

## Would You Want to Buy an Expensive Handbag without a Logo? – The Role of Conspicuous in Luxury Handbag Consumption in China

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### Abstract

*Luxury handbags give customers more spiritual value with the idea of expensive, but not cost-effective, high-brand premium products. Many studies have pointed out that purchasing handbags tends to give consumers the perception of higher social class and successful status. Besides, other studies pointed out that people have spiritual satisfaction because luxury handbags are expensive, as well as the recognition of the senior class of society. However, some studies point out that people buy luxury goods because they identify with the brand and feel that the successful brand fits their identity. Therefore, this study needs to explore the motivation for purchasing luxury handbags and the stimulators of the motivations. From the perspective of the purchasing trend of luxury handbags, the consumption power of China is on the rise. Therefore, this study takes Chinese consumers as the research object and interviews 15 customers from Shanghai, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Chengdu, Qingdao, and Zhengzhou who have the purchasing experience of luxury handbags via qualitative research method. It takes quantitative research for 371 respondents to explore the relationship between brand users' image, brand self-congruity, conspicuous, and purchase intention. This study found that brand users' image, self-congruity, and conspicuous act on purchase intention. Then, brand self-congruity mediates the relationship between brand users' image and purchase intention. The conspicuous acts mediate between brand users' image and purchase intention, brand self-congruity, and purchase intention, respectively. The results of this study can support merchants in building and promoting their brands better via customer psychology and can provide ideas for marketing activities for luxury brands based on the motivation formed by potential customers.*

**Keywords:** *Luxury consumption, Brand users' image, Brand self-congruity, Conspicuous, Consumer behaviour.*

### Introduction

Economic levels are growing worldwide, and the gross domestic product (GDP) is growing in many countries (Kutasi & Marton, 2020). In developed countries like some Western countries, citizens solved the problems of lack of food and clothing a long time ago, and now they have more money to realise their spiritual needs; they want more recognition and respect from others, as well as self-realisation. Hence, this leads to the global phenomenon that luxury consumption has almost doubled in the past twenty years (Ko et al., 2019). However, China's social assets have been gradually enriched since the reform and opening-up in 1978, and more people have a higher level of consumption (Itō & Krueger, 1995). When China first opened, many families began getting rid of poverty. Life has some changes, and concepts, including consumption, have gradually changed, but these changes are only preliminary (Quach & Anderson, 2008). Hence, people began to be able to buy some things they wanted, but they were looking for value for money as there may still be some risk awareness, and gold was started to be focused on by individuals at that time (Tien, 1998).

In the later period, the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) also promoted China's economic and social development and enhanced world global exchanges (Bai, 2016). Therefore, the problem of food and clothing was complex and affected people at that time, and more foreign brands allowed more Chinese people to contact and purchase. Moreover, citizens with the building of a moderately prosperous society in all aspects in 2020, China has entered the modernisation process, people's lives are becoming rich wealthy, more affluent, and more prosperous, culture and other aspects have been greatly improved, but also begun to have extra money and ideas to enjoy the spiritual life (Fuzhan, 2021). In the pursuit of the concept of "petty bourgeoisie", "Chinese consumers began to buy Westernized products such as coffee (Kang & Bi, 2022) and wine (Duan et al., 2020), and when these products became popular, luxury handbags became a significant trend of people's shopping for iconic (Xu & Nuangjamnong, 2022). This study will explore the motivations of current Chinese consumers when purchasing luxury handbags through a mixed method of

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qualitative and quantitative research.

## Literature Review

This chapter will point out the research gap and elaborate elaboration on the definition of a luxury brand, emotional value in luxury consumption, the stimulators of emotional value, and the history and recent situations of luxury consumption in China through the existing research of critical evaluation.

### *Luxury Brands*

Luxury brands are defined as those that are less cost-effective in terms of utility, but luxury brands are defined as those that are less cost-effective in terms of utility but have more spiritual and intangible value (Nueno & Quelch, 1998). Some researchers found that luxury brands have something more than the normal average standard product, and they argued that some characteristics like premier brand image, brand equity, and brand attributes could be formed within the luxury brand (Berthon et al., 2009; Keller, 2009). Besides, in early 1987, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory showed that human needs develop from basic physiological needs to higher spiritual needs. People pursue belonging, love, respect, and self-realisation after satisfying basic survival materials such as food and water (Maslow et al., 1987).

### *Emotional Value of Luxury Consumption*

From the practical consumption proposition, goods luxury good has luxury goods are more for the spiritual level for people. Luxury goods have more intangible value, and these values can make them obtain more spiritual pleasure (Nueno & Quelch, 1998). Later, emotional value is pointed out as a link between businesses and customers (Zorfas & Leemon, 2016), and it could influence customer satisfaction (Choi & Kim, 2013). Recently, research indicated that emotional value and perceived quality significantly influence the purchase intention of local American products (Asshidin et al., 2016). Besides, another research on luxury consumption confirmed that good perceived quality could prompt emotional value and purchase intention, while emotional value significantly influences purchase intention (Butcher et al., 2016). Then, the further study concluded that act attacks on that hedonic motivation self-image congruence act as emotional value, and they both significantly influence luxury purchase intention (Yuanita & Marsasi, 2022).

Customer behavioural theory in brand studies indicates that purchase behavioural intention is often based on an individual's self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). Then, this emotional value developed the measuring methods of self-image congruence (Sirgy et al., 1997; Japutra et al., 2019). To illustrate, there are three crucial brand self-congruity concepts, which include brand personality congruity, brand user imagery congruity, and brand usage imagery congruity, and they are associated with Big Five personality dimensions (i.e., sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness) (Aaker, 1997) about luxury brands (Liu et al., 2012). Recently, research has determined the consumers' actual and ideal selves in some cases. For example, car research found that a brand should be within the range defined by consumers' actual versus ideal selves (the zone of unity). Any deviation below (for all three Evaluation, Potency, and Activity dimensions) or above (for the Potency and Activity dimensions) is detrimental to a brand (Wijnands & Gill, 2020). Hence, emotional value is connected with luxury consumption, so customers purchase luxury products.

