

How similar-to-me is too similar-to-me? Do young women really want to be like the influencer in that luxury fashion advertisement?

Abstract

This study asks whether social media influencers or celebrities are more effective in endorsing luxury fashion goods. Using a New Zealand sample of women aged 18-25, this study employed a between-subjects experimental design with participants responding to either a celebrity or influencer advertising condition, using a luxury handbag as a stimulus. Using match-up hypotheses and self-congruity theory, the current study finds that celebrities encourage greater feelings of wishful identification among the sample group of young women, that participants express an actual self-concept that is more similar to celebrity images and that celebrities promote stronger positive attitudes towards luxury products and advertisements amongst these young women. The study provides a novel contribution to endorsement and promotion literature, as it contradicts prior studies of low involvement goods (such as cosmetics or diet products) which find that young female consumers prefer endorsers who are socially closer to themselves. The study is one of the few to directly compare responses to celebrity and social media endorsement of luxury products, thus extending our knowledge of the likely return on investment in social media endorsement by social influencers.

Keywords: celebrity, social media, influencers, endorsement, luxury

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Zoe McDonald-Mair,² Lisa S McNeill¹

¹Dean Postgraduate Research, Otago Business School, University of Otago, New Zealand

²University of Otago, New Zealand

Correspondence: Lisa S McNeill, Dean Postgraduate Research, Otago Business School, University of Otago, Fourth Floor, 60 Clyde St, Dunedin, Ōtepoti, PO Box 56, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand, Tel: +64 3 479 5758, Email lisa.mcneill@otago.ac.nz

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Introduction

Luxury brands by design create a strong sense of identity and are heavily reliant on imagery that conveys a symbolic sense of belonging to their brand.^{1,2} People often purchase luxury products as part of conspicuous consumption behaviour, in an effort to elevate their prestige among their peers and society generally.³ As exclusivity is a key component of luxury attributions, the marketing of luxury goods necessarily conveys the same sense of elegance and distance.^{4,5} When marketing luxury goods, brands recognise that customer motivations are different from those purchasing non-luxury products, thus promotion is often focussed on desiring a product rather than needing it. Hence, luxury promotion is producer-led rather than consumer-focused and seeks to create a sense of admiration rather than community in order to maintain a refined and exclusionary image.^{6,7}

Increasingly, luxury brands are turning to social media influencers rather than traditional celebrities, as they are deemed to have a greater return on investment and offer a new way to penetrate the market and create gross brand awareness. However, whilst recent literature celebrates the strengths of social media influencers in motivating sales of products, within the specialised field of marketing luxury goods some question whether these influencers may dilute the luxury brand image by contradicting its core value of exclusivity.⁸ While there are studies that consider the role of social media in luxury brand promotion,⁹⁻¹² few of these explicitly consider the social media influencer and their effectiveness in promoting luxury brands. This study thus considers the role of the endorser in modern luxury product advertising, asking whether consumers are more likely to engage positively with celebrities or social media influencers when evaluating luxury product advertisements? And, what effect does the use of celebrity or social media influencers have on purchase intention toward luxury products?

Luxury goods and social motivation

The concept of luxury has an inherent social component as luxury goods were formerly reserved for the upper class, and they are therefore associated with social distance.^{13,14} The showcasing of social distinction is a prime example of the motive for luxury brand purchases.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Social status is significantly related to the perceived purchase intention of luxury brands.¹⁸⁻²¹ Luxury brands stimulate vertical comparisons, create social distance and facilitate downward comparison.²²

Identification with a luxury brand's image can express a consumer's need to show their social standing, and can create further attraction to the brand.²³ Jiang et al.⁴ found that the more luxurious the advertisement was, the more rejected the participant felt. This alienating strategy works because as people feel excluded and distant from the images, their desire to amass luxury goods increases, in an effort to enhance their social desirability.^{24,25} Consumers look for luxury products that elevate them by differentiating them from others, rather than products used by those to whom they relate.²⁶ Consumers are looking to level up and need to see endorsers who represent a level above them, rather than someone with whom they feel familiarity.

