

# The Relationship Between Retailing Channels and Brand Identity in Luxury Fashion

By

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## ABSTRACT

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, fashion brands had to get creative with the ways they reached consumers to provide them with a unique combination of experience and convenience. This led to an increase in usage of omnichannel retailing methods, which combines experience and convenience through a seamless integration of multiple selling channels to reach consumers. Luxury fashion brands were late to the game in joining brands on a digital space, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they had to reach consumers in new and unique ways, besides just an in store experience. This study explores how multiple retailing channels are affecting the consumer shopping experience for luxury fashion brands. It also explores the usage of branding elements in luxury fashion brands and how that may contribute to the consumer shopping experience for luxury fashion brands. This study explores whether or not omnichannel retailing is present in luxury fashion brands.

INDEX WORDS: Omnichannel, luxury fashion, brand identity, qualitative, semi-structured interviews, Customer Value Proposition, retailing channels

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## **DEDICATION**

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## **Chapter 1:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Overview**

This chapter aims to provide a background of retailing channels in luxury fashion and introduce the relationship between the two while introducing the gap in research in this field. This section justifies why this research is necessary to the current climate of the fashion industry, states the research objectives, and supplies the reader with conceptual definitions of terms that will be stated throughout the paper.

#### **Background of Study**

Omnichannel retailing is becoming the most important player in retailing methods, following the COVID-19 pandemic. As consumers were unable to shop in store and gain the same experiences one gets from in store shopping, retailers had to get creative with their retailing methods. Omnichannel retailing seamlessly integrates multiple selling channels to combine convenience and experience for consumers. Omnichannel retailing methods that are effectively seamlessly integrating their selling channels are able to maintain a cohesive brand experience across platforms. Luxury fashion brands have had to come up with creative ways to increase their sales following the pandemic and had to expand the usage of multiple retailing channels. Now, you can create an appointment online when purchasing from most luxury brands and meet with stylists in stores to have an improved in person experience, combined with the convenience of shopping online. Luxury fashion brand purchases involve a deeper customer decision making

journey that leads them to their brand preference and purchase intention. With multiple retailing channels, luxury fashion brands create a journey that begins in a digital space, via their website or social media, and continues into their physical space, like a pop-up shop, luxury brand retailer, or the brand's brick-and-mortar store. Ebrahim et al. (2016) suggest that consumer brand preferences are primarily to do with marketing experiences. Retailing channels in luxury fashion brands seek to combine those marketing experiences with shopping experiences to provide a unique opportunity for consumers to shop luxury fashion goods in both a convenient and experiential way. Brand identity creates the brand's personality and how the brand will be portrayed to consumers. These are the external features of the brand that the consumer is able to perceive, including the visual and aesthetic elements of a brand, such as color, design, font, and logo. The brand identity is used to distinguish the brand to consumers (Chernatony 1999). This research will explore how brand identity is incorporated in retailing channels in luxury fashion brands to add to the consumers' experience. This study will research the effect of these retailing channels on brand preference, consumer purchase intention, and customer perception, leading to the consumer purchasing process and consumer shopping experience.

### **Justification**

Luxury fashion brands have an effect on styles and trends in the fashion industry, but recently, the lower class retailers have had an impact on the retailing industry with their ability to offer multiple selling channels that are seamlessly integrated to their consumers. As brands are adding social media into their branding strategy by utilizing it as a selling channel that seamlessly integrates with their other channels, they are able to create an experience for consumers that rivals that of luxury fashion brands. Luxury brands have only recently begun to

incorporate multiple retailing channels into their branding strategy, so this study will explore what luxury fashion brands are doing to incorporate multiple selling channels into their branding strategy, how they are incorporating these methods, and whether or not seamless integration is present. Luxury fashion brands have always created an exceptional customer experience within the brick-and-mortar store, but have now begun to improve the experience for customers by expanding their selling channels to cover multiple platforms in order to increase accessibility for consumers. Because multiple retailing channels are so new to luxury fashion brands, there is a gap in academic research on how these methods are incorporating brand identity into their methods, how they are enhancing the consumer perception, and how it is influencing consumers' brand preference and purchase intention to add to the consumer shopping experience. This research and study will help luxury fashion brands understand the importance of multiple selling channels from the perspective of the consumer and what they are doing right and what needs to be improved in their retailing channels.

There is a gap in this research because there is little research on retailing channels in luxury fashion brands through the lens of the consumer experience, which this study focuses on through the framework of the transitional Customer Value Proposition perspective. This research is necessary because it will provide information about whether or not it is important for luxury fashion brands to invest resources in integrating retailing channels to create an omnichannel experience through the lens of the customer experience during the purchasing process of luxury goods.

## **Purpose of Study**

Luxury brands have pristine quality matched with high prices that consumers appreciate because of their timelessness. With luxury products, consumers are spending more time researching what goods they want to purchase, rather than making impulse purchases, thus creating a more extensive customer journey through multiple selling channels in luxury fashion brands. The purpose of this study is to explore the customer relationship with retailing channels in luxury fashion brands by examining the luxury brands' selling channels and consumers' perceptions, brand preference, and purchase intention in response to the retailing channels. In addition, this study will explore how a luxury brand's brand identity is incorporated into retailing channels and consumers' perceptions of the brand identity.

## **Research Objectives**

- To explore the relationship between retailing channels in luxury fashion brands and consumer shopping experience
- To determine if branding elements in retailing channels in luxury fashion brands impacts consumer shopping experience

## **Conceptual Definitions**

1. **Luxury fashion brands** - brands that sell luxury goods that have a high rating of these characteristics: price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, speciality, and symbolism (Heine, 2010)
2. **Retailing Channels** - the ways brands reach consumers through various selling platforms (van Baal, 2014)

3. **Omnichannel retailing methods** - seamlessly integrating multiple selling channels to serve customers when and how they want, combining convenience and experience (Lynch & Barnes, 2020)
4. **Branding strategy** - a long term plan to create identity and branding within a brand to create identification and perception by consumers (Douglas et al., 2001)
5. **Consumer perception** - how the customer views and perceives a brand based on the customer's personal desires and needs (Sreejesh et al., 2018)
6. **Consumer shopping experience** - encompassing every aspect of a company from customer care, advertising, branding, product, packaging, ease of use, and reliability (Meyer & Schwager, 2007)
7. **Purchase intention** - the consumers' likelihood of completing a purchase from a luxury brand; the intention of consumers to purchase products (Arnett et al., 2003)
8. **Brand identity** - a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these factors that identifies a brand and differentiates it from its competitors (Okonkwo, 2007)
9. **Brand preference** - consumers rely on their experiences to judge alternative brands and make choices about their preferred brands (Ebrahim et al., 2016)
10. **Purchasing process** - the steps taken to complete a purchase, beginning with initial idea and ending with completing the transaction, specifically in regards to the consumer purchasing process (Yilmaz, 2017).

**Chapter 2:**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**  
**Overview**

This section reviews relevant literature to provide information about the topics discussed in the paper and concepts relevant to the study.

**Theoretical Framework**

*Customer Value Proposition*

The Customer Value Proposition (CVP) is a strategic tool that is utilized by a brand to communicate how it aims to provide value to consumers. Payne et al. define cvp as follows: “a customer value proposition (CVP) is a strategic tool facilitating communication of an organization’s ability to share resources and offer a superior value package to targeted customers. A CVP is considered a brand’s most important organization principle” (2017). The CVP aimed to explain why consumers should purchase the brand’s goods or services. The Customer Value Proposition identifies four elements: economic, functional, emotional, and symbolic. In the context of this study, the emotional CVP and symbolic CVP will be most beneficial in the understanding of consumer perception in omnichannel retailing methods in luxury fashion brands. A CVP is a strategic tool that facilitates communication of an organization’s ability to share resources and offer a superior value package to targeted customers (Payne et al. 2017). The CVP explores how omnichannel retailing offers a different type of value to products and how that can be created for consumers through omnichannel retailing (Yrjola et al. 2017). The CVP

also explores how multi-channel retailing can focus on the shopping process-related aspects, including whether the shopping experience is utilitarian (convenience based) or hedonic (experience based). CVP that targets hedonic shopping can involve the retailer in supporting the customer's lifestyle (Yrjola et al. 2017). In this research pertaining to luxury fashion brands, it is important to recognize the customer value proposition as well as the targeted customers from a luxury fashion brand.

