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**LUXURY BRAND EXPERIENCES AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY FOR  
MILLENNIALS: THE ROLE OF SELF-EXPANSION**

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# **LUXURY BRAND EXPERIENCES AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY FOR MILLENNIALS: THE ROLE OF SELF-EXPANSION**

## **Abstract**

Luxury brands, with their capacity to provide multi-dimensional experiences, serve as resources to enrich consumers' sense of self, a process known as self-expansion, which is a strong motivational factor for developing a relationship and strengthening identification with a brand. Self-expansion appears particularly attractive for Millennials, who are at a stage of life when they seek out opportunities for self-exploration. This study examines the impact of luxury brand experiences using a sample of 264 Millennials and demonstrates how such experiences strengthen relationship quality and consumer-brand identification through self-expansion and highlights the moderating role of novelty-seeking. These findings contribute to research on luxury brands by shedding new light on consumers' motivations related to broadening their sense of selves. Luxury brands offer more than mere conspicuous or hedonic benefits; they can also represent opportunities to enlarge an individual's perspective and self-content, in contrast to some criticism of luxury consumption on moral grounds.

## **Key words**

Luxury; Self-expansion; Millennials; Brand experience

## 1. Introduction

The luxury market is expected to remain dynamic over the next few years, with 85% of its growth fueled by Millennials, who will represent 45% of the global personal luxury goods market by 2025 (Shin, Eastman, & Mothersbaugh, 2017), with projected spending of more than \$65 billion per year. Millennials represent a particular group of individuals born between 1979 and 1995, who share common values, beliefs, and experiences (Howe & Strauss, 2009). Studies have shown that Millennials are more sophisticated shoppers, more influenced by the symbolic aspects of luxury brands (Shin, Eastman, & Motherbaugh, 2017), and more motivated to consume for status than older customers (Eastman & Liu, 2012). Millennials are also eager to exercise social influence (Butcher et al., 2017), which impacts their purchase intentions toward luxury products (Soh et al., 2017). Therefore, the luxury brand experience, which in this study refers to internal consumer responses evoked by brand-related stimuli when consumers interact with, shop for, and consume brands (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009), could be unique for Millennials. Although Millennial targets seem particularly attractive in terms of purchasing power and willingness to buy, Millennials also pose a challenge to marketers because it is difficult for brands to create strong emotional and psychological attachment with them (Adkins, 2016).

Practitioners and researchers in luxury marketing have shown significant interest in better understanding Millennials' consumption behaviors, with a focus on their use of luxury goods as a mean to differentiate themselves, be unique, and signal status (Mundel, Huddleston, & Vodermeier, 2017; Gentina, Shrum, & Lowrey, 2016). However, although it has been argued that Millennials value experiences over possessions (Oyedele & Simpson, 2018), little work has been done to investigate their responses to luxury brand experiences. Delivering a superior customer experience is no longer simply an option, but an expectation in luxury (Chandon, Laurent & Valette-Florence, 2017), where consumption is not only about the pursuit of materialism but also the search for enrichment through indulgent, recreational, and cultural experiences. Marketers in the luxury domain respond to this desire for brand experience by allowing customers to enter the brand's universe through stories about its heritage, emotional stimulation, and sensorial discoveries. For instance, Chanel included a catalog of stories on its website as a window "*Inside Chanel*," giving visitors the opportunity to learn about the history and discover the know-how of the brand.

The goal of the present study is to probe further into how consumers process luxury brand experiences. Despite the acknowledged need for deeper understanding of brand experience in the luxury domain (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2017), limited research has investigated the mechanisms through which experience allows consumers to develop a deep relationship with luxury brands. Much remains unknown regarding the luxury brand experience and its relationship to the self during the life stage between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood, which is a period of self-focus and self-exploration with unique characteristics (Arnett, 2007). Throughout their teenage years, Millennials developed an independent self-view and, as they reach adulthood, they become open to new experiences (Ryff, 1989) and search for opportunities to advance their knowledge, experience new emotions, and express all facets of their personality (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014). Opportunities for self-expansion can be more particularly attractive for Millennials also due to a generation effect, as constant connection with and stimulation from tremendous amount of information may fuel a stronger desire among Millennials to invest in the experience associated with the brands they own (Mundel, Huddleston, & Vodermeier, 2017).

This research builds on the tenets of self-expansion theory to investigate how luxury experiences allow Millennials to enhance their sense of self. Multi-dimensional luxury experiences create opportunities to learn, acquire skills, and engage in rich emotional or sensorial discoveries, which in turn give rise to an enriched self-concept. To our knowledge, the unique opportunity for self-growth offered by luxury brand experiences has never been examined in past research. We thus contribute to the literature by adding a new driver to the consumption of luxury beyond hedonic or social motivations. Moreover, we complement past research on consumer–brand relationships, particularly on consumer–brand identification, by suggesting that consumers may also identify with brands that are not perceived as being similar to the self at first but which provide an opportunity for self-expansion. We also add to the knowledge on self-expansion by uncovering one pathway explaining how a relationship with a brand may fuel a sense of self-growth. Specifically, we demonstrate that an intense brand experience provides opportunities for social, intellectual, emotional, and sensorial stimulation, which allow individuals to self-expand.

In this study, we first discuss the luxury brand experience and delineate its dimensions. Second, we elaborate on the role of the brand experience in building brand identification and relationships through a connection with the “self” as an intrinsic motivational factor. Third, we

discuss the moderating role played by novelty-seeking as part of the influence of self-expansion on brand identification and on relationship quality. Fourth, the methodology and study design are described and the proposed empirical model is tested using PLS (partial least-squares) estimation methods. Finally, results of the model fit and conclusions are discussed in the context of self-expansion theory. The study ends with a presentation of theoretical contributions to current knowledge on luxury consumption, consumer–brand relationships, and self-expansion, and with insights that can help managers in the luxury industry to better target and retain Millennials by allowing them to enrich their sense of self.

## **2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses**

### *2.1. Luxury brand experience and self-expansion*

A brand experience can be defined as subjective internal consumer responses evoked by brand-related stimuli when consumers interact with, shop for, or consume brands (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). These interactions expose customers to product attributes and brand-related stimuli, which include brand’s design and identity, packaging, and marketing communications as well as the environments in which the brand is marketed or sold. This array of interactions involves multi-sensory, fantasy, and emotive aspect of the product use (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) beyond pure utilitarian value (Gentile et al., 2007). Brand experiences that offer pleasure and meaning lead to positive emotions and enhanced satisfaction (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2014; Kim & Ko, 2012) compared with material purchases (Gilovich, Kumar, & Jampol, 2015).

Nysveen and Pedersen (2014) argue that most conceptualizations of the brand experience include the notion that experiences are subjective, result from multiple touch points between the brand and the consumer, and are a multi-dimensional construct due to involving different types of consumer responses. Dube and Le Bel (2003) emphasize the emotional, intellectual, physical, and social pleasure dimensions. Gentile et al. (2007) distinguish sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, and relations components of brand experiences. Schmitt (2010, 1999) states that brand experiences provide sensory, feeling, thinking, acting, and relating values. In particular, the “relate” dimension expands beyond the personal, connecting individuals with a broader social system. This dimension reflects the relational aspirational content of the

experience, including the desire to relate to a reference group and be perceived positively by others.

Luxury brand–related stimuli may be particularly relevant to providing intense experiences compared with mundane, low-involvement products (Reimann & Aron, 2009). The unique characteristics of luxury brands in terms of heritage, style, quality of materials, craftsmanship and authenticity in the production process, exclusive and prestigious outlets, and expertise (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Okonkwo, 2016) may explain how and why luxury brands trigger peak experiences (McDonald et al., 2009) and a deep sense of meaning or purpose in life (Belk, 1988; Arnould & Price, 1993). As such, luxury brands can be attractive for emerging adults, going through an exploration period (Weinberger, Zavisca, & Silva, 2017). Millennials seek a sense of fulfillment and luxury brands that provide intense experiences may be included in their sense of self and become means to extend it.

