to individuals' autonomous control over their actions, but also to their sense of ownership and responsibility over outcomes (Sokol et al., 2015).

Beyond its social dimension, luxury consumption also generates a form of internal, psychological empowerment. In the SDT framework, competence refers to the need to feel effective and capable in one's interactions with the environment: in other words, to experience mastery and a sense of accomplishment in one's actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In a luxury context, this need can be activated in multiple ways. First, it may take the form of financial competence: being able to afford luxury products conveys a feeling of achievement and legitimizes the payment of a premium for the symbolic value attached to luxury goods (Zha et al., 2023). Competence can also emerge through aesthetic expertise: by engaging with luxury brands, consumers perceive themselves as refined individuals capable of making tasteful choices, reinforcing their identity as *connoisseurs* (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2018). More broadly, luxury brands are frequently associated with notions of success and self-efficacy, strengthening consumers' internal sense of validation and accomplishment. This dynamic resonates with concepts of self-expression and self-representation (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2018), where luxury consumption serves to affirm and stabilize one's personal identity. This also explains why some consumers prefer discreet or understated luxury, as the empowerment they seek is internal rather than socially displayed (Zha et al., 2023).

Finally, the third need identified by the SDT is relatedness, defined by Deci & Ryan (1985) as the fundamental need to feel connected to others. In other words, to belong, to care, and to be cared for within social groups. Luxury consumption is strongly embedded in this dynamic. Research shows that individuals surrounded by luxury consumers are more likely to adopt luxury consumption themselves (Zha et al., 2023), highlighting the role of social influence and group affiliation. Luxury brand communities and the importance of customer-to-customer interactions in luxury contexts (Holmqvist et al., 2020) are concrete expressions of this phenomenon. Moreover, because material possessions function as extensions of the self (Belk, 1988), luxury goods become symbolic markers of social belonging, aspiration, and distinction, thus satisfying the need for relatedness and fostering a sense of social empowerment. Given its multidimensional nature, relatedness will be operationalized in this thesis as brand attachment, a construct that captures both the social and affective dimensions detailed above while remaining measurable in an experimental luxury context.

In sum, applying the Self-Determination Theory to luxury consumption highlights how the satisfaction of the three fundamental psychological needs, ACR, fosters both social and psychological forms of consumer empowerment. Luxury is thus not only a display of wealth or status: it enables consumers to construct their identity, show their uniqueness, and exercise control over their choices, ultimately reinforcing their sense of agency and empowerment.

F) Research focus: The role of digitalization in consumer empowerment in the luxury industry

a. Literature review: summary and conclusions

Building on the theoretical foundations established above, it becomes clear that digitalization is reshaping the mechanisms of consumer empowerment in the context of luxury. Indeed, the three psychological needs identified by the Self-Determination Theory (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are not confined to physical retail experiences: digital platforms, social media, and other digital and technology-embedded touchpoints create new contexts in which these needs can be fulfilled, extending and reshaping the ways in which luxury consumers feel empowered.

To synthesize the insights gathered throughout this section, the following table provides a structured mapping of the main digital touchpoints identified in the literature. For each touchpoint, the table specifies which SDT components it is most likely to activate, illustrates its application through some concrete luxury brand examples, and references the corresponding academic sources. Beyond serving as a summary of the literature reviewed, this mapping fulfils a key methodological purpose: by offering a comparative overview of the touchpoints most studied in relation to consumer empowerment, it provides the basis for selecting the digital touchpoint that will be the focus of the rest of this study.[3]

Touchpoint	SDT Theory	Example	Authors
Immersive and Experiential touchpoints			
Virtual Reality experiences	**Autonomy:** Users freely navigate the virtual environment at their own pace, retaining control over their experience and fostering a sense of self-directed exploration.	Louis Vuitton organizes interactive VR fashion shows, generating 50% more engagement than conventional online broadcast (InChain Digital, n.d.). The brand also uses VR for storytelling, transporting its customers to the founder's family house in Asnières. (Tam et Lung, 2025).	Pantano et al., 2022 Tam et Lung, 2025
Augmented Reality mirrors / apps	**Autonomy:** Customers can independently try on products at their own pace, without relying on sales assistants. It can happen both in-store and remotely through AR applications, reinforcing their sense of control over the shopping experience.	The Italian luxury brand Brioni has integrated virtual try-on mirrors in some of its shops (notably in Rome, Milan and New York) (Journal du Luxe, 2018). Another form of AR is proposed by brands such as Gucci, Fendi, or Burberry where customers can try on accessories directly via their phones through a dedicated app or social media filters (WANNA, n.d.).	Pantano et al., 2022 Nawres et al., 2024
Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) in Metaverse	**Relatedness:** By signaling membership in an exclusive digital community, NFT	Gucci's presence in the Metaverse in strong: first, through the Gucci Garden on Roblox (InChain Digital, n.d.). It has also	Bao et al., 2024

[3] This table is non-exhaustive and only provides the elements considered as most relevant for this work.

	ownership satisfies the need for social belonging and identity affirmation, reinforcing the connection between the consumer, the brand, and fellow collectors.	launched 25 digital sneakers, which can be worn in various virtual worlds and AR applications, an initiative that allows users to virtually try on and showcase sneakers across platforms (Massi et al., 2025).	Massi et al., 2025
Gamification, gaming experiences proposed by brands.	**Competence:** Gaming mechanics can trigger a strong sense of mastery and accomplishment (Baiwir, 2025). **Relatedness:** Gaming is inherently social, fostering a sense of community and shared experience among players.	The Gucci garden on Roblox (InChain Digital, n.d.). Balenciaga is present on Fortnite, where players can purchase branded "skins" (Massi et al., 2025).	Tam & Lung, 2025 Massi et al., 2025
AI-driven interactive touchpoints			
Chatbots and generative AI	**Competence:** Immediate and tailored assistance reduces consumer effort and enhances their sense of effectiveness. **Autonomy:** Interactions are self-initiated and on-demand, independent from human mediation. However, poorly designed AI can undermine autonomy if perceived as directive or controlling (Bassano et al., 2020).	Louis Vuitton has integrated an AI-based chatbot on their social media platforms (Zha et al., 2023). Overall, most luxury brands now have a chatbot on their websites, but some of them prefer proposing a live chat with a real human or an hybridation between human and AI to keep the authenticity and the premium aspect (Zeng et al., 2023).	Bassano et al., 2020 Pantano et al., 2022 Tam & Lung, 2025 Zeng et al., 2023
Personalization and Customization touchpoints			
Product customization, co-creation	**Autonomy:** Customization enables active and meaningful choices that reflect personal preferences and values. It can generate a strong sense of self-expression and perceived control over the outcome. **Competence:** By seeing their choices successfully reflected in a luxury product, consumers experience a sense of mastery, reinforcing their perceived confidence as decision-makers. **Relatedness:** Personalized products serve as symbolic extensions of the self,	Gucci DIY: a phygital experience of customization proposed by Alessandro Michele between 2016 and 2018. Louis Vuitton's "Mon Monogram": online digital customization of a bag where the customer chooses its own initials, patches, colors, … (Louis Vuitton, n.d.). Goyard proposes customization options for bags: colors and initials can be added and modified.	Harkison, 2018 Koivisto et Mattila, 2020

	signaling individual identity and values to others. It potentially fosters a sense of connection to the brand and its creative community, leading to brand attachment.		
Social, Community and Advocacy touchpoints			
Brand-owned social media pages	**Relatedness:** Both customer-to-brand and customer-to-customer interactions are facilitated, fostering a sense of community and belonging around the brand.	Almost all luxury brands have a social media page: it is easier to cite the ones that do not, such as Bottega Veneta who deleted its accounts in 2021 (Faure, 2021).	Tam et Lung, 2025 Baker et al., 2018
Online brand communities	**Relatedness**: Dialogue and interaction foster the feeling of belonging and connection. **Competence**: Is enhanced through information-sharing between users.	Online luxury brand communities are often selective and rarely opened to everyone. Here are a few examples of luxury brand communities: Rolex forums on Reddit or Discord, Gucci Vault, Burberry's Art of the Trench community, …	Holmqvist et al., 2020 Baker et al., 2018
User-generated content	**Autonomy:** Users voluntarily create and share content. **Competence**: Creative expression and peer feedback reinforce skill and efficacy. **Relatedness**: Content sharing strengthens peer connection and recognition.	Burberry's "Art of the Trench" campaign featured customer photos wearing their trench coats (Gomez, 2024).	Koivisto & Mattila, 2020
Influencer marketing	**Competence**: Content shared by influencers may reduce decision uncertainty. **Relatedness**: Fostered by perceived closeness and identification.	Aimee Song, a fashion blogger, partnered with Dior for its Spring 2019 show, resulting in a significant engagement among her followers (Gomez, 2024).	Tam & Lung, 2025 Aw & Agnihotri, 2023 Zhou et al., 2021

Table 1 – A conceptual mapping of digital touchpoints and SDT components in the luxury literature
Source: Own, based on research

Although digitalization and consumer empowerment have both received significant scholarly attention, limited research has integrated these perspectives within a single conceptual framework applied to luxury. Addressing this gap, the present research adopts a Self-Determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) perspective to examine how digitalization can enhance consumer empowerment through the fulfilment of fundamental psychological needs. Drawing from the summary presented above, digitally enabled product customization was identified as the digital touchpoint of interest for this study. In this context, customization is defined as the possibility for consumers to co-create and personalize their purchases, positioning them as agents rather than passive recipients (Choi et al., 2022).

The rationale for selecting customization as the digital touchpoint of interest is threefold. First, it has been widely identified as a key driver of the future of luxury, offering brands higher margins, broader market

appeal, and increased customer loyalty (O'Rourke et al., 2025), while reflecting the rise of the "prosumer", a consumer who actively participates in value creation and product design (Piller et al., 2004; Kim & Lee, 2020). Second, despite its well-documented experiential and economic benefits (Choi et al., 2022), relatively little attention has been devoted to the underlying psychological mechanisms explaining why and how customization enhances consumer responses (Kim & Lee, 2020) a gap this thesis directly addresses through the lens of SDT. Third, customization is not without tensions in a luxury context: some scholars argue that brands should resist consumer-driven customization to preserve their creative integrity (Baker et al., 2018), while others question whether a customized product can still be considered truly luxurious (Choi et al., 2022), or warn that excessive options may generate decision fatigue and choice paralysis (Mick et al., 2004).

Digitally enabled customization thus represents a particularly relevant context in which to examine consumer empowerment in digital luxury. By allowing consumers to make meaningful choices, demonstrate their creative abilities, and develop a personal connection with the brand, customization has the potential to activate all three core psychological needs identified by SDT (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Building on this gap, the present research proposes a conceptual model examining how digitally enabled customization influences consumer empowerment and, in turn, behavioral intentions in a luxury context.

b. Hypothesis formulation

As detailed above, the self-determination theory is a particularly relevant framework to study the mechanisms inherent to luxury goods consumption and involves three components: autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Deci & Ryan (1985) define autonomy as the feeling to act in accordance with one's own values and preferences rather than under external pressure or constraint. For consumers, autonomy is defined as a customer's perceived control on their purchase or consumption experience. According to Marathe & Sundar (2011), the availability of customization options increases consumers' autonomy and sense of control, as the mere presence of choice among design elements reinforces perceived freedom. This is confirmed by Kim & Lee's (2020) experiment, which showed that exposure to customization triggers autonomy in non-luxury contexts. Given that customization in luxury contexts similarly invites consumers to express personal preferences and make meaningful choices, this effect is expected to translate to luxury consumption. Considering these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

***H1a**: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived autonomy, a dimension of customer empowerment.*

Self-determination theory conceptualizes competence as a psychological need reflecting individuals' desire to feel effective, capable, and confident (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Within consumption settings, exposure to customization options may foster this sense of competence by presenting consumers with meaningful choices that signal trust in their aesthetic judgment and decision-making abilities (Schreier, 2006; Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2018). When consumers perceive that a brand offers them the opportunity to make skilled and deliberate choices, this may reinforce their sense of capability and aesthetic expertise. Kim & Lee (2020) confirm that customization triggers perceived competence in non-luxury contexts, an effect that is expected to extend to luxury consumption, where the availability of personalization options similarly invites consumers to exercise their own preferences and judgment. Building on these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

***H1b**: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived competence, a dimension of customer empowerment.*

Within self-determination theory, relatedness refers to individuals' fundamental need to feel connected to others and to experience a sense of belonging within social groups (Deci & Ryan, 1985). While this dimension was originally conceptualized in interpersonal terms, its application to consumer behavior research has been extended to include the emotional bond consumers develop with brands, a transposition that is particularly

relevant in luxury contexts, where brand relationships are strongly tied to identity expression and social belonging (Park et al., 2010). In this study, relatedness is therefore operationalized through the concept of brand attachment, defined by Park et al. (2010) as "the strength of the bond connecting the brand with consumers' self."

The availability of digitally enabled customization options can strengthen this dimension by presenting consumers with opportunities for self-representation and social signaling, consistent with conspicuous consumption motives such as status and identity display (O'Rourke et al., 2025). Exposure to personalization options may reinforce the perception of customized objects as potential extensions of the self, deepening consumers' psychological connection to both the product and the brand (Franke & Schreier, 2010). Moreover, the presence of customization options enhances the self-expressive and social values associated with luxury products, increasing satisfaction and brand loyalty (Yoo & Park, 2016). Importantly, while luxury consumption may sometimes evoke feelings of inauthenticity (Goor et al., 2020), the availability of customization options can mitigate these concerns by reinforcing personal authenticity and subjective well-being (Choi et al., 2022). By signaling opportunities for self-expression and authentic self-representation, digitally enabled customization options are therefore likely to enhance consumers' perceived attachment to a brand, reflecting the relatedness dimension of customer empowerment. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

***H1c**: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customer's perceived brand attachment, reflecting the relatedness dimension of customer empowerment.*

Individual characteristics such as digital confidence and age are likely to shape how consumers perceive their own competence when exposed to digital customization interfaces. Prior research suggests that technology acceptance tends to be higher among younger consumers (particularly millennials born after 1980), who generally report greater ease and confidence with digital tools (Kim & Lee, 2020). This may, however, create a paradox in the luxury context, where some important customer segments are older and potentially less digitally confident.

Moreover, perceived competence in digital contexts is not solely determined by objective skills, but also by subjective competence beliefs (Ulfert-Blank et al., 2022). In this regard, digital self-efficacy (DSE), defined as individuals' confidence in their ability to successfully navigate digital technologies, has been identified as a key predictor of how individuals evaluate their own capabilities in technology-related contexts (Bandura, 2001; Compeau & Higgins, 1995; Eastin & LaRose, 2000). Differences in digital self-efficacy may therefore moderate how consumers assess their own competence when confronted with digitally enabled customization options, regardless of whether they actively engage with them.

For the purposes of this research, digital self-efficacy is assumed to be negatively associated with age: older consumers are expected to report lower levels of DSE. This assumption, while a simplification, is grounded in the literature reviewed above and allows for a more measurable empirical model. Accordingly:

***H2**: The customer's age moderates the positive relationship between digitally enabled product customization and perceived competence, such that this relationship is stronger among younger consumers.*

To strengthen the managerial implications of this research, this study goes beyond examining empowerment solely as a dependent variable and investigates its potential influence on broader consumer behaviors, namely purchase intentions and word-of-mouth. By positioning empowerment as a predictor, this approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of its strategic relevance.

