# Second-Hand Luxury

## A threat or an opportunity for luxury brands?

*An explorative study on the second-hand luxury experience*

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# ABSTRACT

The popularity of the second-hand luxury market, fostered by digitization and the change in consumers' behaviours, contributes to the increasing influence this market has over the general luxury one. Becoming a popular way in which consumers access luxury, is today a relevant touchpoint between the consumer and the luxury brand. Due to the influence different brand related experiences have on luxury brands, it is the purpose of the study to shed light on how second-hand luxury experiences influence the overall luxury brand experience. Throughout an explorative study of the second-hand luxury phenomenon, qualitative semi-structured interviews are conducted with second-hand consumers. The findings indicate that second-hand luxury experiences influence the brand experience on a sensorial, cognitive, behavioural, affective and social level. Here different brand related stimuli were found to be relevant, like the resale value, uniqueness of the product, availability of popular products, packaging, past owner presence, perceived preciousness, sustainability and brand involvement. The findings contribute with novel knowledge and theoretical implications to the topic of second-hand luxury and brand experience in the context of luxury brands as well as with new insights for managerial decision-making.

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2015 it generated 17 billion € in sale, today the second-hand luxury market generates 26 billion € (Statista, 2019b). The changing consumers behaviours fostered by the power of digitalization contributed to the growing popularity of this luxury consumption practice. In 2019, more than 60% of luxury consumers were interested in it. Second-hand luxury marketplaces and platforms are today important touchpoints between the consumer and the brand, with the opportunity to influence the experience consumers have with the brand and the perceptions they develop about it. Characterized by wide accessibility, lower prices, online presence as well as consumer to consumer transactions, this practice can be found in contradiction with the core of luxury, which lays in exclusivity, prestige as well as service and product excellence. This contradiction between these two worlds rises the author's interest to investigate how these two concepts coexists and influence each other.

The growing popularity of this market among luxury consumers, proves its relevance for them. Understanding what is relevant for today's luxury consumers is a necessity for luxury brands, if they want to reach and maintain a relevant position in consumers' minds. Luxury brands have to be aware of the changes in consumers behaviours as well as their values, priorities and preferences and act upon them through innovation and change, if they want to stay at the top of the consumer's preferences (Beverland et al., 2015).

On the other hand, to create a strong brand image in consumers' minds consistence and alignment in all the brand related stimuli and communications is key (Beverland et al., 2015). All the touchpoints on which the consumer meets the brand, have therefor to be aligned and communicate the same message. Due to its growing popularity among luxury consumers, the second-hand market is becoming a more and more important touchpoint between the luxury consumer and the various luxury brands. Several questions therefore arise: are the brand related experiences the luxury consumer lives in the second-hand market in line with the overall brand image and message luxury brands want to have? How are luxury brands perceived in this market? Is the concept of luxury even the same for the consumers of this market? Can luxury brands influence their brand image in the second-hand market? All these are relevant questions that needs to be answered to understand the influence the second-hand market has on the first-hand one and its brands.

With the purpose to understand these two worlds and their meaning for the luxury consumer, an exploration of both is necessary.

Luxury is generally seen as a multidimensional concept, characterized by expensiveness, excellent quality, personal and emotional connection with its customers, perceived rarity as well as prestigious image (Dubois et al., 2011; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Ko et al., 2019). The subjective nature of this concept makes it change over time mirroring the changes in consumers behaviours. This idea rises an inevitable doubt whether today's luxury is still the same as yesterdays. In this regard a new experiential perspective on luxury is gaining popularity among practitioners, that see the traditional product-focused conceptualization as just a part of the whole luxury experience. The importance of luxury experience, however, is not a new finding, Kapferer highlighted its importance already in 1998. Luxury is in fact strongly linked to benefits that go beyond its functionality, and rather evolve around emotional, personal and social experiences. For Kapferer "luxury is luxury experience" (p 141 in Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Due to the relevance of these experiences for luxury, a question arises on whether these can coexist and take place in the second-hand market, where low prices, wide accessibility, bargain and bets are the normal.

Several authors addressed the topic of second-hand luxury: some of them from the perspective of the meaning it can have for its consumers (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015), some focusing on the motives that drive these consumers (Amatulli et al., 2018; Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019), while others studying its influence on brand attachment (Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019). None of them however focused on understanding the experience second-hand luxury consumers go through and how this one influences the overall brand experience the consumer lives in relation to the brand.

It is therefore the purpose of this paper to answer the following research question on how second-hand luxury experiences influence the overall luxury brand experience and fill the identified knowledge gap. With this purpose in mind the following chapters will present an overview of the available literature about luxury, second-hand luxury and brand experience. The knowledge collected in these chapters will function as a base to explore the identified research gap and fill it with new empirical knowledge. The elaboration of the research question and the method used to answer it will be presented followed by the analysis of the findings. The work will be concluded by a final chapter highlighting the main findings, their theoretical and managerial implications as well as providing relevant suggestions for future researches and exposing the limitations of the study.

# LUXURY

## LUXURY INDUSTRY

The luxury goods industry today generates $247 billion in sales (aggregate luxury goods sales) (Deloitte, 2019). Despite the general economic downturn, this industry stayed positive in the last years. With strong international players, the industry's top 10 performing luxury goods companies represent nearly half (48.2%) of the industry sales. Among them LVMH (French), Estée Lauder (American) and Richemont (Swiss) are the top 3 performers (Deloitte, 2019). The annual growth for 2019 reached 10.8% for the top 100 luxury goods companies around the world (Deloitte, 2019). The main drivers for this growth were identified in the increase of the Chinese consumers spending and the increasing dominance of Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers in the industry (Statista, 2019a).

Geographically speaking, the market has its centres in Europe, United States and the largest Asian markets like China (Hong Kong) and Japan. For the purpose of the study however, the research will focus on the European market, as it is assumed that cultural differences outside this area should be taken into account and therefore approached separately.

From a product category point of view, many product sectors can be considered part of this industry, among them personal goods like apparel and footwear, jewellery and watches, leather goods, eyewear, cosmetics and fragrances, but also wine and spirits, food, designer furniture, hospitality and travel, luxury cars and artisanal and small scale production (Statista, 2019a). An increase in the demand for luxury experiences, such as food, wine, hotels and travels, was noted, proving the tendency of today consumers to prefer the being over the owning (Statista, 2019a). For the purpose of the research, however, the attention will be focused on personal luxury goods and specifically luxury fashion including clothing, footwear, bags and accessories. This segment represents the biggest fraction of the personal luxury goods market accounting for 29,1% of it in 2018 (Statitsta, 2019a) and it is furthermore, also the most represented category within the top 100 world luxury goods companies, where more than 38% operates in luxury fashion (Deloitte, 2019).

Today, as many other industries, also the luxury sector is perceiving the impact of changing consumers' behaviours, digitalization of the business and society as well as of the increasing attention towards sustainability issues (Deloitte, 2019). In order to better understand the situation in which the industry and its players find themselves today an understanding of these economic, social and environmental changes is presented.

# CHANGING CONSUMERS BEHAVIORS

The luxury segment is experiencing the entrance of new generations, which in the last years are gaining more and more economic power. Represented by people born between the 1989 and the 1995, the so-called generation of Millennials is slowly outnumbering the older generations. According to a study conducted by D'Arpizio & Levato (2019) Millennials will represent 40% of the global personal luxury goods market by 2025. Similarly, also the younger Gen Z (1996-2002) is becoming more relevant. Estimated to represent 4% of the personal luxury goods market in 2019, this generation is the first generation of true digital natives (Boston Consulting Group (BCG) & Altagamma, 2019).

Influenced by the environment in which they were raised and in which they live, the behaviours and values of these generations might noticeable differ from previous ones. According to researchers, in fact, they are strongly connected with their peers, and they seek for advices for most of their purchase decisions. While for previous generations family and friends where the most consulted opinions, Millennials and Gen Z rely more on reviews from even unknown peers and users and use multiple online and offline sources and cross-referencing in order to find valuable information (D'Arpizio & Levato, 2019; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). In order to maintain a relevant reputation among these customers, luxury brands have therefore to pay extra attention on the opinion and reviews shared online as these are often used for decision making.

Furthermore, Millennials were also found to be looking for fast and immediate satisfaction. Due to their limited time they want to find immediate, easy, efficient and convenient solutions for their needs (BCG & Altagamma, 2019). Additionally, their demand for experience and access rather than possession, especially evident in the Gen Z's behaviours, was another identified characteristic that

differentiate these generations from previous ones. These behaviours were further supported by the popularity of subscription models among these generations. According to a survey among US Millennials, 3 out of 5 of their online purchases is subscription based (Nielsen, 2018) while Gen Z are among the main users of rental services (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). These insights can strongly influence the strategic decisions of luxury brands, which so far focused on traditional product sales models based on limited accessibility and the idea of ownership as a status signal.

Additionally, also the decision criteria of these young consumers in the context of luxury were found to be different. While brand history and heritage represent less important attributes for these consumers, product exclusivity, design and customer service were among the most important (Deloitte, 2019). Their need for uniqueness and expression of their individuality were further confirmed by the finding that Millennials and Gen Z are not primarily inspired by celebrities and super starts, but rather by real an authentic stories about their peers (Statitsta, 2019a). Differently from previous generations, it was also found that Millennials and Gen Z represent the main consumers of collaborations and limited-edition collections, confirming in this way again their need for uniqueness (D'Arpizio & Levato, 2019; Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

In attempt to attract these young consumers, less interested in the history of the brand, many brands decided to collaborate with known streetwear brands like Louis Vuitton x Supreme, Manolo Blahnik x Vetements, Jimmy Choo x Off-White, but also sportswear brands like Dior x Nike, Prada x Adidas or Puma x Balmain. Brands are therefore aware that to attract these new generations different approaches would be needed. But not only for new generations. The report presented by D'Arpizio & Levato (2019) emphasizes the importance of understanding the new generations as more than simple age groups, but rather as a state of mind. In fact, according to their study a change in behaviours, that assimilates those of the Millennials and Gen Z can be seen also in older generations.

## DIGITALIZATION

As another important driving force of change, digitalization influenced to some extend the life of every consumer. This change in behaviours, with the newer generations leading it, introduces a more hyper-connected consumer, whose shopping journey is a mix of online and offline experiences.

Today, the majority of luxury consumers (80%) is influenced by the online setting (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). These consumers are influenced and seek for information primarily on social media, from trusted bloggers and influencers as well as by visiting companies' websites and reviews. The speed of digitalization incentivizes brands to include these new digital touchpoints in their marketing strategies. Many luxury brands like Louis Vouitton, Gucci, Chanel already strengthened their online presence, focusing on social media, on their online websites and e-stores as well as their digital instore experience (Statitsta, 2019a)

Social media, among all, are one of the main game changers in this setting. According to the report presented by BCG & Altagamma (2019) 81% of the luxury consumers use social media to interact with luxury brands as well as bloggers, influencers and peers about luxury products, with Millennials and Gen Z reaching even higher percentages, 92% and 95% respectively. Today, brands are implementing different strategy in order to maintain relevance for these consumers. Some of them use social media as community creation tools that stimulate discussions around the brand, while others as promotional tools to advertise their products. Many brands also establish relationships and partnerships with known influencers and bloggers, that contribute to the brand performance by advocating for their products to their large and loyal audiences (Deloitte, 2019).

With 1 billion users in June 2018, Instagram is among all the social channels, the one that contributes with the highest value to luxury brands (Launch Metrics, 2019). Luxury consumers turn to this social network to follow up on trends and find style inspirations, follow their favourite brands and connect with influencers. Compared to an average Instagram user, luxury users are 5 times more active in consuming content. In addition, luxury and fashion influencers have on average twice as much followers as the average influencer (Instagram, 2017), confirming that Instagram is the place where consumers interact with luxury.

Besides social media, today's consumers are hyper-connected on many other platforms: brand websites, retailers e-stores, blogs and online communities as well as emails and messaging apps (D'Arpizio & Levato, 2019). These are all digital touchpoints at which luxury consumers can get in contact with the brand. Brands are therefore increasingly using digital technologies to assure their presence on these touchpoints and have the chance to be part of the conversation as well as assure an aligned brand image across the whole consumer journey. More and more brands are therefore turning to a new omnichannel model, based on the digitalization of the overall consumer experience. This

model pushes the brand to maintain an aligned brand image and experience thought all the touchpoints (Batat, 2019b), as this alignment is considered as fundamental in order to build a clear and strong brand image in consumers' minds (Beverland et al., 2015)

# SUSTAINABILITY

Not only being presents where the consumers are, but also being involved in relevant conversations and discussions is important for brands if they want to keep their relevance among their consumers. One of such topics today is sustainability. Today consumers, are considered more conscious and aware of their ethical and moral values. Particularly for younger generations like Millennials and Gen Z, sustainability and ethical standards are important aspects over luxury brand preference. These generations are willing to support responsible brands as they expect that brands, they buy from, reflect their own values (Deloitte, 2019). According to a study conducted by The Nielsen Company (2018) among US Millennials, 73% of the respondents would prefer a sustainable and socially conscious brand. The report conducted by BCG & Altagamma (2019) also showed that 59% of luxury purchases is influenced by environmental, animal and ethical concerns, reaching even higher percentages in case of Millennials and Gen Z (64%). Many brands already took action upon. The group Kering (n. 4 in terms of sales in the industry) is increasingly investing in the use of renewable materials. Similarly, as Prada, they also implemented a Code of Ethics to be followed by the whole group in order to assure sustainable and ethical behaviours. Rolex is supporting young talents and their projects driving positive environmental or cultural change. While Burberry decided to stop the destruction of unsold finished luxury goods and rather invest in the practice of recycling and repairing (Deloitte, 2019).

# LUXURY INNOVATION

All the above mentioned social, economical and environmental changes in today's society are putting on test luxury brands and their positions.

Brands are in this context understood as identities, defined by a unique set of associations that the consumer has with the brand and influenced by the aspirational view managers have about the brand. Brand identities are therefore considered social constructs created over time in a dynamic dialogue between multiple stakeholders, like consumers and managers (De Silveria et al., 2011).

It is therefore clear that the role of the consumer is crucial and maintaining brand relevance among the target group should be a priority for brand managers. Brand relevance is understood as the consumers perception that a brand has something personally relevant and appropriate to satisfy their needs and desires. Its maintenance is therefore key in order to keep the discussion about the brand, and therefore it's co-creation alive. In other words, a relevant brand can only be defined as such if the consumers are perceiving it in that way (Beverland et al., 2015)

Beverland et al., (2015) argues that brand relevance can be achieved with continuous innovations and changes. As consumers preferences and behaviours change also their criteria about what is relevant can change. Brand managers should therefore monitor these changes and address them with continuous innovations in order to be still considered as a relevant choice among other brands. On the other hand, Beverland et al., (2015) stresses also the need to create strong and stable brand identities. Continuous changes in the brand communication can easily confuse the consumer on what the brand stands for. It is therefore the authors' argument that in order to avoid this confusion, brands should maintain a certain consistency in their communication, building a strong brand frame with clear and over time consistent elements like logos, brand values or brand symbols. Being addressed with a consistent message over time helps the consumer to memorize it and associate it with the messenger, the brand. This helps the brand to create a clear, consistent and therefore stronger image in consumers' minds.

According to Beverland et al., (2015) both approaches are needed, and only a balance between relevance through innovation and consistency through strong brand frames can lead to an

ambidextrous behaviours, or in other words to the organization's ability to conduct both types of behaviour, resulting in the capability to sustain positive performance in the long term.

Digitalization, environmental issue and different social and economical conditions led to a big change in consumers' values and behaviours. This change led to new preferences, new criteria of relevance and in this way also to new ways of consuming luxury. Among these, the rise of the second-hand (from now on S-H) luxury consumption is one of the clear indicators that today luxury consumers might have a different mindset. A certain degree of change is therefore needed in order to address new consumers demands and maintain brand relevance. It is however the brand manager's role to understand how the existing brand frame should fit into the new consumers' world. To do so, an understanding of these world is needed.

# LUXURY CONSUMPTION

In the following section the concept of luxury will be discussed, with the purpose to review what is already know about luxury and its consumption. The first section will focus on the concept of luxury, introducing the different dimensions that characterizes this construct from a more traditional point of view (Dubois et al., 2011; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Ko et al., 2016). In the following section these authors findings on luxury consumption will also be presented and afterwards, compared with an emerging conceptualization of luxury and its consumption, that focuses on a more experiential understanding of luxury (Hemetsberger et al., 2012; von Wallpach et al., 2020).

