The Artification of Luxury: How Art Can Affect Perceived Durability and Purchase Intention of Luxury Products

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Abstract Luxury brands are currently addressing the issues arising from the "democratization" of luxury consumption by looking for new ways to reinforce their aesthetic, moral and symbolic value. Along with this challenge, luxury brands are facing the growing consumers' concern about the social and environmental impact that luxury brands' activities bring forth. In this chapter, we propose that associating luxury products and brands with the concept of art and artworks might help luxury companies tackle these issues. We start from the definition of luxury and the analysis of the motives behind luxury consumption and then discuss the role played by sustainability in luxury through an overview of the main characteristics of luxury goods, such as scarcity and durability, that make them be considerable as sustainable in nature. Next, we discuss the idea that luxury and art share some important elements, such as the inherent strong emotional value, the relevance of craftmanship and savoir faire, and, above all, the idea of durability (defined as the ability of a product to maintain its quality and value over time), which characterizes both luxury products and artworks. In particular, building on this premise as well as on previous studies documenting the existence of the so-called *art infusion effect*—defined as the general positive effect that the presence of art in product advertising has on product evaluation and perception—we propose that the relevance of the artist's craftmanship in the process of the artwork creation positively influences consumers' perceived durability of the product advertised, which, in turn, positively affects consumers' purchase intention. Results of an experimental study discussed next support for our hypothesis. Theoretical contributions of our study and managerial implications of our findings are finally discussed in the chapter.

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1 Defining Luxury

Several scholars, managers and actors operating in the luxury industry have attempted to provide a definition of what luxury is. However, the complexity of the luxury phenomenon is such to make the search for a unique and comprehensive definition a still open question [1, 2]. Indeed, as highlighted by Belk [3], the classification of a product or service as luxury is fluid and open to significant changes, since the perception of luxury is "specific to a particular time and place and is always socially constructed" (p. 41). For example, in the economically developed countries many products and services previously considered luxuries—such as mobile phones, foreign travel and computers—are today perceived as necessities [3]. However, while strong arguments exist about the fact that luxury products cannot be categorized as such by their appearance or intrinsic qualities [2], many contributions have been provided in the attempt to categorize luxuries and identify their peculiar characteristics.

Firstly, an open question is to what extent product expensiveness defines luxury. In economic terms, luxury brands are those which have constantly been able to justify a high price: a price significantly higher than the price of products with comparable characteristics [4]. Despite the prominence of price as a discriminant element of luxury products, this definition does not seem to be comprehensive enough to cover all features of luxury items, since it implies that the luxury status can be gained to goods having a price differential with other goods in the same category, included the upper-range brands [5].

A more comprehensive view of luxury has been provided by Ko et al. [6], who have highlighted three criteria to reach a thorough definition of luxuries: the existence of a sound conceptual foundation, the applicability to every product category and the measurability of the construct. Considering them all together, authors have agreed to theoretically define a luxury brand as "a branded product or service that consumers perceive to: be high quality; offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional; have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality; be worthy of commanding a premium price; and be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer" (p. 406). Along this line, Vickers and Renand [2] argue that luxury goods can be "usefully defined in terms of a mix of components of functionalism, experientialism and symbolic interactionism" (p. 472), in which the role of social and individual (psychological) cues is significantly more relevant than in the context of non-luxury products. Mortelmans [7] has gone even further, defining luxury products as those "that have a sign-value on top of (or in substitution of) their functional or economical meaning" (p. 510) or, in other words, as objects to which the consumer society attaches additional and undetermined meanings that are independent from any functional and economical logic.

To conclude, although many authors have attempted to account for the multidimensionality of luxury, the fluidity and the complexity of the notion of luxury have made it difficult to come up with a comprehensive definition. A deeper discussion about the personal and interpersonal role played by luxury, whose distinctiveness lies in its psychological value [8], can thus help to clarify.

2 Luxury Consumption: Personal Versus Interpersonal Motives

According to Amatulli and Guido [9], luxury can be broadly categorized into *externalized* and *internalized*, on the basis of the idea that individuals purchase luxury goods under the influence of both interpersonal and personal motives. Externalized luxury is a socially embedded construct as it refers to individuals' tendency to purchase luxury under the influence of others with the aim to socially position themselves. Conversely, internalized luxury is an individually embedded construct as it refers to the purchase of luxury goods for the satisfaction of consumers' personal needs and tastes. In this case, consumers go "beyond externally imposed criteria" [8, p. 125] and are driven by personal lifestyle, emotions/hedonism and culture [9], as well as by the need to transform their identities into an ideal self and to find support for their own individual identity [10].

Such a dichotomy grounds its root in a number of theories about drivers of luxury consumption (see Table 1 for a summary of these theories). The oldest theory is that built off the idea of conspicuous consumption. In 1899, Veblen introduced this label to define individuals' tendency to consume goods in a high visible way in order to impress others and make them infer their wealth and power, particularly in the context of high socioeconomic mobility. Mauss [11] resumed Veblen's reflections to explore their application in the gift-giving social dynamics, arguing that conspicuous and costly generosity is the most powerful means to signal status. The author anticipated what would have been lately conceptualized as the signaling theory, which states that the individual's disposal of sufficient personal resources can be inferred by his or her engagement in generous or wasteful behaviors that, perhaps paradoxically, are too costly to be fake [12].

