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**Getting over discomfort in luxury brand stores:**

**How pop-up stores affect perceptions of luxury, embarrassment, and store evaluations**

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## **Getting over discomfort in luxury brand stores:**

### **How pop-up stores affect perceptions of luxury, embarrassment, and store evaluations**

#### **Abstract**

The shift to an experiential economy—in which consumers are searching for memorable experiences—has led to an increased attention to the aesthetics of store environments. Because luxury brands are expected to help consumers accomplish status-seeking purposes, and thus must provide emotional rewards through the environment of their retail stores, the design of their store environments is particularly important. In this context, a question that arises is whether the emotions that luxury stores engender are always positive. What we posit in this research is that in refined luxury retail stores consumers potentially may feel the negative emotion of embarrassment. Therefore, the issue we examine here is that of the efficacy of pop-up stores, referring to temporary itinerant retail spaces intentionally opened for a short time period. We suggest that because their design might lead them to be perceived as less luxurious than traditional luxury stores, they may lead to less embarrassment and thus may reveal an interesting unconventional retail format for luxury brands. Building on the stimulus-organism-response model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and two experiments, we provide evidence for this notion. We also show that need for uniqueness moderates the effects of pop-up stores on anticipated embarrassment. Consumers who do not value exclusivity when shopping exhibit the lowest degree of anticipated embarrassment, this degree being the one that differs the most across the two traditional and pop-up retail formats. Taken together, the results of these two studies enhance the theoretical progress for luxury pop-up retail stores and highlight the advantages of this unconventional format for luxury brands.

**Keywords:** Pop-up format, embarrassment, luxury brand store, need for uniqueness

## **Getting over discomfort in luxury brand stores:**

### **How pop-up stores affect perceptions of luxury, embarrassment, and store evaluations**

#### **1. Introduction**

Pop-up stores—or temporary itinerant retail spaces that are intentionally opened only for a short period of time (Picot-Coupey, 2014, p. 643)—have become an appealing model for retailing, offering agile formats for brands to communicate about their special collections. Such stores are different from traditional stores in three ways: (i) their focus on creating a marketing environment that is highly experiential; (ii) their ephemeral dimension, these stores having a mean duration of about one month; and (iii) their promotional emphasis, by promoting either widely known or smaller, new brands (Kim et al., 2010; Warnaby and Shi, 2018). These stores are thus available for a short time period, generally in smaller venues, and usually used to express identity in new ways through installations and partnerships (Gordon, 2004; Warnaby et al. 2015). As such, pop-up stores have gained increasing attention from retailers and consumers, and many brands have had resorted to using these types of stores. For instance, the brand Nike opened for its fourth annual Air Max Day a series of clandestine pop-up shops across major US cities in which local art installations inspired by “air,” occasional music performances, and a personal fitting service were offered.<sup>1</sup> Beyond such world-known brands, less popular brands also welcome these contemporary retail formats, as illustrated by the brand Pantone, which has derived its core proposition on the notion of the “taste of color” through a series of pop-up cafes.

In this context, pop-up stores appear to be a relevant solution for brands to offer a ludic brand experience (De Lassus & Freire, 2014), to achieve awareness through positive word-of-mouth (Klein et al., 2016), or to benefit from cost advantages due to the reliance on viral

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.insider-trends.com/top-50-pop-up-stores/>

marketing techniques to communicate their implementation (Picot-Coupey, 2014). For consumers, the question of the benefits of the pop-up format of a luxury brand store remains underexamined (Kim et al., 2016). In an era of ‘new luxury’ (as opposed to ‘old’ luxury; Okonkwo, 2007) whereby trademarks are conspicuously displayed for all to see, the tangible elements of luxury brands (logo, name...) are seen as a measure of social stratification, consumers measuring their own self-worth and the worth of others by the luxury brands worn (Miller & Mills, 2012). This evolution suggest that luxury has to become more accessible, and one question that remains is therefore if the pop-up format of a luxury brand store can contribute to make consumers perceive the luxury brand more approachable.

To this regard, previous research suggests that pop-ups might be perceived as more approachable than traditional brand stores (De Lassus & Freire, 2014). Even though rather unconventional for luxury brands, such pop-up stores may reveal particularly interesting for luxury brands, whose traditional stores may make consumers feel embarrassed because their environments convey undesirable information about them, such as not having the necessary economic power (Dahl, Manchanda, & Argo, 2001). Kim et al. (2016) examined the set of emotions felt by consumers before entering a luxury shop but left unexamined the embarrassment that consumers may have about entering a luxury brand retail store and the effects of this emotion on their evaluations of the store. Not only is this lack of knowledge about the occurrence and effects of embarrassment in luxury retailing surprising but also it is a shame considering its importance for consumer research, as proven by the use of this emotion as an item in scale batteries measuring emotion in marketing contexts (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Richins, 1997).

This research thus addresses the question of whether pop-up stores may relieve consumers of their embarrassment concerning shopping in luxury brand stores. More specifically, building on the S-O-R (stimulus-organism-response) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), we

propose that pop-up stores decrease the luxurious image of the store and help consumers associate lower embarrassment with entering the store, leading ultimately to more favorable store evaluations. First we test and confirm this notion in an experiment using the luxury brand Cartier. Then, relying on the notion that luxury is associated with exclusivity (Phau & Prendergast, 2000), we posit that pop-up stores—which do not make luxury as salient as traditional luxury brand stores—may lead to lower embarrassment for people who do not value exclusivity and who are thus low in need for uniqueness. Beyond replicating the results observed in Study 1, we test and bring support to this notion in a second experiment using the brand Chanel. We then discuss these results and their theoretical and managerial implications.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### *2.1. The luxury retail experience*

The view of consumers as passive and cognitive agents switched to a more active and affective view in the 1990s after the emergence of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). According to this view, consumers heavily weigh emotions when they decide which setting to visit, leading brands and retailers to pay great attention to the design of their stores and their ability to prompt positive emotions (Healy et al., 2007). Retailers now devote considerable amounts of money to designing refined environments, where the atmosphere offers some thematization and helps create memorable experiences (Ritzer, 1999).