## CONCEPT OF LUXURY

Luxury is a largely studied concept, however researchers and practitioners still did not agree upon a definition of what luxury is, and consequently on what a luxury brand is (Ko et al., 2019). This lack of a common definition derives from the fact that luxury is a relative concept and its conception changed over time. What is luxurious for someone, might be just ordinary for someone else, as well as what is luxury today might not be luxury tomorrow (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Most

of the literature defines luxury based on consumers perception of it. Managers actions can influence this perception, for example with premium pricing, product characteristics or marketing communication, however whether a brand is considered luxury or not in the end depends on the consumer (Ko et al., 2019). This conclusion is in line with the above-mentioned conceptualization of a brand as identity, according to which a brand identity is defined by the perception of the consumer, influenced by other stakeholders (De Silveria et al., 2011). The importance of understanding the consumer and the dynamics behind luxury consumption is therefore undeniable.

Many authors tried to conceptualize and amplify the understanding of the concept of luxury, analysing it from different points of views and with different approaches. Three main authors and their works will be discussed in the following pages. Ko et al., (2019) analysed the luxury construct by conducting an extensive literature review of the luxury knowledge already available. Dubois et al., (2011) analysed this construct form the consumer perspective, conducting qualitative and quantitative studies about the attitudes consumers have towards luxury, while Kapferer & Bastien, (2012) wrote a whole book about luxury.

Despite they choose different approaches to address this topic, all of them reached the conclusion that luxury is a complex concept, that can only be defined as a multidimensional construct. In other words, the authors used multiple dimensions and characteristics that as a whole define luxury. The dimensions that were clearly mentioned by all of the authors were: excellent quality and high price. The topics of personal and emotional involvement, perception of rarity and prestigious image were also identified.

## HIGH QUALITY

With the purpose to study consumers attitude toward luxury brands, Dubois et al. (2011) found a very strong link between luxury and quality, to such level that they were often used as synonyms. This relation arises from different levels. On one hand it is related to the components and material used for the production of the product. It is therefore strongly linked with the concept of craftmanship as well as heritage of the brand, that through its history acquired the skills and the ability to create such products (Dubois et al., 2011). It can also be related to the service and experience offered, not only during the purchase phase, but also before and after it. The idea of quality is further linked to a

feeling of eternity, a feeling that something will last for ever (Dubois et al., 2011; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

## HIGH PRICE

A strong relation between price and quality was evident in Dubois et al. (2011) study, according to which a high price was the logical consequence of high quality. The authors however, pointed out that functional benefits are not the main justifiers of the high price. Social and emotional benefits must be considered as well. According to Kapferer & Bastien, (2012) luxury products are different from the rest of the products. In this market when the prices rise, the demand usually rises as well. With a price increase, the accessibly of the product decreases. This creates a sense of scarcity and rarity around the product and consequently increases its desirability (Ko et al., 2019). From a social point of view, limited accessibility due to high prices, creates an entry barrier to the luxury world, increasing the exclusivity of such circle and the power luxury products have to distinguish the owners from the non-owners (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Ko et al., 2019;).

## PERSONAL AND EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

The third dimension that can be identified in the above-mentioned works is related to the emotional involvement of the consumer with the luxury product. Ko et al., (2019) defines this dimension as the capability of luxury to establish a deep connection and resonance with its consumers. Both Dubois et al. (2011) and Kapferer & Bastien, (2012) link this dimension to the concepts of aesthetics, hedonic experiences as well as personal connotations. Kapferer & Bastien, (2012) argue that luxury is characterized by aesthetic pleasures, stressing the subjective property of this dimension. This pleasure is called by Dubois et al. (2011) the polysensuality of luxury, or in other words the multisensorial experience luxury is able to create for the consumer. Many luxury consumers participating in the Dubois et al. (2011) study in fact pointed out the pleasure created by watching a beautiful piece of design, by touching the hand-worked leather, by the pleasant smell in the store as well as by the exciting sound of a luxury packaging. Aesthetic preferences as well as pleasures, despite can be influenced by the social and cultural context, they remain highly personal and therefore able to create deep and memorable connections with the consumer.

In relation to the personal aspect of luxury, both Kapferer & Bastien (2012) and Dubois et al. (2011) also point out the relation between luxury and personalization, considered as the pick of the luxury

experience. A personalized experience is not only able to optimally address the desires and demand of the consumer but also creates a feeling of being special and taken care of.

Dubois et al. (2011) additionally point out, that the personal connotation of luxury is not only related to the actual luxury experience, but often is also linked to the personal story of the individual getting in this way a strong personal meaning for the consumer. The consumers interviewed in his study often explained stories about their luxury purchases which are often considered as rewards for an achieved goal or as milestones they wanted to achieve.

## PERCEPTION OF RARITY

The fourth dimension identified in the work of the above-mentioned authors relates to the perception of rarity.

In their book Kapferer & Bastien, (2012) consider the limited accessibility to luxury products and experiences as a prerequisite of luxury brands. They see the inaccessibility as a strategy to create desirability among those who do not own the product and a feeling of uniqueness among those who own it. Similarly, also Dubois et al., (2011) highlights the importance of creating a feeling of uniqueness. While in Kapferer & Bastien (2012) case this feeling is achieved by limiting the access to luxury through high prices and selected distribution strategies, Dubois et al., (2011) points out also the role of quality. Given the quality of luxury products, achieved with special components, particular skills and processes of artisanship and craftmanship, luxury products cannot be mass-produced. As such, they are available in limited quantities and therefore to a limited number of people that can afford them. These two points of view on limited luxury, can be explained by the fact that Kapferer & Bastien, (2012) analysed it from a brand perspective, thus how can a brand create the perception of rarity, while Dubois et al., (2011) analyses it from a consumer perspective, thus their justification of the perceived rarity.

Ko et al. (2019) did not touch base directly on the concept of rarity, however they do see a prestigious image as a feature of luxury brands, addressed in the following section, which according to both Kapferer & Bastien, (2012) and Dubois et al., (2011) is strongly interlinked and influenced by the perception of rarity and uniqueness.

## PRESTIGIUS IMAGE

According to Kapferer & Bastien (2012) a prestigious and exclusive brand image is what differentiate luxury brands from other expensive and premium brands. Ko et al. (2019) argue that this image is „built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality" (p 406). This can be seen as a very managerial perspective focused on the brand and its storytelling. Dubois et al. (2011) in this context instead points out also the importance of the consumer perspective. People tend to associate product qualities to its users as well as vice versa. Thus, the authors concluded that the brand image is not influenced only by the characteristics of its offering and managerial decisions, but also by the perceived image of its users. Luxury products and services are generally used by higher classes, perceived as successful, powerful and elegant. The perceived image of these individual is reflected in the goods they use (Dubois et al. 2011). The luxury brand image is therefore co-created by the managerial decisions as well as by the consumers perceptions and associations to it.

## LUXURY CONSUMPTION THEORIES

In order to understand why these specific dimensions are so relevant when we talk about luxury, a deeper understanding of the luxury consumption behaviours and motives is needed. In this context four authors' work will be analysed: Kapferer, (1998) work will be presented with the purpose to understand the traditional point of view on luxury consumption motives. Ko et al., (2019) would be addressed here again as it presents an exhaustive overview of the available literature on luxury consumption theories. And to conclude two studies conducted by Hemetsberger et al. (2012) and von Wallpach et al., (2020) will be analysed and compared to the previous works as they consider a different point of view on luxury consumption motives focused on an experiential perspective. The analysis of both perspectives, the traditional product-focused and the more recent one focus on the experiential aspect of luxury, will provide a more complete overview on the luxury consumption practices.

In his empirical study "Why are we seduced by luxury brands?" Kapferer (1998) explores the motives that push consumers towards luxury brands. Among the most common motives the respondents of

his study indicated the beauty of the product and its excellence. Other drivers ware also magic, conceptualized as a feeling of pleasure, as well as creativity, sensuality, uniqueness, heritage and tradition, timelessness, and reputation. Exclusivity was not among the most common motives, however Kapferer (1998) argues that this might be due to the rationalization during the answering process. Most of these motives are strongly linked to the properties of the luxury product, however many of those, like uniqueness, timelessness, sensuality and specifically magic indicate the importance of the emotional aspect of luxury consumption and the experience around it.

The theories explored by Ko et al., (2019) in their luxury consumption literature review were also in line with Kapferer's (1998) findings. A complete overview of the studies analysed by Ko et al. (2019) is available in Appendix 1. One of the main findings of their analysis however, not directly addressed by Kapferer (1998) was that luxury brands help consumers to express who they are or who they want to be.

Considered from a social perspective, this finding is aligned with the conspicuous consumption theory and the social comparison theory (in Ko et al., 2019). The first argues that luxury contributes to signal wealth to others, who then infer status and power. Here the high price characterizing luxury items helps to indicate that the owner of such products is financially wealthy as he/she can afford such products. The second theory instead states that the consumption of luxury is a result of a conformity with the opinions and behaviours of the group the individual belongs to or aspires to and is therefore used to signal appurtenance to a group. In this context the bandwagon behaviour was also addressed, according to which individuals' demand for a product or brand increases with the increase of popularity of this item among other individuals.

From a personal perspective, this conclusion is aligned with the consumer culture theory as well as the theory of uniqueness (in Ko et al., 2019). The former argues that luxury products are used to develop self-image, to help consumers express who they are or get closer to who they want to be. The prestigious image of luxury is especially relevant in this case. The later instead argues that luxury items are often used to differentiate its owner from others. In this context the snobbish behaviour was also addressed according to which certain individuals tend to lose interest in a certain product or brand when it becomes too popular. In this context, the high prices, the perception of rarity, the knowledge needed to understand the quality of these products all contribute to increase the perceived distance between the luxury and non-luxury consumers.

In conclusion the self-concept theory found that how and with what intention are luxury brands used depends on the individual personal characteristics and values like the individual's self-concept, need for uniqueness, value consciousness, susceptibility to normative influence, self-confidence and pride (in Ko et al., 2019). For examples it was found that individuals with an independent self-concept tend to consume luxury for hedonic and self-expressive motives like pleasure or reward, while individuals characterized by an interdependent self-concept turn to luxury for socially related motives like appurtenance or status. These individuals are usually also keener to engage in bandwagon behaviours. The perception of the brand would also play a relevant role in the luxury consumer decision making, as it was found that an alignment between the perceived brand values and the individual's value increases the interest of the individual towards the brand (Ko et al., 2019).

From the traditional point of view luxury derives its meaning primarily from the product, its characteristics (quality, price, aesthetics) and its social context (exclusivity and prestige). Recent studies however introduced a more experiential perspective on luxury. From this point of view, it's primarily the luxury experience, rather than the object, that generates value for its consumers.

In their study, Hemetsberger et al., (2012) analysed the value luxury adds to consumers selves. What they found was, that is the luxury experience, or "the moment of luxury" (p 491) that is the most relevant for the consumers. They concluded that these moments can arise through the experience of having, doing, being or becoming. While the having experience is directly related to the possession of a product, the authors point out that the luxurious aspect of this experience is the moment itself, its meaning, symbolic value and relation to one's self, rather than the object. Luxury from these authors point of view is not a product or a state, but rather a "transient moment" (p 488) usually preceded by moments of suspense before a moment of liberation. Luxury is therefore abstract and not associated with a physical object, despite this might be in some cases part of the experience as well. However similarly to the traditional point of view, luxury for these authors is rare, an extraordinary moment in an ordinary life.

The two perspective are not mutually exclusive, but rather the traditional point of view is considered by the more experience focused researchers as part of the luxury experience, where is not the product and its properties that creates value for the luxury consumer, but rather the moments around them and the meaning they have for the individual.

Similarly, also von Wallpach et al. (2020) studied the moments of luxury interviewing young Millennials. They concluded that although different moments of luxury exist, there are some qualities shared by all these experiences. They are considered to be exciting, caring, perfect (beautiful and spotless), happy (meaningful and pleasurable), freeing from (liberating from obstacles) as well as freeing to (new opportunities). And lastly, as shared by all the previously addressed works, they are scares (precious and rare). These qualities distinguish a luxury experience from a mere pleasant experience.

It can be therefore concluded that luxury is a complex concept and different points of view ranging from more product focused to more experiential perspectives, still exists. Considering the before mentioned behavioural changes in today consumers, striving for experiences rather than possessions, the later might be of even more relevance. However, if it's the experience the real essence of luxury, the brand experience a luxury brand provides to its consumers is crucial. This can be however beyond the control of the brand in many cases, as for example in the luxury S-H market, where the brand is not directly involved in the experience consumers live. Are therefore S-H luxury consumption and the luxury brands offered in this market able to create luxury experiences for their consumers? How does the S-H luxury consumption influence the brand experience of its consumers?

In order to answer these questions a deeper understanding of the S-H luxury market and its consumption dynamics is needed and provided in the following sections.

# SECOND-HAND LUXURY

## SECOND-HAND LUXURY MARKET

The second-hand (S-H) market refers to the marketplace for previously owned and used goods (Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016). Here the sellers hand-over their "preloved" goods at a discounted price to S-H stores or they sell them directly to S-H buyers through apposite platforms and marketplaces (Beauloye, 2019).

While this type of market is not new, it is currently experiencing unprecedent growth. The S-H luxury industry reached 22 billion € in sales in 2018 and is expected to grow by 12% in 2021 (BCG x Altagamma, 2019), expected in this way to grow 4 times faster than the primary luxury market (Beauloye, 2019). The best performing product categories are handbags, representing 40% of purchases in 2018, followed by clothing (16%) and small leather goods (13%) (BCG & Altagamma, 2019). In geographical terms, the S-H luxury market mirrors the first-hand (from now on F-H) one, with US, Europe and China representing the main markets. In 2018, the BCG x Altagamma (2019) report showed that 60% of luxury consumers is interested in S-H items and among them 34% showed interest in selling the products, while 26% in buying them. While it would be interesting to understand also the brand experience of S-H sellers, the current study will focus only on S-H buyers. In any case, these numbers prove the relevance of the S-H opportunities among today's luxury consumers.

Different drivers were associated to the growth and popularity of the S-H market, among them the most prominent were the changes in consumers behaviours and digitalization (Beauloye, 2019).

### DIGITALIZATION

The S-H luxury market was traditionally characterized by "small local boutiques and person-to-person transactions with limited consumer reach" (Beauloye, 2019, p 1). The rise and expansion of internet, characterized by unlimited access to the web and fast connectivity among individuals, gives today the opportunity to various sellers and buyers to meet in this virtual world without being limited by the geographical distance. In 2018, 80% of the S-H luxury market transactions occurred

online (BCG & Altagamma, 2019). The S-H market is not a new market, but it reached unprecedent scale thanks to the digitalization (Beauloye, 2019), which therefore worked as a catalysator for the S-H market growth. This situation contributed to the rise of various digital platforms and marketplaces, like Vestiarie Collective, Vinted and Insta Lux (BCG & Altagamma, 2019). These businesses are intermediate digital platforms, that give the opportunity to fashion luxury products owners to sell their "preloved" goods to consumers interested in them. Thus, these platforms facilitate the communication and transaction between the seller and the buyer. Often, they also offer additional services to guarantee the smoothness of the transaction as authentication of the product, payment or delivery (Abbes et al., 2020).

# SECOND-HAND LUXURY CONSUMPTION

Despite digitalization had a crucial role for such a rapid expansion of the S-H luxury market, a change in consumers behaviours and values is assumed to be the main driver. Such change was necessary for the S-H practice to lose the negative connotation characterizing it in the past years and become a largely accepted and popular shopping practice. In 2018 more than 45% of luxury consumers were already involved in the S-H market. Among them Gen Z and Millennials were the most active, reaching 54% and 48% participation respectively (BCG & Altagamma, 2019).

However, despite its growing popularity the practice of S-H luxury consumption received little attention in the research field so far. Most of the studies focused their attention on the meaning of S-H consumption (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015), motivational factors that drive S-H consumers (Amatulli et al., 2018; Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019) and the decision criteria they put in place while buying S-H luxury products (Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016; Turunen & Pöyry, 2019).

In their study on pre-loved luxury, Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015), through interviews with Finish female S-H luxury consumers, found 5 dimensions of the meaning S-H consumptions has for its consumers:

## REAL DEAL

The real deal dimension is related to the attractiveness of the price. Luxury products are generally characterized by high prices and limited or no discounts. The S-H market gives the opportunity to access these items at lower prices, giving access to luxury also to lower income consumers. A S-H Chanel bag, for example, can be purchased on a reselling platform for approximately 20.000 dkk (Vestiarie Collective, n.d.), while a price for a similar bag on the Chanel official website is approximately 50.000 dkk (Chanel, n.d.). This however could represent a risk for the luxury brand itself, as limited accessibility is one of the main features characterizing luxury brands, important especially as an indicator of social status and belonging to a restricted elite.

The real deal concept is further explained by the concept of timelessness and quality associated with luxury products. The popularity of these products is not affected by short-term fashion trends, but they rather remain relevant over time. In addition, due to their excellent quality these products are assumed to have a long-life cycle and therefore their value depreciation is slower over time. These makes the finding of a Chanel bag for a 50% lower price a "real deal" for the consumer, who can use the product for a long time or resale it at a relatively high price after the usage (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). This might be a positive aspect for luxury brands as it proves the high quality of the products, one of the main characteristics of a luxury brand.