A rich perspective to understand how individuals' sense of self can be extended through connection with brands is self-expansion theory, which established that people seek to expand themselves through close relationships (Aron & Aron, 1996; Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2001). The self-expansion model posits that individuals are motivated to broaden their sense of self by acquiring new identities, developing new perspectives, enhancing their capabilities, and gaining resources from their partner (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014). These motives have been described as exploration and self-improvement (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). When this expansion occurs at a rapid pace, it generates high levels of positive affect arousal (Strong & Aron, 2006). Although self-expansion was first developed to describe romantic relationships such as those of married couples (Fraley & Aron, 2004), the theory has been extended to consumer–brand relationships, highlighting that rapid self-expansion can also take place due to interactions between individuals and a brand, for instance through developing a brand romance (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011). Having novel and exciting experiences with a brand allows for enlarging the content of self-definition and taking on new perspectives (Reimann & Aron, 2009).

As noted by Brakus et al. (2009, p.53) “brand experiences vary in strength and intensity; that is, some brand experiences are stronger or more intense than others.” By offering opportunities for cultural discovery, perception to project an enhanced status, aesthetic pleasure, and emotions, luxury brands in particular have a capacity to provide rich and intense experiences that offer pathways for consumers to expand and strengthen their sense of self

(Belk, 1988). The special characteristics of luxury brands mentioned by Dubois et al. (2001) such as excellent quality, high prices, scarcity and uniqueness, aesthetics and poly-sensuality, ancestral heritage and personal history, highlight specific features that allow luxury brands to have such impacts on consumers. For instance, access to unique and original products that have been presented as highly desirable and are sold in exclusive stores contributes to a feeling of being privileged as well as experiencing a pleasurable moment. Use of products high in aesthetics and poly-sensuality arouses the senses when marketers in the luxury domain use talented designers and advanced technology to develop new creative collections. High prices and scarcity can influence the social dimension and thereby reflect a desire to showcase logos of well-known prestigious brands (Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2017). This social dimension of the brand experience is associated with the impression to gain social approval (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999; Wilcox, Kim & Sen, 2009). The heritage and personal history behind luxury brands may fuel the intellectual dimension by presenting the rich history associated with a luxury brand. As such, we argue that luxury brands provide a unique brand experience, one that is more intense and arousing than non-luxury brands. Luxury brands should thus trigger more intense responses (in comparison with non-luxury brands) and in turn provide more opportunities for self-expansion. The following hypotheses have thus been developed:

**Hypothesis 1a:** *Luxury brands stimuli generate more intense brand experiences (affective, sensory, social, and intellectual) in comparison with non-luxury brands.*

**Hypothesis 1b:** *Luxury brands stimuli generate higher level of self-expansion in comparison with non-luxury brands.*

Consumers perceive opportunities for self-expansion when interacting with a brand which provides new perspectives, resources, and identities (Reimann & Aron, 2009). Drawing from the brand experience literature (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009) and the theory of self-expansion, we argue that luxury brand experiences give access to specific resources allowing for consumer self-growth and development. Indeed, through luxury brand experiences, consumers can obtain sensorial pleasures, be in positive moods or emotions, learn about or imagine new worlds, and project an enhanced social image. Self-expansion theorists do not emphasize motivations for future behaviors but rather focus on motivations to access the current partner's (in this case, the brand's) resources to enlarge the individual's sense of self. Moreover, the behavioral dimension of a luxury brand experience did not emerge during our preliminary qualitative phase (see methodology section for details). The perception that



consumers may engage in physical actions did not appear to represent a resource acquired from a luxury brand experience. As such, we did not consider the behavioral dimension of brand experience included in Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009 (*i.e.*,: *I engage in physical actions and behaviors when I use this brand; This brand results in bodily experiences; This brand is not action oriented - R*). We hypothesize that luxury brands stimuli trigger self-expansion through giving access to affective, sensorial, social, and intellectual brand experience dimensions:

**Hypothesis 2:** *The dimensions of brand experience mediate the relationship between the luxury/non-luxury brands and self-expansion, such that*

**Hypothesis 2a:** *The brand experience affective dimension mediates the relationship between the luxury/non-luxury brand and self-expansion.*

**Hypothesis 2b:** *The brand experience sensory dimension mediates the relationship between the luxury/non-luxury brand and self-expansion.*

**Hypothesis 2c:** *The brand experience social dimension mediates the relationship between the luxury/non-luxury brand and self-expansion.*

**Hypothesis 2d:** *The brand experience intellectual dimension mediates the relationship between the luxury/non-luxury brand and self-expansion.*

## *2.2. Self-expansion strengthens brand identification and relationship quality*

Self-expansion theory (Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Mashek, 2004) posits that people possess an inherent motivation to incorporate others (in our context, brands) into their conception of self. As a consumer interacts with a brand, new resources and perspectives become part of that person's cognitive structure of the self (Reimann & Aron, 2009). When inclusion occurs, the partner's novel perspectives, identities, and resources become cognitively linked to one's sense of self. The need for identification is thought to be motivated by people's higher-order self-definitional needs to know and feel good about themselves (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012).

Expansion and feelings of personal growth produce positive affect through increased self-efficacy, which is highly rewarding and pleasurable (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). Thus, after the initial discovery, self-expansion fuels a desire to maintain a relationship with the partner who provides opportunities for expansion of one's repertoire of interests. As such, self-expansion is frequently associated with high levels of relationship quality, defined as reflecting the overall nature of relationships (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). In addition, self-expansion is a proven robust predictor of relationship stability over time (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010). We thus hypothesize that increased self-expansion enhances both a desire to identify with a brand and to continue the relationship:

**Hypothesis 3:** *Self-expansion positively influences brand identification.*

**Hypothesis 4:** *Self-expansion positively influences relationship quality.*

### 2.3. Novelty-seeking

Novelty-seeking is a personality trait associated with exploratory activity whereby someone seeks new and exciting stimulation and responds positively to a novel experience (Mallet & Vignoli, 2007; Fraj & Martinez, 2006). The perception that a brand allows for a sense of broader and richer self-concept has been shown to be attractive for consumers with a growth mindset (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014). Novelty-seeking relates to the desire for an exciting life (Khare, Singh, & Khare, 2010) and is exhibited by young adults, who are often in a phase of exploration and trying out different experiences (Arnett, 2007). Although some individuals may commit more quickly to enduring choices in love and work, others may still have a high need for novel stimulation, thereby expressing exploratory consumer behavior tendencies for a longer period (Raju, 1980). Self-expansion opportunities should be more appealing to individuals wishing for a stimulating life. We thus suggest that consumers who are higher in novelty-seeking tendencies will more strongly desire to connect with and include in their sense of self those brands associated with self-expansion opportunities:

**Hypothesis 5a:** *Novelty-seeking moderates the impact of self-expansion on brand identification such that the higher the novelty-seeking, the higher the impact of self-expansion on brand identification.*

**Hypothesis 5b:** *Novelty-seeking moderates the impact of self-expansion on relationship quality such that the higher the novelty-seeking, the higher the impact of self-expansion on relationship quality.*

Our proposed theoretical model is shown in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Procedure*

Our study followed a mixed method approach with an initial qualitative phase to better understand luxury brand experience for Millennials, followed by a quantitative phase to test our final model and hypotheses.

#### *3.2. Qualitative phase*

As noted by Shard, Nysveen, & Pedersen (2011), developing a measurement scale for brand experience is complex because such experience is context-specific. Those authors recommend using a qualitative approach to truly understand the consumer's perspective and the richness of an experience. Thus, in order to incorporate the specificities of luxury brand experience for Millennials, we carefully designed a qualitative phase of data collection through in-depth interviews with Millennials. The qualitative phase was designed to glean deeper insight into how Millennials interact, shop for, utilize, and consume luxury brands as well as the connections they develop with luxury brands.

To that purpose, we selected 22 respondents who had made at least one purchase in the past 6 months of a luxury-branded product for themselves so that they could refer to a recent personal luxury brand experience. The sample included a mix of mature students and young working individuals, both male and female, with a wide range of expertise and familiarity with luxury brands (from very occasional to frequent buyers of luxury items). We asked each participant to detail a brand experience for one particular luxury purchase in terms of how they shopped for, interacted with, and used that brand. We first adopted a broad approach to the luxury brand experience encompassing sensorial, emotional, behavioral, social, and intellectual

responses evoked by brand-related stimuli. We then asked respondents to detail the extent to which they developed their sense of self and perceived abilities since owning this brand. After 22 interviews, authors believed that a point of saturation was reached, with additional informants providing no new information (McCracken, 1988). In order to interpret the transcripts, a constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used. Based on the analysis and classification of the verbatim responses, we identified the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the content analysis. The content analysis helped to identify dimensions associated with a luxury brand experience.

