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Assessing the effects of customization on luxury perception and consumer behaviour: analysing the differences between in-store and online shopping experiences

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ABSTRACT

During the last years, the business environment has been shaped by the increase of modern digital technologies, that forced companies to start selling online. The development of these new technologies led to new shopping experiences for consumers that can now be either traditional, offered in a store, or digital, offered online through websites and other online resources. Particularly important in these new shopping experiences is the product customization, that companies consider as the perfect tool to both differentiate from the others and respond to individual customer needs. The phenomenon of customization mainly involves luxury brands; indeed, they can maintain the prestige of the brand and, at the same time, engage a broader audience involving consumers through new innovative tools and experiences.

The aim of the present study is to analyse the differences between an in-store and online customization shopping experiences and the effects on consumer's perception of luxury and its behaviours. The empirical research has been carried out through an online questionnaire in which respondents undergo two different scenarios representing the online and in-store experiences. The advertisement represents the opportunity to customize Tod's shoes online or in a shop with the claim "*The shoes that define you, for both women and men. Whatever you imagine to wear, you can make it yours*". Through this claim, the company highlights the possibility of creating the shoes that people want, choosing among a wide range of combination. The results emerged from analysis highlight the relevance of in-store experience that leads to a higher customer involvement respect to the digital experience with positive effects on luxury perception and brand

authenticity, consumer's willingness to buy and Word of Mouth (WOM). Consequently, theoretical and marketing implications have been defined.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preface

For 25 years luxury has been used as a symbol of privilege for royalties and religious authorities, as well as in all the situations in which it was ostentatiously displayed in public as a sign of superiority. With the beginning of the Renaissance and the spread of the early capitalist societies, it started becoming accessible also to bankers and industries' captains, so that creators of these luxury products began signing their pieces (Chandon et al., 2016). This phenomenon is associated to a first glance at the modern luxury branding. Consequently, luxury products started to be a gift that consumers make occasionally to themselves as a way to feel happy and granted. This shift in consumer behaviour signed the entering in a new era for luxury goods where the previously inaccessible products are now accessible to nearly everyone: the reservation of these goods only for elite switches to the modern concept of luxury in which every consumer can buy them to make their dream come true and express themselves (Chandon et al., 2016). Indeed, luxury is defined as a centuries-old notion which evolved in meaning and perception: while in the seventeenth century luxury was used to indicate only extraordinary and rare goods, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it developed a deep understanding of craftmanship and customization to communicate the values of uniqueness and exclusivity (Berthon et al., 2009).

In the past two decades, luxury brands started implementing digital technologies in order to enhance customer engagement and relationships, especially by offering the

opportunity to customize their products (Moreau et al., 2020). Over the last two decades the global market for luxury brands has rapidly grown, considering that it had an increase of the 20% in 2021 after the strong impact of the pandemic (Xi et al., 2022). Altagramma Consensus (2023) registered a record year for the global luxury market with a solid growth that involves all the main markets in the world, starting from Europe (+5%), China and Asia (+9%) and United States (+5%). As well as the expansion and growth in markets, also product categories of luxury goods will see a solid increase in sales, for both leather goods and footwear, respectively +8.5% and +7%, but also hard luxury and watches with an increase of respectively 8% and 5%.

The global market of luxury is rapidly and globally growing, both the physical and digital distribution channels have seen a high increase. This phenomenon allows the direct relationship between consumers and brands with a greater control on all the touchpoints, strengthening the omnichannel strategy that brands started to adopt. According to data collected by Altagramma Consensus (2023), physical retail remains crucial (+7%) thanks to the increase in personalized and phygital approaches that improve consumer's engagement, also with the expansion in new cities and markets. However, digital retail continues to expand and register an increase of the 8% (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Distribution channels of luxury goods*

DISTIBUTION CHANNELS	2023
Physical retail	+7%
Digital retail	+8%
Physical wholesale	+3.5%
Digital wholesale	+5.5%

Source: Altagramma Consensus (2023)

The development of new digital technologies represents a key tool for companies that want to expand globally (Reynolds, 2012). Among the wide range of tools that digital technology offers to brand, the opportunity to offer the customization of their products is extensively growing (Moreau et al., 2020). Therefore, companies are slowly reintroducing the former characteristic of bespoke products that characterized luxury products in the past but renovating it in a modern way. The customization platform, indeed, can both appeal the masses and maintain the sense of exclusivity of the luxury brand (Yoo and Parks, 2016). Indeed, a luxury product involves a symbolic, but also social and cultural meaning: not only people who purchase luxury search excellent quality, aesthetics, and high price, but also exclusivity and uniqueness of the product, its connection to human values and lifestyle, as well as the heritage behind it built through time. Through customization, consumers experience the 'I designed it myself' effect (Franke et al., 2010): the more they construct and contribute, the more they value the final

product, especially if compared to a pre-made product. Customize the product, in fact, create a product that is sold exclusively to the single customer, which means a unique product not only for the person, but also for the design (Moreau et al., 2020).

Another distinctive trait of luxury brands regards how they distributed their product in the market to be as competitive as possible. First, luxury brands invested in direct distribution activities, such as flagship stores, DOS and temporary stores. These stores can express the brand's values and the symbolic attributes of their products, as well as offer to consumers a fully immerged experience. Moreover, luxury companies started integrating communication activities and developing the digital channel in luxury markets, which is strategically integrated with the activities in the physical distribution. These means of communication offer the opportunity to expand and reach a wider audience with different socio-demographic characteristics, as well as extend the consumer's shopping experience. Finally, luxury brands started considering the content generated by users through social-media marketing when they receive and share information or respond by liking the products and purchase them in the physical or digital store (Mosca, 2014).

To sum up, companies moved from a multi-channel to an omnichannel consumer experience, that combines different channels of communication and touchpoints so that consumers can experience shopping and contact with the brand through the channel they choose and live a homogeneous shopping experience (Romero et al., 2020).

1.2 Consumer shopping experience

As introduced above, the shopping experience can be lived by the consumer either in physical or digital stores. It is important to highlight that shopping is not only the single

act of purchasing a product, but also the experience that consumer lives which is prior to purchase (Yoon and Park, 2018). Whether they buy online or in the store, companies should be able to give them what they expect from purchasing a luxury product. Luxury consumers who buy online or in the store can be motivated by different reasons which usually change between the traditional and digital environment. Indeed, when purchasing online, consumers mainly evaluate the convenience, which means the opportunity to buy products anywhere and at any time, but also the possibility to save time. Moreover, the price still plays a significant role because, even though luxury consumers expect to pay a high price, they usually search for better prices. Indeed, better prices are more attractive and sometimes made consumers enjoy the purchase and the saving of money. In addition, shopping online offers a wider availability of products, especially because usually luxury stores have limited geographic locations. Finally, online shopping attitudes and online trust are the last two variables that influence the shopping online. The former is related to the enjoyment in the online environment; indeed, some consumers can feel happier and more relaxed when purchasing online. The latter is related to consumer trust on the internet, especially with the increase in using customer satisfaction ratings and reviews of other consumers that already tried the product (Liu et al., 2013).

On the other hand, traditional luxury consumers give importance to different factors, starting from the aesthetic appeal of the store which gave the opportunity to smell, see, taste, hear and feel before purchasing. Indeed, consumers who are going to spend a lot of money, usually want to be completely sure and evaluate all the aspects. Moreover, the store trust is highly perceived when purchasing in the store than online. The stores are able to give to consumers the certainty of the product authenticity, but also limit the problems connected to credit cards, information privacy, and product returns. In addition,

the shopping experience in the store is relaxing and enjoyable, people feel it as a relief from work or stress. Finally, consumer service and sense of power are the last variables ranked important by traditional consumers. The former is related to the assistance given to consumers in the decision-making process, which usually helps them selecting products from a wide variety or offers customized services. The latter is related to the feeling of power that consumers have when visiting a luxury store. The store gives them the opportunity to feel important and highly valued, but also unique and sophisticated (Liu et al., 2013). To conclude, it can be assumed that while online shoppers show more trust for online retailers and customer reviews, in-store shoppers develop more trust for the store environment.

This comparison between the two shopping experiences highlights how consumer which purchase luxury products do not pay attention only to the product itself, but also the services and values they offer to them. Physical attributes such as high quality, artisanal work and manufacturing are still important, but also is its ability to communicate the values in which believes, to feel gratified and pleased by the consumption of the product, to distinguish from the others and express their true selves. All these qualities are offered to consumers during the shopping experience through both cognitive and emotional experiences (Schmitt, 1999).

To conclude, in recent years companies have to face a lot of changes and start adopting digital technologies to be competitive in the luxury market. Consequently, they start offering their services online, even due to the emergence of the pandemic that accelerates the phenomenon of e-commerce and forced them to sell online. For this reason, it is important to understand if the store still plays a fundamental role in influencing consumer behaviour and perception of luxury, or if, with the implementation of digital technologies

and stores online, the brand and the products are perceived to be innovative and more appealing.

1.3 Research purposes

The main purpose of this research is to analyse how luxury brands can influence consumers behaviour through customization and how this affects the perception of brand and products. Particularly, the research aims to analyse the perception of luxury and brand authenticity of Tod's shoes through the creation of two different advertising stimuli which represent the two shopping experiences in which the consumer can find himself, namely in the store and online environments. Moreover, the research aims to investigate how these contexts can influence brand image and consumer behaviour, in terms of Word of Mouth and purchase intensions, as well as the involvement of consumer in the shopping experience.

To conclude, the general purpose of this research is to evaluate if the store still plays an important role for luxury brands or if the use of new digital technologies online can enhance consumer experience and, consequently, affect the perception of luxury of both the brand and the products, as well as brand authenticity. A further purpose is to assess the effects on consumer behaviour and, thus, understand if companies should increment the use of digital technologies or not to develop new marketing strategies that can satisfy consumer's needs lined to the product customization.

1.4 Research structure

After this introductory chapter, the body of this present research is articulated in four main chapters, each of them with a specific purpose:

- Chapter 2 illustrates the literature review of the subject of the research. In addition, it investigates the subject through the different theoretical constructs and their terminology, which has been considered to reach research objectives and purposes.

- Chapter 3 presents the aim of the research. It includes the explanation of the company chosen for the study, but mainly focusing on research methodology used for the development of the research. Moreover, each variable and each respective dimensions and items included in the questionnaire are analysed and explained into details. The final section presents the socio-demographics data collected form the questionnaire respondents.

- Chapter 4 presents and analyses the results of the research from a statistic point of view, outlining the significant difference that emerged between the two groups of respondents.

- Chapter 5 discusses the results of the questionnaire and gives the conclusions of the research. Moreover, theoretical and marketing implications are described, and, in the last section, limitation of the present research and future studies are presented.

Finally, the Annex A contains the questionnaire administered to Italian-speaking people, taking into consideration that each group undergone one of the two scenarios, but they all answer the same questions of the questionnaire in both versions.

1.4.1 Second chapter summary: Luxury products and customization

The second chapter is articulated in seven sections. The first section introduces the subject of the research, focusing on the changes in the costumer experience due to the development of new modern digital technologies. The aim of this section is to give an introductory background and explain the role that customization has in the luxury sector.

The following section is dedicated to the concept of luxury and aims to explain what the concept means, especially analysing it from the costumer point of view. Indeed, the subsections are dedicated to luxury perception and luxury brand authenticity, each of them explained by identifying the main characteristics and traits. The former concept is analysed through the cognitive, extrinsic, and intrinsic attributes that characterize luxury products. Moreover, two models are presented to individuate the characteristics of luxury that influence consumers' vision and consumer decision-making process. In addition, the four dimensions that influence luxury consumption are presented, involving its financial, functional, individual, and social dimension. The latter concept is presented through a model which includes the dimension of continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism of the brand.

The third section introduces the relevance of branding and aims to trace the phases of the brand development. Indeed, companies who want to build a strong brand image have to experience the different levels that bring more and more into proximity with the consumer. Each subsection describes the phases over which the brand evolves from brand awareness to brand spirituality, particularly dwelling on brand image and its three dimensions of cognitive, emotional, and sensory associations, and brand experience, which involves the five Strategic Experiential Modules (SEM) developed by Schmitt (1999).

The fourth section explains the transition from the traditional to the digital marketing. It presents and highlights the differences and the opportunities offered by each situation and explains the transition from a multichannel to an omnichannel consumer experience due to the spread and development of new technologies. Indeed, the following subsection introduces the consumer shopping experience comparing both the characteristic and

differences between the experience lived in the store or online. The following subsection is dedicated to the development of new digital technologies, specifically focusing on the customization service of products offered by luxury brands.

The fifth section is dedicated to the involvement of the consumer in the shopping experience, in both the product and the shopping activity, while the sixth section introduces the concept of mental imagery, linking it to the concepts of sensory perceptions, decision confidence, behavioural intent, and anticipatory emotion.

Finally, the last section is dedicated to the explanation of the variables of consumer purchase intention and Word of Mouth. This section aims to describe the connection that there is between the two variables, and the significant role that they play in the ability of companies to meet consumers' needs.

1.4.2 Third chapter summary: Research methodology

The third chapter aims to present the methodology used for the conduction of the research, define the questions that the study wants to answer and present the reference company which is the object of the study. The first section is dedicated to the explanation of the research purpose, specifically the behaviour of consumers when purchasing luxury products in two different situations, online or in the store. For this reason, this section includes an explanation of the two advertising stimuli that have been created for the questionnaire, representing the two ways of customizing Tod's shoes.

The second section focuses on the methodology, specifically the design of the research, the individuation of the case study of Tod's and the survey. The first subsection describes the development phases of the research from the definition of the case study to the explanation of how data were collected. The following subsection describes Tod's brand,

explaining why this brand is suitable for this research. It presents the history of the brand and its internationalization, introducing through which channels it communicates with customers. In addition, the core values of the brand are presented, highlighting the combination of tradition with innovation, the mission, and the central importance of the consumer for the brand which led to the development of the customization service offered through their platform. Specifically, this service allows consumers to create their own versions of the shoes combining different models, colours, and fabrics. The following subsection introduces the survey, firstly describing the two versions of the advertising and the creation of the claim in English, which aims to emphasize the opportunity for customers to create their own shoe. Moreover, it defines the measurement scales and introduces all the variables and items that has been considered: luxury perception, consumer involvement in the shopping experience, brand authenticity, brand image, product luxury perception, product customization, consumer empowerment, mental imagery, consumer behaviour. Finally, the last section presents the samples regarding respondent's age, gender, annual income, and education. Moreover, the last section describes the analysis methodology for the research which consists in the comparison between the average of the different variables between the two groups of respondents.

1.4.3 Fourth chapter summary: Research results

The fourth chapter presents the results of the research and analyses them taking into consideration each construct and its respective dimensions used to create the two versions of the questionnaire. Both versions contain the same questions and differ only for the advertising stimuli: one version has the advertising suggesting the customization experience in the store, the other suggesting the customization online. The chapter is made

up of a series of charts that aim to visually highlight the differences between the average of the two groups of respondents. Each chart is preceded by a comment which indicates if substantial differences have been found or not. The sections of the chapter are ten and the constructs results are inserted as follow: luxury perception, consumer involvement, brand authenticity, brand image, product luxury perception, product customization, consumer empowerment, mental imagery, and consumer behaviour, which involves the marketing variable of willingness to buy and Word of Mouth.

1.4.4 Fifth chapter summary: General discussion and conclusions

The last chapter provides a general discussion of the results previously presented in the chapter four. The first section gives a short description of the main findings, going through each variable but focusing especially on the ones that registered substantial differences between the two groups. The following section focuses and discusses the conclusions that emerged from the analysis of the results. This section deals especially with the role that the shopping experience environment plays in consumer decision-making process, including both the involvement of the consumer and the efficacy of the advertising. Moreover, the chapter discusses theoretical and marketing implications that emerged from the analysis: the former concerning the attributes of the luxury products and consumer behaviour, the latter concerning marketing strategies that can be implemented.

Finally, the last section is dedicated to explaining the limitation of the present research, but also individuating the improvement that can be made in the future. This section aims to highlight how the research can be improved in the future in order to obtain even more relevant results and investigates in every side of the world of luxury.

CHAPTER 2

LUXURY PRODUCTS AND CUSTOMIZATION

2.1 Introduction

The development of modern digital technologies has shaped the business environment during the last years and, consequently, has changed the way people live and work and what they expect from companies. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerates the phenomenon of e-commerce and companies were forced to start selling online. Nowadays companies need to focus on consumer's experience, especially online, in order to face their competitors and to give consumers what they expect. In so doing, companies have to differentiate from competitors and meet the individual consumer wishes. Industry 4.0 and digitalization revealed to be a key and flexible factor to allow consumers' personalization of products and help industries and companies to meet the specific needs of their consumers (Pech and Vrchota, 2022). Customization refers to the production of tailored products in response to individual customer needs (Blecker and Friedrich, 2007); companies usually gave the opportunity to personalize their products in stores, while in the last years they started giving this opportunity online towards customization platforms that allows consumers to choose the best combination of size, colours, and materials. Offering customization services online has emerged also among luxury brands, so that they maintain their prestige and, at the same time, engage a broader audience (Moreau et al., 2020).

In addition, luxury brands need to understand why people buy luxury goods and, above all, the perception that they have of luxury (Weidman, 2007). Indeed, luxury perception

and authenticity are two main constructs of luxury: the former depends not only on social aspects, but also financial, functional and individual aspects of the specific luxury brand (Hennings et al., 2007), the latter is the combination of objective, subjective and existential aspects related to a brand, including their ability to be honest, true to its consumers and moved by responsibility (Morhart et al., 2015). In order to convey all these social, cultural and personal meanings, brand must be able to develop a solid brand image, which is the perception that consumers associate with a specific brand (Keller, 1993).

This chapter aims to provide the readers with a general presentation of luxury and introduce theoretically the concepts of luxury perception, luxury authenticity and brand image. In addition, the chapter proposes a comparison of online and offline shopping experiences, in relation to the switching from traditional to digital marketing and omnichannel shopping experiences and as a background for the introduction of customization concept. Moreover, readers are introduced to the role of mental imagery that can be related to customization process and, at the end, will be explained marketing variables characterizing the consumer behaviour, such as of Word of Mouth (WOM) and consumers' purchase intention which are significant to understand how and if customization affects consumers.

2.2 The concept of luxury

According to the Oxford Latin Dictionary (1992), the word luxury derives from "luxus", which means "soft or extravagant living, (over) – indulgence" and "sumptuousness, luxuriousness, opulence" (Dubois et al., 2005, p.115). Its meaning broadens over the decades and this term is currently used to refer to products or services categories that want to communicate a specific type of offer to their consumers (Dubois

et. al, 2005). Precisely, a luxury brand "represents specific social and cultural meanings conveyed by the product or brand that are used by consumers" (Becker et al., 2018, p.51) and aims to describe both the personal and social relationship with the consumer and its position when compared to others in the society. The image of luxury brands derives from the perception that consumers have of the brand itself and, for this reason, when consumers and marketers try to give a definition of luxury products tend to use a more abstract language, instead of the language used to describe an ordinary product (Hansen and Wänke, 2011). Therefore, when defining a luxury product, three dimensions need to be considered: product category, degree of luxury associated with the brand and context of use. A new approach to the concept has been developed by Becker, Lee and Nobre (2018) to describe the attributes that characterize a luxury product through three points of view: the characteristics of the luxury product, the consumer phycological characteristics toward the luxury product, and the personal relationship between consumer and product. This model gives a representation of the combination between the psychological characteristics of both the consumers and the product to create the consumer luxury brand relationship. The authors (Becker et al., 2018) choose a pyramid to communicate the hierarchal order of values among the three steps. Indeed, at the base there must be a deep understanding of the high quality of the product by consumers. Once the quality is assured, at a secondary level consumer uses these products to communicate their social status and to associate with specific groups of consumers. At the third level, the consumer characteristics started to be more intrinsic regarding self-image and identity. During the three hierarchal steps, consumers built with the brand a relationship that is based respectively on satisfaction, prestige, and loyalty.

The more basic level is represented by cognitive attributes which correspond to the foundation of the product, while extrinsic and intrinsic attributes are respectively the two advanced levels (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: *The BECKER Model of Consumer Luxury Brand Relationships*
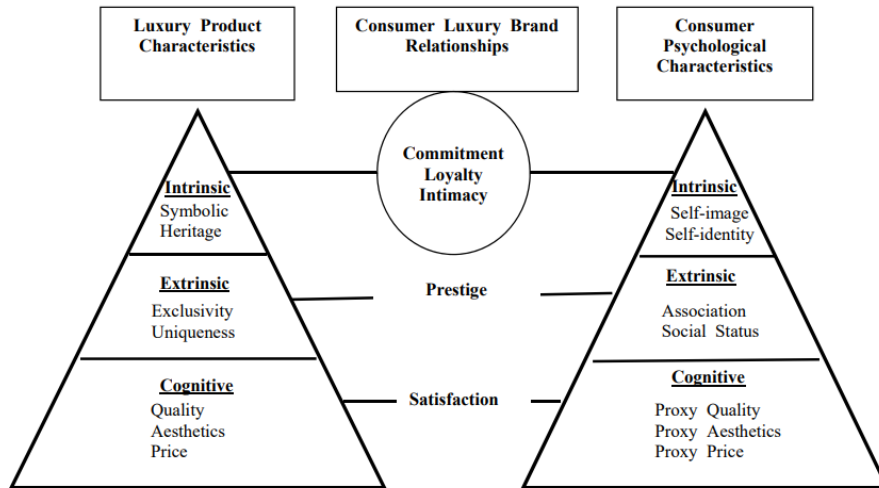
Cognitive attributes are the characteristics of quality, aesthetics, and price of the product. These attributes are linked to both physical and psychological characteristics of the product and, for this reason, are considered the base of the building blocks of the consumer's cognitive attributes. (Becker et al., 2018). First of all, product quality is a keystone that makes the purchase of luxury products reasonable, even with the high prices that characterize luxury goods (Eastman and Eastman, 2011). Another important feature is aesthetics, that is defined as an extension of highly creative individuals. Through the features that companies determine in a product or a brand, they aim to induce emotions of exclusivity and superiority, as if they are talking about a work of art (Arnould and Dion, 2011). The third cognitive attribute is price: as the high price is considered an

indicator of the social status, so the possess and use of luxury products is usually used by consumers to signal their social status (Eastman and Eastman, 2011). Indeed, the most objective characteristic that is taken into consideration to evaluate the level of luxury of a product is the price. Evidence to that is the fact that products with lower prices are rarely considered luxury and, consequently, even though price alone do not create a luxurious image, it establishes at least an expectation of luxury (Becker et. al, 2018).