The role of endorsers

To demonstrate the value of their goods, luxury brands often use endorsement in their advertising to illustrate the social benefits of owning these conspicuous goods. Endorsement aligns the personification of a brand with the values consumers wish to emulate. Endorsers are evaluated by consumers in how they fit with the brand, how much expertise they have in relation to the product and the level to which the consumer wishes to be like the endorser. This, in turn, influences the effectiveness of the advertisement. Endorsement is considered to be a way of externalising the brand image to aid in the formation of favourable brand opinions.²⁷ Endorsement by a celebrity has been found to be one of the most effective marketing techniques.²⁸⁻³⁰

Endorser selection

While recent literature has theorised whether social media influencers or celebrities are more effective endorsers,^{31,32} to date there has been only one study which directly compares the two endorsers.³³ Further, there has been no direct comparative investigation of celebrities and social media influencers within the realm of luxury goods. Traditionally, celebrities have been employed for the endorsement of luxury brands; however, with the rise of social media, luxury brands are increasingly reliant on influencers to promote their brand through different avenues.

There is evidence which suggests celebrity endorsements do not always pay off.^{34–36} Celebrity endorsements, while attracting attention to the brand, also have the potential to overshadow the brand itself.^{37,38} Literature surrounding social media influencers has shown that they can be more reliable, have lower costs and be effective endorsers.^{32,33} Belch and Belch³⁹ found that consumers are influenced more by people to whom they relate; hence, if someone relates more to an influencer, that advertisement may be more effective. However, relatability is not the design of luxury brands. It has also been found that the gap between advertisements and sales is hard to measure,^{40,41} and, as a result, to claim that a celebrity endorser has not worked well may be an overstatement. The ways in which celebrities can benefit brands cannot always be measured, as illustrated by Nelson and Deborah,⁴² who theorised that as celebrities are admired, this admiration can translate into profits for brands. Older research has found that celebrity endorsement has been found to produce more positive attitudes to advertising and purchase intention in comparison with a non-celebrity endorser,^{43,44} however these studies occurred prior to the rise of the pseudo celebrity of the social media influencer. Research which investigates the effectiveness of endorsements often compares celebrities to normal people. While influencers are 'normal' people, they represent a middle ground between celebrities and non-celebrities. Where influencers can motivate purchase decisions and enjoy higher levels of trust online, this has generally been explored in the context of low involvement goods.^{33,45}

Luxury goods and endorsement effectiveness measures

Wishful identification: Consumers are more likely to be influenced by endorsers with whom they identify.⁴⁶ Identification with the endorser and perceived endorser credibility influence advertising effectiveness.^{33,46,47} Identification is a process in which a person takes on the identity of a character, losing their own self in the process.⁴⁸ In the context of celebrity endorsements, identification usually exists in the form of wishful identification, which is derived from social cognition theory, whereby people change their behaviour to mirror another's.^{49,50} Wishful identification is the process of wanting to be more like a media figure.⁵¹ Normally associated with fictional figures in the media, wishful identification can be used to evaluate luxury brands as the wishful aspect works in conjunction with the aspirational nature of luxury.^{52–54} Schouten et al.³³ used wishful identification to explain attitudes about both influencers and celebrities. The popularity of a celebrity conveys the image of a higher status, to which people aspire.⁵⁵ Identification with influencers derives from perceived similarity, rather than wishful identification.⁵⁶ Influencers are able to mimic parasocial interaction which strengthens bonds with their followers, whereas traditional celebrities do not tend to interact with their fans online.⁵⁷ Schouten et al.³³ found that consumers felt higher degrees of wishful identification with influencers, rather than celebrities, and explained this as people aspiring to become social media influencers nowadays;⁵⁸ however, this finding was within low

involvement goods, and consumers may be sceptical that celebrities actually use these cheaper products as they do not find them as congruent with the match-up hypothesis. Luxury products are high involvement goods, as well as aspirational, and seeing that consumers feel wishful identification with celebrities, it can be hypothesised that:

HP1: Consumers wishfully identify more with the celebrity endorser than social media influencer endorser when evaluating the luxury goods advertisement.