A majority of participants mentioned that the ownership and usage of a luxury brand item were linked to sensorial arousal. For example, R11 (the 11<sup>th</sup> respondent anonymously labelled as Respondent 11) and R5 mention haptic or visual senses [*“the touch because the wallet was in a really quality leather, then the sight because of the design of the wallet”* (R11); *“there were different sort of materials but this thin cashmere made me buy it and feel really comfortable”* (R5)].

Affective dimensions mentioned by respondents referred to emotions associated with feeling of being special and being taken care of [*“everybody is nice and warm with you... you feel special”* (R6)] as well as making a gift to oneself and having pleasure [*“I like to own nice and pretty things for pleasure, because sometimes I have the desire to have quality products.”* (R9); *“When I use the brand, I feel like I am taking care of me, I have a sensation of pleasure. I feel that not so many people have the chance to feel that”* (R3)].

The perceived enhanced social image was frequently cited as a key dimension in the experience with the luxury brand. Indeed, R7 declares *“To me, it is important to have luxury product in the sense that we feel good with them. It is kind of an accomplishment and it confirms our external image. I think there is also a notion of social status.”* Similarly, R6 claims *“I am very proud to wear this brand. People look at my watch.”* The notion of social status is linked with external image and conspicuous consumption. Interviewees associated their luxury brand experience with perceived social prestige [e.g., *“I want people to have a good impression of me”* (R10); *“I feel different, as my friends don’t wear the same one”* (R2)]. These responses show that the social-related dimension refers to extrinsic elements. Interviewees viewed their luxury brand experience as unique opportunities and moments during which they feel like they gain social prestige. These associations were different from the ones related to the affective dimension mentioned earlier, which referred more to an inner feeling of being special and

pleasing oneself. This finding from the interviews is aligned with the distinction made in prior research (e.g., Seo & Buchanan-Oliver, 2017) between the social meaning of luxury (associated with status symbol) and the personalized meaning of luxury (associated with individual pleasure).

Interviewees also frequently explained that they learned about the brand and developed a desire to discover even more about it as a result of acquiring a luxury item. For instance, R 14 stated *“Even if I already know it well, maybe to know a little bit more about the leather they use, the location they are made etc.”*; R17 mentioned *“I would like to keep up with the next artistic limited edition they will do.”*; and R18 stated *“During each of this stage we can learn about the history, the values, the production,”* including learning as part of a brand experience.

During these interviews, we asked specific questions regarding respondents’ behaviors linked to their luxury brand experience. We observed that none of the respondents perceived that their activities and courses of actions were affected by the fact that they own and carry a luxury brand. Respondents considered that nothing really changed in their behaviors as a result of their experience with a luxury brand (e.g., R3 stated *“I don’t believe this product modifies my behavior.”* and R9 insisted that *“[I] haven’t change my behavior”*). Only a few respondents acknowledged that they had become more careful in protecting and not damaging their belongings (e.g., R4 said *“the watch cannot really change my behavior but I maybe would say that I am more careful about what I do with it, it take more care of it than with some other watch or item”* and R2 said *“I pay more attention to it, I don’t lend it to my daughters, I would never go to the countryside with it or in a place it could be damaged!”*). Responses obtained in all interviews highlighted the lack of behavioral responses as part of the luxury brand experience and led us to conclude that the items from Brakus et al. (2009) pertaining to the behavioral dimension appear not applicable to our empirical setting. Millennials could be at a life stage when they are asserting who they are and are gaining more control of their behaviors as they move away from their family. In addition, they could be resistant to seeing their behavior as anything but intrinsically motivated and thus genuine expressions of their authentic self. Consequently, Millennials may not perceive themselves as being influenced by brands or marketers in their actions or behaviors when they use a luxury product.

Hence, the findings from the qualitative phase highlighted four key dimensions (sensory, affective, social, and intellectual), out of which three (sensory, affective, and intellectual) correspond to the conceptualization of brand experience developed by Brakus et al. (2009),

and one dimension (social) emerged from the interviews. Interviewees did not perceive that one of their belongings on its own would influence their behaviors nor result in bodily experiences.

### *3.3. Survey design and data collection*

We designed our main survey to assess consumers' perception of luxury and non-luxury brands and test our final model and hypotheses. A questionnaire for luxury included a list of luxury brands based on professional ranking of top luxury brands. We adopted the classification of luxury brands proposed by (D'Arpizio, 2007) and included brands from "Absolute luxury" (elitism, heritage, and uniqueness like Hermes), "Aspirational luxury" (status and distinctiveness like Louis Vuitton), and "Accessible luxury" (more affordable like Coach). We focused on personal intimate luxury categories (clothing, leather goods, shoes, and eyewear). In each of these categories, luxury brands create rich experiences through creativity that assures style, emotional appeal, quality of materials, exclusive and prestigious outlets, limited production, premium price, tradition of knowledge, and expertise (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Okonkwo, 2016). A questionnaire for non-luxury included non-luxury brands that fall under the parameters of lower price and higher accessibility, and included the same constructs as designed for the luxury brand survey with wording adapted accordingly.

### *3.4. Sample*

Millennials aged 23 to 39 years old (Howe & Strauss, 2000) in the US participated to our survey via an online platform (Amazon Mturk). Respondents were randomly assigned to either the luxury brand or the non-luxury brand condition. Those assigned to the luxury brand condition had to confirm that they had made at least one purchase in the past 6 months within our selection of product categories and from our list of recognized luxury brands. Respondents then had to answer the questionnaire for one brand in particular. Subjects assigned to the non-luxury condition, had to confirm a non-luxury brand item purchase in the past 6 months from within the same selection of categories and then from a list of non-luxury brands provided by the authors before completing the questionnaire for a non-luxury brand in particular.

To verify that the respondents in the luxury brand condition referred to a real luxury brand and that those in the non-luxury condition referred to a real non-luxury brand, researchers applied several checks and filters. A Brand Luxury Index or BLI, similar to the one developed by Vigneron & Johnson (2004), was calculated for each respondent (average of the following items: *popular vs. elitist*, *affordable vs. expensive*, *manufactured vs. crafted*, *original vs. sophisticated*, *tasteful vs. exquisite*, and *valuable vs. precious*). This index was used to verify the consistency between a brand selected and its perceived luxuriousness. For the luxury brand condition, only respondents evaluating their “luxury” brand with a BLI equal to or greater than 3 were selected; for the non-luxury brand condition, only respondents evaluating their “non-luxury” brand with a BLI equal to or less than 4 remained in the final sample. In addition, we verified that prices reported by respondents were all above \$350 for the luxury condition and all below \$200 for non-luxury condition. If any of the aforementioned conditions was not met, the questionnaire was excluded from the analysis.

After applying such treatments, the final sample contained 264 Millennials (142 for the luxury questionnaire and 122 for the non-luxury questionnaire). Respondents had purchased products from 26 different luxury brands and 26 different non-luxury brands (see list of brands in Appendix A). The gender distribution is 51.4% female for luxury brands and 48.4% female for non-luxury brands. The median personal annual income is \$66,000 for luxury brands respondents, of whom 77.5% had at least an associate degree. The median income for respondents for non-luxury brands is \$57,500 with 84.4% having at least an associate degree.

In order to assess how familiar respondents were with their chosen brand, the statement “*I interact regularly with this brand*” was used. Respondents answering the questionnaire for luxury showed similar degree of brand familiarity as those answering in reference to a non-luxury brand (t-test = 1.560, *p*-value = 0.146). Both luxury and non-luxury respondents were demographically similar and did not show statistical differences regarding average income, education, gender split, and familiarity with the chosen brand. The sample power was 95% with a 5% error to detect a minimum R-square of 0.05 in the endogenous constructs in the structural model (G\*Power).