This shift and the importance given to the aesthetics of store environments are particularly true for luxury brand stores. Because luxury brands are expected to help consumers accomplish status-seeking purposes (Atwal & Williams, 2009), they must provide hedonic and sensory rewards through the environment of their retail stores, implying the need to

provide exquisite retail environments. Another reason for such refined and enjoyable luxury brand stores lies in the association that consumers make between emotions and consumers' attitude toward luxury brands (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). The transformation of physical spaces into a multisensorial experience thus appears essential for luxury brands to prompt positive emotions and behavioral responses (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). In this context, the question that nevertheless arises is whether the emotions that luxury stores engender are always positive.

## *2.2. Luxury brands retail stores and consumer embarrassment*

From a combination of multisensorial stimuli, luxury retail offers a hedonic appeal and is affect-rich (Dion & Arnould, 2011). There is evidence in the retail literature of the ability of luxury stores to prompt strongly positive emotions, such as comfort or happiness (Kim et al., 2016). However, there is reason to expect that the emotions in luxury retail stores may not always be positive. This expectation is based on the notion that, as highlighted by Dion and Arnould (2011), luxury retail stores differ from the average or even upgrade brand stores for five different reasons: (1) they evoke scarcity and aesthetic value through workmanship, (2) they infuse an aura of authenticity, (3) they benefit from a legitimacy derived from an exceptional charismatic persona, (4) they express the creative leader's charisma, and (5) they anchor their retail ideology in beauty. Their strategy implies the use of rituals that employees have to comply with to prompt feelings in consumers that the store is a place of privilege. For instance, as well illustrated by Dion and Arnould (2011), in top jewelry stores the access to the jewelry includes rituals such as the use of specialized accessories, a slow and solemn ceremonial cadence, and exaggerated theatricality. What we posit is that such rituals might

lead consumers to potentially feel another emotion before or during their luxury retail store visit: embarrassment.

This emotion represents a negative self-conscious affect that occurs in social interactions when unwanted events intervene and results in a loss of composure and the ability to participate in an encounter (Dahl et al., 2001, p. 474). Evidence in the contexts of product purchases (Brumbaugh & Rosa, 2009; Dahl et al., 2001; Nichols, Raska, & Flint, 2015) and service interactions (Grace, 2009) indicates that consumers tend to avoid situations in which they might feel embarrassed (White, 2004), and, when feeling so, they may want to quit the situation (Robbins & Parlavecchio, 2006). Embarrassment can even shape future decisions, as people who experience embarrassment in a service setting report more likelihood not to use the same service in future and describe increased intention to spread negative word-of-mouth about the experience (Grace, 2007).

Relying on the S-O-R paradigm from environmental psychology (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974)—which posits that people's evaluations and emotional reactions (O) to the environment mediate the effects of the environmental stimuli (S) on approach/avoidance responses (R)—it may be likely that embarrassment arises when consumers visit luxury stores. Their design and employee behavior and rituals may be impressive but they also make consumers who are not used to such rituals or feel they don't belong to the target of the luxury brand feel not at ease. On the contrary, because pop-up brand stores represent retail environments that are operated with the intention of reinforcing the brand experience rather than selling products at a profit (Klein et al., 2016; Warnaby and Shi, 2018), their design must send a signal that consumers are to be at ease with the idea of shopping within the store. Therefore, for a given luxury brand, the atmosphere of its pop-up store must be perceived as less luxurious than the atmosphere of its traditional store. This difference in the design of the pop-up versus traditional store may make people anticipate less embarrassment from the idea of shopping at



pop-ups of the brand than at the traditional luxury store. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. For luxury brands, a pop-up store will lead to a less luxurious image of the brand store than a traditional brand store.

H2. The luxurious image of brand the store will be positively related to anticipated embarrassment (H2a); therefore, the luxurious image of the brand store will mediate the effect of the pop-up (versus traditional) store on anticipated embarrassment such that the indirect effect of the pop-up store on anticipated embarrassment will be negative (H2b).

Considering the broad amount of evidence showing that emotions driven by the store environment affect store evaluations (e.g., Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006; Kim et al., 2016; Spangenberg, Grohmann, and Sprott, 2005), it may be likely that a decrease in embarrassment felt as a response to the more casual environment of the pop-up store leads to an increase in store evaluations. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3. Anticipated embarrassment will negatively affect store evaluations (H3a), leading the effect of the pop-up (versus traditional) format on store evaluations to be serially mediated by the luxurious image of the brand store and anticipated embarrassment (H3b).

Finally, a wide body of research recognizes the particular importance of congruency in the effects of retail stores on consumer evaluations (e.g., Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994; Bosmans, 2006; Im Schloss & Kuehnl, 2017; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Mitchell, Kahn, & Knasko, 1995; North, Hargreaves, & McKendrick, 1999; Spangenberg et al., 2005).

Therefore, one may wonder if the pop-up stores may not lead to a decrease in store evaluations because people may not perceive the pop-up format as appropriate for a luxury brand. Hence, we posit the following hypothesis:

H4: For luxury brands, a pop-up store will lead to lower perceived congruency than a traditional brand store (H4a); perceived congruency will mediate the negative effect of a pop-up (versus a traditional) format on store evaluations (H4b).

