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# Spending as protection: the need for safety increases preference for luxury products

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## Abstract

We live in a world where physical threats, to ourselves and to our loved ones, are made salient every single day in the news and in the entertainment that we consume. Our research provides initial evidence that consumers survive in such a world by purchasing luxury brands to act as safety shields against these threats. This is because consumers derive symbolic safety value from luxury brands even when no functional safety features are relevant for the product category in which the brand operates. Thus, we hypothesize that when need for safety is likely salient (such as, after facing a physical safety threat), consumers are likely to show an increased preference for luxury brands, given the associations of luxury brands with safety. We provide empirical support for our proposed hypothesis, using four multi-method studies.

**Keywords** Safety · Luxury brands · Consumer behavior

## 1 Introduction

All human beings have a fundamental need to feel physically safe in their day-to-day lives (Griskevicius and Kenrick 2013). Products with explicit safety features help consumers meet this goal by helping protect them from external harm. For example, airbags and braking features in cars act as safety features to minimize accidents (e.g., Vrkljan and Anaby 2011). In product categories that help serve functional safety needs, pricier, luxury brands are often perceived as offering superior functional safety value

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(Esmailpour 2015). The current research reaches beyond the functional safety benefits offered by luxury brands, proposing that consumers are likely to perceive greater symbolic safety value with luxury brands even when no functional safety features are relevant for the product category in which the brand operates.

This prediction is grounded in prior research showing that luxury brands provide customers with a wide range of symbolic benefits (e.g., higher self-esteem) beyond their physical and utilitarian characteristics (Shavitt 1990). Since luxury brands are perceived to be exclusive (i.e., purchased by a few; Godey et al. 2013), powerful (Ajitha and Sivakumar 2017), and intimidating (Dion and Borraz 2017), they can provide a tool with which consumers can create social and psychological distance from others (e.g., Fiske et al. 2016). That is, because luxury brands allow consumers to become psychologically closer to those they aspire to emulate and further from those who they wish to avoid (Dubois and Ordabayeva 2015), we propose that the purchase of luxury brands may also increase consumer's sense of symbolic safety.

Activating a self-protection motive influences many aspects of consumer behavior, including seeking functional safety-oriented products (Griskevicius and Kenrick 2013). Extending this line of research, we posit that when a self-protection motive is salient, and consumers engage in brand decisions among alternatives that offer no functional safety attributes, they are more likely to prefer luxury over budget brands because luxury brands serve as compensatory sources of safety. Thus, we suggest that need for safety acts as the mediator between physical threats and luxury brand preference.

In the sections that follow, we provide a more detailed literature review, followed by results of four empirical studies—an Implicit Association Test (IAT) study, a main effect study, a mediator study, and a boundary condition study—and end with a discussion of our findings.

## 2 Theoretical development

### 2.1 Symbolic value of luxury brands

Although there are several attributes that separate luxury brands from their non-luxury counterparts—such as quality, hedonic value, and a low ratio of utility to price (Nueno and Quelch 1998; Patrick and Hagtvæd 2014)—several authors have indirectly suggested that luxury brands are likely imbued with feeling of safety and security (e.g., Amatulli and Guido 2011; Heine 2012). For instance, Amatulli and Guido's (2011) qualitative investigation of consumers' purchasing intentions for luxury goods found consumers associate feelings of security with luxury. While luxury brands offer superior performance for a higher price (Vigneron and Johnson 2004), researchers suggest that the real utility consumers derive from luxury is more symbolic than functional (Kwon et al. 2016). Luxury brands have symbolic value both to those who own them and those who observe their owners (e.g., Berthon et al. 2009). To the self, the symbolic value of luxury goods has been found to meet a whole host of needs, such as identity construction and uncertainty reduction (Dubois and Ordabayeva 2015), secular immortality (Hirschman 1990), and expressing self-worth (Shachar et al. 2011). To others, luxury goods have high symbolic value in signaling the wealth and status of their owners (e.g., Carr and Vignoles 2011).