### *Stimulators of Emotional Value*

A recent survey of young consumers' attitudes towards luxury goods, based on the affect-behaviour-cognitionaffect-behaviour-cognition (ABC) mode, showed that attitudes based on emotion and cognition could enhance the attractiveness of a brand to consumers and thus positively influence the purchase intention of luxury goods (Lau et al., 2023)—purchase—purchase intention (Lau et al., 2023). Earlier studies have also indicated that psychological factors such as brand consciousness, social comparison, and fashion innovativeness are becoming increasingly essential and crucial for consumers to purchase luxury goods (Zhang & Kim, 2013). A study on online shopping indicates that leisure shopping stimulates emotional experiences through hedonic values (Fiore et al., 2005). In a survey conducted in the United States, intrinsic experiential value personal fulfilment sustainability strongly influences the purchase

of luxury goods, and consumers are motivated to purchase luxury goods because of inconspicuousness (Atkinson & Kang, 2022). However, unlike this study, research in China suggests that Chinese consumers purchase luxury cars primarily for face-saving and social recognition (Yi, 2021). For such differences, one study explains that consumer behaviour will become more heterogeneous due to cultural differences and that there are also cultural differences in how consumers in different countries assess the value dimensions of luxury goods (Teimourpour & Hanzae, 2011). Meanwhile, Chinese consumers tend to care more about face and that Chinese consumers tend to care more about face-to-face interaction than American consumers (Bao et al., 2003). Yet another study in China indicated that face had no significant effect on Chinese consumers' shopping and gift-giving (Chen & Kim, 2013). However, another study on Chinese consumers' perceptions of luxury goods found that they have ambiguous perceptions of luxury brands, identify luxury goods differently and may recognise some ordinary brands as luxury goods (Zhan & He, 2012). Moreover, the study found that Chinese consumers want to buy luxury goods in the hope of gaining social recognition, which has an element of face the emotional value they want to gain through a commodity that has the mark of a high social class (Zhang & Zhao, 2019). Therefore, after distinguishing the brand boundaries of luxury goods, it will be more accurate to explore the shopping intention of Chinese consumers.

### *Luxury Consumption in China*

Luxury consumption could be a spiritual satisfaction purchase (Keller, 2009), and due to the shopping for value preservation is less than before in China, individuals will choose to buy products with low-cost performance and pursue spiritual pursuits, such as luxury handbags and cost for piano lessons to distinguish them from others. With the globalisation of culture, the life people feel satisfied with has also changed, from adequate food and clothing to the pursuit of "petty bourgeoisie, like visiting the winery (Duan et al., 2020). For another example, since the entry of coffee culture, coffee has become a medium for people to pursue the "petty bourgeoisie," and the entry of Starbucks as Western culture is also the initial stage of Western culture consumption for many people in changing their lifestyle (Kang & Bi, 2022). However, coffee is becoming more common nowadays, and people will choose another item to represent their class, like fashion or other useless products (Joubin, 2022). Meanwhile, luxury handbags are more expensive, less utility, and more representative of the consumer's identity product (Nueno & Quelch, 1998). Hence, China's demand for luxury goods seems to be rising.

### *Research Gap*

There are many studies on the psychology of luxury consumption and emotional value (Butcher et al., 2016; Asshidin et al., 2016). China, as a rising luxury purchasing country, also has some relevant studies, including the understanding of consumers' psychology of purchasing wines (Duan et al., 2020), their spiritual pursuit (Joubin, 2022), and brand self-consistency for Western consumption (Kang & Bi, 2022). However, more research needs to be done on how consumers achieve these spiritual aspirations by purchasing luxury goods. Therefore, this study can fill the theoretical gap.

Then, even though research has been conducted on consumers' motivations for shopping for luxury products, little research has been conducted on the factors that motivate consumers to make purchasing decisions. However, with the current increase in the number of consumers of luxury handbags, it has become a vehicle, after coffee and wine, to show the "petty bourgeoisie" and reflect one's spiritual values and higher social status. Therefore, in practice, luxury handbags are also a direction worth studying.

### *Conceptual Framework of Study 2*

Through interviews, we get that brand users' image, brand self-congruity, and conspicuous will affect Chinese consumers' motivation to consume luxury handbags. Therefore, Study 2 will explore and test the relationship between these variables.

From the results of interviews, consumers will choose to buy luxury handbags because of the image of

other users who purchase these luxury handbags, well brand self-congruity, as well as the psychology of conspicuous; so in the quantitative research, we first talk about these three factors to confirm. Therefore, we start with the hypothesis:

H1: Brand users' image has a significant influence on purchase intention.

H2: Brand self-congruity has a significant influence on purchase intention.

H3: Conspicuous has a significant influence on purchase intention.

Secondly, the interview results show that the image of brand users affects consumers' purchase intention of luxury handbags because they will fantasise that after owning this handbag, they are also the same image as other users, and most of the luxury users give a feeling of social elites, which is why many people fantasise that after owning this handbag, they will also become social elites the same. Therefore, a relationship exists between the brand user's image and the consumer's brand self-congruity. And it is this user-self-congruence that makes consumers choose to buy luxury handbags. Therefore, we propose the hypothesis:

H4: Brand self-congruity mediates between brand user image and purchase intention.

Then, almost every consumer mentioned that when they are going to shop for luxury goods, they will choose the one with a relatively visible logo because if there is no logo displayed on the outside or if the brand identity is not, no one will recognise the handbag and they will think that they have bought it for nothing in the interviews. Consumers when they said that other consumers' image would affect their intention to buy luxury handbags, all mentioned that when other consumers use a handbag with an obvious, unmistakable, conspicuous, prominent logo, it will trigger their intention to buy it because they feel that a handbag with a logo is more representative of their status, and many successful people use the brand's low-key style, which will not make the consumers imitate it. Therefore, we hypothesise:

H5: Conspicuously mediate between brand user image and purchase intention.

Whereas consumers often think of iconic scenes of success when imagining brand self-congruity, the handbag is one of these. Therefore, we hypothesise hypothesis:

H6: Conspicuous acts as a mediator between brand self-congruity and purchase intention.