Extrinsic and *intrinsic attributes* are both important features that allow the recognition of a luxury product. The former refers to those characteristics that are not strictly related to the product itself, the latter to those that are basic characteristics of a product. Exclusivity and uniqueness are extrinsic attributes of a luxury product and led to a concrete connection between luxuriousness and social status (Becker et. al, 2018). As a confirm, the scarcity of a product induces consumers to believe that these products are more special and unique due to the exclusivity that they present (Aggarwal et al., 2011). Connected to exclusivity is uniqueness, a product characteristic that derives from qualities of distinctive design or construction (Heine and Phan, 2011). On the other hand, intrinsic product characteristics include a complex combination of concrete attributes which are symbolic and heritage. Symbolic brings the consumer attention on the human values and lifestyles that the product wants to communicate, instead of the functional benefits of it (Heine and Phan, 2011). Heritage has a similar meaning but with a more concrete basis. Indeed, heritage is developed and built through time and is what make the brand prestigious. Superior quality, uniqueness and authenticity are the result of consumers perceptions when they know and recognize that the brand has a prestigious heritage (Arnould and Dion, 2011).

2.2.1 Luxury perception

Most of the times, the perception of luxury depends on several individual and contextual factors as well as the perception of a luxury product cannot depend only on its own aesthetics and intrinsic attributes, but also on the context or situation in which these products are used (Wang, 2022). Indeed, a car that can be perceived as a luxury product in a developing country, may be perceived as common good in a developed one. In this regard, Alleres (1990) developed a hierarchy of three levels according to the accessibility of a luxury product: accessible luxury, intermediary luxury and inaccessible luxury (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: *Hierarchy of luxury*

INACCESIBLE

INTERMEDIARY
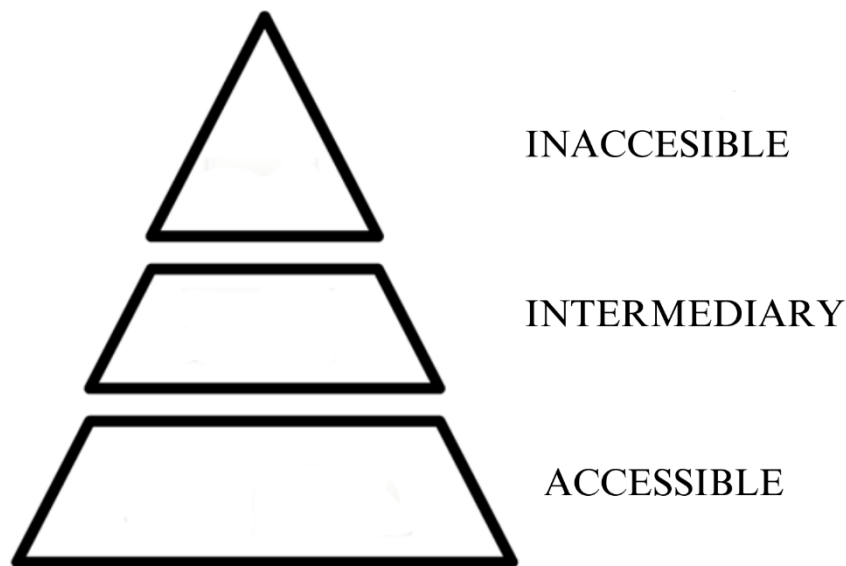
ACCESSIBLE

Source: Alleres (1990)

The bottom of the hierarchy is represented by accessible luxury, which are products achievable by the middle-class and, consequently, products that can be reached by a wide

range of consumers to get closer to the emotional experience of luxury. The second level is intermediary luxury achievable by professional socio-economic classes. These products are produced in small quantities and sell through selected channels of distribution, prices are high but do not reach the level of inaccessible products. The top of the hierarchy is inaccessible luxury, which is associated to elite classes. These products are usually custom-made and produced in a limited number, as well as distributed through selected channels. As a consequence, the aim of these products is to communicate a dimension of rarity and unsurpassed exclusivity. In a global context, luxury companies are asked to understand why people buy luxury goods, what they believe luxury is and the perception that they have (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

Czellar, Dubois, and Laurent (2001) individuated six characteristics of luxury that influence the vision of consumers and their rapport to it. The first attribute is *excellent quality*, especially because consumers usually use the words luxury and quality as synonyms. A luxury product is expected to have a good quality and to be certain of that, consumers usually refer to two major indicators which are the perceived exceptional nature of the components and the perceived delicacy and expertise in the manufacturing. Therefore, quality is strictly connected and associated with durability and reliability, because a quality product should guarantee trust. The second item is *very high price*, which is usually perceived as a sign of excellent quality of a product or a service. High prices are used by consumers to legitimate and assess the quality of the product, especially because people are willing to spend more in order to buy a product that last longer. *Scarcity* and *uniqueness* are the following concepts. The former is associated with the two previous concepts, luxury products are expected to be scarce because the special characteristic of the component, the necessary skills to manufacture them and the delivery

process made them more difficult to be mass-produced. Indeed, mass-stores that offers a wide assortment are known to be of medium quality, while luxury stores provide not only the product to their consumers but also an immersive experience in the store, which is part of their value. Consequently, a luxury product is considered unique. The fourth item concerns *aesthetics* and *polysensuality*. Aesthetics is expected to be present not only in the product itself but also in the context in which it is presented, in order to give a full immersion consumer experience that can involve all the senses. Indeed, luxury is described as a source of luxury pleasure. Another important notion is *ancestral heritage and personal history* because consumers are more likely to evaluate as luxurious a product that has long history, elaboration processes and respect of the tradition. Finally, *superfluousness* which means that luxury products are not bought to be necessary, they just give additional benefits to the person that use them. This item can be perceived in the form of over-abundance, feeling of freedom to do or go wherever you want, and extended life space.

In addition to this, based on previous research and literature, including the above research of Czellar, Dubois and Laurent (2001), a framework called 'Brand luxury index' has been developed by Johnson and Vigneron (2004) to explain the five major factors that influence the decision-making process of a consumer seeking luxury (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: *Brand luxury index*
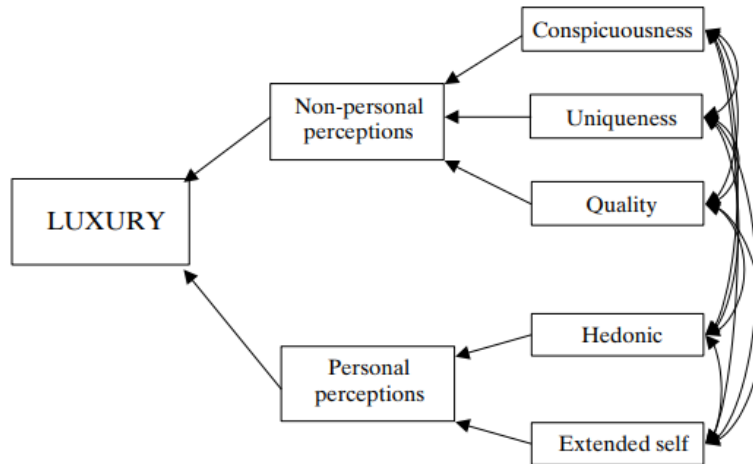
Source: Johnson and Vigneron (2004)

The first three dimensions reflect non-personal-oriented perceptions, while the other two reflect personal-oriented perceptions:

1. *Perceived Conspicuousness*: reflects the satisfaction that derives from a purchase, not for its value but for the reaction of a reference group, from which people search social representation and position. Related to conspicuousness is the price, perceived as an indicator of luxury.

2. *Perceived Uniqueness:* this characteristic is related to the scarcity or limited supply of a product that make consumer more attracted to search something which is difficult to obtain, instead of a product that they can find everywhere. The consumers' perceptions of exclusivity and rarity increase the desirability of a brand, in addition to the fact that brands are perceived as unique and more expensive when difficult to find.

3. *Perceived Quality:* quality is a fundamental characteristic that is expected to be present in every luxury product that consumers purchase. Indeed, a good luxury brand

image is the result of a long-term commitment to quality that led to the identification and recognition of brand as superior if compared to non-luxury ones.

4. *Perceived Hedonism:* people which seek for luxury can do it to feel gratified and pleased by the consumption of that product. Particularly, both the purchase and consumption can give them rewards and fulfilment thanks to the emotional benefits and intrinsic properties of the good, instead of the functional ones. These types of consumers rely only on their personal opinions and their senses, without being influenced by trends.

5. *Perceived extended self:* luxury products are usually used by consumers not only to classify or distinguish themselves from the others, but also to construct their self appears. People that seek for luxury are called by the desire to conform or to distinguish respectively from affluent or non-affluent lifestyles and want to make the possession of a luxury good a matter of identity.

Furthermore, Wiedman, Hennings, and Siebels (2007) proposed a model that extended the Vigneron and Johnson's five dimensions framework and individuated four latent value dimensions that influences luxury consumption. The first one is the *Financial Dimension of Luxury Value Perception*, which is directly related to economic and monetary aspects, such as price, discount, etc. This dimension is described as the monetary value of a product and represents what people are willing to renounce to obtain that object. Secondly, the *Functional Dimension of Luxury Value Perception*, which refers to characteristics like quality, uniqueness, usability, reliability and durability of the products, which are the benefits and utilities that influence consumers' decisions (Sheth et al., 1991). The *Individual Dimension of Luxury Value* focuses on the personal orientation of consumers when consume a product and comprehend materialism (Dawson

and Richins, 1992), hedonistic and self-identity value (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Johnson and Vigneron, 2004). The last dimension is the *Social Dimension of Luxury Value Perception* which involves the social function performed by luxury products, indeed consumers are influenced by the perception and utility of products and services recognized by their social groups (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: *Luxury value in consumer's perception*
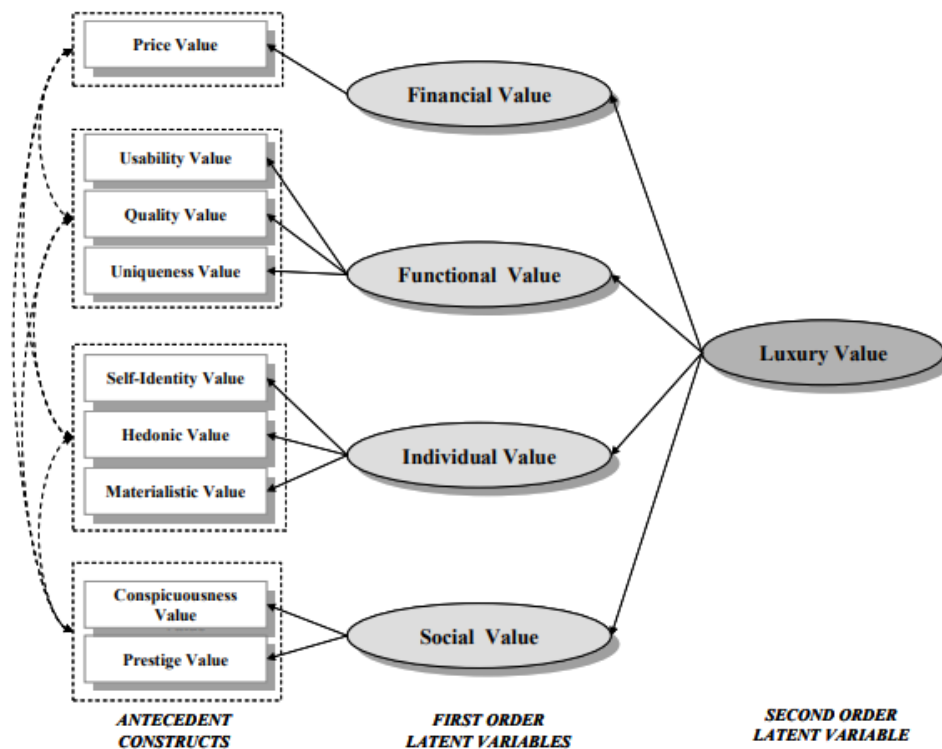
Source: Hennings et al. (2007)

In conclusion, the customer perception of the value of luxury and the motivations for consuming a luxury brand are not only related to social aspects, but also to the financial, functional and individual utility of a certain luxury brand.

2.2.2 Luxury authenticity

The term authenticity is used in different ways and is described as a dynamic concept that cannot be captured in a simple definition. There are three authenticity-related perspectives that tried to describe the concept: *objectivist, constructivist*, and *existentialist*. The objectivist perspective affirms that the brand authenticity derives from an evidence-based reality, meaning that it can be assessed using information about the brand (Morhart et al., 2015). The constructivist perspective assures that authenticity is the result obtained from different interpretations of the "real world" (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Leigh et al., 2006). Therefore, it is not something objective as the objectivist perspective assumed, but a projection of one's beliefs, expectations, and perspectives (Wang, 1999). Finally, the existential perspective suggests that brand authenticity is the ability of the brand to become a resource for consumers and help them to reveal their true selves during the time they are consuming the brand (Morhart et al., 2015). Nevertheless, these three perspectives are intertwined and each of them confers a particular attribute to the concept of authenticity.

Perceived brand authenticity derives from the interaction of objective facts (*indexical authenticity*), subjective mental associations (*iconic authenticity*), and existential motives connected to a brand (*existential authenticity*) which respectively correspond to the objectivist, constructivist, and existential perspective (Morhart et al., 2015). Every authenticity is described by cues, which are attributes or characteristics that help consumers develop their perceived brand authenticity. Indexical cues refer to attributes for what a brand claims to be, indeed brand scandals and brand-congruent employee behaviour might negatively or positively influence brand integrity and credibility (Morhart et al., 2015). Furthermore, iconic cues refer to marketing and promotional cues,

such as the communication style of a brand that emphasize brand's roots or brand's virtue. These two ways of communicating can increase perceived continuity and integrity (Morhart et al., 2015). Finally, existential cues refer to self-referential aspects of the brand, for example brand anthropomorphism that might increase perceived symbolism. Every consumer is influenced by these aspects and use them to evaluate brand authenticity among four authenticity dimensions (Morhart et al., 2015):

- *Continuity*: it refers to the ability of brands to not change over time and remain the same, surviving trends. The dimension of continuity is related to brand heritage, especially because they both involve the history of a brand, its stability over time, and the persisted likelihood into the future.

- *Credibility*: this dimension is the ability of brands to maintain and deliver the promises that they made. This concept is described also as the transparency and honesty towards the consumer, a credible brand is one that is willing and able to maintain the promises and fulfil its claims. The credibility's dimension has several connections with other elements that characterize brand luxury starting from the concept of brand trustworthiness (Erdem and Swait, 2004) with which share the consumers' perception to honour its promises. In addition to that, credibility has common qualities with both brand quality (Frazier and Lassar, 1996) and brand personality (Aaker, 1991). The former refers to the expectations that a brand is able to perform, the latter to the sincerity of a brand.

- *Integrity*: this concept reflects in brands' intentions and values that they communicate. It is defined as the responsibility and moral purity of a brand, for example when it cares about consumer and adheres to certain values.

- *Symbolism*: is the ability to support consumers in being true to themselves, a sort of resource for identity for them. Symbolism reflects the symbolic quality of a brand that consumers use to identify themselves and decide who they are and who they are not.

To sum up, the perceived brand authenticity is the result of the capacity of a brand to be honest towards itself (continuity), true to its consumers (credibility), moved by responsibility (integrity), and able to support consumers in being true to themselves (symbolism) (Morhart et al., 2015). According to Wijaya (2013, p.55), a brand is "a mark left on the minds and hearts of consumers, which creates a specific sense of meaning and feeling". Therefore, in the world of luxury, companies understood the importance of branding especially because a luxury brand represents and conveys social, cultural, but also personal meanings, and to do so they must create a solid relationship with their consumers to build trust and loyalty through time.

2.3 The hierarchy and relevance of branding

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defined a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kottler, 2000, p. 404). Brand represents what consumer see at first glance and that help us to identify the products, they are the front-liner of a product. Companies when creating a brand are creating a promise to their consumers (Wijaya, 2013) and, for this reason, they are not just logos or symbols, but promises and relationships that involved trust. Therefore, building and developing a strong brand image require time, Wijaya (2011) identified a Hierarchy of Branding to explain the branding process, along which every

level indicates to what extent the brand development is in relation to proximity to the consumer (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: *Hierarchy of Branding*
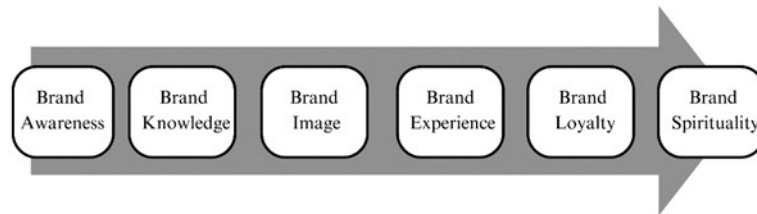
2.3.1 Brand Awareness

This is the first step of the branding process during which brands start searching for new consumers to increase their awareness among them, which means make them know more about the brand (Wijaya, 2011). The brand awareness refers to how brands are able to make consumer and potential consumers aware of their presence, it is important in this stage to differentiate from the others to became recognizable in comparison to other brands and products (Wijaya, 2011). To create an effective brand awareness, companies must focus on the production of a consistent advertising, which will represent what brands offer to consumers. Moreover, they should build a strong image in order to maximise brand recognition and positive impressions and create slogans and claims which should be consistent through mediums and material (Chabot and Gustafson, 2007).

According to Faraj et al. (2021), consumers identify and recognize products and services quicker if associated with their respective brands and, consequently, brand awareness is a significant and fundamental asset that became useful for brand. So, brand

awareness can be basically described as what a consumer remembers about a brand and what a consumer thinks about the brand in general (Faeq, 2022), which are referred to the image of the brand, involving both attributes and brand name (Anwar and Ghafoor, 2017).

However, nowadays a brand is regarded not only to its logo, but also to the experience that offers thoroughly to consumers (Sadq et al., 2020). The positive brand awareness that brands build through time, help them to increase consumer's contentment and his intention to purchase, as well as boost the quality of the service and their loyalty. Consequently, companies should be able to maintain a positive brand awareness, which infer also in its ability to maintain their market position (Anwar, 2017)

2.3.2 Brand knowledge

The following stage is brand knowledge and corresponds to the level in which consumers not only know about the existence of the brand, but also start to learn more about it and to collect information about the brand and the products. Anderson (1983) affirmed that brand knowledge is a system of nodes of brand's information which are interconnected by links. Consequently, when a node is activated, also the other ones that are linked to it are activated. Information is encoded by consumers according to their initial encounters with the brand and usually the first thing they know about a brand is its name. For this reason, the name become a significant part for the development of brand knowledge (Sen, 1999).

Brand knowledge is a combination of brand-related notions of brand awareness and brand image, that comprises information about attributes, benefits, images, feelings and experiences of the brand and, consequently, directly influence consumer responses (Keller, 1993, 2003). Moreover, it is based on a constant communication with the

consumer that allow them to truly comprehend the qualities of the product or the service offered (Richards et al., 1998).

In addition, according to Sharif (2004), brand knowledge comprehends both explicit and tacit knowledge. The former refers to objective and theoretical knowledge that consumer can assess through different media, such as documents or audiovisual devices. The latter refers to subjective and personal knowledge, such as know-how and personal experiences.

2.3.3 Brand Image

This stage corresponds to the association between brand and a certain image of it in consumers' mind. Brand image is defined as perceptions that consumers associate with a particular brand (Keller, 1993). In particular, the brand image of a fashion product is important to consumers because is used to express self-identity and to create the image that they want to show to others (Bettman and Escalas, 2005). Moreover, research shown that brand that are able to construct a positive brand image consequently built a stronger brand loyalty that bring to positive word of mouth and purchase intentions (Kim et al., 2009) and contribute to build brand equity.

According to Keller (1993), brand image can be described within three dimensions which are distinct yet interrelated among them. The three dimensions are represented by cognitive, emotional and sensory associations, each of them represented by an emotion (respectively mystery, intimacy and sensuality). The cognitive associations derive from both direct and indirect interactions with the brand and reflects beliefs, thoughts and evaluations of the brand made by consumers. These thoughts are about attributes of products and services or about meaning of the brand (Keller, 2001). Particularly, the

mystery dimension is described as a favourable brand image that derives from brands' great stories expressed by the firm or developed by consumers, so that it becomes a global icon (Roberts, 2005). The mystery dimension comprehends several themes that influence the behaviour of consumers, for instance positive present experiences and positive memories from past experiences. The former refers to personal stories with the product or the brand or perceived high quality of the brand, while the latter to positive memories from both the personal and family members' experiences. Moreover, mystery dimension can be influenced by future aspirations and self-congruity.

On the other hand, emotional associations involved the sphere of feelings, which are only subjective and can be excitement, joy, happiness (Keller, 2001). As in the mystery dimension, intimacy can derive from both direct or indirect interactions with the brand and is related to product- or non-product-related attributes (Cho and Fiore, 2015). When consumers feel continuously supported by the brand, they are more likely to feel positive sensations towards it (Albert et al., 2008). The intimacy dimension is influenced by the themes of firm's empathy, consumer commitment and enjoyment. Indeed, to build a strong brand image companies should understand their consumers preferences and remember personal events, in order to make them feel important. In addition, consumer enjoyment means that consumers feel pleasure from owning a brand or from interacting with that brand.

