Me, myself and I

How luxury fashion brands have become consumers' extended selves

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Abstract – English

This thesis aims to explore the role of luxury fashion brands in creating and developing the consumer's self-concept. Previous studies have investigated how individuals make use of consumption behavior to build their self-concept adopting, however, a one-dimensional view. Therefore, this research contributes to the self-concept's literature by embracing a multidimensional lens of the consumer' self.

We built an integrated conceptual framework, inspired by the two main conceptual models of the 'self' and carried out a qualitative research, conducting fifteen in-depth interviews with consumers of luxury fashion brands.

The findings show that individuals have a solid awareness of their 'self', consistent with the way they perceive themselves through consumer practices. We find the needs for self-consistency, self-esteem, social consistency and social approval as the self-concept motives for luxury consumption, albeit with different magnitudes. Consumers possess a 'self-centered' view of luxury, once individualistic factors (e.g. hedonic experiences) are more likely to determine purchase intention, compared to collectivistic factors (e.g. social eagerness).

Regarding the theoretical contribution, this research concludes that brand personality is more linked to the 'actual' self-dimensions of individuals, whereas brand image with the 'ideal' ones.

Title: Me, myself and I - How luxury fashion brands have become consumers' extended selves

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Keywords: self-concept; self-congruity; luxury fashion brands; brand image; brand personality

Abstract – Portuguese

A presente tese visa explorar o papel das marcas de moda de luxo na criação e desenvolvimento do auto-conceito do consumidor. Estudos anteriores investigaram como os indivíduos fazem uso do comportamento de consumo para construir o seu próprio auto-conceito, adotando, no entanto, uma visão unidimensional. Dessa forma, esta pesquisa contribui para a literatura existente do auto-conceito, ao administrar uma perspetiva multidimensional do 'eu'.

Desenhámos um referencial teórico inspirado nos dois principais modelos conceptuais do 'eu' e conduzimos uma pesquisa qualitativa, realizando quinze entrevistas em profundidade a consumidores de marcas de moda de luxo.

Os resultados mostram que os indivíduos possuem uma sólida consciência de si mesmos, consistente com a forma como se revêem por meio das suas práticas de consumo. Descobrimos as necessidades de auto-consistência, auto-estima, consistência social e aprovação social como os motivos do auto-conceito para o consumo de moda de luxo, embora em diferentes magnitudes. Os consumidores revelaram uma visão do luxo centrada no 'eu', uma vez que fatores individualistas (por exemplo, sensações hedónicas) têm maior probabilidade de determinar a intenção de compra, comparados com fatores coletivistas (por exemplo, status social).

No que respeita à contribuição teórica, este estudo concluiu que a imagem da marca está mais ligada às dimensões do 'eu ideal' dos indivíduos, enquanto a personalidade da marca com as dimensões do 'eu real'.

Título: 'Me, myself and I' – Como as marcas de moda de luxo se tornaram extensões do 'eu' dos consumidores

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Palavras-chave: auto-conceito; auto-congruência; marcas de moda de luxo; imagem da marca; personalidade da marca

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LV – Louis Vuitton

CK – Calvin Klein

1. Introduction

"The key to style is learning who you are, which takes years. There's no how-to road map to style. It's about self-expression"

Iris Apfel - Fashion design icon

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In 2019, the value of the personal luxury goods market worldwide totaled 281 billion euros in the global industry (Statista, 2019). Even ten years earlier, when luxury faced its first recession in six years with a 7% decline in overall sales, the big names of the luxury fashion industry were unaffected by this economic slowdown (Bain & Co., 2009). Interestingly, demand for prominent brands like Dior, Hermès or Cartier remained stable or even increased during this recession period (Han et al., 2010). As such, analysts justify this outcome based on the growing claim for luxury brands in emerging markets and the crisis-proof demand in Western countries.

However, research on luxury brands represents somewhat of a paradox: *"They are one of the most profitable and fastest-growing brand segments, yet at the same time they are poorly understood"* (Berthon et al., 2009, p. 45). This is due to the variability of approaches, definitions and numbers of dimensions in an attempt to define luxury brands, thus creating different understandings in the academic literature (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Berthon et al., 2009). Therefore, Berthon et al., (2009) suggested that, rather than conceptualizing luxury brands based on their characteristics, it is more advantageous to apprehend their role, as it spontaneously provides a practical understanding of their characteristics.

Here, the symbolic nature of luxury fashion brands comes into play, involving a storytelling, a self-expressive meaning and even the "luxury dream" – for the value that a luxury brand signals to others, but also to the owner (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). As such, a Chanel coat can be described as a symbol of status and wealth's possession to others, at the same time as a hedonic experience strongly congruent with the consumer's self-concept.

Indeed, previous research has highlighted the importance of self-concept knowledge to understand how individuals participate in consumption behavior (e.g. Giovannini et al., 2015; Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., 2012; Escalas & Bettman 2005). In fact, when individuals are building their identity, they opt for specific brands that, in turn, are consistent with their perceived 'self'.

This notion of "match" between the brand image and the consumer's self-concept is labeled as congruity in the academic literature (Sirgy, 2018; Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., 2012).

However, when related to luxury brand consumption, the researchers seem to have approached the concept of the 'self' as a one-dimensional construct and, therefore, do not provide an in-depth analysis of how the consumption of luxury brands reveals the individuals' self-concept to the fullest extent (Sirgy, 2018). In short, the role of luxury fashion brands in developing the individual's self-concept remains scarcely understood in literature, once a multidimensional lens of the 'self' has been neglected over the years, which embodies the main strength of this thesis.

To fulfill this lack, this thesis is a contribution to the self-concept literature by considering the four disparate dimensions of the 'self' with regard to the luxury fashion brands' consumption, as advanced by Sirgy (2018) and Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., (2012). As such, we will answer the following research question:

"*How does the consumption of luxury fashion brands disclose individuals' multidimensional self-concept*?"

The answer to this research question is crucial for managers and marketers of luxury fashion brands in order to create brand images consistent with the self-concept of their target consumers, thus ensuring that they incorporate brands into their self-concept (Miller & Mills, 2012). Moreover, the value-expressive advertising should accentuate the brand's ability to enhance - rather than to just maintain - the facets of target consumers' self-concepts (Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., 2012).

In addition, to answer this research question, we built a theoretical framework, based on the two conceptual models of the 'self' – self-concept and self-congruity. We adopted a qualitative approach and conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews with consumers of luxury fashion brands.

Lastly, this thesis is structured in six chapters. Chapter one constitutes the present introduction. Chapter two portrays a review of the literature on the diverse conceptualizations of luxury brands, highlighting their peculiar symbolic nature in the context of luxury fashion. Furthermore, it elucidates the two 'self' conceptual models that served as the foundation for the theoretical framework constructed. In the methodology, we present in detail why qualitative

research was preferred over other methods, even though most of the existing research on self-concept is of a quantitative nature. Further, data collection and subsequent analysis are also described, followed by a practical illustration of how the coding process was performed. Chapter four discloses the findings collected, answering the research question. Then, chapter five involves a reflective discussion, in which the contribution of this research to scientific knowledge is put into perspective. Finally, chapter six ends the thesis by highlighting the prominent aspects that meet the research goal. In addition, it also describes limitations faced and provides suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

This literature review elucidates the historical migration of the value of luxury brands to consumers throughout time. The results show that during the 19th century, luxury was mainly about goods and their durability, being the result of great craftsmanship. In that sense, the value was predominantly located in the functional dimension. Recently, the focus of value has shifted to the symbolic meaning and, as a result, psychological factors clearly prevail over functional ones. The review of the literature shows that this symbolism plays an important role in developing consumer self-concept. Based on the two conceptual models of the 'self' – self-concept and self-congruity – we show that the needs for self-consistency, self-esteem, social consistency and social approval to be the main forces for luxury fashion brands consumption.

The literature review starts by highlighting the particular symbolic nature of luxury brands (2.1), followed by several attempts to conceptualize luxury brands in the existing literature (2.1.1). In (2.1.2.) we explain luxury fashion brands through their self-expressive and psychological meanings. This resulted in the prominent role played by consumer's self-concept when opting for a specific brand, giving rise to an in-depth research on the 'self' in (2.2). Therefore, (2.2.1.) and (2.2.3) examines the self-concept's and self-congruity's theory, respectively. For an accurate understanding of the latter, the concepts of brand image and brand personality will be previously apprehended in (2.2.2). Finally, in (2.2.4) we built an integrated framework which will serve as the basis for data analysis.

2.1. The singular nature of luxury brands

The literature review reveals a wide range of definitions for luxury brand. Paradoxically, one of the areas of agreement in the luxury brand literature lies on the lack of agreement on what a luxury brand is, due to its strong context-dependency (Berthon et al., 2009). In that sense, what a luxury brand offers, rather than of what is made of, is a set of symbolic narratives and self-expressive meanings, which in turn are unattainable by non-luxury brands (Fionda & Moore, 2009).

2.1.1. The controversy in defining luxury brand

In "The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands", Kapferer and Bastien stated that "*Nowadays, luxury is fashionable (...). It can be approached from different angles, with highly subjective results: Your luxury is not my luxury*" (2012, p. 476). In fact, research on luxury brands is somewhat of a paradox: first, for some social researchers, they are considered socially divisive and a threat to egalitarian society. For others, they embody the desired rescue so that vertical stratification and hierarchies are reborn (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Second, "*Despite the significant insights the luxury sector provides to contemporary business, brand luxury is under-represented in the academic literature*" (Miller & Mills, 2012, p. 1). Third, although there are several well-defined conceptualizations in the literature (see Table 1), there is no consensus definition on what a luxury brand is (Berthon et al., 2009). In a nutshell, previous studies have improved knowledge about luxury brands in the same way that added confusion about their conceptualization.

As shown in Table 1, the disparity in the definition of luxury brand is unsolved and persists in the very recent literature. This is due to the diversity of approaches, definitions and number of dimensions in the typologies of luxury brands, thus creating different understandings among scholars (Miller & Mills, 2012). To increase clarity, Berthon et al. (2009) suggested conceptualizing luxury brand in terms of what it does, instead of trying to limit it to a single definition of a restricted set of characteristics and attributes.

Therefore, the next section will describe luxury brand in terms of its functions, more specifically, its symbolic role in the development of the consumer self-concept, once its functions provides an empirical understanding of its characteristics (Berthon et al., 2009).

Authors	Luxury brand definitions
Kapferer & Bastien (2012)	Luxury brand has two facets: (1) luxury for one's self - surrender to 'self' pleasures; (2) luxury for others - demonstration of wealth. When it comes to luxury, being exclusive is the motivator.
Fionda & Moore (2009)	Luxury brand has nine components: (1) clear brand identity; (2) luxury marketing communications; (3) product integrity; (4) brand signature; (5) premium price; (6) exclusivity; (7) heritage; (8) luxury environment and experience and (9) culture.
Berthon et al. (2009)	Luxury is primarily a conspicuous possession and aesthetically pleasing that offers status to the individual. It is up to the owner to appreciate it discreetly or conspicuously, as a certain degree of social mystique and exclusivity is inherent to it. Luxury brand involve three dimensions: (1) functional- what a brand does; (2) experiential- what a brand means to the individual; (3) symbolic – what a brand means to others.
Keller (2009)	Luxury brand has ten characteristics: (1) premium image; (2) intangible brand associations; (3) quality of the product and pleasurable experiences; (4) tangible brand elements (logos, symbols and packaging design); (5) secondary associations from linked personalities and endorser); (6) controlled distribution; (7) premium pricing strategy; (8) careful management, (9) broad definition; (10) legal protection of trademarks.
Vigneron & Johnson (2004)	Luxury brand has five dimensions: (1) perceived conspicuousness; (2) uniqueness; (3) quality; (4) hedonism and (5) perceived extended self.
Phau & Prendergast (2000)	Luxury brand has for key attributes: (1) evoke exclusivity; (2) well-known brand identity; (3) increase brand awareness and (4) quality.
Kapferer (1997)	Luxury brand has seven attributes: (1) quality; (2) beauty; (3) sensuality; (4) exclusivity; (5) history; (6) high price and (7) uniqueness.
Dubois and Duquesne (1993)	Luxury involves the desire to impress others, given the ability to charge particularly high prices. It is a form of ostentatious display of wealth.

