

Should luxury brands display their logos prominently? Implications for brand authenticity, coolness and behavioral intentions

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NOTE: This is the author-accepted version of the manuscript.

Abstract

Purpose – Extant research captures the signaling and attitudinal effects of luxury brand prominence strategy; however, little is known about the underlying mechanisms that drive this effect. This study uncovers brand authenticity and brand coolness as parallel mediators driving the effects of brand prominence on luxury purchase intentions and explores the moderating role of consumers' self-brand connection.

Design/methodology/approach – The research consisted of three experiments. Study 1 (n = 121) explored the direct effects of brand prominence among Chinese consumers. Using a sample of Turkish consumers (n = 115), Study 2, measured the mediation effects of brand authenticity and brand coolness. Study 3 (n = 211) examined how self-brand connection moderated the mediation effects among British customers.

Findings – A luxury brand prominence strategy leads to negative perceptions of coolness and authenticity and, in turn, reduces purchase intentions. The negative effect of brand prominence is even more pronounced among consumers with high self–brand connection.

Research limitations/implications – The study elaborates on how brand prominence informs consumers’ perceptions of authenticity and coolness. In examining the role of self–brand connection, the study reveals a theoretically- and managerially-relevant boundary condition of this focal effect.

Practical implications – The research highlights how luxury brands can utilize differing brand prominence strategies. It informs brand managers on how to enhance brand authenticity and coolness while managing self–brand connection.

Originality/value – The study extends the luxury branding literature by explaining the brand prominence effect through the parallel mediators of brand authenticity and brand coolness. In contrast to extant research, the findings show that the negative effect of brand prominence is particularly strong among consumers with high self–brand connection.

Keywords: Luxury, Branding, Brand prominence, Authenticity, Coolness, Self–brand connection

Introduction

Luxury brands are status symbols desired mainly for their prestige and image connotations (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2021). Their logos are some of the most recognized brand symbols globally (Interbrand, 2021). Thus, many luxury brands use visible markings to ensure that observers recognize them, a strategy referred to as brand prominence (Han *et al.*, 2010).

While some brands, including Balenciaga, Burberry and Louis Vuitton, prefer conspicuous and prominent displays of their logos or patterns, other brands, such as Hermes and Bottega Veneta, are well-known for muted logos across their product ranges. We aim to investigate how luxury purchase intentions are affected by brand prominence and the underlying mechanisms that explain consumer preferences.

Previous research has sought to identify symbolic, functional, and experiential motivations (Han *et al.*, 2010; Butcher *et al.*, 2016) and consumers' sociodemographic and psychographic characteristics that influence preference for brand prominence (Schulz *et al.*, 2015; Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2018; Greenberg *et al.*, 2020). For instance, studies have examined the effect of brand prominence on consumer attitude functions (Wilcox *et al.*, 2009), meaningful segmentation (Han *et al.*, 2010; Berger and Ward, 2010), brand alliance communications (Roosens *et al.*, 2019) and perceptions of social responsibility (Janssen *et al.*, 2017). These studies highlight that brand prominence preferences are driven mainly by consumer identity signaling goals (Raimondo *et al.*, 2022), and that they depend on consumption context and consumer traits. For instance, in a luxury leather goods context, Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.* (2018) find that men prefer brand prominence. On the other hand, in a luxury apparel setting, Schulz *et al.* (2015) show that women with very low and very high incomes prefer prominent brand displays. Thus, although a rich stream of research has identified critical drivers of brand prominence, little work has examined the consequences of

brand prominence for consumers' purchase intentions and the underlying mechanism driving those effects.

In this paper, we build on this initial research on brand prominence and address the novel question of how it affects luxury purchase intentions. Specifically, we uncover the underlying mechanism driving the effects of brand prominence, and explore how consumers with differing levels of self-brand connection react to prominence strategies employed by luxury firms. We ask three key questions. Is there value in luxury brands displaying their logos prominently? Do consumers with high self-brand connection to the luxury brand react more favorably to a brand prominence strategy? If so, what psychological reasons underlie this effect?

In answering these questions through three studies, first, we extend the luxury branding literature by clarifying the signaling effects of brand prominence and its negative impact on purchase intentions. Second, we show that the effect of brand prominence can be explained through the parallel mediators of brand authenticity and brand coolness. The former reflects consumers' evaluation of the genuineness of a brand (Napoli *et al.*, 2014; Septianto *et al.*, 2020), and the latter refers to the extent to which the brand is perceived to be extraordinary, high-status and popular (Warren *et al.*, 2019). Importantly, we show that brand prominence leads to lower perceptions of authenticity and coolness. Third, we examine the self-brand connection associated with the underlying product as a theoretically- and managerially-relevant boundary condition of this focal effect. Self-brand connection, which refers to links that consumers create between brands and their own identities (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019), is defined as the extent to which a brand is integrated into consumers' self-concept (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). In this study, we postulate that the effect of brand prominence on perceived authenticity and coolness may differ according to consumer self-brand connection. Previous studies have shown that high self-brand connection leads to more favorable brand attitudes

and behavioral commitment to the brand (Lisjak *et al.*, 2012; Khalifa and Shukla, 2017). Contrary to previous studies, we demonstrate that the negative effect of brand prominence operating through brand authenticity and brand coolness is particularly strong among consumers with high self–brand connection.

From a substantive perspective, our findings highlight the conditions under which luxury brands may utilize differing brand prominence strategies. Extant research shows a waning influence of conspicuous signaling in many developed markets (Shukla, 2012). Similarly, as evidenced in the recent rhetoric of “common prosperity” in China, the second-largest luxury market in the world (Statista, 2021), research in emerging markets seems to suggest that luxury brands will need to adjust their ostentatious approach (Felsted and Trivedi, 2021). Thus, our findings have important marketing implications for how luxury brands should approach their brand prominence strategies in a fast-changing world.

Literature review

Brand prominence

Demand for luxury brands is growing steadily worldwide (Statista, 2021). Luxury brands are some of the most known brands globally. For instance, of the top 100 global brands, based on brand equity, 17 are in the luxury sector (Interbrand, 2021). These brands help consumers to signal their identities through visible logos and explicit visual patterns (Berger and Ward, 2010; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2021). LV’s monogram, Burberry’s check pattern and the Chanel and Gucci logos all facilitate communication and allow others to make desired inferences about the wearer. The conspicuousness of a brand’s visible identifiers, such as a mark, a logo or a pattern on a product that allows consumers to recognize the brand, is termed brand prominence (Han *et al.*, 2010). More prominent forms of these visual elements include large logos with contrasting color backgrounds, and patterns covering the product surface. On the

other hand, subtle or muted brand signs include small logos, with less color contrast and discreet patterns. Some brands even adopt a “no logo” strategy, where brand identification elements are usually hidden inside the product (Raimondo *et al.*, 2022).

Some luxury brands, including Coach, Michael Kors and Versace, use highly conspicuous logos on all their products, whereas others, such as Brunello Cuccinelli and Ermenegildo Zegna, prefer subtle and muted logos. Furthermore, many brands use varying levels of brand prominence between and within product ranges. For instance, while Louis Vuitton handbags display the logo prominently, few products in its floral range do so.

Previous research shows an inverted U-shaped relationship between price and brand prominence. For instance, in Berger and Ward’s (2010) study of sunglasses and handbags, lower priced brands displayed smaller logos, and as the price increased, the brand logo’s presence also increased; however, beyond a certain price threshold, the logo’s presence decreased. Han *et al.* (2010) demonstrate that brand prominence is preferred by a specific segment of consumers with a greater desire for status. The authors show that greater brand prominence is preferred by wealthy *parvenus* who associate with other wealthy consumers and wish to dissociate from those below their societal hierarchy, and by *poseurs* who are not wealthy but aspire to join higher social strata.