These hypotheses lead to the theoretical model presented in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

### **3. Study 1**

The goal of Study 1 is to test the theoretical model and show that, for luxury brands, pop-up stores—as opposed to traditional luxury stores—decrease the store’s image as a luxury retail space, which consequently leads to a decrease in consumers’ negative emotion of embarrassment and an increase in store evaluations.

#### *3.1. Participants, stimuli, and procedure*

One hundred and fifty individuals (50.7% female,  $M_{\text{Age}} = 32.78$ ,  $SD = 11.40$ , range: 20–60) from France were recruited online by a panelist and asked to watch one out of two 40-second videos of a store and to answer a questionnaire. The videos were made by a researcher and manipulated the format of store (pop-up versus traditional). For ecological validity purposes (Bateson & Hui, 1992), the videos were of either a real pop-up or a real traditional store. Participants were thus presented either the pop-up store of the luxury brand Cartier in the Saint-Germain quarter in Paris, France, or the traditional store of the same brand on Place Vendôme in the same city. This choice of two retail stores from the same brand and the same city was made to avoid any potential confound effect.

After having been exposed to one of the two videos, in order to inhibit response bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), participants were first asked to rate their store evaluations using three items from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989; favorable; positive; good;  $\alpha = .97$ ). Then, they rated their anticipated embarrassment using a three-item measure from Dahl et al. (2001; embarrassed, awkward, and uncomfortable;  $\alpha = .80$ ), the luxurious image of the store (luxurious and sophisticated;  $\alpha = .82$ ), and the congruency of the atmosphere (Demoulin, 2011; “This atmosphere fits well with the brand,” “I am not surprised finding such an atmosphere for a store of the brand,” and “For the brand Cartier, this atmosphere suits well”;  $\alpha = .84$ ). Also, because store evaluations could be influenced by the familiarity with the brand (Kim et al., 2016), respondents’ familiarity with the brand Cartier was assessed (“How familiar are you with the brand Cartier?”: 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much). This item was included as a covariate in further analyses. All the statements were rated on Likert scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). Table 1 provides a description of the scales and their psychometric properties. Finally, for manipulation check purposes, respondents were asked to tell if the store they had watched a video of was a traditional store of the brand or a pop-up store (a definition was given describing a pop-up store as a retail space that is open only for a short period of time). To avoid any bias due to the potential understanding of the focus of the study on pop-up versus traditional luxury brand stores, we included as other options “a department store” and “other.”

[Insert Table 1 here]

Discriminant validity of the multi-item scales was assessed following Fornell and Larcker (1981). The squared interfactor correlations between the constructs were less than the mean item communality of either factor, supporting the discriminant validity of our measures.

Convergent validity was also supported because the average variance extracted clearly exceeded .50 for all variables. Together, these analyses indicate that all measures possess reasonable psychometric properties, with high reliabilities and good convergent and discriminant validities (Table 2).

[Insert Table 2 here]

### *3.2. Manipulation checks*

A Chi-square test was used to test the effectiveness of the manipulation of the format of store (pop-up versus traditional). Results revealed a strongly significant Chi-square ( $\chi^2 = 74.30$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with participants in the pop-up store condition being significantly more likely to perceive the store as being a pop-up (57.3%) than a traditional store (13.3%). On the contrary, and as expected, in the traditional store condition, participants were significantly more likely to perceive the store as being a traditional store of the brand (83.3%) as opposed to a pop-up store (6.9%). The manipulation therefore appears effective.

Further, a *t*-test for independent samples was used to ensure that respondents across store format conditions (pop-up versus traditional) did not differ in brand familiarity. Results were reassuring, with a non-significant difference across conditions ( $t = .43$ ,  $p > .60$ ).

### *3.3. Testing of hypotheses*

Hypotheses 1 and 2a were tested using analyses of variance (ANOVAs), in which the format of the store (pop-up versus traditional, coded respectively 1 and 0) was used as the factor.

Brand familiarity was included as a covariate as well as gender due to previous research showing that female consumers see luxury brands in a particularly favorable way, providing them more uniqueness, status, and hedonic value than non-luxury brands (Stokburger-Sauer &

Teichmann, 2013). To test H1, luxurious store image served as the dependent variable. As expected, a significant negative main effect of the pop-up (versus traditional) store format ( $F(1, 149) = 16.01, p < .001$ ), with the image of a luxurious store being lower in the pop-up store condition ( $M = 4.92$ ) than in the traditional brand store condition ( $M = 5.74$ ). These results bring support to H1. Again, brand familiarity and gender had no effects ( $ps > .10$

[Insert Table 3 here]

Hypothesis 2—that is, the test of the mediating role of the luxurious brand store image in the effect of the store format (pop-up versus traditional) on anticipated embarrassment—was performed using a mediation analysis (Process, model 4, 5,000 bootstrap samples). The manipulation of the store format served as the independent variable, the luxurious brand store image as the mediating variable, and anticipated embarrassment as the dependent variable. Again, the effects of brand familiarity and gender were controlled for and the variables were included as covariates. Results revealed a significant indirect effect of the store format ( $\beta = -.18, 95\% \text{ CI} = -.409; -.026$ ), indicating that the luxurious image of the brand store mediates the effect. Specifically, the pop-up versus traditional format of the store decreases the luxurious image of the store ( $\beta = -.80, p < .001$ ), which shows that this variable is then positively related to embarrassment ( $\beta = .22, p < .05$ ). The pop-up format of the store had a marginally negative effect on embarrassment ( $\beta = -.50, p < .10$ ). Overall, these results support H2.

