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**THE NEW MUSES OF SUSTAINABLE LUXURY: WHAT EFFECTS DO INFLUENCERS HAVE ON THE
CHARISMA OF LUXURY BRANDS?**

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THE NEW MUSES OF SUSTAINABLE LUXURY: WHAT EFFECTS DO INFLUENCERS HAVE ON THE CHARISMA OF LUXURY BRANDS?

Abstract : Recent research demonstrates the positive impact of celebrities when they endorse the sustainable activities of luxury brands, thanks to their compatibility with luxury and sustainability. However, a new type of endorsement is observed: the collaboration between luxury brands and influencers. These personalities benefit from a stronger perception of proximity with individuals and could therefore be perceived as less compatible with the inaccessibility dimension of luxury. The objective of this research is to better understand what type of endorser (i.e., celebrity or influencer) could improve the perception of congruence between the brand and the sustainable cause, and if this congruence has an effect on the charisma and attractiveness of the brand. Finally, this study proposes to better understand the effect of these endorsement strategies on behavioral and attitudinal variables, such as perception of luxury, willingness to pay a high price, and proselytism intentions.

Keywords : Luxury; Corporate Social Responsibility; Celebrity endorsement; Influencers; Brand charisma

FRENCH

LES NOUVELLES ÉGÉRIES DU LUXE DURABLE : QUELS EFFETS DES INFLUENCEURS SUR LE CHARISME DES MARQUES DE LUXE ?

Résumé : De récentes recherches démontrent l'impact positif des célébrités lorsqu'elles endossent les activités durables des marques de luxe, grâce à leur compatibilité avec le luxe et le développement durable. Un nouveau type d'endossement est toutefois observé : la collaboration entre marques de luxe et influenceurs. Ces personnalités bénéficient d'une plus forte perception de proximité avec les individus et pourraient donc être perçues comme moins compatibles avec la dimension d'inaccessibilité du luxe. L'objectif de cette recherche est de mieux comprendre quel type d'endosseur (i.e., célébrité ou influenceur) pourrait améliorer la perception de congruence entre la marque et la cause durable, et si cette congruence a un effet sur le charisme et l'attractivité de la marque. Enfin, cette étude propose de mieux comprendre l'effet de ces stratégies d'endossement sur des variables comportementales et attitudinales, telles que la perception du luxe, la volonté de payer un prix élevé et les intentions de prosélytisme.

Mots clefs : Luxe ; Responsabilité Sociale d'Entreprise ; Endossement par les célébrités ; Influenceurs ; Charisme de marque

THE NEW MUSES OF SUSTAINABLE LUXURY: WHAT EFFECTS DO INFLUENCERS HAVE ON THE CHARISMA OF LUXURY BRANDS?

Introduction

In August 2022, Yves Saint Laurent Beauty invited American singer Lil Nas X to become an ambassador for the brand's beauty range. The singer, committed to LGBTQIA+ causes and seen as a symbol of self-affirmation and acceptance, can transfer his enduring values to the brand through this collaboration (McCracken, 1989). This strategy of celebrity endorsement of products or the brand has been used for decades by the luxury industry (Veg-Sala, 2014) and has demonstrated its positive impacts in the context of sustainable luxury (Park et al., 2019). Indeed, if engaged celebrities can help luxury brands promote their ethical values, it's mainly because they are perceived as compatible both with the world of luxury, with their prestigious lifestyle, and with the world of ethics, thanks to their support for social or environmental causes (Muniz and Guzmán, 2021).

Lately, we've been witnessing a new type of endorsement in the luxury sphere: association with influencers. While collaboration between a celebrity and a luxury brand may be perceived as consistent due to celebrities' prestigious lifestyles (Park et al., 2019), this perceived compatibility could decline in the case of influencers, who inspire a greater sense of proximity (Temessek-Behi and Laribi, 2016). This means that, while celebrities may be perceived as "untouchable", like luxury brands, influencers are part of the "common man" and therefore appear far removed from the dimension of inaccessibility associated with the world of luxury. This perception of incompatibility between the influencer and the luxury brand could therefore make the brand's lasting commitment lack credibility, and thus tarnish its image.

The effects of these new types of collaboration in the context of sustainable luxury have not yet been studied in an academic context, to our knowledge. This ongoing study therefore focuses on new endorsement strategies for sustainable activities by luxury brands. The forthcoming analysis of the results of this study will, more specifically, provide a better understanding of the impact on customer reactions of collaboration between a luxury brand and an influencer.

Literature review

Are luxury and sustainable development compatible?