The influence of intrinsic motivation on purchase intentions has been widely documented in prior literature. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, studies have consistently shown that the fulfillment of the three core psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) positively shapes consumers' behavioral intentions across a variety of contexts, including organic food (Khan et al., 2022), sustainable products (Ng et al., 2024) or electric vehicles (Zhao et al., 2024). Beyond SDT specifically, the literature emphasizes that

empowerment is a multi-dimensional construct that influences human judgement and behavior (Zhang et al., 2018). More generally, some authors support a direct link between perceived empowerment and purchase intention (Pitt et al., 2002; Henry, 2005; Hunter & Garnefeld, 2008). Furthermore, Nawres (2024) recently demonstrated a similar relationship in the context of augmented reality, suggesting that digitally enabled experiences more broadly may activate behavioral responses.

While these relationships have been established across multiple domains, they remain underexplored in the specific context of digitally enabled customization in luxury. It can therefore be expected that when digital customization enhances consumers' perceived empowerment, this will positively influence their purchase intentions. Accordingly,

H3a: *Perceived autonomy positively influences purchase intention in the context of luxury.*

H3b: *Perceived competence positively influences purchase intention in the context of luxury.*

H3c: *Perceived relatedness positively influences purchase intention in the context of luxury.*

The link between Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and positive word-of-mouth (WOM) has been highlighted by Sweeney et al. (2008), who argue that the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness significantly influence consumers' likelihood to engage in WOM. Autonomy increases individuals' willingness to express themselves and share their experiences, aligning with self-enhancement and social motivations for WOM (Sundaram et al., 1998; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Competence, defined as the desire to effectively influence one's environment, encourages consumers to provide advice, help others, or support organizations, which are key drivers of WOM. Finally, relatedness strengthens the motivation to connect with others through information sharing, reflecting altruistic and other-oriented WOM motivations (Sweeney et al., 2008).

In digitally enabled environments, these dynamics are further amplified by the rise of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which significantly extends the reach and impact of consumer communication (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). When digital customization enhances consumers' perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness, it can therefore be expected to stimulate positive WOM behaviors. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4a: *Perceived autonomy positively influences word-of-mouth intention in the context of luxury.*

H4b: *Perceived competence positively influences word-of-mouth intention in the context of luxury.*

H4c: *Perceived relatedness positively influences word-of-mouth intention in the context of luxury.*

To further investigate the behavioral dimensions of the model, brand familiarity is proposed as a moderating variable in the relationships between perceived relatedness and the two outcome variables: purchase intention and word-of-mouth. Although brand familiarity is controlled through its direct effect on the dependent variables, its moderating role is examined separately to derive more nuanced and actionable managerial insights.

Consumer knowledge has been conceptualized along two major dimensions, familiarity and expertise (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987), and, as highlighted earlier, constitutes a form of consumer empowerment in itself (Pires et al., 2006). More broadly, the literature consistently demonstrates that brand familiarity positively shapes consumer cognitions and behaviors: Fournier (1998) argues that the longer and more established the consumer-brand relationship, the stronger the consumer's behavioral engagement, while Park et al. (2010) more specifically identify purchase intention and word-of-mouth as two key behavioral outcomes of brand familiarity. In this study, brand familiarity is operationalized through three components: brand awareness, frequency of purchases, and attitude towards the brand.

The choice to examine brand familiarity as a moderator of the relatedness-behavior relationship specifically (rather than autonomy or competence) is theoretically motivated by the nature of relatedness as a construct. Operationalized here as brand attachment, relatedness develops and deepens over time through repeated interactions with a brand (Park et al., 2010; Shimul & Phau, 2022). It can therefore be expected that consumers already familiar with Louis Vuitton will be more receptive to relatedness cues and more likely to translate these feelings into concrete behavioral intentions. In other words, brand familiarity may act as a psychological amplifier, strengthening the effect of perceived relatedness on both purchase intention and word-of-mouth. By contrast, autonomy and competence are more internally driven psychological evaluations, and may therefore be less contingent on prior familiarity with the brand (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

This moderation also adds a distinctly luxury-specific dimension to the theoretical model. Unlike mainstream consumer contexts, luxury consumption is deeply rooted in long-term brand relationships and emotional investment, making the degree of consumer-brand familiarity a particularly relevant variable in this setting (Kapferer, 2014; Holmqvist et al., 2020; Roux et al., 2017). Accordingly, the following moderation hypotheses are proposed:

***H5a**: In the context of luxury, the customer's familiarity with the brand positively moderates the relationship between perceived relatedness and the purchase intention.*

***H5b**: In the context of luxury, the customer's familiarity with the brand positively moderates the relationship between perceived relatedness and word-of-mouth intention.*

c. Hypotheses and theoretical model proposition

H1a: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived autonomy, a dimension of customer empowerment.

H1b: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived competence, a dimension of customer empowerment.

H1c: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived brand attachment, reflecting the relatedness dimension of customer empowerment.

H2: The customer's age moderates the positive relationship between digitally enabled product customization and perceived competence, such that this relationship is stronger among younger consumers.

H3a: Perceived autonomy positively influences purchase intention in the context of luxury.

H3b: Perceived competence positively influences purchase intention in the context of luxury.

H3c: Perceived relatedness positively influences purchase intention in the context of luxury.

H4a: Perceived autonomy positively influences word-of-mouth intention in the context of luxury.

H4b: Perceived competence positively influences word-of-mouth intention in the context of luxury.

H4c: Perceived relatedness positively influences word-of-mouth intention in the context of luxury.

H5a: In the context of luxury, the customer's familiarity with the brand positively moderates the relationship between perceived relatedness and the purchase intention.

H5b: In the context of luxury, the customer's familiarity with the brand positively moderates the relationship between perceived relatedness and word-of-mouth intention.

2.2 Research model

Taking into account the hypotheses presented above, the following model is proposed:

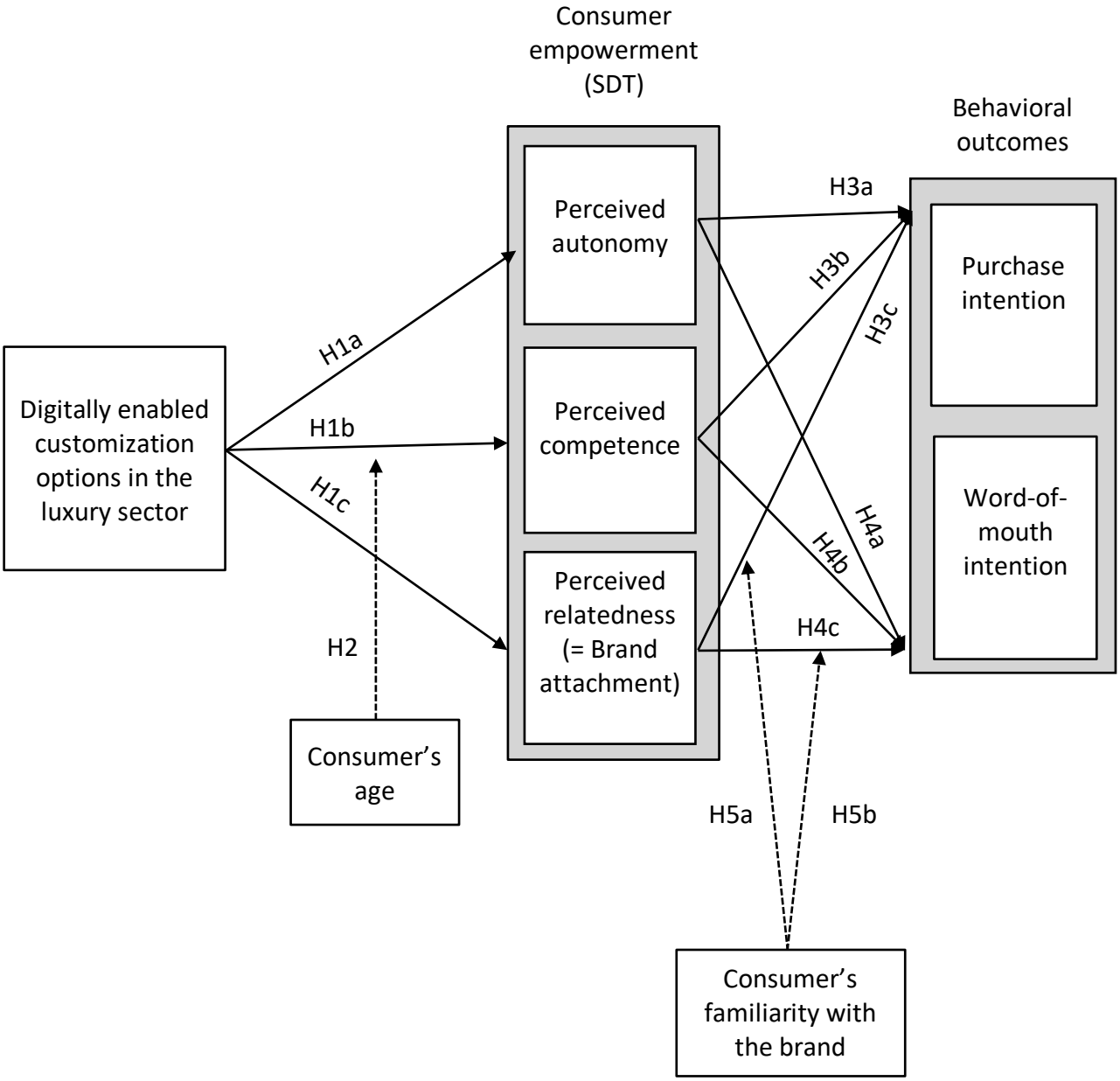


Figure 1 – Research model
Source: Own

Chapter 3 – Research design

3.1 Methodology

A) Research design

To properly conduct this research, it was essential to define an appropriate research design. A research design refers to the overall plan ensuring that findings are credible, minimize bias, and allow for generalizability (Dannels, 2018).

Following Saunders et al.'s (2007) "Research Onion" framework, a positivist, deductive approach was adopted, as the study relies on clearly formulated hypotheses aimed at testing relationships between constructs. Given resource constraints and the objective of statistically testing these relationships, a mono-method quantitative design was chosen, with an experimental method preferred over a survey design.

The main purpose of this study is to determine whether the availability of customization options affect customers' feeling of empowerment through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (autonomy, competence, relatedness), and to explore the resulting impact on word-of-mouth and purchase intentions.

Several experimental formats were considered. Having participants complete an actual purchase process would have maximized external validity but would have been challenging to implement. It would also have been complex to ensure that participants remained within the designated purchase process rather than navigating freely across the website, which could have introduced significant confounds. On the other hand, designing a simulated luxury website offered full experimental control but would have lacked the heritage and notoriety central to luxury branding, undermining ecological validity (Schmuckler, 2001).

Ultimately, a trade-off had to be found between internal and external validity, while also considering practical considerations such as budget, feasibility, and time constraints. Given the limitations of the alternatives discussed above, presenting the customization processes through screen-recorded videos emerged as the best option: it preserved realism by featuring an actual luxury brand website, while allowing experimental control through post-filming editing.

Three videos were produced using the Louis Vuitton website, each depicting a different level of customization. In the low customization condition, the customer selects and adds a bag to the cart without any customization. In the medium condition, initials are added. The video was then carefully edited to isolate the other options proposed by the brand. In the high customization condition, all available options (initials, patches, color changes) are used. This one-way between-subjects design randomly assigned each respondent to one condition, followed by a manipulation check to verify experimental effectiveness.

When designing a research model, it is crucial to consider the strengths and weaknesses of it: the experimental method offers key strengths: it enables mediation and moderation analyses (Aguinis et al., 2017), and randomization minimizes confounds while strengthening internal validity (Shadish et al., 2002). Moreover, this design is further supported by a strong theoretical grounding, which Hunt (2010) identifies as one of the four conditions of causality. That said, limitations remain. Causal claims cannot rest on these four conditions alone, and controlling for all external factors is, by nature, impossible (Schunk, 2025). Risks of demand characteristics and social desirability bias are inherent to online experiments (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and the artificial stimulus may limit generalizability to real-world luxury consumer behavior (Calder et al., 1981).

Moreover, it is worth noting that this design assesses the effect of the *availability* of customization options rather than the active performance of customization itself, a distinction that is consistent with the research question and hypotheses of this study, which deliberately examine exposure to customization options rather than the act of customizing. While a more interactive stimulus would have allowed for the study of customization as an active experience, this falls beyond the scope of the present research question. The implications of this boundary condition are discussed later in this work.

B) Sample

When designing the research, no strict selection criteria were defined. Hence, the sampling approach for this study relied on convenience sampling through social networks. Convenience sampling, characterized by its reliance on easily accessible respondents (Malhotra, Nunan & Birks, 2017), offers a straightforward and time-efficient approach to data collection when no strict sampling frame is required.

However, several considerations regarding diversity guided the process. First, age diversity was actively sought, in order to ensure sufficient variance for testing H2, which positions age as a moderating variable in the relationship between customization and perceived competence. Second, while the focus on bags may naturally have attracted a higher proportion of female respondents, including male participants remained important, as men represent a non-negligible share of both personal bag purchasers and gift-giving consumers in the luxury sector. Variability in respondents' familiarity with Louis Vuitton and with the luxury sector more broadly was also considered important, with the aim to provide adequate conditions for testing the moderating effects examined in H5a and H5b. Finally, to avoid self-selection bias, the subject of the experiment was not disclosed in advance: respondents were not informed that the study involved Louis Vuitton prior to participation, to avoid attracting exclusively brand-familiar consumers and risk skewing the results accordingly.

Ultimately, the questionnaire was administered over a cross-sectional time-horizon of twenty-five days. During this period, a total of 192 responses were collected. However, after sorting the data, only 101 responses were retained as complete, while the remaining 91 were presented as incomplete, and thus removed from the database before starting the analysis on JASP. A demographic analysis of the participants was performed to provide the proportion of individuals in each category.

The final sample is predominantly female (76.23%), with a well-diversified age distribution, the largest group being respondents aged 45–54 (31.68%). The majority are active individuals (64.35%). Full demographic details are provided in the table below. Regarding luxury consumption, the sample presents a great diversity of profiles: roughly 42% report being unfamiliar with the sector, while 27% consider themselves familiar. Frequency of purchase data reveals a similarly widespread, ranging from non-buyers (25.74%) to occasional purchasers to regular consumers (2.97% purchasing more than six times a year). Regarding Louis Vuitton specifically, brand awareness was near-universal (n = 100/101), yet approximately 70% had never purchased from the brand. Attitudes were well distributed across the scale, providing adequate conditions to test the moderating effects of brand familiarity examined in H5a and H5b. Visual representations are available in Appendix C.

Demographics		
Age	15-24	18.81%
	25-34	7.92%
	35-44	13.86%
	45-54	31.68%
	55-64	20.79%
	65 +	6.93%

Gender	Male	23.76%
	Female	76.2%
	Other	0%
	Prefers not to say	0%
Occupation	Students	17.82%
	Active	64.35%
	Unemployed	1.92%
	Retired	7.92%
	Other	7.92%
Luxury sector familiarity		
Familiarity	Unfamiliar	31.68%
	Rather unfamiliar	9.99%
	Not familiar nor unfamiliar	31.68%
	Rather familiar	21.78%
	Very familiar	4.95%
Frequency of purchases	Never	25.74%
	Rarely (less than once a year)	33.66%
	Occasionally (1 to 3 times a year)	28.71%
	Regularly (4 to 6 times a year)	8.91%
	Frequently (more than 6 times a year)	2.97%
Brand familiarity - Louis Vuitton		
Brand awareness	"I know the brand"	99.01%
	"I don't know the brand"	0.9%
History with the brand (past purchases)	Never	71.28%
	Once or twice	14.85%
	Occasionally (more than twice)	5.94%
	Frequently (once a year or more)	7.92%
Attitude towards the brand on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = I don't like it, 5 = I appreciate it much)	1	13.86%
	2	29.71%
	3	24.75%
	4	18.81%
	5	12.87%

Table 2 – Sample description
Source: Own (based on collected data)

3.2. Measures and scales

To ensure the rigorous measurement of each variable, established scales drawn from the existing literature were adopted throughout the questionnaire. Where necessary, individual items were slightly adapted to align with the specific context of this study while preserving the original structure and intent of the validated instruments. For some of the variables (autonomy and competence), an academic translation guide was used to create the French version of the questionnaire (Appendix D). Prior to this questionnaire, a short manipulation check was conducted, asking respondents to assess their perceived customization level on a 5-point Likert scale.