Hypothesis 3 was tested using a serial mediation (Process, model 6, 5,000 bootstrap samples). The procedure was the same as that used for the test of H2b but here the luxurious brand store image and anticipated embarrassment were included as mediators. Results revealed a significant index of serial mediation ( $\beta = .09, 95\% \text{ CI} = .015; .226$ ), which indicated that the decrease in the luxurious image of the store derived from the pop-up format of the store and the subsequent decrease in anticipated embarrassment explained the total positive

indirect effect of the pop-up (versus traditional) store on consumers' store evaluations (Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Finally, Hypothesis 4 and the notion that perceived congruency—unlike the luxurious brand store image and anticipated embarrassment—negatively mediates the effect of the pop-up format on store evaluations, and was tested using a mediation analysis. Results revealed a significant indirect effect of the pop-up format on store evaluations ( $\beta = -.31$ , 95% CI =  $-.603; -.130$ ), due to the negative effect of the pop-up format on perceived congruency ( $\beta = -.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the positive effect of this variable on store evaluations ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Of note, familiarity with the brand had a positive effect on perceived congruency ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

### *3.4. Discussion*

Study 1 demonstrates that the pop-up format of luxury stores can help consumers develop more favorable evaluations of the store due to the decrease in the perception of luxury associated with such stores and consequently the embarrassment that consumers have when shopping. However, Study 1 shows that consumers may form negative store evaluations when the pop-up format of the store makes them see the store environment as not congruent with one of a traditional luxury store.

In spite of such results, Study 1 left unexamined the question of whether the effect of the pop-up format on anticipated embarrassment could be observed for all consumers. To this regard, previous research shows for instance that highly innovative consumers, as well as those consumers who exhibit strong shopping enjoyment, are likely to be attracted by pop-up

retail stores (Kim et al., 2010). In spite of the interest of these variables, one may argue that some consumers might anticipate feeling lower embarrassment when shopping in the pop-up store of a luxury brand, thus making another individual variable of potential interest for the understanding of consumer approach toward pop-up stores: consumer's need for uniqueness. This construct fits into the theory of consumption as an extension of self (Belk, 1988) and is consensually viewed as useful to examine consumer responses to marketing stimuli that employ uniqueness appeals (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Specifically, consumer need for uniqueness refers to a three-dimensional construct that reflects need for differentiation while highlighting different degrees of social divergence (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2018). The first dimension, labeled "creative choice counter-conformity"—measures the consumer need for social dissimilarity. The second dimension—"unpopular choice counter-conformity"—taps into the consumer quest for dissimilarity and social disapproval. The third dimension—"avoidance of similarity"—measures the need for dissimilarity from social norms and the consumer lack of interest in conventional possessions.

Because luxury brands are associated with exclusivity (Phau & Prendergast, 2000), it thus may be likely that people who are low in the need for exclusivity respond more positively to stores formats that do not make salient the luxury side of the store. Hence, a need for uniqueness may play a role in how people respond to the design of the luxury store environment, and when consumers are low in need for uniqueness, the exclusivity of the luxury store may be a source of anticipated embarrassment. Hence, we posit the following hypothesis:

H5: Consumer need for uniqueness will moderate the effect of the pop-up (versus traditional) format of the luxury store on embarrassment. Specifically, for consumers who are low in need for uniqueness, pop-up stores will lead to lower embarrassment than

traditional luxury stores; for consumers who are high in need for uniqueness, such a difference in embarrassment will not be observed.

Study 2 is designed to test this notion.

#### **4. Study 2**

Beyond trying to replicate the results observed in Study 1 with another luxury brand and provide evidence for external validity, Study 2 aims to examine if all consumers react the same way to the pop-up (versus traditional) format of luxury brand stores. More specifically, Study 2 explores consumers' need for uniqueness as an individual trait able to explain when consumers feel less embarrassment when visiting a pop-up (versus traditional) luxury brand store.

##### *4.1. Participants, design, and procedure*

Two hundred and three individuals (53.7% female,  $M_{\text{Age}} = 36.42$ ,  $SD = 11.52$  ranging from 20 to 68) from United Kingdom were recruited online by a panelist and asked to participate in this study. In order to test the notion that the pop-up format of the luxury brand store leads to decreases in luxurious store image and embarrassment—and consequently in an increase in satisfaction—the format was manipulated as a between-subjects factor (pop-up versus traditional). In both conditions, respondents were first asked to watch a 44-second video designed from nine pictures of a luxury brand (Chanel) store. As in Study 1, to avoid any confound effect, the same luxury brand Chanel was retained for the stores shown in the two videos. This choice was made for two reasons. First, Chanel is a strongly recognized luxury brand, which thus made it a suitable brand for the current study. Further, Chanel launched a



pop-up store in 2017 in Berlin, a city where the brand actually already has a traditional store, making the use of that particular brand especially relevant for the ecological validity of the study. Still to avoid confound effects, when selecting on the web the pictures of the two store formats, a strong attention was devoted to selecting pictures that did not differ in human density, because this variable could explain differences in the dependent variable of the model, store evaluations (Van Rompay et al., 2008).