The last dimension refers to the sensory associations which evoke physical senses of the consumers and are produced only by direct experiences with product-related and retail environment-related attributes (Keller, 1993). The sensations evoked can be visual, such as a pleasant store environment or website design, beautiful product colours or appealing

packaging, olfactory such as pleasantly scented environments, auditory which might be pleasant music in a store, and tactile such as textural qualities of the products.

2.3.4 Brand Experience

The stage of brand experience refers to the involvement and engagement of consumers in activities that permit a direct contact with both the products and the brand (Wijaya, 2011). Experiences can be direct, with a physical contact, indirect, through advertisement, or can occur during the examination of a product. The thing that combines all these different types of experience that a brand can offer to consumers is the evocation of emotions, imaginations and sensory aspects because they are fully involved during the shopping experience (Carù and Cova, 2003).

In addition to that, Schmitt (1999) affirmed that the experience that consumers can live are of five types:

- *Sense* (sensing): sensory experiences are the ones that appeal the five senses (touch, sight, sound, smell and taste).

- *Feel* (emotions): also called 'feel-related experiences' that involve emotions and feeling of consumers.

- *Think* (intellectual): defined as 'cognitive experiences' which involve consumers in problem-solving activities to engage them using creativity and intelligence.

- *Act* (physical or act experience): experiences that aim to use physical body, interactions, and lifestyle.

- *Relate* (social identity experience): these are experiences that create a sense of belonging and social identity for consumers.

In order to create a significant shopping experience, companies have to combine and integrate all of them.

2.3.5 Brand Loyalty

If a brand has developed and established a good brand equity, consequently it tends to be more favoured by consumers. Brand equity has been defined as a "set of categories of brand assets (liabilities) linked to a brand's name or symbol that add to (subtract from) the value provided by a product or service" (Aaker, 1991, p.15). Brand equity results from a strong position of the brand in minds and hearts of the consumers, deriving from a good combination of positive brand image and exciting experiences and feelings (Wijaya, 2011). According to Aaker (1991) brand equity is made up of four dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

To make sure that consumers are loyal to the brand so that they will not switch to another one, the following stage is building a strong brand loyalty (Wijaya, 2011). Brand loyal consumers are willing to pay higher prices and are less price sensitive (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990) and companies will gain trade leverage and valuable time to respond to competitive moves (Aaker, 1991). However, brand loyalty is different from the other dimension of brand equity, especially because it implies the use experience by the consumer, indeed, brand loyalty cannot exist without a prior purchase and experience (Prasad and Dev, 2002).

There are two main types of brand loyalty:

- *Behavioural loyalty*, which is defined as the amount of times that the consumer chooses to purchase the same product or service in a specific category compared to

the total amount of times that the consumer purchase in that category (Rundle-Thiele and Bennett, 2001);

- *Attitudinal loyalty*, which is a preference or positive attitude over time toward a brand or a service referring to the intention to buy it (Russell-Bennett et al., 2010).

To sum up, brand loyalty represents a strategic asset, which is also a major factor in the construction of brand equity.

2.3.6 Brand Spirituality

Brand spirituality is the last stage of the journey and corresponds to not only loyalty to the brand but also a sense of belonging to it. The brand is now part of consumers' lives and it also influence them and their perspective of life. At this stage, consumers that obtained the spiritual happiness and life values offered by the brand, are now ready to spread the information to other consumers, so that they can live the same experience. The aim of this broadcasting is building a wide environment in which every consumer can feel and experience the brand in their lives and, at the same time, became part of a strong community (Wijaya, 2011).

This is the last and higher achievement than brands can obtain because they are part of consumers' hearts, and consequently became what consumers search and want in response of their spiritual needs or as part of their life values and culture. (Wijaya, 2011).

All these stages that the brand lives are aimed to get into proximity with the consumers. Indeed, while the stages of brand awareness and brand image aim to gain mind-share, brand experience aims to gain market-share. The last two stages of brand loyalty and brand spirituality respectively aim to gain heart-share and social-share (Wijaya, 2011).

To conclude, building a positive brand image led to positive word of mouth, purchase intentions and willingness to buy a premium price (Kim et al., 2009). The combination of a strong brand image and the opportunity to customize in the luxury sector represents a perfect tool to increase consumer's self-expressive and social value, but also brand loyalty towards the brand (Yoo and Park, 2016).

2.4 The relevance of product customization

In recent years, new digital technologies have become a key tool for the fashion industries that want to expand their business globally (Reynolds, 2012). Companies still give importance to their physical stores but also started to develop electronic trade of fashion products. The aim of fashion companies is to offer an omnichannel experience to their consumers, integrating online and offline marketing activities (Guercini et al., 2017). Among the different ways of implementing these digital technologies, many luxury brands started to offer consumers the opportunity to customize their products (Moreau et al., 2020; Kalantari et al., 2021). This choice derived from the fact that customization can maintain the sense of privilege and exclusivity that luxury brands usually want to communicate. In addition, customization can be an effective way to increase satisfaction and brand loyalty because the activity of customize a product increase social and creative achievement, but above all the expression of themselves (Park and Yoo, 2016). Indeed, the product is both exclusive for a specific consumer and unique in design (Moreau, 2020) because customization platforms usually offer a wide range of choices among which consumers can choose. In this way, consumers can create their ideal luxury product, lowering the risks of copying someone else's product and maintain the trait of uniqueness of luxury brands.

Customization is defined as a system that uses information technology, flexible processes, and organizational structures to deliver a wide range of products and services that meet the specific needs of individual customers (Da Silveira et al., 2001). Consumers have the opportunity to choose fabrics and colours, visualize all the changes that they do in real time, confront and try different combination until they found those that they like more. To understand how consumer behaviour in the customization process works, is fundamental to consider the factors that influence this behaviour (Karpen et al., 2019) which are related to consumer or to product. The consumer-related variables are four:

1. *innovativeness*, defined as the extent of willingness for consumers to try new experiences and products (Konus et al., 2008);

2. *attitude*, described as the individual positive or negative evaluation of the intended behaviour;

3. *subjective norm*, which is the social pressure to begin an action and which influences the engagement in a specific behaviour;

4. *perceived behavioural control* which is the perceived level of difficulty in doing an action (Ajzen, 1991).

Moreover, when consumers are involved in the action of customize, they are asked to make selections among pre-defined options, so that they have to feel involved and in control during the whole process. However, sometimes they can feel overwhelmed by the options available to them (Chang and Lee, 2011), that is why *perceived usefulness* has been identified as a product-related variable to consider. The other product-related variable is *product involvement* because the more interest consumers have in customize that product, the more value they will give to that (Damm et al., 2013).

In addition to consumer and product variables influencing customization decisions, Karpen, Pallant and Sands (2019) analyse the variables influencing the outcome of customization decisions which are aesthetic product design, functional product design, symbolic product design, and future purchase intention. These variables derive from the competitive advantage that product design usually represents for companies and the importance that it assumes in consumer behaviour. However, when people customize a product, this advantage depends only on consumers and the three dimensions of product design became significant and impact on consumer purchase intentions (Karpen et al., 2019). *Product aesthetics* is related to the attributes and beauty of the product, valuing the appearance of it. *Functionality* refers to the perception of consumers on the fulfilment of the purposes for which the product is designed. This characteristic became extremely important in customization because consumers can only visualize the functionality of the product in online spaces. *Symbolism* is the perceived message of self-image deducted by the consumer on the physical appearance of the product. It is relevant because consumers usually have different views about the qualities of a product and they helped them to express their extended selves (Homburg et al., 2015) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: *Customization demand profiles*
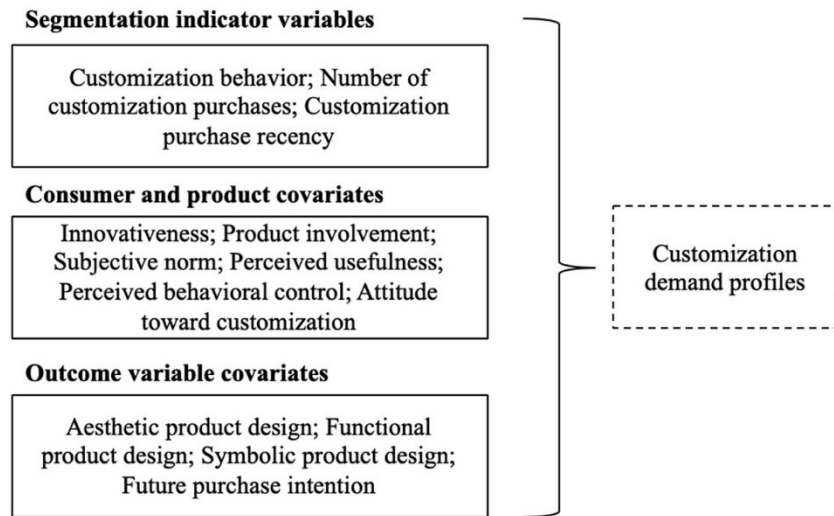
Source: Karpen et al. (2019)

To sum up, customization in luxury products allows consumers to express and reflect their identity and values, enhance self-authenticity and increase their subjective well-being (Cable et al., 2013; Erickson, 1995).

In these years, digital technologies have been used by luxury brand to increase the involvement and engagement of new consumers (Godey et al., 2016), for example giving them the opportunity to customize their products. The customization of products is offered with the help of different digital technologies, such as online interactive product configurators that provide an easy and user-friendly way to customize the product according to consumer's preferences, as well as social media and crowdsourcing technologies that allow companies to analyse the popularity of combinations and products. Moreover, 3D scanners are able to shape a real-world object and measure, for example, a human body for tailored clothes (Gandhi et al., 2013).

2.5 The evolution of marketing

Since the beginning of the 21st century companies have to face a lot of changes. The advance in technology, in fact, brought many opportunities that companies should take to adapt to the new consumers' needs and to answer their requests. Indeed, many of the normal activities that we do in everyday life are now performed exclusively online. People as consumers started to become more central and participate in actions such as share opinions, publish contents, or be involved in creating a product (Sawicki, 2016). The switching from traditional to digital marketing is a key phase in the history of marketing, digital technologies and devices have completely changed the approach of consumers and companies.

Traditional marketing is the base from which activities of marketing begin and which promotes products and services through the traditional means of communication, e.g. radio, television, newspapers, flyers and pamphlets, defined as communication channels by Kotler (2001). On the other hand, digital marketing is an evolution of the traditional one which promotes products and services through internet platforms such as website, social media, email, blog, mobile apps (Lawrence et al., 2018). The differences between traditional and digital marketing are much more than these. First of all, the interaction of the costumers with the brand in the digital environment is in real time and, as a consequence, is easier to check and control if a strategy (i.e., a campaign or advertising) is working through real-time feedbacks from the audience. This flexibility in traditional marketing is not possible and it makes difficult to do any changes during the promotion of the campaign (Bala and Verna, 2018). Moreover, internet and digital marketing offer a wider and greater coverage and reach of the campaigns, which can be seen several times and in any part of the world with lower costs if compared to a tradition marketing

campaign. The electronic devices gave the opportunity to marketers to stimulate the target in different ways such as visit the website and meanwhile inform them about the products and services that they offer. In addition, the viral effect of promotion that social media and internet can create is much efficient and effective than the modes used in traditional marketing (Bala and Verna, 2018).

The rapid technological developments led to a significant change in customers buying behaviour, especially because of the advances of digital marketing. Indeed, as the market changes, so do consumers who are always connected and started access companies through different channels. Consequently, companies moved from a multi-channel to an omnichannel consumer experience. The former approach implies a set of activities offered through different channels, but without an interaction among them (Beck and Rygl, 2015). In order to provide richer experiences to their consumers, companies moved to an omnichannel approach, which is the combination of different channels of communication or touchpoints with the consumers, so that users can perceive a homogeneous shopping experience without depending on which channel they choose (Romero et al., 2020). In this approach, all channels are integrated and allow companies to offer a holistic shopping experience (Payne et al., 2017). As a consequence, the connection between brand and consumer is not merely through separate channels, but through a several distribution points that are part of a single design.

In addition, these channels have to be integrated among them and permit consumers to connect with the company through both direct and indirect channels. The former are usually physical stores and allows a direct interaction between company and consumer, while the latter use an intermediary to sell products, usually on the internet (Rodriguez and Sanchez, 2014). In the last years, due to both the switching from traditional to digital

marketing and the impact that the pandemic had on the relationships with consumers, companies were forced to modify their use of digital technologies both for breadth and depth, which respectively means number of technologies and intensity of use. Indeed, they not only invest in new technologies, but also increase the use of the ones that they already have (Bettiol et al., 2021). Therefore, digital technologies create new forms for value through new consumer shopping experiences, interactions among consumers and adaptive digital touchpoints (Kannan and Li, 2016).

2.5.1 The shopping experience: online or in store

Doing shopping is an action that comprehends a set of activities that involves not only the act of buying something but also the experience of doing shopping (Yoon and Parks, 2017). Especially people who want to buy a luxury product are increasingly searching to live a special experience and to buy a dream, that is why the actions taken by consumers are usually emotional and impulsive (Dobois and Paternault, 1995).

With the development of new technologies, the shopping experience can now be online or in store. The traditional shopping experience involves people visiting shops and purchasing what they desire, while the online shopping experience involves people searching on internet sites to purchase what they want. The store experience offers to consumers a unique experience with the aim to create a value that comprehends not only provision of information, but also a holistic and emotional experience (Schmitt, 1999). Indeed, when people walk into a shop, they are surrounded by several stimuli which involves all the senses in simple and spontaneous actions such as listening to the music and sounds in the shop, smelling the perfumes, and touching the materials of the products they want to buy. Moreover, people can see and try the products in real time, test if they

fit and then pay for them. On the other hand, online shopping experience is considered less engaging because consumers usually shop on their computers or smartphones, as if they are virtually entering in a shop. Nevertheless, Hoffman and Novak (1996; 2009) assumed that the online environment is interactive by nature and brings to a loss of self-consciousness that the consumer's sense of time becomes distorted. In this way, consumers can feel this experience as enjoyable as the store because they are immersed in the activity to the point that this is transformed into an act of play (Stenger and Trevinal, 2014). The online shopping site gives the opportunity to buy anywhere and at any time and, above all, to check constantly if the products are available, if they return in stock or even if there are discounts or last-minute offers. Therefore, this type of experience tends to be more convenient in terms of time if compared to the hours that people spend visiting real shops. In addition, consumers can compare prices and find the cheapest product (Sarkar and Das, 2017).

To sum up, both experiences have their advantages and disadvantages, but during the last decades, especially due to the pandemic, e-commerce has proliferated. Consumers when shopping are involved not only by the act of purchasing but also by the experience the brand offers to them (Yoon and Park, 2018), that is why the involvement of consumers in the shopping experience is a multidimensional aspect that have to be taken into considerations by companies to enhance the experience, but also to contribute to positive WOM, brand loyalty and purchase intention (Yoon and Park, 2018).

2.5.2 Consumer involvement

According to Zaichkowsky (1985, p.32), involvement is defined as "a person's perceived relevance of the object based upon inherent needs, values, and interests". In addition, three categories of involvement have been studied by Laaksonen (1994):

- *Cognitive-based approaches*, which represent involvement as a personal factor that depends on the personal importance and relevance of the object or service.

- *Individual-state approaches*, which describe involvement as the inherent potential of a situation to arouse interest for consumers to act in that situation.

- *Response-based approaches*, which are related to the processing of information made by consumers and are not influenced by personal or potential factors.

Considering that shopping is an activity that comprehends not only the mere act of purchase but also the experience lived by consumers prior to purchase (Yoon and Park, 2018), the factors that can influenced consumer involvement are a wide range. Indeed, consumers that purchase a product or a service can behave for two main reasons: *experience-based behaviour*, which involves doing shopping for fun or enjoyment, and *goal-oriented shopping*, which is a more efficient ad rational type of shopping (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003). Therefore, there are respectively experiential and cognitive signals that can influence their satisfaction and trust to the brand, which are both essential to build and maintain a real relationship with consumers (San Martin and Camarero, 2011).

According to Josiam et al. (2005), the more the consumer is involved, the more the consumer purchases for long periods. Especially for the fashion sector, involvement is considered an important aspect in purchase decisions. Indeed, clothing involves a self-expressive nature that allows consumers to express themselves through clothes and

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capture their identity (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006). Therefore, when choosing what to wear, consumers dedicate more time and relevance because they want to use clothes as a mean to enhance themselves (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006). The decision-making process is also influenced by sensory perceptions and mental imagery lived by consumers during the shopping experience (Kim et al., 2021), concepts that are introduced in the following section.

2.6 Mental imagery

When consumers have to decide what to buy, the first things that they do is searching and collecting information about the product and the brand. The primary way from which they collect product information is through direct experiences using their senses (Rahman, 2012). Consequently, sensory experiences are essential to help consumers in their decisions (Biswas, 2019). Is important to distinguish real and imagined sensory experiences: the former is called *sensory perception* and happens when consumers register and process information directly from the senses. The latter is *mental imagery* and corresponds to the creation of mental images when consumers are living sensory experiences (Kim et al., 2021). With the global gradually switching from multi-channel to omnichannel retailing, companies should be able to assure consumers sensory experiences of the traditional offline shopping in online shopping experiences (Park and Yoo, 2019).

Mental imagery refers to the "mental invention or recreation of an experience that in at least some respects resembles the experience of actually perceiving an object or an event, either in conjunction with, or, in the absence of direct sensory stimulation" (Manz and Neck, 1992, p. 684). It is important in information processing because it can make

consumers visualize mental images, evoke old experiences as images, or activate stored information (Kim and Yoo, 2014). Mental imagery enables people to live sensory experiences even in the absence of true stimuli by 'seeing with mind's eye' and 'hearing with mind's ear' (Yim et al., 2018). It is frequently used in advertising to influence consumers' choices, but many companies started using mental imagery in online retailing because it serves as a proxy for actual sensory experiences (Overmars and Poels, 2015). Indeed, the use of a concrete background image when displaying products online can stimulate a greater mental imagery instead of using a solid background (Kim and Yoo, 2014). Moreover, virtual consumer experiences can stimulate both haptic and spatial imagery, for instance by using visual presentation in 3D or gesture-based interaction modes (Liu et al., 2019). Therefore, the interactivity in online experiences is able to activate mental imagery (Esch and Kiss, 2006) because it helps and facilitate the manipulation of an object on a website directly by the consumer (Schlosser, 2003).

According to Kim, Yoo and Park (2021) mental imagery is linked with the concepts of *sensory perceptions, decision confidence, behavioural intent*, and *anticipatory emotion*. First of all, mental imagery and sensory perceptions are significantly correlated because the more visual and haptic sensory perceptions there are, the more consumption imagery is experienced by consumers. The following conceptual framework (see Figure 8) demonstrates that sensory perceptions and mental imagery also influence anticipatory emotions and decision confidence, but indirectly influence behavioural intent through them. During the decision-making process, anticipatory emotions evaluate the risk or value associated with the stimuli and offer consumers the response to help them taking a decision (Bechara et al., 1997). Decision confidence is related to the level of risk perceived and the search of information (Philips et al., 2014). Indeed, most decisions are

made under a condition of uncertainty and consumers try to find information that help them make the right decision. Consequently, spatial and mental imagery helps the reduction of perceived product uncertainty and increase confidence in acquiring more information (Clarke et al., 2012). Finally, the behavioural intent is defined as the intention to buy again in a shop (Lennon and Kim, 2011). In this case, a vivid mental imagery produces a resemblance of the actual experience and so bring to a higher behavioural intention (MacInnis and Price, 1987).

Figure 8: *The roles of sensory perceptions and mental imagery in consumer decision-making*
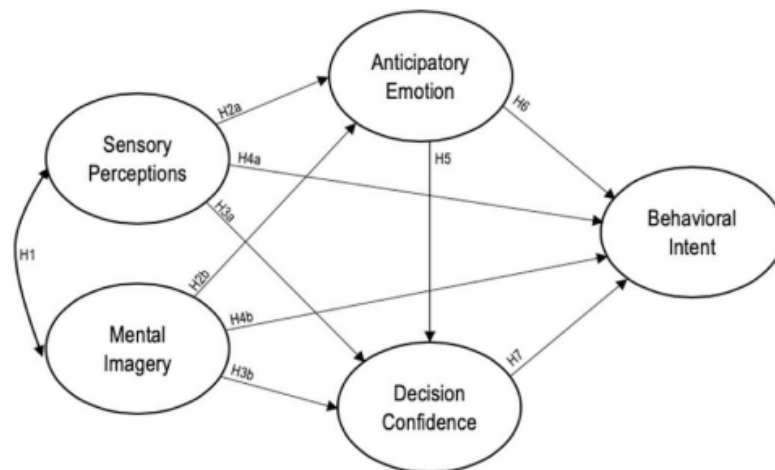

Source: Kim et al. (2021)

To sum up, considering that sensory perceptions and mental imagery play a critical role in shopping experiences, companies should develop in-store but also online strategies to optimise both sensory perception and imagery for instance with visual product presentations. In addition, sensory perceptions of customers might be stimulated not only by touching products but also by activating mental imagery. To do so they can create

product displays that allow consumers to visualise the processing or useful information in order to facilitate their decision-making. Moreover, companies can use technology not only to give online but also in-store experiences for instance using touch screen monitors or version of mobile apps that permit consumers to elicit mental imagery during shopping (Kim et al., 2021).