Defined as "the behavioral tendency to value status and acquire and consume products that provide status to the individual" [14, p. 34], status consumption is strictly related to, yet still separate from, conspicuous consumption. In other words, status consumption relies on the desire to enhance social status by owning luxury goods (which may or may not be publicly displayed), while conspicuous consumption focuses more on the overt display of luxury and wealth. Building on extant studies, Eastman and Eastman [19] focused on the identification of internal and external motivations for status consumption. External motivations are interpersonal and extrinsic, focusing on the social effects that the ownership of luxury goods produces. They include the above-mentioned need for conspicuous consumption, exclusivity (snob luxury purchase behavior) and social identity (bandwagon luxury purchase behavior). Conversely, internal motivations are personal and intrinsic, focusing on the expression of inner values and tastes. They include hedonism, self-reward and

Table 1 Most relevant theories explaining luxury consumption

Interpersonal motives		
Conspicuous consumption	Individuals' tendency to consume goods in a high visible way in order to impress others and make them infer a condition of wealth and power	Veblen [13]
Status consumption	Behavioral tendency to value status and acquire and consume products that provide status to the individual	O'Cass and McEwen [14]
Social comparison	Individuals' tendency to evaluate themselves through objective and nonsocial means that, if not available, will be replaced by the comparison to other people	Festinger [15]
Uniqueness	Individuals' tendency to engage in nonconformist behaviors and to differentiate themselves when the degree of similarity relative to others is perceived as excessively high	Snyder and Fromkin [16]
Personal motives		
Self-concept	Individuals' cognitive and emotional perception of themselves	Rosenberg [17]
Extended self	Individuals' tendency to consider their possession as part of their self-concept	Belk [18]

perfectionism. Indeed, status consumption can be motivated by the search for emotional and sensorial gratification, by the desire to reinforce the self-concept through self-reward and by the search for high quality.

Another relevant contribution has been provided by social comparison theory, according to which individuals tend to evaluate themselves through objective and nonsocial means that, if not available, will be replaced by the comparison to other people [15]. Since this theory also states that individuals tend to conform to the prevalent opinion of the social groups they belong to, Wiedemann et al. [20] have argued that luxury goods, by enclosing prestigious values, may be used to conform to social standards.

According to self-concept theory, moreover, self-concept is defined as the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" [17, p. 7], i.e., how the individual cognitively and emotionally perceives himself or herself. Since general agreement exists regarding the expressive and symbolic value of luxury—defined as the ability of the product to convey a psychological meaning [21]—self-concept can be a motivator for luxury consumption. Moreover, Kastanakis and Balabanis [22] have provided evidences of the fact that differences in self-concept orientation can lead to differences in luxury consumption: For example, bandwagon luxury consumption is more likely to occur among consumers with an interdependent self-concept than among those with an independent self-concept.

The concept of extended self can be extremely useful to understand luxury consumption motivations as well. Conceptualized for the first time by Belk [18], the extended self refers to the phenomenon according to which individuals define themselves not only through what it is seen as "me," but also through what is seen as "mine." Specifically, individuals perceive their possessions as part of their self-concept and use them to get closer to their ideal self that is to whom they hope to be. In this perspective, the luxury symbolic value previously mentioned may play a fundamental role in making luxury consumption an effective tool for self-extension.

Last is the theory of uniqueness. Developed by Snyder and Fromkin [16], it states that although people sometimes feel the need to conform, they may tend to engage in nonconformist behaviors and to differentiate themselves when the degree of similarity relative to others is perceived as excessively high. This need for uniqueness can be fulfilled by the consumption of luxury goods, which are by definition scarce and rare [23].

3 The Luxury Dream and Scarcity

The basic law of economics states that when demand exceeds supply, price increases. This imbalance is the *sine qua non* condition for luxury to exist, since scarcity represents the core of luxury brands' DNA. Indeed, luxury goods need to be admired by all and owned by few to be properly considered as such [5]. Their power relies on their magical aura of unattainability, which is psychologically evoked by their incorporation in the lifestyle of extraordinary people and practically fostered by physical rarity. As argued by Dubois and Paternault [24], the deeper the gap between awareness and penetration of the luxury brand the stronger its desirability, since "awareness feeds the dream but purchase makes the dream come true and therefore contributes to destroy it" (p. 73).

Without prejudice to the general validity of what mentioned above, Kapferer [25] offers interesting insights regarding the concept of rarity and its different applications in the luxury context. The first and most intuitive type of rarity is the objective rarity that is the outcome of the material limitation imposed on the production and commercialization of luxury goods, achieved through high prices and limited production. As an example, Lamborghini's CEO Stefano Domenicali has recently stated that no more than 8000 vehicles per year will be sold from 2020 onward [26], demonstrating the company will reinforce its exclusivity. However, it is worth mentioning that physical scarcity clearly places a limit to luxury brands' growth and consequently risks compromising both company's well-being and shareholders' expectations. Therefore, a shift in what the author defines "virtual rarity" is currently taking place in the luxury sector. It represents an ephemeral and artificially induced type of rarity, which makes the perceptions of exclusivity and privilege arise without sacrificing sales. The means through this type of rarity achieved are many: the regular launch of limited editions, the adoption of an exclusive distribution strategy and the careful selection of the messages to be communicated. As an example, Louis Vuitton has recently partnered with six of the world's most renowned artists to create the limited edition of Artycapucines collection [27].

4 Luxury and Sustainability

Defined as the "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [28], sustainable development is today a very urgent issue concerning both individuals and companies. The urgency to find practical solutions to assure a sustainable growth has been fueled by the rise of a throwaway society that "relies on the relentless production of novelty by firms and the relentless consumption of novelty by households" [29, p. XVI]. Keen sociological insights regarding this phenomenon have been provided by Bauman [30], who has highlighted the liquidity of postmodern times: In a society obsessed by appearance and individualism, individuals anxiously look for immediate gratification of their constantly evolving temporary identities, distancing themselves from the immobility imposed by traditional and heavy objects of consumption and embracing the liquefaction of goods. Solid accumulation is replaced by elimination and substitution that gratify individuals' need for fluidity. This trend has been both powered and exploited by product suppliers, who often take advantage of planned obsolescence. The concept of planned obsolescence consists in producing goods which will be "no longer functional or desirable after a predetermined period" [29, p. 4], by cutting production costs at the expense of quality and encouraging consumers to replace the product (sometimes leveraging on technological development).

Unfortunately, such a sociological and economic context does not allow to achieve a really sustainable development. Importantly, Elkington's "triple bottom line" model, proposed in 1994, identifies three main dimensions that should be taken into consideration by those companies that desire to pursue a sustainable development. The economic dimension refers to the ability of the company to generate enough profits to ensure business and technological development, as well as employees' stability over time. The ecological dimension refers to the ability of the company to minimize its environmental impact by optimizing its production processes. Finally, the social dimension refers to the commitment of the company to improving collective well-being and promoting the cultural heritage.