## RISK INVESTEMENT

The second dimension, risk investment, on the other hand relates to the risk associated with the S-H shopping. As S-H products are not sold directly by the brand, the buyer has limited guarantee that the product she/he will receive is in good condition and is not a counterfeit. This is a big risk especially for consumers that use luxury products to signal their appurtenance to a high social class and to distinguish themselves from lower classes. Owning a counterfeit, would expose such consumers to a big social risk. On the other hand, for consumers that opt for S-H luxury due to their limited financial capability, such prices could still be a relevant investment augmenting the fear of losing money (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). The issue related to counterfeits is additionally a big risk also for the brands, as a large availability of fake products around the market might dilute the value of the brand.

## UNIQUE FIND

The unique find represents the third dimension. Through the S-H luxury market, consumers are able to access rare and unique products that are not available anymore in F-H stores (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). This finding is in line with the theory of uniqueness characterizing luxury consumption, according to which consumers uses luxury products to differentiate themselves from others as well as signal their knowledge about luxury among their reference group (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977 in Ko et al., 2019). It is also aligned with the finding that newer generations are distancing themselves from mass consumption practices and they look for more unique items to express their identity (Statista, 2019a). By giving access to luxury products that are not available in the stores anymore but also to products that have a unique story due to their past owners, the S-H market is considered to be also a result of this behavioural change. In fact, sold out, limited edition and vintage items were found to be the most searched items on S-H platforms (BCG & Altagamma, 2019). Being able to find a luxury product that creates for the owner a strong feeling of uniqueness, might have a positive connotation for the brand, as this emotional involvement with the product might contribute to a stronger relationship with the luxury brand.

Many brands are currently trying to create this sense of rarity and uniqueness through special or limited editions, which are often resold on S-H platforms for a higher price than the original. Besides the profits of the resell are not directly gained by the luxury brand, the potential indirect profits through the perceived exclusivity and popularity of the brand cannot be neglected. It is in fact brand managers task to find the right balance between the sales turnover and brand exclusivity, where brand awareness of luxury brands should not exceed brand penetration (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

## SUSTAINABLE CHOICE

The last meaning dimension found by Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015) is the sustainable choice. Today's consumers were found to have a higher sense of social responsibility and attention to sustainable practices, as a result of the current environmental crisis (Beauloye, 2019). A relevant percentage of S-H luxury consumers (17%) in fact turns to S-H consumption due to its positive environmental impact (BCG & Altagamma, 2019). This practice extends the life of the luxury item and in this way decreases the number of items to be disposed (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). Furthermore, it is seen as a more responsible consumption practice, as it counter fights the negative impact of mass consumption and fast fashion. It is however part of a large debate

whether environmental concerns are a real motivator for S-H luxury or rather just emerge as a rational justification.

Amatulli et al. (2018) on the other hand, with their study centred on the Italian market, focused their attention on the motivational factors that incentivize S-H consumers. Their findings indicate a strong link with the motivations characterizing luxury consumption in general. In fact, they were able to identify functional motives like quality, product timelessness, psychological drivers like feeling of uniqueness, externalized social image ("impressing others", "attractiveness" and "expertise") as well as emotional connection, instrumental drivers like social acceptance and belonging and terminal motivators like self-expression. Furthermore, the S-H luxury products were found to be perceived as of superior quality, durable, stylish and unique. Differently from the motives for F-H luxury consumption, S-H consumer pointed out also affordability and sustainability as strong motivators and defined S-H products as relatively inexpensive, environmentally friendly, reminders of the past as well as hunted treasures.

Kessous & Valette-Florence (2019) went a step further. With their study, they explored the affective and cognitive motivations of S-H consumers and compared them with F-H consumers' motivators. Their results were aligned with Amatulli et al. (2018) findings, where the main drivers of S-H consumption were psychological and fulfilment needs of social climbing and status seeking, windfall, eco-friendly consumption and connection with the past. On the other hand, the main motivational factors for F-H luxury consumption were related to puissance, social rank and display of power, know-how and service quality as well as social recognition. The authors therefore concluded that, while S-H luxury consumption is driven by the need of belonging, improvement of self-esteem and social climbing, F-H consumption help its consumers to display their power, get social recognition as well as being recognized as experts.

In the second part of their studies instead, the authors focused their attention on the influence the different motivators and consumption behaviours have on brand attachment in the context of S-H as well as F-H luxury. What they found was, that brand attachment in the context of S-H, is driven by conspicuous consumption, for both bandwagon and snob behaviours, status seeking and nostalgic connections. While for F-H luxury consumption similar result were found, the main difference between the two was related to conspicuous consumption behaviours. While for both, the consumer

susceptibility to normative influence (CSNI) and the bandwagon behaviours were the most important one for brand attachment, in the case on S-H luxury the influence was stronger, with the aspirational goals of these consumers leading to a stronger brand attachment. On the other hand, snob behaviours were found to have no influence on brand attachment for F-H luxury consumers, as these consumers are looking for more exclusive, more niche and less known brands and they are not relentless to change them if they get too popular. Interestingly, however, in the case of S-H luxury, snob behaviours were found to have a positive influence on brand attachment. S-H consumers see their luxury purchases as treasures, great findings that make them unique, and are therefore more "thankful" to the brand.

The purchasing decision criteria of S-H consumers instead, were addressed by Sihvonen & Turunen (2016), who focused their study on the flea markets available on Facebook. They found 6 factors influencing the buying decisions of these customers, namely perceived quality, price, design, origin and availability. The importance of price confirms the "real deal" dimension also found by Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015) and with it one of the main motivators being convenience. On the other hand, quality, brand availability or scarcity and design are aligned with the traditional point of view on luxury consumers buying motivations, as high quality, exclusivity and aesthetics. In addition is has to be noted that time appeared to be an important factor while evaluating the value of a product on the online flea market, decreasing the perceived value of those products that were available for longer periods, indicating that the demand for the product was lower (Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016).

Turunen & Pöyry (2019) additionally found a seventh factor playing an important role for S-H shoppers, the resale value. According to their study S-H consumers' purchase behaviour is influenced also by the extent of probability and the value for which the product can be resold after the use. This dimension indicates a consumer seeking for high price-quality value as well as an approach to shopping led by an investment mindset.

While all these studies focus on the consumption behaviours of S-H consumers, almost none of them addresses the influence of this type of shopping on the luxury brands. Only two studies were found about the relationship between the S-H luxury consumers and the luxury brands. Kessous & Valette-Florence (2019), as already mentioned, addressed this research topic from the brand attachment point of view. On the other hand, Abbes et al., (2020) approached this topic from a brand loyalty perspective. By focusing on the shopping behaviours of S-H consumers on different redistributive

platforms, they found that loyalty intentions towards a redistributive platform positively impact consumer brand loyalty intentions.

The relation between luxury brands and the S-H luxury consumers is therefore largely unexplored. Despite strong communalities have been found between F-H and S-H luxury consumers in terms of motivators and decision criteria, also relevant points of difference were highlighted:

• The price dimension is considered one of the main differences. In relation to this dimension S-H luxury products are perceived as accessible, convenient, real deals (Amatulli et al., 2018; Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015; Sihvonen & Turunen, 2016). On the other side F-H luxury products are characterized by high prices and limited accessibility (Dubois et al., 2011; Kapferer, 1998; Ko et al., 2019). This increase in accessibility in the S-H context diminishes the entry barriers to the luxury world. Consequently, it can also undermine the perceived exclusivity of the brand image. As mentioned, brand image is also influenced by the perceived image of its users. Increasing the number of customers that can access luxury items can indeed change the perceived image of a typical user, posing the risk to create a snobbish effect, when a brand loses its luxuriousness as it gets too popular or loses its power to distinguish its users from lower status consumers. Furthermore, the availability of a similar product for a lower price might create doubts in some consumers, who might not see the added value of a new product compared to a S-H one.

• Loss of control is one of the main risks reported by luxury brands in relation to the S-H market (Beauloye, 2019). The emotional involvement and the hedonic pleasure proper of F-H luxury are often strongly connected with the overall luxury experience: search of the product, shopping, consumption. Specifically, the shopping experience is generally strictly monitored by luxury brands in order to guarantee excellence in the service and experience. In the context of S-H luxury however luxury brands are not able to maintain this control. This might represent a risk for the brand if the experience on the S-H market is not aligned with the overall brand experience as it influences the perceptions consumers have about the brand (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

• The risk associated with S-H luxury shopping is another main difference. Differently from F-H products, that can be bought directly from the brand or trusted retailers, S-H shopping does not guarantee the same certainty about product authenticity and its conditions (Turunen & Leipämaa-

Leskinen, 2015). A large availability of counterfeit products or even products in bad conditions is a big risk also for brands, which fear that the brand might be alienated or influenced by these bad experiences. The relevance of this issue is supported by the Chanel lawsuit against the reselling platforms What Comes Around Goes Around (WCAGA) (Beauloye, 2019) and TheRealReal. The reselling e-commerces were accused of actively selling counterfeit goods and in this way damaging the French brand. In this context however, many S-H luxury e-commerces, like Vestiarie Collective, begin to offer authentication checks for their clients (Beauloye, 2019).

• The concept of time and ownership was also found to differ between F-H and S-H luxury. Today's consumers are used to large amounts of variety and constant changes. Driven by the fast rate of new styles showcased on social media, they are looking for a constant renovation of their wardrobes. Their interest is moving away from long term ownership toward a more experiential approach of temporarily accessing luxury (Beauloye, 2019). In this light, S-H luxury is the reflection of this behaviour. In the first place it allows its participants to access luxury in an easier way, at a lower cost, and therefore more frequently. Furthermore, it also allows them to sell their pre-loved items to finance new purchases, shortening the period an individual owns a luxury product and increasing the variety of luxury items one can experience. In other words, the purchase of a luxury items is in this context not seen as a lifelong ownership, but rather as a temporary state. Consequently, luxury consumers involved in the S-H market consider also the resale value of the product. Products quality and its timelessness are two of the main properties of luxury products that allows S-H luxury sellers to pass their preloved products to the next owner for a relatively convenient price, as well as two of the main motivators for S-H buyers to buy luxury products. Therefor if the qualitative value of luxury products is not perceived by S-H consumers this might negatively influence also its perception by F-H consumers.

• It is here worth mentioning also the concept of uniqueness. Differently from F-H luxury, S-H luxury perceived uniqueness can be associated also to the pre-owned item story (reminder of the past) as well as its limited availability in the marketplace. Often the products available on the S-H platforms might not be produced by the brand anymore, creating a perception of rarity around them.

• The last main difference between F-H and S-H luxury is its environmental impact. Despite it is not yet clear whether consumer shop with the environmental value in mind, this dimension is often mentioned in the studies related to S-H luxury. As an environmentally friendly consumption

behaviour, S-H might be perceived by some consumers as a better choice. It could also indicate that brands that support this type of consumptions or associate their image to it might benefit from positive brand associations in terms of corporate social responsibility.

# BRAND EXPERIENCE

In this section the concept of brand experience will be addressed. Brakus et al. (2009) brand experience theory will be presented and used as the main theoretical framework in the following sections. Findings in the context of luxury experience and digital luxury experience will also be discussed.

Brakus et al. (2009) were one of the first researchers to conceptualize the concept of brand experience. According to them, brand experience is defined as "sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli" (p 52). By analysing the construct from different fields' perspective, like phycology, consumer behaviour and management, the authors define brand experience as subjective internal consumer responses that can develop on four dimensions: sensorial, affective, intellectual and behavioural.

The sensorial dimension relates to six human senses, that can be evoked by different brand related stimuli. For example, by entering a luxury store, consumers can see the product and the design of the store, they can touch the product, smell the aroma in the room or listen to the sounds playing. All these stimuli and the sensorial reactions connected to them influence the consumer perception of the experience.

Experiences can, on an affective level, elicit emotions. The experience of ordering online and waiting for the delivery can create anticipation and excitement. The experience of wearing a product in which the individual feels good and comfortable can generate happiness. But also, an experience with bad quality products can generate sadness and anger.

On an intellectual level, experiences can generate knowledge. The experience of visiting a brand website can enrich the visitor with new knowledge about the brand, its story and its products. As the first experience with a product can contribute to the consumers knowledge about the quality and properties of the item.

And finally, experiences can involve behavioural aspects. A positive experience with the brand on social media can incentivize the consumer to engage and interact with the brand (commenting, liking, sharing, following) or even visit the store.

Furthermore, in their study the authors differentiate among 3 different type of experiences: product, shopping and consumption. These experiences take place at different points of the costumer journey.

Product related experiences usually take place in the initial steps of the journey, when the consumer is searching and evaluating the product. Different stimuli can influence these experiences: ease to find the product, reviews, price, product features, marketing communications and brand image, just to name a few.

The shopping experience on the other hand, take place during the action of purchase. This could take place in physical stores as well as online, in brand own stores or by external retailers or resellers.

The third experience category instead relates to the post purchase experiences. These could be influenced by the post purchase customer service and CRM but also just by the consumption experience itself, when consumers expectations meet reality.

From these examples and categories, it can be noted that while all of them are influenced by brand related stimuli, not all the stimuli can be directly controlled by the brand itself. Often a third party can be involved, like a reseller (multi-brand stores or S-H stores) or another consumer (reviews). In these cases, the brand can only indirectly influence the experience. Furthermore, considering the subjective nature of experiences (involvement of senses and emotions) it is the consumer individual perception and reaction that will define the experience. This conclusion leads back to the initial idea that brands are socially constructed by different stakeholders, where the consumers have the final word.

The relevance of the brand experience, as highlighted by Brakus et al. (2009), lays in its link with other relevant brand constructs. Brand experiences can be either positive or negative. They can vary in intensity and also in terms of duration of their effects. Long-lasting experiences, that are stored in the consumer memory influence satisfaction and loyalty. A positive experience pleases the consumer and in turn makes him/her want to repeat it. Additionally, brand experience was also found to be an antecedent of brand personality. The brand experiences consumers go thought help them develop the image and personality of the brand in their minds. The perceived personality of the brand in turn also influences consumers behaviour toward the brand, its satisfaction and loyalty. Drawing on the before mentioned need for brand consistency, it is therefore concluded that in order to build a strong brand image in consumers' minds all brand related stimuli have to be aligned between each other for the

consumer to perceive the brand image in a consistent way across all the touchpoints and through different brand related experiences. In this way the S-H luxury shopping, as one of the experiences related to luxury brands, can influence the overall brand experience and therefore its image and perceived personality (Brakus et al., 2009).

# LUXURY EXPERIENCE

Considering the importance of creating a prestigious image as well as elicit a deep personal and emotional connection with its consumers, the creation of a positive and aligned brand experience if crucial for luxury brands.

Different authors addressed the concept of luxury experience. However, to the authors knowledge none of them used the brand experience construct developed by Brakus et. al (2009) in the context of luxury. This adds an additional contribution to the paper, which aims to add knowledge to the topic of brand experience as well.

In the context of luxury experience some authors focused their attention on experiential luxury, like hotel experiences, wine tasting or salsa classes… (von Wallpach et al., 2020) while others contributed to the concept of unconventional luxury, where the "true luxury" is experienced in small everyday luxuries (Banister et al., 2020, Thomsena et al., 2020). Few authors however focused their attention on the luxury experience in a more conventional context (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Batat, 2019a; Batat, 2019b;)

According to Kapferer & Bastien (2012) "luxury is luxury experience" (p 141). As mentioned in the previous sections the value of a luxury product extends beyond its functional benefits, including also its emotional and social benefits the consumer can experience during the consumption. As such, the characteristics of the luxury experience do not differ from the main dimensions characterizing luxury. They give a sense of rarity as they are not experienced in the ordinary. They are related to exclusivity as they give the perception to be accessible to a limited number of people. They are also characterized by excellence and quality, where every small detail counts. And furthermore, they are strongly connected to the experiential demotions of hedonism and aestheticism.

Batat (2019b) wrote different books about luxury experience. According to the author's point of view "luxury is a specific type of experience that is desirable, out of the ordinary and not a necessity" (p 6). The author argues that luxury experiences deliver value on four levels. In line with Brakus et al., (2009) model, the author indicates sensorial, emotional and cognitive aspects of the luxury experience. While she does not mention the behavioural dimension, she points out the relational value of luxury experiences, when the consumer feels the connection with the brand and creates an intimate relation with it. This value can be created for example during the participation in brand related activities like visits to the store, events or special campaigns when the consumers is invited to be part of the brand world.

Furthermore, the author points out four elements that can have an impact on luxury experience: consumer's personal characteristics (personality, previous experience, lifestyle, life cycle, and motivations), social and economic exchanges with other social agents, experiential elements (like sale support, user experience…) and the physical environment (Batat, 2019b).

These experiences can take place at different stages of the consumer journey and all together, as a comprehensive experience influence consumers' evaluation of the brand.