The symbolic function of luxury brands operates at both the collective and the individual levels (Fionda and Moore 2009). At the collective level and across cultures, the major role of luxury goods is to distance the privileged from the poor. At an individual level, the exclusive nature of luxury brands (Hansen and Wänke 2011) serves to distinguish the self from low status others, helping avoid the costs of misidentification (Berger and Heath 2008). For instance, owning luxury brands such as an expensive car can act as signal of one's superior resources or ability (Nelissen and Meijers 2011), allowing individuals to signal status and their position in the social hierarchy to others (Berger and Ward 2010), while simultaneously making one feel more dominant, powerful, and competent (Rucker and Galinsky 2008). The exclusive nature of luxury provides value as a social indicator, serving to distance the luxury consumer from other consumers (e.g., Kapferer and Bastien 2009; Morley and McMahon 2011). These feelings of exclusivity allow luxury brand consumers to construct a psychological barrier between themselves and non-consumers, potentially translating to higher symbolic safety value associated with purchasing luxury brands.

## 2.2 Symbolic safety as compensatory consumption

According to the Fundamental Motives Framework (Kenrick et al. 2010), natural selection has shaped human behavior to respond adaptively to a variety of challenges faced in our evolutionary past, such as mate attraction, disease avoidance, and self-protection. In terms of self-protection, individuals have been shown to be sensitive to environmental and interpersonal features that provide cues to a physical safety threat because of the substantial survival costs associated with these threats (Kenrick et al. 2010). Indeed, encountering stimuli that pose a safety threat has been found to activate neural, physiological, and behavioral changes that function to mitigate the threat (e.g., Ohman and Mineka 2001). Because feeling threatened is unpleasant, people tend to respond to threats by trying to distance themselves from the source of the threat (e.g., Ehrlich and Becker 1972) or by engaging in behaviors aimed at reducing the psychological vulnerabilities that are highlighted in its wake (e.g., Mandel et al. 2017).

Prior research on compensatory consumption (Mandel et al. 2017) suggests that when individuals are faced with threats that cause deficiencies in psychological resources, they offset these deficiencies with products that offer the deficient resource in a symbolic form. For example, Rucker and Galinsky (2008) demonstrated that a lack of power can lead to increased purchase and consumption of products signaling social status. Similarly, Gao et al. (2009) showed that a lack of confidence in one's intelligence spurs increased consumption of intelligence-related products.

In this research, we focus on physical threats rather than psychological threats. Extant research examining how individuals react to physical threats exists almost exclusively in the domain of interpersonal behavior. For example, research finds that, after exposure to a physical threat, individuals are more likely to stereotype and engage in prejudicial behavior (Kenrick et al. 2010), help familiar, but not unfamiliar others (White et al. 2012), and avoid threatening targets (Young et al. 2015). Moving from interpersonal effects to the realm of products, we propose that exposure to a physical threat causes consumers to experience increased self-protection motivation, increasing their need for safety. Given that luxury brands are hypothesized to be associated with

greater symbolic safety, we propose that individuals will exhibit a greater preference for luxury brands when a need for safety is elicited.

Therefore, we hypothesize that:

- H1: Luxury brands are more closely associated with safety than are non-luxury brands.
- H2: When consumers perceive physical safety threat (vs. not), they show a heightened preference for luxury over non-luxury brands.
- H3: The increased preference for luxury brands after a physical safety threat is driven by a need for safety.

### 3 Study 1

We used an Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Greenwald et al. 1998; Greenwald et al. 2003) to examine whether luxury brands are perceived to be imbued with more feelings of safety than common brands. The IAT is an established tool for measuring the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., a type of person or object) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy) that might be associated with a person or object. In our IAT, the concepts were luxury and common brands, and the evaluations were words related to feeling safe and unsafe. We predicted that consumers would implicitly associate luxury brands with feelings of safety while associating common brands with feelings of unsafety.

#### 3.1 Materials and procedure

One hundred and ten ( $M_{\text{age}} = 31.87$  years,  $SD = 14.32$ ) MTurk participants were recruited in exchange for a small monetary payment. After finishing the IAT, participants were directed to provide demographic information such as age.

The IAT measures participants' implicit associations between concepts by measuring the amount of time it takes to categorize a specific concept (e.g., a type of person or object) to an assigned attribute (e.g., "good" or "bad"). When individuals have strong associations between a specific concept and attribute (e.g., "women" and "bad"), it takes them less time to correctly categorize them; when associations between a specific concept and attribute are weak, on the other hand, they take longer to categorize.