Table 1 - Definitions of luxury brand in existing literature

2.1.2. The symbolic role of luxury fashion brands

The luxury brand market undergone a huge transformation in terms of value and identity. For instance, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the value of luxury fashion was predominantly located in its functional dimension, as luxury was mainly the result of a great craftsmen, high-quality materials, alongside with its durability and design (Okonkwo, 2009). More recently, in the industrialized era and with the emergence of powerful fashion conglomerates (e.g. LVMH

and Richemont in the 1990s and Gucci Group in the early 2000s), the focus of the value shifted to the symbolic dimension: a dream-world surrounded by signs, images and motifs that go beyond the material, carefully addressed to its luxury brands (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009)

We witness a widespread trend in luxury fashion industry, in which "*firms that invested substantially in brand building were shown to have a stronger competitive positioning than those whose core values were linked more to products and services than to branding*" (Okonkwo, 2009, p. 288). In addition, according to the Esmaeilpour (2015)'s findings, the symbolic values inherent to luxury brands are key motivators for their purchase, because, when perceived, consumers do not mind paying more. This is extremely important for luxury fashion managers, as consumers are more likely to assess symbolic than economic value when considering the overall worth of a luxury brand.

As a result, a fresh flow of thought has emerged in the literature that seeks to explain luxury consumption through its symbolic and self-expressive meaning (e.g., Giovannini et al., 2015; Roper et. al, 2013; Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Han et al.*,* 2010; Wiedmann et al., 2009). Within it, Amatulli and Guido (2011) categorized two groups of symbolic reasons behind the consumption of luxury brands. On the one hand, internal motivations that remit to self-pleasure and aesthetics, instigated by emotions that involve a more personal sensitivity (Tsai, 2005; Vickers & Renand, 2003). On the other hand, external motivations refer to cases in which the main intention lies in public display, in order to affirm the individual's wealth possession (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that, although these consumption stimuli may appear to go in opposite directions, they can coexist in a single consumer.

In short, consumers make use of the symbolism inherent to luxury fashion brands to build and enhance their perceived 'self', which supports Belk's (1988) notion of "extended-self", where he suggests that we define and express who we are – or who we want appear to be – by our possessions. As such, given the prominent role that consumer self-concept plays in consumption decision-making and brand choice, the next section will thus provide an in-depth understanding of the consumer self-concept.

2.2. The 'self' extensions

2.2.1. How do researchers deal with the 'self'?

As above-mentioned, luxury brands were described in terms of their symbolic role regarding consumption decisions, which, in turn, revealed a close connection with the consumer's 'self'. Indeed, the conceptual definition that has been widely addressed by the academic community, in the context of consumer behavior, describes the 'self' as the "*the totality of individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object*" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7).

The 'self' is consensually perceived as a non-watertight concept, built throughout the consumer's life. For instance, Waugh claims the 'self' to be: "*a multidimensional and context-dependent learned behavioral pattern that reflects an individual's evaluation of past behaviors and experiences, influences an individual's current behaviors, and predicts an individual's future behaviors*" (2001, p. 87)

Furthemore, Escalas & Bettman (2005) and Elliot & Wattanasuwan (1998) share the assumption that an individual, by himself, does not possess a fully realized 'self' and lacks individual meaning, classifying the 'self' as "fragmented" and "highly diffuse". As such, in an attempt to fill this void of personal meaning, individuals make use of the consumption of such brands to have a greater awareness of themselves, being labeled as "identity seekers" by Arnould & Thompson (2005).

Nonetheless, according to Escalas & Bettman (2005), the consumption of such brands goes beyond just supporting the individuals in building their own identity, as it also operates as an expression of how they position themselves or wish to position themselves in society. In other words, it works as a statement of "we are what we have", as emphasized by Kwon and Mattila (2015). To understand how brands are linked to the 'self', Escalas & Bettman (2005) compiled five functions that explain how brands may operate:

(A) work as a symbol of personal accomplishment;

(B) boost consumer self-esteem;

(C) allow one to differentiate oneself;

(D) disclose the individual 'self' to others;

(E) assist individuals through life transitions.

Therefore, if on the one hand, the purchase of a specific luxury brand works "privately", in order to help the individual to build his own identity, on the other hand, it works "publicly", externalizing this same individuality in a view of social integration.

2.2.2. The self-concept theory

To properly assesses the purchase phenomenon of luxury fashion brands, the knowledge of the self-concept, in all its dimensions, proved to be an advantageous tool for analysis (e.g. Giovannini et al., 2015; Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., 2012; Escalas & Bettman 2005; Fournier, 1998). Several theories about the self-concept were developed over time. We chose the one developed by Sirgy (1982), and further completed by Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., (2012), as it is the most followed and recognized theory in the existing consumer self-concept literature. According to these authors, the 'self' must be conceived as multidimensional: diverse types of the 'self' end up arising, each depending on a social context that surrounds it. As a result, these authors pointed out four distinct dimensions to completely cover the self-concept with regard to consumer's purchase motivations:

The first dimension was identified as the 'actual self', the one that has been subjected to the greatest scrutiny and the object of extensive research in consumer behavioral studies. Thus, the 'actual self' refers to the way in which individuals really perceive themselves, also called "me as I am". In this sense, the goods acquired carry a symbolic meaning of how individuals perceive their own 'self', thus creasing their self-concept through such consumption practices (Grubb & Grathwol, 1967). Accordingly, Belk reinforced that in modern societies "*we learn, define and remind ourselves of who we are by our possessions*" (1988, p. 160). The second dimension, the 'ideal self', also labeled "idealized self" or "desired self", plays in the aspirational field of how the individual would like to see himself or what he would like to become. Transposing to the consumption context of the brands, certain products purchased act as a tool through which the individual reaches a mental stage corresponding to his idyllic notion of himself. However, researchers disagree on the distinction between the 'actual' and 'ideal' dimensions. For instance, according to Zinkhan and Hong (1991), while the 'actual' dimensions express the perceived reality of the 'self', the 'ideal' dimensions are created under an 'idyllic' conception of the 'self'. On the contrary, Grubb and Grathwohl argue that, for the common individual, the actual-self and ideal-self end up overlapping on a large scale, despite "*in specific circumstances, one or the other could be the chief motivator of behavior*" (1967, p. 26). In this

sense, the present research also intends to perceive how distant these two dimensions are from each other, realizing which one appears in each specific social context.

Sirgy (2018) and Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., (2012) argued that the third dimension of the self-concept lies in how people believe they are perceived by significant others, that is, "the actual social self". The individual's consumption practices emphasize how an individual wants to present himself to others, especially in a social context, and, conversely, how he believes he is perceived by others. The last dimension, "the ideal social self", concerns how people would like to be perceived by other significant individuals. In other words, the individual's symbolic purchasing behavior can be used to convey an aspirational social performance that an individual would like to see recognized by significant others.

These four dimensions of the consumer self-concept were used as a standard reference to examine their level of congruence with brand personality and brand image, respectively (Sirgy, 2018).

However, Sirgy warned of a gap still existing in the literature:

> *"Over the last 40 + years, much research has been conducted using self-concept theory in consumer behavior and marketing (...). However, most consumer researchers recognize the actual self reflects what we refer to as the 'consumer self-concept'. But consumer self-concept involves not only one dimension but at least four"* (2018, p. 199)

This means that the operationalization of self-concept has been approached as a one-dimensional construct, focusing on only one of the four dimensions – the actual self – generally recognized as the consumer behavior that is performed based on the individual's perceived image and then reflected in his purchase choices (e.g. Bezzaouia & Joanta 2016; Giovannini et al., 2015; Anggraeni, 2015; Esmaeilpour, 2015; Liu et al., 2012; Roper et. al, 2013; Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Fournier 1998). Moreover, in the same "Self-congruity theory in consumer behavior", Sirgy ended up regretting that:

> *"I believe that the concept of self-congruity is a key construct in the behavioral, social, and administrative/policy sciences. My hope is that scholars from a variety of disciplines will continue to work with this construct to achieve greater explanatory heights."* (2018, p. 204).

2.2.3. Brand image and brand personality

While brand image has been conceptualized unevenly by several scholars, we chose the definition of Cho and al. (2015): *"consumer's perceptions and feelings towards a brand"* (2015, p. 28). In this definition, brand image consists of a consumer' subjective and mental representation towards the functional and non-functional attributes of a product (Patterson, 1999). In accordance to Ismail and Spinelli (2012), diversified factors build the perception of brand image in the consumer's mind: brand users' type, previous experiences with the brand, brand's name, logo and core values and product attributes. They also claim that brand image can be strengthened using brand communications such as marketing activities, advertising or word of mouth publicity. As a natural consequence, the more the positive associations regarding the brand image, the greater the likelihood of purchase intention and, therefore, creating solid loyalty to the brand (Keller, 1993).

Keller and Richey's (2006) experiments agree that brand personality is the set of human characteristics or traits associated with a brand, motivated by the fact that consumers generally infuse brands with people. As individuals inevitably relate the personality of a brand to theirs, this assessment will depend on consumer's direct or indirect contact with the brand itself. Finally, Cho et al., (2015) and Aaker's (1997) still claim that the brand personality is a subcategory of brand image, in the sense that the former is an integral part in the formulation of brand image in consumer's mind, which reveals a huge interdependence between these two concepts.

2.2.4. The self-congruity theory

The match between consumer's self-concept and brand image is named self-congruity, a psychological process as well as its outcome. In other words, self-congruity refers to the perceived similarity that an individual finds between his mental construction of the brand image and himself. As such, consumers show more favorable responses to a brand, the closer the consumers' self-concept matches the brand image (Liu et al., 2012; Mazodier & Merunka, 2012).

For example, if consumers consider themselves "conservative" and also perceive Cartier's image as "conservative", we are witnessing a high self-congruity, in the sense that the correspondence between the consumer's self-concept and brand image is a match. Conversely,

if consumers still perceive Cartier's image as "conservative", but consider themselves as "reactionary", we now witness a low self-congruity, as there is an incompatibility. As such, incongruity between brand image and consumers' self-concept tend to cause cognitive dissonance and psychological discomfort that threatens the individuals' belief about the 'self' (Sirgy, 1982).

Because self-congruity results from the level of correspondence between the consumer's self-concept and the brand image, self-congruity should also be approached as a multidimensional construct. Therefore, four dimensions of self-congruity emerge: actual self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, actual social self-congruity, and ideal social self-congruity (Sirgy, 2018; Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., 2012). The congruity between the actual self and the brand image has been referred to as actual self-congruity; between the ideal self and brand image as ideal self-congruity; between the actual social self and brand image as actual social self-congruity; and between the ideal social self and the brand image as ideal social self-congruity.

When assessing how the brand image interacts with the self-concept, Sirgy (2018) and Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., (2012) found that each of the dimensions of self-concept (actual, ideal, social, and ideal social self) underlies a distinct self-concept motive, which consumers want to satisfy through the congruity with the brand image. These self-motives are translated into the satisfaction of needs for self-consistency, self-esteem, social consistency and social approval:

Firstly, the need for self-consistency lies in the motivation to behave or make decisions consistent with one's personal identity. Through self-consistency, consumers purchase a specific brand to consolidate or validate their personal identity. This is particularly relevant when consumers possess strong beliefs about their own identity.

Secondly, the need for self-esteem shows how consumers purchase a brand to help them reach the person they would like to be - their idyllic 'self' - and that serves to increase their self-confidence. Previous research has shown that self-esteem is the main predictor of brand choice (e.g. Giovannini et al., 2015).

Thirdly, the need for social consistency embodies individual's motivation to behave in a manner consistent with the way others expect him to behave. By acting differently, the individual may feel at odds with others' expectations of him, which restores the need for social consistency.

