

Individuals' materialism and brand rituals and traditions as drivers of luxury brand love on social media

Sonia Cruz-Ros¹ | Maria-Jose Miquel-Romero² | Rachel W. Y. Yee³ 

¹Business Management Department,
University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

²Marketing Department, University of
Valencia, Valencia, Spain

³School of Fashion and Textiles, The Hong
Kong Polytechnic University, Kowloon,
Hong Kong

Correspondence

Rachel W. Y. Yee, School of Fashion and
Textiles, The Hong Kong Polytechnic
University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
Email: rachel.yee@polyu.edu.hk

Abstract

Luxury brands have engaged in social media use, becoming exposed to a wider market but confronting the exclusivity and uniqueness linked to these brands. This paper explores the role of a personality trait and a brand characteristic in brand love by social media users in the luxury fashion industry. Specifically, the individual's materialism (measured by the relevance given to luxury premium prices and fashionability), the essence of the brand perceived through its rituals and traditions, and their influence on self-brand integration are considered. An empirical study is carried out on 432 social media users, and two different research methodologies are conducted: Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) and fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). Findings from both methodologies support the relevance of the variables analysed with regard to brand love. However, fsQCA offers a new perspective by identifying that for loving the brand, materialistic individuals also have to value the brand's rituals and traditions; and that personality traits can contribute to brand love, the resultant outcome of the relevance given to a luxury premium price, or to its aesthetic and fashionability, but not to both aspects at the same time; finally, self-brand integration is not necessary for brand love but is sufficient. From these results, managerial implications are suggested in order to favour brand love, as it exerts a strong influence on purchase intention.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the early years, employing social media was a concern for luxury companies because it was thought to have potential adverse effects on brand exclusivity, rarity and uniqueness (e.g., Heine & Berghaus, 2014; Okonkwo, 2009). However, recent decades have witnessed the effectiveness of social media in developing customer relationships, regardless of the brand. Through social media, luxury brands can pursue not only sales and loyalty (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016) but also customer affect (Mandler et al., 2020) and engagement (Liu et al., 2021), resulting in empathy towards the brand and the maintenance of its equity, even if the individual has no option to buy it (Clark &

Melancon, 2013; Creevey et al., 2022). This is of special interest to luxury brand managers, as many social media users have a young profile and cannot necessarily afford these brands. Although research on the use of online technologies by luxury brands has been prolific in recent years, the systematic literature review conducted by Creevey et al. (2022) highlights that much remains to be investigated.

The wider availability of and access to luxury brands via social media force these brands to find a balance between their interest in fostering relationships with social media users and in preserving the brand's core values (Creevey et al., 2022). Rituals and traditions promoted by the brand through social media enhance individual-brand relationships, as they positively influence brand value creation

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practices (Habibi et al., 2016). However, materialism is a key driver in shaping attitudes and behaviours towards luxury goods (Gil et al., 2012; Lewis & Moital, 2016), which could put aside the relevance of rituals and traditions as brand markers. The goal of this research is to analyse which of both aspects, the individual's materialism (as a personality trait) or the brand's core values identified by means of its rituals and traditions, plays a more important role in generating brand-consumer relationships, particularly brand love, also paying attention to their influence on self-brand integration. Brand love, defined as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name” (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81), is a more proper predictor of consumer behaviour than is brand satisfaction or brand liking (e.g., Batra et al., 2012; Nguyen & Feng, 2021), as it has a stronger affective focus and is embedded with a longer-term relationship with consumers (Nguyen & Feng, 2021). Research on 432 Chinese individuals visiting branded social media in the luxury fashion context is performed to achieve the goal. Two methodological approaches are employed: Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), a quite often used variance-based technique in this field of research, and fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), a methodology to understand cases that, resting on asymmetry and equifinality tenets (Pappas & Woodside, 2021), will offer a complementary view of the data.

This study contributes to the existing literature in two main areas. Firstly, it adds research on the effectiveness of customer-luxury brand relationships through social media. Machado et al. (2019) recently pointed out the scarcity of studies on brand love in the online context. Secondly, this research analyses both individual characteristics and brand variables in a single paper to explain the consumer-brand relationship. Ahuvia et al. (2021) highlighted that literature analysing brand love and materialism in combination is scarce. A third contribution comes from a methodological perspective by combining two different methodologies, whereby providing a richer understanding of the phenomena.