Research on brand prominence offers interesting insights (see Table I). Several studies focus on antecedents of brand prominence, including personality traits such as extraversion and openness to experience and narcissism (Greenberg *et al.*, 2020; Jiang *et al.*, 2022), vanity (Cheah *et al.*, 2015) and personal motives such as need for uniqueness, self-monitoring and social-identity (Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, in a luxury counterfeiting context, Wilcox *et al.* (2009) show that consumers prefer counterfeit luxury brands with conspicuous logos, depending on their attitude functions. In particular, when luxury brand attitudes serve a social-adjustive function, consumers prefer conspicuous logos. A few studies

examine the consequences of brand prominence, with inconclusive results. For instance, Dens *et al.* (2012) show that brand prominence increases recall and recognition, but leads to negative brand attitudes and brand choice. On the other hand, in a non-luxury context, D’Hooge *et al.* (2017) find a positive effect of brand prominence on brand evaluations. Gender-driven differences are also observed. For example, some researchers identify a greater preference for brand prominence among men (Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2018), whereas others show that a prominence strategy attracts women from lower strata (Schulz *et al.*, 2015).

– Insert Table I around here –

Thus, extant research elaborates a rich tapestry of sociodemographic and psychographic traits and motivations that drive consumers’ preference for brand prominence (Schulz *et al.*, 2015; Butcher *et al.*, 2016; Greenberg *et al.*, 2020). However, it fails to explain mechanisms underlying the effects of brand prominence. Consumers regularly use visual elements of brands, such as logos and patterns, to satiate their need for status and display their self-concept to relevant reference groups (Han *et al.*, 2010; Raimondo *et al.*, 2022). Previous research on luxury brands consistently shows that consumer preferences are driven mainly by social and symbolic values (Berger and Ward, 2010; Shukla *et al.*, 2022a). Symbolic visual cues give the impression that a brand is authentic (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010) and help to signal high status and popularity, allowing it to be perceived as cool (Warren *et al.*, 2019). This study aims to expand the brand prominence literature by considering brand authenticity and brand coolness as underlying mechanisms that drive consumers’ behavioral outcomes.

Brand authenticity

Despite increasing academic attention to authenticity over the past 20 years, its conceptualization lacks consistency. Numerous idiosyncratic definitions of what it means to be authentic have been proposed (Nunes *et al.*, 2021), and this conceptual ambiguity persists in domain-specific definitions, such as multiple conceptualizations of brand authenticity (Morhart *et al.*, 2015). For example, Schallehn *et al.* (2014, p. 193) view brand authenticity as something internal to the brand and its positioning, whereas Cinelli and LeBoeuf (2020) conceptualize it as an external perception and judgment of the genuineness of a brand's image. Given the multitude of definitions, authenticity can be summarized, at its core, as a manifestation of "what is genuine, real, and/or true" (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010, p. 839). Warren *et al.* (2019) concur that a brand behaving consistently and remaining true to its roots is seen as authentic.

In measuring brand authenticity, researchers delineate it as a multidimensional construct. Morhart *et al.* (2015, p. 203) propose a four-dimensional brand authenticity construct comprising continuity, integrity, credibility and symbolism. In a recent study, this multidimensional view of authenticity is extended to authentic consumption (Nunes *et al.*, 2021), defining authenticity as a holistic consumer assessment determined by six judgment components: accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality and proficiency.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of authenticity in consumer decision making, and has revealed consumer-relevant downstream consequences, such as attitudes and behavioral intentions (Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Septianto *et al.*, 2020). For instance, authenticity may predict attitudes and behavioral intentions across products and services and to both hedonic and utilitarian offerings (Kennedy *et al.*, 2021). In evaluating consumption experiences, this implies a positive association between assessments of authenticity and

consumers' inclination to search for further information, purchase the offering and spread positive information by word-of-mouth (Nunes *et al.*, 2021).

Marketing research has manipulated various qualities of offerings presumed to impact on perceptions of authenticity, such as whether a product is from a company's original manufacturing location (Newman and Dhar, 2014). In this vein, calls have been made for further research to systematically identify how authenticity underpins consumer judgments (Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Nunes *et al.*, 2021). Our study contributes to this literature by investigating the role played by brand authenticity in channeling the impact of brand prominence on consumers' behavioral intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations.

Brand coolness

Cool brands are highly desirable. Marketers strive to imbue their brands with specific traits to enhance perceived brand coolness. However, there is no clear indication of what makes a cool brand, and academic research in this area of enquiry is in its infancy. In Warren and Campbell's (2014) initial conceptualization of brand coolness, they define it as "a subjective and dynamic, socially constructed positive trait attributed to cultural objects inferred to be appropriately autonomous" (p. 544).

Other researchers have sought to identify traits associated with coolness (Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2018; Warren *et al.*, 2018). For example, cool brands are found to be extraordinary, aesthetically appealing, energetic, high-status, rebellious, original, authentic, subcultural, iconic and popular (Warren *et al.*, 2019). Some studies focus on identifying antecedents that influence perceptions of coolness, such as autonomy (Warren and Campbell, 2014) and novelty (Im *et al.*, 2015). Others delineate important outcome variables of brand coolness, including positive attitudes, satisfaction, word-of-mouth recommendations and willingness to pay for the brand, and demonstrate how cool brands change over time (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

Emphasis has been placed on the dynamic and subjective nature of coolness (Dar-Nimrod *et al.*, 2018), indicating that characteristics of cool brands may change as a brand transitions from niche to mass cool. In particular, when a brand expands from a niche group of consumers to a mass market, it eventually begins to lose the characteristics, such as desirability or autonomy, that made it cool in the first place. However, empirical findings on the coolness lifecycle remain preliminary, and more research is needed to investigate factors that may influence how brand coolness changes (Warren *et al.*, 2018). Given a recent call to investigate social, cultural, individual difference and category characteristics that influence what consumers perceive to be cool (Warren *et al.*, 2019), our study seeks to fill this gap by examining how the effect of luxury brand prominence on purchase intentions is mediated by brand coolness.

Previous research has found a link between brand coolness and high status: consumers view cool brands as possessing traits associated with high status, such as being exclusive, upper-class, glamorous and sophisticated (Im *et al.*, 2015; Warren *et al.*, 2018, 2019). Given that luxury brands are high-status objects that are inherently exclusive and rare, it is assumed that they have high perceived coolness. However, less is known about the extent to which the brand prominence of luxury brands may be perceived as cool. It is well established in the luxury marketing literature that one of the main motivations for luxury consumption is to signal consumers' desired identities (Khalifa and Shukla, 2021). While explicit brand logos and patterns may facilitate this signaling process, research suggests that subtle brand signals may also have a signaling function among consumers with high cultural capital (Han *et al.*, 2010; Berger and Ward, 2010). By investigating how brand coolness underpins the subsequent effect of brand prominence on luxury purchase behavior, our research seeks to reconcile current thinking relating to brand prominence.

Self-brand connection

It is well established that consumers communicate their identity to others through brands in both offline and online settings. Self-brand connection entails integrating the brand's identity into one's own identity to symbolically represent one's self-concept (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Saenger *et al.*, 2020). While some researchers conceptualize this as connecting with the consumer's personal identity (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2007), others argue that self-brand connections are formed as a result of reference group usage, and therefore reflect group identity (Escalas and Bettman, 2003, 2005). Research also shows that some brands are more strongly linked to consumers' identities than others, and that consumers are more likely to engage in positive behavioral responses to such brands to communicate desired aspects of their identity to others (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019).