Payne et al. describes three perspectives of Customer Value Proposition that allow for further investigation into the importance of CVP. The perspectives are supplier-determined perspective with a value in exchange factor, transitional perspective that values customer experience, and mutually determined perspective with a value in use emphasis (Payne et al., 2017). This perspective emphasizes the understanding of the customer experience during usage. For the context of this study, it is necessary to view the CVP in a transitional perspective to determine the customer value experience in omnichannel retailing in luxury fashion brands.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: How do retailing channels utilized by luxury brands affect consumers' shopping experience?

Research Question 2: Does the brand identity in luxury brands' retailing channels enhance consumer shopping experience?

### **Omnichannel Retailing Methods**

Omnichannel retailing methods seamlessly integrate multiple selling channels to create a unique and personal experience for consumers that combine convenience and experience.

Omnichannel retailing contains several key trends that are important to consider when implementing these retailing methods into a branding strategy. These include channel integration, mobile technologies, social media and the digital space, and the changing role of the brick-and-mortar stores (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014). Customers require new shopping experiences that integrate multiple channels for them to interact with as they make purchase decisions (Cabigiosu 2020). Omnichannel retailing is the synergetic management of multiple selling channels so that the barriers between selling channels no longer affect the customer purchasing process.

### *Channel Integration*

A channel in retailing is a contact point or medium through which the company and the customer interact (Mirsch et al. 2016). Customers are expecting consistency in their shopping experience, whether that be constant access to selling channels or the quality of the channels they are using. By offering omnichannel retailing methods, brands are able to seamlessly integrate multiple selling channels to allow for a seamless shopping experience. Channel integration is combining experiences for the ease of use for consumers. It is allowing one channel to be simultaneously used with another channel and allows for consumers to switch between channels easily. Brands are utilizing channel integration by combining social media sites. with digital spaces such as an e-commerce selling platform or a mobile application. These digital channels can then seamlessly integrate with physical or offline spaces, such as a pop-up store or a brick-and-mortar store. Brands cannot just add new distribution channels for their products, but rather have to ensure that their strategy is coherent and seamlessly integrated with other selling channels. Channel integration can also be looked at as channel synergies, where they work together and support each other and are designed as an integrated structure (Cabigiosu 2020).

The seamless integration of multiple channels requires perfect synchrony of online and offline channels to create the optimization of the customer purchasing process.

### *Mobile Technologies*

Mobile technologies in omnichannel retailing are revolutionizing the way retailers are able to sell and market to their consumers. Mobile solutions are creating an easier way for consumers to research, make decisions, and ultimately purchase products. Retailers are combining e-commerce sites and channels with social media, and artificial intelligence to allow consumers to transform their shopping experience. Mobile technologies in omnichannel retailing stores allow for consumers to research, compare prices, look up how to use/style the product, see fit details, and product reviews all in one place. A common phenomena in mobile technologies in omnichannel retailing is webrooming, where customers search online, complete product and price comparison, read customer reviews, and conduct research on a product before ultimately making a decision about a product. Webrooming results in customers completing the purchase at a physical space, like a brick-and-mortar store, where they can complete a final evaluation and then finalize their decision making journey (Cabigiosu 2020).

### *Social Media and the Digital Space*

Social media and the digital space have become a large selling channel for many retailers as social media sites like Instagram and Facebook have made it possible for retailers to sell right through their social media platforms (social commerce). Social media also allows for influencers to promote and advertise products and brands. Social media influencers have become a powerful tool for brands in recent years and it is increasingly apparent that social media influencers can be integral for promoting brands and products as they can easily reach up to millions of consumers, at seemingly little cost to the brands. Social media also allows for brands to access their

consumers right away by responding to comments and direct messages with questions about fit, styling, product quality, and orders. Social media allows brands to interact with consumers like never before, making it an important selling channel that brands can utilize to create a relationship with consumers, and consumers can use as a part of their omnichannel decision making journey.

### *The Role of Brick-and-Mortar Stores*

The role of brick-and-mortar stores is changing throughout the retailing industry due to omnichannel retailing methods. Brick-and-mortar stores are increasingly needing to improve their in store experiences to not just become an obsolete part of the customer purchase journey. Brick-and-mortar stores offer incentives to consumers to use Buy Online, Pick Up In Store, versus having a purchase shipped from a warehouse, which allows for consumers to see more products as they come in store to pick up their purchase. With the right visual merchandising, this can lead to impulse purchases, which increases a brand's sales. Customers still want the ability to see, touch, and try on products, a feature that technology can't offer, so brick-and-mortar stores still hold an important role in omnichannel retailing. Retailers are using in-store technologies that include augmented reality, and "magic mirrors" (Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson 2014). There is also an increasing use of technology for the employee inside the brick-and-mortar stores that allows them to better serve customers to combine experience and convenience for the consumer shopping experience. Retailers are creating apps for their employees to use on smartphones or tablets that allows employees to check inventory, prices, and even size and fit recommendations. Nordstrom has created an application for sales associates to use on their smartphones that allows them to offer fit recommendations and also demonstrates different ways to style the apparel/accessory. This feature adds to the consumer shopping

experience by making it better for the consumer, and also makes styling more convenient for the employee. By combining technology with the physical space of retail, brick-and-mortar stores are able to offer a better experience for consumers than ever before.

### **Luxury Fashion Brands**

Luxury fashion brands combine prestige and quality to provide consumers with an exceptional luxury product. Luxury fashion brands provide consumers with a complete package of design, quality, and prestige that makes luxury fashion goods luxury. Luxury fashion brands also provide an emotional connection that makes them more timeless and, to most consumers, an irreplaceable part of their closet. Luxury fashion brands are undergoing an evolution as they compete with mass market fashion brands to be accessible to consumers, while also maintaining the exclusivity that luxury fashion is known for. Luxury consumers typically have a luxurious lifestyle that competes for their time, so the shopping experience for luxury fashion consumers is increasingly important (Okonkwo 2007). Luxury fashion brands include rarity as a trait, which adds to the exclusivity of luxury. Luxury fashion goods are oftentimes not mass produced, which creates an element of rarity. This is how luxury fashion consumers begin collecting luxury goods, because the item they purchased will eventually be a rarity and a special piece of a wardrobe. Luxury fashion brands also differentiate from each other through their brand identity and particular symbolic characteristics (Heine 2010). Luxury fashion brands are defined by core characteristics that include brand strength, differentiation, exclusivity, innovation, product craftsmanship, premium pricing, precision, and high quality (Okonkwo 2007). During the twentieth century, luxury became a term for describing a high quality or expensive product

(Cabigiosu 2020). Luxury fashion brands can be broken down into two categories that seek to define the meaning of luxury fashion: psychological values and physical product perspective. At the psychological value level, luxury brands are explained as the emotional feeling consumer's relate to them, the function of luxury brands as a status symbol, and a highly involved consumption experience that is correlated to a person's self-concept. For the physical product perspective, luxury is defined by excellent quality, high transaction value, distinctiveness, exclusivity, and craftsmanship (Fionda & Moore 2008). Rarity and exclusivity are important characteristics of luxury fashion brands, combined with the notable environment and service luxury brands provide to their consumers.