This paper is organised in the following. Literature on the antecedents and consequence (i.e., purchase intention) of brand love is reviewed in the next section, concluding with the presentation of the hypotheses. Subsequently, the methodology is described, and the findings are presented. Lastly, the theoretical and managerial implications as well as the limitations are discussed.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: LUXURY BRANDS AND BRAND LOVE

There are many different definitions as regards a luxury brand (Ko et al., 2019), but marketing scholars have generally advocated the consumer perspective (Li et al., 2012; Loureiro et al., 2020); noting that consumers perceive product value during consumption, consumption is interrelated with the nature of luxury products (Li et al., 2012). Luxury goods are often recognised as representing exclusivity, rarity and uniqueness in a consumer's mind; therefore, consumers perceive the brands of luxury fashion as symbolic markers of

their group members, helping them to demonstrate their social status during consumption (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000). This research adopts a broader perspective on consumption, including luxury brands' social media content, as social media offers an opportunity for brand-consumer interactions without the necessity to own the luxury good. Luxury brands “[...] offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional, [...] have a prestigious image within the market, [...] are worthy of commanding a premium price and [...] are capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer” (Ko et al., 2019, p. 406), characteristics that can be enhanced through social media. Specifically, luxury fashion brands are perceived to be fashionable and, of course, expensive, and they need to show themselves to be trendy, well designed and of superior quality if they want to engage customers via social media (Bazi et al., 2020). In this context of hedonic and symbolic benefits, it is easier for a “passionate emotional attachment”, that is, brand love, to emerge (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81).

Brand love can happen when consumers assign human personalities to the brand (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017). It favours a long-term relationship with the brand, having positive consequences for purchase and repurchase intentions (see Nguyen & Feng, 2021), loyalty (Khamitov et al., 2019), as well as brand performance and shareholder returns (Barker et al., 2015). Extant literature on brand love is focused on two main streams of research: the first explores the concept and its nature and dimensions (e.g., Albert et al., 2008; Batra et al., 2012; Sajtos et al., 2021), and the second attempts to identify its antecedents (e.g., Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Nguyen & Feng, 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2018), on which this research is focused. As Delgado-Ballester et al. (2017) suggest, to go deeper into the understanding of brand love, it is necessary to consider its relationship with characteristics other than consumption or personality traits, as this research does.

There are many theories in the field of psychology that help to explain the behaviour of individuals in relation to luxury products (see Donthu et al., 2021), most of which have a social nature basis (Ko et al., 2019). Three of them play a special role in this research: the theory of uniqueness, advocating that when people have an unpleasant feeling associated with similarity in their milieu, they will seek to avoid it by striving to acquire and maintain self-distinctiveness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977); the self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986), positing that people are motivated to involve and develop close relationships that they can expand their self through acquiring identities, perspectives and resources from the others in the relationships; in doing so, they can heighten the ability to attain their goals (Aron & Aron, 1986); and the theory of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which postulates that part of a person's self-concept comes from the meaning that the individual attributes to his/her social environment.

3 | HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 | Materialism and brand love

Luxury brand consumption is often associated with materialistic individuals, who assess their success and that of others by the quantity

and quality of their possessions, take individuals with a high socioeconomic status as referents, and believe that fashionable possessions favour admiration from others (Lewis & Moital, 2016). This involves constant social comparisons to differentiate themselves from others and maintain a distinct image (Das & Mukherjee, 2020), as the theory of uniqueness posits. In fact, the need for uniqueness is often considered to be a motivator of luxury product purchasing and consumption (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

Luxury brand followers may have different motivations to engage on social media, one of which is status signalling (Bazi et al., 2020). Being an expensive brand could favour brand love for those who are more materialistic and look for status, as luxury clothing products are affordable to only a limited consumer segment. Staying up to date with trends is also a motivational factor among luxury brand social media followers (Bazi et al., 2020). Fashionability plays an aesthetic role in clothing (Lewis & Moital, 2016) and, based on the extended self (Belk, 1988), it can be used to show who the individual is or would like to be. In fact, luxury brand social media can make users feel like fashion connoisseurs, enhancing their identity and their admiration from others. The platforms involve individuals in a constant social comparison that determines and shapes their social status and uniqueness (Mandler et al., 2020). Therefore, we posit:

H1a. The more materialistic the individual regarding the role of the expensive clothing in an individual's life, the higher the individual's brand love.

H1b. The more materialistic the individual regarding the role of fashionable clothing in an individual's life, the higher the individual's brand love.