Previous research has documented the positive buffering effect of high self-brand connection. In particular, when consumers highly identify with a brand, any threat to the brand is experienced as a personal failure, resulting in lower self-esteem (Lisjak *et al.*, 2012). This, in turn, elicits defensive responses, as consumers increase their purchasing behavior to protect their beloved brands (Khalifa and Shukla, 2017). Consumers who are more connected to a brand tend to exhibit greater brand involvement and positive brand responses, including increased purchase intentions and positive word-of-mouth (Chen and Lin, 2021). By incorporating self-brand connection into this study, we demonstrate its moderating role on the effects of brand prominence. In doing so, we provide further evidence of the boundary conditions of brand prominence effects.

Hypothesis development

The role of brand prominence

Previous research on brand prominence suggests that consumers' purchase intentions for loud (prominent) or quiet (subtle) luxury goods relate largely to their associative/dissociative motives and status consumption needs (Kauppinen-Räsänen *et al.*, 2018). In particular, consumers choose products with more or less visible brand marks based on their willingness to associate themselves with the wealthy or dissociate themselves from the less wealthy (Han *et al.*, 2010). However, crucially, not all consumers seek high status or prestige through luxury consumption. A significant rise in inconspicuous luxury consumption has been noted among consumers globally (for a review, see Eckhardt *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, a steady stream of research demonstrates that brand prominence leads to negative brand evaluations (Dens *et al.*, 2012) and reduced sharing intentions in the digital marketplace (Tellis *et al.*, 2019). In their pioneering research on brand prominence among consumers with varying degrees of wealth and need for status, Han *et al.* (2010) show that several consumer segments, including patricians (wealthy consumers who pay a premium for inconspicuously branded products) and proletariats (less affluent consumers who are also less status conscious) avoid loud signaling and prefer subtle or soft signaling through small or inconspicuous logos. In addition, research in the field of luxury consistently shows a consumer trend towards avoiding conspicuous signaling (Wilcox *et al.*, 2009; Sharma, 2010; Shukla *et al.*, 2022b) and preferring subtle brand marks (Berger and Ward, 2010). Similarly, Janssen *et al.* (2017) find less favorable attitudes to luxury brands that use conspicuous brand signals. These studies suggest that luxury consumers' attitudes to brand prominence strategies are increasingly negative. Hence, we propose that:

- H1.* Increasing brand prominence for luxury products leads to lower consumer purchase intentions.

The mediating role of brand authenticity

Brand authenticity is central to brand success in helping to create a unique brand image (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). For instance, a recent survey with more than 15,000 respondents carried out by global communications agency, Cohn and Wolfe revealed that 91% of consumers would reward brands for their authenticity by purchasing, investing in or endorsing those brands (Danziger, 2018). Consumers prefer brands and experiences that reinforce their desired identity (Berger and Heath, 2008), and therefore actively seek authenticity in brands to find meaning in their lives (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Septianto *et al.*, 2020). Research has sought to identify factors influencing consumers' perceptions of authenticity, such as the company's original manufacturing location (Newman and Dhar, 2014).

Our research seeks to extend previous findings by examining whether the impact of brand prominence – a product-related iconic cue – on purchase intentions is mediated by perceived brand authenticity. Luxury brands tend to highlight their authenticity through exquisite craftsmanship and use of rare and precious raw materials (Kapferer and Bastien, 2012). As previously explained, luxury brands also use various brand prominence signals. For instance, some brands (e.g., LVMH and Coach) prominently display their logos on most of their products, whereas others (e.g., Hermes and Bottega Veneta) prefer subtle and silent logos. Extant research also confirms that cheaper luxury brands tend to be more conspicuous (Berger and Ward, 2010). Moreover, research on counterfeits has shown that fake luxury products tend to use loud logos, as they are used mainly by lower-income consumers to signal their social status (Wilcox *et al.*, 2009; Han *et al.*, 2010). Accordingly, consumers may consider a brand displaying a prominent logo to be cheap or counterfeit (Berger and Ward, 2010; Wilcox *et al.*, 2009), and thus may perceive it as less genuine, real or true (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010), and therefore less authentic. Furthermore, based on existing research on

the downstream consequences of authenticity (Mohart *et al.*, 2015; Charlton and Cornwell, 2019), we posit that the decreased brand authenticity resulting from a brand prominence strategy will lead to lower purchase intentions. Based on these observations, we hypothesize that this negative effect of brand prominence on purchase intentions for luxury brands is mediated by brand authenticity:

H2. Brand authenticity mediates the relationship between luxury brand prominence and purchase intentions.

The mediating role of brand coolness

Brand coolness is a subjective and dynamic concept (Belk *et al.*, 2010), and its association with consumer perceptions (Connor, 1995) makes it difficult to delineate clearly. However, the literature identifies several related qualities, including extraordinary, aesthetically appealing, energetic, original, rebellious, high-status, subcultural, iconic and popular (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

Perceptions of brand coolness are not static, because although brands initially become cool to a small subculture of knowledgeable insiders while remaining relatively unfamiliar to the broader population, as they are adopted by a wider audience they lose their coolness. For instance, Juicy Couture emerged as a cool brand in the early 2000s, with its differentiated design and prominent logo. However, as it became popular, many loyal consumers and influencers moved away from it, citing the brand as having become “uncool,” and in 2013 the brand closed all its US stores and was sold to the Authentic Brands Group.

In this study, we argue that brand coolness mediates the impact of brand prominence on purchase intentions. In particular, as brand prominence increases, consumers perceive brands as less cool, thereby reducing their purchase intentions. Luxury brands that use conspicuous and prominent logos tend to be more popular amongst the middle classes because they can be easily recognized by others, whereas inconspicuous luxury brands can only be identified by

people in the know (Han *et al.*, 2010; Berger and Ward, 2010). Therefore, aspirational, middle-income consumers tend to favor highly conspicuous branded products to signal their wealth and prestige (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2018). We posit that the greater the popularity of luxury brands using prominent logos, the more likely that they will be perceived as less cool. This is because consumers assume that a more widely available brand has lost its niche position and is vying for the mass market. The luxury marketing literature confirms that a key motivation for luxury consumption is luxury brands' ability to signal consumers' desired identities (Khalifa and Shukla, 2021). As brands lose their coolness, consumers' preference for them declines. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H3. Brand coolness mediates the relationship between luxury brand prominence and luxury purchase intentions.

Empirical evidence is currently lacking on the causal chain linking the constructs of brand authenticity and brand coolness. Thus, without a specific direction of causal flow (Hayes, 2013), we measure the parallel mediation of brand authenticity and brand coolness on the relationship between luxury brand prominence and purchase intentions.

The moderating role of self-brand connection

Self-brand connection refers to the extent to which consumers integrate brands into their self-concept to symbolically represent the self (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Previous research indicates that consumers' tendency to identify with brands stems from their desire to associate with in-groups and dissociate from out-groups (Berger and Heath, 2008; Escalas and Bettman, 2003, 2005). Owing to their social and psychological benefits, consumers use luxury brands to create and communicate their desired identities, and to gain social affiliation by forming strong connections with these brands (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019; Chen and Lin, 2021). Consumers with high self-brand connection use brands for self-expression (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2007; Saenger *et al.*, 2020), and thus are more forgiving of brand transgressions and more

likely to defend their brands in the face of status threat or brand rejection by others (Lisjak *et al.*, 2012; Khalifa and Shukla, 2017). Therefore, although brand prominence may lead to brand dilution in relation to its authenticity and coolness, we posit that this dilution effect is buffered for consumers with high self–brand connection. We argue that consumers with high self–brand connection will continue to perceive highly prominent brands as authentic and cool.