We chose well-known luxury and common brands for our target products. Our luxury brands included Starbucks, Polo, Dior, Rolex, and Gucci. Our common brands included McCafe, Affordable Beauty, Nautica, Timex, and Old Navy. For our attribute terms, we used words related to "feeling safe" and "feeling unsafe." The attributes related to feeling safe included "safe," "barriers," "secure," and "far from harm." The attributes related to feeling unsafe included "unsafe," "no barriers," "not protected," and "close to harm."

If, as hypothesized, consumers implicitly associate luxury brands with safety, we should find that they respond more quickly when luxury brands are paired with attributes related to feeling safe than when they are paired with attributes related to

feeling unsafe. We followed the standard experimental protocol for IAT studies (Greenwald et al. 2003),<sup>1</sup> using Inquisit 5 software.

### 3.2 Results and discussion

Reaction times were calculated using difference ( $d$ ) scores (Greenwald et al. 2003). These scores reflect the difference in response latency means between the blocks with safe-luxury pairings and unsafe-common pairings compared to the difference in response latency means with the reverse pairings. A positive  $d$  score indicates a stronger association between safe-luxury brands and unsafe-common brands than for the opposite pairings; a negative  $d$  score indicates a stronger association between unsafe-luxury brands and safe-common brands than for the opposite pairings. We followed the revised IAT scoring algorithm (Greenwald et al. 2003). A one-sample  $t$  test conducted on the  $d$  scores revealed a mean  $d$  score of .165,  $t(109) = 3.78$ ,  $p < .01$ , indicating support for H1, that is, a stronger association between luxury brands and safety than common brands and safety.<sup>2</sup>

## 4 Study 2

In Study 2, we sought to provide initial evidence for H2. We also sought to rule out already-established mechanistic drivers of luxury good preference in response to threat—mortality salience, desire for money, compensatory control, enhanced need for power, mood, and desire for higher quality.

### 4.1 Methods and procedure

One hundred and forty-four ( $M_{\text{age}} = 38.96$  years,  $SD = 13.03$ ) MTurk participants were recruited in exchange for a small monetary payment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (physical threat vs. control). In the physical threat condition, participants were asked to read a short scenario adopted from Griskevicius et al. (2006) that activates concerns with physical safety.<sup>3</sup> Participants in the control condition skipped the reading task and moved directly to the brand-choice task.

On completion of the scenario-reading task, participants completed a brand-choice task indicating their preference between a luxury and a common brand in two different product categories: coffee and grocery stores.<sup>4</sup> For each product category, participants were shown two advertisements with similar visual stimuli, but different positioning taglines, where one connoted a luxury and the other a common positioning. For example, the common coffee (brand A) was labeled “Good coffee, great value” while the luxury coffee (brand B) was labeled “Luxury you can taste.” Participants were then asked to indicate their preference between the products (7-point scale, 1: *Definitely A*; 7: *Definitely B*) for each product category.

<sup>1</sup> See Web Appendix 2 for detailed procedures.

<sup>2</sup> In Web Appendix 1, we used explicit measures to support the implicit IAT measures in Study 1 and found that individuals associate luxury brands with safety even when the product has no functional safety features.

<sup>3</sup> In Web Appendix 3, we show all the primes and measures used in this study and the next.

<sup>4</sup> In Web Appendix 4, we show pictures of the actual stimulus used in this study.



After the brand-preference ratings, participants provided ratings on perceived mortality salience (4-item scale [ $\alpha = .87$ ]; adapted from Huang and Wyer 2015), desire for money (7-item scale [ $\alpha = .79$ ], adapted from Lasaleta et al. 2014), perceived control (8-item scale [ $\alpha = .92$ ], adapted from [Lachman and Weaver 1998]), and perceived power state (8-item sense of power scale [ $\alpha = .82$ ], adapted from Anderson and Galinsky 2006). Ratings on each item of these four alternative mechanisms were made on 7-point scales (1: *Strongly Disagree*; 7: *Strongly Agree*). Participants also rated their current mood state using the 18-item ( $\alpha = .82$ ) Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS; Mayer and Gaschke 1988; 1: *Not at all*; 5: *Extremely*). Moreover, to measure the perceived quality of the products, participants were asked to rate which brand positioning they considered to communicate higher quality (7-point scale, 1: *Definitely A*; 7: *Definitely B*).