### *3.5. Operational Measure of Constructs*

#### *Brand experience*

Brand experience was operationalized as a dichotomous variable to indicate the “luxuriousness” nature of the brand experience: a luxury brand experience versus a non-luxury brand experience. In order to verify that respondents clearly identified their brand as luxury versus non-luxury and thus avoid misclassification, their perception of luxuriousness was assessed through the luxury brand index, LBI (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). This index was used to verify the consistency between the brand selected and its perceived luxuriousness.

Other filters applied included price paid for the purchased item congruency, and elimination of non-relevant brands. If any of the above conditions was not met, the questionnaire was eliminated from the analysis. As such, we are confident that answers in the luxury brand condition pertain to a luxury brand experience and those in the non-luxury brand condition answers pertain to a non-luxury brand experience.

#### *Brand experience dimensions*

Brand experience dimensions were assessed through a four-factor structure: the sensory, affective, and intellectual dimensions suggested by Brakus et al. (2009), with the addition of a social dimension as suggested by Schmitt (1999), by past research on luxury value consumption (Gentile et al., 2007; Hennigs, Wiedmann, Klarmann, & Behrens, 2015; Wilcox, Kim & Sen, 2009) and supported by our qualitative phase, reflecting the social function of the luxury brand experience. All dimensions were measured with a four-item seven-point Likert scale (see Table 1).

#### *Self-expansion*

Self-expansion was assessed through an eight-item seven-point Likert scale modified from the Lewandowski and Aron (2002) self-expansion questionnaire (SEQ). The SEQ was originally constructed to assess the extent to which a person’s experiences with a romantic partner increases knowledge, abilities, and sense of self, and induces exciting experiences. The items chosen were adapted to reflect the individual’s perception of self-expansion.

#### *Novelty-seeking*

Novelty-seeking was assessed through a seven-item seven-point Likert scale selected from Pearson (1970) and Mallet and Vignoli (2007). These items reflect an exploratory consumer



tendency where an individual seeks new and exciting stimulation as result of an internal drive and motivation force and responds strongly to a novel experience.

### *Brand identification*

Brand identification was defined as the consumer's perceived state of oneness with a brand (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). This conceptualization builds on the self-brand connections defined as the extent to which a consumer incorporated a brand into his or her self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Brand identification was assessed through a five-item seven-point Likert scale adapted from Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) that assessed the shared beliefs, sense of belonging, and the brand's meaning to the individual.

### *Relationship quality*

Relationship quality reflects the satisfaction, quality perception, commitment, attachment, and interest in maintaining a relationship. Relationship quality was operationalized through four-item seven-point Likert scale. Items related to quality and satisfaction embody the cognitive aspect of the relationship and were adapted from Clark and Melancon (2013). Meanwhile, items related to commitment and continuity reflect the affective aspect of the relationship and followed the dimensions of self-connection and interdependence suggested by Fournier (1998).

## **4. Validation**

### *4.1. Brand experience and self-expansion for millennials versus non-millennials*

We first provide some evidence that Millennials have a unique way of processing luxury brand experiences leading to self-expansion. For that purpose, we preliminary compare the mean differences for self-expansion as a result of brand experience as expressed in our Millennials cohort (264 individuals born between 1979 and 1995) versus a Non-Millennials cohort (238 individuals born between 1965 and 1978). We examined a 2 (luxury, non-luxury) by 2 (Millennials, non-Millennials) fixed factor design. The GLM procedure showed a significant interaction effect between factors ( $f$ -test = 3.443, d.f. = 1, and  $p$ -value = 0.06). Millennials experience significantly higher level of self-expansion compared with Non-Millennials when interacting with luxury brands. When experiencing non-luxury brands,

Millennials show a lower level of self-expansion. The results confirm that the luxury brand experience has a unique effect on self-expansion for Millennials. Thus, we focus our analysis on the Millennials cohort only in the next sections to explore in more details how a brand experience impacts them.

#### *4.2. Comparison of luxury brand versus non-luxury brand experience intensity*

Experience intensity for luxury brands versus non-luxury brands were examined through the perceived level of affective, sensory, social, and intellectual dimensions evoked and were compared through a T-test and Levene's test for equality of variances. The results shown in Table 1 validate H1a and demonstrate that a luxury brand experience is more intense than a non-luxury brand experience in terms of affective, sensory, social and intellectual responses to brand-related stimuli.

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Insert Table 1

#### *4.3. Factor structure*

All items identified in the assessment of the brand experience dimensions were subject to an exploratory factor analysis through maximum likelihood estimation and Varimax rotation with a test sample of 96 participants (see Table 2). A four-factor structure reflecting the dimensions of the luxury experience was able to explain 80% of the total variance and thus validates the conceptualization of the experience dimensions of luxury branding. The factor pattern structure is shown in Table 2. We therefore included these four-factor structure in our final model for empirical testing.

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Insert Table 2

#### *4.4. Reliability and construct validity*

Previously used and validated scales from the literature were modified as required to fit the specific study's research requirements. All constructs included in the hypothesized model have reflective indicators. These indicators provided unbiased chi-square estimates and robust standard errors (Chou & Bentler, 1995). Internal consistency reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs with reflective indicators and were acceptable, with scores above the minimum of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Using the items loadings, the internal composite reliabilities (ICRs) were calculated and all exceeded the 0.70 threshold. A better indicator of the unidimensionality of the construct is Dillon-Goldstein's rho coefficient, which was also above minimum of 0.70 (Chin, 1998). Table 3 presents the reliability indexes for all reflective constructs.

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Insert Table 3

#### *4.5. Discriminant and convergent validity of constructs with reflective indicators*

PLS includes two measures of discriminant validity: the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion and cross-loadings. All constructs show acceptable discriminant validity, as indicated in Table 3. Chin (1998) suggests that each indicator should have a loading greater than its cross-loadings. This requirement is fulfilled for all constructs with reflective indicators. PLS allows for testing of convergent validity for reflective constructs by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE); an AVE of at least 0.50 indicates sufficient validity. This means that a construct is able to explain at least half of the variance of its indicators. All constructs' AVEs with reflective indicators are greater than 0.50.

#### *4.6. Test of common method variance*

To test for common method variance, the Common Marker Variable, CMV method recommended by Lindell and Whitney (2001) and Simmering et al. (2015) was used. The construct's intensity-seeking behavior in our survey as method factor was measured with a three-item Likert scale. The selected marker shows a high reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.819$

and  $\rho = 0.893$ ). This construct is theoretically unrelated to all other constructs in the final model, as shown by non-significant paths ( $p$ -value 5%) and thus is expected to have no relationship, as indicated by the small variance accounted. The selected marker explains only 0.011 of variance in the brand experience construct, 0.055 in the affective construct, 0.025 in the sensory construct, 0.036 in the social construct, 0.036 in the intellectual construct, 0.031 in the self-expansion construct, 0.219 in the novelty-seeking construct, 0.004 in the relationship quality construct, and 0.006 in the brand identification construct. Because all variances are very small and below 50%, the CMV method suggests that there is no significant common method bias in the data.

#### *4.7. Testing the structural model*

The final model was estimated using Partial Least-Squares Path Modeling (Tenenhaus, Vinzi, & Chatelin, 2005) and PLS regression as implemented in XLSTAT software. PLS makes minimum demands on measurement scales, multicollinearity, and distribution of residuals; it also allows for inclusion of reflective and formative indicators and is prediction-oriented (Fornell & Bookstein 1982). PLS provides different fit indexes: communality, redundancy, and goodness of fit (GoF).

The AVE (communalities) range is 0.522 to 0.864 with an average of 0.656. This indicates the proportion of variance in indicators reproduced by their latent variables and thus indicates the measurement model's quality. An AVE of at least 0.50 indicates sufficient validity. Thus, the validity of indicators for predicting their constructs is adequate (see Table 4). The coefficient of determination (R-square) is used to evaluate the inner path model estimates and is a measure of predictive power. R-square values for all endogenous latent constructs were as follows: affective (0.096), sensory (0.049), social (0.105), intellect (0.048), self-expansion (0.629), relationship quality (0.320), and brand identification (0.632). These values were considered moderate and acceptable (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009).