In light of the existence, according to the bulk of extant scientific research, of a sort of contradiction between the values associated with luxury and those associated with sustainability (see [31] for a review on this topic), whether the luxury sector can be considered sustainable or not is a highly debated issue. Indeed, in a surely too simplistic way, sustainability has been typically associated with concepts such as altruism, sobriety and morality, while luxury has been typically associated with excess, ostentation and superficiality [32]. In contrast, however, several authors believe that luxury is among the sectors that best fit with the conditions enabling sustainable development and that most distance themselves from the values of the throwaway society [33, 34]. To illustrate, according to Kapferer [35], luxury and sustainable development converge because they both focus on rarity and durability. The objective rarity that fuels luxury value characterizes both materials and craftmanship. On the one side, resources are precious and require to be protected to guarantee the future of the sector itself. On the other side, the crafted nature of luxury products requires the involvement of rare savoir faire and fine artisans' skills, in contrast to the unskilled labor exploitation that oftentimes characterizes the mass fashion industry. Durability is a key element too: Since they typically never go "out of fashion," luxury products are conceived and produced in a way that preserves their aesthetic and functional value as long as possible.

Amatulli et al. [31] have proposed a quite detailed analysis of the reasons why luxury items might be *inherently* sustainable, possibly more so than their mass-market counterparts. The first reason lies in luxury goods' high quality: By ensuring materials' safety and reliability, they certainly provide positive benefits to consumers. The second reason lies in durability and rarity: Luxury products are by definition scarce, and their longer life span prevents frequent purchase of alternative and more perishable products, with positive outcomes in terms of resource outflow and waste. The third reason lies in craftmanship: The employment of talented, highly skilled and experienced labor force by luxury firms produces a positive social impact and ensures the preservation of traditions and heritage. To conclude, luxury goods stand for sustainable, long-term investments that are consistent with the concept of "circular economy," which states the necessity to extend products' life within the economic and social system in order to minimize waste and make the most out of material resources.

5 The Growth of Luxury Market

Except for the years encompassing the last financial crisis, occurred between 2007 and 2009, the luxury market never stopped growing in the last thirty years [36]. The overall value of luxury market has been estimated at about € 920 billion in 2018, and a 4–5% annual growth is expected until 2025 [37]. Valued € 330 billion in 2018, the personal luxury sector will enjoy a 3% annual growth until 2025, driven by accessories and cosmetics. The experiential luxury sector, valued € 590 billion in 2018, is supposed to grow even faster, enjoying a 5% annual growth until 2025 [37]. Data clearly shows that the luxury sector has never been as prosperous as it is today. Its success appears to be driven by two main forces. On the one hand, the impressive growth of digital channels, that cover today around 10% of total sales in the personal luxury sector, while on other other hand, the impressive increase of luxury consumption among Chinese consumers, that today account for about 33% of global luxury purchases [36].

It might be certainly interesting to reflect on the reasons underlying the luxury business' growth. As highlighted by Kapferer [38], in the past luxury was a prerogative of the *happy few*, namely a small circle of powerful individuals who used to leverage on luxury consumption in order to show their taste and impress crowds [39]. In the nineteenth century, the rapid rise of a new middle class has led to the fast expansion of luxury customer base and to the gradual "democratization" of luxury desire. As illustrated by McNeil and Riello [40], this phenomenon, firstly emerged in Europe, has later happened in several emerging countries, which entered into the luxury market just at the time when saturation was being reached. In particular, in the 2000s China has gone from being a "virgin land for luxury" [40, p. 245] to being the motherland of those consumers "who have made the fortune of those European luxury brands that today account for the lion's share of the market" [40, p. 247]. Indeed, luxury brands started having a great appeal especially to young middle-class Chinese consumers, "who have no personal recollection of China under the duress of strict communism" [40, p. 247]. Strong growth in the middle class has also characterized BRIC countries [40]. In particular, luxury has recently become the symbol of wealth for those Russian who have "accumulated enormous fortunes since the fall of communism in the early 1990s" [40, p. 250], while the rise of Brazilian middle class has made the country the second largest market for several luxury services [41].

6 The Challenges Posed by Luxury Growth and the Resolutive Role of Art

While growth and product diffusion are not an issue for premium brands, which indeed benefit from the increase of their market share, they conversely may represent an obstacle for luxury brands' well-being. In fact, besides the unquestionable short-term economic benefit, sales growth can also cause the exposure of luxury firms to the risk of losing their exclusive appeal and their narrative meaning [42]. In other words, the extension of luxury customer base from the *happy few* (the powerful élite) to the *happy many* (the wealthy middle class), thus the transformation of luxury "from the ordinary of the extraordinary people to the extraordinary of the ordinary people" is likely to distance the élite itself, which is populated by those individuals who "ensure the long-term desirability of the brand" [38, p. 373]. Moreover, the expansion of luxury has created a condition of overexposure of luxury brands, which have invaded individuals' everyday life by massively resorting to generic media channels such as television, newspapers, magazines and Internet [40]. This phenomenon has exacerbated the moral criticisms that always existed around luxury, blamed to foster social inequality. Such arguments call into question the reputation of the luxury sector and even its right to exist [38].

Aware of the above-mentioned issues, Kapferer [25, 38] claimed the centrality of art in the resolution of the problems posed by the growth of luxury. Able to provide a powerful aesthetic and moral endorsement, art can strengthen luxury symbolical authority and offer new segmentation criteria beyond price (such as cultural and humanistic sensitivity), establishing a dialogue with a new, creative and post-materialistic élite populated by those "extraordinary people" who are destined to shape the future. The involvement of art, therefore, not only guarantees the loyalty of the *happy few*, but also defuses the moral criticisms related to luxury consumption by taking it to a higher and unquestionable level of meaning. Moreover, associating luxury with art may also help discouraging new potential competitors from entering the luxury market. Indeed, competitors may have difficulty decoding and imitating this source of competitive advantage, since the art–business collaborations are usually complex to define, highly specific and tacit [43]. Kastner [44] identified three benefits stemming from the associations between art and luxury brands. Firstly, this association "entrenches in the consumer's mind the perceptions of originality, ingenuity and inventiveness" (p. 45) and enshrines the aesthetic sensitivity of the brand. Secondly, it enriches brand content and invigorates the aspirational storytelling typical of luxury brands. Thirdly, the art–luxury association elevates luxury brands above the purely commercial dimension.