## 4.2 Results and discussion

As positioning preference for the two types of product categories was correlated ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ ), we created a single, mean-composite measure of participants' preference for luxury-branded positioning. This composite served as our dependent variable. An independent samples  $t$  test with physical threat as the independent variable and brand choice as the dependent variable revealed a significant main effect of the priming condition on participants' brand preferences,  $t(142) = 2.69$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $d = .45$ . Results demonstrated that after exposure to a physical threat, participants experienced a heightened preference for the luxury-branded products ( $M_{\text{threat}} = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.52$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ), providing direct support for H2.<sup>5</sup>

Next, we ran a series of  $t$  tests to examine whether our physical threat prime would influence potential alternative explanations such as participants' mortality salience, desire for money, perceived control, sense of power, mood, and perceptions of the target products' quality. Results revealed no condition-based differences in the desire for money ( $p = .65$ ), sense of power ( $p = .29$ ), or mood ( $p = .24$ ).

Although significant condition-based differences in mortality salience were found ( $t[142] = -2.82$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $d = .47$ ,  $M_{\text{threat}} = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 1.66$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ), participants in the physical threat (vs. control) condition reported lower mortality salience, which would argue against mortality salience as an explanation. To test whether our predicted result held while controlling for the effects of mortality salience, we ran a one-way ANCOVA with mortality salience as the control variable. The predicted result remained significant ( $F[141] = 7.05$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ ), and mortality salience did not significantly predict participants' product preferences ( $p = .84$ ).

Not surprisingly, perceived control was lower in the physical safety threat condition than in the control condition ( $t[142] = -2.30$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $d = .52$ ,  $M_{\text{threat}} = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 1.66$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ). An ANCOVA with perceived control as the covariate indicated that our main effect remained significant with inclusion of this covariate ( $p = .01$ ) and that differences in perceived control did not impact participants' product preferences ( $p = .51$ ). Although not traditionally significant, results further demonstrated that participants in the physical threat (vs. control) condition perceived luxury

<sup>5</sup> Separate  $t$  tests conducted on preference for grocery store and coffee individually revealed the same pattern (grocery store:  $t[142] = 2.14$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $d = .36$ ,  $M_{\text{threat}} = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 1.87$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ; coffee:  $t[142] = 2.14$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $d = .36$ ,  $M_{\text{threat}} = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.86$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ).



brands to communicate higher quality ( $t[142] = 1.78, p = .08, d = .30, M_{\text{threat}} = 4.70, SD = 1.67$  vs.  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.18, SD = 1.82$ ). An ANCOVA with perceived quality as the covariate indicated that perceived quality did predict increased preference for luxury brands across conditions ( $\beta = .36, t = 5.79, p < .001$ ), but that the main effect of condition still remained significant ( $p = .04$ ).<sup>6</sup>

## 5 Study 3

The purpose of Study 3 was threefold. First, we sought to conceptually replicate the effect found in Study 2 using real brands. Secondly, we sought to test H3 by examining whether the relationship between physical threat and preference for luxury brands was driven by an increased need for safety. Third, we wished to use a subtler manipulation of a self-protection prime.

### 5.1 Methods and procedure

Ninety-eight ( $M_{\text{age}} = 33.81$  years,  $SD = 12.02$ ) MTurk participants were recruited in exchange for a small monetary payment. We employed a new physical threat manipulation in this study.<sup>7</sup> As in Study 2, participants were randomly assigned to physical threat or control condition. After completing the priming procedure, participants engaged in a brand-choice task for the product categories of grocery stores and coffee. The brand-choice task was similar to Study 2, with one exception. Instead of luxury positioning, participants were shown images of actual relative luxury and common brands (grocery stores: Whole Foods vs. Walmart; coffee: Starbucks vs. McCafe) presented side-by-side. They then indicated their preferred brand within each category using a 7-point scale with luxury brands marked as brands A and common brands marked as brands B (1: *Definitely A*; 7: *Definitely B*).<sup>8</sup> Product-choice scores were reversed coded such that higher values reflect a greater preference for luxury brands.