Actual self-congruity

Self-congruity theory is the concept that consumers use brands for the practical and symbolic uses they have pertaining to the consumers' own self-concept, and that self-congruity is the match-up between a brand and a person's view of themselves.^{59,60} Self-congruity is the idea that the more alike the brand and a person's concepts are, the higher the desire for the brand, as the brand supports the person's identity.⁶¹ Luxury consumption literature shows that consumers buy luxury products to reflect self-concepts.⁶² Achieving congruence between the different elements of one's self-concept and brand image is important for validating one's feelings of satisfaction with self and social consistency, self-esteem and social approval needs.^{63,64} When a brand's product-user image is congruent with a consumer's self-concept, it results in higher product and brand attitudes.^{65,66} Younger consumers look for products which match their self-concept; therefore, if an endorser matches their self-image, consumers are more likely to positively engage with a brand.^{67,68} When consumers believe that they are similar to an endorser, they are more likely to follow their opinions.^{69,70} Influencers are perceived as more relatable which promotes an easier identification process.³³ This has been found with luxury handbags and YouTube Vloggers.⁷¹ Celebrities are considered as socially distant,⁷² whereas influencers portray themselves as being more like regular people.³³ Consumers believe they have more in common with influencers, therefore:

HP2: Consumers' perceived actual self-congruity will be stronger in the context of the social media influencer endorsement rather than the celebrity endorsement.

Ideal social self-congruity

People aspire to their ideal self-image so they can extend their true self-image.⁷³ As luxury is symbolic and people purchase luxury goods due to social motivations, an understanding of the ideal social self is a necessity as the influence of meeting one's ideal social self is more pronounced with these goods.⁶⁵ The consumption of luxury is motivated through peers and social values.¹⁹ As luxury goods are not a basic need, they are purchased as a means to enhance one's ideal self-image.⁷⁴ Luxury brands have the ability to improve the user's self-concept and worth, which is not always possible with non-luxury brands.⁷¹ Luxury brands' advertising is designed to appeal to consumers' ideal self-image as a way of portraying the aspirational nature of the brand.^{75,76}

Within the context of luxury, celebrity endorsements have been shown to be valuable. Okonkwo⁷⁷ theorised that celebrity endorsements held long-term benefits for luxury brands, such as increased brand loyalty and brand equity, which translates to a higher sales turnover. Celebrity endorsement of luxury goods has been found to influence purchasing decisions,^{78,79} whereas Sharma³⁴ found that celebrities can motivate consumers to purchase luxury products if they trust the value of the brand. Through match-up hypothesis, consumers' perceptions transfer from the endorser to the product, e.g. premium price with high-class celebrity.⁸⁰

Thus, it can be hypothesised that:

HP3: Celebrities encourage stronger positive attitudes towards luxury advertisements compared to social media influencers; and

HP4: Celebrities are more effective endorsers for luxury goods than social media influencers.

Methodology

Survey Measures

Ideal social self was measured with Han and Hyun's⁸¹ ideal social-self congruity scale, adapted to include 'handbag' (α 0.862). Product perception was measured using Harben and Kim's⁸² scale of liking for clothing products (α 0.84). Using a scale adapted from Spears and Singh⁸³ (α 0.97), purchase intention toward the handbag product was measured. Actual-self congruity was measured using a scale adapted to the current context, from Sirgy and Su⁸⁴ (α 0.83). The survey measured wishful identification using Hoffner and Buchanan's⁵² scale originally developed for television characters (α 0.84 for female characters). Attitude toward the advertisement was assessed using a scale based on Spears and Singh's⁸³ study, adapted to the context of the current study. Scale items are shown in Tables 1–8.