3.2 | Materialism and self-brand integration

As the self-expansion theory supports, individuals tend to expand their sense of self, reinforcing their identity and feeling more satisfied with their lives (Aron & Aron, 1986). This can happen through close relationships that can come from different potential sources, and not solely from individuals or the possession of physical objects; in fact, luxury brands can serve as resources, in the form of symbols, used to express consumers' identities (Belk, 1988). Therefore, consumers may consider luxury brands or the social media content around them to be resources for expanding their self-concept, as well as for facilitating the attainment of consumers' goals of showing their identity. In doing so, the luxury brand is integrated into the present and expected self-identities of a consumer, whereby producing self-brand integration (Batra et al., 2012).

Studies suggest that materialism is considered to be a predictor of the degree to which the brand is integrated into self-concept of consumers (e.g., Rindfleisch et al., 2009). Accordingly, the use of luxury brand social media content could be considered a more relevant resource by those individuals who are more materialistic. This type of consumer would integrate the brand in general and its attributes in

particular, that is, premium price and fashionability, into his/her identity and, furthermore, would make use of such attributes to reach their desired self-identity. Therefore, we hypothesise:

H2a. The more materialistic the individual regarding the role of the expensive clothing in an individual's life, the higher the individual's self-brand integration.

H2b. The more materialistic the individual regarding the role of fashionable clothing in an individual's life, the higher the individual's self-brand integration.

3.3 | Rituals and traditions and self-brand integration

Brands can be perceived as stories that carry emotions as meanings (Twitchell, 2004). This is especially relevant in the case of iconic, resonant brands, which create identity myths that can be persuasive while passing down among consumers (Holt, 2004; Holt & Cameron, 2010). Luxury brands are often built on a strong history, heritage and tradition (Kelly, 2019), sometimes rooted in their place of origin (Heine & Atwal, 2022). Communicated to the customer, it creates a compelling narrative for the brand (Holt, 2003). Such storytelling will promote a superior cultural authenticity perception (Beverland, 2009) that favours the individual's as well as the brand community's interest towards the brand (Brown et al., 2003). In fact, shared rituals and traditions are an integral part of any social-media-based brand community (Habibi et al., 2016). Based on the theory of social identity, Hoang et al. (2020) prove that shared rituals and traditions affect brand awareness and brand loyalty, as they favour the individual's willingness to participate in value-creating behaviours within the community. The superior cultural authenticity perception can nurture the luxury brand's symbolic meaning, whereby helping to signal the individual's status, prestige and uniqueness. According to Gong et al. (2022), the more symbolic the meaning that individuals perceive from the brand, the stronger their self-brand connection. Therefore, we posit:

H3a. The higher the perception of rituals and traditions linked to the luxury brand, the higher the individual's self-brand integration.

3.4 | Rituals and traditions and brand love

Refer to Alexander and Doherty (2023, p. 134), "[...] the unique value of an authentic brand is derived from the rituals that surround it". Thus, authenticity results from and is embedded in rituals and traditions. The impact of a brand's authenticity on its love has been supported not only for luxury brands (e.g., Manthiou et al., 2018) but also for non-luxury ones (e.g., Safeer et al., 2021). As Batra et al. (2012, p. 14) expose, "endowing the brand with a sense of authenticity from

its origin and history [...] can make the buyer feel a sense of kinship about the brand, inducing positive affect towards the brand and favoring brand love". On the basis of the aforementioned reasoning, we hypothesize:

H3b. The higher the perception of rituals and traditions linked to the luxury brand, the higher the individual's brand love.

3.5 | Self-brand integration and brand love

Literature on luxury brands supports the relevance of self-brand integration in an individual's love for brand (e.g., Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2018). Extant work on the predictors of brand love supports that brand love improves when it fits with the personality of a consumer, as it aids to express the individual's self-concept (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Rauschnabel et al., 2015). Specifically, Rodrigues et al. (2018, p. 190) argue that "consumers' identification with the brand and congruence with their self will influence how they perceive the value of luxury brands, leading to establishing a relationship with the brand which is as strong as brand love". According to Ahuvia (1993), when a brand gets an individual to identify with it and feels an actual and expected high degree of self-brand integration, the consumer feels brand love. Therefore, we propose:

H4. The higher the individual's self-brand integration, the higher the individual's brand love.