Emotions during experiences have a strong impact on consumers' decision-making and satisfaction (Batat, 2019b). It can be therefore assumed that the emotional aspect of S-H luxury experience, as part of the consumers overall experience with a specific brand, can influence the evaluation of this specific luxury brand from a consumer point of view. This finding confirms the relevance of this study and the importance of increasing the understanding of consumers' experience in the S-H luxury context and its influence on brand evaluation.

# DIGITAL LUXURY EXPERIENCE

Both authors, Batat (2019a) and Kapferer & Bastien (2012), in their work address also the topic of digital luxury experience.

Three main aspects of the digitalization represent a challenge for the luxury experience (Batat, 2019a).

The first relates to the lack of the physical contact. The sensorial dimensions are an important aspect of brand experiences as they contribute to increase the intensity of the experience (Brakus et al., 2009). In the digital setting however two of the primary senses are deprived: touch and smell. In the luxury context, the experience of touching the product contributes to the perception of quality and craftmanship this item incorporates. Similarly, a nice smell in the store can contribute to a pleasurable experience and activation of unconscious human reactions. It is additionally important to mention also the relational factor. While in a physical store, luxury consumers are served by pleasant sales assistants and they can be seen by others in this elite shopping activity, the online experiences cannot offer this social element. The luxury experience in the digital world, therefore, loses part of its immersive multisensoriality and social meaning.

The second aspect addressed by Batat (2019a) relates to the fast and dynamic nature of the digital world, which is in contradiction with the timelessness and heritage characterizing luxury brands. In this context Kapferer & Bastien (2012) also added that excellence and quality often require time, which might be limited in the digital world.

As the third characteristic of digitalization, the author mentions democratization (Batat, 2019a). The rise of the internet economy increased the accessibility to the different products, services and experiences. In contrast with this democratic nature of internet, luxury builds on the perception of rarity and exclusivity, through limited accessibility. The rise of the S-H market driven by the digitalization of the marketplace, therefore represents a potential issue for brands that built their image on concepts like exclusivity and scarcity.

Kapferer & Bastien, (2012) point out the importance for luxury brands to recreate the same experience for their consumers on all the different touchpoints. In other words, luxury consumers should have the same experience and feelings no matter which way of shopping they choose. In order to maintain

their perception of excellence and prestige it is therefore better for a luxury brand "to not have a web site, rather than having an average one" (p 266). In line with the challenges identified by Batat (2019a) the authors argue that e-commerce reduces the exclusivity of the brand, decreases the efforts needed to access a luxury brand and therefore the desire. It also eliminates the personal experience and creation of a relationship that can be achieved in the store. The authors take a firm position that the true luxury experience only takes place in the physical world, and therefore argue that luxury brands should keep their core offering offline. They however agree, that online sales would have a positive impact if the objective is to attract new consumers that will generally not enter the store (due to location, accessibility, pressure). They therefore suggest that luxury brands should find a balance between their online and offline presence in order to create a unique and aligned holistic experience for their consumers on all the touchpoints, but they should however exploit the instore experience as their differentiation point and main point of sale.

In is however important to note that not all the touchpoints between the brand and its consumers can be controlled by the brand itself. It can be sometimes beyond the capabilities of the brand to recreate the same brand experience in all the settings. This is one of the main challenges, luxury brands face in relation to S-H luxury. As more and more luxury consumers turn to the S-H market when they shop luxury products, the experience they go through might have a significant influence on the brand.

# RESEARCH QUESTION

Luxury is a complex and multidimensional construct. Its value goes beyond its functional benefits, extending also on an emotional, social and intellectual level. This value is not derived only from the product itself but from the whole experience the luxury consumer goes through when in touch with luxury brands. Few dimensions are considered to be crucial in defining a luxury brand as such: high price, perceived high quality, perceived rarity and inaccessibility, prestigious image and personal and emotional connection. These characteristics must be perceived by the consumers for them to define a brand as luxury (Dubois et al., 2011; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Ko et al., 2016).

The experience these consumers go through is crucial for defining the brand personality in consumers mind, which in turn influences satisfaction and loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). In order to clearly define their identity as luxury brands, brands need to assure an aligned experience crossover all the touchpoints where the consumer meets the brand. On all these points the sensorial, emotional, behavioural, cognitive and social reactions to the brand stimuli should be consistent (Beverland et al., 2015).

The growing popularity of the S-H luxury market increases the influence this touchpoint has on the overall luxury brand experience, therefore on the luxury brand itself. The issue of this channel however is its limited control from the luxury brand. In this market luxury products are sold by third parties. Thus, these shopping experiences are out of control of the brand and rather influenced by the reselling platforms and private resellers (Beauloye, 2019). Additionally, different aspects of the S-H market, as lower prices or higher accessibility, might negatively influence the experience the consumers have with the brand and its perception. Understanding how S-H consumers experience luxury brands is, therefore, an important step for the brand to take strategic decisions about it. To the authors knowledge none of the previous studies about luxury analysed the experience luxury consumers have in the S-H market. It is therefore the purpose of this paper to study the luxury brand experience in the S-H market and answer the following research question:

**How do second-hand luxury experiences influence the luxury brand experience?**

In order to find an answer to this question primary data will be collected and analysed drawing on the before describe framework of brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009). Considering the importance of

the social benefits characterising luxury brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), a fifth component would be added to the framework, based on the findings from Bustamante & Rubio, (2017). This component will focus on the social or relational experiences that consumers live in the context of S-H luxury. The final framework on which the research is base is presented in figure 1.

FIGURE 1:
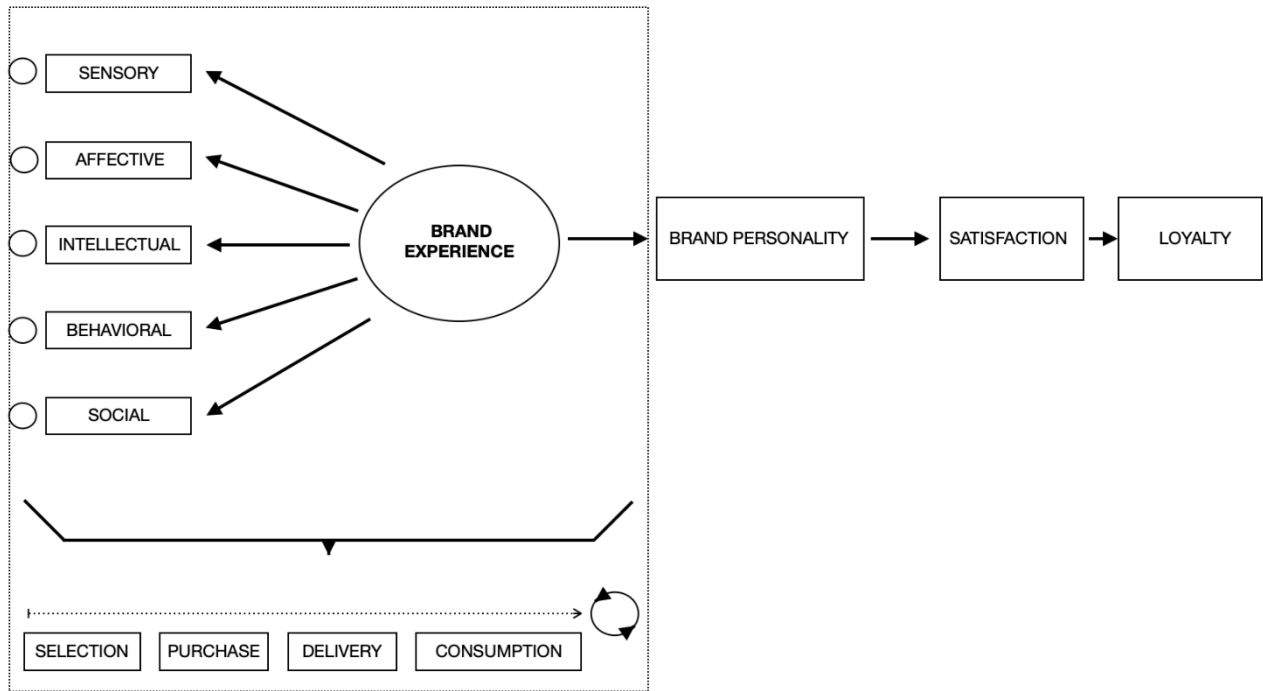


To the authors knowledge none of the previous studies used Brakus et al., (2009) framework in the context of luxury, which will add additional value to the study, especially considering the relevance of brand experience in the luxury industry.

The application of the framework, the methodology used, the data collection as well as data analysis methods will be presented to guide the reader through the different phases of the research process the author went through.

# METHODOLOGY

As the starting point of the study, the concept of luxury, was found to be a highly subjective construct, dependent on the individual and its context. In fact, what is perceived as luxury for someone, could be seen just as ordinary by someone else (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). This idea is in line with the ontological view of interpretivism, and more specifically subjectivism, according to which the perceptions and actions of social actors create the social phenomena itself (Saunders et al., 2016). From the social constructivist point of view these social phenomena are not static constructs, but rather they change and evolve over time as the actors and the context change. Similarly, the concept of luxury evolved over time with the transformation of the social conditions and the emergence of new generations (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012).

While ontology deals with the nature of reality, epistemology relates to the study of knowledge and its generation. According to the interpretivist point of view, the knowledge is obtained through insights from the subjective meanings of social actors, representing in this way an aligned philosophy with the subjectivist ontological perspective. As such, the interpretivist aim is to understand the reality from the individual's perspective, as the insights collected are perceived as the synergy of specific situations and actors placed in a specific time frame (Saunders et al., 2016). The researcher standpoint is therefor of an empathic nature, aimed to understand and discover the individual point of view of each of the actors involved. With this in mind, the aim of the author is to understand the world of the S-H luxury consumption as a construct dependent on the individual actors involved with it, in this case S-H luxury consumers and the context they are influenced by and they in turn influence, a world characterized by internet expansion, social media as well as environmental issues and new social behaviours.

Following the Saunders et al. (2016) research onion framework, the next step to be addressed in order to delineate a solid research design is to clarify the research approach taken. The different research approaches, which can be inductive, deductive or abductive, define the relationship between knowledge and theory characterising the research. According to a deductive approach, existing knowledge is used as a starting point to build hypothesis which are consequently tested empirically. On the other hand, an inductive approach generates new knowledge through research. This paper will however take an abductive approach, according to which both inductive and deductive approaches

will be used. In the first steps, a more deductive approach is taken. A literature review is conducted based on secondary data in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the studied area. This allowed the author to detect gaps not addressed in the current research field as well as strengthen her knowledge of the phenomenon researched. In the following parts however, an inductive approach is introduced, with the purpose to generate the missing knowledge and answer the research question. This approach is visible in the research strategy, addressed later in the paper, focused on semi-structured interviews, as qualitative research methods are generally associated with the inductive approach.

# RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy specifically refers to the plan on how the researcher intends to answer the research question. This plan includes the objectives set, the sources to be used, and the data collection and data analysis methods to be implemented.

As a starting point, the research question sets the objective of the research, understand how second-hand luxury experiences influence the luxury brand experience. As an open question aimed at discovering the influence of S-H luxury consumption on luxury brands, this objective indicates an explorative purpose. The aim of the research is in fact increase and deepen the understanding of the S-H luxury phenomenon, which influence and dynamics are still unclear. In conclusion, due to the lack of clarity and understanding about the relations between S-H luxury consumption and luxury brands, taking in to account the current social, economic and environmental changes, the purpose of the study is to explore the relation between these two constructs in order to gain new and meaningful insights on how luxury brands are experienced by S-H luxury consumers.

In order to maintain alignment between the research philosophy, the research approach and the purpose of the study, the research is built on a qualitative study. Qualitative studies are often associated with interpretive philosophy, built on subjectivism and social constructivism, as "qualitative research describes life from the point of view of the people who participate" (Flick et al., 2004, p 3). It helps the researchers collect precise descriptions of the world and get a better understanding of a specific cultural phenomena by recognizing structures and patterns in that particular setting. The advantage of the qualitative research method is its openness, compared to the quantitative method that focuses on few standardized answers. This openness contributes to the

discovery of the unknown. While the quantitative method usually requires a fixed pre-existing idea on which the research is built, the qualitative method has the potential to become this fixed idea, the starting point on which to develop a theoretical base (Saunders et al., 2016). Aligned with the purpose of the study and its research question, qualitative studies do not focus on explaining a specific relationship of cause-and-effect, but rather take a more open perspective focusing on understanding a set of complex relationships that characterize a phenomenon. They concentrate on understanding the specific point of view of each participant and are therefore strongly contextual. Considering the importance of the context in the underlying study, a qualitative research seamed the most suitable one (Saunders et al., 2016).

Furthermore, taking in to account the aim of the study, being researching the emerging phenomenon of S-H luxury shopping, a phenomenological approach will be utilized. The advantage of this approach is that it allows the researcher to explore the individual experiences of the participants related to the studied phenomenon and reveal meaningful insights on how these experiences relate to their individual lives (Bhar, 2019). The approach is in fact build around the discovery of deep personal meanings for individuals, assumed to be the drivers of their actions and interactions.

Considering the highly subjectivist nature of the research, the study is based on semi-structured interviews, that allows the participants to disclose and explain their personal experiences in relation to the studied phenomenon, the S-H luxury shopping. Avoiding a structured approach, leaving space for improvisation, allows the interviewer to adapt the questions to the specific case and in this way gain deeper and more relevant insights about the individual's experience (Bhar, 2019). However, taking in to account the limited experience of the author with the research field, an interview guide was developed in order to help the interviewer to maintain the focus on the purpose of the interviews and collect all the necessary data. The development of the guide started with a clear clarification of the purpose of the interview. To gain a clearer picture of the identified problem, the brand experience framework developed by Brakus et al., (2009) was used. In other words, the aim of the interviews was to collect insights about the sensorial, affective, intellectual, behavioural and social subjective internal responses consumers experience when they are involved with S-H luxury selection, shopping and consumption phase.

An overview of the data collection process is provided in the following chapter followed by the data analysis chapter.

# DATA COLLECTION

The data collection phase took place in the form of semi-structured interviews. The criteria used to select the participants as well as the interview process are described in the following sections.

## SAMPLE

The participants for the study were chosen on the basis of their experience with buying luxury brands on S-H platforms. They were recruited on the social media network Instagram. Due to the social nature of luxury consumption, Instagram was chosen as it is one of the main platforms where consumers showcase their fashion and lifestyles as well as seek for inspirations (Beauloye, 2019). The tagging feature of the platform was used to select the participants. Instagram users that tagged products purchased on S-H platforms as Vestiarie Collective, TheRealReal and Rebelle were contacted via direct messaging and invited to participate in the interview. Figure 2 shows some examples of the content that was used to select the participants (more content is shown in appendix 4).

FIGURE 2:
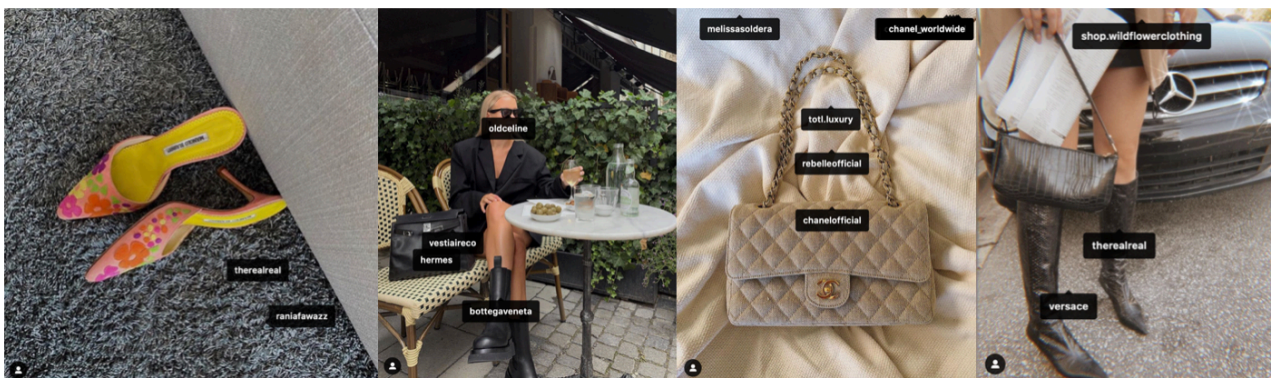


In the selection process the author focused on achieving heterogeneity in terms of backgrounds, professions, number of followers as well as income levels. Due to the perceived cultural differences with countries outside the Europe the research focused only on this area, inviting only consumers that represent different European countries. It was however considered important to not focus only on one

country as the studied S-H market lives mainly on online platforms accessible to consumers from different parts of the world.

# INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interviews followed a pre-created guide (appendix 3). After the introduction part with the welcoming and briefing about the interview process, the interview starts with questions related to luxury in general. The purpose of these questions is to understand the meaning luxury has for the participant, how they conceptualize it, and which are the main motives that drive them towards its consumptions. This part helps the researcher to understand how this conceptualization influences their responses. The purpose here is also to understand whether there are any differences in the way S-H consumer conceptualize luxury compared to the findings from previous authors.