When buying a specific brand, individuals reinforce their sense of belonging to the social group while expressing compliance with the group's norms.

Finally, the need for social approval refers to how individuals would like to be seen by others. In this case, consumers meet their need for social approval by participating in the purchase of such brands, so that others think highly of them or to be recognized by an aspirational group.

To sum up, this research is a contribution to fill the identified gap in the sense that the consumption of luxury brands in the context of fashion has revealed a credible symbolic meaning in the development of the consumer self-concept (Anggraeni, 2015), as detailed in this chapter. To achieve it to its full extent, this thesis adopts a multidimensional view of the self-concept, involving the four different dimensions of the 'self', previously neglected by past scholars (Sirgy, 2018). To answer the research question "How does the consumption of luxury fashion brands disclose individuals' multidimensional self-concept?", an integrated theoretical framework was subsequently built, also serving as a support tool for collecting empirical evidence and data analysis.

2.2.5. A 'self' integrated theoretical framework

To answer the research question "How does the consumption of luxury fashion brands disclose individuals' multidimensional self-concept?", we built a theoretical framework integrating two main theoretical pillars: the self-concept and the self-congruity, each composed of four corresponding dimensions, as emphasized by the multidimensional view of Sirgy (2018) and Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., (2012).

Although much research has been carried out in the last 40 years in the field of self-concept and self-congruence, contextualized to consumer behavior, none of these investigations has provided an integrated framework, addressing the multidimensional perspective of the 'self' and, therefore, accurately relating these two models of the 'self' (e.g. Cho et al, 2015; Wang et al., 2015; Lin & Sung, 2014; Mazodier & Merunka, 2012; Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Perez et al., 2010).

In this sense, through the individual and joint assessment of the self-dimensions, we established a linkage between each dimension of each theory, as detailed in section 2.2.3, resulting in Figure 1. Based on Sirgy (2018) and Aguirre-Rodriquez et al., (2012) research, each dimension of self-concept (actual, ideal, social, and ideal social self) underlies a distinct self-concept motive that

translates into the satisfaction of needs for self-consistency, self-esteem, social consistency and social approval, respectively. Therefore, Figure 1 should be read as follows: the need for self-consistency is the motive-driver to sustain one's actual self; the need for self-esteem is the motive-driver to sustain one's ideal self; and so on, …
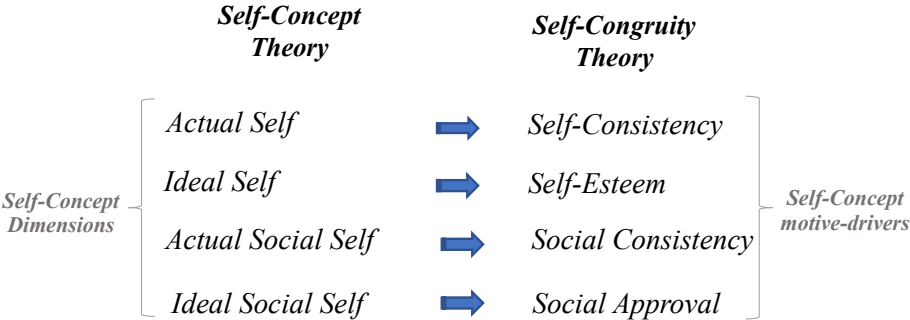
Figure 1 - 'Self' integrated theoretical framework proposal

To conclude, this research will provide an explicit understanding of how the luxury fashion brands consumption somehow reveals the knowledge of the individual's self-concept, which remains undeveloped on the existing literature as a multidimensional 'self' was disregarded (Sirgy, 2018). Bearing this in mind, the following research question, alongside the theoretical framework, were designed to assist with the research purpose: *"How does the consumption of luxury fashion brands disclose individuals' multidimensional self-concept?"*.

3. Methodology

This chapter is divided into four parts: the first part explains why a qualitative approach was preferred to a quantitative one, even though most of the existing research on self-concept is of a quantitative nature. Part two discloses the criteria taken into account to ensure a relevant and adequate sample. Part three details the entire process of gathering and measuring data. Lastly, part four describes how the collected data was organized and structured in order to obtain useful insights from it.

3.1. Research approach

In view of the aforementioned research question, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate for several reasons.

First, the main purpose of the present research is to gain a deeper understanding of the current research phenomena, and not to obtain findings that result in a scale of measures related to this relationship (Myers, 2013). Second, the qualitative approach has the ability to adapt to the quality of information being collected. This means that, if the information provided begins to disperse, the author can, in real time, shift gears smoothly and seek to collect data in the intended direction (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This offers more opportunities to gather important data about self-concept knowledge, in particular. Third, a qualitative approach allows interviewees to respond freely and fluidly on each topic, basing the reasoning on their own personal life experiences and observations. This is critically important, as it is an emotional response that usually influences an individual's decision and guides their consumer behavior (Myers, 2013). Finally, according to Bryman & Bell (2011), the qualitative method is the appropriate approach when the topics under investigation are of a controversial, sensitive or tabooed nature, which is the case in this research. We confronted interviewees with questions within the scope of social's aspirations and eagerness, their hierarchical positioning in the society and respective consumption patterns harmonized with the preferences of an aspirational social group. As such, they might have felt somehow inhibited from reporting their responses in a transparent and spontaneous manner. Like this, we conducted online interviews in an open, semi-structured question format, to enable the author to penetrate in the interviewee's way of thinking.

3.2. Sample strategy

As above-mentioned, the present research intended to analyze the extent to which consumption practices of luxury fashion brands expose the consumer's self-concept, as well as how these "covered" self-dimensions may differ between individuals.

We chose to include in the sample both regular and occasional consumers of luxury fashion brands, since a "*peripheral sampling*" described as "*people who are not central to the phenomenon but are neighbors to it*" allows to avoid to restricted sampling and obtain a better understanding of the overall phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 34). In fact, a sample of consumers at different stages of luxury consumption's involvement offers richer findings, as each "group of consumers" is driven by different purchasing patterns and social aspirations and, as such, by disparate self-concepts. Moreover, the conceptualization of "regular" or "non-regular" luxury consumer is highly subjective and instinctive in the literature, since there is no official measurement scale which indicates that a consumer is designated as a regular as long as he purchases a luxury good X times a year. It is easily recognizable that it would be conditioned to multiple variables and the type of context involved, difficult to predict a priori. That said, we consider as a regular consumer an individual who bought more than six luxury fashion items during the last year, and conversely, a non-regular purchased less than six, but bought at least one luxury product during the past year. We established number "six" based on the research conducted by Ipsos – Global Market Research (2013), which concluded that, on average, consumers in Western countries purchase 6 luxury fashion items per year. As such, as it is a merely suggestive measure, we considered "regular" those who buy above average.

Regarding the sampling strategy, we used a sampling technique based on purposive and convenience criteria, in order to efficiently target a sample of adequate interest for the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We identified the following five criteria: (1) A similar number of men and women, in order to avoid a gender imbalance in the weighting of the sample - 6 male, 9 female; (2) The age of the interviewees ranged between 30 and 65 years, leveraging the likelihood of being consumers of luxury fashion brands for an already reasonable period of time; (3) Luxury fashion brands' consumers with different levels of engagement; (4) Stability or even some financial relief, showing sufficient financial flexibility to be involved in the luxury fashion segment; 5) As a last criterion, not mandatory, but preferential - expressing a certain

personal taste or sense of aspiration for the context of luxury fashion brands, was also taken into consideration.

The search for convenient interviewees was carried out through the "snowball technique" (Roper et. al, 2013). We recruited four initial participants in my network of contacts, who were regular consumers of luxury. These participants were then invited to recruit contacts or acquaintances for the study. This allowed us to recruit four other respondents satisfying the criteria.

In a next step, we recruited seven participants from Facebook groups specifically targeting lovers and enthusiasts of the world of luxury fashion who, possibly, could also incur in this type of consumption (for instance, "World of Luxury Style", "High-end luxury designer items - Buy and Chat" or "Luxury Brand Fashion enthusiasts discussion group"), and in Facebook Groups addressed to a specific luxury fashion brand – as examples, "Louis Vuitton Community" or "Gucci Addicted". Ultimately, we sent private messages to Instagram profiles whose owners exhibit luxury fashion items. None of them replied or were able to conduct an interview.

Accordingly, a total of fifteen respondents who consume luxury fashion brands were selected. Fifteen far exceeds the number eight suggested by McCracken (1988, p. 17) as satisfactory for generating categories or themes in the context of qualitative research. Moreover, other qualitative research within the scope of the consumer self-concept rely on a sample size of fifteen interviewees (e.g. Castro & Marquez, 2017; Fritz et al. 2017; Gistri et al., 2009). Among our sample, nine of them regularly engaged in this type of consumption and the remaining six were occasionally consumers of luxury goods. As a remark, we faced serious difficulties in finding interviewees, as they needed to be regular or occasional consumers of luxury fashion brands, willing to conduct interviews.

To ethically ensure the privacy of those involved, fictitious names were assigned to all respondents. The profile of each interviewee's profile is presented in Table 2 by displaying fictitious names, gender, age, place of residence, occupational background and frequency of involvement in a luxury fashion purchase last year.

Fictitious name	Gender	Age	Place of residence	Occupational background	Regular / Non-Regular luxury fashion brands consumer
1. Sónia	Female	54	Portugal	Official translator	Regular (8-10 times/year)
2. Celia	Female	66	Portugal	Reformed	Regular (8 times/year)
3. Pedro	Male	46	Portugal	Medical doctor	Regular (8 times/year)
4. Rui	Male	54	Portugal	Individual entrepreneur	Regular (7-8 times/year)
5. Alexandre	Male	53	Portugal	Embassy worker	Regular (7-8 times/year)
6. Margarida	Female	55	Portugal	University professor	Regular (6-7 times/year)
7. Cláudia	Female	34	Portugal	Architect	Regular (6 times/year)
8. José	Male	31	Portugal	Consultant	Regular (6 times/year)
9. Eduardo	Male	57	Portugal	Owner of a private travel agency	Non-regular (3-4 times/year)
10. Gonçalo	Female	37	Portugal	Marketeer free-lancer	Non-regular (3 times/year)
11. Mariana	Female	34	Portugal	Financial controller	Non-regular (2-3 times/year)
12. Cristina	Female	53	Portugal	Owner of a private real estate company	Non-regular (2 times/year)
13. Paula	Female	48	Portugal	Civil engineer	Non-regular (2 times/year)
14. Bárbara	Female	30	Portugal	Lawyer	Non-regular (1-2 times/year)
15. Daniela	Female	30	Portugal	Physiotherapist	Non-regular (1 time/year)

Table 2 - Overview of the Interviewees' Profile

3.3. Data collection

We conducted in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews have been used by previous research to investigate self-concept in relation to the motivations for luxury consumption and have revealed advantages over other methods of data collection (e.g. Roper et. al, 2013; Amatulli and Guido, 2011; Perez et al., 2010). As such, it is through the individual's mental and embodied performances that we can deeply understand to what extent the interviewees' purchasing experience is intertwined with their own self-concept. While on-site face-to-face interviews would have been preferred, it was not possible, due to the COVID-19 pandemic's context in which this research was conducted. We conducted all fifteen interviews by video Skype, with both parties in their respective households. Even online, the interview atmosphere was peaceful and serene, contributing to the total focus of the interviewee during the requested time and conducive to no distractions.

We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews as it appeared to be the most suitable approach for several reasons. First, the topic involved is of an extremely personal nature, where the risk of bias due to social undesirability or other peers' judgement could be very present if other qualitative method was assigned (e.g.: focus groups), which does not guarantee the deserved privacy and individuality (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Second, semi-structured interviews promote a greater sense of self-disclosure and reliability between the two parties, even if virtually, which generates more intimate interviews in the emotional field of the responses (Holstein & Gubrium, 2001). As such, the interviewer merely focuses on following the path traced by the interviewee, assuming the role of being "the interested listener". Third, semi-structured interviews adopt an open-ended question format, which encourages respondents to probe their deepest intuitions and life experiences in relation to the current topic, in order to trigger unexpected insights (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Besides that, particularly on some questions where the answer was of a "yes" or "no" type, we made a point to include "follow-up questions", which is vital if we intend to gain a deep understanding of the research phenomenon, while expressing engagement with the conversation (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Besides that, the interview intends to give interviewees enough time to reflect on their thoughts and respond freely as they intended.