2.7 Consumer behaviours: purchase intention and word of mouth

Consumer behaviour is mainly characterized by the action to buy something (products or services) and to share shopping and consumption experiences with others (Ricard et al., 2010). Purchase intention is important because permit to individuate and target the segments that are more likely to buy products (Karpen et al., 2019). It is defined as the intention of consumers to be part of the exchange relationship, which involves not only the act of purchase but also sharing information, maintain business relationships and create business transaction (Zwass, 1998). As explained before, consumers who purchase luxury do it primarily for symbolic reasons because they want the product to reflect their social and individual aims. Therefore, the consumption of luxury brands is influenced by social-function attitudes (i.e. self-expression and self-presentation) because consumers respectively express their need for uniqueness (individuality) and self-monitoring (social standing) through luxury products (Wilcox et al., 2009). In addition, self-expression and self-presentation attitudes can, directly or indirectly, affect the feelings or emotions of one consumer and, consequently, influence their purchase intentions. Indeed, consumers might choose to purchase a luxury brand as a result of their affective attitude (Batra et al., 2000) (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: *Purchase intention for luxury brands*
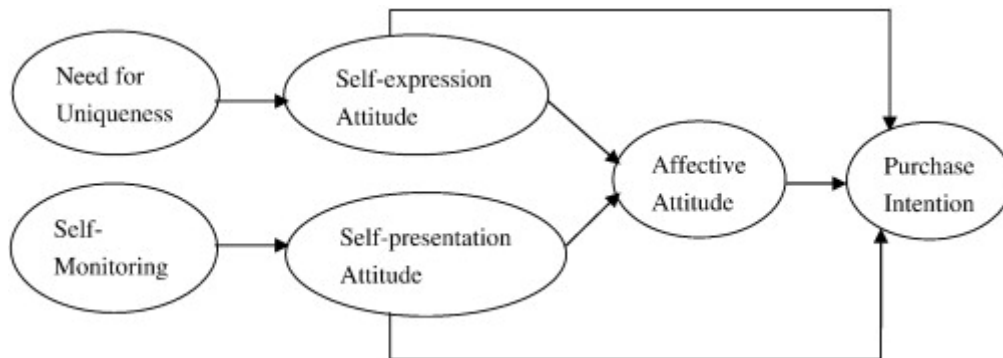
Source: Bian and Forsythe (2012)

Need for uniqueness is defined as an individual characteristic that bring consumer to purchase a brand or a product to convey his individual identity to distinguish from the others (Tian et al., 2001), whereas self-monitoring indicates when consumers buy luxury product to convey the image thy desired of themselves (Park et al., 2008). Furthermore, both self-expression and self-presentation attitudes are expected to influence purchase intentions, especially because people purchase luxury for the intrinsic beliefs and values that it communicates (Wilcox et al., 2009). To sum up, attitudes can impact both affect and behaviour, and consequently play an important role in influencing purchase intentions (Bian and Forsythe, 2012).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is the oldest but still most leading factor influencing consumer behaviour and the mean used to exchange opinions on goods and services offered by markets (Ricard et al., 2010), especially because people are willing to trust more other consumers instead of sellers of services. With the increase of digital technologies and online communication tools, consumers have started sharing opinions about the products and services that they consume (Lee et al., 2011). Consequently, a new

form of WOM has developed, called e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth) which is describes as "all informal communication via the Internet addressed to consumers and related to the use or characteristics of goods or services or the sellers" (Litvin et al., 2008, p.3). Nowadays everyone who have access to Internet can participate and write opinions, experiences, and comments on brands, services or products allowing other consumers to have updated and accessible information in the easiest way. Consumers can be divided into active or passive. The former is the person who share opinions with the others, the latter who just search information without participate himself (Fesenmaier and Wang, 2004). eWOM can be divided also in two major types depending on the context, which are information-oriented and emotion-oriented. The former regards those reviews or feedbacks on websites made by consumers on products or services, so this type of reviews are specifically oriented and focused on the product itself. The latter involves an emotive part in feedbacks and includes non-product focused online communities. Consequently, reviews of this type are more subjective and tend to empathize broader product experiences (Rodgers and Wang, 2010).

Nowadays luxury brands are engaging consumers especially in social media, a two-way communication platform that permit an interaction between consumers and brands by sharing information and opinions, creating a social community in which consumer feel as real members and allow the building of a relationship with them (Kim and Ko, 2010).

A study conducted by Hyun, Parks, and Thavisay (2021) demonstrates that there is a relationship between social media WOM and luxury brand purchase intention. Indeed, consumers are more likely to purchase when they read reviews on social media, which represents an effective tool in shaping consumer decisions especially towards luxury brands. Moreover, perceived social, personal, and functional value significantly influence

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consumer engagement in social media WOM. This indicates that consumers who perceive value of a luxury product, brand, and service demonstrate greater engagement in social media WOM.

Companies see both WOM and eWOM as an opportunity to listen to consumers and, consequently, adjust their product and services and the promotion of them to meet consumers' needs. Future purchase intentions of consumers might be influenced by a positive or negative attitude towards the product or the service, that is why is important to let them compare the actual performance of products according to their expectations (Yang, 2017). In addition, consumers are more likely to pay more attention on negative information instead of the positive one, which will influence their consumer behaviour on a wider eye (Cheung and Thadani, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research purpose

The aim of this study is to examine how consumers behave when purchasing luxury products in two different situations, specifically an online or in store shopping experience. Particularly, the study focuses on the opportunity given to consumer to customize their products and the comparison is between the customization allowed in a store, with the help of artisans and specialists, and online, through the website of the brand. The focus of the research is to understand how different shopping experiences can impact consumer behaviour, influence their purchase decisions, and shape their product recommendations. To reach the research purposes, Tod's luxury shoes have been taken into consideration and two different advertisements' stimuli were created and were submitted to the respondents. Both represent the same shoes for women and for men, specifically Tod's distinctive Gommino that made the brand famous. However, the two stimuli were created with the aim to highlight two different ways of customizing it (and, thus, two different environments): physically in a store or digitally through the company's website. Therefore, even if the product in the advertisement is the same, the location suggested the differences between the two situations in which the consumer might be. In addition, the study aims to determine any potential changes in consumers' luxury perception. Indeed, consumer's intention to purchase can be influenced by the setting around them, so that a traditional environment represented by a shop, or an online environment represented by

a website can be key aspects in influencing consumers. To address these objectives, the present study aims to answer the following main research questions:

RQ1: *Can consumer behaviour be affected by the customization of the product made either in store or online?*

RQ2: How do the different traditional and digital shopping experiences affect consumer's luxury perception and brand authenticity through product customization?

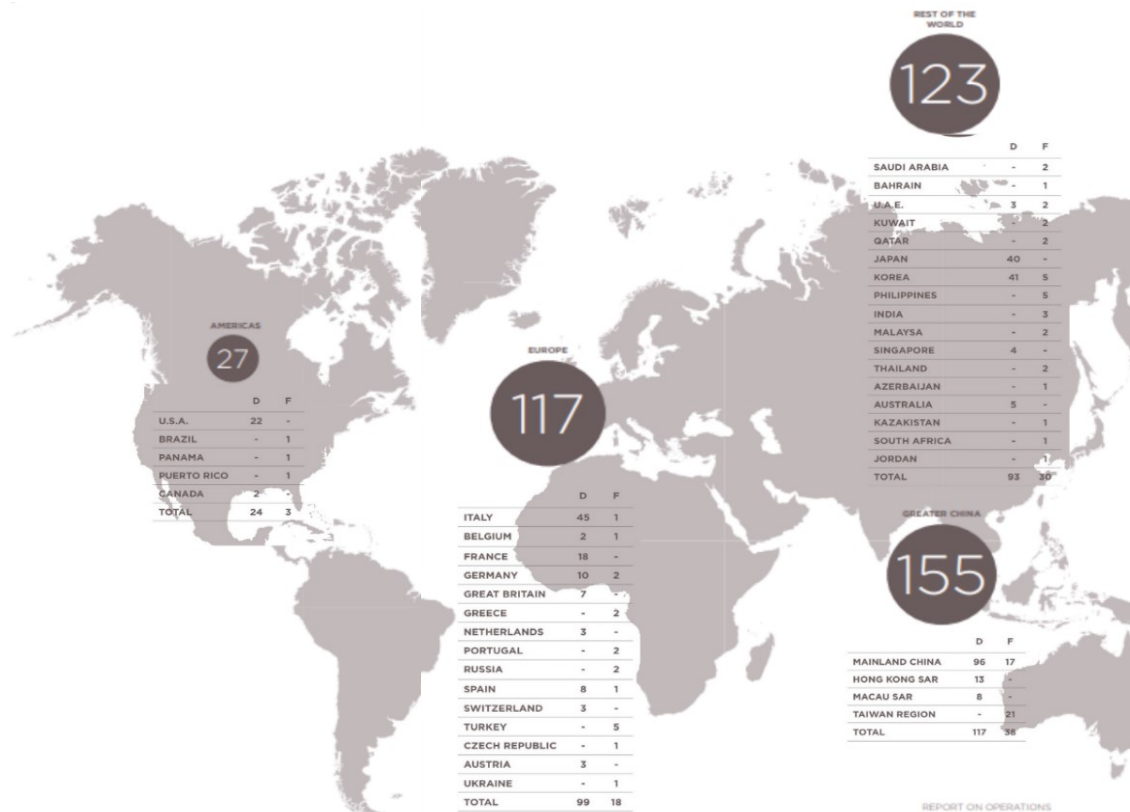**3.2 Methodology**

3.2.1 Research design

The first step of the research's design has been choosing the case study that can be suitable for the intended research, a brand that offer the opportunity of customizing their product both online and in store. The case study focused on Tod's, an Italian luxury brand that has recently developed an online customization platform for customizing their typical Gommino shoes. After the definition of the case study, an online survey has been developed and then conducted using Google Form. The survey analysed several aspects, including consumer perceptions of luxury, brand authenticity, product authenticity, and consumers' purchasing intentions and Word of Mouth, maintaining the focus on the impact that the two different advertising stimuli, and so the two different shopping experiences, can have on them. Data were collected using a questionnaire, which participants accessed through a URL link. The link was distributed through different channels, including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, to ensure a wider and varied audience.

3.2.2 Tod's: an Italian luxury fashion company

Tod's is an Italian luxury fashion house which is part of the TOD'S Group. It produces luxury shoes and becomes famous for the iconic Gommino shoe; the brand's shoe made of high-quality leather with 133 pebble sole typically made from rubber. At the end of the 20th century, Filippo Della Valle started a small workshop for making shoes, during the years he refined his shoemaking business and elevated it to a level of excellence. In the 1980s Tod's had a brilliant idea: the company launches its first Gommino, without knowing that it will become the brand's icon and emblem of values of tradition and innovation. What made this type of shoe so iconic was the fact that until that moment there were no luxury shoes that could be worn every day, for the entire day with both elegant attire and casual outfits. Tod's became famous not only for shoes, but also for bags, first launched in the 1990s with the D-bag, inspired by Princess Diana and that became an example of outstanding artisans workmanship. Over the years, the TOD'S Group has expanded its production by evolving and proposing consumers new versions of the historical pieces, such as the reinterpretation of the Gommino and the Di Bag, revising them in contemporary keys and enriching them with a customization programme. In addition, Tod's started launching and acquiring prestigious brands and opening flagship stores in locations around the world, including Milan, Paris, New York, and Tokyo and arriving to 420 boutiques located all over the world, including Europe, Asia, North and South America (Tod's, 2022). Tod's Group mainly uses three channels: directly operated single-brand stores (DOS), franchised single brand stores and a series of independent multi-brand stores selected according on the suitability to the brands' positioning, their location, and the visibility that they can provide for products (wholesale distribution). Precisely, Tod's Group started it international expansion in 1987 opening the first direct

store in the United States. Following the consolidating of the success of its product, Tod's began opening stores in the strategic, respected markets, starting from Europe and then expanding to Asia and Australia.

Figure 10: *Tod's boutiques around the world*

REST OF THE WORLD

123

	D	F
SAUDI ARABIA	-	2
BAHRAIN	-	1
U.A.E.	3	2
KUWAIT	-	2
QATAR	-	2
JAPAN	40	-
KOREA	41	5
PHILIPPINES	-	5
INDIA	-	3
MALAYSA	-	2
SINGAPORE	4	-
THAILAND	-	2
AZERBAIJAN	-	1
AUSTRALIA	5	-
KAZAKISTAN	-	1
SOUTH AFRICA	-	1
JORDAN	-	1
TOTAL	93	30

AMERICAS

27

	D	F
U.S.A.	22	-
BRAZIL	-	1
PANAMA	-	1
PUERTO RICO	-	1
CANADA	2	-
TOTAL	24	3

EUROPE

117

	D	F
ITALY	45	1
BELGIUM	2	1
FRANCE	18	-
GERMANY	10	2
GREAT BRITAIN	7	-
GREECE	-	2
NETHERLANDS	3	-
PORTUGAL	-	2
RUSSIA	-	2
SPAIN	8	1
SWITZERLAND	3	-
TURKEY	-	5
CZECH REPUBLIC	-	1
AUSTRIA	3	-
UKRAINE	-	1
TOTAL	99	18

GREATER CHINA

155

|	D	F
MAINLAND CHINA	96	17
HONG KONG SAR	13	-
MACAU SAR	8	-
TAIWAN REGION	-	21
TOTAL	117	38

REPORT ON OPERATIONS

Notes: D= Directly Operated Stores; F= Franchised Stores

Source: todsgroup.com

The TOD'S Group is now made up of four brands: Tod's, Hogan, Roger Vivier and FAY, each of them with a distinctive identity, but sharing the same philosophy and values promoted by the Group. Hogan proposes a new concept of footwear based on an urban chic luxury shoe together with a blend of sport-inspired codes, perfect and suitable for

any occasion. On the other hand, FAY is a clothing brand became famous for the iconic work jacket that combine tradition with timeless elegance. Roger Vivier promotes a more sophisticated and chic ways of wearing a shoe, driven by the savoir-faire of the French tradition. Its womenswear is designed for women who want to express their timeless elegance, but with an extravagant touch. Finally, Tod's which is described by the brand as an icon of Made in Italy, combining the Italian flair, good taste and savoir vivre. Tod's is not only a symbol for the footwear, but also for its ready-to-wear leather goods collections for both women and men (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Tod's Group S.p.a brands
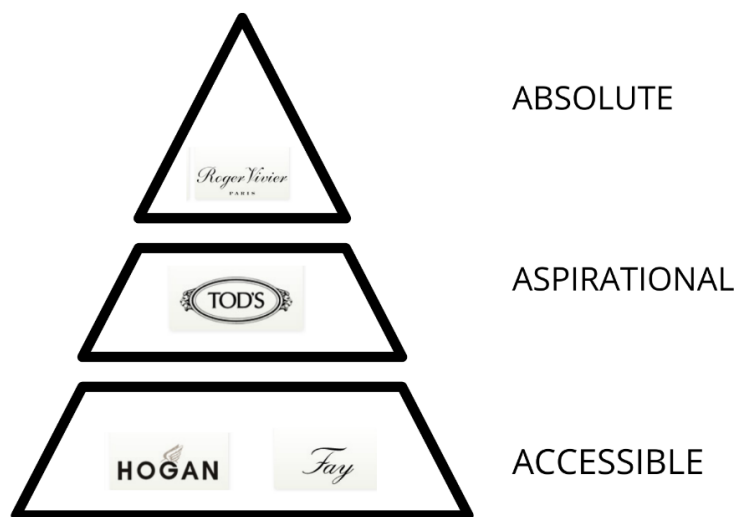
Source: todsgroup.com

The brand's values combine tradition with innovation: the former is associated with a century of heritage, the latter based on passion and creativity. Moreover, Tod's assesses products quality, ethics and made in Italy. The ethics' value focuses on maintaining honesty and transparency with all the stakeholders, supporting projects that care for and protect people, the environment and cultural heritage. The Made in Italy is a fundamental

value in which Tod's believes. It combines the exceptional craftmanship of the artisans that transfer their inimitable Italian know-how, and the continuous search for excellence and quality which maintain an unbreakable bold with the local roots. Indeed, the cultural heritage of the industrial district of origin, such as the knowhow of the manufacturing tradition, is proposed as the main source of the competitive strategy of this Group (Napolitano et al., 2020). Nowadays the TOD'S Group is considered as a global ambassador for Italy's manufacturing traditions and is a symbol of the unparalleled quality (Tod's, 2022).

In the latest annual report (2022), Tod's Group declared that its mission is to provide customers with high-quality handmade products made by professional craftsmen, maintaining the elegance and quality of the products. In 2017, Tod's developed the idea of customizing their products to offer their consumers unique products, but maintaining the artisanal part of the process that made their shoes lovable by the consumers. For Tod's the importance of costumers is central in their strategies and the ability to offer them the possibility to design the products they wear, make it more efficient. Indeed, consumers feel part of the creation process, they can enjoy a unique experience, both in boutiques and online, that lead them to identify themselves with the brand. Specifically, the iconic Gommino loafer has been the object of the customization initiative that is now available in TOD'S boutiques and online and allows customers to create their own versions from millions of available combinations.

Figure 12: *Tod's Studios, Via Montenapoleone, Milan*

Source: identity.ae

In addition to the material and colour, they can also choose details such as stitching, the strap or toecap and can even customize shoes by changing the colour of the rubber or adding their own initials. The product is handmade with care and passion by TOD'S artisans and can be picked up at any of the brand's stores or sent directly to the customer's home. On Tod's website, or boutiques, consumers can choose the model they prefer among both women and men's collections and then start the customization. The online platform gives the opportunity to see different angles of the Gommino shoe, so that consumers can choose as if they have the shoe in their hand.

Offering this opportunity online or in boutiques demonstrates the multi-channel approach that the group is developing to offer their customers the best possible experience. Starting from the creation of the Tod's T Factory, a workshop where some of the world's most creative talents collaborate to create unique capsule collection. In this way, Tod's opens its imagination to novel style influences, new stimuli and surprising outcomes. Moreover, in 2022, Tod's organized more than twenty days in stores around

the world to engage costumers in the craftmanship process, so that they can witness the creation of shoes and bags, but also the customization of them. To develop their customer centricity programme, Tod's Group started testing the use of new channels and innovative formats in digital advertising, using Tik Tok, Twitch, Snapchat, as well as evolving in the Metaverse with the launch of the first Metaverse Fashion Week and the "Untraditional" sneaker in NFT (Tod's, 2022).

Figure 13: *Tod's online customization platform*
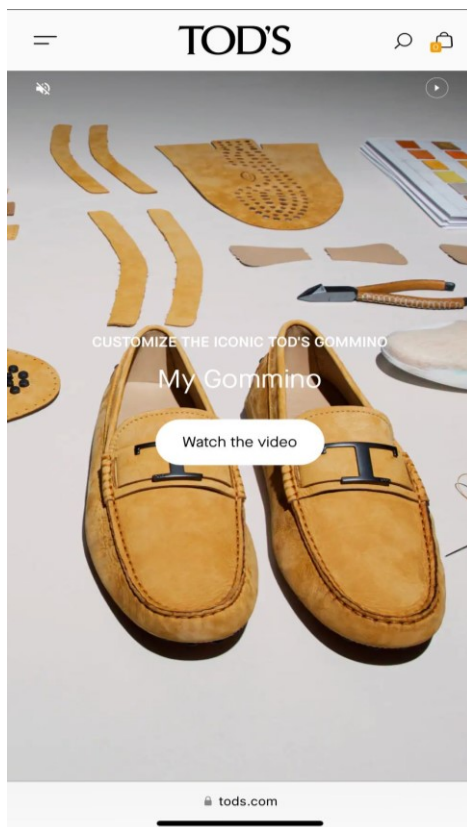
Source: tods.com

3.2.3 The survey

To reach the research purposes, an online survey was carried out, randomly submitting a double version of the same questionnaire (in terms of questions) but with two different advertising representing two different scenarios. In this regard, two stimuli, only for academic purposes, have been created to conduct the research and address the research questions. They consisted of two versions of a Tod's shoes advertisement (see Figure 14): the first version aimed to represent and give the idea of the in-store shopping experience and portrayed the image of a Tod's shop together with artisans' hands that model and assemble the iconic Gommino shoes, showing different versions of it to suggest the customization that costumers can experience. On the other hand, the second version which represents the online shopping experience depicts the Tod's customization platform giving three different combinations of colours, models, and fabrics for both women and men's models.

Figure 14: *Questionnaire's advertising stimuli*

In this way respondents have immediately the idea of what customization means: the possibility of choosing among different combination until they found the one that they want. Both advertisements are completed with the same claim *" The shoes that define you, for both women and men. Whatever you imagine to wear, we will help you make it yours"*, but with a difference in the last part because in the online version it is *"...you can make it yours"* instead of *"...we will help you make it yours"*. The decision behind the use of this claim is to both emphasize the significance of the customization processes and underline the difference between the in-store and online experience.

3.2.3.1 The advertising claim in English

The two advertising stimuli have been proposed with an English claim, the same claim that respondents were asked to translate in the first section of the questionnaire. For the in-store questionnaire we choose to use the claim *"The shoes that define you, for both women and men. Whatever you imagine to wear, we will help you make it yours"*. The first part of the claim defines the product that the brand wants to sell, underlining the fact that is available for both women and men. The second part of the claim focuses on the customization opportunity given by the brand, suggesting that people can create and wear whatever they want. Indeed, consumers can make it personal and unique, selecting among a wide range of colours and fabrics, and, above all, combining them in the most personal way. The words "we will help you make it yours" want to highlight the fact that costumers are helped and assisted by artisans and shoppers in Tod's boutiques but maintaining the personal customization experience. On the other hand, in the online questionnaire the claim is almost identical, but the choice to change the second part in *"The shoes that define you, for both women and men. Whatever you imagine to wear, you can make it yours"* was made to bring the attention on the action, considering that costumers are the ones that choose and make the customization on their own.

Research studies demonstrate that English is frequently and widely used in international advertising to communicate with consumers, especially in non-English-speaking countries. This phenomenon results from the fact that businesses have to communicate with both national and international stakeholders and, when they produce their campaigns, they have to choose to whether adapt or standardize the communication in the countries in which they want to expand (Hornikx et al., 2010). Moreover, the reason of using English, or a foreign language, in advertising is not for the need to convey the

message, but to use the symbolic significance of that foreign language. Piller (2001) demonstrates that even if consumers do not understand the real meaning of the message, they immediately recognize the language and activate the stereotypes about the it. As far as English is concerned, the language activates stereotypes of modernity, prestige, international orientation, and sophistication. Considering that Tod's is nowadays a worldwide known company, the best choice was to adopt English for the advertising claim to underline the international image and appeal of the brand.