In 1987, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development called on us to watch our behavior so as not to harm the prosperity promised to future generations. While this alarm has been picked up by many brands, it seems that the luxury industry has had difficulty implementing more sustainable practices (Athwal et al., 2019). More to the point, it has been reluctant to publicly demonstrate its sustainable commitments (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2020). Indeed, academic research tends to show that, when luxury brands show themselves to be more ethically minded, customers do not perceive the association between luxury and sustainability as consistent (Torelli, Monga and Kaikati, 2012). This low perceived compatibility can either lead individuals to experience a phenomenon of cognitive dissonance (Dekhili and Achabou, 2016), or motivate them to avoid the brand that engages in sustainable practices (Chang et al., 2019). These difficulties in seducing consumers with ethical claims have led luxury brands to remain silent about their sustainable approaches, leading many to believe that they provide none (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2020).

Nevertheless, although luxury and sustainable development may be perceived as incompatible due to their conflicting dimensions (Torelli, Monga and Kaikati, 2012), it seems that customers ignore rather than reject luxury products labeled sustainable, as they value more the interlude of pleasure associated with their luxury purchase compared to the ethical dimension of their act (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau, 2020). Similarly, Muniz and Guzmán (2021), in their work on the impact of celebrity endorsement of responsible luxury, point out that luxury and sustainable development can be congruent, as long as individuals perceive a compatibility between the ethical cause and the brand. This perceived compatibility is further reinforced by the presence of a celebrity.

This necessary compatibility between the brand and its sustainable activities aligns with the notion of brand consistency, which suggests that a company's activities should be consistent with the personality traits perceived by individuals (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). This coherence also has a direct impact on the perceived attractiveness of the brand (Currás-Pérez, Bigné-Alcañiz and Alvarado-Herrera, 2009). Finally, ethical luxury brands are perceived as more charismatic, suggesting that luxury and sustainability can be identified as compatible (Semaan, Ashill and Williams, 2019).

While the positive impact of celebrity endorsement of sustainable luxury has already been highlighted (Muniz and Guzmán, 2021; Park et al., 2019), it remains to be seen whether this strategy also works when collaborating with influencers.

Is an influencer a celebrity?

A celebrity represents "any individual who enjoys public recognition and uses that recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (McCracken, 1989, p. 310). These famous individuals are usually known for their talent in a specific field such as film (e.g., Natalie Portman), music (e.g., Ed Sheeran) or sport (e.g., Michael Jordan) (Danglade, 2013). The meaning transfer model describes the phenomenon whereby these celebrities can transfer their attributes to the endorsed brand or product, such as their image, status, wealth, appeal and inspirational lifestyle (McCracken, 1989). In the context of sustainable development, celebrities can be seen as actors capable of raising public awareness of important societal causes, particularly in view of their growing commitments in recent years (Lochard and Murat, 2011). A committed celebrity can thus enable luxury brands to benefit from its values of prestige and commitment, and lead consumers to positively welcome the luxury brand's sustainable commitment (Muniz and Guzmán, 2021; Park et al., 2019).

Recently, we've been witnessing a new type of collaboration between luxury brands and famous personalities, such as Emma Chamberlain and Louis Vuitton, or Léna Mahfouf and Dior. These individuals, known as influencers, are not perceived as competent in a specific professional field such as sport or film, but have instead gained recognition by presenting themselves as experts on a particular theme, such as beauty, cooking, fitness, fashion or video games (Lin, Bruning and Swarna 2018). Influencers, compared to traditional celebrities, generally share their intimate and private lives with their community (Abidin, 2019), which leads to an increase in the level of trust and perceived closeness, as well as a strengthening of the identification process between the influencer and the individual (Temessek-Behi and Laribi, 2016). Finally, differences emerge regarding the level of perceived charisma between influencers and traditional celebrities. While traditional celebrities may benefit from a charisma inherent in the origin of their authority, the charisma attributed to influencers is "activated" by their community (Cocker and Cronin, 2017). In other words, while traditional celebrities are perceived as naturally charismatic, influencers are only so if their community so decides.

Is the collaboration between a luxury brand and an influencer coherent?

The valence of the impact of these new types of collaboration between an influencer and a luxury brand still awaits clarification by solid scientific evidence (Temessek-Behi and Laribi, 2016). Indeed, while the perceived closeness between the influencer and the individual can have positive effects on purchase intention and brand attitude in a traditional industry (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011; Lee and Watkins, 2016), this intimacy can be problematic in the case of luxury brands, rather associated with values such as inaccessibility, desire or dream (Kapferer, 2016). This could lead to a perceived incompatibility between the influencer and the luxury brand, compared to a traditional celebrity (perceived as out of reach). In terms of the degree of charisma that these collaborations can bring to the brand, differences may emerge in terms of the type of endorser selected. As celebrities carry a natural charisma, they could more easily transfer it to the brand, compared to influencers for whom charisma has been built at the whim of their community (Cocker and Cronin, 2017).