3.6 | Brand love and purchase intention

Consistent with the literature, brand love results in the latter feeling positive emotions to the brand, passion for the brand, brand attachment, and proclamations of brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). It is well recognized that satisfaction with the brand is a different construct from brand love. Moreover, Fournier and Mick (1999) point out

that brand love is a mode of satisfaction. Thus, we can consider that consumers who love the brand are fully satisfied with it and have positive evaluations of the brand that will influence their purchase intention. In the context of social media, research supports that satisfaction is one of the factors affecting consumers' repurchase intention (Basak & Calisir, 2015; Chang & Zhu, 2012; Mouakket, 2015). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H5. Luxury brand love affects purchase intention positively.

All of the relationships proposed are summarised in Figure 1.

4 | METHODOLOGY

We conducted a survey among consumers over 18 years of age who used social media at least once per week (ensuring that the respondents were frequent users of social media) and had visited the social media of a luxury brand at least once in the previous month; to ensure that the individuals understood what we were referring to when mentioning luxury brands, they were told some examples, such as Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta, Chanel, Gucci, Hermès, or Louis Vuitton.

A professional survey company helped us to recruit the respondents in October 2021, using quota sampling based on gender and age. Data were collected by means of a structured online questionnaire in China, obtaining 432 valid questionnaires. We consider it to be a relevant market for our study because China is the third-largest luxury goods market worldwide; it occupied 17% of the market share of global luxury goods sales in 2022 (Statista, 2022a). Furthermore, the number of social media users in China is the largest, accounting for 1.03 billion in 2022, and it is predicted to increase by a further 18.6% by 2027 (Statista, 2022b).

The questionnaire was organised into three parts: the first one presented the research topic and ensured an adequate profile of respondents. The second part identified the demographic profile of the respondents. Finally, the relevant constructs were measured; all of the scales were one-dimensional multi-item seven-point Likert

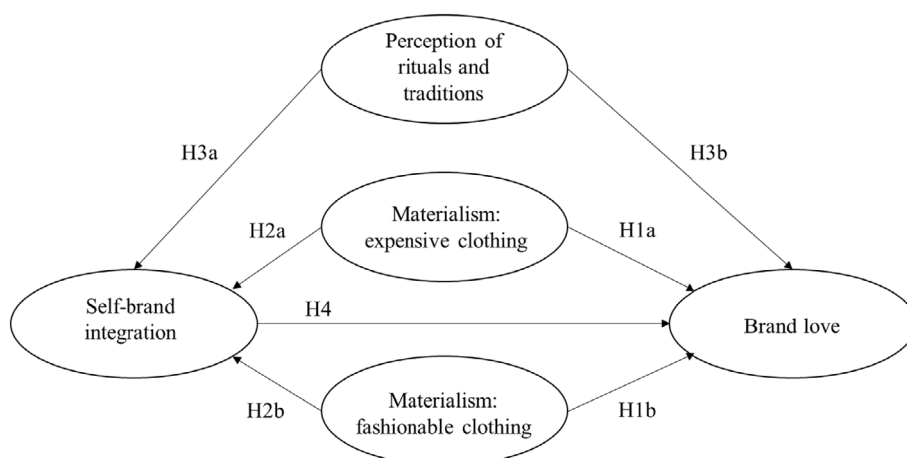


FIGURE 1 Proposed theoretical model.

scales (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) extracted, based on the literature and adapted where necessary (Table A1).

The profile of the sample was as follows: 49.3% males, an average age of 40.68 years (with 50% of the sample below 40 years of age), and 53.71% with an income level between \$15,000 and \$29,999.

The hypotheses were tested using PLS-SEM method firstly. Afterwards, fsQCA method was carried out to complement and enrich this research.

5 | RESULTS

5.1 | Results from PLS-SEM

5.1.1 | Psychometric properties of the measurement model

Before testing the hypotheses, confirmatory factor analysis with PLS was performed. To ensure the psychometric properties, those items with standardised loadings below 0.7 were removed (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), specifically two items from the brand love scale, one item from materialism_expensive clothing, one item from materialism_fashionable clothing, two items from rituals and traditions, and one item from self-brand integration. Table A2 displays that all of the final scales met the criteria for reliability and validity.

5.1.2 | Hypothesis testing

The theoretical model was examined, in terms of the magnitude and significance of the path coefficients (β), the proportion of variance explained (R^2) by the dependent variables, and their predictive relevance (Q^2). Table 1 displays the R^2 values that indicate that the variables analysed explained a moderate proportion of purchase intention and self-brand integration, being around 0.5, but a high proportion of brand love ($R^2 = 0.707$). Additionally, it is observed that all values in the Stone-

Geisser (Q^2) test being above 0, confirming that the predictive quality of the model is adequate. Finally, following the procedure of bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples suggested by (Hair et al., 2011), we analysed the significance of the path coefficients. As seen in Table 1, six of the eight proposed hypotheses are supported by referring to the t -values, that show the significance of the proposed relationships.