As reported by Kastner [44], the relationship between art and luxury experienced relevant evolutions over the twentieth century. In the 1930s, the surrealist painters Salvador Dalì and Jean Cocteau partnered with the Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli in order to bring their creativity in her clothing designs [45], while the Italian shoe manufacturer Ferragamo launched an advertising campaign realized in collaboration with the futurist painter Lucio Venna [46]. In the 1960s, Yves Saint Laurent launched its haute couture collection taking explicit inspiration from Piet Mondrian's artworks [47]. In the 1980s, longer-term forms of collaboration were introduced, such as the creation of the art museum Foundation Cartier in Paris [48]. Finally, the huge commercial success of the high-profile artistic collaborations initiated by Louis Vuitton's artistic director Marco Jacobs in the late 1990s made this phenomenon definitely popular among luxury brands.

Today, *artification*—defined as the process in which "something that is not regarded as art in the traditional sense of the word is changed into something art-like or into something that takes influences from artistic ways of thinking and acting" [49]—involves several short-term and long-term elements of luxury brand management. Chailan [43] has provided an overview of the main long-term activities that luxury brands undertake to link themselves with art. Taking into consideration both the intensity of the engagement and the time perspective of the relationship, the author has identified four types of links: artistic mentoring, artistic collaboration, foundations and patronage. Given their long-term nature, all these strategies fall outside the ordinary management of luxury brands and thus represent exceptional activities which require both managerial and financial extra-efforts. But also the most ordinary elements of the luxury marketing mix—such as retailing, merchandising and advertising—are actively involved in the process of *artification*. In this respect, as highlighted by Joy et al. [50] through an ethnographic study about consumers' experience in Louis Vuitton flagship stores, luxury retailing is rapidly changing by turning stores into hybrid institutions embodying elements of both museums and art galleries. This is achieved by leveraging interior design, effective lighting, artisanal merchandising and suggestive product display, all managed together with curatorial attention. Advertising is another element of the marketing mix of luxury brands which is deeply involved in the process of *artification*. The effect that the introduction of artistic elements in product advertisement has on product perception and evaluation—named the *art infusion effect*—has been extensively explored by several scholars. This subject, which is at the core of the present study, is discussed in the next section.

7 The "Art Infusion Effect"

Despite the general awareness that marketers and scholars have shown regarding the positive effect that the introduction of artistic elements can have on consumer evaluations [51], neither empirical evidence nor theoretical conceptualization existed until Hagtvedt and Patrick's studies [52]. They proved the existence of the *art infusion effect*, which is the general and positive "influence of the presence of art on consumer perceptions and evaluations of products with which it is associated" (p. 379). Authors theorize that it represents a special kind of spillover effect, since the "perceptions of luxury associated with visual art spill over from the artwork onto products with which it is associated, leading to more favourable evaluations of these products" (p. 379). The spillover effect—namely, the transfer of properties from one object to another, linked to the previous one [53]—is the impact that information provided in product-related messages has on beliefs about attributes that are not mentioned in the messages [54] and has proved to be more influential in terms of attitude changes than the message itself [55]. The effect is explained by consumers' tendency to infer missing attribute information relying on their intuitive notions of inter-attribute correlations and on the correlational information gathered from the message [54].

Hagtvedt and Patrick's [52] findings have been later challenged by further studies, which expanded the above-mentioned theoretical framework by bringing in the mediating role of emotions [56]. In particular, authors supported prior findings regarding the mediating role of luxury perception and also demonstrated across three studies the mediating role of brand affect—namely the positive emotional response to the brand [57], arguing that emotion represents "the lower-level mechanism driving the higher-level effect of perceived luxury on product evaluations" (p. 403). Results fully supported assumptions: when introduced as additional mediator, brand affect significantly and fully mediated the *art infusion effect,* while perceived luxury became nonsignificant.

7.1 *How Product Type and Price Affect the* **Art Infusion Effect**

Since artwork can be potentially included in the communication of any type of product, several scholars have tried to assess if any differences in the art infusion mechanism exist among different product types. The most significant distinction among products is drawn taking into consideration the needs they are aimed to satisfy. Hedonic goods are the ones whose consumption is sensorial and both affectively and aesthetically driven, being linked to sensual pleasure, fantasy and fun [58]. Conversely, utilitarian goods are the ones whose consumption is cognitively driven, goal-oriented and linked to the completion of a functional task [59]. Although products can embody both hedonic and utilitarian dimensions to varying degrees, a primary classification of them among the two categories can usually be drawn by consumers [60].

Whereas evidences about the effectiveness of the *art infusion effect* among hedonic and utilitarian goods diverge, most of the studies have demonstrated that the use of art better fits with hedonic products. Taking inspiration from the semantic matching process theorized by Collins and Loftus [61], Huettl and Gierl [62] claimed that a positive *art infusion effect* on luxury perception exists only for hedonic products. Hüttl-Maack [63] further extended existing knowledge by testing whether ambiguous and only moderately hedonic product differs from hedonic ones in terms of art infusion efficacy. Evidences show that, while in the highly hedonic condition "uniformly beneficial effect of art are found" (Hüttl-Maack, p. 271), in the more ambiguous condition the effect of art's presence is influenced by consumer's interest in art. In particular, the presence of art has a positive effect among art-interested consumers and no effect on non-interested ones: While the former individuals "are motivated to engage in processing to make sense of this combination," the latter ones "seem to be not motivated for this step" (Hüttl-Maack, p. 271).