Stimulus selection and pre-test

A pre-test was conducted to examine which brands, influencers and celebrities would serve as appropriate stimuli for the experiment. A convenience sample of 10 female students at the University of Otago was recruited for the pre-test, and they were presented with pictures of three influencer endorsers, three celebrity endorsers and three luxury handbags. Three handbag brands were selected for the pre-test (Louis Vuitton; Gucci; Yves St Laurent) all of whom target young consumers, and all have used social media campaigns. Similar, entry price-point bags were selected for inclusion. The influencers and celebrities used in the pre-test were selected for age (under 25 years, to ensure social relevance to the participants) and high recognisability among the target population. Further, all endorsers had previously worked with luxury brands. In the pre-test, participants were asked to indicate how well they identified with the endorsers and how recognisable they perceived endorsers to be. The requirement for recognisability was established as an experimental control to minimise the effects of unfamiliarity as a confounding variable. For the main experiment, the celebrity and the influencer with the highest fit score was selected (International actress Sophie Turner for the celebrity and New Zealand social media influencer Jamie Ridge). The Yves Saint Laurent 'Kate' bag was selected as the most desirable handbag to the pre-test group.

Sample

The study used a non-probability convenience sample of women between 18-25 years, recruited online, via social media. The age cohort for the sample was based on prior research that examines the impact of celebrity endorsements, which finds that this approach is most useful in targeting young consumers.⁸⁵ Further, studies show that consumers in this age cohort are increasingly investing in luxury goods.⁸⁶⁻⁸⁸ Women are said to be more predominant users of social media and more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption than men.^{89,90} Participation in the study was incentivised with the chance to win one of two \$100 NZD gift cards. 153 participants took part in the study, consistent with extant literature.^{33,38}

Procedure

In the study, participants were randomly assigned to either treatment group (A) the celebrity condition, or treatment group (B),

the influencer condition. The experiment was hosted via Qualtrics, and participants first saw a photograph of the luxury product (a handbag) and were then asked to respond to 7-point Likert scales for items measuring ideal social self-congruity, product perception and purchase intention. In the second part of the study participants saw a manipulated image of either the (A) celebrity or (B) influencer endorser, alongside the product and the brand logo and again asked to respond to 7-point Likert scales for items measuring the perceived level of expertise of the endorser, actual self-congruity, wishful identification, attitude towards the advertisement and purchase intention.

Data analysis

153 survey responses were collected and exported to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Inspecting the data, six cases were removed due to a non-response error. Factor analysis, comparison of means and one-way ANOVA were used to analyse the data.

Validation of scales

All scales had Cronbach alphas of over 0.8, indicating acceptable reliability within this study.⁹¹ All scales had Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values of above the threshold of 0.6 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, cited in Shepherd & Edelmann,⁹²) and the Eigenvalues indicated there was one dominant factor in all scales (ideal social self-congruity: 2.298, product perception: 2.616, expertise: 3.289, actual self-congruity: 3.366, wishful identification: 2.963, attitude towards advertisement: 4.177). A principal factor analyses further confirmed that all values loaded onto one component, and as such, the scales can be seen to be reliable.

Results

Pre-endorser exposure

The stimulus utilised was liked and considered stylish, indicating its appropriateness for measuring the effect of endorsers, however purchase intention was towards the low end of the scale (Table 1). Participants who did wish to buy the handbag felt that their ideal self was more similar to the typical owner of a luxury handbag in comparison to those who would not like to purchase the handbag ($m = 4.14$) ($p = 0.000$), ($m = 4.95$) ($p = 0.000$), ($m = 4.65$) ($p = 0.000$) (Table 2).

Those who wanted to buy the handbag had higher overall product perceptions ($m = 6.08$) ($p = 0.000$), ($m = 5.84$) ($p = 0.000$), ($m = 6.03$) ($p = 0.000$) (Table 3) and those who did wish to buy the handbag felt that the endorser was 'similar to how I am' ($m = 3.14$) ($p = 0.002$). The remaining items on the scale were non-significant (Table 4).

Those who would like to buy the handbag had higher levels of wishful identification ($m = 4.22$) ($p = 0.035$) and emulation ($m = 4.38$) ($p = 0.031$); however, the other items within the scale were non-significant (Table 5).

Celebrity and influencer condition treatment comparison

Treatment group A (Celebrity) expressed more positive attitudes towards the advertisement than did Treatment group B (Influencer) (Table 6).