### **Retailing Channels in Luxury Fashion**

Multiple retailing channels in luxury fashion brands are becoming more and more important to the success of luxury fashion brands. Certain luxury fashion brands have been faster at adopting multiple retailing channels and reaching their consumers through expanding selling platforms. Louis Vuitton was named No. 1 in NewStore's 2021 Omnichannel Leadership Report for their implementation of virtual and in-store appointments and is allowing Buy Online, Pick Up In Store for their consumers to retrieve their purchased goods (Berthiaume 2020). Other luxury fashion brand retailers, such as Nordstrom, Neiman Marcus, and Saks Fifth Avenue are also allowing for convenience and experience when purchasing a luxury good by implementing omnichannel retailing methods into their branding strategy. Channel integration in luxury fashion brands combines online and offline spaces and recognizes that they are not mutually exclusive because frequently consumers use both spaces during their purchasing process. Consumers may use offline sites to feel and look at the product, or try it on, then purchase at an online site at their

convenience. They then might choose in store pickup to receive the product to avoid the stress of shipping a luxury product. Likewise, consumers may use online sites to research products and pricing and then make the purchase in store, which in turn could lead to impulse purchases made in store (Okonkwo, 2007).

Luxury fashion brands are catering to their clients' new needs with new technologies and expanding retailing channels are providing a way for consumers to be introduced to a luxury collection or product, research the collection or product, shop the product, and ultimately decide whether or not to purchase it. The digitalization of luxury fashion brands through new retailing channels has led to an evolution of the way consumers are completing purchases (Cabigiosu, 2020). Luxury fashion brands are also creating more products to keep up with the continuous demand created by multiple retailing channels. It is no longer satisfactory to create just seasonal collections, but rather consumers must produce collections with specific marketing strategies to keep up with the fast paced climate of the fashion industry created by omnichannel retailing methods.

The shift to digitalization in luxury fashion brands was a slow one, as many brands were reluctant to switch to a multiple channel selling strategy. After creating online sites, the first step most luxury brands took towards omnichannel retailing was introducing digital changes to better support their consumers during the purchasing process. While luxury fashion brands are making strides towards adding new channels to traditional selling channels and introducing digital innovations to primary and secondary activities, the change to complete seamless integration across all channels has been a slow process for many luxury fashion brands (Cabigiosu, 2020). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased need for a combination of convenience

and experience for consumers, this shift to omnichannel retailing methods for luxury fashion brands is speeding up.

### **Brand Identity**

Brand identity is a combination of the name, term, sign, symbol, and design of a brand that identifies and differentiates it from its competitors. Consistency in brand identity is especially important as luxury fashion brands expand into multiple selling channels. This is the first, and most crucial, step in seamlessly integrating channels. Consistency of the brand manifests from the perspective of the consumer, but it is the brand's job to make sure the brand identity is present on each selling channel to create a strong promotional mix. Elements of brand identity including font, artwork, logos, voice, and photography/videography styles must be consistent across selling channels to maintain a seamlessly integrated experience (Lynch & Barnes 2020). Brand identity and management involves assembling and maintaining over time the unique mix of physical attributes (i.e. visual elements) and intangible values (i.e. a brand's mission or values) that separate brand's from one another (Saviolo 2002). Branding and brand identity is becoming more about the relationship between the consumer and the brand based on emotion, rather than economics.

#### *Visual Elements*

Visual elements in a brand identity include the brand colors, fonts, logo, and any other visual elements utilized by a brand to create their identity. This is crucial for a brand in differentiating itself to consumers. In the context of luxury fashion brands, brand identity plays an important role in differentiating their brand from competitors, and many of the visual elements in luxury fashion brands have been carried through their branding since the company

began, making them classic in the fashion industry. Hermès uses their iconic orange, Louis Vuitton uses their LV logo throughout their branding, Dior has a recognizable font, and Prada has the triangle logo. These visual elements help the consumer to easily recognize the brand in comparison to competitors.

### *Branding in Luxury Fashion Brands*

Branding in luxury fashion brands has been implemented for generations of luxury collections for some brands. Luxury fashion brands typically implement a key visual element, be it a color, logo, or font, to separate them from competitors. Tiffany & Co. is the most noticeable with the easily identifiable Tiffany Blue®. Other examples include the LV logo from Louis Vuitton, the Hermès orange, the Dior font, the GG Gucci logo, and countless others. Implementing this branding into their marketing strategies and omnichannel platforms allows the brand to differentiate themselves from competitors. Success factors in fashion brands have become less focused solely on the product, and more focused on a combination of the product and the intangible elements created by brand identity and retail management (Saviolo 2002). Brand identity was defined by Saviolo as a “system of attributes” that include history and core elements of the brand, product identity, and visual identity.

### **Consumer Shopping Experience**

The consumer shopping experience encompasses every aspect of a retailer’s experience towards consumers from customer care, marketing, branding, product quality, ease of use, and reliability (Meyer & Schwager 2007). An important element of the consumer shopping experience is the creation of shopping environments designed to enhance experiences (Iyer & Kuksov 2012). In an omnichannel retail strategy it is important for the brand to create a

consumer shopping experience that caters to the desires and needs of the consumer. The consumer shopping experience relies on the relationship between convenience and experience and affects brand preference, purchase intention, and customer perception.

### *Convenience vs. Experience*

Convenience is defined as the quality or state of being available, easy to use, and helpful. In the context of omnichannel retailing methods, convenience can be defined as easily accessing selling channels to have an easy and helpful shopping experience. For example, Buy Online, Pick Up In Stores would be more convenient than experiential.

Experience is defined as the process of doing things and having things happen to you. In the context of omnichannel retailing methods, experience can be defined as the things consumers see or do in the process of purchasing a good. For example, a pop-up shop would be more experiential than convenient for consumers. Omnichannel retailing is about the marriage of convenience and experience for consumers. E-commerce sites have become an integral part of retailers' selling strategies, however for consumers, they are mostly a source of convenience and lack the experience that is available to them at brick-and-mortar stores. As more and more consumers are craving that experience again, retailers are having to implement new methods to combine experience and convenience.

Some retailers focus on convenience, and others focus on experience. In the past, luxury fashion brands have focused on convenience, but in current times, they are having to combine convenience and experience via omnichannel retailing methods to help their consumers in a way that is useful to them but also provides a meaningful experience.

### *Brand Preference*

Brand preference is when customers rely on their consumer shopping experiences to make a decision about their brand preferences in comparison to the brand's competitors. Customers judge alternative brands and make decisions about their preferred brands. While this doesn't mean customers will exclusively shop only at that brand, it does suggest that customers will continuously shop there over other brands in that same sector. These brands have a competitive advantage over other brands. Brand preferences have focused on consumers' cognitive judgment of brand attributes, but due to the shift from functional attributes to experiences, the role of consumer brand preferences has shifted. Due to the increase in selling and media channels, it is difficult for consumers to differentiate brands on functional attributes, so brands have to come up with ways to differentiate from other brands (Ebrahim et al. 2016).

#### *Purchase Intentions*

Purchase intention is the customer's intent to purchase a good from a brand after completing the decision-making journey. It is the likelihood the consumers will complete a purchase from a brand. In luxury fashion brands, it is believed that brand name has a large effect on purchase intention (Mirabi et al. 2015). Mirabi et al. also tested if product quality played a role in purchase intention, in which they found that it had a positive correlation. This is important to consider in the context of luxury fashion brands because of the high quality associated with luxury products.

If a consumer has an enjoyable shopping experience and is provided with convenience and experience during their shopping experience, they are more likely to continuously visit a selling channel from that brand, increasing the purchase intention (Sohn & Kim 2020). Convenience shopping in online selling channels is an important factor in purchase intention. Some factors that have been identified by Sohn and Kim (2020) in affecting purchase intention

are necessity, reliability, interaction, and sales promotion. These elements are important factors in the consumer shopping experience of omnichannel retailing methods. Impulse buying, spontaneous purchases made by consumers without prior research or comparison, is also said to have a positive effect on purchase intention (Peña-Garcia et al., 2020). Purchase intentions can be a way for brands to test the effectiveness of the integration of channels and if the implementation of new selling channels and the integration of multiple channels requires further development to add to the consumer shopping experience. Social media marketing activities (SMMA) has had a positive influence on luxury fashion brands' consumer purchase intention (Ibrahim et al., 2020). Purchase intention has a positive effect on consumer purchase behavior, although for the purpose of this study the research will just explore how purchase intention is affected by omnichannel retailing methods.