After having been exposed to the scenario and the map, participants were asked to answer items on a questionnaire. The measures were the same as in Study 1. Specifically, participants first rated their store evaluations, using the same three-item scale used previously ( $\alpha = .96$ ). They then completed the same measures of embarrassment ( $\alpha = .88$ ), luxurious store image ( $\alpha = .88$ ), and congruency of the atmosphere ( $\alpha = .92$ ). The last multi-item measure they had to complete was the 12-item scale of consumer need for uniqueness developed by Ruvio, Shoham, and Brencic (2008;  $\alpha = .92$ ). For manipulation check purposes, participants also had to answer the same question as in Study 1 and say if the store they had watched on the video was a traditional store of the brand, a pop-up store, a department store, or another type of store. Finally, using the same measure as in Study 1, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they were familiar with the brand Chanel, and this item was included as a covariate in the further analyses. Also, because one might argue that store evaluations could be influenced by how much people love the brand Chanel (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012), an item measuring brand love was included (“To what extent do you love the brand Chanel?”, 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much) and used as a covariate. All the statements were rated on Likert scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree).

#### *4.2. Manipulation checks*

A Chi-square test was used to test the effectiveness of the manipulation of the pop-up versus traditional format of store. A significant Chi-square ( $\chi^2 = 75.44$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was observed. Specifically, participants in the pop-up store condition were significantly more likely to perceive the store as being a pop-up (63.4%) than a traditional store (24.8%). On the contrary and as expected, in the traditional store condition, participants were significantly more likely to perceive the store as being a traditional store of the brand (82.2%) as opposed to a pop-up store (7.9%). These results lend support to the effectiveness of the manipulation.

Further, no differences in brand familiarity were observed across the condition of store format ( $t = 1.20$ ,  $p > .20$ ).

#### *4.3. Hypotheses testing*

Given the similarity in the design used in Studies 2 and 1, hypotheses were tested in Study 2 using the same procedures as in Study 1. Specifically, Hypotheses 1 and 2a were tested using ANOVAs, where the format of the store (pop-up versus traditional, coded respectively 1 and 0) was used as the factor. Brand familiarity and brand love were included as a covariate. The test of H1 involved a luxurious store image as the dependent variable. As expected, a significant negative main effect of the pop-up (versus traditional) store format is that the luxurious image of the store was lower in the pop-up store condition ( $M = 4.28$ ) than in the traditional brand store condition ( $M = 5.56$ ,  $F(1, 202) = 63.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Here, only the covariate of brand familiarity had a negative effect ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -2.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These results replicate those observed in Study 1 and bring further support to H1.

Hypothesis 2 was tested using a similar mediation analysis as in Study 1 (Process, model 4, 5,000 bootstrap samples). Results revealed a significant indirect effect of the store format ( $\beta = -.60$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $95\% CI = -.896; -.361$ ), indicating that the luxurious image of the brand store actually mediates the effect of anticipated embarrassment. Specifically, the pop-up versus

traditional format of the store decreases the luxurious image of the store ( $\beta = -1.31, p < .001$ ), and this variable consequently increased anticipated embarrassment ( $\beta = .46, p < .05$ ). The pop-up format of the store had no effect on anticipated embarrassment when controlling for a luxurious store image ( $p > .10$ ). Overall, these results support H2.

A serial mediation analysis (Process, model 6, 5,000 bootstrap samples) was then employed to test H3, with both luxurious brand store image and anticipated embarrassment included as mediators. Results revealed a strongly significant index of serial mediation ( $\beta = .30, SE = .08, 95\% CI = .164; .493$ ), indicating that the increase in store evaluation results from the sequential decrease in the luxurious image of the store and derives from the pop-up format of the store and the subsequent decrease in anticipated embarrassment (Figure 2).

Then, the notion that congruency could mediate the effect of the pop-up format on store evaluations was tested using a mediation analysis. Results revealed a significant indirect effect of the pop-up format on store evaluations ( $\beta = -.65, SE = -.15, 95\% CI = -.973; -.406$ ), here again due to the negative effect of the pop-up format on perceived congruency ( $\beta = -1.32, p < .001$ ) and the positive effect of this latter variable on store evaluations ( $\beta = .49, p < .001$ ). Of note, brand love had a positive effect on store evaluations ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ). Overall, these results provide further support to H5 and the notion that pop-up stores can lead to a decrease in store evaluations because of their lack of congruency with luxury brands.

The last analysis consisted of testing H6 and the notion that need for uniqueness moderates the effect of the pop-up versus traditional format of the store on anticipated embarrassment. To avoid any loss of statistical power (Spiller et al., 2013), a floodlight analysis was performed using the Process macro and 5,000 bootstrap samples. The moderation analysis involved store format as the independent variable, anticipated embarrassment as the dependent variable, the complete measure of need for uniqueness as the moderator, and brand love and familiarity as the covariates. As observed previously, results revealed a negative

effect of the pop-up (versus traditional) format on anticipated embarrassment ( $\beta = -2.60, p < .01$ ). A negative effect of need for uniqueness also emerged ( $\beta = -.31, p < .05$ ) and, as expected, its significant interaction with store format ( $\beta = .46, p < .05$ ). We graph this interaction in Figure 3, using the Johnson-Neyman technique for identifying regions in the range of the moderator variable in which the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is and is not significant (Hayes & Matthes, 2009). The Johnson-Neyman point for the need for uniqueness moderator occurs at a value of 4.42. This value indicates that the pop-up format results in significantly lower levels of anticipated embarrassment than the traditional format for values of need for uniqueness lower than 4.42. These results thus support H6 and the notion that need for uniqueness moderates the effect of the pop-up store format on anticipated embarrassment, with consumers low in need for uniqueness anticipating lower embarrassment when facing a pop-up (versus traditional) store.

#### *4.4. Discussion*

Using another luxury brand—Chanel—Study 2 replicates the results of Study 1 by showing that the pop-up format of a luxury brand store leads to lower perceptions of the store as luxurious, which leads to lower anticipated embarrassment and more favorable store evaluations. Study 2 also replicates the result whereby the pop-up format can lead to an increase in store evaluations if the atmosphere of the pop-up store is judged to be incongruent to the luxury brand.