We approached the in-depth semi-structured interviews by means of an interview guide, subdivided into three main sections in accordance with the three subjects emerging from the research question, and subsequently adapted to the theoretical framework – "Luxury Fashion Brand's Consumption"; "The Self"; "Brand's Perceptions" (See Appendix 1). This interview guide allowed to encapsulate these critical concepts in order get a relevant interview, aligned with the research objective. When needed, we clarified any emerging questions. All interviews conducted were recorded, with the respective permission of all fifteen participants before the interview started. The time length of the interview varied according to each interviewee, however, all took between fifty minutes and an hour and fifteen minutes.

This interview guide was based on a "progressive approach", starting with the description of the most remarkable purchase of a luxury fashion product, for general perceptions of luxury brands, in order to grasp the level of importance of each matter on interviewees' mind (McCracken, 1988). Within it, we chose to formulate "grand-tour questions", in which, as the term suggests, requests respondents to take a verbal tour of something they are familiar with and stimulate them to ramble within a certain topic (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Finally, although the research required a "more directive" approach in order to apprehend what actually moves respondents, we have redesigned these same questions in order to begin with "how" or "would you" instead of "why", since it is proven that the latter puts the interviewees on the defensive and causes feelings of self-prejudice (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Moreover, we requested interviewees to relate their responses to the most significant luxury fashion item ever purchased, as well as its respective brand. Taking the interviewee to revisit a personal sensory experience, made the interview more personalized, emotionally engaging and, therefore, conducive to a richer exploration in the field of hedonic purchase motivations (Holstein & Gubrium, 2001). Table 3 provides an overview of the most remarkable good and respective brand chosen by each respondent, which they referred throughout the interview.

This question had also an introductory function. The next questions intended to grasp the individuals' purchase motivator-drivers and "self-brand" relatedness connection (See Appendix 1). With regard to the latter, we presented three hypothetical real-life scenarios to the interviewees with possible paths they could choose to follow. In doing so, they imagined themselves in that real context and, thus, it was possible for us to delve into respondents' ideals, those closest to their own 'self'. Indeed, we clarified that there would be no "right" or "wrong"

answers, as long as genuine points of view and authentic paths of choice were what was fully sought.

Interviewee	Most remarkable luxury fashion item purchased and its brand
1. Sónia	Fendi Clutch
2. Celia	Dior Necklace
3. Pedro	Hugo Boss Tuxedo
4. Rui	Rolex's Watch
5. Alexandre	Tom Ford silk trousers
6. Margarida	Cartier Bracelet
7. Cláudia	Louis Vuitton Handbag
8. José	Armani's Jacket
9. Eduardo	Gucci Loafers
10. Gonçalo	Armani Suit
11. Mariana	Cartier's Watch
12. Cristina	Chanel Dress
13. Paula	Balenciaga high heels
14. Bárbara	Prada Pochette
15. Daniela	Tyffany & Co. Backpack

Table 3 - Overview of the luxury fashion item and brand chosen by each interviewee

3.4. Data analysis

Each interview was listened several times and transcribed, since the interpretation of the recorded data is considered a critical step in the processing, treatment and subsequent triangulation of the collected data (Flick, 2009).

To analyze the data, we chose the coding method. While there are several ways of coding, thematic analysis seemed to be the most appropriate method to answer our research question. Thematical analysis has been broadly used in qualitative research and focuses on examining themes or patterns of meaning within data, generating a rich description of the data set and theoretically-based interpretation of meaning (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

However, within the thematic analysis, we carried out a hybrid approach, mixing deductive and inductive processes of data analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). A mixed deductive and inductive approach allows validating the pre-designed codes, but also captures significant new codes

emerging from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We started with a deductive approach, which means that we first accessed the data with some pre-conceived themes that we expected to find reflected there. These themes emerged from the research question and were later integrated into the theoretical framework (see Figure 1). Then, after reading and interpreting the raw textual data, it has surfaced new inductive themes as a result of the participant's discussion, which were not covered by the theoretical framework. In addition, we developed a codebook to reflect a narrative of the empirical data, changing permanently as new codes were added and categories reorganized (See Appendix 2).

Apart from that, at a first stage, we began to dive into the data by listening to the recorded interviews before the information transcription process. When transcribing interviews, we highlighted the relevant parts of the information and provided them with a preliminary code that summarized the general topic that the information was describing. Within this data selection process, we disregarded many data because it was repeated, redundant, unrelated or simply not significant for the purpose of the research question, the result of the participants' free speech and verbalized discourse. In total, the transcription process took abound 12 hours for the fifteen interviews, resulting in 212 pages of transcribed information.

This lengthy process resulted in a list of sixteen codes, based on their frequency and relatedness to the research question. We then grouped similar codes into the same comprehensive categories, and a pool of eight categories were candidates for themes for further analysis. As such, once we also play in the deductive field, these categories were consistently assigned to one of the four pre-conceived themes, being "self-consistency"; "self-esteem"; "social consistency" and "social approval" (See Figure 1). As a matter of fact, the vast majority of topics of interest to us were covered, in part aided by the structure of the interview script.

We found a new relevant theme that, in turn, was not covered by the theoretical framework – later labeled as "self-brand connection". In fact, this is one of the prominent findings of this research and, therefore, will be dealt with appropriately in Section 5 - Discussion, leading to a redefinition of the a priori theoretical framework constructed.

In conclusion, we present below an exemplification of the process to which the transcribed data was submitted - starting as codes, grouping later into categories and, finally, attached to the pre-conceived themes, the latter used as sections for the next Findings' chapter (See Table 4 and Table 5). The complete list of codes and their development is available in Appendix 2 - Coding Book.

Code	*Quote*
Assertiveness about the 'Self'	*"No, it's not a big deal for me. (...) I think that as long as it suits me, I really don't care what other people think. If they don't like it, they just don't realize" Mariana*
Self-Reward Given	*"It is something that I know I deserve, in fact, not everyone can say the same" Bárbara*

Table 4 - Codes from the data. Quote source from Interview nº 11 and Interview nº14, respectively

Code	*Category*	*Theme*
Assertiveness about the 'Self'	Solidity of Personal Meaning	Self-Consistency
Self-Reward Given		

Table 5 - Codes, corresponding category and theme (Retrieved from the Coding Book – Appendix 2)

4. Findings

In this chapter, we answer the research question "*How does the consumption of luxury fashion brands disclose individuals' multidimensional self-concept?*". The findings and their subsequent analysis are structured according to the integrated theoretical framework constructed. We uncovered how each of the four facets of the 'self' emerges in each specific luxury purchase context, thereby providing an outline of the consumer's self-concept to the fullest extent. We also expose the new theme emerging from the data that was not covered by the pre-designed theoretical framework, leading to its redefinition.

4.1. The 'self' refuge in luxury fashion brands

The analysis shows that consumers perceive luxury brands as a key component to define themselves as they wish, both internally and socially. Indeed, luxury fashion brands are part of a new protocol in which one's identity and self-worth are strongly determined by the visible brands worn on the body, becoming authentic extensions of individuals.

4.1.1. Self-Consistency - *"I dress to impress myself"*
4.1.1.1. Solidity of personal meaning

Interestingly, Cláudia revealed a solid and precise awareness of her 'actual self' dimension – that is, how someone really perceives oneself - which made her feel established in the way she perceives her "self":

> *"For me what really matters is my perception of how I look when I use them (fashion clothes). Sometimes other people say that you look good with them, but if you don't agree, it's useless. I buy things because it suits my style, not others' style"*

This means that consumers are faithful to their own principles and to the way in which they review themselves through purchasing decisions, as confirmed by Mariana:

> *"I really don't care what others think. If people don't like it, they just don't realize it"*

In addition, Sónia and Paula vehemently rejected the alternative of incurring the purchase of a counterfeit luxury item, justifying that *"It feels like I am lying to myself"* and *"More than*

others, I would feel very uncomfortable and ashamed of myself", respectively. More specifically, Eduardo demonstrated a very pronounced "*Me as I am*" dimension arguing that

> *"It is only to deceive others who are not knowledgeable in this type of luxury fashion matter. If I could not afford it, I prefer to purchase a similar one but from the common segment"*

Further, Table 6 shows that, when respondents were faced with the ambiguity of whether or not to buy their luxury fashion good, knowing a priori that no one would see them displaying it, the answer was an assertive "yes". Behind that, they all carried a feeling of personal gratification, even considered a "delight" that hovers over a "self-reward" mental state.

Interviewee	*Quote*	*Sense of self-gratification*
Bárbara	*"It is something that I know I deserve, not everyone can say the same thing"*	✓
Gonçalo	*"This is one of the things that drives me to buy luxury: When people praise you "such a fancy jacket", and then you can say, "I earned it""*	✓
Rui	*I expressed a crucial moment in my life on that Rolex. It was something I achieved, I fought for and, as such, it is due to me"*	✓
Celia	*"Luxury gratifies me as a "modus vivendi""*	✓
Daniela	*"I worked for three consecutive months and with that money I bought this Tyffany's backpack. It won it by myself. I kind of feel proud of that"*	✓

Table 6 - Sense of self-gratification obtained through luxury brands, expressed by each interviewee

As noted, interviewees showed that they are established in terms of their 'self', once they mainly seek to delight their personal taste and fail to meet others' expectations through such consumption practices. In addition, twelve out of fifteen interviewees argued that they did not incur the purchase of a counterfeit luxury item for reasons of personal discomfort, not because of the negative connotation this may have on others. In short, the findings collected when related to the dimension of the 'actual self' revealed a mature awareness of their 'self', not primarily seeking to build its perceived identity through such luxury purchases.

4.1.1.2. 'Self'-centered hedonism

In fact, all respondents expressed both utilitarian and hedonic motivations regarding their fashion luxury's purchase experience. However, functional features such as product "durability", "design" and "quality materials against dust and water" were somewhat undervalued in the interviewee's enthusiastic discourse.

All respondents reveal some sort of consumer behavior conducive to the search for sensory pleasures or hedonistic sensations, which refers to *"people's desire to experience positive feelings and affective states they believe possible by consuming those luxury goods"* (Bezzaouia & Joanta, 2016, p. 152). Indeed, most of the interviewees revealed a kind of self-centered view of the luxury fashion consumption, in a sense that the gratification of the own 'self' surpasses everything else, being, above all, a *'self'*-referencing pleasure.

In this sense, Table 7 provides a summary of the main hedonic sensations expressed by some respondents when referring to the purchase of the chosen luxury fashion good. These findings suggest that individuals primarily seek epicurean feelings that delight their perceived 'self', when they incur in this type of consumption. In a nutshell, hedonism takes precedence over functionality, due to the prominent role of luxury fashion brands in the individuals' internal motivations, as a form of self-love, self-respect and self-investment.

Interviewee	'Self'-Centered Hedonic Sensations
Cristina	Positive madness - *"Wearing a Chanel piece and not feeling like it's all 'insane'"*
Daniela	Joy – *"I don't know if it's just for me, but buying something luxurious is extremely delightful and pleasurable"*
Margarida	Achieve the imaginary - *"It never fails to make me fly"*
Alexandre	Alter ego - *"It seems that I like myself better"; "It delegates to me that I don't have a mass-produced taste"*
Paula	Pursuit of happiness - "*Short-term of happiness*; "*The true pleasure of life*"

Table 7 - Hedonic sensations lying on the 'Self', expressed by each interviewee

4.1.2. Self-Esteem - *"Become the best version of ourselves"*
4.1.2.1.Boost one's true self

When we turn to another dimension of the self-concept - the 'ideal self' – which refers to how someone desires to perceive himself, the consumption of luxury fashion brands revealed the most prominent role.