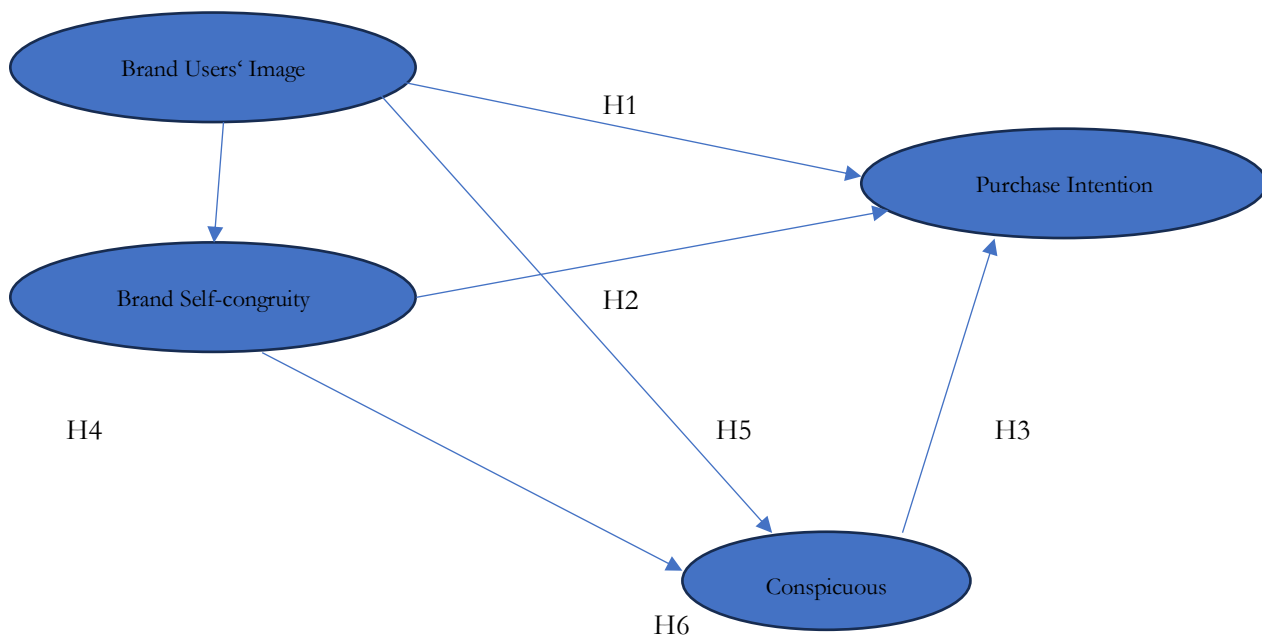


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework

## Methodology

This study combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Firstly, it interviews 15 Chinese customers who have purchased luxury handbags. Then, according to the interview results, the factors influencing Chinese consumers' purchase of luxury handbags are summarised. Finally, through quantitative research, an online questionnaire surveyed 371 Chinese citizens who had experience purchasing luxury handbags, and a conclusion was drawn.

### *Study 1*

Study 1 will focus on the following research questions to be addressed through interviews based on existing studies and research gaps:

RQ1: What motivations influence Chinese consumers to buy luxury handbags?

RQ2: What factors stimulate these motivations?

In this study, 15 respondents from Shanghai, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Chengdu, Qingdao, and Zhengzhou were interviewed by telephone using a qualitative method. Each interview was recorded, and the recording was then transcribed into the transcript. Finally, the thematic map was formed to summarise the conclusions of this study. The focus group of this study is selected by convenience from those who purchased luxury handbags from international first-line luxury brands, and 15 eligible respondents were selected through voluntary registration.

### *Study 2*

Study 2 used a quantitative research methodology of convenience to test the theoretical model among these constructs: brand uses 'image, brand self-congruity', conspicuousness, and purchase intention. This study will choose the quantitative method to verify research questions and will adopt the quantitative method, mainly focusing on an online survey of respondents. The target respondents were selected by convenience and were Chinese customers with the purchase experience. They were selected for convenience, and they were Chinese customers with the purchase experience of luxury handbags—online questionnaires were provided to respondents via various social media platforms such as WeChat and QQ. Besides, bilingual versions of the questionnaires (English and Chinese) will be provided for the investigation conducted in China.

In addition, the sample size should be greater than ten times the maximum number of inner or outer model links pointing at any latent variable in the model (Watkins et al., 2016). This research plan will have 400 samples. Respondents will be asked if they have ever bought second-hand luxury handbags. If they choose 'No,' it will be regarded as the end of the questionnaire. If they choose 'Yes', the next stage of the questionnaire begins, including the demographic items. This is to ensure that the research results are more authentic because the customers who have purchased experience of luxury handbags may also have a more real user experience, and the data reflected by the real feelings of the participants are more reliable.

This study will divide luxury brands based on brand, and according to Statista, there are several luxury brands whose handbags will be the most popular in China in 2022. Therefore, the psychology of consumers of these luxury handbags is representative, and this data in China will make the results more directional. In this study, the consumers' experience of buying second-hand luxury handbags is for these luxury brand handbags, including Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Dior, Chanel, Prada, Tod's, Fendi, Saint Laurent, Armani, Celine (Thomala, 2023).

The scale of measurement is adapted from prior studies. Five items were adapted from Xie et al. (2020) to measure brand users' image. Then, brand self-congruity is measured within five items adapted from Song & Kim (2020). Besides, conspicuous is measured within seven items adapted from Vigneron and Johnson (2004). Finally, purchase intention is measured within four items adapted from Jain (2021). Then, the eight demographic questions included gender, age, material, monthly income, career, working duration, times of purchase on luxury handbags per year, and the occupation of income for luxury handbags per year. Hence, there are 29 questions in total. Table: 3.1 Measurement

Section	No. of items	Latent Construct	Item used	Sources
A	5	Brand User's Image	Adapted	(Xie et al., 2020)
B	5	Brand Self-congruity	Adapted	(Song & Kim, 2020)
C	7	Conspicuous	Adapted	(Vignero& Johnson, 2004)
D	4	Purchase intention	Adapted	(Jain, 2021)
E	8	Demographic		
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>			

The structural equation model (SEM) was employed to confirm the hypothesis test. All the questionnaires will be coded to input SPSS and SmartPLS4.0. The model of this study includes multivariable and mediator variables. SPSS uses hypothetical data to analyse demographic data, and SmartPLS will be used to conduct validation factor analysis and structural model testing of the scales, followed by the model's construction to test the paper's hypothesised relationships.

## Findings

### Study 1

This section will summarise the data obtained from the interviews and interpret the findings to answer the research questions.