As mentioned before, moderate disagreement exists among studies. Estes et al. [56], who investigated the mediating role of emotions in the *art infusion effect*, counterintuitively stated that the presence of art increases brand affect more for utilitarian products than for hedonic ones, due to a phenomenon of diminishing return. Since "hedonic products primarily possess emotional attributes, the additional affect induced by an artwork has a smaller influence on evaluations. And contrarily, because utilitarian products tend to possess functional attributes, increasing affect via art has a relatively large effect on evaluations" [56, p. 404]. To conclude, product type has proved to significantly influence the art infusion mechanism. Despite the lack of full agreement on the subject, the bulk of scientific research seems to confirm that the *art infusion effect* is more likely to be successful for among hedonic goods.

Some scholars have also investigated the role that price difference and price information play in the *art infusion effect* and, in particular, on perceived prestige of the advertised product. Lee et al. [53], who investigated the interaction effect of price differences and art's presence on perceived prestige, demonstrated that the presence of art in the product advertisement has a positive effect on perceived prestige, regardless of the product price. Conversely, in the non-art condition a moderately higher price difference has proved to affect perceived prestige more than a non-price difference strategy. Indeed, while the presence of art itself enhances perceived prestige and weakens the effect of price difference, the absence of art makes the price more relevant, given its role in signaling customer's status, indicating product quality and enhancing perceived product exclusivity. Surprisingly, authors have also observed that, in the non-art condition, price difference has no effect on perceived prestige when too high (i.e., 150% price difference). Despite the lack of full clarity on the non-art condition, the research definitely confirms that "products could benefit from artwork to increase their price above their regular price" (Lee et al. [53, p. 602].

Some scholars have also questioned whether the positive effect elicited by the association of art with a product can be undermined by the increase of perceived expensiveness that is likely to be aroused by this association and whether the mentioned interference mechanism is affected by price information (e.g., [62]). Indeed, artwork scarcity and uniqueness can elicit perceptions of expensiveness that may spill over onto the product in the same way luxury perceptions do. However, this effect can be mitigated or even neutralized by providing information about the product price within the message. Findings have supported authors' hypothesis, proving the coexistence of interfering effects caused by the spillover of both luxury and expensiveness perceptions and the inhibiting role that price information plays on the negative expensiveness-related effect.

7.2 Beyond Product Evaluation: How Art Affects Consumers' WTP and Brand Extendibility

Different authors contributed to better understand what the presence of art in product advertising can affect, exploring other variables besides product evaluation and perception. Hüttl-Maack [63] contributed to this goal by giving evidences of the fact that, besides product evaluation and perception, the use of art in product communication is also able to affect consumers' willingness to pay (WTP), being the former a key determinant of the latter [64]. This research not only "extends the prior findings conceptually by showing that not only expensiveness but also the perceived value behind it is increased" (p. 271), but also highlights how art can affect consumer's behavioral response, being the WTP a much closer measure of it compared to product evaluation.

Other relevant insights have been provided by Hagtvedt and Patrick [65], who further expanded the knowledge related to the *art infusion effect* by demonstrating how it can be used to enhance brand extendibility. As recalled by the authors, prior research about brand extendibility has identified two main factors affecting it, namely the parent brand image/quality and the category and conceptual fit between the new product and the parent brand [66, 67]. They argued and demonstrated that both constructs can be positively influenced by the presence of art, leading to more favorable evaluations of brand extension. On the one hand, the presence of art enhances brand image through the spillover of luxury perception. On the other hand, it increases the perceptions of category and conceptual fit by intensifying consumer's cognitive flexibility: Improving consumers' capacity to integrate information in non-obvious ways, art enables consumers to draw meaningful patterns among stimuli, even if divergent.

7.3 *The Content-Independent Influence of Visual Art*

Along with the original demonstration of the *art infusion effect* existence, Hagtvedt and Patrick [52] provided evidence about its content-independent nature. In other words, they showed that the positive influence of art on product evaluations and perceptions does not depend on the content of the artwork used to advertise the product, but rather "on general connotations of luxury associated with visual art" (p. 379). If it did, the *art infusion effect* would not be generalizable, since the valence of product evaluation would depend on the positive or negative valence of the artwork content. The independence of the *art infusion effect* from artwork content is explained by the fact that art has "general connotations that are positive per se" (p. 381) and that make it intrinsically different from any other sensory phenomena that, in turn, can have positive or negative valence (such as smell, sound and non-art visual stimuli).

Neural responses to art images have also been investigated in order to test the content-independent nature of the *art infusion effect*. By performing an event-related functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study, Lacey et al. [68] demonstrated that the exposure to art images, regardless of their content and style, activates regions of the brain (i.e., ventral striatum, hypothalamus and orbitofrontal cortex) related to reward circuitry, whose key function is to drive behavior and decision making under conditions of uncertainty [69]. The same regions did not appear to be engaged in the presence of non-art images.

Deepening the comprehension of the role of the art content in the *art infusion effect*, Hagtvedt and Patrick [70] investigated across three studies the distinction between art content and manner, providing evidence of the fact that, while "artwork as art" is context-independent, "artwork as illustration" is context-dependent. Content and manner represent two components of the artwork: While the former concerns "what is depicted" and conveys information, the latter concerns "how it is depicted" and distinguishes artworks from mere illustrations. Findings showed that, when the artwork content is not stressed, it does not affect product evaluation. Conversely, when the artwork is no longer perceived as art because of the shift of emphasis from manner to content, product evaluation is affected by the fit between the artwork content and the product. Moreover, the third study conducted by the authors demonstrated that consumers' mind-set can drive them to process the artwork as either art or mere illustration. Since abstract mind-sets are "associated with higher-level construals and schematic, global processing" (p. 1628), they are more focused on the image category (i.e., visual art) and thus will be unaffected by artwork content. Conversely, since concrete mind-sets are "associated with lower-level construals and attribute-level, local processing with a focus on contextualized features" (p. 1628), they are more focused on particulars of the image and will be affected by artwork content.

To conclude, we can state that the *art infusion effect* is content-independent. However, the content of the artwork can become relevant if consumers' attention gets focused on it. Indeed, in this case the artwork will be no longer processed as belonging to the art category, being perceived as a mere illustration.