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Insert Table 4

The redundancy index measures the structural models in terms of each endogenous construct being accounted for by the measurement model. This model specification explains 50.8% of self-expansion, 24.8% of relationship quality, and 54.6% of brand identification. These redundancies show acceptable levels because each latent variable is explained by only a few exogenous latent variables (Henseler et al., 2009). The  $f^2$  effect sizes for exogenous latent variables on self-expansion are 0.061 (affective), 0.035 (sensory), 0.012 (social), and 0.198 (intellect). Intellect has the largest effect on self-expansion, but the other experience dimensions show only small effects. The effect size of self-expansion is 0.253 on relationship quality and 1.320 on brand identification, which are considered large (Cohen, 1988). Finally, the Stone-Geisser's  $Q^2$  value is 0.487 for self-expansion, 0.168 for relationship quality, and 0.529 for brand identification. All values are larger than 0 and indicate the model's out-of-sample predictive power. Overall, all exogenous constructs show a high predictive accuracy.

The overall GoF index is 0.988 for the measurement model and 0.881 for the structural model, with SRMR = 0.189 (see Table 5). The relative GoF is 0.870 (95% confidence interval of 0.720–0.923), close to the ideal cut-off point of 0.90, which highly favors the model (Esposito Vinzi et al., 2010).

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Insert Table 5

#### 4.8. Analysis

Overall, the theoretical model fits the data well, which validates our hypotheses. This model suggests that luxurious brands provide a more intense experience for Millennials and generate higher positive feelings of self-expansion when compared with non-luxury brands, which in turn positively influences the quality of the relationship and the level of identification with the brand.

Hypothesis H1b suggests that responses to a luxury brand experience trigger higher levels of self-expansion than responses to non-luxury brand experience. A Levene test for equality of variances was performed, and the hypothesis for equality of variances was accepted. As shown in Table 1, comparison of means through an independent sample T-test concluded that the two

samples have different means (independent samples' mean comparison,  $t = 4.751$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.00). Thus, an experience with a luxury brand triggers significantly higher levels of self-expansion in comparison with a non-luxury brand experience. Accordingly, H1b is accepted.

Hypotheses H2a through H2d posited the mediation effect of the affective, sensory, social, and intellectual dimensions between the luxury/non-luxury brand experiences and self-expansion. These four dimensions explain 62.9% of the variance in self-expansion (affective 29.99%, sensory 13.93%, social 11.54%, and intellectual 44.54%), and their paths (from luxury/non-luxury experience to its dimensions and from these dimensions to self-expansion) were significant at the 5% level, with the exception of the social dimension, which was at the 8% level. Therefore, H2a through H2d were accepted.

Mediation effects were further assessed by including in the empirical model a path from luxury brand experience/ non-luxury brand experience to self-expansion. This path became non-significant following this addition ( $\beta = 0.053$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.186). Therefore, the difference in self-expansion between luxury and non-luxury brand experiences is due to the significant role that the four experience dimensions play as mediators between the luxury brand experience and self-expansion (indirect effect).

Self-expansion was found to positively impact brand identification (0.764) and relationship quality (0.455), thus confirming H3 and H4.

The moderating effect of novelty in the relationship between self-expansion and brand identification has a path = 0.076, which is significant at  $p$ -value = 0.057. This result suggests that higher levels of novelty-seeking lead to a stronger effect of self-expansion on brand identification, thus validating H5a. The moderating effect of novelty in the relationship between self-expansion and relationship quality has a path = 0.181, which significant at  $p$ -value = 0.001. This result suggests that novelty-seeking is highly relevant in determining the effect of self-expansion on relationship quality. Therefore, H5b is accepted.

The complete estimated model is shown in Figure 2.

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Insert Figure 2

## **5. Findings and discussion**

### *5.1. Theoretical contributions*

A central contribution of this study is the proposition and verification that the luxury brand experience results in self-expansion. By providing the opportunity for Millennials to broaden their sense of self, the complex and rich meaning of luxury brands translates into stronger consumer-brand identification and relationship quality. We demonstrate that self-expansion is needed to capture the essence and significance of these experiential dimensions offered by luxury brands.

This research provides theoretical contributions to three important research streams. First, our findings extend prior research on luxury. The benefits often associated with luxury brands revolve around image projection, conspicuousness, self-esteem, and self-indulgence (Mootee, 2008; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Vickers & Renand, 2003; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Young et al., 2010). Most studies on luxury have highlighted social, symbolic, and hedonic values but tended to give predominance to extrinsic motivations linked to a desire to impress others and signal wealth, especially among younger adults (Schade, Hegner, Horstmann, & Brinkmann, 2016). Although a few studies have probed the link between the self and the motivations for consuming luxury products, those that did tended to mainly consider the dimension of self-fit and similarities of values between a consumer and a brand (e.g., Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). We thus shed light on a new benefit provided by luxury brand experience, namely an opportunity for self-growth. More specifically, we show that because luxury brand experiences provoke a high degree of arousal in affective, sensorial, social, and intellectual dimensions, they lead to a state of self-expansion. Atwal and Williams (2009) suggested a mindset change regarding how luxury is valued, namely a shift from seeing it as a transactional relationship to a holistic experience. By showing how luxury brands in particular have the capacity to trigger self-expansion, our findings support the proposition made by Reimann and Aron (2009), that luxury brands may especially expand the self; this proposition had never previously been empirically tested. The theoretical insight identified in our research appears to be different from the benefits highlighted in prior studies. Self-expansion as a benefit is more particularly linked to the self and as such can be enduring and contribute to customers' long-term well-being to a greater extent than a contextual social image.

Second, our model expands understanding of the consumer–brand relationship. Numerous studies have established that satisfactory brand experiences lead to enhanced relationship quality (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Francisco-Maffezzoli et al., 2014) and that congruency between brand attributes and personality facilitates such relationships. In particular, consumer–brand identification literature has focused on the importance of perceived similarity and overlap between a consumer’s personality or values and a specific brand in order to facilitate identification (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar & Sen, 2012; Escalas, 2004). It has been argued that when a brand’s image reflects an individual’s sense of self, that individual is likely to identify with that brand (Tuškej et al., 2013). The present study suggests that self-expansion can also be an antecedent to consumer–brand identification. We thus offer a new insight as we underline that brands with which customers do not initially identify with can still be integrated in their sense of self through self-expansion. In contrast with attachment theory, which suggests that greater familiarity produces stronger attachment, we highlight that following an exploration phase during which consumers go through an intense brand experience, self-expansion occurs, leading to inclusion in the consumer’s sense of self of the resources offered by a non-familiar brand. Indeed, as in the case of interpersonal relationships, dissimilar brands may be very attractive as a source of self-expansion because they represent an arousing or novel experience for consumers.

Third, our findings contribute to the literature on self-expansion. Prior research highlighted that people primarily expand their sense of self through exciting activities and relationships that offer opportunities for acquiring new resources and perspectives (Fivecoat et al., 2015; Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014). However, the process allowing for such a self-growth has not been deeply investigated. We add to the knowledge on self-expansion by uncovering a new path explaining how a relationship with a brand may fuel a sense of self-growth. In particular, we demonstrate that an intense luxury brand experience, which provides social, intellectual, emotional, and sensorial stimulation, allows individuals to acquire new resources. As such, we advance the understanding of the process through which an experience with a brand that triggers high level of stimulation will then expand individuals’ self-concept.

We also found that brand experience dimensions differ in terms of their relative importance in building self-expansion. Millennials considered the social dimension as being less relevant as means to self-expand (in comparison to the other three dimensions). Whereas Reimann and Aron (2009) suggested that resources for self-expansion include social status, our findings



suggest that intellectual, sensorial, and emotional dimensions make a greater contribution to the feeling of self-growth than the social dimension. It could be that other external validation of the self, such as a perception that one is fitting in with his/her community, may be even more relevant than traditional conceptions of social status for Millennials.

Moreover, this study further contributes to the literature on self-expansion through the finding that novelty-seeking moderates the relationship between self-expansion and relationship outcomes. Customers who are high in novelty-seeking develop an even stronger relationship with brands that allow for self-expansion. Searching for a stimulating life may fuel an individual's willingness to go through an intense brand experience, which provides resources for exploration.