Variables	Scales	Statements	Items
Autonomy (Chen et al., 2015 adapted by Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020)	5-point Likert scale (From 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)	If I experienced this purchasing journey myself, I would have the impression of having the choice and of being free.	A01
		If I experienced this purchasing journey myself, I would have the feeling of being able to do what I really want.	A02
		If I experienced this purchasing journey myself, I would have the feeling of being able to express who I really am (through the purchased item).	A03
Competence (Chen et al., 2015 adapted by Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020)	5-point Likert scale	If I experienced this purchasing journey myself, I would feel confident that I could complete it well.	C01
		If I experienced this purchasing journey myself, I would feel able to do it.	C02
		If I experienced this purchasing journey myself, I would feel overwhelmed by the things I am unable to do.	C03 (REV)
Relatedness = Brand attachment (Park et al., 2010)	5-point Likert scale	To what extent is now Louis Vuitton a part of you and who you are?	R01
		To what extent do you feel personally connected to Louis Vuitton?	R02
Purchase intention (Bian & Forsythe, 2012)	5-point Likert scale	If I were going to purchase a luxury product, I would consider buying this brand.	PI01
		If I were shopping for a luxury brand, the likelihood I would purchase this luxury brand is high.	PI02
		My willingness to buy this luxury brand would be high if I were shopping for a luxury brand.	PI03
		The probability I would consider buying this luxury brand is high.	PI04
Word-of-mouth intention (Zeithaml et al., 1996)	5-point Likert scale	I am likely to say positive things about the brand to other people.	W01
		I am likely to recommend the brand to someone who seeks my advice.	W02
		I would consider the brand my first choice to buy luxury products.	W03

Table 3 – Measurement instrument
Source: diverse, see table for references

Chapter 4 - Results

Once the data collection method and sample characteristics have been outlined, the next step is to analyze the survey results using JASP. The analysis begins with preliminary checks, including tests of normality, correlation matrices, and descriptive statistics, followed by t-tests. Finally, linear regression analyses are conducted to test the hypotheses and draw conclusions.

4.1 Data cleansing

Before importing the dataset into JASP, a data cleansing step was conducted using Microsoft Excel. This process first involved removing incomplete responses, resulting in a final sample of 101 valid observations. Next, nominal variables (e.g., gender, familiarity) were recoded into numerical values to facilitate statistical analysis. The gender was coded into a binomial variable (0,1) as no other option than "male" or "female" had been selected by respondents. Others were recoded using the "RECHERCHEV" formula and the negatively worded item C03 was reverse-coded. Finally, as each variable from the model was measured using multiple items, aggregated variables were created by calculating the mean scores for each subset of questions. Unless mentioned otherwise, all statistics presented in this section were computed using these aggregated values (means). Coding details are available in Appendix E.

4.2 Preliminary checks

A) Manipulation check – One-way ANOVA

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions, with a relatively balanced distribution across groups (n1 = 31, n2 = 31, n3 = 39), indicating that the randomization was reasonably successful.

As the study relies on an experimental design, a manipulation check was conducted to verify that the three conditions were perceived as intended by the respondents. Each participant was exposed to one customization scenario representing a simulated purchasing process, then asked to rate their perceived level of customization on a 5-point Likert scale. A one-way ANOVA was then performed to assess whether perceived customization differed significantly across the three conditions.

ANOVA - MAN01

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
RAND01	38.773	2	19.386	25.268	< .001	0.340
Residuals	75.188	98	0.767			

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

Table 4 – One-way ANOVA for manipulation check
Source: JASP

The one-way ANOVA test examines whether mean differences exist between groups defined by an independent variable. It tests the null hypothesis that all group means are equal (Malhotra, Nunan & Birks, 2017). In this study, ANOVA is appropriate as it allows the comparison of perceived customization across three experimental conditions, making it particularly suitable for conducting this manipulation check. The analysis was conducted with MAN01 the perceived level of customization (measured on a 1-5 scale) as the dependent

variable, and RAND01 the actual level of customization (three conditions, ranging from low to high) as the fixed factor.

The results indicate that the manipulation was successful: the results confirm that perceived customization differed significantly across the three experimental conditions, indicating that the manipulation was successful and strengthening the internal validity of the study (Shadish et al., 2002; Schunk, 2025). The F-value, F (2, 98) = 25.268, reflects a strong between-group difference, and the associated p-value ($p < .001$) confirms that these differences are statistically significant. The effect size, estimated by eta-squared (0.340), is large according to conventional thresholds (Cohen, 1988), further supporting the effectiveness of the manipulation.

B) Normality test – Shapiro-Wilk test and Skewness / Kurtosis assessment

Prior to the analysis, the normality of the variables was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, along with skewness and kurtosis indicators. The Shapiro-Wilk test evaluates the null hypothesis that the data is normally distributed. Detailed analysis provided in Appendix F.

Scales	Shapiro-wilk	Skewness	Kurtosis
AM (Autonomy mean)	W-Score = 0.979	-0.021	-0.469
	p-value 0.116		
CM (Competence mean)	W-Score = 0.903	-0.589	-0.589
	p-value <.001		
RM (Relatedness mean)	W-Score = 0.828	0.870	-0.167
	p-value <.001		
PIM (Purchase intention mean)	W-Score = 0.896	0.306	-1.250
	p-value <.001		
WM (Word-of-mouth mean)	W-Score = 0.926	0.236	-1.174
	p-value <.001		
LM (Relationship with Louis Vuitton mean)	W-Score = 0.901	0.827	0.016
	p-value <.001		
P02 (Age)	W-score = 0.893	-0.360	-0.945
	p-value <.001		
LuxM (Relationship with Luxury sector mean)	W-Score = 0.932	0.247	-0.749
	p-value <.001		

Table 5 – Normality assessment: Shapiro-wilk, Skewness and Kurtosis values.
Source: JASP

For all variables except AM, the test was significant (at the threshold $p < .05$), indicating a deviation from normality. However, for these variables, the W-Score remained close to 1, and skewness and kurtosis values fell within the acceptable range of [-2; +2] (George & Mallery, 2019), suggesting no severe departure from normality. In contrast, AM was found to be normally distributed across all indicators.

C) Reliability of multi-item scales - Cronbach's alpha

To assess the internal reliability of the multi-item scales, Cronbach's alpha was calculated (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). This measure evaluates the consistency of responses across the items of a given scale. Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater reliability. A minimal alpha of 0.70 is generally considered acceptable, supporting the internal consistency of the constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

Variables	Items	Cronbachs' Alpha	
		If item dropped	Total
Autonomy (Chen et al., 2015 adapted by Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020)	A01	0.793	0.864
	A02	0.719	
	A03	0.907	
Competence (Chen et al., 2015 adapted by Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020)	C01	0.533	0.701
	C02	0.363	
	C03 (reversed)	0.816[4]	
Relatedness = Brand attachment (Park et al., 2010)	R01	Only assessed for 3 items and more.	0.957
	R02		
Purchase intention (Bian & Forsythe, 2012)	PI01	0.963	0.965
	PI02	0.943	
	PI03	0.950	
	PI04	0.959	
Word-of-mouth intention (Zeithaml et al., 1996)	W01	0.883	0.932
	W02	0.867	
	W03	0.949	

Table 6 – Reliability analysis: Cronbach's alpha
Source: JASP

The analysis of Cronbach's alpha indicates that the reliability coefficient exceeds 0.70 for all five variables, suggesting satisfactory internal consistency across all scales. The only item warranting attention is C03, as its removal would marginally improve the reliability score. However, given the small number of items per scale, removing any item would risk undermining content validity. It was therefore decided to retain all items in the final analysis.

Overall, these preliminary analyses provide a solid foundation for the next statistical procedures. The manipulation check confirms that the different experimental conditions were perceived as intended, supporting the internal validity of the research. Although the Shapiro-Wilk test indicates some deviations from normality, these remain limited and acceptable given the sample size and the robustness of parametric tests. Furthermore, the reliability analysis demonstrates satisfactory internal consistency across all variables, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the recommended threshold. Taken together, these results suggest that the collected database is suitable for further analysis.

4.3 Descriptive statistics

Now that the preliminary checks have been conducted, descriptive statistics are examined to provide an initial overview of the data. This step allows for a first assessment of central tendencies, variability, and potential patterns, thereby facilitating the interpretation of deeper analyses. The results are presented, for each variable, by condition for an optimal interpretation. Appendix F provides detailed analysis.

Overall, mean scores suggest some variation between conditions. Specifically, the intermediate level of customization (Condition 2) tends to yield higher scores in relatedness, purchase intention, and word-of-mouth intentions. In contrast, the highest level of customization (Condition 3) appears to be associated with slightly higher autonomy but lower competence. These preliminary trends suggest that higher levels of

[4] Which is not surprising, reversed items being potentially more confusing for respondents.

customization may not always lead to more favorable outcomes and could potentially have diminishing or even negative effects. However, these differences remain relatively modest and require further statistical testing to determine their significance.

	Autonomy (mean)			Competence (mean)			Relatedness (mean)			Purchase intention (mean)			Word of mouth (mean)		
Condition	**1**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**2**	**3**
N	31	31	39	31	31	39	31	31	39	31	31	39	31	31	39
Median	3	3	3.333	4.333	4.333	4	2	1	1	2.250	3	2	2.333	2.667	2.667
Mean	3.043	2.892	3.256	4.161	4.161	3.863	1.984	2.145	1.987	2.548	2.815	2.545	2.430	2.742	2.667
Standard deviation	0.902	0.858	1.101	0.789	0.843	0.897	0.970	1.142	1.315	1.328	1.43	1.413	1.116	1.293	1.327

Table 7 – Descriptive statistics of the database
Source: JASP

4.4 Correlations matrix

Prior to the verification of hypothesis through linear regressions, a Pearson's correlations matrix was performed on JASP to uncover the first trends of the database, assess the internal coherence of the model and detect potential anomalies.

Pearson's Correlations ▼

Variable		AM	CM	RM	PIM	WM	LuxM	LM
1. AM	Pearson's r	—						
	p-value	—						
2. CM	Pearson's r	0.252	—					
	p-value	0.011	—					
3. RM	Pearson's r	0.483	−0.013	—				
	p-value	< .001	0.894	—				
4. PIM	Pearson's r	0.432	0.065	0.648	—			
	p-value	< .001	0.516	< .001	—			
5. WM	Pearson's r	0.497	0.171	0.634	0.868	—		
	p-value	< .001	0.088	< .001	< .001	—		
6. LuxM	Pearson's r	0.131	0.131	0.442	0.350	0.277	—	
	p-value	0.191	0.191	< .001	< .001	0.005	—	
7. LM	Pearson's r	0.317	0.132	0.596	0.648	0.652	0.563	—
	p-value	0.001	0.187	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	—

Table 8 – Pearson's correlation analysis
Source: JASP

Several significant correlations were observed among the study variables. Autonomy (AM) was moderately correlated with both relatedness (RM) and word-of-mouth (WM) ($r = 0.483$ and $r = 0.497$, respectively, $p < .001$), while relatedness showed strong positive associations with both purchase intention (PI) ($r = 0.648$, $p < .001$) and word-of-mouth ($r = 0.634$, $p < .001$). Purchase intention and word-of-mouth were themselves very strongly correlated ($r = 0.868$, $p < .001$), suggesting that these two behavioral outcomes capture closely related constructs (a finding consistent with prior consumer behavior research). As both serve as separate dependent variables in distinct regression models, however, this does not raise multicollinearity concerns. Brand familiarity with both the luxury sector (LuxM) and Louis Vuitton (LM) also showed significant associations with PI and WOM. By contrast, competence (CM) displayed limited associations with the other variables, with only a weak significant correlation with autonomy ($r = 0.252$, $p = .011$).

Among the independent and control variables, no correlation exceeded the 0.80 threshold for problematic multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019). Overall, these results support the expected relationships between constructs and confirm that predictors can be included simultaneously in the regression models, with VIF values used to further monitor multicollinearity.

4.5 Linear regressions

A) Experimental model

H1a: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived autonomy, a dimension of customer empowerment.

H1a proposes that the availability of customization options positively influence consumers' perceived autonomy. To test this hypothesis, a multiple linear regression was conducted using the experimental customization condition (RAND01) as the categorical independent variable, while controlling for respondents' familiarity with the luxury sector (LuxM) and familiarity with Louis Vuitton (LM). Hence, the regression model was specified as follows: **AM (Autonomy Mean) = β 0 + β 1(RAND01) + β 2(LuxM) + β 3(LM).** The overall regression model was statistically significant (at the threshold $p < .05$), with $F(4,96) = 3.465$ and $p = 0.011$, though it demonstrated a relatively modest explanatory power of 12.6% (R-squared = 0.126). The JASP output is presented in Appendix G. The statistical significance of the model alone being insufficient to verify H1a, hereunder is the table of coefficients that was analyzed to draw final conclusions.

Coefficients (Source: JASP)

Model		β (unstand.)	Standard Error	t	p-value	VIF (collinearity)
1	**(Intercept)**	2.308	0.310	7.451	<.001	
	LuxM	-0.067	0.106	-0.637	0.526	1.228
	LM	0.551	0.181	3.041	0.003	1.241
	RAND01 (2)	-0.261	0.240	-1.087	0.280	1.014
	RAND01 (3)	0.080	0.229	0.351	0.726	

Table 9 – Regression output for H1a

H1a cannot be supported by this model, as neither customization condition significantly predicted perceived autonomy relative to the reference condition. However, comparing coefficients for conditions 2 and 3 shows divergent patterns: medium customization was negatively associated (β = -0.261), while high customization showed a slight positive effect (β = 0.080), suggesting that higher customization may better support autonomy than moderate levels. Among the control variables, familiarity with Louis Vuitton (LM) emerged as the only significant predictor ($p = 0.003$) and has a high, positive β (= 0.551), suggesting that familiarity with the brand may play a stronger role in shaping consumers' perceived autonomy than the objective level of customization itself. Familiarity with the luxury sector (LuxM) was not statistically significant. Finally, multicollinearity

diagnostics did not show collinearity concerns, as all VIF values remained well below the commonly accepted threshold of 10.

H1b: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived competence, a dimension of customer empowerment.

The aim of H1b was to establish a positive relationship between the level of customization proposed by a luxury brand and consumers' perceived competence, still considering LM and LuxM as control variables. Hence, the linear regression model is: **CM (Competence Mean) = β 0 + β 1(RAND01) + β 2(LuxM) + β 3(LM).** The regression analysis did not demonstrate a statistically significant model overall, with F (4,96) = 1.383, p = 0.246. The explanatory power of the model was relatively limited (R-squared = 0.054), indicating that the predictors included in the model explain only a small proportion (5.4%) of the variance in respondents' perceived competence (Appendix H). The table of coefficients is provided below to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the individual effects.