The studies by Hornikx, van Meurs, and de Boer (2010) demonstrate that a relationship between complexity and comprehension of slogans existed, and specifically difficult slogans were more frequently mistranslated. As a consequence, the slogans that were more often translated incorrectly and were rated as more difficult were appreciated less. This study demonstrates that comprehension of a slogan is a key factor in the evaluation not only of the advertisements, but also of the product. Indeed, the English slogan was created in a way that can be comprehensible even for non-English-speaking people, so that they are able to understand it also with the help of the images in the advertisement. The claim's aim has been to draw the potential consumer attention towards the advertised images. Indeed, it tests if respondents' perception of the advertisement for this specific luxury brand is influenced or not by the two possible customization processes, given that the claims are very similar.

3.2.3.2 The measurement of theoretical constructs

The survey analysis was conducted using a structured questionnaire consisting of seventy-two items divided into seven sections and data collection took place between April and May 2023. Both versions of the questionnaire featured the same questions, the

only difference is in the advertising stimuli, which indicate the in-store or online customization experience of Tod's shoes. A 5-point Likert scale was employed to measure agreement or disagreement with the proposed items, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). All items were selected from multidimensional scales by various authors and translated from their original English version into Italian to ensure complete understanding among Italian-speaking participants, clarity and accurate representation of participants' evaluations and perceptions.

The first section asks respondents to choose among three possible translations from English into Italian of the claim in the advertising *"The shoes that define you, for both women and men. Whatever you imagine to wear, you can make it yours"*. The second section focuses on luxury perception and shopping experience and comprises respectively ten and five items. Luxury perception has been analysed through a multidimensional scale developed by Parks et al. (2021) and measured four dimensions: perceived quality, social value, personal value and functional value. Perceived quality is a fundamental characteristic that is expected to be present in every luxury product. It can influence consumer's purchase decisions considering that it results from the recognition of superiority of a brand by them (Ngoma and Ntale, 2015). On the other hand, social, personal and functional values are key dimensions of luxury value perceptions (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Moreover, this section analysed the typical shopping experience that consumers are more likely to live through five items taken from Zaichkowsky (1985) and Yoon and Park (2018) and adapted to the questionnaire. Indeed, respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 if they like more doing shopping online or in a store, the value of the scale respectively represents only the in-store experience (1) and only the online shopping experience (5).

The third section presented one of the two advertising stimuli, either in-store or online and asked respondents to answer thirty items about perceived brand authenticity and brand image. Brand authenticity has been analysed through the ten items that assess the dimensions of continuity, integrity, and symbolism from Morhart et al (2015) and thirteen items assessing brand reliability, brand intentions and brand credibility from Napoli et al. (2014). The continuity dimension refers to the ability of brand to not change over time, including the ability of surviving trends. Integrity is described as the responsibility and purity of the brand that should be reflected in their intentions and values that communicate. To conclude, symbolism is the ability of a brand to support consumers to be true to themselves. According to Napoli et al. (2014) brand authenticity can be analysed through the concept of reliability, intentions, and credibility of a brand. These authors developed a psychometrically scale to measure PBA from a consumer's point of view. Furthermore, the analysis of brand image has been assessed trough six items regarding the dimension of intimacy. According to Cho and Fiore (2015) emotional associations with the brand involved the sphere of feelings and make consumers feel supported by the brand, consequently building a strong brand image in consumers' minds and heart.

The fourth section focused on the product itself and explored the concepts of product luxury perception and product customization through eight items, respectively four from Parks et al (2021) and four from Pallant et al. (2020), considering the dimension of the usefulness perceived by the consumer in the shopping experience. The following section analyses consumer empowerment with six items from Füller et al. (2009) with the aim to assess both the experienced empowerment of the consumer and his involvement in the task, specifically with innovations. Moreover, three items from Kim et al. (2021) have

been included to measure mental imagery with the aim to analyse if consumers imagine the product, using their mental imagination, even when it is absent or physically not present (Horowitz, 1972).

The sixth section delved into consumer behaviour, specifically purchase intention and word-of-mouth recommendations, using nine items taken from Dodds et al.(1991), Goyette et l. (2010), and Daugherty and Hoffman (2014) which respectively analyse traditional WOM and eWOM.. The final section collected socio-demographic data including age, gender, annual income, and education level and a section for open-ended comments was also provided.

3.2.4 The sample

The research was conducted among the Italian-speaking public and 238 responses have been collected, 119 for each of the online and in-store questionnaire. Among the respondents, the majority of them were female and specifically, those who answered the online experience questionnaire were 78,10% female and 21,90% male, whereas those who respond to the in-store experience questionnaire were 75,60% female, 22,70% male and 1,70% who prefer not to specify their gender (see Figure 15 and 16).

Figure 15: *Online Questionnaire: Gender of the respondents*
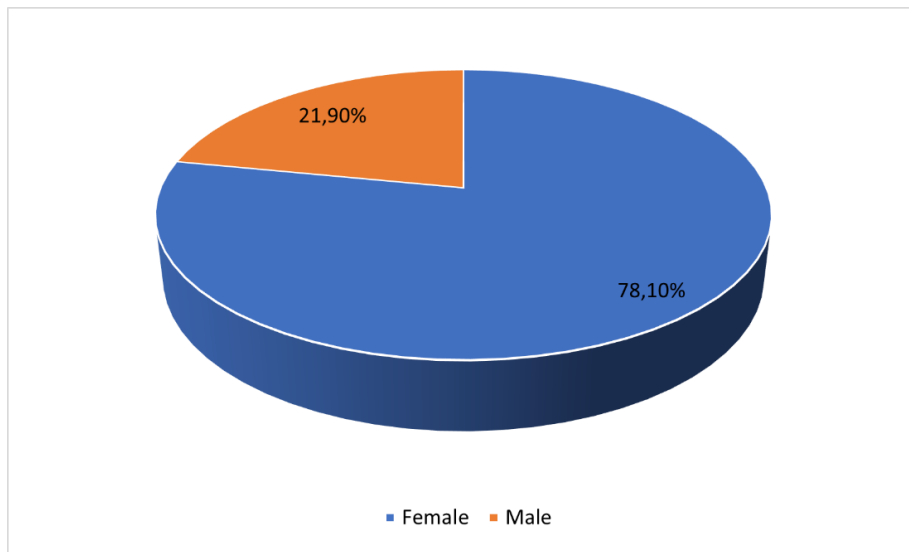
Notes: N=119

Figure 16: *In-store Questionnaire: Gender of the respondents*
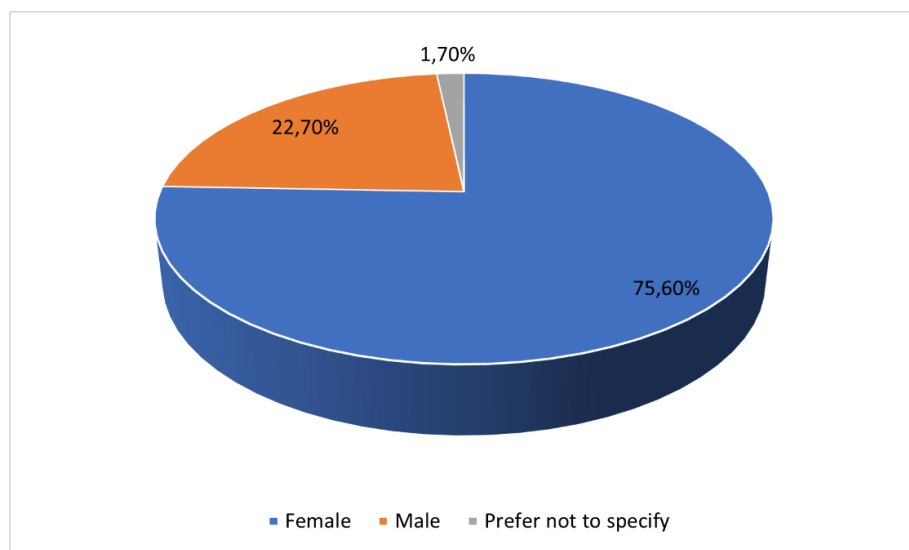
Notes: N=119

Moreover, respondents of both surveys were asked to indicate their annual family income and data suggested that most of them have an income between EUR 20,000 and EUR 50,000. Specifically, the 26,90% of respondents of the online experience

questionnaire have an income within EUR 20,000, the 56,30% earns between EUR 20,000 and EUR 50,000, the 13,50% between EUR 50,000 and EUR 100,000 and the minority of them, the 3,30% have an income of more than EUR 100,000. On the other hand, the 30,30% of the respondents of the in-store experience questionnaire have an income within EUR 20,000, the 54,60% of them between EUR 20,000 and EUR 50,000, the 12,60% earn between EUR 50,000 and EUR 100,000 and only the 2,50% have an income of more than EUR 100,000 (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: *Annual income of the respondents*
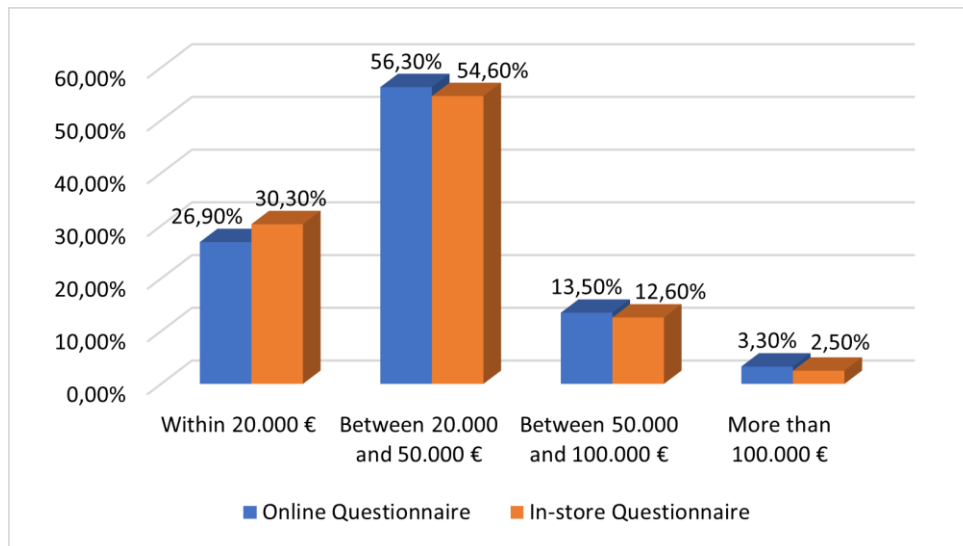
Notes: N online =119; N in-store = 119

In conclusion, respondents were asked to indicate their level of education and the majority of them, in both questionnaires, indicated to have a bachelor's degree. Specifically, the 46,20% for the online questionnaire and the 52,10% for the in-store questionnaire. Moreover, 10,10% of respondents of the online questionnaire declared to have secondary school diploma, the 38,70% a high school diploma. The minority of them, the 5,00% have a master or PhD degree. As far as the in-store questionnaire is concerned,

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5,90% of the respondents have a secondary school diploma, the 37,00% a high school diploma and only the 5,00% a master or PhD degree (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: *Education of the respondents*
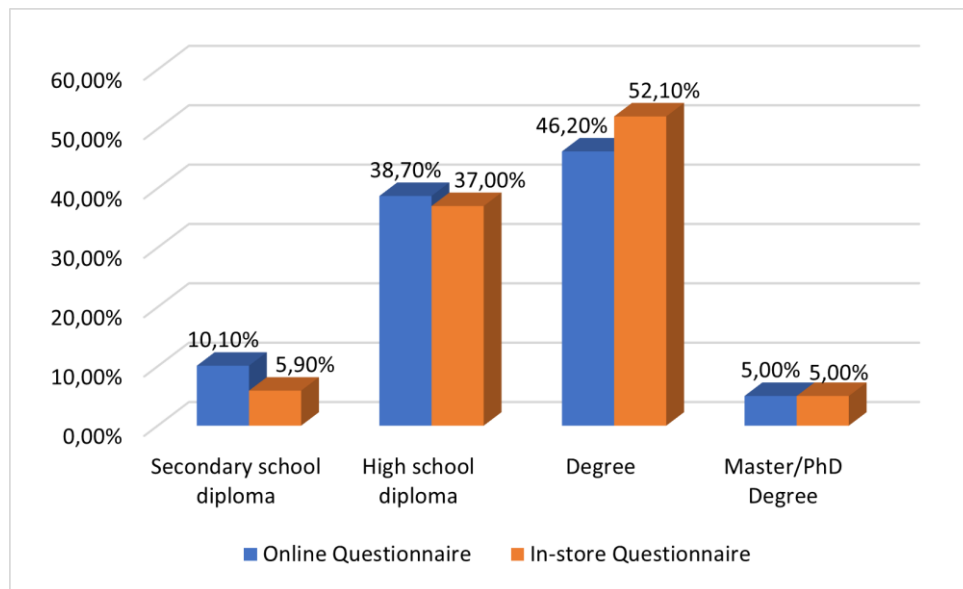
Notes: N online =119; N in-store=119

3.3 Analysis methodology

After collecting all the respondents' replies, data have been analysed to answer the research objectives. Specifically, the answers given by participants in each section of the questionnaire for the potential in-store and online consumers will be compared and, then, explained in the following chapter. The aim is to analyse if the potential consumer of either online or in-store experience will be influenced by the different advertising stimuli of which they undergone.

The analysis methodology implemented consists in the comparison between the different variables' average to underline the differences of the two groups of consumers. The independent variables taken into consideration are two for each of the consumers'

group: one for people who undergo the online advertising stimulus and the other for people who undergo the in-store advertising stimulus. In addition, the dependent variables on which the answers of the two groups have been tested are luxury perception, perceived brand authenticity (PBA), in-store and online shopping experience, brand image, product customization, mental imagery, and marketing variables, which are purchase intention, and Word of Mouth.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Research results

The aim of this chapter is to present the results obtained from the analysis of the data collected with the two surveys. Data are presented through the comparison of the average of the two groups of potential Italian consumers of luxury products, specifically Tod's shoes. The comparison involves those who will have an in-store shopping experience and those who will have an online shopping experience.

4.2 Luxury perception results

Questions related to luxury perception have been asked to respondents in the second section of the questionnaire, before the advertisement of the in-store or online shopping experience. The concept of luxury perception has been analysed through four dimensions, specifically perceived quality, social value, personal value, and functional value. Figure 19 shows that there is no significant difference between the group who experienced shopping in a store and the group who experienced shopping online. Indeed, the average quality perception are respectively 3.21 and 3.16. This result suggests that both groups have a similar perception of the brand even without the influence of the context experience. Consequently, Tod's products are perceived to have a good quality.

Figure 19: *Luxury perception – Perceived quality*
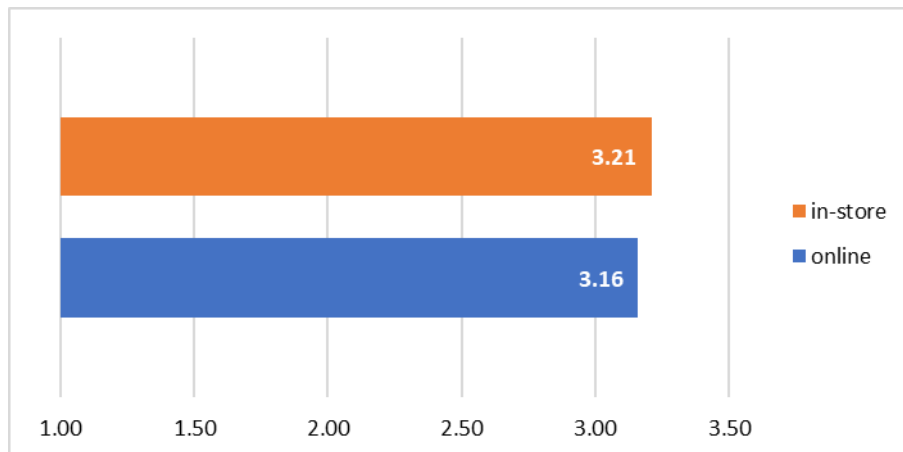
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119.

The second dimension of luxury perception that has been analysed is social value. As in the case mentioned earlier, there is no substantial difference between the two groups of potential consumers considering that the average for in-store shopping experience is 2.59, while the average for online shopping experience is 2.43 (see Figure 20).


Figure 20: *Luxury perception – Social value*
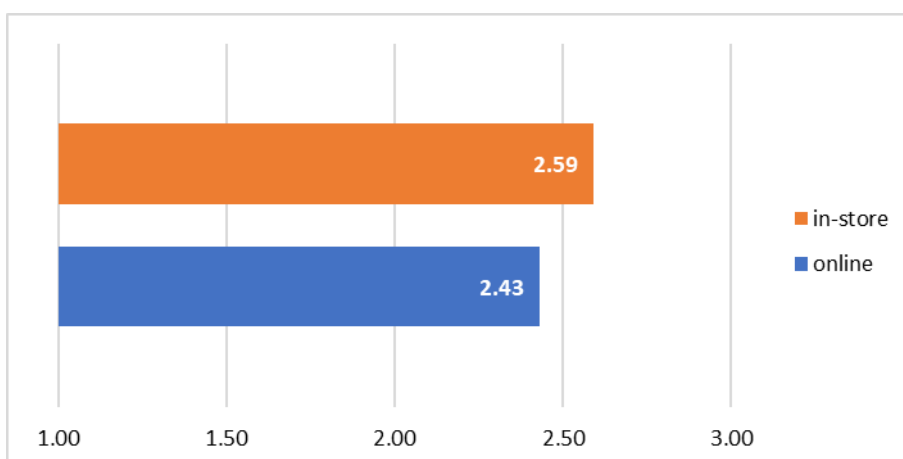
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119.

Results of the following dimension of personal value are shown in Figure 21. In this case, the average of both groups of potential consumers is the same (1.84), a result that highlights the similar attitudes that people have on the personal value of luxury products.

Figure 21: *Luxury perception – Personal value*
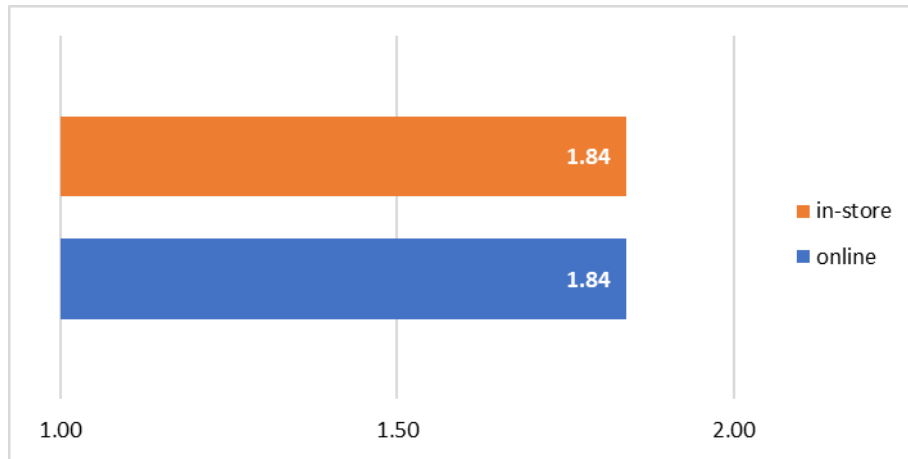
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119.

The last dimension is functional value. Figure 22 shows that, as in the other dimensions mentioned above, the difference between the two groups is very minimal. Indeed, the average of traditional consumers is 2.66, while the average of digital consumers is 2.62.

Figure 22: *Luxury perception – Functional value*
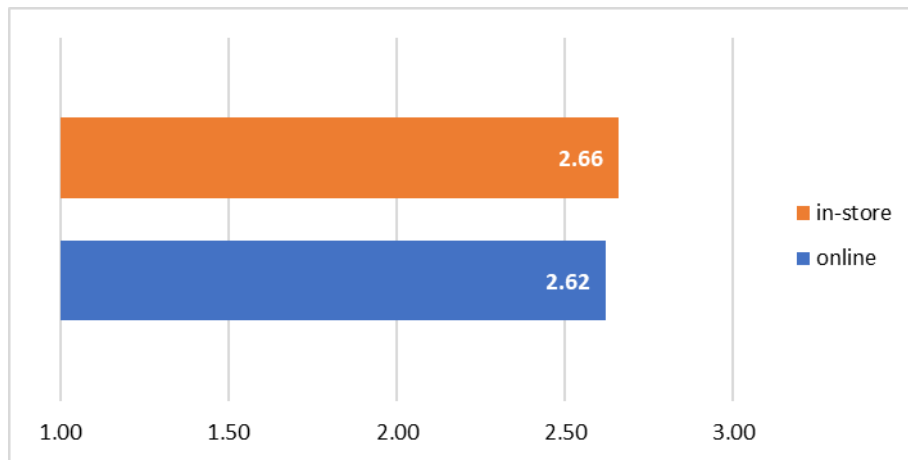
4.3 Consumer involvement in shopping experience results

Consumer involvement has been assessed asking potential consumers whether they prefer a completely online or in-store shopping experience. The graph illustrates a significant difference between the two groups, indeed the average of the online consumers is 2.47, while the average of the traditional consumers is 2.70 (see Figure 23). Considering that the scale was from 1 (only in-store) to 5 (only online), results show that consumers prefer a traditional shopping experience in a store if compared to an online shopping experience.