Also, and of importance, Study 2 identifies need for uniqueness as an individual trait that explains why people react positively to pop-up stores. More specifically, our results show that when people are low in need for uniqueness—and thus do not feel the need to differentiate themselves—their reaction to pop-up stores leads to lower anticipations of embarrassment.

## **5. General discussion**

This research investigated pop-up stores as unconventional retail settings for luxury brands. More specifically, the focus was made on how such a format can help consumers be more at ease when visiting luxury brand stores. Across two experiments, we first demonstrated that consumers feel less embarrassment and exhibit more positive store evaluations when the luxury brand store is designed using a pop-up format as compared with a more traditional format. Importantly, we identified the luxurious store image as the underlying mechanism that explains why being in a pop-up luxury store leads to lower embarrassment. Specifically, our results show that the pop-up format prompts lower perceptions of luxury, which help people feel more at ease and anticipate less embarrassment. In other words, it is because the pop-up format makes consumers feel the store is not as luxurious as the traditional store that the pop-up format can make consumers feel more at ease about their visit. Further, we have demonstrated the moderating role of need for uniqueness in the effects of the pop-up format on embarrassment, whereby consumers who are low in such need for uniqueness anticipate less embarrassment when facing a pop-up versus a traditional luxury brand store.

### *5.1. Theoretical contributions*

Together, these results obtained using two different luxury brands—Cartier and Chanel—offer several important theoretical contributions to the literature on luxury consumption. A first contribution relates to the addition to the still-scarce literature on the pop-up format of luxury retail stores by demonstrating how such a format can help people feel less embarrassed by the idea of visiting luxury brand stores. Recent research has provided mixed results as to how consumers respond to a pop-up format for luxury brand stores, with Taube & Warnaby (2017) finding out that such a format could either positively or negatively influence

consumers' luxury brand perceptions. The current research contributes by showing that the luxury brand store evaluation made by consumers exposed to a pop-up format could actually be explained by the emotion of embarrassment. This emotion has been shown to result from a breakdown in social encounters (Dahl et al., 2001), but its decrease as a response to the pop-up format remained unidentified. This identification of embarrassment as emerging in a retail context is important for two reasons. First, in line with previous research showing the negative states associated with shopping and the “dark side” of retailing (Maxwell & Kover, 2003), this research provides evidence for the notion that luxury can actually have a dark side, which is evidenced by the results showing that people anticipate the negative emotion of embarrassment when thinking about visiting a traditional luxury brand store as opposed to the pop-up store of that same brand.

The second reason is that the affect-as-information framework (Schwarz & Clore, 1983, 2003) posits that consumers who feel unpleasant affective states are likely to rely on the informational property of their present feelings to decide what behavior to adopt. By showing that exposure to pop-up format leads to a decrease in anticipated embarrassment, our results suggest that such a decrease can reveal positive responses and behaviors. Our results provide support to this idea by showing that the decrease in the negative affective state of embarrassment following exposure to a pop-up format plays a strong positive role in generating favorable evaluations of the luxury brand store.

In addition, this research contributes to the growing literature linking luxury consumption and consumer need for uniqueness. Specifically, our research identifies consumer need for uniqueness as an individual variable that explains the differences in consumer embarrassment across conditions of pop-up versus traditional luxury brands stores. What our results show is that consumers who are low in need for uniqueness—and who thus don't need to see themselves as being different from other consumers (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977)—are helped

by the pop-up format of the luxury store to feel less embarrassed as compared with traditional stores. This result is interesting because the literature on need for uniqueness usually examines this motivation for unconformity in the domain of consumer goods (Ruvio, 2008; Tian & McKenzie, 2001) rather than in the retail context. Hence, although need for uniqueness is viewed as a trait motivation for differentiating the self via consumer goods and their visual display, we show that such a need for uniqueness can also be considered to be a motivation for shopping in particular formats of luxury brand stores.

Beyond contributing solely to the luxury consumption literature, this research also contributes to the impressive body of research that has been built on the S-O-R model to investigate the effects of the store environment (e.g., Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006; Lunardo, Roux, & Chaney, 2016; Michon, Chebat, & Turley, 2005). In spite of this broad body of research, no insight has been provided so far regarding how cognitions and emotions relate to one another in the Organism component of the model. Specifically, research has left unanswered the question pertaining to whether cognitions precede emotions or, on the contrary, if emotional states drive cognitions. Our results indicate that among the two cognitive and emotional dimensions that constitute the Organism in the S-O-R model, it is cognitions that determine emotions. Here, the image of the pop-up store as less of a luxurious retail space decreases the anticipated emotion of embarrassment, and this sequence helps explain why pop-up stores can increase consumers' store evaluations. What becomes interesting here is that the direct effect of pop-up stores on evaluations is negative, and the indirect effect through a luxurious store image and anticipated embarrassment is positive, indicating that this sequence between cognitions and emotions is important to explaining consumer responses.

## *5.2. Managerial implications*

For managers of luxury stores or brands, this research brings converging evidence toward the notion that pop-up stores can help people feel less embarrassed with the idea of visiting luxury stores, resulting in more favorable store evaluations. As such, pop-up stores might be likely to attract more consumers, and a rather straightforward recommendation would consist of implementing pop-up stores. In light of the results showing the moderating effect of need for uniqueness, this recommendation appears to be of even greater importance for luxury brand managers. Our results indicate that most people do not feel the need to be unique, with 57.6% of people reporting a need for uniqueness lower than the mid-point of 4 on the 1–7 Likert scale ( $M_e = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). For this majority of people, embarrassment is significantly greater in the traditional luxury store format than in the pop-up format. It thus appears that this majority of people benefit from the pop-up format and that a manager aiming to attract those people may gain in designing their luxury stores to follow a pop-up format.