However, luxury brands have recently seen this character of inaccessibility diluted as they have moved from a "happy few" to a "happy many" target, giving more individuals access to luxury items (Kapferer, 2016). This democratization of luxury could therefore lead customers to perceive greater consistency in the collaboration between influencers and luxury brands, with the latter now partly dispossessed of their untouchable character.

At present, the literature provides no answers to these questions. In this respect, this study proposes to understand what the effects of these new forms of endorsement in a responsible luxury context might be on customer perceptions.

Research model and hypothesis

This ongoing study therefore focuses on new forms of endorsement of sustainable luxury. This section describes the construction of the conceptual model proposed for this investigation (Figure 1), as well as the associated hypotheses.

On the one hand, we know that celebrity increases the perceived compatibility between the luxury brand and the sustainable cause it defends (Muniz and Guzmán, 2021). On the other hand, the perceived charisma associated with the brand may derive from its various ethical commitments (Semaan, Ashill and Williams, 2019). We therefore propose that celebrity endorsement of a luxury brand's sustainable activities positively impacts the perceived congruence between the cause championed and the brand, and that this perceived congruence positively impacts the brand's charisma.

H1: When the brand's enduring commitment is endorsed, the perceived congruence between the brand and the cause positively influences the brand's charisma.

One of the differences between a celebrity and an influencer lies in the perceived proximity between the consumer and the influential personality (Temessek-Behi and Laribi, 2016). Therefore, we propose that with the presence of a celebrity, and even more so with an influencer, a stronger identification of the consumer with the endorser will positively moderate the effect of brand-cause congruence on perceived brand charisma.

H2: Consumer identification with the endorser positively moderates the effect of brand-cause congruence on brand charisma.

The perception of consistency in the sustainable activities undertaken by the brand can increase the perceived attractiveness to customers (Currás-Pérez, Bigné-Alcañiz and Alvarado-Herrera, 2009). Since the endorser increases the compatibility (and therefore consistency) between the cause and the luxury brand (Muniz and Guzmán, 2021), we propose that the brand will be perceived as more attractive in this context. To better understand which variables impact perceived brand attractiveness, this experiment proposes to test whether

brand charisma mediates the effect of perceived compatibility between the brand and the sustainable cause it champions on brand attractiveness.

H3: Brand charisma positively influences brand attractiveness.

Specifically, we propose that this mediating effect is stronger in the case where the celebrity, rather than the influencer, endorses the brand's sustainable activity, mainly because the celebrity's charisma is more natural than that of influencers (Cocker and Cronin, 2017). Since luxury brands are perceived as more charismatic when they engage in sustainable practices (Semaan, Ashill and Williams, 2019), we propose that this perception of brand charisma directly reinforces the impression of luxury associated with the brand.

H4: Brand charisma positively influences the impression of luxury.

Currás-Pérez, Bigné-Alcañiz and Alvarado-Herrera (2009) have shown that brand attractiveness in the context of CSR activities can increase purchase intentions. The present model also tests whether brand attractiveness encourages the propensity to pay a higher price, in a luxury context.

H5: Brand attractiveness positively influences the impression of luxury.

Finally, we propose to study the effects of brand attractiveness on other variables, in particular, whether a more attractive luxury brand may also reinforce the perception that the brand is luxurious (i.e., luxury impression) and whether customers may develop a proselytizing intention as a result of this perceived attractiveness.

H6: Brand attractiveness positively influences the propensity to pay a high price.

H7: Brand attractiveness positively influences proselytizing intentions.

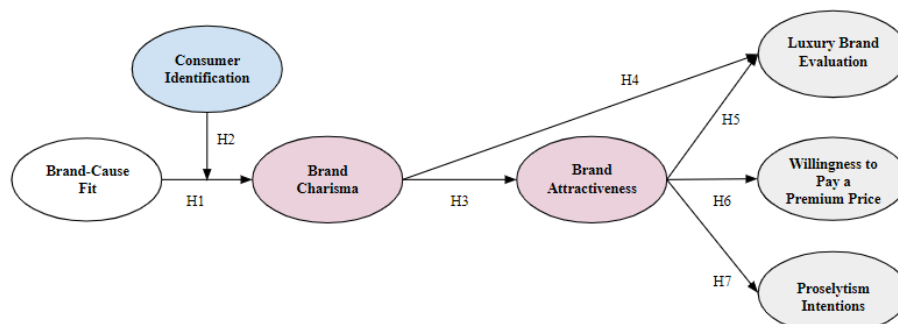


Figure 1: Research model.