### *Consumer Perception*

Consumer perception is how the consumer views and perceives a brand based on the customer's personal wants and needs. Each customer has a different perception of a brand based on their own desires and needs for a brand. Agyekum et al. defined consumer perception as a complex process by which consumers select, process, and interpret information about a product (2015). Consumer perception can be broadly categorized by external factors and internal factors that allow the consumer to make decisions about products and brands. External factors would be the tangible aspects related to a brand, including selling channels, products, branding, etc., that influences consumer perception. Internal factors would be the consumer's motives and expectations. The process of developing consumer perception involves exposure, attention, and interpretation (Agyekum et al., 2015). Because of the multiple channels used in omnichannel retailing methods, consumers are constantly exposed to brands and products, so it is up to the

brand to create engaging, integrated channels to capture and maintain the attention of consumers to have a positive effect on consumer perception of a brand.

Other factors that have been identified as dominant and important factors in influencing consumer perception specifically for online channels are Information, Ease of Use, Convenience, Satisfaction, Security/Privacy, and Proper Utilization of the channels (Thakur & Aurora 2015). In the context of this study, it is important to explore convenience, satisfaction, and proper utilization of channels as factors that influence consumer perception of a brand. The study conducted by Thakur & Aurora found that consumers use online channels for price comparison, unique products, and for convenience. Social media marketing activities affect consumer perception through several factors including entertainment, customization, word of mouth, and trendiness (Ibrahim et al., 2020). Social media, as a selling channel, can be a useful and effective method for improving consumer perception in luxury fashion brands.

### *Consumer Purchasing Process*

The simple explanation of the consumer purchasing process consists of explaining the three stages consumers go through in their purchasing process, including pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase. Consumers move through online and offline selling channels while moving through the consumer purchasing process (Frambach et al., 2007). It is important for brands to understand how consumers navigate the various selling channels during the purchasing process to understand consumer channel preference and how it relates to the purchasing process.

The purchasing process includes all steps of completing a purchase from initial idea, research, intent to purchase, purchase, and post-purchase. An extensive purchasing process often includes the navigation of multiple retailing channels so consumers can make an informed decision about their purchase.

**Chapter 3:**  
**METHODOLOGY**  
**Overview**

This chapter details the methodology used in the study, as well as how data were collected and analyzed through a qualitative study.

**Research Design**

The research design of this study included a qualitative exploratory design that sought to deeply understand how omnichannel retailing methods impact the consumer shopping experience for luxury fashion brand consumers through interviewing the researchers. Qualitative exploratory research was beneficial in this study because it explores what lies beneath the surface of the study. Exploratory research is characterized by a flexibility of method (Stevens et al. 2013). Qualitative research requires in-depth research and analysis of data, and it gives researchers the opportunity to understand and explain the topic they are researching more (Bansal & Corley 2012).

This research study contains transactional validity present through member check, or member validation, in which the research will present the data collected to the interviewees and determine if the reported data is accurate (Koelsch 2013). Member check allows for validity because the confirmation of data collected ensures there is no bias present, thus confirming the validity of the research.

## **Interviews with Luxury Brand Consumers**

Data was collected through interviewing participants to determine if omnichannel retailing methods in luxury fashion brands improves the consumer shopping experience, as well as the participants' relationship with brand identity in luxury fashion brands. Participants were asked to think of a luxury good they have purchased in the past four years to the interview. Using a specific luxury good as an example during the interview that they have purchased recently ensured omnichannel retailing methods could have been present in the consumer shopping experience. By asking the participants to think of a specific good they purchased in the last four years, and if possible showing it during the interview, will lead to object elicitation. Participants were then asked to explain the journey of purchasing the luxury good from start to finish, making note of the specific channels mentioned. Participants then answered a series of probing semi-structured interview questions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accurate data collection. During the interview process, the researcher took notes of the interviews to pay specific attention to the consumer shopping experience and selling channels mentioned throughout the journey of purchasing the luxury good. The notes were helpful in determining key themes before analyzing the transcriptions of the interviews.

### *Luxury Fashion Brand Selection Criteria*

The luxury fashion brands included in this study were selected based on research in the literature review that revealed omnichannel retailing methods in these fashion brands. The literature review acted as a pre-interview screening to ensure the luxury fashion brands matched the criteria needed for this interview process. The luxury fashion brands were selected to ensure

they had similar omnichannel methods, consumer demographics, and products/price points to make the brands easily comparable.

*Table 3.1;*  
Luxury Fashion Brand Profiles

<b>Luxury Fashion Brand Name</b>	<b>Brand Profiles</b>	<b>Omnichannel Methods Utilized</b>
Dior	- French luxury fashion brand founded in 1946 - Ready-to-wear, leather goods, accessories, makeup/skincare, fragrance	E-commerce platform, online virtual fashion shows, social media selling, brick-and-mortar stores, in store appointments, online live chat, smartphone application
Chanel	- French luxury fashion brand founded in 1910 - Ready-to-wear, leather goods, accessories, makeup/skincare, fragrance	Online site, online virtual fashion shows, social media selling, brick-and-mortar stores, online boutique advisors, smartphone application
Gucci	- Italian luxury fashion brand founded in 1921 - Ready-to-wear, leather goods, accessories, makeup, fragrance, home goods	E-commerce platform, brick-and-mortar stores, online client advisors, smartphone application
Prada	- Italian luxury fashion brand founded in 1913 - Ready-to-wear, leather goods, accessories, fragrance	E-commerce platform, online virtual fashion shows, social media selling, brick-and-mortar stores, in store item reservation and appointments
Yves Saint Laurent	- French luxury fashion brand founded in 1961 - Ready-to-wear, leather goods, accessories, makeup, fragrance, home goods	E-commerce platform, social media selling, brick-and-mortar stores, in store item reservation

### **Instrument Development**

The instrument created for interview questions was developed based on the research of Payne et al. and their study on the transitional CVP perspective. The researchers created a study

on the customer experience based on the transitional CVP perspective, which was able to be mirrored for this study on the customer experience in omnichannel retailing in luxury fashion. Interview questions were created after reviewing the study of the transitional CVP perspective to conduct interviews with probing and semi-structured questions. Payne et al.'s study focuses on the brand management perspective of customer experience, whereas this study will focus on the customer experience through the lens of consumers of luxury fashion brands.

*Table 3.2:*  
Instrument Development based on the transitional CVP perspective

<b>Transitional CVP Perspective</b>	<b>Interview Set Up</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Purchasing Process	Please bring a luxury item you purchased in the last four years.	Tell me about the process of purchasing this product. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What was your first step in the process of making your purchase decision?</li> <li>- What were the steps that followed that initial step?</li> <li>- What was the final step in your purchasing process of this product?</li> </ul>
Consumer Shopping Experience	Please reflect on your purchasing process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What did you enjoy about the different steps you took to complete the purchase?</li> <li>- What did you dislike or would consider doing differently the next time you make a purchase from that luxury brand?</li> <li>- What selling channels did you find helpful for product information?</li> <li>- What selling channels did you find helpful for completing the purchase?</li> <li>- What selling channel</li> </ul>

		caused you to make the final decision to purchase the product?
Consumer Experience and Purchase Intention	Please take five minutes to browse selling channels of your preferred luxury brand from the list.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What selling channel are you looking at?</li> <li>- What are your initial thoughts about the selling channel?</li> <li>- Do you have a positive or negative opinion of the selling channel?</li> <li>- Would you be interested in making a purchase through this selling channel or would you rather complete the purchase through another selling channel, i.e. an in store experience?</li> </ul>

Table 3.3:  
Interview Instrument

Probing Question	Brand Identity Elements	Interview Questions
How does brand identity play a role in the selling channels you used throughout your purchasing process?	Brand name	How does brand name play a role in your purchasing process and your shopping experience?
	Brand logo	Does the brand logo affect how you view the selling channels?
	Brand font	Does the font used by the brand affect your experience with the various selling channels?