Specifically, the results suggest that materialism, neither through the role of expensive clothing nor through that of fashionable clothing, influences brand love (H1a and H1b, respectively). However, this individual trait plays a role in self-brand integration, exerting a positive influence. Accordingly, although the influence is not too strong, those individuals believing that wearing expensive clothes is a sign of success and favours admiration perceive better integration between the concept of themselves and that of the luxury fashion brand (H2a). The same positive influence on self-brand integration occurs among those perceiving that wearing fashionable clothes is positive for the individual's life (H2b). As Table 1 shows, both facets of materialism have the same level of influence. Shared rituals and traditions on the social media of luxury fashion brands not only favour the integration among a consumer's self-concept and a brand (H3a) but also positively influence the brand love of the consumer (H3b). Finally, self-brand integration strongly and positively influences luxury brand love (H4), which results in a strong purchase intention (H5).

5.2 | Results from fsQCA

Through fsQCA, each case is reported as a combination of an outcome (the result of interest) and causal conditions (those variables leading to the outcome) (Ragin, 2006). In this research, two fsQCAs were performed, as two outcomes were considered (self-brand integration and brand love, as both were dependent variables in our previous proposed model—Figure 1). Our goal when applying fsQCA was to identify which combinations of causal conditions (i.e., individual materialistic traits, perceived brand rituals and traditions, and self-brand integration) lead to brand love.

TABLE 1 Structural equation modelling: Causal relations analysis.

Structural relations		β	t-value (bootstrap)	Test
H1a	M_Expensive clothing \rightarrow Brand love	-.004	.087	Rejected
H1b	M_Fashionable clothing \rightarrow Brand love	-.011	.242	Rejected
H2a	M_Expensive clothing \rightarrow Self-brand integration	.168	2.671*	Accepted
H2b	M_Fashionable clothing \rightarrow Self-brand integration	.164	2.829*	Accepted
H3a	P. Rituals & traditions \rightarrow Self-brand integration	.555	12.232**	Accepted
H3b	P. Rituals & traditions \rightarrow Brand love	.279	6.991**	Accepted
H4	Self-brand integration \rightarrow Brand love	.629	15.182**	Accepted
H5	Brand love \rightarrow Purchase intention	.729	28.403**	Accepted

Brand love $R^2 = 0.707$; $Q^2 = 0.346$

Purchase intention $R^2 = 0.532$; $Q^2 = 0.309$

Self-brand integration $R^2 = 0.571$; $Q^2 = 0.271$

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$ (based on a one-tailed Student's t (4999) distribution).

5.2.1 | Calibration

When using metric scales, calibration is the first step in performing fsQCA, as it transforms raw data into fuzzy sets from 0 (fully excluding from the set) to 1 (fully within the set) (Ragin, 2008). As fsQCA works only with single-item scales, it was necessary to calculate the average of all the multi-item scales. Three anchors were considered for data calibration (Table 2).

5.2.2 | Necessary and sufficient conditions

We first analysed if there was any necessary condition for the outcomes to occur, that is, if any of the causal conditions analysed must be present for individuals perceiving self-brand integration (outcome 1) or individuals loving the brand (outcome 2). The results did not reveal any necessary condition for either outcome, as none of the causal conditions achieved the minimum consistency and coverage thresholds required.

Sufficient condition analysis was then performed for both outcomes. Intermediate solutions appear in Table 3. Focusing on the outcome of self-brand integration, we can conclude that although perceived brand rituals and traditions was not a necessary condition, it appears in both causal configurations, which means that for some

individuals perceiving self-brand integration, brand rituals and traditions combines with the materialistic trait of fashionable clothing (solution 1a), whereas for other individuals it combines with the materialistic trait of expensive clothing (solution 2a). These two solutions explain 72% of the cases of individuals perceiving self-brand integration. For this outcome, all causal conditions are core conditions, as the intermediate solutions match with the parsimonious ones.