Finally, our study supports the difference between self-expansion and self-extension. In self-extension theory developed by Belk (1988), customers take control of specific brands and objects. Individuals collect objects with meanings and extend their own identities into these objects, which are used to fit the projections of who they are with who they hope to be. In contrast, our study shows that brands can also take control to influence self-expansion through brand-related stimuli. The luxury brand triggers different dimensions of the experience, which in turn allows customers to self-expand. As shown in our model, luxury brand content impacts the nature of the customer's experience and their level of self-expansion by providing specific stimuli that arouse emotional, sensorial, intellectual, and social responses.

## *5.2. Managerial implications*

Customers, especially those from the younger generation, are eager to access unique experiences that differ from their daily habits and allow them to discover and explore. This facet of self-expansion seems particularly interesting for marketers at a time when some criticism has emerged regarding luxury brands and their association with non-essential consumption associated with "opulence" and "indulgence" (Paschen, Ulrich, & Kietzmann, 2016). When customers may sometimes reject luxury brands because they fear that they will be seen as pretentious or focused too much on their own pleasure, marketers could take advantage of the positive emotions associated with a sense of self-growth. By communicating a promise that luxury brands create multi-dimensional experiences, which in turn allow customer to develop their sense of self, marketers may strengthen motivations to purchase a

particular brand. Self-expansion might be a more enduring long-term benefit that allows the individual to grow as a person, whereas enhanced social image might be more transitory and context-dependent. As such, customers may strongly value the self-expansion benefit obtained through luxury brand experiences.

Therefore, it is advisable that luxury brands ensure their brand-related stimuli evoke rich brand experiences that allow Millennials to discover something new and explore. Marketers can be in control of the brand-related stimuli, monitoring the content and level of exploration by providing specific stimuli that arouse the emotional, sensorial, intellectual, and social responses. Marketing strategies should center on providing customers with opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge, thus adding positive qualities to their sense of self. Such opportunities could be offered through the marketing mix, offering exquisite products stimulating the senses, communicating the feeling of being special and unique in a store, and reiterating the exclusivity of some expensive items. Marketers can take advantage of a brand's long history and mythic founder to create learning experiences where customers acquire knowledge and deepen their understanding of the brand's meaning. Also, a sophisticated aesthetic and creative design could be used to create unique sensorial experiences. This will make the brand's proposition even more attractive to users, by allowing them to gain a sense of personal enrichment and self-identity. Luxury brands have frequently been recognized as forging new paths. Marketers in the luxury domain have a role to play in helping customers to open their horizons and gain new perspectives. By striving to create arousing multi-dimension brand experiences, luxury products may contribute to consumers' well-being and happiness.

Using the social dimension of projecting a certain image might be viewed as a straightforward strategy for luxury brands; however, for these brands, allowing customers to expand and discover for themselves could be more valuable in terms of creating a meaningful relationship that is more connected to the self and authentic from within. This could be a very interesting strategy for marketers in the luxury domain, who often seek ways to reinforce brand identification, a task that can be challenging for prestigious brands that sometimes may appear as distant or "for the others," especially among customers who are new to the luxury category. The opportunity to create identification after a phase of discovery represents a new possibility for marketers to target customers who are not yet familiar with and do not yet associate their identity with those of luxury brands.

In terms of targeting strategy, marketers could be particularly attentive to reach consumers who are more open to exploration and novelty, such as, for instance, key opinion leaders, lead users, and trendsetters, who could be highly attracted by self-expansion opportunities. These influential customers appreciate being pioneers by going through new experiences to enlarge their perspectives, and may identify with and relate more to luxury brands and in turn positively generate interest for a brand among their followers.

## **6. Limitations and future research**

This study presents some limitations and areas for future research.

In this study, researchers avoided using fictitious brands as stimuli and instead required respondents to recall a real purchase and brand experience. This decision was made in order to better evaluate the impact of a lived experience on self-growth. Indeed, it is difficult to simulate repeated brand interactions over a certain period of time and to ask respondents to evaluate how a projected scenario-based experience would enhance their sense of self. The brand purchase and experience remain self-reported and could not be objectively verified, even though we limited this risk by measuring the consistency between the perception of luxuriousness and the brand mentioned, in addition to carrying out other checks and filters such as verification of the product category, place of purchase, and price paid. To avoid this limitation, further field research could be conducted in partnership with a luxury company, using a database of real buyers.

In our model, which was developed to study how Millennials react to luxury brands, the dimensions of brand experience do not include the behavioral dimension suggested by Brakus et al. (2009). Further research could investigate more deeply the reasons why the luxury brand-related stimuli (e.g., colors, shapes, typefaces, designs, slogans, mascots, brand characters, etc.) do not evoke behavioral reactions from Millennials. It could be that these individuals are resisting any attempt from marketers to influence their behaviors and daily course of actions. It might also be that other sources of influence, beyond brand-related stimuli, may exert greater influence over the actions and behaviors of Millennials (e.g., how social media influencers use and showcase a luxury item).

Our findings and conclusions were tested in a sample of Millennials and may not be generalized to other age groups or generation cohorts. Millennials have shown particular value structures, beliefs, and interests in connecting and building relationships with luxury brands. Other generations may emphasize differently the intensity and directionality of the experiential dimensions and brand relationship outcomes. More research could be conducted to examine more closely how consumers from various generations and across ages process a luxury experience leading to self-expansion and in turn connection with a luxury brand. For instance, it might be that older customers—who may have relationships with some luxury brands that have endured for many years—perceive the luxury experience less as one that is offering opportunities for discovery and thus acknowledge limited self-expansion. The optimal level of self-expansion opportunities sought by consumers might vary depending on age, with older individuals possibly searching more for security and consistency in their consumption than for novelty. Also, older individuals, who have already reached a certain degree of maturity in their life, might be less open to expanding their sense of self and adopting new perspectives. In addition, the influence of novelty-seeking might be less pronounced among older customers who have an established course of life and are less likely to be searching for exploration (Arnett, 2007).

Even though our results are robust in terms of explaining how luxury experience dimensions impact self-expansion, brand identification, and relationship quality and several demographic markers were similar between the luxury and non-luxury respondents (average income, education, gender split, and familiarity with the chosen brand), other value-driven and lifestyle variables such as rich cultural capital may influence the effects identified in this study. Furthermore, respondents were from the United States, and their view on the luxury experience might differ in comparison with that held by individuals of other nationalities. As such, it would be interesting to verify if the effects of luxury experience on self-expansion are similar in countries that emphasize individual initiatives and autonomy (e.g., the US with an individualism index score of 91 and U K. with a score of 89) in comparison with countries promoting interdependent selves (e.g., France as representing a more collectivist setting with an individualism index score of 71 or Italy with a score of 76), and even countries reflecting mainly collectivist environments such as Mexico with an individualism index score of 30.

Our study opens new areas for future research on the brand experience and its impact on the formation of consumer identities. Luxury brands may nurture the content of the

relationship, which translates into reinforcement of loyalty to the brand. This content is considered positive in valence because it adds to the self-concept as a result of the relationship. However, even if luxury communicates positive content, this may be interpreted as subtraction from the self by consumers (e.g., luxury reflects materialism, ego-centric values, superficiality, etc.), a process known as “self-pruning” (McIntyre et al., 2015). Further research could focus on negative responses evoked by brand-related stimuli in luxury as well as cognitive mechanisms consumers use to counterbalance this impact (e.g., engage in more ethical behaviors).

Another promising area for a follow-up research revolves around well-being and guilt. Past research on luxury marketing has suggested marketing strategies to reduce feelings of guilt, such as partnering with charity (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2016; Khan, Dhar, & Schmidt, 2010), volunteering (Jeong & Koo, 2015), adding a functional alibi (Keinan, Kivetz, & Netzer, 2016), or earning the right to indulge (Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). Our findings that a luxury experience allows for self-expansion may help to attenuate feelings of guilt and to increase well-being. Further investigations may verify that perceptions of self-expansion and adding new qualities to one sense of self can also be valuable in limiting feelings of guilt and increasing happiness.