Table 7 above provided an overview of the emotions extrapolated from the interviewees' discourse about how these luxury brands make them feel, which ends up inducing a strengthening in the way individuals see themselves – that is, operating as an increase of self-confidence. As such, Mariana clarified how the use of Cartier brand enhanced her perception of her 'actual self':

> *"I feel safer when I have the Cartier bracelet on my wrist. Recalling a quote I read once on a fashion & lifestyle blog that I follow: 'Self-confidence is the best outfit you can wear'"*

Following Mariana's thought, Bárbara highlighted how the simple use of her Prada pochette acts as a self-esteem's booster:

> *"I consider myself an introvert, but when the use, I feel that my self-esteem increases 10 times. It feeds my sense of security".*

To conclude, the findings found "self-confidence" to be the main driving force for the consumption of luxury fashion brands. Through delving into respondents' discourse, the hidden motivation behind their consumption decisions relates to psychological stages linked to self-esteem, achieved through the purchase of such brands and consistent with an idyllic 'self' in which individuals would like to review themselves.

4.1.2.2.The need for self-actualization

The need for self-actualization can be described as the desire of individuals to reach a mental stage of complete self-realization, that is, to accomplish everything they are capable of, and, therefore, to achieve their best version possible (Brooker, 1976). In short, once you are self-actualized, you have met your full potential as an individual.

In fact, Cláudia revealed an aspirational dimension very present in her speech, arguing that the purchase of the LV's handbag made her feel that she had achieved things that she wanted to achieve with herself. Rui and Bárbara went further than that, considering, respectively, their luxury purchases as *"a life goal achieved"* and *"an imaginary stage of having accomplished something"*, that is, a step forward in what is their journey to reach self-actualization. As noted, these respondents also revealed a sense of awareness in the way they would like to perceive their 'self', meaning, their "ideal self". This observed pattern corroborates the perspective of a solid and precise conscious of their 'self', as argued in the previous section.

Curiously, an interesting pattern of responses was observed among younger respondents: the consumption of such luxury fashion brands remits to an unattainable image of their future vision, as highlighted by Bárbara:

> *"It's like looking in the mirror and seeing who I will be when I'm older. It says a lot about who I want to become"*

Hereupon, it makes more sense than ever to rename the dimension in question – the 'ideal self' – by the 'desired self'. When approaching it this way, it is more explicit how younger respondents perceive luxury brands - as an unattainable symbol to strive for, whether they are regular buyers of that brand or not. For instance, Pedro's response embodies the role that luxury brands play in assisting individuals through personal accomplishments:

> *"Even though I am already in my 40's, I still have one of my life goals to fulfill: to buy a tailored coat from Versace. Certainly, I still have to work a few more years, but the truth is that it is not that far away from happening"*

In addition, another eye-catching aspect emerged when Cláudia declared luxury fashion brands as something she had to fight for, but when it came to fast fashion chains like Zara, these striving feelings would no longer made sense, as the latter did not offer those striving aspects, in turn obtained only through luxury fashion brands:

> *"Although I already have some Louis Vuitton pieces, I like to see the brand as my unattainable image of the future. It is something I like to strive for and cannot take for granted. However, I admit that this feeling does not occur when it comes, for example, to the Zara's handbag that I mentioned earlier"*

To summarize these findings, each purchase of a luxury brand incurred is felt by individuals as a goal achieved or to be achieved, or as an "immaculate" image of their future vision to pursue, which brings them closer to self-actualization.

4.1.3. Social Consistency – *"Style is a way to say who you are without having to speak"*

4.1.3.1. A call for individuality

There is something about putting our worth in someone else's hand and luxury consumer practices have proven to be a possible way in which individuals disclose certain parts of themselves to others. In fact, the findings collected agree on how an individual makes use of these brands to choose which image of himself he wishes to present in a social context, and, conversely, how he believes that he is perceived by others – their "actual social self".

Inescapably, uniqueness and exclusivity have been actively mentioned by the interviewees as the top two characteristics they intend to convey when displaying a luxury fashion item in a given social context (see Appendix 2). In this sense, Table 8 shows how individuals believe that they mainly stand out from others through the uniqueness that the luxury item confers to them, thus making them also an "exclusive".

In summary, Table 8 shows how individuals perceive the use of luxury brands as a way of introducing themselves to others, in order to disclose the individual 'self' to significant others and individualize one individual 'self' from other 'selves'.

Interviewee	*Quote*	*Sense of exclusivity/uniqueness*
Rui	*"I see watches as the type of men's jewelry. Then others will recognize that no one else has this watch, which also conveys my exclusivity as a man"*	✓
Eduardo	*"The almost guarantee that I will attend a party with the certainty that no one will wear the same Gucci shoes as I do is priceless"*	✓
Sónia	*"Most importantly, the likelihood of other women displaying the same Fendi clutch as I do is very low"*	✓
Alexandre	*"Tom Ford is not a 'trendy' brand; it is a classic. So, I am not wearing it because I want to follow current trends or try to be updated with them, otherwise I would be part of the 'massification phenomenon'. To be honest, I think it introduces me as I am not a 'mass-produced' taste person and I am grateful for that"*	✓

Table 8 - Sense of exclusivity and uniqueness obtained through luxury brands, expressed by each interviewee

4.1.3.2. Conspicuous Consumption

Individuals consume conspicuous guided by the need for social consistency, that is, consumers' desire to maintain an image of how they are perceived by their significant peers. When engaging in luxury shopping, individuals show compliance with the group's norms and, therefore, sustain their sense of belonging to the social class to which they believe they belong.

Consequently, Table 9 summarizes interviewees' findings about their conspicuous motivations regarding luxury fashion brands' consumption and the extent to which they flow into a sense of belonging - whether to feel that they actually belong to the social class in which they are inserted or to feel accepted by the similar peers of that same class.

Indeed, the interviewees, when perceiving the use of luxury fashion brands to introduce them to other people, revealed a stronger connection with the ultimate goal of feeling that they belonged, or of proving it to significant pairs, rather than engage in ostentatious behavior to get an upgrade on their social status (also see section 4.1.4.). Furthermore, these findings emphasized how brands act as a statement for individuals to express "we are what show", meaning how they want to present themselves to society and how they want society to perceive them.

Interviewee	Conspicuous Consumption's Motivation	Sense of Belonging Motivator	
		Prove to myself	Prove to peers
José	*"I would rent it, but I wouldn't tell anyone it was a rented piece. In the social cluster I'm in, I know that if some people knew, they would think 'He only wore Armani because it was rented. Otherwise, he would never have it'"* *"To be honest, the judgements that concern me are those that come from those who belong to my network of contacts, not people in general"*		✓
Célia	*"It's not just about us. I think everyone likes to see their beloved ones well presented in a social context, as a way of representing the social cluster to which we all belong"*	✓	✓
Mariana	*"In general, I think people strive to keep up with the social segment in which they operate, just to feel themselves inside"* *"Oftentimes, they purchase fashion items on sale, online promotions or even second-hand... Just to say that they also have one. It works like "Just because the people around me display a LV handbag, so I want it too"*	✓	✓
Eduardo	*"I actually have both styles at home - casual and luxurious. If I go to an event that I previously know that people dress sumptuously, I will adjust my style so that I don't feel or be left out by others"*	✓	✓
Alexandre	*"In a social context where someone does not know you, if the person finds you highly attractive, they will respect you more and be more careful with the approach. Because we live in a society that 'if he is dressing luxurious, he may have money and so deserves another type of personal treatment'. It is unconscious, we all do that."* *"People do it naturally. It's intrinsic to match your cluster's consumption patterns"*	✓	✓

Table 9 - Conspicuous motivations driven by the sense of belonging, perceived by each interviewee

4.1.4. Social Approval – *"Dress how you want to be addressed"*

If something does not go our way and people do not give the admiration or the recognition we crave for, our "ideal social self" will not be realized. Hence, the eager for social approval is fueled by an individual's consumption practices consistent with those incurred by a specific aspirational group. Consequently, driven by a strong will to attain the social status above, consumers become involved in a conspicuous consumer, but this time, in a form of an ostentatious display of wealth.

However, the empirical findings were shown to be slightly connected to this "ideal social self" dimension – that is, how one would like to be seen by others - suggesting that individuals do not make use of their discretionary purchasing power to achieve a certain social status, to which they actually do not belong. Indeed, merely Pedro and Sónia, among the fifteen respondents, revealed some sort of social approval, even so, very smoothly:

> *"Hypocrisies aside, what is true is that no one likes to be associated to the social class below. On the other way around, if someone who doesn't know you and, based on your appearance, catapults you to a higher social segment, to which you don't belong, it simply does not bother you as you are even satisfied" Pedro*

> *"As it is a visible clutch from Fendi, it is implied that not everyone can afford it. So, in general, people's line of reasoning is: 'If she has money, she has education, she takes care of herself and certainly concerns about looks and fashion, among many others…'. This assigns me social status and makes me feel that I belong to a certain social class that, to be honest, I don't mind being associated with" Sónia*

Ultimately, Bárbara brings to light an interesting perspective by aligning the need for consistency in her purchasing practices with those of her aspirational group:

> *"The people I admire and follow display Prada repeatedly. As such, it encourages me to seek for that brand too, making it a launching pad to reach this social cluster I wanted to be in"*

Seen from another perspective, individual's behavioral actions that differ from those of the desired group, lead to failure to conquer the aimed social status and, consequently, to social disapproval.

4.2. The 'self-brand' connection – "*Brand yourself before others brand you*"

Indeed, throughout the thesis, it was scrutinized how consumers diversely reveal their four dimensions of the 'self' - in different magnitudes according to their own 'self' motivate-drivers - through the consumption of certain luxury fashion brands in which they resemble or would like to resemble. Therefore, as the focus of this research is primarily to disclose the individuals' self-concept, the factors that lead the individual to choose one brand over another will be addressed in this chapter only, if some way, they are related to one of the four dimensions of the self-concept. The others, due to the pertinency of the study, will be disregarded (see next section for examples). As a remark, questions 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 of the interview's guide provided fundamental data on this topic (See Appendix 1), as they allowed participants to play

in the emotional field of their responses, addressing their empathic connection with their favorite luxury brand image.

4.2.1. The 'self-brand image' connection

The brand image's definition adopted in the present research resides in the mental representation developed by consumers based on their feelings and perceptions towards a specific brand (Cho et al., 2015). In fact, the findings collected found brand image to exert a huge influence when it comes the consumer choice over a brand.

In fact, several elementary attributes that assisted in the mental construction of the brand image were mentioned by the interviewees, when referring to the chosen luxury fashion brand: the brand's strategic marketing and merchandise, communication and advertising channels, brand culture in the form of cultural identity and brand history, prestige and reputation of the brand and how long it has been in the market - which, in turn, culminate as whole into brand loyalty. However, two factors stood out among the range of attributes described above, due to its close linkage to the consumers' self-concept - the similarity with the type of brand users and the feeling of belonging to the brand community.