7.4 *The Role of Art Saliency in the* Art Infusion Effect

Some authors have investigated how product and brand evaluations and perceptions can be affected by two possible expressions of art saliency, namely artwork recognizability and artist's iconicity. Peluso et al. [71] examined the role that art recognizability plays in the art infusion mechanism and how it is affected by consumers' characteristics and needs. Recognizable artworks are the ones that can be easily identified by most individuals. Embodying the most recurrent colors, techniques and images used by the artist, they are able to "elicit the artist's image in people's minds" [71, p. 2194] and to conform to preconceived mental schemas [72]. Authors provided evidence of the fact that these artworks, compared with less recognizable ones by the same artists, increase the luxury perception of products advertised together with them, thus their evaluation. Indeed, being highly recognizable artworks usually perceived as more valuable and sold at a higher price than the less recognizable ones by the same artist, they are able to infuse a higher sense of prestige and exclusiveness that spills over onto the related product.

As mentioned, authors also questioned if the needs supposed to be main drivers of luxury consumption—namely the desire to signal status and the desire of distinction—influence the above-described findings. A consistent part of luxury consumers purchase luxury products that display easily recognizable luxury qualities because they use luxury consumption as means to demonstrate their higher social standing and wealth to others. Authors demonstrated that these consumers, compared to those who show a lower desire to signal status, are "more interested in buying luxury products promoted in advertisements that feature recognizable artworks rather than non-recognizable artworks" [71, p. 2195]. Conversely, other consumers purchase luxury products to differentiate themselves from the other luxury consumers and to convey their uniqueness. These consumers generally use uncommon signals of luxuriousness and thus prefer rare, special or nonconforming luxury products. Authors proved that these consumers, compared to those who are characterized by a lower desire for distinction, are "more interested in buying luxury products promoted in advertisements featuring non-recognizable artworks rather than recognizable artworks" (p 2196). To conclude, the positive effect of art recognizability on the art infusion mechanism has been demonstrated. Furthermore, it has been shown that consumer needs can change it: While the evaluations of consumers who aim at signaling their status are more positively influenced by highly recognizable artworks, evaluations of those who aim at differentiating from others are more positively influenced by hardly recognizable artworks.

Another issue that the literature has explored is how the image of the artist who produced the art associated with the product advertised can affect product evaluation and perception. Specifically, Scarpaci et al. [73] investigated the effects that artist's iconicity has on the perception of national brands. Artists, who "may be viewed as uniquely positioned representatives of their culture" (p. 321), often serve as national icons by embodying national identity and values. Through a qualitative study, these authors demonstrated that artists' association with a national brand enables an "icon myth transfer effect" that is a mechanism of translation of cultural and national values into brand associations [73]. To do that, they distanced from the main characteristics of previous studies: Taking into consideration two forms of artistic expression (dance and poetry) that do not have a visual display, they introduced the artistic element into the experiment by considering two products named after famous artists. This research has contributed to both enrich the knowledge of the *art infusion effect* and extend the boundaries of cultural branding. On the one hand, it demonstrated that the association of the product with art can generate positive effects because of the spillover not only of luxury perception, but also of cultural values. On the other hand, it challenged the most traditional views of cultural branding, in which "the brand is the myth, and the myth reflects characteristics of the myth market" [73, p. 330].

8 A New Theoretical Model

In the present work, we introduce a novel conceptual framework that aims to advance extant knowledge about the art infusion effect in two important ways. First, we introduce the role of a construct that, while being peculiar to both art and luxury, has not been investigated by previous research in this stream: the perceived durability of the product advertised. Second, we introduce a distinction between artworks based on what we call *intensity of artist's craftmanship,* which we predict to affect consumers' perceptions of product durability and, in turn, purchase intention (see Fig. 1).

Indeed, some scholars have highlighted that the luxury sector can be intrinsically sustainable (e.g., [31]), and more specifically, two luxury goods' peculiar characteristics, such as craftmanship and durability, are particularly important to respond to stakeholders' growing concern for the environmental and social impact of companies' activities. Craftmanship—namely the skill with which something is made by hand—is not only "synonymous with time and the specialized labor needed to produce an object of value, a symbol of tradition passed down from generation to generation, the fruit of manual know-how", but also a "type of guarantee in terms of quality, duration and aesthetics" [8, p. 130]. Thus, consumers link the intensity of craftmanship to product durability, which literature considers as one of the main drivers of luxury value perception [74]. Building on knowledge about *art infusion*

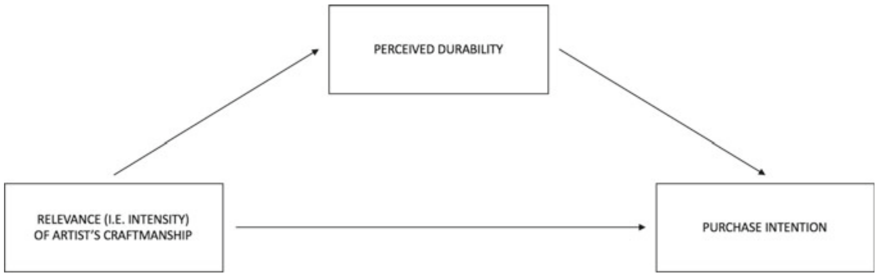

Fig. 1 Effect of intensity of artist's craftmanship on purchase intention through perceived durability

effect and its underlying spillover mechanism, we therefore argue that, in the context in which the product is advertised through the use of artistic elements, the intensity of artist's craftmanship in the process of artwork creation may affect the perceived durability of the product, since the savoir faire elicited by the artwork may spill over onto the product itself. We also argue that, in turn, perceived durability may affect consumers' purchase intention, being it considered a relevant driver of luxury purchase. Specifically:

H1. When a luxury product is advertised through an artwork, the intensity of artist's craftmanship in the process of artistic creation positively affects perceived product durability.
H2. When a luxury product is advertised through an artwork, perceived product durability mediates the relationship between the intensities of artist's craftmanship in the process of artistic creation and consumer purchase intention.