Moving forward, the focus shifts on the concept of luxury experience. It is here important to understand and clarify what the interviewee considers and understand as luxury experience in order to proceed with the exploration of this concept in different settings. In the main part, the participants are asked to choose a brand and talk about the experience they had with the brand in general. Here, the researcher tries to pilot the conversation in order to discover the different sensorial, affective, intellectual, behavioural and social responses the participant had in relation to the brand.

If the topic of S-H luxury is not introduced by the respondent at this point, the interviewer directs the conversation towards it. Here the participants are asked about their S-H luxury consumption in order to understand their experience with it and how it influences the following reposes. After that, the interviewee is asked to focus on one brand to share the specific S-H brand experiences. Here again the interviewer focuses her attention on obtaining information about the different subjective responses enacted by the experience. In this section the author will also make sure to cover all the different consumer journey stages the participants went through to assure a wholistic overview on the entire S-H luxury experience.

In the last part the participants are also asked to compare the S-H experience with a lived or imaginary F-H experience. The purpose of these questions is to add additional insights to the already mentioned one, to better understand the perceived differences between F-H and S-H experiences.

The interview is concluded with the thanking of the participant and an explanation of the purpose of the study.

# INTERVIEWS

The interviews were conducted online, via Skype, as due to the Covid-19 situation in person meetings were not recommended. In total 11 S-H customers were interviewed, among them all the participants were female, representing 9 different European nationalities. The interviews lasted approximately 1 hour.

The created interview guideline was followed and adapted based on the flow of the conversation if necessary.

In the following pages the data analysis process is describe.

# DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis for qualitative studies, differently from the one for quantitative ones, is not characterized by strict and rigid rules for conclusion drawing. In this type of studies, data collection and data analysis are not considered as two separate steps, but rather two overlapping activities. Therefore, with the start of the data collection the author also started with the analysis (Berkowitz & Mahoney, 1997). This is also the reason why semi-structured interviews were chosen, to allow the researcher to control the direction of the conversation and change it to dig deeper in some topics considered relevant for the research purpose.

The data analysis is an iterative process of revising and re-examining the data collected with the purpose to understand the respondents' behaviours. Following the guidelines from Berkowitz & Mahoney (1997), the author started the analysis with the aim of finding patterns and common themes, deviations from those as well as their explanations. In order to support the different affirmations, the author also paid attention to the various stories shared by the participants, as these give a better overview and understanding of the consumer experience and thinking.

The structure of the analysis process was based on Miles & Huberman (1994 in Berkowitz & Mahoney, 1997) model, with the first step being data reduction. Here the author narrowed down the amount of insights considered, highlighting those that were assumed to be the most relevant for answering the research question. Various theories explored in the literature review, as those about the concept of luxury (Dubois et al., 2011; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Ko et al., 2019), findings about the meaning of S-H luxury (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015) and primarily Brakus et al. (2009) framework of brand experience, were functioning as guidelines for the selection of the most relevant insights. The data display is considered by Miles & Huberman (1994 in Berkowitz & Mahoney, 1997), an important step in the data analysis process as it provides an organized overview of the findings that are consequently used to draw exhaustive conclusions. With these steps in mind, the author grouped the relevant insights in a matrix table, available in appendix 5, based on the different theories presented in the literature review used also for the data reduction.

In the following pages the data collected is presented. The data presentation includes different direct quotes from the interviews, that contribute to give a better understanding of what the consumer was trying to express. The entire transcripts of all the 11 interviews is available in appendix 6.

The initial section provides an overview on who the participants are, about their backgrounds and their ideas. The following sections presents the different concepts on which the author focused on during the data analysis. Here the first sub-section focuses on the conceptualization of luxury among S-H luxury consumers. This helps to understand the consumers' stand points toward luxury and their motives to consume it. Moving forward, based on Brakus et al (2009) framework, the S-H luxury experiences occurring at the different stages of the consumer journey, are analysed. Within each of these sub-sections the author addresses affective, cognitive, sensorial, behavioural and social dimensions. These dimensions, however, are not presented as separate elements, but rather as interlinked components of the same experience. Meaning that, as the same experience can take place on different dimensions, their analysis cannot be taken out of the context and analysed separately one from another.

# SECOND-HAND LUXURY CONSUMERS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, 11 S-H luxury consumers took part to the interview sessions. The group was heterogenous in terms of nationality as well as backgrounds. An overview of who the participants are is provided below.

Participant 1 is a digital consultant from Sweden. She has a strong passion for vintage looks as well as a strong admiration for Gucci since as a brand is able to transport her to other times, like the 70s. Due to her passion for luxury as well as vintage products, she is a recurrent S-H luxury customer. She sees this market as an opportunity to find unique pieces that are able to connect her with the past, at a convenient price. She is therefore looking for unique styles, rather than popular trends. She has different experiences with S-H, however none of them can be compared with an instore experience. Which however the participant does not see as worth it all the time, but just for extraordinary occasions.

Participant 2 is a young aspiring fashion designer. She is very sustainability conscious and therefore sees S-H as a better, more environmentally friendly way to consume fashion. In line with that her aim is to find high quality and excellent luxury products that help her to feel part of the fashion world.

Participant 3 is a fashion enthusiast and aspiring influencer. She sees luxury as a way to be part of this exclusive, "magic" world. She showed a strong affection for Chanel and the story of its founder, with whom she also identifies herself, as a strong woman working hard for what she wants. S-H is therefore an opportunity for her to access luxury at a more accessible price point. She has a strong affection for this practice as it gives her the opportunity to experience luxury, which would otherwise not be easily accessible for her.

Similarly, participant 4 is also a fashion enthusiast, with a strong connection with the Chanel brand due to its story, considered one of the most iconic brands of all the times. As she shared with the author, she is from a poor area and luxury is for her a way to prove that she changed her life. She feels in that way closer to her aspirational group of strong, creative, innovative and wealthy elite. F-H luxury is still often inaccessible for there, therefore she turns to S-H. However due to her knowledge of luxury she recognizes that for some luxury products her money is better invested in the S-H market.

Participant 5 on the other hand is a French lawyer with an extensive experience with luxury. In the interview she shares that she used to be a corporate lawyer and luxury was her way to express also her creative side. She used to be a VIP client for different brands in Paris, as well as an event organizer for luxury related events and many people around her define her as a luxury collector. Today she exited this corporate life for a more relax ambient and she started to use S-H platforms more and more. She sees it as a great opportunity to find unique pieces that are difficult to find in stores, besides that she does not seem interested in living a luxury experience anymore but rather collecting artistic luxury pieces that represent her unique self.

Participant 6 is a young professional from Netherlands, who just entered the work world. Luxury for her is a way to signal the appurtenance to a specific group, to feel popular and special. She entered the S-H luxury market due to its accessibility, but even though now she could afford also F-H luxury, she is money conscious and she appreciates the convenience of S-H.

Participant 7 is an ambitious young professional, who likes to reward herself for the results achieved, like a new job. For her, luxury is an investment in herself, that shows her value. It expresses who she is: valuable, successful, elegant, unique as well as knowledgeable about luxury. She turns to S-H to get qualitative products, special items that might not be available in store anymore, that show her knowledge about luxury. The fact that she can get these items for a more convenient price make her feel empowered and skilled in identifying great deals. She however invests great attention in assuring that the item is in good condition and not fake as this would not be in line with who she is. She still

turns to F-H luxury, particularly for more iconic pieces, that are not purchased that often in life, like a Hermes bag or a luxury watch, as this are considered more special items.

Participant 8 is a young half German half Croatian student that lives in Munich. She appears as a very proud and independent young woman, used to work hard to get what she wants. She has a strong desire to differentiate herself from the "typical" girls from Munich, that are used to receive luxury presents from their parents. She feels the pressure, especially from her teenage years, caused by the gap between rich and poor. She wants to be autonomous and unique. She therefore also shows admiration for luxury brands that are different, like Jacquemus, to which she feels a strong connection due to the story of the designer, who despite reaching fame and success still maintained his integrity and humility. She sees S-H as an opportunity to find unique pieces that can differentiate herself as well as prove a change in the mindset from consuming environmentally dangerous brands to a more sustainable consumption.

Participant 9 is a Norwegian student in marketing with an interest in fashion. She consumes luxury to feel special and feel closer to her aspirational group. Luxury products make her feel popular, sophisticated and exclusive. She turns to S-H due to financial limitations, but she would in most of the cases prefer a F-H experience, despite she feels a little bit intimidated by it.

Participant 10 is an ambitious young professional from Greece leaving in Vienna. She sees luxury as a prove of her success and status. She consumes it to prove and reward herself for the goals achieved. Despite these products have an important meaning for her, as she is working for an NGO, she feels the pressure of showing these products too much, as in her mind they represent different values. She therefore turns to luxury just in special occasions. She enjoys S-H instead mainly for its convenience, while she still turns to F-H for special purchases.

Participant 11 is an international fashion influencer living in Brussels, she therefor consumes luxury as part of her profession as well as her interest in art as she is also an art advisor. Luxury for her gains value when its able to deliver exclusivity and prestige. She turns to S-H due to sustainability, since as an influencer she feels the duty to advocate for it.

# LUXURY CONCEPT

Each of the luxury dimensions emerged from the literature review, is addressed in the below pages from a S-H consumer perspective. For the purpose of the analysis a sub-section would be added, based on Dubois et al. (2011) findings on the contradictory and ambivalent attitudes towards luxury.

## QUALITY

When asked "what comes to your mind when I say luxury?" most of the respondents (4, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 11) directly and explicitly associated it with quality. Respondent 2 and 3 additionally associate it with the high price: "high quality, expensive due to cost of manufacturing" and "I would like to think that the luxury products because they are more expensive than they also last longer, or higher quality or something like that." The answer of the last respondent, however, sounds a bit sceptical, almost as she does not believe this is true. Similarly, respondents 7 and 8 were reluctant towards the quality of all luxury brands. Despite they see quality as one of the main aspects of luxury, they pointed out that not all the luxury brands maintained their quality over time.

## PRICE

Price was also one of the commonly mentioned dimensions characterising luxury. Respondent 1 briefly explains: *"I would say (luxury) it's something expensive …"*.

Respondent 2 and 3, as mentioned before associates high prices to products' quality, while the respondent 8 links it to the brand: *"...you definitely pay for the name"*.

Participants 9 and 10 instead bring up the concept of investment in relation to the price. Respondent 9 explain this idea as: *"I think it's more of a special thing that you invest in, because I see like, for example, the bags from Chanel as an investment, because usually they actually yeah, the price actually goes up on them"*. They do not associate the price to either the quality or the brand, but they see it as an overall investment with returns, rather than an expense.

## PERSONAL & EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

When respondents were talking about luxury brands, they used expressions like *"I love Gucci" (1)* or *"I absolutely love it" (4)*.

Participant 3 talks about the emotion of feeling special: *"(it) makes you feel special, something to be excited about"* also participant 6 has a similar connection to luxury: *"you feel special, like it is your gift"*, furthermore, she associates this feeling to client service: *"I feel like I'm a special client"*. Also, participant 5 brings up the connection to luxury as its client: *"They clearly know how to give clients a sense of, a sense of care, a sense of being taken care ...you feel somewhat part of that you belong with a brand"*.

Participant 1, on the other hand, stresses the importance of the whole experience in defining luxury: *"the atmosphere and the total experience of the brand: like stores, you know, everything from social media to webpage, but more I would say the experience in store"*. The in-store experience was often brought up by all the participant as an important luxury element able to rise strong emotions: *"And we get champaign and it was like a little party and I think that was amazing"* (6).

Apart from the client service provided, this emotional connection with the brand for some consumers is also linked to the story of the brand itself. *"I've always loved the story behind the brand and was always interested in the life of Coco Chanel"* explains the respondent 4 as well as participant 9: *"It's this long history about the person who started it and where she came from"*.

Beside the history of the brand, respondent 7 also mentions the visual identity of the brand: *"I just loved like the design and their historical references."* While talking about the aesthetics of one of the luxury brands, participant 1 explains: *"it's kind of gives me the feeling that I would like to be in that time, a bit like a movie."* These consumers therefore feel connected with the visual identity of luxury brands: *"it was just because I really liked that the new design, I was very excited about that collection."* (7). When defining what a luxury brand is participant 2 argues: *"I guess it's something about like, of course creating a distinctive style in a way and something that actually can set them apart from others"*. She therefore sees the aesthetics of the brand not only as a way to connect with consumers but also as a contradistinctive characteristic of luxury brands.

Participant 10, on the other hand is a little bit reluctant towards associating beauty to luxury, arguing that is rather the perceived luxuriousness of the brand or product the one defining aesthetic standards: *"they (luxury products) are always seen as beautiful, even if they are like not. For example, like the big shoes of Balenciaga for me they are ugly, but for so many people they are kind of beautiful because it's from a luxury brand"* For this consumer, the emotional connection takes place on a more personal level: *"so I could identify with a product and also I always saw it as a kind of a treat. So, I worked hard besides my studies, and then I actually taught myself now I kind of need a treat."* For her luxury is like a present to herself, that has a special meaning for her, symbolizing a milestone

achieved in her life. It is also a way for her to express who she is: *"I think a girl (using luxury products) looks more successful than a guy, I don't know why. But like, yeah, like a young woman who enjoys life, it's successful and she really likes to wear something elegant and maybe like, feel special."* This meaning luxury has for her plays a role also in her social identity and how she looks in front of others. These luxury items are the proof that she achieved success, that she is elegant and sophisticated. Similarly, participant 5 explains that the luxury products that she consumes: *"have to be connected to me. What I wear, what I carry is part of my nonverbal communication."*. When further talking with this participant, which is the oldest in the group, a certain confidence emerges about who she is. For her therefor luxury items are just tools to express who she already is. Similarly, also participant 8, who shines within the group for her confidence and strong opinions, argues about the luxury brands she consumes: *"it would be something I'd like to show because it has character, it's fitness to my style."*

For other participants on the other hand, seems to be the opposite. They feel a strong connection with these products as they help them to get closer to their desired self: *"I almost feel more confident when I wear them"* argues participant 1, while respondent 6 thinks: *"I could wear like a garbage bag and that bag and I feel pretty and classic"*, associating to the bag almost like a super power that makes her look good even if she wears a trash bag.

## PERCEPTION OF RARITY

Most of the participants mentioned the accessibility and exclusivity of luxury: *"something ...that not everyone can have"* (1), *"it's about exclusivity, like not all people can buy it"* (2), *"only accessible to a very limited portion of the customers"* (5), *"less accessible"* (7), or *"not everyone can have it"* (10). The inaccessibility is often associated with money, as many people cannot afford luxury. Participant 5 additionally points at it to be *"very hidden"*, arguing that accessing luxury is not only about money, which still plays a major role, but it is also about being accepted as a special client and having the knowledge to know what luxury really is. As the VIP client of some of the notorious brands in Paris, participant 5 was considered a special client also for her knowledge about fashion, art as well as her aesthetic taste. She was therefore invited to the shows and consulted in terms of future trends. It can therefore be argued that she had a way more VIP experience with luxury compared with the other participants, who mainly refer to their experiences in the store.

However, most of the participants are aligned in saying that this exclusivity makes them feel special. Participant 3 connects it to an emotional state of excitement: *"(it) makes you feel special, something to be excited about"*. Similar participant 6 feels gifted by it: *"I feel like I'm a special client..you feel special like you're gifted"*. Participants 5, 7, 10 and 11 feel *"privileged"* to have access to it. Respondent 5 further connects it with the ego: *"...the experience and the privilege of being considered as one of the important clients... It's always like good for the ego. And you feel like you belong to this small club."* Respondent 9 additionally points out a sense of belonging to an elite group: *"it made me just feel it just was super special. You feel it's so kind of like elite or something, but you feel kind of like different. Or like that you have something special that no one else"*. Respondent 10 also points out the exclusivity as a point of different between her and others: *"...not everyone can have it. So, if you wear something you distinguish from other people, and also, you're like kind of adding a value. So, like it's something very valuable"*. For her, as for participant 11, being able to differentiate herself from others is a valuable aspect of luxury.

## PRESTIGIUS IMAGE

A prestigious image and status signalling capability is associated to luxury by most of the participants. Respondent 9 argues: *"It just makes a statement. It's kind of like status. you're part of this group, because you're that type of girl who has that bag"*. Also, participant 2 explains: *"... it's in a way like subconsciously it's about showing that you have money for that and showing that you're wealthy..."*. Similarly, also participant 10 relates it to money: *"So like when you walk around wearing something from Gucci, like, people look at you like "Oh, she might be rich or have more money than I do". I look more fashionable. I look more elegant."*. As already addressed in the previous section, luxury is perceived to have the power to make you look better, transferring that aspects that characterize the product and the brand to its owner, in this case prestige, elegance and status.