However, low self–brand connection entails feeling a disconnection from a brand to preserve a positive sense of identity. Consumers with low self–brand connection are less inclined to use the brand for self-expression (Ferraro *et al.*, 2013), and when brand dilution occurs, these consumers are less likely to protect or defend the brand (Khalifa and Shukla, 2021). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, cheaper and counterfeit luxury brands tend to use prominent signaling (Berger and Ward, 2010; Wilcox *et al.*, 2009). Hence, we posit that consumers with low self-brand connection will associate prominent logo displays by luxury brands with being cheap and/or counterfeit, thereby diluting the brand’s perceived coolness and authenticity respectively:

- H4.* Self–brand connection moderates the relationship between luxury brand prominence and brand authenticity, such that, among consumers with high (low) self–brand connection, high brand prominence does not (does) reduce (a) perceived brand authenticity and (b) perceived brand coolness.

Overview of studies

Three experiments were conducted to examine the hypothesized relationships. Study 1 examines the direct effect of brand prominence on luxury purchase intentions. Study 2 examines the mediating role of brand coolness and brand authenticity on the relationship between luxury brand prominence and consumers’ behavioral intentions. Building on this, Study 3 extends earlier studies by examining the moderating effect of self–brand connection.

In doing so, the latter also provides a robustness check on the findings of Studies 1 and 2. The studies were carried out in three distinctly different cultural contexts: Study 1 in China, Study 2 in Turkey and Study 3 in the United Kingdom. The consistency of findings across these cultures strengthens the robustness of the hypothesized relationships.

Study 1 – Brand prominence influences luxury purchase intentions

Study 1 examined the direct effects of brand prominence on luxury purchase intentions. We conducted this study in China specifically to assess the impact of a new government policy relating to “common prosperity,” which actively requests citizens to shun conspicuous goods and not use them for signaling (Felsted and Trivedi, 2021). The independent variable, brand prominence, was manipulated, and the dependent variable, luxury purchase intentions, was measured.

Participants and procedure

A total of 121 Chinese respondents (74.40% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.51$ years) participated in this study. Participants were recruited using WeChat platform-based forums that focused on luxury goods. They were randomly allocated to either a brand prominence or a non-brand prominence condition in a between-subjects experimental design.

The study began with a cover story informing participants that they would be examining design aesthetics. At the start of the study, participants were provided with the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of luxury as “hard to obtain, offers status, high priced compared to other brands in their category and exclusive,” and were asked to complete a questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire captured participants’ sociodemographics. Participants were then randomly exposed to either the brand prominence or non-brand prominence condition. To create ecological validity, participants were asked to think about luxury fashion brands. They were then asked to mention the luxury fashion brand they immediately thought of. This brand was used for the manipulation. Next, participants

were shown an image of a cap, mentioning that the luxury fashion brand they had specified earlier was planning to launch this cap in its next product range. As shown in Figure 1, participants in the brand prominence condition saw a large X logo and were asked to imagine that the brand logo would appear in that sized font on the front of the cap. In the non-brand prominence condition, participants saw a much smaller X and were also asked to imagine that the brand logo would appear in a similarly sized font on the front of the cap.

– Insert Figure 1 about here –

Following this manipulation, a brand prominence manipulation check was carried out ($\alpha = 0.80$), adopting the brand prominence scale items developed by Butcher *et al.* (2016), and using a seven-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The items were “The brand intends to use visible logos,” “The brand intends to use big logos,” “The brand intends to use highly noticeable logos” and “The brand label will be conspicuous.” Lastly, participants’ purchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.91$) were measured using three items rated on a seven-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (Sichtmann *et al.*, 2019). These items were “It is very likely that I will buy this brand,” “I will purchase this brand the next time I am shopping for luxury” and “I will definitely try this brand.” As the respondents were asked to think about a luxury brand in this study, we also controlled for self–brand connection by asking them to rate brand intimacy (Simon and Tossan, 2018), comprising the items “I experience a form of connection between this brand and me,” “I feel closer to this brand” and “I feel there is more intimacy between this brand and me,” on a seven-point Likert-type scale ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Results

The manipulation check for brand prominence was successful, based on the one-way ANOVA results ($F(1, 119) = 11.77, p = 0.001$). Respondents agreed that brand prominence was significantly higher in the brand prominence condition ($M_{\text{prominence}} = 4.76, SD = 1.23$) than in the non-brand prominence condition ($M_{\text{non prominence}} = 3.95, SD = 1.36$).

H1 focused on examining the effects of brand prominence on luxury purchase intentions. As hypothesized, respondents in the brand prominence condition exhibited significantly lower purchase intentions ($F(1, 119) = 13.27, p = 0.000; M_{\text{prominence}} = 3.09, SD = 1.46$) than in the non-brand prominence condition ($M_{\text{non prominence}} = 4.07, SD = 1.52$). Furthermore, there was no interaction between brand prominence and brand intimacy ($F(1, 117) = 0.64, p = 0.425$), indicating that, irrespective of brand intimacy, when the luxury brand logo was prominently displayed, consumer purchase intentions decreased substantially. Thus, *H1* is supported.

Study 1 thus provides initial causal evidence consistent with our theorization that brand prominence leads to lower purchase intentions. As this study was carried out in China, where current government policy seems to be to shun conspicuousness and reduce luxury consumption, we then examined these effects in Studies 2 and 3 in markets without such policies. Study 2 extends this causal design to examine the mediation effect of brand authenticity and brand coolness.

Study 2 – The mediating effects of brand authenticity and brand coolness

Study 2 had two aims: to examine the direct effects of luxury brand prominence on luxury purchase intentions, as a robustness check for Study 1; and to determine whether brand coolness and brand authenticity mediate this relationship. The independent variable, brand

prominence, was manipulated in this study. We measured the mediators, brand authenticity and brand coolness, and the dependent variable, luxury purchase intentions.

Participants and procedure

A total of 115 Turkish respondents (62.60% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 34.37$ years) participated in this study. Participants were invited using an online Turkish consumer panel. The instrument was developed in English and translated into Turkish, and was then back-translated by a different translator. Both translations were checked by a third professional translator, and the final instrument was refined accordingly.

The study began with a cover story informing respondents that they would be taking part in a memory test based on reading a text. Similar to Study 1, participants first read the definition of luxury goods, and their sociodemographics were captured. They were then exposed to a fictitious luxury brand, “Masal Parla,” and were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (brand prominence or non-brand prominence). In the brand prominence condition participants read:

Masal Parla is a luxury fashion brand that is very well-known in high society and among rich people around the world. Among global luxury consumers, it is known for its iconic style, big logos and design philosophy that underpins global trends. The brand has always had a design philosophy of using big, loud logos, as a signal of social status to differentiate itself from others.

In the non-brand prominence condition, participants read:

Masal Parla is a luxury fashion brand that is very well-known in high society and among rich people around the world. Among global luxury consumers, it is known for its iconic style, subtle logos and design philosophy that underpins global trends. The brand has always had a design philosophy of using small logos, as a signal of social status to differentiate itself from others.

Participants were asked to respond to brand-related manipulation checks, including brand name and design philosophy. As a brand prominence manipulation check ($\alpha = 0.84$), they were asked to respond to questions based on Butcher *et al.*'s (2016) items, using a seven-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," as in Study 1. This was followed by a brand authenticity measure ($\alpha = 0.78$) derived from Warren *et al.* (2019), responding to four items on a five-point Likert scale: "X is authentic," "X is true to its roots," "X does not seem artificial" and "X does not try to be something it is not." Brand coolness ($\alpha = 0.72$) was measured using three items conceptualized by Warren *et al.* (2019) – "To what extent do you consider X to be cool?" "To what extent do you believe that other people consider X to be cool?" and "To what extent do you expect X's coolness to change in future?" – on a five-point scale from "not at all" to "very much so." Finally, luxury purchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.93$) were measured using a similar scale to Study 1 (Sichtmann *et al.*, 2019).