#### *Motivations of Luxury Handbag Purchase Intention*

##### *Brand Users' Image with Brand Self-congruity and Purchase Intention*

Early research on luxury goods pointed out that luxury goods often give people a feeling of avoidance and attraction (Dubois & Laurent, 1994). Moreover, as for the change in consumers' attitudes, some literature points out that user and usage imagery will impact consumers' brand attitudes (Liu et al., 2012).

The study finds the factors transforming Chinese consumers in these two seemingly contradictory emotions. As many interviewees said, buying luxury goods is not something they started from a young age, but they think they need a luxury handbag from a specific time. But this is often when they think that luxury is no longer far away from them. Hence, whether people around them use luxury handbags will affect their perceptions of the accessibility and availability of luxury goods:

*"At first, I never considered buying luxury goods because I felt it was far away. But the first time I thought I needed a luxury item was because I studied abroad and people around me all had luxury bags, which made me feel that luxury was no longer far away from me and dared me to imagine myself with a luxury item."*

Therefore, consumers believe that other people using luxury handbags are representatives of high-end social class and career success. Owning a luxury handbag means they are also one of them, and confidence will increase with a luxury handbag. Hence, other brand users' images could influence consumers' intention to purchase luxury handbags in China.

### *Brand Self-congruity and Purchase Intention*

Personal achievement is the most critical factor affecting consumers' willingness to contact new luxury brands. Among personality traits, luxury consumers' self-orientation, self-esteem, and other factors are also significant features (Atkinson & Kang, 2022). Meanwhile, brand self-congruity is often used as one of the variables in luxury research (Wang et al., 2022; Saxena et al., 2023).

This study confirmed that most consumers believe that the unity of their ideal and authentic selves is a significant factor in their purchase of handbags. These unities come from the personal image of the ideal self as well as the taste level of the ideal self. For personal image, it is due to good-looking blogger outfits on social media or the use of a particular luxury handbag by a celebrity taken in an advert that makes consumers look like themselves vicariously as they browse. In addition, most of these factors come from celebrities or bloggers having a significant upper body effect on the product and can showcase it well. When watching adverts or social media, people feel that they too can look significantly beautiful because of the product, and they visualise the upper body effect of the endorser or social media blogger as their upper body effect. As one respondent said:

*"I've bought luxury bags many times, but most of the time, I think about what I'm going to buy and then go to the shop rather than browsing the shops and choosing because social media platforms will seed me, and it's easy for me to buy a recognisable item".*

The thoughts of another respondent confirm this:

*"I used to make impulse purchases when I saw pictures of beautiful bags because I can immediately imagine myself using this bag."*

In conclusion, consumers' definition of brand self-congruity when buying a luxury handbag is mainly based on its appearance and taste. Then, luxury bags can quickly allow consumers to connect with their success, fashion, tastes, and beauty. Hence, brand self-congruity could motivate Chinese consumers to purchase luxury handbags.

### *Conspicuous and Purchase Intention*

In consumer psychology research, the term "Conspicuous" is often mentioned consumer psychology research, and "Conspicuous" is often used to refer to the psychology of luxury purchases. Many studies also show that the psychology of showing off is a primary significant reason for consumers to buy luxury goods (Jain, 2021; Ki et al., 2024). In the traditional meaning, people will think that the more expensive things are, the better, and the price can generate different consumers. In terms of luxury goods, consumers subconsciously think that they should be expensive, and they have positive thoughts about the goods with high prices (Schiessl, 2023). Meanwhile, the sense of certain specific for show-off often arises when people think that a specific part of themselves is excellent; for example, some people show off by being richer or having a higher social status (Jaikumar et al., 2018).

In this study, most respondents said they choose to buy luxury goods not only because they are expensive but also because of their choice of brands. In other words, if the price of a brand is not exceptionally high, and it is a first-line luxury brand, people will think that the brand is influential enough. If only because a bag is expensive, but there is no brand logo, they are still not willing to buy, and compared with buying luxury brand handbags, it is challenging to buy some brand logo is not apparent handbags, due to it is challenging to make themselves have a feeling of "change ":

*"It must be the purchase of brands that everyone knows, ah, I admit that there is a certain vanity in the purchase of luxury handbags, because I really hope that everyone can recognize me, buy a brand that everyone does not know, I will feel that I have bought in vain..... However, grooming yourself is a process of pleasing yourself and others."*

Therefore, when consumers purchase luxury handbags, there will be a conspicuous factor. When consumers

decide to show off a product, they will judge the value of the product itself, whether it is in line with the capital of showing off, and whether it can become their advantage. Therefore, conspicuous is a motive that affects consumers' intention to purchase luxury handbags in China.

#### *The Role of Brand Self-congruity Between Brand Users' Image and Purchase Intention*

Meanwhile, some studies often associate luxury goods with personality traits, so luxury bags can sometimes remind people of a specific type of person (Atkinson & Kang, 2022). Then, the responses from this interview were mentioned that consumers are attracted by luxury handbags because other successful persons have them, and to some extent, they want to be the same people as them. Hence, luxury handbags represent not only a bag, but also a social class and lifestyle in their opinion:

*"I recently happened to be looking at a luxury bag used by white-collar workers, and I can already imagine myself carrying it and hurrying between office buildings in Shanghai. By the way, the last time I felt like this was when I first started working, holding a cup of coffee in my hand, and I had a feeling that I was very bourgeois."*

Hence, what can make the consumption have this motivation is that the image of the brand user represents the brand image in the minds of consumers, and this in turn is related to the self-congruity of the consumer brand.

#### *The Role of Conspicuous between Brand Users' Image and Purchase Intention*

For some representative celebrities, consumers often imitate consumption (Tri, 2022). With the development of the current star-chasing culture, more people will follow the star's dress, and sometimes feel that following the star's dress or being as fashionable as the star, can show themselves and satisfy their show-off psychology (Zhang et al., 2020).

In this study, most of the respondents believe that they are influenced by social media and other spokespersons or users because they think they are supposed to be part of the trend, an affirmation of their own aesthetics. Meanwhile, celebrities have a certain degree of influence, they are the trendsetters of fashion, so owning the same model proves that they have similar aesthetics and fashion concepts as the endorsers:

*"Pursuing the same model is a popular thing, especially when I go out with my bag and my friends look at it as the same model of the celebrity, which makes me very happy and satisfied, and my spending is worthwhile."*

Therefore, consumers will consume this luxury handbag because they feel that their image aligns with that of the endorser, internet blogger and other good-looking influencers. Besides, they will believe that the consistency with the endorsing celebrity can prove their while, fashion, and goodness in perceiving beauty. Hence, one of the reasons why consumers have purchase intention for luxury goods due to it gives them the satisfaction of conspicuous consistent with the portraits of other users of luxury goods.