Coefficients (Source: JASP)

Model		β (unstand.)	Standard Error	t	p-value	VIF (collinearity)
1	**(Intercept)**	3.780	0.283	13.366	<.001	
	LuxM	0.047	0.097	0.490	0.625	1.228
	LM	0.159	0.165	0.963	0.338	1.241
	RAND01 (2)	-0.022	0.219	-0.101	0.919	1.014
	RAND01 (3)	-0.328	0.209	-1.570	0.120	

Table 10 – Regression output for H1b

As indicated in the table, none of the customization conditions (RAND01) significantly influenced perceived competence: H1b is therefore not supported. However, the negative direction of the coefficient associated with condition 3 (β = -0.328), substantially stronger than that of condition 2 (β = -0.022), suggests that specifically high levels of customization may generate feelings of overwhelm rather than empowerment. Neither familiarity with Louis Vuitton (LM) nor familiarity with the luxury sector (LuxM) emerged as significant predictors in this model. Finally, all VIF values remained below the recommended threshold, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

H1c: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived brand attachment, reflecting the relatedness dimension of customer empowerment.

H1c aimed to establish a positive relationship between the level of customization and consumers' perceived relatedness. In the present study, relatedness was operationalized through the concept of brand attachment, as this construct appeared to be the most relevant for deriving managerial implications. The model is the following: **RM (Relatedness Mean) = β 0 + β 1(RAND01) + β 2(LuxM) + β 3(LM)**. With a p-value < .001 and a F (4,96) = 14.637, this model is significant, and the explanatory power of the model is 37.9% (R-Squared = 0.379) (Appendix I).

Coefficients (Source: JASP)

Model		β (unstand.)	Standard Error	t	p-value	VIF (collinearity)
1	**(Intercept)**	0.029	0.310	0.093	0.926	
	LuxM	0.157	0.106	1.487	0.140	1.228
	LM	0.946	0.181	5.225	<.001	1.241
	RAND01 (2)	0.011	0.240	0.046	0.963	1.014
	RAND01 (3)	-0.192	0.229	-0.837	0.404	

Table 11 – Regression output for H1c

None of the customization levels significantly predicted brand attachment (relatedness) and H1c is therefore not supported. However, regarding the coefficients, the highest level of customization tends to have a negative effect on the dependent variable (β = -0.192), which is the same pattern as for H1b. The overall significance of the model appears to be primarily driven by brand familiarity with Louis Vuitton (LM) ($p < .001$), suggesting that it exerts a stronger influence on perceived relatedness than the customization manipulation itself, and the positive direction of its coefficient further strengthens this idea. These results suggest that brand attachment is more deeply rooted in pre-existing consumer-brand relationships than in short-term exposure to digitally enabled customization options. Finally, all VIF values remained below the recommended threshold, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

B) Comparison between experimental and perception-based models

Beyond analyses based on the randomized condition (RAND01), a complementary analysis used perceived customization (MAN01) as the independent variable (measured by a 5-point Likert scale and thus treated as continuous). This follows the idea that consumer responses are more driven by subjective perception than objective features (Zeithaml, 1988), especially in luxury contexts. This approach tests whether the relationships hold when accounting for individual perceptions. All models include the same controls (LM, LuxM) for comparability.

Regarding H1a, the result was different from the experimental model: the perception-based model turned out to be statistically significant ($p < .001$) and the p-value for MAN01 = 0.002, meaning that the subjective perception of a greater customization level leads to a greater perceived autonomy for consumers.

However, the results remained the same as in section A for competence (H1b) and relatedness (H1c): no statistical significance was found. Hence, H1b and H1c could not be confirmed in this context either. Full regression outputs are provided in Appendices J-K-L.

	Hypotheses	**R-Squared**	**P-value (model)**	**P-value (IV)**	**Rejected or supported ?**
Experimental model Var. : RAND	**H1A**	0.126	0.011	RAND(2) = 0.280	Rejected
				RAND(3) = 0.726	
	H1B	0.049	0.182	RAND(2) = 0.919	Rejected
				RAND(3) = 0.120	
	H1C	0.377	<.001	RAND(2) = 0.963	Rejected
				RAND(3) = 0.404	
Perception based model Var. : MAN	**H1A**	0.186	<.001	P(MAN) = 0.002	Supported
	H1B	0.027	0.446	P(MAN) = 0.491	Rejected
	H1C	0.381	<.001	P(MAN) = 0.242	Rejected

Table 12 – Comparison between experimental and perception-based models
Source: Own (JASP data)

Although the research model does not directly address the link between perceived customization and the ACR components of SDT, the comparison between experimental and perception-based models still emerged as an insightful outcome of the statistical analysis. Across all models, the only condition in which the customization variable itself reached significance was H1a in the perception-based model, suggesting that perceived autonomy is more sensitive to subjective perception than to objective manipulation. This raises meaningful questions that are explored further in the discussion.

C) Moderation variable: H2

H2: The customer's age moderates the positive relationship between digitally enabled product customization and perceived competence, such that this relationship is stronger among younger consumers.

Although H1b was not supported, it remains relevant to examine whether age (P02) moderates the relationship between customization and perceived competence. As the age was measured in categories, it was not relevant to standardize this variable beforehand. The independent categorical variable RAND01 (representing the objective customization level), however, was standardized pre-analysis. A multiple linear regression was conducted, using an interaction term linking age to the customization level to assess the relevance of H2. The variables LuxM and LM were included in the model as control variables. The regression model is specified as: **CM (Competence mean) = β 0 + β 1(RAND01_C) + β 2(P02) + β 3(LuxM) + β 4(LM) + β 5(RAND01_C*P02)**

This model was not significant, with a p-value = 0.277 and F (19, 81) = 1.203, and H2 is therefore not supported. When treating both age and customization condition as categorical variables, the output generates interaction terms for each combination of age category and customization condition, the full details of which are provided in Appendix M.

Two findings nonetheless deserve attention. First, the main effect of age category 6 (65+) was significant (β = -2.140, p = 0.019), suggesting that the oldest respondents reported meaningfully lower perceived competence than the reference group (16-24) in the baseline condition, independently of customization level. Second, the interaction term P02(6) * RAND01(3) approached significance (β = 1.783, p = 0.086), suggesting that exposure to high customization tends to partially mitigate this negative age effect among the oldest consumers: a pattern consistent with the finding observed in the previous model. This goes in the opposite direction to the hypothesized effect, and may suggest that meaningful challenge, rather than simplicity, activates competence beliefs among older consumers. However, given the overall non-significance of the model, the small size of the 65+ subgroup, and the absence of any consistent pattern, both effects should be interpreted with caution.

D) Behavioral outcomes: H3 and H4

Since H1a, H1b, and H1c could not be confirmed, it is important to note that any empowerment perceptions reported by respondents cannot be statistically attributed to the customization manipulation. In other words, the following analyses examine the relationship between perceived empowerment and purchase intentions independently of the experimental conditions. Moreover, no mediation analysis was conducted to test the full hypothesized chain, as the relationships between the customization manipulation and the SDT dimensions were not statistically supported, the precondition for mediation was not met (Baron & Kenny, 1986), making mediation testing inappropriate in this context.

H3a/b/c: Perceived autonomy/competence/relatedness positively influences purchase intention in the context of luxury.

These hypotheses seek to discover whether the feeling of empowerment, measured through the A/C/R components of SDT, positively impacts purchase intentions, and if so, to which extent each of the factors contribute to it. In this objective, a multiple linear regression was conducted, including the control variables LuxM and LM: **PIM = β0 + β1(AM) + β2(CM) + β3(RM) + β4(LuxM) + β5(LM)**

Model Summary (Source: JASP)

	R	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	RMSE
Model M1	0.738	0.544	0.520	0.959

ANOVA (Source: JASP)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
1	**Regression**	104.297	5	20.859	22.672	< .001
	Residual	87.405	95	0.920		
	Total	191.702	100			

The statistics above show that the overall model is significant, with $p < .001$ and $F(5,95) = 22.672$, and has a relatively strong explanatory power: the model accounts for 54.4% of the variance in purchase intention (PIM). The detailed statistics for each covariate are presented below to examine their individual effects.

Coefficients (Source: JASP)

Model		β (stand.)	Standard Error	t	p-value	VIF (collinearity)
1	**(Intercept)**		0.532	-0.411	0.682	
	AM	0.135	0.119	1.612	0.110	1.470
	CM	-0.013	0.120	-0.170	0.865	1.149
	RM	0.353	0.118	3.586	< .001	2.022
	LuxM	-0.067	0.111	-0.773	0.442	1.559
	LM	0.434	0.208	4.529	<.001	1.910

Table(s) 13 – Regression output for H3a/b/c [5]

The regression results (and the coefficient analysis in particular) suggest that the three dimensions of customer empowerment do not contribute equally to purchase intention. Among the empowerment dimensions, only relatedness was found to significantly and positively predict purchase intention ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < .001$). In contrast, autonomy showed a positive but non-significant effect ($\beta = 0.135$, $p = 0.110$), while competence did not significantly influence purchase intention ($p = 0.865$). Regarding the control variables, familiarity with Louis Vuitton (LM) emerged as a strong positive predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.434$, $p < .001$), while familiarity with the luxury sector in general (LuxM) was not statistically significant ($p = 0.442$). This indicates that brand-specific familiarity may be more influential than general luxury familiarity in driving purchase intentions. Hence, the regression results only support H3c, as not all dimensions of empowerment significantly influenced purchase intentions.

In addition to the model presented above, a stepwise regression (Appendix O) was conducted for comparative purposes. As expected from the regular regression data, the stepwise procedure retained RM and LM as significant predictors, while AM, CM, and LuxM were excluded from the final model. These findings suggest that emotional and relational aspects of empowerment may play a more central role in shaping consumers' purchase intentions than autonomy-related or competence-related perceptions in this context.

In all the analyses presented here, the VIF scores did not raise any collinearity concerns, as all values remained below the commonly accepted threshold of 10.

H4a/b/c: Perceived autonomy/competence/relatedness positively influences word-of-mouth intention in the context of luxury.

To examine whether there is a positive relationship between positive word-of-mouth intentions and the three SDT components (ACR), a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted, still including the control variables

[5] Complete JASP output available in Appendix N.

LM and LuxM: **WM = β0 + β1(AM) + β2(CM) + β3(RM) + β4(LuxM) + β5(LM).** As noted in the previous section, this analysis is conducted independently of the experimental manipulation.

Model Summary (Source: JASP)

	R	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	RMSE
Model M1	0.765	0.585	0.563	0.826

ANOVA (Source: JASP)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
1	**Regression**	91.343	5	18.269	26.806	< .001
	Residual	64.743	95	0.682		
	Total	156.086	100			

The ANOVA analysis above show that this model is statistically significant, with a $p < .001$ and $F(5,95) = 26.806$. According to the statistics, the model explains 58.5% of the variance in word-of-mouth intention, thus showing a relatively strong explaining power.

Coefficients (Source: JASP)

Model		β (stand.)	Standard Error	t	p-value	VIF (collinearity)
1	**(Intercept)**		0.485	-1.216	0.227	
	AM	0.181	0.103	2.264	0.026	1.470
	CM	0.089	0.103	1.262	0.210	1.149
	RM	0.339	0.102	3.613	< .001	2.022
	LuxM	-0.180	0.095	-2.182	0.032	1.559
	LM	0.482	0.179	5.279	<.001	1.910

Table(s) 14 – Regression output for H4a/b/c [6]

Overall, the regression results only partially support H4, as not all dimensions of empowerment significantly influenced positive word-of-mouth intentions: among the three SDT components, relatedness (RM) emerged as the strongest empowerment-related predictor of WOM intentions ($\beta = 0.339$, $p < .001$), suggesting that emotional attachment and relational closeness to the brand play a central role in encouraging consumers to share positive opinions about the brand. Autonomy (AM) also showed a positive and significant effect on WOM intentions ($\beta = 0.181$, $p = 0.026$), indicating that consumers who perceive greater freedom and self-direction in the customization process are more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth behaviors. In contrast, competence did not significantly predict WOM intentions ($\beta = 0.089$, $p = .0210$).

Regarding the control variables, familiarity with Louis Vuitton (LM) had the strongest positive effect in the model ($\beta = 0.482$, $p < .001$), while familiarity with the luxury sector (LuxM) showed a small but significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.180$, $p = 0.032$).

To further explore the structure of the model, the stepwise method (Appendix Q) was applied to the regression: as expected, the final model retained LM (familiarity with Louis Vuitton), AM (autonomy), RM (relatedness), and LuxM as significant predictors, while CM (competence) was excluded from the model due to its non-significant contribution. Among the retained predictors, LM emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.494$, $p < .001$), followed by RM ($\beta = 0.310$, $p < .001$) and AM ($\beta = 0.213$, $p = 0.007$). LuxM showed a small but significant negative effect, with $\beta = -0.166$ and $p = 0.046$.

[6] Complete JASP output available in Appendix P.

These results show a certain hierarchy in the empowerment constructs to explain the positive word-of-mouth. Indeed, while relatedness seems to play a dominant role, the perceived autonomy is also influential: H4a and H4c are supported by the model. However, the perceived competence experienced by a consumer does not have a significant influence on future word-of-mouth intentions, hence H4b cannot be supported. The familiarity with the brand is also impactful and must be considered.

In all the analyses presented here, the VIF scores did not raise any collinearity concerns, as all values remained below the commonly accepted threshold of 10.

E) Moderation variables: H5a and H5b

The hypotheses 5a and 5b are aiming to explore whether the familiarity with a specific brand plays a positive role of moderation in the relationship between the feeling of relatedness towards this brand and the behavioral outcomes of the theoretical model, namely purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention.

H5a: In the context of luxury, the customer's familiarity with the brand positively moderates the relationship between the feeling of relatedness and the purchase intention.

To test this hypothesis, a multiple linear regression was conducted. First, standardized values were created for the independent variable RM (relatedness mean) and the moderating variable LM (familiarity with Louis Vuitton, mean), facilitating the interpretation of the interaction effect and reducing potential multicollinearity. Then, an interaction term was created between these two variables. Finally, the multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The equation for the model is the following**: PI = β0 + β1(RM_C) + β2(LM_C) + β3(RM_C*LM_C)**

This model has an explanatory power of 53.1% (R-squared = 0.531) and is significant ($p < .001$, and $F(3,97) = 36.594$). However, to support or reject the hypothesis H5a, the significance of the interaction term must be assessed through its individual p-value. The coefficients of each covariate of the model, including the interaction term, are presented in the table below.

Coefficients (Source: JASP)

Model		β (stand.)	Standard Error	t	p-value	VIF (collinearity)
1	**(Intercept)**		0.111	24.196	<.001	
	RM_C	0.412	0.104	4.748	<.001	1.560
	LM_C	0.451	0.211	4.637	<.001	1.959
	RM_C*LM_C	-0.086	0.129	-1.018	< .311	1.488

Table 15 – Regression output for H5a [7]

While both predictors (RM_C) and (LM_C) have a $p < .001$, showing a strong individual effect, the interaction term itself is not significant, with a p-value = 0.311: this statistical model cannot therefore support H5a. This suggests that the positive relationship between relatedness and purchase intention remains relatively stable regardless of consumers' familiarity with the brand. This may indicate that perceived relatedness operates as a sufficiently strong driver of purchase intention on its own, independently of any moderating influence of prior brand relationship.

[7] Complete JASP output available in Appendix R.

H5b: In the context of luxury, the customer's familiarity with the brand positively moderates the relationship between the feeling of relatedness and word-of-mouth intention.