Another implication derives from the mediating effect of the luxurious store image. Although previous research presents luxury in relation to symbolic consumption as a way for the members of the upper class to demonstrate their status (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014), our research contradicts this notion of status-related motivations for luxury consumption. Our results indicate that consumers form more favorable evaluations of a luxury brand store when such a store—here because of its pop-up format—prompts lower perceptions of luxury. Therefore, luxury brand managers may gain in designing their retail places in such a way that the luxury atmosphere is not made too salient. This recommendation has to be taken with caution given the wide variance that may exist in motivations for luxury consumption (Dubois, Czellar, & Laurent, 2005). However, the sequential mediation here suggests that—at least when it comes to pop-up stores—a decrease in the perception of a luxurious atmosphere helps consumers feel more at ease and develop more positive evaluations of the store.



### *5.3. Limitations and further research*

A limitation of this research lies in the lack of testing for the effects of the two variables of scarcity and urgency that yet may play a role in purchase intentions. Because pop-up stores are temporary by nature, customers are less likely to delay purchases and may thus increase their purchase intentions. As with such urgency, scarcity might also be of interest to examine in further research. Pop-up stores typically offer limited edition brands, as it was the case when the brand Nike opened a pop-up store for four days only with the specific purpose of selling only 250 pairs of limited edition basketball shoes (Gogoi, 2007). In light of the reactance theory (Brehm, 1966) and the marketing research showing that people who face scarcity develop a sense of reactance that makes the scarce product more attractive (Moore & Fitzsimons, 2014), research should examine if offering limited editions creates a sense of urgency, which may prompt consumers to consider purchasing the scarce products.

Also, in our studies, we focused on the positive effects of pop-up formats. In spite of evidence for such positive effects, one may wonder if the pop-up format may not contribute to making the luxury stores mostly perceived as a mass marketing tool for attracting more consumers. Because mass marketing techniques undermine the feeling of authenticity (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), the pop-up format could therefore lead to lower brand authenticity perceptions. Further research that investigates this question would be helpful.

Further, pop-up formats may affect other dimensions of brand image than the mere luxurious dimension examined here. Because communicating the appropriate brand image – or the set of reasoned or emotional perceptions that consumers attach to specific brands (Low & Lamb, 2000, p. 352) – to a target represents as an important marketing activity, luxury brands may be careful about the potential change in brand image that the pop-up format of their stores can induce. The current research focused on one particular dimension of brand image, the luxurious store image, but other dimensions exist and may deserve attention.

Specifically, brand image includes symbolic meanings that consumers associate with the specific attributes of the product or brand. By focusing on the luxurious store image, we focused on the emotional or symbolic meanings of the store, and left unexamined the question as to if the pop-up format of a luxury brand store could affect more reasoned and utilitarian associations and meanings. Yet, and although Klein et al. (2016) found support for the notion that pop-up stores help achieve hedonic goals and value, one might argue that pop-up (versus traditional) luxury stores could also lead people to perceive that the luxury store will help them achieve more utilitarian (e.g., finding some luxury items at a lower price) than emotional benefits (e.g., decrease in embarrassment). Hence, further research should investigate if pop-up stores only affect the symbolic dimension of brand image or also its utilitarian and more reasoned dimensions.

Another research avenue of potential interest lies in the examination of the relationship between luxury brands and consumer embarrassment. The current research rests upon the notion that consumers might feel embarrassed entering luxury brands stores, and thus that luxury brands would gain in finding ways to prevent such embarrassment. However, because luxury is often associated with symbolism, status and prestige (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999, 2004), brands that aim to be perceived as luxury may actually gain in prompting embarrassment, if one posits that such embarrassment could help the brand be perceived as more luxurious. Therefore, further research is needed to address when embarrassment can actually help luxury brands.

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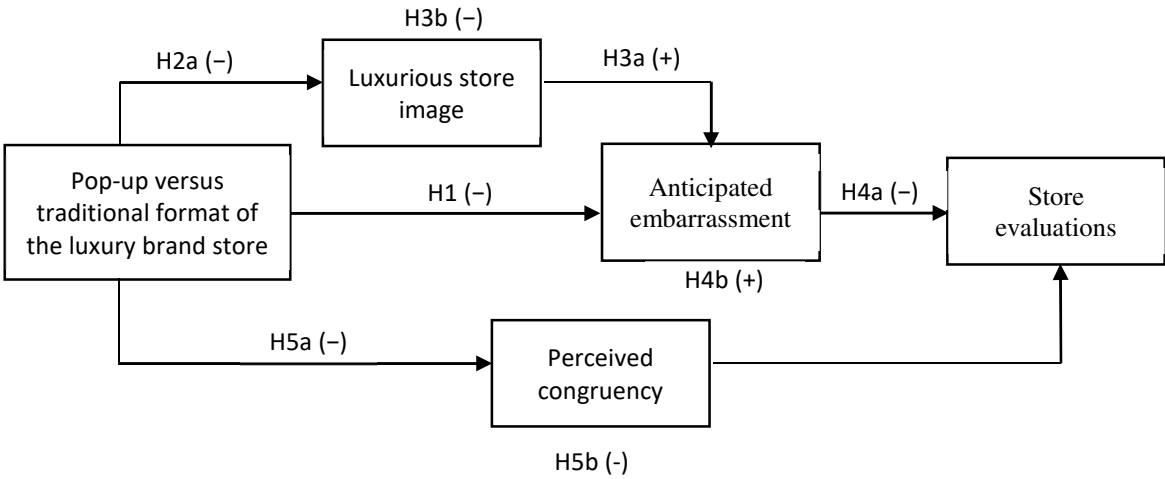
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**Figure 1.** Study 1: The theoretical model