Brand colors	How do the colors used by the brand contribute to your shopping experience with the selling channels?
Other branding elements	What other branding elements do you notice in selling channels of luxury fashion brands that you think positively affect your shopping experience?

### **Data Collection**

The participants of this study included 8 consumers of luxury fashion brands, selected by snowball sampling, which allows for one participant to recommend one or more other participants for the study. The research concluded with 8 participants because the researcher felt there was a saturation of data and that the research questions had been answered by the interviews of the participants. After the Institutional Review Board approved the application for this study, participants were reached out to and provided consent for participation and inclusion in this study. Anonymity remained in this study by removing names and any identifying factors that could determine participant identification to ensure participants are comfortable with this study. Pseudonyms were given to participants for the purpose of analysis and explanation of findings. These participants were necessary to answer the research questions because they are consumers of luxury fashion brands and will be used to determine a relationship between omnichannel retailing in luxury fashion and consumer shopping experience, as they have shopped with luxury brands and can share their experience with omnichannel retailing in luxury fashion. Participants of this study were asked to think of a luxury fashion product they purchased

in the past four years. It is necessary to understand their experience from the past four years because that is when multiple selling channels became more widespread for luxury fashion brands.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed by denoting common themes brought up in the participant interviews. The analysis consisted of a systematic data analysis following the conclusion of the interviews. Interview recordings were transcribed via Trint, an online transcription software, and exported to Microsoft word documents for analysis. The researcher listened to the recordings along with the transcription and took extensive notes on recurring themes, as well as any notable differences. These themes are outlined in Chapter 4: Findings.

This research was analyzed using a constant comparative method which consists of coding data into common themes, then separating the themes into separate categories to form conclusions (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001).

Validity in this study was present through data triangulation and member check. Using data triangulation as a validation strategy was achieved through the use of content analysis in the literature review and an interview methodology. Member check was present in this study to ensure validity of study by confirming with participants that their opinions were accurately recorded and represented in this study.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Overview**

This chapter will discuss the findings after conducting interviews with luxury fashion brand consumers and the relationship between omnichannel retailing methods in luxury fashion brands and the purchasing process that contributes to the consumer shopping experience. The key findings were the purchasing process, in store shopping experience, perception of luxury fashion brand selling channels, branding elements in luxury fashion brands, and feelings associated with luxury purchases.

#### **Findings from the Interviews**

##### **Selecting Interviewees**

Participants were contacted via email regarding joining the study and snowball sampling was utilized to expand the participant pool. There resulted in a total of 8 interviews, all conducted in March and April of 2022, and lasting between 20 and 45 minutes. The findings in relation to the research questions will be discussed in the following sections.

*Table 4.1:*  
Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees

Name (alias)	Generation	Product purchased in last four years	Selling channel used to complete purchase
Angela	Boomer II	Chanel handbag	Chanel brick and

			mortar store
Emily	Boomer II	Chanel jacket	Saks Fifth Avenue department store (in store)
Nicole	Boomer II	Tory Burch handbag	Tory Burch outlet store
Christopher	Generation Z	Dior handbag	Dior brick and mortar store
Collin	Generation Z	Yeezy shoes	Adidas e-commerce platform
Samantha	Generation X	Chanel sandals	Saks Fifth Avenue department store (in store)
Catherine	Millennial	YSL handbag	YSL brick and mortar store
Richard	Generation Z	Louis Vuitton bag	Louis Vuitton brick and mortar store

**Purchasing Process**

The interview process began by asking participants to think of a luxury fashion product they have purchased in the past four years, and what that product was. They were then asked to describe their experience and the process required for purchasing the product. For Angela, she knew she wanted a classic handbag that she could use for years to come, so she researched Chanel handbags online. She used the Chanel website to find product information, specifically in researching different leathers and price points. She then did further research on the product by looking up reviews for Chanel handbags to add to her knowledge of the leather and handbag. This process lasted for several months and then resulted in an in store purchase of the Chanel handbag. Christopher’s experience was primarily in store, but began with the desire to purchase a Dior bag after seeing them on social media. He went to the Dior store on Fifth Avenue in New

York City, remarking that it added to the experience of purchasing a luxury fashion product. Christopher worked with a stylist in store and tried on several different handbags before completing his purchase in store. Samantha's purchasing process began when she was walking through Saks Fifth Avenue and saw a pair of Chanel sandals that she loved. She was in a rush, so she did not have time to purchase them that day. She then looked online at the Chanel website and was pleased to find product information for the sandals on the website, but was frustrated to discover she could not complete the purchase of the sandals online because Chanel does not offer an e-commerce platform. After thinking about the shoes for some time, she went back in store to Saks Fifth Avenue where she completed the purchase of the sandals and had a very positive experience in store. All participants agreed that for luxury fashion goods it was very important for them to see the products in store before purchasing so they made sure they were satisfied with the product before completing the purchase.

**Angela:** I had always seen them, and then I was curious looking at the different styles and so forth. I did research online and looked at them. I read about the brand online and then I also looked at price points and so forth of where I wanted to be. I did comparisons to other brands like Louis Vuitton and stuff, and Hermes and others. But I just liked the look and the feel of the Chanel, and the price point seemed OK. So that's kind of where I landed. I would say just popping into the store periodically and seeing some of their stuff and whether that was when I was traveling or here in Atlanta, if I was in a place that had them, so they have their own standalone stores, as you know. And then they also were embedded in some of the higher end. I guess you call it. Like Neiman Marcus or Saks or whatever. Right, so if they were there and they had a space, I would go and look at their stuff and then eventually ended up making a purchase.

As expected, for participants, the purchase process was an extended period of time. No participant mentioned seeing one product and making a purchase decision and completing a purchase instantaneously. The participant with the fastest experience was Christopher, however he knew he wanted a Dior handbag for an extended amount of time. When the time came to make a decision and complete a purchase, he decided on an in store shopping experience.

## **In Store Shopping Experience**

The in store shopping experience was the most important part of the purchasing process for luxury fashion brand consumers. It was the primary selling channel and a key factor in the decision making process for consumers to complete the purchase of a luxury fashion product. The most important feature that was appreciated by all but one participant was the one on one experience of working directly with stylists and associates from the brands. Angela mentioned that the brands are very client centric. Christopher discussed his experience with Dior when purchasing a handbag:

**Christopher:** I went in, he showed me six different bags, and when I tried on the one I got, I knew it was the one. And he was like, just looking at your face for when I tried on the one I got versus all the others, he was like, I knew that was the one.

Christopher's experience in Dior was very positive as he worked directly with one stylist to find a new bag that was everything he wanted. After viewing 6 different options, he picked one out to purchase, with the help of the stylist. He now has the stylist's phone number and the stylist is going to reach out when a pair of shoes matching Christopher's new bag come in stock in his size. That positive experience with one purchase has led to a desire to continue to work with that same stylist and make more purchases at Dior.

Emily had a similar story to tell. Emily has a personal shopper at Saks Fifth Avenue that she has worked with since 1996. While she was not originally looking for a personal shopper, she had such a positive experience working with this stylist in store that they developed a relationship that has lasted since they initially met and has expanded into the personal shopper helping Emily with all major purchases. The personal shopper worked directly with Emily to help her find the Chanel jacket that Emily knew she would get a lot of use out of. Emily

mentioned she wanted something classic and timeless, so she landed on a red and black jacket after working with her personal shopper. That experience that was related to Saks Fifth Avenue, a department store specializing in luxury brands, was unique to Emily.