#### *The Role of Conspicuous between Brand Self-congruity and Purchase Intention*

A recent survey of luxury jewelry buying intentions in China found that when people match themselves with brands, they tend to choose a good brand, and the higher the perceived value of the product, the higher their approval (Xi et al., 2022). In addition, Self-consistency with luxury brands will enhance consumers' self-cognition, and the repeated use of luxury brands is also speculated to be related to the motivation to show off (Roy & Rabbanee, 2015).

One respondent's answer also confirmed besides, this information:

*"I usually see a lot of bloggers' outfits online, and a lot of them are very nice and make me think of buying, but when I see that it's a miscellaneous brand, or an ordinary brand, I immediately lose my interest in buying. Because I think the*



*money purchase for several general bag can buy a luxury one, I do not want to imitate which affordable brands."*

This shows that when consumers choose to buy luxury goods, the brand outweighs the price, and they value which brand they buy more than how much money they spend. Therefore, when a product has brand self-congruity for consumers, the conspicuous function is the driving factor of consumers' purchase intention.

Hence, this could answer the RQ 1: brand users' image, brand self-congruity, and conspicuous can be the motivations to luxury handbags' purchase intention of Chinese consumers.

#### *The Stimulation of the Emotional value*

According to the previous answers, it has been known that brand users' image, brand self-congruity and conspicuous consumption will have an impact on Chinese consumers' congruity on luxury bags. However, some interviews also mentioned that this kind of influence has preconditions and is not static.

First, brand users' image will affect consumers' purchase intention to some extent. However, for the impact of such other users, the interview results indicated that the relationship between brand users' image and consumption intentions would be more likely to be triggered at times of greater availability. Some interviewees answered:

*"Celebrities using this bag, or some people using it who are too far away from my class, will not stimulate my desire to buy it, I may have seen it and forget about it, because the difference is so great that I will not put myself into it at all. "*

Therefore, it can be concluded that brand users' image has an influence on consumers' purchase of luxury handbags, and this is through the self-congruity of other users and consumers. However, when the image of the product or user is closer to the consumer, the consumer will feel that the product is easier to obtain and will have more intention to consume. Therefore, the brand uses its image to stimulate potential consumers' purchase desire only when it is consistent with or not very different from the positioning of luxury consumers.

Secondly, celebrities may have some moral issues (Borchers & Enke, 2022). Although the choice of some star endorsements or can temporarily satisfy the consumer's sense of self-consistency and showing off, there will be hidden drawbacks. To illustrate, many interviewees also mentioned that China's rectification of the entertainment industry is gradually strict, many bad artists will affect a brand's endorsement, because they will be held accountable for some legal responsibility, many endorsements will be withdrawn, and consumers may have some prejudice against these products:

*"I didn't buy it because of the endorsement, after all, the price is high, which is the same as buying stationery ..... that are totally different concepts. But I'm not immune. But sometimes, if I buy something endorsed by a bad artiste, I'm also afraid that people will see it and be sceptical about my taste, i.e. that I'm still using something endorsed by this celebrity. "*

Hence, the avoidance of products endorsed by bad artists, on the other hand, reacts to the fact that consumers will still give up buying a product because of the inconsistency of a product's self when a product cannot be in the good taste of the consumer anyway, the values, then that product loses the meaning of buying.

Then, not all luxury goods are ostentatious (Kumar et al., 2022), and consumers' intention to buy luxury goods will be affected by social visibility (Goenka & Thomas, 2020). It is also mentioned in this study that whether the conspicuous function of luxury bags is satisfied is also related to the ability of others to see and recognize the brand. Besides, for some luxury goods whose logos are not obvious, almost no respondents said they would buy them. As one of the respondents said:

*"Every time I carry a luxury bag, I hope to run into someone I know on the road because I will be more confident."*

Meanwhile, there are also many reasons for consumers' attachment to brands. Some respondents said that their choice of brands is due to trust. Luxury goods can be ranked in this category because of their high added value, historical precipitation, better after-sales service, and access to excellent designers in the global field. And these are because there is a brand in the chivalrous foundation and behind the support, which is the ordinary brand cannot do:

*"I had the experience of buying a niche luxury product, and I paid about the same price as a first-line luxury entry, and I was proud to be unique. But then my bag broke and I went to the after-sale shop and found that the service was not available. It makes me feel that there is a reason why a brand can enter the luxury category. My choice is not only about price, but also about everything I trust in luxury brands, such as service, so I can spend more confidently."*

Therefore, consumers buy handbags from these luxury brands out of trust in these brands. In other words, consumers have a deep admiration and yearning for luxury brands. They think luxury represents good service, fashionable design, long history, and because of this, they will have more taste when using luxury handbags.

Hence, this can answer RQ 2: Luxury handbags need to make efforts in brand users' image, brand self-congruity and conspicuous, but pay attention to marketing planning, otherwise it will backfire. To illustrate, luxury handbags can provide a distinct brand identity, such as an obvious Logo. Then, the brands can invite the popular star endorsement. However, it should be noted that the selection of celebrity endorsements needs to identify personal qualities. Besides, always maintain their high-grade positioning, but in the case of maintaining a noble identity in advertising or marketing activities, consumers should not feel too distant and untouchable.

## Study 2

### Response Rate

A total of 400 questionnaires were sent out on the online platform for this study, excluding those that were not filled out completely and those filled out by respondents who had no experience of purchasing luxury goods as invalid questionnaires. In the end, 371 valid questionnaires were collected.

### Demographic Profile

As the data obtained from this survey shows below (Table 4.1), it was revealed that more women than men make up the components of Chinese consumers who buy luxury bags. Surprisingly, most consumers who buy luxury bags do not seem to have particularly high incomes, with monthly incomes of less than 10,000 yuan (about \$1,398). What is more, students accounted for more than staff members instead, accounting for nearly half of the total. Among those with work experience, those under 30 years old and those with less than five years of work experience are the main purchasers. Meanwhile the data also shows that 36.13% of consumers spend 40-60% of their annual income on luxury handbags. It seems that China's luxury consumers are getting younger, spending a significant proportion of their money on luxury handbags. Instead, as they get older and work longer, this is becoming less common.