As for H5a, a multiple linear regression was conducted keeping the standardized variables and interaction terms created above, the only difference being the dependent variable, now WM (the mean of word-of-mouth intentions). The regression model was specified as: **WM = β0 + β1(RM_C) + β2(LM_C) + β3(RM_C*LM_C)**

The model explains 52.3% of the variance in the dependent variable and is statistically significant (F (3,97) = 35.498, p < .001). To formally assess H5b, however, the individual coefficients must be examined in greater detail, especially the interaction term. The table below provides the necessary data.

Coefficients (Source: JASP)

Model		β (stand.)	Standard Error	t	p-value	VIF (collinearity)
1	**(Intercept)**		0.101	26.416	<.001	
	RM_C	0.386	0.095	4.409	<.001	1.560
	LM_C	0.470	0.192	4.792	<.001	1.959
	RM_C*LM_C	-0.084	0.117	-0.981	< .329	1.488

Table 16 – Regression output for H5b [8]

While both predictors (RM_C) and (LM_C) have a p < .001, showing strong individual effects, the interaction term itself is not significant, with a p-value = 0.329. Hence, this statistical model cannot support H5b. This indicates that brand familiarity does not appear to strengthen or weaken the relationship between relatedness and word-of-mouth intentions in this context. Taken together with the results of H5a, this consistently suggests that perceived relatedness and brand familiarity operate as independent drivers of behavioral intentions, rather than as interacting mechanisms.

In conclusion for H5a and H5b, it is worth noting that despite the non-significance of the interaction terms, both overall models were statistically significant and explained a substantial proportion of variance in purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention, confirming the individual predictive power of relatedness and brand familiarity.

4.6 Statistical analysis: conclusions

Despite the fact that the statistical analyses did not support most of the hypotheses, the results provide several meaningful insights regarding the effect of digitally enabled customization options in the luxury sector. The findings suggest that the availability of customization options does not automatically enhance all dimensions of consumer empowerment in a direct and measurable way, highlighting the complexity of translating customization features into psychological outcomes.

The analyses further revealed that the different SDT dimensions do not contribute equally to behavioral intentions. Relatedness — operationalized here as brand attachment — consistently emerged as the most influential dimension in predicting both purchase intention and word-of-mouth, while autonomy demonstrated a significant role in explaining word-of-mouth specifically. Competence, by contrast, appeared to have little influence across all tested models. These findings suggest that emotional and relational mechanisms may be more important drivers of consumer responses than functional or competence-related perceptions, particularly in luxury contexts.

[8] Complete JASP output available in Appendix S.

Finally, brand familiarity with Louis Vuitton consistently emerged as a strong predictor across models, confirming that prior consumer-brand relationships play a central role in shaping behavioral intentions in luxury consumption. Its moderating effect, however, was not supported, suggesting that brand familiarity and perceived relatedness operate as independent rather than interacting drivers of consumer behavior.

A table summarizing these different insights is presented hereunder:

H1a: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived autonomy, a dimension of customer empowerment.	Rejected, but supported by perception-based model
H1b: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived competence, a dimension of customer empowerment.	Rejected
H1c: In the context of luxury, digitally enabled product customization options have a positive impact on customers' perceived brand attachment, reflecting the relatedness dimension of customer empowerment.	Rejected
H2: The customer's age moderates the positive relationship between digitally enabled product customization and perceived competence, such that this relationship is stronger among younger consumers.	Rejected
H3a/b/c: Perceived autonomy/competence/relatedness positively influences purchase intention in the context of luxury.	H3a: Rejected
	H3b: Rejected
	H3c: Supported
H4a/b/c: Perceived autonomy/competence/relatedness positively influences word-of-mouth intention in the context of luxury.	H4a: Supported
	H4b: Rejected
	H4c: Supported
H5a: In the context of luxury, the customer's familiarity with the brand positively moderates the relationship between the feeling of relatedness and the purchase intention.	Rejected
H5b: In the context of luxury, the customer's familiarity with the brand positively moderates the relationship between the feeling of relatedness and word-of-mouth intention.	Rejected

Table 17 – Overview of hypotheses and results
Source: Own

Overall, although the proposed theoretical model was only partially supported, this work contributes to a better understanding of the psychological processes underlying digitally enabled customization in luxury marketing. The results and insights will be deeper discussed in the next chapter, and suggestions for further research will be proposed as well.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This study explored the impact of digitally enabled customization options on consumer empowerment in the luxury sector, while examining the moderating roles of age and brand familiarity. The theoretical framework and hypotheses were grounded in existing marketing literature and tested through an experimental research design. The results reveal a nuanced picture, with some hypotheses receiving empirical support while others do not. This chapter interprets these findings by confronting them with the existing literature presented previously.

The first hypothesis (H1a) was not supported, meaning that neither customization condition significantly influenced perceived autonomy compared to the reference condition, contrary to previous findings (Kim & Lee, 2020; Marathe & Sundar, 2011). A potential explanation lies in the experimental design: unlike prior studies, participants did not actively engage in the customization process but observed it through a video stimulus. As autonomy is closely linked to agency and personal control (Deci & Ryan, 1985), this passive exposure may have been insufficient to generate a meaningful sense of empowerment. It should be noted that this design remains consistent with the research question, which examines the effect of the availability of customization options rather than the act of customizing itself, yet it nonetheless constitutes a boundary condition of this study. Moreover, Kim and Lee (2020) examined the effect of customization in a non-luxury context, suggesting that such findings may not fully transfer to luxury consumption environments.

However, the comparison of coefficients for conditions 2 and 3 reveals an interesting pattern: while the medium customization condition showed a negative tendency relative to the reference group, the high customization condition exhibited a slightly positive direction. Although neither effect reached statistical significance au must be thus interpreted with caution, this suggests that the relationship between customization and perceived autonomy may not be linear. Potentially, maximal choice reinforces feelings of freedom and control more than moderate customization, consistent with the idea that autonomy is activated by the breadth of available options rather than their mere presence (Marathe & Sundar, 2011).

The complementary perception-based analysis revealed a significant positive effect of perceived customization on autonomy, suggesting that it is not the objective level of customization that drives consumers' sense of control, but rather their subjective experience of it. This finding is consistent with SDT, within which autonomy is inherently activated by perception rather than objective conditions (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

H1b was not supported either, as neither customization condition significantly influenced perceived competence. As for H1a, the passive nature of the video stimulus likely explains this result: observing a customization process may not be sufficient to generate the feeling of effective task execution underlying perceived competence, which emerges through the experience of performing skillfully (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When examining condition levels, however, an interesting pattern emerges: while the medium customization condition showed a near-neutral effect on perceived competence, the high customization condition exhibited a more pronounced negative tendency. This echoes the notions of decision fatigue and choice paralysis identified in prior literature (Mick et al., 2004). This is particularly telling in a luxury context, where consumers typically expect a seamless and guided experience, suggesting that an excess of options may conflict with these expectations rather than enhance feelings of competence. However, these effects are non-significant and must be interpreted with caution.

Regarding H1c, it was not supported either. While the overall model was significant and demonstrated satisfactory explanatory power, neither customization condition significantly predicted perceived relatedness. This finding is not entirely surprising, as brand attachment (selected here as the operationalization of relatedness) is inherently a construct developed over time through repeated interactions with the brand (Park et al., 2010). This reveals that a single exposure to video stimulus may be insufficient to influence such a deeply

rooted psychological bond. As for H1b, the coefficient analysis of the various conditions reveals a consistent pattern: the high customization condition again showed the most negative tendency while the medium condition remained almost neutral.

Taken together, the condition-level analyses of H1a, H1b and H1c reveal an interesting pattern: the highest level of customization options tends toward a positive direction for autonomy, while consistently showing negative tendencies for both competence and relatedness. This suggests that maximal customization may activate a sense of freedom and choice while simultaneously overwhelming consumers' sense of mastery (competence) and brand connection: this theoretical trade-off between SDT dimensions warrants further investigation.

Moreover, across all three models, brand familiarity consistently emerged as a stronger predictor than the customization manipulation itself, suggesting that in luxury contexts, pre-existing consumer-brand relationships shape psychological responses more powerfully than short-term exposure to customization options. This is consistent with previous literature (Fournier, 1998).

More broadly, the operationalization of relatedness through brand attachment, while defensible in a luxury context, remains conceptually imperfect and carries a risk of circularity: consumers already strongly attached to Louis Vuitton may mechanically express higher purchase intentions and word-of-mouth independently of any empowerment effect, potentially limiting the causal interpretations that can be drawn from the model.

The moderation hypothesis H2 was not supported, as the overall moderation model did not reach statistical significance. Moreover, no consistent moderating pattern was found across the different age and customization condition combinations. This means that the hypothesis predicting a stronger relationship between customization and perceived competence among younger consumers (grounded in the assumption that digital self-efficacy is negatively associated with age (Ulfert-Blank et al., 2022)) cannot be confirmed. The non-significance of H2 may be partly explained by the fact that H1b, representing the underlying moderated relationship, was itself not significant.

Moreover, as highlighted in the literature review, perceived competence is not only shaped by objective skills but also by subjective competence beliefs (Ulfert-Blank et al., 2022). If the customization stimulus itself was insufficient to trigger perceived competence, which is likely due to the passive nature of video-watching, it makes sense that age could not meaningfully moderate a relationship that was, itself, absent.

Nonetheless, two findings deserve attention. First, the main effect of age category 6 (65+) was significant, suggesting that older consumers reported lower perceived competence than the reference group independently of customization level. Second, the interaction term P02(6)*RAND01(3) approached significance, suggesting that exposure to the highest level customization tends to attenuate this negative age effect among the oldest consumers. Rather than feeling overwhelmed, older consumers may have experienced a stronger sense of accomplishment when exposed to higher customization levels, consistent with SDT's view that competence emerges from meaningful challenge (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and with evidence that digital engagement can reinforce competence beliefs regardless of age (Eastin & LaRose, 2000). Given the overall non-significance of the model and the small size of the 65+ subgroup, however, both effects should be interpreted with caution.

The results offer partial support for H3: while the multiple linear regression model was highly significant and demonstrated a strong explanatory power, only H3c was supported. This means that relatedness emerged as the only empowerment (SDT) dimension significantly predicting purchase intention, while autonomy showed a positive but non-significant effect and competence did not contribute meaningfully. These findings are consistent with the broader SDT literature, which recognizes that the three components of the SDT do not necessarily exercise similar influence across all contexts (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Especially in the context of luxury

consumption, it is potentially unsurprising that relatedness (which is operationalized here as brand attachment) emerges as the dominant effect driving purchase intention. As highlighted in the literature review, luxury consumption is deeply embedded in social signaling, identity expression, and brand relationship dynamics (Kapferer, 2014; Park et al., 2010). This may partly explain why the relational dimension of empowerment turns out to be the most influential here.

The strong predictive role of brand familiarity in H3's regression model reinforces a recurring theme across the analyses: in the luxury sector, the pre-existing consumer-brand relationship appears to be a more powerful driver of consumer behavior than the customization experience itself: a finding that is consistent with the brand relationship literature reviewed in the early stage of this work (Holmqvist et al., 2020; Park et al., 2010).

Regarding the three sub-hypotheses of H4, the overall model has a strong explanatory power and the results provide support for H4a and H4c, suggesting that, in this context, autonomy and relatedness emerged as the two empowerment (SDT) dimensions significantly predicting word-of-mouth intention. Here again, competence did not contribute meaningfully to the model.

The significance of autonomy here is noteworthy, particularly in contrast with its non-significant role in predicting purchase intention (H3a). This suggests that autonomy may be more closely linked to expressive behaviors, such as sharing and recommending, than to transactional ones. This is consistent with Sweeney et al.'s (2008) argument that autonomy fuels individuals' willingness to express themselves and share their experiences, aligning with self-enhancement and social motivations for WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

The strong effect of relatedness is again consistent with the luxury context, where brand attachment and social connectedness naturally translate into advocacy behaviors. Consumers who feel a strong bond with a brand are more likely to recommend it to others, reflecting the altruistic and other-oriented WOM motivations associated with relatedness (Sweeney et al., 2008).

The non-significant effect of competence is also theoretically coherent. As noted by Sweeney et al. (2008), competence reflects the desire to effectively influence one's environment (a motivation that presupposes active engagement with a product or experience). In this study, competence perceptions were generally high across conditions (mean = 4.046) but showed limited variance and weak correlations with behavioral outcomes, suggesting that in a luxury context, feeling capable may be a relatively neutral state rather than a differentiating driver of behavioral intentions.

Finally, the results of the moderation analyses did not provide support for H5a and H5b, as the interaction terms linking perceived relatedness and brand familiarity were non-significant in both models. While perceived relatedness and brand familiarity each independently and positively influence purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention, their effects appear to be additive rather than interactive. In other words, the impact of relatedness on behavioral outcomes remained stable across the different levels of brand familiarity.

The non-significant moderating effect of brand familiarity can be interpreted in light of the SDT. Hence, in the SDT, relatedness reflects a fundamental psychological need for emotional connection (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which, once established, may already be sufficiently strong to directly drive behavioral intentions, leaving limited room for additional moderation effects. This is consistent with other research showing that brand attachment and relational bonds are strong direct predictors of consumer behavior (Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2010; Shimul & Phau, 2022). In this perspective, relatedness may operate as a more affective and identity-based driver, which directly translates into purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention.

By contrast, brand familiarity (LM), defined as accumulated exposure and knowledge of the brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987), operates at a more cognitive level. In luxury contexts, where consumption is primarily driven by emotional and symbolic value (Holmqvist et al., 2020; Kapferer, 2014), this cognitive dimension may

influence behavior independently rather than by strengthening relational effects. These findings suggest that relatedness and brand familiarity act as independent drivers of consumer behavioral intentions rather than interacting mechanisms.

Overall, these findings reveal that in luxury contexts, emotional and relational dimensions consistently outweigh the situational influence of customization options in shaping both empowerment perceptions and behavioral intentions. Notably, the coefficient analyses suggest that the relationship between customization levels and psychological responses is not linear and may involve trade-offs between SDT dimensions that remain to be fully explored.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

6.1 Short Summary

Luxury brands face a rapidly evolving environment marked by shifting consumer preferences toward experiential consumption and growing digital expectations, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, this study investigates how digitally enabled customization reshapes consumer empowerment in the luxury sector through the lens of Self-Determination Theory, bridging three underexplored concepts (consumer empowerment, digitalization, and luxury consumption) while examining downstream effects on purchase intention and word-of-mouth.

Drawing on theories of luxury, digitalization, and consumer empowerment, the literature review establishes the theoretical foundation for the research hypotheses and conceptual model, examining digitalization's role in luxury, the psychological mechanisms of empowerment through SDT, and the behavioral consequences of empowerment.

The framework is tested through an online experiment in which participants were randomly assigned to one of three video stimuli representing different levels of customization. Data were collected from a cross-sectional sample of French-speaking respondents using convenience sampling, and all measures were drawn from validated scales.

The results show that a higher level of customization stimulus did not significantly enhance perceived empowerment across SDT dimensions. However, significant relationships were found between autonomy and relatedness and positive behavioral outcomes, while brand familiarity consistently emerged as a central driver of consumer responses, offering insights into luxury consumption dynamics beyond the hypothesized customization effects.

6.2 Managerial implications

While the experimental manipulation did not produce significant differences in perceived empowerment across customization levels, the findings of this thesis still offer valuable insights for luxury brand managers, organized around four key implications.

First, the absence of a significant empowerment effect in response to passive video stimuli suggests that customization may only generate meaningful psychological engagement when consumers are genuinely involved in the process. Luxury brands should therefore invest in interactive, hands-on digital touchpoints that authentically place the consumer in control, creating immersive experiences that reinforce psychological involvement and avoid proposing superficial customization options that create the illusion of control without genuine agency.