Participants who were exposed to the celebrity advertisement expressed greater agreement with statements that the endorser was 'similar to how I see myself' ($m = 2.75$) ($p = 0.010$) and 'similar

to how others believe that I am' ($m = 2.63$) ($p = 0.016$) (Table 7). Participants also felt greater levels of wishful identification towards celebrities in most items of the scale ($(m = 4.18)$ ($p = 0.000$), ($m = 4.56$) ($p = 0.010$), ($m = 4.27$) ($p = 0.001$)) (Table 8) (Table 9).

Table 1 Product stimulus congruency & perceptions

Ideal social self-congruity	Owens a luxury bag	Does not own a luxury bag	Sig.
	N=34	N=113	
The typical owner of this handbag:	Mean	Mean	
Has personality characteristics similar to mine, as perceived by others	3.94	2.81	.000**
Has an image similar to how I would like other people to see me	4.47	3.31	.000**
Is very much the kind of person I would like other people to see me as	4.09	3.1	.001**
Product perception			
The handbag in this image is stylish	5.62	5.28	0.199
The handbag in this image is attractive	5.62	5.07	.048*
Overall, I like the handbag in this image	5.59	5.07	0.07
Purchase intention			
How likely are you to buy this handbag?	4.24	2.98	.000**

1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree, 1=Definitely not buy, 7=Definitely buy.

Table 2 Ideal social self-congruity by purchase intention

The typical owner of this handbag:	Definitely would purchase	Definitely would not purchase	Total	Sig.
	N=37	N=81	N=118	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	
Has personality characteristics similar to mine, as perceived by others	4.14	2.54	3.04	.000**
Has an image similar to how I would like other people to see me	4.95	2.88	3.53	.000**
Is very much the kind of person I would like other people to see me as	4.65	2.63	3.26	.000**

*Significant at 0.05. 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree.

Table 3 Product perception by purchase intention

For the following statements, please select a response	Definitely would purchase	Definitely would not purchase	Total	Sig.
	N=37	N=81	N=118	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	
The handbag in this image is stylish	6.08	4.86	5.25	.000**
The handbag in this image is attractive	5.84	4.72	5.07	.000**
Overall, I like the handbag in this image	6.03	4.58	5.03	.000**

*Significant at 0.05. 1=Strongly disagree, 7= Strongly agree.

Table 4 Actual self-congruity by purchase intention

The woman in this advertisement is:	Definitely would purchase	Definitely would not purchase	Total	Sig.
	N=37	N=81	N=118	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	
Similar to how I am	3.14	2.4	2.63	.002*
Similar to how I see myself	2.7	2.35	2.46	0.14
Similar to how others believe that I am	2.59	2.26	2.36	0.183
Similar to how others see me	2.84	2.35	2.53	0.094

*Significant at 0.05. 1= Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree.

Table 5 Wishful identification by purchase intention

For the following statements, please select a response.	Definitely would purchase	Definitely would not purchase	Total	Sig.
	N=37	N=81	N=118	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	
The type of person who would own this handbag is the type of person I want to be like	4.22	3.53	3.75	.035*
Sometimes I wish I could be more like the type of person who would own this handbag	4.62	4.22	4.35	0.193
The type of person who would own this handbag is someone I would like to emulate	4.38	3.69	3.91	.031*
I'd like to do the kind of things the type of person who owns this handbag would	4.32	3.72	3.93	0.08

*Significant at 0.05. 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree.

Table 6 Attitudes toward advertisement

I find this promotional image:	Treatment A (Celebrity) N=73	Treatment B (Influencer) N=74	Sig.
Unappealing/Appealing	4.74	3.97	.002*
Bad/Good	4.75	4	.002*
Unpleasant/Pleasant	4.93	4.19	.001**
Unfavourable/Favourable	4.75	3.96	.000**
Unlikable/likeable	4.93	4.03	.000**

*Significant at 0.05; Semantic differential scale of 1–7 for every item.

Table 7 Actual self-congruity with endorser type

The woman in this advertisement is:	Treatment A (Celebrity) N=73	Treatment B (Influencer) N=74	Sig.
Similar to how I am	2.82	2.5	0.09
Similar to how I see myself	2.75	2.2	.010*
Similar to how others believe that I am	2.63	2.14	.016*
Similar to how others see me	2.62	2.49	0.489

*Significant at 0.05; 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree.