Emily shared another story about her positive experience with Chanel when she went to visit the Chanel store in Paris, France in 2015. The experience included drinks being served to her and her husband, a visit to Coco Chanel's apartment above the store, and the purchase of several Chanel products. She noted how incredible the experience was and how much she enjoyed every part of it, even commenting she still has the bag from her purchases in 2015.

Richard has created a loyal and trusting relationship with one stylist at Louis Vuitton on Fifth Avenue and shared the positive feelings he has towards the in store experience of luxury fashion brands.

**Richard:** I appreciate the attentiveness. I feel like I don't know, name any store, you're not going to have someone to cater and help you and answer questions and that kind of thing. I think the best version that's like non luxury fashion would be like Apple. And like sometimes when you go to the Apple Store, you don't really want someone with you the whole time, but like when you go into it, we have a tight knit like we're like any luxury store. You know. It elicits a certain feeling, you know, like you feel like you're being taken care of, you know, you're making a really big purchase. So you want to make sure you're making the right decision. And of course, like they're there to sell you the item, but also it can, you know, encourage you to get it. And, you know, even though they want to sell you an item once you build up a relationship with the person. So like now that I'm in New York City, like I have the one person I see every time and they'll be like, No, I don't think you should get this right now. And, you know, to me, that is really important because they're willing to build a relationship with you even if they get commission. But to tell you, you shouldn't get a certain item, that's how, you know you've built up a good client service relationship.

While a Tory Burch outlet store was not the ideal example for this study, it was helpful in creating a comparison to the luxury brand consumer experience. Nicole did not want help from the associates in store, compared to the other participants who greatly desired help from the stylists and associates in store. Christopher worked specifically with one stylist who showed him

6 different handbags, then helped him in making a final decision. In contrast, Nicole began her purchasing process online and then decided she needed to see it in person before making the final purchase.

**Nicole:** It was just easy, I just looked around and kind of pulled the things together that I liked and then kind of compared them and made my purchase. I think [the sales associates] tried to be helpful, but I just kind of didn't want their help.

For Nicole, she didn't feel the need to have assistance and one-on-one help from the associates in store, a direct contrast from other participants' luxury shopping experiences. This was notable because it is important to differentiate the consumer shopping experiences based on brand, and a Tory Burch outlet store is not on the same level as Dior or Chanel, stores that participants commonly noted for their incredible in store experience.

### **Perception of Luxury Fashion Brand Selling Channels**

The participants were asked to browse multiple selling channels of various luxury fashion brands and then asked to share their perspective on the selling channels. The overall findings were that very few participants used social media and the online e-commerce sites were primarily used for product information, not to actually make a purchase from a luxury fashion brand.

After asking participants to browse selling channels, it was discovered that the e-commerce websites for luxury fashion brands were overall used for product information and price comparison. One of the main takeaways from the interviews was that luxury fashion brands should not have runway fashion as the first image when the website is opened because it doesn't bring in customers since they can't picture themselves wearing it. Luxury fashion consumers appreciate the accessibility of e-commerce websites because it provides them with the opportunity for price comparison and detailed product information before going to a store to

make the final decision on the purchase. It was noted by Angela that luxury fashion brands used to not display prices on websites, but since the increased use of e-commerce platforms as a selling channel following COVID-19, brands have needed to increase accessibility and availability of information by providing prices to consumers. Many participants mentioned appreciating the ability to do price comparison before shopping in store. Luxury fashion brands could improve their selling channels by increasing the amount of product information and making it more readily available.

For example, Prada's social media sites are filled with beautiful imagery of the products, but no direct product information. Even if the product is linked to the website and additional images through the Instagram Shop feature, it takes several clicks to get to product information, and it is not as detailed as on the website. On the Prada website, for the same handbag as seen on Instagram, it has lots of pictures of the exterior of the handbag, as well as pictures with models holding the handbag, but there are no pictures showing the inside of the handbag and if there are any pockets. It mentions in the product description there are "three compartments, including one with zipper" but no pictures to accompany this description, which might discourage customers from making the purchase through the e-commerce platform. The Find In Store feature on the Prada website is very helpful because it would allow customers to see where they can find this product to see it in person before completing a purchase. Another helpful detail on the product page for Instagram Shop was details about returns or cancellations, which was viewed as a positive so they don't have to search for it on a website. Not all products on the Prada Instagram page are linked to Instagram Shop, or if they are linked, they might not match the caption or content of the post. For example, there is a picture of Tom Holland for a campaign with Prada where he is holding a crossbody bag and the caption describes the crossbody bag, but does not

give the name of the bag, and the products linked to the post are the pants and sweater he is wearing. Consistency among content for social media in luxury fashion brands is necessary for a seamless consumer experience. Throughout the interview process, no one mentioned using smartphone applications as a means for product information, purchasing, or price comparison.

Catherine shared her perspective on the Gucci, Chanel, and YSL websites by comparing what she liked and didn't like about the websites, offering insight to what makes a website preferable for consumers. It is important to Catherine that luxury fashion brands offer a combination of editorial photos and product photos, as well as price and product information to combine experience and convenience for consumers.

**Catherine:** I'm kind of biased, but I do love the Gucci website because I feel like we have a lot of campaign photos. So when you get on the home page, it's like a little slideshow of all the new campaign items. But then when you're actually shopping and looking at the categories, it's very like up front, like handbags, crossbody, shoulder bags. It's organized very well. And then they have basic photos like product photo shots. But then they also include a few like editorial ones. So I think they do a good job. It's kind of like Chanel. They do a combination of Chanel and YSL, you kind of get it all whereas Chanel completely leaves out the reasonable photos and prices and all that stuff.

When asked if participants felt that the introduction of more selling channels, especially on digital platforms, takes away from the exclusivity of luxury fashion brands, most participants agreed that it does take away from the exclusivity. However, no participant felt that it was a bad thing and would take away from the value or importance of luxury fashion. Collin, in particular, had an interesting perspective on the introduction of a digital age to luxury fashion.

**Collin:** I think like they're trying to just keep that seed planted that they're there and they're evolving with the times and their clothes are catching up as well with the digital age, as more and more people, like I said, are like online shopping and stuff like that. And especially with like COVID and post COVID, there still is that aspect of like uncomfotability with like what normal life was pre-2020? So like, that's kind of why there's also been like this, I'd say, exponential growth in online shopping since 2020. So I think that's much more important for the brands to kind of increase their digital footprint in order to not to maintain relevance because

some of these fashion houses have a platform so big that they're not going to like, fade off. But I think it's like the fact that they want to stay in touch or like a little bit in tune with the younger generation because that's who's going to be wearing their clothes later on. It's like Virgil always said that the kids are the future.

Based on the findings of the study, it was determined that, while there are multiple selling channels in luxury fashion brands, there is not a seamless integration of selling channels, meaning the brands need to focus on integration of selling channels to achieve omnichannel retailing methods.

### **Branding Elements in Luxury Fashion Brands**

Branding elements in luxury fashion brands are what keeps the brand relevant and sets it apart from other competitors. Branding was really important to participants when it was broken down to specific elements, including brand name, logo, font and colors. Most participants agreed that brand name was important to them in the purchasing process, but it was important because of the standard created by the brand and quality and experience associated with the brand. Collin mentioned the brand name having surface value that automatically adds to the value of the product. Angela, however, felt that it was important to her to purchase a quality product over a brand name product, using the Louis Vuitton logo bags as an example.

A common theme that all participants mentioned, even though it was not probed in questions, was the packaging that comes with the purchase of a luxury fashion product, especially when the purchase is completed in store. The packaging, for many participants, was a large part of the overall positive experience with an in store shopping experience. Participants noted that they have kept the packaging and boxes these products come in and really enjoy that element of branding. Catherine mentioned the new green boxes that Gucci is using and mentioned that, while it is a nice display of their brand, she enjoys the timeless, classic, and chic packaging that came with her YSL handbag purchase. The simpler box with the words “Saint

Laurent” printed on the top was a contributing factor in her positive experience when completing a purchase from Yves Saint Laurent.