Second, analyzing the differences of impact between customization levels revealed that the relationship between customization intensity and consumer responses is not linear and may vary across SDT dimensions. While the highest level of customization options tends toward a positive direction for autonomy, it consistently showed negative tendencies for competence and relatedness. This suggests a potential trade-off: while maximal customization activates feelings of freedom, it simultaneously overwhelms consumers' sense of competence and brand attachment. This has a direct practical implication: luxury brands should carefully calibrate the degree of customization they offer, as more is not necessarily better. The optimal level of customization should be sufficient to signal creative freedom without generating cognitive overload.

Third, brand familiarity emerged as a significant factor across all models, confirming that consumers' prior relationship with a brand shapes how they engage with its digital offerings. Digital empowerment initiatives

are unlikely to be equally effective across all consumer segments, and luxury brands should tailor their strategies accordingly while cultivating consistent brand identities across physical and digital environments. This work also invites managers to reconsider assumptions about digital engagement across generations: the absence of any age effect suggests that older consumers may engage with customization just as readily as younger ones.

Finally, this work highlights a fundamental tension between consumer empowerment and the traditional values that define luxury such as craftsmanship, authenticity, and creative direction. Indeed, excessive control granted to the consumer risks undermining these codes. Luxury brands must navigate this balance carefully, designing experiences that feel genuinely empowering without diluting brand authority.

6.3 Theoretical implications

This study offers valuable academic contributions by linking three theoretical constructs that have rarely been examined together: consumer empowerment (through the SDT), luxury consumption, and digitalization (through online customization). While the experimental results did not allow for a full confirmation of the proposed model, this integrative framework advances the body of research on the challenges and opportunities faced by luxury brands in the digital era.

First, by conceptualizing consumer empowerment through the lens of SDT and its three core components, this research proposes a theoretically grounded operationalization of empowerment in a luxury context. Rather than treating empowerment as a single-dimensional construct, this decomposition enables a more nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying luxury consumption and provides a replicable framework for future research in related settings.

Second, this work contributes to the body of research on digital customization. By experimentally manipulating three distinct levels of customization, this study goes beyond a binary treatment of the construct and (although non-significant) provides nuanced insights into how increasing degrees of consumer control may differentially activate the three SDT components, suggesting that the effect is not always linear.

The results further highlight the role of perceived relatedness in shaping purchase intention, as well as the influence of both autonomy and relatedness on word-of-mouth intention. These findings support the idea that psychological need satisfaction is crucial in luxury consumption, even when the initial trigger (here, customization) did not produce the expected effect.

Overall, these findings show that while investigating psychological need satisfaction is theoretically relevant in luxury contexts, the ability of short-term digital experiences to activate it remains limited. They suggest that SDT needs may vary depending on context and depth of interaction, rather than being uniformly activated. Consequently, although SDT dimensions result in behavioral outcomes, they may require deeper or repeated interactions to emerge.

Third, the conceptual table developed in the literature review, which systematically maps digital touchpoints onto SDT components and synthesizes existing scholarly support for each relationship, represents an original theoretical contribution to the literature on luxury digitalization.

Finally, the examination of age and brand familiarity as moderating variables contributes to a more robust theoretical model. While no significant moderating effect of age was identified in the relationship between customization and perceived competence, the absence of a negative effect suggests that older consumers may not necessarily experience lower psychological engagement with digital customization experiences in luxury contexts. Brand familiarity, on the other hand, emerged as a strong, meaningful factor in shaping consumers' responses individually (although no moderation effect with relatedness was supported),

reinforcing the importance of prior consumer–brand relationships in reactions to digital experiences. This finding further highlights the central role of brand relationship in luxury consumption contexts and supports the integration of brand-related variables into future research.

6.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

While this work has provided interesting insights on the interactions between digital touchpoints in the luxury sector and consumer empowerment, it has encountered various limitations, thus opening a broad scope for future research in this field.

Notably, several limitations can be identified regarding the study design and research methodology. First, the experimental design itself was potentially not ideal: although consistent with the research question and hypotheses, the video stimulus may not have been sufficient to trigger an actual feeling of empowerment among respondents, as it placed them in a passive observer role rather than an active participant one. This suggests that the experiment should be replicated using a more immersive and interactive stimulus, ideally by having respondents complete the customization process themselves. In practice, however, this would require a more sophisticated experiment design.

Moreover, while the quantitative design was consistent with the positivist perspective adopted in this study, it restricted the depth of insight that could be gained regarding respondents' subjective experience of empowerment. Future research adopting a mixed-methods approach could complement experimental findings with qualitative data (such as post-experiment in-depth interviews) to gain deeper insights on the subjective mechanisms through which customization translates, or fails to translate, into feelings of empowerment.

Concerning the sample, various limitations can be identified, providing avenues for future research. First, the sample's relatively modest size (n = 101), due to time and resource constraints, may have limited the statistical power of the moderation analyses, potentially increasing the risk of Type II errors ("false negative"). Future research should seek to replicate these findings with larger samples. Second, the sample was predominantly female, which limits the representativeness of male consumers' perceptions in this study. Future research should seek to replicate this experimental design using customization of male-targeted products to assess whether the findings generalize across genders. Last, the use of convenience sampling restricts the representativeness of the study, as respondents were largely drawn from the Walloon region. Further research should replicate this study in markets more representative of global luxury consumption, such as the USA or the APAC [9] area (insights from Bain & Co. (2025), Appendix T) or conduct a cross-continental analysis to assess whether the empowering potential of customization varies across cultures. It may be particularly relevant given that perceptions of both luxury and personal agency differ significantly across national and cultural contexts.

Regarding the design of the questionnaire, first, the limited number of items used to measure each variable may have affected the reliability of the scales, although this was a deliberate choice to minimize respondent fatigue and maximize completion rates. To mitigate this effect, reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Second, this study calls for a broader reflection on the operationalization of relatedness within the SDT framework. In the context of this experiment, brand attachment serves as a relevant and practically meaningful proxy. However, it may not fully capture the social connectedness dimension of relatedness as originally conceptualized by Deci and Ryan (1985). Future research could explore alternative operationalizations (for instance, sense of community or social identity) that may be more sensitive to short-term experimental manipulations.

[9] Asia-Pacific

Moreover, future research could extend the proposed model by incorporating additional moderating variables. As mentioned previously, cultural background represents a particularly promising avenue, as perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness may vary significantly between cultures. Prior customization experience could also be considered, as consumers already familiar with customization processes may respond differently than first-time users. Finally, the notion of self-congruity (Sirgy, 1985), which refers to the degree of alignment between a consumer's self-identity and the brand's image, constitutes an ideal positive moderator: in the context of customization, high self-congruity may amplify empowerment effects by making the co-creation process feel like a more authentic extension of self-expression.

Regarding the variables to be included in future research models, this study also highlights the obvious but crucial importance of brand familiarity across the different models tested. This emphasizes the importance of including brand-related constructs in luxury-specific studies.

Furthermore, the present study focused exclusively on Louis Vuitton handbags, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other product categories and other brands. Customization options and their psychological impact may differ significantly across luxury segments: the degree of customization achievable on a watch, a piece of jewelry, or a tailored suit varies considerably, and may elicit distinct empowerment responses. Replicating this experimental design across a broader range of luxury product categories (for both genders, as suggested above) would therefore constitute a valuable avenue for future research. The current trends in categories of luxury spendings can be found in Appendix A.

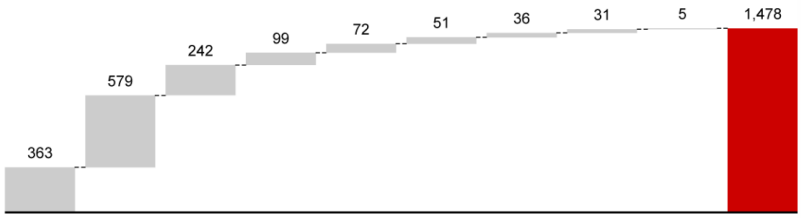
Finally, this study focused on customization as the digital touchpoint of interest, contributing to the growing body of research on digital touchpoints in luxury and their impact on consumer responses. Future research could investigate the empowering potential of other digital touchpoints, such as augmented reality try-on experiences, AI-powered styling recommendations, or immersive virtual showrooms. All of these interactions place the consumer in an increasingly active and personalized role and may be more effective at activating the psychological needs identified by SDT.

Beyond these considerations, this study also opens a broader conceptual debate around the very nature of customization in the luxury sector. A fundamental question emerges: if a luxury product's original design is altered by the consumer, does it still carry the same luxury codes? To what extent should brands retain creative control over their products, and where does meaningful customization end and brand dilution begin? These are not only philosophical questions: they have direct implications for how luxury houses position and protect their identity. As noted by Choi et al. (2022), while moderate levels of customization can enhance purchase intention by satisfying consumers' desire for self-expression, excessive customization risks eroding the signaling value of the product, undermining the very exclusivity that makes luxury desirable. Simultaneously, an overabundance of options may generate decision fatigue and cognitive overload on the consumer side, potentially transforming what should be an empowering experience into an overwhelming one. These concerns were partly highlighted by the results presented in this work (although non-significant), where the highest level of customization seemed to exert a negative impact on perceived competence and relatedness compared to a smaller range of options. Hence, the presence of a potential U-curve in customization effects should be investigated. More broadly, future research should further investigate the concept of "optimal customization" from a dual perspective: the preservation of creative control and brand integrity on the managerial side, and the mitigation of cognitive overload on the consumer side.

Appendices

A) Appendix A – Insights of the luxury market in 2024 and 2025

Worldwide luxury spending, 2024E (€ billions)



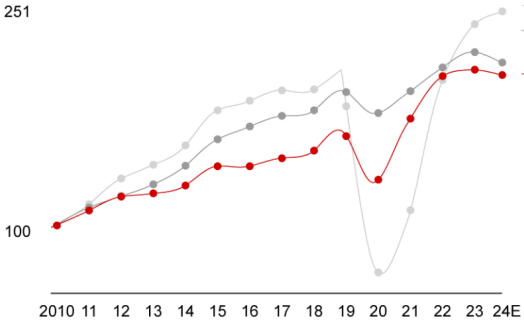
	Personal luxury goods	Luxury cars	Luxury hospitality	Fine wines and spirits	Gourmet food and fine dining	High-end furniture and house-wares	Fine art	Private jets and yachts	Luxury cruises	Total
2019–24E overall growth at current exchange rates	27%–29%	5–6	16–18	29–31	35–36	20–22	–2–0	29–34	130–140	**15–17**
2023–24E growth										
at current exchange rates	–2%	–5	4	0	8	–2	–7	13	30	**–3 to –1**
at constant exchange rates	0%	–3	5	2	10	–1	–7	14	31	**–1 to 1**

Note: E indicates estimated value
Source: Bain & Company

Spendings through the whole luxury industry in 2024
Source: Bain & Company, 2025

Luxury consumers continued to shift their spending toward experiences, which again grew faster than goods

Growth of global luxury spending by segment (indexed to 100 in 2010)



	CAGR 2010–19	CAGR 2019–24E	CAGR 2023–24E
Experiences	9%	4%	5%
Experience-based goods	8%	2%	–3%
Personal goods	6%	5%	–2%

Notes: Growth shown at current exchange rates; E indicates estimated value; experience-based goods include fine art, luxury cars, private jets and yachts, fine wines and spirits, and gourmet food; personal goods include high-end furniture/housewares and personal luxury goods; experiences include luxury hospitality, cruises, and fine dining
Source: Bain & Company

The trend of experiential luxury
Source: Bain & Company, 2025

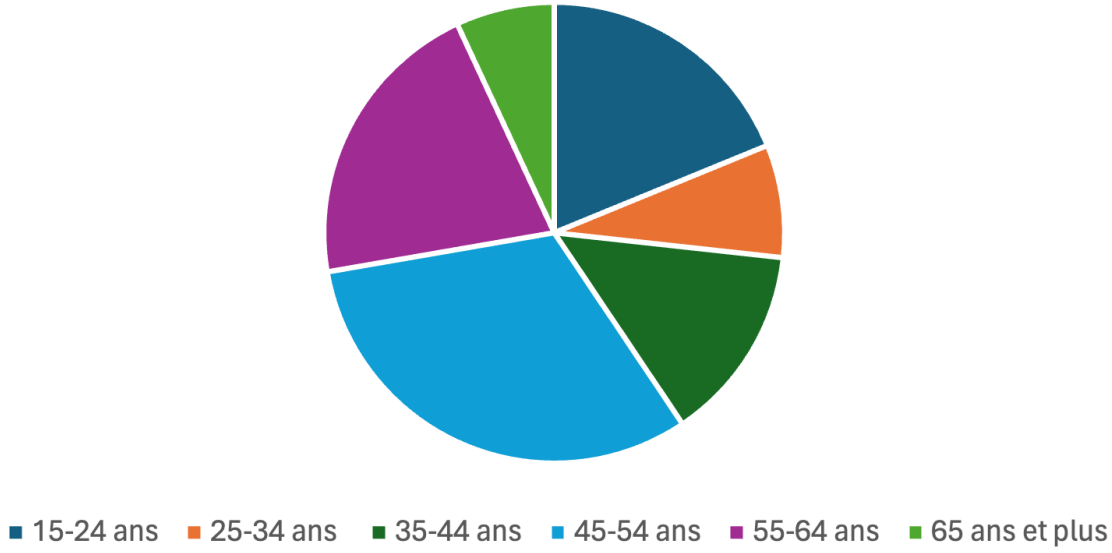
Previsions for online retailing by 2030
Source: Bain & Company, 2025

B) Appendix B – Links towards the video stimulus (experiment)

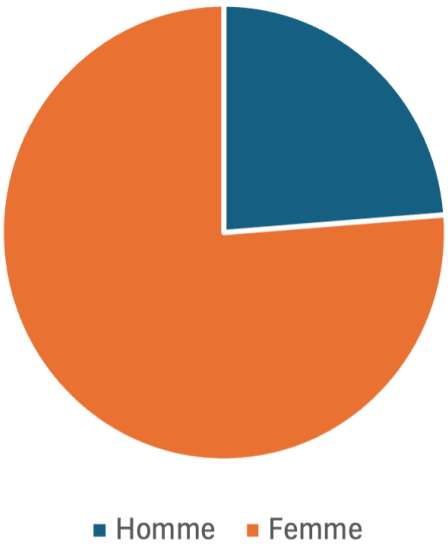
Level 1 – No customization https://youtu.be/Bbp6lvVNAmM
Level 2 – Middle customization https://youtu.be/k9KTCqcEqhA
Level 3 - Maximal customization https://youtu.be/AuNcRWb7QQQ

C) Appendix C – Visual representation of sample characteristics

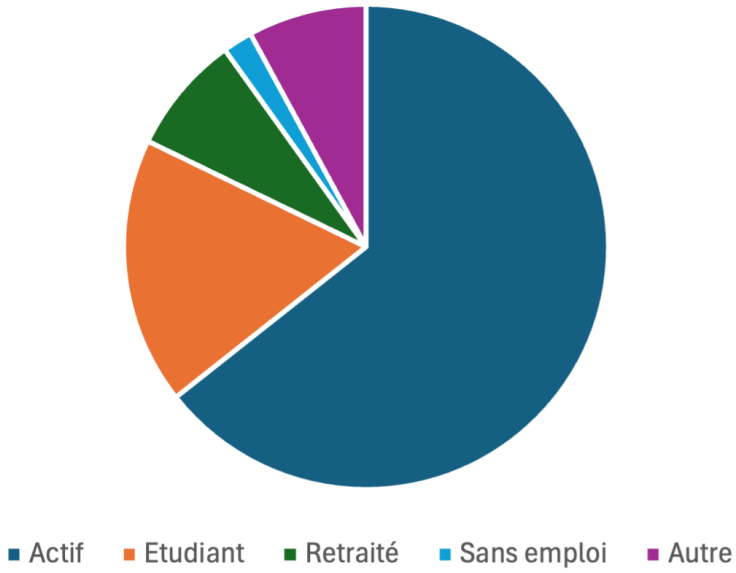
Age proportion (Source: Excel)