4.2.1.1.Identity with the brand's user type

Unanimously, respondents revealed how crucial it is to resemble the individuals who actually purchase this brand, in order to enhance not only the brand, but also the consumer himself. As a matter of fact, when consumers discern for a particular brand, it is also because they want to be associated with the type of person who purchases that same brand too. For example, for Rui, a brand is not "autonomous" in itself: *"It is not just the brand itself, since 'who the brand implies' weights a lot"*. Alexandre, in turn, corroborated Rui's thought:

> *"I think associate myself so much with Tom Ford because of the kind of people I see who also display the brand. That is extremely important"*

Furthermore, José illustrated with personal experience why "who the brand entails" is a determining factor in getting involved with a brand instead of another:

> *"For example, I was not sure whether to buy this jacket from Armani or a similar one from Calvin Klein, both of my two favorite men's clothing brands. Still, the CK jacket was a little more affordable in terms of price. However, I ended up choosing Armani just because I identify myself much more with the type of man who wears Armani than with CK"*

4.2.1.2. A sense of belonging to the brand community

If, on the one hand, the interviewees claim the need to resemble with those who also exhibit the same brand, on the other, they claim to assume a certain aspirational sense of representing the brand as users. In fact, when purchasing the respective luxury fashion brands, Margarida and Cláudia act unconsciously almost as "brand ambassadors" in their personal sphere: "*Cartier is indeed an image that I like to serve*" and "*For me, being part of the Louis Vuitton's consumers portfolio is such a pleasure! It's like a family that I chose, I would say*", respectively. Likewise, Gonçalo and Pedro feel that they embody the brand community and serve it as their own, as their enthusiastic discourses revealed:

> "*Armani is very powerful in what I call "tribal marketing". Whenever I get involved in any Armani purchase, I feel that I belong to the Armani's tribe or clan, even though I am not a regular consumer*" Gonçalo

> "*It is very important to review ourselves in the values that the brand conveys. This gives us the feeling of belonging to the brand community. It's a mood, a lifestyle*" Pedro.

4.2.2. The 'self-brand personality' connection

Brand personality is characterized as the set of human characteristics attributed to a brand (Keller & Richey, 2006), once consumers generally assign their own personality traits to brands. In the same vein, Daniela revealed the more the congruence between the brand' set of traits and her personality, the more she enjoys the brand:

> "*I would say that the characteristics I see in Tiffany's, I review them in myself as a woman. We are both fragile, warmhearted and delicate. I'm talking about the brand as if it were me, it's strange, but amusing at the same time*"

Indeed, Paula's testimonial interestingly corroborates the way she applies her perceived personality and temperament into the brand she seeks and considers her favorite: "*In fact, if I take a moment to think about it, I see many similarities between myself and all the features I mentioned about Balenciaga*".

In addition, the virtue of luxury fashion brands was described by Cristina in terms of allowing her to communicate her personality to others, and, therefore, she does not feel the need to comply with aesthetic stereotypes:

"I disclose my personality through the way I dress. I am a sober and discreet person (...). I like stylish pieces, but without any eccentricity. I like Chanel because it uses neutral patterns in black and white, as it is very unusual for me to wear red or purple, for example".

Thus, when exhibiting such fashion brands, individuals oftentimes do not do so because they want to differentiate themselves or stand out, but they do so in a manner consistent with their inner personality, as highlighted by Alexandre:

"I highly value Tom Ford's brand because it reveals my own personality. These trousers can be refined for me, but even for another man with a body similar to mine, they are no longer. It is a matter of self-expression"

In a nutshell, brand personality primarily plays a self-expressive role, in virtue of individuals convey their self-concept through the traits of the preferred brands to be consumed.

5. Discussion

This thesis constitutes a contribution to the academic literature on the multidimensional view of the consumer's self-concept, which is still in its embryonic stage. Diving into the context of luxury fashion, we designed a research question "How does the consumption of luxury fashion brands disclose individuals' multidimensional self-concept?", in the sake of the research purpose. To provide empirical results that address this same subject, we carried out a qualitative approach and conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews with luxury fashion consumers. Indeed, Table 10 presents an overview of the findings obtained:

Key takeaways from findings	
Self-consistency	(1) Denial of a misstructured and highly diffuse 'self'; (2) Denial of a ceaseless consumer's search for identity ("*identity seekers*"); (3) Very pronounced feeling of self-reward and personal gratification; (4) "Self-centered" view of luxury consumption, as a form of self-love, self-respect and self-investment; (5) Priority search for hedonic and epicurean sensations, prevailing over functionality;
Self-esteem	(1) The increase in self-confidence is the driver for luxury fashion consumption (e.g. Empowerment; Refinement; Sophistication); (2) A step forward on the hunt for self-actualization (e.g. assisting individuals in personal achievements); (3) Aspirational and unattainable image of the individual's future vision, which they need to strive for (among the younger respondents);
Social consistency	(1) Individuals choose which facet of the 'self' they disclose in a social context; (2) Individuals stand out for the exclusivity that the brand conveys to them (e.g. individualize one 'self' from the others 'selves'); (3) Individuals consume conspicuously for two motives: - Purchasing luxury brands increase consumers' sense of belonging - Show compliance with the group's norms to feel accepted by the peers (4) Luxury consumption plays a self-expressive role – *"we are what we have";*
Social approval	(1) Ostentatious consumption to achieve an aspiration status – not meaningful
'Self-brand' connection	- The brand's user type proved is a determining factor in the choice of one brand by another; - Individuals act as "brand ambassadors" in their personal sphere; - Individuals infuse their set of personality traits into their favorite brand

Table 10 - Summary of the findings

5.1. Internalized luxury takes precedence over externalized one

From the literature review, the existing self-concept research suggests that individuals do not possess a fully realized 'self', caused by an inherent lack of personal meaning (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). In this sense, individuals, when assuming the role of brands' consumers, try to fill this "highly diffuse" 'self' by engaging in the purchase of such pertinent brands, which, in turn, gives the individual a greater awareness of his own self-concept (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988). Interestingly, the findings do not support the perspective of a misstructured 'self' lacking consistency, as advanced by the research conducted by Escalas and Bettman (2005). In fact, interviewees revealed a precise awareness of their 'self', faithful to their own inner principles and to the way in which they review themselves through purchasing decisions.

As a result, the findings also contradict the illustration that individuals are constantly pursuing identity trough luxury fashion purchases, labeled "identity seekers" by Arnould & Thompson (2005). Moreover, if there is one thing that the Table 10's overview provides us, it is that consumers recognize luxury, above all, as a vehicle for obtaining some kind of internal satisfaction, and not for "someone else", not for an end "external" to themselves. The findings are in accordance with Amatulli and Guido's (2011) assumption, in which individuals seek primarily epicurean feelings that delight their perceived 'self', when they incur luxury fashion consumption. Thus, although both live in the same consumer, the internalization of luxury takes precedence over externalization, as consumers feed their egocentric perspective of luxury through two main forces:

First, an increasing number of individuals are consuming luxury brands to gain self-directed hedonic gratification and pleasurable sensations of the consumer's internal 'self'. The findings reveal that interviewees adopt a self-centered view of luxury, using the pronounced role of luxury fashion brands as of way of *"taking care of themselves, as a form of respect, a way to give importance to themselves, to respect themselves"* (Amatulli and Guido, 2011, p. 131), in contrast to the social benefits focused on pleasing others' expectations. In this sense, the findings corroborated that *"more than practical utility, luxury is an access to pleasure"* (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012, p. 19).

Second, the findings collected infer "self-esteem" as the main terminal value for the consumption of luxury fashion brands, as also advocated by Giovannini et al., (2015). In addition, other constructs that have emerged similar to this (e.g. self-confidence, personal fulfillment and self-actualization), also refer primarily to internalized luxury.

As a matter of fact, no motivating factors were identified regarding externalized luxury or ostentation. In fact, when incurring the consumption of such brands, interviewees intend to comply with the group's norms and, therefore, sustain their sense of belonging to the social class to which they believe they belong (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012). Furthermore, these findings emphasized how brands act as a declaration for individuals to show "*we are what we have*" (Kwon & Mattila, 2015, p. 428), meaning how they want to present themselves to society and how they want society to perceive them.

Finally, with regard to the five functions compiled by Escalas & Bettman (2005) on how brands help consumers achieve 'self'-motivated goals, the current findings support for of them: (A) work as a symbol of personal accomplishment; (B) boost consumer self-esteem; (C) allow one to differentiate oneself; (D) disclose the individual 'self' to others, as detailed in chapter 4.1. However, there was no empirical evidence about (E), in which brands assist individuals though life transitions, that is, that brands assist individuals to fulfill an apparent "distorted" 'self', as propped up.

5.2.   Theoretical contribution

Based on the pertinent literature on self-concept, we formerly outlined an integrated theoretical framework, which mainly portrayed the multidimensional view of the 'self', until then neglecting (Sirgy, 2018). This multidimensional construct, in addition to be the theoretical contribution of this thesis, also acted as the theoretical lens to assist in data analysis (See Figure 1).

What was unpredictable was the need to redesign this framework, after completing the data collection and its subsequent analysis. The empirical findings have offered us a more complete and accurate view when relating the consumer's self-concept with brand personality and brand image. That is, brand personality was treated as a subcategory of brand image throughout the research, once built under it and, therefore, revealing a high level of dependence on the latter

(Cho et al., 2015). However, the outcome of the semi-structured interviews shows that, even though these two concepts may be intertwined, the consumer's self-concept is differently related to the respective concepts of brand's image and personality.

In fact, when consuming luxury fashion brands, we found that brand image is more linked to the "ideal" dimensions of individuals (e.g. ideal-self and ideal social self), whereas brand personality was closer to "actual" dimensions (e.g. actual-self and actual social self). That is explained due to the level of congruence between the brand and the 'self' (e.g. "self-brand image" connection and "self-brand personality" connection).

Indeed, with regards to "self-brand image" connection, when the interviewees refer to the mental construction of the brand image, they spontaneously remit to an aspirational dimension of it (see section 4.2.1). In other words, luxury brands develop in themselves striving aspect in which consumers want to fight for. Therefore, taking the leap to the individuals' self-concept, this attribute of luxury fashion brands embodies the two "unattainable" self-dimensions of individuals – being, ideal-self and ideal social self (respectively, how they would like to perceive themselves and how they would like others to perceived them). As an empirical evidence, when asked *"If you were a brand, which one would you be?",* Cláudia highlighted this curious congruence*:*

> *"I don't think that it necessarily has to be in accordance with who I really am, but with some part of myself, even with someone that I aspire to be. Fashion brands have these advantages: they don't have to be congruent with how I actually perceive myself, but with a 'self" that may not even exist ..."*

On the other hand, the "self-brand personality" connection suggests how brand personality was merely connected to the two "actual" dimensions of the individual, in the sense that the vast majority of respondents impregnated such brands with their own personality traits (see section 4.2.2). As such, interviewees argued that they were able to express who they really are trough brands compatible with their temperament. Therefore, brand personality is shown to be related to the more "substantial" dimensions of self-concept, which, in turn, are stripped of any aspirational sense – being, actual-self and actual social self (respectively, how someone perceives himself and how he is actually perceived by others). Furthermore, when faced with the same question asked to Cláudia above, Bárbara approached these congruences distinctly:

"If my person were a brand, it would be IRO Paris. I have a neutral personality that tends a little towards the introvert. I also attribute these personal traits to this brand, as they bet on pastel colors, which are not effusive. However, if the question were what brand I would aspire to be – Balenciaga, I would say. It's because I need to be more confident and extrovert, and that's what I associate with Balenciaga's personality"

To conclude, as the empirical findings offered a new and more thorough view of the initial theoretical framework, it is necessary to reform it. To provide more clarity, we provide the two 'self' frameworks to expose the surprising modifications. The first is the initial theoretical framework (Figure 1), which was modified based on what the findings of this research provided. Then, Figure 2 embodies the new improved theoretical framework, so that it explicitly unveils how the consumer's self-concept relates disparately to the brand image and brand personality.
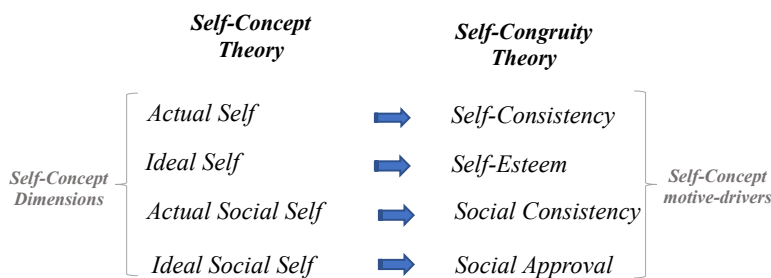

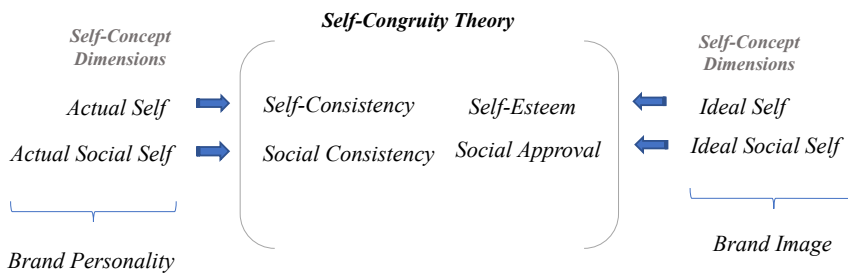*Figure 1: Initial 'self' theoretical framework*

Figure 2 - Improved 'self' theoretical framework

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to understand in-depth the role of luxury fashion brands in revealing the consumer's self-concept, in all its dimensions. However, existing research lying on the 'self' so far has been treated merely from one perspective – the 'actual' self (Sirgy, 2018). To address this lack, this research contributed to the self-concept knowledge when approaching the 'self' through a multidimensional lens. In fact, the bibliographic research carried out for this thesis corroborates Sirgy (1982)'s lament in the sense that the self-concept literature falls far short when compared with the consumer attitude literature, for instance.