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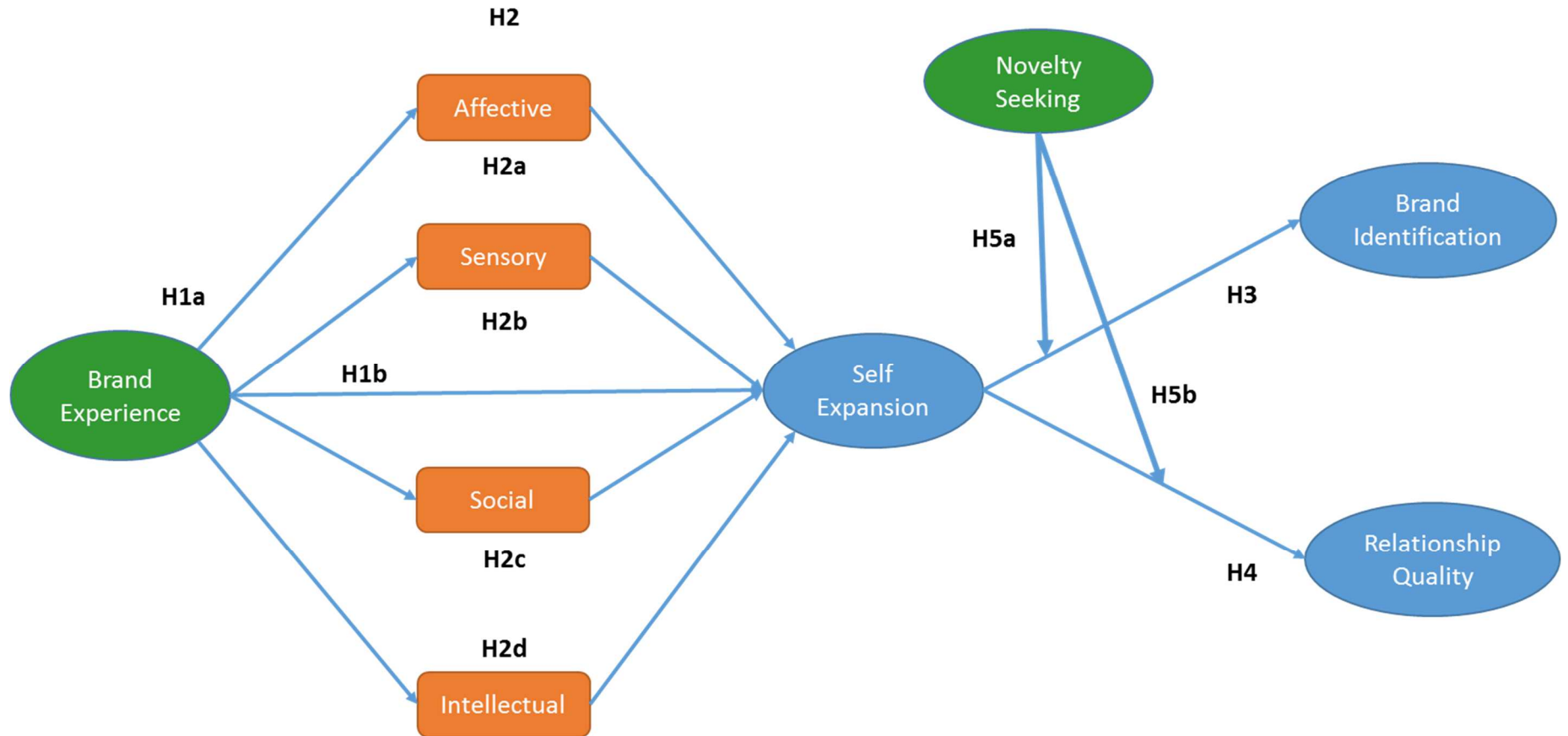
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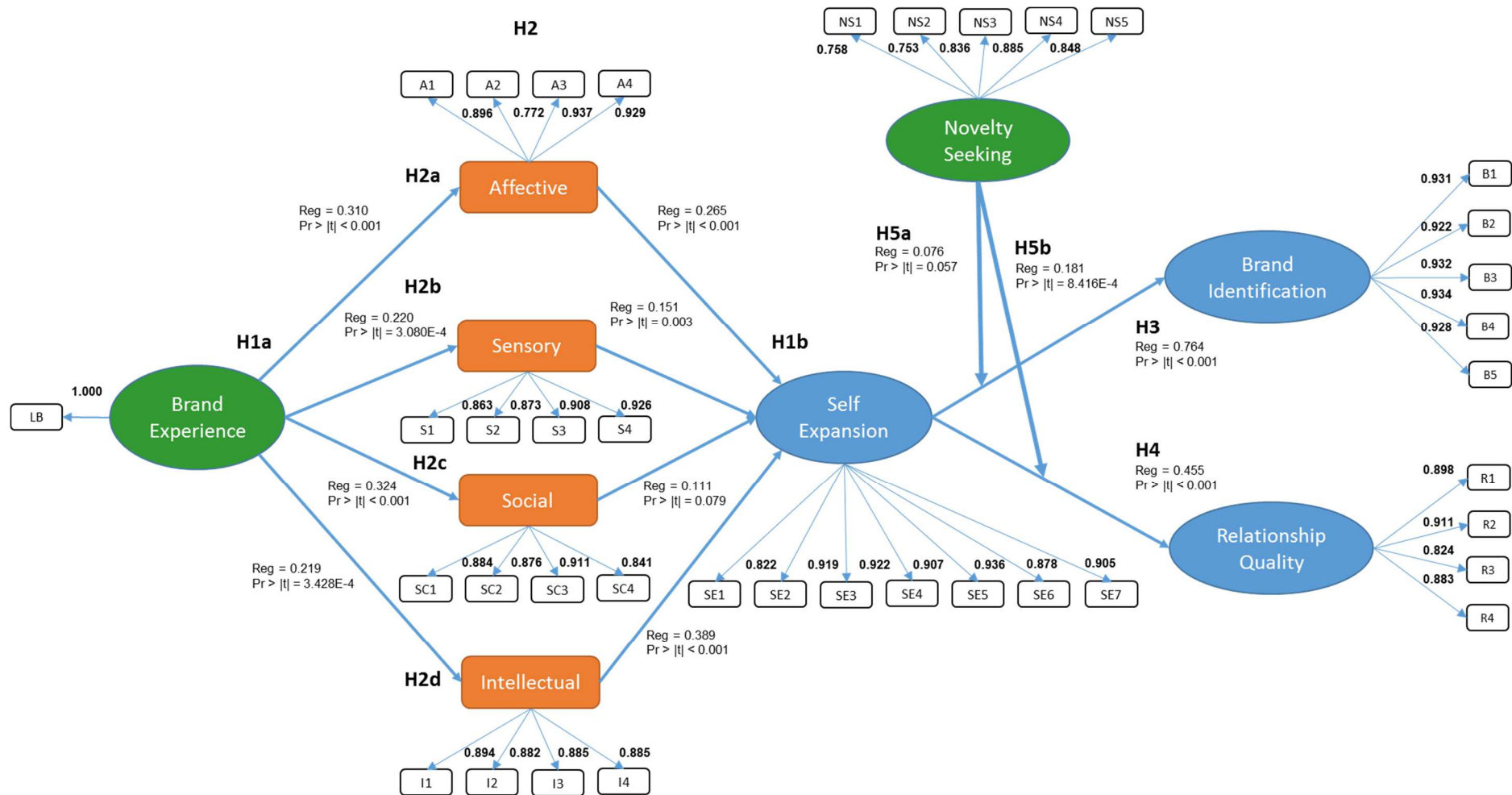
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**Fig. 1.** Theoretical model



**Fig. 2.** Final estimation model



**Table 1**

T-test comparison of luxury brand versus non-luxury brand experience

Construct	Mean Luxury	Mean Non-luxury	T-test	d.f.	Sig. (2-tailed)
Affective	5.3081	4.4734	5.170	243.68(*)	0.000
Sensory	5.6989	5.2295	3.623	262	0.000
Social	5.4736	4.6660	5.475	262	0.000
Intellectual	4.9384	4.3750	3.558	241.85(*)	0.000
Self-Expansion	4.7555	3.9227	4.751	262	0.000

(\*) Levene's test for equality of variances indicated different variances for luxury and non-luxury.