Table 4.1 : Demographic profile

Variable	Description	Number of Respondents	%
Gender	Male	144	38.81
	Female	227	61.19
Age	18-30	236	63.61
	31-40	64	17.25
	41-50	36	9.70
	51-60	17	4.58

	60 and above	18	4.85
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	168	45.28
	Married	203	54.72
	Others	0	0
<b>monthly income</b>	Less than 10000 yuan	268	72.24
	10000-20000 yuan	57	15.36
	20000-30000 yuan	26	7.01
	Above 30000 yuan	20	5.39
<b>Working time</b>	Less than 5 years	195	52.56
	6-10 years	74	19.95
	11-15 years	56	15.09
	16-20 years	27	7.28
	More than 20 years	19	5.12
<b>Occupation</b>	Government agencies	51	13.75
	Business unit	99	26.68
	Self-employed	18	4.85
	Employee	24	6.47
	Student	157	42.32
	Others	22	5.93
<b>Purchase frequency</b>	Less than 2 times a year	195	52.56
	2-4 times a year	114	30.73
	More than 5 years	62	16.71
<b>Percentage of income</b>	Below 20%	118	31.81
	21%-40%	119	32.08
	41%-60%	73	19.68
	61%-80%	30	8.09
	More than 80%	31	8.36

#### *Common method bias and collinearity*

Besides, the researcher must ensure that there is no transverse covariance problem in the structural model. Meanwhile, the internal VIF value should be less than 3.3 (Kock, 2015). As lists the internal VIF values are lower than the above requirement, indicated by Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2:** Lateral collinearity assessment

	Brand Self-congruity	Brand User Image	Conspicuous	Purchase Intention
Brand Self-congruity			2.173	2.724
Brand User Image	1		2.173	2.631
Conspicuous				2.745
Purchase Intention				

#### *Measurement Module*

Cronbach Alpha value is to judge and analyse the reliability of the questionnaire scales, the value is greater than 0.7 means the reliability is better (Taber, 2018), while CR and AVE values are to analyse the aggregation validity of the scales, if the CR value of the scales is greater than 0.7 (Gefen et al, 2000), and at the same

time the AVE value is greater than 0.5, it means that the aggregation validity of the scales is better (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

According to Table 4.3, the Cronbach coefficient of each scale of the questionnaire is greater than 0.8, the CR value is greater than 0.8, and the AVE value is greater than 0.6, which indicates that the information and aggregation validity of the scale is good.

**Table 4.3:** Evaluation of Measurement Model

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Self-congruity	0.881	0.882	0.913	0.678
Brand User Image	0.899	0.899	0.925	0.712
Conspicuous	0.921	0.922	0.937	0.679
Purchase Intention	0.865	0.867	0.908	0.712

Then, analyses the discriminant validity to show that the scales do portray different dimensions of information. The method is the Heterotrait-Monotrait -Ratio (HTMT) matrix. According to Henseler et al. (2015), all values must be less than 0.9, indicating good discriminant validity between the scales. And all values obtained from this survey indicated by Table 4.4 are less than 0.9, which represents good validity.

**Table 4.4:** Discriminant validity (Heterotrait-Monotrait -Ratio: HTMT) matrix.

	Brand Self-congruity	Brand User Image	Conspicuous	Purchase Intention
Brand Self-congruity				
Brand User Image	0.824			
Conspicuous	0.829	0.81		
Purchase Intention	0.829	0.795	0.803	

#### *Structure Model Interpreter Hypothesis Result*

From the figure of PLS-Path analysis of R-square values (Figure 4.1), it is indicating that R<sup>2</sup> Brand self-congruity

= 0.540 ,  $R^2_{Conspicuous} = 0.636$  and  $R^2_{Purchase\ intention} = 0.620$  and in current model were larger than 0.10, which adapts as the Hair et al. (2019). Hence, Figure 4.1 shows that this model has no explanator power.

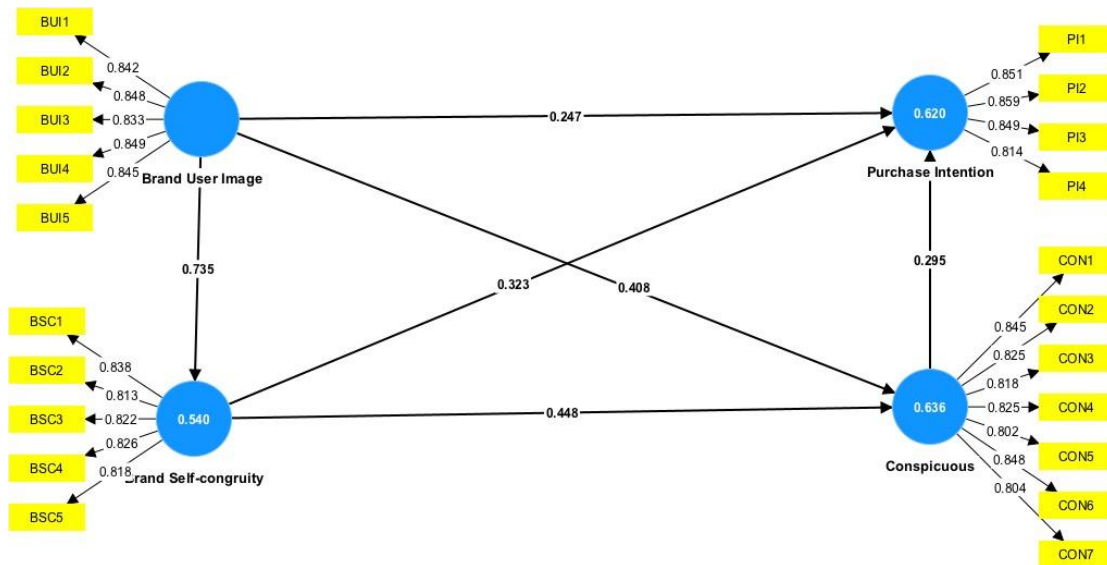


Figure 4.1: PLS-Path analysis of R-square values (N=371)

In this study, the results bootloder with a resampling rate 5000 to test the hypotheses as toward PLS suggested by Usakli and Rasoolimanesh (2023). Then, according to Kwak (2023), a p-value less than 0.05 indicates good significance, and the relationship between variables is established.