This research aimed to answer the following research question: *"How does the consumption of luxury fashion brands disclose individuals' multidimensional self-concept?"*. A qualitative approach was carried out by means of fifteen semi-structured interviews, with individuals between 30 and 65 years old who consume luxury fashion brands.

The top insights from the present research are as follows: first, individuals revealed a solid awareness of their own 'self', which makes them faithful to their *"Me as I am"* conception and consistent with the way they review themselves through consumption practices. Second, individuals have proven to be highly "personal-oriented" consumers, seeking hedonic experiences and pleasurable emotions from the luxury good. Therefore, individualistic factors like these are more likely to define the purchase intention, compared to collectivistic factors, such as social eagerness. Third, self-esteem proved to be the driving force behind luxury consumption. In fact, the "ideal self" stood out among the four, as the purchase of luxury fashion brands leads the individual to reach an imaginary stage of self-realization, corresponding to his idyllic notion of 'self'. Lastly, the empirical findings showed an absence of meaning with the "ideal social self", which suggests that individuals do not incur ostentatious consumption to obtain social approval social approval from an aspiration group.

In terms of theoretical contribution, we built an integrated theoretical framework, linking the two conceptual models of the 'self' (see Figure 1). However, our findings subsequently led to its redefinition (see Figure 2), which can be explained due to the congruence between the consumer self-concept and the brand. In other words, the findings state that the brand image takes individuals to an aspirational and "immaculate" mental stage, and, therefore, more linked to their 'ideal' dimensions, while brand personality showed more connection with the consumer's set of personality traits that relate precisely to their 'actual' dimensions.

The main limitations faced by this research must be illustrated. First, the sample is limited to Portuguese consumers. Therefore, the results of this research would not apply if other nationalities were included, as cross-cultural studies have already shown sharp divergences in the motivations for luxury consumption, comparing, for example, Western, Asian and Hispanic consumers (e.g. Park & Reisinger, 2009). Second, as a qualitative approach was performed, it is not possible to generalize the findings to the population of interest, due to the small sample size. Third, the measurement of what is a "regular" consumer of luxury is highly subjective in the literature, however, this study considered who buys more than six luxury fashion goods per year. This scale is merely suggestive and may vary from author to author - nonetheless, we believe that this difference would not be significant. As a result, we faced immense difficulty in finding respondents who regularly consumed luxury fashion brands.

Future research based on self-concept is strongly recommended for applied social science researchers, once its knowledge contributes to the modeling of consumer's attitude and enables to predict social behavior. In fact, two recommendations emerged in the course of this research, based on two eye-catching but still underestimated aspects: first, a large number of respondents revealed that the more positive the associations between the 'self' and brand image are, the more robust the loyalty they create towards the brand. As such, it is worth scrutinizing the extent to which consumer self-concept can relate and lead to the outcome of robust brand loyalty. Finally, the present sample is composed of individuals aged 30 to 65 years, to guarantee the consumption of luxury fashion brands for a reasonable period of time. However, a peculiar pattern only among younger respondents (in their 30s) revealed an unattainable vision of luxury brands, as something they need to strive for. As such, future research may consider a sample composed merely of young individuals between 25 and 35 years old, as it is very likely that new self-motive drivers will emerge, diverging from those collected here.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Data Collection

8.1.Interview Guide

Respondent's Name:
Age:
Gender:
Place of Residence:
Occupational Background:

Interview Guide
Theme 1 - Luxury Fashion Brands' Consumption
1. Can you describe the most remarkable fashion luxury item you purchased and its brand?
Author's observation: Please, from now on, report your answers keeping in mind that same item and respective brand you just mentioned.
2. Can you specify what were your motivations that led you to purchase this brand?
3. In relation to that same good, what led you to opt for a luxury brand instead of a "common brand"?
4. Imagine a hypothetical situation in which you can only use that item at home, which means that it would only be visible to you, no one else would see you displaying it. Would you purchase it anyway? Or, in this specific scenario, would you rather buy the same product, but from an "ordinary" brand?
5. Would you buy and display a perfect counterfeit clone of that item?
6. Imagine that you had a special occasion and the store's owner would give you the possibility to rent the item for a really special only for a short period of time. Would you rent it and why/why not? If so, occasionally, a friend of yours praised the item and then asked you indiscreetly how much it cost. Would you say that the item was rented?
7. On a scale of 0 to 100, what proportion do you attribute to the weight of each of the following motivations had in the decision process for that brand? A) Self-directed pleasure; B) Display to others
Theme 2 – The 'Self'
Actual-Self (Self-Consistency)

8. How does the purchase of that brand make you feel about yourself?
Ideal-Self (Self-Esteem)
9. By displaying that brand, how do you differentiate yourself from others?
10. Do/Does your feelings/mood vary accordingly whether you buy a good from the luxury segment rather from the "common"? What are they? (For instance: excitement, sense of achievement…)
Actual Social-Self (Social-Consistency)
11. How do you think this brand introduces you to other people in a social context?
12. Do you think that others evaluate you differently, depending on whether you are using the same good, but from a luxury brand or from a "common" one?
Ideal Social-Self (Social Approval)
13. Is the factor "People I'm meeting today" a criterion for deciding whether or not to display the luxury good that day?
14. Do you feel your fashion consumption patterns match those of the social group you are in or you aspire to be in, even if in a "natural way"?
15. Can you tell an episode in which someone who just for showing off a luxury fashion brand item, has been praised or criticized in a certain context?
Theme 3 – 'Self-Brand' Connection
"Self-Brand Image" connection
16. Do you think that the good and the respective brand you purchased act as a way to express who you are or who you want to be?
17. How crucial was the image of the brand when it comes to your choice of consumption?
"Self-Brand Personality" connection
18. Do you review yourself in the characteristics of the brand?
Author's note: Please, for the next two last questions, disregard the assumption that your answers should relate to the luxury fashion item you mentioned at the beginning.
19. If you were a brand, which one would you be? Why?
20. If you were a brand, which one would you like to be? Why?

THEME	CATEGORY	CODE	INTERVIEW 1 - Sónia, (Female, 54)	INTERVIEW 2 - Celia (66, Female)	INTERVIEW 3 - Pedro (46, Male)	INTERVIEW 4- Rui (54, Male)	INTERVIEW 5 - Alexandre (Male, 53)	INTERVIEW 6 - Margarida (55, Female)	INTERVIEW 7 - Cláudia (34, Female)	INTERVIEW 8 - José (31, Male)
Self - Consistency "I dress to impress myself"	Solidity of Personal Meaning	Assertiveness about the own 'Self'	"It feels like I am lying to mysel (purchase of a counterfeit luxury item)			I expressed a crucial moment in my life on that watch, I still associate it with that today.			"For me what really matters is my perception of how I look when I use them (fashion clothes). Sometimes other people say that you look good with them, but if you don't agree, it's useless. I buy things because it suits my style, not others' style"	That jacket belongs to me, regardless of who sees it; "I don't have a mass-produced taste"
		Self-Reward Given /Personal Gratification		Luxury gratifies me as a "modus vivendi"		It was something I achieved, I fought for and, as such, it is due to me				It is a gratification for my hard work; You know, it was like a present for myself
	Self'-Centered Hedonic Sensations	Pleasure as the key terminal value		For me, to purchase a luxury fashion item is the exponent of contentment	Empowerment	Gratification; Contentment; Self-satisfaction	"It seems that I like me better"; "It delegates to me that I don't have a mass-produced taste"	"It never fails to make me fly"; "Joyousness"	I was so excited that I shouted to the world I bought a LV's handbag (laughs)"; Cheerfulness; "I mean, the purchasing of that LV's banana handbag meant an adventure, an experience to me, contrary to what I felt with the purchase of Zara"	Personal Delightness

THEME	CATEGORY	CODE	INTERVIEW 10 - Eduardo (57, Male)	INTERVIEW 10 - Gonçalo (37, Male)	INTERVIEW 11 - Mariana (34, Female)	INTERVIEW 12 - Cristina (53, Female)	INTERVIEW 13 - Paula (Female, 48)	INTERVIEW 14 - Bárbara (30, Female)	INTERVIEW 15 - Daniela (30, Female)
Self - Consistency "I dress to impress myself"	Solidity of Personal Meaning	Assertiveness about the own 'Self'	"It is only to deceive others who are not knowledgeable in this type of luxury fashion matter. If I could not afford it, I prefer to purchase a similar one but from the common segment".		"I really don't care what others think. If people don't like it, they just don't realize it".		I think my consumer behavior is a mirror of who I am; More than because of the others, More than others, I would feel very uncomfortable and ashamed of myself for using a counterfeit of a luxury good	I would buy anyway with the same will, whether others saw it or not.	I'm very assertive about my style and so I just think it's worth it, that I'm going to buy
		Self-Reward Given /Personal Gratification		This is one of the things that moves me to buy luxury brands. For instance, when people praise you "such a fancy bag", and you can say, "I earned it"		I have purchased it as a self-given gift, I have deserved it in that time		"I would buy anyway with the same will, whether others saw it or not. It is something that I know I deserve, in fact, not everyone can say the same."	I feel a little guilty when I use my parents' money for these luxury things. Therefore, I prefer to use my own money. I remember working for three consecutive months and with that money I bought this Tyffany's backpack. It feels like I won by myself. I kind of feel proud of that
	Self'-Centered Hedonic Sensations	Pleasure as the key terminal value		"The good side of life"		"Wearing a Chanel piece and not feeling like it's all" insane "	Short-term of happiness; "The true pleasure of life"		Pleasure; Fun; "Pure happiness";"I don't know if it's just for me, but buying something luxurious is extremely delightful and pleasurable"

THEME	CATEGORY	CODE	INTERVIEW 1 - Sónia, (Female, 54)	INTERVIEW 2 - Celia (66, Female)	INTERVIEW 3 - Pedro (46, Male)	INTERVIEW 4- Rui (54, Male)	INTERVIEW 5 - Alexandre (Male, 53)	INTERVIEW 6 - Margarida (55, Female)	INTERVIEW 7 - Cláudia (34, Female)	INTERVIEW 8 - José (31, Male)
Self- Esteem "Become the best version of ourselves"	Boost one's true self	Self-Confidence booster	Enhances the way you feel and that's the best attribute of luxury items; Sophistication	Refinement		Singularity	Distinction; Sophistication; Established; "It makes me feel I am 'the one and only'"	"Feminine elegance"	It gives me a sense of power and confident about myself;	I feel I can be a limited edition as well
	The need for Self-Actualization	Apparent sense of achievment				"It may seem superficial, but I see the Rolex watch as one of my life goals achieved. I leveled up"			An imaginary stage of having accomplished something	I would buy it anyway, as I really like the brand and it gives me the feeling that I won something for myself
		Unnattainable and Striving image			"Even though I am already in my 40's, I still have one of my life goals to fulfill: to buy a tailored coat from Versace. Certainly, I still have to work a few more years, but the truth is that it is not that far away from happening".				"Although I already have some Louis Vuitton pieces, I like to see the brand as my unattainable image of the future. It is something I like to strive for and cannot take for granted. However, I admit that this feeling does not occur when it comes, for example, to the Zara's handbag that I mentioned earlier"	The consumption of such luxury fashion brands remits me to an unattainable image of my future vision