Table 8 Wishful identification with endorser type

Considering the advert:	Treatment A (Celebrity) N=73	Treatment B (Influencer) N=74	Sig.
The woman in this image is the type of person I want myself to be like	4.18	3.26	.000**
Sometimes I wish I could be more like the woman in this image	4.56	3.92	.010*
The woman in this image is someone I would like to emulate	4.27	3.43	.001**
I'd like to do the kind of things the woman in this image does	4.04	3.92	0.802

*Significant at 0.05. 1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree.

Table 9 Hypotheses summary

Hypotheses	Outcome
HP1: Consumers wishfully identify more with the celebrity endorser than social media influencer endorser when evaluating the luxury goods advertisement.	Supported
HP3: Consumers' perceived actual self-congruity will be stronger in the context of the social media influencer endorsement rather than the celebrity endorsement.	Not supported
HP4: Celebrities encourage stronger positive attitudes towards luxury advertisements compared to social media influencers.	Supported
HP5: Celebrities are more effective endorsers for luxury goods than social media influencers.	Supported

Discussion

This study contributes by directly comparing the endorsement of luxury products by celebrities and social media influencers, in evaluating their effectiveness as endorsers. The study sought to understand how young adult female consumers related to and perceived endorsers in luxury advertising, and which endorser was more effective in promoting positive attitudes toward the advertisement, as well as stimulating purchase intention. Overall it was found that participants felt their actual self was more similar to the celebrity, they wishfully identified with the celebrity more, and had a more positive response to the celebrity advertisement. This indicates that the celebrity condition was supported by the match-up hypothesis,⁹³ which finds celebrities as a more effective match with luxury goods than social media influencers. It was found that the celebrity condition reinforced the existing associations of luxury.

The match-up hypothesis

The first research question asked whether consumers engaged more with celebrities or social media endorsers when evaluating luxury product advertisements. This study found that participants had higher levels of wishful identification with celebrities, supporting H1.

This contrasts Schouten et al.³³'s findings, that consumers wishfully identified with influencers more than celebrities. However, Schouten et al.³³ used low involvement goods as their stimulus (e.g. makeup/protein shakes), as opposed to luxury goods. The pairing of social media influencers and low involvement goods may be more convincing, as influencers, these seemingly regular people, are perceived as more likely to use these products. It may be more believable that celebrities use luxury goods, due to the match-up hypothesis placing them in the same category of aspiration. Here attribution theory can be applied, as the fee involved in employing an endorser affects consumer perception (Silvera & Austad, 2004). In evaluating an advertisement, consumers judge the internal attribution, whereby they believe that the endorser promotes a product because they personally believe in its value, and external attribution, whereby they believe the endorser promotes the product because they are being paid (Hsu & McDonald, 2002).

Self-concept and endorsement

The majority of participants did not greatly aspire to be like the typical owner of the luxury handbag, before the introduction of the endorser. The handbag alone did not encourage strong aspirations for meeting one's ideal social self, and as such, demonstrates the value of including a person in advertisements to illustrate perceived

social benefits and promote identification. H2 was not supported, as participants self-concept was aligned more with the celebrity than the influencer. This is a new finding within social media influencer research, where prior studies align actual self and influencers (Chapple & Cownie, 2017).^{32,33,56}

Attitudes to advertisement

The second research question asked whether luxury brands would benefit from celebrity or social media influencers as endorsers, in regard to improved purchase intention. H4, that celebrities encourage stronger positive attitudes towards luxury advertisements compared to social media influencers was supported. This is consistent with existing theory^{38,43,44,94} which suggests the combination of celebrity endorsers and luxury leads consumers to have more positive perceptions about an advertisement.