Firstly, Table 4.5 demonstrates the association between brand users’ image with purchase intention, brand self-congruity with purchase intention, and conspicuous with purchase intention are supported. To illustrate, brand users’ image ( $t= 3.713, p<0.01$ ), brand self-congruity ( $t= 4.192, p<0.01$ ), and conspicuous ( $t= 3.741, p<0.01$ ) have significant effect on purchase intention. Hence, we accept H1-H3.

Table 4.5: Test of path estimates

	O	M	SD	t	p
Brand Self-congruity -> Conspicuous	0.448	0.448	0.072	6.226	0.000
Brand Self-congruity -> Purchase Intention	0.323	0.321	0.077	4.192	0.000
Brand User Image -> Brand Self-congruity	0.735	0.735	0.039	18.78	0.000
Brand User Image -> Conspicuous	0.408	0.408	0.07	5.821	0.000
Brand User Image -> Purchase Intention	0.247	0.247	0.067	3.713	0.000
Conspicuous -> Purchase Intention	0.295	0.297	0.079	3.741	0.000

Note: O= Original sample, M= Sample mean, SD= Standard deviation, t= T statistics, p= P values

Meanwhile, as the mediation results show in Table 4.6, brand self-congruity mediates the relationship between brand users’ image and purchase intention ( $t= 4.118, p<0.01$ ). Hence, we accept H4. Besides, conspicuous mediates the relationship between brand users’ image and purchase intention ( $t= 3.156, p<0.01$ ). Hence, we accept H5. Finally, s, conspicuous mediates the relationship between brand users’ image and purchase intention ( $t= 3.085, p<0.01$ ). Therefore, we support H5.

**Table 4.6:** Specific indirect effects

	O	M	SD	t	p
Brand User Image -> Conspicuous -> Purchase Intention	0.12	0.12 1	0.03 8	3.15 6	0.00 2
Brand User Image -> Brand Self-congruity -> Purchase Intention	0.23 8	0.23 6	0.05 8	4.11 8	0.00 0
Brand Self-congruity -> Conspicuous -> Purchase Intention	0.13 2	0.13 3	0.04 3	3.08 5	0.00 2

**Note:** O= Original sample, M= Sample mean, SD= Standard deviation, t= T statistics, p= P values

#### Summary of the Hypothesis Result

Finally, Table 4.7 summarises the hypotheses of this study, showing that all the hypotheses are accepted.

**Table 4.7:** Hypotheses summary

No.	Hypothesis	
H1.	Brand users' image has a significant influence on purchase intention.	Support
H2.	Brand self-congruity has a significant influence on purchase intention.	Support
H3.	Conspicuousness has a significant influence on purchase intention.	Support
H4.	Brand self-congruity acts as a mediator between brand user image and purchase intention.	Support
H5.	Conspicuous act as a mediator between brand user image and purchase intention.	Support
H6	Conspicuous acts as a mediator between brand self-congruity and purchase intention.	Support

#### Discussion

##### Study 1

Based on confirming some existing studies, this study proposes the specific feeling of brand self-congruity of Chinese consumers when purchasing luxury handbags. Consumers consider themselves congruent with brand users by purchasing luxury handbags, examining their higher social status, and being more successful. Congruity with brand users also proves that consumers hope to enter a higher stratum or become a higher social circle through congruity with brand users. They choose luxury brands used by the upper social classes, which can make them feel that they already exist in this class more than just spending money.

However, for brand self-congruity they are more focused on showing appearance and taste. Meanwhile, consumers will automatically ignore unbranded but still good-looking items and optimise for highly identifiable luxury items to emulate. This also shows that luxury goods with prominent logos make consumers feel they are personally enjoying luxury goods.

More precisely, in the ranks of luxury goods, people will choose more well-known ones because they think that popularity is built up by numerous buyers, brand history, brand service, etc., and well-known brands can guarantee their purchase, gain consumers' trust, and better demonstrate themselves and the "changes" before purchasing luxury goods.

Therefore, consistent with Sirgy (1982), Chinese people's luxury consumption has brand self-congruity. Besides, like Joubin (2022), consumers believe that luxury goods are not vital and solid in use. However, in this survey, consumers added that although the use value is like that of ordinary handbags, luxury goods provide them with an intangible emotional value, that is, conspicuous. This is their perception of luxury brands, but they also use the brand's identity products to increase their perceived confidence in themselves. Finally, consumers have spiritual satisfaction with the purchase of luxury handbags, which is consistent with the research conclusion of Yuanita & Marsasi (2022), but the difference is that their research suggests that luxury purchases are motivated by hedonism, and now consumers of luxury handbags also have a self-proving component. They think that they will prove that they are up to date, that they are successful, and that they have good taste by purchasing luxury handbags. Hence, this study found that brand users' image, brand self-congruity, and conspicuousness can motivate purchase luxury handbags

### *Study 2*

According to the results obtained from the questionnaire, brand users' image of brand self-congruity is a significant influencing factor on consumers' purchase of luxury goods, which is consistent with the findings of Sirgy (1982), Aaker (1997), Zhang & Kim (2013), Yuanita & Marsasi (2022). However, the conspicuous vs. purchase intention findings obtained from the current data line do not align with Atkinson & Kang (2022). Even so, some studies are consistent with the current study's findings, such as the study of Yi (2021) on the psychology of luxury consumption in China. Therefore, this needs to be comparatively debated in future studies based on different countries. Besides, the current study confirms Aaker's (1997) theory that brand self-congruity role correlates with brand users' image and develops the conclusion that brand self-congruity can mediate in brand users' image and purchase intention. Meanwhile, the current study proposes that conspicuous can play a mediating role in brand users' image and purchase intention and can mediate between brand self-congruity and purchase intention, which is in line with Zhan & He (2012), Duan *et al.* (2020), and Joubin (2022), who found that there is a need to choose a new "medium" to present oneself as different and of a higher social class and that this "medium" is the luxury handbag, and that identifiability is an essential influence on brand users' image and purchase intention. Recognisability is an essential factor. This study also confirms that conspicuousness can be understood as a significant part of identity, which constitutes an intermediary factor in consumer consumption.

### *General Discussion*

This study aims to explore the motivations of Chinese consumers to buy luxury handbags and confirmed by interviews and questionnaires that brand users' image, brand self-congruity and conspicuousness are the motives influencing Chinese consumers' luxury handbag purchase intention, while brand self-congruity and conspicuous could act as mediate roles.