Participants then completed a 3-item measure assessing their need for safety ( $\alpha = .89$ ; adapted from Neal et al. 2000). All items were responded to on 7-point scales (1: *Strongly Disagree*; 7: *Strongly Agree*). Finally, to rule out the alternative explanation that general beliefs about the danger in the local environment were driving the effect, participants completed the Belief in a Dangerous World scale ( $\alpha = .90$ ; Altemeyer 1988).

### 5.2 Results and discussion

Consistent with the results of Study 2, an independent samples  $t$  test revealed that participants in the threat condition exhibited a greater preference for the luxury brands

<sup>6</sup> Each of the alternative explanations was tested as mediator of the relationship between threat and purchase of a luxury brand, and none of the six emerged significant.

<sup>7</sup> In Web Appendix 5, we present pretests of the new prime. In Web Appendix 6, we replicate results of Study 1 with the new prime, and in Web Appendix 7, we replicate the effect in a real-life context.

<sup>8</sup> In Web Appendix 4, we show pictures of the stimuli used in this study.

than did those in the control condition ( $M_{threat} = 4.98$ ,  $SD = 1.33$  vs.  $M_{control} = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ;  $t[96] = 2.24$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $d = .47$ ).<sup>9</sup>

A mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of priming condition on participants' preference for the luxury brands via their need for safety ( $b = .20$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ; 95% CI [.04, .46]; 5000 bootstraps). Providing support for H3, this result indicates that the relationship between participants' increased preference for luxury brands in response to a perceived physical threat is mediated by an increased need for safety in response to feeling threatened.<sup>10</sup>

Participants' general beliefs about the dangerousness of their environment were not influenced by the physical threat manipulation ( $p = .17$ ) and did not mediate the relationship between physical threat and preference for luxury brands (95% CI [- .27, .02]; 5000 bootstraps).

## 6 Study 4

In Studies 1–3, we showed that individuals associate luxury brands with symbolic safety and, hence, have a heightened preference for luxury brands when need for safety is activated (e.g., after a physical threat prime). In this study, we sought to establish a boundary condition for the effect. In particular, we sought to examine whether consumers' desire for luxury products offering symbolic safety value is eliminated in contexts in which the symbolic safety value of a luxury product is overshadowed by the practical safety risk it poses. For example, using luxury brand earphones may provide symbolic safety value to a consumer at his or her home. However, using these same earphones on a night-time run in a dangerous neighborhood could be a practical safety risk. In such contexts, we predict that consumers should indicate no increase in preference for luxury brands after a threat.

### 6.1 Methods and procedure

Ninety-seven MTurk participants were recruited in exchange for a small monetary payment ( $M_{age} = 36.01$  years,  $SD = 12.43$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two priming conditions (physical threat vs. control condition) used in Study 3. After exposure to the prime, participants completed the brand-choice task. In this study, participants were asked to choose between two brands of earphones: Sony (positioned as the common brand) and Beats (positioned as the luxury brand). Participants were asked to indicate their preference between the brands in two usage contexts: (a) indoors at home/office and (b) during next run (1 = *Definitely Sony*, 7 = *Definitely Beats*). We predicted that for the "at home" usage context, participants in the physical safety threat condition will exhibit a greater preference for the luxury brand than those in the control condition. No such threat-induced preference for the luxury brand was expected for the

<sup>9</sup> Separate one-way ANOVAs conducted on preference for grocery store and coffee individually showed the same result (grocery store:  $F[1, 78] = 3.14$ ,  $p = .08$ ,  $M_{threat} = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 2.17$  vs.  $M_{control} = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ; coffee:  $F[1, 78] = 4.38$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $M_{threat} = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 2.16$  vs.  $M_{control} = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ).

<sup>10</sup> In Web Appendix 8, we externally vary the mediator using a moderator to provide further support for our mediator.

“next run” usage context, as the symbolic safety value of a luxury brand will be reduced in contexts where using a product can pose as a safety threat.