9 Empirical Study

In order to empirically test our formal hypotheses, we conducted a quantitative study aimed at demonstrating that the intensity of artist's craftmanship positively influences product durability, which in turn increases consumer purchase intention. Specifically, we conducted an experiment based on a two-condition between-subject design. Data has been collected through an online pull of prepaid respondents and analyzed using SPSS statistical software.

9.1 Procedure and Sample

The survey, created through the Qualtrics platform, has been distributed online through different social media channels. Being destined to be completed by Italian respondents, it has been fully drafted in Italian. Once 270 observations have been collected, the questionnaire has been closed and data cleaned. Specifically, all the incomplete observations as well as the ones which have failed the attention check have been deleted in order to improve data quality and reliability, leading to a reduced sample of 215 respondents. The final sample was equally distributed by gender (51.2% female and 48.8% male) and composed of 39.1% students, 14.4% independent contractors, 34.0% employees, 9.8% executives and 1.8% pensioners or unemployed. Most of the respondents (61.9%) were aged between 18 and 34, while 20.4% were aged between 35 and 54, and finally 17.7% were 55 years old or older. The majority of respondents, about 77% of the sample, declared to have a bachelor's degree or a higher academic qualification.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents' attentiveness has been solicited by asking them to pay particular attention to the image and text they would have seen immediately after. Moreover, they have been informed that the following were fictional scenarios. Respondents were then randomly assigned to one of the two scenarios resulting from the manipulation of the independent variable, namely the intensity of craftmanship involved in the creation process (102 respondents were exposed to the low-intensity condition, and 113 respondents were exposed to the high-intensity condition). In order to avoid any potential influence coming from respondents' previous experience with the brand, we decided to resort to a fictional one created for the purpose that is Kéntro. In both scenarios, it has been said to respondents that the brand Kéntro has decided to promote its new wallet collection by incorporating in its visual advertising the artwork of a famous artist. In the low-intensity condition, the artist was Lucio Fontana, a major abstract artist. In the high-intensity condition, the artist was Sandro Botticelli, a leading figure of Renaissance art. Moreover, we provided respondents with a brief overview about the art genre the displayed artwork was representative of, stressing the level of importance of the artist's craftmanship (low in the abstract condition and high in the Renaissance condition). The above-described text has been paired with a figure showing the Kéntro's advertising. In both conditions, the visual stimuli have been realized showing the brand's logo, the artwork and the product advertised, on a white background (see Fig. 1). We decided to use a wallet in our stimuli because this product category is widely used by the majority of people in everyday life, thus to reduce the risk that the purchase intention could be affected by respondents' potentially low usage. Moreover, accessories seem to represent the most relevant product category in the luxury fashion sector.[1] In addition, to avoid a potential effect of respondents' gender on purchase intention, we created two versions (one for male and one for female) for each of the two conditions (low versus high intensity of craftmanship). Thus, whatever the randomly assigned scenario was, respondents were in any case exposed to the version of the product compatible with their gender, which has been previously asked and operationalized through a screening question. Both wallets have been selected among the ones displayed on Prada's official Web site and have been slightly modified by substituting the original logo with Kéntro's one (see Fig. 1). Once respondents have been exposed to the text and image stimuli, they were asked which artwork they have seen

[1] https://www.bain.com/insights/luxury-goods-worldwide-market-study-fall-winter-2018/.

displayed. This question has been used as an attention check, whose failure implied the respondent's exclusion from the sample. Subsequently, perceived durability and purchase intention of the product advertised have been measured. Furthermore, the extent to which respondents consider themselves expert in the artistic field has also been measured. Lastly, socio-demographics information has been collected.

Most of the constructs have been measured through pretested scales, coming from previous studies and duly translated in Italian. Perceived durability was measured recurring to Stone-Romero et al.'s [75] semantic differential scale ($\alpha = 0.85$), measured on 7 points and composed of two pairs of adjectives (not durable/durable and not reliable/reliable). Respondents reported their willingness to buy by expressing their degree of agreement/disagreement (1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree") with three distinct statements ($\alpha = 0.95$)—"I would buy this product," "I would consider buying this product" and "The probability that I would consider buying this product is high"—drawn by Dodds et al. [76]. Finally, by using two distinct 1-item 7-point scales (1 = "at all" and 7 = "very much") respondents were asked how confident they felt about art and about the specific art genre displayed.

9.2 Results

First of all, no significant difference between men's ($M = 4.15$ and SD = 1.51) and women's ($M = 3.94$ and SD = 1.70) purchase intentions has been detected ($t(213) = -0.97$ ns), confirming that differentiating the product advertised by gender has not produced a bias in terms of purchase intention, but has rather prevented it. The mediation model included intensity of artist's craftmanship as the independent variable (high-intensity condition = 1 and low-intensity condition = 0), purchase intention as the dependent variable and perceived durability as the mediating variable. First, we verified through a regression analysis that the overall effect, that is the positive effect of intensity of artist's craftmanship on purchase intention, was positive and significant ($b = 0.85$, $t(213) = 3.99$, $p < 0.01$). Then, using the bootstrapping method as implemented in the PROCESS SPSS Macro by Hayes [77, Model 4], we performed the mediation analysis, which confirmed that perceived durability fully mediates the relationship between intensities of artist's craftmanship and purchase intention. As expected, the effect of intensity of artist's craftmanship on perceived durability is positive and significant ($b = 2.08$, $t(213) = 14.50$, $p < 0.01$), as well as the effect of perceived durability on purchase intention ($b = 0.37$, $t(213) = 3.73$, $p < 0.01$). As expected, the direct effect—that is the effect of intensity of artist's craftmanship on purchase intention controlling perceived durability—is not significant ($b = 0.08$, $t(213) = 0.29$ ns). Thus, both H1 and H2 are supported. Data, however, also shows a significant difference between the two scenarios in terms of respondents' knowledge about the art genre they have been exposed to ($t(213) = 3.68$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, the level of knowledge of Renaissance art expressed by respondents exposed to the

Renaissance condition (high-intensity condition) ($M = 3.58$, SD $= 1.32$) is significantly higher than the level of knowledge of abstract art expressed by respondents exposed to the abstract condition (low-intensity condition) ($M = 2.90$, SD $= 1.37$).