Existing studies have pointed out that Chinese consumers are willing to spend in the field of enjoying spiritual life (Keller, 2009; Fuzhan, 2021), and the appearance of the term "petty bourgeoisie" further proves that with the development of The Times, the consumption level of Chinese residents has improved, and they have begun to shift from preservation consumption to spiritual enjoyment. Or consumption in pursuit of pleasure (Xu & Nuangjamnong, 2022). The selection of luxury bags in this study is an extension of the research on luxury bags done by Xu & Nuangjamnong (2022), and based on this, the motivation of Chinese consumers for luxury bags is found.

First, the discussion on the relationship between brand users' image, brand self-congruity and purchase intention is consistent with the conclusion of Zhang & Kim (2013), which shows that consumers pursue fashion when buying luxury handbags. However, this study also extends to the concrete presentation of psychology; consumers will imagine luxury goods as the image of a success or a person they pursue so that they think they have a luxury handbag and feel like an imaginary perfect self. sense the pursuit of fashion; it is through the purchase of popular styles such as the same model of the star that the unity of self and brand fashion sense is obtained. Besides, consistent with the conclusion of Zhang & Zhao (2019), luxury handbags are a kind of goods with high social class symbols that gain emotional value in the minds of Chinese consumers. This is also consistent with Joubin (2022), who proposed that consumers could select fashion or any other useless product as a representative of the higher class.

Then, Bao et al. (2003) and Yi (2021) believe that Chinese consumers will shop because of Mianzi, while Chen & Kim (2013) believe that Chinese consumers will not be affected by Mianzi when shopping. This study produces a consistent view with Bao et al. (2003) and Yi (2021) without verifying the view of Chen & Kim (2013). In the study, consumers all hope to have a giant Logo and a clear brand identity. If it is only an expensive product without a brand, consumers will not be willing to buy it precisely because others can not recognise the handbag. Therefore, this is somewhat inconsistent with the conclusion of Zhan & He (2012). Currently, Chinese consumers have a more unified definition of luxury goods; that is, they evaluate them according to brands.

Moreover, given Mianzi's discussion, this study goes deeper into the ostentatious feature and finds that luxury goods can satisfy people's desire to show off. It is consistent with Berthon et al. (2009) and Keller (2009) that luxury brands have more similar characteristics than ordinary products, such as brand image. The conclusion of this study shows that the show-off performance of consumers of luxury handbags can affect the consumption intention, but it is also a relatively crucial variable. Consumers' imitation of other characters using the brand and perception of brand self-congruity is based on conspicuous.

Meanwhile, there is also a close relationship between these variables. To illustrate, brand self-congruity and conspicuousness can also be used as a stimulus for motivation. By analysing the data, it is obtained that consumers' brand users' image availability is vital is that consumers will generate consumption intention through brand-self congruity and conspicuous, and brand users' image could connect with purchase intention due to consumption of luxury handbags could let the customer get more Mianzi so that the feelings of conspicuous developed. Conspicuous psychology is also consistent with the ideal state in customers' minds.

In addition, other findings of this study on the perception of luxury consumers also confirm that consumers believe that luxury goods can become luxury goods because they are guaranteed in all aspects. Consumers are willing to believe in the after-sales service of luxury goods, which makes people feel more secure in purchasing. This point is also consistent with Butcher et al. (2016), who pointed out that luxury goods can give consumers better-perceived quality and thus promote their purchase intention. On this basis, the reason is further explored.

## Conclusion

The objective of this study is to explore motivation for purchasing luxury handbags and the stimulators of motivation. Through qualitative research, by telephone interview, this study surveyed 15 consumers with luxury brand handbag purchasing experience in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Chengdu, Qingdao and Zhengzhou in China. Then, a quantitative study with 371 valid samples was used to justify the findings of the qualitative study. The results of this study show that when Chinese consumers consume luxury handbags, brand users' image, brand self-congruity, and conspicuousness will significantly influence purchase intention. Meanwhile, brand self-congruity will act as a mediating effect between brand users' image and purchase intention. Besides, conspicuous mediates between brand users' image and brand self-congruity and purchase intention, respectively. Hence, Chinese consumers' choice of luxury handbags will be more concerned with the visibility of logos and brand recognition.



This study fills the theoretical gap in luxury consumption in China of handbags, and the conclusions obtained by qualitative research bring new data and analysis to these fields. More practical contributions are also being made. This study is a study on the psychological motivation of consumers. The new in-depth interview enables more data to be displayed and enables the Marketing Department of luxury brands to make corresponding and more effective countermeasures for brand promotion in a more targeted manner.

With the rapid economic and social development in China, when consumers have extra money to buy luxury products, their pursuit of spirit gradually increases, and then the demand for self-certification is also increasing. Through this consistency, they can show their better appearance image, keep up with the trend, prove their suitable aesthetic and taste, perceive that they have completed the social class change, and be more satisfied and confident with themselves, which are the consistent concept and emotional value that luxury handbags can bring to consumers. Therefore, for the Marketing Department of luxury brands, it is necessary to choose a representative endorser with an excellent image to speak for them. It is also necessary to avoid the negative impact that some endorsers may have and think about countermeasures in advance. In addition, the brand can show its historical heritage by telling the brand story so that the luxury crown has cultural characteristics and add some emotional characteristics to the brand. To promote social media, some fashion experts or social elites can act as Key Opinion Leaders to be recruited to publish pictures and Vlogs to improve consumers' psychological positioning and brand awareness of the brand. Finally, for the design of luxury goods, it is essential to highlight the characteristics of the luxury goods or brand as much as possible so that consumers feel that the brand is highly recognisable, such as using the conspicuous logo.

#### *Limitation and Further Research*

This study found that age and work experience impact Chinese consumers' intentions to purchase luxury handbags and that the target demographic for luxury handbags seems to be getting younger. Regarding income groups, the target customers of luxury handbags seem to be leaning towards the middle class. Due to the limitations of the research topic, this study did not deal much with the comparison of age and social class on the intention of Chinese consumers to buy luxury handbags, and future studies can be based on this and specialise in comparative studies of groups with different ages and working experiences. Further studies can also explore the psychological factors that influence the purchase of luxury goods by Generation Z and the middle class.

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