Particular attention will be paid to the age of respondents regarding the effects of celebrity or influencer on these relationships. Indeed, while the celebrity may have a stronger impact on the hypotheses formulated due to its greater compatibility with the luxury universe (Park et al., 2019), it is possible that the younger generation feels closer to influencers, as is more accustomed to seeing them daily on social media. This could lead to a stronger effect of influencers on the expected results for this generation in particular.

Methodology

This study is currently underway, and the results will be presented at the AFM international conference in May 2023.

Type of experiment. Two experiments were designed for this study, plus a control group. In these 3 conditions, respondents were exposed to a stimulus presenting a luxury brand committed to defending women's rights (sustainable cause defended). In the first experiment, the brand's activity is endorsed by an influencer, and in the second experiment, a celebrity endorses the brand's commitment. In the control group, no celebrity endorses the

brand's commitment (the brand presents its sustainable activities alone). This allows us to understand whether the celebrity and the influencer have different effects on the proposed hypotheses. For each condition, we plan to survey 250 North American and British consumers of luxury brands, female and aged 18 to 41, to match the Gen Z and Gen Y generations¹. In all, the experiment hopes to attract 750 entries (Appendix 1).

Brand selection. The experiment plans to use a brand to add credibility to the stimuli. A pre-test is underway to assess the degree to which the brand is perceived as luxurious, familiar, likely to commit to ethical causes and likely to collaborate with a celebrity. The brands selected for the pre-test are Saint Laurent, Gucci, Hermès, Christian Dior, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Jean Paul Gaultier and Prada.

Choice of communication support. A communication campaign on the social medium Instagram was chosen. Indeed, this social media is used by the target population (Millennials and Gen Z), and is also the platform through which collaborations between the brand and ambassadors can be broadcast. This social media is centered on the attractiveness of the image, a criterion that corresponds to the communication campaigns of luxury brands, most of the time centered on the aesthetics of images, rather than on a functional description of items (e.g., fragrance ads). The stimuli for these experiments are still under construction. We are taking many precautions to ensure that we are really measuring the concepts we have chosen, and to avoid, as far as possible, any other undesired effects or biases. An example of inspiration for constructing the stimuli is given in Appendix 2.

Choice of endorsers. Finally, particular attention was paid to the selection of the influencer and celebrity to make them as "similar" as possible to avoid any bias. After pre-testing, actress Zendaya was selected as the celebrity and Youtuber Emma Chamberlain as the influencer. In terms of age, they were born in 1996 and 2001 respectively; we judged that a difference of 5 years was acceptable, making the impact of age limited. This would not have been the case if we had selected Natalie Portman and Emma Chamberlain, for example, as there is a 30-year difference between the two personalities. In this situation, the Millennial generation might have identified better with Natalie Portman (closer in age) than with the influencer, generating a bias in the appreciation of the collaboration. Likewise, both celebrities are located on the border between the two generations (the Millennial generation ends in 1996). If older (younger) celebrities are selected, this may increase perceived familiarity for the Millennial (Z) generation and decrease it for Generation Z (Millennials), again introducing a bias into the experiment. In terms of notoriety, both celebrities are well known in the USA (the context of the study) and have already endorsed a luxury brand (Louis Vuitton, Cartier or Calvin Klein for Emma Chamberlain and Valentino, Lancôme and Bulgari for Zendaya).

¹ Pew Research Center includes individuals born between 1981 and 1996 in Generation Y (Millennials). Generation Z begins in 1997.

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Appendix 1: Proposed experiment.

			BRAND
			<i>to be defined</i>
ENDORSER	Influencer	<i>Emma Chamberlain</i>	<i>N = 250</i>
	Celebrity	<i>Zendaya</i>	<i>N = 250</i>
	Control group	\emptyset	<i>N = 250</i>

Appendix 2: Work in progress on experimental stimuli.

The following photos give an overview of the desired stimuli for experimentation (with the Gucci brand), in particular for the influencer and celebrity conditions. After pre-testing for the selection of the most similar photos, these photos will be integrated into an Instagram publication where the brand describes its collaboration with the influencer or celebrity as part of a sustainable engagement (and one where it presents its engagement alone - control group). The following photographs are not definitive and may be modified or replaced, depending on the results of the pre-test.

2.a. First proposed stimuli



2.b. Second proposed stimuli



2.c. Third proposed stimuli