Figure 23: *Consumer involvement in shopping experience*
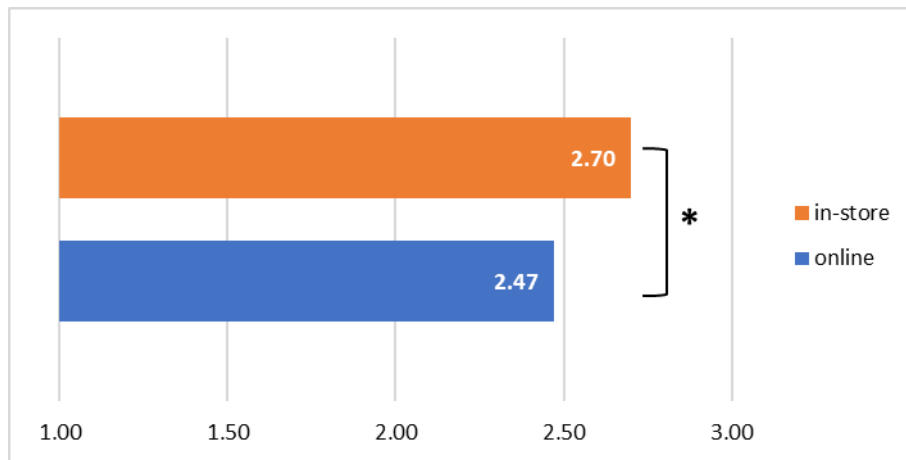
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119; * = p < .05.

4.4 Brand authenticity results

The multidimensional construct of brand authenticity has been analysed through the six dimensions of continuity, integrity, symbolism, brand reliability, brand intentions and brand credibility. As far as the dimension of continuity is concerned, the following chart compares responses of both groups of potential consumers and shows the significant difference between them. Indeed, while the average of online experience's respondents is 3.34, the in-store ones recorded an average of 3.72 (see Figure 24). The results highlight that brand authenticity in terms of continuity is highly perceived in the in-store shopping experience than online.
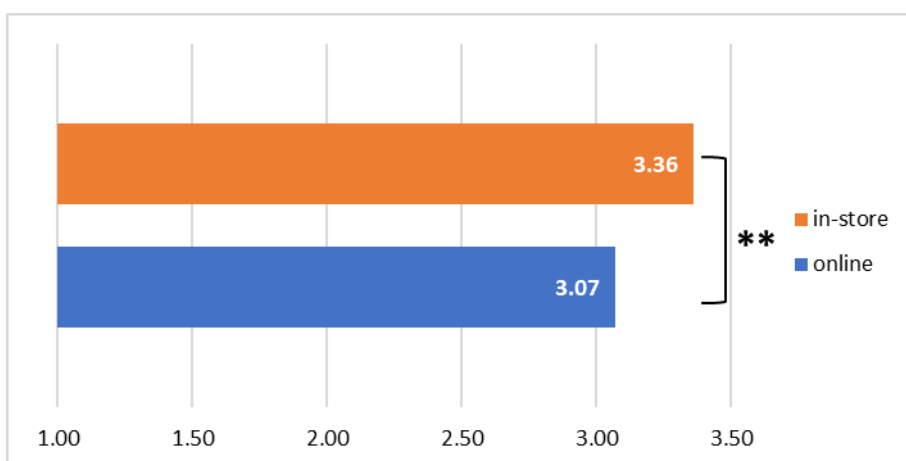
Figure 24: *Brand authenticity - Continuity*
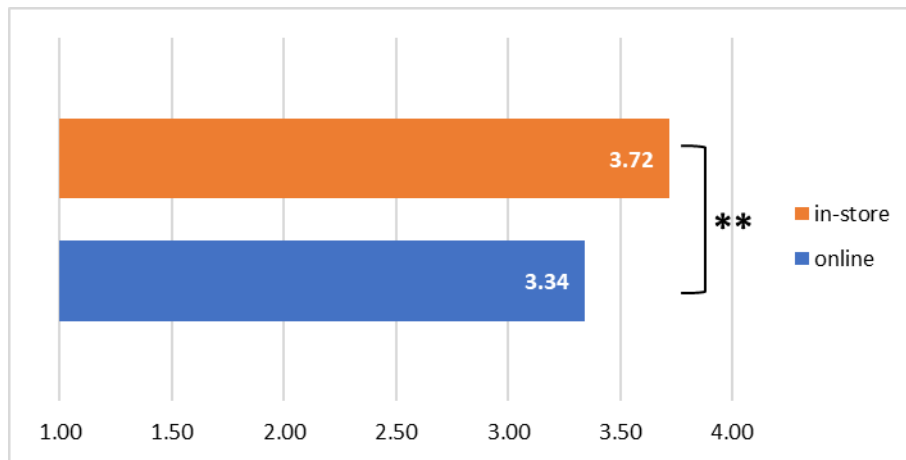
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119; ** = p < .01.

As the dimension mentioned above, the following dimension of integrity shows a similar significant difference between the two groups (see Figure 25). The averages of in-store and online consumers are respectively 3.36 and 3.07, highlighting the fact that integrity is more influenced by traditional shopping experiences than digital ones.
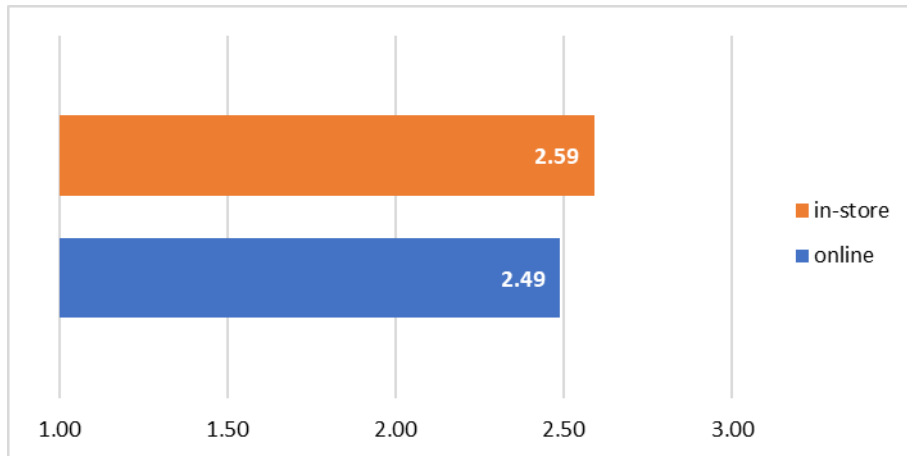
Figure 25: *Brand authenticity - Integrity*

Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119; ** = p < .01.

No particular difference between the two shopping experiences emerged for the symbolism dimension. Indeed, the average of people who experienced traditional shopping is 2.59, while the average of online consumers is 2.49 (see Figure 26).

Figure 26: *Brand authenticity - Symbolism*

Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119.

The following dimension of brand reliability is shown in Figure 27. As in the dimension mentioned above, no significant difference was recorded between traditional (2.90) and digital consumers (2.71). It can be deducted that both advertising communicate a similar level of reliability of the brand.

Figure 27: *Brand authenticity – Brand reliability*
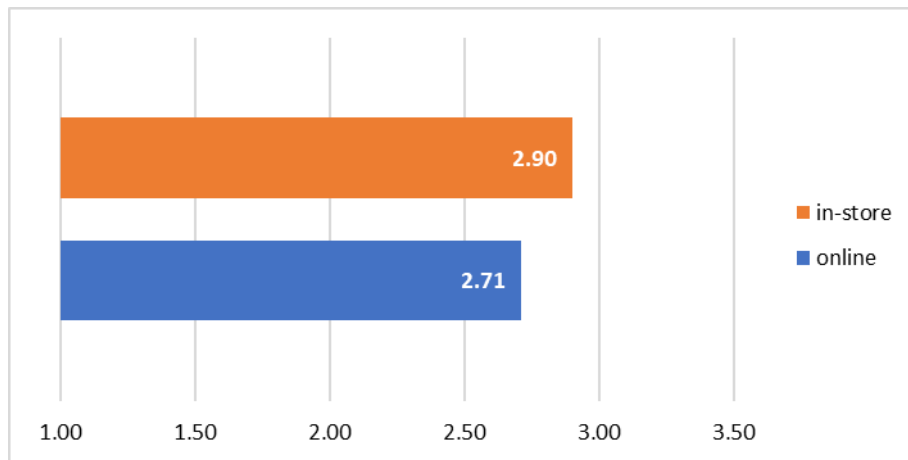
As far as the dimensions of brand intentions and brand credibility are concerned, there is no substantial difference between the two groups in both charts (see Figure 28 and 29). Results of both dimensions pointed out the same averages for traditional respondents (3.17) and digital respondents (3.08). Therefore, intentions and credibility of the brand are not influenced by the different contexts of shopping, whether in-store or online.

Figure 28: *Brand authenticity – Brand intentions*
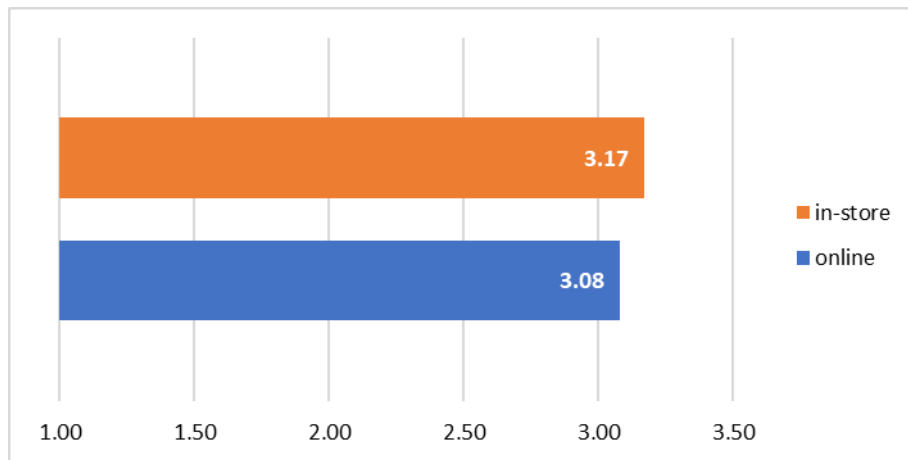
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119.

Figure 29: *Brand authenticity – Brand credibility*
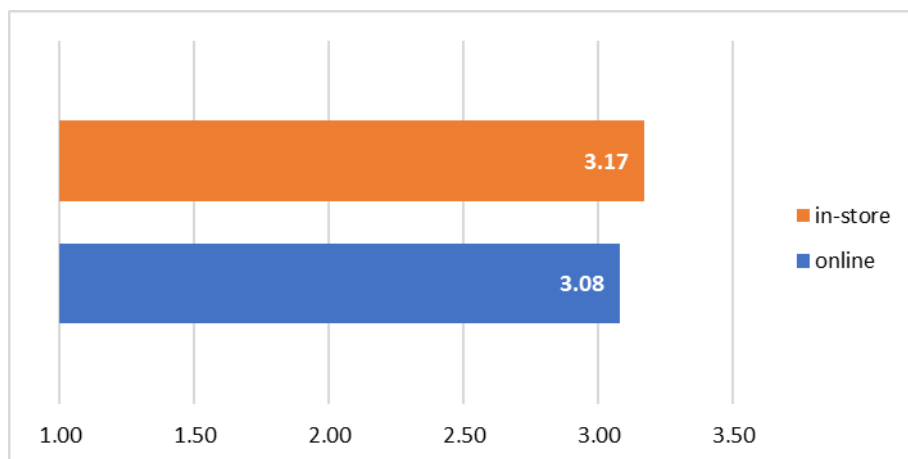
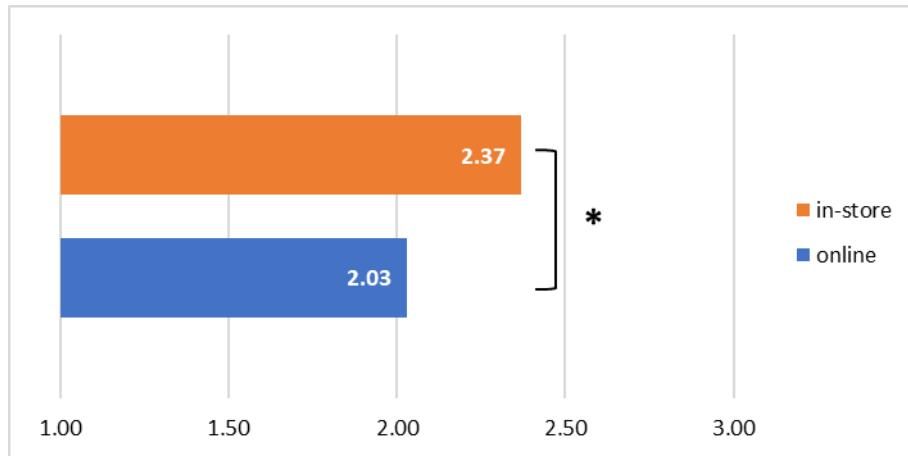Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119.

4.5 Brand image results

The construct of brand image has been analysed through the dimension of intimacy with the aim to study if any difference emerges between the respondents of the two groups. As shown in Figure 30, results highlight a significant difference between the average of potential in-store consumers (2.37) and online consumers (2.03). The result

demonstrates that people who live a traditional shopping experience are more influenced in the perception of the image of the brand, if compared to the ones living an online shopping experience.

Figure 30: *Brand image - Intimacy*

Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119; * = p < .05.

4.6 Product luxury perception results

The questionnaire aims to assess not only the general perception of luxury of the brand, but also the luxury perception of the product, specifically Tod's shoes. Results, shown in Figure 31, demonstrate that there is a substantial difference between the two groups of consumers. The average of people experiencing the store is 2.69, while the average of people experiencing the online version is 2.45. Results suggest that traditional consumers are more influenced in the perception of luxury of Tod's products and, consequently, perceive a higher quality in the store than online.

Figure 31: *Product luxury perception*
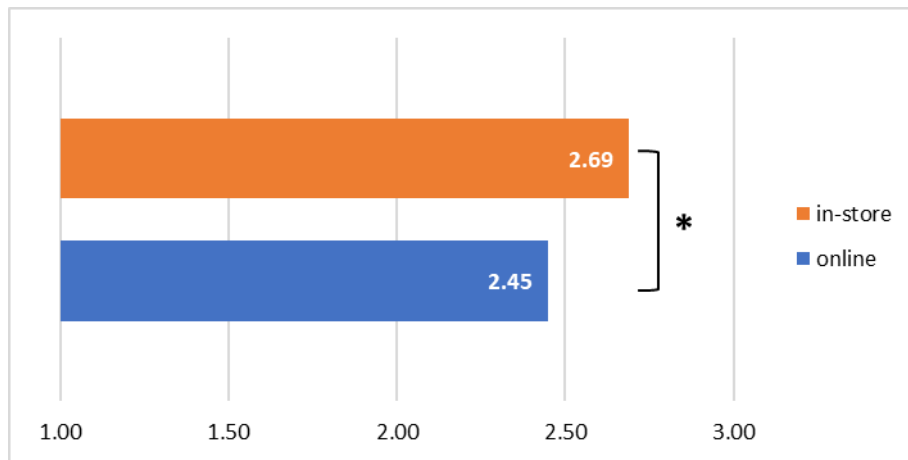
4.7 Product customization results

The construct of product customization has been assessed through the dimension of perceived usefulness. The results show no significant difference between the two groups, considering that the averages of traditional and digital potential consumers are respectively 3.55 and 3.39 (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: *Product customization – Perceived usefulness*
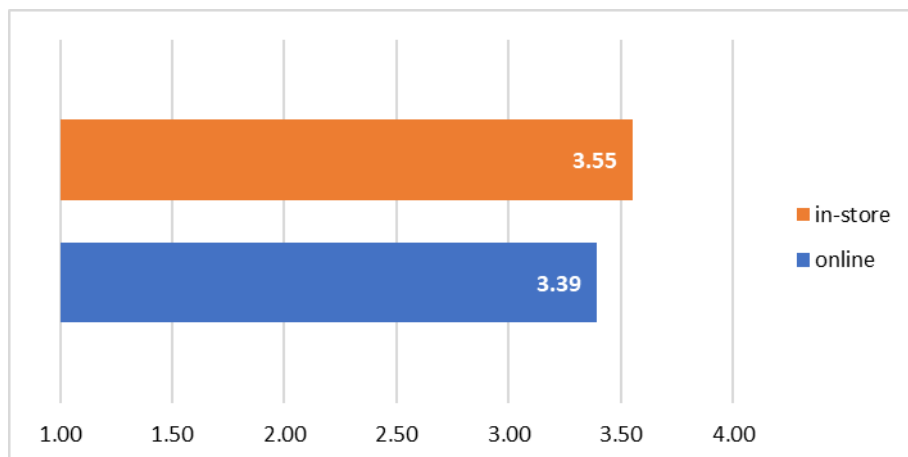
4.8 Consumer empowerment results

The concept of consumer empowerment involves the dimensions of experienced empowerment and task involvement. The former shows a significant difference between the groups of potential consumers with traditional consumers averaging 3.61, and digital consumers averaging 3.38 (see Figure 33).

Figure 33: *Consumer empowerment – Experienced empowerment*
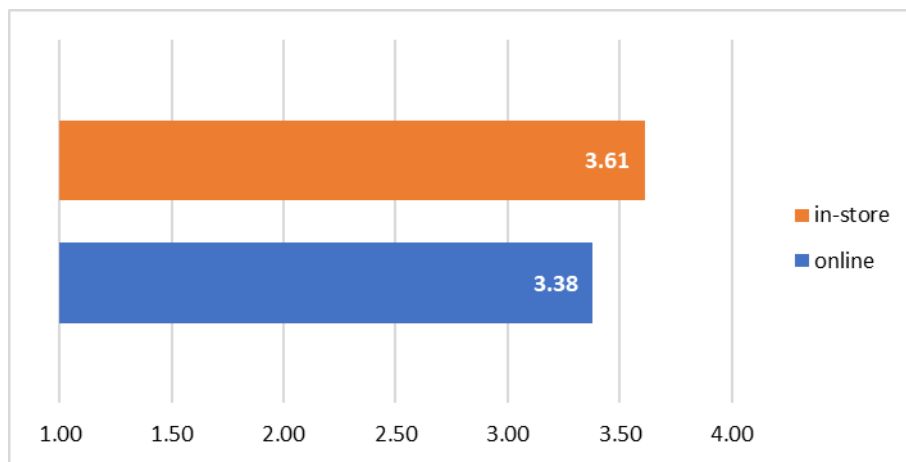
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119.

The latter illustrates a higher average for consumers of traditional shopping experience (3.89) than consumers of online shopping experience (3.65). From this result can be deducted that traditional consumers are more involved in innovations when compared to digital consumers (see Figure 34).

Figure 34: *Consumer empowerment – Task involvement*
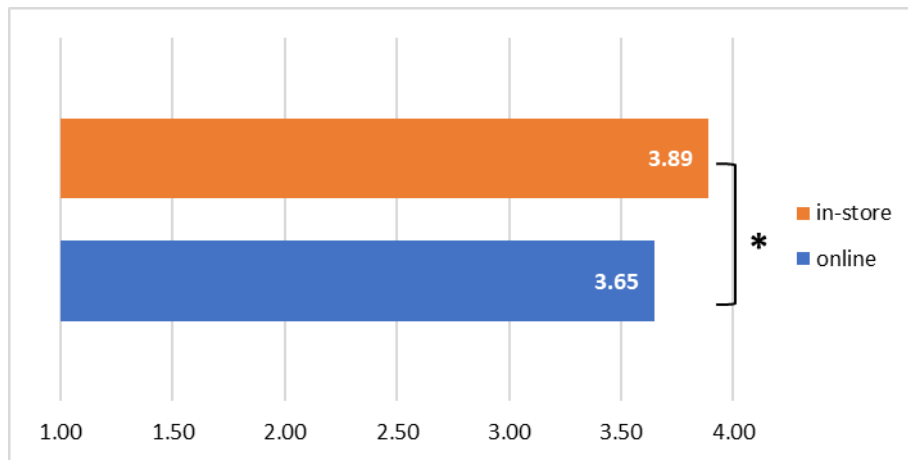
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119; * = p < .05.

4.9 Mental imagery results

The following construct of mental imagery does not present significant differences. While the average of people experiencing shopping in a store is 2.93, the average of those experiencing shopping online is 2.78 (see Figure 35).

Figure 35: *Mental imagery*
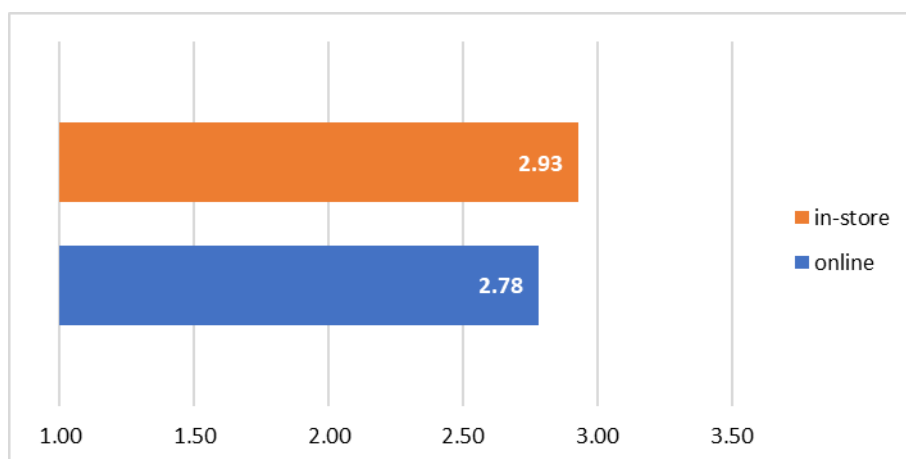
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119.

4.10 Consumer behaviour results

The two marketing variables of willingness to buy and Word of Mouth (WOM) both registered highly significant differences among the two groups of potential consumers (see Figure 36). The variable of WOM, which comprehends online (e-WOM) and offline WOM, reported substantial differences considering that the average of traditional potential consumers (3.05) is higher than the average of online potential consumers (2.64). As far as willingness to buy is concerned, the average of traditional purchase intentions (2.82) is significantly higher than digital purchase intentions (2.29). Consequently, even though the numbers of online platforms for shopping is increasing, consumers are more likely to purchase in physical stores.