When paying attention to the outcome of brand love, we can observe that the same causal configurations linked to the outcome of self-brand integration appear (solutions 2b and 3b). However, individuals can also love the brand when they only perceive self-brand integration (solution 2a). The three solutions now explain 89% of the cases of brand love, with solution 1b being the one with higher coverage. Also concerning this outcome, all of the causal conditions are core conditions.

6 | DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Brand love is an emotional attachment that luxury brands should encourage due to its influence on purchase intention, as previous literature (e.g., Khamitov et al., 2019; Nguyen & Feng, 2021) and this research support. It can be nurtured through social media, but that

TABLE 2 Thresholds used for calibration.

	Full membership (90th percentile)	Crossover point (50th percentile)	Full non-membership (10th percentile)
Brand love	6.8	6.00	5.00
Self-brand integration	6.5	5.83	4.83
Perception of rituals and traditions	6.5	5.75	4.85
Materialism: Expensive clothing	6.5	5.75	4.50
Materialism: Fashionable clothing	6.5	5.75	4.25

TABLE 3 Results from sufficient condition analysis.

Causal conditions	Outcome: Self-brand integration		Outcome: Brand love		
	Solutions		Solutions		
	1a	2a	1b	2b	3b
Perception of rituals and traditions	●	●		●	●
Materialism: Expensive clothing		●		●	
Materialism: Fashionable clothing	●				●
Self-brand integration			●		
Raw coverage	0.69	0.67	0.82	0.65	0.67
Unique coverage	0.05	0.03	0.19	0.01	0.01
Consistency	0.87	0.87	0.85	0.87	0.87
Overall solution coverage (frequency cut-off)		0.72 (16)		0.89 (6)	
Overall solution consistency (consistency cut-off)		0.85 (0.86)		0.89 (0.81)	

gives to these brands wider access to the market, which confronts the exclusivity and rarity associated with them. Through social media, luxury brands are available to everyone, even to social media users who perhaps cannot afford them. This research analyses which aspects, the individual's materialism (as a personality trait that research associates with luxury attitudes and behaviours) or the brand's core values identified by means of its rituals and traditions shared through social media, play a more important role in brand love.

Results from PLS-SEM and fsQCA recommend that both, the consumer's materialism and the brand rituals and traditions, are relevant in brand love by social media users. Although a first approach to data from PLS-SEM suggests that only rituals and traditions directly impact brand love, a deeper case analysis through fsQCA shows that materialism as a personality trait is also relevant. More precisely, individuals with this personality trait also have to perceive and value the rituals and traditions rooted in the brand to love it. These results reinforce Delgado-Ballester et al.'s (2017) proposal to consider variables other than consumption or personality traits in explaining love for the brand. According to our results, neither being a materialistic individual nor the relevance of associated rituals and traditions is enough, *per se*, for luxury brand love. Such results are consistent with those by Ahuvia et al. (2021), who consider brand love to be an expression of materialism, and conclude that the more materialistic the individual, the more likely they are to love brands; however, our results go further by suggesting that this personality trait is not enough.

Both methodologies, PLS-SEM and fsQCA, identify the relevant role that materialistic individual attribute in the characteristics of luxury fashion goods, that is, their premium price and their aesthetic and trendiness. But fsQCA highlights that each characteristic is relevant to different materialistic individuals: while some are more interested in the premium price, others pay more attention to the aesthetic. This result is novel, since this trait had been previously treated globally (e.g., Habibi et al., 2016) without considering that it could lead to valuing the characteristics of luxury goods differently according to the individual.

The interaction between the relevance that individuals place on one specific characteristic of luxury brands (premium price or aesthetic) and their rituals and traditions is important not only for loving the brand, as mentioned previously, but also for self-brand integration. Research conducted by Gong et al. (2022) relates a higher brand symbolic meaning with a higher self-brand connection; prior research also states that self-brand integration can come from brands that enrich individuals' life and make them experience a feeling of desire, as could be the case with luxury brands representing one's economic status or fashion signalling (e.g., Batra et al., 2012). But our findings suggest that each of those aspects (rituals and traditions and materialism) separately is not enough for self-brand integration; on the contrary, they have to combine.