## 6.2 Results and discussion

We conducted a  $2 \times 2$  mixed factorial ANOVA with priming condition (physical threat vs. control) as the between-subject factor and usage contexts (at home vs. next run) as the within subject factor. The results revealed a significant main effect of the usage context ( $F[1, 95] = 7.83, p = .006$ ), where participants preferred the luxury brand when the usage context was at home (vs. next run) ( $M_{at\ home} = 4.22, SD = 1.78; M_{next\ run} = 3.79, SD = 2.01$ ). We found no main effect for the physical threat condition ( $p = .35$ ). Moreover, the interaction effect between the physical threat condition and the usage context was significant ( $F[1, 95] = 5.12, p = .03$ ). For the at home usage context, participants in the threat condition had a higher preference for luxury brands than those in the control condition ( $M_{threat} = 4.62, SD = 1.51; M_{control} = 3.91, SD = 1.92, F[1, 95] = 3.90, p = .05$ ). However, for the next run usage context, we found no difference in preference for the luxury brand between the two conditions ( $p = .89$ ).

## 7 General discussion

Are luxury brands perceived to be safer than similar common versions, regardless of whether they provide actual safety features? Drawing from prior theory and research on the symbolic value of luxury, we predicted that luxury brands would be associated with greater symbolic safety than their non-luxury counterparts. Further, we predicted that this association would influence consumers' preference for luxury when safety threats are made salient. Moreover, we hypothesized that this increased preference for luxury brands after a physical threat would be driven by increased need for safety elicited by said threat. Support for these hypotheses was found across four experiments.

First, we demonstrated that consumers implicitly associate luxury brands with the concepts of safety and security (Study 1). Because luxury goods hold symbolic safety for consumers, we predicted that a physical safety threat prime would increase preference for luxury brands. Consistent with this prediction, a physical threat prime increased preference for luxury—compared to common-positioned brands (Study 2) and actual luxury (compared to common) brands (Study 3). Moreover, the increased preference for luxury brands in response to the threat was found to be mediated by increased need for safety in this condition (Study 3). Lastly, we identified usage context as a boundary condition for the relationship between safety threats and preference for luxury products (Study 4). When using a luxury product that could increase one's physical safety risk (i.e., wearing earphones while running alone in a park), we found no increase in preference for the luxury brand. Together, these results demonstrate that luxury brands are associated with symbolic safety and that this association influences consumers' preferences for luxury brands when under a physical threat.

Although prior luxury-brand management literature has suggested that luxury brands are associated with safety (Amatulli and Guido 2011; Heine 2012; Keller 2009), this association has not been tested experimentally until now. While some luxury versions of products, such as cars and gated communities, actually provide

more functional safety features than their non-luxury counterparts (Consumer Reports 2017; Huang et al. 2014; Wilson-Doenges 2000), the current research found that luxury brands may provide symbolic safety, regardless of whether they include actual safety features. It is noteworthy that this effect was found with existing luxury brands as well as luxury-positioned brands (i.e., brands labeled as luxury). Further, throughout these experiments, alternative drivers of the relationship between a physical safety threat and preference for luxury brands, such as mood and belief in a dangerous world, were systematically ruled out. While the results of Study 2 suggest that the greater preference for luxury brands under conditions of physical threat is not likely driven by concerns related to mortality salience, one limitation is that mortality salience was assessed after the preference for luxury or common brands were collected. Accordingly, it is possible that expressing preference for luxury brands may have minimized the impact of mortality salience. Another limitation arises in our measure of mortality salience. That is, this measure assessed anxiety about death, not fear of immediate death, which is a construct more closely related to our manipulation. These limitations should be addressed in future research.

This research contributes to the luxury brand literature in several important ways. First, by providing evidence of the luxury-safety association and demonstrating how this association can influence product choice, we are able to add a unique, hitherto unstudied, explanatory perspective regarding why individuals purchase luxury brands. Second, we show that the link between luxury brands and consumer safety associations occurs at an implicit level, suggesting that this preference may operate outside of conscious awareness. Finally, we add to the compensatory consumption literature (Mandel et al. 2017) by showing that when need for safety is made salient, consumers choose luxury brands due to the symbolic safety value that they offer. As such, this research is posed to make a substantial contribution to the body of literature on consumer psychology, consumer behavior in response to threat, and theory on the symbolic value of luxury brands (Han et al. 2015; Kwon et al. 2016).

Our findings also offer advertising implications for marketing firms and managers. For example, luxury brands could be more positively received by consumers when embedded in advertisements eliciting safety threats. Correspondingly, luxury advertising could be more effective during shows containing cues of violence that might elicit safety threats, such as *Game of Thrones*.

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