**Table 1:** The measures used in the studies and their psychometric properties (Studies 1–2)

Measures	Study 1 (Cartier)		Study 2 (Chanel)	
	Loadings	Reliability	Loadings	Reliability
<i>Store evaluations</i>				
Unfavorable/Favorable	.967	.972	.965	.967
Negative/Positive	.977		.977	
Bad/Good	.976		.965	
<i>Embarrassment</i>				
Embarrassed	.858	.806	.882	.881
Awkward	.877		.934	
Uncomfortable	.893		.882	
<i>Luxurious store image</i>				
Luxurious	.923	.822	.931	.881
Sophisticated	.912		.907	
<i>Congruency</i>				
This atmosphere fits well with the brand ____.	.868	.843	.942	.926
I am not surprised finding such an atmosphere for a store of the brand ____.	.819		.909	
For the brand ____, this atmosphere suits well.	.932		.954	
<i>Need for uniqueness</i>				
I often combine possessions ...	-	-	.804	.927
I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill ...	-		.816	
I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products ...	-		.822	
Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me ...	-		.810	
When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them...	-		.790	
I have often violated the understood rules of my social group ...	-		.880	
I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group ...	-		.865	
I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know ...	-		.624	
When a product I own becomes popular among the general population ...	-		.815	
I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population	-		.876	
As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone	-		.876	
The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population...	-		.885	

**Table 2.** Convergent and discriminant validity of the scales

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean (S.D.)
Study 1: Cartier						
1. Store evaluations	.94	-.38**	.16	.35**	-	4.64 (1.75)
2. Embarrassment	.14	.74	.15	-.03	-	2.92 (1.46)
3. Luxurious store image	.03	.02	.60	.46**	-	5.38 (1.19)
4. Congruency	.12	.01	.21	.76	-	5.29 (1.48)
Study 2: Chanel						
1. Store evaluations	.93	-.44**	.22**	.45**	.150*	4.79 (1.61)
2. Embarrassment	.19	.80	.36**	.06	-.16*	3.30 (1.77)
3. Luxurious store image	.05	.13	.64	.66**	-.09	4.93 (1.28)
4. Congruency	.20	.01	.43	.87	.01	5.15 (1.45)
5. Need for uniqueness	.02	.03	.01	.00	.80	3.77 (1.23)

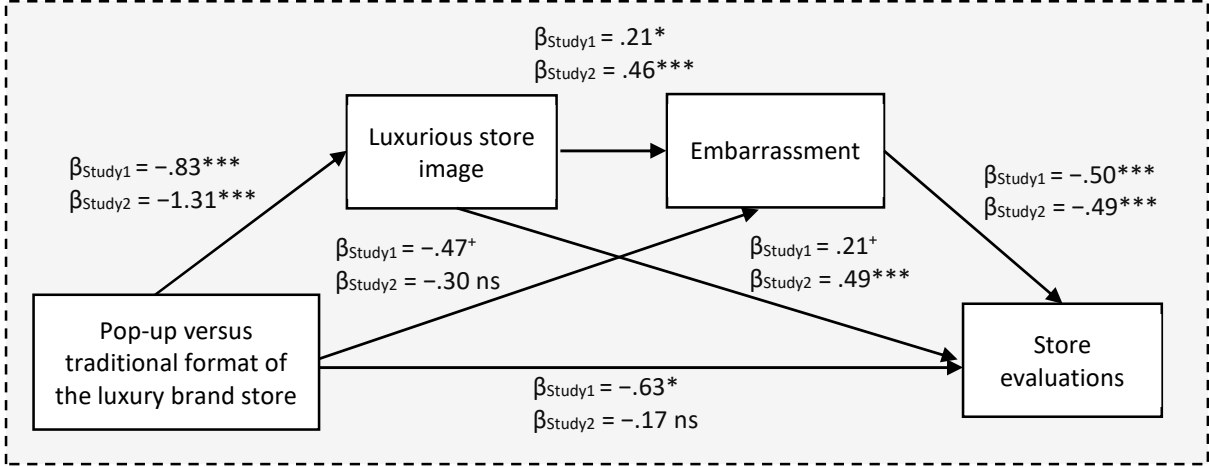
Note: The squared correlations among constructs appear below the diagonal; the correlations appear above the diagonal. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is on the diagonal.

\*\* :  $p < .01$ ; \* :  $p < .05$ .

**Table 3.** Univariate analyses (Studies 1–2)

	Study 1 (Cartier)			Study 2 (Chanel)		
	Luxury store format			Luxury store format		
	Traditional	Pop-up	<i>p</i>	Traditional	Pop-up	<i>p</i>
Store evaluations	4.92	4.40	.067	5.03	4.56	<.05
Embarrassment	3.64	2.96	<.01	3.70	2.97	<.001
Luxurious store image	5.74	4.92	<.001	5.56	4.28	<.001
Congruency	5.69	4.89	<.001	5.79	4.49	<.001
Need for uniqueness	-	-	-	3.78	3.76	> .800

**Figure 2.** Studies 1–2: The serially mediating effect of pop-up versus traditional formats of luxury stores on store evaluations



Note: \*\*\*:  $p < .001$ ; \*\*:  $p < .01$ ; +:  $p < .10$ ; ns: not significant.

**Figure 3.** Study 2: Embarrassment as a function of pop-up versus traditional format of luxury stores and consumer need for uniqueness.