Results

The brand prominence manipulation was successful, based on one-way ANOVA analysis ($F(1, 113) = 91.23; p = 0.000$). Participants in the brand prominence condition agreed that the brand prominence was significantly higher ($M_{\text{prominence}} = 5.67, SD = 1.05$) than those in the non-brand prominence condition ($M_{\text{non prominence}} = 3.45, SD = 1.42$).

As hypothesized in *H1*, increased brand prominence led to lower luxury purchase intentions ($F(1, 113) = 34.02, p = 0.000$). Participants in the brand prominence condition exhibited significantly lower purchase intentions ($M_{\text{prominence}} = 2.86, SD = 1.56$) than those in the non-brand prominence condition ($M_{\text{non prominence}} = 4.42, SD = 1.28$).

To examine the mediating effects of brand authenticity and brand coolness (see Figure 2), the PROCESS macro model 4 was employed with 10,000 bootstraps (Hayes, 2013). The analysis revealed a significant direct effect of brand prominence on both brand authenticity ($F(1, 113) = 6.18, p = 0.014; \beta = -0.19, p = 0.014; 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.33, -0.04]$) and brand coolness

($F(1, 113) = 3.95, p = 0.049; \beta = -0.16, p = 0.049; 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.32, -0.01]$). Furthermore, the direct effect of brand prominence on luxury brand purchase intentions was negative and significant ($F(1, 113) = 19.31, p = 0.000; \beta = -0.64; 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.90, -0.39]$). Similarly, luxury purchase intentions were significantly influenced by both brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.45, p = 0.009; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.11, 0.78]$) and brand coolness ($\beta = 0.34, p = 0.032; 95\% \text{ CI } [0.03, 0.64]$). The indirect effects of brand authenticity ($\beta = -0.08; \text{BoostSE} = 0.05; 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.20; -0.01]$) and brand coolness ($\beta = -0.06; \text{BoostSE} = 0.04; 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.15; -0.01]$) did not include zero, thus further confirming the robustness of the mediation model and supporting *H2* and *H3*.

– Insert Figure 2 about here –

The findings of this study provide a further robustness check on Study 1, and show that when luxury brands use a prominence strategy, consumer purchase intentions decrease. In Study 1, conducted in China, the social policy may have driven the effect, whereas through Study 2 we demonstrate that the negative effect of brand prominence remains valid in countries with no such political or normative pressures. Moreover, this study demonstrates the mediating role of brand authenticity and brand coolness in this relationship. Building on these results, in Study 3 we examine whether self-brand connection moderates the relationship between luxury brand prominence and both perceived brand authenticity and brand coolness.

Study 3 – Self-brand connection as a boundary condition

Study 3 extends the earlier investigations in four important ways. First, while Study 1 captured the direct effects of brand prominence and Study 2 revealed the mediating effects of brand authenticity and brand coolness, this study tests the moderating effects of self-brand

connection on this mediation process. Second, Study 2 used a fictitious brand in the prominence manipulation, whereas in Study 3 we used a real luxury brand to capture the ecological validity of our study. Third, to examine the cross-cultural stability of our findings, Study 3 was carried out in the UK. In addition to luxury purchase intentions, in this study we also measure word-of-mouth recommendation intentions. We manipulate the independent variable (brand prominence) and the moderator (self–brand connection) and measure the mediators (brand authenticity and brand coolness) and dependent variables (luxury purchase intentions and word-of-mouth recommendation intentions).

Participants and procedure

A total of 211 British respondents (66.90% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 34.85$ years) participated in this study. Participants were invited using the Prolific online consumer panel. The study utilized a 2 x 2 (brand prominence versus non-brand prominence; high versus low self–brand connection) between-subjects experimental design.

Having consented to participation, the participants were given the definition of what constitutes luxury, and their sociodemographics were captured. Rather than using a fictitious brand, as in Study 2, in this study we first randomly exposed participants to a self–brand connection manipulation. In the high self–brand connection condition participants were asked:

In the box below, please write down a luxury fashion brand that you feel very personally connected to. This should be a brand that you feel reflects who you are, you can identify with this brand, and you can use this brand to communicate who you are to other people.

In the low self–brand connection condition, participants were asked:

In the box below, please write down a luxury fashion brand that you do not feel very personally connected to. This should be a brand that you feel does not reflect who you

are, you cannot identify with this brand, and you do not wish to use this brand to communicate who you are to other people.

After the self–brand connection manipulation, participants were exposed to a brand prominence manipulation. They were asked to read a news item. In the brand prominence condition participants read:

X, a well-known luxury fashion brand, has recently decided to adopt a new design philosophy. Based on this new design philosophy, X's logo will be prominently displayed on all products. The logo will be big, eye catching and clearly visible. For example, in the image below, see where the large X symbol is shown. This is how large the logo will be on every item of apparel the brand produces.

In the non-brand prominence condition, participants read:

X, a well-known luxury fashion brand, has recently decided to adopt a new design philosophy. Based on this new design philosophy, X's logo will be subtly displayed on all products. The logo will be small and muted, and only those who know the brand will be able to recognize it. For example, in the image below, see where the small X symbol is shown. This is how subtle the logo will be on every item of apparel the brand produces.

In the text, X was the brand that the participants had mentioned earlier (see Figure 3).

Following the manipulations, all participants were asked to complete self–brand connection and brand prominence manipulation checks. The brand prominence manipulation check ($\alpha = 0.83$) was measured using scale items developed by Butcher *et al.* (2016), similar to Study 1. The self–brand connection manipulation check ($\alpha = 0.97$) was measured using a six-item scale developed by Escalas and Bettman (2005), with the items: “This brand reflects who I am,” “I can identify with this brand,” “I feel a personal connection to this brand,” “I use this brand to communicate who I am to others,” “I think this brand will help me become

the type of person I want to be” and “I consider this brand to be me (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to other(s)).” Responses were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

– Insert Figure 3 about here –

These manipulations were followed by mediation measures of brand authenticity ($\alpha = 0.88$) and brand coolness ($\alpha = 0.71$), as in Study 2 (Warren *et al.*, 2019). Luxury purchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.96$) were measured as in Study 1 (Sichtmann *et al.*, 2019). Word-of-mouth recommendation intentions ($\alpha = 0.96$) were captured using three items derived from Morhart *et al.* (2015), namely “I would recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice,” “I say positive things about this brand to other people” and “I would recommend this brand to others,” on a seven-point Likert-type scale.

Results

One-way ANOVA analysis was carried out to check whether the manipulations had been successful. The self-brand connection manipulation was successful ($F(1, 209) = 853.42, p = 0.000$), as the analysis showed that participants in the high self-brand connection condition ($M_{\text{highsb}} = 4.80, SD = 0.93$) exhibited significantly higher levels of self-brand connection than those in the low condition ($M_{\text{lowsb}} = 1.52, SD = 0.70$). The brand prominence manipulation was similarly successful ($F(1, 209) = 229.17, p = 0.000$), with participants in the high prominence condition scoring significantly higher on the brand prominence measure ($M_{\text{prominence}} = 5.68, SD = 1.42$) than those in the non-brand prominence condition ($M_{\text{nonprominence}} = 3.05, SD = 1.09$).

The direct effects of luxury brand prominence on luxury purchase intentions ($F(1, 209) = 6.48, p = 0.012$) and word-of-mouth recommendation intentions ($F(1, 209) = 6.05, p = 0.015$)

were significant, as both decreased substantially in the brand prominence condition ($M_{\text{purchase}} = 2.72$, $SD = 1.67$; $M_{\text{wordofmouth}} = 2.98$, $SD = 1.61$) compared with the non-brand prominence condition ($M_{\text{purchase}} = 3.36$, $SD = 1.97$; $M_{\text{wordofmouth}} = 3.58$, $SD = 1.92$).