On the other hand, also here, some of the participants were not attributing this power to luxury but rather see it as a proof of who they already are: *"I want to buy things, luxury items if I can earn and I can pay it by myself"* (participant 8). Similarly, participant 10 wants luxury to signal the truth: *"I kind of feel, like grown successful woman because I know it's not that accessible. It's expensive and I know I worked hard to earn that amount of money to say I can afford some products from a specific brand. So, it really feels like rewarding, I would say because I'm kind of wearing the fruits of my work"* or signal a change in who she will become when some important change happens: *"when I'll start to work and with my first wage, I want to buy a Chanel bag. Because for me this is like the kind*

*of material proof that I reached this kind of point where I'm successful and I have enough money to afford it.''* (participant 10).

## AMBIVALENCE

Ambivalence is an additional topic about luxury brought up by Dubois et al. (2011) as an attitude, consumers often have towards luxury. It is considered by the author as an important aspect to analyse and understand in the context of S-H shopping as it contributes to better understand the experience these consumers go through.

Some of the interviewed consumers had in fact very ambivalent opinions and feeling towards luxury. While explaining the meaning luxury has in signalling status, participant 9 also adds: *"it just makes a statement. And it's super, like, superficial. I know. But it's kind of like people will look at me and be like, Oh, she's really well dressed."* A certain guilt can be therefore perceived associated with superficialness. Similarly, also participant 2 when she talks about luxury signalling wealth argues: *"course it's in a way like subconsciously it's about showing that you have money for that and showing that you're wealthy I don't like I don't like that thought."*

As an employee at an NGO also participant 10 has a complex relation with luxury: *"I always have an issue with going out wearing something very elegant, because I feel like people kind of stare at me in like in a jealous way, when I walk around in daily life like this, I feel weird. But for example, I'm working for NGOs. And if I would walk around like this at my work which is about other things, it would send the wrong signals. So, like, for me, it's like more like something I wear to special occasions".* Some sort of immorality and guild therefore arises in the participant as well as a fear of being judged as superficial.

Also, participant 7 feels this pressure from relevant others: *"they are judgemental… They would say that it costs too much, and yes I understand, but I don't know I just like it, it makes me feel good."* There is a dissonance in her mind where on one sides she understands the rational point of view of her friends and she agrees with it, but on the other hand there is something she cannot really explain that ties her to consume luxury anyway, a pleasure related to it.

A discussion about these findings will follow in the next chapter.

# SECOND-HAND LUXURY

This section presents the findings related to S-H luxury experience. The understanding of what luxury represents for the participants was needed in order to have a better view and understanding of the following findings. In the next pages the different experiences luxury consumers go through in the context of S-H are presented. The purpose of these questions was therefor to understand how consumers experience luxury and luxury brands in the context of S-H shopping. In order to better understand their experiences an initial discussion about the meanings and motives that drive them to consume pre-loved luxury was initiated, followed by a discussion about the various experiences and stimuli the consumers live.

## MOTIVES

From the literature review four main meaning dimensions emerged in relation to S-H luxury consumption (Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015). The presentation of the findings therefore follows this structure.

### REAL DEAL

Among the most common drivers where price and convenience. Luxury consumers engage in this type of consumption as it allows them to access their desired luxury product at a lower price. Luxury products in the S-H market are cheaper than in the F-H one. Participant 6 and 9 in fact tell: *"I think the main reason for me was the money if I'm being totally honest"* and *"I want designer bags, but they're very expensive, so I tried buying some of them second-hand"*. Participant 3 points out the constant increase in prices of luxury products: *"so cost was a big thing, Chanel recently put their prices up so buying a bag becomes that little bit harder"*.

On the other hand, their perceived quality and durability do not decrease with usage in the same way as price. Consumer in fact argue, that as these products are of high quality, they also maintain their good condition and look over time and therefore even if passed from owner to owner their value is still there: *"the quality is pretty much the same"* (participant 7). This associations with quality, therefore, increases the value for money luxury consumers can get and it incentivizes them to opt for

S-H products. Participant 5 explains: *"I buy more and more on these types of platform because I don't see the point of, you know, the local luxury experience isn't worse, you know, but the saving you are making…(are noticeable)"*. Participant 6 additionally adds: *"Because you profit, you don't pay the whole price, you don't pay the big amount for the name, so you get the product cheaper"*. She sees S-H as a real deal opportunity as you get the brand name without paying for it.

Respondent 7 on the other hand points out the timelessness of the pieces as wells as her concerns about quality of F-H luxury: *"That trench coat in that exact style cut everything is the same thing from almost like 70 years ago or so like very little has changed, if I can get the exact same product that they're selling in store new now, from all those years ago, for way cheaper, the quality is pretty much the same. Some brands, the quality even decreases when it's newer"*. For her therefore the real deal is not only in terms of price but also in terms of modernity and timelessness of the item and the availability of an even better quality than the one offered by F-H. Here a different level of knowledge about luxury can be noted, where some consumers value mainly the lower price, others points out that is a profitable purchase as you don't have to pay for the value of the brand while others are even aware of the past collection as well as quality changes the luxury brands went through and therefor have a deeper understanding of the value of the different pieces.

Additionally, for these consumers that analyse the value of the different items and brands, price, apart from being one of the main motivators for S-H luxury shopping, it is also perceived as a signal of value. These consumers consider the resale value when they purchase luxury products. However, not necessarily because they have the intention to resale it, as most of the respondents don't, but mainly just to estimate the value of their investment. As participant 7 clearly explains: *"…when you look on the second-hand market, Chanel keep its value a lot more. So, you think that's a lot more luxury, it's a lot more worth the investment. Whereas Dior does not keep its value at all. My opinion of that brand now is that I don't really think it's as worth the money as investing in something else. There's just no way I'll ever buy this bag new and you knowing that as soon as you get it on the second-hand market, it loses more than 50% of its value to me, it's not worth it. I don't see the brands being worth it in my eyes anymore"*.

Similarly, for some of the respondents, the age and conditions of the product are also important signals of value. The fact that a product is not new, and it has been used by other luxury consumers before, but at the same time it was still able to keep its good condition and look is a signal of quality. Consumer 2 for example explains: *"I think it's just like it tells that they last long, they are timeless pieces"*. However not all of the participants are that involved in the evaluation of the quality and

value of the luxury products, but rather as participant 4 see those as a natural, almost granted, consequences of luxury: *"For luxury you know that even if it's used it doesn't really matter because it will last like very long, almost for ever"*.

## RISK INVESTMENT

The risk related to S-H shopping was pointed out by all the participants. This risk was associated to two main concerns: the conditions of the product and its authenticity. All of the respondents have experiences with S-H online shopping, where they pointed out that the lack of sensorial opportunities with the product, meaning the opportunity to see and touch the product, as well as the inability to return the products as main causes of worries and fear. Additionally, they pointed out that the monetary investment, despite lower than F-H, is still relevant and therefor increases the fear of a bad purchase. The main differences identified among the respondents were in the ways they address these risks. This dimension is therefore further addressed in the following section, when the entire experiences is analysed in detail.

## UNIQUE FIND

The theme of uniqueness was raised by the participants in different contexts. Respondents 1 and 10 explain that the S-H market gives them the opportunity to find items that are not available on the F-H market anymore: *"you can buy something that's not available anymore"* (1) or *"I can't find it in most shop. So, I'm considering to buy it second-hand"* (10). Also participant 7 has a similar view: *"...my next vintage purchase I'm planning, because I've got my new contract, is a Chanel classic flap in small size or medium size and I know for sure I'm going to get it vintage and before certain time because they used to do gold plating and that's very important to me"*. S-H luxury gives her the chance to access better products than the one available on the F-H market. The respondent appears to be very knowledgeable about luxury and she likes to see herself as such. S-H luxury in fact is for her also an opportunity to get her hands on products that are not that popular among luxury consumers and therefore able to differentiate her and proof her appurtenance to a more limited group of luxury connoisseurs: *"I used to buy things that were like quite recognizable to other people. But now especially as I've gotten older, I buy things that are only recognizable to people that already know luxury. It makes you feel like you're in a secret club. that's quite a cool feeling quite I quite like that part of it where it's like if you know luxury you know what it is but if you don't know luxury or*

*fashion you have no idea"*. Respondents 8 shares a similar view: *"the main motivation would be to have something special in your hands."*

For others on the other had the uniqueness of S-H luxury products is related to the past of the product itself. Participant 3 explains: *"I like the idea of second hand bags having a longer life with someone that loves to wear them…I'm currently looking at buying a watch, and as much as I would love a brand new one which has only been mine, I love the idea of vintage watches because they've lived a life with someone else, image where they've been and what they've seen etc, sounds ridiculous I know, but I like it"*. The mystery around the past of the product is something that intrigues the respondent and makes the product more unique in her eyes. Also, respondent 8 points out the relevance of the past, but more in relation to the product and the brand rather than its owner: *"I actually think it's quite nice to know that it lived a life before me. Like that bag is from 2003. It's super old. But that kind of like, for me, that's kind of special because they launched that model in 2001 or something. So, it's actually from like, the first couple years when they produce it. So, for me, that's kind of like, the special"*. Participant 1 also enjoys that S-H products have a story behind them, in a way that she also argues that this connection with the past makes the S-H experience more emotional in her eyes, especially if compared to an online F-H experience: *"Since I like this, like the story behind something that if you can get a second life, maybe I would say it (second-hand) is a bit even more emotional than first-hand, especially if we talk about online."*

Despite having different meanings, the concept of uniqueness was brough up by all the participants.

## SUSTAINABLE CHOICE

Sustainability was also an important motivator pointed out by most of the participants. Participant 6 explains: *"I have difficulty with source like h&m and Zara that produces fast fashion because I think the environment is going down"*. This negative attitude toward mass consumption practices like fast fashion makes her turn to S-H. Similarly, also participant 10 argues: *"it's better to buy luxury brands second-hand then buying cheap brands."* Additionally, also respondents 1, 3, 5 and 8 includes sustainability as an incentive on top of the others. Participant 2 instead lists it as the main motivator: *"Essentially, just because it's more sustainable way to purchase clothing, that's the main reason."* as well as participant 11 who as an influencer feels the duty to give the example and behave responsibly towards the environment and the society.

Despite all of the participant are aware and value the sustainable benefits of S-H consumption, only for respondent 2 and 11 this is the main motivator for consuming S-H luxury. For the rest of the group this is more an additional benefit as well as a justifier but not the main driver.

All the meaning dimensions of S-H luxury were therefore mentioned during the interviews. However relevant differences between respondents' conceptualization of those were noticed. These findings will be later discussed and analysed from a research question point of view in the next chapter.

## SECOND-HAND LUXURY EXPERIENCE

After understanding the individuals' conceptualization of luxury and the motives and meanings they associate with S-H consumption the discussion evolved toward the topic of S-H luxury experience. For the purpose of the analysis, the experiences shared by the participants will be presented as part of different consumer journey stages, based on when they occur. This approach made it easier for the author to analyse and better understand what these consumers were going through.

### SELECTION PHASE

In the selection phase, consumers start to research and deciding which item to purchase. Basing the conversation on past experiences and purchases the author tried to understand the underlaying characteristics of these experiences.

According to most of the respondents the selection phase often starts outside the S-H context. Meaning that they don't use S-H platforms as tools for inspiration about luxury and new style ideas, but they rather enter this market with an already clear intent of what they want to buy. Respondent 2 in fact explains, talking about S-H shopping: *"I don't usually go just randomly search or look through some clothing and then just like oh, this is nice. I want to buy that one, I have a specific product that I want to buy at some point"*. Similarly, respondent 9 states that S-H shopping is rarely impulsive for her: *"I've actually never bought anything like yeah second-hand luxury like on impulse it's always like yeah. I know what I want and then I think about it and search for it"*. In line with that also respondent 7 starts the search with a clear idea already in mind as well as a clear strategy on how to

find it: *"I'm shopping for a particular model..I'll look for a particular model from the brand. I'll search the obviously brand then model name, then I will search for the colour that I want. And sometimes I'll do like a price range because I don't want anything that's like the lower end of the spectrum because usually those bags are a bit damaged and there's a bit too much wear"*. Differently, however, only participant 6 mentioned that she likes to scroll down the different S-H apps to see if there's something that might interests her.

Participants who enter the S-H market with a clear intent, over time had developed clear strategies on how to search for desired pieces. These strategic approaches were explained to be reactions to the risk and fear associated with S-H in terms of bad conditions and inauthenticity. In this regard, participant 4 explains: *"Like second hand is a longer process you need to check a lot of things, you need to be more careful, you're a bit suspicious all the time and even scared that was you know that will arrive in bad conditions or something"*, while participant 7 points out her concerns about inauthenticity: *"Usually I watch like videos, if I ever buy something second-hand… Because if it's second-hand, especially if they don't make that bag anymore, you just need to like research as much as you can…because with second-hand is also that authenticity issue depends where you're buying from, but you need to know a bit more about the bag or the brand and to feel comfortable that you're buying an authentic product"*. The impossibility to physically see and touch the product (participants 5, 6, 7 and 9) as well as the inability to return the product if not satisfied with it (participant 5 and 10) also play an important role in these regards for some of the respondents.

Among the strategies mentioned by the participants were visiting the store to see and touch the product in person, buy already known brands, watch videos about authentication tricks, opt for platforms that offer the authentication service or for platforms where you can meet the seller in person. All of the respondents took advantage of one or more of these strategies to be more comfortable with the purchase.

Besides the negative emotions related to the fear of a bad purchase, some of the respondents also pointed out the affections they nurture towards S-H luxury shopping: *"It's so much fun"* (participant 10). Participant 9, who also shared her concerns about fake and damaged products, adds that besides that she also feels excited: *"I think also if you go second-hand, and you search for you know, that is something that you want, and you search for it, and it takes a while and need to be patient, and you need to maybe try several times to actually get it and bid on it and then you finally get and then you're super excited as well"*. The effort invested in the research is therefore repaid by the excitement of the finding. A similar answer was given also by participant 2, who sees the whole experience as a hunting

game: *"But when you opt for second hand, then you need to actually look through and kind of do a bit of research and like search and then when you find it, it's just like, I don't know sometimes it's just an amazing feeling, like a hunting game."* Also, participant 5 has the same feeling and associates the experience to a treasure hunt: *"you feel a bit of the thrill of finding the piece and grab it ...when I can snap a piece, um, yeah, I feel pretty pretty happy. I found something that I think is a little bit of a treasure"*. Participant 3 instead, points out her curiosity: *"I am always super curious, and I can wait to get the product"*.

Few of the respondents however did not mention this emotional attachment, but rather pointed out the lack of luxury experience in this setting further addressed also in the purchase phase.

Participant 9 additionally also points out the look of the S-H online platforms as less appealing: *"I mean if you check just the look ,the site, yes, obviously the first hand is more luxurious, they put more work into their customer experience and, and just like making things look good for you, and while going on Trend Sales is kind of like going to flea market"*.

The discussion of these findings is presented in the following chapter.