Figure 36: *Consumer behaviour*
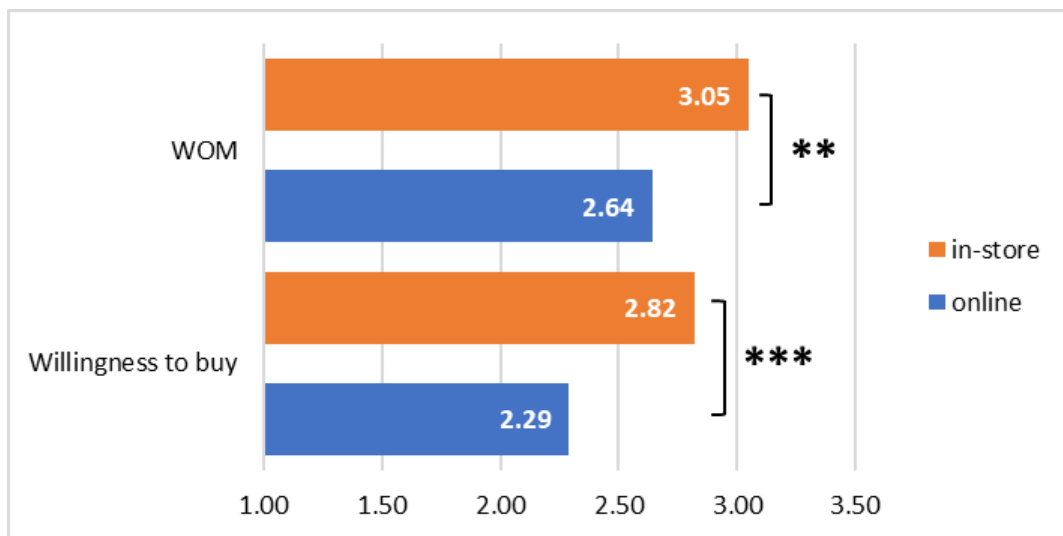
Notes: N in-store = 119; N online = 119; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$.

CHAPTER 5

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 General discussion

The aim of this research is assessing the effects that two different shopping contexts, specifically online and in a store, can have on consumer behaviour. The focus of the research is studying if consumer perception of luxury and brand authenticity are influenced by the two scenarios. The case study for this research has been chosen with the purpose of comparing the service of customization that the company offers either online and in the traditional store, and, through this service, analyse if consumer's perception of the brand and the products, as well as their consumer behaviour change under the influence of the different scenarios.

Tod's is an Italian luxury brand known not only in Italy, but also in the world. The internationalization of the brand led to a development of innovative services, such as customization platforms, that they offer to their consumers, but maintaining a connection to the tradition of the artisanal work that made the brand famous. Therefore, Tod's brand combines tradition and innovation but always believe in the power of craftmanship and want to maintain a bold with the local roots. What made Tod's the perfect case study for this research was the fact that it is one of the first luxury brands that started offering the opportunity to personalize their products, specifically their shoes, both online and in the store.

In the previous chapter data were analysed and presented, then a general discussion of the results will be given in this chapter to analyse the effects that the two advertisements

might have produced on consumer behaviour. The present analysis will help to understand if the shopping context is still a fundamental aspect in both the perception of luxury and consumer behaviour, taking into consideration the remarkable variable of consumer's involvement.

The first variable that have been analysed is perceived luxury perception. Respondents were asked to answer the questions before the two stimuli of the advertising to understand the general idea they had of the world of luxury. Results highlight the similar perception that the public have on perceived quality, social value, personal value, and functional value. This is a significant result because it implies that both groups have the same shared idea of the luxury world. Consequently, the following results will be exclusively influenced by the advertising stimuli representing online and in-store experiences.

Moreover, results of the following variable of brand authenticity highlight a substantial difference between the two shopping experiences. The dimensions of continuity and integrity are the ones that recorded a significant difference and, consequently, the ones that the public consider determinant when comparing online and in-store experiences. Specifically, as far as the dimension of continuity is concerned, the in-store group demonstrated to be positively influenced by the advertising. It can be deduced that Tod's history and heritage is better conveyed through the experience in the store than online. On the other hand, results of the dimension of integrity suggest that the brand is perceived to be more responsible and morally pure when the consumer visits the shop, as well as the intentions and values that wants to communicate are highly perceived in the store experience than online. The other dimensions connected to brand authenticity result to be less influenced by the change of context. That could be argued that the perception of credibility, reliability and symbolism of the brand cannot easily change with a single

advertisement, so that the brand is perceived to be authentic, transparent, and honest both online and in the store.

Significant differences have been recorder in the variable of perception of luxury of a product. In the section dedicated to measure the consumer involvement in the shopping experience, people surprisingly prefer the experience in the store and, therefore, potential consumers of Tod's shoes revealed to be more influenced in the perception of the product in the store than online. Therefore, as far as consumer empowerment is concerned, results from the research confirm that a higher perceived involvement in the task bring consumers to be more likely to enjoy the experience and the product itself.

Furthermore, the variable of brand image recorded a consistent difference and results shown how people who see the in-store advertisement turned out to be more influenced in the perception of the image of the brand. Brand image aims to represent how the company want to be and appear in consumer's mind. The results confirms that the creation of a strong and positive brand image, consequently led to a positive word of mouth and increasing purchase intention (Kim et al., 2009). Indeed, the last construct that records significant results was consumer behaviour, specifically analysed through the variables of Word of Mouth (WOM) and willingness to buy. People who undergo the in-store stimulus were more positively influenced in the potential intentions to buy Tod's shoes, when compared to the ones who envisioned the online advertisement. Considering that people are more involved in the store experience, it is consequently true that they are more propense to purchase and recommend the product when they visit a shop to when they shop online.

5.2 Conclusions

Results obtained from the survey suggest that, despite the increasing number of opportunities that online platforms offer to consumers, in terms of product customization of luxury brands, they prefer an offline experience (in a store), confirming that it still plays a significant role in the luxury sector. The shopping experience in the luxury sector, indeed, involves its co-creation and evolution through personalized experiences in which the consumer feels as an active participant (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Consumers can feel delight during the activity of doing shopping but also simply visiting the store. This confirms what Dion and Arnould (2011) said about the importance of the store experience in the luxury sector, arguing that visiting directly operated store can contribute to live a unique service experience, but also build and enhance brand relationships.

Even though only some of the tested variables registered a substantial difference between the two groups of respondents, the average of in-store respondents has always been higher than online in all of them. This means that, given the different advertising stimuli, people which envisioned the advertising promoting online customization experience have a lower perception of luxury of the product and brand authenticity, but also are less inclined to purchase or recommend the brand.

The variable that helps understanding these results is *customer involvement in the shopping experience*. Indeed, when asking potential consumers where they feel more happy, relaxed, or stimulated in doing shopping, they significantly choose the store. Therefore, this result confirms the idea expressed by Schmitt (1999) that shopping is not only a simple provision of information but also a holistic and emotional experience. People feel more engaged in the store experience because, according to Pantano et al.

(2018), the traditional store can provide a better atmosphere of exclusivity and uniqueness, that is what consumers are searching for when purchasing a luxury product.

Moreover, taking into consideration that the perception of luxury among the respondents was on a similar level, the results underline the fact that the advertising should not only present the product to sell, but also convey a message, a story behind it to communicate to the public the values and the experience they offer. For instance, the advertising which suggests the artisanal manufacturing of the shoes revealed to be a key factor influencing consumers, highlighting that in the store people can touch the fabrics, combine a thousand of colours, be assisted by professional consultants and, above all, live a fully immerged experience in the luxury world of the brand.

To sum up, even though results from this study accentuate the importance that the traditional shopping experience still have in the perception of luxury, this does not imply that new digital technologies should not be implemented by companies to enhance the costumer experience.

5.2.1 Theoretical implications

Some theoretical implications that can be deduced from this research are related to the literature of luxury marketing. Starting with luxury perception and authenticity, while the former is strictly associated to the perceived quality of the product, the latter is connected to attributes, communication style and values of the brand.

Both constructs are related to intrinsic and extrinsic attributes; the consumer who purchase a luxury product pays attention not only to physical attributes of the object, but also to what the brand is capable to offer to them, including its heritage, transparency, values, and identity. Indeed, this research highlights the importance that perceived

integrity and continuity of the brand have on consumers, as well as perceived luxury product. Results emphasize that luxury products are the combination of different aspects, starting from excellent quality and high prices, but also involving the aesthetics of living a full immersion experience, the heritage, and the tradition built through time (Dubois et al., 2001). Indeed, consumers accept to pay a higher price to possess that product not only for the product itself, but also to share the unique values, history, and hedonistic properties that the brand communicates, because they want to build their identity and express themselves through them (Johnson and Vigneron, 2004). The store still represents and play a key role because offer the possibility to physically touch the product, but also sensitively live the experience through the senses. Consumers are more engaged in the process because it evokes emotions, imaginations, and sensory aspects when they are fully involved in the experience (Carù and Cova, 2003).

However, although luxury perception and brand authenticity differ between offline and online environment when the product customization is concerned, there are no differences in terms of mental imagery. Customization allows consumers to image both in the traditional store as well as in the digital one.

As far as consumer behaviour is concerned, consumers intention to buy is positively influenced by the store shopping experience suggested by the advertising. As mentioned above, the involvement registered by consumers is crucial to understand the results obtained, because they demonstrated to be more involved in both the experience and the product in the store context. It confirms that the variable of product involvement, or interest in the product, is important because the more interest consumers have in the product, the more intentions they will have in customizing it (Damm et al., 2013). As a

consequence, people which are positively involved in the process, are more likely to buy or recommend the product.

5.2.2 Marketing implications

As well as theoretical implications, the findings of the research give to companies some hints in terms of marketing strategies that can implement to improve the effectiveness of product customization and advertising. Firstly, this study highlights how a change of setting in the advertising can shape people's mind and easily influence their behaviour. When creating the two advertising stimuli, indeed, the purpose was to promote the same object but suggest the differences between the two contexts in which the consumer might find himself. Companies do not have to communicate and focus only on the product that they want to sell, but should be able to express feelings, essence, and values in which they believe. As mentioned above, consumer buy a luxury product not just for the product itself, but above all for the symbolic meaning that it has.

Moreover, results of this study surprisingly confirm that, even though marketing is evolving to a fully digital experience, the store remain an important factor in consumers decision making process. Thus, companies should offer to consumers an omnichannel experience, which integrates the traditional with the digital. This result confirms the study made by Pantano et al. (2022), which argued that companies do not have to use technological innovation just to purely enhance the customer experience, but they must know how to use them and approach the topic in a mature and strategical way. They must identify and pursue the strategy that make most sense for them, integrating new digital technologies with the experience lived in the store. For instance, retailers can provide

unique and differentiable store experiences even inside the store such as sensory experiences that appeal customer's sensory touch points (Park and Yoon, 2018).

5.3 Limitations and future works

Even though this study offers important contributions to the issues, some limitations should be still taken into consideration. The first aspect is related to the accessibility of the object of the study, specifically shoes. This product can be part of accessible luxury products that can be achieved by middle-classes. It would be interesting to study if even for less accessible products, such as intermediate and inaccessible luxury products, people would have had the same perception and consequently compare the differences among the three levels. Moreover, this research focuses only on one sector of luxury goods. Indeed, the perception of luxury might be different for fashion than for accessorises, such as watches. It will be interesting to study even other categories and understand how the sector of luxury can influence and change the perception.

Another aspect is the reference sample, both for the size and the average age. The research is confined to the number of respondents of the questionnaire, which are 238 with an average age of 31,30 for the in-store and 33,83 for the online. It would be preferable to obtain a wider audience in terms of numbers but also age, considering that the average sample is moderately young.

Moreover, the last significant limitation is represented by the country in which the questionnaire was administered. Even though the company is globally known and is provided with several shops and boutiques around the world, respondents of the questionnaire were only Italian-speaking people. Consequently, it would be interesting to

study the issue abroad to have a wider and more international point of view, as well as study the influence that the country of origin can have.

LIST OF FIGURES

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Pagina 1

Ciao, sono Sara, una studentessa del Dipartimento di Lingue dell'Università di Padova, che sta conducendo, per la mia tesi di laurea magistrale in marketing esperienziale, una ricerca sul marketing dei beni di lusso e, nello specifico, sul comportamento del consumatore a seguito dei processi di personalizzazione del prodotto.

La compilazione del questionario non richiederà più di 5 minuti.

La tua partecipazione sarebbe davvero utile per la mia ricerca!

Il questionario rimarrà anonimo e le poche informazioni sociodemografiche che ti verranno richieste, verranno analizzate solo in maniera aggregata.

Grazie in anticipo per il tuo aiuto e la tua partecipazione.

Sara

*1. Indica come tradurresti la seguente frase:

The shoes that define you, for both women and men. Whatever you imagine to wear, you can make it yours.

☐ Le scarpe che ti rappresentano, sia per uomo che per donna. Qualsiasi cosa immagini di indossare, potrai farla tua.

☐ La scarpa che ti definisce, sia per uomo che per donna. Qualsiasi cosa immagini di vestire, potrai farla tua.

☐ Le scarpe che ti definiscono, sia per uomo che per donna. Qualsiasi cosa vuoi indossare, puoi farla tua.

Pagina 2

*2. Considerando i marchi e i prodotti di lusso, indica su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo) quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5. Completamente d'accordo
I prodotti di lusso sono affidabili					
I prodotti di lusso durano nel tempo					
I prodotti di lusso sono di alta qualità					
I prodotti di lusso sono di ottima fattura					
Possedere prodotti di lusso è sinonimo di ricchezza					
Possedere prodotti di lusso è sinonimo di prestigio					

Per me è importante possedere prodotti di lusso molto belli		111			
Acquistare prodotti di lusso ti permette di creare un'immagine personale difficile da imitare					
Il prezzo elevato applicato ai prodotti di lusso è sinonimo di qualità					
Sono disposto a pagare di più per ottenere il meglio					

*3. Ora, invece, pensa alla tua tipica esperienza di shopping ed esprimi indica, su una scala da 1 (= solo in negozio) a 5 (= solo online), la tua opinione in merito alle seguenti domande:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5.Completamente d'accordo

L'esperienza di acquisto che mi rende felice è?		112			
L'esperienza di acquisto che mi fa sentire rigenerato è?					
L'esperienza di acquisto che mi fa sentire rilassato è?					
L'esperienza di acquisto che mi fa sentire soddisfatto è?					
L'esperienza di acquisto che mi stimola è?					

Leggere con attenzione:

Presta ben attenzione all'immagine sottostante, che riporta una pubblicità delle scarpe Tod's in cui viene enfatizzata la possibilità di personalizzare il prodotto attraverso la scelta del modello, del materiale, del gommino e del colore.

Tenendola ben in mente immagine, messaggio pubblicitario, prodotto e brand, rispondi nella maniera più spontanea alle domande che ti verranno poste nelle pagine successive, tenendo conto che non esistono risposte giuste o sbagliate, ma solo risposte che rispecchiano il tuo personale giudizio.

A. 50.0%

The shoes that define you, for both women and men.
Whatever you imagine to wear, we will help you make it yours.

B. 50.0%

The shoes that define you, for both women and men.
Whatever you imagine to wear, you can make it yours.

*4. Pensa al marchio Tod's e indica su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo) quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5. Completamente d'accordo
Tod's è un brand con una storia					
Tod's è un brand senza tempo					
Tod's è un brand che sopravvive alle mode					
Tod's è un brand che ripaga i propri clienti					
Tod's è un brand con principi morali					
Tod's è un brand che ci tiene ai propri clienti					
Tod's è un brand che aggiunge					

valore alla vita delle persone		116			
Tod's è un brand che riflette valori importanti, ai quali le persone tengono					
Tod's è un brand che connette le persone con sé stesse					
Tod's è un brand che connette le persone con ciò che è davvero importante					

*5. Continuando a pensare al marchio Tod's, indica su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5. Completamente d'accordo

Tod's soddisfa le mie aspettative		117		
Ho fiducia nel marchio Tod's				
Tod's non delude mai				
Il marchio Tod's garantisce la soddisfazione del consumatore				
Tod's è un marchio che non crea dubbi in merito ai suoi prodotti				
Tod's è un marchio su cui ci si può affidare per soddisfare un'esigenza				
Tod's fa qualsiasi sforzo per soddisfare i propri clienti				

Tod's risarcirebbe in qualche modo i propri clienti che hanno un problema con il prodotto acquistato		118			
Tod's è un marchio affidabile					
Tod's è un marchio competente					
Tod's è un marchio sincero e onesto					
Ho molta fiducia nella qualità del marchio Tod's					
Tod's è un marchio che non delude mai					
Tod's è un marchio che mantiene le proprie promesse					

*6. Considerando il marchio Tod's, indica su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo) quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5. Completamente d'accordo
Questo marchio sa ciò che voglio indossare					
Sono devoto a questo marchio					
Sostengo pienamente questo marchio					
Posso fidarmi di questo marchio					
Mi piace molto indossarlo					
Mi sento felice quando lo indosso					

Pagina 4

*7. Ora concentrati sulle scarpe Tod's e indica su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo) quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5. Completamente d'accordo
Considero le scarpe Tod's un prodotto di alta qualità					
Possedere delle scarpe Tod's è sinonimo di prestigio					
L'acquisto di scarpe Tod's aumenta la mia felicità					
Possedere scarpe Tod's ti permette di creare un'immagine personale unica					

*8. Pensando al marchio Tod's e alla pubblicità vista in precedenza, indica su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5. Completamente d'accordo
Personalizzare un prodotto migliora la mia esperienza di acquisto					
Personalizzare un prodotto aumenta la mia produttività nell'esperienza di acquisto					
Personalizzare un prodotto aumenta la mia efficacia nell'esperienza di acquisto					
Personalizzare un prodotto mi permette di comprare ciò che desidero					

*9. Concentrandoti sulla pubblicità vista in precedenza indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5. Completamente d'accordo
Poter personalizzare un prodotto mi fa sentire un consumatore attivo					
Poter personalizzare un prodotto mi fa sentire importante					
Avere a che fare con innovazioni è stimolante					
Avere a che fare con le innovazioni è divertente					
Avere a che fare con le innovazioni è eccitante					

Avere a che fare con le innovazioni è interessante		123			

*10. Rimanendo concentrato sulla pubblicità vista in precedenza, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5. Completamente d'accordo
Immagino di provare veramente la scarpa che sto comprando					
È facile per me immaginare di provare la scarpa che sto comprando					
Fantastico sul provare la scarpa che sto comprando					

*11. Infine, considerando la pubblicità vista in precedenza e sulla possibilità di personalizzare il prodotto, indica, su una scala da 1 (= per niente d'accordo) a 5 (= completamente d'accordo), quanto ti trovi d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni:

	1.Per niente d'accordo	2.	3.	4.	5. Completamente d'accordo
Se potessi, acquisterei con molta probabilità delle scarpe Tod's					
Se dovessi acquistare delle scarpe, prenderei in seria considerazione l'acquisto di un modello Tod's					
Allo stesso prezzo dei concorrenti, sceglierei di acquistare le scarpe Tod's					
Con molta probabilità					

consiglierei il marchio Tod's		125			
Con molta probabilità raccomanderei le scarpe Tod's					
Parlerei positivamente del marchio Tod's					
Parlerei positivamente delle scarpe Tod's					
Lascerei una recensione positiva sul marchio Tod's					
Lascerei una recensione positiva sulle scarpe Tod's					

Pagina 7

Dati socio-anagrafici

12. Età

13. Genere

Maschio	
Femmina	
Preferisco non specificare	

14. Reddito familiare

€ 0- € 20.000	
€ 21.000-€50.000	
€ 50.000-€ 100.000	
>€ 100.000	

15. Titolo di studio

Licenza elementare	
Licenza media	
Diploma scuola superiore	
Laurea	
Master-Dottorato	

16. Lascia un commento sulla ricerca, se lo desideri

SUMMARY

Lo scopo della ricerca è analizzare il mondo del lusso e come determinati fattori possano influenzare la percezione del marchio e dei prodotti di lusso da parte del consumatore, in particolare attraverso l'opportunità di personalizzare i propri prodotti. La presente ricerca mira, quindi, ad analizzare la percezione del lusso e l'autenticità del marchio italiano Tod's attraverso la creazione di due diversi stimoli pubblicitari, creati per il solo scopo accademico, che rappresentano due esperienze di consumo opposte nelle quali il consumatore può ritrovarsi. Entrambi raffigurano lo stesso prodotto, cioè il tipico Gommino Tod's per uomo e per donna, ma sottolineando i due modi (e quindi due ambienti) in cui il cliente può customizzare il prodotto: fisicamente in un negozio o online attraverso il sito web. Il questionario è stato somministrato a un pubblico di parlanti italiani per testare diverse variabili, tra cui percezione del lusso, autenticità del marchio e del prodotto, intenzioni d'acquisto e passaparola. Il suddetto questionario è stato sottoposto al pubblico in maniera casuale, proponendo talora una versione della pubblicità, talora l'altra. La prima versione mira a dare l'idea dell'esperienza di shopping in negozio e ritrae l'immagine di un negozio Tod's insieme alle mani di artigiani che modellano e assemblano le iconiche scarpe, presentandone diverse versioni per suggerire la personalizzazione che i clienti possono sperimentare. La seconda versione, che rappresenta l'esperienza di shopping online, raffigura la piattaforma di personalizzazione dal sito web di Tod's con tre diverse combinazioni di colori, modelli e tessuti per modelli sia da donna che da uomo. In questo modo i rispondenti hanno subito un'idea di cosa signifchi personalizzazione: la possibilità di scegliere tra diverse combinazioni fino a

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trovare quella che desiderano. Entrambe le pubblicità sono accompagnate dallo stesso slogan "Le scarpe che ti rappresentano, sia per donna che per uomo. Qualsiasi cosa immaginiate di indossare, noi vi aiuteremo a farla vostra", ma con una differenza nell'ultima parte poiché nella versione online è "...potete farla vostra" invece di "...vi aiuteremo a farla vostra".