Purchase intention

Neither treatment had a significant effect on purchase intention. Extant theory is mixed, with studies indicating that celebrity endorsement can significantly, and not significantly, influence purchase intention. Daneschvary & Schwer⁷⁸ and Gardner & Shuman⁷⁹ found that celebrity endorsement positively influenced purchase intention. Yet, as these studies are dated, it could signify that young consumers are becoming less responsive to celebrity endorsements (Kirkpatrick, 2017), and by extension, less receptive to advertising (Newman, 2015). Erdogan³⁷ theorised that a positive reaction to a celebrity would not necessarily lead to a change in behaviour or a purchase decision and Park and Yim³⁸ note that celebrities do not drive purchase intention when evaluating luxury goods. While this study's participants had more positive attitudes to the celebrity advertisement, the inclusion of the celebrity was not motivating enough to encourage purchase intention. This could be explained as a function of the cost of a luxury bag, as although consumers like the endorser and the handbag, the advertisement does not motivate them to consider purchasing.

While only a small proportion of the sample (23.1%) owned a luxury bag, these participants also had significantly higher levels of ideal social self-congruity. They also found the bag more attractive and perceived their actual self-congruity as more similar to the endorser that they were presented with. As brand identification leads to brand loyalty (Hongwei et. al., 2012), consumers who are already in the market identify more with luxury brands, resulting in higher purchase intention. This is supported by the literature, as attitudinal brand loyalty has been found to be high within luxury goods (Thakur, 2015). As luxury consumers have an emotional relationship with luxury brands, it can predict purchase intention (Bain & Co. 2005; Choo et al. 2012). The handbag owners group had a more positive reception to the advertisement. Supporting the match-up hypothesis,⁹⁵ where the consumer who finds their identity similar to the brand has positive purchase intentions and attitudes towards the advertisement.⁹⁶ Handbag owners had significantly higher purchase intentions before and after the exposure to the endorser advertisement. This suggests that once people already belong to the target market, they are more receptive towards the advertisement. However, to a degree this signifies that it does not matter who is endorsing the product. This is a significant finding in this study.⁹⁷⁻¹²⁰

Conclusion

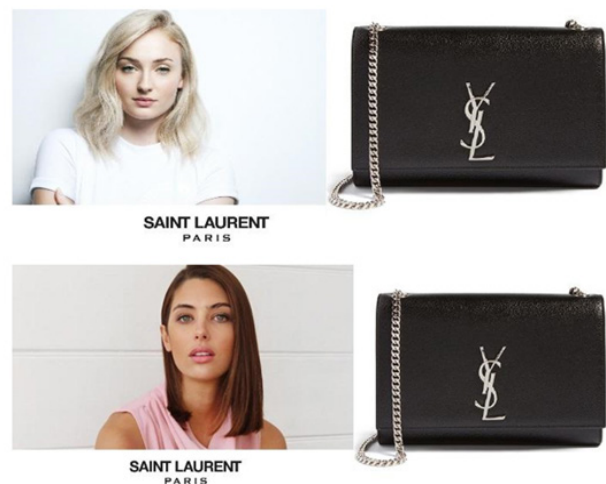
This study sought to examine whether celebrities or social media influencers were more effective in endorsing luxury brands. Self-congruity theory and match-up hypothesis were used to analyse the effects of the endorser advertisement. Despite the increase in luxury

brands utilising social media influencers, there is little literature on the effectiveness of influencers within the luxury context, and even less comparing the traditional luxury endorser of the celebrity to social media influencers. This study sought to fill this gap in the literature and to better understand the role of endorsers in luxury advertising by conducting an experiment to test how consumers feel about both endorsers. The results of this study indicate that consumers favoured the celebrity condition; however, this was not a particularly strong result. As such, it widens the scope of this study, and asks if endorsement is really necessary for luxury brands. Endorsement is an expensive and high-risk venture, and this study places a question mark over its value in luxury marketing.

While this study found that luxury handbag ownership played a significant role in the analysing of data, people's personal opinions of what constitutes a luxury handbag may differ. This study considers a luxury handbag to be in line with the accessible core and above of Rambourg's (2014) Pyramid of Luxury (Appendix I), which some participants may have incorrectly reported. Further, whilst the study design featured mock advertisements, usually these are placed on social media as part of a larger campaign (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016) and as the study does not mimic this it loses external validity when discussing the findings in a more general manner. While this study compares influencers and celebrities, the lines between these two are becoming increasingly blurred, as celebrities often have large followings on social media platforms, and influencers are becoming so well-known they are becoming celebrities.

Appendix I

Appendix I: Treatment Images



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Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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