Gender proportion (Source: Excel)

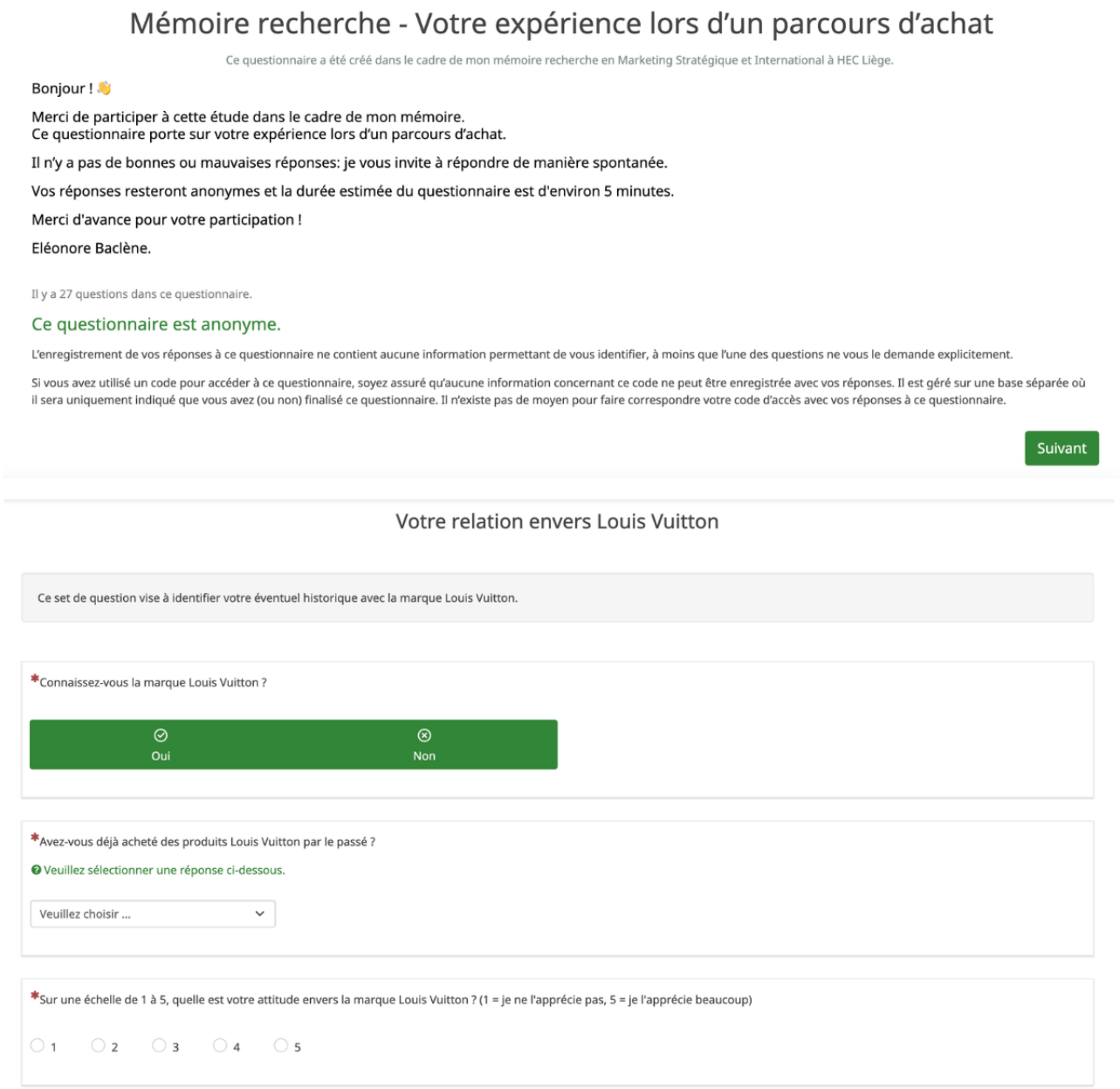


Occupation proportion (Source: Excel)



D) Appendix D – Questionnaire (French version)

Source: own, based on academically validated scales and translation guide



Mémoire recherche - Votre expérience lors d'un parcours d'achat

Ce questionnaire a été créé dans le cadre de mon mémoire recherche en Marketing Stratégique et International à HEC Liège.

Bonjour ! 👋

Merci de participer à cette étude dans le cadre de mon mémoire.
Ce questionnaire porte sur votre expérience lors d'un parcours d'achat.

Il n'y a pas de bonnes ou mauvaises réponses: je vous invite à répondre de manière spontanée.

Vos réponses resteront anonymes et la durée estimée du questionnaire est d'environ 5 minutes.

Merci d'avance pour votre participation !

Eléonore Baclène.

Il y a 27 questions dans ce questionnaire.

Ce questionnaire est anonyme.

L'enregistrement de vos réponses à ce questionnaire ne contient aucune information permettant de vous identifier, à moins que l'une des questions ne vous le demande explicitement.

Si vous avez utilisé un code pour accéder à ce questionnaire, soyez assuré qu'aucune information concernant ce code ne peut être enregistrée avec vos réponses. Il est géré sur une base séparée où il sera uniquement indiqué que vous avez (ou non) finalisé ce questionnaire. Il n'existe pas de moyen pour faire correspondre votre code d'accès avec vos réponses à ce questionnaire.

Suivant

Votre relation envers Louis Vuitton

Ce set de question vise à identifier votre éventuel historique avec la marque Louis Vuitton.

*Connaissez-vous la marque Louis Vuitton ?

Oui Non

*Avez-vous déjà acheté des produits Louis Vuitton par le passé ?

Veuillez sélectionner une réponse ci-dessous.

Veuillez choisir ...

*Sur une échelle de 1 à 5, quelle est votre attitude envers la marque Louis Vuitton ? (1 = je ne l'apprécie pas, 5 = je l'apprécie beaucoup)

1 2 3 4 5

Votre rôle dans le processus d'achat

(1 = pas du tout d'accord, 5 = tout à fait d'accord)

*Si j'expérimentais moi-même ce parcours d'achat, j'aurais l'impression d'avoir le choix et d'être libre.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*Si j'expérimentais moi-même ce parcours d'achat, j'aurais le sentiment de pouvoir faire ce que je veux vraiment.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*Si j'expérimentais moi-même ce parcours d'achat, j'aurais le sentiment de pouvoir exprimer qui je suis vraiment *(à travers l'objet acheté)*.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Votre aisance dans le processus d'achat

(1 = pas du tout d'accord, 5 = tout à fait d'accord)

*Si je devais réaliser le processus moi-même, j'aurais l'impression que je peux l'accomplir (= atteindre mon but) avec succès.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*Si je devais réaliser ce processus d'achat moi-même, je m'en sentirais capable.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*Si je devais accomplir le processus moi-même, je serais submergé(e) par les choses que je me sens incapable de faire.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Votre sentiment envers la marque

Répondez aux questions ci-dessous en imaginant que vous venez d'accomplir vous-même le processus qui a été présenté en vidéo et que vous avez fait les choix vous-mêmes.

(1 = pas du tout d'accord, 5 = tout à fait d'accord)

*A quel point la marque Louis Vuitton fait-elle maintenant partie de vous et de qui vous êtes ?

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*A quel point vous sentez-vous personnellement connecté.e à la marque Louis Vuitton ?

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Vos intentions suite à cette expérience

Merci de répondre aux questions ci-dessous comme si vous veniez d'effectuer vous-même le processus d'achat, avec vos propres choix. (1 = pas du tout d'accord, 5 = tout à fait d'accord).

*Si je devais acheter un produit de luxe, je considèrerais la possibilité de me tourner vers cette marque.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*Si je faisais du shopping dans le secteur du luxe, la possibilité que j'achète cette marque serait grande.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*Mon intention d'achat envers cette marque serait élevée si je faisais du shopping dans le secteur du luxe.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*La probabilité pour que je considère l'idée d'acheter des produits de cette marque de luxe est grande.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Votre communication autour de cette expérience

Merci de répondre aux questions ci-dessous comme si vous veniez d'effectuer vous-même le processus d'achat, avec vos propres choix. (1 = pas du tout d'accord, 5 = tout à fait d'accord).

*Je suis susceptible de dire des choses positives sur cette marque à d'autres personnes.

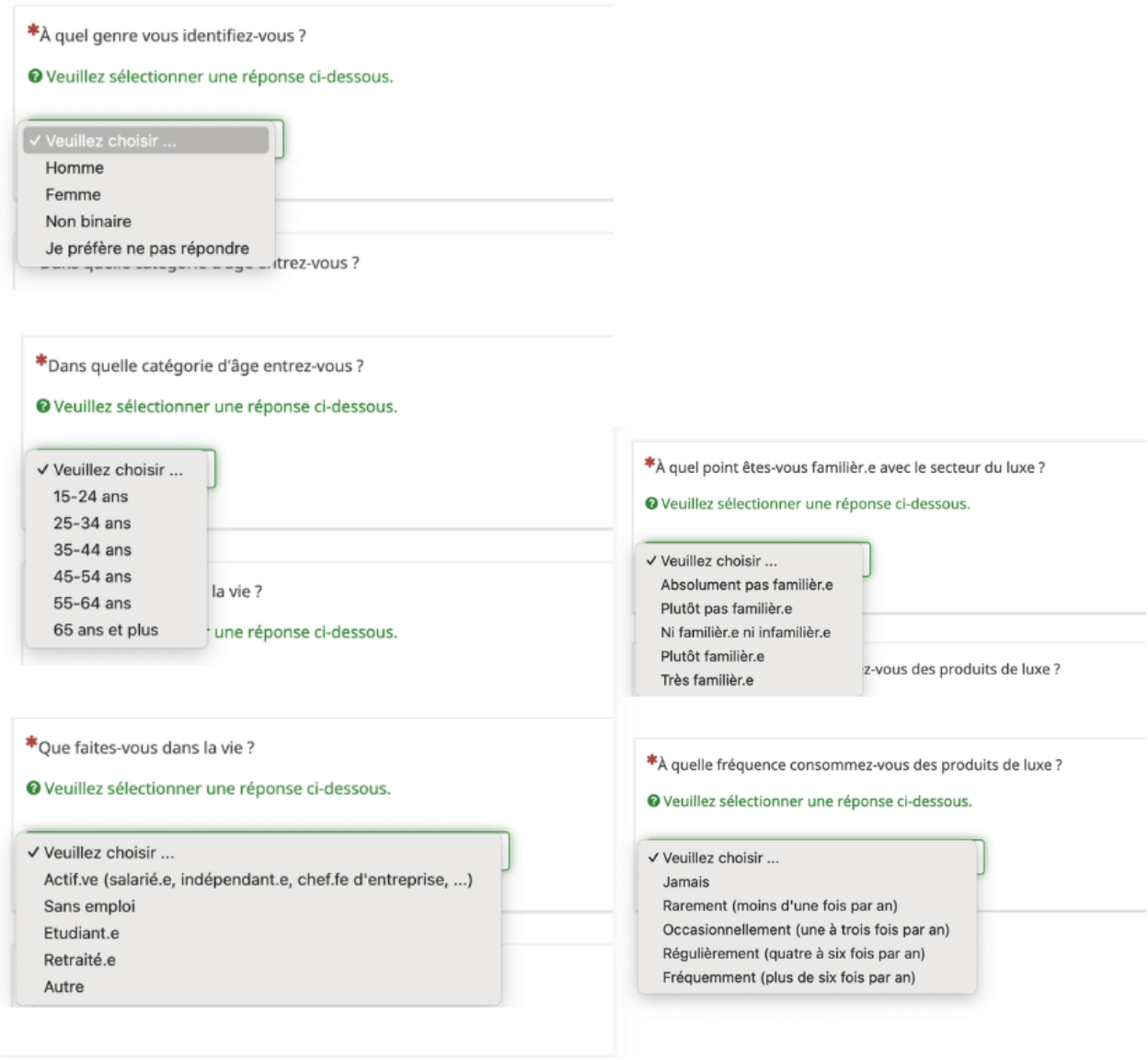
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*Je suis susceptible de recommander cette marque à quelqu'un qui me demande conseil.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

*Je considèrerais cette marque comme mon premier choix pour acheter un produit de luxe.

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5



Merci beaucoup pour votre participation !

Ce questionnaire étant anonyme, vos réponses resteront confidentielles.

Vos réponses contribueront directement à mon mémoire et sont très précieuses.

Merci encore pour votre temps et votre aide !

Eléonore Baclène.

E) Appendix E – Coding for variables

This section is dedicated to the codes used during data clean-up in Microsoft Excel to replace text values with numerical values. Most of the data were already scales, but some variables were coded to facilitate the importation into JASP.

Brand awareness – Do you know the brand Louis Vuitton?

Yes	1
No	0

Past history - Have you purchased Louis Vuitton items in the past?

Never	1
Once or twice	2
Occasionally (more than twice)	3
Frequently (roughly once a year)	4

Gender

Male	0
Female	1

Age

15-24	1
25-34	2
35-44	3
45-54	4
55-64	5
65+	6

Luxury familiarity – How familiar are you with the luxury sector?

Absolutely unfamiliar	1
Rather unfamiliar	2
Not familiar nor unfamiliar	3
Rather familiar	4
Very familiar	5

Luxury frequency – How frequently do you buy luxury items?

Never	1
Rarely	2
Occasionally	3
Regularly	4
Frequently	5

F) Appendix F - Results of Descriptive Statistics with Skewness, Kurtosis and Shapiro-Wilk tests

Descriptive Statistics ▼

	AM	CM	RM	PIM	WM	LM	LuxM	P02
Valid	101	101	101	101	101	101	101	101
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.079	4.046	2.035	2.629	2.617	1.789	2.441	3.485
Std. Deviation	0.974	0.855	1.156	1.385	1.249	0.637	1.080	1.547
Skewness	−0.021	−0.589	0.870	0.306	0.236	0.827	0.247	−0.360
Std. Error of Skewness	0.240	0.240	0.240	0.240	0.240	0.240	0.240	0.240
Kurtosis	−0.469	−0.589	−0.167	−1.250	−1.174	0.016	−0.749	−0.945
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.476	0.476	0.476	0.476	0.476	0.476	0.476	0.476
Shapiro-Wilk	0.979	0.903	0.828	0.896	0.926	0.901	0.932	0.893
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk	0.116	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Minimum	1.000	2.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.667	1.000	1.000
Maximum	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000	3.333	5.000	6.000

G) Appendix G – H1a analysis

Experimental H1A

Model Summary - AM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.974
M_1	0.355	0.126	0.090	0.930

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, RAND01

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	11.976	4	2.994	3.465	0.011
	Residual	82.946	96	0.864		
	Total	94.922	100			

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, RAND01
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized[a]	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	3.079	0.097		31.763	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	2.308	0.310		7.451	< .001		
	LuxM	−0.067	0.106	−0.075	−0.637	0.526	0.814	1.228
	LM	0.551	0.181	0.360	3.041	0.003	0.806	1.241
	RAND01 (2)	−0.261	0.240		−1.087	0.280	0.986	1.014
	RAND01 (3)	0.080	0.229		0.351	0.726		

[a] Standardized coefficients can only be computed for continuous predictors.