– Insert Figure 4 about here –

To examine the moderated mediation effects (see Figure 4), the PROCESS model 7 was employed (Hayes, 2013), with 10,000 bootstraps, using luxury brand prominence as the predictor, brand authenticity and brand coolness as mediators, self-brand connection as the moderator, and luxury purchase intentions and word-of-mouth recommendation intentions as criteria. The direct effect of brand prominence (1 = prominent, -1 = non-prominent) on brand authenticity was significant and negative ($F(3, 207) = 15.26$, $p = 0.000$; $\beta = -0.18$, $p = 0.003$; 95% CI [-0.30, -0.06]). A similar effect was observed for brand coolness ($F(3, 207) = 8.09$, $p = 0.000$; $\beta = -0.15$, $p = 0.008$; 95% CI [-0.26, -0.04]). Furthermore, luxury purchase intentions were significantly influenced by both brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.76$, $p = 0.000$; 95% CI [0.54, 0.98]) and brand coolness ($\beta = 0.85$, $p = 0.000$; 95% CI [0.61, 1.09]). Similarly, word-of-mouth recommendation intentions were influenced by both brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.75$, $p = 0.000$; 95% CI [0.53, 0.97]) and brand coolness ($\beta = 0.71$, $p = 0.000$; 95% CI [0.46, 0.95]). The moderating effect of self-brand connection (see Figure 5; 1 = high self-brand connection, -1 = low self-brand connection) was significant on the relationship between luxury brand prominence and both brand authenticity ($\beta = -0.19$, $p = 0.002$; 95% CI [-0.31, -0.07]) and brand coolness ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.021$; 95% CI [-0.24, -0.02]). Furthermore, the index of moderated mediation did not include zero for either brand authenticity (95% CI [-0.50, -0.10]) or brand coolness (95% CI [-0.43, -0.04]) in the case of luxury purchase intentions. Similar results were observed for word-of-mouth recommendation intentions in

relation to brand authenticity (95% CI [-0.44, -0.13]) and brand coolness (95% CI [-0.35, -0.08]), thus confirming the robustness of the mediated moderation. As shown in Figure 5, further post hoc comparison through two-way ANOVA showed a significant decrease in brand authenticity and brand coolness among consumers with high self-brand connection. Thus, *H4* is partially supported, as self-brand connection does moderate the relationship between luxury brand prominence, brand authenticity and brand coolness. However, the effect is the reverse of that originally theorized. In particular, the results show that high self-brand connection results in lower perceived brand authenticity and brand coolness, while no significant difference is observed among consumers with low self-brand connection.

- Insert Figure 5 about here -

Interestingly, the indirect effects reveal that the mediation effect is significant for luxury purchase intentions only in the high self-brand connection condition for both brand authenticity ($\beta = -0.28$; BoostSE = 0.08; 95% CI [-0.45; -0.14]) and brand coolness ($\beta = -0.24$; BoostSE = 0.08; 95% CI [-0.40; -0.10]). This effect is also observed for word-of-mouth recommendations intentions, with the indirect effects of brand authenticity ($\beta = -0.27$; BoostSE = 0.08; 95% CI [-0.44; -0.13]) and brand coolness ($\beta = -0.20$; BoostSE = 0.07; 95% CI [-0.35; -0.08]) being significant only in the high self-brand connection condition.

This study provides additional causal evidence of the direct negative effects of brand prominence on purchase intentions. It also reveals the mediating effects of brand authenticity and coolness on this relationship. Furthermore, contrary to existing research (Lisjak *et al.*, 2012; Khalifa and Shukla, 2017), the results show that self-brand connection does not act as a barrier to the negative effects of brand prominence, as predicted in *H4*. In fact, the reverse

is observed: when a luxury brand uses a prominence strategy, consumers with high self-brand connection tend to perceive that the brand has lost its authenticity and coolness.

Discussion

As the luxury market becomes increasingly competitive and cluttered, many brands are engaging in prominent displays of their brand patterns, marks, and logos to make them stand out. Research in various fields, including psychology, marketing, and consumer research, has shown substantial interest in understanding the dynamics of brand prominence (Han *et al.*, 2010; Jiang *et al.*, 2022). Our research contributes to the burgeoning literature on the role of brand prominence in luxury industries. Although extant research highlights the negative effect of brand prominence on consumers' behavioral intentions (Berger and Ward, 2010; Janssen *et al.*, 2017), these studies overlook important mechanisms that may underpin this relationship. We aimed to shed light on how brand authenticity and brand coolness underlie the effect of brand prominence on behavioral intentions. Our three studies systematically demonstrate that luxury brand prominence leads to lower authenticity and loss of coolness for the brand, and in turn reduces purchase intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations. Research in consumer and social psychology suggest that self-brand connection acts as a defensive barrier against brand transgressions such as brand threats or brand rejection (Escalas and Bettman, 2003, 2005; Khalifa and Shukla, 2017, 2021). However, contrary to previous findings, we show that self-brand connection does not act as a buffer against the negative effect of brand prominence. We further highlight that consumers with high self-brand connection tend to punish the brand by reducing their purchase intentions and recommending the brand less than before, as they may question the genuineness and authenticity of the luxury brand.

Theoretical contributions

Our study makes several contributions to notions of brand prominence that pervade both academic theory and marketing practice. In particular, research has examined how publicly visible consumption communicates social identities through visible logo displays that enable the signaling process (D’Hooge *et al.*, 2017; Jiang *et al.*, 2022). Our research shows that loud signals negatively affect consumers’ purchase intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations. Moreover, our investigation contributes to knowledge of the brand prominence effect by highlighting the role played by brand authenticity and brand coolness. Thus, by revealing the mechanisms underlying the effect of brand conspicuousness on consumers’ evaluations, this research contributes to the literature on brand authenticity and brand coolness. Extant research focuses mainly on origin effects associated with luxury brand authenticity (Newman and Dhar, 2014). Our work offers novel guidance on how researchers might systematically identify other specific qualities of luxury brands that impact on assessments of authenticity. This research also sheds light on authenticity’s broader role in consumer decision making.

Furthermore, our study elaborates on how brand prominence may shape consumer perceptions of whether or not a brand is cool. Consequently, our study answers calls made in previous theoretical studies for research exploring the potential antecedents of brand coolness (Warren *et al.*, 2019) and its consequences. This finding adds a new perspective to those in previous studies who observe that brand coolness was capable of influencing passion-driven intentions to use luxury brands (Batra *et al.*, 2012).

Han *et al.* (2010) highlight that some consumer segments prefer prominently branded luxury products, whereas others prefer less prominently branded ones, depending on their level of self-brand connection (Chen and Lin, 2021). Building on notions of brand authenticity and brand coolness, we argue for a dilution effect of visible brand signals,

particularly among consumers with high self–brand connection. In addition, we determine that among consumers with high self–brand connection, brand coolness is predictive of negative behavioral intentions. Contributing further to this line of research, we show a growing consumer preference for subtle signaling across different countries (China, Turkey and the UK).