In sum, the experimental study was conducted to show how, in the context in which a luxury product is advertised through the use of visual art, the level of craftmanship involved in the process of artwork creation can affect consumers' purchase intention and how this effect is mediated by the perceived durability of the product itself. Mediation analysis confirmed these assumptions and demonstrated that perceived durability is responsible for most of the underlying effect. In other words, the study has shown that, when a visual artwork is used to promote a luxury product, the intensity of artist's craftmanship positively affects consumers' purchase intention mainly because it elicits a higher perception of product durability in consumers' mind (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Visual stimuli

10 General Discussion

The present work pursued two main objectives. On the one hand, it wanted to provide a comprehensive yet concise overview of the luxury phenomenon, looking further into its definition and evolution, as well as into the challenges it currently needs to deal with. On the other hand, it wanted to further investigate the *art infusion effect* under the lens of two luxury-related concepts—namely craftmanship and product durability—in order to enrich the existing theoretical knowledge and provide some relevant insights that could be used by luxury firms to tackle the above-mentioned challenges—namely the ones arisen by luxury "democratization" and by individuals' growing concern toward sustainability.

The *art infusion effect*—namely the positive influence that the presence of art has on consumers' perceptions and evaluations of products with which it is associated—has been investigated by several authoritative scholars, who first proved its existence and then acquired a deeper understanding of it by exploring its underlying mechanisms, as well as its field of action. We joined this line of research by focusing our study on the luxury context and by exploring the effects of an art-related characteristic that has never been investigated so far—that is the intensity of the craftmanship used by the artist in creating the artwork. We found that the intensity of artist's craftmanship is able to affect consumers' perceived durability of the product advertised which, in turn, affects consumers' purchase intention. We therefore believe that the current study can give two main contributions to the existing literature. Firstly, most of the studies conducted so far have focused on the effects that art can produce in terms of consumers' perceptions and evaluations rather than in terms of consumers' behavioral response. As far as we know, only Hüttl-Maack [63] have proved that the presence of art can produce behavioral effects as well, specifically on consumers' willingness to pay. Our study goes one step further, proving that consumers' behavior can be affected not only by the presence of art, but also by the manipulation of the artwork itself. Specifically, we proved that pairing products with artworks that have required a higher level of artist's craftmanship positively affects consumers' intention to buy the product advertised. Furthermore, general agreement exists regarding the fact that the *art infusion effect* occurs because of the spillover of positive properties—specifically, the perception of luxury and the positive emotions arisen by art—from the artwork onto the product advertised. Our study has proved that another property, that is perceived durability, may spill over from the artwork onto the product. In other words, we argue that besides the perception of luxury and the emotions evoked by art, also perceived durability may be transferred from the artwork to the product advertised, leading to positive effects in terms of consumers' response.

The main findings of this research, combined with the knowledge acquired in the process of the literature review, also provide interesting insights for the luxury sector overall as well as practical guidance for marketers who operate in the luxury business environment, which is currently facing important changes and that consequently needs to find new ways to preserve its value in the eyes of its customer base. As proven by our study, leveraging on both art and craftmanship means to elicit perceptions of product durability and thus enhance consumers' purchase intention. In light of the previously mentioned issues affecting the luxury sector, we believe that these findings could be relevant to two main reasons. Firstly, as claimed by Kapferer [25, 38], art is per se able to restore luxury attractiveness in the eyes of the élite and to protect luxury from its democratization. Stressing the craftmanship inherent in the artwork and thus eliciting perceptions of product durability may even enhance this positive effect, since it recalls one of the founding principles of luxury—that is the eternity of its value, which the passing of time cannot affect. Secondly, eliciting perceptions of product durability can also help luxury firms to be perceived as more sustainable and to consequently defuse the moral criticism fueled by the recent overexposure of luxury brands. Indeed, high product durability resounds with the concepts of "slow production" and "slow consumption," two practices that are known to be highly compatible with sustainable development because of their commitment in the protection of both natural and human resources. From a strictly managerial perspective, it follows that it is firstly recommended to continue the ongoing process of artification undertaken by the luxury sector. The incorporation of artistic elements in luxury visual advertising is today more relevant than ever, given the increasing importance that visual communication has gained thanks to the dominant role of social networks. It is secondly recommended to carefully select the type of artwork to display, as well as to privilege the ones in which the intensity of artist's craftmanship is higher, possibly making also use of claims recalling it. Lastly, given all the above-mentioned benefits related to product durability, we also recommend luxury firms to leverage on all the means at their disposal besides art to communicate it (such as packaging and quality certifications).

The present work certainly features some limitations which open the way to further investigations. The most relevant criticality concerns the experiment itself and specifically the stimuli used to manipulate the independent variable. Indeed, since the two levels of intensity of artist's craftmanship (low vs high) have been simulated by resorting to two different types of visual art (abstract vs Renaissance art), findings may be affected by respondents' level of knowledge and liking of the type of visual art they have been exposed to. Indeed, among the two scenarios developed to manipulate the intensity of artist's craftmanship, respondents showed significantly different levels of knowledge of the specific art genre they have been exposed to. In particular, respondents exposed to the Renaissance condition showed a higher level of knowledge of the art displayed than the respondents exposed to the abstract condition. Consequently, we suggest to researchers who desire to further validate our findings to do that by controlling the above-mentioned external variables. Furthermore, the experiment has been conducted by taking into consideration only one product type, while it would be interesting to verify if any changes in the results occur for different types of products. Moreover, considering the strict link between product durability and sustainability, we also suggest to further investigate the effects that product durability may have on consumers' perceptions and behaviors, in order to substantiate the managerial implications we have inferred. Finally, given the consistent variety of tools today used by firms to convey their visual messages, we also recommend to further investigate how our findings may be affected by the use of different means of communication (i.e., billboards, social media, online banners, press, store merchandising).

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