## PURCHASE PHASE

In this phase a decision is made about the purchase and the consumer becomes the owner of the product. Once the desired product is found and chosen, for some of the respondents the *"game"* is still on. Respondent 4 for example, once she founds the product, she saves it to her wishlist in order to monitor whether the price might decrease even more. Participants 5 and 9 on the other hand take a more proactive approach and bargain for a better price: *"I still like a good bargain"* (5) and *"it's kind of like a treasure hunt. And you can bet on the stuff and it's kind of like a totally different experience. So, you're not there to get like good customer experience or like, you're there for a bargain."* (9). This approach increases the excitement for the respondents as it increases the chance to get an even better deal. At the same time it also increases the chance to lose the deal: *"It happened to me a few times when I was thinking about something or trying to you know, negotiate 50 euro cheaper and then I didn't get the piece and I felt like oh, you know, this is my fault. I should have been faster."* (5). The participant 5 therefore feels it is lake a competition, like a game that she wants to win. For some of the participants therefore the purchase is perceived as the prize of the game they won. It is therefore an experience associated with excitement, satisfaction and happiness. For participant 5 it is about *"the emotion or the pleasure to find the piece that you've been looking for and you thought you would*

*not find anymore… when I can snap a piece, um, yeah, I feel pretty pretty happy…, I found something that I think is a little bit of a treasure in my collection”.* Participant 7 also shares her positive attitude towards the experience: *“I really love the experience. you feel so excited because it feels like you've like gotten a deal on something. I don't know how to explain it, but like you feel like you've gotten like a great deal.”*, she also compares it to a good sale opportunity: *“Imagine you're at like at a sale and it's like the best sale ever. And the item is like everything that you've been looking for. But the price is like insanely good. That feeling when you press checkout, it feels a lot better. like wow, like I've gotten a great deal on something”.*

Some participants on the other hand express a more negative attitude towards it. Respondent 4 for example explains: *“I was excited but also a little scared as I haven't seen it in person before purchasing”.* Participant 6 is even more negative about it: *“It gets me more nervous when I buy something second-hand because it's second-hand and used. And when something is new, you know, it's brand new and no scratches or damages or something and I'm not sure if I buy something second-hand”.*

Additionally, participants were also asked to compare their S-H experiences to their first ones. For all of them the in-store experience is more emotional, calls out all the senses as well as taps into the social sphere through the presence and assistance of the sales assistants. Participant 2 argues that: *“that's of course, another level of luxury products and luxury fashion”*, for her there's no comparison in terms of experience, however she will still opt for S-H if she finds the product under the right conditions, mainly due to an environmental factor. Participant 4 also believes that: *“Buying in store is definitely a nicer experience than buying online, you are just surrounded by luxury”.* Whether she would go for S-H or F-H for her depends on the value of the purchase: *“Well if it's an icon bag like the Hermes Birkin, which is like a one in life purchase, and I have the money of course, then I will go to the store… But if its, I don't know, probably if it's another Gucci or a bag like that loses a lot of value, you know like a Hermes on second hand, the price is not that far from the new one, but because they are very expensive and just a few have them. Honestly I don't know why someone would want to sell her Birkin..But yes there are some Gucci bags that on second-hand are way cheaper and you know that you will not have it forever, you know I think that Gucci is more changing with the trends compared to maybe Hermes and Dior.”* She would therefor evaluate the value of the investment before choosing the way to buy it. Participant 7 is also really clear about it: *“the difference between buying first-hand and second-hand is only the experience in store”.* Similarly as participant 4, she explains that there are some brands like Hermes or some categories as luxury watches, that she does

not buy that often in life, for which she would go to the store: *"I would want to get those things in store because you have the whole experience because there is the emotional side of it, where you want them to sit you down, you want them to offer you a drink, especially if you're going to spend that much money on something where it's like your first big purchase in one of those like really important categories, especially something like jewellery because it has a very like, personal sentimental feeling"*. Few other participants pointed out the rituality of the experience, not only from an instore service point of view as participant 7 points out, but respondent 6 also adds the preparation for this *"event"*: *"I put on a nice dress to go into the Louis Vuitton store. So, the whole experience is it's so so much fun"*. For her therefor is not just about buying the product but is living the whole experience. Similarly also participant 10 sees it as an event, as an extraordinary occasion that needs to be celebrated: *"So like, if I buy a luxury brand, I really want to celebrate it and go to the boutique and buy it and then like, I don't know when you went shopping with your friends after you like want to grab a coffee or drink and like kind of, enjoy that you bought something"*. Despite they all have a similar point of view on in-store luxury experience, participant 6 would still first consider S-H as her value for money is an important aspect, while participant 10 would go for F-H if she would not have financial limits, as this would be for her a proof of her status.

When comparted to the F-H online experience, however, the participants did not perceive such a difference, as both of the experiences loses their sensorially in the online setting. Participant 7 however pointed out that she would purchase on the official website when she is interested in buying something new, that is therefore not available on the S-H market and at the same time something that is expected to be sold out very soon. Participant 5 instead points out the larger choice of colours, sizes and models on the online platforms as well as the option to save the item in the purchase basket for longer.

The argumentation of the findings is discussed in the following chapter.

## DELIVERY PHASE

The receival of the package is also considered a relevant experience in the online setting. This is the moment when the consumer has her first contact with the product, when she evaluates whether the purchase is worth the investment. This is the "moment of truth", therefore in the analysis was considered as a separate section from the purchase and consumption phase.

At this point some of the respondents pointed out the importance of the package. Participant 6 points out the lack of a nice packaging for one of her purchases. In her mind this makes the delivery more ordinary and not that special. On the other hand, some of the other participants pointed out their pleasant and surprising experience when the product was delivered in a nice packaging from the S-H platform (1, 4, 8, 11) or even in the original box from the previous owner (7). Respondent 4 argues that is very similar to the F-H online delivery: *"The nice package, the note, it really felt a proper luxury delivery let´s day. If I order on Net-a-Porter is very similar"* and that she was even positively surprised when she saw it: *"but when it arrives you are just super happy and I think I was even surprised when I saw it because the bag didn't look at all as used you know."* While respondent 7 was also really pleasantly surprised when: *"I received it in the original box, and she included the certificate, she made it very nice for me"*. Also, participant 6 has a positive experience in relation to packaging: *"there's this webshop. It's called luxury vintage in Amsterdam. And it always sent second-hand bags in very nice packaging of their own. So, they made really good branding box for themselves"*. For these consumers therefore the packaging increases the pleasure around the delivery experience.

On the other hand, participant 7 also pointed out that she is still very cautious when she receives the product. She explains: *"when I receive a new delivery, I feel like I'm getting a small present. But with especially vintage online purchases, you're still going through that stage in your head where you're thinking, hmm, but like, does this fit like how I imagined it to fit? Because a lot of that process was in your head and you're like, Oh, so what can I style it with in my wardrobe? Like you're still trying to understand how it fits on you."* … *"with online second-hand item, my first thing to do is like inspect the item. With the first hand one you just assume that the items perfect because no one's ever used it before"*. She even learns some tricks before head on how to evaluate the authenticity of a product that she then tries when the product arrives. When she receives the product, therefore she still needs to evaluate whether the item is worth the purchase. Participant 9 instead, does not even remember an initial positive feeling around it, but more the concerns: *"I don't remember feeling that happy I was more like sceptical. is this a real deal? Does it look good? Is it worth it? But after you feel very good about it."* She also shares, that to plague these doubts she went to the store to authenticate the bad: *"and then I went to the store with it. okay to have it checked. Okay. So that I was kind of like oh my god, did I just pay for something fake or was it actually real? "*. Participants 10 also points out that as you are taking some risks when you purchase S-H in can happen that you end up disappointed: *"I*

*think it would be in the same, exactly the same feeling (between second-hand and first-hand delivery) just that you don't get so often disappointed because it's new product so it's in a good condition.".* Participant 6 on the other hand shares that: *"it gave me also a great feeling, but it was not brand new, so it had some scratches and everything. I knew it was not completely mine".* Knowing that the item was owned by someone else before head, creates this feeling in the respondent as she is not really owning the product. The presence of the owner influences also participant 5, who however takes a more proactive approach to overcome this feeling: *"what I do with second hand is that everything I receive, I get cleaned or if it's shoes or whatever I get disinfected".* This ritual is not only about cleaning the products, but it is also about drawing the line between the previous owner an her, about starting a new beginning. Despite she was not talking about herself, she specified in this context, that many people believe that the ghosts of dead people live in their belonging. Despite she does not really believe in this she prefers to clean the products before using them anyway.

In relation to the F-H experience it is additionally relevant to mention, that consumer 1, 6, 9 and 11 pointed out the lack of the social experience: *"it's not like in store, it's just a normal experience, like receiving a mail" (6).* While instore, participant 1 mentioned the "feeling when you go out of the store" as an important aspect of F-H shopping, while as participant 9 expresses *"(when you buy online) no one can see you".* Participant 5 additionally mentions also the advantage of buying F-H online, due to its better service, same day delivery as well as option for returns.

The delivery phase is therefore seen as an important phase the online consumer goes through. The findings related to these experiences are also discussed in the following chapter.

## CONSUMPTION PHASE

In relation to the consumption phase the author discussed with the participants their experiences related to the usage of the product as well as the social interactions around it.

In this context participant 3 describes her excitement and meaning associated with the item: *"It's my dream handbag and even though it wasn't brand new the excitement I got of having this handbag as part of my collection, I felt like a little girl."* She additionally adds that the fact that it is S-H is even more special: *"I'm currently looking at buying a watch, and as much as I would love a brand new one which has only been mine, I love the idea of vintage watches because they've lived a life with someone else, imagining where they've been and what they've seen etc - sounds ridiculous I know…you know that this bag has a story before you that makes it kind of special so you feel special*

*as well"*. Therefore, the past of the product makes it unique in her eyes and has also the power to transfer this uniqueness to her. Similarly, also participant 7 likes the idea of luxury products having a life behind them: *"wow, like, this item could be like, 20 years old, have so many different owners and now I'm gonna own it. And you're just like continuing its life"*. She even feels like part of something, part of the items story. On the other hand, participant 5 does not feel this connection, as she gets her S-H products cleaned and disinfected before she uses them.

While the connection with the previous owner is something special just for few of the respondents, the rarity and limited availability of the product is a characteristic of S-H products that is important for some of the respondents as well. The S-H market gives the opportunity to luxury lovers to find items that are not available in the stores anymore, limited editions or past collections. As these products are not produced anymore their availability is dependent on the pieces already in the market. These items are therefore rarer and more unique. Participant 9 in fact finds her S-H Balenciaga bag special because it was produced in a specific point in time in the past, that makes it more unique: *"I actually think it's quite nice to know that it lived a life before me. Like that bag is from 2003. It's super old. But that kind of like, for me, that's kind of special because they launched that model in 2001 or something. So, it's actually from like, the first couple of years when they produced it. So, for me, that's kind of special"*.

Wearing these unique pieces makes the consumer feel even more special and unique. This benefit is particularly valuable for consumers who uses luxury to express who they are and differentiate themselves, like participant 8: *"I was crying because of happiness. It was a very, very special present because I've never seen this bag on someone else. Even though it was second-hand ... but I don't know it was perfect. This was great for me"*. The fact that the S-H bag she received was so limited and not popular among other luxury consumers make her very happy and satisfied with the present, as she believed this bag would make her look more like her true self and different from the others.

Similarly, for those consumers that showed to have a lot of experience with luxury, being able to express themselves, their uniqueness and their knowledge about the item was a strong advantage of the S-H luxury. In fact, participant 7 explains: *"I buy things that are only recognizable to people that already know luxury. that's quite a cool feeling quite I quite like that part of it where it's like if you know luxury you know what it is but if you don't know luxury or no fashion you have no idea…. I feel a lot more cool for having done so because especially when you wear a second-hand product that people don't really know so well. I don't know. It just it just feels better"*. Due to its rarity and limited accessibility, S-H products give the opportunity to her to express who she is and specifically to

express her appurtenance to a very restricted group of people who share elevated knowledge about luxury.

Additionally, to that, some of the consumers pointed out also the role of making a responsible purchase in influencing the experience of consuming the product. In fact, most of the interviewed consumers see S-H as a sustainable and responsible behaviour, which makes them feel good about themselves, like participant 7 explains: *"I feel like I have a bit of a cleaner mind. I have a way cleaner mind about my purchase because I know that I´ve also made like a variable sustainable purchase, it´s a much more ecologically friendly purchase"*. Participant 8 takes this topic very personally, as a social duty: *"But I think nowadays, even if you're like me, you have to have to think about second-hand and if you see something for example, my boyfriend and he's also a person like that, like only new stuff, nothing that someone else had on his body. That's, I feel uncomfortable with this"*. Participant 6 instead uses it as a justification for her purchase: *"Well sometimes I feel a bit guilty, because it is a lot of money. But on the other hand, I buy just one and she (friend) buys 15 so I don't know what is worst, not only for the money but also for the environment. And if you buy like second hand is even better"*. The sustainability factor makes these consumers feel good when they use the S-H product, despite not for all of them sustainability is a driving motive to consume S-H.

Different stimuli related to the S-H products makes it special and more valuable for these consumers. On the other hand, however, some of the respondents also express a perceived *"lower value"* of the S-H item, related to the newness of the product. Participant 9 for example explains: *"I would say the way I would take care of the bag if it was completely new, I would be a little bit more careful with it… but (with second-hand) I'm not that conscious about where I put it in or if it's raining"*. Similarly, also respondent 7 shares the same thought: *"because you're the first owner, you are a bit more careful with things. Even without thinking about it. You treat it as Little bit more special…you are a lot more comfortable to actually use it in your everyday life straightaway"*.  Participant 6 also points out that with her last S-H purchase she did not feel special at all: *"I did not take as much care as I would do to my new one, my first-hand one. it was more like a daily bag for normal use and I was rougher with it and it's making me feel quite normal"*. Participants 1 and 10 also shared similar thoughts: *"I actually wear it more. Still I take care of it, but I'm not so afraid of ruin it. you are just more careful, and you don't wear it every day" (1)* and *"I kind of feel more free because I don't care so much about wearing something so valuable because it was actually cheaper than it looks like. And as I have something new, like I really like care about it like a baby and like wanted to last forever so it's different and if it's like second hand I don't really mind"*. The participants argue that since these

products are already used and might already have some marks from the previous owner, they are less worried about adding new ones. They perceive these products as less delicate and more resistant since they already survived the previous owner. They are therefore less careful with the bag when they use it. Interestingly this was the case for all the participants.

Additionally, as luxury in general is strongly related to its consumers social sphere the conversation was directed also towards this direction. Here the participants experience different reactions from the people they interact with. On one side, there are those who are very open and supportive, while on the other hand there are those who are sceptical about it and talk about it as something risky and dirty. Despite all the participants were very open to talk about it, both with the interviewer as well as with their friends, also proven by their posting and tagging on their social media accounts (see appendix 3), respondent 9 also points out that it is not really visible whether the product is S-H or not: *"I don´t think people can see that it´s second-hand, but I think people are gonna tell that you´ve had that bag for long"*. She therefore is open to talk about her S-H purchases with her friends, but if she feels like omitting the source of a product in front of other people, she can also do that, as no one will really know.

The discussion of the findings will be presented in the following chapter.

## BRAND INVOLVEMENT

The last section of the data analysis focused on the participants experience and thoughts about the involvement of the luxury brands with the S-H market. This section was added as through the interviews few of the respondents spontaneously brought up topics and experiences where luxury brands took a standpoint in relation to S-H.

One of the participants, respondent 6, describes the experience she has with Louis Vuitton, when they repaired her bag even thought it was S-H: *"I like to see that Louis Vuitton takes care of second-hand bags...They are not focused on only the first-hand products but also on the second-hand products because they´re still theirs. They are still their products. I think, I like to see they put more effort in their service"*. This experience makes her feel appreciated and happy.

Another one mentions the affair about burned stocks, when some of the know luxury brands like Louis Vuitton and Burberry burned the whole stock because they were not able to sell it at the actual price and they did not want to dilute the brand by selling those items at a discounted rate. In relation to that the respondent commented: *"this is about the industry and thinking about what they want be with the client and the consumer. The consumers are more and more aware, they have access to many different ways of buying without necessarily going through their experience. And personally, you know, if a brand wants to partner with a resale platform to sell, last year collections or the collections from years ago I actually support that…It´s good for the clients and is good for the business…I´d rather see that, that they go in and burn the collection as some people are doing."*

The third case brought up by the respondents was related to Chanel. As also mentioned in previous sections this brand started different lawsuits against S-H platforms like TheRealReal and Vestiare Collective. One of the participants comments on that: *"I really like their stuff, but I don´t have a great opinion about Chanel. I think it´s just really distasteful to encourage people to make worse choices…that´s how they´re involved in vintage, is basically by stopping people from buying it. Whereas you get other brands that are more involved in vintage because they actually want to actively encourage people to make better responsible choices."*

The attention to these topics confirms the before mentioned importance for S-H luxury consumer of what the brand stands for: *"I don´t care what they put out; I will just never ever shop with them. Dolce & Gabanna, you will never ever see me shopping with them ever in my life"*. The comment was related to the involvement of one of the brand´s designer in racistic and unrespectful comments about the Asian population.

These cases where at the end of the interview shared also with the rest of the respondents to have an overview on how they feel about them. The answers were very aligned. Only the case about Chanel lawsuit raised some differences, as some of the respondents, especially those with knowledge about luxury and marketing understood the standpoint of the brand.

# DISCUSSION

The previous chapter gives an overview of the main findings that were collected during the data collection process. Different topics emerged during the data analysis process that are further discussed in the following pages.

## LUXURY CONCEPT

The concept of luxury among S-H consumers does not relevantly differ from its conceptualization among luxury consumers in general (Dubois et al., 2011; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Ko et al., 2019). Luxury is still perceived as a multidimensional concept and for some of the respondents it has a strong subjective connotation. According to the studies conducted by Dubois et al., 2011; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012 and Ko et al., 2019 the concept of luxury builds on 5 main dimensions: high quality, high price, perception of rarity, emotional and personal connection as well as prestigious image. All of these dimensions were found to be relevant also for the S-H consumers when defining luxury.

However, in relation to price a strong investment mindset was identified, where luxury items are not seen as normal purchases but rather investments that can keep or even increase their value over time. This conceptualization is in line with Turunen & Pöyry (2019) finding according to which S-H luxury consumers shop also with the resale value in mind. This does not mean that they are necessarily planning to sell the product. In fact, the interviewed consumers in most of the cases did not express their intention to sell. They rather saw the resale value as a way to evaluate the product as well as the brand. It is important additionally to note that the relevance of the resale value was higher for consumers with an elevated level of knowledge about luxury as well as a strong desire to maintain their image of luxury experts, while for the rest of the respondents the perception of luxury was a quality guarantee. This finding therefor challenges the conclusions reached by Kessous & Valette-Florence (2019), according to which the desire to be seen as experts is a motive that characterizes F-H luxury consumers and not S-H. These expert luxury consumers in fact turn also to S-H to find unique and rare pieces that prove their knowledge.