Contrary to extant work (Lisjak *et al.*, 2012), our research reveals that consumers with high self–brand connection perceive a brand as less authentic and cool when prominent logos or marks are used. This contradictory result can be explained in relation to the nature of brand prominence and identity salience. Brand prominence preferences are driven largely by identity signaling goals (Raimondo *et al.*, 2022). More importantly, low-income consumers show a greater preference for prominent logos (Schulz *et al.*, 2015). Thus, when a luxury brand employs a brand prominence strategy, high self–brand connection consumers may feel that the brand is targeting low-income groups or has started to democratize to expand its user base. Research has also shown that downward brand extensions and democratization have a substantial negative effect on consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions toward luxury brands (Shukla *et al.*, 2022a). Moreover, Warren *et al.* (2019) argue that as brands expand from a niche group to mass markets, they lose their coolness. High self–brand connection consumers are in tune with the brand’s reference group usage and the group identity it reflects (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). If they assume that a new, less desired user group is now being targeted by the brand, these consumers may feel that the brand is becoming uncool. Furthermore, a brand prominence strategy indicates inconsistency by luxury brands generally associated with subtle signaling (Han *et al.*, 2010). This inconsistency may induce reflection by high self–brand connection consumers, leading them to question the genuineness and authenticity of the luxury brand. Our study further nuances existing debate about preferences for brand prominence, which has focused predominantly on socio-

psychographics, including cultural capital (Berger and Ward, 2010), need for status and sociodemographics such as income (Han *et al.*, 2010). Thus, we extend the debate on brand prominence strategy and the role played by consumers' individual characteristics.

Finally, in capturing the complex interplay between self-brand connection, brand authenticity and brand coolness and their interactive effects on consumers' intentions, our study provides a more holistic understanding of the observed effects of brand prominence.

Managerial implications

The findings have numerous implications for managers in the luxury space. All brand managers want to highlight their brand prominently in multiple communications. However, the findings indicate that they should carefully evaluate how their brand prominence strategies affect brand evaluations. Specifically, our findings suggest that luxury brands that choose a conspicuous branding strategy will struggle to communicate authenticity. Moreover, if the brand's logo is too prominent, the mark loses its value as a cool status signal, and consumers tend to avoid purchasing and stop spreading positive messages about the brand.

This is particularly problematic among consumers who identify closely with the brand and have made substantial investments in this identification. To avoid alienating consumers who are highly connected with the brand, managers need to develop subtle cues that identify their products, even in the absence of an explicit logo or brand name, through a variety of motifs such as design cues, cuts and styling. Reducing prominent use of logos may challenge awareness and recall among some groups of customers (Han *et al.*, 2010), but to avoid these detrimental effects, brand managers might increase short-term sales by establishing a lower-priced line or extending the brand to multiple categories. Such products are likely to sell well if they are advertised with the prestigious labels of their high-priced forebears.

This research also provides valuable insights for marketing managers aiming to enhance the authenticity of their offerings. Our findings suggest that managers should devise

alternative routes for signaling the authenticity of their own offerings that differ from the overt conspicuousness of brand markers. To be seen as authentic, brands need to remind consumers of their history and core values, including integrity, originality and their founders, while avoiding use of overt advertisements or other strategies associated with mass-market brands (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Nunes *et al.*, 2021).

Our findings contribute to building a better understanding of how luxury brands can become cool. Perceived coolness is an important factor driving success, as it can transform unrecognizable products into market leaders. Our findings suggest that for luxury brands to be perceived as cool, an inconspicuous branding strategy is most effective.

Limitations and future directions

Although this research makes several contributions to the academic literature, it has some limitations that might help further the debate. First, our findings elaborate on the impact of brand prominence on brand-related outcomes moderated by self-brand connection. Research has highlighted the need for uniqueness, desire for distinction and desire for exclusivity as important boundary conditions in the context of luxury (Berger and Ward, 2010; Khalifa and Shukla, 2021). In addition, consumers' judgments of brand coolness and authenticity may be construed from a multitude of factors. Thus, we recommend research to examine other important moderators. Several cross-cultural studies have demonstrated differences in luxury consumption underpinned by cultural orientation (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2018). Thus, interesting insights might be gained from examining the role of brand prominence in consumer behavior in more individualistic rather than collectivist societies, or in markets with differing cultural capital.

While our study measures two different mediation mechanisms, extant conceptualizations of brand authenticity and brand coolness (Nunes *et al.*, 2021; Warren *et al.*, 2019) suggest further avenues for future research. Studies might examine the interactive

relationship between brand authenticity and brand coolness to establish whether they have parallel effects or guide each other.

Moreover, our study focuses on the visibility of brand markers, whereas signal explicitness influences communication in a host of other domains. Whether this explicit signaling manifests differently among different sociodemographics has not yet been examined. Is this effect more pronounced if in-groups use the brand prominently? Does it change the brand's authenticity- and coolness-related meanings? A particularly interesting direction pertains to the spillover effect of brand prominence. Many brands use a mix of brand prominence strategies for their different product ranges. How a brand prominence strategy employed on one product range affects others in the brand portfolio remains to be examined. Our study thus offers a plethora of further avenues for research on the roles of brand authenticity and brand coolness in driving luxury consumption.

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Figure 1. Brand prominence condition manipulation (Study 1) (Source: Authors' own work).

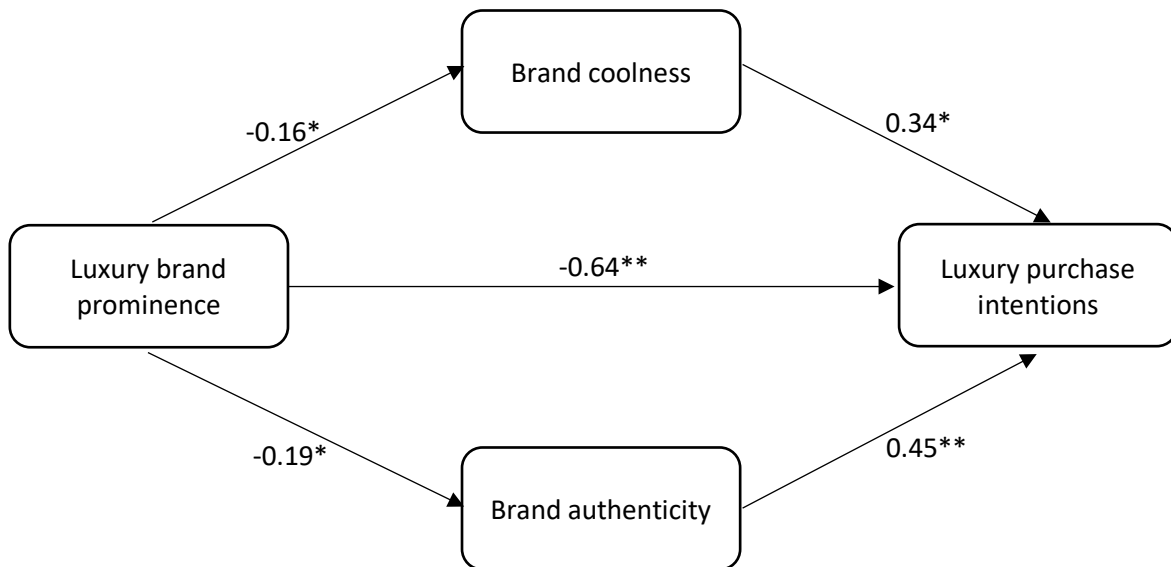


Figure 2. Mediating effects of brand coolness and brand authenticity on the relationship between luxury brand prominence and behavioral intentions (Study 2) (Source: Authors' own work).

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.005$.