**Table 2**

Factor structure for brand experience dimensions

Items	Sensory	Intellectual	Social	Affective
This brand has a sensory appeal.	.873			
I find this brand interesting in a sensory way.	.845			
This brand makes an impression on at least one of my senses: smell, sound, sight, taste, and touch.	.745			
This brand appeals to my senses.	.623			
This brand invites me to discover new things.		.885		
This brand encourages me to explore new things.		.838		
This brand encourages my learning.		.624		
I had the desire to advance my knowledge with this brand.		.591		
This brand has a positive impact on what others think of me.			.777	
This brand improves the way society views me.			.710	
Owning this brand allows me to indicate to others the kind of person I am.			.678	
I like to be seen owning this brand.			.615	
I have feelings for this brand.				.791
I have emotions for this brand.				.765
This brand induces feeling and sentiments.				.518
This brand is affective.				.383



**Table 3**

Unidimensional factor structures and reliabilities for reflective constructs in the final model

Items	Source
<b>Experience Dimensions</b>	
<p><i>Affective Dimension</i> (<math>\alpha = 0.907</math>) (<math>\rho = 0.936</math>) (*)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This brand induces feelings and sentiments.</li> <li>▪ This brand is affective.</li> <li>▪ I have emotions for this brand.</li> <li>▪ I have feelings for this brand.</li> </ul> <p><i>Sensory Dimension</i> (<math>\alpha = 0.915</math>) (<math>\rho = 0.940</math>) (*)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This brand appeals to my senses.</li> <li>▪ This brand makes an impression on at least one of my senses: smell, sound, sight, taste, and touch.</li> <li>▪ This brand has a sensory appeal.</li> <li>▪ I find this brand interesting in a sensory way.</li> </ul> <p><i>Social Dimension</i> (<math>\alpha = 0.901</math>) (<math>\rho = 0.931</math>) (*)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This brand improves the way society views me.</li> <li>▪ Owning this brand allows me to indicate to others the kind of person I am.</li> <li>▪ This brand has a positive impact on what others think of me.</li> <li>▪ I like to be seen owning this brand.</li> </ul> <p><i>Intellectual Dimension</i> (<math>\alpha = 0.910</math>) (<math>\rho = 0.937</math>) (*)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This brand invites me to discover new things.</li> <li>▪ This brand encourages me to explore new things.</li> <li>▪ This brand encourages my learning.</li> <li>▪ I had the desire to advance my knowledge with this brand.</li> </ul>	<p>Factor structure (Brakus et al. 2009)            Social dimension (Wilcox et al. 2009)            Qualitative inquiry and interviews (the authors).</p>
<b>Self-expansion</b> ( $\alpha = 0.960$ ) ( $\rho = 0.967$ ) (*)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I feel an increase in my ability to accomplish new things.</li> <li>▪ I feel that I have a larger perspective on things.</li> <li>▪ I feel that I have learned new things.</li> <li>▪ I feel that I have increased my knowledge.</li> <li>▪ I feel a greater awareness of things.</li> <li>▪ I feel I have added positive qualities to my sense of self.</li> <li>▪ I feel that I have expended my sense of the kind of person I am.</li> </ul>	(Lewandowski Jr. and Aron 2002)
<b>Novelty-Seeking</b> ( $\alpha = 0.884$ ) ( $\rho = 0.915$ ) (*)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I wish something new and exciting would happen.</li> <li>▪ I often wish life were more stimulating.</li> <li>▪ I want to experience new and different things in my life.</li> <li>▪ I like innovative product because it gives me some of new experience.</li> <li>▪ I tend to seek out new things.</li> </ul>	(Pearson 1970; Mallet and Vignoli 2007)
<b>Brand Experience</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Luxury/non-luxury</li> </ul>	
<b>Brand Identification</b> ( $\alpha = 0.961$ ) ( $\rho = 0.969$ ) (*)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I feel a strong sense of belonging to this brand.</li> <li>▪ This brand embodies what I believe in.</li> <li>▪ I identify strongly with this brand.</li> <li>▪ This brand is like part of me.</li> <li>▪ This brand has a great deal of personal meaning for me.</li> </ul>	(Stokburger-Saauer et al. 2012)

<b>Relationship Quality (<math>\alpha = 0.903</math>) (<math>\rho = 0.932</math>) (*)</b>	(Clark and Phillips Melancon 2013; Fournier 1998)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I have the intention to be loyal to this brand.</li> <li>▪ I want to maintain the relationship to this brand.</li> <li>▪ I am satisfied with my relationship with this brand.</li> <li>▪ The quality of my relationship with this brand is high.</li> </ul>	

(\*)  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha; ICR = internal composite reliability;  $\rho$  = Dillon-Goldstein's rho calculated for constructs with reflective indicators.

**Table 4**

Convergent validity: AVEs > 0.50; discriminant validity: squared Correlations < AVEs for endogenous latent constructs in the final model.

	Category	Affective	Sensory	Social	Intellect	Self Expansion	Novelty Seek	Interaction Self Expansion Novelty	Relationship Quality	Brand Identification	Mean Communalities (AVE)
Category	<b>1</b>	0.096	0.049	0.105	0.048	0.080	0.041	0.000	0.009	0.061	
Affective	0.096	<b>1</b>	0.370	0.586	0.487	0.508	0.126	0.005	0.340	0.578	0.785
Sensory	0.049	0.370	<b>1</b>	0.391	0.261	0.336	0.103	0.000	0.263	0.319	0.797
Social	0.105	0.586	0.391	<b>1</b>	0.400	0.427	0.129	0.009	0.387	0.461	0.772
Intellect	0.048	0.487	0.261	0.400	<b>1</b>	0.519	0.076	0.008	0.262	0.449	0.786
Self-Expansion	0.080	0.508	0.336	0.427	0.519	<b>1</b>	0.143	0.003	0.280	0.626	0.808
Novelty Seek	0.041	0.126	0.103	0.129	0.076	0.143	<b>1</b>	0.065	0.087	0.109	0.669
Interaction Self-Expansion Novelty	0.000	0.005	0.000	0.009	0.008	0.003	0.065	<b>1</b>	0.027	0.011	0.522
Relationship Quality	0.009	0.340	0.263	0.387	0.262	0.280	0.087	0.027	<b>1</b>	0.467	0.774
Brand Identification	0.061	0.578	0.319	0.461	0.449	0.626	0.109	0.011	0.467	<b>1</b>	0.864

**Table 5**

Goodness of fit index (monofactorial manifest variables)

	Goodness of fit	Goodness of fit (Bootstrap)	Standard error	Critical ratio (CR)	Lower bound (95%)	Upper bound (95%)
Absolute	0.420	0.429	0.039	10.818	0.343	0.521
Relative	0.870	0.824	0.050	17.543	0.706	0.931
Outer model	0.988	0.985	0.032	31.279	0.934	1.000
Inner model	0.881	0.837	0.033	26.360	0.754	0.889

## **Appendix A**

- **List of brands chosen by respondents of the luxury questionnaire:** *Armani; Balenciaga; Ben Sherman Suit; Birmingham; Bottega Veneta; Burberry; Chanel; Chloe; Christian Louboutin; Coach; Cole Haan; Dolce & Gabbana; Giorgio Armani; Giuseppe Zanotti; Goyard; Gucci; Hermès, Hugo Boss; Jimmy Choo; Louis Vuitton; Michael Kors; Oakley; Prada; Ray Ban; Salvatore Ferragamo; Versace*

- **List of brands chosen by respondents of the non-luxury questionnaire:** *Abercrombie and Fitch; Adidas; Alfani; Asics; Avon; Banana Republic; Birkenstocks; Calvin Klein; Carter's; Clarks; Columbia; Faded Glory; Fossil; Foster Grant; Irish Setter; J. Crew; Jockey; Johnny Sunglasses; L.L. Bean; Levi; Nike; Nine West; Ralph Lauren; Timberland; Tommy Hilfiger; Urban Outfitters*