**Catherine:** With YSL, the website and everything, even the packaging, it's just like a black box and like just a small, simple font. It's like Saint Laurent. Like, it's just so simple and classy. I think it makes it timeless, whereas sometimes Gucci can have crazy, over-the-top packaging, and I just think it can be kind of tacky sometimes. So I definitely like the more simple branding.

**Samantha:** I prefer going to the store and just getting that experience. And plus the packaging is so nice, always like it's like they just wrap it so nice, you know.

Packaging can be a part of branding as it features elements of the brand, such as logos or colors. For participants, it was an important element that added to their consumer shopping experience with luxury fashion brands. Packaging is also interesting because it combines many elements of branding into one tangible element, such as color, logo, or font.

An interesting finding with branding elements was in relation to colors. When asked about their perception of colors in luxury fashion brands, many participants, still looking at a digital platform of a luxury fashion brand, noted the colors used in collections and products, rather than the brand colors. When asked specifically about the colors associated with the brand, like green in Gucci branding elements, many participants noted that they were indifferent to the colors. When asked about Hermés orange boxes as another example of branding, many participants found an added value in the orange box.

**Christopher:** Hermes is obviously known for retaining their value, and everyone knows the orange box.

Analyzing the perception of luxury fashion brand logos was also an interesting finding during this study. Angela specifically mentioned the Chanel logo and her love for it, also noting she appreciates the other four symbols that are associated with Chanel. For many participants, the logo added value to the product as most luxury logos were seen as timeless and classic.

Intangible elements, such as branding elements, adding value to the product was a common theme in the findings and an important part of the consumer experience in luxury fashion brands.

### **Consumer Perception**

Consumer perception of luxury fashion brands based on omnichannel retailing methods and branding elements associated with brand identity was an important finding of this study based on the responses from participants. Intangible elements that added value to the consumer perception of luxury fashion brands were things like the treatment they got from sales associates and stylists in store that elicited very positive feelings.

**Samantha:** They just really take very good care of you. So, it's a unique experience. And as it should be, because you're spending a lot of money. Overall, I like shopping in them. And I mean, I prefer going to the store and just getting that experience.

For Samantha, shopping at brick and mortar luxury stores provided a unique experience that created a positive consumer perception of the brand. In contrast, Samantha had a negative perception of Chanel after trying to complete a purchase online, only to realize she was unable to complete the purchase through Chanel's website because it is not an e-commerce platform. This created frustration for her because she had already tried on the shoes at an offline store, so she wanted to create the purchase online, but was unable to, resulting in her having to go back to the department store to complete the purchase. This inconvenience for her was created by the lack of omnichannel retailing in Chanel and altered her perception of the brand.

Positive consumer perception creates an overall brand preference and brand loyalty with consumers that encourages them to continue to shop and support specific brands, increasing purchase intention.

Exclusivity in luxury fashion brands was an important intangible element that contributed to the customer perception and value of the brand and product. Participants of the study were asked if they felt the increase in omnichannel retailing or the digitalization of luxury fashion brands took away from the exclusivity of luxury fashion brands. Many participants agreed that it did take away from that exclusivity, but that it wasn't necessarily a negative thing that would take away from the value of the brand or products. Luxury fashion brands can use digitalization to provide a unique experience that adds to the value of the brand or products in other ways.

**Collin:** I think [digitalization is] giving a whole new rise to luxury fashion. Honestly, as we're shifting towards the digital world, there are still aspects of society that are catching up to where technology currently is at because of just how fast the times have been shifting. And I think in order to capitalize on a broader audience, more and more people are finding an interest in fashion because of the digital world and social media.

### **Feelings Associated with Luxury Purchases**

A common theme that was discovered throughout the interview process was the feelings associated with completing a luxury purchase. Participants mentioned feeling happy, completing purchases to fulfill the desire of escapism, instant gratification, and feeling special due to the experiences related to an in store shopping experience. The feelings associated with luxury purchases are different, according to the findings of this study, compared to non-luxury purchases.

The interview with Christopher, in specific, highlighted lots of different feelings associated with luxury purchases. Christopher completed a purchase at Dior in celebration of his birthday and also getting a new job. His purchase was completed in the Dior store on Fifth Avenue in New York City. He mentioned making this purchase in store compared to online because he wanted that instant gratification of being able to walk away with the product that day. Christopher said, "When you're spending so much money, like you want that instant

gratification, and the packaging tends to be better.” When asked how he feels about purchasing luxury products in general, Christopher remarked, “I love it. They make me feel happy, although they hurt my bank account. But I think some pieces are great investments, so it’s all about doing your research.” As mentioned earlier, Christopher created a connection with the stylist who helped him in the store, adding to that overall experience that made him feel happy. Although joking about the overall price of luxury products, he concluded the interview by saying that luxury pieces are an investment and that the purchasing process includes doing your research. Luxury pieces as an investment was another common theme that was discovered throughout the interview process.

The interview with Samantha began with asking why she purchased the Chanel sandals and her response was that she wanted to treat herself. She mentioned that she earns extra money from her side job as a social media influencer, and likes to spend that money on investments in luxury fashion products as a way to treat herself. That desire to treat herself created positive feelings that were associated with the luxury fashion product purchase.

Emily’s story with luxury fashion brands consisted of a desire for escapism when dealing with some personal hardships. Considering fashion purchases as a form of escapism is not a new idea as many fashion enthusiasts partake in the concept of retail therapy.

**Emily:** I was coming to Atlanta all of the time. And I guess as an escape from all the issues that I was dealing with, I would go shopping in Lenox or whatever. And you know, one of the places was Neiman's.

A very interesting discussion found in this study was how easy it was for participants to remember luxury fashion purchases and their experiences, even if it has been years since the purchase. This provides proof that consumers have such positive experiences with luxury fashion brands that it is easy to remember their experiences years later, like Emily remembers the names

of so many stylists who have helped her over the years. Luxury fashion brands create memorable experiences for their consumers that contribute to brand preference and customer perception.

For Richard, his Louis Vuitton bag was purchased during a college graduation trip. It marked an important milestone in his life as he moved from one chapter of life to the next.

**Richard:** I was moving to New York City and I was starting a new job, so it's kind of like a milestone moment. And when you're making a purchase such as that, I feel like it's a good way to mark that, you know, every time you wear it, it can only reinforce those ideas.

For interviewees, it was important that their entire process with luxury fashion purchases was an experience. Participants mentioned completing these purchases as a way to reward themselves, to mark big milestones in their life, and to provide them with gratification and satisfaction, qualities that might not be present in non-luxury purchases.

### **Validation Strategy for Interviews**

Validity was confirmed for interview participants through member check, which allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of the recorded notes and themes. Member check was completed by contacting participants via email to inform them of the main themes discovered during analysis. The findings were summarized into brief overviews of each category presented in this section. Participants were able to review the presented material and respond, detailing their thoughts on the findings. Member check allows for the findings to be stronger and ensures the data analysis is justified.

*Table 4.2:*  
Member Check Response Example

Hi Shannon,  Thank you for sharing your results with me! I really enjoyed participating in this study and
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found it really interesting how you broke up the responses into different categories. They reflect my feelings on luxury fashion and my experience with Dior well.

Thanks!  
Christopher

**Chapter 5:**  
**DISCUSSION**  
**Overview**

This chapter will provide a discussion of the current research and conclusions from findings of the study. Theoretical and managerial implications are examined. Limitations and suggestions for future research are proposed.

**Summary of Study**

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, fashion brands have had to incorporate the integration of multiple selling channels into their branding strategy to provide better experiences for their consumers. Luxury fashion brands were slow to respond to these new methods of reaching consumers and adapting omnichannel retailing methods. The COVID-19 pandemic and the closing of retail stores forced these brands to find new and innovative ways to cater to their consumers while combining convenience and the luxury experience consumers desire.