Results from PLS-SEM also show that self-brand integration is a main driver for loving the brand. But results from fsQCA suggest that self-brand integration is not necessary for brand love: it is sufficient for loving the brand, but only for some individuals (the majority), not for all. For most individuals, "love involves an integration of the

individual's self and the love object so that the love object becomes an important part of the lover's identity", as advocated by Delgado-Ballester et al. (2017, p. 91). However, for others loving the brand, self-brand integration plays no role; they are merely social media users who value luxury brand rituals and traditions and have a materialistic side that places much value on the fact of being an expensive brand or being a fashion brand. This aligns with Batra et al.'s (2012) suggestions regarding how brand love can be increased by developing a sense of authenticity, built on the brand's origin and history, which (properly promoted) can develop a compelling narrative (Holt, 2003) that favours its symbolic meaning, a key aspect of luxury brands (Neave et al., 2020). But again, that is not enough; individuals also have to value what the luxury brand represents from a materialistic perspective.

7 | MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research can contribute to the management of luxury brands in the fashion sector, and brand love should be in their crosshairs. Managers have to be aware that social media is accessible to anyone, and some social media users perhaps will never be real customers of their brands. There is extensive evidence that brand love favours purchase intention. But even in the case that users cannot afford the brand, managers should encourage their love for it, as they also help to increase luxury brand equity (Creevey et al., 2022). To increase brand love among social media users, managers should pay attention to the rituals and traditions rooted in their brand, as well as how the brand reflects the personalities of consumers and their self-identity, in such a way that it helps consumers to identify with it. Managers should make social media users aware of the rituals and traditions linked to the brand by communicating and celebrating the brand's history, rituals and traditions. Interviews with relevant actors associated with the history of the brand, pictures or videos detailing the specific manufacturing procedure or use of the brand, or whatever other rituals and traditions are linked to the brand should be considered in order to offer great symbolic value to individuals and, consequently, generate strong positive emotions in relation to the brand. Undertaking these types of actions more or less frequently will also help to validate and reinforce the symbolic value of the luxury brand proposal, whereby favouring its authenticity. Moreover, luxury brand managers should encourage these rituals and traditions to be shared among social media users as a way of reinforcing them, also favouring the perception of a shared identity. Additionally, this would also increase self-brand integration.

This proposal should be part of a holistic strategic action aimed at increasing the love for the brand, in which self-brand integration also plays a relevant role, although for all. Considering that the analysed features related to materialism, that is, the value of wearing expensive goods and that of being fashionable clothes, also play a role in loving the brand and in self-brand integration, managers should not forget them. They should incorporate the fashionable and premium-price perspective of luxury brands into their communication actions for

reinforcing their awareness in the minds of social media users. As both characteristics are not equally relevant for all social media users, each characteristic should be promoted with different actions. For example, social media posts on global fashion trends could encourage that perception of luxury brand fashionability. Considering that both characteristics are also relevant for the self-perception of some users, luxury brand companies should invest in knowing the personality characteristics of their consumers, as well as their ideal self-concept. Showing via their social media the appearance of people who seem to be successful in their lives and are wearing expensive and fashionable clothes can lead consumers to integrate themselves with the luxury brand.

Based on our results, social media seems to be an adequate managerial tool for fostering brand love. However, research undertaken by Jiao et al. (2018) on the value of social media should be taken into consideration, as that value is different in Chinese and Western cultures; the former, with a collectivist culture, focuses more on its social value, while the latter (with an individualist culture) emphasises its content value. Accordingly, although the general managerial implications could be relevant for whichever luxury brand in whichever country, the role that social media could play in favouring brand love could be different. Social media could play a more important role in emphasising brand rituals and traditions in Western cultures, whereas in the case of collectivist cultures, luxury brand managers could take advantage of social media by using it for promoting the luxury symbolic meaning, that is, premium price and fashionability.

8 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has limitations. Firstly, this study focuses only on the domain of social media, but consumer–brand interactions occur via many different and specific online and offline channels, conditioning the type of relationship that the consumer can establish with the brand. Thus, it could be interesting in future research to consider other specific channels, as well as other sectors and other product categories, taking into account that the antecedents and effects of brand love depend on the brand (hedonic brands vs. utilitarian brands), the product category (specifically brand relevance in the product category), and market-related factors (e.g., market competition), as literature on this topic suggests. Secondly, this research is carried out in China, which is characterised by a collectivist culture. As social media is widely used nowadays and there are many global luxury brands, the findings of this study can be generalised to many countries, especially those with a collectivist culture, such as Japan, Singapore or Thailand. However, future research could analyse the proposed model in other countries with different culture-specific variables, other than collectivism, to give more support to our results. For instance, it would be interesting to analyse the model in non-collectivist countries, since Hofstede (1980) points out that in individualist countries, consumers place much more importance on the “individual” than on the group, which recommends that there is a different role for the “need for uniqueness”. On the other hand, Bajac et al. (2018) show that consumer–brand congruence is more imperative in Latin cultures than

in the ones of North American. Thus, comparative studies could contribute to explaining the antecedents of brand love as well as factors affecting purchase intention, taking into account the cultural context on social media. Finally, this study focuses on investigating the factors leading to brand love and purchase intention in the setting of social media. Given that the shopping experience can affect subsequent consumer purchase intention, further research could examine how the proposed relationships could potentially be moderated by any previous purchase experience with luxury brands.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest for this research.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