Additionally, in relation to the personal and emotional connections luxury can create, two distinct groups were identified. In line with the self-concept theory analysed by Ko et al. (2019), these groups differ one from another due to different characteristics of their individuals, in terms of self-concept, need for uniqueness, susceptibility to normative influence and self-confidence. In fact, one group was represented by an interdependent self-concept. Luxury is for these consumers a way to feel part of a group. Additionally, a lower self-esteem was detected, as luxury was mainly used to feel closer to their desired self: *"more elegant", "more fashionable", "more popular"* and *"richer"*. These participants were therefore associating to luxury the power to transfer its characteristic to them and make them look better, closer to what they want to be. In line with that most of these consumers also showed a higher subjectivity to normative influence as they were striving to more popular products rather than unique one.

The other group, on the other hand, was characterized by a higher self-confidence and they saw luxury as a way to express their actual self. Luxury is therefore a reflection of who they are. These participants were also looking for more exclusive items to prove their uniqueness as they were generally negatively influenced by the popularity of the product.

# SECOND-HAND MOTIVES

The different dimensions of S-H luxury meaning presented by Turunen & Leipämaa-Leskinen (2015), were found to be relevant also for the respondents of this study. However, it is interesting to highlight here that the concept of uniqueness differs among the participants. The two groups identified in the context of the emotional and personal connection with luxury, were evident also here. On one hand consumers with a more independent self, saw the uniqueness of the S-H luxury experience as it gives access to rare pieces that prove the uniqueness of the consumer itself as well as in some cases the knowledge and the expertise of the buyer. On the other hand, for those with a more interdependent self, the primary value of S-H luxury was the access to the luxury world and the unique feeling of being part of it. Here a third group was also identified, that in some cases overlapped with the above-mentioned ones. Some of the respondents in fact associated the uniqueness of S-H luxury to the unique stories of these items. These participants in fact felt part of something special, part of the unique story of the item, showing therefore a need for belonging but also a certain need for uniqueness.

Additionally, the sustainability choice was for most of the participants seen as a justifier of the purchase rather than a motivator, that however helps to decrease the dissonance some of the participants feel when relate to luxury (Dubois et al., 2011). Two participants, however, also indicate it as the main motivation to consumer S-H as they felt it as a personal duty to be responsible and act sustainably.

# SECOND-HAND LUXURY EXPERIENCE

The S-H experience is characterized by ambivalent emotional states floating between excitement due to the find of a great deal and fear associated with the risk of getting inauthentic products or products in bad conditions. This dissonance is approached by the consumers with a more exploitative and proactive behaviour. S-H consumers in fact in the majority of cases enter this market with an already clear objective in mind of finding a specific product. The impossibility to physically see and touch the product as well as the uncertainty related to the seller and the product create tension in consumers' minds and prevent them to buy products or brands that they don't know. Additionally, they approach this selection phase more proactively researching and evaluating the different items and deals available. This behavioural reaction was more accentuated in respondents that perceive inauthenticity as a big danger to their image. These were usually respondents that use luxury to express their value and their success. Interestingly however, bad experiences with fake or damaged goods were not associated directly with the brand but rather with the S-H platform.

For the less risk-averse respondents the ambivalence of this experience created additional excitement, as it was perceived as a hunting game. For them the initial effort needed to find and seal a great deal increases the excitement and satisfaction of getting the deal. It therefore also increases the perceived value of the product, which required more work to be obtained. The risk aversity was related also to the level of income of the respondents, as the risk was perceived higher for the participants with lower incomes.

Additionally, a relevant difference in the perceived experience was found based on the level and number of past experiences the respondents had with F-H luxury. In fact, participants with an extensive experience with luxury lived S-H as an exciting and convenient alternative to consume luxury. Over time, the F-H experience to some extent lost its extraordinary image and relevance for

these consumers. It is in fact not worth for them to pay the difference in price for the in-store luxury experience and even less for the one online. Besides S-H is seen as a relevant opportunity to experience more unique and rare luxury pieces. They however pointed out that for some brands and product, the F-H experience is still worth, among them, best in class luxury brands, like Hermes, as well as "one in life" purchases like luxury watches or limited-edition products which value on the second-hand market is expected to increase.

On the other hand, consumers with limited or no F-H luxury experience, nourish a strong desire to experience it. They therefore see the S-H market only as a way to access luxury products, which would be otherwise inaccessible for them. Their lack of experience with F-H luxury therefore incentivises them to idealize the emotional, social and sensorial aspect of this experience which for them adds value to the luxury product. The lack of the hedonic, prestigious and sensorial dimension they believe characterizes the S-H luxury, instead, decreases the perceived luxuriousness of the experience and can consequently influence the perceived value of the product and the brand. It is important here to point out that this does not mean that the group with extensive luxury experience does not perceive F-H luxury as more luxurious, which it does, but rather that is does not see it worth the difference in the products price. If brands want to stay relevant for these consumers, they should consider some innovation in the offered experiences.

In the delivery phase consumers are still going through an evaluation process of whether the item was worth the investment. Here the importance of the packaging in influencing their satisfaction and enjoyment with the purchase was evident.

Some of the respondents, however, also pointed out their distance toward the product as they feel the presence of the previous owner. They therefore put in place cleaning rituals to end the previous ownership and start a new one. This additional step is a requirement for some consumers to fully enjoy their purchase.

On the other-hand the past story of the item for some of the respondents was seen as an emotional aspect of S-H luxury, which increases the value of the item in their eyes.

Despite the feeling of uniqueness that the consumption of S-H luxury products can bring to its owners, whether due to the rarity of the item, its unique history or just its luxuriousness, also a lower degree of care characterized this experience. All the respondents in fact indicated that they are more careless

and more comfortable in using S-H luxury products everyday as they are not that worried about ruining them. While this behaviour and attitude can increase the attachment to the product and the brand as it becomes part of their everyday life, it can also negatively influence its perceived value and prestige. This product and consequently the brand are not seen as that precious and that special anymore.

# CONCLUSION

## SECOND-HAND LUXURY BRAND EXPERIENCE

According to Brakus et al., (2009) brand experience is a synergy of sensorial, affective, cognitive and behavioural reactions to different brand related stimuli. Bustamante & Rubio, (2017) additionally added the social dimension to the concept of brand experience.

The overall experience of a luxury brand is therefore influenced by different stimuli and consumers reactions the luxury consumers live at the different points of contact with the brand. The S-H luxury market is one of these touchpoints.

The experiences in this context were found to be characterized by a general limited sensorially, substituted by the consumers with proactive behaviours of researching and comparing. The lack of touch, smell as well as the lack of opportunity to see the product in person are typical characteristics of the online setting. The intensity of the sensorial involvement increases the consumer involvement in the experience and therefore increases its memorability (Batat, 2019a). In line with this theory about the online experience, the findings of this study indicate that S-H luxury consumers are missing the sensorial experience of luxury when they enter this market. Particularly for luxury brands, which were found to be strongly dependent on the experiences they can create (Batat, 2019b, 2019a; Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), this limited sensorially has a negative influence on the experience S-H luxury consumers live, making them less involved and therefore making their experience less memorable.

From an affective point of view, S-H luxury consumers go through an ambivalent experience characterized by feelings of fear related to the risk associated to this consumption and feelings of excitement for finding the desired piece. This floating of emotions can make this experience more intense and therefore more memorable, which makes also its influence on the overall experience higher (Batat, 2019b). The intensity of the experience however appears to be influenced by consumers attitude towards the selection process as well as the perceived value and meaning of S-H luxury. This experience does not necessarily have a positive connotation, particularly in cases when a product in

bad conditions or fake is received. However, this bad experience is generally not attributed to the luxury brand, by the respondents, but rather to the S-H platform.

The risk associated to these purchases, additionally, evokes behavioural reactions that pushes the consumers to research and attentively evaluate the product before the purchase. This also makes the consumer more involved and knowledgeable about the brand and its products, which can have both positive and negative influence for the brand based on the knowledge that can be acquired. Additionally, in the consumption phase, the lack of newness proper of the S-H items make some of the consumers engage with cleaning rituals that can minimize the presence of the previous owner. If not completely removed this presence can distance the user from the product and therefore limit her attachment to it. Furthermore, for most of the respondents this pre-used nature of S-H is also justifying the consumers to use the product more carelessly and more often. Both these behavioural reactions can decrease the perceived prestigiousness and value of the product.

From an intellectual point of view, S-H luxury consumption is a strongly cognitive experience, where the consumer needs to be conscious about the risk she is taking and evaluate whether is worth taking it or not. As a more rational and premeditated experience, it can lose the "magic" and emotionality that usually characterizes luxury experiences (Kapferer, 1998) as well as make the consumer more aware of the value of the product. Especially the more experienced luxury consumers were found to be very conscious of the quality and value of different products and brands, not seeing the luxury brand necessarily as a guarantee for its value. This can have a negative impact for the brands it they are not able to maintain their value in the S-H market.

The S-H luxury experience also losses its social aspect related to the in-store experience. However, the consumption of these products still maintain a social relevance as, on one hand, they are still luxury products and not necessarily visibly associated to the practice of S-H and on the other they contribute to make the owner look better: skilled in finding and recognizing great deals, special for owning unique products or responsible for choosing a qualitative and sustainable option.

Is therefore the author's conclusion, that the S-H experience consumers go through, has a relevant influence on how luxury brands are experienced. This influence, however, is not necessarily positive or negative, as different stimuli and consumer experiences can have a different impact on the overall brand experience. Among these stimuli and experiences the most prominent were:

•        The resale value of the item, or the change in price between the F-H and the S-H market, if small or negative can positively influence the perceived value and exclusivity of the brand, but if high

it has a negative impact on it. This stimulus is particularly relevant for consumers with an elevated knowledge about luxury and see these items as expressions of their actual self. It is important here to note, that due to the risk associated with S-H, S-H consumers are keener to collect information about the products and the brand. Due to the democratization of internet they are also more likely to find real data, which might not always benefit the brand.

• The uniqueness of the products available has a positive influence for consumers that are looking for rare pieces to express their self and their knowledge, as it increases the attachment to the brand and its perceived value (Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019).

• The availability of popular products on the other hand can satisfy the aspirational luxury consumers, who uses S-H to access luxury at a lower price point. However, this can also have a negative impact, if the products in store are also available on the S-H market for a lower price. This will in the first place create confusion over the value of the product and influence the decision making of those consumers who are considering buying the item F-H. Furthermore, it will also decrease the perceived exclusivity of this item, an important characteristic of luxury products.

• The packaging and delivery experience if positively perceived, influences the perceived luxuriousness of the product and consumer's emotional involvement with it positively, having therefore a positive influence on the brand.

• The past owner presence has a positive influence for consumers that see the emotional value in the connection with the past, as this strengthens the relation between the product and its owner. However, it can have a negative impact for consumers who do not perceive this as valuable, but rather as an obstacle that limits them to fully enjoy the item.

• The perceived quality and low delicacy of the product due to past usage, has a positive impact on consumers experience with the product as it makes them more comfortable to use it more often and in all situations. This positively influences the relationship the consumer has with its product as well as the perception of its quality, and therefore influences the brand. However, in the context of luxury, this negatively influences the perception of the product in terms of its prestigiousness. Due to their usability these products are not experiences as prestigious and precious as the new ones.

• The sustainability aspect of the experience positively influences the experience as it decreases the dissonance luxury consumers live in relation to luxury.

• Brand involvement with S-H luxury positively influences the brand experience if perceived to be beneficial for both the brand and the consumer. If perceived as incentivizing consumers to make bad choices this will have a negative impact on the brand

The study, therefore, contributes with novel knowledge to the research field about S-H luxury experiences as well as their influence on luxury brands. In other words, the study deepens the understanding of how consumers live luxury in the S-H market and how these experiences impact the overall luxury brand experience.

Additionally, to the authors knowledge, the Brakus et al., (2009) brand experience framework was used in the context of luxury for the first time in this study. It contributed, therefore, to confirm the applicability of the specific framework as well as to the development of new knowledge about brand experience.

Additionally, due to the explorative nature of the study, these findings can be seen as a base for future researches as they provide a starting point for the understanding of the phenomenon of S-H luxury from an experiential point of view as well as a useful insight for managerial decision making.

# MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study and its findings are also considered relevant from a managerial point of view. The knowledge about how S-H luxury consumers experience luxury brands can in fact contribute to the decision-making of brand managers and can therefore influence the standing point of the brand towards the S-H practice as well as the actions taken to gain relevance among these consumers.

Considering the different findings about which stimuli and reactions positively influence the brand experience in the context of S-H, brand managers can make sure to incentivize these stimuli or limit and try to contain the ones that might have a negative impact. For example, by monitoring the resale value of their products, managers can have an overview on how the brand is perceived and evaluated and can take different actions consequently. As it was found that S-H consumers enter this market with an already clear intention of what they want to buy, luxury brands have a great opportunity to influence these decisions on different touchpoints over which they have more control. On the other

hand, as limited availability was still found to be an important aspect of luxury, controlling the number of items available in the overall market might contribute to maintain the perception of rarity also on the S-H market. Additionally, taking in to account the increasing popularity of the S-H luxury market as well as its influence on luxury brands, managers can take into consideration to partner with S-H platforms and collaborate with them on assuring a soother experience also on these channels. The collaboration can be in terms of authentication of the products, luxurious packaging as well as repairing services. This can benefit the brand by elevating the experience S-H luxury consumers go through, help the brand to protect its image from counterfeits as well as associate its brand image to a sustainable and caring personality. The findings also pointed out the relevance of the F-H instore experience as the main luxury experience. Therefore, luxury brands should focus on making this experience as unique as possible, particularly to maintain the relevance among the more frequent luxury consumers, which according to the findings in same cases turn to S-H because they don't perceive the value of having the in-store experience. Brands should therefore turn to innovation to improve their relevance for this group, which should be the main focus for them, as aspirational luxury consumers will still turn to F-H when they get the chance.

# LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the study contributes with novel knowledge to the research field as well as with strong implications that managers can consider in their decision making, the study does not come without limitations.

One of the main limitations relates to the sample of the respondents. These participants were recruited via Instagram based on their posts, where they specified with tagging that they purchased a luxury item on one of the S-H online platforms. The decision to tag the source of their luxury product and share it with their audience indicate a positive attitude towards S-H luxury and an information they feel positive about sharing. This recruitment criteria therefore oversees those S-H luxury consumers who are not willing to share their S-H consumption practices. These consumers can in fact have a different attitude towards it as well as a different experience and relation with luxury brands. Additionally, due to the lack of male Instagram users that shared their S-H products on this social

channel, the used sample included only female participants. This limitation also decreased the heterogeneity of the sample and therefore of the findings.

An additional limitation of the study relates to the process of data collection. Due to the Covid-19 situation all the interviews were conducted online, via Skype. Despite all the participants agree to use the video feature during the conversation, the online setting limited the interviewer in understanding the unconscious facial and emotional reactions of the respondents, which also made it harder to establish a more intimate and personal conversation. Some of the emotional and unconscious reactions might therefore have been missed. Furthermore, due to the nature of the conversation, which focused on topics like feelings, emotions and moods, the reluctancy of some of the participants to share these intimate thoughts and perceptions is also considered a limitation of the study.

It is however, the believe of the author that these limitations do not completely undermine the validity of the study, which could still be used as a relevant starting point for future researches.

On one side, in order to evaluate and confirm the validity of the findings, future reaches could include a more heterogeneous sample in order to understand whether consumers that do not share their S-H purchases on social media have the same experience. Additionally, it would be interesting to see whether gender has an influence on the findings.

Due to its explorative nature, the present study contributes with a qualitative overview of the S-H luxury experience and the different stimuli that can influence it. Future studies could use these insights as base for new quantitative researches that quantify the influence of the different stimuli identified in this study.

Additionally, for the purpose of the study, the research was limited to European S-H consumers as well as the buyers' point of view. It is therefore an opportunity for future research to analyse also different cultures and geographical locations as well as consider the sellers point of view rather than the buyers, to understand how luxury brands are experience by these S-H consumers.

It is undeniable that the second-hand luxury consumption is becoming a popular practice among aspirational as well as actual luxury consumers. The findings of this study give an overview on how luxury brands are perceived and experience on this touchpoint. Brands should take into account these insights about today's luxury consumers. They should use them to make sure their brand image is aligned on all the touchpoints or otherwise act upon it influencing the stimuli and experiences that challenge this consistency. Additionally, they should take advantage of these insights to innovate

their current offerings in order to be more relevant for today's luxury consumers who in some cases are turning to the S-H market because they don't perceive enough value in the F-H experiences.

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