THEME	CATEGORY	CODE	INTERVIEW 10 - Eduardo (57, Male)	INTERVIEW 10 - Gonçalo (37, Male)	INTERVIEW 11 - Mariana (34, Female)	INTERVIEW 12 - Cristina (53, Female)	INTERVIEW 13 - Paula (Female, 48)	INTERVIEW 14 - Bárbara (30, Female)	INTERVIEW 15 - Daniela (30, Female)
Self- Esteem "Become the best version of ourselves"	Boost one's true self	Self-Confidence booster	Exclusivity; "Timeless Classy";		"I feel safer when I have the Cartier bracelet on my wrist. Recalling a quote I read once on a fashion & lifestyle blog that I follow: 'Self-confidence is the best outfit you can wear'"	I feel unique and exclusive; Classy	Sense of Security	"I consider myself an introvert, but when the use, I feel that my self-esteem increases 10 times. It feeds my sense of security".	
	The need for Self-Actualization	Apparent sense of achievment						"Just because it (handbag) has 'Prada' written there, it makes me feel I have invested in something that really has value and, therefore, takes me to an idyllic stage of having accomplished something"	
		Unnattainable and Striving image		I have always look at these luxury male brands, such as Boss, Armani,Versaci... as the 'future me'	"For me, luxury fashion brands are very aspiring, and I like to see them that way. Even when I am old, I would always like to see them in the aspirational field" (laughs).			"It's like looking in the mirror and seeing who I will be when I'm older. It says a lot about who I want to become"	It's a kind of future goal that I also want to achieve and luxury fashion gives me sometimes the illusion that I have already achieved it

Table 1

THEME	CATEGORY		CODE	INTERVIEW 1 - Sónia, (Female, 54)	INTERVIEW 2 - Celia (66, Female)	INTERVIEW 3 - Pedro (46, Male)	INTERVIEW 4- Rui (54, Male)	INTERVIEW 5 - Alexandre (Male, 53)	INTERVIEW 6 - Margarida (55, Female)	INTERVIEW 7 - Cláudia (34, Female)	INTERVIEW 8 - José (31, Male)
Social Consistency "Style is a way to say who you are without having to speak"			A call for individuality	"Most importantly, the likelihood of other women displaying the same Fendi clutch heels as me, is very low"			"I look at watches as the type of men's jewerelly and the proof of that was the purchase of this Rolex. So, probably others will recognize that no one else will have this watch, which also conveys my exclusivity as a man"	"Tom Ford is not a 'trendy' brand; it is a classic. So that's why. I am not wearing it because I want to follow the current trends or try to be updated with them, otherwise I would be part of the 'massification phenomenon'. To be honest, I think it introduces me as I am not a 'mass-produced' taste person and I am grateful for that"		"Not everyone has it. It is more personalized. The main motivation is that I like to be unique"	
	Conspicuous Consumption	Sense of Belonging	Prove to myself that I belong		"It's not just about us. I think everyone likes to see their friends and beloved ones well presented in a social context, as a way of representing the social cluster to which we all belong"			"I think so, people do it naturally. It's intrinsic to match your cluster's consumption patterns"	"To be honest, among my friends and acquaintances, I don't think it differentiates me because they also buy products from luxury fashion brands as well"		
			Prove to peers that I belong	"I would say it was a rental item only if it was a close friend asking. Otherwise, I wouldn't say. The same is true when goods are purchased second-hand. If people know, they will think or even criticize saying that I don't belong to that class, because I rented the dress or even bought it second hand"	People automatically place you in a specific social class, without even knowing you; It is intrinsic in nowadays society and in people's mindsets.			"In a social context where someone does not know you, if the person finds you highly attractive, they will respect you more and be more careful with the approach. Because we live in a society that 'if she is dressing luxurious, she may have money and so deserves another type of personal treatment'. It is unconscious, we all do that."			"If it was just for an occasion, I would rent it. But I wouldn't tell anyone it was a rented piece. In the social cluster I'm in, I know that if some people knew that they would think 'He only wore the Armani jacket because it was rented. Otherwise, he would never have it'" "To be honest, the judgements that concern me are of those that come from those who belong to my social environment and are knowledgeable about luxury fashion, not people in general"

Table 2

THEME	CATEGORY		CODE	INTERVIEW 10 - Eduardo (57, Male)	INTERVIEW 10 - Gonçalo (37, Male)	INTERVIEW 11 - Mariana (34, Female)	INTERVIEW 12 - Cristina (53, Female)	INTERVIEW 13 - Paula (Female, 48)	INTERVIEW 14 - Bárbara (30, Female)	INTERVIEW 15 - Daniela (30, Female)
Social Consistency "Style is a way to say who you are without having to speak"			A call for individuality	"The almost guarantee that I will attend a party or wedding with the certainty that no one will wear the same Gucci loafers that I do, that is priceless"	"This sets me apart from others exactly because it is not an easily accessible suit, not all men will have the chance in life to buy it"					
	Conspicuous Consumption	Sense of Belonging	Prove to myself that I belong	"Yes, I actually have both styles at home - casual and luxurious. If I go to an event that I previously know that people dress sumptuously, I will adjust my style so that I don't feel or be left out by others"	"In a way, the brand's image also conveys our personal brand as an active member of society. In this way, I take the opportunity to outline a position in the social class to which I belong"	"In general, I think that people strive to keep up with the social segment in which they operate, just to feel inside."				
			Prove to peers that I belong		I think other people are much more critical than we are when it comes to how we present ourselves in social contexts. They highly value the use of luxury fashion brands, and therefore automatically assume that you take care of yourself.	Oftentimes, they purchase fashion items on sale, online promotions or even second-hand... Just to say that they also have one. It works like "Just because the people around me display this handbag, so I want it too"			People measure others by the social status to which they seem to belong. By the way you are showing off, you are placed according to a certain social class	

THEME	CATEGORY	CODE	INTERVIEW 1 - Sónia, (Female, 54)	INTERVIEW 2 - Celia (66, Female)	INTERVIEW 3 - Pedro (46, Male)	INTERVIEW 4- Rui (54, Male)	INTERVIEW 5 - Alexandre (Male, 53)	INTERVIEW 6 - Margarida (55, Female)	INTERVIEW 7 - Cláudia (34, Female)	INTERVIEW 8 - José (31, Male)
Social Approval "Dress how you want to be adressed"		*Ostentatious Consumption*	"As it is a visible clutch from Fendi, it is implied that not everyone can afford it. So, in general, people's line of reasoning is: 'If she has money, she has education, she takes care of herself and certainly concerns about looks and fashion, among many others…'. This assigns me social status and makes me feel that I belong to a certain social class that, to be honest, I don't mind being associated with"		"Hypocrisies aside, what is true is that no one likes to be associated to the social class below. On the other way around, if someone who doesn't know you and, based on your appearance, catapults you to a higher social segment, to which you don't belong, it simply does not bother you as you are even satisfied"					
The 'Self-Brand' Connection "Brand yourself before others brand you"	*"Self- Brand Image" Connection*	*Identity with the brand's user type*				"It is not just the brand itself, since 'who the brand implies' weights a lot. This factor, as trivial as it may seem, makes the brand stand out among the others, and, therefore, also highlights me. It was one of the main reasons why I chose Rolex and not another luxury watchmaking's brand"	"I think associate myself so much with Tom Ford because of the kind of people I see who also display the brand. That is of extremely important"			"For example, I was not sure whether to buy this jacket from Armani or a similar one from Calvin Klein, both of my two favorite men's clothing brands. Still, the CK jacket was a little more affordable in terms of price. However, I ended up choosing Armani just because I identify myself much more with the type of man who wears Armani than with CK"
		Sense of Belonging to the brand's community			"It is very important to review ourselves in the values that the brand conveys. This gives us the feeling of belonging to the brand community. It's a mood, a lifestyle"			"Particularly in the luxury fashion world, in my opinion it is almost antagonistic to buy a brand that you do not find similarities between you and what the brand image conveys to you"	"For me, being part of the Louis Vuitton's consumers portfolio is such a pleasure! It's like a family that I chose, I would say"	
		"Ideal" Dimensions proeminency						"Well, Cartier is indeed an image that I like to serve"	"I don't think that it necessarily has to be in accordance with who I really am, but with some part of myself, even with someone that I aspire to be. Fashion brands have these advantages: they don't have to be congruent with how I actually perceive myself, but with a 'self' that may not even exist ..."	"However, as I get older, I imagine myself in my sixties showing off a Prada jacket or Armani shoes. As I will probably boast a more executive posture, this brand will be classic, but with a lot of style. No one will give me 60 years" (laughs)
	"Self- Brand Personality" Connection	*"My name has become a brand"*				"If the brand is distinctive, there is a great likelihood that the individual is also sophisticated"	"I highly value Tom Ford's brand because it reveals my own personality. These trousers can be refined for me, but even for another man with a body similar to mine, they are no longer. It is a matter of self-expression"			
		"Actual" Dimensions proeminency		"I would say a little bit of everything. In fact, if I take a moment to think about it, I see many similarities in all the features I mentioned (about Dior), but I am not sure to what extent"		"Brands in general convey individual's personality"				Nowadays, since I still on my 30's, I would be Ralph Lauren, for example. It is an elegant brand but at the same time young and stylish.

THEME	CATEGORY	CODE	INTERVIEW 10 - Eduardo (57, Male)	INTERVIEW 10 - Gonçalo (37, Male)	INTERVIEW 11 - Mariana (34, Female)	INTERVIEW 12 - Cristina (53, Female)	INTERVIEW 13 - Paula (Female, 48)	INTERVIEW 14 - Bárbara (30, Female)	INTERVIEW 15 -Daniela (30, Female)
The 'Self-Brand' Connection *"Brand yourself before others brand you"*	*"Self- Brand Image" Connection*	*Identity with the brand's user type*							
		Sense of Belonging to the brand's community		"Yes, I think Armani is very powerful in what I call "tribal marketing". Whenever I get involved in any Armani purchase, I feel that I belong to the Armani's tribe or clan, even though I am not a regular consumer"					
		"Ideal" Dimensions proeminency				If I was a brand, I would like to be Zadig & Voltaire. It is irreverent qb and THE design draws attention by the color's patterns		However, if the question were which brand I would aspire to be - Balenciaga I would say. That's because I need to be a more confident and extrovert person, and this the image I associate with Balenciaga and who wears it"	
	"Self-Brand Personality" Connection	*"My name has become a brand"*		The brand's personalitymakes the outfit more yours	Hmm, I would probably be a Zadig & Voltaire - it is an irreverent QB brand and its design draws attention by the colorful patterns and bold lines. Likewise, I am a flashy and 'in' person, this is my way of living.	"I disclose my personality through the way I dress. I am a sober and discreet person (…). I like stylish pieces, but without any eccentricity. For example, Chanel uses neutral black and white patterns, that's what I like. It is very unusual for me to wear red or purple pieces"	"I would say a little bit of everything. In fact, if I take a moment to think about it, I see many similarities in all the features I mentioned (regarding Balenciaga), but I am not sure to what extent		"Yes, we are probably both affectionate, feminine, soft, and graceful. I would say that most of the traits that I see in Tiffany's, I review in myself. It may seem a little strange as I'm referring to the brand as a person, but fun and interesting at the same time" (laughs)
		"Actual" Dimensions proeminency				"I disclose my personality through the way I dress"	The brands somehow transmit my personality. By re-quoting someone "We are what we dress".	"If my person were a brand, I would be IRO Paris. I have a neutral personality that tends a little towards the introvert. I also attribute these personal traits to this brand, as they bet on pastel colors, which are not effusive"	