ORCID

Rachel W. Y. Yee  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9698-5681>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Sonia Cruz-Ros is an Associate Professor in the Business Management Department at the University of Valencia, Spain. Her research interests include strategic management, entrepreneurship, quality management and social media. She has co-authored numerous book chapters and papers published in indexed journals on her topics of interest. She has been a visiting scholar at the University of Glasgow, Scotland (UK), the Autonomous University

of the State of Hidalgo (UAEH), Mexico, and Beijing International Studies University (BISU), China.

Maria-Jose Miquel-Romero is a Full Professor in the Marketing Department at the University of Valencia, Spain. She has worked as the Academic Director of the master's degree in Marketing and Market Research in the School of Business Studies at the University of Valencia and has performed the role of coordinator of the master's degree in Marketing and Communication, also at the University of Valencia. Her research interests include advertising, private labels, omnichannel retailing, and consumer behavior. She has co-authored numerous book chapters and papers published in indexed journals on her topics of interest. She has been a visiting scholar at the University of Glasgow, Scotland (UK), the University of Salford, Manchester (UK), and HEC Montréal, Montreal (Canada).

Rachel W. Y. Yee is an Associate Professor, School of Fashion and Textiles, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She received a Ph.D. from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and a MPhil. from The University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include behavioral operations management, innovation management, and service management.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE A1 Measurement scales (sources from literature)*Self-brand integration*

(Albert et al., 2008; Batra et al., 2012; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010)

- This brand reflects my personality
- This brand manifests my social status
- This is important for me to be one of the users of this brand
- This brand makes me feel like my “ideal self”
- This brand makes me feel good
- This brand reflects my “ideal self-identity”

Materialism: Expensive clothing

(Lewis & Moital, 2016)

- Expensive brand clothes say a lot about how successful that person is in life
- I admire people who own expensive brand clothes
- I pay much attention to whether other people own expensive brand clothes
- I regard the amount of expensive brand clothing that a person owns as a sign of success

Materialism: Fashionable clothing

(Lewis & Moital, 2016)

- Fashionable clothes say a lot about how successful that person is in life
- I admire people who own fashionable clothing
- I pay much attention to whether other people own fashionable clothes
- I regard the amount of fashionable clothing that a person owns as a sign of success

Perception of rituals and traditions

(Habibi et al., 2016)

- I think that these specific traditions contribute to the culture of this brand
- It is important for this brand how advertisements portray the brand
- Members involved on this social media page appreciate the history and culture of this brand
- If members involved on this social media page have interesting stories about and experiences with this brand they share them to enhance the traditions and culture of this community

Brand love

(Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006)

- This is a wonderful brand
- This brand makes me very happy
- I love this brand
- This brand is a pure delight
- I am very attached to this brand

Purchase intention

(Aditya, 2019)

- I would buy this brand rather than any other brands available
- I am willing to recommend that others buy this brand
- I intend to purchase this brand in the future

TABLE A2 Psychometric properties.

Reliability and convergent validity				Discriminant validity					
AVE	CR	Cronbach α		BL	MEC	MFC	PI	RT	SBI
0.525	0.847	0.774	BL	0.724					
0.622	0.868	0.798	MEC	0.460	0.789				
0.648	0.880	0.819	MFC	0.449	0.709	0.805			
0.615	0.827	0.700	PI	0.720	0.485	0.451	0.784		
0.543	0.826	0.719	RT	0.715	0.452	0.437	0.644	0.737	
0.512	0.863	0.809	SBI	0.717	0.551	0.542	0.762	0.703	0.716

Note: Correlations between constructs appear below the diagonal; the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) appears on the diagonal.

Abbreviations: AVE, average variance extracted; BL, brand love; CR, composite reliability; MEC, materialism_expensive clothing; MFC, materialism_fashionable clothing; PI, purchase intention; RT, perception of rituals and traditions; SBI, self-brand integration.