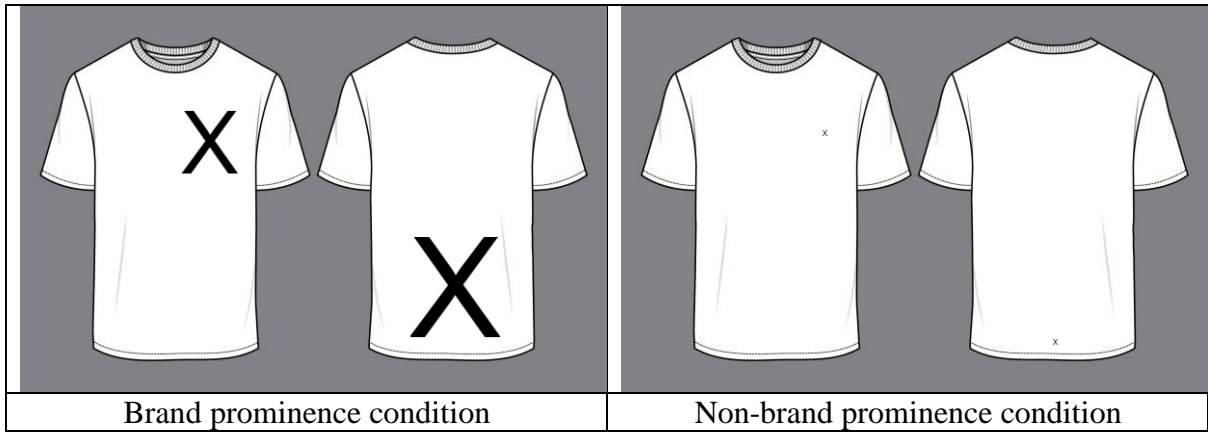


Figure 3. Brand prominence condition manipulation (Study 3) (Source: Authors' own work).

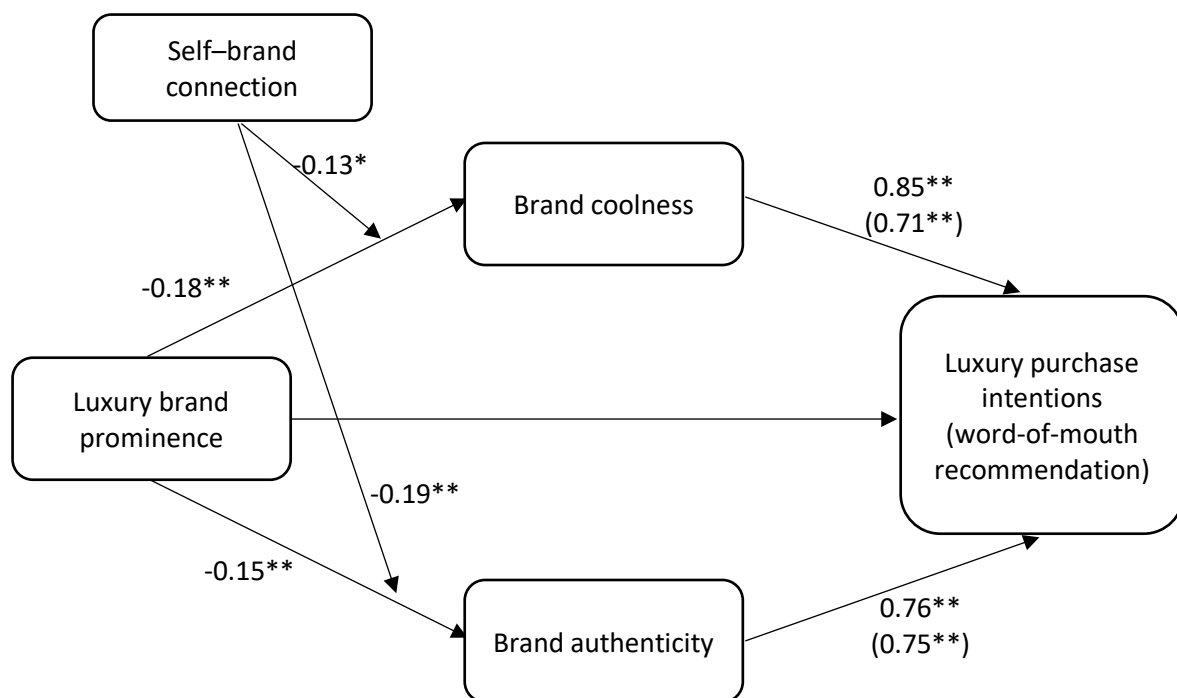


Figure 4. Mediating effects of brand coolness and brand authenticity on the relationship between luxury brand prominence and behavioral intentions and the moderating effects of self-brand connection (Study 3) (Source: Authors' own work).

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.005$; figures in brackets for word-of-mouth recommendations; for luxury purchase intentions index of moderated mediation for brand authenticity (95% CI [-0.50, -0.10]) and for brand coolness (95% CI [-0.43, -0.04]); for word-of-mouth recommendation intentions index of moderated mediation for brand authenticity (95% CI [-0.44, -0.13]) and for brand coolness (95% CI [-0.35, -0.08]).

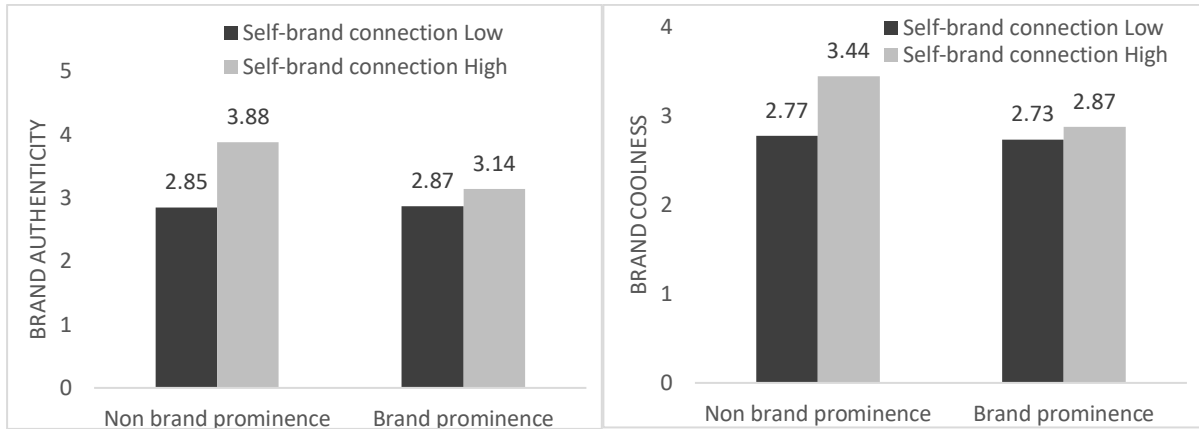


Figure 5. Moderating effects of self–brand connection on the relationship between brand prominence and brand authenticity and brand coolness (Study 3) (Source: Authors’ own work).

Table I. Literature on brand prominence and luxury

Authors	Main antecedents	Consequences of brand prominence	Underlying mechanisms of the brand prominence effect	Types of luxury goods used
Han <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Wealth, need for status	N/A	NA	Luxury handbags
Berger and Ward (2010)	Cultural capital	N/A	Desire for distinction	Luxury handbags
Cheah <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Perceived brand value, social influence, vanity	Willingness to buy	N/A	Luxury in general
Schulz <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Gender, ethnicity, race, age, education, income, marital status, number of children	N/A	N/A	Luxury apparel
Butcher <i>et al.</i> (2016)	N/A	Purchase intentions	Perceived quality, emotional value	Ready-to-wear luxury
Kauppinen-Räsänen <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Self-monitoring, need for uniqueness, nationality	N/A	N/A	Luxury leather goods
Greenberg <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Need for status, need for uniqueness	N/A	N/A	Ready-to-wear luxury
Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Narcissism, social attitude functions, social anxiety	N/A	N/A	Luxury handbags, clothing
Raimondo <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Brand self-verification	N/A	N/A	Ready-to-wear luxury
This paper	Luxury brand prominence	Luxury purchase intentions	Brand authenticity, brand coolness	Ready-to-wear luxury

(Source: Authors' own work).