La ricerca vuole indagare come questi contesti possano influenzare l'immagine del marchio e il comportamento del consumatore, in termini di passaparola e di intenzione di acquisto, nonché il coinvolgimento del consumatore nell'esperienza di acquisto. L'obiettivo generale di questa ricerca è quello di valutare se il negozio svolge ancora un ruolo importante per i marchi di lusso o se l'utilizzo di nuove tecnologie digitali online possa migliorare l'esperienza del consumatore e, di conseguenza, influenzare la percezione del lusso sia del marchio che dei prodotti, nonché l'autenticità del marchio stesso. L'obiettivo finale è comprendere il comportamento dei consumatori e studiare se le imprese debbano incrementare l'uso delle tecnologie digitali per sviluppare nuove strategie di marketing in grado di soddisfare le esigenze dei consumatori.

La ricerca si articola in cinque capitoli: il primo capitolo introduce il mercato del lusso facendo riferimento al diffondersi del fenomeno della customizzazione e all'importanza che l'esperienza di acquisto rappresenta per il cliente nel mondo del lusso. Il secondo capitolo illustra la rassegna letteraria dell'oggetto della ricerca attraverso i diversi costrutti teorici utilizzati per raggiungere gli obiettivi e le finalità della ricerca. Il terzo capitolo presenta l'obiettivo della ricerca, concentrandosi principalmente sulla metodologia di ricerca utilizzata per il suo sviluppo. Inoltre, vengono analizzate e spiegate dettagliatamente ciascuna variabile e le relative dimensioni e voci incluse nel questionario. La sezione finale presenta i dati sociodemografici raccolti dai rispondenti al

questionario. Il quarto capitolo presenta e analizza i risultati della ricerca da un punto di vista statistico, evidenziando le differenze emerse tra i due gruppi di intervistati. Infine, il quinto capitolo discute i risultati del questionario e presenta le conclusioni della ricerca. Vengono inoltre descritte le implicazioni teoriche e di marketing e, nell'ultima sezione, presentate le limitazioni della ricerca e gli studi futuri. L'allegato A contiene il questionario somministrato al campione della ricerca quantitativa.

Il primo capitolo della tesi comincia con la prefazione, il cui obiettivo è descrivere il lusso e il suo cambiamento nel corso degli anni. In particolare, si fa riferimento al cambiamento nel comportamento dei consumatori che, in passato, ha segnato l'inizio di una nuova era per i beni di lusso in cui i prodotti un tempo inaccessibili sono ora accessibili a quasi tutti. Di conseguenza, si passa al concetto moderno di lusso in cui ogni consumatore può acquistare quel prodotto per realizzare il proprio sogno. Il lusso, infatti, si definisce come un concetto secolare che si è evoluto nel senso e nella percezione: mentre nel Seicento il lusso veniva usato per indicare solo beni straordinari e rari, nell'Ottocento e Novecento ha sviluppato una profonda conoscenza dell'artigianalità e della personalizzazione per comunicare i valori dell'unicità e dell'esclusività. Negli ultimi due decenni, i marchi di lusso hanno iniziato a implementare tecnologie digitali per migliorare il coinvolgimento e le relazioni con i clienti. Il mercato globale del lusso sta crescendo rapidamente e globalmente, sia i canali di distribuzione fisici che digitali hanno visto una forte crescita negli ultimi anni. Questo fenomeno consente un rapporto diretto tra consumatori e marchio con un maggiore controllo su tutti i punti di contatto, rafforzando la strategia omnicanale che i marchi hanno iniziato a adottare. Le aziende, infatti, sono passate da un'esperienza multicanale a un'esperienza omnicanale, che combina diversi canali di comunicazione e punti di contatto per consentire ai consumatori

di sperimentare lo shopping e di entrare in contatto con il marchio attraverso il canale scelto e vivere un'esperienza di shopping omogenea. Il capitolo si focalizza poi sull'esperienza di consumo tra online e negozio sottolineando i pro e i contro di ciascuna dal punto di vista del consumatore. Di seguito, viene descritto lo scopo della ricerca che consiste nell'analizzare in che modo i marchi di lusso possono influenzare il comportamento dei consumatori attraverso la personalizzazione e in che modo ciò influisce sulla percezione del marchio e dei prodotti. Infine, l'intera struttura della ricerca viene sintetizzata capitolo per capitolo.

Il secondo capitolo si articola in sette sezioni e presenta la rassegna letteraria relativa ai diversi studi e costrutti utilizzati nello sviluppo della ricerca. La prima sezione introduce il tema della tesi, al fine di fornire al lettore le informazioni necessarie per la comprensione del mondo del lusso, così come i costrutti teorici affrontati e applicati poi alla ricerca sperimentale: percezione del lusso, autenticità del marchio e del prodotto, rilevanza del marchio, esperienza di acquisto, customizzazione, immagini mentali, passaparola e intenzione d'acquisto. La prima parte di questo capitolo, infatti, introduce il concetto di lusso, analizzandolo soprattutto dal punto di vista del cliente. Lo scopo è quello di far emergere le caratteristiche che distinguono un marchio di lusso che sono, di conseguenza, anche quelle che i consumatori si aspettano di trovare quando comprano un prodotto di lusso. Viene infatti introdotta una piramide che visivamente fa comprendere al lettore come si compone un marchio di lusso, comprendendo non solo qualità cognitive, tra cui l'alta qualità, l'estetica e il prezzo, ma anche qualità estrinseche e intrinseche ai prodotti che poi si rispecchiano nei comportamenti e nelle volontà del consumatore. A tal proposito, per introdurre e spiegare il concetto di percezione del lusso, vengono presentati due modelli per individuare le caratteristiche del lusso che influenzano la

visione e il processo decisionale dei consumatori, così come le quattro dimensioni che influenzano il consumo dei beni di lusso, coinvolgendo la loro dimensione finanziaria, funzionale, individuale e sociale. In seguito, viene presentato il concetto di autenticità del marchio facendo riferimento al fatto che i consumatori sono influenzati non solo dalle qualità tecniche del prodotto, ma soprattutto dall'eredità e dalla tradizione che accompagnano il marchio nel corso del tempo, così come la trasparenza e l'onestà nei confronti del consumatore e dei propri ideali, con la conseguente capacità di mantenere fede alle promesse fatte e valori in cui credono. Infine, l'abilità di offrire ai consumatori l'opportunità di riconoscersi nel marchio per quello che sono realmente. A riguardo, per riuscire trasmettere tutto ciò, il marchio di lusso deve prima essere capace di costruire una forte e positiva immagine di sé. Il marchio, infatti, costituisce un fattore importante soprattutto per il mondo del lusso e costruire un'idea di marchio forte richiede una gerarchia di fasi che portano il marchio sempre più in prossimità al consumatore. Partendo dalla iniziale scoperta del marchio, passando per la sua conoscenza, proseguendo con la costruzione dell'immagine e dell'esperienza per i consumatori, arrivando infine alla fidelizzazione dei clienti e al successivo sentimento di essere parte di quel marchio. Il capitolo prosegue poi collegandosi alla rilevanza della customizzazione di un prodotto di lusso, diventato un fattore chiave per le compagnie che intendono espandersi globalmente. L'opportunità offerta ai consumatori di customizzare i propri prodotti, infatti, è divenuta cruciale perché capace di mantenere il senso di privilegio e esclusività che i marchi di lusso vogliono comunicare e, allo stesso tempo, personalizzare il prodotto secondo i gusti e le preferenze del singolo cliente. Questo fenomeno della customizzazione si accompagna allo sviluppo delle nuove tecnologie digitali utilizzate principalmente nel mondo del lusso per aumentare il coinvolgimento del consumatore.

L'introduzione di queste nuove tecnologie è frutto dell'evoluzione che il marketing sta vivendo nel corso degli anni, cercando di rispondere sempre di più alle esigenze e richieste dei consumatori. In particolare, il passaggio dal marketing tradizionale a digitale ha completamente cambiato l'approccio sia di consumatori che di aziende. Mentre il marketing tradizionale, infatti, utilizza i mezzi di comunicazione tradizionali, il marketing digitale promuove prodotti e servizi attraverso internet, offrendo quindi una maggiore interattività e disponibilità di informazioni in tempo reale e in qualsiasi momento. Le aziende, di conseguenza, si spostano da una strategia definita multicanale a una omnicanale, che offre esperienze più ricche attraverso la combinazione di diversi canali di comunicazione così da offrire un'esperienza olistica al consumatore. A questo proposito si collega l'introduzione dell'esperienza di acquisto del consumatore che viene offerta, ad oggi, sia in negozio che online. Mentre la prima rispecchia la tradizionale esperienza in cui il cliente visita il negozio sottoponendosi quindi non a una sola fornitura di informazioni, ma soprattutto a vivere un'esperienza olistica ed emotiva sotto tutti i punti di vista, la seconda consiste nel fare shopping online attraverso i siti web delle compagnie, privandosi quindi l'aver vissuto le sensazioni nella visita del negozio. Allo stesso tempo però offre vantaggi che nel mondo moderno sono apprezzati da gran parte dei consumatori, come la possibilità di comprare ovunque e in qualsiasi momento. Cruciale nella scelta di quale esperienza vivere è il coinvolgimento del consumatore: fare shopping, infatti, include non il solo atto di comprare, ma soprattutto l'esperienza che il marchio di lusso offre. Più il consumatore è coinvolto, più sarà portato a comprare per lunghi periodi, soprattutto nel settore della moda in cui il vestito rappresenta un modo per esprimere sé stessi e la propria identità. Nel processo di decisione nell'acquisto, il consumatore è influenzato anche dalle immagini mentali e percezioni sensoriali vissute

durante l'esperienza di shopping. L'utilizzo di immagini mentali nella pubblicità è spesso utilizzato per influenzare le scelte dei consumatori, e allo stesso tempo, è utile nelle esperienze online perché l'interattività di quest'ultime è capace di attivare immagini mentali nel consumatore. Infine, l'ultima sezione introduce due importanti comportamenti tenuti dal consumatore: intenzioni d'acquisto e passaparola. Il primo è utile nell'individuare e selezionare i segmenti di consumatori che sono più invogliati a comprare, mentre il passaparola è il mezzo più influente ed efficace per scambiare opinioni su beni e servizi. I consumatori, infatti, sono spesso più inclini ad ascoltare i consigli di altri consumatori o di persone che hanno già provato il prodotto o servizio.

Il terzo capitolo ha lo scopo di presentare la metodologia utilizzata per lo svolgimento della ricerca, di definire le domande alle quali lo studio intende rispondere e di presentare la società scelta come oggetto di studio della ricerca. La prima sezione è dedicata alla spiegazione dello scopo della ricerca, nello specifico il comportamento dei consumatori quando acquistano prodotti di lusso in due diverse situazioni, online o in negozio. In questo punto vengono delineati i due quesiti di ricerca: Il comportamento del consumatore può essere influenzato dalla personalizzazione del prodotto in negozio o online? In che modo le diverse esperienze di shopping tradizionale e digitale influenzano la percezione del lusso e l'autenticità del marchio attraverso la personalizzazione del prodotto?

La seconda parte si concentra sulla metodologia di ricerca dell'esperimento, con una prima sezione in cui viene descritto il modo in cui è stata condotta la ricerca. Il questionario è stato somministrato tramite Google Form e diffuso tramite un link al quale i rispondenti accedevano attraverso i principali canali di comunicazione. In seguito, viene spiegata la scelta del marchio Tod's per la ricerca, viene presentata la storia del marchio e della sua internazionalizzazione, introducendo i canali attraverso i quali comunica con

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i clienti. Inoltre, vengono presentati i valori fondamentali del marchio, evidenziando il connubio tra tradizione e innovazione, la mission e la centralità del consumatore per il marchio che hanno portato allo sviluppo del servizio di personalizzazione offerto attraverso la loro piattaforma. In particolare, questo servizio consente ai consumatori di creare le proprie versioni delle scarpe combinando diversi modelli, colori e tessuti. La sezione seguente introduce la struttura dell'esperimento, descrivendo in primo luogo le due versioni della pubblicità e la creazione dello slogan in inglese, che mira a sottolineare la possibilità per i clienti di creare la propria scarpa personalizzata. Le due pubblicità suggerivano i due differenti contesti in cui il consumatore può vivere l'esperienza di customizzazione dei prodotti, il primo suggeriva l'idea del negozio e dell'assistenza di artigiani ed esperti del settore, mentre il secondo raffigurava il sito web dell'azienda utilizzando diverse combinazioni di colori e modelli a suggerire la personalizzazione online delle scarpe. Lo slogan in inglese mira a trasmettere un messaggio generico ma mirato ad enfatizzare l'opportunità di creare ciò che più si addice al consumatore, esaudendo i loro desideri, che è quello che i marchi di lusso vogliono generalmente trasmettere. Di seguito, vengono definite le scale di misura e le variabili prese in considerazione per la creazione del questionario. Quest'ultimo si divide in sei sezioni che si occupano rispettivamente di percezione del lusso e coinvolgimento del consumatore nell'esperienza di acquisto, autenticità del marchio e immagine del marchio, percezione del lusso del prodotto e personalizzazione del prodotto, responsabilizzazione del consumatore e immagini mentali, comportamento del consumatore. All'inizio del questionario veniva chiesto ai rispondenti di scegliere tra tre diverse opzioni su come avrebbero tradotto lo slogan presente sullo stimolo pubblicitario. Infine, l'ultima sezione

presenta i campioni relativi all'età, al sesso, al reddito annuo e all'istruzione dei 238 rispondenti totali al questionario.

Il quarto capitolo presenta i risultati della ricerca e li analizza tenendo conto di ciascun costrutto e delle rispettive dimensioni utilizzate per creare le due versioni del questionario. Entrambe le versioni contengono le stesse domande e differiscono solo per gli stimoli pubblicitari: una versione ha la pubblicità che suggerisce l'esperienza di personalizzazione in negozio, l'altra che suggerisce la personalizzazione online. Il capitolo è costituito da una serie di grafici che mirano a evidenziare visivamente le differenze tra la media dei due gruppi di intervistati, rispettivamente coloro che hanno risposto al questionario con lo stimolo del negozio o con lo stimolo della piattaforma online. È da sottolineare che è stato chiesto ai rispondenti di rispondere nella maniera per loro più corretta, essi non erano a conoscenza dell'esistenza dell'altra versione del questionario così da non influenzare le loro risposte. I risultati più rilevanti sono stati ottenuti nelle variabili di coinvolgimento del consumatore nell'esperienza di shopping, continuità e integrità del marchio, immagine del marchio, percezione del lusso del prodotto, passaparola e intenzioni d'acquisto. In tutte queste variabili, la percezione da parte dei potenziali clienti è maggiore per l'esperienza vissuta in negozio piuttosto che online, sottolineando come il negozio rappresenti ancora un fattore importante per i marchi di lusso nonostante l'avvento delle tecnologie digitali.

L'ultimo capitolo fornisce una discussione generale sui risultati precedentemente presentati nel capitolo quattro. La prima sezione fornisce una breve descrizione dei principali risultati, esaminando ciascuna variabile ma concentrandosi in particolare su quelle che hanno registrato differenze sostanziali tra i due gruppi. I risultati evidenziano la percezione analoga che il pubblico ha della qualità percepita, del valore sociale, del

valore personale e del valore funzionale del lusso. Si tratta di un risultato importante perché implica che entrambi i gruppi condividono la stessa idea del mondo del lusso. Di conseguenza, i risultati saranno influenzati esclusivamente dagli stimoli pubblicitari che rappresentano le esperienze online e in-store. I risultati riguardanti l'autenticità del marchio evidenziano una differenza sostanziale tra le due esperienze di shopping. In particolare, per quanto riguarda la dimensione della continuità, il gruppo in negozio ha dimostrato di essere influenzato positivamente dalla pubblicità, dimostrando che la storia e il patrimonio di Tod's vengono trasmessi e recepiti maggiormente attraverso l'esperienza in negozio. Dall'altro lato, i risultati della dimensione dell'integrità suggeriscono che il marchio viene percepito come più responsabile e moralmente puro quando il consumatore visita il negozio, così come le intenzioni e i valori che vuole comunicare sono fortemente percepiti nell'esperienza del negozio piuttosto che online. Le altre dimensioni legate all'autenticità del marchio risultano essere meno influenzate dal cambiamento di contesto, implicando che la percezione della credibilità, dell'affidabilità e del simbolismo del marchio non può cambiare facilmente con una sola pubblicità, cosicché il marchio viene percepito come autentico, trasparente e onesto sia online che in negozio. La sezione che segue si concentra e discute le conclusioni emerse dall'analisi dei risultati. Differenze significative sono state registrate nella variabile di percezione del lusso di un prodotto e nella variabile dedicata alla misurazione del coinvolgimento dei consumatori nell'esperienza di acquisto. Le persone hanno sorprendentemente preferito l'esperienza in negozio e, pertanto, i potenziali consumatori delle scarpe Tod's si sono rivelati più influenzati nella percezione del prodotto in negozio che online. Pertanto, per quanto riguarda la responsabilizzazione dei consumatori, i risultati della ricerca confermano che maggiore è la partecipazione percepita nel compito, maggiore

l'apprezzamento dell'esperienza e il prodotto stesso per il consumatore. Inoltre, i risultati hanno mostrato come le persone che vedono la pubblicità del negozio risultino maggiormente influenzate nella percezione dell'immagine del marchio. I risultati confermano che la creazione di un'immagine di marca forte e positiva ha portato, di conseguenza, ad un passaparola e ad un aumento dell'intenzione d'acquisto. Le persone che hanno visto lo stimolo del negozio, infatti, sono state influenzate positivamente nelle potenziali intenzioni di acquistare le scarpe Tod's, rispetto a coloro che hanno visto la pubblicità online.

Nelle conclusioni, si descrive come nonostante il numero crescente di opportunità che le piattaforme online offrono ai consumatori, in termini di personalizzazione del prodotto dei marchi di lusso, essi preferiscono un'esperienza offline (in negozio), confermando come esso svolge ancora un ruolo significativo nel settore del lusso. Visitare un negozio può ancora contribuire a vivere un'esperienza unica, ma anche costruire e migliorare le relazioni con il marchio. Anche se solo alcune delle variabili testate hanno registrato una differenza sostanziale tra i due gruppi di rispondenti, la media degli intervistati in negozio è sempre stata superiore a quella online. Ciò significa che, dati i diversi stimoli pubblicitari, le persone che hanno immaginato l'esperienza di personalizzazione online hanno una minore percezione del lusso del prodotto e dell'autenticità del marchio, ma sono anche meno inclini ad acquistare o raccomandare il marchio. Quando si chiede ai potenziali consumatori dove si sentono più felici, rilassati o stimolati nello shopping, scelgono in modo significativo il negozio. Pertanto, questo risultato conferma l'idea espressa da Schmitt (1999) secondo cui lo shopping non è solo una semplice fornitura di informazioni, ma anche un'esperienza olistica ed emotiva che i consumatori vogliono vivere. Le persone si sentono più coinvolte nell'esperienza del negozio perché il negozio

tradizionale può offrire una migliore atmosfera di esclusività e unicità, che è ciò che i consumatori cercano quando acquistano un prodotto di lusso. Le implicazioni teoriche riguardano percezione del lusso e autenticità: entrambi i costrutti sono legati ad attributi intrinseci ed estrinseci. Infatti, il consumatore che acquista un prodotto di lusso presta attenzione non solo alle caratteristiche fisiche dell'oggetto, ma anche a ciò che il marchio è in grado di offrirgli, tra cui il suo patrimonio, la sua trasparenza, i suoi valori e la sua identità. Inoltre, i consumatori hanno dimostrato di essere maggiormente coinvolti sia nell'esperienza che nel prodotto nel contesto del negozio, confermando come la variabile del coinvolgimento del prodotto è importante perché maggiore è l'interesse dei consumatori per il prodotto, maggiore è l'intenzione di personalizzarlo. Le implicazioni di marketing riguardano come un cambiamento di impostazione nella pubblicità può influenzare il comportamento dei consumatori. Le aziende non devono comunicare e concentrarsi solo sul prodotto che vogliono vendere, ma devono essere in grado di esprimere sentimenti, essenza e valori in cui credono. Inoltre, i risultati di questo studio confermano sorprendentemente che, anche se il marketing si sta evolvendo verso un'esperienza completamente digitale, il negozio rimane un fattore importante nel processo decisionale dei consumatori. Pertanto, le imprese dovrebbero offrire ai consumatori un'esperienza omnicanale che integri il tradizionale con il digitale, l'innovazione tecnologica non deve essere utilizzata solo per migliorare l'esperienza del cliente, ma le aziende devono saperla utilizzare in modo maturo e strategico.

Infine, l'ultima sezione è dedicata a spiegare i limiti della ricerca attuale, ma anche ad individuare i miglioramenti che si possono apportare in futuro. Il primo aspetto riguarda l'accessibilità dell'oggetto dello studio, nello specifico le scarpe. Questo prodotto fa parte di prodotti di lusso accessibili, sarebbe, quindi, interessante esaminare se, anche per i

prodotti meno accessibili, come i prodotti di lusso intermedi e inaccessibili, le persone avrebbero avuto la stessa percezione e quindi confrontare le differenze tra i tre livelli. Inoltre, la ricerca si concentra su un solo settore dei beni di lusso, sarebbe interessante studiare anche altre categorie e capire come il singolo settore del lusso può influenzare e cambiare la sua percezione. Un altro aspetto è il campione di riferimento, sia per le dimensioni che per l'età media. La ricerca si limita al numero di rispondenti al questionario, 238 con un'età media di 31,30 per il negozio e 33,83 per l'online. Sarebbe preferibile avere un pubblico più ampio in termini di numero ma anche di età, dato che il campione medio è moderatamente giovane. Inoltre, l'ultimo limite significativo è rappresentato dal paese in cui è stato somministrato il questionario. Anche se l'azienda è conosciuta a livello mondiale e dispone di numerosi negozi e boutique in tutto il mondo, i partecipanti al questionario erano solo italiani. Sarebbe quindi interessante studiare la reazione all'estero per avere un punto di vista più ampio e internazionale, nonché studiare l'influenza che il paese d'origine può esercitare.