H) Appendix H – H1b analysis

Experimental H1B ▼

Model Summary - CM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.855
M_1	0.233	0.054	0.015	0.849

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, RAND01

ANOVA ▼

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	3.984	4	0.996	1.383	0.246
	Residual	69.133	96	0.720		
	Total	73.118	100			

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, RAND01
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized[a]	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	4.046	0.085		47.555	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	3.780	0.283		13.366	< .001		
	LuxM	0.047	0.097	0.060	0.490	0.625	0.814	1.228
	LM	0.159	0.165	0.119	0.963	0.338	0.806	1.241
	RAND01 (2)	−0.022	0.219		−0.101	0.919	0.986	1.014
	RAND01 (3)	−0.328	0.209		−1.570	0.120		

[a] Standardized coefficients can only be computed for continuous predictors.

I) Appendix I – H1c analysis

Experimental H1C ▼

Model Summary - RM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.156
M_1	0.615	0.379	0.353	0.930

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, RAND01

ANOVA ▼

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	50.623	4	12.656	14.637	< .001
	Residual	83.006	96	0.865		
	Total	133.629	100			

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, RAND01
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized[a]	t	p
M_0	(Intercept)	2.035	0.115		17.689	< .001
M_1	(Intercept)	0.029	0.310		0.093	0.926
	LuxM	0.157	0.106	0.147	1.487	0.140
	LM	0.946	0.181	0.522	5.225	< .001
	RAND01 (2)	0.011	0.240		0.046	0.963
	RAND01 (3)	−0.192	0.229		−0.837	0.404

[a] Standardized coefficients can only be computed for continuous predictors.

J) Appendix J – H1a perception-based

Model Summary - AM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.974
M_1	0.431	0.186	0.161	0.892

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, MAN01

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	17.661	3	5.887	7.391	< .001
	Residual	77.261	97	0.797		
	Total	94.922	100			

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, MAN01
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	3.079	0.097		31.763	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	1.598	0.347		4.603	< .001		
	LuxM	−0.029	0.101	−0.032	−0.292	0.771	0.676	1.480
	LM	0.413	0.175	0.270	2.363	0.020	0.643	1.554
	MAN01	0.270	0.086	0.296	3.130	0.002	0.940	1.064

K) Appendix K – H1b perception-based

Model Summary - CM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.855
M_1	0.164	0.027	−0.003	0.856

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, MAN01

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	1.974	3	0.658	0.897	0.446
	Residual	71.144	97	0.733		
	Total	73.118	100			

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, MAN01
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients ▼

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	4.046	0.085		47.555	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	3.820	0.333		11.470	< .001		
	LuxM	0.059	0.096	0.074	0.608	0.544	0.676	1.480
	LM	0.143	0.168	0.106	0.852	0.396	0.643	1.554
	MAN01	−0.057	0.083	−0.071	−0.691	0.491	0.940	1.064

L) Appendix L – H1c perception-based

Model Summary - RM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.156
M_1	0.617	0.381	0.362	0.924

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, MAN01

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	50.885	3	16.962	19.884	< .001
	Residual	82.744	97	0.853		
	Total	133.629	100			

Note. M_1 includes LuxM, LM, MAN01
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	2.035	0.115		17.689	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	−0.279	0.359		−0.777	0.439		
	LuxM	0.180	0.104	0.168	1.731	0.087	0.676	1.480
	LM	0.870	0.181	0.480	4.818	< .001	0.643	1.554
	MAN01	0.105	0.089	0.097	1.177	0.242	0.940	1.064

M) Appendix M – H2 moderation analysis

Model Summary - CM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.855
M_1	0.469	0.220	0.037	0.839

Note. M_1 includes P02, LM, LuxM, RAND01, P02:RAND01

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	16.088	19	0.847	1.203	0.277
	Residual	57.029	81	0.704		
	Total	73.118	100			

Note. M_1 includes P02, LM, LuxM, RAND01, P02:RAND01
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients ▼

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized[a]	t	p
M_0	(Intercept)	4.046	0.085		47.555	< .001
M_1	(Intercept)	3.997	0.381		10.486	< .001
	P02 (2)	−0.149	0.680		−0.218	0.828
	P02 (3)	−0.496	0.671		−0.738	0.463
	P02 (4)	−0.356	0.405		−0.881	0.381
	P02 (5)	−0.417	0.423		−0.986	0.327
	P02 (6)	−2.140	0.895		−2.391	0.019
	LM	0.262	0.192	0.195	1.365	0.176
	LuxM	0.026	0.111	0.033	0.237	0.814
	RAND01 (2)	−0.431	0.515		−0.837	0.405
	RAND01 (3)	−0.586	0.436		−1.345	0.183
	P02 (2) ✻ RAND01 (2)	0.016	1.003		0.016	0.987
	P02 (3) ✻ RAND01 (2)	0.897	0.853		1.051	0.296
	P02 (4) ✻ RAND01 (2)	0.421	0.629		0.670	0.505
	P02 (5) ✻ RAND01 (2)	0.469	0.707		0.664	0.509
	P02 (6) ✻ RAND01 (2)	0.230	1.296		0.178	0.859
	P02 (2) ✻ RAND01 (3)	0.486	0.849		0.572	0.569
	P02 (3) ✻ RAND01 (3)	−0.223	0.854		−0.260	0.795
	P02 (4) ✻ RAND01 (3)	0.391	0.577		0.677	0.500
	P02 (5) ✻ RAND01 (3)	0.382	0.642		0.594	0.554
	P02 (6) ✻ RAND01 (3)	1.783	1.028		1.735	0.086

N) Appendix N – H3a/b/c analysis

Model Summary - PIM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.385
M_1	0.738	0.544	0.520	0.959

Note. M_1 includes AM, CM, RM, LuxM, LM

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	104.297	5	20.859	22.672	< .001
	Residual	87.405	95	0.920		
	Total	191.702	100			

Note. M_1 includes AM, CM, RM, LuxM, LM
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	2.629	0.138		19.081	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	−0.218	0.532		−0.411	0.682		
	AM	0.192	0.119	0.135	1.612	0.110	0.680	1.470
	CM	−0.020	0.120	−0.013	−0.170	0.865	0.870	1.149
	RM	0.423	0.118	0.353	3.586	< .001	0.494	2.022
	LuxM	−0.086	0.111	−0.067	−0.773	0.442	0.641	1.559
	LM	0.942	0.208	0.434	4.529	< .001	0.523	1.910

O) Appendix O – Stepwise regression H3a/b/c

Model Summary - PIM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.385
M_1	0.648	0.420	0.414	1.060
M_2	0.725	0.526	0.516	0.963

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	80.472	1	80.472	71.624	< .001
	Residual	111.230	99	1.124		
	Total	191.702	100			
M_2	Regression	100.815	2	50.408	54.353	< .001
	Residual	90.886	98	0.927		
	Total	191.702	100			

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	2.629	0.138		19.081	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	0.111	0.316		0.350	0.727		
	LM	1.408	0.166	0.648	8.463	< .001	1.000	1.000
M_2	(Intercept)	0.062	0.287		0.215	0.830		
	LM	0.882	0.188	0.406	4.688	< .001	0.645	1.551
	RM	0.486	0.104	0.406	4.684	< .001	0.645	1.551

Note. The following covariates were considered but not included: AM, CM, LuxM.

P) Appendix P – H4a/b/c analysis

Model Summary - WM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.249
M_1	0.765	0.585	0.563	0.826

Note. M_1 includes AM, CM, RM, LuxM, LM

ANOVA ▼

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	91.343	5	18.269	26.806	< .001
	Residual	64.743	95	0.682		
	Total	156.086	100			

Note. M_1 includes AM, CM, RM, LuxM, LM
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	2.617	0.124		21.053	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	−0.557	0.458		−1.216	0.227		
	AM	0.233	0.103	0.181	2.264	0.026	0.680	1.470
	CM	0.131	0.103	0.089	1.262	0.210	0.870	1.149
	RM	0.367	0.102	0.339	3.613	< .001	0.494	2.022
	LuxM	−0.208	0.095	−0.180	−2.182	0.032	0.641	1.559
	LM	0.945	0.179	0.482	5.279	< .001	0.523	1.910

Q) Appendix Q – Stepwise regression H4a/b/c

Model Summary - WM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.249
M_1	0.652	0.426	0.420	0.952
M_2	0.721	0.519	0.510	0.875
M_3	0.749	0.560	0.547	0.841
M_4	0.760	0.578	0.561	0.828

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	66.449	1	66.449	73.390	< .001
	Residual	89.637	99	0.905		
	Total	156.086	100			
M_2	Regression	81.060	2	40.530	52.942	< .001
	Residual	75.025	98	0.766		
	Total	156.086	100			
M_3	Regression	87.451	3	29.150	41.198	< .001
	Residual	68.634	97	0.708		
	Total	156.086	100			
M_4	Regression	90.257	4	22.564	32.906	< .001
	Residual	65.828	96	0.686		
	Total	156.086	100			

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	2.617	0.124		21.053	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	0.329	0.283		1.160	0.249		
	LM	1.279	0.149	0.652	8.567	< .001	1.000	1.000
M_2	(Intercept)	−0.586	0.334		−1.753	0.083		
	LM	1.079	0.145	0.550	7.450	< .001	0.899	1.112
	AM	0.414	0.095	0.323	4.369	< .001	0.899	1.112
M_3	(Intercept)	−0.363	0.330		−1.099	0.274		
	LM	0.815	0.165	0.416	4.952	< .001	0.644	1.554
	AM	0.299	0.099	0.233	3.032	0.003	0.765	1.306
	RM	0.295	0.098	0.273	3.005	0.003	0.549	1.823
M_4	(Intercept)	−0.167	0.339		−0.492	0.624		
	LM	0.968	0.179	0.494	5.414	< .001	0.529	1.891
	AM	0.273	0.098	0.213	2.780	0.007	0.752	1.330
	RM	0.335	0.099	0.310	3.396	< .001	0.527	1.898
	LuxM	−0.192	0.095	−0.166	−2.023	0.046	0.654	1.530

Note. The following covariate was considered but not included: CM.

R) Appendix R – H5a moderation analysis

Model Summary - PIM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.385
M_1	0.729	0.531	0.516	0.963

Note. M_1 includes RM_centered , LM_centered , RM_centered :LM_centered

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	101.776	3	33.925	36.594	< .001
	Residual	89.925	97	0.927		
	Total	191.702	100			

Note. M_1 includes RM_centered , LM_centered , RM_centered :LM_centered
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	2.629	0.138		19.081	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	2.686	0.111		24.196	< .001		
	RM_centered	0.494	0.104	0.412	4.748	< .001	0.641	1.560
	LM_centered	0.981	0.211	0.451	4.637	< .001	0.511	1.959
	RM_centered ✻ LM_centered	−0.131	0.129	−0.086	−1.018	0.311	0.672	1.488

S) Appendix S – H5b moderation analysis

Model Summary - WM

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
M_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.249
M_1	0.723	0.523	0.509	0.876

Note. M_1 includes RM_centered , LM_centered , RM_centered :LM_centered

ANOVA ▼

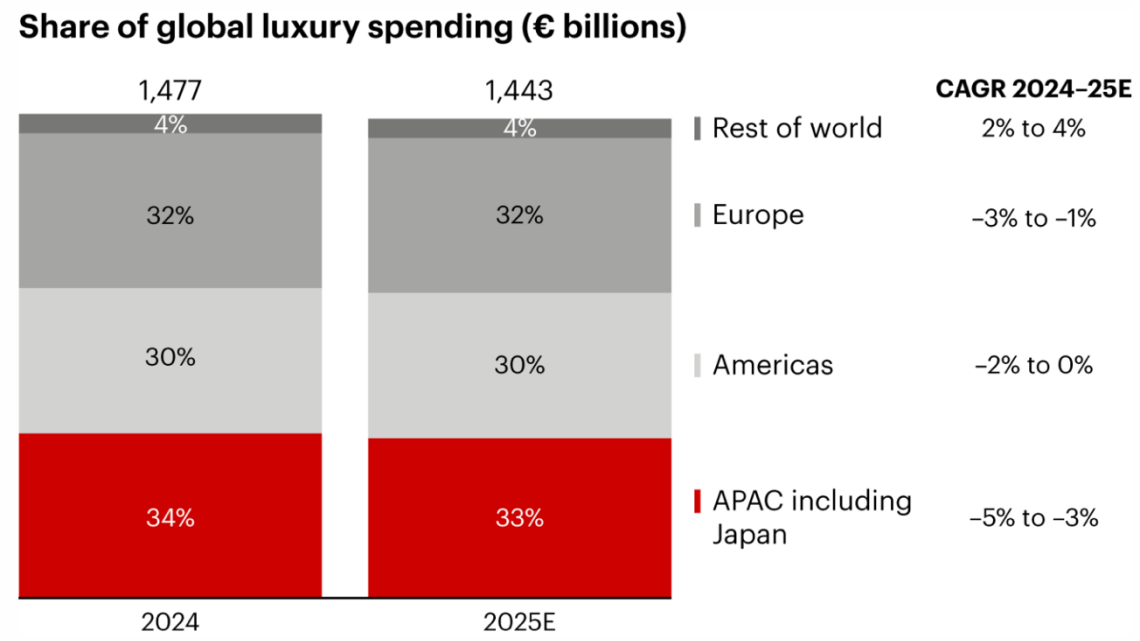
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
M_1	Regression	81.684	3	27.228	35.498	< .001
	Residual	74.402	97	0.767		
	Total	156.086	100			

Note. M_1 includes RM_centered , LM_centered , RM_centered :LM_centered
Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

							Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
M_0	(Intercept)	2.617	0.124		21.053	< .001		
M_1	(Intercept)	2.667	0.101		26.416	< .001		
	RM_centered	0.417	0.095	0.386	4.409	< .001	0.641	1.560
	LM_centered	0.922	0.192	0.470	4.792	< .001	0.511	1.959
	RM_centered ✻ LM_centered	−0.115	0.117	−0.084	−0.981	0.329	0.672	1.488

T) Appendix T – Global luxury spending by region



Source: Bain & Company, 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The luxury sector stands at a pivotal crossroads. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and driven by a broader shift from material ownership toward experiential consumption, luxury brands must now navigate a delicate balance between heritage and digital innovation. In this context, product customization (enabled by digital technologies) has emerged as one of the most promising yet underexplored strategic tools available to luxury brands.

This thesis examines how digital customization shapes consumer perceived empowerment and, in turn, influences behavioral responses. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a well-established psychological framework centered on the human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, this research conceptualizes empowerment not as a mere marketing outcome, but as a deeper psychological construct with meaningful consequences for brand engagement and loyalty.

To test this, a controlled experiment was designed in which participants were randomly assigned to one of three levels of customization proposed by Louis Vuitton, from no customization to its maximal form. Results shed light on the psychological mechanisms at play when consumers are granted (or denied) creative agency over luxury products. Beyond the core relationship between customization and empowerment, the study also investigates the role of moderating factors such as brand familiarity and generational differences, offering a more nuanced and actionable picture for practitioners.

Critically, this research does not shy away from the tensions inherent to luxury customization: the risk of diluting exclusivity and signaling value, as well as the phenomenon of choice paralysis when customization options become overwhelming. These dual risks represent important boundaries for any brand considering this strategy.

For marketers and industry leaders, the findings offer concrete guidance on how to design customization experiences that genuinely empower consumers, strengthen brand relationships, and drive meaningful behavioral outcomes without compromising the codes that make luxury, luxury.

(290 words).

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS: luxury, digital customization, consumer empowerment, Self-Determination Theory, purchase intention, word-of-mouth, digitalization

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