This study interviewed eight consumers of luxury fashion brands to determine their preferred methods of shopping and examine the consumer experience in luxury fashion as it relates to selling channels and branding elements. This study also determined the customer perception of luxury fashion brands based on omnichannel retailing methods and brand identity. An overall discovery that was interesting was the lack of consumer experience differences amongst the varying generations of participants. The Generation Z consumers, millennials, and boomers all had similar opinions on their shopping experience. As mentioned in Chapter 4, all

but one consumer completed their purchases in store and there was very little variation amongst the purchasing process. It was originally assumed that there would be differences in experience and purchasing process amongst the varying ages of consumers, but all participants mentioned utilizing social media and luxury brand websites for product information, price comparison, and research.

A common theme that came up during the study was accessibility during the shopping experience. This was interesting because it provides a near variation to convenience. The object of omnichannel retailing is to encourage a combination of experience and convenience for consumers, so it is interesting to note that accessibility of luxury fashion brands through multiple selling channels was an important element.

The purpose of this study was to explore the customer relationship with omnichannel retailing methods in luxury fashion brands and how it is impacting the consumer shopping experience by examining consumer perception, purchase intention, and brand preference. The purpose of this study was used as a guide to create the research objectives and research questions.

#### *Research Objectives*

- To explore the relationship between retailing channels in luxury fashion brands and consumer shopping experience
- To determine if branding elements in retailing channels in luxury fashion brands impacts consumer shopping experience

#### *Research Questions*

Research Question 1: How do retailing channels utilized by luxury brands affect consumers' shopping experience?

Research Question 2: Does the brand identity in luxury brands' retailing channels enhance consumer shopping experience?

This study consisted of semi-structured interviews of eight participants to analyze the consumer shopping experience with retailing channels in luxury fashion brands. Conducting semi-structured interviews with open ended questions allowed for the participants to have freedom in the stories they shared about their experiences with luxury fashion brands. Many of these stories contributed to a greater understanding of the consumer shopping experience in luxury fashion brands and helped develop the findings of this study. Completing this research through a qualitative lens was essential to gaining a deeper understanding of what luxury fashion brands can do to continue to enhance the consumer shopping experience and how they can seamlessly integrate their retailing channels to create an omnichannel experience. While this study determined there are multiple channels that consumers utilize in their purchasing process, it was concluded that there is little integration between channels and luxury fashion brands should focus on improving that integration to create a seamless combination of convenience and experience for their consumers.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Luxury fashion brands can utilize retailing channels to their advantage by giving a whole new rise to luxury fashion by capitalizing off a broader audience. This study found that while consumers are utilizing multiple selling channels during their purchasing process of luxury goods, the channels are not seamlessly integrated, meaning omnichannel retailing is not yet fully present in luxury fashion brands. For luxury fashion consumers, the main priority is experience, so maintaining that luxury experience through all elements is essential for the success of luxury

fashion brands. Creating luxury experiences in a digital space keeps the brand relevant as it stays in touch with younger generations. While it may take away from the exclusivity of luxury fashion, that is not necessarily a negative effect of omnichannel retailing in luxury fashion brands. It can allow for luxury fashion brands to expand into a whole new element of the industry by creating a brand new experience for luxury consumers. Taking luxury fashion brands into a digital world requires the brands to evolve and adapt to combine the typical luxury experience with accessibility of information.

### *Managerial Implications*

Despite the popularity of omnichannel strategies, the findings from the study suggest that physical space still plays an essential role, especially in the luxury fashion industry. This is because consumers want to touch, feel, and try the product before purchasing it. Participants' responses indicate that customers may visit digital and brick-and-mortar stores multiple times as showrooming (see offline, buy online) and webrooming (see online, buy offline) have grown in popularity. Therefore, luxury brands should understand and take advantage of the interconnectedness between the two within the omnichannel realm. It means that not only can in-store customers explore and shop the brand online, but also online customers can visit offline stores within the full circle of omnichannel.

The study found that luxury consumers are open to e-commerce, but it will not replace the in-store experience. Consumers who want a luxury experience will look for a human touch, even when ordering online. Therefore, luxury brands need to strike a balance between offering a dynamic online presence and providing a premium offline experience to be successful in this new omnichannel world. They must provide seamless, integrated brand experiences across

devices and physical touchpoints. For example, luxury brands can improve the experience for consumers in stores by ensuring sales associates or stylists have the necessary tools to provide for their needs. It might be possible to offer smartphone applications for employees in the stores that assist stylists with product information, styling suggestions, other products consumers might be interested in, and inventory information. Using this approach, stylists and associates can create a more personalized and one-on-one experience for consumers that they aren't going to find at non-luxury stores, while allowing them to experience both digitally and in-store.

The ability to reserve products in-store would also be very useful for luxury fashion brands. Since many brands use appointment systems, they could expand on that by allowing consumers to reserve products they are interested in so that they can visit the store to see them. By doing this, sales associates and stylists can get a better idea of what the consumer is looking for before they even enter the store and they have the opportunity to suggest complementary products, such as matching wallets or shoes, for example, if the consumer is looking for a new handbag.

Study participants discussed accessibility as a common theme, and it is interesting to see how that relates to convenience. Luxury brands should emphasize product information on digital platforms, with editorial photos and product photos to create a luxury experience, coupled with the accessibility of information. Ultimately, omnichannel success can be attributed to a differentiated online experience, such as personalized searches, virtual fitting rooms, and virtual assistants, along with a tailored in-store experience.

### *Theoretical Implications*

In the theoretical framework, Customer Value Proposition was introduced as a strategic tool that is utilized by a brand to communicate how it intends to provide value to consumers. It

was noted that emotional and symbolic CVPs were the most beneficial for this study. After conclusion and analysis of the findings of this study, it is determined that emotional CVP had the greatest importance in this study. As discussed in the findings, there were many feelings associated with purchases in luxury fashion brands as consumers felt they were being catered to and desired that attention from brands to elicit positive feelings.

Symbolic CVP was also an important element of this study because it was found that there are intangible elements, such as the factors of brand identity, that add value to the customer experience. The transitional CVP perspective outlined by Payne et al.'s 2017 study was crucial in developing this study to examine the customer experience and can be used for other research studies examining the consumer shopping experience in retail.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study answered the research questions set forth, there were several limitations that gave rise to future research opportunities. These limitations included a small sample of participants in the study that made it difficult to create a generalization about the opinions of all luxury fashion consumers. This could be avoided in a future study by creating a survey to reach a larger number of luxury fashion brand consumers to further answer the research questions. A survey might be helpful in providing generalizations about the opinions of consumers of luxury fashion brands in relation to omnichannel retailing methods and brand identity. A mixed method study combining generalizations found in a survey and more detailed responses found through interviews would allow for a greater understanding into consumer perception of retailing channels in luxury fashion brands. Since it was discovered in this study that omnichannel retailing methods are not fully present in luxury fashion, a future study could explore if retailing

channels are beginning to seamlessly integrate to create an omnichannel experience for luxury fashion consumers.

Future research for omnichannel retailing in luxury fashion brands can focus specifically on the increase in the secondhand luxury fashion market, looking at how websites like Poshmark and TheRealReal are impacting the consumer experience. It would also be interesting to take a look at fashion rental companies, such as Rent the Runway, and what that is doing for the luxury fashion experience as a whole. While these are not specifically selling channels for one brand, it creates an interesting narrative on the relationship between the consumer shopping experience and luxury fashion brands as it provides another way for consumers to access these products and interact with the brands.

Overall, this research provides meaningful insights on the progress of multiple retailing channels and brand identity in luxury fashion brands. As omnichannel retailing continues to become an increasingly important part of selling strategies for fashion brands, further research is needed to determine consumer perception and if these methods are enhancing the consumer shopping experience. The digitalization of luxury fashion will continue to increase in the coming years, so more research will be needed to continue to provide insight into the effects of omnichannel retailing in luxury fashion brands.

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